

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 1 of 79

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- Tina's. Baskets](#)
- [5- Hutchinson County Fatal Crash](#)
- [5- Dates Vehicle Owners May Be Impacted By System Updates](#)
- [6- City Council Agenda](#)
- [7- SD News Watch: Ballot measure battle could curtail South Dakota's direct democracy](#)
- [12- Dominant Defense, Sharp Shooting Propel Groton Lady Tigers to Victory](#)
- [13- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Governor to make call on immigration sanctuary cities ban after House passage](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Noem calls deportation protection for Venezuelans 'contrary to the national interest'](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: SD opens bids in state-funded \\$7 million cybersecurity effort to protect local governments](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Bill requiring public schools set policies for chaplain visits, services in SD passes committee](#)
- [18- SD SearchLight: Trump postpones big tariffs against Canada and Mexico for one month](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: Members of Congress refused entry to USAID agency shuttered by Trump administration](#)
- [21- SD SearchLight: Bill eliminating out-of-pocket breast cancer screening costs fails in committee](#)
- [22- SD SearchLight: Federal politicians could face a limit on money transfers to their state committees](#)
- [23- Weather Pages](#)
- [28- Daily Devotional](#)
- [29- Subscription Form](#)
- [30- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [31- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [32- News from the Associated Press](#)

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



Tuesday, Feb. 4

Senior Menu: Cheese tortellini alfredo with diced chicken, green beans, Mandarin oranges, breadstick.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
Boys basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli: C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow. At Elementary school, 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m.
JH wrestling at Britton-Hecla, 5 p.m.
Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.
Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center
Groton United Methodist Bible Study, 10 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 5

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potato with gravy, peas and carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.
Groton Chamber Board Meeting, noon, at City Hall
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

© 2025 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 2 of 79

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.

Uncertainty at USAID

Secretary of State Marco Rubio was named acting director of the US Agency for International Development yesterday, stepping in as the organization faced increasing calls for its closure by the Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency.

The roughly \$40B-per-year agency oversees the vast majority of US foreign aid, funding efforts ranging from economic development to humanitarian assistance. The organization, authorized and funded by Congress each year, was created in 1961 as a means to consolidate foreign aid under one roof. As of yesterday afternoon, reports suggested USAID would be folded into the State Department with an unspecified reduction in workforce while retaining its humanitarian mission.

Analysts say the move could face legal obstacles—while USAID has reporting and budgetary ties to the State Department, it was established by Congress and, therefore, may require an act of Congress to dissolve.

The move follows a weekend standoff between Musk aides and agency personnel, who claimed DOGE staff did not have appropriate clearance to access classified documents.

... and a Tariffs Whiplash

President Donald Trump's 25% tariffs on goods imported from Mexico and Canada are now paused for at least 30 days after the commander in chief struck last-minute border security deals with both countries. The tariffs—initially set to take effect today—would have ignited a North American trade war, with consequences potentially passed on to consumers.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau agreed to send approximately 10,000 troops each to their respective borders with the US as part of efforts to curb the flow of illicit drugs and illegal immigration. Trudeau also said he would carry out a previously announced \$1.3B border plan, appoint a "fentanyl czar," and launch a joint strike force to tackle organized crime, fentanyl trafficking, and money laundering. Negotiations between the US and its neighbors are expected to continue.

A 10% tariff on Chinese imports will still take effect today. Mexico, Canada, and China accounted for 42% of total US imports last year, or about \$1T in goods.

Quakes Shake Santorini

More than 200 earthquakes have rattled the Greek island of Santorini since Friday, with tremors occurring every few minutes and reaching a magnitude of up to 4.9. Experts say the quakes are not linked to Santorini's dormant volcano but to tectonic plate movements and could signal a larger impending event.

Santorini, part of the Hellenic Volcanic Arc, is in one of Europe's most seismically active regions. The island, home to 20,000 residents and drawing roughly 3.4 million tourists annually, experienced a massive volcanic eruption around 3,600 years ago that formed its famous crescent-shaped caldera. The last major earthquake in the area struck in 1956 with a magnitude of 7.5, triggering a tsunami about 80 feet high.

Experts predict the seismic activity could continue for weeks. Authorities have closed schools on Santorini and nearby Aegean islands, deployed emergency crews, and added extra flights to accommodate increased departures.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 3 of 79

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Beyoncé announces concert dates in support of her Grammy-winning album "Cowboy Carter"; the 22-show world tour will kick off in Los Angeles April 28.

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer" sequel series in the works featuring original show star Sarah Michelle Gellar.

Former President Joe Biden signs with talent firm Creative Arts Agency; CAA represented Biden for a book deal and paid speaking tours from 2017 to 2020.

Sexual assault trial against former Spanish Football Federation President Luis Rubiales begins; Rubiales is accused of an unwanted kiss on Spanish star Jenni Hermoso following Spain's victory at the 2023 Women's World Cup.

Science & Technology

OpenAI unveils deep research tool, an AI agent the company says can perform complex, multistep tasks and information synthesis with minimal user input.

Engineers develop approach for mass-produced inkjet printing of wearable biosensors; technology could lead to cheap and widely available monitoring of health data.

Daily omega-3 supplements may slow biological aging by up to four months, according to three-year study of more than 700 participants.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.8%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq -1.2%) amid spate of tariff announcements.

President Donald Trump signs executive order seeking to establish first-ever US sovereign wealth fund—a government-owned fund that invests in various financial assets; fund would require congressional approval.

Vanguard cuts fees on nearly half of its US funds in largest fee reduction in firm's history.

Tech giant Palantir shares surge nearly 23% in after-hours trading after posting better-than-expected Q4 earnings and revenue; company attributes much of its growth to its use of artificial intelligence.

Politics & World Affairs

Salvage crews remove wreckage of American Airlines regional jet from Potomac River after last week's deadly midair collision near Reagan National Airport; at least 55 of 67 victims have been recovered and identified so far.

Jury selection begins in trial of Aimee Bock, the alleged ringleader behind a \$250M pandemic relief fraud scheme that exploited federal child nutrition programs and led to criminal charges against 70 individuals.

Blast in Moscow kills at least two people, including the founder of a separatist unit fighting in eastern Ukraine, per reports.

Rwanda-backed rebels declare ceasefire in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, beginning today .

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 4 of 79

Tina's Baskets! Text/Call at 605-397-7285 to reserve your basket now. They are going fast! Cash, check or Venmo.



2. White vase with sour suckers. \$7.50



3. Kit Kat Cake with Valentine suckers on top. \$35



4. Hersheys Cake, two tier with strawberry hard candy. \$40



7. Valentine container with fake roses and white bears. \$5



8. Reeses candy bars with Valentine suckers. \$50



9. Heart basket with assorted candy. \$15



10. Vase filled with strawberry drops and chocolate rose candy. \$9



12. Valentine's love balloon with fake flowers, MMs, skittles. \$15



14. Mini chip ahoy's cookies, be mine valentines book, a bear with a love heart on it and some hot wheels in it. \$12



15. Betsie Voucher book, puppy, mini chocolate hearts. Behind the dog a bag of heart bear gummies and a small box of mix chocolates. \$12

Hutchinson County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 81, mile marker 25, nine miles south of Freeman, SD

When: 11:18 a.m., Monday, February 3, 2025

Driver 1: 24-year-old female from Yankton, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2008 Dodge Ram 1500

Seat belt Used: No

Passenger 1a: 31-year-old male from Yankton, SD, minor injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Hutchinson County, S.D.- A Yankton woman died and a passenger was injured in a single vehicle crash nine miles south of Freeman, SD this morning.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2008 Dodge Ram 1500 was traveling north on US Highway 81 near mile marker 25. For an unknown reason, the vehicle left the roadway and entered the east ditch and rolled.

The driver, a 24-year-old Yankton woman, received fatal injuries. A 31-year-old male passenger sustained minor injuries.

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

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

Dates Vehicle Owners May Be Impacted By System Updates

PIERRE, S.D. – The Department of Revenue’s Motor Vehicle Division will launch a new title and registration system, 605Drive, on February 17, 2025.

Training for the new system began on December 9, 2024, with basic trainings for county and internal users. Since then, 18,060 computer-based training modules have been assigned to county users. Fifty-one counties have completed 80% of those training courses.

The transition to the new system will occur in three phases. Starting on February 7, registration renewals will not be available on mySDCars.gov or at the DMVNow Kiosks. Registration renewals will continue to be available at county offices through 7 PM Central Time on February 13th although we recommend checking with your treasurer’s office to see if they have an earlier stop time to work through their end-of-day processes.

Between February 14 – 16, 2025, motor vehicle transactions, including title transfers and registration renewals, will not be available. During that same time, the system transition will also delay a dealership’s ability to transfer a title and a financial institution’s ability to release liens.

The new system will launch on February 17, 2025. Access to registrations will be available at county treasurer offices, DMVNow Kiosks, and through the new online platform, whose link can be found on the Department’s website at dor.sd.gov by clicking “Vehicle Registration and Plates” under Online Services.

The Department recommends vehicle owners who renew in February renew their registration early to avoid any delays.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 6 of 79

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

February 4, 2025 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Open Sealed Bids for Roof Repairs
4. Airport Discussion – Darrell Hillestad
5. Department Reports
6. Electric Department Equipment
7. Authorization to Sign Letter of Commitment as a Participant in the Brown County Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
8. Minutes
9. Bills
10. Reminder: Applications are Open for Summer Recreational Positions:
 - Baseball Coordinator
 - Softball Coordinator
 - Legion Coach
 - Jr. Legion Coach
 - Jr. Teener Coach
 - Girls' Softball Coaches (U8/U10/U12/U14)
 - Day Baseball/Softball Coach
 - Concessions Manager
 - Swimming Pool Manager
11. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
12. Hire Summer Recreational Employees
13. Adjournment



Ballot measure battle could curtail South Dakota's direct democracy

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

Has South Dakota soured on direct democracy?

The answer to that question will be partly answered during the 2025 legislative session, as Republican lawmakers continue a recent trend of trying to restrict the state's first-in-the-nation initiative and referendum process.

In the spirit of such laws, the people will ultimately determine the fate of a South Dakota system that dates to 1898 and has led to progressive reforms such as increased minimum wage and Medicaid expansion in a deeply conservative state.

The power of residents to amend the state constitution through the petition process was added in 1972.

Michael Card, emeritus professor of political science at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, calls this power "the gun behind the door," allowing a given percentage of state residents to propose a law or amendment that must be approved at the polls.

The guiding principle is that "direct democracy" – which also allows existing laws to be challenged through referendum, as seen with the carbon pipeline debate in 2024 – provides a check on the "representative democracy" power of state legislators.

The Republican super majority in Pierre has frequently pushed back, passing laws to make it harder to get initiated measures and constitutional amendments on the ballot and raising the voting threshold for measures to pass.

'Death by a thousand cuts'

Most prominent among the 2025 proposals is House Joint Resolution 5003, which would raise the percentage of voters needed to pass constitutional amendments in a statewide election to 60%.

That would match Florida and Illinois for the highest voting threshold among the 18 states that allow for constitutional amendments through the initiative process.

The resolution passed the House by a 61-5 vote on Jan. 22 and appears headed to the 2026 ballot, where a simple majority of voters can pass or reject it. Similar attempts to raise the voting threshold failed at the polls in 2018 and 2022.

Legislators have been more successful curtailing the process with statutory changes in Pierre. From 2018 to 2024, South Dakota passed 11 laws to make direct democracy more difficult, the most of any state, according to Ballotpedia.

These restrictions include petition deadlines, circulation requirements and allowing for the revocation of signatures. Another joint resolution proposed this year would increase the number of signatures required to make the ballot, from 5% to 10% of the general electorate for initiated measures and from 10% to 15% for constitutional amendments.

"They're attempting to orchestrate the death of direct democracy by a thousand cuts," said Rick Weiland, whose Dakotans for Health organization has been a frequent sponsor of ballot measures, including unsuccessful abortion rights and grocery tax repeal efforts in 2024. "They keep trying and trying because when people organize and use their voice, they become a threat to the political establishment."

Federal courts have rolled back some of the restrictions as First Amendment violations, recognizing petition circulation as core political speech.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 8 of 79

Holding amendments to higher standard

Rep. John Hughes of Sioux Falls, the Republican sponsor of House Joint Resolution 5003, said his proposal is meant to highlight the difference between initiated measures, which impact state statutes, and initiated amendments, which change the state constitution.

"I think all of us would agree that a constitution is different than a statute," Hughes told House State Affairs committee members at a Jan. 17 hearing. "It's intended to be much more permanent. It's meant to be a fundamental expression of the near universal agreement of the people of South Dakota as to the rights, duties and values that we hold to."

Republicans have criticized the use of initiated amendments for policy provisions such as Medicaid expansion, which passed in 2022, and legalization of recreational marijuana, which passed in 2020 but was overturned by the South Dakota Supreme Court for violating the state's single-subject rule.

Nathan Sanderson, executive director of the South Dakota Retailers Association, said his group supports the joint resolution because policy programs that involve budget fluctuations are best handled within state statutes.

"(Our association) has always believed that the constitution should be reserved for a philosophy of governance, not for specific policies and programs," Sanderson said. "Amending the constitution can only be done every two years and is not a very good way of handling nuanced policy."

Do voters have ballot measure fatigue?

Card, who has authored several studies on direct democracy, told News Watch that the arguments from Hughes and Sanderson don't fully explain the reasoning behind the latest attempt to restrict the process in South Dakota.

"I think it's being cast as something other than what it really is," Card said of the joint resolution. "What it's really about is that the Democrats with a small minority (23% of registered voters) are doing what is popular with the citizenry in terms of proposing initiatives. The real intent is to limit the ability to pass some of these laws."

But Hughes alluded to "fatigue" among voters toward ballot measures, with an average of nearly six measures on the ballot every two years since 2000. The highest during that period were 11 in 2006 and 10 in 2016.

Of the 122 measures that made the South Dakota ballot since 1985, 52 were successful, for a winning percentage of 43%.

Three of the most liberal measures on the 2024 ballot – abortion rights, grocery tax repeal and recreational marijuana legalization – all failed with less than 45% of the vote.

The only successful measures were populist (property rights groups rallying to refer a bill they saw as pro-pipeline) and staunchly conservative (allowing work requirements for Medicaid expansion, stemming from the Legislature).

But Card pointed out that even residents who don't agree with many of the issues being put forth "aren't going to give up a right that they have."

Voters in 2022 strongly rejected Amendment C, which was placed on the primary ballot and would have required a 60% vote for ballot measures that raise taxes or spend \$10 million in general funds in their first five years. That amendment, viewed as a preemptive strike against Medicaid expansion, managed only 33% of the vote.

Four years earlier was Amendment X, which came out of a legislative task force and would have required a 55% vote to approve constitutional amendments. That effort failed with just 47% support.

South Dakota blazes new ballot trail

It's hard to assess the future of direct democracy in South Dakota without understanding the past, including the decision by voters in 1898 – nine years after statehood – to adopt the system of initiated ballot measures and referendums.

Several days after that election, the Omaha (Nebraska) Bee newspaper noted that South Dakota rejected women's suffrage on the same ballot, observing that the state's voters "were of the opinion that one ex-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 9 of 79

periment at a time was enough.”

The newspaper also noted that South Dakota’s system was partly based on the Switzerland model of allowing citizens to vote on how the country is run.

“That it has been at least fairly successful in the little country where it originated is true,” wrote the Omaha Bee in an editorial. “But (in America), the process has been looked upon by practical men as a pretty but impracticable theory. Other states will be satisfied to let South Dakota stand the cost of the experiment.”

The Chicago Record newspaper was more supportive of the direct democracy principle, framing it as a way for rural voters to have more say in their state’s legislative affairs, especially at a time when monied interests were gaining power as part of the rise of corporations and corruption in the Gilded Age.

“Of late there has been a growing tendency on the part of legislatures to submit to popular vote measures of importance relating especially to larger cities,” the editors wrote in an editorial. “The people of South Dakota, however, have put into operation a plan whereby the popular will can be given expression in law regardless of the indifference of the legislative body.”

‘No interference’ with people’s rights

This power of the people was elevated in 1972 with Amendment E, which expanded the resident petition process to include constitutional amendments in South Dakota.

In the House State Affairs hearing, Hughes incorrectly stated that this occurred in 1988 and that it “passed by a slim margin of our voters.” Actually, the change was approved by 67% of the vote when introduced in 1972.

The amendment, which also included provisions for calling constitutional conventions, was initiated by the Legislature and a constitutional revision commission. It was approved 67-2 by the House and 34-0 by the Senate before going on the general ballot.

Hughes told News Watch that he was referring to Amendment A from 1988. But that was a procedural change that removed the requirement that the Legislature enact a measure proposed by voters before it could be placed on the ballot. Lawmakers had no choice but to “vote” for the measure under this formality, which ruffled feathers politically.

“It eliminates a bit of red tape,” then-Legislative Research Director Terry Anderson told the Argus Leader at the time of that amendment. “It also makes it abundantly clear that there can be no interference with the people’s right to initiate laws.”

The amendment passed with 52% of the vote.

Progressive causes take hold

As the makeup of the South Dakota Legislature trended heavily Republican over the past 15 years (GOP legislators currently outnumber Democrats 95-9), direct democracy became a way to circumvent Pierre and take progressive issues to the polls.

One successful campaign was Weiland’s push to raise the state’s minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$8.50 per hour in 2014, with future raises for inflation. Initiated Measure 18 passed with 55% of the vote.

When the Legislature voted in 2015 to exempt workers under age 18 from the required wage, Democrats gathered petitions to refer the law and more than 7 of 10 voters supported the referral, upholding the minimum wage.

“The message from the people was simple: Hands off,” said Weiland, who ran an unsuccessful campaign for U.S. Senate in 2014.

South Dakota’s minimum wage is currently \$11.50 per hour, higher than neighboring Minnesota (\$11.13).

Two years later came Initiated Measure 21, a bipartisan effort that targeted payday loan outlets and other predatory lenders by establishing a maximum interest rate of 36% on their loans.

The group faced aggressive opposition from the Atlanta-based owner of North American Title Loans and other payday and car title lenders, who were accused of luring low-income customers into high-interest loans.

Veteran political strategist Steve Hildebrand, who served as former President Barack Obama’s deputy campaign manager in 2008, was one of the key organizers behind IM 21, which passed with 76% of the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 10 of 79

vote.

"I've never been more proud of anything in my 30 years of political experience than trying to cap the interest on payday lending," Hildebrand said during the campaign. "It's time to stop treating our low-income families like dirt."

Out-of-staters fueled Marsy's Law

Those seeking to dial back direct democracy point to cautionary tales such as Marsy's Law, a 2016 victims' rights measure passed in South Dakota as a constitutional amendment as part of a nationally coordinated campaign.

The law was marred by unintended consequences. In some cases, law enforcement was unable to share information with the public in order to assist in solving crimes. There were also instances of alleged offenders being held longer behind bars because victims weren't available to be notified of a bond hearing.

A legislatively referred constitutional amendment was placed on the ballot two years later to fix some of the problems and passed with 80% of the vote.

The original measure was funded by California tech billionaire Henry Nicholas, who took up the cause of victims' rights after his sister, Marsy, was shot to death by an ex-boyfriend in 1983. He spent \$2 million to orchestrate the campaign in South Dakota, including ads featuring TV personality Kelsey Grammar, whose sister was murdered in 1975.

"They made some mistakes," said former Republican state legislator Mark Mickelson, who helped spearhead the follow-up amendment. "They didn't consult stakeholders and they had some language issues. No one on the ground was comfortable with what was being proposed or how it would be implemented."

Mickelson also helped orchestrate Amendment Z, a 2018 measure requiring that constitutional amendments involve only one subject "and that multiple proposed amendments to the constitution be voted on separately."

That amendment passed with 62% of the vote and became the basis for the South Dakota Supreme Court overturning the passage of legalized recreational pot two years later.

The ruling found that Amendment A, the 2020 marijuana measure, "contains provisions embracing at least three separate subjects, each with distinct objects or purposes," referring to recreational marijuana, medical marijuana and hemp.

South Dakota used as 'laboratory'

Hughes mentioned out-of-state influence as a key factor in his quest to make it harder to pass constitutional amendments. The state's simple majority provision and affordable advertising rates are cited as reasons that national advocacy groups view South Dakota as fertile ground for ballot efforts.

"My experience going door to door is that there is a weariness over (advertising) paid for by millions of out-of-state dollars to reshape and remold our state constitution," Hughes testified at the Jan. 17 hearing. "It's only because we have the 50-plus-one majority that we're a target for being used as a laboratory for the emergence of new values and new ideas that many South Dakotans do not share."

He pointed to Amendment G, the abortion rights measure placed on the 2024 ballot by Dakotas for Health. The campaign received a late influx of donations totaling \$750,000 from Think Big America, a progressive advocacy group funded by Democratic Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

Not mentioned at the hearing was the fact that the anti-abortion campaign, led by groups such as Life Defense Fund and No G for SD, received a \$500,000 donation from The Concord Fund, a Virginia-based nonprofit connected to conservative judicial activist Leonard Leo, as part of its effort to defeat the amendment.

Chase Jensen of Dakota Rural Action, which helped spur a grassroots petition effort that led to anti-pipeline forces rejecting Referred Law 21, said higher voting thresholds could lead to less involvement from everyday residents and more influence from wealthy political action groups, the opposite of Hughes' intent.

"With the unprecedented concentration of wealth in society and politics today, we believe that raising the threshold of votes wouldn't deter out-of-state money," said Jensen. "It would only open the tap even further."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 11 of 79

'What about your politicians?'

Weiland, who served as an aide to former Democratic U.S. Senate Leader Tom Daschle, has become closely linked to direct democracy through his work with progressive organizations such as Dakotans for Health and Take it Back.

He finds the argument against out-of-state money ironic given the story behind Initiated Measure 22, a successful 2016 ballot effort that revised lobbying and campaign finance laws while establishing a state ethics commission after several state scandals.

Republican legislators, decrying sloppy and confusing language in the law, sought a preliminary injunction and later repealed the measure with an emergency clause that ensured it could not be sent back to voters.

That experience spawned another reason for petitioners to prefer constitutional amendments over initiated measures – they're impossible for the Legislature to overturn without getting the permission of voters.

As for the out-of-state money argument, Weiland called it hypocritical.

"You don't like ballot measures getting funded by out-of-state interests?" he said. "Well, what about your politicians? All of our federal politicians have millions of dollars in their campaign accounts, and I can tell you that all of that money didn't come from South Dakota."

Weiland and Rapid City lawyer Jim Leach, who represents Dakotans for Health, have submitted wording for potential 2026 ballot measures to counteract what's happening in Pierre.

One would prevent legislators from amending or repealing a resident-enacted ballot measure for seven years after it becomes effective, except by a three-fourths vote of both the House and Senate, followed by a vote in the general election.

The other would require that changes to a law that impacts the state's initiative and referendum process would have to be approved by voters on a general election ballot.

As the push-and-pull battle over direct democracy in South Dakota continues, Leach said "we plan to keep fighting to preserve the rights of citizens to propose and vote on the laws they're going to be subject to."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Stu Whitney at stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org

Dominant Defense, Sharp Shooting Propel Groton Lady Tigers to Victory

The Groton Area Lady Tigers put on a defensive clinic and an offensive showcase in their commanding 54-18 victory over the Florence-Henry Falcons. From the opening tip, Groton's relentless pressure and efficient shooting paved the way for a decisive win.

Fast Start Sets the Tone

After an early 3-2 deficit, the Lady Tigers roared to life with an 11-0 run to close the first quarter, taking an 11-3 lead. Their defensive pressure forced multiple turnovers, which they quickly converted into fast-break points.

The second quarter was more of the same as Groton's stifling defense held Florence-Henry to just one point in the period. Meanwhile, the Tigers kept their offense rolling with a 17-point surge that carried into the third quarter, extending their lead to 30-4.

Balanced Attack and Defensive Dominance

Leading the offensive charge, Taryn Traphagen poured in 11 points, while Rylee Dunker added 10. The Tigers moved the ball well, racking up 16 assists, with Kennedy Hanson dishing out six of them.

On the defensive side, Jercia Locke was a key disrupter, grabbing four of Groton's 14 steals. The Tigers forced 16 turnovers and capitalized on four of them for points. Florence-Henry struggled to find an offensive rhythm, making just six of their 30 shot attempts for 20 percent from the field.

Strong Finish

Even as Florence-Henry found some footing in the second half, Groton never let up. By the end of the third quarter, the Tigers held a 40-13 advantage, and they cruised through the final period to seal the 54-18 victory.

The Lady Tigers' efficiency was evident as they shot 49 percent from two-point range (17 of 35) and an impressive 50 percent from beyond the arc (5 of 10). Florence-Henry had a slight edge in free throws, making three of four compared to Groton's four of six, but it wasn't nearly enough to shift momentum.

Statement Win

With just six turnovers on the night and a dominant defensive showing, Groton proved they are a force to be reckoned with. Their combination of aggressive defense, unselfish ball movement, and efficient shooting made for an all-around stellar performance.

This victory not only adds another win to their record but also serves as a statement that the Lady Tigers are ready to take on any challenge ahead.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Taryn Traphagen: 11 points, 1 rebound, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Rylee Dunker: 10 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal.

Chesney Weber: 7 points, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Jercia Locke: 6 points, 3 rebounds, 4 assists, 4 steals, 1 foul.

Jaedyn Penning: 6 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 4 points, 6 assists, 2 fouls.

Faith Traphagen: 4 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 3 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals.

McKenna Tietz: 2 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist.

Laila Roberts: 1 rebound, 1 assist, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Talli Wright: 1 rebound.

2-pointers: 17-35 49%, 3-pointers: 5-10 50% (Taryn Traphagen - 3, Brooklyn Hansen - 1, Chesney Weber - 1). 18 rebounds, 6 turnovers, 16 assists, 14 steals, 11 fouls.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 13 of 79

Florence-Henry: Ashlynn Vavruska 6, Ashelyn Klitzke 3, Brooke Hlavacek 3, Addison Byer 2, Mylee Sumner 2, Grace Kahnke 2. Field Goals: 6-30 20%, Free throws: 3-4 75%, 4 fouls, 16 turnovers.

Ashlynn Warrington made a basket with 1:14 left in the game to life the junior varsity team to a 34-32 win over Florence-Henry. The game was tied six times and there were seven lead changes. The game was tied at eight after the first quarter, the Falcons led, 18-16 at half time and the game was tie dat 27 after three quarters. Chesney Weber led Groton Area with 9 points followed by Talli Wright 6, McKenna Tietz 5, Kella Tracy 4, Ashlynn Warrington 4, Mia Crank 3, Emerlee JOnes 2, Makenna Krause 1.

Ana Byer led Florence-Henry with 13 points while Lucy Bloom had 9, Addison Byer 6, Madison Stemwedel 2, Avari Gusso 2.

Groton Area won the C game, 40-13. Ashlynn Warrington led Groton Area with 19 points followed by Makenna Krause with 9, Sydney Locke 4, Kinsley Rowen 2, Kella Tracy 2, Emerlee Jones 2, Tevan Hanson 2.

All three games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover. Weber Landscaping sponsored the junior varsity game and Larry and Val Fliehs sponsored the C game. Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel were on hand for the game.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM

Tuesday, Feb. 04

Groton Area
Tigers

**Boys Basketball
at Roncalli**

GT

5:00 C Game

Sponsored by Larry & Val Fliehs

6:00 JV Game

Sponsored by Hefty Seed

Followed by Boys Varsity

Sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt at Groton Ford, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover



\$5 ticket or

GDI Subscription

required to watch the games.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Governor to make call on immigration sanctuary cities ban after House passage

Safe haven prohibition among several immigrant-related proposals in Pierre

BY: JOHN HULT AND SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 5:19 PM

A bill barring cities, counties or schools from acting as safe havens for undocumented immigrants in South Dakota is headed to the governor's desk after a 62-6 vote in the state House of Representatives.

Lawmakers are considering several bills this legislative session dealing with immigration. Senate Bill 7, the first of those bills to pass both chambers, would prohibit the state and its political subdivisions from adopting any policy to prevent local law enforcement from cooperating with federal immigration authorities or disciplining officers who do.

There are no South Dakota cities or counties where police or sheriff's deputies have refused to work with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), according to the bill's sponsor, Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-Spearfish.

"Potentially, if we didn't pass this legislation, maybe we would," Fitzgerald said in response to a question from Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls. "This is really a proactive bill, a proactive step toward making our state safe."

The bill is meant in part as a statement of support on the state level for the immigration law enforcement actions undertaken by the Trump administration, Fitzgerald said.

"President Trump vowed to make America safe again, and as we've seen since January 20, he is living up to that promise with thousands of arrests and ICE detainers," she said. "The South Dakota Legislature is not in charge of border security, but we are affected by the criminals who have entered the United States illegally."

Wittman voted against the bill. There's no need to address an issue if it doesn't exist, she argued, but there could be unintended consequences. Migrant victims of domestic violence may be less likely to call for help for fear of detention, she said, and a statement of support for federal raids will serve to sour relationships between migrants and the members of law enforcement who may need their help investigating criminal activity.

The bill's easy passage through the House – it cleared the House Local Government committee 12-1, with Wittman the lone opponent – follows an even smoother trajectory in the Senate. The upper chamber placed SB 7 on its consent calendar, passing it unanimously and with no debate alongside three other uncontested bills.

Gov. Rhoden's office did not immediately respond to a question on whether he'll sign SB 7.

Two other proposals tied to immigration advanced Monday, as well.

The Senate sent legislation to the House that would add language to state law and the state constitution saying it's illegal for noncitizens to vote in South Dakota elections.

Federal law already says only U.S. citizens may vote in federal elections. But Sen John Carley, R-Piedmont, said there is nothing in state law specifying that a person must be a U.S. citizen to vote in South Dakota elections.

"We have always just assumed this is required," Carley said.

His bill contains language to that effect and would also make voting by noncitizens a felony punishable by up to two years in prison and a \$4,000 fine.

The other bill, from Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, would ask voters to put similar language in the state

constitution on Election Day in 2026. The constitution can only be amended by voters.

Asked by South Dakota Searchlight if the bills are redundant, Carley said his bill is needed to put a law in place with a penalty now while the Legislature waits to see if the ballot measure wins approval later.

Carley said the two bills are part of a "trifecta of safeguards" against noncitizens voting. The third bill, from Sen. Amber Hulse, R-Hot Springs, would require driver's licenses and identification cards to indicate whether the licensee is a U.S. citizen. Identification is required to cast a ballot in South Dakota.

The Senate sent that bill to the House last week.

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

Noem calls deportation protection for Venezuelans 'contrary to the national interest'

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 4:56 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security will not renew temporary protections for more than 350,000 Venezuelans who were granted those protections in 2023, paving the way for them to potentially face deportation by spring, according to a Monday prepublished Federal Register notice.

In the notice, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem revoked one of two Temporary Protected Status designations for Venezuelans, arguing that renewing TPS for the 2023 Venezuelan recipients is "contrary to the national interest of the United States." She has cited gang activity as one factor in her decision.

Those 2023 TPS holders will have work permits and deportation protections until April.

President Donald Trump has ramped up immigration enforcement, signing a memo to open 30,000 beds for migrant detention in the military base Guantanamo Bay.

On Sunday, during an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," Noem would not answer questions from host Kristen Welker if migrant women, children and families who lack legal status in the United States would be held at Guantanamo Bay.

"You know, if you look at what we are doing today of targeting the worst of the worst, we've been very clear on that," Noem said. "The priority of this president is to go after criminal aliens that are making our streets more dangerous."

Legal pathways limited

The Trump administration has curtailed legal immigration pathways created under the Biden administration, such as ending humanitarian parole for asylum seekers and ending a separate program that granted work permits and protections for nationals from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela if they had a U.S. sponsor and passed a background check.

Last week, Noem revoked the 18-month TPS extension for Venezuelans, something the Biden administration did shortly before leaving office. The extension under the Biden administration offered protections until October 2026.

Lawsuits likely

Litigation is likely to follow Monday's announcement, as it did in 2018, when Trump ended TPS designations for Haiti, El Salvador, Sudan and Nicaragua, but was blocked by the courts.

Countries receive a TPS designation if it's deemed too dangerous for a national to return to their home due to war, disaster or other unstable circumstances, rather than for reasons of "national interest."

"In particular, the Secretary has determined it is contrary to the national interest to permit the covered Venezuelan nationals to remain temporarily in the United States," according to the notice.

Noem said that TPS designation for Venezuela has "resulted in associated difficulties in local communities where local resources have been inadequate to meet the demands caused by increased numbers."

She also argued it led to the arrival of a Venezuelan gang called the Tren de Aragua, or TDA.

That same reasoning could be used to justify ending TPS for the second group of Venezuelans.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 16 of 79

Two groups

There are two categories of TPS recipients from Venezuela. About 250,000 Venezuelans have had TPS since 2021 and another 350,000 have had TPS since 2023.

Those 2021 recipients have TPS protections until Sept. 10. Noem has until July 12 to decide if she will renew protections.

TPS is usually for a limited time, about 18 months, and allows a national from that country to work and live in the United States and be protected from deportation proceedings.

TPS is not a legal pathway to citizenship, but recipients can apply for asylum if they are eligible while holding the TPS status.

"I think that this move is going to raise questions for many TPS holders about whether their designations are safe now, especially now that it's not just about the country conditions, but about how the Trump administration defines public national interest," said Julia Gelatt, the associate director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute, a think tank that studies migration.

Trump earlier protected Venezuelans

On Trump's final day in office in 2021, his administration issued 18-month deportation protections for Venezuelans — known as Deferred Enforcement Departure, or DED — citing the country's unstable government under President Nicolás Maduro.

"Through force and fraud, the Maduro regime is responsible for the worst humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere in recent memory," according to the Jan. 19, 2021 memo. "A catastrophic economic crisis and shortages of basic goods and medicine have forced about five million Venezuelans to flee the country, often under dangerous conditions."

Following the Trump administration's 18-month DED designation, the Biden administration issued the TPS designation for Venezuela.

Noem has criticized the Biden administration for renewing TPS designation for Venezuelans and has pledged to review the designation of 17 countries that hold that status.

"This program has been abused and manipulated by the Biden administration, and that will no longer be allowed," Noem said during her confirmation hearing.

She made similar remarks in her Sunday interview with NBC.

"The (TPS) program has been abused, and it doesn't have integrity right now," Noem said. "And folks from Venezuela that have come into this country are members of TDA."

All TPS recipients — roughly 1 million — undergo a security screening and background check in their application.

"This administration's evaluating all of our programs to make sure they truly are something that's to the benefit of the United States, so that they're not to the benefit of criminals," Noem said.

Those 17 countries under TPS status include Afghanistan, Burma, Cameroon, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon, Nepal, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela and Yemen.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

SD opens bids in state-funded \$7 million cybersecurity effort to protect local governments

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 3:30 PM

South Dakota wants to hire a company to review local governments' vulnerabilities to hackers.

The request for proposals was announced Monday by Attorney General Marty Jackley's office. Madison-based Dakota State University (DSU) will review each company's pitch to "evaluate and optimize firewall configurations" across local government networks. Firewalls are designed to protect computer networks by monitoring traffic across them.

The winning bidder will tap into a \$7 million pool of state general funds earmarked by lawmakers last year for cybersecurity. The administration of former Gov. Kristi Noem twice declined to apply for the state's share of \$1 billion in federal grant funding for local cybersecurity. The 2024 bill that created the program came from Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison.

The "SecureSD: Cybersecurity for Municipalities and Counties Initiative" partners Jackley's office and DSU to address concerns about the security of the locally operated systems used to manage elections, tax collections, property records and a host of other sensitive information.

The program hired a director last fall who'd once overseen South Dakota's centralized education email system. Crabtree frequently lauded that system during last year's legislative session as a model to improve the scattershot setups found across South Dakota's city and county networks.

The website for SecureSD calls local governments "among the highest value targets for hackers due to the critical infrastructure and public services they must provide without interruption."

In South Dakota, a 2021 cyberattack in Brown County affected city services. In 2018, South Dakota sent electronic payments to someone posing as a vendor.

A 2019 ransomware attack in Hutchinson County temporarily held up \$4 million in county business by targeting receipts and records, according to the Yankton Press & Dakotan.

Attacks have risen sharply nationwide in recent years — 2023 saw a 10% spike in consumer complaints to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center, rising to 880,413. That's double the number of crimes reported in 2019, and the agency put the monetary losses at \$37.4 billion.

Companies can apply for the bid through Feb. 28.

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

Bill requiring public schools set policies for chaplain visits, services in SD passes committee

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 2:09 PM

Public school districts in South Dakota would be required to set policies to allow chaplains to serve within school buildings under legislation approved in committee Monday.

Lawmakers in several other states are introducing similar bills this year, said Rep. Al Novstrup, R-Aberdeen, the bill's primary sponsor.

A chaplain is a certified member of a religious body, such as a Christian denomination, who provides spiritual care for people outside of a religious organization. Chaplains serve in prisons, hospitals, and the military. Novstrup told lawmakers school board policies would spell out the definition of "chaplain," since neither state law nor the bill define the role.

Faith leaders are already involved in many South Dakota schools through clubs and other outreach efforts, but Novstrup told lawmakers the bill would formalize the effort. School districts would set their own policies, he said, including qualification requirements and parental consent.

Representatives of the state's public education system opposed the bill, saying it could force school districts to pay for chaplains instead of investing in other aspects of education or mental wellness. The American Civil Liberties Union also opposed the legislation, warning that, if passed, the law could violate the First Amendment and become the subject of lawsuits.

"Even well-intentioned chaplain policies will undermine the fundamental premise of our public education system and violate our longstanding First Amendment principles," said Samantha Chapman of the ACLU. "We urge you to reject this bill and seek better ways to serve public school students that do not involve unconstitutional, school-sponsored religion."

House Education Committee members debated the legality of the bill, referencing a provision in the state

constitution restricting the use of state funds for sectarian or religious institutions.

"The worst thing that happens is maybe there's a little more Christianity in schools," said Rep. Logan Manhart, R-Aberdeen, "and maybe some kids nowadays could use some of that."

The bill passed out of the House Education Committee 10-5. It'll head to the House floor next.

Another piece of legislation at the intersection of religion and public schools is a bill would mandate that public schools display the Ten Commandments in every classroom and teach their historical significance. That bill passed the Senate and heads to the House of Representatives.

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.

Trump postpones big tariffs against Canada and Mexico for one month

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 5:24 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Monday punted for one month his plans to impose sweeping tariffs against Mexico and Canada after both countries agreed to act on his demands to curb drug trafficking and illegal immigration into the United States.

The pauses came as Trump signed a trio of executive orders over the weekend that would kick-start a 25% tariff on Mexico, a 25% tariff on most goods from Canada and a 10% tariff on imports from China, beginning early Tuesday. The tariff against China remained in place Monday night.

Many economists have warned about the negative effects such broad tariffs could have on consumers.

Trump imposed the tariffs — a tax on goods that come into the country — in an effort to hold the three countries "accountable to their promises of halting illegal immigration and stopping poisonous fentanyl and other drugs from flowing into our country," according to a White House fact sheet.

Mexico, Canada and China are the United States' top trading partners. The three countries had responded to Trump's plans with their own retaliatory measures.

Two calls with Trudeau

In a post on social media, Trump said "Canada has agreed to ensure we have a secure Northern Border, and to finally end the deadly scourge of drugs like Fentanyl that have been pouring into our Country, killing hundreds of thousands of Americans, while destroying their families and communities all across our Country."

Trump held two calls Monday with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

After his second call with Trump, Trudeau said in a social media post that "Canada is implementing our \$1.3 billion border plan — reinforcing the border with new choppers, technology and personnel, enhanced coordination with our American partners, and increased resources to stop the flow of fentanyl."

He said nearly "10,000 frontline personnel are and will be working on protecting the border" and that the country would make new commitments to appoint a "Fentanyl Czar."

Canada will also "list cartels as terrorists, ensure 24/7 eyes on the border" and "launch a Canada- U.S. Joint Strike Force to combat organized crime, fentanyl and money laundering," Trudeau said.

"I have also signed a new intelligence directive on organized crime and fentanyl and we will be backing it with \$200 million," he said.

Negotiations with Mexico

In a social media post on Monday, Trump said he had a "very friendly conversation" with Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum and that the two agreed to "immediately pause the anticipated tariffs for a one

month period.”

Negotiations led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Commerce Secretary nominee Howard Lutnick and “high-level” Mexico representatives would take place during that time, Trump said.

Sheinbaum also agreed to “immediately supply” 10,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border in an effort to curb illegal immigration to the United States, in addition to fentanyl smuggling.

Senate Dems on tariff impacts

Meanwhile, Senate Democrats — including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York; Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota; Ron Wyden of Oregon; Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire; and Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland — underscored how Trump’s tariff plans could hit Americans’ pocketbooks.

“Trump is yet again rigging the same game for his billionaire friends while doing nothing to lower costs for American families,” Schumer said.

“These nonsense tariffs equate to a tax increase on the American people, and the president isn’t just randomly slapping on tariffs — he’s slapping consumers right where it hurts: their wallets,” he added.

Asked about any legislation the Senate Democrats were contemplating, Wyden said “everything is on the table at this point.”

“No president has ever used this particular statute to impose a tariff, and we’ve already got legislation from several Democrats to make sure that it can’t be used as a blank check for the president,” the Oregon Democrat said.

The senators also brought in Ernie Tedeschi, director of economics at the Budget Lab at Yale, which has conducted its own analysis on the economic and fiscal effects of Trump’s tariff plans regarding Mexico, Canada and China.

“We found that the average price increase was the equivalent of about \$1,250 per household in America,” Tedeschi said.

“Now bear in mind that that’s just an average — tariffs are not an equitable tax — they pinch the middle class more than they pinch upper-income households.”

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.

Members of Congress refused entry to USAID agency shuttered by Trump administration

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 3:23 PM

WASHINGTON — Democratic members of Congress were denied entry Monday to the U.S. Agency for International Development, after billionaire Elon Musk, empowered by President Donald Trump, worked to close the nation’s humanitarian arm.

Senators and House members rallied outside the agency’s shuttered headquarters in Washington, D.C., vowing to fight Musk’s actions over the weekend. That included sending individuals from Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, to forcefully access USAID’s computer systems and files.

“We are not going to let this injustice happen. Congress created this agency with the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and if you want to change it, you got to change that law,” Rep. Gerry Connolly of Virginia told a large crowd that gathered outside the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, where the agency is housed.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen told a swarm of journalists and USAID employees that the Trump administration’s action against USAID was “illegal” and that he had been speaking to lawyers over the weekend.

“This is a clear violation of our law,” the Maryland Democrat told the crowd, which was dotted with homemade protest signs reading “USAID Must Be Saved” and “USAID Saves Lives.”

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 20 of 79

Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii, who also joined the press conference, announced afterward that he would place a blanket hold on all of Trump's State Department nominees going forward.

Connolly, Van Hollen, Schatz and several other Democratic lawmakers, including Reps. Jamie Raskin and Johnny Olszewski of Maryland, Don Beyer of Virginia, and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, were denied entry to USAID's office following the outdoor press conference.

Employees received emails and text blasts telling them not to report to the building Monday.

Agency manages \$40B in U.S. spending

The workforce of roughly 10,000 — two-thirds of which work overseas — manages projects and distributes funds that reach approximately 130 countries. The agency was appropriated roughly \$40 billion in fiscal year 2023.

The agency, by statute, is an "independent establishment" and "under direct authority and policy guidance of the Secretary of State," according to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Speaking to reporters in El Salvador Monday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he is now the acting administrator for USAID.

Rubio told reporters that USAID "is involved in programs that run counter to what we're trying to do in our national strategy" in any given country.

"It's been 20 or 30 years where people have tried to reform it, and it refuses to reform, it refuses to cooperate," Rubio said.

Early Monday, Musk said during a live conversation on X Spaces that Trump "agreed we should shut it down," The Associated Press reported. Recordings of live X Spaces are not automatically publicly available afterward. Musk was joined by GOP Sens. Joni Ernst of Iowa and Mike Lee of Utah during the live chat.

The agency's website, USAID.gov, and its X social media account went dark Saturday.

Democrats demand update from Rubio

Individuals identifying themselves as DOGE personnel entered USAID headquarters over the weekend to access the agency's computers and files, CNN reported. At least two USAID security officials were put on administrative leave after initially refusing to grant access.

Trump signed an executive order on his first day in office establishing DOGE for the purposes of "modernizing Federal technology and software to maximize governmental efficiency and productivity."

Democrats on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations have asked Rubio for an "immediate update" on who accessed USAID's system and files on Saturday and whether they reviewed classified and personally identifiable information.

"While some of the individuals purported to have security clearances, it is unclear whether those who accessed secure classified facilities had proper clearance or what they were seeking to access. We understand that the security guards present at the facility were threatened when they raised questions," Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's top Democrat, wrote in a letter co-signed by all Democrats on the panel.

Shaheen said the committee, which has jurisdiction over monitoring international aid, was not notified that Trump's Department of Government Efficiency was planning to visit USAID's headquarters.

"Following this incident, the senior management of the Office of Security, which secures USAID personnel and facilities and safeguards national security information, were placed on administrative leave. The potential access of sensitive, even classified, files, which may include the personally identifiable information (PII) of Americans working with USAID, and this incident as a whole, raises deep concerns about the protection and safeguarding of matters related to U.S. national security," Shaheen wrote.

DOGE representative Katie Miller wrote on X Sunday that "No classified material was accessed without proper security clearances."

Trump told journalists Sunday that USAID is "run by radical lunatics, and we're getting them out and we'll make a decision."

In a post on his social media platform X Sunday, Musk wrote that the agency is “a criminal organization.” States Newsroom reached out to the White House and the State Department for comment. Just hours into his presidency, Trump signed an executive order to halt foreign assistance programs for 90 days.

Work stops at consumer finance watchdog

Newly installed U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has ordered the stoppage of numerous activities at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Rulemaking, enforcement actions, litigation and public communication are now halted, according to a memo from Bessent to employees that was obtained by NPR and Politico.

Trump appointed Bessent as the bureau’s acting director after dismissing its former head, Rohit Chopra, a Biden appointee.

The independent bureau within the Federal Reserve system was established by Congress in 2010 as a safeguard for consumers following the Great Recession.

Ashley Murray covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Bill eliminating out-of-pocket breast cancer screening costs fails in committee

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 1:34 PM

A bill intended to eliminate out-of-pocket expenses for breast cancer screenings in South Dakota failed in an 11-2 vote during a legislative committee meeting Monday at the Capitol in Pierre.

Aberdeen Republican Rep. Brandei Schaeftbauer introduced the bill, drawing on personal experience paying for screenings after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2017. The bill would have prohibited health insurers from charging patients for preventive and diagnostic breast cancer screenings.

She urged lawmakers to pass the bill “so all women and men, no matter what their medical history or physiology is, can be treated the same on the same health insurance plan and get the preventative screening their medical professionals deem medically necessary due to their uniqueness as a human being.”

Doctors sometimes recommend more intensive tests, such as ultrasounds or MRIs, for patients who are at high risk or if patients have dense breasts, making it difficult to differentiate between tumors and tissue.

Schaeftbauer and other proponents said the legislation could increase accessibility and affordability for South Dakotans who require such screenings. They also said the preventative measures would reduce health care costs overall because screenings can catch cancer earlier.

More than 25 states have passed similar laws.

Opponents, including insurance companies and business representatives, warned lawmakers that the bill could make health care coverage more expensive for business owners and South Dakotans.

“We are concerned that many of our businesses who are currently scraping by and struggling to cover the rising costs of health insurance will be forced to make a difficult decision to end coverage for their employees,” said Garth Wadsworth, a lobbyist representing Elevate Rapid City.

The bill is unlikely to be resurrected during the 2025 session. A similar bill failed to clear the committee last year.

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.

Federal politicians could face a limit on money transfers to their state committees

Sponsor says proposed legislation would affect members of Congress who decide to run for governor

BY: SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 3, 2025 11:31 AM

PIERRE — Federal officeholders who seek a state office — such as a member of Congress who decides to run for governor — would face a limit on the money they could transfer from their federal campaign account to their state account if a legislative idea becomes law.

Rep. Spencer Gosch, R-Glenham, proposed the measure Monday at the state Capitol. It would put a \$10,000 annual cap on federal-to-state transfers.

Gosch convinced a legislative committee to amend the new language into an existing campaign finance bill.

"If we're already talking about limiting unfettered access to money, well, there's another loophole that allows anyone unfettered access to money," Gosch told South Dakota Searchlight.

He confirmed that the amendment would affect U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, if Johnson decides to act on his long-rumored interest in running for governor. The balance in Johnson's federal campaign committee is \$5.2 million.

Gosch also answered affirmatively when asked if the limit would have prevented then-U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem from transferring more than \$1 million from her federal committee to her state committee when she ran successfully for governor in 2018.

The bill that Gosch amended is from state Sen. Michael Rohl, R-Aberdeen, who has proposed several campaign finance reforms this legislative session. Rohl's bill would close a campaign finance loophole exposed last year when Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden reported a \$100,000 contribution to his Dakota First Action committee.

The contribution exceeded the state's \$10,000 annual limit on individual contributions to political action committees. So Doeden amended the report, reclassifying the contribution as a loan. State law allows loans to be forgiven, effectively providing a "pathway" to ignore campaign finance limits, Rohl told a legislative committee Monday.

"This essentially got rid of campaign finance limits in South Dakota," he said.

Rohl's bill says that any loan, when combined with contributions from the same source, could not exceed contribution limits in state law. In other words, in the case of Doeden, he would have been limited to a combined \$10,000 of annual contributions and loans to his political action committee.

The original text remains in the bill alongside Gosch's amendment. The House State Affairs Committee sent the amended bill to the full House of Representatives. Passage there would trigger a conference committee with the Senate, to iron out the differences between the amended bill and the original version approved by senators.

The committee also sent another Rohl bill to the House that would require candidates to file pre-primary reports of their fundraising and spending even if they're not involved in a primary race. Current law exempts candidates from filing reports if they don't have a primary race, but still allows them to raise and spend money that doesn't get reported until the next deadline.

"It helps hide campaign finance donations for friends and allies," Rohl said.

A third Rohl bill awaiting action by the committee proposes new restrictions on contributions from inactive candidate committees.

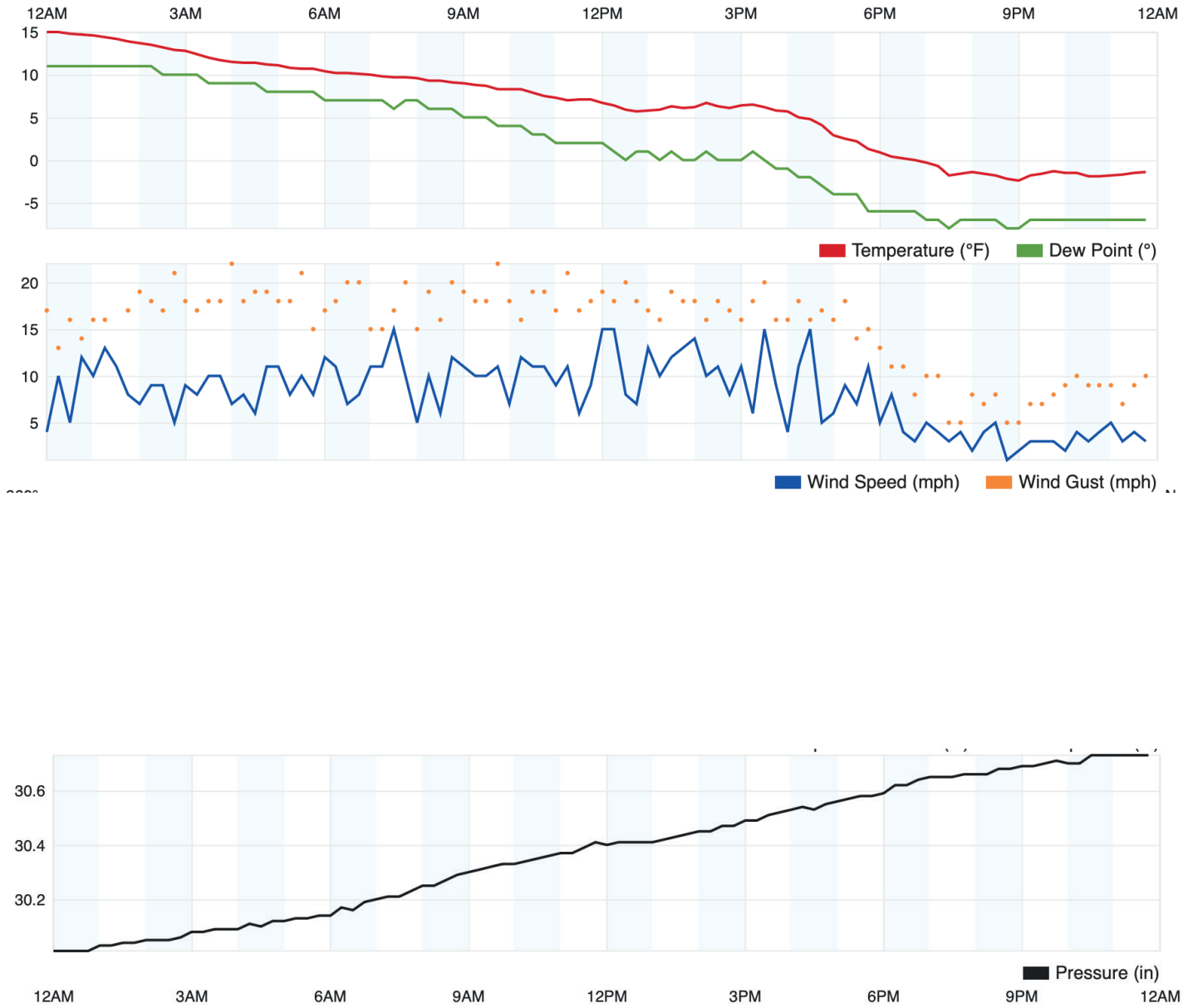
Committees associated with politicians who are retired or no longer seeking office sometimes retain significant balances and can make unlimited contributions. The bill would impose the same contribution limits that active committees face.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 23 of 79

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 24 of 79

Today



High: 12 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 4 °F

Mostly Cloudy

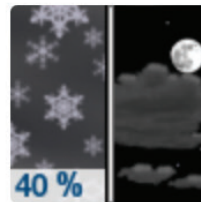
Wednesday



High: 27 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Chance
Snow

Wednesday
Night



Low: 5 °F

Chance Snow
then Partly
Cloudy

Thursday



High: 22 °F

Sunny



February 3, 2025
2:24 PM

Through Mid-Week

Tuesday



Highs: 7-18°F
Lows: 1-12°F

Wednesday



Highs: 22-40°F
Lows: 2-11°F

Light snow mainly in
north central and
northeast SD, west
central MN

Thursday



Highs: 22-34°F
Lows: 0-14°F

The next few days will be relatively quiet with highs warming slightly after Tuesday. Wednesday will bring a chance (20-40%) of snow to north central and northeast SD along with west central MN. Accumulations are expected to be around an inch or less.

Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 25 of 79



Snow Friday Night Into Saturday

February 4, 2025
4:04 AM

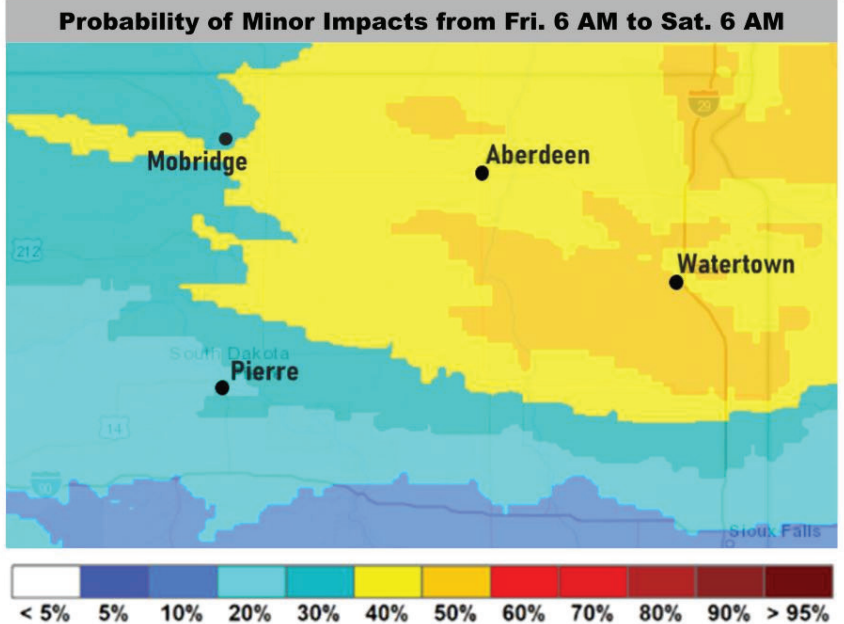
Snow may bring minor impacts to central and NE South Dakota & western Minnesota

Key Messages

- Snow is expected Friday night into Saturday morning.
- There is currently a 50-70% chance of 2 inches of snow or more and a 30-50% chance of 4 inches of snow or more through Saturday morning over central and NE South Dakota.
- **There is still a decent amount on uncertainty in the snow amount and timing of the heaviest snowfall.** Continue to monitor the forecast for updates in the coming days.
- Plan on slippery road conditions Saturday morning and use caution if you have to drive.

Minor Impacts

- Expect a few inconveniences to daily life.
- Winter driving conditions. **Use caution while driving.**



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Snow/Sleet Possible Wednesday

February 4, 2025
3:56 AM

Light snow over northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota

Key Messages

- Light snow may fall Wednesday afternoon and evening.
- Less than an inch of accumulation is expected over northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota.
- There is a low chance that sleet will fall at times, mainly during the afternoon.
- **Roads may become slippery, especially if sleet is falling.**
- In addition to the snow, strong winds of 20 mph gusting to 30 mph will be present over central SD on Wednesday and over both central and northeastern SD, as well as western MN on Thursday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 26 of 79

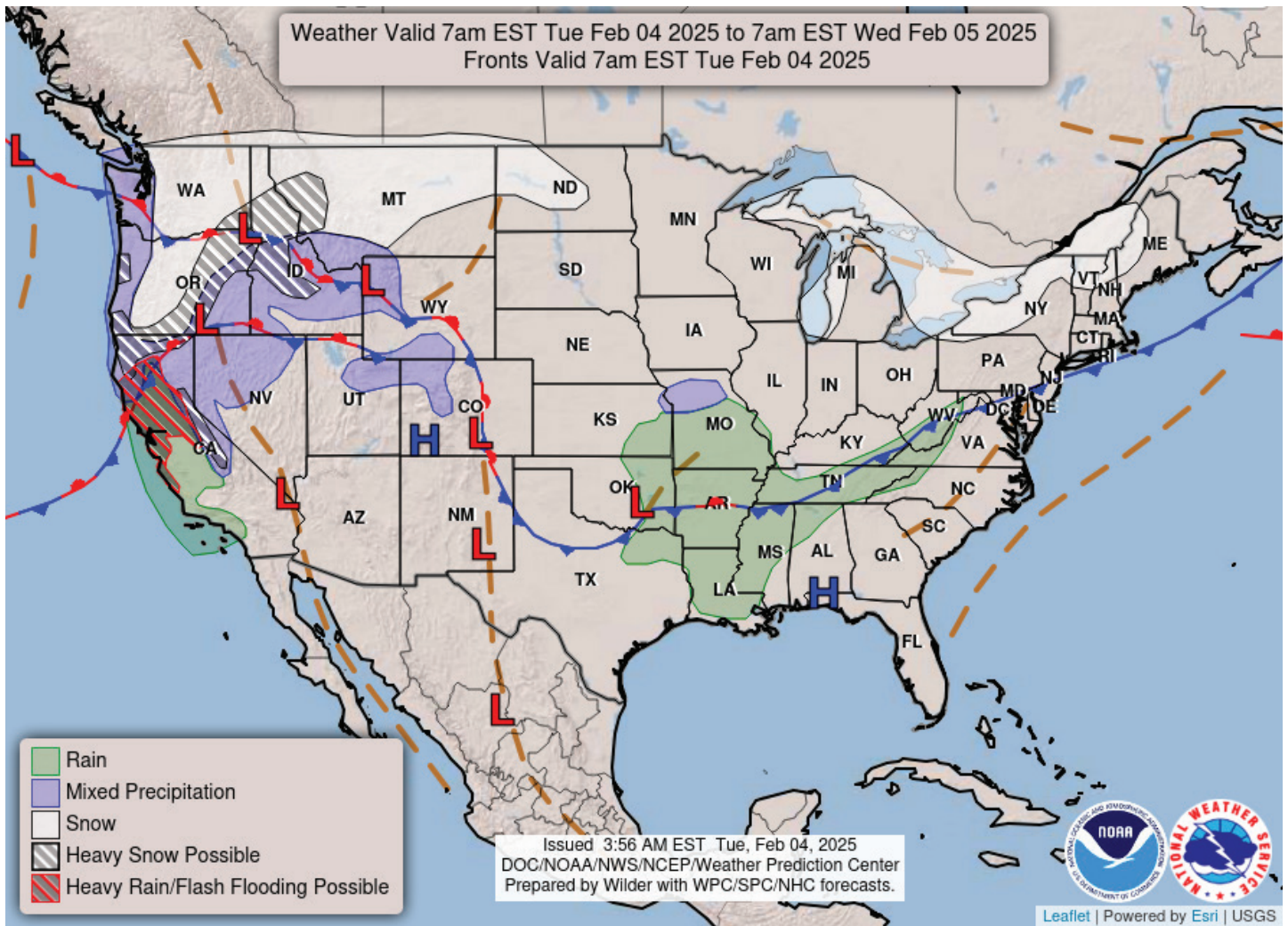
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 15 °F at 12:02 AM
Low Temp: -2 °F at 8:52 P
Wind: 22 mph at 3:58 AM
Precip: : Snow: 2" - Moisture Content: 0.14

Day length: 9 hours, 58 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 55 in 2005
Record Low: -36 in 1893
Average High: 26
Average Low: 3
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.08
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.63
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:45:30 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:45:50 am



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 27 of 79

Today in Weather History

February 4, 1984: A fast-moving blizzard pounded the northeast and east-central with light snow and raging winds. Snow amounts were less than 2 inches region-wide. As the storm progressed, temperatures dropped thirty degrees in three hours as winds gusted to 70 mph. Fierce winds struck quickly, plummeting visibilities to zero, and made travel difficult in a matter of minutes. No travel was advised across much of the area. Hundreds of travelers became stranded in the white-out, and the highway crews were pulled off the road to wait for decreasing winds. There were also some spotty power outages.

1842: A dreadful tornado passed over Mayfield, Kirkland, and other Cuyahoga and Lake Counties in Ohio. According to the Cleveland Herald, no less than 30 houses, barns, and buildings were entirely demolished or very much shattered. A "report from Kirtland says that one man and one child are dead."

1924: In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 20.3 inches of snow fell in 24 hours. This ranks as the most snowfall in 24 hours since 1884. This storm caused over \$1 million in damage. Streetcar and train service crippled. Snowdrifts of 8 to 10 feet high were common, along with much ice on trees and wires. Schools were closed, and several plate glass windows were broken.

1961 - The third great snowstorm of the winter season struck the northeastern U.S. Cortland NY received 40 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Gales lashed the northern Pacific coast and the coast of northern New England. A storm in the central U.S. produced five inches of snow at Rapid City SD. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow from the Upper Ohio Valley to New England, with up to 12 inches reported in Vermont and New Hampshire. Strong northerly winds in the Upper Midwest produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Two dozen cities in the south central and northwestern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. The low of 14 below zero at Boise ID was a February record. A winter storm continued in the southwestern U.S. Alta UT reported 49 inches of snow in four days, Wolf Creek CO reported 66 inches in six days, including 28 inches in 24 hours, and up to 84 inches buried the ski resorts of northern New Mexico in three days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the northeastern U.S. Snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 13 inches at Gorham, with 11 inches reported at Portland. Totals in New Hampshire ranged up to 14 inches at Franconia, with 13 inches reported at Portsmouth. A mixture of snow, sleet and freezing rain caused numerous traffic accidents in eastern New York State resulting in three deaths and fourteen injuries. Subzero cold also gripped parts of the northeastern U.S. Caribou ME and Houlton ME reported morning lows of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: A massive nor'easter pounded areas from the southern Mid-Atlantic to northern New England. It would be the only significant storm in the 94-95 winter season. Over 20 inches of snow buried parts of upstate New York. Wind chills dropped as cold as 40 degrees below zero. Behind the storm, arctic air crossing the relatively warm waters of the Great Lakes produced intense lake effect squalls for nearly two weeks from the 4th through the 14th. Snowfall totals for the storm ranged from near two to seven feet. During the storm east of Lake Ontario, snow was falling at the incredible rate of five inches an hour! The heavy snow combined with strong winds produced whiteouts and hazardous driving. Actual storm totals downwind of Lake Erie included: Erie County: West Seneca 39 inches, Orchard Park 36 inches, Cheektowaga 36 inches, Colden 32 inches, and Buffalo Airport 31 inches; Genesee County: Corfu 38 inches; Chautauqua County: Sinclairville 27 inches and Jamestown 15 inches. Downwind of Lake Ontario, storm totals included: Oswego County: Palermo 85 inches, Fulton 60 inches, and Oswego 46 inches; Lewis County: Montague 66 inches, Highmarket 48 inches, and Lowville 36 inches; Cayuga County: Fairhaven 36 inches, Wayne County: Wolcott 22 inches; and Jefferson County: Adams 47 inches.

2004 - 7.15 inches of rain deluges Pinson, AL, setting an all-time record rainfall over 24 hours for the town. The Weather Doctor

2007 - Kahului reports a minimum temperature of 54°F, a daily low temperature record for the date. The Weather Doctor

2011 - A winter storm settled four to six inches of snow over northern Texas, including Dallas, just days before the Super Bowl between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Green Bay Packers.



THE BEST ADVICE EVER

Derek Jeter, formerly a New York Yankee, is acknowledged by some to be one of the greatest shortstops who ever played baseball. One day a reporter asked him, "What's the best advice your father ever gave you?"

Came the quick reply, "Don't let anyone ever outwork you!"

It was hard, relentless work over many years that led Jeter to the pinnacle of his profession. And, it is the same hard work that kept him there and served as a model that many seek to follow. His efforts have rewarded him lavishly and brought him friends, fame, and fortune.

There are some of us, however, who work just as hard but get relatively little recognition. No one sees us and no one knows how hard we try. We may even wonder if what we do really matters to anyone. We ask: "Does what I do make a difference?"

Yes, it does – at least to God. One day He will reward us personally in front of everyone in heaven for the good we have done for others in His Name.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to realize that You will reward each one of us for all that we have ever done. Give us a desire to develop every gift we have! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Ephesians 6:7-8

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

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 29 of 79

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent www.397news.com Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$15.98
- 3 Months \$26.63
- 6 Months \$31.95
- 9 Months \$42.60
- 12 Months \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 30 of 79



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.31.25

9 28 48 56 63 2

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$77,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 19 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.03.25

10 33 35 49 51 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$23,290,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 34 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.03.25

3 24 28 33 35 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 49 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.01.25

2 5 17 24 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$26,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 49 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.03.25

7 38 39 42 55 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.03.25

12 37 47 54 60 17

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$113,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 31 of 79

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

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 32 of 79

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Bison 68, Edgemont 42

Britton-Hecla 55, Northwestern 38

Colman-Egan 63, Chester 30

Corsica/Stickney 45, Bon Homme 43

De Smet 66, Canistota 39

Gregory 53, Winner 39

Howard 73, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 20

James Valley Christian School 77, Ethan 68

Milbank 50, Elk Point-Jefferson 30

Waverly-South Shore 56, Arlington 25

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 64, Tiospa Zina 26

Dell Rapids 65, Baltic 35

Ethan 74, Paton-Churdan, Iowa 13

Groton 54, Florence-Henry 18

Howard 49, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 37

Waubay/Summit 43, Langford 32

Wilmot 73, Ortonville, Minn. 22

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Dupree vs. Newell, ccd.

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

South Dakota birthing risks rise as another hospital ends service

By BART PFANKUCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

The elimination of birthing services at Winner Regional Health hospital on Saturday will force dozens of expectant mothers in a wide swath of south-central South Dakota to drive one to two hours on rural highways to give birth under the care of a doctor.

Ending the hospital's labor and delivery services came only after "a lot of tears and sleepless nights," but the difficult decision was ultimately the correct one, said hospital CEO Brian Williams.

When all factors were considered – especially the high cost of the service and a lack of qualified providers – the decision to end birthing services at the small, independent hospital boiled down to patient risk and safety concerns, he said.

"The unfortunate thing is we weren't doing the safest things for everybody involved," which included expectant mothers and their babies, Williams said of the hospital that delivered 107 babies in 2024. "This was a horrible decision for us and for the community."

For maternity care, traveling long distances on country highways requires more planning and more time, two things that can be hard to find during the uncertain hours surrounding a delivery. An hourlong drive or more also creates greater risk to both mother and child if any complications arise.

"Anytime someone has to travel in pre-labor or active labor, it could cause a negative outcome," Williams said. "Obviously the closer you are (to a birthing hospital) the better off you'll be."

'Maternity deserts' expanding in SD, US

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 33 of 79

Health experts across the country are increasingly concerned that the reduction in birthing sites, especially in rural areas, will lead to more health complications and even deaths among mothers and children.

"Access to quality maternity care is a critical component of maternal health and positive birth outcomes, especially in light of the high rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity in the U.S.," according to an exhaustive report by the March of Dimes.

Ending birthing services in Winner, which Williams hopes will be temporary, adds to a growing "maternity desert" in South Dakota. The state ranks second-worst in the nation for percentage of counties without delivery services or obstetric care. North Dakota has the highest number nationally, with 74% of counties without birthing services, and South Dakota has 56% of counties without the service, according to the March of Dimes.

Winner also becomes the latest rural hospital in the U.S. to end delivery services, joining more than 200 others that have ended the service over the past decade, including the hospital in Sisseton, in northeast South Dakota, as reported previously by News Watch.

According to the March of Dimes report, more than 9% of South Dakota women live more than an hour from the nearest birthing hospital, compared to 1% nationally. Furthermore, 16% of new mothers in South Dakota did not receive adequate prenatal care, according to the report.

The shortage of women's health care providers is expected to worsen in coming years.

According to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. will face a shortage of about 5,200 obstetrician-gynecologists by 2030 and South Dakota will see a shortage of 30 providers, roughly 25% fewer than what is needed.

Costs, personnel are barriers at rural hospitals

The hospital in Winner faces many of the same challenges as other rural hospitals across the country.

Williams said he has had great difficulty recruiting and retaining doctors in the city of fewer than 3,000 people, especially those who specialize in obstetrics and gynecology or family physicians who are certified to perform deliveries.

The greatest barrier to continue offering delivery services was a lack of qualified personnel, as delivering a baby requires a trained OB-GYN or family doctor and two nurses. That staffing level can be difficult to reach, especially when a birth occurs overnight or on weekends, Williams said.

The costs of delivery are also a major hurdle to providing birthing services, he said. With a high percentage of expectant mothers at Winner Regional Health hospital on Medicaid or other government insurance plans that typically do not cover the full costs, the hospital loses thousands of dollars on almost every birth, Williams said.

On average, it costs \$65,000 a day to operate the hospital, and the ongoing nursing and physician shortage forced the hospital to spend about \$1.2 million a year on temporary traveling practitioners, many in the OB-GYN field, he said.

The region of South Dakota served by Winner is an especially bad place for a new maternity desert, according to the U.S. Census. The six counties surrounding the hospital all have birth rates above the state average, with Todd County, home to the Rosebud Indian Reservation, among the highest.

South Dakota also has a high rate of maternity complications and challenges compared to other states and the nation. The state infant mortality rate of 7.8% in 2023 was 44% higher than the national average of 5.4%.

According to a recent South Dakota Department of Health report, 7.1% of babies born in 2022 were low birth weight, 2% of mothers had no prenatal care and 30% of mothers were on Medicaid or other government insurance programs, including the Indian Health Service.

About 13% of babies suffered from abnormalities and 10% of infants required care in a neonatal intensive care unit in 2022, the report said. South Dakota only has three NICUs, two in Sioux Falls and one in Rapid City, according to neonatal0gysolutions.com.

Abortion ban a disincentive to practice in SD

South Dakota's abortion law also makes it more difficult to recruit and retain physicians, said Amy Kelley, M.D., an OB-GYN at Sanford Health in Sioux Falls.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 34 of 79

The strict abortion ban – which allows for medically necessary abortions only to save the life of a mother – is turning away some delivery doctors, she said. Many worry that ambiguity in the law about exactly what constitutes a threat to the life of a mother could put them at risk of a criminal charge if they conduct an abortion during an emergency, Kelley said.

“We shouldn’t have to risk our license or our freedom when conducting a medically necessary procedure,” she said.

Kelley, who works on state affairs for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and also attends national conferences, said she’s heard numerous delivery doctors across the country say they won’t practice in states where abortion bans could put them in legal jeopardy.

“It is not hyperbole,” she said. “People in this field are repeatedly saying, ‘Why would I come there with the laws the way they are?’”

Avery Olson, 30, is a Rapid City native who graduated from medical school at the University of South Dakota. Olson is nearing the end of her medical residency as an OB-GYN in Hawaii.

Olson, who delivered her first baby as a medical student at Winner Regional Health a few years ago, said she hasn’t decided where to practice, and added that her partner’s ongoing job search will also play a role in where they decide to live and work.

Olson really wants to return to her home state but is concerned about the less-than-supportive environment for women’s health and the ambiguity in the current laws surrounding maternity in South Dakota.

“I miss home a lot because I’m a South Dakota girl through and through,” she said. “But it (the current legal and political environment) would make it easier for me to accept that I would go to a different place.”

Worsening climate for women’s health care

After more than 30 years of providing women’s health care in western South Dakota, and delivering more than 9,000 babies along the way, OB-GYN Marvin Buehner, M.D., of Rapid City decided to retire in late 2024.

Buehner, 67, had hoped to sell his practice, where he built a reputation for kindness, quality care and a devotion to helping women in underserved populations, including Native Americans.

While the need for birthing and other services remains extremely high, and his practice was highly profitable, Buehner tried to sell his practice but was ultimately forced to close Black Hills Obstetrics and Gynecology for good.

“We had a great reputation and more patients than we could see,” Buehner told News Watch. “But nobody wants to come to South Dakota, and you can’t really blame them.”

Serving as an OB-GYN is a tough job, he said, given the long hours, being on call 24/7 for several days in a row and caring for patients who often lack insurance or are on Medicaid. But things have worsened in recent years due to what Buehner said increasingly feels like a hostile political and cultural environment toward women and women’s health care in the state and country.

“It’s a cultural problem that is trickling down into the mechanics of health care, and women’s health care is not only a low priority, it’s also a target,” he said.

The current law surrounding medically necessary abortions does not jibe with established medical reasons for terminating a pregnancy in a crisis situation, Buehner said, which makes practicing in states with a near-complete ban more stressful and mentally draining.

Buehner is a co-chair of the group Doctors for Freedom, which formed in 2024 to support a statewide ballot measure to legalize first-trimester abortions. The measure failed in November.

“An abortion is a tragedy every time,” he said. “But the reasons a woman or a doctor would choose to end a pregnancy are multifactorial and can’t be easily simplified.”

Buehner said he is pained to leave the medical field at such a devastating time for women’s health. The shortage of OB-GYNs has led to reduced rates of prenatal health care, especially in rural areas and among lower-income populations, including those on reservations, he said.

“That is increasing the maternal mortality rate, which is already abysmal in South Dakota,” he said.

Buehner said he sees little hope that women’s health care will improve anytime soon in South Dakota. And yet, he believes the hard work of individual providers, and a potential grassroots return to greater

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 35 of 79

support for women's health care, will someday reshape the landscape into a positive future.

"It's the dark of night right now," he said. "But at some point, there will be a dawn or a movement and a realization that this isn't working and that we need to change."

China counters with tariffs on US products. It will also investigate Google

By KEN MORITSUGU and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China countered President Donald Trump's across-the-board tariffs on Chinese products with tariffs on select U.S. imports Tuesday, as well as announcing an antitrust investigation into Google and other trade measures.

U.S. tariffs on products from Canada and Mexico were also set to go into effect Tuesday before Trump agreed to a 30-day pause as the two countries acted to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the next few days.

The Chinese response was "measured," said John Gong, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. "I don't think they want the trade war escalating," he said. "And they see this example from Canada and Mexico and probably they are hoping for the same thing."

This isn't the first round of tit-for-tat actions between the two countries. China and the U.S. had engaged in a trade war in 2018 when Trump raised tariffs on Chinese goods and China responded in kind.

This time, analysts said, China is much better prepared to counter, with the government announcing a slew of measures that cut across different sectors of the economy, from energy to individual U.S. companies.

Counter tariffs

China said it would implement a 15% tariff on coal and liquefied natural gas products as well as a 10% tariff on crude oil, agricultural machinery and large-engine cars imported from the U.S. The tariffs would take effect next Monday.

"The U.S.'s unilateral tariff increase seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organization," the State Council Tariff Commission said in a statement. "It is not only unhelpful in solving its own problems, but also damages normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the U.S."

The impact on U.S. exports may be limited. Though the U.S. is the biggest exporter of liquid natural gas globally, it does not export much to China. In 2023, the U.S. exported 173,247 million cubic feet of LNG to China, representing about 2.3% of total natural gas exports, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

China imported only about 700,000 cars overall last year, and the leading importers are from Europe and Japan, said Bill Russo, the founder of the Automobile Limited consultancy in Shanghai.

Further export controls on critical minerals

China announced export controls on several elements critical to the production of modern high-tech products.

They include tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum and indium, many of which are designated as critical minerals by the U.S. Geological Survey, meaning they are essential to U.S. economic or national security that have supply chains vulnerable to disruption.

The export controls are in addition to ones China placed in December on key elements such as gallium.

"They have a much more developed export control regime," Philip Luck, an economist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and former State Department official, said at a panel discussion on Monday.

"We depend on them for a lot of critical minerals: gallium, germanium, graphite, a host of others," he said. "So ... they could put some significant harm on our economy."

US companies also impacted

In addition, China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Tuesday it is investigating Google on suspicion of violating antitrust laws. The announcement did not mention the tariffs but came just minutes after Trump's 10% tariffs on China were to take effect.

It is unclear how the probe will affect Google's operations. The company has long faced complaints from Chinese smartphone makers over its business practices surrounding the Android operating system, Gong said.

Otherwise, Google has a limited presence in China, and its search engine is blocked in the country like most other Western platforms. Google exited the Chinese market in 2010 after refusing to comply with censorship requests from the Chinese government and following a series of cyberattacks on the company.

Google did not immediately comment.

The Commerce Ministry also placed two American companies on an unreliable entities list: PVH Group, which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and Illumina, which is a biotechnology company with offices in China. The listing could bar them from engaging in China-related import or export activities and from making new investments in the country.

Beijing began investigating PVH Group in September last year over "improper Xinjiang-related behavior" after the company allegedly boycotted the use of Xinjiang cotton.

The response from China appears calculated and measured, said Stephen Dover, chief market strategist and head of the Franklin Templeton Institute. However, the world is braced for further impact.

"A risk is that this is the beginning of a tit-for-tat trade war, which could result in lower GDP growth everywhere, higher U.S. inflation, a stronger dollar and upside pressure on U.S. interest rates," Dover said.

Middle East latest: At least 6 injured in attack in Israel-occupied West Bank; assailant is killed

By The Associated Press undefined

At least six people were injured in a shooting attack at a checkpoint in the Israeli-occupied West Bank early Tuesday morning, according to the Israeli military and area hospitals.

The Israeli military said an attacker fired at soldiers at a checkpoint in the village of Tayasir, which is in the northern West Bank. In a tense exchange, soldiers returned fire and the attacker was killed, the military added.

Israeli hospitals said they had received a total of six people injured in the shooting attack. Israeli media reported the injured are soldiers and at least two of them were critically injured.

Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad militant group praised the attack but neither claimed responsibility for it.

Israel has carried out an extensive operation in nearby Jenin over the past weeks to clamp down on what Israel said is militant activity in the city, as soldiers and armored bulldozers have caused widespread damage and destroyed scores of homes.

Palestinian health officials have not released a total death toll, but say Israeli fire has killed at least 20 Palestinians since the start of the raid.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of the Gaza Strip ignited the war there.

Here's the latest:

Turkey will host 15 Palestinian prisoners released as part of ceasefire

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's state-run news agency says the country will host 15 Palestinian prisoners who were released and deported as part of the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel.

The Turkish intelligence organization, MIT, is taking steps to "facilitate" the arrival of the 15 Palestinians from Egypt, the Anadolu Agency said Tuesday.

Arrangements were made to ensure the Palestinians can live "peacefully and securely" in Turkey, Anadolu said.

The news agency did not name the Palestinians that Ankara was preparing to take in. Those who were deported have been convicted of serious crimes.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 37 of 79

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Sunday that Turkey was prepared to support the Palestinian people, including providing medical treatment for those wounded in the conflict and taking in released prisoners who would be deported from the region.

Unlike its Western allies, Turkey does not consider Hamas to be a terror organization. A strong critic of Israel's military actions in Gaza, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has hosted several Hamas officials over the years.

Family members of Thai hostages released by Hamas visit them in Israeli hospital

JERUSALEM — Family members of Thai hostages released by Hamas last week after over 15 months of captivity in the Gaza Strip have visited them at the Israeli hospital where they are recuperating.

The Thai Embassy in Israel said the family members flew in on Tuesday and met with the freed hostages at the Shamir Medical Center.

Hamas released five Thai hostages last week along with three Israeli captives who were freed as part of a ceasefire agreement in exchange for 110 Palestinian prisoners.

Hamas militants kidnapped 31 Thai nationals along with scores of Israelis and a few other foreigners during the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel that ignited the war.

Tens of thousands of Thai farmers work in Israel, where they can make higher wages than they can at home.

Many lived in compounds on the outskirts of southern Israeli farming communities and towns that were overrun by Hamas-led militants.

During an earlier ceasefire in November 2023, 23 Thai nationals were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran.

According to Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 46 Thais have been killed during the conflict, including two Thai citizens who were killed on Oct. 7, 2023 and their bodies taken into Gaza.

Trump and Netanyahu hold talks as US president warns 'no guarantees' fragile peace in Gaza will hold

By AAMER MADHANI and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu are set to meet Tuesday as the Israeli prime minister faces competing pressure from his right-wing coalition to end a temporary truce against Hamas militants in Gaza and from war-weary Israelis who want the remaining hostages home and the 15-month conflict to end.

Trump is guarded about the long-term prospects for the truce, even as he takes credit for pressuring Hamas and Israel into the hostage and ceasefire agreement that went into effect the day before he returned to office last month.

"I have no guarantees that the peace is going to hold," Trump told reporters on Monday.

The leaders' talks are expected to touch on a long-sought Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization deal and concerns about Iran's nuclear program, but hammering out the second phase of the hostage deal will be at the top of the agenda.

Netanyahu's arrival in Washington for the first foreign leader visit of Trump's second term comes as the prime minister's popular support is lagging. Netanyahu is in the middle of weeklong testimony in an ongoing corruption trial that centers on allegations he exchanged favors with media moguls and wealthy associates. He has decried the accusations and said he is the victim of a "witch hunt."

Being seen with Trump, who is popular in Israel, could help distract the public from the trial and boost Netanyahu's standing.

It's Netanyahu's first travel outside Israel since the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants in November for him, his former defense minister and Hamas' slain military chief, accusing them of crimes against humanity during the war in Gaza. The U.S. does not recognize the ICC's authority over its citizens or territory.

Netanyahu and Trump's Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff on Monday began the daunting work of brokering

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 38 of 79

the next phase of a ceasefire agreement.

Netanyahu said in statement that the meeting with Witkoff and U.S. National Security Adviser Michael Waltz was "positive and friendly."

The Israeli leader said he would send a delegation to Qatar to continue indirect talks with Hamas that are being mediated by the Gulf Arab country, the first confirmation that those negotiations would continue. Netanyahu also said he would convene his security Cabinet to discuss Israel's demands for the next phase of the ceasefire when he returns to Israel at the end of the week.

Netanyahu is under intense pressure from hard-right members of his governing coalition to abandon the ceasefire and resume fighting in Gaza to eliminate Hamas. Bezalel Smotrich, one of Netanyahu's key partners, vows to topple the government if the war isn't relaunched, a step that could lead to early elections.

Hamas, which has reasserted control over Gaza since the ceasefire began last month, has said it will not release hostages in the second phase without an end to the war and Israeli forces' full withdrawal. Netanyahu, meanwhile, maintains that Israel is committed to victory over Hamas and the return of all hostages captured in the Oct. 7, 2023 attack that triggered the war.

Mira Resnick, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for Israeli and Palestinian affairs, said Trump may "have little patience for political woes of Netanyahu if it gets in the way of the broader goals of this administration."

"The president started his term by saying that he wanted the ceasefire to be in place by Jan. 20. That's what he got," Resnick said. "He is invested in this because he was able to take credit for it."

Einav Zangauker, whose son Matan is among the hostages, called on Trump to use American leverage to keep Netanyahu committed to the agreement.

Matan, 24, is among those who are expected to be included in the second phase of the deal, when all remaining living hostages — including men under the age of 50 and male soldiers — are to be exchanged for a yet-to-be-determined number of Palestinian prisoners. The second phase is also expected to include the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza.

"I want President Trump to know there are certain extreme elements from within Israel who are trying to torpedo his vision," said Zangauker, who traveled to Washington from Israel to join a planned Tuesday rally outside the White House. "We are representative of the vast, vast majority of Israel. The ultra-extremists are blackmailing the prime minister to do their bidding."

Since returning to office, Trump has called for relocating Palestinians from Gaza to neighboring Egypt and Jordan, even as Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Jordanian King Abdullah II have rejected it. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the Palestinian Authority and the Arab League have joined Egypt and Jordan in rejecting plans to move Palestinians out of their territories in Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

Yet Trump insists he can persuade Egypt and Jordan to come around to accept displaced Palestinians because of the significant aid that the U.S. provides Cairo and Amman. Hard-line right-wing members of Netanyahu's government have embraced the call to move displaced Palestinians out of Gaza.

Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, said the push by Trump to move Palestinians out of Gaza is helpful to Netanyahu. But he added that it undercuts Trump and Netanyahu's desire to land a normalization deal with Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis, the biggest Arab power in the Middle East, have said they would only agree to such a deal if the war ends and there is a credible pathway to a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank.

"This push by Trump doesn't square with the idea of a Palestinian state as we know it," Telhami said. "It's hard to see the Saudis going along with it."

Netanyahu on Monday met with Trump's pick to serve as ambassador to Israel, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, and evangelical leaders. Huckabee has long rejected a Palestinian state in territory previously seized by Israel.

The prime minister is also expected to press Trump to take decisive action on Iran. Tehran has faced a series of military setbacks, including Israeli forces significantly degrading Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 39 of 79

militants in Lebanon as well as an operation that decimated Iran's air defenses. The moment, Netanyahu believes, has created a window to decisively address Tehran's nuclear program.

"This is one of the most important and critical meetings between an American president and an Israeli prime minister," said Eytan Gilboa, an expert on U.S.-Israel relations at Bar-Ilan University near the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. "What's at stake here is not just bilateral relations between Israel and the United States but the reshaping of the Middle East."

The Latest: Super Bowl week kicks off with opening night

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Super Bowl 2025 kicks off almost a week before the big game with its opening night in New Orleans. Players and coaches from both the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles will have the opportunity to answer questions from reporters ahead of Sunday's game.

Here's the latest:

Super Bowl opening night in New Orleans is closed

The first night of Super Bowl week is over.

The Chiefs and Eagles are gone from the Superdome. The next big media spectacle is Thursday: the Super Bowl 59 pregame and halftime show news conference featuring Kendrick Lamar, Jon Batiste, Trombone Shorty, Lauren Daigle and Ledisi.

And then, of course, game time on Sunday.

Andy Reid jokes about Patrick Mahomes' 'dad body'

Chiefs coach Andy Reid turned a question about the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue into an opportunity to make a joke at quarterback Patrick Mahomes' expense.

The question concerned which of his players he'd pick to be featured in the magazine.

"Well, if it was a dad body, it would be Pat," he said.

The Chiefs may be running a play you ran in high school

If the Kansas City Chiefs run a play Sunday that you think your team ran in high school, you might be right.

Chiefs coach Andy Reid says he'll take plays from all sorts of sources. He's taken stuff from watching high school games. He's even taken concepts from when teams ran the Wing-T offense many, many decades ago.

"We'll take anything, as long as we think it's a good one," Reid said.

Travis Kelce on possible proposal: 'Next question'

Travis Kelce was asked if he planned to give anyone a special ring if the Chiefs win on Sunday.

"A Super Bowl ring?" he asked. "Next question."

Kelce has been dating pop superstar Taylor Swift for more than a year. They smooched on the field after last year's Super Bowl win and she is expected to attend the game.

Chiefs' Butker silent on question about gays

Chiefs kicker Harrison Butker, who has been outspoken on the subject of his Christian faith, went silent when asked, "What do you think about gays?"

An NFL official waved off the questioner and Butker, seemingly unfazed, went about answering other questions.

"I understand that this is a great evening and we're here to focus on the game," Butker said. "Maybe if I saw him without a camera we'd have a great conversation."

Patrick Mahomes would love to play in Australia

Patrick Mahomes said he'd love to play an NFL game in Australia.

Mahomes said his honeymoon was originally planned for Down Under, but COVID-19 forced a change to those plans.

"It's been cool to see the NFL go global," Mahomes said.

Travis Kelce won't be doing the Griddy

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 40 of 79

Travis Kelce says he doesn't have a touchdown dance planned in case he scores in the Super Bowl. How about the Griddy?

"I'm not a Griddy kind of guy," he said. "Maybe the skedaddle."

Taylor Swift grew up in Eagles country, but her dad may have switched sides

Taylor Swift grew up on a Christmas tree farm — she wrote a song about it — in West Reading, Pennsylvania, until she was 13.

That's Eagles country.

Which explains why Scott Swift, Taylor's father, was apparently an Eagles fan. And that makes for an interesting Super Bowl conversation, since Swift's boyfriend happens to be Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce.

So, Travis, what colors will your girlfriend's dad be wearing on Super Sunday?

"I'll have to ask Scott himself. We haven't had that convo yet," Kelce said. "But I think he'll be wearing red."

Scott Swift was at a Chiefs playoff game a couple weeks ago, so it's a good bet he will, in fact, be wearing red.

Wentz is healthy for this Super Bowl, but still unlikely to play

Carson Wentz called his journey from star young quarterback in Philadelphia to backup in Kansas City a "whirlwind."

Wentz feels fortunate to be at his second Super Bowl, even though he's once again unlikely to play.

He was hurt seven years ago when he watched his backup Nick Foles lead the Eagles to the title. Now he's the backup to Patrick Mahomes.

Travis Kelce takes a break from answering questions to ask one

Now this was a unique Super Bowl opening night moment.

Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce was asked if there was something he could ask the assembled media, what would it be?

He thought for a moment.

"Why are you guys leaning into this whole ref thing?" he asked.

The reference was this: There's a perception by some — not Kansas City fans — that officials give the Chiefs, particularly quarterback Patrick Mahomes, favorable calls.

A 'Super' Mavericks fan speaks out about the Luka Doncic trade

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes had a tough weekend. He's a Dallas Mavericks fan.

And they just traded Luka Doncic — the team's best player — to the Los Angeles Lakers.

"It's tough," Mahomes said. "I've watched him since he was 18 years old. It was Dirk (Nowitzki) and Luka and seeing his maturation and how great of a basketball player he's become, it's been fun to watch. As a Dallas fan, it hurts me. But I'm happy for him that he's going to be able to go out there and be in LA and try to achieve his dream of winning a championship."

Mahomes excited to have Brady on the Super Bowl call

Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes has 17 playoff wins as a starting quarterback. The only player in NFL history with more will be at the Super Bowl on Sunday as well.

In the broadcast booth, that is.

Tom Brady will be part of the broadcast team for Fox. He won 35 playoff games as a starter, including seven Super Bowls.

"I have so much respect for Tom and he's been someone that's given me so much advice in my career," said Mahomes, who's seeking his fourth Super Bowl title. "So, it'll be really cool and I'm sure he'll break it down and it'll be a great game and I'm excited for the fans to see it."

Jameis Winston to the Giants? Saquon likes the idea

A lot of NFL players travel to the Super Bowl. Some play. Others work in media, which is the role Jameis Winston has this week.

And he got to ask Eagles star Saquon Barkley a question about his own future. Here's how it went.

Winston: "One more question, Saquon! One more question! In this free agency, man, I'm a free agent,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 41 of 79

I don't really got no job. Who should sign me in free agency?"

Barkley: "Um, I think New York needs a quarterback right now."

Winston: "New York who?"

Barkley: "Giants."

It's possible Big Blue Nation won't like that, especially coming from Barkley.

Travis Kelce shouts out Chiefs fans and their volume

Travis Kelce has famously told Kansas City fans — they call themselves Chiefs Kingdom — a few times over the years that "you've got to fight for your right to party," referencing an old Beastie Boys hit.

He had a chance to address the fans at opening night on Monday. Evidently, he knows they are already partying.

"The loudest fan base in the world, baby," Kelce said. "Yeaaaah, Chiefs Kingdom. "We're ready, baby. Let's get this thing going."

How did Chiefs get to three straight Super Bowls? Patrick Mahomes credits Andy Reid

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes may get a lot of the credit for Kansas City having a chance to win three consecutive Super Bowls.

But he says the credit should go to coach Andy Reid.

"It starts with coach Reid," Mahomes said. "The culture that he's built, we know it's a day-by-day process. It's awesome to be in the Super Bowl but we have to go put in the work every single day first. And I'm glad we're here."

Reid says the Chiefs make it easy for him.

"Listen, they're good human beings, and that's the most important thing," Reid said. "Good football players, but most of all I'm proud of them for just being good guys."

Turns out not every tight end is a Taylor Swift fan

Philadelphia's Dallas Goedert won't be going 1-on-1 with Kansas City's Travis Kelce in the Super Bowl. They're both tight ends. They both play offense.

But if they cross paths, we think we know what might come up in conversation.

Turns out, Goedert doesn't know much about Taylor Swift — Kelce's girlfriend and one of the most famous singers on the planet.

"Does she sing 'Don't go chasing waterfalls?' She doesn't? Man," Goedert said, referencing a single by TLC that was released in 1995 — when Swift was 5 years old. "She's an incredible artist, but she ain't on my playlist."

Dude. Come on.

Goedert says he listens to Philly icons like Meek Mill, and has been listening to plenty of Kendrick Lamar — the Super Bowl halftime show performer this year.

Saquon Barkley picks an interesting favorite color

Among the highlights of Saquon Barkley's opening-night media session were some questions that had nothing to do with football.

They included:

Favorite color? "I'm gonna go red." (He then paused, realizing red is part of Kansas City's primary color scheme.) "Maybe that wasn't the right color to say at this moment," he said.

Favorite Mexican dish? "Is a quesadilla a Mexican dish? It is? I'll go with that."

Message to Giants fans? "It's nothing but love. I'll be naive to think they weren't supportive to me over the last six years. ... All the things that happened over there and the love I have for them is the reason I'm able to have the success I'm having now."

DeVonta Smith wishes he could teleport

A young reporter from Nickelodeon presented Eagles wide receiver DeVonta Smith with a big necklace, then got to the real question that needed asking.

"Are there any superpowers that you think would help you on the big day?" she asked.

Smith's reply: "If I could teleport."

Let's face it: That would be a difficult weapon for any secondary to deal with.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 42 of 79

Big Dom won't play on Sunday. You'll see him anyway

Perhaps one of the most recognizable figures on the Philadelphia sideline has zero catches this season, zero tackles and probably doesn't have a great time in the 40-yard dash.

And the Eagles think he's indispensable.

Big Dom. That's how everyone knows Eagles security chief Dom DiSandro, who has a cult following in Philadelphia.

"I would say this: Nobody does their job better in the National Football League than Big Dom does his," Eagles coach Nick Sirianni said. "He's awesome. He truly just wants to help other people."

DiSandro joined the Eagles in 1999. He's a broad-chested guy who tends to find his way into television shots on the sideline. He oversees all safety and security matters for players, coaches and executives.

"I couldn't do my job without Dom. That's for sure," Sirianni said.

Eagles' Fangio feared the worst during power outage at Superdome 12 years ago

Eagles defensive coordinator Vic Fangio has "vivid" memories of the last Super Bowl played at the Superdome.

He had the same role for San Francisco when a power outage forced a long delay in the third quarter against Baltimore 12 years ago.

"I thought it was a terrorist attack," he recalled.

The 49ers mounted a big comeback after the stoppage but fell short at the end.

Did a reporter kiss Nick Sirianni? Chad Johnson did.

It's hard to get a question at Super Bowl opening night. There are a lot of people yelling at once.

One method that works: Kissing the coach.

Really.

Former NFL wide receiver Chad Johnson, working as a reporter for the CW, jumped onto Eagles coach Nick Sirianni's podium to ask a question. And before he asked — it was about strategy involving the Kansas City secondary — the man known as "Ochocinco" smacked his lips on the side of Sirianni's head.

"I was trying to call you," Sirianni told Johnson. "I didn't ever get your number, though."

Johnson remembered there were a lot of microphones around and didn't give Sirianni his number. Maybe he will later. And then he left with just a handshake, no kiss.

Most call it the tush push. Jalen Hurts does not

The most unstoppable and perhaps most reviled goal-line play in football right now is Philadelphia's famed tush push, where quarterback Jalen Hurts follows about a ton of offensive linemen into the end zone.

Some want it banned. The Washington Commanders tried jumping offside multiple plays in a row to stop it (to no avail) in the NFC championship game.

Hurts knows most people don't like the tush push. Perhaps that's why he doesn't call it that.

"That's what you call it. I call it the quarterback sneak," Hurts said. "I keep it very standard."

Graham expects to play after he was sidelined by triceps injury

Super Bowl 52 hero Brandon Graham is ready to return less than three months after tearing his triceps.

The Eagles defensive end said his first two practices went well and that he will play Sunday as long as he has no setbacks this week.

Graham's strip-sack helped seal Philadelphia's win in the Super Bowl against New England seven years ago.

Saquon speaks: He 'definitely envisioned' making Super Bowl with Eagles

Eagles running back Saquon Barkley admitted this much: He didn't think about the scene at Super Bowl opening night.

But Super Bowl Sunday, yes, he thought about that.

"Never this, but definitely envisioned playing in this game," the Philly star told FS1 before taking the podium. "That's why me and my family made the decision to come to Philadelphia, to have an opportunity to play in the Super Bowl. And here we are."

Barkley has made headlines all year for his stellar numbers, but his preference is to be considered a team guy. And it'll take the team to win it all, he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 43 of 79

"It took everyone," Barkley said. "And for us to do what we want to do, it's going to take everyone again."

Get your phones out: For Eagles, opening night is a memory to savor

The Eagles were the first team to hit the field for opening night. And two things immediately stood out: One, they were all in new white sweatsuits. And two, just about everyone had a phone out to capture the scene.

Assistant coach Clint Hurtt, one of the toughest guys in the game, was smiling broadly — a rare sight for him on the field — when he came out for the festivities. Yes, he had his phone out, video rolling to remember it all.

It seemed about 80% of Eagles players were either snapping photos or taking video of the scene for the first major event of Super Bowl week.

On opening night, Cooper Kupp reflects on an era closing

Cooper Kupp was Super Bowl MVP three years ago. As this Super Bowl week was getting underway, he found out the Los Angeles Rams plan to trade him.

"I was informed that the team will be seeking a trade immediately and will be working with me and my family to find the right place to continue competing for championships," Kupp wrote on social media. "I don't agree with the decision and always believed it was going to begin and end in LA."

Kupp had eight catches for 92 yards and two touchdowns in Super Bowl 56, leading the Rams to a 23-20 win over the Cincinnati Bengals.

Local band has Superdome crowd dancing

The introduction to the Super Bowl opening night included some local music.

The eight-member Soul Rebels brass band, dressed in all white, played an original number, "Greatness," from a makeshift stage in what would normally be front-row sideline seats. Fans in the stands and some media members danced nearby.

The band was followed by Eagles cheerleaders performing a dance number on a raised stage on the field shortly before players and coaches filtered out of a tunnel to take part in interviews.

The Soul Rebels also were slated to do a closing performance.

Here's who will speak on the risers

Nearly all players and coaches will be available for interviews with the media, but only a select few from each team will be available on the risers.

For the Eagles, those will be:

1. DeVonta Smith
2. A.J. Brown
3. Jalen Hurts
4. Saquon Barkley
5. Lane Johnson
6. Jordan Mailata
7. Dallas Goedert
8. Zack Baun
9. Darius Slay Jr.
10. Nick Sirianni
11. Brandon Graham

And here's who's up for the Chiefs:

1. Chris Jones
2. Nick Bolton
3. Patrick Mahomes
4. Travis Kelce
5. Justin Reid
6. Trent McDuffie
7. Isiah Pacheco
8. Harrison Butker

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 44 of 79

9. DeAndre Hopkins

10. Andy Reid

11. Xavier Worthy

Super Bowl tradition of combined media day began at Superdome

The NFL says the first time both teams took part together in media day was at the Superdome before Super Bowl 20 between Chicago and New England in 1986.

This Super Bowl will be the eighth played at the dome in New Orleans and the first since 2013.

Goodell: Idea that refs favor Chiefs is 'ridiculous'

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell shot down the perception that officials favor the Kansas City Chiefs.

The Chiefs are going for a three-peat Sunday in a rematch against the Philadelphia Eagles, who lost to Kansas City 38-35 two years ago.

The two-time defending champions have benefited from calls that have gone their way in the playoffs, including officials' ruling that the Buffalo Bills came up short on a critical fourth down in the AFC championship game.

"It's a ridiculous theory for anyone who might take it seriously," Goodell said. "But at the end of the day it's something we have to work at, how do we make our officiating better."

Saquon Barkley could set more records in Super Bowl

Saquon Barkley has already produced the greatest season by a running back in Philadelphia Eagles history. He can only boost his credentials with his performance Sunday in the Super Bowl against the Kansas City Chiefs.

The numbers are already impressive, starting with his 2,005 yards rushing and his seven (postseason included) touchdown runs of 60-plus yards. He is one of only two players in NFL history with at least 400 yards rushing and five touchdowns in a single postseason. The other is former Denver Broncos star Terrell Davis.

Chiefs are first team to get to Super Bowl with chance at three-peat

Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs are the first team ever to win back-to-back Super Bowls and then get back to the title game with a chance at a third. They are one win away from pulling the rare three-peat.

The last team in the NFL, NBA, MLB or NHL to win three straight championships was the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers from 2000-02, led by Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant. The New York Yankees pulled it off in baseball from 1998-2000 and the New York Islanders were the last NHL team to win three straight titles — they won four consecutive Stanley Cups from 1980-83.

No team has done it in the Super Bowl era in the NFL. Green Bay won the NFL title in 1965 in the season before the first Super Bowl and followed that up by winning the first two Super Bowls in the 1966-67 seasons. The Packers also won three straight NFL titles from 1929-31 before there was a postseason.

Jalen Hurts would join select company with a win after loss in first Super Bowl start

Jalen Hurts is back on the Super Bowl stage for the second time in his young career.

The Eagles quarterback produced four total touchdowns in a losing effort two years ago against the Chiefs and bucked recent history by getting back this far.

Out of the last 19 QBs who lost their first Super Bowl start, Hurts is the only one to get back to the title game as a starter. With a win on Sunday, he would join Hall of Famers Len Dawson, Bob Griese and John Elway as the only QBs to win a Super Bowl as a starter after losing their debut.

Goodell: NFL will look into 'serious' allegations against Ravens' Tucker

Commissioner Roger Goodell said the NFL will look into the "serious" allegations that Baltimore Ravens kicker Justin Tucker engaged in sexually inappropriate conduct with several massage therapists.

Nine massage therapists from five spas and wellness centers have told the Baltimore Banner that Tucker engaged in sexually inappropriate conduct during sessions from 2012-16.

Tucker said in a statement last week that he has never received any complaints from a massage therapist or been told he was not welcome at a spa or other place of business.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 45 of 79

"They are obviously serious issues and he is taking that seriously as are we," Goodell said Monday. Goodell says NFL could have both franchise and Super Bowl outside the U.S.

Commissioner Roger Goodell said the NFL could hold a Super Bowl outside of the United States if the league expands to have an international team.

The NFL has made big efforts to expand its footprint worldwide with games played in England, Germany, Mexico and Brazil in recent years. A game is scheduled in Spain next season.

But as of now, the Super Bowls have been played in NFL stadiums and international sites haven't been considered.

"I do think there's potential that someday we will have an international franchise. If we do, it would not surprise me at all if a Super Bowl follows and is played there," Goodell said.

Chiefs and Eagles meet again, with Eagles trying to buck trend in Super Bowl rematches

For the second time in three seasons, it's Kansas City against Philadelphia for the Super Bowl title.

Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs got the win two years ago in Arizona and will try to do the same this week in New Orleans. This is the fifth time teams have met in the Super Bowl twice in a span of five seasons or less, with all four previous times ending in sweeps.

Goodell: 'A lot of work' before an 18-game season

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell says there's "a lot of work to be done" before the NFL possibly expands its season to 18 regular-season games.

Goodell said at a pre-Super Bowl news conference that the league hasn't had formal negotiations with the NFL Players Association about adding a game to the season but that he has had informal discussions with the union's executive director, Lloyd Howell Jr.

The NFL added a 17th game and cut the preseason from four games to three before the 2021 season and Goodell has indicated an interest in eventually adding another regular-season game.

Goodell says league will look into rules surrounding Brady's dual role

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell says the league will look into whether rules surrounding Tom Brady's role as both an analyst for Fox and a minority owner of the Las Vegas Raiders need to be altered in any way.

Brady played a big role during the team's search for a new coach and general manager that led to the hiring of Pete Carroll and John Spytek.

Brady is also in his first season as an analyst for Fox and is under rules that prevent his access to team facilities and production meetings with players and coaches.

Goodell said Monday that Brady is under the same tampering rules as any other member of the league and has checked in frequently to make sure he isn't violating any rules.

Rubio says El Salvador offers to accept deportees from US of any nationality, including Americans

By MATTHEW LEE and JUAN ZAMORANO Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said late Monday that El Salvador's president has offered to accept deportees from the U.S. of any nationality, including violent American criminals now imprisoned in the United States.

President Nayib Bukele "has agreed to the most unprecedented, extraordinary, extraordinary migratory agreement anywhere in the world," Rubio said after meeting with Bukele at his lakeside country house outside San Salvador for several hours.

"We can send them and he will put them in his jails," Rubio said of migrants of all nationalities detained in the United States. "And, he's also offered to do the same for dangerous criminals currently in custody and serving their sentences in the United States even though they're U.S. citizens or legal residents."

Rubio was visiting El Salvador to press a friendly government to do more to meet President Donald Trump's demands for a major crackdown on immigration.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 46 of 79

Bukele confirmed the offer in a post on X, saying El Salvador has "offered the United States of America the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system." He said his country would accept only "convicted criminals" and would charge a fee that "would be relatively low for the U.S. but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable."

Elon Musk, the billionaire working with Trump to remake the federal government, responded on his X platform, "Great idea!!"

After Rubio spoke, a U.S. official said the Trump administration had no current plans to try to deport American citizens, but said Bukele's offer was significant. The U.S. government cannot deport American citizens and such a move would be met with significant legal challenges.

The State Department describes El Salvador's overcrowded prisons as "harsh and dangerous." On its current country information webpage it says, "In many facilities, provisions for sanitation, potable water, ventilation, temperature control, and lighting are inadequate or nonexistent."

Rubio arrived in San Salvador shortly after watching a U.S.-funded deportation flight with 43 migrants leave from Panama for Colombia. That came a day after Rubio delivered a warning to Panama that unless the government moved immediately to eliminate China's presence at the Panama Canal, the U.S. would act to do so.

Migration, though, was the main issue of the day, as it will be for the next stops on Rubio's five-nation Central American tour of Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic after Panama and El Salvador. His tour is taking place at a time of turmoil in Washington over the status of the government's main foreign development agency.

Trump's administration prioritizes stopping people from making the journey to the United States and has worked with regional countries to boost immigration enforcement on their borders as well as to accept deportees from the United States.

The agreement Rubio described for El Salvador to accept foreign nationals arrested in the United States for violating U.S. immigration laws is known as a "safe third country" agreement. Officials have suggested this might be an option for Venezuelan gang members convicted of crimes in the United States should Venezuela refuse to accept them, but Rubio said Bukele's offer was for detainees of any nationality.

Rubio said Bukele then went further and said his country was willing to accept and to jail U.S. citizens or legal residents convicted of and imprisoned for violent crimes.

Human rights activists have warned that El Salvador lacks a consistent policy for the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees and that such an agreement might not be limited to violent criminals.

Manuel Flores, the secretary general of the leftist opposition party Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, criticized the "safe third country" plan, saying it would signal that the region is Washington's "backyard to dump the garbage."

After meeting with Bukele, Rubio signed a memorandum of understanding with his Salvadoran counterpart to advance U.S.-El Salvador civil nuclear cooperation. The document could lead to a more formal deal on cooperation in nuclear power and medicine that the U.S. has with numerous countries.

The deportation flight Rubio watched being loaded in Panama City was carrying migrants detained by Panamanian authorities after illegally crossing the Darien Gap from Colombia. The State Department says such deportations send a message of deterrence. The U.S. has provided Panama with financial assistance to the tune of almost \$2.7 million in flights and tickets since an agreement was signed to fund them.

Rubio was on the tarmac for the departure of the flight, which was taking 32 men and 11 women back to Colombia. It's unusual for a secretary of state to personally witness such a law enforcement operation, especially in front of cameras.

"Mass migration is one of the great tragedies in the modern era," Rubio said, speaking afterward in a nearby building. "It impacts countries throughout the world. We recognize that many of the people who seek mass migration are often victims and victimized along the way, and it's not good for anyone."

Monday's deportation flight came as Trump has been threatening action against nations that will not accept flights of their nationals from the United States, and he briefly hit Colombia with penalties last week for initially refusing to accept two flights. Panama has been more cooperative and has allowed flights of

third-country deportees to land and sent migrants back before they reach the United States.

His trip comes amid a sweeping freeze in U.S. foreign assistance and stop-work orders that have shut down U.S.-funded programs targeting illegal migration and crime in Central American countries. The State Department said Sunday that Rubio had approved waivers for certain critical programs in countries he is visiting, but details of those were not immediately available.

While Rubio was out of the country, staffers of the U.S. Agency for International Development were instructed Monday to stay out of the agency's Washington headquarters after Musk announced Trump had agreed with him to shut the agency.

Thousands of USAID employees already had been laid off and programs shut down. Rubio told reporters in San Salvador that he was now the acting administrator of USAID but had delegated that authority so he would not be running its day-to-day operations.

The change means that USAID is no longer an independent government agency as it had been for decades — although its new status will likely be challenged in court — and will be run out of the State Department by department officials.

In his remarks, Rubio stressed that some and perhaps many USAID programs would continue in the new configuration but that the switch was necessary because the agency had become unaccountable to the executive branch and Congress.

On his weekend discussion with Panama's president on the Panama Canal, Rubio said he was hopeful that the Panamanians would heed his and Trump's warnings on China. Panamanians have bristled at Trump's insistence on retaking control of the American-built canal, which the U.S. turned over in 1999, although they have agreed to pull out of a Chinese infrastructure and development initiative.

"I understand that it's a delicate issue in Panama," Rubio told reporters in San Salvador. "We don't want to have a hostile and negative relationship with Panama," he said. "I don't believe we do. And we had a frank and respectful conversation, and I hope it'll yield fruits and result in the days to come."

But back in Washington, Trump was less diplomatic, saying: "China's involved with the Panama Canal. They won't be for long and that's the way it has to be."

"We either want it back, or we're going to get something very strong, or we're going to take it back," Trump told reporters at the White House. "And China will be dealt with."

A Russia-like crackdown has jailed dozens in Georgia, with human rights groups sounding the alarm

By SOPHIKO MEGRELIDZE and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Jailed journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli gets weaker every day as her hunger strike has reached three weeks in Rustavi, a town near the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, her lawyer says.

Now the 49-year-old is having difficulty walking the short distance from her cell to the room where they usually meet, and human rights officials, colleagues and family fear for her life.

Amaghlobeli was arrested Jan. 12 during an anti-government protest in the coastal city of Batumi, one of over 40 people in custody on criminal charges from a series of demonstrations that have hit the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million in recent months.

The political turmoil follows a parliamentary election that was won by the ruling Georgian Dream party, although its opponents allege the vote was rigged.

Its outcome pushed Georgia further into Russia's orbit of influence. Georgia aspired to join the European Union, but the party suspended accession talks with the bloc after the election.

As it sought to cement its grip on power, Georgian Dream has cracked down on freedom of assembly and expression in what the opposition says is similar to President Vladimir Putin's actions in neighboring Russia, its former imperial ruler.

Accusations of fomenting revolution

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze defended the actions of his government, accusing the protesters of seeking "to inflict harm on the state" and trying to stage a revolution akin to the uprising in Ukraine in

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 48 of 79

2014 that ousted a pro-Kremlin leader.

Georgian Dream last year adopted a series of laws similar to ones in Russia imposing restrictions on rights groups and media outlets and severely curtailing LGBTQ+ rights. Those laws, condemned by the EU, also drew protests.

Amaghlobeli, founder of two prominent independent media outlets in Georgia, faces charges of assaulting a police officer, with a possible prison sentence of up to seven years.

Many of those detained by police have reported being abused physically and verbally by police or while in detention. International human rights groups are sounding the alarm.

"All of that paints a picture of an aggressive campaign to halt these demonstrations of which the large majority are reported to have been peaceful," Alice Jill Edwards, the U.N. special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, told The Associated Press.

Allegations of abuse in custody

A video released by the media showed Amaghlobeli slapping Batumi's police chief in the protest. Witnesses and her lawyers say police physically and verbally abused her beforehand, and the slap was her reaction to it.

The abuse continued while in custody, when the police chief "spat in Mzia's face and denied her access to drinking water or using the toilet," her lawyer, Juba Sikharulidze, told AP.

Authorities were investigating the accusations, the lawyer said. The Interior Ministry has not responded to an AP request for comment.

Kobakhidze has said authorities would investigate any excessive use of force, but in Amaghlobeli's case, her actions came "in front of cameras."

"This crime is absolutely clear," the prime minister said.

Amaghlobeli, who founded the independent media sites Batumelebi and Netgazeti, began a hunger strike in protest, and now Georgian and Western rights advocates say her life is in danger.

Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that Amaghlobeli's situation "requires urgent action."

"This is not just a matter of freedom and imprisonment – this is a matter of life and death. And I very much hope that the authorities will act with the necessary speed in this extremely difficult situation," O'Flaherty was quoted by the outlet as saying.

Amaghlobeli's arrest has had a chilling effect on other journalists, said Nestan Tsetskhladze, editor of Netgazeti.

"If this is how they are treating the founder of the most prominent independent media, a director and media manager who is free from any political influences and influential groups, others can be treated the same way or even worse," Tsetskhladze told AP.

Prominent actor sees a Kafkaesque scene

Another prominent Georgian jailed for taking part in protests is Andro Chichinadze, a theater and film actor. Chichinadze, 28, actively participated in the protests that reignited in November.

Police raided his home and arrested him Dec. 5, and he faces charges of "participating in group violence," punishable by up to nine years in prison.

His lawyers say prosecutors have videos of Chichinadze swinging a stick and throwing a bottle, which they allege was hurled at him by police. They also say there is no evidence he hit anyone and no one has come forward as a victim of his alleged violence.

Chichinadze denied the accusations. At a pre-trial detention hearing, he compared himself to a "Kafka character who is on trial and could not figure out what is happening to him."

His mother, Lika Guntsadze, called the case against her son "absurd, just absurd" in an interview with AP.

Plans for harsher penalties

More arrests — so far on petty "administrative" charges punishable by fines or short stints in jail — took place over the weekend, during continued demonstrations in Tbilisi. On Monday, police said a total of 31 people had been detained.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 49 of 79

According to media reports, some were released shortly afterward. Many reported physical abuse by police both during their arrest and after being taken into police vans, according to the office of Georgia's Public Defender, a human rights ombudsman elected by parliament.

Georgian Dream announced plans Monday to adopt harsher punishment for both criminal and administrative offenses that protesters can be accused of, including increased jail time, higher fines and prison terms.

Eka Gigauri, executive director of Transparency International Georgia, told AP she believed the government was "using the Russian and Belarusian playbook" in targeting government opponents.

"There is nothing new in how they attack the civic activists," she said. "This was happening in Russia years ago."

The mother of Andro Chichinadze, the actor who was arrested, echoed this sentiment, in describing the crackdown that followed Georgia's aspirations to join the EU.

"We chose Europe and were taken to Russia," Lika Guntsadze said.

Trump's foreign aid freeze could prove to be a boon for the world's authoritarian strongmen

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — When President Donald Trump froze foreign assistance for 90 days, he argued that such a drastic step was needed to eliminate waste and block what he derides as "woke" spending that doesn't align with American interests.

Experts say the suspension has another, far more serious consequence: emboldening authoritarian strongmen. Wrapped into the billions the U.S. spends annually on foreign aid — more than any other nation — are hundreds of grants for grassroots groups dedicated to fighting for democracy in authoritarian countries around the world.

Among the groups that won't be receiving critical funding is an organization that trained poll workers to detect fraud in Venezuela's recent presidential vote, pro-democracy activists in Cuba and China and a group of Belarusian exiles behind a campaign to block the country's strongman from winning a sham election.

"Cutting funding to these essential efforts sends the wrong signal to dictatorships and undermines the brave individuals fighting for freedom," said Thor Halvorssen, founder of New York-based Human Rights Foundation, which does not receive U.S. government funding. "These particular investments should not just be restored — they should be prioritized."

Congress budgeted at least \$690 million on pro-democracy programs this year to counter authoritarian rule in eight countries considered by experts among the world's least free: Belarus, China, Cuba, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela.

Much of the pro-democracy funding is channeled through the U.S. Agency for International Development, where hundreds of employees were laid off amid attempts by billionaire Elon Musk to shut down the decades-old agency as part of his campaign to slash spending.

Trump, announcing the aid freeze on his first day in office, said all foreign assistance would be evaluated as to whether it makes the United States safer, stronger and more prosperous.

To overhaul USAID, he's relying on Peter Marocco, a former U.S. marine and conservative activist from Dallas who briefly worked for the agency USAID during the first Trump administration. Marocco didn't respond to an AP request for comment and The White House pointed to Trump's comments Monday slamming USAID as being run by "radical left lunatics."

While funding for some of the programs aligned with Trump's "America First" foreign policy could resume, strongmen throughout the world are already celebrating and doubling down on attacks against opponents.

In Venezuela, Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, the main enforcer of the ruling socialist party's security apparatus, boasted last week on state TV that the aid channeled by USAID to the opposition was a "black box of corruption" that he vowed to investigate. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said on X that he hopes the "notorious Deep State doesn't swallow" Musk for pulling the plug on the agency.

In Nicaragua, a TV network owned by President Daniel Ortega's sons declared that "Trump turned off

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 50 of 79

the faucet" for the "terrorists." Media outlets aligned with the Islamic leadership in Iran joked that the U.S. was treating its allies like "disposable tissues."

Meanwhile, in Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko crowed that Trump's decision to cut funding for the "fugitive opposition" was in response to his government's calls for a reset of bilateral relations.

Lena Zhivoglod, head of Honest People, which was set up in 2020 to counter Lukashenko's official narrative and end three decades of his iron-fisted rule, said that she will soon have to lay off 15 staffers and terminate the lease on the group's office in Warsaw, Poland.

"This isn't about 15 Belarusian emigrants in Poland being forced to leave their jobs," said Zhivoglod. "It means losing yet another battle to the propaganda machines of the Lukashenko regime and the Kremlin — machines that bombard Belarusians daily."

The outlook was similarly bleak in Venezuela.

Among those impacted in the South American nation are journalists who've exposed corruption by top military and civilians officials, an organization that provides legal services to political prisoners and an election monitoring group that helped uncover credible evidence that President Nicolás Maduro stole last summer's election.

All of the organizations asked The Associated Press not to be named for fear the government could activate a new law making it a criminal offense to receive international funding.

"Trump is doing the work that Maduro could never accomplish: suffocating civil society," said one of the activists impacted by the funding freeze and who on Monday started laying off dozens of contractors who've played a key role mobilizing opposition to Maduro.

Halvorsen said that while there is merit in reevaluating programs to make sure taxpayer money is being wisely spent, pro-democracy programs are among the most effective tools for advancing U.S. interests. Still, opinion polls consistently show that Americans believe the U.S. is too generous in giving money away to foreign governments, even if other countries, such as Norway and Sweden, donate far more and foreign aid comprises less than 1% of the federal budget.

Another casualty of the aid freeze is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which has focused much of its recent work on Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela — all countries where institutions are stacked with ruling party loyalists. The watchdog group has been a linchpin of the U.S.-led Inter-American system since the 1950s and depends primarily on contributions from Washington, where it is based. In recent days, it has had to lay off about a third of its workforce.

Roberta Clarke, president of the watchdog, referred to the foreign aid freeze as "extraordinarily disruptive, extraordinarily cruel" in a call with her staff Friday to discuss the stop-work order. One senior manager on the call described the funding crisis as unlike anything she had seen in 24 years working at the commission. Another veteran manager said the commission is facing "collapse."

"I would say good afternoon, but it's not a good afternoon," Clarke, a lawyer from Barbados, said at the start of the call, a recording of which was shared with AP on the condition of anonymity.

Successive administrations, including the first Trump White House, have also been a stalwart supporter of democracy activists battling China's ruling Communist Party. These stop work orders have left the groups — especially those working on issues in Tibet and Hong Kong, as well as among Uyghur minorities— without financial support and vulnerable to Beijing targeting them with impunity.

Some Republicans are also concerned that Trump could be damaging U.S. strategic and national security interests.

"We're glad President Trump is taking a hard look at how money is spent and how foreign assistance can be most useful. We just hope it's an expeditious review," said Daniel Twining, president of the International Republican Institute, which manages programs on behalf of the State Department in some of the most dangerous countries for activists. "Dictators and adversaries like China aren't pausing."

Russian attacks near Ukrainian nuclear infrastructure heighten scrutiny of Kyiv's preparedness

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 51 of 79

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Moscow's renewed attacks on Ukraine's electricity infrastructure this winter have heightened scrutiny over the Ukrainian Energy Ministry's failure to protect the country's most critical energy facilities near nuclear power sites.

Despite more than a year of warnings that the sites were vulnerable to potential Russian attacks, the Energy Ministry failed to act swiftly, current and former Ukrainian officials in Kyiv told The Associated Press.

Two years of punishing Russian strikes on its power grid have left Ukraine reliant on nuclear power for more than half of its electricity generation. Especially vulnerable are the unprotected nuclear switchyards located outside the perimeters of its three functioning nuclear plants, which are crucial to transmitting power from the reactors to the rest of the country.

"The switchyards that handle electrical routing from nuclear power plants are a vital component of Ukraine's nuclear energy infrastructure — powering homes, schools, hospitals, and other critical civilian infrastructure. Given Ukraine's heavy reliance on nuclear energy, military attacks on these switchyards would be devastating, severely impacting civilian life and undermining the resilience of the energy grid," said Marcy R. Fowler, head of the office for research and analysis at Open Nuclear Network, a program of the U.S.-based NGO PAX sapiens that focuses on reducing nuclear risk.

Only in the fall, after Ukrainian intelligence agencies warned of potential Russian strikes targeting the nuclear switchyards, was action taken to begin building protection — far too late in the event of an attack, analysts said.

"If two (nuclear switchyards) are hit, we are out of supply for a minimum of 30 to 36 hours, and there will be a huge limitation on energy supply for at least three weeks, best-case scenario," said Oleksandr Kharchenko, a Ukrainian energy industry expert.

He said it would take three to five weeks to transport and install new equipment, a miserable scenario for Ukraine's people during the bitterly cold winter months.

Even more worrying, these nuclear switchyards also have a second critical function: delivering electricity to nuclear plants from the offsite grid that is essential to cooling their reactors and spent fuel. A disruption could potentially spell disaster, the U.N. nuclear agency has repeatedly warned since the Russian attacks began in August.

And while Ukraine's nuclear plants have backup emergency power systems, these "are designed to provide temporary support," Fowler said. "Without functioning switchyards, the backup systems alone would not be sufficient to sustain operations or prevent safety risks during an extended outage."

Lawmakers cited failure to protect these sites in a resolution calling for the removal of Energy Minister Herman Haluschenko last month. The list of grievances, which also censured Haluschenko for alleged systematic corruption and inadequate oversight of the energy sector, must still be voted on by parliament.

Delays in fortifying nuclear switchyards

Russian attacks in November and December came dangerously close to the country's nuclear power plants, causing five out of its nine operating reactors to reduce power generation. The attacks did not strike the nuclear switchyards about a kilometer (half-mile) away from reactor sites but came alarmingly close.

The task of building protections for energy transmission substations, both nuclear and non-nuclear, fell to state and private companies, with the Energy Ministry supervising.

Three layers of fortifications were ordered: sandbags followed by cement barricades capable of withstanding drone attacks and — the most costly and least complete — iron-and-steel-fortified structures.

Following a government decree in July 2023, many state energy companies began immediately contracting to build first- and second-layer fortifications for their most critical power facilities. In the spring of 2024, the government repeated the urgent call to get the work done.

But nuclear switchyards, under the responsibility of Ukraine's state nuclear company Energoatom, did not issue contracts to build second-layer concrete fortifications until this fall. By then, state energy company Ukrenergo, which manages the high-voltage substations that transmit power from the nuclear reactors to the grid, had already completed 90% of its 43 sites.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 52 of 79

The bidding process for two nuclear plants — in Khmelnytskyi and Mykolaiv — only started in early October, according to documents seen by the AP. The tender for the Rivne Nuclear Power Plant was even later, at the end of November.

Construction is not expected to be completed until 2026, the contract documents said.

A chorus of warnings is ignored

Concerns over the delays were raised repeatedly in closed-door meetings and letters sent to energy officials over the last year, three current and former government officials told the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the foot-dragging by the Energy Ministry.

"We wrote officially to the Energy Ministry several times stating this problem over the last 12 to 14 months," said Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the former head of Ukrenergo, who was fired in September and blamed for the failures to protect the energy infrastructure — a move widely criticized as politically motivated.

Energy Minister Haluschenko gave reassurances the situation was under control and prioritized other projects, including lobbying for parliamentary approval for the construction of costly nuclear reactors that take up to a decade to build.

Ukraine's Western partners were also repeatedly told "all" critical infrastructure was protected, according to two Western diplomats with knowledge of Western financial assistance to the country's energy sector, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue.

Haluschenko, the Energy Ministry and Energoatom did not respond to requests for comment from the AP about the delays, citing the sensitivity of the issue. Haluschenko also did not comment about the parliamentary resolution calling for his ouster.

Over the summer and again in December, Ukraine raised the alarm internationally about potential Russian attacks targeting nuclear infrastructure and compromising nuclear safety. In mid-December it convened an extraordinary session of the International Atomic Energy Agency after attacks a month earlier damaged electrical substations deemed crucial to Ukraine's nuclear safety, heightening the possibility of a nuclear emergency.

The U.N. nuclear agency sent teams in December to electrical substations at Ukraine's Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and South Ukraine nuclear power plants to document damage and gathered evidence "highlighting the electricity grid's vulnerabilities as a result of attacks," the agency's Director General Rafael Grossi said in a statement in January.

"These attacks impact grid stability and jeopardize the reliability of the off-site power supply, creating risks to nuclear safety," Grossi said, warning of similar concerns at the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia plant, Europe's largest.

The presence of the IAEA inspection teams led some in the Ukrainian government to believe the country's nuclear sites were off-limits for Russian attacks, said a senior Ukrainian official who requested anonymity to speak candidly about the delays.

But that has proven to be a major miscalculation.

"Why didn't they react?" Kudrytskyi, the former Ukrenergo director, said of the Energy Ministry's failure to quickly respond to the series of warnings. "I don't have an answer to that."

What is USAID? Explaining the US foreign aid agency and why Trump and Musk want to end it

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dozens of senior officials put on leave. Thousands of contractors laid off. A freeze put on billions of dollars in humanitarian assistance to other countries.

Over the last two weeks, President Donald Trump's administration has made significant changes to the U.S. agency charged with delivering humanitarian assistance overseas that has left aid organizations agonizing over whether they can continue with programs such as nutritional assistance for malnourished infants and children.

Then-President John F. Kennedy established the U.S. Agency for International Development, known

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 53 of 79

as USAID, during the Cold War. In the decades since, Republicans and Democrats have fought over the agency and its funding.

Here's a look at USAID, its history and the changes made since Trump took office.

What is USAID?

Kennedy created USAID at the height of the United States' Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. He wanted a more efficient way to counter Soviet influence abroad through foreign assistance and saw the State Department as frustratingly bureaucratic at doing that.

Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act and Kennedy set up USAID as an independent agency in 1961.

USAID has outlived the Soviet Union, which fell in 1991. Today, supporters of USAID argue that U.S. assistance in countries counters Russian and Chinese influence. China has its own "belt and road" foreign aid program worldwide operating in many countries that the U.S. also wants as partners.

Critics say the programs are wasteful and promote a liberal agenda.

What's going on with USAID?

On his first day in office Jan. 20, Trump implemented a 90-day freeze on foreign assistance. Four days later, Peter Marocco — a returning political appointee from Trump's first term — drafted a tougher than expected interpretation of that order, a move that shut down thousands of programs around the world and forced furloughs and layoffs.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has since moved to keep more kinds of strictly life-saving emergency programs going during the freeze. But confusion over what programs are exempted from the Trump administration's stop-work orders — and fear of losing U.S. aid permanently — is still freezing aid and development work globally.

Dozens of senior officials have been put on leave, thousands of contractors laid off, and employees were told Monday not to enter its Washington headquarters. And USAID's website and its account on the X platform have been taken down.

It's part of a Trump administration crackdown that's hitting across the federal government and its programs. But USAID and foreign aid are among those hit the hardest.

Rubio said the administration's aim was a program-by-program review of which projects make "America safer, stronger or more prosperous."

The decision to shut down U.S.-funded programs during the 90-day review meant the U.S. was "getting a lot more cooperation" from recipients of humanitarian, development and security assistance, Rubio said.

What do critics of USAID say?

Republicans typically push to give the State Department — which provides overall foreign policy guidance to USAID — more control of its policy and funds. Democrats typically promote USAID autonomy and authority.

Funding for United Nations agencies, including peacekeeping, human rights and refugee agencies, have been traditional targets for Republican administrations to cut. The first Trump administration moved to reduce foreign aid spending, suspending payments to various U.N. agencies, including the U.N. Population Fund and funding to the Palestinian Authority.

In Trump's first term, the U.S. pulled out of the U.N. Human Rights Council and its financial obligations to that body. The U.S. is also barred from funding the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, or UNRWA, under a bill signed by then-President Joe Biden last March.

As a Florida senator, Rubio often called for more transparency on foreign assistance spending, but was generally supportive. In a 2017 social media post, Rubio said foreign assistance was "not charity," that the U.S. "must make sure it is well spent" and called foreign aid "critical to our national security."

In 2023, Rubio sponsored a bill that would have required U.S. foreign assistance agencies to include more information on what organizations were implementing the aid on the ground.

Why is Elon Musk going after USAID?

Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE, has launched a sweeping effort empow-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 54 of 79

ered by Trump to fire government workers and cut trillions in government spending. USAID is one of his prime targets. Musk alleges USAID funding been used to launch deadly programs and called it a “criminal organization.”

What is being affected by the USAID freeze?

Sub-Saharan Africa could suffer more than any other region during the aid pause. The U.S. gave the region more than \$6.5 billion in humanitarian assistance last year. HIV patients in Africa arriving at clinics funded by an acclaimed U.S. program that helped rein in the global AIDS epidemic of the 1980s found locked doors.

There are also already ramifications in Latin America. In Mexico, a busy shelter for migrants in southern Mexico has been left without a doctor. A program to provide mental health support for LGBTQ+ youth fleeing Venezuela was disbanded.

In Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala, so-called “Safe Mobility Offices” where migrants can apply to enter the U.S. legally have shuttered.

The aid community is struggling to get the full picture—how many thousands of programs have shut down and how many thousands of workers were furloughed and laid off under the freeze?

How much does the U.S. spend on foreign aid?

In all, the U.S. spent about roughly \$40 billion in foreign aid in the 2023 fiscal year, according to a report published last month by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

The U.S. is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance globally, although some other countries spend a bigger share of their budget on it. Foreign assistance overall amounts to less than 1% of the U.S. budget.

What do Americans think of foreign aid?

About 6 in 10 U.S. adults said the U.S. government was spending “too much” overall on foreign aid, according to a March 2023 AP-NORC poll. Asked about specific costs, roughly 7 in 10 U.S. adults said the U.S. government was putting too much money toward assistance to other countries. About 9 in 10 Republicans and 55% of Democrats agreed that the country was overspending on foreign aid. At the time, about 6 in 10 U.S. adults said the government was spending “too little” on domestic issues that included education, health care, infrastructure, Social Security and Medicare.

Polling has shown that U.S. adults tend to overestimate the share of the federal budget that is spent on foreign aid. Surveys from the Kaiser Family Foundation have found that on average, Americans say spending on foreign aid makes up 31% of the federal budget rather than closer to 1% or less.

Could Trump dissolve USAID on his own?

Democrats say presidents lack the constitutional authority to eliminate USAID. But it’s not clear what would stop him from trying.

A mini-version of that legal battle played out in Trump’s first term, when he tried to cut the budget for foreign operations by a third.

When Congress refused, the Trump administration used freezes and other tactics to cut the flow of funds already appropriated by Congress for the foreign programs. The Government Accountability Office later ruled that violated a law known as the Impoundment Control Act.

It’s a law we may be hearing more of.

“Live by executive order, die by executive order,” Musk said on X Saturday in reference to USAID.

Neighbors in dispute: After Trump declares a trade war, Canadians grapple with a sense of betrayal

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — As Canadians absorb U.S. President Donald Trump’s trade war and his threats to make Canada the 51st state, one thing has become abundantly clear: One of the world’s most durable and amicable alliances — born of geography, heritage and centuries of common interests — is broken.

Canadians are feeling an undeniable sense of betrayal after Trump declared a trade war against America’s northern neighbor and longtime ally. Trump keeps threatening Canada’s sovereignty and vowing to

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 55 of 79

put sweeping 25% tariffs on Canadian products, though Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Monday afternoon the tariffs will be postponed by at least 30 days after he promised more cooperation on the border.

In Canada, discussion and disapproval are everywhere. Canadian hockey fans have even been booing the American national anthem at recent National Hockey League games. Addressing the nation this past weekend, Trudeau channeled the betrayal that many Canadians are feeling, reminding Americans that Canadian troops fought alongside them in Afghanistan and helped respond to myriad crises from wildfires in California to Hurricane Katrina. "We were always there standing with you, grieving with you, the American people," he said.

The Canadian jitters, some worry, could go beyond the moment. "The damage is going to be long-lasting," said Robert Bothwell, a professor of Canadian history and international relations at the University of Toronto. "The Americans won't be trusted anymore. The 51st state stuff is just contemptuous. It treats Canada like we don't even exist."

How, they ask, is Canada the problem?

The ties between the two countries are without parallel. Nearly \$3.6 billion Canadian (US\$2.5 billion) worth of goods and services cross the border each day. Canada is the top export destination for 36 U.S. states and 77% of Canada's exports go to the United States. Each day, about 400,000 people cross the world's longest international border. There is close cooperation on defense, border security and law enforcement, and a vast overlap in culture, traditions and pastimes.

"He wants to come after us?" said Doug Ford, the leader of Canada's most populous province of Ontario. He has said that it feels like being stabbed in the heart by a family member. "I've yet to hear one American citizen say Canada is the problem," he said.

Some Canadians are circulating lists of Canadian products they can buy instead of American items and others are canceling vacation plans to the United States. The U.S. Travel Association said the tariffs on Canada could impact Canadian visitation to and spending in the United States, noting that Canada is the top source of international visitors to the United States, with 20.4 million visits last year.

"What he is doing now is unprecedented and highly damaging for the relationship. ... He is eroding Canadians' trust towards the U.S. in ways that will make it hard to repair the relationship," said Daniel Beland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal. He says many Canadians feel betrayed by Trump's threats and attitude, especially because the two countries have long enjoyed strong economic, cultural and geographic ties.

"It's certainly one of the worst moments in Canada-U.S. relations since the creation of Canada in 1867," Beland said. "His talk about making Canada the 51st state is a direct attack against the country's sovereignty. Even if we exclude that threat, he shows no respect for Canada's sovereignty and institutions."

Canadian officials said they are applying 25% retaliatory tariffs to American imports including beverages, cosmetics and paper products. A second phase will be even more punishing.

Trudeau did hold out hope that Trump wouldn't "punish" Canada. Trump and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum put their planned tariffs on hold Monday for a month to give time for further negotiations, and Mexico said it planned to deploy 10,000 members of its national guard to address drug trafficking.

Trudeau noted that the United States and Canada have built the most successful economic, military and security partnership the world has ever seen — a relationship that, he says, has been the envy of the world.

"As President John F. Kennedy said many years ago, geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends, economics has made us partners and necessity has made us allies," he said.

The closer the allies, the bumpier the ride?

Trump also plans to put a 10% tariff on Canadian energy. Underscoring the potential effects, Canada provides more than 4.3 million barrels of oil a day to the United States. The U.S. tends to consume about 20 million barrels a day, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. It has been producing domestically about 13.2 million barrels.

Yet Trump keeps saying the United States doesn't need Canada for anything and said again Monday that

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 56 of 79

he'd like to see Canada become the 51st state. And his vice president dismisses Canada, too.

"Spare me the sob story about how Canada is our 'best friend.' I love Canada and have many Canadian friends. But is the government meeting their NATO target for military spending? Are they stopping the flow of drugs into our country?," U.S. Vice President JD Vance posted on X.

Canada announced a billion-dollar plan to secure the border even though far fewer migrants and less drugs enter the U.S. through Canada than Mexico.

The pause in the tariff threat didn't make Canadians feel much better.

"30-day pause on wrecking our economy in exchange for some border theater to stop an almost non-existent cross-border problem," respected Toronto Star columnist Bruce Arthur posted on the social platform X.

As with most close relationships, there have been rough spots before. Limited trade wars over lumber, pulp and paper, and other products have flared on and off for decades. In the early 1960s, there was a bitter rift because of personal enmity between President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, who balked at U.S. pressure to be more aggressive in Cold War maneuverings.

Later the Vietnam War caused some divisions, as Canadians — including Trudeau's father, then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau — welcomed American draft evaders who crossed the border. And some Canadians, notably the Ontario intelligentsia, tend to regard Americans as more crass and gun-happy than people north of the border.

Trump himself attacked Canada's trade and prime minister during his first term. But nothing like now. Trump posted that Canada would cease to exist as a "viable country" if there weren't a "massive subsidy" from the U.S.

"Canada should become our Cherished 51st State," Trump posted on social media. Retorted respected Globe and Mail reporter Steve Chase: "Asking Canada to submit to annexation is the conduct of a hostile foreign power."

The booing continued at an NBA game in Toronto where the Raptors played the Los Angeles Clippers. One fan at the Raptors game chose to sit during the anthem while wearing a Canada hat. Joseph Chua, who works as an importer, said he expects to feel the tariffs "pretty directly."

"I've always stood during both anthems. I've taken my hat off to show respect to the American national anthem," he said. "But today we're feeling a little bitter about things."

Some US businesses close in a 'day without immigrants.' But many say they can't lose income

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and MELISSA PEREZ WINDER Associated Press

Several businesses from day cares to grocery stores and hair salons closed Monday across the U.S. in a loosely organized day of protest against President Donald Trump's immigration policies.

But participation in the "day without immigrants" faced headwinds from employees and business owners who said they need the income — especially as rumors of widespread raids, often false, are leaving many migrant communities afraid to venture outside, affecting even some schools. Monday's event also came on the heels of street protests Sunday in California and elsewhere.

Noel Xavier, organizing director for the North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters, said that while it's important to remind the country of the value migrant workers bring to the communities they toil in, many workers couldn't afford to take a day off.

"If I don't go to work today, that's one day less that I have, you know, to be able to pay for my next rent," Xavier said of the prevailing sentiment among the workers he organizes. "I didn't see this big rallying around being able to do that, or having the luxury to be able to do that."

Jaime di Paulo, president of the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, noted that small restaurants and retailers in Chicago's biggest Latino neighborhoods closed, but most major employers as well as those in construction and other industries were operating normally.

"This is only hurting our own community," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 57 of 79

Andrea Toro decided to close her hair salon in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. She added that many of her clients are teachers and have seen children missing school since Trump took office last month because they fear it may not be safe to go. In Chicago, as in San Diego, school districts said some students and families were participating in Monday's protest.

"If we don't have immigrants, we don't have anything work around here," said Toro, who is from Puerto Rico. "If we're mute, we're in silence, then they're going to do whatever they want."

El Burrito Mercado, which boomed from a small Latino market in the 1970s to one of the most widely recognized restaurant, catering and grocery businesses in St. Paul, Minnesota, shut for the whole day in 2017 — when the latest major such event was held at the beginning of the first Trump administration.

But on Monday, it stayed open for a few hours with a skeleton crew, said co-owner Milissa Silva.

Her parents emigrated from Mexico, and most of the 90 employees have Mexican roots. But many staffers expressed concern about losing a work day and about depriving people in the neighborhood of access to groceries.

Similarly, the Spanish-immersion day care provider Tierra Encantada kept its 14 locations open. But many parents decided to keep their children home Monday in solidarity with the mostly first and second-generation immigrant workforce, said CEO Kristen Denzer.

Families — most of them not immigrants — pulled some 450 children from day care and preschool, about 70% of those enrolled in Minnesota alone, where most of the organization's centers are, Denzer said. Several staffers who had been on the fence decided to take the day after the show of support.

In Utah, several Latino-owned stores, restaurants and supermarkets closed their doors.

"The movement today, it's more about being compassionate," said state Sen. Luz Escamilla, a Democrat and Senate minority leader. "A lot of companies and communities are coming together in the state just to raise awareness of how much this has created a fear."

Asked about the day of protest at his Monday media availability, Utah Senate President Stuart Adams, a Republican, defended Trump's immigration policies and said law-abiding immigrants should have nothing to worry about.

"The only people that are being talked about being deported (are) those that are criminals, those that are on probation, those bad people who have committed difficult crimes," Adams said.

While immigration enforcement officers continue to target for deportation migrants considered public safety and national security threats, a big change from the Biden administration is that officers can now arrest people without legal status if they run across them during operations.

Senate confirms fossil fuel CEO Chris Wright as energy secretary. He vows to 'unleash' US resources

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Monday confirmed fossil fuel executive Chris Wright to serve as energy secretary, a key post to promote President Donald Trump's efforts to achieve U.S. "energy dominance" in the global market.

Wright, CEO of Denver-based Liberty Energy, has been one of the industry's loudest voices against efforts to fight climate change. He says more fossil fuel production can lift people out of poverty around the globe and has promised to help Trump "unleash energy security and prosperity."

The Senate approved his nomination, 59-38. Eight Democrats — including both senators from Wright's home state of Colorado — voted in favor.

The centerpiece of Trump's energy policy is "drill, baby, drill," and he has pledged to dismantle what he calls Democrats' "green new scam" in favor of boosting production of fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal that emit planet-warming greenhouse gases.

"President Trump shares my passion for energy," Wright said at his confirmation hearing last month, promising that if confirmed, he would "work tirelessly to implement (Trump's) bold agenda as an unabashed steward for all sources of affordable, reliable and secure American energy."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 58 of 79

That includes oil and natural gas, coal, nuclear power and hydropower, along with wind and solar power and geothermal energy, Wright said.

Trump's energy wishes are likely to run into real-world limits, including the fact that U.S. oil production is already at record levels. The federal government cannot force companies to drill for more oil, and production increases could lower prices and reduce profits.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the second-ranking Republican, called Wright an innovator who "tells the truth about energy production."

While Wright "acknowledges that climate change is real, he knows more American energy is the solution — not the problem," Barrasso said, calling Wright's "energy realism" welcome news.

Sen. Mike Lee, a Utah Republican who chairs the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said Wright "understands that energy policies should focus on making energy abundant and affordable for families" and businesses.

"Our nation deserves a champion for American energy and innovation, and we've got the Wright guy for the job," Lee posted on X.

Colorado's two Democratic senators both supported their home-state nominee.

"Chris Wright is a scientist who has dedicated his life to the study and use of energy. He believes in science and supports the research that will deliver the affordable, reliable and clean energy" that will lower costs and make the country more secure, Sen. John Hickenlooper said.

"While we don't always agree, we will work together because none of us have four years to wait to act," Hickenlooper said.

Sen. Michael Bennet called Wright a successful Colorado entrepreneur with deep expertise in energy innovation and technology. He pledged to work with Wright to "ensure Colorado continues to lead the country in energy production and innovation."

While acknowledging that climate change is real, Wright said at his hearing that he believes "there isn't dirty energy or clean energy." Rather, he said, there are different sources of energy with different tradeoffs.

Wright, 60, has been chairman and CEO of Liberty Energy since 2011 and has no prior experience in government. He grew up in Colorado, earned an undergraduate degree at MIT and did graduate work in electrical engineering at the University of California, Berkeley and MIT. In 1992, he founded Pinnacle Technologies, which helped launch commercial shale gas production through hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

He later served as chairman of Stroud Energy, an early shale gas producer, before founding Liberty Resources in 2010.

As energy secretary, Wright will join Interior Secretary Doug Burgum as a key player on energy policy. Both will serve on a new National Energy Council that Burgum will chair. The panel will include all executive branch agencies involved in energy permitting, production, generation, distribution, regulation and transportation, with a focus on "cutting red tape" and boosting domestic energy production, Trump said. The council's mission represents a near-complete reversal from actions pursued by Democratic President Joe Biden, who made fighting climate change a top priority.

Wright said he would sever all ties across the energy industry if confirmed.

Lena Moffitt, executive director of Evergreen Action, an environmental group, said Democrats should have unanimously opposed Wright.

"Senate Republicans just handed Trump's Big Oil allies the keys to the Department of Energy," she said in a statement. "Chris Wright built his career expanding fossil fuels and denying climate science. Now, he'll be in a position to help Trump" stall clean energy investments, hike energy prices "and keep Americans addicted to expensive, volatile fossil fuels."

Now is the time, she added, "for Democrats to stand united and fight back against Trump's relentless push to rig the system for Big Oil."

Salvage crews recover engine, large portion of jet from river after deadly air collision near DC

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 59 of 79

By DAVID R. MARTIN, MICHAEL R. SISAK and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — Salvage crews have recovered an engine and large pieces of fuselage and are working to retrieve a wing from the wreckage of a commercial airliner involved in last week's midair collision near Washington's Reagan National Airport, officials said Monday.

They also recovered more human remains from the Potomac River, although they declined to offer specifics, reiterating only that 55 of the 67 victims have been found and identified since the crash Wednesday.

Authorities have said the operation to remove the plane will take several days and they will then work to remove the military helicopter involved. The crash between the American Airlines jet and an Army helicopter over Washington D.C. was the deadliest U.S. air disaster since 2001.

More than 300 responders were taking part in the recovery effort at any given time, officials said. Two Navy barges were also deployed to lift heavy wreckage.

Washington, D.C. Fire Department Assistant Chief Gary Steen told a news briefing that officials are confident all of the victims would be found.

Divers and salvage workers are adhering to strict protocols and stopped moving debris at times when human remains were being recovered, said U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Col. Francis Pera. The "dignified recovery" of remains takes precedence over all else, he said.

Portions of the two aircraft that collided over the river Wednesday night near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport — an American Airlines jet with 64 people aboard and an Army Black Hawk helicopter with 3 aboard — are being loaded onto flatbed trucks and will be taken to a hangar for investigation. Crews hoped to recover the jet's cockpit on Tuesday, Pera said.

The crash occurred when the jet, en route from Wichita, Kansas, was about to land. The Black Hawk was on a training mission. There were no survivors.

On Sunday, family members were taken in buses with a police escort to the Potomac River bank near where the two aircraft came to rest after colliding.

The plane's passengers included figure skaters returning from the 2025 U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Wichita and a group of hunters returning from a guided trip. Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Austin O'Hara, 28, of Lilburn, Georgia; Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Loyd Eaves, 39, of Great Mills, Maryland; and Capt. Rebecca M. Lobach, of Durham, North Carolina, were in the helicopter.

Federal investigators were working to piece together the events that led to the collision. Full investigations typically take a year or more. Investigators hope to have a preliminary report within 30 days.

Wednesday's crash was the deadliest in the U.S. since Nov. 12, 2001, when a jet slammed into a New York City neighborhood just after takeoff, killing all 260 people on board and five on the ground.

Experts stress that plane travel is overwhelmingly safe, but the crowded airspace around Reagan Airport can challenge even experienced pilots.

The NTSB said Saturday that preliminary data showed conflicting readings about the altitudes of the airliner and the helicopter.

Investigators also said that about a second before impact, the jet's flight recorder showed a change in its pitch. But they did not say whether that change in angle meant that pilots were trying to perform an evasive maneuver to avoid the crash.

Data from the jet's flight recorder showed its altitude as 325 feet (99 meters), plus or minus 25 feet (7.6 meters), when the crash happened, NTSB officials told reporters. Data in the control tower, though, showed the Black Hawk at 200 feet (61 meters), the maximum allowed altitude for helicopters in the area.

The discrepancy has yet to be explained.

On Monday, officials cautioned against premature speculation about the cause of the crash or the helicopter's altitude, or whether or why it may have been traveling above the 200-foot ceiling in the area.

"There are all kinds of reasons that you could deviate from an altitude, you know, something as simple as a flock of birds is in front of you or you may deviate if you see something that's an obstacle or other threat," said Col. Mark Ott, deputy director of aviation for the Army.

Investigators said they hoped to reconcile the difference with data from the helicopter's black box and planned to refine the tower data, which can be less reliable. All five air traffic controllers in the Reagan

Airport tower at the time of the collision have been interviewed, the NTSB said Monday.

Elon Musk tightens grip on federal government as Democrats raise alarms

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk is rapidly consolidating control over large swaths of the federal government with President Donald Trump's blessing, sidelining career officials, gaining access to sensitive databases and dismantling a leading source of humanitarian assistance.

The speed and scope of his work has been nothing short of stunning. In a little more than two weeks since Trump took office, the world's richest man has created an alternative power structure inside the federal government for the purpose of cutting spending and pushing out employees. None of this is happening with congressional approval, inviting a constitutional clash over the limits of presidential authority.

Trump says Musk is doing his bidding

Musk has been named as a special government employee, which subjects him to less stringent rules on ethics and financial disclosures than other workers. Trump has given Musk office space in the White House complex where he oversees a team of people at the so-called Department of Government Efficiency. The team has been dispersed throughout federal agencies to gather information and deliver edicts. Some of them were spotted on Monday at the Department of Education, which Trump has vowed to abolish.

Republicans defend Musk as simply carrying out Trump's slash-and-burn campaign promises. Trump made no secret of his desire to put Musk, the billionaire entrepreneur behind the electric automaker Tesla and the rocket company SpaceX, in charge of retooling the federal government.

"Elon can't do and won't do anything without our approval," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday.

The Republican president also played down concerns about Musk's conflict of interests as he flexes his power over the bureaucracy even though his businesses face regulatory scrutiny and have federal contracts.

"Where we think there's a conflict or there's a problem, we won't let him go near it, but he has some very good ideas," Trump said.

Musk persists in spite of Democrats' outrage

Democrats, for their part, accused Musk of leading a coup from within the government by amassing unaccountable and illegal power.

"We will do everything in our power in the Senate and the House to stop this outrage," Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland said. "And in the meantime, since we don't have many Republican colleagues who want to help us, we are doing everything we can with our colleagues through the courts to make sure that we uphold the rule of law."

The apex of Musk's work so far came on Monday at the Washington headquarters for the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, where yellow police tape blocked access to the lobby and hundreds of employees were locked out of computer systems. Musk said Trump had agreed to let him shutter the agency.

"It's not an apple with a worm in it, what we have is just a ball of worms," Musk said of the world's largest provider of humanitarian, development and security assistance. "You've got to basically get rid of the whole thing. It's beyond repair."

Federal workers are in uncharted territory

Musk has also turned his attention to the General Services Administration, or GSA, which manages federal government buildings. An email sent last week from the Washington headquarters instructed regional managers to begin terminating leases on roughly 7,500 federal offices nationwide.

The initiative is being led by Nicole Hollander, according to an agency employee who requested anonymity to discuss internal matters. Hollander describes herself on LinkedIn as an employee at X, Musk's social media platform.

"This has gone beyond the pale. This is out of control. This is not a normal situation," said Keya Chatter-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 61 of 79

jee, executive director of Free DC, a local advocacy organization. She participated in a protest on Monday outside the Office of Personnel Management, which is one of the lesser-known federal agencies key to Musk's agenda.

Musk's work has unnerved federal employees who are being nudged toward the exits. On Sunday night, concerns swept through the workforce that they could be locked out of internal human resources system, denying them access to their own personnel files that showed pay history, length of service and qualifications. Supervisors in some agencies encouraged employees to download their records, called an SF-50, to personal computers so that they could prove their employment history in the event of disputes.

Musk's penchant for dabbling

Musk has been tinkering with things his entire life, learning to code as a child in South Africa and becoming rich with the online payment company PayPal. He bought the social media platform Twitter a little more than two years ago, renamed it X and slashed its workforce while turning it into his personal political megaphone.

Now Musk is popping open the hood on the federal government like it's one of his cars or rockets.

"The Silicon Valley playbook to disrupt the status quo — by disregarding and disobeying rules that you don't like — is in full effect here," said Rob Lalka, an expert on entrepreneurship and innovation in business at Tulane University.

One of the most significant steps was gaining access to the U.S. Treasury payment system, which is responsible for 1 billion payments per year totaling \$5 trillion. It includes sensitive information involving bank accounts and Social Security payments.

"No one outside of the staff doing the work ever asked to have access to the payment files," said Richard Gregg, who spent four decades working for Treasury and oversaw the payment system as fiscal assistant secretary.

It's unclear what Musk wants to do with the payment system. He's claimed that he could trim \$1 trillion from the federal deficit "just by addressing waste, fraud and abuse."

"That's the biggest data hack ever in the world," Sen. Tammy Baldwin, a Wisconsin Democrat, told reporters in Madison. "I am outraged about it."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, said Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent must revoke Musk's access to the payment system.

"We must halt this unlawful and dangerous power grab," he said on Capitol Hill.

A group representing retirees and union workers sued Bessent and the Treasury Department on Monday to get them to stop sharing personal and financial information with DOGE.

Trump rewards Musk's fealty

Musk's role is partially a reward for his work on behalf of Trump during the campaign. He spent roughly \$250 million supporting Trump through America PAC, which included door-to-door canvassing and digital advertising.

Although the PAC has not announced its next plans, Musk has suggested that he could endorse primary challenges to Republican lawmakers who defy Trump's agenda.

"The more I've gotten to know President Trump, the more I like him," Musk said in a conversation streamed live on X. "Frankly, I love the guy. He's great."

Musk also described his work overhauling the federal government in existential terms, making it clear that he would push as hard and as far as he could.

"If it's not possible now, it will never be possible. This is our shot," he said. "This is the best hand of cards we're ever going to have. If we don't take advantage of this best hand of cards, it's never going to happen."

Tariff threats take aim at fentanyl trafficking. Here's how the drug reaches the US

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

President Donald Trump's plan to impose tariffs on goods from Mexico, Canada and China is partly

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 62 of 79

aimed at combating the illicit flow of fentanyl into the U.S., where the opioid is blamed for some 70,000 overdose deaths annually.

Mexico agreed Monday to send 10,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border as part of a deal with Trump to pause the tariffs for a month — and hold off levying its own. Canada reached its own deal with Trump hours later, delaying the trade war and pledging several steps against fentanyl trafficking.

China hasn't signaled major changes in tackling the flow of fentanyl into the U.S., and has said it would retaliate for any U.S. tariffs.

What role do Mexico, Canada and China play in fentanyl reaching the U.S.? And how much can their governments do?

Where does fentanyl come from?

The ingredients in fentanyl are largely produced by companies in China and used by pharmaceutical companies to make legal painkillers. But a portion of those chemicals is purchased by the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels in Mexico.

Cartels make the synthetic opioid in labs and then smuggle it into the U.S., largely at official land crossings in California and Arizona. The small amounts of fentanyl in any shipment — the drug is 50 times more potent than heroin — and its lack of odor, make detection and seizures extremely challenging.

Fentanyl is also made in Canada and smuggled into the U.S., but to a much lesser extent. U.S. customs agents seized 43 pounds (19.5 kilograms) of fentanyl at the Canadian border during the last fiscal year, compared with 21,100 pounds (9,570 kilograms) at the Mexican border.

Seizures of fentanyl jumped by as much as tenfold under President Joe Biden, an increase that may reflect improved detection.

What changed after Trump threatened tariffs?

Mexico announced in December the seizure of more than a ton of fentanyl pills in what it described as the largest bust of synthetic opioids in the country's history. The haul was striking because fentanyl seizures in Mexico had fallen dramatically in the first half of 2024.

Under President Claudia Sheinbaum, who took office in October, Mexico's security forces appear to be far more aggressive than they were under her predecessor. Former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador denied that fentanyl was even produced in Mexico, contradicting officials in his own administration.

To pause the tit-for-tat tariffs, Mexico agreed to immediately deploy 10,000 National Guard troops to the border to battle drug-trafficking, while the U.S. committed to do more to stop the trafficking of guns into Mexico, said Trump and Sheinbaum on social media.

Facing tariff threats, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has highlighted his country's recent \$1.3 billion investment in border enforcement, including chemical detection tools at entry ports and a new unit focused on the oversight of precursor chemicals.

Once Trump ordered the tariffs, Trudeau rebuked the move and geared up for a trade war before reaching a deal with Trump Monday to pause the use of tariffs for at least a month.

Trudeau posted on X that Canada would appoint a fentanyl czar, list Mexican cartels as terrorist groups and launch a "Canada- U.S. Joint Strike Force" to combat fentanyl, organized crime and money laundering.

China defended its efforts to combat fentanyl in what has been years of touch-and-go cooperation with the U.S. China doesn't have the same fentanyl crisis among its own population, and doesn't view it as a priority, said Zongyuan Zoe Liu, a senior fellow for China studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

How much can Mexico, Canada and China do?

Combating the production and movement of illicit fentanyl is particularly challenging.

Unlike heroin and cocaine, which are produced from plants, fentanyl is made with ingredients used for legal pharmaceutical drugs, and can be made in cheap labs that can be erected relatively quickly. And despite the dangers, demand in the U.S. for the highly addictive drug remains strong.

Mike Vigil, the former chief of international operations at the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, said he was skeptical that Mexico's extra troops at the border on their own would make much of a dent in trafficking.

Once fentanyl leaves the labs, it's usually well concealed in hidden compartments of vehicles or in huge cargo trucks; better detection technology is crucial, in addition to more troops, he said. The other

challenge, Vigil said, is that combating the fentanyl trade will likely require more than just collaboration between the U.S. and its neighbors.

"Even if Mexico, Canada and these other countries snap their fingers and did away with the drug trade, as long as we have that demand, there will be another country that will satisfy that demand."

Umpire Pat Hoberg fired by MLB for sharing sports gambling accounts with friend who bet on baseball

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Umpire Pat Hoberg was fired by Major League Baseball on Monday for sharing his legal sports gambling accounts with a friend who bet on baseball games and for intentionally deleting electronic messages pertinent to the league's investigation.

MLB opened the investigation last February when it was brought to its attention by the sportsbook, and Hoberg did not umpire last season. While MLB said the investigation did not uncover evidence Hoberg personally bet on baseball or manipulated games, MLB senior vice president of on-field operations Michael Hill recommended on May 24 that Hoberg be fired.

Commissioner Rob Manfred said Monday he upheld Hill's decision. Among the highest-rated umpires at judging the strike zone, Hoberg can apply for reinstatement no earlier than 2026 spring training.

MLB said the friend made 141 baseball bets between April 2, 2021, and Nov. 1, 2023, totaling almost \$214,000 with an overall win of nearly \$35,000.

"The strict enforcement of Major League Baseball's rules governing sports betting conduct is a critical component of upholding our most important priority: protecting the integrity of our games for the fans," Manfred said in a statement. "An extensive investigation revealed no evidence that Mr. Hoberg placed bets on baseball directly or that he or anyone else manipulated games in any way.

"However, his extremely poor judgment in sharing betting accounts with a professional poker player he had reason to believe bet on baseball and who did, in fact, bet on baseball from the shared accounts, combined with his deletion of messages, creates at minimum the appearance of impropriety that warrants imposing the most severe discipline. Therefore, there is just cause to uphold Mr. Hoberg's termination for failing to conform to high standards of personal conduct and to maintain the integrity of the game of baseball."

Now 38, Hoberg became a professional umpire in 2009, made his big league debut as a call-up on March 31, 2014, and joined the major league staff ahead of the 2017 season. During Game 2 of the 2022 World Series, he had an unprecedented "umpire's perfect game" by accurately calling balls and strikes on all 129 taken pitches, according to Umpire Scorecards.

"I take full responsibility for the errors in judgment that are outlined in today's statement," Hoberg said in a statement. "Those errors will always be a source of shame and embarrassment to me. Major League Baseball umpires are held to a high standard of personal conduct, and my own conduct fell short of that standard.

"That said, to be clear, I have never and would never bet on baseball in any way, shape, or form. I have never provided, and would never provide, information to anyone for the purpose of betting on baseball. Upholding the integrity of the game has always been of the utmost importance to me. I apologize to Major League Baseball and the entire baseball community for my mistakes. I vow to learn from them and to be a better version of myself moving forward."

Hoberg was notified of his termination on May 31 for violating Article 9 (A) of the umpires' collective bargaining agreement, which states the umpire must "conform to high standards of personal conduct; and maintain the integrity of the international game of baseball." Under the labor contract, Hoberg had the right to appeal Hill's decision, triggering the hiring by MLB of a neutral fact finder who made a report to Manfred.

MLB said the sportsbook notified it that Hoberg opened an account in his name on Jan. 30 last year

and an electronic device associated with the account had accessed an account in the name of another person, who had bet on baseball.

Hoberg's devices placed 417 direct bets with Sportsbook A between Dec. 30, 2020, and Jan. 15, 2024, on the friend's accounts totaling \$487,475.83, which lost \$53,189.65 in the aggregate. The devices placed at least 112 bets with Sportsbook B totaling \$222,130 that resulted in a loss of \$21,686.96 in the aggregate. Most of the direct bets were on football, basketball, hockey and golf.

Nineteen of the 141 baseball bets by the friend were made from Hoberg's home and eight involved five games that Hoberg umpired or was a replay umpire. MLB detailed those games:

—On April 13, 2021, Hoberg had three close calls at third base that MLB said he ruled correctly on. There were money line bets of \$2,000 and \$1,000 on Cincinnati, which lost to San Francisco 7-6.

—On June 15, 2021, Hoberg was the lead replay umpire and there were no replay reviews in a Chicago Cubs' 3-2 loss to the New York Mets. There was a \$1,050 bet on a live runs line, a baseball equivalent of a points spread, and the bet won and paid \$1,550.

—On Aug. 15, 2021, Hoberg was the plate umpire for the Los Angeles Dodgers' 14-4 win over the Mets and had 98.89% accuracy, missing two pitches that MLB said were in low-leverage situations and benefited Los Angeles. Six calls were in a "buffer zone" and four went against the Dodgers and two against the Mets. A \$3,200 money line bet for the Dodgers paid \$5,200.

—On Oct. 8, 2021, Hoberg was the third base umpire for the Dodgers' 4-0 loss to San Francisco in an NL Division Series opener and did not have any close calls. A \$2,000 money line bet and \$3,000 run line bet on the Giants both won and paid a combined \$9,300.

—On Oct. 30, 2021, Hoberg was lead replay official for World Series Game 4. Houston challenged on a possible overslide by Atlanta's Austin Riley at second base in the sixth inning of the Braves' 3-2 win and Hoberg upheld the call by Alfonso Márquez, a decision MLB said was supported by its replay operations center staff. Money line bets on Houston of \$3,000 and \$1,050 on the Astros both lost.

"Although the baseball bets were profitable, the data did not support a finding that baseball bets from Individual A's accounts were connected to game-fixing or other efforts to manipulate any part of any baseball game or event," MLB said in its findings. "The baseball betting activity did not focus on any particular club, pitcher or umpire, and there was no apparent correlation between bet success and bet size. The eight bets on games Hoberg worked similarly did not reveal any obvious pattern."

After being contacted by MLB investigators, the friend deleted Telegram threads communicating the bets and tracking amounts owed and, after a phone conversation between Hoberg and the friend, the umpire deleted his Telegram account, according to MLB. MLB said Hoberg told it during the investigation and appeal that he had been unaware of his friend's baseball bets.

"If our union believed that an umpire bet on baseball, we would never defend him," the Major League Umpires Association said in a statement. "But as today's statement from the league makes clear, the neutral fact finder did not find that Pat placed bets on baseball. Yet we respect Pat's unequivocal acceptance of responsibility for the mistakes that led to his termination."

The Rwanda-backed rebels who seized a major Congo city declare a unilateral ceasefire

By CHINEDU ASADU and JUSTIN KABUMBA Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — The Rwanda-backed rebels who seized eastern Congo's key city of Goma announced a unilateral ceasefire in the region Monday for humanitarian reasons, following calls for a safe corridor for aid and hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

The M23 rebels said the ceasefire would start Tuesday. The announcement came shortly after the U.N. health agency said at least 900 people were killed in last week's fighting in Goma between the rebels and Congolese forces.

The city of 2 million people is at the heart of a region home to trillions of dollars in mineral wealth and

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 65 of 79

remains in rebel control. The M23 were reported to be gaining ground in other areas of eastern Congo and advancing on another provincial capital, Bukavu.

But the rebels said Monday they did not intend to seize Bukavu, though they earlier expressed ambition to march on Congo's capital, Kinshasa, a thousand miles away.

"It must be made clear that we have no intention of capturing Bukavu or other areas. However, we reiterate our commitment to protecting and defending the civilian population and our positions," M23 rebel spokesman Lawrence Kanyuka said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from Congo's government.

The rebels' announcement came ahead of a joint summit this week by the regional blocs for southern and eastern Africa, which have called for a ceasefire. Kenya's President William Ruto said the presidents of Congo and Rwanda would attend.

Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven advanced economies, or G7, urged parties in the conflict to return to negotiations. In a statement on Monday, they called for a "rapid, safe and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians."

Congolese authorities have said they are open to talks to resolve the conflict, but that such a dialogue must be done within the context of previous peace agreements. Rwanda and the rebels have accused the Congo government of defaulting on previous agreements.

The M23 rebels are backed by some 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, far more than in 2012 when they first briefly captured Goma then withdrew after international pressure. They are the most potent of the more than 100 armed groups vying for control in Congo's east, which holds vast deposits critical to much of the world's technology.

The latest fighting forced hundreds of thousands of people who had been displaced by years of conflict to carry what remained of their belongings and flee again. Thousands poured into nearby Rwanda.

The fighting in Congo has connections with a decades-long ethnic conflict.

M23 says it is defending ethnic Tutsis in Congo. Rwanda has claimed the Tutsis are being persecuted by Hutus and former militias responsible for the 1994 genocide of 800,000 Tutsis and others in Rwanda.

Many Hutus fled to Congo after the genocide and founded the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda militia group. Rwanda said the group is "fully integrated" into the Congolese military, which denies the charges.

On Monday, families desperate to identify their loved ones besieged morgues as body bags were loaded onto trucks for burials in Goma.

A weeping Chiza Nyenyezi recalled how her son died from a gunshot injury after a bullet went through his chest. "His entire chest was open," Nyenyezi said.

Louise Shalukoma said her son's body could not be immediately recovered from the streets because a bomb detonated as people tried to retrieve it.

"My God, my fourth child, when I saw that he was dead I said, 'Lord, what am I going to do?'" she lamented. "This M23 war came for me in Goma."

What is known about the deadly collision between a passenger jet and Army helicopter

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

American Airlines Flight 5342 and an Army helicopter collided in midair near Washington D.C.'s Reagan National Wednesday night, sending the two aircraft into the Potomac River and killing all 67 aboard in the deadliest U.S. air disaster since 2001.

The cause of the crash 3 miles (5 kilometers) south of the White House and U.S. Capitol was under investigation Monday as crews recovered wreckage from the river.

Crews have identified 55 bodies. Authorities are confident all will be found, Washington, D.C. Fire and EMS Chief John Donnelly Sr. said.

The crash

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 66 of 79

The regional jet out of Wichita, Kansas carried 60 passengers and four crew and was preparing to land. The UH-60 Black Hawk based at Fort Belvoir in Virginia was on a training exercise and carried three soldiers, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. Skies were clear.

A few minutes before the Canadian-made Bombardier CRJ-700 series twin-engine jet was to land, air traffic controllers asked Flight 5342 if it could use a shorter runway. The pilots agreed. Controllers cleared the landing. Flight-tracking sites show the plane adjusted its approach to the new runway.

Less than 30 seconds before the collision, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it had the plane in sight. The military pilot responded yes.

Moments later the controller made another call to the helicopter, apparently telling the copter to wait for the jet to pass.

There was no reply and the aircraft collided.

The recovery

Crews were seen aboard a vessel with a crane in the river early Monday and by around midday they had moved a large piece of the jet. Portions of the two aircraft will be loaded onto flatbed trucks and taken to a hangar.

More than 300 people participated in the recovery effort at some moments, officials said. Two Navy barges lifted wreckage from the river.

Divers and salvage workers adhere to strict protocols and stop moving debris if a body is found because the dignified recovery of remains takes precedence, Col. Francis B. Pera of the Army Corps of Engineers said.

The investigation

Preliminary data showed conflicting readings about the altitudes of the two aircraft.

Data from the jet's flight recorder showed its altitude as 325 feet (99 meters), plus or minus 25 feet (7.6 meters), National Transportation Safety Board officials told reporters. Data in the control tower showed the Black Hawk helicopter at 200 feet (61 meters) — its maximum allowed altitude — at the time.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators have the plane's flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder, along with the helicopter's black box, and are working to download the information inside all three.

Investigators said that about a second before impact, the jet's flight recorder showed a change in its pitch. But they did not say whether that change in angle meant that pilots were trying to perform an evasive maneuver to avoid the crash.

The plane's radio transponder stopped transmitting about 2,400 feet (732 meters) short of the runway, roughly over the middle of the Potomac, and the plane was found upside-down in three sections in waist-deep water. The helicopter's wreckage was also found in the river.

Army aviation chief of staff Jonathan Koziol said the helicopter crew was "very experienced" and familiar with the congested flying around Washington.

Full NTSB investigations typically take a year or more. Investigators hope to have a preliminary report within 30 days.

President Donald Trump has publicly faulted the helicopter for flying at too high an altitude. He also said federal diversity and inclusion efforts — particularly regarding air traffic controllers — were somehow to blame. When repeatedly pressed on it by reporters in the White House briefing room, the president could not back up those claims.

The victims

Among the passengers were members of the Skating Club of Boston who were returning from a development camp that followed the 2025 U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Wichita.

Victims included teenage figure skaters Jinna Han and Spencer Lane, the teens' mothers and two Russian-born coaches, Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, who won a 1994 world championship in pairs skating.

The victims also included a group of hunters returning from a guided trip in Kansas, nine students and parents from Fairfax County, Virginia, schools and four steamfitters members of a steamfitters' local in suburban Maryland and two Chinese nationals.

The plane captain was Jonathan Campos, 34, according to multiple media reports.

The Army identified the soldiers on the helicopter as Capt. Rebecca M. Lobach of Durham, North Carolina; Staff Sgt. Ryan Austin O'Hara, 28, of Lilburn, Georgia, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Loyd Eaves, 39, of Great Mills, Maryland. O'Hara was the crew chief and Eaves and Lobach were pilots.

Families at the site

Families of the victims visited the crash site on Sunday.

They were taken in buses with a police escort to the Potomac River bank near where the two aircraft came to rest after colliding.

Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar led one of the best Grammys in years. Has the awards show transformed?

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Grammy Awards have long been criticized over a lack of diversity, with a history of artists of color, women, and rap and R&B musicians being snubbed for top prizes. Sunday's edition suggests something may have shifted.

Beyoncé, the most awarded and nominated artist in Grammys history, finally won album of the year for her country-and-then-some album, "Cowboy Carter," furthering her dedication to recentering Black art in popular culture. Kendrick Lamar took home two of the top four prizes of the night, celebrating hip-hop on a show that has historically neglected the genre. The Grammys placed young pop performers in the spotlight at the moment of their ascent, meeting the contemporary music moment.

The Recording Academy has made concerted efforts to diversify in recent years. Could it be those strides have already paid off in a course correction? Or were the 2025 Grammys simply a one-off?

A feud squashed

Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason jr. appeared onstage to address "some real criticism" facing the organization behind the Grammys.

"Artists were pretty vocal with their complaints," he said, reaching back to 2020: "The Weeknd called out the academy for lack of transparency in our awards. He went so far as to announce he was boycotting the Grammys."

Five years can make a world of difference. At the end of his speech, Mason introduced The Weeknd as a surprise performer, making his first appearance at the Grammys since 2017.

His return suggested approval of a new voting class — several presenters took care to note that the awards were decided by more than 13,000 voting members.

Peter A. Berry, a music journalist with work in XXL and Complex, believes that reading might be too pat, though. "He performed to promote his new album," he said, referencing The Weeknd's "Hurry Up Tomorrow." That timing aligned with the Grammys' need to highlight its reform.

"I can't remove my cynical music industry lens," he says. "Time heals all wounds when you need promo."

A more diverse voting body

Of the Recording Academy's current voting membership, 66% are men, 49% are white and 66% are over the age of 40. But the academy announced last year that 3,000 female voting members had been added since 2019. Two-thirds of the total voting body joined in the last five years. In that same time, the academy has increased the number of members who identify as people of color by 63%, with 100% growth in Asian American and Pacific Islander voters, 90% growth in Black voters and 43% growth in Latino voters.

At the 2024 Grammys, women dominated the major categories and as a result, every televised competitive Grammy went to at least one woman. It appeared to reflect contemporary interest in female pop performers — Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus, Victoria Monét and Karol G, among them. In 2025, that trend continued. Women received every single televised award on Sunday night with the exception of Lamar's and one shared between Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars.

"They got it right this year," Berry says. "Maybe it is that the voting committee changed."

Nominees and winners reflect contemporary interest

The nominations announced in November acknowledged the artists who led the conversation in 2024.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 68 of 79

Beyoncé was celebrated with 11 nominations, what Kinitra D. Brooks — an academic and author of “The Lemonade Reader” — says was the result of voters finally recognizing “this is clearly someone who deserves the respect of her peers.”

Chappell Roan and Sabrina Carpenter, experiencing breakout years, received six nods each. The ubiquitous, discourse-dominating “Not Like Us” from Lamar and Charli xcx’s “BRAT” also received recognition.

And that translated to awards. There were a number of first-time award winners, many women and people of color like DoeChii, Carin León and Sierra Ferrell. In the relatively new songwriter of the year, non-classical category, Amy Allen became the first woman to take home the trophy.

A move in the right direction for hip-hop

“Not Like Us” was an early winner at the Grammys’ Premiere Ceremony, receiving trophies for music video, rap song and rap performance. It marked his seventh time winning in that last category. But it was his presence during the main broadcast that really made a splash. One of the biggest global hits of 2024, his Drake diss track won song and record of the year — only the second hip-hop single to ever win record of the year. By the end of the night, “Not Like Us” had won all five awards for which it was nominated.

Lamar’s recognitions arrived the year after Jay-Z criticized the Grammys for ignoring the rap legends before him — those who brought hip-hop to the preeminent music award show, only to have rap categories not make the official broadcast.

“We want you all to get it right,” Jay-Z said last year. “At least get it close to right.”

Berry describes Lamar’s wins as “a layup,” a celebration of one of the great rap records of recent history.

And though Lamar’s wins meant more hip-hop on the broadcast, Berry says the Grammys’ hip-hop picks tend to be predictable. He says there’s a “cookie cutter” formula for the kind of rappers the Recording Academy recognizes.

“The more esoteric and abstract rap,” as well as “the mid-level street rap,” goes largely ignored, he says.

Course-correcting the biggest blind spot

Beyoncé’s album of the year victory was widely thought long overdue. The superstar had four of her albums nominated in the category before winning on her fifth.

She seemingly alluded to it in her acceptance speech: “It’s been many, many years,” she said.

“I Am... Sasha Fierce” lost to Taylor Swift for “Fearless” in 2010. In 2015, her self-titled album “Beyoncé” lost to Beck’s “Morning Phase” and Harry Styles’ “Harry’s House” beat “Renaissance” in 2023. Perhaps most infamously, though, was the loss of “Lemonade” to Adele’s “25.”

“I can’t possibly accept this award. And I’m very humbled, and I’m very grateful and gracious, but my artist of my life is Beyoncé,” Adele said in her 2017 acceptance speech, holding back tears.

In winning album of the year Sunday, Beyoncé became the first Black woman to win the top prize in the 21st century. The last was Lauryn Hill with “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” 26 years ago. Before her were Natalie Cole and Whitney Houston, and the list ends there.

Brooks believes “Beyoncé reflects that Black women can be excellent and still ignored in very particular ways — because this is a top honor in her field.”

Emily Lordi, a Vanderbilt University professor whose focus is African American literature and Black popular music, describes “Cowboy Carter” as “an album with a capital A — one that explicitly aims to restore the Black roots and routes of country, a genre long coded as white. It is the kind of historic intervention the academy could not fail to recognize — it was undeniable.”

Berry points to the fact that the record’s country influence may have aligned with the academy’s traditionalist voters — but also appealed to those inspired by its break with convention.

“It is some cosmic justice being done,” says Berry. “It might not be the best Bey album, but it was the best of the category.”

Even Grammys’ host Trevor Noah couldn’t help but acknowledge the milestone: “We finally saw it happen, everyone,” he said. That, we did.

Ukrainian troops losing ground to Russia as Trump talks of ending

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 69 of 79

war

By SAMYA KULLAB, VASILISA STEPANENKO and EVGENIY MALOLETKA Associated Press
POKROVSK REGION, Ukraine (AP) — A dire shortage of infantry troops and supply routes coming under Russian drone attacks are conspiring against Ukrainian forces in Pokrovsk, where decisive battles in the nearly three-year war are playing out — and time is running short.

Ukrainian troops are losing ground around the crucial supply hub, which lies at the confluence of multiple highways leading to key cities in the eastern Donetsk region as well as an important railway station.

Moscow is set on capturing as much territory as possible as the Trump administration is pushing for negotiations to end the war and recently froze foreign aid to Ukraine, a move that has shocked Ukrainian officials already apprehensive about the intentions of the new U.S. president, their most important ally. Military aid has not stopped, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said.

Ukrainian soldiers in Pokrovsk said that Russian forces switched tactics in recent weeks, attacking their flanks instead of going head-on to form a pincer movement around the city. With Russians in control of dominant heights, Ukrainian supply routes are now within their range. Heavy fog in recent days prevented Ukrainian soldiers from effectively using surveillance drones, allowing Russians to consolidate and take more territory.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian commanders say they do not have enough reserves to sustain defense lines and that new infantry units are failing to execute operations. Many pin hopes on Mykhailo Drapatyi, a respected commander recently appointed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as ground forces chief, to shift the dynamic and counterattack.

"The war is won by logistics. If there is no logistics, there is no infantry, because there is no way to supply it," said the deputy commander of the Da Vinci Wolves battalion, known by the call sign Afer.

"(Russians) have learned this and are doing it quite well."

Poor weather at the worst time

A combination of factors led Kyiv to effectively lose the settlement of Velyka Novosilka this past week, their most significant gain since seizing the city of Kurakhove in the Donetsk region in January.

Scattered groups of Ukrainian soldiers are still present in Velyka Novosilka's southern sector, Ukrainian commanders said, prompting criticism from some military experts who questioned why the higher command did not order a full withdrawal.

The road-junction village is 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region, where authorities have begun digging fortifications for the first time since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, anticipating further Russian advances.

Russia amassed a large number of infantry around Velyka Novosilka, soldiers there said. As heavy fog set in in recent days, Ukrainian drones "barely worked" to conduct surveillance, one commander near Pokrovsk told The Associated Press. Long-range and medium-range surveillance was impossible, he said. He spoke on condition of anonymity in order to speak freely about sensitive military matters.

"Because of this, the enemy was amassing forces ... taking up positions, digging in. They were very good at it," he said.

It was at that fateful moment that Russian forces launched a massive attack: Up to 10 columns of armoured vehicles, each with up to 10 units, moved out from various directions.

Ukrainian logistics in peril

Key logistics routes along asphalted roads and highways are under direct threat from Russian drones as a result of Moscow's recent gains, further straining Ukrainian troops.

Russian forces now occupy key dominant heights around the Pokrovsk region, which allows them to use drones up to 30 kilometers (18 miles) deep into Ukrainian front lines.

The Pokrovsk-Pavlohrad-Dnipro highway is "already under the control of Russian drones," said the commander at Pokrovsk's flanks. Russian forces are less than 4 kilometers (2 1/2 miles) away and are affecting Ukrainian traffic, he said. "Now the road is only 10% of its former capacity," he said.

Another paved highway, the Myrnohrad-Kostyantynivka road, is also under Russian fire, he said.

This also means that in poor weather, military vehicles, including armored personnel carriers, tanks and pickup trucks, have to trudge through the open fields to deliver fuel, food and ammunition, as well as evacuate the wounded.

In a first-aid station near Pokrovsk, a paramedic with the call sign Marik said evacuating wounded soldiers once took hours, now it takes days.

"Everything is visible (by enemy drones) and it is very difficult," he said.

New recruits are unprepared

Ukrainian soldiers in Pokrovsk said shortages of fighting troops are "catastrophic" and challenges are compounded by newly created infantry units that are poorly trained and inexperienced, putting more pressure on battle-hardened brigades having to step in to stabilize the front line.

Afer, the deputy commander, complained that new recruits are "constantly extending the front line because they leave their positions, they do not hold them, they do not control them, they do not monitor them. We do almost all the work for them."

"Because of this, having initially a 2-kilometer area of responsibility, you end up with 8-9 kilometers per battalion, which is a lot and we don't have enough resources," Afer said. Drones are especially hard to come by for his battalion, he said, adding they only have half of what they need.

"It's not because they have lower quality infantry, but because they are completely unprepared for modern warfare," he said of the new recruits.

His battalion has almost no reserves, forcing infantry units to hold front-line positions for weeks at a time. For every one of his soldiers, Russians have 20, he said, emphasizing how outnumbered they are.

Back at the first-aid station, a wounded soldier with the call sign Fish was recovering from a leg wound sustained after he tried to evacuate a fallen comrade. He had moved him from a dugout to load him into a vehicle when the Russian mortar shell exploded nearby.

"We are fighting back as much as we can, as best as we can," he said.

Another car bomb in a northern Syria city kills at least 19, mostly women

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and OMAR ALBAM Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Another car bomb exploded on the outskirts of a city in northern Syria on Monday, killing at least 19 people and leaving over a dozen wounded, hospital workers and emergency responders said.

Eighteen women and one man were killed, a nurse at the local hospital, Mohammad Ahmad, told The Associated Press. Another 15 women were wounded, some in critical condition, according to the local civil defense.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the blast that occurred next to a vehicle carrying agricultural workers on the outskirts of Manbij.

It was the seventh car bombing in Manbij in over a month, said Munir Mustafa, the deputy director of civil defense, warning that the attacks near Syria's second city are a threat to Syria's efforts to bring about post-war security and economic recovery.

Manbij in northeastern Aleppo province continues to see violence two months after the fall of President Bashar Assad in an insurgent offensive.

Turkish-backed factions known as the Syrian National Army have clashed with the U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. The factions took the city from the SDF in early December during the insurgency.

Not long after accusations against the SDF surfaced on social media, the SDF in a statement condemned Monday's attack and accused Ankara-backed groups of possibly being involved with the aim of causing more strife in Syria.

The statement said the SDF will communicate with Syria's new interim government in Damascus to investigate.

In a statement, Syria's presidency said that "the perpetrators will face the harshest penalties to serve

as a lesson to anyone who dares to threaten Syria's security or harm its people."

A car bombing in Manbij on Saturday killed four civilians and wounded nine, state news agency SANA reported, citing civil defense officials.

The attacks have forced residents to become more vigilant, one said.

"There are efforts from the people of Manbij to focus on protecting some neighborhoods as well as setting up surveillance cameras in the main neighborhoods," said Jameel al-Sayyed, an activist and journalist.

Multiple earthquakes are rattling Greece's volcanic island of Santorini. Here's what we know

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Multiple earthquakes are rattling Santorini, a volcanic island in Greece, prompting authorities to dispatch rescuers with tents, a sniffer dog and drones, and to shut schools on four islands.

Residents have been warned to avoid indoor gatherings, check escape routes, stay away from cliffs and to drain swimming pools to reduce potential structural damage to buildings in the event of a large earthquake.

Greece lies in a highly seismically active part of the world, and earthquakes are frequent. The vast majority cause no injuries and little or no damage, but the country has also seen deadly quakes. Earthquakes can't be predicted, but authorities are taking measures as a precaution.

Santorini, one of Greece's most popular tourist destinations, took its present crescent shape following a massive volcanic eruption in antiquity. Now, millions of visitors each year come to see its dramatic scenery of whitewashed houses and blue-domed churches clinging to the cliff along the flooded caldera, or volcanic crater.

Last week, scientists said they had noticed increased volcanic activity in the caldera, but say this isn't linked to the earthquakes.

Here's a look at the current situation:

What's going on?

About 200 quakes with magnitudes between 3 and 4.9 were registered from Saturday to Monday afternoon between Santorini and the nearby island of Amorgos, authorities said.

Seismologist Gerasimos Papadopoulos said on Greece's ERT television that the seismic activity began on Jan. 24, but intensified Saturday, with increasing frequency and magnitudes.

The fault line producing the current earthquakes runs for about 120 kilometers (75 miles), but only the southern part between Santorini and Amorgos has been activated. The earthquakes have epicenters beneath the seabed, roughly 30-40 kilometers (18-25 miles) from any of the islands. Scientists say this is good news, as an epicenter beneath land could potentially be more destructive. But a large quake could also trigger a tsunami, so authorities have warned people to stay away from coastal areas and head inland if they feel a significant earthquake.

So far, there has been no damage or injuries reported, although some minor rock slides have occurred.

Could the earthquakes trigger a volcanic eruption?

Santorini lies along the Hellenic Volcanic Arc, which stretches from the Peloponnese in southern Greece through the Cycladic islands.

Last Wednesday, Greece's Climate Crisis and Civil Protection Ministry announced monitoring sensors had picked up "mild seismic-volcanic activity" inside the island's caldera. Similar volcanic activity had been recorded in 2011, when it lasted for 14 months and ended without any major issues.

Another volcano — a submarine one called Kolumbo — lies about 8 kilometers (5 miles) northeast of Santorini, nearer to the epicenter of the current earthquakes.

But seismologists say the quakes aren't related to the volcanoes.

A meeting between government officials and scientists determined that seismic activity within Santorini's caldera "remains at the same low levels as in recent days," the Civil Protection Ministry said Monday, but that it was "particularly increased" between Santorini and Amorgos.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 72 of 79

What are authorities worried about?

Scientists are still trying to determine definitively whether the multiple quakes are foreshocks — smaller earthquakes before a major temblor. Papadopoulos said that there was a “high probability” they are.

Santorini’s main villages are built along the rim of the volcano’s caldera — producing the dramatic scenery of cascading whitewashed houses and sunset viewpoints that make the island so popular, but also raising concerns in the event of a major earthquake. The sheer cliffs also make some areas prone to rock slides.

What precautions are being taken?

Authorities sent a team of rescuers with a sniffer dog and drones to Santorini, where they set up tents in a basketball court next to the island’s main hospital as a staging area. Push alerts have been sent to cellphones warning people to stay away from areas where rock slides could occur, and banning access to some coastal areas.

Residents and hotels have been asked to drain swimming pools, as the water movement in a major quake could destabilize buildings. People have been told to avoid old buildings and check for exit routes when in built-up areas.

Schools on Santorini, as well as the nearby islands of Anafi, Amorgos and Ios, will remain shut all week.

What’s the history?

The fault line that has been activated was the site of Greece’s largest quake in the last century: a 7.7 magnitude temblor dubbed the Amorgos earthquake that struck in 1956, triggering a roughly 20-meter (65-foot) tsunami, causing significant damage in Amorgos and Santorini and killing more than 50 people.

Santorini is also the site of one of the largest volcanic eruptions in human history. Known as the Minoan eruption, it occurred around 1,600 B.C. and destroyed much of the formerly round island, giving Santorini its current shape. The eruption is believed to have contributed to the decline of the ancient Minoan civilization.

Although it’s still an active volcano, the last notable eruption occurred in 1950.

“What we must realize is that the Santorini volcano produces very large explosions every 20,000 years,” Eftymios Lekkas, seismologist and head of the scientific monitoring committee for the Hellenic Volcanic Arc, said last week. “It’s been 3,000 years since the last explosion, so we have a very long time ahead of us before we face a big explosion.”

Aid is surging into Gaza under the ceasefire. Is it helping?

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Two weeks after the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel took effect, aid is flooding into the Gaza Strip, bringing relief to a territory suffering from hunger, mass displacement and devastation following 15 months of war.

But Palestinians and aid workers say it’s still an uphill battle to ensure the assistance reaches everyone. And looming large is the possibility that fighting will resume if the ceasefire breaks down after the six-week first phase.

As part of the ceasefire agreement, Israel said it would allow 600 aid trucks into Gaza each day, a major increase. Israel estimates that at least 4,200 trucks have entered each week since the ceasefire took hold.

Humanitarian groups say aid distribution is complicated by destroyed or damaged roads, Israeli inspections and the threat of unexploded bombs.

On Saturday, Samir Abu Holi, 68, watched over a food distribution point in Jabaliya, an area in northern Gaza razed to the ground during multiple Israeli offensives, the most recent of which cut off nearly all aid for over a month.

“I have more than 10 children. All of them need milk and food. Before the ceasefire, we used to provide food with difficulty,” he said. “Today there is a little relief.”

Here’s a closer look at the aid situation:

A surge of aid

The main U.N. food agency, the World Food Program, said it dispersed more food to Palestinians in Gaza during the first four days of the ceasefire than it did, on average, during any month of the war. Over 32,000 metric tons of aid have entered Gaza since the ceasefire, the agency said last week.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 73 of 79

Aid is now entering through two crossings in the north and one in the south. Aid agencies said they are opening bakeries and handing out high-energy biscuits, and Hamas police have returned to the streets to help restore order.

Before the ceasefire, aid organizations said delivery was complicated by armed gangs looting the trucks, attacks on aid workers, arduous Israeli inspections and difficulties coordinating with COGAT, the Israeli military body charged with facilitating aid. Israel blamed the U.N. and humanitarian organizations for failing to deliver aid once it reached Gaza.

There's now the "political will to make everything else work," said Tania Hary, executive director of Gisha, an Israeli organization dedicated to protecting Palestinians' right to freedom of movement.

"COGAT is fast-tracking responses to coordination requests. It's allowing two crossings instead of one to operate in the north. The ceasefire is allowing Hamas forces to operate freely to stop looting ... and the lack of hostilities allows aid agencies to move freely and safely," Hary said.

Food prices are still a challenge

Nadine Jomaa, a young woman in Bureij in central Gaza, said the aid is not freely available, and she needs to buy goods in the market, where they are resold for inflated prices. Though prices are coming down, flour and cooking gas still cost roughly triple the amount they did before the war, according to the World Food Program.

Her family is eating only cheap canned goods. "We need more food, water, household items for the kitchen and bathroom and women's items," she said.

Although humanitarian officials have long said the best way to prevent extortion is to flood Gaza with aid, Palestinians in the north say that, so far, the influx appears to have only boosted shadowy middlemen. Residents complain that there are not nearly enough tents entering Gaza while non-essential items such as chocolate, nuts and soda are suddenly ubiquitous.

Ahmed Qamar, 34, who returned to live in the ruins of his former home in Jabaliya, said his area has seen just a few dozen aid trucks.

"Hundreds of families here are sleeping in the open and in the cold," he said. "We need electricity and shelter, and meanwhile markets are flooded with chocolate and cigarettes."

Tess Ingram, a spokesperson for UNICEF, said health workers report that they're still recording cases of malnutrition in children and pregnant women.

Though aid workers say the Israeli inspection process has accelerated, getting certain types of aid into Gaza is still challenging. Some items are deemed "dual-use," barring them from Gaza because of concerns they could be diverted by militants for military purposes.

Some hospitals and desalination plants still have fuel shortages. Hamas on Sunday also accused Israeli officials of obstructing the delivery of medical supplies and reconstruction machinery.

According to a list circulated to humanitarian groups by COGAT and shared with The Associated Press, desalination and water-collection devices, storage units, tools, tent kits, ovens, water-resistant clothing and equipment for shelter construction teams all require "pre-approval" before entering Gaza. Large tents, sleeping bags, portable toilets, heating pads and vaccines are cleared to enter the strip without Israeli approval.

"While aid is getting in higher numbers, we also know that those restrictions on essential items are persisting," said Sophie Driscoll, head of communications for the International Rescue Committee in the Palestinian territories.

Ingram, the spokesperson for UNICEF, said the list has made it difficult to bring in the generators and heavy materials necessary to repair Gaza's damaged water network. As they return home, many Palestinians are living in areas where the water network has been destroyed. That makes dehydration and the spread of disease due to poor sanitary conditions and limited medical care a threat.

Ingram said she has traveled to some of the hardest-hit areas in the north — Jabaliya and Beit Lahiya — in recent days, where people are "desperate for something to drink."

"Everywhere I have gone here in the north of Gaza, people asking for water," she said. "I could see children on the side of the road doing that kind of universal sign for water."

COGAT acknowledged keeping certain items on the dual-use list but said it is still permitting them into Gaza after screening. The agency said tents are not considered dual-use, and Israel has allowed tens of thousands into Gaza in recent weeks "without restriction." It also said Israel has extended the hours crossings are open and allowed road repairs inside Gaza.

"Regarding the distribution of aid inside Gaza, Israel does not control the situation inside," COGAT said. Destroyed roads, unexploded ordnance

Roads have been heavily damaged by the war, and unexploded bombs litter the landscape. The U.N. estimates that 5% to 10% of all ammunition dropped in Gaza has failed to detonate, making the territory potentially perilous for civilians and aid workers.

UNMAS, the U.N. agency handling unexploded ordnance, said that since the ceasefire took hold, humanitarian convoys and civilians have reported finding large aircraft bombs, mortars and rifle grenades.

Speaking from southern Gaza, Jonathan Crickx, chief of communications at UNICEF, recalled being on a road where "thousands and thousands of children and families were walking."

"I was seeing them with nothing," he said, "only the clothes they're wearing on their back."

France's government is fighting for survival over its 2025 budget. Here's what to know

By SYLVIE CORBET and SAM PETREQUIN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou used special executive powers Monday to get the country's 2025 budget approved without a vote by lawmakers, and now faces a no-confidence motion that threatens the survival of his 6-week-old government.

Opposition parties were expected to file the no-confidence motion later Monday, and a vote is expected in the National Assembly on Wednesday.

That may provide France with a budget at last, or send the country into new political and economic turmoil. Bayrou's survival depends on how many parties agree to support the motion. He is France's fourth prime minister in little over a year.

Why this is important for France and Europe

French politics have been in disarray since President Emmanuel Macron called snap elections last year that left no party with a majority in parliament. With one of the world's biggest economies, France's failure to pass a budget has worried investors and hurt the 20-country eurozone.

France is also under pressure from the European Union to reduce its huge debt and deficit.

For Macron, this is a particularly bad time for France to be weakened. U.S. President Donald Trump is threatening new tariffs on the EU and making designs on Greenland, and Russia is growing more emboldened in Ukraine.

What is happening this week

After weeks of debate, French lawmakers on Monday debated the conclusions of a joint Parliamentary committee on the state budget.

The previous government collapsed over its budget plans, which included slashing 40 billion euros (\$42 billion) in spending and raising taxes by 20 billion euros. Bayrou's revised version has addressed some concerns from opposition lawmakers.

The joint committee has kept an extra tax on large companies while increasing a tax on financial transactions. And Bayrou agreed not to cut 4,000 jobs in national education as previously envisaged.

But opposition parties said that wasn't enough. So Bayrou, who has no majority at the National Assembly, used a constitutional tool known as Article 49.3 that allows the government to pass legislation without a parliamentary vote. It is rarely used for a budget.

The hard-left party France Unbowed said it would file a no-confidence motion over Bayrou's move.

What happens next

To pass, a no-confidence motion needs at least half the votes in the 577-seat Assembly. France Unbowed's measure will likely have the support of Communist and Green lawmakers, but that's not enough.

The vote of the Socialists could be decisive. The Socialist Party said Monday that it would not vote to bring down the Bayrou government because "it's time to give France a budget." Yet some lawmakers may not follow the party's instructions.

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen was instrumental in ousting the previous government. Her National Rally party has the largest single group in France's lower house of parliament, and said it will give its lawmakers instructions Wednesday on how to vote.

If Bayrou is voted out, Macron would face the prospect of finding a new prime minister once again and forming another government capable of finding consensus on the budget.

Why this sounds familiar

Something similar happened in December, when a confidence motion triggered by budget disputes forced conservative Prime Minister Michel Barnier to resign.

Barnier was named to solve the political impasse created by last year's elections. But his proposed austerity budget only deepened divisions.

Macron then tapped the veteran centrist Bayrou in the hope he could bridge divides.

Unlike Barnier, Bayrou has held intense negotiations with the Socialists aimed at reaching a non-aggression deal over the budget under which they would agree not to undercut each other.

Beyoncé wins album of the year at the 2025 Grammys for 'Cowboy Carter'

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Beyoncé won album of the year for "Cowboy Carter" at Sunday's Grammys, delivering her — at last — the show's elusive top award.

The superstar, who is both the most awarded and nominated artist in Grammys history, has been up for the category four times before and many feel she has been snubbed by its top honors.

In winning album of the year with "Cowboy Carter," Beyoncé has become the first Black woman to win the top prize in the 21st century. The last was Lauryn Hill with "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" 26 years ago. Before her was Natalie Cole and Whitney Houston. That means Beyoncé is only the fourth Black woman to win album of the year at the Grammys.

Members of the Los Angeles Fire Department presented Beyoncé with the trophy, one of several times the show reflected the recent wildfires that burned thousands of homes.

"It's been many, many years," Beyoncé said in her speech. "I want to dedicate this to Ms. Martell," she said, referencing Linda Martell, the performer who became the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry.

"We finally saw it happen, everyone," host Trevor Noah said, nodding to the long overdue achievement for one of music's transcendent artists.

Kendrick Lamar won song and record of the year for his diss track "Not Like Us," taking home two of the night's most prestigious awards.

"We're gonna dedicate this one to the city," Lamar said before shouting out Los Angeles area neighborhoods.

It is the second hip-hop single to ever win in the category. The first was Childish Gambino's "This Is America."

The Weeknd mends fences, Chappell Roan challenges music industry

The Weeknd has mended his fractious relationship with the Grammy Awards with a surprise performance of his new single, "Cry For Me" and "Timeless" with Playboi Carti.

His decision is a direct reflection of the changes the Recording Academy has made to diversify its voting body, CEO Harvey Mason jr. said in his introduction. The Weeknd has been openly critical of the Grammys organization, dating back to 2020 when he wrote on Twitter: "The Grammys remain corrupt."

It was just one of many pleasant surprises Sunday night. Chappell Roan was named best new artist.

She read a speech from a notebook, speaking directly to major labels and the music industry, instruct-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 76 of 79

ing them to "offer a living wage and healthcare, especially to developing artists." She described getting signed as a minor, getting dropped and entering the workforce during COVID-19 with no work experience and no health care. She asked them to treat artists like "valuable employees."

"Labels, we got you," she concluded her speech. "But do you got us?"

Beyoncé and Chappell Roan give Grammys a country theme

In one of the biggest moments of the evening so far, Taylor Swift presented the award for best country album to Beyoncé. She became the first Black woman to ever win in the category.

"Genre is a cold word to keep us in our place as artists," she said in her speech. "I'm still in shock. Thank you so much for this honor."

Beyoncé entered the night as the leading nominee.

A little bit of the wild west, a little bit of West Hollywood. Roan brought a rocking version of her "Pink Pony Club" to the Grammy stage. Joined by a posse of dancing clown cowboys, she sang from atop a giant pink horse.

Los Angeles on the mind

In incorporating the wildfires throughout the show, the Grammys put the spotlight on the city's resiliency.

Noah's opening speech was dedicated to those affected by the fires, promising a show that not only celebrates them, but one that also celebrates "the city that brought us so much of that music." The Grammys have also allotted ad time to be used by local businesses affected by the fires.

As the show neared its end, Noah announced that viewers had contributed \$7 million to relief efforts Sunday night so far.

On a stage set up to look like the mountains of Los Angeles, the LA born-and-raised Billie Eilish and her brother/collaborator Finneas performed her hit "Birds of a Feather." It was one of a number of ways the show seeks to salute the city. "We love you LA," she told the crowd at the end of the set.

The show kicked off with a powerful opening performance of Randy Newman's "I Love L.A." by Dawes — whose members were directly affected by the Eaton fire — backed by John Legend, Brad Paisley, Sheryl Crow, Brittany Howard and St. Vincent.

Star studded performances and victories

The first televised award went to Doechii for best rap album for "Alligator Bites Never Heal."

The tears were immediate. "This category was introduced in 1989. Two women have won, Lauryn Hill —" she said, correcting herself. "Three women have won. Lauryn Hill, Cardi B and Doechii."

Will Smith introduced a tribute to the late, great, legendary producer Quincy Jones. "In his 91 years, Q touched countless lives, but I have to say he changed mine forever," he said. "You probably wouldn't even know who Will Smith was without Quincy Jones."

Jones died in November at age 91. Kicked off by Cynthia Erivo, accompanied by Herbie Hancock on piano, the "Wicked" star sang Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon." Then came Lainey Wilson and Jacob Collier with "Let the Good Times Roll," followed by Stevie Wonder and Hancock busting out "Bluesette" and "We Are The World." For the latter, they were joined by student singers from two schools that were lost in the LA-area fires.

Then, Janelle Monae with an inspired rendition of "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," channeling Michael Jackson in a sparkly tuxedo and an effortless moonwalk.

The Beatles' "Now and Then," which used AI technology, took home best rock performance. Sean Lennon accepted the award on behalf of his father John Lennon. "As far as I'm concerned, it's the best band of all time," he said of the Beatles.

First time winners were abundant. They included Carpenter, Roan, Doechii, Charli xcx, songwriter Amy Allen, Música Mexicana star Carin León, French metal band Gojira and country folk artist Sierra Ferrell.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers' Anthony Kiedis and Chad Smith led the crowd in a short singalong of their hit "Under the Bridge," reminding the crowd to "support their friends and neighbors as they rebuild their lives," said Kiedis. Then they presented the best pop vocal album award to Carpenter for "Short n' Sweet."

"I really wasn't expecting this," she said. "This is, woo, my first Grammy so I'm going to cry." (She's now

won two, but the earlier award was handed out a pre-telecast ceremony that many artists don't attend.) She also performed.

Winners use speeches to lift marginalized communities in tense political climate

Shakira won Latin pop album for "Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran" and gave a powerful, short speech. "I want to dedicate this award to all my immigrant brothers and sisters in this country," she said.

Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars teamed up for a cover of "California Dreamin'." Later, SZA presented them with the award for best pop duo/group performance for "Die With A Smile."

"Trans people are not invisible. ... The queer community deserves to be lifted up," Gaga said in her speech.

Alicia Keys was awarded the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award "DEI is not a threat, it's a gift," she said in her speech, referencing diversity, equity and inclusion programs that have been scrapped recently by the U.S. government and several major corporations.

Hospitals in eastern Congo are crowded with wounded and exhausting their supplies

By VIVIEN LATOUR Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — Hundreds of wounded people have poured into overcrowded hospitals in Goma, a major city in eastern Congo, as fighting rages on between government forces and the Rwanda-backed rebels who seized the city of around 2 million people.

"They will get infected before we can treat them all," said Florence Douet, an operating room nurse at Bethesda Hospital, as she attended to patients with varying degrees of injuries.

Since the start of the M23 rebels' offensive on Goma on Jan. 26, more than 700 people have been killed and nearly 3,000 have been wounded in the city and its vicinity, officials say. Bethesda Hospital alone said it receives more than 100 new patients each day, overstretching its capacity of 250 beds.

Bethesda is one of several hospitals in Goma that The Associated Press visited that has inadequate personnel and supplies. The city hosts many of the close to 6.5 million people displaced by the conflict, which is one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.

As more people arrived at the hospitals with gunshot or shrapnel wounds, many were forced to share beds while others lay on the floor, writhing in pain as they waited for medical attention.

"This is the first time I'm experiencing this," said Patrick Bagamuhunda, who was wounded in the fighting. "This war has caused a lot of damage, but at least we are still breathing."

The M23 rebels are backed by some 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, far more than in 2012, when they first captured Goma before withdrawing under international pressure. They are the most potent of the more than 100 armed groups vying for control in Congo's mineral-rich east, which holds vast deposits critical to much of the world's technology.

Unlike in 2012, the rebels say they now plan to march to Congo's capital, Kinshasa, 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) away, describing the country as a failed state under President Félix Tshisekedi.

The fighting in Congo has connections with a decadeslong ethnic conflict. M23 says it is defending ethnic Tutsis in Congo. Rwanda has claimed the Tutsis are being persecuted by Hutus and former militias responsible for the 1994 genocide of 800,000 Tutsis and others in Rwanda. Many Hutus fled to Congo after the genocide and founded the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia group. Rwanda said the group is "fully integrated" into the Congolese military, which denies the charges.

Hospitals are running out of supplies

Medical workers at Kyeshero Hospital in Goma say they are treating an increasing number of patients with bullet wounds.

"We removed 48 bullets yesterday," Johnny Kasangati, a surgeon, said Friday as he examined a patient under a tent.

Kyeshero is also severely overcrowded, hitting more than 200% of its capacity on some days, according to Joseph Amadomon Sagara, a project coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, which runs the hospital.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 78 of 79

In the past, hospitals in Goma could transport wounded patients by boat to South Kivu's main Bukavu city, 180 kilometers (111 miles) to the south, but transport across Lake Kivu was suspended during the rebellion and roads have been mostly cut.

The fighting in and around Goma has also disrupted supply chains, leading to shortages in medical supplies that aid groups rely on. Some of it previously entered the city through its international airport, which is now under rebel control.

"Goma was cut off from the world. It was a total blackout," said Virginie Napolitano, Goma's emergency coordinator for Doctors Without Borders.

The aid group's stockpiles, along with those of other groups, have been looted.

"We're getting by with what we had in the cabinets, but I don't know for how long," Napolitano said.

How many have died in the conflict?

Congo's government has confirmed 773 deaths and 2,880 injured persons at morgues and hospitals. The toll could be higher, it said, citing fears of finding mass graves and more bodies.

The Maternité de la Charité Hospital in Goma was among those struggling to find space for the dead.

"We had 66 bodies here. Fifty-six were transferred to the provincial hospital, where the morgue has more space than ours," said Jules Kafitiye, the hospital's medical director.

"We need to avoid decomposition due to disease," he added, pointing to a tent where bodies were being stored.

Fears of disease spread as morgues overflow

Scores of bodies lay on streets and in hospitals in Goma after the city's capture, raising fears of disease outbreaks in the region, which is also facing mpox and cholera outbreaks.

The U.N. health body warned last week that repeated mass displacement in Congo has created ideal conditions for the spread of endemic diseases in displacement camps and surrounding communities, including cholera, which saw more than 22,000 infections last year, and measles, which affected close to 12,000 people. The region also battles with chronic child malnutrition.

"There's a fear for the disease to be spreading widely in communities," said Dr. Boureima Hama Sambo, the World Health Organization's representative in Congo. "But at this point, we cannot say because we have not been able to get there."

Today in History: February 4, O.J. Simpson found liable in civil trial

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 4, the 35th day of 2025. There are 330 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 4, 1997, a civil jury in Santa Monica, California, found O.J. Simpson liable for the deaths of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman, ordering Simpson to pay \$33.5 million to the victims' families.

Also on this date:

In 1789, electors unanimously chose George Washington to be the first president of the United States.

In 1801, John Marshall took office as chief justice of the United States, a position he would hold for a record 34 years.

In 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin began a wartime conference at Yalta.

In 1974, newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst, 19, was kidnapped in Berkeley, California, by the radical Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 1976, more than 23,000 people died when a severe earthquake struck Guatemala with a magnitude of 7.5.

In 2004, Facebook had its beginnings as Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg launched "Thefacebook."

In 2013, British scientists announced that the skeletal remains they had discovered during an excavation beneath a Leicester, England parking lot were, beyond reasonable doubt, the remains of 15th century

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 04, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 224 ~ 79 of 79

monarch King Richard III.

In 2021, a voting technology company, Smartmatic USA, sued Fox News, three of its hosts and two former Trump lawyers — Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell — for \$2.7 billion, for allegedly conspiring to spread false claims that the company helped “steal” the presidential election. (The case remains ongoing.)

Today’s birthdays: Former Argentinian President Isabel Peron is 94. Former Vice President Dan Quayle is 78. Rock singer Alice Cooper is 77. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is 72. Football Hall of Famer Lawrence Taylor is 66. Country singer Clint Black is 63. Boxing Hall of Famer Oscar De La Hoya is 52. Singer Natalie Imbruglia is 50. Rapper Cam’ron is 49. Singer-songwriter Gavin DeGraw is 48. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Carly Patterson is 37.