

# Groton Daily Independent

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wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal with toppings.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Basketball Double Header at Tiospa Zina: Girls JV at 5 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity.

## Friday, Jan. 13

Senior Menu: Chili, corn bread, coleslaw, pears.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Pizza, cooked carrots.

Elementary Christmas Concert, 2:30 p.m. (re-scheduled from Dec. 22)

## Saturday, Jan. 14

Wrestling at Potter County Tournament, 10 a.m.

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

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

## Groton Community Calendar

### Wednesday, Jan. 11

Senior Menu: Spaghetti, mixed vegetables, garlic toast, fruit.

School Breakfast: Hashbrown pizza.

School Lunch: Chicken alfredo, cooked broccoli.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

### Thursday, Jan. 12

Senior Menu: Roast pork, mashed potatoes with gravy, Cauliflower and broccoli, apple sauce, whole

**CLOSED: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

**Groton Daily Independent**

**The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.**

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

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

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## Lady Tigers beat Aberdeen Christian

Groton Area's girls basketball team posted a 53-25 win over Aberdeen Christian. The game was played Tuesday at the Aberdeen Civic Center.

The Tigers led at the quarters tops at 13-10, then scored 17 unanswered points to take a 30-12 lead at half time and led, 39-14, after the third quarter.

Coach Matt Locke told viewers on GDILIVE.COM that Senior Gracie Traphagen will be out for the season after suffering a knee injury during practice on Friday. She will continue to be involved with the team.

Jerica Locke led the Tigers with 11 points, seven rebounds, two assists and two steals. Sydney Leicht had 10 points, three rebounds, one assist and two steals. Aspen Johnson had six points, three rebounds, two assists and three steals. Jayden Penning had six points, seven rebounds and two steals. Laila Roberts had six points, one assist and two steals. Brooke Gengerke had five points, four rebounds, one assist and two steals. Brooklyn Hansen had five points and two rebounds. Rylee Dunker had four points, one rebound and one steal. Kennedy Hansen had two rebounds, three assists and one steal. Faith Traphagen had one rebound. Elizabeth Flihs had one steal and Emily Clark had one rebound.

Groton Area made 19 of 50 two-pointers for 38 percent, two of 13 three-pointers for 15 percent, made nine of 13 in free throws for 69 percent, had 31 rebounds, nine turnovers, 10 assists, 16 steals and 13 team fouls.

Chloe Bosma led the Knights with 11 points while Chloe Holt and Sophia Fogarty each had seven points.

Groton Area is now 5-2 on the season while the Knights fall to 0-8.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 42-3, leading at the quarters tops at 9-0, 19-0 and 32-1. Rylee Dunker led Groton Area with 10 points followed by Brooklyn Hansen with nine points which was made by three three-pointers, Laila Roberts and Kennedy Hansen each had eight, McKenna Tietz had four and Talli Wright had three points.

Jolie Fogarty had two points for the Knights and Sophia Eichler had one free throw.

Both games were carried live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity game was sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Chamber of Commerce, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric, Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, Bahr Spray Foam, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting. Larry and Val Flihs sponsored the junior varsity game.

- Paul Kosel

## Adjustments made to school calendar By Joe Schwan, Groton Area Superintendent

At the board meeting on Monday night, after much discussion, the decision was made to do the following to attempt to make up for some of our lost instructional time in an educationally relevant manner:

We will be IN SESSION on Monday, February 20.

We will be IN SESSION on Monday, April 10.

IF we miss another day between now and March 1, THEN we will be IN SESSION on Thursday, March 16.

A decision on the when the last day of school will be is going to be made at a later date. I expect that additional days will be added to the end of the calendar but that number will depend on how the rest of the winter plays out.

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**By: Governor Kristi Noem  
January 10, 2023  
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery**

## INTRODUCTION

Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, Chief Justice Jensen, Supreme Court justices, constitutional officers, and my fellow South Dakotans:

The South Dakota state constitution requires the Governor to begin each legislative session by “[giving] the Legislature information concerning the affairs of the state and [recommending] the measures he considers necessary.” Notice I didn’t say “she.” The Constitution doesn’t say that. We’re going to fix that.

It’s also the perfect time for me to come before you to let you know that I have a brand new grandbaby. His name is Branch Bryon, named after his grandpa. He’s a healthy 8 pounds, 9 ounces.

South Dakota is growing. We are thriving. And we are strong.

Our state’s agriculture industry is now a \$32 billion industry, and it’s responsible for 1 in 5 jobs in the state. We need to continue to preserve agriculture’s opportunity to thrive. Tourism, financial services, and other industries are continuing to grow, as well.

Today I am going to share with you how our state has become the number one state for individuals, families, and businesses to build the American Dream, how we have promoted and will continue to promote stronger families, and how we will secure South Dakota for now and into the future.

We are number one in the nation for personal income growth over the past several years. That is how South Dakotans build the American Dream by working hard and earning more than they have before. We have the fastest growth of housing developments in the entire country. We have the most family-owned businesses of any state. That’s part of how we make families stronger. We have the most registered hunters per-capita of any state. And we were recognized for making the best decisions by the American Legislative Exchange Council. And one more thing – The South Dakota State University Jackrabbits are the FCS National Champions in Football! GO JACKS!

I normally wait to honor our military for the end of the speech, but I want to highlight this now: we are the number one state in the nation to live and work as a soldier, an airman, and a veteran. That is how we make South Dakota safer and more secure for the future.

Both our Army and Air Guard units have led the nation, winning award after award for best units in the country. Just this past month, we deployed the 109th Regional Support Group to the Middle East as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. But the National Guard stands ready here at home, too. When the winter snow and bitter cold hit our state just before Christmas, the men and women in uniform took time away from their families to help other families in need across the state, including all the tribal reservations that needed assistance. Would everyone who is a veteran or serves in the National Guard please rise to be recognized?

I believe South Dakota is the freest state in the nation. We fight to defend our constitutional rights. We ensure that every South Dakotan has the right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

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But here's what I love about South Dakota – we never settle. We never sit back and say, "good enough."

We turn the challenges we face into opportunities.

Together, I want all of us to take on the challenge of making South Dakota number one in: growth, tax climate, work ethic, and building – and supporting – strong families.

Our nation was built on Freedom – but our constitutional freedoms are under assault from Washington D.C.

America needs South Dakota's example of how conservative policies and values make people's lives better. These policies bring success and hope.

In the last four years, we made South Dakota the strongest state in America by making it the state to pursue the American Dream, a state for Stronger Families, and a Secure State. In the next four, we will prove that the best is yet to come.

## BUILDING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Together, we must continue to build and advance the American Dream. And this legislative session, we will accomplish that.

We will accomplish it by cutting taxes for our people. We continue to have record surpluses. What should we do with our surplus? My answer is simple: Cut taxes and provide relief to South Dakotans.

I have been to a lot of grocery stores across the state over the past few months. Prices have increased so dramatically over the past two years that families are unprepared when they see the final bill in the checkout line. When I've been checking out groceries, about 1 in every 4 shoppers have had to put something back because they can't pay for everything. Folks, South Dakotans need this relief.

Fair Market in Sioux Falls is a grocery store that provides a special service to those who need it. They offer groceries for about half the price that you see at a typical grocery store. Kristin Johnson recognized the need for affordable groceries in her community, so she opened Fair Market in early 2021. She's had to relocate and expand multiple times as demand grew. And just last month, they opened a 2nd location on the west side of Sioux Falls.

When I visited, I met customers who were so grateful for the opportunity that Fair Market provides. Because many of their groceries are "reclaimed," meaning there may have been a branding change, maybe it's a damaged can, maybe it's a seasonal good, or maybe there's a market surplus. So there's always something new and unique – many customers enjoy hunting for those unique finds.

Kristin, her husband Greg, and Denelle (who works with them) are here today. Would you all please stand? Thank you for everything that you do for the people of South Dakota.

Fair Market's customers will greatly benefit from the elimination of the sales tax on groceries – but so will every South Dakota family, every person, every small business owner, even every homeowner. Our economy is the strongest it has ever been. Our revenues continue to grow. December revenues have us up another \$10 million above legislative adopted estimates. Now is the time – let's get it done.

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South Dakota's economy has been thriving over the past few years! But with that, we've experienced some growing pains. In 2022, our unemployment rate was the lowest it's been in our state's history. But we still have 23,000 open jobs in our state.

During my first year in office, I signed legislation that recognized occupational licenses for military spouses who moved to our state. Then, two years ago, in response to the challenge of filling healthcare jobs, I proposed legislation to recognize the healthcare licenses of folks moving here from other states. This legislation was expanded to other professions and helped us fill jobs. We have an opportunity now to finish the job and provide a path to recognize the licenses of just about every profession in the state.

When other states have done this, they have seen their workforces grow almost immediately. Arizona's workforce has grown by about 5,000 workers since their law was implemented. Thousands more in the future are sure to come, as well. That's the kind of drastic workforce boost that we need here in South Dakota.

We are constantly looking for opportunities to expand registered apprenticeships in South Dakota. Just last month, the Department of Labor & Regulation awarded four grants to create four apprenticeship pipelines for high schoolers across the state. The four recipients were Bear Butte Gardens for agriculture, Belle Fourche School District for healthcare, Harrisburg School District for agriculture, and Dakota State University for education. Later this week, they'll announce even more awards.

More and more businesses are realizing the value of these apprenticeship programs. I want to highlight Lemmonmade Butcher Shop in Lemmon, which has incorporated an apprenticeship program to hire and train new staff. They initially hired an employee named Jesse who is now supervising more people going through the program, allowing the owner of the business to take his first ever vacation. That's making the American dream come true.

Howe Inc. in Sioux Falls has used apprenticeships to build their workforce for decades. When they gave me a tour of their apprenticeship classroom and program, I was impressed. It's incredible. They already provide apprenticeships in plumbing, fire protection, and HVAC sheetmetal, and they recently worked with the Department of Labor and Regulation to add a mechatronics apprentice program. They are currently in the process of setting up another program for fire sprinkler fitters. Over the years, Howe has used their apprenticeship program to hire more than 60 employees. It has been a total game changer for their workforce. Other companies can seize this opportunity, too.

I want South Dakota businesses to continue to start apprenticeship programs. If you are interested in launching one at your business, reach out to us. And stay tuned for more news about how we're expanding our apprenticeship program later this year.

South Dakota will continue to attract the careers of the future and address workforce challenges. In the last year, you worked with me to expand Dakota State University's cyber research capabilities, which will bring 500 six-figure jobs to Sioux Falls. More importantly, it will give our kids and grandkids another reason to pursue the career of their dreams right here in South Dakota. I promised to bring the next big industry to South Dakota. This is it.

In the last year, we also broke ground on the largest economic development project in our state's history. Gevo's Net-Zero 1 Site in Lake Preston is the first ever billion-dollar investment in South Dakota. They will literally turn corn into jet fuel, as impossible as that sounds.

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What we are doing in South Dakota is reverberating across this country and around the world. We would be growing even more if there weren't federal mandates preventing companies from coming – and Biden just extended these mandates last week. We are in touch with a company in Canada that wants to move their business to the Black Hills. And I can't share too many details yet, but we're very excited.

They are buying property that they haven't even seen in-person. This family and their business have suffered due to COVID restrictions and vaccine mandates in Canada. Their daughter was even expelled from her university for refusing the vaccine. They are ready to gain back their freedoms. They want to grow their business and improve their quality of life here in our state. The Biden Administration's vaccine mandates are standing in their way.

We aren't just bringing new businesses to South Dakota – our existing businesses are growing and thriving. Valley Queen in Milbank broke ground last year on a \$200 million expansion that will create an additional 140 jobs for the community. South Dakota's total milk production has risen 11% in the last year, and that will continue to increase once this facility is completed.

The Governor's Office of Economic Development facilitated \$1.7 billion in new economic investments in South Dakota over the last year, creating 2,400 new jobs. In fact, in my first term, we delivered more economic investment in South Dakota than in the previous 10 years combined. That's the kind of success you only see in a state where government is limited, personal responsibility is central to everything, and the private sector is unleashed.

Remember, we were the only state to reject the additional elevated unemployment benefits offered by the federal government. Our people kept working, our unemployment rate remained low, our economy remained strong, and new businesses moved here. Now, we have a very healthy unemployment trust fund balance – which gives us the opportunity to cut the unemployment tax for businesses. My Department of Labor will be bringing a bill to revise employer contribution rates to the unemployment trust fund. This will bring an estimated \$18 million savings to South Dakota businesses over the next couple of years.

We're continuing to break records for tourism. It's no secret that folks have been visiting South Dakota by the millions, and that many of them first heard about us during the pandemic. In 2020, we broke the record for most visitors to South Dakota's state parks. In 2021, we shattered that record – and broke the record for visitor spending, too.

We don't have final data yet, but it looks like South Dakota set another record for visitor spending in 2022. Our airport arrivals increased by about 10% over last year. Even with nationwide inflation and increases in gas prices, visitors continue to choose South Dakota. And our economy is reaping the benefits. In fact, tourism revenue decreases the tax burden by \$1,000 per South Dakota family. The tourism industry also supports about 57,000 jobs.

This year, the Department of Tourism will launch a dedicated Native American tourism marketing campaign. Beginning in 2023, bus tours will bring both domestic and international visitors to Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Standing Rock, and Milk's Camp. We will continue to emphasize telling tribal stories. They are a key part of our state's rich history and heritage, and I'm excited to share that with the world.

People who visit South Dakota also come to hunt and fish. Access to hunting opportunities has never been greater. Since I took office, more than 50,000 private acres have become available for public hunting. 15,000 new habitat acres have been added to promote strong wildlife numbers. Momentum continues

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to build – our most recent pheasant harvest shows more total birds and birds per-hunter than the 5-year average. And in 2022, we set a record for the most nonresident fishing licenses sold.

Every year, more and more South Dakota youth are participating in our Nest Predator Bounty Program. Youth participants jumped up to 32% of total program participants this year. These kids are discovering a passion for the great outdoors.

When tourists, hunters, and fishermen choose to come to South Dakota, they are not just pursuing big game wildlife or a catch of a lifetime. They are literally pursuing happiness – a break from their day to day lives. Moments with their families and the excitement of new adventures in the great outdoors. They are choosing South Dakota, and visiting us creates memories that will last a lifetime.

## PROMOTING STRONGER FAMILIES

We will continue to build stronger families in South Dakota.

Three years ago, we worked together to pass legislation to provide paid family leave for state employees. This gave families the opportunity to bond with newborn and adopted children – and it put us in a better position to attract top talent to our state government. This year, I want to expand that opportunity.

Currently, the state provides paid family leave benefits at 60% of an employee's salary for 8 weeks. I am proposing that we extend that benefit to 100% of salary for 12 weeks. And this new family leave policy won't just cover new births or adoptions – it will also cover taking care of a child, spouse, or parent with a serious health condition, or a situation where a spouse is called to active-duty military service.

This will be a tremendous benefit for state employees – but it won't stop with them. Private sector companies will have the opportunity to be a part of the state's risk pool, as well. This will make it much cheaper for companies to offer this benefit to their employees. And the more people that buy in, the lower the cost will be for everyone. My budget provides \$20 million in grants to incentivize private sector companies to participate for the first few years.

My budget also proposes \$1.1 million to help give pregnancy and postpartum care for moms who are Medicaid recipients. Pregnant moms who are at risk of poor birth outcomes will receive intensive care management. This will help moms have a healthy pregnancy – and this care will extend after birth.

Moms who are involved in this program have babies who are less likely to be admitted to the NICU. And after birth, these moms will be able to join the Bright Start program, which you helped provide funding for last year. This proves our commitment to helping moms and families through whatever situations they may face. We will help them and their babies both before birth and after.

And we'll also help families adopt children who are in need of a loving home. During my time as Governor, I have emphasized adoption as an area where we can improve as a state. And my Life.SD.gov website helps families find resources to help, whether they are adopting or giving a child up for adoption.

I am also recommending up to \$25,000 for state employees to cover the cost of adopting a child domestically. Today, we have several state employees with us who have adopted children into their homes. Would you all please stand and be recognized? Thank you for your service to our state – and thank you for providing a loving home for these kids.

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Another way to help kids grow up in a loving home is foster care. Two years ago, I launched the “Stronger Families Together” initiative. Before this initiative, we were recruiting fewer than 200 new foster families every year. Now, we’re recruiting more than 300 foster families a year to help. We met our target in year one, and our recruitment contacts are up for year 2! But our foster children face educational challenges as a result of their circumstances.

Today, I am announcing the “Stronger Families Scholarships” proposal, which I will be working with you on to provide a new education opportunity for these kids. Any child in the foster care system will have the opportunity to receive up to \$4,000 in a scholarship to help them achieve their full potential, from kindergarten through 12th grade. This money can be used to pay tuition at a private school, pay for tutoring or teaching services, purchase curriculum, pay for standardized tests or AP exams, and more.

There is always more that we can do. Today, more than 100 businesses across the state provide targeted discounts to foster families and children. I love that! And I’d love to see more businesses take up that challenge, too.

I know that one of the biggest challenges that families in South Dakota face today is access to childcare. Families might have to go on a wait list for months. One parent may have to stop working for the time being.

In the coming days, we will be completing an overhaul of our childcare rules and regulations. We’ve been working closely with childcare providers to rewrite these rules in a way that makes sense – while prioritizing the safety of our kids.

We will also be releasing nearly \$40M in federal grants for childcare providers. We held several meetings with providers so that these grants will target exactly what they need – from new technology to startup funds to quality initiatives.

We also heard about their workforce challenges. We are going to help tackle this by making it more attractive to work in the childcare field. Currently, childcare providers struggle to give benefits to their employees. So we will be partnering with the South Dakota Farm Bureau to fix this. Today, we have with us some of the leadership team from Farm Bureau who is helping us make these health benefits possible. Would you please stand and be recognized?

Through all of these efforts, we are making clear that South Dakota prioritizes stronger families.

## SECURING SOUTH DAKOTA

We live in the strongest and greatest nation in the history of the world. With that greatness comes unique challenges. But we aren’t afraid of challenges. As President Harry S. Truman famously said, “America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination, and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand.”

Perhaps the greatest external challenge facing the United States is the Chinese Communist Party. They are using a popular app called TikTok to gather data on the American people. It’s possible they could be using the app to gather users’ keystrokes – which means the Chinese Communist Party could have access to the financial information of tens of millions of Americans. This is an unacceptable security threat coming from a nation that hates America.

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A little over a month ago, I signed an executive order banning TikTok for state government. And in doing so, South Dakota began an important movement. More than 20 states have since taken action. Congress recently passed legislation to reflect this policy for the federal government, too. They all followed our lead. That's the power of the example that South Dakota is setting for the nation. That's the responsibility that we all need to take seriously.

Our efforts to combat Communist China didn't stop there. We are also looking for ways to ensure taxpayer dollars aren't benefitting Chinese companies or the Chinese Communist Party. And I am working with Senator Tobin and Representative Cammack on legislation to block purchases of South Dakota ag land from nations that hate us.

This legislation will create a board called the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States – South Dakota, or CFIUS-SD. This new board will include ag experts, national and state security experts, and legal counsel. It will review any purchase, lease, or transfer of South Dakota agriculture land by a foreign person, company, or entity and make its recommendation to the Governor whether the purchase should be approved.

That's the kind of decisive action that we need. We all saw what happened to our neighbors to the north – where a Chinese affiliate purchased land near critical infrastructure to our nation's security – we cannot allow that to happen here. We cannot allow Chinese interests to purchase any South Dakota ag land, much less land near any military base or critical state infrastructure. South Dakota will set the example here, too. Other states are already looking at our legislation with plans to replicate it. I look forward to working with you to get it done and keep our people safe.

We are committed to securing our state, and we are committed to honoring the men and women in uniform who make that possible. South Dakota respects law enforcement. We've proven that in our actions – not just in our words. We recruited out-of-state law enforcement officers to move to a state where they are respected.

It isn't just our law enforcement officers who go above and beyond the call of duty. I hear story after story of incredible South Dakotans who step up every day.

Stories like the staff at the Avera Avantara nursing home in Salem who brought residents into an inner room when the Derecho hit last spring. They had to physically hold the doors shut with their bare hands to keep them from being ripped off their hinges. And when the storm abated, everything on the other side of that door was gone. Those nursing home employees may have felt like they were just doing their job – but they saved so many lives that day. The staff of this nursing home is here today. Would you all please stand, and remain standing for just a moment.

I want to tell one last story of heroism today. Mark Kock works in construction. He has a wife and 5 kids. One day, he was driving through a torrential downpour when he saw a car flipped on its side in the median. He pulled over, climbed into the flipped vehicle, and found a woman who was in shock from the crash. The car was filling up with water. The woman was hanging by her seatbelt. Mark cut her loose, held her out of the water, calmed her down, and held the car door open above his head until emergency responders could arrive.

Mark is a hero. He was a hero that day. He's also a hero in uniform. Mark is a Staff Sergeant in the South Dakota Air Guard, and he was driving on his way to drill when he stopped and helped that woman, potentially saving her life. His job in the Guard is to keep our nation safe and protect our Freedoms – but he could have just kept driving that day. He didn't. He pulled over. He stepped up. Staff Sergeant Kock

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and his family are here today – would you please stand?

Today, I want to honor both the staff at Avera Avantara in Salem AND Staff Sergeant Mark Kock with the Governor's Award for Heroism.

Our state is safer because of men and women who answer the call of duty without being asked. I'm proud to be a South Dakotan because of people like all of you. Thank you for setting an example.

## CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen: that is the State of our State. For four years we have made South Dakota the state where anyone can build their American Dream. We have strengthened families. And we have secured the state. What we have built here over the last four years is exactly what our Founding Fathers envisioned when they created our nation – and the founders of our state who enshrined the phrase, "Under God the People Rule." And we're just getting started.

In 1790, less than one year after taking office as the first President of the United States, George Washington delivered the first State of the Union Address. Some people think it was the best State of the Union ever delivered. It was the shortest. President Washington delivered an important point that I think we should all remember today: "The welfare of our country is the great object to which our cares and efforts ought to be directed. I shall derive great satisfaction from a cooperation with you in the pleasing – though arduous – task of ensuring to our fellow citizens the blessings which they have a right to expect from a free, efficient, and equal government."

That is still our task today: to ensure a free, efficient, and equal government for the people of South Dakota. I look forward to working with all of you to get it done.

God bless you all. And may God continue to bless the great state of South Dakota.

## Democrats Respond to Gov. Noem's 2023 State of the State Address

South Dakota Democratic leaders issued the following statements in response to Governor Noem's 2023 State of the State Address:

SDDP Chair Randy Seiler: "Even though Governor Noem was just re-elected to serve the people of South Dakota, it seems she already has her eye on the next job, and her State of the State address reflected that. South Dakota needs a governor focused on serving South Dakota, not generating national attention and controversy to boost a presidential run."

Asked by Fox News if she'd consider a 2024 presidential run, Noem said "that's fair to say."

Senate Democratic Leader Reynold Nesiba: "What I was most disappointed about, both with Governor Noem's speech and her overall approach, is the lack of attention to the child care crisis in South Dakota. South Dakota is the only state in the country that doesn't have an early education council. We're one of a handful of states that has no state aid to fund early education, and this is compounded by the fact that we spend very little state funding on childcare. If we are going to have affordable, high-quality childcare that pays a living wage, then the state is going to have to step up and do its share.

"If we're bringing new people and new families to South Dakota, we have to address this childcare crisis to build our workforce and to meet the needs of all South Dakota families, including those that are already here."

House Democratic Leader Oren Lesmeister: "I enjoyed hearing about job creation and economic development in the state, but we're here to solve problems, not sugarcoat the truth, and Governor Noem didn't talk about the real problems our state faces. With so many open jobs across the state, where does our workforce come from and how do we provide the housing those folks will require?"

"I commend the Governor on her proposal on paid family leave, but we need a plan to replace those folks in the workforce, too."

Assistant House Democratic Leader Erin Healy: "It's apparent that Governor Noem is focused on her impending presidential run. We know she doesn't spend much time here in South Dakota with South Dakotans and I think we can expect more of that when she announces her national run."

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## NSU Men's Basketball

### **Moni Leads Wolves from Dragon Land, Northern Grabs One Spot**

Moorhead, Minn. – Streak stoppers. The Northern State University men's basketball team snapped a 10-game win streak by No. 25 MSU Moorhead. The Dragons only league losses this season are to Northern State, which gives the Wolves sole possession of first place in the NSIC Overall and North Division standings.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 72, MSUM 71

Records: NSU 13-3 (9-1 NSIC), MSUM 13-3 (8-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 3000

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern led for a majority of the first half, however the Dragons stormed back with under five minutes to play, ultimately holding a 36-35 lead as the two teams entered the locker room
- The Wolves dug in for the final 20 minutes of regulation and came away with a 1-point victory, following a Sam Masten driving layup with 15 seconds to play
- The NSU defense held steady in the final seconds, fending off a drive up the court and inbounds play which could have sealed the win for MSUM
- Northern out-shot MSU Moorhead in the game, hitting 29-of-63 (46.0%); including seven from beyond the arc
- In addition, the Wolves out-rebounded the Dragons and tallied a game high 16 assists, 44 points in the paint, 25 points off the bench, 12 second chance points, and 11 points off turnovers
- Four Wolves scored double figures in the game, including a team second best 15 from Josh Dilling off the bench
- Jordan Belka pulled down a game high nine rebounds and five Wolves tallied two assists or more led by Sam Masten with four

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Jacksen Moni: 26 points, 68.8 field goal%, 5 rebounds
- Josh Dilling: 15 points, 54.5 field goal%, 5 rebounds, 3 assists
- Sam Masten: 14 points, 5 rebounds, 4 assists
- Michael Nhial: 10 points, 50.0 field goal%, 5 rebounds, 2 assists

#### UP NEXT

The Wolves remain on the road Friday and Saturday at Sioux Falls and Southwest Minnesota State. Game times are set for 7:30 p.m. on Friday against the Cougars and 5:30 p.m. on Saturday versus the Mustangs.

## NSU Women's Basketball

### **Wolves Fall to Dragons in Defensive Battle**

Moorhead, Minn. – The Northern State women's basketball team led for a majority of the first half of Tuesday night's contest, but the Wolves struggled to score in the third quarter which allowed the Dragons to come from behind for the 60-53 victory. Alayna Benike led four Wolves in double figures on the night, scoring 12 points off 5-7 shooting from the field and shot a perfect 2-2 from beyond the arc.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 53, MSUM 60

Records: NSU 9-7 (4-6 NSIC), MSUM 8-6 (5-5 NSIC)

Attendance: 313

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

After falling behind 6-4 early, Northern State used a 7-0 scoring run to take an 11-6 lead into the first quarter media timeout; Rianna Fillipi would continue to knock down the mid-range jumper early, scoring eight points on 4-6 shooting in the quarter to give the Wolves a 20-16 edge after ten minutes of play

Fillipi was able to find Laurie Rogers cutting down the court on a fast break layup to stretch the Northern lead to seven points (25-18), capping a quick 5-0 scoring run just over two minutes into the second quarter

Alayna Benike knocked down Northern State's third 3-pointer of the first half to give the Wolves their largest lead of the game at nine points (32-23) with 2:19 remaining

The NSU defense limited MSUM to 3-13 (23.1%) shooting from the field in the second quarter and held the Dragons to no made field goals in the final 3:50 of the period

MSU Moorhead reclaimed the lead in the third quarter for the first time since the game's opening minutes, out-scoring the Wolves 21-6 in the period

Despite holding the Dragons scoreless for over four minutes of game time from 7:42 to 3:23 in the fourth quarter, the Wolves were only able to cut the lead down to four points after trailing by eight

Jordyn Hilgemann brought NSU within two points with 3:08 remaining in the game, knocking down her second 3-pointer of the contest

Both teams shot 22-54 (40.7%) from the field, while Northern knocked down five 3-pointers compared to only one for MSUM; the Dragons held the advantage at the charity stripe, shooting 15-17 (88.2%) compared to 4-7 (57.1%) for the Wolves

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Alayna Benike: 12 points, 3 rebounds, 4 assists, 2-2 3-pointers

Rianna Fillipi: 11 points, 7 rebounds, 4 assists, 3 steals

Kailee Oliverson: 10 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 1 block

Jordyn Hilgemann: 10 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist

#### UP NEXT

Northern State will stay on the road for their next two games as they travel south to face Sioux Falls and Southwest Minnesota State. The Wolves and Cougars are scheduled for a 5:30 p.m. tip-off on Friday evening at the Stewart Center. NSU will then close the weekend on Saturday afternoon against the Mustangs with a 3:30 p.m. tip-off at the R/A Facility.

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## Basketball Double Header

Thursday, Jan. 12

Groton at Tiospa Zina



**Livestreaming  
Girls JV Game at 4 p.m.**

Sponsored by Larry & Val Flihs

**Followed by Boys JV Game**

Sponsored by Mike & Dawn Imrie

**followed by Girls then Boys Varsity Games**

Sponsored by

Bary Keith at Harr Motors

Bierman Farm Service

Blocker Construction

Dacotah Bank

Groton Chamber of Commerce

Groton Ford

John Sieh Agency

Locke Electric

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting

# GDILIVE.COM

Friday, Jan. 13, 2:30 p.m.  
Groton Area Elementary

*Christmas Program*

## **Groton Elementary Music Presents:**

**A Visit from St. Nicholas**

**Directed by Scott Glodt**

Speaking roles by the 5th Grade Class  
Original poem by Clement Clarke Moore

Junior Kindergarten & Kindergarten: Santa Claus is Coming to Town (J. Fred Hoots and Havin Gillespie)

1st Grade: Up on the Housetop (Benjamin Hanby)

2nd Grade: Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Johnny Marks)

3rd Grade: Jolly Old St. Nicholas (James R. Murray)

4th Grade: Christmas Time is Here (Vince Guaraldi)

5th Grade: Oh Christmas Tree (Ernst Anshutz)

JK-5th Grade: We Wish You a Merry Christmas (English Carol)

Thank You's

- To all the parents that care for these talented children.
- To Mike Nehls and the custodial staff for all their assistance.
- To Desiree Yeigh for running the sound system and her continuous support.
- To the wonderful Elementary staff who are always willing to lend a helping hand.
- To the administration, the school board, and all of you for your continued support of music education in our school!
- It is truly a blessing to work with so many wonderful kids and adults. I hope you enjoy the performance!

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**City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich shows off his hockey skills as he poses with one of the six hockey sticks donated by S & S Lumber. In addition, the Chris Frost family donated a box of hockey pucks to the city's skating rink. (Photo by Paul Kosel)**



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Noem seeks relief for employers, families in State of State speech**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 10, 2023 4:59 PM**

Gov. Kristi Noem said Tuesday she wants to save employers \$18 million worth of contributions to the state unemployment fund, while announcing other new proposals and reiterating her support for previously announced plans as she delivered her annual State of the State address at the Capitol in Pierre.

"For four years we have made South Dakota the state where anyone can build their American Dream," Noem said.

The South Dakota Legislature will consider her proposals during the 2023 session, which also began Tuesday and continues until March.

Noem said the unemployment trust fund balance is healthy enough to cut unemployment tax rates. She credited South Dakota's actions during the pandemic with keeping unemployment lower than other states.

Noem said she wants to extend state employees' family leave benefits to 100% of their salary for 12 weeks, from 60% of their salary for eight weeks. She also wants to allow private-sector companies to be a part of the state's risk pool, she said, making it more affordable for them to offer similar benefits to their own workers. She said her budget includes \$20 million in grants to incentivize private-sector participation.

Additionally, the governor is recommending up to \$25,000 for state employees to cover the cost of adopting a child domestically.

And to help children in foster care, Noem announced the Stronger Families Scholarships proposal, which would offer any child in the foster care system up to \$4,000 for their K-12 education. The money could be used to pay tuition at a private school, pay for tutoring or teaching services, purchase curriculum, and more, Noem said.

The speech also touched on the shortage of affordable child care in the state. Noem announced her office is overhauling child care rules and regulations and partnering with the South Dakota Farm Bureau to help child care providers offer benefits to employers. She did not provide further specifics on the Farm Bureau plan.

To help alleviate a shortage of workers statewide, the governor is proposing the state honor more types of business licenses from other states – meaning a license from another state would be valid in South Dakota.

"When other states have done this, they have seen their workforces grow almost immediately," Noem said.

Noem mentioned prior efforts to recognize health care licenses from other states but did not specify what professions she wants to target next.

"We have an opportunity now to finish the job and provide a path to recognize the licenses of just about every profession in the state," she said.

The governor also touched on policies she has previously announced and spoken at length about, like a board to vet foreign ownership of ag land and eliminating the state sales tax on groceries.

"Our economy is the strongest it has ever been. Our revenues continue to grow," Noem said. "Now is the time, let's get it done."

Eliminating the state sales tax on groceries would cut about \$124 million in tax revenue annually, according to the Legislative Research Council.

The state can afford to cut taxes because of high revenues, according to Noem. She said December 2022 revenues were up another \$10 million above estimates.

Some of Noem's measures have Democratic support, said state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls.

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"Democrats are eager to work with the governor to cut the sales tax on food," said Nesiba, who noted he's been advocating a repeal of the food tax for 19 years, prior to Noem announcing her support for it during her 2022 re-election campaign.

Nesiba also criticized some aspects of the speech. He said Noem should devote even more attention to child care and said South Dakota is the only state without an early education council, and one of a handful of states with no state aid to fund early education.

"If we are going to have affordable, high-quality child care that pays a living wage, then the state is going to have to step up and do its share," Nesiba said.

Noem took a detour away from state issues in the speech to express frustrations with the White House.

"We would be growing even more if there weren't federal mandates preventing companies from coming," Noem said.

South Dakota Democratic Party Chairman Randy Seiler put out a statement criticizing Noem's national focus, citing a recent media report that she's considering a run for president.

"Even though Governor Noem was just reelected to serve the people of South Dakota, it seems she already has her eye on the next job, and her State of the State address reflected that," Seiler said.

Not all of the speech was political or policy-oriented. Noem announced the recipients of her Governor's Award for Heroism: the staff at Avera Avantara nursing home in Salem, who protected their residents from the derecho that hit last spring, and South Dakota Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Mark Kock, who rescued a person whose car had flipped and was flooding with water.

The first week of the legislative session continues with more speeches by other officials, including the State of the Judiciary speech on Wednesday and the State of the Tribes speech on Thursday.

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

## Housing money fix could clear Senate in week one

**\$200 million in infrastructure funding sat unused through 2022**

**BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 10, 2023 4:26 PM**

State lawmakers aim to quickly pass a bill to clear a thicket of confusion over how to get \$200 million in housing infrastructure money out of state coffers and into the hands of developers.

The money, initially appropriated last session, was meant to help address a 10,000-home shortage in workforce housing. But concerns over the legal authority to dispense the funds kept the money in a holding pattern through 2022.

The South Dakota Housing Development Authority (HDA) shelved \$150 million shortly after lawmakers sent the money its way in March of last year. In September, the HDA put awards for the remaining \$50 million on hold, even as developers had submitted applications for shovel-ready housing projects.

A mismatch between legislative intent and funding authority factored into those decisions.

The goal was to aid the construction of homes without income restrictions for buyers. The initial 2022 infrastructure proposal, backed by Gov. Kristi Noem, would have given the Governor's Office of Economic Development broad authority to decide where to send the funding.

But lawmakers opted to re-write the bill, adding provisions on how to divide the money between urban and rural areas and depositing it into the HDA-managed Housing Opportunity Fund, an account designed for affordable housing.

Senate Bill 41 would allow the HDA to award the money as lawmakers intended.

Its prime sponsor is Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, who introduced the 2022 rewrite. There had been disagreements on how to administer the money, Crabtree told South Dakota Searchlight this week, but there was never a question as to its importance.

"I think this addresses the concerns that existed out there, and we're really looking to get this money invested in communities in South Dakota," Crabtree said.

Communities across the state need more workers than they can house, he said. That problem, as well as issues like a lack of child care options, exacerbates the difficulty of economic development across the state.

Infrastructure expenses were targeted in part because they are a significant burden for developers, according to a 2021 summer study on workforce housing. The costs for laying water and sewer lines or paving roads, typically borne by home builders, have increased more quickly than also-rising cost of building materials and labor.

Easing that burden is part of the solution, Crabtree said.

In addition to delegating authority to the HDA, the proposal would create a revolving loan fund Crabtree said will allow the HDA to offer continued infrastructure support for developers after the grant funding runs dry.

"If we don't get this issue tackled in a big way in the next 10 years, South Dakota is going to look really different, and it's not going to be as appealing for the next generation as it is for us," Crabtree said.

SB 41 preserves clauses on rural and urban development that were added by the Crabtree-sponsored re-write last March. A third of the money is earmarked for projects in communities with populations of 50,000 or more; the remainder would go to smaller communities.

The new bill has an emergency clause, meaning it would take effect immediately with Gov. Noem's signature. Noem spokesman Ian Fury said on Tuesday that the governor supports the proposal.

Crabtree expects the bill to be heard on Thursday by the Commerce and Energy Committee, and to be voted on by the full Senate the following day – an unusually short timeline for the Legislature. On the House of Representatives side, the bill is co-sponsored by House Speaker Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, and House Speaker Pro Tempore Mike Stevens, R-Yankton.

The Senate majority leader expects lawmakers in both chambers to make SB 41 a priority.

"We've been working on this for years. And it's been sitting there and not working for the folks of South Dakota, so we intend to take it up right away," Crabtree said.

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

## Nonprofit tagged to enroll low income South Dakotans in monthly internet discount program

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 10, 2023 4:20 PM

A Sioux Falls nonprofit is one of five recipients nationally of a new grant to connect people to the internet. Roughly one in six South Dakotans don't have access to high-speed internet, according to state data from 2021. In Sioux Falls, the state's largest city, roughly 15% of households lack internet access at home or on a mobile device, based on a 2020 survey.

Gov. Kristi Noem vowed to get reliable internet infrastructure to every South Dakotan after pushing for the ConnectSD broadband grant program in 2019, connecting over 27,500 residents to high speed internet in the last four years.

Sioux Falls established the Inclusive Digital Equity Alliance in 2021 to study the issue of digital equity in places where internet broadband is already established, focusing on affordable broadband and digital literacy skills.

Yet thousands of South Dakotans are still without adequate internet access, said Taneeza Islam, executive director of South Dakota Voices for Peace.

Access to the internet is imperative for business growth, remote work, access to health care, and virtual education — all of which came to a head during the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, desktop or laptop computers are needed to fill out forms and apply for jobs. Many low income Sioux Falls residents only have a cell phone for internet use, Islam added, referencing a digital equity task force study.

"There is a large gap between those who do have access and those who do not," Islam said in a news release. "... We hope providing direct assistance for enrollment will ease the process for community members."

South Dakota Voices for Peace is one of five organizations to receive a pilot grant from Civic Nation, a national nonprofit, to enroll low income, multilingual Sioux Falls and Flandreau residents in a federal internet discount program and further the digital equity mission. The nonprofit will help Civic Nation learn best practices to encourage better national enrollment in the program, Islam said.

"The first step is knowing the program exists," Islam said. "Because it is a cumbersome process, being able to help someone one-on-one apply has a higher success of enrollment."

Eligible households for the Affordable Connectivity Program receive a discount of up to \$30 a month toward internet services and a one-time \$100 discount to purchase a laptop, desktop computer or tablet. Households on tribal lands can receive up to \$75 off internet services a month.

The program started in 2021 and is funded for five years. Eligible households must get re-certified on a yearly basis.

South Dakota Voices for Peace plans to enroll 100 multilingual South Dakotans, in part by translating application information into Spanish, Amharic and Nepali. They'll also hold office hours at Sioux Falls locations and be available over the phone to help residents apply for the program.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

## U.S. House Republicans roll out a slew of new committee chairs to steer agenda

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 10, 2023 6:01 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans filled their top committee seats this week, choosing the leaders who will set the course for bills and issues for the new majority in the 118th Congress.

Veteran GOP lawmakers from Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Tennessee, Ohio, Arkansas, Kentucky and Missouri were among those who won the right to head up panels.

The top gavels were doled out Monday by “making sure that our committees are represented by a full swath of our membership,” Majority Leader Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican, said during a GOP leadership press conference Tuesday morning after majority lawmakers began the ratification process in a closed-door meeting.

“You don’t want to wait until a bill’s on the floor to recognize that there might be an issue. You take care of those issues in committee and that’s why you want the entire conference represented, the different groups within our conference represented on the various committees, and we’re going to be working to do that,” he said.

Organization of the committees had been delayed by an historic House speaker contest in which members voted in 15 ballots over multiple days before California Republican Kevin McCarthy finally was elected.

A handful of far-right Republicans essentially blockaded the slim majority McCarthy needed while a behind-the-scenes deal was worked out to include the opposition’s priorities, which included committee representation. The GOP on Monday approved a rules package to govern the new House in a mostly party line vote. A reported separate addendum — not part of the package — has not been made public.

Scalise denied any closed-door deals for committee placements, and said “there’s no addendum.”

McCarthy “made it very clear that there were no gavels given out, there were no deals like that that were made,” Scalise said, referring to a Tuesday morning communication by the speaker with conference members.

Scalise said leadership will be “looking very closely” at Democratic appointments to the minority committee ranks.

### Among the new chairs:

- Pennsylvania Rep. Glenn Thompson will lead the House Agriculture Committee, where this year the committee will be tasked with passing a massive five-year farm bill. Rep. David Scott of Georgia will be the top Democrat on the committee.

- Texas Rep. Kay Granger will become chair of the Appropriations Committee, in charge of drafting the dozen annual spending bills that currently dole out about \$1.7 trillion to departments and agencies. She’ll also be in charge of implementing sweeping cuts to domestic spending that McCarthy promised conservatives in exchange for votes for speaker. Connecticut Democrat Rosa DeLauro will be the top Democrat.

- Alabama Rep. Mike Rogers, who gained C-SPAN fame during the House’s 14th ballot for speaker, when North Carolina’s Richard Hudson had to pull him back from approaching Florida’s Matt Gaetz, will lead the Armed Services Committee that drafts the annual defense policy bill. Congress has passed a bipartisan, bicameral National Defense Authorization Act for 61 consecutive years. Rep. Adam Smith, a Washington Democrat, will be ranking member.

- Texan Jodey Arrington will take over as chair of the Budget Committee that drafts and debates the annual budget resolution. The tax and spending blueprint, which is not a bill and does not become law, is supposed to balance during the 10-year window, a benchmark that will likely lead to the fiscal 2024 version proposing significant cuts. Arrington said in a written statement that “It will take a team effort across the GOP Conference and across the aisle to restore fiscal responsibility and reverse the curse.” Pennsylvania Rep. Brendan Boyle will be the top Democrat on the panel.

- Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina will take the gavel again for the renamed House Education and the Workforce Committee. She received a special waiver to chair the committee again. Rep. Bobby Scott

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of Virginia will be the ranking Democrat on the committee.

- Washington's Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers will head the Energy and Commerce Committee, which handles health care, energy and technology policy among other issues. Rodgers served as the ranking member during the 117th Congress. Former Chair Frank Pallone, of New Jersey, will become the new ranking member.

- Rep. Patrick McHenry of North Carolina secured the top spot on the panel that deals with banking, housing, insurance and more, Financial Services. McHenry played a lead role in negotiating McCarthy's path to the speaker's gavel. California Democrat Maxine Waters will continue as the top Democrat.

- Rep. Michael McCaul, of Texas, will lead the Committee on Foreign Affairs. He served as the GOP leader on the committee that holds jurisdiction over the State Department and diplomatic affairs beginning with the 116th Congress. McCaul previously chaired the Committee on Homeland Security. Outgoing committee chair Rep. Gregory Meeks, of New York, will be ranking member.

- Rep. Mark Green, of Tennessee, has been tapped to chair Homeland Security. Green sat on national security panels during the 117th Congress, including the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs committees. Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson will be the panel's top Democrat.

- Ohio's Rep. Jim Jordan, briefly a pick for the speaker's gavel by far-right party members, will head up the sprawling and influential Judiciary Committee. Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York will continue as the top Democrat on the panel.

- Rep. Bruce Westerman, of Arkansas, will chair the Natural Resources Committee that has jurisdiction over extractive industries such as logging and mining and environmental issues including public lands and endangered species management. Westerman opposed many of the Biden administration's moves on energy policy. Outgoing Chairman Raúl Grijalva of Arizona is expected to remain the leading Democrat on the panel.

- Kentucky's James Comer will lead the Oversight and Reform Committee. Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland will be the top Democrat on the panel. The committee is meant to be a watchdog on the rest of the federal government.

- The Science, Space and Technology Committee will be chaired by Rep. Frank Lucas of Oklahoma. Rep. Zoe Lofgren of California will be the top Democrat on the panel.

- Rep. Roger Williams of Texas will chair the Small Business Committee. New York Democrat Nydia Velázquez will be the panel's ranking member.

- Rep. Sam Graves, of Missouri, will go from ranking member to chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Graves previously chaired the Highways and Transit Subcommittee the last time Republicans held a House majority. Washington Democrat Rick Larsen will become the panel's leading Democrat after the retirement of Oregon's Peter A. DeFazio.

- The Veterans' Affairs Committee, which will oversee the VA's implementation of a sweeping health care and benefits law for veterans with toxic exposure, will be led by Illinois Republican Rep. Mike Bost. California Rep. Mark Takano will continue as the panel's top Democrat.

- Rep. Jason Smith, of Missouri, will lead the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee after winning a three-way race within the House GOP to control that gavel. Smith, who was the top Republican on the Budget Committee last Congress, will be central to any changes to the tax code. Massachusetts Rep. Richard E. Neal will continue as the panel's top Democrat.

## Next steps for GOP

GOP leaders said Tuesday that the party is "unified and united" on its agenda.

"We're just getting started," said Steering Committee Chair Elise Stefanik of New York.

In a 221-210 vote Monday night, the majority approved a bill to rescind funding to bolster staffing at the Internal Revenue Service.

The House on Tuesday also approved the creation of two committees identified in the rules that will govern the 118th Congress.

Those committees include a Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government,

a subset of the Judiciary Committee, and a Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party. The latter received bipartisan support.

Wisconsin Rep. Mike Gallagher will become chair of the China select committee.

Two abortion-related bills are slated to be voted on by the House majority later this week.

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

*Ariana Figueroa, Jacob Fischler and Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.*

## New federal student loan repayment plan aimed at low-income borrowers

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 10, 2023 3:29 PM**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education unveiled a proposal Tuesday that would overhaul a federal student loan income-driven repayment plan, and, if implemented, could help millions of low-income borrowers.

However, it's unclear how the agency would be able to finance the program. Many student debt relief advocates also criticized the proposal for leaving out graduate students and parental loans.

The federal agency that would implement the plan, the Office of Federal Student Aid, handles the loans of 44 million borrowers. But it was not given an increase in its \$2 billion funding in the recent \$1.7 trillion government spending bill that covers the current fiscal year.

In a call with reporters late Monday, senior administration officials said funding their new plan would be difficult.

"It's true that we were very disappointed with the level of funding we received from Congress for Federal Student Aid," a senior administration official said. "And that's going to make it a challenge for us to carry out a number of our policy initiatives."

### Changes in plan

Under the proposed rule, undergraduate borrowers would only be required to pay 5% of their income toward their loans, which would be down from the 10% required under the current income-driven repayment plan.

The proposed rule would also amend the "Revised Pay As You Earn" federal plan to offer zero monthly payment plans to any borrowers who make less than \$30,600 a year and any borrower in a family of four who makes less than \$62,400.

"The proposed regulations would also ensure that borrowers stop seeing their balances grow due to the accumulation of unpaid interest after making their monthly payments," according to the Department of Education's website.

The department's goal is to implement the program this year, officials said. However, rule making can be a lengthy process, which can even take longer if there are legal challenges. Public comment will be open on Wednesday for the proposed rule.

### Pathway to forgiveness

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a statement that the proposed regulation will help create a faster pathway to federal loan forgiveness and help those borrowers avoid defaulting on their loans.

"We cannot return to the same broken system we had before the pandemic, when a million borrowers defaulted on their loans a year and snowballing interest left millions owing more than they initially borrowed," he said.

More than 43 million Americans have student loan debt, and the Federal Reserve estimates that the total U.S. student loan debt is more than \$1.76 trillion.

If implemented, the department estimates that federal loan borrowers who are low income would see payments that are 83% less, while federal loan borrowers who make higher incomes would see a 5%

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reduction.

Federal student loan borrowers who went to community college would be debt free within 10 years if the program is implemented, the department said.

The move comes as the Biden administration's larger plan for student loan relief is tied up in the courts and under a nationwide injunction awaiting a U.S. Supreme Court hearing and ruling.

The court action has prevented the administration from implementing its plan for one-time student loan debt cancellation of up to \$20,000 for millions of borrowers.

The Supreme Court will hear oral arguments on the case Feb. 28.

## Criticism of proposal

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a bipartisan think tank focusing on government spending, criticized the plan announced Tuesday and argued that if implemented it would lead to more student loan borrowing and drive up tuition costs.

Maya MacGuineas, the president of the group, said in a statement that "it now looks like the Biden Administration's student debt proposals could cost \$600 billion, or perhaps even more."

"The Administration should abandon their unilateral effort to remake higher education financing, and instead work with Congress on a thoughtful package of reforms that truly address college costs and value," she said.

The deputy executive director of the Student Borrower Protection Center, Persis Yu, said in a statement that while the proposals are significant, the Department of Education should go further by including Parent PLUS loans and graduate student loan borrowers in the program.

Parent PLUS loans allow parents to borrow money for a dependent's higher education, and those loans are on an income-driven repayment plan. The loan cannot be transferred to the child and is the sole responsibility of the parent.

There are about 4 million Parent PLUS loans, according to Student Loan Hero.

Yu argued that many low-income families of color are more likely to rely on Parent PLUS loans and students of color are more likely to "need to get a graduate degree to earn the same salary as their wealthier white peers."

"Equity demands that these borrowers have equal access to an affordable payment plan and the necessary supports to free themselves from the crushing weight of student debt," Yu said.

The president of the Student Debt Crisis Center, which advocates for student loan debt relief, Natalia Abrams, made similar criticisms in a statement.

"Unfortunately, the plan repeats past mistakes that leave too many holes in the student loan safety net," she said.

"Parents are excluded from the new benefits even though many are shouldering their children's debt on top of their own debt. And, graduate students are blocked from the full benefits of the plan despite them carrying higher, more unaffordable monthly payments."

Abrams called for a broad-based debt cancellation plan and reforms that would benefit all borrowers.

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

## U.S. House GOP plan calls for federal spending cuts, conditions on debt limit increase

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 10, 2023 3:09 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republican leaders during a closed-door meeting Tuesday shared more details of the secret agreements Speaker Kevin McCarthy made with conservative lawmakers last week to secure the votes he needed to hold the gavel.

The so-called handshake deal, displayed on slides during the GOP weekly conference meeting, if adhered to could have significant ramifications for federal departments and agencies as well as the global economy. Democrats on Tuesday in reaction slammed the agreement as potentially leading to a partial government shutdown, an economic crisis or both.

According to a slide on government spending and the debt limit shown during the GOP meeting, disclosed by CNN, the McCarthy deal places limits on when and how the GOP House will take up the annual government funding bills, needed to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The agreement also attaches strings to legislation that would raise or suspend the debt limit, required to avoid a first-ever default on the country's debt later this year.

The agreement will make it much more difficult for House Republicans to broker a deal with the Democratic Senate and Biden administration on both spending and the debt limit.

The slide said House Republicans would:

- Adopt a fiscal 2024 budget resolution balancing the budget within 10 years. Fiscal 2024 begins on Oct. 1.
- Pursue "reforms to" the budget process and mandatory spending programs. Such programs include Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.
- Cap fiscal 2024 discretionary spending at enacted fiscal 2022 levels or lower.
- Only pass spending bills that comply with the budget resolution and pass all 12 regular spending bills on time. Congress has not been able to do that since 1996.
- Pass any stopgap spending bill, or continuing resolution, before the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.
- Reject any negotiations with the Senate unless that chamber's 12 spending bills are passed, the bills comply with the House budget resolution, and they reduce non-defense discretionary spending.
- Not agree to a debt limit increase without a budget agreement or "commensurate fiscal reforms."

Republican plans to pass a CR, or continuing resolution, before Sept. 30 indicate the party doesn't expect to wrap up the fiscal 2024 government funding process by the start of the next fiscal year on Oct. 1.

### 'An honest conversation'

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said during a press conference Tuesday that McCarthy did disclose parameters of the handshake deal during the closed-door GOP meeting.

The Louisiana Republican argued that Republicans should force spending cuts in order to raise the debt limit, which pays for spending already approved by Congress.

"If we're about to max out the credit card, then before we hit that limit, shouldn't we have an honest conversation about how to start living within our means, how to make sure we're not spending money that we don't have?" Scalise said.

"And when that comes up — at the same time you're dealing with the debt limit — you ought to also put mechanisms in place so that you don't keep maxing it out."

Scalise said that Republicans "haven't talked about reducing defense spending," which means the roughly \$130 billion in discretionary spending reductions that would have to take place in order for the fiscal 2024 government funding bills to comply with the fiscal 2022 spending levels would all come out of non-defense discretionary programs.

That side of the federal balance sheet includes hundreds of programs, such as the Agriculture Department, Army Corps of Engineers, Homeland Security, the Energy Department, national parks and forests, Transportation Department and veterans health care programs.

Scalise didn't go into detail about whether Republicans will push for changes to mandatory spending in order to offset raising the debt limit. That side of the federal budget includes Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. It also grows much faster than the discretionary side, which includes the dozen annual

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government funding bills.

## Shutdown warnings

Connecticut Democratic Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee, said during a separate press conference that Republican demands about significantly reducing domestic spending are a nonstarter that could lead to a partial government shutdown later this year.

"Appropriations bills are must-pass bills. They require bipartisan, bicameral agreement," DeLauro said. "It appears — quite honestly — that Republicans, they don't understand this process, because in his attempt to become speaker, Kevin McCarthy reportedly already promised to cap spending at the 2022 levels in exchange for votes."

The cuts to domestic funding, DeLauro said, would "slash what are crucial investments" in programs that address veterans mental health services, veterans homeless assistance programs, high-poverty schools, early learning programs, access to child care, job training programs and small businesses.

Pennsylvania Rep. Brendan Boyle, the top Democrat on the Budget Committee, warned the GOP against using the debt limit as a political negotiating card.

"The debt ceiling should not ever be something we play around with. It is too dangerous. This country has been able to get through and weather government shutdowns. We would not be able to weather a compromise on the full faith and credit of the United States," said Boyle. "It would cripple not only the U.S. economy but the world economy."

The Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank regularly relied on for debt limit predictions, said in June that the default date, or X-date, for the debt limit would "likely arrive no earlier than the third quarter of 2023."

But Shai Akabas, BPC's director of economic policy, noted in a written statement this week that a lot has changed since he released the last forecast, including President Joe Biden's student debt loan forgiveness plan and ongoing court cases, persistent inflation and the speed of interest rate increases.

"Each of these could have a significant impact on the X Date," Akabas said. "The problem right now is that we don't have a new baseline to work off, and (the Congressional Budget Office) won't issue one until later in January, so we won't really be able to make a comprehensive new projection until we have that information."

Akabas said the new default deadline could now be "sometime around the middle of the year."

U.S. Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington Democrat, and ranking member Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, released a joint statement Tuesday, saying that as the new leaders of the panel the two "look forward to working in a bipartisan way here in the Senate to find common ground and move our country forward."

"There are so many pressing challenges our nation faces right now — both here at home and abroad — and it is our responsibility as Members of Congress to do the hard work to listen to one another, find common ground, and then reach sensible solutions that help the American people," they wrote.

"This starts with funding the government in a responsible and bipartisan manner — that means marking up our appropriations bills and bringing them to the floor in a timely way."

## Budget process

House Republican efforts to overhaul the annual budget process, as outlined in the slides, could be especially challenging if the party attempts to rework the process for all of Congress and not just the House GOP.

The Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform, a 16-member bipartisan panel that included members of the House and Senate, spent much of 2018 attempting to rework the process.

Their recommendations included moving from an annual budget resolution to a two-year budget resolution, changing who sits on the Senate Budget Committee and some technical changes. But the panel never reported its recommendations to the House or Senate chamber.

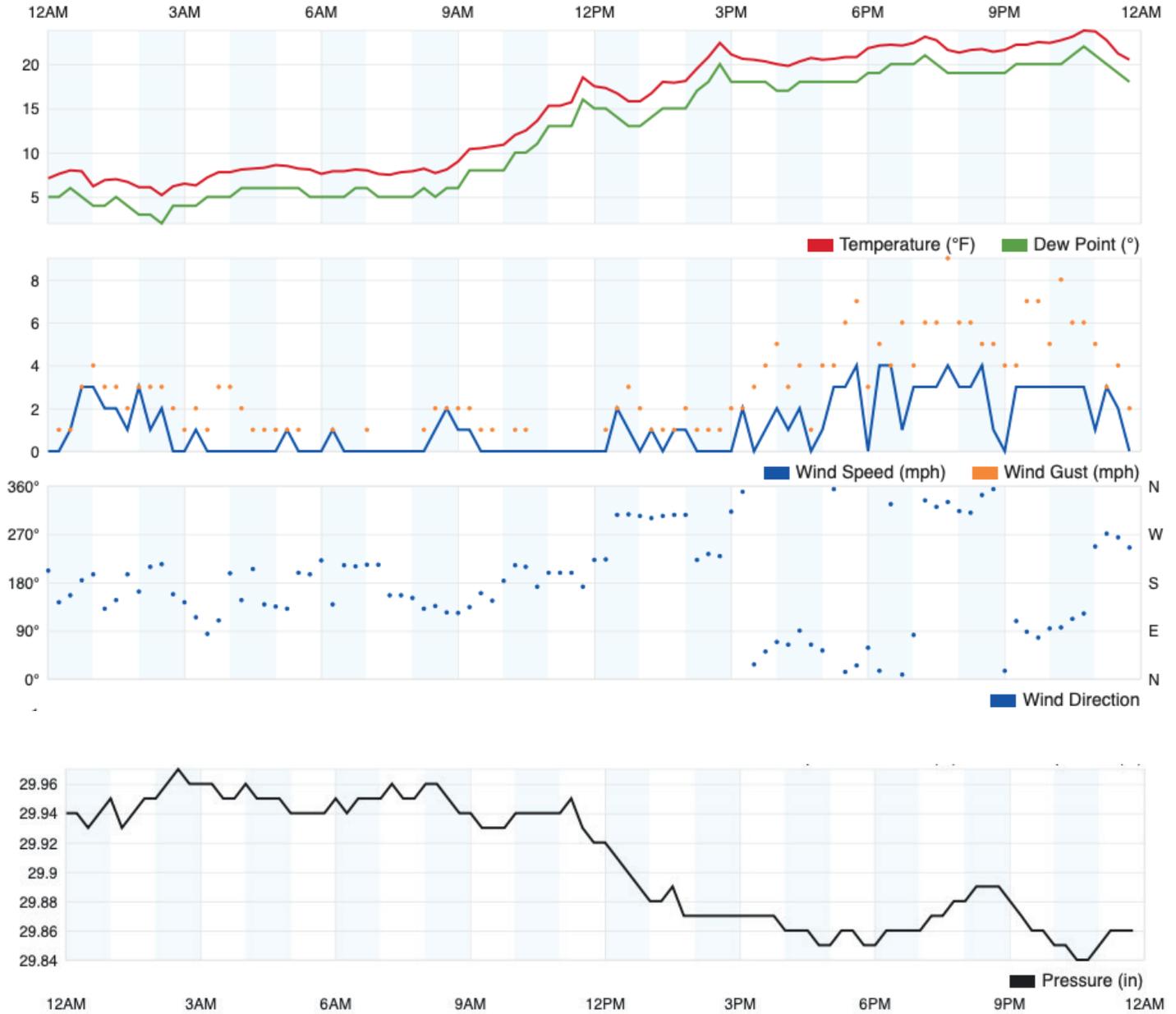
Arkansas GOP Rep Steve Womack and Kentucky Democratic Rep. John Yarmuth, now retired, later released their own bill to overhaul the process, though it never advanced.

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



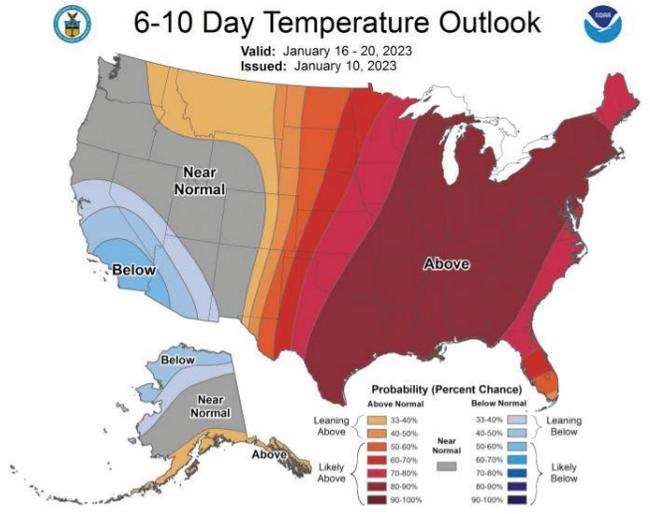
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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Patched Fog then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy
High: 23 °F	Low: 8 °F	High: 17 °F	Low: 2 °F	High: 22 °F	Low: 15 °F	High: 33 °F

 **Dry and Average Temperatures For the Rest of the Week** January 11, 2023  
3:16 AM

<p><u>Today</u></p>  <p>Fog</p> <p>Highs: 20 to 32° Lows: 6 to 18°</p>	<p><u>Thursday</u></p>  <p>Highs: 13 to 29° Lows: 0 to 14°</p>	<p><u>Friday</u></p>  <p>Highs: 17 to 37° Lows: 13 to 25°</p>
---	---	--



 **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** U.S. Department of Commerce **National Weather Service**  
Aberdeen, SD

We are still dealing with fog, mainly across northeastern SD into western MN this morning. Across the area patchy fog is still possible through the morning. Otherwise, clouds will be on the increase today with highs in the 20s and 30s. Dry conditions expected through the end of the week



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## Today in Weather History

January 11, 1980: A strong area of low pressure resulted in strong winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts to 70 mph across Minnesota on the 11th and 12th. Blowing and drifting snow made roads hazardous or impossible. The strong winds also caused some damage. There were areas in western Minnesota that had a lot of blowing dirt.

January 11, 1995: A combination of an ice storm, heavy frost accumulation, and strong winds for several days caused widespread damage to electrical systems resulting in power outages across central and north-central South Dakota. The first ice storm occurred on the 11th and the 12th. In the days following, widespread fog developed and resulted in additional heavy deposits of ice and frost on power lines and other surfaces. Much of the damage occurred when strong winds, mainly from the 16 through the 18th, caused the heavily weighted power lines and poles to collapse. Power outages lasted as long as eight days. Several electric cooperatives had never experienced damages of this magnitude. Some traffic accidents resulted from icing, and many vehicles slid off the roads. The property damage was estimated at 3.5 million dollars.

January 11, 2009: A vigorous but fast-moving winter storm system moved through the Dakotas last night and early today. Although snow accumulations from the storm only ranged from 1 to 4 inches, strong winds behind the system produced significant blowing and drifting snow and widespread blizzard conditions across the area. Reports from trained spotters and law enforcement indicated visibility dropped to below one-quarter mile for several hours and near-zero (white-out conditions) in many rural or unsheltered areas. Sustained north to northwest winds at many locations was 20 to 35 mph, with peak wind gusts as high as 60 to 65 mph. As the arctic airmass surged into the region, temperatures fell some 30 degrees from early this morning to mid-afternoon.

1898: An estimated F4 tornado struck the city of Fort Smith, Arkansas, just before midnight. The tornado, which touched down about 100 miles southwest of town, killed 55 people and injured 113 others along its track.

1918: A powerful area of low pressure brought snow and bitterly cold temperatures to Chattanooga, Little Rock, and Shreveport. Birmingham, Alabama, picked up an inch of snow. In far southeastern Alabama, an estimated F3 tornado virtually damaged every building in the town of Webb. The tornado leveled one rural school, killing one teacher and seven students. Please note, the date on the historical marker is an error. January 10th in 1918 was a Thursday.

1963: An F2 tornado was reported in Scott County, Indiana, north of Louisville, Kentucky. It was on the ground for 5 miles north of Scottsburg and damaged or destroyed several homes and barns.

1972: Downslope winds hit the eastern slopes of the Rockies in northern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming. Boulder CO reported wind gusts to 143 mph and twenty-five million dollars property damage.

1987 - A storm in the northeastern U.S. buried the mountains of central Vermont with up to 26 inches of snow, and snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 27 inches at Telos Lake. Winds gusted to 45 mph at Newark NJ and Albany NY. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Snow and high winds in Utah resulted in a fifty car pile-up along Interstate 15. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 115 mph at Rendezvous Peak. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A cold front which the previous day produced 21 inches of snow at Stampede Pass WA and wind gusts to 75 mph at Mammoth Lakes CA, spread snow across Colorado. Totals in Colorado ranged up to 17 inches at Steamboat Springs. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong northwesterly winds associated with a deep low pressure system crossing the Upper Great Lakes Region ushered cold air into the central U.S. Winds gusted to 72 mph at Fort Dodge IA, and wind gusts reached 75 mph at Yankton SD. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in northwestern Minnesota. Squalls produced heavy snow in parts of Upper Michigan and northern Lower Michigan, with 16 inches reported at Wakefield. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008 - Iraqis in Baghdad woke up to the novelty of falling snowflakes as the city experienced its first snowfall in about 100 years. (NCDC)

2010: Bitter cold temperatures gripped central and southern Florida with lows in the teens and 30s.

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### IT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY

What's in a name?

More than we often imagine.

No matter where I've lived, whether Ohio or South Carolina, California or North Carolina, Ohio or Texas, Georgia or Oklahoma, I have always been greeted by the same question: "Are you Michael Guido's brother?" And I always seem to have the same feelings surface: "I wonder what expectations they will have of me?" Or, "Will they expect me to be just like him?" Or, "Will he always get there before I have my opportunity to even try to establish my identity?"

In the final analysis, those questions did not matter. It was an honor to have Michael for a brother and an example. Everywhere he went he "sowed God's seeds." Seeds of love and compassion; seeds of concern and conviction, seeds of hope and healing; seeds of grace and mercy; seeds of insight and understanding that would bring the Word of God to life; seeds that would change lives and mend families; seeds of happiness and joy; seeds of light and life; seeds that inspired and encouraged everyone that heard or read them.

"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold," wrote Solomon. I did not understand the significance of that verse for many years. Yes, I enjoyed many benefits of being identified with Michael. It did have its value. But, with the joy that came from having Michael as my brother came sadness for those who suffer the disgrace of a family member who led a life that defied God's teachings and made life difficult for those who were harmed by their reputation.

But the challenge contained in this is not beyond any of us: we have the potential, with God's power, to do whatever is necessary to live lives that establish a "good name."

Prayer: Father, give us Your courage and strength, insight and wisdom to leave a legacy worthy of Your name. Enable us to live as Jesus lived by serving others as He did. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. Proverbs 22:1



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

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## 2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 – SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 07/04/2023 – Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 – GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 – Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 – GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 – Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 – Tour of Homes & Holiday Party

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.10.23

7 13 14 15 18 9

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$1,350,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 15  
DRAW: Mins 43 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.09.23

27 32 34 39 43 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$34,070,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 15 Mins 43  
DRAW: Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.10.23

7 15 29 41 43 5

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 45 Mins  
DRAW: 43 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.07.23

2 23 24 28 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 15 Mins 44  
DRAW: Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.09.23

19 41 47 53 54 25

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 14 Mins 44  
DRAW: Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.09.23

18 43 48 60 69 14

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$360,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 14 Mins 43  
DRAW: Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

## Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Belle Fourche 83, Lead-Deadwood 58

Beresford 60, McCook Central/Montrose 42

Bowman County, N.D. 57, Lemmon 20

Bridgewater-Emery 42, Ethan 38

Britton-Hecla 62, Wilmot 55

Castlewood 54, Clark/Willow Lake 51

Centerville 65, Scotland 44

Corsica/Stickney 62, Mitchell Christian 51

Crow Creek 83, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 64

Dakota Valley 55, West Central 50

DeSmet 67, Howard 23

Deuel 67, Arlington 30

Elk Point-Jefferson 74, Canistota 55

Estelline/Hendricks 62, Great Plains Lutheran 56

Freeman Academy/Marion 69, Avon 65

Gregory 58, Wagner 48

Hanson 46, Parkston 44

Harding County 75, Dupree 40

Highmore-Harrold 66, Faulkton 57

Ipswich 63, Sully Buttes 48

James Valley Christian 84, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 39

Kimball/White Lake 66, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 59, 2OT

Leola/Frederick 47, North Central Co-Op 42

Madison 52, Vermillion 44

McLaughlin 52, Mobridge-Pollock 37

Miller 51, Redfield 46

Mitchell 71, Huron 66

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 84, Wessington Springs 68

Northwestern 65, Florence/Henry 49

Parker 68, Freeman 64, 2OT

Pierre 66, Winner 32

Pine Ridge 63, St. Francis Indian 55

Rapid City Christian 74, Sturgis Brown 60

Sioux Falls Christian 65, Dell Rapids 63

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 56, Brookings 39

Sioux Valley 69, Hamlin 65

Todd County 56, Little Wound 55

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 66, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 31

Viborg-Hurley 51, Alcester-Hudson 43

Warner 50, Hitchcock-Tulare 47

Watertown 48, Aberdeen Central 30

Waubay/Summit 57, Sisseton 26

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## GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 71, Faulkton 43  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 66, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 32  
Arlington 60, Deuel 42  
Avon 51, Freeman Academy/Marion 39  
Belle Fourche 77, Lead-Deadwood 10  
Bowman County, N.D. 57, Harding County 50  
Canistota 39, Menno 38  
Castlewood 44, Clark/Willow Lake 37  
Centerville 45, Scotland 28  
Colman-Egan 45, Chester 37  
Corsica/Stickney 54, Mitchell Christian 23  
DeSmet 59, Howard 48  
Dell Rapids St. Mary 67, Elkton-Lake Benton 53  
Ethan 60, Bridgewater-Emery 24  
Flandreau 44, Garretson 29  
Freeman 61, Parker 34  
Great Plains Lutheran 41, Estelline/Hendricks 39  
Groton Area 53, Aberdeen Christian 26  
Hamlin 63, Sioux Valley 46  
Hanson 75, McCook Central/Montrose 38  
Hill City 51, Philip 18  
Hot Springs 51, Moorcroft, Wyo. 38  
Huron 49, Mitchell 45  
James Valley Christian 40, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 19  
Kadoka Area 48, Lyman 41  
Leola/Frederick 51, North Central Co-Op 39  
Lower Brule 64, Sunshine Bible Academy 29  
Marty Indian 67, Crazy Horse 21  
Milbank 69, Tiospa Zina Tribal 38  
Miller 42, Redfield 27  
Mobridge-Pollock 58, Herreid/Selby Area 45  
Newell 43, Upton, Wyo. 37  
Parkston 50, Chamberlain 31  
Potter County 64, Stanley County 42  
Rapid City Christian 63, Sturgis Brown 33  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 60, Kimball/White Lake 33  
Sioux Falls Christian 56, Dell Rapids 21  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 63, Brookings 30  
St. Thomas More 51, Custer 26  
Tea Area 63, Tri-Valley 54  
Vermillion 54, Madison 26  
Viborg-Hurley 45, Alcester-Hudson 20  
Wagner 75, Gregory 29  
Warner 59, Hitchcock-Tulare 20  
Watertown 50, Aberdeen Central 36  
West Central 57, Dakota Valley 44  
Wilmot 53, Britton-Hecla 48  
Winner 45, North Central, Neb. 31

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

## South Dakota governor calls for eliminating grocery tax

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Gov. Kristi Noem called Tuesday for using the state's surplus to eliminate the tax charged on groceries and lower other taxes in a State of the State address that steered clear of the hot-button topic of abortion.

The Republican governor, who is seen as a potential contender for the 2024 White House, delivered her address as the Legislature's nine-week session began. All eyes are on what lawmakers might do with the state's \$423 million surplus.

Noem said that shoppers are "astonished" when they arrive at the checkout line to pay for their groceries. She said it is so costly that she has watched many shoppers have to put items back on the shelves because they don't have enough money to purchase them.

"South Dakotans need this relief," said Noem, whose executive budget calls for repealing the state's 4.5% sales tax on groceries, a move that would save taxpayers \$100 million.

Noem was critical of a proposal to repeal the state grocery tax during the final days of the legislative session in March, but this fall, she changed course and made it a centerpiece of her reelection campaign. She has called repealing the tax her top priority for 2023, arguing that the state's surplus would cover the revenue loss.

While minority Democrats support the idea, a number of staunch Republicans oppose it, questioning whether the state can absorb the lost revenue.

"We will help every single family in the state," she said. "And then they have the freedom to decide how to use those dollars to meet their needs in their family."

Sen. Casey Crabtree, the Republican caucus leader, said he also anticipates sales and property tax reduction proposals. He was vague about the legislation's prospects of success.

"We'll see where it all ends up," he said.

House GOP leader Rep. Will Mortenson said several tax reduction proposals, including the proposed grocery tax cut, will be the subject of debate.

"Of course, as a conservative, I would prefer that no one pay any tax," he said. "But given that we have limited budget resources, we'll need to be weighing all these proposals against each other."

Budget-setting during most of Noem's first term was filled with state revenues swollen by consumer spending and federal pandemic relief. Lawmakers are also cautioning that those years of plenty — when millions of dollars went to upgrading university campuses and other projects — could soon be over.

Noem also highlighted workforce shortages, noting that the state has 23,000 open jobs. To address that, she called for updating licensing requirements for professional jobs. She said that other states like Arizona that have taken steps to recognize out-of-state licenses have added thousands of workers.

"That's the kind of drastic workforce boost that we need right here in South Dakota," she said.

Noem is also calling for improving paid family leave and creating a way for childcare workers to get benefits.

Under her family leave proposal, state employees could get their entire salary paid for 12 weeks, instead of the 60% that is currently offered for eight weeks. The new policy would cover new births or adoptions, as well as taking care of a child, spouse, or parent with a serious health condition, or a situation where a spouse is called to active-duty military service.

Her plan also calls for allowing private sector companies to be a part of the state's risk pool, which would make it cheaper for them to offer the benefit, and providing \$20 million in grants to incentivize them to participate.

Those proposals are key pieces of her goal of supporting families alongside a bid to uphold the state's abortion ban, which was triggered by the U.S. Supreme Court's June ruling. Noem, an ardent abortion opponent, faces a challenge to the ban through a citizen-proposed constitutional amendment that could appear on the 2024 ballot. She never discussed the issue directly in her address, though.

Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba was critical of Noem for bypassing the issue.

"At the moment that a woman needs access to reproductive health care, it is far easier for them to simply

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go somewhere else if they have the means to do that," Nesiba said. "But one shouldn't have to leave the state to be able to have access to reproductive health care."

Noem also notably stepped up her rhetoric against China, touting legislation that would create a board that would review the sale or lease of agricultural land to non-Americans. The move came after she blocked the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok from state devices in November 2022 and ordered a review of Chinese investments.

"We can't allow Chinese interests to purchase any South Dakota ag land, much less any land near any military base or critical state infrastructure," she said.

## Widespread flight delays in US after FAA computer outage

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A computer outage at the Federal Aviation Administration brought flights to a standstill across the U.S. on Wednesday, with hundreds of delays quickly cascading through the system at airports nationwide.

The FAA ordered all U.S. flights to delay departures until 9 a.m. Eastern, though airlines said they were aware of the situation and had already begun grounding flights.

At 7:30 a.m. Eastern, there were more than 1,200 delayed flights within, into or out of the United States, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware. More than 100 have been cancelled.

Most delays were concentrated along the East Coast, but were beginning to spread west.

The FAA said it was working on restoring its Notice to Air Missions System.

"We are performing final validation checks and reloading the system now," the FAA said. "Operations across the National Airspace System are affected."

The agency said that some functions are beginning to come back on line, but that "National Airspace System operations remain limited."

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a tweet that he is in touch with the FAA and monitoring the situation.

United Airlines said that it had temporarily delayed all domestic flights and would issue an update once it learned more from the FAA.

The FAA is working to restore what is known as the Notice to Air Missions System.

NOTAMs used to be available through a hotline but that was phased out with the internet. The alerts span from mundane information about construction at airports to urgent flight restrictions or broken equipment.

There is a potential for widespread disruption because of the outage. All aircraft are required to route through the system, including commercial and military flights.

European flights into the U.S. appeared to be largely unaffected.

Irish carrier Aer Lingus said services to the U.S. continue, and Dublin Airport's website showed that its flights to Newark, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles were running on schedule.

"Aer Lingus plan to operate all transatlantic flights as scheduled today," the carrier said in a prepared statement. "We will continue to monitor but we do not anticipate any disruption to our services arising from the technical issue in the United States."

The FAA said that it would provide frequent updates as it made progress.

## Pope honors Cardinal George Pell, divisive Australian cleric

By ROD MCGUIRK, NICOLE WINFIELD and NICK PERRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis on Wednesday paid tribute to Cardinal George Pell, who spent 404 days in solitary confinement in his native Australia before his child sex convictions were overturned, praising his diligence in reforming the Vatican's finances and his faith "even in the hour of trial."

Francis sent a telegram of condolences to the head of the College of Cardinals, expressing his "sadness" over Pell's death and relaying his prayers and sympathy to the Australian prelate's family.

Pell died Tuesday in Rome, where he had attended the funeral last week of Pope Benedict XVI. Pell suf-

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ferred fatal heart complications following hip surgery, said Archbishop Peter Comensoli, Pell's successor as archbishop of Melbourne. He was 81.

He was a divisive figure. He lived to see Vatican rivals charged with financial crimes after he worked to reform the Holy See's finances. In Australia, he was a lightning rod for disagreements over whether the Catholic Church had been properly held to account for historic child sex abuse.

Sydney Catholic Archbishop Anthony Fisher told reporters the death had come as a shock.

"It will be for historians to assess his impact on the life of the church in Australia and beyond, but it was considerable and will be long lasting," Fisher said.

"For many people, particularly of the Catholic faith, this will be a difficult day and I express my condolences to all those who are mourning today," said Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Fisher said a requiem for Pell would be held at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican in the next few days, and in time his body would be brought back to Australia for a funeral Mass and buried in the crypt at St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.

Journalist Lucie Morris-Marr, who wrote the book "Fallen" about Pell's trial, said on Twitter that Pell's death "will be terribly triggering for many Australians impacted by Catholic child sexual abuse and not just those involved in his trial."

Pell, the former archbishop of Melbourne and Sydney, became the third-highest ranked official in the Vatican after Pope Francis tapped him in 2014 to reform the Vatican's notoriously opaque finances as the Holy See's first-ever finance czar.

He spent three years as prefect of the newly created Secretariat for the Economy, where he tried to impose international budgeting, accounting and transparency standards.

But Pell returned to Australia in 2017 in an attempt to clear his name of child sex charges dating from his time as archbishop.

A Victoria state County Court jury convicted him of molesting two 13-year-old choirboys at St. Patrick's Cathedral in the latest 1990s shortly after he had become archbishop of Melbourne. An initial trial had ended in a jury deadlock. Pell served 404 days in solitary confinement before the full-bench of the High Court unanimously overturned his convictions in 2020 on appeal.

The High Court found there was reasonable doubt surrounding the testimony of the main witness, now the father of a young family aged in his 30s, who said Pell had abused him and another choirboy.

In the telegram, Francis praised Pell's consistent dedication to the church "and particularly the diligent cooperation given to the Holy See in the context of its recent economic reform, of which he laid the foundation with determination and wisdom."

Francis said he was praying for the "faithful servant who has followed his Lord with perseverance even in the hour of trial."

During his time in prison, Pell kept a diary documenting everything from his prayers and Scripture readings to his conversations with visiting chaplains and the prison guards. The journal turned into a triptych, "Prison Journal," the proceeds of which went to pay his substantial legal bills.

In the diary, Pell reflected on the nature of suffering, Pope Francis' papacy and the humiliations of solitary confinement as he battled to clear his name for a crime he insisted he never committed.

Pell and his supporters believed he was scapegoated for all the crimes of the Australian Catholic Church's botched response to clergy sexual abuse. Victims and critics say he epitomized everything wrong with how the church has dealt with the problem, pointing in particular to a widely circulated photo of a young Pell accompanying a notorious abuser, Gerald Risdale, to court.

The U.S. survivor group SNAP bitterly complained that Pell's "serious wrongdoing is already ignored and minimized by the church's hierarchy." It accused him of covering up clergy sex crimes. "His true sentence begins with death," the group tweeted.

Pell strongly denied his own abuse allegations and repeatedly defended his response to the abuse scandal while a bishop and later the archbishop of Melbourne, though he acknowledged the Catholic hierarchy as a whole had made "enormous mistakes." He expressed regret over encounters with victims seeking com-

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pensation, saying he and others in the church failed in their moral and pastoral responsibilities to them. Anthony Foster testified at one of Australia's inquiries into abuse that when he and his wife sought compensation over the abuse their daughters suffered, Pell showed a "sociopathic lack of empathy."

Even after he was acquitted of the Melbourne allegations, Pell's reputation remained tarnished by the scandal and in particular his handling of other priests who abused children and his treatment of victims. Australian inquiries concluded that Pell created a victims' compensation program mainly to limit the church's liability, and that he aggressively tried to discourage victims from pursuing lawsuits.

Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the highest form of inquiry in the country, also found that he knew of clergy molesting children in the 1970s and did not take adequate action to address it.

Pell had testified remotely to the Royal Commission over four days in Rome in 2016, a remarkable moment in the history of the church's reckoning with abuse that saw a top Vatican cardinal sitting in a hotel conference room answering questions via video link from 10 p.m.-2 a.m. each night, with victims, journalists and supporters in the audience.

The late-night hours were set to accommodate Australian time zones after Pell argued that his heart condition made flying too dangerous. But it had the effect of amplifying testimony that might have remained confined to Australia to a global audience.

After his testimony, Pell met with Australian survivors who had traveled to Rome to hear him in person. He acknowledged that he had failed to act on an allegation a decade ago and vowed to work to put an end to the rash of suicides in his Australian hometown of Ballarat, where scores of people had taken their lives as a result of the trauma of their abuse.

"We now know it was one of the very worst places in Australia" for child sex crimes, Pell said at the time.

After he was held responsible for failing to take adequate action by the Royal Commission, Pell said he was surprised by the findings and that they weren't "supported by evidence."

With his rather brusque, no-nonsense Australian sensibilities, Pell clashed frequently with the Vatican's Italian old guard during the years he worked to get a handle on the Vatican's assets and spending. He was vindicated when Vatican prosecutors put 10 people, including his onetime nemesis, on trial in 2021 for a host of alleged financial crimes.

The ongoing trial against Cardinal Angelo Becciu, during Pell's tenure the No. 2 in the secretariat of state, mostly concerns the office's 350 million euro investment in a London real estate deal. Pell's biggest battle had been to wrest control of the office's asset portfolio, which remained off the Holy See's balance sheets and was managed by a few inexperienced Monsignors and laymen who lost the Vatican tens of millions in euros.

Only in the last year, nearly a decade after Pell first announced that he had uncovered nearly 1 billion euros in unreported assets, has Francis ordered the secretariat of state's entire financial portfolio moved into the Vatican's centralized patrimony office for more professional management and accounting.

After Pell returned to Rome following his release from prison in 2020, he had a well-publicized private audience with Francis.

"He acknowledged what I was trying to do," Pell said of the pope during a 2020 interview. "And, you know, I think it's been sadly vindicated by revelations and developments."

Francis said as much in a recent interview with Italy's Mediaset broadcaster, crediting Pell with having set the Vatican on the path of financial transparency and lamenting that he was forced to abandon the effort to face the "calumny" of the abuse charges back home.

"It was Pell who laid out how we could go forward. He's a great man and we owe him so much," Francis said last month.

Pell was born on June 8, 1941, the eldest of three children to a heavyweight champion boxer and publican also named George Pell, an Anglican. His mother Margaret Lillian (nee Burke) was from an Irish Catholic family.

He grew up in the Victorian regional town of Ballarat. At 193 centimeters (6 foot, 4 inches) tall, he was a talented Australian Rules Footballer. He was offered a professional football contract to play for Richmond

but opted for a seminary instead.

While in Melbourne, he set up the Melbourne Response which was a world-first protocol to investigate complaints of clergy sexual abuse and to compensate victims. However many abuse victims criticized the system as being designed more to shield the church from litigation.

After his convictions were overturned, Pell divided his time between Sydney and Rome, where he took part in the typical life of a retired cardinal, attending Vatican events and liturgical feasts and otherwise keeping up with news of the church.

"I've become very Italian," Pell told a visitor during a lull of the coronavirus pandemic, which he spent in Rome.

Pell, along with the Melbourne archdiocese, was also battling a civil case back in Australia, which lawyers said Wednesday would continue against Pell's estate.

That case was brought by the father of a former altar boy who claimed he was sexually abused by Pell. The father claims he suffered psychological effects from the abuse of his son, who died in 2014 from an accidental drug overdose.

"A civil trial likely would have provided the opportunity to cross examine Pell, and truly test his defense against these allegations," said Lisa Flynn, the chief legal officer of Shine Lawyers. "There is still a great deal of evidence for this claim to rely on."

## Storm-struck California scrambles to clean up ahead of rain

By BRIAN MELLEY and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Storm-ravaged California scrambled to clean up and repair widespread damage on Wednesday as the lashing rain eased in many areas, although the north could see thunderstorms and another powerful weather front was expected to hit the state Friday.

At least 17 people have died in the storms battering the state. The figure is likely to rise, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Tuesday during a visit to the scenic town of Capitola on the Santa Cruz coast that was hard hit by high surf and flooding creek waters last week.

A pickup truck driver and a motorcyclist were killed early Tuesday in the San Joaquin Valley when a tree that had been struck by lightning fell on them, authorities said.

More than half of California's 58 counties were declared disaster areas, the governor said.

The latest storm that began Monday was one in a series that began late last month and repairing the damage may cost more than \$1 billion, said Adam Smith, a disaster expert with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Crews worked to reopen major highways that were closed by rockslides, swamped by flooding or smothered with mud while more than 10,000 people who were ordered out of seaside towns on the central coast were allowed to return home.

They included Montecito, a wealthy Santa Barbara County community that is home to Prince Harry and other celebrities where 23 people died and more than 100 homes were destroyed in a mudslide five years ago.

Yet thousands of people living near rain-swollen creeks and rivers remained under evacuation orders. In the San Joaquin Valley, raging waters from Bear Creek flooded parts of the city of Merced and neighboring Planada, a small agricultural community along a highway leading to Yosemite National Park.

All 4,000 residents of Planada were ordered to leave Tuesday morning. Neighborhoods were under water with cars submerged up to their roofs. Residents ordered to evacuate carried whatever they could salvage on their backs as they left in the rain.

Other evacuations were ordered because of levee breaches in parts of Monterey County.

The most recent atmospheric river — a long plume of moisture stretching into the Pacific that can drop staggering amounts of rain and snow — have eased in some areas. Light to moderate rain with some thunderstorms was forecast to arrive Wednesday in Northern California. A longer storm system was predicted to last from Friday until Jan. 17.

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Despite the rain, most of the state remained in extreme or severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The storms may help locally "but will not resolve the long-term drought challenges," said Rick Spinrad, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Damage from the storm included washed-out roads and seaside businesses flooded by 20-foot (6-meter) surf that pounded Santa Cruz County.

Many areas saw unprecedented amounts of rain coupled with furious winds and even hail and lightning that knocked down trees and damaged electrical lines.

More than 75,000 homes and businesses around the state were without power as of late Tuesday night, according to the website Poweroutage.us.

Mudslides damaged some homes in pricey Los Angeles hillside areas, while further up the coast a sink-hole damaged 15 homes in the rural Santa Barbara County community of Orcutt.

Kevin Costner, best-actor winner in a television drama series for "Yellowstone," was unable to attend Tuesday's Golden Globe awards in Los Angeles because of the weather. Presenter Regina Hall said he was sheltering in place in Santa Barbara due to flooding.

In San Francisco, a tree fell on a commuter bus on Tuesday without causing injuries and lightning struck the city's iconic Transamerica Pyramid building without damage. High winds also ripped away part of the roof on a large apartment building.

Some people found themselves stranded in small communities inundated with water and mud.

"We're all stuck out here," Brian Briggs said, describing a scary night during which the deluge unleashed mudslides in remote Matilija Canyon that buried one house and cut off the only road to nearby Ojai. The canyon creek began to flood yards and the surrounding hills, which were stripped of vegetation in the 2017 Thomas Fire, began to tumble down in the dark.

Mudflows dragged sheds, gazebos and outhouses into the creek, Briggs said. After helping neighbors get to higher ground, he returned home to find his fence destroyed by waist-deep mud.

A helicopter dropped 10 sheriff's deputies Tuesday to help the residents of dozens of canyon homes.

The wet and blustery weather left California's large homeless population in a precarious situation. At least two homeless people in Sacramento County died and more than a dozen people were rescued from a homeless encampment on the Ventura River.

Theo Harris, who has lived on San Francisco's streets since 2016, fortified his shelter with tarps and zip ties Tuesday and took in his girlfriend after her tent flooded.

"The wind has been treacherous, but you just got to bundle up and make sure you stay dry," Harris said. "Rain is part of life. It's going to be sunny. It's going to rain. I just got to strap my boots up and not give up."

## Japan, S. Korea protest China visa stoppage amid COVID spat

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and KIM TONG-HYUNG ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO (AP) — Japan and South Korea defended public health restrictions on travelers from China on Wednesday, a day after China stopped issuing new visas in both countries in apparent retaliation.

Chinese embassies stopped issuing new visas for South Koreans and Japanese on Tuesday. It wasn't clear whether China would expand the visa suspensions to other countries that have imposed stricter virus testing on passengers from China following its COVID-19 surge.

South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin said Wednesday he finds "significantly regrettable" that China stopped issuing short-term visas to South Koreans and called for China to align its pandemic steps with "scientific and objective facts."

According to South Korea's Disease Control and Prevention Agency, about 17% of the 2,550 short-term travelers from China from Jan. 2 to Tuesday have tested positive.

South Korea has stopped issuing most short-term visas at its consulates in China through the end of January while also requiring all passengers from China, Hong Kong and Macau to submit proofs of nega-

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tive tests taken within 48 hours of their arrival in addition to COVID-19 tests at the airport.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno criticized China for "one-sidedly" restricting visa issuances to the Japanese nationals "because of a reason that is not related to COVID-19 measures."

Tokyo protested and demanded China scrap the measures and that Japan will "respond appropriately while closely watching China's infection situation and how information disclosures are handled by the Chinese side," Matsuno said.

Matsuno said Japan had to take temporary measures to avoid rapid inflow of infections into Japan because of China's spreading infections and lack of transparency about the situation.

He said that Japanese border measures are purely aimed at preventing infections and have aimed to limit effects on international travel. "It is extremely regrettable that China has one-sidedly restricted visa issuances."

The Chinese embassies in Tokyo and Seoul announced the suspensions in brief online notices, without providing reasons or details such as when visa issuances will resume.

China's Foreign Ministry threatened countermeasures last week against countries that had announced new virus testing requirements for travelers from China. At least 10 governments in Europe, North America and Asia have done so recently. Meanwhile, Thailand sent three ministers to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport to welcome the country's first planeload of Chinese tourists in years, in a bid to revive inbound tourism.

Japan reopened its borders for individual tourism in October. Most travelers can show proof of vaccination instead of testing at the airport, unless they show symptoms, but since Dec. 30 travelers from China must show pre-departure negative tests and take an additional test upon arrival. Those who test positive must quarantine at designated facilities for up to seven days.

According to health ministry statistics, about 8% of 4,895 passengers of all nationalities tested positive upon arrivals from Dec. 30 to Jan. 5, and most of the infected were Chinese or those who had recently been in China.

Some Japanese media recently showed Chinese tourists at pharmacies buying anti-fever medicine, noting shortages.

China's worsening COVID-19 situation and lack of information mean that South Korea may need to extend restrictions, senior Disease Control and Prevention Agency official Lim Sook-young told a briefing. "Just because we haven't seen the emergence of a new variant doesn't necessarily mean we won't see one later," she said.

Korea's Park said he doesn't believe that the friction over COVID-19 measures would seriously hurt bilateral relations, which he described as stable.

"The most important reason for our government's measure is the lives and safety of our people," he said. "We will monitor the COVID-19 situation in China before determining how long we will maintain our measures."

Liang Wannian, the head of China's COVID-19 expert panel, said that all strains of COVID-19 found in China have been reported to the WHO. "We have not found any new variants that are worthy of attention and concern," he said at a briefing Wednesday in Beijing.

Withholding of visas from South Korean or Japanese businesspeople could delay commercial activity and potential new investment.

South Korea's Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Startups on Wednesday opened telephone lines for small businesses to report any disruption caused by China's decision to halt short-term visas. While only a few calls had been received as of Wednesday afternoon, officials say that the Chinese steps could hurt some companies exporting to China by forcing their employees to cancel visits and business meetings.

"We are closely monitoring how much disruption," the Chinese steps may cause, said ministry official Lee Gwon-jae.

Impact on Japan could be limited for now, as Japanese business people are still largely watching the development. A major tour agency said none of its customers were currently seeking China visas.

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TBS television in Tokyo reported that applicants at the Chinese embassy's visa center were successfully picking up visas due to be issued Wednesday, but that new applicants were being turned away.

A South Korean restaurant owner in Beijing said the announcement forced friends to postpone plans to visit China. He spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern his business might be affected. He added that he is preparing to renew his Chinese work visa and doesn't know whether that will be affected.

China's move appeared to be grounded in its strict view of reciprocity, and demands that its citizens be treated the same as those of other countries.

"A handful of countries, in disregard of science, facts and their actual epidemic situation, have insisted on taking discriminatory entry restriction measures targeting China," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Wednesday. "China made reciprocal responses in light of the actual discriminatory measures taken by these countries against China."

He did not respond directly when asked if new visas had been suspended for South Koreans and Japanese, saying only that he had "made it very clear."

The Japanese Embassy in China, in a tweet in Chinese later Wednesday, wrote that Japan is not restricting visa issuances and that "China's approach is completely lacking in reciprocity."

China is facing a surge in cases and hospitalizations in major cities after the country abruptly reversed its "zero-COVID" strategy of trying to contain the virus last month in response to what it says was the changing nature of the outbreak. That came after three years of lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing that prompted rare politically tinged protests in major cities. The country is bracing for a further spread into less developed areas with the start of the Lunar New Year travel rush, set to accelerate in the coming days.

The World Health Organization and several nations have accused China of withholding data on its outbreak.

The worst appears to be over in Beijing, which was hit hard by the initial onslaught of infections, but challenges remain, said Wang Guiqiang, the head of the infectious disease department at Peking University First Hospital.

"We have borne the brunt in Beijing," he said. "From the perspective of hospital and clinical treatment, the pressure is still huge."

## A flowery pianist, Eddie's brevity and other Globes moments

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Standout moments from the Golden Globe Awards, which returned to television Tuesday night after a year's absence.

DON'T SHOOT THE PIANO PLAYER

Pianist Chloe Flower had a sweet gig at the Golden Globes, playing TV and movie theme songs on camera as the show went to commercial breaks, but it turned temporarily sour when some in the viewing audience wrongly assumed she was the one deciding when annoyed winners had to wrap up their speeches.

"Shut up, I can beat you up," said Michelle Yeoh, the star of many a kung fu movie, when piano music began playing her off about two minutes into her acceptance of the Globe for best actress in a musical or comedy film for "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

"You can forget that piano," Colin Farrell said over the music as he accepted the male version of the same award for "The Banshees of Inisherin."

When Austin Butler won best actor in a drama film for "Elvis" and the piano began, he pleaded for a song by the man he portrayed.

"At least play 'Suspicious Minds' or something," Butler said.

But none of that was Flower.

"People on Twitter are mad like she's playing people off, but it's a track," host Jerrod Carmichael said during the show. "Chloe, we are lucky to have you."

Flower tweeted on the topic herself mid-show.

"I would never play piano over people's speeches!!" wrote. "I'm only playing when you see me on camera!"

MURPHY SLAPS WITH TWO MINUTES AND A MIC DROP

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Eddie Murphy certainly didn't need playing off. Many who win the Cecil B. DeMille Award, a lifetime achievement prize, use the moment to make a major speech. Oprah Winfrey's in 2018 inspired calls for a presidential run. But Murphy's acceptance took just two minutes, shorter than many of the night's regular winners.

He thanked a handful of people and quickly wrapped it up with a mic-drop joke about Will Smith and Chris Rock.

"I've been doing this for a long time so I could stand up here and keep saying thank you until they play the piano," Murphy said. "But I'm gonna wrap it up and just say something to all the up-and-coming dreamers and artists that are in the room tonight. I want to let you know that there is a definitive blueprint that you can follow to achieve success, prosperity and peace of mind. Pay your taxes, mind your business, and keep Will Smith's wife's name out of your (expletive) mouth!"

## TEARS FOR LEAN YEARS AND LOST FAMILY

Despite the Globes' diminishment amid controversy in recent years, winning them still brought plenty of tears, sometimes from unexpected people. Ke Huy Quan set the emotional tone as he cried throughout his acceptance of the night's first award, best supporting actor in a film for "Everything Everywhere All At Once." He tearfully thanked Steven Spielberg for giving him his start in "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" before talking about the decades he spent thinking he would never get to top it.

Spielberg, who has remained restrained winning bigger awards, got emotional when he won the best director Globe for "The Fabelmans." Because this one was about his family. "I've been hiding from this story since I was 17 years old," he said, his voice cracking. He called out each of his family members by name, ending with his late mother, Leah Adler, who inspired the Michelle Williams character at the heart of the film, saying "she is up there kvelling about this right now."

Jennifer Coolidge, who always seems to be doing a bit when she speaks on stage, and frequently was Tuesday night as a presenter and winner, shed a few sincere tears when she effusively thanked creator Mike White for putting her in "White Lotus," for which she won best actress in a limited series.

"You changed my life in a million different ways," Coolidge said. "My neighbors are speaking to me."

White wept during the speech, and was still red-eyed minutes later when he accepted the best limited series award for the show.

## EXCUSING ALL THE ABSENCES

On a night when some boycotted the show, Golden Globes presenters took the rare step of explaining, sometimes in detail, why some winners weren't there. Cate Blanchett, winner of best actress in a movie drama for "Tár," "couldn't be here tonight because she's on production in the UK," presenter Henry Golding said.

Amanda Seyfried, winner of best actress in a limited series for "The Dropout," "is deep in the process of creating a new musical so she could not be here tonight," presenter Mo'Nique said.

Regina Hall made it clear that she was reading from a teleprompter and mocked the explanation she had to give for Kevin Costner not accepting his best actor in a TV drama award for "Yellowstone," despite the serious subject matter of this week's severe flooding in California.

"He so much wanted to be here," Hall said, shaking her head and laughing, "but because of the unprecedented weather, he has to shelter in place, in Santa Barbara."

"Let's pray everyone," she said, before catching herself and saying "no, that's awful."

## CARMICHAEL CASUALLY COURTS CONTROVERSY

Host Jerrod Carmichael pulled no punches with his jokes, starting with his opening monologue, in which he said he was hired "because I am black." A few of his on-the-edge jokes, delivered in his laid back style, fell flat, including a dig at Tom Cruise and the Church of Scientology, and his calling the Beverly Hilton, the Globes' longtime home, "the hotel that killed Whitney Houston." The superstar died in a room there in 2012.

But a joke based on the antisemitic statements of Ye, formerly Kanye West, got a strong laugh when Carmichael told Spielberg that he had seen "The Fabelmans," which is based on Spielberg's Jewish family.

"I actually saw it with Kanye," Carmichael said, "and it changed everything for him."

Spielberg responded with a “thank God” gesture.

## German coal mine clash pits laws against climate

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

ERKELENZ, Germany (AP) — The fate of a tiny village has sparked heated debate in Germany over the country’s continued use of coal and whether tackling climate change justifies breaking the law.

Environmental activists have been locked in a standoff with police who started eviction operations on Wednesday in the hamlet of Luetzerath, west of Cologne, that’s due to be bulldozed for the expansion of a nearby lignite mine. Some stones and fireworks were thrown at officers in riot gear, who could be seen dismantling stalls set up by protesters.

Protesters refused Tuesday to heed a court ruling effectively banning them from the area. Some dug trenches, built barricades and perched atop giant tripods in an effort to stop heavy machines from reaching the village, before police pushed them back by force.

“People are putting all of their effort, all of their lives into this struggle to keep the coal in the ground,” said Dina Hamid, a spokesperson for the activist group Luetzerath Lives.

“If this coal is burned, we’re actually going to take down our climate goals,” she said. “So we’re trying to, with our bodies, protect the climate goals.”

The debate flared up hours later at a townhall meeting in nearby Erkelenz, when one regional official accused activists of being willing to “spill human blood” to defend the now-abandoned village.

Stephan Pusch, who heads the district administration, said that while he sympathized with the protesters’ aims, the time had come to give up Luetzerath. The village’s last resident left in 2022 after being forced to sell to utility company RWE.

“You’ve achieved your goal. Now clear the pitch,” he said to jeers from the room.

Many disagreed, arguing that the village is more than just a potent symbol for the need to stop global warming.

Studies indicate that about 110 million metric tons of coal could be extracted from beneath Luetzerath. The government and RWE say this coal is needed to ensure Germany’s energy security — squeezed by the cut in supply of Russian gas due to the war in Ukraine.

Critics counter that burning so much coal would make it much harder for Germany, and the world, to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) as agreed in the 2015 Paris climate accord.

“Nobody wants to be out there in the cold right now, defending a forest or a village,” said Maya Rollberg, a 26-year-old student who had traveled from southern Germany. “But I think that people have realized that they have to do that in order to (protect) future generations.”

Dietmar Jung, a retired priest attending the meeting, said he was tired of hearing officials say the law was on the side of RWE.

“They keep going back to the legal situation,” he said. “But the right to live doesn’t play a role here (for them).”

Pusch, the regional administration chief, warned protesters that intentionally breaking the law wouldn’t help their cause in a country where the violent seizure of power and the horrors of dictatorship are still within living memory.

“I’ll tell you honestly that I’m scared my children will grow up in a world that isn’t worth living in anymore,” he said. “But I’m at least as scared of my children growing up in a country where everyone takes the law into their own hands.”

“You won’t save the world’s climate on your own,” said Pusch. “(We’ll) only do so if we manage to take the majority of the population with us.”

Similar debates over how far civil disobedience can go have taken place in Germany and elsewhere in recent months amid a wave of road blockades and other dramatic actions by protesters demanding tougher measures to combat climate change.

Some climate activists say the law is ultimately on their side, citing a 2021 ruling by the country’s su-

preme court that forced the government to step up its effort to cut emissions. They also note the legally binding nature of Germany's commitments under the Paris accord.

Speaking after the townhall meeting, student Jannis Niethammer acknowledged that the dispute over Luetzerath touches on fundamental issues. "It's a question of democracy and how do we actually get a democracy to move toward climate protection, toward climate justice," he said.

Janine Wissler, a federal lawmaker and co-leader of the opposition Left party, suggested the way out would be for the government to reverse its decision allowing the village to be razed.

"If we want to achieve our climate targets and take the Paris climate agreement seriously, then the coal beneath Luetzerath needs to stay in the ground," she told The Associated Press on the sidelines of the protest.

Wissler criticized an agreement struck last year between the government and utility company RWE to permit mining beneath the village in return for an earlier end to coal use in Germany. Some experts say that, in sum, the deal will lead to higher emissions.

"We're already experiencing droughts, famines and floods. Climate change is happening already," she said. "And therefore wrong decisions need to be corrected."

## **Biden 'surprised' government records found at old office**

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said he was surprised when informed that government records were found by his attorneys at his former office space in Washington. He was asked about the issue after the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee requested that the U.S. intelligence community conduct a "damage assessment" of potentially classified documents.

Speaking to reporters in Mexico City on Tuesday, Biden said his attorneys "did what they should have done" when they immediately called the National Archives about the discovery at the offices of the Penn Biden Center. He kept an office there after he left the vice presidency in 2017 until shortly before he launched his Democratic presidential campaign in 2019.

The White House confirmed that the Department of Justice was reviewing "a small number of documents with classified markings" found at the office.

"I was briefed about this discovery and surprised to learn that there are any government records that were taken there to that office," Biden said in his first comments since news of the Nov. 2, 2022, document discovery emerged Monday. He added that "I don't know what's in the documents" and that his lawyers had suggested he not ask.

Earlier Tuesday, Rep. Mike Turner sent the request to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, saying that Biden's retention of the documents put him in "potential violation of laws protecting national security, including the Espionage Act and Presidential Records Act."

Irrespective of a federal review, the revelation that Biden potentially mishandled classified or presidential records could prove to be a political headache for the president, who called former President Donald Trump's decision to keep hundreds of such records at his private club in Florida "irresponsible."

"Those entrusted with access to classified information have a duty and an obligation to protect it," said Turner in a letter to Haines. "This issue demands a full and thorough review."

On Tuesday, Rep. James Comer, the new GOP chairman of the House Oversight Committee, sent the White House Counsel's office a letter requesting copies of the documents found at the Biden office, communications about the discovery, and a list of those who may have had access to the office where they were found. The White House didn't immediately respond to the request.

Haines agreed in September to conduct a "risk assessment" rather than a "damage assessment" of the Trump case.

There are significant differences between the Trump and Biden situations, including the gravity of an ongoing grand jury investigation into the Mar-a-Lago matter. The intelligence risk assessment into the Trump documents is to examine the seized records for classification as well as "the potential risk to national

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security that would result from the disclosure of the relevant documents.”

Sen. Mark Warner, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, called for a briefing on the documents.

“Our system of classification exists in order to protect our most important national security secrets, and we expect to be briefed on what happened both at Mar-a-Lago and at the Biden office as part of our constitutional oversight obligations,” he said. “From what we know so far, the latter is about finding documents with markings, and turning them over, which is certainly different from a months-long effort to retain material actively being sought by the government. But again, that’s why we need to be briefed.”

Special counsel to the president Richard Sauber said Monday that after Biden’s attorneys found the records, they notified the National Archives and Records Administration — which took custody of the documents the next day.

“Since that discovery, the President’s personal attorneys have cooperated with the Archives and the Department of Justice in a process to ensure that any Obama-Biden Administration records are appropriately in the possession of the Archives,” Sauber said.

A person who is familiar with the matter but not authorized to discuss it publicly said Attorney General Merrick Garland asked U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois John Lausch to review the matter after the Archives referred the issue to the department. Lausch is one of the few U.S. attorneys to be held over from Trump’s administration.

Trump weighed in Monday on his social media site, asking, “When is the FBI going to raid the many homes of Joe Biden, perhaps even the White House?”

Republicans have just taken control of the House of Representatives and are promising to launch widespread investigations of Biden’s administration.

The revelation also may complicate the Justice Department’s consideration of whether to bring charges against Trump, a Republican who is trying to win back the White House in 2024 and has repeatedly claimed the department’s inquiry into of his own conduct amounted to “corruption.”

The National Archives did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday. Spokespeople for Garland and Lausch declined to comment.

Comer also sent a letter to the National Archives requesting records and correspondence relating to discovery of the Biden documents, asserting that “NARA’s inconsistent treatment of recovering classified records held by former President Trump and President Biden raises questions about political bias at the agency.”

His Democratic counterpart, Rep. Jamie Raskin, said Biden’s attorneys “appear to have taken immediate and proper action.”

“I have confidence that the attorney general took the appropriate steps to ensure the careful review of the circumstances surrounding the possession and discovery of these documents and make an impartial decision about any further action that may be needed,” he added.

Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, chair of the powerful House Judiciary Committee, said Monday that the American public deserved to know earlier about the classified documents.

“They knew about this a week before the election, maybe the American people should have known that,” Jordan told reporters. “They certainly knew about the the raid on Mar-a-Lago 91 days before this election, but nice if on November 2, the country would have known that there were classified documents at the Biden Center.”

Jordan is among House Republicans pushing for the creation of a “select subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal government” within the Judiciary Committee.

It wasn’t immediately clear why the White House didn’t disclose the discovery of the documents or the DOJ review sooner. CBS was first to report Monday on the discovery of the potentially classified documents.

The Justice Department for months has been investigating the retention of roughly 300 documents that were marked as classified and were recovered from Trump’s Florida estate. In that instance, prosecutors say, representatives of Trump resisted requests to give back the full stash of classified documents and failed to fully comply with a subpoena that sought their return.

FBI agents in August served a search warrant at the Mar-a-Lago property, removing 33 boxes and containers.

That investigation is being led by special counsel Jack Smith. Prosecutors have interviewed an array of Trump associates and have been using a grand jury to hear evidence.

Democrats made a similar request of the director of national intelligence in August following the search of Mar-a-Lago. Reps. Carolyn Maloney and Adam Schiff, who then led the House Oversight and Intelligence committees, asked Haines for an "immediate review and damage assessment," alleging that Trump "has potentially put our national security at grave risk."

Intelligence officials are not believed to have briefed Congress on their assessment in the four months since, according to public statements from lawmakers. Haines noted in her letter that any risk assessment would not "unduly interfere" with the Justice Department's criminal investigation into the documents seized at Mar-a-Lago.

## **The AP Interview: Korean leader cites North's serious threat**

By ADAM SCHRECK and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea's spike in missile tests, growing nuclear ambitions and other provocative acts pose a "serious threat" that could lead to a dangerous miscalculation and spark a wider conflict, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said Tuesday.

Speaking with The Associated Press at the presidential office in Seoul, the conservative leader reiterated his call for closer security cooperation with the United States and Japan to counter the "dangerous situation" being created by North Korea as he played down the prospect for direct negotiations like those pursued by his liberal predecessor.

"We've seen a miscalculation leading to serious wars many times in history," Yoon said, adding that the North's advancing nuclear arsenal poses a direct threat to the U.S. mainland as well as South Korea and nearby Japan.

Much of the nearly hourlong interview focused on North Korea, which carried out a record number of missile tests last year and just weeks ago violated South Korean airspace by flying drones across the border for the first time in five years.

That incursion prompted the South to fire warning shots, scramble jets and fly its own drones over the border.

Days later, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un began the new year by ordering the "exponential" expansion of his nuclear arsenal and the development of a more powerful intercontinental ballistic missile.

Some experts believe the testing spree is largely meant to modernize an arsenal that North Korea would ultimately want to use as leverage in future dealings with the United States to wrest sanctions relief and other concessions.

"North Korea could have its own internal reasons, but there's no way for our country or any other country to know exactly why they are conducting such provocations," Yoon said.

"These unlawful North Korean provocations can only result in the strengthening of (South Korea's) security response capabilities and a further strengthening of the security cooperation between South Korea, the United States and Japan," he said.

Yoon, a former top prosecutor, took office in May vowing to take a tougher stance on North Korea. During the presidential election campaign, he accused his liberal predecessor, Moon Jae-in, of being "submissive" to North Korea.

Moon, who met Kim Jong Un three times, was credited with arranging now-dormant nuclear diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington and easing fears of war. But he invited criticism that his dovish engagement policy eventually helped Kim Jong Un buy time and perfect weapons technologies in the face of U.N. sanctions.

In a recent newspaper interview, Yoon cited discussions with the U.S. about joint planning potentially involving U.S. nuclear assets.

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Asked for further clarity Tuesday, he said the proposed plans include "tabletop exercises, computer simulations and drills ... on delivery means for nuclear weapons."

"The discussions are under way over the so-called joint planning and joint execution, and I think it's right for South Korea and the United States to cooperate because both of us are exposed to the North Korean nuclear threat," Yoon said.

While Yoon didn't reveal further details, some observers have said he likely wants to stress efforts to boost the viability of the U.S. security commitment to protect its Asian ally from North Korea.

In a policy report to Yoon on Wednesday, Defense Minister Lee Jong-Sup said the South Korean and U.S. militaries plan to hold a tabletop exercise next month to sharpen their response to scenarios where North Korea uses a nuclear weapon. Lee said that South Korea will push for the U.S. to deploy strategic assets near the Korean Peninsula more frequently, according to Lee's office.

Despite the heightened animosities, Yoon maintained he won't pursue talks for the sake of talks with North Korea, saying past inter-Korean discussions were often politically exploited by leaders in both countries and failed to eliminate the North's nuclear program.

Yoon also accused North Korea of cutting off all communication channels with South Korea. Pointing at a white telephone on a desk that he said is meant for a direct hotline with the North Korean leader, Yoon said that "The North is obstructing this line and isn't coming to dialogue."

Yoon also voiced his support for Ukraine in its fight to repel Russia's invasion, which he called "unlawful and illegitimate."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has urged South Korea to provide arms and other military equipment. The Asian country, a growing arms exporter with a well-equipped, U.S.-backed military, has provided humanitarian aid and other support while joining U.S.-led sanctions against Moscow. But it has stopped short of providing arms directly.

Yoon said Korean laws, as well as domestic public opinion, make it difficult for his government to arm Ukraine while it is at war.

An American official said in November that the U.S. agreed to buy 100,000 artillery rounds from South Korean manufacturers to provide to Ukraine. South Korea maintains that the rounds it was selling were meant to backfill depleted U.S. stocks.

Yoon expressed openness to similar deals in the future, noting the two allies regularly buy military equipment from one another.

"If the conflict (in Ukraine) isn't resolved swiftly, it could send a message to North Korea that the international community would fail to respond to an act of invasion with the appropriate sanctions or punishment, and that message would further encourage the North to conduct provocations."

On the domestic front, Yoon appeared to still be shaken by the crowd crush tragedy that killed nearly 160 Halloween revelers in late October in Seoul's Itaewon neighborhood.

He described rushing to his office, not far from the neighborhood, soon after hearing the first reports. He said he initially did not know how many people had been killed and only later came to realize the scale of the disaster.

"It's still hard for me to fully understand how such a huge crowd accident can happen in a country with a (developed) system like ours because of a failure in crowd management," he said.

Authorities ordered a sweeping investigation, but no senior officials have lost their jobs so far despite calls by families of the victims and members of the opposition for greater accountability.

Yoon said it was important to conduct a thorough investigation before assigning blame.

"For victims and relatives, the results of the investigation could provide a base to establish the government's responsibility, so I instructed (officials) to thoroughly investigate the government's responsibility, even if that means taking a lot of responsibility," Yoon said.

## School lawsuits over social media harm face tough legal road

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Like the tobacco, oil, gun, opioid and vaping industries before them, the big U.S. social media companies are now facing lawsuits brought by public entities that seek to hold them accountable for a huge societal problem — in their case, the mental health crisis among youth.

But the new lawsuits — one by the public school district in Seattle last week, with a second filed by a suburban district on Monday and almost certainly more to come — face an uncertain legal road.

The U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments next month over the extent to which federal law protects the tech industry from such claims when social media algorithms push potentially harmful content.

Even if the high court were to clear the way for lawsuits like Seattle's, the district has a daunting challenge in proving the industry's liability.

And the tech industry insists there are many ways social media's effects on teen mental health differ from, say, big pharma's role in pushing opioid addiction.

"The underlying argument is that the tech industry is to blame for the emotional state of teenagers, because they made recommendations on content that has caused emotional harm," said Carl Szabo, vice president and general counsel of the tech industry trade association NetChoice. "It would be absurd to sue Barnes & Noble because an employee recommended a book that caused emotional harm or made a teenager feel bad. But that's exactly what this lawsuit is doing."

Seattle Public Schools on Friday sued the tech giants behind TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat, alleging they have created a public nuisance by targeting their products to children. The Kent School District south of Seattle followed suit on Monday.

The districts blame the companies for worsening mental health and behavioral disorders including anxiety, depression, disordered eating and cyberbullying; making it more difficult to educate students; and forcing schools to take steps such as hiring additional mental health professionals, developing lesson plans about the effects of social media and providing additional training to teachers.

"Our students — and young people everywhere — face unprecedented learning and life struggles that are amplified by the negative impacts of increased screen time, unfiltered content, and potentially addictive properties of social media," Seattle Superintendent Brent Jones said in an emailed statement Tuesday. "We are confident and hopeful that this lawsuit is a significant step toward reversing this trend for our students."

Federal law — Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 — helps protect online companies from liability arising from what third-party users post on their platforms. But the lawsuits argue the provision, which predates all the social media platforms, does not protect the tech giants' behavior in this case, where their own algorithms promote harmful content.

That's also the issue in *Gonzalez v. Google*, the parent company of YouTube, set for argument at the Supreme Court on Feb. 21. In that case, the family of an American woman killed in an Islamic State group attack in Paris in 2015 alleges that YouTube's algorithms aided the terror group's recruitment.

If the high court's decision makes clear that tech companies can be held liable in such cases, the school districts will still have to show that social media was in fact to blame. Seattle's lawsuit says that from 2009 to 2019, there was on average a 30% increase in the number of its students who reported feeling "so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row" that they stopped doing some typical activities.

But Szabo pointed out that Seattle's graduation rates have been on the rise since 2019, during a time when many kids relied on social media to keep in touch with their friends throughout the pandemic. If social media were truly so harmful to the district's educational efforts, the graduation rate wouldn't be rising, he suggested.

"The complaint focuses on only how social media harms kids, and there might be evidence of that," said Eric Goldman, a professor at Santa Clara University School of Law in Silicon Valley. "But there's also a lot of evidence that social media benefits teenagers and other kids. What we don't know is what the distress rate would look like without social media. It's possible the distress rate would be higher, not lower."

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The companies have insisted that they take the safety of their users, especially kids, seriously, and they have introduced tools to make it easier for parents to know whom their children are contacting; made mental health resources, including the new 988 crisis hotline, more prominent; and improved age verification and screen time limits.

"We automatically set teens' accounts to private when they join Instagram, and we send notifications encouraging them to take regular breaks," Anitigone Davis, Meta's global head of safety, said in an emailed statement. "We don't allow content that promotes suicide, self-harm or eating disorders, and of the content we remove or take action on, we identify over 99% of it before it's reported to us."

Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed internal studies in 2021 showing the company knew Instagram negatively affected teenagers by harming their body images and worsening eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. She alleged the platform prioritized profits over safety and hid its research from investors and the public.

Even if social media benefits some students, that doesn't erase the serious harm to many others, said Josh Golin, executive director of Fairplay for Kids, a nonprofit working to insulate children from commercialization and marketing.

"The mental health costs to students, the amount of time schools have to spend monitoring and responding to social media drama, is exorbitant," Golin said. "It is ridiculous that schools are responsible for the damages caused by these social media platforms to young people. Nobody is seeing the kinds of cumulative effects that social media is causing to the extent school districts are."

Both cases were filed in U.S. District Court in Seattle, but they are based on state public nuisance law — a broad, vaguely defined legal concept whose origins date back at least to 13th century England. In Washington, public nuisance is defined, in part, as "every act unlawfully done and every omission to perform a duty" which "shall annoy, injure or endanger the safety, health, comfort, or repose of any considerable number of persons."

Most famously, public nuisance claims helped prompt the tobacco industry's \$246 billion, 25-year settlement with the states in 1998. But public nuisance law also has been at least part of the basis for litigation by state, city, county or tribal governments seeking to hold oil companies responsible for climate change, the gun industry for gun violence, the pharmaceutical industry for the opioid crisis and vaping companies like Juul for teen vaping.

Much of the litigation is ongoing. Juul Labs last month agreed to settle thousands of lawsuits — including 1,400 from school districts, cities and counties — for a reported \$1.2 billion.

The Seattle litigation has the potential to enact massive change, prompting questions about the appropriateness of addressing big societal issues in court rather than through lawmaking. Yet there is little risk to the school district because a private law firm filed the complaint on a contingency basis in which the firm is paid only if the case succeeds.

Jolina Cuaresma, senior counsel for privacy and tech policy at Common Sense Media, which aims to make media safer for children, said she was thrilled to see a school district make a public nuisance claim against the tech companies.

"Folks have become tired waiting for Congress to do something," she said.

## **New Mega Millions jackpot of \$1.35B is game's 2nd highest**

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The Mega Millions prize has grown again to an estimated \$1.35 billion after there was no winner of the lottery's latest giant jackpot.

The numbers drawn late Tuesday night were: 7, 13, 14, 15, 18 and gold Mega Ball 9.

The new jackpot drawing on Friday night will be another milestone in the game, Mega Millions said in a statement early Wednesday.

"Now at \$1.35 billion, the Mega Millions jackpot is moving up and making history as the second highest Mega Millions jackpot ever," Pat McDonald, Ohio lottery director and lead director of the Mega Millions Consortium, said in the statement.

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The only Mega Millions jackpot larger than Friday's prize is the \$1.53 billion won in South Carolina in 2018, Mega Millions said.

The largest jackpot in the U.S. to date was a \$2.04 billion Powerball won by a single ticket in California in November.

The estimated \$1.35 billion jackpot in the next drawing would only be distributed to a winner who chooses an annuity paid over 29 years. Nearly all grand prize winners opt to take a cash payout, which for Friday night's drawing is an estimated \$707.9 million.

There have been 25 drawings over three months since the last time a player matched all six numbers and claimed the jackpot.

Despite the game's long odds of 1 in 302.6 million, players continue to purchase tickets as the size of the grand prize grows.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states as well as in Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## At rehabbed Globes, 'The Fabelmans,' 'Banshees' triumph

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

The Golden Globes returned to the air Tuesday with a red carpet flush with celebrities, comedian Jerrod Carmichael as a hesitant emcee and top awards for Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" and Martin McDonagh's "The Banshees of Inisherin," as the beleaguered award show sought to rekindle its pre-pandemic and pre-scandal glamour.

Spielberg's autobiographical coming-of-age film "The Fabelmans" won best drama film and the dark friendship tale "The Banshees of Inisherin," captured best film, comedy or musical. "Abbott Elementary," "White Lotus" and "House of the Dragon" led the TV awards.

The Globes' would-be comeback ended like many Globes ceremonies before it: with a triumphant Spielberg. For the fifth time, one of Spielberg's films won a best picture Globe. Nominated 14 times by the Globes for best director, Spielberg also won the honor for the third time. He began by thanking his three sisters, his late father and his late mother, Leah Adler (played by Michelle Williams in the film). "She is up there kvelling about this right now," said Spielberg.

Carmichael kicked off the 80th Golden Globes from the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California, with little of the fanfare that usually opens such ceremonies. He plunged straight into the issues that drove the Globes off television and led much of the entertainment industry to boycott the Hollywood Foreign Press Association after the group was revealed to have no Black members. Carmichael opened by asking the crowd to "be a little quiet here."

"I am your host, Jerrod Carmichael," said the "Rothaniel" comedian. "And I'll tell you why I'm here. I'm here 'cause I'm Black.

"I won't say they were a racist organization," he continued before sitting on the stage. "But they didn't have a single Black member until George Floyd died. So do with that information what you will."

McDonagh's "The Banshees of Inisherin" left with three awards, including best screenplay for McDonagh and best actor in a comedy for Colin Farrell. Fourteen years earlier, Farrell won a Globe for McDonagh's "In Bruges," which likewise paired him with Brendan Gleeson. In his remarks, Farrell thanked the playwright, his castmates, his kids and the film's donkey, Jenny.

On a soggy night following punishing, prolonged rains that have lashed Southern California, the first award went to Ke Huy Quan, the former child star of "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom," for best supporting actor in "Everything Everywhere All at Once." A clearly emotional Quan, who had left acting years before directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert cast him in their multiverse tale, thanked them for his second act.

"More than 30 years later, two guys thought of me," said Quan. "They remembered that kid. And they gave me the opportunity to try again."

Michelle Yeoh, the star of "Everything Everywhere At Once," also won, for best actress in a comedy or musical. The Malaysian-born Yeoh was just the second female actor of Asian descent to win in the cat-

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egory, after her "Crazy Rich Asian" costar Awkwafina, who won for "The Farewell" in 2020. "Forty years," the 60-year-old Yeoh said. "Not letting go of this."

Possibly Yeoh's stiffest competition at the Academy Awards, Cate Blanchett of "Tár," won best actress on the drama side. Blanchett, in production, wasn't in attendance to pick up her fourth Globe. (Also absent was Kevin Costner, best-actor winner in a drama series for "Yellowstone." Presenter Regina Hall said he was sheltering in place in Santa Barbara due to flooding.)

Angela Bassett, a likely Oscar frontrunner, won best supporting actress for her performance in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

"Weeping may come in the evening, but joy comes in the morning," Bassett said, referencing the loss of "Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman.

Best actor was an upset. Austin Butler won for his performance in Baz Luhrmann's "Elvis." The favorite in the category has arguably been Brendan Fraser for "The Whale." Ahead of the Globes, Fraser said he would not attend because "my mother didn't raise a hypocrite." In 2018, Fraser said he was groped in 2003 by longtime HFPA member Philip Berk. Berk, who is no longer an HFPA member, denied it.

Mike White's "The White Lotus" won for best limited or anthology series. Fresh off her dramatic finale, Jennifer Coolidge gave one of the night's lengthiest and warmest speeches while accepting the best supporting actress in a limited series award.

"Even if this is the end, you sort of changed my life in a million different ways," Coolidge told White. "My neighbors are speaking to me, things like that."

The public school sitcom "Abbott Elementary" came in the lead TV nominee and took home three awards, including best comedy series. Quinta Brunson, the show's creator and star, won best actress in a comedy series, and Tyler James Williams won for his supporting role.

"It has resonated with the world in a way that I couldn't even have imagined it would have," said Brunson as she thanked the studios that backed her vision. "But let's be real. I did imagine it. That's why I sold it to you."

Best drama series went to "Game of Thrones" prequel "House of the Dragon."

"Naatu Naatu" from the Telugu sensation "RRR," won best song over the likes of Rihanna and Taylor Swift.

The Globes were plunged into chaos shortly before a largely remote pandemic 2021 awards show when a Los Angeles Times report revealed that the HFPA, then numbering 87 members, had no Black members.

Stars and studios boycotted last year's ceremony, which NBC opted not to televise, saying the HFPA needed time to make "meaningful reform."

Tom Cruise, whose "Top Gun: Maverick" was nominated for best picture, drama, famously returned his three Golden Globe awards after the HFPA revelations. Mid-show Tuesday, Carmichael came out with three trophies he said he found backstage, and suggested they be traded for Shelly Miscavige, the wife of the leader of the Church of Scientology.

The HFPA pledged to reform, diversified its membership and changed some of the ways it operates. It now has 96 members, including six Black members, along with 103 nonmember voters. Billionaire Todd Boehly purchased the Globes and has begun turning the nonprofit group into a for-profit company.

Reaction to the Globe nominations last month was muted. But much of the industry turned out Tuesday. Eddie Murphy and Ryan Murphy received tributes. Sean Penn introduced a message from Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"There will be no third World War," Zelenskyy said in a taped message, predicting Russia's defeat. "It is not a trilogy."

When the Globes were on the brink, NBC reworked its Globes deal into a one-year contract and moved the show from Sunday to Tuesday. That meant the Globes were essentially put on a one-year audition to recapture its awards-season perch.

As it has for most award shows, Globes viewership has cratered. After 18.4 million watched the 2020 awards, the 2021 edition managed just 6.9 million, according to Nielsen. Still, the Globes remain a valuable

marketing tool for awards contenders, propping up ads for films in the long stretch between the holidays and the Oscars, which air March 12, a year after "the slap."

Accepting the Cecil B. DeMille Award, Eddie Murphy said he knew the blueprint for longevity in show business: "Pay your taxes, mind your business, and keep Will Smith's wife's name out of your (expletive) mouth!"

## **AP: WHO knew of past sex misconduct claim against doctor**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — When a doctor tweeted that she was "sexually assaulted" by a World Health Organization staffer at a Berlin conference in October, the U.N. agency's director-general assured her that WHO had "zero tolerance" for such misconduct.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus replied to her, saying he was "horrified" by the accusations of groping and unwelcome sexual advances. He offered his personal assistance, WHO suspended the staffer and the agency opened an investigation that is nearing its conclusion.

But internal documents obtained by The Associated Press show the same WHO staffer, Fijian physician Temo Waqanivalu, was previously accused by another woman of sexually harassing her several years ago. That claim was flagged to senior agency directors and others in 2018, before the accuser was informed that pursuing a formal investigation might not be in her best interests, according to the documents.

A former WHO ombudsman who helped assess the previous allegation against Waqanivalu noted the similarities between the two women's accusations, several years apart, and suggested the agency had missed a chance to root out bad behavior.

"I felt extremely angry and guilty that the dysfunctional (WHO) justice system has led to another assault that could have been prevented," said the staffer, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity for fear of losing their job.

The previous allegation didn't derail Waqanivalu's career at WHO. As the new accusation surfaced, he was positioning himself for an exceptionally big promotion with a very public role: He was seeking to become WHO's top official in the western Pacific, with support from Fiji's prime minister, other Pacific islands and WHO colleagues, messages show.

The regional director would support countries fighting problems including dengue, malaria and heart disease, as well as coordinating the first global response to any new emerging outbreaks — as was the case when the coronavirus was first detected in China in late 2019.

Waqanivalu hung up when the AP contacted him for comment. He didn't respond to several follow-up requests sent through email and two messaging apps.

Waqanivalu "categorically" denied that he had ever sexually assaulted anyone, including at the Berlin conference, according to correspondence between him and WHO investigators that the AP obtained. He said the accusations were "false" and could "irreparably damage" his career and reputation.

The physician said there may have been "a mutual misunderstanding" in Berlin and that his accuser was possibly "under the influence of alcohol." He said he was "bewildered" and "confused" by the sexual misconduct allegation.

The U.N. health agency said in an email that it could not comment on individual cases for confidentiality and due process reasons, but that sexual misconduct by anyone working for the agency is "unacceptable."

WHO said its investigation into the Berlin conference complaint "is in its final stage" and that a report, which will not be publicly released, would soon be submitted to Tedros.

"Perpetrators of sexual misconduct face grave consequences, including dismissal," WHO said. It added that the names of perpetrators are entered into a U.N. screening database, to avoid their future employment.

In a speech posted to Twitter in December, Tedros said that "sexual misconduct is particularly grave when the perpetrators are our own personnel." He called sexual misconduct by WHO staffers "a violation of the trust placed in WHO to serve public health."

The claims against Waqanivalu are the latest in a series of misconduct accusations against people work-

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ing for WHO, which is mandated to lead the international response to acute crises including COVID-19 and Ebola.

In May 2021, the AP reported that senior WHO managers were informed of sex abuse allegations during a Congo Ebola outbreak but did little to stop it. A panel appointed by WHO later found that more than 80 workers under WHO's direction sexually abused women. No senior WHO officials tied to the exploitation have been fired.

And WHO's last regional director in the western Pacific -- the person Waqanivalu was seeking to replace -- was put on leave in August, after AP reported that numerous staffers had accused him of racist and abusive behavior that compromised the U.N. agency's response to COVID-19.

In the coming weeks, the agency's highest governing body is meeting to set public health priorities and to address critical administrative concerns, including sexual misconduct. The officials also may discuss how and when the election for the region's next director might occur.

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The earlier accusation against Waqanivalu came after a 2017 chronic diseases workshop in Japan, where a WHO employee said that Waqanivalu had harassed her at a post-work dinner and on other occasions. Her report was shared with senior WHO officials, according to documents obtained by the AP.

"Under the table, (Waqanivalu) took off his shoes, lifted one of his legs and toe(s) between my legs," the woman wrote in the 2018 report. "It took me a while to process what was actually happening."

She left the restaurant and said Waqanivalu followed her to a nearby train station. That's where he grabbed her hand, asked if she was seeing anyone and questioned why she was not attracted to him, she reported.

After she said goodbye, Waqanivalu "proceeded to give me a hug, grabbing my buttocks with both of his hands and trying to kiss my lips," the woman said. She said she turned her head to avoid him and moved his hands.

The woman is identified in the documents, but the AP does not typically name people who say they have been sexually harassed unless they come forward publicly. The AP contacted the woman, but she declined to comment.

According to WHO protocols, her complaint should have been investigated by the organization's office of internal oversight, following guidance from ombudsmen, who help staff mediate personnel problems.

After submitting her confidential report to WHO's "integrity hotline" in July 2018, the case was "tossed around in (Geneva) for months" among officials tasked with misconduct claims, an ombudsman wrote to the woman in an email obtained by the AP.

"It seems our internal process is not efficient enough to address such cases," the ombudsman said.

Months after raising her concerns, the woman was informed by the WHO ombudsman's office that its director had decided to give Waqanivalu a general "informal warning" that didn't reference the alleged misconduct. Following that discussion, the office of the ombudsman and ethics considered the case closed, the woman wrote in an email to a WHO official.

In a follow-up message to a WHO ombudsman, the woman said the agency's ethics office told her it would be difficult to prove a sexual harassment case, saying it might "compromise" her name and that she likely lacked "hard evidence." She said she was also warned that Waqanivalu could file his own complaint against her for "degrading/dishonouring" his name and was told that pressing for an investigation "may not be the best option for me."

WHO's human resources director at the time told colleagues in a November 2018 email that the director of the agency's compliance, risk management and ethics department had been informed of the allegations against Waqanivalu.

"He is aware of the case ... (and has) the matter in hand," the human resources director said in an email obtained by AP.

It is unclear if any investigation was ever conducted.

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In October, Waqanivalu sat on a panel at the World Health Summit in Berlin as part of a high-level

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conference with attendees including WHO chief Tedros, philanthropist Bill Gates, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron.

In a hotel lobby one evening, numerous people were having drinks, including Waqanivalu and Dr. Rosie James, a young British-Canadian physician and former consultant for WHO.

"We were talking about his work at WHO and he just started putting his hand on my bottom and keeping it there," James told the AP. She said she felt intimidated talking to a senior manager at the organization. "I felt this power dynamic and I was really uncomfortable," she said, explaining that she moved away to join her friends, who told her Waqanivalu's actions were inappropriate.

"Somehow I ended up talking to him again and he was literally holding my bum cheek," she said. James said Waqanivalu "firmly held my buttock in his hand multiple times (and) pressed his groin" into her. Before Waqanivalu left, she says he cornered her and repeatedly asked for her hotel room number.

Later that night, she tweeted about the encounter, saying that she was "sexually assaulted" and that "this was not the first time in the global health sphere that this has occurred." WHO chief Tedros replied, pledging to do "everything we can to help you."

James was later interviewed by WHO's investigators. She said WHO officials told her she would not be entitled to see its final investigation report. James also said Tedros never personally followed up directly but said the agency's communications director contacted her and that the two had lunch during the Berlin conference. She said WHO also offered to reimburse her for any private therapy costs related to her encounter with Waqanivalu.

Waqanivalu told WHO investigators he greeted James that evening "by tapping her on her left upper arm" and did not believe that was inappropriate, according to a record of the discussion obtained by AP. He acknowledged asking for her hotel room number, saying he made the request "to connect, if need be."

"I recall that we faced each other the whole time with about an arm's length distance between us," Waqanivalu told investigators, adding that the conversation lasted about five minutes. He said he believed people in the group, including James, "were under the influence of alcohol" and that he remembered the event as "a good evening mixing around with everyone."

Waqanivalu is a unit head at WHO's Geneva headquarters, overseeing a small team in the non-communicable diseases department. He has been featured in several WHO Facebook videos and also sits on the agency's health, safety and wellbeing committee.

Last fall, he put himself forward as a candidate to be WHO's next director for the western Pacific, a region that has a quarter of the world's population.

"The experience and expertise I have gathered over the years ... have given me the relevant credentials to lead the Western Pacific," Waqanivalu wrote in a September letter addressed to Fiji's then-Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama and other officials.

About a week after the Berlin conference, the chair of WHO's top governing body in the region told Waqanivalu in a message seen by the AP that his name was mentioned "as a potential candidate" to be the next regional director. The chair messaged him to say that Pacific health ministers planned to push for a candidate from the region.

"That would be an opportunity for you, Dr. Temo," Waqanivalu was told.

Correspondence obtained by the AP between Waqanivalu and a senior staffer in Bainimarama's office also show Waqanivalu asked about formalizing his candidacy.

A memo from the prime minister's office dated Oct. 17 and marked "approved," confirmed "Fiji's proposed candidacy" of Waqanivalu to the position. A handwritten note said officials should coordinate with the country's ministry of health and inform all other Pacific nations of Waqanivalu's candidacy. Bainimarama, who lost a December election in Fiji, did not respond to multiple requests for comment from the AP.

Waqanivalu's candidacy also had supporters within WHO itself. A WHO-produced election-style campaign brochure created in September — before the Berlin conference — outlined his vision for the region and was aimed to garner votes from member countries in the region.

"Under my leadership, WHO will empower people to serve within their countries," the document reads. Paula Donovan is co-director of the Code Blue campaign, which seeks to hold U.N. personnel accountable for sexual offenses. She said the allegations regarding Waqanivalu were unsurprising but deeply worrying. She said it was particularly concerning that an official accused of sexual harassment had been potentially in line for such a prominent leadership role and that WHO seemingly had failed to uphold its own "zero tolerance" policy for unprofessional behavior.

"It's patently false that WHO does not condone sexual misconduct," Donovan said, calling for its member countries to overhaul the agency's internal structures so that its officials are held accountable. "When WHO keeps this kind of stuff under wraps, they are giving sexual predators carte blanche to do it again with impunity."

## **Afghan women athletes barred from play, fear Taliban threats**

The Associated Press undefined

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Noura's determination to play sports was so great that she defied her family's opposition for years. Beatings from her mother and jeers from her neighbors never stopped her from the sports she loved.

But the 20-year-old Afghan woman could not defy her country's Taliban rulers. They have not just banned all sports for women and girls, they have actively intimidated and harassed those who once played, often scaring them from even practicing in private, Noura and other women say.

Noura has been left shattered. "I'm not the same person anymore," she said. "Since the Taliban came, I feel like I'm dead."

A number of girls and women who once played a variety of sports told The Associated Press they have been intimidated by the Taliban with visits and phone calls warning them not to engage in their sports. The women and girls spoke on condition of anonymity for fear they will face further threats.

They posed for an AP photographer for portraits with the equipment of the sports they loved. They hid their identities with burqas, the all-encompassing robes and hood that completely cover the face, leaving only a mesh to see through. They didn't normally wear the burqa, but they said they sometimes do now when they go outside and want to remain anonymous and avoid harassment.

The ban on sports is part of the Taliban's escalating campaign of restrictions that have shut down life for girls and women.

Since their takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban have barred girls from attending middle and high school. Last month, they ordered all women thrown out of universities as well.

The Taliban require women to cover their hair and faces in public and prohibit them from going to parks or gyms. They have severely limited women's ability to work outside the home and most recently forbade non-governmental organizations from employing women, a step that could cripple the vital flow of aid.

Even before the Taliban, women's sports were opposed by many in Afghanistan's deeply conservative society, seen as a violation of women's modesty and of their role in society. Still, the previous, internationally-backed government had programs encouraging women's sports and school clubs, leagues and national teams for women in many sports.

A 20-year-old mixed martial artist recalled how in August 2021, she was competing in a local women's tournament at a Kabul sports hall. Word spread through the audience and participants that the advancing Taliban were on the city's outskirts. All the women and girls fled the hall. It was the last competition the young athlete ever played in.

Months later, she said she tried to give private lessons for girls. But Taliban fighters raided the gym where they were practicing and arrested them all. In detention, the girls were humiliated and mocked, she said. After mediation by elders, they were released after promising not to practice sports anymore.

She still practices at home and sometimes teaches her close friends.

"Life has become very difficult for me, but I am a fighter, so I will continue to live and fight," she said.

Mushwanay, spokesman of the Taliban's Sports Organization and National Olympic Committee, said authorities were looking for a way to restart sports for women by building separate sports venues. But

he gave no time frame and said funds were needed to do so. Taliban authorities have repeatedly made similar promises to allow girls 7th grade and up to return to school, but still have not done so.

Noura faced resistance her whole life as she tried to play sports.

Raised in a poor Kabul district by parents who migrated from the provinces, Noura started out playing soccer alongside local boys in the street. When she was nine, a coach spotted her and, at his encouragement, she joined a girls' youth team.

She kept it a secret from everyone but her father, but her cover was blown by her own talent. At 13, she was named the best girl soccer player in her age group, and her photo and name were broadcast on television.

"All over the world, when a girl becomes famous and her picture is shown on TV, it's a good day for her and she's at the peak of happiness," she said. "For me, that day was very bitter and the beginning of worse days."

Furious, her mother beat her, shouting that she was not allowed to play soccer. She kept playing in secret but was exposed again when her team won a national championship, and her photo was in the news. Again, her mother beat her.

Still, she sneaked off to the award ceremony. She broke down in tears on stage as the audience cheered. "Only I knew I was crying because of loneliness and the hard life I had," she said.

When she found out, her mother set fire to her soccer uniform and shoes.

Noura gave up soccer, but then turned to boxing. Her mother eventually relented, realizing she couldn't stop her from sports, she said.

The day the Taliban entered Kabul, she said, her coach called her mother and said Noura should go to the airport to be taken out of the country. Noura said her mother didn't deliver the message because she didn't want her to leave. When she learned of the message—too late to escape—Noura said she cut her wrists and had to be taken to the hospital.

"The world had become dark for me," she said.

Three months later, someone who identified himself as a member of the Taliban called the family and threatened her. "They were saying, why did you play sports? Sports are forbidden," she recalled.

Terrified, she left Kabul, disguising herself in her burqa to travel to her family's hometown. Eventually, she returned but remains in fear.

"Even if my life was difficult, I used to have confidence in myself and knew that, with effort, I could do what I wanted," she said. "Now I don't have much hope anymore."

## **Policeman burned to death amid antigovernment unrest in Peru**

By DAVID PEREDA Z. Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — A police officer on patrol was attacked and burned to death by protesters in the Peruvian region of Puno as the death toll from demonstrations in the wake of the ouster of former President Pedro Castillo rose to 47, authorities said Tuesday.

José Luis Soncco Quispe, 29, was on patrol with a fellow officer in Juliaca, a city near the border with Bolivia and Lake Titicaca, on Monday night when they were attacked by a mob that later set fire to their vehicle, according to police reports.

Soncco's partner in the patrol car, Ronald Villasante Toque, said the men were "detained and physically attacked by some 350 protesters," according to the reports.

Villasante was taken to a hospital in Lima with multiple head injuries after being beaten. He said he was unaware of what was happening to his partner.

Prime Minister Alberto Otárola confirmed Soncco's death in a session of Congress, saying the men were attacked by protesters.

"Police arrived at the scene and found that one officer had been beaten and tied up, and the other, Luis Soncco Quispe, unfortunately had died," he said. "He was burned alive in his patrol car."

Otárola announced a three-day curfew from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. in Puno, and a day of mourning for the fallen on Wednesday.

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Peru's Ombudsman's Office said that since the protests began in early December after Castillo's dismissal, 39 civilians had been killed in clashes with police and another seven had died in traffic accidents, as well as the fallen police officer.

The police officer's death came after the killing of 17 people Monday in Juliaca as protests seeking immediate elections resumed in neglected rural areas of the country still loyal to Castillo.

The unrest began following Castillo's removal and arrest following a widely condemned attempt to dissolve Congress and head off his own impeachment.

Castillo's successor, his former running mate Dina Boluarte, has supported a plan to push up to 2024 elections for president and congress originally scheduled for 2026. She's also expressed support for judicial investigations into whether security forces acted with excessive force.

But such moves have so far failed to quell the unrest, which after a short respite around the Christmas and New Year's holidays have resumed with force in some of Peru's poorest areas, where support for Castillo's unorthodox rule had been strongest.

Castillo, a political novice who lived in a two-story adobe home in the Andean highlands before moving to the presidential palace, eked out a narrow victory in elections in 2021 that rocked Peru's political establishment and laid bare the deep divisions between residents of the capital, Lima, and the long-neglected countryside.

## Review: The good, the bad and the Tuesday of the 2023 Globes

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Tuesday night doesn't really scream "glamorous awards show."

We've been trained to expect those on Sundays, when you can spend a lazy evening half-watching E! reporters vamp in formal wear for hours on end, waiting for stars to arrive as you do other things. Sundays are elegant. Tuesdays are not.

But the embattled Hollywood Foreign Press Association probably didn't have much say in the matter if they wanted to get the Golden Globe Awards back on broadcast television in time for its 80th anniversary. So, Tuesday it was.

Hollywood, in large part, turned out too, acting as though it wasn't a rainy weekday in Southern California and as though they hadn't just a year ago protested the existence of the show. Brad Pitt and Angela Bassett came. So did Steven Spielberg and Ryan Coogler. Everyone played their roles.

There were gowns and suits and bow ties and diamonds, clavicle bones and updos. Eddie Redmayne even had an oversized Carrie Bradshaw-esque satin flower affixed to his suit lapel. On the sodden silver carpet, Laverne Cox swooned over Austin Butler and Michelle Yeoh's nominated performances, in "Elvis" and "Everything Everywhere All At Once," respectively. No one seemed very worried about being there.

How much is the viewing audience — aside from the select few who are both very online and film fans — really thinking about the organization that votes for these awards? Once the lights go down, it's all about the show that's right in front them — the stars, the speeches, the laughs. But host Jerrod Carmichael made sure to remind everyone of the ugly truths behind all the glitz and advertising dollars at the start.

In the familiar ballroom of the Beverly Hilton hotel, awards went to good people who gave good, emotional speeches.

Ke Huy Quan, winning the first award of the night for his big comeback role in "Everything Everywhere All At Once," warmed hearts shouting out Spielberg for giving him his first opportunity. The cameras were ready to cut back to the director, who cheered on the kid he directed so long ago in "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom."

Jeremy Allen White, who catapulted to fame with "The Bear," quivered when he mentioned his beloved, late manager Chris Huvane, continuing to say "thank you" as he walked off stage in a daze. "The White Lotus" Jennifer Coolidge wasn't the only one reflecting on her own career and life on stage. Even Spielberg, normally stoic, got teary-eyed during his own turn the podium.

The room looked like a dimly lit lounge, with endless champagne on the tables and a piano player decked

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in white feathers while giving theatrical flourishes to the "Sex and the City" theme and vamping for the cameras.

Bassett and Quinta Brunson learned the hard way that reading acceptance speeches off their phones was perhaps a mistake as family and friends texted them congratulations for their win. Colin Farrell used his own acceptance speech to compliment Ana de Armas' performance in "Blonde," as well as all of his "Banshees of Inisherin" collaborators, down to Jenny the donkey. Both he and Yeoh scolded the piano music that started to play them off.

"Shut up, please!" Yeoh said. "I can beat you up."

It wasn't for another hour that Carmichael would step up to clarify that the woman shown at the piano, Chloe Flower, was not actually the one playing many a winner off. It was a track, he said.

In many ways, the big film acting winners — Yeoh, Butler, Farrell and Quan — at the Globes looked like a possible rehearsal for those who might take the stage on Oscar night in March. But is that a good thing?

Depends on who you're asking: For those campaigning, the value is clear. For those watching, well, it might just start to feel redundant. They also came very, very early in the show that somehow kept going past 11 p.m. Eastern (despite the aggressive playing off).

But Carmichael kept the room on edge even well into the show as he came out, some 90 minutes in, holding "Tom Cruise's three returned Golden Globe statuettes" and suggesting they could be used in exchange for "the safe return of Shelly Miscavige," Scientology leader David Miscavige's wife who hasn't been seen in public for years.

"Anyway, from 'Top Gun: Maverick,' please welcome Glen Powell and Jay Ellis," Carmichael followed, introducing two Cruise co-stars.

Moments later, Shelly Miscavige was trending on Twitter.

"It's a good thing Tom's not here," Ellis said. It was about something else, technically, but also not.

Later, Carmichael got in an edgy dig in at Will Smith too, saying they gave him the "Rock Hudson award for best portrayal of masculinity on television" during the commercial break.

Carmichael was the live wire that kept the otherwise typical show interesting. WHAT would he say next, everyone wondered? He made Ricky Gervais look tame. Because aside from Carmichael's go-for-broke unpredictability, the 80th Golden Globe Awards was just that: Typical.

There were truly moving moments and truly boring ones too and it stayed past its welcome and got less and less climactic as the night went on. Who made the decision to present most of the major film awards at the beginning of the show? By the time Eddie Murphy finally got his Cecil B. DeMille honor and got in his own dig at Smith, it felt as though the show was already on its fourth ending. But there were still honors, the obligatory HFPA president speech and a shouting Quentin Tarantino to come.

What do we really want in an awards show? It's the big, existential question that doesn't just plague the Golden Globes. A little dose of Coolidge, Regina Hall and a tipsy, hungry Mike White never hurts. But the fact remains: It's hard to throw a comeback party on a Tuesday.

## Unity is new tone for often-divided Democrats in Washington

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The infighting was so intense a year ago that Democrats who controlled both the White House and Congress couldn't win support for a sweeping social spending package that was the party's top legislative priority. President Joe Biden, meanwhile, was viewed skeptically enough that some of his fellow Democrats questioned the wisdom of him seeking reelection.

What a difference a year makes.

Speculation about Biden's political future has quieted after Democrats outperformed expectations during the November midterm elections. His toughest critics on the left are signaling they'll work to help him secure a second term.

And perhaps most notably, last year's dissent on Capitol Hill melted away over the past week as every Democrat voted — repeatedly — in support of Hakeem Jeffries for the House speakership. That was the

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type of showing Republican Kevin McCarthy could only long for as he worked through 15 votes over four bruising days to finally win backing from his party to take the gavel.

That unity is a shift for a Democratic Party built on fragile electoral coalitions that often begin to fray when it's time to govern. But the dynamic was a tonic of sorts for lawmakers otherwise unhappy to be shifting to the House minority and spurred optimism that the party could stick together heading into the next campaign, when both Congress and the White House are at stake.

"It's a very powerful feeling," New Hampshire Democratic Rep. Annie Kuster said of Jeffries receiving all 3,179 votes for speaker of the 3,179 cast by his party's House members. "It's sort of a championship moment."

Of course, the unity may not prove sustainable. It will get an immediate test as the Department of Justice investigates potentially classified documents found in the Washington office space of Biden's former institute — which Republicans are likening to federal authorities probing of former President Donald Trump keeping hundreds of such records at his Florida club.

Tensions could also come from fellow Democrats on policy issues like immigration, police reform, raising the minimum wage, expanding voting rights and better protecting access to abortion — all areas where the party's progressive wing would like to see Biden and the establishment do more.

Joseph Geevarghese, executive director of the progressive advocacy group Our Revolution, said grass-roots activists and elected officials around the country understand the strategic value of the party holding firm during so many House speaker votes.

But he warned that it may not last.

"I don't think this show of unity should create any illusion that progressives are going to pull their punches," Geevarghese said. "There's an old organizing adage, 'No permanent allies, no permanent enemies, only permanent interests.'"

Indeed, McCarthy alluded to how hard it will be for Democrats to stave off eventual dissent within their own ranks, joking, "Hakeem, I've got to warn you: Two years ago, I got 100% of the vote from my conference." That recalled House Republicans uniformly opposing Democrat Nancy Pelosi as speaker in 2021, when doing so was easier than settling on someone to actually run the House.

Still, former New York Rep. Steve Israel, who was a top Pelosi adviser, predicted that additional divisions within the House GOP would make it easier for Democrats to find common ground.

"I expect that House Republicans will pursue a vitriolic agenda that pleases their own base and that will keep Democrats united for the next two years," said Israel, who headed the House Democratic campaign arm from 2011 to 2015 and now directs the Cornell University Institute of Politics and Global Affairs.

That's a far cry from early last year, when Democratic congressional disagreements derailed Build Back Better, an environmental and social spending proposal that was supposed to be the centerpiece of Biden's domestic agenda.

The president later salvaged some of that package's green energy and health care priorities via a major spending bill. He also scored key victories on a bipartisan infrastructure package, new gun safety regulations and bolstering U.S. technology manufacturing.

Democrats additionally made progress in expanding Medicaid for the poorest children, capping insulin prices for Medicare recipients and giving Medicare the ability to negotiate drug pricing — all of which seemingly satiated many progressives, at least for now.

The party did that despite having a House majority about as razor-thin as the one that left Republicans unable to settle on a speaker for so long last week. Jeffries has also been part of the Progressive Congressional Caucus, but that hasn't prevented other disagreements from surfacing.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., head of the progressive House caucus, has already co-authored a statement calling "unacceptable" a Biden administration announcement that it would continue enforcing Title 42, the emergency powers that allows officials on the U.S.-Mexico border to quickly turn away migrants, amid court orders.

Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., also is gearing up for a primary challenge against incumbent Sen. Kyrsten

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Sinema, who recently left the Democratic Party to become an independent, because of her past opposition progressive legislation.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent who launched Democratic presidential primary challenges from the left against Biden in 2020 and Hillary Clinton in 2016, has vowed to campaign against his own colleagues, promising to try to defeat Sinema and moderate West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin.

Sanders hasn't ruled out a third White House run but plans to support Biden if he runs — and the party appears to be coalescing around the president, whose aides and allies are preparing for a reelection run, even though one hasn't yet been formally announced.

That's despite Biden being the oldest president in U.S. history and remaining unpopular, with just 43% job approval rating — even after Democrats' strong midterm elections showings. One progressive group isn't onboard, paying for a national cable TV spot and mobile billboard circulating between the White House and U.S. Capitol proclaiming, "Don't Run, Joe."

But Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., a rising star on the left and possible future presidential contender, said that what he's telling "my friends on the progressive side is it's in our interest to have the president succeed as much as possible, and then we can argue about what the future is post Biden."

"I definitely want to be part of the conversation about the future of the party," Khanna said. "And I know probably that conversation starts in 2028."

Geevarghese struck a similar, conciliatory tone, saying Our Revolution has enjoyed a strong working relationship with Biden despite it having grown out of Sanders' 2016 White House bid.

"There's a conversation that's been happening where progressive feel like we have an opening with Joe Biden to press our priorities," Geevarghese said. "We may not win everything. But we're a partner in the process."

## US to max out on debt soon, setting up political fight

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal government is on track to max out on its \$31.4 trillion borrowing authority as soon as this month, starting the clock on an expected standoff between President Joe Biden and the new House Republican majority that will test both parties' ability to navigate a divided Washington, with the fragile global economy at stake.

Once the government bumps up against the cap — it could happen any time in the next few weeks or longer — the Treasury Department will be unable to issue new debt without congressional action. The department plans to deploy what are known as "extraordinary measures" to keep the government operating. But once those measures run out, probably mid-summer, the government could be at risk of defaulting unless lawmakers and the president agree to lift the limit on the U.S. government's ability to borrow.

The expected showdown over the debt limit would be a stark display of the new reality for Biden and Democrats, who enjoyed one-party control of Washington for the past two years. It would presage the challenges to come in achieving even the modest ambitions that Democrats are bringing to the task of legislating in a divided Capitol.

The White House has insisted that it won't allow the nation's credit to be held captive to the demands of newly empowered GOP lawmakers. But the concessions made by new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in his arduous path to securing the job raise questions about whether he has the ability to cut any kind of deal to resolve a standoff.

McCarthy, who only secured his post after 15 rounds of voting and major compromises with hard-line members of his caucus, has said that his fellow Republicans will only agree to increase the debt ceiling in return for spending cuts of unspecified magnitude. And a new rule that allows any one lawmaker to trigger a vote for McCarthy's removal could make even the most urgent of votes a dicey matter.

McCarthy said he's spoken with Biden about the coming debt ceiling and told the president "it doesn't have to come to that" — meaning a federal government shutdown over spending levels.

"This is our moment to change the behavior," McCarthy said Tuesday on Fox's "Hannity."

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But the new speaker stopped short of saying Republicans now in charge of the House would go so far as to refuse to pass the annual spending bills needed to fund the government, as happened more than a decade ago during an earlier debt ceiling showdown in Congress.

"We're going to look at every single dollar spent," McCarthy said.

The stakes are treacherous. Past forecasts suggest a default could instantly bury the country in a deep recession, right at a moment of slowing global growth as the U.S. and much of the world face high inflation because of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The White House has ruled out executive action to stave off a default.

"Congress is going to need to raise the debt limit without — without — conditions and it's just that simple," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said recently. "Attempts to exploit the debt ceiling as leverage will not work. There will be no hostage taking."

On Capitol Hill, Republican Rep. Chip Roy of Texas, one of the McCarthy holdouts and an outspoken critic of government spending, wouldn't rule out trying to oust McCarthy if he fails to live up to his pledge to seek spending cuts along with any debt limit increase.

"We will use the tools of the House to enforce the terms of the agreement," Roy told CNN on Sunday.

Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., said in a Fox News interview on Monday that the debt limit will be "the real test" for conservatives. Republicans have to begin "leveraging power to accomplish what you need to accomplish," he said. Good fought McCarthy's bid to become speaker until the final vote, when he responded "present."

The debt ceiling debate is a form of political theater — it encourages lawmakers to engage in brinkmanship in the name of fiscal responsibility — though past showdowns have done little to meaningfully alter the long-term rise in federal debt.

House Republican leaders liken the debt ceiling to a credit card limit, promising to put "mechanisms in place so that you don't keep maxing it out," in the words of House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana.

"We're going to confront this and I think the American people have called on us to confront this," said Scalise.

Any effort to compromise with House Republicans could force Biden to bend on his own priorities, whether that's the funding of the IRS to ensure that wealthier Americans pay what they owe, or domestic programs for children and the poor.

It's hard to peg the exact date when the government will hit its debt ceiling, because payments and receipts vary from day to day, especially with the April filing deadline for income taxes. The current balance suggests the debt ceiling could be reached as early as this week or as late as March.

When Treasury takes extraordinary measures to keep the government running, it can halt contributions to pension funds and borrow from accounts to manage changes in the foreign exchange rate, freeing up cash to meet its other obligations.

Treasury first used these measures in 1985 and has used them at least 16 times since, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a fiscal watchdog. But the extraordinary measures only work for so long, and would likely run out — and put the U.S. at risk of default — sometime around the summer.

If the government were to default, financial markets could be expected to crash. Several million workers could be laid off. The world could feel the aftershocks of the crisis for years to come. Moody's Analytics called this risk "cataclysmic" in a 2021 forecast ahead of the previous debt ceiling increase, suggesting that the resulting chaos would be due to government dysfunction, rather than the underlying health of the U.S. economy.

"Debt limit negotiations are always protracted and almost always contentious, and the political trends seem to make it likely that they will exacerbate those tendencies and will create a volatile situation," said Shai Akabas, director of economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, which forecasts the so-called X-date when the government exhausts its extraordinary measures.

Akabas told the Associated Press the X-date has "likely moved forward" from this year's third quarter due to rising interest rates and a pause on student loan repayments recently extended by the Biden administration. A more precise date will become available when the Congressional Budget Office updates

its outlook later this month.

Either way, lawmakers know the risks that they're taking with the livelihoods of people across the country by having this dispute. Economists have warned them plenty of times.

A 2013 Treasury report drew on the debt ceiling impasse in 2011, when Republicans had also just won a House majority. It outlined how impasses contribute to long-lasting scars on financial markets, noting that business and household confidence fell to levels that are typically only seen during recessions.

"It took months before confidence recovered, even though, ultimately, there was no default," the report said.

## Cardinal Pell, whose convictions were overturned, dies at 81

By ROD McGUIRK, NICOLE WINFIELD and NICK PERRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Cardinal George Pell, a onetime financial adviser to Pope Francis who spent 404 days in solitary confinement in his native Australia on child sex abuse charges before his convictions were overturned, died Tuesday in Rome. He was 81.

Pell suffered fatal heart complications following hip surgery, said Archbishop Peter Comensoli, Pell's successor as archbishop of Melbourne. Pell had been in Rome to attend the funeral last week of Pope Benedict XVI.

"For many people, particularly of the Catholic faith, this will be a difficult day and I express my condolences to all those who are mourning today," said Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Sydney Catholic Archbishop Anthony Fisher told reporters the death had come as a shock.

"It will be for historians to assess his impact on the life of the church in Australia and beyond, but it was considerable and will be long lasting," Fisher said.

Fisher said a requiem for Pell would be held at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican in the next few days, and in time his body would be brought back to Australia for a funeral mass and buried in the crypt at St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.

Journalist Lucie Morris-Marr, who wrote the book "Fallen" about Pell's trial, said on Twitter that Pell's death "will be terribly triggering for many Australians impacted by Catholic child sexual abuse and not just those involved in his trial."

Pell, the former archbishop of Melbourne and Sydney, became the third-highest ranked official in the Vatican after Pope Francis tapped him in 2014 to reform the Vatican's notoriously opaque finances as the Holy See's first-ever finance czar.

He spent three years as prefect of the newly created Secretariat for the Economy, where he tried to impose international budgeting, accounting and transparency standards.

But Pell returned to Australia in 2017 in an attempt to clear his name of child sex charges dating from his time as archbishop.

A Victoria state County Court jury initially convicted him of molesting two 13-year-old choirboys at St. Patrick's Cathedral in the latest 1990s shortly after he had become archbishop of Melbourne. Pell served 404 days in solitary confinement before the full-bench of the High Court unanimously overturned his convictions in 2020.

During his time in prison, Pell kept a diary documenting everything from his prayers and Scripture readings to his conversations with visiting chaplains and the prison guards. The journal turned into a triptych, "Prison Journal," the proceeds of which went to pay his substantial legal bills.

In the diary, Pell reflected on the nature of suffering, Pope Francis' papacy and the humiliations of solitary confinement as he battled to clear his name for a crime he insists he never committed.

Pell and his supporters believe he was scapegoated for all the crimes of the Australian Catholic Church's botched response to clergy sexual abuse. Victims and critics say he epitomized everything wrong with how the church has dealt with the problem.

"Looking back, I was probably excessively optimistic that I'd get bail," Pell said in a 2021 interview at his home in Rome, crediting his "glass half-full" attitude to his Christian faith.

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Even after he was acquitted, Pell's reputation remained tarnished by the scandal.

Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that he knew of clergy molesting children in the 1970s and did not take adequate action to address it.

Pell later said in a statement he was "surprised" by the commission's findings. "These views are not supported by evidence," Pell's statement said.

With his rather brusque, no-nonsense Australian sensibilities, Pell clashed frequently with the Vatican's Italian old guard during the three years he worked to get a handle on the Vatican's assets and spending. He was vindicated when Vatican prosecutors put 10 people, including his onetime nemesis, on trial in 2021 for a host of alleged financial crimes.

After Pell returned to Rome following his release from prison, he had a well-publicized private audience with Francis.

"He acknowledged what I was trying to do," Pell said of the pope during a 2020 interview. "And, you know, I think it's been sadly vindicated by revelations and developments."

Francis said as much in a recent interview with Italy's Mediaset broadcaster, crediting Pell with having set the Vatican on the path of financial transparency and lamenting that he was forced to abandon the effort to face the "calumny" of the abuse charges back home.

"It was Pell who laid out how we could go forward. He's a great man and we owe him so much," Francis said last month.

Pell was born on June 8, 1941, the eldest of three children to a heavyweight champion boxer and publican also named George Pell, an Anglican. His mother Margaret Lillian (nee Burke) was from an Irish Catholic family.

He grew up in the Victorian regional town of Ballarat. At 193 centimeters (6 foot, 4 inches) tall, he was a talented Australian Rules Footballer. He was offered a professional football contract to play for Richmond but opted for a seminary instead.

While in Melbourne, he set up the Melbourne Response which was a world-first protocol to investigate complaints of clergy sexual abuse and to compensate victims. However many abuse victims were critical of the system and of compensation payments, saying they were designed more to shield the church from litigation.

After his convictions were overturned, Pell divided his time between Sydney and Rome, where he took part in the typical life of a retired cardinal, attending Vatican events and liturgical feasts and otherwise keeping up with news of the church.

"I've become very Italian," Pell told a visitor during a lull of the coronavirus pandemic, which he spent in Rome.

Pell, along with the Melbourne archdiocese, was also battling a civil case back in Australia, which lawyers said Wednesday would continue against Pell's estate.

That case was brought by the father of a former altar boy who claimed he was sexually abused by Pell. The father claims he suffered psychological effects from the abuse of his son, who died in 2014 from an accidental drug overdose.

"A civil trial likely would have provided the opportunity to cross examine Pell, and truly test his defense against these allegations," said Lisa Flynn, the chief legal officer of Shine Lawyers. "There is still a great deal of evidence for this claim to rely on."

A requiem Mass would be celebrated in Rome, but Pell was expected to be buried in Sydney.

## Texas executes ex-officer who hired 2 people to kill wife

By JUAN A. LOZANO and MICHAEL GRACZYK Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) — A former suburban Houston police officer was executed Tuesday for hiring two people to kill his estranged wife nearly 30 years ago amid a contentious divorce and custody battle.

Robert Fratta, 65, received a lethal injection at the state penitentiary in Huntsville for the November 1994 fatal shooting of his wife, Farah. He was pronounced dead at 7:49 p.m., 24 minutes after the lethal

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dose of the powerful sedative pentobarbital began flowing into his arms.

For about three minutes before the execution began, Fratta's spiritual adviser, Barry Brown, prayed over Fratta, who was strapped to the death chamber gurney with intravenous needles in each arm.

Brown, his prayer book on the pillow next to Fratta's head and his right hand resting on Fratta's right hand, asked for prayers for "hearts that have been broken ... for people who grieved and those who will grieve in days ahead." He asked God to "be merciful to Bobby."

Asked by the warden if he had a final statement, Fratta replied: "No."

Brown resumed praying as the lethal drugs began and Fratta, his eyes closed, took a deep breath and then snored loudly six times. Then all movement stopped.

Prosecutors say Fratta organized the murder-for-hire plot in which a middleman, Joseph Prystash, hired the shooter, Howard Guidry. Farah Fratta, 33, was shot twice in the head in her home's garage in the Houston suburb of Atascocita. Robert Fratta, who was a public safety officer for Missouri City, had long claimed he was innocent.

The punishment was delayed for little more than an hour until the last of a flurry of final-day appeals cleared the U.S. Supreme Court and Texas' highest courts, the Texas Supreme Court and Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.

Fratta's lawyers argued unsuccessfully that prosecutors withheld evidence that a trial witness had been hypnotized by investigators, leading her to change her initial recollection that she saw two men at the murder scene as well as a getaway driver.

Prosecutors have argued the hypnosis produced no new information and no new identification. They had also said that Fratta had repeatedly expressed his desire to see his wife dead and asked several acquaintances if they knew anyone who would kill her, telling one friend, "I'll just kill her, and I'll do my time and when I get out, I'll have my kids," according to court records. Prystash and Guidry were also sent to death row for the slaying.

Fratta was also one of four Texas death row inmates who sued to stop the state's prison system from using what they allege are expired and unsafe execution drugs. That lawsuit also failed late Tuesday,

The Supreme Court and lower courts previously rejected appeals from Fratta's lawyers that sought to review claims arguing insufficient evidence and faulty jury instructions were used to convict him. His attorneys also unsuccessfully argued that a juror in his case was not impartial and that ballistics evidence didn't tie him to the murder weapon.

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles last week unanimously declined to commute Fratta's death sentence to a lesser penalty or to grant a 60-day reprieve.

Fratta was first sentenced to death in 1996, but his conviction was overturned by a federal judge who ruled that confessions from his co-conspirators shouldn't have been admitted into evidence. In the same ruling, the judge wrote that "trial evidence showed Fratta to be egotistical, misogynistic, and vile, with a callous desire to kill his wife."

He was retried and resentenced to death in 2009.

Andy Kahan, the director of victim services and advocacy for Crime Stoppers of Houston, said that Farah Fratta's father, Lex Baquer, who died in 2018, raised Robert and Farah Fratta's three children with his wife.

Kahan, Fratta's son, Bradley Baquer, and Farah's brother, Zain Baquer, were among witnesses watching Fratta die. Fratta never acknowledged them or looked at them as they stood at a window to the death chamber.

"Bob was a coward in 1994, when he arranged the murder for hire of his estranged wife," Kahan said after the execution. "And 28-plus years later, he still was a coward tonight. When he was offered an opportunity to at least extend an olive branch to his son that he knew was watching this.

"And he still chose the coward's way out. He could have said: 'I'm sorry.'"

Fratta was the first inmate put to death this year in Texas and the second in the U.S. Eight other executions are scheduled in Texas for later this year.

## Court weighs tossing Boston marathon bomber's death sentence

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's attorney urged a federal appeals court Tuesday to throw out the 29-year-old's death sentence because of juror misconduct claims just months after it was revived by the nation's highest court.

Tsarnaev is making a renewed push to avoid execution after the Supreme Court last year reinstated the death sentence imposed on him for his role in the bombing that killed three people and injured hundreds near the finish line of the marathon in 2013.

His lawyers are now challenging issues that weren't considered by the Supreme Court, including whether the trial judge wrongly denied his challenge of two jurors who defense attorneys say lied during jury selection questioning.

One juror said she had not commented about the case online but had retweeted a post calling Tsarnaev a "piece of garbage." Another juror said none of his Facebook friends had commented on the trial, even though one had urged him to "play the part" so he could get on the jury and send Tsarnaev to "jail where he will be taken of," defense attorneys say. Tsarnaev's lawyers raised those concerns during jury selection, but the judge chose not to look into them further, they say.

"This case was tried in Boston on a promise ... that despite the extraordinary impact of the marathon bombing on this community," a through questioning of potential jurors would remove anyone unqualified, Tsarnaev attorney Daniel Habib told the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges. "That promise was not kept."

The Justice Department has continued to push to uphold Tsarnaev's sentence even after Attorney General Merrick Garland in 2021 imposed a moratorium on federal executions while the department conducts a review of its policies and procedures. The department has not indicated how long it might maintain the hold, which came after former President Donald Trump administration's put to death 13 inmates in its final six months.

President Joe Biden has said that he opposes the death penalty and will work to end its use, but he has taken no action to do so while in office. And the moratorium doesn't prevent federal prosecutors from seeking the death penalty, as they are in the case of a man currently on trial for killing eight people on a New York City bike path in 2017.

William Glaser, a Justice Department lawyer, said the trial judge did nothing wrong in his handling of the jurors. Glaser acknowledged that the jurors made inaccurate statements but said other disclosures they made to the court suggest they were merely misremembering.

"There is no indication in this record that the inaccuracies were the kind of knowing dishonesty that would lead to disqualification," Glaser said.

But Judge William Kayatta Jr. questioned how the trial judge could know that without looking further into Tsarnaev's claims. And Judge O. Rogeriee Thompson told the Justice Department lawyer she found it difficult to see how Tsarnaev can't at least plausibly claim that the juror told to "play the part" was knowingly lying.

"If, for instance, the Facebook friend had said 'get on the jury and make sure that the death penalty isn't imposed,' it's hard for me to believe that you wouldn't be in here arguing the opposite of what you are arguing now," she told Glaser.

Some survivors of the bombing who attended the hearing met briefly with Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Rachael Rollins afterward outside the courtroom. Marc Fucarile, who lost a leg and suffered other serious injuries in the blast, said he came to the arguments to let the judges know survivors are "still paying attention to what they are doing."

"At a certain point we need to draw a line in the sand and say enough is enough. It is not in question what he did," Fucarile told The Associated Press.

Tsarnaev's lawyers acknowledged at the very beginning of his trial that he and his older brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, set off the two bombs that killed Lingzi Lu, a 23-year-old Boston University graduate

student from China; Krystle Campbell, a 29-year-old restaurant manager from Medford, Massachusetts; and 8-year-old Martin Richard, of Boston.

They have argued, however, that he shouldn't be put to death, saying his brother radicalized him and was the mastermind of the attack.

Tsarnaev was convicted in 2015 of all 30 charges against him, including conspiracy and use of a weapon of mass destruction and the killing of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police Officer Sean Collier during the Tsarnaev brothers' getaway attempt. Tamerlan Tsarnaev died in a gunbattle with police a few days after the April 15, 2013, bombing.

The 1st Circuit in 2020 overturned Tsarnaev's death sentence and ordered a new penalty-phase trial to decide whether he should be executed, finding that the judge did not sufficiently question jurors about their exposure to extensive news coverage of the bombing. But the Supreme Court justices, by a 6-3 vote, agreed with the Biden administration that the 1st Circuit's ruling was wrong.

## Soaring US egg prices put pressure on consumers, businesses

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Chickens may not be able to fly very far, but the price of eggs is soaring.

A lingering bird flu outbreak, combined with soaring feed, fuel and labor costs, has led to U.S. egg prices more than doubling over the past year, and hatched a lot of sticker shock on grocery aisles.

The national average price for a dozen eggs hit \$3.59 in November, up from \$1.72 a year earlier, according to the latest government data. That's putting stress on consumer budgets and the bottom lines of restaurants, bakeries and other food producers that rely heavily on eggs.

Grocery prices that were up 12% in November are driving inflation higher, even though the overall pace of price increases slowed a bit through the fall as gas prices eased.

But egg prices are up significantly more than other foods — even more than chicken or turkey — because egg farmers were hit harder by the bird flu. More than 43 million of the 58 million birds slaughtered over the past year to control the virus have been egg-laying chickens, including some farms with more than a million birds apiece in major egg-producing states like Iowa.

Everyone who approaches the egg case at a Hy-Vee grocery store in Omaha, "has a sour face," said shopper Nancy Stom.

But even with the cost increases, eggs remain relatively cheap compared to the price of other proteins like chicken or beef, with a pound of chicken breasts going for \$4.42 on average in November and a pound of ground beef selling for \$4.85, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"It's still an inexpensive meal," Stom said. But the 70-year-old said that at these prices, she'll watch her eggs more closely in the fridge and try not to let them go bad before they get used.

If prices remain this high, Kelly Fischer said she will start thinking more seriously about building a backyard chicken coop in Chicago because everyone in her family eats eggs.

"We (with neighbors) are contemplating building a chicken coop behind our houses, so eventually I hope not to buy them and have my own eggs and I think the cost comes into that somewhat," the 46-year-old public school teacher said while shopping at HarvesTime Foods on the city's North Side. "For me, it's more of the environmental impact and trying to purchase locally."

In some places, it can even be hard to find eggs on the shelves. But egg supplies overall are holding up because the total flock is only down about 5% from its normal size of around 320 million hens. Farmers have been working to replace their flocks as soon as they can after an outbreak.

Jakob Werner, 18, said he tries to find the cheapest eggs he can because he eats five or six of them a day while he's trying to gain weight and build muscle.

"For a while, I just stopped eating eggs as they got more expensive. But since they're my favorite food, I came back to them in the end," said Werner, who lives in Chicago. "So I think for like a few months I just stopped eating eggs, waited for the price to come down. It never did. So now I'm buying again."

Purdue University agricultural economist Jayson Lusk said he believes the bird flu outbreak is the big-

gest driver in the price increases. Unlike past years, the virus lingered throughout the summer and made a resurgence last fall infecting egg and poultry farms.

"Bird flu is not the only factor, but in my view it's the main driver of what we're experiencing at the moment," Lusk said.

But the president and CEO of the American Egg Board trade group, Emily Metz, said she believes all the cost increases farmers have faced in the past year were a bigger factor in the price increases than bird flu.

"When you're looking at fuel costs go up, and you're looking at feed costs go up as much as 60%, labor costs, packaging costs — all of that ... those are much much bigger factors than bird flu for sure," Metz said.

Jada Thomson, a University of Arkansas agricultural economist, said there may be some relief coming in egg prices in the next couple months because egg farmers have been steadily replacing their flocks lost to bird flu last year and demand will ease a bit now that people are done with their holiday baking.

But she said bird flu remains a wildcard that could still drive prices higher if there are more sizeable outbreaks at egg farms.

Farmers are doing all they can to limit the spread, but the disease is easily spread by migrating wild birds and the virus can be picked up on clothing or vehicles.

"But there are some things that are just outside of our control," Thompson said. "You can't control nature sometimes."

Food producers and restaurants are hurting because it's hard to find a good substitute for eggs in their recipes.

Any decrease in egg prices would be welcome at Patti Stobaugh's two restaurants and two bakeries in Conway and Russelville, Arkansas, because all of her ingredients and supplies are more expensive these days. For some of her baked goods, Stobaugh has switched to a frozen egg product that's not quite as pricey, but she's still buying eggs for all the breakfasts she serves.

A case of 15 dozen eggs has gone from \$36 to \$86 over the last year, but flour, butter, chicken and everything else she buys is also more expensive. Stobaugh said that has her "hyper vigilant about every little item."

She's already increased her prices 8% in the past year, and she may have to soon increase them again. It's a delicate balance of trying not to make it too expensive for people to eat out and hurting sales, but she doesn't have much choice while trying to provide for her 175 employees.

"We have a lot of employees that work for us and we're responsible for making payroll every week and supporting their families. We take that very seriously. But it certainly has been tough," Stobaugh said.

## **Buu Nygren sworn in as next Navajo Nation president**

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. (AP) — Buu Nygren was sworn in Tuesday as the next president of the vast Navajo Nation, a job that will test his ability to make good on promises to deliver water, electricity and broadband to tens of thousands of residents who don't have it.

Nygren beat out incumbent President Jonathan Nez in the tribe's general election by about 3,500 votes. Nygren was joined by his wife Jasmine, daughter Evelyn and grandmother Marilyn Slim as he took the oath of office during a ceremony that highlighted the challenges he grew up with and, later, academic and business successes that helped him ascend as the youngest person to hold the tribal presidency.

Nygren stood amid hand-woven Navajo rugs and blankets as he addressed the crowd in a mix of Navajo and English, saying his administration's mission is simple: bring basic services to Navajo people so they can do more than survive.

"I will not hesitate. I will do whatever it takes to make sure that our people have a chance, our people have an opportunity to make something of themselves," he said. "That's all they want."

He added that, growing up, someone believed in him and he wants Navajos to know he also believes in them.

Nygren, 36, had never held political office before now, though he was former President Joe Shirley Jr.'s

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vice presidential candidate in 2018. Current Vice President Richelle Montoya is the first woman to hold that position.

Montoya, who was the elected leader of a small Navajo community, took a moment to pay tribute to women on the Navajo Nation Council and in the matriarchal society, holding her hand to her heart. She encouraged tribal members to speak the Navajo language and always think seven generations ahead.

"For the next four years, I will give you my very best," she told the crowd.

The inauguration took place at an indoor arena in Fort Defiance, just north of the tribal capital of Window Rock, and featured an all-women color guard. Thousands attended the ceremony, many donning turquoise and silver jewelry, moccasins, crushed velvet or ribbon skirts, or business attire.

Young girls sang the national anthem and recited the pledge of allegiance in Navajo. Montoya's relative, Chishi Haazba Montoya, coursed through Navajo history in poem, weaving in traditional elements, reviling western greed and declaring that Navajo sovereignty will be restored and any monsters defeated.

Nez and his vice president, Myron Lizer, sat in the front row along with Shirley, former Navajo President Ben Shelly and former Navajo Chairman Peter MacDonald.

A public luncheon at the fairgrounds in Window Rock, a gospel celebration, a song and dance, a comedy show, a pow wow and an inaugural ball followed the ceremony.

The Navajo Nation is the largest Native American reservation in the U.S. at 27,000 square miles (69,000 square kilometers). It stretches into parts of New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. Its population of around 400,000 is second only to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

Nygren brought an energy to the presidential race that resonated with voters, campaigning with his wife, former Arizona state Rep. Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren. He had a flair for rising and falling speech and created a signature look with his hair tied in a traditional bun, a wide-brimmed black hat, blue trousers and a lighter blue, long-sleeved shirt.

Nygren is half Vietnamese but never knew his father. He was raised on the Utah portion of the reservation in a home without electricity or running water, he said. He has a background in construction management and has said he expects tribal citizens to hold him accountable as president — a point he emphasized in his speech Tuesday.

Cheryl R. Benally said Nygren's words about being disciplined reminded her of what she heard from her own mother as she grew up around Chaco Canyon in New Mexico: wake up early, greet the rising sun and pray. Benally's daughter, Mya Benally, 18, said Nygren's words on making water and education more accessible appealed to her as a college student who wants to return to the reservation.

"He's helping me think 'I can do more,' she said.

Julian Begay, a 36-year-old school board member and farm board president in Many Farms, said he sees a sense of faith and belief in Nygren that his promises to the Navajo people will be fulfilled.

"He's coming down to the people's level, but I'm curious to see what he's going to do about the economy," Begay said. "We can't keep shopping in border towns forever."

Nygren pledged to work closely with the 24 members of the Navajo Nation Council who also were sworn in Tuesday along with other elected officials. About one-third of the council will be women — a record number. The council often is seen as more powerful than the presidency and is the path through which big agenda items have to move.

Some of the women delegate's priorities include infrastructure, addressing social ills and generational trauma, bolstering law enforcement, managing a budget and ensuring a continued focus on the epidemic of missing and slain Indigenous people. A handful of people stood at an intersection holding signs Tuesday urging action on some of those same topics.

"I know that most of us as women are going to have that natural indication to love our people, to put our people first, to understand there's a stronger responsibility to protecting our homes, meaning the Navajo Nation," said Shaandiin Parrish, who was elected to the council.

Returning Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty said she's looking forward to having difficult conversations where tribal lawmakers can confront problems, learn from shared experiences and examine the challenges that lead to families being victimized and services not delivered to Navajo people.

One thing should not be expected of women leaders, she said.

"Although nurturing is part of our teaching, we cannot hold the emotional baggage of others," Kanazbah Crotty said. "What I mean by that is the expectation shouldn't be that as women leadership, we're here to fix all the issues."

Nez and the previous council laid the groundwork for infrastructure projects using money the tribe received in federal coronavirus relief aid. But Nygren has said those decisions may need to be revisited. Nez worried any changes would jeopardize the tribe not meeting deadlines for spending the money.

In one of his last actions, Nez vetoed legislation Monday to expand oil and gas exploration and development, including for helium, on the reservation. He said the affected communities hadn't reached consensus, and concerns over profit-sharing and health went unresolved.

## 'No amnesty!': Brazilian protests demand jail for rioters

By DAVID BILLER and FELIPE MELLO Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — "No amnesty! No amnesty! No amnesty!"

The chant reverberated off the walls of the jam-packed hall at the University of Sao Paulo's law college on Monday afternoon. Within hours, it was the rallying cry for thousands of Brazilians who streamed into the streets of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, penned on protest posters and banners.

The words are a demand for retribution against the supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro who stormed Brazil's capital Sunday, and those who enabled the rampage.

"These people need to be punished, the people who ordered it need to be punished, those who gave money for it need to be punished," Bety Amin, a 61-year-old therapist, said on Sao Paulo's main boulevard. The word "DEMOCRACY" stretched across the back of her shirt. "They don't represent Brazil. We represent Brazil."

Protesters' push for accountability evokes memories of an amnesty law that for decades has protected military members accused of abuse and murder during the country's 1964-85 dictatorship. A 2014 truth commission report sparked debate over how Brazil has grappled with the regime's legacy.

Declining to mete out punishment "can avoid tensions at the moment, but perpetuates instability," Luis Felipe Miguel, a professor of political science at the University of Brasilia, wrote in a column entitled "No Amnesty" published Monday evening. "That is the lesson we should have learned from the end of the military dictatorship, when Brazil opted not to punish the regime's killers and torturers."

The same day, Brazilian police rounded up roughly 1,500 rioters. Some were caught in the act of trashing Brazil's Congress, the Supreme Court and the presidential palace. Most were detained the following morning at an encampment in Brasilia. Many were held in a gymnasium throughout the day, and video shared on pro-Bolsonaro social media channels showed some complaining about poor treatment in the crowded space.

Almost 600 who were elderly, sick, homeless or mothers with their children were released Tuesday after being questioned and having their phones inspected, the Federal Police said in a statement. Its press office previously told The Associated Press that the force plans to indict at least 1,000 people. As of Tuesday afternoon, 527 people had been transferred to either a detention center or prison.

The administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva says jailing the rioters is only the start.

Justice minister Flávio Dino vowed to prosecute those who acted behind the scenes to summon supporters on social media and finance their transport on charges involving organized crime, staging a coup, and violent abolition of the democratic rule of law. Authorities also are investigating allegations that local security personnel allowed the destruction to proceed unabated.

"We cannot and will not compromise in fulfilling our legal duties," Dino said. "This fulfillment is essential so such events do not repeat themselves."

Lula signed a decree, now approved by both houses of Congress, ordering the federal government to assume control of security in the capital.

Far-right elements have refused to accept Bolsonaro's electoral defeat. Since his Oct. 30 loss, they have camped outside military barracks in Brasilia, pleading for intervention to allow Bolsonaro to remain in

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power and oust Lula. When no coup materialized, they rose up themselves.

Decked out in the green and yellow of the national flag, they broke windows, toppled furniture and hurled computers and printers to the ground. They punched holes in a massive Emiliano Di Cavalcanti painting at the presidential palace and destroyed other works of art. They overturned the U-shaped table where Supreme Court justices convene, ripped a door off one justice's office and vandalized a statue outside the court. Hours passed before police expelled the mob.

"It's unacceptable what happened yesterday. It's terrorism," Marcelo Menezes, a 59-year-old police officer from northeastern Pernambuco state, said at a protest in Sao Paulo. "I'm here in defense of democracy, I'm here in defense of the people."

Cries of "No amnesty!" were also heard during Lula's Jan. 1 inaugural address, in response to the president detailing the neglect of the outgoing Bolsonaro administration.

Bolsonaro, a former army captain, has waxed nostalgic for the dictatorship era, praised a notorious torturer as a hero and said the regime should have gone further in executing communists. His government also commemorated the anniversary of Brazil's 1964 coup.

Political analysts had repeatedly warned that Bolsonaro was laying the groundwork for an insurrection in the mold of that which unfolded in the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. For months, he stoked belief among hardcore supporters that the nation's electronic voting system was prone to fraud — though he never presented any evidence and independent experts disagreed.

Results from the election, the closest since Brazil's return to democracy, were quickly recognized by politicians across the spectrum, including some Bolsonaro allies, as well as dozens of other governments. The outgoing president surprised nearly everyone by promptly fading from view, neither conceding defeat nor emphatically crying fraud. He and his party submitted a request to nullify millions of votes, which was swiftly dismissed by the electoral authority.

None of that dissuaded his die-hard backers from their conviction that Bolsonaro should still be in power.

In the immediate aftermath of the riot, Lula said that the so-called "fascist fanatics" and their financial backers must be held responsible. He also accused Bolsonaro of encouraging the uprising.

Bolsonaro denied the president's accusation Sunday. Writing on Twitter, he said peaceful protest is part of democracy, but vandalism and invasion of public buildings cross the line.

Authorities are also investigating the role of the federal district's police in either failing to halt protesters' advance or standing aside to let them run amok. Prosecutors in the capital said local security forces were negligent at the very least. A supreme court justice temporarily suspended the regional governor, who oversees the force, for what he termed "willful omission" and issued warrants for the preventative arrests of the former heads of the security secretariat and military police, as well as searches of their residences.

Another justice blamed authorities across Brazil for not swiftly cracking down on "homegrown neofascism."

The upheaval finally prompted municipal and state governments to disperse the pro-Bolsonaro encampments outside the military barracks. Their tents and tarps were taken down, and residents were sent packing.

Meanwhile, pro-democracy protesters want to ensure their message — "No amnesty!" — will be heeded by both the law enforcement authorities and any far-right elements who might dare defy democracy again.

"After what happened yesterday, we need to go to the street," said Marcos Gama, a retiree protesting Monday night in Sao Paulo. "We need to react."

## Weinstein asks NY high court to reverse 2020 rape conviction

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Fresh off a second rape conviction, Harvey Weinstein asked New York's highest court Tuesday to overturn his first one, arguing that the judge in his 2020 case betrayed his right to a fair trial by "succumbing to the pressure" of the #MeToo movement.

Weinstein's lawyers are asking the state's Court of Appeals to dismiss the disgraced movie mogul's rape conviction and to order a new trial on a single count of criminal sexual act. The rape charge, they said,

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involves alleged conduct outside the statute of limitations and couldn't be retried.

Weinstein, 70, was convicted in a Manhattan court in February 2020 of a criminal sex act for forcibly performing oral sex on a TV and film production assistant in 2006, and rape in the third degree for an attack on an aspiring actress in 2013. He was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

Last month, a Los Angeles jury convicted Weinstein of raping and sexually assaulting an Italian actor and model, who said he appeared uninvited at her hotel room door during a film festival there in 2013. He is due to be sentenced in that case on Feb. 23.

The Court of Appeals agreed to hear Weinstein's appeal last summer after a mid-level appellate court upheld his conviction. Weinstein's legal team, led by veteran defense attorney Arthur Aidala and former judge Barry Kamins, repeated some of the same arguments in their brief Tuesday.

They again took aim at the trial judge, James Burke, arguing that he swayed the landmark trial's outcome with repeated rulings favorable to prosecutors — including his decision allowing additional accusers to testify about allegations that never led to criminal charges.

They also challenged Burke's refusal to remove a juror who had written a novel involving predatory older men, as well as his decision to allow prosecutors to have an expert on victim behavior and rape myths testify while rejecting testimony on similar subjects from defense experts.

Weinstein's lawyers said Burke gave into an "unrelenting deluge of publicity, vocal special interest groups, and a morally outraged public," creating a carnival atmosphere that deprived Weinstein of the "judicial serenity and calm to which he was entitled."

Prosecutors have until March 1 to respond. Burke is no longer on the bench.

Allegations against Weinstein, the once powerful and feared studio boss behind such Oscar winners as "Pulp Fiction" and "Shakespeare in Love," ushered in the #MeToo movement — a cultural reckoning on sexual misconduct in the entertainment, news and other industries.

Weinstein's New York trial drew intense publicity, with reporters packing the courtroom and cameras lined up outside to capture images of the one-time studio boss shuffling in and out of court. Protesters chanted "rapist" outside the courthouse.

"Put bluntly, the court of public opinion became the court in this case," Weinstein's lawyers wrote.

Weinstein maintains his innocence and contends that any sexual activity was consensual.

He was acquitted at the New York trial of first-degree rape and two counts of predatory sexual assault stemming from actor Annabella Sciorra's allegations of a mid-1990s rape — testimony that his lawyers argue was so dated it should never have been allowed.

The judge's decision to allow testimony from three women whose allegations did not lead to charges in the New York case "overwhelmed" the trial with "excessive, random, and highly dubious prior bad act evidence."

Rules vary by state on calling witnesses to testify about "prior bad acts" outside the actual charges. New York's rules, shaped by a landmark decision in a 1901 poisoning case, are among the more restrictive.

Weinstein's lawyers argued that extra testimony went beyond detailing motive, opportunity, intent or a common scheme or plan and essentially put him on trial for crimes he wasn't charged with and hadn't had an opportunity to defend himself against.

The Associated Press does not generally identify people alleging sexual assault unless they consent to be named; Sciorra has spoken publicly about her allegations.

A five-judge panel in the state's intermediate appeals court heard Weinstein's initial appeal. Some of the judges were critical of Burke and prosecutors, suggesting at a December 2021 hearing they were open to reversing Weinstein's conviction and ordering a new trial.

Judge Sallie Manzanet-Daniels said Burke let prosecutors pile on with "incredibly prejudicial testimony" from additional witnesses.

But, the five judges were ultimately unanimous in finding that Burke had properly exercised his discretion and concurred with his decision to let prosecutors confront Weinstein with evidence about other, unrelated misbehavior if he were to have testified — which he declined to do.

In their appeal to the Court of Appeals, Weinstein's lawyers said that material — pertaining to 28 alleged

acts of boorish behavior over 30 years — would've served "only to make the jury hate Weinstein" and that giving prosecutors those arrows in their quiver deprived him of his right to testify in his own defense.

Aidala said he wants the Court of Appeals to remind the state's trial courts "that a defendant cannot be tried based on his character — but must be tried based on the conduct for which he has been accused."

## Trump executive Allen Weisselberg gets 5-month jail sentence

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Allen Weisselberg, a longtime executive for Donald Trump's business empire, was taken into custody Tuesday to begin serving a five-month jail term for dodging taxes on \$1.7 million in job perks — a punishment the judge who sentenced him said was probably too lenient for a case "driven entirely by greed."

Weisselberg, 75, was promised the short sentence in August when he agreed to plead guilty to 15 tax crimes and to be a witness against the Trump Organization, where he worked since the mid-1980s. His testimony helped convict the former president's company, where he had served as chief financial officer, of tax fraud.

But when he made the sentence official Tuesday, Judge Juan Manuel Merchan said that after listening to Weisselberg's trial testimony, he regretted that the penalty wasn't tougher. He said he was especially appalled by testimony that Weisselberg gave his wife a \$6,000 check for a no-show job so that she could qualify for Social Security benefits.

Had he not already promised to give Weisselberg five months, Merchan said, "I would be imposing a sentence much greater than that."

"I'm not going to deviate from the promise, though I believe a stiffer sentence is warranted, having heard the evidence," he added.

Weisselberg, who came to court dressed for jail rather than in his usual suit, was handcuffed and taken away by court officers moments after the sentence was announced. He was taken to New York City's notorious Rikers Island complex, where he was expected to be housed in an infirmary unit. He will be eligible for release after little more than three months if he behaves behind bars.

Weisselberg's sentencing also marked the end of his career at the Trump Organization, where he had been on leave since the fall, continuing to make \$1.14 million in salary and bonuses, even as he was testifying against the company. His lawyer, Nicholas Gravante, said that as of Tuesday, the executive and the company "have amicably parted ways."

As part of the plea agreement, Weisselberg was required to pay nearly \$2 million in back taxes, penalties and interest, which prosecutors said he has done. Prosecutors recommended a six-month jail sentence, but Merchan said he settled on five months, in part because of mitigating factors, such as Weisselberg's military service and stint as a public school teacher. In addition, Merchan ordered Weisselberg to complete five years of probation after his leaves jail.

Gravante had asked the judge for an even lighter sentence than the one in the plea bargain, citing Weisselberg's age and "far from perfect health."

"He has already been punished tremendously by the disgrace that he has brought not only on himself, but his wife, his sons and his grandchildren," Gravante said.

Weisselberg faced the prospect of up to 15 years in prison — the maximum punishment for the top grand larceny charge — if he were to have reneged on his deal or if he didn't testify truthfully at the Trump Organization's trial. Weisselberg is the only person charged in the Manhattan district attorney's three-year investigation of Trump and his business practices.

Weisselberg testified for three days, offering a glimpse into the inner workings of Trump's real estate empire. Weisselberg has worked for Trump's family for nearly 50 years, starting as an accountant for his developer father, Fred Trump, in 1973. He joined Donald Trump in 1986 and helped expand the company into a global golf and hotel brand.

Weisselberg told jurors he betrayed the Trump family's trust by conspiring with a subordinate to hide more

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than a decade's worth of extras from his income, including a free Manhattan apartment, luxury cars and his grandchildren's private school tuition. He said they fudged payroll records and issued falsified W-2 forms.

A Manhattan jury convicted the Trump Organization in December, finding that Weisselberg had been a "high managerial" agent entrusted to act on behalf of the company and its various entities. Weisselberg's arrangement reduced his own personal income taxes but also saved the company money because it didn't have to pay him more to cover the cost of the perks.

Prosecutors said other Trump Organization executives also accepted off-the-books compensation. Weisselberg alone was accused of defrauding the federal government, state and city out of more than \$900,000 in unpaid taxes and undeserved tax refunds.

The Trump Organization is scheduled to be sentenced on Friday and faces a fine of up to \$1.6 million.

Weisselberg testified that neither Trump nor his family knew about the scheme as it was happening, choking up as he told jurors: "It was my own personal greed that led to this."

But prosecutors, in their closing argument, said Trump "knew exactly what was going on" and that evidence, such as a lease he signed for Weisselberg's apartment, made clear that Trump was "explicitly sanctioning tax fraud."

Trump Organization lawyers have said Weisselberg concocted the scheme without Trump or the Trump family's knowledge.

Weisselberg said the Trumps remained loyal to him even as the company scrambled to end some of its dubious pay practices following Trump's 2016 election. He said Trump's eldest sons, entrusted to run the company while Trump was president, gave him a \$200,000 raise after an internal audit found he had been reducing his salary and bonuses by the cost of the perks.

The company punished him only nominally after his arrest in July 2021, reassigning him to senior adviser and moving his office. He even celebrated his 75th birthday at Trump Tower with cake and colleagues in August, just hours after finalizing the plea agreement that ushered his transformation from loyal executive to prosecution witness and, now, jail inmate.

Rikers Island, a compound of 10 jails on a spit of land in the East River, just off the main runway at LaGuardia Airport in Queens, has been plagued in recent years by violence, inmate deaths and staggering staffing shortages.

Though just 5 miles (8 kilometers) from Trump Tower, it's a veritable world away from the life of luxury Weisselberg schemed to build — a far cry from the gilded Fifth Avenue offices where he hatched his plot and the Hudson River-view apartment he reaped as a reward.

## Santos probe sought by Democrats over House ethics

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Ethics Committee was asked Tuesday to investigate Rep. George Santos, the newly-elected Republican from New York who has admitted to lying about his job experience, college education and even family heritage, and now faces questions about his campaign financial disclosures.

Two Democrats requested the probe, saying Santos "has failed to uphold the integrity expected of members of the House of Representatives."

In a letter to the Ethics Committee, Democratic Reps. Ritchie Torres and Dan Goldman, both of New York, said Santos also failed to file "timely, accurate and complete" financial disclosure reports as required by law. They said the reports Santos did file are "sparse and perplexing." They asked the panel to investigate and "take appropriate action as soon as possible."

Some Democratic leaders said Santos should be expelled from the House.

A spokesperson for Santos did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Santos has admitted to fabricating several aspects of his life story and experience in his run for the House seat that he won in November, helping to give Republicans a narrow majority. Nevertheless, the newly-elected lawmaker was sworn into office last week alongside all other members of the House.

Republican leaders have refused to take action against Santos, whose election helped give them a 222-

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seat hold on the House majority. Santos also voted last week in the raucous balloting to make GOP leader Kevin McCarthy the House speaker.

Majority Leader Steve Scalise said Tuesday the situation is being "handled internally" by Republicans. "Obviously there were concerns about what we had heard," said Scalise, R-La. "So we're gonna have to sit down and talk to him about it."

Santos admitted two weeks ago that he lied about his job experience and college education during his successful campaign for a seat in the U.S. House.

Santos had also said he had worked for Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, but neither company could find any records verifying that.

In an interview with the New York Post, Santos said: "My sins here are embellishing my resume. I'm sorry."

He also explained that he never claimed to be Jewish after the Jewish American site The Forward had questioned a claim on Santos' campaign website that his grandparents "fled Jewish persecution in Ukraine, settled in Belgium, and again fled persecution during WWII."

Democrats were scathing in their criticism.

"Kevin McCarthy owns George Santos, lock stop and barrel," said Rep. Pete Aguilar of California, the chairman of the House Democratic caucus. "It's the only reason why he was seated, to give George Santos that ability to vote for Kevin McCarthy. So let's call this exactly what it is. There should be repercussions."

It's unclear the Ethics Committee's next steps. As part of the new House rules package, any member of the public can now file complaints against lawmakers. Ethics advocates have warned other new rules will weaken the committee's staff and membership.

The committee has not fully formed yet as House Republicans are in the midst of choosing committee chairs, members and setting up the new Congress.

## Mega Millions swells to \$1.1B after 3-month losing trend

By TERESA CRAWFORD Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — After nearly three months of lottery losing, will someone break the trend Tuesday night and win a \$1.1 billion Mega Millions jackpot?

Regardless of how long it takes, the odds of winning the top lottery prize don't change, and they're formidable at 1 in 302.6 million. But someone will eventually match all six numbers and win the jackpot, which now ranks as the fifth-largest in U.S. history.

The \$1.1 billion prize is for a winner who chooses to be paid through an annuity with 30 payments over 29 years. Winners usually prefer cash, which for Tuesday night's drawing would be an estimated \$568.7 million.

Customers at Lucky Mart on Chicago's South Side on Tuesday were hoping they picked a winner. Toni Woods, a retired city worker, said that if she won, the first thing she would do was give her church 10%.

After that, Woods, 73, said, "I've got a list of people that need things, my family members, I would take care of them." Then she'd go on a vacation.

Retired Chicago firefighter Kirby Collins, 58, said he would use winnings to "travel, share with my friends and family, help out, you know, needy people. You know, just do the right thing with it. I don't want to just blow it."

The drawing is set for 11 p.m. EST Tuesday but it usually takes a couple hours before it's clear if there is a winner.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states as well as Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## AP source: Correa spurns Mets, reaches \$200M deal with Twins

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

Carlos Correa has reversed course again, bringing him back to where he started in the most convoluted free-agent negotiation in baseball history.

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Correa agreed Tuesday to a \$200 million, six-year contract that keeps him with the Minnesota Twins after failing to complete deals with the New York Mets and San Francisco Giants, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because no announcement was made.

The agreement for the All-Star shortstop could be worth \$270 million over 10 seasons if Correa remains healthy. The contract is subject to a successful physical, and Correa was in the Minneapolis area on Tuesday for the physical, the person said.

More than 100 free agents negotiate contracts each offseason, and letters of agreement routinely are signed by agents and clubs that are subject to successful physicals. A player goes for exams and tests at a team-selected medical facility, club physicians review the results and the team finalizes the contract, which then is reported to Major League Baseball and the players' association.

While 99% of deals follow that path, Correa and agent Scott Boras twice reached agreements that collapsed, an unprecedented twist for a star.

Correa agreed Dec. 13 to a \$350 million, 13-year contract with the Giants, who scheduled a news conference a week later to announce the deal, then called off the announcement hours before it was set to begin over concerns with a right ankle injury Correa sustained in 2014.

Correa agreed that night to a \$315 million, 12-year deal with the Mets, and high-spending owner Steve Cohen even confirmed the pending agreement. But the Mets also had concerns about the ankle after a Dec. 22 physical and held off finalizing the agreement while attempting to negotiate protections over the next two weeks.

The deal with the Twins reached Tuesday calls for an \$8 million signing bonus, half payable next month and half in February 2024, and salaries of \$32 million in each of the first two seasons, \$36 million in 2025, \$31.5 million in 2026, \$30.5 million in 2027 and \$30 million in 2028.

Minnesota's deal includes team options for \$25 million in 2029, \$20 million in 2030, \$15 million in 2031 and \$10 million in 2032, salaries that would become guaranteed if Correa has 575 plate appearances in 2028, 550 in 2029, 525 in 2030 and 502 in 2031. The contract could be worth \$225 million over seven seasons, \$245 million over eight years and \$260 million over nine seasons.

Correa's options also could be triggered by a top-five finish in MVP voting, a Silver Slugger award or World Series or League Championship Series MVP. He gets a no-trade provision.

New York's deal guaranteed \$157.5 million over the first six seasons, the person said.

Following Correa's December physical for New York, Mets chief legal officer Katie Pothier proposed that Correa be subject to an annual physical starting after the 2028 season. The physical would be directed by a doctor of the team's choosing and Correa would have to demonstrate he was capable of physically performing to his top potential the following season offensively and defensively, the person said.

Pothier did not immediately respond to an email from the AP seeking comment.

While the guaranteed money kept decreasing in each successive agreement, the average annual value increased from \$26.9 million with San Francisco to \$33.3 million with Minnesota. New York's deal originally would have guaranteed \$210 million in the first eight seasons.

Correa left Houston and joined the Twins last offseason for a \$105.3 million, three-year deal that included opt-outs after each season. He pulled out of the deal after making \$35.1 million in 2022 to chase a longer-term contract.

Boras maintained last month that the player's 2014 surgery to repair a broken right tibia should not have been an issue. Dr. Kevin Varner, chairman of the Department of Orthopedics at Houston Methodist Hospital, operated on Correa.

Boras in prior years had worked out medical issues in contracts for Ivan Rodriguez and Magglio Ordóñez with Detroit and for J.D. Drew and J.D. Martinez in Boston, specifying time on the injured list or a season-ending injury that would eliminate the guarantee.

Correa, the first overall pick in the 2012 amateur draft and the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year with Houston, has a .279 batting average with 155 homers and 553 RBIs in eight major league seasons. He also has been a stellar postseason performer with 18 homers and 59 RBIs in 79 games, winning a World Series

title in 2017 with the Astros.

The two-time All-Star and 2021 Gold Glove winner raved about his time with Minnesota and how much he and his family enjoyed the community, maintaining all along the Twins were in the mix even with the bigger spenders pursuing him in a particularly lucrative offseason for shortstops. Xander Boegarts, Trea Turner and Dansby Swanson all struck it rich, too.

## 'What madness looks like': Russia intensifies Bakhmut attack

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces are escalating their onslaught against Ukrainian positions around the wrecked city of Bakhmut, Ukrainian officials said, bringing new levels of death and devastation in the grinding, monthslong battle for control of eastern Ukraine that is part of Moscow's wider war.

"Everything is completely destroyed. There is almost no life left," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Monday of the scene around Bakhmut and the nearby Donetsk province city of Soledar, known for salt mining and processing.

"The whole land near Soledar is covered with the corpses of the occupiers and scars from the strikes," Zelenskyy said. "This is what madness looks like."

Late Tuesday, the head of the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor, Dmitry Prigozhin, claimed in audio reports posted on his Russian social media platform that his forces had seized control of Soledar, with battles continuing in a "cauldron" in the city's center. Ukrainian officials did not comment on the claim, and The Associated Press was unable to verify it.

The U.K. Defense Ministry said earlier that Russian troops alongside soldiers from the Wagner Group had advanced in Soledar and "are likely in control of most of the settlement."

The ministry said that taking Soledar, 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of Bakhmut, was likely Moscow's immediate military objective and part of a strategy to encircle Bakhmut. But it added that "Ukrainian forces maintain stable defensive lines in depth and control over supply routes" in the area.

A Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Wagner Group "has moved from being a niche sideshow of Russia's war to a major component of the conflict," adding that its forces now make up as much as a quarter of Russian combatants.

The Kremlin, whose invasion of its neighbor 10 1/2 months ago has suffered numerous reversals, is hungry for victories. Russia illegally annexed Donetsk and three other Ukrainian provinces in September, but its troops have struggled to advance.

After Ukrainian forces recaptured the southern city of Kherson in November, the battle heated up around Bakhmut.

Ukraine's deputy defense minister, Hanna Malyar, said Russia has thrown "a large number of storm groups" into the fight for the city. "The enemy is advancing literally on the bodies of their own soldiers and is massively using artillery, rocket launchers and mortars, hitting their own troops," she said.

Pavlo Kyrylenko, the Donetsk region's Kyiv-appointed governor, on Tuesday described the Russian attacks on Soledar and Bakhmut as relentless.

"The Russian army is reducing Ukrainian cities to rubble using all kinds of weapons in their scorched-earth tactics," Kyrylenko said in televised remarks. "Russia is waging a war without rules, resulting in civilian deaths and suffering."

Wounded soldiers arrive around the clock for emergency treatment at a Ukrainian medical stabilization center near the front line around Bakhmut. Medics fought for 30 minutes Monday to save a soldier, but his injuries were too severe.

Another soldier suffered a head injury after a fragment pierced his helmet. Medics quickly stabilized him enough to transfer him to a military hospital.

"We fight to the end to save a life," Kostyantyn Vasylykevich, a surgeon and the center's coordinator, told The Associated Press. "Of course, it hurts when it is not possible to save them."

The Moscow-backed leader of the occupied areas of Donetsk, Denis Pushilin, told Russian state TV control over the city would create "good prospects" for taking over Bakhmut, as well as Siversk, a town

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further north where Ukrainian fortifications "are also quite serious."

An exceptional feature of the fighting near Bakhmut is that some of it has taken place around entrances to disused salt mine tunnels which run for some 200 kilometers (120 miles), the British intelligence report noted.

"Both sides are likely concerned that (the tunnels) could be used for infiltration behind their lines," it said.

In Russia, two signs emerged Tuesday that officials were grappling with the military shortcomings revealed during the conflict in Ukraine.

Russian Defense Minister Shoigu, whose performance has been fiercely criticized in some Russian circles but who has retained Russian President Vladimir Putin's confidence, said Tuesday that his military would use its experience in Ukraine to improve combat training.

Military communications and control systems will be improved using artificial intelligence, Shoigu said, and troops will be given better tactical gear and equipment.

The second indication of trouble involves Russia's production of weapons and other supplies its military needs for the fight in Ukraine. The deputy head of Russia's Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, warned that officials who failed to meet deadlines for such items could face criminal charges.

Putin appointed Medvedev last month to head a new commission tasked with trying to solve the military's supply problems. Numerous reports have suggested Russia is running low on certain weapons and was sending some troops into battle with insufficient equipment and clothing.

Part of the Kremlin's challenge is keeping up with the weapons and supplies that Western allies are providing to Ukraine.

The Patriot surface-to-air guided missile defense system is one of the weapons Ukraine is about to receive, and the Pentagon announced Tuesday that about 100 Ukrainian troops will head to Oklahoma's Fort Sill as soon as next week to begin training on it. That will help Ukraine protect itself against Russian missile attacks. The United States pledged one Patriot battery last month, and Germany has pledged an additional system.

Germany's foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, announced Tuesday while visiting Ukraine's second largest city, Kharkiv, that her country would also provide 40 million euros (\$43 million) to help with demining, energy infrastructure and internet connections, German news agency dpa reported.

Several front-line cities in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces have witnessed intense fighting in recent months.

Together, the provinces make up the Donbas, a broad industrial region bordering Russia that Putin identified as a focus from the war's outset and where Moscow-backed separatists have fought since 2014.

Russia's grinding eastern offensive captured almost all of Luhansk during the summer. Donetsk escaped the same fate, and the Russian military subsequently poured manpower and resources around Bakhmut.

Taking Bakhmut would disrupt Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian forces to press toward Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, key Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk.

Like Mariupol and other contested cities, Bakhmut endured a long siege without water and power even before Moscow launched massive strikes to take out public utilities across Ukraine.

Kyrylenko, the Donetsk region's governor, estimated more than two months ago that 90% of Bakhmut's prewar population of over 70,000 had fled since Moscow focused on seizing the entire Donbas.

Ukraine's presidential office said at least four civilians were killed and another 30 wounded in Russian shelling between Monday and Tuesday.

Vitaliy Kim, the governor of the southern Mykolaiv region, said Russian forces shelled the port of Ochakiv and the area around it late Monday and again early Tuesday. He said 15 people, including a 2-year-old child, were wounded.

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## Bolsonaro eyes return to Brazil as US stay pressures Biden

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Biden administration is under growing pressure from leftists in Latin America as well as U.S. lawmakers to expel Jair Bolsonaro from a post-presidential retreat in Florida following his supporters' brazen attack on Brazil's capital over the weekend.

But the far-right ex-president may pre-empt any plans for such a stinging rebuke. On Tuesday, he told a Brazilian media outlet that he would push up his return home, originally scheduled for late January, after being hospitalized with abdominal pains stemming from a 2018 stabbing.

"I came to spend some time away with my family but these weren't calm days," Bolsonaro told CNN's Portuguese-language affiliate in Brazil. "First, there was this sad episode in Brazil and then my hospitalization."

Bolsonaro arrived in Florida in late December, skipping the Jan. 1 swearing-in of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who became the first elected Brazilian president not to receive the presidential sash from his predecessor since democracy was restored in the 1980s. Bolsonaro is reportedly staying at the Orlando-area home of Brazilian mixed martial arts fighter Jose Aldo, a fervent supporter.

His visit to the Sunshine state went largely unnoticed in the U.S. until Sunday's attack by thousands of die-hard supporters who had been camping for weeks outside a military base in Brasilia, refusing to accept Bolsonaro's narrow defeat in an October runoff. Their invasion of Brazil's congress and presidential palace left behind shattered glass, smashed computers and slashed artwork.

Almost from the moment the images of destruction were broadcast to the world, Democrats voiced concern about Bolsonaro's continued presence on U.S. soil, drawing parallels between the rampage in Brazil and the Jan. 6, 2020, insurrection by allies of Donald Trump who stormed the Capitol to try to overturn the U.S. presidential election results.

Among those calling for President Joe Biden to give Bolsonaro the boot was Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

"Nearly two years to the day the U.S. Capitol was attacked by fascists, we see fascist movements abroad attempt to do the same in Brazil," the New York City lawmaker said. "The U.S. must cease granting refuge to Bolsonaro in Florida."

It should be a no brainer for the White House, experts say.

Biden has never had a close relationship with Bolsonaro, who made common cause with Trump's top allies on the far right. And any action to expel him is likely to play well in Latin America, where Biden is courting a crop of new leftist leaders who have risen to power in places like Chile and Colombia expressing similar concerns about threats to democracy.

"It's one thing to make statements about support for democracy," said John Feeley, a longtime U.S. diplomat in Latin America who resigned as ambassador to Panama in 2018 over differences with the Trump administration.

"It's another to actually take action in your own home, where you have sovereign control, with someone who is clearly in league with the same folks who brought you Jan. 6," Feeley said.

But so far the Biden administration has proceeded cautiously.

On Monday, State Department spokesman Ned Price, while sidestepping questions about Bolsonaro's presence, said anyone entering the U.S. on a so-called A-1 visa reserved for sitting heads of state would have 30 days to either leave the country or adjust their status with the Department of Homeland Security at the conclusion of their term of office.

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, was similarly circumspect, saying only that any request from Brazil's government related to Bolsonaro would be evaluated, taking into consideration legal precedent. Typically, the U.S. is reluctant to discuss visa issues out of privacy concerns.

Feeley said the longer the Biden administration waits the weaker its support for democracy will be perceived in the region.

One place Bolsonaro apparently isn't going is Italy. The former president is the descendant of 19th-century immigrants from northern Italy and Brazilian media had speculated for months that he and his children would seek Italian citizenship out of fear he could be prosecuted in Brazil for corruption or his mishandling

of the coronavirus pandemic.

But Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told state radio on Tuesday that Bolsonaro has never requested citizenship — despite being bestowed honorary citizenship in 2021 by the small town where his great-grandfather was born.

“There are laws that address who gets citizenship,” Tajani said, emphasizing his far-right-led government’s strong condemnation of the raid on Brazilian government institutions by Bolsonaro supporters. “It is not a political, discretionary choice.”

## Federal utility chooses gas plant despite EPA concerns

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The nation’s largest public utility has decided to build a new natural gas plant despite concerns from the Environmental Protection Agency that its analysis of alternatives is faulty and that the project is at odds with President Biden’s clean energy goals.

Tennessee Valley Authority President and CEO Jeff Lyash on Tuesday signed a decision to move forward with a 1,450-megawatt natural gas plant at the site of the utility’s coal-burning Cumberland Fossil Plant, near Cumberland City, Tennessee. TVA plans to retire the first of two coal burning units there by the end of 2026 and plans to have the gas plant up and running before then.

TVA provides power to 10 million people in parts of seven Southern states.

The utility provided the EPA with a final environmental impact statement in early December analyzing alternatives for replacing the Cumberland plant. It compared the costs and benefits of two types of natural gas plants as well as a solar array with battery storage. The analysis recommended a combined cycle natural gas plant as the preferred alternative. It determined that the solar array would cost \$1.8 billion more and could not be completed by the utility’s 2026 deadline.

“Replacing retired generation with a natural gas plant is the best overall solution because it’s the only mature technology available today that can provide firm, dispatchable power by 2026 when the first Cumberland unit retires – dispatchable meaning TVA can turn it off and on as the system requires the power,” Lyash said in a statement Tuesday.

The EPA issued a detailed response to the analysis on Friday, writing that TVA relied on “inaccurate underlying economic information” and “may continue to underestimate the potential costs of the combined cycle gas plant and overstate the cost of solar and storage.”

TVA used a “misleading” measure of comparison to show that solar and storage would be more expensive than gas, according to EPA. TVA also failed to account for the opportunities presented by recent federal legislation providing \$375 billion over 10 years for clean energy projects. And TVA failed to consider that the cost of renewables is declining while gas prices are expected to rise, the EPA said.

In addition to the economic analysis, the EPA is critical of TVA’s environmental analysis. The utility found similar greenhouse gas impacts for solar and gas. When factoring in the social costs of greenhouse gases, TVA found the solar alternative would save \$4.8 billion over the “no action” alternative — that is, keeping the coal plant in place — while the combined cycle gas plant would save \$4.4 billion.

But the EPA said TVA used outdated social cost estimates and falsely asserted that there is “legal uncertainty” around the newest estimates.

Although TVA stated that the environmental impacts are relatively close for all alternatives, the utility’s own analysis results in a \$3 billion difference between gas and solar over the 30-year life of the project, according to the EPA.

“Moreover, the document does not reflect the urgent need to take climate action” despite TVA’s own strategic plan calling for a “deep carbon reduction,” EPA states.

Biden has set a goal of a carbon-pollution-free energy sector by 2035 that TVA has said it can’t achieve without technological breakthroughs in nuclear generation and energy storage. TVA has set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2035, compared with 2005 levels.

Scientists have warned that failing to meet the 2035 target will only lead to more intense and more

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frequent extreme weather events, as well as droughts, floods and wildfires. Teams of meteorologists across the world have predicted there is nearly a 50-50 chance that Earth will hit a key warming mark that international agreements have tried to prevent by 2026.

EPA's letter states that TVA failed to incorporate several suggested improvements, including using energy efficiency and demand management to reduce the need for new electricity. Demand management helps customers change their usage patterns to flatten peak demand periods and could "help avoid rolling blackouts like those TVA implemented recently," EPA wrote.

The Cumberland plant and a second coal-burning plant, Bull Run, went offline during a deep freeze over Christmas weekend. Along with unspecified "issues" at some of TVA's gas plants, the outages forced TVA to resort to rolling blackouts for the first time in its 90-year history. TVA has said it is investigating what went wrong but has provided few details.

TVA did seem to take one of EPA's suggestions into consideration. Lyash's Tuesday decision in favor of the gas plant says the utility will design it to accommodate modifications that would allow it to capture carbon and use hydrogen fuel if those become viable options in the future.

Already, TVA is facing a lawsuit that claims it violated federal law by approving a gas-power plant that is under construction at its retired coal-burning Johnsonville Fossil Plant without properly assessing the environmental and climate impacts.

The Center for Biological Diversity issued a statement on Tuesday calling for TVA's board of directors to take action. Six new Biden-appointed board members were sworn in last Thursday, making up a majority of the utility's nine-member board of directors. However, a previous board had already delegated the decision on the Cumberland plant to Lyash.

"TVA's gas plants failed miserably during the December storm, and now its CEO is making the grave mistake of doubling down on fossil fuels," Gaby Sarri-Tobar, with the Center for Biological Diversity's energy justice program, said in a news release. "Our country's largest federal utility is dependent on fossil fuels when it should be leading the transition to 100% renewable energy."

TVA also plans to retire Cumberland's second coal-burning unit by the end of 2028. The utility has not yet said how it will replace the power lost from that retirement.

## Romanian court upholds arrest of influencer Andrew Tate

By VADIM GHIRDA and STEPHEN McGRATH undefined

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — A court in Romania's capital Bucharest has upheld the 30-day arrest of divisive social media personality and self-described misogynist Andrew Tate on charges of organized crime, human trafficking and rape, an official said late Tuesday.

Ramona Bolla, a spokesperson for Romanian anti-organized crime agency DIICOT, said the court rejected an appeal by Tate against a judge's earlier decision to extend his arrest from 24 hours to 30 days.

Tate, 36, a British-U.S. citizen who has 4.5 million followers on Twitter, was initially detained on Dec. 29 for 24 hours along with his brother Tristan, who was charged in the same case. Two Romanian women also were taken into custody.

The Bucharest Court of Appeal late Tuesday rejected all four appeals against a judge's Dec. 30 decision to grant prosecutors' request to extend the arrest period. A document explaining the judge's earlier decision said "the possibility of them evading investigations cannot be ignored," and that they could "leave Romania and settle in countries that do not allow extradition."

Tate and the other three defendants arrived at the Bucharest court in handcuffs Tuesday morning and were taken away in the afternoon, hours before the court ruled against them.

After Tate lost his appeal, a cryptic post on his Twitter account read: "When Allah said 'I test only those I love.' I took the pain like it was an honour — Abu Hurayrah." It was one of several ambiguous posts that appeared on the account since his arrest.

Tate, a former professional kickboxer who has reportedly lived in Romania since 2017, was previously banned from various prominent social media platforms for expressing misogynistic views and hate speech.

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The week of his arrest, he traded insults on Twitter with teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg.

DIICOT said it had identified six victims in the trafficking case who were subjected to "acts of physical violence and mental coercion" and were sexually exploited by the members of the alleged crime group.

The agency said victims were lured by pretenses of love, and later intimidated, kept under surveillance and subjected to other control tactics while being coerced into performing pornographic acts that were intended to make money for their alleged persecutors.

Prosecutors investigating the case have seized 15 luxury cars, at least seven of which were owned by the Tate brothers, and more than 10 properties or land owned by companies registered to them, DIICOT spokesperson Bolla said.

Bolla said that if prosecutors can prove the Tates gained money through human trafficking, the assets "will be taken by the state and (will) cover the expenses of the investigation and damages to the victims."

After the appeals court upheld the arrest warrant extension, prosecutors can now request detentions of up to 180 days for the four people charged.

Since Tate's arrest, a series of ambiguous posts have appeared on his Twitter account. Each tweet garners widespread media attention.

One, posted Sunday and accompanied by a Romanian report suggesting he or his brother have required medical care since their arrests, read: "The Matrix has attacked me. But they misunderstand, you cannot kill an idea. Hard to Kill."

Another post, from Saturday, read: "Going to jail when guilty of a crime is the life story of a criminal ... going to jail when completely innocent is the story of a hero."

Hope not Hate, a U.K. advocacy group, said it monitored Tate for years "because of his close links to the far right." It described the influencer in a report it produced last year as an "extreme misogynist" who holds conspiratorial views.

"Our major concern is that his brand of extreme and sometimes violent misogyny is reaching a young male audience and that he could serve as a gateway to wider far-right politics," Hope not Hate said in a statement after Tate was banned by Facebook parent company Meta in August.

## 'Diamond,' of pro-Trump duo Diamond and Silk, dies at 51

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Lynette Hardaway, an ardent supporter of former President Donald Trump and one half of the conservative political commentary duo Diamond and Silk, has died, according to the pair's Twitter account. She was 51.

Hardaway, known by the moniker "Diamond," carved out a unique role as a Black woman who loudly backed Trump and right-wing policies, earning fame first on the Internet and then as a cable television commentator. Her promotion of COVID-19 falsities eventually got her dropped from Fox News, but she landed on another right-wing cable platform.

She and her sister, Rochelle "Silk" Richardson, rose to prominence during the 2016 presidential campaign cycle when they appeared on stage in support of Trump, who embraced the two Black women amid widespread accusations of racism and sexism.

Hardaway's cause of death has not been released. Trump, who called her death "really bad news for Republicans" in a Monday night post on his Truth Social platform, said it was "totally unexpected."

"Our beautiful Diamond of Diamond and Silk has just passed away at her home in the State she loved so much, North Carolina," Trump wrote. "There was no better TEAM anywhere, at any time!"

The pair's verified Twitter account had asked people to "please pray for Diamond" in a November tweet but did not elaborate on the circumstances.

"The World just lost a True Angel and Warrior Patriot for Freedom, Love, and Humanity," the account wrote Monday night, linking to a memorial fundraising page.

A memorial ceremony will be announced.

The sisters, who called themselves Trump's "most outspoken and loyal supporters," have said they

switched political parties to support his first presidential bid, in which he carried only about 8% of Black voters in the 2016 general election. He invited them to his inauguration in 2017 and, later, to the White House.

In the introduction to their co-written autobiography "Uprising," published in 2020, the pair wrote that they faced criticism throughout the 2016 campaign cycle from people who called them "sellouts" and worse names as they stumped for Trump. They said their time in the spotlight wasn't planned.

"We were just going along with our lives as usual, then we were thrust into this political arena all because we dared to speak out and speak up for what we believed," they wrote.

Raised in the Tar Heel state, the two amassed a following of 347,000 subscribers on YouTube and leveraged their Internet stardom to land many network television appearances and regular roles at Fox News.

The network removed them from its list of contributors in 2020 after they came under fire for spreading false information about the pandemic and vaccines. The duo had falsely suggested the virus was man-made and that the rising death toll was a media conspiracy to make the Trump administration look bad.

Twitter briefly locked their account for violating its coronavirus misinformation policy after they tweeted the baseless claim that "quarantining people inside of their houses for extended periods will make people sick."

Landing at Newsmax, a far-right cable news and digital media company, they hosted three seasons of their talk show "Diamond and Silk: Crystal Clear."

## Baltimore launches plan to get squeegee workers off corners

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Tyemaur Scott started 2023 with an important New Year's resolution. He vowed to leave the ranks of Baltimore's squeegee workers, whose intractable presence at busy downtown intersections remains a source of heated public debate.

A deadly confrontation last summer — when a teen windshield washer shot an irate, baseball bat-wielding driver near the Inner Harbor during evening rush hour — galvanized disparate opinions about the practice. And on Tuesday, police launched a new program that allows officers to issue panhandling citations in six zones where squeegee work is most common. The planned enforcement marks a major turning point in the city's approach.

To some city residents and officials, the young men washing windshields for cash are hard-working entrepreneurs trying to survive under difficult circumstances. They represent a host of systemic problems facing Black Baltimoreans, including deep-seated poverty, racism and disinvestment in communities of color. But other downtown drivers consider them a nuisance and public safety hazard.

While city leaders pledged to finally address the root causes, members of the public expressed skepticism about whether this latest effort will provide anything more than a Band-Aid solution.

Past initiatives have come and gone with little impact. Baltimore City Council outlawed the practice in the 1980s, with white council members voting in favor and Black members against. The city opened "squeegee stations," where youths with approved badges could work after receiving safety and etiquette instructions. But the idea never caught on.

In November, a collaborative of local officials, squeegee workers and other stakeholders presented a plan to combine limited law enforcement action with robust outreach efforts aimed at connecting economically disadvantaged youths with long-term jobs and resources, including mentors and housing support.

Officials said police would start enforcing anti-panhandling laws Tuesday in six zones. Baltimore's previous efforts stopped short of police involvement, unlike in cities such as New York, where frequent arrests made windshield washers virtually extinct.

But some workers said they were already rethinking squeegeeing after experiencing increased stigma and decreased profits in recent months. For those reasons, along with his mother's longtime disapproval and his own ambitions, Scott said he decided to turn a new leaf.

"It's like I was standing still when I could've been accomplishing so much more," he said.

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Scott, 22, said he started squeegeeing about five years ago because he needed money to help support himself. He estimated his recent daily earnings fluctuate between \$40 and 200.

Scott attended a career readiness fair Friday afternoon hosted by the Baltimore mayor's office. He hopes to earn his GED and become a firefighter someday.

Many squeegee workers grow up in poor, majority-Black communities. Squeegeeing allows them to earn money while avoiding the drugs or gang violence plaguing many Baltimore neighborhoods.

Scott said squeegeeing also gave him a unique brand of customer service. His number one rule: When in doubt, just walk away — because "two wrongs don't make a right."

With an infectious smile and unassuming demeanor, Scott bemoaned the small group of "knuckleheads" who give Baltimore squeegee workers a bad name.

Some drivers have reported getting scammed after handing over their cellphones to make payments through money transfer apps. Others have complained about squeegee workers darting through traffic at dangerous intersections.

In response to the Inner Harbor shooting, Republican Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan reiterated claims that some people were afraid to come downtown because of squeegee workers. He blamed city leadership.

Scott was skeptical about the new enforcement plan. But ideally, he said, the threat of criminal citations would motivate his peers to seek other opportunities. City officials didn't respond to questions Monday about whether they plan to add more enforcement zones in the future.

On Tuesday, outreach workers were present at some downtown intersections, but they said most windshield washers were already informed about the changes. Officials also posted signs warning people against entering the roadway at high-traffic intersections.

"We're being proactive," said Andrey Bundley, director of the Baltimore Mayor's Office of African American Male Engagement. "The goal is to never get to issuing citations."

Officials have already partnered with several local businesses and agencies offering employment and workforce training to former squeegee workers.

Jason Bass, director of culture and impact at the Revival Hotel in Baltimore, which currently employs three former squeegee workers, said he hopes that number grows.

"These kids know how to work through hard times," he said.

Many squeegee workers have to overcome multiple barriers before joining the workforce. Some are too young. Others lack proper identification, stable housing, reliable transportation and work clothes. Officials have repeatedly stressed the importance of meeting those underlying needs.

"There is no silver bullet," Baltimore Deputy Mayor Faith Leach said during a public hearing last year. "We have an opportunity to serve as a national model for how to treat Black boys. They are not a problem to be solved; they are the sons of Baltimore and they deserve our very best."

Shamonte Jones, 22, was squeegeeing Tuesday morning at his usual intersection, which falls outside the enforcement zones. He said he doesn't plan to stop anytime soon. He works at least eight-hour days and makes decent money. His savings are growing. Plus, he's made countless friends and acquaintances — drivers sometimes offer him jobs and other opportunities, Jones said. He hopes to invest in real estate someday.

Jones, who proudly showed a picture of himself celebrating high school graduation, believes the city should implement an application process for squeegee workers instead of banning them from certain intersections.

"The problem is they're treating all squeegee boys the same," he said.

Derwin Catchings, 23, said he keeps coming back to squeegeeing because the payout is immediate, allowing him to help with family expenses over the past several years.

"It's a hustle," he said. "I make money every day."

But now his girlfriend is pregnant, they recently moved in together and he's looking for more stable employment. He's optimistic about the next chapter.

Perhaps most importantly, he said, squeegeeing has taught him perseverance — how to accept rejec-

tion and keep moving. Countless drivers might refuse his services, but there's always another windshield, another red light, another dollar.

## **NOAA: Ian, drought supercharged US weather extremes in 2022**

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

DENVER (AP) — Costly weather disasters kept raining down on America last year, pounding the nation with 18 climate extremes that caused at least \$1 billion in damage each, totaling more than \$165 billion, federal climate scientists calculated Tuesday.

Even though 2022 wasn't near record hot for the United States, it was the third-wildest year nationally both in number of extremes that cost \$1 billion and overall damage from those weather catastrophes, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said in a report issued at the American Meteorological Society's conference.

The amount, cost and death toll of billion-dollar weather disasters make up a key measurement, adjusted for inflation, that NOAA uses to see how bad human-caused climate change is getting. They led to at least 474 deaths.

"People are seeing the impacts of a changing climate system where they live, work and play on a regular basis," NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad said at a Tuesday press conference. "With a changing climate buckle up. More extreme events are expected."

Hurricane Ian, the costliest drought in a decade and a pre-Christmas winter storm pushed last year's damages to the highest since 2017. The only more expensive years were 2017 — when Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria struck — and the disastrous 2005 when numerous hurricanes, headlined by Katrina, pummeled the Southeast, federal meteorologists said. The only busier years for billion-dollar disasters were 2020 and 2021.

Ian was the third-costliest U.S. hurricane on record with \$112.9 billion in damage, followed by \$22.2 billion in damage from a western and midwestern drought that halted barge traffic on the Mississippi River, officials said. The \$165 billion total for 2022 doesn't even include a total yet for the winter storm three weeks ago, which could push it close to \$170 billion, officials said.

More than 40% of the continental United States was under official drought conditions for 119 straight weeks, a record in the 22 years of the federal drought monitor, easily passing the old mark of 68 straight weeks, Spinrad said. The country peaked at 63% of the nation in drought in 2022. Spinrad said he expects the atmospheric river pouring rain on California to provide some relief, but not a lot.

"Climate change is supercharging many of these extremes that can lead to billion-dollar disasters," said NOAA applied climatologist and economist Adam Smith, who calculates the disasters, updating them to factor out inflation. He said more people are also building in harm's way, along pricey coasts and rivers, and lack of strong construction standards is also an issue. With a good chunk of development beachside, real estate inflation could be a small localized factor, he said.

"The United States has some of the consistently most diverse and intense weather and climate extremes that you'll see in many parts of the world. And we have a large population that's vulnerable to these extremes," Smith told The Associated Press. "So it's really an imbalance right now."

Climate change is a hard-to-ignore factor in extremes, from deadly heat to droughts and flooding, Smith and other officials said.

"The risk of extreme events is growing and they are affecting every corner of the world," NOAA chief scientist Sarah Kapnick said.

The problem is especially bad when it comes to dangerous heat, said NOAA climate scientist Stephanie Herring, who edits an annual study in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society that calculates how much of the extreme weather in past years was worsened by climate change.

"Research is showing that these extreme heat events are also likely to become the new normal," Herring said at the weather conference.

There's been a dramatic upswing in the size and number of super costly extremes in the U.S. since about

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2016, Smith said. In the past seven years, 121 different billion-dollar weather disasters have caused more than \$1 trillion in damage and killed more than 5,000 people.

Those years dwarf what happened in the 1980s, 1990s or 2000s. For example, in the entire decade of the 1990s there were 55 different billion-dollar disasters that cost \$313 billion total and claimed 3,062 lives.

"It's not just one but many, many different types of extremes across much of the country," Smith said. "If extremes were on a bingo card, we almost filled up the card over the last several years."

In 2022, there were nine billion-dollar non-tropical storms, including a derecho, three hurricanes, two tornado outbreaks, one flood, one winter storm, a megadrought and costly wildfires. The only general type of weather disaster missing was an icy freeze that causes \$1 billion or more in crop damage, Smith said. And last month, Florida came close to it, but missed it by a degree or two and some preventive steps by farmers, he said.

That prevented freeze was one of two "silver linings" in 2022 extremes, Smith said. The other was that the wildfire season, though still costing well over \$1 billion, wasn't as severe as past years, except in New Mexico and Texas, he said.

For the first 11 months of 2022, California was going through its second-driest year on record, but drenchings from an atmospheric river that started in December turned it to only the ninth-driest year on record for California, said NOAA climate monitoring chief Karin Gleason.

With a third straight year of a La Nina cooling the eastern Pacific, which tends to change weather patterns across the globe and moderate global warming, 2022 was only the 18th-warmest year in U.S. records, Gleason said.

"It was a warm year certainly above average for most of the country but nothing off the charts," Gleason said. The nation's average temperature was 53.4 degrees (11.9 degrees Celsius), which is 1.4 degrees (0.8 degrees) warmer than the 20th century average.

The year was 1.5 inches (3.8 centimeters) below normal for rain and snow, the 27th-driest out of 128 years, Gleason said.

NOAA and NASA on Thursday will announce how hot the globe was for 2022, which won't be a record but is likely to be in the top seven or so hottest years. European climate monitoring group Copernicus released its calculations Tuesday, saying 2022 was the fifth-hottest globally and second-hottest in Europe.

U.S. greenhouse gas emissions — which is what traps heat to cause global warming — rose 1.3% in 2022, according to a report released Tuesday by the Rhodium Group, a think tank. That's less than the economy grew. The emissions increase was driven by cars, trucks and industry with electric power generation polluting slightly less.

It's the second straight year, both after lockdowns eased, that American carbon pollution has grown after fairly steady decreases for several years. It makes it less likely that the United States will achieve its pledge to cut carbon emissions in half by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, according to the Rhodium report.

## Political vacuum in Haiti deepens as senators' terms expire

By DÁNICA COTO and EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti awoke Tuesday stripped of its last democratically elected institution — this time, its Senate — an alarming development that solidifies what some call a de facto dictatorship nominally in charge of a country wracked by gang violence.

While only 10 senators had been symbolically representing the nation's 11 million people in recent years because Haiti had failed to hold legislative elections since October 2019, their terms expired overnight, leaving Haiti without a single lawmaker in its House or Senate amid a spiraling political crisis. Organized crime groups have been running virtually unchecked since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, who himself had been ruling by decree.

"It's a very grim situation," said Alex Dupuy, a Haitian-born sociologist at Wesleyan University, "one of the worst crises that Haiti has had since the Duvalier dictatorship."

The bloody regime of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who fled the country in 1986, marked the last

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time Haiti lacked elected officials.

The Parliament building in downtown Port-au-Prince remained deserted on Tuesday, with only security guards at the gate. Similar scenes were evident outside Haiti's non-functioning Supreme Court and electoral commission.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who assumed leadership of Haiti with the backing of the international community after Moïse was killed, has failed to hold general elections despite multiple pledges over the last year and a half to do so. His latest promise, on Jan. 1, was that the Supreme Court would be restored and a provisional electoral council tasked with setting a reasonable date for elections.

But Henry offered no timeline, even as he asked Haitians to trust each other and "take me at my word when I speak of my government's desire to do everything possible to reconstitute our democratic institutions."

"There are no powers to check his decisions," Dupuy said. "As long as that situation continues, Henry is going to be behaving like a dictator."

A spokesman for Henry's office declined to comment.

The U.N. has warned that security in Haiti needs to improve before elections are held. Reported kidnappings soared to more than 1,200 last year, double what was reported the previous year, according to the U.N., and at least 280 killings were reported in November alone, the highest monthly record.

Briefing the U.N. Security Council in December, Helen La Lime, who was appointed Haiti's U.N. special envoy in October 2019, described what she called "alarmingly high levels of gang violence" in Haiti, which has fewer than 9,000 active police officers nationwide.

The gangs increasingly rely on kidnappings to fund their operations, with experts estimating that they control about 60% of Port-au-Prince.

"We are scared to step out of our houses," said Daniel Jean, 25, who sells phone chargers and other equipment in the capital. "We are cornered: kidnapping, extortions. Gangs are killing people because we don't have ransom."

Haitians have lost all trust in the democratic process, Jean said, adding that he won't vote if the same politicians and parties appear on the ballot: "They have more influence than the gangs. They control all the gangs.

"This is why the country is not going to move forward until the international community ... comes in to help," he said.

Henry requested the immediate deployment of foreign troops in October after the most powerful gang seized control of a key fuel terminal, cutting off supplies to hospitals, schools, businesses and homes.

But the United States and Canada, among others, have responded only by implementing sanctions, not sending troops.

"Haiti needs stability," decried Andrea Marcele, 29, who sells yams, lemons, carrots and other goods in the streets of the capital after migrating from the northern region of Grand-Anse.

"The country has no president ... no elected officials," she said. "Everybody is hungry for power. We are paying the consequences."

As the situation worsens, Haitians increasingly flee by plane or aboard rickety boats, desperately risking their lives to reach some safety and economic security. Many aim for the Bahamas, or Florida. President Joe Biden's administration intercepted tens of thousands last year, sending them back to Haiti.

Rodelie Kator, 49, sells rice, beans and other goods, hoping to send her 18-year-old son to Chile or Brazil, popular destination points for Haitians who then try to reach Mexico and cross into the United States.

"I'm hoping for a better life for my son," she said. "I don't want to witness him being killed."

Kator said she wishes he could stay in Haiti because she has seen in the news "what my brothers and sisters have to go through to get to Mexico. ... being treated like animals."

But Haiti holds no promise for her son, even as Biden announced last week that his administration would immediately turn away Haitians and other migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Haitian economist Enemy Germain tried to use this moment, with zero elected officials in Haiti, to en-

courage his countrymen.

"This date will have marked the beginning of the end of a political class without vision — without regard for the common good and without balance — if you good people get involved," he tweeted. "Know that tomorrow will not be better without you."

But even if elections were to be held, many Haitians wonder whether any candidate will be worthy of their support as they fear for their life.

"It feels like we're heading toward a civil war," said Marcele. "You're walking with a coffin under your arm."

## Feds propose 'student loan safety net' alongside forgiveness

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is moving forward with a proposal that would lower student debt payments for millions of Americans now and in the future, offering a new route to repay federal loans under far more generous terms.

President Joe Biden announced the repayment plan in August, but it was overshadowed by his sweeping plan to slash or eliminate student debt for 40 million Americans. Despite the low profile of the payment plan, however, some education experts see it as a more powerful tool to make college affordable, especially for those with lower incomes.

Education Department officials on Tuesday called the new plan a "student loan safety net" that will prevent borrowers from getting overloaded with debt.

"Student debt has become a dream killer," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said. "This is a promise to the American people that, at long last, we will fix a broken system and make student loans affordable."

Biden, a Democrat, is moving forward with the repayment plan even as his one-time debt cancellation faces an uncertain fate before the Supreme Court. The White House has asked the court to uphold the plan and reject two legal challenges from conservative opponents. The Biden administration submitted its brief last week, with oral arguments slated for Feb. 28.

The Education Department formally proposed the new repayment plan on Tuesday by publishing it in the Federal Register, starting a public comment period that often takes months to navigate.

If it's finalized, the proposal would give a major overhaul to income-driven repayment plans — one of several payment options offered by the federal government. The resulting plan would have lower monthly payments, an easier path to forgiveness and a promise that unpaid interest will not be added to a borrower's loan balance.

The federal government now offers four types of income-driven plans, but the proposal would mostly phase out three of them while focusing on one simplified option, scaling back the confusing array of options borrowers now face.

Under existing plans, monthly payments are capped at 10% of a borrower's discretionary income, and those earning less than \$20,400 a year aren't required to make payments. The new proposal would cap payments for undergraduate loans at 5% of borrowers' discretionary pay, cutting their bills in half, and require payments only for those who earn more than about \$30,000 a year.

As long as borrowers make their monthly payments, any unpaid interest would not be charged. The change is meant to prevent borrowers from having unpaid interest added to their loan balance, a practice that can cause debt to snowball even as borrowers make payments.

Significantly, the proposal would also make it easier to get debt erased after making several years of payments. Existing plans promise to cancel any remaining debt after 20 or 25 years of payments. The new plan would erase all remaining debt after 10 years for those who took out \$12,000 or less in loans. For every \$1,000 borrowed beyond that, a year would be added.

Typical graduates of a four-year university would save about \$2,000 a year compared with today's plans, the Biden administration says, while 85% of community college borrowers would be debt-free within 10 years.

Supporters see the proposal as a significant stride toward college affordability. Some say it's so gener-

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ous that it approaches free community college — a campaign promise that Biden has pushed but failed to deliver.

The Institute for College Access and Success, a nonprofit organization that promotes college affordability, praised the proposal as a significant improvement over existing plans.

“The changes proposed today would provide meaningful financial relief to millions of borrowers and help shield students from debt that has not paid off, including those who start college but do not complete a degree,” said Sameer Gadkaree, the group’s president.

Opponents on the right blast the revamped plan as an unfair handout with a steep price tag. The Biden administration estimates the repayment plan would cost nearly \$138 billion over the decade, and some critics have put it closer to \$200 billion.

Republican Rep. Virginia Foxx, chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, said the proposal turns the federal loan program into “an untargeted grant with complete disregard for the taxpayers that fund it.”

“Because President Biden couldn’t get his radical free college agenda through Congress, he has resorted to doing it through the backdoor by executive fiat,” Foxx said in a statement.

Even some on the left have questioned the prudence of the idea, saying it’s so generous that it effectively turns student loans into grants that don’t need to be repaid. That could lead more students to borrow, they warn, and it could spur colleges to raise tuition prices if they know students won’t be on the hook.

Still others have urged the administration to abandon income-driven payment plans entirely, calling them a failed policy. Critics cite a federal report from last year finding that sloppy oversight of the program left thousands of borrowers stuck with debt that should have been forgiven.

Cardona said his agency is working on other proposals that would hold colleges accountable if their students get overburdened with debt. One idea promoted by Biden is to warn the public about programs that leave graduates saddled with debt.

The Education Department on Tuesday began the process to deliver that goal, asking the public about the best way to identify “low-value” programs.

## World Bank: Recession a looming threat for global economy

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The global economy will come “perilously close” to a recession this year, led by weaker growth in all the world’s top economies — the United States, Europe and China — the World Bank warned on Tuesday.

In an annual report, the World Bank, which lends money to poorer countries for development projects, said it had slashed its forecast for global growth this year by nearly half, to just 1.7%, from its previous projection of 3%. If that forecast proves accurate, it would be the third-weakest annual expansion in three decades, behind only the deep recessions that resulted from the 2008 global financial crisis and the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Though the United States might avoid a recession this year — the World Bank predicts the U.S. economy will eke out growth of 0.5% — global weakness will likely pose another headwind for America’s businesses and consumers, on top of high prices and more expensive borrowing rates. The United States also remains vulnerable to further supply chain disruptions if COVID-19 keeps surging or Russia’s war in Ukraine worsens.

And Europe, long a major exporter to China, will likely suffer from a weaker Chinese economy.

The World Bank report also noted that rising interest rates in developed economies like the United States and Europe will attract investment capital from poorer countries, thereby depriving them of crucial domestic investment. At the same time, the report said, those high interest rates will slow growth in developed countries at a time when Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has kept world food prices high.

“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has added major new costs,” World Bank President David Malpass said on a call with reporters. “The outlook is particularly devastating for many of the poorest economies where poverty reduction is already ground to a halt and access to electricity, fertilizer, food and capital is likely

to remain limited for a prolonged period.”

The impact of a global downturn would fall particularly hard on poorer countries in such areas as Saharan Africa, which is home to 60% of the world’s poor. The World Bank predicts per capita income will grow just 1.2% in 2023 and 2024, which is such a tepid pace that poverty rates could rise.

“Weakness in growth and business investment will compound the already devastating reversals in education, health, poverty and infrastructure and the increasing demands from climate change,” Malpass said. “Addressing the scale of these challenges will require significantly more resources for development and global public goods.”

Along with seeking new financing so it can lend more to poorer countries, Malpass said, the World Bank is, among other things, seeking to improve its lending terms that would increase debt transparency, “especially for the rising share of poor countries that are at high risk of debt distress.”

The report follows a similarly gloomy forecast a week earlier from Kristina Georgieva, the head of the International Monetary Fund, the global lending agency. Georgieva estimated on CBS’ “Face the Nation” that one-third of the world will fall into recession this year.

“For most of the world economy, this is going to be a tough year, tougher than the year we leave behind,” Georgieva said. “Why? Because the three big economies — U.S., EU, China — are all slowing down simultaneously.”

The World Bank projects that the European Union’s economy won’t grow at all next year after having expanded 3.3% in 2022. It foresees China growing 4.3%, nearly a percentage point lower than it had previously forecast and about half the pace that Beijing posted in 2021.

The bank expects developing countries to fare better, growing 3.4% this year, the same as in 2022, though still only about half the pace of 2021. It forecasts Brazil’s growth slowing to 0.8% in 2023, down from 3% last year. In Pakistan, it expects the economy to expand just 2% this year, one-third of last year’s pace.

Other economists have also issued bleak outlooks, though most of them not quite as dire. Economists at JPMorgan are predicting slow growth this year for advanced economies and the world as a whole, but they don’t expect a global recession. Last month, the bank predicted that slowing inflation will bolster consumers’ ability to spend and power growth in the United States and elsewhere.

“The global expansion will turn into 2023 bent but not broken,” the JPMorgan report said.

## DOJ reviewing potentially classified docs at Biden center

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is reviewing a batch of potentially classified documents found in the Washington office space of President Joe Biden’s former institute, the White House said Monday.

Special counsel to the president Richard Sauber said “a small number of documents with classified markings” were discovered as Biden’s personal attorneys were clearing out the offices of the Penn Biden Center, where the president kept an office after he left the vice presidency in 2017 until shortly before he launched his 2020 presidential campaign in 2019. The documents were found on Nov. 2, 2022, in a “locked closet” in the office, Sauber said.

Sauber said the attorneys immediately alerted the White House Counsel’s office, who notified the National Archives and Records Administration — which took custody of the documents the next day.

“Since that discovery, the President’s personal attorneys have cooperated with the Archives and the Department of Justice in a process to ensure that any Obama-Biden Administration records are appropriately in the possession of the Archives,” Sauber said.

A person who is familiar with the matter but not authorized to discuss it publicly said Attorney General Merrick Garland asked U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois John Lausch to review the matter after the Archives referred the issue to the department. Lausch is one of the few U.S. attorneys to be held over from former President Donald Trump’s administration.

Irrespective of the Justice Department review, the revelation that Biden potentially mishandled classified or presidential records could prove to be a political headache for the president, who called Trump’s deci-

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sion to keep hundreds of such records at his private club in Florida "irresponsible."

Trump weighed in Monday on his social media site, asking, "When is the FBI going to raid the many homes of Joe Biden, perhaps even the White House?"

The revelation comes as Republicans have taken control of the House of Representatives and are promising to launch widespread investigations of Biden's administration.

It also may complicate the Justice Department's consideration on whether to bring charges against Trump, who has launched a repeat bid for the White House in 2024 and has repeatedly claimed that the department's inquiry of his own conduct amounted to "corruption."

The National Archives did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday. Spokespeople for Garland and Lausch declined to comment.

Rep. James Comer, the new GOP chairman of the House Oversight Committee, said Monday that the revelation raised questions about the Justice Department's handling of the Trump probe.

"Is the White House going to be raided tonight? Are they going to raid the Bidens?" he asked reporters. "This is further concern that there's a two-tier justice system within the DOJ with how they treat Republicans versus Democrats, certainly how they treat the former president versus the current president."

His Democratic counterpart, Rep. Jamie Raskin, said Biden's attorneys "appear to have taken immediate and proper action."

"I have confidence that the Attorney General took the appropriate steps to ensure the careful review of the circumstances surrounding the possession and discovery of these documents and make an impartial decision about any further action that may be needed," he added.

Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, chair of the powerful House Judiciary Committee, said Monday that the American public deserved to know earlier about the revelation of classified documents.

"They knew about this a week before the election, maybe the American people should have known that," Jordan told reporters. "They certainly knew about the the raid on Mar-a-Lago 91 days before this election, but nice if on November 2, the country would have known that there were classified documents at the Biden Center."

Jordan is among House Republicans pushing for the creation of a "select subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal government" within the Judiciary Committee.

Votes on creating that committee are expected as soon as this week, setting up a showdown between Republicans and the prosecutors leading various federal investigations, including the ones into Trump.

It wasn't immediately clear why the White House didn't disclose the discovery of the documents or the DOJ review sooner. CBS was first to report Monday on the discovery of the potentially classified documents.

The Justice Department for months has been investigating the retention of roughly 300 documents that were marked as classified and were recovered from the Trump's Florida estate. In that instance, prosecutors say, representatives of Trump resisted requests to give back the full stash of classified documents and failed to fully comply with a subpoena that sought their return.

FBI agents in August served a search warrant at the Mar-a-Lago property, removing 33 boxes and containers.

That investigation is being led by special counsel Jack Smith. Prosecutors have interviewed an array of Trump associates and have been using a grand jury to hear evidence.

It is not clear when a decision when will be made on whether Trump, or anyone else, should be charged.

The think tank, formally known as the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, is affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania and continues to operate independently of the Biden administration.

## Today in History: JAN 11, Wuhan reports 1st COVID-19 death

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 11, the 11th day of 2023. There are 354 days left in the year.

On Jan. 11, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed the Grand Canyon National Monument (it became a national park in 1919).

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On this date:

In 1913, the first enclosed sedan-type automobile, a Hudson, went on display at the 13th National Automobile Show in New York.

In 1927, the creation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was proposed during a dinner of Hollywood luminaries at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

In 1935, aviator Amelia Earhart began an 18-hour trip from Honolulu to Oakland, California, that made her the first person to fly solo across any part of the Pacific Ocean.

In 1943, the United States and Britain signed treaties relinquishing extraterritorial rights in China.

In 1963, the Beatles' single "Please Please Me" (B side "Ask Me Why") was released in Britain by Parlophone.

In 1964, U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry issued "Smoking and Health," a report that concluded that "cigarette smoking contributes substantially to mortality from certain specific diseases and to the overall death rate."

In 1978, two Soviet cosmonauts aboard the Soyuz 27 capsule linked up with the Salyut 6 orbiting space station, where the Soyuz 26 capsule was already docked.

In 1989, nine days before leaving the White House, President Ronald Reagan bade the nation farewell in a prime-time address, saying of his eight years in office: "We meant to change a nation and instead we changed a world."

In 2003, calling the death penalty process "arbitrary and capricious, and therefore immoral," Illinois Gov. George Ryan commuted the sentences of 167 condemned inmates, clearing his state's death row two days before leaving office.

In 2010, Mark McGwire admitted to The Associated Press that he'd used steroids and human growth hormone when he broke baseball's home run record in 1998.

In 2020, health authorities in the central Chinese city of Wuhan reported the first death from what had been identified as a new type of coronavirus; the patient was a 61-year-old man who'd been a frequent customer at a food market linked to the majority of cases there.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai met at the White House, where they agreed to speed up slightly the schedule for moving Afghanistan's security forces into the lead across the country. The government assured the public that Boeing's new 787 "Dreamliner" was safe to fly, even as it launched a review to find out what caused a fire, a fuel leak and other recent incidents. Italian actress Mariangela Melato ("Swept Away"), 71, died in Rome.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump was quoted as having used bluntly vulgar language during an Oval Office meeting with lawmakers while asking why the U.S. would accept more immigrants from Haiti and African countries rather than places like Norway. Edgar Ray Killen, a 1960s Klan leader who was convicted decades later in the slayings of three civil rights workers, died in prison at the age of 92.

One year ago: Speaking in Atlanta, President Joe Biden called on senators to "stand against voter suppression" by changing Senate rules to pass voting rights legislation that Republicans were blocking from debate and votes. (The legislation failed after two Democrats refused to join others in their party in changing the rules to overcome a Republican filibuster.) Just days after the one-year anniversary of the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the Justice Department's top national security official told lawmakers that the department was establishing a specialized unit focused on domestic terrorism.

Today's birthdays: Former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (zhahn kray-tee-EHN') is 89. Movie director Joel Zwick is 81. World Golf Hall of Famer Ben Crenshaw is 71. Singer Robert Earl Keen is 61. Actor Phyllis Logan is 67. Musician Vicki Peterson (The Bangles) is 65. Actor Kim Coles is 60. Actor Jason Connery is 60. Former child actor Dawn Lyn (TV: "My Three Sons") is 60. Rock musician Tom Dumont (No Doubt) is 55. Movie director Malcolm D. Lee is 53. Singer Mary J. Blige is 52. Musician Tom Rowlands (The Chemical Brothers) is 52. Actor Marc Blucas is 51. Actor Amanda Peet is 51. Actor Rockmond Dunbar is 50. Actor Aja Naomi King is 38. Actor Kristolyn Lloyd is 38. Reality TV star Jason Wahler is 36. Pop singer Cody Simpson is 26.