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Groton Community Calendar

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.

Sunday, Jan. 15

Open Gym: Grades JK-8; 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.,
Grades 6-12; 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Avantara worship, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

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

“The truth is, unless you let go, unless you forgive yourself, unless you forgive the situation, unless you realize that the situation is over, you cannot move forward.”

STEVE MARABOLI



Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

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

Monday, Jan. 16

Senior Menu: Parmesean chicken breast, baked potato with sour cream, wild rice, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Taco salads.

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

Girls Basketball at Langford Area: JV game at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Middle School Wrestling at Redfield.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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

CLOSED: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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**Is anyone interested in sponsoring
any of these upcoming events?**

Monday, Jan. 16

Girls JV at Langford

Tuesday, Jan. 17

Two junior high boys games with Milbank at Groton

Thursday, Jan. 19

Boys and Girls JV Games at Milbank

**We could consider doing C games as well, but with
no commentary.**

Saturday, Jan. 21

C and JV girls games at Great Plains Lutheran

Message Paul or Text him at 605-397-7460

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #11 Results

Team Standings: Chipmunks – 11, Jackelopes – 11, Coyotes – 9, Shihtzus – 6, Foxes – 6, Cheetahs – 5

Men's High Games: Brad Waage – 193, Tony Madsen – 189, Lance Frohling – 187

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter – 178, Sam Bahr – 169, Lori Wiley – 168

Men's High Series: Brad Waage – 553, Lance Frohling – 548, Brad Larson – 496

Women's High Series: Vicki Walter – 505, Sue Stanley – 456, Darci Spanier – 448

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Groton Elementary Music Presents:

A Visit from St. Nicholas

Directed by Scott Glott

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!

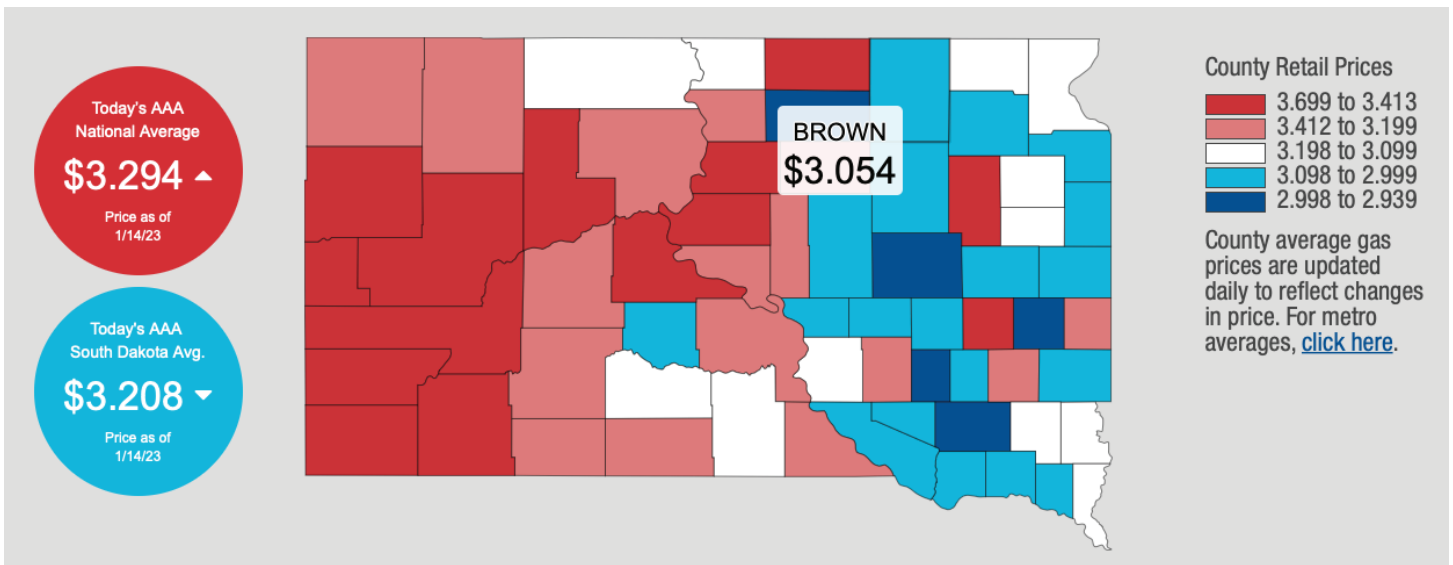
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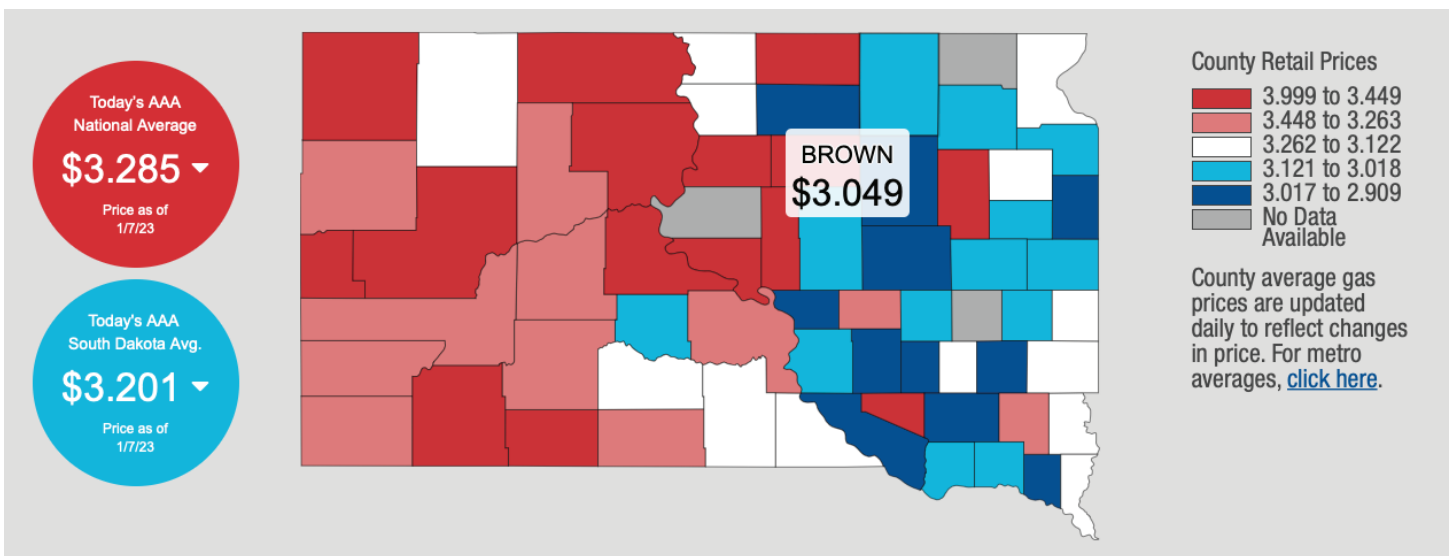
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.201	\$3.371	\$3.830	\$4.338
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.212	\$3.364	\$3.832	\$4.340
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.130	\$3.286	\$3.766	\$4.304
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.262	\$3.425	\$3.908	\$4.659
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.155	\$3.242	\$3.598	\$3.494

This Week



Last Week



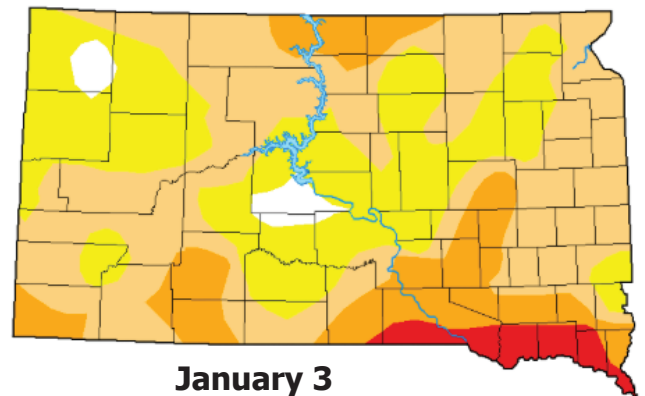
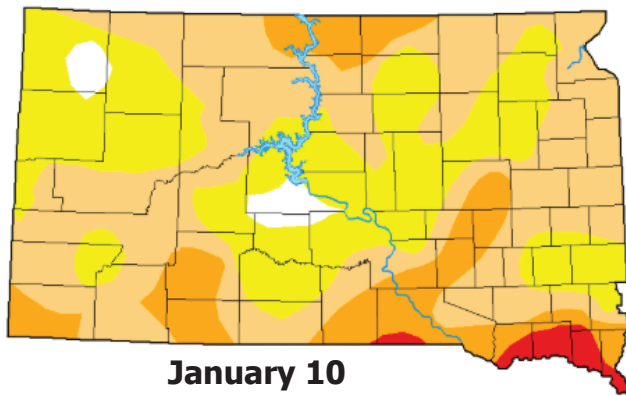
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Most of the Region was much drier than the prior week, with a few tenths of an inch of precipitation restricted to southeastern South Dakota and adjacent portions of Nebraska, as well as isolated sites in the higher elevations of Colorado and southern Wyoming. Other areas recorded little if any precipitation. Most of the region remained unchanged from last week, but some improvement occurred in southeastern South Dakota and adjacent Nebraska. No areas appeared to deteriorate significantly due to the heavy precipitation of the previous week and seasonably cold temperatures reducing human and natural water demand. But most of the region remained in at least moderate drought (D1), with extreme to exceptional drought (D3-D4) stretching from southeastern Wyoming eastward across most of Nebraska into adjacent Iowa, and southward from western Nebraska through most of southern and western Kansas. A broad swath covering the southwestern half of Kansas and much of northeastern Nebraska remained in exceptional drought (D4).

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NSU Men's Basketball

Sioux Falls Stifles Northern State on the Road

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team battled in the second half of Friday's NSIC contest at the University of Sioux Falls, however a 6-point first half deficit proved difficult to overcome. Neither team was very efficient shooting under 40.0% from the floor with just a combine eight made 3-pointers.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 68, USF 70

Records: NSU 13-4 (9-2 NSIC), USF 13-4 (8-3 NSIC)

Attendance: 855

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Despite poor shooting from both team is the game, Northern gave up just six turnovers and forced four
- The scoreboard saw 17 lead changes and 12 tie games through 40 minutes of action and starters from both teams going scoreless
- In total the Wolves shot 39.3% from the floor, 22.7% from the 3-point line, and 71.4% from the foul line, while the Cougars shot 39.4% from the floor, 25.0% from the 3-point line, and 68.2% from the foul line
- Sioux Falls out-rebounded Northern State 42-37 in the game and tallied 15 assists to the Wolves eight; a season low for NSU
- Northern recorded 36 points in the paint, eight second chance points, and nine points off turnovers
- Four Wolves scored in double figures led by Sam Masten with 25 points and six assists, as well as a team second best six rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Sam Masten: 25 points, 50.0 field goal%, 6 rebounds, 6 assists, 1 steal
- Augustin Reede: 15 points, 4 rebounds, 1 steal
- Jacksen Moni: 13 points, 7 rebounds
- Jordan Belka: 10 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 block

UP NEXT

The Wolves are back in action today for a 5:30 p.m. tip at Southwest Minnesota State University.

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NSU Wrestling

No. 21 Northern State Dominates Minot State in NSIC Action

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 21 Northern State University wrestling team opened their 2022-23 home slate with a bang on Friday evening, taking eight weights over Minot State. Five of their eight victories were bonus point wins, led by No. 11 Wyatt Turnquist with a victory by fall.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 32, MiSU 10

Records: NSU 4-2 (2-1 NSIC), MiSU 5-5 (0-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 753

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Landen Fischer kicked off the dual at 125-pounds, notching a 12-0 major decision victory over Dylan McDonald
- Teagan Block tallied an 11-8 decision victory over Logen Fischer, giving the Wolves a 7-0 lead
- The tag-team of Kolton Roth, in his first action of the 2022-23 season, and Wyatt Turnquist extended the Northern State lead with 10-points at 141 and 149 pounds
- Roth defeated Ethan Wonser in a 10-0 major decision and Turnquist pinned Isaac Ortega at 3:52 in the match where he held an 8-0 lead
- Minot State tallied their first points of the day, notching a pin at 157 pounds before heading to the mid-match break
- Chase Bloomquist responded and put the Wolves back on track, defeating Brendan Barnes in a 5-4 decision
- In the only technical fall of the evening, Kelby Hawkins defeated Brody Mohr with a score of 17-2, sealing the 5-point team victory with a riding time point as the clock ran out in the third period
- In his first match in the maroon and gold, Sam Kruger tallied a 9-0 victory over Cayden White
- No. 2 Cole Huss closed out the scoring for NSU, defeating Dustin Swisher in a 9-3 decision
- The Beavers closed out the dual with a major decision victory by their lone ranked wrestler, No. 8 Jake Swirple
- Northern State out-scored Minot State 76-19 through all ten matches and tallied their second highest team score of the season

MATCH RESULTS

Weight	Summary	NSU	MINOT
125	Landen Fischer (Northern State) over Dylan McDonald (Minot State) (MD 12-0)	4	0
133	Teagan Block (Northern State) over Logen Fischer (Minot State) (Dec 11-8)	3	0
141	Kolton Roth (Northern State) over Ethan Wonser (Minot State) (MD 10-0)	4	0
149	#11 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) over Isaac Ortega (Minot State) (Fall 3:52)	6	0
157	Nathan Baca (Minot State) over Devin Bahr (Northern State) (Fall 4:49)	0	6
165	Chase Bloomquist (Northern State) over Brendan Barnes (Minot State) (Dec 5-4)	3	0
174	Kelby Hawkins (Northern State) over Brody Mohr (Minot State) (TF 17-2 7:00)	5	0
184	Sam Kruger (Northern State) over Cayden White (Minot State) (MD 9-0)	4	0
197	#2 Cole Huss (Northern State) over Dustin Swisher (Minot State) (Dec 9-3)	3	0
285	#8 Jake Swirple (Minot State) over Nathan Schauer (Northern State) (MD 8-0)	0	4
Team Score:		32	10

UP NEXT

The Wolves will host top-10 opponent Upper Iowa on Sunday afternoon. The dual kicks off at 2 p.m. versus the No. 9 Peacocks from Wachs Arena. Free ice cream sundaes will be available for all fans as a part of the Sundaes on Sunday promotion while supplies last.

NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Rally Falls Short in Sioux Falls

Sioux Falls, S.D. – After a strong third quarter of play Northern State was unable to get shots to fall late, dropping a 49-44 game at Sioux Falls on Friday night in the Stewart Center. Northern led by four points with four minutes remaining in the game, however an untimely scoring drought allowed the Cougars score nine unanswered and protect home court.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 44, USF 49

Records: NSU 9-8 (4-7 NSIC), USF 5-12 (2-9 NSIC)

Attendance: 641

HOW IT HAPPENED

Cold shooting plagued Northern State in the game's opening minutes, with the Wolves first field goal not coming until the 6:17 mark on a Rianna Fillipi 3-point basket

After a Kailee Oliverson layup tied the game at six with 3:51 remaining in the first quarter, Sioux Falls used three 3-pointers to power an 11-0 scoring run to end the opening ten minutes of play

After trailing by 13 points early in the second quarter, Jordyn Hilgemann knocked down a 3-pointer to cut the USF lead to 22-16 midway through the period

The Cougars opened the game having made their first five 3-pointers, not missing until the 4:11 mark of the second quarter

A Madelyn Bragg jumper once again brought the Wolves within seven points during a 7-0 scoring run with 6:45 remaining in the third quarter

A driving layup by Fillipi capped the third quarter of play with the Wolves holding a 16-8 scoring advantage in the period, bringing NSU within four points (38-34)

The Northern defense held Sioux Falls to 3-14 (21.4%) shooting from the field in the third quarter, the Cougars had scoring droughts of 4:24 and 3:22 during the third period

Northern State took their first lead of the game with 6:59 remaining in the game on a Laurie Rogers layup

A 7-0 scoring run allowed the Wolves to lead by as many as four points (44-40) with four minutes remaining in the contest, during the scoring run the NSU defense once again held USF scoreless for nearly a five-minute stretch

An untimely scoring drought hit the Wolves late, allowing the Cougars to score nine unanswered points during the final four minutes of the game

Rogers set a new season-high mark with eight blocks in tonight's game, falling one short of her career-high set last season

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 9 points, 3 rebounds

Rianna Fillipi: 8 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals

Laurie Rogers: 7 points, 11 rebounds, 2 assists, 8 blocks, 1 steal

UP NEXT

Northern State will close out their weekend road trip this afternoon as they visit Marshall, Minnesota, to face Southwest Minnesota State. The Wolves and Mustangs are scheduled for a 3:30 p.m. tip-off at the R/A Facility.

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GFP Commission Holds January Meeting

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their January meeting at Pierre's Matthew's Training Center.

WILDLIFE PROPOSALS

Archery Antelope

The Commission continued to discuss proposed changes to the archery antelope season. They are as follows:

Unlimited number of nonresident one-tag archery antelope licenses valid on private land not leased by the Department of Game Fish and Parks for public hunting; and,

No more than 450 nonresident one-tag archery antelope licenses valid on public and private land.

Resident one-tag archery licenses valid on public and private land would remain unlimited.

Archery Deer

The Commission continued their discussions on the proposed several changes to the archery deer season. They are as follows:

Unlimited nonresident "any deer" licenses (limit of one per hunter) may be issued statewide valid on private land not leased by the Department of Game, Fish and Parks for public hunting;

No more than 2,200 nonresident "any deer" licenses may be issued statewide on public and private lands;

With the proposed limit of 2,200 nonresident "any deer" licenses valid on public and private lands, the Commission proposed to eliminate the April 1 application deadline for those licenses that will be issued by a lottery drawing; and,

Unlimited resident and nonresident antlerless whitetail deer licenses (limit of one per hunter) may be issued for unit ARD-LM1.

Unlimited resident "any deer" licenses remain unchanged, and residents may be issued one statewide license valid on public and private land. In lieu of a statewide "any deer" license, a resident may purchase one East River "any deer" license and one West River "any deer" license valid on public and private land.

Mountain Goat

The Commission proposed the closing of the mountain goat hunting season.

During the 2022 helicopter survey, 42 mountain goats were counted in the survey area near Crazy Horse Memorial, Battle Creek Road, and Black Elk Peak. Based on the mountain goat action plan, Objective 3, Strategy B states "When the minimum number counted reaches less than 50 individuals the season will be closed."

Included in this proposal would be the discontinuance of the sale of preference points for mountain goat hunting.

No Boating Zone

The Commission proposed to change the "no boating zone" on Angostura from 100 to 300 feet fronting the dam which includes the 5 control gates and the canal siphon.

PARKS PROPOSALS

Firearms Changes to State Parks and Recreation Areas

The Commission proposed to make a change to provide the Department the option to open up portions of state parks and recreation areas to hunting during the months of September and May by means of posting, signage, and other designations. This change would provide additional public hunting acres in some state parks for early fall seasons such as mourning dove, archery deer, and youth seasons in addition to spring turkey seasons.

The proposal will allow hunters to hunt park lands at Oahe Downstream Recreation Area west of SD Hwy 1806. Park lands include: OHV and land outside the fenced shooting complex perimeter.

It would also help clarify Revheim Bay Recreation Area as archery only and designate Newtown Hills State Park, Rocky Point Recreation Area, and Lake Poinsett Recreation Area to archery hunting and shotgun with shot shells only, but with options to post certain areas for open hunting.

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Public Comments Currently Being Accepted

If you would like to comment on any of these proposals, visit gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions. Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave Pierre, SD.

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these proposals in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. CST on March 5.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held in Pierre, March 9-10.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Bill would make it harder to move county seats; opponents call it 'antidemocratic'

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 13, 2023 4:11 PM

Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel, wants to make it more difficult to move a county seat to another city. Senate Bill 56, which he introduced Tuesday, follows a failed 2022 effort to move the Dewey County seat from Timber Lake to Eagle Butte.

Dewey County is one of a few South Dakota counties that is within a Native American reservation, in this case the Cheyenne River Reservation. The county's population is 79% Native American, according to the 2020 census.

Mahe, who lives in Dewey County and whose district includes Dewey, Butte, Corson, Harding, Perkins and Ziebach counties, filed the bill in response to the effort, citing the potential cost associated with moving the county seat and the influence of non-Dewey County residents on the process. Eagle Butte straddles the Dewey and Ziebach county lines, and some petition signers last year were Eagle Butte residents of Ziebach County.

The existing state law (SDCL 7-6-4) governing the change of a county seat was written in 1939 and was last amended in 1987. Maher's proposed changes to the statute include:

- Raising the required number of petition signatures from 15% to 40% of registered voters in the county, which Maher admits he "threw in for shock value."
- Setting a July 1 deadline for the petition ahead of a general election. There is no deadline currently set by state law.
- Raising the voter approval from two-thirds majority to three-fourths majority.
- Extending the allowable deadline for a county seat relocation, if voters approve one, from 30 days to one year because there's "no way" to move in the current timeframe, Maher said.
- Restricting the relocation question from being introduced again for four years if the vote fails.
- Establishing the county auditor's authority – which Maher said is not clear in current law – to verify petition signatures are from county registered voters, based on the last general election.
- Requiring petitioners provide a cost estimate and timeline to move the county seat.

"If you're going to make these people commit to a \$10 million expenditure, they better know what they're voting on and they better be serious about it," Maher said.

Carl Petersen, the 25-year-old Parade resident, member of the Oohenumpa band of Lakota and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal member who petitioned the Dewey County move, believes the bill is racist and unnecessary, since "it's already nearly impossible" to move county seats under current law.

"They're more interested in maintaining the non-Indian oligarchy than representing the people who live here," Petersen said. "The community of Timber Lake does not want to lose to Indians, specifically the county commissioners and its supporters."

Petersen began circulating the petition to move the Dewey County seat to Eagle Butte in March 2022. While he had until November to gain 15% of voter signatures from the last general election, or 518 signatures, he turned in the petitions in July to afford the county more time to get the issue on the ballot, he said. According to a county commission review of the petitions, he submitted fewer than 500 valid signatures.

Petersen wanted to move the county seat to the largest city in the county, which is heavily populated by Native Americans. Eagle Butte has a population of 1,421 while Timber Lake, the county seat, has a

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population of 513.

Four-fifths of the county commission is White, Petersen said. He added that when the county seat was established in 1910, some Native Americans weren't legally allowed to vote.

Moving the county seat would hopefully make involvement at the county level easier for Native Americans, Petersen said. The drive to Timber Lake from Eagle Butte takes about 40 minutes one way.

The move would also serve as a symbol of "Native people taking control of these systems imposed on us," Petersen added.

The changes laid out in SB 56 are restrictive, he said.

"This bill, to me, shows Ryan Maher and his supporters have a very narrow understanding of democracy and they care not what their voters believe but only what is most convenient to them," Petersen said.

Maheer responded that he's willing to adjust the bill.

"I have some things in there that can be negotiated and things that really need to pass," Maheer said. "Because this is a real, true life issue that's affecting the taxpayers of Dewey County."

Maheer denied any racial motivation for the bill and said it's motivated by fiscal concerns.

"Why would the residents of Dewey County force themselves to pay, and I'm just guessing here, \$10 million to build a new courthouse? Why subject themselves to move it 50 miles away for no other reason than location?" Maheer said.

He emphasized that about 40% of Dewey County land is taxable by the county while the rest is tribal land or in trust, so "very few taxpayers" would pay the cost.

Meanwhile, Maheer said Dewey County officials are working to bring a kiosk to Eagle Butte so tribal members can renew their vehicle registration without driving to Timber Lake.

Petersen plans to petition the relocation of the Dewey County seat again.

"They believe Timber Lake would die without this courthouse and they might be right. At least their way of life acting like they don't live on a reservation would die," Petersen said. "It's a legitimate cultural problem. If they don't want to sign a petition, fine. If they don't vote for it, fine. But restricting the ability to get this on the ballot at all is antidemocratic."

SB 56 is awaiting a hearing by the Senate Local Government Committee.

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.

COMMENTARY

Success brings Rounds an opportunity on Wounded Knee medals

SETH TUPPER

JANUARY 13, 2023 3:45 PM

Senator Mike Rounds deserves praise for his recent repeal of laws that discriminated against Native Americans. There's a related issue he should consider next: the medals awarded for the Wounded Knee Massacre.

Rounds, a Republican from South Dakota, has momentum on Native American legislation from the passage of his bill that wiped away 11 egregious and antiquated laws. They included provisions that authorized the federal government to punish "hostile" tribes, to make government benefits contingent on sobriety, and to place Native American children in boarding schools without parental consent.

Rounds first introduced the bill in 2016. He kept introducing it until it gained congressional approval and a presidential signature last month. Rounds said in a news release that the bill's passage was "long overdue."

The same could be said, according to many Native Americans, about a serious re-examination of the Wounded Knee medals.

The massacre occurred on Dec. 29, 1890. About 350 Miniconjou Lakota people – many of them women and children – were concluding a cross-country trek to the Pine Ridge Agency. They camped near Wounded Knee Creek in southwest South Dakota, where a force of nearly 500 U.S. soldiers took positions around them.

The soldiers tried to disarm the camp. According to some accounts, soldiers struggled with a man who refused to give up his gun, and it fired into the sky. Chaotic shooting ensued. Soldiers used rifles and wheel-mounted, rapid-fire artillery guns.

Fewer than 40 soldiers were killed (some by friendly fire, according to historians), while Native American deaths have been estimated at 200 or 300 or more, depending on the source. After some of the Native American bodies froze on the ground for several days, a military-led burial party dumped them into a mass grave.

Historians have revealed how military leaders rushed to assign and then escape blame for the massacre. Gen. Nelson Miles, who was in command of Army departments west of the Mississippi River, criticized the commander on the ground at Wounded Knee, Col. James Forsyth, for unwisely positioning his soldiers and failing to keep them sufficiently separated from Native Americans in the camp.

But Miles' critiques were whitewashed as they moved up the chain of command. Within months after the massacre, the secretary of war began awarding Medals of Honor to soldiers who participated in it. Historians say about 20 Medals of Honor were awarded to soldiers for their actions during the massacre, give or take several additional medals awarded for action during the days immediately following the massacre, and other medals that vaguely mention the 1890-91 "Sioux campaign."

Some of the medal citations praised unspecified "gallantry" and "bravery." Others lauded soldiers for helping wounded comrades. And some heaped honor on a group of soldiers for raining gunfire into a ravine where Native Americans fled.

The rush to cover the event in manufactured glory did nothing to change the underlying facts. One hundred years later, in 1990, Congress passed a resolution that described the incident as a "massacre" and expressed "deep regret" on behalf of the United States.

Yet the Medals of Honor remain.

Several attempts to rescind the medals have failed to gain traction. One possible reason is the conspicuous lack of support and even opposition from the congressional delegation of South Dakota.

If Rounds or either of the state's other two congressional delegates were to support rescinding the medals, they would undoubtedly come under fire from critics accusing them of trying to "rewrite history." But rescinding the medals would do nothing to assign new or greater blame to soldiers who committed atrocities, or soldiers who were perhaps guilty of nothing more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In other words, we may never know exactly how much blame to place on any one person. But that doesn't have to stop us from considering whether anyone deserves a medal for a massacre.

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

U.S. to hit debt limit much sooner than expected, thrusting Congress into showdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 13, 2023 12:45 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government will hit its borrowing limit next week, forcing the new, divided Congress into negotiations over the debt limit much sooner than expected, though a potential date for the nation to default isn't expected until this summer.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen wrote to Congress on Friday afternoon, telling leaders the United States will hit the debt ceiling on Jan. 19, after which she'll use accounting maneuvers, which she called "extraordinary measures," to keep U.S. finances up and running for a few months.

Yellen urged the Republican House and Democratic Senate to get to work on a bipartisan debt limit bill quickly, writing it is "critical that Congress act in a timely manner." The January date is much sooner than the third quarter of this year, the preliminary estimate the Bipartisan Policy Center released last June.

"Failure to meet the government's obligations would cause irreparable harm to the U.S. economy, the livelihoods of all Americans, and global financial stability," Yellen wrote. "Indeed, in the past, even threats that the U.S. government might fail to meet its obligations have caused real harms, including the only credit rating downgrade in the history of our nation in 2011."

Yellen said use of the extraordinary measures should last until early June, though that's not a guarantee. With the country's \$31.385 trillion borrowing limit on track to consume headlines during the coming months, here's a rundown of what you need to know about the debt ceiling as Congress and the world economy head toward another fiscal cliff:

Q: What is the debt limit?

A: It gives the U.S. Treasury Department the ability to borrow money to pay for all the spending that Congress has approved, including the dozen annual government funding bills and mandatory spending programs that essentially run on autopilot, like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Raising the debt limit does not authorize or appropriate new federal spending, but allows Treasury officials to continue paying all the nation's bills in full and on time. The U.S. government has debt because nearly every year the federal government runs a deficit, meaning it spends more than it brings in from taxes and fees.

Q: What are extraordinary measures?

A: Once the U.S. government reaches the debt ceiling, the Treasury Department can use accounting maneuvers to give lawmakers more time to reach bipartisan, bicameral agreement on a debt limit bill. But the moves can add some uncertainty to financial markets the longer they go on, especially as Treasury gets closer to an actual default date.

Extraordinary measures can include "suspensions and delays of some debt sales and auctions, under-investment and disinvestment of certain government funds, and exchange of debt securities for debt not subject to the debt limit," according to a Congressional Research Service report.

Q: What does Congress have to do with the debt limit?

A: Whenever the federal government approaches the debt limit, Congress must pass new legislation to allow the U.S. Treasury Department to continue borrowing to meet all the country's financial obligations.

Lawmakers can do this by either raising the debt limit to a new dollar amount or suspending the debt ceiling through a set date.

Q: Has the United States ever defaulted on the debt?

A: The country has never defaulted on its debts.

There were some lapses in the 1970s that left the amount of debt above its limit, but those didn't result in any missed payments that would constitute a default.

Q: What would happen to the federal government if the country were to go past the so-called X-date, or default date?

A: The United States defaulting on its debts would mean that the U.S. Treasury Department no longer

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had borrowing authority or extraordinary measures to pay all the country's bills in full and on time.

The Treasury secretary, currently Yellen, would need to limit payments from the federal government to the amount of money on hand on any given day or week. Depending on what programs, departments or agencies were prioritized, that could mean lapses in Social Security payments or delayed Medicare reimbursements. Members of the U.S. military and other federal employees could go without paychecks, and veterans could be shorted on their health care and benefits.

Q: What would happen to the economy if the country were to go past the X-date?

A: Moody's Analytics Chief Economist Mark Zandi and Assistant Director Bernard Yaros wrote in a September 2021 report that came out during the last round of debt limit brinkmanship that, "Global financial markets and the economy would be upended, and even if resolved quickly, Americans would pay for this default for generations, as global investors would rightly believe that the federal government's finances have been politicized and that a time may come when they would not be paid what they are owed when owed it."

"To compensate for this risk, they will demand higher interest rates on the Treasury bonds they purchase," they added. "That will exacerbate our daunting long-term fiscal challenges and be a lasting corrosive (effect) on the economy, significantly diminishing it."

Q: What's the difference between a partial government shutdown and a debt limit default?

A: The federal government begins a funding lapse or a partial government shutdown when Congress fails to pass all 12 government spending bills or a stopgap spending bill by the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1 or a subsequent deadline.

Exempt government employees continue going to work without paychecks and non-exempt federal employees are sent home without pay until Congress passes a new spending bill. Partial government shutdowns have a negative impact on federal government operations, like national parks closing, but not nearly the impact a default on the debt would have.

Partial government shutdowns are called that — partial — because the U.S. military and national security personnel continue operations, staff continue feeding the animals at the Smithsonian Zoo in Washington, D.C., and Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid operations mostly go interrupted.

Q: How were debt limit deals worked out during the Trump and Biden administrations?

A: Congress and the Trump administration brokered debt limit agreements three times during his four years in office. There has been one debt limit bill so far during the Biden administration.

In September 2017, the White House and Congress agreed to suspend the debt limit through Dec. 8 in a package that included natural disaster relief and a stopgap government funding bill. The Senate approved the measure in an 80-17 vote and the House sent it to Trump following a 316-90 vote. Republican Reps. Kevin McCarthy, who is now the speaker of the House, and Elise M. Stefanik, now chair of the House Republican Conference, voted for the measure. Louisiana's Steve Scalise, now majority leader, didn't vote.

In February 2018, Congress and the Trump administration reached a bipartisan budget agreement to suspend the debt limit through March 1, 2019, and increase spending caps set under a 2011 law by \$293 billion during fiscal 2018 and 2019. The Senate voted 71-28 and the House voted 240-186 to send Trump the measure. McCarthy, Scalise and Stefanik all voted for the bill.

In July 2019, Congress and the Trump administration brokered another bipartisan budget agreement that raised the spending caps set by a 2011 deficit reduction law and suspended the debt limit through July 31, 2021. The House voted 284-149 and the Senate voted 67-28 to send Trump the package. McCarthy, Scalise and Stefanik all voted for the bill.

In December 2021, following months of partisan fighting over the debt limit, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, brokered an agreement where Republicans would provide the votes needed to get past the chamber's 60-vote legislative filibuster on a debt limit bill, but not actually help Democrats to pass the bill.

The legislation, raising the debt limit by \$2.5 trillion, passed the Senate following a 50-49 vote and the

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House following a 221-209 vote. Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger was the sole Republican in Congress to vote for the measure.

Q: What agreements on the debt limit did McCarthy make in order to secure the votes needed to hold the gavel?

A: The California Republican reportedly agreed that U.S. House Republicans wouldn't agree to raise or suspend the debt limit without a budget agreement or "commensurate fiscal reforms." McCarthy and his office have declined to make the various agreements with conservative lawmakers public.

Q: When is this year's debt limit deadline?

A: The country will reach the debt limit on Jan. 19 at which point the Treasury Department will begin using extraordinary measures, according to the letter Yellen sent to Congress on Friday.

"The period of time that extraordinary measures may last is subject to considerable uncertainty due to a variety of factors, including the challenges of forecasting the payments and receipts of the U.S. government months into the future," Yellen wrote. "While Treasury is not currently able to provide an estimate of how long extraordinary measures will enable us to continue to pay the government's obligations, it is unlikely that cash and extraordinary measures will be exhausted before early June."

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.

U.S. House GOP would make it easier for feds to give public lands away to states

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JANUARY 13, 2023 3:38 PM

U.S. House Republicans included in the new rules for the chamber they passed this month a provision meant to make it easier for Congress to give away public lands.

The provision is a fairly technical piece of the 55-page rules package. It affects internal House accounting and requires that anytime Congress were to give any federal lands to a state, municipality or tribe, it would not be counted as a loss to the federal budget. House Republicans had an identical rule when they controlled the chamber from 2017 to 2019.

Advocates and critics agree the measure would be helpful to any effort by the House to transfer federal lands to states.

But they disagree about the wisdom of such giveaways.

Republicans and conservative groups see states as preferable stewards of most public lands. Those closest to the land are in a better position to make decisions on how to manage them than those in Washington bureaucracies, they say.

Environmental groups and Democrats see federal divestment as a step toward restricting access to places to which all Americans should have a claim. States couldn't afford to protect public lands, which would lead them to sell to private companies, they say.

Republicans "want to make it easier to cheat American taxpayers and give away our public lands for nothing in return," House Natural Resources ranking Democrat Raul Grijalva, of Arizona, said in a written statement.

"They're ordering Congress's accountants to cook the books for them. This is not good economic or environmental policy. This is Republicans doing the bidding of anti-public lands extremists."

Rebekah Hoshinko, a spokeswoman for new House Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman, a Republican from Arkansas, said Grijalva misrepresented the rule change, which would only apply to transfers to states, local governments and tribes — not the private sector.

"Republicans are committed to ensuring federal land management best reflects the needs of the local people closest to these lands," she wrote in an email. "This provision is not a giveaway to private industry like Mr. Grijalva is claiming."

The rule would apply to any land owned by the federal government, almost all of which is in 11 Western

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states and Alaska. In practice, it would likely be pertinent mostly to undeveloped tracts.

Accounting dispute

The two sides disagree about the accounting merits of the rule change.

Environmental groups and some Democrats say federal lands do have real value. The federal government could make money from leasing energy or mineral rights, or from selling the land. Giving land away is not neutral to the budget.

"You are giving up any potential revenue, whether it's from entry fees, usage fees, or from natural resources if there were rights there," said Aaron Weiss, the deputy director of the public lands group Center for Western Priorities. "That's money that would have gone to taxpayers."

Groups that favor less federal involvement in public lands, though, say any value tied to potential extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas or logging is overstated by a federal government that limits such activities.

"It's kind of a false cost," said David McDonald, an attorney with the Mountain States Legal Foundation, a group that litigates on behalf of private property interests. "This is more of an honest accounting."

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, which is not bound by House Republican rules, would still have a final score of any legislation to convey federal lands. The Senate is also not bound to use the same accounting rules.

But the House rules are still important because they could make giving away those valuable lands more palatable to a Republican majority that wants to protect an image of fiscal responsibility, critics of the provision say.

"The internal rules would let Republican members of the House say, 'This bill is revenue neutral,'" Weiss said. "It lets them just wave their hands away the fiscal cost. So a party that pretends to care about fiscal responsibility is abdicating that fiscal responsibility."

Supporters of the measure agree that it would make it easier for Congress to divest public lands, but they say that's a good thing.

Karla Jones, a senior director for federalism at the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council, said in an email that the federal government should seek opportunities for more local control of federal lands.

Policies that facilitate the transfer of federal land — excluding national parks, monuments, wilderness areas and military installments — to the states "will ensure that territory is managed by those who have the greatest interest in its preservation and condition and the best understanding of how to care for it," Jones wrote. "The states are the optimal environmental and economic stewards of the lands within their borders."

How could states pay for maintenance?

But states may also be hard-pressed to afford formerly federal lands.

"The biggest problem is the cost of maintaining public lands," Nicole Gentile, the senior director for public lands at the liberal Center for American Progress, said. "Fighting wildfire alone would bankrupt a lot of states."

If states can't afford new acquisitions, they'd look to sell, likely to oil and gas or other industries that covet spaces in the West, the location of most federally owned land. So, while the rule change only applies to transfers of federal land to other governments, it could quickly result in privatization that could block access to regular users, opponents of the provision say.

Advocates of relinquishing federal lands say pushing the costs to states would be a good thing.

The provision "will ensure that the House can process legislation that will actually benefit the federal government by reducing maintenance costs and increasing tax revenues," Hoshinko said.

Even if the states don't end up having to sell newly acquired lands, public access could become an issue.

Access to federal lands is stronger than in many state trust lands.

According to a 2017 analysis by the Center for Western Priorities, Montana had the highest score of eight Mountain West states rated for access to public lands.

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Idaho, New Mexico and Nevada were rated "average."

Arizona "needs improvement," according to the analysis. Colorado had the most restrictive access laws but scored well for having strong dedicated funding for conservation and wildlife management.

Ratings today would be similar to the six-year-old study, Weiss said.

No rush of land transfers

The rule's return is significant because it shows the new Republican House majority is aligned with the industries that stand to benefit from a divestment of federal lands, Gentile said.

"The reason it's important to shine a light on is the question of, which interests are they actually looking out for?" she said.

House Republicans and their allies dispute that the measure is primarily intended to enrich industry. Allowing private landowners to manage pieces of land, though, would be more beneficial, McDonald said.

Rather than setting land aside for those who can afford to take a long backpacking trip, the areas could be used for ranchers or oil and gas interests to earn a livelihood, he said.

"It's the democratizing of federal land," he said.

The rules change is perhaps unlikely to result in a federal lands giveaway to states anytime soon.

It would only apply to internal House bookkeeping. The Congressional Budget Office would still weigh in on any bill with a budget impact and the Democratic Senate and Biden White House would be unlikely to rubber stamp House Republican calculations.

The last time the rule was in effect, when Republicans held the House, Senate and White House in the first half of the Trump administration, the only major bill to transfer federal land to states went nowhere.

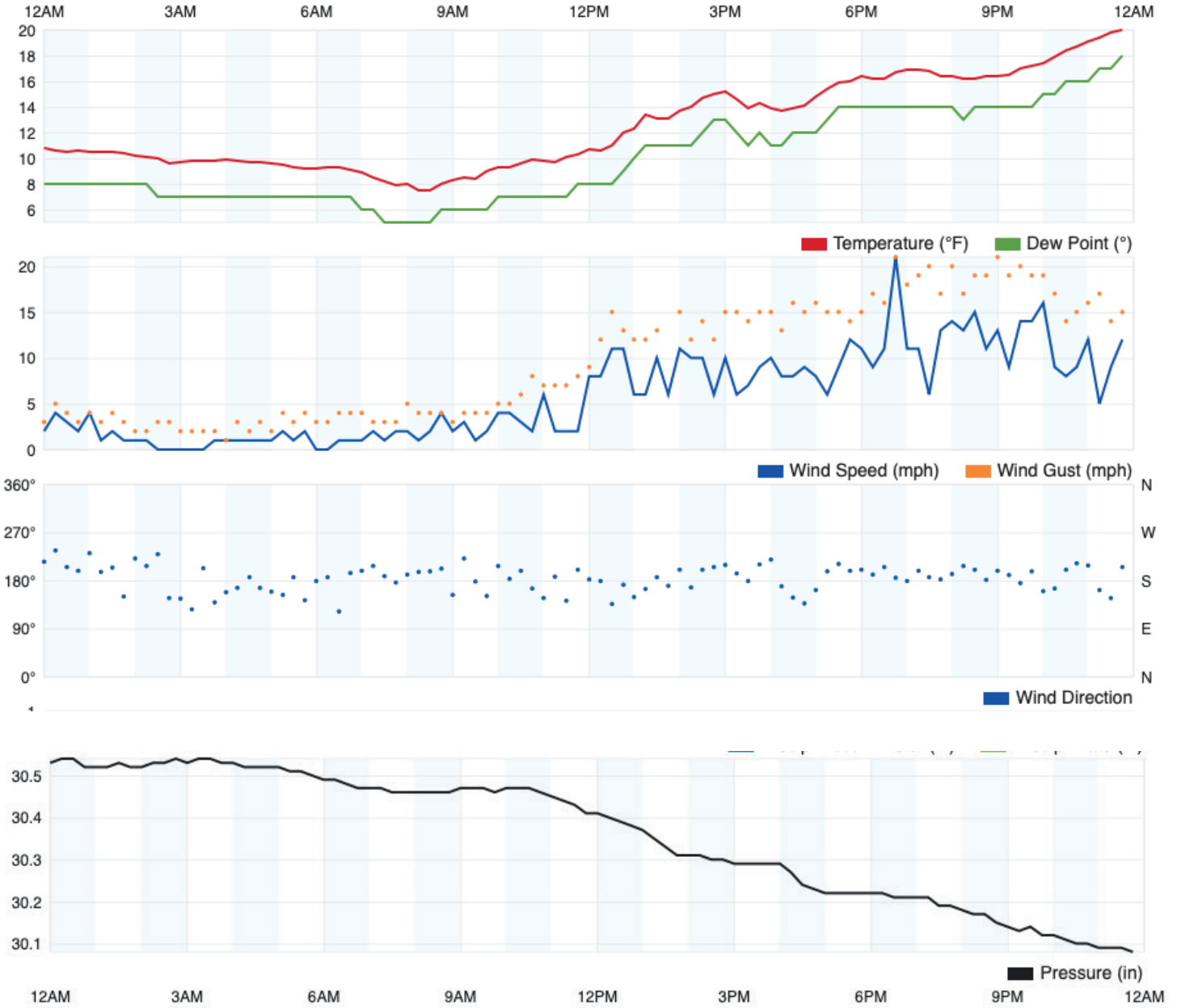
Then-Oversight Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz of Utah pushed a bill to give away 3 million acres of federal land in Utah, but ultimately withdrew it under public pressure.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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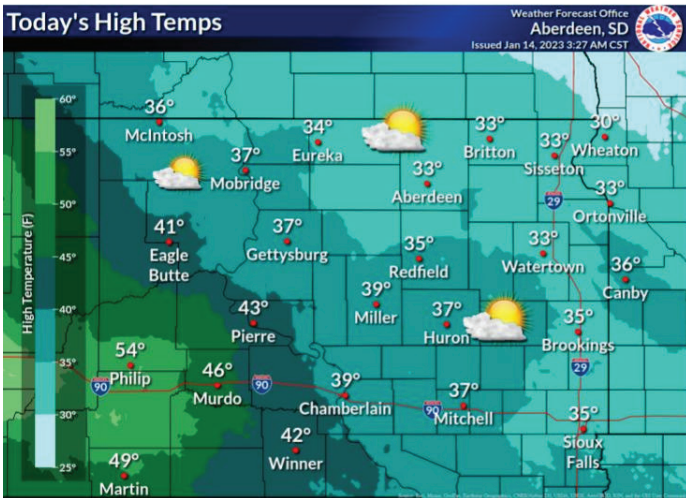
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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	M.L.King Day	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Patchy Fog then Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Snow Likely	Chance Snow then Cloudy	Cloudy
High: 33 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 31 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 30 °F	Low: 18 °F	High: 23 °F

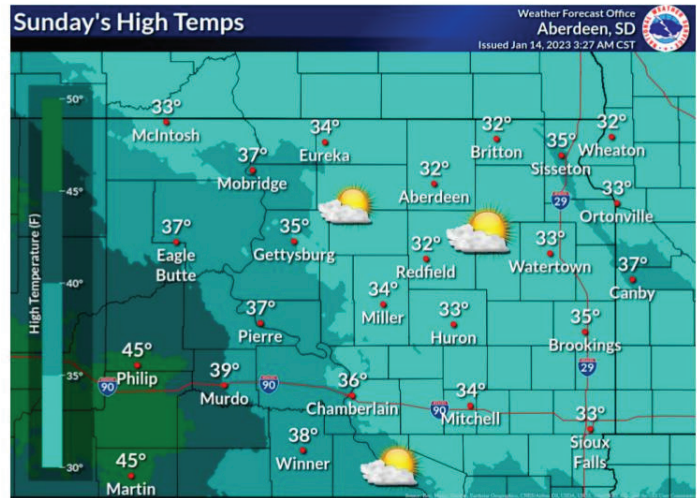


Above Average Temperatures For The Weekend

January 14, 2023
4:32 AM



DRY



DRY



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Some patchy fog out there this morning, otherwise a blend of clouds and sun for today and Sunday. Above average temperatures expected so hopefully we can melt down some of this snow! Gusty downsloping winds, on the eastern side of the Coteau, will occur late tonight through the overnight. where drifting snow is possible.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 11:52 PM

Low Temp: 7 °F at 8:14 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 8:19 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 08 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 50 in 1901

Record Low: -36 in 1916

Average High: 23°F

Average Low: 2°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.28

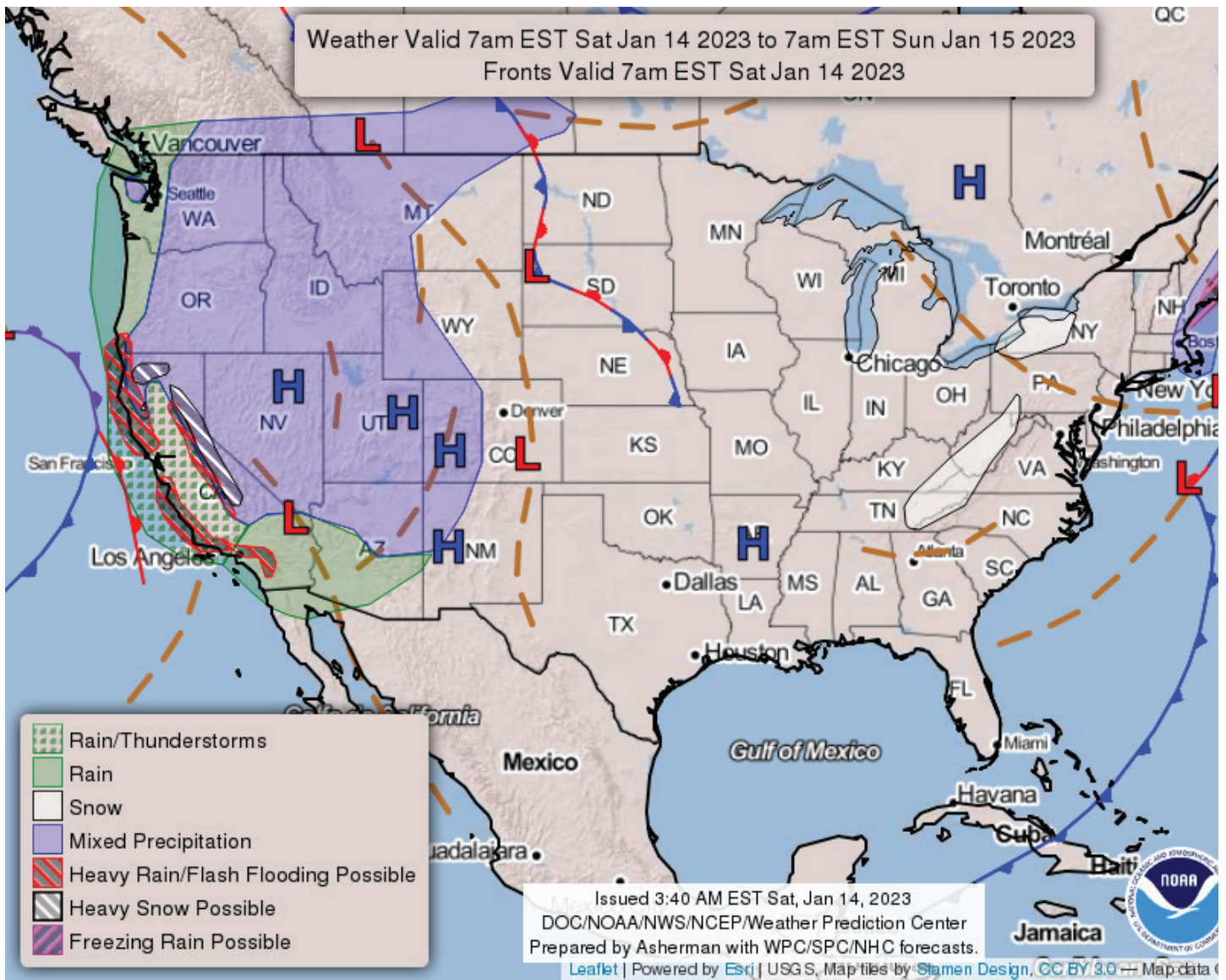
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.28

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:15:42 PM

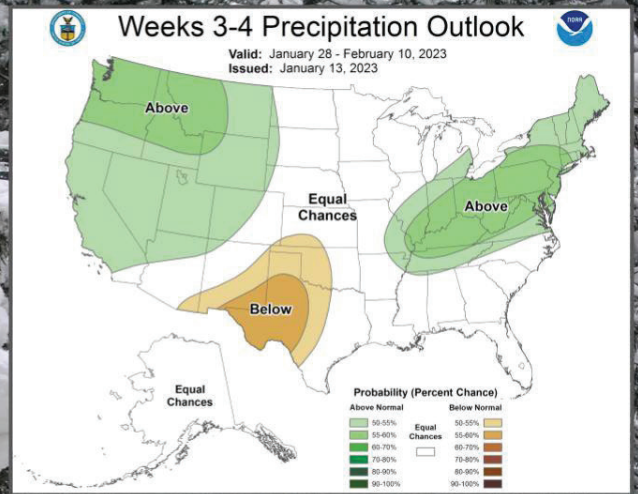
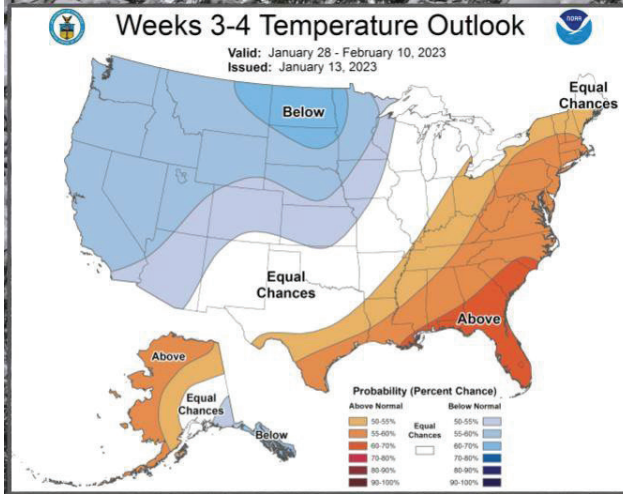
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06:39 AM



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3 - 4 Week Outlook



Precipitation

Temperature

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

There are hints of a transition back to colder than normal temperatures later this month into February. Precipitation chances are generally equal and will largely depend on how much northwest flow sets up across the region. Enjoy the warmer temperatures while you can!

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Today in Weather History

January 14, 1916: Record cold continued on this date in weather history in 1916 across central and north-east South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Aberdeen, Kennebec, Mobridge, Timber Lake, Watertown, and Wheaton all set record lows. The record lows were 24 degrees below zero at Kennebec, 28 degrees below zero at Wheaton, 31 degrees below zero at Timber Lake, 35 degrees below zero at Mobridge, 36 degrees below zero at Aberdeen, and 38 degrees below zero at Watertown.

1863 - The greatest snowstorm of record for Cincinnati OH commenced, and a day later twenty inches of snow covered the ground. That total has remained far above the modern day record for Cincinnati of eleven inches of snow in one storm. (David Ludlum)

1882: Snow fell in southern California, with the highest amount of 15 inches at San Bernardino. Three feet of snow fell in Campo over four days and produced 8-foot drifts in spots. Two to five inches fell in outlying San Diego, including four inches along Poway Grade, 3 inches at El Cajon, and one inch in Poway. Five inches fell in Riverside. Light snow fell in Del Mar. Snowflakes fell but did not stick at San Diego Lindbergh Field. Birds and livestock were killed, telegraph lines were knocked down, and citrus crops were damaged.

1882 - Southern California's greatest snow occurred on this date. Fifteen inches blanketed San Bernardino, and even San Diego reported a trace of snow. (David Ludlum)

1972: In Loma, Montana, the temperature soared from 54 degrees below zero to 49 degrees above zero on January 14-15, 1972. The 103-degree change is the greatest ever recorded in the world for a 24 hour period.

1979 - Chicago, IL, was in the midst of their second heaviest snow of record as, in thirty hours, the city was buried under 20.7 inches of snow. The twenty-nine inch snow cover following the storm was an all-time record for Chicago. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Arctic cold invaded the north central U.S. By evening blustery northwest winds and temperatures near zero at Grand Forks ND were producing wind chill readings of 50 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful Pacific storm produced rain and high winds in the western U.S. In Nevada, a wind gust to 90 mph at Reno was an all-time record for that location, and wind gusts reached 106 mph southwest of Reno. A wind gust to 94 mph was recorded at nearby Windy Hill. Rainfall totals in Oregon ranged up to six inches at Wilson River. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A winter storm spread snow and sleet and freezing rain from the Middle Mississippi Valley to the northeastern U.S. Freezing rain in West Virginia caused fifteen traffic accidents in just a few minutes west of Charleston. Tennessee was deluged with up to 7.5 inches of rain. Two inches of rain near Clarksville TN left water in the streets as high as car doors.

1990 - A winter storm in the southwestern U.S. blanketed the mountains of southwest Utah with 18 to 24 inches of snow, while sunshine and strong southerly winds helped temperatures warm into the 60s in the Central Plains Region. Five cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including North Platte NE with a reading of 63 degrees. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2009: In Washington State, freezing fog and freezing drizzle enveloped much of the Inland Northwest during 13-23 January 2009. The area most affected by this was the high plateau region along Highway 2 between Wenatchee and Spokane.

2016: Hurricane Alex became the first January hurricane in the Atlantic since Hurricane Alice in 1955.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Sad to say, some Christians take great pleasure in doing the work of God. They establish themselves as judge, jury, and executioner. Finding a verse of Scripture that supports their need to condemn others, they often take it out of context, violate the meaning God instilled in its correct interpretation, and use their personal interpretation of it to embarrass and harass others.

Perhaps no other verse has been more misaligned than Solomon's admonishment to parents: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." Is this verse a guarantee or a guide?

Some scholars believe that to "train a child" begins with the parents dedicating the child to God. This may have come from a formal or informal ceremony in the life of the family when a child and the parenting of the child were absolutely consecrated to the Lord. The "training" of the child was to be God-centered and God-honoring and would develop the skills and talents that God gave the child to love, worship, honor, and serve the Lord. The child was to be trained not only intellectually but by the words and behavior of the parents. They were to be examples of who the child was to become, and what the child could do with their lives by encouraging the child to find God's will and way for their life! Children are to be taught that "humility and fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" and, if followed, will lead to a life of honor and success that pleases God.

But what if parents follow this plan and the child turns from God? We come back to the fact that parents are responsible to do as God commands. Parents must be obedient and faithful to God and live consistent Christ-filled lives. If children see that "it" works for their parents, they will understand that it will work for them. If parents do their part, God will do His.

Prayer: Enable us who are parents, Lord, to be loving, understanding, worshipping, consistent, obedient, and humble examples of Your Son. Then, all will be well! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6



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

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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:
01.13.23

30 43 45 46 61 14

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[GAME DETAILS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

5 23 45 46 51 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$34,120,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 41 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.13.23

3 17 21 24 44 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 30 Mins
40 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

6 12 18 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 40
Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

1 3 11 44 62 6

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 59 Mins 41
Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

4 8 46 47 48 5

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$404,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 59 Mins 41
Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 81, Potter County 36
Belle Fourche 57, Redfield 54
Brandon Valley 57, Spearfish 33
Bridgewater-Emery 58, Chamberlain 44
Campbell County, Wyo. 58, Rapid City Stevens 52
Clark/Willow Lake 60, Deuel 40
Colman-Egan 66, Garretson 58
Dell Rapids 77, Baltic 40
Elk Point-Jefferson 54, Ponca, Neb. 46
Estelline/Hendricks 58, Deubrook 54
Ethan 45, Canistota 43
Faith 65, Upton, Wyo. 44
Freeman Academy/Marion 66, Flandreau Indian 43
Gregory 58, Burke 40
Hamlin 70, Webster 31
Harrisburg 57, Douglas 40
Herreid/Selby Area 63, Faulkton 55
Hot Springs 57, Moorcroft, Wyo. 21
Ipswich 56, Wilmot 33
Kimball/White Lake 57, Corsica/Stickney 38
Lakota Tech 71, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 32
Leola/Frederick 56, Oakes, N.D. 45
Madison 64, Flandreau 34
Mitchell 69, Brookings 31
New Underwood 69, Newell 28
Oelrichs 46, Edgemont 32
Rapid City Central 60, Sturgis Brown 55
Red Cloud 70, Custer 57
Sioux Falls Jefferson 65, Sioux Falls Washington 56
Sioux Falls Lincoln 83, Huron 48
Sioux Valley 74, McCook Central/Montrose 37
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 62, Platte-Geddes 48
Waubay/Summit 79, Tri-State, N.D. 35
Yankton 59, Watertown 43
Jones County Tournament=
Kadoka Area 35, Stanley County 26
Lyman 73, Bennett County 43
Philip 57, Jones County 48
White River 59, Colome 40

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

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

EXPLAINER: What came together to make deadly Alabama tornado

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

DENVER (AP) — A La Nina weather pattern, warm moist air coming from an unusually toasty Gulf of Mexico, likely juiced by climate change, and a decades long eastward shift of tornadoes came together to create the unusually early and deadly storm system that hit Alabama Thursday, meteorologists said.

And it may be the start of a bad tornado year, one expert worries.

Early signals, which could change, "indicate the overall pattern remains favorable for an above average tornadic year," said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini, who studies tornado patterns.

Gensini said his concern is mostly based on historic patterns and changes in atmospheric conditions that happen when a La Nina, which is a natural cooling of parts of the Pacific that changes weather worldwide, dissipates like it is forecast to do in a few months.

A NEEDED COMBINATION

For tornadoes to form, two big ingredients are needed that often aren't at high enough levels at the same time: wet stormy instability and wind shear, which is a difference in wind speeds and directions at different altitudes.

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At this time of year, "shear is a guarantee," said Harold Brooks, a senior scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Severe Storms Laboratory. "What happens is when you get moisture you can have a (storm) system. That is the ingredient that is usually missing this time of year."

The cold front was following a classic waviness in the jet stream — the atmospheric rivers that move weather systems — seen in La Nina winters, Gensini said. La Nina winters tend to produce more tornadoes and NOAA this week said preliminary numbers show 1,331 tornadoes in 2022, which was a La Nina year, 9% more than average.

"If you're going to get tornadoes in January, this is the type of setup that's going to produce them," Gensini said.

Still without moisture there are no tornadoes.

WARM MOIST AIR

Measurements of moisture in the Alabama air were about twice as high as they should be this time of year and more like May in Tornado Alley, an area stretching from Texas to South Dakota known for being prone to twisters, Gensini said. That's more than enough for a tornado.

The warm moist air is from the Gulf of Mexico and he said, "that's a climate change signal."

Gensini pointed to NOAA measurements of water temperature throughout the Gulf on a computer screen and said: "Look at that number. 70 (21 degrees Celsius). 70. 70. That is ridiculous. That's way above average" for this time of year. That nearby warm water juiced up the air.

"This is very much a La Nina type of system that you'd expect but is being augmented by abnormally warm Gulf of Mexico sea surface temperatures," Gensini said.

The warm humid air hits the cold front and goes up like a ramp and the mixing that creates tornadoes begin, Gensini said.

TORNADOES HITTING EAST

Over the past few decades, a new pattern of tornado activity has emerged.

There are fewer tornadoes in Tornado Alley and more of them east of the Mississippi River in the Southeast, a 2018 study by Gensini and Brooks found.

Tornado activity is increasing most in Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Alabama, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa and parts of Ohio and Michigan. The biggest drop in number of tornadoes is in Texas, but even with the decline, Texas still gets the most tornadoes of any state.

Gensini said his lab is working this summer to try to figure out why that is.

MORE VULNERABILITY

A nasty side effect of tornadoes moving further east is that they are moving from less populated areas to more crowded ones, Brooks and Gensini said.

In Tornado Alley, a tornado can go for miles and miles and not hit anything and anyone and thus not be an issue, Brooks said. But that's not really the case in the East. People and buildings are in the way.

And the people in the way are more vulnerable.

"There's more poverty in the Southeast, there's a greater mobile home population" which is one of the most dangerous places to be in a tornado, Brooks said.

Also because of storm tracks, or the routes storms follow due to wind and weather conditions, the further east tornadoes hit, the more likely they are to hit later in the day and even at night, when people are sleeping or not listening for warnings, Gensini said.

Iran hangs former defense ministry official over spy claim

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran said Saturday it executed a former high-ranking defense ministry official and dual Iranian-British national, despite international warnings not to carry out the death sentence. The execution further escalated tensions with the West amid the nationwide anti-government protests shaking the Islamic Republic.

The hanging of Ali Reza Akbari, a close ally of top security official Ali Shamkhani, suggests an ongoing

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power struggle within Iran's theocracy as it tries to contain the demonstrations over the September death of Mahsa Amini. It also harkened back to the mass purges of the military that immediately followed Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Akbari's hanging drew immediate anger from London, which along with the U.S. and others has sanctioned Iran over the protests and its supplying Russia with the bomb-carrying drones now targeting Ukraine.

"This was a callous and cowardly act, carried out by a barbaric regime with no respect for the human rights of their own people," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly summoned Iran's chargé d'affaires in the United Kingdom and separately warned: "This will not stand unchallenged."

Iran similarly summoned the British ambassador after the execution.

Iran's Mizan news agency, associated with the country's judiciary, announced Akbari's hanging without saying when it happened. However, there were rumors he had been executed days earlier.

Iran has alleged, without providing evidence, that Akbari served as a source for Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, known popularly as MI6. A lengthy statement issued by Iran's judiciary claimed Akbari received large sums of money, his British citizenship and other help in London for providing information to the intelligence service.

However, Iran long has accused those who travel abroad or have Western ties of spying, often using them as bargaining chips in negotiations.

Akbari, who ran a private think tank, is believed to have been arrested in 2019, but details of his case only emerged in recent weeks. Those accused of espionage and other crimes related to national security are usually tried behind closed doors, where rights groups say they do not choose their own lawyers and are not allowed to see evidence against them.

Iranian state television aired a highly edited video of Akbari discussing the allegations, footage that resembled other claimed confessions that activists have described as coerced confessions.

The BBC Farsi-language service aired an audio message from Akbari on Wednesday, in which he described being tortured.

"By using physiological and psychological methods, they broke my will, drove me to madness and forced me to do whatever they wanted," Akbari said in the audio. "By the force of gun and death threats they made me confess to false and corrupt claims."

Iran has not commented on the torture claims. However, the United Nations human rights chief has warned Iran against the "weaponization" of the death penalty as a means to put down the protests.

On Friday, State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel also criticized Akbari's pending execution.

"The charges against Ali Reza Akbari and his sentencing to execution were politically motivated. His execution would be unconscionable," he said. "We are greatly disturbed by the reports that Mr. Akbari was drugged, tortured while in custody, interrogated for thousands of hours, and forced to make false confessions."

He added: "More broadly, Iran's practices of arbitrary and unjust detentions, forced confessions and politically motivated executions are completely unacceptable and must end."

Iran is one of the world's top executioners. However, it wasn't immediately clear when the last time of a former or current high-ranking defense official had been executed. In 1984, Iran executed its navy chief Adm. Baharam Afzali along with nine other military people on a charge of spying for the Soviet Union.

Iran's government for months has been trying to allege — without offering evidence — that foreign countries have fomented the unrest gripping the Islamic Republic since the death of 22-year-old Amini in September after her detention by the morality police. Protesters say they are angry over the collapse of the economy, heavy-handed policing and the entrenched power of the country's Islamic clergy.

For several years, Iran has been locked in a shadow war with the United States and Israel, marked by covert attacks on its disputed nuclear program. The killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist in 2020, which Iran blamed on Israel, indicated foreign intelligence services had made major inroads. Iran mentioned that scientist in discussing Akbari's case, though it's unclear what current information, if any, he would

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have had on him.

Akbari had previously led the implementation of a 1988 cease-fire between Iran and Iraq following their devastating eight-year war, working closely with U.N. observers. He served as a deputy defense minister under Shamkhani during reformist President Mohammad Khatami's administration, likely further making his credentials suspicious to hard-liners within Iran's theocracy.

Today, Shamkhani is the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, the country's top security body which Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei oversees. Akbari's audio message aired by the BBC Persian included him saying he was accused of obtaining top-secret information from Shamkhani "in exchange for a bottle of perfume and a shirt." However, it appears Shamkhani remains in his role.

The anti-government protests now shaking Iran are one of the biggest challenges to the Islamic Republic since the 1979 revolution.

At least 520 protesters have been killed and 19,400 people have been arrested, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that has been monitoring the unrest. Iranian authorities have not provided official figures on deaths or arrests.

Iran has executed four people after convicting them of charges linked to the protests in similarly criticized trials, including attacks on security forces.

UK to supply tanks to Ukraine as Russian missiles hit Kyiv

By SYLVIA HUI and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Saturday promised to provide tanks and artillery systems to Ukraine, amid renewed missile attacks by Moscow targeting the Ukrainian capital and other cities in the nearly year-long war.

Sunak made the pledge to provide Challenger 2 tanks and other artillery systems after speaking to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday, the British leader's Downing Street office said in a statement.

It didn't say when the tanks would be delivered or how many. British media have reported that four British Army Challenger 2 main battle tanks will be sent to Eastern Europe immediately, with eight more to follow shortly after, without citing sources.

Zelenskyy tweeted his thanks to Sunak on Saturday "for the decisions that will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal to other partners."

Ukraine has for months sought to be supplied with heavier tanks, including the U.S. Abrams and the German Leopard 2 tanks, but Western leaders have been treading carefully.

The Czech Republic and Poland have provided Soviet-era T-72 tanks to Ukrainian forces. Poland has also expressed readiness to provide a company of Leopard tanks, but President Andrzej Duda stressed during his recent visit to the Ukrainian city of Lviv that the move would be possible only as an element in a larger international coalition of tank aid to Kyiv.

Earlier this month, France said it would send AMX-10 RC armored combat vehicles to Ukraine, designated "light tanks" in French. The U.S. and Germany announced the same week that they would send Bradley fighting vehicles and Marder armored personnel carriers, respectively, for the first time.

Sunak's announcement came as air raid sirens sounded across Ukraine in the anticipation of further attacks, and regional officials urged local residents not to ignore alarms and seek shelter.

Air defense systems were activated on Saturday afternoon in the southern Mykolaiv region, Gov. Vitali Kim said on Telegram and hinted that some missiles have already been intercepted.

Ukraine's Operational Command South reported that five Russian missile carriers were spotted in the Black Sea on Saturday afternoon, capable of launching a total of 36 Kalibr cruise missiles.

In the morning, a series of explosions rocked Kyiv. An infrastructure target was hit in what Ukrainian officials said was a missile attack.

Explosions were heard in the Dniprovskiy district, a residential area on the left bank of the Dnieper River, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. Klitschko also said that fragments of a missile fell on a nonresidential area

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in the Hosiivskiy district on the right bank, and a fire briefly broke out in a building there. No casualties have been reported so far.

It wasn't immediately clear whether several facilities in Kyiv were targeted or just the one that was reported hit. The Ukrainian capital hasn't been attacked by missiles since Jan. 1.

In the outlying Kyiv region, a residential building in the village of Kopyliv was hit, and windows of the houses nearby were blown out, Tymoshenko said.

A total of 18 private houses were damaged in the region, according to regional Gov. Oleksii Kuleba. "There are damaged roofs and windows," but no casualties, Kuleba said in a Telegram post. He added that a fire has been contained at a "critical infrastructure facility" in the region.

Earlier on Saturday, two Russian missiles hit Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, the governor of the Kharkiv region reported.

Oleh Syniehubov said Russian forces fired two S-300 missiles at the industrial district of Kharkiv. The strikes targeted "energy and industrial objects of Kharkiv and the (outlying) region," Syniehubov said. No casualties have been reported, but emergency power cuts in the city and other settlements of the region were possible, the official said.

The attacks follow conflicting reports on the fate of the fiercely contested salt mining town of Soledar, in Ukraine's embattled east. Russia claims that its forces have captured the town, a development that would mark a rare victory for the Kremlin after a series of humiliating setbacks on the battlefield.

Ukrainian authorities and Zelenskyy insist the fight for Soledar continues.

Moscow has painted the battle for the town and the nearby city of Bakhmut as key to capturing the eastern region of the Donbas, which comprises of partially occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and as a way to grind down the best Ukrainian forces and prevent them from launching counterattacks elsewhere.

But that cuts both ways, as Ukraine says its fierce defense of the eastern strongholds has helped tie up Russian forces. Western officials and analysts say the two towns' importance is more symbolic than strategic.

Analysis: Documents probe dents Biden's claims to competence

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden offered himself to Americans as a president they wouldn't have to think about after the tumult of his predecessor. But an excruciating week of awkward disclosures and the appointment of a special counsel to investigate classified records found at his Delaware home and a former office dating to his time as vice president is beginning to strain his claim to competence.

The surprise revelations that on three different occasions Biden's lawyers found improperly stored classified documents and official records evoked the turmoil surrounding Donald Trump's presidency, a four-year ruckus from which Biden has tried to move the country past.

It's an embarrassment to Biden, and the selection of a special counsel to investigate potential criminal wrongdoing in the matter exposes the president to a new, self-inflicted risk.

Further, it complicates the Justice Department's calculus about whether to bring charges against Trump over his handling of classified material, hands fresh ammunition to newly empowered House Republicans eager to launch investigations and undercuts a central plank of Biden's pitch to voters just as he looks to launch a reelection bid in the coming months.

"It just won't be so exhausting," former President Barack Obama had promised about a Biden presidency in the closing days of the 2020 campaign, adding that voters are "not going to have to think about the crazy things ... and that is worth a lot."

The Biden case is markedly different from Trump's mishandling of classified documents and official records — not least because Biden's team voluntarily turned them over to federal officials when they were discovered. Still, it has caused private frustration among Biden allies and some advisers because the president and his team, as billed, were supposed to be better than this.

The current White House explanation, offered by lawyer Richard Sauber, is that the special counsel's inquiry "will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced" — a "mistake" with the nation's

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secrets.

Biden seemingly ignored or forgot about a cardinal rule in politics: Check your closet for skeletons before you complain about someone else's. His public criticisms about Trump's "irresponsible" handling of classified documents, however different the circumstances, are now coming back to haunt him.

Biden allies say the packing up of his vice presidential office happened swiftly. Biden aimed to run through the tape on his eight years alongside Obama even as aides worked to close down his office before Trump's inauguration at noon on Jan. 20, 2017.

But that explanation, said Richard Painter, the top ethics official in the George W. Bush administration, suggests behavior that was "incredibly careless and really quite shocking."

Painter said that while Biden probably would avoid the criminal issues looming over Trump because there is so far no sense that Biden intentionally mishandled classified records, it still merited investigation.

"You never just pack stuff up and cart it out of there," Painter said. He said aides and lawyers are supposed to carefully sift through what are official records that are property of the National Archives and personal records that may be removed.

"To say nothing of classified documents which have these distinctive markings on them," Painter said. "It's still very worrisome. It's a serious national security breach."

Beyond all that, the piecemeal way that word of the discoveries became public — more than two months after the first batch of classified documents had been found at the Penn Biden Center in Washington — has drawn bewilderment from crisis management experts.

"The White House can't let itself be seen as hiding information or be bled to death by investigators' or others' leaks," said Adam Goldberg, who served as special associate counsel to President Bill Clinton from 1996-1999.

It wasn't until Monday that the White House confirmed that classified documents had been found at Biden's former office on Nov. 2, days before the midterm elections. Even then, that acknowledgement came only in response to news inquiries.

Not until Thursday did Biden lawyers acknowledge the Dec. 20 discovery of documents in the garage of Biden's house in Wilmington, Delaware, and inform the Justice Department that another classified record had been found the night before in Biden's home library.

"If there's any further bad news out there, they better be the ones to put it out and put it out all at once," Goldberg said.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday that Americans can "assume" there are no more classified documents or government records improperly stored after Biden's personal lawyers conducted a final search that concluded on Wednesday evening.

She repeatedly deflected questions about the White House's public disclosures, insisting the president's team was handling the matter the "right way" by deferring to the Justice Department.

If Biden's White House needs to get its messaging back on track after a week of missteps and unforced errors, Trump's issues go well beyond mere competence.

"On the political front, assuming the White House gets its communications right, I'm not worried about any political fallout," said Goldberg. "With Trump, competency hasn't been the issue, intentional misconduct has been. While Republicans will try to muddy this up, there's just such a big difference between Biden discovering and disclosing these on his own and Trump's obstruction and lying."

China reports 60,000 COVID-related deaths, says peak passed

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Saturday reported nearly 60,000 deaths in people who had COVID-19 since early December following complaints it was failing to release data, and said the "emergency peak" of its latest surge appears to have passed.

The toll included 5,503 deaths due to respiratory failure caused by COVID-19 and 54,435 fatalities from other ailments combined with COVID-19 since Dec. 8, the National Health Commission announced. It said

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those "deaths related to COVID" occurred in hospitals, which left open the possibility more people also might have died at home.

The report would more than double China's official COVID-19 death toll to 10,775 since the disease was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

China stopped reporting data on COVID-19 deaths and infections after abruptly lifting anti-virus controls in early December despite a surge in infections that began in October and has filled hospitals with feverish, wheezing patients.

The World Health Organization and other governments appealed for information after reports by city and provincial governments suggest as many as hundreds of millions of people in China might have contracted the virus.

The peak of the latest infection wave appears to have passed based on the decline in the number of patients visiting fever clinics, said a National Health Commission official, Jiao Yahui.

The daily number of people going to those clinics peaked at 2.9 million on Dec. 23 and had fallen by 83% to 477,000 on Thursday, according to Jiao.

"These data show the national emergency peak has passed," Jiao said at a news conference.

The United States, South Korea and other governments have imposed virus-testing and other controls on people arriving from China. Beijing retaliated on Wednesday by suspending issuance of new visas to travelers from South Korea and Japan.

China kept its infection rate and deaths lower than those of the United States and some other countries at the height of the pandemic with a "zero-COVID" strategy that aimed to isolate every case. That shut down access to some cities, kept millions of people at home and sparked angry protests.

The average age of people who died since Dec. 8 is 80.3 years and 90.1% are aged 65 and above, according to the Health Commission. It said more than 90% of people who died had cancer, heart or lung diseases or kidney problems.

"The number of elderly patients dying from illness is relatively large, which suggests that we should pay more attention to elderly patients and try our best to save their lives," said Jiao.

This month, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said agency officials met with Chinese officials to underline the importance of sharing more details about COVID-19 issues including hospitalization rates and genetic sequences.

Biden welcomed back to Georgia after lying low in midterms

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — During the 2022 midterm campaign, President Joe Biden steered clear of Georgia as Sen. Raphael Warnock, like many other battleground-state Democrats, tried to distance himself from the White House amid an inflationary economy and the president's lagging approval ratings.

Now, with Warnock having secured his first full term and Biden buoyed by Democrats' better-than-expected election results, the senator is welcoming the president back to Georgia and to America's most famous Black church.

The president is set to speak Sunday at Ebenezer Baptist Church as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend. Biden and Warnock aides said the invitation was issued by the senator, who for 17-plus years has led the church where King once preached. The White House billed Biden's planned speech as a "sermon," noting that he will become the first sitting U.S. president to speak as part of the church's regular Sunday morning services.

Senior White House adviser Keisha Lance Bottoms, a former Atlanta mayor, said Biden will use his time in Warnock's pulpit to "reflect on Dr. King's life and legacy and ways we can go forward together." She said he will cover a number of issues but will emphasize voting rights and related legislation that has languished on Capitol Hill during Biden's first two years in office.

"The president has been very clear that voting, the right to vote, the access to vote is a core component of our democracy," Bottoms said.

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King, the civil rights leader assassinated in 1968 after he fueled passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, would have celebrated his 94th birthday on Sunday. Biden will follow his Ebenezer appearance by attending the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network conference on voting rights in Washington on Monday, the federal holiday that observes King's birthday.

The president's stop at Ebenezer is ostensibly an official trip, not a political one. But the timing stands out as the president tries to steady his footing after Attorney General Merrick Garland on Thursday announced the appointment of a special counsel to investigate how the president handled classified documents.

The move, which followed disclosures that some documents from Biden's tenure as vice president were found at his Delaware residence and at a University of Pennsylvania office he used, complicates, at least politically, a federal inquiry of former President Donald Trump's own handling of classified documents. And it upends a run of victories for Biden, who had been enjoying a drop in inflation, an uptick in his approval ratings and the juxtaposition of a steady White House with a Republican House majority in disarray.

Biden's chosen venue in Atlanta is especially notable as he looks toward a 2024 reelection campaign after a midterm cycle in which his political reach was so limited. Biden won Georgia in 2020 by fewer than 12,000 votes out of almost 5 million cast. Political observers expect Georgia to again be pivotal in the 2024 general election, joining Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan and Arizona as critical battlegrounds.

"Georgia is a good first stop for the president ... it makes perfect sense," said Quentin Fulks, who managed Warnock's reelection bid and is among the names being bantered about for a top leadership post in Biden's 2024 campaign.

Biden scored his narrow Georgia victory over Trump in 2020 by pairing strong Black turnout with a solid performance among moderate white voters who lean Republican but were disenchanted by Trump.

Biden depends on similar coalitions in the Great Lakes region, but Georgia stands out for its large Black electorate that makes the state critical in Democratic primary politics. It's so important, in fact, that Biden recommended that Georgia be included as an early voting state on the Democratic Party's presidential nominating calendar. Atlanta, meanwhile, is a finalist for Democrats' 2024 convention.

"We've shown that this will remain a winnable state for Democrats," Fulks said. "It's been done in a presidential, and now it's been done in a midterm."

Bottoms framed the visit more in terms of governing than campaigning but acknowledged the importance of in-person connections with Black leaders and activists in both. When Biden came to Georgia in early 2022 to deliver a speech on voting rights, some activists skipped the event, unhappy with the administration's efforts to shore up the Voting Rights Act after the Supreme Court gutted key provisions a decade ago.

Bottoms said Biden planned to speak with civil rights leaders at the church. "There's no better place to do that than at Ebenezer," she said but offered no further details.

NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson said Biden has done a "good job" on civil and voting rights given a closely divided Senate.

Before January, the chamber was 50-50 with Vice President Kamala Harris providing Democrats a tie-breaking vote. By holding all incumbent seats in the midterms and flipping a GOP-held seat in Pennsylvania, Democrats now hold a 51-49 majority. But it takes 60 votes to move major legislation, including one of Democrats' proposed voting laws named for the late Atlanta congressman John Lewis, one of Warnock's parishioners, and Republicans simply aren't on board with expanding federal power again over state-run elections.

"The Black community isn't giving up," Johnson said, crediting Biden with the use of executive orders intended to increase federal authority to ensure local jurisdictions protect voting access for minorities. "But we need policy change that only comes through Congress."

Bottoms said Warnock and Biden had a "wonderful conversation" Thursday evening about the significance of their Sunday plans.

That's a turnabout from the recent campaign, when Warnock would barely utter Biden's name and even then mentioned the president only to remind voters how much he was pressuring Biden to keep his 2020 campaign promise to ease student loan burdens. Warnock celebrated Democratic achievements, includ-

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ing the confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, without crediting Biden. When Warnock finally enlisted Biden's help during a four-week runoff campaign, it was to headline a fundraiser — in Massachusetts, without Warnock in attendance.

Fulks said the president understood all along.

"No candidate can ever completely outrun the national environment, (and) there was no question when we started this race that Georgians wanted a Republican Senate," he said, referring to the campaign's analysis of a likely Georgia midterm electorate.

"For us, it wasn't so much, 'Is President Biden popular?' or 'Is he not popular?'" Fulks continued. "It was keeping this race about Georgia and Sen. Warnock. That was the calculus."

Claim of mammoth bones brings treasure hunters to NYC river

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ask people what you might find buried in the muck at the bottom of New York City's East River and they'd likely say "mob boss" before thinking of mammoth bones.

But several groups of treasure hunters have taken to the waterway in recent weeks after hearing a guest on comedian Joe Rogan's podcast claim a boxcar's worth of potentially valuable prehistoric mammoth bones was dumped in the river in the 1940s.

Despite a lack of evidence to back up the story, treasure seekers using boats, diving apparatuses and technology like remote-operated cameras have gone searching, in hopes the murky waters are hiding woolly mammoth tusks.

"I think the chances are just as good as the lottery. And people buy those tickets every day," said Don Gann, 35, of North Arlington, New Jersey, a commercial diver who's been out on the water since early last week with his brother and two workers.

It all started when John Reeves, an Alaskan gold miner with a passion for fossils, came onto "The Joe Rogan Experience" for an episode that aired Dec. 30 to talk about his land, where he has personally uncovered numerous age-old bones and tusks. In the first half of the 20th century, under previous ownership, digging for gold unearthed a trove of prehistoric mammal remains.

Some of that material was brought to New York City decades ago to be handed over to the American Museum of Natural History. Reeves cited a draft of a report put together by three men, including one who worked at the museum, that included a reference to some fossils and bones deemed unsuitable for the museum being dumped into the river.

"I'm going to start a bone rush," Reeves told Rogan, before reading from the draft and giving out a location: East River Drive, which is now known as the FDR Drive, at around 65th Street.

"We'll see if anybody out there's got a sense of adventure," he said, later adding, "Let me tell you something about mammoth bones, mammoth tusks - they're extremely valuable."

After the episode aired, the American Museum of Natural History threw water as cold as the East River on the tale.

"We do not have any record of the disposal of these fossils in the East River, nor have we been able to find any record of this report in the museum's archives or other scientific sources," it said in a statement.

When reached by The Associated Press via telephone, Reeves refused to talk and instead told a reporter to read the pages of the draft he had posted on social media before hanging up. He didn't answer other calls and emails.

The pages posted on social media identify three men as the authors: Richard Osborne, an anthropologist; Robert Evander, who formerly worked in the American Museum of Natural History's paleontology department; and Robert Sattler, an archeologist with a consortium of Alaska Native tribes.

Reached by The Associated Press, Sattler said the story about the dumped bones came from Osborne, who died in 2005.

The document cited by Reeves was real, he said, and written in the mid-1990s. But it wasn't something intended for an academic journal. It was a starting point for something — maybe a book — based on

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Osborne's knowledge of a period in Alaska when mammoth remains were being discovered in plenty. Osborne's father worked at a company involved in the digging.

Sattler said Osborne spent time around the operation as a young man and probably heard the story about surplus bones being dumped in the river secondhand. Sattler said he didn't have any specifics beyond Osborne's recollections.

"He would have had some knowledge from somebody telling him that they dumped some excess material in the East River," he said.

Mammoth remains discovered in Alaska did wind up at the American Museum of Natural History, including some still on display today.

The section of the Manhattan shoreline where Reeves claimed the bones were dumped underwent major changes in the 1930s and 1940s, as the East River Drive, later renamed for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was constructed on fill and pilings. The highway opened fully to drivers in 1942, raising questions about how someone would have dumped a huge trove of bones without disrupting traffic.

Gann said he's seen about two dozen other sets of fossil hunters in the time he's spent searching for mammoth remains out on the East River.

Visibility in the East River is extremely poor, he said. On a good day, you can see maybe a foot in front of you. The current at the bottom is strong.

But the avid diver, who appeared in Discovery's "Sewer Divers," has a thing for searching out unusual finds — although mammoth bones are admittedly on a different scale than finding a Paul Revere spoon at an estate sale.

"I've hunted for weird artifacts my entire life, so this one, it just kind of fits into my repertoire," Gann said.

He and his crew haven't found anything, which he admits is disappointing, but it has spurred him to do some of his own digging into history. He's switched his sights to a location off of the southern part of Brooklyn, saying it would have been a more likely site for cargo to be dumped than the East River off Manhattan.

"If I find nothing, then I find nothing. I gave it an honest shot," Gann said.

Vatican holds funeral for cardinal who decried Francis' rule

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Australian cardinal who decried the papacy of Pope Francis as a "catastrophe" was given a funeral Saturday in St. Peter's Basilica, with the pontiff imparting a final blessing for the once high-ranking Vatican prelate.

Cardinal George Pell, 81, died on Jan. 10, shortly after undergoing hip surgery in a Rome hospital. As the Vatican's finance minister for three years, Pell had been a key player in the early years of Francis' papacy, whose goals included reforming the Holy See's finances, which had a long history of scandals and poor management.

Pell later returned to his native Australia to be tried on child sex abuse charges over allegations that he molested two choirboys while he was archbishop of Melbourne. He served a year in solitary confinement before an earlier court conviction was overturned in 2020.

As is customary for funerals of cardinals, a final blessing, delivered in Latin, in the form a prayer for mercy and eternal rest, was recited by Pope Francis.

The funeral Mass itself was celebrated by an Italian cardinal, Giovanni Battista Re, in his role as Dean of the College of Cardinals.

Right after Pell's death, it was revealed that the cardinal was the author of a memo that had been circulating for many months. In the memo, Pell had lamented that the current papacy as a "disaster" and a "catastrophe."

Separately, the day after Pell died, a conservative magazine published what it said was an article by the cardinal decrying as a "toxic nightmare" Francis' determination to sound out Catholic laity on such issues as church teaching on sexuality and the role of women. Those issues are expected to be hotly debated later this year in a meeting of bishops from around the world summoned by Francis to the Vatican.

The day after Pell died, Francis in a condolence telegram paid tribute to the cardinal, saying that while the prelate led the economy office, "he laid the bases with determination and wisdom" for reforms of the Holy See's finance system, which had been taken to task for years by international financial watchdog bodies.

Among the concelebrants at the altar on Saturday was another high-profile Vatican prelate who in recent days had blasted Francis' leadership of the Roman Catholic church. German Archbishop Georg Gaenswein — like Pell a staunch advocate of the church hierarchy's more conservative faction and a longtime aide of Pope Benedict XVI — bitterly complained about how he was treated by Francis after Benedict retired in 2013 and Francis was elected as pontiff.

Gaenswein unleashed a torrent of criticism of Francis in interviews hours after Benedict died in retirement at the Vatican on Dec. 31 and in a book published days later.

Violence soars in Mali in the year after Russians arrive

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Alou Diallo says he was drinking tea with his family one morning last month when groups of "white soldiers" invaded his village in central Mali, setting fire to houses and gunning down people suspected of being Islamic extremists. He scrambled to safety in the bush, but his son was shot and wounded while fleeing, then was finished off as he lay on the ground.

"I watched my 16-year-old son die," Diallo told The Associated Press in Mali's capital, Bamako, where he lives in a makeshift camp for displaced people. As he recounted that awful Saturday in his village of Bamguel, the 47-year-old former cattle breeder made no attempt to hide the anger toward the troops, which he believed to be Russian mercenaries, who turned his world upside down.

"I really want peace to return and things to go back to normal," he said. "Here in Bamako, I live a life I didn't choose."

It's been more than a year since hundreds of fighters from the Wagner Group, a shadowy Russian military contractor, began working alongside Mali's armed forces to try to stem a decade-long insurgency by Islamic extremists in the West African country, Western officials say.

But since the mercenaries arrived, diplomats, analysts and human rights groups say indiscriminate violence against civilians has grown, the extremists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have only gotten stronger, and there's concern the Russian presence will further destabilize the already-troubled region.

More than 2,000 civilians have been killed since December 2021, compared with about 500 in the previous 12 months, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a nongovernmental organization. At least a third of those deaths recorded last year were from attacks involving the Wagner Group, according to the data compiled by ACLED.

"They are killing civilians, and by their very presence, giving Malian security forces a green light to act on their worst inclinations," said Michael Shurkin, senior fellow at Atlantic Council and director of global programs at the consultancy group 14 North Strategies.

Military contractors from Wagner, which was founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a millionaire businessman with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, have been bolstering Moscow's forces during its invasion of Ukraine. But experts say they also operate in a handful of African countries.

Ever since Mali's military seized power in two coups starting in 2020, a junta led by Col. Assimi Goita has had tense relations with the international community.

France sent troops to Mali in 2013 to help its former colony drive Islamic militants from northern areas of the country but withdrew them in August as relations frayed and anti-French sentiment grew in the population. The West says Mali is increasingly looking to Moscow for security, although the junta says it has only invited in military trainers.

Alassane Maiga, head of communications for the junta, insisted that Wagner was not operating in the country. Asked about the attacks on civilians, Maiga said Mali's government protects its citizens and their property.

"The army's protection and security missions are carried out with respect for human rights and inter-

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national humanitarian law," he said.

The Wagner Group did not respond to requests for comment. At a U.N. Security Council debate on Tuesday, Russia's deputy ambassador Anna Evstigneeva rejected attempts from abroad "to besmirch Russian assistance to Mali," where Moscow has a bilateral agreement to assist the transitional government. She did not mention the Wagner Group.

Up to 1,000 mercenaries have been deployed and the Wagner Group is being paid nearly \$11 million a month to provide security and training, according to a report by the U.S. Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center, which studies extremist violence.

The report said Wagner's forces are struggling to make significant gains, with jihadi violence increasing. During the rainy season between June and September when fighting usually subsides, there were over 90 attacks against civilians and the military by an al-Qaida linked extremist group, compared with six in the same period a year earlier, it said, and an August assault on a barracks by an Islamic State-linked group killed at least 42 Malian soldiers.

In the bloodiest attack, Human Rights Watch said Mali's army and foreign troops suspected to be Russian rounded up and killed an estimated 300 men in the town of Moura in March. Some were believed to be Islamic extremists but most were civilians. The investigation cited 27 people, including witnesses, traders, community leaders, diplomats and security analysts.

Mali's Defense Ministry reported a similar incident at the time but said it had killed 203 "terrorists" and arrested 51 others.

"There are broad reports of human rights abuses across the region where they are working," U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland said of the Wagner mercenaries. "And we worry that these forces are not interested in the safety and security of the people of Mali but, instead, are interested in enriching themselves and strip-mining the country and are making the terrorism situation worse."

Samuel Ramani, associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, a defense and security think tank, said Russia is not very credible at counterterrorism in Africa or more broadly.

"What we've seen repeatedly is that Russia and the Wagner Group forces are much better at strengthening the hold of authoritarian regimes in power than actually combating rebels and terrorist groups," Ramani said, citing their limited knowledge of the terrain, strained relationships with low-ranking officers and a rigid command and control structure.

Many Malians accuse the military and the white soldiers working with them of arbitrary arrests of civilians herding cattle, farming or going to market. Most of them are ethnic Fulani who are increasingly targeted by security forces suspecting them of supporting the Islamic militants.

Rights groups say these alleged abuses aid the extremists, who capitalize on public grievances for use as a recruiting tool.

A 29-year-old cattle herder named Hamidou said he was arrested at his home in Douentza village in central Mali with two other people in November and accused of being an Islamic militant. He was locked in a tiny room where he was bound, beaten and interrogated by "white soldiers."

"We were severely beaten daily. We didn't think we'd survive," said Hamidou, who asked to be identified only by his first name for fear of reprisal, adding that most of those detained were ethnic Fulani, like him. "From the day Wagner came to Mali until today, arbitrary arrests and killings of Fulani civilians have been increasing tremendously."

The AP was unable to verify all of his account independently but a human rights researcher who also asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal said he saw the scars on Hamidou's back and forehead after his release.

Thousands of United Nations peacekeeping troops have been in Mali for nearly a decade to protect civilians from violence, but Mali's government has constrained their ability to operate, and countries such as Benin, Germany, Sweden, Ivory Coast and the United Kingdom have announced troop withdrawals, according to the International Crisis Group.

Nuland, the U.S. diplomat, said the Wagner Group has encouraged the junta to deny the peacekeepers

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access to areas where it has a mandate to investigate abuses. Security is "becoming more difficult as Wagner forces and others take on a larger role in the country and squeeze out U.N. peacekeepers," she said.

While many locals say they detest Wagner, they fear nothing will change until there is a new government following elections scheduled for February 2024.

"It is up to the Malians to decide what steps to follow for the return of peace in Mali," said Seydou Diawara, head of a political opposition group. "Force and pressure by the international community on the military can only worsen the security and humanitarian situation."

In Alabama, tornadoes rattle historic civil rights community

By AARON MORRISON AP National Writer

Zakiya Sankara-Jabar's cellphone buzzed relentlessly as a deadly storm system that spawned tornadoes throughout the U.S. South laid waste to relatives' homes and churches across a part of Alabama known as the Black Belt.

Text messages and calls from loved ones, many of them hysterical, provided her with devastating updates of Thursday's storms, which tore through her native Dallas County, including the history-steeped streets of Selma.

Family in the city synonymous with the civil rights movement saw their homes damaged, but they remained structurally sound. For those in Beloit, a nearby unincorporated town where Sankara-Jabar spent the first 20 years of her life, the damage was almost unfathomable.

"I have family who lost everything," she said Friday. "My great-aunt's house was leveled. I saw pictures and it's like the house was never even there."

Sankara-Jabar's family has called this part of Alabama home for generations. Taking its name from the rich, dark soil, the Black Belt is a region all too familiar with hardship, both economic and social. Many of the civil rights movement's most important struggles took place in the area, including "Bloody Sunday," when nearly 58 years ago state troopers and deputized klansmen viciously attacked Black people marching nonviolently for voting rights across Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge.

Nearly every year since the march, Selma and Dallas County have welcomed back hundreds to thousands of movement footsoldiers, tourists, politicians and activists who ceremonially cross the Pettus Bridge to commemorate the sacrifices of those who bled for democracy. But when the annual celebration is over, the Black Belt continues on as a working class region struggling to deal with gun violence and drug addiction, much like many U.S. communities, but with far fewer resources.

Dallas County, which includes Selma, is home to about 37,600 people, roughly 71% of them Black and 27% white. The county's median household income is \$35,000 and nearly one out of every three residents lives in poverty.

"These are people who are not poor in spirit, but poor financially," said Sankara-Jabar, a racial justice activist who now lives just outside of Washington, D.C. "Losing everything for somebody who was already working class and already poor financially is devastating."

Thursday's storm inflicted heavy damage on Selma, cutting a wide path through the downtown area, where brick buildings collapsed, oak trees were uprooted, cars were tossed onto their sides and power lines were left dangling. While Selma officials said no fatalities had been reported there, several people were seriously injured.

The city is famed for its historic sites: Pettus Bridge, where the Selma-to-Montgomery march is commemorated; Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, where the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference worked with local activists during the Selma movement; and the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute, founded in 1991 and opened near the bridge.

"We ask that people keep Selma in their hearts right now, because it is the communities of color that have suffered the most in this particular storm," said Felecia Pettway, a member of the voting rights museum's board of directors. "We are really concerned about what happens next."

Pettway is also a development director for Legal Services Alabama, an organization that provides free

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civil legal advocacy for low-income residents. The organization's Selma office was damaged in the tornado.

It is not hyperbole to consider Selma's downtown district hallowed ground. It's the place from which the late Amelia Boynton Robinson, a Selma voting rights strategist and civil rights movement matriarch, convinced King to get involved in the movement, hoping he would help nationalize the voting rights struggle. It's where the late Georgia congressman and voting rights icon John Lewis was beaten nearly to death by state troopers as he crossed the Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965.

It's also where the first Black president and the first Black vice president have offered tributes to a civil rights movement that helped their ascensions to high office go from pipe dream to reality.

When the expected ten of thousands gather there this coming March for the annual Selma Bridge Cross Jubilee, the downtown will resemble a huge street festival. There will be music blaring and vendors selling food, T-shirts and other memorabilia.

But when the national political figures leave and the news media cameras disappear, Selma's high crime levels, pothole-covered streets, abandoned homes and vacant businesses will remain. The city famous for the voting rights struggle will still have to address its sagging voter turnout.

And undoubtedly, the community and areas of Dallas County will still be cleaning up and rebuilding from Thursday's tornadoes.

"The community needs an infusion of support," said Adia Winfrey, executive director of Transform Alabama, a nonprofit that promotes civic engagement and voter participation, and a member of the Black Southern Women's Collaborative.

Winfrey said the needs of the entire Black Belt in Alabama, not just Selma, are manifold. From water, sewage and educational infrastructure to childcare, parental support and activities for young people, the area isn't getting enough funding to make progress faster.

"There are great people doing great work, but their capacity is limited," said Winfrey, who is also board secretary for the Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee.

The jubilee is a cherished community tradition and it provides some degree of economic stimulus, she added.

"People just come for the photo op or the experience and don't really leave anything," Winfrey said. "And that is partially what Selma is missing. How do we leverage the excitement about jubilee and interest in the history of Selma, to bring the resources to Selma?"

On Friday, Sankara-Jabar said she grew frustrated with the seeming lack of urgency from statewide leadership to provide relief and shelter to Black Belt residents affected by the storm. As friends reached out asking where they could donate to help her family, Sankara-Jabar took to Twitter and tweeted Republican Gov. Kay Ivey.

"Ma'am with respect what are you doing?? I have family in Dallas County that have lost everything," she wrote. "You are missing in action."

Ivey did send a tweet after Sankara-Jabar's plea, but not as a direct response.

"I just got off the phone with (President Joe Biden) following my visits to Dallas and Autauga Counties," the governor tweeted. "I have asked him to expedite a major disaster declaration for Alabama. He assured me he will approve that as soon as he receives it. We are truly grateful!"

Sankara-Jabar said she plans to be vigilant about how emergency relief funding is distributed in her home state.

"I want to make sure that the state government of Alabama, which is controlled by Republicans, does right by the Black Belt, when the cameras are gone and when the news is not there anymore," she said choking up with tears.

"When those federal dollars come through for my family and everybody that lives in the Black Belt, those dollars need to go where they need to be."

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Ukraine's leader wants to visit UN on invasion anniversary

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wants to visit the United Nations to address a high-level meeting of the 193-member General Assembly on the eve of the first anniversary of Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of his country if the security situation permits, a senior Foreign Ministry official said Friday.

First Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova cautioned in an interview with The Associated Press that many factors need to be in place for him to come, citing first and foremost the military situation on the ground and a warning from Ukraine's intelligence service that Russia is planning "a very serious offensive in February."

"Our president would want to come, he has a will or intention to come," she said, "but it's still a question if there will be a security situation that will allow him to come."

If Zelenskyy does come to the U.N., it would be only his second trip outside Ukraine since the invasion. He made a surprise visit to Washington on Dec. 21 to meet his most important backers in the war against Russia — President Joe Biden and members of Congress whom he thanked for their support and told that "against all odds" Ukraine still stands.

Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya said the General Assembly has already scheduled a high-level debate on the war on Feb. 23, which will be followed by a ministerial meeting of the Security Council on Feb. 24.

Dzhaparova said Ukraine would like to see the assembly adopt one of the two resolutions that Zelenskyy wants to see approved on the eve of the anniversary of the invasion.

She said Ukraine is consulting with its partners on the two measures, one that would support the president's 10-point peace formula that includes the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the withdrawal of Russian forces and the other that would establish a tribunal to prosecute crimes of aggression, which would enable Russia to be held accountable for its unprovoked invasion.

"We have to act step by step," Dzhaparova said. "It's still a question what will be the first. ... I believe that this is something that we will know very soon, in the nearest week or two."

In late December, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told AP the government wanted a "peace" summit by the end of February at the U.N., with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as mediator, but he didn't anticipate Russia taking part. That would make it difficult to foresee mediation or an end to the devastating war.

Kyslytsya, the Ukrainian ambassador, said he doesn't think Russian President Vladimir Putin would allow anyone to attend a summit because it doesn't go along with his plan that Russian territorial gains are non-negotiable.

Dzhaparova said a summit is still under discussion and stressed that "it's not a negotiation."

Dzhaparova said the summit would be a platform to discuss things that Ukraine considers important on top of the 10-point peace proposal, which also includes the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the Russian aggression, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

"It's about shaping the discourse," she explained.

It doesn't mean that by adopting a resolution or holding a summit Ukraine is ready to sign up to a peace agreement or cease-fire, Dzhaparova said. It means that only after a resolution or summit "negotiation about peace, or the agreement on peace, might be started."

The former journalist and TV anchor, a Crimean Tatar whose parents left Crimea after Russia's 2014 takeover and annexation of the strategic peninsula, said Ukraine needs political, economic and military support.

Politically, Dzhaparova said, Russia has discredited the U.N. Charter, which opposes the use of force against another country, and flouted international law and should be isolated by the international community.

She said it's crucial to provide financial support to Ukraine because its economy has suffered much more than Russia's, and to provide weapons "to fight for peace."

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Dzhaparova said the Ukrainian armed forces are highly motivated and are fighting to protect their land and people, "but the Russian army doesn't understand what they're fighting for."

"We are doing our best to win, but then at the end of the day, it's still a question of what will be the end," she said.

If Ukraine were to lose, Dzhaparova said, Putin won't be satisfied "and I'm sure that Russia would attack other countries in the nearest future."

"This is not about Ukraine solely, it's about a common goal to avoid further aggression," she stressed. "If the war is not contained in Ukraine, the war will become bigger."

US nears new cooperation deals with Pacific Island nations

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is nearing deals with two Pacific Island nations to extend ties that are considered critical to maintaining balance in the U.S.-China rivalry for influence in a region where the Chinese are rapidly expanding their economic, diplomatic and military clout.

This week, the U.S. signed memorandums of understanding with the Marshall Islands and Palau that administration officials hope will pave the way for the quick completion of broader agreements that will govern the islands' relations with Washington for the next two decades. Those ties grant the U.S. unique military and other security rights on the islands in return for substantial aid.

The administration believes that extending those so-called "Compacts of Free Association" agreements will be key to efforts to retain American power and blunt Chinese assertiveness throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The memorandums signed this week lay out the amounts of money that the federal government will provide to the Marshall Islands and Palau if their compacts are successfully renegotiated. Negotiations on a similar memorandum with a third compact country, Micronesia, are ongoing.

The current 20-year compacts with the Marshall Islands and Micronesia expire this year; the current compact with Palau expires in 2024 but administration officials said they believe all three can be renewed and signed by mid- to late-spring.

Officials would not discuss specifics of the amounts of money involved because the deals aren't yet legally binding and must still be reviewed and approved by Congress as part of the budget process.

A Micronesian news outlet, Marianas Variety, reported Thursday that the Marshall Islands will receive \$700 million over four years under the memorandum that it signed. But that amount would cover only one-fifth of a 20-year compact extension and does not include the amount Palau would receive.

Joe Yun, Biden's special presidential envoy for compact negotiations, said the amounts will be far greater than what the U.S. had provided in the past.

Islanders have long complained that the previous compacts they signed did not adequately address their needs or long-term environmental and health issues caused by U.S. nuclear testing in the 1950s and '60s. Lawmakers had expressed concern dating back to 2021 that the administration was not giving enough attention to the matter.

Yun, who signed the memorandums with representatives of the Marshalls and Palau on Tuesday and Wednesday in Los Angeles, said the Marshall Islands, in particular, would be compensated for such damage and would be given control over how that money is spent.

Yun said it would pay "nuclear-affected communities' health, welfare and development" and also noted that the U.S. had committed to building a new hospital as well as a museum in the Marshalls to preserve the memory and legacy of their role, notably in the Pacific theater during WWII.

This week's signings clear the way for individual federal agencies — including the Postal Service, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the National Weather Service — to negotiate their own agreements with the Marshalls and Palau, which will then become part of the broader compacts.

Along with the federal money, those agencies provide their services to the islands. In return, the U.S. is given unique military and national security basing rights and privileges in an area where China is increas-

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ingly flexing its muscles.

Yun said China did not come up specifically in the negotiations but it was a major element in all sides' discussions.

"The threat from China is unstated but there is no question that China is a factor," Yun said. Not only does China have a large and growing economic presence in the region, but the Marshall Islands and Palau both recognize Taiwan diplomatically. "They are coming under Chinese pressure," he said.

China has steadily poached allies from Taiwan in the Pacific, including Kiribati and the Solomon Islands in 2019. The U.S. announced plans last year to reopen an embassy in the Solomon Islands, which has signed a security agreement with China.

Since World War II, the U.S. has treated the Marshall Islands, along with Micronesia and Palau, much like territories. On the Marshall Islands, the U.S. has developed military, intelligence and aerospace facilities in a region where China is particularly active.

In turn, U.S. money and jobs have benefited the islands' economy. And many islanders have taken advantage of their ability to live and work in the U.S., moving in the thousands to Arkansas, Guam, Hawaii, Oregon and Oklahoma.

Many on the Marshall Islands believe a U.S. settlement of \$150 million agreed to in the 1980s fell well short of addressing the nuclear legacy. But the U.S. position has remained static for more than 20 years, the last time the compact came up for renegotiation.

Various estimates put the true cost of the damage at about \$3 billion, including for repairs to a massive nuclear waste facility known as the Cactus Dome which environmentalists say is leaking toxic waste into the ocean.

The U.S. Department of Energy says the dome contains over 100,000 cubic yards (76,000 cubic meters) of radioactively contaminated soil and debris but the structure isn't in any immediate danger of failing.

Brazil's Supreme Court agrees to probe Bolsonaro for riot

By DAVID BILLER and CARLA BRIDI Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil's Supreme Court has agreed to investigate whether former president Jair Bolsonaro incited the far-right mob that ransacked the country's Congress, top court and presidential offices, a swift escalation in the probe that shows the ex-leader could face legal consequences for an extremist movement he helped build.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes granted a request from the prosecutor general's office to include Bolsonaro in the wider investigation, citing a video the former president posted on Facebook two days after the riot. It claimed Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva wasn't voted into office, but rather was chosen by the Supreme Court and Brazil's electoral authority.

Although Bolsonaro posted the video after the riot and deleted it in the morning, prosecutors argued its content was sufficient to justify investigating his conduct beforehand.

Otherwise, Bolsonaro has refrained from commenting on the election since his Oct. 30 defeat. He repeatedly stoked doubt about the reliability of the electronic voting system in the run-up to the vote, filed a request afterward to annul millions of ballots cast using the machines and never conceded.

None of the ex-president's claims were proved, and the results of the election were recognized as legal by different politicians, including some Bolsonaro allies, and several foreign government.

He has taken up residence in an Orlando suburb since leaving Brazil in late December and skipping the Jan. 1 swearing-in of his leftist successor, and some Democratic lawmakers have urged President Joe Biden to cancel his visa.

Following the justice's decision late Friday, Bolsonaro's lawyer Frederick Wassef said in a statement that the former president "vehemently repudiates the acts of vandalism and destruction" from Jan. 8, but blamed supposed "infiltrators" of the protest — something his far-right backers have also claimed.

The statement also said Bolsonaro "never had any relationship or participation with these spontaneous social movements."

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Brazilian authorities are investigating who enabled Bolsonaro's radical supporters to storm the seats of power in an attempt to overturn results of the October election. Targets include those who summoned rioters to the capital or paid to transport them, and local security personnel who may have stood aside to let the mayhem occur.

Much of the attention thus far has focused on Anderson Torres, Bolsonaro's former justice minister, who became the federal district's security chief on Jan. 2, and was in the U.S. on the day of the riot.

De Moraes ordered Torres' arrest this week and has opened an investigation into his actions, which he characterized as "neglect and collusion." In his decision, which was made public Friday, de Moraes said that Torres fired subordinates and left the country before the riot, an indication that he was deliberately laying the groundwork for the unrest.

The court also issued an arrest warrant for the former security chief, and he must return within three days or Brazil will request his extradition, Justice Minister Flávio Dino said Friday.

Torres has denied wrongdoing, and said Jan. 10 on Twitter that he would interrupt his vacation to return to Brazil and present his defense. Three days later, that has yet to occur.

The minister pointed to a document that Brazilian federal police found upon searching Torres' home; a draft decree that would have seized control of Brazil's electoral authority and potentially overturned the election. The origin and authenticity of the unsigned document are unclear, and it remains unknown if Bolsonaro or his subordinates took any steps to implement the measure that would have been unconstitutional, according to analysts and the Brazilian academy of electoral and political law.

But the document "will figure in the police investigation, because it even more fully reveals the existence of a chain of people responsible for the criminal events," Dino said, adding that Torres will need to inform police who drafted it.

By failing to initiate a probe against the document's author or report its existence, Torres at very could be charged with dereliction of duty, said Mario Sérgio Lima, a political analyst at Medley Advisors.

Torres said on Twitter that the document was probably found in a pile along with others intended for shredding, and that it was leaked out of context feed false narratives aimed at discrediting him.

Dino told reporters Friday morning that no connection has yet been established between the capital riot and Bolsonaro.

Also on Friday night, the popular social media accounts of several prominent right-wing figures were suspended in Brazil in response to a court order, which journalist Glenn Greenwald obtained and detailed on a live social media broadcast.

The order, also issued by Justice de Moraes, was directed at six social media platforms and established a two-hour deadline to block the accounts or face fines. The accounts belong to a digital influencer, a YouTuber recently elected federal lawmaker, a podcast host in the mold of Joe Rogan, and an evangelical pastor and senator-elect, among others.

Survivors emerge from wreckage after US storms kill 9 people

By KIM CHANDLER and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Stunned residents tried to salvage belongings, and rescue crews pulled survivors from beneath collapsed houses Friday in the aftermath of a tornado-spawning storm system that killed at least nine people as it barreled across parts of Georgia and Alabama.

The widespread destruction came into view a day after violent storms flipped mobile homes into the air, sent uprooted trees crashing through buildings, snapped trees and utility poles and derailed a freight train.

Those who emerged with their lives gave thanks as they searched the wreckage to find anything worth saving.

"God was sure with us," Tracey Wilhelm said as she looked over the shattered remnants of her mobile home in Alabama's Autauga County.

She was at work Thursday when a tornado lifted her mobile home off its foundation and dumped it several feet away in a heap of rubble. Her husband and their five dogs scrambled into a shed that stayed

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intact, she said. Rescue workers later found them inside unharmed.

A search crew also found five people unharmed but trapped in a storm shelter after a wall from the adjacent house fell onto it, Autauga County Coroner Buster Barber said. Someone inside had a phone and kept calling for help.

The National Weather Service, which was working to confirm the twisters, said suspected tornado damage was reported in at least 14 counties in Alabama and 14 in Georgia. Temperatures were forecast to plunge below freezing overnight in hard-hit areas of both states, where more than 30,000 homes and businesses remained without power at sundown.

The twister blamed for killing at least seven people in rural Autauga County left damage consistent with an EF3 tornado, which is just two steps below the most powerful category of twister. The tornado had winds of at least 136 mph (218 kph), the weather service said.

Downtown Selma, about 40 miles (64 kilometers) to the southwest, also sustained severe damage before the worst of the weather moved across Georgia south of Atlanta.

James Carter's Selma home was damaged when the tornado tore through the city.

"I was at my house and I started hearing a little sound like a train. The closer it got, the louder it got. By the time it got over the house, the whole house was just shaking. My mom, she was laying in the bed, and I tried to put my body on top of her to protect her," Carter said.

At least 12 people were taken to hospitals, Ernie Baggett, Autauga County's emergency management director, said as crews cut through downed trees looking for survivors.

About 40 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, including several mobile homes that were launched into the air, he said.

"They weren't just blown over," he said. "They were blown a distance."

In Selma, the city council met on a sidewalk using lights from cellphones and declared a state of emergency.

A 5-year-old child riding in a vehicle was killed by a falling tree in central Georgia's Butts County, said Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Director James Stallings. He said a parent who was driving suffered critical injuries.

Elsewhere, a state Department of Transportation worker was killed while responding to storm damage, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp said. He gave no further details.

Kemp surveyed some of the worst storm damage by helicopter. In some areas, he said, rescue teams had to dig into collapsed homes to free trapped survivors.

"We know people that were stranded in homes where literally the whole house collapsed, and they were under the crawl space," Kemp told reporters.

The governor said the storm inflicted damage statewide, with some of the worst around Troup County near the Georgia-Alabama line, where more than 100 homes were hit. At least 12 people were treated at a hospital in Spalding County, south of Atlanta, where the weather service confirmed at least two tornadoes struck.

The storm hit Spalding County as mourners gathered for a wake at Peterson's Funeral Home in Griffin. About 20 people scrambled for shelter in a restroom and an office when a loud boom sounded as a large tree fell on the building.

"When we came out, we were in total shock," said Sha-Meeka Peterson-Smith, the funeral home's chief operational officer. "We heard everything, but didn't know how bad it actually was."

The uprooted tree crashed straight through the front of the building, she said, destroying a viewing room, a lounge and a front office. No one was hurt.

The tornado that hit Selma cut a wide path through the downtown area. Brick buildings collapsed, oak trees were uprooted, cars were tossed onto their sides and power lines were left dangling. Several people had serious injuries, Selma Mayor James Perkins said, but no deaths were reported.

"We're some strong resilient folks here and we're going to pull this thing back together, but we're going to need some help," Perkins said.

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Kathy Bunch was inside the Salvation Army Service Center in Selma when tornado sirens sounded. She huddled in a back room and prayed as a loud roar passed through the brick building.

"It took the roof off. It busted the windows," Bunch said. "And I'm just grateful to God to be alive."

Workers in Selma used heavy machinery to scoop up splintered wooden framing and mangled siding Friday as utility poles leaned at odd angles and power lines sagged in the street.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey visited the city and pledged to ask President Joe Biden to expedite a major disaster declaration to get aid flowing. Officials said federal assistance will be critical for communities such as Selma, where nearly 30% of the city's 18,000 residents live in poverty.

"It was far worse than anything I had envisioned or seen on television. Roofs are just gone and trees look like toothpicks," Ivey said while touring the damage in Selma.

Located about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Montgomery, Alabama's capital, Selma was a flashpoint of the civil rights movement where state troopers viciously attacked Black people who marched non-violently for voting rights across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965.

Three factors — a natural La Nina weather cycle, warming of the Gulf of Mexico likely related to climate change and a decades-long eastward shift of tornado activity — combined to make Thursday's unusual tornado outbreak, said Victor Gensini, a meteorology professor at Northern Illinois University who studies tornado trends.

Review: Spellbinding 'Saint Omer' straddles truth, fiction

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

First, the real-life facts of the case, more shocking than you'll find in most fiction: In November 2013, a mother took a train from Paris to the northern French coast, along with her 15-month old daughter. She checked into a hotel, walked down to the water at night, fed the hungry child, and left her to drown at high tide.

That mother, Fabienne Kabou, went on trial in 2016, where she acknowledged the killing and spoke of sorcery and witchcraft, but added: "Nothing makes sense in this story."

Sitting in that courtroom was French documentary filmmaker Alice Diop. Like Kabou a woman of Senegalese descent, Diop had been fascinated by the case since she'd seen a grainy surveillance photo in a newspaper and felt that "I know her so well, I recognize myself." She spent days sitting in the courtroom, staring at the woman in front of her, seeking to understand the impossible.

What emerged from that experience is the spellbinding "Saint Omer," Diop's debut feature, but really a film that exists somewhere in the space between documentary and scripted narrative, between truth and fiction. Most crucially, it's a film so original in approach that one feels only Diop could have made or even conceived of it.

Whether it answers the question that an empathetic defense lawyer asks the jury to consider — not whether, but WHY — is less clear. But the film, which Diop co-wrote with Amrita David and Marie NDiaye, peels back so many layers by merely asking it — layers of race, gender, motherhood, and the lasting effects of French colonialism, for starters — that in the end, you'll likely feel an answer isn't really the point.

Diop begins with a mercifully brief scene on a dark beach, a woman walking, holding something, while the waves in the distance grow louder. The scene turns out to be a dream, experienced by Rama, a French novelist and professor, also of Senegalese descent. Rama is a proxy for Diop; she has developed an obsession with the infanticide story, and wants to base her next novel on it.

Soon Rama (a soulful Kayije Kagame), like Diop, is traveling to the coast and settling onto a bench into a wood-paneled courtroom (the film set was next door to the real courtroom) where defendant Laurence Coly, a fictional stand-in for Kabou, is facing a methodical but incredulous judge (Valérie Dréville).

Laurence is not the kind of defendant anyone expects — and that's part of what's both fascinating and troubling. She is highly educated, a fact that seems surprising to the media and to others. Even Rama's book editor back in Paris tells her he's heard Laurence speaks in a "sophisticated" way; Rama retorts that she speaks like any other educated woman.

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Laurence's mother in Senegal, we learn, was obsessed with her education and upward mobility, and wouldn't let her daughter speak the native Wolof language, only French. "Her obsession with my success tortured me," she testifies. (In a heartbreaking moment, her mother, attending the trial, buys every newspaper she can, so proud is she that her daughter is generating headlines.) As for her father, he severed ties and stopped funding her studies in France when she switched from law to philosophy.

Lacking resources to survive, Laurence finally had to stop her studies and move in with an older white boyfriend, Luc, who hid their relationship from his own family. When she became pregnant, keeping the child against Luc's wishes, she withdrew completely from the world. When Luc is on the stand, the judge draws out how this supposedly devoted father didn't even attend the baby's funeral — it was too far, the man complains. "It was very abstract to me."

All the testimony is taken from the official record, brought to life by Guslagie Malanda as a maddeningly serene and utterly riveting Laurence, and a supporting cast of theater actors. The spectators are played by local townspeople, and the proceedings were filmed in chronological fashion, all contributing to a documentary-style feel.

But unlike a documentary, we're witnessing it all through Rama. She's horrified not only by the crime but by the prejudices, large and small, directed at Laurence — some that she herself experiences, as a woman, as a woman of color, as an academic in a white world — and as a daughter, with a mother who often treated her selfishly.

There's another parallel between Rama and Laurence: Rama is pregnant. (Diop herself was mother of a small child during the trial, and has said the experience helped her healing process with post-partum depression). In bed one night with her partner, Rama tells him: "I'm scared I'll be like her." It's her mother she is talking about, she clarifies. Or is it?

"I hope this trial will give me an answer," someone says at the beginning of the film. If you think it's Rama, or the judge, you're wrong. It's Laurence herself, admitting to a stunned courtroom that she has no tidy explanation up her sleeve.

Likewise, Diop refuses to wrap her film with a neat bow. In fact, she doesn't even tell us what sentence, if any, Kabou received (there's Google for that.) But in her unique way, she has taken us further into the emotional, social and moral crevices of this real-life case than any documentary could. And we're much the better for it.

"Saint Omer," a Super release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America "for some thematic elements and brief strong language." Running time: 122 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

High court takes 8 new cases, 1 about a religious mailman

By JESSICA GRESKO and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to consider what employers must do to accommodate religious employees, among eight new cases it added.

The cases are expected to be argued in April. In one involving a former postal employee, the justices will consider what accommodations employers must make for religious employees. The case comes when religious plaintiffs have generally fared well at the court, which is dominated 6-3 by conservative justices.

Under a federal civil rights law, employers can't discriminate against employees because of their religion. The law says employees' religious practices have to be accommodated unless the employer can demonstrate doing so is an "undue hardship" to the business. The justices are being asked to reconsider a 1977 Supreme Court case that challengers say means lower courts almost always side with employers "whenever an accommodation would impose any burden."

The case the justices agreed to hear involves Gerald Groff, a former postal worker in Pennsylvania. Groff, a Christian, said his religious beliefs required him to be off on Sundays. Initially his bosses were able to accommodate him but eventually that ended. Groff resigned and sued the post office. Two lower courts have ruled against him.

Among other cases the justices agreed to hear:

—The case of Billy Raymond Counterman, who was charged with stalking a Colorado musician on Facebook, sending her messages over the course of two years. Counterman argued his messages were protected speech but a court found them to be unprotected “true threats” and he was ultimately sentenced to more than four years in prison. An appeals court also ruled against him. The high court will consider what prosecutors must show to prove a statement is a “true threat.”

—The case of a 94-year-old Minnesota woman who fell behind in her property taxes, then had her home confiscated by local authorities.

Hennepin County sold Geraldine Tyler’s home for \$40,000 as payment for approximately \$15,000 in property taxes, penalties, interest and costs. But the county kept all the money.

Tyler’s lawyers say the practice, a version of which is used in roughly a dozen states, violates two constitutional provisions, barring excessive fines and taking property without fair payment.

—A case about reviving whistleblower lawsuits claiming that supermarket and pharmacy chains SuperValu Inc. and Safeway overcharged government health-care programs for prescription drugs by hundreds of millions of dollars.

The justices on Friday also agreed to hear appeals from the whistleblowers, who alleged that the companies defrauded the Medicare and Medicaid programs when they reported retail prices for generic prescription drugs, even though they had mainly been sold to customers at deeply discounted prices.

The cases stem from the companies’ effort to match a 2006 decision by Walmart to offer 30-day supplies of many generic drugs for \$4.

Supervalu and Safeway matched the discounted price at their pharmacies, but they reported to the federal and various state governments a much higher “usual and customary” price when seeking reimbursement.

An expert for the whistleblower in the Safeway lawsuit testified that the company received \$127 million more than it would have gotten had it reported the discounted price, according to court papers.

In the case against Supervalu, the whistleblower said the company matched Walmart’s discounted price 6.3 million times over 11 years, according to court papers.

The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed both cases, holding that the companies’ decisions to report the higher prices were “not objectively unreasonable.”

In urging the high court to reject the appeals, lawyers for Supervalu wrote that the correct price to report “may seem easy enough to determine in the abstract, but it is far from simple.”

The Biden administration is backing the whistleblowers.

School searched 1st-grader’s backpack before teacher shot

By DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Administrators at the Virginia school where a first-grader shot his teacher last week learned the child may have had a weapon in his possession before the shooting but did not find the 9mm handgun he brought to school despite searching his bag, the school system’s superintendent said.

Police said Friday they were not told about the tip before the shooting occurred. Kelly King, a spokesperson for the Newport News Police Department, told The Associated Press that some time after the shooting, police learned through their investigation that a school employee was notified of a possible gun at Richneck Elementary School before the Jan. 6 shooting.

“The Newport News Police Department was not notified of this information prior to the incident,” King wrote in an email.

The student’s backpack was searched after school officials received the tip, but the gun wasn’t found before the shooting, said Michelle Price, a spokesperson for the Newport News school district.

She declined to comment on the police statement. She said that typically, when school officials receive a tip about a potential weapon or other contraband in the schools, if the tip includes specific information about a particular student or a particular classroom, “that’s where the search starts.”

“I’m not able to comment on whether other searches may have occurred, except for the fact that the

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superintendent has shared that the student's backpack was searched and nothing was found at the time," Price told The Associated Press.

Price confirmed that Superintendent George Parker told parents during an online meeting Thursday night that at least one school administrator was notified the boy may have a weapon before the 6-year-old shot the teacher. Parker's comments were first reported by WAVY-TV, which gained access to the parents-only meeting.

Police Chief Steve Drew has previously said the boy brought the gun to school in his backpack the day of the shooting.

Price said she has not been told where school officials believe the gun was when the boy's backpack was searched.

"That probably is definitely part of our internal investigation and the police investigation, but nothing about that has been released publicly," Price said.

She declined to comment when asked who reported that the boy may have a weapon and whether school officials should have taken additional steps after the weapon was not found in his backpack.

The teacher, Abigail Zwerner, 25, was shot in the chest with injuries initially considered to be life threatening. Her condition has improved, though, and she has been reported in stable condition at a hospital.

Earlier Thursday, Newport News School Board Chair Lisa Surlis-Law said the district will install metal detectors at all schools, starting with Richneck.

The Jan. 6 shooting occurred as Zwerner was teaching her class. Authorities said there was no warning and no struggle before the 6-year-old boy pointed the gun at Zwerner.

Drew has described the shooting as intentional. A judge will determine what's next for the child, who is being held at a medical facility following an emergency custody order.

Drew said the child used his mother's gun, which had been purchased legally. It's unclear how he gained access to the weapon. A Virginia law prohibits leaving a loaded gun where it is accessible to a child under 14 as a misdemeanor.

The shooting has sparked an outcry around the country about how a child so young could have gained access to a gun and brought it to school. News of the unsuccessful backpack search also raised questions.

Mo Canady, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, said that while details are still outstanding about how the search was conducted, the situation underscores the need to search very thoroughly and preferably have a law enforcement officer handle it.

"I want to know how thoroughly someone conducted that search," he said. "Keep in mind that there are some very small firearms out there, so you really have to search every nook and cranny if you really believe there is a firearm."

Senate Democrats in Virginia held a news conference Friday to unveil a list of gun safety legislation they hope to pass this year, including a bill that would require anyone who owns a gun in a home where a minor is present to store the gun unloaded and in a locked container or cabinet, and to store all ammunition in a separate locked container.

"Gun violence is the number 1 cause of death for children in Virginia and in our nation, and safe firearm storage will help prevent gun deaths and injuries," said Sen. Jennifer Boysko, the bill's lead patron. "My bill would not only stop tragedies, like we saw in Newport News, but will prevent other tragedies, including gun accidents, youth suicides and school shootings."

Also on Friday, more than 200 volunteers with Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action attended a rally and met with Virginia lawmakers to push for new gun safety measures. Members of the groups — both part of Everytown for Gun Safety's grassroots network — said their priorities include the secure storage law proposed by Boysko and bills that would strengthen the state's red flag law and increase funding for gun violence prevention and intervention programs.

Philip Van Cleave, a gun rights advocate who is president of the Virginia Citizens Defense League, said Boysko's gun storage law would not allow gun owners to defend themselves or others in a timely way during an emergency because it would require them to unlock one container to get the gun, then to unlock another container to get ammunition, then to load the gun.

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"If the back door is kicked in ... that's ridiculous. It's pointless and it just doesn't work," he said.
"It's not for when I'm in an absolute life or death emergency and everything hangs on me being able to get that gun out of that safe," he said.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Billion-dollar Mega Millions jackpot won't trigger \$850M IRS bill

CLAIM: The IRS would collect nearly \$850 million in taxes from a more-than \$1 billion Mega Millions jackpot.

THE FACTS: The winner of the lottery jackpot that sat at \$1.1 billion earlier this week, when the claims circulated, would expect to pay at least \$135 million in federal income taxes if they choose to receive their earnings all at once, rather than over 30 years. That's still far less than the \$850 million claimed online. Amid the frenzy leading up to Tuesday's Mega Millions drawing, social media users shared posts suggesting the lion's share of such a jackpot will ultimately end up in the federal government's coffers in the form of tax revenue. No one has hit all six numbers in 25 tries stretching back more than two months. The prize now stands at \$1.35 billion — the second highest in the contest's history — with the next drawing slated for Friday night. Danielle Frizzi-Babb, a spokesperson for the Mega Millions contest, says lottery winners can choose between receiving their earnings either through annual payments, or all at once. For a \$1.1 billion jackpot, that's a choice between a roughly \$569 million lump sum, or annual payments that increase over 30 years, ranging from \$16.5 million in the first year to about \$68 million in the final year, she explained in an email. The lump-sum payment represents the present-day value of the advertised jackpot, which is based on the total annual payments. Whatever option the winner chooses, the federal tax rate of 24% is automatically withheld from the payments, according to Frizzi-Babb. For the lump sum option, that means about \$136.5 million, leaving the winner with a roughly \$432 million payout. The winner would also be subject to additional federal taxes, as well as their state's income tax, noted Robert Pagliarini, president of Pacifica Wealth Advisors, an investment management and tax strategy firm in Irvine, California. For example, the massive, one-time payout would put the winner into the top federal tax bracket, as lottery profits are considered regular income by the IRS, he said. But even with additional federal taxes factored, Pagliarini estimated the jackpot winner would still end up owing the IRS closer to \$210 million if they opted for the lump sum — a far cry from the nearly \$850 million suggested by social media users. If the winner opts for the annual payments, the total IRS bill would still only come out to around \$444 million, assuming the top federal tax rate remains at 37%, Pagliarini said. "The short answer is those Instagram figures are incorrect," he wrote.

— Associated Press writer Philip Marcelo in New York contributed this report.

World leaders have ridden in US president's limo

CLAIM: When Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador rode in the U.S. presidential limousine sometimes referred to as "the beast," it marked the first time a foreign leader traveled in the vehicle with a U.S. president.

THE FACTS: Several world leaders have traveled in the U.S. presidential Cadillac, including former Mexican President Vicente Fox, French President Emmanuel Macron, the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. President Joe Biden's visit to Mexico this week for a summit of North American leaders began with a ride in his heavily armored presidential limousine sometimes referred to as "the beast." Biden and López Obrador rode together in the vehicle, chatting while driving into Mexico City, the AP reported. Social media users responded to news reports of the drive with false claims that it was "unprecedented" or abnormal for a foreign president to travel in the presidential

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limousine. "It's the first time that a foreign leader travels on board with a U.S. President," one Twitter user wrote. "President Biden and past US presidents travel the world and are met by host leaders, but the protocol is that POTUS always rides alone or with family/staff in the Beast," wrote another. But news reports over the years confirm several foreign leaders have shared the vehicle with U.S. presidents. In 2017, then-President Donald Trump and his French counterpart Macron rode together in "the beast" to the presidential palace in Paris, the AP reported. Also in 2017, photos from AP and other news agencies show that Abe rode in the presidential limousine with Trump during a visit to a Florida golf resort. Former President Barack Obama also shared the vehicle with Medvedev in 2010. In response to an AP request for comment, the Secret Service said that "due to the need to maintain operational security, the U.S. Secret Service does not comment on the means, methods or resources used to conduct our protective operations."

— Associated Press writer León Ramírez in Mexico City contributed to this report with additional reporting from Ali Swenson in New York.

Archaeologists didn't dig up a mythological tomb of Osiris

CLAIM: "Scientists Just Found The Tomb Of Egyptian God Osiris Next To The River Nile."

THE FACTS: No such discovery occurred. Online posts recycle information about past archaeological findings in Egypt, including the 2015 discovery of a tomb modeled after Osiris' tomb. A YouTube video that amassed more than 1.7 million views in seven days set off a wave of online rumors that archaeologists in Egypt had excavated the real tomb of an Egyptian god. "Scientists Just Found The Tomb Of Egyptian God Osiris Next To The River Nile," the video's title announced. Social media users reacted to the video with dread, because Osiris is the ancient Egyptian god of the underworld and the deity responsible for judging souls in the afterlife. However, archaeologists didn't disturb the ancient burial grounds of Osiris or any other mythological figures, experts in Egyptian archaeology told the AP. No such recent discovery has been reported in the news, and the 28-minute YouTube video features clips about a variety of discoveries over the years, the experts confirmed. "Nothing accurate here; the videos just string together snippets from tombs and temples all over Egypt," Peter Der Manuelian, professor of Egyptology at Harvard University, told the AP in an email. For example, the video describes, without mentioning the date, a 2015 discovery of a tomb "constructed in the likeness" of Osiris' tomb. In that discovery on the west bank of the Nile near Luxor, a Spanish-Italian archaeological team found a tomb that "was not build for Osiris but its architecture mimics the famous Osireion at Abydos which itself partially mimics the plans of the New Kingdom royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings," according to Lorelei Corcoran, director of the Institute of Egyptian Art & Archaeology at the University of Memphis. "The tomb contains a statue of Osiris but such statues formed the cult focus of other Late Period tombs such as the tomb of Harwa in the nearby Assasif area of Thebes," Corcoran said. "Recent news seems to be a recycling of this discovery." An email message left for the lead excavator of the tomb was not returned.

— Ali Swenson

Coronavirus doesn't mean 'heart attack virus' in Latin

CLAIM: In Latin, the phrase "Cor ona virus," written with spaces between parts of the word, translates to "heart attack virus" in English.

THE FACTS: The word "coronavirus" in Latin, even when split up, does not translate to "heart attack virus." Social media users are entering additional spaces when translating "cor ona virus" from Latin in Google Translate, which skews results in English. A recent video circulating on social media claimed that entering "cor ona virus" into Google Translate proved that it translates to "heart attack virus." In the video, the social media user enters two spaces between "ona" and "virus" to get the result. Without the spaces, Google Translate just repeats "cor ona virus" in Latin to "cor ona virus" in English. One Twitter user shared the video with the hashtags "#vaccinedeaths" and "#VaccineSideEffects." In the past, social media users have falsely claimed that the COVID-19 vaccine causes heart attacks. But experts say this is an inaccurate translation from Latin. Adding spaces to "coronavirus" is causing the Google Translate tool

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to attempt to translate some sections separately. "This equation (cor ona virus = heart (attack) virus) is little more than subliterate nonsense," wrote Marcus Folch, an associate professor of classics at Columbia University. Folch pointed out that "corona" in Latin translates to "crown" and "cor" translates to "heart," while "virus" translates to a slimy liquid or poison. And "ona" is not a word in Latin. Daniel Solomon, a professor of classic studies at Vanderbilt University, told The Associated Press in an email that "ona" is not a Latin word, but the translation could be a confusion with "onus" or "onera," which means "burden." Since "cor ona virus" isn't a word or phrase in Latin, the Google Translate tool is translating some individual root words separately, a spokesperson for Google confirmed to the AP.

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

Robbie Knieval, daredevil son of Evel Knieval, dies at 60

By KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Robbie Knieval, an American stunt performer who set records with daredevil motorcycle jumps following the tire tracks of his thrill-seeking father — including at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas in 1989 and a Grand Canyon chasm a decade later — has died in Nevada, his brother said. He was 60.

Robbie Knieval died early Friday at a hospice in Reno after battling pancreatic cancer, Kelly Knieval said. "Daredevils don't live easy lives," Kelly Knieval told The Associated Press. "He was a great daredevil. People don't really understand how scary it is what my brother did."

As a boy, Robbie Knieval began on his bicycle to emulate his famous father, Evel Knieval, who died in 2007 in Clearwater, Florida.

But where Evel Knieval famously almost died from injuries when he crashed his Harley-Davidson during a jump over the Caesars Palace fountains in Las Vegas in 1967, Robbie completed the jump in 1989 using a specially designed Honda.

Robbie Knieval also made headline-grabbing Las Vegas Strip jumps over a row of limousines in 1998 at the Tropicana Hotel; between two buildings at the Jockey Club in 1999; and a New Year's Eve jump amid fireworks in front of a volcano attraction at The Mirage on Dec. 31, 2008.

After a crash-landing to complete a motorcycle leap over a 220-foot (61-meter) chasm at an Indian reservation outside Grand Canyon National Park in 1999, Robbie Knieval noted that his father always wanted to jump the spectacular natural landmark in Arizona, but never did. Robbie Knieval broke his leg in his crash.

Evel Knieval instead attempted to soar over a mile-wide Snake River Canyon chasm in Idaho in September 1974. His rocket-powered cycle crashed into the canyon while his escape parachute deployed.

Robbie Knieval's brother recalled other stunts including a 2004 jump over a row of military aircraft on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid, a museum in New York.

Robbie Knieval, who promoted himself as "Kaptain Robbie Knieval," set several stunt records, but also failed in several attempts. In 1992, at age 29, he was injured when he crashed into the 22nd of 25 pickup trucks lined up across a 180-foot (55-meter) span in Cerritos, California.

"Injuries took quite a toll on him," Kelly Knieval said Friday.

Kelly Knieval lives in Las Vegas. He said his brother died with three daughters at his side: Krysten Knieval Hansson of Chicago, Karmen Knieval of Missoula, Montana, and Maria Collins of Waldport, Oregon.

Services were not immediately scheduled, but Kelly Knieval said his brother will be buried with other family members in Butte, Montana.

Actor Ezra Miller gets fine, probation after home break-in

By WILSON RING Associated Press

Actor Ezra Miller pleaded guilty Friday to a charge stemming from a break-in and theft of alcohol at a neighbor's home in Vermont, one of a string of arrests and reports of erratic behavior last year that stretched from Hawaii to New England.

Miller, who appeared in several "Justice League" movies and stars in the upcoming film "The Flash," agreed that by entering the plea and abiding by the conditions, they would avoid a three-month jail sentence for

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a misdemeanor charge of unlawful trespass, but pay a \$500 fine and a court fee, get a year of probation, and abide by a number of conditions including continued mental health treatment.

Two other charges were dropped, including a felony burglary count that could have carried a sentence of 25 years in prison, but Vermont Superior Court Judge Kerry Ann McDonald-Cady told Miller the felony charge could be refiled if they fail to abide by the details of probation.

During the nearly 30-minute hearing in Bennington, Miller, 30, answered the judge's questions but declined to make a statement. However, after the hearing, Miller's attorney, Lisa Shelkrot, sent a statement on the actor's behalf.

"Ezra would like to thank the court and the community for their trust and patience throughout this process, and would once again like to acknowledge the love and support they have received from their family and friends, who continue to be a vital presence in their ongoing mental health," the statement said.

Miller pleaded not guilty in October to stealing liquor from a neighbor's home in Vermont. State police responded to a burglary complaint in Stamford on May 1 and found that several bottles of alcohol had been taken while the homeowner was away.

The homeowner said he had been friends with Miller for about 18 years and bought the home a year and half ago in Stamford, where Miller also had a home, according to the police affidavit. Miller was charged after police consulted surveillance footage and interviewed witnesses.

Miller was arrested twice last year in Hawaii, including for disorderly conduct and harassment at a karaoke bar.

Yellen tells Congress US expected to hit debt limit Thursday

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen notified Congress on Friday that the U.S. is projected to reach its debt limit on Thursday and will then resort to "extraordinary measures" to avoid default.

In a letter to House and Senate leaders, Yellen said her actions will buy time until Congress can pass legislation that will either raise the nation's \$31.4 trillion borrowing authority or suspend it again for a period of time. But she said it's "critical that Congress act in a timely manner."

"Failure to meet the government's obligations would cause irreparable harm to the U.S. economy, the livelihoods of all Americans, and global financial stability," she said.

"In the past, even threats that the U.S. government might fail to meet its obligations have caused real harms, including the only credit rating downgrade in the history of our nation in 2011," she said. Yellen was referring to the debt ceiling impasse during Barack Obama's presidency, when Republicans had also just won a House majority.

In this new Congress, the debt ceiling debate will almost certainly trigger a political showdown between newly empowered GOP lawmakers who now control the House and want to cut spending and President Joe Biden and Democratic lawmakers, who had enjoyed one-party control of Washington for the past two years.

The White House has insisted that it won't allow the nation's credit to be held captive to the demands of GOP lawmakers.

"We have seen both Republicans and Democrats come together to deal with this issue," White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters Friday. "It is one of the basic items that Congress has to deal with and it should be done without conditions."

House Republican leaders liken the debt ceiling to a credit card limit and have said they would only raise the statutory ceiling if doing so also secures a spending overhaul.

New House Speaker Kevin McCarthy told reporters in his first press conference that he had a "very good conversation" with Biden about the coming debt ceiling debate. "We don't want to put any fiscal problems to our economy and we won't, but fiscal problems would be continuing to do business as usual," he said.

"We've got to change the way we are spending money."

McCarthy has floated the kind of budget-cap deal that was engineered in the last go around on the debt

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ceiling during the Trump administration, which would involve capping federal spending levels in return for the House votes needed to raise the debt limit.

But any effort to compromise with House Republicans could force Biden to bend on his own priorities, whether that's money for the IRS to ensure that wealthier Americans pay what they owe or domestic programs for children and the poor.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and new House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a joint statement Friday that "a default forced by extreme MAGA Republicans could plunge the country into a deep recession and lead to even higher costs for America's working families on everything from mortgages and car loans to credit card interest rates."

They said the two parties worked together to increase the debt limit three times when Trump was president and Republicans had majorities in the House and Senate. "This time should be no different," the Democratic leaders said.

Yellen said that while Treasury can't estimate how long the extraordinary measures will allow the U.S. to continue to pay the government's obligations, "it is unlikely that cash and extraordinary measures will be exhausted before early June."

Shai Akabas, director of economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, told reporters Friday that "this is not the time for panic, but it's certainly a time for policymakers to begin negotiations in earnest."

"Most policymakers agree that we have a major fiscal challenge as a country, our debt is unsustainable," he said, and "there's no reason why we couldn't agree on measures to improve our fiscal outcome, and also ensure that we are paying all of our bills in full and on time."

Treasury first used extraordinary measures in 1985 and has used them at least 16 times since, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a fiscal watchdog.

Those measures include divesting some payments, such as contributions to federal employees' retirement plans, in order to provide some headroom to make other payments that are deemed essential, including those for Social Security and debt instrument

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 financial markets could crash and several million workers could be laid off.

The aftershocks could be felt for years. Moody's Analytics called this risk "cataclysmic" in a 2021 forecast before the previous debt ceiling increase, suggesting that the resulting chaos would be due to government dysfunction, rather than the underlying condition of the U.S. economy.

Lisa Marie Presley will be buried at Graceland next to son

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Lisa Marie Presley will be buried at Graceland, the famed home of Elvis Presley that on Friday became a gathering place for fans distraught over her death a day earlier.

The singer-songwriter's final resting place will be next to her son, Benjamin Keough, who died in 2020, said a representative of her daughter and actor Riley Keough. Elvis and other members of the Presley family are also buried at Graceland.

Fans paid their respects at Graceland's gates on Friday, writing messages on the stone wall, leaving flowers and sharing memories of Elvis Presley's only child, who was one of the last remaining touchstones to the icon whose influence and significance still resonates more than 45 years after his own sudden death.

Lisa Marie Presley, 54, died Thursday, hours after being hospitalized for a medical emergency.

A singer-songwriter herself, Lisa Marie did not live in Memphis, where she was born. But she made trips to the city for celebrations of her father's birth anniversary and commemorations of his death, which stunned the world when he was found dead in his Graceland home at age 42 on Aug. 16, 1977. She was in Memphis just this past Sunday, on what would have been her father's 88th birthday.

Angela Ferraro was among those on Thursday night who stopped by Graceland, where the trees in the

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front lawn were adorned by green and red lights. Fans took photos and left flowers at the front gate on the chilly and windy evening.

Ferraro and her fiance drove 25 minutes from Olive Branch, Mississippi, to pay their respects. Ferraro said she was a fan of Elvis' music and of Lisa Marie's — the couple listened to Lisa Marie's song "Lights Out" on the drive north to Graceland.

"Elvis died young, and so did she. And her son, his passing was very tragic as well," said Ferraro, 32. "It's hard and it's devastating."

Lisa Marie became the sole heir of the Elvis Presley Trust, which — along with Elvis Presley Enterprises — managed Graceland and other assets until she sold her majority interest in 2005. She retained ownership of the mansion itself, the 13 acres around it and items inside the home.

A representative from Elvis Presley Enterprises told The Associated Press that the mansion is in a trust that will go to the benefit of her children — she's survived by three daughters. The representative did not have details on the timing of a funeral or burial.

Lisa Marie was 9 when her father died. She was staying at Graceland at the time and would recall him kissing her goodnight hours before he died. When she next saw him, the following day, he was lying face down in the bathroom.

"I just had a feeling," she told Rolling Stone in 2003. "He wasn't doing well. All I know is I had it (a feeling), and it happened. I was obsessed with death at a very early age."

Lisa Marie visited Graceland in 2012 to attend the opening of a new exhibit, "Elvis Through His Daughter's Eyes," a personal look that included her baby shoes — her birth, nine months exactly after Elvis and Priscilla Presley's wedding, was international news — as well as her first record player and a small white fur coat.

During an interview with the AP during that stop, she smiled when recalling the time spent with her dad. She said one of her favorite items was the key used to operate a golf cart because it helped her recall when she was alone with her father, riding around the neighborhood.

"That was my life," she said. "I carried it everywhere. It was never far from me or not on my person when I was a child. I hadn't seen it in 35 years."

On Thursday, Sancelle Vance, 50, had taken the Graceland tour, which included a stop by Lisa Marie's old swing set and the grave of her son.

About an hour and a half later, Vance heard about Lisa Marie's death; the mood at The Guest House at Graceland, the hotel where she is staying, became somber. Vance, who decided to stop in Memphis while moving from Mississippi to California, said it was "surreal" that she was at Graceland on the day Lisa Marie died.

Kristen Sainato and her husband were visiting Memphis from Cleveland when she heard the news of Lisa Marie's death on Thursday. She wore a black jacket with the well-known TCB lightning bolt (shorthand for taking care of business in a flash, a motto Elvis lived by) on the back as she described meeting Lisa Marie at a celebration of her father's birthday. Sainato set down a bouquet of flowers at the front gate of Graceland, where one of two planes is named for Lisa Marie.

"Those are for Lisa," she said.

She said Lisa Marie Presley was one of the last connections to her famous father.

"Everyone is shocked over this. Why? Why did this have to happen?" Sainato said, wiping tears from her eyes as she stood in front of the stone wall that borders the home-turned museum. "She deserved a long, happy life."

NFL All-Pros: Kelce, Jefferson unanimous; 16 first-timers

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Travis Kelce and Justin Jefferson are unanimous choices for The Associated Press 2022 NFL All-Pro Team, and Sauce Gardner is the first rookie cornerback selected in 41 years.

The Chiefs' Kelce and the Vikings' Jefferson received first-team votes Friday from all 50 members of a nationwide panel of media members who regularly cover the league.

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Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes, San Francisco 49ers edge rusher Nick Bosa and Chiefs defensive lineman Chris Jones each got 49 of 50 first-team votes. The Chiefs and Niners led the way with four players each on the first team.

Gardner, the fourth overall pick by the New York Jets, was named on all 50 ballots, receiving 43 first-place votes. Pro Football Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott was the last rookie cornerback chosen for the first team in 1981.

"That's a big deal to me," Gardner told the AP. "It was one of my goals before training camp. It's something I pray for. I worked so hard for it. It's a true blessing for sure."

Kelce's older brother, Jason, also earned first-team honors for the fifth time in his career to stay one ahead of his pass-catching brother. Jason Kelce's fellow Philadelphia Eagles linemate, right tackle Lane Johnson, joins him on the squad.

"Big honor, especially happy for (Johnson) who is the best tackle in the NFL without question, especially on the right side," Jason Kelce told the AP.

Johnson, a second-time All-Pro, has missed the past two games with an adductor injury but hopes to return when the No. 1 seed Eagles host a divisional round playoff game next week.

"We put in a lot of time and effort in the game, especially as you get older, you start to cherish it," Johnson told the AP.

Las Vegas Raiders running back Josh Jacobs is among the 16 first-time All-Pros. Jacobs led the NFL in rushing with 1,653 yards, scored 12 touchdowns rushing and averaged 4.9 yards per carry. The Raiders had three first-team picks despite finishing 6-11.

"The year definitely didn't go the way we wanted it to but, individually, it's definitely an honor to be selected," Jacobs told the AP.

Jefferson, who had a league-best 128 catches and 1,809 yards receiving, is the other newcomer on offense. Miami's Tyreek Hill made it for the fourth time, third as a receiver. Hill had 119 catches for 1,710 yards and seven TDs in his first season with the Dolphins. Raiders wideout Davante Adams got the nod for a third time. Adams had 100 receptions for 1,516 yards and 14 TDs in his first season in Las Vegas.

Cowboys right guard Zack Martin is a six-time All-Pro, 49ers left tackle Trent Williams and Browns left guard Joel Bitonio made it for the second straight season.

Mahomes also was an All-Pro in 2018 when he was the NFL MVP. He led the league with 5,250 yards passing and 41 TDs, helping the Chiefs go 14-3 to capture their seventh straight AFC West title. Philadelphia's Jalen Hurts got one first-team vote, preventing Mahomes from being a unanimous choice.

Cowboys edge rusher Micah Parsons, 49ers linebacker Fred Warner and Steelers safety Minkah Fitzpatrick are the only returning All-Pros on defense. It's a third time for Fitzpatrick. Parsons, who had 13 1/2 sacks, made it as a linebacker his rookie season last year.

Bosa, Jones, Jets defensive lineman Quinnen Williams, Ravens linebacker Roquan Smith, Bills linebacker Matt Milano, Broncos cornerback Patrick Surtain II and Niners safety Talanoa Hufanga all earned their first All-Pro selection.

Bosa led the NFL with 18 1/2 sacks. Williams had 11.

"I tell my wife my goals every day so she can keep me accountable and make sure I do the right thing and it was become a Pro Bowler and an All-Pro," Williams told the AP. "To get this news, all the work I put in has paid off and I gotta continue to do the same thing."

All six special-teams players are first-timers, too.

They are: Raiders kicker Daniel Carlson, Chiefs punter Tommy Townsend, Packers kick returner Keisean Nixon, Patriots punt returner Marcus Jones, Commanders special teamer Jeremy Reaves and Vikings long snapper Andrew DePaola.

This was the first year for the AP's new voting system. Voters chose a first team and a second team. First-team votes are worth 3 points, second-team votes are worth 1.

Trump Organization fined \$1.6 million for tax fraud

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's company was fined \$1.6 million Friday for a scheme in which the former president's top executives dodged personal income taxes on lavish job perks — a symbolic, hardly crippling blow for an enterprise boasting billions of dollars in assets.

A fine was the only penalty a judge could impose on the Trump Organization after its conviction last month for 17 tax crimes, including conspiracy and falsifying business records. The amount was the maximum allowed by law. Judge Juan Manuel Merchan gave the company 14 days to pay. A person convicted of the same crimes would've faced years in prison.

Trump himself was not on trial and denied any knowledge that a small group of executives were evading taxes on extras including rent-free apartments, luxury cars and private school tuition. Prosecutors said such items were part of what they dubbed the Trump Organization's "deluxe executive compensation package."

The company denied wrongdoing and said it would appeal.

"These politically motivated prosecutors will stop at nothing to get President Trump and continue the never ending witch-hunt which began the day he announced his presidency," the company said in a statement after the fine was announced.

Neither the former president nor his children, who helped run the Trump Organization, were in the courtroom.

While the fines — less than the cost of a Trump Tower apartment — aren't big enough to impact the company's operations or future, the conviction is a black mark on the Republican's reputation as a savvy businessman as he mounts a campaign to regain the White House.

Outside the courtroom, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, said he wished the law had allowed for a more serious penalty.

"I want to be very clear: we don't think that is enough," he said. "Our laws in this state need to change in order to capture this type of decade-plus systemic and egregious fraud."

Besides the company, only one executive was charged in the case: former Trump Organization Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg, who pleaded guilty last summer to evading taxes on \$1.7 million in compensation. He was sentenced Tuesday to five months in jail.

The criminal case involved financial practices and pay arrangements that the company halted when Trump was elected president in 2016.

Over his years as the company's chief moneymen, Weisselberg received a rent-free apartment in a Trump-branded building in Manhattan with a view of the Hudson River. He and his wife drove Mercedes-Benz cars, leased by company. When his grandchildren went to an exclusive private school, Trump paid their tuition. A handful of other executives received similar perks.

When called to testify against the Trump Organization at trial, Weisselberg said that he didn't pay taxes on that compensation, and that he and a company vice president conspired to hide the perks by having the company issue falsified W-2 forms.

Assistant District Attorney Joshua Steinglass told jurors Trump had a role, showing them a lease that the Republican signed himself for Weisselberg's apartment.

"Mr. Trump is explicitly sanctioning tax fraud," Steinglass argued.

Weisselberg also attempted to take responsibility on the witness stand, saying nobody in the Trump family knew what he was doing. He choked up as he told jurors, "It was my own personal greed that led to this."

At the trial, Trump Organization lawyers repeated the mantra, "Weisselberg did it for Weisselberg." In its statement Friday, the company took a different tone.

"Allen Weisselberg is a victim," it said. "He was threatened, intimidated and terrorized. He was given a choice of pleading guilty and serving 90 days in prison or serving the rest of his life in jail -- all of this over a corporate car and standard employee benefits."

A jury convicted the company of tax fraud on Dec. 6.

The Trump Organization was charged through two corporate entities: The Trump Corporation, which

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was fined \$810,000; and Trump Payroll Corporation, which was fined \$800,000.

Those fines "constitute a fraction of the revenue" generated by Trump's real estate empire, Steinglass said in court. It could face more trouble outside of court from reputational damage, such as difficulty finding new deals and business partners.

"We all know that these corporations won't go to jail, as Allen Weisselberg has," Steinglass said. "The only way to deter such conduct is to make it as expensive as possible."

The Trump Organization's sentencing doesn't end Trump's battle with Bragg, who said the sentencing "closes this important chapter of our ongoing investigation into the former president and his businesses. We now move onto the next chapter."

Bragg, in office for little more than a year, inherited the Trump Organization case and the investigation into the former president from his predecessor, Cyrus Vance Jr.

At the same time, New York Attorney General Letitia James is suing Trump and the Trump Organization, alleging they misled banks and others about the value of its many assets, including golf courses and skyscrapers — a practice she dubbed the "art of the steal."

James, a Democrat, is asking a court to ban Trump and his three eldest children from running any New York-based company and is seeking to fine them at least \$250 million. A judge has set an October trial date and appointed a monitor for the company while the case is pending.

Trump faces several other legal challenges as he ramps up his presidential campaign.

A special grand jury in Atlanta has investigated whether Trump and his allies committed any crimes while trying to overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia.

Last month, the House Jan. 6 committee voted to make a criminal referral to the Justice Department for Trump's role in sparking the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The FBI is also investigating Trump's storage of classified documents.

Rifts in Russian military command seen amid Ukraine fighting

By The Associated Press undefined

As Russian troops wage a ferocious house-to-house fight for control of strongholds in eastern Ukraine, a parallel battle is unfolding in the top echelons of military power in Moscow, with President Vladimir Putin reshuffling his top generals while rival camps try to win his favor.

The fighting for the salt mining town of Soledar and the nearby city of Bakhmut has highlighted a bitter rift between the Russian Defense Ministry leadership and Yevgeny Prigozhin, a rogue millionaire whose private military force known as the Wagner Group has played an increasingly visible role in Ukraine.

Putin's shakeup of the military brass this week was seen as a bid to show that the Defense Ministry still has his support and is in charge as the troubled conflict nears the 11-month mark.

Prigozhin declared Wednesday that his mercenary force had captured Soledar, arguing the prize was won exclusively by Wagner. The Defense Ministry waited until Friday to announce its capture, saying that it became possible thanks to air and artillery strikes and airborne forces' maneuvers. A Ukrainian army spokesman denied that, saying Kyiv's troops were still in Soledar.

The Defense Ministry initially didn't mention the private contractor, but after Prigozhin accused the military of "constantly trying to steal Wagner's victory," it acknowledged his group's "courageous and selfless action" to storm the city.

The 61-year-old Prigozhin, who was known as "Putin's chef" for his lucrative catering contracts and was indicted in the U.S. for meddling in the 2016 presidential election, has expanded his assets to include Wagner, as well as mining and other spheres. He has scathingly criticized the military brass for blunders in Ukraine, saying Wagner was more efficient than regular troops.

He has found a powerful ally in Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has deployed elite troops from his southern Russian region to fight in Ukraine and also assailed the military leadership and the Kremlin for being too soft and indecisive.

While both have pledged loyalty to Putin, their public attacks on his top generals openly challenged the

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Kremlin's monopoly on such criticism, something that Russia's tightly controlled political system hadn't seen before.

In the reshuffle announced Wednesday, the Defense Ministry said the head of the General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, was named the new chief of Russian forces in Ukraine, while the former top commander there was demoted to Gerasimov's deputy after only three months on the job.

The Washington-based Institute of the Study of War saw the reshuffle as an attempt by the Kremlin to "reassert the primacy of the Russian Ministry of Defense in an internal Russian power struggle," weaken the influence of its foes, and send a signal to Prigozhin and others to reduce their criticism.

Prigozhin and his allies have repeatedly criticized Gerasimov, the main architect of the Russian operation in Ukraine, and held him responsible for military defeats.

Russian troops were forced to retreat from Kyiv after a botched attempt to capture the Ukrainian capital in the opening weeks of the war. In the fall, they hastily pulled back from the northeastern Kharkiv region and the southern city of Kherson under the brunt of a swift Ukrainian counteroffensive.

The former commander in Ukraine, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, directed the retreat from Kherson, the only regional center captured by Russia, and was credited for shoring up command and increasing discipline in the ranks. But a Jan. 1 Ukrainian missile strike in the eastern town of Makiivka killed scores of Russian troops and tainted his image.

Political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya observed that Gerasimov's appointment marked yet another attempt by Putin to resolve his military problems by shaking up the brass.

"He is trying to reshuffle the pieces and is therefore giving chances to those who he finds persuasive," she wrote. "But in reality, the problem is not with the people, but with the tasks at hand."

Stanovaya argued that Gerasimov could have asked for "carte blanche in the heat of verbal battles against the background of some very tense discussions." For Putin, "this is maneuvering, a tug-of-war between Surovikin (and sympathizers like Prigozhin) and Gerasimov," she added.

Gerasimov, who began his military career as a Soviet army tank officer in the 1970s, has been chief of the General Staff since 2012 and was seen at the start of the conflict in February sitting next to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at a very long table with Putin. His appointment to directly lead the forces in Ukraine drew stinging comments from some Russian hawks.

Viktor Alksnis, a retired Soviet air force colonel who spearheaded botched attempts to preserve the USSR in 1991, noted that Gerasimov had overseen the action in Ukraine even before his appointment.

"This decision reflects the understanding by our political and military leadership that the special military operation has failed and none of its goals has been fulfilled in nearly a year of fighting," Alksnis wrote on his messaging app channel. "Replacing Surovikin with Gerasimov will change nothing."

Mark Galeotti, who specializes in Russian military and security affairs at University College, London, said the appointment handed Gerasimov "the most poisoned of chalices" as he now will bear direct responsibility for any more setbacks.

"Gerasimov is hanging by a thread," Galeotti said in a commentary on Twitter. "He needs some kind of win, or a career ends in ignominy. This may well suggest some kinds of escalation."

Galeotti also warned that frequent reshuffling of Russia's generals could erode allegiance in the officer corps.

"If you keep appointing, rotating, burning your (relative) stars, setting unrealistic expectations, arbitrarily demoting them, that's not going to win loyalty," he said.

Prigozhin, meanwhile, has taken advantage of military setbacks in Ukraine to expand his clout by making the Wagner Group a pivotal element of the Russian fighting force, augmenting the regular army that has suffered a heavy attrition.

Ukrainian officials alleged Wagner contractors have suffered massive losses in the fighting in Soledar and Bakhmut, advancing "on the bodies of their own comrades."

Once convicted of assault and robbery, for which he served time in prison, Prigozhin in recent months went on a tour of Russia's sprawling network of penal colonies to recruit inmates to join Wagner's forces to fight in Ukraine in exchange for pardons.

He recently released a video showing about 20 convicts allowed to leave the ranks of fighters after a half-year on the front line, while also making clear that anyone breaking ranks will face brutal punishment.

Footage posted in the fall showed a Wagner contractor being beaten to death with a sledgehammer after allegedly defecting to the Ukrainian side. Despite public outrage and demands to investigate the incident, authorities have turned a blind eye to it.

Observers have warned that by giving Prigozhin a free hand to run Wagner as a private army governed by medieval-style rules, the government has effectively planted dangerous seeds of possible upheaval.

"In the end, there is chaos and the expansion of violence — extrajudicial and illegal," predicted Andrei Kolesnikov, an analyst with the Carnegie Endowment.

FEMA fires group for nonsensical Alaska Native translations

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — After tidal surges and high winds from the remnants of a rare typhoon caused extensive damage to homes along Alaska's western coast in September, the U.S. government stepped in to help residents — largely Alaska Natives — repair property damage.

Residents who opened Federal Emergency Management Agency paperwork expecting to find instructions on how to file for aid in Alaska Native languages like Yup'ik or Inupiaq instead were reading bizarre phrases.

"Tomorrow he will go hunting very early, and will (bring) nothing," read one passage. The translator randomly added the word "Alaska" in the middle of the sentence.

"Your husband is a polar bear, skinny," another said.

Yet another was written entirely in Inuktitut, an Indigenous language spoken in northern Canada, far from Alaska.

FEMA fired the California company hired to translate the documents once the errors became known, but the incident was an ugly reminder for Alaska Natives of the suppression of their culture and languages from decades past.

FEMA immediately took responsibility for the translation errors and corrected them, and the agency is working to make sure it doesn't happen again, spokesperson Jaclyn Rothenberg said. No one was denied aid because of the errors.

That's not good enough for one Alaska Native leader.

For Tara Sweeney, an Inupiaq who served as an assistant secretary of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Interior Department during the Trump administration, this was another painful reminder of steps taken to prevent Alaska Native children from speaking Indigenous languages.

"When my mother was beaten for speaking her language in school, like so many hundreds, thousands of Alaska Natives, to then have the federal government distributing literature representing that it is an Alaska Native language, I can't even describe the emotion behind that sort of symbolism," Sweeney said.

Sweeney called for a congressional oversight hearing to uncover how long and widespread the practice has been used throughout government.

"These government contracting translators have certainly taken advantage of the system, and they have had a profound impact, in my opinion, on vulnerable communities," said Sweeney, whose great-grandfather, Roy Ahmaogak, invented the Inupiaq alphabet more than a half-century ago.

She said his intention was to create the characters so "our people would learn to read and write to transition from an oral history to a more tangible written history."

U.S. Rep. Mary Peltola, who is Yup'ik and last year became the first Alaska Native elected to Congress, said it was disappointing FEMA missed the mark with these translations but didn't call for hearings.

"I am confident FEMA will continue to make the necessary changes to be ready the next time they are called to serve our citizens," the Democrat said.

About 1,300 people have been approved for FEMA assistance after the remnants of Typhoon Merbok created havoc as it traveled about 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) north through the Bering Strait, potentially affecting 21,000 residents. FEMA has paid out about \$6.5 million, Rothenberg said.

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Preliminary estimates put overall damage at just over \$28 million, but the total is likely to rise after more assessment work is done after the spring thaw, said Jeremy Zidek, a spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

The poorly translated documents, which did not create delays or problems, were a small part of efforts to help people register for FEMA assistance in person, online and by phone, Zidek said.

Another factor is that while English may not be the preferred language for some residents, many are bilingual and can struggle through an English version, said Gary Holton, a University of Hawaii at Manoa linguistics professor and a former director of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Central Alaskan Yup'ik is the largest of the Alaska Native languages, with about 10,000 speakers in 68 villages across southwest Alaska. Children learn Yup'ik as their first language in 17 of those villages. There are about 3,000 Inupiaq speakers across northern Alaska, according to the language center.

It appears the words and phrases used in the translated documents were taken from Nikolai Vakhtin's 2011 edition of "Yupik Eskimo Texts from the 1940s," said John DiCandeloro, the language center's archivist.

The book is the written record of field notes collected on Russia's Chukotka Peninsula across the Bering Strait from Alaska in the 1940s by Ekaterina Rubtsova, who interviewed residents about their daily life and culture for a historical account.

The works were later translated and made available on the language center's website, which Holton used to investigate the origin of the mistranslated texts.

Many of the languages from the area are related but with differences, just as English is related to French or German but is not the same language, Holton said.

Holton, who has about three decades experience in Alaska Native language documentation and revitalization, searched the online archive and found "hit after hit," words pulled right out of the Russian work and randomly placed into FEMA documents.

"They clearly just grabbed the words from the document and then just put them in some random order and gave something that looked like Yup'ik but made no sense," he said, calling the final product a "word salad."

He said it was offensive that an outside company appropriated the words people 80 years ago used to memorialize their lives.

"These are people's grandparents and great-grandparents that are knowledge-keepers, are elders, and their words which they put down, expecting people to learn from, expecting people to appreciate, have just been bastardized," Holton said.

KYUK Public Media in Bethel first reported the mistranslations.

"We make no excuses for erroneous translations, and we deeply regret any inconvenience this has caused to the local community," Caroline Lee, the CEO of Accent on Languages, the Berkeley, California-based company that produced the mistranslated documents, said in a statement.

She said the company will refund FEMA the \$5,116 it received for the work and conduct an internal review to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Lee did not respond to follow-up questions, including how the mistaken translations occurred.

Nighttime Israeli arrests haunt Palestinian kids, families

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

BALATA REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank (AP) — Yousef Mesheh was sleeping in his bunk bed when Israeli forces stormed into his home at 3 a.m.

Within moments, the 15-year-old Palestinian said he was lying on the floor as troops punched him, shouting insults. A soldier struck his mother's chest with his rifle butt and locked her in the bedroom, where she screamed for her sons.

Yousef and his 16-year-old brother, Wael, were hauled out of their home in Balata refugee camp in the northern West Bank. Yousef was in a sleeveless undershirt and couldn't see without his glasses.

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"I can't forget that night," Yousef told The Associated Press from his living room, decorated with photos of Wael, who remains in detention. "When I go to sleep I still hear the shooting and screaming."

The Israeli military arrested and interrogated hundreds of Palestinian teenagers in 2022 in the occupied West Bank, without ever issuing a summons or notifying their families, according to an upcoming report by the Israeli human rights organization HaMoked.

The charges against those being arrested ranged from being in Israel without a permit to throwing stones or Molotov cocktails. Some teens say they were arrested to obtain information about neighbors or family members.

In the vast majority of the military's pre-planned arrests of minors last year, children were taken from their homes in the dead of the night, HaMoked said. After being yanked out of bed, children as young as 14 were interrogated while sleep-deprived and disoriented. Water, food and access to toilets were often withheld. Yousef said soldiers beat him when he asked to relieve himself during his seven-hour journey to the detention center.

The Israeli army argues it has the legal authority to arrest minors at its discretion during late-night raids.

Lawyers and advocates say the tactic runs counter to Israel's legal promises to alert parents about their children's alleged offenses.

In response to a petition to the Supreme Court by HaMoked two years ago, there had been some small improvement when Israel asked the military to first summon Palestinian parents about their accused children. But the progress was short-lived. Last year, the Israeli military rounded up hundreds of Palestinians in the West Bank ages 12-17 in late-night arrests, according to HaMoked. Rights activists say they believe such tactics are meant to create fear.

"The fact that the military is making no effort to reduce these traumatic night arrests indicates to us that the trauma is part of the point," said Jessica Montell, director of HaMoked. "This intimidation and terrorizing of communities seems actually part of the policy."

According to figures reported to the Supreme Court, the army summoned Palestinian parents to question their children only a handful of times in 2021. Last year, not a single family received a summons in nearly 300 cases HaMoked tracked in the West Bank.

Petty offenses and cases where children were released without charge — as happened to Yousef — were no exception. HaMoked said the numbers are incomplete because it believes scores of similar cases are never reported.

"They are not implementing the procedure they created themselves," said Ayed Abu Eqtaish, accountability program director for Defense for Children International in the Palestinian territories. "The beating and mistreatment of children during night arrests is really what we're concerned about."

In response to a request for comment, the Israeli military said it tries to summon Palestinian children suspected of minor offenses who have no history of serious criminal convictions. But, the army argued, this policy does not apply to serious offenses or "when a summons to an investigation would harm its purpose."

The army would not comment on Yousef's arrest, but said his brother, Wael, faces charges related to "serious financial crimes," including "contacting the enemy," "illegally bringing in money" and helping "an illegal organization." These charges typically reflect cases of Palestinians communicating with people in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

Although HaMoked found most cases were soon dropped, the late-night arrests haunted children long after.

Since his Nov. 7 arrest, Yousef "is not like he was before," said his mother, Hanadi Mesheh, who also recounted her ordeal to the AP. He can't focus in school. He no longer plays soccer. She sleeps beside him some nights, holding him during his nightmares.

"I feel like I'm always being watched," Yousef said. "I'm frightened when my mother wakes me in the morning for school."

Similar stories abound in the area. The northern city of Nablus emerged as a major flashpoint for violence last year after Israel began a crackdown in the West Bank in response to a spate of Palestinian attacks in Israel.

Last year Israeli forces killed at least 146 Palestinians, including 34 children, the Israeli rights group

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B'Tselem reported, making 2022 the deadliest for Palestinians in the West Bank in 18 years. According to the Israeli army, most of the Palestinians killed have been militants. But youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed. Palestinian attacks, meanwhile, killed at least 31 Israelis last year.

Israel says the operations are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks. The Palestinians have decried the raids as collective punishment aimed at cementing Israel's open-ended 55-year-old occupation of lands they want for a future state. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Nighttime arrest raids are not limited to the West Bank. Israeli police also carry out regular raids in Palestinian neighborhoods of east Jerusalem.

Last fall in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Beit Hanina, Rania Elias heard pounding on the door before dawn. Her youngest son, 16-year-old Shadi Khoury, was sleeping in his underwear. Israeli police burst into their home, shoved Khoury to the floor and pummeled his face. Blood was everywhere, she said, as police dragged him to a Jerusalem detention center for interrogation.

"You can't imagine what it's like to feel helpless to save your child," Elias said.

In response to a request for comment, the Israeli police said they charged Khoury with being part of a group that threw stones at a Jewish family's car on Oct. 12, wounding a passenger.

Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new ultra-nationalist government, parents say they fear for their children more than ever. Some of the most powerful ministers are Israeli settlers who promise a hard-line stance against the Palestinians.

"This is the darkest moment," said activist Murad Shitawi, whose 17-year-old son Khaled was arrested last March in a night raid on their home in the West Bank town of Kfar Qaddum. "I'm worried for my sons."

Maduro's newest foe: an in-home caregiver who fled Venezuela

By RAQUEL REDONDO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

VALENCIA, Spain (AP) — Like many of the 7 million Venezuelans who have abandoned their homeland in recent years, when Dinorah Figuera left behind her family and medical career in 2018 she was forced to accept meals from local charities and hop from one low-cost shared apartment to another upon arriving in Spain.

Today, she still hustles to make ends meet working as an in-home caregiver for an elderly diabetic woman in the port city of Valencia.

But now the 61-year-old has an even weightier responsibility — leading Venezuela's opposition from exile in the seemingly impossible fight to unseat President Nicolás Maduro as the new head of the National Assembly elected in 2015.

Figuera's selection this month as part of an all-female leadership team of former backbench lawmakers was initially celebrated as an overdue acknowledgement of the key grassroots role women like her have played in the two-decade fight against Venezuela's socialist administration.

It could all easily backfire. To most observers, Figuera only managed to steal some of the spotlight from the men who dominate the U.S.-backed opposition because of an ugly internal fracas that has left it discredited in the eyes of millions of Venezuelans doing what they can to avoid joining the country's mass exodus.

"This could end up being a double-edged knife if we don't do things right," Figuera said in an interview Thursday in a park as she interrupted a busy schedule of phone calls with opposition politicians seeking her out for the first time. "But we're going to take that risk, with all of the possible consequences, because we Venezuelans deserve a change."

Figuera emerged as an unlikely power broker after her party this month led a putsch to oust the beleaguered Juan Guaidó from his role as "interim president." It was a title he claimed in 2019 as head of the National Assembly when several top opponents were barred from running against Maduro in the presidential election. Even though the assembly's five-year mandate ended at the end of 2020, it still functions

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as a symbolic shadow to Maduro's rubber-stamping legislature and is widely considered Venezuela's last democratically elected institution.

The same opposition stalwarts chose Figuera to replace Guaidó in a parliamentary session held over Zoom because so many had fled Venezuela in recent years. But in a twist, the so-called interim government was officially disbanded, thus downgrading Figuera's sway.

While Figuera's plight is similar to many Venezuelan migrants, the circumstances of her departure are unique.

In October 2018, her close friend Fernando Albán — godfather to her daughter — died after falling from the 10th floor of a building belonging to Maduro's intelligence services. It was ruled a suicide by Maduro's government. Figuera had to quickly flee when she began to receive threats for denouncing that her fellow activist had been killed in custody.

"I didn't have time to say goodbye to my family," she recalled.

In Spain, she was granted asylum. A single mother, she was separated from her daughter for a while and wept from abroad as her mother and two siblings passed away — her training as a surgeon and epidemiologist useless from thousands of miles (kilometers) away. Today, more settled, she sends money to loved ones back home from a job for which she is vastly overqualified but is grateful to have.

"I feel like I'm part of the family," Figuera said of her Spanish employer, the daughter of the elderly woman under her care. "She's always saying that nobody believes that the woman who cares for my mother is the president of the Venezuelan national assembly."

Although not well known in Venezuela, Figuera has been active in politics since a teenager, with a focus on helping neighbors in the working class Caracas neighborhood where she grew up. After taking a two-year recess to undergo treatment for leukemia, she was elected to congress in 2010 and again in 2015 for the Justice First party.

Her main task as head of the would-be legislature is re-connecting with disillusioned voters and uniting the opposition a year out from elections. It's a steep challenge with so many activists like herself in exile and Maduro's near total control of all institutions. Hours after her appointment, Maduro's attorney general announced orders for her arrest.

Figuera believes the opposition needs a more modest stance to refocus Venezuelans' attention on the Maduro government's corruption, human rights abuses and mismanagement of a once thriving oil economy battered today by high inflation, gaping poverty and widespread shortages.

"We're at a crossroads where rectifications are needed," she said, without providing specifics. "And that means abandoning some positions that have weakened us."

But the opposition's own history of overreach, strategic missteps and battling egos are also a hazard. Guaidó and his allies consider that his removal was unconstitutional. Even some fellow female politicians see her appointment as a desperate attempt to improve the opposition's worn down image.

"I have nothing to celebrate as a woman," said Adriana Pichardo, a former lawmaker from Guaidó's party.

To be sure, Venezuela's politics have long been defined by a heavy dose of machismo — of which the opposition isn't immune. All of Guaidó's commissioners, which functioned as shadow ministers, were men and only two of nine members of the opposition team negotiating in Mexico with Maduro's government are women.

"Women are where the power isn't," said Natalia Brandler, director of CAUCE, a Caracas-based non-profit group that trains female political leaders.

The dearth of opportunities has drawn grumblings from the U.S. and other Western governments that support Venezuela's pro-democracy movement. In 2019, after Guaidó was recognized as Venezuela's legitimate leader by the U.S. and dozens of countries, a non-profit called Independent Diplomat was quietly hired with a grant from Canada to provide mentorship and workshops with valuable foreign contacts to a group of lawmakers and activists calling itself Women for Democracy in Venezuela.

"All too often the international community pushes engagement in a tokenistic way, for example setting up parallel tracks for women on the sidelines of substantive negotiations rather than within the core

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negotiations as peacemakers in their own right," said Reza Afshar, a former British diplomat who heads Independent Diplomat. "We need to shift the paradigm. Women need to play leading roles because evidence suggests it yields better results, and, as we've seen, men running things for hundreds of years hasn't worked very well."

Ironically, much of the female empowerment inside the opposition is a result of policies pursued by Maduro. The congressional election in 2015 was the first in Venezuela to require gender parity to correct longstanding imbalances that led to as many as 91% of local mayors being men. Most of the slots for female candidates were in pro-government strongholds like the central state of Aragua, which Figuera represents. When the opposition won the vote by a landslide, a number of previously unknown women gained a surprise foothold.

Figuera, having been herself excluded from so many closed door meetings of male party bosses, hopes to convert her unassuming touch into a strength to help the opposition recover some of its lost credibility.

"I'm a woman from modest upbringing that has worked hard and won elections," she said, reflecting on her unlikely ascendance. "I have the experience of resistance and I have the experience of making indeclinable decisions."

EXPLAINER: What came together to make deadly Alabama tornado

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

DENVER (AP) — A La Nina weather pattern, warm moist air coming from an unusually toasty Gulf of Mexico, likely juiced by climate change, and a decades long eastward shift of tornadoes came together to create the unusually early and deadly storm system that hit Alabama Thursday, meteorologists said.

And it may be the start of a bad tornado year, one expert worries.

Early signals, which could change, "indicate the overall pattern remains favorable for an above average tornadic year," said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini, who studies tornado patterns.

Gensini said his concern is mostly based on historic patterns and changes in atmospheric conditions that happen when a La Nina, which is a natural cooling of parts of the Pacific that changes weather worldwide, dissipates like it is forecast to do in a few months.

A NEEDED COMBINATION

For tornadoes to form, two big ingredients are needed that often aren't at high enough levels at the same time: wet stormy instability and wind shear, which is a difference in wind speeds and directions at different altitudes.

At this time of year, "shear is a guarantee," said Harold Brooks, a senior scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Severe Storms Laboratory. "What happens is when you get moisture you can have a (storm) system. That is the ingredient that is usually missing this time of year."

The cold front was following a classic waviness in the jet stream — the atmospheric rivers that move weather systems — seen in La Nina winters, Gensini said. La Nina winters tend to produce more tornadoes and NOAA this week said preliminary numbers show 1,331 tornadoes in 2022, which was a La Nina year, 9% more than average.

"If you're going to get tornadoes in January, this is the type of setup that's going to produce them," Gensini said.

Still without moisture there are no tornadoes.

WARM MOIST AIR

Measurements of moisture in the Alabama air were about twice as high as they should be this time of year and more like May in Tornado Alley, an area stretching from Texas to South Dakota known for being prone to twisters, Gensini said. That's more than enough for a tornado.

The warm moist air is from the Gulf of Mexico and he said, "that's a climate change signal."

Gensini pointed to NOAA measurements of water temperature throughout the Gulf on a computer screen and said: "Look at that number. 70 (21 degrees Celsius). 70. 70. That is ridiculous. That's way above aver-

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age" for this time of year. That nearby warm water juiced up the air.

"This is very much a La Nina type of system that you'd expect but is being augmented by abnormally warm Gulf of Mexico sea surface temperatures," Gensini said.

The warm humid air hits the cold front and goes up like a ramp and the mixing that creates tornadoes begin, Gensini said.

TORNADOES HITTING EAST

Over the past few decades, a new pattern of tornado activity has emerged.

There are fewer tornadoes in Tornado Alley and more of them east of the Mississippi River in the Southeast, a 2018 study by Gensini and Brooks found.

Tornado activity is increasing most in Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Alabama, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa and parts of Ohio and Michigan. The biggest drop in number of tornadoes is in Texas, but even with the decline, Texas still gets the most tornadoes of any state.

Gensini said his lab is working this summer to try to figure out why that is.

MORE VULNERABILITY

A nasty side effect of tornadoes moving further east is that they are moving from less populated areas to more crowded ones, Brooks and Gensini said.

In Tornado Alley, a tornado can go for miles and miles and not hit anything and anyone and thus not be an issue, Brooks said. But that's not really the case in the East. People and buildings are in the way.

And the people in the way are more vulnerable.

"There's more poverty in the Southeast, there's a greater mobile home population" which is one of the most dangerous places to be in a tornado, Brooks said.

Also because of storm tracks, or the routes storms follow due to wind and weather conditions, the further east tornadoes hit, the more likely they are to hit later in the day and even at night, when people are sleeping or not listening for warnings, Gensini said.

Today in History: JAN 14, Marilyn Monroe weds Joe DiMaggio

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Jan. 14, the 14th day of 2023. There are 351 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

In Jan. 14, 1964, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy, in a brief televised address, thanked Americans for their condolences and messages of support following the assassination of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, nearly two months earlier.

On this date:

In 1784, the United States ratified the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War; Britain followed suit in April 1784.

In 1914, Ford Motor Co. greatly improved its assembly-line operation by employing an endless chain to pull each chassis along at its Highland Park, Michigan, plant.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and French General Charles de Gaulle opened a wartime conference in Casablanca.

In 1952, NBC's "Today" show premiered, with Dave Garroway as the host, or "communicator."

In 1954, Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio were married at San Francisco City Hall. (The marriage lasted about nine months.)

In 1963, George C. Wallace was sworn in as governor of Alabama with the pledge, "Segregation forever!" — a view Wallace later repudiated.

In 1964, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy, in a brief televised address, thanked Americans for their condolences and messages of support following the assassination of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, nearly two months earlier.

In 1967, the Sixties' "Summer of Love" unofficially began with a "Human Be-In" involving tens of thou-

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sands of young people at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

In 1970, Diana Ross and the Supremes performed their last concert together, at the Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas.

In 1975, the House Internal Security Committee (formerly the House Un-American Activities Committee) was disbanded.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed an accord to stop aiming missiles at any nation; the leaders joined Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk in signing an accord to dismantle the nuclear arsenal of Ukraine.

In 2010, President Barack Obama and the U.S. moved to take charge in earthquake-ravaged Haiti, dispatching thousands of troops along with tons of aid.

Ten years ago: Lance Armstrong ended a decade of denial by confessing to Oprah Winfrey during a videotaped interview that he'd used performance-enhancing drugs to win the Tour de France.

Five years ago: Chelsea Manning confirmed that she was a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Maryland; the former Army intelligence analyst was known as Bradley Manning at the time of her 2010 arrest that led to a conviction for leaking classified documents. (Manning lost in a Democratic primary won by incumbent Ben Cardin.) On the defensive in the wake of disparaging comments about Haiti and African nations, President Donald Trump told reporters, "I am the least racist person you have ever interviewed."

One year ago: The Australian government revoked the visa of tennis star Novak Djokovic for a second time as Djokovic fought to stay in the country and compete in the Australian Open despite being unvaccinated for COVID-19. (Djokovic would be deported two days later, but returned in January, 2023 for competition.) China further tightened its anti-pandemic measures in Beijing and across the country as scattered COVID-19 outbreaks continued, a little over two weeks ahead of the Winter Olympics.

Today's birthdays: Blues singer Clarence Carter is 86. Singer Jack Jones is 85. Actor Faye Dunaway is 82. Actor Holland Taylor is 80. Actor Carl Weathers is 75. Singer-producer T-Bone Burnett is 75. Movie writer-director Lawrence Kasdan is 74. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Maureen Dowd is 71. Rock singer Geoff Tate (Queensryche) is 64. Movie writer-director Steven Soderbergh is 60. Actor Mark Addy is 59. Former Fox News Channel anchorman Shepard Smith is 59. Actor/producer Dan Schneider is 59. Rapper Slick Rick is 58. Actor Emily Watson is 56. Actor-comedian Tom Rhodes is 56. Rock musician Zakk Wylde is 56. Rapper-actor LL Cool J is 55. Actor Jason Bateman is 54. Rock singer-musician Dave Grohl (Foo Fighters) is 54. Actor Kevin Durand is 49. Actor Jordan Ladd is 48. Actor Ward Horton is 47. Actor Emayatzy Corinealdi is 43. Retro-soul singer-songwriter Marc Broussard is 41. Rock singer-musician Caleb Followill (Kings of Leon) is 41. Actor Zach Gilford is 41. Actor Jake Choi is 38. Actor Jonathan Osser is 34. Actor-singer Grant Gustin ("Glee") is 33. Singer/guitarist Molly Tuttle is 30.