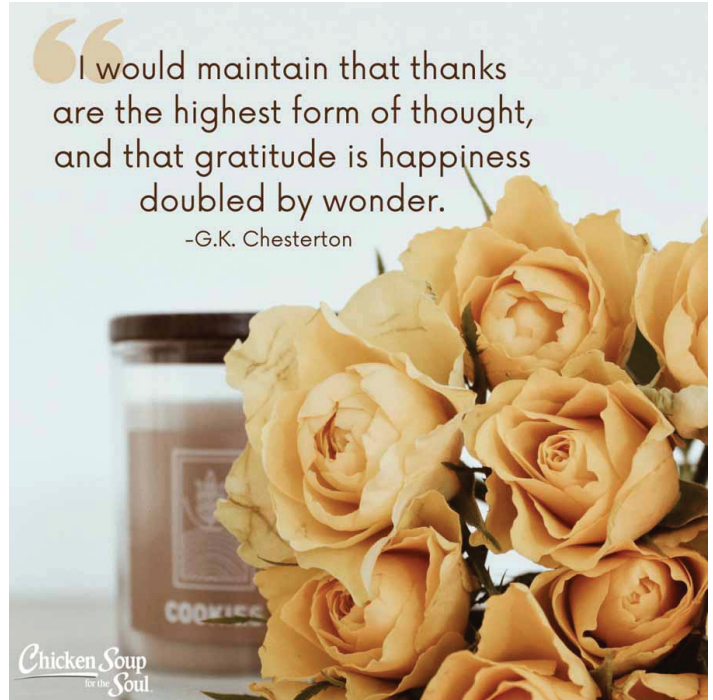


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Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Groton Community Calendar Saturday, Jan. 28

NEC-DAXXII boys basketball clash at Madison. (Groton vs. Elk Point-Jefferson at 2 p.m.)
Groton Area Wrestling 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. 29

Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
Carnival of Silver Skates, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.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 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.

OPEN: 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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Groton Daily Independent

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Fall to Warriors in Winona

Winona, Minn. – A cold-shooting second quarter hindered Northern State on Friday evening, forcing them to play from behind the remainder of the game and fall to Winona State by a score of 73-66. The Wolves were able to shoot 48.3 percent from the floor in the second half and out-score the Warriors 40-38, however it was not enough to make up the first half deficit. The Warriors were efficient from floor all four quarters, shooting better than 50 percent from the field and 3-point range in the game.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 66, WSU 73

Records: NSU 12-9 (7-8 NSIC), WSU 10-11 (4-11 NSIC)

Attendance: 763

HOW IT HAPPENED

Winona State jumped out to an early 9-5 advantage in the opening minutes, however Morgan Fiedler and Rianna Fillipi knocked down back-to-back 3-pointers to give Northern State a 17-16 lead with 2:13 remaining in the first quarter

The Wolves were able to stay within single digits the entire second quarter, but the Warriors held a 17-9 advantage in the second period to take a 35-26 advantage into the halftime break

Five quick points for WSU pushed the Warrior lead to 14 points early in the second half, however Kailee Oliverson scored seven points for NSU on a 10-2 scoring run to bring the game back within single digits at 42-36

Jordyn Hilgemann scored the final four points of the third quarter to cap an 8-2 scoring run for the Wolves, bringing the deficit back to four points after the Warriors briefly pushed the lead back to ten points again mid-way through the period

A majority of the fourth quarter was Northern State and Winona State trading baskets, while the largest scoring run by either team was a 6-0 run by the Wolves early in period

Four points was the closest NSU was able to get in the final quarter when Rachel Garvey knocked down a 3-pointer with 24 seconds remaining; the Warriors iced the game away in the fourth quarter, going 10-11 from the free throw line

Northern State continues to be one of the best teams in NCAA Division II in terms of ball security, the Wolves recorded their eighth game of the season with ten or fewer turnovers, committing only nine against the Warriors

Northern out-rebounded Winona State 29-26 in the game, however tonight marked only the third game of the season with fewer than 30 rebounds for NSU

The Wolves shot 23-60 (38.3%) from the field, 8-17 (47.1%) from 3-point range, and 12-16 (75.0%) from the free throw line

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kailee Oliverson: 21 points, 8 rebounds

Rianna Fillipi: 15 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal

Alayna Benike: 8 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 steal

UP NEXT

The Northern State women's basketball team will play their final cross-division contest of the season this afternoon when they visit Upper Iowa. The Wolves and the Peacocks are set for a 5:30 p.m. tip-off in Dorman Memorial Gymnasium in Fayette, Iowa.

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NSU Wrestling

No. 20 Wolves Open the Weekend Strong, Downing the Mavericks

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 20 Northern State University wrestling team tallied their third straight victory, and third all-time, over (RV) Minnesota State on Friday evening. The 19-17 victory over the Mavericks marked the Wolves third NSIC win of the season, leaving them fifth in the NSIC standings behind tomorrow night's opponent St. Cloud State.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 19, MSU 17

Records: NSU 8-3 (3-2 NSIC), MSU 4-3 (1-3 NSIC)

Attendance: 927

HOW IT HAPPENED

- The Wolves tallied four wrestled wins in the dual and a forfeit victory at 125-pounds
- Minnesota State jumped out to an early 6-point lead with two decision wins at 165 and 174 pounds
- Sam Kruger broke through for NSU, defeating Nicolas Leo in a 6-1 decision
- No. 3 Cole Huss gained the lead for Northern State and tallied the lone bonus point win for the Wolves, defeating Max Villnow in a 14-4 major decision
- The Mavericks regained the lead heading into the break with a 6-3 decision victory in the 285 weight class
- Landen Fischer nabbed six team points in a forfeit win and Teagan Block extended the lead in the following match
- Block defeated Isaiah Misna in a 4-1 decision, which gave Northern the 16-9 lead over Minnesota State
- The 141-pound match head to the sudden victory round and the 12th ranked Maverick, Brock Luthens, tallied the three team points in the win
- With Northern holding a 16-12 lead, No. 7 Wyatt Turnquist sealed the dual for the Wolves
- The 149-pounder battled in a 6-1 decision win over Caleb Meunier, the final victory of the evening for Northern State

MATCH RESULTS

Weight	Summary	NSU	MSU
165	Kole Marko (Minnesota State) over Chase Bloomquist (Northern State) (Dec 4-2)	0	3
174	Michael Smith (Minnesota State) over Kelby Hawkins (Northern State) (Dec 9-4)	0	3
184	Sam Kruger (Northern State) over Nicolas Leo (Minnesota State) (Dec 6-1)	3	0
197	#3 Cole Huss (Northern State) over Max Villnow (Minnesota State) (MD 14-4)	4	0
285	#7 Darrell Mason (Minnesota State) over Nathan Schauer (Northern State) (Dec 6-3)	0	3
125	Landen Fischer (Northern State) over Unknown (For.)	6	0
133	Teagan Block (Northern State) over Isaiah Misna (Minnesota State) (Dec 4-1)	3	0
141	#12 Brock Luthens (Minnesota State) over Kolton Roth (Northern State) (SV-1 8-6)	0	3
149	#7 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) over Caleb Meunier (Minnesota State) (Dec 6-1)	3	0
157	Drake Hayward (Minnesota State) over Robert Coyle III (Northern State) (TF 19-3 4:52)	0	5
Team Score:		19	17

UP NEXT

The Wolves return to Wachs Arena this afternoon versus No. 5 St. Cloud State. The match begins at 2 p.m. and fans are encouraged to wear white. Students in attendance will have the opportunity to win a MacBook Air sponsored by AutoMaxx of Aberdeen.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Northern State Starting Five Lead the Charge in Win over WSU

Winona, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team rallied back in the final minutes of regulation to defeat Winona State on the road Friday evening. The two teams traded leads 17 times in the contest.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 77, WSU 74

Records: NSU 16-5 (12-3 NSIC), WSU 11-9 (6-9 NSIC)

Attendance: 1072

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern trailed 43-42 at the half, after shooting 51.6% from the floor and 45.0% from the 3-point line
- Down 74-70 with just over a minute to play in the game, Jordan Belka drained a three and brought the Wolves within one
- After a defensive stop, Sam Masten headed to the free throw line and gave the Wolves a 1-point lead with 16 seconds to play
- The Northern defense forced an offensive foul and turnover by the Warriors which ultimately sealed the victory, followed by two made foul shots by Josh Dilling
- The Wolves hit 14-of-37 from beyond the arc and added a game high 33 rebounds and 16 assists
- In addition, NSU tallied 22 points in the paint, seven points off turnovers, and six seconds chance points
- All five starters scored in double figures, led by Jordan Belka with 21 points and seven rebounds
- Sam Masten dished out a team leading nine assists and led the Wolves on the glass with eight rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Jordan Belka: 21 points, 53.5 field goal%, 7 rebounds, 2 assists
- Jacksen Moni: 14 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists
- Augustin Reede: 14 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist
- Josh Dilling: 13 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist
- Sam Masten: 10 points, 9 assists, 8 rebounds

UP NEXT

The Wolves travel to Upper Iowa this afternoon for a 3:30 p.m. tip-off against the Peacocks. Northern will then host St. Cloud State and Minnesota Duluth for the annual I Hate Winter weekend to open February. Full I Hate Winter details can be found at nsuwolves.com/IHW.



Position available for full-time Police Officer. Experience and SD Certification preferred. Salary negotiable DOE. Please send application and resume to the City of Groton, PO Box 587, Groton, SD 57445. This position is open until filled. Applications may be found at <https://www.city.grotonsd.gov/forms/Application-ForCityEmployeePO.pdf>. For more information, please call 605-397-8422. Equal opportunity employer.

GDILIVE.COM

Dak XII/NEC Boys Basketball Clash Groton Area vs. Elk Point-Jefferson

Saturday, Jan. 28, 2023, 2 p.m.

Madison High School

Varsity Game

Sponsored by

Bary Keith at Harr Motors

Bierman Farm Service

Blocker Construction

Dacotah Bank

Groton Chamber of Commerce

Groton Ford

John Sieh Agency

Locke Electric

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting



\$5 ticket required to watch. Purchased online at GDILIVE.COM

GDI Subscribers will have free access.

85th Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

Sunday, January 29th—2:00 and 6:30
Groton Ice Rink—west side of Groton

You are cordially invited to attend a great show performed by our local youth. This show will be sure to entertain through music, costumes, and skating talent.

*** Skating Through the Decades ***

Admission:

13 & older—\$3.00

6-12—\$2.00

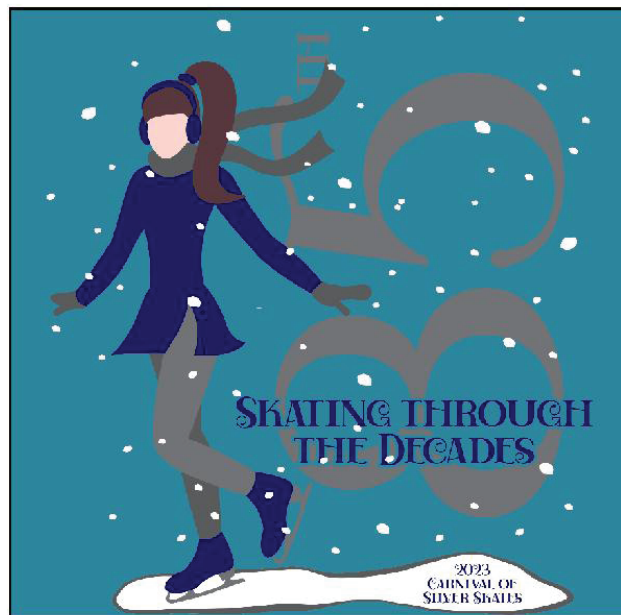
Parking:

-Provided around the rink and on the ice, or cozy up on the bleachers.

-Ice parking begins at 10 am, and again at 4:30 pm.

Check us out on Facebook at
"Silver Skates"

WE HOPE TO
SEE YOU THERE!



Emerald Ash Borer Confirmed in Union County – State Quarantine to be Extended

PIERRE S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) has confirmed an infestation of emerald ash borer (EAB) in Dakota Dunes, South Dakota.

In response, DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts will extend the existing state Plant Pest Quarantine to include Union County. The updated quarantine area will now include all of Minnehaha, Lincoln, Turner, and Union Counties. The quarantine is designed to slow the spread of EAB.

The quarantine, which is in place year-round, prohibits the movement of firewood and ash materials out of the quarantined counties. Movement of firewood from any hardwood species, whether intended for commercial or private use, is also restricted. EAB has been positively identified in three counties, Lincoln, Minnehaha, and Union and six communities Brandon, Canton, Crooks, Dakota Dunes, Sioux Falls, and Worthing.

“We all need to work together to slow the spread of EAB,” said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. “Firewood is the most common way EAB is moved from one location to another. Please, follow the quarantine restrictions and buy it where you burn it!”

If an ash tree is infested before it is cut, the wood may still contain EAB larvae. An individual split piece of ash firewood can have five or more adults emerge in the summer.

EAB is a boring beetle that feeds on all species of North American ash. It was first detected in the United States in 2002, and in South Dakota in 2018.

GDILIVE.COM

85th Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

Sunday, Jan. 29th, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Broadcast for FREE VIEWING on GDILIVE.COM

sponsored by the Carnival of Silver Skates Committee

Internet Service for livestreaming provided free of charge from

**FREE
VIEWING!**

 **MIDCO**

**FREE
VIEWING!**

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Higher Power Sports



➤ **FREE Event**

➤ **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!**

Groton Fellowship of Christian Students
presents TWO motivational speakers,

Tim Weidenbach & Deb Hadley

➤ **Sunday,
February 5th
3:16pm**
➤ **at the Groton
Methodist
Church**



Tim's Character Coaching & Be Kind Talk:

Higher Power Sports supports & serves HS & College athletes, coaches & families throughout the Midwest. He focuses on leadership, perseverance, opportunity, integrity, loyalty & making an impact on the teams he serves. Tim shares a fun & inspiring message on how kindness is contagious & encourages acceptance.

Deb's Overcoming Adversity Presentation:

Adversity is inevitable. Deb has had more than her share of loss. Often our students are caught off guard & lack the skill set to cope with hardships that come their way. Broken relationships, setbacks from COVID, bullying, lack of playing time, academic struggles, poor body image & low self-esteem, struggles at home &/or the death of loved ones, are some of the possibilities that can send the life of a student spiraling out of control. The goal of this seminar is to equip today's youth with the tools to help prepare them to handle the hardships that come their way & inspire them to turn their setbacks into opportunities to better their lives!

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Groton Area Girls' Basketball

Free throws propel Tigers to win over Webster

Groton Area girls' basketball team put together a stronger fourth quarter (compared to the first three) to overcome Webster Area, 31-24. The game was played Friday in Groton.

Groton Area held a 3-2 lead after the first quarter, a 10-8 lead at halftime and a 17-15 lead after three quarters. Webster Area took the lead, 18-17, early in the fourth quarter. The Tigers quickly reclaimed the lead, 19-18, but it was close until the score was 25-24. The Tigers made six of eight free throws down the stretch to pull out the win.

Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with 14 points, five rebounds, one assist and five steals. Brooke Gengerke had four points and two rebounds. Kennedy Hansen had four points, one rebound, one assist and two steals. Jaedyn Penning had four points, eight rebounds, two assists and two steals. Aspen Johnson had two points, two rebounds and one steal. Jerica Locke had two points, three rebounds and four steals. Rylee Dunker had one free throw, two rebounds and one steal. Brooklyn Hansen had one rebound, one assist and one steal. Faith Traphagen had one steal.

Groton Area made 10 of 27 two-pointers for 37 percent, one of 18 three-pointers for six percent, eight of 15 free throws for 53 percent, and 24 rebounds, 14 turnovers, five assists, 17 steals and 11 team fouls.

Webster Area was led by Carrington Hanson and Erin Sannes with seven points apiece, Payton Snell and Karli Sannes each had four points and Erin Case had two points.

The Bearcats made 11 of 31 field goals for 35 percent, five of six free throws for 83 percent, had 15 team fouls and 25 turnovers.

Groton Area now goes to 10-3 on the seasons while the Bearcats fall to 3-9. Groton Area heads to Florence on Monday.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 33-23, leading at the quarters tops at 16-2, 24-6 and 27-12.

Kennedy Hansen led the Tigers with 15 points while Brooklyn Hansen had nine, Laila Roberts five, Rylee Dunker two and Elizabeth Flihs and Mia Crank each had one point.

Karli Sannes led the Bearcats with 16 points.

Webster Area won the C game, 23-20. It was tied at four after the first quarter, Groton Area had a 10-8 lead at half time and a 16-15 lead at the end of the third quarter. The game was tied four times and there were two lead changes with the final at the end as Webster scored the last three points to come from behind to win.

Taryn Traphagen led Groton Area with 12 points while Talli Wright had four, Kella Tracy three and McKenna Tietz one.

Mallory Steiner led the Bearcats with six points, Chesney Deibert had five, Abby Vanderbilts Linden and Karli Sannes each had four points and Alyssa Zacher and Ryan Johnson each added two points.

All three games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The C game was sponsored by Doug and Wanda Hamilton. The junior varsity game sponsored by Mr. Anonymous and the varsity game sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Chamber of Commerce, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric, Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, Bahr Spray Foam, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting.

- Paul Kosel

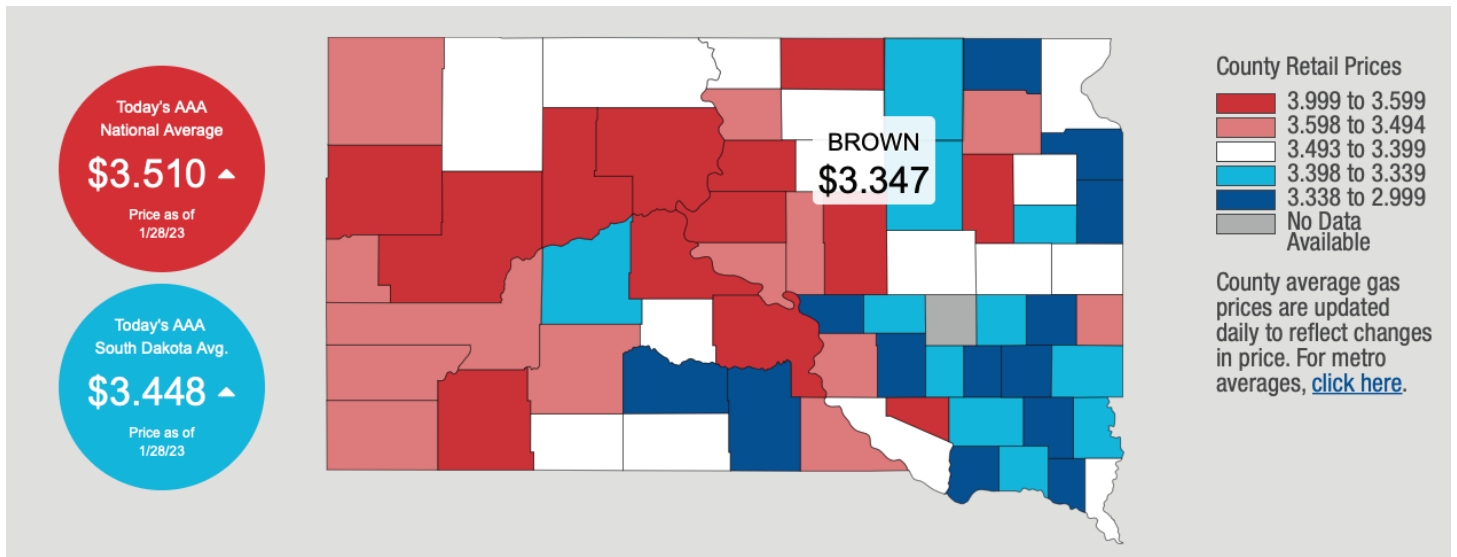
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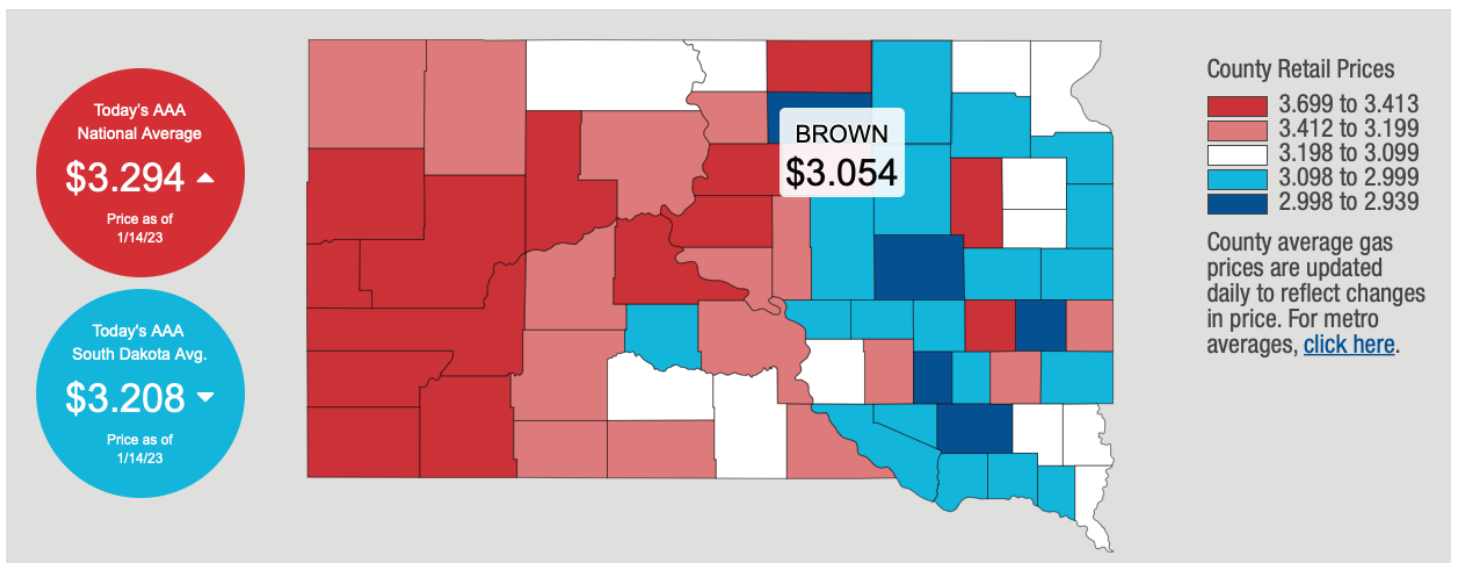
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.448	\$3.577	\$4.013	\$4.458
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.445	\$3.580	\$4.006	\$4.442
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.319	\$3.497	\$3.974	\$4.338
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.074	\$3.218	\$3.690	\$4.343
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.223	\$3.332	\$3.691	\$3.603

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



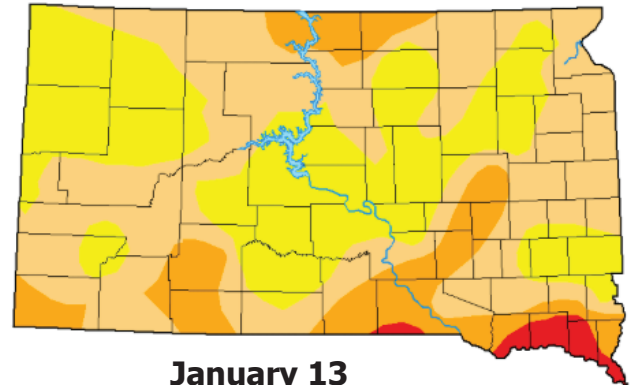
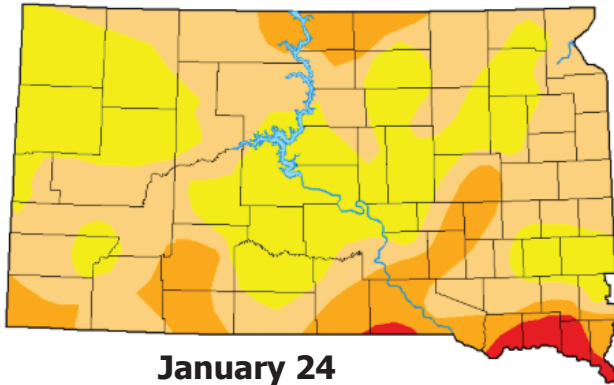
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



A half an inch or more of precipitation fell across parts of Kansas, eastern Colorado, southeast Wyoming and Nebraska. Parts of northwest Nebraska, western Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Montana received less than half an inch of precipitation. Moderate to extreme (D1-D3) drought and abnormal dryness (D0) was contracted in Kansas, Colorado and Wyoming where snowpack is above normal and soil moisture conditions are improving.

Groton Wrestling Tournament swells to more teams

The Groton Area Wrestling Tournament is scheduled for today. With the cancellation of some tournaments due to the weather in the southern part of the state, teams were looking for tournaments. According to Superintendent Joe Schwan, there will be three mats going at once. "We had to add a third mat or the tournament would have lasted a very long time," he said. So there will be two mats in the Arena and one mat in the GHS Gym.

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GROTON

ROBOTICS



Pancake Feed

Sponsored by Groton Lions Club

Sunday, January 29th, 2023

10:00 AM—1:00 PM

Groton Community Center

Pancakes, Sausage, Coffee, Milk and Juice

FREE WILL DONATION!

Proceeds will go to Groton Robotics

Carnival of Silver Skates performing at 2:00pm & 6:30 pm!





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Senate leaders appoint committee for Frye-Mueller complaint, release more details

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JANUARY 27, 2023 6:27 PM

South Dakota Senate leaders have appointed a committee to hear a complaint against Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller, R-Rapid City, and have released further details of allegations that led to her suspension.

The new committee could ultimately make a recommendation leading to a Senate vote to expel, censure, discipline or exonerate Frye-Mueller.

A news release Friday afternoon from Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, of Madison, said Senate Republicans received a detailed report Thursday from a Legislative Research Council staff member alleging inappropriate behavior and harassment by Frye-Mueller. The behavior was initially reported Wednesday and "related to private maternal matters, including childhood vaccines and breastfeeding," the release said.

Frye-Mueller was given an opportunity to speak privately to Senate Republican leadership on Wednesday, and "comments made by Sen. Frye-Mueller in that private discussion are inconsistent with her public statements and the report received from the LRC staff member," according to the release.

"We thank the state employee for bringing this matter to our attention," Crabtree said in the news release. "Our goal is to create a safe work environment for staff and legislators, and an environment where employees feel safe bringing concerns forward. All allegations of harassment must be taken seriously. There will be due process afforded to all parties as this matter moves forward."

Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, of Watertown, removed Frye-Mueller from her committee assignments on Wednesday, and senators voted Thursday to suspend Frye-Mueller.

The release said Sen. David Wheeler, R-Huron, will chair a Select Committee on Discipline and Expulsion that will convene next week to begin hearing the complaint against Frye-Mueller. The committee will ultimately make a recommendation to the full Senate. The chamber's rules say the committee could make a recommendation to expel, censure, discipline or exonerate Frye-Mueller.

Except as provided by law, the committee hearings will be open to the public and the final report will be a public record, the news release said.

Senate rules state that adoption of a select committee recommendation to expel a senator requires a two-thirds majority vote by the full Senate, while censure or discipline requires a three-fifths majority and exoneration requires a simple majority.

From prison to a payroll: Program trains inmates as machinists

Over 40% of SD prisoners return after release.

Officials hope free higher education will help.

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 27, 2023 4:28 PM

Kimberlee Browne thought she'd die on the streets.

The 40-year-old mother of six and former educator has been in and out of the South Dakota prison system twice since 2012. Each time she was released, something would happen to make her lose her confidence and faith; she'd fall back into bad habits and be arrested, typically for drug use.

Browne is one of thousands of South Dakota prisoners released back into society each year. She's also part of over 40% of prisoners who've returned to prison within 36 months of their release.

South Dakota has an average 36-month recidivism rate of 42.5%. Alaska has the highest recidivism rate,

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with 61.6% of its released inmates returning to the prison system.

After her latest release in late 2022, Browne is confident she won't return this time.

That's largely due to her certificate in precision machining from Lake Area Technical College — earned while she was serving her last sentence at the Women's Prison in Pierre.

Her parole was contingent upon completing the program, which she said outweighed the cost of completing her sentence without the program — without a home, job or family to return to.

"A lot of us in prison don't believe in us. Nothing took away my intelligence or my good heart, but I didn't believe I was worth anything anymore," Browne said. "This gave me the realization that I could be successful, that I matter and that I have purpose. All of that was true before the class, but now it feels like the sky is the limit."

The program is a partnership between the state Department of Corrections, the state Department of Labor and Regulation and the state's technical colleges. Since the program kicked off in January 2022, 29 prisoners have graduated so far with certificates in welding and precision machining.

Such higher education programs for inmates are proven to lower recidivism rates, and officials hope the partnership will help address South Dakota's workforce needs in some of its most in-demand fields.

Filling South Dakota's workforce & 'hot jobs' needs

Browne, originally from Vermillion, will start her new precision machining job at a facility in Watertown next month.

The starting wage for students who complete the certification ranges from \$19 to \$21 an hour. And if Browne decides to complete a two-year associate degree in precision machining, that jumps up to between \$32 and \$34 an hour — about \$70,000 a year.

In January 2022, more than 300 jobs were projected to open in the precision machining field in South Dakota by the beginning of this year.

Discussions about offering postsecondary education certificates to inmates began in the fall of 2021, said Kendra Ringstmeyer, the state Department of Labor and Regulation's workforce development director.

The program is funded through SD UpSkill, a partnership between the Board of Technical Education and the state DLR, which was originally developed with funding from the federal Department of Labor to offer 18-credit short term certificate programs for people who lost their jobs during the coronavirus pandemic.

Women who are minimum or low-medium custody, completed high school or earned a GED, and are within six months of their prison release date are eligible to enroll in the Pierre cohort, learning manual mills and lathes and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining.

Now, the program has expanded beyond Pierre and Lake Area Tech's partnership to include a welding certification program through Southeast Tech in Sioux Falls, another precision machining certification program through the Regional Technical Education Center in Yankton, and a two-semester construction technology program through Western Dakota Technical College in Rapid City.

The state DLR also offers incentives for employers to hire released inmates, including tax credits, federal bonds and reimbursed job training, said Carmen Pacheco, UpSkill labor program specialist. The department's goal is to provide holistic support for released prisoners as they reintegrate to society.

"I think of the confidence that I've heard these gals have at their graduations — about a future that some of them maybe didn't see or weren't even sure they wanted," Pacheco said. "If we can provide an opportunity for them to offer a living for their families and support themselves while meeting employers' needs and supporting them through that, that's our goal."

The partnership is different from Pheasantland Industries, which employs 227 prisoners to produce products such as road signs, license plates, cabinetry and braille work for the state. Pheasantland Industries provides work experience to prisoners and compensates them between \$0.25 and \$0.70 an hour.

The technical college partnership does not compensate students for their time, but offers free education and focuses on developing skill sets to be used once they are released.

With the proper training, the needs of in-demand industries could be partially met by the thousands of inmates who are released each year, said Angela Smith, the state DOC associate director of education

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and programs.

In fiscal year 2021 alone, 3,920 adults were released from the state prison system.

"Employers are coming to the Department of Corrections, asking how many people we can get through these programs and if we can expand," Smith said. "They're waiting for our cohorts to get done so they can hire them."

Programs make reintegration easier with a 'foot in the door'

That's a stark contrast compared to most prisoners' experience when released from the prison system.

Most have no job to return to and have to seek one on their own — while also juggling parole meetings, substance abuse classes or treatment, finding transportation, securing housing, connecting with family again and more.

There is no state law preventing employers from using a "felon box," requiring formerly incarcerated people to identify their history to apply for a job. But such boxes can immediately remove a candidate from the running, despite their qualifications.

Just because someone has been convicted of a felony doesn't mean it's "the end for them," Smith said.

"To expect someone to figure all this out on their own and not really have any opportunity made available to them is incredibly daunting," Smith said. "Especially for people who, before they came to prison, had a lifestyle that was funded by illegal activities that got them into prison, it's a lot easier to think about going back to that lifestyle and reverting back to old habits than going through the struggle of finding a job when an employer will just make them mark that felony box and discard them anyway."

A 2018 analysis found that rates of employment post-release increase by 12% for incarcerated people who participate in any type of correctional education. And for Browne, it was a relief upon release.

"It eases so much anxiety because it's a foot in the door already," Browne said. "I still have to work and show up and prove myself, but the whole 'I'm a felon and I don't believe in myself' is gone."

Education programs impacts families, children & communities

Upon Browne's release, she spent Christmas with her mother and some of her children for the first time in three years.

Her mother is taking care of Browne's twin 16-year-old daughters, and the two had lost touch with one another because of Browne's addiction and prison cycle.

But her mother saw a change in Browne, in part because of the educational program, but also the therapy and personal reflection she was working through. Her mother even offered to drive to Pierre and bring her home to Vermillion before moving to Watertown.

Those connections show that the education program impacts not only inmates' careers, but their familial connections as well. According to the state DLR, there were 26 children and five grandchildren connected to the eight women in the first precision machining cohort, which graduated in May 2022.

Finding the right students & planning for expansion

Not just anyone should take these classes, Browne said. People serving sentences have to be mentally and emotionally prepared for the challenge, since the work can be frustrating — especially when students are relearning trigonometry many of them haven't touched for years or never learned at all.

Browne herself had taken similar workforce preparation classes while she served prior sentences, including a certification course to become a flagger in construction zones. But she wasn't ready to use what she'd learned when released.

"It's kind of like being sober. People might not be done using or aren't done going to prison," Browne said. "I can say that because I've been on both sides. It's a choice you have to make, and I think I've made that choice now. I want to hold onto this feeling."

With the possibility of a new women's prison being built in Rapid City, Smith sees the potential to expand the partnership. While some other states offer higher education and career and technical courses, South Dakota's targeted technical education partnership is a unique way to meet several of the state's needs, Smith added.

"I think there's a lot more hope and support than there was five to 10 years ago to let success not only be possible after release but let it be the norm," Smith said.

Browne formed bonds with her classmates and still keeps in touch with many of them. Because of the course, she found her love for helping others again by encouraging them throughout the class. While she will work in Watertown, she's considering going back to school, possibly completing her precision machining degree or becoming a substance abuse counselor.

"I still have to figure out what I want to be when I grow up," Browne joked. "If you can find a way to believe in yourself, really anything is possible."

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.

558 people and groups now have legal standing in two carbon pipeline applications

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 27, 2023 4:27 PM

More than 500 people and organizations now have standing to participate in the regulatory review of two proposed carbon-capture pipelines that would go through South Dakota.

The latest is Lesley Pedde of Texas, who received late notice of the application process. The Public Utilities Commission granted him "party status" Friday in the review of the Navigator pipeline application.

Pedde, along with two siblings, owns a farm in rural Hudson, according to documents filed with the PUC. That land is within half a mile of the proposed pipeline route.

Pedde is one of 140 people and organizations granted official status in the Navigator matter, allowing them – and their lawyers if they have one – to participate in the proceedings, ask questions, and present evidence and testimony.

Another 418 people and organizations have official status in Summit Carbon Solutions' PUC pipeline case.

Many of the people granted party status in both cases appear to be landowners potentially impacted by the projects.

PUC staff spokesperson Leah Mohr said in an emailed statement "that is a very large number of formal parties participating in these two dockets."

The number of people participating in the cases has not yet been a problem, Mohr said. "However, that issue is expected to be delved into more thoroughly at the Feb. 9 commission meeting."

For the Navigator Heartland Greenway docket, the proposed project consists of 111.9 miles of carbon dioxide pipeline through South Dakota that would cross the counties of Brookings, Moody, Minnehaha, Lincoln and Turner.

For the Summit docket, the proposed length of the pipeline through South Dakota would be 477 miles and would cross the counties of Beadle, Brown, Clark, Codington, Edmunds, Hamlin, Hand, Hyde, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, McPherson, Minnehaha, Miner, Spink, Sully and Turner.

"Given the length and span as well as the type of the proposed projects, there are a number of affected landowners and other interested parties who have come forward to identify their desire to participate as formal parties to these dockets," Mohr said in a statement.

The CO2 pipeline projects

The two projects are the first-ever carbon dioxide pipeline projects proposed in South Dakota.

The project proposals arose from ethanol producers' opportunity to get more money for their products in states with stricter emission standards by shrinking their carbon footprint.

One way to offset carbon dioxide emitted during ethanol production is to capture it and bury it underground. That's a process known as sequestration. Sequestering carbon keeps it out of the atmosphere, where it traps heat.

To sequester carbon, ethanol companies need pipelines to carry liquified carbon dioxide to a sequestration site.

Heartland Greenway would transport carbon dioxide to Illinois, and the Summit pipeline would transport it to North Dakota. Those states have areas with the geological conditions needed for underground sequestration.

Ethanol producers would also benefit from a federal tax credit awarding \$50 per ton of sequestered carbon dioxide. The Heartland Greenway would transport 15 million metric tons annually, and the Summit pipeline could transport 12 to 20 million metric tons.

Proponents say carbon pipelines are necessary to control the greenhouse gases driving climate change, but some environmental groups are skeptical of carbon capture, arguing it does nothing to address the root causes of pollution. Opponents worry that spills from the pipeline could damage soil and water sources, and endanger human health.

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

Lengthy timeline for DACA legal fight puts lives on hold for years

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 27, 2023 7:38 PM

WASHINGTON — Karen Judith Briseno Ortiz mailed in her application for a program meant to protect undocumented children from deportation, one day after her twin sister's application.

Her sister was accepted into the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, but Briseno Ortiz, who grew up in Dallas, was not. Now her application is in limbo due to an injunction placed by a Texas federal judge, who determined the Obama-era program was unlawful.

"That opportunity got taken from me," she said of Texas District Judge Andrew Hanen's decision, which prevented the government from accepting new applicants into the program, but allowed it to remain for current participants as it undergoes litigation.

Multiple immigration attorneys who spoke with States Newsroom said they expect a decision on the legality of DACA, when it eventually goes to the U.S. Supreme Court, to not be issued until 2024. Congress appears unlikely to take action, although immigration advocates have suggestions about policy initiatives the Biden administration could study for DACA recipients.

In the meantime, they must wait.

One legal to work, one not

Briseno Ortiz and her sister, now 20, live together and attend Texas A&M University.

One twin is allowed to work, because DACA gives her access to work permits and a Social Security number.

But Briseno Ortiz, a chemistry major, cannot get work permits and will likely have to leave her home state to attend medical school, since there is only one medical school in Texas that admits DACA students.

The program, which has protected more than 800,000 undocumented children from deportation since 2012, is at risk of being deemed unlawful, leaving recipients in limbo and uncertain if they will be protected from deportation.

Briseno Ortiz is the only one of her three siblings not in the program, despite being eligible for DACA. The Migration Policy Institute, a think tank that tracks migration, estimates that as of December 2021, there are 1.5 million undocumented people who are DACA-eligible but not enrolled.

"It's frustrating because we're just waiting," Briseno Ortiz said of her application and others that are still pending due to the injunction.

DACA legal challenges

The Trump administration tried to rescind the program in 2017. That is the same year the twins turned 15, making them eligible for DACA.

When the Supreme Court in June 2020 deemed the Trump administration's actions were unlawful, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services should have begun to accept first-time DACA applications, but the Trump administration didn't.

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It wasn't until December 2020 that USCIS complied and opened up applications for first-time applicants, which is when Briseno Ortiz and her sister sent in their applications. Her twin's paperwork was sent on Dec. 22 and hers on Dec. 23, 2020.

They sent their applications one day apart to avoid any confusion with immigration officials or hold-up with their applications because they share the same birthday and first and last name.

Briseno Ortiz' twin was accepted in DACA in June 2021, just before Hanen's decision, which barred future applications, but allowed for renewals. This stems from a lawsuit brought by Republican-led states that argue the program is burdensome to states and the government overreached its power in creating the program.

Briseno Ortiz said she feels helpless waiting for the court to make a decision.

The Biden administration appealed that July 2021 decision to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, headquartered in New Orleans. A three-judge panel said that the Obama administration did not have the authority to create the program in 2012 and sent the case back to Hanen.

The panel asked the judge to look at the new version of a rule on the program issued by the Biden administration in August 2022, which was set to take effect on Oct. 31.

As of now, the lower court is hearing arguments about whether the Biden administration's new rule, which is nearly identical to the memo creating DACA, is lawful. A schedule for that case has not been set yet.

"But advocates are not very hopeful that the decision coming out of this court will be positive or in favor of DACA," said Veronica Garcia, an attorney at the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

She said the best case scenario is if DACA gets struck down, renewals will be allowed to continue while the case then goes to the Supreme Court.

Some hopes

Muzaffar Chishti, an attorney and director of the Migration Policy Institute office at New York University School of Law, said he believes the Biden administration has given DACA more legal standing by writing a rule on the program, rather than having it as a memo, which the Obama administration crafted.

"That doesn't mean that it will not be ruled unlawful, but it's in a much better legal footing," he said, pointing out that when Hanen first looked at the Obama-era program he decided that the administration overreached its power in creating the program through a memo, rather than proper rule making.

Chishti said that in many ways, the Biden administration has already responded to Hanen's arguments by going through the rule making process in creating DACA.

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He added that briefs in the case can be filed through April, meaning that a date for oral arguments won't be set until after that.

"I don't think we're looking at a decision in this case till at least the summer," Chishti said.

Then, once the case is appealed to the 5th Circuit, as expected, and then the Supreme Court, Chishti said he doesn't expect a decision until the spring of 2024 or later.

"So that means there's nothing imminent wrong potentially happening to the existing DACA recipients," he said.

DACA 'is outdated'

Juliana Macedo do Nascimento, the deputy director of federal advocacy of United We Dream, said DACA could be ended as early as next year by the Supreme Court, during the Biden administration, "which would just be a shame given his history, and his legacy with the program."

United We Dream is a nonprofit youth immigration advocacy group.

"DACA was never enough, and it's outdated," she said, adding that there are 11 million undocumented people in the country who also need protections.

Macedo do Nascimento pointed out that undocumented youth who would be eligible for the program can't qualify because they were not born by 2007. In order to qualify for DACA, undocumented youth had to have continually resided in the U.S. from 2007.

"We know that immigrant youths who are turning 15,16, who would otherwise be eligible for it, are no longer eligible because they weren't even alive in 2007," she said.

So far, the only thing that would change DACA is an act of Congress, she said.

Congress stalled

Briseno Ortiz said she doesn't have much hope that Congress will take legislative action to protect DACA recipients, and sees the only course of action to get involved in immigration advocacy groups.

Even when Democrats controlled the U.S. House last year, Democrats in the Senate did not have the votes to overcome the 60-vote threshold requirement.

Last year, Senate Democrat leaders set a December deadline of passing any bipartisan legislation to create a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients.

With the House majority won by Republicans in the 2022 midterm elections, Democrats only had a couple of months to pass any legislation protecting DACA before they lost the House.

There were some talks of a bipartisan agreement with Sens. Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat from Arizona who's now become an independent, and Thom Tillis, Republican of North Carolina, but nothing solidified.

Even with Congress gridlocked, Macedo do Nascimento said, the Biden administration still has some policy initiatives it can take to protect those in DACA, such as through Temporary Protected Status, which is granted to those who are already residing in the U.S. but whose home country is deemed unsafe for return, and allows those recipients to stay in the U.S. temporarily, or Deferred Enforced Departure.

DED is not a specific immigration status, but allows those covered to be exempt from deportation for a certain period of time.

The administration could also include countries with a high number of DACA recipients for TPS, such as Mexico, Macedo do Nascimento added.

"The parole authority that the administration has is really powerful, and they can use that to protect people," she said.

New parole program

Early this year, the Biden administration announced a new parole program that would expand opportunities for migrants from Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua to legally enter the United States.

The program will allow up to 30,000 migrants each month from those countries who have U.S.-based financial sponsors and have passed a background check to enter the country legally. They would be allowed to work temporarily for two years.

Macedo do Nascimento said the Biden administration could work to implement a similar parole program for those under DACA.

"We're hopeful that they're looking into these other options on how to use different tools to ... protect people," she said.

Democrats and immigration advocates welcomed the new parole program, but criticized the administration's continued use and expansion of Title 42, which is a controversial policy that immediately turns away migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border during a health crisis, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

However, those parole programs that the Biden administration has implemented are already facing legal challenges from Republican-led states.

The White House did not respond to States Newsroom's requests for comment on its plans pertaining to the potential ending of DACA.

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

How did renewables fare during Winter Storm Elliott

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - JANUARY 27, 2023 7:33 PM

A day after Christmas, as parts of the country were still digging out from Winter Storm Elliott, the Wall Street Journal's editorial page, undeterred by the absence of much concrete data, already knew where to cast the blame for rolling blackouts implemented in parts of the South to keep the grid from collapsing.

"While there wasn't a single cause for the power shortages, government policies to boost renewables snowballed and created problems that cascaded through the grid," the editorial board wrote.

However, more than a month after the storm and the power cuts it triggered for customers of the Tennessee Valley Authority and Duke Energy in North Carolina, wind and solar energy — which made up just 9.2% and 3%, respectively, of U.S. power generation in 2021 — appear to have met, and, in some cases, exceeded, expectations, according to presentations by grid operators and utilities.

A joint Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and North American Electric Reliability Corporation inquiry into the power system's performance during the storm is ongoing.

But the picture that's emerged in the month since Elliott is one of inaccurate forecasting of how much electricity would be needed to weather the storm and large-scale fossil fuel plant failures and gas shortages that left grid operators scrambling to find enough power to meet demand.

"Almost no one got the load forecast right during Elliott, which was quite surprising," said Joshua Rhodes, a research scientist at the University of Texas at Austin who focuses on the bulk power system. He added that, generally speaking, grid managers rely chiefly on thermal resources (power plants that convert heat into electricity like nuclear, coal and natural gas plants) in their planning for severe winter weather because of the intermittent nature of solar and wind.

"If you're going to call yourself reliable baseload, you better be able to turn on and produce electricity when you're called on," he said.

Duke Energy

In North Carolina, where about 500,000 Duke Energy customers for the first time ever had service cut to save the broader electric grid, company executives told the state's public utility commission earlier this month that the company thought it had adequate reserve power to weather the storm.

But as electric demand grew well beyond forecasts, natural gas and coal power plants began to experience freezing instruments and other problems (a total loss of about 1,300 megawatts of generation) and power purchases from out of state didn't show up, the utility was forced to cut power to avoid causing a larger grid collapse.

"All of our neighbors were tight," Sam Holeman, a Duke executive, told the commission.

The company's modest solar generation, which performed "as expected" during the storm, wasn't much of a factor because the electric shortfall happened overnight. As of 2021, wind, solar and hydroelectric power made up just 7% of Duke's electrical generation.

"We own what happened. We have set out on a path to ensure that if we are faced with similar chal-

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enges, we will see a different outcome and provide a better customer experience,” said Julie Janson, executive vice president and CEO of Duke Energy Carolinas, in a statement.

TVA

In the Tennessee Valley Authority’s service area, which includes 10 million people in most of Tennessee and parts of Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Virginia and North Carolina, actual electric demand surged well past forecasts, with TVA breaking its all-time record for single-day electric demand. At the same time, TVA’s 2,500 megawatt Cumberland power coal plant went offline early on Dec. 23, the authority said, because of frozen instrumentation. Other gas plants went offline “due to the cold,” a spokesman said, though more details will be available after a full internal review is completed.

Just 3% of TVA’s generation portfolio is wind and solar, but according to preliminary data from the federal Energy Information Administration, the relatively small amount of solar TVA has performed consistently during the storm.

“Our crews worked 24/7 to successfully restore some of the impacted generating units to service during the event,” spokesman Scott Fiedler wrote in an email. “We also purchased and imported generation from neighboring markets as much as we could, however, these efforts were challenged as surrounding utilities and market operators were also experiencing high demand.”

TVA was able to pull power from the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, which manages the flow of electricity in all or part of 15 U.S. states (Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin). Despite its own unplanned generation outages, MISO was able to export power to its southern neighbors in part because its wind energy production remained high during the storm.

“Wind saved the day,” said Simon Mahan, executive director of the Southern Renewable Energy Association, a nonprofit trade organization. “Had there not been nearly as much wind I think things might have been more severe.”

The situation forced TVA to cut power to thousands of customers, though an exact number hasn’t been released. Fiedler said TVA has also created a “Blue Ribbon Panel” that includes the former CEO of the Electric Power Research Institute, a former U.S. senator and the president of the American Public Power Association, to provide an independent perspective and insight on TVA’s internal review.

“This review will be transparent and will move with a sense of urgency as we identify gaps, lay out corrective action plans and make the necessary changes to allow us to better respond to such challenging events in the future,” he said. “We know there is work to do to fully restore confidence in TVA’s ability to reliably provide the energy 10 million people count on every day, and we are committed to meet that expectation for the future.”

PJM

When PJM, the nation’s largest grid operator responsible for coordinating the movement of electricity in all or parts of 13 states and Washington, D.C — a territory that numbers 65 million people — issued a call for customers to conserve power during Elliott, it set off alarm bells for people in the power industry.

After all, PJM had been under fire from consumer advocates who argued it was saddling customers in its territory with too much electric generation capacity.

Going into the storm, PJM had a forecast for electric demand of nearly 127,000 megawatts and called nearly 156,000 megawatts of capacity into action.

“We believed we had almost 29 gigawatts of reserve capacity available to absorb load and generation contingencies and to support our neighboring systems,” PJM staff wrote in a preliminary report earlier this month.

But as temperatures started to plummet, “a significant portion” of that generation fleet failed to perform, with as much as 46,000 megawatts of power offline by Christmas Eve as a result of fuel problems, equipment failures and other issues, PJM reported. That severely limited the ability of PJM to send electricity to its neighbors, like Duke and TVA. On Dec. 23, “PJM began curtailing exports as our capacity position deteriorated due to the generation failures that we were having.”

Most of those failures were natural gas power plants, followed by coal power stations. About 6,000 megawatts that went offline was listed in the "other" category, which includes renewables and nuclear, but a PJM spokesman declined to provide a more detailed breakdown due to what he said were confidentiality restrictions. PJM says the power generators that failed to perform when called upon face between \$1 and \$2 billion in penalties.

"I can tell you that wind and solar resources performed as the near-term forecasts projected based upon wind speed and solar irradiance," PJM spokesman Jeff Shields said. At the end of 2021, renewables made up about 6% of the total generation mix.

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

White House launches new push to help states remove lead pipes that carry drinking water

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 27, 2023 4:47 PM

WASHINGTON — The White House on Friday announced plans to speed up the use of infrastructure law funds to replace lead pipes in underserved communities, with a focus on Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin beginning this year.

The four states, each led by Democratic governors, will be part of what's called the Lead Service Replacement Accelerators program in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Labor.

The administration characterized it as a way to "drive progress" in using the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding dedicated to removing and replacing lead lines that carry drinking water to homes and schools. Exposure to lead in drinking water, particularly in children or pregnant women, can cause lasting neurological damage.

"Our Lead Service Line Replacement Accelerators demonstrate our commitment to ensuring every community has access to safe, clean drinking water," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement Friday.

"By leveraging the historic investment made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we are moving one step closer to achieving President Biden's vision of 100% lead-free water systems for all."

Help for communities

The new initiative is meant to bring "hands-on support" and technical assistance from the EPA to guide communities through the lead service line removal process. That assistance might include help completing federal grant and loan applications, or expertise in finding labor and contractors.

Up to 10 million households and 400,000 schools and child care centers have lead service lines, according to the White House.

Some of the communities set to participate in the new plan include:

East Newark and Newark, New Jersey

Erie County and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Edgerton, Kenosha, Madison, Milwaukee, Sheboygan and Wausau, Wisconsin

"It should be a right of every occupant of this earth and certainly of our country to have clean water, let's just start there. Then let us understand, because many may not be aware, sadly, that it is not a right that is guaranteed to all the occupants of our country," said Vice President Kamala Harris at the Accelerating Lead Pipe Replacement Summit held Friday at the White House.

"In many communities, families, children, parents cannot take for granted that they will turn on a tap and that clean water will come out. And I think we would all agree there is nothing about this that should be considered a luxury or an option," Harris said during the summit's keynote conversation with Regan.

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Invited guests who attended the summit included mayors, philanthropic organizations, advocacy groups and community leaders.

Harris sent a letter to governors across the U.S. inviting them to join a wider, overarching coalition called the Biden-Harris Get the Lead Out Partnership.

So far it has brought together 123 municipalities, water utilities, community organizations and labor unions that have agreed to deploy federal funds to replace lead pipes, according to the vice president's office.

"We have labor, nonprofits, our agencies, and the private sector, all who are here with one thing in mind, and that's to get lead pipes out of all of our communities," Regan said Friday.

How funds are divided

The administration budgeted \$15 billion in infrastructure funds over several years for the EPA to divvy up among states for lead service line replacements.

Another \$11.7 billion was directed toward the EPA's state revolving fund meant to support a range of water quality projects, including lead pipe replacements.

In 2022 the administration allocated a portion of the funds to states and territories to cover the next five years of lead line fixes.

The states that received the highest allocations were California, Texas, New York, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, North Carolina and Massachusetts.

"Pennsylvanians have a constitutional right to clean air and pure water, but far too many communities here in Pennsylvania suffer from old and outdated lead pipes that endanger the health of our children and families," Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said in a statement Friday about being named to the accelerator program.

"My Administration is ready to work with President Biden, Vice President Harris, and our federal partners to make life-saving investments that will deliver clean drinking to families across the Commonwealth, especially in communities that have been left behind for too long."

Allotments for 2023 are expected to be announced in the spring after the EPA publishes its latest, legally required Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs and Survey Assessment, according to the agency.

Some advocacy organizations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, criticized the breakdown of last year's funds, arguing that states with the most lead pipes — like Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey and Ohio — were receiving fewer funds per replacement than states with fewer lead pipes.

"Every state has lead service lines, but some have significantly more than others. The highest concentration of lead service lines delivering water to homes are in the upper Midwest and Northeast states as well as Texas," the NRDC's Cyndi Roper wrote in July.

Risks of childhood lead poisoning not equal

Not all children and families are equally susceptible to lead exposure. The risk is greater for those who live in low-income households and in older homes where lead plumbing fixtures, pipes and lead-based paint have not been replaced or remediated.

Research as recent as 2021 continues to show that Black children and children in low-income communities consistently show higher blood lead levels than their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

"It is up to communities to hold our elected officials accountable [for] implementing the infrastructure bill. It's up to utilities to share what they need to ramp up their lead service line [replacement] programs. Most importantly, it is up to our government agencies and mayors and governors to act with a sense of urgency to prioritize removing every single lead service line," Deanna Branch, of the Milwaukee-based Coalition for Lead Emergency, said at Friday's White House summit.

Branch was accompanied at the podium by her 9-year-old son, Aiden, who at the age of 2 was hospitalized with lead poisoning.

No level of lead is safe for children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC estimates that about a half a million children in the U.S. have elevated blood lead levels, meaning the amount of lead found during a blood test is higher than most other children.

Some of the most common sources of exposure include lead paint in older housing stock, water carried

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through lead pipes, soil and dust near industrial sites and imported toys or jewelry.

Children under age 6 are most at risk for lead poisoning because of their hand-to-mouth behavior and because their developing nervous systems are vulnerable to what can be permanent effects of lead exposure, including lower IQ, behavioral problems, developmental delays and learning difficulties.

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

Legislative roundup: Taxes and tribes, feedlots and lithium

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 27, 2023 2:08 PM

PIERRE — Things really picked up at the Capitol this week, and deadlines had something to do with that. Lawmakers had free reign to submit as many bills as they pleased until 11 a.m. on Thursday, which meant dozens of bills dropped just before lunch that day.

Each lawmaker can file up to three more bills until Feb. 2, but they need to be aware of crossover day a few weeks later. That's when all bills need to move from their chamber of origin (House or Senate) to the other side. Bills that don't make it in time die on the vine.

Pierre-watchers also likely noticed the kerfuffle between Senate leadership and GOP Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller of Rapid City. She was stripped of her committee assignments on Wednesday and lost her voting privileges the next day. Details on why are scarce, but the hubbub is tied to Frye-Mueller's feelings about vaccines, according to The Associated Press.

Here's what happened with the bills we've written about so far:

Food tax: The Gov. Kristi Noem-backed repeal of the food sales tax, House Bill 1075, passed House Taxation 12-1 and will land in House Appropriations. Makenzie Huber explored the potential impact to tribes.

Ag lawsuits: Josh Haiar wrote about HB 1090, which would make it harder to sue agricultural operations. That one passed the House Ag and Natural Resources Committee, then sailed through the House with just nine no votes. It's on to the Senate.

Tribal Relations: Senate Bill 69 would change the makeup of the state's Tribal Relations Committee. The gist? Fewer Democrats, more Republicans. Here's Josh's rundown. SB 69 passed out of committee and passed 27-7 on the Senate floor.

Battery tax: Lithium would be taxed as an energy mineral under HB 1072. Josh tells us the proposal is meant to wring tax dollars from a potential mining boom that could result from Black Hills lithium prospecting.

County seats: Last week, Makenzie told you about SB 56, which would make it harder to move a county seat. That one passed the Senate 31-4 on Tuesday, in a watered-down form compared to its original draft, and heads to House Local Government.

Fentanyl test strips: HB 1041 would decriminalize fentanyl test strips, which are small bits of paper that can detect the presence of the deadly synthetic opioid. The bill passed the House Judiciary Committee 11-2 and was deferred to another day in the House.

Higher education: SB 45 would repeal the requirement for an annual intellectual diversity report by the Board of Regents. It passed the Senate Education Committee 5-2 and the Senate 21-12. Now it'll head to the House Education Committee. HB 1070, which would create a Center for American Exceptionalism at BHSU, passed House Education 9-6 and heads to House Appropriations.

Prison costs: HB 1003 would kill the cost estimates currently attached to any bill that would increase the prison or jail population. It's one Senate vote from Gov. Noem's desk after a Thursday endorsement from Senate State Affairs.

Election laws, forensic exams: The Senate passed SB 46, which makes it easier to charge ballot circulators with perjury. Here's the backstory. That one's on to House Judiciary. SB 47, which would apply class 2 misdemeanor charges for election law violations, failed in the Senate. Hear the debate here (lawmakers were concerned about overreach). A bill to make convicts pay for searches of laptops and cell phones, SB 54, also died in the Senate, in spite of an amendment limiting its scope. Here's that debate (overreach

was an issue there, too).

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

GOP U.S. House passes bill opening more public land to development if reserve oil is tapped

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JANUARY 27, 2023 1:40 PM

U.S. House Republicans passed a bill Friday to force the White House to make more federal land and waters available for oil and gas development if the president orders the withdrawal of more oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

The bill, passed 221-205, mostly along party lines, would strip the president's power to remove oil from the reserve unless the U.S. Energy Department has a plan to allow new leasing on federal lands and waters for oil exploration.

The vote comes after a volatile two years for gas prices, which have spiked and fallen in response to several factors. President Joe Biden sought to reduce price spikes by selling record amounts from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the federally controlled stockpile of crude oil housed in underground salt caverns along the Gulf Coast in Louisiana and Texas.

The bill would require that the percentage of federal lands and waters opened to leasing is the same as the percentage of oil drawn from the reserve, with a limit of 15%.

All Republicans who voted were in favor, while only one Democrat, Jared Golden of Maine, cast a ballot to pass the bill. Eight members did not vote.

The measure is unlikely to become law, as Biden has already pledged to veto it — even in the unlikely event the Democratic-controlled U.S. Senate were to send it to his desk.

House Democrats largely dismissed the measure as an unserious messaging bill.

GOP hammers on Biden energy policy

The Republican message, voiced repeatedly by members over two days of debate, was that Biden mismanaged the country's energy agenda in his first two years in office.

The 2 ½-page bill itself deals narrowly with the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and oil and gas leasing on federal lands and waters.

Republicans criticized the use of emergency reserves.

"The bill today will help ensure this vital American energy asset — and American security interests — will not be drained away for non-emergency, political purposes," the bill's chief sponsor, Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington state, said on the House floor Thursday.

"It provides a path towards making energy more affordable for Americans, who are looking to us to help ease the pain at the pump."

The bill's requirement that Strategic Petroleum Reserve withdrawals are offset by additional leasing responds to an order in the early days of the Biden administration — later reversed in federal court — to pause new oil and gas leases on federal lands.

But the debate Thursday and Friday quickly morphed into an airing of wider GOP grievances against the administration's energy agenda.

They said the need to raid the emergency supply was emblematic of the administration's misguided policy to limit oil and gas development.

Biden blocked the Keystone XL crude oil pipeline that was to run from Canada through Montana en route to U.S. refineries, they said. He sought to import oil, sometimes from adversarial countries, while stifling domestic production, they said.

Biden's moves proved he had "an intentional plan to destroy America's oil industry," Georgia Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene said.

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Bill shows 'no real vision,' Democrats say

Democrats dismissed the measure as frivolous and counterproductive. If enacted, it would only take a tool away from presidents of either party to deal with future oil supply volatility. That would result in less available oil, not more, they said.

"There is no real vision for Republican energy policy," Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey said. "They are reduced to defending their oil and gas interests and attacking President Biden's successful efforts to lower gas prices for Americans."

"The bill would significantly weaken a critical energy security tool, resulting in more oil supply shortages and higher gas prices for working families," Biden's statement of administration policy said. "This Administration's use of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) has been essential to protecting our energy security and to lowering gas prices for Americans."

One criticism centered on the idea that more leases don't necessarily lead to more oil reserves.

Energy companies already hold thousands of leases of federal lands and waters that are not being used for oil exploration. Auctioning more leases would do little to increase short-term oil supply or drop the price of gas, Democrats said.

"There is no relationship between opening up more federal lands for the production of oil and gas and the price that Americans pay at the pump," Colorado Democrat Diana DeGette said. "None. And instead of helping to bring down prices for consumers, what this bill does is it really makes it harder for future administrations to respond."

Among the dozens of failed Democratic amendments was one from Nevada's Susie Lee that would have barred leasing of lands deemed to have low potential for oil and gas.

Democrats and environmentalists generally oppose oil companies leasing lands with little potential, saying that those lands would be better used for conservation or recreation.

The measure was the second bill the House has passed this year related to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

The first was a measure barring sale of the reserve crude oil to China or state-backed Chinese companies. That bill passed Jan. 12 with broad bipartisan support.

Republican U.S. Senators John Barrasso of Wyoming and Susan Collins of Maine have cosponsored a similar bill, as did Ted Cruz of Texas. None yet have Democratic cosponsors.

Barrasso has also introduced a bill similar to the one the House passed Friday.

The House took two days, Thursday and Friday, to consider the bill under a modified open rule, a process that has become rare in recent decades and doesn't restrict any relevant amendments filed by a certain deadline.

Members filed nearly 150 amendments and voted on 56, rejecting most of them. Others were ruled not germane to the bill and did not receive votes.

Of those that passed, several restricted or opened specific areas for oil exploration.

Amendments offered by Republicans Matt Gaetz of Florida and Nancy Mace of South Carolina stipulated that existing restrictions on drilling off the coasts of those states would still be in effect if the bill became law.

U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert, a Colorado Republican, authored a successful amendment that would require any plan for additional leasing under the bill would include identifying portions of the Thompson Divide in her district to be leased.

Another Boebert amendment lifted the cap on total lands and waters offered for leasing from 10% to 15%.

The House adopted an amendment from New Jersey Democrat Josh Gottheimer requiring that any drawdown from the reserve not be sold to China, Iran, North Korea or Russia.

The amendment would expand the bill the House passed two weeks earlier that barred only sales to China.

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.

National Dems ready to OK new 2024 primary voting calendar, despite uncertainty in two states

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 27, 2023 11:08 AM

WASHINGTON — The full Democratic National Committee is set to vote in just days about a decision to ratify a new lineup of five states that would lead the nation in primary voting for Democratic presidential candidates in 2024.

But approval of the new calendar at a meeting scheduled for Feb. 4 in Philadelphia won't be the last step in what's become a contentious process.

Democrats in New Hampshire will still need to get their Republican-controlled state government to change a law that says the state must schedule its primary ahead of similar contests and to expand access to early voting — both of which GOP lawmakers have said they won't do.

Georgia Democrats also will need to get their GOP secretary of state to change the state's presidential primary date to match the DNC's requirements — a similarly unlikely feat.

If the two states' Democrats don't, in fact, get Republicans to follow along with the DNC's plan, waivers will become void, moving New Hampshire and Georgia back into the so-called regular window that begins in March.

The waivers allow the five states to vote before the regular window if those states implement the dates and policies the DNC Rules and Bylaws Committee detailed during its December meeting.

New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan said Thursday that the "state law is very clear that we will go first."

"There is a way for us to make sure that we are honoring all the values of the Democratic Party with New Hampshire going first," Hassan said. "And it's really important that the DNC develop a proposal that is actually one that all of the participants can meet."

Time extended

The DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee, which originally approved the new slate of early voting states in December, voted this week to give New Hampshire and Georgia through June 3 to show the national party that the states were moving to match the DNC's vision.

Similar extensions weren't necessary for South Carolina, Nevada, or Michigan, which have met the requirements to get the waiver, allowing the three states to vote early without incurring the wrath of the national party.

The Rules and Bylaws Committee, which is spearheading the process, is expected to meet again shortly after the new June 3 deadline, according to an individual familiar with the process who wasn't authorized to speak publicly.

During that meeting, panel members are likely to discuss whether New Hampshire and Georgia have met the requirements needed to vote early, or if the waivers the full DNC will vote to approve next week have become void.

New Hampshire Sen. Jeanne Shaheen said Thursday the extension until June 3 is unlikely to change much.

"Well, I appreciate that they provided the extension. Sadly, I don't think it's going to make much difference because the Republican governor and the Republican legislative leadership have been very clear they don't intend to make the changes that the DNC has requested," Shaheen said.

"And I think it's unfortunate for the DNC to put at risk Democratic elected officials in the state, because of those rules," Shaheen added.

Waivers would become void

If New Hampshire Republicans don't take steps during the next four months to match the proposed Feb. 13 primary election day and expand access to early voting, then the waiver the DNC is set to approve Feb. 4 would become void automatically.

That would mean New Hampshire no longer has the DNC's approval to vote ahead of the regular window, which begins the first Tuesday in March.

If the state were to hold its Democratic presidential primary ahead of that benchmark, the DNC would bar Democratic presidential candidates from campaigning in the state, including placing their name on the ballot. The DNC would also strip New Hampshire Democrats of half of their delegates.

The same would be true for Georgia's Feb. 20 waiver, though Peach State voters aren't as tied to the "first-in-the-nation" primary distinction that New Hampshire has clung to for years.

Georgia voters tend to head to the primary polls a bit later in the process, casting their ballots on June 9 for the 2020 presidential primary, March 1 during the 2016 primaries and March 6 for the 2012 primary.

So if Georgia doesn't complete the steps outlined in the waiver a DNC panel approved in December and extended this week, the state would likely just vote during the so-called regular window that begins the first Tuesday in March.

Georgia Sen. Jon Ossoff said Thursday that his home state moving up in the presidential primary voting process would be beneficial, though he deferred to the secretary of state when asked if the additional time would move the needle.

"It would be great for Georgia and Georgia would benefit from being earlier in the process," Ossoff said. "So we will see how the process plays out."

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.

Public lands near Minnesota's Boundary Waters withdrawn from federal mining leases

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - JANUARY 27, 2023 10:51 AM

WASHINGTON — After more than a year of assessment and debate, the U.S. Department of the Interior on Thursday announced the withdrawal of more than 225,000 acres of public lands near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota from federal mine leasing programs.

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland signed Public Land Order 7917, which protects areas of the Superior National Forest from federal geothermal and mineral extraction leases for the next 20 years. The lands being withdrawn are predominantly in the northern portion of the Superior National Forest.

The release cited departmental concerns over the impacts of mining on ecosystem health, tribal rights, and the local recreation economy.

"The Department of the Interior takes seriously our obligations to steward public lands and waters on behalf of all Americans," Haaland said in the release. "With an eye toward protecting this special place for future generations, I have made this decision using the best-available science and extensive public input."

The 20-year suspension on extraction leases is the maximum that the Department of the Interior can apply. Only Congress can authorize a permanent withdrawal of federal lands, like those in the Superior National Forest, from these programs.

225,000 public comments

The decision follows a 2021 environmental assessment and withdrawal application from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. More than 225,000 public comments were submitted on the application.

The Forest Service found that development of copper-nickel ore mining in the Duluth Complex, a large deposit of valuable minerals, would have adverse effects on ecological health, no matter what environmental mitigation methods are used.

The withdrawal application cited increased risk to Native American and low-income communities to acid mine drainage, and said unintended leakage from mines and their retention ponds could cause die-offs of animal life, and be detrimental to soil health.

The Forest Service report added that plans to mine the now-withdrawn public lands had been in place as early as 2006.

"I applaud Secretary Haaland's decision to protect the long-term health of the Rainy River watershed, including the irreplaceable Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack

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said in a statement. "This landscape is an international resource renowned for its multitude of recreational opportunities and provides millions of visitors with unparalleled wilderness experiences."

Republicans criticize decision

The U.S. House Natural Resources Committee decried the new decision on the committee's Twitter feed. The chairman is Arkansas Republican Bruce Westerman.

"As Democrats shut down U.S. mines, China is laughing straight to the bank," the tweet said. "We won't stop fighting to access our resources and give jobs to American workers instead of supporting China's appalling child and slave labor practices."

Rep. Pete Stauber, a Republican whose Minnesota district includes the Boundary Waters, also denounced the decision in a Thursday statement, saying that the withdrawal of these public lands amounted to "a direct attack on our way of life."

"We cannot have a future of renewable energy without minerals, period — not to mention their necessity to our defense systems, satellites, cellphones and virtually every other advanced technology," Stauber said in the statement.

In contrast, Rep. Betty McCollum, a Minnesota Democrat, celebrated the decision.

"I applaud Sec. Haaland for this action, which is an enormous step in safeguarding the Boundary Waters," McCollum said in a statement. "Unfortunately, it can be reversed by another administration, which is why I am committed to reintroducing the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act in the 118th Congress to continue working to protect this national treasure in perpetuity."

More than 166,000 visitors from around the world every year are drawn to the 1.1-million-acre Boundary Waters, according to USDA. It is the only lake-land wilderness in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

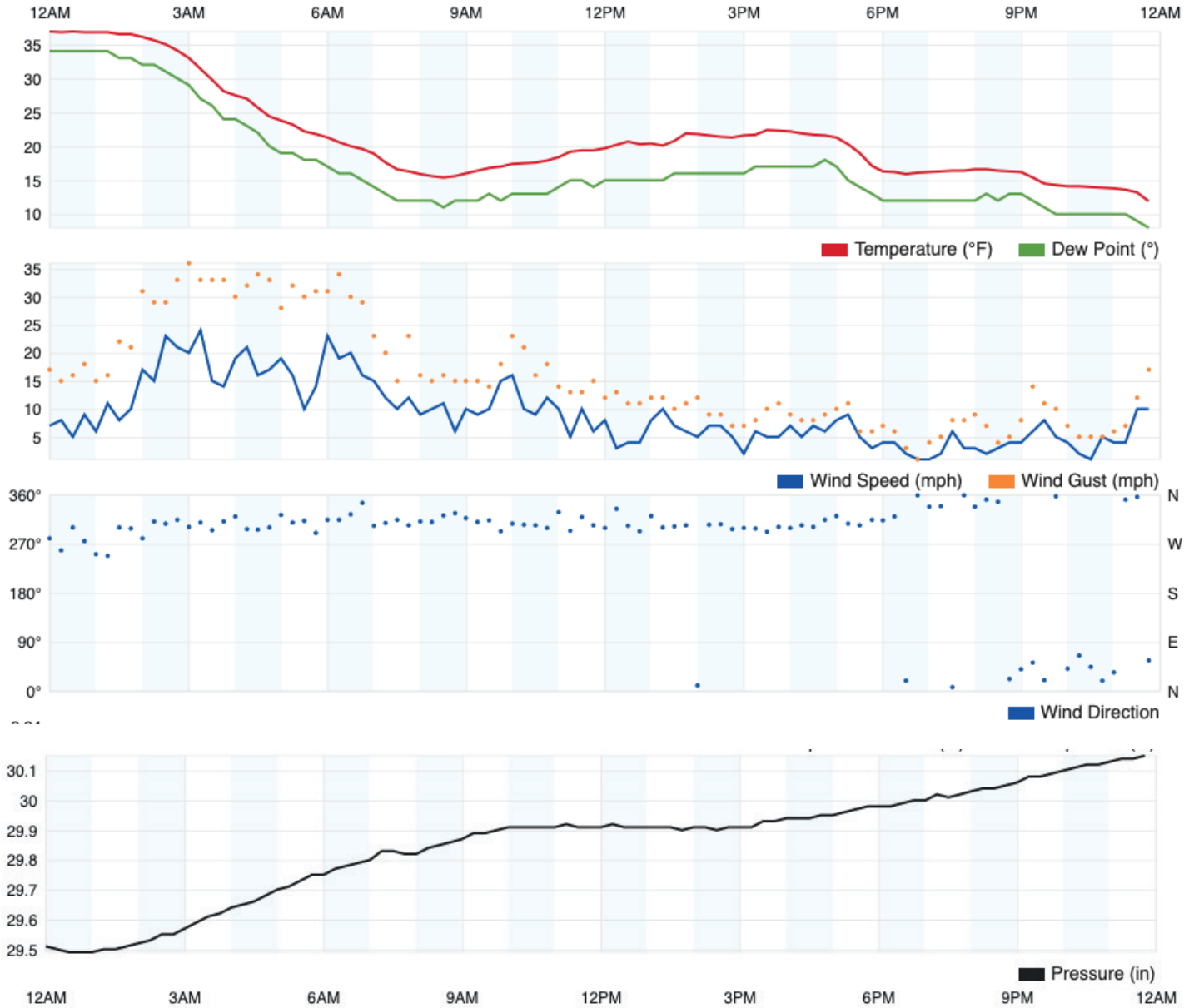
The public lands contribute up to \$17.4 million annually to the more than \$540 million recreation and tourism economies in Cook, Lake and St. Louis counties, according to the Thursday release.

Adam Goldstein is the D.C. Bureau intern for States Newsroom. Goldstein is a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, studying digital reporting. He is originally from San Francisco, and loves swimming, cooking, and the San Francisco 49ers.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

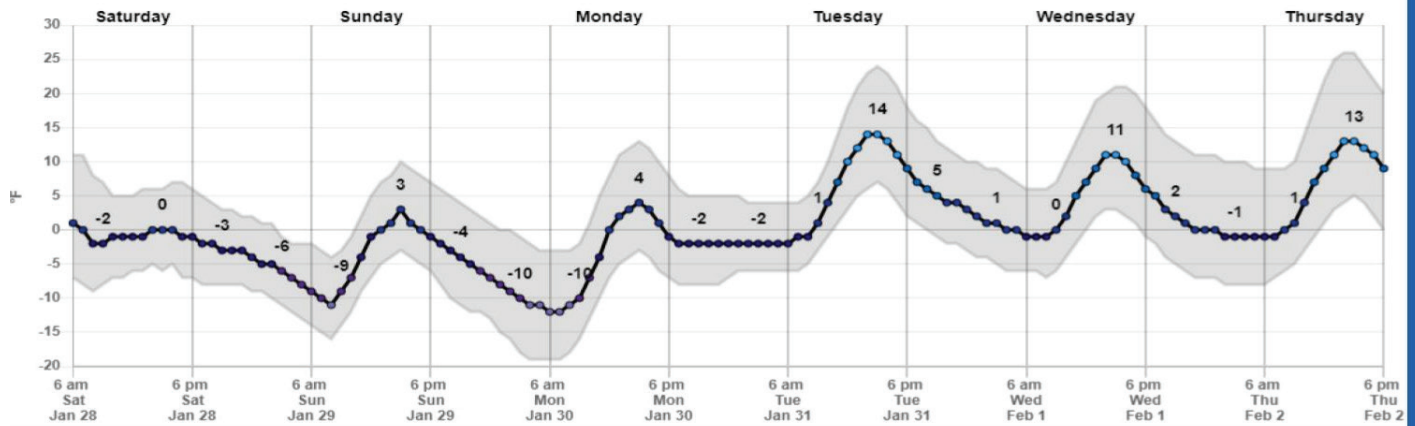


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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Cold	Mostly Cloudy	Patchy Fog then Partly Sunny	Decreasing Clouds	Cold	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: -1 °F	Low: -14 °F	High: 2 °F	Low: -19 °F	High: 2 °F	Low: -11 °F	High: 11 °F


Regional Temperature Forecast



Cold...
With a slow warming trend

High Temps → **Breezy**

www.weather.gov/abr
January 28, 2023 2:37 AM

Today	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed
				
-4 to +11°	-1 to +9°	-1 to +11°	+9 to +25°	+6 to +24°

Its going to be cold through the weekend and start of next week with a slow warming trend thereafter. It will be dry for the most part, aside from maybe an inch of snow in south central South Dakota tonight into Sunday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 37 °F at 12:21 AM

Low Temp: 11 °F at 11:57 PM

Wind: 40 mph at 3:05 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 38 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1931

Record Low: -31 in 1915

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 2°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.50

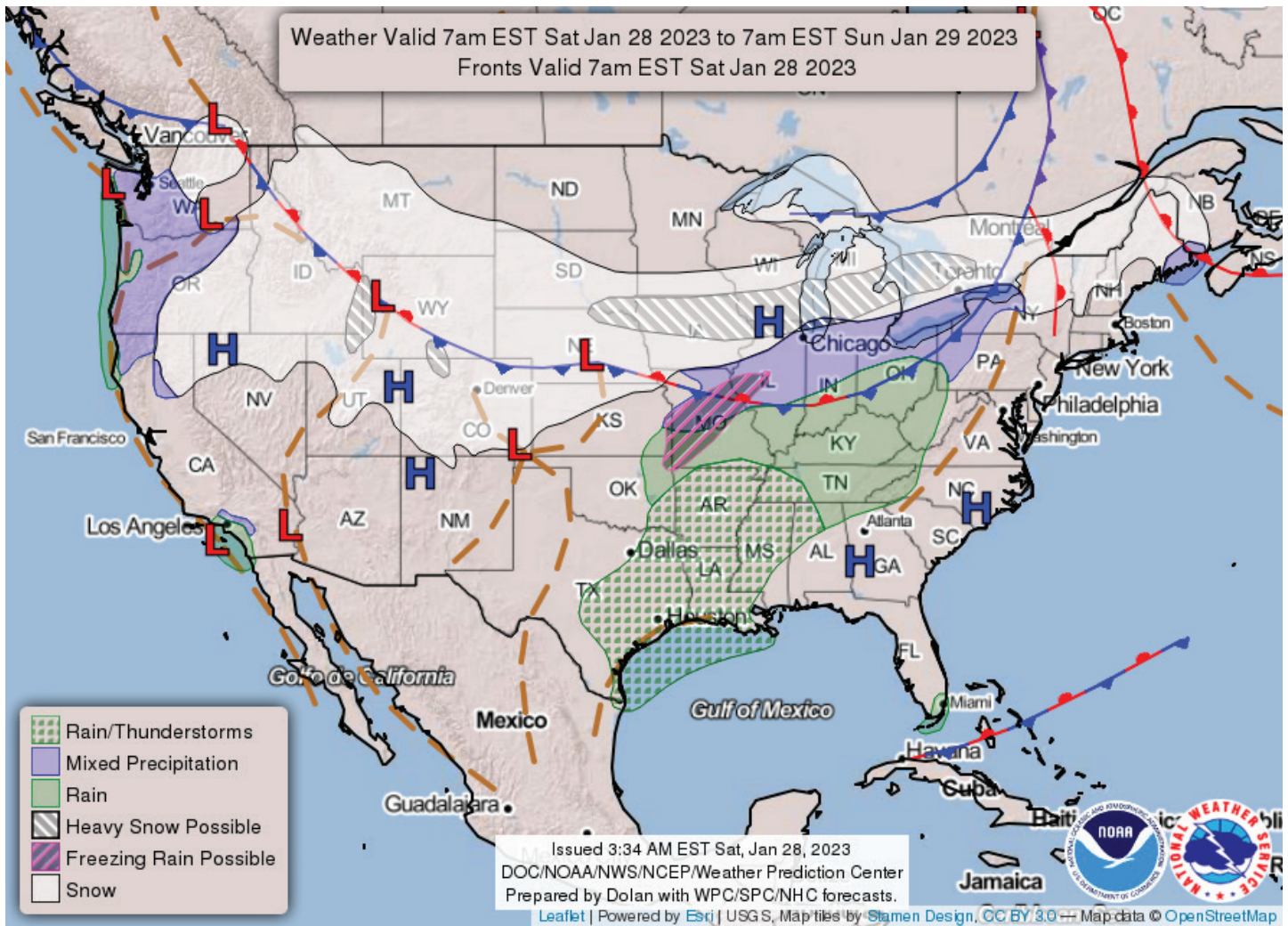
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.50

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:34:40 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:54:53 AM



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Today in Weather History

January 28, 1983: Freezing rain coated much of eastern South Dakota with up to a half-inch accumulation before it changed over to light snow from the late evening of the 28th to the late evening of the 29th. The combination of ice, light snow, and powerful winds made travel extremely difficult. Numerous accidents and stranded vehicles resulted. Visibilities were near zero at times.

January 28, 1996: Extreme wind chills developed across central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota, and west-central Minnesota as cold arctic air moved in behind an area of low pressure. With temperatures falling well below zero and northwest winds increasing to 20 to 35 mph, wind chills dropped to 40 to 70 below throughout the night of the 28th and into the evening of the 29th. Two to five inches of snow had fallen across the area. The strong northwest winds caused areas of blowing snow, significantly reducing visibilities. Big Stone and Traverse counties experienced a blizzard for about six hours on the 29th.

January 28, 2013: A low-pressure system moving slowly across the region produced a moderate to a heavy band of snow across much of central and northeastern South Dakota. Snowfall rates exceeded one inch per hour in some locations. Several area schools and businesses were either closed or opened late on the 29th.

1887: Snowflakes "as large as milk pans" fell at Fort Keogh of Montana. The flakes, which were said to measure 15 inches across and 8 inches thick, hold the unofficial size record!

1922 - The "Knickerbocker" storm immobilized the city of Washington D.C. The storm produced 28 inches of snow in 32 hours, and the heavy snow caused the roof of the Knickerbocker movie theatre to collapse killing 96 persons. (David Ludlum)

1963 - The low of -34 degrees at Cynthiana, KY, equalled the state record established just four days earlier at Bonnieville. (The Weather Channel)

1969: Heavy rains of tropical origin that began on 1/18 ended on this day. As much as 50 inches of rain fell at 7,700 feet. 31 inches of rain fell on the south slopes of Mt. San Geronimo, 15.5 inches at San Jacinto Peak, around ten inches at Banning, less than one inch from Indio southeast. 91 were reported dead from flooding and mudslides all over California and state-wide.

1977: The Blizzard of '77 was one of the worst winter storms to hit southern Ontario and upstate New York. With the rapid onset of the storm, about 2,000 students in the Niagara region were stranded overnight in schools.

1986: The Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart at 11:39 am EST, 73 seconds after liftoff from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida, on a frigid morning. Starting in the 20s, the ground temperature at liftoff was 36 degrees. Morton Thiokol recommended not launching if the liftoff temperature was below 53 degrees. The cold was blamed for causing the O-rings on the Shuttle's external booster to fail, leading to the explosion. Low-level wind shear also played a factor.

1987 - A storm moving out of the Central Rockies into the Northern Plains Region produced up to a foot of snow in the Colorado Rockies, and wind gusts to 99 mph at Boulder CO. High winds in Colorado caused 5.6 million dollars damage. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Barometric pressure readings of 30.55 inches at Miami FL, 30.66 inches at Tampa FL, and 30.72 inches at Apalachicola FL were all-time record high readings for those locations. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - Nome, AK, reported an all-time record low reading of 54 degrees below zero, and the temperature at Fairwell AK dipped to 69 degrees below zero. Deadhorse AK reported a morning low of 49 degrees below zero, and with a wind chill reading of 114 degrees below zero. In the Lower Forty-eight States, a winter storm over Colorado produced up to 15 inches of snow around Denver. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong and gusty winds prevailed across the northwestern U.S., and heavy snow continued over the mountains of Washington State and Oregon. In Idaho, Mullan received seven inches of snow, and winds gusted to 65 mph southeast of Burley. Heavy rain soaked coastal sections of western Oregon. Rainfall totals of 1.20 inches at Portland and 1.57 inches at Eugene were records for the date. Winds in Oregon gusting to 60 mph downed power lines in Umatilla County knocking out power to more than 13,000 homes, just prior to the kick-off of the "Super Bowl" game. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

PREPARING WISELY

All through college, it was my desire to be on the debate team. I would sit quietly, listen carefully and watch intently as one "team" would present their side of an issue. When finished, the other team would take "issue" with their position and attempt to dismantle their carefully stated, but opposing view. Although I saw the debate, I did not see the preparation. Both teams came to the "contest" thoroughly and carefully prepared. Both teams expected to win. Both teams were mentally alert and emotionally prepared. Both teams were ready to do battle with words, ideas, thoughts, and illustrations.

We saw the teams debate but we never saw what the teams did to prepare for the debate. Their preparation, however, is described by a proverb of Solomon: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Knives are first shaped and fashioned for their intended use. They are crafted for a special or specific purpose and then polished to give them beauty and elegance. The handle must "fit" properly and be smoothed to perfection for a sure grip. But the final step in the process is when they are sharpened by the knife-maker. The work is completed when one metal is used against another metal to sharpen the blade to perfection and precision.

No one knows everything about anything. We all have "mental" gaps and "space" in our brains for more knowledge, wisdom, and insight. Though the Bible is the best place to prepare for life, we must use other resources - books and friends - to "sharpen" our minds.

Prayer: Father, may we bring others into our lives who know You and who will challenge our thoughts and ideas so that we will become our best to do battle for You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17



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:
01.27.23

4 43 46 47 61 22

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$31,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[GAME DETAILS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.25.23

9 15 28 47 49 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$34,420,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 55 Mins 35 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.27.23

4 5 7 39 42 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 25 Mins 34 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.25.23

6 11 15 22 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$30,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 55 Mins 34 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.25.23

15 32 35 42 47 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 54 Mins 35 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.25.23

9 17 20 38 40 18

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$572,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 54 Mins 35 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 62, Timber Lake 49
Arlington 52, Estelline/Hendricks 33
Beresford 50, Parker 40
Bowman County, N.D. 54, Lemmon 31
Castlewood 56, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 34
Chester 46, Baltic 42
Colman-Egan 53, DeSmet 40
Corsica/Stickney 61, Menno 35
Custer 61, Hill City 56
Elkton-Lake Benton 43, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 29
Ethan 61, Howard 54
Faith 46, Newell 16
Flandreau 51, Garretson 43
Flandreau Indian 50, Takini 33
Groton Area 31, Webster 24
Hanson 72, Bridgewater-Emery 23
Herreid/Selby Area 56, Ipswich 27
Huron 47, Rapid City Central 40
Jones County 52, Gregory 39
Kadoka Area 68, Bison 39
Lennox 50, West Central 38
Lower Brule 61, Wakpala 25
Mobridge-Pollock 51, Chamberlain 49
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 54, Winner 45
North Central Co-Op 42, Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 23
Northwestern 48, Langford 22
Omaha Nation, Neb. 65, Marty Indian 50
Pierre 57, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 46
Platte-Geddes 58, Colome 26
Rapid City Stevens 56, Mitchell 37
Red Cloud 98, Lead-Deadwood 10
Sioux Valley 62, McCook Central/Montrose 41
Tea Area 64, Madison 38
Tiospaye Topa 49, Crazy Horse 14
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 48, Burke 40
Warner 59, Waubay/Summit 54
Watertown 62, Douglas 25

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Avon 38, Freeman 37
Canton 67, Parker 47
Castlewood 68, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 36
Chester 58, Sioux Falls Lutheran 28

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Clark/Willow Lake 64, Redfield 32
Corsica/Stickney 48, Menno 29
DeSmet 88, Colman-Egan 21
Gregory 61, Jones County 42
Hamlin 67, Sisseton 22
Hanson 60, Bridgewater-Emery 58
Hay Springs, Neb. 59, Edgemont 57
Hot Springs 71, Lakota Tech 66, OT
Howard 65, Ethan 55
Ipswich 47, Herreid/Selby Area 36
Lower Brule 78, Marty Indian 58
Mobridge-Pollock 54, Chamberlain 45
Northwestern 84, Langford 46
Platte-Geddes 65, Colome 46
Rapid City Central 54, Huron 36
Rapid City Stevens 54, Mitchell 48
Red Cloud 77, Lead-Deadwood 23
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 68, Pierre 64, OT
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 53, Sioux Falls Washington 47
St. Thomas More 61, Rapid City Christian 38
Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 51, North Central Co-Op 42
Tiospaye Topa 80, Takini 39
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 48, Burke 40
Wakpala 74, Flandreau Indian 45
Watertown 58, Douglas 32
Waubay/Summit 56, Warner 34
Waverly-South Shore 61, Florence/Henry 58, OT
White River 78, St. Francis Indian 59
Winner 66, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 48
Wolsey-Wessington 50, Kimball/White Lake 45

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

S. Dakota GOP leader: Senator accused of harassment

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's Senate Republican leader said Friday that a committee will investigate a suspended senator for allegedly harassing a legislative aide during an exchange over childhood vaccines and breastfeeding.

Sen. Casey Crabtree, the Senate GOP leader, had declined to provide details of the allegations against fellow Republican Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller on Thursday when the Senate voted to suspend her legislative powers. Crabtree said in a statement on Friday afternoon that Senate Republicans this week had received a "detailed report" from a staff member of the Legislative Research Council accusing Frye-Mueller of "inappropriate behavior and harassment related to private maternal matters, including childhood vaccines and breastfeeding."

Republican legislative leaders had previously refused to release any details on the allegations. Frye-Mueller had told reporters Thursday that she had shared her views on vaccinations with the aide, but Crabtree said her public statements did not match with what she told Senate Republican leaders in a private discussion or what the legislative aide reported.

A Select Committee on Discipline and Expulsion will be formed to investigate the allegations and is ex-

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pected to complete its work next week, Crabtree said. The committee, which will be chaired by Republican Sen. David Wheeler, is expected to deliver a recommendation to the Senate.

During Thursday's Senate hearing that led to her suspension, Frye-Mueller said the action deprived her of due process. Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, who presides over the Senate, also cautioned against punishing a senator without first conducting an investigation.

Crabtree, in his statement, pushed back on those objections: "Our goal is to create a safe work environment for staff and legislators, and an environment where employees feel safe bringing concerns forward. All allegations of harassment must be taken seriously. There will be due process afforded to all parties as this matter moves forward," he said.

Crabtree said the investigative committee's meetings would be open to the public, except when they delve into issues that are private by state law, and that the committee's final report would be a public record.

The committee will be made up of seven Republicans and two Democrats.

Frye-Mueller is a part of a right-wing group of lawmakers and has proposed legislation removing school requirements for childhood vaccines.

Vaccines have been championed as public health success stories, but rates among kindergarteners have dropped nationwide in recent years. Officials with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that's due to decreased confidence in vaccines and disruptions to routine health care during the pandemic are the.

Falling vaccination rates open the door to outbreaks of diseases once thought to be in the rearview mirror, experts say.

South Dakota's Noem breaks news conference tradition

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has yet to make herself available to the Capitol press during the first three weeks of the state's legislative session, breaking with a decades-old ritual of South Dakota governors holding a weekly news conference to publicly discuss their policy initiatives and take questions from reporters.

The Republican governor, who is a potential 2024 White House contender, has granted numerous TV interviews to national outlets. But in her home state Capitol, where she is proposing a historic tax repeal, new rules for foreign entities purchasing farmland and a batch of bills aimed at aiding new parents, she has not personally taken questions from reporters.

Noem's retreat from a forum that allows her to face public scrutiny — as well as make a case for her proposals — comes after a campaign season in which candidates nationwide skipped out on debates. The practice deprives the public of a chance to hear politicians respond to questions they may not want to answer. Many officials, such as Noem, have instead made their public case on social media, where they can control their message.

Noem's spokesman, Ian Fury, declined to say whether she will hold any news conferences this year but said they would be announced in advance. He did not respond to a request for comment on why she has not held any this year.

The governor's weekly news conferences have been occurring for decades during the state's 40-day legislative session, said Kevin Woster, a journalist who has covered South Dakota since the late 1970s. And some former governors, such as the bombastic Bill Janklow, seemed to relish the opportunity to spar with the press over the legislative debates of the day, he said.

"The governor and her office are right in the middle of (the legislative session) and should be talking about it," Woster said, adding, "It's a denial of something that the public certainly deserves."

Traditionally, South Dakota's Democratic and Republican legislative leaders have held half-hour news conferences on the week's final day when the Legislature is in session. They usually discuss their priorities — and sometimes exchange a few digs at each other — before answering questions from reporters. Then, the governor gets her turn.

While both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have continued the practice this year, Noem has not.

She also did not attend a meeting this week with the state's top newspaper editors — an annual gathering she attended in years past. The editors, who drove hours from around the mostly rural state, did gain audiences with Republican and Democratic legislative leaders.

Michael Card, a retired Republican political strategist and political science professor, said that skipping direct interactions with the press is a missed opportunity for the governor to explain her agenda and creates an information vacuum that leaves room for speculation.

"It is not a good thing for our democracy," he said.

North Dakota landowners at odds in carbon pipeline plans

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

North Dakota landowners testified for and against a carbon capture company's use of eminent domain Friday, as Summit Carbon Solutions moves forward in constructing a massive underground system of carbon dioxide pipelines spanning 2,000 miles across several states and under hundreds of people's homes and farms in the Midwest.

The proposed \$4.5 billion carbon pipeline project would capture carbon dioxide emissions across neighboring states and deposit the emissions deep underground in North Dakota.

Landowners who opposed the company's right to eminent domain argued that a private entity should not be able to forcibly buy their land and that the pipeline will potentially endanger people living above it.

Eminent domain refers to the government's right to forcibly buy private property — like the land under a person's house or farm — for public use.

Landowners who supported Summit's right to exercise eminent domain said the company's timely construction of the carbon pipeline serves an important public interest — it would reduce the state's carbon footprint and thereby allow North Dakotans to continue working in energy and agriculture — and that people living above the pipeline will be safe.

"The safety of our operations, our employees, and the communities where we operate is the foundation of Summit Carbon Solutions' business," Summit said on its website. "As the project is constructed, we will utilize the latest and most reliable technologies and materials."

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee did not immediately vote on the bills heard Thursday and Friday about carbon pipelines and eminent domain.

Republican Sen. Jeffery Magrum, of Hazelton, said he introduced the bills because he has heard from "many landowners" that carbon pipeline developers are threatening the use of eminent domain as a way to negotiate for property rights and access.

"We need to support property rights and our land owners as we develop our natural resources," Magrum said.

The bill heard Friday would prohibit carbon pipeline companies from exercising eminent domain, but would allow oil, gas and coal companies to continue using eminent domain.

"The proposed carbon dioxide pipeline would move a dangerous product through our community to a location where it cannot be used for any purpose, but instead must be injected underground and sequestered forever," said Gaylen Dewing, who has worked as a farmer and rancher near Bismarck for over 50 years.

Dewing added that the state's energy industry "would not benefit in any way" from this practice of storing carbon dioxide underground, so carbon pipeline companies should not have the right to exercise eminent domain.

Susan Doppler, a landowner in Burleigh County, said her family does not want "our land ripped up — toxic and useless — to give way to a hazardous pipeline. What a worthless and disgusting inheritance to leave a future generation."

But other North Dakota landowners pushed back.

Keith Kessler, a farmer and rancher in Oliver County who owns land within the boundaries of the pipeline project, said a different pipeline has been transporting carbon for over 20 years between North Dakota and Canada. That pipeline has never had a rupture or leak, and hazardous incidents from carbon pipelines

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are rare, he said.

And Lori Flemmer, a resident of Mercer County, said her husband and sons work in the energy industry and on their family farm. Working in agriculture and energy is "reality in coal country," she said, and carbon capture technology is necessary for reducing carbon footprints and keeping coal plants alive.

Summit Carbon Solutions' Executive Vice President Wade Boeshans said the company must keep its ability to use eminent domain in order to build carbon pipelines in a timely fashion, deliver on the \$4.5 billion pipeline project and keep North Dakota's economy afloat. According to the company's website, the project would span Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska.

Republican Gov. Doug Burgum lauded North Dakota's efforts to store carbon dioxide in January.

"We're on our way toward achieving carbon neutrality as a state by 2030, thanks to our extraordinary capacity to safely store over 252 billion tons of CO₂, or 50 years of the nation's CO₂ output," Burgum said. "And in the process, we can help secure the future of our state's two largest industries: energy and agriculture."

The Trump administration in 2018 gave North Dakota the power to regulate underground wells used for long-term storage of waste carbon dioxide. North Dakota was the first state to be given such power, the Environmental Protection Agency said in announcing the move. The state has since invested heavily in carbon capture and sequestration technology.

S. Dakota tribes seek disaster declaration in storm recovery

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's congressional delegation wrote letters to President Joe Biden in support of the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations' requests for a major disaster declaration following winter storms that left six people dead.

The declaration would assist the tribes' recovery from destruction that tribal leaders say could have been prevented if there had been more resources to assist people stranded by the December storms. The requests outline that the weather's severity blocked access to medical and heating supplies.

Both the Oglala Sioux and Rosebud Sioux tribes are asking for the declaration to address emergency costs and damages.

"The emergency operations conducted by the tribe reduced the storms' impact and accelerated the recovery of tribal communities," U.S. Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds, and U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, wrote in a letter to Biden on Thursday. "Despite these efforts, a number of tribal members remained trapped in their homes and were unable to access necessary supplies."

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Madison Daily Leader. January 25, 2023.

Editorial: Can we avoid a "Santos" In S.D.?

Rep. George Santos is a member of the United States House of Representatives, representing New York's Third Congressional District. He was elected on a platform of lies. This isn't political rhetoric; the lies were discovered and he has admitted to them.

He said he attended and graduated from Baruch College, starring on the volleyball team. He never attended the school. He said he worked for Goldman Sachs and Citigroup in New York City. He never worked for either firm. He said his mother was working in the World Trade Center when it was struck on 9/11 and died because of it. She was in Brazil at the time and died several years later.

He said he had four employees who died in the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando. None of the 49 victims ever worked for a company that Santos worked for. He said he is Jewish when he isn't.

Santos was elected in November. Most of his lies came to a national spotlight after the election, although a local newspaper called The North Shore Leader reported some of the falsehoods before the election.

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Santos took the congressional oath of office earlier this month, and other members of Congress are trying to figure out what to do. Their reputation is on the line.

We can't imagine this type of thing happening in South Dakota, right? Doesn't it seem as though we know most of the candidates well enough to see any lies? It may be true that someone couldn't lie as many times as George Santos did, but it seems very possible that a candidate could deceive voters on a lesser scale.

There isn't much of a vetting process for candidates in South Dakota. Past misdeeds may be looked up by the political party the potential candidate belongs to, but in many cases, the political parties are desperate to recruit candidates to run and aren't thorough in screening.

An opponent may look up falsehoods, although they may be accused of "digging up dirt." The local newspaper might do that research, but in certain markets in South Dakota, the newspapers don't have the resources anymore to do thorough research on every candidate.

Columnist Peggy Noonan wrote on Saturday: "If you think Facebook posts can make up for local newspaper investigations, ladies and gentlemen, we give you New York's Third Congressional District."

So what can be done? We must do better on all fronts: parties must be more thorough in vetting. Opposing candidates should learn all they can about opponents. Objective media must commit to reporting the truth.

We have some optimism on this front. Several new news organizations have sprung up, all with the mission of discovering and reporting things that are going unreported. South Dakota NewsWatch is the state's first nonprofit news organization covering statewide issues. South Dakota Searchlight is also a nonprofit news organization, focusing more on state Capitol reporting. The Dakota Scout is a new newspaper/paid website that covers both Sioux Falls and Pierre politics.

Let's all commit to fielding honorable candidates for all elected offices and avoid the embarrassment of what's now happening on Long Island in New York.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. January 24, 2023.

Editorial: US Exceptionalism And SD School Curricula

A bill introduced in the South Dakota House calling for the promotion of "American exceptionalism" in schools and colleges may not specifically be related to the efforts to revamp the state's social studies standards, but it certainly seems to be flying a parallel course.

House Bill 1070 (HB1070) would create the "Center for American Exceptionalism" at Black Hills State University. According to South Dakota Searchlight, it would "curate supplemental curriculum on American history and civic education." Unlike the proposed social studies standards, the supplemental curriculum would be optional.

The proposed center would be state funded, with the bill calling for \$150,000 to be allocated to the project.

Rep. Scott Odenbach (R-Spearfish) said, "We're not interested in indoctrinating students. We want students to engage in critical thinking." But, according to The Associated Press, he also said that, when students graduate from the state's educational institutions, "they should love America" — which, in a vacuum, sounds a lot like an end goal of indoctrination.

America is an amazingly diverse tapestry of people and backgrounds, and it has thrived on a democratic principle that remains unmatched anywhere. We love this country because it offers so much to so many, and its horizons seem boundless.

But America is not a flawless land: It has had its share of struggles and mistakes. We remind you again, one key to America's greatness has been its willingness to face up to these issues and address them. While this process has taken longer on some matters than others and there is always more work to do, it still shows the hallmark of a vibrant nation that is constantly evolving with the times and the people. And that could be one definition of "exceptional."

However, HB1070 seems part of a trend of moving away from critical self-examination of our past, which has been seen in the current contentious battle over social studies standards. The latter proposal (actually, proposals — this task is currently on its second go-round after controversy scuttled the first effort) seems to downplay Native American aspects of this state's history and relies on considerable memorization of

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principles at young (critics have argued, too young) levels.

If HB1070 (which is opposed by several education group) passes, perhaps the proposed Center for American Exceptionalism would remain only an optional offering, but since it seeks taxpayer funding and is being promoted by lawmakers who ultimately have a say over school funding, it's not unreasonable to conclude that the center could eventually become a state-sanctioned source for educational guidance.

"You're bringing private entities into deciding curriculum," Dianna Miller of the Large School Group told lawmakers. "I would caution you to be very careful about all the people you want involved in statewide education."

Indeed, there is already a process in place for this, which is what the current battle over the social studies curriculum is about. Bringing yet another entity into the mix seems unwise and unnecessary.

END

Palestinian teen wounds 2, day after 7 killed in Jerusalem

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Palestinian attacker in his early teens opened fire in east Jerusalem on Saturday, wounding two people, officials said, a day after another assailant killed seven outside a synagogue in the deadliest attack in the city since 2008.

The shooting in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in east Jerusalem, near the historic Old City, wounded a father and son, ages 47 and 23, paramedics said. Both were fully conscious and in moderate to serious condition in the hospital, the medics added.

As police rushed to the scene, two passers-by with licensed weapons shot and overpowered the 13-year-old attacker, police said. Police confiscated his handgun and took the wounded teen to a hospital. Video showed police escorting a wounded young man, wearing nothing but underwear, away from the scene and onto a stretcher, his hands cuffed behind his back. Authorities taped off the street, emergency vehicles and security forces swarmed the area and helicopters whirled overhead.

"He waited to ambush civilians on the holy Sabbath day," Israeli police spokesman Dean Elsdunne told The Associated Press, adding that the teenager opened fire on a group of five civilians. He described a "significant rise" in the level of Palestinian militant activity in recent days.

"The Israeli police are going to act accordingly," he said.

Saturday's events — on the eve of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's arrival in the region — raised the possibility of even greater conflagration in one of the bloodiest months in Israel and the occupied West Bank in several years. On Friday, a Palestinian gunman killed at least seven people, including a 70-year-old woman, in a Jewish settlement in east Jerusalem, an area captured by Israel in 1967 and later annexed in a move not internationally recognized.

The attacks pose pivotal test for Israel's new far-right government. Its firebrand minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has presented himself as an enforcer of law and order and grabbed headlines for his promises to take even stronger action against the Palestinians.

The Israeli army said it had deployed another battalion to the West Bank on Saturday, adding hundreds more troops to a presence already on heightened alert in the occupied territory.

Prime Minister Benjamin said he would convene his Security Cabinet later Saturday, after the end of the Sabbath, to discuss a further response to the attack near the synagogue. Security forces launched a crackdown earlier in the day, fanning out into the neighborhood of the 21-year-old Palestinian gunman, who was shot and killed at the scene. Police arrested 42 of his family members and neighbors for questioning in the At-Tur neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

Police Chief Kobi Shabtai permanently moved a force analogous to a S.W.A.T. team in the city and beefed up forces, instructing police to work 12-hour shifts. He urged the public to call a hotline if they see anything suspicious.

The earlier Friday attack, which occurred as residents were observing the Jewish Sabbath, came a day after an Israeli military raid killed nine Palestinians in the West Bank that prompted a rocket barrage from

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Gaza and retaliatory Israeli airstrikes.

Although calm had appeared to take hold after the limited exchange of fire between Israel and Gaza militants, tensions were running high in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Thursday's raid, deadliest single incursion in the West Bank since 2002, followed a particularly bloody month that saw at least 30 Palestinians — militants and civilians — killed in confrontations with Israelis in the West Bank, according to a tally by the AP.

Israel says most of the dead were militants. But youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in the confrontations also have been killed.

The Israeli military contends its raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart attacks. But Palestinians say they further entrench Israel's 55-year, open-ended occupation of the West Bank, captured along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians demand east Jerusalem as the capital of a future independent state, and much of the world considers it illegally occupied. Israel claims as its united, sovereign capital.

Home to the shrines of all three major monotheistic religions, the contested capital been the centerpiece of spiking tensions between Israelis and Palestinians for years.

Both Palestinian attackers behind the shootings on Friday and Saturday came from east Jerusalem. Palestinian residents of east Jerusalem hold permanent residency status, allowing them to work and move freely throughout Israel, but they are not allowed to vote in national elections. Residency rights can be stripped if a Palestinian is found to live outside the city for an extended period or in certain security cases.

Although their standard of living is generally better than in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian residents of the city receive a fraction of the services that Jewish residents do. They also complain of home demolitions and the near impossibility of obtaining Israeli building permits.

'He's close to us': Wheelchair users in Africa await pope

By JUSTIN KABUMBA, DENG MACHOL and CARA ANNA Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — When Pope Francis arrives in Congo and South Sudan next week, thousands of people will take special note of a gesture more grounded than the sign of the cross. Watching from their wheelchairs, they will relate to the way he uses his.

The pope, who began using a wheelchair last year, is visiting two countries where years of conflict have disabled many, and yet they are among the world's most difficult places to find accessibility and understanding. His visit is heartening Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

"We know that it's a suffering, but it also comforts us to see a grand personality like the pope using a wheelchair," said Paul Mitemberezi, a market vendor in Goma, at the heart of the eastern Congo region threatened by dozens of armed groups. "Sometimes it gives us the courage to hope that this isn't the end of the world and one can survive."

Mitemberezi, a Catholic and a father, has been disabled since he was 3 because of polio. He works to support his family because he can't imagine a life of begging. On the way to market, his three-wheeled chair crunches the stones of unpaved roads. Without a ramp at home, he must leave the brightly painted vehicle outdoors, at risk of theft.

Every morning, before he leaves for basketball practice, he makes sure the chair's still there before crawling out his front door. "It is my legs, which helps me to live," he said. He applies a bicycle pump to the wheels and is off, weaving through traffic of motorcycles and trucks.

Pope Francis is still adjusting to a life that Mitemberezi has long accepted. The pope was first seen publicly in a wheelchair in May, with an aide pushing it. The pope, at age 86, never propels himself. Sometimes he walks with a cane, but he uses the chair for longer distances and has a wheelchair lift to get on and off planes.

Francis has insisted that his mobility limitations don't affect his ability to be pope, saying "You lead with your head, not your knee." He has lamented how today's "throwaway culture" wrongly marginalizes disabled people. He makes it a point to visit places serving the disabled during his foreign trips, and routinely

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spends time greeting wheelchair users at the end of his general audiences.

"No disability — temporary, acquired or permanent — can change the fact that we are all children of the one Father and enjoy the same dignity," Francis wrote in his annual message for the U.N. International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December. He said people with different abilities enrich the church and teach it to be more humane.

Such messages are warmly awaited by wheelchair users in South Sudan, where a five-year civil war killed hundreds of thousands of people. As in Congo, data is lacking on just how many people are disabled by conflict or other means.

While the road leading to the Vatican's embassy in the South Sudan capital, Juba, was paved by city authorities this month for ease of travel, residents who use wheelchairs said they have long gone without easy access to schools, health centers, toilets and other public facilities.

South Sudan, unlike Congo, is yet to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Both countries, however, face vast challenges including underfunded health systems, poor infrastructure and conflicts that leave many disabled people vulnerable as others flee. Even displacement camps and shelters often are not accessible, the United Nations has said, and wheelchairs are not always available.

Discrimination is another problem. "People see those who get around using a wheelchair as useless," said James Moses, who leads a local organization in South Sudan for disabled people and uses crutches after being wounded by a land mine.

He and others called on South Sudan's government to give them special consideration during the pope's visit, and they hope that Francis will advocate for them. "He's close to us," said Susan Samson, a wheelchair user and mother.

They hope they will have a chance to greet the pope at the airport with congratulatory messages and flowers. "Put us in front so the pope will see us," urged wheelchair user Seme Lado Michael.

The Vatican's ambassador to Congo, Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, said he believed the sight of a wheelchair-using pope could be a powerful teaching moment in a culture where disabilities are often viewed with suspicion and superstition.

Families often abandon their disabled children, he said.

Seeing someone like the pope suffer should make Francis more approachable for people during his visit, Balestrero said. "They identify, in a way, even more with him."

Japan firm opens whale meat vending machines to push sales

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and KWIYEON HA Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan (AP) — A Japanese whaling operator, after struggling for years to promote its products amid protests from conservationists, has found a new way to cultivate clientele and bolster sales: whale meat vending machines.

The Kujira (Whale) Store, an unmanned outlet that recently opened in the port town of Yokohama near Tokyo, houses three machines for whale sashimi, whale bacon, whale skin and whale steak, as well as canned whale meat. Prices range from 1,000 yen (\$7.70) to 3,000 yen (\$23).

The outlet features white vending machines decorated with cartoon whales and is the third location to launch in the Japanese capital region. It opened Tuesday after two others were introduced in Tokyo earlier this year as part of Kyodo Senpaku Co.'s new sales drive.

Whale meat has long been a source of controversy but sales in the new vending machines have quietly gotten off to a good start, the operator says. Anti-whaling protests have subsided since Japan in 2019 terminated its much-criticized research hunts in the Antarctic and resumed commercial whaling off the Japanese coasts.

Conservationists say they are worried the move could be a step toward expanded whaling.

"The issue is not the vending machines themselves but what they may lead to," said Nanami Kurasawa, head of the Iruka & Kujira (Dolphin & Whale) Action Network.

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Kurasawa noted the whaling operator is already asking for additional catches and to expand whaling outside of the designated waters.

Kyodo Senpaku hopes to set up vending machines at 100 locations nationwide in five years, company spokesperson Konomu Kubo told The Associated Press. A fourth is to open in Osaka next month.

The idea is to open vending machines near supermarkets, where whale meat is usually unavailable, to cultivate demand, a task crucial for the industry's survival.

Major supermarket chains have largely stayed away from whale meat to avoid protests by anti-whaling groups and remain cautious even though harassment from activists has subsided, Kubo said.

"As a result, many consumers who want to eat it cannot find or buy whale meat. We launched vending machines at unmanned stores for those people," he said.

Company officials say sales at the two Tokyo outlets have been significantly higher than expected, keeping staff busy replenishing products.

At the store in the Motomachi district of Yokohama, a posh shopping area near Chinatown, 61-year-old customer Mami Kashiwabara went straight for whale bacon, her father's favorite. To her disappointment it was sold out, and she settled for frozen onomi, tail meat that is regarded as a rare delicacy.

Kashiwabara says she is aware of the whaling controversy but that whale meat brings back her childhood memories of eating it at family dinners and school lunches.

"I don't think it's good to kill whales meaninglessly. But whale meat is part of Japanese food culture and we can respect the lives of whales by appreciating their meat," Kashiwabara said. "I would be happy if I can eat it."

Kashiwabara said she planned to share her purchase of a 3,000 yen (\$23) handy-size chunk, neatly wrapped in a freezer bag, with her husband over sake.

The meat mostly comes from whales caught off Japan's northeastern coast.

Japan resumed commercial whaling in July 2019 after withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission, ending 30 years of what it called research whaling, which had been criticized by conservationists as a cover for commercial hunts banned by the IWC in 1988.

Under its commercial whaling in the Japanese exclusive economic zone, Japan last year caught 270 whales, less than 80% of the quota and fewer than the number it once hunted in the Antarctic and the northwestern Pacific in its research program.

The decline occurred because fewer minke whales were found along the coast. Kurasawa says the reason for the smaller catch should be examined to see if it is linked to overhunting or climate change.

While conservation groups condemned the resumption of commercial whaling, some see it as a way to let the government's embattled and expensive whaling program adapt to changing times and tastes.

In a show of determination to keep the whaling industry alive in the coming decades, Kyodo Senpaku will construct a 6 billion yen (\$46 million) new mother ship for launch next year to replace the aging Nisshin Maru.

But uncertainty remains.

Whaling is losing support in other whaling nations such as Iceland, where only one whaler remains.

Whales may also be moving away from the Japanese coasts due to a scarcity of saury, a staple of their diet, and other fish possibly due to the impact of climate change, Kubo said.

Whaling in Japan involves only a few hundred people and one operator and accounted for less than 0.1% of total meat consumption in recent years, according to Fisheries Agency data.

Still, conservative governing lawmakers staunchly support commercial whaling and consumption of the meat as part of Japan's cultural tradition.

Conservationists say whale meat is no longer part of the daily diet in Japan, especially for younger generations.

Whale meat was an affordable source of protein during Japan's undernourished years after World War II, with annual consumption peaking at 233,000 tons in 1962.

Whale was quickly replaced by other meats. The whale meat supply fell to 6,000 tons in 1986, the year before the moratorium on commercial whaling imposed by the IWC banned the hunting of several whale

species.

Under the research whaling, criticized as a cover for commercial hunts because the meat was sold on the market, Japan caught as many as 1,200 whales annually. It has since drastically cut back its catch after international protests escalated and whale meat supply and consumption slumped at home.

Annual meat supply had fluctuated in a range of 3,000-5,000 tons, including imports from Norway and Iceland. The amount further fell in 2019 to 2,000 tons, or 20 grams (less than 1 ounce) of whale meat per person a year, the Fisheries Agency statistics show.

Whaling officials attributed the shrinking supply in the past three years to the absence of imports due to the pandemic, and plan to nearly double this year's supply with imports of more than 2,500 tons from Iceland.

Japan managed to get Iceland's only remaining whaler to hunt fin whales exclusively for shipment to Japan, whaling officials said. Iceland caught only one minke whale in the 2021 season, according to the IWC.

Criticizing Iceland's export to Japan, the International Fund for Animal Welfare said it "opposes all commercial whaling as it is inherently cruel."

With uncertain outlook for imports, Kyodo Senpaku wants the government to raise Japan's annual catch quota to levels that can supply about 5,000 tons, which Kubo describes as the threshold to maintain the industry.

"From a long-term perspective, I think it would be difficult to sustain the industry at the current supply levels," Kubo said. "We must expand both supply and demand, which have both shrunk."

With the extremely limited supply, whale meat processing cannot be a viable business and may not last for the next generations, he added.

Yuki Okoshi, who started serving whale meat dishes at his Japanese-style seafood restaurant three years ago when higher quality whale meat became available under commercial whaling, said he hopes whale meat supply will stabilize.

Okoshi said "the future of the whale industry depends on whether customers need us" and that whale meat restaurants could hold the key to survival.

"Whaling can be a political issue, but relationships between the restaurant and our customers is very simple," Okoshi said. "We serve good food at reasonable prices and customers are happy. That's all there is to it."

Tyre Nichols' brutal beating by police shown on video

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Authorities released video footage Friday showing Tyre Nichols being beaten by five Memphis police officers who held the Black motorist down and repeatedly struck him with their fists, boots and batons as he screamed for his mother.

The video is filled with violent moments showing the officers, who are also Black, chasing and pummeling Nichols and leaving him on the pavement propped against a squad car as they fist-bump and celebrate their actions.

The footage emerged one day after the officers were charged with murder in Nichols' death. The chilling images of another Black man dying at the hands of police renewed tough questions about how fatal encounters with law enforcement continue even after repeated calls for change.

Protesters gathered for mostly peaceful demonstrations in multiple cities, including Memphis, where several dozen demonstrators blocked the Interstate 55 bridge that carries traffic over the Mississippi River toward Arkansas. Semitrucks were backed up for a distance. In Washington, dozens of protestors gathered in Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House and near Black Lives Matter Plaza.

Other cities nationwide braced for demonstrations, but media outlets reported only scattered and non-violent protests. Demonstrators at times blocked traffic while they chanted slogans and marched through the streets of New York City, Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon.

The recording shows police savagely beating the 29-year-old FedEx worker for three minutes while

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screaming profanities at him throughout the attack. The Nichols family legal team has likened the assault to the infamous 1991 police beating of Los Angeles motorist Rodney King.

After the first officer roughly pulls Nichols out of a car, Nichols can be heard saying, "I didn't do anything," as a group of officers begins to wrestle him to the ground.

One officer is heard yelling, "Tase him! Tase him!"

Nichols calmly says, "OK, I'm on the ground."

"You guys are really doing a lot right now," Nichols says. "I'm just trying to go home."

"Stop, I'm not doing anything," he yells moments later.

Nichols can then be seen running as an officer fires a Taser at him. The officers then start chasing Nichols.

Other officers are called, and a search ensues before Nichols is caught at another intersection. The officers beat him with a baton, and kick and punch him.

Security camera footage shows three officers surrounding Nichols as he lies in the street cornered between police cars, with a fourth officer nearby.

Two officers hold Nichols to the ground as he moves about, and then the third appears to kick him in the head. Nichols slumps more fully onto the pavement with all three officers surrounding him. The same officer kicks him again.

The fourth officer then walks over, draws a baton and holds it up at shoulder level as two officers hold Nichols upright, as if he were sitting.

"I'm going to baton the f--- out you," one officer can be heard saying. His body camera shows him raise his baton while at least one other officer holds Nichols. The officer strikes Nichols on the back with the baton three times in a row.

The other officers then appear to hoist Nichols to his feet, with him flopping like a doll, barely able to stay upright.

An officer then punches him in the face, as the officer with the baton continues to menace him. Nichols stumbles and turns, still held up by two officers. The officer who punched him then walks around to Nichols' front and punches him four more times. Then Nichols collapses.

Two officers can then be seen atop Nichols on the ground, with a third nearby, for about 40 seconds. Three more officers then run up, and one can be seen kicking Nichols on the ground.

As Nichols is slumped up against a car, not one of the officers renders aid. The body camera footage shows a first-person view of one of them reaching down and tying his shoe.

It takes more than 20 minutes after Nichols is beaten and on the pavement before any sort of medical attention is provided, even though two fire department officers arrived on the scene with medical equipment within 10 minutes.

Throughout the videos, officers make claims about Nichols' behavior that are not supported by the footage or that the district attorney and other officials have said did not happen. In one of the videos, an officer claims that during the initial traffic stop Nichols reached for his gun before fleeing and almost had his hand on the handle, which is not shown in the video.

After Nichols is in handcuffs and leaning against a police car, several officers say that he must have been high. Later an officer says no drugs were found in his car, and another officer immediately counters that Nichols must have ditched something while he was running away.

Authorities have not released an autopsy report, but they have said there appeared to be no justification for the traffic stop, and nothing of note was found in the car.

The video raised questions about the role and possible culpability of the other officers at the scene, in addition to the five who were charged. The footage shows a number of other officers standing around after the beating.

Memphis Police Director Cerelyn "CJ" Davis has said other officers are under investigation for their part in the arrest. Davis described the five officers' actions as "heinous, reckless and inhumane."

During the traffic stop, the video shows the officers were "already ramped up, at about a 10," she said. The officers were "aggressive, loud, using profane language and probably scared Mr. Nichols from the

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very beginning.”

“Police are trained to understand that people might flee just because they are scared,” said Geoffrey Alpert, a criminologist at the University of South Carolina who studies use of force.

Nichols’ relatives urged supporters to protest peacefully.

“I don’t want us burning up our city, tearing up the streets, because that’s not what my son stood for,” Nichols’ mother, RowVaughn Wells, said Thursday. “If you guys are here for me and Tyre, then you will protest peacefully.”

Christopher Taylor was one of the protesters at the Interstate 55 bridge on Friday. He said he watched the video. The Memphis native said it was horrible that the officers appeared to be laughing as they stood around after the beating.

“I cried,” he said. “And that right there, as not only a father myself but I am also a son, my mother is still living, that could have been me.”

Speaking at the White House, President Joe Biden said Friday that he was “very concerned” about the prospect of violence and called for protests to remain peaceful.

Biden said he spoke with Nichols’ mother earlier in the day and told her that he was going to be “making a case” to Congress to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act “to get this under control.” The legislation, which has been stalled, is meant to tackle police misconduct and excessive force and boost federal and state accountability efforts.

Court records showed that all five former officers — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Desmond Mills Jr., Emmitt Martin III and Justin Smith — were taken into custody.

The officers each face charges of second-degree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression. Four of the five officers had posted bond and been released from custody by Friday morning, according to court and jail records.

Second-degree murder is punishable by 15 to 60 years in prison under Tennessee law.

Shelby County Sheriff Floyd Bonner said in a statement late Friday that two deputies who appeared on the scene after the beating were relieved of duty pending the outcome of an internal investigation.

Patrick Yoes, the national president of the Fraternal Order of Police, condemned the alleged actions of the Memphis officers.

“The event as described to us does not constitute legitimate police work or a traffic stop gone wrong. This is a criminal assault under the pretext of law,” Yoes said in a statement.

As state and federal investigations continue, Davis promised the police department’s “full and complete cooperation.”

Republicans confront bitter divide; no clear path forward

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

DANA POINT, Calif. (AP) — Ronna McDaniel has become the longest serving leader of the Republican National Committee since the Civil War. But now, she must confront a modern-day civil war within the GOP.

Frustrated Republicans from state capitals to Capitol Hill to the luxury Southern California hotel where RNC members gathered this week are at odds over how to reverse six years of election disappointments. And while there are many strong feelings, there is no consensus even among the fighting factions about the people, policies or political tactics they should embrace.

On one side: a growing number of elected officials eager to move beyond the divisive politics and personality of former President Donald Trump despite having no clear alternative. And on the other: the GOP’s vocal “Make America Great Again” wing, which has no cohesive agenda yet is quick to attack the status quo in both parties.

“It will be extraordinarily difficult, if not near impossible, for Ronna McDaniel to put the pieces back together,” said Republican fundraiser Caroline Wren, a leading voice in the coalition of far-right activists, conservative media leaders and local elected officials across the country who fought and failed to defeat McDaniel. “These people are not just going to forget.”

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Indeed, as RNC members packed up from the Waldorf Astoria ballroom Friday, there was broad agreement that McDaniel's reelection alone would do little to heal the gaping divide that plagues their party, even as she celebrated a notably decisive reelection victory.

Trump quickly congratulated McDaniel on his social media platform after privately helping her campaign. But conservative activist Charlie Kirk, a Trump loyalist, likened McDaniel's successful reelection to a "middle finger" for the GOP's grassroots who demanded change at the institution that leads the party's political activities.

"The country club won today," Kirk said from the back of the Waldorf Astoria ballroom where RNC members from across the country voted to give McDaniel another two-year term. "So, the grassroots of people that can't afford to buy a steak and are struggling to make ends meet, they just got told by their representatives at an opulent \$900-a-night hotel that, 'We hate you.'"

A similar sentiment roiled the Republican Party earlier in the month on Capitol Hill as Kevin McCarthy struggled through days of embarrassing defeats in his quest to become House speaker before acquiescing to the demands of the anti-establishment MAGA fringe.

McCarthy's inability to control the hardline Trump loyalists in his conference now threatens to undermine a high-stakes vote on the nation's debt limit that could send shockwaves through the U.S. economy if not resolved soon. So far, House Republicans haven't articulated a specific set of demands.

Some see the Republican divide as a byproduct of the GOP's years-long embrace of Trumpism, a political ideology defined by its relentless focus on a common enemy and a willingness to fight that perceived foe no matter the cost.

McDaniel has repeatedly highlighted the perils of GOP infighting as she campaigned for an unprecedented fourth term as RNC chair. On Friday, she pleaded for Republican unity while citing a Bible verse once used by former President Abraham Lincoln before the Civil War.

"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand," McDaniel said from the ballroom podium. "Nothing we do is more important than making sure that Joe Biden is a one-term president. But in order to do that, we have to be unified."

It may get worse before it gets better.

The conclusion of the RNC's winter meeting marks the unofficial beginning of the 2024 presidential primary season. Trump has already launched his candidacy and promises to wage a fierce campaign against any would-be Republican competitors.

The RNC is in the process of scheduling the first Republican presidential primary debates, which will likely take place in Milwaukee, the site of the party's next national convention, in late July or early August.

While he has been slow to hit the campaign trail since announcing a 2024 bid last November, Trump has events in New Hampshire and South Carolina this weekend. Sensing political weakness in the former president, as many as a dozen high-profile Republicans are expected to line up against him in the coming months.

Should he fail to clinch the GOP's next presidential nomination, Trump has already dangled the possibility of a third-party presidential bid, which would all but ensure Democrats win the White House again in 2024.

New Hampshire-based RNC member Juliana Bergeron reflected upon the state of her party as she prepared to take a red-eye flight back home to attend Trump's Saturday appearance. The New Hampshire GOP is working through its own bitter leadership feud.

"The party in New Hampshire is divided. The party nationally is divided. I just think there's a lot of space between the far right and some of the rest of us," Bergeron said.

"I think it's over," she said when asked about Trump. "I want to see a new generation out there."

And there are some signs that Trump's MAGA movement may be ready to move on as well. Some privately acknowledged that Trump had lost control of his own movement, which worked to defeat McDaniel even as the former president and his lieutenants tried to help her.

While Trump declined to publicly endorse McDaniel, Wren said it wouldn't have changed the grassroots' demand for new GOP leadership even if he had.

"We're not just sheep that follow a single endorsement anywhere," Wren said. "We want to win elections

and we're not winning elections."

Indeed, Republicans may need a successful national election to come together again. The next national election? Nov. 5, 2024.

"The hard work now begins for bringing our party together," said former Trump chief of staff Reince Priebus, a former RNC chair who backed McDaniel's reelection. "This isn't going to be easy."

How to fix a howitzer: US offers help line to Ukraine troops

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

A MILITARY BASE IN SOUTHEASTERN POLAND (AP) — On the front lines in Ukraine, a soldier was having trouble firing his 155 mm howitzer gun. So, he turned to a team of Americans on the other end of his phone line for help.

"What do I do?" he asked the U.S. military team member, miles away at a base in southeastern Poland. "What are my options?"

Using phones and tablets to communicate in encrypted chatrooms, a rapidly growing group of U.S. and allied troops and contractors are providing real-time maintenance advice — usually speaking through interpreters — to Ukrainian troops on the battlefield.

In a quick response, the U.S. team member told the Ukrainian to remove the gun's breech at the rear of the howitzer, and manually prime the firing pin so the gun could fire. He did it and it worked.

The exchange is part of an expanding U.S. military help line aimed at providing repair advice to Ukrainian forces in the heat of battle. As the U.S. and other allies send more and increasingly complex and high-tech weapons to Ukraine, demands are spiking. And since no U.S. or other NATO nations will send troops into the country to provide hands-on assistance — amid worries about being drawn into a direct conflict with Russia — they've turned to virtual chatrooms.

The U.S. soldier and other team members and leaders stationed at a base in Poland spoke last week to two reporters who were traveling with Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when he visited the facility. Because of the sensitivity of the operation, the troops there spoke on condition of anonymity under guidelines set by the U.S. military. Reporters also agreed not to reveal the name or location of the base or take photos.

Fixing a howitzer, the repair team said, has been a frequent request from Ukrainian troops on the front lines. The need for help with weapons has been growing. Just a few months ago, there were just a bit more than 50 members of what they call the remote maintenance team. That will surge to 150 in the coming weeks, and the number of encrypted chat lines has more than tripled — from about 11 last fall to 38 now.

The team includes about 20 soldiers now, supplemented by civilians and contractors, but the military number may dip a bit, as more civilians come on board. And they expect it will continue to evolve as new sophisticated weapons are delivered to the Ukrainians, and new chatrooms set up to handle them.

"A lot of the times we'll get calls from right there on the firing line, so there'll be outgoing or incoming fire at the same time you're trying to help the forward maintainers troubleshoot the best they can," said a U.S. soldier who is part of the maintenance team. Sometimes, he said, the chat has to wait a bit until troops can get to a safer location.

A key problem, said one officer, is that Ukrainian troops are pushing the weapons to their limits — firing them at unprecedented rates and using them long after a U.S. service member would turn them in to be repaired or retired.

Holding up his tablet, the U.S. soldier showed photos of the barrel of a howitzer, its interior ridges nearly worn completely away.

"They're using these systems in ways that we didn't necessarily anticipate," said the officer, pointing to the tablet. "We're actually learning from them by seeing how much abuse these weapon systems can take, and where's the breaking point."

But the Ukrainian troops are often reluctant to send the weapons back out of the country for repairs. They'd rather do it themselves and in nearly all cases — U.S. officials estimated 99% of the time — the

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Ukrainians do the repair and continue on.

Many of the chats are regularly scheduled with depot workers in Ukraine — like the one they call “Coffee Cup Guy,” because his chat has a coffee cup emoji. Other times they involve troops on the battlefield whose gun just blew apart, or whose vehicle stalled.

Sometimes video chats aren’t possible.

“A lot of times if they’re on the front line, they won’t do a video because sometimes (cell service) is a little spotty,” said a U.S. maintainer. “They’ll take pictures and send it to us through the chats and we sit there and diagnose it.”

There were times, he said, when they’ll get a picture of a broken howitzer, and the Ukrainian will say, “This Triple 7 just blew up — what do we do?”

And, in what he said was a remarkable new skill, the Ukrainians can now put the split weapon back together. “They couldn’t do titanium welding before, they can do it now,” said the U.S. soldier, adding that “something that was two days ago blown up is now back in play.”

Doling advice over the chats means the U.S. experts have to diagnose the problem when something goes wrong, figure out how to fix it, then translate the steps into Ukrainian.

As they look to the future, they are planning to get some commercial, off-the-shelf translation goggles. That way, when they talk to each other they can skip the interpreters and just see the translation as they speak, making conversations easier and faster.

They also are hoping to build their diagnostic capabilities as the weapons systems get more complex, and expand the types and amount of spare parts they keep on hand. For example, they said the Patriot missile system the U.S. is sending to Ukraine will be a challenge requiring more expertise in diagnosing and repairing problems..

The expanse of weapons and equipment they’re handling and questions they’re fielding was even too complicated for a digital spreadsheet — forcing the team to go low-tech. One wall in their maintenance office is lined with an array of old-fashioned, color-coded Post-it notes, to help them track the weapons and maintenance needs.

The team in Poland is part of an ever expanding logistical network that stretches across Europe. As more nations send their own versions of weapon systems, they are setting up teams to provide repair support in a variety of locations.

The nations and the manufacturing companies quickly put together manuals and technical data that can be translated and sent to the Ukrainians. They then set up stocks of spare parts and get them to locations near Ukraine’s borders, where they can be sent to the battlefield.

Just days before Milley visited the base, Ukrainians traveled to the Poland facility for parts. The visit gave U.S. soldiers a chance to meet someone from their chatrooms face-to-face and swap military patches.

“In the next video chat we had he was wearing our patches in his video,” the U.S. soldier said.

The hub for the growing logistical effort is at Lucius D. Clay Kaserne, the U.S. Army base in Wiesbaden, Germany.

There, in cubicles filling an expansive room, the international coalition coordinates the campaign to locate and identify farflung equipment, weapons and spare parts in other countries that are needed in Ukraine. They then plan out deliveries — by sea, air and ground routes — to border locations where everything is loaded onto trucks or trains and moved to the warzone.

At least 17 nations have representatives in what’s called the International Donor Coordination Center. And as the amount and types of equipment grow, the center is working to better meld the donations from the U.S. and other nations.

“As we send more additional advanced equipment, like Strykers, like Bradleys, like tanks, of course that sustainment activity will have to increase,” said Douglas Bush, assistant Army secretary for acquisition. “I think the challenge is recognized. I think the Army knows how to do it.”

Trump kicks off 2024 bid with events in early voting states

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By MEG KINNARD and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump is set to kick off his 2024 White House bid on Saturday with visits to a pair of early voting states, his first campaign events since launching his bid more than two months ago.

Trump will be the keynote speaker at the New Hampshire GOP's annual meeting before traveling to Columbia, South Carolina, where he is set to unveil his leadership team at the Statehouse. The states hold two of the party's first three nominating contests, giving them enormous power in selecting its nominee.

Trump and his allies hope the events will offer a show of force behind the former president after a sluggish start to his campaign that left many questioning his commitment to running again. In recent weeks, his backers have been reaching out to political operatives and elected officials to secure support for Trump's reelection at a critical juncture when other Republicans are preparing their own expected challenges.

"The gun is fired, and the campaign season has started," said Stephen Stepanek, chair of the New Hampshire Republican Party and the co-chair of Trump's 2016 campaign in the state.

While Trump remains the only declared 2024 presidential candidate, a host of potential challengers, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who served as Trump's ambassador to the United Nations, are widely expected to launch campaigns in the coming months.

In South Carolina, Gov. Henry McMaster, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and several members of the state's congressional delegation plan to attend Saturday's event. But Trump's team has struggled to line up support from state lawmakers, even some who eagerly backed him during previous runs.

Some have said that more than a year out from primary balloting is too early to make endorsements or that they're waiting to see who else enters the race. Others have said it is time for the party to move past Trump to a new generation of leadership.

Republican state Rep. RJ May, vice chair of South Carolina's state House Freedom Caucus, said he wasn't going to attend Trump's event because he was focused on the Freedom Caucus' legislative fight with the GOP caucus. He indicated that he was open to other GOP candidates in the 2024 race.

"I think we're going to have a very strong slate of candidates here in South Carolina," said May, who voted for Trump in 2016 and 2020. He added, "I would 100% take a Donald Trump over Joe Biden."

Dave Wilson, president of conservative Christian nonprofit Palmetto Family, said some conservative voters may have concerns over Trump's recent comments that Republicans who opposed abortion without exceptions had cost the party critical wins in the 2022 midterm elections.

"It gives pause to some folks within the conservative ranks of the Republican Party as to whether or not we need the process to work itself out," said Wilson, whose group hosted Pence for a speech in 2021. He added: "You continue to have to earn your vote. Nothing is taken for granted."

Acknowledging that Trump "did some phenomenal things when he was president," like securing a conservative U.S. Supreme Court majority, Wilson said South Carolina's GOP voters may be seeking "a candidate who can be the standard-bearer not only for now but to build ongoing momentum across America for conservatism for the next few decades."

But Gerri McDaniel, who worked on Trump's 2016 campaign and will be attending Saturday's event, rejected the idea that voters were ready to move on from the former president.

"Some of the media keep saying he's losing his support. No, he's not," she said. "It's only going to be greater than it was before because there are so many people who are angry about what's happening in Washington."

The South Carolina event, at a government building, surrounded by elected officials, is in some ways off-brand for a former reality television star who typically favors megarallies and has tried to cultivate an outsider image. But the reality is that Trump is a former president who is seeking to reclaim the White House by contrasting his time in office with the current administration.

Rallies are also expensive, and Trump, who is notoriously frugal, added new financial challenges when he decided to launch his campaign in November — far earlier than many allies had urged. That leaves him subject to strict fundraising regulations and bars him from using his well-funded leadership PAC to

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pay for such events, which can cost several million dollars.

Officials expect Trump to speak in the second-floor lobby of the Statehouse, an opulent ceremonial area between the House and Senate chambers.

The venue has played host to some of South Carolina's most notable political news moments, including Haley's 2015 signing of a bill to remove the Confederate battle flag from the Statehouse grounds and Gov. Henry McMaster's 2021 signing of legislation banning abortions in the state after around six weeks of pregnancy. The state Supreme Court recently ruled the abortion law unconstitutional, and McMaster has vowed to seek a rehearing.

Trump's nascent campaign has already sparked controversy, most particularly when he had dinner with Holocaust-denying white nationalist Nick Fuentes and the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, who had made a series of antisemitic comments. Trump also was widely mocked for selling a series of digital trading cards that pictured him as a superhero, a cowboy and an astronaut, among others.

At the same time, he is the subject of a series of criminal investigations, including a probe into the discovery of hundreds of documents with classified markings at his Mar-a-Lago club and whether he obstructed justice by refusing to return them, as well as state and federal examinations of his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

Still, Trump remains the only announced 2024 candidate, and early polling shows he's a favorite to win his party's nomination.

Stepanek, who is required to remain neutral as New Hampshire party chair, dismissed the significance of Trump's slow start, which campaign officials say accounts for time spent putting infrastructure in place for a national campaign.

In New Hampshire, he said, "there's been a lot of anticipation, a lot of excitement" for Trump's reelection. He said Trump's diehard supporters continue to stand behind him.

"You have a lot of people who weren't with him in '15, '16, then became Trumpers, then became never-Trumpers," Stepanek said. "But the people who supported him in New Hampshire, who propelled him to his win in 2016 in the New Hampshire primary, they're all still there, waiting for the president."

Live Updates | Release of video of Tyre Nichols' beating

The Latest on the release of a Memphis Police Department video showing the beating of Tyre Nichols, who later died.

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are both condemning the Memphis police beating of Tyre Nichols that ended in his death.

The president said in a statement that he was "outraged and deeply pained to see the horrific video" of the beating and said people who see it will be "justifiably outraged."

But he also urged protesters to avoid any violence.

Harris issued a statement that said: "Yet, once again, America mourns the life of a son and father brutally cut short at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve."

She said the video images will "open wounds that will never fully heal."

KEY DEVELOPMENTS:

— Memphis authorities have released more than an hour of footage of the police beating of Tyre Nichols, whose death resulted in murder charges and provoked outrage

— Family and friends remember Tyre Nichols as a generous, lovable man who worked hard to be a good father to his 4-year-old son

— Memphis Grizzlies, other NBA teams speak out on Tyre Nichols' death

— Timeline of events in the arrest, death of Tyre Nichols

MEMPHIS — Protesters, mayors, law enforcement officials and police unions are condemning Memphis police after the public release of video showing five officers savagely beating Tyre Nichols, who later died.

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Protesters gathered in a park near the White House, in Memphis and other cities as the video was released. In Memphis, about 100 protesters blocked the heavily-traveled Interstate 55 bridge connecting Arkansas and Tennessee over the Mississippi River, miring semi-trucks and other vehicles in a stand-still.

Unions in California and Hawaii issued a joint statement calling the actions of the officers "repugnant and the complete antithesis of how honorable law enforcement professionals conduct themselves."

The Prosecutors Alliance of California calls the killing senseless and in California's capitol of Sacramento, Mayor Darrell Steinberg said: "I am filled with anger, with sorrow and revulsion."

In Los Angeles, new Mayor Karen Bass, who is Black, said the video showed "ferocious violence from an out-of-control herd" but also commended Memphis officials for firing, arresting and charging the officers involved with murder.

MEMPHIS — Video showing five Memphis police officers beating a Black man was made public Friday, one day after they were charged with murder in the death of Tyre Nichols.

The footage shows the Black officers savagely beating the 29-year-old FedEx worker for three minutes in an assault that the Nichols family's legal team likened to the infamous 1991 police beating of Los Angeles motorist Rodney King.

Cities across the country braced for large demonstrations. Nichols' relatives urged supporters to protest peacefully.

WASHINGTON — The national president of the Fraternal Order of Police has issued a scathing statement over the actions of five former Memphis police officers involved in the arrest of Tyre Nichols.

Patrick Yoes says the officers' encounter with Nichols "does not constitute legitimate police work or a traffic stop gone wrong." Instead, Yoes called it a "criminal assault under the pretext of law."

Nichols died three days after a Jan. 7 confrontation with the officers during a traffic stop.

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said he was "very concerned" about the prospect of violence, but called for protests over the death of Tyre Nichols to remain peaceful.

Speaking Friday at the White House before departing for Camp David, the president reflected on his call earlier with Nichols' mother, RowVaughn Wells.

"I'm obviously very concerned about it," Biden said when asked if he was worried about violence, "but I think she has made a very strong plea. She's obviously in enormous pain."

Biden said that "innocent lives" were at stake Friday as the country awaited the release of police footage of depicting five Memphis officers beating Nichols during a traffic stop.

NEW YORK — In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams, a former police officer, said he and other mayors across the country had been briefed by the White House in advance of the video's release, which he said would "trigger pain and sadness in many of us. It will make us angry."

He urged demonstrators to "respect the wishes of Mr. Nichols' mother. If you need to express your anger and outrage, do so peacefully. My message to the NYPD has been, and will continue to be, to exercise restraint."

Adams, who during his years as a New York Police Department officer co-founded an organization that advocated for diversity in policing and against abuses of power, said he "felt betrayed" by the officers charged in the Memphis death of Nichols.

"Any officer who engages in violence and brutality tarnishes all the work we have done to keep communities safe," he said. He added: "They make it harder for the brothers and sisters in uniform to accomplish the incredible work they do, day in and day out."

Tyre Nichols remembered as beautiful soul with creative eye

By ADAM BEAM, TRAVIS LOLLER and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

On most weekends, Tyre Nichols would head to the city park, train his camera on the sky and wait for

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the sun to set.

"Photography helps me look at the world in a more creative way. It expresses me in ways I cannot write down for people," he wrote on his website. He preferred landscapes and loved the glow of sunsets most, his family has said.

"My vision is to bring my viewers deep into what I am seeing through my eye and out through my lens," Nichols wrote. "People have a story to tell, why not capture it."

Nichols, a 29-year-old father, was on his way home from taking pictures of the sky on Jan. 7, when police pulled him over. He was just a few minutes from the home he shared with his mother and stepfather, when he was brutally attacked by five Memphis police officers.

He died three days later at a hospital, and the officers have since been charged with second-degree murder and other offenses.

"Nobody's perfect, nobody. But he was damn near," his mother, RowVaughn Wells, said at a news conference this week, moments after she watched the video of her son being beaten. "He was damn near perfect."

He was the baby of their family, born 12 years after his closest siblings. He had a 4-year-old son and worked hard to better himself as a father, his family said. He was an avid skateboarder from Sacramento, California, and came to Memphis just before the coronavirus pandemic and got stuck. But he was fine with it because he was with his mother, and they were incredibly close, Wells said. He had her name tattooed on his arm.

Friends at a memorial service this week described him as joyful and lovable.

"This man walked into a room, and everyone loved him," said Angelina Paxton, a friend who traveled to Memphis from California for the service.

Growing up in Sacramento, Nichols spent much of his time at a skate park on the outskirts of the city. It could be a rough place sometimes for younger kids. But when Niko Chapman was 10 years old, his parents would let him walk to the park alone as long as they knew Nichols was there.

"You remember people that are really kind to you, and Tyre was just a really kind person," Chapman said. "He just always made me feel really welcome."

Chapman's dad, Curtis Chapman, ran a youth group at a local church that would often meet at the skate park for pizza. Nichols quickly became a regular, bringing his energetic spirit and quick wit. But away from the group, Nichols would often show up at the Chapman house to talk about life — including coming to grips with being a young parent.

"What drew me to Tyre was just — he's real," Curtis Chapman said. "He would talk about being a dad and wanting to be a good dad and seeking advice."

There was a Bible study on Thursdays that Nichols would attend with his friend Brian Jang. One day, the group watched a sermon about how the world is filled with distractions. Jang said Nichols was so moved by it that he pulled out his flip phone and dropped it in a cup of water.

"I thought it was awesome, just seeing his growth and his commitment," Jang said.

The last time Jang saw Nichols was in 2018 at the food court in a local mall. The two hadn't seen each other in awhile, but Jang said Nichols came up behind him and gave him a big hug as the two caught up.

"It's honestly pretty devastating to see such a good human go through such unnecessary brutality, such unnecessary death," Jang said.

His mother said she raised him to love everyone openly — until they give you a reason not to. So Nichols was quick to make friends.

In Memphis, Nichols went to Starbucks every morning, and Nate Spates Jr. would hang out with him there. They chatted about sports or life. Spates was with his wife once when they ran into Nichols there, and they all talked for a couple of hours. Afterwards, Spates said his wife commented, "He's got such a good spirit and soul and calm presence."

Nichols worked second shift at FedEx with his stepfather. Every day, they'd come home together on their break at 7 p.m., and his mother would have a meal waiting for them.

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Wells said she'd offered to buy her son Jordans, the popular athletic shoes, but he didn't want them. "He was just his own person," she said. "He didn't follow what anyone else was doing."

When he wasn't working, he went to the park to skateboard and take pictures. His website, called This California Kid, starts with an invitation: "Welcome to the world through my eyes."

He included a gallery of what he considered his masterpieces: bridges and railroad tracks rendered in black and white, the neon lights of Beale Street at night. He took pictures of pink flowers, sunsets over the Mississippi River, fields of grass, statues of Elvis. He highlights a quote from another photographer: "A good photographer must love life," it begins.

After she watched the video of her son's death, she stood with her family and their lawyers at a lectern, shaking, to convey what the world lost.

A lawyer described the beating shown in the video — "he was a human pinata" — and Wells turned her head away, burying her face into her hands.

In the video footage, which was released Friday to the public, Nichols is heard saying he just wants to go home, family lawyers said. He was less than 100 yards from his mother's house.

Lawyers described the last words Nichols is heard saying — calling for his mom, three times.

"Oh my God," she wailed as they spoke. "Oh my God."

She still finds herself waiting for him to walk in the door every day at 7 p.m.

"It's not even real to me right now. I don't have any feelings right now," she said. "I know my son Tyre is not here with me anymore. He will never walk through that door again."

A timeline of events in Tyre Nichols arrest, death

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A timeline of events in the Tyre Nichols case, which sparked state and federal investigations into police brutality and led to murder and other charges against the five officers involved in his arrest this month:

— Jan. 7: Tyre Nichols is pulled over by police for an alleged traffic violation after photographing a sunset, according to accounts his family would give later. A confrontation ensues, and he is brutally beaten by five Memphis police officers in an encounter that is recorded by police body cameras.

— Jan 8: Memphis police say in a statement that officers attempted to stop a man for reckless driving on Jan. 7 and he was taken to a hospital in critical condition after two confrontations. The first description of what happened says one confrontation occurred when officers approached the vehicle and the suspect fled on foot. Officers pursued, and another confrontation occurred when they took him into custody, police said. The subject complained of shortness of breath and was taken to a hospital. Due to his condition, police contacted the Shelby County District Attorney General's Office, which asked the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to conduct a use-of-force investigation.

— Jan. 10: The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation says the man involved in the altercation with Memphis officers has "succumbed to his injuries" and identifies him as 29-year-old Tyre D. Nichols, a Black man.

— Jan. 14: Family, friends and supporters of Nichols protest in front of a Memphis police station and call for police to release body camera video of the arrest. Nichols' stepfather, Rodney Wells, tells local media that his stepson suffered cardiac arrest and kidney failure because of a beating by officers.

— Jan. 15: Police Chief Cerelyn Davis says she has reviewed information on the encounter and has decided to take immediate action by serving notice of policy violations to the officers involved.

— Jan. 16: Civil rights attorney Ben Crump announces he is representing Nichols' family and calls on police to release body camera and surveillance video from the traffic stop. Meanwhile, protesters gather at the Civil Rights Museum to push for the release of police video and call for officers to be charged.

— Jan. 18: The U.S. Justice Department announces that it has opened a civil rights investigation.

— Jan. 20: The five officers involved in the arrest are fired after an internal investigation finds they used excessive force, failed to intervene and failed to render aid. They are identified as Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith. All five are Black.

— Jan. 23: Nichols' family views the police video with their attorneys, who say it shows Nichols being

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beaten for three minutes in a "savage" encounter reminiscent of the infamous 1991 police beating of Los Angeles motorist Rodney King. The video shows Nichols was shocked, pepper-sprayed and restrained after he was pulled over minutes from his home while returning from a suburban park where he had taken photos of the sunset. Crump says the family has agreed to investigators' request to delay making the video public so as not to risk compromising the criminal investigation.

— Jan. 24: Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy says the release of police video will be carefully timed to avoid the chance that suspects or witnesses tailor their statements to what they saw in it and asks the public for patience. The timetable rankles activists who had expected the video to be released after Nichols' family viewed it. Meanwhile, the Memphis Fire Department says two employees involved in the initial care of Nichols the night of his arrest have been removed from duty while the agency conducts an investigation.

— Jan. 25: Davis, the police chief, calls the officers' actions "heinous, reckless and inhumane" and makes a plea for people to protest peacefully when the video is made public. She says in a statement issued on social media that other officers are still being investigated for violating department policy and that "a complete and independent review" will be conducted of the department's specialized units.

— Jan 26: The five officers are charged with murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression. Mulroy says they each played different roles in the killing but "they are all responsible." Mulroy also announces that video of the traffic stop will be released to the public the following evening. Nichols' parents say they are satisfied with the charges against the officers. At an evening candlelight vigil, Nichols' mother pleads with supporters to "protest in peace" when the "horrific" video footage is released.

— Jan. 27: Memphis authorities release video footage showing Nichols being beaten by five officers who repeatedly strike him with their fists, boots and batons as he screams for his mother. The video is filled with violent moments showing the officers, who are also Black, chasing and pummeling Nichols and leaving him on the pavement propped against a squad car as they fist-bump and celebrate their actions. Protesters gather for mostly peaceful demonstrations in multiple cities including Memphis, New York and Washington.

Palestinian gunman kills 7 near Jerusalem synagogue

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Palestinian gunman opened fire outside an east Jerusalem synagogue Friday night, killing seven people, including a 70-year-old woman, and wounding three others before he was shot and killed by police, officials said. It was the deadliest attack on Israelis in years and raised the likelihood of more bloodshed.

The attack, which occurred as residents were observing the Jewish sabbath, came a day after an Israeli military raid killed nine Palestinians in the West Bank. Friday's shooting set off celebrations in both the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, where people fired guns into the air, honked horns and distributed sweets.

The burst of violence, which also included a rocket barrage from Gaza and retaliatory Israeli airstrikes, has posed an early challenge for Israel's new government, which is dominated by ultranationalists who have pushed for a hard line against Palestinian violence. It also cast a cloud over a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region Sunday.

Addressing reporters at Israel's national police headquarters, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had held a security assessment and decided on "immediate actions." He said he would convene his Security Cabinet on Saturday night, after the end of the sabbath, to discuss a further response.

Netanyahu declined to elaborate but said Israel would act with "determination and composure." He called on the public not to take the law into their own hands.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. strongly condemned the attack and was "shocked and saddened by the loss of life," noting it came on International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

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U.S. officials said later Friday that President Joe Biden spoke with Netanyahu to offer U.S. support to the government and people of Israel, calling the shootings "an attack against the civilized world." "The President stressed the iron-clad U.S. commitment to Israel's security," the White House said of the call.

Israeli police said the shootings occurred in Neve Yaakov, a settlement with a large ultra-Orthodox population, and that the gunman fled in a car. Police said they chased after him and after an exchange of fire, killed him.

Jerusalem police chief Doron Turjeman confirmed seven deaths, in addition to the shooter, and said three people were wounded.

Police identified the attacker as a 21-year-old east Jerusalem resident who apparently acted alone. Turjeman promised an "aggressive and significant" effort to track down anyone who helped him.

Police also released a photo of the pistol it said was used by the attacker.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant huddled with Israel's military chief and other top security officials and instructed them to assist police and strengthen defenses near Jerusalem and for Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

"Israel's defense establishment will operate decisively and forcefully against terror and will reach anyone involved in the attack," Gallant said.

Israel's MADA rescue service said that those killed included five men and two women, among them several who were 60 or older. Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital said a 15-year-old boy was recovering from surgery.

The attack was the deadliest on Israelis since a 2008 shooting killed eight people in a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem, according to the Foreign Ministry. Given the location and timing, it threatened to trigger a tough response from Israel.

Overnight Thursday, Gaza militants fired several rockets into southern Israel, with all of them either intercepted or landing in open areas. Israel responded with airstrikes on targets in Gaza. No casualties were reported, and calm had appeared to be taking hold before Friday night's shooting.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. In Gaza, Hazem Qassem, spokesman for the ruling Hamas militant group, said the attack was "a revenge and natural response" to the deadly military raid Thursday.

At several locations across the Gaza Strip, dozens of Palestinians gathered in spontaneous demonstrations to celebrate the Jerusalem attack, with some coming out of dessert shops with large trays of sweets to distribute.

In downtown Gaza City, celebratory gunfire could be heard, as cars honked and calls of "God is great!" wafted from mosque loudspeakers. In various West Bank towns, Palestinians launched fireworks.

The attack escalated tensions that were already heightened following Thursday's raid in the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin, where nine people, including at least seven militants and a 61-year-old woman, were killed. It was the deadliest single raid in the West Bank in two decades. A 10th Palestinian was killed in separate fighting near Jerusalem.

Angry Palestinians marched Friday as they buried the last of those killed a day earlier.

Scuffles between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters erupted after the funeral for a 22-year-old Palestinian north of Jerusalem and elsewhere in the occupied West Bank, but calm prevailed in the contested capital and in the blockaded Gaza Strip for most of the day.

That suddenly dissolved with the east Jerusalem shooting, described as "horrific and heartbreaking" by Yair Lapid, the opposition leader and former prime minister.

Neve Yaakov is a religious Jewish settlement that Israel considers to be a neighborhood of its capital. Israel claims all of Jerusalem as its undivided capital, while the Palestinians seek east Jerusalem, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war, as a capital of their future state.

Blinken's trip will probably now focus heavily on lowering tensions. He is likely to discuss the underlying causes of the conflict, the agenda of Israel's new far-right government and the Palestinian Authority's decision to halt security coordination with Israel in response to the Jenin raid.

The Biden administration has been deeply engaged with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in recent days, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said, underscoring the "urgent need here

for all parties to deescalate to prevent the further loss of civilian life and to work together to improve the security situation in the West Bank.”

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars and several smaller skirmishes since the militant group seized power in Gaza from rival forces in 2007.

Tensions have soared since Israel stepped up raids in the West Bank last spring, following a series of Palestinian attacks.

Nearly 150 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem in 2022, making it the deadliest year in those territories since 2004, according to leading Israeli rights group B'Tselem. Last year, 30 people were killed in Palestinian attacks against Israelis.

So far this year, 30 Palestinians have been killed, according to a count by The Associated Press.

Israel says most of the dead were militants. But youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in the confrontations also have been killed.

Israel says its raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart attacks. The Palestinians say they further entrench Israel's 55-year, open-ended occupation of the West Bank, captured along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war.

Afghan soldier seeking US asylum hopes for 'American dream'

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — In the months he was held in detention in Texas during his legal fight to remain in the U.S., Afghan soldier Abdul Wasi Safi thought he would eventually be returned to his home country and meet a likely death at the hands of the Taliban because of his work with the U.S. military.

But on Friday, he stood a free man, filled with hope that the help he provided the U.S. military will ultimately help him secure asylum in the U.S.

Amid hugs from his brother and lawyers, Wasi Safi proudly smiled as he received an award from one of his supporters — Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, a Democrat from Houston — that honored his military service to the U.S. He said he hoped that would be a harbinger of things to come for him in his new life in the United States.

“I am hopeful about the next step in this process and one day being able to live the American dream,” Wasi Safi said at a news conference in Houston.

For the past few months, Wasi Safi, 27, had been jailed by federal authorities after being arrested while crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in September near Eagle Pass, Texas.

An intelligence officer for the Afghan National Security Forces, he had fled Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. forces in August 2021, fearing reprisals from the Taliban. After making his way last year to Brazil, he started a months-long journey to the U.S. in summer 2022, crossing 10 countries on his treacherous trek.

Wasi Safi had been facing a federal immigrant charge. But a judge on Monday dropped the count at the request of prosecutors. He was freed from a detention center in Eden, Texas, on Wednesday and was reunited with his brother, Sami-ullah Safi, 29, who goes by Sami and lives in Houston.

“Today a wrong has been made right, and I would like to thank those who have worked tirelessly to secure justice for my brother,” said Sami Safi, who had been employed in Afghanistan by the U.S. military as a translator before he moved to the U.S.

The lawyers, bipartisan lawmakers and military organizations that have been working to free Wasi Safi say his case highlights how America's chaotic military withdrawal from Afghanistan continues to harm Afghan citizens who helped the U.S. but were left behind.

Jackson Lee said being able to free Wasi Safi from detention and provide him help and resources as he applies for asylum is part of the promise the U.S. has long made to those such as Afghan soldiers who have helped the country's military in its efforts to preserve democracy.

“America made a promise. Today we emphasize America kept her promise,” Jackson Lee said.

Wasi Safi, whose case was first reported by The Texas Tribune, had suffered serious injuries from beatings during his journey to the U.S., including damaged front teeth and hearing loss in his right ear. Sami

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Safi said as his brother's asylum claim is reviewed, he will be helping him heal his body and mind and get him acclimated to living in the U.S.

Wasi Safi said part of what he hopes his American dream includes is being able to work and support those members of his family who remain in Afghanistan, including his parents, six sisters and two other brothers. He hopes that one day, they can all be reunited.

Nearly 76,000 Afghans who worked with American soldiers since 2001 as translators, interpreters and partners arrived in the U.S. on military planes after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. But their immigration status remains unclear after Congress failed to pass a proposed law, the Afghan Adjustment Act, that would have solidified their legal residency status.

"Please do not forget that there are people who are still left behind. This is not the last person. This is the first page of the book. Please raise your voice. There are hundreds of people. There are thousands of people that are every day being targeted," said Nisar Momand, a former interpreter for the U.S. government who left Afghanistan and now lives in Houston.

Pence: 'Mistakes were made' in classified records handling

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence said Friday that he takes "full responsibility" after classified documents were found at his Indiana home.

In his first public comments since the discovery, Pence said he hadn't been aware that the documents were in his residence but acknowledged his lack of awareness wasn't an excuse.

"Let me be clear: Those classified documents should not have been in my personal residence," Pence said at Florida International University, where he was talking about the economy and promoting his new book, "So Help Me God." "Mistakes were made, and I take full responsibility."

The discovery made public by Pence's team earlier this week marked the latest in a string of recoveries of sensitive papers from the homes of current and former top U.S. officials. The Department of Justice was already investigating the discovery of classified documents in former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort and at President Joe Biden's home in Delaware and his former Washington office.

Pence's public acceptance of responsibility over his handling of the documents marks a departure from the reactions of both Trump, his former boss, and Biden in their own cases. Trump denounced the search of Mar-a-Lago as "one of the most shocking abuses of power by any administration in American history" and suggested without evidence that investigators may have planted the documents. Biden has said he was surprised to learn the documents had been found but had "no regrets" about how the public was informed.

The discovery of documents at Pence's home came five months after he told The Associated Press that he did not take classified records with him when he left the vice presidency. "No, not to my knowledge," he said when asked if he had retained any such information.

The comment — which would typically be unremarkable for a former vice president — was notable at the time given that FBI agents had seized classified and top secret information from Trump's Florida estate on Aug. 8 while investigating potential violations of three different federal laws. Trump claimed that the documents seized by agents were "all declassified."

Pence said he decided to undertake the search of his home "out of an abundance of caution" after recent disclosures by Biden's team that documents were found at his former office and in his Delaware home.

He said he had directed his counsel to work with the National Archives, Department of Justice and Congress and fully cooperate in any investigation.

The former vice president said national security depends on the proper handling of classified documents, but he hopes that people realize that he acted swiftly to correct the error.

"We acted above politics and put national interests first," he said.

Pence, who remains estranged from Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, is considering a 2024 White House challenge to his former boss, who announced his campaign in November. Biden has said he intends to seek reelection in 2024, though he has yet to officially kick off his campaign.

Referring to a possible White House bid, Pence said he has been reflecting on the challenges the nation has. He said many accomplishments have been “dismantled” by the Biden administration, highlighting problems with immigration and the economy.

“We are giving powerful considerations on what might be next for us,” he said. “I am going to continue to travel all across this country. I am going to continue to listen and to reflect.”

DEA Mexico chief quietly ousted over ties to drug lawyers

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration quietly ousted its former top official in Mexico last year over improper contact with lawyers for narcotraffickers, an embarrassing end to a brief tenure marked by deteriorating cooperation between the countries and a record flow of cocaine, heroin and fentanyl across the border.

Nicholas Palmeri’s socializing and vacationing with Miami drug lawyers, detailed in confidential records viewed by The Associated Press, brought his ultimate downfall following just a 14-month stint as DEA’s powerful regional director supervising dozens of agents across Mexico, Central America and Canada.

But separate internal probes raised other red flags, including complaints of lax handling of the coronavirus pandemic that resulted in two sickened agents having to be airlifted out of the country. And another disclosed this past week found Palmeri approved use of drug-fighting funds for inappropriate purposes and sought to be reimbursed to pay for his own birthday party.

“The post of regional director in Mexico is the most important one in DEA’s foreign operations, and when something like this happens, it’s disruptive,” said Mike Vigil, the DEA’s former chief of international operations.

“It’s even more critical because of the deteriorating situation with Mexico,” added Phil Jordan, a former director of the DEA’s El Paso Intelligence Center. “If we don’t have a strong regional director or agent in charge there, it works against the agency’s overall operations because everything transits through Mexico, whether it’s coming from Colombia or the fentanyl that flows in through China. It cannot be taken lightly.”

Palmeri’s case adds to a growing litany of misconduct roiling the nation’s premier narcotics law enforcement agency at a time when its sprawling foreign operations — spanning 69 countries — are under scrutiny from an external review ordered by DEA Administrator Anne Milgram.

That review came in response to the case of Jose Irizarry, a disgraced former agent now serving a 12-year federal prison sentence after confessing to laundering money for Colombian drug cartels and skimming millions from seizures to fund an international joyride of jet-setting, parties and prostitutes.

Palmeri’s is the second case in recent months to shine a light on the often-cozy interactions between DEA officials and Miami attorneys representing some of Latin America’s biggest narcotraffickers and money launderers. Last year, federal prosecutors charged a DEA agent and a former supervisor with leaking confidential law enforcement information to two unnamed Miami defense attorneys in exchange for \$70,000 in cash.

One of those attorneys, identified by current and former U.S. officials as David Macey, was also implicated in the probe into Palmeri. Internal investigative records show Macey hosted Palmeri and his Mexican-born wife for two days at his home in the Florida Keys — a trip that investigators said served no useful work purpose and violated rules governing interactions with attorneys that are designed to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

Palmeri, 52, acknowledged to investigators that he stayed at Macey’s getaway home, that his wife worked as a translator for another prominent attorney, Ruben Oliva, and that he took an unauthorized trip to Miami with his wife in February 2021.

The purported purpose of the Miami trip had been to “debrief” a confidential source. But it took place at a private home where Palmeri showed up with his wife — and a bottle of wine, according to the internal report.

“The meeting had the appearance of a social interaction with a confidential source,” the investigators

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wrote, "and there was no contemporaneous official DEA documentation concerning the substance of the debrief, both of which violate DEA policy."

Those violations prompted Palmeri's abrupt transfer to Washington headquarters in May 2021 before he ultimately stepped down last March, the records show. Palmeri told investigators he had shown "not the best judgment."

The DEA wouldn't discuss the specifics of Palmeri's ouster or why he was allowed to retire instead of being fired. But an official told the AP the agency "has zero tolerance for improper contacts between defense attorneys and DEA employees."

"The DEA aggressively investigates this serious misconduct and takes decisive action, including removal, against employees who engage in it," said the official, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly and asked not to be named.

For his part, Palmeri described the misconduct investigations as a "witch hunt" prompted by personal and professional jealousies he refused to specify and "an ill-conceived narrative to remove me from my position."

Palmeri added that his relationships with attorneys have "always been professional and ethical," and that all his expenditures in Mexico were "judicious" and benefited the U.S. government.

"It is ironic," Palmeri wrote in an email, "that the Department of 'Justice' would commit this injustice to the country."

Macey did not respond to requests for comment. Oliva told AP the the translation work Palmeri's wife did for him was "totally unrelated" to Palmeri and that he's "never met a more ethical, hard-working and highly effective drug enforcement agent."

A former New York City police officer, Palmeri raised eyebrows from the moment he arrived in Mexico in 2020.

Some agents complained about his near-obsession with capturing Rafael Caro Quintero, the infamous drug lord behind the killing of a U.S. DEA agent in 1985, saying Palmeri prioritized that over the agency's less-flashy efforts to stem the flow of Chinese precursor chemicals used to make fentanyl. Quintero was finally taken into custody last summer, months after the DEA recalled Palmeri to Washington.

Chris Landau, who oversaw Palmeri as U.S. ambassador to Mexico during the Trump administration, said that singular focus on Quintero and other such headline-grabbing arrests is characteristic of the DEA's broader failings in the drug war.

Landau cited the shocking U.S. arrest in 2020 of a former defense secretary, Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos, which prompted Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to disband the elite police unit that was the DEA's key ally. López Obrador also rammed through a national security law keeping DEA agents at their desk instead of out in the field. Overnight, law enforcement cooperation between the neighboring countries went from strained and spotty to non-existent.

"Unfortunately, in the absence of a broader strategy, DEA is driving the bus of U.S. counter-narcotics policy and it's a very narrow lane they drive in," Landau said. "It's not going to move the needle in terms of stemming the flow of drugs into the U.S. and frequently carry sometime devastating foreign policy consequences."

Palmeri also came under criticism for his handling of coronavirus procedures in 2020, when federal agents were under orders to avoid in-person meetings and unnecessary travel. Several agents under Palmeri's command, including an assistant regional director, contracted COVID-19 following a meeting at the DEA office in the resort town of Mazatlán, where some agents say they were admonished or ridiculed for wearing masks.

Two agents became so ill they had to be airlifted out of the country, according to two former U.S. officials who weren't authorized to discuss the controversy and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity.

An Office of Inspector General report released this past week also found Palmeri sought government reimbursement to pay for his own birthday party and approved the purchase of "unallowable items" as part of foreign trips by the then acting DEA administrator. Tim Shea, who held that position during Palmeri's

tenure, did not respond to requests for comment.

The report, which did not detail specific items or amounts spent, also did not explain its conclusion: "Criminal prosecution of the Regional Director was declined."

Police charge 2nd teen in Iowa school shooting that killed 2

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Authorities on Friday charged a second teenager with murder in the shooting deaths of two students at a Des Moines educational program.

Bravon Michael Tukes, 19, of Des Moines, faces two counts of first-degree murder, one count of attempted murder and one count of criminal gang participation.

The charges match those filed earlier in the week against Preston Walls, 18, who is accused of fatally shooting the two teenage students at the Starts Right Here education program Monday and wounding the program's founder.

Police said evidence shows Tukes communicated with Walls before and immediately after the shooting and drove the vehicle in which Walls allegedly fled. Tukes and Walls are members of the same gang and committed the shootings "in connection with that gang membership," police said in a news release.

Police said they recovered four firearms during their investigation.

Online court records did not indicate whether Tukes had an attorney yet who could speak on his behalf.

The shooting left 18-year-old Gionni Dameron and 16-year-old Rashad Carr dead. Will Keeps, a former Chicago gang member who moved to Des Moines and later founded the program to help at-risk youth, was seriously wounded and remains in a hospital.

Police have said all four teens were gang members, but relatives and friends of Dameron and Carr dispute that, saying they were not involved in gangs and were close friends who were dedicated to their families.

Police say the shooting was premeditated and that Walls, who was on supervised release for a weapons charge last year, cut off an ankle monitor 16 minutes beforehand. Court documents say he had a concealed semiautomatic handgun with a high-capacity extended magazine when he entered a common area of Starts Right Here and opened fire.

Classes at the education program, which works with Des Moines Public Schools to help students who haven't succeeded in traditional schools, were cancelled this week. Keeps has forged deep ties with community leaders, and the city's police chief serves on the program's board.

Matt Smith, the interim schools superintendent, described Keeps as "Amazing. Incredibly passionate."

Pelosi attack video shows struggle and savage hammer swing

By STEFANIE DAZIO and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

Video released Friday shows the husband of former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi struggling with his assailant for control of a hammer moments before he was struck in the head during a brutal attack in the couple's San Francisco home last year.

Police body-camera footage shows David DePape wrest the tool from Paul Pelosi, 82, and lunge toward him with the weapon over his head. The blow to Pelosi occurs out of the camera's view and the officers — one of them cursing — rush into the house and one tackles DePape.

Pelosi, apparently unconscious, can be seen lying face down on the floor in his pajama top and underwear. Officials later said he woke up in a pool of his own blood.

The video release comes after a coalition of news agencies, including The Associated Press, sought access to the evidence that prosecutors played in court last month. The San Francisco district attorney had refused to make the exhibits available to journalists and defense lawyers fought their release.

A state court judge Wednesday ruled there was no reason to keep the video secret.

The evidence included portions of Paul Pelosi's 911 call on Oct. 28, as well as video from a Capitol police surveillance camera, a camera worn by one of the two police officers who arrived first at the house and nearly 18-minutes of audio from DePape's interview with police.

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The Capitol Police video shows DePape approach a glass-panel door shortly after 2 a.m., leave and then return wearing a large backpack and carrying two other bags. He set the items down and pulled out a hammer, pausing to put on gloves, and used it to smash the door enough to force his way through an opening.

DePape, 43, has pleaded not guilty in state and federal cases and is jailed without bail. He faces charges including attempted murder, elder abuse, and assaulting an immediate family member of a federal official.

San Francisco Deputy Public Defender Adam Lipson, who represents DePape, called the video's release a "terrible mistake."

"The footage is inflammatory and could feed unfounded theories about this case, and we are extremely concerned about Mr. DePape's ability to get a fair trial," Lipson said in a statement.

Members of Congress have faced a sharp rise in threats in the two years since the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

During the Jan. 6 attack, rioters chanted menacingly for the speaker as they rampaged through the halls trying to halt certification of Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump in the presidential election. One man was convicted this week of eight criminal counts after he put his feet on a desk in Pelosi's office and left a note to her punctuated with a sexist expletive.

Paul Pelosi was asleep at the couple's home when DePape broke in. Nancy Pelosi was in Washington at the time and protected by a security detail that does not extend to family members.

After DePape confronted Paul Pelosi in his bedroom, Pelosi tried to make it to an elevator in the home to reach a phone, but DePape blocked his way, authorities previously said. Pelosi then told DePape he had to use the restroom, where his cellphone was charging, allowing him to call 911.

Police praised a dispatcher, who could hear DePape in the background, for recognizing the threat despite Pelosi's calm voice and coding the call as a priority, resulting in a faster police response.

San Francisco Officer Kolby Wilmes' body-camera video begins with officers approaching the home and rapping on the door. In the 20 seconds it takes for the door to open, the officers discuss whether they have the right house.

After the door swings open, Paul Pelosi says, "Hi, guys, how are you?"

Both men are facing the officers at the door. Initially, the hammer is in the shadows and it takes about five seconds before a flashlight shows DePape holding the handle of a hammer with his right hand and clutching Pelosi's right hand, which is gripping the hammer head, with his left hand. The struggle is not apparent in the first few seconds.

"What's going on, man?" the officer asks.

"Everything's good," DePape replies.

"Drop the hammer," the officer says.

DePape says "Umm, nope."

"Hey," Pelosi says, wincing as DePape twists his wrist to wrest the hammer free. "Hey, hey, hey."

DePape pulls the weapon loose and in a swift motion winds up with his right hand and delivers a vicious overhead blow as Pelosi disappears from view. An officer calls for backup as they struggle with DePape while Pelosi lies on the floor.

In an interview with San Francisco Police Lt. Carla Hurley after he was taken into custody, DePape said he didn't regret the attack even though it was not on Nancy Pelosi, his intended target.

Surprised to find Paul Pelosi in the home, DePape described most of their encounter as "pretty amicable," but said he attacked him because he was on a mission.

DePape said the attack happened very quickly and he recalled how it took the officers by surprise.

"I yank the hammer away from him, I jump into action," he said with excitement in his voice. "They jump into action. They're like on top of me instantly."

DePape said he didn't remember how many times he struck Pelosi, but said it was with "full force."

Paul Pelosi later underwent surgery to repair a skull fracture and serious injuries to his right arm and hands. He has since appeared in public wearing a hat and a glove to cover his wounds.

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Speaking at the U.S. Capitol after the video's release, Nancy Pelosi said her husband "is making progress but it will take more time."

DePape told Hurley he was going after Nancy Pelosi for lying to the American public and that he planned to hold her hostage for her crimes. He believed the discredited conspiracy that Democrats stole the 2020 election from Trump.

He said he planned to have a discussion with his hostage and would "break her kneecaps" if she lied.

When Hurley asked why DePape did not leave when he realized Nancy Pelosi wasn't home and the police were on the way, he compared himself to the Founding Fathers, explaining that he refused to surrender.

Nancy Pelosi said she had not seen the videos or heard the police interview.

"I have absolutely no intention of seeing the deadly assault on my husband," she said.

The U.S. Capitol Police investigated nearly 10,000 threats to members last year, more than twice the number from four years earlier. The department faced heavy criticism in the aftermath of the attack on Paul Pelosi. The agency has access to about 1,800 cameras, including one on the couple's house that was not being monitored during the attack because the speaker was not there.

Public officials across the U.S., from local school board members to election workers, have also endured harassment and intimidation.

This month, a former Republican candidate for a state House seat in New Mexico was arrested in a series of shootings targeting the homes or offices of elected Democratic officials and a Kansas man was convicted of threatening a GOP congressman.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden continues to condemn political violence.

"I think you don't even need a video to know how horrific and unconscionable the attack on Paul Pelosi was, and to be very honest it's a miracle that Paul was not more seriously injured and we are grateful that he is on his way and continues to recover," she said Friday.

GOP Chair Ronna McDaniel defeats rival in fierce campaign

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

DANA POINT, Calif. (AP) — Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel won her bid Friday to lead the GOP for two more years, prevailing in an election that highlighted fierce internal divisions that threaten to plague the party into the next presidential season.

McDaniel, whom Donald Trump tapped as RNC chair in 2016, won on the secret ballot, 111 to 51, over Harmeet Dhillon, a California lawyer. The high-profile election played out inside a resort on the Southern California coast as the RNC's 168 voting members — activists and elected officials from all 50 states — gathered for their annual winter meeting.

A relieved McDaniel invited her rivals to the stage immediately after the outcome was announced.

"With us united, and all of us working together, the Democrats are going to hear us in 2024," she declared.

With the victory, McDaniel becomes the longest-serving RNC chair since the Civil War. While the vote itself wasn't as close as some had expected, friends and foes alike agree that she will not be leading the RNC from a position of strength.

"The party is not united," McDaniel's chief rival, Trump attorney Dhillon, told reporters in the hallway soon after standing alongside McDaniel on stage. "Nobody's going to unite around the party the way it is, which is seemingly ignoring the grassroots."

Indeed, while Trump privately backed McDaniel, powerful forces within his "Make America Great Again" movement lined up behind Dhillon.

Backed by MAGA leaders in conservative media, Dhillon waged an aggressive challenge against McDaniel that featured allegations of chronic misspending, mismanagement and even religious bigotry against Dhillon's Sikh faith — all claims that McDaniel denied. Above all, the case against McDaniel centered on deep dissatisfaction with the direction of the party after continuous election losses since Trump chose her to lead the committee following his upset 2016 victory.

The former president ignored the feud as he congratulated McDaniel on her "big WIN" on his social

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media network.

"Now we have to STOP THE DEMOCRATS FROM CHEATING IN ELECTIONS!" Trump wrote in capital letters, repeating baseless allegations of election fraud that have filled his political messaging for the past two years.

But some of Trump's acolytes were not so willing to move on.

Conservative activist Charlie Kirk cited the Republican base's overwhelming desire for change and said those members who voted for McDaniel would be held "accountable."

"The RNC has contempt for their voters," said Kirk, who sat among several Dhillon allies in the back of the hotel ballroom where the vote was held. "They basically just gave them a middle finger."

While McDaniel prevailed, some of her supporters privately conceded they were open to a change in the committee's leadership after three successive disappointing elections. But there were specific concerns about Dhillon – and the people around her.

The California Republican closely aligned herself with Caroline Wren, a former Trump fundraiser who was involved with raising money for the Washington rally on Jan. 6, 2021, that preceded the violent attack on the Capitol.

Dhillon's chief surrogate at the RNC meeting this week was Kari Lake, the failed Arizona gubernatorial candidate who has spread debunked claims of voter fraud. Lake courted RNC members on Dhillon's behalf inside the conference hotel.

From afar, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a likely 2024 presidential contender, spoke out against McDaniel on the eve of the vote as well.

"I think we need a change. I think we need to get some new blood in the RNC," DeSantis said in an interview with Florida's Voice, citing three "substandard election cycles in a row" under McDaniel's leadership.

Meanwhile, Trump had quietly supported McDaniel, a niece of Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, and dispatched a handful of his lieutenants to Southern California to advocate on her behalf.

The former president avoided making a public endorsement at McDaniel's request, according to those with direct knowledge of the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe private conversations. McDaniel's team was confident she would win without his public backing, allowing her to maintain a sense of neutrality heading into the 2024 presidential primary season.

According to its rules, the RNC must remain neutral in the presidential primary. Trump is the only announced GOP candidate so far, but other high-profile contenders are expected in the coming months.

McDaniel is now set to lead the RNC through the 2024 election. Under her leadership, the committee will control much of the presidential nominating process – including the debates and voting calendar -- while directing the sprawling nationwide infrastructure designed to elect a Republican president.

Also in the race on Friday was MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, a pro-Trump conspiracy theorist who won four votes.

Lindell has already endorsed Trump's 2024 campaign and said he would not change his mind if his long-shot bid was successful Friday.

"I've never not endorsed Donald Trump," Lindell said. "I'm never moving off that space."

Brazil police raid Bolsonaro nephew's home in uprising probe

By CARLA BRIDI Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Brazil's federal police searched the home of a nephew of former President Jair Bolsonaro on Friday in connection with the Jan. 8 storming of government buildings in the capital by far-right protesters.

Police said Leonardo Rodrigues de Jesus, known by Bolsonaro supporters as Leo Índio, was one of the targets of a series of raids that led to 11 arrests in different states. It was the first time a member of Bolsonaro's family has been included in the investigations of the uprising in Brasilia, which underlined the political polarization in Brazil.

Police said those under investigation could be tried for crimes against democracy and criminal association.

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De Jesus posted his picture near the entrance of the Congress building on social media on the day of the uprising. Later, Bolsonaro's nephew accused leftists of infiltrating the protest to attack government buildings. Police investigations have found no evidence to back up this claim.

De Jesus has a close relationship to one of Bolsonaro's sons, Carlos Bolsonaro, a city council member in Rio de Janeiro. The two often appeared together at the presidential palace in Brasilia when the far-right president was in office. Their visits were kept secret by the Bolsonaro administration following opposition criticism.

Carlos Bolsonaro is the head of the former president's digital operations and a key member of Bolsonaro's failed reelection bid.

De Jesus was one of Carlos Bolsonaro's aides in Rio and moved to Brasilia in 2019. He joined a senator's Cabinet team and later Bolsonaro's Liberal Party group as an adviser at the Senate. He was later fired after the local media revealed he was a "phantom employee" — someone who did not show up for work but still was paid for the post.

In 2022, he ran as a Federal District councilor but didn't gather enough votes.

De Jesus has been investigated by Rio de Janeiro's judicial authorities since 2021, when it was alleged he received money transfers from the Cabinet of one of Bolsonaro's sons, Flavio, when he was on the city council. Public money was also allegedly used to pay De Jesus' rent.

The Supreme Court had already requested De Jesus' preventative arrest in connection with the Jan. 8 attacks, but police said he had not been detained yet. De Jesus can appeal that order, but he declared a lack of funds to pay the costs of his attorneys.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva guaranteed at a meeting with state governors that what happened on Jan. 8 won't occur again, calling it a coup attempt

Auschwitz anniversary marked as peace again shattered by war

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

OSWIECIM, Poland (AP) — Auschwitz-Birkenau survivors and other mourners commemorated the 78th anniversary Friday of the Nazi German death camp's liberation, some expressing horror that war has again shattered peace in Europe and the lesson of Never Again is being forgotten.

The former concentration and extermination camp is located in the town of Oświęcim in southern Poland, which was under the occupation of German forces during World War II and became a place of systematic murder of Jews, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, Roma and others targeted for elimination by Adolf Hitler and his henchmen.

In all, some 1.1 million people were killed at the vast complex before it was liberated by Soviet troops on Jan. 27, 1945.

Today the site, with its barracks, barbed wire and ruins of gas chambers, stands as one of the world's most recognized symbols of evil and a site of pilgrimage for millions.

Jewish and Christian prayers for the dead were recited at the memorial site, which lies only 300 kilometers (185 miles) from Ukraine, where Russian aggression is creating death and destruction — a conflict on the minds of many this year.

"Standing here today at this place of remembrance, Birkenau, I follow with horror the news from the east that the Russian army, which liberated us here, is waging a war there in Ukraine. Why? Why?" lamented survivor Zdzisława Włodarczyk during observances Friday.

Piotr Cywinski, Auschwitz state museum director, compared Nazi crimes to those the Russians have committed in Ukrainian towns like Bucha and Mariupol. He said they were inspired by a "similar sick megalomania" and that free people must not remain indifferent.

"Being silent means giving voice to the perpetrators," Cywinski said. "Remaining indifferent is tantamount to condoning murder."

Russian President Vladimir Putin attended observances marking the 60th anniversary of the camp's liberation in 2005. This year, no Russian official was invited due to the attack on Ukraine.

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Valentina Matvienko, speaker of Russia's upper house of parliament, deplored that as a "cynical" move. "They refused to invite the liberators so that they could pay tribute to the memory of the victims," she said. "Of course, this is very worrying."

Rabbi Berl Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis, said not having any Russian invitees was "a humiliation for sure, because we perfectly know and remember the role of the Red Army" in the liberation of Auschwitz.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy commemorated Holocaust victims at Babi Yar, a ravine in Kyiv where nearly 34,000 Jews were killed within 48 hours in 1941.

"We know and remember that indifference kills along with hatred," he said in social media post.

"Indifference and hatred are always capable of creating evil together only. That is why it is so important that everyone who values life should show determination when it comes to saving those whom hatred seeks to destroy."

An Israeli teacher, Yossi Michal, paying tribute to the victims with a teachers union delegation, said it was important to remember the past, and while he said what is happening in Ukraine is terrible, he felt each case is unique and they shouldn't be compared.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, whose Brothers of Italy party has its roots in the post-World War II neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, called the Holocaust "the abyss of humanity. An evil that touched also our country with the infamy of the racial laws of 1938."

Bogdan Bartnikowski, a Pole who was 12 when he was transported to Auschwitz, said the first images he saw on television last February of refugees fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered traumatic memories.

He was stunned seeing a little girl in a large crowd of refugees holding her mother with one hand and grasping a teddy bear in the other.

"It was literally a blow to the head for me because I suddenly saw, after almost 80 years, what I had seen in a freight car when I was being transported to Auschwitz. A little girl was sitting next to me, hugging a doll to her chest," Bartnikowski, now 91, said.

Bartnikowski was among several survivors of Auschwitz who spoke about their experiences to journalists Thursday.

Another, Stefania Wernik, who was born at Auschwitz in November 1944, less than three months before its liberation, spoke of Auschwitz being a "hell on earth."

She said when she was born she was so tiny that the Nazis tattooed her number — 89136 — on her thigh. She was washed in cold water, wrapped in rags and subjected to medical experiments.

And yet her mother had abundant milk, and they both survived. After the war, her mother returned home and reunited with her husband, and "the whole village came to look at us and said it's a miracle."

She appealed for "no more fascism, which brings death, genocide, crimes, slaughter and loss of human dignity."

Among those who attended Friday's commemorations was Doug Emhoff, the husband of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. Emhoff, the first Jewish person to be married to one of the top two nationally elected U.S. officials, bowed his head at an execution wall at Auschwitz, where he left a wreath of flowers in the U.S. flag's colors and the words: "From the people of the United States of America."

The Germans established Auschwitz in 1940 for Polish prisoners; later they expanded the complex, building death chambers and crematoria where Jews from across Europe were brought by train to be murdered.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said "the suffering of 6 million innocently murdered Jews remains forgotten — as does the suffering of the survivors."

"We recall our historic responsibility on Holocaust Memorial Day so that our Never Again endures in future," he wrote on Twitter.

The German parliament held a memorial event focused this year on those who were persecuted for their sexual orientation. Thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual people were incarcerated and killed by the Nazis — a fate only publicly recognized decades after WWII.

Elsewhere in the world events marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day, an annual commemo-

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ration established by a United Nations resolution in 2005.

In Britain, candles were lit to remember victims of genocide in homes and public buildings, including Buckingham Palace.

Oh, brother! WWE star, Eagles coach ready for big weekend

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Mike Rallis had his younger brother draped over his shoulders and was set to dump him to the turf — as a roughhousing brother might do — when he took an abrupt blow to his ribs.

In a flash, Nick Rallis was on his feet and had turned the fight around. He spun his brother and dropped Mike with a brutal Stone Cold Stunner in a scene straight out of WWE's "Raw." Mike Rallis popped in the air and landed flush on his back. Minnesota Gophers football players that had lined a makeshift wrestling ring roared "finish him!" at Nick. Nick hooked big brother's left leg, watched the referee count, 1! 2! 3! and stumbled to his feet, his hand raised in victory.

In wrestling parlance, this was a loser-leaves-town match for Mike Rallis. He had finished his career as a Gophers linebacker in 2013 and symbolically passed the torch to fellow linebacker, Nick. That moment at Minnesota's indoor practice facility also provided a sneak peak into what was ahead for the brothers: Mike Rallis followed his pro wrestling passion and is better known these days as WWE star Madcap Moss. Much like he did in his match against his brother, Nick Rallis knows how to leave a football field a winner. At just 29, he's in his second season as linebackers coach for the Philadelphia Eagles.

On Saturday, Madcap Moss is among the wrestlers in the mix for WWE's Royal Rumble event, one of the sports entertainment company's premier events. The next day, the Eagles host San Francisco in the NFC championship game.

"If I went back to 2012, and you asked what career either of those guys would have found themselves in, anyone in that locker room would have told you Nick is obviously going to be a coach one day and Mike is going to be in the WWE one day," said former Gophers teammate Brock Vereen. "It is fascinating that both of them ended up exactly where they were going to end up."

Mike Rallis was such a fan of both sports that he took his pro wrestling surname from, yes, former Vikings receiver Randy Moss.

"There's a lot of kids who were into football," Madcap Moss said. "But we were kind of known as the guys who were into wrestling, too. And we loved it, man. There's videos of us probably doing some stuff that we shouldn't have been doing as kids. It wasn't the safest thing to be doing, having wrestling matches on the bed and performing the moves, usually on Nick. He was the smaller one."

The brothers didn't show their wrestling love by just watching the Monday night shows and pay-per-view events. Moss said the brothers used their collection of hundreds of wrestling figures to create their own version of WWE. They made a ramp and ring out of shoe boxes and dubbed the promotion "Wrestling Guys." They wrote the storylines, controlled the action and, in many ways, set the tone for their future professions.

They did it again in college, though this time they ditched the figures and put on the tights. At Minnesota, they called it the Locker Room Wrestling League, with the final match between the brothers. Madcap Moss was the bad guy.

Moss did have a tryout with the Miami Dolphins before he made the move to WWE's farm system in 2014. He told his younger brother the new gig was fun, hard, rewarding and nonstop action. Nick, though, always had his head in the playbook or eyes on film, and while there might have been dreams of becoming the next Goldberg or The Rock, his future was in coaching football.

He spent one season coaching college ball before he was hired by his hometown Vikings. His was quickly hired by the Eagles in 2021 and became the youngest position coach in the NFL.

"Nick will be a defensive coordinator some day," said Vereen, now a TV college football analyst. "The guy knows so much football. He could have been a college defensive coordinator before he even graduated college."

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There are some things that get by Nick.

Take for example in September 2021 when Moss was set to make a surprise return on WWE "Smackdown" at a show in Philadelphia. Moss was dressed all in black to hide his identity as he pretended to be a camera man and helped sidekick Happy Corbin sneak attack Kevin Owens.

"I walked right past Nick with a hoodie over my head and a hat low on my face and he had no idea I was there," Moss said, laughing. "As smart as he can be with football, I guess Happy Corbin and I outsmarted him in that situation."

Super Bowl winners, World Series champions, all kinds of great teams are often awarded WWE championship belts for their achievements. Moss, who has thrown his loyalties behind his brother and the Eagles, would love to be the wrestler who brings the belt to Philly.

"I sure hope that I get the chance to do that," Moss said. "I've definitely caught myself daydreaming about being in the stadium for the Super Bowl and maybe somehow sneaking my way on down to the field after the game for the celebration. Then I have to snap out of it because I don't want to get ahead of myself."

The Eagles wouldn't mind that scenario either, with big brother watching, while Nick Rallis walks off the football field a winner again.

Man who claimed he had bomb near Capitol pleads guilty

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man who caused evacuations and an hourslong standoff with police on Capitol Hill when he claimed he had a bomb in his pickup truck outside the Library of Congress pleaded guilty on Friday to a charge of threatening to use an explosive.

Floyd Ray Roseberry, of Grover, North Carolina, pleaded guilty to the felony charge in Washington federal court. He faces up to 10 years behind bars and is scheduled to be sentenced in June.

An email seeking comment was sent to his attorney on Friday.

Roseberry, 52, drove a black pickup truck onto the sidewalk outside the Library of Congress in August 2021 and began shouting to people in the street that he had a bomb. He later made the same bomb threats to police officers and professed a litany of antigovernment grievances as part of a bizarre episode that he livestreamed for a Facebook audience.

Police later said they did not find a bomb but did collect possible bomb-making materials. Roseberry surrendered after about five hours.

During an initial court appearance, Roseberry told the judge he had not taken his "mind medicine" and the judge ordered a mental competency hearing.

A psychiatrist found that medication that Roseberry had been taking wasn't effectively treating his diagnosed bipolar disorder. A magistrate judge later ruled that the new treatment had been effective and Roseberry was competent to stand trial.

Brutality of Russia's Wagner gives it lead in Ukraine war

By The Associated Press undefined

Fierce battles in eastern Ukraine have thrown a new spotlight on Russia's Wagner Group, a private military company led by a rogue millionaire with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Wagner has spearheaded the push to jump-start Russia's stalemated offensive in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province. The ferocious house-to-house fighting has produced some of the bloodiest encounters since Russia sent troops into Ukraine, with Wagner personnel "marching on the bodies of their own soldiers" as Ukrainian authorities put it.

The U.S. this week expanded sanctions against Wagner for its role in Ukraine and mercenary activities in Africa.

Here is a look at the Wagner Group's history and its current role in the fighting.

WHO OWNS THE WAGNER GROUP?

Yevgeny Prigozhin, who received a 12-year prison term in 1981 on charges of robbery and assault, started a restaurant business in St. Petersburg following his release from prison. It was in this capacity that he

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got to know Putin, who served as the city's deputy mayor in the 1990s.

Prigozhin, 61, used his ties with Putin to develop a catering business and won lucrative Russian government contracts that earned him the nickname of "Putin's chef." He later expanded to other businesses, including media outlets and an infamous "troll factory" that led to his indictment in the U.S. for meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Prigozhin denied any link to the Wagner Group before he acknowledged owning the company in September. This month, he declared he also founded, led and financed it.

WHERE HAS WAGNER WORKED?

The Wagner Group was first spotted in action in eastern Ukraine soon after a separatist conflict erupted there in April 2014, weeks after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

While backing the separatist insurgency in the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, Russia denied sending its own weapons and troops there despite ample evidence to the contrary. Engaging private contractors in the fighting allowed Moscow to maintain a degree of deniability.

Prigozhin's company was called Wagner after the nickname of its first commander, Dmitry Utkin, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Russian military's special forces.

It soon established a reputation for its extreme brutality and ruthlessness.

Along with Ukraine, Wagner personnel deployed to Syria, where Russia supported President Bashar Assad's government in the country's civil war. In Libya, they fought alongside forces of Libyan commander Khalifa Hifter.

The group also has operated in the Central African Republic and Mali.

Prigozhin has reportedly used Wagner's deployment to Syria and African countries to secure lucrative mining contracts.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Thursday that the company was using its access to gold and other resources in Africa to fund its operations in Ukraine.

Some Russian media have alleged Wagner's involvement in the July 2018 killings of three Russian journalists, who were shot dead in the Central African Republic while investigating the group's activities there. The slayings remain unsolved.

WHAT IS THE GROUP'S REPUTATION?

Western countries and United Nations experts have accused Wagner Group mercenaries of committing numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

In December 2021, the European Union accused the group of "serious human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings," and of carrying out "destabilizing activities" in the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

Some of the reported incidents stood out in their grisly brutality.

A 2017 video posted online showed a group of armed people, reported to be Wagner contractors, torturing a Syrian man, beating him to death with a sledgehammer and cutting his head before mutilating and then burning his body. Russian authorities ignored requests by the media and rights activists to investigate the killing.

In November 2022, another video surfaced online that showed a former Wagner contractor getting beaten to death with a sledgehammer after he allegedly fled to the Ukrainian side and was recaptured. Despite public outrage and a stream of demands for an investigation, the Kremlin turned a blind eye to it.

WHAT IS WAGNER'S ROLE IN UKRAINE?

The Wagner Group has taken an increasingly visible role in the war in Ukraine as regular Russian troops suffered heavy attrition and lost control over some previously captured territory in a series of humiliating setbacks.

Prigozhin claimed full credit this month for capturing the Donetsk region salt-mining town of Soledar and accused the Russian Defense Ministry of trying to steal Wagner's glory. He said Wagner was spearheading the attack on the city of Bakhmut, a nearby Ukrainian stronghold that Russian forces have tried to win for months.

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Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survived a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. He recently posted a video in which he congratulates the first group of convicts that received official pardons and the right to leave the company.

The U.S. estimates Wagner has about 50,000 personnel fighting in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 of the convicts the company enlisted.

The U.S. assesses that Wagner is spending about \$100 million a month in the fight and has taken delivery of weapons from North Korea, including rockets and missiles.

WHAT DO RUSSIA'S MILITARY BRASS THINK?

Wagner's reach for North Korean weapons may reflect its long-running spat with the Russian military leadership, which dates back to the company's creation.

A group of troops purported to be Wagner contractors on the front line in Ukraine recently recorded a video in which they showered the chief of the Russian military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, with curses for an alleged failure to provide ammunition.

Prigozhin himself castigated the top military brass in recent months, accusing top-ranking officers of incompetence. His remarks were unprecedented for Russia's tightly-controlled political system, in which only Putin could air such criticism.

Earlier this month, Putin reaffirmed his trust in Gen. Gerasimov by putting him in direct charge of the Russian forces in Ukraine, a move that some observers also interpreted as an attempt to cut Prigozhin down to size.

Prigozhin somewhat toned down his harangues against the military leadership after that, but remained defiant.

He also has increasingly raised his public profile, issuing daily messaging app statements to boast about Wagner's purported victories and sardonically mock his enemies.

Asked recently about a media comparison of him with Grigory Rasputin, a mystic who gained fatal influence over Russia's last czar by claiming to have the power to cure his son's hemophilia, Prigozhin snapped: "I don't stop blood, but I spill blood of the enemies of our Motherland."

HAS WAGNER BEEN SUBJECTED TO WESTERN SANCTIONS?

The U.S. slapped several waves of sanctions on Prigozhin and Wagner. The Treasury Department further ramped up sanctions against Wagner and affiliated companies and individuals on Thursday.

The European Union also has sanctioned Prigozhin and in December 2021 imposed sanctions on several people associated with Wagner and three Russia-based energy companies linked to the group in Syria.

Prigozhin mocked the Western sanctions.

"We have conducted an internal check to look into alleged crimes by Wagner but found no incriminating evidence," he said, commenting on the latest U.S. round.

He challenged Wagner's accusers to send proof of wrongdoing to his press service.

Lots of sound and fury on US debt, but not a crisis — yet

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For all the sound and fury about raising the nation's debt limit, most economists say federal borrowing is not at a crisis point ... at least not yet.

The national debt is at the core of a dispute about how to raise the government's legal borrowing authority, a mostly political argument that could turn into genuine financial trouble this summer if the U.S. runs out of accounting maneuvers to keep paying its bills.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy insists that the debt, so huge it defies most people's grasp, is already breaking the economy. President Joe Biden counters that the government spending cuts sought by Republicans in return for a debt limit increase would break the middle class.

The political jousting masks contrasting realities: Today's \$31.4 trillion national debt does not appear to be a weight on the U.S. economy, but the debt's path in the decades to come might put at risk national security and major programs including Social Security and Medicare.

The national debt is the accumulation over time of the yearly deficit. If the government cuts spending or

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raises taxes, it can trim the deficit and run a surplus, something that last happened in 2001. Lower levels of borrowing can contain and even reduce the cumulative debt.

However, at a time when high inflation already has the U.S. teetering near a recession, it's a potentially dangerous game to force more deficit reduction, says Megan Greene, global chief economist at the Kroll Institute.

"Spending cuts and tax hikes would kill off growth in a year when we're more likely than not to go into recession," Greene said. "It's not clear that it would put us onto a more sustainable fiscal footing at all."

But the debt challenge will keep unfolding over time, meaning that choices may become more severe as the costs of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid increasingly outstrip tax revenues.

Publicly held debt is roughly equal now to the U.S. gross domestic product, a measure of yearly economic output. It's on track to be 225% of GDP by 2050, according to the Penn Wharton Budget Model.

To stabilize the debt near current levels, the government would need to permanently slash all spending by 30%, raise tax revenues by 40% or some combination of both, said Kent Smetters, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the Penn Wharton Budget Model. Those changes could come at the expense of younger generations who might be stuck paying more and receiving far fewer benefits from the government than their parents.

"We're talking about a current fiscal path that's very unbalanced," Smetters said. "That's not a partisan statement. It's an accounting thing."

Given his estimates, Smetters said, he worries that investors lending to the U.S. will pull back "if we don't do something before the 2030s, pretty boldly."

So, why aren't more economists sweating the debt right now?

First of all, the costs of servicing the debt have fallen over time. Investors are charging less to lend to the federal government. This has occurred even as the national debt has climbed almost nine-fold since 1991.

How did that happen? Interest rates are dramatically lower. The interest on a 10-year Treasury Note in December 1991 was 7.09%, compared to 3.62% last month. That means the U.S. government is spending less money as a share of the total economy to repay the interest now than it did more than 30 years ago.

McCarthy has emphasized the total debt size when calling for Biden to hold negotiations on spending cuts. His argument is that Biden funded \$1.9 trillion in coronavirus aid through debt, which contributed to the inflation that now threatens the economy.

"We have now hit a point that we can't continue," McCarthy said Tuesday on Fox Business News. "Right now, we have to save America and stop the spending."

House Republicans favor a path toward a balanced budget that their leaders — including McCarthy — have yet to publicly detail, while Biden wants to increase the borrowing cap without preconditions.

"I will not let anyone use the full faith and credit of the United States as a bargaining chip," Biden said in a Thursday speech in Virginia. "In the United States of America, we pay our debts. It took 200 years to accumulate that debt."

One of the challenges in holding any negotiations is that Republicans have yet to embrace a set of policies. Some lawmakers have floated cuts to Social Security and Medicare, which McCarthy has rejected as he has publicly said he wants to identify waste in spending that can be cut.

McCarthy has said it's reasonable to negotiate over the issue, but the White House stressed Friday that he has yet to identify any cuts that would have support from the Republican majority, let alone the Democrat-controlled Senate and Biden.

"We haven't seen a plan from Republicans — what's their plan?" White House press secretary Kaine Jean-Pierre asked reporters at Friday's briefing. "They want to cut, cut, cut, but they're just saying this rhetoric that is incredibly dangerous."

Basic math poses a problem for balancing the budget. If tax hikes, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, national security and veterans' support are off the table, every other government program would need to be cut by 85% to balance the budget in 10 years, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a fiscal watchdog.

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The debt is largely the gap between the taxes that people are willing to pay and the benefits they expect to receive from the government. Voters generally want minimal taxes, but they also want more Social Security, health care and other programs.

All of this makes the politics tricky, said Doug Elmendorf, a former director of the Congressional Budget Office and now dean of the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

"It's very hard to build a coalition for specific sorts of debt reduction," Elmendorf said. "The inability of Democrats and Republicans to have constructive engagement on this topic, for decades now, poisons the well for future compromises."

By wanting to focus on the deficit, McCarthy is "manufacturing" a crisis that would detract from other risks to the economy such as climate change and poverty, said Sharon Parrott, president of the liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

"It's really telling, right, that there's not a clear articulation of the spending that they want to cut," Parrott said. "The public is pretty clear that they want schools to be funded, and they want investments in transportation, and they want low income families to have access to food assistance."

Michael Strain, an economist at the center-right American Enterprise Institute, said he thinks there is too much skepticism about the parties' willingness to tackle the debt. He noted that Ronald Reagan effectively reduced Social Security benefits, while Democrats' tax proposals would increase revenue.

But would a debt limit standoff actually change the federal debt's trajectory?

"No," Strain said.

'A Thousand and One' wins Sundance grand jury prize

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

"A Thousand and One," a drama about an impoverished single mother and her son in New York City, won the Sundance Film Festival's grand jury prize in the U.S. dramatic competition, while "Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project" was awarded the top prize in the U.S. documentary category. This year's winners were announced at an awards ceremony Friday afternoon in Park City, Utah, which included an audience prize for the documentary "20 Days in Mariupol."

Writer Jeremy O. Harris, filmmaker Eliza Hittman and actor Marlee Matlin judged the U.S. dramatic competition.

Harris, through tears, said he asked to give the grand jury prize to "A Thousand and One" and writer-director A.V. Rockwell himself.

"Never have I seen a life so similar to my own rendered with such nuance and tenderness" Harris said. "This film reached into my gut and pulled from it every emotion I've learned to mask in these spaces."

Rockwell, who made her feature debut with the film, was similarly emotional.

"This has been such a long journey for me but the institute has been such a beautiful support system," Rockwell said.

"20 Days in Mariupol," a first-person account of the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, won the audience prize for world cinema documentary. A joint project between The Associated Press and PBS "Frontline," the film utilizes 30 hours of footage AP journalist Mstyslav Chernov and his colleagues shot in the besieged Ukrainian city before they were extracted.

"I want to thank everyone who believed in us: AP, Frontline and Sundance and all the audiences who did not turn away," Chernov said. "This is not an achievement, this is a privilege."

Sing J. Lee won the directing award in U.S. dramatic for "The Accidental Getaway Driver." The team from "Theater Camp" was recognized with a special jury prize for ensemble. Lío Mehiel, who goes by they/ them pronouns, received the special jury award for their performance in "Mutt," about a trans-masculine person one day in New York. And the drama "Magazine Dreams," in which Jonathan Majors plays an amateur bodybuilder, was recognized for creative vision.

"Everyone in this room, everyone, every person, we give you our deepest props and our deepest respect," Matlin said through an interpreter. She also gave a shout-out to her "CODA" team, who won big at

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the festival two years ago. Her Oscar winning co-star Troy Kotsur was in the audience cheering her on. Other grand jury prizes winners were: "Scrapper," in world cinema, about a 12-year-old girl living alone on the outskirts of London after her mother's death; and "The Eternal Memory," in world cinema documentary, about the effects of Alzheimer's on a relationship of 25 years. "Kokomo City," about the lives of Black, trans sex workers, won the NEXT innovator award and the audience award in the NEXT category. Other audience award winners included "The Persian Version," for U.S. Dramatic, "Beyond Utopia," for U.S. Documentary and "Shayda" for World Cinema Dramatic. The "festival favorite" award went to "Radical," starring Eugenio Derbez as an inspirational teacher in a Mexican border town.

In total, 12 films premiered in the world cinema documentary section, including films about climate change, Syria, growing up during apartheid and the International Chopin Piano Competition. "The Eternal Memory," about a couple dealing with Alzheimer's, won the category's grand jury prize.

Other prize winners in the category included "Fantastic Machine," for creative vision, "Against the Tide" for verité filmmaker, and "Smoke Sauna Sisterhood" for directing.

Several Sundance winners from last year were recently nominated for Oscars, including documentaries "Navalny" and "All That Breathes."

Many Sundance films came to the festival with distribution in place. Apple TV+ debuted "Still: A Michael J. Fox Story" and "Stephen Curry: Underrated." Neon had "Infinity Pool," A24 brought six films including "All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt," "You Hurt My Feelings," "Past Lives." Searchlight had the South London rom com "Rye Lane."

There were also several big acquisitions made at the festival this year. Apple TV+, who got its first best picture win when it paid \$25 million for "CODA" out of Sundance, scooped up John Carney's ("Once") musical rom com "Flora and Son," with Eve Hewson and Joseph Gordon Levitt. Netflix secured the rights to the corporate thriller "Fair Play," with Alden Ehrenreich and Phoebe Dynevor, made and sold by MRC. Both films went for a reported \$20 million. Searchlight also bought Molly Gordon and Nick Lieberman's mockumentary "Theater Camp" for a theatrical release later this year.

This year's festival, the first in-person gathering since 2020, debuted 111 feature films and 64 short films. Over 75% of the films are available on Sundance's online platform through Sunday, January 29.

"We're already thinking about the next one," Sundance CEO Joana Vicente said.

4 of NFL's best TEs on display in conference title games

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — When Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes headed up the tunnel inside Arrowhead Stadium to have X-rays taken on his sprained right ankle, and Chad Henne trotted onto the field in the second quarter of their divisional playoff game against Jacksonville, it was obvious who the backup quarterback was going to target.

Not that the Jaguars could do anything about it.

Henne's first throw went to Travis Kelce. So did another. And another. And by the time the Chiefs were on the doorstep of the end zone, it was the All-Pro tight end whose short touchdown grab finished off a 98-yard scoring drive.

In that respect, Kelce was like a big, comfy security blanket for the Chiefs, who went on to win 27-20 and advance into a Sunday night rematch with the Cincinnati Bengals for the AFC title. Kelce finished with 14 catches, one off the NFL playoff record, and along the way continued his run on career statistical charts too numerous to count.

"Every time I step up here," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said afterward, "I feel like he breaks another record."

Kelce isn't the only standout tight end in the conference championships, though. The Bengals feature Hayden Hurst in their high-flying attack, and the 49ers' George Kittle and the Eagles' Dallas Goedert will square off in the NFC title game.

But it's been Kelce who, over the past decade, has continued to revolutionize the position.

He is athletic enough to beat one-on-one coverage. Crafty enough to find holes in zones. And while

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the 33-year-old is a little bit older and perhaps a tad bit slower these days, he's also a whole lot wiser, and his uncanny rapport with Mahomes — and Henne, apparently — makes him a matchup nightmare for defensive coordinators

"It's like Travis knows exactly where Patrick is, what he's going to do when he scrambles to his right or his left," said Chiefs defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo, who sees enough of him in training camp and practice.

"To me, that's the most amazing thing," Spagnuolo said. "How they get that, I'll never know."

Each of the tight ends playing Sunday brings something unique to their teams.

Hurst keeps defensive backfields from focusing entirely on Ja'Marr Chase, Tee Higgins and Tyler Boyd, thus taking some of the pressure off one of the best trios of wide receivers in the game. He had four catches for 45 yards in the wild-card round against Baltimore before catching five passes for 59 yards and a score in the divisional round against Buffalo.

Goedert brings a certain physical attitude to the potent Philadelphia offense. Or, as Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts put it, when he's on the field "he's trying to punish somebody. He's not trying to spare no man."

Take their divisional win over the Giants. Hurts threw to his 6-foot-5, 256-pound tight end on the game's third play, and Goedert proceeded to plant New York cornerback Adoree' Jackson with a stiff arm, helping to set the tone for the rest of the night. Goedert finished the drive with a touchdown catch to kick off the 38-7 rout.

"He's tough to tackle. He is really tough to tackle," Eagles coach Nick Sirianni said. "I wouldn't want to tackle him."

His counterpart in San Francisco is equally tough to tackle, though not because Kittle bulldozers defenders so much as he makes them miss. Kittle did that on five catches for 95 yards in their divisional win over the Cowboys.

The tone the ever-smiling Kittle sets for his team? One of loose, unbridled joy.

"Times we sort of feel uptight and whatnot, Kittle is like, the guy to put a smile on your face and say, 'Hey, we're good enough,' that kind of thing," 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy said. "He does bring energy and good vibes to everyone, and honestly, I do feel like he gets us back into the zone of playing well.

"So that's what he does, and I think he's the best in the NFL with just his personality and everything like that, too."

Kelce is playing in his fifth consecutive AFC title game. Hurst made the playoffs earlier in his career in Baltimore. Goedert is in the postseason for the fourth time while Kittle is playing in his third conference title game in four years.

That's four of the game's best tight ends, all trying to reach the Super Bowl this Sunday.

"It's what you dreamt about since you were a kid," Kittle said. "It's what you dream about when you're in high school and college. You dream about it when you're in the NFL. You dream about situations like this. Whether it's a hunger, starvation or desperation, you do everything you can to make sure at the end of the game you can win it."

5 women, immense power: Can they keep US from fiscal brink?

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They are now among the most powerful women in Congress. But when they were first elected in the 1990s, they were often overlooked, or even talked down to.

Rep. Kay Granger, R-Texas, remembers that men would avoid asking her questions, addressing other men in the room instead. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., says a male colleague once challenged her at a hearing to describe a military tank engine produced in her district without looking at her notes. (She shot back: "Damn straight I can!")

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, says that one of the first times she chaired a committee hearing, she looked around the room and realized she was the only female senator there. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., recalls being seated on the far edge of the committee dais, with the more senior men making the decisions in

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the middle.

"I remember finally just standing up at the end of the table going, 'Excuse me!' Because you couldn't get their attention," Murray says. "Everything was decided in the middle of this table. I think it's pretty amazing that we're at the middle of the table now."

This year, for the first time in history, the four leaders of the two congressional spending committees are women. Granger is chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, while DeLauro is the top Democrat; Murray is Senate Appropriations chairwoman and Collins is the top Republican.

Sitting down with The Associated Press on Thursday for their first joint interview — and joined by Shanda Young, the first Black woman to lead the Office of Management and Budget and a former House aide — the women talked like old friends, nodding and laughing in agreement when listening to each others' stories about the way things used to be for women, and sometimes still are.

When they were elected, Collins says, men were automatically accepted once they came to Congress but women still had to prove themselves. "That extra barrier that was definitely in place still exists to some extent, but far less than it used to," Collins said. "Women bring different life experiences and different perspectives. And that's why it matters."

The women said their camaraderie, friendship and willingness to collaborate will be crucial as they shoulder the massive responsibility of keeping the government running and open — an annual task that will be made even harder this year as conservatives in the new GOP House majority are insisting on major spending cuts and the U.S. is at risk of default. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., won his post only after agreeing to several demands of those far-right members, creating a dynamic that could prove perilous for negotiations as Congress must raise the debt ceiling in the coming months.

"This is a moment in time," DeLauro says. "You are really looking at five women who have control of the most powerful levers of government."

Still, she says, "none of us have our head in the sand. We know there are difficulties that are going to be involved."

Granger is in the trickiest position as she tries to balance the demands of the House GOP conference with her own responsibility to keep the government running. One important task ahead, she said, is explaining what appropriators do to the public. While the committees are rarely in the spotlight, they are the beating heart of Congress, writing "must-pass" bills that keep the government running. Decisions about funding levels for almost everything the government pays for — from the military to health care to food safety to federal highways — pass through the hands of appropriators.

Asked about the challenge ahead, Granger says "deadlines are very important" when communicating to the Republican conference. She said there will come a time when she'll have to tell GOP colleagues, "This is when it has to be final."

Another key to the negotiations will be Young, who is the former Democratic staff director for the House appropriations panel and has maintained a close relationship with all four women since becoming the Cabinet-level OMB director for President Joe Biden. DeLauro and Granger threw her a baby shower before she gave birth to her daughter in 2021, she says, and "you cannot replace those relationships."

Young's relationships were helpful at the end of last year as lawmakers labored to pass a massive, \$1.7 trillion spending bill that funded federal agencies through September and provided another significant round of military and economic aid to Ukraine. Signaling potential troubles ahead, though, Granger did not sign off on the final bill as GOP leadership balked.

Young joked that the four lawmakers probably wouldn't have invited any other OMB director to do an interview with them. Murray agreed, saying she answers their calls and texts immediately, "and that is new for me."

As the OMB director, Young says, one of her jobs is to help the appropriators be successful. "You probably need to pick up the phone every now and then and show up," she says. "And we don't have to start from scratch. I became who I am on the committee that they now lead. So that's a special relationship."

The women were gathered in Murray's office, an enviable spot on the West front of the Capitol with a dead-on view of the Washington Monument. It was once the domain of legendary appropriator Sen.

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Robert Byrd, D-W.Va.

Murray recalled when she entered the same room just after she was elected in 1992 — the so-called “year of the woman” — and asked Byrd outright for a seat on the powerful spending panel.

As one of the only women in the Senate, Murray immediately won the coveted seat. But she found that she had to assert herself in what was still very much an old boys’ club. Thirty years later, she became chairwoman of the panel, replacing now-retired Sen. Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy. She also replaced Leahy as the Senate pro tempore, a senior member of the majority who presides over the Senate and is third in line to the presidency.

“This office has been inhabited by numerous men who smoke cigars,” Murray said as she welcomed her colleagues. “I’m delighted it no longer is.”

Murray and Collins, in particular, have a long history together. In 2013, they were both key to efforts to end a government shutdown. And as they replaced Leahy and retiring Republican Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama as committee leaders this year, they immediately issued a joint statement calling for a return to the regular process of passing individual spending bills “in a responsible and bipartisan manner,” instead of shoving them all into one massive bill at the end of the year.

Collins said no one on either side of the aisle, in either chamber wants to fund the government again with a huge, end-of-the-year bill. “I truly believe we can make real progress by working closely together,” she said.

All of them give credit to their female predecessors on the committees, including former Sen. Barbara Mikulski, a Maryland Democrat who was the first chairwoman of the Senate appropriations panel and used to invite new senators to her office for what she called a “workshop” on the appropriations process so they could become more familiar with the elaborate workings of the committee.

In an interview, Mikulski, who retired in 2017 after 30 years in the Senate, says the women are “brilliant strategists” who may disagree on policy but won’t let rancor come between them.

“What I’m excited about is that they have not only broken the glass ceiling, but they have the keys to the vault,” Mikulski says.

US inflation and consumer spending cooled in December

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve’s preferred inflation gauge eased further in December, and consumer spending fell — the latest evidence that the Fed’s series of interest rate hikes are slowing the economy.

Friday’s report from the Commerce Department showed that prices rose 5% last month from a year earlier, down from a 5.5% year-over-year increase in November. It was the third straight drop.

Consumer spending fell 0.2% from November to December and was revised lower to show a drop of 0.1% from October to November. Last year’s holiday sales were sluggish for many retailers, and the overall spending figures for the final two months of 2022 were the weakest in two years.

The pullback in consumer spending will likely be welcomed by Fed officials, who are seeking to cool the economy by making lending increasingly expensive. A slower pace of spending could boost their confidence that inflation is steadily easing. Still, the decline in year-over-year inflation matches the Fed’s outlook and isn’t likely to alter expectations that it will raise its key rate by a quarter-point next week.

On a monthly basis, inflation ticked up just 0.1% from November to December for a second straight month. Energy prices plunged 5.1%, and the overall cost of goods also fell.

“Core” prices, which exclude volatile food and energy costs, rose 0.3% from November to December and 4.4% from a year earlier. The year-over-year figure was down from 4.7% in November, though still well above the Fed’s 2% target.

Falling prices for oil, gas, copper, lumber, wheat and other commodities, along with the unclogging of supply chains, have helped slow the retail costs of cars, furniture and clothes, among other items.

Price increases, though, have remained persistently high for some goods and services, including eggs,

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which skyrocketed 60% last month compared with a year ago. Egg prices rose 11.1% just in December, inflated by an outbreak of avian flu that has led to a culling of herds and higher feed costs.

Car rental prices have also soared nearly 27% from a year ago and rose 1.6% just in December.

But for many other items, inflation is easing. Coffee prices, though up nearly 14% in the past year, rose just 0.2% last month. And the cost of clothes and shoes rose just 3% in the past year and 0.3% last month.

Friday's figures are separate from the better-known inflation data that comes from the consumer price index. The CPI, which was released earlier this month, has also shown a steady deceleration.

"The latest data offer the first tangible signs that the economy's main engine is slowing," said Oren Klachkin, lead U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, referring to consumers, whose spending accounts for about 70% of economic activity.

The Fed has been seeking to slow spending, growth and the surging prices that have bedeviled the nation for nearly two years. Its key rate, which affects many consumer and business loans, is now in a range of 4.25% to 4.5%, up from near zero last March. Though inflation has been decelerating, most economists say they think the Fed's harsh medicine will tip the economy into a recession sometime this year.

"We continue to see the U.S. economy experiencing a mild recession this year," said Lydia Bousour, senior economist at EY Parthenon.

A recession typically causes widespread layoffs and higher unemployment. But for now, U.S. employers are adding workers, and the unemployment rate remains at a half-century low of 3.5%.

Should job losses — which are occurring at many finance and tech companies — drive up unemployment, a recession could eventually be declared by a group of economists at the National Bureau of Economic Research, a nonprofit that officially determines when recessions occur. The economists at the NBER typically make such an announcement well after a recession has actually begun.

For now, the number of people seeking unemployment benefits — a proxy for layoffs — declined last week to 186,000, a very low level historically. And Walmart, the nation's largest employer, said it would raise its minimum wage, from \$12 to \$14 an hour, to help it keep and attract workers.

The Fed is in an increasingly delicate position. Chair Jerome Powell has emphasized that the central bank plans to keep boosting its key rate and to keep it elevated, potentially until the end of the year. Yet that policy may become untenable if a sharp recession takes hold.

On Thursday, the government reported that the economy grew at a healthy clip in the final three months of last year but with much of the expansion driven by one-time factors: Companies restocked their depleted inventories as supply chain snarls unraveled, and the nation's trade deficit shrank.

By contrast, consumer spending in the October-December quarter as a whole weakened from the previous quarter, and business investment dropped off sharply. Overall, the economy expanded at a 2.9% annual rate in the October-December quarter, down slightly from a 3.2% pace in the previous quarter.

If consumers remain less willing to boost their spending, companies' profit margins will shrink, and many may cut expenses. That trend could lead eventually to waves of layoffs. Economists at Bank of America have forecast that the economy will grow slightly in the first three months of this year — but then shrink in the following three quarters.

More frugal consumers would threaten to send the economy into a recession. But they can also help reduce inflation. Companies can't keep raising prices if Americans won't pay the higher costs.

Last week, the Federal Reserve's beige book, a gathering of anecdotal reports from businesses around the country, said: "Many retailers noted increased difficulty in passing through cost increases, suggesting greater price sensitivity on the part of consumers."

Filipino workers: Oil company abandoned us in Hurricane Ida

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — As Hurricane Ida struck the Louisiana Gulf Coast in August 2021, Renato Decena and Rosel Hernandez watched the storm punch a hole in the roof of the bunkhouse where they were sheltered — abandoned, they allege, by their offshore oil industry employer as the hurricane bore down.

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"I could not think of anything to do but to pray and to pray," Decena, whose court records indicate worked for the company for about four years, told The Associated Press.

Decena and Hernandez are two of 10 Filipino workers who are suing their former employer, major off-shore oil industry company Grand Isle Shipyard, alleging they were virtual prisoners at their bunkhouse and that the company abandoned Decena, Hernandez and some of their co-workers there during the storm. The 10 plaintiffs also allege they were illegally underpaid and that those among them who tested positive for COVID-19 were quarantined on vulnerable moored supply boats or other vessels, sometimes without adequate food or medicine.

Grand Isle Shipyard not only denies the claims but has struck back with a counterclaim accusing the workers — whose lawsuit invokes federal human trafficking and fair housing laws — of defamation. The judge in the case dismissed the defamation allegations in a Jan. 20 order but said the company could pursue them again once the workers' lawsuit is concluded.

The competing court filings at the U.S. District Court in New Orleans lay out starkly different views of life for Filipinos who work under federally granted visas at the Louisiana-based company.

Overseas employment of Filipino citizens has been a key part of the Philippines' economy since the government of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s, according to nonpartisan research and analysis organization the Migration Policy Institute.

The Philippines' worldwide remittances — money sent back to family and friends from Filipino workers employed abroad — totaled more than \$36 billion in 2021, according to data from the World Bank.

"As part of its labor export policy, the Philippines has developed a significant government infrastructure to regulate labor migration and the recruitment industry, and to manage relations with labor-receiving countries and provide some protections for workers at destination," Michelle Mittelstadt, spokesperson for MPI, said in an email. "That said, foreign workers can be vulnerable to abusive conditions at destination, at the mercy of employers and recruiters."

Decena and Hernandez said the better-paying jobs in the United States help them provide for their families.

"We have dreams for our family and children," Hernandez said in an email. "We want them to have a better future."

They and the other plaintiffs in the lawsuit allege they suffered abusive conditions while employed and housed by the company, and that discrimination played a role.

Aside from Decena's and Hernandez's claims that they were abandoned at the bunkhouse during Ida, they also allege poor care and cramped quarters for those among them who were quarantined on moored tugboats or supply vessels when they tested positive for COVID-19.

"Not one medicine, not one tablet, not one vitamin. Nobody gave these things to us. We were on our own," Hernandez told the AP.

A 15-year employee of the company, Hernandez said there was little food when he arrived at the quarantine vessel.

"I drank juice and hot water with salt to cure my coughing," he said.

The company denied such allegations in its counterclaim filed Oct. 10, 2022.

"The houseboats and vessels that workers were quarantined on have fully stocked kitchens, bedrooms, and bathrooms," the company filing said. "Breakfast, lunch and dinner for workers was delivered by Defendants to all such quarantine sites."

"GIS' on-site clinic physician routinely visited those in quarantine, dispensing medicine and monitoring symptoms," the filing said.

The lawsuit alleges that the company used threats of deportation to keep the workers from leaving the bunkhouse.

"All workers are free to come and go as often as they wish," the company said in its counterclaim.

Early on, the argument had been over whether the workers' claims should be heard in U.S. federal court or whether the contracts the men signed meant the claims had to be settled by arbitration in the Philippines.

The workers' lawsuit says the Philippines' agency that administers arbitration won't enforce legal remedies called for in U.S. law, and that the arbitration process is corrupt.

"We want a fairer treatment," Hernandez said in the AP interview. "We know that the system here is better."

In a Sept. 23, 2022, ruling in New Orleans, U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier said the workers' disputes over wages — they claim the company did not pay promised rates and denied them overtime for periods when they were effectively on call for offshore work — would be subject to arbitration in the Philippines. Barbier allowed the U.S. court case to proceed involving the allegations that the men were confined to the bunkhouse and treated unfairly, claims invoking U.S. human trafficking and fair housing law.

The workers' lawsuit seeks class-action status — meaning, if Barbier agrees, it would cover roughly 90 other Filipino men who worked for Grand Isle Shipyard. A victory would mean unspecified damages paid to the workers for the alleged human trafficking and fair housing allegations.

Grand Isle Shipyard is seeking damages, too, accusing the workers of making false allegations they claim were "maliciously fabricated" and could carry criminal implications that would damage the company.

In its counterclaim, Grand Isle Shipyard said it discovered that two of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit — who like Hernandez and Decena were said to be among numerous workers stranded in the bunkhouse when Ida hit — were actually in the Philippines at the time of the storm. Lawyers for the workers have since filed an amended version of the lawsuit, keeping the two as plaintiffs over living conditions and wages but removing the claim that they were with Hernandez, Decena and other workers in the bunkhouse at the time of the hurricane.

Grand Isle Shipyard has not granted telephoned requests for interviews or comment.

The workers are represented by attorney Daniel Werner in Georgia and lawyers with the Tulane University Law Clinic.

Ukrainian presidency: 10 killed in latest Russian shelling

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A new barrage of Russian shelling killed at least 10 Ukrainian civilians and wounded 20 others in a day, the office of Ukraine's president said Friday as the country worked to recover from an earlier wave of Russian missile strikes and drone attacks.

Regional officials said towns and villages in the east and in the south that are within reach of the Russian artillery suffered most. Six people died in the Donetsk region, two in Kherson, and two in the Kharkiv region. A day earlier, missiles and self-propelled drones that Russian forces fired had hit deeper into Ukrainian territory, killing at least 11 people.

The bombardments followed announcements by the United States and Germany of plans to ship powerful tanks to help Ukraine defend itself. Other Western countries said they also would share modern tanks from their stockpiles.

Moscow has bristled at the move, and accused Western nations of entering a new level of confrontation with Russia.

Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said the Russian military used fiercely-burning phosphorus munitions in its shelling of the village of Zvanivka, about 20 kilometers north of Bakhmut, a city that has become the focus of a grueling standoff in recent months. The shelling also damaged apartment buildings and two schools in the nearby town of Vuhledar, Kyrylenko said.

The governor of the neighboring Luhansk region, Serhii Haidaj, said Ukrainian shelling hit two Russian bases in the occupied towns of Kreminna and Rubizhne, killing and wounding "dozens" of Russian soldiers. His claim couldn't be independently verified.

Further south, Russian troops resumed shelling the town of Nikopol, across the river Dnieper from the Russia-held Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, damaging apartment buildings, gas pipelines, power lines and a bakery, officials said.

Separately on Friday, Russian authorities took new steps in their months-long and widely criticized effort to graft four Ukrainian provinces onto Russia's already vast territory. They said the illegally annexed provinces would change from the time zone that covers Kyiv to the one in Moscow.

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The switch in the Ukrainian southern and eastern regions that Russia declared as part of its territory four months ago — Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson — will take place “in the near future,” Russia’s Ministry of Industry and Trade said. The move comes as part of what the ministry called the “gradual synchronization” of Russian legislation after the “admission of the four subjects.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s highly orchestrated announcement of the illegal annexations came despite widespread international condemnation and the fact that Russia didn’t fully control the areas it annexed. Russia claims to control nearly all of Luhansk and about half of Donetsk.

Less than 1-1/2 months after the annexations, Russia lost control of the city of Kherson and broad swaths of the surrounding territory following a Ukrainian counteroffensive. Kherson was the only regional capital Russia seized since starting its invasion on Feb. 24, and its loss dealt a heavy blow to the Kremlin.

Planned Western deployments of modern tanks for Ukraine remained on many minds on Friday.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told Canada’s CTV that his country was ready to send 60 modern tanks — half of them the PT-91 model, which was built in Poland from 1994 to 2001 as a modernized version of the Soviet-era T-72M1. He said those deliveries would come on top of Poland’s plans to send 14 of its Leopard 2s, after Berlin approved other allies sending the German-made tanks to Ukraine.

On Friday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the supply of Western tanks to Ukraine would not change the situation in Kyiv’s favor, but rather “bring the countries of the West to a new level of confrontation with our country and our people.”

The German government insisted Friday that it does not see itself in direct conflict with Russia, after Moscow seized on comments by Germany’s top diplomat this week that suggested otherwise.

During a debate Tuesday with lawmakers at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said it was important for European countries to avoid a “blame game” when it comes to discussing support for Ukraine “because we are fighting a war against Russia and not against each other.”

Asked about those comments, German government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann referred to a line laid out by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and told reporters in Berlin on Friday that “the chancellor has always emphasized that NATO and Germany are not parties to this war of attack by Russia against Ukraine.”

“We support Ukraine, but we are not parties to the war,” she added.

In other developments:

- German officials said the country was targeted by a series of cyberattacks of apparent Russian origin this week following the decision to supply modern tanks to Ukraine. A spokeswoman for the Interior Ministry said the so-called denial of service attacks, in which websites or entire networks are bombarded with requests in an attempt to make them inaccessible, were observed on Wednesday and Thursday, and “were largely fought off or had no serious impact.”

- Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said Russia used its latest hypersonic Kinzhal missiles to strike energy facilities in Kyiv and Zaporizhzhia regions Thursday. He said Ukraine lacks defenses against the Kinzhal, adding that Russia has few such missiles and mostly uses them against priority targets.

Ihnat said in televised remarks that Russia also used Kh-55 missiles — air-launched missiles that were designed to carry nuclear warheads — with dummy warheads to distract Ukraine’s air defenses.

- Russian state-run media say the state communications watchdog has restricted access to the CIA and FBI websites for allegedly spreading materials “containing inaccurate socially significant information” and “discrediting” Russia’s armed forces. The Russian government has made it illegal to discredit its troops or spread “false information” about the military.

Norway’s last Arctic miners struggle with coal mine’s end

By GIOVANNA DELL’ORTO Associated Press

ADVENTDALEN, Norway (AP) — Kneeling by his crew as they drilled steel bolts into the low roof of a tunnel miles-deep into an Arctic mountain, Geir Strand reflected on the impact of their coal mine’s impending closure.

“It’s true coal is polluting, but ... they should have a solution before they close us down,” Strand said

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inside Gruve 7, the last mine Norway is operating in the remote Svalbard archipelago.

It's scheduled to be shut down in two years, cutting carbon dioxide emissions in this fragile, rapidly changing environment, but also erasing the identity of a century-old mining community that fills many with deep pride even as the primary activities shift to science and tourism.

"We have to think what we're going to do," Strand, a 19-year mining veteran, told two Associated Press journalists as his headlamp spotlighted black dust and the miners' breath in the just-below-freezing tunnel. "(Mining) is meaningful. You know the task you have is very precise. The goal is to get out coal, and get out yourself and all your crew, safe and healthy."

After the main village of Longyearbyen, 16 kilometers (10 miles) away, announced it would switch its only energy plant from coal-fired to diesel this year, and later to greener alternatives, mining company Store Norske decided it would close its last mine in Svalbard. The date was then postponed to 2025 because of the energy crisis precipitated by the war in Ukraine.

Puzzlement over the future mingles with grief for the end of an era. It permeates the underground room where the last five dozen soot-covered miners take a break during their 10-hour shifts and the stylish café where their retired predecessors gather on weekday mornings to trade news.

"A long, long tradition is fading away," said foreman Bent Jakobsen. "We're the last miners. Makes me sad."

The history of mining and its perils are etched on the mountainside in Longyearbyen. Below abandoned coal conveyor towers on a mid-January day, a trail of footprints in the snow led to a memorial monument, floodlit in the constant darkness of winter's polar night, listing the 124 miners who have died on the job since 1916.

"I've been there, and families go there," said Trond Johansen, who worked in mining for more than 40 years.

The half dozen other retired miners sipping their morning coffee were quick with more examples of the sacrifice that mining entailed, citing the exact ages and dates when colleagues were killed.

Among the last was Bent Jakobsen's older brother, Geir, who was 24 when he was crushed to death inside Gruve 3 in 1991. Their eldest brother, Frank, who also worked at the mine, rushed to the scene only to be told by the doctor that it wasn't survivable. Frank did most of the research for the memorial, erected in 2016.

"We have a place to go and put flowers on Christmas Eve," Frank said. "It's not only our brother, it's other colleagues, too."

Longyearbyen's only pastor, the Rev. Siv Limstrand, whose Svalbard Kirke was founded by the mining company a century ago and still plays a critical role in the community, said it's important to recognize the pain.

"People ask themselves the question, 'Was it (worth) nothing?' So there's a kind of sorrow," Limstrand said in the church's cabin, a retreat built in the broad valley below where Gruve 7's entrance lights shone in the polar night. "It should upset us in the community."

In nearly two decades at Gruve 7, Bent Jakobsen rose to production manager and is now working on the clean-up processes needed for the closure.

His pride in the job is palpable, whether he's driving down a 6-kilometer (3.7 mile) tunnel dug with "a lot of time, a lot of sweat, a lot of swearing," or scraping off a piece of 40-million-year-old coal, or checking one of the steel bolts, each 1.2 meters long (4 feet), that hold up 400 meters (1,300 feet) of mountain above the workers.

"We're a really tight-knit group in the mine, because you actually trust and lay your lives in the hands of others every day," he said.

Jakobsen has seen how the landscape outside the mine is rapidly changing, too. Scientists say this slice of the Arctic warms up faster than most of the rest of the world.

From his childhood, the Svalbard native recalls the rhythmic clanking of the coal carts making their way across town, every day except Sunday. Today, herds of reindeer dig through the snow for moss and grass by the disused mining conveyances.

Jakobsen remembers when the archipelago's fjords regularly froze over in winter, giving polar bears easy

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passage, while earlier this month it was all open water. He's unconvinced, however, that closing the mine will make a significant difference.

Environmental scientists agree that Svalbard's own emissions are minuscule – its coal reserves could keep the global economy running for about 8 hours, according to Kim Holmén, a special advisor at the Norwegian Polar Institute and professor of environment and climate. But they counter that every pollutant counts, and the archipelago can set an example.

"We're all part of the problem and should become part of the solution ... every action has a symbolism, is a value, period," Holmén said.

Most of all, Jakobsen and others in mining worry about the alternatives, especially since Gruve 7 exports coal for Europe's metallurgic industry – like car engine construction in Germany – in addition to feeding the local energy plant.

"If you don't take coal from us, you'll take coal from someone else where it's not that good – the world needs to take coal for your Tesla battery," he said.

Even windmill components need coal, added Elias Hagebø, his face smeared with coal dust as he grabbed a quick lunch in the mine's underground break room.

"If they just throw away coal, it's stupid," he said. At 18, he's the youngest worker, and hopes he'll be able to make a career in the mine just like his father.

Furthermore, Russia has operated mines in Svalbard for 93 years under an international treaty that gave Norway sovereignty on the archipelago while allowing all signatory nations equal rights to commercial enterprise.

"There are no plans to decrease this operation," Ildar Neverov, director general of Russia's mining company Arcticugol, told AP in an email from Barentsburg, a village about 37 miles (60 kilometers) from Longyearbyen.

Given the race by global powers, including China, for increasingly profitable natural resources in Arctic, some in Longyearbyen worry that Norway might give up precious rights by closing the mine.

"It will be an unusual situation if the only nation doing mining is the Russians. This is a very geopolitical place," Arnstein Martin Skaare, a businessman and former shareholder in Store Norske, said at the retired miners' coffee hour in Longyearbyen's café.

Back inside Gruve 7, crouched in a 1.3-meter-high (4.1 foot) tunnel, Jonny Sandvoll said he wished people understood more about coal and its uses before deciding to close the mine.

"It's not the right way to do it," said Sandvoll, a miner's son with 20 years in mining. Then he refocused on the huge machine next to him that loudly burrowed into the shining black vein and extracted more coal.

Green comet zooming our way, last visited 50,000 years ago

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A comet is streaking back our way after 50,000 years.

The dirty snowball last visited during Neanderthal times, according to NASA. It will come within 26 million miles (42 million kilometers) of Earth Wednesday before speeding away again, unlikely to return for millions of years.

So do look up, contrary to the title of the killer-comet movie "Don't Look Up."

Discovered less than a year ago, this harmless green comet already is visible in the northern night sky with binoculars and small telescopes, and possibly the naked eye in the darkest corners of the Northern Hemisphere. It's expected to brighten as it draws closer and rises higher over the horizon through the end of January, best seen in the predawn hours. By Feb. 10, it will be near Mars, a good landmark.

Skygazers in the Southern Hemisphere will have to wait until next month for a glimpse.

While plenty of comets have graced the sky over the past year, "this one seems probably a little bit bigger and therefore a little bit brighter and it's coming a little bit closer to the Earth's orbit," said NASA's comet and asteroid-tracking guru, Paul Chodas.

Green from all the carbon in the gas cloud, or coma, surrounding the nucleus, this long-period comet was

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discovered last March by astronomers using the Zwicky Transient Facility, a wide field camera at Caltech's Palomar Observatory. That explains its official, cumbersome name: comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF).

On Wednesday, it will hurtle between the orbits of Earth and Mars at a relative speed of 128,500 mph (207,000 kilometers). Its nucleus is thought to be about a mile (1.6 kilometers) across, with its tails extending millions of miles (kilometers).

The comet isn't expected to be nearly as bright as Neowise in 2020, or Hale-Bopp and Hyakutake in the mid to late 1990s.

But "it will be bright by virtue of its close Earth passage ... which allows scientists to do more experiments and the public to be able to see a beautiful comet," University of Hawaii astronomer Karen Meech said in an email.

Scientists are confident in their orbital calculations putting the comet's last swing through the solar system's planetary neighborhood at 50,000 years ago. But they don't know how close it came to Earth or whether it was even visible to the Neanderthals, said Chodas, director of the Center for Near Earth Object Studies at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California.

When it returns, though, is tougher to judge.

Every time the comet skirts the sun and planets, their gravitational tugs alter the iceball's path ever so slightly, leading to major course changes over time. Another wild card: jets of dust and gas streaming off the comet as it heats up near the sun.

"We don't really know exactly how much they are pushing this comet around," Chodas said.

The comet — a time capsule from the emerging solar system 4.5 billion years ago — came from what's known as the Oort Cloud well beyond Pluto. This deep-freeze haven for comets is believed to stretch more than one-quarter of the way to the next star.

While comet ZTF originated in our solar system, we can't be sure it will stay there, Chodas said. If it gets booted out of the solar system, it will never return, he added.

Don't fret if you miss it.

"In the comet business, you just wait for the next one because there are dozens of these," Chodas said. "And the next one might be bigger, might be brighter, might be closer."

Djokovic tops Paul; faces Tsitsipas in Australian Open final

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Of all of his considerable talents, Novak Djokovic's ability to cast aside whatever appears to stand in his way might be the most valuable.

So forget about the potential distraction of his father's decision to stay away from Rod Laver Arena for Djokovic's semifinal against unseeded American Tommy Paul at the Australian Open on Friday after getting caught up in a flap over being seen with a group waving banned Russian flags at the tournament. Forget about the heavily taped left hamstring that was an issue for Djokovic last week. Forget about just how physical the points were against Paul. Forget about how Djokovic produced twice as many unforced errors, 24, as winners, 12, in the opening set. Forget about the lull of four games in a row that went to Paul. Forget about the brief back-and-forth with the chair umpire.

And remember this: Djokovic simply does not lose semifinals or finals at Melbourne Park. Does. Not. Lose. And so, not surprisingly, he overcame some shaky play in the early going and took over the match, beating Paul 7-5, 6-1, 6-2 to close in on a 10th Australian Open championship and 22nd Grand Slam title overall.

From 5-all in the first set, Djokovic claimed seven games in a row and 14 of the last 17.

"I'm really thankful that I still have enough gas in my legs to be able to play at this level," said Djokovic, a 35-year-old from Serbia. "Some long rallies, you could really feel them. We both had heavy legs in the first set. I was really fortunate to kind of hold my nerves toward the end of the first set. That was a key. After that, I started swinging through the ball more."

He extended his Australian Open winning streak to 27 matches, the longest in the Open era, which dates to 1968.

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There was a pause in that string of victories a year ago, of course, when Djokovic was deported from Australia before competition began because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19. He still has not gotten the shots, but the strict border controls established by the country during the pandemic have been eased.

"Of course, it's not pleasant for me to go through this with all the things that I had to deal with last year and this year in Australia. It's not something that I want or need," said Djokovic, who defended his father, Srdjan, for standing with a group of people waving Russian flags — at least one showing an image of Vladimir Putin — after the son's quarterfinal victory against a Russian opponent.

"I hope that people will let it be," Djokovic said, "and we can focus on tennis."

That is what the No. 4-seeded Djokovic himself will hope to do Sunday when he takes on No. 3 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who eliminated Karen Khachanov 7-6 (2), 6-4, 6-7 (6), 6-3 to reach his first final at Melbourne Park and second at a Slam.

Whoever wins the final will rise to No. 1 in the ATP rankings. For Djokovic, that would mark a return to a spot he has occupied for more weeks than anyone; for Tsitsipas, it would mark a debut there.

"I like that number. It's all about you. It's singular. It's '1,'" said Tsitsipas, who was 0-3 in Australian Open semifinals before Friday. "These are the moments that I've been working hard for."

Djokovic is now a perfect 19-0 over the last two rounds in Melbourne, and his nine triumphs there already are a men's record. If he can add one more to go alongside his seven titles at Wimbledon, three at the U.S. Open and two at the French Open, Djokovic would equal Nadal for the most Grand Slam trophies earned by a man.

"Winning Grand Slams and being the No. 1 in the world is probably the two biggest peaks that you can climb as a professional tennis player," said Djokovic, who is 10-2 against Tsitsipas, taking the last nine encounters in a row. "So let's see what happens."

Tsitsipas' other major final came at the 2021 French Open, when he grabbed the first two sets before blowing that big lead and losing to Djokovic in five.

Which was all related to an amusing moment this week, when Djokovic said about Tsitsipas: "He has never played a final, am I wrong?" Reminded by reporters about what happened at Roland Garros, Djokovic replied: "That's right. Sorry, my bad."

Asked about that exchange, Tsitsipas responded with a deadpan expression and the words: "I don't remember, either."

Until this week, the 35th-ranked Paul never had been past the fourth round in 13 previous appearances at majors.

The 25-year-old was born in New Jersey and grew up in North Carolina, playing tennis at a club where the walls were festooned with posters of Andy Roddick — the last American man to win a Grand Slam singles title, way back at the 2003 U.S. Open. That drought will continue for now, because even though Djokovic was not at his best in the opening set, he was good enough at the end of it, breaking in the last game, and never relented.

"He didn't really let me execute any game plan that I wanted to do," Paul said.

The blips for Djokovic arrived right at the outset.

The footwork was not up to his usual reach-every-ball standard. The shotmaking was subpar. The serving was so-so. He started gesturing and shouting in the direction of coach Goran Ivanisevic and the rest of this entourage.

In the first game, Djokovic flubbed an overhead, a weakness he's never solved. He dumped a backhand into the net. He double-faulted. Still, he overcame that to get off to a 5-1 lead. Then came a quick switch in direction.

Djokovic got broken when serving for the set there. And again at 5-3, when Paul walloped a down-the-line forehand and Djokovic's backhand on a 29-stroke point landed out. Paul held for 5-all.

Might he be making a match of it?

Not for much longer. Djokovic, the greatest returner of his, or maybe any, generation, broke to close that set, when Paul sent a forehand wide. Serbian flags were displayed throughout the stands and the air

was filled with chants of Djokovic's two-syllable nickname, "No-le! No-le!"

The contest was never much of a contest from there on out.

Pandemic, culture wars revive 'school choice' policy push

By SAM METZ and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Nichole Mason first became concerned when she learned administrators at her children's public school were allowing transgender students to use girls' bathrooms. Her frustrations mounted when she felt her children's next school went too far with how they enforced COVID regulations during the pandemic.

Now, the mother of five is among a swelling number of parents around the United States funneling those frustrations into a renewed push to get state lawmakers to create taxpayer-funded programs to help parents pay for other educational options including private school, home-schooling or hybrid models. In Utah, a proposal would allow roughly 5,000 students to apply for \$8,000 scholarships.

"If right now my kid's school is getting \$10,000 a year to educate him, he's not thriving and I could do a better job educating him with \$8,000," said Mason, who co-founded the Utah chapter of the group Parents United. "Then I feel a moral obligation to give him an outstanding education instead of a satisfactory education."

At least a dozen other states are considering similar legislation in what has emerged as a landmark year for school choice battles.

With memories fresh from pandemic-era school closures and curriculum battles — particularly over how matters of gender and race are taught — Mason and legions of parents like her are trekking to the marble floors of their state Capitols to fight to create education savings accounts, also known as ESAs. Though they vary, these voucher-style proposals have been introduced in states including Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas and Utah.

No state has more legislation pending than Virginia, where Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin won his race for governor in 2021 in the liberal-leaning state after making education grievances a key tenet of his campaign.

Additionally, GOP governors in Oklahoma and Nevada have suggested plans to push for voucher-style policies and politicians in Arkansas and Florida have said they plan to expand pre-existing programs that are currently limited to certain student populations.

"School vouchers and education savings accounts were kind of in retreat for a while. They were sort of in vogue in the '90s and then charter schools kind of supplanted them," said Rob Shand, an education policy professor at American University.

Now, he added, "school choice advocates are trying to capitalize on discontent with the public school system. They see a sort of a moment to try to push for push for some more choice-friendly or alternative policies."

If enacted, education savings accounts could transform the nature of state government's relationship with K-12 schools and deepen contrasts between how education looks in red versus blue states.

Funneling public funds toward private schools is a decades-old idea that first gained traction in the 1990s. Today, "school choice" policies in effect in conservative states include vouchers, scholarships, education savings accounts and tax credits.

Tax credits allow families to deduct amounts from their overall tax burden to be used toward alternatives to public school. Vouchers traditionally allow parents to take the funds that would otherwise be used to educate their children in public schools and put them toward tuition for accredited private or religious schools. Education savings accounts and scholarship programs are more expansive, giving parents additional latitude on how they can spend the funds, including on home-schooling.

ESAs have steadily grown in popularity over traditional vouchers due to legal challenges in states with constitutional limits on sending public money directly to religious organizations.

Statewide ESA programs now exist in Arizona and West Virginia. And in Tennessee, where a court ruled

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last year that a voucher program in the Nashville and Memphis area is constitutional, efforts are underway to expand them to the Chattanooga area.

In Utah, where the proposal passed the House and Senate this week, lawmakers coupled the proposal with teacher raises. Though one school choice lobbyist said she wanted to “destroy public education” with the proposal, supportive lawmakers hesitate to call their idea “vouchers” and emphasize that no more than \$42 million could be used for the scholarships. In Iowa, students with vouchers would receive \$7,600 — the amount sent to schools as part of the state’s per-pupil formula — and \$1,200 additional dollars would be sent to public schools in their district. In South Carolina, only kids from Medicaid-eligible families could apply.

Proponents say the pandemic made the limits of a “one size fits all” approach crystal clear and hope expanding options will spur competition and make all schools better. They’re notching victories, even in states where the proposals previously failed to gain traction.

Opponents like Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, argue the dollars would be better spent bolstering chronically underfunded public schools. They see the programs as a stepping stone toward dismantling traditional public schools and further privatizing K-12 education.

Hobbs wants to roll back an expansion of a school voucher program championed last year by her GOP predecessor. Her office said this month that it would cost \$1.5 billion dollars over the next decade.

The proposals also have kindled fury and resistance from teachers unions and their Democratic Party allies, who note the lump sum isn’t enough to cover most private schools. As a result, they argue, the programs will cater to wealthy and middle-class students, further entrench educational inequities and lead to worse outcomes on a statewide basis.

“This is the crack in the wall,” said John Arthur, the 2021 Utah Teacher of the Year. “After it’s cracked, the splinters will come. Once people wrap their head around the idea of public money going to private schools and become more comfortable with it, then the amount of money taken will grow.”

Both sides have noticed the number of proposals under consideration this year exceeds prior years.

“It’s happening across the nation, where parents — some are waking up and some are getting the courage to speaking out about their child’s educational journey,” Wade Moore, a bishop at a non-denominational Christian Faith Center said at a rally in Topeka. “We have new parents, millennial parents. They were born in choice. They’ve always had a choice in everything, except education.”

World champion says Rubik’s Cube and violin go hand in hand

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — A University of Michigan student is one of the world’s foremost “speedcubers,” a person capable of quickly solving a Rubik’s Cube. He also is an accomplished violinist.

Stanley Chapel says the two fields go hand in hand.

Not only does Chapel say he has equal interest in both, but the 21-year-old says the violin has aided in his speedcubing success.

“Repetition, breaking things down into their smallest fundamental elements, all of these different things that we use to improve at an instrument, and being able to take these into the world of cubing has certainly been a huge help to my progression,” said Chapel, a junior majoring in violin performance at the university’s school of music, theater and dance.

Chapel, who grew up in Ann Arbor not far from the Michigan campus, solved his first 3x3 Rubik’s Cube as a 14-year-old. Five weeks later, Chapel entered his first competition, solving the cube in an average of 22 seconds.

Fast-forward a year to 2017 in Paris, with Chapel placing fifth in both the 4x4 blindfolded and 5x5 blindfolded categories at the World Cube Association World Championship.

At the 2019 world championship in Melbourne, Australia, the recent high school graduate won both events.

Factoring in the time it takes for him to review the cube before placing the blindfold over his eyes, Chapel can solve one in around 17 seconds.

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"The deeper I go into the realm of cubing technique, the more I find interest in pushing the boundaries of what's possible there," he said.

Chapel has certain inherent abilities: He is capable of remembering and applying thousands of algorithms to solve a Rubik's Cube and performing one of Johann Sebastian Bach's violin sonatas from memory.

But he also spends hours upon hours honing his craft, including doing regular hand stretches that help Chapel avoid the kinds of aches and pains that come with the frequent and frenetic turning of the cube's sides.

Chapel says years of playing the violin also has contributed to him having "very, very fine motor control already built up."

Later this year, Chapel intends to defend his world titles in South Korea. Since the 2021 event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chapel is the reigning champion in both heading into the 2023 event in Seoul.

Once he's done with school, though, Chapel isn't sure how speedcubing fits into his future plans.

"I guess it's cool to know that nobody is able to do this," he said. "But, at the same time, giving myself a little bit of a reality check, it's like, 'How much does that actually matter?'"

"It's not going to pay the bills when I'm older," Chapel said, laughing.

Today in History: JAN 28, Space Shuttle Challenger explodes

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Jan. 28, the 28th day of 2023. There are 337 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 28, 1973, a cease-fire officially went into effect in the Vietnam War, a day after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords by the United States, North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

On this date:

In 1547, England's King Henry VIII died; he was succeeded by his 9-year-old son, Edward VI.

In 1813, the novel "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen was first published anonymously in London.

In 1915, the United States Coast Guard was created as President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill merging the Life-Saving Service and Revenue Cutter Service.

In 1916, Louis D. Brandeis was nominated by President Woodrow Wilson to the Supreme Court; Brandeis became the court's first Jewish member.

In 1922, 98 people were killed when the roof of the Knickerbocker Theatre in Washington, D.C., collapsed under the weight of nearly two feet of snow.

In 1945, during World War II, Allied supplies began reaching China over the newly reopened Burma Road.

In 1956, Elvis Presley made his first national TV appearance on "Stage Show," a CBS program hosted by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey.

In 1980, six U.S. diplomats who had avoided being taken hostage at their embassy in Tehran flew out of Iran with the help of Canadian diplomats.

In 1982, Italian anti-terrorism forces rescued U.S. Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier, 42 days after he had been kidnapped by the Red Brigades.

In 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds after liftoff from Cape Canaveral, killing all seven crew members, including schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe.

In 2011, chaos engulfed Egypt as protesters seized the streets of Cairo, battling police, burning down the ruling party's headquarters and defying a military curfew.

In 2013, Lynyrd Skynyrd keyboard player Billy Powell, who survived the 1977 plane crash that killed three band members, died in Orange Park, Fla., at age 56.

Ten years ago: Side by side, leading Democratic and Republican senators pledged to propel far-reaching immigration legislation through the Senate by summer, providing a possible path to citizenship for an estimated 11 million people in the U.S. illegally. (Although the Senate did pass such a measure, it has

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encountered opposition from House Republicans who insisted on a more limited approach.) Backed by French helicopters and paratroopers, Malian soldiers entered the fabled city of Timbuktu after al-Qaida-linked militants who'd ruled the outpost by fear for nearly 10 months fled into the desert.

Five years ago: Bruno Mars won all six Grammy awards for which he was nominated, including album of the year for "24K Magic;" the leading nominee, Jay-Z, walked away empty-handed. Roger Federer won his 20th Grand Slam singles title, defeating Marin Cilic in the Australian Open final. Protesters gathered across Russia to support the call from opposition leader Alexei Navalny to boycott the March presidential election; Navalny himself was arrested while walking to the Moscow demonstration.

One year ago: A 50-year-old bridge collapsed in Pittsburgh, requiring rescuers to rappel down a ravine and form a human chain to reach some occupants of a municipal bus that plummeted along with the span; there were no fatalities, but at least four people were taken to hospitals. President Joe Biden, on a previously-planned trip to Pittsburgh to tout a \$1 trillion infrastructure law he had signed, visited the site of the bridge collapse hours later and vowed to fix the nation's aging bridges. Police in the Canadian capital called in reinforcements as trucks and cars began rolling into downtown Ottawa, part of a protest by a group demanding an end to vaccine mandates and COVID-19 restrictions.

Today's birthdays: Actor Nicholas Pryor is 88. Actor Alan Alda is 87. Actor Susan Howard is 81. Actor Marthe (cq) Keller is 78. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., is 76. Actor-singer Barbi Benton is 73. Evangelical pastor Rick Warren is 69. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy (sahr-koh-ZEE') is 68. Actor Harley Jane Kozak is 66. Movie director Frank Darabont is 64. Rock musician Dave Sharp is 64. Rock singer Sam Phillips is 61. Rock musician Dan Spitz is 60. Gospel singer Marvin Sapp is 56. Singer Sarah McLachlan is 55. Rapper Rakim is 55. DJ Muggs (Cypress Hill) is 55. Actor Kathryn Morris is 54. Humorist Mo Rocca is 54. Rock/soul musician Jeremy Ruzumna (Fitz and the Tantrums) is 53. R&B singer Anthony Hamilton is 52. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett is 51. Singer Monifah is 51. Actor Gillian Vigman is 51. Retired MLB All-Star Jermaine Dye is 49. Actor Terri Conn is 48. Singer Joey Fatone Jr. ('N Sync) is 46. Rapper Rick Ross is 46. Actor Rosamund Pike is 44. Actor Angelique Cabral is 44. Singer Nick Carter (Backstreet Boys) is 43. Actor Vinny Chhibber is 43. Actor Elijah Wood is 42. Rapper J. Cole is 38. Actor Alexandra Krosney is 35. Actor Yuri Sardarov is 35. Actor Ariel Winter is 25.