

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar Monday, Feb. 13

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff noodles, mixed vegetables, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Mini waffles.
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.
1 p.m.: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center.
The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 14

Senior Menu: Valentine Dinner: Baked pork chop, baked potato with sour cream, baby glazed carrots, cheesecake with strawberry glaze, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Egg and cheese wrap.
School Lunch: Meatballs, tiny whole potatoes.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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



Boys Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli (C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity)
United Methodist Church: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Junior High Boys Basketball games at Roncalli Elementary Gym, 4 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 15

Senior Menu: Teriyaki chicken, rice pilaf, broccoli, pineapple strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.
School Lunch: Chicken strips, tater tots.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
United Methodist Church: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
2023 Annual Hunger Banquet, 6:30 PM, SEAS Church

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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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

Conway said that President Joe Biden's age will not be a hindrance in 2024, breaking with the prevailing wisdom among both sides of the aisle.

- The Philippines has accused a China Coast Guard ship of pointing a "military grade" laser light at some of its crew and temporarily blinding them in the disputed South China Sea.
- Flights have been grounded, and more than 45,000 homes in New Zealand have lost power after Cyclone Gabrielle swept through parts of the country. A state of emergency has been declared as the cyclone nears the North Island.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia might force U.S. citizens living in the country to fight for them in Ukraine, the U.S. embassy in Moscow warned, asking its citizens to leave Russia "immediately." President of the Russian republic of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov said his top general in Ukraine has been poisoned after handling an envelope.

U.S. Military Takes Down Fourth Unidentified Flying Object

The U.S. shot down another unidentified flying object over Lake Huron near the Canadian border in the fourth such incident in just over a week. The Pentagon said that the object—an "octagonal structure"—was traveling at 20,000 feet, posing a threat to commercial air traffic. The Chinese spy balloon (spotted on February 4) traveled at an altitude well above civilian air traffic.

President Joe Biden ordered to take down an object over Canada's Yukon region on Saturday "out of an abundance of caution" and another over northern Alaska on Friday. Amid these reports, China said it had spotted a UFO near the eastern Shandong Province and was prepared to shoot it down. The series of incidents has raised security concerns not just at home but also in other countries. U.K. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the "development is another sign of how the global threat picture is changing for the worse."

What happens now? Currently, reports do not suggest any connection to the Chinese spy balloon and U.S. officials have not publicly cast blame on China or any other country. The U.S. and Canada are working to recover the debris from the objects. Air Force General Glen VanHerck—overseeing North American airspace—said that he has not ruled out any explanation about the origin of these unidentified objects, including extraterrestrial life. "I'll let the intel community and the counterintelligence community figure that out," he said.

• High-altitude U.S. balloons "illegally overflew" China's airspace "more than ten times" in the past year, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Read about the U.S.-China balloon saga below.

• An injured Patrick Mahomes led the Kansas City Chiefs to a Super Bowl LVII victory — their second title in four years — against Philadelphia Eagles, 38-35. And, Rihanna stunned the crowd with her halftime performance and a surprise: She's pregnant with her second child.

• Donald Trump's former political consultant Kellyanne

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

February 13, 2023 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of January 9, 2023 board meeting, February 1, 2023 special board meeting, and February 8, 2023 special board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of January 2023 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of January 2023 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of January 2023 School Lunch Report.
5. Approval of January 2023 School Transportation Report.
6. Approve open enrollment #23-18 with special circumstances.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Program Overview Presentation
 - a. Science...K. Gonsoir, T. Kurth, L. Hawkins
 - b. English/Language Arts, Reading...S. Hanten, D. Kurtz, R. Pederson, R. Long-Buechler
3. Approve 2023-2024 school calendar.
4. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Consider bids for elementary roofing repairs.
2. Consider bids for school bus purchase.
3. Discuss and consider architectural proposals for Health Science Lab Renovation and 1969 Gym Renovation.
4. Set 2023 Driver's Education Fee and issue Driver's Education Instructor Agreements.
5. Approve hiring Caitlyn Fischbach as 1st Grade Teacher for the 2023-2024 school year.

ADJOURN

GDILIVE.COM

Boys Basketball Action at Aberdeen Roncalli
Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023

Livestreaming begins with Boys JV at 6 p.m.
Sponsored by Coach Kyle and Tyhe Gerlach

Varsity to follow 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

Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting



\$5 ticket to watch can be purchased at GDILIVE.COM.

GDI Subscribers can watch for free

GDILIVE.COM

Basketball Double Header at Britton-Hecla
Friday, Feb. 17, 2023

Livestreaming begins at 5 p.m. for both JV Games
Boys Game sponsored by Grandpa
Girls Game sponsored by Rich & Tami Zimney

Varsity to follow 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
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
Spanier Harvesting & Trucking
Bahr Spray Foam
Thunder Seed with John Wheeting



Shane Clark will be doing the play-by-play of the girls games!

\$5 ticket to watch can be purchased at GDILIVE.COM.
GDI Subscribers can watch for free

GDILIVE.COM

Boys Basketball Action hosting Florence-Henry
Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023

Livestreaming begins at 11 a.m.
JH and JV games sponsored by
GDI Living Heart Fitness Center

Varsity to follow 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

Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting



\$5 ticket to watch can be purchased at GDILIVE.COM.

GDI Subscribers can watch for free

You're Invited!

RESET

women's conference

ROSE HILL CHURCH

12099 ROSE HILL RD, LANGFORD SD

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2023

9:30 AM - 2:00 PM

*Women and girls of all generations
are welcome to enjoy a day to reset.*

GUEST SPEAKERS

**PASTORS LISA PALMER
AND MICAH LOMBARDI, A
MOTHER-DAUGHTER TEAM**



REGISTER ONLINE

**THIS IS A FREE EVENT.
REGISTER BY SCANNING
THE QR CODE OR AT
ROSEHILLEFC.COM**

CHILDCARE WILL BE AVAILABLE

"Hidden in Plain Sight"

If I asked you to name a chronic disease, you would probably think of conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, or dementia. The odds are, one of the most common chronic diseases would never cross your mind.

World wide, this condition affects over 3 billion people, and causes significant physical and emotional suffering. Annually it costs the American economy upwards of 45 billion dollars in productivity. Our children miss nearly 35 million hours of school. Our emergency rooms field nearly 2 million visits.

So what is it?

Dental disease.

Those of us whose experiences with dental disease have been limited to the occasional cavity, or perhaps wearing braces for a year or two, may be tempted to dismiss it as an inconvenience or annoyance, not a threat. No doubt this impression is reinforced by the artificial distinction the insurance industry draws between our teeth and our bodies.

However, an unhealthy mouth can lead to what we all understand to be a serious medical illness: pneumonia, bloodstream infections, and malnutrition, to name a few. It is linked to heart disease and preterm birth. It can worsen other underlying diseases, such as diabetes. And many conditions, or their treatments, can in turn worsen oral health.

In addition to the physical suffering, dental disease can cause significant social consequences. How often do we say, without even thinking, "They have a nice smile?" Consciously or not, we assess people by their teeth. Those with visible dental disease are acutely aware of this judgement. I almost never saw my wonderful mother in law with a full smile on her face, no matter how happy she was. She was just too aware of her discolored and crooked front teeth. The consequences are more severe for many others: lost job or educational opportunities, lost social standing, relationships that don't move forward. Dental diseases can affect not just the appearance but the function of the mouth, impacting speech and communication, and even the fundamental daily activity of eating.

Preventing dental disease begins very early in life, and continues indefinitely. Most people know brushing, flossing, and seeing a dentist regularly are important. They may know that sugar and tobacco are bad for their teeth, and athletes probably know they should wear mouth guards. Many people do not know that cavities are contagious: the bacteria that contributes is often spread from person to person, especially parent to child. They may not know that their sports drink or diet soda is acidic enough to damage the enamel protecting their teeth.

A healthy mouth is fundamental to health. When was your last trip to the dentist?

Debra Johnston, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® based on science, built on trust, at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show, streaming live on Facebook and on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Based on Science, Built on Trust



Debra Johnston, M.D.

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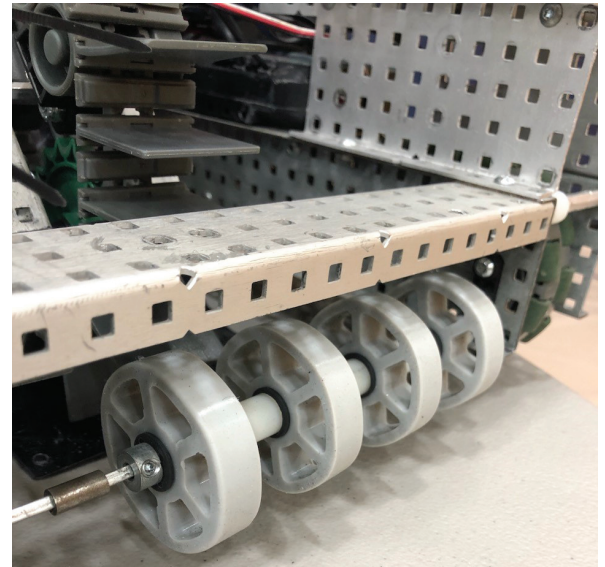
GHS Robotics

Gear Heads made it to quarterfinals; G-Force placed sixth at SD School of Mines VRC Robot Rumble

Groton Robotics sent two teams down to Rapid City on Saturday, February 11th to compete in the SD School of Mines VRC Robot Rumble: Gear Heads 9050B- Seniors Ethan Clark & Jack Dinger, G-Force 9050A- 6th grade, Grant Cleveland & Connor Kroll. They competed against 25 teams from 7 towns: Omaha, NE(2), Mitchell, SD(4), Harrisburg, SD(4), Groton, SD(2), Windsor, CO(6), Spearfish, SD(2), Box Elder, SD(5).

The competition started off with 38 qualifying matches, each team competing 7 times. At the end of 38 qualifying matches Gear Heads 9050B was ranked 3rd and G-Force 9050A 6th.

Gear Head Seniors-Ethan and Jack, worked on the robot's intake by adding flex wheels (see picture) to the bottom of their giving 9050B the ability to pick up disks easier. The autonomous was reprogrammed telling the robot to turn a roller instead of pushing a disk as rollers have more points. The vision sensor, intended to sense the goal and guide the disk to the basket when shot out by the robot, is still a work in progress. 9050B was able to aim and score points a couple times by shooting disks into the basket (5 points each), but mostly worked on owning rollers by turning to their alliance color(10 points each 'owned' roller). They lost in the quarterfinals with a very close score of 48-49! Great job Ethan and Jack!



Soft 'intake' wheels on 9050B, Jack and Ethans robot. Makes it easier to roll a disk up and shoot it out. (Courtesy

Photo)



Grant Cleveland and Connor Kroll making some final adjustments to their robot. (Courtesy Photo)

G-Force 6th graders-Connor and Grant added two end game expansion arms (see picture) to their robot and successfully launched them at the end of a match scoring points for each tile they touched! They also changed a motor on 9050A's roller giving it more power to turn and slowed down the autonomous for more control during the 15-second autonomous period at the beginning of every match. G-Force also ended their day in the quarterfinals with a score of 35-88. An amazing feat as a 6th grade team to be in 6th place out of 25 teams! Keep up the good work Connor and Grant!

Tournament champions were from Harrisburg and Mitchell. Congratulations to all the robotist who participated!

Groton Robotics will be headed back out to Rapid City on Saturday, March 4th for the South Dakota State Vex Tournament at Douglas High School in Box Elder, SD.

For more information check out the vex VRC robotics website, download the VEX via app and follow Groton Tiger Robotics on Facebook.

Thanks to all who support Groton Robotics!

Submitted by Groton Robotics

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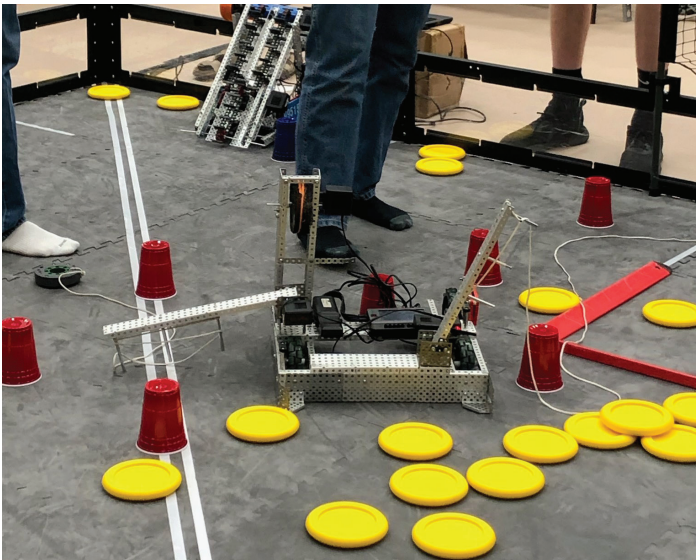
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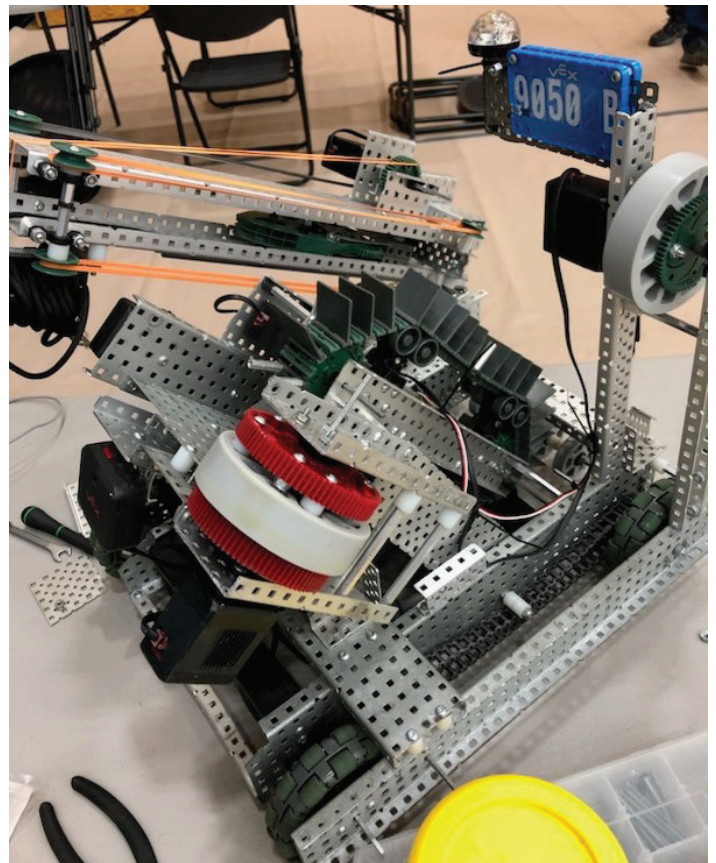
Gear Heads Jack Dinger and Ethan Clark at the queuing table before a match. (Courtesy Photo)



Groton teams hanging out at the queuing table before a match. (Courtesy Photo)



9050A (Connor and Grant's) Successful expansion arms. Each cup place equals a point for that match. (Courtesy Photo)



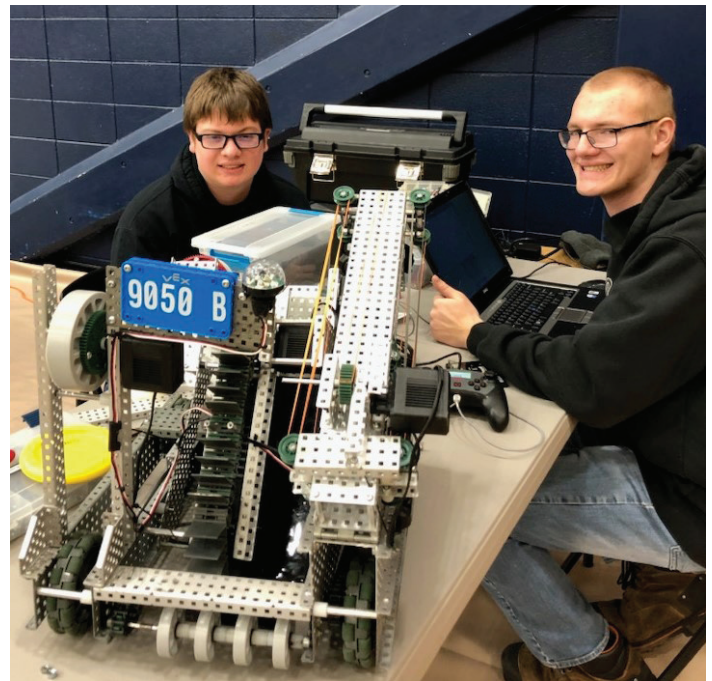
9050B resting between matches. (Courtesy Photo)

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G-Force Connor Kroll and Grant Cleveland.
(Courtesy Photo)



Jackson Dinger and Ethan Clark between matches. (Courtesy Photo)



G-Force and Gear Heads waiting for a match to start. (Courtesy Photo)



Jack and Ethan unpacking for the day. (Courtesy Photo)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Competing Republican views about 'election integrity' yield dozens of bills

More than 40 election-related measures have been filed so far

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 12, 2023 7:00 AM

Political rhetoric about election integrity has translated into a cascade of election-related bills from feuding factions of South Dakota's Republican Party.

Republican legislative leaders announced a package of election-related bills they want to adopt during this year's 38-day legislative session in Pierre, which began last month and continues until March. Meanwhile, a subset of Republican lawmakers, many of them associated with the South Dakota Freedom Caucus, has its own set of bills.

All told, more than 40 election-related bills have been filed so far.

Republican leadership bills

Republican leaders call their bill package "Stronger and Safer for 2024." House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Pierre, said it's part of the party's commitment to ensuring fair and honest elections.

"We promised the voters we'd look under every rock to make it better and we have a package of legislation to do just that," Mortenson said in a written statement.

The package includes a bipartisan bill requiring ballot tabulation machines be publicly tested prior to elections (that bill awaits a Senate committee hearing), another establishing a post-election audit process in the state (that bill awaits a Senate vote), and one defining how far poll watchers should stand from the table at which voters announce their name and address (that bill has failed).

Freedom Caucus bills

Other bills are from Republicans associated with the South Dakota Freedom Caucus, which launched in June.

The caucus serves as one of 10 state-level branches of the State Freedom Caucus Network, launched with the help of former President Trump Chief of Staff Mark Meadows. The caucus is led by Rep. Aaron Aylward, R-Harrisburg; Rep. Tony Randolph, R-Rapid City; and Rep. Tina Mulally, R-Rapid City.

Mulally is the prime sponsor of several election-related bills this year, including one requiring written consent to fill out someone else's voter registration (that bill failed), one allowing the Legislature to sue the governor or any other state, county, or local election official for changing election rules or laws (that bill awaits an initial hearing), and another requiring the removal of the dead, the mentally incompetent and active felons from voter rolls each month (that bill awaits a Senate committee hearing).

Mulally said Republican leadership didn't make her aware of the "Stronger and Safer for 2024" package. She doubts the sincerity of the Republican leadership's commitment to election integrity.

"It's difficult for me to believe their announcement is genuine if I don't even know what's going on," Mulally said.

GOP split apparent

The shifting alliances among Republicans were visible when a committee of state representatives gave seven election bills their first hearing recently. Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, opposed some of the bills from Republican leadership.

For example, a bill brought by Mortenson aims to require the secretary of state to determine if a proposed constitutional amendment complies with a single-subject rule (that bill currently awaits a Senate

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committee hearing).

"I'm going to have to vote no," Hansen said, despite the bill passing 12-1 with a Democrat on the committee, Rep. Oren Lesmiester, D-Parade, voting in its favor.

Then, when Freedom Caucus lobbyist Jordan Mason and Rep. John Sjaarda, R-Valley Springs, testified in favor of a bill allowing citizens to request court orders against any official for not enforcing a state election law or rule, Hansen was the lone representative voting in favor of the bill as it was rejected 12-1.

On another bill from Rep. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, to extend rules regarding elder care absentee voting during a general election to all elections, Hansen was again the lone supporter of the bill as it failed 12-1.

One bill associated with the Freedom Caucus found unanimous support. When Mason and Sjaardatestified in favor of a bill to delay the destruction of ballots and poll books from 60 days after an election to 182 days, the bill passed unanimously, 13-0. It also passed unanimously in the full House, 70-0 (that bill awaits a Senate committee hearing).

Other bills

Among other election-related bills, legislation banning ranked-choice voting in the state passed the Senate 31-4 and awaits a House committee hearing.

Legislation failed that would have permitted the display of campaign signage in cities prior to the beginning of absentee voting. Another bill would move the date for a statewide runoff election from 10 weeks to eight weeks after the primary (that bill awaits a Senate committee hearing).

Drop boxes for receiving absentee ballots could only be placed inside a county office, with access limited to office hours, if a bill that passed the full House of Representatives 57-11 passes the Senate and is signed into law by the governor.

The bill also would amend the state's absentee voting laws in 19 different sections, including adding a list of conditions that bar an absentee ballot from being counted (like a felony, registration change to a different state, or mental incompetence), language that would require the counting of absentee ballots be open to poll watchers, and language that "prevents anyone from sending out a pre-filled absentee request form," according to prime sponsor Rep. Kirk Chaffee, R-Whitewood.

One of the votes against the bill came from Rep. Oren Lesmeister, D-Parade. He said some people in rural areas have to drive 80-plus miles to access a drop box at odd hours, and limiting the hours they can access a drop box is an unnecessary hurdle.

The state's handful of Democratic legislators have some election bills of their own this session. One that's already failed sought to permit the use of tribal identification cards when registering to vote.

Some of the election-related bills introduced so far this year in the South Dakota Legislature:

A resolution asking voters at the next general election to amend the state constitution to restrict legislators to term limits of eight total years in each chamber, eliminating the current option of coming back for non-consecutive eight-year periods of service (the bill awaits its first hearing).

A bill introduced at the request of the state Supreme Court chief justice and already delivered to the governor to specify dates and provide more options for the convening of recount boards for primary elections.

A bill to permit the display of campaign signage in municipalities prior to the beginning of absentee voting, which failed.

A bill requiring written consent to fill out someone else's voter registration, which failed.

A bill allowing the Legislature to sue the governor or any other state, county or local election official for changing election laws, which is pending a hearing.

A bill requiring the removal of the dead, the mentally incompetent and active felons from voter rolls each month awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill that would introduce numerous new requirements for removing ineligible voters from the voter rolls awaits its first hearing.

A bill to increase campaign contribution limits has died in the House.

A bill to modify a statewide runoff election to take place eight weeks after a primary rather than 10 has passed the House and awaits a Senate committee hearing.

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A bill to revise the qualifications to be a member of a recount board, including a ban on candidates for the office and relatives of the candidates, awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill to revise the state law allowing the destruction of ballots and poll books from 60 days after an election to 182 days awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill to authorize school boards to modify the length of terms for members from three years to four to allow for holding joint elections awaits a vote in the House.

A bill changing pre-election testing requirements for ballot tabulation machines, including opening the testing to the public, awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill to extend rules regarding elder care absentee voting from general elections to all elections has failed.

A bill to require the secretary of state to determine if a legislatively proposed constitutional amendment complies with the single subject requirement and is not a constitutional revision awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill authorizing any registered voter to request a court order against any official they think has not followed election laws has failed.

A bill to define how far poll watchers should stand from the table at which voters announce their name and address has failed.

A bill placing limits on ballot drop boxes and altering some provisions of absentee voting awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill awaiting its first hearing would allow governor candidates to select their own running mate instead of having the running mate selected at a political convention; the bill would also move the nominating process for the attorney general and secretary of state from political conventions to primary elections.

A bill to require candidates for party precinct committeeman or committeewoman to include an email address and phone number in the written statement submitted to the county auditor awaits a House committee hearing.

A bill to provide a route to recall school board members failed.

A bill requiring the secretary of state to maintain a continuously updated list of election candidates on its website awaits a House committee hearing.

A bill to reform the process of drawing election precinct boundaries and the establishment of polling places failed.

A bill to authorize legislative intervention into certain cases pertaining to election law awaits a House committee hearing.

A bill introducing numerous new requirements for the maintenance and verification of voter registration files is pending its first hearing.

A bill to permit the use of tribal identification cards when registering to vote has failed.

A bill making numerous changes to voter registration is pending a House committee hearing.

A bill to allocate \$313,107 to the Office of the Secretary of State for voter roll maintenance, ballot machines and election security, has been approved by the Joint Appropriations Committee for possible inclusion in the state budget.

A bill to establish post-election audits awaits a Senate vote.

Another bill to require post-election audits is pending a hearing.

A bill to implement stricter residency requirements for the purposes of voter registration awaits a Senate vote.

A bill pending its first hearing would increase the petition signature threshold to place an initiated constitutional amendment on the ballot from 5 to 10 percent of the total votes cast for governor in the last gubernatorial election, with no more than one-35th of the signatures from any one legislative district.

A bill to provide for the public election of State Brand Board members is pending its first hearing.

A bill introduced at the request of the Office of the Attorney General to enhance the penalty for petition circulation perjury is awaiting a House committee hearing.

A resolution that would ask voters in the 2024 general election to do away with contested judicial elections has been withdrawn.

A bill that would make it more difficult to force an election to relocate a county seat awaits a vote in the House.

A resolution failed that would have asked voters to amend the state constitution to require a delay before a proposed initiated constitutional amendment could be proposed again.

A bill clarifying registration and residence requirements for voting at a township meeting awaits a Senate committee hearing.

A bill to remove the option to register to vote by a signed statement when a voter lacks other forms of identification awaits an initial hearing.

A resolution asking the voters at the next general election to make the language within state law and the constitution gender-neutral awaits a House committee hearing.

A bill creating term limits for future public utilities commissioners awaits a vote in the Senate.

A bill that would place new restrictions on absentee voting and outlaw ballot drop boxes awaits an initial hearing.

A bill revising provisions related to residency for voter registration, including a ban on using campgrounds or businesses as an address (such as a mail-forwarding service for full-time RVers) awaits an initial hearing.

A bill providing a penalty for the expenditure of public funds to influence the outcome of an election awaits a Senate vote.

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.

Lawmakers heap competing tax cut bills on Appropriations Committee

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 11, 2023 7:00 AM

The House Taxation Committee wasn't willing to kill two tax cut bills during its Thursday morning meeting. Instead, the committee was forced to send the two bills to House Appropriations.

The House Appropriations Committee will wrestle with at least six bills proposing various tax cuts for South Dakotans in the coming weeks.

"I'm sure House Appropriations appreciates your work," House Taxation Chairman Kirk Chaffee, R-Whitewood, sarcastically told legislators.

The 2023 legislative session has been flooded with tax cut bills — with over a dozen introduced, three of which are major tax cuts worth a combined \$360 million. And while legislators expressed a thirst for such cuts earlier this session, some are starting to feel like they're drowning.

Rep. Oren Lesmeister, D-Parade, requested the committee table his second tax cut bill shortly after his first was passed Thursday, because of the "pain and agony" the committee was in.

While there's a buffet of tax cuts to pick from, House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Pierre, said the Legislature will be "planful and deliberate" on which cut South Dakotans will see affect their bank accounts this year.

"They are for tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, and we have an obligation to make sure they're sustainable for decades into the future," Mortenson said. "We don't want to end up in a situation where we cut taxes only to raise them down the road."

Why cut taxes now?

The rush to cut taxes stems from Gov. Kristi Noem's reelection campaign promise to eliminate the food sales tax in South Dakota.

Noem proposed what she called the "largest tax cut in South Dakota history" in her December budget address, justified by a booming economy, large reserves, surging tax revenue and millions in available one-time funds.

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The state has had “extraordinary revenue growth” over the last three years, Mortenson said.

“Two years ago, we thought it was a federal-government-induced blip. Last year, we thought it was just a one-time thing, so we didn’t cut taxes last year either,” Mortenson said. “This year, there’s more of a sense that this is ongoing revenue growth and sustainable in the future.”

The food sales tax repeal bill, HB 1075, cleared its first legislative hurdle in the Taxation Committee after lengthy debate last week.

State Finance Commissioner Jim Terwilliger told the committee that even with the \$102 million tax cut there is another \$280 million in revenue to spend. Revenue is \$145 million higher than projected — or 13% higher — for the first six months of the fiscal year.

The Legislative Research Council has since changed the estimated tax savings to be \$120 million from the elimination of the food sales tax.

With that anticipated revenue, “everyone wants to take a stab at cutting something, since the opportunity is finally here,” Lesmeister said.

What bills have been introduced?

The reason there are so many bills introduced this year is because there are “a lot of ideas” on how to cut taxes, Mortenson said.

“Our job in the Legislature is to vet them on their policy merits and how they work mechanically. That’s done in the House Taxation Committee — they look at the policy, if it’s a workable tax cut. Then it’s sent to the Appropriations Committee, where they look at whether tax cuts are sustainable years into the future,” Mortenson said.

Lesmeister introduced two bills, HB 1095 and HB 1096, that would only cut the food sales tax to 2.5% and 3.5%, respectively. Food is currently taxed at the standard state rate of 4.5%, plus any applicable local taxes.

While the Democratic Party hopes to eliminate the state food sales tax, Lesmeister said he wanted to provide bills that would offer a compromise. Only HB 1095 is headed to Appropriations.

Another proposal would exempt the first \$100,000 of valuation on owner-occupied dwellings. The proposal would save the average homeowner an estimated \$350 a year on property taxes.

Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, said his constituents overwhelmingly support property tax relief. In the Republican legislative press conference last week, Crabtree told reporters he favors that bill, in part because out-of-staters passing through South Dakota would share the benefits of a sales tax reduction.

“When you look at the owner-occupied property tax reduction, the only people who get the tax reduction are South Dakotans,” Crabtree told South Dakota Searchlight. “With the grocery tax and sales tax, that’s not true.”

But Noem told South Dakota Public Broadcasting she’d rather see a tax cut broadly applied to consumers.

“I just don’t understand why they only want to help certain people and not the rest of the families in the state,” Noem told SDPB. “That only helps the wealthier individuals that own property in the state.”

The biggest tax cut proposed this season, though, was introduced by Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls.

His proposal would reduce the state sales and use tax by half a percentage point – on everything, not just food – and cut \$168 million in taxes. The state tax rate would return to what it was before 2016 when a half-percentage tax was implemented to support raising teacher salaries in the state (despite that legislation, South Dakota currently ranks 50th in average teacher pay).

Karr told the Taxation Committee last week there was a plan in place to reduce the sales tax incrementally as the state saw more remote, online sales. But that has not happened since the increase was implemented.

Other tax cut bills introduced this year include one that would exempt feminine hygiene products from sales taxes and one that would exempt funeral and burial services from the state gross receipts tax. Two empty bills, commonly known as “vehicle bills” that could be filled later with tax cut language, have been introduced in the Senate and House.

Mortenson, who introduced the vehicle bill in the House, said the House majority hasn’t decided which

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tax cut proposal to support yet, and there's a chance more than one could pass.

HB 1011, which cuts unemployment insurance employer contributions by 0.5%, was one of the first bills to be signed into law by the governor. The bill delivers an \$18 million tax cut for South Dakota businesses.

What's next?

The tax cut bills referred by the House Taxation Committee will be considered in the House Appropriations Committee in the coming weeks.

Appropriations will set revenue estimates for the state on Feb. 14 and 15, which will be the basis for budget bills, said Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls and vice chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

"That's what everyone is holding their breath for before they latch onto any one thing," Lesmeister said.

But not everyone supports tax cuts.

The South Dakota Retailers Association is adamant that any sales tax cuts could lead to efforts to replace the lost revenue with income taxes. And lobbyists for school organizations believe tax cuts that don't ensure replacement funds for education would spell trouble for public schools, which are already battling inflation and teacher shortages.

The House will have until Feb. 22, or crossover day, to pass any of the tax cut bills.

This is the first time in recent memory that the Legislature has competing bills with tax cuts in the hundreds of millions of dollars, Venhuizen said. As House Appropriations begins discussion on the bills, he said the Republican caucus will decide what the overall approach will be.

"We need to move in a direction that is going to have the support of the whole House. Our committee is doing its work and the caucus is doing its work as well so we're all headed in the right direction," Venhuizen said. "We're going to pick the path with the best policy and the most support and move forward. We know where the governor stands. Our goal is to get everybody on the same page by the end of session."

After the bill, or bills, pass onto the Senate, that chamber will have the rest of session to deal with the tax cut issue. Crabtree said the discussion between the House and Senate will continue through the rest of session.

"If there can be a tax cut, what are the priorities we need to invest in?" Crabtree said. "Most of those appropriators have been looking at where we've been underinvesting."

If nothing gets passed this session, a constitutional amendment and an initiated measure eliminating the food sales tax could appear on the ballot in 2024.

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

COMMENTARY

Salivating over a surplus: Tax cut proposals are enticing, but shortsighted

DANA HESS

Most national news about the economy seems to be filled with worries about whether or not the nation is heading for a recession. In South Dakota, we're worried about what to do with this avalanche of tax revenue.

In this state, tax revenue projections are traditionally conservative. Lately, they have also been wildly inaccurate.

In her budget address to the Legislature, Gov. Kristi Noem said general fund tax collections were \$146 million ahead of legislative projections. She said that total was likely to grow to \$203 million by the end of the fiscal year 2023. Add that to the federal COVID money that hasn't been spent yet, and you're talking about some serious money.

That's quite a haul in a small state like South Dakota, where a million dollars is still considered big money.

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This windfall has put the Legislature in an odd position. Usually during a legislative session, lawmakers have a few million dollars to throw around as most of the budget is spoken for by funding education, nursing homes, Medicaid and state employee salaries.

Other South Dakota governors would have loved to have faced the problem of what to do with surplus tax revenue. The first time Gov. Bill Janklow left office, he had to be jealous of the funding cushion enjoyed by Gov. George Mickelson as he raked in cash from the newly instituted video lottery. Gov. Dennis Daugaard, who famously had to cut state funding during tough times, must be wondering, as many other South Dakotans are, about the sustainability of large tax cuts.

For the most part, the state's budget will be decided by the Republican super majorities in the House and Senate. This surplus of money creates a real problem for Republicans. They're salivating over the prospect of using the surplus as a reason to cut taxes. They're also conservative enough to realize that if the tax cuts aren't sustainable, in the future they could be faced with the ugly prospect of raising taxes. It's not exactly Sophie's Choice, but it is a dilemma.

Just as they face a surplus of funding, Republicans have a surplus of tax cut plans from which to choose. The most famous of those may be Noem's proposal to cut the state sales tax on food. Estimates value this as a \$120 million tax cut.

After years of repeating the usual talking points opposing a sales tax cut on food — it will lead to an income tax, revenue increases may not be sustainable — Noem was suddenly, during her re-election campaign, a believer.

Cutting the tax on food isn't the only sales tax reduction being considered. Rep. Chris Karr, a Republican from Sioux Falls, is the prime sponsor of a bill that would lower the state sales tax from 4.5% to 4%. This is estimated to be a \$170 million tax cut.

Also under consideration is a property tax reduction bill sponsored by Rep. Trish Ladner, a Hot Springs Republican. This would exempt the first \$100,000 of valuation on owner-occupied dwellings. This clocks in as an estimated \$70 million to \$80 million tax cut, saving homeowners approximately \$350 per year. Since property taxes are largely meant for school funding, the state would supply the money to backfill those budgets so that school districts don't lose any money.

Of those tax cut plans, the property tax cut seems the diciest as it depends on the state to provide the funding every year. State funding for education is usually a sticking point in the budget, anyway. It's hard to imagine it would bring much relief to school officials if they needed to rely on the state to provide an extra \$80 million every year.

If lawmakers can be convinced that revenues are going to continue to be there to sustain a tax cut, one of the current tax cut plans is likely to be approved at the end of the legislative session. As pleasant as this may be to contemplate, any tax cut is short-sighted.

There is plenty that legislators can do with this windfall — get full funding for nursing homes and Medicaid, give a bigger raise to state employees and give a much needed boost to teacher salaries. Instead of giving in to their first instinct to cut taxes, Republican lawmakers and the governor should allow these surplus tax dollars to fulfill their best destiny by spending them on the needs of South Dakota.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Advocacy groups ask FTC to expand Biden administration efforts to rein in junk fees

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - FEBRUARY 11, 2023 1:06 PM

President Joe Biden devoted 19 sentences of his State of the Union speech to "junk fees," which includes credit card late fees, service fees for concert tickets and airplane seating preferences that he said strain families' budgets. Biden did not mention the numerous and opaque fees faced by prisoners and their families every day. But several think tanks and advocacy organizations want the federal government to

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tackle them.

The groups sent a letter on Feb. 8 to the Federal Trade Commission to let the agency know that prisoners and their families also need financial relief. The FTC announced in October that it was considering a rule to end many of the “unnecessary, unavoidable, or surprise charges,” which the agency said are cost-free to companies and target consumers who have no way to avoid them.

The Prison Policy Initiative, a criminal justice policy think tank, and the National Consumer Law Center, along with 27 other organizations, including the Center for Responsible Lending, and Southern Poverty Law Center, signed the letter. It explained that incarcerated people are often hit with fees for phone calls and messaging services, electronic monitoring and post-arrest diversion programs.

Prepaid debit cards given to people leaving a correctional facility with money they earned in prison or received from family also include a range of fees, including for balance inquiries and for not using the correct bank for a transaction — despite card companies rarely providing lists of banks, according to the Prison Policy Initiative

“These excessive fees bear all of the hallmarks of an unfair act or practice under the Commission’s enforcement authority,” the organizations wrote. “They cause substantial harm because they constitute high sums for people least able to afford them. They cannot reasonably be avoided because consumers are captive to private companies awarded exclusive contracts.”

These companies also benefit from monopoly contracts and provide little to no added value for consumers, the groups added.

Their language reflects that used by Biden during his State of the Union speech when he pushed for the passage of the Junk Fee Prevention Act. The administration has been targeting junk fees since last year. In September, Biden called on federal agencies to address the issue of hidden fees or junk fees, an issue he said should help relieve families’ budgets.

“Look, junk fees may not matter to the very wealthy, but they matter to most other folks in homes like the one I grew up in, like many of you did. They add up to hundreds of dollars a month. They make it harder for you to pay your bills or afford that family trip,” he said in his speech.

The president told Congress to focus on regulating consumers’ entertainment ticket fees, airline fees, phone, internet, and television fees for switching providers, and resort fees and destination fees that hotel guests only see at the end of their reservation process.

Several agencies have already taken steps to alleviate the fees, including:

In October, the Department of Transportation proposed a rule to require airlines to clearly disclose fees, including fees for family members to sit with young children, when the consumer sees schedule and fare information.

Over the summer, the department encouraged airlines not to charge parents for seating their child next to them during a flight.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau proposed a rule this month to lower late fees from credit card companies.

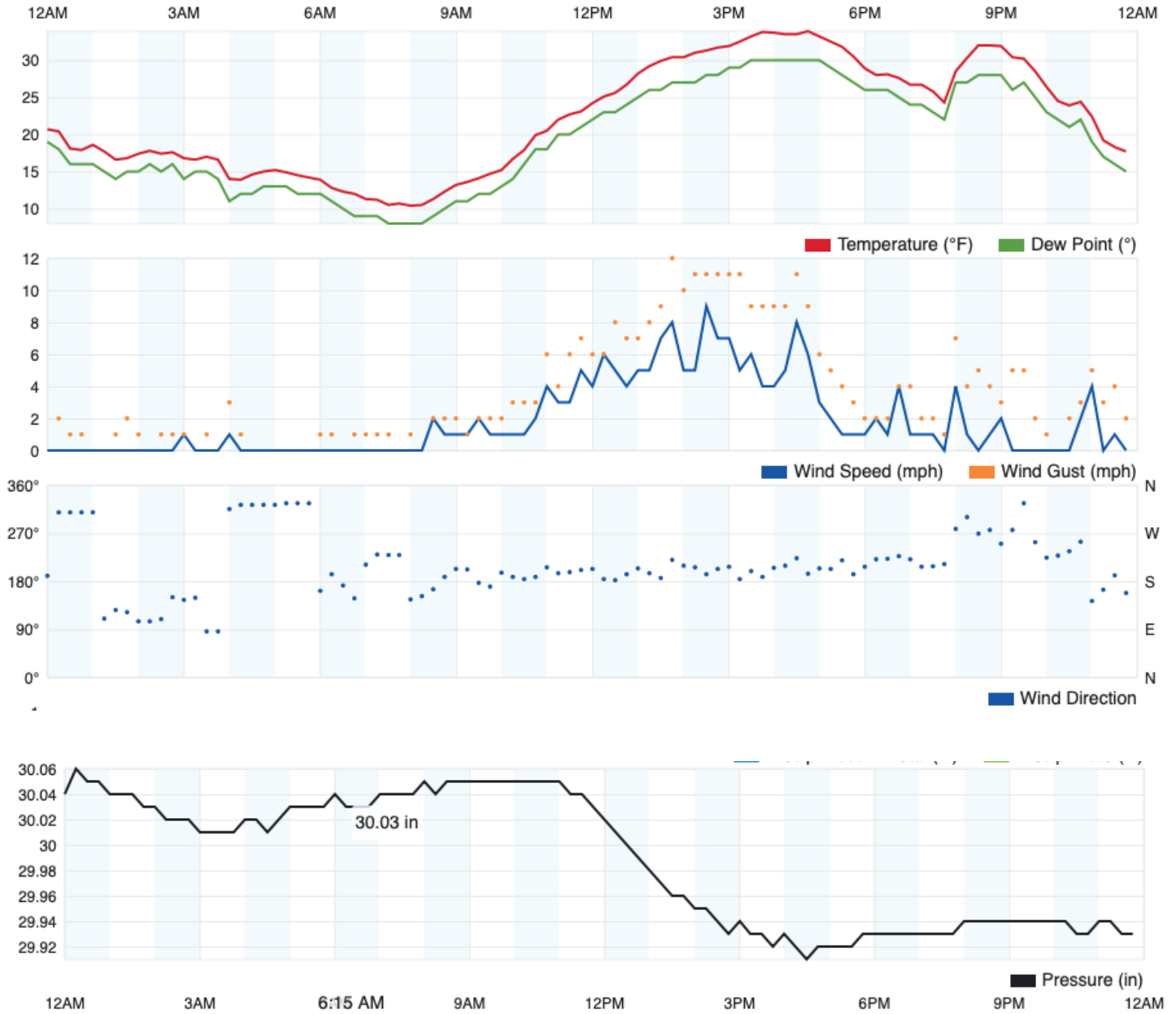
The Federal Communications Commission has rules going into effect in 2024 to adopt labels that consumers can check out early in the process of shopping for broadband providers so that they can comparison shop for a better price.

Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
						
Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Wintry Mix Likely and Breezy	Rain/Snow Likely and Patchy Blowing Snow	Patchy Blowing Snow and Windy then Partly Sunny and Blustery	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 42 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 36 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 14 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 13 °F



Winter Storm System Tue - Wed

February 13, 2023
4:17 AM

Key Messages

- Potential for travel impacts is increasing
- **Snow totals remain uncertain**, but the highest potential for 2 inches or more is along and east of the James River Valley Tue evening into Wed AM
- **Winds of 35 to 55+ mph are expected** to develop late Tue afternoon and continue into Wed AM.
- Significant visibility reductions possible when and where strong winds overlap with falling snow

NEW

Important Updates

- A **Winter Storm Watch for blizzard conditions has been issued** for all of northeastern SD and west central MN for Tue evening into Wed AM.

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Monday Afternoon

Latest Watch/Warning/Advisory Headlines

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Feb 13, 2023 3:53 AM CST



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The combination of strong winds, mixed precipitation, accumulating snow and blowing snow with potentially significant visibility reductions may lead to travel impacts Tuesday into Wednesday. Uncertainty remains however, so stay tuned for updates.

Broton Daily Independent

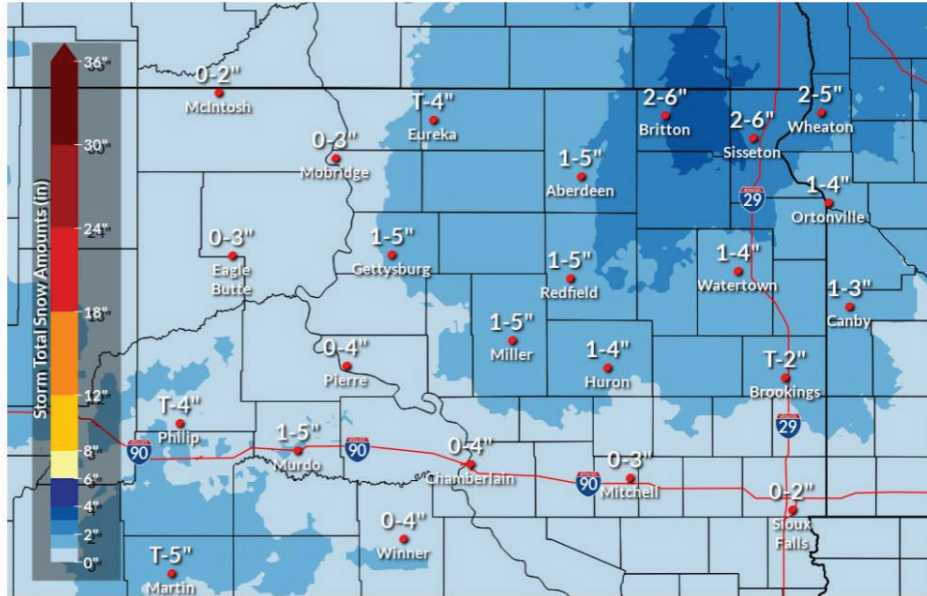
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Accumulating Snow Potential

February 13, 2023
4:27 AM

*** Approximate Snowfall Forecast from Noon Tue to Noon Wed ***



What/When

Precipitation will transition from rain to snow from west to east Tuesday afternoon and evening. Most snow accumulations will occur Tuesday night, before coming to an end Wednesday morning.

Impacts

Travel may be impacted by wintry precipitation and blowing snow.

Uncertainty

Models currently disagree about how much snow will accumulate across the region, thus the relatively high snowfall ranges depicted on the map to the left.

Stay tuned for updates.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Mixed Precipitation Potential

February 13, 2023
4:29 AM

Precipitation type timing and chances

	Weather Forecast										
	2/14 Tue						2/15 Wed				
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm
Aberdeen	20%	20%	70%	70%	70%	70%	50%	50%	15%	15%	
Britton	25%	25%	80%	80%	85%	85%	60%	60%	20%	20%	
Eagle Butte			35%	35%	45%	45%	20%	20%			
Eureka			40%	40%	55%	55%	30%	30%			
Gettysburg			40%	40%	55%	55%	35%	35%			
Kennebec			40%	40%	50%	50%	30%	30%			
McIntosh			40%	40%	35%	35%	15%	15%			
Milbank	45%	45%	95%	95%	90%	90%	60%	60%	25%	25%	
Miller	15%	15%	60%	60%	70%	70%	45%	45%	15%	15%	
Mobridge			45%	45%	45%	45%	25%	25%			
Murdo			35%	35%	55%	55%	30%	30%			
Pierre			35%	35%	50%	50%	30%	30%			
Redfield	20%	20%	70%	70%	75%	75%	50%	50%	15%	15%	
Sisseton	35%	35%	90%	90%	90%	90%	70%	70%	25%	25%	
Watertown	35%	35%	90%	90%	90%	90%	55%	55%	20%	20%	
Webster	30%	30%	85%	85%	85%	85%	60%	60%	20%	20%	
Wheaton	40%	40%	90%	90%	90%	90%	75%	75%	30%	30%	

*Created: 3 am CST Mon 2/13/2023. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation ≥ 10%.

- Rain + - Fz Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +

What/When

Precipitation will start out as rain on Tuesday, before transitioning to a mix of rain and snow and then all snow by the early evening. Snow ends Wednesday morning.

Impacts

The falling snow may lead to roads becoming snow covered and slippery.

Uncertainty

Confidence is high on the transition from rain to snow, but any change in timing would impact snowfall amounts. An earlier transition would produce more snow, while a slower transition would produce less snow.

Stay tuned for updates.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Winter Storm Watch

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

236 AM CST Mon Feb 13 2023

MNZ039-046-SDZ006>008-011-018>023-131700-/O.NEW.KABR.WS.A.0001.230215T0000Z-230215T1500Z/
 Traverse-Big Stone-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-Spink-Clark-Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-
 Including the cities of Wheaton, Ortonville, Aberdeen, Britton, Sisseton, Webster, Redfield, Clark, Water-
 town, Milbank, Hayti, and Clear Lake

...WINTER STORM WATCH IN EFFECT FROM TUESDAY EVENING THROUGH WEDNESDAY MORNING...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions possible. Total snow accumulations of 1 to 5 inches possible. Winds could gust as high as 60 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of west central Minnesota and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From Tuesday evening through Wednesday morning.

* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. Blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning commute. Strong winds could cause tree damage.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Prepare for possible blizzard conditions. Continue to monitor the latest forecasts for updates on this situation.



Strong Wind Potential

February 13, 2023

4:32 AM

Wind gust strength and timing

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	2/13 Mon				2/14 Tue				2/15 Wed				2/16 Thu		
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	20	20	20	21	21	20	16	15	23	40	58	58	58	56	49
Britton	31	28	23	23	23	22	14	12	15	30	51	58	58	54	52
Eagle Butte	15	15	12	12	10	13	20	31	44	56	56	53	51	49	45
Eureka	15	12	12	10	9	9	12	21	35	47	51	51	53	54	48
Gettysburg	15	16	15	16	14	13	14	22	31	45	52	54	49	49	49
Kennebec	15	15	24	24	21	21	21	18	23	38	46	51	51	46	47
McIntosh	15	12	8	7	10	20	30	43	54	56	52	51	52	51	43
Milbank	24	23	23	35	33	30	28	16	14	14	37	48	53	56	54
Miller	17	20	26	31	29	29	26	17	15	31	46	48	47	48	45
Mobridge	15	14	12	9	9	9	15	29	38	52	53	51	46	47	41
Murdo	20	21	23	26	22	18	17	22	31	46	55	58	49	45	45
Pierre	14	14	15	16	14	13	10	17	26	44	52	53	46	45	38
Redfield	16	18	21	24	24	26	30	21	14	35	48	53	54	52	46
Sisseton	30	30	25	31	32	22	16	13	9	18	41	58	58	56	55
Watertown	24	23	28	37	39	40	37	28	22	16	33	47	54	55	51
Webster	28	28	29	38	40	40	39	24	17	22	46	58	58	58	58
Wheaton	22	22	16	15	17	18	17	16	15	15	32	44	51	52	52

What/When

A strong low pressure system is expected to bring strong winds later Tuesday into Wednesday.

Impacts

Travel may be impacted by blowing snow and reduced visibilities, due to the combination of the wind and falling snow.

Uncertainty

Confidence is high on the wind strength, but there is some uncertainty in timing of winds. The exact strength and timing of winds will determine the blowing snow potential. Stay tuned for updates.

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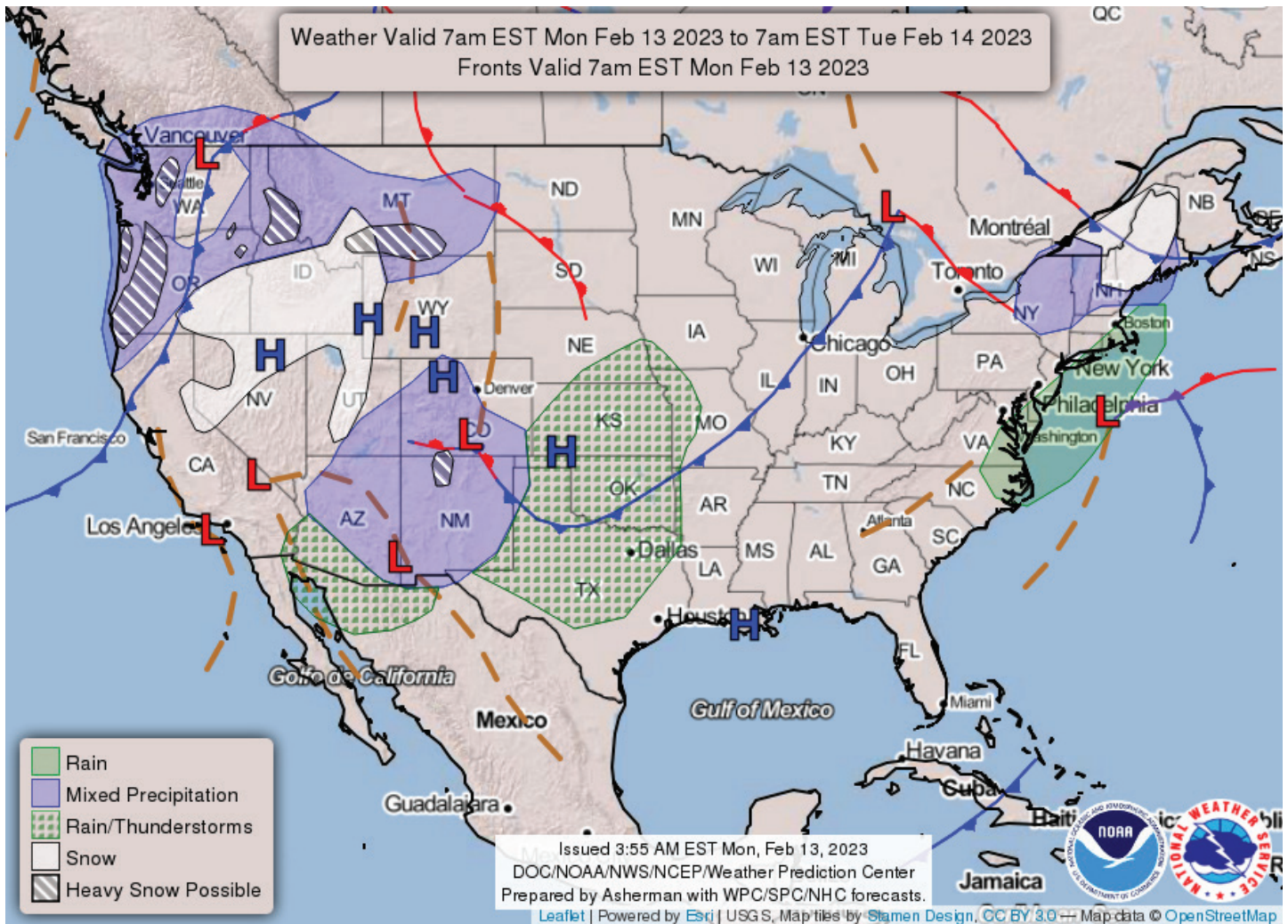
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 34 °F at 3:51 PM
Low Temp: 10 °F at 8:05 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 1:47 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 22 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1901
Record Low: -34 in 1905
Average High: 28
Average Low: 5
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.26
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.81
Precip Year to Date: 0.25
Sunset Tonight: 5:57:49 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33:47 AM



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Today in Weather History

February 13, 1995: Snow fell over a broad strip from southwest to northeast South Dakota. The snow began as freezing rain in the northeast, and there were several vehicle accidents attributed to the icing. The most substantial snow was at Custer in the Black Hills, with 14 inches. A few six to eight inches amounts were reported over the southwest, central, and northeast South Dakota plains. In addition, strong winds caused some blowing and drifting snow in northeastern South Dakota.

1905: Freezing temperatures were recorded over the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. Morning lows of 29 degrees below zero at Gravette, Arkansas, 40 below at Lebanon, Kansas, and 40 below at Warsaw, Missouri, established all-time records for those three states.

The low temperature at Vinita, Oklahoma, plummeted to 27 degrees below zero. The temperature would be tied at Watts in January 1930 and Blackwell and Medford in February 2011. The negative 27-degree reading is cold enough to be the 2nd lowest temperature on record in Oklahoma. The coldest is currently 31 degrees below zero, recorded at Nowata on February 10, 2011.

1784 - Ice floes blocked the Mississippi River at New Orleans, then passed into the Gulf of Mexico. The only other time this occurred was during the "Great Arctic Outbreak" of 1899. (David Ludlum)

1885 - The "Friday the 13th" avalanche at Alva, UT, killed sixteen persons, and left thirteen others buried for twelve hours before being rescued. (David Ludlum)

1889 - It was the coldest morning of record along the Gulf Coast. The temperature dipped to 7 above zero at New Orleans LA and Pensacola FL, and plunged to -1 degree at Mobile AL. The mercury dipped to -2 degrees at Tallahassee, the coldest reading of record for the state of Florida. (David Ludlum)

1905 - Morning lows of -29 degrees at Pond AR, -40 degrees at Lebanon KS, and -40 degrees at Warsaw MO established all-time records for those three states. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain over central California. Chews Ridge reported nearly eleven inches of rain in 24 hours, and extensive flooding occurred in San Benito County. The Mount Rose ski resort in Nevada experienced a "white-out" with 60 mph winds and 36 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds in the wake of a storm in the northeastern U.S., gusting to 60 mph at Oswego NY, produced six foot snow drifts in northeastern Ohio. High winds in the mountains of Utah, gusting to 106 mph at the Snowbird ski resort, contributed to a forty car pile-up on Interstate 15, near the town of Bluffdale. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rain and flash flooding from central Texas to western Pennsylvania. Up to ten inches of rain deluged western Kentucky in two days, with five day totals ranging up to 13.16 inches at Gilbertsville Dam KY. Flooding caused tens of millions of dollars damage, including 18 million dollars damage at Frankfort KY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A slow moving cold front brought heavy snow to Utah, Colorado and Wyoming. Big Horn WY reported 15 inches of snow, and up to 22 inches was reported in Utah. In Colorado, 8 to 12 inches of snow fell over the northwest suburbs of Denver, while 16 to 22 inches was reported in the high mountain elevations west of Fort Collins. Strong winds accompanied the heavy snow, and bitter cold weather followed in its wake. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: A National Weather Service Survey Team concluded a weak (F1) tornado occurred at the General Motors Desert Proving Grounds facility in Mesa, Arizona. Moderate damage was observed. A roof was damaged, and about 20 vehicles were destroyed and moved around. One car was lifted, moved several feet, and set down inside a roped-off area containing solar exposure equipment. The tornado traveled northeast and lasted about five minutes. The image below is from the February 1995 Storm Data.

2000: Late in the day and into the early morning hours of the 14th, severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes over southwestern Georgia that killed 19, injured 202, and caused \$35 million in damages. An F3 tornado hit southern Camilla, killing 11 people and wounding 175 others in the town.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NOTHING TO CHANCE!

During World War II all Americans were cautious and vigilant about the things they said and did. They did not want to give the enemy any opportunity to gain an advantage that could harm our country.

One of the slogans was "Your resolution will bring us victory!" Being resolute - or determined, and not wavering in one's opinion, purpose or position - was one of the most quoted. It was a rallying cry that people took to heart because they could not entertain the possibility of defeat.

No wonder Solomon wrote, "She watches over the affairs of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness." He knew that the alternative of being slothful and compromising, inconsistent and careless, was a disaster. "Watching" is a full-time responsibility and an important priority for those God calls to be a "faithful household administrator." No matter what other tasks or duties are part of her "job description," this "wife of noble character" never allows her attention to be diluted or her mind to be diverted to less important items than her household responsibilities. She is thoroughly absorbed in the things that matter most.

"Idleness" does not imply that this "wife" would be one who watches "soaps" or spends her time foolishly "tweeting" or on Facebook. Not at all. It refers to a "wife" who believes strongly in the fact that whatever she has is a result of her faithfulness to her calling as a wife. She has joyously and graciously fulfilled her obligations as a wife, mother, household administrator, and witness of the love of God to all whom He brings into her life.

She is deserving of all of the blessings and benefits of God that she has received because of her untiring faithfulness to God and her fidelity to her husband, children, and community. Dads and children must always support and honor a godly mother.

Prayer: Father, we join our hearts and pray that You will bless those noble wives who serve You with distinction! May they be honored for their service to You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: She watches over the affairs of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Proverbs 31:27



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)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 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
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 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
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.10.23

20 29 30 52 58 19

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$67,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.11.23

2 3 24 28 46 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$35,870,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 28 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.12.23

8 9 21 22 32 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 58 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.11.23

12 14 18 23 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$51,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.11.23

45 48 54 60 63 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 27 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.11.23

10 23 30 54 65 11

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$45,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 27 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Super Bowl magic: Mahomes, Chiefs beat Eagles 38-35

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Patrick Mahomes was magical when the Kansas City Chiefs desperately needed him to pull off another Super Bowl comeback.

Playing on an injured ankle, Mahomes threw two touchdown passes in the fourth quarter and scrambled 26 yards on the go-ahead drive before Harrison Butker kicked a 27-yard field goal with 8 seconds left to give the Chiefs a 38-35 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday night.

The Chiefs won their second NFL title in four years and two-time NFL MVP Mahomes earned his second Super Bowl MVP award.

"I thought guys just embraced the moment," Mahomes said about rallying from a 10-point halftime deficit. "In that first half, we were playing and doing some good stuff, but I felt like the guys were getting consumed by everything around us."

Mahomes and Jalen Hurts excelled in the first Super Bowl matchup featuring two Black starting QBs. But Mahomes turned it up in the second half after re aggravating a sprained right ankle.

"It took everybody to win the game," Mahomes shouted as red and yellow confetti littered the field.

Coach Andy Reid, who couldn't win the big game in Philadelphia, beat his former team to earn his second ring with Mahomes and the Chiefs.

"We wanted to get this so bad for him," Travis Kelce said. "His legacy in Philly lives on forever. ... There's a lot of pride in knowing that he's had success in two different organizations, but this was the better one."

With the score tied at 35-35, the Eagles tried to let the Chiefs score a touchdown with under two minutes left so they could get the ball back after a defensive holding call on cornerback James Bradberry on third-and-8 gave Kansas City a first down. But Jerick McKinnon slid at the 2, forcing the Eagles to use their last timeout.

"It was holding. I tugged his jersey. I was hoping they would let it slide," Bradberry said.

After Mahomes took a knee twice, Butker nailed his kick, sending thousands of red-clad Chiefs fans into a frenzy.

"It feels amazing just to see the confetti," said Butker, who missed a 42-yarder in the first quarter. "I just tried to focus on one kick and focusing on the process."

The Chiefs won their second Super Bowl following the 2019 season, 50 years after the first one. Mahomes led them back from a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter against San Francisco in that one. It took just three years to get another Lombardi.

Chiefs fans were outnumbered in the stadium, but did their part to silence the boisterous Philly fans with the tomahawk chop chant.

Down 24-14 with a limping Mahomes, the Chiefs (17-3) followed up Rihanna's electrifying halftime performance with a sensational offensive outburst.

Mahomes, who suffered a high ankle sprain in the divisional round, hurt it again on a 3-yard scramble late in the second quarter. He limped off the field but showed no ill effects on Kansas City's next possession.

"I knew it was pretty bad when he got up limping but I knew it wasn't gonna be bad enough to where he was gonna pull himself off the field," Chiefs offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy said. "If we would've pulled him off, I would've had to fight him. He would've probably fought me. And so it wasn't worth entertaining."

Mahomes slipped — several players lost their footing on the natural grass surface — in the pocket yet somehow regained his balance and scrambled 14 yards to the Eagles 4, setting up Isiah Pacheco's 1-yard TD run that cut the deficit to 24-21.

Mahomes then tossed a 5-yard TD pass to a wide-open Kadarius Toney to give Kansas City its first lead, 28-27, early in the fourth quarter.

After the Chiefs tightened up their defense, forcing Philly to punt, Toney returned a line-drive kick 65

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yards to the Eagles 5 for the longest punt return in Super Bowl history.

On third down from the 4, Mahomes connected with Skyy Moore to extend their lead to 35-27. Moore also was wide open on the play.

But the Eagles wouldn't go away.

Hurts hit DeVonta Smith for a 45-yard gain to the Chiefs 2 and ran in for his third score of the game. He also ran in for the 2-point conversion to tie it at 35-35 with 5:15 to go.

As "Fly! Eagles! Fly!" reverberated throughout the stadium, Mahomes and the Chiefs went back to work.

The 27-year-old Mahomes became the third player to win his second NFL MVP award before age 28. He also became the youngest QB to start three Super Bowls. Mahomes finally broke the MVP curse, becoming the first player to win the Super Bowl the same season after nine straight players lost.

Just five years after winning the first Super Bowl in franchise history, the Eagles (16-4) came close with a different coach and new quarterback. Nick Sirianni replaced Doug Pederson in 2021 and Hurts took over for Carson Wentz in late 2020.

Hurts set a Super Bowl record with 70 yards rushing and tied a record with three rushing scores. He also threw for 304 yards and one TD.

"We use this pain, we use this failure to motivate us so we can make it a strength," Sirianni said.

Hurts, who missed two games late in the season with a shoulder injury, had TD runs of 1 and 4 yards in the first half along with a 45-yard TD pass to A.J. Brown.

But Hurts also made a rare mistake when he fumbled without being hit while scrambling away from pressure. Nick Bolton picked it up and raced 36 yards for a score that made it 14-14. Hurts had just eight turnovers this season, six picks and two fumbles.

Mahomes finished 21 of 27 for 182 yards with three TDs and no turnovers. He ran for 44 yards.

Mahomes connected with Kelce on an 18-yard TD pass in the right corner to tie it at 7-7 in the first quarter. The Chiefs' All-Pro tight end and Eagles All-Pro center Jason Kelce became the first set of brothers to play against each other in the Super Bowl.

Their mom, Donna Kelce, wore a half-red, half-green jersey with No. 87 on the front for Travis and No. 62 on the back for Jason. She sat in a suite between NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell and Damar Hamlin.

Eagles fans turned State Farm Stadium into a sea of green, chanting "E-A-G-L-E-S!" and singing the team's fight song after each score. But they left disappointed.

Reid won more games than any coach in team history during 14 seasons with the Eagles but the one knock against him was that he couldn't win the big one. Reid finally earned his ring in his seventh season with the Chiefs. They went back the next year and lost to Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Reid, who turns 65 next month, ended any speculation about his potential retirement.

"If they'll have me, I'll stick around," he said.

The first Super Bowl involving both No. 1 seeds since the Eagles beat the Patriots 41-33 in February 2018 lived up to its hype. It was the third-highest scoring Super Bowl and the Eagles scored the most points by a losing team.

Philippines says China ship used laser against coast guard

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The Philippines on Monday accused a Chinese coast guard ship of hitting a Philippine coast guard vessel with a military-grade laser and temporarily blinding some of its crew in the disputed South China Sea, calling it a "blatant" violation of Manila's sovereign rights.

The Chinese ship also maneuvered dangerously close, about 137 meters (449 feet), to block the Philippine patrol vessel BRP Malapascua from approaching Second Thomas Shoal, a submerged reef that has been occupied by Philippine forces, on Feb. 6, the Philippine coast guard said in a statement.

The Philippines has filed nearly 200 diplomatic protests against China's aggressive actions in the disputed waters in 2022 alone.

China claims the South China Sea virtually in its entirety, putting it on a collision course with other claim-

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ants. Despite friendly overtures to Beijing by former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and his successor, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who met Chinese leader Xi Jinping in January in Beijing, tensions have persisted, drawing in closer military alliance between the Philippines and the U.S.

Although the Chinese coast guard had tried to block Philippine coast guard ships in the disputed waters before, this was the first time it used lasers and caused physical suffering among Filipino personnel, Philippine coast guard spokesperson Commodore Armand Balilo told The Associated Press.

"The Chinese ship illuminated the green laser light twice toward the BRP Malapascua, causing temporary blindness to her crew at the bridge," the Philippine statement said.

A video issued by the coast guard in Manila shows a Chinese coast guard ship cutting across the path of a Philippine vessel from a distance. A green laser-like light is later emitted by the Chinese ship.

The Philippine military said it's time for China to restrain its forces from committing "any provocative act that will endanger the lives of people." Spokesman Col. Medel Aguilar told reporters that the Philippine defense chief deemed the Chinese coast guard's action "offensive and unsafe."

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said a Philippine coast guard vessel trespassed into Chinese waters without permission on Feb. 6. Chinese coast guard vessels responded "professionally and with restraint at the site in accordance with China's law and international law," he said, without elaborating and mentioning the use of laser.

"We hope the Philippines will earnestly respect China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea and avoid any actions that may lead to the expansion of the dispute and complication of the situation," Wang said in reply to a question at a daily media briefing. "China and the Philippines are maintaining communication through diplomatic channels in this regard."

The Philippine vessel was forced to move away from the area, where it was escorting a supply vessel that was delivering food and sailors to a Philippine navy sentry ship, the BRP Sierra Madre, which has been marooned on Second Thomas Shoal since 1999, the coast guard said.

"The deliberate blocking of the Philippine government ships to deliver food and supplies to our military personnel on board the BRP Sierra Madre is a blatant disregard for, and a clear violation of, Philippine sovereign rights in this part of the West Philippine Sea," the coast guard said, using the name the Philippines has adopted for the stretch of waters close to its western coast.

It was not immediately clear if the Philippine resupply mission pushed through despite the incident.

The Chinese coast guard also blocked Philippine ships escorting a supply vessel from approaching Second Thomas Shoal in August, the coast guard said. At the time, one of the two Chinese ships that were joined by two Chinese civilian vessels removed the cover of its 70mm armament, the coast guard said, adding it would not be deterred by China's aggression in protecting Philippine sovereignty in the disputed sea.

Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping claims in the resource-rich and busy waterway, where a bulk of the world's commerce and oil transits.

The United States lays no claims to the disputed sea but has deployed forces to patrol the waters to promote freedom of navigation and overflight — moves that have angered Beijing, which has warned Washington to stop meddling in what it says is a purely Asian dispute.

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps held joint exercises in the South China Sea over the weekend at a time of heightened tensions with Beijing over the shooting down of a suspected Chinese spy balloon. The U.S. has been taking steps to rebuild its military might in the Philippines more than 30 years after the closure of its large bases in the country and reinforcing an arc of military alliances in Asia.

Russia pushes advance on Bakhmut, bolsters defenses in south

SAMYA KULLAB and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Fierce battles raged outside Bakhmut as Russian forces pushed their advance on the eastern city with heavy shelling and infantry attacks, Ukraine's presidential office said Monday, with at least five civilians killed and as many wounded in action across the war-torn country in the last 24 hours.

The presidential office said the situation in Bakhmut's northern suburb of Paraskoviivka is "difficult" as

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Russian forces continued to pummel the area with "intense shelling and storming actions." The nearby town of Vuhledar is also under heavy bombardment.

Russian forces shelled a dozen cities and villages in the Donetsk region in the last 24 hours including in Druzhkivka where a missile hit a hospital and in Pokrovsk where shelling damaged seven houses and a kindergarten.

"The shelling intensifies, and the Russians accumulate more forces for an attack on peaceful cities," Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said. "We're seeing a very tough battle in which the Russians aren't sparing neither themselves, nor us."

In the neighboring Luhansk region, Russian troops pulled back after several days of intense fighting near the key city of Kreminna, although they're not "running out of steam," Luhansk Gov. Serhii Haidai told Ukrainian television.

In the partially occupied southern region of Kherson, artillery fire hit more than 20 cities and villages over the past 24 hours including the regional capital of the same name which was recaptured by Ukrainian forces in November. Two men were killed in one of the villages when their car ran over a landmine.

In the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region, Russian shelling of the city of Nikopol killed one person and wounded two others. The shelling also damaged a residential building, a water treatment facility and a college.

Meanwhile, the U.K. Defense Ministry said Russian forces are bolstering defensive fortifications on the edge of the battlefield in southern Ukraine to protect their flank, despite their focus on the Donbas region.

"This is demonstrated by continued construction of defensive fortifications in Zaporizhzhia and Luhansk oblasts and deployment of personnel," the Ministry said in a briefing Monday.

The U.S. embassy in Moscow issued another warning to U.S. citizens not to travel to Russia for fear of harassment or detention, urged them to leave immediately if they have to travel there.

The warning cited "the potential for harassment and the singling out of U.S. citizens for detention by Russian government security officials, the arbitrary enforcement of local law, limited flights into and out of Russia, the Embassy's limited ability to assist U.S. citizens in Russia, and the possibility of terrorism."

The embassy also noted that Russian authorities may sweep up U.S. citizens who also hold Russian citizenship in a possible renewed mobilization of reservists. "Russia may refuse to acknowledge dual nationals' U.S. citizenship, deny their access to U.S. consular assistance, subject them to mobilization, prevent their departure from Russia, and/or conscript them," the warning said.

Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February, the embassy has regularly issued advisories for U.S. citizens not to travel to Russia and leave if they already have.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied Monday that a second round of mobilization is looming.

Although many people have fled the Donetsk province where the bulk of the fighting is concentrated, those who opted to stay depend on sporadic aid deliveries of food and water.

In the city of Sviatohirsk, in northern Donetsk, the few residents who remain rely on volunteers with the organization World Central Kitchen for food and supplies to cope with freezing temperatures. Sviatohirsk was liberated by Ukrainian forces in September.

On Sunday, the area was blanketed with snow, concealing the massive destruction from repeated bombardments and heavy fighting.

Standing by the ruins of the city council building, resident Valeriy Andrievskiy said the building used to be "beautiful."

"God forbid our forces retreat and we stay (behind enemy lines). God forbid. I will not survive this one more time," he said.

Walking near the ruins of her home, 80-year-old Tamara Yevdokimova said she had been "tortured" by Russian forces.

"I haven't been able to hear for five months ... They (Russians) have knocked my teeth out. What can I do?" she said. In her yard were the burned out remnants of a Russian tank.

People who left the front lines in search of safety continue are still struggling to adapt to a new life else-

where. In Kyiv, dozens of people from Donbas, Kherson and Kharkiv regions are being helped by Center of Hope and Recovery, an organization that provides temporary homes and meals.

"These are people who have left in the past what they have earned for years, and this is a very traumatic experience," said head of the center Anna Harkun. They receive psychological and medical help, while volunteers help them find work and permanent lodging, she added.

Russian rockets destroyed the home of 80-year-old Anatoly Zakharenko in village Terny in Donetsk. His wife, daughter, and disabled granddaughter were all evacuated and are being helped in the city.

Missing his hometown, he wrote a poem to ease the pain of displacement. "I will return to you, believe me," he said, reading it aloud.

Portugal church sex abuse study: victims may number 4,800

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — More than 4,800 individuals may have been victims of child sex abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church and 512 alleged victims have already come forward to speak out, an expert panel looking into historic abuse in the church said Monday.

Senior Portuguese church officials had previously claimed that only a handful of cases had occurred.

Senior clergymen sat in the front row of the auditorium where committee members read out some of the harrowing accounts of alleged abuse, replete with vivid and shocking descriptions.

The Independent Committee for the Study of Child Abuse in the Catholic Church, set up by Portuguese bishops just over a year ago, looked into alleged cases from 1950 onward. The panel produced its final report Monday. Portuguese bishops are due to discuss the report next month.

The statute of limitations has expired on most of the alleged cases. Only 25 allegations were passed to prosecutors, the panel said.

The report, criticized by some as long overdue, came four years after Pope Francis gathered church leaders from around the world at the Vatican to address the sex abuse crisis in the church.

That meeting was held more than 30 years after the scandal first erupted in Ireland and Australia and 20 years after it hit the United States.

Bishops and other Catholic superiors in many parts of Europe at the time continued to deny that clergy sex abuse existed or insisted on giving little weight to the problem.

Pedro Strecht, a psychiatrist who headed the panel in Portugal, said it estimates the true number of victims during the period as being at least at 4,815. He didn't explain how the extrapolation was made.

The panel is not publishing the names of the victims, the identities of the alleged abusers, or the places the abuses allegedly happened. However, it is to send to bishops by the end of the month a list of alleged abusers who are still active in the church.

The final report includes a separate — and confidential — annex of all the names of church members reported to the committee that is being sent to the Portuguese Bishops Conference and to the police.

The Portuguese church hasn't said whether it intends to pay compensation to any victims.

The six-person committee included psychiatrists, a former Supreme Court judge and a social worker.

The report said that 77% of the abusers were priests, with other perpetrators being linked to church institutions. It added that 77% of victims didn't report the abuse to church officials and only 4% went to the police.

It said 48% of those who came forward had spoken about the abuse for the first time. Most of the alleged victims were male, though 47% were female, the report said.

It said there were places in Portugal, such as some seminaries and religious institutions, that were "real blackspots" for abuse.

The panel recommended that the statute of limitations on such crimes be extended to at least 30 years from the current 23 years.

Moldova's President outlines Russian 'plan' to topple gov't

By STEPHEN McGRATH and CRISTIAN JARDAN Associated Press

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP) — Moldova's President outlined Monday what she described as a plot by Moscow to use external saboteurs to overthrow her country's government, put the nation "at the disposal of Russia" and derail its aspirations to one day join the European Union.

President Maia Sandu's briefing comes a week after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country had intercepted plans by Russian secret services to destroy Moldova, claims that were later confirmed by Moldovan intelligence officials.

"The plan for the next period involves actions with the involvement of diversionists with military training, camouflaged in civilian clothes, who will undertake violent actions, attack some state buildings, and even take hostages," Sandu told reporters at a briefing.

"The purpose of these actions is to overthrow the constitutional order, to change the legitimate power from Chisinau to an illegitimate one," Sandu said, "which would put our country at the disposal of Russia, in order to stop the European integration process."

She defiantly vowed: "The Kremlin's attempts to bring violence to our country will not succeed."

Since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly a year ago, Moldova, a former Soviet republic of about 2.6 million people, has sought to forge closer ties with its Western partners. Last June, it was granted European Union candidate status, the same day as Ukraine.

Sandu said that between October and December, Moldovan police and its Intelligence and Security Service, or SIS, have intervened in "several cases of organized criminal elements and stopped attempts at violence."

Over the past year, Non-NATO Moldova has faced a string of problems. These include a severe energy crisis after Moscow dramatically reduced gas supplies; skyrocketing inflation; and several incidents in recent months involving missiles that have traversed its skies, and debris that has been found on its territory.

Moldovan authorities confirmed that another missile from the war in Ukraine had entered its airspace on Friday.

Sandu said that Russia wants to use Moldova in the war against Ukraine, without providing more details, and that information obtained by intelligence services contained what she described as instructions on rules of entry to Moldova for citizens from Russia, Belarus, Serbia, and Montenegro.

"I assure you that the state institutions are working to prevent these challenges and keep the situation under control," Sandu said.

She said that Moldova's Parliament must adopt draft laws to equip its Intelligence and Security Service, and the prosecutor's office, "with the necessary tools to combat more effectively the risks to the country's security."

The President added that the plan would "rely on several internal forces, but especially on criminal groups" and went on to name two Moldovan oligarchs, Ilan Shor and Vladimir Plahotniuc, both of whom are currently in exile. Both men last year were sanctioned by the U.S. and the U.K.

Last fall, a series of mass anti-government protests organized by Shor's populist, Russia-friendly Shor Party, also rocked Moldova amid the energy crunch.

The President's press briefing Monday comes after the resignation on Friday of Moldova's Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita. The same day, Sandu appointed her defense and security adviser, pro-Western economist Dorin Recean, to succeed Gavrilita.

On Friday, after Moldovan authorities confirmed the missile incident, U.S. State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters in Washington that "Russia has for years supported influence and destabilization campaigns in Moldova, which often involve weaponizing corruption to further its goals."

Thousands march in Israel as Netanyahu allies push overhaul

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Tens of thousands of Israelis — hoisting flags, blowing on horns and chanting "de-

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mocracy" and "no to dictatorship"— protested outside the parliament building on Monday as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government formally launched a contentious plan to overhaul the country's legal system.

It was the largest protest outside the Knesset in years and reflected the deep divisions over the plan. The proposed changes have triggered weeks of mass demonstrations, drawn cries of protests from influential business leaders and former military men and even prompted a statement of concern from President Joe Biden.

Despite a plea from the nation's figurehead president to put the legislation on hold, Netanyahu's allies approved a series of legislative changes during a stormy committee meeting Tuesday. The vote now sends the legislation to the full parliament for a series of votes — an opening salvo in a battle expected to stretch on for weeks.

"They hear our cry. They hear the strong voice of truth," opposition leader Yair Lapid said from the stage outside parliament. "They hear it and they're afraid."

Netanyahu and his supporters say the proposed changes are needed to rein in a judiciary that wields too much power. But his critics say the judicial overhaul is tantamount to a coup and will destroy Israeli democracy. They also say that Netanyahu, who is on trial for a series of corruption charges, has a conflict of interest.

The protesters came from across the country. Organizers said that upwards of 100,000 people were in attendance. Trainloads of people arrived in Jerusalem on packed trains, streaming up escalators in the city's main train station chanting, "democracy," cheering and whistling, and waving the national flag. A few hundred others gathered in protest at Jerusalem's Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray, before marching toward the Knesset.

In parliament, opposition lawmakers vocally protested the proposed reform to judge appointments ahead of a committee vote that would send the bill to the full parliament for a vote. During an unruly session, members of the opposition stood on the conference table and shouted as a key Netanyahu ally tried to hold the vote. The motions passed in a 9-7 committee vote.

Thronges of people marched to the Knesset, the Israeli legislature, a day after the country's figurehead president urged Netanyahu's government to delay its proposed changes to the judiciary — moves that critics say will weaken the country's Supreme Court and erode democratic checks and balances.

Many protesters carried the blue and white Israeli flag and posters decrying what they saw as attack on the country's democratic institutions. "Shame! Shame!" and "Israel will not be a dictatorship!" they chanted.

Other demonstrations were held outside schools around the country.

Netanyahu and his allies took office in December after the country's fifth election in less than four years. That election, like its predecessors, focused on Netanyahu's fitness for office at a time when he is facing serious criminal charges.

Netanyahu has lashed out at the country's police, prosecutors and judges, saying he is the victim of a deep-state style conspiracy to oust him. His critics say he is motivated by a personal grudge and his campaign will destroy Israel's democratic system of checks and balances.

The legislation approved in committee Monday would give Netanyahu's parliamentary majority the authority for appointing all of the country's judges — a step that critics say could pave the way for his trial to be dismissed. A second change would take away the Supreme Court's authority to review the legality of major pieces of legislation, known as Basic Laws.

His coalition also plans on passing another law that would give parliament the power to overturn Supreme Court decisions it dislikes.

Taken together, critics say this will destroy the country's system of checks and balances and unleash a process similar to those in authoritarian countries like Poland and Hungary.

Eliad Shraga, chairman of the Movement for Quality Government, a civil-society group that organized Monday's demonstration, said the gathering was meant to send a message of support to the Supreme Court and a warning to the Knesset.

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"We will fight to the end," he told The Associated Press. "They want to change Israel from a liberal democracy to a dictatorship, a fascist dictatorship."

Late Sunday, President Isaac Herzog appealed to Netanyahu to put the legislation on hold and open a dialogue with the opposition. Netanyahu has not responded to the appeal.

Google to expand misinformation 'prebunking' in Europe

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After seeing promising results in Eastern Europe, Google will initiate a new campaign in Germany that aims to make people more resilient to the corrosive effects of online misinformation.

The tech giant plans to release a series of short videos highlighting the techniques common to many misleading claims. The videos will appear as advertisements on platforms like Facebook, YouTube or TikTok in Germany. A similar campaign in India is also in the works.

It's an approach called prebunking, which involves teaching people how to spot false claims before they encounter them. The strategy is gaining support among researchers and tech companies.

"There's a real appetite for solutions," said Beth Goldberg, head of research and development at Jigsaw, an incubator division of Google that studies emerging social challenges. "Using ads as a vehicle to counter a disinformation technique is pretty novel. And we're excited about the results."

While belief in falsehoods and conspiracy theories isn't new, the speed and reach of the internet has given them a heightened power. When catalyzed by algorithms, misleading claims can discourage people from getting vaccines, spread authoritarian propaganda, foment distrust in democratic institutions and spur violence.

It's a challenge with few easy solutions. Journalistic fact checks are effective, but they're labor intensive, aren't read by everyone, and won't convince those already distrustful of traditional journalism. Content moderation by tech companies is another response, but it only drives misinformation elsewhere, while prompting cries of censorship and bias.

Prebunking videos, by contrast, are relatively cheap and easy to produce and can be seen by millions when placed on popular platforms. They also avoid the political challenge altogether by focusing not on the topics of false claims, which are often cultural lightning rods, but on the techniques that make viral misinformation so infectious.

Those techniques include fear-mongering, scapegoating, false comparisons, exaggeration and missing context. Whether the subject is COVID-19, mass shootings, immigration, climate change or elections, misleading claims often rely on one or more of these tricks to exploit emotions and short-circuit critical thinking.

Last fall, Google launched the largest test of the theory so far with a prebunking video campaign in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The videos dissected different techniques seen in false claims about Ukrainian refugees. Many of those claims relied on alarming and unfounded stories about refugees committing crimes or taking jobs away from residents.

The videos were seen 38 million times on Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Twitter — a number that equates to a majority of the population in the three nations. Researchers found that compared to people who hadn't seen the videos, those who did watch were more likely to be able to identify misinformation techniques, and less likely to spread false claims to others.

The pilot project was the largest test of prebunking so far and adds to a growing consensus in support of the theory.

"This is a good news story in what has essentially been a bad news business when it comes to misinformation," said Alex Mahadevan, director of MediaWise, a media literacy initiative of the Poynter Institute that has incorporated prebunking into its own programs in countries including Brazil, Spain, France and the U.S.

Mahadevan called the strategy a "pretty efficient way to address misinformation at scale, because you can reach a lot of people while at the same time address a wide range of misinformation."

Google's new campaign in Germany will include a focus on photos and videos, and the ease with which they can be presented of evidence of something false. One example: Last week, following the earthquake

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in Turkey, some social media users shared video of the massive explosion in Beirut in 2020, claiming it was actually footage of a nuclear explosion triggered by the earthquake. It was not the first time the 2020 explosion had been the subject of misinformation.

Google will announce its new German campaign Monday ahead of next week's Munich Security Conference. The timing of the announcement, coming before that annual gathering of international security officials, reflects heightened concerns about the impact of misinformation among both tech companies and government officials.

Tech companies like prebunking because it avoids touchy topics that are easily politicized, said Sander van der Linden, a University of Cambridge professor considered a leading expert on the theory. Van der Linden worked with Google on its campaign and is now advising Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, as well.

Meta has incorporated prebunking into many different media literacy and anti-misinformation campaigns in recent years, the company told The Associated Press in an emailed statement.

They include a 2021 program in the U.S. that offered media literacy training about COVID-19 to Black, Latino and Asian American communities. Participants who took the training were later tested and found to be far more resistant to misleading COVID-19 claims.

Prebunking comes with its own challenges. The effects of the videos eventually wears off, requiring the use of periodic "booster" videos. Also, the videos must be crafted well enough to hold the viewer's attention, and tailored for different languages, cultures and demographics. And like a vaccine, it's not 100% effective for everyone.

Google found that its campaign in Eastern Europe varied from country to country. While the effect of the videos was highest in Poland, in Slovakia they had "little to no discernible effect," researchers found. One possible explanation: The videos were dubbed into the Slovak language, and not created specifically for the local audience.

But together with traditional journalism, content moderation and other methods of combating misinformation, prebunking could help communities reach a kind of herd immunity when it comes to misinformation, limiting its spread and impact.

"You can think of misinformation as a virus. It spreads. It lingers. It can make people act in certain ways," Van der Linden told the AP. "Some people develop symptoms, some do not. So: if it spreads and acts like a virus, then maybe we can figure out how to inoculate people."

Skiers seek climate change moves: 'The seasons have shifted'

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

COURCHEVEL, France (AP) — Overall World Cup winners Mikaela Shiffrin, Federica Brignone and Aleksander Aamodt Kilde are among nearly 200 athletes from multiple disciplines who have signed a letter addressed to the International Ski and Snowboard Federation demanding action over climate change.

The letter was delivered during the skiing world championships after warm weather and a lack of snow wiped out nearly a month of racing at the start of this season, with preseason training on melting European glaciers heading toward extinction and the impact of climate change on the schedule being seen even in January.

"It's about time to address a really important topic," Kilde said after earning a silver medal in downhill on Sunday. "We see that the world is changing. We see also the impact of our sport. ... I want the future generations to experience winter and to be able to do what I do."

The letter was written by Austrian downhiller Julian Schütter, an ambassador for the nonprofit organization Protect Our Winters, known as POW.

"We are already experiencing the effects of climate change in our everyday lives and our profession," the athletes said in the letter. "The public opinion about skiing is shifting towards unjustifiability. ... We need progressive organizational action. We are aware of the current sustainability efforts of FIS and rate

them as insufficient.”

Olympic cross-country skiing champion Jessie Diggins and Freeride World Tour champions Arianna Tricomi and Xavier de le Rue were also among the letter’s signees.

“This is our most important race, let’s win it together,” the athletes said.

In terms of Alpine skiing, the athletes asked the federation, known as FIS, to shift the start of the season from late October to late November and the end of the season from mid-March to late April.

“The seasons have shifted and in the interest of us all we need to adapt to those new circumstances,” they said.

Racers also requested a more “geographically reasonable” race schedule to reduce carbon emissions, citing how the men’s circuit will have traveled from Europe to North America and back twice by the end of this season.

“The races of Beaver Creek in November and those in Aspen in February are 50 kilometers (30 miles) away from each other,” the skiers said, referring to the two Colorado resorts. “Planning those two races one after the other would reduce approximately 1,500 tons of (carbon emissions).”

The athletes also asked FIS to create a sustainability department.

There was no immediate response from FIS.

As more rescued, quake survivors in Turkey ask what’s next

By MEHMET GUZEL, SUZAN FRASER and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

ADIYAMAN, Turkey (AP) — Thousands who survived the earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria a week ago are pondering what comes next. While many have been evacuated from the devastated region, others are staying by wrecked homes and as the search for missing loved ones continues.

Rescuers found a woman alive 174 hours after the first quake struck, but reports of rescues were coming less often as the time since the quake reaches the limits of the human body’s ability to survive without water, especially in freezing temperatures.

The magnitude 7.8 and 7.5 quakes struck nine hours apart in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria on Feb. 6. They killed over 35,000, with the toll expected to rise considerably as search teams find more bodies, and reduced much of towns and cities inhabited by millions to fragments of concrete and twisted metal.

On Monday rescuers from Istanbul pulled a woman named Naide Umay from a collapsed building in the hard-hit city of Antakya. Earlier, a 40-year-old woman was rescued from the wreckage of a 5-story building in the town of Islahiye, in Gaziantep province, while a 60-year old was rescued in Besni, in Adiyaman province.

A week after the quakes hit, many people were still without shelter in the streets. Some survivors were still waiting in front of collapsed buildings for the bodies of their loved ones to be retrieved.

In the village of Polat, in Malatya province, some 100 kilometers (62 miles) from the epicenter, almost no houses were left standing. Residents were trying to salvage refrigerators, washing machines and other goods from wrecked homes.

Resident Zehra Kurukafa said not enough tents had arrived, forcing up to four families to share the tents that were available.

“We sleep in the mud, all together with two, three, even four families. There aren’t enough tents,” she said.

In the city of Adiyaman, 25-year-old Musa Bozkurt was waiting for a vehicle to transport him and others to the city of Afyon, in western Turkey.

“We’re going away but we have no idea what will happen when we get there” Bozkurt said. “We have no goal. Even if there was (a plan) what good will it be after this hour? I no longer have my father or my uncle. What do I have left?” he said.

Fuat Ekinici, a 55-year-farmer, was reluctant to leave his home in rural Adiyaman for Afyon despite the destruction, saying he didn’t have the means to live elsewhere and had fields that need to be tended.

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"Those who have the means are leaving, but we're poor," he said. "The government says, go and live there a month or two. How do I leave my home? My fields are here, this is my home, how do I leave it behind?"

Volunteers from across Turkey have mobilized to help millions of survivors, including a group of volunteer chefs and restaurant owners who served traditional food such as beans and rice and lentil soup for survivors in downtown Adiyaman.

Other volunteers continued with the rescue efforts. But Eduardo Reinoso Angulo, a professor at the Institute of Engineering at the National Autonomous University of Mexico said the likelihood of finding people alive was "very, very small now."

The lead author on a 2017 study involving deaths inside buildings struck by earthquakes, Reinoso said that the odds of survival for people trapped in wreckage fall dramatically after five days, and is near zero after nine days, although there have been exceptions.

David Alexander, a professor of emergency planning and management at University College London, agreed, saying the window for pulling people alive from the rubble is "almost at an end."

But, he said, the odds were not very good to begin with. Many of the buildings were so poorly constructed that they collapsed into very small pieces, leaving very few spaces large enough for people to survive in, Alexander said.

"If a frame building of some kind goes over, generally speaking we do find open spaces in a heap of rubble where we can tunnel in," Alexander said. "Looking at some of these photographs from Turkey and from Syria, there just aren't the spaces."

Wintery conditions further reduce the window for survival. Temperatures in the region have fallen to minus 6 degrees Celsius (21 degrees Fahrenheit) overnight.

"The typical way the body compensates for hypothermia is shivering — and shivering requires a lot of calories," said Dr. Stephanie Lareau, a professor of emergency medicine at Virginia Tech. "So if somebody's deprived of food for a number of days and exposed to cold temperatures, they're probably going to succumb to hypothermia more rapidly."

Many in Turkey blame faulty construction for the vast devastation, and authorities have begun targeting contractors allegedly linked with buildings that collapsed.

At least 131 people were under investigation for their alleged responsibility in the construction of buildings that failed to withstand the quakes, officials said.

Turkey has introduced construction codes that meet earthquake-engineering standards, but experts say the codes are rarely enforced.

In Syria, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said that the international community has failed to provide aid.

Visiting the Turkish-Syrian border Sunday, Griffiths said Syrians are "looking for international help that hasn't arrived."

"We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned," he said, adding, "My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can."

The earthquake death toll in Syria's northwestern rebel-held region has reached 2,166, according to the rescue group the White Helmets. The overall death toll in Syria stood at 3,553 on Saturday, although the 1,387 deaths reported for government-held parts of the country hadn't been updated in days. Turkey's death toll was 31,643 as of Sunday.

In the Syrian capital of Damascus, the head of the World Health Organization warned that the pain will ripple forward, calling the disaster an "unfolding tragedy that's affecting millions."

"The compounding crises of conflict, COVID, cholera, economic decline, and now the earthquake have taken an unbearable toll," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Dubai boom sees Russian cash, high rents and reborn projects

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

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DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Fourteen years after a financial crisis nearly brought Dubai to its knees, several major abandoned real estate projects are finally showing signs of life as part of a new economic boom in the city-state.

As with previous upturns in Dubai, war is a driving force. But this time it's Russian investors fleeing Moscow's war on Ukraine, rather than people escaping Mideast battlefields.

"There's lots of parts of the world where there are real challenges and people looking for a safe haven," said Richard Waind, group managing director for Betterhomes, a real estate brokerage in the emirate. "I think that's a safe haven both for the capital but also for their families."

While there's no sign the market could be in similar trouble as in 2009, some concerns have started to surface. Skyrocketing rental costs are worsening a cost-of-living squeeze for the foreign workforce that powers the emirate.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Treasury is worried about the amount of Russian money flowing into the real estate market of the most populous city in the United Arab Emirates.

"In theory, there should be significant reputational risk with the UAE apparently acting as a willing bridge, enabling Russian oligarchs to use the Emirates as a waystation between the Russian financial system and that of the West," said Jodi Vittori, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who has written extensively on Dubai being a money-laundering haven.

"But the reality seems to point otherwise," she said.

Dubai's government and the UAE's Foreign Ministry did not respond to detailed questions from The Associated Press.

It's hard to overstate just how much the Emirates has changed over the last half century. Since 1968, the seven sheikdoms that make up the UAE have grown from a British protectorate of some 180,000 people to a federation that's home to more than 9.2 million. Government statisticians say 3.5 million people live in Dubai alone, with an additional 1.1 million who temporarily live in the city or commute there for work each day.

Oil, much of it from Abu Dhabi's vast reserves, fueled the UAE's initial modernization. After Dubai began allowing foreign ownership of "freehold" properties in 2002, the world's tallest building, cavernous malls and sprawling subdivisions emerged from what once were uninterrupted stretches of windblown sand dunes.

Real estate now represents some 10% of Dubai's overall gross domestic product. After a slump due to COVID-19 restrictions, Dubai saw 86,849 residential sales in 2022, beating a previous record of 80,831 set in 2009.

Buyers and renters have filled exclusive neighborhoods such as the Palm Jumeirah, a man-made archipelago in the shape of a palm tree that juts into the Persian Gulf.

The average asking rent for an apartment there is over \$67,600 per year, with a villa renting for \$276,000 annually, according to real estate firm CBRE. Analysts attribute growth in the luxury market to the wealthy fleeing pandemic restrictions elsewhere.

That pressure has grown even outside the world of the ultra-wealthy. Rents on average across Dubai are up 26.9% year-on-year, even with anti-price-gouging protections. Families living in villas can expect to pay median rents of \$76,000 a year.

The sudden increase in rent prompted Gavin Hill, a 34-year-old car salesman from Essex, England, to move with his partner from a villa in the Dubai Hills neighborhood near downtown to a smaller apartment some 20 kilometers (12 miles) south.

"In terms of looking for a new place, previously it was reasonably easy," said Hill, who has moved four times in the six years he has lived in Dubai. "This time it's a minefield"

Russian money has helped fuel this.

Betterhomes, which has operated here since 1986, saw Russians lead all other nationalities in purchases by non-residents for the first time last year. Other real estate brokers have also acknowledged anecdotally the influence Russians have had.

"Since the crisis in Eastern Europe, we have seen a lot of Russians, a lot of Ukrainians as well, looking

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to both move their family and and money out there,” Waind said.

Dubai has a history of seeking a business advantage in crises like the Arab Spring, COVID-19 and now Russia’s war on Ukraine. During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, its new Jebel Ali port repaired ships damaged by explosions and gunfire in the Persian Gulf. The U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq saw wealthy émigrés arrive in Dubai and the wider UAE.

Those booms included what the West would consider dirty money as well. Some of the nearly \$1 billion embezzled in the 2010 Kabul Bank scandal in Afghanistan went toward luxury homes on Palm Jumeirah. A cousin of Syrian President Bashar Assad tied to Assad’s sanctioned business dealings also owned property there.

It remains unclear how many Russians have bought in Dubai — and whether the purchases involve people fleeing potential conscription into the Russian army or mass purchases that can be the work of money launderers. Unlike in the U.S., where property records are public, Dubai does not offer an easily accessible database of transactions.

A team from the U.S. Treasury stopped in the UAE on a Mideast tour in January.

A senior U.S. official told The Associated Press that the agency is concerned about the Russian money coming into the Dubai real estate market. The official spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity about discussing sanctions.

Already, the Treasury has issued an alert aimed at U.S. commercial real estate stating that Russian oligarchs and their intermediaries could use “highly complex financing methods and opaque ownership structures” to hide illicit funds.

But it remains unclear what, if any, action Treasury would take, considering the defense and economic ties the U.S. has with the Emirates. A global body focused on fighting money laundering put the UAE on its “gray list” over concerns it isn’t doing enough to stop criminals and militants from hiding wealth there.

Once-abandoned projects that are showing new life include the Dubai Pearl, a planned \$4 billion luxury development that was supposed to host multiple hotels and apartments in four, 73-story towers. Those plans collapsed during the 2009 financial crisis, brought on by the Great Recession, that forced Abu Dhabi to provide the city-state a \$20 billion bailout.

Demolition crews are now bringing down the concrete husk of the Dubai Pearl, though plans for the site remain unclear.

Plans for the development of Palm Jumeirah’s forgotten twin, the Palm Jebel Ali, are also being relaunched.

One practice that helped fuel Dubai’s 2009 crisis involved speculators buying yet-to-be built properties. “Off-plan” flipping is growing again as initial buyers “are capitalizing on the current market upswing and cashing out with a premium in hand,” local firm Property Monitor said.

That company and others warn that speculative purchasing could lead to another bubble.

“This does suggest a rise in speculative activity, which is a feature of any market that is seeing price rises,” said Scott Livermore, the chief economist at Oxford Economics Middle East.

Hill — the renter from England — would like to buy a place if the market comes down again. But he’s cautious after what he’s seen in this boomtown.

Dubai “can eat people out and spit them out quite quickly,” Hill said. “I’ve seen too many people go crazy and then go bust very, very fast.”

After quake, war-hit Syrians struggle to get aid, rebuild

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

ATAREB, Syria (AP) — After years of war, residents of areas in northwest Syria struck by a massive earthquake are grappling with their new and worsening reality.

Almost one week after the devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck northern Syria and neighboring Turkey, the United Nations has acknowledged an international failure to help Syrian quake victims.

In Atareb, a town that Syrian rebels still hold after years of fighting government troops, survivors dug through the debris of their homes Sunday, picking up the remnants of their shattered lives and looking

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for ways to heal after the latest in a series of humanitarian disasters to hit the war-battered area.

Excavators lifted rubble and residents with shovels and picks destroyed columns to even out a demolished building.

Dozens of newly displaced families gathered for hot meals from local volunteers and the local opposition-run government. A private citizen went tent to tent to give out wads of cash in a makeshift shelter — the equivalent of about \$18 to each family.

Syrians were doing what they have honed over years of crises: relying on themselves to pick up the pieces and move on.

"We are licking our own wounds," said Hekmat Hamoud, who had been displaced twice by Syria's ongoing conflict before finding himself trapped for hours beneath rubble.

Syria's northwestern rebel-held enclave, where over 4 million people for years have struggled to cope with ruthless airstrikes and rampant poverty, was hit hard by the Feb. 6 quake.

Many in the area were already displaced from the ongoing conflict and live in crowded tent settlements or buildings weakened by past bombings. The quake killed over 2,000 people in the enclave, and displaced many more for a second time, forcing some to sleep under olive groves in the frigid winter weather.

"I lost everything," said father of two Fares Ahmed Abdo, 25, who survived the quake. But his new home and body shop where he fixed motorcycles for a living were destroyed. Once again with barely any shelter and no power nor toilets, he, his wife, two boys and ill mother are crammed in a small tent.

"I am waiting for any help," he said.

Visiting the Turkish-Syrian border Sunday, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths acknowledged in a statement that Syrians have been left "looking for international help that hasn't arrived."

"We have so far failed the people in north-west Syria. They rightly feel abandoned," he said. "My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can."

Northwest Syria relies almost entirely on aid for survival, but post-quake international assistance has been slow to reach the area. The first U.N. convoy to reach the area from Turkey was on Thursday — three days after the earthquake.

Before that, the only cargo coming across the Bab al-Hawa crossing on the Turkey-Syria border was a steady stream of bodies of earthquake victims coming home for burial — Syrian refugees who had fled the war in their country and settled in Turkey but perished in the quake.

The U.N. aid sent from Turkey to Syria is only authorized to enter via the Bab al-Hawa crossing, and logistics were complicated by pressure on the roads, many of them destroyed by the quake. While technically, international aid can also be sent from Syrian government-held areas to rebel-held areas in the northwest, that route brings its own set of hurdles and was at best a trickle.

Critics of the government of President Bashar Assad say aid funneled through government-held areas in Syria faces bureaucracy and the risk that authorities will misappropriate or divert the aid to support people close to the government.

A convoy carrying U.N. aid that was scheduled to cross Sunday into rebel-held Idlib from the government area was canceled after its entry was blocked by the the Qaida-affiliated rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which dominates the area. An administrative arm of the group said in a statement declined to receive assistance from government areas.

Strips of northern Syria are held by a patchwork of sometimes-conflicting groups, further hindering aid deliveries. Turkish-backed rebels have blocked aid convoys from reaching earthquake victims that were sent by rival U.S.-backed Kurdish groups in neighboring areas.

"We are trying to tell everyone, put politics aside. This is the time to unite behind the common effort to support the Syrian people," said Geir Pedersen, the U.N. special envoy for Syria who landed in Damascus on Sunday.

At the United Nations, U.S. envoy Linda Thomas-Greenfield called for an urgent U.S. Security Council vote to authorize the opening of additional cross-border passages into northwestern Syria. "People in the affected areas are counting on us," she said in a statement. "They are appealing to our common humanity

to help in their moment of need. We cannot let them down.”

While aid has been slow to reach the northwest, a number of countries that had cut ties with Damascus during Syria’s civil war have sent help to government areas. Arab countries including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have stepped in. UAE’s foreign minister visited Damascus and met with Assad on Sunday.

Raed al-Saleh, the head of the White Helmets, a civil defense group operating in the rebel-held northwest, said Griffiths’ visit was “too little, too late.” He said calls for international assistance by local rescue teams went unheeded for days “and during this time, countless lives have been needlessly lost.”

Al-Saleh met with Griffiths to demand the opening of additional cross-border routes for aid to enter without waiting for authorization from the U.N. Security Council.

Abdel-Haseeb Abdel-Raheem sifted through the rubble of his aunt’s destroyed four-story building in the town of Atareb in opposition-run northern Aleppo. He had pulled the bodies of his aunt and her husband from beneath the rubble hours after the quake. Now he went back to find any valuables, using his hands and dipping his body inside the skeleton of the destroyed building to pull out blankets and pillows, as well as some clothes.

The 34-year-old said he had no illusion that humanitarian assistance will solve his problems.

“We have no hope anymore,” he said.

Haley faces ‘high-wire act’ in 2024 bid against Trump

By MEG KINNARD and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Few have navigated the turbulent politics of the Trump era like Nikki Haley.

In early 2016, the then-South Carolina governor said she was “embarrassed” by candidate Donald Trump and decried his reluctance to condemn white supremacists. Nine months later, she agreed to join his Cabinet, serving as a key validator as Trump sought to win over skeptical world leaders and voters at home.

And shortly after Trump left the White House, Haley, whose resume by then included an ambassadorship to the United Nations, vowed not to step in the way if he ran for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. Yet on Wednesday, she is poised to become the first major Republican candidate to enter the race against him.

“It’s going to be quite the high-wire act,” said veteran Republican strategist Terry Sullivan. “She says she’s always been an underdog. She will be again.”

The 51-year-old Haley may be the first to take on Trump, but a half-dozen or more high-profile Republicans are expected to join the GOP’s 2024 presidential nomination contest over the coming months. Some would-be competitors may be more popular than Haley even in South Carolina, where she lives and has established a campaign headquarters.

Likely rivals include Sen. Tim Scott, a fellow South Carolinian and perhaps the most celebrated elected official in a state where Trump has already locked up endorsements from the governor and its senior senator, Lindsey Graham. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former Vice President Mike Pence could also be formidable foes should they run, as widely expected.

Indeed, on the eve of this week’s announcement, there is broad agreement that Haley — the only Republican woman of color expected in the 2024 contest, a politician who loves to remind people that she has never lost an election — is about to be tested as never before.

Trump has stepped up his attacks on Haley in recent weeks. But allies describe the former governor, who is the daughter of Indian immigrants, as a savvy executive uniquely positioned to lead a new generation of Republicans. They understand that the fight ahead could get ugly.

“She took the bull by the horns and said, ‘That doesn’t matter to me, I’m going to run,’” said longtime supporter Gavin J. Smith. “She did that when she ran for governor, and that’s what you’re going to see when she runs for president.”

Perhaps more than anyone this young presidential primary season, Haley personifies the Republican Party’s shifting views on Trump. Her reversal on whether to challenge the former president was based less on concerns about his divisive leadership or policy disagreements than the growing belief within the

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GOP that Trump is losing political strength.

Haley, like the vast majority of her party, largely supported Trump even after he inspired a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol. It was not until Trump-backed candidates across several key states were defeated in last fall's midterm elections that a wave of high-profile Republicans began to openly weigh 2024 bids against him.

New York-based Republican donor Eric Levine says he's convinced that another Trump Republican nomination would lead to his party's destruction. Haley, he said, is among the three favorite Trump alternatives.

"I think as a woman of color and a daughter of legal immigrants from India, she'd give the Democratic Party no reason to exist. All their woke crap goes out the window," Levine said. "I think she's a spectacular candidate."

Haley's announcement will take place Wednesday in Charleston, the historic coastal city where her campaign will be based. Almost immediately, she'll travel to meet voters in New Hampshire and Iowa.

She's entrusted her campaign to a collection of senior staff led by longtime aides. Betsey Ankney, who heads up Haley's PAC, will manage the campaign, with the PAC's development director, Mary Kate Johnson, as finance director, Haley's team told The Associated Press.

Longtime Haley adviser Chaney Denton and Nachama Soloveichik, who was a spokeswoman for recently retired Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey, will head up communications. Strategist Jon Lerner will serve as senior adviser, and Barney Keller of Jamestown Associates will be Haley's media consultant.

For Haley, this week's launch marks a significant step on a long road that began in South Carolina's "Good Old Boys Club," she wrote in a Friday fundraising appeal.

"People thought I was too brown ... too female ... too young ... too conservative ... too principled," she wrote.

Born in 1972 in rural South Carolina, Haley has long spoken of a Southern rural childhood in which she felt she didn't fit. She was raised in the Sikh faith with a mother who wore traditional saris, and a father clad in a turban.

"Nikki has been regularly underestimated," said Catherine Templeton, a Republican who served Haley in two roles, leading South Carolina's labor and public health agencies. "But it makes her work harder."

In her first campaign in 2004, Haley, formerly an accountant, defeated the longest-serving member of South Carolina's House. After six years in the Legislature, she was considered a longshot when she mounted her 2010 gubernatorial campaign.

The GOP field was filled with more experienced politicians, and at times, she faced blatant racism. Then-state Sen. Jake Knotts appeared on a talk show and used a racial slur in reference to Haley. He apologized, saying it was meant as a joke.

Still, Haley became the first woman and person of color elected South Carolina's governor — and the nation's youngest state executive. After winning reelection in 2014, her second term was marred by crisis.

She spent weeks attending funerals of Black parishioners gunned down by a self-avowed white supremacist at a Charleston church in 2015. Later that year, she pushed for and signed legislation to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds, where it had flown for more than 50 years.

Haley's political skills were tested in a different way in 2016, as Trump went from late-night television punchline to serious Republican presidential contender.

She endorsed Florida Sen. Marco Rubio ahead of South Carolina's high-stakes Republican primary, then backed Texas Sen. Ted Cruz once Rubio was knocked out.

Then, Haley described Trump as "everything a governor doesn't want in a president." She also said she was "embarrassed" by his attacks against former President George W. Bush and condemned Trump's reluctance to disavow the KKK.

But shortly after Trump won the presidency, Haley agreed to serve as the new administration's ambassador to the United Nations, a Cabinet-level position.

"I proudly serve in this administration, and I enthusiastically support most of its decisions and the direction it is taking the country," Haley said in a 2018 op-ed.

Later that year, Haley abruptly announced her departure from the U.N. in the wake of an ethics probe, fueling speculation that she might challenge Trump in 2020 or replace Pence on the ticket. Neither happened.

Instead, Haley returned to South Carolina, joined the board of aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co. and hit the lucrative speaking circuit, reportedly commanding fees as high as \$200,000. She also penned two books.

Her public support for Trump continued even after the attack on the Capitol.

"I'm really proud of the successes of the Trump administration. Whether it was foreign policy or domestic policy, we should embrace those," she tweeted three weeks after the insurrection.

But it's unclear whether such platitudes will give Haley much cushion in a party that, for now, remains dominated by Trump and his supporters. Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, the No. 3 House Republican, has already endorsed Trump's 2024 bid. While she declined to comment directly on Haley's candidacy, she insisted that Trump would defeat any Republican challenger "by massive margins."

"It is time for Republicans to unite around the most popular Republican in America," she said of Trump.

Grief gives way to anger over Turkey's earthquake response

By JUSTIN SPIKE and BERNAT ARMANGUÉ Associated Press

ANTAKYA, Turkey (AP) — When Zafer Mahmut Boncuk's apartment building collapsed in Turkey's devastating earthquake, he discovered his 75-year-old mother was still alive — but pinned under the wreckage.

For hours, Boncuk frantically searched for someone in the ancient, devastated city of Antakya to help him free her. He was able to talk to her, hold her hand and give her water. Despite his pleas, however, no one came, and she died on Tuesday, the day after the quake.

Like many others in Turkey, his sorrow and disbelief have turned to rage over the sense there has been an unfair and ineffective response to the historic disaster that has killed tens of thousands of people there and in Syria.

Boncuk directed his anger at President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, especially because she seemed so close to rescue but no one came. Her remains were finally removed Sunday, nearly a week after the building collapsed. His father's body is still in the rubble.

"What would happen if it was your own mother, dear Recep Tayyip Erdogan? What happened to being a world leader? Where are you? Where?" he screamed.

"I gave her water to drink, I cleared her face of rubble. I told her that I would save her. But I failed," said Boncuk, 60. "The last time we spoke, I asked if I should help her drink some water. She said no, so I rubbed some water on her lips. Ten minutes later, she died."

He blamed "ignorance and lack of information and care — that's why my mother died in front of my eyes."

Many in Turkey express similar frustration that rescue operations have been painfully slow since the Feb. 6 quakes and that valuable time was lost during the narrow window for finding people alive.

Others, particularly in southern Hatay province near the Syrian border, say Erdogan's government was late in delivering assistance to the hardest-hit region for what they suspect are both political and religious reasons.

In the southeastern town of Adiyaman, Elif Busra Ozturk waited outside the wreckage of a building on Saturday where her uncle and aunt were trapped and believed dead, and where the bodies of two of her cousins already had been found.

"For three days, I waited outside for help. No one came. There were so few rescue teams that they could only intervene in places they were sure there were people alive," she said.

At the same complex, Abdullah Tas, 66, said he had been sleeping in a car near the building where his son, daughter-in-law and four grandchildren were buried. He said that rescuers had first arrived four days after the earthquake struck. The Associated Press could not independently verify his claim.

"What good is that for the people under the debris?" he asked.

Onlookers stood behind police tape Saturday in Antakya as bulldozers clawed at a high-rise luxury apartment building that had toppled onto its side.

Over 1,000 residents had been in the 12-story building when the quake struck, according to relatives

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watching the recovery effort. They said hundreds were still inside but complained the effort to free them had been slow and not serious.

"This is an atrocity, I don't know what to say," said Bediha Kanmaz, 60. The bodies of her son and 7-month-old grandson had been pulled from the building — still locked in an embrace — but her daughter-in-law was still inside.

"We open body bags to see if they're ours, we're checking if they're our children. We're even checking the ones that are torn to pieces," she said of herself and other grief-stricken relatives.

Kanmaz also blamed Turkey's government for the slow response, and accused the national rescue service of failing to do enough to recover people alive.

She and others in Antakya expressed the belief that the presence of a large minority of Alevis — an Anatolian Islamic community that differs from Sunni and Shia Islam and Alawites in Syria — had made them a low priority for the government. Traditionally, few Alevis vote for Erdogan's ruling party. There was no evidence, however, that the region was overlooked for sectarian reasons.

Erdogan said Wednesday that disaster efforts were continuing in all 10 affected provinces and dismissed allegations of no help from state institutions like the military as "lies, fake slander."

But he has acknowledged shortcomings. Officials said rescue efforts in Hatay were initially complicated by the destruction of the local airport's runway and bad road conditions.

Anger over the extent of the destruction, however, is not limited to individuals. Turkish authorities have been detaining or issuing detention warrants for dozens of people allegedly involved in the construction of buildings that collapsed, and the justice minister has vowed to punish those responsible.

Kanmaz blamed negligence on the part of the developer of the apartment building where her family had been killed.

"If I could wrap my hands around the contractor's neck, I would tear him to shreds," she said.

That contractor, who oversaw the construction of the 250-unit building, was detained at Istanbul Airport on Friday before boarding a flight out of the country, Turkey's official Anadolu news agency reported. On Saturday, he was formally arrested. His lawyer suggested the public was looking for a scapegoat.

In multiethnic southern Turkey, other tensions are rising. Some expressed frustration that Syrian refugees who fled to the region from their devastating civil war are burdening the sparse welfare system and competing for resources with Turkish people.

"There are many poor people in Hatay, but they don't offer us any welfare; they give it to the Syrians. They give so much to the Syrians," Kanmaz said. "There are more Syrians than Turks here."

There were signs Saturday the tensions could be boiling over.

Two German aid groups and the Austrian Armed Forces temporarily interrupted their rescue work in the Hatay region citing fears for the safety of their staff. They resumed work after the Turkish army secured the area, the Austrian Defense Ministry spokesman tweeted.

"There is increasing tension between different groups in Turkey," Lt. Col. Pierre Kugelweis of the Austrian Armed Forces told the APA news agency. "Shots have reportedly been fired."

German news agency dpa reported that Steven Berger, chief of operations of the aid group I.S.A.R. Germany, said that "it can be seen that grief is slowly giving way to anger" in Turkey's affected regions.

For Kanmaz, it was a mixture of grief and anger.

"I'm angry. Life is over," she said. "We live for our children; what matters most to us is our children. We exist if they exist. Now we are over. Everything you see here is over."

New Zealand city grinds to halt as deluge from cyclone looms

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Auckland residents hunkered down Monday as they braced for a deluge from Cyclone Gabrielle, two weeks after a record-breaking storm swamped New Zealand's largest city and killed four people.

Much of Auckland ground to a halt as train services were canceled, libraries and most schools were

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closed, and authorities asked people to make only essential trips.

Air New Zealand canceled all domestic flights to and from Auckland through Tuesday morning, as well as many international flights. Some international routes would continue operating, the airline said, although they might need to be diverted from Auckland. The carrier also canceled domestic flights to and from the cities of Hamilton, Tauranga and Taupo.

In all, Air New Zealand canceled more than 500 flights. More than 10,000 international customers had been affected, the airline said, with thousands still to be rebooked.

The cyclone, which was moving south, dumped more than 220 millimeters (9 inches) of rain in areas north of Auckland, cutting power to about 58,000 households and forcing many roads to close.

About 46,000 homes remained without power Monday afternoon.

Authorities declared a state of emergency in Northland, Auckland and some other regions, and were asking some residents in low-lying areas to evacuate.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said the weather had made the start of the year "incredibly challenging" for people in Auckland and other northern areas.

"Extreme weather event has come on the back of extreme weather event," Hipkins said. "For families and businesses, I know that that has been just exhausting, and I want to acknowledge how hard many of them are doing it."

Gabrielle was expected to pass Auckland overnight Monday. Its windspeed was downgraded as gusts abated to about 130 kilometers per hour (80 miles per hour).

Weather forecaster MetService said there was a very high likelihood of "extreme, impactful, and unprecedented weather" over many regions, with heavy rain, strong winds and large waves.

With Hipkins and some other lawmakers unable to immediately travel from Auckland to the capital, Wellington, some events scheduled for this year's opening session of Parliament were rescheduled, including Hipkins' statement outlining his priorities for the year, which has been moved from Tuesday to Wednesday.

Two weeks ago, Aucklanders experienced the wettest day ever recorded in the city, as the amount of rain that would typically fall over an entire summer hit in a single day.

Quickly rising floodwaters and landslides killed four people, caused widespread disruption and left hundreds of homes unlivable.

Pregnant Rihanna soars in Super Bowl halftime performance

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

Rihanna was above it all. And pregnant to boot.

She began and ended the Super Bowl 57 halftime show hovering high above the field at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.

The performance lacked the surprise guests stars included in many previous Super Bowl halftimes, save one — her representative revealed afterward that the singer is pregnant with her second child.

Rihanna wore a puffy, bright red jumpsuit with tight, rubbery garb underneath that showed a baby bump that fueled a wave of social media speculation until the big revelation. She stood on a transparent rectangular platform that raised and lowered as she belted out the lyrics to "Bitch Better Have My Money" over the turf where the Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs were battling moments earlier.

Dancers wearing white ski-style suits and shaded goggles had their own suspended platforms that moved in concert with hers.

She and the dancers were lowered to a long stage that matched her outfit as she sped through hits including "Work," "Where Have You Been," and "Only Girl," belting out "Want you to make me feel like I'm the only girl in the world."

There were also none of the constant costume changes and scene shifts from previous years. The theme — and the color scheme — stayed the same throughout the 13-minute show, with red lights bathing the stage at times and golden fireworks exploding in the air above her.

The long stage allowed for extended pull-away shots as she stared down the camera and overhead

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tracking shots of Rihanna and her dancers.

At one point she powdered her face and checked it in a mirror before getting back on the mic.

Lights sparkled from the stands as she was hoisted alone back into the air and sang "Diamonds" — with its refrain of "shine bright like a diamond" — as the set closed.

Rihanna's performance was her first solo performance event in seven years, and her first since becoming a mother for the first time nine months ago.

A SIMPLY SPANGLED BANNER

Country star Chris Stapleton made the national anthem a simple affair at Super Bowl 57, standing alone on the field accompanied by only his electric guitar as he sang "The Star Spangled Banner" moments before the Kansas City Chiefs kickoff to the Philadelphia Eagles to start the game.

Dressed simply in smooth black denim and sunglasses, with neatly combed hair instead of his signature feathered cowboy hat, he sang the anthem as a plaintive ballad, picking it up to rock only briefly as he delivered the final lines "banner yet wave" and "land of the free!"

His anthem felt slow, but it clocked in at 2 minutes, 2 seconds, under the 2 minutes, 5 seconds predicted by oddsmakers. But it was more than 10 seconds longer than last year's sung by another country star, Mickey Guyton.

Eagles coach Nick Sirianni and starting center Jason Kelce both had tears in their eyes during Stapleton's emotional performance.

As the eight-time Grammy winner sang, "CODA" star Troy Kotsur, the first deaf man to win an acting Oscar, signed the anthem lyrics.

OTHER ANTHEMS

Before Stapleton's anthem, "Abbot Elementary" star Sheryl Lee Ralph performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Wearing a flowing red velvet gown, Ralph began the song dubbed the Black national anthem as a reflective ballad, and it became a soaring hymn as it went on, with military-style drums joining her and a choir dressed all in white chiming in behind her on the field at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.

And R&B legend Babyface delivered "America the Beautiful" as a soulful folk song, playing an acoustic guitar painted with an American flag and blue flowers as he stood alone on the field. A backing track with drum machines and singers kicked in before he was done.

FAMOUS FANS, PERFORMERS AND PITCH PEOPLE

Die-hard Chiefs fan Paul Rudd was on the field before the game, sporting a big smile and a team jersey.

Philadelphia native Bradley Cooper, wearing an Eagles T-shirt, celebrated from the stands as his team put the first points of a thriller of a game on the board. Another famous Philly fan, Kevin Hart, wearing a jersey, stood and flapped his arms.

Jay-Z, Tiffany Haddish, rapper GloRilla and chef Gordon Ramsay were also spotted in the stadium.

Pregame performances came from DJ Snake and Jason Derulo, whose backup dancers included synchronized robot dogs.

Many stars have made the scene at Super Bowl week parties.

Many others, including Serena Williams, Adam Driver and John Travolta, are showing up in the big game's big commercials.

And U2 revealed in a commercial late in the game that they were returning to the concert stage for the first time since 2019.

US jets down 4 objects in 8 days, unprecedented in peacetime

By COLLEEN LONG, LOLITA C. BALDOR and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. fighter jet shot down an "unidentified object" over Lake Huron on Sunday on orders from President Joe Biden. It was the fourth such downing in eight days and the latest military strike in an extraordinary chain of events over U.S. airspace that Pentagon officials believe has no peacetime precedent.

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Part of the reason for the repeated shootdowns is a "heightened alert" following a spy balloon from China that emerged over U.S. airspace in late January, Gen. Glen VanHerck, head of NORAD and U.S. Northern Command, said in a briefing with reporters.

Since then, fighter jets last week also shot down objects over Canada and Alaska. Pentagon officials said they posed no security threats, but so little was known about them that Pentagon officials were ruling nothing out — not even UFOs.

"We have been more closely scrutinizing our airspace at these altitudes, including enhancing our radar, which may at least partly explain the increase," said Melissa Dalton, assistant defense secretary for homeland defense.

U.S. authorities have made clear that they constantly monitor for unknown radar blips, and it is not unusual to shut down airspace as a precaution to evaluate them. But the unusually assertive response was raising questions about whether such use of force was warranted, particularly as administration officials said the objects were not of great national security concern and the downings were just out of caution.

VanHerck said the U.S. adjusted its radar so it could track slower objects. "With some adjustments, we've been able to get a better categorization of radar tracks now," he said, "and that's why I think you're seeing these, plus there's a heightened alert to look for this information."

He added: "I believe this is the first time within United States or American airspace that NORAD or United States Northern Command has taken kinetic action against an airborne object."

Asked if officials have ruled out extraterrestrials, VanHerck said, "I haven't ruled out anything at this point."

The Pentagon officials said they were still trying to determine what exactly the objects were and said they had considered using the jets' guns instead of missiles, but it proved to be too difficult. They drew a strong distinction between the three shot down over this weekend and the balloon from China.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz tweeted that airmen in the 148th Fighter Wing, an Air National Guard fighter unit in Duluth, shot down the object over Lake Huron.

The extraordinary air defense activity began in late January, when a white orb the officials said was from China appeared over the U.S. and hovered above the nation for days before fighter jets downed it off the coast of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. That event played out over livestream. Many Americans have been captivated by the drama playing out in the skies as fighter jets scramble to shoot down objects.

The latest brought down was first detected on Saturday evening over Montana, but it was initially thought to be an anomaly. Radar picked it up again Sunday hovering over the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and it was going over Lake Huron, Pentagon officials said Sunday.

U.S. and Canadian authorities had restricted some airspace over the lake earlier Sunday as planes were scrambled to intercept and try to identify the object. According to a senior administration official, the object was octagonal, with strings hanging off, but had no discernable payload. It was flying low at about 20,000 feet, said the official who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials were still trying to precisely identify two other objects shot down by F-22 fighter jets, and were working to determine whether China was responsible as concerns escalated about what Washington said was Beijing's large-scale aerial surveillance program.

An object shot down Saturday over Canada's Yukon was described by U.S. officials as a balloon significantly smaller than the balloon — the size of three school buses — hit by a missile Feb. 4. A flying object brought down over the remote northern coast of Alaska on Friday was more cylindrical and described as a type of airship.

Both were believed to have a payload, either attached or suspended from them, according to the officials who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing investigation. Officials were not able to say who launched the objects and were seeking to figure out their origin.

The three objects were much smaller in size, different in appearance and flew at lower altitudes than the suspected spy balloon that fell into the Atlantic Ocean after the U.S. missile strike.

The officials said the other three objects were not consistent with the fleet of Chinese aerial surveillance balloons that targeted more than 40 countries, stretching back at least into the Trump administration.

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Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told ABC's "This Week" that U.S. officials were working quickly to recover debris. Using shorthand to describe the objects as balloons, he said U.S. military and intelligence officials were "focused like a laser" on gathering and accumulating the information, then compiling a comprehensive analysis.

"The bottom line is until a few months ago we didn't know about these balloons," Schumer, D-N.Y., said of the spy program that the administration has linked to the People's Liberation Army, China's military. "It is wild that we didn't know."

Eight days ago, F-22 jets downed the large white balloon that had wafted over the U.S. for days at an altitude of about 60,000 feet. U.S. officials immediately blamed China, saying the balloon was equipped to detect and collect intelligence signals and could maneuver itself. White House officials said improved surveillance capabilities helped detect it.

China's Foreign Ministry said the unmanned balloon was a civilian meteorological airship that had blown off course. Beijing said the U.S. had "overreacted" by shooting it down.

Then, on Friday, North American Aerospace Defense Command, the combined U.S.-Canada organization that provides shared defense of airspace over the two nations, detected and shot down an object near sparsely populated Deadhorse, Alaska.

Later that evening, NORAD detected a second object, flying at a high altitude over Alaska, U.S. officials said. It crossed into Canadian airspace on Saturday and was over the Yukon, a remote territory, when it was ordered shot down by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

In both of those incidents, the objects were flying at roughly 40,000 feet. The object on Sunday was flying at 20,000 feet.

The cases have increased diplomatic tensions between the United States and China, raised questions about the extent of Beijing's American surveillance, and prompted days of criticism from Republican lawmakers about the administration's response.

U2 returning to stage in Las Vegas, minus one of quartet

By DAVID BAUDER AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U2 is returning to the concert stage later this year for the first time since 2019 but without one of the original quartet, as drummer Larry Mullen Jr. is on the injured list.

The band offered a hint about its reemergence on the biggest stage possible — in a commercial that aired during the Super Bowl on Sunday — and announced it would play a series of shows this fall to open the new MSG Sphere venue in Las Vegas.

The concerts will be focused on the band's 1991 album, "Achtung Baby."

"We need to get back on stage and see the faces of our fans again," band members Bono, the Edge and Adam Clayton said in a statement Sunday.

No other dates were announced beyond Las Vegas, although it's unlikely a show will be built for just one city. In 2017 and 2019, the band did a worldwide concert tour based on its "Joshua Tree" album.

Mullen is arguably the band's founder; the four members met in his Dublin kitchen to answer an ad he had placed on a high school bulletin board seeking musicians. U2 wouldn't detail his health concerns, but a report in The Washington Post in November said the drummer had issues with his neck and elbows that needed surgery.

Only twice before has the band taken stage without all four members — when Clayton missed a gig in Australia for health reasons in 1993, and after Mullen broke his foot in a motorcycle accident in 1978, according to Bono's book, "Surrender."

Mullen will be replaced in Las Vegas by Dutch drummer Bram van den Berg.

Next month U2 is planning to release the disc "Songs of Surrender," featuring re-recorded and re-imagined versions of 40 songs from its catalog.

The Edge said he was impressed by the state-of-the-art sound and video system being constructed for the MSG Sphere. "We all thought about it and decided we'd be mad not to accept the invitation," he said.

Pope worried about Nicaraguan bishop sentenced to 26 years

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday expressed sadness and worry at the news that Bishop Rolando Álvarez, an outspoken critic of the Nicaraguan government, had been sentenced to 26 years in prison.

It's just the latest move against the Catholic Church and government opponents, and comes amid growing concern for Álvarez.

"The news that arrived from Nicaragua has saddened me no little," the pontiff said, expressing both his love and concern at a traditional Sunday gathering in St. Peter's Square.

He called on the faithful to pray for the politicians responsible "to open their hearts."

Álvarez was sentenced Friday, after refusing to get on a flight to the United States with 222 other prisoners, all opponents of President Daniel Ortega. In addition to his prison term, Álvarez was stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship.

The bishop said if he boarded the plane, it would be he was admitting he was guilty to a crime he never committed, according to a person close to Álvarez who asked not to be identified out of fear of reprisal.

"Let them go and I'll stay and serve out their sentence," he said that Álvarez told him.

Until now, no one has been able to contact Álvarez, nor confirm for themselves where he is or if he is safe, he said.

That concern was also echoed in Nicaragua's capital, when Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes said someone had asked him what they could do for Álvarez.

"Pray, that is our strength," Brenes told those gathered inside the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. "Pray that the Lord gives him strength, gives him judgment in all of his actions."

The comments by Pope Francis and Cardinal Brenes on Sunday were the first made publicly by the church about the expulsion of the prisoners — several priests did board the flight — and of Álvarez's sentence.

Ortega ordered the mass release of political leaders, priests, students and activists widely considered political prisoners and had some of them put on a flight to Washington Thursday. Ortega said Álvarez refused to board without being able to consult with other bishops.

Nicaragua's president called Álvarez's refusal "an absurd thing." Álvarez, who had been held under house arrest, was then taken to the nearby Modelo prison.

In the run-up to Ortega's re-election in November 2021, Nicaraguan authorities arrested seven potential opposition presidential candidates to clear the field. The government closed hundreds of nongovernmental organizations that Ortega has accused of taking foreign funding and using it to destabilize his government.

The former guerrilla fighter has long had a tense relationship with the Catholic Church. But he targeted it more directly last year in his campaign to extinguish voices of dissent.

Ortega kicked out the papal nuncio, the Vatican's top diplomat in March. Later, the government shut down several radio stations in Álvarez's Matagalpa diocese ahead of municipal elections. Álvarez was arrested in August along with several other priests and lay people, accused with undermining the government and spreading false information.

The church's response to the government's increasingly aggressive behavior has been muted, apparently in an attempt to not inflame tensions.

On Saturday, a few thousand Ortega supporters marched in the capital in a show of support for the expulsion of the opposition prisoners. While some seemed genuine in their support, the government has earned a reputation for turning out people by making government employees attend.

Outside Managua's cathedral Sunday, it was clear that the lengthy sentence for a priest and stripping critics of their citizenship rankled people in the still heavily Roman Catholic country.

Jorge Paladino, a 49-year-old architect, said he felt "disillusioned, upset, dismayed." He said those who were expelled will always be Nicaraguans, regardless of what they are told.

María Buitrago, a 61-year-old retiree, spoke softly but with indignation.

"They took their nationality in a horrible way as if they are gods and can take from someone where they live, where they were born," Buitrago said. "They can't take Nicaraguan blood. They can't take it. But they do what they please."

New Mex St cancels season after sex, harassment allegations

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

New Mexico State's men's basketball season came to an abrupt halt Sunday after the release of a police report that detailed three players ganging up on a teammate and attacking him in a case that includes allegations of false imprisonment, harassment and criminal sexual contact.

"It's time for this program to reset," chancellor Dan Arvizu said in the statement that announced the end of the season.

Arvizu said the shutdown was in response to a report filed to campus police on Friday by a player against three teammates. According to the report, the victim said that on Feb. 6, his teammates held him down "removed his clothing exposing his buttocks and began to slap his (buttocks). He also went on to state that they also touched his scrotum."

The victim, whose name was redacted in the report along with those of the other players, said other incidents involving inappropriate physical and sexual touching had been occurring in locker rooms and on road trips since last summer. Regarding the latest instance, the victim told police he had no choice but to let this happen "because it's a 3-on-1 type of situation."

Arvizu, who will be leaving the university in June after regents recently chose not to renew his contract, said "this action is clearly needed, especially after receiving additional facts and reviewing investigation reports related to the hazing allegations involving student-athletes on the team."

"We must uphold the safety of our students and the integrity of our university," said Arvizu, who had initially suspended the program on Friday, then revealed what he called hazing allegations a day later.

He said he had spoken with the commissioner of the Western Athletic Conference, which said it was reviewing how to treat the six New Mexico State games that will be wiped off the schedule in regards to seeding for next month's conference tournament.

The report said the victim went to campus police to report a possible assault, but did not want to press criminal charges for the time being.

The allegations come less than three months after the suspension of forward Mike Peake, who is being investigated in the case of the fatal shooting of a student from rival school, University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque on Nov. 19.

Peake has not been charged in that case, which included state police stopping the team bus on Interstate-25 as it headed back to Las Cruces shortly after the shooting. Missing from the bus were Peake and three of his teammates, who had taken him to the hospital with an injured leg.

New Mexico State finished the season at 9-15, with only two conference wins in 12 games. The Aggies, long a source of pride on their 13,000-student campus in Las Cruces, have been to eight NCAA tournaments since 2007. They are scheduled to move from the WAC to Conference-USA next season.

The next big decision for this program appears to be coming Tuesday, when university regents will hold a closed meeting to discuss "limited personnel matters concerning individual employees." It did not name the employees who were to be discussed. The scheduling of the meeting came Saturday, the day after Arvizu placed coach Greg Heiar and his staff on administrative leave at the same time he suspended the season.

The scrubbing of the 2022-23 campaign came a day after two players quit following the initial reports of the hazing incident.

One of them, redshirt freshman Shahar Lazar, said he was leaving because "I don't think the program that I originally committed to aligns with my beliefs and core values."

Report: Companies' climate targets not what they claim to be

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

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BERLIN (AP) — Climate commitments by companies aren't always as green as they seem. A new report concludes major brands are exaggerating how ambitious their efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions are — in effect misleading consumers, investors and governments.

The report published Monday by the Europe-based environmental think tanks NewClimate Institute and Carbon Market Watch examined 24 companies, including KitKat manufacturer Nestle, French retailer Carrefour and automaker Volkswagen. It found that only one company — shipping firm Maersk — had climate plans with “reasonable integrity” while the rest were assessed to be moderate to very low.

“For the majority of companies, we found their climate strategies to be lacking,” said Thomas Day, a researcher at the NewClimate Institute who co-authored the report.

Actual emissions cuts resulting from the companies' plans would amount to less than half those needed by 2030 to help meet the Paris climate accord's goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit), it found in its second annual assessment.

The researchers also questioned companies' pledges to achieve “net zero” emissions, arguing that most consumers would understand that to mean largely stopping the release of planet-heating gas into the atmosphere.

“These net zero pledges, they actually amount to a commitment to reduce the emissions of those companies by just 36%,” said Day. Companies either claim the rest will be removed from the atmosphere by artificial or natural means — so-called carbon offsets — or simply remove large chunks of their emissions from the tally.

This was the case, for example, for Carrefour, which excludes 80% of its stores from the net zero target for 2040, according to the report. The company was among four corporations ranked as having climate plans with “very low integrity,” along with American Airlines, food processing company JBS and Samsung Electronics.

Carrefour said it disagreed with the report, adding that its climate efforts had been validated by independent experts — a position also taken by Swiss-based Nestle, whose targets were labeled as having “low integrity.”

“We will continue to pursue a holistic strategy of reducing our emissions and removing carbon from the atmosphere through measures that deliver benefits to the millions of people connected to our company's operations,” Nestle said in a statement.

Volkswagen, whose targets were also assessed as having “low integrity,” said it was committed to meeting the goal of the Paris accord, noting that it plans to invest €52 billion (\$55.5 billion) in electric vehicles by 2026.

“We support the NewClimate Institute's concern to achieve the greatest possible transparency and comparability in the climate goals of large companies,” it said.

The report's authors said their findings highlighted the need for greater transparency and stricter regulation of corporate climate efforts, to prevent companies from greenwashing their environmental impact — particularly when making ‘net zero’ claims.

“In many ways, carbon-neutral products are similar to cancer-neutral cigarettes,” said co-author Gilles Dufresne of Carbon Market Watch. “There is no robust scientific basis behind those claims, and most consumers are just completely confused about what those claims would mean.”

Turkey probes contractors as earthquake deaths pass 33,000

By JUSTIN SPIKE, ZEYNEP BILGINSOY and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

ANTAKYA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish authorities are targeting contractors allegedly linked with buildings that collapsed in the powerful Feb. 6 earthquakes as rescuers found more survivors in the rubble Sunday, including a pregnant woman and two children, in the disaster that killed over 33,000 people.

The death toll from the magnitude 7.8 and 7.5 quakes that struck nine hours apart in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria rose to 33,185 and was certain to increase as search teams find more bodies. As despair bred rage at the agonizingly slow rescues, the focus turned to assigning blame.

Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag said 131 people were under investigation for their alleged responsi-

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bility in the construction of buildings that failed to withstand the quakes. While the quakes were powerful, many in Turkey blame faulty construction for multiplying the devastation.

Turkey's construction codes meet current earthquake-engineering standards, at least on paper, but they are rarely enforced, explaining why thousands of buildings toppled over or pancaked down onto the people inside.

Among those facing scrutiny were two people arrested in Gaziantep province on suspicion of cutting down columns to make extra room in a building that collapsed, the state-run Anadolu Agency said. The justice ministry said three people were arrested, seven others were detained and another seven were barred from leaving Turkey.

Two contractors held responsible for the destruction of buildings in Adiyaman were arrested Sunday at Istanbul Airport while trying to leave the country, the private DHA news agency and other media reported. One detained contractor, Yavuz Karakus, told DHA: "My conscience is clear. I built 44 buildings. Four of them were demolished. I did everything according to the rules."

Rescuers reported finding more survivors amid increasingly long odds. Thermal cameras were used as crews demanded silence to hear those trapped.

In hard-hit Hatay province, a 50-year-old woman who appeared badly injured was carried out by crews in the town of Iskenderun. Similar rescues in the province saved two other women, one of them pregnant, according to broadcasters TRT and HaberTurk.

HaberTurk showed a 6-year-old boy rescued from his wrecked home in Adiyaman. An exhausted rescuer removed his surgical mask and took deep breaths as several women cried in joy.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca posted a video of a young girl in a navy blue jumper who was found alive. "There is always hope!" he tweeted.

Rescuers in Antakya, elsewhere in Hatay province, pulled a man in his late 20s or 30s from the rubble, saying he was one of nine trapped in the building. He waved weakly as he was removed on a stretcher as workers applauded and chanted, "God is great!"

German and Turkish workers rescued an 88-year-old in Kirikhan, German news agency dpa reported. Italian and Turkish rescuers found a 35-year-old man in Antakya who appeared unscathed, private NTV television reported.

A child was freed overnight in the town of Nizip, in Gaziantep, state-run Anadolu Agency said, while a 32-year woman was found in a wrecked eight-story building in Antakya and asked for tea when she emerged, according to NTV.

Those were the rare exceptions.

Backhoes and bulldozers prepared a large cemetery in Antakya's outskirts as trucks and ambulances brought a steady stream of black body bags. Hundreds of graves were marked with simple wooden planks.

Hatay's airport reopened Sunday after its runway was repaired, and military and commercial planes ferried in supplies and will take away evacuees.

There are 34,717 Turkish personnel involved in rescue efforts. On Sunday, Turkey's Foreign Ministry said they were joined by 9,595 personnel from 74 countries, with more on the way.

In the Syrian capital of Damascus, the head of the World Health Organization warned that the pain will ripple forward, calling the disaster an "unfolding tragedy that's affecting millions."

"The compounding crises of conflict, COVID, cholera, economic decline, and now the earthquake have taken an unbearable toll," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Tedros said WHO experts were waiting to enter northwestern Syria "where we have been told the impact is even worse."

U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths, visiting the Turkish-Syrian border Sunday, said Syrians are "looking for international help that hasn't arrived."

"We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned," he said, adding, "My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can."

In the town of Atareb, in opposition-run northern Aleppo province, Abdel-Haseeb Abdel-Raheem returned

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Sunday to his ruined four-story building to try to salvage any valuables but could find only blankets, pillows and some clothes. His aunt and her husband died there, but their three children survived.

With no international rescue efforts in the war-battered region, the 34-year-old had to recover the bodies himself.

"You can't hear someone inside screaming and sit tight. You can't sit still. You can't have the heart to hear someone (crying for help) and you do nothing," he said, sitting above a mound of debris.

Political disputes have held up aid convoys sent from areas of northeast Syria controlled by U.S.-backed Kurdish groups to those controlled by the Syrian government and by Turkish-backed rebels who have fought with the Kurdish groups over the years.

A U.N. aid convoy sent to northwestern Syria through government-held areas was postponed due to obstruction from Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, an al-Qaida affiliated group ruling Idlib province, a U.N. spokesperson told The Associated Press.

Meanwhile, U.N. aid convoys continue to cross from Turkey into northwestern Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. The first U.N. convoy only reached northwest Syria from Turkey on Thursday, three days after the disaster struck.

Before that, it was only a steady stream of bodies coming through Bab al-Hawa: Syrian refugees who had fled the civil war and settled in Turkey but died in the disaster, being returned home for burial.

The earthquake death toll in Syria's northwestern rebel-held region has reached 2,166, according to the rescue group the White Helmets. The overall death toll in Syria stood at 3,553 on Saturday, although the 1,387 deaths reported for government-held parts of the country hadn't been updated in days. Turkey's death toll was 29,605 as of Sunday.

Turkey's Justice Ministry announced the establishment of Earthquake Crimes Investigation bureaus to identify contractors and others responsible for building works. It would gather evidence; instruct experts including architects, geologists and engineers; and check building permits and occupation permits.

A contractor was detained Friday at Istanbul airport before he could leave the country. He built a luxury 12-story building called Ronesans Rezidans in Antakya, and when it fell, it killed an untold number. He was formally arrested Saturday.

In leaked testimony published by Anadolu, the man said the building followed regulations and he did not know why it didn't stay standing. His lawyer suggested his client was a scapegoat.

Under programs that allowed building owners to pay fines instead of bringing them up to code, the government agency responsible for enforcement acknowledged in 2019 that over half of all buildings in Turkey — accounting for some 13 million apartments— were not in compliance.

The detentions could help direct public anger toward builders and contractors, deflecting it from local and state officials who allowed apparently substandard construction to proceed. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, already burdened by an economic downturn and high inflation, faces parliamentary and presidential elections in May.

The nongovernmental business organization TURKONFED estimated the earthquake damage at \$84.1 billion, based on statistics from the devastating 1999 quake in northwestern Turkey, including \$70.1 billion in housing and \$10.4 billion to gross domestic product.

Rescue crews have been overwhelmed by the widespread damage that has affected roads and airports, making it even harder to move quickly.

Erdogan acknowledged the initial response was hampered by the damage, with the worst-affected area 500 kilometers (310 miles) in diameter and home to 13.5 million. During a tour Saturday, Erdogan said such a tragedy was rare, referring to it as the "disaster of the century" in multiple speeches.

In New York City, mourners gathered Saturday at a mosque to remember a family of four from the borough of Queens who were killed while visiting relatives in Turkey. The Council on American-Islamic Relations said Burak and Kimberly Firik and their sons, aged 1 and 2, died in the disaster.

Ex-minister Christoulides wins Cyprus presidential election

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By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Former foreign minister Nikos Christodoulides was elected as the new president of Cyprus in a runoff election Sunday, pledging to revive stalemated reunification talks with the nation's breakaway Turkish Cypriots and to form a coalition government with women filling half of the Cabinet positions.

With 100% of ballots counted, Christodoulides had 51.9% of the vote and his runoff rival, veteran diplomat Andreas Mavroyiannis, had 48.1%, according to official election results. Mavroyiannis conceded defeat before the vote tally was complete.

Christodoulides, 49, campaigned as a unifying force for ethnically divided Cyprus, eschewing ideological and party divisions. His message resonated with a wide swath of voters.

"I'm looking you all in the eye and I sincerely make you this promise: I'll do everything I can to appear worthy of your trust," Christodoulides told supporters at his victory rally.

He made a special reference to the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Turkish Cypriots, including members of a volleyball team, were among the more than 33,000 people declared dead in the disaster as of Sunday.

"We share in their mourning, and I want to assure them that we stand by their side," the president-elect said.

Mavroyiannis, who previously served as Cyprus' ambassador to the United Nations, had positioned himself as the agent of change, ushering in a new political era following a decade of rule by outgoing President Nicos Anastasiades.

He ran as an independent, but the support he received from the communist-rooted AKEL party, the country's second-largest political party, may have pushed swing voters into backing Christodoulides.

Speaking to a somber crowd of supporters, Mavroyiannis, 66, who also was Anastasiades' chief negotiator with the nation's breakaway Turkish Cypriots, said he would not pursue an "active and daily role" in politics but remained willing to offer his counsel to the new government, if asked.

"I want to congratulate Nikos Christodoulides for his election victory and to wish more power to him," Mavroyiannis said. "I'm saddened that we couldn't fulfill the hopes and expectations for a large progressive changes that our homeland needs."

Christodoulides appeared to have won with support from members of the Democratic Rally (DISY) party, whose leader, Averof Neophytou, failed to make it into the runoff. The DISY leadership decided not to formally back either candidate and left it to members of the country's largest party to vote as they saw fit.

Many DISY party insiders had blamed Christodoulides, a long-time party member, for running against Neophytou and splitting the party vote.

However, many did not want the AKEL, Mavroyiannis' main backer, to regain a foothold in government and feared the diplomat becoming the next president of Cyprus would threaten the country's fragile economy and pro-Western trajectory.

Critics fault AKEL for bringing Cyprus to the brink of bankruptcy a decade ago and for maintaining a pro-Moscow slant.

Amid the bickering within DISY, Anastasiades, a former party leader, took the unusual step of issuing a statement suggesting that DISY members should work to thwart an AKEL-backed government.

He urged the party's voters to safeguard the island's Western orientation and its deepening alliance with the U.S.

Christodoulides said he has already received congratulatory messages from world leaders including French President Emmanuel Macron and U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"Our country's European, Western orientation is our steady compass for tomorrow," Christodoulides said.

Trying to mend fences with Christodoulides and divisions within DISY, Neophytou said the president-elect could count on the party's support "for the good of the country."

Christodoulides inherits the challenge of trying to restart moribund peace talks with the country's Turkish

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Cypriots, who declared independence nearly a decade after a 1974 Turkish invasion that followed a coup aimed at union with Greece.

The island's reunification has eluded politicians during over nearly a half-century of negotiations, despite progress on the shape of an overall peace deal.

A potential resolution became more complicated following the 2017 collapse of talks at a Swiss resort that many believed had come tantalizingly close to producing a breakthrough.

Turkey, the only country to recognize the minority Turkish Cypriots' independence, has since turned its back on a United Nations-backed arrangement for a federated Cyprus. It advocates instead a two-state deal, which the U.N., the European Union, the U.S. and other countries have rejected.

As the government spokesman and Anastasiades' close confidant at the time, Christodoulides was a key insider during the failed peace drive in Switzerland. He has blamed Turkey's insistence on maintaining a permanent troop presence and military intervention rights in a reunified Cyprus as the main reason the negotiations unraveled.

Christodoulides has said he draws the line at those two Turkish demands but would utilize Cyprus' European Union membership to engage with Ankara on ways to break the current deadlock.

"The current state of affairs cannot be considered a solution to the Cyprus issue, and I have expressed my readiness to make use of our European Union membership to break the deadlock and lead us to a settlement as quickly as possible, to reunify our homeland," Christodoulides said from his campaign headquarters, flanked by his wife and four daughters.

On the economy, Christodoulides said a top priority would be to maintain fiscal discipline without endangering the country's social safety net and to effectively deal with unauthorized migration.

The president-elect also aims to expedite development on newly discovered natural gas deposits off Cyprus' south coast as Europe grapples with an energy crunch.

"Mr. Christodoulides' candidacy is an opportunity for Cypriot people to turn the page, with a new type of governance, with a humanist purpose above all else," voter Neophytos Makrides, 58, said as he cast his ballot in Paphos. "No to corruption and in favor of the right resolution of the Cypriot problem."

Cardi B brings energy at pre-Super Bowl concert, joins crowd

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

CHANDLER, Ariz. (AP) — Cardi B teamed with her husband Offset onstage, embraced Serena Williams and later partook with a lively crowd during the rapper's energetic pre-Super Bowl concert in suburban Phoenix.

The Grammy winner joyfully danced and performed her biggest jams from "Up" to "I Like It" at the Hall of Fame party early Sunday. She brought high energy into a laid-back nightclub atmosphere at the Gila River Resorts & Casino in Chandler, Arizona.

The crowd rose to their feet and pulled out their phones to capture Cardi B's show as they recited almost word-for-word all the lyrics during her 30-minute set. She kicked off her performance with "Money" as she pranced across the stage.

"How are we doing tonight?" she asked the enthusiastic concertgoers. "I need to take a shot... Do I look good? Yeah. Let's get it poppin'."

After Cardi B's quick speech, Offset joined her onstage to perform their hit "Clout." She amped the crowd while her husband rapped his verse before she returned the favor and finished the song.

Cardi B went on to perform her other hits such as "WAP," "Finesse" and "Bodak Yellow," her final song of the night. Afterward, she shook her hips then hugged Williams onstage before the rapper ventured offstage and marched with her security through a sea of audience members, which included comedian Tiffany Haddish, who cheered her on and took selfies and videos of her.

Earlier, Offset opened up for his wife, performing "Roc Flair Drip," "Taste" and played a snippet of "Bad and Boujee" from his former group Migos.

'Magic Mike's Last Dance' wins Super Bowl weekend box office

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The third installment in the "Magic Mike" series danced its way to the top of the box office charts this weekend with a James Cameron double header, "Avatar: The Way of Water" and "Titanic" (yes that "Titanic"), looming close behind.

"Magic Mike's Last Dance" earned \$8.2 million in its first weekend in North American theaters, according to studio estimates on Sunday. Cameron's "Avatar" sequel brought in an additional \$6.9 million while the 25th anniversary rerelease of "Titanic" took in \$6.4 million from Friday to Sunday.

North American moviegoing tends to come to a halt on Super Bowl Sunday and studios react strategically, often releasing films that are more "female-targeted." Star Channing Tatum has also had several films perform well in the Super Bowl/Valentine's Day corridor, including "The Vow," "Dear John" and "Dog."

"This is not known as a spike the football weekend for theaters. But there are people who want to go to theaters, even on Super Bowl weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "And this is perfect counterprogramming."

"Magic Mike's Last Dance," which brought Steven Soderbergh back to the director's chair, was given a modest theatrical release in only 1,500 theaters. The film starring Tatum as the lovable male stripper and introducing a wealthy benefactor played by Salma Hayek, was made to go straight to HBO Max. But like the "House Party" reboot from several weeks ago, Warner Bros. pivoted and decided to go theatrical first with both in a company effort to refocus on the theatrical experience and give fresh fare to exhibitors.

The "Magic Mike" franchise has been a profitable one. In 2012, the first film opened to some \$39.1 million from just under 4,000 theaters, on its way to earning \$167.3 million globally (against a \$7 million production budget). The second, "XXL," was made for slightly more (\$14 million) and took in slightly less (\$122.5 million) in 2015. The success of the films also spawned a Las Vegas stage show that has since expanded to Miami and London – in the lead up to the release of "Last Dance," ticket sales for "Magic Mike Live" spiked too.

This latest installment reportedly carried a much bigger production budget, around \$40 million, according to entertainment trades.

"Avatar: The Way of Water" in its ninth weekend added \$25.8 million globally, bringing its total earnings to \$2.2 billion, holding its spot as the 4th biggest movie release ever but closing in on "Titanic."

"Titanic" was rereleased in 2,464 domestic locations this weekend, with Paramount handling the North American release and The Walt Disney Co. on the international rollout in 51 territories. All told the film earned \$22.3 million globally, with \$2 million of that from IMAX screens. "Titanic" has now earned an estimated \$2.2 billion globally, maintaining its title as the third biggest movie of all time.

In fourth place was the Super Bowl-themed "80 for Brady," in its second weekend, with \$6 million. The Paramount release has made just under \$25 million so far. M. Night Shyamalan's "Knock at the Cabin," a Universal release, rounded out the top five with \$5.5 million.

"Super Bowl weekend is typically slow for theaters, and this one is no exception, but help is on the way with 'Ant-Man,'" Dergarabedian said. "It'll start a chain reaction that should carry throughout the whole year."

The Marvel/Disney film "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" opens in theaters on Feb. 17.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore, with Wednesday through Sunday in parentheses. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Magic Mike's Last Dance," \$8.2 million.
2. "Avatar: The Way of Water," \$6.9 million.
3. "Titanic," \$6.4 million.
4. "80 for Brady," \$6 million.
5. "Knock at the Cabin," \$5.5 million.
6. "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," \$5.5 million.
7. "A Man Called Otto," \$2.6 million.
8. "Missing," \$2.6 million.

9. "M3GAN," \$2.4 million.

10. "Plane," \$1.2 million.

Arrests made in Louisiana mass shooting that wounded 12

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Police in Louisiana's capital city have arrested two people for a mass shooting that left 12 others wounded at a nightclub in January.

Two 19-year-olds, Nikeal Franklin and Jy'Shaun Jackson, were arrested Friday, the Baton Rouge Police Department said. Franklin was charged with 12 counts of attempted first-degree murder while Jackson was charged with 12 counts of principal to attempted first-degree murder.

On Jan. 22, shots rang out around 1:30 a.m. in the Dior Bar & Lounge in Baton Rouge. A dozen people were injured, and most sustained non-life-threatening injuries. Three victims were initially listed in critical condition, but their conditions later improved.

Police said they believe the shooting was not a random act of violence and that it was "targeted." Sgt. L'Jean McKneely Jr., a police spokesman, told The Associated Press in the days following the shooting that investigators believed the shooting was targeted at one partygoer and that bystanders were hurt in the process.

Before the shooting, the nightclub had advertised a Southern University and Louisiana State University-themed party as the two schools kicked off new semesters. Spokespeople for both LSU and Southern University told The Advocate that the event at the club that evening in Baton Rouge was not affiliated with either school.

In a social media post Friday, police said the investigation was ongoing and did not release any details beyond an announcement of the arrests.

Although the number of homicides in Baton Rouge decreased last year from 2021, Louisiana's capital city has been plagued by gun violence. In October, an early-morning shooting near Southern University's campus in Baton Rouge left nine people injured.

The Baton Rouge shooting occurred just hours after a gunman killed 11 people and wounded nine others at a Lunar New Year celebration in Monterey Park, California.

In Mexico, US complaints help union organizing efforts

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — It has been nearly two years since the United States began pressing Mexico over labor rights violations by using rapid dispute resolution methods contained in the U.S.-Mexico Canada free trade agreement.

The administration of President Joe Biden has brought six such complaints and brags that, for the first time, someone is challenging Mexico's anti-democratic, old-guard unions that have kept wages painfully low for decades.

But workers and union organizers are mixed on the results, saying it's hard to build a real union movement overnight, and that employers and old union bosses continue to resist change.

The first complaint was filed in May 2021 about attempts by the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) union to interfere with a vote at the GM plant in Silao, in the north-central state of Guanajuato.

Under the pressure of the U.S. complaint — which could eventually have led to trade sanctions — Mexican officials and observers oversaw a squeaky-clean union vote in which the old-guard CTM union was thrown out, and a new, independent union won the right to negotiate.

The new union quickly won an 8.5% wage increase and more bonuses.

"On the economic side, the truth is the change came very quickly, though they were a little slow in giving us the increase," said Manuel Carpio, a GM worker. Carpio credits the reformed Mexican labor laws and the pressure brought to bear under the USMCA complaint.

"I think that had a lot to do with it," Carpio said.

Before, pro-company unions signed contracts behind workers' back, and employed thugs to keep work-

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ers from questioning the contracts, or relied on the company to fire dissidents. Carpio, an early union supporter, said that before, it was impossible to organize.

"There was a lot of retaliation, but now we were protected by the law, that protected us a little, they couldn't do as much against us," he said. Before, "if we had tried to do it, heads would have rolled."

Which is not to say the problems are all solved; Carpio said the new union, known by its initials as SINTTIA, has a learning curve, and has been slow to hand out benefits derived from union dues. And autoworkers in Mexico still earn as little as \$300 per month, or \$12 per day.

The new union got the minimum increased to about \$14 per day, but that's still less than a U.S. auto-worker earns in an hour. The U.S. government hopes one day wages will equalize with the United States, stemming the outflow of manufacturing jobs, though that's not going to happen for a very long time.

"That is very far away," said José Guadalupe Alonso, a representative of the new union, who is still trying to cope with the fact that the old CTM union took everything down to the chairs and computers in union offices, and left the treasury bare.

Alonso has no doubt that the U.S. labor complaints were key to getting the new union at GM.

"What really made the difference here was that the U.S. government forces pressured to get certain things," said Alonso.

But Alonso says similar organizing efforts at other area plants, which have not attracted as much international attention, are still often as hard as ever.

For example, an organizing effort by the same union at a German plant making automotive pipes and tubing met resistance recently. Alonso said that when Mexican labor authorities tried to carry out an inspection at the plant, guards told them they had the wrong address.

"Maybe we will have to submit another complaint to the U.S. government," Alonso said.

Mexico's Labor Department says it is committed to making the country's new labor laws work. The reforms guarantee workers the right to vote by secret ballots, see their contracts and periodically approve union leaders, all of which did not happen before. But Mexico still hasn't built the labor boards, inspectors and outreach that would make it all work.

But the U.S. labor complaints are no magic wand: the best example so far is the VU Manufacturing auto parts plant in the border city of Piedras Negras, Coahuila,

It is the only place where the United States has had to file not one, but two labor complaints under the USMCA, asking Mexico to ensure that its laws guaranteeing freedom to organize are being enforced.

The plant, located across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas, illustrates some of the uphill battles that organizers face in making union freedom a reality.

The VU facility is largely staffed by women who often work 12-hour shifts assembling visors, armrests and dashboard parts for cars. Their base wage is about \$15 per day.

Piedras Negras is a relatively small, isolated border city where there is so little tradition of unions that the old-guard CTM union dominated the plant but never even bothered to ask the owners for a labor contract, says Pablo Franco, a Piedras Negras labor lawyer.

After the U.S. filed a first labor complaint in July, the company was forced to allow a vote, but they let the CTM union inside to try to cow workers into rejecting the new union, the Mexican Workers Union League.

"They spoke to the workers and they told them they couldn't allow an outside union like the league in, that it would be better to go with the people they knew," said Franco. "They (the company) spoke to workers, and allowed the CTM to speak to workers, to try to convince them. That was what the company did."

Even though the new union won a vote in late August by an almost two-to-one margin, the harassment hasn't ceased, and the company has been loathe to negotiate, said union organizer Julia Quiñonez, a Piedras Negras labor activist.

Quiñonez has been the target of a number of social media videos in which workers at the plant were allowed to leave the factory — in their company uniforms — and hold a press conference attacking the new union for asking too much in terms of wage increases: a scandalous \$32 per day.

"No company can do that," said one of the dissidents in the video. "Not even the owner has that much

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(money)."

Quiñonez disputes that — she says the new union is only asking for \$19 per day — but says the company has refused to negotiate, and has allied with the CTM union to launch a smear campaign against the union.

"They say we are egging the workers on to ask for more than the companies can give, so they will close down and return to the United States," Quiñonez says.

The company also allegedly severely limited the new union's access to hold an assembly in the plant, and refused to hand over information as part of the negotiations.

VU Manufacturing did not respond to requests by phone and email for comment.

The situation drew an unprecedented second U.S. complaint on Jan. 30.

"Despite this facility taking positive actions in 2022, some of the failures we identified previously appear to be recurring," said U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

Mexico's Labor Department said in a statement "VU Manufacturing is obligated to negotiate in good faith" with the new union and "must allow its representatives and advisors to enter the facility, participate in negotiations and inform the workers."

Super Bowl week was back to its normal wildness this year

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — From Super Bowl opening night to the night before the big game, the party was on all week long.

The frenzy was back in full force this year after COVID-19 restrictions limited the wild, zany atmosphere that surrounds the most-anticipated and most-hyped week on the sports calendar.

More than 6,000 media members from 24 countries were accredited to provide coverage of the Kansas City Chiefs vs. the Philadelphia Eagles and related events onsite in Arizona, per the NFL.

Officials estimated 100,000 visitors were passing through the area surrounding the downtown convention center where the NFL set up its Super Bowl Experience, an interactive theme park.

That doesn't count the hundreds of thousands of people who came out for the WM Phoenix Open in Scottsdale, 20 miles from downtown Phoenix. About 600,000 attended the tournament this week, including some 200,000 fans on Saturday with many wearing Chiefs and Eagles gear. It's expected to wrap up in time for people to watch or go to the big game.

The Super Bowl media center was buzzing with a record 128 outlets filling radio row, which now includes podcasts and television networks.

Restaurants were packed, parties were crowded, hotels were booked, traffic blocked streets and people were everywhere just as in the pre-pandemic days.

Red-clad Chiefs fans flooded the streets, doing the Chiefs' tomahawk chop chant. A sea of green-wearing Eagles fans screamed "Go Birds" and sang "Fly! Eagles! Fly!"

"This community has opened their arms," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said. "This is a wonderful community. It's a diverse community. The indigenous communities here, we're so proud to partner with them also."

There was a strong sense of normalcy at last year's Super Bowl in Los Angeles but the teams held opening night remotely and in-person availability with players and coaches was shortened to a couple of days because of COVID-19 restrictions.

The league suspended protocols in March and had no issues throughout the season.

The Chiefs and Eagles met the media on opening night and three more times through Thursday, a return of several opportunities to interview players and coaches.

This is Kansas City's third appearance in a Super Bowl in four years. Chiefs coach Andy Reid made sure to install the game plan last week while the team practiced at home.

"You can take your time and make sure you're nice and thorough — we didn't rush into it," he said. "Before you get down to Arizona, with the distractions and different events that go on, you'd like to at least have the base part (established). If you have to tweak here or there, you can do that."

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Eagles coach Nick Sirianni treated his family time this week in Arizona like a normal week back in Philadelphia.

"I'll see them Thursday and I'll do my very best to be a really good dad on Thursday, but on Tuesday and Wednesday, I'll do what I normally do," he said earlier in the week. "I'll be in the office late, continuing to work through the plan, continuing to iron out the details of the plan."

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who won his second AP NFL Most Valuable Player award on Thursday night, told his teammates to keep their focus on the game and avoid the hoopla surrounding it.

"The Super Bowl week is special. It's a special week, but it's not about being down there the week of the Super Bowl, it's about winning the game," Mahomes said. "I want guys to keep that at the front of mind. Enjoy it, enjoy the whole entire week, but make sure you're prepared to go out there and play your best football as well."

More than 70,000 screaming fans will greet Mahomes, Jalen Hurts and the teams on Sunday. Even more fans will be around the stadium without tickets to soak in the fun.

A tailgate hosted by Guy Fieri is free for 10,000 people who pre-registered for tickets. The tailgate starts at 11:30 a.m. and is a short walk from the stadium. It features more than 20 different restaurant pop-ups and interactive dining experiences for fans. Diplo will perform live as the musical entertainment.

Neutral Austria under pressure to get tougher on Russia

By STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Austria has come under heavy criticism for granting visas that will allow sanctioned Russian lawmakers to attend a Vienna meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The issue highlights the delicate balancing act the European country has engaged in while trying to maintain its longstanding position of military neutrality during the war in Ukraine. The Austrian government has condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine almost a year ago but also stressed the need to maintain diplomatic relations with Moscow.

Austria hosts several U.N. agencies and international organizations such as the OSCE, which was established during the Cold War as a forum for dialogue between East and West. Russia is one of the 57 nations in North America, Europe and Asia that participate in the Vienna-based organization.

Moscow plans to send delegates to the Feb. 23-24 meeting of the OSCE's parliamentary assembly, including 15 Russian lawmakers who are under European Union sanctions. Among them are Deputy Duma Chairman Pyotr Tolstoy and fellow parliament member Leonid Slutsky.

In a letter to Austria's chancellor, foreign minister and other officials, 81 OSCE delegates from 20 countries, including France, Canada, Britain, Poland and Ukraine, called upon the Austrian government to prohibit the participation of the sanctioned Russians.

"It is important to remember that Russian parliamentarians are an integral part of the power system and complicit in the crimes Russia commits every day in Ukraine," read the letter, which was seen by The Associated Press. "They have no place in an institution tasked with promoting sincere dialogue and opposition to the war."

The U.S. delegates to the Parliamentary Assembly were not among the letter's signatories. U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE Michael Carpenter told reporters Friday that the Russian delegates "are not people who deserve to be able to travel to Western countries." However, Carpenter added that it was "up to the Austrian government to determine whether they are going to grant visas or not."

Austrian officials haven't commented on the letter. On Feb. 5, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg defended Austria's decision to allow the sanctioned Russians to enter the country, arguing it was important to keep channels of communication with Moscow open despite the "brutal Russian attack against Ukraine."

The Austrian Foreign Ministry also insisted that as host to the OSCE headquarters in Vienna, it is legally obliged to grant visas to representatives of participating nations who want to take part in meetings there.

Austria, which became a European Union member in 1995, has criticized Moscow and joined the sanctions the EU imposed against Russia over the invasion of Ukraine. But unlike Finland and Sweden, which

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decided to abandon their non-aligned stances in May by applying to join NATO, Austria remains committed to the military neutrality it adopted in 1955.

The Austrian government has sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine but no weapons. Chancellor Karl Nehammer became the first and so far only EU leader to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin face-to-face after the war started. Nehammer traveled to Moscow in April 2022 in a fruitless attempt to persuade the Russian leader to end the invasion.

Support remains strong for Austrian neutrality among the public and political establishment.

"I believe that Austrian neutrality can still play a positive role today," saysid Ralph Janik, an expert in international law and researcher at the Sigmund Freud private university in Vienna. "The alternative would be to join NATO, but every single Austrian politician is very well aware that this is not supported by the majority of the Austrian public."

Austria, which was annexed by Nazi Germany in the run-up to World War II, declared neutrality after the war under pressure from Western allies and the Soviet Union. It sought a role as a mediator between East and West and developed ties with Moscow during and after the Cold War.

In 1968, Austria became the first Western European country to import gas from the Soviet Union, and its dependence on Russian energy increased in the following decades. Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 80% of Austria's natural gas came from Russia. It has since reduced the share to just over 20% by turning to Norwegian gas, according to Austria's regulator for electricity and gas.

The Austrian banking system is also closely connected to Russia. Austria's second-largest bank, the Raiffeisenbank International, earned more than half of its profits in 2022 from Russia. The bank has come under intense pressure for continuing its business in Russia despite Moscow's war against Ukraine, and is currently evaluating strategic options, including an exit from Russia.

Vienna is also known to be a playground for spies, including from Russia, due to its lenient espionage laws. Despite its initial reluctance, Austria has expelled eight Russian diplomats who are believed to have been engaged in spying since the start of the Russian war against Ukraine.

While there are no signs of a shift away from Austrian neutrality, some have called for the policy to be reassessed following the Ukraine war.

Werner Fasslabend, a former Austrian defense minister from the conservative People's Party, is among the few prominent voices arguing in favor of the country renouncing neutrality and joining NATO. With the end of Cold War and Austria's accession to the EU, Austrian neutrality has "lost its function," said Fasslabend, the director of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy.

As a NATO member, Austria would "be in a better position to shape European security policy and will gain greater security," he added, admitting that it was unlikely to happen given it would require changing the constitution by a two-thirds majority in the Austrian parliament.

"This majority is not within sight," Fasslabend said.

Army sees safety, not 'wokeness,' as top recruiting obstacle

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — While some Republicans blame the COVID-19 vaccine or "wokeness" for the Army's recruiting woes, the military service says the bigger hurdles are more traditional ones: Young people don't want to die or get injured, deal with the stress of Army life and put their lives on hold.

They "just don't see the Army as something that's relevant," said Maj. Gen. Alex Fink, head of Army marketing. "They see us as revered, but not relevant, in their lives."

Addressing those longtime issues has taken on greater urgency as the Army tries to recover from its worst recruiting year in decades, a situation aggravated by the tight jobs market. The Army is offering new programs, advertising and enticements in an effort to change perceptions and reverse the decline.

One incentive gives recruiters bonuses of up to \$4,500 per quarter if they exceed their baseline enlistment requirement. A pilot program allows young enlisted soldiers — those in the three lower ranks — to get a promotion if they refer someone who enlists and goes to basic training. Only one promotion per

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soldier is allowed.

The Army fell about 15,000 soldiers, or 25%, short of its 60,000 recruitment goal last year, when all the branches struggled to meet recruiting goals.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said the Army has set a difficult goal for this year: aiming to bring in 65,000 recruits, which would be 20,000 more than in 2022. It's difficult to predict how it will go, she said, adding that recruiters need to do all they can to surpass last year's numbers.

"I would say it is a stretch goal," she said.

Wormuth said she and Gen. James McConville, the Army's chief of staff, believed they needed to set a big goal.

"I think we are seeing some forward momentum. But it is still too early to tell where we will likely land at the end of this fiscal year. I know we will do better than we did last year," she said.

Guiding the Army's efforts are surveys intended to help pinpoint why young people dismiss the Army as a career.

Those surveys were conducted over four months last spring and summer. They involved about 600 respondents, ages 16 to 28, per month. The Army discussed the general findings with The Associated Press but declined to provide detailed methodology, saying the surveys were done by a private research contractor and that licensing agreements limited the public release of some data collection details.

Officials said that based on the surveys, young people simply do not see the Army as a safe place or good career path, and believe they would have to put their lives and careers on hold if they enlisted.

Army leaders said very few say they are deterred from enlisting due to "wokeness." In fact, concerns about discrimination against women and minorities is seen as a bigger issue, along with a more general distrust of the military.

"Wokeness" is a slang term that originally described attentiveness to issues of racial and social justice. Some people and groups, especially conservatives, now use it in a derogatory sense implying what they see as overreactions.

Republicans in Congress, including Rep. Jim Banks, chairman of the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel, have pledged to target "wokeness" this year. Banks, R-Ind., has said "exposing and dismantling the Biden administration's woke agenda that is driving down military recruitment and retention" will be a top priority for him this year. His spokesman, Buckley Carlson, said combating "wokeness" at the Defense Department will be a key issue for the congressman.

Banks and others have complained about the Pentagon's efforts to target extremism in the military, provide courses in critical race theory and other efforts to expand diversity. They say focusing on partisan issues pushed by the left takes away from the Pentagon's core missions, weakens the military and turns off recruits.

But the Army says that on average, only 5% of the respondents in the surveys listed "wokeness" as an issue, compared with 13% who say they believe that women and minorities will face discrimination and not get the same opportunities.

Wormuth said the survey data is a tool to "assuage the concerns that some may have, whether influencers or members of Congress, about wokeness or the vaccine mandate — which is now rescinded — and show they are not, by any means, primary drivers of the recruiting challenges we're experiencing."

She said the information from the surveys also provides insight on how the Army needs to better explain its benefits.

Fink, the Army's marketing head, said the top three reasons young people cite for rejecting military enlistment are the same across all the services: fear of death, worries about post-traumatic stress disorder and leaving friends and family — in that order. He said the Army wanted a better understanding of any additional barriers to service, beyond those top three.

By a "significant margin," he said, the most common response beyond Nos. 1-3 was, "I will be putting my life on hold." That was cited by more than 1 in 5 people surveyed.

Many young people do not know anyone in the Army and are unfamiliar with the jobs or benefits it offers. Fink said trust in government institutions, including the military, has declined, particularly among this group.

"They just don't perceive the Army as being in touch with the modern, everyday culture that they're used to," he said.

Fink said about 10% in the surveys say they do not trust military leadership, based on the way recent events or missions have been handled. That could include the Afghanistan withdrawal or use of the military during racial unrest and protests in the United States.

Other reasons get much smaller mentions. They include concerns about living conditions on military bases, getting assigned to unwanted jobs, the coronavirus vaccine and the "wokeness" issue.

In some cases, those reasons vary by region. But Fink said the "wokeness" issue was pretty consistent — between 4% and 5% across the nation, without much variance by gender or ethnicity.

GOP election tactics no surprise to Wisconsin's Black voters

By HARM VENHUIZEN Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Recent revelations about Republican election strategies targeting minority communities in Wisconsin's biggest city came as no surprise to many Black voters.

A Wisconsin election commissioner bragged about low turnout in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods during last year's elections. Weeks later, an audio recording surfaced that showed then-President Donald Trump's Wisconsin campaign team laughing behind closed doors about efforts to reach Black voters in 2020.

Many people who voted this past week in the state's primary election said they had long felt targeted by Republicans. The difference now is the public display of strategies that at best ignore the priorities of Black voters and at worst actively look to keep them from voting.

"It's a plan that they devised and carried out with quite a lot of precision," said lifelong Milwaukee resident Dwayne Walls, 63. "It's a repeatable pattern that's going to continue to happen over and over as long as they have that plausible deniability and as long as they have the power in Madison" — the state capital.

Walls and other Black voters said they are tired of the countless hurdles that disproportionately try to keep them from being heard at the ballot box. Voters said their experiences with the GOP have been as voices to silence, not to win over.

"The Republican Party needs a lot of work. All of them need to actually step into our shoes, go in our neighborhoods, work our jobs, do the things that we're doing on a daily basis and see how they feel about what's going on once they experience it," said Valeria Gray, 59.

She described the relationship between Milwaukee and much of the rest of the state as one divided by race.

"It doesn't look like it's gonna ever go anywhere," she said.

Voting rights advocates for years have accused Wisconsin Republicans of pushing policies to suppress voters of color and lower-income voters. Many such policies centered on the Democratic stronghold of Milwaukee, home to nearly 70% of Wisconsin's Black population.

Those claims were reinforced by an email sent to about 1,700 people in December from Bob Spindell, a Republican member of the Wisconsin Election Commission. He said Republicans "can be especially proud" of depressed midterm voter turnout in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods in Milwaukee, a heavily Democratic city.

Spindell later said his email was meant to convey the steps Republicans took to counter Democratic messaging in the city.

The Associated Press then obtained an audio recording of a meeting in which the head of Trump's 2020 Wisconsin campaign team talked with staff about their efforts to reach Black voters: "We ever talk to Black people before? I don't think so," the campaign official said to laughter.

Dwayne Morgan, 59, called it "the same old, same old" for the GOP in Milwaukee. "They're trying to get us not to vote. They're trying to wipe away the history," he said.

Republican-drawn legislative maps adopted last year dilute Milwaukee's influence and nearly guarantee a Republican majority in the Legislature. That's despite statewide races routinely being decided by narrow margins and Democrats winning the major statewide offices, including for governor, attorney general and

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secretary of state.

The Republican-controlled Legislature enacted strict voter ID laws in 2011 under then-Republican Gov. Scott Walker. Since his first term began in 2019, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers has vetoed more than a dozen GOP-backed bills that would make it harder to vote. Those include ID requirements for older and disabled voters who are indefinitely confined, limits on when and where absentee ballots could be collected, and prohibiting election officials from filling out missing voter information.

Nonetheless, Republicans have prevailed in the courts, using lawsuits to outlaw ballot drop boxes and deny election clerks the ability to fill in missing information on the envelopes containing mail ballots. The Wisconsin Supreme Court's conservative majority, which is at stake in this year's election, has routinely ruled in favor of Republicans on consequential voting decisions.

That adds to a host of reasons Black voters in Milwaukee have increasingly felt as if their votes don't matter. The city has some of the worst racial disparities nationwide in health care, education, wealth and incarceration.

Low-income residents, who are disproportionately Black, already struggle to meet basic needs. Confusion over new election rules or limited options for when and where they can vote further discourage voting, said the Rev. Greg Lewis, founder of Souls to the Polls Milwaukee.

"Suppression is not just a few things," he said. "It's not just, not being able to vote without IDs. It's not just, not being able to take your ballots to the drop box. It's not just language barriers. It's all those things together."

For Barbara Bryant, 76, "all the extra steps" were the biggest barrier to voting. But she wasn't going to be deterred from participating in this month's primary. This past week, amid a snowstorm, a poll worker helped her from her car and into an early voting location.

Bryant said she has preferred voting early in recent years so poll workers have time to explain any new rules, but she has seen inaccessible voting sites and the removal of drop boxes discourage other older adults from voting.

Wisconsin Republicans told the AP they have been trying for a decade to make inroads with Black and Latino voters in Milwaukee.

The state party opened its first office in downtown Milwaukee in 2019, specifically with the goal of reaching out to Black voters. The focus is on engaging them in conversation, rather than meeting typical campaign metrics such as knocking on a certain number of doors, said Mark Jefferson, the state GOP executive director.

He said the party is not trying to suppress votes, but to chip away at the support for Democrats in those communities.

"People are listening when they haven't before," Jefferson said. "I think we've learned a lot. I think we are cutting into Democrats' margins, albeit faster currently in the Latino community and the Hispanic communities. But we're also cutting into margins on the north side of Milwaukee, as well. And that's because we are more in touch than we were."

Angela Lang, executive director of Milwaukee-based Black Leaders Organizing Communities, wasn't worried about Republicans gaining a foothold with Black voters. She said the GOP's priorities are fundamentally at odds with what most Black voters in Milwaukee want.

But Lang said she was concerned about the precedent that could be set by Republicans so openly talking about strategies to lower turnout.

"It's incredibly dangerous, because when one starts, then people just feel more emboldened," she said.

Several Black voters interviewed at the polls said they had seen little activity from Republicans in the city and described the GOP outreach center as more of a showpiece for the party.

"I don't think they ever come down here to try to reach us at all," said voter Damario Wright, 36. "I mean, you barely see a Republican in Milwaukee — come on, now."

Today in History: FEB 13, Supreme Court Justice Scalia dies

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Feb. 13, the 44th day of 2023. There are 321 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 13, 1935, a jury in Flemington, New Jersey, found Bruno Richard Hauptmann guilty of first-degree murder in the kidnap-slaying of Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh. (Hauptmann was later executed.)

On this date:

In 1633, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei arrived in Rome for trial before the Inquisition, accused of defending Copernican theory that the Earth revolved around the sun instead of the other way around. (Galileo was found vehemently suspect of heresy and ended up being sentenced to a form of house arrest.)

In 1933, the Warsaw Convention, governing airlines' liability for international carriage of persons, luggage and goods, went into effect.

In 1939, Justice Louis D. Brandeis retired from the U.S. Supreme Court. (He was succeeded by William O. Douglas.)

In 1965, during the Vietnam War, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, an extended bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese.

In 1972, "Cabaret," directed by Bob Fosse, based on John Kander and Fred Ebb's musical of the same name, starring Liza Minnelli and Michael York, was released.

In 1980, the 13th Winter Olympics opened in Lake Placid, New York.

In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, allied warplanes destroyed an underground shelter in Baghdad that had been identified as a military command center; Iraqi officials said 500 civilians were killed.

In 1996, the rock musical "Rent," by Jonathan Larson, opened off-Broadway less than three weeks after Larson's death.

In 2000, Charles Schulz's final "Peanuts" strip ran in Sunday newspapers, the day after the cartoonist died in his sleep at his California home at age 77.

In 2002, John Walker Lindh pleaded not guilty in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, to conspiring to kill Americans and supporting the Taliban and terrorist organizations. (Lindh later pleaded guilty to lesser offenses and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He was released in September 2019 after serving 17 years of that sentence.)

In 2011, Egypt's military leaders dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and promised elections in moves cautiously welcomed by protesters who'd helped topple President Hosni Mubarak.

In 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia, the influential conservative and most provocative member of the U.S. Supreme Court, was found dead at a private residence in the Big Bend area of West Texas; he was 79.

Ten years ago: Beginning a long farewell to his flock, a weary Pope Benedict XVI celebrated his final public Mass as pontiff, presiding over Ash Wednesday services inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, said he had paid \$130,000 out of his own pocket to a porn actress who claimed to have had a sexual relationship with Trump. Ahmad Khan Rahimi was sentenced in New York to multiple terms of life in prison for setting off small bombs in New York and New Jersey; the attacks in September, 2016, left 30 people injured. A bichon frise named Flynn was named best in show at the Westminster Kennel Club in New York, a choice that seemed to surprise most in the packed crowd at Madison Square Garden.

One year ago: Airlines canceled flights to the Ukrainian capital and troops there unloaded fresh shipments of weapons from NATO members, as the country's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy sought to project confidence in the face of U.S. warnings of possible invasion within days by a growing number of Russian forces. Playing in their home stadium, the Los Angeles Rams beat the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20 in the Super Bowl.

Today's birthdays: Actor Kim Novak is 90. Actor Bo Svenson is 82. Actor Stockard Channing is 79. Talk show host Jerry Springer is 79. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is 77. Singer Peter Gabriel is 73. Actor David Naughton is 72. Rock musician Peter Hook is 67. Actor Matt Salinger is 63. Singer Henry Rollins is

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62. Actor Neal McDonough is 57. Singer Freedom Williams is 57. Actor Kelly Hu is 55. Rock singer Matt Berninger (The National) is 52. Country musician Scott Thomas (Parmalee) is 50. Singer Robbie Williams is 49. Singer-songwriter Feist is 47. R&B performer Natalie Stewart is 44. Actor Mena Suvari (MEE'-nuh soo-VAHR'-ee) is 44. Actor Katie Volding is 34. Michael Joseph Jackson Jr. (also known as Prince Michael Jackson I) is 26.