

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 1 of 74

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [3- Marching Festival moved to the Arena](#)
- [3- Nina Hoops Thank You](#)
- [3- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [4- Good luck at State](#)
- [5- Senior Citizens donate to the Transit](#)
- [6- West Nile Update – South Dakota, Oct. 11, 2023](#)
- [7- Dock Removals Continuing Across Eastern South Dakota](#)
- [7- C Match Sponsors](#)
- [8- SD News Watch: Johnson re-enters politics, claims U.S. House seat](#)
- [11: SD SearchLight: Report: South Dakota legislative redistricting more fair to Native Americans](#)
- [12: SD SearchLight: State board approves \\$25 million bond for large dairy](#)
- [13: SD SearchLight: South Dakota ACT scores decline but remain higher than national average](#)
- [14: SD SearchLight: Biden administration working to recover U.S. hostages held by Hamas](#)
- [16: SD SearchLight: Scalise nominated by U.S. House GOP as speaker in closed-door meeting](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Statewide group representing news organizations rebrands](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [23- Daily Devotional](#)
- [24- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)

October 2023 Calendar

Thursday, Oct. 12

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots and broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pop Tarts

School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce.

Region 1 Cross Country at Webster, 1:30 p.m.

JH Football hosts Britton-Hecla, 5 p.m.

Volleyball hosts Deuel: (C/7th at 5 p.m., JV/8th at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

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

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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Friday, Oct. 13

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle hot dish with peas, mixed vegetables, Swedish apple pie square, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps

School Lunch: Hamburger, fries.

Lake Region Marching Festival in Groton, 10 a.m.

Football hosts Mobridge-Pollock, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 14

State Soccer Championship Game at Brandon Valley, 11 a.m. (Groton Area vs. Tea Area)

Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Pumpkin Fest at City Park, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 2 of 74

The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Philadelphia Phillies beat the Atlanta Braves 10-2, with two home runs each from Nick Castellanos and Bryce Harper in Game 3 of their NL Division Series, bringing Philadelphia one step closer to eliminating their NL East rival in the series for a second straight year.

Negotiations between the SAG-AFTRA actors union and Hollywood studios broke down Wednesday, with studios claiming the two sides are too divided to continue talks.

Supreme Court conservative justices expressed doubt that South Carolina's newly redrawn congressional district map is unconstitutional and racially gerrymandered.

A ticket sold in California won Wednesday night's \$1.765 billion Powerball jackpot, the second-biggest in U.S. lottery history.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, a handful of NATO members took further steps in developing the European Sky Shield Initiative, roughly one year after the air and missile defense system was introduced..

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

All eyes will be on September's consumer price index report at 8:30 a.m. ET. Economists widely expect inflation to decline to 3.6% on a year-on-year basis from 3.7% reported in August. Core inflation, which excludes volatile items like food and energy prices, will likely inch lower to 4.1% from 4.3%.

Shares of Fastenal, Delta Air Lines, Walgreens Boots Alliance, and Domino's Pizza will be in focus as the companies report their quarterly results.

Vladimir Putin is set to visit Kyrgyzstan in what could be the Russian president's first known travel outside of Russia since an international arrest warrant was issued against him. Kyrgyzstan is not a member of the International Criminal Court.

Kelsey Grammar reprises his role as Dr. Frasier Crane in a reboot of Frasier, which will be exclusively available today on Paramount+. The 10-part series comes 30 years after the original Frasier aired. Non-Paramount+ subscribers can catch the show on CBS on October 17..

TALKING POINTS

"I do not support targeting and killing of civilians, whether in Israel or Palestine. [The] fact that some have suggested otherwise is offensive and rooted in bigoted assumptions about my faith and ethnicity." Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian-American member of Congress, hitting back at her critics accusing her of supporting the Hamas attacks in Israel.

"This is a situation His Majesty is extremely concerned about, and he has asked to be kept actively updated. His thoughts and prayers are with all of those suffering, particularly those who have lost loved ones, but also those actively involved. His Majesty is appalled by and condemns the barbaric acts of terrorism in Israel," A Buckingham Palace spokesperson said of King Charles in reaction to Hamas' attacks on Israel.

"The No. 1 question you all ask me is, are you going to take a plea deal? No, the answer is I will not take a plea deal. I have not been in discussion for a plea deal at this time. And the reason so is I'm strong in my convictions that I can prove my innocence," Rep. George Santos told reporters in light of 10 more charges added to an ongoing indictment regarding allegations of campaign fraud.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 3 of 74

Marching Festival moved to the Arena

Groton Area Band Director Desiree Yeigh has said that the Lake Region Marching Festival scheduled for Main Street on Friday will be moved to the Arena. The weather is looking to be very unpleasant for an outdoor event.

Yeigh said that "We have to limit our spectators to make sure we have enough seating in the arena. I would encourage you to watch on the livestream at GDILIVE.com. Paul is offering this event free of charge. THANK YOU, Paul!"

2023 Lake Region Marching Festival Lineup

10:00- Groton Area High School Marching Band (EXHIBITION)

10:06- Groton Area Middle School Marching Band (6-8) (EXHIBITION)

High School Division

10:12- Warner

10:18- Northwestern

10:24- Pierre T.F. Riggs, Emerald Regiment

10:30- Britton-Hecla High School

Combined Division

10:36- Aberdeen Roncalli

10:42- Frederick

10:48- Leola

10:54- Langford

Middle School Division

11:00- Simmons/Holgate Middle School

11:06- Milbank Middle School

11:12- NSU Marching Wolves

NSU Marching Wolves Performance

Groton Area Drumline

Awards Ceremony

CARD OF THANKS

AS MY LAST day approaches, I want to let the community of Groton and surrounding area know what a pleasure it has been to serve you. I will miss each and everyone of you.

Thank You!

Nina Hoops

DG Manager

GDILIVE.COM

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023

Groton Area

at Groton Area

Tigers

6:00 JV: Fans of Jaedyn Penning

GT



Deuel
Cardinals



Varsity Sponsors: Agtegra, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency and Locke Electric



Groton Area heads to State Championship Game!

Pictured in back, left to right, are Assistant Coach Kaylin Kucker, Kayla Lehr, Gretchen Dinger, Taryn Traphagen, Faith Traphagen, Jaedyn Penning, Brooklyn Hansen, Brenna Imrie, Kennedy Hansen, Emerlee Jones, Mia Crank and Assistant Coach Wyatt Locke; in front, left to right, are Head Coach Chris Kucker, Avery Crank, Carly Gilbert, Rylee Gilbert, Addison Hoffman, Laila Roberts, Jerica Locke, Elizabeth Fliehs, Sydney Locke, McKenna Tietz and the Tiger Mascot Rowan Hanson. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Area vs. Tea Area

11 a.m., Saturday, Oct. 14, 2023
Brandon Valley

Good Luck in the State Title game from

Weismantel Agency
Weber Landscaping
Tom & Rachael Crank
Spanier Harvesting & Trucking
S & S Lumber
Rix Farms/R&M Farms
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic
Love to Travel - Becah Fliehs
Lori's Pharmacy
Locke Electric
Ken's Food Fair
Groton Legion Post #39
Groton Daily Independent
Groton Chiropractic Clinic
Fliehs Sales & Service
Farmers Union Insurance - JR Johnson
Doug & Wanda Hamilton
Blocker Construction
BK Custom T's & More
Bierman Farm Services
Bary Keith at Harr Motors
Allied Climate Professionals
Agtegra

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 5 of 74



The Groton Area Senior Citizens donated a \$100 Gas card to the Groton Community Transit. Pictured are Bev Sombke, treasurer; Eugenia Strom from the Groton Transit, Ruby Donovan, vice president; Sarge Liknes, president; and Elda Stange, secretary. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 6 of 74

West Nile Update – South Dakota, October 11, 2023

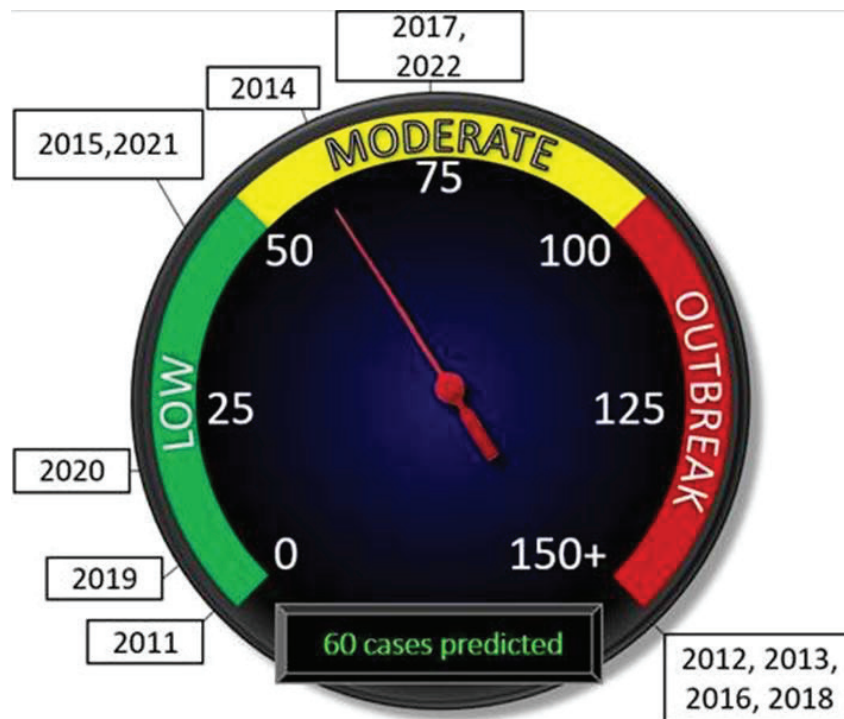
87 human cases reported (Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Buffalo, Brown, Campbell, Clark, Codington, Corson, Davison, Day, Deuel, Dewey, Edmunds, Fall River, Faulk, Hamlin, Hand, Hughes, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Lyman, Marshall, McCook, Mead, Minnehaha, Moody, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, Perkins, Sanborn, Spink, Union, Walworth, Yankton) and 3 deaths.

11 human viremic blood donors (Brown, Custer, Codington, Charles Mix, Faulk, Minnehaha, Pennington, Yankton)

8 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brown, Brookings, Codington, Hand, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of October 10): 1776 cases (AI, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, WV, WY)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2023, South Dakota (as of October 11)



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 7 of 74

Dock Removals Continuing Across Eastern South Dakota

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) has been working with private individuals and dock removal companies to prepare for the winter seasons and continue to survey lakes and rivers across the state for the presence of zebra mussels.

"Boat dock removal companies and private individuals are a key partner for aquatic invasive species (AIS) surveillance efforts," said Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, Tanner Davis. "As boat docks are removed in the fall, these make for a perfect sampling platform for each waterbody."

Fall is an excellent time to investigate these structures as juvenile zebra mussels, settlers, will have attached if present. New mussel development will not be noticed until late August through October. Dock inspections occur when they are pulled out for the season before ice cover and therefore do not impact any use of these structures in the summer months.

"While pulling docks, one of the dock removal companies reported finding zebra mussels on several structures," said Davis. "The zebra mussels were confirmed by fisheries staff following these findings."

Following this detection, Big Stone Lake is now considered infested for zebra mussels. The Zebra Mussel Rapid Response Team will place high-profile signs on access areas, actively engage boaters using the infested water, reiterate information on decontamination requirements, and communicate with groups of people and entities that will be potentially affected by the infestation.


"Identifying and working with impacted individuals is a key part of our Rapid Response Plan," Davis continued. "We want to make sure everyone is aware of the infestation, and it's possible impacts, and continue to communicate with them regarding next steps."

"Effective education and outreach is key for slowing the spread of AIS," said GFP Communications Manager, Nick Harrington. "Individuals taking the time to inspect for zebra mussels, being able to identify them, and swiftly reporting them to GFP show our methods are working."


GFP has significantly enhanced efforts to slow the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) in recent years, both educating anglers and boaters to clean, drain, dry every time they are on the water as well as physically inspecting boats prior to and/or after loading.

"It may be October, but hunters, anglers, and boaters are reminded to clean, drain, and dry every time they are out enjoying the water," concluded Harrington.


You can learn more about AIS by visiting SDLeastWanted.sd.gov



Groton Area
Tigers



BECOME A SPONSOR



LADY TIGER
VOLLEYBALL

Is anyone interested in being a sponsor of any of these volleyball matches to be livestreamed on GDILIVE.COM? They are \$25 per match. Text Paul at 605-397-7460 or email paperpaul@grotonsd.net.

C hosts Deuel
C hosts Northwestern
C hosts Faulkton Area

Part 3

Johnson re-enters politics, claims U.S. House seat

Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

This is the third in a four-part series by South Dakota News Watch about the political journey and Republican Party challenges faced by U.S. Representative Dusty Johnson:



President Donald Trump shakes hands with South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson after he lands Friday, Sept. 7, 2018, in Sioux Falls. Trump visited to help campaign for Kristi Noem's gubernatorial campaign.

In politics, working in the private sector and spending more time with family can also mean mulling the right moment to get back in the game.

When Dusty Johnson announced he was leaving his position as Dennis Daugaard's chief of staff after the 2014 election to work for Vantage Point Solutions, a Mitchell-based technology consulting firm, he cited no such ulterior motives.

But he didn't rule anything out.

"I had conversations with the CEO during the hiring process where I said, 'Listen, there's a decent chance I'm done with politics. I mean, I might be a co-owner of this business with you for the next 30 years, but I also want to be palms up. There's

a chance that I'm going to feel called to run for something in the future.' I didn't have a particular office in mind."

If Johnson's upbringing in Pierre, successful PUC campaigns and stint in the governor's office positioned him to become a South Dakota statesman, it was natural to ask, as he reached 40 years old, when his time would come.

Tremors within the Republican Party, both in-state and nationally, added urgency.

Trump announced his presidential run in June 2015, promising to build "a great, great wall" on the southern border. Six months later, after a mass shooting in California committed by extremists inspired by Islamic terrorists, the real estate mogul and former reality TV star called for "a total and complete shutdown" of Muslims entering the country.

Noem, who criticized Trump's candidacy and character but became a political ally when he won the White

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 9 of 74

House, was making moves. She announced she was running for governor six days after her 2016 re-election to the House, beating a deadline to transfer funds left from her congressional campaign into a state account for governor.

That left an enticing opening for South Dakota's lone U.S House seat.

"The timing was right," said Dusty's wife, Jacqueline. "You don't want to regret not trying."

The 2018 election would mark eight years since Johnson had run for office and four years since he worked full-time politically. But there were only so many shots at major seats in South Dakota, and the leanings of his lifelong party made him restless.

His campaign kickoff at the Alex Johnson Hotel in Rapid City in May 2017 played all the hits, bringing back the cardboard cutouts, jokes about his resemblance to pop-corn impresario Orville Redenbacher and a sequel of his "elevator speech" ad, featuring a cameo from Jacqueline and the kids and ending with a manufactured "Go, Dusty, Go!" chant.

Johnson's speech to supporters that day was more solemn.

He pledged to steer away from the bitterness and anger of the political scene and focus not on cultural grievances but issues more central to South Dakotans' everyday lives. It was a subject that had weighed on his mind since the populist emergence of Trump and the formation of the Freedom Caucus in Congress, making it hard to stay on the sidelines.

"I just didn't understand why everybody needed to be angry all the time and why the rhetoric needed to be so toxic," Johnson told News Watch of his decision to run. "I was making more money in the private sector than I would make in Congress, and obviously I was able to spend more time at home. But it didn't seem like that was a good excuse for not getting back into the arena. It sort of felt like I was taking the cheap way out."

His most prominent primary opponent was Secretary of State Shantel Krebs, a former state legislator who touted her political experience and small-government approach. The wild-card candidate was state senator and former Trump state campaign chair Neal Tapio, who echoed the president's anti-Muslim rhetoric and advocated for restricting refugee resettlement.

Krebs declined an interview request for this story.

Tapio sent a message to News Watch declaring Johnson, Thune and Rounds to be "South Dakota representatives of the globalist establishment mafia."

Krebs courted "America First" supporters by touting an endorsement from Kansas Secretary of State and Trump adviser Kris Kobach, echoing his call for a registry for people from areas where terror threats were detected.

Johnson tried to stay above the fray, offering support for Trump's travel ban but opposing the Muslim registry as "clearly unconstitutional."

The gloves came off in the late stages of a debate held a week before the June primary, with Krebs down in the polls. She fended off claims from Johnson about her voting record on spending bills, which he said cast doubt on her claims of fiscal austerity.

Krebs then called into question Johnson's use of taxpayer-funded state planes when he served as chief of staff, teasing TV ads that rolled out the next morning. At issue were flights where Johnson was picked up and dropped off in Mitchell for state business rather than Pierre, costing the state tens of thousands



Rep. Dusty Johnson talks to a landowner near the U.S.-Mexico border in 2019.

(Photo: Dusty Johnson's office)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 10 of 74

of dollars, according to Krebs' camp.

Johnson's campaign sent a cease-and-desist letter to television stations to stop airing the ads, but the commercials kept running. Daugaard did interviews calling the allegations "absolutely false," bolstering Johnson's contention that the claims were a Hail Mary from a desperate candidate rather than substantive breach of the public trust.

"I'm sure my public statements at the time indicated that I thought it was baloney, but looking back, I don't have any particular anger about it," Johnson said. "I mean, these are the things that happen in campaigns. It certainly helped to have my boss publicly explain that these were things he was asking me to do. He was asking me to renegotiate contracts with medical providers, and there were contracting officials and Cabinet secretaries who were also going to these meetings. None of these flights were commute flights."

Internal polling didn't show any real damage from the claims, allowing Johnson to keep his cushion. He carried 48% of the vote in the primary, distancing himself from Krebs (30%) and Tapio (22%) and justifying the strategy of staying in his campaign lane, regardless of the noise.

"I think it shows that when it's competitive, it's hard to outwork and out prepare Dusty Johnson," said Schaff. "I mean, Shantel Krebs is a talented politician and basically popular and I don't think your standard-issue Republican would have had a problem with her. But Dusty just works really hard and probably seemed like a more credible candidate when it mattered."

The general election against Democrat Tim Bjorkman was largely a formality, but Johnson took no chances. He doubled his opponent's fundraising haul and took his "Energy to Burn" tour through 30 cities and rural towns, pledging support for the ethanol industry, work requirements for welfare programs and balanced federal budgets.

On election night, Dusty's parents looked on at the Hilton Garden Inn in Sioux Falls as their son declared victory with 60% percent of the vote. For Kevin and Jacque, it seemed the culmination of a political journey, from a fifth grader testifying in Pierre to an influential Teenage Republican and trusted adviser to a United States congressman taking his talents to Washington.

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at sdnewswatch.org.



ABOUT STU WHITNEY

Stu Whitney is an investigative reporter for South Dakota News Watch. A resident of Sioux Falls, Whitney is an award-winning reporter, editor and novelist with more than 30 years of experience in journalism.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Report: South Dakota legislative redistricting more fair to Native Americans

Work remains on outreach to tribal communities, voting rights group says

BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 11, 2023 4:24 PM

Grouping Native American voters together earned South Dakota a better-than-average score from a voting rights watchdog group.

Common Cause, a nonprofit organization, released a state-by-state scorecard on Wednesday, ranking states based on the way they redrew congressional and state legislative districts following the 2020 U.S. census. South Dakota only adjusts legislative districts, because the entire state is one congressional district with one U.S. representative.

South Dakota scored a C+, slightly better than the national average of C-. Fifteen states scored higher, and five states joined South Dakota with a C+ score.

The scores were based on a review of each state's redistricting process, 120 surveys and more than 60 interviews with community organizers nationwide, according to the Common Cause methodology page. The Washington, D.C.-based organization partnered with a coalition of voting rights groups to produce the report, including the National Congress of American Indians and the League of Women Voters.

Fairness in redistricting was measured by transparency, public input opportunities, decision-maker willingness to change maps, nonpartisanship and the empowerment of communities of color.

Report: South Dakota process more fair than years past

Redistricting follows each census, and is meant to adjust representation to reflect changes in population. Redistricting frequently sparks concerns about gerrymandering – drawing districts to dilute the power of certain voting blocs to the advantage of their opponents – and sometimes sparks lawsuits over allegations of minority voter suppression.

North Dakota found itself in federal court this summer over accusations its lawmakers penciled Native Americans out of a fair shot at representation. The state Supreme Court in North Carolina redrew its legislative districts following a lawsuit over its legislative maps.

South Dakota has a history of conflicts over Native voting rights, as well. In 2001, Native American groups successfully sued the state over the creation of districts that weakened the voice of tribal voters.

In 2021, however, the lawmakers charged with redrawing the state's maps did two things to earn a higher-than-average rank.

First, they combined the Crow Creek and Lower Brule reservations into one district, District 26, rather than splitting them up. They also drew the lines in Rapid City in a manner that kept residents of a predominantly Native American area together in District 32.

South Dakota Native American voting rights advocate OJ Semans Sr. was interviewed for the report and pointed to those wins as significant for Native voters, sparked by Native Americans speaking up on the issues. A Rapid City man named Kellen Returns From Scout, for example, helped lead a push to keep the members of the North Rapid area together.

"For years, the community has been divided between three different state legislative districts, but during this redistricting cycle, they were able to advocate and be drawn into one single district," said Semans Sr., a co-executive director of a voting rights advocacy group called Four Directions. "Though they are not the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 12 of 74

majority, Native people are now between 30-40% of the voting age population of that state legislative district, creating opportunities for Native people to be a political force."

Areas for improvement

On the negative side, South Dakota's C+ grade reflects what the report described as a less-than-stellar outreach to Native communities.

"Although the legislature generally responded to requests from tribes, they were not proactive in actively seeking to hold hearings on reservations nor in engaging directly with tribal leaders and councils," the report said.

Sen. Jim Bolin, R-Canton, chaired the Senate Redistricting Committee and sat on the Tribal Areas Subcommittee. He pushed back on the notion that lawmakers were unresponsive, noting that there were public meetings in more than half a dozen cities, including two on or near reservation communities.

"The Native Americans came to Pierre to plead their case numerous times," he said in an interview with South Dakota Searchlight.

The decision in North Rapid will reverberate for years, Bolin said, as it turned the district into a potentially competitive one for Democrats.

Republicans won seats, but "they had to work for it in 2022, and they'll have to work for it again in 2024." "It will be perpetually competitive," Bolin said.

He also pointed out that Districts 26 and 27, which represent Oglala Lakota County and Todd County, each have fewer people than the "perfect" number of 25,333 residents.

That figure is derived by dividing the state's population by 35, the number of legislative districts. Bolin said lawmakers work to keep districts within 5% of that population target. They went outside that range to make sure that Native Americans are fairly represented in those two districts, he said.

Former Sen. Troy Heinert of Mission, an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, served on redistricting committees with Bolin and others. He said the wins noted by Common Cause were hard fought.

"It was not easy to try and hold North Rapid and to keep Lower Brule and Crow Creek together," Heinert said. "Those were some tough conversations."

Census undercounts on tribal areas have been a problem for decades, Heinert said, and that's made redistricting difficult. Reservation population counts in the 2020 census were marred by pandemic restrictions that closed off parts of reservations as the count took place.

Heinert would like to see lawmakers find a way to consider tribe-collected enrollment figures during redistricting. Tribal enrollments were called "more reliable than data from the Census Bureau" in comments from tribes to the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the distribution of American Rescue Plan Act dollars.

Heinert said Oglala Lakota County and Todd County would each be their own state legislative districts if tribal enrollment figures were used.

"We trust the census, why wouldn't we trust the tribal enrollment?" Heinert said.

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

State board approves \$25 million bond for large dairy

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 11, 2023 6:07 PM

A state board approved a bond of up to \$25 million Wednesday to help a dairy near Bryant construct manure management facilities.

During a Zoom meeting, the South Dakota Economic Development Finance Authority approved issuing the bond for the 12,500-cow Washington Dairy owned by Riverview, a Minnesota company that already operates four other dairies and a feedlot in South Dakota. The funding will be used for site preparation, concrete collection lanes, lagoons, settling ponds, and other equipment to collect and dispose of manure.

The Livestock Nutrient Management Bond program issues tax-exempt bonds to purchasers — typically local banks — who set the repayment terms and interest rates for the company borrowing the money.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 13 of 74

Members of the Economic Development Finance Authority are appointed by the governor. The bond program is one of many economic incentives offered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED).

The authority held a public meeting on Sept. 20 at the Clark County Courthouse to collect feedback regarding the bond, but no members of the public attended.

In a separate project, Riverview plans to build an \$86 million, 12,500-cow dairy in Hamlin County on land currently owned by Gov. Kristi Noem's brothers. That would be the company's sixth in the state. For that project, Riverview has applied to another GOED program for a refund of up to \$4.5 million of sales and use taxes spent to build the dairy.

\$4 million in loans to companies

In a separate meeting Wednesday, the South Dakota Board of Economic Development awarded about \$4 million in loans to four companies.

Three companies were approved for loans from the South Dakota Works program, which offers business and commercial loans to companies in need of working capital, fixed assets and interim construction financing. Barbeque Twist of Aberdeen was approved for a loan of \$89,875; Maxwell Construction, based in Iowa, was awarded a \$1,851,312 loan; and Cole-TAC of Rapid City was approved for a \$343,800 loan.

TM Industries of Parkston was approved for a \$1,800,000 loan from the Revolving Economic Development & Initiative Fund, which offers low-interest loans to businesses starting up, expanding or relocating in South Dakota.

Noem recently highlighted Cole-TAC, a tactical shooting gear manufacturer, in a press release urging California gun manufacturers to leave that state and move to South Dakota. Cole-TAC relocated from New Hampshire to the Black Hills in 2021, bringing with it 40 jobs.

The board also extended a loan for Dakota Protein Solutions of Freeman and reconfirmed a loan amount for Phase Technologies of Rapid City.

Additionally, the board decided it would pause plans to commission a feasibility study assessing the viability of small meatpacking projects in the state. The department planned to hire an independent consultant for the study, focusing on areas such as available cattle supply, sales and marketing, the economics of processing, and workforce availability. The reason for halting the study was that only one entity applied to conduct the study so far.

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.

South Dakota ACT scores decline but remain higher than national average

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - OCTOBER 11, 2023 10:36 AM

South Dakota students' average ACT score is down for the third consecutive year, but it remains higher than the national average.

The national nonprofit that administers the college readiness exam released new results Tuesday from the class of 2023. South Dakota students earned an average composite score of 21.1. The highest possible score on the ACT is 36.

That continued a decline from the state's recent high of 21.7 in 2020, followed by scores of 21.6 in 2021 and 21.5 in 2022. The minimum score for acceptance at the state's public universities is 18.

The national average composite score this year is 19.5, which is down for the sixth straight year after peaking at 21 in 2017.

"South Dakota's ACT scores are good," said state Secretary of Education Joseph Graves on Wednesday in

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 14 of 74

Average Composite ACT Scores – South Dakota vs. National*

Year	South Dakota	National
2019	21.6	20.7
2020	21.7	20.6
2021	21.6	20.3
2022	21.5	19.8
2023	21.1	19.5

South Dakota school buildings closed about two months early during the spring of 2020 at the suggestion of Gov. Kristi Noem. As the pandemic continued, the state's schools did reopen earlier and to a greater extent than many other states.

Comparing state ACT scores is difficult, because some states require the test while others don't, and the percentages of students taking the test in each state varies widely. In Nevada, 100% percent of 2023 high school graduates took the test and posted the nation's worst average composite score of 17.2. In each of Connecticut and Massachusetts, 8% of graduates took the test, and the states tied for the nation's highest score of 26.4.

In South Dakota, the average composite score of 21.1 was posted by the 59% of 2023 high school graduates who took the exam. That score was better than the two states with the most similar participation rates: Hawaii, where 64% of graduates took the test and posted an average composite score of 17.9, and Iowa, where 48% of students took the test and posted a score of 20.8.

Biden administration working to recover U.S. hostages held by Hamas

Rounds part of bipartisan group calling for Iron Dome aid

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - OCTOBER 11, 2023 6:19 PM

U.S. officials are working to recover American hostages from the Middle East and provide aid to Israel as violence continues in the region following last weekend's attack by Hamas, administration and congressional leaders said Wednesday.

Speaking to Jewish community leaders at the White House late Wednesday afternoon, President Joe Biden said the administration was working to extract U.S. hostages taken by Hamas, that he was in consistent communication with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and that he condemned antisemitism and hate of all kinds.

Biden affirmed a strong U.S. commitment to Israel, saying it went beyond geopolitical interests. He invoked the Holocaust and said that without Israel, "no Jew in the world would be able to be safe."

"The past few days have been a solemn reminder that hate never goes away," he said. "All it does is go underground. It doesn't go away, it just hides."

At the White House press briefing Wednesday, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said 22 Americans are confirmed dead in Israel and 17 are unaccounted for. Officials expect those numbers to rise, she and National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said from the briefing room.

The administration is aware that several missing Americans are being held hostage by Hamas and is working to extract them, Biden said, though he said he could not provide details on those efforts.

"We're working on every aspect of the hostage crisis in Israel, including deploying experts to advise and assist with the recovery efforts," he said.

Biden said he knew the Jewish leaders and the news media would have questions about plans to retrieve hostages, but said he couldn't share any details without compromising the mission.

"I have not given up hope that we can get them home," he said. "But the idea that I'm going to stand here before you and tell you what I'm doing is bizarre."

a news release. "Taking the ACT means a student is considering education beyond high school, and in a knowledge-based economy, that's a critical thing."

He went on to attribute South Dakota's better-than-average scores "to the fact that we kept our schools open during the pandemic. Our students and teachers did the work straight through a difficult time."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 15 of 74

Evacuating Americans, Gaza civilians

More than 100 U.S. House members said in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken they've received calls from constituents who are in Israel and are seeking to return and urged the secretary to help them come home.

"We urge the State Department to use all resources at its disposal, including charter flights, to help those Americans that remain in Israel and wish to return to the United States," the letter reads.

Kirby and some members of Congress also highlighted efforts to protect civilians in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas is based.

"We're actively discussing this with our Israeli and Egyptian counterparts," Kirby said of evacuating civilians in Gaza. "We support safe passages for civilians. Civilians are not to blame for what Hamas has done. They didn't do anything wrong."

Kirby said he couldn't announce any concrete plans Wednesday, but that civilians were protected under international law and should be given "every opportunity to avoid fighting."

House Foreign Affairs Committee ranking Democrat Gregory Meeks, of New York, said at a morning news conference that Palestinian civilians should not be punished for the actions of Hamas.

"I want to acknowledge that there are innocent Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank that hope to just live normal and free lives," Meeks said. "They want nothing to do with Hamas. Hamas is their enemy, too. What the cowardly people of Hamas do is use them as human shields."

"I just want to make sure that we cannot lose sight of this," he continued. "We must keep these Palestinian people, and their safety and livelihoods, in mind as we crush Hamas."

Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent who caucuses with Democrats, criticized Israel's response of cutting off food, water and other necessities from Gaza, calling it "a serious violation of international law" that "will do nothing but harm innocent civilians."

Sanders, who is Jewish, said in a statement the U.S. was right to offer solidarity and aid to Israel, but "must also insist on restraint from Israeli forces attacking Gaza."

"Let us not forget that half of the two million people in Gaza are children," he said. "Children and innocent people do not deserve to be punished for the acts of Hamas."

Rounds calls for Iron Dome aid

Four bipartisan members of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Democrats Jacky Rosen of Nevada and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Rick Scott of Florida and Mike Rounds of South Dakota, wrote to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to request the U.S. send two batteries for Israel's Iron Dome defense system.

Kirby said the U.S. was "able to replenish" some Iron Dome interceptor missiles. The missiles were already in Israel but in possession of the U.S. military, which "just transferred ownership" to the Israeli military, he said.

Members of both parties also called for stopping any release of the \$6 billion in Iranian assets the Biden administration agreed to provide earlier this year in return for the release of U.S. prisoners.

That money is supposed to be used for humanitarian purpose—and has not been released at all yet, officials said Tuesday — but Iran has provided aid to Hamas and Hezbollah, a militant group based across Israel's northern border in Lebanon, and lawmakers argued the humanitarian funding could allow for more money to be sent to militants.

"Based on what I heard today in our classified briefing, I believe we need to hit the pause button on any release of the funds that were part of this deal," Michigan Democratic Rep. Elissa Slotkin said on X, formerly Twitter, referring to a classified briefing House members received Wednesday morning.

Several Republicans made a similar request in a letter Tuesday, and U.S. Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, supported that view in a statement Tuesday.

U.S. Senate Banking and Housing Committee Chairman Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, said the panel "will examine the financing behind Hamas's attacks, including whether cryptocurrency was involved, and what additional economic tools we need to stop state sponsors of terrorism, including Iran, from support-

ing Hamas and other terrorist groups.”

“As we work to hold any state sponsors of terrorism accountable, the administration must freeze the \$6 billion in Iranian assets,” he added.

Widening the war

Reports early Wednesday indicated Hezbollah, a militant group on Israel’s northern border that also receives backing from Iran, could be organizing an attack.

Biden and Kirby said Wednesday the administration was warning other actors not to get involved.

“We’re sending a loud and clear message that the United States is ready to take action should any actor hostile to Israel consider trying to escalate or widen this war,” Kirby said.

-Ashley Murray and Jane Norman contributed to this report.

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

Scalise nominated by U.S. House GOP as speaker in closed-door meeting

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT, ASHLEY MURRAY AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - OCT. 11, 2023 2:07 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans elected Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise as their nominee for speaker Wednesday following a secret ballot vote in a closed-door conference, according to Republicans leaving the meeting.

“We need to make sure we’re sending a message to people all throughout the world, and that the House is open and doing the people’s business,” Scalise told reporters after the meeting.

Scalise did not confirm whether he had all the votes from his party to take the gavel, but said “we’re gonna have to go upstairs on the House floor and resolve this and get the House reopened again.”

The next step for Scalise, who currently is the majority leader, will be garnering the support of nearly all his GOP colleagues to win a floor vote to become speaker, replacing former Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California.

The nominee picked in the conference meeting only needed to get the backing of a majority of the 221 House Republicans, but Scalise will need about 217 on the floor before he can hold the gavel.

When asked whether he would vote for Scalise, Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, chair of the far-right House Freedom Caucus, said “We’re going to go figure it out. Vote’s pretty close.”

“We need to quit having this place run the way it’s run,” he added on how he could be convinced to support the Louisiana Republican.

Rep. Kevin Hern of Oklahoma told reporters as he left the meeting that he will run for House majority leader.

Republicans haven’t yet announced when a floor vote will take place, though the House is scheduled to come into session at 3 p.m.

Reps. Frank Lucas of Oklahoma, Ashley Hinson of Iowa and John James of Michigan gave nominating speeches for Scalise. His path to the nomination was smoothed when Republicans tabled a proposal by Texas Republican Chip Roy to change the rules on how a nominee was selected.

The other candidate was Ohio’s Jim Jordan, chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

Reps. Kelly Armstrong of North Dakota, Erin Houchin of Indiana and Mike Carey of Ohio nominated Jordan.

Reps. Tim Burchett of Tennessee and Matt Gaetz of Florida who voted to oust McCarthy said they would support Scalise on the floor.

“Long live Speaker Scalise,” Gaetz, who filed the motion to vacate McCarthy, said.

The new speaker will have several crises to address as soon as the swearing-in is over.

The first task will likely be addressing the situation in Israel, which is under an ongoing attack from Hamas and possibly other organizations.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 17 of 74

Scalise said if elected speaker, one of the first orders of business for the House is to pass a resolution showing the United States support for Israel.

Congress will need to approve supplemental funding expected to be requested by President Joe Biden, an issue that will garner strong bipartisan support. Biden has said he wants Congress to take "urgent action" on Israel's security needs.

Scalise, if elected speaker, will need to work with the Democratic Senate to pass some type of government funding bill ahead of a Nov. 17 deadline. Additional aid to Ukraine could be attached to that package, or a bill carrying aid to Israel.

Scalise also would be tasked with fundraising, protecting centrist Republicans and wrangling far-right conservatives to support his agenda.

However, there are some GOP lawmakers who still plan to vote for Jordan on the House floor such as Rep. Max Miller of Ohio.

He said he'd back Jordan "because he's not in leadership."

"Trust has been shattered in that room," Miller said. "The only way, in my opinion, that you regain that trust is with a whole new set of people."

Florida Rep. Kat Cammack said after the closed-door meeting she doesn't believe Scalise will get the votes needed on the floor to become speaker

"I think that what's going to happen at three o'clock is going to be a continuation of the chaos that has plagued the House."

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

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

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

Statewide group representing news organizations rebrands

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - OCTOBER 11, 2023 11:34 AM

The association representing the state's newspapers and other news media outlets has changed its name to the South Dakota NewsMedia Association (SDNA), according to a news release.

For the past 35 years, the association was known as the South Dakota Newspaper Association.

"The change in the name of our association reflects the changes occurring in the news media industry today as well as our organization's strategic desire to adapt and move forward," said SDNA President Kristi Hine, who also is publisher of the True Dakotan newspaper at Wessington Springs.

The name change coincides with the association's recent decision to expand its membership ranks to include not only newspapers but other types of news media organizations that have started the past few years, including certain digital-only news outlets.

The new name also reflects trends occurring among community newspapers.

"The printed newspaper remains the bread-and-butter product in our communities, but newspapers large and small today are delivering news, information and advertising on many different media platforms," Hine said. "It's about meeting the expectations and news consumption habits of our readers and customers."

Hine pointed out that the most recent statewide survey commissioned by SDNA showed that 83% of all South Dakota adults read local newspapers every month, whether it's in print or online. "The local newspaper remains essential to keeping the community informed, engaged and connected," she said.

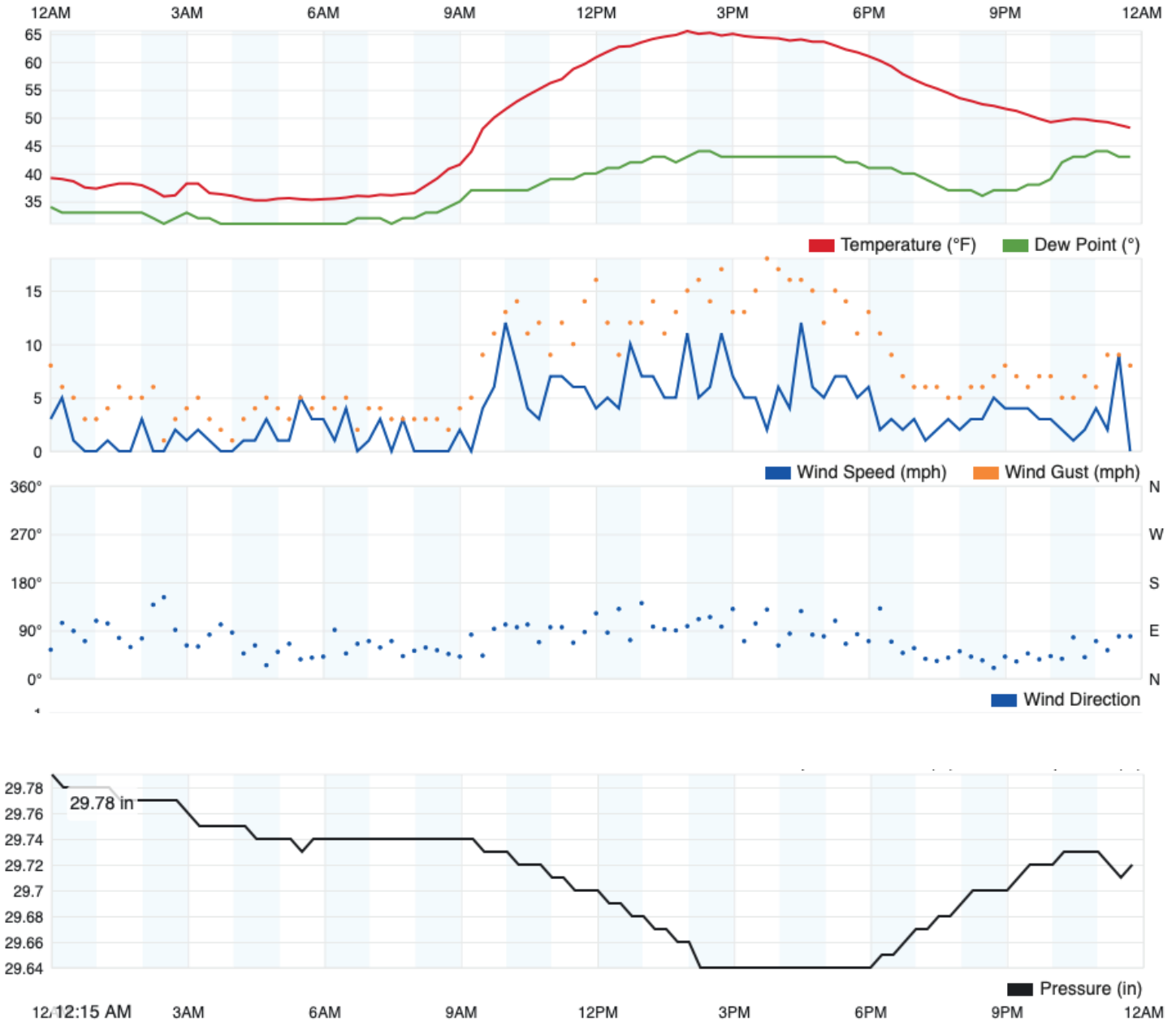
"While the name is changed, our association remains committed to our core mission of serving and supporting the newspapers and news organizations that serve their communities with quality journalism and relevant news and information."

Prior to becoming the South Dakota Newspaper Association in 1988, the organization was known as the South Dakota Press Association for most of its 141-year history. The change to South Dakota NewsMedia Association was approved this fall in a vote by members of the organization.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 18 of 74

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 19 of 74

Thu Oct 12	Fri Oct 13	Sat Oct 14	Sun Oct 15	Mon Oct 16	Tue Oct 17	Wed Oct 18
54°F 41°F	45°F 39°F	50°F 38°F	50°F 31°F	54°F 34°F	57°F 41°F	55°F 44°F
ENE 31 MPH	NNE 29 MPH	N 17 MPH	N 10 MPH	NNW 9 MPH	S 12 MPH	SSE 13 MPH
80%	90%					



System Overview

October 12, 2023
4:33 AM

Key Messages

- Expansion of rain from south to north today.
- Heaviest rainfall expected along & south of this line:

Philip - Pierre - Redfield - Watertown

- Increasingly windy: Gusts between 45 and 55 mph - winds peak this afternoon/evening.

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	10/12 Thu				10/13 Fri				10/14 Sat			Maximum						
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12am		3am	6am				
Aberdeen	33	39	41	43	46	46	45	45	45	46	44	39	39	35	29	25	23	46
Britton	29	38	41	43	41	44	44	45	45	45	41	39	37	33	29	24	21	45
Brookings	35	39	44	48	49	49	49	47	47	45	43	38	35	30	26	26	25	49
Chamberlain	43	44	45	45	45	46	47	47	49	45	43	39	35	29	25	24	22	49
Clark	41	46	49	52	52	53	53	48	46	46	41	39	38	30	26	26	23	53
Eagle Butte	43	46	47	51	51	48	46	44	44	41	36	36	32	24	20	17	15	51
Ellendale	31	38	40	43	41	41	41	43	43	44	41	40	35	30	28	23	21	44
Eureka	40	43	45	46	45	44	43	43	43	39	39	37	32	25	21	20	17	46
Gettysburg	44	47	49	54	54	54	52	48	47	41	40	40	35	29	23	20	18	54
Huron	39	40	44	45	46	47	46	45	43	43	41	39	38	31	24	24	22	47
Kennebec	43	46	49	52	54	56	56	53	48	45	43	43	38	30	26	24	21	56
McIntosh	39	44	44	48	46	44	41	41	38	37	36	35	30	21	15	15	14	48
Milbank	21	29	33	36	37	38	37	35	33	32	31	30	30	26	26	23	22	38
Miller	35	38	43	48	49	49	51	47	46	44	40	38	35	29	24	23	20	51
Mobridge	37	39	41	44	44	41	40	38	40	38	36	33	30	25	20	16	15	44
Murdo	45	47	49	53	54	56	53	52	49	46	43	41	39	31	23	20	18	56
Pierre	40	45	47	52	55	55	54	49	45	39	37	37	35	30	21	17	15	55
Redfield	32	38	41	48	48	48	48	47	46	46	41	39	39	30	26	25	22	48
Sisseton	18	30	33	35	35	37	37	37	37	36	33	32	31	28	25	22	18	37
Watertown	38	40	46	48	51	52	53	49	46	44	40	39	37	31	26	26	25	53
Webster	38	46	48	52	51	51	51	49	48	47	45	43	43	35	30	28	24	52
Wheaton	22	28	30	31	31	33	33	32	33	33	31	30	26	24	22	20	18	33



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The system approaching the area will generate rain and wind. The strongest winds are expected this afternoon/evening and overnight. Rainfall will be heaviest along and south of a line from Pierre to Redfield and Watertown. There will be a gradient in rainfall amounts north of that line, and in fact north central SD could see very moisture w/ this system. Winds decrease for the latter half of Friday as precipitation shifts east.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 20 of 74



Timing Precipitation

October 12, 2023
4:36 AM

Probability of Precipitation Forecast

	Probability of Precipitation Forecast																				
	10/12 Thu						10/13 Fri						10/14 Sat								
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm
Aberdeen	0	5	15	35	80	90	95	90	90	85	85	65	65	45	45	25	25	5	5	5	5
Britton	0	0	10	15	55	70	80	90	85	90	90	75	75	55	55	30	30	10	10	0	0
Brookings	35	50	75	90	100	100	100	95	95	95	95	85	85	70	70	45	45	30	30	20	20
Chamberlain	75	85	95	95	100	100	100	100	95	90	90	65	65	55	55	45	45	10	10	5	5
Clark	10	25	60	85	100	100	100	100	90	95	95	75	75	70	70	35	35	15	15	5	5
Eagle Butte	20	35	50	65	75	75	75	80	75	60	60	55	55	30	30	10	10	10	10	10	10
Ellendale	0	0	5	15	35	55	55	70	70	75	75	60	60	45	45	25	25	5	5	0	0
Eureka	5	5	10	15	50	60	65	75	70	65	65	55	55	40	40	20	20	5	5	0	0
Gettysburg	15	35	55	75	95	100	100	90	95	80	80	70	70	45	45	25	25	10	10	10	10
Huron	40	60	75	90	100	100	100	95	95	95	95	80	80	60	60	40	40	15	15	15	15
Kennebec	80	90	95	95	100	100	100	100	95	90	90	60	60	50	50	25	25	15	15	5	5
McIntosh	5	10	10	15	25	35	35	40	45	45	45	45	45	25	25	10	10	5	5	5	5
Milbank	0	5	20	70	95	95	100	100	100	100	100	95	95	70	70	40	40	15	15	5	5
Miller	35	65	85	95	100	100	100	100	95	95	95	80	80	60	60	35	35	20	20	20	20
Mobridge	5	5	15	20	50	70	70	75	60	60	60	45	45	35	35	15	15	5	5	0	0
Murdo	85	90	95	95	100	100	100	100	95	80	80	45	45	40	40	20	20	15	15	0	0
Pierre	60	80	85	95	100	95	100	95	90	80	80	55	55	35	35	20	20	15	15	5	5
Redfield	15	35	65	85	100	100	100	95	100	90	90	65	65	55	55	35	35	10	10	5	5
Sisseton	0	5	5	20	70	90	95	95	95	95	95	80	80	60	60	35	35	10	10	0	0
Watertown	5	20	50	80	100	100	100	100	90	100	100	90	90	75	75	45	45	20	20	10	10
Webster	5	5	15	60	95	95	95	95	90	95	95	80	80	65	65	45	45	10	10	5	5
Wheaton	0	0	5	15	55	75	85	95	95	100	100	85	85	55	55	30	30	10	10	0	0

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Moisture Probabilities

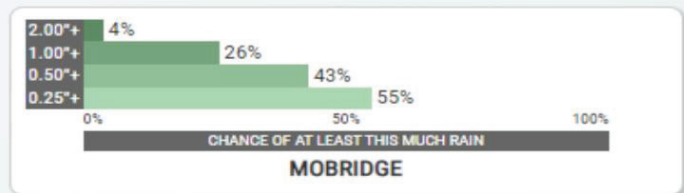
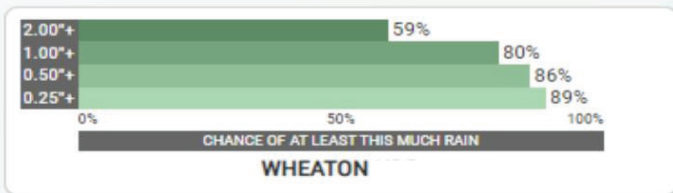
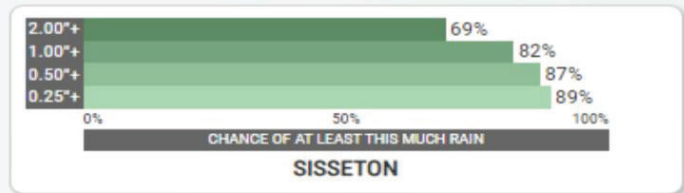
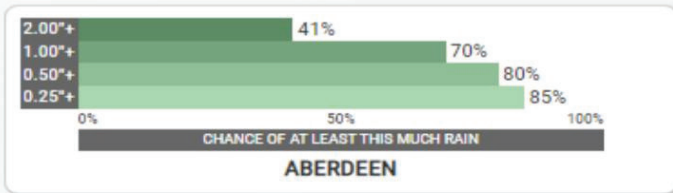
October 12, 2023
4:39 AM



Rainfall Probabilities

Thu, Oct 12, 2023, 7 PM to Fri, Oct 13, 2023, 7 PM

These graphs show the probability that rainfall will reach or exceed the given value for select locations. Values above 50% indicate that rainfall of this amount has a greater than 50/50 chance of occurring.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 21 of 74

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 66 °F at 1:57 PM

Low Temp: 35 °F at 4:32 AM

Wind: 18 mph at 1:03 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 11 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 89 in 1910

Record Low: 11 in 1917

Average High: 62

Average Low: 35

Average Precip in Oct.: 0.90

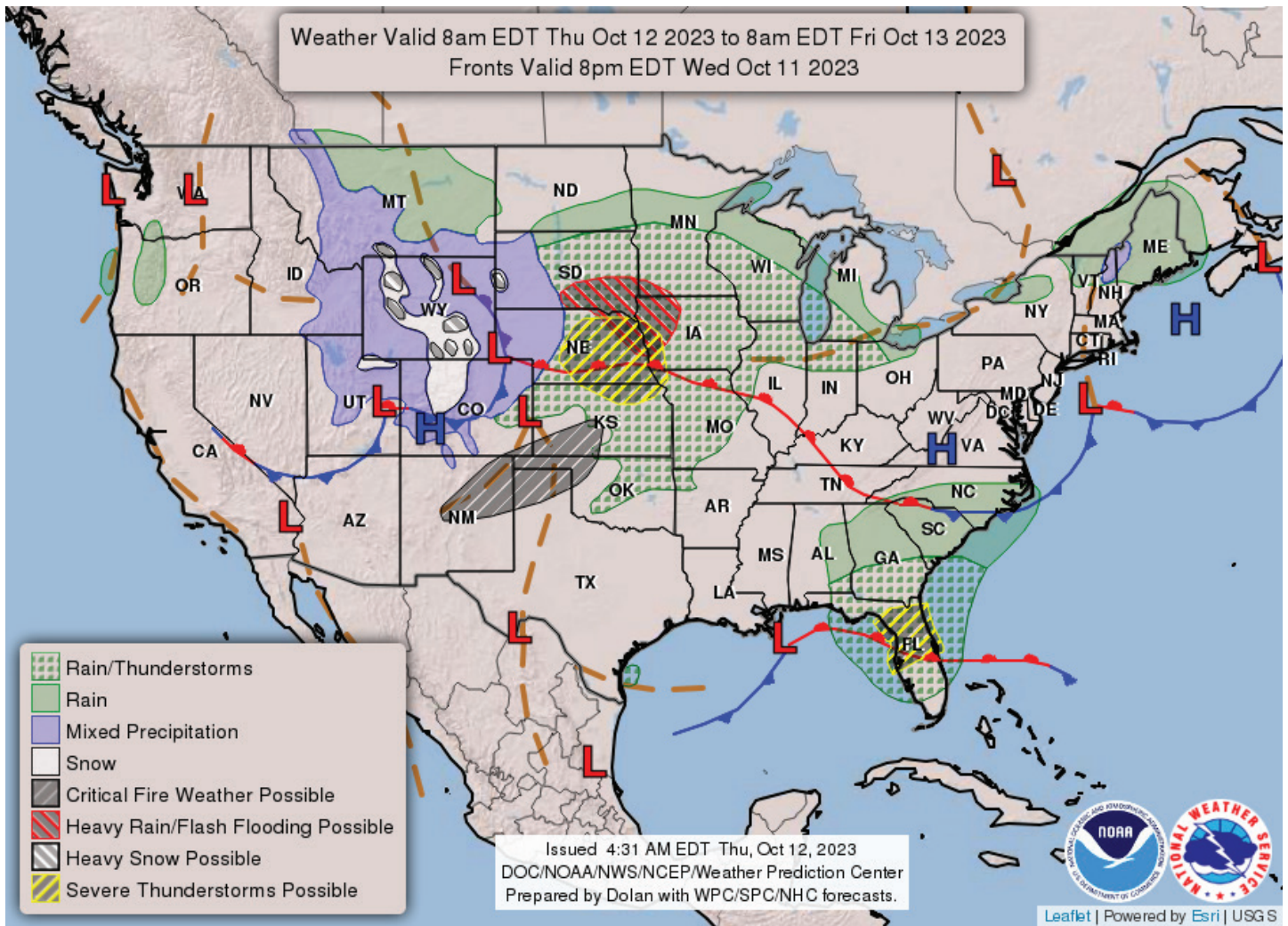
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.06

Average Precip to date: 19.23

Precip Year to Date: 21.83

Sunset Tonight: 6:54:28 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44:34 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 22 of 74

Today in Weather History

October 12, 1997: High winds upward of 60 mph were recorded throughout western South Dakota.

1918: On October 10, 1918, two men working near a railroad siding northwest of Cloquet, Minnesota, saw a passenger train pass by the siding, and soon after, that discovered a fire burning through grass and piles of wood. The fire could not be contained, and by October 12, fires had spread through northern Minnesota. At least 450 lives were lost, and 52,000 people were injured or displaced, 38 communities were destroyed, 250,000 acres were burned.

1836 - A third early season storm produced heavy snow in the northeastern U.S. Bridgewater NY received 18 inches, a foot of snow fell at Madison NY, and for the third time all the mountains of the northeastern U.S. were whitened. (David Ludlum)

1918 - Forest fires ravaged parts of Minnesota from the Duluth area northeastward, claiming the lives of 600 persons. Smoke with a smell of burnt wood spread to Albany NY and Washington D.C. in 24 hours. Smoke was noted at Charleston SC on the 14th, and by the 15th was reported in northeastern Texas. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1962: The Columbus Day Storm of 1962 was a Pacific Northwest windstorm that struck the West Coast of Canada and the Pacific Northwest Coast of the United States. It is considered the benchmark of extra-tropical wind storms. The storm ranks among the most intense to strike the region since at least 1948, likely since the January 9, 1880 "Great Gale" and snowstorm.

1962 - The "Columbus Day Big Blow" occurred in the Pacific Northwest. It was probably the most damaging windstorm of record west of the Cascade Mountains. Winds reached hurricane force, with gusts above 100 mph. More than 3.5 billion board feet of timber were blown down, and communications were severely disrupted due to downed power lines. The storm claimed 48 lives, and caused 210 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1979: The lowest barometric pressure ever recorded occurs in the center of Typhoon Tip on this day. A fly reconnaissance mission recorded the low pressure of 870 hPa or 25.69 inHg. Typhoon Tip was the most extensive tropical cyclone on record with a wind diameter of 1380 miles at its peak.

1987 - Floyd, the only hurricane to make landfall the entire season, moved across the Florida Keys. Floyd produced wind gusts to 59 mph at Duck Key, and up to nine inches of rain in southern Florida. Sixteen cities in the Ohio Valley and the Middle Mississippi Valley reported record low temperatures for the date. Record lows included 27 degrees at Paducah KY, and 24 degrees at Rockford IL and Springfield IL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Twenty cities in the Upper Midwest reported record low temperatures for the date, including International Falls MN with a reading of 17 degrees. The town of Embarass MN reported a morning low of 8 degrees. Snow showers in the northeastern U.S. produced five inches at Corry PA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Temperatures again warmed into the 80s in the Central Plains Region and the Middle Mississippi Valley, with 90s in the south central U.S. Six cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Fort Smith AR with a reading of 92 degrees. Strong winds along a cold front crossing the Great Lakes Region and the Ohio Valley gusted to 61 mph at Johnstown PA. (The National Weather Summary)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 23 of 74

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

GOING BUT NOT DOING

While waiting for a bus to take me to the hotel at the end of the day, I watched as several of them passed by my waiting area. As they sped to their destination, there was a sign in each of them that read, "Out of Service."

Jesus, when speaking about the responsibilities of His disciples said, "Look around you! Vast fields are ripening all everywhere we look, and are ready now for the harvest."

Our Lord repeatedly addressed a pressing need in His day and a need that we, as His disciples, face today: There are many in front of us, to the side of us, and even behind us that are waiting to be brought into the Kingdom of God. It is not that He is unconcerned about them or that they are not willing to listen to His offer of salvation. Rather, it is because we, His followers, are out of service.

Sometimes we excuse ourselves from being His witnesses and "harvesters" by saying that our family members and friends are not ready to believe. Jesus, however, made it very clear that we are surrounded by an opportunity to be involved in a constant and continual harvest waiting to be reaped. It's not that there are no fields to be harvested. It's that we cannot (or refuse?) to see them!

Each day we must remind ourselves that He will return and find us doing "something." What will that "something" be? Will He find us involved in taking the Good News of the Gospel to those around us? When He appears will we be doing what He has called us to do or find us out of service?

Prayer: Lord, You have called us to labor with You in the "great harvest" by witnessing and winning the lost around us. Convict us of our lack of concern for "the harvest." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. John 4:34-38



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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 24 of 74

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 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 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
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 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
- 08/10/2023 Family Fun Fest, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/08/2023 Family Fun Fest 3:30-5:30pm
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/09-10/2023 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 09/10/2023 Emmanuel Lutheran Church Sunday School Rally 9:00am
- 09/10/2023 7th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 4-6pm
- 09/15/2023 Homecoming Parade
- 10/13/2023 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 11/25/2023 Snow Queen Contest
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes, Live & Silent Auctions at Olive Grove Golf Course 4pm-close
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 25 of 74

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 26 of 74



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.10.23

3 8 17 46 63 7

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$48,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 54
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.11.23

3 6 9 17 51 2

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,700,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 9
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.11.23

23 25 26 37 38 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 24 Mins
DRAW: 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.11.23

2 7 8 16 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$22,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 24
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.11.23

3 40 51 59 66 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 53
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.11.23

22 24 40 52 64 10

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 53
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

More Americans support striking auto workers than car companies, an AP-NORC poll shows

By DAVID KOENIG AP Business Writer

A majority of Americans support higher pay for auto workers who are on strike against Detroit's Big Three carmakers, although approval of the workers' other demands is more mixed, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll found that 36% of Americans sympathize with the workers in their dispute with the automakers, 9% support the automakers, and the rest back both or neither.

Support for the autoworkers fell short of the 55% support for striking Hollywood writers and actors in an AP-NORC poll conducted last month.

Still, the new poll adds to evidence of U.S. support for labor unions during a year marked by strikes in Hollywood, a walkout that was narrowly averted by Teamsters at United Parcel Service, and now the picket lines outside auto plants.

In the new AP-NORC survey, 51% say labor unions help U.S. workers while only 15% say they hurt working people. About one-third say unions help the U.S. economy, while 22% say they damage the economy.

A Gallup poll taken in August found that 67% of Americans approve of unions, down four points from 2022 but up from a low of 48% in 2009.

Rachel Collins, a fifth-grade teacher and union member in Chicago, says she hopes the UAW strike could help reverse a long decline in labor power and raise pay for workers across the economy.

"For far too long, labor has been the backbone of what we do in this country but has never been compensated," she said. "In the last 50 years we have seen the decline of the working class and the rise of this sort of billionaire class and corporations taking and taking and not giving anything to the workers."

Chris Ross, a mechanical engineer from Oviedo, Florida, said he understands the workers' desire for more money to cope with inflation. However, he thinks they are paid better than similar workers in other industries, and he fears that the union's demands will drive the carmakers' costs too high as they face lower-cost rivals including non-union Tesla.

"If they are burdened with high labor costs, I suspect that's going to hurt them," Ross said. "I'd like to see the Big Three have an ideal opportunity to compete. That's better for the consumers."

The United Auto Workers went on strike Sept. 15 against Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, which owns the Jeep, Dodge and Ram brands. The union is seeking large pay raises, a shorter work week, an end to lower-pay tiers for new workers and limits on the use of temporary workers.

Six in 10 people in the AP-NORC poll say they think better pay for the autoworkers would be a good thing. Eight in 10 Democrats and just under half of Republicans say it would be a good thing if the workers got raises.

General sympathy for the workers also breaks along party lines. More than half of Democrats (55%) say they support the workers over the automakers, while only 22% of Republicans feel that way. A majority of Republicans say they support both equally, or neither.

Americans are less certain about the UAW's specific demands beyond pay raises. More than one-third (38%) think the union's call for a four-day work week would be a good thing, while 21% think it's a bad idea. The public is also somewhat more likely to say it would be a good thing than a bad thing to place limits on the car companies' use of temporary workers and to require electric vehicles and parts to be made by union workers, but many are unsure or express no opinion either way.

President Joe Biden has openly supported the UAW and joined a picket line near Detroit on Sept. 26, telling the workers that they deserve significant raises.

The front-runner for the Republican nomination, former President Donald Trump, spoke to a group of current and former union members nearby the following night and said Biden's support for electric ve-

hicles — he signed a law last year that extended tax credits for buying EVs — would cost jobs. That's a fear held by some auto workers who maintain that EVs require fewer people to build.

The poll shows only 25% of Americans approve of Biden's handling of the auto dispute, while 34% disapprove. Trump's ratings on the issue are even worse, with 19% approving and 39% disapproving of his response to the strike. Thirty-five percent trust Democrats more than Republicans when it comes to handling issues facing American workers, while 24% trust the GOP more.

Barbara Tubbs, a retired caregiver from Dallas, said Biden's support for the strikers shows empathy for working-class people struggling to pay their bills.

"He has said he knows what it's like to be in hardship," which makes him "willing to help with life situations and challenges we are dealing with today," she said.

But Jim Grove, a retired teacher and guidance counselor in Sharon, Pennsylvania, wasn't impressed by Biden's visit to the picket line.

"He's a shameless panderer," Grove said. "If he gets a chance to pander to some special interest group, he does it."

The poll of 1,163 adults was conducted Oct. 5-9, 2023, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, designed to represent the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

The US is moving quickly to boost Israel's military. A look at what assistance it's providing

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Within hours of the horrific attack by Hamas, the U.S. began moving warships and aircraft to the region to be ready to provide Israel with whatever it needs to respond.

A second U.S. carrier strike group departs from Norfolk, Virginia, on Friday. Scores of aircraft are heading to U.S. military bases around the Middle East. And special operations forces are now assisting Israel's military in planning and intelligence.

The buildup reflects U.S. concern that the deadly fighting between Hamas and Israel could escalate into a more dangerous regional conflict. So the primary mission for those ships and warplanes for now is to establish a force presence that deters Hezbollah, Iran or others from taking advantage of the situation. But the forces the U.S. sent are capable of more than that.

The U.S. is also expediting the shipment of munitions and interceptors for Israel's fight against Hamas.

A look at what weapons and options the U.S. military could provide:

WEAPONS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The U.S. is providing some personnel and much-needed munitions to Israel. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced that a small cell of special operations forces was now assisting Israel with intelligence and planning. They have not been tasked with hostage rescue, contrary to some reporting, a defense official said, but could if they were requested to do so.

The U.S. is also getting U.S. defense companies to expedite weapons orders by Israel that were already on the books. Chief among those is getting munitions for Israel's Iron Dome air defense system sped along.

President Joe Biden said Tuesday that resupplying Iron Dome munitions and air defense systems was an immediate priority.

"We're surging additional military assistance, including ammunition and interceptors to replenish Iron Dome," Biden said. "We're going to make sure that Israel does not run out of these critical assets to defend its cities and its citizens."

Iron Dome's missiles target rockets that approach one of its cities. According to Raytheon, Israel has 10 Iron Dome systems in place to protect its cities. Beginning with Saturday's attack, Hamas has fired more than 5,000 rockets at Israel, most of which the system has been able to intercept, according to the Israel

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 29 of 74

Defense Forces.

Raytheon produces most of the missile components for Iron Dome in the U.S., and the Army has two Iron Dome systems in its stockpile.

NAVY SHIPS AND PLANES

One of the most visible examples of the U.S. response was the announcement Sunday by the Pentagon to redirect the Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group to sail toward Israel. The carrier had just completed an exercise with the Italian Navy when the ship and its crew of about 5,000 were ordered to quickly sail to the Eastern Mediterranean.

The carrier provides a host of options. It's a primary command and control operations center and can conduct information warfare. It can launch and recover E2-Hawkeye surveillance planes, recognized by their 24-foot (7-meter) diameter disc-shaped radar. The planes provide early warnings on missile launches, conduct surveillance and manage the airspace, detecting not only enemy aircraft but also directing U.S. movements.

The Ford carries F-18 fighter jets that could fly intercepts or strike targets. The carrier also has significant capabilities for humanitarian work, including an onboard hospital with an ICU and emergency room and about 40 medics, surgeons and doctors. It sails with helicopters that can be used to airlift critical supplies in or victims out.

On Friday, the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike group will leave its homeport of Norfolk, Virginia, and sail for the Mediterranean, potentially doubling the Navy's Israel response.

The Eisenhower had already been scheduled to deploy to the Mediterranean on a regular rotation, and the Ford is near the end of its deployment. But the Biden administration may decide to extend the Ford's deployment and keep both strike groups out there, White House spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday.

AIR FORCE WARPLANES

The Pentagon has also ordered additional warplanes to bolster existing squadrons of A-10, F-15 and F-16 squadrons at bases throughout the Middle East and is ready to add more if needed.

Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said Tuesday at an Atlantic Council event that the service was doubling up by directing units that were about to come home to remain in place and stay there along with their replacements.

The U.S. Air Force already has significant airpower in the region to conduct manned and unmanned operations, most notably in Syria where an Air Force F-16 last week was ordered to shoot down a Turkish drone that was posing a threat to U.S. ground forces operating there.

Kendall also said U.S. Air Force C-17s have landed in and departed from Israel since the attacks. The transport planes were picking up U.S. military personnel who were there for a military exercise that hadn't started yet when the attacks began, the Air Force said in a statement.

Neither the Air Force nor Central Command would comment on what additional missions U.S. airpower might take on in response to the conflict.

Palestinians rush to buy food and struggle under strikes as Israel readies possible ground operation

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinians lined up outside bakeries and grocery stores in Gaza on Thursday after spending the night surrounded by the ruins of pulverized neighborhoods darkened by a near-total power outage. Israel launched new airstrikes and said it was preparing for a possible ground invasion.

International aid groups warned that the death toll in Gaza could mount after Israel stopped all deliveries of food, water, fuel and electricity and the tiny enclave's crossing with Egypt closed. The war — which was ignited by a bloody and wide-ranging assault on Israel by Hamas militants — has already claimed at least 2,500 lives on both sides.

Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, an Israeli military spokesman, told reporters Thursday that forces "are preparing for a ground maneuver if decided," but that political leaders have not yet ordered one. A ground offensive

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 30 of 74

in Gaza, whose 2.3 million residents are densely packed into a sliver of land only 40 kilometers (25 miles) long, would likely bring even higher casualties on both sides in brutal house-to-house fighting.

As Israel pounds Gaza, Hamas fighters have fired thousands of rockets into Israel since their weekend assault. Militants in the territory are also holding an estimated 150 people taken hostage from Israel.

Already, Palestinians fleeing airstrikes could be seen running through the streets, carrying their belongings and looking for a safe place. Tens of thousands have crowded into U.N.-run schools while others are staying with relatives or even strangers who let them in.

Lines formed outside bakeries and grocery stores during the few hours they dared open, as people tried to stock on food before shelves are emptied. On Wednesday, Gaza's only power station ran out of fuel and shut down, leaving only lights powered by scattered private generators.

A senior official with the the International Committee of the Red Cross warned that lack of electricity could cripple hospitals.

"As Gaza loses power, hospitals lose power, putting newborns in incubators and elderly patients on oxygen at risk. Kidney dialysis stops, and X-rays can't be taken," said Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC's regional director. "Without electricity, hospitals risk turning into morgues."

Israel's Energy Minister Israel Katz said nothing would be allowed into Gaza until the captives were released. "Not a single electricity switch will be flipped on, not a single faucet will be turned on, and not a single fuel truck will enter until the Israeli hostages are returned home," he tweeted.

After Hamas militants stormed through a border fence Saturday and massacred hundreds of Israelis in their homes, on the streets and at an outdoor music festival, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to "crush and destroy" the group, which has governed Gaza since 2007.

"Every Hamas member is a dead man," Netanyahu said in a televised address late Wednesday.

The Israeli government is under intense public pressure to topple the militant group rather than continuing to try to bottle it up in Gaza after four previous conflicts ended with Hamas still firmly in charge of the territory. Israel has mobilized 360,000 reservists, massed additional forces near Gaza and evacuated tens of thousands of residents from nearby communities.

Netanyahu now has the backing of a new war Cabinet that includes a longtime opposition politician. The U.S. has also pledged unwavering support, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Tel Aviv on Thursday to meet with Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders. He plans to meet Friday with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Jordan's King Abdullah II.

The Israeli military said overnight strikes targeted Hamas' elite Nukhba forces, including command centers used by the fighters who attacked Israel on Saturday, and the home of a senior Hamas naval operative that it said was used to store unspecified weapons.

Another airstrike killed a commander with the Islamic Jihad armed group in his family home in the northern town of Beit Lahia, according to media linked to the group. And a commander from a small, leftist militant group was also killed in a strike, along with some of his relatives, the group's media said.

"Right now we are focused on taking out their senior leadership," Hecht, the military spokesman, said. "Not only the military leadership, but also the governmental leadership, all the way up to (top Hamas leader Yehia) Sinwar. They were directly connected."

The Hamas-run Interior Ministry said Israeli strikes demolished two multistory houses without warning, killing and wounding "a large number" of people, mainly civilians. Hamas has threatened to kill hostages if Israel strikes Palestinian civilians without warning.

While Israel has insisted that it is giving notice of its strikes, it is employing a new tactic of leveling whole neighborhoods, rather than just individual buildings.

Israel's tone has changed as well. In past conflicts, its military insisted on the precision of strikes in Gaza, trying to ward off criticism over civilian deaths. This time, military briefings emphasize the destruction wrought.

Hecht said Israel was not "doing carpet bombing, though some people would like to see that." He said targeting decisions were based on intelligence and civilians were warned.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 31 of 74

Even with the evacuation warnings, Palestinians say some are unable to escape or have nowhere to go, and that entire families have been crushed under rubble.

Other times, strikes come with no notice, survivors say.

"There was no warning or anything," said Hashem Abu Manea, 58, who lost his 15-year-old daughter, Joanna, when a strike late Tuesday leveled his home in Gaza City.

The U.N. said late Wednesday the number of people displaced by the airstrikes had soared 30% within 24 hours, to 339,000, two-thirds of them crowding into U.N. schools. Others sought shelter in the shrinking number of safe neighborhoods.

The U.N. humanitarian office said Israeli strikes have leveled 1,000 homes since the retaliation began last Saturday, with another 560 housing units severely damaged and rendered uninhabitable. It said an Israeli cutoff has resulted in dire water shortages for over 650,000 people. Sewage systems have been destroyed, sending fetid wastewater into the streets.

Egypt has engaged in intensive talks with Israel and the United States to allow the delivery of aid and fuel through its Rafah crossing point, which is closed after an airstrike hit nearby earlier this week.

But it has pushed back against proposals to establish corridors out of Gaza, saying an exodus of Palestinians would have grave consequences for their hopes of one day establishing an independent state. Egypt is also likely concerned about a potential influx of hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

The death toll in Gaza rose to 1,200 early Thursday, including at least 326 children and 171 women, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Ghassan Abu Sitta, a reconstructive surgeon at the Gaza Strip's biggest hospital, said he had 50 patients waiting to go to the operating room.

"We're already beyond the capacity of the system to cope," he said. The health system "has the rest of the week before it collapses, not just because of the diesel. All supplies are running short."

Shock, grief and demands for vengeance against Hamas are running high in Israel.

Netanyahu alleged that the attackers engaged in atrocities, including binding boys and girls and shooting them in the head, burning people alive, raping women and beheading soldiers.

The prime minister's allegations could not be independently confirmed. Rescue workers and witnesses have described horrifying scenes, including the slaughter of elderly people and finding bloody rooms crowded with massacred civilians.

The Israeli military said more than 1,300 people, including 222 soldiers, have been killed in Israel, a staggering toll unseen since the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria that lasted weeks.

Israel says roughly 1,500 Hamas militants were killed inside Israel, and that hundreds of the dead inside Gaza are Hamas members.

Germany offers Israel military help and promises to crack down at home on support for Hamas

BERLIN (AP) — Germany is offering military help to Israel and promising to crack down on support for the militant Hamas group at home following the group's attack on Israel. Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Thursday underlined Germany's historical responsibility for Israel's security.

The Defense Ministry said it agreed to an Israeli request to use up to two of five Heron TP combat drones that are currently leased by the German military and were already in Israel for the training of German servicepeople. And Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said in Brussels that Israel has requested ammunition for warships, a request that will now be discussed.

Scholz told the German parliament that he has asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to inform Germany of any needs, "for example the treatment of wounded."

"At this moment, there is only one place for Germany — the place at Israel's side," he told lawmakers. "Our own history, our responsibility arising from the Holocaust, makes it a perpetual task for us to stand up for the security of the state of Israel."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 32 of 74

Scholz noted that thousands of people have demonstrated in support of Israel in recent days, but said that "there were also other, shameful pictures from Germany last weekend."

On Saturday, a small group handed out pastries in a Berlin street and dozens of people later demonstrated in celebration of the Hamas attack.

Scholz said that Germany will issue a formal ban on activity by or in support of Hamas, which is already listed by the European Union as a terror group. He said groups such as Samidoun, which was behind the weekend pastry action, will be banned.

Scholz said there will be "zero tolerance for antisemitism."

The chancellor also questioned the lack of a clear condemnation of the Hamas attack by the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, saying that "their silence is shameful."

Germany has suspended development aid for the Palestinian areas, though it is keeping up humanitarian help.

Scholz also assailed Iran's role in the region. "We have no tangible evidence that Iran gave concrete and operative support to this cowardly attack by Hamas," he said. "But is clear to us all that, without Iranian support in recent years, Hamas would not have been capable of these unprecedented attacks on Israeli territory."

Several German citizens were among those kidnapped in Saturday attack.

\$1.73 billion Powerball jackpot goes to lucky lottery player in California

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A player in California won a \$1.73 billion Powerball jackpot Wednesday night, ending a long stretch without a winner of the top prize.

The winning numbers were: 22, 24, 40, 52, 64 and the Powerball 10. The winning ticket was sold at Midway Market & Liquor in Frazier Park, according to the California Lottery.

Phone calls Wednesday night to Midway Market & Liquor went unanswered.

"The phone's been ringing off the hook, people saying congratulations. Pretty crazy," the store's night worker, identified only as Duke, told KCAL-TV.

"Somebody owes me a truck," he said with a smile. "A lot of customers come in, you know they come in every day to get their tickets, religiously. And a lot of them ... said: 'Oh, if I win I'm gonna get you a new truck.' So where's my truck? I'll be waiting."

He expected the winner will be a local resident.

Before someone won the giant prize, there had been 35 consecutive drawings without a big winner, stretching back to July 19 when a player in California matched all six numbers and won \$1.08 billion.

The jackpot is the world's second-largest lottery prize after rolling over for 36 consecutive drawings, since the last time someone won the top prize on July 19. That streak trails the record of 41 draws set in 2021 and 2022.

The only top prize that was ever bigger was the \$2.04 billion Powerball won by a player in California last November.

Powerball's terrible odds of 1 in 292.2 million are designed to generate big jackpots, with prizes becoming ever larger as they repeatedly roll over when no one wins. And wins in recent months have been few and far between.

That didn't bother those eager to plunk down their money on Wednesday for a long-shot chance at instant wealth.

Robert Salvato Jr., a 60-year-old electrician, bought 40 Powerball tickets at a hardware store in Billerica, Massachusetts.

"I would take care of family and give my cat that extra leg that she needs and make her a good kitty," said Salvato, who got married on Saturday.

"I could give her a ring on every finger, I guess," Salvato said of his new wife.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 33 of 74

Nevada is among the five states without Powerball, so friends Tamara Carter and Denise Davis drove from Las Vegas across the state line into California to buy tickets. But the line was so long at their first stop that they gave up and went in search of another store.

"The line was about three hours long," Carter estimated. "I was waiting for maybe a half hour, and it didn't move."

The jackpot has grown enormous due to a long dry spell. The previous winning Powerball ticket was sold on July 19, and it was worth \$1.08 billion after 39 drawings without a jackpot win.

At the same hardware store as Salvato, Kevin Button seemed to understand the long odds as he bought a ticket.

"I only buy them usually when the jackpot's high," Button said. "Seems to have been pretty high quite often lately. So I've tried quite a few times and haven't even won a free ticket. But maybe tonight's the night."

In most states, a Powerball ticket costs \$2 and players can select their own numbers or leave that task to a computer.

The \$1.73 billion jackpot is for a sole winner who opts for payment through an annuity, doled out over 30 years. Winners almost always take the cash option, which for Wednesday night's drawing is estimated at \$756.6 million.

Winnings would be subject to federal taxes, and many states also tax lottery winnings.

Powerball is played in 45 states, as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

IMF and World Bank are urged to boost funding for African nations facing conflict and climate change

By TAIWO ADEBAYO Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Many poor countries in Africa face the harshest effects of climate change: severe droughts, vicious heat and dry land, but also unpredictable rain and devastating flooding. The shocks worsen conflict and upend livelihoods because many people are farmers — work that is increasingly vulnerable in a warming world.

Climate challenges are at the root of vulnerabilities faced by conflict-ridden countries in Africa's Sahel region, such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria, experts say. Adapting to these challenges could cost up to \$50 billion per year, according to the Global Commission on Adaptation, while the International Energy Agency estimates the clean energy transition could cost as much as \$190 billion a year — overwhelming costs for Africa.

Countries have limited space in their budgets, and borrowing more to fund climate goals will worsen their considerable debt burdens, argue African leaders, who are seeking a rapid boost in financing.

Some leaders suggested that this week's meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Marrakech, Morocco, would be "a good place to start" a conversation about Africa's financial challenges and its ability to handle climate shocks.

It comes amid criticism that the lending institutions are not taking climate change and the vulnerabilities of poor countries enough into account in their funding decisions.

The global financial system "is now outdated, dysfunctional and unjust," said a New York Times opinion column by Kenyan President William Ruto, African Development Bank President Akinwumi Adesina, African Union Commission chairman Moussa Faki and Patrick Verkooijen, chief executive of the Global Commission on Adaptation.

It's outdated because international financial institutions "are too small and limited to fulfill their mandate. Dysfunctional because the system as a whole is too slow to respond to new challenges, such as climate change. And unjust because it discriminates against poor countries," the leaders wrote.

In recent years, climate funding to Africa has increased, with recognition that the continent is least responsible for emissions but most at risk from climate change because of a lack of financing and ability to cope. Major development banks have increasingly recognized climate change as an economic threat.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 34 of 74

During a panel in Marrakech this week, IMF economist Daniel Lee said the organization is "mainstreaming climate change in policy advice, capacity development and lending." He did not detail the size or breakdown of funding.

Lee pointed to an IMF program that launched last year to help poor countries address problems like climate change. Only one African country — Rwanda — has gotten financing from the program: \$319 million over three years.

Like African leaders, experts say climate financing to the continent has been insufficient and particularly difficult to get for countries in the Sahel that lack stable and recognized governments, with many of them led by military juntas.

"The reality has fallen short of expectations," said Carlos Lopes, a professor at the Mandela School of Public Governance of the University of Cape Town, South Africa. "A significant portion of funding goes toward mitigation efforts, while adaptation, a top priority for the continent, receives less attention and support."

In Niger, whose leader was ousted in a coup in August, as well as northern Nigeria, thousands of hectares of arable land is being lost to soil erosion and dry conditions. It's led farmers and livestock herders to battle for resources and reduces economic opportunities, helping armed groups recruit, said Idayat Hassan, senior Africa program fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Irrigation projects are among the ways to adapt to climate change, but violence is eroding those gains as it leaves farmers, who are already facing lower yields, struggling to access their farmland.

"Apart from extreme heat levels and unpredictable rainfall, insecurity also is affecting us because many times we will not have the chance to go to our farms," said Ibrahim Audi, 58, a wheat farmer in Nigeria's far northern Katsina state.

Femi Mimiko, a professor of political economy and international relations at Nigeria's Obafemi Awolowo University, called the climate money heading to Africa "rather negligible and it is not what we should celebrate at all."

He added that "the challenges are enormous" because of strict conditions to get IMF and World Bank funding.

Plus, climate financing for Africa needs to address persistent debt crises in many countries, Lopes said.

Africa's debt repayments are estimated to reach \$62 billion this year, exceeding the continent's costs of adapting to climate change, the African leaders said in their column. They reiterated a call made at the Africa Climate Summit in Kenya last month for a pause on foreign debt repayments.

Another issue is leaders underestimating how climate change feeds violence and economic problems, experts say.

"The national policy to address climate change is lax — little or no focus is on climate change and the nexus between climate change and conflict in the Sahel is underappreciated," Hassan said. "Go beyond the conflict itself to start prioritizing climate change as the root cause of the problem affecting these countries."

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which are all ruled by military juntas, 16 million people need humanitarian assistance, a 172% increase since 2016, and more than 5 million are experiencing high levels of food insecurity, according to the International Rescue Committee.

The humanitarian group blames conflict and climate change for "driving an ever-deeper crisis" affecting agriculture, which is the primary source of livelihood for most of the population in the three military-led countries.

"That fact alone — illegitimate governments — would constrain their ability not just to meet the requirements set by IMF and the World Bank for funding, but indeed, to access such support," Mimiko said.

"And so, what we must do is to persuade — or arm-twist — the juntas, who at any event have no capacity to run those countries, to commit to what I call, timely redemocratization," he added.

25 years after Matthew Shepard's death, LGBTQ+ activists say equal-rights progress is at risk

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

It's been 25 years since Matthew Shepard, a gay 21-year-old University of Wyoming student, died six days after he was savagely beaten by two young men and tied to a remote fence to meet his fate. His death has been memorialized as an egregious hate crime that helped fuel the LGBTQ+ rights movement over the ensuing years.

From the perspective of the movement's activists — some of them on the front lines since the 1960s — progress was often agonizingly slow, but it was steady.

Vermont allowed same-sex civil unions in 2000. A Texas law criminalizing consensual gay sex was struck down in 2003. In 2011, the military scrapped the "don't ask, don't tell" policy that kept gay, lesbian and bisexual service members in the closet. And in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriages were legal nationwide.

But any perception back then that the long struggle for equality had been won has been belied by events over the past two years.

Five people were killed last year in a mass shooting at an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado. More than 20 Republican-controlled states have enacted an array of anti-LGBTQ+ laws including bans on sports participation and certain medical care for young transgender people, as well as restrictions on how schools can broach LGBTQ+-related topics.

"Undoubtedly we've made huge progress, but it's all at risk," said Kevin Jennings, the CEO of Lambda Legal, which has been litigating against some of the new anti-LGBTQ+ laws. "Anybody who thinks that once you've won rights they're safe doesn't understand history. The opponents of equality never give up. They're like the Terminator — they're not going to stop coming until they take away your rights."

Some of the new laws are directed broadly at the entire LGBTQ+ community, such as Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" law, which imposes bans and restrictions on lessons in public schools about sexual orientation and gender identity. But in many of the GOP-governed states — including Florida — the prime target of legislation has been transgender people.

In addition to measures addressing medical treatments and sports participation, some laws restrict using the pronouns trans students use in classrooms.

"What we've said in Florida is we are going to remain a refuge of sanity and a citadel of normalcy," said Gov. Ron DeSantis as he signed such bills earlier this year. "We're not doing the pronoun Olympics in Florida."

Shannon Minter, a transgender civil rights lawyer with the National Center for Lesbian Rights, depicted the wave of anti-trans bills — in some cases leading to legal harassment of trans people — as the one of the gravest threats to the LGBTQ+ community in his 30 years of activism.

"We are in danger now, given the ferocity of this backlash," he said. "If we don't stop this with sufficient urgency, we'll end up with half the country living with very significant bias and lack of legal protection."

Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, depicted the legislative attacks as "the backlash to our progress."

"We made so much progress as an LGBTQ+ movement, at a fast pace compared to other social justice movements," he said. "You do have a minority who is overwhelmingly upset by it. They are fired up and they are well-resourced."

Heng-Lehtinen is optimistic for the long term but said that right now, "trans people across the country are really struggling with feeling any kind of hope."

The key to changing the current dynamic is for more people in GOP-governed states to get to know and understand trans people, said James Esseks, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's LGBTQ & HIV Project.

"But the efforts of the other side are designed to stop that from happening," Esseks said. "They want trans people to disappear — no health care, can't use public restrooms, can't have a government ID con-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 36 of 74

sistent with who you are, and the schools can't teach about the existence of trans people."

Esseks reflected back to the Supreme Court's historic same-sex marriage ruling in 2015. At the time, he said, many activists were thinking elatedly, "OK, we're kind of done."

"But the other side pivoted to attacking trans people and seeking religious exemptions to get a right to discriminate against gay people," he said. "Both of those strategies, unfortunately, have been quite successful."

The president of the largest national LGBTQ+ rights organization, Kelley Robinson of the Human Rights Campaign, summarized the situation on Tuesday:

"LGBTQ+ Americans are living in a state of emergency — experiencing unprecedented attacks from extremist politicians and their right-wing allies in states across the country, who are working tirelessly to erase us."

Several activists interviewed this week by The Associated Press evoked Matthew Shepard as they discussed broader developments. His memory lives on in many manifestations, including:

— The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, signed by then-President Barack Obama in 2009. The act expanded the federal hate crime law to include crimes based on a victim's sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

— "The Laramie Project," a play based on more than 200 interviews with residents of Laramie, Wyoming, connected to Shepard and his murder. It is a popular choice for high school theater productions but has faced opposition due to policies resembling Florida's "Don't Say Gay" law that have surfaced in various states and communities.

— The Matthew Shepard Foundation, a nonprofit co-founded by Shepard's mother, Judy. Its self-described mission: "To inspire individuals, organizations, and communities to embrace the dignity and equality of all people ... and address hate that lives within our schools, neighborhoods, and homes."

"Matthew Shepard's death was a life-altering moment for a lot of people," said Shelby Chestnut, executive director of the Transgender Law Center.

Earlier in his career, Chestnut worked with the New York City Anti-Violence Project, an experience that influences his worries about the recent anti-trans bills.

"When you create conditions where people have lack of access to jobs, to health care, they're more likely to be victims of violence," he said.

The communications director of the National LGBTQ Task Force, Cathy Renna, was in the early stages of her LGBTQ+ activism when she became involved in media coverage of Shepard's murder in 1998.

"It shapes the way you do your advocacy for the rest of your life," she said. "It got many people involved. It was a lightbulb — realizing that hate crimes are a thing that happens."

CIA publicly acknowledges 1953 coup it backed in Iran was undemocratic as it revisits 'Argo' rescue

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — While revealing new details about one of the most famed CIA operations of all times — the spirited out of six American diplomats who escaped the 1979 U.S. Embassy seizure in Iran — the intelligence agency for the first time has acknowledged something else as well.

The CIA now officially describes the 1953 coup it backed in Iran that overthrew its prime minister and cemented the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as undemocratic.

Other American officials have made similar remarks in the past, but the CIA's acknowledgment in a podcast about the agency's history comes as much of its official history of the coup remains classified 70 years after the putsch. That complicates the public's understanding of an event that still resonates, as tensions remain high between Tehran and Washington over the Islamic Republic's rapidly advancing nuclear program, its aiding of militia groups across the Mideast and as it cracks down on dissent.

The "CIA's leadership is committed to being as open with the public as possible," the agency said in a statement responding to questions from The Associated Press. "The agency's podcast is part of that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 37 of 74

effort — and we knew that if we wanted to tell this incredible story, it was important to be transparent about the historical context surrounding these events, and CIA's role in it."

In response to questions from the AP, Iran's mission to the United Nations described the 1953 coup as marking "the inception of relentless American meddling in Iran's internal affairs" and dismissed the U.S. acknowledgments.

"The U.S. admission never translated into compensatory action or a genuine commitment to refrain from future interference, nor did it change its subversive policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran," the mission said in a statement.

The CIA's podcast, called "The Langley Files" as its headquarters is based in Langley, Virginia, focused two recent episodes on the story of the six American diplomats' escape. While hiding at the home of the Canadian ambassador to Iran, a two-man CIA team entered Tehran and helped them fly out of the country while pretending to be members of a crew scouting for a made-up science fiction film.

The caper, retold in the 2012 Academy Award-winning film "Argo" directed by and starring Ben Affleck, offered a dramatized version of the operation, with Affleck playing the late CIA officer Antonio "Tony" Mendez. The podcast for the first time identified the second CIA officer who accompanied Mendez, naming him as agency linguist and exfiltration specialist Ed Johnson. He previously only had been known publicly by the pseudonym "Julio."

"Working with the six — these are rookies," Johnson recounts in an interview aired by the podcast. "They were people who were not trained to lie to authorities. They weren't trained to be clandestine, elusive."

But in the podcast, another brief exchange focuses on the 1953 coup.

In it, CIA spokesman and podcast host Walter Trosin cites the claims of agency historians that the majority of the CIA's clandestine activities in its history "bolstered" popularly elected governments.

"We should acknowledge, though, that this is, therefore, a really significant exception to that rule," Trosin says of the 1953 coup.

CIA historian Brent Geary, appearing on the podcast, agrees.

"This is one of the exceptions to that," Geary says.

Seven decades later, the 1953 coup remains as hotly debated as ever by Iran, its theocratic government, historians and others.

Iran's hard-line state television spent hours discussing the coup that toppled Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh on its anniversary in June. In their telling, a straight line leads from the coup to the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ultimately toppled the fatally ill shah. It still fuels the anti-Americanism that colors decisions made by the theocracy, whether in arming Russia in its war on Ukraine or alleging without evidence that Washington fomented the recent nationwide mass protests targeting it.

From the U.S. side, the CIA's hand in the coup quickly was revealed as a success of Cold War espionage, though historians in recent years have debated just how much influence the agency's actions had. It also led the CIA into a series of further coups in other countries, including Guatemala, where American clandestine action in 1954 installed a military dictator and sparked a 40-year civil war that likely killed some 245,000 people.

That's led to an American political reappraisal of the 1953 CIA action in Iran. Then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright acknowledged the U.S.' "significant role" in the coup in 2000. President Barack Obama, speaking in Cairo in 2009, described the CIA's work as leading to the "overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government."

But largely absent from the discussion was the CIA itself. After years of conflicting versions of the coup both in public and classified papers, a member of the CIA's own in-house team of historians wrote a reappraisal of the operation in a 1998 paper titled "Zendabad, Shah!" in Farsi — or "Long Live the Shah!"

But despite a series of American historical documents being made public, including a major tranche of State Department papers in 2017, large portions of that CIA reappraisal remain heavily redacted despite attempts to legally pry them loose by the George Washington University-based National Security Archive. That's even after pledges by former agency directors Robert Gates and James Woolsey Jr. in the 1990s

to release documents from that coup and others engineered by the agency.

Further complicating any historical reckoning is the CIA's own admission that many files related to the 1953 coup likely had been destroyed in the 1960s.

"It's wrong to suggest that the coup operation itself has been fully declassified. Far from it," said Malcolm Byrne of the National Security Archive. "Important parts of the record are still being withheld, which only contributes to public confusion and encourages myth-making about the U.S. role long after the fact."

What was Hamas thinking? For over three decades, it has had the same brutal idea of victory

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In the three and a half decades since it began as an underground militant group, Hamas has pursued a consistently violent strategy aimed at rolling back Israeli rule — and it has made steady progress despite bringing enormous suffering to both sides of the conflict.

But its stunning incursion into Israel over the weekend marks its deadliest gambit yet, and the already unprecedented response from Israel threatens to bring an end to its 16-year rule over the Gaza Strip.

Israel's retaliation for the Hamas assault, in which over 1,200 people were killed in Israel and dozens dragged into Gaza as hostages, will likely bring a far greater magnitude of death and destruction to Gaza, where 2.3 million Palestinians have nowhere to flee and where 1,100 have already been killed.

Hamas officials say they are prepared for any scenario, including a drawn-out war, and that allies like Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah will join the battle if Israel goes too far.

"I don't think anyone really knows what the endgame is at the moment," said Tahani Mustafa, a Palestinian analyst at the Crisis Group, an international think tank. But given the amount of planning involved in the assault, "it's difficult to imagine they haven't tried to strategize every possible scenario."

Shaul Shay, an Israeli researcher and retired colonel who served in military intelligence, said Hamas "miscalculated" Israel's response and now faces a far worse conflict than it had anticipated.

"I hope and I believe that Israel will not stop until Hamas has been defeated in the Gaza Strip, and I don't think that this was their expectation before the operation," Shay said of Hamas.

FROM UPSTART INSURGENCE TO PROTO-STATE

From its establishment in the late 1980s, on the eve of the first Palestinian intifada, or uprising, Hamas has been committed to armed struggle and the destruction of Israel. At the height of the peace process in the 1990s, it launched scores of suicide bombings and other attacks that killed hundreds of Israeli civilians. The violence only intensified with the breakdown in peace talks and the far deadlier second Palestinian uprising in 2000.

Hamas attacks were met with massive Israeli military incursions into the occupied West Bank and Gaza that exacted a far heavier death toll on Palestinians. But as the violence wound down in 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew its soldiers and some 8,000 Jewish settlers from Gaza, while maintaining tight control over access to the enclave by land, air and sea.

Hamas claimed the withdrawal as vindication for its approach, and the following year it won a landslide victory in Palestinian elections. In 2007, after bitter infighting, it violently seized Gaza from the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority.

Over the next 16 years, through four wars and countless smaller battles with Israel that rained devastation upon Gaza, Hamas only grew more powerful. Each time it had more rockets that traveled farther. Each time its top leaders survived, securing a cease-fire and the gradual easing of a blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt. In the meantime, it built a government — including a police force, ministries and border terminals with metal detectors and passport control.

And what of the thousands of Palestinians killed, the flattened apartment blocks, the crumbling infrastructure, the suffocating travel restrictions, the countless dreams deferred in Gaza, a 40-kilometer (25-mile) coastal strip sandwiched between Israel and Egypt?

Hamas blamed Israel, as did many Palestinians. The Hamas government has seen only sporadic protests

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 39 of 74

over the years and has quickly and violently suppressed them.

NEGOTIATIONS AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

If Hamas' armed struggle against Israel looks like a failure — or much worse — consider the alternative.

The Palestinian leadership in the West Bank recognized Israel and renounced armed struggle over three decades ago, hoping it would lead to a state in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories seized by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war.

But the talks repeatedly broke down, partly because of Hamas' violence but also because of Israel's relentless expansion of settlements, now home to more than a half million Israelis. There have been no serious peace talks in well over a decade, and the Palestinian Authority has become little more than an administrative body in the 40% of the occupied West Bank where it is allowed to operate.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, an 87-year-old moderate, has been powerless to stop settlement expansion, settler violence, home demolitions or the unraveling of longstanding arrangements around a sensitive Jerusalem holy site. He has been sidelined during every Gaza war — including this one — and the Palestinian Authority is widely seen as a corrupt accomplice to the occupation.

"Palestinians have tried everything from elections to boycotts to the (International Criminal Court) to engaging in a supposed peace process," said Mustafa, of the Crisis Group. "You've had one of the most conciliatory leaderships in the entire history of the Palestinian national movement, and that still hasn't been enough."

Still, the scale of last weekend's attack takes Hamas' approach into uncharted territory.

"It is unclear what Hamas' endgame is beyond either fighting to the death or liberating Palestine," said Hugh Lovatt, a Mideast expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

The latest attack marks a "complete strategic rupture," he said.

"Despite conducting attacks against civilians in the past and fighting previous wars against Israel, (Hamas) did also simultaneously engage in political tracks," including negotiations with Abbas' Fatah movement and even tacit coordination with Israel, Lovatt said.

"Now it appears to have fully embraced open-ended violence as its long-term strategic choice."

FOR ISRAEL, VICTORY COULD AGAIN PROVE ELUSIVE

Israel appears increasingly likely to launch a ground offensive in Gaza. It could reoccupy the territory and try to uproot Hamas, in what would surely be a long and bloody counterinsurgency. But even that might just drive the group — which is also present in Lebanon and the West Bank — back underground.

And Hamas has a horrifying trump card that could give Israel pause.

Hamas and the more radical Islamic Jihad militant group are holding some 150 men, women and children who were captured and dragged into Gaza. Hamas' armed wing claims some have already been killed in Israeli strikes and has threatened to kill captives if Israel attacks Palestinian civilians without warning.

Hamas may succeed — as it has in the past — at trading them for thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel in a lopsided deal that Palestinians would see as a triumph and Israelis as agony.

Israel has faced virtually no calls for restraint in the wake of the Hamas attack, but that could change if the war drags on.

In the end, the two sides could find themselves returning to the status quo: An internationally mediated truce, with Hamas ruling over a devastated and aid-dependent Gaza, and Israel redoubling security along its frontier.

That too, for Hamas at least, would look like a victory.

An Oklahoma man used pandemic relief funds to have his name cleared of murder

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

GREENWOOD, Ark. (AP) — Ricky Dority spends most of his days playing with his grandchildren, feeding chickens and working in the yard where he lives with his son's family.

It's a jarring change from where he was just several months ago, locked in a cell serving a life prison sentence at Oklahoma's Joseph Harp Correctional Center in a killing he said he didn't commit. After more than two decades behind bars, Dority had no chance at being released — until he used his pandemic relief funds to hire a dogged private investigator.

The investigator and students at the Oklahoma Innocence Project at Oklahoma City University, which is dedicated to exonerating wrongful convictions in the state, found inconsistencies in the state's account of a 1997 cold-case killing, and Dority's conviction was vacated in June by a Sequoyah County judge.

Now, the 65-year-old says he's enjoying the 5-acre property in a quiet neighborhood of well-to-do homes in the rolling, forested hills of the Arkansas River Valley outside of Fort Smith. "If you're gone for a lot of years, you don't take it for granted anymore."

Dority is one of nearly 3,400 people who have been exonerated across the country since 1989, mostly over murder convictions, according to the National Registry of Exonerations. In Oklahoma, there have been more than 43 exonerations in that time, not including three new exonerations this year.

The cases underscore a serious problem facing a judicial system in which many old convictions resulted from overworked defense attorneys, shoddy forensic work, overzealous prosecutors and outdated investigative techniques.

The problem is particularly acute given Oklahoma's history of sending people to death row, where 11 inmates have been exonerated since 1981. The issue has pushed a Republican-led legislative panel to consider whether a death penalty moratorium should be imposed.

In Oklahoma County, Glynn Ray Simmons was freed after spending nearly 50 years in prison, including time on death row, in a 1974 killing after a judge determined prosecutors failed to turn over evidence in the case, including a police report that showed an eyewitness might have identified other suspects.

And just this week, Perry Lott, who served more than 30 years in prison, had his rape and burglary conviction vacated in Pontotoc County after new DNA testing excluded him as the perpetrator. Pontotoc County, in particular, has come under intense scrutiny for a series of wrongful convictions in the 1980s that have been the subject of numerous books, including John Grisham's "The Innocent Man," which he produced into a six-part documentary on Netflix.

The most common causes of wrongful convictions are eyewitness misidentification, misapplication of forensic science, false confessions, coerced pleas and official misconduct, generally by police or prosecutors, according to the Innocence Project, a national organization based in New York.

In Dority's case, he said he was railroaded by an overzealous sheriff and a state prosecutor eager to solve the killing of 28-year-old Mitchell Nixon, who was found beaten to death in 1997.

Investigators who reopened the case in 2014 coerced a confession from another man, Rex Robbins, according to Andrea Miller, the legal director of the Oklahoma Innocence Project. Robbins, who would plead guilty to manslaughter in Nixon's killing, implicated Dority, who at the time was in a federal prison on a firearms conviction. Dority said he knew he didn't have anything to do with the crime and found paperwork that proved he had been arrested on the day of the killing.

"I thought I was clear because I knew I didn't have anything do with that murder," Dority said. "But they tried me for it and found me guilty of it."

Jurors heard about Robbins' confession and testimony from a police informant who said Dority had changed bloody clothes at his house the night of the killing. They convicted him of first-degree murder and recommended a sentence of life without parole.

After years in prison, while most inmates spent their federal COVID-19 relief check in the commissary,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 41 of 74

Dority used his to hire a private investigator, he said. Bobby Staton had mostly investigated insurance fraud, but he took on the case and realized quickly that it was riddled with holes, Staton said.

He eventually turned to the university's Oklahoma Innocence Project, which assigned a law student, Abby Brawner, to help investigate.

Their investigation turned when Staton and Brawner visited Robbins in the maximum-security Oklahoma State Reformatory in Granite, and he recanted his statement implicating Dority.

"It was pretty intimidating," Brawner said. "Especially when you're going in to meet someone who doesn't know you're coming and doesn't want to talk to you."

Brawner and Staton also learned the informant didn't live at the home where he told investigators Staton showed up in bloody clothes. When the actual homeowner testified at a hearing this summer, the judge dismissed the case.

Dority's original attorneys were ineffective for not discovering the informant didn't live at the home, the judge said, giving prosecutors 90 days to decide whether they will retry him. That three months has been extended, and prosecutors have said they intend to ask the judge for more time for DNA testing. Dority, confident in his innocence, said he's not concerned about additional forensic testing.

Sequoyah County District Attorney Jack Thorp and former Sheriff Ron Lockhart did not respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press. But Assistant District Attorney James Dunn, who is overseeing the case and was not in the office when it was originally prosecuted, said he agreed with the judge's dismissal after hearing the homeowner's testimony and learning a witness "was not credible."

"The last thing I want to see is an innocent person in prison for a crime they didn't commit," Dunn said. "Because that means the person who actually did commit the crime, or those persons, are still out there."

Meanwhile, Dority is learning to use a smartphone and the television remote control, he said. He's thankful to Staton and the Innocence Project and says his case proves others are wrongfully imprisoned in Oklahoma.

"After they've done what they've done to me, I know there are people in that prison who are innocent that need to be out and need help getting out," he said. "If they hadn't gotten me out, I'd have been in there for the rest of my life."

Who witnessed Tupac Shakur's 1996 killing in Las Vegas? Here's what we know

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Duane "Keffe D" Davis is the last living suspect in one of hip-hop's most enduring mysteries — the 1996 killing of rap icon Tupac Shakur in Las Vegas.

Davis, 60, is accused of orchestrating the drive-by shooting near the Las Vegas Strip that also wounded rap music mogul Marion "Suge" Knight. Davis was arrested and indicted Sept. 29 — more than two months after police raided his home outside Las Vegas. He remains jailed on a murder charge and is due back in court Oct. 19.

On the night of Sept. 7, 1996, Shakur was in the passenger seat of a black BMW that Knight was driving when a white Cadillac pulled up on their right side and gunfire erupted. Knight was wounded but survived. Shakur died a week later at the age of 25.

Police and prosecutors say the shooting stemmed from a fierce competition for dominance in a musical genre that pitted East Coast members of a Bloods gang sect against West Coast members of a Crips sect that Davis has said he led in Compton, California.

That night, three others were with Davis in the Cadillac, but none of them faced charges in Shakur's killing before they died.

Here's what we know about who was in both vehicles from authorities, court records, grand jury testimony, interviews and Davis' 2019 tell-all memoir, "Compton Street Legend."

Tupac Shakur

Shakur is considered one of the most influential rappers of all time. He had five No. 1 albums, was nomi-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 42 of 74

nated for six Grammy Awards and was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2017. He received a posthumous star this year on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and is the subject of a Los Angeles museum exhibit, "Tupac Shakur. Wake Me When I'm Free."

His death came as his fourth solo album, "All Eyez on Me," remained on the charts, with some 5 million copies sold. He also used the stage names 2Pac and Makaveli. As an actor, he starred in several films.

Shakur was born Lesane Parish Crooks in New York in 1971, and his name was changed a year later. His late mother Afeni Shakur, and late stepfather Mutulu Shakur, were active in the Black Panther Party in New York. Tupac Shakur was not close with his biological father, William "Billy" Garland.

Two of the rapper's siblings, Sekyiwa "Set" Shakur and Mopreme Shakur, have criticized authorities for inaction and slowness in charging anyone with their brother's death before now.

Marion "Suge" Knight

Knight founded Death Row Records, a Los Angeles-based music label that represented Shakur at the time of his death. Knight's moniker was shortened from "Sugar Bear," his nickname growing up in Compton.

Knight and Shakur were headed to a nightclub when their car was shot at near the Las Vegas Strip. Knight was grazed by a bullet or shrapnel.

Now 58, Knight is serving a 28-year prison sentence in California for running over and killing a Compton businessman outside a burger stand in January 2015. The case capped the former rap music mogul's downfall from his heyday as one of the biggest — and most feared — names in the music industry.

Davis said he and Knight knew each other growing up and even played on the same youth football team in Compton. Knight went on to play college football at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Briefly, during the 1987 NFL players' strike, he was a replacement player for the Los Angeles Rams.

In his memoir, Davis describes Knight and himself as the "only living eyewitnesses to what truly happened."

Orlando "Baby Lane" Anderson

Law enforcement authorities long suspected that Anderson was the gunman. He was 22 at the time. Though Davis was his uncle and 12 years older, he described their relationship as that of brothers, friends and even father-son.

Shortly before the drive-by shooting, Anderson was beaten in a brawl at the MGM Grand casino involving Shakur and associates, including Knight. Authorities, authors and Davis himself say the shooting was an act of retaliation for beating up Anderson.

"Them jumping on my nephew gave us the ultimate green light to do something," Davis writes in his book.

Davis said he obtained a handgun from an associate and tossed it into the back seat of the Cadillac but did not say who fired the fatal shots. Anderson was sitting in the backseat of the car, behind his uncle.

Neither the Cadillac nor the gun used in the shooting were recovered, according to retired Las Vegas police Detective Clifford Mogg, who was assigned to the investigation in early 2018.

"We were never able to identify the person who rented the car, where it was rented from, and then when it comes to the gun, we have never recovered as of this date, the weapon that was used in the murder," Mogg said in testimony to the grand jury.

Anderson, who denied involvement in Shakur's killing, died two years later in what police said was an unrelated shooting at a Compton car wash.

Deandrae "Freaky" Smith

Also known as "Big Dre," Smith was in the back seat of the car that night, sitting next to Anderson.

Although authorities have said they believe Anderson pulled the trigger, the grand jury testimony challenged that theory.

Denvonta Lee, a former associate of Davis, told the grand jury that it was Smith who shot Shakur and Knight. He said Anderson tried reaching over Smith but didn't have a "clear shot" out the left-rear passenger window.

The former associate, who wasn't in the car but recounted a conversation he had with Smith days after the shooting, said Smith took the gun from Anderson, opened fire and let Anderson take credit for Shakur's death.

Smith was 30 when he died in 2004 of natural causes, according to the Los Angeles County coroner's

office.

Terry "Bubble Up" Brown

Brown was driving the Cadillac from which the shots were fired.

Davis said in his memoir that they were driving toward Las Vegas Boulevard that night but spotted Shakur "hanging out of the window" of the BMW and waving to fans. Davis told Brown to make a U-turn, and they drove slowly past the rapper's convoy until Davis said they "found who we were seeking."

Brown died in a 2015 shooting at a medical marijuana dispensary in Compton.

The Los Angeles County coroner's office said his full name was Terry Tyrone Brown, although Brown has been referred to as both "Terrence" and "Terrance" in investigative records. The coroner's office declined to release more information, citing a security hold on the case.

Republican Steve Scalise is seen as a fighter, but becoming House speaker might require a brawl

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With his walker positioned on the mound, Rep. Steve Scalise threw out the ceremonial first pitch at Washington Nationals ballpark, a breathtaking comeback for the Republican congressman who just months earlier was fighting for his life after a gunman had opened fire on lawmakers at their own charity baseball game practice.

An "American hero," is how Republican colleagues describe Scalise after the 2017 shooting and on Wednesday, a narrow majority of them nominated him as their next House speaker following the unprecedented ouster of the former speaker, Rep. Kevin McCarthy.

Scalise, 58, and recently diagnosed with blood cancer, spent the rest of the day holed up in the stately Speaker's office at the Capitol, vigorously working to secure the support he will need from his detractors to lead the divided Republican majority ahead of a full House vote to take the gavel.

"As we've all witnessed, he is a fighter," said Rep. Andy Barr, R-Ky. "He has proven against all odds he can get the job done and come back from adversity."

An affable Louisianan, Scalise was first elected to Congress in 2008, after more than a decade in the state legislature, and swiftly rose through the ranks in Washington.

Early on he positioned himself as a conservative, part of a new generation of younger Republicans who came of political age during the Ronald Reagan era, many intent on changing Washington.

Once Republicans took majority control in the 2010 election "tea party" wave of hardline lawmakers to Congress, Scalise soon became part of the House leadership team alongside McCarthy and others under then-Speaker John Boehner.

An early rivalry developed between Scalise and McCarthy that punctuated their rise, and continues to this day as the Louisianan is about to take the gavel after the Californian was pushed out.

Scalise has long drawn his support from the Southern states, and he fell outside of the triumvirate of McCarthy, Rep. Eric Cantor and eventual Speaker Paul Ryan, who called themselves the "Young Guns" and penned a book about their vision for the Republican Party in Congress.

When a right-wing challenger toppled Cantor in a GOP primary election for his congressional seat in Virginia in summer of 2014, it also set off a domino effect in the House leadership ladder.

McCarthy rose to become Majority Leader, and Scalise the Majority Whip.

One early morning three years later, Scalise and other Republican lawmakers gathered at a grassy park in the suburbs outside of Washington to practice for the upcoming congressional baseball game.

A rifleman with grievances over then-President Donald Trump started shooting, gravely wounding Scalise, and hitting several people and U.S. Capitol Police, who also fired back. Lawmakers dove for cover.

During an interview later on C-SPAN, Scalise described asking the medic as he was being airlifted to the hospital to call his wife back home in Louisiana

"I just felt like things were fading away," Scalise recalled.

No one picked up the phone but his wife saved the voice mail message he left her that day, and listening

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 44 of 74

back to it, he said, is tough.

But Scalise said: "It's hard to focus on the negative when I know how close I was to not making it, and to know that I'm here alive and I get to do all the things I love doing,"

When Scalise returned to the House three months later he was cheered with a standing ovation.

"You have no idea how great this feels to be back here at work in the people's House," he said at the time to a chamber packed with lawmakers.

Scalise went on to champion Second Amendment rights, despite a series of mass shootings in the U.S.

If the Capitol Police officers on his security detail had not been there with guns to counter the shooter, "then there would have been nobody to take him down," Scalise said around the first anniversary of the shooting.

He said the shooting "deepened my appreciation for the Second Amendment because it was people with guns who saved my life and every other member out there."

A father of two, Scalise recently returned to work after receiving treatment for blood cancer, raising questions from colleagues about his health and ability to lead.

The speaker's job can be brutal and thankless, with busy travel across the country raising campaign cash and recruiting candidates for elections.

Behind closed doors Wednesday, Scalise's wife, Jennifer, joined the private meeting, sending a message that her husband's blood cancer would not slow him down.

"If there was any outside chance that this was going to be detrimental to his health, or counterproductive to his well being, she would have put her foot down," Womack said. "She's all in."

But that wasn't enough for some holdouts who supported rival Rep. Jim Jordan, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee who had Trump's backing to become speaker, and are now denying Scalise the votes for the gavel.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., said she would continue supporting Jordan because she wants to see Scalise "defeat cancer more than sacrifice his health" in a demanding job.

Others dredged up his past. Scalise had apologized in 2014 after he was found to have addressed a white supremacist group in 2002 founded by former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. Scalise said he didn't know of the group's racial views.

It's not the first time a leader has risen on the heels of another's downfall.

When Boehner abruptly retired rather than face the threat of ouster, McCarthy reached for the gavel only to step aside for Ryan when it was clear he did not have support.

After Ryan decided to retire in 2018 as it became more difficult to lead during the Trump era, the political rivalry between Scalise and McCarthy sparked again.

Scalise did not openly challenge McCarthy at the time as Republicans fell into the minority, but positioned himself as a fallback in case the votes weren't there.

When McCarthy seized the gavel in January once Republicans regained the majority, Scalise won the No. 2 job as Majority Leader.

Late Wednesday, the speaker's office became a revolving door as holdout Republican lawmakers met with Scalise bringing their concerns, complaints and demands.

The Republicans want to prevent the spectacle of repeated House floor votes to elect the speaker. Republicans hold just a slim 221-212 majority, and almost all of them will need to support Scalise over the objections of Democrats.

"We're having continued conversations," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, a member of the Freedom Caucus.

"As I said earlier, I was not happy with the way things unfolded," said Roy. "I thought we should figure this out behind closed doors, as a conference before we started moving towards the floor."

US inflation may have risen only modestly last month as Fed officials signal no rate hike is likely

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation in the United States likely eased again last month, though the decline might have slowed since summer, a reminder that the outsize price pressures of the past two years will take more time to cool.

Consumer prices are forecast to have risen 0.3% from August to September, according to economists surveyed by the data provider FactSet. Such a rise would be much slower than the previous month's 0.6% price increase but still too fast to match the Fed's 2% inflation target.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, "core" prices likely also rose 0.3% in September, the same as in August. The Federal Reserve tracks the core figure in particular as a good indicator of the likely future path of inflation.

Thursday's inflation data could bolster — or undercut — the growing belief that the Fed can tame inflation through the series of 11 interest rate hikes it imposed beginning in March 2022 without causing a recession.

Hiring surged unexpectedly in September, the government reported last week, and job gains in July and August were also revised higher. More people earning paychecks should help fuel consumer spending, the principal driver of the economy. Yet the report also showed that wage growth slowed — a trend that, if it continues, should help ease inflationary pressures.

The decline in inflation from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022, without a spike in layoffs or a recession, has confounded economists' expectations that widespread job losses would be needed to slow price increases.

The latest consumer price figures follow a recent surge in longer-term interest rates that has inflated borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans and business loans. The yield, or rate, on the 10-year Treasury note was just below 4.6% Wednesday, down from a peak of nearly 4.9% Friday but still up from 3.3% in April. Several Fed officials in the past week have suggested that higher long-term rates could help cool the economy, lessening the need for the central bank to further raise its key short-term rate.

"They're going to do some of the work for us" in attacking inflation, Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's Board of Governors, said Wednesday, referring to higher longer-term bond yields.

Several factors have combined to force up longer-term rates. They include the belated acceptance by financial markets of the likelihood that the economy will remain on firm footing and avoid a recession. That would mean that the Fed would probably keep its short-term rate higher for longer than investors had expected last summer.

The government's budget deficit is also worsening, requiring more Treasury debt to fund it. The result has been an increased supply of Treasuries, which means a higher yield is needed to attract enough buyers.

A larger reason, though, is that investors regard the future path of inflation and interest rates as increasingly uncertain and demand a higher long-term Treasury yield to compensate for that risk.

Economists expect Thursday's inflation report to show that on a year-over-year basis, consumer prices rose 3.6% in September, down from a 3.7% annual increase in August, according to a survey by FactSet. On an annual basis, core price increases are expected to have slowed to 4.1% from 4.3%.

More expensive gas probably helped drive up overall inflation from August to September, though those prices have fallen since then. On Wednesday, the national average price was \$3.66 a gallon, according to AAA, down from more than \$3.80 a month ago.

Economists note that some wild-card factors might have caused inflation to come in higher or lower than expected in September. One such factor is used car prices. Some economists expect such prices to have tumbled from August to September, though others envision a small increase.

José Abreu homers again to power the Astros past the Twins 3-2 and into their 7th straight ALCS

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Houston Astros gathered in the clubhouse with their bottles and goggles to toast another postseason victory, when manager Dusty Baker called Justin Verlander forward to lead the celebration.

“I’m doing the World Series!” Baker said. “You do this one!”

Verlander, after a profanity-punctuated speech that had teammates roaring with laughter, started the cork-popping countdown at seven — one for each consecutive AL Championship Series appearance.

José Abreu homered for the third time in two games, a two-run rocket in the fourth inning that launched the Astros to their seventh straight ALCS with a 3-2 win that eliminated the Minnesota Twins in Game 4 of their Division Series on Wednesday night.

“We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for the bond that we have and the relationships that we have in this locker room, and we hold each other accountable in a good way,” said Verlander, who returned to the Astros in August via trade from the New York Mets. “Obviously, this team is built different. These guys are built different. When it’s time to step up, we play our best baseball.”

José Urquidy gave the defending World Series champion Astros another solid postseason start, withstanding home runs by Royce Lewis in the first and Edouard Julien in the sixth before handing the ball to the bullpen.

Hector Neris and Bryan Abreu combined for five strikeouts over 2 1/3 hitless innings. Ryan Pressly, who pitched five-plus years for the Twins before a trade to Houston in 2018, struck out the side in the ninth for the save. He froze Max Kepler with a full-count fastball to end it, leaving former Astros star Carlos Correa on deck.

“Oh yeah, we knew, and I was trying not to have nightmares, because I remember when Carlos was with us he hit that ball up in the right-center field seats up there,” Baker said, referring to Correa’s homer at Minnesota in a 2020 Wild Card Series. “But we never got to Carlos, so that was a great, great victory.”

Correa hit .409 with three doubles and four RBIs in the series.

“I wanted that at-bat so bad. I know Pressly very well, and it would’ve been a fun matchup,” Correa said. “It didn’t get there, but it’s the way it was supposed to be.”

Houston will host in-state rival Texas in Game 1 of the ALCS on Sunday, when Verlander is scheduled to make his 36th career postseason start.

“They know us, and we know them,” Baker said, “and it’s going to be a heck of a series.”

The Astros, who are 56-34 in the playoffs since 2017, hit 10 homers in the series. Abreu had eight RBIs.

“They never give up, and they understand that this is the time where the greats need to be good,” Abreu said through an interpreter.

Urquidy, much like Game 3 starter Cristian Javier, had an October track record to rely on after a forgettable regular season. The right-hander, who has logged 42 postseason innings and made his seventh start in the playoffs, missed three months with shoulder trouble this year.

Michael Brantley got the Astros started with a solo shot in the second against Twins starter Joe Ryan, who was pulled after that inning in manager Rocco Baldelli’s all-out attempt to extend the series.

Caleb Thielbar, the only left-hander on the roster, gave up a leadoff single in the fourth to Yordan Alvarez, a win for the Twins considering he had two doubles and four homers in the series. With one out, Abreu hit a 1-0 fastball to the opposite field for a 3-1 lead.

The rest of the relievers gave the Twins some energy back from the crowd, particularly when Chris Padack pitched 2 1/3 hitless innings with four strikeouts. But the home team just didn’t have enough hits to overcome all those swings and misses.

Lewis gave the Twins another big-moment home run, a smash to left field with a similar trajectory to the one he hit in his first postseason at-bat in Game 1 of the Wild Card Series sweep over Toronto.

Bad luck cost them a critical extra run. Julien led off the game with a double, but Jorge Polanco followed

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 47 of 74

with a line drive straight at Jeremy Peña that was sharp enough to give the shortstop time to make a diving tag on Julien for the double play.

"We didn't get it done in this series," Baldelli said. "We got beat, but I couldn't be happier with what I saw from so many of our guys, and I told them that."

GOING DEEP

The Astros hit four homers in their 9-1 win in Game 3, even taking Sonny Gray — the runaway major league leader in fewest home runs allowed per nine innings this year — deep twice.

Their patience, confidence and power made Ryan a vulnerable opponent, considering the right-hander was making his first career postseason start after allowing 24 homers over his last 14 turns. Hall of Fame member Bert Blyleven was the only other Twins pitcher to give up that many long balls in a 14-start span.

Twins batters set the all-time record with 1,654 strikeouts this year, a whopping 413 more whiffs than the Astros had with the third-fewest in baseball.

SERIES STREAKS

The only club with more consecutive league championship series appearances than Houston was Atlanta with eight NLCS trips from 1991-99. There were no playoffs in 1994 due to the players' strike.

POWER COMPANY

In just his sixth playoff game, Lewis tied Greg Gagne with four postseason home runs for the second-most in Twins history, one behind Hall of Fame member Kirby Puckett. Gagne and Puckett each played 24 postseason games on their way to winning World Series titles in 1987 and 1991.

UP NEXT

Houston went 9-4 against the wild-card Rangers this season, giving the Astros the tiebreaker for the AL West title after both teams finished 90-72. Texas led the division for most of the year, but the Astros beat Arizona on the final day of the regular season and the Rangers lost at Seattle.

As strikes devastate Gaza, Israel forms unity government to oversee war sparked by Hamas attack

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joined with a top political rival Wednesday to create a wartime Cabinet to oversee the fight to avenge the gruesome weekend attack by Hamas militants. In the sealed-off Gaza Strip, Palestinian suffering mounted as Israeli bombardment demolished neighborhoods and the only power plant ran out of fuel.

Netanyahu vowed to "crush and destroy" Hamas. "Every Hamas member is a dead man," he said in a televised address.

The new Cabinet establishes a degree of unity after years of bitterly divisive politics and at a time when the Israeli military appears increasingly likely to launch a ground offensive into Gaza. The war has already claimed at least 2,300 lives on both sides.

The Israeli government is under intense public pressure to topple Hamas after its militants stormed through a border fence Saturday and massacred hundreds of Israelis in their homes, on the streets and at an outdoor music festival.

Netanyahu alleged that the attackers engaged in atrocities, including binding boys and girls and shooting them in the head, burning people alive, raping women and beheading soldiers.

The prime minister's allegations could not be independently confirmed, and authorities did not immediately offer further details. Rescue workers and witnesses have described horrifying scenes, including the slaughter of elderly people and finding bloody rooms crowded with massacred civilians.

Militants in Gaza are holding an estimated 150 people taken hostage from Israel — soldiers, men, women, children and older adults — and they have fired thousands of rockets into Israel over the past five days.

The Cabinet, which will focus only on issues of war, will be led by Netanyahu; Benny Gantz, a senior opposition figure and former defense minister; and current Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Still, Israel's political divisions remain. The country's chief opposition leader, Yair Lapid, was invited to

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 48 of 74

join the Cabinet but did not immediately respond to the offer. It appeared that the rest of Netanyahu's existing government partners, a collection of far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties, would remain in place to handle non-war issues.

Israel's increasingly destructive airstrikes in Gaza have flattened entire city blocks and left unknown numbers of bodies beneath debris. A ground offensive in Gaza, whose 2.3 million residents are densely packed into a tiny, coastal strip, would likely result in a surge of casualties for fighters on both sides.

The death toll in Gaza rose to 1,200 early Thursday, the Palestinian health ministry said, including 51 people killed in what the Israeli military called a large-scale attack in the hours before daylight.

Hamas on Wednesday launched a fresh barrage of rockets into Israel aimed at the southern town of Ashkelon.

The UN said late Wednesday the number of people displaced by the airstrikes had soared 30 percent within 24 hours, to 339,000, two-thirds of them crowding into U.N. schools. Others sought shelter in the shrinking number of safe neighborhoods in the strip of land only 40 kilometers (25 miles) long, wedged among Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

After nightfall, Palestinians were plunged into pitch blackness in large parts of Gaza City and elsewhere after the territory's only power station ran out of fuel and shut down. Only a few lights from private generators still glowed.

Israel on Monday halted the entry of food, water, fuel and medicine into the territory. The sole remaining crossing from Egypt was shut down Tuesday after airstrikes hit nearby.

The Gaza Strip's biggest hospital, Al-Shifa, has only enough fuel to keep power on for three days, said Matthias Kannes, a Gaza-based official for Doctors Without Borders. The group said the two hospitals it runs in Gaza were running out of surgical equipment, antibiotics, fuel and other supplies.

Ghassan Abu Sitta, a reconstructive surgeon at al-Shifa, said he had 50 patients waiting to go to the operating room.

"We're already beyond the capacity of the system to cope," he said. The health system "has the rest of the week before it collapses, not just because of the diesel. All supplies are running short."

The Palestinian Red Crescent said other hospitals' generators will run out in five days. Residential buildings, unable to store as much diesel, likely will go dark sooner.

Egypt and international groups have been calling for humanitarian corridors into Gaza. Convoys stood loaded with fuel and food Wednesday on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing, but were unable to enter Gaza, an Egyptian security official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press.

In Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, rescue workers and civilians carried men covered with blood and soot toward ambulances after strikes toppled buildings. Streets were left blanketed with metal, chunks of concrete and thick dust.

Medical teams and rescuers struggled to enter other areas where roads were too damaged, including Gaza City's al-Karama district, where a "large number" were killed or wounded, according to the Hamas-run Interior Ministry. Strikes have killed at least four Red Crescent paramedics, the organization said.

The risk of the war spreading was evident Wednesday after the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah fired anti-tank missiles at an Israeli military position and claimed to have killed and wounded troops.

The Israeli military confirmed the attack but did not comment on possible casualties. The Israeli army shelled the area in southern Lebanon where the attack was launched.

U.S. President Joe Biden called Saturday's Hamas attack "the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust."

"This attack was a campaign of pure cruelty, not just hate, but pure cruelty against the Jewish people," Biden said at a meeting with Jewish community leaders at the White House.

On Tuesday, he warned other countries and armed groups against entering the war. The U.S. is already rushing munitions and military equipment to Israel and has deployed a carrier strike group to the eastern Mediterranean as deterrence.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 49 of 74

In the West Bank, Israeli settlers attacked a village south of Nablus, opening fire on Palestinians and killing three, the territory's health ministry said. More than two dozen Palestinians have died in fighting in the West Bank since the weekend.

Israel has mobilized 360,000 reservists, massed additional forces near Gaza and evacuated tens of thousands of residents from nearby communities.

Toppling Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, would likely require reoccupying Gaza, at least temporarily. Even then, Hamas has a long history of operating as an underground insurgency in areas controlled by Israel.

Hamas said it launched its attack Saturday because Palestinians' suffering had become intolerable under unending Israeli military occupation and increasing settlements in the West Bank and a 16-year-long blockade in Gaza.

In the kibbutz of Be'eri near Gaza, Israeli troops were still removing the bodies of dead Hamas militants who stormed the community and killed more than 100 residents, then battled soldiers for nearly three days.

Major General Itai Veruv told visiting journalists that the military found evidence of Hamas militants cutting throats of bound captives, lining up children and killing them and packing 15 teenage girls in a room before throwing a grenade inside.

Shock, grief and demands for vengeance against Hamas are running high in Israel.

In a new tactic, Israel is warning civilians to evacuate whole Gaza neighborhoods, rather than just individual buildings, then leveling large swaths in waves of airstrikes.

Israel's tone has changed as well. In past conflicts, its military insisted on the precision of strikes in Gaza, trying to ward off criticism over civilian deaths. This time, military briefings emphasize the destruction being wreaked.

Even with the evacuation warnings, Palestinians say some are unable to escape or have nowhere to go, and that entire families have been crushed under rubble.

Other times, strikes come with no notice, survivors say.

"There was no warning or anything," said Hashem Abu Manea, 58, who lost his 15-year-old daughter, Joanna, when a strike late Tuesday leveled his home in Gaza City.

Israeli airstrikes late Tuesday struck the family house of Mohammed Deif, the shadowy leader of Hamas' military wing, killing his father, brother and at least two other relatives in the southern town of Khan Younis, Hamas official Bassem Naim told The Associated Press. Deif has never been seen in public, and his whereabouts are unknown.

The Israeli military said more than 1,200 people, including 189 soldiers, have been killed in Israel, a staggering toll unseen since the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria that lasted weeks.

Israel says roughly 1,500 Hamas militants were killed inside Israel, and that hundreds of the dead inside Gaza are Hamas members.

Donald Trump attacks President Biden on foreign policy as Israel-Hamas war rages

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Former President Donald Trump on Wednesday defended his record governing the nation for four years without any new wars, and criticized President Joe Biden's foreign policy as the world watches a war that has already claimed 2,300 lives unfold in Gaza, ignited by Hamas' attack on Israel.

Trump and other Republicans have tried to lay blame on the Biden administration, particularly citing the release of nearly \$6 billion in frozen assets to Iran, a supporter of Hamas. Administration officials insist that money has not been spent.

"With crooked Joe Biden, you have chaos, bloodshed, war, terror and death. Look what's happening today," Trump told a crowd of supporters in a speech that lasted more than an hour and a half at a convention center in West Palm Beach, Florida.

The Biden campaign said Trump has been pushing dangerous misinformation about the crisis in Israel

at a time when the country should stand together.

"While Trump continues to lie about his record, President Biden is laser-focused on providing steadfast support for Israel and leading on the global stage," Biden campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz said.

Trump spoke to his supporters at the venue near Mar-a-Lago as he campaigns as the front-runner in the 2024 Republican primary race for the White House, despite four criminal cases against him.

Rep. Matt Gaetz appeared at the event but did not speak. Gaetz is a Florida congressional ally who, with other hard-right conservatives, engineered the ouster of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. The unprecedented action has kept Congress partly shuttered.

Trump has tried to use the power vacuum to underline his lingering influence over the Republican Party, backing Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan to replace McCarthy. However, Republicans on Wednesday nominated House majority leader Steve Scalise to take over the job.

Jordan formed a close alliance with the former president, particularly during the effort to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which Trump lost to Biden. Two of the cases against Trump, in Washington and Georgia, are over his efforts to overturn the results.

Trump has continued to travel to early primary states and has been spending much of his time focused on the four criminal indictments and several civil cases he is facing.

He has put pressure on his Republican challengers to drop out of the 2024 primary race to help him defeat Biden. On Tuesday, he criticized GOP candidates for meeting with donors in an event hosted by Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, who unsuccessfully challenged then-President Barack Obama in 2012 as the Republican presidential nominee, and Paul Ryan, a former congressman who was the House speaker between 2015 and 2019.

"These failed candidates should have started by campaigning effectively, which they didn't because they don't have the skill or the talent," Trump said on his Truth Social site.

Among those 10 Republicans challenging him are Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, once a strong ally; Mike Pence, his former vice president; and Nikki Haley, who served as United Nations ambassador under Trump.

After a hard fight to clear militants, Israeli soldiers find a scene of destruction, slain children

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

KIBBUTZ BE'ERI, Israel (AP) — Trudging down a cul-de-sac turned to rubble, an Israeli army commander stopped in front of one scorched home, its front wall blown wide open. Look at what Hamas militants have done, he said, to this close-knit community that only days ago brimmed with life.

"Children in the same room and someone came and killed them all. Fifteen girls and teenagers, they put (them) in the same room, threw in a hand grenade and it's over," Maj. Gen. Itai Veruv said.

"This is a massacre. It's a pogrom," he said, recalling the brutal attacks on Jews in Eastern Europe in the 19th and early 20th century.

The Israeli military led a group of journalists, including an Associated Press reporter, on a tour of this village a few miles from Israel's fortified border with Gaza on Wednesday, following an extended battle to retake it from militants. Before Israeli forces prevailed, the attackers killed more than 100 residents, Israeli officials said.

Be'eri, a settlement of a little more than 1,000 people, is one of more than 20 towns and villages ambushed early Saturday as part of a sweeping assault launched from the embattled Palestinian enclave.

Before the attack, Be'eri — started by Zionist settlers two years before the country itself was founded — was known for its industriousness, including a large printing plant that turns out Israeli driver's licenses. Now it has become a horrific symbol of the war with Hamas, which authorities say has so far left about 1,200 dead in Israel and about 1,100 in Gaza.

Veruv, who had retired from the military until he was recalled Saturday to lead forces fighting to regain control of towns that were attacked, said Hamas fighters had taken up entrenched positions in the ruins, hiding in small groups before surprising Israeli soldiers as they went from house to house.

"Every time that we thought we cleaned the area and everything was silent, suddenly another 12 or another 20 got out," he said.

Standing in front of the two-story stucco home where he said militants killed teenagers with a grenade, he said soldiers had found the bodies of other residents with their wrists tied together. During the short visit, a reporter saw gaping holes smashed in the side of some homes and torched cars. Framed family photos lay amid the ruins, along with a children's backpack.

Outside, items brought by the militants hinted at meticulous preparation. Prayer rugs and extra shoes lay scattered on the ground, not far from a toothbrush, containers full of medicine and rifle magazines. A pair of Toyota pickups, one with a machine gun mount in the bed, also remain.

By the time reporters were brought in a little before sunset Wednesday, rescue crews had removed the bodies of most of the residents who were killed. But the corpses of several militants remained and the odor of death was overpowering.

"We will hit Gaza. We will hit Hamas. And we will destroy," Veruv said.

Federal judge won't block suspension of right to carry guns in some New Mexico parks, playgrounds

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) —

A federal judge cleared the way Wednesday for enforcement of a public health order that suspends the right to carry guns at public parks and playgrounds in New Mexico's largest metro area.

The order from U.S. District Judge David Urias rejects a request from gun rights advocates to block temporary firearms restrictions as legal challenges move forward.

It marks a victory for Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and her advocacy for temporary gun restrictions in response to recent shootings around the state that left children dead.

The standoff is one of many in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court decision last year expanding gun rights, as leaders in politically liberal-leaning states explore new avenues for restrictions.

In New Mexico, the restrictions have ignited a furor of public protests, prompted Republican calls for the governor's impeachment and widened divisions among top Democratic officials.

Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, continued to argue this week that some sensitive public spaces should be off limits for open or concealed carry of firearms.

Gun rights advocates have filed an array of lawsuits and court motions aimed at blocking the restrictions in her order, arguing that even a new, scaled-back version would deprive Albuquerque-area residents of 2nd Amendment rights to carry in public for self-defense.

But in denying the request for injunction, the judge ruled that the plaintiffs had not shown a substantial likelihood of success in court. He rejected arguments that gun restrictions for "sensitive" places should apply only to locations for core government functions, such as polling places, and not playgrounds.

"Given the Supreme Court's recognition of schools as sensitive places and the sound analogy between schools and playgrounds ... the court finds that the recognition of what constitutes a sensitive place could very well be determined by the type of function occurring at those locations as well as whether a vulnerable population — such as children — utilize such locations," Urias wrote.

Urias also said it appears "plausible, although not certain" that the governor may "demonstrate a national historical tradition of firearm restrictions at public parks within cities."

Zachary Fort, who is a plaintiff in several consolidated lawsuits challenging the gun restrictions, said he carries in public parks for self-defense when he can.

"I was disappointed in the judge's decision today, but I think it's too early to say now what our next steps are going to be," Fort said.

The governor's initial order would have suspended gun-carry rights in most public places in the Albuquerque area, while the current version applies only to public parks and playgrounds with an exception that ensures access to a municipal shooting range park. The restrictions were tied to a statistical threshold

for violent crime that applies only to Albuquerque and the surrounding area.

State police have authority under the order to assess civil penalties and a fine of up to \$5,000, but the sheriff and Albuquerque's police chief had refused to enforce it.

The rest of the public health order has remained intact, including directives for monthly inspections of firearms dealers statewide, reports on gunshot victims at New Mexico hospitals, wastewater testing for illicit substances at schools, safe-surrender programs for gun owners who choose to decommission firearms they no longer want and more.

A temporary restraining order that previously blocked the gun restrictions was to expire at the end of Wednesday.

NASA shows off its first asteroid samples delivered by a spacecraft

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA on Wednesday showed off its first asteroid samples delivered last month by a spacecraft — a jumble of black dust and rubble that's the most ever returned to Earth.

Scientists anticipated getting a cupful but are still unsure how much was grabbed from the carbon-rich asteroid named Bennu, almost 60 million miles (97 million kilometers) away. That's because the main sample chamber has yet to be opened, officials said during an event at Johnson Space Center in Houston.

"It's been going slow and meticulous, but the science is already starting," said the mission's lead scientist, Dante Lauretta of the University of Arizona.

NASA's Osiris-Rex spacecraft collected the samples three years ago from the surface of Bennu and then dropped them off sealed in a capsule during a flyby of Earth last month. The expected cupful was far more than the teaspoon or so that Japan brought back from a pair of missions.

Black dust and particles were scattered around the outside edge of the internal sample chamber, according to Lauretta. He said there's still "a whole treasure chest of extraterrestrial material" to be studied. The samples are priceless, the preserved building blocks from the dawn of the solar system.

No one at Wednesday's celebration at Johnson got to see any of the samples firsthand — just photos and video. The asteroid pieces were behind locked doors in a new lab at the space center, accessible only to scientists in protective gear.

Besides carbon, the asteroid rubble holds water in the form of water-bearing clay minerals, Lauretta and others pointed out.

"That is how we think water got to the Earth," he said. "Minerals like we're seeing from Bennu landed on Earth 4 billion years ago to 4.5 billion years ago, making our world habitable."

That was one of the primary reasons for the \$1 billion, seven-year mission: to help learn how the solar system — and Earth in particular — formed. "You can't get more exciting than that," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

Back in 2020, Lauretta and his team lost some of their haul when the lid on the sample container jammed a few days after the spacecraft collected the material. It vacuumed up so many pieces from Bennu that small rocks got lodged under the lid and prevented it from closing, sending pieces floating off into space.

That's why scientists did not have a precise measurement of what was coming back; they estimated 250 grams, or about a cupful, ahead of the Sept. 24 landing in the Utah desert. They won't have a good count until the container is opened, within two weeks or so.

Much of the material shown Wednesday was overflow from when the lid was stuck open, before everything could be sealed inside the return capsule. The larger visible rocks were under an inch (2.5 centimeters) in size.

"We have a bounty of sample on our hands already and we're not even inside" the main sample container, said NASA astromaterials curator Francis McCubbin.

Once the samples are archived, the team will dole out particles to researchers around the world, while saving a fair amount for future analysis when better technology should be available.

NASA has another asteroid-chasing spacecraft on a Florida launch pad, ready to blast off later this week.

The destination will be a rare asteroid made of metal named Psyche. No samples will be coming back.

Auto workers escalate strike as 8,700 workers walk out at Ford Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The United Auto Workers union significantly escalated its strikes against Detroit Three automakers Wednesday when 8,700 workers walked off their jobs at Ford's Kentucky truck plant.

The surprise move about 6:30 p.m. took down the largest and most profitable Ford plant in the world. The sprawling factory makes pricey heavy-duty F-Series pickup trucks and large Ford and Lincoln SUVs.

UAW President Shawn Fain said in a statement that the union has waited long enough "but Ford hasn't gotten the message" to bargain for a fair contract.

"If they can't understand that after four weeks, the 8,700 workers shutting down this extremely profitable plant will help them understand it," Fain said.

The strike came nearly four weeks after the union began its walkouts against General Motors, Ford and Jeep maker Stellantis on Sept. 15, with one assembly plant from each company.

In a statement, Ford called the strike expansion "grossly irresponsible" but said it wasn't surprising given the UAW leadership's statements that it wanted to keep Detroit automakers hobbled with "industrial chaos."

A Ford executive said the union set up a meeting at the company's Dearborn, Michigan, headquarters Wednesday afternoon where Fain asked if the company had another offer.

High-ranking Ford executives responded that they are working on possibly bringing electric vehicle battery plants into the UAW national contract, essentially making them unionized. But they didn't have a significantly different economic offer, the executive said. Fain was told the company put a strong offer on the table, but there wasn't a lot of room to increase it and keep it affordable for the business, the executive said.

Fain responded by saying, if that's the company's best offer, "You just lost Kentucky Truck Plant," said the executive. The meeting only lasted about 15 minutes, he said.

A UAW official said that Ford has been saying for two weeks that it would add to its economic offer, but at the meeting Wednesday, the company presented the same offer it made earlier. Then Fain and Vice President Chuck Browning called local leaders and the strike began a short time later, the official said.

The significant escalation against Ford shows that Fain is trying to increase pressure on the company, said Marick Masters, a business professor at Wayne State University who follows labor issues.

But Ford and the other automakers have made concessions and raised wage offers, he said. The companies, he said, "may have reached their resistance points to varying degrees." Executives, he said, have bottom line positions they can't cross in terms of staying competitive with other automakers.

Fain, Masters said, likely is testing how far he needs to push Ford before going to "full throttle," by taking all 57,000 Ford members out on strike.

The union's move doesn't leave him optimistic for a quick end to the strikes, Masters said. "I think the issues that remain on the table are quite thorny," he said, pointing to union demands that all workers get defined benefit pensions and health insurance when they retire.

The UAW expanded its strikes on Sept. 22, adding 38 GM and Stellantis parts warehouses. Assembly plants from Ford and GM were added the week after that. The Kentucky strike brings to 33,700 the number of workers on strike against the three automakers.

Thus far, the union has decided to target a small number of plants from each company rather than have all 146,000 UAW members at the automakers go on strike at the same time.

Last week, the union reported progress in the talks and decided not to add any more plants. This came after GM agreed to bring joint-venture electric vehicle battery factories into the national master contract, almost assuring that the plants will be unionized.

Battery plants are a major point of contention in the negotiations. The UAW wants those plants to be unionized to assure jobs and top wages for workers who will be displaced by the industry's ongoing transition to electric vehicles.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 54 of 74

Since the start of the strike, the three Detroit automakers have laid off roughly 4,800 workers at factories that are not among the plants that have been hit by the UAW strikes.

The companies say the strikes have forced them to impose those layoffs. They note that the job cuts have occurred mainly at factories that make parts for assembly plants that were closed by strikes. In one case, layoffs have been imposed at a factory that uses supplies from a parts factory on strike.

The UAW rejects that argument. It contends that the layoffs are unjustified and were imposed as part of the companies' pressure campaign to persuade UAW members to accept less favorable terms in negotiations with automakers. The factories that have been affected by layoffs are in six states: Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Kansas, Indiana and New York.

Sam Fiorani, an analyst with AutoForecast Solutions, a consulting firm, said he thinks the layoffs reflect a simple reality: The automakers are losing money because of the strikes. By slowing or idling factories that are running below their capacities because of strike-related parts shortages, Fiorani said, the companies can mitigate further losses.

"It doesn't make sense to keep running at 30% or 40% of capacity when it normally runs at 100%," he said.

Striking workers are receiving \$500 a week from the union's strike pay fund. By contrast, anyone who is laid off would qualify for state unemployment aid, which, depending on a variety of circumstances, could be less or more than \$500 a week.

Fiorani said that as the strikes widen, more workers will likely be laid off at non-striking plants. Once metal stamping factories that supply multiple assembly plants have produced enough parts for non-striking facilities, the companies would likely shut them down.

"Once you've filled up the stocks for the other plants you supply," he said, "you have to lay off the workers and wait out the strike."

Separate companies that manufacture parts for the automakers are likely to have laid off workers but might not report them publicly, said Patrick Anderson, CEO of the Anderson Economic Group in Lansing, Michigan.

A survey of parts supply companies by a trade association called MEMA Original Equipment Suppliers found that 30% of members have laid off workers and that more than 60% expect to start layoffs in mid-October.

Republicans nominate Steve Scalise to be House speaker but struggle to unite quickly and elect him

By LISA MASCARO, KEVIN FREKING and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Deeply divided Republicans nominated Rep. Steve Scalise on Wednesday to be the next House speaker but struggled to quickly unify and elect the conservative in a public floor vote after the historic ousting of Rep. Kevin McCarthy from the job.

In private balloting at the Capitol, House Republicans narrowly pushed aside Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, the firebrand Judiciary Committee chairman, in favor of Scalise, the current majority leader. The Louisiana congressman, who is battling blood cancer, is seen as a hero to some after surviving a shooting on lawmakers at a congressional baseball game practice in 2017.

"We have a lot of work to do," Scalise said afterward.

A floor vote of the whole House was expected but then abandoned by nightfall. Tensions are still running high among Republicans and the House is at a standstill amid bitter infighting after McCarthy's stunning removal last week. The House was gavelled into a brief session, then closed, with next steps uncertain.

It's an extraordinary moment of political chaos at a time of uncertainty at home and crisis abroad, moving into a second week without a House speaker. Just 10 months after Republicans swept to power aspiring to operate as a team and run government more like a business, the GOP majority has drifted far from that goal.

"We need to make sure we're sending a message to people all throughout the world, that the House is

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 55 of 74

open to doing the people's business," Scalise said.

What's uncertain is whether lawmakers who supported Jordan, the hard-liner backed by Donald Trump, will throw their support to Scalise in what is sure to be a close vote of the full House. Democrats are set to oppose the Republican nominee, easily nominating their leader, New York Rep. Hakeem Jeffries.

Jordan said little after the vote, only that the GOP majority "is divided."

But Jordan did offer to give Scalise a nominating speech on the floor, in what would be a show of support during a vote. And Jordan himself plans to vote for Scalise, and is encouraging his colleagues to do the same, said a person familiar with the private talks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

A centrist leader, Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., said, "We do need to get a speaker in place so we can govern."

"What we should have heard today after the vote count was: 'I will heartily support Steve. Let's get behind him,'" Bacon said. "We did not hear that."

Americans are watching. One-quarter of Republicans say they approve of the decision by a small group of Republicans to remove McCarthy as speaker. Three in 10 Republicans believe it was a mistake, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

At the White House, presidential press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said, "We want to see the chaos be done with so that we can deliver for the American people."

The hard-right coalition of lawmakers that ousted McCarthy, R-Calif., has shown what an oversize role a few lawmakers can have in choosing his successor.

In a floor vote, Scalise would need to amass votes from almost all Republicans to overcome the Democratic opposition. Usually, the majority needed would be 218 votes, but there are currently two vacant seats, dropping the threshold to 217.

Many Republicans want to prevent the spectacle of a messy House floor fight like the grueling January brawl when McCarthy became speaker.

Behind closed doors, the Republicans voted to set aside a proposed a rules change that would have tried to ensure a majority vote before the nominee was presented for a full floor vote.

Without the rules change, the Republican lawmakers would be expected to agree to a majority-wins process. But several lawmakers announced they were not supporting Scalise.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., said she backed Jordan in the private ballot and would do so in the floor vote. Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., said he let Scalise know "he doesn't have my vote on the floor."

Scalise worked from the speaker's office at the Capitol, trying to shore up the vote.

"Steve's going to have to talk to them all and see what their concerns are," said McCarthy, who said he would be voting for Scalise.

Neither Scalise nor Jordan was seen as the heir apparent to McCarthy, who was removed in a push by the far-right flank after the speaker led Congress to approve legislation that averted a government shut-down. The next deadline to fund the government is Nov. 17, again threatening federal closures.

All three men have been here before. In 2018, they were similarly vying for leadership, with McCarthy and Scalise extending the rivalry to this day.

Scalise was in line for the job this time after McCarthy's ouster, but faced a challenge from Jordan, a founding member of the Freedom Caucus, who was viewed as a more hard-edged option.

Jordan is known for his close alliance with Trump, particularly when the then-president was working to overturn the results of the 2020 election, leading to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Trump backed Jordan's bid for the gavel.

Several lawmakers, including Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who engineered McCarthy's ouster, said they would be willing to support either Scalise or Jordan.

"Long live Speaker Scalise," Gaetz said after the vote.

McCarthy had briefly floated a possible comeback earlier this week but the eight hard-liners who helped engineer his removal showed no signs of budging. He told his colleagues late Tuesday not to put his name forward for a nomination.

At the speaker's office, where McCarthy's name had still been out front since his ouster last week, crews

were seen carting boxes and artwork out of the stately suite in the Capitol.

For now, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., who was named as the speaker pro-tempore, is effectively in charge. He has shown little interest in expanding his power beyond the role he was assigned — an interim leader tasked with ensuring the election of the next speaker.

The role was created in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to ensure the continuity of government. McHenry's name was at the top of a list submitted by McCarthy when he became speaker in January.

Families in Israel and abroad wait in agony for word of their loved ones taken hostage by militants

By DANICA KIRKA and AMI BENTOV Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — One of those taken hostage is a grandmother who learned Arabic in hopes of building bridges with her neighbors. Others include 10 members of an extended family, one an elderly man in a wheelchair who requires hospital care. Still another is a nurse who delivered thousands of babies over the years to parents both Israeli and Palestinian.

All are among roughly 150 people abducted by Hamas militants early Saturday during sweeping raids on Israeli towns and villages near the heavily fortified border with the Gaza Strip. They include citizens of Brazil, Britain, Italy, the Philippines and the United States, as well as many Israelis. The number of hostages, provided by Hamas and Israeli officials, has not been independently confirmed.

Militants have vowed to start killing hostages if Israel's airstrikes target civilians inside Gaza without first providing a warning allowing them to flee. It has placed the families and friends of those taken in a terrifying and desperate situation, with little they can do but wait.

Noam Sagi, a psychotherapist who lives in London, believes his mother, Ada, who turns 75 next week, is among those taken hostage. He hasn't heard from her since early Saturday morning when she called him from a panic room at Kibbutz Nir Oz, a communal settlement near the southeastern border with Gaza.

Ada Sagi, the daughter of Holocaust survivors from Poland, was born in Israel in 1948. As a member of a kibbutz built on the ideals of equality and humanity, she learned Arabic and taught the language to others in southern Israel as a way to improve communication and build a better relationship with Palestinians living nearby, her son said.

Sagi hopes his mother's language skills will help her negotiate with the hostage takers. But she has severe allergies, and has recently had a hip replacement. He is desperately worried.

"The only hope I have now is almost like for humanity to do something for me to see my mother again and for my son to see his grandmother again," Sagi told The Associated Press.

Nir Oz is also home to Sagui Dekel-Chen, 35, a married father of two daughters who is awaiting the birth of his third child. Neighbors reported that he helped fight off the militants who stormed the kibbutz, but he hasn't been heard from since, according to his father, Jonathan.

About 240 of the community's 400 residents are dead or missing, Jonathan Dekel-Chen said at the press conference in Tel Aviv called to appeal to the U.S. government to rescue the hostages.

Rachel Goldberg told the story of her son Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, who was born in Berkeley, California, and was saving money to see the world.

Hersh was attending a music festival where at least 260 young people were killed. When militants threw grenades into the shelter where a group of festival goers had taken refuge, Hersh and a friend picked them up and threw them back outside, witnesses reported. He lost an arm in the fighting.

He hasn't been seen since the militants loaded him into the back of a pickup truck and drove off. His cell phone signal was lost at the Gaza border.

His mother said she got two texts from him, then nothing: "I love you" and, moments later, "I'm sorry."

Born in California, Adrienne Neta has lived in Israel since 1981. During a long career as a nurse and midwife, the race and religion of her patients were irrelevant, her family said.

Adrienne Neta called her family as the militants burst in at her home in Kibbitz Be'eri, where at least 100

people were later found dead. Then the line went dead.

"The optimistic scenario is she is held hostage and not dead on the street," said her son Nahar Neta.

Others presumed taken hostage include a family with both Italian and U.S. citizenship who were living in the same southern Israeli community of Be'eri.

Their number include Eviatar Moshe Kipnis, 65, and Lilach Lea Havron, 60, and their health care aide, who were last heard from Saturday morning sheltering in their safe room, after militants began storming the village.

Their son, Nadav Kipnis, told The Associated Press that in addition to his parents and the aide, eight members of Havron's family are also missing, including three children.

The family believes all 11 were taken hostage because their bodies weren't recovered and some of their cell phones have been traced to Gaza. The family fears especially for the father, who uses a wheelchair, takes several medications daily and needs regular hospital care for a severe autoimmune condition.

Italy's foreign minister travelled to Egypt on Wednesday to try to enlist regional Arab support to liberate hostages, including Kipnis' parents and family.

For now, all the family has to go on are the messages and videos contained in a "nightmarish" group chat of Be'eri neighbors who described in real time as the militants went door to door, flushing people from their safe rooms, sometimes by setting their houses on fire, Kipnis said.

The chat described "people jumping off windows because their safe rooms are starting to fill with smoke and they were choking and they broke their legs trying to run to different houses, people being dragged out of their homes by terrorists..." Kipnis said, summarizing the chat.

"We're like lucky we just read this instead of being there."

His parents shielded him from gunfire as Hamas attacked. He survived. They did not

By MICHAEL CASEY and TRISHA AHMED Associated Press

An Israeli-American teenager survived a siege on his home by Hamas attackers over the weekend after his parents shielded him from the gunfire but were killed themselves.

The family lived on a kibbutz in southern Israel near the border with Gaza. They had less than a minute to seek safety after being alerted to the attack.

As the fighters invaded their home, they scrambled into a tiny room meant to protect them from rocket attacks. Shlomi Mathias had his arm blown off trying to keep the fighters out of the room, relatives said. As fighters peppered the room with gunfire, Debbie Mathias yelled at her son, Rotem, to get down. Then she was shot dead; the bullet traveled through her and hit him in the stomach.

Rotem Mathias, 16, stayed underneath his mother and played dead for about 30 minutes before running for shelter under a bed and eventually hiding under a blanket in adjacent laundry room, relatives told The Associated Press. Twice, Rotem Mathias managed to elude the fighters — some of them laughing — before he was rescued by Israeli soldiers.

"The last thing my dad said is he lost his arm. Then my mom died on top of me," Rotem Mathias told ABC News in an interview from the hospital where he was being treated for gunshot and shrapnel wounds. He was released Tuesday.

"I just stopped my breathing. I lowered it down as much as I possibly could. I didn't move and was terrified," he said. "I didn't make any noise. I prayed for any god. I didn't really care which god. I just prayed for a god that they won't find me."

The family's ordeal unfolded on group chat early Saturday morning, starting with the couple messaging that they had heard voices in Arabic, breaking of glass and gunfire. Then they went silent for 20 minutes before Rotem Mathias responded: "Mom and dad r dead sorry. Call help."

For the next 10 hours, relatives including Deborah Mathias' brother-in-law Eran Shani, his wife and daughters supported Rotem. At one point, they managed to get a doctor to join the call to ask Rotem Mathias about his level of bleeding and to assess the situation.

Shani told AP that his wife, a psychotherapist, tried to calm Rotem for "many hours before the soldiers

came. He was bleeding. He gave up a few times. He did not know whether he was going to survive or not.”

Meanwhile, the Mathias’ other two daughters, 21-year-old Shir and 19-year-old Shakked, were hiding separately in their own safe rooms in the kibbutz just minutes from their parents. They got a message from their mom that fighters were in the kibbutz and that they shouldn’t “open the door.”

“All we could hear were gunshots and people screaming and bombs going off, cars exploding,” Shir Mathias said, recalling how she hid for more than 12 hours before both sisters were rescued by soldiers.

“It’s like if you close your eyes, you might think you’re in a movie theater. Then you open your eyes and you realize: I’m in my room. I’m in my house. This is real,” she told AP. “We could hear missiles flying down. We could hear them whistle and explode. It was insane. I’ve never heard anything like this. It was terrifying.”

As it grew dark, Shakked Mathias went in search of her sister.

“I packed up a bag as quietly as I could, and I ran to my sister’s apartment and I knocked at her door. She thought I was a terrorist. I called out her name and she opened up,” Shakked Mathias said. “From that point on, we were together. And the first thing I asked her, ‘Do you think ... Mom and Dad are dead? Do you think our brother is OK?’”

They were nearly caught by Hamas fighters who knocked on their door and shined a flashlight inside. After the fighters left, Shir Mathias began frantically calling anyone she could reach before connecting with a soldier who came to their house.

The attack came hours after the family had gathered for a festive evening that included music, since both their parents were musicians. Shlomi Mathias was a music teacher; Debbie Mathias was a singer and songwriter. Their parents were in a nostalgic mood, talking about how they met.

The family returned to the kibbutz, and Shir Mathias remembers her mom telling her to have a good time Saturday, since they were planning to attend a Bruno Mars concert in Tel Aviv. Their dad helped check the oil in the car.

“Before I went to my house, Mom said, ‘Bye. Have fun tomorrow,’” Shir Mathias said. “I was like, ‘Thank you, I love you.’ I gave her a hug and gave my dad a hug.” Hours later, they were gone.

As Israeli military retaliates, Palestinians say civilians are paying the price in strikes on Gaza

By ISABEL DEBRE and FATIMA SHBEIR Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Hallways filled with screaming voices. A terrible stench in the air. Wounded people streaming through the doors. Lifeless bodies and bags of body parts arriving in bedsheets.

The scene at Shifa Hospital was a grisly reflection of the chaos around it. Even as workers mopped up blood and relatives rushed children with shrapnel wounds into surgery, explosions thundered in central Gaza City.

Over the last five days, Israeli warplanes have pummeled the blockaded strip with an intensity that its war-weary residents had never experienced. The airstrikes have killed over 1,100 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Officials have not said how many civilians are among the dead, but aid workers warn that Israel’s decision to impose a “complete siege” on the crowded enclave of 2.3 million people is spawning a humanitarian catastrophe that touches nearly every one of them.

The airstrikes have transformed lively neighborhoods into wastelands of rubble strewn with bodies. There is no clean water. And there is darkness — the territory’s only power plant ran out of fuel Wednesday, leaving only generators that won’t last long.

“This is an unprecedented scope of destruction,” said Miriam Marmur, a spokeswoman for Gisha, an Israeli human rights group. “Israeli decisions to cut electricity, fuel, food and medicine supplies severely compound the risks to Palestinians and threaten to greatly increase the toll in human life.”

The Israeli bombardment has escalated in retaliation for Hamas militants’ unprecedented multifront attack Saturday. The Israeli military says more than 1,200 were killed and dozens more abducted, and the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 59 of 74

government declared war, promising a punishing campaign to destroy Hamas' military capabilities.

But Palestinians say Israel has largely unleashed that fury on civilians — a population that has lived for 16 years under a crippling blockade imposed by Israel and through four devastating wars and other hostilities.

The strikes across Gaza, from its farming villages on the northern border to upmarket towers in the heart of Gaza City, have killed 171 women and at least 326 people under 18, the Gaza Health Ministry said. Eight journalists have been killed, local media organizations said, and six medics, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent. The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees reports 11 of its staffers among the dead.

During past wars, news of a single shattered neighborhood could shake the international community. This time, Israeli airstrikes are rapidly laying waste to vast swaths of Gaza, and casualties are mounting too fast for anyone to keep up.

"In previous escalations, there would always be some time, even a half-hour, without airstrikes," said Nebal Farsakh, spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent. "But now, there is not a single minute. That's why the casualties keep going up and up."

The stark toll is palpable at Gaza hospitals.

Even in ordinary times, they're poorly supplied. Now, there's a shortage of everything from bandages to intravenous fluids, beds to essential drugs, said Richard Brennan, regional director of the World Health Organization.

"It's almost as bad as it gets," Brennan said. "It's not just the damage, the destruction. It's that psychological pressure. The constant shelling ... the loss of one's colleagues."

An airstrike hit one of the territory's biggest hospitals, in northern Beit Hanoun, rendering it inoperable. Shrapnel has flown into seven other hospitals and 10 U.N. emergency shelters, according to the World Health Organization and United Nations.

At Shifa Hospital, doctors battled to keep the place running. Fuel supplies ran low, and panic ensued outside. As explosions crashed, women and children streamed into the streets with their belongings, some of them barefoot.

From the hospital corridor, Muhammad Al-Gharabli recalled four missiles crashing into a mosque in the seaside Shati refugee camp Monday, decapitating his 2-year-old son, Mohammed, and sending shrapnel into the leg of his 5-year-old son, Lotfi.

Al-Gharabli said that when he regained consciousness, he saw the bodies of dozens of neighbors strewn over the ruins of their homes. He recognized the still and bloodied face of his next-door neighbor, a car mechanic.

"I can't sleep from the horror," he said.

In many cases, residents say, the Israeli military has bombed apartment towers without the usual warning shots, wiping out families in their homes. Israel says it is going after only militant targets and does its utmost to avoid civilian casualties — a claim the Palestinians reject.

The Gaza Health Ministry has reported 22 incidents in which airstrikes have killed many members of the same extended family, without providing details. The Israeli military rarely comments on individual airstrikes.

For the densely populated Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, the mayhem began early Wednesday. Jaber Weshah said there was no warning when a strike pummeled the multistory building next door.

Few survived. Some people remained trapped under the rubble, awaiting ambulances for hours, Weshah said.

The death toll from that strike reached 12, residents said. Among the dead was a bookseller, his wife and two toddler daughters; a landlord, his son and his disabled sister; and six members of one family, leaving only its patriarch.

"It was an inferno," said Weshah, a 73-year-old human rights activist. "If you're trying to confront Hamas, I get it, you can do that. But you have the best military technology and you can't differentiate between who is a civilian and who is not?"

When Israeli airstrikes pounded Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza, at least 50 people — including two entire families — were killed and much of the camp razed, health authorities and residents said. The

Israeli military said that the targets it struck "were only directed at Hamas situation rooms and operational apartments."

One of the families killed were the Masouds — two public schoolteachers and their sons, ages 12 and 10 — according to neighbor Khalil Abu Yahia.

"They would sacrifice their lives to care for their children," he said of parents Alaa and Atallah.

The morning of the strike, the family of four huddled close in the one room, far from the windows.

Abu Yahia knows this, he said, because that's how all four bodies were found.

Social media is awash in misinformation about Israel-Gaza war, but Musk's X is the most egregious

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

While Twitter has always struggled with combating misinformation about major news events, it was still the go-to place to find out what's happening in the world. But the Israel-Hamas war has underscored how the platform now transformed into X has become not only unreliable but is actively promoting falsehoods.

Experts say that under Elon Musk the platform has deteriorated to the point that it's not just failing to clamp down on misinformation but is favoring posts by accounts that pay for its blue-check subscription service, regardless of who runs them.

If such posts go viral, their blue-checked creators can be eligible for payments from X, creating a financial incentive to post whatever gets the most reaction — including misinformation.

Ian Bremmer, a prominent foreign policy expert, posted on X that the level of disinformation on the Israel-Hamas war "being algorithmically promoted" on the platform "is unlike anything I've ever been exposed to in my career as a political scientist."

And the European Union's digital enforcer wrote to Musk about misinformation and "potentially illegal content" on X, in what's shaping up to be one of the first major tests for the 27-nation bloc's new digital rules aimed at cleaning up social media platforms. He later sent a similar, though toned-down, version of the letter to CEO Mark Zuckerberg of Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram.

While Musk's social media site is awash in chaos, rivals such as TikTok, YouTube and Facebook are also coping with a flood of unsubstantiated rumors and falsehoods about the conflict, playing the usual whack-a-mole that emerges every time a news event captivates the world's attention.

"People are desperate for information and social media context may actively interfere with people's ability to distinguish fact from fiction," said Gordon Pennycook, an associate professor of psychology at Cornell University who studies misinformation.

For instance, instead of asking whether something is true, people might focus on whether something is surprising, interesting or even likely to make people angry — the sorts of posts more likely to elicit strong reactions and go viral.

The liberal advocacy group Media Matters found that since Saturday, subscribers to X's premium service shared at least six misleading videos about the war. This included out-of-context videos and old ones purporting to be recent — that earned millions of views.

TikTok, meanwhile, is "almost as bad" as X, said Kolina Koltai, a researcher at the investigative collective Bellingcat. She previously worked at Twitter on Community Notes, its crowd-sourced fact-checking service.

But unlike X, TikTok has never been known as the No. 1 source for real-time information about current events.

"I think everyone knows to take TikTok with a grain of salt," Koltai said. But on X "you see people actively profiteering off of misinformation because of the incentives they have to spread the content that goes viral — and misinformation tends to go viral."

Emerging platforms, meanwhile, are still finding their footing in the global information ecosystem, so while they might not yet be targets for large-scale disinformation campaigns, they also don't have the sway of larger, more established rivals.

Meta's Threads, for instance, is gaining traction among users fleeing X, but the company has so far tried

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 61 of 74

to de-emphasize news and politics in favor of more “friendly” topics.

“One of the reasons why you’re not hearing a lot about Facebook is because they have something called demotions,” said Alexis Crews, a resident fellow at the Integrity Institute who worked at Meta until this spring. If something is labeled as misinformation, the system will demote it and send it to independent fact-checkers for assessment. Crews cautioned that if Meta — which has been cutting costs and laid off thousands of workers — deprioritizes its fact-checking program, misinformation could flood its platforms once again. The Associated Press is part of Meta’s fact-checking program.

Meta and X did not immediately respond to AP requests for comment. TikTok said in a statement that it has dedicated resources to help prevent violent, hateful or misleading content, “including increased moderation resources in Hebrew and Arabic.” The company said it also works with independent fact-checkers to help assess the accuracy of material posted to its platform.

A post late Monday from X’s safety team said: “In the past couple of days, we’ve seen an increase in daily active users on @X in the conflict area, plus there have been more than 50 million posts globally focusing on the weekend’s terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas. As the events continue to unfold rapidly, a cross-company leadership group has assessed this moment as a crisis requiring the highest level of response.”

While plenty of real imagery and accounts of the carnage have emerged, they have been intermingled with social media users pushing false claims and misrepresenting videos from other events.

Among the fabrications are false claims that a top Israeli commander was kidnapped, a doctored White House memo purporting to show U.S. President Joe Biden announcing billions in aid for Israel, and old unrelated videos of Russian President Vladimir Putin with inaccurate English captions. Even a clip from a video game was passed on as footage from the conflict.

“Every time there is some major event and information is at a premium, we see misinformation spread like wildfire,” Pennycook said. “There is now a very consistent pattern, but every time it happens there’s a sudden surge of concern about misinformation that tends to fade away once the moment passes.”

“We need tools that help build resistance toward misinformation prior to events such as this,” he said.

For now, those looking for a central hub to find reliable, real time information online might be out of luck. Imperfect as Twitter was, there’s no clear replacement for it. This means anyone looking for accurate information online needs to exercise vigilance.

In times of big breaking news such as the current conflict, Koltai recommended, “going to your traditional name brands and news media outlets like AP, Reuters, who are doing things like fact checking” and active reporting on the ground.

Meanwhile, in Europe, major social media platforms are facing stricter scrutiny over the war.

Britain’s Technology Secretary Michelle Donelan summoned the U.K. bosses of X, TikTok, Snapchat Google and Meta for a meeting Wednesday to discuss “the proliferation of antisemitism and extremely violent content” following the Hamas attack.

She demanded they outline the actions they’re taking to quickly remove content that breaches the U.K.’s online safety law or their terms and conditions.

European Commissioner Thierry Breton warned in his letter to Musk of penalties for not complying with the EU’s new Digital Services Act, which puts the biggest online platforms like X, under extra scrutiny and requires them to make it easier for users to flag illegal content and take steps to reduce disinformation — or face fines up to 6% of annual global revenue.

Musk responded by touting the platform’s approach using crowdsourced factchecking labels, an apparent reference to Community Notes.

“Our policy is that everything is open source and transparent, an approach that I know the EU supports,” Musk wrote on X. “Please list the violations you allude to on X, so that the public can see them.”

Breton replied that Musk is “well aware” of the reports on “fake content and glorification of violence.”

“Up to you to demonstrate that you walk the talk,” he said.

An Oklahoma judge could be removed from office for sending more than 500 texts during a murder trial

By KEN MILLER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A new Oklahoma judge could lose her job for sending more than 500 texts to her bailiff during a murder trial, including messages mocking the prosecutor, praising the defense attorney and calling a key witness a liar.

The chief justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court recommended the removal of Lincoln County District Judge Traci Soderstrom in a court filing Tuesday following an investigation by the state's Council on Judicial Complaints.

Soderstrom has been under scrutiny since July after she was caught on camera scrolling through social media and texting during the trial of a man accused in the fatal beating of a 2-year-old.

Soderstrom, who was sworn in on Jan. 9 after being elected in November, was suspended with pay pending the outcome of a hearing by the Court on the Judiciary, which will determine whether to remove her from the bench.

"The pattern of conduct demonstrates Respondent's (Soderstrom's) gross neglect of duty, gross partiality and oppression," Chief Justice John Kane IV wrote. "The conduct further demonstrates Respondent's (Soderstrom's) lack of temperament to serve as a judge."

A phone call to a number listed for Soderstrom rang unanswered before disconnecting Wednesday.

The judge's texts included saying the prosecutor was "sweating through his coat" during questioning of potential jurors and asking "why does he have baby hands?" according to Kane's petition. The texts described the defense attorney as "awesome" and asked "can I clap for her?" during the defense attorney's opening arguments.

Soderstrom also texted a laughing emoji icon to the bailiff, who had "made a crass and demeaning reference to the prosecuting attorneys' genitals," Kane wrote.

Khristian Tyler Martzall — the man who was on trial while the judge was on her phone — was eventually convicted of second-degree manslaughter in the 2018 death of Braxton Danker, the son of Martzall's girlfriend, and sentenced to time served.

Martzall's girlfriend and the mother of the child, Judith Danker, pleaded guilty to enabling child abuse, was sentenced to 25 years and was a key prosecution witness who was called a liar by Soderstrom during testimony.

"State just couldn't accept that a mom could kill their kid so they went after the next person available," Soderstrom texted, according to the filing from Kane.

Soderstrom's texts also included comments questioning whether a juror was wearing a wig, if a witness has teeth and calling a police officer who testified, "pretty," adding, "I could look at him all day."

When questioned by the Council on Judicial Complaints, Soderstrom said her texting "probably could have waited" rather than realizing the comments should never have been made. She said she thought, "oh, that's funny. Move on."

Security video published by The Oklahoman newspaper showed Soderstrom texting or messaging for minutes at a time during jury selection, opening statements and testimony during the trial in Chandler, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) northeast of Oklahoma City.

Kane's petition also said Soderstrom had previously criticized other attorneys and prosecutors, and berated a member of the courthouse staff.

Soderstrom should be removed for reasons that include gross neglect of duty, gross partiality in office and oppression in office, Kane wrote.

The judge's four-year term ends in January 2027.

Biden calls Hamas attacks the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust as US death toll ticks up

By MATTHEW LEE and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday condemned the weekend attack by Hamas militants on Israel as the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust as the number of U.S. citizens killed in the fighting ticked up to at least 22.

"This attack was a campaign of pure cruelty — not just hate, but pure cruelty — against the Jewish people," Biden told Jewish leaders gathered at the White House.

Beyond the 22 known to have been killed, the State Department said at least 17 more Americans remain unaccounted for in a war that has already claimed more than 2,200 lives on both sides. A "handful" of U.S. citizens are among the estimated 150 hostages captured by Hamas militants during their shocking weekend assault on Israel, White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday.

Signs of U.S. support for Israel were seen across the administration, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveling there for meetings, Biden denouncing antisemitism in America and the U.S. military moving a second aircraft carrier toward the Mediterranean Sea as part of efforts to prevent the war from spilling over into a more dangerous regional conflict.

Kirby said the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and its ships would be an "available asset" if necessary. The USS Gerald R. Ford, the Navy's most advanced aircraft carrier, and its strike group have already arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The attack has raised questions about the role of Iran, the main sponsor of Hamas, and whether it was directly involved in the operation. But the U.S. has collected information that suggests senior Iranian government officials were caught off guard by the multipronged assault, according to a U.S. official who wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. That piece of intelligence has informed White House officials publicly asserting that it has not yet seen evidence of direct involvement by Iranians in the planning or execution of the Hamas attack.

"We haven't seen anything that tells they have specifically cut checks to support this set of attacks, or that they were involved in the training. And obviously, this required quite a bit of training by these terrorists," Kirby said, though he added that the U.S. will continue to look at the intelligence "and see if that leads us to different conclusion."

Biden at the roundtable with Jewish leaders suggested the deployment of U.S. military ships was a not-so-subtle message to Iran and other actors in the region. "We made it clear to the Iranians: Be careful."

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joined with a top political rival to create a war-time Cabinet, establishing a degree of unity as the government there faces public pressure to topple Hamas. Israel continued destructive airstrikes in Gaza, where a potential ground offensive would likely result in a large number of casualties on both sides of the conflict.

With many airlines suspending commercial flights in and out of Israel because of the ongoing rocket and missile exchanges, Kirby said the United States was exploring "a range of other options" to assist Americans who want to leave, appearing to leave open the possibility of a U.S.-assisted evacuation.

Kirby said the administration was still in talks with Israel and Egypt to try to arrange safe passage for Gaza's civilians. "These people are victims, too," he said. "They didn't ask Hamas to do this."

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday morning, Biden sought to connect the Hamas attacks directly to decades of antisemitism and violence endured by Jews around the world.

"This attack has brought to the surface the painful memories and scars left by a millennium of anti-semitism and genocide against the Jewish people," Biden said. "We have to be crystal clear: There is no justification for terrorism, no excuse and the type of terrorism that was exhibited here is just beyond the pale, beyond the pale."

Biden said he and Vice President Kamala Harris spoke by phone on Wednesday with Netanyahu. It was at least the fourth call between Biden and Netanyahu since Saturday's attack.

"The United States has Israel's back and we're going to be working on this through the day and beyond,"

Biden said.

Later in the day, while addressing Jewish leaders at the White House, Biden said he had tasked homeland security and law enforcement leaders "to work intensively with our Jewish community partners."

"We're also going to condemn and combat antisemitism at every single turn, every turn," Biden said. "The past few days have been a solemn reminder that hate never goes away." It can go underground, he said, but it doesn't go away.

Shadowy snitch takes starring role in bribery trial of veteran DEA agents

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In his two decades as a professional drug snitch, Jorge Hernández was a master of the double cross.

He lied to his handlers, threatened to unmask fellow informants and even admitted killing three people during his days as a cocaine runner. But time and again, he leveraged his extensive contacts in the narco-trafficking underworld to stay alive, avoid the inside of a jail cell and keep making money.

Now Hernández has turned the tables again, this time on the same U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration that launched his lucrative career as the go-to fixer for traffickers, prosecutors and defense attorneys alike. And he's delivered his most explosive trophy yet: two veteran DEA agents charged in a \$73,000 bribery conspiracy involving leaked information about ongoing drug investigations.

Hernández, a beefy, bald-headed figure known by the Spanish nickname *Boliche* — bowling ball — made secret recordings for the FBI and is expected to play a key role this month in the Manhattan federal court trial of former DEA supervisors Manny Recio and John Costanzo Jr. It's a case that threatens to expose the seamy underbelly of the nation's premier narcotics law enforcement agency, which has seen at least 18 agents charged or convicted of crimes since 2015, many for being too cozy with informants.

Not on trial but in the middle of it all is a fiercely competitive circle of high-priced Miami defense attorneys flippantly referred to as the "white powder bar." Their stock in trade is not so much the finer points of law but in scrambling to sign up kingpin clients before the ink is dry on their indictments, negotiating surrender deals and converting them into government cooperators.

In such a world, informants like Hernández thrive by trading in the currency of information — who will be charged and when, said Steven Dudley, co-founder of Insight Crime, a research center focused on Latin America.

"He's a linchpin in a corrupt system that is about making cases and making money," Dudley said.

"When cases are made everyone wins," he added. "The narcos get lower sentences and get to keep some proceeds, the prosecutors and agents get promotions, and the lawyers rake in the money. The only loser is Lady Justice."

The case is just the latest embarrassment for the DEA, following the arrest of a standout agent in Colombia who laundered money for the cartels and spent lavishly on Tiffany jewels and VIP travel, and another accused of accepting \$250,000 in bribes to protect the Mafia in Buffalo, New York.

Hernández's central role in the latest case emerged from an Associated Press review of hundreds of court records, some of which have never been revealed publicly, and interviews with 12 current and former law enforcement officials familiar with his career as a confidential informant, including several who spoke on the condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the matter.

Lawyers for Recio and Costanzo have raised concerns in court papers about Hernández's criminal history, particularly the three people he admitted to killing prior to becoming an informant. But prosecutors insist he is reliable, pointing to bank records and wiretapped calls they say corroborate his testimony.

"Just because someone has committed crimes doesn't mean that we immediately discount everything they say," Assistant U.S. Attorney Sheb Swett told a judge earlier this year.

Neither the DEA nor the Justice Department responded to requests for comment. Hernández hung up when contacted by the AP.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 65 of 74

"Call the Justice Department's customer service line," he later texted. "They have all the information you desire."

Court records show the 56-year old Hernández began his criminal climb in the 1990s dispatching boatloads of cocaine for the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia, a right-wing group that later morphed into one of the world's largest drug-trafficking organizations.

In 2000, after a warlord placed a hit on him, he fled to neighboring Venezuela, where he was arrested. After paying bribes to secure his release, he approached the DEA about becoming an informant.

By all accounts, Hernández proved an adept casemaker, developing a reputation for delivering results but also aggressive behavior toward friends and foes alike.

Agents grew so reliant on Hernández's network of more than 100 informants across Latin America and the Caribbean that they set him up with a phone and desk at the Tampa headquarters of Operation Panama Express, a federal anti-narcotics task force combining resources from the FBI, DEA, U.S. Coast Guard and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

However, people familiar with Hernández's past say his luck ran out in 2008 when he was recorded threatening to expose federal informants as snitches unless they paid him to keep quiet. Court records show the DEA abruptly terminated his cooperation agreement and he returned to Venezuela.

But when one door closed, another opened. Despite being blackballed as an informant, Hernández continued to keep in close contact with the DEA and in 2016 met Costanzo, who was supervising agents in Miami investigating Colombian businessman Alex Saab, a suspected bag man for Venezuela's socialist leader, Nicolas Maduro. At some point, Hernández was also receiving money transfers on Saab's behalf from offshore accounts and banished from the case, people close to the probe said.

Shortly after, Hernández started cooperating with the FBI in New York, which had its own investigation into Saab. This time his payout wasn't in cash — it was in seeking to avoid his own criminal exposure.

In 2017, Hernández connected Saab with Bruce Bagley, a University of Miami expert on narcotics trafficking. At Hernández's urging, Bagley received \$3 million from accounts controlled by Saab in the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland. He then transferred the money to Hernández, prosecutors have said, believing it would be forwarded to Saab's U.S. attorneys, who were secretly negotiating a deal for Saab to turn on Maduro.

But the professor admitted keeping a 10% commission and in 2021 was sentenced to six months in prison for money laundering.

People familiar with the case told the AP that Hernández was also charged under seal in the same money laundering scheme, and that may have pushed him to keep cooperating.

Court papers show that in early 2019, at the FBI's direction, Hernández recorded conversations with Recio as well as Miami attorney Luis Guerra in which they discussed recruiting targets of DEA investigations as clients using confidential information allegedly furnished by Costanzo. Recio had recently retired from DEA and was working as a private investigator with Guerra and another attorney, David Macey.

Recio is accused in the indictment of speaking hundreds of times on a burner phone he purchased for Costanzo to allegedly coordinate unlawful searches of criminal databases. In exchange, Recio allegedly directed purchases to Costanzo totaling \$73,000, including plane tickets and a down payment on a condo. Prosecutors did not allege in the indictment that the lawyers were aware of those gifts but a court filing this month said they "belonged to the conspiracy."

Also under scrutiny were conversations between Recio and Costanzo discussing confidential DEA plans in 2019 to arrest another potential client. César Peralta was a high-level trafficker in the Dominican Republic who was able to elude capture for more than four months despite a massive search involving 700 law enforcement officials, according to court documents and people familiar with the case.

The task of reaching out to drug suspects to steer them to the attorneys of choice was assigned to Hernández, who was allegedly promised a generous cut of any legal fees.

"Don't tell anybody where that information comes from," Guerra tells Hernández in one recorded conversation, according to court documents and the people familiar with the case. "Do it the way you always do it, brother. Using your magic."

Court filings in the case said agents also allegedly tried to gain favor with Nicholas Palmeri, a senior DEA official who last year was quietly ousted for improper contacts with attorneys for narcotraffickers, including Macey. In April 2019, Macey allegedly spent nearly \$2,000 on tickets for a Yankees-Red Sox game and dinner in Manhattan for Costanzo, Palmeri and himself.

"We about to own Mexico. Nic is in," Costanzo texted Recio a few months later, when Palmeri was serving as regional director for the DEA in Mexico and Central America.

Prosecutors declined to say whether any attorneys have been or will be charged. Attorneys for Recio and Costanzo did not respond to requests for comment, nor did Macey and Guerra.

Costanzo, who was suspended by the DEA after being indicted, denied in a 2019 FBI interview that he ever took anything of value. But he acknowledged that he and other agents sometimes tipped off defense attorneys as part of their mission to encourage suspects to turn themselves in and cooperate.

"We've been doing this for years," he said.

As for Hernández, he's still involved in Miami's legal community, running Hernández de Luque Brothers, billed on its website as a "new kind of consulting firm for a changing world."

"An integral part of our services is to work closely with our clients so that they can make the right decisions in selecting the right attorney."

Voting begins in Ohio in the only election this fall to decide abortion rights

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — In-person voting for a November ballot measure over abortion rights began Wednesday in Ohio, the latest state where voters will decide the issue after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a nationwide right to the procedure last year.

Ohio is the only state to put an abortion rights question before voters this fall, making it a testing ground for messaging ahead of the 2024 elections when it's expected to be on the ballot in more states and a major factor in races up and down the ballot.

Election officials throughout the state are generally predicting heavier-than-normal turnout for an off-year vote because of the high-profile campaigning over Issue 1, a constitutional amendment that seeks to enshrine abortion rights.

Mary Weiss was among the voters who entered an early voting center in Toledo during the first day of early in-person voting ahead of Election Day on Nov. 7.

"Women should have total control over their own bodies," said Weiss, who lives in the Toledo suburb of Sylvania. "No one should be making those decisions for us."

Initial early voting numbers won't be available from the secretary of state's office until next week, but absentee ballot requests in Ohio's three most populous counties — home to about a third of the state's total population — have been far greater this year than in Ohio's last off-year election in November 2021.

The voting beginning this week follows a heavy-turnout special election over the summer, when voters defeated an attempt by Republican lawmakers to make it much harder to pass constitutional amendments. Republicans and anti-abortion groups had hoped to pass that measure ahead of the fall vote on abortion rights.

AP VoteCast polling last year found that 59% of Ohio voters say abortion should generally be legal.

Several vote centers visited Wednesday had no lines but a steady trickle of voters. Among them was Jonathan Griffiths from the Dayton suburb of Beavercreek. A Republican, Griffiths said he voted yes on the constitutional amendment to protect abortion rights.

"I'm fairly conservative, but I'm also married and have daughters and granddaughters," he said. "Women's body, women's choice."

Ohio's proposed constitutional amendment would give every person "the right to make and carry out one's own reproductive decisions." The effort comes on the heels of a string of victories for abortion rights supporters around the country who have been winning in both Democratic and heavily Republican

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 67 of 74

states since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade decision, which had legalized abortion nationwide for half a century.

Republican Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and first lady Fran DeWine, who cast votes against Issue 1 in rural Xenia on Wednesday, urged Ohioans to oppose the measure. The governor said it "goes too far for Ohio."

"If we're able to defeat this, then I think we can come together as a state and find a place where a majority of Ohioans can, in fact, agree," he said.

Shari Moore, a retired banker from suburban Toledo who voted against the amendment along with her husband, said it was a decision rooted in their Christian beliefs.

"Abortion is murder," she said. "It's a dangerous thing for Ohio and for the whole country."

Linda Debar, 73, a retired French teacher from Columbus, said she would be voting yes on the amendment "because I believe firmly that it's nobody's business but the family's what decisions you make with women's health care. No. Keep the government, politicians out of it."

Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights, the campaign promoting the amendment, emphasizes the measure would prevent Ohio's ban on most abortions after fetal cardiac activity is detected from taking effect. A judge's order has placed that 2019 law on hold, but the Ohio Supreme Court, which has a Republican majority, is considering whether to lift that stay.

Supporters' ads say abortion-related decisions should be kept between a woman and her family, doctor and faith leaders, not regulated by government.

The opposition campaign, Protect Women Ohio, has zeroed in on questions raised by Issue 1's broad wording, citing legal theories — as yet, untested — that passing the amendment would jeopardize Ohio's parental consent requirements for minors receiving abortions and other types of medical care.

Opponents also have campaigned heavily on the idea that the amendment would allow abortions to happen in the final stages of pregnancy, despite such procedures being rare and generally involving life-threatening situations. Misinformation has also swirled around the campaign.

Sam Zern, a regional field organizer for Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights and a graduate student at Kent State University, said the organization has seen "an inspiring amount of energy on college campuses" around the state.

Protect Women Ohio spokesperson Amy Natoce said the group has seen strong turnout at its events, including a March for Life last Friday at the state capital. She said it's placing "a huge emphasis on people getting out and banking their vote before Nov. 7."

A second question on Ohio's November ballot asks whether Ohioans want to legalize recreational marijuana. If passed, it would make Ohio the 24th state to legalize cannabis for adult use.

Federal Reserve minutes: Officials signal cautious approach to rates amid heightened uncertainty

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials regarded the U.S. economy's outlook as particularly uncertain last month, according to minutes released Wednesday, and said they would "proceed carefully" in deciding whether to further raise their benchmark interest rate.

Such cautious views are generally seen as evidence that the Fed isn't necessarily inclined to raise rates in the near future. Their next meeting is in three weeks.

Economic data from the past several months "generally suggested that inflation was slowing," the minutes of the Sept. 19-20 meeting said. The policymakers added that further evidence of declining inflation was needed to be sure it would slow to the Fed's 2% target.

Several of the 19 policymakers said that with the Fed's key rate "likely at or near its peak, the focus" of their policy decisions should "shift from how high to raise the policy rate to how long" to keep it at economically restrictive levels.

And the officials generally acknowledged that the risks to Fed's policies were becoming more balanced between raising rates too high and hurting the economy and not raising them enough to curb inflation. For

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 68 of 74

most of the past two years, the Fed had said the risks were heavily tilted toward not raising rates enough.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the economy, the Fed left its key short-term rate unchanged at 5.4% at its September meeting, the highest level in 22 years, after 11 rates hikes over the previous 18 months.

The officials noted several sources of uncertainty. They include the strike by the United Auto Workers union against Detroit automakers; higher oil and gas prices; concern that an economically weaker China would slow growth in the United States; and the threat of an extended U.S. government shutdown. Since the September meeting, two of those threats have abated: Oil and gas prices have dropped. And a government shutdown has been avoided, at least until mid-November.

The minutes arrive in a week in which several Fed officials have suggested that a jump in longer-term bond rates could help cool the economy and inflation in the coming months. As a result, the Fed may be able to avoid a rate hike at its next two-day meeting, which ends Nov. 1. Futures markets prices show few investors expect a rate increase at that meeting or at the next one in December.

Overall inflation, as measured year over year, has dropped from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.7% in August. The latest data on consumer price changes will be released Thursday, and economists expect it to show that annual inflation ticked down in September to 3.6%.

On Wednesday, Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's governing board, suggested that higher long-term bond rates, by making many loans costlier for consumers and businesses, are doing "some of the work for us" in fighting inflation. Waller also underscored the Fed's cautious approach in his remarks in Park City, Utah, during a question-and-answer session.

"We're in this position where we can kind of watch and see what happens," Waller said.

But he also expressed more optimism about inflation than he has in the past, noting that the past three months of price changes, according to the Fed's preferred measure, have been "very good."

"If this continues," Waller said, "we're pretty much back to our target."

At their meeting last month, Fed officials issued an optimistic set of projections that envisioned inflation falling over the next two years, with only a small increase in unemployment and modest economic growth. The forecast raised the prospect of a "soft landing" in which inflation would slow to the Fed's 2% target without causing a deep recession.

Yet the projections also showed that the policymakers expected to keep their benchmark rate elevated well into 2024 to keep the economy from sending inflation up again. They showed that Fed officials expected to cut rates only twice next year. Previously, they had penciled in four rate cuts.

"We're fairly close, we think, to where we need to get," Chair Jerome Powell said at a news conference after the September meeting. "A soft landing is a primary objective. ... That's what we've been trying to achieve."

The Dolphins and the 49ers are off to record-threatening offensive starts

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Kyle Shanahan and Mike McDaniel spent years together scheming ways to exploit NFL defenses.

Now split apart with McDaniel in his second season coaching Miami and Shanahan in Year 7 in San Francisco, the two offensive coaches have their teams threatening records with their early season domination.

The 49ers and Dolphins rank 1-2 in several key offensive categories, from scoring to yards per play to success rate to passer rating to first downs.

Miami is the second team in NFL history to average at least 500 yards of offense a game through five games, with its 513.6 beating out the previous record of 505.4 set by the Rams in 2000.

The Dolphins are scoring 36.2 points per game for the best total at this point of the season in eight years, as defenses have had no answer for the speed of players like Tyreek Hill, DeVon Achane, Jaylen Waddle or Raheem Mostert.

Miami has seven of the nine fastest speeds for ball carriers tracked by NFL NextGen stats, led by Hill's 22.01 mph on a 64-yard catch last week. Hill also reached a speed of 20.95 mph on a 69-yard TD against

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 69 of 74

the Giants last week that gave him five TDs on the season and tied him with Lance Alworth for fifth place with his 19th career TD of at least 60 yards.

Achane has been on a record-setting pace of his own, with his seven TDs in his first four games ranking second in NFL history to Bill Paschal's eight in 1943.

Achane has rushed for 100 yards and a TD in three straight games, tied for the second-longest streak ever for a rookie since the merger behind Franco Harris' six-game streak in 1972. He is averaging 12.1 yards per carry on the season.

Achane will have to wait a bit to have a chance to tie Harris' streak after getting placed on injured reserve Wednesday with a knee injury.

Mostert leads the NFL with eight TDs, making the Dolphins the second team ever with three players with at least five TDs from scrimmage in the first five games of a season. New England did it in 2011 with Rob Gronkowski, Wes Welker and BenJarvus Green-Ellis.

The Niners have been more dominant overall, becoming the ninth team in the Super Bowl era to start 5-0 with a point differential of plus-99 or better. Six of the previous eight teams to do it made the Super Bowl, with Washington (1991), the Rams (1999) and Saints (2009) winning it all.

San Francisco is the sixth team to score at least 30 points in each of the first five games of a season and its eight-game regular-season streak of scoring at least 30 points ranks fifth-longest ever.

Quarterback Brock Purdy and running back Christian McCaffrey have fueled this run, with Purdy throwing a career-high four TD passes and McCaffrey running for a score in a 42-10 win over Dallas.

Purdy has won all 10 of his regular-season starts, with his 121.1 rating in those starts the best ever through 10 starts. He has completed 70.4% of his passes — second best to Chad Pennington's 70.8% — through 10 starts. Only Ben Roethlisberger has won more consecutive starts (15) to begin his career.

McCaffrey has TDs in 14 consecutive games in the regular season and playoffs, tied with Emmitt Smith for the fourth-longest streak ever. Only Lenny Moore (17 games), O.J. Simpson (15) and John Riggins (15) have longer streaks.

PITIFUL PATRIOTS

Bill Belichick appears to be set to eclipse the NFL coaching record for losses well before he becomes the winningest coach ever the way things are going for New England early this season.

One week after suffering his most lopsided loss in 498 career regular-season and playoff games as a head coach in a 38-3 defeat to Dallas, Belichick took his most lopsided shutout loss ever in a 34-0 defeat to New Orleans.

This marked just the 13th time in the Super Bowl era that a team lost back-to-back games by that many points, with Miami the last to do it in 2019.

The Patriots have allowed 69 consecutive points since making a field goal to tie Dallas at 3 early in that Week 4 game. That's two points shy of the most consecutive points allowed in franchise history, set in the team's inaugural season in 1960 when the Patriots gave up 71 straight points over three games.

The back-to-back losses leave Belichick with a career record of 330-169-0 in the regular season and playoffs. He is 17 shy of tying Don Shula's record for wins and nine shy of tying Tom Landry's record for losses.

MAGNIFICENT MAHOMES

With last week's win over Minnesota, Patrick Mahomes has beaten every team in the NFL in the regular season or playoffs other than his own Kansas City Chiefs, becoming the 10th player to beat 31 teams. Only Brett Favre, Peyton Manning, Drew Brees and Tom Brady have wins over all 32 teams.

Mahomes gets to play his favorite opponent this week when he tries to improve to 12-0 all-time against Denver. The only quarterback since at least 1950 who is undefeated against an opponent with more starts than Mahomes has against the Broncos is Otto Graham, who went 12-0 in his career against the Cardinals.

In all, Kansas City has won 15 straight games against Denver, which is tied for the fourth-longest regular-season winning streak against an opponent ever. Miami won 20 straight vs. Buffalo in the 1970s, San Francisco won 17 in a row against the Rams in the 1990s and Washington won 16 straight vs. Detroit from 1968-97.

UNDER PRESSURE

Sam Howell and Daniel Jones are spending far too much time on their backs this season.

Howell has been sacked an NFL-worst 29 times for Washington after taking five more last week, while Jones is only one behind at 28 for the Giants after being sacked six times against Miami.

Both are just behind the record-setting pace of David Carr. As a rookie on the expansion Texans in 2002, Carr was sacked 31 times in the first five games on the way to an NFL-record 76 for the season.

The only other time since the merger that a QB was sacked more in the first five games than Howell and Jones came in 2005 when Carr was sacked 30 times for Houston.

Exxon Mobil doubles down on fossil fuels with \$59.5 billion deal for Pioneer Natural as prices surge

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Exxon Mobil is buying Pioneer Natural Resources in an all-stock deal valued at \$59.5 billion, its largest buyout since acquiring Mobil two decades ago, creating a colossal fracking operator in West Texas.

Including debt, Exxon is committing about \$64.5 billion to the acquisition, leaving no doubt of the Texas energy company's commitment to fossil fuels as energy prices surge.

Pioneer shareholders will receive 2.32 shares of Exxon for each Pioneer share they own.

"I think fossil fuels, as the world looks to transition and find lower sources of affordable energy with lower emissions, fossil fuels oil and gas are going to continue to play a role over time," Exxon Mobil CEO Darren Woods said during an interview with CNBC. "That may diminish with time. The rate of that is, I think, not very clear at this stage. But it will be around for a long time."

Woods explained that Exxon and Pioneer will be able to use their combined capabilities to drive down emissions and produce lower carbon intensity oil and gas.

Exxon purchased XTO Energy in 2009 for approximately \$36 billion. In the late 1990s, the merger between Exxon and Mobil was valued around \$80 billion.

The deal with Pioneer Natural vastly expands Exxon's presence in the Permian Basin, a massive oilfield that straddles the border between Texas and New Mexico. Drilling the Permian accounted for 18% of all U.S. natural gas production last year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Pioneer's more than 850,000 net acres in the Midland Basin will be combined with Exxon's 570,000 net acres in the Delaware and Midland Basin, nearly contiguous fields that will allow the combined company to trim costs.

Woods said in prepared remarks that the combined company will have an estimated Permian resource of 16 billion oil equivalent barrels, with 15 to 20 years of remaining inventory.

Natural gas rigs in operation have declined over 26% in the U.S. since the start of the year, according to government data, largely due to the rising costs for drilling materials and labor over the past two years.

"Their tier-one acreage is highly contiguous, allowing for greater opportunities to deploy our technologies, delivering operating and capital efficiency as well as significantly increasing production," Woods said of Pioneer in a statement.

Once the deal closes, Exxon Permian production volume will more than double to 1.3 million barrels of oil equivalent per day, based on 2023 volumes. It's expected to climb to about 2 million barrels of oil equivalent per day in 2027.

Woods said that by 2027, about 60% of the combined company's production will come from low-cost, high-growth strategic assets, including the Permian, Guyana, Brazil, and LNG, with total production of more than 5 million oil equivalent barrels per day.

"The combination of ExxonMobil and Pioneer creates a diversified energy company with the largest footprint of high-return wells in the Permian Basin," Pioneer CEO Scott Sheffield said in a prepared statement.

Citi's Alastair Syme wrote that the transaction could provide multiple benefits to Exxon.

"Across the industry, the logic of consolidation in the highly fragmented Permian shale remains compelling with significant gains to be achieved from economies of scale by minimizing facilities spend, optimizing

drilling and reducing" general spending, Syme wrote.

Exxon is flush with cash. The company posted unprecedented profits last year of \$55.7 billion, breezing past its previous record of \$45.22 billion in 2008 when oil prices hit record highs.

Exxon Mobil Corp. has been using some of that cash on acquisitions. In July the company announced that it was buying pipeline operator Denbury in an all-stock deal valued at \$4.9 billion.

Pioneer Natural has been making similar maneuvers. In 2020 the company said it was buying Parsley Energy in an all-stock deal valued at approximately \$4.5 billion. It then purchased DoublePoint Energy in a cash-and-stock deal worth about \$6.4 billion in 2021.

The boards of both companies have approved the transaction, which is expected to close in the first half of next year. It still needs approval from Pioneer shareholders.

Shares of Exxon fell more than 4% in afternoon trading on Wednesday.

Lidia dissipates after killing 1 person, injuring 2 near Mexico's Puerto Vallarta resort

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Lidia dissipated Wednesday after hitting land as a Category 4 hurricane near the resort of Puerto Vallarta, where one person was killed by a falling tree and two others injured

The hurricane knocked over trees and blew roofs off houses with winds as high as 140 mph (220 kph) before moving inland.

Laura Velázquez, the head of Mexico's civil defense system, said one person died on the northern outskirts of Puerto Vallarta after being hit by a falling tree, and two others were injured elsewhere in the area.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Tuesday that Lidia's winds were down to 35 mph as it dissipated about 145 miles (235 kilometers) north-northeast of the city of Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city and the capital of the western state of Jalisco.

Lidia made landfall on a sparsely populated peninsula and then moved inland south of Puerto Vallarta, still with winds of 105 mph (165 kph).

Victor Hugo Romo, the head of the Jalisco state civil defense office, said several homes around the landfall area had their roofs blown off, and the Puerto Vallarta city government said about a dozen trees had been knocked down there.

Trees were also downed in the neighboring state of Nayarit.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Lidia's eye appeared to have reached land near Las Penitas, near Cabo Corrientes, a sparsely populated peninsula.

Lidia remained a powerful hurricane even after moving over land, with some highways briefly blocked in the region.

The state had 23 shelters open, he said. The Puerto Vallarta city government said a few dozen people had gone to shelters there.

In 2015, Hurricane Patricia, a Category 5 hurricane, also made landfall on the same sparsely-populated stretch of coastline between the resort of Puerto Vallarta and the major port of Manzanillo.

Local authorities canceled classes in communities around the coast. The expected impact came one day after Tropical Storm Max hit the southern Pacific coast, hundreds of miles away, and then dissipated. Rains from Max washed out part of a coastal highway in the southern state of Guerrero.

Scientists pry a secret from the 'Mona Lisa' about how Leonardo painted the masterpiece

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The "Mona Lisa" has given up another secret.

Using X-rays to peer into the chemical structure of a tiny speck of the celebrated work of art, scientists have gained new insight into the techniques that Leonardo da Vinci used to paint his groundbreaking portrait of the woman with the exquisitely enigmatic smile.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 72 of 74

The research, published Wednesday in the Journal of the American Chemical Society, suggests that the famously curious, learned and inventive Italian Renaissance master may have been in a particularly experimental mood when he set to work on the "Mona Lisa" early in the 16th century.

The oil-paint recipe that Leonardo used as his base layer to prepare the panel of poplar wood appears to have been different for the "Mona Lisa," with its own distinctive chemical signature, the team of scientists and art historians in France and Britain discovered.

"He was someone who loved to experiment, and each of his paintings is completely different technically," said Victor Gonzalez, the study's lead author and a chemist at France's top research body, the CNRS. Gonzalez has studied the chemical compositions of dozens of works by Leonardo, Rembrandt and other artists.

"In this case, it's interesting to see that indeed there is a specific technique for the ground layer of 'Mona Lisa,'" he said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Specifically, the researchers found a rare compound, plumbonacrite, in Leonardo's first layer of paint. The discovery, Gonzalez said, confirmed for the first time what art historians had previously only hypothesized: that Leonardo most likely used lead oxide powder to thicken and help dry his paint as he began working on the portrait that now stares out from behind protective glass in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Carmen Bambach, a specialist in Italian art and curator at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, who was not involved in the study, called the research "very exciting" and said any scientifically proven new insights into Leonardo's painting techniques are "extremely important news for the art world and our larger global society."

Finding plumbonacrite in the "Mona Lisa" attests "to Leonardo's spirit of passionate and constant experimentation as a painter – it is what renders him timeless and modern," Bambach said by email.

The paint fragment from the base layer of the "Mona Lisa" that was analyzed was barely visible to the naked eye, no larger than the diameter of a human hair, and came from the top right-hand edge of the painting.

The scientists peered into its atomic structure using X-rays in a synchrotron, a large machine that accelerates particles to almost the speed of light. That allowed them to unravel the speck's chemical make-up. Plumbonacrite is a byproduct of lead oxide, allowing the researchers to say with more certainty that Leonardo likely used the powder in his paint recipe.

"Plumbonacrite is really a fingerprint of his recipe," Gonzalez said. "It's the first time we can actually chemically confirm it."

After Leonardo, Dutch master Rembrandt may have used a similar recipe when he was painting in the 17th century; Gonzalez and other researchers have previously found plumbonacrite in his work, too.

"It tells us also that those recipes were passed on for centuries," Gonzalez said. "It was a very good recipe."

Leonardo is thought to have dissolved lead oxide powder, which has an orange color, in linseed or walnut oil by heating the mixture to make a thicker, faster-drying paste.

"What you will obtain is an oil that has a very nice golden color," Gonzalez said. "It flows more like honey."

But the "Mona Lisa" — said by the Louvre to be a portrait of Lisa Gherardini, the wife of a Florentine silk merchant — and other works by Leonardo still have other secrets to tell.

"There are plenty, plenty more things to discover, for sure. We are barely scratching the surface," Gonzalez said. "What we are saying is just a little brick more in the knowledge."

Salman Rushdie was stabbed onstage last year. He's releasing a memoir about the attack

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Salman Rushdie has a memoir coming out about the horrifying attack that left him blind in his right eye and with a damaged left hand. "Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder" will be published April 16.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 73 of 74

"This was a necessary book for me to write: a way to take charge of what happened, and to answer violence with art," Rushdie said in a statement released Wednesday by Penguin Random House.

Last August, Rushdie was stabbed repeatedly in the neck and abdomen by a man who rushed the stage as the author was about to give a lecture in western New York. The attacker, Hadi Matar, has pleaded not guilty to charges of assault and attempted murder.

For some time after Iran's Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a 1989 fatwa calling for Rushdie's death over alleged blasphemy in his novel "The Satanic Verses," the writer lived in isolation and with round-the-clock security. But for years since, he had moved about with few restrictions, until the stabbing at the Chautauqua Institution.

The 256-page "Knife" will be published in the U.S. by Random House, the Penguin Random House imprint that earlier this year released his novel "Victory City," completed before the attack. His other works include the Booker Prize-winning "Midnight's Children," "Shame" and "The Moor's Last Sigh." Rushdie is also a prominent advocate for free expression and a former president of PEN America.

"'Knife' is a searing book, and a reminder of the power of words to make sense of the unthinkable," Penguin Random House CEO Nihar Malaviya said in a statement. "We are honored to publish it, and amazed at Salman's determination to tell his story, and to return to the work he loves."

Rushdie, 76, did speak with The New Yorker about his ordeal, telling interviewer David Remnick for a February issue that he had worked hard to avoid "recrimination and bitterness" and was determined to "look forward and not backwards."

He had also said that he was struggling to write fiction, as he did in the years immediately following the fatwa, and that he might instead write a memoir. Rushdie wrote at length, and in the third person, about the fatwa in his 2012 memoir "Joseph Anton."

"This doesn't feel third-person-ish to me," Rushdie said of the 2022 attack in the magazine interview. "I think when somebody sticks a knife into you, that's a first-person story. That's an 'I' story."

Today in History: October 12, "Gang of Four" arrested in China

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Oct. 12, the 285th day of 2023. There are 80 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 12, 1976, it was announced in China that Hua Guofeng had been named to succeed the late Mao Zedong as chairman of the Communist Party, and that Mao's widow and three others, known as the "Gang of Four," had been arrested.

On this date:

In 1492 (according to the Old Style calendar), Christopher Columbus' expedition arrived in the present-day Bahamas.

In 1792, the first recorded U.S. celebration of Columbus Day was held to mark the tricentennial of Christopher Columbus' landing.

In 1870, General Robert E. Lee died in Lexington, Virginia, at age 63.

In 1933, bank robber John Dillinger escaped from a jail in Allen County, Ohio, with the help of his gang, who killed the sheriff, Jess Sarber.

In 1971, the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" opened at the Mark Hellinger Theatre on Broadway.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon nominated House minority leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan to succeed Spiro T. Agnew as vice president.

In 1984, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher escaped an attempt on her life when an Irish Republican Army bomb exploded at a hotel in Brighton, England, killing five people.

In 1986, the superpower meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, ended in stalemate, with President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev unable to agree on arms control or a date for a full-fledged summit in the United States.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 110 ~ 74 of 74

In 2000, 17 sailors were killed in a suicide bomb attack on the destroyer USS Cole in Yemen.

In 2002, bombs blamed on al-Qaida-linked militants destroyed a nightclub on the Indonesian island of Bali, killing 202 people, including 88 Australians and seven Americans.

In 2007, former Vice President Al Gore and the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change won the Nobel Peace Prize for sounding the alarm over global warming.

In 2011, a Nigerian al-Qaida operative pleaded guilty to trying to bring down a jetliner with a bomb in his underwear; Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (OO'-mahr fah-ROOK' ahb-DOOL'-moo-TAH'-lahb) defiantly told a federal judge in Detroit that he had acted in retaliation for the killing of Muslims worldwide.

In 2012, the European Union won the Nobel Peace Prize for fostering peace on a continent long ravaged by war.

In 2017, the Trump administration said it would immediately halt payments to insurers under the Obama-era health care law.

In 2018, Roelof "Pik" Boetha, the last foreign minister of South Africa's apartheid era, died at age 86.

In 2021, the NBA's Brooklyn Nets said Kyrie Irving could not play or practice with them until he could be a full participant; New York City required professional athletes to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to play or practice in public venues.

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Jake Garn, R-Utah, is 91. Singer Sam Moore (formerly of Sam and Dave) is 88. Broadcast journalist Chris Wallace is 76. Actor-singer Susan Anton is 73. Pop/rock singer/songwriter Jane Siberry is 68. Actor Hiroyuki Sanada is 63. Actor Carlos Bernard is 61. Jazz musician Chris Botti (BOH'-tee) is 61. R&B singer Claude McKnight (Take 6) is 61. Rock singer Bob Schneider is 58. Actor Hugh Jackman is 55. R&B singer Garfield Bright (Shai) is 54. Country musician Martie Maguire (Courtyard Hounds, The Chicks) is 54. Actor Kirk Cameron is 53. Olympic gold medal skier Bode Miller is 46. Rock singer Jordan Pundik (New Found Glory) is 44. Actor Brian J. Smith is 42. Actor Tyler Blackburn is 37. Actor Marcus T. Paulk is 37. Actor Ito Aghayere is 36. Actor Josh Hutcherson is 31.