

# Groton Daily Independent

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**Thursday, Oct. 19**  
Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, cauliflower, apricots, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Muffins.  
School Lunch: Taco salad.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA (final day to pack LWR projects), potluck, 1:30 p.m.  
First Round of Football Playoffs: Groton Area at Elk Point/Jefferson, 6 p.m.

**Friday, Oct. 20**  
Senior Menu: Scalloped chicken, carrots/broccoli medley, pineapple tidbits, Gingerbread with topping, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Bagel bites.  
School Lunch: Mac and cheese, cooked carrots.  
End of First Quarter  
Volleyball at Redfield (C/7th at 5 p.m., JV/8th at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow)

## Saturday, Oct. 21

Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.  
State Cross Country Meet at Yankton Trail Park, Sioux Falls  
Robotics at Douglas High School

## Sunday, Oct. 22

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school singing in church, 10:30 a.m.  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship/Confirmation, 10:30 a.m.; No Sunday school; Choir, 7 p.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

**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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## The Bulletin by Newsweek

### World in Brief

The Las Vegas Aces team completed a 70-69 victory over the New York Liberty on Wednesday night to secure their second consecutive WNBA title.

The U.S. sent its first deportation flight to Venezuela with 127 nationals, ending a four-year suspension of returning migrants as the U.S. struggles with record border crossings. The administration said it would lift some sanctions against Venezuela in the energy sector.

Oscar-nominated actor Burt Young, known for playing Paulie in six of Sylvester Stallone's Rocky movies, has died at 83 in Los Angeles.

Russia has detained Russian-American journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, who works for publicly funded U.S. broadcaster Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, after she allegedly failed to register as a "foreign agent."

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Kerch Strait Bridge that connects Russia with annexed Crimea has become a thorn in the side of Moscow, having been twice been struck by Kyiv's forces, Britain's defense ministry said, calling it a "significant security burden requiring multi-domain protection, including the use of air defense systems and crews who would otherwise be deployed elsewhere..."

### What to Watch in the Day Ahead

The weekly initial and continuing jobless claims report for week ending October 14 is due at 8:30 a.m. ET. Philadelphia Fed manufacturing survey, existing home sales and U.S. leading economic indicators are also on the economic calendar.

AT&T, Blackstone and Philip Morris are among the major companies set to report their third-quarter earnings reports..

### TALKING POINTS

"You changed the course of our lives, and you turned them upside down. You are a killer," Natalee Holloway's mother, Beth Holloway, standing a few feet away from Joran van der Sloot after he revealed he murdered her daughter—ending a nearly two-decade mystery about her disappearance case.

"The fundraising email he put out, accusing Republicans (of) working with certain Democrats when he had worked with every Democrat and then the crazy eights worked with him. That is infuriating. Every single Democrat with the crazy eights who are led by Gaetz put us in this place. And then he was fundraising last night off of this? Going after Republicans that would work with anything with Democrats when he did all this to us? I know that infuriates a lot of members about him," Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy pointing the blame at Rep. Matt Gaetz for Rep. Jim Jordan's failure to secure the votes a second time to become House speaker.

"[The supply of ATACMS] of course, causes harm, and it poses an additional threat. We will, of course, be able to repel these attacks...They are a threat, it goes without saying. But most importantly, it is fundamentally unable to change the situation on the line of contact at all. Impossible. That's for sure. There is nothing good for Ukraine in this sense either—it simply prolongs the agony. The mistake of a larger, so far invisible nature... is that the United States is more and more personally drawn into this conflict," Russian President Vladimir Putin admitting U.S.-made Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) pose a threat to Russia in the ongoing war in Ukraine.

China has expressed "deep disappointment" over the U.S. veto on a Security Council resolution calling for a humanitarian pause in the hostilities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak met Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Israel on Thursday, where the pair stressed an "imperative need to avoid further escalation of violence in the region."

A U.S. Marine has been arrested on suspicion of homicide after a fellow soldier was killed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina on Wednesday night.

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## Service Notice: Marjorie Overacker

Private family services for Marjorie Overacker, 73, of Groton, will be 11:00 a.m., Saturday, October 21st at the United Methodist Church, Groton. Rev. Rob Moorlach will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.

Visitation will be open to the public from 3-7 p.m. at the funeral chapel on Friday. A prayer service will begin at 7:00 p.m.

Marjorie passed away October 17, 2023 at her home after a courageous battle.

## Follow Post Season Football Playoffs of the Groton Area Tigers on **GDILIVE.COM**, sponsored by



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Bierman Farm Services  
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Groton Dairy Queen  
Groton Ford  
Krueger Brothers  
Lori's Pharmacy  
Milbrant Enterprises Inc  
Professional Management Service  
S & S Lumber  
Spanier Harvesting  
The Meathouse, Andover  
Weismantel Agency

**Groton Area  
vs.  
Elk Point/  
Jefferson  
Thursday,  
Oct. 19  
6 p.m.**

## **DANR Accepting Applications for the Volkswagen Electric Vehicle Charging Station Program**

PIERRE, S.D. –The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) is accepting applications for round three of the Volkswagen Electric Vehicle Charging Station Program. The goal of the program is to improve and protect ambient air quality across South Dakota.

The application deadline is February 16, 2024.

Applicants may be reimbursed up to 80 percent for light-duty electric charging stations installed in South Dakota. Stations must be available to the public 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Eligible participants include federal, state, or local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

For more information visit the program website or contact Barb Regynski at 605.773.3151 or [DANRmail@state.sd.us](mailto:DANRmail@state.sd.us).

Approximately \$1.2 million is available for the Volkswagen Electric Vehicle Charging Station Program. The charging station program is part of the Volkswagen Settlement – South Dakota Mitigation Trust fund authorized by the legislature in 2019.

Information about the first two rounds of funding is available on the next page.

## Volkswagen Electric Vehicle Charging Station Program First Two Rounds of Rebates

Applicant	Location	Type	Amount
<b>Round 1 EVCS Rebates</b>			
<b>VW Category 9</b>			
West River Electric Association*	Wall	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
Watertown Municipal Utilities*	Watertown	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
NorthWestern Energy Solutions, Inc	Mitchell	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
NorthWestern Energy Solutions, Inc*	Chamberlain	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
Brookings Municipal Utilities*	Brookings	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
West Central Electric Cooperative*	Murdo	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
Sioux Valley Energy*	Sioux Falls	DCFC/L2	\$58,035
<b>Total for Round 1</b>			<b>\$58,035</b>

\* Withdrew after selected. Funds will be used in a future round.

Applicant	Location	Type	Maximum Rebate Amount
<b>Round 2 EVCS Rebates</b>			
<b>VW Category 9</b>			
City of Vermillion	Vermillion	DCFC	\$37,905
NorthWestern Energy*	Huron	DCFC	\$184,350
NorthWestern Energy*	Yankton	DCFC	\$184,350
NorthWestern Energy*	Aberdeen	DCFC	\$184,350
Oahe Electric Cooperative	Pierre	DCFC	\$120,000
Red E Charging	Brookings	DCFC	\$66,025
Red E Charging	Murdo	DCFC	\$162,850
Red E Charging	Spearfish	DCFC	\$162,850
<b>Total for Round 2</b>			<b>\$549,630</b>

\* Withdrew after selected. Funds will be used in a future round.

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**Mike Nehls has been the voice of Tiger football on GDILIVE.COM for several years. Tina Kosel made this arrangement for Mike to show our appreciation for his work with GDILIVE.COM.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Study group proposes a dozen ideas for long-term care with up to \$9 million cost

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - OCTOBER 18, 2023 6:25 PM

Lawmakers on an interim committee studying long-term care in South Dakota plan to bring 12 proposals to the 2024 legislative session.

The proposals are meant to support the long-term care industry as the state's population ages. Problems in the industry have contributed to the closure of at least 18 nursing homes in South Dakota since 2015.

The committee hopes to incentivize regionalization, expand and increase Medicaid reimbursements for in-home care services, and support more technology use in long term-care facilities, among other recommendations.

Altogether, the price tags on the proposals could add up to an estimate of over \$9 million in the first year of implementation — if all bills pass as drafted.

The group will deliver a report to the legislative Executive Board in November. If approved, the Legislative Research Council will move forward with bill drafts.

The proposals, picked from a list of 22 original recommendations, are:

- Establishing a one-time \$5 million technology grant program.
- Expanding Medicaid reimbursement to palliative care.
- Increasing the personal needs allowance for Medicaid recipients.
- Creating a reimbursement program to incentivize nursing homes mergers.
- Expanding and establishing new reimbursement rates for in-home services.
- Increasing reimbursements for remote patient monitoring services.
- Creating a health care workforce coalition.
- Joining interstate compacts for licensing health care professionals.
- Creating a waiver for long-term care facilities to accept adult day care participants.
- Supporting a feasibility study for a community-based program providing care to Medicaid recipients in urban areas.
- Redefining Medicaid eligibility for adult traumatic brain injury patients.
- Streamlining and updating the Department of Human Services' online portal for long-term care.

While some proposals received a clear majority or unanimous support from committee members Wednesday in Pierre, two were highly contested: the \$5 million technology grant program and the feasibility study for the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, known as PACE.

PACE is a Medicare and Medicaid program that allows patients to get health care while remaining in their home and community, rather than being moved into a long-term care facility.

The program is used in 32 other states, and it can help save the state money by keeping Medicaid recipients out of nursing homes and emergency rooms, said Sen. Sydney Davis, R-Burbank.

However, some committee members, such as Rep. Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, said the program seemed "like a private entity business decision." The group ultimately decided to bring the issue to the Executive Board and Legislature.

"There's no harm in bringing something forward that is innovative, that does offer another model, and that incentivizes people not to enter into long-term care facilities," said Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls. "I think it's a great thing that does no harm to us."

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The technology grant, while noted as a tool to help South Dakotans age in their homes and decrease potential costs on the state, is a "big appropriation," said Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, while opposing the recommendation.

"I want to understand all the priorities before sending this out," he said.

Rehfeldt countered, saying the grant amount could be amended as the bill moves forward in the Legislature.

The three other big-ticket items recommended by the committee include increasing Medicaid recipients' monthly "personal needs allowances," expanding Medicaid to include palliative care, and creating a reimbursement program to incentivize long-term care facility mergers.

Medicaid recipients in South Dakota currently receive \$60 a month for their personal needs allowance, which can be spent on items from hygiene products and haircuts to cell phone bills and care insurance. The amount has not been increased since 2004, said Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls.

North Dakota increased its monthly allowance from \$65 to \$100 this year, Nebraska from \$60 to \$75, and Nevada from \$35 to \$149. Iowa offers \$120; Minnesota, \$121; Montana, \$50; and Wyoming, \$50.

The recommendation by the committee could cost the state anywhere from \$217,256 a year (an increase to \$70 a month) to \$869,025 a year (an increase to \$100 a month). The amount has not been decided yet.

Expanding Medicaid to include palliative care could cost between \$1.23 million to \$3.55 million, assuming 10-25% of Medicaid patients in South Dakota would use the benefits, according to a fiscal note on the recommendation. Palliative care focuses on reducing the pain and suffering of people with serious and often terminal illnesses.

Sen. Bryan Breitling, R-Miller, said the expansion would be more of a cost shift than an actual cost to the state, since more residents receiving palliative care could reduce emergency room and hospital visits.

Under another recommendation, a capital reimbursement plan would incentivize long-term care facility regionalization throughout the state.

Several nursing homes across the state are more than a half-century old, Bartels said. They aren't designed for today's needs and "aren't where you want to put your mom and dad."

The regionalization program could cost the state anywhere from \$480,160 (one merger) to \$9,603,206 (20 mergers) in the first seven years. The program would reimburse capital costs of construction and remodels for up to 30 years.

"It's a real carrot for our nursing homes to merge," Bartels said.

Some lawmakers, including Karr, are skeptical of regionalization.

"We've tried it before and we didn't have any takers," Karr said. "I understand making the carrot bigger to get facilities to merge. But I'm not sure we'll see success. Personally, I believe it should be more organic: let the private sector do what the private sector does."

The legislative Executive Board will meet Nov. 14 and 15 in Pierre.

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

## Report: State court system fields fewer criminal cases

**Some violent crimes increase, but drug crimes decrease**

**BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 18, 2023 4:57 PM**

The number of criminal case filings dropped in South Dakota in fiscal year 2023, continuing a five-year slide in criminal caseloads.

The drop in caseloads appears in the state Unified Judicial System's annual report, released this week. The drop is a contrast from the arrest figures in the state Division of Criminal Investigation's annual "Crime in South Dakota" report from August, but both data sources point to multi-year reductions in drug crimes.

The DCI reported year-over-year increases in arrests for assault, vehicle theft, robbery, weapons violations and kidnapping in 2022. Rape and narcotics violations fell, however, and the increases in 2022 did not push most statewide arrest figures over the five-year highs recorded in 2020.



The just-released state court information is sorted by state fiscal year, which ends on July 1 each year. Overall criminal filings dropped across the board in the court data. The long-term decrease in drug arrests is reflected in the criminal filing figures, as drug and DUI cases make up a larger overall share of the state's criminal caseload.

Prosecutors filed:

223 fewer felonies in FY 2023, compared to 2019.

2,582 fewer class 1 misdemeanors (e.g. DUI, simple assault).

9,874 fewer class 2 misdemeanors (e.g. careless driving).

1,115 fewer juvenile delinquencies.

Only once since 2019 have adult felonies and cases against juveniles fallen to a lower level than they did at the end of July. That was in 2021, when felonies dropped to 11,596 and juvenile cases dropped to 2,537.

The UJS report also notes that the combined number of court trials – trials held before a judge – and jury trials has hit its lowest point in five years. Jury trials in 2023 fell to 177, which is 112 fewer than five years ago. Court trials, meanwhile, dropped by 830, from 3,307 trials in 2019 to 2,477.

*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.*

## U.S. House stalled again after rejecting Jim Jordan as speaker a second time

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - OCTOBER 18, 2023 1:45 PM**

WASHINGTON — Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan in his second bid for U.S. House speaker on Wednesday failed to win enough support from his fellow Republicans, leaving the party deadlocked with no clear path to govern the chamber.

Jordan's 200 votes on a first ballot on Tuesday dropped Wednesday to 199, a signal from centrist Republicans that they are unlikely to be swayed by the pressure that some of his allies have been using to whip votes.

Jordan remained confident following the second ballot, telling reporters he expects a third vote to be scheduled at some point. That vote won't happen before noon on Thursday, according to a schedule update Republicans sent out late Wednesday afternoon.

"Speaker McCarthy, he had a two-month runway from when he got the conference nomination and when we got to that first week of January," Jordan said, referring to former Speaker Kevin McCarthy. "So we're right where he was and his numbers."

Jordan plans to talk with the Republicans who voted against him and hopes to win those who flipped Wednesday back to his side.

"We picked up three votes today," he said.

He noted that he also lost some votes, but "those people we lost ... they voted for us before so we just gotta continue."

The inability of GOP lawmakers to unify behind a candidate after 15 days without a speaker increased calls from centrist Republicans and Democrats for a consensus candidate, or to empower Speaker Pro Tempore Patrick McHenry of North Carolina to run the chamber.

Ohio Republican Rep. David Joyce was expected to introduce a resolution Wednesday that would name McHenry as the elected speaker pro tempore. Pennsylvania Republican Rep. Mike Kelly introduced a resolution earlier this week that would elect McHenry through Nov. 17 or until Republicans elect an actual speaker.

At some point, Jordan said, the House could vote on giving McHenry more authority.

"There's that resolution," Jordan said. "I think at some point that question should be called, but obviously that's up to Patrick McHenry."

Electing McHenry would empower him to bring up resolutions and bills, and conduct several other duties

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that he has not attempted as the designated speaker pro tem amid debate about how much authority he has in that role.

McHenry became the designated speaker pro tem after eight Republicans and Democrats voted more than two weeks ago to remove McCarthy as speaker after nine months' tenure. McHenry got the gig because he was at the top of McCarthy's list.

The role of designated speaker pro tem was established after 9/11 to ensure continuity of government in the event of a catastrophic attack. But the section of House rules that defines the role is somewhat vague, leading to debate among academics and experts about whether McHenry has significant authority absent an election.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat, said Tuesday evening that McHenry is among the Republicans that Democrats could possibly support.

"I have respect for Patrick McHenry. I think he is respected on our side of the aisle," Jeffries said. "There are a whole host of other Republicans who are respected on our side of the aisle. Jim Jordan is not one of them."

Democrats, Jeffries said, are looking for "a bipartisan path forward that is authentic, genuine and that we want to agree upon in good faith."

## Nominating speeches

The dysfunction, which has dragged on for more than two weeks, has halted the chamber from taking up any bills and could slow down an aid package to Israel if the House doesn't organize before the Senate approves the measure.

Floor action on Wednesday began with nominating speeches for Jordan, a founder of the far-right House Freedom Caucus, and Jeffries, followed by a roll call vote where each lawmaker was called on in alphabetical order to name their choice.

A total of 22 Republicans didn't vote for Jordan, with many opting to vote for Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise or McCarthy, though neither of those two were officially nominated. Michigan Rep. John James voted for former GOP Rep. Candice Miller of Michigan, who now serves as Macomb County public works commissioner.

Several Republican lawmakers flipped to opposing Jordan, compared with Tuesday's vote.

Republican Reps. Vern Buchanan of Florida, Drew Ferguson of Georgia, Mariannette Miller-Meeks of Iowa and Pete Stauber of Minnesota flipped from supporting Jordan on Tuesday to opposing him Wednesday.

Republicans Doug LaMalfa of California and Victoria Spartz of Indiana switched to backing Jordan on Wednesday after voting against him Tuesday. Florida Rep. Gus Bilirakis, who was absent on Tuesday to attend a funeral, voted for Jordan on Wednesday.

Republican Reps. Don Bacon of Nebraska, Ken Buck of Colorado, Lori Chavez-DeRemer of Oregon, Anthony D'Esposito of New York, Mario Díaz-Balart of Florida, Jake Ellzey of Texas, Andrew Garbarino of New York, Carlos Giménez of Florida, Tony Gonzales of Texas, Kay Granger of Texas, James of Michigan, Kelly of Pennsylvania, Jen Kiggans of Virginia, Nick LaLota of New York, Mike Lawler of New York, John Rutherford of Florida, Mike Simpson of Idaho and Steve Womack of Arkansas, as well as all Democrats, voted against Jordan on Wednesday, the same as they did Tuesday.

## An elected speaker pro tem?

It wasn't immediately clear Wednesday how McHenry would approach the role if elected speaker pro tem. McHenry, who chairs the Financial Services Committee, has repeatedly indicated to reporters that he isn't interested in leading the chamber on a more permanent basis.

Republicans would have to decide if they want an elected McHenry acting as a regular speaker, including negotiating with the other three congressional leaders and President Joe Biden on must-pass legislation — or if they'd want him just running the floor with another Republican negotiating.

That would include talks with the Democratic Senate and White House on an aid package for Israel and Ukraine, final versions of the dozen annual government funding bills, the annual defense policy bill and the farm bill.

McHenry does have a recent track record of working out big, bipartisan deals.

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This spring, he and Louisiana Rep. Garret Graves negotiated the debt limit deal with top Biden administration officials. That legislation, approved with broad bipartisan support, also included total spending levels for the current fiscal year as well as fiscal 2025.

## Pressure to pick Jordan backfires

Florida Rep. Mario Díaz-Balart told reporters before the Wednesday vote that trying to threaten members opposed to Jordan wasn't the right path to take.

"As soon as you go into the strategy, of kind of trying to intimidate and threaten people. What happens is that, you know, there are people here who are honorable and they're dignified and they will not be threatened and that just makes it worse," Díaz-Balart said.

There would likely be "a wide consensus" to ensure legislation can move across the House floor while Republicans continue to debate who should become their next speaker, he said.

"We need to be able to move things forward," Díaz-Balart said. "I think ... that there is a consensus that we need to have a process where we can move legislation forward."

But not all Republicans are sold on the idea of a bipartisan path forward.

House Majority Whip Tom Emmer, a Minnesota Republican, told reporters before the vote that working with Democrats to select a speaker was unacceptable.

"A Democratic coalition government is a non-starter," Emmer said. "We're going to get Jim Jordan."

Womack said following the vote the next move for Republicans is to go back to conference. He said there are three options.

The first is a third ballot, but he expressed skepticism that Jordan would be successful if another vote is called.

"I personally think that if we go to a third vote it's ... going to get a lot worse," he said.

The second option, Womack said, would be for Jordan to bow out and nominate McCarthy for speaker, and the third option is to temporarily empower McHenry.

House Freedom Caucus Chair Scott Perry of Pennsylvania said he wants Jordan to hold another ballot, arguing that a majority of Republicans voted for Jordan.

"It's all about stamina here," Perry said.

*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.*

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

## A historic housing construction boom may finally moderate rent hikes

### South Dakota building permits falling after multi-year surge

BY: TIM HENDERSON - OCTOBER 18, 2023 11:34 AM

An unprecedented surge in the nationwide construction of new housing — mostly apartments — may finally be making a dent in fast-rising rents that have been making life harder for tenants.

More than 1.65 million housing units were under construction across the U.S. last year, the highest annual number since federal record-keeping started in 1969. This year, the number was even higher — almost 1.7 million in September.

Meanwhile, the typical annual rent increase nationally fell to zero in June for the first time since the pandemic began, after peaking at 17.8% in 2021, according to Apartment List, a rent information aggregator and research firm. In September, rents fell 1.2%.

Vacancy rates are rising, said Alexander Hermann, a research associate at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University.

"You've had this huge rush to build apartments in the last couple of years, and projects are bigger and bigger. It's more common now to be building 50 or more units," he said. "You can start to see where new

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supply is coming online, you see starker and stronger rent decreases.”

Federal statistics, which don't track active construction below the regional level, show that construction hasn't been higher in the Northeast since 1987 or in the Midwest since 2005, and it's at all-time highs in both the West and South. A growing share of the country's housing construction is in the South, up from 40% in 2017 to 46% in 2022.

## Case study: Austin

In some places, rents are falling back a little, but they're still plenty high compared with just a few years ago. In Texas, Austin has seen rents drop more than 6% for the fiscal year ending in September to \$1,734 for a two-bedroom — but that's still up almost 20% from 2020, according to Apartment List.

Austin's rent decreases are the most in the Sun Belt, according to Apartment List, while its surrounding metro area is issuing more housing permits than any other large metro — “signaling the important role construction plays in managing long-term affordability.”

Travis County, which includes Austin, increased its housing units by more than a third between 2012 and 2022, creating 169,700 new units in that time as its population swelled by almost 230,000, according to a Stateline analysis of census estimates.

Among the arrivals to Austin in the past decade is K.N., a single father who asked to be identified only by his initials because he doesn't want his children's schoolmates to hear about his problems. K.N., a tech programmer who moved from San Francisco a decade ago, said his increasingly high rent may force him to move.

The landlord for his two-bedroom townhouse has asked for annual \$100 rent increases in recent years, and just asked for another \$200, K.N. said, upping his monthly housing costs with utilities to around \$2,500.

“It would reduce my disposable income to basically zero, and that's not wise with all the extras kids need in school,” K.N. said. “I'd have to pinch pennies to the point that it would cause anxiety. Being housing poor is something I'm trying to avoid.”

Despite a good income, K.N. said, he might have to move farther from his children's school, which now is within walking distance. He moved to Texas in the first place partly to save money on rent in hopes of buying a house. But he says he sees apartment construction everywhere in Austin.

His observations match reality: Last year, Austin built 24 million square feet of apartment buildings alongside 8.7 million square feet of single-family housing, according to city records.

## National stats

It's a similar story nationally, with nearly 1 million apartments under construction as of September. By comparison, there were 914,500 apartments under construction in 2022 and 736,900 in 2021.

The number of single-family homes being built is also high, though the pace has slowed in the past two years. There were about 694,000 homes under construction in September, down from about 736,000 at the end of 2022 and 750,500 at the end of 2021. The last time construction was so high was in 2006, when about 748,000 single-family homes were under construction during the housing bubble before the Great Recession.

The new supply is already having an effect.

Rents dropped in 71 of the nation's 100 largest cities in the year ending in September. That eclipses the most recent large decrease, in June 2020, when 65 cities had year-over-year declines, according to Apartment List. In early 2022, rents were rising year over year in all 100 cities.

Apartment List said in an October report that construction is one reason vacancies are rising, combined with a decline in remote work as more companies call employees back to the office, which has led to fewer renters in “Zoom towns” in states such as Arizona, Idaho and Nevada.

Other areas with big recent drops in rents are also mostly in the South and West, where construction is at all-time highs. The Austin metro area dropped 6%; Portland, Oregon, dropped 5%; and Atlanta, Las Vegas, Orlando, Phoenix, Salt Lake City and San Francisco all dropped by 4% in the past year as of September.

Some of those areas are, like Austin, just beginning to see modest drops in average rents but remain much pricier than just a few years ago. The Miami metro area, for instance, has had the nation's biggest jump

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in rents since 2020, at 40%. Orlando, Florida, rose 32% over the same time, according to Apartment List.

In the past six months, rents dwindled just 1% in each city.

"Recent gains in housing supply have helped to slow rental prices and housing costs, although I would be cautious about calling rent decreases of 1% very significant," said Randy Deshazo, director of economic development and research at the South Florida Regional Planning Council. Soaring prices are particularly painful in the region, he said, because affordability, in terms of housing costs compared with income, is the worst in the country.

In some parts of the Northeast and Midwest, where the construction boom hasn't been quite as robust, rents have continued to rise in the past six months as of September. Rents were up by 7% in Providence, Rhode Island, for example. During the same period, the increase was 5% in Boston, New York City and Hartford, Connecticut.

Estimates of the nation's housing shortage, which many experts blame for high rents, vary. Fannie Mae last year estimated that there were 4.4 million too few units in large metro areas, and Realtor.com this year pegged the shortage at 2.3 million units. About 1.4 million units were finished in 2022, the most since 2007, and another nearly 947,000 were finished in 2023 through August, according to a U.S. Census Bureau construction survey.

Permits issued from mid-2022 to August 2023 point to likely large increases in housing in Utah, Idaho, Florida, Texas, South Dakota, North Carolina, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, Arizona, Tennessee, Georgia and Colorado.

Those states could all see housing stock grow by about 2% above census estimates for mid-2022, the latest available, according to a Stateline analysis.

Nationwide, the number of permits issued in 2023 is down compared with a peak in late 2021 and early 2022, even as the numbers remain high in some states. That's one reason most analysts expect some kind of slowdown from the recent torrid pace of building, said Hermann, of Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

## South Dakota data

South Dakota's building permits have fallen back from a 48% surge in 2020 followed by a 24.8% increase in 2022. This year they dropped 37% in the second quarter.

Even so, South Dakota had one of the highest rates of new building permits between mid-2022 and August 2023 — more than 2% of its existing units, or almost 9,000 new housing units, if they all get built.

The initial pandemic boom was "likely induced by more work-from-home options and increased demand for space and land, of which South Dakota has an abundance," said Aaron Scholl, an assistant economics professor at Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota, who worked on a Dakota Institute report on real estate in September.

The recent decline likely points to stagnation in the state's housing market and eventually its whole economy, Scholl said.

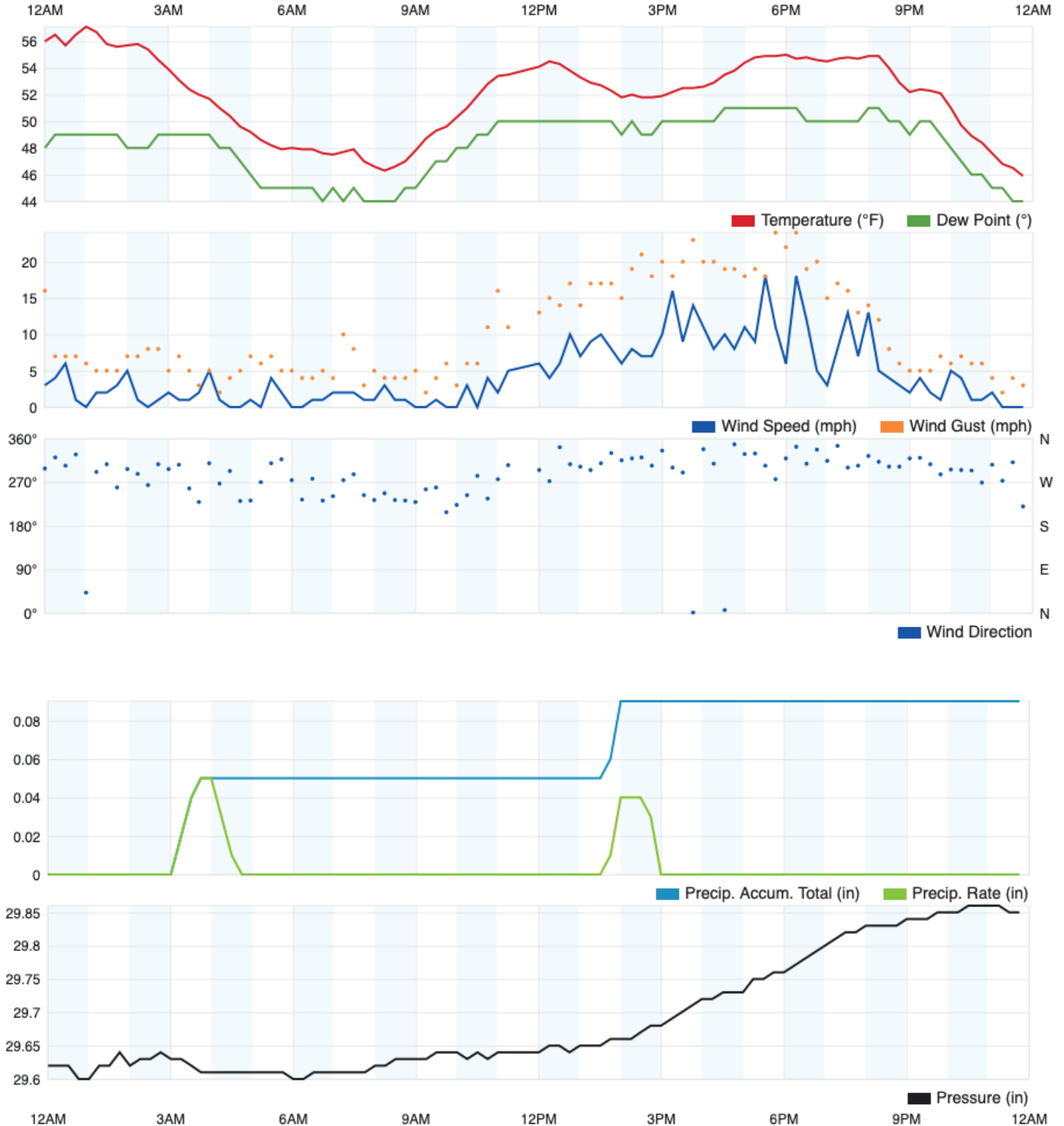
"Building permits are often a leading indicator for not only housing market demand, but the overall economic landscape," Scholl said. "As the housing market cools, I'd expect the economy to do so as well."

*Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and The Journal News in suburban New York. Henderson became fascinated with census data in the early 1990s, when AOL offered the first computerized reports. Since then he has broken stories about population trends in South Florida, including a housing affordability analysis included in the 2007 Pulitzer-winning series "House of Lies" for the Miami Herald, and a prize-winning analysis of public pension irregularities for The Journal News. He has been a member and trainer for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting since its inception 20 years ago, specializing in online data access and visualization along with demographics.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thu Oct 19	Fri Oct 20	Sat Oct 21	Sun Oct 22	Mon Oct 23	Tue Oct 24	Wed Oct 25
67°F 42°F	74°F 40°F	60°F 38°F	61°F 46°F	64°F 43°F	55°F 36°F	46°F 34°F
WSW 13 MPH	S 28 MPH	NNW 15 MPH	ESE 13 MPH	SSE 18 MPH	N 16 MPH 30%	NNE 16 MPH 30%

## Through the Weekend

<u>Tonight</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u>Friday</u>	<u>Saturday</u>	<u>Sunday</u>
Lows: 41-45°F	Highs: 63-75°F Lows: 41-45°F	Highs: 67-78°F Lows: 38-44°F	Highs: 56-64°F Lows: 37-41°F	Highs: 56-63°F Lows: 41-45°F
Winds decreasing		Gusty winds lasting into overnight hours		

Aberdeen, SD

Dry and Mild through the Upcoming Weekend

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 57 °F at 1:04 AM

Low Temp: 46 °F at 8:12 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 5:45 PM

Precip: : 0.09

Day length: 10 hours, 49 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1958

Record Low: 10 in 1917

Average High: 58

Average Low: 32

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.44

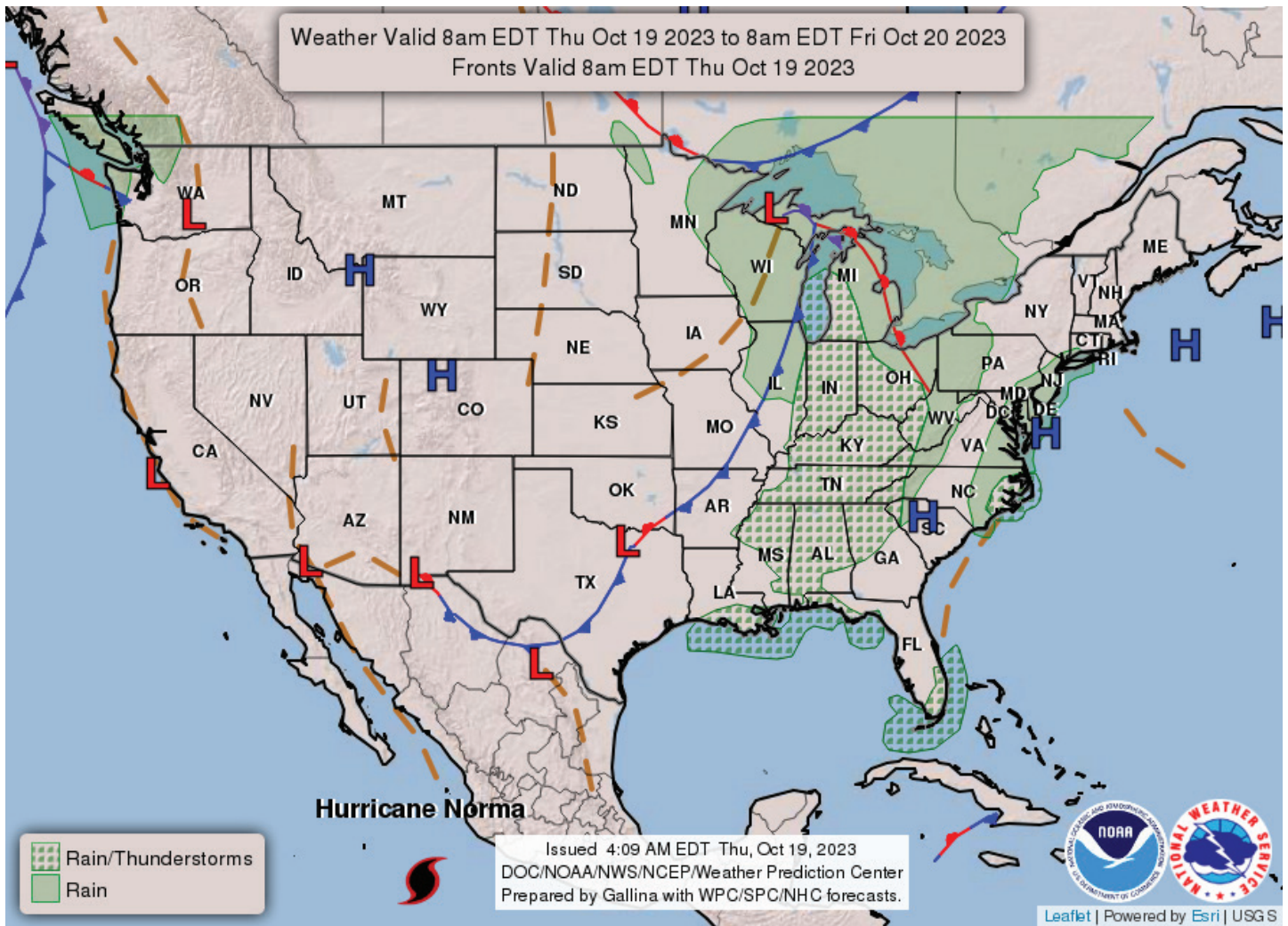
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.89

Average Precip to date: 19.77

Precip Year to Date: 22.66

Sunset Tonight: 6:42:11 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:53:51 AM





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## Today in Weather History

October 19, 1982: An early fall snowstorm dropped 3 to 12 inches of wet snow over the southeastern corner of South Dakota. The wet snow combined with the gusty winds of 20 to 40 mph dropped wind chills to around zero. Numerous trees snapped downing power lines. Power outages were extensive from Vermillion to Mitchell. Thunder rumbled, and lightning flashed amidst the height of the snowstorm. Almost a foot of snow fell in northern Union and southern Lincoln counties. High wind gusts knocked out television and radio transmitters in Sioux Falls. The weight of the snow collapsed a panel on the covered stadium at the University of South Dakota at Vermillion. 1844 - The famous "Lower Great Lakes Storm" occurred. Southwesterly winds were at hurricane force for five hours, driving lake waters into downtown Buffalo NY. The storm drowned 200 persons. (David Ludlum)

1961 - Rain changed to a record early season, heavy wet snow over the southern mountains of West Virginia. Leaves were still on trees, resulting in the worst forest disaster since the fires of 1952 and 1953. One to two feet of snow fell near Summersville and Richwood. (19th-20th) (The Weather Channel)

1984 - Thunderstorms deluged the town of Odem, TX (located 15 miles northwest of Corpus Christi) with 25 inches of rain in just three and a half hours. Most businesses in Odem were flooded, as were 1000 homes in nearby Sinton. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front brought rainshowers to parts of the central U.S., and ushered cool Canadian air into the Great Plains Region. Daytime highs were only in the 30s in North Dakota and eastern Montana. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced high winds in eastern Colorado, with gusts to 63 mph reported at La Junta. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Record breaking snows fell across northern and central Indiana. Totals ranged up to 10.5 inches at Kokomo, and 9.3 inches was reported at Indianapolis. The 8.8 inch total at South Bend was a record for the month as a whole. Up to seven inches of snow fell in extreme southern Lower Michigan, and up to six inches fell in southwestern Ohio. The heavy wet snow downed many trees and power lines. Half the city of Cincinnati OH was without electricity during the morning hours. Temperatures dipped below freezing across much of the Great Plains Region. Twenty cities, including fourteen in Texas, reported record low temperatures for the date. North Platte NE reported a record low of 11 degrees. In Florida, four cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The record high of 92 degrees at Miami also marked a record fourteen days of 90 degree weather in October.

1996: The opening game of World Series between the Braves and Yankees in New York was postponed by heavy rains and high wind from a major storm system affecting the East Coast, marking the third time in history that the World Series opener had been postponed. Overall, nine of the 22 games that have been canceled in Series history were scheduled in New York or Brooklyn.

2007: A total of 87 tornadoes were reported in the United States from Oct. 17-19, a new record outbreak for the month, according to NOAA's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma. The outbreak also contributed to the monthly total of 105 tornado reports – the second highest for October, behind the 117 tornadoes in October 2001. Records date back to 1950.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### OUT OF SERVICE

Recently, while waiting for a bus to take me to an airport parking lot, bus after bus passed by the "waiting zone" without stopping or even pausing. Tired and exhausted, I was puzzled and frustrated until I noticed that they had signs in their windows that read OUT OF SERVICE! There I stood waiting and wondering, part of a crowd but still alone, left in the exhaust and noise of empty buses. I waited for quite some time until one came to take me to my vehicle.

While waiting I thought of those standing around me. No doubt they, too, were anxious to get to their destination. Perhaps they had been on a long, lonely journey and were discouraged with the results of their efforts. Maybe they were fearful of what might be awaiting them, knowing that a loved one was sick and in pain. And, of course, some were filled with joy and the expectations of a happy homecoming to a welcoming family or friends.

As I waited with them, I was reminded of all the people that God brings into my life, who like me, are on life's journey. Everyone faces the same issues at one time or another: good days and bad ones, successes and failures, sickness and health, life and death. Unfortunately, many whom we see every day face their problems alone because no one is willing to provide help or hope. Like the buses, we neglect to recognize their needs; we are "OUT OF SERVICE."

Jesus said, "Look around you! Vast fields are ready right now for the harvest."

Prayer: Help us, Father, to willingly serve You by serving others. Open our eyes to see the needs of others, open our ears to hear their cries, and share Your love. 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

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## 2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 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
- 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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.17.23

5 6 29 32 61 20

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$91,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 10  
DRAW: Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.18.23

1 5 14 16 48 9

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,850,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 25  
DRAW: Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.18.23

14 24 28 39 47 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 40 Mins 14  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.18.23

10 18 20 22 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$28,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 40  
DRAW: Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.18.23

26 59 62 64 65 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.18.23

1 4 13 35 58 24

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$70,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### US announces \$3.5B for projects nationwide to strengthen electric grid, bolster resilience

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Wednesday announced \$3.5 billion for 58 projects across the country to strengthen electric grid resilience as extreme weather events such as the deadly Maui and California wildfires continue to strain the nation's aging transmission systems.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said it was the largest federal investment ever in grid infrastructure, supporting projects that will harden electric systems and improve energy reliability and affordability. The federal spending, combined with money promised by private partners, could result in up to \$8 billion in investments nationally to upgrade the grid, Granholm said.

"The grid, as it currently sits, is not equipped to handle all the new demand" and withstand natural disasters and extreme weather worsened by climate change, Granholm said at a news conference. "We need it to be bigger, we need it to be stronger, we need it to be smarter" to bring a range of renewable energy projects online and meet the Biden administration's goal of reaching 100% clean electricity by 2035, she said.

Projects funded by the federal Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships program will increase the flexibility, efficiency and reliability of electric power systems, with a particular focus on spurring solar, wind and other renewable energy, Granholm said. The projects also are aimed at fixing problems that may contribute to wildfires and other disasters and will improve reliability by deploying innovative approaches to electricity transmission, storage and distribution, she and other officials said.

Projects to be funded include \$249 million each for rural areas in Georgia and Louisiana and \$250 million for a Native American tribe in Oregon.

The largest grant, \$464 million, will go to improve five transmission projects across seven Midwestern states, from Iowa to North Dakota. The money includes \$95 million previously announced for Hawaii in the wake of devastating wildfires this summer, and \$150 million to PacifiCorp to upgrade the grid and boost wildfire mitigation in California, Oregon, Utah and other states.

"Our outdated grid has been in need of an update for a long, long time," said Mitch Landrieu, a White House senior adviser who coordinates implementation of the 2021 infrastructure law signed by President Joe Biden.

The grid "is especially vulnerable to the increasing impacts of the climate crisis," Landrieu added. "Older equipment can overload during extreme heat and cold when power is needed most. And it's more likely to fail when communities are washed out by historic floods and decimated by stronger storms."

The nation's existing power grids are not built to handle the growing energy demand, a fact that is complicated by the intermittent nature of renewables, since energy isn't generated when the sun doesn't shine or the wind isn't blowing.

"As we sadly saw in California, aging electricity infrastructure can cause catastrophic loss of life, property, natural areas and forest fires," said Jonathan Foley, executive director of Project Drawdown, a group that publicizes climate solutions.

The projects announced Wednesday are "exactly the kind of thing that we should be doing: promoting renewables, better storage and better electrical grids for a better, greener, more resilient future," Foley said.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said the \$464 million grant to the state Department of Commerce and its partners for five high-voltage transmission lines in seven states will spur about \$1 billion in private investments, reducing costs to ratepayers and providing communities with a range of benefits.

"Minnesota is proud to lead the way on delivering affordable, clean energy to families across the Midwest," he said.

In Georgia, the state's environmental finance authority and companies that supports Georgia's electric

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cooperatives will team up on a project to upgrade the grid, including investments in battery storage, local microgrids, grid reliability and new transmission lines. The project will focus on remote, historically underinvested communities, Granholm said, including rural Locust Grove, where she visited Wednesday as part of the grant rollout.

In Louisiana, two projects will focus on helping disadvantaged communities withstand extreme weather and develop microgrids to work with local utilities and back up existing assets. Entergy New Orleans also will enhance the local grid's resilience to severe weather, including hardening existing transmission lines and distribution systems to reduce outage frequency and duration.

CPS Energy in San Antonio will receive \$30 million for a resiliency program, and Minnesota-based Xcel Energy will receive \$100 million for projects in Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Minnesota and Wisconsin to mitigate wildfire risk, including thousands of fire-resistant poles. Texas has faced repeated challenges, from sweltering heat this summer to a winter blackout in 2021 that knocked out power to millions of customers and resulted in hundreds of deaths.

In Michigan, Consumers Energy will get \$100 million to strengthen electric systems in disadvantaged communities where outages are more frequent, including northern Michigan and the Flint and Grand Rapids areas. DTE Energy, meanwhile, will receive \$23 million for adaptive microgrids in the Detroit area to enhance reliability and reduce outages.

In Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation will work with Portland General Electric to upgrade transmission capacity and improve service east of the Cascade Mountains, including the reservation.

## **1 killed, 2 others flown to hospital after house explosion in rural South Dakota**

HUMBOLDT, S.D. (AP) — One man was killed in a house explosion Wednesday morning in rural South Dakota and two other occupants were so seriously hurt that they were flown to a hospital, authorities said.

Capt. Josh Phillips, of the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office, said a bystander who spotted the house engulfed in flames reported it around 7 a.m. and helped the victims.

Several volunteer fire crews from the surrounding area rushed to the home, which is located just a few miles south of the town of Humboldt. The Sioux Falls Fire Department also responded, but the home was leveled.

"This just wasn't a house fire and a minor explosion. This was a significant event," Phillips said, adding that the state fire marshal is working with investigators from the sheriff's office and other agencies to determine the cause.

The name of the man who was killed in the blast wasn't immediately released. Phillips declined to provide details on the man and woman who survived.

## **Palestinians trapped in Gaza find nowhere is safe during Israel's relentless bombing**

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMYA KULLAB and RAVI NESSMAN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes pounded locations across the Gaza Strip early Thursday, including parts of the south that Israel had declared as safe zones, heightening fears among more than 2 million Palestinians trapped in the territory that nowhere was safe.

In the nearly two weeks since a devastating Hamas rampage in southern Israel, the Israeli military has relentlessly attacked Gaza in response. Even after Israel told Palestinians to evacuate the north and head to what it called "safe zones" in the south, strikes continued overnight throughout the densely populated territory.

A residential building in Khan Younis, a city in southern Gaza where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had fought shelter, was among the places hit. Medical personnel at Nasser Hospital said they received at

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least 12 dead and 40 wounded.

The bombardments came after Israel agreed Wednesday to allow Egypt to deliver limited humanitarian aid to Gaza, the first crack in a punishing 11-day siege. Many among Gaza's 2.3 million residents have cut down to one meal a day and resorted to drinking dirty water.

The announcement of a plan to bring water, food and other supplies into Gaza came as fury over a Tuesday night explosion at Gaza City's al-Ahli Hospital spread across the Middle East. There were conflicting claims of who was behind the blast, which the Hamas-run Health Authority said had killed hundreds of Palestinians.

Hamas officials in Gaza blamed an Israeli airstrike, saying hundreds were killed. Israel denied it was involved and released a flurry of video, audio and other information that it said showed the blast was instead due to a rocket misfire by Islamic Jihad, another militant group operating in Gaza. Islamic Jihad dismissed the Israeli claim.

The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who visited Israel on Wednesday, said data from his Defense Department showed the explosion was not likely caused by an Israeli airstrike. The White House later said an analysis of "overhead imagery, intercepts and open-source information" showed Israel was not behind the attack. But the U.S. continues to collect evidence.

Video from the scene showed the hospital grounds strewn with torn bodies, many of them young children. Hundreds of wounded were rushed to Gaza City's main hospital, where doctors already facing critical supply shortages were sometimes forced to perform surgery on the floors, often without anesthesia.

More than 1 million Palestinians, roughly half of Gaza's population, have fled their homes in Gaza City and other places in the northern part of the territory since Israel told them to evacuate. Most have crowded into U.N.-run school shelters or the homes of relatives.

Following early Thursday's airstrikes, sirens wailed as emergency crews rushed to rescue survivors from a building in Khan Younis, where many residents were believed trapped under misshapen bed frames, broken furniture and cement chunks.

A small, soot-covered child, unconscious and dangling in the arms of a rescue worker, was taken out of a damaged building and rushed toward a waiting ambulance.

Gaza's Hamas-led government said several bakeries in the territory were hit in the overnight strikes, making it even harder for hungry residents to get food.

The Israeli military said it killed a top Palestinian militant in Rafah, near the Egyptian border, and hit hundreds of targets across Gaza, including tunnel shafts, intelligence infrastructure and command centers. It said it hit dozens of mortar launching posts, most of them immediately after they launched shells at Israel. Palestinians have been launching barrages of rockets at Israel since the fighting began.

Israel has said it is attacking Hamas militants wherever they may be in Gaza, and accused the group's leaders and fighters of taking shelter among the civilian population, leaving Palestinians feeling in constant danger.

The Musa family fled to the typically sleepy central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah and took shelter in a cousin's three-story home near the local hospital. But at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, a series of explosions, believed to be airstrikes, rocked the building, turning the family home into a mountain of rubble that they said buried some 20 women and children.

The dead body of Hiam Musa, the sister-in-law of Associated Press photojournalist Adel Hana, was recovered from the wreckage Wednesday evening, the family said. They don't know who else is under the rubble.

"It doesn't make sense," Hana said. "We went to Deir al-Balah because it's quiet, we thought we would be safe."

The Israeli military said it was investigating.

In northern areas that Israel warned to evacuate, airstrikes also hit three residential towers in al-Zahra, the Hamas-led Interior Ministry in Gaza said, as well as homes along the border with Israel. Israel has



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massed troops in the area and is expected to launch a ground invasion into Gaza, though military officials say no decision has been made.

The Gaza Health Ministry said 3,478 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, and more than 12,000 wounded, mostly women, children and the elderly. Another 1,300 people are believed buried under the rubble, health authorities said.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, mostly civilians slain during Hamas' deadly incursion on Oct. 7. Roughly 200 others were abducted. The Israeli military said Thursday it had notified the families of 203 captives.

Violence between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon has also flared in recent days amid fears the Hamas-Israel conflict could spread across the region. In the West Bank, where scores of Palestinians have been killed since the war started, Israeli forces killed dozens of Palestinians in the past two days, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The deal to get aid into Gaza remained fragile, while hospitals in the sealed territory say they are on the verge of collapse.

Biden said Egypt's president agreed to open the Rafah crossing to let in an initial group of 20 trucks with humanitarian aid. If Hamas confiscates aid, "it will end," he said. The aid will start moving Friday at the earliest, White House officials said.

Egypt must still repair the road across the border, which was cratered by Israeli airstrikes. More than 200 trucks and some 3,000 tons of aid are positioned at or near the crossing, Gaza's only connection to Egypt, said the head of the Red Crescent for North Sinai, Khalid Zayed.

Supplies will go in under supervision of the U.N., Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told Al-Arabiya TV. Asked if foreigners and dual nationals seeking to leave would be let through, he said: "As long as the crossing is operating normally and the (crossing) facility has been repaired."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the decision was approved after a request from Biden. It said Israel "will not thwart" deliveries of food, water or medicine from Egypt, as long as they are limited to civilians in the south of the Gaza Strip and don't go to Hamas militants. The statement made no mention of fuel, which is badly needed for hospital generators.

Relatives of some of the people who were taken hostage and forced back to Gaza during the Oct. 7 Hamas attack reacted with fury to the aid announcement.

"Children, infants, women, soldiers, men, and elderly, some with serious illnesses, wounded and shot, are held underground like animals," said a statement from the Hostage and Missing Families Forum. But "the Israeli government pampers the murderers and kidnappers."

In his brief visit, Biden tried to strike a balance between showing U.S. support for Israel, while containing growing alarm among Arab allies. He also announced \$100 million in humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

King Abdullah II of Jordan planned to meet in Egypt with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi to discuss the conflict. The two countries have peace agreements with neighboring Israel and are dealing with anger from their populations over the hospital blast.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak arrived in Israel on Thursday in a trip aimed at showing solidarity after the Hamas attack and preventing the war from escalating.

The people of Israel had "suffered an unspeakable, horrific act of terrorism and I want you to know that the United Kingdom and I stand with you," he said on arriving.

## **Most in the US see Mexico as a partner despite border problems, an AP-NORC/Pearson poll shows**

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Most people in the U.S. see Mexico as an essential partner to stop drug trafficking and illegal border crossings, even as they express mixed views of Mexico's government, according to a new poll.

The poll from the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts and The Associated

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Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about two-thirds of Americans see their southern neighbor as having at least a friendly relationship with the U.S. Relatively few within that group, or 16%, consider Mexico a close ally. Meanwhile, U.S. adults are more likely to have an unfavorable (38%) view of Mexico's leadership than a favorable (12%) one. The remaining responded they did not have an unfavorable or favorable view or were not sure.

The poll captures the different perceptions Americans have of Mexico, its leadership and the estimated 10 million immigrants living in the U.S. Mexico is the largest trade partner of the U.S. and both countries have deep diplomatic and cultural ties. But both Washington and Mexico City are under immense pressure to reduce unauthorized migration at their shared border and to stop the trafficking of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids that killed around 75,000 people in the U.S. last year.

"For two countries that are such close neighbors, so intertwined in each others' lives, and have been for so long, there's still room to grow," said Benjamin Lessing, an associate professor of political science at the University of Chicago and faculty affiliate of the Pearson Institute.

Americans see a shared responsibility for the two countries to address their international problems, including illegal immigration and drug trafficking. About two-thirds of Americans say the U.S. government and Mexican government should both be responsible for preventing immigrants — from Mexico or from other countries — from getting into the U.S. illegally through Mexico. An even larger share, or about three-quarters of Americans, say the governments should both be responsible for preventing illegal drug trafficking from Mexico to the U.S.

"We need as best relations as possible," said Kris Bennefield, 41, of San Augustine, Texas. "We should be working hand in hand with Mexico to take the cartels down."

The results come as several of the Republican presidential candidates say they would use military force against Mexico in response to the trafficking of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. As the Israel-Hamas war rages on, some in the GOP field are suggesting without evidence that militants may be taking advantage of the mass arrivals of migrants to come through the U.S.-Mexico border.

Americans place a high level of importance on preventing illegal immigration across the border between the U.S. and Mexico: 53% of U.S. adults call this an important foreign policy goal. Republicans (80%) are more likely than Independents (50%) and Democrats (35%) to call this important.

Slightly fewer (43%) Americans say it's important to create more opportunities for legal immigration from Mexico to the U.S., with Democrats (57%) being more likely than Republicans (25%) to prioritize this.

"There's a big part of the population that recognizes the importance and the big effort that the two nations are making to work together," said Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, a professor at George Mason University who specializes in U.S.-Mexico relations.

Bennefield, a Democrat, said he feels the U.S. needs to create a better system for people to arrive in the U.S. legally. The last extensive package on immigration came under President Ronald Reagan in 1986 and a more limited effort was signed by President George H.W. Bush four years later.

"We need to boost our economy with people," said Bennefield, adding he also feels it is equally important to prevent illegal immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border.

That emphasis on stopping illegal immigration is also reflected in how Americans view Mexican immigrants differently depending on whether they live in the U.S. legally or not. About two-thirds of Americans say they have a positive view of Mexican immigrants who are living in the United States legally, compared to just 20% who say that about those who reside in the U.S. illegally.

Dan Allstun, a retired utility company worker who lives in Los Angeles, said he thinks it is a problem when people reside in the U.S. and do not pay taxes. Experts have said that immigrants who are in the country illegally pay sales taxes and that very significant numbers of them also have federal and state tax withholding in their paychecks.

Allstun, who is a Republican, said he thinks the vast majority of immigrants are fleeing poor economic conditions in their countries.

"It's not that these people are bad. They're coming here for economic reasons. However, it becomes

quite difficult for our country to control," he said. "So there could be people who are coming here to take advantage."

Hispanic Americans were more likely than Americans overall to say it's important to create more opportunities for legal immigration from Mexico to the U.S. They were also more likely to have a favorable view of Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. illegally.

The poll also reflected that about two-thirds of Americans (65%) say they have a positive view of Mexican culture. Three in five say they have personally engaged with Mexican culture within the United States such as through festivals or cultural events.

"Mexico is part of the American culture," said Correa-Cabrera. "The politicization of the issues of immigration and border security and how they are used to divide and conquer in elections differentiates from the realistic perspective of who Americans are in their day-to-day lives."

## **Russian foreign minister offers security talks with North Korea, China as he visits Pyongyang**

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia's foreign minister proposed regular security talks with North Korea and China to deal with what he described as increasing U.S.-led regional military threats, as he met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his top diplomat on Thursday during a visit to Pyongyang.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in North Korea's capital on Wednesday on a two-day trip expected to focus on how to boost the two countries' defense ties following a September summit between Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Last week, the United States said North Korea had transferred munitions to Russia to boost its fighting capabilities in Ukraine in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any weapons trading involving North Korea.

On Thursday, Lavrov met Kim for talks that lasted about an hour, Russia's state-run Tass news agency reported, without elaborating. Lavrov met his North Korean counterpart, Choe Son Hui, earlier Thursday and lauded deepening bilateral cooperation.

The Lavrov-Kim meeting "means that the recent fleet of containers likely carrying munitions from North Korea to Russia was not the last Kim-Putin transaction the world has to worry about," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

"After accepting Pyongyang's help to resupply the illegal invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is set to commit further violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions by providing North Korea with weapons technology that could threaten stability in East Asia," Easley said.

More details of Lavrov's meetings with Kim and Choe weren't immediately available. But Tass quoted Lavrov as telling reporters that he supports holding regular talks on security issues on the Korean Peninsula with North Korea and China.

"The United States, Japan and South Korea intensifying military activity here and Washington working toward moving strategic infrastructure, including nuclear aspects, here, are of great concern to us and our North Korean friends," Lavrov said, according to Tass. "We oppose this unconstructive and dangerous policy with a course toward de-escalation and inadmissibility of escalating tensions here."

The recent flurry of diplomacy between Russia and North Korea underscores how their interests are aligning in the face of their separate, intensifying confrontations with the United States — North Korea over its advancing nuclear program and Russia over its war with Ukraine.

The U.S. has been expanding regular military drills with South Korea and temporarily deploying more powerful military assets around the Korean Peninsula in response to North Korea's barrage of missile tests since last year. The U.S. and South Korea have also resumed some trilateral military exercises with Japan.

The focus of outside attention during Lavrov's visit is whether the two countries will provide any hints of how they will solidify their security cooperation or announce the timing of Putin's promised trip to Pyongyang to reciprocate Kim's visit to Russia's Far East.

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During his travel to Russia, Kim met Putin at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, Russia's most important domestic space launch center, and inspected other key Russian weapon-making sites. That triggered intense speculation that Kim seeks sophisticated Russian technologies to modernize his nuclear arsenal in return for supplying conventional arms to refill Russia's declining weapons inventory. Neither Russia nor North Korea has disclosed what Putin and Kim agreed to during the summit.

"After the historic summit between President Putin and Chairman of State Affairs Kim Jong Un at the Vostochny Cosmodrome on September 13, we can confidently say that the relations have reached a qualitatively new strategic level," Lavrov said at the start of his meeting with Choe, according to Russia's state-run Interfax news agency.

Choe said her meeting with Lavrov "will become an important stage in terms of the implementation of the agreements" reached by Kim and Putin, Tass said.

During a dinner banquet held for him on Wednesday, Lavrov said Russia deeply values North Korea's "unwavering and principled support" for its war on Ukraine as well as Pyongyang's decision to recognize the independence of Russian-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, according to Russia's Foreign Ministry.

North Korean state media said Lavrov also praised North Korea for "remaining unfazed by any pressure of the U.S. and the West," and said that Russia fully supports Kim's push to protect its security and economic interests. Choe said Pyongyang and Moscow were building an "unbreakable comradely relationship" under the leadership of Kim and Putin.

The White House said Friday that North Korea had delivered more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Russia. The White House released images that it said showed the containers were loaded onto a Russian-flagged ship before being moved via train to southwestern Russia.

Since last year, the U.S. has accused North Korea of providing ammunition, artillery shells and rockets to Russia, likely much of them copies of Soviet-era munitions. North Korea has steadfastly denied it shipped arms to Russia, but South Korean officials said North Korean weapons provided to Russia have already been used in Ukraine.

Lim Soosuk, spokesperson of South Korea's Foreign Ministry, told reporters Thursday that Seoul was closely monitoring Lavrov's visit to North Korea and that any cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang should be conducted in a way that complies with U.N. Security Council resolutions.

When asked whether Lavrov's comments stating that Russia fully supports Kim's policies could be interpreted as an acceptance of North Korea's nuclear weapons status, Lim insisted that the North "no matter what it does, will never be recognized as a nuclear power and will face increasing international sanctions."

## Live updates | Israel OKs limited aid for Gaza as regional tensions rise following hospital blast

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel has agreed to allow Egypt to deliver limited humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip while the Israeli military keeps up its airstrikes on the Palestinian territory.

More than 1 million Palestinians, roughly half of Gaza's population, have fled homes in the north and Gaza City after Israel told them to evacuate. The airstrikes early Thursday continued across the entire territory, including in areas in the south that Israel had declared as "safe zones."

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that limited humanitarian aid would be allowed into Gaza from Egypt following a request from U.S. President Joe Biden.

The war that began on Oct. 7 after Hamas militants stormed into Israel, and Israel vowed to destroy the militant group, has become the deadliest of five Gaza wars for both sides. The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry said Wednesday that 3,478 Palestinians have been killed and more than 12,000 others have been wounded in the past 11 days.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed. An Israeli military spokesperson said Thursday that the families of 206 people believed to have been captured by Hamas and taken into Gaza had been notified.

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Currently:

1. Misinformation about the Israel-Hamas war is flooding social media. Here are the facts.
2. Woman becomes Israeli folk hero for plying Hamas militants with snacks until rescue mission arrives
3. Egypt and other Arab countries typically don't want to take in Palestinian refugees.
4. Relatives of people taken hostage by Hamas militants tell their stories as they hope for their safe return.

Here's what's happening in the latest Israel-Hamas war:

## PALESTINIANS SAY ISRAEL IS TARGETING BAKERIES IN GAZA

Israel has bombed and targeted areas with bakeries in Gaza over the course of the war while dozens of Palestinians were lining up to buy bread, causing high numbers of dead and wounded, Salam Marouf, the head of the government media office, said in a statement.

By repeatedly targeting bakeries, he said that Israel sought to worsen the humanitarian situation, inflict a greater number of casualties and "make it more difficult for citizens, to the point that obtaining some loaves of bread has become a dangerous journey." More than five bakeries were targeted in different areas to the north and south of Gaza, either directly or in the area where they are located, Maarouf said.

Aid groups, including the World Food Program, have warned Gaza is running low on food supplies with shops only having a few days worth of supplies left. More are available in warehouses run by humanitarian organizations, but these are hard to reach because of constant bombardment.

## EGYPT'S PRESIDENT MEETS WITH US GENERAL IN CAIRO

CAIRO — Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi met with Gen. Michael Kurilla, head of the U.S. Central Command, in Cairo to discuss efforts to "intensify cooperation" between the two countries and to "restore stability" in the region, the president's office said.

Within hours of the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, the U.S. began moving warships and aircraft to the eastern Mediterranean to provide Israel with support. Israel has conducted unrelenting airstrikes on Gaza.

Egypt has long acted as a key broker between Israel and Hamas. On Wednesday, Egypt and Israel reached a deal that would allow aid to enter the Palestinian territory.

Also Thursday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry met with U.K. counterpart James Cleverly in Cairo, where they talked about ways to de-escalate the conflict and address the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

## XI URGES EGYPTIAN PREMIER TO OPEN A HUMANITARIAN CORRIDOR

BEIJING — At a meeting in China's capital Beijing on Thursday, President Xi Jinping urged visiting Egyptian Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouly to open a humanitarian corridor for civilians fleeing the fighting in Gaza.

Xi also reiterated China's backing of the formation of a Palestinian state as solution to the ongoing violence.

## EMERGENCY CREWS WORK TO RESCUE SURVIVORS OF STRIKE ON GAZA BUILDING

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — A doctor at a hospital in the southern Gaza Strip says at least 12 people were killed and 40 others wounded in an Israeli strike that hit a residential building in a densely populated neighborhood in the city of Khan Younis.

Dr. Mohammed Qandeel said the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis received the patients on Thursday morning. The city is located within what Israel called a safe zone when it encouraged Gaza residents to evacuate the territory's north.

Emergency crews rushed to rescue survivors around a crater at least one floor deep where people were believed to be trapped. One rescued woman staggered unsteadily from the scene, screaming that God would take revenge against Israel.

A rescue worker rushed a small, ash-covered child toward an ambulance, according to an Associated Press journalist at the scene.

## GERMANY'S LEADER DEMANDS RELEASE OF HOSTAGES

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has demanded in a speech watched by relatives of some of the hostages held by Hamas for the militant group to free the captives.

In a speech to the German parliament, Scholz underlined Germany's staunch support for Israel and renewed a warning that it "would be a serious mistake" for Hezbollah, Iran or their proxies to enter the war.

Scholz traveled to Israel and Egypt this week. He said Thursday: "One important task we all have is to

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free the hostages, the kidnapped. They must be released without preconditions.”

German officials say a “low two-digit number” of German-Israeli dual citizens are believed to be held in Gaza.

## UK PRIME MINISTER ARRIVES IN ISRAEL

JERUSALEM — British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has arrived in Israel at the start of a two-day trip aimed at showing solidarity with the country and preventing the crisis triggered by Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack from escalating.

Sunak is holding talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog before traveling to other regional capitals.

After landing at Ben Gurion Airport, Sunak said the people of Israel had “suffered an unspeakable, horrific act of terrorism, and I want you to know that the United Kingdom and I stand with you.”

The U.K. is pushing for the opening of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt to allow aid to get in and foreign nationals to leave. After a visit by U.S. President Joe Biden on Wednesday, Israel said it had agreed to allow limited humanitarian aid into Gaza, and Biden said Egypt had agreed to open the crossing to up to 20 trucks.

Sunak said before leaving for the Middle East that an explosion at the al-Ahli hospital in Gaza on Tuesday, which appears to have killed hundreds, “should be a watershed moment” for world leaders to unite and prevent escalation of the conflict.

British authorities have not said who they believe was responsible for the blast.

## SWEDEN RAISES TRAVEL ADVISORY FOR LEBANON

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Norway and Sweden have advised their citizens against all travel to Lebanon until further notice.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said Thursday that Norway revised its travel guidance “due to the serious security situation in the region. There are daily military actions on the border between Lebanon and Israel.”

He noted that there are still flights from Beirut but “at short notice, it may become even more difficult to leave Lebanon.”

Sweden updated its travel advisory for Lebanon late Wednesday.

## AUSTRALIAN LAWMAKER ACCUSES ISRAEL OF ‘COLLECTIVELY PUNISHING’ PALESTINIANS

CANBERRA, Australia — Australian government minister Ed Husic has accused Israel of collectively punishing Palestinians in its war on Hamas.

Husic told Australian Broadcasting Corp. on Thursday: “I feel very strongly that Palestinians are being collectively punished here for Hamas’ barbarism.” He added: “I really do feel there is an obligation on governments, particularly the Israeli government, to ... follow the rules of international law and to observe in particular that innocents should be protected.”

Opposition senator Jane Hume accused the Muslim lawmaker of using “loose language” that did not align with the government’s position. Australia’s House of Representatives this week passed a government motion that recognizes Israel’s “inherent right to defend itself” and “unequivocally condemns” the Hamas attacks. The motion also calls for the “protection of civilian lives and the observance of international law.”

## AIRSTRIKE KILLS 7 SMALL CHILDREN IN GAZA HOME, RESIDENTS AND DOCTORS SAY

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — Residents and doctors in this southern Gaza town said an airstrike slammed into a home, killing seven small children.

The news spread quickly on social media, as grisly images of dead and bloodied toddlers lined up side by side on a hospital stretcher stirred outrage in Gaza and the West Bank.

Bandaged and caked in dust, the bodies were brought to the Gaza European Hospital in Khan Younis along with three other dead members of the Bakri family. Photographers swarmed the operating room as women covered their eyes and doctors wept.

“This is a massacre,” hospital director Dr. Yousef Al-Akkad said, his voice choking with emotion. “Let the world see, these are just children.”

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Local medics also confirmed that the children were killed in a strike and said the Bakri family was just one of many such cases Wednesday.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

**LIVERPOOL AND EGYPT SOCCER STAR SALAH URGES LEADERS TO GET HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA**  
CAIRO — Egyptian soccer star Mohamed Salah, arguably the most celebrated Arab footballer, called on world leaders to “come together to prevent further slaughter of all innocent souls” and for the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza.

“There has been too much violence and too much heartbreak and brutality,” the Liverpool striker said in a video that lasted a little under a minute. “The escalations in the recent weeks is unbearable to witness. All lives are sacred and must be protected. The massacres need to stop. Families are being torn apart.”

They were Salah’s first comments on the Israel-Hamas war, after he was criticized by some Arab fans for his silence.

**US SENATORS SAY AFTER CLASSIFIED BRIEFING THAT ISRAEL NOT BEHIND HOSPITAL BLAST**  
WASHINGTON — Senators who attended a classified briefing with top defense, intelligence and other administration officials said they were briefed that Israel was not responsible for the hospital blast.

“The intelligence community assesses that Israel is not to blame for the explosion of the hospital in Gaza,” Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said as he left. “They believe it was an errant rocket from terrorists in Gaza.”

Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut said the intelligence is “definitive” that it was not an Israeli operation.

In a joint statement earlier, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner, D-Va., and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, the top Republican on the panel, said they reviewed intelligence and “feel confident that the explosion was the result of a failed rocket launch by militant terrorists and not the result of an Israeli airstrike.”

**UN OFFICIALS WARN OVER GAZA HEALTH SYSTEM, RISK OF CONFLICT EXPANDING**  
UNITED NATIONS – U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths told an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council that the deadly destruction of a hospital has heaped further pressure on Gaza’s crumbling health system, depriving the territory of a facility that cared for 45,000 patients every year.

Speaking in a video briefing from Qatar, Griffiths also said the Al Ahli hospital was previously struck on Oct. 14.

Meanwhile the U.N. Mideast envoy warned that the risk of the conflict expanding is “very real and extremely dangerous.”

Tor Wennesland told the council that recent events “have served to reignite grievances and re-animate alliances across the region.”

Earlier in the day at the U.N., the United States vetoed a resolution that would have condemned violence against civilians in the Israel-Hamas war and pushed for humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza.

**BIDEN SAYS EGYPT AGREES TO OPEN RAFAH CROSSING FOR GAZA AID**  
President Joe Biden on Wednesday said Egypt’s president has agreed to open a border crossing into Gaza to allow in 20 trucks with humanitarian aid.

Biden said he spoke with Egypt President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi after his visit to Israel, where leaders there agreed to allow the aid in. Biden was speaking to reporters on Air Force One during a refueling stop in Germany on his way back to the U.S. from Tel Aviv.

Israel sealed off the Gaza Strip, stopping all entry of food, water, medicine and fuel to its 2.3 million people following the Hamas attack on Oct. 7.

White House officials said the aid would flow in the coming days. Biden said if Hamas confiscates the aid, “it will end.”

Earlier in the day, the United States promised \$100 million in humanitarian assistance to help Palestinian people who have been displaced or otherwise affected by conflict in Gaza and the West Bank.

**SECURITY FORCES ARREST DOZENS, FIRE LIVE ROUNDS TO DISPERSE PROTESTS IN THE OCCUPIED WEST BANK**

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JERUSALEM — Rights groups in the occupied West Bank say Palestinian security forces arrested dozens of Palestinians protesting the deadly explosion at al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza.

The protests late Tuesday devolved into skirmishes with Palestinian security forces, who fired tear gas, stun grenades and live fire to disperse stone-throwing demonstrators, wounding several.

Lawyers for Justice, a legal aid group, said Wednesday that some 50 protesters were arrested overnight by Palestinian security forces in Ramallah.

The Palestinian Red Crescent meanwhile reported that Israeli soldiers using live rounds and rubber bullets shot and wounded 10 Palestinian protesters in the southern city of Hebron and 21 people in the northern city of Nablus. A 24-year-old Palestinian man was killed, according to the organization.

## PROTESTS AROUND THE WORLD

Thousands of people demonstrated outside the consulates of Israel and the United States in Istanbul late Wednesday. Many waved Palestinian flags, shouted anti-Israeli slogans and called for revenge against Israel a day after the deadly explosion at a hospital in Gaza.

Large protests also erupted in Tunisia and Morocco, with demonstrators outraged by the blast at the hospital in Gaza.

Protesters gathered outside the Parliament in Rabat chanting “Down with America” and demanding that Morocco reverse its 2020 decision to normalize relations and deepen security ties with Israel.

In Tunis, protesters gathered outside the U.S. and French Embassies to condemn those nations’ support of Israel and demand that their ambassadors be removed from Tunisia.

There was also a march by an estimated 10,000 pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Athens, Greece, that was quelled by riot police who fired tear gas. Earlier in the day about 100 people took part in a pro-Israeli gathering.

## NEW YORK GOVERNOR VISITS ISRAEL TO SHOW SOLIDARITY

TEL AVIV, Israel — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul arrived in Israel to show support for the country.

The Democrat was met at Ben-Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv by Israel’s ambassador to the U.S., Michael Herzog.

After a security briefing, Hochul met with families and was scheduled to head to a food pantry to help pack and drop off boxes for people displaced by the conflict. Hochul was expected to stay in Jerusalem overnight.

She said her trip is meant as a gesture of solidarity and support. New York is home to the largest Jewish population of any U.S. city, according to the American Jewish Population Project at Brandeis University.

## HAMAS REJECTS CLAIMS THAT ISRAEL ISN’T BEHIND HOSPITAL BLAST

BEIRUT — Hamas is denying Israel’s claims that another militant group was responsible for the massive explosion at a Gaza City hospital that killed hundreds of people.

In a statement Wednesday, Hamas said that in the days before Tuesday’s blast at al-Ahli Hospital, Israeli authorities sent threats to several Gaza Strip hospitals and told each to evacuate or they would “be responsible for what happens.”

Hamas said Israeli forces have targeted several emergency departments and ambulances since the violence began, adding that Israeli military officials contacted 21 hospitals including Al-Ahli, demanding that they evacuate “immediately because they are located in area of operations for the Israeli” army.

## EU seeks answers to rising security challenges as Israel-Hamas war fuels new concerns

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union interior ministers on Thursday debated how to manage the impact of the war between Israel and Hamas on the bloc, amid heightened security tensions after a firebomb assault on a Berlin synagogue and killings in Belgium and France by suspected Islamist extremists.

Officials from across the 27-nation EU have expressed concerns about a rise in antisemitic attacks, the radicalization of young people online, the use of encrypted messaging services by criminals or extremists,



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and the need to speed up the deportation of people who might pose a public danger.

But calls for an increase in security across the board are also creating deep unease as the solutions being discussed could undermine free movement and the right to assemble in Europe.

Italy is introducing border checks to counter a possible rise in tensions over the Israel-Hamas war. Denmark and Sweden are too, due to what they say is an "Islamist terrorist threat." France intends to keep checks in place until at least May 2024, citing "new terrorist threats and external borders situation."

More police have been deployed in Belgium, France and Germany.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell believes that part of the solution to Europe's security woes must involve the bloc helping diplomatically and financially to bring an end to years of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

"We have learned from history that the most difficult decisions are always taken when we are on the edge of the abyss. I believe that is where we are now: on the edge of the abyss," Borrell told EU lawmakers on Wednesday.

"When I hear Muslim religious authorities speaking the language of inter-religious conflict and explicitly stating that Europe is a party to this conflict, I feel that the storm clouds are looming," he said.

Still, not all of Europe's challenges are directly linked to the war.

Earlier on Thursday, Sweden hosted a meeting of ministers from eight countries, among them Germany, Belgium and France, focused on how to handle incidents where people burn the Muslim holy book, the Quran.

Prosecutors are trying to establish whether that was a key motive for a Tunisian man who shot three Swedes in Brussels on Monday, killing two of them, ahead of a Belgium-Sweden soccer match in the capital.

While the Quran burnings are not directly linked to the conflict between Israel and Hamas, they are a sign of rising tensions between religious and other communities in Europe.

The war that began Oct. 7 has become the deadliest of five Gaza wars for both sides. The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry said Wednesday that 3,478 Palestinians have been killed and more than 12,000 injured in the past 11 days.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, and at least 199 others, including children, were captured by Hamas and taken into Gaza, according to Israeli authorities.

"We have to address multiple impacts from the continuing crisis in the Middle East" in the EU, European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas said.

"This entails the protection of our Jewish communities, but also the protection against a generalized climate of Islamophobia that has no place in our society," he told reporters in Luxembourg, where the meetings were held.

Pro-Palestinian rallies have been held in several European cities since the war. France has banned them. Germany has also promised to take tougher action against Hamas, which is already on the EU's list of terrorist organizations.

After assailants threw two Molotov cocktails at the Berlin synagogue on Wednesday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that "we will never accept when attacks are carried out against Jewish institutions."

In France, the Palace of Versailles — a major tourist attraction — and three airports were evacuated for security reasons and temporarily closed Wednesday. The incidents were the latest in a spate of evacuations in the past five days, and the French government is threatening to fine or jail prank callers.

They followed the killing of a teacher in northern France on Friday by a suspected Islamist extremist.

French Interior Minister Gerland Darmanin noted that two foreigners were behind the recent attacks in Belgium and France, and he insisted that long-delayed reforms of EU asylum rules must be put in place.

Europe must "manage our borders, register people and conduct the security interviews that are necessary before every asylum request," he told reporters.

Belgium's top migration official, Nicole de Moor, said that "we are facing terror in the streets of our cities, in France, in Belgium, and we cannot tolerate this. Innocent people are dying, and this is unacceptable."

She said tougher deportation laws are needed and countries that refuse to take back their nationals must be made to cooperate. The EU has agreements with Turkey and Tunisia to get them to prevent migrants

reaching Europe but they are not working. Other deals, with Egypt notably, are planned.

## **Evidence shows Hamas militants likely used some North Korean weapons in attack on Israel**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM, KIM TONG-HYUNG and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press  
SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Hamas fighters likely fired North Korean weapons during their Oct. 7 assault on Israel, a militant video and weapons seized by Israel show, despite Pyongyang's denials that it arms the militant group.

South Korean officials, two experts on North Korean arms and an Associated Press analysis of weapons captured on the battlefield by Israel point toward Hamas using Pyongyang's F-7 rocket-propelled grenade, a shoulder-fired weapon that fighters typically use against armored vehicles.

The evidence shines a light on the murky world of the illicit arms shipments that sanction-battered North Korea uses as a way to fund its own conventional and nuclear weapons programs.

Rocket-propelled grenade launchers fire a single warhead and can be quickly reloaded, making them valuable weapons for guerrilla forces in running skirmishes with heavy vehicles. The F-7 has been documented in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, said N.R. Jenzen-Jones, a weapons expert who works as the director of the consultancy Armament Research Services.

"North Korea has long supported Palestinian militant groups, and North Korean arms have previously been documented amongst interdicted supplies," Jenzen-Jones told the AP.

Hamas has published images of their fighters with a launcher with a rocket-propelled grenade with a distinctive red stripe across its warhead, and other design elements matching the F-7, said Matt Schroeder, a senior researcher with Small Arms Survey who wrote a guide to Pyongyang's light weapons.

"It is not a surprise to see North Korean weapons with Hamas," Schroeder said.

The North Korean F-7 resembles the more widely distributed Soviet-era RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade, with a few noticeable differences. Jenzen-Jones described the F-7 rocket-propelled grenade as "intended to offer a lethal effect against personnel" given its shape and payload, rather than armored vehicles.

Weapons seized by the Israeli military and shown to journalists also included that red stripe and other design elements matching the F-7.

In a background briefing with journalists Tuesday, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff specifically identified the F-7 as one of the North Korean weapons it believed Hamas used in the attack. The Israeli military declined to answer questions from the AP about the origin and the manufacturer of those rocket-propelled grenades, saying the ongoing war with Hamas prevented it from responding.

North Korea's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment from the AP. However, Pyongyang last week through its state-run KCNA news agency dismissed claims that Hamas used its weapons as "a groundless and false rumor" orchestrated by the United States.

Hamas propaganda videos and photos previously have shown its fighters with North Korea's Bulsae guided anti-tank missile. Jenzen-Jones said he believed, based on imagery of the weapons wielded by Hamas fighters in the Oct. 7 attack, they also used North Korea's Type 58 self-loading rifle, a variant of the Kalashnikov assault rifle.

"Many North Korean weapons have been provided by Iran to militant groups, and this is believed to be the primary way by which Palestinian militants have come to possess North Korean weapons," Jenzen-Jones said.

Iran also has modeled some of its ballistic missiles after North Korean variants.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. Officials in Iran long have supported Hamas and have praised their assault on Israel.

In December 2009, Thai authorities grounded a North Korean cargo plane reportedly carrying 35 tons of conventional arms, including rockets and rocket-propelled grenades, as it made a refueling stop at a Bangkok airport. Thai officials then said the weapons were headed to Iran. The United States later said

in 2012 the shipments interdicted by the Thais had been bound for Hamas.

North Korea also faces Western suspicions that it supplies ammunition, artillery shells and rockets to Russia to support of its war on Ukraine. The White House said last week that North Korea recently delivered more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Russia.

## **Joran van der Sloot's confession in Natalee Holloway case provides long-sought answers, mother says**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Beth Holloway was after one thing for 18 years: answers about what happened to her missing daughter.

She got them Wednesday when Joran van der Sloot, long considered the chief suspect in her daughter's 2005 disappearance in Aruba, admitted in submitted court filings to bludgeoning Natalee Holloway to death on a beach and dragging her body out to sea.

Van der Sloot, 36, pleaded guilty on Wednesday to federal charges of attempting to extort money from Beth Holloway in 2010 in exchange for information about the location of her daughter's body. The plea agreement included an unusual provision for van der Sloot to "provide all information and evidence" about what happened to Natalee Holloway and to let her family hear him in "real time" give his account to federal investigators.

Beth Holloway said in an interview with The Associated Press that the family made the decision to allow the plea agreement to "finally get the answers we've been searching for for all these years."

Natalee Holloway, 18, went missing during a high school graduation trip to Aruba with classmates. She was last seen May 30, 2005, leaving a bar with van der Sloot, a Dutch citizen and student at an international school on the Caribbean island where he grew up.

Natalee Holloway's disappearance quickly became an international sensation, filling evening newscasts with live reports from the island and photos of her smiling cherubic face. Her disappearance also spawned countless books, podcasts and movies.

Under the terms of the plea agreement, Natalee Holloway's parents listened and watched several weeks ago as van der Sloot, under questioning from his own attorney, described what happened on the beach. Prosecutors filed excerpts of the conversation with the court.

He said Natalee Holloway was physically fighting his sexual advances and that he kicked her "extremely hard" in the face while she was still lying down. Van der Sloot said the teen was already unconscious, or even dead, when he picked up a nearby cinderblock and brought it down on her face.

"I smash her head in with it completely," van der Sloot said, according to an Oct. 3 transcript of the meeting.

He then said he dragged her body until he was knee-deep in the waves and pushed her out to sea.

"It's just blistering to your soul, and it hurts so deeply," Beth Holloway said of hearing the details. "But you know that you're there in a functionality role because this is the moment where I've been searching for for 18 years. Even as hard as it is to hear, it still not as torturous as the not knowing. It was time for me to know."

Beth Holloway said she recognized her feisty daughter in van der Sloot's description of her kneeling him between legs when he refused to stop his sexual advances.

"Yes, I said, 'That's her,'" Beth Holloway recalled with a brief smile. "She fought like hell. I think she fought like hell with her killer. She stood her ground."

Dave Holloway, Natalee's father, called van der Sloot "evil personified" in a statement issued after the sentencing hearing.

He said that after witnessing the confession he believes van der Sloot worked alone in killing his daughter but that he suspects others may have helped dispose of the body or covered up the crime. Natalee Holloway's body was never found during land and sea searches.

"While it may not be in a court of law, I believe their judgment is still to come," Dave Holloway said. "We

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are living every parent's nightmare. Today and every day, please hug your children in honor and loving memory of our daughter, Natalee Ann Holloway."

Beth Holloway flew to Aruba in 2005, quickly piecing together that van der Sloot left the bar with her daughter, tracking him down and questioning him about what happened. What followed was 18 years of lies and taunts, but she believes they finally have obtained the truth, she said.

At the hearing Wednesday, Beth Holloway again stood in front of van der Sloot.

"You are a killer," she told him. "I want you to remember that every time that jail door slams."

Shackled and wearing an orange jail uniform, van der Sloot told the crowded courtroom he hopes his statement provides some closure.

"I would like the chance to apologize to the Holloway family, to my own family," he said, later adding, "I am no longer the person I was back then."

Mark White, an attorney for Dave Holloway, said he understands from law enforcement authorities that van der Sloot cannot be prosecuted in Aruba — even with his confession — because the statute of limitations has expired. The Aruba public prosecutor's office said it was not immediately clear whether van der Sloot could face murder charges on the island. The investigation into Natalee Holloway's disappearance is still open, and authorities "will follow up on any serious leads," said Ann Angela, a prosecutor's office spokesperson.

Peru agreed to temporarily extradite van der Sloot to the U.S. to face proceedings on the extortion charge. He is expected to be returned to Peru in the coming days after the settlement of the U.S. criminal case.

His 20-year sentence for extortion will run concurrently with prison time he's serving for another killing in Peru.

Van der Sloot's guilty plea in a crowded courtroom, a few miles from where Natalee Holloway attended high school, came three days before what would have been her 37th birthday. She had planned to go to medical school, her mother said.

"I fully believe now, today, she would be a doctor, married, children," Beth Holloway said.

She said she is undecided how she will spend her daughter's birthday but that she feels like now the "never-ending nightmare" is over.

"We've been searching so desperately for those answers," Beth Holloway said. "It's hard to hear what he did, but it's very victorious to finally be at the end of this nightmare."

## Havana's once stately homes crumble as their residents live in fear of an imminent collapse

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The house on Villegas Street, in the heart of Old Havana, looks nothing like the stately two-story home it used to be a century ago, with its high ceilings, wrought iron railings, semicircular arches and stairs covered in white marble. Its former elegance is such that local lore says it used to belong to a marquise.

Today, everything inside the six-family unit is chaos.

The roots of a tree protrude through the wall of a makeshift toilet where birds have made their nests. The roofs of the first and second floors are propped up. There is rubble and fresh sand scattered everywhere. The walls seem to tilt and the façade has completely disappeared, exposing a patio where one can see freshly washed clothes hanging.

The structure is one of many once luxurious houses in the island nation that in recent years have partially collapsed — or suffer visible damage. Barely 100 meters (yards) away, also on Villegas Street, a similar building fell in earlier this month, causing three deaths.

Residents say they have repeatedly asked authorities for help to no avail. Years of neglect, inclement weather and a deepening economic crisis only aggravate the fear that their home will eventually collapse.

"How can we not live in fear? Every time it rains I feel like small pebbles come falling down on me," said Maricelys Colás, a retired 64-year-old who has lived in the house with her 85-year-old mother for 59 years.

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“And a collapse doesn’t warn you.”

The Cuban government has in the past acknowledged the problem of housing deterioration, but says the lack of material resources prevents it from tackling it. Yet, many Cubans wonder why the pace of investment in tourism megaprojects such as hotels — a vital business sector that has failed to take off in at least the last two years — is not slowing down to address the dire housing crisis.

The house on Villegas Street was built at the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th on a plot measuring about 15 meters (50 feet) wide by 60 meters (about 200 feet) deep. Three families live on the ground floor, where there used to be a main patio and rooms for the domestic staff. Three other families live on the more deteriorated top floor, where cracks abound and the staircase creaks as you climb it.

All of the residents say the building once belonged to the Marquise of Pinar del Río, a title granted by the Spanish crown when the island was part of its domains. The Associated Press could not verify that, but its elegant design is visible.

Nowadays, everything smells of mold.

AP interviewed all the residents in the unit, except for an elderly man who was temporarily staying in a relative’s house. They unanimously reported having made efforts before the government, requesting to live elsewhere or to have access to materials for repairs. They said they never received a response.

The Cuban government did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

Mario Luis Poll, a 57-year-old art restorer who has lived in the building for 19 years, walks around his unit showing a reporter all the repairs he has done to try to hold the ceiling together after the floor of the room above collapsed.

Right above him, 47-year-old musician Marcos Villa faces a different problem: Foliage from a tree is growing out of his improvised bathroom.

“The struts (the wooden posts that support the roof of the entire construction) are almost just for decoration,” Poll said, shrugging in a sign of resignation.

Cuba’s housing crisis is one of the most pressing challenges facing the island, where a humid climate, the passage of hurricanes and other storms, poor maintenance and a low completion rate of new ones are usually among the top complaints of Cubans.

Cuba’s director of housing, Vivian Rodríguez, said earlier this month that the island has a housing deficit of 800,000 homes, especially in the provinces of Havana, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba and Camagüey.

Government figures from 2020 say Cuba had 3.9 million homes, out of which nearly 40% were deemed to be in only fair or poor condition.

“The situation is critical,” said Abel Tablada, professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the Technological University of Havana, adding that rebuilding and restoring partially collapsed buildings “requires many resources that the Cuban state does not have in these moments of acute crisis.”

The residents of the house in Villegas Street, tired of asking authorities for help, can only sigh about the fate of the former mansion they inhabit.

“If those marquises came back to life and saw this house, they would surely die again,” joked Elayne Clavel, 26, wife of musician Villa.

## Spain’s leader mulls granting amnesty to thousands of Catalan separatists in order to stay in power

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Barcelona accountant Oriol Calvo ran afoul of the law when he was arrested in 2019 during a mass protest by supporters of Catalonia’s independence from Spain that turned violent. A court found him guilty of public disorder and of aggressive behavior toward a police officer — offenses he denies.

The 25-year-old is among several thousand ordinary citizens who faced legal trouble for their often tiny part in Catalonia’s illegal secession bid that brought Spain to the brink of rupture six years ago.

Now Calvo hopes his conviction and those of many others will be wiped clean if Spain’s acting prime

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minister, Pedro Sánchez, follows through and issues a sweeping amnesty for the separatists in exchange for their movement's political parties helping him form a new government in Madrid.

Calvo's sentence of 18 months was suspended since it was his first offense, but it is still a stain on his record and has affected his willingness to participate in politics. He has stopped going to rallies for independence for fears that it could complicate his legal situation. He also felt betrayed.

"I became very bitter," Calvo said. "I felt betrayed by the justice system, but also I thought about all the efforts that the movement had made in the fight to achieve independence that had gotten us nowhere."

Sánchez, who has granted pardons to several leaders of the movement in the past, says that the amnesty will be positive for Spain because it will further reduce tensions inside Catalonia. Yet no one doubts that he is doing it only out of political necessity given how divisive the Catalan independence movement is both inside Catalonia and the rest of Spain.

A national election in July left no party close to an absolute majority and with Sánchez in need of the support of several smaller parties to stay in power. Those include two pro-secession Catalan parties who led the unsuccessful 2017 breakaway attempt and who now find themselves holding the key votes in Parliament that Sánchez requires.

Given the chance to play kingmaker, the two separatist parties are using their leverage. They have made an amnesty law as a prerequisite for supporting Sánchez.

The clock is already ticking. Sánchez has until Nov. 27 to form a government, otherwise new elections will be triggered for January.

Sánchez and his center-left Socialist party have tried to keep as quiet as possible on the amnesty question, but the leader has acknowledged that talks are on-going with the Catalan parties, including one led by the fugitive former regional leader of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, who fled Spain for Belgium after his dream to carve out a new state in northeast Spain collapsed.

Spain's courts are still trying to have Puigdemont extradited. Given that Puigdemont is considered an enemy of the state for many Spaniards, any deal that could benefit him is politically toxic.

Tens of thousands of people rallied in downtown Barcelona on Oct. 8 against a possible amnesty in a sign of the danger that Sánchez runs.

An amnesty "would be shameful because Spain can't be governed by people who want to split from the country," said 23-year-old Pablo Seco, an aeronautical engineer who attended the rally.

For Montserrat Nebrera, professor of constitutional law at the International University of Catalonia, the negotiations between Sánchez and the separatist leaders are a "hall of mirrors" wherein both sides try to appear that they have the upper hand, when in reality they need one another.

"Pedro Sánchez needs the amnesty law to pass so he can get the four votes he is lacking," Nebrera told the AP. "The secessionists, however, also need to show their people that they are not only interested in saving the necks of their leaders ... but also of the people who disobeyed authorities or damaged public property and whose punishments, while not huge, have greatly complicated their lives."

Spain's conservative party, which lost a bid to form a government last month, is already bashing Sánchez for what it describes as selling Spain out to stay in power. Former Socialist prime minister Felipe González has also said that the amnesty is not merited.

Spain granted a sweeping amnesty during its transition back to democracy following the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. But legal experts are divided over the constitutionality of an amnesty for the Catalan separatists.

The pro-independence Catalan organization Omnium Cultural says that an amnesty should benefit some 4,400 more people, mostly minor officials and ordinary citizens who either helped to organize an illegal 2017 referendum or participated, like Calvo, in protests that turned ugly.

But Omnium and the two Catalan separatist parties say they want much more than just a clean slate for people in trouble with the law: they want the terms of the amnesty to establish a legal pretext for Catalonia eventually holding a binding, authorized referendum on independence.

"For us, the amnesty is not the solution to the conflict, it is the starting point from which the conflict

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can begin to be resolved," said Xavier Antich, president of Omnium Cultural.

That going-for-broke position, however, may run the risk of wrecking the whole operation, as well as leaving people like Calvo in the lurch.

"They have already tried to have a referendum authorized and it has not worked," Calvo said. "So I believe that trying to force something that we know isn't going to happen is useless and could derail the amnesty talks."

## **The trees arrived with Polynesian voyagers. After Maui wildfire, there's a chance to restore them**

By ED KOMENDA and AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii (AP) — For people around the world, the green leaves that sprouted from a scorched, 150-year-old banyan tree in the heart of devastated Lahaina symbolized hope following Maui's deadly wildfire this summer. Teams rushed to flood its roots with water, hoping to save a magnificent tree that had provided shade for community events, a picturesque wedding venue and a popular backdrop for posing tourists.

But the fire also nearly wiped out another set of trees, one with a much longer history in Lahaina and a greater significance in Hawaiian culture: breadfruit, or ulu, which had given sustenance since Polynesian voyagers introduced it to the islands many centuries ago. Before colonialism, commercial agriculture and tourism, thousands of breadfruit trees dotted Lahaina; the fire charred all but two of the dozen or so that remained.

Now, as Maui recovers from the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century, one that left at least 98 people dead, a band of arborists, farmers and landscapers has set about trying to save Lahaina's ulu, kukui nut and other culturally important trees, in some cases digging down to the roots of badly burned specimens to find live tissue that could be used to propagate new shoots.

They see the destruction as a chance to restore the trees to Lahaina, to teach about their care and use, and to reclaim a bit of the town's historic identity amid a larger discussion about whether the community's reconstruction will price out locals and Hawaiian culture in favor of deep-pocketed outsiders seeking a slice of tropical paradise.

"Even in this tragedy and the destruction, there is a lot of hope in our communities that there is opportunity here to bring awareness and appreciation and incorporation of some of our values and history and identity," said Noa Kekuewa Lincoln, an associate researcher of indigenous crops at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

The banyan tree at the center of Lahaina was a sapling when it was planted in 1873 — a quarter century before the Hawaiian Islands became a U.S. territory and seven decades after King Kamehameha declared Lahaina the capital of his kingdom. It was a gift shipped from India to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first Protestant mission in Lahaina.

The sprawling tree is beloved, towering more than 60 feet (18 meters) and spanning nearly an acre with aerial roots descending from its boughs. It has provided shade for locals and tourists alike in a town whose name means "relentless sun." But for some it also continues to represent the colonization that eventually transformed Lahaina into a travel destination.

By contrast, researchers believe breadfruit and kukui nut — now the state tree of Hawaii — were among the many edible plants Polynesian voyagers brought around 1,000 years ago. Such imports could have been carried across the ocean, wrapped in rotted coconut husk and dried leaves and protected in a woven coconut basket.

Kukui nut oil was used for torches — kukui is known as the "tree of light." Other uses included wood for canoes, dyes for tattoos and bark infusions for preserving fish nets.

Ulu can grow to 60 feet (18 meters) tall, with large dark green leaves, and each can bear hundreds of pounds of breadfruit. A staple in some tropical countries, the fruit looks like an oversized, scaly lime. It is typically eaten cooked and is starchy, like potatoes or bread. It has a short shelf life, rotting within 48

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hours of ripening.

Kaipo Kekona, a ninth-generation Lahaina native, has led efforts to restore its ancient food forests for several years. He said ulu can be made into dishes resembling mashed potatoes, French fries, mousse, hummus, cakes, pies and chips, and that it can help ensure food security when other industries fail, such as tourism during the pandemic or after the wildfire.

"When we look at reforestation efforts in our town, reclamation of ulu and its historical value, it can be complemented by the evolving palates of our community," Kekona said.

The footprint of the burn zone largely overlaps what is known in Hawaiian history as Malu `ulu `o Lele: "the shaded breadfruit grove of Lele," Lele being an earlier name for Lahaina. By the late 19th century many of those trees had been burned to make way for sugar plantations. Fresh water sources at streams and canals were diverted. Development transformed the landscape into a tourism destination with far fewer trees.

Efforts to revive the banyan and other important surviving trees have included trucking in water, applying compost extract and testing soil. The volunteers working to save Lahaina's breadfruit have dug down to extract viable root matter. In one case, they peeled back asphalt that butted against a charred breadfruit trunk. Underground, they found life.

The samples they collected are now in a University of Hawaii lab in Hilo, on the Big Island. Lincoln projects hundreds of trees could be propagated, with seeds or saplings being given to homeowners seeking to replant their properties.

But replanting breadfruit in urban areas comes with challenges, said Steve Nimz, an arborist on Oahu who has been helping restore Lahaina's trees.

When ripe breadfruit falls, it splats and rots in an unsightly, gooey, fragrant mess. Trees planted near a sidewalk or public area could pose a threat to passersby, as some varieties have fruits weighing up to 12 pounds (5.5 kg). Falling breadfruit can cause serious injury.

"You probably don't want to put breadfruit in a really high traffic area," said Hokuao Pellegrino, an ethnobotanist who has helped in the volunteer effort and who has 22 breadfruit trees on his own farm in Waikapu, on the other side of the West Maui Mountains from Lahaina. "But restoring some of the breadfruit groves as part of the individual homeowner's landscape, now that is a worthy cause, because those can be managed a little bit better."

Pellegrino said the efforts to replant breadfruit in Lahaina should also come with efforts to teach people about its care and its uses: "We want people to use the breadfruit. We don't want it just to be in the landscape."

But for now, many are more focused on housing and cleaning up after the disaster than on what trees to eventually plant. Pellegrino, who calls himself an outsider because he's not from Lahaina, says reintegrating breadfruit and restoring wetlands, canals and streams could bring a new future for the town.

"It's about reclaiming the identity of that place," Pellegrino said.

## The House speaker's race hits an impasse as defeated GOP Rep.

### Jim Jordan wants to try again

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Refusing to drop out, Republican Rep. Jim Jordan has brought the House speaker's race to a stalemate — the hard-fighting ally of Donald Trump has been unable to win the gavel but he and his far-right allies won't step aside for a more viable GOP nominee.

The House is tentatively set to convene sometime Thursday afternoon for Jordan to try again.

But there's a sinking realization that the House could remain endlessly stuck, out of service and without a leader for the foreseeable future as the Republican majority spirals deeper into dysfunction. The impasse has left some Republican lawmakers settling in for a protracted stretch without a House speaker.

"I think clearly Nov. 17 is a real date," said Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., who leads a large conservative caucus, referring to the next deadline for Congress to approve funding or risk a federal government shutdown.



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Next steps were highly uncertain as angry, frustrated Republicans looked at other options. A bipartisan group of lawmakers floated an extraordinary plan — to give the interim speaker pro tempore, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., more power to reopen the immobilized House and temporarily conduct routine business. But that seems doubtful, for now.

What was clear was that Jordan's path to become House speaker was almost certainly lost.

On Wednesday, Jordan failed in a crucial second ballot, opposed by 22 Republicans, two more than he lost in first-round voting the day before. Many view the Ohio congressman as too extreme for a central seat of U.S. power and resented the harassing hardball tactics from Jordan's allies for their votes. One lawmaker said they had received death threats.

"We'll keep talking to members, keep working on it," Jordan, a founding member of the hard-right Freedom Caucus, said after the vote.

The House came to another abrupt standstill, 16 days now since the sudden ouster of Kevin McCarthy without a speaker — a position of power second in line to the presidency.

As Republicans upset and exhausted by the infighting retreated for private conversations, hundreds of demonstrators amassed outside the Capitol over the Israel-Hamas war, a stark reminder of the concern over having the House adrift as political challenges intensify at home and abroad.

"The way out is that Jim Jordan has got to pull his name," said Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., who voted twice against him. "He's going to have to call it quits."

After Wednesday's vote, McCarthy and other party leaders appeared to tentatively rally around Jordan, giving the combative Judiciary Committee chairman the time he was demanding, though it was doubtful he could shore up votes.

With Republicans in majority control of the House, 221-212, Jordan must pick up most of his GOP foes to win. Wednesday's tally, with 199 Republicans voting for Jordan and 212 for Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, left no candidate with a clear majority.

The holdouts added to a surprisingly large and politically diverse group of 20 Republicans who had rejected Jordan's nomination the day before.

Jordan's refusal to concede only further embittered some of the Republicans, who were upset that the party's first choice, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, was essentially forced to drop his own bid 24 hours after a failed vote last week in large part because Jordan's backers refused to give their support.

Bipartisan groups of lawmakers have been floating ways to operate the House by giving greater power to McHenry or another temporary speaker. The House had never ousted its speaker before McCarthy, and McHenry could tap the temporary powers that were created after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks to ensure continuity of government.

The novel concept of boosting the interim speaker's role was gaining favor with a pair of high-profile Republicans: former GOP speakers Newt Gingrich and John Boehner.

The two men have deep experience with the subject. Both were chased to early retirement.

"All options are on the table to end the Republican civil war," Jeffries said Wednesday.

But McHenry appeared to brush off the idea of taking further powers for himself, saying Jordan "has the support of the conference to keep going, so that's what we're gonna do."

McHenry added that he finds himself in an unprecedented position and has constructed his role "as narrowly as the rules say I should, and we can't transact business until we elect a speaker."

To win over his GOP colleagues, Jordan had relied on backing from Trump, the party's front-runner in the 2024 election to challenge President Joe Biden, and groups pressuring rank-and-file lawmakers for the vote. But they were not enough and in fact backfired on some.

"One thing I cannot stomach or support is a bully," said a statement from Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa, who voted against Jordan on the second ballot and said she received "credible death threats and a barrage of threatening calls."

Flexing their independence, the holdouts are a mix of pragmatists — ranging from seasoned legislators and committee chairs worried about governing, to newer lawmakers from districts where voters prefer

Biden to Trump.

Instead, the holdouts cast their ballots for McCarthy, Scalise and others, with one vote even going to the retired Boehner.

Jordan has been a top Trump ally, particularly during the Jan. 6 Capitol attack by the former president's backers who were trying to overturn the 2020 election he lost to Biden. Days later, Trump awarded Jordan a Medal of Freedom.

The political climb has been steep for Jordan, who is known more as a chaos agent than a skilled legislator, raising questions about how he would lead. Congress faces daunting challenges, risking a federal shutdown at home if it fails to fund the government and fielding Biden's requests for aid to help Ukraine and Israel in the wars abroad.

First elected in 2006, Jordan has few bills to his name from his time in office. He also faces questions about his past. Some years ago, Jordan denied allegations from former wrestlers during his time as an assistant wrestling coach at Ohio State University who accused him of knowing about claims they were inappropriately groped by an Ohio State doctor. Jordan has said he was never aware of any abuse.

## **Trump's campaign cash overwhelms his GOP rivals. Here are key third-quarter fundraising takeaways**

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump is crushing his Republican presidential rivals in the contest to raise campaign cash, putting the other White House hopefuls in an unenviable position before the first votes are cast in January.

Those who have amassed a nest egg will have the resources to last for the foreseeable future, while those without will face hard choices in the coming days, weeks and months.

Here are some takeaways from the recently released campaign finance disclosures that cover the third quarter:

### **LET'S BE REAL**

Trump's political operation has splurged at least \$20 million this year on legal expenses arising from a sprawling set of court cases and lawsuits faced by the former president and his allies. It's an enormous outlay of cash, big enough to sink even a generously financed campaign.

Yet as the GOP presidential primary enters a crucial make-or-break phase before voting begins early next year, the latest campaign finance disclosures show Trump still has more money socked away than his top rivals — combined.

The amount of cash a candidate has in reserve offers a window into the health of their campaign. Those with an ample sum will have the money needed to hold events, run TV ads and communicate with voters. Those who lack it are all but certain to struggle.

But the stark disparity between Trump, whose presidential campaign had \$37.5 million at the end of September, and the balances held by his rivals like former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott speaks to a broader reality in the race: It's Trump's to lose and his rivals have both limited time and limited means to change that.

The drop-off from Trump is steep. That's led some candidates to send repeated and at times desperate-sounding pleas.

"Did you know that every new member who donates to Team DeSantis gets their own bumper sticker as a welcome present? Chip in \$5 or more today," read one text message solicitation sent last month.

### **PALMETTO RIVALRY**

Tim Scott was in an enviable position when he entered the Republican presidential contest, boasting of a \$21.9 million war chest amassed over the years from his prominent perch in the Senate.

Things were less rosy for Haley, his home state rival. The one-time accountant raised \$8.3 million last April, but relied on accounting gimmicks to inaccurately inflate her fundraising success by several million dollars in a press release.

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Now the tables have turned.

Haley entered October with somewhat of a fundraising tailwind after doubling the money in her campaign account to \$11.5 million over the past three months, thanks in part to strong debate performances that led to a flood of contributions.

Scott, meanwhile, has so far failed to catch on while hemorrhaging cash. That includes \$14 million spent on advertising, according to data from advertising tracking firm Ad Impact. And he held \$13.3 million at the end of September — down from \$21 million at the start of the quarter.

The big spending super PAC that supports him — a group that can raise and spend unlimited sums, so long as they do not coordinate with Scott — also cancelled tens of millions of dollars in TV reservations planned for the fall.

DESANTIS

Like Scott, DeSantis has also blown through a prodigious amount of money. The Florida governor entered the race with sky-high expectations and a \$20 million pile of cash.

But his campaign, which was built out to convey the image of a front-runner, soon bowed to reality. DeSantis trimmed staff and expenses after burning through \$8 million during an early six-week spending spree that included more than 100 paid staffers, a large security detail and luxury travel.

While he has continued to raise respectable sums, he is still spending almost as much as he takes in. That left him with \$12.3 million at the end of the quarter.

One variable is his super PAC, Never Back Down, which DeSantis' political operation seeded with money left over from his 2022 gubernatorial campaign. The group won't have to disclose its finances until later.

WITHER MIKE PENCE

Mike Pence was always going to face an uphill climb in a Republican presidential contest dominated by Trump, the man whom he served as a loyal vice president for four years.

His dismal fundraising has not helped.

Pence entered October running on fumes with \$1.1 million cash on hand and debts of \$621,000. That's after Pence, who is not independently wealthy, lent \$150,000 of his own money to the campaign in July, records show.

The rate at which he has burned through cash is not sustainable absent a large infusion of cash. Though Pence raised about \$4.5 million since entering the race, he has spent \$3.4 million.

His expenditures offer a glimpse of a campaign flying low to the ground. Postage and printing was his biggest expenditure, costing \$1.4 million. Travel cost him \$207,000. Advertising and media production — what well-financed campaigns rely on to get their message out — accounted for about \$80,000, records show.

It hasn't been all bad for Pence, who had a couple buzzy moments at a GOP debate in August. They came at the expense of Vivek Ramaswamy, a 38-year-old biotech financier and conservative ingenue whose critiques of "woke" politics have garnered attention.

"Now is not the time for on-the-job training. We don't need to bring in a rookie," Pence said during one memorable exchange.

The difficulty for Pence is that it is a steep climb for him to reach the next debate stage. The Republican National Committee uses a candidates' ability to raise money from grassroots donors as a metric for qualifying — and it raised the thresholds for the next one.

BIDEN HIS TIME

While the Republican field of contenders crow about raising \$10 million or \$20 million, President Joe Biden has repeatedly touted totals that are far greater, like the \$71 million his campaign says he has taken in since July.

Welcome to one of the advantages of incumbency.

As the leader of his party, Biden is able to rake in massive amounts through a joint fundraising agreement with the Democratic National Committee and all 50 state party committees. Under that arrangement, a single donor can stroke a check for nearly \$1 million.

Republicans vying for the GOP nod, meanwhile, are on their own without this strategic advantage. Under

federal campaign finance laws, their donations are capped at \$3,300 per donor for the primary, though that will change once a nominee is selected and they can raise money in concert with the party.

## **The pope's absolute power, and the problems it can cause, are on display in 2 Vatican trials**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Two Vatican trials are coming to a head this week and posing uncomfortable questions for the Holy See, given they both underscore Pope Francis' power as an absolute monarch and the legal, financial and reputational problems that can arise when he wields it.

On Wednesday, the Vatican's former in-house auditor was in court for a hearing in his 9.3 million euro wrongful dismissal lawsuit against the Holy See. Libero Milone says Vatican police forced his resignation in 2017 under the threat of arrest, after he was told Francis had "lost faith" in him over his zealous attempts to audit Vatican monsignors.

The Vatican secretariat of state has objected to being named as a defendant in the suit, arguing it had nothing to do with Milone's hiring or resignation and that the city state's tribunal had no place getting involved.

The rationale: The pope hired Milone and then wanted him out, and the court has no right to judge his decisions.

On Thursday, the Vatican's long-running financial fraud, extortion and corruption trial resumes, with defense attorneys offering final arguments ahead of a verdict expected before the end of the year.

On their first day of closing arguments earlier this month, lawyers for the former managers of the Vatican financial watchdog agency challenged key elements of the prosecutors' case by underlining that Francis had approved the key transaction at the heart of the trial, and that Vatican officials merely executed his will as required.

Even Vatican News, the Holy See's in-house media which has been sympathetic to the prosecutors' case from the start, acknowledged that the defense had provided a "change in perspective for the narrative of the trial."

Prosecutors have charged 10 people, including a cardinal, with a host of alleged financial crimes stemming from the secretariat of state's 350 million euro investment in a London property. Prosecutors allege Vatican monsignors and brokers fleeced the Holy See of tens of millions of euros in fees and commissions, and then extorted the Holy See for 15 million euros to cede control of the building.

Much of the London case rests on the passage of the property from one London broker to another in late 2018. Prosecutors allege the second broker, Gianluigi Torzi, hoodwinked the Vatican by maneuvering to secure full control of the building that he only relinquished when the Vatican paid him 15 million euros.

For Vatican prosecutors, that amounted to extortion. For the defense – and a British judge who rejected Vatican requests to seize Torzi's assets – it was a negotiated exit from a legally binding contract.

The two former managers of the Vatican's financial watchdog, Rene Bruehlhart and Tommaso Di Ruzza, are accused of abuse of office for having not blocked the payment to Torzi, and for not having reported it all to Vatican prosecutors.

Their lawyers, however, both cited the fact that Francis himself had asked them to help the secretariat of state wrest control of the property from Torzi once the Vatican realized it didn't actually own the building.

They cited written testimony from the Vatican chief of staff, Monsignor Edgar Pena Parra, who said Vatican lawyers in Britain and Luxembourg had advised against suing Torzi since their case was so weak: The Vatican had signed contracts clearly giving him control of the building.

Pena Parra said that on the basis of such advice, the Vatican chose to negotiate a payout with Torzi because that option was considered best in terms of cost, risk, and outcome.

"It also appeared to be purely aligned with the will of the superior," he said, referring to Francis.

Bruehlhart attorney Filippo Dinacci said once the pope decided on that course of action, the Vatican machinery was obliged to put it into effect and that it was "paradoxical" for those officials to now be on

trial for abuse of office.

In his closing, he cited the “principle of mutual collaboration” enshrined in the Holy See’s founding constitution that all Vatican institutions are called to work with a “unity of intent” for the good of the church, headed by the pope as supreme authority.

Di Ruzza attorney Roberto Borgogno concurred, saying there were no grounds to fault Di Ruzza or Bruehlhart for not reporting the transaction to Vatican prosecutors, since the deal was authorized by the pope and they regardless fulfilled their obligations by launching their own financial intelligence-gathering investigation.

Challenging another narrative of the prosecutors’ case, Di Ruzza’s team also noted that the Vatican bank – hailed by prosecutors and the pope for having triggered the investigation by flagging the London deal as suspicious – actually cost the secretariat of state some 17 million euros in excess mortgage payments. The bank had dragged its feet and ultimately rejected a loan request to extinguish the onerous mortgage on the building; a loan subsequently secured from another Vatican office.

The Vatican is the lone absolute monarchy left in Europe, with Francis wielding supreme legislative, executive and judicial power. While he delegates that power on a day-to-day basis, he is still pope and what he says goes.

Francis had strongly supported the trial, holding it up as evidence that his financial reforms were working. After two years of hearings, prosecutors in July asked the tribunal to convict all 10 defendants, sentence them from three to 13 years in prison and confiscate 415 million euros from them to claw back some of the losses the Vatican sustained.

But after two years, the trial has also become something of a reputational boomerang for the Holy See, with unseemly revelations about Vatican vendettas, spy stories and even ransom payments to Islamic militants playing out in court and subsequent media coverage.

The defense has also raised fundamental questions about the rule of law in the city state, since Francis secretly changed the law four times during the investigation to benefit prosecutors, and then changed it again to allow a cardinal to stand trial.

The Rev. Filippo Di Giacomo, a canon lawyer and frequent Vatican commentator for Italy’s state-run RAI broadcaster, said the trial had indeed exposed the Vatican to reputational harm given the numerous “anomalies” that came to light.

He cited Francis’ interventions in the investigation, the frequent confusion in the courtroom about what legal codes prevailed (Italian, Vatican, canonical or ad hoc) and the role of two mysterious women who persuaded the key suspect-turned-star witness to turn on his boss.

“More than what some insist on calling a trial ‘of the century,’ it looks more like a 19th-century show, with mediocre performers,” he told an online magazine recently.

## **Racial gaps in math have grown. A school tried closing theirs by teaching all kids the same classes**

By MAURA TURCOTTE of The Post and Courier undefined

Hope Reed was seeing stark disparities a decade ago at her high school in the suburbs of Columbia, South Carolina.

Nearly half the school’s students were white, but the freshman remedial math classes were made up of almost all students of color. Reed, then chair of the math department at Blythewood High School, intervened with an experiment.

She taught a ninth-grade remedial class and used the regular Algebra 1 curriculum with nearly 50 students. They were honors students, and they were going to do honors work, she recalled telling them.

At the end of the year, about 90% of the students passed. The experiment convinced Reed that detracking — or getting rid of classes that separate students by achievement level — could be a key to narrowing gaps in math performance. The school then tried going a step further, enrolling all ninth-graders in the same level of math class.

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The Education Reporting Collaborative, a coalition of eight newsrooms, is documenting the math crisis facing schools and highlighting progress. Members of the Collaborative are AL.com, The Associated Press, The Christian Science Monitor, The Dallas Morning News, The Hechinger Report, Idaho Education News, The Post and Courier in South Carolina, and The Seattle Times.

Racial achievement gaps have worsened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptions to learning. Math scores dropped for Black 13-year-olds far more than white 13-year-olds between the 2019-2020 and 2022-2023 school years, according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card.

Addressing those disparities is critical for strengthening students' understanding of math, and for increasing their access to higher-paying jobs in STEM fields. Schools that have implemented detracking have aimed to level the playing field by exposing all students to the same higher concepts and standards.

Step into any American school and you'll most likely find tracked classes, especially for math.

The practice took root during the 20th century. Following immigration waves, desegregation orders and the inclusion of special education students in classes, tracking separated those students deemed fit for higher learning from those seen as less intelligent, said Kevin Welner, an educational policy professor at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Tracking continues to reflect larger societal inequalities given that students from marginalized backgrounds often come to kindergarten or first grade already with measured achievement gaps.

Studies of schools that have detracked classes show achievement gaps have been narrowed with varying levels of success, Welner said. He pointed to the Rockville Centre school district on New York's Long Island as the gold standard. In the 1990s, it got rid of many tracked classes in its middle school and high school, and provided training for teachers to handle students of varying levels in the same classroom. As a result, the district has seen more students take more advanced classes.

When Reed expanded detracking across ninth-grade math classes in the 2014-15 school year at Blythewood High, an additional class was also added for students who would have been placed in lower-level math classes. Those students received algebra lessons in the morning, and then took Algebra 1 with their full class.

The additional learning time offered a boost in confidence for students, Reed said.

"They didn't go in there just blindsided, lost," she said.

The extra math seminar also ensured the pace of learning did not slow down for students who would have been in a higher-level class.

Among the ninth-graders enrolled in the math seminar in 2014-2015 was Kianna Livingston. Initially, she believed she wasn't good at math. But Livingston, who is Black, said her confidence grew with her skills.

Livingston recalled feeling so assured of her math knowledge that she would help other students.

"It really allowed me to really own my leadership skills," she said.

At the end of the school year — and to her surprise — she was recommended for honors Geometry the following year.

Still, tracking returned to Blythewood's math classes.

A small group of students continued to struggle with the material despite the support from the math seminar, Reed said. By the middle of the 2014-15 school year, she realized they might fail and not receive math credit. So those students were moved to a slower-paced algebra class.

That tension highlights what some education experts say is one troubling aspect of detracking: The approach lacks flexibility for when students need more support.

"If you have kids who are really struggling at mathematics, they really need to be identified and probably treated differently in terms of curriculum and instruction than kids who are just sailing through math courses," said Tom Loveless, an education researcher and former senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who has studied detracking for three decades.

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Loveless cited San Francisco as an example where detracking hasn't helped. Since the school district eliminated tracks in middle and high schools starting in 2014, gaps between Black and Latino students and their white peers in San Francisco have only widened, he said.

Reed, who now works with just freshmen at Blythewood, said she still believes in detracking. The school's end-of-course passing rate has never been as high as it was in 2014-15, when for at least half a year the school had completely detracked Algebra 1.

The average score for Black students on the exam was 80, up two points from the year prior. The average for white students was 83, an increase by less than one point from the year prior.

But after that first year, the school approached the setup differently. Rather than moving struggling students to another math class midyear, teachers started the school year with two lower-track math classes. The last remnant of her program, the math seminar, ended with the last school year due to changes in the school schedule.

Reed is keen on seeing this year's end-of-course data to see how it compares with previous years, but she isn't critical of the changes. At the core of her efforts, she said, is a desire to give all students the opportunity to try higher-level math classes.

"They just need to know they matter," she said.

## Israel will let Egypt deliver some aid to Gaza, as doctors struggle to treat hospital blast victims

By NAJIB JOBAIN, ISABEL DEBRE and RAVI NESSMAN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel said Wednesday that it will allow Egypt to deliver limited humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. The first crack in a punishing 10-day siege on the territory came one day after a blast at a hospital killed hundreds and put immense strain on Gaza's struggling medical system.

The announcement to allow water, food and other supplies happened as fury over the blast at Gaza City's al-Ahli Hospital spread across the Middle East, and as U.S. President Joe Biden visited Israel in hopes of preventing a wider conflict in the region.

There were conflicting claims of who was behind the explosion on Tuesday night, but protests flared quickly as many Arab leaders said Israel was responsible. Hamas officials in Gaza blamed an Israeli airstrike, saying hundreds were killed. Israel denied it was involved and released a flurry of video, audio and other information that it said showed the blast was instead due to a rocket misfire by Islamic Jihad, another militant group operating in Gaza. Islamic Jihad dismissed that claim.

The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence.

Israel shut off all supplies to Gaza soon after Hamas militants rampaged across communities in southern Israel on Oct. 7. As supplies run out, many families in Gaza have cut down to one meal a day and have been left to drink dirty water.

The bloody devastation at al-Ahli threw the siege's impact into sharp relief. Video from the scene showed the hospital grounds strewn with torn bodies, many of them young children. Hundreds of wounded were rushed to Gaza City's main hospital where doctors, already facing critical supply shortages, were sometimes forced to perform surgery on the floors, often without anesthesia.

A steady stream of ambulances, taxis, cars and at least one motorcycle also arrived at a hospital in Khan Younis. Men jumped from the vehicles and scrambled to open doors, with hospital staff and bystanders helping carry the injured.

One man rushed in carrying a limp child in his arms. A girl with her head wrapped with a makeshift bandage was helped from a car. Many injured had to be carried by multiple men or hoisted onto gurneys.

As soon as one vehicle was unloaded, another arrived to take its place.

Biden said Egypt's president agreed to open the crossing and to let in an initial group of 20 trucks with humanitarian aid. If Hamas confiscates aid, "it will end," he said. The aid will start moving Friday at the earliest, White House officials said.

Egypt must still repair the road across the border that was cratered by Israeli airstrikes. More than 200

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trucks and some 3,000 tons of aid are positioned at or near the Rafah crossing, Gaza's only connection to Egypt, said the head of the Red Crescent for North Sinai, Khalid Zayed.

Supplies will go in under supervision of the U.N., Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told Al-Arabiya TV. Asked if foreigners and dual nationals seeking to leave would be let through, he said: "As long as the crossing is operating normally and the (crossing) facility has been repaired."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the decision was approved after a request from Biden. It said Israel "will not thwart" deliveries of food, water or medicine from Egypt, as long as they are limited to civilians in the south of the Gaza Strip and don't go to Hamas militants. The statement made no mention of fuel, which is badly needed for hospital generators.

Relatives of some of the roughly 200 people who were taken hostage and forced back to Gaza during the attack reacted in fury to the aid announcement.

"Children, infants, women, soldiers, men, and elderly, some with serious illnesses, wounded and shot, are held underground like animals," said a statement from the Hostage and Missing Families Forum. But "the Israeli government pampers the murderers and kidnappers."

Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel resumed Wednesday after a 12-hour lull. Israeli strikes on Gaza continued, including on cities in the south that Israel had described as "safe zones" for civilians.

In his brief visit, Biden tried to strike a balance between showing U.S. support for Israel, while containing growing alarm among Arab allies. Upon his arrival, Biden embraced Netanyahu, said the hospital blast appeared not to be Israel's fault and expressed concern for the suffering of Gaza's civilians. He also announced \$100 million in humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Israeli military held a briefing Wednesday laying out its case for why it was not responsible for the explosion at the al-Ahli Hospital.

Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said the military was not firing in the area when the blast occurred. He said Israeli radar confirmed a rocket barrage was fired by Islamic Jihad militants from a nearby cemetery at the time of the blast. Independent video showed one rocket in the barrage falling out of the sky, he said.

The misfired rocket hit the parking lot outside the hospital, he said. Were it an airstrike, there would have been a large crater there; instead, the fiery blast came from the misfired rocket's warhead and its unspent propellant, he said.

Hamas called Tuesday's hospital blast "a horrific massacre" caused by an Israeli strike.

Islamic Jihad said Israeli orders issued days before for al-Ahli to be evacuated, and a previous strike at the hospital, proved the hospital was an target. The group added that the scale of the explosion, the angle of the explosive's fall and the extent of destruction all pointed to Israel.

The Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum, said the hospital, run by the Episcopal Church, received at least three Israeli military orders to evacuate in the days before the blast. Israeli shelling hit it Sunday, wounding four staff, he said. Israel ordered all 22 hospitals in northern Gaza to evacuate last week. The Israeli military accuses the militants of hiding among civilians.

Hundreds of Palestinians had taken refuge in al-Ahli and other hospitals in Gaza City, hoping to be spared bombardment after Israel ordered all residents of the northern Gaza Strip to evacuate to the south.

On Wednesday morning, the blast scene was littered with charred cars. One man who had been sheltering there with his family, Mohammed al-Hayek, said he was sitting with other men in a hospital stairwell Tuesday night when he stepped away for coffee.

"When I returned, they were torn to pieces," he said.

The death toll was in dispute. The Health Ministry initially said at least 500 had died, but revised that number to 471 on Wednesday. Al-Ahli officials said the toll was in the hundreds.

The Gaza Health Ministry said 3,478 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, and more than 12,000 wounded, mostly women, children and the elderly. Another 1,300 people across Gaza are believed to be buried under the rubble, alive or dead, health authorities said.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, mostly civilians slain during Hamas' deadly incursion. Militants in Gaza have launched rockets every day since toward cities across Israel.



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Israel has been expected to launch a ground invasion into Gaza, though military officials say no decision has been made.

More than 1 million Palestinians have fled their homes, roughly half of Gaza's population. Those fleeing the north and Gaza City to move south have crowded into U.N. schools or the homes of relatives.

With Israeli airstrikes relentlessly pounding the Gaza Strip, displaced Palestinians increasingly feel that no place is safe.

The Musa family fled to the typically sleepy central town of Deir al-Balah and took shelter in a cousin's three-story home near the local hospital. But at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, a series of explosions, believed to be airstrikes, rocked the building, turning the family home into a mountain of rubble that they said buried some 20 women and children.

The dead body of Hiam Musa, the sister-in-law of Associated Press photojournalist Adel Hana, was recovered from the wreckage Wednesday evening, the family said. They don't know who else is under the rubble.

"It doesn't make sense," Hana said. "We went to Deir al-Balah because it's quiet, we thought we would be safe."

The Israeli military said it was investigating.

## **Brazil's Bolsonaro should be charged with attempting to stage a coup, congressional panel says**

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — A Brazilian congressional panel on Wednesday accused former President Jair Bolsonaro of instigating the country's Jan. 8 riots and recommended that he be charged with attempting to stage a coup.

An inquiry panel of senators and representatives mostly allied with the current leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva — who narrowly defeated Bolsonaro in last fall's election — voted 20-11 to adopt the damning report drafted by Sen. Eliziane Gama.

The move was largely symbolic for Bolsonaro because it amounts to a recommendation for police and prosecutors to investigate, and federal law enforcement officials separately have already been investigating his possible role in inciting the Jan. 8 uprising.

Bolsonaro has denied involvement in the rioting, which took place more than a week after the right-wing leader had quietly left the country to stay in Florida while refusing to attend Lula's inauguration.

"It's completely biased," Bolsonaro said Wednesday of the inquiry, in comments to reporters. "It's an absurdity."

One week after Lula took office, thousands of Bolsonaro supporters stormed Congress, the Supreme Court and presidential palace, refusing to accept his election defeat. They bypassed security barricades, climbed on roofs, smashed windows and invaded the public buildings.

Many observers at the time speculated that the riot was a coordinated effort to oust Lula from office, and could not have occurred without the complicity of some of the military and police. Gama's report jibed with those claims, and went a step further in saying they were orchestrated by Bolsonaro.

The report recommends that Bolsonaro be charged on a total of four counts, including attempting to overthrow a legitimately constituted government and attempting to overthrow democratic rule. It also includes a slew of other charges against dozens of Bolsonaro allies, including former ministers, top military brass and police officers.

Those include Gen. Braga Netto, who served as Bolsonaro's defense minister and then was his running mate; Anderson Torres, ex-justice minister and secretary of public security in Brasilia; former institutional security minister Gen. Augusto Heleno; former Chief of Staff Gen. Luiz Eduardo Ramos; and the head of Brazil's defense, navy and armed forces.

Military and police forces are blamed for not getting rid of illegal encampments in several Brazilian cities, where protesters spent several weeks demanding a military intervention, and for their leniency toward

protesters on Jan. 8.

"I don't remember in Brazilian history a (congressional inquiry) that included such a large number of high-ranking officers," said Eduardo Heleno, who teaches civil-military relations at the Federal Fluminense University. Heleno said the report's efforts to highlight the military's alleged role in the riots, even if passive, marked a stark contrast with the 1979 Amnesty Law, which turned a blind eye to human rights violations during the dictatorship.

"Without fear. This is how we end this (inquiry), because courage is the raw material of civilization. No amnesty, so that it never happens again and so that we never forget what happened," Sen. Randolfe Rodrigues said Wednesday before casting his vote backing the report.

Nara Pavão, who teaches political science at the Federal University of Pernambuco, said that Wednesday's vote by lawmakers was an important move toward accountability "even though it is symbolic."

"It is very important to have been able to take action against what happened," Pavão said.

The 1,300 page report is the fruit of months of investigation by a panel that interrogated nearly two dozen people and gathered hundreds of documents, including bank statements, phone records and text messages.

It includes a minute-by-minute account of the afternoon when thousands of Bolsonaro supporters stormed the key government buildings in the capital, following a protest march that began about 1 p.m.

But the committee also explored the months and years that preceded the events — touching on rising polarization, and Bolsonaro's repeated efforts to cast doubt on the reliability of the nation's electronic voting system, which he claimed was prone to fraud, though he never presented any evidence.

Bolsonaro "not only instrumentalized public bodies, institutions and agents, but also exploited the vulnerability and hope of thousands of people," the report read.

## **RFK Jr. spent years stoking fear and mistrust of vaccines. These people were hurt by his work**

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

When 12-year-old Braden Fahey collapsed during football practice and died, it was just the beginning of his parents' nightmare.

Deep in their grief a few months later, Gina and Padrig Fahey received news that shocked them to their core: A favorite photo of their beloved son was plastered on the cover of a book that falsely argues COVID-19 vaccines caused a spike of sudden deaths among healthy young people.

The book, called "Cause Unknown," was co-published by an anti-vaccine group led by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President John F. Kennedy's nephew, who is now running for president. Kennedy wrote the foreword and promoted the book, tweeting that it details data showing "COVID shots are a crime against humanity."

The Faheys couldn't understand how Braden's face appeared on the book's cover, or why his name appeared inside it.

Braden never received the vaccine. His death in August 2022 was due to a malformed blood vessel in his brain. No one ever contacted them to ask about their son's death, or for permission to use the photo. No one asked to confirm the date of his death — which the book misdated by a year. When the Faheys and residents of their town in California tried to contact the publisher and author to get Braden and his picture taken out of the book, no one responded.

"We reached out in every way possible," Gina Fahey told The Associated Press in an emotional interview. "We waited months and months to hear back, and nothing."

How could a member of one of the most influential political dynasties in American history be involved in such a shoddy, irresponsible project, the Faheys wondered?

Braden's story is just one example of how Kennedy, son of the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, has used his famous name to disseminate false information about vaccines and other topics in a time when spreading conspiracy theories has become a powerful way to grow a constituency. An AP examination of his work and its impact found Kennedy has earned money, fame and political clout while leaving people like the

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Faheys suffering.

Now, Kennedy's decision to drop his Democratic bid for president and run as an independent gives him a new spotlight in an election that's currently heading toward a rematch between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump. There's concern in both parties that he could emerge as a spoiler who could affect the outcome of the campaign in unexpected ways. And at a time when Republicans in the 2024 race also are sowing doubt about vaccine effectiveness, it threatens to further promote harmful misinformation that already has cost lives.

One mom told AP about how she had delayed important care for her child because she believed Kennedy's vaccine falsehoods. A former elected leader described being harassed by Kennedy's followers. Doctors and nurses recounted how his work has hurt people in the U.S. and abroad.

Kennedy's campaign did not respond to several emails seeking comment for this article, but after AP contacted Kennedy and others involved in the book last week, the president of Skyhorse Publishing, which co-published it, texted the Faheys, offering to talk. Gina Fahey told AP she felt he reached out only after it became clear the situation could harm his reputation.

"There's still that lack of compassion that was always there from the beginning," she said, adding that she is hesitant to engage with them now because she doesn't trust their intentions. "It's only now that they're reaching out, days prior to knowing this story is going to be released."

Braden's parents have read vicious comments from people who falsely blame vaccines for their son's death. They say seeing Braden's memory being misrepresented by Kennedy and others has been deeply painful.

"When you barely feel like you can even come up for air, you just get smacked back down again by this," Gina Fahey said.

"It's very manipulative. And you know, he's making money off of our tragedies," she said, adding, "How could you want somebody running our country that operates like that?"

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Many years before anti-vaccine activists exploited the pandemic to bring their ideas to the American mainstream, Kennedy, an environmental lawyer, was among the most influential spreaders of fear and distrust around vaccines. He has long advanced the debunked idea that vaccines cause autism. He has said vaccines had caused a "holocaust," and has traveled the world spreading false information about the pandemic.

In recent years, Kennedy has used his name and rhetorical skills to build his anti-vaccine group, Children's Health Defense, or CHD, into an influential force that spreads false and misleading information. An AP investigation previously revealed how Kennedy had capitalized on the pandemic to build CHD into a multimillion-dollar misinformation engine.

One of the ways Kennedy and CHD have made money is through the sale of books. Kennedy's longtime publisher, Skyhorse, joined with CHD to create a book series that has published titles including "Vax-Unvax," "Profiles of the Vaccine Injured," and the book that included Braden Fahey, "Cause Unknown."

Written by Edward Dowd, a former executive at BlackRock, that book is built on the false premise that sudden deaths of young, healthy people are spiking. Experts say these rare medical emergencies are not new and have not become more prevalent.

"We are just not seeing anything that suggests that," said Dr. Matthew Martinez, of Atlantic Health System in Morristown Medical Center, who researches cardiac events among professional athletes.

The AP found dozens of individuals included in the book died of known causes not related to vaccines, including suicide, choking while intoxicated, overdose and allergic reaction. One person died in 2019.

AP asked Kennedy's campaign, CHD, Dowd and Skyhorse president Tony Lyons several questions about the book, including why they chose to feature Braden, why they didn't speak to his family first and what steps they took to fact check.

The only person to respond was Lyons, who also co-chairs the Kennedy Super PAC American Values 2024.

In emails, Lyons did not address why Braden specifically was chosen for the cover but defended his inclusion by saying that news stories and his obituary did not mention his cause of death.

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Hundreds of deaths are cited in the book, though Lyons said it only attributes nine of them to the vaccine. Lyons said Braden's death and others are never explicitly attributed to the vaccine, and that the book explores many possible reasons for deaths that have appeared in headlines since 2021.

Still, the book several times refers to its "thesis" that mass administration of COVID-19 vaccines caused a spike in deaths. Braden's parents said his appearance in the context of the book implies he died of the vaccine, putting his death in a false light.

Lyons said he was unaware of the Faheys' efforts to contact his company and asked AP to share with them his contact information. He said he would make some corrections in future editions, including to Braden's date of death, but said they were studying whether to remove him from the book or the cover.

Lyons told the AP that Children's Health Defense has a publishing deal with Skyhorse, though he would not say how much money CHD has received through it.

Kennedy also has a consulting deal with Skyhorse that personally paid him \$125,000 since August 2022 for scouting out books for the company, according to a financial disclosure he filed. Lyons said that deal has so far resulted in 27 books of different genres including children's books, mysteries and cookbooks, but declined to name them.

Lyons also praised Kennedy's record of environmental work, such as protecting New York's Hudson River, and other work he's done to take on powerful corporate interests and what Kennedy sees as government corruption. Those are also topics Kennedy has focused on during his presidential campaign.

The platform Kennedy built for himself has an impact. In a study of verified Twitter accounts from 2021, researchers Francesco Pierri, Matthew DeVerna and others working with Indiana University's Observatory on Social Media found Kennedy's personal Twitter account was the top "superspreader" of vaccine misinformation on Twitter, responsible for 13 percent of all reshares of misinformation, more than three times the second most-retweeted account.

The messages Kennedy shares have convinced a significant slice of the public, some of whom attend his campaign events proudly wearing pins with crossed-out syringes or repeating Kennedy's talking points about vaccine ingredients.

Kennedy's anti-vaccine organization has a lawsuit pending against a number of news organizations, among them The Associated Press, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. Kennedy took leave from the group when he announced his run for president but is listed as one of its attorneys in the lawsuit.

Many people have staked their lives and the lives of their families on the views espoused by Kennedy and others who oppose vaccines.

The AP spoke to mothers who once identified as anti-vaccine and counted themselves among Kennedy's most devoted followers.

"I thought he was heroic, because he was saying the things publicly that other people were too afraid to say," said Lydia Greene.

Greene, who lives in the Canadian province of Alberta, declined all vaccines for her son after buying into the claims by Kennedy and other anti-vaccine "gurus" that vaccines cause autism. When her son started to show signs of autism, Greene discounted it out of hand.

"I couldn't even see his autism because in the anti-vax movement, autism is the worst outcome that can happen to a child. And when they talk about their vaccinated autistic kids, it's often with a tone of resentment and how they talk about how their life is ruined, their marriage is ruined, and it's just this kid is damaged," Greene said. "And so when my son was different, I couldn't see that stuff about him."

She said she did not recognize his condition until she "came out of the rabbit hole of anti-vax."

"I realized I had wasted so much valuable time where he should have been in occupational therapy, speech therapy, evidence-based therapy for autism," Greene said.

Kennedy's Children's Health Defense produces articles, newsletters, books, podcasts, even TV shows on its own CHD.TV. Greene said those articles often validate anxious parents' fears – no matter how irrational – while making them feel like someone powerful is listening.

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Today, Greene believes the group exploited her.

"That's what CHD does," Greene said. "They find parents when they're vulnerable. And hack into that."

Because of his national profile, Kennedy's work has ripple effects beyond the most devoted anti-vaccine activists.

Medical professionals told the AP that vaccine disinformation spread by Kennedy and other influencers makes the patients they serve wary about lifesaving vaccinations.

Sharon Goldfarb, is a family nurse practitioner in Berkeley, California, who spent the worst of the pandemic caring for people on society's margins: people with no homes; people who were living in the country illegally; people with serious mental health needs. She has seen firsthand the consequences of vaccine misinformation and refusal.

"It's disturbing because he has a huge family name," Goldfarb said. "When you're a trusted public figure and you have a trusted family name, you have to answer to a higher authority. ... I just don't get it."

Dr. Todd Wolynn, a Pittsburgh pediatrician who works to clarify the facts about vaccines on social media, said despite Kennedy's lack of clinical experience, he has an outsized influence on his followers.

"He uses a very big platform to amplify disinformation that leads people down a path to make a decision that's not evidence based," Wolynn said. "And as a result, it puts their own lives, the lives of their children, the lives of their family, in harm's way."

Though Kennedy did not respond for this story, he has long said that he is not anti-vaccine, and only wants vaccines to be rigorously tested. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains that vaccines undergo thorough testing before they are authorized or approved in the U.S. and they are monitored for safety after they are introduced to the public.

COVID-19 vaccines were initially developed under the Trump administration, through the program Operation Warp Speed. But what his Republican-led administration viewed at the time as a point of pride has since become a topic of criticism in Republican circles, including among GOP presidential candidates who have expressed skepticism about the immunizations.

The Republican candidate and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy said in a July podcast interview that if he'd had the facts he would not have gotten vaccinated against COVID-19. The administration of fellow GOP candidate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has broken with CDC guidance to advise Floridians under 65 not to get the latest COVID-19 booster.

That kind of rhetoric, along with the conspiracy beliefs that Kennedy has shared about other subjects, like 5G, "can impact the smooth running of societies," said Daniel Jolley, a University of Nottingham social psychology professor, who has published several papers on conspiracy thinking and its impacts.

While skepticism is important, proper evaluation of the evidence is key, Jolley said. Anyone pushing conspiracy theories while running for president makes the theories seem normal.

"It's that kind of rhetoric that I think is really damaging," Jolley said. "You worry when you think about the next pandemic or the next event or the next issue that's going to come our way."

Jolley wonders: Will people listen to doctors or experts next time?

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Kennedy's role in legitimizing anti-vaccine activism has not been limited to the U.S. Perhaps the most well-known example was in 2019 on the Pacific island nation of Samoa.

That year, dozens of children died of measles. Many factors led to the wave of deaths, including medical mistakes and poor decisions by government authorities. But people involved in the response who spoke to AP said Kennedy and the anti-vaccine activists he supported made things worse.

In June 2019, Kennedy and his wife, the actress Cheryl Hines, visited Samoa, a trip Kennedy later wrote was arranged by Edwin Tamasese, a Samoan local anti-vaccine influencer.

Vaccine rates had plummeted after two children died in 2018 from a measles vaccine that a nurse had incorrectly mixed with a muscle relaxant. The government suspended the vaccine program for months. By the time Kennedy arrived, health authorities were trying to get back on track.

He was treated as a distinguished guest, traveling in a government vehicle, meeting with the prime

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minister and, according to Kennedy, many health officials and the health minister.

He also met with anti-vaccine activists, including Tamasese and another well-known influencer, Taylor Winterstein, who posted a photograph of herself and Kennedy on her Instagram.

"The past few days have been profoundly monumental for me, my family and for this movement to date," she wrote, adding hashtags including #investigatebeforeyouvaccinate.

A few months later, a measles epidemic broke out in Samoa, killing 83 people, mostly infants and children in a population of about 200,000.

Public health officials said at the time that anti-vaccine misinformation had made the nation vulnerable.

The crisis of low vaccination rates and skepticism created an environment that was "ripe for the picking for someone like RFK to come in and assist with the promotion of those views," said Helen Petousis-Harris, a vaccinologist from New Zealand who worked on the effort to build back trust in the measles vaccine in Samoa.

Petousis-Harris recalled that local and regional anti-vaccine activists took their cues from Kennedy, whom she said "sits at the top of the food chain as a disinformation source."

"They amplified the fear and mistrust, which resulted in the amplification of the epidemic and an increased number of children dying. Children were being brought for care too late," she said.

Kennedy's campaign did not respond to emails seeking comment about Samoa, though he says on his campaign website that he had no role in the outbreak. He also said in an interview for a forthcoming documentary, "Shot in the Arm," that he bears no responsibility for the outcome.

"I had nothing to do with people not vaccinating in Samoa. I never told anybody not to vaccinate. I didn't, you know, go there for any reason to do with that."

But people who worked on the Samoan measles response told AP the credibility he gave to anti-vaccine forces when he met with them had an impact.

Moelagi Leilani Jackson, a Samoan nurse who worked on the vaccination campaign to stem the scourge of measles, said she remembered that after Kennedy's visit, the anti-vaccine influencers "got louder."

"I feel like they felt they had the support of Kennedy. But I also think that Kennedy was very – well, he came in and he left," she recalled. "And other people picked up the pieces."

A few weeks after his trip to Samoa, Kennedy appeared in Sacramento, California, where lawmakers were debating a bill to make it more difficult to get a vaccine exemption. The bill was sponsored by Democratic state Sen. Richard Pan, a pediatrician.

As a crowd gathered outside the capitol, Kennedy stood to speak. Two large posters behind him featured Pan's image, with the word "LIAR" stamped across his face in blood-red paint. Pan told AP he felt the staging was intended to incite the crowd against him.

"So he's rallying to have people attack me, essentially, personally," said Pan, who is no longer in office.

Within months, one anti-vaccine extremist assaulted Pan, streaming it live on Facebook. Another threw blood at Pan and other lawmakers.

Kennedy has repeatedly brought up the Holocaust when discussing vaccines and public health mandates, comparisons that Pan said amount to an "indirect call to violence" against health advocates.

"Who creates an atmosphere where they think what's appropriate is to actually physically assault a legislator? It's people like Robert F. Kennedy Jr." Pan said.

Pan said it's one of many instances when Kennedy has whipped people up against public health advocates. Kennedy also wrote a bestselling book attacking infectious disease expert and former top government scientist Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has received death threats.

Those attacks have prompted criticism from Kennedy's sister Kerry Kennedy, who invoked the Kennedy family history of political violence – their father and uncle were both assassinated – when she told the AP in 2021: "Attacking doctors and scientists is irresponsible because many have received death threats. This can deter people from those professions. Our family knows that a death threat should be taken seriously."

Kerry Kennedy and three other siblings on Oct. 9 issued a statement denouncing Kennedy's independent

candidacy, calling it "dangerous" and "perilous" to the country.

Pan said that Kennedy's rhetoric, which often demonizes scientists and health care professionals, is part of a strategy to intimidate and silence them.

"When you call something a holocaust, it is incitement to violence," Pan said.

"The real consequence of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is we have dead children, and we have people who are in good faith doing their best to try to protect people, including children, who are basically being threatened and even assaulted because of his rhetoric and his lies," said Pan, who is now running for mayor of Sacramento, a nonpartisan position. "That harms America."

## President Biden wraps up his visit to wartime Israel with a warning against being 'consumed' by rage

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — President Joe Biden swept into wartime Israel for a 7 1/2-hour visit Wednesday that produced a heaping dose of vocal support, a deal to get limited humanitarian aid into Gaza from Egypt, likely by the end of the week, and a plea for Israelis not to allow rage over the deadly Hamas attack to consume them.

"I understand. Many Americans understand," Biden said as he wrapped up his stay in Tel Aviv, likening the Oct. 7 Hamas assault to the attacks against the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, that killed nearly 3,000 people. "You can't look at what has happened here ... and not scream out for justice," he said.

"But I caution this: While you feel that rage, don't be consumed by it," he said. "After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. And while we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes."

Biden urged Israel to step back from the brink, not just to ease growing tensions in the Mideast that threaten to spiral into a broader regional conflict, but also to reassure a world rattled by images of carnage and suffering, in Israel and Gaza alike. One million people have been displaced in roughly 10 days, according to the United Nations.

Biden's mission was to display resolve for Israel and to diminish the likelihood of a wider war, while providing assurances that he was not overlooking the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. Aboard the flight back to Washington Biden made progress when he spoke by phone with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi who agreed to reopen his country's sealed border crossing with Gaza and allow up to 20 trucks carrying humanitarian aid supplies to cross.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Biden said roads near the crossing would first need hours of repairs, but that aid could begin rolling into the region by Friday. He suggested the aid could be distributed by international officials "which could take a little time" and added that, "if Hamas confiscates it, it's going to end. We're not going to send any aid to Hamas."

"I wanted to make sure that there was a vehicle, a mechanism where this could happen quickly," Biden said during a refueling stop at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. He added that el-Sissi was "very cooperative."

"He stepped up. As did Bibi," the president said, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But Biden was also in a mood to celebrate his own accomplishment, saying: "I came to get something done. I got it done."

"Not many people thought I could get this done," Biden said. "And not many people wanted me to be associated with failure."

In fact, the president said officials had a discussion "of an hour or more" on "whether to go" before the trip began. "Had we gone and this failed, then the United States failed. The Biden presidency failed, et cetera, which would be a legitimate criticism," he said.

Aid moving into Gaza will accomplish a key objective for Biden, and the White House announced that the president will address the nation from the Oval Office on Thursday night to "discuss our response to Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel and Russia's ongoing brutal war against Ukraine."

Less clear is how far the trip would take the president in trying to tamp down volatile Mideast divisions, particularly after his plan collapsed to follow the Israel stop with an Arab leaders summit in Jordan.

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His visit was full of signature Biden moments as he walked a careful diplomatic line. He doled out embraces to Netanyahu and to first responders, doctors and victims who witnessed nightmare moments. He spoke quietly of his own history with grief. He told the familiar anecdote about meeting every Israeli prime minister over more than five decades in elected office, starting with Golda Meir in 1973. He quoted an Irish poet.

"I come to Israel with a single message: You're not alone," Biden said. "As long as the United States stands — and we will stand forever — we will not let you ever be alone."

His presence and comments to Israeli leaders held weight. Netanyahu said the president's visit was "deeply, deeply moving" and said Biden had rightly drawn a clear line between the "forces of civilization and the forces of barbarism."

"The civilized world must unite to defeat Hamas," the Israeli leader said.

Biden arrived in Israel as the nations across the Mideast shook with protests triggered by an explosion Monday at a Gaza hospital that killed hundreds.

The blast undid plans for Jordan's King Abdullah II to host Biden along with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and el-Sissi. Abbas withdrew in protest of the hospital explosion; the summit was subsequently canceled outright. Yet Biden's presence in Israel prompted fresh outrage.

In Amman, a sign hoisted by one protester labeled Biden and Netanyahu war criminals and called them "Partner in Crime." At the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el-Hilweh in south Lebanon, protesters set fire to a cardboard cutout of Biden's head with a rope around his neck and blood painted over his mouth.

Ayman Safadi, Jordan's foreign minister, told a state-run television network that the war is "pushing the region to the brink."

Still, Biden emerged from the day trumpeting food, water and medicine poised to move into Gaza after lengthy deadlock. Israel cut off the flow of aid and fuel to the Gaza Strip after the attack that killed 1,400 civilians by Hamas, which controls the region.

The Biden administration plans to ask Congress for more than \$2 billion in combined additional aid for Israel and Ukraine. Biden on Wednesday also announced \$100 million in aid to Gaza and the West Bank.

"The vast majority of Palestinians are not Hamas," Biden stressed. "Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people."

The tone of the discussions between Biden and Netanyahu stood in stark contrast to their optimistic meeting just a month ago on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, where Netanyahu marveled that a "historic peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia" seemed within reach.

The possibility of improved relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors has dimmed considerably with the outbreak of the latest Israel-Hamas war. Israel has been preparing for a potential ground invasion of Gaza. There are also fears that a new front could erupt along Israel's northern border with Lebanon, where Hezbollah operates. The Iran-backed organization has been skirmishing with Israeli forces.

Allowing aid into the region had been seen by U.S. officials as a critical step toward the cooling of tensions in Arab nations after the blast at the hospital, which had been treating wounded Palestinians and sheltering many more who were seeking a refuge from the fighting.

There were conflicting claims of who was responsible.

Officials in Gaza quickly blamed an Israeli airstrike. Israel denied it was involved and released a flurry of video, audio and other information that it said showed the blast was instead due to a missile misfire by Islamic Jihad, another militant group operating in Gaza. The Islamic Jihad dismissed that claim. The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

Biden said data from his Defense Department showed that the explosion was not likely caused by an airstrike by the Israeli military. A White House National Security Council spokesperson followed up later with a post on social media that an analysis of "overhead imagery, intercepts and open source information" showed Israel was not behind the attack. But the U.S. continues to collect evidence.

"Based on what I've seen, it appears as though it was done by the other team, not you," Biden told Netanyahu.



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The leaders of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee in a joint statement said they felt confident the explosion was "the result of a failed rocket launch" by militants and not an Israeli airstrike.

Roughly 2,800 Palestinians have been reported killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza. An additional 1,200 people are believed to be buried under the rubble, alive or dead, health authorities said. Those numbers predate the explosion at the Al-Ahli hospital on Tuesday.

Jordan declared three days of mourning, and Jordanian officials said the summit was canceled after speaking with all leaders. Foreign Minister Safadi said they had wanted the meeting to produce an end to the war, which seems unlikely now, and to give Palestinians the respect they deserve.

## **GOP's Jim Jordan fails again on vote for House speaker as frustrated Republicans search for options**

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Rep. Jim Jordan failed again Wednesday on a crucial second ballot to become House speaker, but the hard-fighting ally of Donald Trump showed no signs of dropping out despite losing support from even more of his GOP colleagues.

Next steps were highly uncertain as angry, frustrated Republicans looked at other options. A bipartisan group of lawmakers floated an extraordinary plan — to give the interim speaker pro tempore, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., more power to reopen the immobilized House and temporarily conduct routine business. But that seems doubtful, for now.

What was clear was that Jordan's path to become House speaker was almost certainly lost. He was opposed by 22 Republicans, two more than he lost in first-round voting the day before. Many view the Ohio congressman as too extreme for a central seat of U.S. power and resented the harassing hardball tactics from Jordan's allies for their votes. One lawmaker said they had received death threats.

"We'll keep talking to members, keep working on it," Jordan, a founding member of the hard-right Freedom Caucus, said after the vote.

The House came to another abrupt standstill, stuck now 15 days since the sudden ouster of Kevin McCarthy without a speaker — a position of power second in line to the presidency.

Once a formality in Congress, the vote for House speaker has devolved into a bitter GOP showdown for the gavel with no foreseeable end. Jordan is resisting entreaties to step aside and no other politically viable candidate is emerging to unite the ruptured Republican majority.

As Republicans upset and exhausted by the infighting retreated for private conversations, hundreds of demonstrators amassed outside the Capitol over the Israel-Hamas war, a stark reminder of the concern over having the House adrift as political challenges intensify at home and abroad.

"The way out is that Jim Jordan has got to pull his name," said Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., who voted twice against him. "He's going to have to call it quits."

After Wednesday's vote, McCarthy and other party leaders appeared to tentatively rally around Jordan, giving the combative Judiciary Committee chairman the time he was demanding, though it was doubtful he could shore up votes. No further action was scheduled and the House lost another day.

With Republicans in majority control of the House, 221-212, Jordan must pick up most of his GOP foes to win. Wednesday's tally, with 199 Republicans voting for Jordan and 212 for Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, left no candidate with a clear majority.

As the rollcall got underway, Jordan lost more than he gained, picking up three backers but adding more detractors.

The holdouts added to a surprisingly large and politically diverse group of 20 Republicans who had rejected Jordan's nomination the day before.

Jordan's refusal to concede only further embittered some of the Republicans, who were upset that the party's first choice, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, was essentially forced to drop his own bid 24 hours after a failed vote last week in large part because Jordan's backers team refused to give their support.

Bipartisan groups of lawmakers have been floating ways to operate the House by giving greater power

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to McHenry or another temporary speaker. The House had never ousted its speaker before McCarthy, and McHenry could tap the temporary powers that were created after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks to ensure continuity of government.

The novel concept of boosting the interim speaker's role was gaining favor with a pair of high-profile Republicans: former GOP speakers Newt Gingrich and John Boehner.

Gingrich said while he likes Jordan, he has "no faith" the nominee can get much beyond the 200 votes he won in the first vote.

Boehner reposted Gingrich's views saying, "I agree," on social media.

The two men have deep experience with the subject. Both were chased to early retirement.

"All options are on the table to end the Republican civil war," Jeffries said Wednesday.

But McHenry appeared to brush off the idea of taking further powers for himself, saying Jordan "has the support of the conference to keep going, so that's what we're gonna do."

McHenry added that he finds himself in an unprecedented position and has constructed his role "as narrowly as the rules say I should, and we can't transact business until we elect a speaker."

In nominating Jordan, veteran Republican Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma said it was time to end the upheaval that he had warned against with McCarthy's sudden ouster.

"We have a chance today to end that chaos, end that uncertainty," Cole said.

Democratic Rep. Pete Aguilar of California nominated Jeffries, noting the Democratic leader continues to win more votes and is the best choice to move the country forward.

"The country cannot afford more delays and more chaos," Aguilar said.

Jordan had relied on backing from Trump, the party's front-runner in the 2024 election to challenge President Joe Biden, and groups pressuring rank-and-file lawmakers for the vote, but they were not enough and in fact backfired on some.

"One thing I cannot stomach or support is a bully," said a statement from Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa, who voted against Jordan on the second ballot and said she received "credible death threats and a barrage of threatening calls."

Flexing their independence, the holdouts are a mix of pragmatists — ranging from seasoned legislators and committee chairs worried about governing, to newer lawmakers from districts where voters prefer Biden to Trump.

Instead, the holdouts cast their ballots for McCarthy, Scalise and others, with one vote even going to the retired Boehner.

Jordan has been a top Trump ally, particularly during the Jan. 6 Capitol attack by the former president's backers who were trying to overturn the 2020 election he lost to Biden. Days later, Trump awarded Jordan a Medal of Freedom.

The political climb has been steep for Jordan, who is known more as a chaos agent than a skilled legislator, raising questions about how he would lead. Congress faces daunting challenges, risking a federal shutdown at home if it fails to fund the government and fielding Biden's requests for aid to help Ukraine and Israel in the wars abroad.

First elected in 2006, Jordan has few bills to his name from his time in office. He also faces questions about his past. Some years ago, Jordan denied allegations from former wrestlers during his time as an assistant wrestling coach at Ohio State University who accused him of knowing about claims they were inappropriately groped by an Ohio State doctor. Jordan has said he was never aware of any abuse.

## **Driver arrested after Pacific Coast Highway crash in Malibu kills 4 Pepperdine University students**

MALIBU, Calif. (AP) — A 22-year-old driver was arrested on suspicion of manslaughter after a crash in Malibu killed four college students and injured two other people, officials said Wednesday.

The six pedestrians were struck around 8:30 p.m. Tuesday along Pacific Coast Highway about 4 miles (6.4 km) east of Pepperdine University, according to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

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Four women were pronounced dead at the scene and two others were taken to a hospital but there was no word Wednesday on their conditions.

Pepperdine initially said on X, formerly Twitter, that officials believed those killed attended the university's Seaver College of Liberal Arts. Pepperdine's president, Jim Gash, later confirmed that the four killed were students.

"Earlier today, we learned that four precious lives who brought joy and light to our campus were taken from us suddenly, tragically, and incomprehensibly," Gash wrote in a message to the university community.

The school later identified the victims as Niamh Rolston, Peyton Stewart, Asha Weir and Deslyn Williams, all seniors.

The male driver was arrested on suspicion of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence, said sheriff's Sgt. Maria Navarro.

Investigators believe he was driving a dark colored BMW westbound at a high rate of speed when he lost control, sideswiped at least three parked vehicles, which then crashed into a group of people walking in the area about 25 miles (40 km) west of downtown Los Angeles.

"As we await further details from the investigation, we pray for our entire community," the university said on X.

A campus prayer service for the victims was scheduled for Thursday morning.

## **Troops hurt after three drones attack US bases in Iraq as tensions flare after Gaza hospital blast**

By ABBY SEWELL, TARA COPP and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Coalition forces were slightly injured in Iraq in a spate of drone attacks over the last 24 hours at U.S. bases in Iraq as regional tensions flare following the deadly explosion at a hospital in Gaza.

Two drones targeted the al Asad airbase in western Iraq used by U.S. forces and one drone targeted a base in northern Iraq, a U.S. official told The Associated Press. U.S. forces intercepted all three, destroying two but only damaging the third, which led to minor injuries among coalition forces at the western base, according to a statement Wednesday by U.S. Central Command.

The U.S. official were not authorized to speak publicly on the attacks and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"In this moment of heightened alert, we are vigilantly monitoring the situation in Iraq and the region. U.S. forces will defend U.S. and coalition forces against any threat," Central Command said in the release.

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq have threatened to attack U.S. facilities there because of American support for Israel.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of Iranian-backed militias, issued a statement afterward claiming responsibility for the two attacks and saying it "heralds more operations" against the "American occupation."

The salvos came at a time of increasing tension and fears of a broader regional conflict in the wake of the latest Hamas-Israel war.

Since the beginning of the war on Oct. 7, much attention has been focused on Hezbollah, the powerful Hamas ally across Israel's northern border in Lebanon, and its formidable arsenal. The group has traded so-far limited strikes with Israel on the border in recent days.

But Iranian-backed militias in Iraq have also threatened to attack U.S. facilities over American support for Israel.

"Our missiles, drones, and special forces are ready to direct qualitative strikes at the American enemy in its bases and disrupt its interests if it intervenes in this battle," Ahmad "Abu Hussein" al-Hamidawi, head of the Kataib Hezbollah militia, said in a statement last Wednesday. He also threatened to launch missiles at Israeli targets.

Following Tuesday night's blast that killed hundreds at a hospital in Gaza, the group issued another statement in which it blamed the U.S. and its support for Israel for the catastrophe and called for an end

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to the U.S. presence in Iraq. Hamas has said the explosion in Gaza was from an Israeli airstrike, while Israel has blamed a misfired rocket by Palestinian militants.

"These evil people must leave the country. Otherwise, they will taste the fire of hell in this world before the afterlife," the statement said.

A U.S. defense official, who wasn't authorized to comment to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed the attack on the al-Asad military base in western Iraq.

Tashkil al-Waritheen, one of the Iranian-backed militias making up the larger group, claimed responsibility in a statement for a second drone attack, which it said had targeted the al-Harir airbase in northern Iraq. U.S. officials did not immediately comment on the claim of a second attack.

The government of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq said an intercepted drone crashed in an open area near the village of Batas.

Also on Wednesday, Iran-allied groups in Iraq announced that they had formed a "joint operations room" to help Hamas in its war effort.

Two officials with Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the issue, confirmed the attacks on the two bases Wednesday. They said the armed groups were on alert and prepared to join the wider battle against Israel, but that Iran had not yet given approval for them to open a new front. Leaders from some of the factions are now in Lebanon and Syria in case they get orders to proceed, one of the officials said.

Officials with the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad declined to comment.

Lahib Higel, a senior analyst for Iraq at the International Crisis Group, said in the short term, the Iraqi groups allied with Iran and Hamas are not likely to open a new front in the war, but that could change if the Hamas-Israel war escalates or becomes protracted.

"Geographically, obviously, they are several steps removed, so they're not going to be the first to react" and are likely to serve in a supporting role, she said.

Renad Mansour, a senior research fellow at the Chatham House, said the Iran-backed groups in Iraq are split between those that are also political parties and have a stake in the Iraqi political system and the "vanguard" groups that are purely militant and tend to be more tightly controlled by Iran.

The latter, he said, have been used in the past as foot soldiers in regional conflicts, including in Yemen and Syria.

"This is what they're designed to do," Mansour said. "The question is more, will Iran and some of the leaders of these groups decide it's in their interest to escalate?"

## Why Egypt and other Arab countries are unwilling to take in Palestinian refugees from Gaza

By JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — As desperate Palestinians in sealed-off Gaza try to find refuge under Israel's relentless bombardment in retaliation for Hamas' brutal Oct. 7 attack, some ask why neighboring Egypt and Jordan don't take them in.

The two countries, which flank Israel on opposite sides and share borders with Gaza and the occupied West Bank, respectively, have replied with a staunch refusal. Jordan already has a large Palestinian population.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi made his toughest remarks yet on Wednesday, saying the current war was not just aimed at fighting Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, "but also an attempt to push the civilian inhabitants to ... migrate to Egypt." He warned this could wreck peace in the region.

Jordan's King Abdullah II gave a similar message a day earlier, saying, "No refugees in Jordan, no refugees in Egypt."

Their refusal is rooted in fear that Israel wants to force a permanent expulsion of Palestinians into their countries and nullify Palestinian demands for statehood. El-Sissi also said a mass exodus would risk bringing militants into Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, from where they might launch attacks on Israel, endangering

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the two countries' 40-year-old peace treaty.

Here is a look at what is motivating Egypt's and Jordan's stances.

## A HISTORY OF DISPLACEMENT

Displacement has been a major theme of Palestinian history. In the 1948 war around Israel's creation, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from what is now Israel. Palestinians refer to the event as the Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe."

In the 1967 Mideast war, when Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 300,000 more Palestinians fled, mostly into Jordan.

The refugees and their descendants now number nearly 6 million, most living in camps and communities in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The diaspora has spread further, with many refugees building lives in Gulf Arab countries or the West.

After fighting stopped in the 1948 war, Israel refused to allow refugees to return to their homes. Since then, Israel has rejected Palestinian demands for a return of refugees as part of a peace deal, arguing that it would threaten the country's Jewish majority.

Egypt fears history will repeat itself and a large Palestinian refugee population from Gaza will end up staying for good.

## NO GUARANTEE OF RETURN

That's in part because there's no clear scenario for how this war will end.

Israel says it intends to destroy Hamas for its bloody rampage in its southern towns. But it has given no indication of what might happen afterward and who would govern Gaza. That has raised concerns that it will reoccupy the territory for a period, fueling further conflict.

The Israeli military said Palestinians who followed its order to flee northern Gaza to the strip's southern half would be allowed back to their homes after the war ends.

Egypt is not reassured.

El-Sissi said fighting could last for years if Israel argues it hasn't sufficiently crushed militants. He proposed that Israel house Palestinians in its Negev Desert, which neighbors the Gaza Strip, until it ends its military operations.

"Israel's lack of clarity regarding its intentions in Gaza and the evacuation of the population is in itself problematic," said Riccardo Fabiani, Crisis Group International's North Africa Project Director. "This confusion fuels fears in the neighborhood."

Egypt has pushed for Israel to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, and Israel said Wednesday that it would, though it didn't say when. According to United Nations, Egypt, which is dealing with a spiraling economic crisis, already hosts some 9 million refugees and migrants, including roughly 300,000 Sudanese who arrived this year after fleeing their country's war.

But Arab countries and many Palestinians also suspect Israel might use this opportunity to force permanent demographic changes to wreck Palestinian demands for statehood in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, which was also captured by Israel in 1967.

El-Sissi repeated warnings Wednesday that an exodus from Gaza was intended to "eliminate the Palestinian cause ... the most important cause of our region." He argued that if a demilitarized Palestinian state had been created long ago in negotiations, there would not be war now.

"All historical precedent points to the fact that when Palestinians are forced to leave Palestinian territory, they are not allowed to return back," said H.A. Hellyer, a senior associate fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Egypt doesn't want to be complicit in ethnic cleansing in Gaza."

Arab countries' fears have only been stoked by the rise under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of hard-right parties that talk in positive terms about removing Palestinians. Since the Hamas attack, the rhetoric has become less restrained, with some right-wing politicians and media commentators calling for the military to raze Gaza and drive out its inhabitants. One lawmaker said Israel should carry out a "new Nakba" on Gaza.

## WORRIES OVER HAMAS

At the same time, Egypt says a mass exodus from Gaza would bring Hamas or other Palestinian militants

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onto its soil. That might be destabilizing in Sinai, where Egypt's military fought for years against Islamic militants and at one point accused Hamas of backing them.

Egypt has backed Israel's blockade of Gaza since Hamas took over in the territory in 2007, tightly controlling the entry of materials and the passage of civilians back and forth. It also destroyed the network of tunnels under the border that Hamas and other Palestinians used to smuggle goods into Gaza.

With the Sinai insurgency largely put down, "Cairo does not want to have a new security problem on its hands in this problematic region," Fabiani said.

El-Sissi warned of an even more destabilizing scenario: the wrecking of Egypt and Israel's 1979 peace deal. He said that with the presence of Palestinian militants, Sinai "would become a base for attacks on Israel. Israel would have the right to defend itself ... and would strike Egyptian territory."

"The peace which we have achieved would vanish from our hands," he said, "all for the sake of the idea of eliminating the Palestinian cause."

## **NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell says league still needs to hire more minority head coaches**

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said the league still needs to hire more minority head coaches.

The latest rule change was aimed at increasing opportunities.

Owners voted Tuesday to push in-person head coaching interviews back one more week until after all divisional playoff games have been completed to slow down the hiring process.

"(Diversity, equity, inclusion) has received more attention in our owners' meetings than probably any subject we have been discussing in the last five years, and I think that focus has been helpful to the clubs as well as to all of us," Goodell said Wednesday after the conclusion of the league's fall meetings. "Our understanding of the priorities, the need to do this and how we do it better. I know the focus is on head coaches, we understand that, but we're focused on the entire league. How do we continue to have diversity be a part of our league and make us better?"

"And we reported on the broader diversity numbers both at the league level and the club level and there is significant progress. But, when you say frustration, I'm probably always frustrated by the pace of progress. Right? It's never enough for yours truly. So, we obviously know we have work to do here, and the clubs are very focused on this, and it has to be a sustainable change, and I think that's where the ownership is."

NFL executive Dasha Smith said the league office and the 32 teams are 50% diverse. There are six minority head coaches, including three who are Black. The goal of pushing the in-person interviews back one week is to create more opportunities for candidates.

"We feel like that is a big step forward and, again, enhances our hiring process and that starts obviously this hiring cycle," league executive Jonathan Beane said.

BRADY WAITS

Colts owner Jim Irsay said there was no conversation at the meetings about approving Tom Brady's offer to purchase a percentage of the Las Vegas Raiders. Brady already is a part-owner of the WNBA's Las Vegas Aces, who are also owned by Mark Davis. Brady reportedly has received a discounted purchase price to buy into the Raiders.

"The number just had to be a reasonable number for purchase price," said Irsay, who is a member of the finance committee that would approve the deal.

The NFL created a special committee on ownership policy several months ago to oversee these matters. Goodell said they've met five times in the past 45 days.

"They've been hard at work," Goodell said. "We want our ownership policies to be good for the owners that are in our league, for attracting new owners, particularly the diversity issue. And also, we've mentioned it before, former players who want to invest in our league. I think all of that is a positive thing for us. So, it's just a balancing act. I hope that they'll make recommendations by the March meeting so that we can

act on that either at the March meeting or in the spring meeting.”

## GAMBLING POLICY

The league recently changed its gambling policy to increase the penalty for betting on the NFL and decreased it for betting on other sports. The league also reduced suspensions for several players, including Lions wide receiver Jameson Williams.

“We want to try to be as clear as we can with our policies,” Goodell said. “I heard feedback from our players about really understanding that and trying to be a little bit more clear on that. So it was an initiative we undertook. We obviously met with the union about it and we wanted to make sure it was clear that if you bet on the NFL, that’s not acceptable. That’s the key takeaway. We obviously believe that betting inside our facilities or on business is something that’s inappropriate. We monitor that and we’ve actually adjusted that discipline so that that’s lower, but the other one is betting on the NFL and that is the highest violation you can have. And we want to make sure people understand that.”

## Woman arrested after trying to get close to Trump at New York trial; she says she’s a supporter

By JENNIFER PELTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A spectator at Donald Trump’s civil fraud trial was arrested Wednesday after standing up in the middle of testimony and walking toward the front of the courtroom where the former president sat.

The woman expressed a desire to aid Trump, and the court system said that neither he nor anyone else at the trial was ever in danger. The ex-president and 2024 GOP front-runner showed no reaction in court and later told reporters he wasn’t aware of the episode that had unfolded behind him.

“Who got arrested?” Trump asked. “We didn’t know anything about it.”

The woman, later identified as a court system employee, retreated after a court officer told her to return to her seat. A short time later, officers escorted her out and arrested her on a contempt charge for disrupting a court proceeding, court spokesperson Lucian Chalfen said.

Chalfen said the woman had been yelling out to Trump that she wanted to help him, though reporters in the courtroom did not hear her raise her voice. She was later heard screaming in the courthouse lobby as officers removed her from the building.

Outside the courtroom, the woman was seen on an NBC camera telling court officers: “You’re scaring me, and I have a right to be here. I’m an American citizen, and I’m also a court employee. I’m also just here to support Donald Trump.”

She went on to say that she had been “peacefully watching this proceeding” and had complied when a court officer told her not to cause “any more problems.”

Chalfen said the woman, whose name wasn’t released, has been placed on administrative leave and barred from entering state courts while authorities investigate.

The trial went on, albeit with one other unusual moment — this one after Trump threw up his hands in apparent frustration and conferred animatedly with his lawyers while real estate appraiser Doug Larson testified about his interactions with a Trump company executive.

State lawyer Kevin Wallace asked Judge Arthur Engoron to ask the defense to “stop commenting during the witness’ testimony,” adding that the “exhortations” were audible on the witness’ side of the room. The judge then asked everyone to keep their voices down, “particularly if it’s meant to influence the testimony.”

The case, brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James, accuses Trump and his company of duping banks and insurers by giving them heavily inflated statements of Trump’s net worth and asset values. Engoron has already ruled that Trump and his company committed fraud, but the trial involves remaining claims of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records.

James maintains that Trump’s financial statements were key to securing deals and loans, and witnesses and evidence presented at trial have indicated that the documents were a factor.

For example, a 2015 offer to refinance a Trump-owned Wall Street building came with terms that included “delivery of financial statements (including tax returns)” from Trump, according to a document shown in

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court Wednesday.

While the deal was in the works, the Trump Organization sent prospective lender Ladder Capital paper copies of Trump's financial statements and personal tax returns, Ladder executive Jack Weisselberg testified, adding that a Trump executive messaged him about when to expect the documents.

"I think they were concerned about confidentiality, and they wanted to make sure it was going directly into my hands," said Weisselberg, who's the son of former longtime Trump Organization finance chief Allen Weisselberg.

Trump denies all James' allegations. He says his assets were actually worth far more than claimed on his statements, which came with disclaimers that he portrays as telling people to vet the numbers themselves.

Engoron will decide the case, not a jury, because state law doesn't allow one in this type of lawsuit.

With Trump voluntarily attending the trial for a second straight day — his fifth overall — his lawyers strove to undercut the state's claims that his top corporate deputies played games to inflate the values of his properties and pad his bottom line.

In a series of questions, Trump lawyer Lazaro Fields sought to establish that Larson had, at one point, undershot the projected 2015 value of the Wall Street office building by \$114 million. Larson said the "values were not wrong — it's what we knew at the time."

Trump threw up his hands during the exchange.

Larson had testified Tuesday that he never consulted with or gave permission for the Trump Organization's former controller, Jeffrey McConney, to cite him as an outside expert in the valuation spreadsheets he used to create Trump's financial statements.

Fields on Wednesday accused Larson of lying, pointing to a decade-old email exchange between McConney and the appraiser.

That touched off an angry back-and-forth between the defense and state sides, with Trump lawyer Christopher Kise suggesting that Larson could risk perjuring himself and needed to be advised about his rights against self-incrimination. State lawyer Colleen Faherty called Kise's comments "witness intimidation."

Ultimately, Engoron allowed Larson to return and answer the question with no legal warning. Larson said he didn't recall the email.

Asked again whether he understood that McConney had asked for his input in order to carry out valuations, a weary Larson said: "That's what it appears."

During a court break, Trump railed that "the government lied."

"They didn't reveal all the evidence that made me totally innocent of anything that they say," added Trump, who has repeatedly cast the case as part of a political attack by James and other Democrats who want to keep him from returning to the White House.

James said outside the courtroom that "none of his behavior, which can best be described as performative, will change what's happening in the courtroom."

"I will not give in. I will not give up. I will only serve justice and enforce the law," she said.

Engoron, a Democrat, has issued a limited gag order barring participants in the case from disparaging members of his staff. The order came after Trump maligned the judge's law clerk on social media on the trial's second day.

## **From hospital, to shelter, to deadly inferno: Fleeing Palestinians lose another sanctuary in Gaza**

By SAMYA KULLAB and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The courtyard of al-Ahli hospital, where thousands of Palestinians had sought shelter or medical treatment, is now a blackened expanse of charred cars, stretchers coated in ash and shredded dolls.

That's all that remains after an explosion on Tuesday turned it into an inferno, tearing apart men, women and children, and burning people alive. Images of the aftermath ignited protests across the region, threatening to broaden the war between Israel and Hamas.



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Mohammed al-Hayek had stepped away to fetch some coffee, making his way through the crowd of displaced people who were singing, praying or sleeping after fleeing to the Gaza City hospital in fear of Israeli airstrikes. Seeking the warm drink on a cold night saved his life.

"I returned to find them torn in pieces," al-Hayek said of his five cousins. He pointed to the mound of debris where they had been sitting, to their blood on the walls.

"This is where Shahir was. This is where Mutasim was," he said of the young men in their early 20s.

There were conflicting claims of who was responsible for the blast.

Israel has been launching waves of airstrikes and Palestinian militants have been firing rockets into Israel since the wide-ranging Hamas incursion on Oct. 7 ignited the fifth, and deadliest, war between the sides.

Officials in Hamas-ruled Gaza quickly said an Israeli airstrike had hit the hospital. Israel denied it was involved and released live video, audio and other evidence it said showed the blast was caused by a rocket misfired by Islamic Jihad, another Palestinian militant group. Islamic Jihad denied responsibility.

The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

Dr. Fadhil Naim, an orthopedic surgeon, was taking a short rest between operations when he heard a loud crash at about 7 p.m. Tuesday. At first he ignored it, thinking it was another airstrike nearby.

Then the wounded began streaming into the operating ward, screaming for help.

"They were alive, and they died in our arms because there wasn't enough of us to save everyone," he said.

He didn't realize the full scale of devastation until later, when he stepped outside into the courtyard and saw that it was filled with corpses.

Saeb al-Jarz, 27, was tending to his mother at Shifa, Gaza's largest hospital, just a few miles (kilometers) away, when he felt the ground shake and heard the blast. He raced to al-Ahli to see what had happened.

He remembers the scene in fragments: Flames lapping cars and hospital walls, victims stumbling around in horror, a courtyard littered with body parts, sheets with soccer ball and flower patterns draped over corpses.

He saw a little girl being carried away by a rescue worker, holding a doll and calling out for her mother.

"I was so, so scared," he said.

The wounded flooded into Shifa, which was already packed with patients. On Wednesday, officials said the hospital was running out of fuel to power its emergency generators after Israel cut off fuel shipments as part of the siege, forcing Gaza's only power plant to shut down.

The death toll from the blast was in dispute Wednesday, even among Palestinians.

The Hamas-run Health Ministry initially said 500 had died, then revised that number to 471, without providing a list of names. The staff at al-Ahli said only that the toll was in the hundreds. Mohammed Abu Selmia, the director of Shifa, said he thought the toll was closer to 250.

But in Gaza, nearly everyone blames Israel. Ten days of fighting have killed over 3,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry. More than 1,400 people have been killed on the Israeli side, the vast majority civilians killed in the initial Hamas onslaught. Some 200 were taken into Gaza as captives.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas, threatening a war like no other. It has ordered the evacuation of over a million Palestinians — around half of Gaza's population — from north to south of the territory it has completely sealed off. Israeli officials say they are trying to separate civilians from Hamas, which they accuse of using Palestinians as human shields.

Many Palestinians have crowded into hospitals, hoping they will be spared. Al-Ahli, an 80-bed hospital founded in 1882 and run by a branch of the Anglican Communion, was seen as especially secure because of its international connection.

"I am tortured when I think, why did those kids have to be killed?" said Suhaila Tarazi, the general director of al-Ahli. "This was not just a hospital, but a safe space for everyone to take refuge — Christians, Muslims, Jews, it doesn't matter. Now it is neither."

The Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum, said the hospital received at least three Israeli military orders to evacuate before Tuesday's explosion. The warnings by phone began Sunday, after Israeli shelling hit two floors of the hospital, wounding four medics, he said.

The staff at al-Ahli, like those of other hospitals across Gaza, refused the evacuation orders, saying that

it would endanger the patients to try to move them, violating the medical vow to do no harm.

On Wednesday, shell-shocked families who survived the blast packed up their mattresses and other belongings and headed out into the streets to look for safety in a war-torn land with one less sanctuary.

"The explosion points to the madness and futility of the current fighting," said the Rev. Canon Nicholas Porter, from an American fundraising arm for the Anglican church.

"It is the poor, the sick, and the innocent who seem to be paying the price."

## Woman becomes Israeli folk hero for plying Hamas militants with snacks until rescue mission arrives

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — When Hamas militants toting grenades appeared in her living room, Rachel Edri served them tea and Moroccan cookies until police stormed in and killed the attackers.

Edri's tale of quick-witted survival during the Israel-Hamas war has turned the 65-year old woman into an unlikely folk hero in Israel. For many, she has come to symbolize the ingenuity of everyday Israelis left to fend for themselves as militants turned sleeping southern communities into bloodbaths on Oct. 7.

After an early-morning air-raid siren, Edri returned from a bomb shelter in her hometown of Ofakim to find a band of Hamas militants in her living room. As gunfire raged outside, Edri's home saw a 20-hour tete-a-tete between hospitality and brutality.

"One of the terrorists said to me: 'You remind me of my mother.'"

"I told him, 'I am really like your mother. I will help you, I will take care of you. What do you need?'" Edri told Ynet.

After one of the grenade-toting gunmen struck Edri across the face with the butt of his gun, Edri soothed him. She served the militants canned pineapple, tea and her signature Moroccan cookies. She sang them Arabic songs, and they replied with Hebrew ones. She offered the men Coke Zero — when they said they preferred Coca Cola, she obliged.

"After they drank and ate, they became much calmer," Edri told Ynet. "I started having conversations, and at one point I even forgot for a moment that they were terrorists."

After 17 hours, a rescue team was able to rescue Edri and her husband with the help of their son, Eviatar. A local policeman himself, Eviatar gave the team a sketch of the house, helping the rescuers surprise the militants and fatally shoot them. With the house heavily damaged, Edri has been relocated to a hotel in central Israel.

On Wednesday, she was one of several Israelis invited to meet with President Joe Biden during his whirlwind visit to Israel. She beamed and hugged Biden, as Biden thanked her for defending the country.

For plying the militants with snacks Edri has been touted online and in national media as the consummate Jewish mother, a play on the stereotype of a women who overfeeds guests. Israelis have also compared Edri to the biblical character of Yael, who slays an evil general by offering him food before killing him in his sleep.

The militants from the Gaza Strip blew through Israel's highly fortified separation wall and entered Ofakim and more than 20 other border communities, killing at least 48 residents of Ofakim.

A group of civilians bearing pistols fought back Hamas militants armed with assault rifles.

"They fought like lions here," said Yoni Shalem, a man who lives down the street from Edri, describing the bravery of his neighbors. "Not the policemen, not the army — they did nothing. The only reason we're alive is because of other citizens who came to protect us."

Edri's brother, Shimon Koram, said he was not surprised when he heard how Edri had managed to avoid near-certain death. Before the war, Edri was known for her hospitality and generosity, Koram said, working at a nearby military base cooking meals for soldiers.

The two were raised in a working class family in Ofakim with 12 siblings, he said, a childhood that taught them how to be scrappy.

"We learned to survive and acquired the wisdom of life like street cats," Shimon said. "You can see that in how she acted."

## Protesters in Lebanon decrying Gaza hospital blast clash with security forces near U.S. Embassy

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hundreds of protesters clashed Wednesday with Lebanese security forces in a Beirut suburb near the U.S. Embassy during demonstrations in support of both Gaza's civilian residents and the militant group Hamas in its war with Israel.

The protest in the Aukar neighborhood came as U.S. President Joe Biden made a show of solidarity with Israel during his visit there Wednesday, a day after an explosion at a Gaza Strip hospital killed hundreds of people and prompted mass protests.

Biden offered his assessment that the explosion was not the result of a strike by the Israeli military. The Palestinian group Hamas, which rules Gaza, and many Arab countries accuse Israel of striking the hospital, while the Israeli military claims it was a misfired rocket from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group in Gaza.

Demonstrators holding Palestinian flags and the flags of various Palestinian factions took down a security wall and cut a barbed wire barrier on a winding road that leads to the U.S. Embassy outside of Beirut.

Riot police lobbed dozens of teargas canisters and fired water canons to disperse the protesters, eventually pushing them back. Several protesters were injured.

Meanwhile, in a southern suburb of Beirut, the Hezbollah group, a key ally of Hamas, held its own rally Wednesday. Thousands of Hezbollah supporters and Palestinians waving Palestinian flags protested against the explosion at the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza the day before.

"The time has perhaps come for the peoples of the region to declare their word in the face of American tyranny," senior Hezbollah official Hashem Safieddine said in a speech at the rally.

Chanting "death to America," protesters burned an American flag in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, where the violence has left more than 3,000 people dead since Hamas militants launched a surprise attack on Israel on Oct. 7, leaving more than 1,000 people dead or kidnapped.

Hezbollah and Israel have clashed along the Lebanon-Israel border, though the skirmishes remain mostly contained along a handful of border towns. The militant group announced another death among its ranks Wednesday, its 11th since the conflict began.

Israel has threatened to aggressively retaliate should Hezbollah escalate, while Hezbollah has promised to do the same should Israel decide to launch a ground incursion into Gaza.

As the clashes continue, Saudi Arabia became the latest country to ask its citizens to leave the tiny Mediterranean country of Lebanon. The U.S. State Department warned its citizens not to come and urged those in the country to "make appropriate arrangements to leave," while commercial flights are still available.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Lebanese Red Cross collected the bodies and remains of four slain Hezbollah militants, a spokesperson for the group told The Associated Press.

An Associated Press photojournalist saw the three bodies and bag of remains transferred from the Lebanese Red Cross to Hezbollah's Islamic Health Unit at the Hiram Hospital near the southern city of Tyre.

The Hezbollah spokesperson said the bodies belonged to militants whose deaths were announced the day before, without giving additional details. Hezbollah announced the death of five of its fighters Tuesday. The spokesperson commented on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

It was unclear why there was a 24-hour delay in collecting the bodies.

The initial death announcement came hours after the Israeli military announced they had killed four militants near the border carrying an explosive device in what they suspected was an attempted cross-border operation.

They did not accuse any group of the attempted operation, nor did any group claim responsibility.

## **“They burned her:” At the end of an awful wait for news comes word that a feared hostage is dead**

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Because of the fracture in her right leg, Karin Journo had talked herself out of going to the Tribe of Nova music festival and sold her ticket. But a week before Hamas militants turned the party into a killing ground, she bought another.

The 24-year-old French-Israeli airport worker who loved to travel had learned that a bunch of her friends were going to celebrate the departure of one of them to the United States. She didn't want to miss out.

Before heading out to dance the night away, she snapped a photo of herself in her party gear — black shorts and black halter top for a joyous night of electronic music in a dusty field. She'd left her long dark hair untied and painted her nails bright red. She was clearly excited, giving a V-sign in her selfie.

And dance she did: Video shot that night showed her waving her arms to the thumping beats, though she was rooted to the spot by the gray protective boot that encased her right foot and calf all the way up to her knee.

It made her easy to recognize in subsequent video footage filmed as Hamas started to launch its deadly attack.

Sheltering behind a car with a friend, her face was marked with worry. With explosions echoing in the background, she looked around anxiously in another. In a final video, she is seen sitting just outside the open door of an ambulance, wearing a brown hoodie borrowed from a friend. Two people were laid out inside the vehicle, not moving.

At 8:43 that Saturday morning she sent a text to her loved ones, according to her father, Doron Journo: “To the whole family, I want to say that I love you a lot, because I am not coming home.”

It turned out to be her final message.

After an awful wait of more than a week for news and of not knowing whether Karin was a hostage in Gaza, the family got word from the Israeli military that her remains had been found.

The military said the ambulance Karin had been sheltering beside was subsequently hit by a rocket, her sister, Meitav Journo, said by text message.

“They burned her,” the sister wrote.

The funeral for Karin Journo was held Tuesday.

## **Hundreds mourn as Israeli family of 5 that was slain together is laid to rest**

By MOSHE EDRI Associated Press

GAN YAVNE, Israel (AP) — An Israeli family of five whose bodies were discovered in each other's arms after being killed by Hamas militants were buried together in a funeral attended by hundreds of mourners.

Family and friends bid farewell Tuesday to the Kotz family — a couple and their three children who were gunned down in their home at kibbutz Kfar Azza during the Oct. 7 Hamas invasion of southern Israel. They were buried side by side in a graveyard 30 miles (50 kilometers) west of Jerusalem.

Aviv and Livnat Kotz, their daughter, Rotem, and sons, Yonatan and Yiftach, were found dead on a bed embracing each other, a family member said.

The family had moved to Israel from Boston and built the home four years ago at the kibbutz where Aviv had grown up, his wife's sister, Adi Levy Salma, told the Israeli news outlet Ynet.

“We told her it's dangerous, but she did not want to move away, as it was her home for life,” Levy Salma said.

With Israel simultaneously in a state of war and mourning, the funeral was one of many being held.

More than 3,400 people have been killed on the Palestinian side, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, and funerals there have been a fixture of daily life, with men running through streets carrying bodies in white sheets and shouting “Allahu akbar,” the Arabic phrase for “God is great.”

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In Israel, grieving family members and friends bid farewell to Shiraz Tamam, an Israeli woman who was among at least 260 people gunned down as heavily armed militants stormed an electronic music festival.

Mourners, most wearing black tops and some in sunglasses, wiped away tears and held each other as they said goodbye to Tamam before her shroud-wrapped body was buried at a cemetery in Holon, in central Israel.

With more than 1,400 killed in Israel and many still unidentified, the funerals will continue for days or longer as the nation tries to cope with the trauma of the attacks that exposed glaring weaknesses in a defense system some thought impenetrable.

Many families awoke on the day of the attacks to air raid sirens and rockets sailing overhead.

Adi Levy Salma said her family rushed to their safe room at their home in Gedera and she texted her sister to see if she was OK.

But Livnat Kotz didn't reply and didn't answer phone calls. Levy Salma was more concerned when her niece, Rotem, didn't respond.

"Then we started getting reports of terrorists who infiltrated the kibbutz," Levy Salma said. "It was at that moment we realized something bad had happened. Their friends and neighbors picked up, but they didn't. We were very worried."

At the Kotz family's funeral, soldiers and civilians sobbed. Graves were piled high with flowers.

Livnat died a week short of her 50th birthday, her sister said. She worked to popularize old crafts and incorporate them into the school system. Her husband was a vice president at Kafrit Industries, a plastics manufacturer, the company said.

Rotem was a military training instructor in the Israeli Defense Forces. The boys played basketball at the Hapoel Tel Aviv Youth Academy.

"Amazing children with enormous hearts," Levy Salma said. "Their whole lives were ahead of them."

## Author Michael Connelly proud that 'Bosch' has become longest running streaming character

By JOHN CARUCCI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Connelly has sold more than 85 million books under nearly 40 titles, but there's another distinction that makes him equally proud: His most famous protagonist, LAPD Det. Harry Bosch, has become the longest running character on streaming television.

"I know the history of streaming is very short, but it's still something that we're very, very proud of," Connelly said.

Based on his book series, "Bosch" ran seven seasons on Amazon, and then spun off as "Bosch: Legacy," which premieres its second season Friday on Amazon Freevee.

But that's not the only streaming series based on his books — Netflix recently premiered the second season of "The Lincoln Lawyer," whose protagonist, Mickey Haller, is the half-brother of Bosch. While the pair have appeared in books together, they're unlikely to appear together on television because they're on separate streaming networks.

Recently, the best-selling author spoke with The Associated Press about the legacy of his detective character, similarities he and his creator have in terms of family life, and how much Bosch is in him.

AP: How do you deal with the gap between the time the book was written and the changing values at the time of the series?

CONNELLY: I still haven't written the perfect book yet. And so you do get a chance to retell things. And there's other dimensions to it. Like, we've adapted books that are almost 30 years old and 30 years in Los Angeles or anywhere, the changes are amazing. So you're automatically kind of telling a new story. And that to me is refreshing and fun. It's a real joy to be in the writing room I got to admit, it's a huge ego boost. All these people are talking about something new created, a character you created.

AP: How many different adventures can Harry Bosch and these characters have on screen?

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CONNELLY: I keep writing about them, so hopefully we won't run out of book material. But also — especially with 'Bosch (Legacy)' — it's a life of its own. Yeah. We use some books as kind of like baseline story.

AP: But you're going beyond the books?

CONNELLY: We are in an area where we're really exploring stories that are not taken from the books, and that's very fun to do. And believe it or not, then I take some of that stuff and put it in the books. For example, Maddie becoming a police officer was in the show before it was in any of my books. Now it's in my books.

AP: Is Harry Bosch anything like you?

CONNELLY: Little things to make him an outsider. But he wasn't sharing my DNA. I was lucky and it got published. And then they wanted another Harry Bosch story and then another. And so eventually you can't keep that separation and you start sharing. There's leakage from my life into his.

AP: What similarities do you have?

CONNELLY: Most notably is that we have daughters who are the exact same age and went to the same schools, and his daughter happens to say stuff my daughter has said to me. So that to me was a big bridge between me and my character.

AP: The father-daughter relationship has become a trademark for you?

CONNELLY: Harry Bosch and Mickey Haller have daughters the exact same age as my daughter. So I'm sharing that in both series. And I really think it's such a key part of my own life or any father's life.

AP: How did it all begin for you?

CONNELLY: I'm a writer because I'm a reader. And the books that turned on that light for me were the classics... I loved the private eye novel. I love the outsider looking in.

AP: But your insight came from being a newspaper reporter?

CONNELLY: I was a journalist for 14 years and I covered the police. I was smart enough to say, 'This is what I have that maybe other writers don't have,' so I'd be a fool not to use that authenticity to my book. So, Harry Bosch started out as a cop, and he was an outsider.

AP: Any chance that Harry Bosch and Mickey Haller will appear on screen together, like they do in the books?

CONNELLY: That would be difficult to do. You know, if we could solve the war in Ukraine, we might be able to bridge the gulf between Netflix and Amazon. But they're competitors and maybe it was a mistake for me to take one series to one and one to the other. But I got two TV shows going and they're both really good. So, I don't really regret it. But there is a small regret that in the books it's important that these guys cross paths... Mickey and Harry might never be in a TV show together.

## Gaza carnage spreads anger across Mideast, alarming US allies and threatening to widen conflict

By SAMY MAGDY and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Within hours after a blast was said to have killed hundreds at a Gaza hospital, protesters hurled stones at Palestinian security forces in the occupied West Bank and at riot police in neighboring Jordan, venting fury at their leaders for failing to stop the carnage.

A summit planned in Jordan on Wednesday between U.S. President Joe Biden, Jordan's King Abdullah II, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was canceled after Abbas withdrew in protest.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had spent much of the past week meeting with Arab leaders to try to ease tensions, but those efforts are now in doubt following the hospital blast. The raw nerve of decades of Palestinian suffering, left exposed by U.S.-brokered normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states, is throbbing once again, threatening broader unrest.

"This war, which has entered a dangerous phase, will plunge the region into an unspeakable disaster," warned Abdullah, who is among the closest Western allies in the Mideast.

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There were conflicting claims of who was responsible for the hospital blast. Officials in Gaza quickly blamed an Israeli airstrike. Israel denied it was involved and released a flurry of video, audio and other information that it said showed the blast was due to a rocket misfire by Islamic Jihad, another militant group operating in Gaza. Islamic Jihad dismissed that claim.

The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties. Biden, speaking in Tel Aviv, said the blast appeared to have been caused "by the other team," not Israel.

But there was no doubt among the Arab protesters who gathered in several countries late Tuesday to condemn what they saw as an Israeli atrocity.

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which has been under lockdown since a bloody Oct. 7 rampage by Hamas militants ignited the war, protesters clashed with Palestinian security forces and called for the overthrow of Abbas.

Israel and the West have long viewed Abbas as a partner in reducing tensions, but his Palestinian Authority is widely seen by Palestinians as a corrupt and autocratic accomplice to Israel's military occupation of the West Bank.

Jordan, long considered a bastion of stability in the region, has seen mass protests in recent days. Late Tuesday, pro-Palestinian protesters tried to storm the Israeli Embassy.

"They are all normalizing Arab rulers, none of them are free, the free ones are all dead!" one protester shouted. "Arab countries are unable to do anything!"

Egypt was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, in the late 1970s. Jordan followed in 1994. Thousands of students rallied at Egyptian universities on Wednesday to condemn Israeli strikes on Gaza.

Protesters in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities chanted "Death to Israel" and "With our souls, with our blood, we sacrifice for you, Al-Aqsa," referring to a contested Jerusalem holy site. A smaller protest was held near the U.S. Embassy in Cairo on Tuesday.

Such protests are rare in Egypt, where authorities have clamped down on dissent for over a decade. But fears that Israel could push Gaza's 2.3 million residents into Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and soaring consumer prices due to runaway inflation, could prove a volatile mix in the country, where a popular uprising toppled a U.S.-backed autocrat in 2011.

Protests also erupted in Lebanon, where Hezbollah has traded fire with Israeli forces at the border, threatening to enter the war with its massive arsenal of rockets. Hundreds of protesters clashed with Lebanese security forces on Wednesday near the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, where riot police lobbed dozens of tear gas canisters and fired water cannons to disperse demonstrators.

Protests have also been held in Morocco and Bahrain, two countries that forged diplomatic ties with Israel three years ago as part of the Abraham Accords.

"The Arab street has a voice. That voice may have been ignored in the past by governments in the region and the West ... but they cannot do this anymore," said Badr al-Saif, a history professor at Kuwait University. "People are on fire."

As recently as a couple of weeks ago, the regional outlook seemed far different.

In his address to the U.N. General Assembly last month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted that the Abraham Accords, in which four Arab states normalized relations with Israel in 2020, were a "pivot of history" that "heralded the dawn of a new age of peace."

He said Israel was "at the cusp of an even more dramatic breakthrough" — a historic agreement with Saudi Arabia that the Biden administration had been focused on in recent months.

The Abraham Accords, with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, were reached with autocratic leaders willing to set aside the Palestinian issue in order to secure their own benefits from the U.S. The UAE hoped for advanced fighter jets. Morocco won U.S. support for its claim to Western Sahara, and Sudan's ruling military junta got longstanding U.S. sanctions lifted.

Saudi Arabia had asked for a U.S. defense pact and aid in establishing a civilian nuclear program, as well as a substantial concession to the Palestinians that the Saudis have yet to publicly spell out.

Shimrit Meir, who served as a diplomatic adviser to former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, said

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“time will tell” what impact the war will have on normalization efforts.

“In the short term, they will suffer, especially the hope for a breakthrough” with Saudi Arabia, she said. “In the longer run, Israel’s appeal and value to these countries comes from its military strength. Therefore, the need for it to restore its deterrence is above any other considerations.”

Despite all the high-level diplomacy, ordinary Arabs and Muslims still express strong solidarity with the Palestinian cause. During last year’s World Cup soccer tournament, for example, Palestinian flags were waved in abundance even though the national team did not compete.

The recent devastation in Gaza has stirred those sentiments again.

“No Arab government is able to extend its hand to Israel amid its aggression on the Palestinians,” said Ammar Ali Hassan, an Egyptian political scientist.

“The Arab peoples won’t accept such a move. Even the rulers wouldn’t benefit from such ties at this time.”

## Struggling offenses lead to the lowest-scoring week in the NFL since 2014

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

The NFL hadn’t experienced a week of inept offenses like it did this past weekend in nearly a decade.

With superstar quarterbacks Patrick Mahomes and Josh Allen unable to generate even 20 points in their games, top defenses for Cleveland and the Jets shutting down high-powered attacks from San Francisco and Philadelphia, and young QBs struggling across the league, the NFL had its lowest-scoring week since 2014.

Teams across the league scored an average of just 18.4 points in Week 6 for the lowest-scoring week in the NFL since Week 15 of the 2014 season when teams averaged 18.2 points.

Only two teams — Miami and Jacksonville — scored at least 27 points for the fewest in any week since the 1995 season. The 23 teams held to 20 points or fewer were the most in any week ever in the NFL.

Mahomes and the Chiefs scored only 19 points in a win over Denver for his second victory this season without scoring 20 points. Mahomes won only three starts without Kansas City scoring at least 20 points in his first five seasons as a starter.

The Bills beat the Giants 14-9 to tie for their fewest points in a win since Allen’s rookie season in 2018.

Eight other teams won last week without scoring more than 21 points, including the Browns in a 19-17 win over the 49ers and Jets in a 20-14 victory over the Eagles. The 10 winning teams that scored 21 points or fewer were tied for the most in any week. That last happened in Week 13 of the 1993 season.

Poor passing production was the biggest culprit as teams across the league combined for a passer rating of 78.6 — the lowest in any week since Week 14 of the 2016 season (77.5).

### SURPRISING LEADERS

The 1972 Dolphins got to celebrate the end of the undefeated teams a little earlier than usual this season.

San Francisco lost to Cleveland and backup quarterback P.J. Walker and Philadelphia fell to the New York Jets and backup QB Zach Wilson, marking the first time since 2017 that every team lost at least once in the first six weeks.

According to the NFL, it was the first time since QB starts began being tracked in 1950 that two teams 5-0 or better lost to backup quarterbacks in the same week.

The losses by the Eagles and Niners put them in a tie with Kansas City, Miami and Detroit for the best record in the NFL at 5-1.

This is the first time since Week 11 of the 1993 season that the Lions have at least a share of the best record in the NFL this late in the season. They were one of five teams tied at 7-2 that season before finishing 10-6.

### MARVELOUS MIAMI

While most offenses are struggling, Miami is still rolling at an incredible clip after beating Carolina 42-21 to give it 223 points on the season.



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Only five teams in NFL history have scored more in the first six games, with the 2013 Broncos (265 points) the last to do it.

The Dolphins have done it through the air and on the ground, joining the 1958 NFL champion Colts as the only teams to have at least 15 TD runs and passes in the first six games of a season.

Raheem Mostert has scored 11 of those TDs, becoming the eighth player in the Super Bowl era to score that many in his team's first six games. Mostert has scored more touchdowns by himself than 11 teams have this season.

Tyreek Hill has 814 yards receiving this season for the second most ever at this point of the season behind Don Hutson's 819 in 1942.

NEW YUCK

Perhaps no team has struggled to score as much as the Giants, as evidenced by their 14-9 loss to Buffalo last week that featured drives ending on the 1-yard line in each half.

New York became the third team in the last 13 seasons to go three straight games without an offensive touchdown. This is just the second time in the Super Bowl era the Giants have done that, with the team going four straight games without an offensive touchdown in 1976.

New York's two TD passes are the fewest through six games since the 2009 Raiders had two with JaMarcus Russell at quarterback, and the Giants are the first team since 1998 to score no offensive touchdowns in the first half of the first six games.

New York came close Sunday night, driving down to the 1 in the closing seconds of the first before getting stopped on a running play and letting the clock run out. The game ended with the Giants throwing an incomplete pass on an untimed down from the 1.

It was the first time a team reached the 1 on two drives without scoring on either since the Broncos did it in the 2022 opener at Seattle last season. Melvin Gordon and Javonte Williams both lost fumbles to end those drives.

TURNAROUND TEAM

The Bills managed to win that game against New York despite being held scoreless in the first three quarters.

It was the second time this season a team got shut out at home in the first three quarters and came back to win, with Green Bay doing it in an 18-17 victory over New Orleans in Week 3.

That hadn't happened once in the previous 10 seasons.

The last time the Bills won a home game after being held scoreless in the first three quarters came during a replacement player game in 1987 when they beat the Giants 6-3.

## **The German chancellor condemns a firebomb attack on a Berlin synagogue and vows protection for Jews**

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz strongly condemned a firebomb assault on a synagogue in Berlin on Wednesday, saying, "We will never accept when attacks are carried out against Jewish institutions."

Assailants threw two Molotov cocktails early Wednesday at the synagogue in the center of the German capital, police said, as antisemitic incidents in the country have been rising following the violent escalation in the Middle East.

"Unknown persons threw two Molotov cocktails from the street," the Kahal Adass Jisroel community wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Dozens of police officers were investigating in front of the synagogue in the city's Mitte neighborhood, and the entire street next to the building was cordoned off and blocked for traffic.

Police said they were investigating "an attempted serious arson" in which two people approached the synagogue on foot at 3:45 a.m. and threw the firebombs, which burst on the sidewalk next to the building. The two people, their faces covered, ran away.

A couple of hours later, when police were already investigating the incident, a 30-year-old man approached the synagogue on a scooter, which he threw aside, and began running toward the building. When police

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officers detained him, he resisted and shouted anti-Israeli slogans.

"We are all shocked by this terrorist attack," Germany's leading Jewish group, the Central Council of Jews, said in a statement. "Above all, the families from the neighborhood around the synagogue are shocked and unsettled. Words become deeds. Hamas' ideology of extermination against everything Jewish is also having an effect in Germany."

The building complex of the Kahal Adass Jisroel community in the center of Berlin houses a synagogue, a kindergarten, a yeshiva school and a community center.

Police also said there were riots overnight between Muslim immigrants and police in the city's Neukoelln and Kreuzberg neighborhoods and at Berlin's landmark Brandenburg Gate in which several officers were injured.

Scholz, who was speaking to reporters during a trip to Egypt on Wednesday, said that Germany would not accept violent and antisemitic protests and that the protection of Jewish institutions would be further increased.

"It outrages me personally what some of them are shouting and doing, and I am convinced that Germany's citizens are of the same opinion as me," Scholz said.

"We stand united for the protection of Jews" in Germany, the chancellor added.

Shlomo Afanasev, a rabbi and long-time member of the Kahal Adass Jisroel community, said he was shocked by the attack.

"I go to the synagogue since 2006, and ... I always go with my kippah on," he told The Associated Press. "We felt until today very safe here. And never thought something like this could happen in this area. In the middle of Berlin."

Afanasev added that he would wear a baseball hat from now on to cover his skullcap because "I don't want to be openly Jewish ... outside, because it doesn't feel safe anymore. Unfortunately."

Germans are particularly sensitive regarding attacks on Jews or Jewish houses of worship because of the country's Holocaust past.

Almost 85 years ago, on Nov. 9, 1938, the Nazis, among them many ordinary Germans, terrorized Jews throughout Germany and Austria. They killed at least 91 people and vandalized 7,500 Jewish businesses. They also burned more than 1,400 synagogues, according to Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.

The pogroms, which became known as Kristallnacht — the "Night of Broken Glass" — preceded the Holocaust in which the Nazis and their henchmen murdered 6 million European Jews.

Following Hamas' brutal attack on Israel on Oct. 7 and the subsequent war in Gaza, police have increased security for Jewish institutions in Berlin and all over Germany. Still, Israeli flags that were flown as a sign of solidarity in front of city halls all over the country have been torn down and burnt. Several building in Berlin where Jews live had the star of David painted on doors and walls.

## Republicans and Democrats agree that the Afghanistan war wasn't worth it, an AP-NORC poll shows

By LINLEY SANDERS and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a time when Americans are deeply divided along party lines, a new poll shows considerable agreement on at least one issue: The United States' two-decade-long war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting.

The poll from the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research comes two years after the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan in August 2021 and the Taliban returned to power. The war was started to go after the masterminds of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the Taliban who allowed them to use Afghan territory. It ended in frantic scenes of Afghans and Americans desperately trying to get on one of the last flights out of Kabul.

Polls suggest the withdrawal, seen by many as chaotic and ill-planned, may have been a turning point for President Joe Biden's approval ratings, which started a downward slide around that time and have not recovered since.

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Two-thirds of Americans say the war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting; 65% of Democrats and 63% of Republicans agree on that evaluation. Many have doubts about how successful the U.S. was at accomplishing more specific goals such as eliminating the threat from extremists or improving opportunities for women.

"It was unwinnable from the beginning," said Martin Stefen, a 78-year-old Republican who lives in Carson City, Nevada. He said the U.S. should have paid closer attention to what happened to the Soviet Union, which waged a decade-long war in Afghanistan during the 1980s only to pull out in defeat in 1989. And, he said, the U.S. should have had a more specific end goal for how it wanted the war in Afghanistan to go and a better understanding of the country's tribal politics.

That thought was echoed by Justin Campbell, a 28-year-old Democrat from Brookhaven, Mississippi. He said it was clear after the U.S. was entrenched in Afghanistan that it didn't have very deep support. Campbell said he's not pleased that the Taliban is back in control.

"But I don't think it was worth us staying over there," he said.

Maliha Chishti, a lecturer and research associate at the Pearson Institute, said she was struck by the fact that after 20 years of war, so many American and Afghan lives lost and billions spent, the vast majority said they felt Afghanistan was not friendly to the U.S. or was an outright enemy. She said the responses demonstrate a frustration on the part of Americans and the need to ask questions about what went wrong with America's attempts to intervene in Afghanistan.

"We invested all of this money to really build a state from scratch and when we left, that state completely collapsed," she said.

Many Americans also say the United States was not successful with many of its key objectives in Afghanistan.

Eliminating the threat from Islamic extremists in Afghanistan during the war is still seen as an important goal by many across party lines: 46% of Democrats and 44% of Republicans called that highly important. But only about one-quarter in each group said this successfully happened during the war.

Slightly fewer than half — 46% — say the U.S. and its allies were successful at the goal of apprehending or killing the individuals in Afghanistan who were responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks, compared with 25% who think the U.S. was unsuccessful in achieving that goal.

Only about one in five Americans say the U.S. successfully improved opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan, with 43% saying such efforts were unsuccessful. But many said advancing the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan was important to them. About three quarters said that goal was extremely, very or somewhat important to them. Those figures are similar to the level of support for the goal of eliminating the threat of Islamic extremists sheltering in Afghanistan.

Since the Taliban's return to power, they have restricted women's rights to education and work and even barred them from public parks.

Women were more likely than men across party lines to call advancing the rights of women in Afghanistan an important goal. Toni Dewey, a 75-year-old Democrat from Wilmington, North Carolina, said she wasn't sure how much the U.S. could do at this point to improve the rights of women in Afghanistan but she did feel their educational opportunities were greater while America was there.

"I think any population that doesn't respect their population, they're missing out because women do contribute to the benefit of everyone," she said.

Even as Democrats and Republicans have similar views on policy goals for Afghanistan, they differ on whether the U.S. should take a more active role in solving the world's problems: 55% of Republicans say the U.S. should take a less active role, compared with 15% of Democrats. The responses also demonstrate the ongoing shift in the Republican Party, which has traditionally been more hawkish and interventionist.

Nola Sayne, a 59-year-old Republican from Loganville, Georgia, said she is "wary of the United States being the world's police." Up until quite recently she had been supportive of policies limiting American involvement abroad — like the war in Ukraine — to instead focus American attention and funding at home. But the Hamas attack on Israel, which took place after the poll was conducted, is making her rethink that

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position.

"They are our friends, our allies. We can't let this heinous act go unanswered," she said.

When it came to general awareness about issues related to the war in Afghanistan, the poll shows 68% of U.S. adults had heard at least some about the U.S. withdrawal; 59% said the same about the Taliban taking control in 2021; and 64% about the Taliban's restrictions on women.

But fewer had heard about the treatment by the Taliban of Afghan citizens who worked with the United States during the war; 52% had heard a lot or some information while 47% said they had heard little or not a thing.

The U.S. evacuated tens of thousands of Afghans in an August 2021 airlift from Kabul airport. But hundreds of thousands of Afghans — many who worked closely with the U.S. government — are still trying to flee Afghanistan. Groups helping them have warned that Afghans who worked closely with the U.S. military have faced retribution from the Taliban and say the U.S. has a moral responsibility and national security interest in helping them.

Mike Mitchell is executive director of No One Left Behind, which helps Afghans who worked with the U.S. relocate. He said the poll results echo what his organization has noted anecdotally: Many Americans are surprised to learn that so many Afghans who worked with U.S. troops were left behind. He said Americans are inundated with information from crisis after crisis around the world. And he said when people learn about the problems Afghan allies are having, they want to help.

He recently spoke at an event connected to the two-year anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal.

"At the end of the talk, so many people came up and said: 'I had no idea. ... What can we do about it?'" Mitchell said.

The poll of 1,191 adults was conducted Sept. 21-25, 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 3.8 percentage points.

## Today in History: October 18

### U.S. takes possession of Alaska from Russia

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Oct. 18, the 291st day of 2023. There are 74 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 18, 1867, the United States took formal possession of Alaska from Russia.

On this date:

In 1648, Boston shoemakers were authorized to form a guild to protect their interests, becoming the first American labor organization on record.

In 1892, the first long-distance telephone line between New York and Chicago was officially opened.

In 1898, the American flag was raised in Puerto Rico shortly before Spain formally relinquished control of the island to the U.S.

In 1954, Texas Instruments unveiled the Regency TR-1, the first commercially produced transistor radio.

In 1962, James D. Watson, Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins were honored with the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology for determining the double-helix molecular structure of DNA.

In 1968, the U.S. Olympic Committee suspended Tommie Smith and John Carlos for giving a "Black power" salute as a protest during a victory ceremony in Mexico City.

In 1969, the federal government banned artificial sweeteners known as cyclamates because of evidence they caused cancer in laboratory rats.

In 1972, Congress passed the Clean Water Act, overriding President Richard Nixon's veto.

In 1977, West German commandos stormed a hijacked Lufthansa jetliner on the ground in Mogadishu,

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Somalia, freeing all 86 hostages and killing three of the four hijackers.

In 1984, actor Jon-Erik Hexum, 26, was taken off life support six days after shooting himself in the head with a pistol loaded with a blank cartridge on the set of his TV show "Cover Up."

In 2001, CBS News announced that an employee in anchorman Dan Rather's office had tested positive for skin anthrax.

In 2010, four men snared in an FBI sting were convicted of plotting to blow up New York City synagogues and shoot down military planes with the help of a paid informant who'd convinced them he was a terror operative.

In 2012, the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York ruled that a federal law defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman was unconstitutional. (The following June, the Supreme Court would use that case to strike down provisions keeping legally-married same-sex couples from receiving federal benefits that were otherwise available to married couples.)

In 2018, President Donald Trump threatened to close the U.S. border with Mexico if authorities could not stop a caravan of migrants making their way from Central America.

Today's Birthdays: College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Mike Ditka is 84. Singer-musician Russ Giguere is 80. Actor Joe Morton is 76. Actor Pam Dawber is 73. Author Terry McMillan is 72. Writer-producer Chuck Lorre is 71. Gospel singer Vickie Winans is 70. Director-screenwriter David Twohy (TOO'-ee) is 68. International Tennis Hall of Famer Martina Navratilova is 67. Actor Jon Lindstrom is 66. International Hall of Fame boxer Thomas Hearns is 65. Actor Jean-Claude Van Damme is 63. Jazz musician Wynton Marsalis is 62. Actor Vincent Spano is 61. Singer Nonchalant is 56. Former tennis player Michael Stich (shteek) is 55. Actor Joy Bryant is 49. Rock musician Peter Svensson (The Cardigans) is 49. Actor Wesley Jonathan is 45. R&B singer-actor Ne-Yo is 44. Country singer Josh Gracin is 43. Olympic gold medal skier Lindsey Vonn is 39. Jazz singer-musician Esperanza Spalding is 39. Actor-model Freida Pinto is 39. Actor Zac Efron is 36. Actor Joy Lauren is 34. U.S. Olympic and WNBA basketball star Brittney Griner is 33. TV personality Bristol Palin is 33. Actor Tyler Posey is 32. Actor Toby Regbo is 32.