

Groton Daily Independent

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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

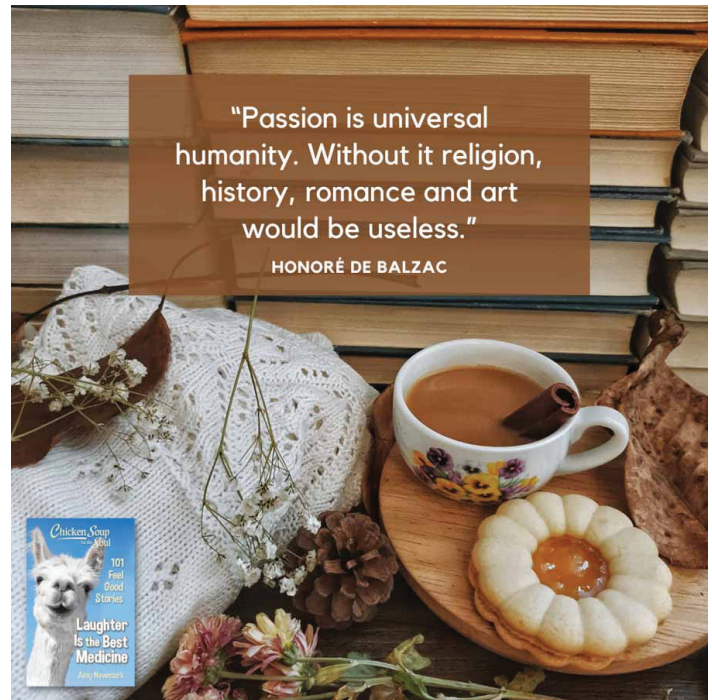
United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school singing in church, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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



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.

Monday, Oct. 23

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff with noodles, mixed vegetables, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, sweet potato fries.

United Methodist: PEO Meeting (outside group), 7 p.m.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at Noon.

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

5th Grade Band Introduction, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Volleyball hosts Faulkton (JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Labour Party in two special elections on Thursday, hinting that Sunak is on track for a heavy defeat at next year's general election.

U.S. Army has charged Private Travis King, a U.S. soldier released by Pyongyang last month, with eight crimes, including desertion for running into North Korea, assault against fellow soldiers, and solicitation of child pornography, Reuters reported.

China has significantly increased its nuclear arsenal over the past year, the Pentagon said in its annual report. It now has over 500 operational warheads and plans to double the number to over 1,000 by 2030.

The Associated Press reported that North Korea dispatched thousands of information technology workers to contract with U.S. companies, citing the FBI and the Justice Department. The workers used false identities and sent home millions of dollars of their wages which were used for North Korea's weapons programs.

The upcoming winter season is expected to be warmer than normal for some parts of the U.S., according to climate experts with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, citing strengthening El Niño conditions.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Kyiv's units appear to be intensifying offensive activity across the Dnieper River as they look to cement and build out their foothold on the left, or eastern, bank of the waterway that has served as a formidable front line for almost one year..

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

The first group of 450 prospective jurors will arrive at the courthouse to answer a lengthy questionnaire to serve a trial of Sidney Powell and Kenneth Chesebro, two of Donald Trump's 18 co-defendants indicted in Fulton County for allegedly trying to overturn the 2020 election in Georgia.

American Express and Schlumberger are among major companies set to report their third-quarter earnings report..

TALKING POINTS

"Civilians in Gaza need core services and supplies and for that we need rapid and immediate humanitarian access, we need water, food and medicine now. We need it at scale, and we need it to be sustained," Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres on the Gaza humanitarian crisis amid the Israel-Hamas war.

"I'm still running for speaker, and I plan to go to the floor and get the votes and win this race. But I want to go talk with a few of my colleagues, particularly want to talk with the 20 individuals who voted against me, so that we can move forward and begin to work for the American people," GOP Rep. Jim Jordan not backing down despite losing his first two ballots in his race for House speaker.

"These shorter-term measures are often volatile. In any case, inflation is still too high, and a few months of good data are only the beginning of what it will take to build confidence that inflation is moving down sustainably toward our goal." Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell speaking at the Economic Club of New York on U.S. inflation.

Despite saying the opposite earlier Thursday, GOP Rep. Jim Jordan said he would seek a third speaker vote, leaving Republicans with few options after some GOP members retracted plans to empower interim Speaker Patrick McHenry. U.S. officials said a U.S. Navy warship intercepted multiple drones and missiles near Yemen. Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder confirmed they came from Iranian-backed Houthi militants.

U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was dealt a blow when two historically safe Conservative seats flipped to the Labour Party in two special elections on Thursday, hinting that Sunak is on track for a heavy defeat at next year's general election.

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Football: Elk Point-Jefferson 48, Groton Area 13

Groton Area Tigers

First Downs: 8

Rushing: 26 carries for 58 yards, 1 touchdown

Korbin Kucker 17-52
Christian Ehresmann 6-12
Brevin Fliehs 1-4
Karston Jeschke 2-5

Passing:

Lane Tietz completed
10 of 21 for 56 yards, 1 TD, 3 Int.
Korbin Kucker: 2 for 3 for 73 yards

Receivers:

Brevin Fliehs 1-61
Taylor Diegel 5-24
Colby Dunker 3-19
Christian Ehresmann 1-16
Korbin Kucker 1-6
Caden McInerney 1-3

Fumbles: Had 2, lost 1

Penalties: 4 for 30 yards

Defensive Leaders

Christian Ehresmann 12 tackles
Logan Ringgenberg 10 tackles
Holden Sippel 10 tackles

Record: 5-4

Next Game: End of Season

Scoring:

First Quarter

11:41: EPJ: Carson Timmins 68 yard pass from Keaton Gale (PAT kick no good).....6-0
7:24: EPJ: Ashton Fairbanks 36 yard pass from Keaton Gale (PAT Timmins kick) 13-0

Second Quarter

8:08: Groton Area: Korbin Kucker 3 yard run. (PAT Kucker kick)13-7
6:13: EPJ: Gunner Ewing 8 yard run (PAT: Timmins kick)..... 20-7
4:52: EPJ: Ashton Fairbanks 27 yard pass from Keaton Gale (PAT Timmins kick)27-7

Third Quarter

4:49: EPJ: Garrett Merkely 40 yard pass from Keaton Gale (PAT Timmins kick) 34-7
0:10: EPJ: Jacob Gale 14 yard run (PAT: Timmins kick)41-7

Fourth Quarter

8:24: EPJ: Luke Schmitz 4 yard run (PAT: Timmins kick) 48-7
4:01: Groton Area: Brevin Fliehs 61 yard pass from Korbin Kucker (PAT: Kick no good)48-13

Elk Point-Jefferson Huskies

First Downs: 21

Rushing: 31 carries for 193 yards, 3 touchdowns

Jacob Gale 6-50
Keaton Gale 4-18
Garrett Merkley 3-25
Gunner Ewing 4-33
Luke Schmitz 2-29

Passing:

Keaton Gale completed 13 of 26 for 268 yards
4 touchdowns

Receivers:

Carson Timmins 1-68
Grayson Girard 1-14
Garrett Merkley 4-86
Ashton Fairbanks 4-76
Kayden Moore 1-11
Luke Schmitz 1-19
Gunner Ewing 1(-6)

Fumbles: Had 3, lost 1

Penalties: 6 for 60 yards

Defensive Leaders

Kaydon Moore 4 tackles
Landon Johnsen 4 tackles

Record: 8-1

Next Game: Host Tri-Valley



Tom Woods is always full of inspiration and Thursday night was no exception as talked to Paul Kosel at halftime of the football game.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Colby Dunker caught this pass to gain some ground for the Tigers. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Elk Point-Jefferson ends the Tiger football season

The Groton Area football season came to an end Thursday at Elk Point as the Tigers lost in the first round of the football playoffs, 48-13.

Korbin Kucker had 52 yards rushing, 73 yards passing including a touchdown pass to Brevin Fliehs for 61 yards and had six yards receiving. Christian Ehresmann had 12 yards rushing, 16 yards receiving and 12 tackles. Logan Ringgenberg and Holden Sippel each had 10 tackles.

Overall, Groton had 58 yards rushing while the Huskies had 193. The Tigers had 129 yards passing while Elk Point-Jefferson had 268 yards. Both teams lost one fumble including Groton's fumble on the five EPJ five yard line. The Tigers had three interceptions while EPJ had none.

Groton scored on a Kucker three yard run and a Kucker to Brevin Fliehs 61 yard pass.

The Tigers end the season with a 5-4 record.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, with Mike Nehls and Jeslyn Kosel. The broadcast was sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Services, BK Customs T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Farmers Union of Ferney and Conde, Fliehs Sales & Service, Full Circle Ag, Groton Chiropractic Clinic, 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.

The Life of Marjorie Overacker



Private family services for Marjorie Overacker, 73, of Groton, will be at 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, October 20th. A prayer service will begin at 7 p.m.

Marjorie passed away on October 17, 2023 at her home surrounded by loved ones after a courageous battle.

Marjorie Marie was born on January 16, 1950 at St. Lukes Hospital, Aberdeen to Donald A. and Margarette (Larsen) Clocksene. She was baptized at the Groton United Methodist Church on March 23, 1951 and later confirmed in 1964. Marjorie attended school in Groton and graduated in 1968. On July 11, 1968, she was united in marriage with Roger E. Overacker at the Groton United Methodist Church. Following their wedding, they moved to St. Maries, Idaho, where they were blessed with two children.

In 1975, they returned to Groton and Marjorie began her medical career at Colonial Manor Nursing Home. She also worked for Home Health, owned a ceramics shop, and worked at the Groton Independent Newspaper. Marjorie started college in 1986 at Presentation College and graduated with a nursing degree in 1989. She worked as a registered nurse on 4th surgical floor at Avera-St.Lukes until her retirement in February of 2013.

Marjorie was an active member of the Legion Post #39 Auxiliary, the Groton Garden Club, P.E.O. Chapter AC, United Methodist Women, and as a member of the UMC Board. She also belonged to the Tuesday Morning Bible Study and Friday Morning Coffee Group. Marjorie's greatest love was her family. She spent countless hours scrapbooking, doing family history, and organizing photos for future generations. She enjoyed helping her grandchildren with homework, teaching them to cook/bake, working in her flower garden, and canning fall produce.

Celebrating her life is her husband of 55 years, Roger; her children, Angela (Shane) Johnson, Jesse Overacker (Stacey Wellnitz); grandchildren, Sterling, Faith, and Luke Johnson, KayLynn, Emily, and Huntley Overacker; her sister, Dona (Merle) Higgs; two first cousins, Marilyn Clocksene, and Kent Sckerl along with many dear in-laws, nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Preceding her in death were her parents; her brothers-in-law, Earl Overacker, Ronald Wallen, Harvey Hanson; and cousins, David Sckerl, Carroll Clocksene, and Greg Clocksene.

Memorials may be designated to the United Methodist Church, a GHS nursing scholarship, or an organization of your choice.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Proposed bentonite mine takes next step; Homestake bond raised

BY: SETH TUPPER - OCTOBER 19, 2023 5:00 PM

A state board approved a step forward for a proposed bentonite mine and increased the required bond amount to protect the state from expenses related to a closed gold mine.

The Board of Minerals and Environment, consisting of nine members appointed by the governor, met in a telephone conference on Thursday.

Texas-based Bentonite Performance Minerals won approval of its contractor for a required socioeconomic assessment of the effects of the company's proposed bentonite mine. The contractor is the global environmental consulting firm SWCA.

The Larsen Mine would be 7 miles northwest of Belle Fourche. Meeting materials included a letter from the company that said it will seek a mine permit "in the near future," which, if approved, would be the fourth South Dakota mine permit granted to the company in the last 10 years.

Bentonite is an absorbent clay used in products ranging from cat litter to drilling fluid. It's been mined in the Belle Fourche area and nearby areas of Wyoming for decades. Bentonite Performance Minerals owns a processing plant just across the border from South Dakota in Colony, Wyoming, and another plant in Lovell, Wyoming, just west of the Bighorn Mountains.

Bentonite is thought to be the product of volcanic ash that settled into an inland sea millions of years ago and was buried under layers of earth. It's mined by scraping away the earth, removing the bentonite, and then refilling the pit.

South Dakota has taxes on some mined materials, such as gold. But the state does not have a tax on bentonite production, while some other states including Wyoming and Montana do.

A spokesperson for the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources did not immediately respond to a South Dakota Searchlight request Thursday for information about existing bentonite mines in the state and annual production statistics.

Homestake bond

Also Thursday, the Board of Minerals and Environment approved a change to the bond that the Homestake Mining Company is required to maintain.

The bond is intended to cover expenses the state would incur if the company — now a subsidiary of Barrick Gold — ever fails to continue water treatment and other activities necessary to contain environmental damage from the former Homestake Mine in Lead. The mine, consisting of a vast system of underground tunnels and a massive above-ground pit, closed in 2002. Part of the mine now houses underground science experiments.

Due to inflation and other factors, the board agreed with a recommendation from the staff of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to increase the required bond amount. This year's amount will change from \$61.2 million to \$80.2 million, an increase of \$19 million. The board also reviewed a schedule of annual increases planned through 2027, when the former mine's next five-year review will occur.

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

Advocates express patience as Medicaid expansion enrollments trail projections

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 19, 2023 4:40 PM

Expanded Medicaid eligibility is attracting fewer enrollments so far than the state anticipated, but some industry insiders say that's to be expected.

Projections indicated about 52,000 people would be eligible for coverage under the expansion.

The number of expansion enrollees reached somewhere between 11,000 and 12,000 as of Tuesday's Board of Social Services meeting in Pierre, according to Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff. He said that's fewer than anticipated.

Tim Rave is the president of the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations. He's not concerned. "It's actually tracking with the studies that we've seen showing how implementation would go," he said. "We knew from the start that it would take a year or two to get to the numbers we expect."

Medicaid is a federal-state program that helps pay the health care expenses of low-income people. South Dakotans voted last November to expand Medicaid eligibility, and the expansion went into effect July 1. That kicked in soon after the expiration of federally funded protections for Medicaid recipients, which were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The co-founder of the group that submitted the petitions to get Medicaid expansion on the ballot said he's not worried yet.

"It doesn't happen overnight," said Rick Weiland with Dakotans for Health. "Sure, you'd hope it would be higher. Sometimes it's hard to find them to let them know they are eligible."

Some lawmakers would like more clarity on what's causing the disparity between enrollments and eligibility.

"How do you fall 40,000 short of your estimate?" said Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls. "People are going to want to know. I want to know."

Deputy Secretary Brenda Tidball-Zeltinger said during the Tuesday meeting that part of the reason has to do with people waiting to enroll until they have a health care appointment.

Department of Social Services spokesperson Emily Richardt told South Dakota Searchlight in an email, "There won't be any further comment than what was presented in the meeting."

Secretary Althoff also introduced a new digital dashboard during the meeting offering an up-to-date look at Medicaid enrollment in the state. It shows about 121,000 South Dakotans are currently enrolled.

Through a combination of disenrollments since the end of federal protections and re-enrollments or new enrollments through expansion, there was a net decline of 32,106 Medicaid enrollees from March through September, according to the new dashboard. Enrollees dropped from 152,987 to 120,881 during that period.

The expansion now allows people earning up to 138% of the federal poverty level to enroll in Medicaid. That includes individuals with incomes up to about \$20,000 per year and families of four with an income up to about \$40,000 per year.

The Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas has initiated an effort to help guide residents in accessing Medicaid coverage. The services are free. Personnel can meet by phone, Zoom or in-person to help sign people up.

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

Federal agency clarifies it would permit a replacement marker in South Dakota for mountain man

BY: PAUL HAMMEL - OCTOBER 19, 2023 10:22 AM

LINCOLN, Nebraska — A federal agency is clarifying its stance on allowing a replacement marker to be installed after the removal this upcoming weekend of a monument to the heroic odyssey of a 1800s mountain man in a remote corner of South Dakota.

Elizabeth Smith, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, said Wednesday that the agency is in "full support" of efforts to install a replacement that honors Hugh Glass, who reportedly crawled/limped 200 miles to safety after being mauled by a grizzly bear.

A week ago, after being asked by the Examiner, Smith cited a federal statute that "prohibits us from placing any new monuments" on the federally owned Shadehill Reservoir near Lemmon, South Dakota, where the Glass/Neihardt monument is located.

But on Wednesday, Smith said that statute only applies to markers placed by "the public" and that the Bureau, as well as the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, which operates a state park on the reservoir, are willing to coordinate in placing a new interpretive sign at the site.

'Full support'

"We're in full support," she said. "It's a very exciting story."

This tale began 100 years ago when Nebraska poet/author John Neihardt, along with some local officials, built a concrete monument on a rancher's land near Lemmon dedicated to Glass, who was mauled by a bear and left for dead in the summer of 1823.

Glass' heroic crawl was memorialized by Neihardt in an epic poem, "The Song of Hugh Glass," and was recently the subject of a Hollywood movie, "The Revenant."

Fast forward to 2023, when Neihardt had challenged students of Wayne State College to unearth a time capsule buried inside the concrete obelisk and celebrate like mountain men might have 200 years ago.

Questions over who owned the monument and whether it could be breached were resolved when the Bureau ruled that it was owned by descendants of Neihardt, the poet laureate in perpetuity of Nebraska, who died in 1973.

Original monument to be 'snatched away'

The Neihardt family plans to remove the monument this weekend and transport it to a state historic site in Nebraska dedicated to the poet/author in Bancroft. There, they hope to retrieve the time capsule, said to contain an "original manuscript" by their grandfather.

The removal led to some complaints that the Glass/Neihardt monument was being "snatched away" from Lemmon, where the historic mauling had occurred. (A second, historic monument, erected by the State of South Dakota in the 1960s, is unaffected and will remain)

Coralie Hughes, a granddaughter of Neihardt, has said it was her intention all along to install an interpretive sign of some kind to replace what had been built in 1923.

That goal is also shared by Arden Saunders, whose grandfather Otto Weinkauff loaned his concrete mixer and helped Neihardt and others build the monument on his ranch. The ranch later was obtained by the Bureau on which it built the Shadehill Reservoir.

Saunders, who lives near Rapid City, South Dakota, said the unique tribute made 100 years ago needs to be memorialized.

His grandparents, he said, painted the monument more than once and faithfully maintained it, even after it was inundated by floods. Neihardt, he said, drove 500 miles in a Model A on dirt roads and cow paths to get to Lemmon and build the obelisk, which includes a bronze plaque.

'Good news'

"It's not the greatest monument in the world, but it's historic and it's been there 100 years," Saunders said. He said Wednesday that it was "good news" the Bureau was in support of a replacement marker or sign. Hughes said she plans to work with Saunders on what should be depicted on an interpretive sign.

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Smith, the Bureau spokeswoman based in Montana, said it was important to clarify the agency's stance given that many people feel that government agencies can be "impersonal and uncaring."

That isn't the case, she said.

"While there may be some difficult individuals in any organization, many government workers are dedicated to serving their community and genuinely care about the people they serve," Smith said.

Paul Hammel is the senior reporter for the Nebraska Examiner. He has covered the Nebraska Legislature and Nebraska state government for decades. He started his career reporting for the Omaha Sun and was named editor of the Papillion Times in 1982. He later worked as a sports enterprise reporter at the Lincoln Journal-Star. He joined the Omaha World-Herald in 1990, working as a legislative reporter, then roving state reporter and finally Lincoln bureau chief. Paul has won awards from organizations including Great Plains Journalism, the Associated Press and Suburban Newspapers of America. A native of Ralston, Nebraska, he is vice president of the John G. Neihardt Foundation and secretary of the Nebraska Hop Growers.

Biden in address to nation calls for support for both Israel and Ukraine

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - OCTOBER 19, 2023 8:48 PM

President Joe Biden reasserted his support for Israel and Ukraine in their conflicts, saying in an Oval Office address Thursday evening that those countries' wars against terrorist and tyrannical opponents were crucial to U.S. and world interests and asking Congress to fund a military aid package.

After nearly two weeks focusing almost entirely on Israel, Biden laid out a broader foreign policy vision to oppose figures such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, who invaded Ukraine last year, as well as terrorist groups such as Hamas that launched attacks against Israel this month that killed more than 1,300, including U.S. citizens.

Such adversaries must be stopped, he said.

"When terrorists don't pay a price for their terror, when dictators don't pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction," he said. "They keep going and the costs and the threats to America and the world keep rising."

"We cannot and will not let terrorists like Hamas and tyrants like Putin win," he added.

Failing to stop Putin would only embolden "would-be aggressors around the world," he said.

Hamas' attack, which killed "at least 32" U.S. citizens, "unleashed pure unadulterated evil in the world," he said.

Biden said he would ask Congress on Friday to approve an aid package to Israel and Ukraine.

The White House request is expected to total upward of \$100 billion, including around \$60 billion for Ukraine, \$10 billion for Israel, aid for Taiwan and funding to improve U.S.-Mexico border security, according to reports.

Ukraine has asked for help with weapons and air defense systems, he said.

The U.S. plays an indispensable role in world affairs, Biden said.

"American leadership is what holds the world together," he said.

Biden said he did not seek to have U.S. troops involved, but would deploy them to support NATO allies from Russian aggression. The Western alliance, which does not include Ukraine, requires its members to join a war if one of them is attacked.

Biden, top administration officials and congressional leaders have also warned Iran and other Middle East adversaries not to widen the war in that region. Biden has deployed military ships to the eastern Mediterranean Sea to be ready for any escalation.

The address was Biden's second from the Oval Office. The first was in June, when he discussed an agreement to lift the debt limit.

Humanitarian aid

Biden focused on the military needs of Ukraine and Israel — and the rationale for providing military aid — but added that he was also working to provide humanitarian aid.

During a trip to Israel Wednesday, Biden secured an agreement with Israel and Egypt to allow United

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Nations humanitarian supplies into the Gaza Strip, where Israel has launched a counteroffensive after Hamas' attack.

Biden said he spoke with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday and recommitted to him that the U.S. supports the Palestinian right to self-determination. The attack by Hamas, which is based in Gaza, didn't change that, he said.

"We cannot give up on peace," he said. "We cannot give up on a two-state solution. Israel and Palestinians equally deserve to live in safety, dignity and peace."

Biden also condemned divisions along racial and religious lines in the U.S., noting the murder last week of 6-year-old Palestinian-American Wadea Al-Fayoume at his Chicago area home.

"Here at home, we have to be honest with ourselves," he said. In recent years, the country has seen a rise in racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia, which have intensified since the Hamas attack, he said.

Senate resolution

The U.S. Senate, the only chamber of Congress currently able to consider legislation, appeared Thursday to be receptive to Biden's request for an aid package, especially for Israel.

Earlier in the day, the Senate approved, 97-0, a resolution in support of Israel.

The resolution "reaffirms Israel's right to self-defense," and demands Hamas release hostages — a group of about 200 that is thought to include U.S. citizens. The measure also "warns against any other party hostile to Israel taking advantage of the current situation."

The four-page resolution also noted that the U.S. has designated Hamas as a terrorist organization that receives funding from Iran. The group has killed 1,300 Israelis and injured and kidnapped others since Oct. 7, the resolution says.

Kentucky Republican Rand Paul, a vocal foreign policy isolationist, was the only member not to cosponsor the measure, but he did vote for it Thursday. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin of Maryland and ranking Republican Jim Risch of Idaho were the resolution's chief sponsors.

Schumer, the highest ranking Jewish official in the U.S., pledged in a floor speech ahead of the vote that the resolution, which does not carry the force of law, would be followed by substantial funding legislation.

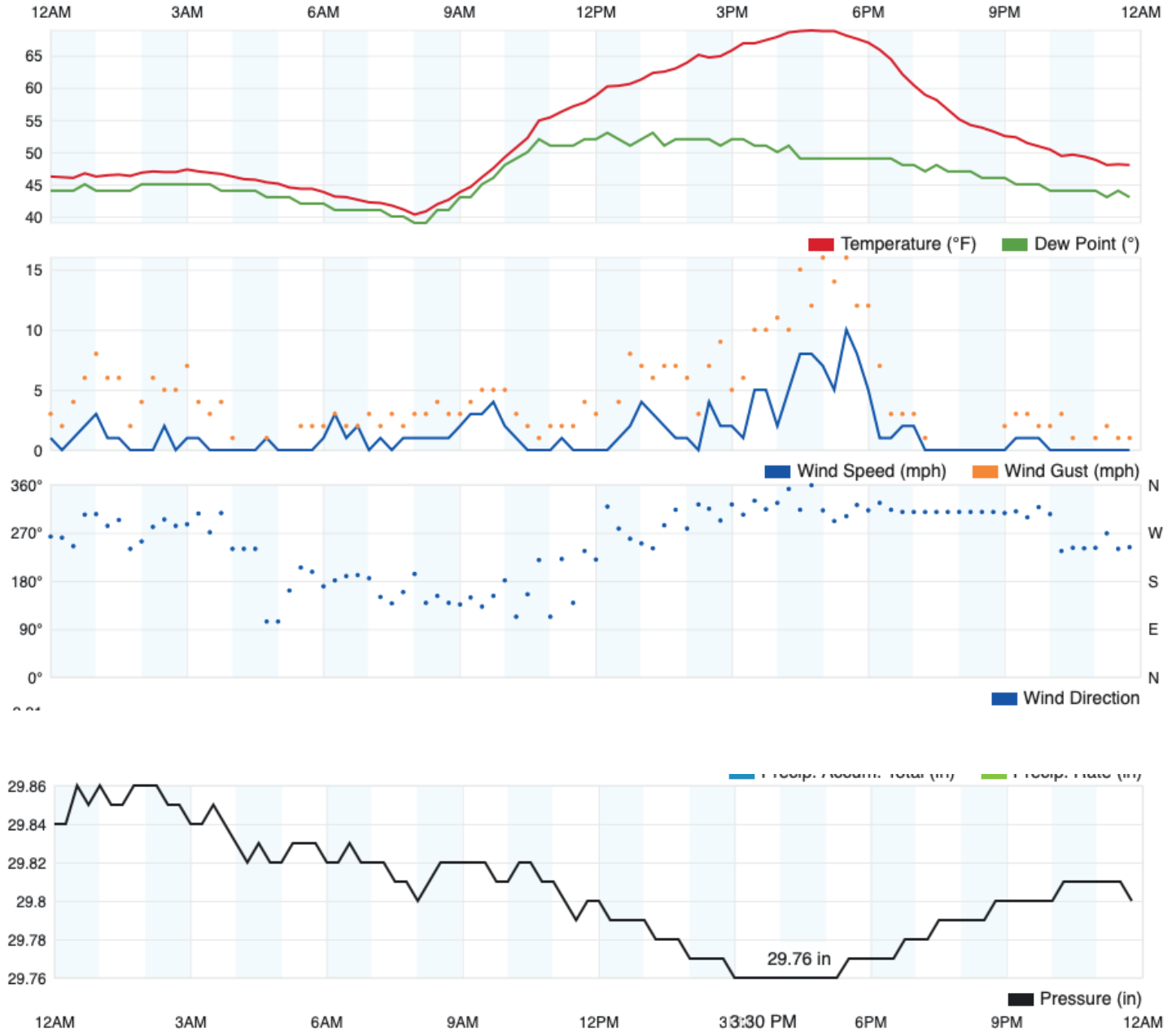
"This resolution is not the end," the New York Democrat said. "It is the beginning. The Senate will back up this resolution with real swift, decisive action and resources. Let the entire world see that today Democrats, Republicans alike stand in total unity. We support Israel's absolute right to defend itself."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
Oct 20	Oct 21	Oct 22	Oct 23	Oct 24	Oct 25	Oct 26
75° F	62° F	63° F	60° F	49° F	50° F	42° F
41° F	37° F	43° F	35° F	34° F	35° F	29° F
S	NW	SSE	S	NNE	NNE	N
18 MPH	16 MPH	23 MPH	14 MPH	13 MPH	13 MPH	17 MPH
				20%	30%	30%



Mild this Weekend

October 20, 2023
3:50 AM

And dry ...

Today

Sunny & Breezy
Highs in the 70s

Saturday

Mostly Sunny
Highs 55-65°

Sunday

Partly Cloudy
Highs in the 60s



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Mild this Weekend

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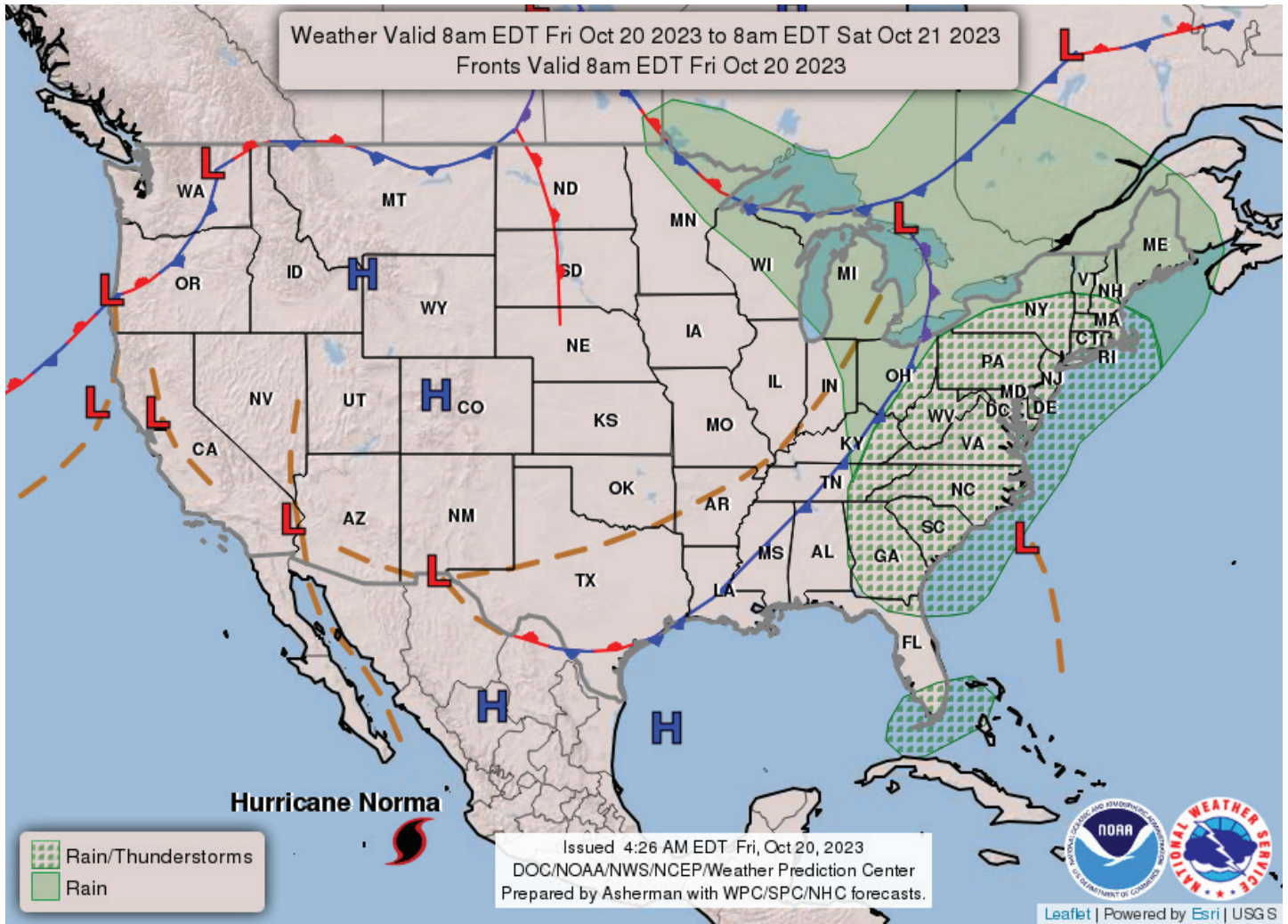
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 69 °F at 4:46 PM
Low Temp: 40 °F at 7:59 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 4:53 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 87 in 1947
Record Low: 12 in 1930
Average High: 57
Average Low: 31
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.51
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.89
Average Precip to date: 19.84
Precip Year to Date: 22.66
Sunset Tonight: 6:40:30 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:55:12 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 20, 1936: Heavy snow across the region brought snowfall totals upwards of 5 inches in Newcastle and Sundance with 5.5 inches reported in Dupree and 10 inches in Faith. Aberdeen saw 2 inches, while Mobridge had three inches from this event.

1770: An exceedingly great storm struck eastern New England causing extensive coastal damage from Massachusetts to Maine, and the highest tide in 47 years.

1956: While not a record, Esperanza Base in Antarctic warmed to 57.2 degrees on this date. The all-time warmest day at this base occurred on March 24, 2015, when the temperature reached 63.5 degrees. As of now, the 63.5 degrees has not been verified to be the warmest temperature recorded on the continent of Antarctica.

1983 - Remnants of Pacific Hurricane Tico caused extensive flooding in central and south central Oklahoma. Oklahoma City set daily rainfall records with 1.45 inch on the 19th, and 6.28 inches on the 20th. (17th-21st) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Cold arctic air invaded the Upper Midwest, and squalls in the Lake Superior snowbelt produced heavy snow in eastern Ashland County and northern Iron County of Wisconsin. Totals ranged up to 18 inches at Mellen. In the western U.S., the record high of 69 degrees at Seattle WA was their twenty-fifth of the year, their highest number of record highs for any given year. Bakersfield CA reported a record 146 days in a row with daily highs 80 degrees or above. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably warm weather continued in the western U.S. In California, afternoon highs of 96 degrees at Redding and Red Bluff were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Forty-nine cities reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and 30s across much of the south central and southeastern U.S. Lows of 32 degrees at Lake Charles LA and 42 degrees at Lakeland FL were records for October, and Little Rock AR reported their earliest freeze of record. Snow blanketed the higher elevations of Georgia and the Carolinas. Melbourne FL dipped to 47 degrees shortly before midnight to surpass the record low established that morning. Showers and thunderstorms brought heavy rain to parts of the northeastern U.S. Autumn leaves on the ground clogged drains and ditches causing flooding. Up to 4.10 inches of rain soaked southern Vermont in three days. Flood waters washed 600 feet of railroad track, resulting in a train derailment. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

2004: Typhoon Tokage blasting across Japan triggers flash floods that wash away entire hillsides, killing 55 people and leaving at least 24 people missing.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

A WORD THAT IS NOT IN GOD'S WORD!

Carl Sandburg was a great American author who won several Pulitzer Prizes for his poetry. Near the end of his life he was asked, "What's the ugliest word in the English language?"

Without hesitation, he answered, "Exclusive!"

While it is included in the world's dictionaries, it is not found in God's Word. "Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord," said Paul, will be saved!" And anyone includes everyone.

How wonderful it is to know that the God of love and the love of God is not exclusive. No matter who we are or what we have done, He loves us. No matter where we have been or whom we have traveled with, He loves us. No matter how dirty we get or how often we have disappointed Him, He loves us. He loves us when we are at our best and when we are at our worst. Anyone at any time can call on the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will hear and help!

But Paul follows his statement about God's gracious invitation with the question: "How can they believe in Him and receive Him if they have never heard about Him?" With this critical question, he places a great responsibility on every Christian: We are accountable to God to take the Good News of God's message of salvation to those who are unsaved. Unless we accept this challenge from Paul, and the Lord Himself, those whom we know that are lost and condemned will never find Christ as their Savior. We must do for others what others have done for us.

Prayer: Father, we are so grateful that someone took Paul at his word and shared Your message of salvation with us. Give us the courage to do the same. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. Romans 10:13-14



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.17.23

5 6 29 32 61 20

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$91,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 51 Mins 2
DRAW: 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 1 Days 15 Hrs 6
DRAW: Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.19.23

12 30 31 35 47 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 21 Mins 2
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.18.23

10 18 20 22 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 21
DRAW: Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.18.23

26 59 62 64 65 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 1 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 1 Days 15 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL

Brandon Valley 49, Sioux Falls Washington 0
Harrisburg 19, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 17
Lower Brule 55, Omaha Nation, Neb. 6
Madison 48, Custer 7
Sioux Falls Lincoln 55, Aberdeen Central 7
Tea Area 31, Watertown 15
Tiospa Zina Tribal 57, Crow Creek Tribal School 6
Todd County 42, Standing Rock, N.D. 0
Vermillion 35, Belle Fourche 0
SDHSAA Playoffs=
First Round=
Class 9A=
Alcester-Hudson 50, Burke 12
Chester 28, Wolsey-Wessington 26
Philip 52, Timber Lake 0
Warner 57, Colman-Egan 0
Class 9AA=
Elkton-Lake Benton 52, Britton-Hecla 0
Howard 60, Ipswich 14
Platte-Geddes 46, Great Plains Lutheran 6
Wall 22, Kimball/White Lake 6
Class 9B=
Avon 54, Faith 14
Corsica/Stickney 46, New Underwood 0
DeSmet 61, Colome 8
Faulkton 50, Jones County 0
Hitchcock-Tulare 44, Lemmon/McIntosh 24
Potter County 38, Dell Rapids St. Mary 22
Class 11B=
Aberdeen Roncalli 17, Wagner 6
Elk Point-Jefferson 48, Groton Area 13
Hot Springs 55, Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 7
Rapid City Christian 36, Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 7
Sioux Valley 59, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 6
Tri-Valley 24, St. Thomas More 7
Winner 36, Parker 0

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Pine Ridge def. Lakota Tech, 25-15, 17-25, 25-22, 14-25, 16-14
Wilmot def. Dupree, 23-25, 25-20, 25-19, 8-25, 15-9

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

Jury selection will begin in the first trial in the Georgia election case against Trump and others

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Jury selection is set to begin Friday for the first defendant to go to trial in the Georgia case that accuses former President Donald Trump and others of illegally scheming to overturn the 2020 election in the state.

Lawyer Kenneth Chesebro was indicted just over two months ago along with Trump and 17 others. Two of those others — including Sidney Powell, who was supposed to go on trial with Chesebro — have already pleaded guilty to reduced charges, and no trial date has been set yet for the rest.

If Chesebro doesn't take a plea deal before the trial starts, the proceedings will provide a first extensive look at the evidence that Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis and her team have amassed against him and the rest of the defendants.

Here's what to expect:

TRUMP WILL LOOM LARGE OVER THE TRIAL

There's little doubt that the Republican former president will be a central figure in the proceedings, even though he's not expected to be there.

After all, the indictment alleges Chesebro and the rest of the defendants "refused to accept that Trump lost, and they knowingly and willfully joined a conspiracy to unlawfully change the outcome of the election in favor of Trump."

As the defense and prosecution weigh potential jurors, it's likely they will try to figure out as much as they can about their feelings about Trump, their political leanings and their opinions about baseless claims that the 2020 election was marred by fraud and stolen from Trump.

CHESEBRO WILL BE TRIED BY HIMSELF

Until Thursday morning, Chesebro was set to go on trial alongside Powell after each filed a demand for a speedy trial. Under Georgia law, a defendant who files a demand for a speedy trial has a right to have a trial begin within the court term when the demand is filed or in the next court term. That meant the trial had to start by Nov. 5.

Powell agreed to a deal with prosecutors, pleading guilty to six misdemeanor counts. As part of the deal, she must testify truthfully if she is called as a witness at any future trials related to the case. She was also sentenced to probation and ordered to pay a fine.

THE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST CHESEBRO

All the defendants are accused of violating Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, known as RICO, by participating in a wide-ranging scheme to keep Trump in power despite his election loss.

Chesebro is also accused of working on the coordination and execution of a plan to have 16 Georgia Republicans sign a certificate declaring falsely that Trump won and declaring themselves the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors.

The indictment says Chesebro wrote memos outlining that plan, including one that "provides detailed, state-specific instructions" for how Trump elector nominees in swing states where Trump had lost could meet to cast votes for Trump on Dec. 14, 2020.

In an email sent a few days before those meetings were to happen, Chesebro wrote that "the purpose of having the electoral votes sent in to Congress is to provide the opportunity to debate the election irregularities in Congress and to keep alive the possibility that votes could be flipped to Trump."

In an email to former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, a Trump lawyer, he outlined strategies to disrupt and delay the joint session of Congress on Jan. 6, 2021, during which electoral votes were to be certified for Democrat Joe Biden, prosecutors said. He wrote that those strategies were "preferable to allowing the Electoral Count Act to operate by its terms."

Besides the racketeering charge, he faces six felony conspiracy counts related to the elector plan.

CHESEBRO'S DEFENSE

Chesebro's attorneys do not dispute that he drafted the legal memos and emails at issue, but they have

said every action he took was justified under Georgia and federal law. He is a constitutional law expert who was working as a lawyer to research and find precedents to support a legal opinion that he provided to the Trump campaign, they argued in court filings.

"Nothing about Mr. Chesebro's conduct falls outside the bounds of what lawyers do on a daily basis; researching the law in order to find solutions that address their clients particularized needs," they wrote in one filing.

His lawyers tried to get the judge to bar prosecutors from using Chesebro's memos and emails at trial, arguing that they were protected by attorney-client privilege and the work product doctrine. But the judge rejected those arguments.

THE JURY SELECTION PROCESS

The 450 prospective jurors summoned to appear at the courthouse in downtown Atlanta on Friday will spend several hours filling out an extensive questionnaire formulated by prosecutors, defense attorneys and Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee. Those will then be scanned into a shared drive accessible to the lawyers.

On Monday, prospective jurors will be called in groups of 14 for individual questioning. For each group, the judge will ask questions to determine whether anyone has qualifying hardships that would keep them from being able to serve as a juror. Then the prosecution and the defense attorneys will have one hour per group of 14 prospective jurors to ask questions.

To ensure there are enough potential jurors, McAfee has requested that another 450 people be brought in on Oct. 27 to fill out questionnaires.

In an order in September, McAfee wrote that he will try to have the jury seated and sworn in by Nov. 3, "to eliminate any doubts that the statutory speedy trial deadline has been met."

THE TRIAL LENGTH

Prosecutors have said that since the case was brought under the RICO law, they intend to prove the entire alleged conspiracy, using all the same witnesses and evidence in any trial in the case. They said at a hearing last month that they estimate a trial would take four months and that they would call more than 150 witnesses.

McAfee recently said he would tell prospective jurors during jury selection that it's likely to take up to five months.

Biden declares Israel and Ukraine support is vital for US security, will ask Congress for billions

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Declaring that U.S. leadership "holds the world together," President Joe Biden told Americans on Thursday night the country must deepen its support of Ukraine and Israel in the middle of two vastly different, unpredictable and bloody wars.

Acknowledging that "these conflicts can seem far away," Biden insisted in a rare Oval Office address that they remain "vital for America's national security" as he prepared to ask Congress for billions of dollars in military assistance for both countries.

"History has taught us when terrorists don't pay a price for their terror, when dictators don't pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction," Biden said. "They keep going. And the cost and the threat to America and the world keep rising."

Biden's speech reflected an expansive view of U.S. obligations overseas at a time when he faces political resistance at home to additional funding. He's expected to ask for \$105 billion on Friday, including \$60 billion for Ukraine, much of which would replenish U.S. weapons stockpiles provided earlier.

There's also \$14 billion for Israel, \$10 billion for unspecified humanitarian efforts, \$14 billion for managing the U.S.-Mexico border and fighting fentanyl trafficking and \$7 billion for the Indo-Pacific region, which includes Taiwan. The proposal was described by three people familiar with the details who insisted on anonymity before the official announcement.

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"It's a smart investment that's going to pay dividends for American security for generations," Biden said. He hopes that combining all of these issues into one piece of legislation will create the necessary coalition for congressional approval. His speech came the day after his high-stakes trip to Israel, where he showed solidarity with the country after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas and pushed for more humanitarian assistance to Palestinians.

With Israel continuing to bombard the Gaza Strip and preparing a ground invasion, Biden placed an increased emphasis on the deadly toll that the conflict has had on civilians there, saying he's "heartbroken by the tragic loss of Palestinian life."

"Israel and Palestinians equally deserve to live in safety, dignity and peace," Biden said. He also warned about a rising tide of antisemitism and Islamophobia in the U.S., noting the killing of Wadea Alfayoumi, a 6-year-old Palestinian-American boy.

"To all you hurting, I want you to know I see you. You belong," Biden said. "And I want to say this to you. You're all Americans."

The White House said that after his speech, the president and first lady Jill Biden spoke over the phone with Wadea's father and uncle to express their "deepest condolences" and share their prayers for the recovery of the boy's mother, who was also stabbed.

Biden included in his remarks a warning to Iran's leaders, who have supported Hamas in Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and said the U.S. "will continue to hold them accountable."

As Biden seeks a second term in a campaign that will likely hinge on voters' feeling about the economy, he was careful to emphasize that the spending will create jobs for U.S. workers, referencing the construction of missiles in Arizona and artillery shells in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Texas.

And he worked in a nod to one of his political heroes, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, by saying that "just as in World War II," the country is "building the arsenal of democracy and serving the cause of freedom."

Biden faces an array of steep challenges as he tries to secure the money. The House remains in chaos because the Republican majority has been unable to select a speaker to replace Rep. Kevin McCarthy, who was ousted more than two weeks ago.

In addition, conservative Republicans oppose money for sending more weapons to Ukraine as its battle against the Russian invasion approaches the two-year mark. Biden's previous request for funding, which included \$24 billion to help with the next few months of fighting, was stripped out of budget legislation last month despite a personal plea from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

There will be resistance from some on the other side of the political spectrum when it comes to military assistance for Israel, which has been bombarding the Gaza Strip in response to the Hamas attack on Oct. 7.

Critics have accused Israel of indiscriminately killing civilians and committing war crimes by cutting off essential supplies including food, water and fuel.

Bipartisan support for Israel has already eroded in recent years as progressive Democrats have become more outspoken in their opposition to the country's decades-long occupation of Palestinian territory, which is widely viewed as illegal by the international community.

There are rumbles of disagreement within Biden's administration as well. Josh Paul, a State Department official who oversaw the congressional liaison office dealing with foreign arms sales, resigned over U.S. policy on weapons transfers to Israel.

"I cannot work in support of a set of major policy decisions, including rushing more arms to one side of the conflict, that I believe to be short-sighted, destructive, unjust and contradictory to the very values that we publicly espouse," he wrote in a statement posted to his LinkedIn account.

A speech from the Oval Office is one of the most prestigious platforms that a president can command, an opportunity to try to seize the country's attention at a moment of crisis. The major television networks broke into regular programming to carry the address live.

Biden has delivered only one other such speech during his presidency, after Congress passed bipartisan budget legislation to avert a default on the country's debt.

The White House and other senior administration officials, including Office of Management and Budget

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Director Shalanda Young, have quietly briefed key lawmakers in recent days about the contours of the planned supplemental funding request.

The Democratic Senate plans to move quickly on Biden's proposal, hoping that it creates pressure on the Republican-controlled House to resolve its leadership drama and return to legislating.

However, there are disagreements within the Senate, too, on how to move forward. Eight Republicans, led by Kansas Sen. Roger Marshall, said they did not want to combine assistance for Ukraine and Israel in the same legislation.

"These are two separate and unrelated conflicts and it would be wrong to leverage support of aid to Israel in an attempt to get additional aid for Ukraine across the finish line," they wrote in a letter.

North Dakota Sen. Kevin Cramer said he was fine with the proposal as long as there was also a fresh effort to address border issues. But he said "it's got to be designed to secure the border, not to facilitate travel through the border."

Although there was a lull in migrant arrivals to the U.S. after the start of new asylum restrictions in May, illegal crossings topped a daily average of more than 8,000 last month.

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who leads a Senate panel that oversees funding for the Department of Homeland Security, was wary of any effort to overhaul border policy during a debate over spending.

"How are we going to settle our differences over immigration in the next two weeks?" Murphy said. "This is a supplemental funding bill. The minute you start loading it up with policies, that sounds like a plan to fail."

Biden's decision to include funding for the Indo-Pacific in his proposal is a nod toward the potential for another international conflict. China wants to reunify the self-governing island of Taiwan with its mainland, a goal that could be carried out through force.

Although wars in Europe and the Middle East have been the most immediate concerns for U.S. foreign policy, Biden views Asia as the key arena in the struggle for global influence.

The administration's national security strategy, released last year, describes China as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge."

Live updates | Israel bombards Gaza with airstrikes 2 weeks into the war against Hamas

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel is bombarding Gaza and evacuating a sizable town near the Lebanese border in the latest sign of a potential ground invasion of Gaza that could trigger regional turmoil. Palestinians in Gaza reported heavy airstrikes in Khan Younis in the south, where Palestinians had been told to seek safety, and ambulances streamed into Gaza's second-largest hospital, already overflowing with patients and people seeking shelter.

Israel's defense minister has ordered troops to prepare to see Gaza "from the inside," hinting at a ground offensive aimed at crushing Gaza's militant Hamas rulers. Aid shipments badly needed in Gaza are positioned to enter through the Rafah border crossing from Egypt.

The war that is in its 14th day Friday is the deadliest of five Gaza wars for both sides. The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry said Thursday that 3,785 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 12,500 wounded.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, mostly in the initial attack Oct. 7 when Hamas militants stormed into Israel. In addition, 203 people were believed captured by Hamas during the incursion and taken into Gaza, the Israeli military has said.

Currently:

1. U.S. President Joe Biden meets with European leaders to assure them the U.S. can deliver wartime aid to Ukraine and Israel.

2. In Nir Oz, a quarter of the residents are dead or missing after the Hamas attack

3. The current crisis in the Middle East has the potential to disrupt global oil supplies and push prices higher.

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4. Egypt and other Arab countries typically don't want to take in Palestinian refugees.

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

GULF AND ASIAN NATIONS END SUMMIT WITH CALL FOR CEASE-FIRE

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Arab Gulf and southeast Asian nations are calling for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war and the entry of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

The final statement of a summit hosted by Saudi Arabia on Friday also condemns "all attacks against civilians."

The joint summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations brought together 16 member states.

Saudi Arabia, which has launched a number of diplomatic initiatives across the Middle East over the past year, has called for a halt to the fighting.

Before the outbreak of the war, the kingdom had been in talks with the United States on normalizing relations with Israel in exchange for a U.S. defense pact, help in establishing a civilian nuclear program and unspecified concessions to the Palestinians.

UN SAYS PALESTINIANS ARE RETURNING HOME

A spokesperson for the U.N. human rights office says there are new signs that some Palestinians who initially moved south in response to the Israeli order to evacuate are returning to their homes because Israeli strikes are taking place in the south, too.

"We remain very concerned that Israeli Forces' heavy strikes are continuing across Gaza, including in the south," Ravina Shamdasani told reporters. "The strikes, coupled with extremely difficult living conditions in the south, appear to have pushed some to return to the north, despite the continuing heavy bombing there."

Shamdasani said the rights office had heard accounts about people wanting to migrate back north, including from one unidentified Palestinian who said "I might as well die in my own house."

SATELLITE IMAGES SHOW CONVOY OF AID TRUCKS WAITING TO CROSS INTO GAZA

JERUSALEM — Satellite photos analyzed Friday by The Associated Press show a massive convoy of semitruck trailers lined up at the Rafah border crossing on the Egyptian side, likely waiting for approval to cross into the besieged Gaza Strip as the Israel-Hamas war rages.

The images, shot Thursday by Planet Labs PBC, show 55 trucks waiting in two lines, just half a kilometer (a third of a mile) away from the border. There are over 50 smaller vehicles visible in the image as well, many appearing to be with aid organizations, waiting at the crossing.

The Gaza Strip, home to over 2 million Palestinians, has been cut off from food, water, fuel and electricity by Israel since Hamas' Oct. 7 surprise attack. There have been days of high-level negotiations over aid getting into the besieged seaside enclave, including officials all the way up to U.S. President Joe Biden.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has arrived in northern Sinai as the world body works on getting aid through, said Jens Laerke, spokesman for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The deal to get aid into Gaza through Rafah, the territory's only crossing not controlled by Israel, remains fragile. Israel said the supplies could only go to civilians and that it would "thwart" any diversions by Hamas. More than 200 trucks and some 3,000 tons of aid were positioned at or near Rafah.

Work began Friday to repair the road at the crossing that had been damaged in airstrikes, with trucks unloading gravel and bulldozers and other road repair equipment filling in large craters.

BODIES OF 8 THAIS KILLED IN HAMAS ATTACK ARRIVE IN BANGKOK

BANGKOK — The bodies of eight Thai nationals who were killed in the Hamas attack on southern Israel arrived at a Bangkok airport Friday as repatriation efforts continued for thousands of Thai workers.

Ahead of the first repatriation of the Thai dead, Thai and Israeli officials laid wreaths at a small memorial ceremony on Thursday at Tel Aviv's airport. Thailand's Foreign Affairs Ministry said Thursday that 30 Thais are feared dead, while 16 are reportedly injured and 17 are believed to have been abducted.

About 30,000 Thai workers are in Israel, mostly agricultural laborers, and about 5,000 were working in the area attacked. Two evacuation flights on Friday brought more than 500 Thais back to the country, with more flights set to arrive daily. Officials say more than 8,000 of the Thais remaining in Israel have

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expressed their wish to return home.

BIDEN REFERENCES BOY'S KILLING TO DENOUNCE ANTISEMITISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

President Joe Biden referenced the killing of a 6-year-old Palestinian American boy in Illinois to deliver a forceful denunciation of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Biden brought up the case of Wadea Al-Fayoume during a televised nighttime address from the Oval Office. Authorities say the boy, who was Muslim, was stabbed 26 times Saturday by his landlord in response to escalating rhetoric about the Israel-Hamas war. Wadea's mother was critically wounded.

Biden said it's difficult to "stand by and stand silent when this happens," adding that "we must without equivocation denounce" antisemitism and Islamophobia.

The White House said that after the speech, Biden and his wife, Jill, spoke with Wadea's father and uncle to offer condolences along with prayers for his mother's recovery.

BIDEN CALLS FOR MORE AID FOR ISRAEL AND UKRAINE

President Joe Biden is urging support for additional U.S. aid for Ukraine and Israel, saying in a televised address from the Oval Office that "American leadership is what holds the world together."

Biden spoke hours after returning to Washington from an urgent visit to Israel to show U.S. support in the wake of a deadly attack by Hamas on Oct. 7. Some 1,400 civilians were killed and roughly 200 others, including Americans, were taken to Gaza as hostages. Israel has responded with airstrikes, and 3,785 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

The U.S. president argued that Israel needs help to defend itself from Hamas. He also said the U.S. must help Ukraine stop the advances of Russian President Vladimir Putin to keep other "would-be aggressors" from trying to take over other countries.

Biden said he will send lawmakers an "urgent budget request" Friday to fund U.S. national security needs. He called the request, said to carry a price tag of about \$100 billion, a "smart investment" that will pay dividends for decades to come.

EMHOFF MEETS US SURVIVOR OF HAMAS ATTACK

Douglas Emhoff, the husband of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, met in Washington with Natalie Sanandaji, a 28-year-old American survivor of Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks in Israel.

Sanandaji recounted the attack on a music festival, where some 260 people were killed, a White House official said.

Emhoff, who is Jewish and has been outspoken about and against antisemitism, spoke to Sanandaji about President Joe Biden and Harris' support for Israel, providing humanitarian aid to civilians and the administration's work to combat hate of all kinds, the official said.

EXPLOSION AT GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH CAUSES DEATHS, GAZA AUTHORITIES SAY

BEIRUT — An explosion struck a Greek Orthodox church housing displaced Palestinians late Thursday, resulting in deaths and dozens of wounded.

Mohammed Abu Selmia, director general of Shifa Hospital, said dozens were hurt at the Church of Saint Porphyrios but could not give a precise death toll because bodies were still under the rubble.

Palestinian authorities blamed the blast on an Israeli airstrike, a claim that could not be independently verified.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchy of Jerusalem issued a statement condemning the attack and said it would "not abandon its religious and humanitarian duty" to provide assistance.

A survivor told Qatar's Al Jazeera Arabic television that there was no warning from the Israeli military beforehand.

In Athens, Greece's Foreign Ministry expressed "deep sorrow over the loss of lives caused by a strike on a building adjacent to the monastery of Saint Porphyrios in Gaza." The ministry's statement said civilians must be protected and religious institutions safeguarded by all sides.

Named after the Bishop of Gaza from 395 to 420, St. Porphyrios is located in the al-Zaytun section of Gaza's Old City. Its thick limestone walls house an elaborate interior of gilded icons and ceiling paintings.

It became a mosque in the 7th century before a new church was built in the 12th century during the Crusades.

ISRAEL SAYS ALMOST 30 CHILDREN AMONG HOSTAGES TAKEN BY HAMAS

JERUSALEM — Nearly 30 of some 200 hostages held by Hamas in Gaza are children, the Israeli military said.

More than 10 are over the age of 60, it said in a statement.

Authorities have no information about the location of more than 100 missing Israelis, it added.

US INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES 100 TO 300 DIED IN HOSPITAL BLAST

WASHINGTON — An unclassified U.S. intelligence assessment delivered to Congress estimates casualties in an explosion at a Gaza City hospital on the “low end” of 100 to 300 deaths.

That death toll “still reflects a staggering loss of life,” U.S. intelligence officials said in the findings, which were seen by The Associated Press. Officials were still assessing the evidence, and the estimate may evolve.

The explosion at Gaza’s al-Ahli hospital on Tuesday left body parts strewn on the hospital grounds, where crowds of Palestinians had clustered in hopes of escaping Israeli airstrikes.

Officials in Hamas-ruled Gaza quickly said an Israeli airstrike had hit the hospital. Israel denied it was involved. The Associated Press has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

President Joe Biden and other U.S. officials already have said that U.S. intelligence officials believed the explosion was not caused by an Israeli airstrike. Thursday’s findings echoed that.

The U.S. assessment noted “only light structural damage” to the hospital itself was evident, with no impact crater visible.

Israel pounds Gaza, evacuates town near Lebanon ahead of expected ground offensive against Hamas

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMYA KULLAB and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel bombarded Gaza early Friday, hitting areas in the south where Palestinians had been told to seek safety, and it began evacuating a sizable Israeli town in the north near the Lebanese border, the latest sign of a potential ground invasion of Gaza that could trigger regional turmoil.

Palestinians in Gaza reported heavy airstrikes in Khan Yunis in the south, and ambulances carrying men, women and children streamed into the town’s Nasser Hospital, Gaza’s second largest, which is already overflowing with patients and people seeking shelter. The Israeli military said it had struck more than 100 targets across Gaza linked to the territory’s Hamas rulers, including a tunnel and arms depots.

On Thursday, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered ground troops to prepare to see Gaza “from the inside,” hinting at a ground offensive aimed at crushing Gaza’s militant Hamas rulers nearly two weeks after their bloody incursion into Israel. Officials have given no timetable for such an operation.

Over a million people have been displaced in Gaza, with many heeding Israel’s orders to evacuate the northern part of the sealed-off coastal enclave.

Gaza’s overwhelmed hospitals are rationing their dwindling medical supplies and fuel for generators, as authorities worked out logistics for a desperately needed aid delivery from Egypt that has yet to enter. Doctors in darkened wards across Gaza performed surgeries by the light of mobile phones and used vinegar to treat infected wounds.

The deal to get aid into Gaza through Rafah, the territory’s only crossing not controlled by Israel, remained fragile. Israel said the supplies could only go to civilians and that it would “thwart” any diversions by Hamas. More than 200 trucks and some 3,000 tons of aid were positioned at or near Rafah.

Work began Friday to repair the road at the crossing that had been damaged in airstrikes, with trucks unloading gravel and bulldozers and other road repair equipment filling in large craters.

Israel has evacuated its own communities near Gaza and Lebanon, putting residents up in hotels elsewhere in the country. The Defense Ministry announced evacuation plans Friday for Kiryat Shmona, a town of more than 20,000 residents near the Lebanese border.

Lebanon’s Hezbollah militant group, which has a massive arsenal of long-range rockets, has traded fire with Israel along the border on a near-daily basis and hinted it might join the war if Israel seeks to an-

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nihilate Hamas. Israel's archfoe Iran supports both armed groups.

The violence in Gaza has also sparked protests across the region, including in Arab countries allied with the U.S. Those demonstrations could flare anew Friday following weekly Muslim prayers.

In an address from the Oval Office on Thursday, U.S. President Joe Biden again pledged unwavering support for Israel's security, while saying the world "can't ignore the humanity of innocent Palestinians" in Gaza.

Speaking hours after returning to Washington from an urgent visit to Israel, Biden linked the current war in Gaza to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying Hamas and Russian President Vladimir Putin "both want to completely annihilate a neighboring democracy."

Biden said he was sending an "urgent budget request" to Congress on Friday, to cover emergency military aid to both Israel and Ukraine.

Meanwhile, an unclassified U.S. intelligence assessment delivered to Congress estimated casualties in an explosion at a Gaza City hospital this week on the "low end" of 100 to 300 deaths. The death toll "still reflects a staggering loss of life," said the report, seen by The Associated Press. It said intelligence officials were still assessing the evidence and their casualty estimate may evolve.

The report echoed earlier assessments by U.S. officials that the blast at the al-Ahli hospital was not caused by an Israeli airstrike, as the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza initially reported. Israel has presented video, audio and other evidence it says proves the blast was caused by a rocket misfired by Palestinian militants.

The AP has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

An Israeli airstrike hit a Greek Orthodox church housing displaced Palestinians near the hospital late Thursday. The Israeli military said it had targeted a Hamas command and control center nearby, causing damage to a church wall. In the immediate aftermath, Palestinian medics gave conflicting accounts of the number of wounded.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchy of Jerusalem condemned the attack and said it would "not abandon its religious and humanitarian duty" to provide assistance.

The Israeli military has relentlessly attacked Gaza in retaliation for the devastating Oct. 7 Hamas attack. Even after Israel ordered a mass evacuation to the south, strikes extended across the territory, heightening fears among the territory's 2.3 million people that nowhere was safe.

Palestinian militants have meanwhile fired daily rocket barrages into Israel from Gaza, and tensions have flared in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Thirteen Palestinians, including five minors, were killed Thursday during a battle with Israeli troops in which Israel called in an airstrike, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The Gaza Health Ministry said 3,785 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, the majority women, children and older adults. Nearly 12,500 were injured, and another 1,300 people were believed buried under rubble, authorities said.

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

In a fiery speech on Thursday to Israeli infantry soldiers on the Gaza border, Gallant, the defense minister, urged them to "be ready" to move in. Israel has called up some 360,000 reserves and massed tens of thousands of troops along the Gaza border.

"Whoever sees Gaza from afar now, will see it from the inside," he said. "It might take a week, a month, two months until we destroy them," he added, referring to Hamas.

With supplies running low because of a complete Israeli siege, some Gaza residents are down to one meal a day and drinking dirty water.

Egypt and Israel were still negotiating the entry of fuel for hospitals. Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Hamas has stolen fuel from U.N. facilities and Israel wants assurances that won't happen again.

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The Gaza Health Ministry has pleaded with gas stations to give fuel to hospitals, and a U.N. agency also donated some of its last fuel. Gaza's sole power plant shut down last week, forcing Palestinians to rely on generators, and no fuel has gone in since the start of the war.

The agency's donation to Gaza City's Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, would "keep us going for another few hours," said Mohammed Abu Selmia, the hospital director.

Protesters march to US Embassy in Indonesia over Israeli airstrikes

By ANDI JATMIKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Protesters marched from several mosques to the heavily guarded U.S. Embassy in Indonesia's capital Friday to denounce the staunch American support for Israel and demand an end to Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip.

Similar protests also took place in front of the United Nations mission, a few kilometers (miles) from the embassy, and in the compound of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Authorities estimated that about 1,000 people participated in the rallies across Jakarta following Friday prayers in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation.

A brutal incursion into southern Israel by Hamas fighters on Oct. 7 provoked Israel to declare war against the militant group that rules Gaza. The Israeli siege of and airstrikes on the Palestinian territory were the focus earlier this week of demonstrations at Egyptian universities, inside a congressional office building in Washington, outside the Israeli Embassy in Bogota and near the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.

Nearly two weeks after the Hamas attack in Israel, such protests continued as Israel prepared for an expected ground invasion of Gaza.

INDONESIA

The protesters who marched to the U.S. Embassy halted traffic along the way as they chanted "God is great," and "Save Palestinians."

Waving Indonesian and Palestinian flags and signs read "We are proud to support Palestine," more than 100 noisy demonstrators gathered along a major street in Jakarta that runs outside the embassy.

"The U.S. actually know this war and violence occurred because Palestinians want free from Israel's occupation, but they close their eyes and pretend to be deaf," a speaker told the crowd, "We call for a two-state solution for Palestinians to end the war."

Some protesters voiced their anger by burning portraits of U.S. President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

About 1,000 police officers were deployed around the embassy, the nearby presidential palace and the U.N. mission.

Indonesia does not have formal diplomatic relations with Israel, and there is no Israeli Embassy in the country. It has long been a strong supporter of the Palestinians.

President Joko Widodo strongly condemned a Tuesday night explosion at a Gaza City hospital filled with wounded Palestinians and residents seeking shelter. Widodo described it as an attack that violated international humanitarian law, although the cause of the blast at al-Ahli Hospital has not been determined.

U.S. assessments said the explosion was not caused by an Israeli airstrike, as the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza initially reported. Israel has presented video, audio and other evidence it says proves the blast was caused by a rocket misfired by Palestinian militants, who denied responsibility.

The AP has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

"Now is the time for the world to stand together to build global solidarity to resolve the Palestinian issue fairly," Widodo said in a televised statement from Saudi Arabia, where he was attending the ASEAN-Gulf Cooperation Council summit.

SOUTH KOREA

In South Korea's capital, dozens of protesters chanted slogans, waved Palestinian flags and raised anti-Israel banners. (where in Seoul was the protest?)

"Free, Free Palestinians!" the protesters shouted, while holding banners that read "We stand with Gaza" or "Stop the massacre by Israel!"

"Please care about human lives. That's all I am thinking about," Elshafei Mohamed, 25, an Egyptian student in Seoul, said. "If we want to really help, we need to supply Gaza with humanitarian aids at once."

More than 5,000 people have been killed in Gaza and Israel since the war began, the majority women, children and older adults.

After 189 bodies were found in Colorado funeral home, evidence suggests families received fake ashes

By JESSE BEDAYN and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press/Report for America

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — A Colorado funeral home where 189 decaying bodies were discovered this month appears to have fabricated cremation records and may have given families fake ashes, according to information gathered by The Associated Press from customers and crematories.

The families that did business with Return to Nature Funeral Home fear their loved ones weren't cremated at all and instead could be among the yet unidentified corpses authorities discovered after responding to a report of an "abhorrent smell."

"My mom's last wish was for her remains to be scattered in a place she loved, not rotting away in a building," said Tanya Wilson, who believes the ashes she spread in Hawaii in August were fake. "Any peace that we had, thinking that we honored her wishes, you know, was just completely ripped away from us."

Return to Nature gave Wilson's family and some others death certificates stating their loved ones' remains had been handled by one of two crematories. But those businesses told the AP they were not performing cremations for Return to Nature on the dates included on the certificates.

Calls and texts sent to numbers listed for Return to Nature and owners Jon and Carie Hallford have gone unanswered since the discovery of the decaying bodies. No arrests have been made. Law enforcement officials have said Return to Nature's owners were cooperating as investigators sought to determine any criminal wrongdoing.

The AP reviewed four death certificates shared by families. All list a crematory owned by Wilbert Funeral Services, but the deaths came at least five months after the company stopped doing cremations for the financially troubled Return to Nature Funeral Home last November. Lisa Epps, attorney for Wilbert, said members of at least 10 families told the company they had death certificates from after November.

A second crematory, Roselawn Funeral Home in Pueblo, Colorado, was contacted by a family last week that had a 2021 death certificate from Return to Nature listing Roselawn as the crematory. Roselawn did not do the cremation, said its manager, Rudy Krasovec.

None of the families the AP interviewed received an identification tag or certificate that experts say are usually given to ensure cremations are authentic. Members of all four families described a similar consistency of the ashes that seemed like dry concrete. Two mixed some ashes with water and said they solidified. Dry concrete has been used before by funeral homes to mimic human ashes.

Stephanie Ford said her dry-witted adrenaline junkie husband, Wesley Ford, had nightmares of waking up in a coffin and hated the idea of being buried and his body decaying.

"He wanted to be cremated," she said, "and back to the earth quickly."

Wesley Ford died in April, and Return to Nature handled the cremation. When Stephanie Ford learned of the grim discovery at the funeral home this month, her daughter, a physician, took a closer look at the ashes.

"Mom, that's not dad," she told her mother.

"I know logically it's not my fault," said Stephanie Ford, pushing the words through tears. "There's a little bit of guilt on my part that I let him down."

Public records show the Hallfords and their company, which opened in 2017 and offered cremations and "green" burials without embalming fluids, were beset by recent financial and legal troubles. Among the problems were a forced eviction, unpaid taxes and a lawsuit by Wilbert, which received a \$21,000

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judgment in June because Return to Nature failed to pay for "a couple hundred" cremations, Epps said. When Return to Nature gave the ashes to Wilson's family, her brother, Jesse Elliott, thought they were unusually heavy. Elliott confronted Carie Hallford about his concerns.

"Jesse, of course this is your mother," Elliott recalled Hallford telling him after she handed him a June death certificate that said Wilbert handled the cremation.

With both siblings skeptical, Wilson took some of the ashes to a different funeral home for a second opinion. Funeral director Amber Flickinger from Platt's Funeral Home told the AP that the ashes were unusually fine and dark, adding, "I've never seen anything that looks like that in the range of what cremated remains would typically expect to look like."

After the bodies were found at Return to Nature, Michelle Johnston also became skeptical of the ashes that the funeral home said were of her husband, Ken, a retired UPS driver with a gentle demeanor. After mixing the ashes with water, she said, it looked like concrete.

"I was kind of getting to a place where I wasn't losing it every day," she said, and now, "I don't know where my husband is."

Properly cremated remains are made up of bone fragments that do not have any organic material left, which means they lack DNA that could be used to identify individuals, said Barbara Kemmis, director of the Cremation Association of North America. Sometimes RNA is preserved in the bone fragments, and that can distinguish if the ashes are from a male or female and if they are human or from another animal, she said.

Determining that ashes are fake can be more straightforward, particularly when they've been substituted with concrete. A simple test entails wetting the material and seeing if it hardens when it dries, Kemmis said. Real ashes won't solidify and would stay brittle, said Faith Haug, who chairs the mortuary science program at Colorado's Arapahoe Community College.

Authorities could be waiting to bring charges until they determine if there are any more improperly stored bodies, said Ian Farrell, a criminal law expert at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law.

Potential charges under state law could include misdemeanor violations of mortuary regulations and misdemeanor fraud, Farrell said. Each body could result in separate charges, meaning potential fines topping \$1 million. The maximum consecutive sentence for misdemeanors is 2 years in jail, he said.

If any federal charges were brought, the penalties potentially could be more severe. In January, a Colorado funeral home operator accused of illegally selling body parts and giving clients fake ashes received a 20-year prison sentence for federal mail fraud.

Abby Swoveland hired Return to Nature when her mother, Sally Swoveland, passed away. The senior Swoveland had run a muzzleloader gun shop called The Mountain Man for nearly 50 years with a sense of humor and a sharp tongue.

When Abby Swoveland called Wilbert Funeral Services, listed on the death certificate, and learned they had long ago stopped doing business with Return to Nature, she was devastated.

"It completely has undone any healing that was taking place," Swoveland said.

A Palestinian engineer who returned to Gaza City after fleeing south is killed in an airstrike

By ISABEL DEBRE and NAJIB JOBAIN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — When Omar Khodari and his family heeded the Israeli military's warning last week advising them to head from the northern Gaza Strip to the south, they thought they were fleeing to a safer place.

They figured they would wait out the airstrikes in the southern town of Khan Younis and go back home when calm returned to Gaza City, Khodari's relatives said.

But the explosions followed them like a slow-moving thunderstorm. Khodari watched as dozens of Palestinians like him who followed Israel's warning and abandoned their homes in search of safety were killed by Israeli airstrikes raining down on residential buildings and United Nations shelters outside the evacuation zone.

On Wednesday, Khodari, his wife, four teenage daughters and two sons decided they'd had enough. Khodari, a 47-year-old civil engineer who spent the last 15 years in Dubai, couldn't stand that he was suffering under bombardment at his friend's crowded Khan Younis apartment when he could be in his own home — an airy country villa that he spent the past months designing and decorating.

The eight Khodaris returned to Gaza City on Wednesday, relatives said. Hours later there was an airstrike. No one was warned, survivors said. The blast instantly killed Khodari and two of his children, 15-year-old Kareem and 16-year-old Hala.

"The pain is too great," said Khodari's brother, Ehab, his voice trembling over the phone. "I will not be able to speak of this for many days."

Khodari's stucco villa, in the well-off Rimal neighborhood, was reduced to ruins. The neighbors pried his wife and other children from the rubble. The explosion had flung them through the window, neighbors said. They remain in intensive care.

There was one factor that determined who lived and who died, said Khodari's cousin, Sami Khodari. When they heard explosions nearby, the family ran in opposite directions in the house to seek shelter. Khodari grabbed two of his children and went right. The strike hit that side of the house.

"Everywhere you go in Gaza these days you're a walking target," Sami Khodari said. "Your fate is only in God's hands."

The Israeli army did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Over the course of the Israeli bombardment, following an unprecedented Hamas attack that killed 1,400 Israelis on Oct. 7, the military has said its airstrikes are aimed at Hamas militants or infrastructure and do not target civilians.

The Khodaris weren't the only victims. The bomb that hit their home was part of a heavy rain of Israeli airstrikes late Wednesday that killed dozens of Palestinians, including 28 people in the Sakallah household, Khodari's neighbors.

When asked about particular people killed in specific airstrikes, few in Gaza can bear to answer, with the sorrow of individual families lost in the face of an entire population brought to grief.

"It's not about this family killed or that family killed," said Noor Swirki in Khan Younis, where an Israeli airstrike killed 10 members of the Bakri family, among them seven infants, earlier this week.

Harrowing images of the babies' bodies captured the Arab world's attention, drawing outrage online.

"Hundreds and hundreds of children like that have been killed since this war started," Swirki said of the Bakris. "It's not about them. It's about all of Gaza that will never be the same."

Army private who fled to North Korea charged with desertion, held by US military, officials tell AP

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Army private who fled to North Korea before being returned home to the United States last month has been detained by the U.S. military, two officials said Thursday night, and is facing charges including desertion and possessing sexual images of a child.

The eight counts against Pvt. Travis King are detailed in a charging document seen by The Associated Press. The officials who confirmed King's confinement spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the charges have not been publicly announced.

King's mother, Claudine Gates, said in a statement that she loved her son "unconditionally" and was "extremely concerned about his mental health."

"As his mother, I ask that my son be afforded the presumption of innocence," she said.

Desertion is a very serious charge and can result in imprisonment for as much as three years. King is also accused of kicking and punching other officers last year, unlawfully possessing alcohol, making a false statement and possessing a video of a child engaged in sexual activity. That allegation dates to July 10, the same day he was released from a South Korean prison where he had served nearly two months on assault charges.

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One week later, King, 23, ran across the heavily fortified border from South Korea and became the first American detained in North Korea in nearly five years. He was set to be sent to Fort Bliss, Texas, where he could have faced potential additional disciplinary actions and discharge.

Officials said King was taken to the airport and escorted as far as customs. But instead of getting on the plane, he left and later joined a civilian tour of the Korean border village of Panmunjom. He ran across the border, which is lined with guards and often crowded with tourists, in the afternoon.

After about two months, Pyongyang abruptly announced that it would expel him. He was flown on Sept. 28 to an Air Force base in Texas.

His release from North Korea was aided by Swedish officials who took King to the Chinese border, where he was met by U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns, the Swedish ambassador to China and at least one U.S. Defense Department official. He was then flown to a U.S. military base in South Korea before heading to the U.S.

Once back in the U.S., King was taken to Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston outside San Antonio. He went through what the military describes as a "reintegration" process that included medical exams, psychological assessments and debriefings. And he was also allowed to meet with family.

Because he had willingly run into enemy hands, he legally was kept in military custody throughout that process.

At the time, officials said they did not know exactly why North Korea decided to let King go, but suspected Pyongyang determined that as a low-ranking serviceman he had no real value in terms of either leverage or information. King joined the Army in January 2021, and served as a cavalry scout.

While he was gone, Army leaders declared him absent without leave, opting to not consider him a deserter, which is far more serious. By declaring King a deserter, the Army would have to conclude that King left and intended to stay away permanently. In times of war, desertion can carry the death penalty.

Service members can go AWOL for several days, but may return voluntarily. The punishment can include confinement in the brig, forfeiture of pay or dishonorable discharge and it is largely based on how long they were away and whether they were apprehended or returned on their own.

The charging document does not provide significant detail on any of the allegations, though it does accuse King of knowingly possessing a video of a child engaging in sexual conduct last July 10 and says that he solicited a user of Snapchat, a social media platform, to produce images of underage sexual activity.

Sean Timmons, an attorney who specializes in military law at the Tully Rinckey law firm and who reviewed the charging document, said all the transactions that occurred on Snapchat were not secure or private and were accessible by the government.

"He probably reasonably believed his illegal conduct would have no evidentiary trail, but Snapchat actually saves everything," Timmons said.

Long lines at gas pump unlikely, but Middle East crisis could disrupt oil supplies, raise prices

By MATTHEW DALY, DAVID McHUGH and STAN CHOE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fifty years after the 1973 Arab oil embargo, the current crisis in the Middle East has the potential to disrupt global oil supplies and push prices higher. But don't expect a repeat of the catastrophic price hikes and long lines at the gasoline pump, experts say.

The Israel-Hamas war is "definitely not good news" for oil markets already stretched by cutbacks in oil production from Saudi Arabia and Russia and expected stronger demand from China, the head of the International Energy Agency said.

Markets will remain volatile, and the conflict could push oil prices higher, "which is definitely bad news for inflation," Fatih Birol, executive director of the Paris-based IEA, told The Associated Press. Developing countries that import oil and other fuels would be the most affected by higher prices, he said.

International benchmark Brent crude traded above \$91 a barrel on Thursday, up from \$85 per barrel

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on Oct. 6, the day before Hamas attacked Israel, killing hundreds of civilians. Israel immediately launched airstrikes on Gaza, destroying entire neighborhoods and killing hundreds of Palestinian civilians in the days that have followed.

Fluctuations since the attack pushed oil prices as high as \$96.

The price of oil depends on how much of it is getting used and how much is available. The latter is under threat because of the Hamas-Israel war, even though the Gaza Strip is not home to major crude production.

One worry is that the fighting could lead to complications with Iran, home of some of the world's largest oil reserves. Its crude production has been constrained by international sanctions, but oil is still flowing to China and other countries.

"In order to get a sustained move (in prices), we really would need to see a supply disruption," said Andrew Lipow, president at Lipow Oil Associates, a Houston-based consultant.

Any damage to Iranian oil infrastructure from a military strike by Israel could send prices jumping globally. Even without that, a shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz that lies south of Iran could also shake the oil market because so much of the world's supplies goes through the waterway.

Until something like that happens, "the oil market is going to be like everyone else, monitoring the events in the Middle East," Lipow said.

One reason 1970s-style gas lines are unlikely: U.S. oil production is at an all-time high. The U.S. Energy Information Administration, an arm of the Energy Department, reported that American oil production in the first week of October hit 13.2 million barrels per day, passing the previous record set in 2020 by 100,000 barrels. Weekly domestic oil production has doubled from the first week in October 2012 to now.

"The energy crisis of 1973 taught us many things, but in my mind, the most critical is that American energy strength is a tremendous source of security, prosperity and freedom around the world," said Mike Sommers, president and CEO of the American Petroleum Institute, the U.S. oil industry's top lobbying group.

In a speech Wednesday marking the 50th anniversary of the 1973 oil embargo, Sommers said current U.S. production contrasts sharply with "America's weakened position during the Arab oil embargo." He urged U.S. policymakers to heed what he called the lessons of 1973.

"We cannot squander our strategic advantage and retreat on energy leadership," said Sommers, who has repeatedly criticized President Joe Biden's policies restricting restricting new oil leases as part of Biden's efforts to slow global climate change.

"With an unstable world, war in Europe, war in the Middle East, and energy demand outstripping supply, energy security is on the line," Sommers said in a speech at the Hudson Institute, a Washington think tank.

"American oil and gas are needed now more than ever," Sommers said. "Let's take to heart the lessons we learned from 1973 and avoid sowing the seeds of the next energy crisis."

For now, the crisis isn't a repeat of 1973. Arab countries aren't attacking Israel in unison, and OPEC+ nations have not moved to restrict supplies or boost prices beyond a few extra dollars.

There are several wild cards in the energy market. One is the supply of Iranian oil. Eager to avoid a spike in gasoline prices and inflation, the U.S. has quietly tolerated some exports of Iranian oil to destinations such as China instead of going all in on sanctions aimed at Iran's nuclear program.

If Iran, which has warned Israel not to undertake a ground offensive, escalates the Gaza conflict — including a possible attack by Hezbollah militants in Lebanon supported by Iran — that might change the U.S. stance. "If the U.S. were then also to enforce the oil sanctions against Iran more strictly again, the oil market would tighten noticeably," say commodities analysts at Commerzbank.

Lawmakers from both parties have urged Biden to block Iranian oil sales, seeking to dry up one of the regime's key sources of funding.

Another wild card is how Saudi Arabia would respond if Iranian oil is restricted. Oil analysts say that while the Saudis may welcome recent oil price hikes, they don't want a massive price spike that would fuel inflation, higher central bank interest rates and possible recession in oil-consuming countries that ultimately would limit or even kill off demand for oil.

A third unknown is whether more oil will reach the market from Venezuela. The U.S. agreed Wednesday to temporarily suspend some sanctions on the country's oil, gas and gold sectors after Venezuela's gov-

ernment and a faction of its opposition formally agreed to work together on election reforms.

Venezuelan production could increase in 2024. In the next six months, however, production could ramp up by some 200,000 barrels a day, a relative drop in the ocean, according to Sofia Guidi Di Sante, senior oil market analyst at Rystad Energy.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, slammed the U.S. action as a "gimmick" that appeases a brutal regime in Venezuela.

"Joe Biden's energy policies put America last," Barrasso said, citing the Democratic president's decisions to kill the controversial Keystone XL oil pipeline and sell off significant portions of the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve, taking it to its lowest level since the 1980s. The Energy Department said Thursday it will seek offers to start refilling the oil reserve in December, with monthly solicitations expected through May 2024.

"He eased sanctions on Iran, which funds terrorism across the Middle East. Now with Israel under attack, Biden is desperate for anything to mask the consequences of his reckless policies," Barrasso said. "America should never beg for oil from socialist dictators or terrorists."

The Treasury Department says it has targeted nearly 1,000 individuals and entities connected to terrorism and terrorist financing by the Iranian regime and its proxies, including Hamas, Hezbollah and other groups in the region.

"We will continue to take action as appropriate to counter Iran's destabilizing activity in the region and around the world," Treasury said in a statement.

Donald Trump is dominating the GOP primary and settling into a new role: Defendant

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After turns as a real estate magnate, a New York tabloid mainstay, a reality TV star and president of the United States, Donald Trump is settling into a new role: defendant.

The front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination spent two days this week in a Manhattan courtroom where a civil fraud trial is unfolding. Trump is accused of grossly inflating his net worth and the value of marquee assets on paperwork used to secure financing and make deals.

In the courtroom, Trump is often subdued, sitting between his lawyers and staring straight ahead with a scowl as he studiously ignores his adversary, New York Attorney General Letitia James. But when he steps into the hallway where a phalanx of TV cameras awaits, Trump transforms into his familiar political persona, eager to spin the proceedings in his favor.

"If I wasn't here, probably — maybe — people wouldn't see the facts the way they are," Trump said during one of his swings before the cameras on Wednesday.

Trump, who also attended portions of the civil trial earlier this month, is under no legal obligation to attend the proceedings. But in a preview of how he'll likely approach the more serious criminal trials that will begin in the coming months, Trump uses the appearances as an extension of his presidential campaign, betting he can shape perceptions and portray himself as a political leader under attack.

The strategy has helped energize his supporters — and fill his campaign coffers — by casting his legal troubles as part of a broad conspiracy to deny him the presidency and rob him of the real estate empire he spent decades building. But it's also testing the limits of Trump's ability to harness his showmanship in a way that bends political and legal realities.

During the same week that Trump was largely focused on New York, his legal vulnerabilities intensified elsewhere. In Washington, a federal judge imposed a limited gag order barring Trump from making statements targeting prosecutors, possible witnesses and court staff. For someone who sees few limits in attacking his perceived enemies, that order may be tested soon.

And in Georgia, lawyer Sidney Powell pleaded guilty Thursday to reduced charges over efforts to overturn Trump's 2020 loss in the state. The deal with Atlanta prosecutors could heighten Trump's legal exposure there if Powell agrees to testify against the former president.

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On top of that, Trump was overshadowed by the escalating war between Israel and Hamas as well as the failure of Republicans to elect a new speaker of the House. While Trump's initial appearances drew a media maelstrom, with cable news networks airing live footage of his motorcade journey, this week's have drawn far less attention.

There have been fewer reporters and more empty seats in the courtroom gallery as news outlets have pulled back on covering his courthouse sojourns because the novelty has worn off. Unaccustomed to losing the spotlight, Trump acknowledged the challenge Tuesday.

"Despite my being here, the talk is all about Biden getting ready to fly to the Middle East to see Abbas, meeting arranged, and Abbas just cancelled," he wrote on his social media platform. "No respect for the United States of America!"

His public mood shifted throughout his time at the trial. He emerged from the courtroom elated on some days, predicting at one point that 80% of the \$250 million fraud case would be thrown out because the judge had been receptive to an argument by his lawyers.

Other times he has come out fuming, like on Wednesday when he accused the government of lying after one of his lawyers alleged a witness had perjured himself. Again and again, he casts the proceedings as "rigged," a "disgrace" and part of a broader plot by Democrats to hobble his chances.

"I should be in Iowa now. I should be in New Hampshire now. I should be in South Carolina now or someplace else, campaigning," Trump complained Tuesday.

In the courtroom, he'll lean in occasionally to confer with counsel and follow along with a live transcript of the proceedings on a screen in front of him. Sometimes he'll flip through a pile of papers or react to testimony with a grimace or other expression.

On Wednesday, Judge Arthur Engoron warned Trump and others involved in the case to keep their voices down after he conferred animatedly with his lawyers at the defense table while a witness was testifying against him.

Trump threw up his hands in frustration and grumbled to his lawyers, prompting state lawyer Kevin Wallace to ask 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."

Otherwise, Trump has shown unusual restraint for a man who's used to being the center of attention, able to say and do as he pleases.

Aside from the historic nature of having a former president and current candidate at the defense table, Trump is something of a non-factor in the courtroom itself — typically seen, but not heard. The most unusual aspect of his attendance is often the moment when a small pool of photographers and video cameras parades into the room for a few minutes to capture the scene for posterity before testimony begins. It's a spectacle, with photographers jostling for position between the defense table and the judge's bench — with all eyes on the commotion.

While Trump's appearances in New York over the last few weeks have been purely voluntary, that will change as the civil case continues and his four criminal cases move toward trial. The former president will be required to return to New York to testify in his civil trial, likely in a few weeks. His lawyers have already told the judge he'll be unavailable for several days around the Nov. 7 off-year election.

Trump isn't required to be in court for writer E. Jean Carroll's second defamation trial against him — he teased an appearance at the first one before passing — but the case could still steal some headlines because it's scheduled to start on Jan. 15, 2024, the same day as the Iowa caucuses that kick off the GOP nomination process.

On Feb. 15, Trump will have to appear in person in New York ahead of a criminal trial on charges that he misclassified reimbursements for hush-money payments made to women during his 2016 campaign. His federal trial in Washington on charges related to his efforts to overturn the 2020 election is tentatively set to begin March 4 — the day before Super Tuesday contests — while his New York trial is set to begin weeks later on March 25.

His trial in Florida over his refusal to return classified documents stashed at his Mar-a-Lago club is set to begin May 20, while his trial in Georgia over his efforts to subvert the results of the state's 2020 election hasn't yet been scheduled.

Defendants in criminal trials generally must be present for large parts of their trials.

The judge in the hush-money case, Juan Manuel Merchan, has acknowledged the "huge undertaking" in getting Trump to court. But he warned that once the trial starts, he's obligated to be there and can't, for instance, "agree to any appearances, commitments, speaking engagements, anything of that kind."

Republicans are facing death threats as the election for speaker gets mired in personal feuds

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It was the thing that was supposed to make Rep. Jim Jordan the 56th speaker of the House.

An onslaught of pressure from the Republican Party base, allies predicted, would compel the GOP's moderate and establishment members to support Jordan, a hero of the far-right, and help him secure the votes for the gavel.

But as the pressure campaign devolved this week into death threats against lawmakers and their families, something unexpected happened: Positions hardened, and a ragtag coalition of roughly 20 House Republicans rose up to deny Jordan the speakership.

In doing so, they defied a belief of many in Washington — that moderates have no backbone.

"Bullying don't work," said Rep. Don Bacon, a Republican centrist who has led the opposition to Jordan's nomination.

Still, Bacon said the harassing text messages and phone calls have taken a toll. His wife slept with a loaded gun near her bedside one night. Other Republicans said their families have been threatened. And every lawmaker who voted against Jordan has received a barrage of angry phone calls and messages.

Still, they vowed Thursday to not back down as Jordan tried for a third day to win the 217 Republican votes he needs to become speaker.

It's just the latest twist in the contentious intra-party feud that has consumed House Republicans since the unprecedented removal of Kevin McCarthy more than two weeks ago. Hopelessly divided, Republicans have been arguing for weeks over how to mend their fractured majority. The death threats have only worsened the tension, with lawmakers feeling their colleagues are partially to blame for the outpouring of bile.

After Rep. Drew Ferguson's family started receiving death threats for his vote against Jordan, the Georgia Republican said in a statement that he would not support "a bully" for speaker. He said the threats were "unacceptable, unforgivable, and will never be tolerated."

For ten months, the ultra-conservatives of the Republican Conference have driven the House agenda, leveraging their position in the GOP's thin majority to demand that their wishes be met. Kevin McCarthy struggled with them for 15 rounds in January to win the speaker's gavel and ultimately had it wrested away by hard-right holdouts.

As Republicans choose their next speaker, however, the just-say-no tactic is coming from new corners of the Republican conference: moderate GOP lawmakers who represent politically purple congressional districts, senior members of the House Appropriations Committee, and loyalists to GOP leadership figures like McCarthy and Majority Leader Steve Scalise.

Many Republicans were angered last week by how the Freedom Caucus seemed to once again get what it wanted by refusing to support Scalise's bid for speaker, forcing him to drop out and clearing the way for Jordan to make a run.

Jordan had several advantages. The hard-charging Ohio Republican, who helped found the House Freedom Caucus, had former President Donald Trump's backing, as well as support from conservative commentators and influencers like Fox News host Sean Hannity.

Meanwhile, Jordan tried to win over more moderate Republicans by casting himself as a unifier who

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would listen to their concerns. He told his fellow Republicans he would not take the speaker vote to the House floor unless he had secured 217 of their votes.

He quickly broke that promise, scheduling a floor vote Tuesday and forcing the holdouts to publicly state their opposition and face the political fallout. Jordan and his allies believed the public vote would quickly wear down their opposition.

Rep. Thomas Massie, a Jordan ally, predicted at the time that the holdouts would be put through a "meat grinder" of pressure and cave by the end of the week.

"I don't think any of these 20 have the stomach for forcing that vote over and over," Massie said.

That proved wrong. Opposition to Jordan only grew. A few more Republicans voted against Jordan during a second ballot Wednesday, and others suggested their support would soon run out. The pressure campaign had backfired.

"As soon as you try to influence by getting outside groups to try to intimidate, in that nanosecond, it's over," said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, a senior Republican on the Appropriations Committee who helped lead the opposition to Jordan.

Jordan, for his part, has tried to stop the threats and pressure. After Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks said in a statement that she had received "credible death threats" after voting against him Wednesday, Jordan condemned the threats and called for unity.

"Stop. It's abhorrent," he said on social media.

But colleagues have watched for years as Jordan and his allies denounced their legislative work while playing to the party's base. They were unmoved.

"This is a matter of picking the person who's going to lead your party," said Rep. Steve Womack, a senior Republican who opposed Jordan. "This is more interpersonal."

Womack said he was done with Jordan after he gave a tepid concession when Scalise initially won the Republican Conference nomination for speaker. Though Jordan eventually offered support for Scalise, Womack felt Jordan had given a "dog whistle" to the House Freedom Caucus to withhold their support.

Womack felt it doomed Scalise's bid for speaker, and he said he told Jordan that his concession speech was "the most unacceptable and egregious treatment of a fellow colleague I've ever witnessed."

As Republicans meet for hours on end trying to work past their grudges, lawmakers are flailing for a path forward that would allow the House to once again do its work. The White House is requesting wartime funding for allies Israel and Ukraine, and the government will enter a shutdown unless Congress passes funding legislation by mid-November.

One senior Republican, Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, said he sympathized somewhat with the holdouts.

"They feel like they've been pushed into a position where it seems to be the only thing these guys understand. And so you start treating them the way they have been treating us," he said.

Still, Cole has also urged them to set aside those tactics to unite around a speaker.

"The problem is, you know that makes you feel pretty good ... but it doesn't get us moving any closer to a solution."

Rep. Jim Jordan will try again for House gavel, but Republicans won't back the hardline Trump ally

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI, STEPHEN GROVES and KEVING FREKING Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite deepening opposition, Rep. Jim Jordan is expected to try a third vote to become House speaker, even as his Republican colleagues are explicitly warning the hard-edged ally of Donald Trump that no more threats or promises can win over their support.

The House is scheduled to convene Friday but Republicans have no realistic or workable plan to unite the fractured GOP majority, elect a new speaker and return to the work of Congress that has been languishing since hardliners ousted Kevin McCarthy at the start of the month. Jordan has scheduled an early morning press conference ahead of the session.

After two failed votes, Jordan's third attempt at the gavel is not expected to end any better. In fact,

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Friday is likely to produce an even worse tally for the fiery Judiciary Committee chairman — in large part because more centrist rank-and-file Republicans are revolting over the hardball tactics being used to win their votes. They have been bombarded with harassing phone calls and even reported death threats.

"I'm still running for speaker and I plan to go to the floor and get the votes and win this race," said Jordan, a founder of the far-right House Freedom Caucus.

But more than two weeks into the stalemate that has shuttered the U.S. House, leaving a seat of American democracy severely hobbled at a time of challenges at home and abroad, the House Republican majority appears to have no idea how to end the political turmoil and get back to work.

"He doesn't have the votes to be speaker," Rep. Carlos Gimenez, R-Fla., said after a late Thursday meeting when Jordan sought to hear them out and shore up support.

The holdouts want "nothing" from Jordan, Gimenez said, adding that some of the lawmakers in the meeting simply called on Jordan to drop out of the race.

One extraordinary idea to give the interim speaker pro tempore, Rep. Patrick McHenry, more powers for the next several months to at least bring the House back into session and conduct crucial business was swiftly rejected by Jordan's own ultra-conservative allies.

Jordan had backed the temporary speaker plan as a way to allow more time to shore up support in his own reach for the gavel.

"Asinine," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, a leader of far-right House Freedom Caucus.

Next steps were highly uncertain as angry, frustrated Republicans predict the House could essentially stay closed for the foreseeable future — perhaps until the mid-November deadline for Congress to approve funding or risk a federal government shutdown.

"We're trying to figure out if there's a way we can get back with a Republican-only solution," said veteran legislator Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

"That's what normal majorities do. What this majority has done is prove it's not a normal majority."

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

Rep. John Rutherford, R-Fla., said "it's not going to happen."

After a first failed vote Tuesday, Jordan lost rather than gained ground on a crucial second ballot Wednesday, opposed by 22 Republicans, two more than the day before.

Many view the Ohio congressman as too extreme for a central seat of U.S. power, second in line to the presidency.

"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."

With Republicans in majority control of the House, 221-212, it appears there is no Republican candidate who can win a clear majority, 217 votes, to become speaker.

A closed-door meeting Thursday to regroup grew heated at times with Republican factions blaming one another for sending their majority into chaos, lawmakers said.

When Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a chief architect of the ouster of the speaker two weeks ago, rose to speak, McCarthy told him it was not his turn.

"We're shaking up Washington, D.C. We're breaking the fever. And, you know what, it's messy," Gaetz said later, saying he had no regrets over the past weeks of havoc.

Elevating McHenry to an expanded speaker's role was seen as a possible off-ramp for the crisis, but it would not be as politically simple as it might seem.

Republicans are loath to partner with the Democrats in a bipartisan way on the arrangement, but it's highly unlikely Republicans could agree to give McHenry more powers on their own, since their hardliners don't like it.

McHenry himself has brushed off attempts to take the job more permanently after he was appointed to the role after the unprecedented ouster of McCarthy more than two weeks ago.

"I'm going to abide by the Constitution and the rules of the House, and no one is going to put me in a different position," McHenry said late Thursday, reiterating what he has told his colleagues.

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"If there is some goal to subvert the House rules to give me powers without a formal vote, I will not accept it," he said.

The North Carolina Republican, who is well-liked by his colleagues and viewed as a highly competent legislator, has said his job is "to get the next speaker elected. That's my focus."

McCarthy himself had leaned into the plan, explaining that he tapped McHenry for the unusual role, created in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to ensure continuity of government, because he "wanted somebody that could work with all sides. And McHenry is ideal for all that."

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

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.

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.

DIARY: Under siege by Hamas militants, a hometown and the lives within it are scarred forever

By MOSHE EDRI Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — There's a saying among us videojournalists: May the news stay far from your home. But on Saturday, Oct. 7, it came terrifyingly close to my hometown.

While I live in Jerusalem, where I work as a cameraman for The Associated Press, I was raised in Ofakim, a city a half-hour drive from the border with Gaza. My mother, parents-in-law and siblings still call it home. I met my wife there.

It was a tight-knit and safe community, made up of some 13,000 working-class Jews of North African descent. Everybody knew everybody.

When hundreds of militants poured over the border from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel that Saturday, I was staying with my wife's parents, marking the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, a jubilant festival that will from now on be remembered as the country's darkest day.

We were awakened by air raid sirens at 6:30 a.m. The smell of hamin, a traditional slow-cooked Jewish meat and bean stew, had begun to fill the house. My wife, her parents and I rushed to the protected room, not thinking too much of it. Ofakim, like many other communities in southern Israel, has for the last two decades been the target of rocket attacks from Gaza. This all felt routine.

Many of the older houses in the community do not have a safe room — it used to be that whenever the sirens sounded, you would run to the communal shelter. Luckily, my wife's parents had built their own safe room five years ago, roughly 3 by 4 meters (10 feet by 13 feet). We had no food or water in it — just a double bed, a mattress, and a TV.

But as the morning wore on, we realized it was anything but a normal day. As we scrolled our phones endlessly from the safe room, we started grasping what awaited Ofakim. Militants had overrun the front-line kibbutzim, or farming villages, along the border, shooting people in their homes and setting some on fire and taking dozens captive.

By noon, I decided to step outside for a moment. But I heard gunfire from terrifyingly close and headed back for the safe room.

We waited anxiously inside the protected room for hours. When we got hungry, we snuck out cautiously to the kitchen to bring in bowls of hamin. Uncertainty reigned and our only source of information were the accounts of the horror from countless residents coming in through Israeli media, which stoked our fear of

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what might happen to our community.

We passed the time watching TV, reading the news on our phone, communicating with loved ones on WhatsApp chat groups. Stuck in a small room together, we began to argue about politics — why hadn't the government protected us?

I wanted to leave, to check on my mother, my daughter. But my wife's father told me that if I dared step out of the house, into the area where the militants roamed, he would tie me to the bed.

We didn't yet understand the bigger picture. Like other Israelis, we were caught off guard, disoriented by the total lack of information about what was going on outside our door and terrorized by the fog of the unknown.

By the afternoon, I learned how truly personal the attack had become. Yaniv Zohar, a former AP cameraman I had worked alongside for years, was killed in his home in Nahal Oz, a communal settlement along the Gaza border, along with his wife and two daughters, aged 18 and 20. I have since learned that yet another friend and cameraman, Roei Dan, was killed in Kfar Azza, also along the Gaza border. Roei's wife was also killed, and his 3-year-old daughter was taken hostage by Hamas.

I couldn't bear sitting inside anymore. My mother's home was a few hundred meters (yards) from the battle with militants and I needed to check in on her. My 15-year-old daughter was staying at my brother's house and other relatives, among them a 4-month-old baby, were also near the fighting.

So I set out, traveling nearly a kilometer (a little more than half a mile) to see my mother. I had been in communication with her through text, but I needed to make sure she was safe.

I also couldn't stay away from the news, no matter how much my family urged me to. By late afternoon, I ventured out with my camera and found the aftermath of a battlefield: white jeeps driven in by the militants on the side of the road, and terrified residents whose homes were pocked with bullet holes.

My coverage felt incredibly personal. The jeeps were left in a spot where Ofakim residents usually gather to watch the sunset. People I've known since my teens let me film their bullet-ridden homes. A good friend of my mother's is in shock after militants shot dead her next-door neighbors. These were the images of my once sleepy hometown hours after the assault.

The military had been nowhere for much of that day. Local police and firefighters were left to use their scant means to fight the militants who marauded through the city and are believed to have killed at least 50 people before they were routed or killed.

Our lives have in many ways been upended.

In the aftermath of the violence, my sister left to the U.S. with her visiting daughter, son-in-law and baby granddaughter. My adult daughter, who lives in southern Israel, fled from the non-stop barrage of rockets to the remote Israeli city of Eilat.

I returned to Jerusalem the morning after the attack, my mother and in-laws now staying at my home indefinitely. Since then, I've covered an endless stream of funerals and watched as my former colleague Yaniv was laid to rest.

I don't have a foreign citizenship. I am Israeli and like everyone else in this country, I am left to pick up the pieces of the vast destruction, confront the national trauma inflicted by the attack and conjure up ways to keep moving forward.

My hometown will never be the same.

Colombian president's statements on Gaza jeopardize close military ties with Israel

By MANUEL RUEDA and ASTRID SUAREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Escalating tensions between Colombia and Israel over the Gaza war could undo decades of close military ties between them and hamper Colombia's ability to fight drug traffickers and rebels, security analysts say.

Israel has been one of Colombia's main suppliers of war planes, surveillance equipment and assault rifles since the 1990s. But on Sunday its foreign ministry announced a suspension of defense exports

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to Colombia, after President Gustavo Petro refused to condemn Hamas' attack on Israel and compared Israel's actions in Gaza to those of Nazi Germany.

Analysts in Bogota say that the suspension could jeopardize several contracts, including a \$5 million deal between Colombia's Defense Ministry and Israeli company IAI to maintain Colombia's ageing fleet of Kfir fighter jets.

Colombia's government also recently hired an Israeli company to outfit two Boeing 737's with electronic warfare equipment and intelligence tools that can help the military jam communications of the nation's remaining rebel groups and monitor their movements.

Israel's embassy in Bogota declined to answer questions about the export ban and whether it applies to contracts that have already been signed.

Security analysts in Bogota said that if the ban is sustained, it could seriously affect Colombia's armed forces due to their reliance on Israeli hardware and technology.

"It will be debilitating and extremely costly," said Jorge Restrepo, the director of CERAC, a security think tank in Bogota. "It can take months or years to find new providers and to train personnel to use and trust new equipment."

Colombia deepened its military ties with Israel in the late 80's by purchasing a group of Kfir fighter jets. The war planes, whose name translates to young lion, are able to launch laser-guided bombs.

They were used by Colombia's air force in numerous attacks on remote guerrilla camps that debilitated the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and helped push the group into peace talks that resulted in its disarmament in 2016.

But as Colombia's fleet of 22 Kfir fighter jets becomes older it also relies more frequently on maintenance from its Israeli manufacturers, said Erich Saumeth Cadavid, a Colombian defense analyst.

Cadavid noted that one potential result of the export ban could be less sorties for the Kfir planes, which are Colombia's only fighter jets and also the only planes in the nation's arsenal that are capable of launching bombs with precision.

Colombian officials have been slow to replace the fleet despite offers from manufacturers in France, Sweden and the United States, as Petro's administration prioritizes spending in other areas.

Israel's military export ban comes as Colombia's government continues to face the threat of rebel groups that did not join the 2016 peace deal with the FARC, and have grown stronger in some rural parts of the country following the FARC's withdrawal from these areas.

Petro's administration recently signed cease-fires with two of these groups — the ELN and the EMC -- that will expire early next year, while it is fighting against the drug trafficking group known as the Gulf Clan, which is the nation's second largest armed group.

Wilder Alejandro Sánchez, a military analyst and president of Second Floor Strategies, a consulting firm based in Washington, said that the effects of Israel's export ban will take some months to be felt by Colombia's armed forces.

He said that while Colombia has a "diverse" set of weapons in its arsenal, including Brazilian made Super Tucano planes that can attack enemies on the ground, the nation relies heavily on Israel for the maintenance of surveillance equipment, including drones.

"Colombia continues to face a plethora of internal security challenges, and they need a strong military with various capabilities" Sánchez said. "So this ban, if it really does come through, comes at a really bad time."

Another contract that could be jeopardized by the ban, Sánchez said, is a license through which Colombia's state owned military factory, Indumil, produces Israeli designed Galil assault rifles, which have become the principal weapon used on the ground by Colombian troops.

Following Israel's announcement of its intent to suspend military exports, Colombia's leftist president threatened to cut diplomatic relations with Israel and blamed the country for the growth of paramilitary groups in Colombia, though he didn't provide evidence for that claim.

"If we must suspend relations with Israel, then that is what we will do," Petro wrote on the social me-

dia platform X. "From the people of Israel I demand help for the construction of peace in Colombia, in Palestine and in the world."

Petro, who was once a member of a left-wing rebel group that made peace with Colombia's government in the 1990s, has written dozens of messages on X about the war in Gaza since the conflict began on October 7.

In some, he has compared the conditions in the Gaza strip to those of a concentration camp, and in other messages he has written that Israel's bombardment of Gaza is equivalent to "genocide."

But the president has refused to condemn Hamas' attack on Israel, despite numerous calls by Colombian politicians and intellectuals for him to do so.

While Petro's supporters commend him for speaking forcefully about the plight of Palestinians, critics are worried that his brand of online diplomacy could eventually lead to a complete rupture of relations with Israel, and undermine Colombia's relations with other countries.

"By not condemning the terrorist attack, he is drifting away from Colombia's strategic allies and putting Colombia next to the nations that support terrorism," said Diego Molano, a former Colombian defense minister.

"Petro is impulsive and he sees in the Palestinian cause something that he can become a vocal supporter of that aligns with his ideology and his passion for anti-colonialism," said Sergio Guzmán, a political risk analyst in Bogota. "But he is not taking Colombia's interests into consideration, and it puts Colombia in a difficult position."

On Thursday afternoon Petro held separate meetings with the ambassadors of Israel and Palestine and posted photos on X. He announced Colombia would send humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza strip and wrote on his account that he had told both ambassadors about his desire to help set up an "international peace conference that opens the path for two free and independent states."

Ruins and memories of a paradise lost in an Israeli village where attackers killed, kidnapped dozens

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

KIBBUTZ NIR OZ, Israel (AP) — Nearly two weeks after Hamas militants left his village scorched and shattered, Shachar Butler returned to bury a friend who was slain. But it was the town itself, a quarter of its residents dead or missing, that he eulogized.

"It was the happiest place alive. It was a green place, with animals and birds and kids running around," Butler said Thursday, standing in a landscape of ransacked homes and bullet-riddled cars, the heat thick with the odor of death.

"They burned the houses while the people were inside," said Butler, a father of three who spent hours trading gunfire with militants on Oct. 7. "The people who came out are the people who got kidnapped, killed, executed, slaughtered. ... It's unimaginable. It's just unimaginable."

Nir Oz is one of more than 20 towns and villages in southern Israel that were ambushed in the sweeping assault by Hamas launched from the embattled Gaza Strip. In many, the devastation left behind is shocking. But even in that company, it is clear that this kibbutz, set on a low rise overlooking the border fence with Gaza, suffered a particularly harsh toll.

On Thursday, the Israeli military and a pair of surviving residents led a group of journalists, including an Associated Press reporter, on a tour of the battered village.

Until the morning of the attack, Nir Oz was home to about 400 people, many employed growing asparagus and other crops, or in the local paint and sealants factory. Surrounded by the Negev desert, it remains an oasis of greenery, with a botanical garden that is home to more than 900 species of flowers, trees and plants.

Now, it is virtually devoid of the people who gave it life.

Authorities are still trying to identify bodies. Residents say fully a quarter of the town's population fell victim to the attack. More than two dozen have been confirmed dead, and dozens of others are believed

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to be among the roughly 200 people taken to Gaza as captives.

On Thursday, the Israeli army released what it said was a manual used by militants outlining methods for taking hostages. It included instructions to light tires outside the heavy metal doors of safe rooms that are built into many Israeli homes to smoke people out.

The manual's contents could not be independently verified, and it wasn't known if any were used by the estimated 200 militants who invaded Nir Oz.

In all, about 100 people from Nir Oz are dead or missing, said Ron Bahat, 57, who was born in the kibbutz and has spent most of his life here. He recounted how militants tried repeatedly to break into the safe room where he and his family barricaded themselves during the attack.

"Luckily we were able to hold the door. I was holding the door, my wife holding the windows, and luckily we survived," he said.

On a walk through Nir Oz, signs of life cut short are everywhere. Ceiling fans still spin lazily inside some ruined homes. A tub of homemade cookies sits uneaten on a kitchen table in one. A tricycle and toys are scattered across the front-yard grass of another.

"Home. Dream. Love," reads a sign that still hangs on the wall of yet another home left vacant.

But destruction overwhelms those reminders of domesticity. Alongside a grove of pines, the windows of nearly 20 cars are shot out, with the Arabic word for Palestine spray-painted in orange across many. A trail of blood curls through one home, stretching through the battered doorway of its safe room. In another, bloodstains sit near an overturned crib.

Bahat said that some surviving residents plan to return eventually. But the Nir Oz that used to be is gone, he and Butler said.

"I lost many friends," Butler said. "We worked the fields until the last yard and always hoping that maybe one day there's going to be something peaceful ... between us and the other side."

Long before the attack, he said, on days when the kibbutz's air raid siren warned of rocket fire from Gaza, holding on to that dream wasn't easy.

But nowhere near as hard as it is now.

US military shoots down missiles and drones as it faces growing threats in volatile Middle East

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With tensions spiking in the Middle East, U.S. forces in the region are facing increasing threats as a Navy warship shot down missiles appearing to head toward Israel Thursday and American bases in Iraq and Syria were repeatedly targeted by drone attacks.

Later, a U.S. official said there had been a rocket attack early Friday morning on U.S. and coalition forces at a diplomatic support center near the Baghdad International Airport. Initial assessments indicated two rockets were fired, the official said, noting that one was intercepted by a counter-rocket system and the other struck an empty storage facility.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public, said no casualties were reported.

Earlier, the USS Carney, a Navy destroyer in the northern Red Sea, intercepted three land attack cruise missiles and several drones that were launched by Houthi forces in Yemen. The action by the Carney potentially represented the first shots by the U.S. military in the defense of Israel in this conflict.

Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, told reporters the missiles were "potentially" headed toward Israel but said the U.S. hasn't finished its assessment of what they were targeting.

A U.S. official said they don't believe the missiles — which were shot down over the water — were aimed at the U.S. warship. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations that had not yet been announced.

But an array of other drone attacks over the past three days did target U.S. bases, including one in southern Syria on Thursday that caused minor injuries.

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The rash of violence comes in the wake of a deadly explosion at a Gaza hospital, triggering protests in a number of Muslim nations. The Israeli military has relentlessly attacked Gaza in retaliation for the devastating Hamas rampage in southern Israel almost two weeks ago, but Israel has denied responsibility for the al-Ahli hospital blast and the U.S. has said its intelligence assessment found that Tel Aviv was not to blame.

In recent days, however, a number of militant groups across the region — from Hezbollah to the Houthis — have expressed support for the Palestinians and threatened Israel. Since Tuesday, militants have launched at least four drone attacks on U.S. military installations in Iraq and Syria where U.S. troops train local defense forces and support the mission to counter the Islamic State group.

The attacks fuel escalating worries in the U.S. and the West that the war in Israel could expand into a larger regional conflict.

"That's exactly what we are trying to prevent," Ryder said.

The most recent drone attack was Thursday at al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq posted a statement claiming responsibility for the attack, saying they had fired a salvo of rockets at the base and "they hit their targets directly and precisely." A U.S. official confirmed the latest attack but said it was too early to assess any impact.

Also Thursday, the al-Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria was struck by drones. U.S. troops have maintained a presence at the base for a number of years to train Syrian allies and monitor Islamic State militant activity.

The Pentagon said one drone was shot down, but another hit the base and caused minor injuries.

The garrison is located on a vital road that often used by Iranian-backed militants to ferry weapons to Hezbollah in southern Lebanon — and Israel's doorstep.

Syrian opposition activists also said there was a separate drone attack on an oil facility in eastern Syria that houses American troops. Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet, said three drones with explosives struck the Conoco gas field in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour that borders Iraq. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, also confirmed explosions at the site.

On Tuesday, militants launched three drones against two Iraq bases that the U.S. uses to train forces and conduct operations against the Islamic State. During the spate of launches, one warning turned out to be a false alarm at al-Asad, but it sent personnel rushing into bunkers. During that incident, a contractor suffered a cardiac arrest and died, Ryder said.

He said the Pentagon does not yet have confirmation on who launched the drone attacks but said the U.S. "will take all necessary actions to defend U.S. and coalition forces against any threat." He said any military response would come "at a time and a manner of our choosing."

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq have sometimes been used as foot soldiers in regional conflicts, including in Syria and Yemen, and have in recent days threatened to attack U.S. facilities in Iraq and elsewhere because of 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 the blast at the 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 to the U.S. presence in Iraq.

"These evil people must leave the country. Otherwise, they will taste the fire of hell in this world before the afterlife," the statement said.

On the intercepts by the Carney, Ryder said the strikes were done because the Houthi missiles "posed a potential threat" based on their flight profile. He added that the U.S. is prepared to do whatever is needed "to protect our partners and our interests in this important region." He said the U.S. is still assessing what the target was, but said no U.S. forces or civilians on the ground were injured.

Iranian-backed Houthi rebels have expressed support for the Palestinians and threatened Israel. Last

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week, in Yemen's Sanaa, which is held by the Houthi rebels still at war with a Saudi-led coalition, demonstrators crowded the streets waving Yemeni and Palestinian flags. The rebels' slogan long has been, "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse of the Jews; victory to Islam."

Last week, Abdel-Malek al-Houthi, the rebel group's leader, warned the United States against intervening in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, threatening that his forces would retaliate by firing drones and missiles.

When approached Thursday, two Houthi officials declined to comment on the incident. One said he was unaware of the incident, while the second said he did not have the authority to speak about it.

As Israel readies troops for ground assault, Gaza awaits urgently needed aid from Egypt

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMYA KULLAB and RAVI NESSMAN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel pounded the Gaza Strip with airstrikes Thursday, including in the south where Palestinians were told to take refuge, as the Israeli defense minister ordered ground troops to prepare to see Gaza "from the inside", though he didn't indicate when the ground assault would begin.

Gaza's overwhelmed hospitals tried to stretch out ebbing medical supplies and fuel for generators, as authorities worked out logistics for a desperately needed aid delivery from Egypt. Doctors in darkened wards across Gaza performed surgeries by the light of mobile phones and used vinegar to treat infected wounds.

Amid the violence, President Joe Biden pledged unwavering support for Israel's security, "today and always," while adding that the world "can't ignore the humanity of innocent Palestinians" in the besieged Gaza Strip.

In an address Thursday night from the Oval office, hours after returning to Washington from an urgent visit to Israel, Biden drew a distinction between ordinary Palestinians and Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza. He linked the current war in Gaza to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying Hamas and Russian President Vladimir Putin "both want to completely annihilate a neighboring democracy."

Biden said he was sending an "urgent budget request" to Congress on Friday, to cover emergency military aid to both Israel and Ukraine.

Meanwhile, an unclassified U.S. intelligence assessment delivered to Congress estimated casualties in an explosion at a Gaza City hospital this week on the "low end" of 100 to 300 deaths. The death toll "still reflects a staggering loss of life," U.S. intelligence officials said in the report, seen by The Associated Press. It said intelligence officials were still assessing the evidence and their casualty estimate may evolve.

Biden and other U.S. officials already have said that U.S. intelligence officials believe the explosion at al-Ahli Hospital was not caused by an Israeli airstrike. Thursday's findings echoed that.

The Israeli military has relentlessly attacked Gaza in retaliation for the devastating Oct. 7 Hamas rampage in southern Israel. Even after Israel told Palestinians to evacuate the north of Gaza and flee south, strikes extended across the territory, heightening fears among the territory's 2.3 million people that nowhere was safe.

Palestinian militants fired rockets into Israel from Gaza and Lebanon, and tensions flared in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

In a fiery speech to Israeli infantry soldiers on the Gaza border, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant urged the forces to "get organized, be ready" to move in. Israel has massed tens of thousands of troops along the border.

"Whoever sees Gaza from afar now, will see it from the inside," he said. "It might take a week, a month, two months until we destroy them," he added, referring to Hamas.

Israel's consent for Egypt to let in food, water and medicine provided the first possible opening in its seal of the territory. Many Gaza residents are down to one meal a day and drinking dirty water.

Egypt and Israel were still negotiating the entry of fuel for hospitals. Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Hamas has stolen fuel from U.N. facilities and Israel wants assurances that won't happen. The first trucks of aid were expected to go in Friday.

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With the Egypt-Gaza border crossing in Rafah closed, the already dire conditions at Gaza's second-largest hospital deteriorated further, said Dr. Mohammed Qandeel of Nasser Hospital in the southern town of Khan Younis. Power was shut off in most of the hospital and medical staff were using mobile phones for light.

At least 80 wounded civilians and 12 dead flooded into the hospital after witnesses said a strike hit a residential building in Khan Younis. Doctors had no choice but to leave two to die because there were no ventilators, Qandeel said.

"We can't save more lives if this keeps happening," he said.

The Gaza Health Ministry pleaded with gas stations to give fuel to hospitals and a U.N. agency donated some of its last fuel.

The agency's donation to Gaza City's Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, would "keep us going for another few hours," hospital director Mohammed Abu Selmia said.

Al-Ahli Hospital was still recovering from Tuesday's explosion, which remains a point of dispute between Hamas and Israel. Hamas quickly said an Israeli airstrike hit the hospital, which Israel denied. The AP has not independently verified any of the claims or evidence released by the parties.

The blast left body parts strewn on the hospital grounds, where crowds of Palestinians had clustered in hopes of escaping Israeli airstrikes. The U.S. assessment noted "only light structural damage," with no impact crater visible.

Near al-Ahli, meanwhile, another explosion struck a Greek Orthodox church housing displaced Palestinians late Thursday, resulting in deaths and dozens of wounded. Abu Selmia, the Shifa Hospital director general, said dozens were hurt at the Church of Saint Porphyrios but could not give a precise death toll because bodies were buried under rubble.

Palestinian authorities blamed the blast on an Israeli airstrike, a claim that could not be independently verified. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchy of Jerusalem condemned the attack and said it would "not abandon its religious and humanitarian duty" to provide assistance.

The Gaza Health Ministry said 3,785 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, the majority women, children and older adults. Nearly 12,500 were injured, and another 1,300 people were believed buried under rubble, authorities said.

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

More than 1 million Palestinians, about half of Gaza's population, have fled their homes in the north since Israel told them to evacuate, crowding into U.N.-run schools-turned-shelters or the homes of relatives.

For the first time since Israel captured Gaza from Egypt in 1967, a major tent camp arose to house displaced people. Dozens of U.N.-provided tents lined a dirt lot in Khan Younis.

The deal to get aid into Gaza through Rafah, the territory's only connection to Egypt, remained fragile. Israel said the supplies could only go to civilians and that it would "thwart" any diversions by Hamas. Biden said the deliveries "will end" if Hamas takes any aid.

More than 200 trucks and some 3,000 tons of aid were positioned at or near Rafah, according to Khalid Zayed, the head of the Red Crescent for North Sinai.

Under an arrangement reached between the United Nations, Israel and Egypt, U.N. observers will inspect the trucks before entering Gaza. The U.N., working with the Egyptian and Palestinian Red Crescent, will ensure aid goes only to civilians, an Egyptian official and European diplomat told the AP. A U.N. flag will be raised on both sides of the crossing as a sign of protection against airstrikes, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.

It was not immediately clear how much cargo the crossing could handle. Waleed Abu Omar, spokesperson for the Palestinian side, said work has not started to repair the road damaged by Israeli airstrikes.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told Al-Arabiya TV that foreigners and dual nationals would be allowed to leave Gaza once the crossing was opened.

Israel said it agreed to allow aid from Egypt because of a request by Biden — which followed days of intense talks with the U.S. secretary of state to overcome staunch Israeli refusal.

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Israel had previously said it would let nothing into Gaza until Hamas freed the hostages taken from Israel. Relatives of some of the captives were furious over the aid announcement.

"The Israeli government pampers the murderers and kidnappers," the Hostage and Missing Families Forum said.

The Israeli military said Thursday it killed a top Palestinian militant in Rafah and hit hundreds of targets across Gaza, including militant tunnel shafts, intelligence infrastructure and command centers. Palestinians have launched barrages of rockets at Israel since the fighting began.

Violence was also escalating in the West Bank, where Israel carried out a rare airstrike Thursday, targeting militants in the Nur Shams refugee camp.

Six Palestinians were killed, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, and the Israeli military said the strike killed militants and resulted in 10 Israeli officers being wounded. More than 74 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since the war started.

Gaza under Israeli siege: Bread lines, yellow water and nonstop explosions

By ISABEL DEBRE and NAJIB JOBAIN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — There are explosions audible in the cramped, humid room where Azmi Keshawi shelters with his family in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis. The bombardments keep coming closer, he says, and they're wreaking death and destruction.

Keshawi, his wife, two sons, two daughters and tiny grandchildren are trying to survive inside.

The Israeli military has relentlessly attacked Gaza in retaliation for a devastating Hamas rampage in southern Israel almost two weeks ago and the Keshawi family's sense of desperation is growing. Food is running out and Israel has so far stopped humanitarian attempts to bring it in.

The family hasn't showered in days since Israel cut off Gaza's water and fuel supplies. They get drinking water from the U.N. school, where workers hand out jerrycans of water from Gaza's subterranean aquifer to desperate families. It tastes salty. The desalination stations stopped working when the fuel ran out.

Keshawi boils the water and hopes for the best.

"How the hell did the entire world just watch and let Israel turn off the water?" said Keshawi, 59, a U.S.-educated researcher at the International Crisis Group, his voice rising with anger.

That the world is watching, he says, saddens him the most.

Sometimes there are too many airstrikes to forage for food. But his family's stocks are dwindling, so he tries to get bread when he can. On Thursday, the line for one loaf was chaotic and took five hours. Several bakeries have been bombed. Others have closed because they don't have enough water or power. Authorities are still working out the logistics for a delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza from Egypt.

Keshawi has money to buy food for his grandchildren. But there's hardly anything to buy. The children often eat stale bread and drink powdered milk. A few Palestinians who own chicken farms and have gas stoves run take-out kitchens from their homes, asking customers to wait for hours to get a meager plate of rice and chicken. Keshawi wishes he didn't see the water they used — liquid with a disconcerting yellow hue, from a donkey cart. He didn't tell his wife.

"It's not the time to be picky," he said from his friend's house where he sought refuge after heeding an Israeli military evacuation order for Gaza City. "We don't know if anything will be available tomorrow."

The toilet in the house is nearly full to the brim with urine. What water they can spare to wash the dishes they then use to flush waste down the toilet. Without enough food or water, they don't use the bathroom much.

The nights are the hardest, he said. When airstrikes crash nearby and explosions light up the sky, the adults muster what little resolve they have to soothe the children.

"Boom!" they yell and cheer when the bombs thunder. The babies laugh.

But older kids are terrified. They see the news and know that the airstrikes have crushed thousands of homes and killed over 3,000 Palestinians in Gaza so far, including dozens of people a mere kilometer (half

mile) from the house they thought would offer safety.

Keshawi said he tries to put on a brave face. But often, he said, he can't stop weeping.

"It's really killing me," he said. "It really breaks my heart."

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

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

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

She said 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 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."

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 killed his daughter but questioned his story of acting alone to dispose of her body and conceal the crime.

"While I am satisfied that the defendant murdered Natalee alone, I have no doubt others provided him with aid and assistance in preventing us from being able to return Natalee home," Dave Holloway said.

Natalee Holloway's body was never found during land and sea searches along the beach.

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."

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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."

Feds OK natural gas pipeline expansion in Pacific Northwest over environmentalist protests

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Federal regulators on Thursday approved the expansion of a natural gas pipeline in the Pacific Northwest over the protest of environmental groups and top officials in West Coast states, who said it goes against the region's plans to address climate change and could pose a wildfire risk.

The project, known as GTN Xpress, aims to expand the capacity of the Gas Transmission Northwest pipeline, which runs through Idaho, Washington and Oregon, by about 150 million cubic feet (4.2 million cubic meters) of natural gas per day. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission gave it the green light in a vote on Thursday.

TC Energy plans to modify three compressor stations along the pipeline — in Kootenai County, Idaho; Walla Walla County, Washington; and Sherman County, Oregon. Compressor stations help maintain the pressure and flow of gas over long distances in a pipeline.

Environmental groups criticized the decision.

In a statement, Audrey Leonard, staff attorney for environmental nonprofit Columbia Riverkeeper, said it represented a "rubber stamp of unnecessary fracked gas in the Northwest" and accused the energy agency of failing to listen to U.S. senators, governors, state attorneys general, tribes and members of the public.

Leonard said potential spills and explosions on the pipeline, which was built in the 1960s, would not only harm the environment but also present a heightened wildfire risk in the arid regions it passes through.

"An explosion of that level in eastern Washington or eastern Oregon would be catastrophic," she said.

Leonard said Columbia Riverkeeper will appeal the federal regulators' decision and submit a petition for

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a rehearing.

The pipeline belongs to TC Energy of Calgary, Canada — the same company behind the now-abandoned Keystone XL crude oil pipeline.

The company said the project is necessary to meet consumer demand and welcomed the decision in an emailed statement.

Environmentalists and officials opposed to the project have expressed concern about TC Energy's safety record. Its Columbia Gas Transmission pipeline exploded in Strasburg, Virginia, in July and its existing Keystone pipeline spilled nearly 600,000 gallons of bitumen oil in Kansas last December.

The 1,377-mile (2,216-kilometer) pipeline runs from the Canadian border through a corner of Idaho and into Washington state and Oregon, connecting with a pipeline going into California.

Oregon, along with Washington and California, have passed laws requiring utilities to transition to 100% clean electricity sources by 2040 and 2045, respectively.

Idaho's Republican governor and Congress members have supported the project and said that imposing other states' climate policies would be "misguided."

After the vote, Washington's Democratic governor and California's Democratic attorney general condemned the decision. And the Democratic U.S. Senators from Washington and Oregon described the project as "incompatible with our climate laws" in a letter to the energy agency.

"GTN Xpress represents a significant expansion of methane gas infrastructure at a time when California, Oregon, and Washington are moving away from fossil fuels," the senators said.

The attorneys general of the three states, citing the energy agency's draft environmental impact statement for the project, said it would result in more than 3.47 million metric tons of planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions per year for at least the next three decades.

The agency's final environmental assessment issued last November revised that number downward by roughly half in calculations contested by environmental groups. This is partly because some of the project's gas would be delivered to Tourmaline, a Canadian natural gas producer. The assessment said it wasn't clear what the end use of the gas delivered to Tourmaline would be, leading it to conclude that the company's downstream emissions — those stemming from consumers — weren't "reasonably foreseeable."

The energy agency's chairman, Willie Phillips, reiterated its stance after Thursday's vote.

"There was no evidence presented that this project would significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions," he told reporters. "The commission determined that this project was needed and therefore we support its approval."

In its final assessment, the federal agency also said the compressor stations were in non-forested areas with low to moderate fire hazard and concluded the project "would result in limited adverse impacts on the environment."

"Most adverse environmental impacts would be temporary or short-term," the federal agency said.

The agency recommended certain steps, such as requiring the company to train its personnel and contractors on environmental mitigation measures before any construction begins.

But environmental groups say the assessment didn't adequately address the harm caused by the project, including by fracking to obtain the natural gas that flows through the pipeline.

Fracking is a technique used by the energy industry to extract oil and gas from rock by injecting high-pressure mixtures of water, sand or gravel and chemicals. It has been criticized by climate and environment groups for increasing emissions of methane, an extraordinarily potent greenhouse gas.

GOP's Jordan says he's still running for House gavel, but plan for a temporary speaker falls flat

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI, STEPHEN GROVES and KEVING FREKING Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Refusing to give up, Rep. Jim Jordan told GOP colleagues Thursday he was still running for the House gavel — leaving Republicans few viable options after his hardline backers resisted

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a plan to expand the temporary speaker's powers to re-open the House.

The combative Jordan delivered the message at a fiery closed-door meeting at the Capitol as the Republican majority considered an extraordinary plan to give the interim speaker pro tempore more powers for the next several months to bring the House back into session and conduct crucial business, according to Republicans familiar with the private meeting who insisted on anonymity to discuss it.

But neither option seemed immediately workable. GOP moderates who have twice rejected Jordan are unwilling to support him now, especially after some report harassing pressures and even death threats from his supporters. At the same time, Jordan's hard-right allies are refusing to allow a temporary speaker to gain more power.

The prolonged stalemate risks keeping the House intractably shut down for the foreseeable future after the unprecedented ouster of Kevin McCarthy as speaker,

"I'm still running for speaker and I plan to go to the floor and get the votes and win this race," said Jordan, the Judiciary Committee chairman and founder of the hardline House Freedom Caucus.

Thursday's meeting grew heated at times with Republican factions blaming one another for sending their majority into chaos, lawmakers said.

When Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a chief architect of the ouster of the speaker two weeks ago, rose to speak, McCarthy told him it was not his turn.

"We're shaking up Washington, D.C. We're breaking the fever. And, you know what, it's messy," Gaetz said later.

With Jordan refusing to concede and his hard-right detractors rejecting the longshot idea of installing McHenry as a temporary speaker, there are few options left to put the shattered House back to normal.

The House convened briefly at midday Thursday, but no action was taken, the schedule ahead uncertain.

There is 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.

"We're trying to figure out if there's a way we can get back with a Republican-only solution," said veteran legislator Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

"That's what normal majorities do. What this majority has done is prove it's not a normal majority."

Elevating McHenry to an expanded speaker's role would not be as politically simple as it might seem. The hard-right Republican lawmakers including some who ousted McCarthy, don't like the idea.

"Asinine," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, a leader of far-right House Freedom Caucus.

While Democrats have suggested the arrangement, Republicans are loathe to partner with the Democrats in a bipartisan way. And it's highly unlikely Republicans could agree give Speaker Pro Tem Patrick McHenry more powers on their own, even though they have majority control of the House.

"It's a bad precedent and I don't support it," said Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., the Freedom Caucus chairman.

McHenry himself has brushed off attempts to take the job more permanently after he was appointed to the role after the unprecedented ouster of McCarthy more than two weeks ago.

"I did not ask for additional powers," said McHenry of North Carolina, a Republican who is well-liked by his colleagues and viewed as a highly competent legislator. "My duty is to get the next speaker elected. That's my focus."

But McCarthy himself explained that he tapped McHenry for the role, created in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to ensure continuity of government, because he "wanted somebody that could work with all sides. And McHenry is ideal for all that."

Next steps were highly uncertain as angry, frustrated Republicans predict the House could stay essentially shuttered, as it has been almost all month, until the mid-November deadline for Congress to approve funding or risk a federal government shutdown.

"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

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. Several lawmakers said they had received death threats.

"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."

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.

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. Jordan's refusal to concede only further emboldened some of the Republicans.

"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."

Rep. John Rutherford, R-Fla., said "it's not going to happen."

With Republicans in majority control of the House, 221-212, it appears no Republican candidate can win a clear majority, 217 votes, if there are no absences.

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.

But it seemed to be slipping away as Republicans do not have support from their own ranks to put it in place on their own, and refused to reach across the aisle to Democrats who have expressed a willingness to consider the option.

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.

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.

At Donald Trump's civil trial, appraiser recalls Eric Trump's 'lofty' views on property value

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The spotlight at former President Donald Trump's civil fraud trial turned Thursday to his son Eric, with testimony and documents suggesting the scion envisioned a "lofty" value for a suburban golf course and was actively involved in appraisals he has said he doesn't remember.

The trial stems from New York Attorney General Letitia James' claims that Donald Trump, his company and executives, including Eric Trump, fraudulently inflated asset values on financial statements given to lenders, insurers and others. The defendants deny the allegations, and the 2024 Republican presidential front-runner says the values actually were underestimated.

About a decade ago, Trump's companies sought appraisals of two of their properties in New York's suburban Westchester County — the Trump National Golf Club and an estate known as Seven Springs, according to documents and testimony Thursday.

At the time, the companies were considering what are known as conservation easements on the properties, according to David McArdle, an appraiser with the commercial real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield. A conservation easement is essentially an agreement to forgo development in exchange for a tax break.

McArdle said he was asked in 2013 to figure out what the golf course would be worth if 71 high-end townhomes were built there, and he got substantial input from Eric Trump, who's an executive vice presi-

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dent at the Trump Organization.

"Of course Eric Trump has lofty ideas on value," assuming the townhouses would easily sell for \$1,000 per square foot, McArdle wrote in an email to a fellow appraiser at the time.

Eric Trump subsequently sent McArdle suggestions of properties to use for comparison, while arguing that none had "close to the amount, quality or kind of amenities" of the Trump course in Briarcliff Manor, New York.

As McArdle settled on a value around \$45 million, he and lawyers for the Trump company strategized in email about how to present it to their client.

McArdle said Thursday that Eric Trump may have had a "more lofty value" in mind, but a higher number wouldn't have been credible. The email discussion was a leadup "to finally tell Eric he should accept this value from the professionals," McArdle testified.

McArdle then got a message from Eric Trump, saying that he'd spoke to one of the lawyers and telling McArdle to hold off sending the appraisal until further notice.

Trump's financial statements went on to list the golf course at values sometimes topping \$100 million, according to James' lawsuit. The villas weren't built.

Donald Trump floated various plans over the years for Seven Springs, a historic mansion and 213-acre property that spans three Westchester County towns. After his development proposals met opposition, he pursued an easement.

McArdle was hired in 2014, through a lawyer for Trump's companies, to evaluate Seven Springs' value. The appraiser said the exercise assumed the estate could be divided into about two dozen building lots for luxury homes.

Once again, McArdle said, Eric Trump touted the property's attributes to him and suggested a supposedly comparable spread — a Connecticut development where lots sold for as much as \$3 million apiece.

"He had a very high opinion of his property," said McArdle, who said he eventually advised in a phone call that Seven Springs was worth up to \$50 million. Eric Trump was included in and responded to emails arranging for McArdle to present his view.

A few months later, Donald Trump's financial statements valued Seven Springs at over \$160 million, according to James' lawsuit.

When asked about McArdle in pretrial testimony this year, Eric Trump said he only "vaguely" recognized the man's name and didn't recall much, if anything, about the appraisals of Seven Springs or the golf course.

"I pour concrete. I operate properties," Eric Trump said. "I don't focus on appraisals between a law firm and Cushman."

Defense lawyer Lazaro Fields, in questioning McArdle, sought to establish that it's not uncommon for owners to talk up their properties' value to appraisers and for their opinions to differ.

"Absolutely," McArdle said, "but ultimately, we're the ones calling the value."

Both Eric and Donald Trump have attended some of the trial but weren't there Thursday, when the court also heard about a \$160 million refinancing loan on a Trump-owned Wall Street office building in 2015.

An internal document prepared by lender Ladder Capital said the "deal strengths" included Trump's stated net worth of nearly \$5.8 billion, over \$300 million of it in cash and other liquid assets — figures that reflected Trump's 2014 financial statement.

"The net worth statement is one of many things that we look at in the underwriting process. I wouldn't say it was a key factor ... it was a factor," Ladder Capital executive Jack Weisselberg testified, explaining that "liquidity was what we were really paying attention to."

Weisselberg is the son of former Trump company finance chief Allen Weisselberg.

The state attorney general is seeking \$250 million and a ban on Trump and other defendants doing business in New York.

In a pretrial ruling, Judge Arthur Engoron found that Trump and his company engaged in fraud, and the judge ordered that a court-appointed receiver take control of some Trump companies. An appeals court has since at least temporarily blocked enforcement of that aspect of the ruling. If upheld, it could strip the

ex-president of control over Trump Tower and other marquee properties.
Both Engoron and James are Democrats.

Communities can't recycle or trash disposable e-cigarettes. So what happens to them?

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the growing popularity of disposable e-cigarettes, communities across the U.S. are confronting a new vaping problem: how to safely get rid of millions of small, battery-powered devices that are considered hazardous waste.

For years, the debate surrounding vaping largely centered on its risks for high school and middle school students enticed by flavors like gummy bear, lemonade and watermelon.

But the recent shift toward e-cigarettes that can't be refilled has created a new environmental dilemma. The devices, which contain nicotine, lithium and other metals, cannot be reused or recycled. Under federal environmental law, they also aren't supposed to go in the trash.

U.S. teens and adults are buying roughly 12 million disposable vapes per month. With little federal guidance, local officials are finding their own ways to dispose of e-cigarettes collected from schools, colleges, vape shops and other sites.

"We are in a really weird regulatory place where there is no legal place to put these and yet we know, every year, tens of millions of disposables are thrown in the trash," said Yogi Hale Hendlin, a health and environmental researcher at the University of California, San Francisco.

In late August, sanitation workers in Monroe County, New York, packed more than 5,500 brightly colored e-cigarettes into 55-gallon steel drums for transport. Their destination? A giant, industrial waste incinerator in northern Arkansas, where they would be melted down.

Sending 350 pounds of vapes across the country to be burned into ash may not sound environmentally friendly. But local officials say it's the only way to keep the nicotine-filled devices out of sewers, waterways and landfills, where their lithium batteries can catch fire.

"These are very insidious devices," said Michael Garland, who directs the county's environmental services. "They're a fire risk and they're certainly an environmental contaminant if not managed properly."

Elsewhere, the disposal process has become both costly and complicated. In New York City, for example, officials are seizing hundreds of thousands of banned vapes from local stores and spending more than \$1 each for disposal.

HAZARDOUS WASTE

Vaping critics say the industry has skirted responsibility for the environmental impact of its products, while federal regulators have failed to force changes that could make vaping components easier to recycle or less wasteful.

Among the possible changes: standards requiring that e-cigarettes be reusable or forcing manufacturers to fund collection and recycling programs. New York, California and several other states have so-called extended product responsibility laws for computers and other electronics. But those laws don't cover vaping products and there are no comparable federal requirements for any industry.

Environmental Protection Agency rules for hazardous waste don't apply to households, meaning it's legal for Americans to throw e-cigarettes in the garbage at home. But most businesses, schools and government facilities are subject to EPA standards in how they handle harmful chemicals like nicotine, which the EPA considers an "acute hazardous waste," because it can be poisonous at high levels.

In the U.S., the push to manage disposable e-cigarettes has chiefly come from schools, which can face stricter regulation if they generate more than a few pounds of hazardous waste per month. Monroe County schools pay \$60 to dispose of each one-gallon container of vapes. More than two thirds of the e-cigarettes collected by the county come from schools.

"Our schools were very relieved because they had confiscated so much of this material," Garland said. "If you think of all the high schools across the country, they are in a very difficult place right now."

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The lithium in e-cigarette batteries is the same highly sought metal used to power electric vehicles and cellphones. But the quantities used in vaping devices are too small to warrant salvage. And nearly all disposable e-cigarette batteries are soldered into the device, making it impractical to separate them for recycling.

Disposable e-cigarettes currently account for about 53% of the multi-billion U.S. vaping market, according to U.S. government figures, more than doubling since 2020.

Their rise is a study in unintended consequences.

In early 2020, the Food and Drug Administration banned nearly all flavors from reusable e-cigarettes like Juul, the cartridge-based device blamed for sparking a nationwide surge in underage vaping. But the policy didn't apply to disposables, opening the door to thousands of new varieties of fruit- and candy-flavored vapes, almost all manufactured in China.

In recent months the FDA has begun trying to block imports of several leading disposable brands, including Elf Bar and Esco Bar. Regulators consider them illegal, but they have been unable to stop their entry to the U.S. and the devices are now ubiquitous in convenience stores, gas stations and other shops.

FDA's tobacco chief, Brian King, said in a statement that his agency "will continue to carefully consider the potential environmental impacts" of vaping products.

THE COST OF CONFISCATING DISPOSABLE E-CIGARETTES

In 2020, New York City outlawed the vast majority of e-cigarette types, banning flavors that can appeal to youngsters.

City employees conduct thousands of inspections annually, and last year issued more than 2,400 citations to corner stores and bodegas selling illegal flavored products. Adding to the challenge are THC vapes sold at hundreds of unlicensed marijuana shops, a separate but related problem that has mushroomed since New York's legalization of recreational pot.

Since last November, officials have seized more than 449,000 vape units, according to city figures. New York City is spending about \$1,400 to destroy each container of 1,200 confiscated vapes, but many more remain in city storage lockers.

"I don't think anyone ever considered the volume of these in our community," said New York Sheriff Anthony Miranda, who leads a task force on the issue. "There's a tremendous amount of resources going into this effort."

A recent lawsuit against four large vaping distributors aims to recoup some of the city's costs.

For now, New Yorkers who vape can bring their used e-cigarettes to city-sponsored waste-collection events.

Ultimately those vapes meet a familiar fate: They are shipped to Gum Springs, Arkansas, to be incinerated by Veolia, an international waste management firm. The company has incinerated more than 1.6 million pounds of vaping waste in recent years, mostly unsold inventory or discontinued products.

Veolia executives say burning e-cigarettes' lithium batteries can damage their incinerators.

"Ideally we don't want to incinerate them because it has to be done very, very slowly. But if have to, we will," said Bob Cappadona, who leads the company's environmental services division.

Veolia also handles e-cigarettes from Boulder County, Colorado, one of the only U.S. jurisdictions that actively tries to recycle e-cigarette batteries and components.

Historically, Boulder has had one of the highest teen vaping rates in the country, peaking at nearly 33% in 2017.

"It was like someone flicked the switch. Suddenly e-cigarettes were everywhere," said Daniel Ryan, principal of Centaurus High School.

Beginning in 2019, county officials began distributing bins to schools for confiscated or discarded e-cigarettes. Last year, they collected 3,500.

County staffers sort the devices by type, separating those with removable batteries for recycling. Disposables are packed and shipped to Veolia's incinerator. Shelly Fuller, who directs the program, says managing vape waste has gotten more costly and labor intensive with the shift to disposables.

"I kind of miss the days when we had Juuls and I could take each battery out and recycle them very

easily," Fuller said. "No one has time to dismantle a thousand Esco Bars."

Hollywood's actors strike is nearing its 100th day. Why hasn't a deal been reached and what's next?

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — While screenwriters are busy back at work, film and TV actors remain on picket lines, with the longest strike in their history set to hit 100 days on Saturday after talks broke off with studios. Here's a look at where things stand, how their stretched-out standoff compares to past strikes, and what happens next.

INSIDE THE ACTORS-STUDIO TALKS THAT FAILED

Hopes were high and leaders of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists were cautiously optimistic when they resumed negotiations on Oct. 2 for the first time since the strike began 2 1/2 months earlier.

The same group of chief executives from the biggest studios had made a major deal just over a week earlier with striking writers, whose leaders celebrated their gains on many issues actors are also fighting for: long-term pay, consistency of employment and control over the use of artificial intelligence.

But the actors' talks were tepid, with days off between sessions and no reports of progress. Then studios abruptly ended them on Oct. 11, saying the actors' demands were exorbitantly expensive and the two sides were too far apart to continue.

"We only met with them a couple of times, Monday, half a day Wednesday, half a day Friday. That was what they were available for," SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher told The Associated Press soon after the talks broke off. "Then this past week, it was Monday and a half a day on Wednesday. And then "Bye bye. I've never really met people that actually don't understand what negotiations mean. Why are you walking away from the table?"

The reasons, according to the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, included a union demand for a fee for each subscriber to streaming services.

"SAG-AFTRA gave the member companies an ultimatum: either agree to a proposal for a tax on subscribers as well as all other open items, or else the strike would continue," the AMPTP said in a statement to the AP. "The member companies responded to SAG-AFTRA's ultimatum that unfortunately, the tax on subscribers poses an untenable economic burden."

Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos, one of the executives in on the bargaining sessions, told investors on an earnings call Wednesday that "This really broke our momentum unfortunately."

SAG-AFTRA leaders said it was ridiculous to frame this demand as as though it were a tax on customers, and said it was the executives themselves who wanted to shift from a model based on a show's popularity to one based on number of subscribers.

"We made big moves in their direction that have just been ignored and not responded to," Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, SAG-AFTRA's national executive director and chief negotiator, told the AP. "We made changes to our AI proposal. We made dramatic changes to what used to be our streaming revenue share proposal," Crabtree-Ireland said.

The studios said just after the talks broke off that the per-subscriber charge would cost them \$800 million annually, a figure SAG-AFTRA said was a vast overestimate.

The AMPTP later responded that the number was based on a union request for \$1 per customer per year, which was lowered to 57 cents after SAG-AFTRA changed its evaluation to cut out non-relevant programming like news and sports.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IN THE ACTORS STRIKE?

The actors are in unscripted territory, with no end in sight. Their union has never been on a strike this long, nor been on strike at all since before many of its members were born. Not even its veteran leaders, like Crabtree-Ireland, with the union for 20 years, have found themselves in quite these circumstances.

As they did for months before the talks broke off, members and leaders will rally, picket and speak out

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publicly until the studios signal a willingness to talk again. No one knows how long that will take. SAG-AFTRA says it is willing to resume at any time, but that won't change its demands.

"I think that they think that we're going to cower," Drescher said. "But that's never going to happen because this is a crossroads and we must stay on course."

The writers did have their own false start with studios that may give some reason for optimism. Their union attempted to restart negotiations with studios in mid-August, more than three months into their strike. Those talks went nowhere, breaking off after a few days. A month later, the studio alliance came calling again. Those talks took off, with most of their demands being met after five marathon days that resulted in a tentative deal that its members would vote to approve almost unanimously.

HOW DID PREVIOUS ACTORS STRIKES PLAY OUT?

Hollywood actors strikes have been less frequent and shorter than those by writers. The Screen Actors Guild (they added the "AFTRA" in a 2011 merger) has gone on strike against film and TV studios only three times in its history.

In each case, emerging technology fueled the dispute. In 1960 — the only previous time actors and writers struck simultaneously — the central issue was actors seeking pay for when their work in film was aired on television, compensation the industry calls residuals. The union, headed by future U.S. President Ronald Reagan, was a smaller and much less formal entity then. The vote to strike took place in the home of actors Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, the parents of current SAG-AFTRA member and vocal striker Jamie Lee Curtis.

Mid-strike, the actors and studios called a truce so all could attend the Academy Awards — a move forbidden under today's union rules. Host Bob Hope called the gathering "Hollywood's most glamorous strike meeting."

In the end, a compromise was reached where SAG dropped demands for residuals from past films in exchange for a donation to their pension fund, along with a formula for payment when future films aired on TV. Their 42-day work stoppage began and ended all within the span of the much longer writers strike.

A 1980 strike would be the actors' longest for film and television until this year. That time, they were seeking payment for their work appearing on home video cassettes and cable TV, along with significant hikes in minimum compensation for roles. A tentative deal was reached with significant gains but major compromises in both areas. Union leadership declared the strike over after 67 days, but many members were unhappy and balked at returning to work. It was nearly a month before leaders could rally enough votes to ratify the deal.

This time, it was the Emmy Awards that fell in the middle of the strike. The Television Academy held a ceremony, but after a boycott was called, only one acting winner, Powers Boothe, was there to accept his trophy.

Other segments of the actors union have gone on strike too, including several long standoffs over the TV commercials contract. A 2016-2017 strike by the union's video game voice actors lasted a whopping 11 months. That segment of the union could strike again soon if a new contract deal isn't reached.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MOVIES AND TV SHOWS?

The return of writers has gotten the Hollywood production machine churning again, with rooms full of scribes penning new seasons of shows that had been suspended and film writers finishing scripts. But the finished product will await the end of actors strike, and production will remain suspended many TV shows and dozens of films, including "Wicked," "Deadpool 3" and "Mission Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part 2."

The Emmys, whose nominations were announced the same day the actors strike was called, opted to wait for the stars this time and move their ceremony from September to January, though that date could be threatened too.

The Oscars are a long way off in March, but the campaigns to win them are usually well underway by now. With some exceptions — non-studio productions approved by the union — performers are prohibited from promoting their films at press junkets or on red carpets. Director Martin Scorsese has been giving interviews about his new Oscar contender "Killers of the Flower Moon." Star and SAG-AFTRA member Leonardo DiCaprio hasn't.

Fewer Californians are moving to Texas, but more are going to Florida and Arizona

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The number of former Californians who became Texans dropped slightly last year, but some of that slack was picked up by Arizona and Florida, which saw their tallies of ex-Californians grow, according to new state-to-state migration figures released Thursday.

The flow of Californians to Texas has marked the largest state-to-state movement in the U.S. for the past two years, but it decreased from more than 107,000 people in 2021 to more than 102,000 residents in 2022, as real estate in Texas' largest cities has grown more expensive. In Florida, meanwhile, the number of former Californians went from more than 37,000 people in 2021 to more than 50,000 people in 2022, and in Arizona, it went from more than 69,000 people to 74,000 people during that same time period.

California had a net loss of more than 113,000 residents last year, a number that would have been much higher if not for people moving to the state from other countries and a natural increase from more births than deaths. More than 343,000 people left California for another state last year, the highest number of any U.S. state.

Housing costs are driving decisions to move out of California, which with 39 million residents is the most populous U.S. state, according to Manuel Pastor, a professor of sociology and American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of Southern California.

"We are losing younger folks, and I think we will see people continuing to migrate where housing costs are lower," Pastor said. "There are good jobs in California, but housing is incredibly expensive. It hurts young families, and it hurts immigrant families."

Nevada also was a top destination for former Californians, but its gains dropped from more than 62,000 people in 2021 to more than 48,000 people in 2022.

The second-largest state-to-state movement in the U.S., from New York to Florida, remained almost unchanged from 2021 to 2022, at around 92,000 movers, according to the migration figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, which are based on American Community Survey one-year estimates.

There was a decrease last year in the outflow of former New Yorkers to New Jersey, dropping from more than 91,000 people in 2021 to more than 75,000 people in 2022. Year-over-year increases in former New Yorkers moving to Connecticut, Texas and Georgia made up for some of that cross-state drop.

Georgia was the most popular destination for residents leaving Florida last year and that outflow jumped from more than 49,000 residents in 2021 to more than 51,000 people in 2022.

Overall, more people living in one U.S. state moved to a different state last year in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic than they did in the previous year, though international migration was the primary driver of growth last year. In 2022, more than 8.2 million U.S. residents lived in a different state than they had in the previous year, compared to 7.8 million U.S. residents in 2021.

Among them were Evan Wu and Todd Brown, who moved from Corvallis, Oregon, to Honolulu in January 2022 for Wu's job as an oncologist and cancer researcher, then at the start of this year to Southern California. Moving has been a constant for them in the past three years. In addition to Oregon, Hawaii and Southern California, they have lived in Baltimore and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Along the way, they added three daughters under the ages of 2 to their family.

They are now in the process of moving from Southern California back to Hawaii, and once that is done, they will have storage units in five cities with possessions they had to leave behind.

"I love moving, but Todd hates it," Wu said. "I love the change of scenery. It keeps you on your toes and keeps you sharp."

Fed Chair Powell: Slower economic growth may be needed to conquer stubbornly high inflation

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Thursday that inflation remains too high and that bringing it down to the Fed's target level will likely require a slower-growing economy and job market.

Powell noted that inflation has cooled significantly from a year ago. But he cautioned that the economy is growing faster than the Fed had expected and could continue to keep inflation elevated. As a result, the Fed chair said, it's not yet clear whether inflation is on a steady path back to the Fed's 2% target.

"We certainly have a very resilient economy on our hands," Powell said in a discussion at the Economic Club of New York. "Many forecasts called for the U.S. economy to be in recession this year. Not only has that not happened; growth is now running for this year above its longer-run trend. So that's been a surprise."

Powell's comments echoed speeches from other Fed officials this week, which have underscored that they are grappling with an unusual and unexpected development: Inflation is slowing even while economic growth and hiring have been robust.

In its drive to tame inflation, the Fed has raised its key rate 11 times since March 2022 to about 5.4%, its highest level in 22 years. Though inflation has tumbled from its peaks of last year, it still has further to go to reach the Fed's 2% inflation target. Doing so is likely to require slower economic growth.

If the healthy economic expansion and hiring endure, Powell said Thursday, the central bank might have to further raise its benchmark rate. The Fed's long series of rate hikes have raised the costs of auto and home loans, credit card borrowing and business loans, imposing financial burdens on many households and companies.

At the same time, Powell suggested that the Fed might not have to impose another hike, at least not soon, because of a spike in longer-term bond rates. The rise in long-term rates has contributed to a jump in the average cost of a 30-year mortgage to nearly 8%. Higher long-term rates, coming on top of the Fed's own short-term rate hikes, could help slow growth and cool inflation, thereby easing pressure on the Fed to hike further.

"That's exactly what we're trying to achieve," Powell said.

"At the margin," he said, "it could" mean the Fed won't have to further raise rates.

Yet Powell also said there was no evidence that interest rates are too high right now, a signal that he thinks the Fed could raise them further without causing a recession in the process.

Asked Thursday about the economy's resilience despite the rate hikes, Powell suggested that interest rates simply "haven't been high enough for long enough." Many economists expect that the Fed, even if it doesn't raise its rate again, will keep them high for an extended period.

Last month, Fed officials predicted that they would impose one more rate hike before the end of the year. Economists and Wall Street traders expect the central bank to leave rates unchanged when it next meets in about two weeks.

Several recent economic reports have suggested that the economy is still growing robustly and that inflation could remain persistently elevated.

In September, hiring was much greater than had been expected, with the unemployment rate staying near a half-century low. Strong hiring typically empowers workers to demand higher wages, which, in turn, can worsen inflation if their employers pass on the higher labor costs by raising their prices.

Yet so far, Powell noted that wage growth has slowed. Other measures of the job market are also cooling, a trend that could keep inflation contained. Indeed, even with solid economic growth, inflation has largely decelerated: The Fed's preferred measure of price changes eased to 3.5% in September compared with 12 months earlier, down sharply from a year-over-year peak of 7% in June 2022.

On Wednesday, Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's governing board, suggested that the slowdown in inflation even as the economy has remained healthy is "great news" but also "a little too good to be true." He noted that growth could either slow, helping cool inflation, or remain strong, fueling higher inflation and requiring further rate hikes by the Fed to contain it.

"It is too soon to tell," Waller said. "I believe we can wait, watch and see how the economy evolves before making definitive moves."

Desperate and disaffected, Argentines to vote whether upstart Milei leads them into the unknown

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Once an activist in a left-leaning youth movement, Rubén Dávalos is now among the millions of disaffected voters in Argentina planning to cast their ballots for right-wing populist and self-described anarcho-capitalist, Javier Milei.

"In this country, you can't plan for the future," said the 30-year-old Dávalos, who began selling cellphone accessories at flea markets after surging inflation ate away at his manufacturing job wages. "I know I'm going to die poor."

Milei, a pundit-turned-presidential candidate, has captivated the downtrodden and most polls showing him with a slight lead in Sunday's election in South America's second-largest economy. Earlier this year, his eyebrow-raising bluster seemed more like a sideshow to boost television ratings than the launch of a viable candidacy — until he shocked the political establishment by winning the most votes in the August primary.

Polls indicate Milei will fall short of the votes needed to avoid a November runoff. Most show Economy Minister Sergio Massa of the ruling center-left Union for the Homeland coalition in second place, followed by former Security Minister Patricia Bullrich of the main opposition coalition United for Change.

"With the economy staring into the abyss, the upcoming election is arguably one of the most important ones in Argentina's recent history," Kimberley Sperrfechter, an emerging markets economist focused on Latin America at Capital Economics wrote in an analysis this week.

Argentines are "facing the choice between more of the same policies that put the country in this situation in the first place" and "a shock-therapy style approach to tackle the country's economic issues," she said.

Milei rose to prominence as a television commentator who angrily blasted the country's "political caste" as parasites while the wider population suffers. His message resonated in a country where even those with jobs often feel they are frantically hustling to stay where they are. Many have fallen behind; over the last seven years, Argentina's poverty rate has jumped 10 percentage points to 40%.

Much like former U.S. President Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Milei has won broad support by scoffing at politically correct niceties while presenting himself as an outsider capable of rescuing his distressed nation. Denouncing socialism has been a constant throughout his campaign, and he says halting its advance globally is a mission he shares with Trump and Bolsonaro, who has endorsed him.

Whoever wins will inherit a slew of economic troubles, including the spectacular challenge of paying down a crushing \$44 billion debt to the International Monetary Fund. Milei pledges to slash government spending, eliminate the central bank and dollarize the economy to put the brakes on inflation currently running at 140% annually. And he assures voters there is nothing to fear about his audacious proposals.

"These are the most important elections of the last 100 years," Milei told a rally in Buenos Aires on Wednesday. "Let's not resign ourselves to nothing changing. Let's not resign ourselves to becoming poorer every day."

As he spoke, the adoring crowd repeatedly chanted: "The caste is afraid!"

But his support is somewhat volatile, given that much of it stems from younger voters whose ideologies aren't solidified and who are easily swayed by social media, said Andrei Roman, CEO of Brazil-based pollster Atlas Intel, whose latest survey shows Massa ahead. Roman noted that about 40% of respondents who didn't vote in the August primaries and plan to vote Sunday say they will cast their ballots for Massa.

To rally support, Massa has issued stark warnings about what he says Milei's plans for public spending cuts would mean for social welfare programs, education and health care. Such fear-mongering may be a key reason he has remained competitive, according to Lucas Romero, head of Synopsis, a local political consultancy.

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Valeria Jiménez, a 28-year-old retail worker, says she will vote for Massa — though she is hardly enthused by the prospect.

"I don't see another option; the other ones scare me," said the resident of a middle-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

Some of the trepidation around Milei stems not just from the unknowns of his planned economic policy, but also the socially conservative talking points he has touted on the campaign trail.

He opposes abortion, which is legal in Argentina, and has said sex education is a left-wing plot to destroy the family. Milei is also in favor of relaxing gun control and rejects the notion of human-caused climate change.

His libertarianism can take on peculiar contours: He says the law shouldn't prevent people from selling their organs and openly pondered whether selling one's children could be a legitimate personal choice.

Much of his agenda would depend on building alliances in Congress, even though his party's legislative candidates stand to ride Milei's coattails to dozens of congressional seats in Sunday's election — when Argentines will vote for just over half of lawmakers in the lower house and one-third in the Senate.

Bullrich, the former security minister who most polls show in third place, has been seeking to persuade voters that she, as a member of a party with a track record of governorships and experience negotiating legislation, is the candidate capable of bringing about reform to Argentina. She is pushing for more business-friendly policies and, like Milei, lower public spending.

Her argument has convinced some voters, including Mariano Peracca, a 38-year-old lawyer.

Bullrich "is the best expression of change and ... has a consolidated team in all areas in which power is wielded," Peracca said.

Milei, however, has billed the established relationships and experience of Bullrich and Massa as a reflection of the entrenched elite that must be dislodged.

That message has resonance with some voters.

"The politicians in this country stole so much money and caused so much suffering to my family," said Benjamin Correa, a 17-year-old high school student at Milei's rally Wednesday. "With Javier Milei, we are going to have a 180-degree change."

Las Vegas Aces become first repeat WNBA champs in 21 years, beating New York Liberty 70-69 in Game 4

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A'ja Wilson and the Las Vegas Aces secured their place as one of the greatest teams in WNBA history.

The Aces became the first team to repeat as champions in 21 years, getting 24 points and 16 rebounds from Wilson and a defensive stop in the closing seconds to beat the New York Liberty 70-69 in Game 4 of the Finals on Wednesday night.

"It's not easy, as you know. This is what it's all about," Wilson said. "Not a lot of people get to do it. To be short-handed and win is amazing. It makes the win that much better. It's hard to get back to the Finals to win again."

The Aces joined the Los Angeles Sparks (2001-02) and the Houston Comets (1997-2000) as the only teams in league history to win consecutive titles.

Las Vegas did it without starters Chelsea Gray and Kiah Stokes, who were both sidelined with foot injuries suffered in Game 3. Gray, the 2022 WNBA Finals MVP, was constantly in the ear of her teammates during timeouts and shouting encouragement from the sideline. Las Vegas was also still missing veteran Candace Parker, who had foot surgery in late July.

"We've been facing adversity all season, playing without different players. ... We have some professional fighters," said Alysha Clark, who was pressed into the starting lineup Wednesday. "To weather the storm of everything we went through, to show up every single day. To be in this moment right now and do it together, it speaks volumes about us, our chemistry."

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Coach Becky Hammon said this was the closest team she has ever been around. The entire team attended the postgame news conference and cheered every answer, especially those by Wilson, the Finals MVP, who finished third in the regular-season MVP balloting.

With the game tied at 64, Las Vegas scored six straight points, including the first four by Jackie Young, to go ahead 70-64 with 1:26 left.

Courtney Vandersloot hit a 3-pointer on New York's next possession, then stole the ball from Kelsey Plum, which led to Sabrina Ionescu's foul-line jumper to get the Liberty within one with 41.7 seconds left.

On the ensuing possession, Las Vegas worked the shot clock down before Hammon called timeout with 3 seconds left on the shot clock. The Aces got the ball to Wilson on a lob, but Breanna Stewart blocked the shot, giving New York one last chance.

After a timeout with 8.8 seconds left, the Liberty got the ball to Stewart, who was double-teamed. The ball swung over to Vandersloot in the corner, but her shot missed badly, setting off a wild celebration by the Aces at midcourt.

"It's a play we've ran before, get the ball to Stewie's hand," Liberty coach Sandy Brondello said. "Sometimes they work, sometimes they don't. We got it where we wanted to, but didn't make it."

Vandersloot finished with 19 points and Betnijah Laney added 15 for New York.

Hammon said before the game she would be "throwing the kitchen sink at (the Liberty), see what sticks, see what works."

The Aces rotated defenses, which stymied New York after the Liberty scored 23 points in the first quarter.

"I think they were throwing whatever defense they had at us and make sure it's ugly," Stewart said. "Sometimes we lost our flow and ball movement."

Hammon started WNBA sixth woman of the year Clark and Cayla George in place of Gray and Stokes. Clark did a stellar job on her former Seattle Storm teammate Stewart, holding her to 10 points on 3-of-17 shooting. George had 11 points.

"Just knowing what she likes to do. And just locking in and making sure that I don't give that to her," Clark said of guarding Stewart. "I'm so proud of this team."

This was the first close game of the season between these teams. The four regular-season matchups were all blowouts with the closest contest being a nine-point win by New York on Aug. 28. The first three games of the WNBA Finals were also routs, with New York winning Game 3 87-73 to stave off elimination.

Game 4 was so tense that Ionescu was seen vomiting into a trash can during a timeout midway through the fourth quarter, shortly after she hit a 3-pointer to get the Liberty within 60-58. Ionescu stayed in the game after the timeout.

New York's record fell to 2-10 all-time in the WNBA Finals. Teams that fall behind 0-2 in the best-of-five series Finals have lost all nine of those series.

STAR-STUDDERD CROWD

Once again, New York drew dozens of celebrities to the game, including basketball royalty Sue Bird and Dawn Staley — the South Carolina coach who loudly cheered on her former star player, Wilson. The two embraced in a long hug after the game. Also in attendance were Liberty Ring of Honor members Vickie Johnson and Sue Wicks, and actors Jennifer Connelly, Issa Rae and Jason Sudeikis.

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 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.

Mahsa Amini, the Kurdish-Iranian woman who died in police custody, is awarded EU human rights prize

STRASBOURG, France (AP) — Mahsa Amini, the 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman who died in police custody in Iran last year, sparking worldwide protests against the country's conservative Islamic theocracy, was awarded the European Union's top human rights prize on Thursday.

The EU award, named for Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, was created in 1988 to honor individuals

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or groups who defend human rights and fundamental freedoms. Sakharov, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, died in 1989.

Other finalists this year included Vilma Núñez de Escorcía and Roman Catholic Bishop Rolando Álvarez — two emblematic figures in the fight for the defense of human rights in Nicaragua — and a trio of women from Poland, El Salvador and the United States leading a fight for “free, safe and legal abortion.”

Amini died on Sept. 16, 2022, after she was arrested for allegedly violating Iran’s mandatory headscarf law. European Parliament President Roberta Metsola said that day will “live in infamy,” adding that her “brutal murder” marked a turning point.

“It has triggered a women-led movement that is making history,” she said as she announced the awarding of the prize to Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran.

“The world has heard the chants of ‘Women, Life, Liberty.’ Three words that have become a rallying cry for all those standing up for equality, for dignity and for freedom in Iran,” Metsola said.

Women have played a leading role in the protests, with many publicly removing the compulsory Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab.

The 27-nation EU has imposed sanctions on Iranian officials and organizations — including ministers, military officers and Iran’s morality police — for human rights abuses over the protests.

“We stand with those who, even from prison, continue to keep women, life and freedom alive,” Metsola said. “By choosing them as laureates for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2023, this House remembers their struggle and continues to honor all those who have paid the ultimate price for liberty.”

Amini died three days after she was arrested by Iran’s morality police. While authorities said she suffered a heart attack, Amini’s supporters said she was beaten by police and died as a result of her injuries.

Her death triggered protests that spread across the country and rapidly escalated into calls for the overthrow of Iran’s four-decade-old Islamic theocracy.

Authorities responded with a violent crackdown in which more than 500 people were killed and over 22,000 others were detained, according to rights groups. The demonstrations largely died down early this year, but there are still widespread signs of discontent. For several months, women could be seen openly flaunting the headscarf rule in Tehran and other cities, prompting a renewed crackdown over the summer.

The award ceremony will take place on Dec. 13.

Last year’s prize was awarded to the people of Ukraine and their representatives for their resistance to Russia’s invasion and defiance during the ongoing war.

Today in History: October 20

3 members of Lynyrd Skynyrd killed in plane crash

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 20, the 293rd day of 2023. There are 72 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Oct. 20, 1977, three members of the rock group Lynyrd Skynyrd, including lead singer Ronnie Van Zant, were killed along with three others in the crash of a chartered plane near McComb, Mississippi.

On this date:

In 1803, the U.S. Senate ratified the Louisiana Purchase.

In 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee opened hearings into alleged Communist influence and infiltration in the U.S. motion picture industry.

In 1967, a jury in Meridian, Mississippi, convicted seven men of violating the civil rights of slain civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner; the seven received prison terms ranging from 3 to 10 years.

In 1973, in what would become known as the “Saturday Night Massacre,” special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox was dismissed and Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and Deputy Attorney General Wil-

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liam B. Ruckelshaus resigned.

In 1976, 78 people were killed when the Norwegian tanker Frosta rammed the commuter ferry George Prince on the Mississippi River near New Orleans.

In 1979, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum was dedicated in Boston.

In 1990, three members of the rap group 2 Live Crew were acquitted by a jury in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., of violating obscenity laws with an adults-only concert in nearby Hollywood the previous June.

In 2001, officials announced that anthrax had been discovered in a House postal facility on Capitol Hill.

In 2004, a U.S. Army staff sergeant, Ivan "Chip" Frederick, pleaded guilty to abusing Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. (Frederick was sentenced to eight years in prison; he was paroled in 2007.)

In 2011, Moammar Gadhafi, 69, Libya's dictator for 42 years, was killed as revolutionary fighters overwhelmed his hometown of Sirte (SURT) and captured the last major bastion of resistance two months after his regime fell.

In 2018, Saudi Arabia announced that U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi (jah-MAHL' khahr-SHOHK'-jee) had been killed in Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul; there was immediate international skepticism over the Saudi account that Khashoggi had died during a "fistfight." (A U.S. intelligence report later concluded that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman had likely approved Khashoggi's killing by a team of Saudi security and intelligence officials.)

In 2020, two weeks before Election Day, President Donald Trump called on Attorney General William Barr to immediately launch an investigation into unverified claims about Democrat Joe Biden and his son Hunter, effectively demanding that the Justice Department abandon its historic resistance to getting involved in elections.

In 2021, Nikolas Cruz pleaded guilty to murdering 17 people during a February, 2018, rampage at his former high school in Parkland, Florida.

Today's Birthdays: Japan's Empress Michiko is 89. Rockabilly singer Wanda Jackson is 86. Former actor Rev. Mother Dolores Hart is 85. Actor William "Rusty" Russ is 73. Actor Melanie Mayron is 71. Retired MLB All-Star Keith Hernandez is 70. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., is 68. Movie director Danny Boyle is 67. Former Labor Secretary Hilda Solis is 66. Actor Viggo Mortensen is 65. Vice President Kamala Harris is 59. Rock musician Jim Sonefeld (Hootie & The Blowfish) is 59. Rock musician Doug Eldridge (Oleander) is 56. Journalist Sunny Hostin (TV: "The View") is 55. Political commentator and blogger Michelle Malkin is 53. Actor Kenneth Choi is 52. Rapper Snoop Dogg is 52. Singer Dannii Minogue is 52. Singer Jimi Westbrook (country group Little Big Town) is 52. Actor/comedian Dan Fogler is 47. Rock musician Jon Natchez (The War on Drugs) is 47. Actor Sam Witwer is 46. Actor John Krasinski is 44. Rock musician Daniel Tichenor (Cage the Elephant) is 44. Actor Katie Featherston is 41. Actor Jennifer Nicole Freeman is 38.