

Groton Daily Independent

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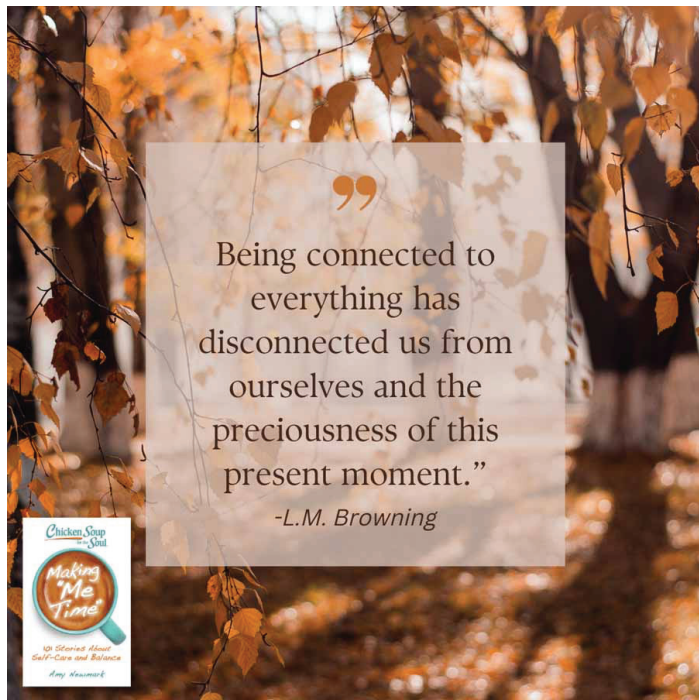
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Saturday, Oct. 21

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., Wor-



ship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship/Confirmation, 10:30 a.m.; No Sunday school; Choir, 7 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

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

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

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Groton Daily Independent
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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Ohio Congressman Jim Jordan has failed in his third bid to become House Speaker following a third vote in the House of Representatives. Support for Jordan dropped even further, with 25 GOP lawmakers voting against him this time, down from 20 in the first vote on Tuesday and 22 in the second vote on Wednesday.

Judge Arthur Engoron has threatened to imprison Donald Trump for violating a gag order placed against him in his ongoing New York fraud trial.

Police are investigating the killing of associate circuit court judge Andrew Wilkinson on Thursday evening, officials said. Wilkinson was found with gunshot wounds in the driveway of his home in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Tropical storm Tammy, the 19th named storm of the hurricane season, may be about to strengthen into a hurricane as it moves northwards. The storm is currently around 100 miles east of Barbados.

A judge in Texas has ruled that controversial Infowars host Alex Jones cannot use bankruptcy protection to avoid paying the \$1.1 billion he was ordered to pay to families of the victims of the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012.

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.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Kyiv officials on Friday celebrated Russia losing more than 5,000 tanks since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022..

U.S. citizens trying to leave Gaza have been warned of a potentially chaotic transit into Egypt after the U.S. Office of Palestinian Affairs said it had received "information" that the Rafah crossing would open on Saturday.

Israel is evacuating the roughly 20,000 residents of the town of Kiryat Shmona near the Lebanese border, over fears of cross-border attacks launched by Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. The White House has requested that Congress provide more than \$105 billion in aid to Ukraine and Israel.

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Fjeldheim has season high 19 kills in Groton's win over Redfield

Groton Area had a near perfect clean sweep of Redfield in volleyball action Friday at Redfield. The varsity lost one set, but besides that, all teams won their matches.

The Tigers won the varsity match, but had to hold off a stubborn 9-15 Redfield team, which won the first set, 25-23. The Pheasants jumped out to a 3-0 lead. Groton Area tied it at five and thereafter, it was tied four more times before Redfield took a 16-13 lead. The Pheasants led, 24-19, but Groton's rally fell short, 25-23. Chesney Weber had four kills in that set while Anna Fjeldheim and Sydney Liecht each had three kills, Rylee Dunker had a kill, a block and an ace serve, Emma Kutter had a kill and a block and Elizabeth Flihs had a kill. Cecilia Suchor led Redfield with four kills.

Fjeldheim was on fire in the second set, leading the Tigers with nine kills as Groton Area won, 25-16. Weber had three kills, Leicht had two ace serves and a kill, Dunker had two kills, Flihs had a kill and an ace serve and Faith Traphagen had a block. Katie Rozell led Redfield with four kills.

The third set was tied three times in the early part with two lead changes as Redfield then took charge and led, 7-3. The Pheasants had a five point lead late in the set, 19-14, but Groton Area would score seven straight points to take a 21-19 lead and the Tigers would score the last three points for the 25-21 win. Weber had four kills, Leicht had two kills and an ace serve, Carly Guthmiller had two ace serves, Fjeldheim and Traphagen each had a kill and Flihs had a kill and an ace serve. Rozell led Redfield with four ace serves and three kills and Kinley Smith had two kills and two blocks.

Redfield kept the fourth set challenging for while as it was tied three times up until 11. Redfield seemed to run out of steam as the Tigers continued to ground the Pheasants. Groton Area outscored Redfield, 7-1, to take an 18-12 lead and went on for the 25-18 win. Fjeldheim had six kills in that set while Flihs and Leicht each had two kills, Traphagen had a kill and a block and Guthmiller and Dunker each had a kill. Charlie Jungwirth and Suchor led the Pheasants with two kills and Rozell had a kill and an ace serve.

The Tigers earned 66 of its 100 points for 66 percent while Redfield earned just 37 of its 80 points for 46 percent.

Fjeldheim had a season high 19 kills, with 45 of 49 attacks. Weber had was 27 of 32 in attacks with 14 kills and an ace serve, Leicht had eight kills and was 24 of 25 in serves with three ace serves, Flihs had 39 assists, five kills and two ace serves, Dunker had four kills, one ace and one block, Traphagen had two kills and two blocks, Guthmiller had 24 digs, was 12 of 14 in serves with two ace serves and one kill, and Kutter had one kill and one block. Laila Roberts had 20 digs and four assists.

Rozell led Redfield with nine kills and five ace serves, Suchor had nine kills, Smith had five kills and two block, Jungwirth had six kills, Hayden Gall had two ace serves and Chloe Zens had one kill.

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency and Locke Electric.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-11 and 25-17. Jaedeyn Penning led Groton Area with seven kills and one ace serve, McKenne Tietz had four kills, Kella Tracy three kills, Chesney Weber, Taryn Traphagen and Talli Wright each had two kills, Faith Traphagen had two blocks, Sydney Locke had a kill and an ace serve and Jerica Locke had an ace serve. Layla Hardie led Redfield with three kills and an ace serve. The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by fans of Jaedyn Penning.

Groton Area won the C match by identical scores of 25-13. Hannah Sandness led Groton Area with six ace serves and a kill, Libby Althoff had three kills and three ace serves, Taryn Traphagen and Emerlee Jones each had four kills, Avery Crank had four ace serves, McKenna Tietz had two ace serves and Brenna Imrie, Leah Jones and Teagan Hanten each had a kill. Madysen Morissette had three kills for Redfield and Jessie Ratigan had two kills and an ace serve. The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the White House Inn.

Groton Area won the eight grade match, 25-22 and 25-16. The Tigers won the seventh grade match, 25-12 and 31-29.

U.S. Winter Outlook: Wetter South, warmer North

Drought improvement likely across the SE, Gulf Coast and Texas amid ongoing El Nino

This year, El Nino is in place heading into winter for the first time in four years, driving the outlook for warmer-than-average temperatures for the northern tier of the continental United States, according to NOAA's U.S. Winter Outlook released today by the Climate Prediction Center — a division of the National Weather Service.

"These outlooks provide critical guidance on the upcoming season for many industries and sectors of our economy, from energy producers to commodities markets to agricultural interests to tourism," said Sarah Kapnick, Ph.D., NOAA chief scientist. "With a strengthening El Nino and more potential climate extremes in an already record-breaking year, we're lucky to have scientists like those at the Climate Prediction Center helping to build a Weather and Climate-Ready Nation by providing critical operational seasonal climate predictions."

From December through February, NOAA predicts wetter-than-average conditions for northern Alaska, portions of the West, the southern Plains, Southeast, Gulf Coast and lower mid-Atlantic and drier-than-average conditions across the northern tier of the U.S., especially in the northern Rockies and High Plains and near the Great Lakes.

"An enhanced southern jet stream and associated moisture often present during strong El Nino events supports high odds for above-average precipitation for the Gulf Coast, lower Mississippi Valley and Southeast states this winter," said Jon Gottschalck, chief of the Operational Prediction Branch of the Climate Prediction Center.

NOAA forecasters, in collaboration with the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), continue to monitor extreme, ongoing drought conditions that have persisted through the southern and central U.S. and worsening drought in Hawaii.

"According to the Oct. 17 U.S. Drought Monitor, a third of the country, including Puerto Rico, is in drought," said Brad Pugh, operational drought lead with NOAA's Climate Prediction Center. "During late October, heavy precipitation is likely to result in drought improvement for the central U.S. El Nino with its enhanced precipitation is expected to provide drought relief to the southern U.S. during the next few months."

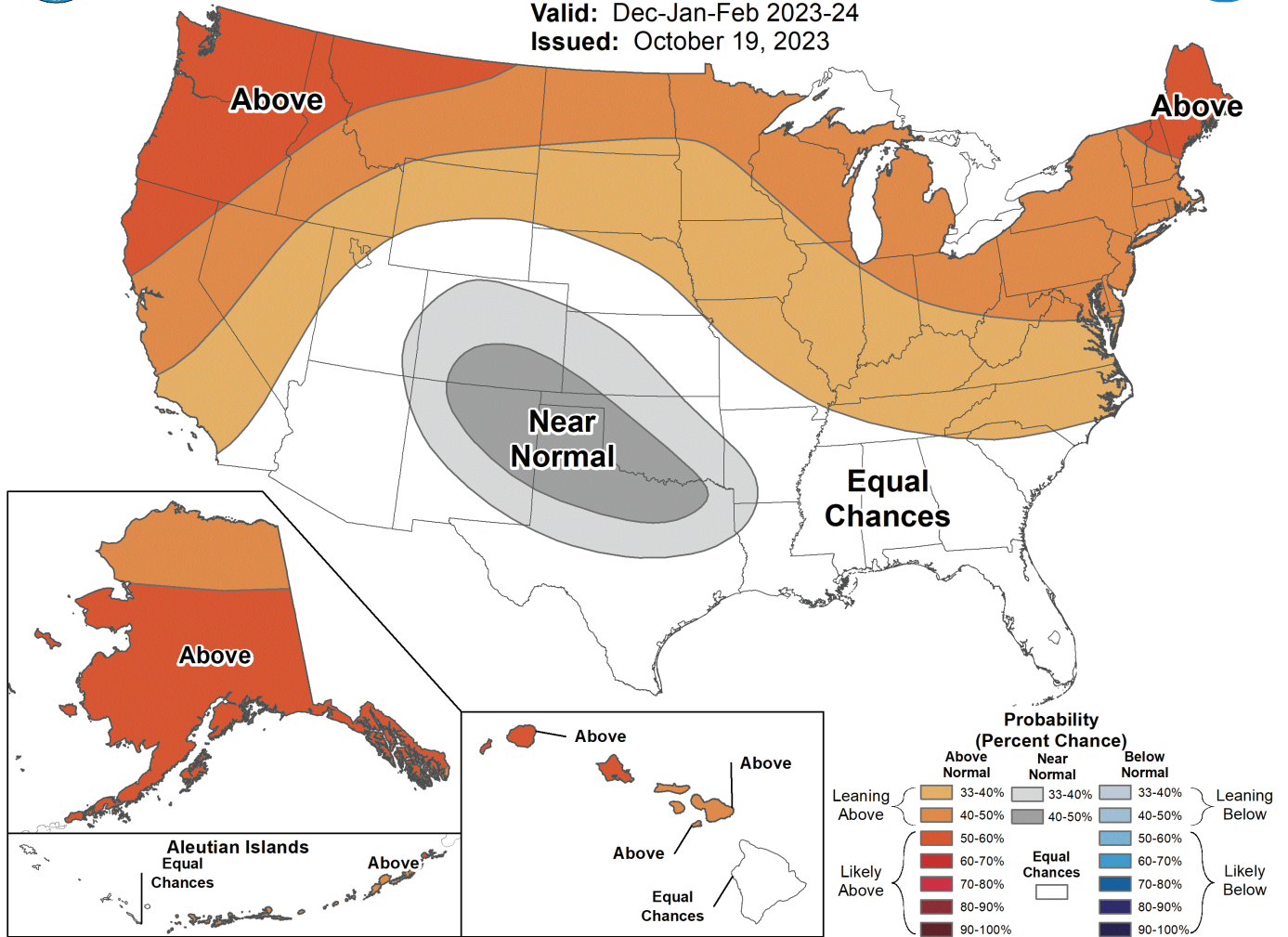
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Seasonal Temperature Outlook

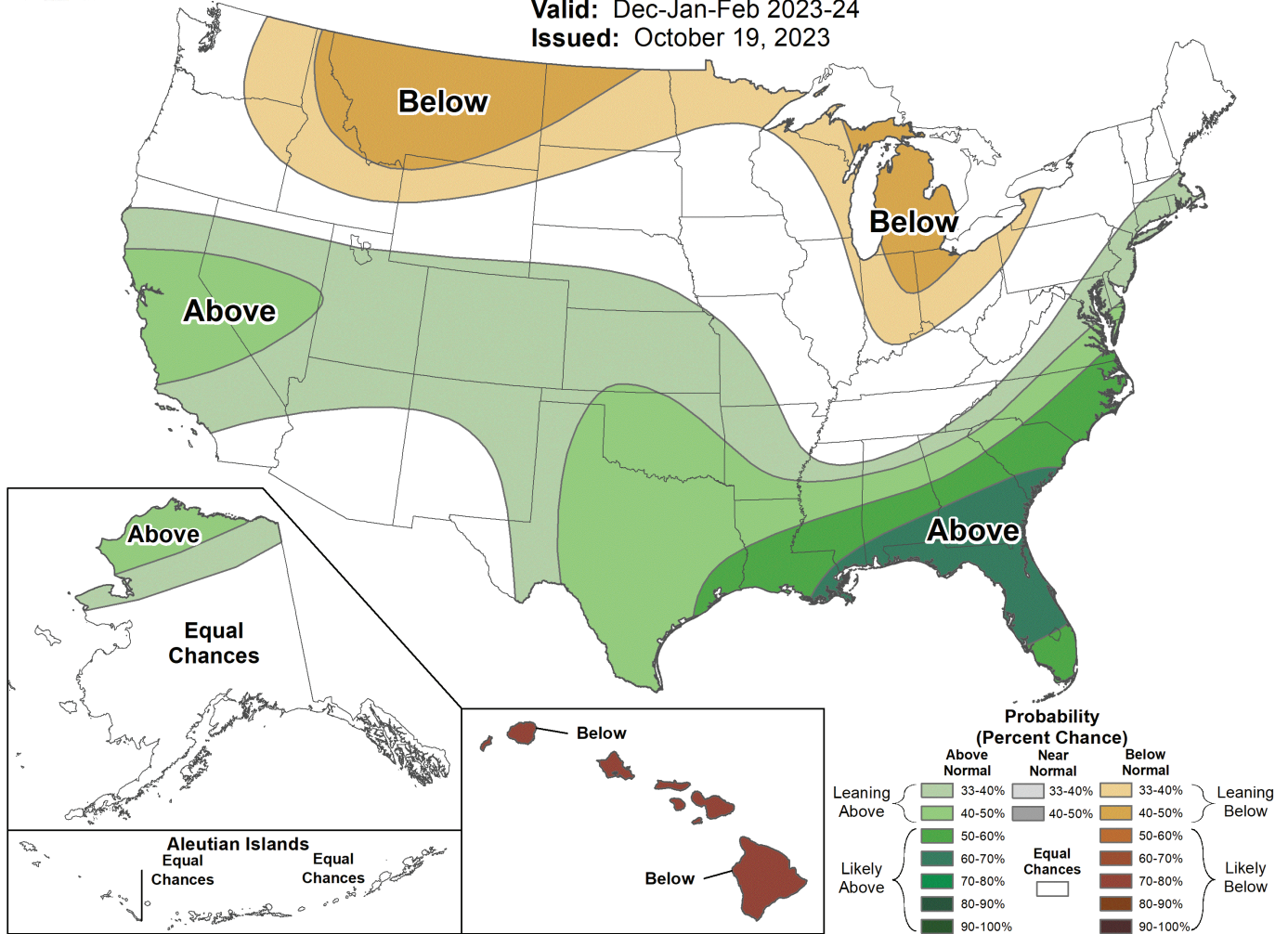
Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2023-24
 Issued: October 19, 2023





Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2023-24
 Issued: October 19, 2023



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No. 1 Wildcats Sneak Past Wolves

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University volleyball team battled and rallied back against the top team in NCAA Division II volleyball on Friday, falling in five sets to No. 1 Wayne State College. In front of 1,358 fans the Wolves played one of their best matches of the season, recording match highs in digs, assists, and aces.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 2, WSC 3

Records: NSU 15-5 (7-4 NSIC), WSC 20-1 (11-0 NSIC)

Attendance: 1358

HOW IT HAPPENED

It was an exciting first set with Wayne edging a 28-26 victory, followed up by a 25-20 Wildcat victory in set two

Northern stormed back with 25-20 and 25-21 victories in sets three and four, forcing the decisive frame

The Wolves led 8-7 at the set break, however ultimately fell 15-12 as the Wildcats tallied 12 kills to the Wolves seven

Each team recorded 65 kills with Northern adding 90 digs, 61 assists, 14 blocks, and seven aces

Wayne State hit .203 in the match, including a match high .375 in the fifth set, while the Wolves hit .154 overall and .333 in the fourth set

Hanna Thompson had a career evening with a team leading 25 kills, followed by Natalia Szybinska with 19

Abby Meister touched all corners of the court for NSU averaging a match leading 7.00 digs per set with 35 total, followed by Keri Walker with 17, as well as 54 assists

Despite a slow night offensive, Eliza Bauers racked up a career high eight blocks, leading six Wolves with three blocks or more

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Hanna Thompson: 25 kills, .267 attack%, 3 blocks

Natalia Szybinska: 19 kills, .241 attack%, 4 digs, 3 blocks

Keri Walker: 54 assists, 17 digs, 5 blocks, 3 aces

Abby Meister: 35 digs, 1 assist

Sara Moberg: 13 digs, 4 assists, 2 aces

Eliza Bauers: 8.0 blocks, 3 kills, 2 digs

UP NEXT

Northern returns to Wachs Arena and Don Meyer Court for a 2 p.m. match against the University of Sioux Falls today. Northern State fans with a valid football ticket can attend the match for free.



Table Talks feeds students physically and spiritually

by Dorene Nelson

Table Talks is held at St. John's Lutheran Church every Wednesday when there is school. It is open to all high school age students who wish to hear about God's word and gather around a delicious meal with their friends.

The meal is at no cost to the students, and with generous donations and willing workers, the weekly event will continue. The donations help defray the costs of paper products, food, and other necessary items to ensure the success of this weekly gathering.

"We average about 50 students weekly," said Pam Rix. "In addition to the great meal, a guest speaker addresses the group for about ten minutes."

The speaker on October 18, 2023, was Micah Westby, the pastor at New Life Fellowship in Aberdeen. It is important that students are fed spiritually on a regular basis.

"These speakers selflessly donate their time to provide the students with their own personal journey of faith," said Laurie LaMee. "They often list ways that the students can give of their time and talents to share the good news they hear at Table Talks."

"The students come into the church parish hall where the food is set up in a self-service style," Pam Rix said. "They automatically line up, fill their plates, and find a spot with their friends."

"I try to keep the Facebook page updated weekly so that the students know what we're serving," Bridget Flihs said. "These kids really are not that fussy about what they eat, but they are always hungry!"

The main workers include the following: Laurie LaMee, Becky Hunter, Laurie Mitchell, Bridget Flihs, Eunice McColister, Becky Knecht, and Pam Rix. Other individuals also help when they can.

Everybody has a specific job, but all will pitch in wherever help is needed. Currently Pam Rix is in charge of organizing everything and often does the cooking; Laurie LaMee and Laurie Mitchell run errands and help get everything set up; Becky Hunter gets the weekly speakers. Bridget Flihs also communicates with the school and Table Talk workers when there is no school or when fewer students might attend.



Back Laurie LaMee, Laurie Mitchell, Becky Hunter Front Pam Rix, Bridget Flihs.

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"We serve God by planting 'seeds' of faith," LaMee said. "Everybody needs to know that God loves them too! After all, even in this hard world we live in, people do care! We hope these weekly meals will provide some nourishment for the soul as well as the body!"

The menu was baked taco casserole, buttered bread, dill pickles, fruit, and a variety of bars. These hard workers also try to accommodate food allergies.

"High school students come hungry and leave with appetites satisfied as well as having received a message for their daily life," Becky Hunter said.

In 2014 Vicci Stange decided to try and start Table Talks here in Groton. She got the idea from a similar event at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Aberdeen. The church provided a bus at Aberdeen Central High School for any students willing to get a free meal and food for their soul! She is still part of this program but is currently working on the farm to get the harvesting done.

The group welcomes any and all workers as well as continuing to plan for the future. In order to do this, supplies of paper products, food, dessert, etc. are needed. If you feel called to support this program, contact Pam Rix at (605) 377-3297.



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West Nile Update – South Dakota, October 20, 2023

SD WNV (as of October 20):

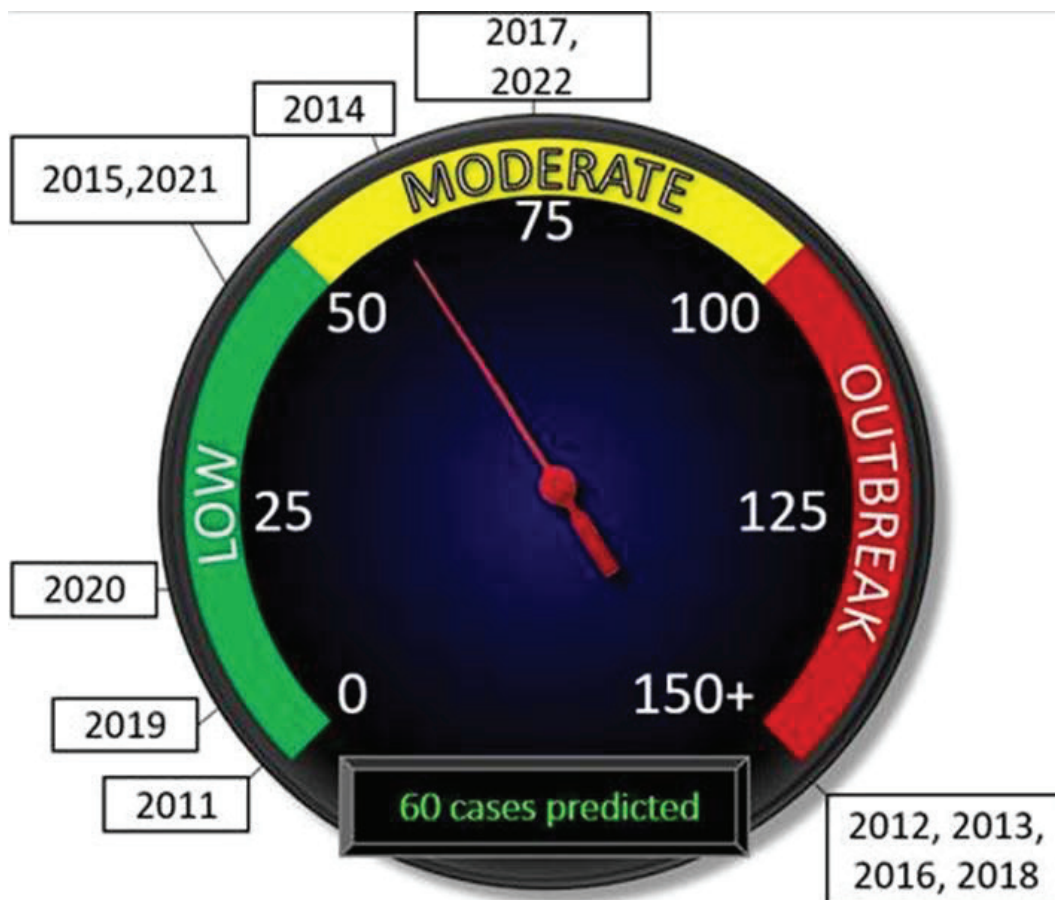
92 human cases reported (Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Buffalo, Brown, Campbell, Clark, Codington, Corson, Davison, Day, Deuel, Dewey, Edmunds, Fall River, Faulk, Hamlin, Hand, Hughes, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Lyman, Marshall, McCook, Mead, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Oglala Lakota,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

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

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

US WNV (as of October 17): 1936 cases (Al, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, WV, WY)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2023, South Dakota (as of October 20)



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BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY
OCTOBER 24, 2023, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Rachel Kippley – Fair/Fairgrounds/Parks Manager
 - a. Discuss Rental House Bid Proposal
 - b. Fairgrounds Improvement Fund
 - c. Report on 2023 Brown County Fair
5. Approve and Authorize Chairman to sign ESRI Small Public Safety Enterprise Agreement (SPSEA) for GIS
6. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of October 17, 2023
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Zoning Ordinance – Set Hearing Date/Authorize Publication
 - e. Plats
 - f. Surplus Vehicle from Equalization
 - g. Operating Transfer for 24/7
7. Other Business
8. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
9. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at

<https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

18 Groton Area musicians attend Northwestern Middle School Music Festival



Libby Cole is a 3 year member for this festival. (Courtesy Photo)

On Tuesday October 10th, 18 students attended the Northwestern Middle School Music Festival. From both the Groton Middle School Choir and Band Departments. The band students are chosen from nominations from band directors and then spend time working with guest director Jared Opp, Band Director from Gregory. The choir students had the wonderful opportunity to work with guest director Katie Opp, Choir Director from Gregory. Overall, the students had a wonderful experience, and the students performed an impressive concert to a gym completely filled with an audience.



MS Choir Photo

Front Row (L to R): Mya Feser, Andi Gauer, Amelia Ewalt, Payton Castles, Kinzleigh Furman, Wyatt Morehouse, Gavin Hanten, Hudson Eichler, Wesley Borg, and Mrs. Amy Warrington, Sub Choir Director

Second Row (L to R): May Dallaire, Ilyanna Dallaire, Aubrie Lier, Dacey Kampa, Tenley Frost, Arianna Dinger, Peyton Padfield, Jose Fernando Nava Remigio. (Courtesy Photo)

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MS Band Photo

Front Row (L to R): Jordan Schwan (Percussion), Kason Oswald (Trumpet), TC Schuster (Tuba), Kyleigh Kroll (Trumpet)- 2nd Chair, Makenna Krause (Percussion)- 2nd chair

Second Row (L to R): Libby Cole (Trombone), Addison Hoeft (Bari Sax)- 1st chair, Journey Zieroth (Tenor Sax)- 1st chair

Third Row: (L to R): Aspen Beto (Clarinet), Novalea Warrington (Flute)- 1st chair, Liam Johnson (Alto Sax), and Mrs. Desiree Yeigh, Band Director. (Courtesy Photo)

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Groton Area Middle School Band

1st row: (L to R): Percussion: Owen Sperry, Kolton Antonsen, Makenna Krause, Caleb Hanten, Ryder Schwan, Wyatt Morehouse, Hudson Eichler, Jordan Schwan (Not pictured)

2nd row: (L to R): Percussion: Peyton Padfield, Trombone: Libby Cole, Rylie Rose, Layne Johnson, Logan Olson, Jace Johnson, Asher Zimmerman, Noah Scepaniak. Percussion: Jose Fernando Nava Remigio

3rd row: (L to R): Baritone: Ilyanna Dallaire, Elias Heilman (Not pictured) Trumpet: Grace-Lynn Hubbs Mullner, Kinzleigh Furman, Kyleigh Kroll, Ryelle Gilbert, Kason Oswald, Shaydon Wood, and Rowin Jansen van Rensburg

4th row: (L to R): Flute: Tenley Frost, Amelia Ewalt, Novalea Warrington, Adeline Kotzer, Arianna Dinger, Aurora Washenberger, Sam Crank, Chloe Witchey (Not pictured)

5th row: (L to R): Clarinet: May Dallaire, Madison Herrick, Trinity Dallaire, Aubrie Lier, Jameson Penning, Aspen Beto, Haden Harder

6th row: (L to R): Alto Sax: Xzavier Klebsch, Andi Gauer, Liam Johnson, Zach Flihs, Lincoln Shilhanek, (Not Pictured), Addison Hoeft. Tenor Sax: Wesley Borg, Journey Zieroth (Not pictured). Bass Clarinet: Connor Kroll

7th row: (L to R): Tuba: TC Schuster, Mrs. Desiree Yeigh (Director), Tuba: Liam Lord. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

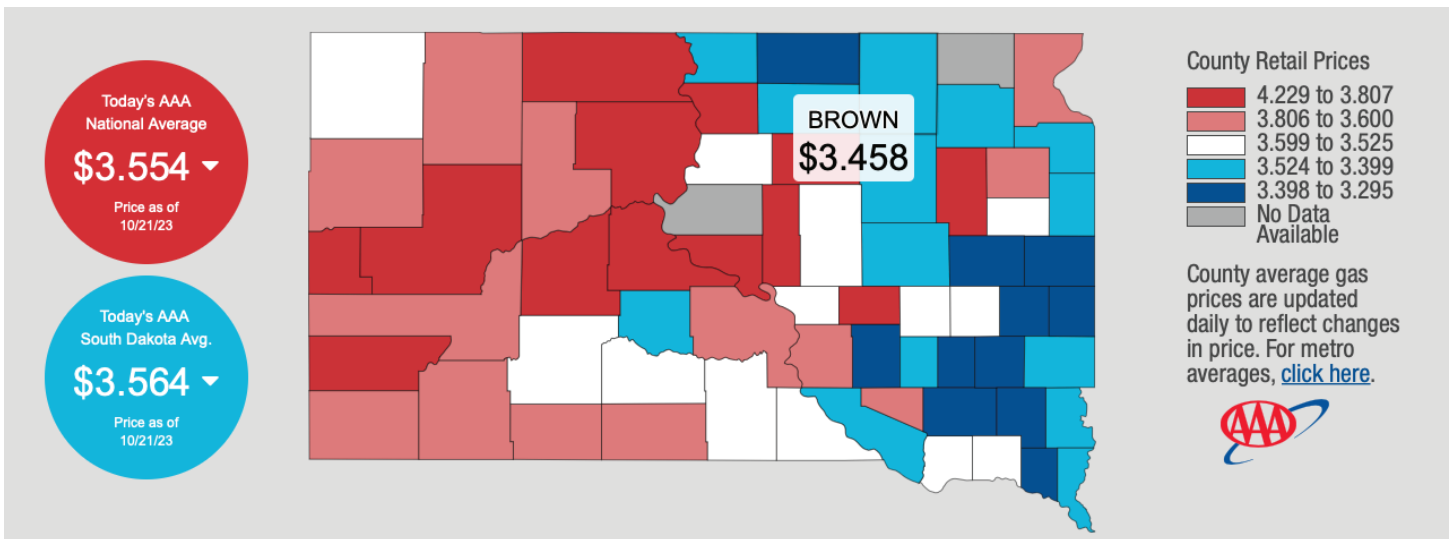
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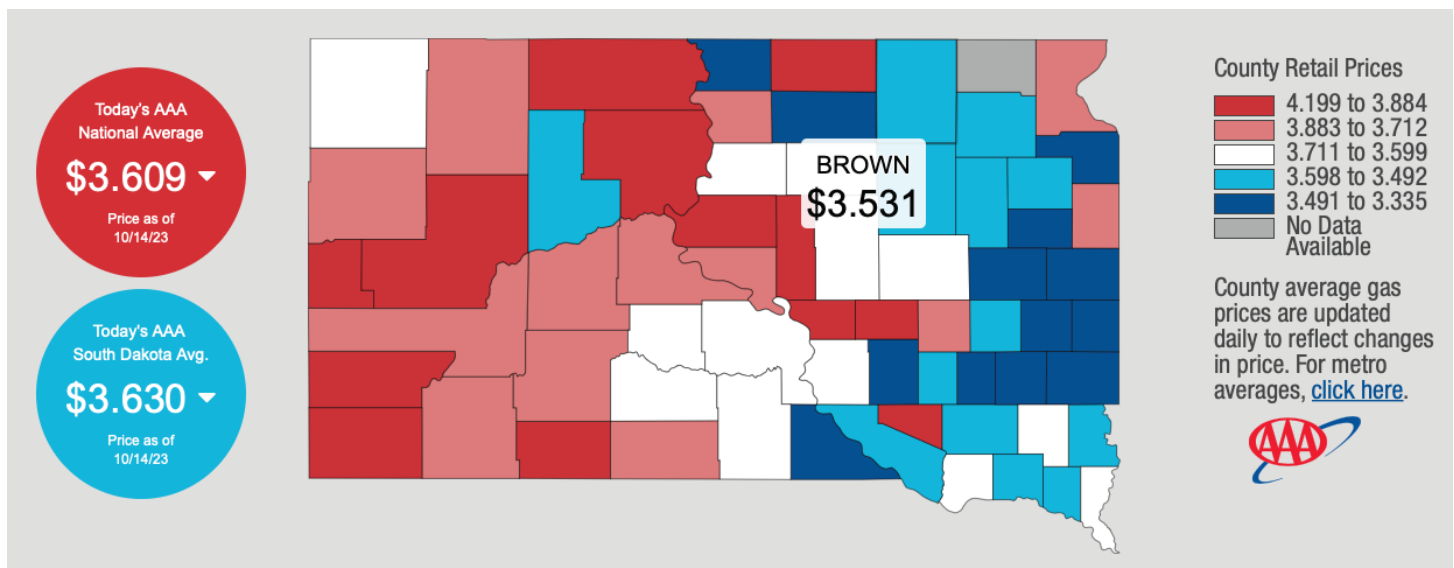
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.564	\$3.743	\$4.211	\$4.527
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.573	\$3.757	\$4.213	\$4.415
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.630	\$3.794	\$4.296	\$4.331
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.918	\$4.082	\$4.563	\$4.391
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.749	\$3.942	\$4.392	\$5.198

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



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Drought Classification

None

D0 (Abnormally Dry)

D1 (Moderate Drought)

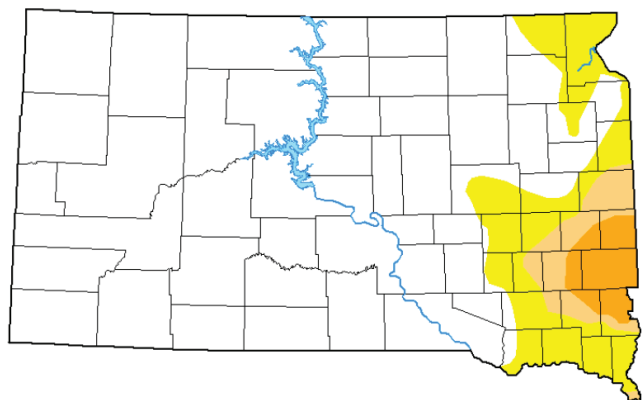
D2 (Severe Drought)

D3 (Extreme Drought)

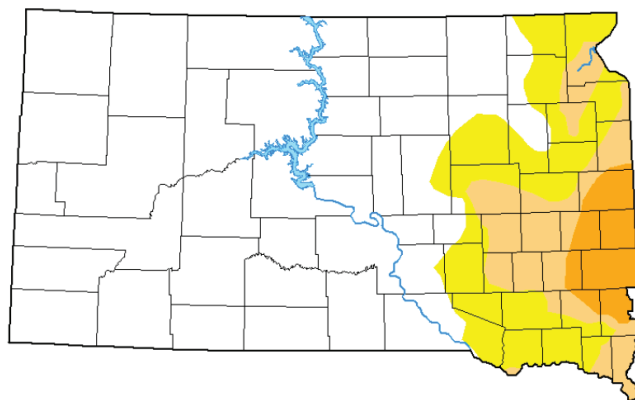
D4 (Exceptional Drought)

No Data

Drought Monitor



October 17



October 10

Heavy precipitation brought widespread improvements to the southeastern parts of the region, especially along the South Dakota and Nebraska border. Much of northern Nebraska received at least 2 inches of precipitation, with some areas reporting more than 7 inches this week. Board 1-category improvements were made across northern Nebraska, while 2-category improvements were made where historic rainfall was reported. The heavy precipitation also improved abnormal dryness (D0) and moderate to severe drought (D1-D2) conditions in eastern South Dakota, as shown in short-term SPI/SPEI timescales and soil moisture data. A small area in southwest Nebraska, Chase County, was degraded to D1 due to acute dryness over the past two months and justified by short-term SPI/SPEI data and soil moisture being consistently under the 20th percentile. In Kansas, northern parts of the state received precipitation this past week but not enough to lead to large improvements. Precipitation did improve a small area of extreme drought (D3) in the central part of the state, in the counties of McPherson and Saline. Status quo was maintained across much of the state with some degradation occurring along the eastern part of the state based on SPI/SPEI and soil moisture data.



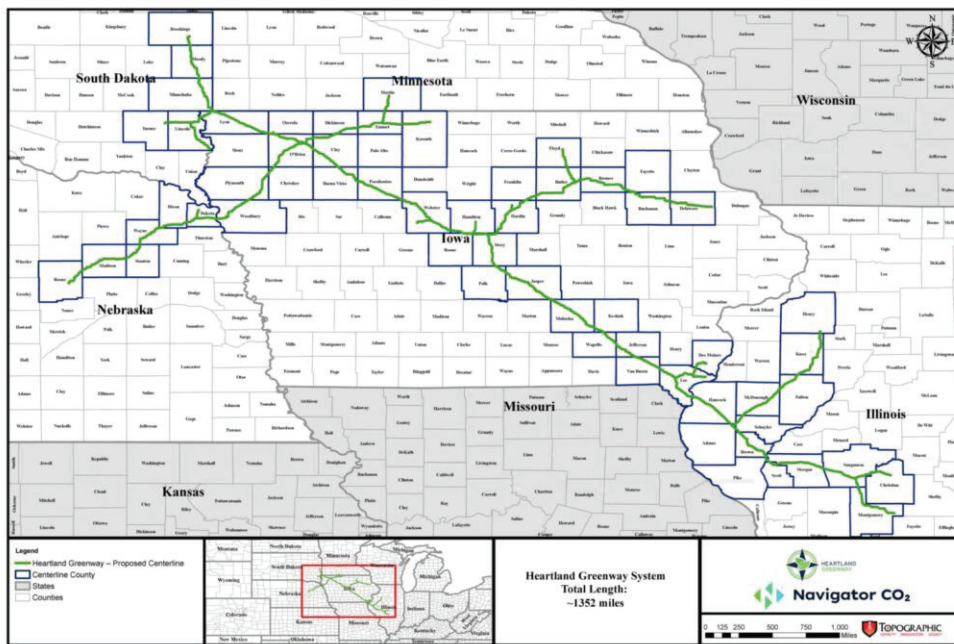
SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Navigator cancels its carbon pipeline project

Meanwhile, Summit project still active and 'well-positioned to add additional plants'

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND SETH TUPPER - OCTOBER 20, 2023 9:36 AM



The route of the proposed Heartland Greenway pipeline.

(Courtesy of Navigator CO2)

A company that sought to build a \$3 billion carbon sequestration pipeline in South Dakota and several other states announced Friday that it's giving up on the plan.

"Given the unpredictable nature of the regulatory and government processes involved, particularly in South Dakota and Iowa, the Company has decided to cancel its pipeline project," said a news release from Navigator CO2.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission unanimously denied a permit for Navigator's Heartland Greenway project on Sept. 6 after a hearing that lasted from July 25 to Aug. 8. The project would have gathered carbon dioxide emitted by ethanol and fertilizer plants and

transported it for storage underground.

Since its permit denial in South Dakota, Navigator had asked to suspend its permitting process in Iowa and had moved to withdraw its permit application in Illinois.

Friday's news release from the company included comments from CEO Matt Vining.

"I am proud that throughout this endeavor, our team maintained a collaborative, high integrity, and safety-first approach and we thank them for their tireless efforts," Vining said. "We also thank all the individuals, trade associations, labor organizations, landowners, and elected officials who supported us and carbon capture in the Midwest."

The pipeline would have crossed Republican state Rep. Karla Lems' land near Canton. She credits the project's demise to the people who opposed it.

"It was due to the people that rose up, the grassroots," she said.

Dakota Rural Action was one of the groups that helped organize opponents against the project. Chase Jensen, an organizer and lobbyist for the group, called the news "a tremendous victory for the impacted citizens and landowners who were going to be crossed."

Summit: 'Well-positioned to add additional plants'

A similar but separate proposal from Summit Carbon Solutions to build a carbon sequestration pipeline

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through South Dakota and other states is still active, even though Summit's permit application has also been denied in South Dakota. Summit has said it plans to modify its route and reapply.

Summit spokesperson Sabrina Zenor said Friday the company is "well-positioned to add additional plants and communities to our project footprint." She said Summit remains "as committed to our project as the day we announced it."

One of Navigator's partners was Poet, the Sioux Falls-based company that describes itself as the world's largest producer of biofuels including ethanol. A pipeline project that captures and sequesters ethanol plant emissions could help Poet sell its ethanol in jurisdictions that have strict emissions restrictions.

Poet said in a written statement Friday that the company "remains committed to pursuing viable technologies that help us maintain access to fuel markets and increase value for farmers."

"We believe that states that are slow to adopt these technologies risk being left behind," the statement said.

One of the main points of contention in both the Summit and Navigator permit applications in South Dakota was the passage of county setback ordinances, which mandate minimum distances between pipelines and existing structures and property. Summit's filing of dozens of eminent domain cases, which the company has since withdrawn, have also been controversial. Eminent domain is a legal process to gain access to land from unwilling landowners.

Navigator did not file any eminent domain cases. The Omaha, Nebraska-based company announced its plans in 2021, hoping to capture carbon dioxide from 21 locations — ethanol and fertilizer plants — and transport it in liquefied form via 1,300 miles of pipe to Illinois for underground sequestration.

In eastern South Dakota, Navigator's pipeline would have covered 111.9 miles in Brookings, Moody, Minnehaha, Lincoln and Turner counties. Pipeline segments also would have stretched into Minnesota, Nebraska and Iowa.

Project backers sought to capitalize on annual federal tax credits of \$85 per metric ton of sequestered carbon. The credits are intended to incentivize the removal of carbon dioxide, a heat-trapping greenhouse gas, from the atmosphere.

Fate of easement agreements addressed

Beverly Nelson has land near Valley Springs that Navigator's pipeline would have crossed. She's "100% thrilled" and "delighted" by news of the project's cancellation, but she said there's still work to be done.

"We still need to tighten South Dakota's eminent domain laws so we don't continue having landowners hit with these things," Nelson said.

Groups representing landowners announced last week that they've formed a coalition to push for restrictions on eminent domain. Last winter, a bill to ban eminent domain for carbon sequestration pipelines passed the state House of Representatives but was defeated in a Senate committee.

Tony Ventura, who owns land near Hudson that would have been crossed by the Navigator pipeline, hopes the Summit pipeline will be the next to get canceled.

"Nobody should have to deal with the disrespect, property damage, and harassment we have incurred," Ventura said.

Some affected landowners and project opponents expressed concern Friday about agreements Navigator had obtained with some landowners to potentially cross private land with the pipeline.

Those agreements are called easements. But Navigator spokesperson Elizabeth Burns-Thompson said the company only ever secured options for easements, rather than actual easements.

"Which basically means those options will just expire after a few years and landowners wouldn't have any easement on their property," she said in a written statement.

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.

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.

Birth to 3 sees increase in providers statewide despite lower travel reimbursement rates

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - OCTOBER 20, 2023 2:20 PM



A proponent of the new social studies standards offers a statement of support to the state Board of Education on Nov. 21, 2022, in Sioux Falls. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

Those who opposed the state Board of Education Standards' 2022 decision to reduce travel reimbursements for providers in South Dakota's Birth to 3 program said the change would make providers less interested in working with the program.

South Dakota Birth to 3 is a federally required program providing developmental and health-related services to infants and toddlers who show delays or disabilities.

But a year after the changes were implemented, only one provider so far has stopped working with Birth to 3 citing the pay changes, according to a Department of Education report to the board at its Friday meeting in Aberdeen.

Board President Terry Nebelsick, from Huron, said the report was "remarkable."

The changes were implemented because 2022 Medicaid rates and a legislative 6% increase in reimbursement rates would have increased spending in the Birth to 3 program by up to an estimated \$400,000, according to reporting from KELO last year. At the time, the state reimbursed providers for travel time up to \$13.14 for every 15 minutes on the road, with rates varying depending on their specialty and the purpose of the visit.

Instead, the department and board changed travel reimbursements for providers to a flat \$1 per mile and saved an estimated \$319,862.

The \$1 per mile travel reimbursement rate is similar to what lawyers are paid by the state Unified Judicial System. UJS officials have admitted the \$1 per mile reimbursement rate is subpar and discourages attorneys from accepting work in rural areas of the state.

The department told board members at the time that the program could use teletherapy more often as well. Those in opposition to the rule changes also said teletherapy sessions weren't in the best interest of the child, according to KELO reporting. The DOE's Thursday report did not touch on teletherapy impacts or results.

Since the changes were implemented, 32 new providers are serving children across South Dakota. The number of special instruction and family training providers has almost doubled during that time, according to Sarah Carter, administrator of the DOE South Dakota Office of Early Childhood Services.

Many of the new providers serve in rural areas of the state that had "previously struggled" to find pro-

viders, Carter added. Four other potential providers are currently in the approval process.

"I'm encouraged you have more providers in rural areas," said board member Linda Olsen, from Dupree in northwestern South Dakota. "That was needed."

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

Baltic controversy serves as cautionary tale about big development in small towns

Sioux Falls sprawl could foist nearby communities into unfamiliar positions

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 21, 2023 7:00 AM

BALTIC — Mayor Deborah McIsaac said she was shocked when she took office in 2022 and discovered a housing development in town had been given the green light without basic paperwork ensuring accountability.

"I'm like, 'seriously?'" McIsaac said.

The situation evolved into a political crisis — including a failed mayoral recall — for the town of about 1,300 residents, which is less than 20 miles north of Sioux Falls and that city's rapidly growing population of about 200,000.

As Sioux Falls sprawls toward nearby small towns, they could experience growing pains similar to Baltic's if local governments don't take precautions.

The Baltic situation began in 2020 when a hometown housing developer initiated a 127-lot housing development and promoted its proximity to Sioux Falls.

When a development is proposed, many municipalities establish a development agreement, which spells out who is obligated to do what — responsibilities such as regulatory compliance, title assurance and inspections. They might also establish a performance bond, which ensures that if a developer doesn't complete a project as agreed, the municipality will get money to finish the job or fix any problems.

Baltic City Attorney John Hughes — who was the attorney when the city began work with the developer — said the mayor and council in charge when the development began ignored basic requirements of sound development and apparently thought a "handshake deal" would suffice instead of a formal development agreement.

The developer declined to comment for this story.

Runoff and drainage problems, litigation

Not having basic documentation makes enforcement and accountability less black and white, Hughes said. He resigned on Feb. 6, 2021, due to concerns about how the city and development were being managed.

"Who wants to be part of a process that lacks integrity?" Hughes said. He was later rehired by McIsaac after she became mayor in 2022.

McIsaac said the development was not constructed to meet basic standards, which resulted in runoff and drainage problems. The state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources determined the developer was not obeying water runoff and erosion rules and required the developer to address the problems and



Mayor Deborah McIsaac does paperwork in Baltic's city administration building during the fall of 2023. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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A 2023 view of a controversial housing development in Baltic that ultimately led to a mayoral recall election. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

ment and agreeing to construct a detention pond to prevent more runoff. In turn, the city had to remove its suspension on building permits.

Controversy arising from the situation led petitioners to subject McIsaac to a recall election last month. She survived by a vote of 301-224, with 67% voter turnout.

McIsaac said the city is still struggling to force the developer to comply with its development standards – pointing to problems with weeds, gravel road degradation, and improperly constructed curbs.

Hughes said small towns near growing cities should heed the example of Baltic and “beef up their ordinances and regulatory oversight,” or they could be next to go through a similar drama.

Other towns say they’re ready

Steve Britzman is the city attorney for Brookings, with about 40 years of experience providing legal guidance for towns including Aurora, Volga, Elkton, Sinai and Bushnell. He said small towns with limited resources and staff can find themselves wrestling a developer with more cash on hand than the city budget – like Baltic’s approximately \$850,000 annual budget.

“It’s always challenging when a big company comes to a small community,” Britzman said. “These communities are left to be more or less reactive.”

He said that’s because regulatory oversight and enforcement are unlikely to be something a small town can afford to do adequately.

“You can’t expect a finance officer, who is also the city administrator, to also handle the technical issues,” Britzman said. “In a sense, you’re left relying on the developer to do the job right. That’s why you want to work with a developer you’re certain you can trust.”

However, many small-town officials surrounding Sioux Falls say they are confident their town can handle rapid development. Jessica Fueston is the economic development coordinator for Garretson, which has a population of approximately 1,200 about 20 miles northeast of Sioux Falls.

“A lot of what makes the difference goes back to having a city council and mayor that have a real hands-

pay \$46,283 in civil penalties.

Additionally, when the city council voted to pause additional development to reassess its protocols, the developer responded with litigation against the mayor, city council members and members of the Planning and Zoning Commission, alleging that the city was undermining its own economic development.

The matter ended with the developer paying a \$735,000 settle-

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on approach," Fueston said. "That's what is most important — having people who are truly involved."

Fueston said leaders must be thorough. And while it may be a slower process than in a city with more staff, developers "have to adopt our rules."

"We understand that it can be a headache for them, but we need to do it right, from the beginning," she said.

'Days of a handshake deal are over'

Tom Earley is the mayor of Dell Rapids. He said municipalities need to "have procedures institutionalized," meaning that basic standards are practiced regardless of the developer or situation.

"The days of a handshake deal are over," he said.

Earley said Dell Rapids has managed growth well because of its partnership with the Southeast Council of Governments (which helps navigate grants and paperwork) and its contract with DGR Engineering (which ensures any development meets engineering standards).

A contracted engineer is something Baltic now has, but could have used when its controversial development began, according to McIsaac. Baltic is not a member of the Southeast Council of Governments.

"What fixes this is a strong city engineer," McIsaac said, explaining that they help craft a comprehensive plan, "and of course, you have their expertise to back everything up."

Glenda Blindert is the mayor of Salem, which has about 1,300 residents 40 miles west of Sioux Falls. She said Salem's approach to its latest 12-acre, 35-lot housing development has been nontraditional.

She said Salem's economic development corporation is developing the water and sewer lines and roads, and then selling the lots to people who want to build a house, without a private developer involved.

"This is how I think you'll see a lot more of these small towns do it going forward," Blindert said.

To fund the infrastructure, Blindert said Salem is hoping to be awarded some of the \$200 million in housing infrastructure money the state recently started granting.

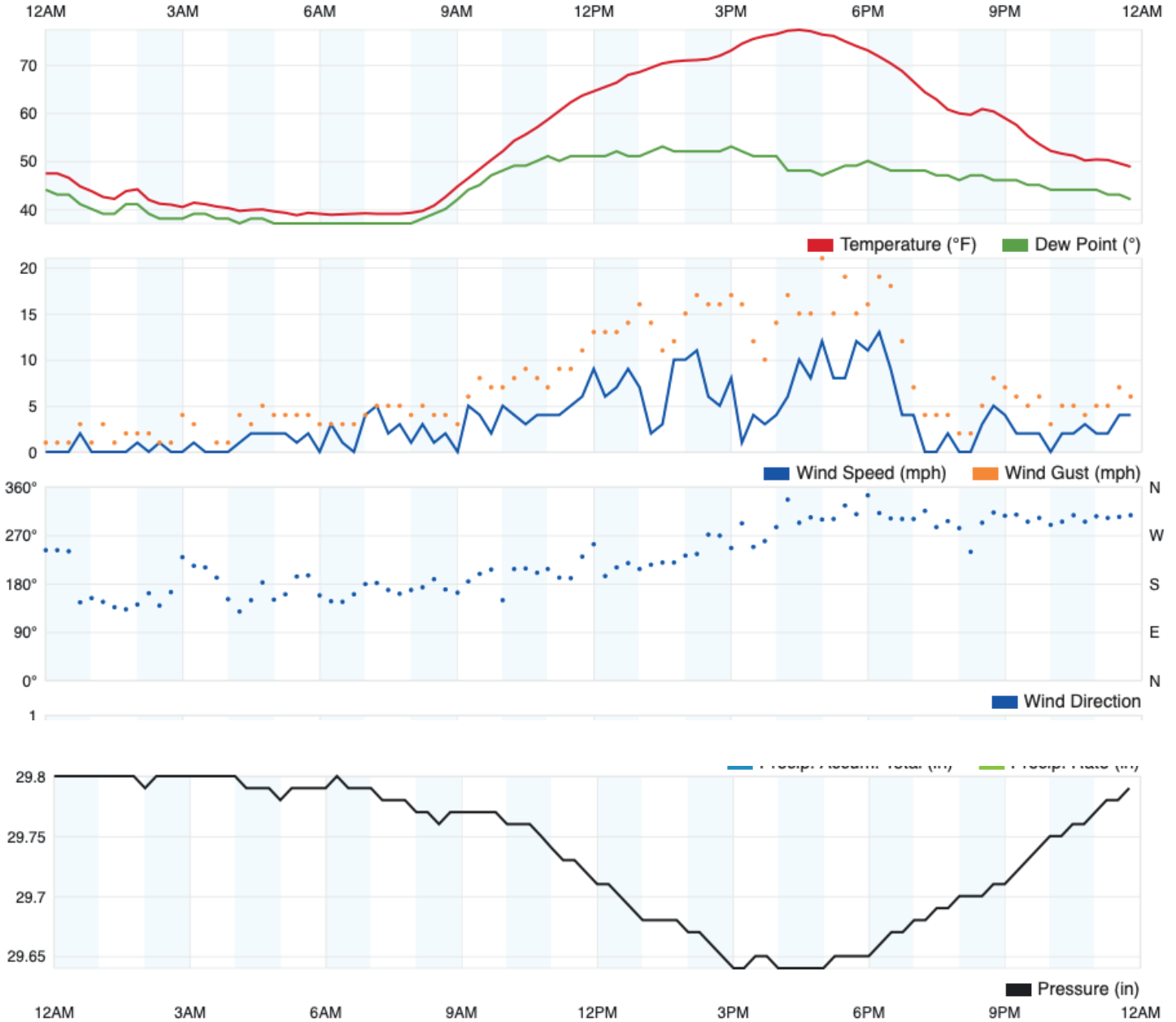
"Otherwise, these projects just get so expensive for a small town," she said.

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs






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Sat Oct 21	Sun Oct 22	Mon Oct 23	Tue Oct 24	Wed Oct 25	Thu Oct 26	Fri Oct 27
						
61°F 38°F	62°F 43°F	64°F 37°F	51°F 34°F	48°F 32°F	45°F 26°F	42°F 26°F
NW 19 MPH	SSE 25 MPH	S 16 MPH	NNE 18 MPH	N 11 MPH	ENE 17 MPH	NNW 17 MPH
				30%	20%	30%





For The Weekend

Today	Tonight	Sunday
		
Highs: 57 to 65	Lows: 35 to 43	Highs: 58 to 69
Wind: NW 15-25 MPH	Wind: NE/SE 5-15 MPH	Wind: S 15-35 MPH

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

www.weather.gov/abr

Mild temperatures in the upper 50s to upper 60s and dry conditions will continue to persist through this weekend. Gusty northwest winds of 20-30 will be possible through early Saturday afternoon across the Sisseton Hills and west central Minnesota. Winds will diminish by tonight with clear to partly cloudy skies. Sunday will feature a sun and cloud mixture with increasing southerly winds of 15-35.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 4:23 PM

Low Temp: 39 °F at 5:22 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 4:56 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1947

Record Low: 9 in 1987

Average High: 56

Average Low: 31

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.58

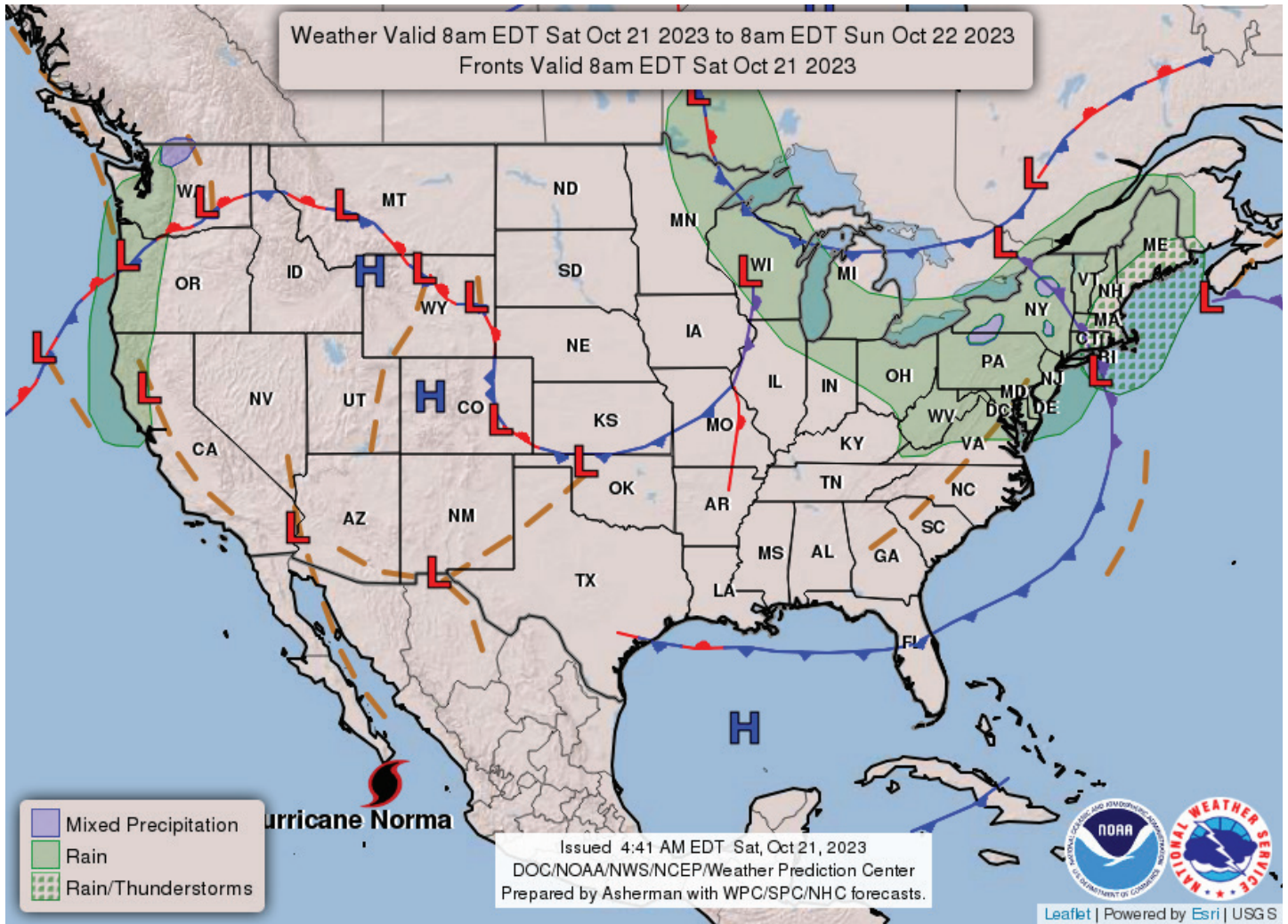
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.89

Average Precip to date: 19.91

Precip Year to Date: 22.66

Sunset Tonight: 6:38:49 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:56:33 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 21, 1987: Cold arctic air continued to invade the central U.S. Eleven record lows were reported in the Great Plains Region, including lows of 12 degrees at Valentine, Nebraska, and 9 degrees at Aberdeen, South Dakota. Temperatures warmed rapidly during the day in the Southern and Central Plains Region. Goodland, Kansas warmed from a morning low of 24 degrees to an afternoon high of 75 degrees.

1934: A severe windstorm lashed the northern Pacific coast. In Washington State, the storm claimed the lives of 22 persons, and caused 1.7 million dollars damage, mostly to timber. Winds, gusting to 87 mph at North Head, WA, produced waves twenty feet high on the Puget Sound.

1957 - The second in a series of unusual October storms hit southern California causing widespread thunderstorms. Santa Maria was drenched with 1.13 inches of rain in two hours. Hail drifted to 18 inches in East Los Angeles. Waterspouts were sighted off Point Mugu and Oceanside. (20th-21st) (The Weather Channel)

1966: An avalanche of mud and rocks buries a school in Aberfan, Wales, killing 148 people, mostly young students. The elementary school was in a valley below where a mining operation dumped its waste. In the days leading up to October 21, there was heavy rain in the area. After five months of investigation and the deposition of more than 100 witnesses, it was determined that the tip had blocked the natural course of water down the hill. As the water was soaked into the tip, pressure built up inside until it cracked, with devastating results. The site of the disaster later became a park.

1975: Carlton Fisk made history on this day because of a walk-off home run in the 1975 World Series, after rain had postponed it for three days.

1987 - Cold arctic air continued to invade the central U.S. Eleven record lows were reported in the Great Plains Region, including lows of 12 degrees at Valentine NE, and 9 degrees at Aberdeen SD. Temperatures warmed rapidly during the day in the Southern and Central Plains Region. Goodland KS warmed from a morning low of 24 degrees to an afternoon high of 75 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988: Hurricane Joan, the last hurricane of the season, neared the coast of Nicaragua packing 125 mph winds. Joan claimed more than 200 lives as she moved over Central America, and total damage approached 1.5 billion dollars. Crossing more than 40 degrees of longitude, Hurricane Joan never strayed even one degree from the 12-degree north parallel. After crossing Central America into the Pacific, the cyclone was renamed Tropical Storm Miriam, with the system's dissipation occurring southwest of Mexico.

1989 - Unseasonably cold weather continued to grip the south central and southeastern U.S. Twenty cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Calico AR with a reading of 26 degrees, and Daytona Beach FL with a low of 41 degrees. Squalls in the Great Lakes Region finally came to an end, but not before leaving Marquette MI buried under 12.7 inches of snow, a record 24 hour total for October. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: Tornadoes do occur in South America. A tornado rampaged through Poza del Tigre, a northern Argentinean town, leaving at least six are dead and over 100 wounded.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

MOTION WITHOUT MOVEMENT

Lucy was sitting behind her desk counseling Charlie Brown one sunny afternoon. Looking at him sternly she said, "Try to accomplish something!"

"Accomplish something," he responded quickly, "I thought we were just supposed to be busy."

Peter had some good advice in one of his most powerful sermons. He reminded his audience that "Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." Peter was reminding his listeners that Jesus lived a life of service and servanthood - always looking for and finding ways to accomplish God's work in His world. What is interesting about this sermon is its brevity: within a few sentences, he was able to present the life, death on the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus, as well as His fulfillment of all that had been written about Him in Scripture.

The effectiveness of our preaching or witnessing, working for or serving Christ does not depend on the length of time we take to present His message or how long we live. Rather, the source of the Christians' effectiveness is found in another statement in this same sermon. Peter said that "God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power."

Our Lord will bless our labors for Him when we are willing to become Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. Only then will our witness have His power and accomplish His will.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to surrender our lives to You and be available to You to do Your work. May we realize the blessings that may be ours as we serve You today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. Acts 10:38



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

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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/10/2023 Family Fun Fest, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/08/2023 Family Fun Fest 3:30-5:30pm
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/09-10/2023 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 09/10/2023 Emmanuel Lutheran Church Sunday School Rally 9:00am
- 09/10/2023 7th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 4-6pm
- 09/15/2023 Homecoming Parade
- 10/13/2023 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/11/2023 Groton American Legion Annual Turkey Party 6:30 pm.
- 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:
10.20.23

7 29 36 49 61 22

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$114,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 13 Hrs 28 Mins 57
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.20.23

2 8 37 39 40 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 13 Hrs 43 Mins 57
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.18.23

10 18 20 22 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$28,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 43 Mins 57
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.18.23

26 59 62 64 65 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 12 Mins 57
DRAW: 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 14 Hrs 12 Mins 57
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Avon def. Menno, 25-21, 17-25, 25-21, 25-22

Bridgewater-Emery def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-20, 25-22, 25-23

Canistota def. McCook Central-Montrose, 25-19, 25-17, 25-18

Castlewood def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-6, 25-13, 25-19

Centerville def. Colome, 25-12, 25-14, 25-7

Clark/Willow Lake def. Britton-Hecla, 25-23, 25-17, 25-21

Dakota Valley def. Vermillion, 25-12, 25-18, 25-12

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Madison, 25-19, 25-18, 14-25, 15-25, 16-14

Florence/Henry def. Webster, 22-25, 25-13, 25-20, 25-21

Garretson def. Colman-Egan, 25-14, 25-21, 19-25, 28-26

Great Plains Lutheran def. Wilmot, 25-16, 25-11, 25-19

Groton Area def. Redfield, 23-25, 25-16, 25-21, 25-18

Hamlin def. Deuel, 25-16, 25-13, 25-10

Herreid/Selby Area def. Faith, 25-22, 15-25, 25-17, 25-20

Highmore-Harrold def. Stanley County, 19-25, 25-22, 25-21, 25-23

Hitchcock-Tulare def. Sully Buttes, 25-5, 25-21, 25-17

Kimball/White Lake def. Wessington Springs, 25-8, 25-13, 25-19

Lakota Tech def. Crow Creek Tribal School, 25-14, 25-15, 25-9

Miller def. Ethan, 16-25, 22-25, 25-23, 25-15, 15-9

Scotland def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-21, 26-24, 25-23

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, 25-15, 25-11, 25-15

Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Howard, 22-25, 25-15, 16-25, 25-19, 15-9

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Pierre T F Riggs High School, 21-25, 25-19, 29-27, 25-15

Sisseton def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-18, 25-16, 25-10

St. Thomas More def. Kadoka Area, 25-13, 25-20, 23-25, 19-25, 15-13

Warner def. Mobridge-Pollock, 25-8, 25-12, 25-20

Waubay/Summit def. Waverly-South Shore, 21-25, 10-25, 25-22, 25-19, 15-7

East-West Invitational=

Brandon Valley def. Douglas, 25-9, 25-13

Brandon Valley def. Rapid City Central, 25-10, 25-10

Brandon Valley def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-9, 25-16

Brookings def. Douglas, 25-17, 25-22

Brookings def. Rapid City Central, 25-19, 25-10

Brookings def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-21, 25-7

Harrisburg def. Douglas, 25-14, 25-9

Harrisburg def. Rapid City Central, 25-11, 25-17

Harrisburg def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-14, 25-17

East-West Tournament=

Spearfish def. Yankton, 25-14, 25-23

Watertown def. Spearfish, 25-17, 25-19

Yankton def. Sturgis Brown, 25-14, 25-9

New Underwood Triangular=

Edgemont def. New Underwood, 25-16, 25-14, 25-14

Wall def. Edgemont, 25-22, 25-27, 17-25, 25-19, 15-9
Wall def. New Underwood, 25-22, 25-27, 17-25, 25-19, 15-9

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AP visual analysis: Rocket from Gaza appeared to go astray, likely caused deadly hospital explosion

By MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

Shortly before 7 p.m. Tuesday, a volley of rockets lit up the darkened sky over Gaza. Videos analyzed by The Associated Press show one veering off course, breaking up in the air before crashing to the ground.

Seconds later, the videos show a large explosion in the same area – the site of Gaza’s al-Ahli Arab Hospital.

Who is to blame for the fiery explosion has set off intense debate and finger pointing between the Israeli government and Palestinian militants, further escalating tensions in their two week-long war.

The AP analyzed more than a dozen videos from the moments before, during and after the hospital explosion, as well as satellite imagery and photos. AP’s analysis shows that the rocket that broke up in the air was fired from within Palestinian territory, and that the hospital explosion was most likely caused when part of that rocket crashed to the ground.

A lack of forensic evidence and the difficulty of gathering that material on the ground in the middle of a war means there is no definitive proof the break-up of the rocket and the explosion at the hospital are linked. However, AP’s assessment is supported by a range of experts with specialties in open-source intelligence, geolocation and rocketry.

“In the absence of additional evidence, the most likely scenario would be that it was a rocket launched from Gaza that failed mid-flight and that it mistakenly hit the hospital,” said Henry Schlottman, a former U.S. Army intelligence analyst and open-source intelligence expert.

WHAT AP FOUND

The AP reached its conclusion by reviewing more than a dozen videos from news broadcasts, security cameras and social media posts, and matching the locations to satellite imagery and photos from before the explosion.

A key video in the analysis came shortly before 7 p.m. local time, when the Arabic-language news channel Al Jazeera was airing live coverage of the Gaza City skyline. As a correspondent speaks, the camera pans to zoom in on a volley of rockets being fired from the ground nearby.

One of the rockets appears to veer from the others, away from the distant lights of Israel and back toward a darkened Gaza City, where electricity has largely been cut. The camera follows the light from the rocket’s tail as it arches in the sky upwards and toward the left. Suddenly, the rocket seems to fragment, and a piece appears to break off and fall. Another fragment shoots sharply up and to the right, blazing before it explodes in a fireworks-like flash, leaving a brief trail of sparks.

A small explosion is then seen on the ground in the distance, followed two seconds later by a much larger blast closer to the camera. The corner of the scroll at the bottom of the live broadcast reads 6:59 p.m. Gaza time.

Using maps and satellite imagery, the AP was able to match the view of the explosion from Al Jazeera’s live camera feed to an upper floor of the building that houses Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau, which is less than a mile (1.5 kilometers) from the al-Ahli Arab Hospital. Using other buildings visible in the frame, the AP was able to confirm that the larger explosion seen at 6:59 p.m. was in the precise direction of the hospital.

A second video, taken from a camera inside Israel at the exact time as the Al Jazeera footage and obtained by the AP, shows a barrage of at least 17 rockets being launched from inside Gaza before a large explosion lights up the horizon on the Palestinian side of the border. The camera is on a building in Netiv

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Ha'asara, an Israeli community footsteps from the border wall, and faces southwest, confirming that the rocket launches and explosion were in the direction of Gaza City.

A third video by Israeli news station Channel 12 — taken from a camera on the upper floor of its building in Netivot, a town about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southeast of the hospital in Gaza City — also captured the barrage of rockets fired at 6:59 p.m.

Seen together, the three videos show multiple rockets were launched from inside Gaza before one appears to have come apart in midair about three seconds before the explosion at the al-Ahli Arab Hospital.

At 7 p.m., one minute after the explosion, Hamas' military wing al-Qassam Brigades said in a post to its Telegram channel that it "fired at occupied Ashdod with a barrage of rockets." Ashdod is an Israeli coastal city about 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of Gaza.

Minutes later, Islamic Jihad, a militant group that works with Hamas, also posted on Telegram that it had launched a rocket strike on Tel Aviv in response "to massacre against civilians." Over the next hour, there were five more posts from the militant groups announcing rocket attacks against Israel.

Israel's military has repeatedly said it did not strike the hospital and blamed an errant rocket fired from within Gaza by the Islamic Jihad. Israel's assessment, backed by U.S. intelligence and President Joe Biden, also cited the lack of both a large crater and extensive structural damage that would be consistent with a bomb dropped by Israeli aircraft.

Hamas calls Israel's narrative "fabricated" and accuses it of punishing the hospital for ignoring a warning to evacuate two days earlier, though it has not released any evidence to support its claims.

Hamas spokesperson Ghazi Hamad told the AP the group would welcome a United Nations investigation into the cause of the blast.

"Look at the stupid position that was taken by the President of the United States of America who said, 'I agree with Israel's version' without any investigation," Hamad said. "Unfortunately, the Western world is full of hypocrisy."

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

AP ran its visual analysis by a half-dozen experts who all agreed the most likely scenario was a rocket from within Gaza that veered off and came apart seconds before the explosion.

Andrea Richardson, an expert in analyzing open-source intelligence who is a consultant with the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, said specific landmarks visible in the videos show where the rockets were launched.

"From the video evidence that I have seen, it's very clear that the rockets came from within Gaza," said Richardson, a human rights lawyer and experienced war crimes investigator who has worked in the Middle East. She added that the timing of the rocket launches, the explosion and the first reports that the hospital had been hit also seemed to confirm the sequence of events.

While still potentially lethal, the explosive warheads carried by the homemade rockets used by militants in Gaza can be relatively small when compared with the munitions used by large militaries like those of the U.S. and Russia. With Gaza's borders and ports blockaded for the past decade, militants often build rockets and launch tubes inside Gaza using whatever parts and materials they can scavenge, including underground water pipes.

Justin Crump, a former British Army officer and intelligence consultant, said the failure rate of such homemade rockets is high.

"You can see obviously it fails in flight, it spins out and disintegrates, and the impacts on the ground follow that," said Crump, CEO of Skyline, a London-based strategic advisory firm. "The most likely explanation is this was a tragic accident."

Such a scenario unfolded last year, when Islamic Jihad-fired rockets malfunctioned and killed at least a dozen Gaza residents. The AP reported at the time that live TV footage showed the militant rockets falling short in densely packed residential neighborhoods.

THREE-SECOND GAP

Some of the questions about who is to blame focus on the three-second gap between the rocket's

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explosive breakup in the sky and the explosion on the ground at the al-Ahli Arab Hospital, and whether those two events are linked, especially because the videos analyzed by AP don't appear to show a trace of light that follows the rocket to the ground.

Outside experts said it's not possible to rule out with absolute certainty that the rocket launches occurring near the hospital and the timing of the explosion seconds later are just a coincidence. However, they also noted there is no evidence to support that scenario.

Richardson said the timestamps on videos showing the rocket launches from within Gaza, the midair malfunction and the large explosion striking the hospital below within seconds of each other provided a logical chain of events.

"An incredibly small timeframe," she said.

Intelligence analyst Schlottman said the most likely scenario remains that it was a militant rocket that somehow had some kind of malfunction mid-flight and then landed on the hospital.

"We have video of when the explosion happened and the only rocket visible in that video was the one that kind of had that diverging trajectory," he said. "We cannot possibly exclude other scenarios. ... Just what we have right now points to that."

EVIDENCE ON THE GROUND

About 10 minutes after the multiple rocket launches from Gaza were captured on video Tuesday night, posts began to appear on social media. The AP verified a video taken from a balcony near the hospital that shows the moment of impact, with the loud whizzing sound followed by a huge fireball and the clap of a massive explosion. AP could find no visual evidence to support speculation that the blast was triggered by a car bomb or other such device.

"Oh God! Oh God!" a man's voice exclaims in Arabic. "The hospital!" says a second male voice.

Other videos and photos reviewed by AP appear to show the explosion in the hospital's central parking lot and courtyard, where civilians had taken refuge after orders to evacuate the city. Some footage shows burning cars and more than a dozen dead bodies, including those of children.

AP photos taken the morning after Tuesday's explosion showed no evidence of a large crater at the impact site that would be consistent with a bomb like those dropped by Israeli aircraft in other recent strikes. The hospital buildings surrounding the outdoor area at the center of the explosion were still standing and did not appear to suffer significant structural damage.

A small crater photographed in the hospital's parking lot appeared to be about a meter across, suggesting a device with a much smaller explosive payload than a bomb. While Israel's extensive arsenal includes smaller missiles that can be fired from helicopters and drones, there has been no public evidence of such missile strikes in the area around the al-Ahli Arab Hospital on Tuesday night.

David Shank, a retired U.S. Army colonel and expert on military rockets and missiles, said the large fireball captured on video at the hospital could potentially be explained by the fact the malfunctioning militant rocket impacted prematurely and was still full of propellant. That highly volatile fuel then ignited when it hit the ground, setting off a large explosion but leaving a relatively small crater.

After Hamas' Oct. 7 surprise attack on southern Israel that killed 1,400, with another 200 people taken hostage, Israel's military said it dropped more than 6,000 bombs on Gaza in the first week of the war alone, and Gaza officials say that campaign has so far resulted in more than 4,100 deaths.

Hamas spokesman Hamad said that Israeli officials had threatened al-Ahli Arab hospital and other medical facilities, and ordered their evacuation before the deadly blast. He argued that the missiles belonging to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad would not have been capable of inflicting such damage.

Al-Ahli Arab Hospital's operators posted on its website that the facility's cancer center was struck by Israel three days before the deadly blast, leaving a hole in an exterior wall and an unexploded artillery shell next to an ultrasound machine.

IRON DOME THEORY

Speculation has circulated on social media in the days since the explosion that the breakup of the rocket and the explosion on the ground was caused by Israel's Iron Dome defense system, which is designed to

shoot such rockets out of the sky.

Israel has said it does not use its Iron Dome system within Gaza, but to intercept and destroy rockets coming into Israeli airspace.

Experts also noted multiple videos from around the time of the hospital explosion showed no visible evidence of Iron Dome missiles being fired from Israel into the airspace over Gaza.

John Erath, the senior policy director at the Center for Arms Control and an expert on missile defense, said that while it might be technically possible for Iron Dome to intercept a missile over Gaza, it would be unlikely in this case because the projectile was very early in its flight path – still on the way up – and the system is designed to only intercept projectiles it determines are on a flight path to a populated part of Israel.

“I’m not saying that it’s impossible,” Erath said. “But based on my understanding of how the system works, it is unlikely.”

Added missile expert Shank: “They don’t engage a target unless it’s going to impact a critical asset such as a population area, maybe a power grid, maybe a military base.”

“It’s technically designed to take the best shot that gives it the highest probability of kill,” he said. “And for Iron Dome ... that is not over Gaza.”

Civilians killed and wounded as Russian forces renew push to take towns in eastern Ukraine

By NEBI QENA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — At least three civilians were killed and others wounded in Ukraine on Friday and Saturday, as Russian forces continued to shell areas across the country and pushed forward near an embattled eastern city, local Ukrainian officials reported Saturday.

A man died as Russian forces shelled the Ukrainian-held town of Nikopol from their stronghold at Ukraine’s largest nuclear plant, according to Ukrainian local Gov. Serhii Lysak. Lysak said that emergency services in Nikopol were working to assess the damage.

Russian troops took over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant early in the war, sparking intermittent fears of a radiation incident as shelling persisted near the site, often targeting Ukrainian-controlled settlements across the Dnieper River.

In Kryvyi Rih, the central Ukraine hometown of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a 60-year-old man died on Friday evening when a Russian missile slammed into an industrial facility, according to Telegram posts by Mayor Oleksandr Vilkul. The man’s wife was hospitalized with serious shrapnel wounds, Vilkul said.

The mayor reported that Russian missiles and drones hit the same place again overnight, causing unspecified damage and sparking a fire that was put out by morning. Vilkul did not elaborate on the site’s nature or whether it was linked to Ukraine’s war effort. He said nobody was hurt in the second strike.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov later told reporters that Russian forces destroyed the Ukrainian military’s fuel and ammunition depots near Kryvyi Rih’s local airport.

There was no immediate response from Ukrainian officials to Konashenkov’s claim.

In southern Ukraine’s front-line Kherson region, one civilian was killed and another wounded during “mass shelling” attacks by Russian troops, Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin said Saturday. The Russians used mortars, artillery, tanks, drones, and multiple-rocket launchers to target the region, striking some residential areas, Prokudin wrote in a Telegram post.

Russian shelling over the past day also wounded one civilian in the front-line city of Avdiivka, in Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region, acting local Gov. Ihor Moroz reported on Saturday. Avdiivka has been fiercely contested by Russian and Ukrainian forces in recent weeks as Kyiv’s forces try to hold off a renewed Russian assault.

Moroz said that exploding drones, missiles, mortars and artillery shells fired by Russian troops also struck other parts of the region.

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Russian troops on Friday launched a fresh offensive north of Avdiivka that has secured minor gains, according to an analysis by the Institute for the Study of War. The Washington-based think tank cited geolocated footage from pro-Kremlin "military bloggers" on the ground to support its assessment.

Moscow's renewed push near Avdiivka reflects the Russian military command's commitment to offensive operations in the area "despite heavy materiel and personnel losses," the institute said.

The Ukrainian General Staff on Friday claimed that Ukrainian forces had damaged and destroyed almost 50 Russian tanks and over 100 armored vehicles in the fighting near Avdiivka during the previous day. The claim that could not be independently verified.

Oleksandr Shputu, a spokesman for the Ukrainian army unit fighting near Avdiivka, said in televised remarks Saturdays that Russian military activity in the area had "decreased slightly," possibly due to heavy losses. However, Shputun acknowledged that Russian units continued to advance.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, a 39-year-old civilian man was hospitalized with wounds as Russian shelling hit two village homes near the embattled town of Kupiansk, Gov. Oleh Syniehubov reported on Saturday. Russian forces have for weeks been pressing an offensive to retake territory near Kupiansk and the nearby town of Lyman.

The governor of Russia's southern Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, said Saturday that Ukrainian forces shelled two of the province's districts with mortars and grenade launchers the previous day. According to Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov, no civilians were hurt.

Egypt's border crossing opens to let a trickle of desperately needed aid into besieged Gaza

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The border crossing between Egypt and Gaza opened on Saturday to let a trickle of desperately needed aid into the besieged Palestinian territory for the first time since Israel sealed it off in the wake of Hamas' bloody rampage two weeks ago.

Just 20 trucks were allowed in, an amount that aid workers said was insufficient to address the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza. More than 200 trucks carrying roughly 3,000 tons of aid have been positioned near the crossing for days.

Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians, half of whom have fled their homes, are rationing food and drinking dirty water. Hospitals say they are running low on medical supplies and fuel for emergency generators amid a territory-wide power blackout. Israel is still launching waves of airstrikes across Gaza that have destroyed entire neighborhoods, as Palestinian militants fire rocket barrages into Israel.

The opening came after more than a week of high-level diplomacy by various mediators, including visits to the region by U.S. President Joe Biden and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Israel had insisted that nothing would enter Gaza until Hamas released all of the captives from its attack, and the Palestinian side of the crossing had been shut down by Israeli airstrikes.

"The situation is catastrophic in Gaza," the head of the U.N.'s World Food Program, Cindy McCain, told The Associated Press. "We need many, many, many more trucks and a continual flow of aid," she said, adding that some 400 trucks were entering Gaza daily before the war.

The Hamas-run government in Gaza also said the limited convoy "will not be able to change the humanitarian catastrophe," calling for a secure corridor operating around the clock.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said "the humanitarian situation in Gaza is under control." He said the aid would be delivered only to southern Gaza, where the army has ordered people to relocate, adding that no fuel would enter the territory.

Guterres meanwhile gave voice to growing international concern over civilians in Gaza, telling a summit in Cairo that Hamas' "reprehensible assault" on Israel two weeks ago "can never justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people."

The opening came hours after Hamas released an American woman and her teenage daughter, the first of captives to be freed after the militant group's Oct. 7 incursion into Israel. It was not immediately clear

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if there was any connection between the two. Israel says Hamas is still holding at least 210 captives.

Hamas released Judith Raanan and her 17-year-old daughter, Natalie, on Friday for what it said were humanitarian reasons in an agreement with Qatar, a Persian Gulf nation that has often served as a Mid-east mediator.

The two had been on a trip from their home in suburban Chicago to Israel to celebrate Jewish holidays, the family said. They were in the kibbutz of Nahal Oz, near Gaza, when Hamas and other militants stormed into southern Israeli towns, killing hundreds and abducting at least 210 others.

Hamas said it was working with Egypt, Qatar and other mediators "to close the case" of hostages if security circumstances permit.

There are growing expectations of a ground offensive that Israel says would be aimed at rooting out Hamas, an Islamic militant group that has ruled Gaza for 16 years. Israel said Friday it does not plan to take long-term control over the small but densely populated Palestinian territory.

Israel has also traded fire along its northern border with Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group, raising concerns about a second front opening up. The Israeli military said Saturday it struck Hezbollah targets in Lebanon in response to recent rocket launches and attacks with anti-tank missiles.

"Hezbollah has decided to participate in the fighting, and we are exacting a heavy price for this," Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said during a visit to the border.

Israel issued a travel warning on Saturday, ordering its citizens to leave Egypt and Jordan — which made peace with it decades ago — and to avoid travel to a number of Arab and Muslim countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Bahrain, which forged diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020. Protests against Israel's actions in Gaza have erupted across the region.

An Israeli ground assault would likely lead to a dramatic escalation in casualties on both sides in urban fighting. More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed in the war — mostly civilians slain during the Hamas incursion. Palestinian militants have continued to launch rockets at Israel — more than 6,900 since Oct. 7, according to the military.

More than 4,300 people have been killed in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry. That includes the disputed toll from a hospital explosion earlier this week. The ministry says another 1,400 are believed to have been buried under rubble, alive or dead.

The Hamas-run Housing Ministry said at least 30% of all homes in Gaza have been destroyed or heavily damaged in the war. That figure does not include the destruction of entire neighborhoods, which the U.N. refugee agency now describes as "inaccessible mounds of rubble."

Hosting a summit on Saturday, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi called for ensuring aid to Gaza, negotiating a cease-fire and resuming Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which last broke down more than a decade ago. He also said the conflict would never be resolved "at the expense of Egypt," referring to fears Israel may try to push Gaza's population into the Sinai Peninsula.

King Abdullah II of Jordan told the summit that Israel's air campaign and siege of Gaza was "a war crime" and slammed the international community's response.

"Anywhere else, attacking civilian infrastructure and deliberately starving an entire population of food, water, electricity, and basic necessities would be condemned," he said. Apparently, he added, "human rights have boundaries. They stop at borders, they stop at races, they stop at religions."

Over a million people have been displaced in Gaza. Many heeded Israel's orders to evacuate from north to south within the sealed-off coastal enclave. But Israel has continued to bomb areas in southern Gaza where Palestinians had been told to seek safety, and some appear to be going back to the north because of bombings and difficult living conditions in the south.

An Associated Press reporter on the Palestinian side of Rafah saw the 20 trucks heading north to Deir al-Balah, a quiet farming town where many evacuees from the north have sought shelter. Hundreds of foreign passport holders at Rafah hoping to escape the conflict were not allowed to leave.

The trucks were carrying 44,000 bottles of drinking water from the U.N.'s children agency — enough for 22,000 people for a single day, it said. "This first, limited water will save lives, but the needs are immediate and immense," said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell.

The World Health Organization said four of the 20 trucks that crossed through Rafah on Saturday were carrying medical supplies, including essential supplies for 300,000 people for three months, trauma medicine and supplies for 1,200 people and 235 portable trauma bags for first responders.

The World Food Program said it has another 930 metric tons of emergency food waiting to be brought in through Rafah. It said it needs to replenish its "rapidly diminishing supplies" as it expands food assistance from 520,000 people to 1.1 million in the next two months.

A tent camp for displaced Palestinians pops up in southern Gaza, reawakening old traumas

By ISABEL DEBRE and NAJIB JOBAIN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — When the sun rose on Friday and the autumn heat baked the rotten debris on Gaza's streets, Mohammed Elian emerged from the zipper hole of his new canvas home.

He — and hundreds of other Palestinians displaced by the latest war between Israel and Hamas — have crowded into a squalid tent camp in southern Gaza, an image that has brought back memories of their greatest trauma.

Last week after the Israeli military ordered Elian's family, along with more than 1 million other Palestinians, to evacuate the north, the smartly dressed 35-year-old graphic designer from Gaza City ended up homeless in the city of Khan Yunis, with few comforts but thin mattresses, solar-powered phone chargers and whatever clothes and pots he could squeeze into his friend's car.

With nowhere else to go, Elian, his wife and four kids landed in the sprawling tent camp that cropped up this week as United Nations shelters overflowed in Gaza, where most people are already refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

"We have left behind everything, and we are not even safe," Elian said from a nearby hospital where he searched for water to bring back to his kids, ages 4-10. The distant roar of airstrikes could be heard over the phone.

Scores of Palestinians have lost or fled their homes during the intense Israeli bombardment prompted by a bloody cross-border attack by Hamas militants nearly two weeks ago. The impromptu construction of the tent city in Khan Yunis to help shelter them has elicited anger, disbelief and sorrow across the Arab world.

Row after row of white tents rise from the dusty parking lot. Children sit in the shade and play languidly with rocks. Men cut each other's hair. Newly acquainted neighbors wait outside to receive their shared meal from U.N. workers — a couple of loaves of bread and cans of tuna or beans.

"These images are something that the Arab world cannot accept," said Daoud Kuttab, a Palestinian journalist in Jordan.

Scenes of Palestinians hastily setting up U.N. tents are dredging up painful memories of the mass exodus that Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, or "catastrophe." In the months before and during the 1948 war, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from what is now Israel. Many expected to return when the war ended.

Seventy-five years later, those temporary tents in the West Bank, Gaza and neighboring Arab countries have become permanent cinderblock homes.

"1948 is immediately brought to mind when Palestinians in Gaza are told to flee, it's immediately brought to mind when you see those images (of tents)," said Rashid Khalidi, a professor of Arab studies at Columbia University. "Palestinian writers have etched this into the Arab consciousness."

The UN Palestinian refugee agency said the camp is not permanent. It said that the agency distributed tents and blankets to dozens of displaced families in Khan Yunis who couldn't fit in other U.N. facilities "to protect them from the rain and provide dignity and privacy." Gaza already is home to eight permanent camps, which over the years have turned into crowded rundown urban neighborhoods.

But regional anxiety over the Khan Yunis tents and Israeli evacuation warnings has grown, adding fuel to the huge, angry protests surging in Mideast capitals over the war in Gaza that began on Oct. 7, when Hamas mounted its raid that killed 1,400 Israelis. Since then, Israel's retaliatory bombing campaign has

killed more than 4,000 Palestinians, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry. Many of the victims are women and children.

"It's very worrisome for the government of Jordan," the journalist, Kuttab, said of the wave of displaced Palestinians. "They don't want to see even a hint of this idea."

Protests in the typically sedate kingdom of Jordan, home to a large population of people descended from Palestinian refugees, have rocked the capital, drawing thousands of demonstrators with an intensity unseen in years.

Elian has been so stressed about where to sleep and get food he said he hasn't had time to fret over the symbolism. He and his family tried sheltering in one of the crowded U.N. schools, but the conditions were "horrific," he said — no space to sleep, no privacy. At least here he can close his tent flap.

"We are living from one moment to the next," he said. "We try not to think about what comes next — how or when we'll go home."

Evacuees live nomadic life after Maui wildfire as housing shortage intensifies and tourists return

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii (AP) — Charles Nahale spent a restless night trying to sleep in the back seat of his pickup truck after a wildfire destroyed his home and the town of Lahaina. The next two nights weren't much better: The singer and guitarist put his feet on one chair and sat in another as he took refuge on the grounds of an evacuated hotel where he once performed for guests.

Nahale eventually found a timeshare condo with a bed, shower and kitchen — lodging he was able to keep until Friday, when, yet again, he had to move, this time with officials setting him up in a different hotel condo.

He is one of many whose lives have become transient since the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century left at least 99 people dead. The blaze destroyed thousands of buildings and unmoored residents who now face myriad challenges posed by Maui's location and status as a vacation hub.

"It's hard to begin the healing process when you're worried about the essentials," Nahale said.

Some are bouncing from hotel room to hotel room, in some cases to make way for the return of tourists who are crucial to the local economy. Many are struggling to find places to rent amid a housing shortage — and steep prices — that plagued the island even before the fire wiped out an estimated 3,000 homes and apartments in Lahaina.

And it's not feasible for authorities to bring in the mobile homes used to shelter people after natural disasters elsewhere, given Hawaii's humidity and the difficulty of shipping them from the U.S. mainland.

The government, via the Federal Emergency Management Agency, paid for Nahale and some 8,000 other displaced residents to move into hotels, vacation rentals and other short-term housing after the Aug. 8 fire. There are still about 6,900 people in short-term lodging more than two months later.

It's unusual for FEMA to put so many people in hotels after a disaster, particularly for months, but Maui had plenty of empty hotel rooms after tourists left in the wake of the fire.

In other states, people unable to move home after a disaster might move in with friends and family members who live within a few hours' drive. That's trickier on Maui, an island of about 150,000 people that's a 30-minute plane ride from the nearest major city, Honolulu.

Bob Fenton, administrator of the FEMA region including Hawaii, is leading the government's response. His agency has the authority to house people in hotels for six months, and in some cases that can be extended, he said. Still, he wants to see people get into stable housing — "a place they could be for the next two Christmases," Fenton said in an interview.

The Red Cross, whose case workers are administering FEMA's hotel stay program, is sending Nahale to another condo unit with a kitchen, but it will only be available for 12 days. Finding a long-term rental is hard when thousands of others are also looking, he said.

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Red Cross CEO Gail McGovern said at a news conference Wednesday that no one is being cut off from short-term housing before there is a long-term solution. Gov. Josh Green urged anyone who feels they are being pushed out to talk to a Red Cross worker.

Tiffany Teruya is among the lucky ones who found a two-bedroom rental to stay in with her 13-year-old son. The monthly cost for the "tiny, tiny cottage" was \$3,000, more than double what she paid for their subsidized apartment in a building that burned in Lahaina.

She signed a lease on Wednesday, paying the first month's rent and a deposit using aid money and \$2,000 from a cousin. Catholic Charities is arranging to pay for the next three months.

The cottage belongs to a member of her extended family. She said about 30 others saw the house before her, including families of three, four and even six people.

"These people are desperate too, you know what I'm saying?" said Teruya, who was a restaurant waitress on Lahaina's famed Front Street before the fire.

A Maui-based software developer, Matt Jachowski, built a website aimed at matching fire evacuees with landlords. More than 600 families have sought housing on the site, but he said very few have actually found lodging because landlords want more in rent than the evacuees can afford to pay.

His analysis showed that the median rent that evacuees are requesting — \$1,500 for a one-bedroom, \$2,400 for a two-bedroom — is about two-thirds of market rate. Some landlords wanted as much as \$8,000 to \$10,000 a month, saying they could get that from tourists, Jachowski said.

To help, FEMA has raised the rental assistance it's offering to evacuees by 75%. Displaced Lahaina residents will be eligible for up to nearly \$3,000 for a one bedroom. This could help plug the gap between what renters can pay and what landlords are asking — at least in the short term, Fenton said.

Longer term, Maui will need to build more affordable housing, Fenton said, noting some developments are awaiting zoning approval or need to be evaluated for sufficient sources of water.

If other temporary solutions fall short, FEMA is preparing to build up to 500 modular units using prefabricated materials or 3D printing. The agency has identified four sites — three in Lahaina and one in central Maui — near power, water and sewer infrastructure. Utility lines would have to be extended to individual lots, but could then be repurposed for permanent housing after the modular homes are removed.

Nahale called the experience of rotating hotels on the island a "second wave of humanitarian disaster." He said the compassionate thing would be to let people stay where they are through the holidays.

But tourists are returning and beginning to fill some of the rooms. Green and Maui Mayor Richard Bisen say the island needs to welcome travelers back to support the economy and give people jobs. Maui's unemployment rate hit 8.4% in September compared to 3.4% the same month last year.

Playing music helps Nahale cope with the ordeal. Before moving to his new condo, he showed two visiting journalists the only guitar he was able to grab before his home burned. Then he began strumming a song written by his late friend, the famous Hawaiian musician Roland Cazimero.

"Please be careful/ Of the dangers of the world/ Careful not to be afraid/ Of the roads we've yet to go," Nahale sang, first in English and then in Hawaiian.

"That song just came to mind," he said. "That song can help heal."

The father of American teenage hostage freed by Hamas says she is 'doing very good'

By CLAIRE SAVAGE, MELISSA PEREZ WINDER and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

EVANSTON, Ill. (AP) — The father of freed American teen hostage Natalie Raanan said Friday she's doing well following two weeks in captivity after she and her mother were abducted in Israel by Hamas and held in Gaza.

Uri Raanan of Illinois told The Associated Press that he spoke to his daughter Friday by telephone. "She's doing good. She's doing very good," said Uri Raanan, who lives in the Chicago suburbs. "I'm in tears, and I feel very, very good."

The 71-year-old said he saw on the news earlier Friday that an American mother and daughter would be

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released by Hamas, and he spent the day hoping that meant his daughter and her mother, Judith Raanan. Knowing Natalie may be able to celebrate her 18th birthday next week at home with family and friends feels "wonderful. The best news," her father said.

Ben Raanan, Natalie's brother, said before her abduction he and his sister had spoken of getting matching tattoos to mark her birthday. Instead, he got a tattoo this week in her honor, incorporating their names along with their brother's name.

The family's text message chain sharing updates on Friday moved from tentative hope to outright celebration, tempered by an awareness that other families still are living in fear for their loved ones, Ben Raanan told The Associated Press at his home in Denver.

"When I see her again, I think there aren't going to be words to express what's going on," he said. "It's just going to be like this intense hug that is bigger than words and bigger than what we could actually communicate verbally."

Uri Raanan said he believes Natalie and Judith to be in transit to Tel Aviv to reunite with relatives, and that both will be back in the U.S. early next week.

An Israeli army spokesperson said the two Americans were out of the Gaza Strip and with the Israeli military. Hamas said Friday it released them for humanitarian reasons in an agreement with the Qatari government.

They were the first hostages to be released since Hamas militants, according to Israel, abducted roughly 200 people during their Oct. 7 rampage.

President Joe Biden was among the many celebrating the news that the Raanans had been freed.

"I am overjoyed that they will soon be reunited with their family, who has been wracked with fear," Biden said in Washington. The president spoke Friday with Judith and Natalie and "relayed that they will have the full support of the U.S. government as they recover from this terrible ordeal," the White House said.

Uri Raanan said later Friday in a short news conference that he spoke with his daughter for only a few emotional minutes and that they didn't talk about what she and her mother experienced in the past two weeks. He said Judith has a minor injury he described as a "little scratch" on her hand.

"They look good and sound good," he said, adding that when he sees his daughter he plans to hug her and kiss her. "It's going to be the best day of my life."

He also said he didn't know why they were chosen for release.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which transported the freed Americans from Gaza to Israel, said their release offered "a sliver of hope" for those still being held.

Judith, 59, and Natalie, who both have dual Israeli-American citizenship, had been on a trip from their home in the Chicago suburb of Evanston to Israel to celebrate Judith's mother's birthday and the Jewish holidays, family members said.

Natalie was born in the U.S., moved to Israel with Judith until she was around 10 and then returned, her father said.

Natalie "always spoke of her home very dearly," 19-year-old stepsister Frida Alonso said, referring to Israel. "She missed it very, very dearly. Every day she missed her grandma, she missed her home. Just the feeling of being there. So I bet this hurts a lot for her."

Mother and daughter were in Nahal Oz, near the Gaza border, on Oct. 7 when Hamas militants stormed into southern Israeli towns, killing hundreds of people and abducting others.

Their family had heard nothing from them since the attack and were later told by U.S. and Israeli officials that they were being held in Gaza, Natalie's brother has said.

"The news that Judith and Natalie have been released from the hands of Hamas is overwhelming. It brings us a tremendous amount of gratitude to the Almighty, to God, for this incredible miracle," Meir Hecht, Judith's rabbi, said at a news conference outside his home in Evanston on Friday afternoon.

"At the same time we hold our pain very deep," said Hecht, who called for the other hostages to be released as soon as possible. "We need to continue besieging whoever we can and however we can, and praying for their release."

Judith came regularly to Meir's congregation and felt like "part of our family," the rabbi said.

Qatar said it would continue its dialogue with Israel and Hamas in hopes of winning the release of all hostages "with the ultimate aim of de-escalating the current crisis and restoring peace."

Israeli military spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Israel was continuing to work to return hostages and find the missing, and its goals had not changed. "We are continuing the war against Hamas and ready for the next stage of the war," he said.

The release comes amid growing expectations of a ground offensive that Israel says is aimed at rooting out Hamas militants who rule Gaza.

Mike Pence faces a cash shortage and questions about how much longer his 2024 campaign can survive

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — With three months to go before the Iowa caucuses that he has staked his campaign on, former Vice President Mike Pence faces mounting debt and lagging poll numbers that are forcing questions about not only whether he will qualify for the next debate, but whether it makes sense for him to remain in the race until then.

Pence ended September with just \$1.18 million left in his campaign account, a strikingly low number for a presidential contest and far less than his rivals, new filings show. His campaign also has \$621,000 in debt — more than half the cash he had remaining — and is scrambling to meet donor thresholds for the Nov. 8 debate. While he would likely meet the debate's polling requirements, Pence has struggled to gain traction and is polling in the low single digits nationally, with no sign of momentum.

Former President Donald Trump, meanwhile, is leading every one of his rivals by at least 40 points in national polls and ended September with \$37.5 million on hand.

People close to Pence say he now faces a choice about how long to stay in the race and whether remaining a candidate might potentially diminish his long-term standing in the party, given Trump's dominating lead. While Pence could stick it out until the Jan. 15 Iowa caucuses, visiting the state's famous Pizza Ranch restaurants and campaigning on a shoestring budget, he must now weigh how that will impact his desire to remain a leading conservative voice, according to the people, some of whom spoke on condition of anonymity to share their unvarnished views.

"For Pence and many of the others, you gotta start looking and saying, 'I'm not going to go into substantial debt if I don't see a pathway forward,'" said former Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who ran against Trump in 2016 but abandoned his bid after concluding "the Trump train had left the station."

Pence, for the moment, is pressing forward. He held a Newsmax town hall in Iowa Tuesday night and fundraisers this week in Cleveland, Philadelphia and Dallas. He was to speak at the Republican National Committee's fall retreat Friday night and at the Republican Jewish Coalition's Annual Leadership Summit in Las Vegas next week — all opportunities to pitch deep-pocketed donors to keep his campaign afloat.

The super PAC supporting Pence is also continuing its efforts, fundraising and conducting extensive voter outreach, including knocking on nearly 600,000 doors and counting.

The campaign is also working aggressively to reach the 70,000-donor threshold needed to qualify for next month's debate and expressed confidence they could get there if they try — even as others remain skeptical he can make it.

"I know it's an uphill climb for a lot of reasons for us, some that I understand, some that I don't," Pence acknowledged as he spoke to reporters in New Hampshire last week after formally registering for the state's first-in-the-nation primary.

Still, some in Pence's orbit believe he has important contributions left to make in the primary, particularly after the Hamas attack on Israel pushed foreign policy to the forefront. Pence has argued he is the most qualified candidate to deal with issues abroad, saying in the August debate that "now is not the time for on-the-job training."

Pence, they say, feels a renewed sense of purpose given his warnings throughout the campaign against the growing tide of isolationism in the Republican Party. Pence has used the conflict to decry "voices of

appeasement," which he argues embolden groups like Hamas.

Another person cautioned that Pence, a devout Evangelical Christian who sees the campaign as a calling, may respond differently than other candidates might in his position if he feels called to stay in the race.

If he decides to exit, Pence would have a potential platform in Advancing American Freedom, the conservative think tank he founded after leaving the vice presidency.

In the meantime, the campaign has been working to cut costs, including having fewer staff members travel to events.

Regardless of what he decides, the predicament facing the former vice president underscores just how dramatically Trump has transformed the GOP.

Pence, in many ways, has been running to lead a party that no longer exists.

He has cast himself as the field's most traditionally conservative candidate in the mold of Ronald Reagan. But many of his positions — from maintaining U.S. support for Ukraine's defense against the Russian invasion to proposing cuts to Social Security and Medicare — are out of step with much of his party's base.

He also faces fallout from Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump's supporters — some chanting "Hang Mike Pence!" — stormed the Capitol building, sending him running for his life. Trump tried to falsely convince Pence and his own followers that the vice president somehow had the power to overturn the results.

Pence has repeatedly been confronted on the campaign trail by people who accuse him of betraying Trump, who still promotes falsehoods about the 2020 election, often several times a day.

But Pence has also faced the same challenge as every candidate in the field not named Trump, a singular figure whose grip on the party has only intensified as he has been charged with dozens of crimes.

"If something big doesn't happen on Nov. 8, the primary is over. Some would argue it is now," said Walker, who entered the 2016 Republican primary as a front-runner only to end his campaign in September 2015, months before a single vote was cast, amid mounting debt.

An August AP-NORC poll found Republicans split on Pence: 41% held a favorable view of the candidate and 42% an unfavorable one. Nationally, a majority of U.S. adults — 57% — view him negatively, with only 28% having a positive view.

Some are hoping Pence doesn't give up. In Iowa, Kelley Koch, chair of the Dallas County Republican Party, said she felt Pence had struggled to define himself beyond Trump and said many remained skeptical of his actions on Jan. 6.

But she said following the attack on Israel, with all eyes now on the Middle East and a new war, that Pence could have a moment to break through.

"He is such a pro on foreign policy. That's one of his strengths. And he has that over a lot of the new rookie candidates who are in the race. He should run on that," she said. "I would think that that would be just a major trumpet setting the stage for Mike Pence to step up and take the mic."

Israel says two Americans held hostage by Hamas, a mother and daughter, have been released

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMYA KULLAB and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Hamas on Friday freed an American woman and her teenage daughter who had been held hostage in Gaza, Israel said, the first such release from among the roughly 200 people the militant group abducted from Israel during its Oct. 7 rampage.

Judith Raanan and her 17-year-old daughter, Natalie, were out of the Gaza Strip and in the hands of the Israeli military, an army spokesman said. Hamas said it released them for humanitarian reasons in an agreement with the Qatari government.

The release comes amid growing expectations of a ground offensive that Israel says is aimed at rooting out Hamas militants who rule Gaza. Israel said Friday it does not plan to take long-term control over the tiny territory, home to some 2.3 million people.

As the Israeli military punished Gaza with airstrikes, authorities inched closer to bringing aid from Egypt

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to desperate families and hospitals. Fighting between Israel and militants in neighboring Lebanon also raged, prompting evacuations of Lebanese and Israeli border towns as fears of a widening conflict grew.

Judith and Natalie Ranaan had been on a trip from their home in suburban Chicago to Israel to celebrate Jewish holidays, the family said. They were in the kibbutz of Nahal Oz, near Gaza, on Oct. 7 when Hamas and other militants stormed into southern Israeli towns, killing hundreds and abducting 203 others.

The family had heard nothing from them since the attack and were later told by U.S. and Israeli officials that they were being held in Gaza, Natalie's brother Ben said.

U.S. President Joe Biden spoke with the two freed hostages and their relatives. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which transported the freed Americans from Gaza to Israel, said their release was "a sliver of hope."

Relatives of other captives welcomed the release and appealed for more people to be freed.

Hamas said in a statement that it was working with mediators "to close the case" of hostages if security circumstances permit. The group added that it is committed to mediation efforts by Egypt, Qatar and other countries.

Qatar said it would continue its dialogue with Israel and Hamas in hopes of winning the release of all hostages "with the ultimate aim of de-escalating the current crisis and restoring peace."

Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Israel continued to work to return hostages and find the missing, and its goals had not changed. "We are continuing the war against Hamas and ready for the next stage of the war," he said.

A potential Israeli ground assault is likely to lead to a dramatic escalation in casualties on both sides in urban fighting. More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed in the war — mostly civilians slain during the Hamas incursion.

More than 4,100 people have been killed in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry run by Hamas. That includes a disputed number of people who died in a hospital explosion earlier this week.

Speaking to lawmakers about Israel's long-term plans for Gaza, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant laid out a three-stage plan that seemed to suggest Israel did not intend to reoccupy the territory it left in 2005.

First, Israeli airstrikes and "maneuvering" — a presumed reference to a ground attack — would aim to root out Hamas. Next will come a lower intensity fight to defeat remaining pockets of resistance. And, finally, a new "security regime" will be created in Gaza along with "the removal of Israel's responsibility for life in the Gaza Strip," Gallant said.

Gallant did not say who Israel expected to run Gaza if Hamas is toppled or what the new security regime would entail.

Israel occupied Gaza from 1967 until 2005, when it pulled up settlements and withdrew soldiers. Two years later, Hamas took over. Some Israelis blame the withdrawal from Gaza for the sporadic violence that has persisted since then.

The humanitarian crisis has worsened for Gaza's civilians every day since Israel halted entry of supplies two weeks ago, depleting fuel, food, water and medicine. Two days after Israel announced a deal to allow Egypt to send in aid, the border remained closed Friday as Egypt repaired the Rafah crossing, damaged by Israeli strikes.

Over a million people have been displaced in Gaza. Many heeded Israel's orders to evacuate the northern part of the sealed-off enclave on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. But Israel has continued to bomb areas in southern Gaza where Palestinians had been told to seek safety. Although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called areas in the south "safe zones" earlier this week, Israeli military spokesman Nir Dinar said Friday: "There are no safe zones."

Some Palestinians who fled from the north appeared to be going back because of bombings and difficult living conditions in the south, said Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the U.N. human rights office.

Gaza's overwhelmed hospitals were rationing their dwindling resources.

Generators in Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, were operating at the lowest setting to conserve fuel while providing power to vital departments such as intensive care, hospital director Mohammed Abu Selmia

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said. Others worked in darkness.

"I don't know how long (the fuel) will last. Every day we evaluate the situation," he said.

The lack of medical supplies and water make it difficult to treat the mass of victims from the Israeli strikes, he said.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said it had received a threat from the Israeli military to bomb Al-Quds Hospital. It said Israel has demanded the immediate evacuation of the Gaza City hospital, which has more than 400 patients and thousands of displaced civilians who sought refuge on its grounds, it said.

Palestinians in Gaza reported heavy airstrikes in Khan Younis, a town in the territory's south that is home to a squalid tent camp for displaced people. Ambulances carrying men, women and children streamed into the local Nasser Hospital.

Late Thursday, an Israeli airstrike hit a Greek Orthodox church in Gaza City housing displaced Palestinians. Gaza's Health Ministry said 16 Palestinian Christians were killed. Former U.S. Rep. Justin Amash, a Libertarian from Michigan, said several of his relatives were among the dead. The military said it had targeted a Hamas command center nearby, causing damage to a church wall.

Work continued Friday to repair the road at the Rafah crossing with Egypt, Gaza's only entry point not controlled by Israel. Trucks unloaded gravel, and bulldozers and other equipment were used to fill in large craters.

But there also appeared to still be differences over the manner of delivering aid. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was working with Egypt, Israel, the U.S. and others to overcome the "impasse" preventing the trucks from entering, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Friday.

Guterres wants to ensure "meaningful" numbers of trucks cross daily, that inspection of truck cargo is "expedited" and that U.N. authorities have fuel to distribute the supplies within Gaza.

More than 200 trucks and some 3,000 tons of aid were positioned near the crossing. Israel said the supplies could only go to civilians and that it would "thwart" any diversions by Hamas. It was unclear if fuel for the hospital generators would be allowed to enter.

An Egyptian official said two aid-packed trucks entered the Egyptian side of the border crossing early Saturday but did not pass through into Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak with the media.

Israel has evacuated its own communities near Gaza and Lebanon, putting residents up in hotels elsewhere in the country.

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 annihilate Hamas. Iran supports both armed groups.

Palestinian militants have launched unrelenting rocket attacks into Israel — more than 6,900 since Oct. 7, according to Israel — and tensions have flared in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israel has targeted militants in raids across the occupied territory. On Friday, two Palestinian teenagers were killed in clashes in the West Bank, where more than 80 Palestinians have been killed over the past two weeks.

House Republicans drop Jim Jordan as their nominee for speaker, stumbling back to square one

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI, STEPHEN GROVES and KEVING FREKING Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans abruptly dropped Rep. Jim Jordan on Friday as their nominee for House speaker, making the decision during a closed-door session after the hard-edged ally of Donald Trump failed badly on a third ballot for the gavel.

The outcome left Republicans dejected, frustrated and sinking deeper into turmoil, another week without a House speaker bordering on a full-blown crisis. House Republicans have no realistic or working plan to unite the fractured GOP majority, elect a new speaker and return to the work of Congress that has been languishing since hard-liners ousted Kevin McCarthy at the start of the month.

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Afterward, Jordan said simply of his colleagues, "We put the question to them, they made a different decision."

The hard-charging Judiciary Committee chairman said House Republicans now need to come together and "figure out who our speaker is going to be."

Their majority control floundering, Republicans left the private session blaming one another for the divisions they have created. Next steps were highly uncertain, as a wide range of Republican lawmakers started pitching themselves for speaker.

But it appears no one at present can win a GOP majority, leaving the House without a speaker and unable to function for the foreseeable future, an embarrassing blow to a central U.S. seat of government.

"We're in a very bad place right now," McCarthy said.

Majority Leader Steve Scalise said they would "start over" Monday. New nominees are to come forward for a candidate forum and internal party votes.

Exasperated with no easy solutions in sight, Rep. Mark Alford, a freshman from Missouri, was far from alone in expressing his anger and disappointment.

"I gave up my career to come here to do something for America, to rebuild our military, to get spending under control, to secure our border — and here we are in this quicksand," he said.

In a floor vote Friday morning, Jordan's third reach for the gavel, he lost 25 Republican colleagues, worse than he had fared earlier in the week, and leaving him far from the majority needed.

A founder of the far-right House Freedom Caucus, Jordan's run essentially collapsed in large part because more centrist Republicans are revolting over the nominee they view as too extreme and the hardball tactics being used to win their votes. They have been bombarded with harassing phone calls and even reported death threats.

To win over 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.

Friday's vote was 194 for Jordan, his lowest tally yet, and 210 for Jeffries, with two absences on each side.

In fact, Jordan lost rather than gained votes despite hours spent trying to win over holdouts, no improvement from the 20 and then 22 Republicans he lost in early rounds this week.

McCarthy himself rose in the chamber to nominate Jordan, portraying him as a skilled legislator who reaches for compromise. That drew scoffs of laughter from the Democratic side of the aisle.

Democrats nominated Leader Hakeem Jeffries, with Rep. Katherine Clark calling Jordan, who refused to certify the 2020 presidential election results, "a threat to democracy."

At a fundraiser Friday night, President Joe Biden offered his own commentary on Jordan's failure: "He just got his rear end kicked."

For more than two weeks the stalemate has shut down the U.S. House, leaving a major part of the government severely hobbled at a time of challenges at home and abroad. While Democrats have offered to broker a bipartisan deal to reopen the House, the Republican majority appears to have no idea how to end the political turmoil and get back to work.

With Republicans in control of the House, 221-212, any candidate can lose only a few detractors. It appears there is no Republican at present who can win a clear majority, 217 votes, to become speaker.

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 and brushed back by McHenry himself.

A "betrayal," said Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind.

Republicans predict the House could essentially stay closed 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's potentially more unsettling is that it's not at all clear what the House Republicans are even fight-

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ing over any more — let alone if any GOP leader can fix it.

The Republican chaos that erupted Oct. 3, when a small band of eight hardliners led by Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida orchestrated McCarthy's historic ouster, has cascaded into angry grievances, new factions and untested alliances.

Gaetz and the hardliners wanted to punish McCarthy for a number of perceived wrongs, including passing legislation with Democrats to keep the government funded and prevent a federal shutdown.

But when Scalise won the nomination to replace McCarthy, Jordan's allies broke from party rules and blocked the Louisianan's rise. Scalise abruptly withdrew his nomination.

Angry that Scalise didn't seem to get fair treatment, more mainstream Republicans staged their own revolt against hard-liner Jordan, saying he didn't deserve the gavel.

Weeks of heated, fiery meetings later, Republicans have drifted far off track from what had been their House majority's stated priorities of cutting spending and other goals.

Democratic Leader Jeffries reiterated that his party was "ready, willing and able" to work with more traditional Republicans on a path to reopen the House — particularly as Congress is being asked to consider Biden's aid package for Israel, Ukraine and other needs.

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.

Biden asks Congress to secure \$105 billion for Ukraine, Israel, the border and more

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Friday released a sweeping set of proposals to bolster Israel and Ukraine in the midst of two wars as well as invest more in domestic defense manufacturing, humanitarian assistance and managing the influx of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The total cost of the supplemental funding request was pegged at just over \$105 billion. President Joe Biden hopes Congress will move urgently on the legislation, and he made the case for deepening U.S. support for its allies during a rare Oval Office address on Thursday night.

The Democratic president's plan faces some immediate complications on Capitol Hill, even as most lawmakers say they want to help both countries. The House is at a standstill, unable to pass legislation, as the Republican majority struggles to choose a new speaker. The money could also get bogged down in a divided Senate where Republicans have increasingly opposed Ukraine aid and demanded adding additional border policies to the measure.

But Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said the Senate would advance Biden's proposals as soon as possible.

"This legislation is too important to wait for the House to settle their chaos," he said. "Senate Democrats will move expeditiously on this request, and we hope that our Republican colleagues across the aisle will join us to pass this much-needed funding."

Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., also expressed support, but said the Senate "must produce our own supplemental legislation that meets the demonstrated needs of our national security."

It could take several weeks to write the bill and negotiate its contents. Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Patty Murray, D-Wash., and the panel's top Republican, Maine Sen. Susan Collins, announced an Oct. 31 hearing on the spending request with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

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Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters Friday that Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine and Hamas' attack on Israel represent a "global inflection point."

"This budget request is critical to advancing America's national security and ensuring the safety of the American people," Sullivan said.

The biggest line item in the supplemental funding request is \$61.4 billion to support Ukraine. Some of that money will go to replenishing Pentagon stockpiles of weapons that have already been provided.

Ukraine has struggled to make progress in a grueling counteroffensive, and the White House has warned that Russia could gain ground if the United States does not rush more weapons and ammunition to the conflict.

"The world is closely watching what Congress does next," Sullivan said.

Israel would receive \$14.3 billion in assistance under the proposal. The majority of that money would help with air and missile defense systems, according to the White House.

While aiding both Israel and Ukraine has broad support in both chambers, some Republicans in both the House and the Senate are wary of linking funding for the two countries. Rep. Roger Williams, R-Texas, said the president's proposal was discussed in a closed-door meeting of his state's Republican delegation Friday.

Williams said Biden's proposal to aid both is "a little disturbing" because "he knows he can't get it done without Israel."

The reaction is emblematic of how Biden's decision to roll together several different issues, in hopes of broadening the potential political coalition to ensure the legislation's passage, could also lead it to its derailment.

Debates over immigration will likely be the most thorny as Republicans seek to bolster enforcement. Many Republicans have said they won't support the measure unless new policies are added, and it is so far unclear whether the money that Biden is requesting would be sufficient. A group of Republican senators huddled Thursday to discuss possible proposals that they would support.

"I support aid to Israel and Ukraine," Texas Sen. John Cornyn posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "But without meaningful and substantive policy changes that will address the #BidenBorderCrisis such aid is in serious jeopardy."

Shalanda Young, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, suggested it would be hypocritical for them to oppose Biden's proposal after complaining about lax border management.

"We will not be lectured by those who refuse to act," she said. "As we've said repeatedly, Congress needs to take action to provide sufficient resources for 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.

The White House wants roughly \$14 billion to, among other things, boost the number of border agents, install new inspection machines to detect fentanyl and increase staffing to process asylum cases.

Sen. Bill Hagerty, a Tennessee Republican, said providing the administration with "more money to fuel its disastrous open-borders resettlement operation is insanity."

"It would worsen the border crisis, not stop it," he wrote on X.

Some Republicans made clear that there was no chance they would support the package. Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton called it "dead on arrival."

Biden's funding request includes \$7.4 billion for a variety of initiatives geared toward the Indo-Pacific, where the U.S. is focused on countering China's influence. The money is divided among joint security initiatives in the region, bolstering submarine manufacturing as part of a partnership with Australia and developing financing programs for countries that would otherwise rely on Beijing.

Another \$9.15 billion is geared toward humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, Israel, Gaza and other places. Administration officials said they would determine where best to direct the money once it's approved.

Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said "time is of the essence" for passing the legislation.

"We will be judged on how the United States responds to ongoing crises, whether we honor our commitments to our allies abroad, and how we care for innocent people around the world caught in the wake

of devastation," she said.

A slain Maryland judge presided over the divorce case of man identified as a suspect in his killing

By LEA SKENE, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press

HAGERSTOWN, Md. (AP) — Police are searching for a man suspected of fatally shooting a Maryland judge who had awarded custody of the suspect's children to his wife on the day of the killing, authorities said Friday.

The judge was shot in his driveway Thursday evening while his wife and son were home and just hours after he ruled against the suspect in a divorce case, authorities said.

Washington County Sheriff Brian Albert said authorities are "actively working" to apprehend 49-year-old Pedro Argote for the "targeted attack" of Maryland Circuit Court Judge Andrew Wilkinson.

Wilkinson, 52, was found with gunshot wounds around 8 p.m. Thursday outside his home in Hagerstown, authorities said. Wilkinson was taken to Meritus Medical Center, where he died of his injuries.

Albert said at a news conference Friday that Argote is considered "armed and dangerous." Albert declined to identify that type of weapon used in the slaying but said Argote legally owned a handgun.

Judges across the U.S. have been the target of threats and sometimes violence in recent years. President Joe Biden last year signed a bill to give around-the-clock security protection to the families of Supreme Court justices after the leak of a draft court opinion overturning the Roe v. Wade abortion-rights decision, which prompted protests outside of conservative U.S. Supreme Court justices' homes.

Wilkinson had presided over a divorce proceeding involving Argote earlier Thursday, but Argote was not present for the hearing, Albert said. The judge gave custody of Argote's children to his wife at the hearing, and that was the motive for the killing, the sheriff said.

Wilkinson issued a judgment Thursday, officially granting the divorce and awarding sole custody of the couple's four children — ages 12, 11, 5 and 3 — to their mother, court records show. He ordered Argote to have no contact with the children and pay \$1,120 a month in child support.

Court records show a messy legal battle that began when Argote filed for divorce last year.

In his initial court filing, Argote accused his wife of neglecting her homeschooling responsibilities and failing to properly supervise the children. But she filed a countercomplaint, accusing Argote of "cruel treatment" and saying she couldn't support herself financially.

Days later, his wife requested a protective order, saying he was harassing her via text, controlling her every move, threatening to abuse their daughter and making false accusations against her.

"I don't get out of the house without his knowledge," she wrote in court documents. "I know he has his weapon on him at all times."

A judge granted a temporary protective order — which included a directive for Argote to surrender his firearms — but it was dismissed weeks later at the wife's request, court records show.

Argote repeatedly proposed that they continue living in the same house while they sorted out their digital advertising business and became more financially stable.

Wilkinson wrote in a March 2023 opinion that Argote's proposal was "frankly, a non-starter."

"The testimony leaves this court with the uneasy sense that Father engages in absolute control over Mother, their finances, and their lives," Wilkinson wrote. "This is not in the best interests of the children."

Argote was ordered to move out of his family's home the same day.

Messages left seeking comments at cell phone numbers listed for Argote weren't immediately returned. Argote didn't have a criminal record in Washington County, but officers had "responded to the residence for verbal domestic assaults two times within the last few years," Albert said.

Attorneys in the divorce case did not immediately respond to emails and calls seeking comment. However, the attorney representing the children had words of praise for the late jurist.

"Judge Wilkinson was an amazing man, father, husband and judge and I am blessed to have known and worked with him," attorney Ashley Wilburn wrote in an email. "He is a hero."

Hagerstown, a city of nearly 44,000, lies about 75 miles (120 kilometers) northwest of Baltimore in the panhandle of Maryland, near the state lines of West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Albert said he wasn't aware of any previous threats against Wilkinson.

Wilkinson was sworn in as a circuit court judge in 2020. The 1994 University of North Carolina graduate received his law degree from Emory University School of Law in 1997 and then became a circuit court law clerk in Washington County.

At his swearing-in, Wilkinson said he wanted to become a judge to serve the community, The Herald-Mail reported.

"It's an honor and it's humbling, and I'm happy to serve," he said.

Wilkinson thanked retired Judge Frederick C. Wright III for guiding his career. Wilkinson's military family had moved around, but when Wright hired his mother as a law clerk in 1983, Hagerstown became his home. Wilkinson later clerked for Wright.

"He was quite an outstanding young man," Wright told The Associated Press in a phone call. "I had the privilege of being his mentor."

Other U.S. judges have been targets of violence in recent years.

In June 2022, a retired Wisconsin county circuit judge, John Roemer was killed in his home in what authorities said was a targeted killing. That same month, a man carrying a gun, a knife and zip ties was arrested near Justice Brett Kavanaugh's house in Maryland after threatening to kill the justice.

A men's rights lawyer with a history of anti-feminist writings, posed as a FedEx delivery person in 2020 and fatally shot the 20-year-old son of U.S. District Judge Esther Salas, and wounded her husband at their New Jersey home. Salas in another part of the home at the time and was not injured.

And a Texas woman was charged in August with threatening to kill U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is overseeing the Washington case accusing Donald Trump of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss.

Judge fines Donald Trump \$5,000 after post maligning court staffer is found on campaign website

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump was fined \$5,000 on Friday after his disparaging social media post about a key court staffer in his New York civil fraud trial lingered on his campaign website for weeks after the judge ordered it deleted.

Judge Arthur Engoron avoided holding Trump in contempt for now, but reserved the right to do so — and possibly even put the 2024 Republican front-runner in jail — if he again violates a limited gag order barring case participants from personal attacks on court staff.

Engoron said in a written ruling that he is "way beyond the 'warning' stage," but that he was only fining Trump a nominal amount because this was a "first time violation" and Trump's lawyers said the website's retention of the post had been inadvertent.

"Make no mistake: future violations, whether intentional or unintentional, will subject the violator to far more severe sanctions, which may include steeper financial penalties, holding Donald Trump in contempt of court, and possibly imprisoning him," Engoron wrote in a two-page order.

Messages seeking comment on the ruling were left with Trump's lawyers and a campaign spokesman.

Trump lawyer Christopher Kise earlier blamed the "very large machine" of Trump's White House campaign for allowing the post to remain on the website after Trump had deleted it from social media, as ordered, calling it an unintentional oversight. It was removed from the website late Thursday after Engoron flagged it to Trump's lawyers.

Trump wasn't in court Friday. He'd been at the trial Tuesday and Wednesday after attending the first three days in early October. Outside court this week, he aimed his enmity at Engoron and New York Attorney General Letitia James, whose fraud lawsuit is being decided at the civil trial. Neither are covered by Engoron's gag order.

Engoron, however, said the buck ultimately stops with Trump — even if it was someone on his campaign who failed to remove the offending post. He gave Trump 10 days to pay the fine.

“I want to be clear that Donald Trump is still responsible for the large machine even if it’s a large machine,” Engoron said after discussing the matter with Trump’s lawyers before testimony resumed Friday morning.

Engoron issued a limited gag order Oct. 3 barring all participants in the case from smearing his staff after Trump maligned principal law clerk Allison Greenfield in a post on Trump’s Truth Social platform. The judge ordered Trump to delete the post, which made a baseless insinuation about the clerk’s personal life, and warned of “serious sanctions” for violations.

“In the current overheated climate, incendiary untruths can, and in some cases already have, led to serious physical harm, and worse,” Engoron wrote Friday.

Before Trump deleted the post from Truth Social, as ordered, his campaign copied the message into an email blast. That email, with the subject line “ICYMI,” was automatically archived on Trump’s website, Kise said.

The email was sent to about 25,800 recipients on the campaign’s media list and opened by about 6,700 of them, Kise told Engoron after obtaining the statistics at the morning break. In all, only 3,700 people viewed the post on Trump’s campaign website, the lawyer said.

“What happened appears truly inadvertent,” Kise said. The lawyer pleaded ignorance to the technological complexities involved in amplifying Trump’s social media posts and public statements, calling the archiving “an unfortunate part of the campaign process.”

New York law allows judges to impose fines or imprisonment as punishment for contempt. Last year, Engoron held Trump in contempt and fined him \$110,000 for being slow to respond to a subpoena in the investigation that led to the lawsuit.

James’ lawsuit accuses Trump and his company of duping banks and insurers by giving them heavily inflated statements of Trump’s net worth and asset values. Engoron has already ruled that Trump and his company committed fraud, but the trial involves remaining claims of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records.

Trump denies wrongdoing, arguing that a disclaimer on his financial statements absolves him of any culpability and that some of his assets are worth far more than what’s listed on the documents. He’s called the trial a “sham,” a “scam” and “a continuation of the single greatest witch hunt of all time.”

The contempt discussion brought unexpected drama to a sleepy Friday ahead of what’s shaping up to be a busy week at the Manhattan trial. Trump’s onetime lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, now a key state witness, said he’ll likely be on the witness stand Tuesday after postponing this week because of a health issue.

Trump and his two eldest sons, Eric and Donald Trump Jr., are expected to testify in a few weeks. His daughter Ivanka Trump is fighting a subpoena for her testimony. Engoron set a hearing on that dispute for next week.

Ivanka Trump was initially a defendant, but an appeals court dropped her from the case in June after finding that claims against her were outside the statute of limitations. Her lawyer argued in court papers Thursday that state lawyers failed to properly serve her subpoena and that she shouldn’t be forced to testify because she isn’t a party to the case and lives outside the court’s New York jurisdiction.

James’ office never questioned Ivanka Trump at a deposition and is now “effectively trying to force her back into this case,” her lawyer, Bennet Moskowitz, wrote.

Lawyer Kenneth Chesebro pleads guilty over efforts to overturn Trump’s 2020 loss in Georgia

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Lawyer Kenneth Chesebro pleaded guilty to a felony on Friday just as jury selection was getting underway in his trial on charges accusing him of participating in efforts to overturn Donald Trump’s loss in the 2020 election in Georgia.

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Chesebro, who was charged alongside Trump and 17 others with violating the state's anti-racketeering law, pleaded guilty to one felony charge of conspiracy to commit filing false documents in a last-minute deal, with prosecutors agreeing to dismiss the other charges. His plea came a day after fellow attorney Sidney Powell, who had been scheduled to go to trial alongside him, entered her own guilty plea to six misdemeanor counts.

In Chesebro's case, he was sentenced to five years' probation and 100 hours of community service and was ordered to pay \$5,000 in restitution, write an apology letter to Georgia's residents and testify truthfully at any related future trial.

The two guilty pleas — along with a third for a bail bondsman last month — are major victories for Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis. They allow her to avoid a lengthy trial of just two defendants — which would have given those remaining a peek at her trial strategy — and to whittle down an unwieldy pool of defendants.

Unlike Powell, who was involved in strategy talks with the former president after the election, the indictment does not indicate direct contact between Chesebro and Trump. This could potentially limit any information he could offer prosecutors that would be helpful to them in their case against Trump.

Chesebro's lawyer, Scott Grubman, said it is entirely up to prosecutors whether his client will be called to testify against others in the case, but he would be surprised if it happens. Asked if Trump should be worried about any testimony Chesebro might offer, Grubman said, "I don't think so."

Chesebro, who lives in Puerto Rico, was initially charged with felony racketeering and six other counts as part of a wide-ranging scheme to keep the Republican president in power after he lost the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden. The indictment alleges Chesebro coordinated and executed a plan to have 16 Georgia Republicans sign a certificate declaring falsely that Trump won the state and declaring themselves the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors.

Grubman said after the plea hearing that his client has been "inaccurately described as the architect of some plan to overturn democracy." He said the plea deal contradicts that.

"I think this plea deal absolutely shows and proves that he was not and never was the architect of any sort of fake elector plan or anything like that," Grubman told reporters.

For prosecutors, the plea deal assures that Chesebro publicly accepts responsibility for his conduct in the case and removes the uncertainty of a trial by a jury of his peers. It also compels him to testify in future trials in the case. Based on court filings by prosecutors, that could include communications he had with Trump's campaign lawyers and close associates, including co-defendant Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor and a Trump attorney.

Trump attorney Steve Sadow said it appears as if Chesebro's guilty plea "was the result of pressure by Fani Willis and her team and the prosecution's looming threat of prison time."

He also reiterated what he said after Powell's guilty plea, which similarly included a commitment to testify in future trials: "Once again, I fully expect that truthful testimony would be favorable to my defense strategy."

Chesebro was also an unnamed, unindicted co-conspirator in an indictment filed against Trump by Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith. The former president was charged in that case with trying to illegally overturn the results of the 2020 election and block the peaceful transfer of power.

The federal indictment alleges that "co-conspirator 5" — identified as Chesebro by The Associated Press through court and congressional records and other means — "assisted in devising and attempting to implement a plan to submit fraudulent slates of presidential electors to obstruct the certification proceeding."

By the time Chesebro agreed to the plea deal, prospective jurors at his planned trial had already been sworn in and filled out an extensive questionnaire. He had been set to be tried alongside Powell after each filed a demand for a speedy trial.

As part of Powell's deal, she will serve six years of probation, will be fined \$6,000 and will have to write an apology letter to Georgia and its residents. She also recorded a statement for prosecutors and agreed to testify truthfully against her co-defendants at future trials.

A lower-profile defendant in the case, bail bondsman Scott Graham Hall, pleaded guilty last month to five misdemeanor charges. He was sentenced to five years of probation and agreed to testify in further proceedings.

All of the other defendants, including Trump and his White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, have pleaded not guilty.

Grubman said this deal means his client will get to return to his family and his life without spending a day behind bars. He said he believes that getting prosecutors to agree on the record that this was not a crime of "moral turpitude" should allow Chesebro to continue practicing law.

Prosecutors allege that Chesebro unlawfully conspired with Trump and lawyers associated with his campaign to have the group of Georgia Republicans sign the false elector certificate and to submit it to various federal authorities. He also communicated with Trump campaign lawyers and Republican leaders in other swing states won by Biden to get those states to submit false slates of electors as well, prosecutors alleged.

That included writing memos advocating for Republicans in those states to meet and cast electoral votes for Trump and providing detailed instructions for how the process should be carried out. In an email to Giuliani, he outlined strategies to disrupt and delay the joint session of Congress on Jan. 6, 2021, during which electoral votes were to be certified. He wrote that those strategies were "preferable to allowing the Electoral Count Act to operate by its terms."

Belgian minister quits after 'monumental error' let Tunisian shooter slip through extradition net

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgium's justice minister resigned on Friday over what he described as a "monumental error" after it was discovered that Tunisia was seeking the extradition last year of an Islamic extremist who shot dead two Swedes and wounded a third this week.

Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne said that he and his services had been searching for details to understand how Abdesalem Lassoued had disappeared off the map two years ago after being denied asylum and ordered by Belgian authorities to be deported to Tunisia.

On Monday night, Lassoued gunned down two Swedish men and wounded a third with a semiautomatic rifle. The attack forced the lockdown of more than 35,000 people in a soccer stadium where they had gathered to watch Belgium play Sweden.

In a video posted online, he claimed to be inspired by the Islamic State group. Police shot him dead on Tuesday morning in a Brussels cafe.

"This morning at nine o'clock, I remarked the following elements: On Aug. 15, 2022, there was an extradition demand by Tunisia for this man," Van Quickenborne told reporters on Friday evening.

"This demand was transmitted on Sept. 1, as it should have been, by the justice expert at the Brussels prosecutor's office. The magistrate in charge did not follow up on this extradition demand and the dossier was not acted upon," he said.

"It's an individual error. A monumental error. An unacceptable error. An error with dramatic consequences," Van Quickenborne said in announcing that he had submitted his resignation to Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

"Even though it's about the work of an individual and independent magistrate, I must, despite this, assume all the political responsibility for this unacceptable error," the minister said.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, De Croo said he took note of Van Quickenborne's resignation and offered "respect for his courage." The prime minister called a meeting of senior ministers and top security officials for Saturday to shed more light on the failure.

The error is yet another indictment of Belgium's justice system, although this time it had deadly consequences. Van Quickenborne has been living under police protection due to threats against his life. Judges and senior police officers routinely complain of staffing shortages and heavy caseloads.

Lassoued had applied for asylum in Belgium in November 2019. He was known to police and had been

suspected of involvement of human trafficking, living illegally in Belgium and of being a risk to state security. Information provided to the Belgian authorities by an unidentified foreign government suggested that the man had been radicalized and intended to travel abroad to fight in a holy war. But the Belgian authorities were not able to establish this, so he was never listed as dangerous.

He was denied asylum in October 2020, and ordered to be extradited in 2021, but the authorities did not do so because they could not find an address for him. After Monday night's shooting, the place where he was living was found within hours.

The attack comes amid heightened global tensions over the war between Israel and Hamas. France's anti-terror prosecutor said Tuesday that a suspected Islamic extremist declared allegiance to the Islamic State group before fatally stabbing a teacher at a French school attack last week.

However, Belgian prosecutors said nothing suggests that Monday's attack was linked to what is happening in Israel and Gaza.

Hunter Biden prosecutor to appear for closed-door congressional testimony, AP sources say

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The special counsel overseeing the Hunter Biden investigation is expected to testify before a Congressional committee behind closed doors as a GOP probe into the Justice Department's handling of the case continues to unfold.

In a rare step, David Weiss is set to appear for a transcribed interview before members of the House Judiciary Committee on Nov. 7, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press Friday. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details of the closed-door appearance.

It comes months after an Internal Revenue Service agent testified as part of a GOP probe that the investigation into the president's son was "slow-walked" and mishandled. Weiss has denied one of the more explosive allegations by saying in writing that he had final say over the case.

Questions about Hunter Biden's business dealings have been central to a GOP-led impeachment inquiry into the president. That's been led in part by Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan, who was also running for speaker Friday in a drawn-out election that's largely brought legislative business to a standstill.

The Justice Department has previously offered to let Weiss testify about the authority he had over the investigation, noting that it is an "extraordinary step" for a prosecutor to speak to Congress while the criminal investigation is still open but saying it is warranted due to deep concerns about "any misrepresentations about our work that could harm public confidence."

Weiss is expected to make a single appearance next month. However, the Justice Department noted in a letter to the Judiciary Committee last month that he could be called on for public testimony after the investigation is over.

Weiss, who also serves as U.S. Attorney for Delaware, has been investigating Hunter Biden for five years, and the case was expected to come to a conclusion with a plea deal on tax and gun charges that spared him jail time this summer. But the agreement imploded after it came under scathing GOP criticism as a "sweetheart deal" and a judge separately raised questions about the terms in court.

Hunter Biden has now been charged with three felony firearm courts related to his purchase of a gun in 2018, a period when he has acknowledged struggling with addiction. Weiss has also indicated Hunter Biden could face tax charges, though none have yet been filed.

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,

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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.

Numerous remains have been identified and notification of family members will begin soon, Fremont County Coroner Randy Keller said in a Thursday night statement. But he added that the identification process is becoming more complicated and could take months to complete.

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, including at another Colorado funeral home where the operators were accused of selling body parts and received lengthy federal prison sentences for mail fraud. Attorney Dave TeSelle is representing families in that case and said the AP's findings were "exactly the type and pieces of evidence" that point toward fake ashes.

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

Wesley Ford died in April. Return to Nature handled the cremation and 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."

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, public documents show. Among the problems were a forced eviction, unpaid taxes and a lawsuit by Wilbert, which received a \$21,000 judgment in June because Return to Nature failed to pay for "a couple hundred" cremations, Epps said.

The couple had claimed they would settle up their rent when they got paid for work they had done for the Federal Emergency Management Agency during the coronavirus pandemic, according to their former landlord, and the funeral home website featured the logos for FEMA and the Department of Defense.

FEMA did not have any contracts with the funeral home, the agency said Friday. A defense department database search also showed no contracts with the funeral home.

When Return to Nature gave ashes to Tanya Wilson's family, her brother thought they were unusually heavy and confronted Carie Hallford about his concerns.

"Jesse, of course, this is your mother," Elliott recalled Hallford saying.

With both siblings skeptical, Wilson took some of the ashes to another funeral home for a second opinion. Platt's Funeral Home director Amber Flickinger told AP 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."

Another woman, Michelle Johnston, became skeptical whether the ashes she received were of her husband, Ken, a retired UPS driver with a gentle demeanor. She mixed ashes with water and it looked like concrete, she said.

"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."

Proper cremations produce bone fragments without any organic material, which means no DNA that could be used to identify individuals, said Barbara Kemmis, executive director of the Cremation Association of North America. Sometimes RNA is preserved 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 fakes can be more straightforward, particularly if they are concrete. A simple test entails wetting the material and seeing if it hardens when it dries. Real ashes would not be expected to transform into a solid object 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 in the case until they determine if there are more 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, he 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.

Potential penalties from federal charges could be more severe.

Abby Swoveland hired Return to Nature when her mother passed away. Sally Swoveland had run a muzzle-loader 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 month after a pig heart transplant, man works to regain strength with no rejection so far

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's been a month since a Maryland man became the second person to receive a transplanted heart from a pig — and hospital video released Friday shows he's working hard to recover.

Lawrence Faucette was dying from heart failure and ineligible for a traditional heart transplant because of other health problems when doctors at the University of Maryland School of Medicine offered the highly experimental surgery.

In the first glimpse of Faucette provided since the Sept. 20 transplant, hospital video shows physical therapist Chris Wells urging him to smile while pushing through a pedaling exercise to regain his strength.

"That's going to be tough but I'll work it out," Faucette, 58, replied, breathing heavily but giving a smile.

The Maryland team last year performed the world's first transplant of a heart from a genetically altered pig into another dying man. David Bennett survived just two months before that heart failed, for reasons that aren't completely clear although signs of a pig virus later were found inside the organ. Lessons from that first experiment led to changes before this second try, including better virus testing.

Attempts at animal-to-human organ transplants — called xenotransplants — have failed for decades, as people's immune systems immediately destroyed the foreign tissue. Now scientists are trying again using pigs genetically modified to make their organs more humanlike.

In Friday's hospital video, Faucette's doctors said the pig heart has shown no sign of rejection.

"His heart is doing everything on its own," said Dr. Muhammad Mohiuddin, the Maryland team's cardiac xenotransplantation chief.

A hospital spokeswoman said Faucette, of Frederick, Maryland, has been able to stand and physical therapists are helping him gain strength needed to attempt walking.

Many scientists hope xenotransplants one day could compensate for the huge shortage of human organ donations. More than 100,000 people are on the nation's list for a transplant, most awaiting kidneys, and thousands will die waiting.

A handful of scientific teams have tested pig kidneys and hearts in monkeys and in donated human bodies, hoping to learn enough for the Food and Drug Administration to allow formal xenotransplant studies.

There isn't much Cher hasn't done in her career. A Christmas album is new territory, though

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — There isn't much Cher hasn't done in her career. She's achieved EGOT status, she's the only artist to have a No. 1 song in each of the past six decades — heck, she's got her own gelato business, Cherlato. But a Christmas album? That's new territory.

So, why now?

"I just didn't want to do one," she told The Associated Press. "I didn't know how I was going to make it a 'Cher Christmas album.'"

The secret, of course, was to lean into the incredible eclecticism of her career, all while avoiding the sleepy, saccharine pitfalls of a "Silent Night" -heavy holiday release.

Her first new album in five years, the appropriately titled "Christmas," releases Friday. In some ways, it required Cher to find her voice again. She hadn't sang since a March 12, 2020, performance in Oklahoma City was canceled when a Utah Jazz basketball player tested positive for the coronavirus.

So she called up her vocal teacher, "Adrienne Angel, who's 96, who came out and hung with me and we worked every day."

"And then I went to the mic and I was able to sing," she says. "I have very young vocal cords."

On "Christmas," Cher enlists an all-star list of collaborators. There's Cyndi Lauper on "Put A Little Holiday In Your Heart," Stevie Wonder on "What Christmas Means to Me," Darlene Love on "Christmas (Baby, Please Come Home)," Michael Bubl  on "Home," and even the rapper Tyga on "Drop Top Sleigh Ride" — you read that last one correctly.

But working with others in this way is something she says she's never done before. When you're Cher, do you really need a featured voice?

"Well, with Darlene, I wasn't going to sing her song without her," she says of the song they first sang together 60 years ago on "A Christmas Gift for You From Phil Spector."

"With Stevie, I did the song, I loved the song, but there were just things I couldn't do, that were just Stevie," she says. "So, I called him and just said, 'Stevie, I've done it. I'm pretty proud of it. But there are things I can't do, and I need you.'"

"I was still trying to sell him when he'd already said yes," she says. "At some point he asked me, 'Is this my song?' And I went, 'You think I could call you to ask you to sing on someone else's song?'"

Alexander Edwards, Cher's romantic partner and a credited producer on the project, is best friends with Tyga, who helped make the most unexpected and delightful collaboration happen.

"Christmas" is dedicated to Cher's late mother, Georgia Holt, who died just before the holidays last year. But don't mistake this album as therapy — the act of reclaiming Christmas in the face of loss, or a way to memorialize Holt.

"I think about my mom all the time," she says. She doesn't need an album to remind her of her mom; her mom is everywhere.

"I don't have a bit of regret that my mom is gone because my mom was such a vibrant woman and she didn't like what was going on in her life," she adds.

Cher says her mom sends her messages all the time — like recently when she rediscovered a huge plate she made her mom, flipped it over, and read what it said: “Dear mom, I love you, Merry Christmas.”

“And it was like, ‘Mom, you’re just not going to leave me alone, are you?’” she says.

In addition to the album, Cher is preparing to release a 25th anniversary edition of her Grammy-winning album “Believe” on Nov. 3. Its title track is credited as the first use of autotune — though, as she recalls, it was termed a “pitch machine” at the time.

She was arguing with her longtime producer Mark Taylor about the track, and he brought up the new technology.

“It started and it was like, ‘Oh my God, this is the best thing ever.’ And I thought, ‘You don’t even know it’s me. This is the best thing ever.’ And then we high fived,” she recounts.

But don’t mistake an openness to technology and musical innovation as an openness to artificial intelligence.

Of the technology, Cher is quick to say: “Not AI. Someone did me doing a Madonna song and it was kind of shocking. They didn’t have it down perfectly. But also, I’ve spent my entire life trying to be myself, and now these a----- are going to go take it? And they’ll do my acting and they’ll do my singing?”

“I’m telling you, if you work forever to become somebody — and I’m not talking about somebody in the famous, money part — but an artist, and then someone just takes it from you, it seems like it should be illegal,” she adds.

For those keeping count: It is also the 35th anniversary of Cher winning the best actress Oscar for her role in “Moonstruck.” When asked if she will act again, she’s quick to point out the necessity of a resolution to the ongoing Hollywood actors strike.

She was asked to do a special, she says.

“They said, ‘Well, we can do it in England.’ I said, ‘We can do it on the moon, but I’m not doing it,’” she says, not until an agreement is reached.

Spoken like, well, Cher.

Church parking near stadiums scores big in a win-win for faith congregations and sports fans

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

CHESTER, Pa. (AP) — The Eagles and the NFL might still be the sports favorites at Calvary Baptist Church, just outside Philadelphia. But many here are also rooting for a neighboring team which last year reached the championship game of Major League Soccer.

Their new-found fandom is all about location — and revenue from parking. The Philadelphia Union plays at Subaru Park, a stadium beside the Delaware River just a few blocks from Calvary in the economically challenged city of Chester. Its poverty rate is among the highest in the metro area.

As the Union continues to attract loyal fans and reach new heights, so have the blessings bestowed on this historic church where Martin Luther King Jr. attended as a seminarian.

It has been crucial. Like many other Black Protestant churches, Calvary Baptist struggled financially during the coronavirus pandemic. Attendance fell, and along with it, funding. But the church has transformed its parking lot to accommodate game-day fundraisers, with volunteers from the congregation staffing the lots and selling spaces for \$15 per vehicle.

These days, the church raises up to \$3,000 per game — about half of what goes into the collection plate on Sundays, said its pastor, Keith Dickens. The welcome influx of extra money is being used to pay for utilities, ministries and a new speaker system that will allow Calvary to reach a broader audience by broadcasting its services online.

“It’s been a blessing,” said Dickens, who on a recent game day proudly sported a Philadelphia Union hat. “Not only just to generate funding, but also to meet and minister to new people.”

Across the nation, houses of worship located near stadiums — from Boston’s Fenway Park to the Green Bay Packers’ Lambeau Field — have opened their parking lots to legions of fans.

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For churches offering parking near pro-soccer stadiums, their coffers recently received an assist from the world's best active player, Lionel Messi who joined an MLS roster this year. All 250 parking spaces at the Calvary lot were full when Messi's Inter Miami played the Union.

Jeffrey Scholes, co-author of "Religion and Sports in American Culture," said churches like Calvary show a growing willingness to use "secular entities like sport for religious purposes" including, "continuing a ministry, feeding the poor, keeping the lights on, things that ideally churches do."

In the past, Scholes said clergy might have preferred the "old-fashioned way" of getting churchgoers to donate while shunning the sports-fan parking business as too "worldly."

"There's just much more openness to different kinds of nonreligious tactics to perform the necessary functions of a church or synagogue or mosque," Scholes said.

It also offers an opportunity to share with fans the history of congregations like Calvary, which was founded in 1879 by a group of formerly enslaved Africans seeking freedom to worship.

On a recent game day, fans decked in the Union's navy, signal blue and gold colors pulled into parking spots in front of Calvary's colorful mural that pays homage to King. The civil rights leader worshipped at the church from 1948-1951, when he attended Chester's Crozer Theological Seminary.

Chester has a notable cultural and industrial history, but now has economic difficulties that make Calvary's new parking revenue all the more appreciated.

"For us, if it gives back to a cause, it makes it all the better," Abe Gitterman, age 37 and Jewish, said before he paid the parking fee. Next to him, his 6-and 7-year-old sons pointed to the mural and asked parking attendant and church member Lisa Lewis if this was the same man they had learned about in school. "Yes," she replied, smiling.

"It feels good," she later said, "to tell them the history about the church."

It can also be fun. In Lubbock, Texas, Leslie Cranford, a parishioner at St. John's United Methodist Church, said Texas Tech football fans have tailgated with RVs — taking up to four spots (\$10 each) — in the church parking lot, near the Red Raiders' Jones AT&T Stadium.

Sometimes, rival fans park at the church. "We tell them: we got to charge you extra!" Cranford said, laughing.

She introduced the parking program at her congregation two decades ago. On a good season, they make up to \$2,000 per game. "Dwindling attendance is a problem," Cranford said. "So, this helps us maintain our ministries."

In Boston, the Christian Science Church opened its parking garage to the public in 2014. That includes Red Sox fans who can park for \$30 — a lower rate than closer to Fenway Park.

Kevin Ness, manager of the Christian Science Committees on Publication, said the revenue helps cover the operating expenses of Christian Science Plaza, a popular tourist attraction which sits on top of the garage in the Fenway neighborhood.

"This in turn allows the contributions from members to directly support the worldwide healing mission of the church," he said.

In Green Bay, Wisconsin, Bethany Church began its Packers parking program in 2010.

"We thought it would be a great avenue for outreach, and a way to get funds to help support the growing ministries," Bethany's administrative assistant, Jill Connery said via email. The church doesn't have a set charge, and instead asks for donation, Connery said, adding that "many people are very generous."

Packers parking helps fund programs, including youth ministries, small group learning and building facility upgrades, Connery said. The church parking lot is often full on game days.

"We are known for our hospitality," she said. "We had a volunteer who began giving rides to Lambeau from our parking lot, free of charge to whoever didn't want to walk the .5 miles to the stadium. So, now we are known for our shuttle service, and friendly volunteers."

Churches also have embraced other fans. Nashville First Church of the Nazarene offered their parking lots for three shows attended by thousands at nearby Nissan Stadium during the Nashville leg of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour. The parking program (\$30 a spot) also is popular during Tennessee Titans games and

has helped fund ministries in Nashville and missions in Haiti and Kenya.

"Every one of these dollars comes right back in to help people," said its senior pastor, Kevin Ulmet. "When people hear that, they love that, they say 'we want to be a part of that.' And that, to me, is the classic definition of win-win."

Russia extends detention of a US journalist detained for failing to register as a foreign agent

By The Associated Press undefined

A Russian-American journalist was ordered Friday to be detained for another three days on charges of failing to register as a foreign agent, Russian media reported.

Alsu Kurmasheva, an editor for the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, appeared in court in the central Russian city of Kazan, according to the state news agency Tass.

She is the second U.S. journalist detained in Russia this year, after Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was arrested on espionage charges in March.

Photos published by independent Russian news website Mediazona showed Kurmasheva, who works for RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir service, inside a defendant's cage in the courtroom, wearing a coat with a hood and a face mask.

The state-run news website Tatar-Info said Kurmasheva faces charges of failing to register as a "foreign agent" and was collecting information on Russian military activities. It said she could receive up to five years in prison.

Kurmasheva was accused of reporting on the Russian military "in order to transmit information to foreign sources," alleging she received information about university teachers who were mobilized by the army, Tatar-Info said.

Her lawyer, Edgar Matevosyan, said she is not guilty of the charges, according to Mediazona.

"Alsu is a highly respected colleague, devoted wife, and dedicated mother to two children," said RFE/RL head Jeffrey Gedmin. "She needs to be released, so she can return to her family immediately."

Kurmasheva, who lives in Prague, was stopped June 2 at Kazan International Airport after traveling to Russia for a family emergency May 20, according to RFE/RL.

Airport officials confiscated her U.S. and Russian passports and she was fined for failing to register her U.S. passport. She was waiting for her passports to be returned when the new charge was filed Wednesday, RFE/RL said.

"At that time, it was clear they did not have anything on her, so maybe it was like a matter of intimidation. And then it took them three months to decide how would they, you know, package the case against her," according to Galina Arapova of Russia's Mass Media Defense Center.

Arapova told The Associated Press the charges against Kurmasheva are a "sophisticated form of censorship." She added that Kurmasheva's case is different from that of Gershkovich, even though both are U.S. citizens.

"She was attacked because she is a Russian journalist. Second, she belongs to a foreign media, which was already regarded as a foreign agent and with which Russian authorities had a longstanding conflict on foreign agent legislation," she said.

The U.S. State Department calls Kurmasheva's arrest another instance of Russian harassment of U.S. citizens. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied it, saying "there has been absolutely no campaign in Russia to harass U.S. citizens."

"There are U.S. citizens who violate the law, and legitimate measures are taken against them," Peskov told reporters Friday.

RFE/RL was told in 2017 to register by Russian authorities as a foreign agent, but it has challenged Moscow's use of foreign agent laws in the European Court of Human Rights. The organization has been fined millions of dollars by Russia.

The Committee to Protect Journalists called the charges against Kurmasheva "spurious," saying her

detention "is yet more proof that Russia is determined to stifle independent reporting."

Kurmasheva reported on ethnic minority communities in the Tatarstan and Bashkortostan republics in Russia, including projects to preserve the Tatar language and culture, her employer said.

Analysts say the Kremlin may be using jailed Americans as bargaining chips after U.S.-Russia tensions soared amid Moscow sending troops into Ukraine. At least two U.S. citizens arrested in Russia in recent years — including WNBA star Brittney Griner — have been exchanged for Russians jailed in the U.S.

Gershkovich has appeared in court several times since his arrest to appeal for his release, without success.

Russia's Federal Security Service alleged Gershkovich, "acting on the instructions of the American side, collected information constituting a state secret about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex."

Gershkovich and The Wall Street Journal deny the allegations, and the U.S. government has declared him to be wrongfully detained.

Russian authorities haven't detailed any evidence to support the charges. Court proceedings against him are closed because prosecutors say details of the case are classified.

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.

"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

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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 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."

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 Yunis 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 Yunis 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.

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.

Trevor Lawrence comes through late and the Jaguars hold off the Saints, 31-24

By BRETT MARTEL AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Jacksonville quarterback Trevor Lawrence was playing with a sprained left knee, and the visiting Jaguars hurt their own cause with turnovers and penalties.

They were still good enough to overcome that and pull out a dramatic victory that extended their winning streak to four games.

Travis Etienne ran for two touchdowns, Foyesade Oluokun returned an interception for a score, and Christian Kirk's late 44-yard touchdown after a short catch over the middle lifted the Jaguars to a 31-24 victory over the New Orleans Saints on Thursday night.

"I don't think I've run that fast since college," said Kirk, a former Texas A&M star, whose late score made up for his lost fumble in the first half. "That was some vintage stuff. I'm glad I was able to do it in that moment."

Lawrence returned from the knee injury that forced him out of the final minutes of a victory over Indianapolis on Sunday and wound up leading Jacksonville (5-2) with 59 yards rushing.

"It's crazy how you have something like that going on and don't plan on moving a lot, and you end up running the ball more than you usually do," Lawrence said. "It felt pretty good. It didn't bother me too much and definitely didn't set it back. That was the goal, to play, find a way to win the game and not set it back."

Lawrence also completed 20 of 29 passes for 204 yards and one TD to help the Jags secure their best start since opening 5-2 in 2007.

After Kirk's touchdown broke a 24-all tie with 3:08 left, the Saints (3-4) were in position to answer when they drove inside the Jacksonville 10 in the final minute, but stalled out with four straight incomplete passes.

Derek Carr's third-down pass bounced off of tight end Foster Moreau's hands in the back of the end zone and a fourth-down timing throw to Chris Olave along the left sideline fell incomplete.

"We're finding it hard to start fast, finding it hard to maintain, to execute sometimes and we're finding it hard to finish," said Saints running back Alvin Kamara, who gained 153 yards from scrimmage on a mix of runs and catches. "That's kind of the glaring and recurring theme."

As time ran out, Moreau, a New Orleans native in his first season back home, looked disconsolate on the bench with his head in his hands. Teammates consoled him and later said there were too many other missed opportunities throughout the game to pin the loss on his drop.

"It doesn't come down to one play," Carr said. "There's so many things that we could have done."

Jacksonville gave the Saints numerous chances to stay in the game, losing two fumbles in the first half and committing untimely penalties throughout the game.

It almost came back to haunt them.

The Saints rallied from 24-9 down to tie the game on touchdowns by Taysom Hill on a 1-yard, fourth-down run and Michael Thomas on a 17-yard reception — the latter followed by Carr's pass to Kamara for

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a 2-point conversion.

Carr finished 33 of 55 for 301 yards, and New Orleans outgained Jacksonville 407 yards to 330, but the Saints again struggled to finish promising drives in the end zone after losing in a similar fashion in Week 6 at Houston.

After practicing on a limited basis this week and being listed as questionable, Lawrence completed five of his first six passes for 60 yards and even scrambled for 9 yards during a game-opening touchdown drive that ended with Etienne's 2-yard run.

"We have to do a better job of not letting the freakin' quarterback scramble," Saints coach Dennis Allen said, calling Lawrence's improvised runs a "black eye on the whole thing."

New Orleans' first drive ended with Blake Grupe's missed 51-yard field goal. But the Saints got the ball right back when Kirk was stripped by cornerback Paulson Adebo after a 19-yard catch and defensive end Carl Granderson recovered.

When New Orleans punted soon after, Jacksonville turned it over again when Tevaughn Campbell, who was trying to block, collided hard with returner Jamal Agnew as Lou Hedley's punt descended and hit Campbell's back.

Lonnie Johnson recovered for New Orleans, which stalled on the Jaguars 5 and settled for Grupe's field goal.

Etienne became the first player in Jaguars history to rush for two touchdowns in three consecutive games when he ran around the left end for a 17-yard score that made it 14-3.

After their seventh third-down failure of the first half, the Saints settled for another Grupe field goal.

In the final minutes of the half, Jacksonville converted a fake punt with punter Logan Cooke completing a 13-yard pass to Tim Jones on fourth and 2, setting up Brandon McManus' 43-yard field goal for a 17-6 halftime lead.

INJURIES

Jaguars: Safety Andre Cisco received attention on the field late in the third quarter but was able to walk off on his own.

Saints: Carr appeared to finish the game in pain, but it was not immediately clear what was ailing him. ... Alontae Taylor left the game briefly in the first quarter with an apparent cut on his nose and returned for the next series.

UP NEXT

Jaguars: Travel to Pittsburgh on Oct. 29.

Saints: Visit Indianapolis on Oct. 29.

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

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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 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."

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 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

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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 media 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."

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.

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

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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 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 mili-

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tary 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.

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.

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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.

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

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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."

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 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

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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 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

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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 president 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.

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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."

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.

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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."

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

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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.

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 reflec-

tion 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."

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."

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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-STUDED 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

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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.

Today in History: October 21 **Thomas Edison perfects a workable electric light**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Oct. 21, the 294th day of 2023. There are 71 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 21, 1879, Thomas Edison perfected a workable electric light at his laboratory in Menlo Park, N.J.

On this date:

In 1797, the U.S. Navy frigate Constitution, also known as "Old Ironsides," was christened in Boston's harbor.

In 1805, a British fleet commanded by Adm. Horatio Nelson defeated a French-Spanish fleet in the Battle of Trafalgar; Nelson, however, was killed.

In 1917, legendary jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie was born in Cheraw, South Carolina.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. troops captured the German city of Aachen (AH'-kuhn).

In 1960, Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard M. Nixon clashed in their fourth and final presidential debate in New York.

In 1966, 144 people, 116 of them children, were killed when a coal waste landslide engulfed a school and some 20 houses in Aberfan, Wales.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon nominated Lewis F. Powell and William H. Rehnquist to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1976, Saul Bellow won the Nobel Prize for literature, the first American honored since John Steinbeck in 1954.

In 1985, former San Francisco Supervisor Dan White — who'd served five years in prison for killing Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk, a gay-rights advocate — was found dead in a garage, a suicide.

In 2001, Washington, D.C., postal worker Thomas L. Morris Jr. died of inhalation anthrax as officials began testing thousands of postal employees.

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In 2012, former senator and 1972 Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern died in Sioux Falls, South Dakota at age 90.

In 2013, a seventh-grader at Sparks Middle School in Sparks, Nevada, shot and killed a teacher and wounded two classmates before taking his own life.

In 2014, former Washington Post executive editor Ben Bradlee died at age 93.

In 2015, Vice President Joe Biden announced he would not be a candidate in the 2016 White House campaign, solidifying Hillary Rodham Clinton's status as the Democratic front-runner.

In 2017, the Houston Astros reached the World Series for just the second time in the team's history, beating the New York Yankees 4-0 in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series. (The Astros would beat the Dodgers in seven games in the World Series.)

In 2021, Actor Alec Baldwin was pointing a gun on a movie set in New Mexico when it went off and killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounded director Joel Souza.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Joyce Randolph is 99. Rock singer Manfred Mann is 83. Musician Steve Cropper (Booker T. & the MG's) is 82. Singer Elvin Bishop is 81. TV's Judge Judy Sheindlin is 81. Actor Everett McGill is 78. Musician Lee Loughnane (LAHK'-nayn) (Chicago) is 77. Actor Dick Christie is 75. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is 74. Actor LaTanya Richardson Jackson is 74. Musician Charlotte Caffey (The Go-Go's) is 70. Movie director Catherine Hardwicke is 68. Singer Julian Cope is 66. Rock musician Steve Lukather (Toto) is 66. Actor Ken Watanabe (wah-tah-NAH'-bee) is 64. Actor Melora Walters is 63. Rock singer-musician Nick Oliveri (Mondo Generator) is 52. Christian rock musician Charlie Lowell (Jars of Clay) is 50. Actor Jeremy Miller is 47. Country singer Matthew Ramsey (Old Dominion) is 46. Actor Will Estes is 45. Actor Michael McMillian is 45. Reality TV star Kim Kardashian (kahr-DASH'-ee-uhn) is 43. Actor Matt Dallas is 41. Actor Charlotte Sullivan is 40. Actor Aaron Tveit (tuh-VAYT') is 40. Actor Glenn Powell is 35. Country singer Kane Brown is 30.