

# Groton Daily Independent

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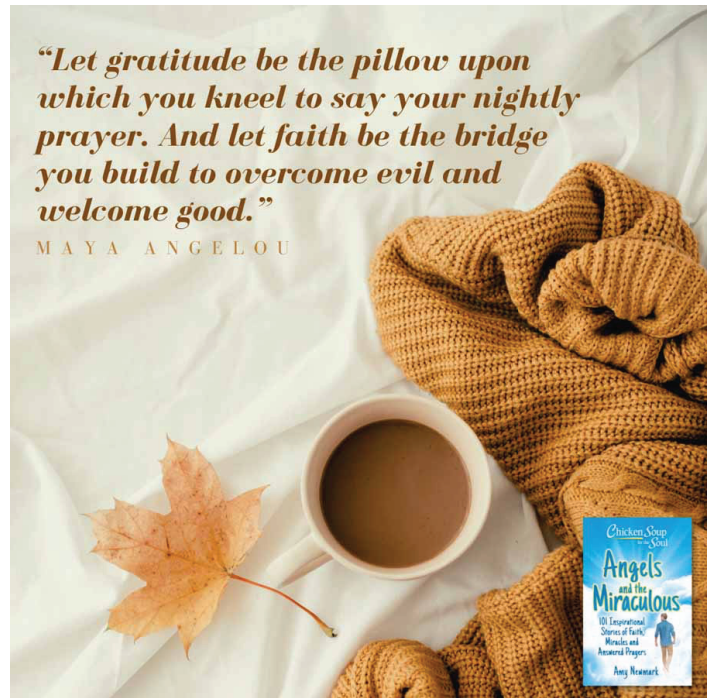
## Thursday, Oct. 26

Senior Menu: Hot turkey combo, mashed potatoes with gravy, 7-layer salad, peaches.  
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School LUnch: Corndogs, mashed sweet potatoes.  
Second Round of Football Playoffs

## Friday, Oct. 27

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad on croissant, tomato spoon salad, frosted brownies, fruit.  
School Breakfast: Biscuits.  
School Lunch: Subs, chips.

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



*"Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good."*

MAYA ANGELOU

## Saturday, Oct. 28

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.  
Junior High Volleyball Tournament at Matchbox in Aberdeen.

## Sunday, Oct. 29

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:30 a.m.  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion (Milestones for JK and Kindergarten), 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

### World in Brief

flooding, mudslides, and cutting off power and internet for more than half a million residents. The death toll is unknown.

India will resume some visa services in Canada on Thursday, in a move that could ease tensions between the two countries after a major diplomatic row last month over the killing of a Sikh activist.

China launched its youngest-ever crew bound for its Tiangong orbiting space station on Thursday, as it continues its push to land astronauts on the moon before 2030.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian generals are "trying to move forward" around the town of Avdiivka despite heavy casualties, said Oleksandr Shtupun, a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern groups of forces, estimating Russian losses in the last six days at 2,500 dead and wounded in the region..

The United Auto Workers union announced it had reached a tentative contract agreement with Ford, possibly ending a nearly six-week strike. The union leaders and members still need to approve the deal.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit the U.S. on October 26 to 29 for high-level talks, setting the stage for a meeting between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping of China in the U.S. next month.

Hurricane Otis slammed into Mexico's southwest coast as one of the more powerful Category 5 storms, causing

BRISTOL, SOUTH DAKOTA

# HAUNTED WAREHOUSE

**OCTOBER 27 & 28**

**BRISTOL MAIN STREET**

7:00PM-11:00PM | \$15 ADMISSION | 6+ |

INCREDIBLE EDIBLES | SHARI'S JO TO GO |

ROB'S PORTA POTTIES

NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCIDENTS

## Schwan named Dean of the Millicent Atkins School of Education



**Dr. Anna Schwan**

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Northern State University officials are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Anna Schwan as Dean of the Millicent Atkins School of Education.

Schwan is well known on campus and in the community. She has been a passionate and respected advocate for teacher excellence for many years. In 2021, Schwan was awarded the Outstanding Early Career Faculty Award for going above and beyond to improve curriculum, mentor students and serve on numerous committees.

“For me, education is not only what I do, but also who I am. Continuing to serve as dean of the Millicent Atkins School of Education allows me the opportunity to empower the faculty and staff to make the changes that they truly want to see...the intentional changes that they believe will impact our students’ lives,” Schwan said.

Schwan has been serving as the interim dean since fall 2022. She has already made monumental changes that will benefit education students. In the last year, Schwan launched a 2-year degree in early childhood education to help meet the demand for qualified childcare providers in South Dakota and brought the Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway program to Northern as a flexible, low-cost option for educational assistants to earn their bachelor’s degree in secondary education. In addition, she revamped a previous scholarship into the 1901 Scholarship, which is available to a wider range of students and ties more closely into Northern’s history as a teacher education college. She will start her new role immediately.

“I see this position as a means of making a difference, of having the capacity to support and guide new programs, foster a climate of innovation and risk-taking, and to fight for what we believe is right for the School of Education, our departments, and most importantly, our students,” said Schwan.

Schwan started at Northern in 2017 as an assistant professor. Since then, Schwan has served as a graduate programs recruiter, graduate faculty coordinator and teacher education department chair. Previously, Schwan was a school administrator for the Groton Area Middle School and High School.

Schwan earned her Doctor of Education and Specialist in Education from the University of South Dakota, her Master of Arts in Education from Valley City State University, her Bachelor of Arts in Arts & Sciences from South Dakota State University, and her Specialization in Spanish Culture and Language from La Escuela Internacional in Spain

“What we have in the Millicent Atkins School of Education is special, and every day when I shut the lights off and walk out of our building, I know that the work that we are doing is important,” said Schwan. “I know that everyone in this building has chosen this career path out of passion and heart, and we genuinely love to teach and serve students. That’s what special, that’s what will inspire true change, and that is why I know this is where I want to be...where I’m meant to be.”

PLEASE JOIN US FOR

## St Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church

### *Fall Dinner*

NOVEMBER 5TH, 5PM TO 7PM

TOSSED SALAD, LASAGNA, GARLIC BREAD,  
ICE CREAM SUNDAE BAR

.....  
**FREE WILL OFFERING**  
.....

BINGO, BINGO, BINGO!



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## Groton Area has five players named to All State Soccer



Five Groton Area soccer players have been named to the All State Soccer Teams. The girls are Jerica Locke, first team; Kennedy Hansen, first team; Jaedyn Penning, honorable mention; Laila Roberts, honorable mention; and Jacob Zak, honorable mention. (Courtesy photos)

## Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. raises \$300 at concession stand



Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. board of directors and volunteers were given the opportunity to work in the concession stand Monday night and received \$300 for doing so. Money will go towards items for The Pantry. Was a fun adventure and definitely a team building activity! Groton Area MS/HS Booster PAC allows clubs and groups this option as a fundraiser for their cause. Pictured here are Pat Miller, Diane Warrington, Lance Larsen, April Abeln, Nancy Larsen, Ruby Larson, Kari Bartling, Karyn Babcock, and Elizabeth Barajas. (Courtesy Photo)

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## Volleyball Region 1A Pairings

### Class A - Region 1

#### #1 - Groton Area High School

	1 Groton Area	18-4	10/31 6:00 PM CT
	8 Waubay/Summit	2-22	

#### #2 - Groton Area High School

	4 Sisseton	11-14	10/31 7:30 PM CT
	5 Redfield	10-16	

#### #3 -

	2 Aberdeen Ronc...	18-5	10/31 TBD
	7 Tiospa Zina	7-20	

#### #4 -

	3 Milbank	19-11	10/31 TBD
	6 Webster Area	10-16	

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## Groton Wage Memorial Library

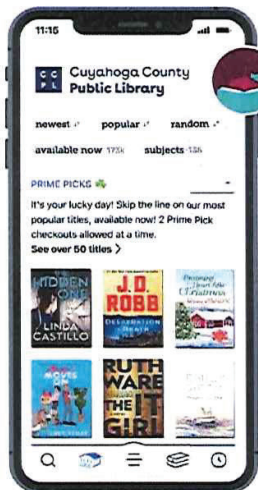


120 N Main St – Groton, SD – (605) 397-8422

Open Monday-Friday 8am-5pm

- Library Cards are FREE to ALL Groton Area Residents!
- Offer a variety of books, magazines, audiobooks and DVDs!
- Offer printing, copying, faxing and scanning services!
- Computer Lab, laptops and tablets available for public use!
- Now offering e-books and audiobooks with the FREE OverDrive/Libby App!

Discover new reads on Libby, the free app from your local library that allows you to borrow ebooks, audiobooks & more on your phone or tablet.



Why you'll love Libby:

- Quick and easy setup! Just follow the prompts to start reading
- A unified bookshelf for all your loans and holds
- Unlimited custom tags to categorize books however you'd like
- Push notifications so you never miss a thing, including available holds
- Easily find the next book in a series
- Preferences to only see the content you like
- More ways to listen on the go with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto

*With the classic OverDrive app being discontinued soon, it's time to read on Libby.* The award-winning Libby app by OverDrive offers a fresh, easy-to-use design with access to the same great titles from your library.



Visit [overdrive.com/libby](https://overdrive.com/libby) to get started with Libby today!



**Summer Storytime EVERY Thursday in the Summer June-August!**  
**'1,000 Books Before Kindergarten Program' is NOW available!**

**FREE UPCOMING EVENTS: *MUST PREREGISTER BY CALLING LIBRARY***

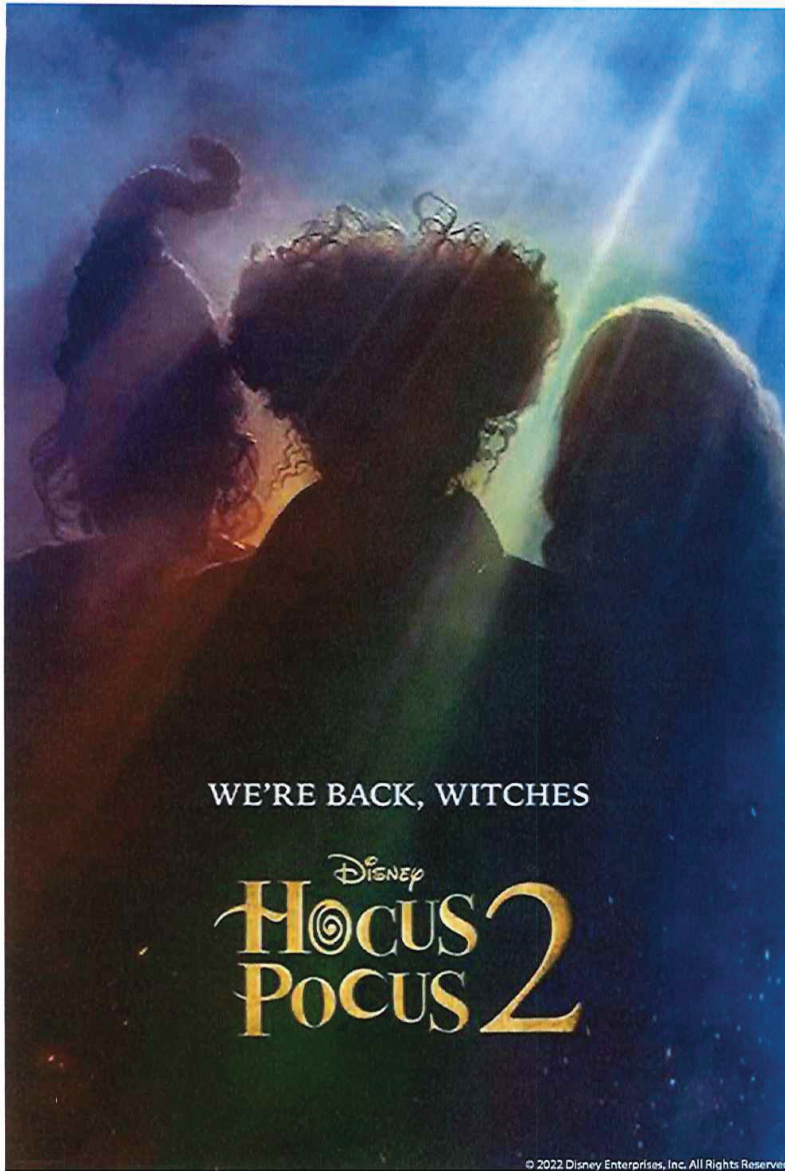
Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup> 3pm-5pm: Halloween Movie Event: Featuring Hocus Pocus 2!

Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> 11am-1pm: Christmas Movie Event (TBA). Jungle Pizza will be served!



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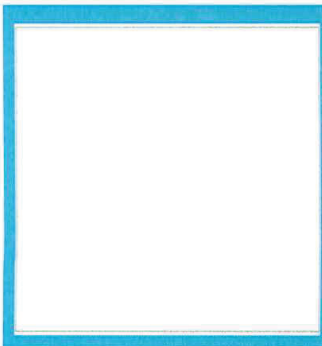
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Groton Wage Memorial  
Library  
120 N Main Street  
Saturday, October 28th  
3:00pm-5:00pm

FREE ADMISSION!  
MUST preregister! Limited  
seating available!  
Questions/Register  
(605) 397-8422

FREE SNACKS provided by  
Dacotah Bank!



**SWANK**  
MOVIE LICENSING USA

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October 16 - 22, 2023

After a great in-state work period spent in South Dakota, we're back in action for another Senate work period. I had the opportunity to visit Sioux Falls to speak at the South Dakota Biotech Association's annual meeting on a panel with Dakota State President José-Marie Griffiths. I visited Brookings during

Hobo Week for a groundbreaking for 3M's new expansion. While in town, I had to make a stop on South Dakota State University's campus to chat with students over donuts, visit with the Collegian newspaper and celebrate homecoming. Great memories of my time as a student there. As we alumni look ahead to this weekend, we're hoping for a Jackrabbit win against the powerful Yotes in Vermillion. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I visited with: This past week, I met with Michael Bockorny, CEO of the Aberdeen Development Corporation. I also presented an Atomic Veterans Commemorative Service Medal to Navy Veteran Darrell Lee Witte from Pierre. Mr. Witte was a member of the USS Walton that took part in Operation RedWing, a nuclear weapon test series that took place in 1956. My office works with veterans to get them the medals they have earned. If you are a veteran or a family member of a veteran needing assistance with this, please contact my office.

Meetings this past week: Tanya Otsuka, nominee for the National Credit Union Administration board; Erik Fyrwald, CEO of Syngenta; The Real Estate Roundtable; and Martin O'Malley, nominee for Commissioner of the Social Security Administration. I also had a meeting with Kathy Warden, CEO of Northrop Grumman for an update on the B-21 Raider stealth bomber coming to Ellsworth AFB.

We also had our Senate Prayer Breakfast, where Senator Ted Cruz of Texas was our speaker this week.

Panel hosted: This past week, I hosted a panel for fellow Senators and their staff members on artificial intelligence and cancer research. The panel featured academic and industry experts who work at the intersection of these two fields. We had an excellent conversation on how AI is transforming health care. You can read more about the panel [here](#).

Cancer research is an issue that's particularly personal to me. As many of you know, I lost my wife Jean to cancer on November 2, 2021. We were already seeing encouraging progress in the development of new treatments during her battle a few years ago. Now, there is a real opportunity to utilize AI in ways never thought possible that will help save lives.

Headline of the week: Q&A: Rounds on regulating AI, which will impact 'every single aspect of our lives' – South Dakota Searchlight

Votes taken: 8 – most notably was the Senate's unanimous passage of a resolution standing with our ally Israel against terrorism.

Hearings: I attended 4 hearings this past week: one in the Select Committee on Intelligence, one in the Banking committee, one in the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and one joint hearing between SASC and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Our Banking committee hearing was on nominations, where we heard from six individual nominees to executive positions. I had the opportunity to serve as Ranking Member and give the opening statement. You can watch a clip of that [here](#).

Classified briefings: I had 2 classified briefings this past week: one was on the B-21 Raider stealth bomber. One was a briefing for all senators on the war in Israel. I talked more about that on CNN last Thursday morning. You can watch the clip of that at the end of the Round[s] Up.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Madison, Mobridge and Roscoe.

Steps taken this past week: 56,514 steps or 28.06 miles

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## 2023 Hoop City Classic

presented by

### First Dakota National Bank

#### Thursday, December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Corn Palace (Mitchell, SD)

<i>Time</i>	<i>HOME</i>	<i>AWAY</i>
9:00am	Viborg-Hurley Girls	Campbell County Girls (WY)
10:30am	Elk Point-Jefferson	Campbell County (WY)
12:00pm	Ethan Girls	Thunder Basin Girls (WY)
1:30pm	Ethan	McCook Central-Montrose
3:00pm	Cordova (TN)	Wauwatosa West (WI)
4:30pm	Sioux Valley	Thunder Basin (WY)
6:00pm	Viborg-Hurley	Corsica-Stickney
7:30pm	Bridgewater Emery	White River
9:00pm	Gregory	Howard

#### Friday, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Corn Palace (Mitchell, SD)

<i>Time</i>	<i>HOME</i>	<i>AWAY</i>
8:00am	Rapid City Christian Girls	Campbell County Girls (WY)
9:30am	Waconia (MN)	Campbell County (WY)
11:00am	Aberdeen Central (Girls)	Thunder Basin Girls (WY)
12:30pm	Groton	Pine Ridge
2:00pm	Sioux Falls Christian	DeLaSalle (MN)
3:30pm	Mitchell (Girls)	Thunder Basin Girls (WY)
5:00pm	White River	Lower Brule
6:30pm	Hamlin	Cordova (TN)
8:00pm	Wauwatosa West (WI)	Totino Grace (MN)
9:30pm	Mitchell	Thunder Basin (WY)

#### Saturday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Corn Palace (Mitchell, SD)

<i>Time</i>	<i>HOME</i>	<i>AWAY</i>
8:00am	Rapid City Christian Girls	Tea Girls
9:30am	Rapid City Christian	Potter County
11:00am	Cordova (TN)	Totino Grace (MN)
12:30pm	Thunder Basin Girls (WY)	Brandon Valley Girls
2:00pm	Thunder Basin (WY)	Brandon Valley
3:30pm	Mitchell Girls	Campbell County Girls (WY)
5:00pm	Campbell County (WY)	Bridgewater Emery
6:30pm	Aberdeen Central	Thunder Basin (WY)
8:00pm	Mitchell	DeLaSalle (MN)
9:30pm	Lennox	Waconia (MN)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State panel suspends Brookings police officer for slamming man against wall

**Commission votes for censure over revocation of law enforcement certification**

**BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 25, 2023 8:46 PM**



**Damien Weets, right, testifies before the Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission on Oct. 25, 2023, in Sioux Falls.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

SIOUX FALLS — A Brookings police officer will be suspended for a year after throwing an intoxicated man against a wall without warning when the man insulted him.

Damien Weets, a 12-year police veteran in Brookings, will be eligible for recertification as a South Dakota law enforcement officer in a year, provided he undergoes a psychiatric evaluation, completes training on topics including conflict de-escalation and use of force, and passes a “fit for duty” exam.

The Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission voted unanimously on Wednesday at the Ramkota Inn to censure Weets for conduct unbecoming of an officer, and for conduct that adversely affects morale or public confidence, for his behavior toward Esai Kaiyou on April 30.

The commission split 6-4 on full revocation, however, with the minority

supporting it. Lincoln County State’s Attorney Tom Wollman argued that the officer’s conduct casts a pall on law enforcement.

“The health of our communities is measured by how we protect the most vulnerable,” said Wollman. “Mr. Kaiyou deserved a measure of care that night that was not provided to him. We have other Mr. Kaiyous in other neighborhoods throughout this state, and how we respond to them needs to be met with absolute professionalism. That was not the case here.”

University of South Dakota Knutson School of Law Dean Neil Fulton, who voted for the yearlong suspension, said it is not “a diminution of what happened that night” or Weets’ response to it.

“The conditions of the suspension are intended to be a road map back into law enforcement, and that’s far from a sure thing, from my perspective,” Fulton said.

#### **Officer turned in by jailers**

Kaiyou settled a civil lawsuit against Weets this fall for an undisclosed sum, but Wednesday’s hearing was more consequential for Weets.

Jim Leach, Kaiyou’s lawyer, said insurance covered the cost of the settlement. A revocation could have ended Weets’ career in law enforcement.

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The commission heard nearly six hours of testimony in the case against Weets, who maintains that he hadn't "thrown" Kaiyou, but rather attempted to stand him up to perform a search for weapons, and to protect a jailer from being spat upon.

That jailer, however, was one of two who turned Weets in for excessive force on May 1, the day after the incident.

Kaeley Dixon told the commission that Weets' sudden actions came with no warning of an impending search or signal of immediate danger.

Dixon had been working to convince Kaiyou to take a breath test for alcohol, as the Brookings County Detention Center requires anyone with a blood alcohol content higher than 0.3 – more than triple the limit to drive – to see a doctor before being admitted to the jail.

Kaiyou, who landed at the detention center several times a month for alcohol-related offenses, sometimes had a breath test reading that high or higher.

Leah Hendrickson, who now works for Avera but was a Brookings correctional officer at the time of the altercation, testified that Kaiyou typically refused breath tests at least a few times before relenting.

"He just needs some coaching," Hendrickson said.

On the day of the incident, Dixon was "mid-sentence" with a seated, handcuffed Kaiyou when Weets simultaneously ordered him to stand up and grabbed him by the sweatshirt to force him to his feet.

Kaiyou, she said, wasn't behaving much differently than he had on his frequent previous visits to the jail.

"I felt more threatened by Officer Weets' actions" than by Kaiyou, Dixon said.

"It felt so wrong," she said.

## Incident started at Walmart

Division of Criminal Investigation Agent Guy DiBenedetto handled the inquiry into the April 30 incident and testified to the facts he gathered through interviews with multiple officers and reviews of bodycam, hospital and jail footage.

Kaiyou had passed out in an aisle at the Brookings Walmart after the store had closed. Weets arrived after two South Dakota State University police officers, and Kaiyou struggled with them as they tried to turn him over to cuff him and remove him from the store.

Weets found a pocket knife in Kaiyou's backpack, but did not perform a full search before taking him to jail for criminal trespassing.

Bodycam footage and video from the jail, played during the hearing, showed Weets and Kaiyou walking into the pre-booking area, where Weets greeted Dixon and started to log in to a computer.

Dixon held a breath test in Kaiyou's face three times, and Kaiyou turned his head away each time. The third time, Dixon started trying to talk him into taking the test. Within seconds of that third attempt, Kaiyou called Weets a "f\*cking liar."

The jail video shows Weets grabbing Kaiyou's shirt, pulling him to his feet and shoving him across the room. Kaiyou's head slams against a wall and appears to hit a doorway before Weets pulls him back onto the concrete bench where he'd just been sitting.

Dixon told commissioners that Kaiyou lost consciousness.

"As soon as his head hit the wall, his body went limp," she said.

DiBenedetto said that if Weets were concerned for Dixon's safety, it wasn't clear why from the video. Kaiyou wasn't taking the breath test, but DiBenedetto and others testified that Kaiyou had the right to decline it.

"He wasn't doing anything wrong by refusing the breath test," the agent said.

Weets: Inmate has history of violence against officers

Weets told the commission the insult had nothing to do with his decision to pick up Kaiyou and push him against the wall. He was trying to conduct a search, he said, and to protect Dixon from behavior he'd seen from Kaiyou in the past.

Weets said Brookings police saw Kaiyou several times a week before he moved away, typically passed out from intoxication. Weets and another Brookings police officer testified that Kaiyou's belligerence typically began as passive aggression – refusing to stand or hurling insults – and progressed to spitting, biting

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or kicking.

Spitting is especially concerning, Weets said, because Kaiyou has HIV.

He hadn't yanked him up to hurt him, Weets said, but because he saw warning signs that he might spit. What Dixon, Hendrickson and DiBenedetto described as Weets throwing Kaiyou into a wall and back to the bench was necessary, Weets said.

Aside from perhaps taking Kaiyou to the hospital before the jail, Weets said, "I would handle it the exact same way."

Kaiyou had been resisting at the jail, Weets told the commission, initially by refusing the breath test, then by refusing to stand up, and finally by thrusting his shoulder into the officer as he tried to take him to the ground to continue a search for weapons.

Instead of falling to the ground, Weets said, Kaiyou fell back on the concrete bench. Weets said Kaiyou was "dazed," but had not lost consciousness.

Jeff Beck, Weets' lawyer, noted that Weets immediately asked Kaiyou if he was OK and took him to the hospital. He also pointed out that Weets hadn't yelled at Kaiyou or cursed at him, despite their frequent encounters.

## Tough questioning

Commissioners pushed Weets on his version of the facts and on his response to the situation. Wollman asked Weets if he really believed that Kaiyou fell into the wall, for example. Weets said yes.

Former Rapid City Police Chief Steve Allender challenged Weets on his assertion that he needed to pull Kaiyou to his feet for not following orders.

"It did not appear you gave him the opportunity to stand up," Allender said.

Allender also pushed him on how quickly he reacted after the insult.

"Are you saying being called a liar had nothing to do with you grabbing him?" Allender asked.

"Sir, I've been an officer for 13 years," Weets said. "If I let people that swore at me or yelled at me get under my skin, I'd have quit a long time ago."

Allender pushed further, noting that "many of us in this room are seasoned law enforcement officers," but the decision to grab Kaiyou came "within a second."

"Would that be coincidental?" he said.

"It wouldn't be out of anger," Weets said. "It was because it was showing a pattern that was consistent with what I'd seen in the past."

Division of Criminal Investigation Director Dan Satterlee wondered why Weets and his fellow officers hadn't warned jailers about Kaiyou's predilection for spitting and biting, or perhaps suggesting a spit mask. Rick Miller of the South Dakota Highway Patrol wondered why Weets hadn't written anything about his fear for the jailer's safety in the report on the incident. More than one commissioner asked why he wouldn't have just asked Dixon to step back, rather than jump between her and Kaiyou.

"It's easier for me to intervene," Weets said, than to take those extra seconds and say, "'Hey, would you please step back?' Because there's generally a conversation that starts like, 'Why do I need to step back?'"

Weets was suspended with pay for about eight weeks after the incident, but reinstated after DiBenedetto concluded that Weets wouldn't face criminal charges for his behavior. Brookings Police Chief Mike Drake told commissioners that the city chose to pass over Weets for a promotion as a result of the situation, but that any further action hinged on the outcome of the hearing.

The city will use the commission's guidance on certification to point the way forward for Weets and the department.

"The city of Brookings takes this very seriously," Drake said.

Commissioners voting for suspension were Allender, Fulton, Sisseton-Wahpeton Police Chief Gary Gaiowski, Clay County Sheriff Andy Howe, and civilian representatives Kathy Peterson of Rapid City and Jay Rasmussen of Sioux Falls. Tea Police Chief Jessica Quigley and Troy VanDusen of the Watertown Police Department joined Wollman and Miller in voting for revocation.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal*

justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

## Governor's economic advisers caution against optimism in 2024

**Council member says his investment company is positioning conservatively**

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 25, 2023 5:20 PM



**Derek Johnson, state economist with the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management, and LRC Chief Fiscal Analyst Jeff Mehlhaff (left to right) present to the Revenue Projection Subcommittee in Pierre during the 2023 legislative session.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Members of a state economic advisory group expressed skepticism Wednesday about positive economic forecasting, citing high interest rates on debt coupled with a \$1.7 trillion federal budget deficit.

The Governor's Council of Economic Advisors includes economists and businesspeople from around the state. The council reviews and critiques the Bureau of Finance and Management's economic forecasts and methodology.

During a Zoom meeting, State Economist Derek Johnson presented an economic forecast, using data from S&P Global Market Intelligence. The forecast projects 1.6% growth in the national gross domestic product — the total value of goods and services produced — in 2024. It also projects U.S. personal incomes rising 5%, an unemployment rate of 3.8%, and 2.4% inflation.

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.



**A summer night in Deadwood.** (Photo by

Travel South Dakota)

## Deadwood gamblers wager \$140 million in September

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - OCTOBER 25, 2023 5:07 PM

A new monthly report shows gamblers wagered \$140 million in Deadwood last month, which was down about 5% from the same month last year.

About 90% of that money — roughly \$127 million — went back to gamblers as winnings. Casinos kept the rest, about \$13 million.

Most of the gambling in Deadwood happens at slot machines. Gamblers put about \$132 million into the machines

in September, which was down 5% from the prior September.

Meanwhile, table game wagering (blackjack, poker, craps and roulette) increased by 1% to \$7.6 million. Sports betting — which began in 2021 after voters approved it in 2020 — increased by 38% to just under \$1 million.

Taxes on Deadwood gambling produced a total of \$1.2 million in September for state government and local governments in Lawrence County.

For the calendar year through September, about \$1.2 billion has been wagered in Deadwood, which is up 3% compared to the same period last year.

## Mike Johnson of Louisiana elected speaker of the U.S. House after three weeks of stalemate

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA AND ASHLEY MURRAY - OCTOBER 25, 2023 1:04 PM



**U.S. Rep. Mike Johnson, R-Louisiana, left, shakes hands with Rep. Andy Barr, R-Kentucky, as the House of Representatives holds an election for a new speaker of the House at the U.S. Capitol on Oct. 25, 2023, in Washington, D.C.** (Win McNamee/Getty Images)

on Jan. 6, Johnson also led a statement with 36 fellow Republicans outlining opposition to the Electoral College results in Georgia and Michigan as well.

Following Wednesday's vote for speaker, Johnson quickly scheduled a vote on a resolution in support of Israel.

"We stand at a very dangerous time. I'm stating the obvious, we all know that. The world is in turmoil, but a strong America is good for the entire world," said Johnson, the first House speaker from Louisiana.

### Working with Democrats

Johnson, who was praised by his colleagues for unifying a fractured and divided GOP conference, will now need to seek the cooperation of Democrats as Congress risks another partial government shutdown in less than a month.

"I've known Mike since I was in the state House. He's an incredibly hard worker, very passionate about this country. And we have a very similar approach to getting our country back on track," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana — an unsuccessful candidate for speaker — said following Johnson's election.

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans on Wednesday voted for Louisiana's Mike Johnson as speaker in a chamber that has been frozen for more than three weeks after former Speaker Kevin McCarthy was ousted.

In a 220-209 party-line vote, all Republicans present backed Johnson, 51, a strongly conservative lawyer who represents northwest Louisiana's 4th District. All Democrats present voted for Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

Former President Donald Trump, the leading Republican candidate for the 2024 presidential race, immediately congratulated Johnson on social media, declaring that he will be a "GREAT 'SPEAKER.'"

As Trump contested the 2020 election, Johnson was one of more than 100 House Republicans who voted to block Pennsylvania and Arizona's presidential results following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

In advance of the joint session of Congress



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Johnson, who does not have a strong bipartisan track record, will be tasked with working with the Democratic-controlled Senate on a quickly approaching Nov. 17 government funding deadline to prevent a government shutdown, and critical legislation such as the recent nearly \$106 billion supplemental request from the Biden administration to fund Ukraine, Israel and global aid and U.S. border security.

"I look forward to meeting with Speaker Johnson soon to discuss the path forward to avoid a government shutdown," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said in a statement following Johnson's election.

"When I meet with him, I will convey that bipartisanship is the only way we can deliver results for the American people. The only way to avoid a government shutdown, pass critical supplemental funding, and deliver common-sense investments to the American people is bipartisanship."

## Nominating speeches

Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik of New York nominated Johnson, saying the conservative congressman "epitomizes what it means to be a leader."

"Today is the day that House Republicans will humbly look in our hearts and elect Mike Johnson as speaker of the people's House," Stefanik said.

Democratic Conference Chair Pete Aguilar of California nominated Jeffries, calling him a "far contrast from who Republicans nominated."

"The most pressing needs of everyday Americans are his North Star," Aguilar said.

The GOP's weeks-long search for a new speaker "has been about one thing, this has been about who can appease Donald Trump," Aguilar said.

The House had been without a speaker for 22 days.

## Johnson's record

Johnson has voted against several recent bipartisan pieces of legislation such as the infrastructure law, a gun safety bill signed into law and the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

During his work in Congress, he's opposed reinstating a pre-clearance section of the Voting Rights Act, arguing that the federal government should not get involved in local elections.

He's railed against the Department of Justice, criticizing Attorney General Merrick Garland for a memo that outlined concerns about violence at school board meetings at the height of the pandemic, when many schools implemented masking requirements.

Johnson also led a successful resolution designed to draw attention to incidents of vandalism and arson at anti-abortion pregnancy centers and other anti-abortion organizations.

Johnson, with his legal experience, has spent most of his time in Congress working on the Judiciary Committee, although he also serves on Armed Services. He'll now have to pass legislation from agriculture to defense to foreign policy, while also undertaking massive fundraising to help expand Republicans' majority. He also sits on the newly formed Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government.

Rep. Frank Lucas of Oklahoma said he's not concerned about Johnson's lack of experience in agriculture policy, as Congress works to pass a massive five-year farm bill that touches everything from food nutrition to providing crop insurance for farmers to establishing conservation benefits.

"Agriculture is very important in Republican districts and very important to consumers all around the world," Lucas said. "I would say this is just one of those issues where we see maturity out of what I believe is a mature speaker."

For the past year, Johnson has led a panel on limited federal government, where during one hearing he argued that parents should not be allowed to let their transgender children have access to gender-affirming care. Johnson's home state of Louisiana allows for a ban on gender-affirming care for youth.

Rising through the ranks

Johnson, who was elected to an open seat in Congress in 2016, has quickly ascended the ranks, serving as the chair of the conservative Republican Study Committee, and holding a position as vice chair of the Republican Policy Conference.

Johnson has a robust though not perfect conservative record, earning a rating of 92% for his entire time

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in Congress from the American Conservative Union.

Johnson, who was the fourth GOP nominee for the speakership, will have to walk a tightrope while establishing a relationship with the White House and wrangling in those same far-right members who ousted McCarthy in early October.

Those who voted to throw out McCarthy gathered on the steps of Capitol Hill, and praised Johnson's election as speaker.

"We have a guy who is honest, who's going to tell the truth, and will be trustworthy not just in the (Republican) conference, but in the House," said South Carolina's Nancy Mace, who voted with seven Republicans to strip McCarthy of his position.

Florida's Matt Gaetz, who brought the motion to vacate McCarthy to the floor, said that he was pleased with Johnson's plan to pass all 12 appropriation bills separately.

"He is going to drive us to single-subject spending bills," Gaetz said. "That is aligned with what we've been fighting for this entire Congress."

Following Johnson's candidacy for speaker, he released a Dear Colleague letter outlining his legislative priorities for government funding, passing the five-year farm bill reauthorization, the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization and an annual defense policy bill.

In the letter, he supported a continuing resolution, or a CR, that would extend government funding until either Jan. 15 or April 15, while the House continues to work on the 12 appropriations bills.

"I am confident we can work together to accomplish that objective quickly, in a manner that delivers on our principled commitments to rein in wasteful spending, and put our country back on a path to fiscal responsibility," he wrote in his letter.

In his letter, Johnson said he wants that CR so "the Senate cannot jam the House with a Christmas omnibus."

Johnson voted against the last CR. The Senate is currently taking up a minibus of three spending bills.

## **Johnson, Biden and Trump**

President Joe Biden congratulated Johnson in an official White House statement Wednesday.

"As I said when this process began, whoever the Speaker is, I will seek to work with them in good faith on behalf of the American people," Biden said. "That's a principle I have always held to, and that I've acted on – delivering major bipartisan legislation on infrastructure, outcompeting China, gun reform, and veterans care."

"The American people have made clear that they expect House Republicans to work with me and with Senate Democrats to govern across the aisle – to protect our urgent national security interests and grow our economy for the middle class," Biden continued.

As speaker, Johnson will also be tasked with certifying the electoral votes for the 2024 presidential election, and he's already drawn criticism from the president's campaign arm.

In a statement from the Biden-Harris 2024 re-election campaign, spokesperson Ammar Moussa said that Johnson's "ascension to the speakership cements the extreme MAGA takeover of the House Republican Conference."

The 2024 presidential election has been a strong undercurrent of the speaker's race.

On his social media platform Truth Social, Trump praised Johnson's victory, writing "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN."

One Republican, Ken Buck of Colorado, who criticized many of the candidates, especially Jordan, for amplifying falsehoods about the 2020 election, said that Johnson leading an amicus brief questioning election results was different from taking part in the 2021 insurrection on the U.S. Capitol.

"What he did was he went to the courts," Buck said of Johnson. "That's what the courts are set up for. It's absolutely appropriate."

Trump's praise for Johnson's election came a day after he admonished the House GOP's previous choice for speaker, Majority Whip Tom Emmer, warning Republicans that electing him would be a "tragic mistake."

Not able to convince members of the far right, Emmer, of Minnesota, did not call for a floor vote on his candidacy and dropped from the race after roughly four hours.

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Johnson ran twice for the speaker's gavel, first announcing his run last weekend after the GOP conference voted to toss aside Ohio's Jim Jordan after he continued to lose Republican support with each vote for his nomination to lead the lower chamber.

Jordan was the second Republican nominee for the speakership following Scalise, who withdrew from the race.

Emmer, the No. 3 Republican, emerged Tuesday as the GOP's third nominee to lead the House.

Emmer was one of the few candidates running for speaker who voted to certify the 2020 presidential election results.

"I firmly believe that with House Republicans now united and ready to get back to work, as our new speaker elect said, our best days still lie ahead," Emmer said in a press conference Wednesday afternoon.

*Samantha Dietel contributed to this report.*

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



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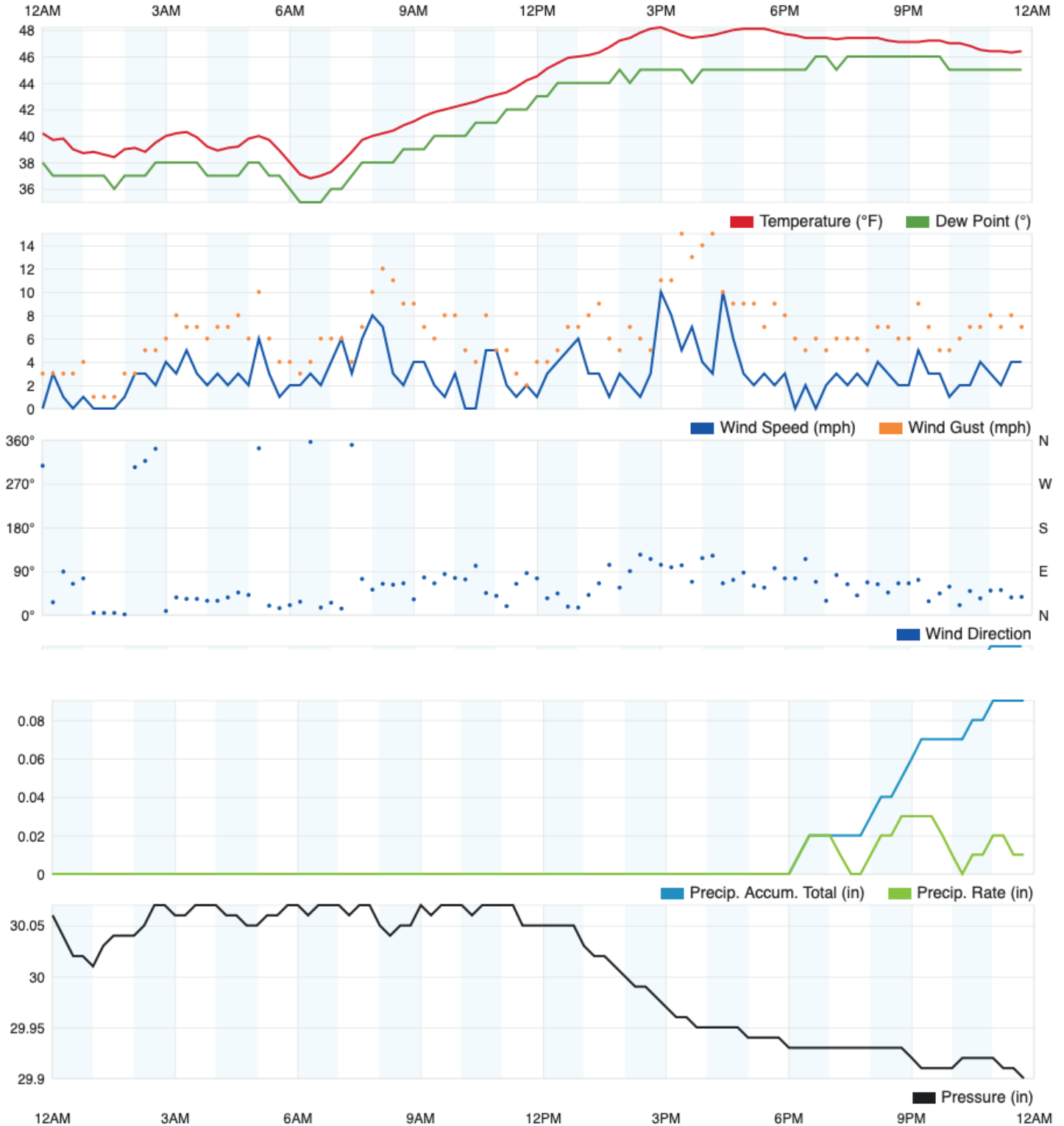
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs








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Thu Oct 26	Fri Oct 27	Sat Oct 28	Sun Oct 29	Mon Oct 30	Tue Oct 31	Wed Nov 1
						
41° F 23° F	32° F 16° F	30° F 12° F	30° F 14° F	33° F 15° F	34° F 18° F	38° F 24° F
N 17 MPH	NW 23 MPH	WNW 9 MPH	W 13 MPH	W 15 MPH	WNW 15 MPH	S 15 MPH

## Cold Weather moving in...

	Friday 29 to 34°	Saturday 28 to 32°	Sunday 28 to 32°	Monday 28 to 32°
				
<b>Light Drizzle</b> Drizzle or Freezing Drizzle changing to Snow over north central SD - Snow expanding across central SD tonight. Breezy N-NW winds 15-25 mph overnight, with gusts up to 35 mph.	<b>Decreasing Clouds</b> Breezy NW winds 15-25 mph, decreasing during the day.	<b>A 20-60% chance of light snow</b> , lowest chances near the ND border. Snow accumulations less than 1".	<b>Dry</b>	<b>Dry</b>

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Warmer air over far eastern SD/western MN today with highs near 50 degrees, will be replaced by much colder air for the rest of the week and into early next week. Expect highs Friday-Tuesday upper 20s and 30s. As the colder air sinks in from the northwest, the drizzle or light freezing drizzle will change over to snow by early afternoon across north central SD. Precipitation will continue to transition to all snow over central SD this evening, and eastern SD overnight before ending.

# Broton Daily Independent

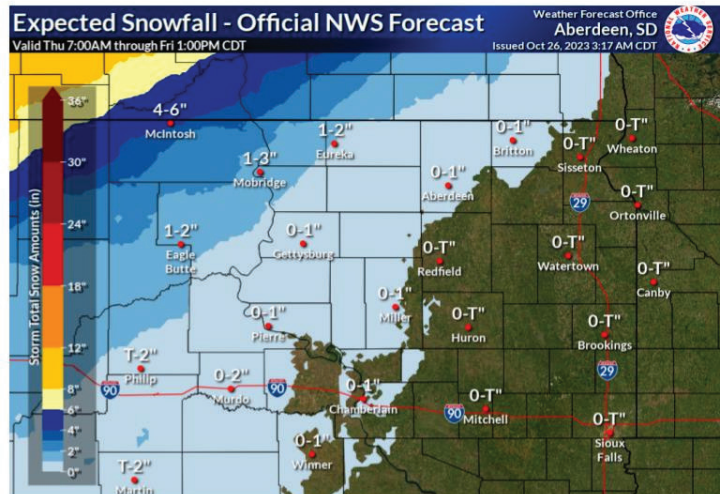
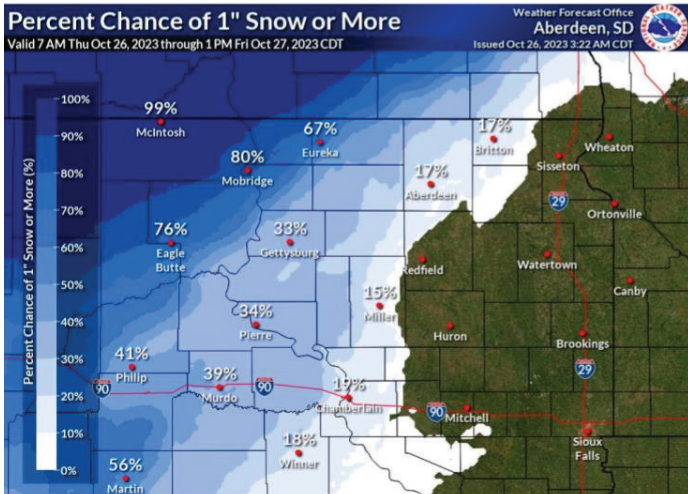
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## Accumulating Snowfall through Friday Morning

October 26, 2023  
4:17 AM

- Rain and Drizzle will transition to Snow through this evening from northwest to southeast.
- Periods of light freezing rain and sleet will be possible before changing over to snow. Little to no ice accumulation expected.
- Little to no snow accumulation expected over eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota.
- North-Northwest winds increase tonight, with gusts of 25 to 35 mph.



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

While little to no accumulating snow is expected over much of eastern SD and west central MN through Friday morning, much of north central SD will see 1-3" of snow with locally higher amounts. As the colder air sinks in from the northwest, the drizzle or light freezing drizzle will change over to snow by early afternoon across north central SD. Precipitation will continue to transition to all snow over central SD this evening, and eastern SD overnight before ending.



## Precipitation Timeline

October 26, 2023  
4:27 AM



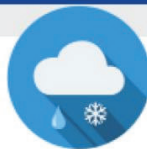
Light Drizzle for much of the area today.

Drizzle or Freezing Drizzle changing to Snow over north central SD

Snow expanding and ending across central SD tonight.



Breezy N-NW winds 15-25 mph overnight and gusts up to 35 mph.



### Weather Forecast

	10/26 Thu					10/27 Fri		
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	40%	45%	45%	55%	95%	80%	15%	5%
Britton	40%	45%	55%	55%	90%	90%	40%	10%
Brookings	25%	35%	40%	50%	75%	75%	20%	15%
Chamberlain	35%	35%	35%	65%	60%	55%	15%	5%
Clark	40%	40%	35%	45%	70%	75%	30%	10%
Eagle Butte	35%	45%	60%	90%	95%	35%	0%	0%
Ellendale	40%	45%	60%	65%	100%	90%	25%	5%
Eureka	55%	45%	60%	60%	95%	75%	15%	5%
Gettysburg	40%	25%	35%	75%	95%	60%	5%	0%
Huron	40%	35%	45%	65%	70%	70%	15%	10%
Kennebec	35%	20%	30%	55%	85%	45%	0%	0%
McIntosh	90%	95%	95%	95%	95%	55%	5%	0%
Milbank	35%	45%	60%	65%	65%	65%	50%	10%
Miller	40%	35%	25%	50%	85%	60%	0%	0%
Mobridge	55%	50%	70%	80%	100%	60%	5%	0%
Murdo	35%	15%	35%	70%	75%	35%	0%	0%
Pierre	40%	20%	30%	70%	90%	50%	0%	0%
Redfield	40%	40%	40%	50%	75%	60%	15%	0%
Sisseton	40%	50%	60%	60%	75%	75%	45%	10%
Watertown	40%	45%	50%	60%	70%	60%	40%	5%
Webster	40%	45%	50%	45%	75%	80%	40%	15%
Wheaton	40%	45%	55%	65%	70%	80%	50%	10%

\*Created: 3 am CDT Thu 10/26/2023. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown.

- Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow + - Fog +

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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 2:56 PM

Low Temp: 37 °F at 6:23 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 3:26 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 25 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 83 in 1922

Record Low: -3 in 2020

Average High: 54

Average Low: 29

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.89

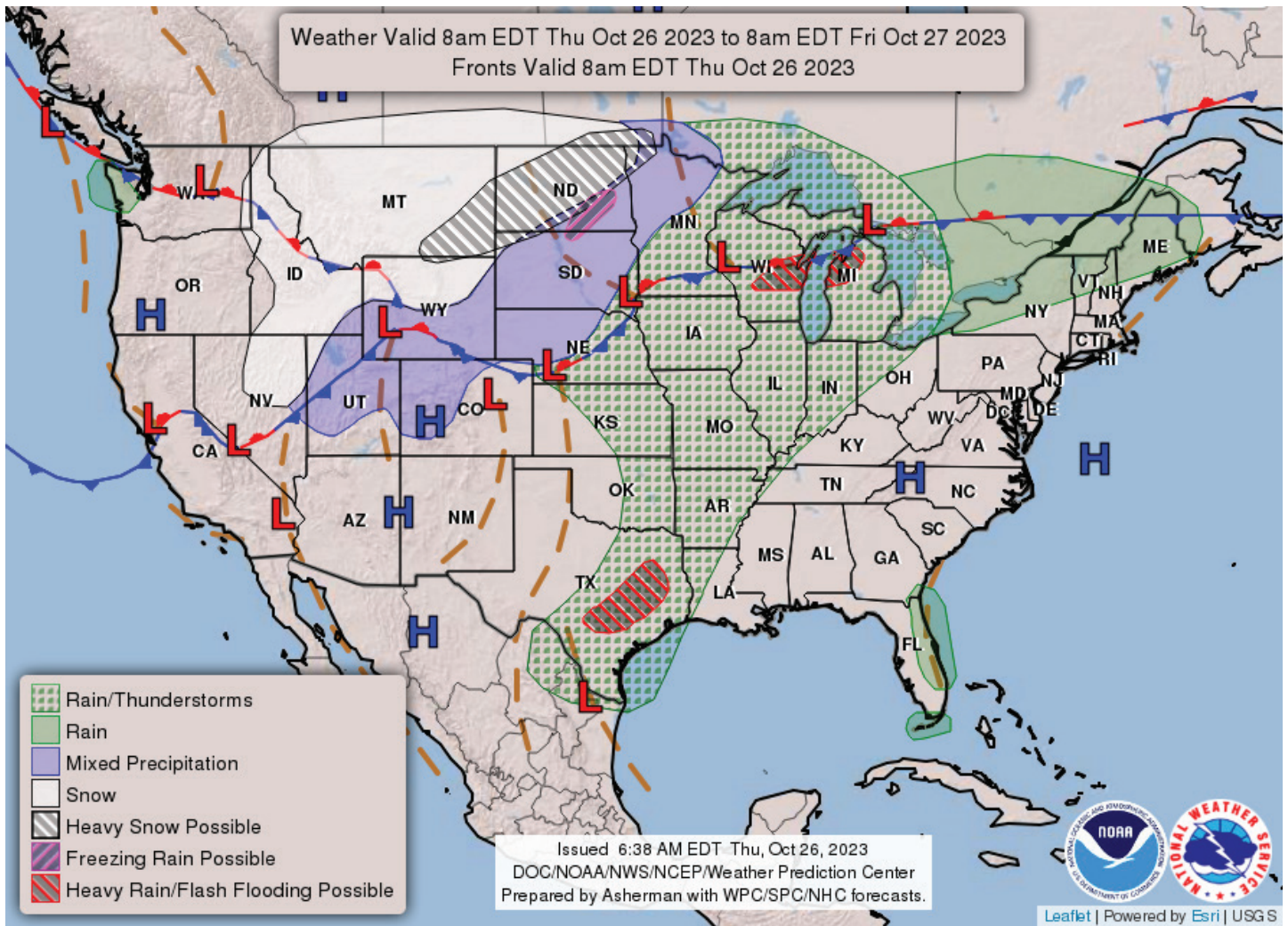
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.89

Average Precip to date: 20.22

Precip Year to Date: 22.66

Sunset Tonight: 6:30:42 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03:22 AM



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## Today in Weather History

October 26, 1919: Record cold occurred across the area on this day in 1919. Temperatures fell below zero at many locations across central and northeast South Dakota and into west-central Minnesota. The record lows were 3 degrees below zero at Aberdeen, 4 degrees below zero at Wheaton, 5 degrees below zero at Kennebec, 8 degrees below zero at McIntosh, and a much below average low of 10 degrees below zero at Miller.

October 26, 1996: A rare and significant late-season tornado outbreak took place as a low-pressure system trekked across the North-Central US. A series of low-topped supercells during the morning and afternoon hours produced a total of 26 tornadoes; 3 in Nebraska, 9 in northeastern South Dakota, and 14 across west-central and central Minnesota. Five of these were rated F2, and while no fatalities resulted, 15 people were injured, and there was a good deal of property damage. To help put the extraordinary timing of this event in perspective, in the 66 years of record-keeping from 1950-2015, Minnesota has only recorded 15 other October tornadoes, and South Dakota 9.

October 26, 2010: A record-breaking surface low-pressure area moved across the Northern Plains and brought high winds to all of central and northeast South Dakota from the early morning of the 26th into the early evening of the 27th. Big Fork, Minnesota, measured a surface low pressure of 955.2 millibars. Sustained northwest winds of 40 to 50 mph with gusts to 60 to 75 mph caused scattered property damage across the region along with blowing several vehicles off the road. Along with the high winds came snowfall of 1 to 5 inches, which resulted in treacherous driving conditions. Several schools started late on the 27th due to the slippery roads and strong winds. The high winds, combined with slick roads at times, blew several semis and other vehicles off the road on Interstate-29 and other locations across the region. Only minor injuries occurred with these incidents. The high winds damaged many traffic signs and signals, downed many power lines and poles, along with downing branches and several trees. As a result, several hundred customers were without power for a time across the area. The high winds caused roof and siding damage to many buildings along with damaging some fences. A shed was also destroyed near Sisseton.

1865: A hurricane sank the steamship USS Mobile off the Georgia coast. The wreck, laden with 20,000 gold coins, was found in 2003.

1952: There have been thousands of weather reconnaissance and research flights into hurricanes in the Atlantic and Pacific since the mid-1940s. There have been several close calls, but only four flights have been lost. A B-29 Super-fortress flight into Super Typhoon Wilma 350 miles east of Leyte in the Philippines disappeared on this date. No trace was ever found of the plane or crew. In the last report, the flight was in the Super typhoon's strongest winds, which were around 160 mph.

1997: An autumn snowstorm pummeled central and south-central Nebraska with record early season snows. Wind-driven snowfall amounts totaled as much as two feet by storms' end. Several highways were closed, including Interstate 80, as near-blizzard conditions developed. Once the snow subsided, the record early season snow totals were tallied. Guide Rock measured twenty-four inches of snow, Clay Center twenty-three inches, and Hastings seventeen inches. A fifty-mile wide swath of snow more than fifteen inches fell from near Alma to York. Amounts further north averaged from four to eight inches. The heavy, wet snow was responsible for many power outages in the area as tree limbs broke and fell on power lines. At one point, the town of Hardy had no power and could not be accessed by vehicles due to the snow. Numerous schools and businesses remained closed several days following the storm. Many highways, including Interstate 80, closed at the height of the storm. On Highway 136 east of Alma, road crews worked for ten hours carving through a ten-foot drift that covered the road. Record cold accompanied the snow as temperatures dropped to the single digits on the morning of the 26th.

1998: Hurricane Mitch, the second deadliest hurricane in the Atlantic Ocean, reached Category 5 strength on this day.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHERE'S GOD WHEN I NEED HIM?

Danny was kneeling next to his bed saying his prayers. Hands folded, eyes shut, lips moving, his mother heard him praying: "Lord, my brother still doesn't have a job and he sure needs one. And, Lord, my sister, Ruth, she hasn't had a date for a long time and she's getting pretty old. And you know about Mom - she's no better and may have to go back to the hospital. And Dad hasn't gotten the promotion his boss promised him. You know, God, I'm getting very tired of praying for my family and not getting any results. Have you quit listening to me?"

Ever feel like Danny? No doubt most of us have.

Thank God for John's insight: "And we can be confident that He will listen to us whenever we ask Him for anything in keeping with His will. And if we know He is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that He will give us what we ask for."

John's emphasis here is on God's will - not our wants. And there is a dramatic difference between the two. Too often when we take our requests to the Lord, they do not "fit" His will for our lives. We ask selfishly and do not take into consideration how what we want may differ from what He needs us to be and what He has designed for us to do. We must align our requests with His will. The ultimate test of any prayer is: "Lord, give me this for Your sake in Your name for Your glory, then I know it will be Your will because it will honor You and not me!"

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand how to pray and what to pray for. May we accept the delays knowing that You will grant our requests if they are for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And we can be confident that He will listen to us whenever we ask Him for anything in keeping with His will. And if we know He is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that He will give us what we ask for. 1 John 5:14-15



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
- 11/05/2023 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church Fall Dinner, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- 11/11/2023 Groton American Legion Annual Turkey Party 6:30 pm.
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 11/26/2023 Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.
- 12/02/2023 Live & Silent Auctions at Olive Grove Golf Course 4pm-close
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.24.23

16 20 30 54 59 7

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$137,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 24  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.25.23

3 8 27 41 46 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$3,270,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 39  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.25.23

1 19 31 32 38 5

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 54 Mins 12  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.25.23

2 7 10 13 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$34,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 54  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.25.23

18 19 38 54 55 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 23  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.25.23

25 27 41 53 68 2

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$125,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 23  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. October 23, 2023.

Editorial: CRP Program Still Seems Popular In South Dakota

Land conservation practices in South Dakota's farming country are important, since the land itself is a key component to the state's economy. And there is more to farmland than just farming it.

A South Dakota Searchlight story last week confirmed that fact. The story reported that South Dakota ranks fourth in the country in terms of federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) payments. State landowners received \$129.5 million in CRP funds in 2022.

(Interestingly, the No. 1 state on the list is Iowa, with more than \$400 million in payments, which is more than the combined totals of No. 2 Illinois at \$172.7 million and No. 3 Minnesota at \$150.8 million. It's interesting because Iowa is, by far, the smallest of these states geographically.)

These program payments are important to note, and not simply because it reflects an influx of funding or, if you wish, the important role federal programs play in farming.

The CRP program pays landowners, through 10- or 15-year leases, to maintain grass, trees and other plant species on enrolled acres. This practice helps reduce soil erosion, filters runoff that flows into waterways (thus promoting cleaner water) and provides habitat for wildlife, including pollinators such as bees which are essential to crop production.

According to Searchlight, "The program also helps fight climate change. Some farming practices can release plant and soil carbon into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide, where it acts as a heat-trapping greenhouse gas. Consistent plant cover pulls carbon dioxide out of the air and stores it in the soil."

The participation of South Dakota farmers in this program is not a surprise, and it is a healthy sign.

But what may be even more encouraging is that CRP continues to grow in the state.

Another Searchlight story from last summer dealing with concerns about dwindling CRP participation nationally indicated that South Dakota may be an outlier in this trend. The number of South Dakota acres enrolled in CRP production in 2023 reached its highest level ever (2,104,715 acres) since the program began in 1986. The 2023 figure represents a 46% increase from 2020. However, there is a 25% acreage cap that many counties are nowhere near approaching.

So, while the CRP program may be struggling overall — national acreage is down 37% since 2007 — it still remains a popular option in South Dakota, and there is room for more growth.

Because of the national issues, some changes may loom in the program. These options may increase payments even more — the maximum payment limitation of \$50,000 hasn't changed since 1986 — as well as offer more assistance in CRP grazing.

So, there is a chance that the CRP program could become even more enticing for producers.

That would only maximize the benefits of the program.

"We can use these lands without abusing them," said Pete Bauman, a South Dakota State University Extension Natural Resources field specialist, "and we still reap the benefits of the water quality, erosion control (and) wildlife habitat."

It's a win-win for producers and the environment — and for everyone.

END

## Israeli troops carry out hourslong ground raid into Gaza before an expected wider incursion

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and AMY TEIBEL Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli troops and tanks launched an hourslong ground raid into northern Gaza overnight into Thursday, the military said, striking several militant targets in order to “prepare the battlefield” before a widely expected ground invasion after more than two weeks of devastating airstrikes.

The raid came after the U.N. warned that it’s on the verge of running out of fuel in the Gaza Strip, forcing it to sharply curtail relief efforts in the territory, which has also been under a complete siege since Hamas’ bloody rampage across southern Israel ignited the war earlier this month.

The rising death tolls in Gaza are unprecedented in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even greater loss of life could come if Israel launches an expected ground offensive aimed at crushing Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007 and survived four previous wars with Israel.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said Wednesday that more than 750 people were killed over the past 24 hours, higher than the 704 killed the previous day. The Associated Press couldn’t independently verify the death toll, and the ministry doesn’t distinguish between civilians and combatants. By comparison, 2,251 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed in the entire six-week-long war in 2014, according to U.N. figures.

On Wednesday, the wife, son, daughter and grandson of Wael Dahdouh, a veteran Al-Jazeera correspondent in Gaza, were killed in an Israeli strike. The Qatar-based network showed footage of his grief upon entering a hospital and seeing his dead son. Dahdouh and other mourners attended the funerals on Thursday wearing the blue flak jackets used by reporters in the Palestinian territories.

The Israeli military says it only strikes militant targets and accuses Hamas of operating among civilians in densely-populated Gaza. Palestinian militants have fired rocket barrages into Israel since the war began.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas’ capacity to govern Gaza or threaten it again, while also saying it doesn’t want to reoccupy the territory from which it withdrew soldiers and settlers in 2005. That could prove a daunting challenge, since Hamas is deeply rooted in Palestinian society, with political and charity organizations as well as a formidable armed wing.

Benny Gantz, a retired general and a member of Israel’s war Cabinet, said the any possible ground offensive would be only “one stage in a long-term process that includes security, political and social aspects that will take years.”

“The campaign will soon ramp up with greater force,” he added.

During the overnight raid, soldiers killed fighters and destroyed militant infrastructure and anti-tank missile launching positions, the military said. It said that no Israelis were wounded. There was no immediate confirmation of any Palestinian casualties.

Israeli Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, a military spokesman, said the limited incursion was “part of our preparations for the next stages of the war.”

Israel also said it had also carried out around 250 airstrikes across Gaza in the last 24 hours, targeting tunnel shafts, rocket launchers and other militant infrastructure.

The Gaza Health Ministry says more than 6,500 Palestinians have been killed in the war. That figure includes the disputed toll from an explosion at a hospital last week.

The fighting has killed more than 1,400 people in Israel, mostly civilians slain during the initial Hamas attack, according to the Israeli government. Hamas also holds at least 224 hostages in Gaza.

The warning by the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, over depleting fuel supplies raised alarm that the humanitarian crisis could quickly worsen.

Gaza’s population has also been running out of food, water and medicine. About 1.4 million of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents have fled their homes, with nearly half of them crowded into U.N. shelters. Hundreds of thousands remain in northern Gaza, despite Israel ordering them to evacuate to the south, saying those who remain might be considered “accomplices” of Hamas.

In recent days, Israel has let more than 60 trucks with aid enter from Egypt, which aid workers say

is insufficient and only a tiny fraction of what was being brought in before the war. Israel is still barring deliveries of fuel — needed to power generators — saying it believes that Hamas will take it.

An official with the International Committee of the Red Cross said that it hopes to bring in eight trucks filled with vital medical supplies.

"This is a small amount of what is required, a drop in the ocean," said William Schomburg, head of the sub-delegation in Gaza. "We are trying to establish a pipeline."

UNRWA has been sharing its own fuel supplies so that trucks can distribute aid, bakeries can feed people in shelters, water can be desalinated, and hospitals can keep incubators, life support machines and other vital equipment working. If it continues doing all of that, fuel will run out by Thursday, so the agency is deciding how to ration its supply, UNRWA spokeswoman Tamara Alrifai told The Associated Press.

"Do we give (it) for the incubators or the bakeries?" she said. "It is an excruciating decision."

More than half of Gaza's primary health care facilities and roughly a third of its hospitals have stopped functioning, the World Health Organization said.

At Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital, the lack of medicine and clean water have led to "alarming" infection rates, the group Doctors Without Borders said. Amputations are often required to prevent infection from spreading in the wounded, it said.

One surgeon with the group described amputating half the foot of a 9-year-old boy with only "slight sedation" on a hallway floor as his mother and sister watched.

The conflict has also threatened to spread across the region. The Israeli military said Wednesday it struck military sites in Syria in response to rocket launches from the country. Syrian state media said that eight soldiers were killed and seven others were wounded.

Israel has also been exchanging near daily fire with Iranian-backed Hezbollah across the Lebanese border.

Israeli airstrikes and drone attacks early Thursday caused fires in open land in the southern Lebanon border town of Aita al Shaab, where clashes have intensified, Lebanon's state-run news agency said. It reported strikes late Wednesday on towns in the Tyre district, saying a mattress factory was hit.

Hamas' surprise attack on Oct. 7 in southern Israel stunned the country with its brutality, its unprecedented toll and the failure of intelligence agencies to know it was coming. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a speech Wednesday night that he will be held accountable, but only after Hamas was defeated.

"We will get to the bottom of what happened," he said. "This debacle will be investigated. Everyone will have to give answers, including me."

## **Fearing airstrikes and crowded shelters, Palestinians in north Gaza defy Israeli evacuation orders**

By SAMY MAGDY and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Mahmoud Shalabi did not evacuate his home in northern Gaza despite the frightful Israeli warnings of a looming, far more brutal assault to come as it presses ahead with its war against the Hamas militant group.

The Palestinian aid worker is among hundreds of thousands who have remained. Others who initially heeded the Israeli warnings to head south have returned to the territory's north, where Israel says it considers all those who stay possible "accomplices" of Hamas.

Shalabi said leaving his home in Beit Lahia didn't make sense considering the relentless bombardment of southern Gaza, where Israel has repeatedly urged the more than 1 million northern residents like him to seek refuge. The overcrowded shelters and shortages of water and food in the south played a part in their decisions, said Shalabi and others who remained.

Risk death at home, or elsewhere in Gaza, they said.

Leaving would be reasonable only if Israel stopped targeting the south, said Shalabi, who works for Medical Aid for Palestinians, a U.K.-based charity providing health services. "It doesn't make sense to me that I should leave my home to go and get killed in a tent in the south of Gaza," he said.

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The risks for those staying in the north are likely to rise exponentially in the event of an expected Israeli ground offensive, after two-and-a-half weeks of heavy bombardments have already claimed more than 6,500 lives in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry.

With tens of thousands of troops massed along Israel's border with Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday Israel was preparing for a ground incursion. He refused to say when it would begin.

Israeli military officials have said they are determined to crush Hamas in response to its brutal Oct. 7 attack on Israeli border communities, and the focus will be on the north, including Gaza City, where Israel says key Hamas assets, tunnels and bunkers are located.

Some 350,000 Palestinians are still in northern Gaza, according to Israeli estimates. Military officials have repeatedly exhorted Palestinians to move south, but have not said whether the presence of a large number of civilians would be a factor in deciding whether to send in tanks and ground troops.

Israel says it seeks to strike Hamas and doesn't target civilians, but Gaza health officials say many of those killed have been women and children. Those numbers are expected to climb with a ground offensive, which would likely see fierce fighting inside crowded urban areas.

International rights groups have sharply criticized the Israeli evacuation orders, saying they cannot be considered effective warning to civilians, under the rules of international law, because of a lack of realistic options for those fleeing.

"When the evacuation routes are bombed, when people north as well as south are caught up in hostilities, when the essentials for survival are lacking, and when there are no assurances for return, people are left with nothing but impossible choices," said Lynn Hastings, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories. "Nowhere is safe in Gaza."

Those staying put in the north are bracing for worse to come. They live among the ruins of once bustling neighborhoods while facing dire shortages of fuel, food and water amid looming hospital shutdowns.

Services in the north have deteriorated since Israel's evacuation order prompted at least 700,000 Palestinians to flee south. Most homes have no electricity, water or fuel.

More than 1.4 million Gaza residents are now displaced across the narrow strip, out of a population of 2.3 million, and U.N. shelters are packed at triple their capacity, U.N. agencies say.

In the north, entire neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble.

"Everywhere there is debris, there are destroyed cars, there are destroyed houses. And it's really difficult to get from one location to the other because there is no fuel," Shalabi said.

He said he walked for two hours to find a bakery still selling bread to feed his family of 10. Shop shelves are empty; residents are living on canned beans, pineapple, corn.

The little fuel still available, often from private stockpiles, is sold for exorbitant prices. Some rent out small water pump motors, demanding 50 shekels (\$12) an hour, a huge amount for the average Gaza resident.

This week Shalabi ran out of cash, and scoured the blocks of dilapidated streets to find a functioning ATM. There were none.

About 50,000 people are sheltering on the grounds of Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, in Gaza City. It is overwhelmed by a steady stream of wounded from airstrikes amid warnings that severe shortages of fuel, needed to power generators, could trigger a shutdown. No new fuel has been allowed into Gaza since the Oct. 7 raid.

Still, many Palestinians are choosing to return north, tired of moving from place-to-place under Israeli fire as shelters become overcrowded and unlivable. U.N. monitors estimate 30,000 have returned.

Ekhlas Ahmed, 24 and eight-months pregnant, was among them.

A week ago, she fled Gaza City after repeated Israeli warnings to move south. She returned after the home she was sheltering in along with 14 other family members in the south was hit by an Israeli airstrike.

"It was a residential building and they bombed it," she said.

Ahmed, who has a 4-year-old son, is hoping for a ceasefire.

"I am very frightened. All of us are frightened," she said.



## At least 16 dead in Maine mass killing and police hunt for the shooter as residents take shelter

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — A man shot and killed at least 16 people at a restaurant and a bowling alley in Lewiston, Maine, on Wednesday and then fled into the night, sparking a massive search by hundreds of officers while frightened residents stayed locked in their homes.

A police bulletin identified Robert Card, 40, as a person of interest in the attack that sent panicked bowlers scrambling behind pins when shots rang out around 7 p.m. Card was described as a firearms instructor believed to be in the Army Reserve and assigned to a training facility in Saco, Maine.

The document, circulated to law enforcement officials, said Card had been committed to a mental health facility for two weeks in the summer of 2023. It did not provide details about his treatment or condition but said Card had reported "hearing voices and threats to shoot up" the military base. A telephone number listed for Card in public records was not in service.

Lewiston Police said in an earlier Facebook post that they were dealing with an active shooter incident at Schemengees Bar and Grille and at Sparetime Recreation, a bowling alley about 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) away.

One bowler, who identified himself only as Brandon, said he heard about 10 shots, thinking the first was a balloon popping.

"I had my back turned to the door. And as soon as I turned and saw it was not a balloon — he was holding a weapon — I just booked it," he told The Associated Press.

Brandon said he scrambled down the length of the alley, sliding into the pin area and climbing up to hide in the machinery. He was among a busload of survivors who were driven to a middle school in the neighboring city of Auburn to be reunited with family and friends.

"I was putting on my bowling shoes when when it started. I've been barefoot for five hours," he said.

Melinda Small, the owner of Legends Sports Bar and Grill, said her staff immediately locked their doors and moved all 25 customers and employees away from the doors after a customer reported hearing about the shooting at the bowling alley less than a quarter-mile away. Soon, the police flooded the roadway and a police officer eventually escorted everyone out of the building.

"I am honestly in a state of shock. I am blessed that my team responded quickly and everyone is safe," Small said. "But at the same time, my heart is broken for this area and for what everyone is dealing with. I just feel numb."

After the shooting, police, many armed with rifles, took up positions while the city descended into eerie quiet — punctuated by occasional sirens — as people hunkered down at home. Schools were closed Thursday in Lewiston, Lisbon and Auburn, as well as municipal offices in Lewiston.

The Androscoggin County Sheriff's Office released two photos of the suspect on its Facebook page that showed the shooter walking into an establishment with a weapon raised to his shoulder.

Two law enforcement officials told The AP that at least 16 people were killed and the toll was expected to rise. However, Michael Sauschuck, commissioner of the Maine Department of Public Safety, declined to provide a specific estimate at a news conference, calling it a "fluid situation." State police planned to hold a mid-morning news conference Thursday.

The two law enforcement officials said dozens of people also had been wounded. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss details of the ongoing investigation and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

On its website, Central Maine Medical Center said staff were "reacting to a mass casualty, mass shooter event" and were coordinating with area hospitals to take in patients. The hospital was locked down and police, some armed with rifles, stood by the entrances.

Meanwhile, hospitals as far away as Portland, about 35 miles (56 kilometers) to the south, were on alert to potentially receive victims.

An order for residents and business owners to stay inside and off the streets of the city of 37,000 was extended Wednesday night from Lewiston to Lisbon, about 8 miles (13 kilometers) away, after a "vehicle

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of interest" was found there, authorities said.

Gov. Janet Mills released a statement echoing instructions for people to shelter. She said she had been briefed on the situation and will remain in close contact with public safety officials.

President Joe Biden spoke by phone to Mills and the state's Senate and House members, offering "full federal support in the wake of this horrific attack," a White House statement said.

Maine Sen. Angus King, an independent, said he was "deeply sad for the city of Lewiston and all those worried about their family, friends and neighbors" and was monitoring the situation. King's office said the senator would be headed directly home to Maine on the first flight possible.

Local schools will be closed Thursday and people should shelter in place or seek safety, Superintendent Jake Langlais said, adding: "Stay close to your loved ones. Embrace them."

Wednesday's death toll was staggering for a state that in 2022 had 29 homicides the entire year.

Maine doesn't require permits to carry guns, and the state has a longstanding culture of gun ownership that is tied to its traditions of hunting and sport shooting.

Some recent attempts by gun control advocates to tighten the state's gun laws have failed. Proposals to require background checks for private gun sales and create a 72-hour waiting period for gun purchases failed earlier this year. Proposals that focused on school security and banning bump stocks failed in 2019.

State residents have also voted down some attempts to tighten gun laws in Maine. A proposal to require background checks for gun sales failed in a 2016 public vote.

## **Acapulco residents are left in flooded and windblown chaos with hurricane's toll still unknown**

By MARK STEVENSON and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — A day after Hurricane Otis roared ashore in Acapulco, unleashing massive floods and setting off looting, the resort city of nearly 1 million descended into chaos, leaving residents without electricity or internet service as the toll remained uncertain.

The early images and accounts were of extensive devastation, toppled trees and power lines lying in brown floodwaters that in some areas extended for miles. The resulting destruction delayed a comprehensive response by the government, which was still assessing the damage along Mexico's Pacific coast, and made residents desperate.

Many of the once sleek beachfront hotels in Acapulco looked like toothless, shattered hulks a day after the Category 5 storm blew out hundreds — and possibly thousands — of windows.

There seemed to be a widespread frustration with authorities. While some 10,000 military troops were deployed to the area, they lacked the tools to clean tons of mud and fallen trees from the streets. Hundreds of trucks from the government electricity company arrived in Acapulco early Wednesday, but seemed at a loss as to how to restore power, with downed electricity lines lying in feet of mud and water.

Jakob Sauczuk was staying with a group of friends at a beachfront hotel when Otis hit. "We laid down on the floor, and some between beds," Sauczuk said. "We prayed a lot."

One of his friends showed reporters photos of the windowless, shattered rooms in the hotel. It looked as if someone had put clothes, beds and furniture in a blender, leaving a shredded mass.

Sauczuk complained that his group was given no warning, nor were offered safer shelter, by the hotel.

Pablo Navarro, an auto parts worker who was lodged in temporary accommodations at a beach front hotel, thought he might die in his 13th story hotel room.

"I took shelter in the bathroom, and thankfully the door held," said Navarro. "But there were some room where the wind blew out the windows and the doors."

Navarro stood Wednesday outside a discount grocery and household goods store near the hotel zone, as hundreds of people wrestled everything from packs of hot dogs and toilet paper to flat screen TVs out of the muddy store, struggling to push loaded metal shopping carts onto the mud-choked streets outside.

"This is out of control," he said.

Isabel de la Cruz, a resident of Acapulco, tried to move a shopping cart loaded with diapers, instant

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noodles and toilet paper through the mud.

She viewed what she took as a chance to help her family after she lost the tin roof of her home and her family's important documents in the hurricane.

"When is the government ever going to look after the common people?" she said.

Inside one store, National Guard officers allowed looters to take perishable items like food, but made futile efforts to prevent people from taking appliances, even as people outside loaded refrigerators on top of taxis.

It took nearly all day Wednesday for authorities to partially reopen the main highway connecting Acapulco to the state capital Chilpancingo and Mexico City. The vital ground link allowed dozens of emergency vehicles, personnel and trucks carrying supplies to reach the battered port.

Acapulco's commercial and military airports were still too badly damaged to resume flights.

Acapulco's Diamond Zone, an oceanfront area replete with hotels, restaurants and other tourist attractions, looked to be mostly underwater in drone footage that Foro TV posted online Wednesday afternoon, with boulevards and bridges completely hidden by an enormous lake of brown water.

Large buildings had their walls and roofs partially or completely ripped off. Dislodged solar panels, cars and debris littered the lobby of one severely damaged hotel. People wandered up to their waists in water in some areas, while on other less-flooded streets soldiers shoveled rubble and fallen palm fronds from the pavement.

Wednesday night the city plunged into darkness. There was no phone service, but some people were able to use satellite phones loaned by the Red Cross to let family members know they were OK.

Alicia Galindo, a 28-year-old stylist in the central Mexican city of San Luis Potosi, was one of the lucky ones to get such a call. Her parents and brother were staying in Acapulco's Hotel Princess for an international mining conference when Otis hit early Wednesday with 165 mph (270 kmh) winds.

They told her the worst part of the storm was between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. when "windows began to fall, floors broke up, mattresses flew, hallways collapsed, doors fell down ... until everything was gone," she said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. Fortunately, they escaped unhurt, she said.

However, Galindo had yet to hear from her boyfriend, who was attending the same conference but staying in a different hotel.

On Tuesday, Otis took many by surprise when it rapidly strengthened from a tropical storm to a powerful Category 5 as it tore along the coast.

"It's one thing to have a Category 5 hurricane make landfall somewhere when you're expecting it or expecting a strong hurricane, but to have it happen when you're not expecting anything to happen is truly a nightmare," said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

Acapulco, Tecpan and other towns along the Costa Grande in Guerrero were hit hard, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Wednesday morning. He said conditions were so bad that communication with the area had been "completely lost."

Later Wednesday, Milenio TV circulated photos of López Obrador trying to make it to Acapulco by ground, in some places getting out to walk. It was not immediately clear if he made it.

Acapulco is at the foot of steep mountains. Luxury homes and slums alike cover the hillsides with views of the glistening Pacific Ocean. Once drawing Hollywood stars for its nightlife, sport fishing and cliff diving shows, the port has in recent years fallen victim to competing organized crime groups that have sunk the city into violence, driving many international tourists to the Caribbean waters of Cancun and the Riviera Maya or beaches farther down the Pacific coast in the state of Oaxaca.

López Obrador noted that Otis was a stronger hurricane than Pauline, which hit Acapulco in 1997, destroying swaths of the city and killing more than 300 people.

## Many in Niger are suffering under coup-related sanctions. Junta backers call it a worthy sacrifice

By DALATOU MAMANE and CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — Hamsa Diakite can't remember the last time her family of eight had a good meal. She once sustained them by selling fried bread until a coup in Niger three months ago resulted in sanctions against the West African nation, squeezing incomes in one of the world's poorest countries and leaving millions like Hamsa struggling in the absence of aid.

"Not only is food very expensive, but school supplies have also doubled in price. I also have to clothe my children and, above all, deal with their illnesses," the 65-year-old said.

After elite soldiers toppled Niger's democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum on July 26, the country faced economic sanctions from West Africa's regional bloc, ECOWAS, as well as Western and European countries including the United States that had provided aid for health, security and infrastructure needs.

Neighbors shut their borders with Niger and more than 70% of its electricity, supplied by Nigeria, was cut off after financial transactions with West African countries were suspended. Niger's assets in external banks were frozen and hundreds of millions of dollars in aid were withheld.

The sanctions are the most stringent yet imposed by the regional bloc in an effort to stem the tide of coups in Africa's volatile Sahel region, but they have had little or no impact on the junta's ambition.

Instead, they have hit hard Niger's more than 25 million people.

"We are quickly running out of funding, medicines. People are running out of food," Louise Aubin, the United Nations resident coordinator in Niger, told The Associated Press. The junta has since told her to leave Niger over allegations the global body is blocking the country's participation in its activities. The U.N. hasn't commented on the allegations.

Aubin said there had been "positive responses" from Niger's neighbors to the idea of reopening borders for a humanitarian corridor, but didn't give details.

The world's third least developed nation, according to U.N. estimates, Niger in 2021 received \$1.77 billion in assistance, more than half for humanitarian aid as well as social infrastructure and services. All of it is now in jeopardy.

Even the country's 2023 budget, which was meant to be largely funded through the now-withheld external support from donors and loans, has been slashed by 40%.

Rather than deter the soldiers who deposed Bazoum and keep him under house arrest, the sanctions have emboldened the junta. It has set up a transitional government that could remain in power for up to three years.

That appears to have the support of many Nigeriens who felt the democratic government performed below their expectations, according to Seidik Abba, a Nigerien researcher and president of the International Center for Reflection for Studies on the Sahel think tank.

Even as they feel the pinch of sanctions, many people on the streets of Niamey, the capital, say they support the coup. They dismiss concerns from the West, which saw Niger as its last remaining strategic partner in its counterterrorism fight in the Sahel.

"The military sees that the people are supporting them, so they are using that support as a tool of legitimacy to hold on to power," Abba said. For some junta supporters, the hardship brought by the sanctions is a worthy sacrifice, he added.

"The love of homeland has made us forget the hard times that the entire country is going through," said Abdou Ali, one supporter in the capital. "No one cares about this rise in the price of goods."

Aid workers and other observers working with the local population might disagree.

"We are trying to respond to a catastrophic situation for the country," said Dr. Soumana Sounna Sofiane, secretary-general of the pharmacists' union in Niger.

Many drugstores across Niger are running out of essential supplies at a time when the country faces public health emergencies including cholera. Desperate for a solution, pharmacies have started to give

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patients alternative medications to the ones they require.

Food is also running short. Rising inflation and high food prices are "significantly impacting communities' capacity to make ends meet," the U.N. World Food Program's country office said. The agency said 3.3 million people in Niger were facing acute food insecurity even before the coup.

Niger is West Africa's second largest country in landmass but it is landlocked, leaving it heavily reliant on trade with neighbors that now has paused. Food and drug supplies were among the top imported products last year.

Now, at the border with Benin, trucks loaded with goods and relief items are lined up for several kilometers (miles) waiting to enter Niger, though some are in transit to other countries.

More than 9,000 metric tons (9,920 tons) of WFP cargo, including specialized foods for the treatment and prevention of malnutrition, destined for Niger and neighboring Burkina Faso remain blocked between Benin and Togo, the U.N. food agency said.

The U.N.'s resident coordinator fears that the goal of reaching at least 80% of 4.4 million targeted people with humanitarian aid in Niger this year could be in jeopardy.

For many families, the sanctions hit them at the core.

Nearly one in five Nigeriens are thought to be livestock breeders, according to the World Bank. They were able to export live animals worth \$10 million to Nigeria in 2021 but are now desperate to find an alternative market.

Across Niger, prices of basic items are surging. A 25-kilogram (55-pound) bag of rice, the main staple food, has jumped more than 50% in price since the sanctions were imposed.

"Our stocks are running out overnight, as nothing crosses borders to supply us. When stocks run out, we will simply close our stores," said Ambouta Idrissa, manager of a large cereal sales depot in Niamey.

Other businesses shut down after incurring extra costs to run generators after Nigeria cut the power supply.

For Nigeriens like Diakite, who struggles to feed her family, the main concern is keeping her children from going to bed on an empty stomach. She said her hopes fade with every passing day.

"For how long can we hold on?" she asked.

## Fire, other ravages jeopardize California's prized forests

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

KYBURZ, Calif. (AP) — On a steep mountainside where walls of flames torched the forest on their way toward Lake Tahoe in 2021, blackened trees stand in silhouette against a gray sky.

"If you can find a live tree, point to it," Hugh Safford, an environmental science and policy researcher at the University of California, Davis, said touring damage from the Caldor Fire, one of the past decade's many massive blazes.

Dead pines, firs, and cedars stretch as far as the eye can see. Fire burned so hot that soil was still barren in places more than a year later. Granite boulders were charred and flaked from the inferno. Long, narrow indentations marked the graves of fallen logs that vanished in smoke.

Damage in this area of Eldorado National Forest could be permanent — part of a troubling pattern that threatens a defining characteristic of the Sierra Nevada range John Muir once called a "waving sea of evergreens."

Forest like this is disappearing as increasingly intense fires alter landscapes around the planet, threatening wildlife, jeopardizing efforts to capture climate-warming carbon and harming water supplies, according to scientific studies.

A combination of factors is to blame in the U.S. West: A century of firefighting, elimination of Indigenous burning, logging of large fire-resistant trees, and other management practices that allowed small trees, undergrowth and deadwood to choke forests.

Drought has killed hundreds of millions of conifers or made them susceptible to disease and pests, and

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more likely to go up in flames. And a changing climate has brought more intense, larger and less predictable fires.

"What's it's coming down to is jungles of fuels in forest lands," Safford said. "You get a big head of steam going behind the fire there, it can burn forever and ever and ever."

Despite relatively mild wildfire seasons the past two years, California has seen 12 of its largest 20 wildfires — including the top eight — and 13 of the most destructive in the previous five years. Record rain and snowfall this year mostly ended a three-year drought but explosive vegetation growth could feed future fires.

California has lost more than 1,760 square miles (4,560 square kilometers) — nearly 7% — of its tree cover since 1985, a recent study found. While forest increased in the 1990s, it declined rapidly after 2000 because of larger and more frequent fires, according to the study in the American Geophysical Union Advances journal.

A study of the southern Sierra Nevada — home to Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks — found nearly a third of conifer forest had transitioned to other vegetation as a result of fire, drought or bark beetles in the past decade.

"We're losing them at a rate that is something that we can't sustain," said Brandon Collins, co-author of that report in the journal Ecological Applications and adjunct forestry professor at the University of California, Berkeley. "If you play it out (over) the next 20 to 30 years at the same rate, it would be gone."

Some environmentalists, like Chad Hanson of the John Muir Project sponsored by the nonprofit Earth Island Institute, said there's a "myth of catastrophic wildfire" to support logging efforts — and he has often sued to block plans to remove dead trees or thin forests.

Hanson said seedlings are rising from the ashes in high-severity patches of fire and the dead wood provides habitat for imperiled spotted owls, Pacific fishers and rare woodpeckers.

His research found forests always had dense patches of trees and some severe fires, Hanson said, contending that increasingly large ones result from weather and climate change, made worse by logging practices.

"If everything people are hearing was true there would be a lot more reason for concern," he said. "But the public is being gaslighted."

However, others are concerned failure to properly manage forests can result in intense fire that could harm wildlife habitat, the ability to store climate-warming carbon in trees and the quality of Sierra snowmelt that provides about 60% of the water for farms and cities.

Burn scars are more prone to flooding and erosion, and runoff becomes tainted with ash and sediment.

"Areas where mixed conifer burned at high severity, those are all areas that are vulnerable to total forest loss," said Christy Brigham, chief of resources management and science at Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. "We have no idea what that means for wildlife habitat, for water cycling, for carbon storage. And that's not even getting into the things we love about forests."

After wildfires in 2020 and 2021 wiped out up to about a fifth of all giant sequoias — once considered almost fireproof — the National Park Service last week embarked on a controversial project to help the mighty trees recover with its largest planting of seedlings a single grove.

## CHANGING FOREST LANDSCAPE

Many researchers say the canopy of the Sierra Nevada has changed dramatically since heavy Gold Rush logging.

Before the mid-1800s, fire sparked by lightning or set by Indigenous people burned millions of acres a year. It kept undergrowth in check, allowing low-intensity flames to creep along the forest floor and remove smaller trees competing with big ones.

"The inviting openness of the Sierra woods is one of their most distinguishing characteristics," John Muir said, describing how a horse rider could easily pass through the trees.

But after settlers drove out Native Americans and logged forests, fighting fires became the mission to protect the valuable trees — and, increasingly, homes built deeper into wildlands. In 1935, the U.S. Forest Service established a policy to knock down any fire by 10 a.m. the next morning.

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That has allowed forests to become four to seven times more densely wooded than they once were, Safford said. While many larger, fire-resilient trees like ponderosa and Jeffrey pines were logged for lumber, smaller trees that are not so fire resistant have thrived. They compete for water and their low branches allow fire to climb into the canopy of taller trees, fueling devastating crown fires.

"John Muir would not recognize any of this," Safford said, gesturing at a stand of tightly packed dead trees during the tour last October. "He wouldn't even know where he was."

## A TINDERBOX TAKES OFF

The Caldor Fire, which destroyed 1,000 structures while burning across the Sierra Crest and into the Tahoe basin, torched forest that hadn't seen flames in over a century, Safford said. Years of drought fueled by a warmer climate had made it a tinderbox.

Swaths of Eldorado National Forest burned at such intensity that mature pines went up in flames and their seeds were killed. Unlike species such as giant sequoias and lodgepole pine that drop their seeds in fire, the dominant pines of the Sierra can't reproduce if their seeds burn.

Manzanita and mountain whitethorn — chaparral typical at lower elevations in California — take root in ashes and can dominate the forest.

Studies have found that repeated fires or other disruption provoke such shifts in ecosystems.

A March study of 334 Western wildfires found increasing fire severity and drier conditions after fire made the dominant conifer species less likely to regenerate and it concluded the problem is apt to worsen with climate change.

Along U.S. Highway 50, where the Caldor Fire had continued burning out of control toward Lake Tahoe, Safford parked his SUV and scrambled up a rocky knoll to point out a slope barren of trees. Forest there had been burned in 1981 and was replaced with chaparral.

The Caldor blaze, allegedly caused by a reckless father and son, is likely to reinforce that condition, Safford said. And whether the severe burn recovers will depend largely on whether another fire tears through in coming years, he said.

## TOOLS FOR TREATING FORESTS

To tackle the problem of huge wildfires, the federal government, which owns nearly 60% of California's 51,560 square miles (134,00 square kilometers) of forest, agreed with the state in 2020 to jointly reduce fuels on 1,560 square miles (4,040 square kilometers) a year by 2025.

While a fraction of the land needing treatment, it's considered a promising development after years of inaction, though not without controversy.

Fire scientists advocate more deliberate burning at low-to-moderate severity to clear vegetation that makes forests susceptible to big fires.

But the Forest Service has historically been risk averse, said Safford, the agency's regional ecologist for two decades before retiring in 2021. Rather than chance that a fire could blow up, officials have generally snuffed flames before they could deliver benefits of lower-intensity fire.

Weeks before the Caldor Fire, the Forest Service had been monitoring a lightning fire south of Lake Tahoe, while dealing with more pressing ones. But when the small fire took off, causing millions of dollars in damage, politicians blasted the agency for not doing more. Officials quickly said they would no longer let some naturally ignited fires burn that season.

With more than \$4 billion in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, the Forest Service plans to ramp up forest thinning in places where the wildfire threat to communities and infrastructure is most immediate.

That will include cutting smaller trees, as well as setting intentional fires to clear accumulated forest litter.

## BATTLELINES OVER THINNING

Last fall when Safford led two graduate students up a rutted fire road through charred forest, they came upon a patch of life where large pines and cedars towered overhead and seedlings sprouted.

A "nirvana" is what Safford called it. Smaller fire-intolerant trees had been harvested and other vegetation removed before the fire. The space between the trees allowed the fire to creep along the ground,

only charring some trunks.

A coalition of Sierra-based conservation groups wrote congressional leaders in 2021 urging more federal funding for fire resilience. Their letter cited “broad consensus among fire scientists, land managers, firefighters” to increase thinning and prescribed fire.

Susan Britting, executive director of one of the groups, Sierra Forest Legacy, acknowledged any cutting triggers skepticism because loggers historically took the largest, most marketable trees. But she said thinning trees up to a certain diameter is acceptable, though she prefers prescribed burning.

“In my experience, things like logging, tree removal, even reforestation, those things happen,” Britting said. “The prescribed fire that needs to happen ... just gets delayed and punted and not prioritized.”

The goal of prescribed burns is illustrated by a large green island on a fire severity map of the nearly 350-square-mile (906 square kilometers) Caldor blaze. The green area, representing low fire severity, corresponded to where a fire was set among older trees in 2019.

The chance of a deliberate burn escaping its perimeter — as happened last year in New Mexico’s largest fire in state history — remains a big challenge to the strategy.

While managed fire and prescribed burns are widely supported by scientists and environmental groups, thinning is controversial and often faces court challenges.

In a 2020 letter to Congress that opposed logging, The John Muir Project’s Hanson and more than 200 climate and forest scientists said some thinning could reduce fire intensity but those operations often take larger trees to make it economically worthwhile.

Safford — now chief scientist at Vibrant Planet, an environmental public benefits corporation — acknowledged larger trees have been logged in the past but said that’s not now envisioned in thinning projects aimed at making forests healthier.

Even with chainsaws, we won’t be able to cut our way out of the problem, he said. Two-thirds of the rugged Sierra is inaccessible or off-limits to logging, so fire will have to do much of the work.

But there’s a backlash against fire as a management tool. Homeowners are anxious prescribed fires will jump perimeters and destroy houses. Similar fears lead fire agencies to tame moderate fires that can clear forest floors.

“It’s the classic wicked problem where any solution you derive has huge implications for other sides of society and the way people want things to be,” Safford said. “So I’m afraid what’s going to happen is at some point we’ll burn all of our forests.”

## **Federal prosecutors urge judge to reinstate Trump gag order, citing comments about ex-chief of staff**

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors are urging a judge to reinstate a gag order on Donald Trump, citing recent social media posts about the former president’s chief of staff that they said represented an attempt to influence and intimidate a foreseeable witness in the case.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is presiding over the federal case charging Trump with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election, last week temporarily paused her order barring Trump from making inflammatory comments about prosecutors, court staff and potential witnesses. The ruling came as Trump’s lawyers challenge the limited gag order in higher courts.

In a motion filed Wednesday night, special counsel Jack Smith’s team encouraged Chutkan to put the restrictions back in place. Prosecutors cited in part statements in social media and at a news conference over the last day by Trump about his former chief of staff, Mark Meadows, who was reported by ABC News on Tuesday to have testified before a grand jury after receiving immunity from prosecution.

The former president mused on social media about the possibility that Meadows, a close ally in the White House who was charged alongside Trump in a separate state prosecution in Georgia related to efforts to undo the election, would give testimony to Smith in exchange for immunity. One part of the post said: “Some people would make that deal, but they are weaklings and cowards, and so bad for the future our



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Failing Nation. I don't think that Mark Meadows is one of them but who really knows?"

In their motion, Smith's team cited the post about Meadows as an example of the type of commentary that the original gag order was meant to prohibit and a reason why the restrictions should be reinstated.

Trump, prosecutors wrote, has "capitalized on the Court's administrative stay to, among other prejudicial conduct, send an unmistakable and threatening message to a foreseeable witness in this case."

They added: "Unless the Court lifts the administrative stay, the defendant will not stop his harmful and prejudicial attacks. In addition, to the extent that the defendant's public message — directed to the Chief of Staff, with knowledge that it would reach him — is not already covered by his release conditions, it is an intentional end-run around them."

Smith's team also asked Chutkan to modify the conditions of Trump's pretrial release by making compliance with the gag order a condition, or by "clarifying that the existing condition barring communication with witnesses about the facts of the case includes indirect messages to witnesses made publicly on social media or in speeches."

In a separate matter Wednesday, Trump was fined \$10,000 after the judge in his civil fraud trial in New York said the former president had violated a gag order.

## As world roils, US and China seek to ease strained ties and prepare for possible Biden-Xi summit

By DIDI TANG and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the midst of two active and potentially world-changing conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, the U.S. is hoping to find at least a small measure of common ground with China as China's top diplomat visits Washington this week.

Over three days of meetings that begin Thursday, top Biden administration officials, including possibly the president himself, will press Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the importance of China stepping up its role on the world stage if it wants to be considered a responsible major international player.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, are both expected to urge China to play a constructive role in both the Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine wars. Those meetings could set the stage for a summit between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping next month on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum leaders gathering in San Francisco.

The U.S. has been disappointed with China over its support for Russia in the war against Ukraine and its relative silence on the Middle East. In addition, the world's two largest economies are at odds on issues such as human rights, climate change, Taiwan, the South China Sea and North Korea.

Still, both sides have expressed a willingness to talk with each other since Blinken canceled a planned visit to China in February after the shutdown of a Chinese spy balloon over the U.S., which marked a low point in recent relations.

In the months that followed that crisis, however, Blinken rescheduled his trip and went to China in June. He was followed in quick succession by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, climate envoy John Kerry and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

In addition, Sullivan met with Wang in Malta in mid-September ahead of Blinken's discussions with Chinese Vice President Han Zheng later that month on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York. And Blinken spoke just last week with Wang about the Israel-Hamas crisis.

The goal, according to U.S. officials, is to set the stage for another Biden-Xi summit at which the two leaders could explore cooperation or at least easing outright hostility on the most pressing matters of the day.

"Wang Yi's visit will serve as one of the final touchpoints in laying the groundwork" for the Biden-Xi meeting, said Ryan Hass, director of the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institute, a Washington-based think tank. "Wang's meetings in Washington will set the contours for the topics the two leaders will discuss when they meet in November."

"It opens the possibility of the world's two largest powers pursuing coordinated efforts to limit escalation or expansion of violence in Ukraine and the Middle East," he said.

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Yun Sun, director of the China Program at the Stimson Center, another Washington think tank, said Wang's trip signals that the Xi-Biden summit is almost certain.

"Wang is here to pave the ground for Xi's San Francisco trip. That's the core focus of the trip. It means issues will be negotiated, solutions will be discussed and details will be deliberated and inked," Sun said. "The APEC summit is 20 days away, so time is of essence. His trip means that Xi is coming. Xi's coming means meeting with Biden. The Xi-Biden summit means efforts to stabilize bilateral ties."

Scott Kennedy, senior adviser and trustee chair in Chinese business and economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said Wang's trip could yield results such as additional direct flights between the two countries, visas for more journalists and even agreements on climate change and resumption of high-level military dialogue.

But while it is important for Wang and the Americans to discuss points of contention in the Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere, Kennedy said it is unlikely the two sides will reach much agreement.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said Wang will "have in-depth exchanges of views" with U.S. officials on a range of issues and "state China's principled position and legitimate concerns" on relations between the two countries.

The Chinese president last came to the U.S. in 2017, when former President Donald Trump hosted him at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. Biden, who took office in 2021, has yet to host Xi on U.S. soil. The two men last met in Bali, Indonesia, in November 2022, on the sidelines of the Group of 20 meeting of leading rich and developing nations.

Wang's trip is one of a string of meetings and activities to warm up Xi's visit to the U.S.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is visiting China this week, had a surprise meeting with Xi on Wednesday in Beijing. The Chinese president told the governor that "the achievements of China-U.S. relations have not come easily and should be cherished all the more," according to the official news agency Xinhua.

Earlier this month, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer led a delegation of six senators to China, in the first visit by U.S. lawmakers since 2019. Schumer was also received by Xi, who said the Thucydides Trap is "not inevitable." The Thucydides Trap is a political term for the tendency of major clashes when an emerging power challenges an existing power.

The U.S.-China relationship began to sour in 2018 when the Trump administration slapped hefty tariffs on \$50 billion worth of Chinese goods. It deteriorated further over a range of issues, including rights abuses, the South China Sea, Taiwan, technology and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Trump isn't accustomed to restrictions. That's beginning to test the legal system**

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press  
NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump isn't used to constraints.

The former president ignores and antagonizes anyone who tells him no. He built a business — and later political — brand as someone who says and does what he wants, largely without consequence. Even after losing the White House, Trump remains accustomed to deference, surrounded by people who greet him with nightly standing ovations at his clubs and cheer his most outrageous lies.

But Trump came face-to-face with a new reality Wednesday when he was called to the witness stand and fined \$10,000 for violating a gag order prohibiting him from attacking court personnel in his New York civil fraud case. Trump denied he was referring to a senior law clerk when he told reporters in the courthouse hallway that someone "sitting alongside" Judge Arthur Engoron was "perhaps even much more partisan than he is."

Engoron wasn't having it.

"I find that the witness is not credible," he concluded before issuing the fine. Minutes later, Trump stormed out of the courtroom in an apparent fit of anger.

The \$10,000 holds little financial consequence for a wealthy defendant who flew to his appearance

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aboard a private jet.

But the courtroom drama previews the tensions mounting between Trump's competing legal and political interests as he vies for the Republican presidential nomination while facing a litany of criminal and civil cases. And it underscores how efforts to hold Trump accountable are testing the legal system in unprecedented ways as judges struggle with how to rein in the former president's inflammatory rhetoric while balancing the free speech rights of a political candidate.

"It's really a new frontier for the legal system, and the legal system is really struggling with how to control this man who has no respect for the rule of law," said Jimmy Gurule, a Notre Dame law school professor.

The court system has never encountered this type of defendant. Trump is not only a former president, but also the leading candidate for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. He has turned his legal fights into a centerpiece of his campaign while also painting himself as the victim of coordinated political persecution.

Lawyers typically tell criminal defendants to stay quiet, knowing prosecutors can use any utterance against them. But Trump has turned the camera-lined hallway outside the courtroom into his own personal campaign stage, holding impromptu press conferences multiple times a day as he enters and exits the room. He also broadcasts his grievances on his social media platform, where he regularly slams Engoron as "a Radical Left Democrat" controlled by New York Attorney General Letitia James "and her Thugs."

Gurule said courts are hamstrung in trying to punish Trump the way they would normal defendants because of his position and personal wealth. A \$10,000 fine is unlikely to deter someone as rich as Trump. And while Engoron floated the possibility of holding Trump "in contempt of court, and possibly imprisoning him" for further violations, jailing an ex-president who is under Secret Service protection would present enormous logistical challenges, in addition to the grave political implications of putting a leading political candidate behind bars.

The absence of meaningful consequences raises questions about whether Trump's prominence has allowed him to exist under a "different standard of law" than other defendants, Gurule said.

Indeed, fines and the threat of jail haven't deterred Trump yet. Just days ago, he was fined \$5,000 for violating the same gag order, which Engoron imposed after Trump targeted his principal law clerk on social media. While Trump immediately deleted the post, the court later learned that a copy remained posted on his campaign website, which his attorneys called an unintentional oversight.

But Trump, so far, has capitalized politically on his trials, plastering his mugshot on merchandise that has brought in millions of dollars and fundraising off every development. Trump fretted last week that his appearances in court weren't drawing as much media attention with the spotlight turned to the war in the Middle East and the House speakership debacle. But with the latest courtroom drama, he was once again making headlines, overshadowing his rivals and filling his campaign coffers.

"For some people, this is what they like about Trump — that he doesn't back down, he pushes against others and he is his own master. But in the world of the courts, the rules are different," said Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor and professor at Loyola Law School.

While Trump's tactics may have political benefits, they could also help prosecutors argue the former president believes he's above the law.

"If he disregards orders of the court, then it may add to the argument that he was disregarding other laws as well," she said.

"By his actions, he's messaging that the laws don't apply to me. And that's problematic because a good prosecutor — and I think Jack Smith is a good prosecutor — can use that at the right time against him," Levenson said, referring to the special prosecutor overseeing the federal cases against Trump.

Indeed, things are likely to get much more complicated for Trump in the coming months as his four criminal trials get underway. While the New York fraud case is a civil trial at which Trump has appeared voluntarily, he is likely to face far tougher restrictions and harsher punishments in his criminal cases.

In 2017, a federal judge in Brooklyn revoked the bail of pharmaceutical company CEO Martin Shkreli, who had been convicted of fraud, and sent him to jail after he went on social media and offered a \$5,000 bounty to anyone who could get him a strand of Democrat Hillary Clinton's hair. Shkreli's lawyers said he

was just joking, but the judge called that offer “a solicitation of an assault.”

More recently, a federal judge in Manhattan revoked the bail of former cryptocurrency mogul Sam Bankman-Fried while he awaited trial on fraud charges after he gave journalists copies of the private writings of his former girlfriend, who was set to testify against him at a trial. The judge ruled that amounted to witness tampering.

Trump has so far seemed to abide by a separate gag order imposed by the judge overseeing his 2020 election interference criminal case in Washington. Trump has decried the order, which barred him from making public statements targeting prosecutors, court staff and potential witnesses, as unconstitutional and is appealing. But he waited until it was temporarily lifted Friday to resume his public attacks against Smith and label those who have made cooperation deals with prosecutors “weaklings and cowards.”

Prosecutors asked late Wednesday for the gag order to be reinstated, citing recent social media posts about Trump’s former chief of staff that they said represented an attempt to influence and intimidate him.

Trump has also avoided inflammatory remarks against Judge Aileen Cannon, who is overseeing the case into his alleged hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago club, and whom he appointed.

In a typical court proceeding, a judge would likely be more concerned about whether a defendant has blatantly broken court rules, like trying to speak to jurors or threatening witnesses, than stray comments made outside of court about feeling like court personnel are biased. But Trump has an unparalleled megaphone, making his message potentially more dangerous at a time when judges are increasingly under threat.

The judge in Trump’s hush-money criminal case, Juan Manuel Merchan, received dozens of death threats around the time of Trump’s arraignment in April after the former president lashed out at him on social media. New York court officials have beefed up security for judges and court personnel involved in Trump matters in the wake of the threats.

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

## **An increase in harassment against Jewish and Muslim Americans has been reported since Hamas attacks**

By CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

Muslim and Jewish civil rights groups say they’ve seen large increases in reports of harassment, bias and sometimes physical assaults against members of their communities since the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks.

The Anti-Defamation League and the Center on American-Islamic Relations saw increases in reported instances, many involving violence or threats against protesters at rallies in support of Israel or in support of Palestinians over the last two weeks as war broke out between Israel and Hamas. Other attacks and harassment reported by the groups were directed at random Muslim or Jewish people in public.

A spokesperson for the Council on American-Islamic Relations said Wednesday that the organization’s chapters and national office had received 774 reports of bias-related acts between Oct. 7 and Oct. 24. The national headquarters had 110 direct reports during that period, compared to 63 for all of August. The council’s leaders believe it’s the largest wave of complaints since December 2015, when then-presidential candidate Donald Trump declared his intent to ban Muslim immigration to the U.S. in the wake of the San Bernadino mass shooting that left 14 people dead.

The reported acts since Oct. 7 include an Illinois landlord fatally stabbing a 6-year-old Muslim boy and wounding the boy’s mother, police say, as well as the arrest of a Michigan man after police say he asked people in a social media post to join him in hunting Palestinians.

“Public officials should do everything in their power to keep the wave of hate sweeping the nation right now from spiraling out of control,” said Corey Saylor, research and advocacy director of the Center on American-Islamic Relations.

Saylor noted that former President George W. Bush’s visit to a mosque after the 9/11 attacks had a calming effect on the backlash felt in Muslim communities. He called on President Joe Biden to visit with Americans who lost family members in Gaza.

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The Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism reported in a statement Wednesday that the organization recorded at least 312 reports of antisemitic acts between Oct. 7 and Oct. 23 — compared to 64 recorded during the same time period in 2022. Those reports included graffiti, slurs or anonymous postings, as well as physical violence such as a woman being punched in the face in New York by an attacker who the league says said, "You are Jewish."

The 312 reports included 109 anti-Israel sentiments spoken or proclaimed at rallies the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism found to be "explicit or strong implicit support for Hamas and/or violence against Jews in Israel," according to the statement.

Protesters at several of the rallies used the slogan, "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," which the Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish groups have criticized as a call to dismantle the state of Israel. Many Palestinian activists say they are not calling for the destruction of Israel, but for freedom of movement and equal rights and protections for Palestinians throughout the land.

The Anti-Defamation League called for strong responses to antisemitic posts, rhetoric and acts. The organization said violent messages that mention Jews on platforms like Telegram Messenger have increased even more than reports of in-person instances.

"It is incumbent on all leaders, from political leaders to CEOs to university presidents, to forcefully and unequivocally condemn antisemitism and terrorism," Jonathan Greenblatt, Anti-Defamation League CEO, wrote in the statement.

Jewish civil rights organizations in the United Kingdom, France and other countries across Europe, Latin America, North Africa and elsewhere have also tracked increases in antisemitic acts in the past few weeks compared to 2022. League officials said London police had received 218 reports of antisemitic crimes between Oct. 1 and Oct. 18, which was 13 times greater than the numbers reported in 2022.

## Israel-Hamas war could threaten already fragile economies in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Economic crises are rippling through the countries bordering Israel, raising the possibility of a chain reaction from the war with Hamas that further worsens the financial health and political stability of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon and creates problems well beyond.

Each of the three countries is up against differing economic pressures that led the International Monetary Fund to warn in a September report that they could lose their "sociopolitical stability." That warning came shortly before Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, triggering a war that could easily cause economic chaos that President Joe Biden and the European Union would likely need to address.

The possible fallout is now starting to be recognized by world leaders and policy analysts. For a Biden administration committed to stopping the Israel-Hamas war from widening, the conflict could amplify the economic strains and possibly cause governments to collapse. If the chaos went unchecked, it could spread across a region that is vital for global oil supplies — with reverberations around the globe.

"The more unstable things are economically, the easier it is for bad actors in the region to stir the pot," said Christopher Swift, an international lawyer and former Treasury Department official. "The notion that you can divorce politics from economics is a little bit myopic, and naive. Politics, economics and security go together very closely."

World Bank head Ajay Banga warned at a conference in Saudi Arabia this week that the war puts economic development at a "dangerous juncture."

The financial situation is serious enough that Charles Michel, president of the European Council, met with the IMF last Thursday and told officials there that they needed to do more to support the Egyptian government, which he said is under pressure due to the possibility of migrants arriving from Hamas-controlled Gaza as well as people fleeing a civil war in Sudan.

"Let's support Egypt," Michel told reporters afterward. "Egypt needs our support and we need to support Egypt."

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Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi refuses to take in Palestinian refugees, fearing that Israel wants to force a permanent expulsion of Palestinians and nullify Palestinian demands for statehood. The Egyptian leader also said a mass exodus would risk bringing militants into the Sinai Peninsula.

Already, over a million people have been displaced within Gaza, and the threat of the war's escalation looms with clashes along the Lebanon-Israel border between the Israeli military and Hezbollah militants.

"To presume that there won't be a movement of people is naïve and premature," said Swift. "Any sudden blow to the el-Sissi regime from the outside, whether it's an economic blow, or whether it's the sudden migration of a lot of people out of Gaza into the Sinai could have destabilizing effects."

Swift said that while el-Sissi's regime is heavily dependent on U.S. economic and military assistance, it's increasingly going to be popular opinion within Egypt that determines his actions, a lesson learned from the Arab Spring protests that brought down the Mubarak regime in 2011.

In April, the IMF concluded that Egypt's financing needs for the year were equal in size to 35% of its gross domestic product. On Oct. 5, Moody's downgraded Egyptian debt that was already at junk status. The downgrade came as past efforts have failed to help Egypt's economy, which was saddled with about \$160 billion in debt as of the end of last year.

Mirette F. Mabrouk, director of the Middle East Institute's Egypt Studies program, said, "Egypt is in the worst economic crisis I can remember in at least five decades" and that only complicates the current turmoil from the war.

"If you have this conflagration in Gaza, you need the rest of the region to be stable for everyone to take appropriate and correct action," Mabrouk said. "You don't need more instability in a region that is already quite unstable."

Mabrouk said one of the most immediate signs of increasing distress is that Egypt's central bank has in the past week imposed foreign currency restrictions on cards linked to local bank accounts.

One major potential setback for Egypt stemming from the latest Israel-Hamas War would be the loss of tourists seeking to explore the country's ancient pyramids and history. Tourism is one of Egypt's leading economic sectors, and along with foreign investment provides needed access to the rest of the global economy.

A representative from the Egyptian government did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

Nearby Jordan is struggling due to slower economic growth and less foreign investment, according to the IMF. Its debt outlook is healthier than Egypt's, but its unemployment rate is in the double digits, according to financial data provider FactSet.

The size of the Lebanese economy shrank by more than half from 2019 to 2021, according to the World Bank. Lebanon's currency, which since 1997 had been pegged to the U.S. dollar at 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, now trades around 90,000 pounds to the dollar.

While many businesses have taken to charging in dollars, public employees who still get their wages in lira have seen their purchasing power crash, with many now relying on remittances from relatives abroad to stay afloat. International donors including the United States and Qatar have been subsidizing the salaries of Lebanese army soldiers.

The country's leaders reached a tentative agreement with the IMF in April 2022 for a bailout package but they have not implemented most of the reforms required to finalize the deal. The IMF warned in a report earlier this year that without reforms, public debt in the small, crisis-ridden country could reach nearly 550% of GDP.

Before the latest Israel-Hamas war, some officials had pointed to Lebanon's rebounding tourism industry as an economic lifeline. But since the conflict has threatened to envelop Lebanon — with regular small-scale clashes already taking place between militants from Hamas-allied Hezbollah and Israeli forces on the country's southern border — foreign embassies have warned their citizens to leave and airlines have canceled flights to the country.

Paul Salem, president of the Middle East Institute in Washington, said that "if tensions spread to the Gulf, this conflict will have the potential to severely impact international markets and struggling economies and

populations around the globe.”

## Democrats’ divisions on Israel-Hamas war boil over in Michigan as Detroit-area Muslims feel betrayed

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

DEARBORN, Michigan (AP) — Many of Michigan’s top Democrats, including Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, took part in a huge pro-Israel rally at a suburban Detroit synagogue days after Hamas’ deadly attack on the country earlier this month, with some of them dancing and joining in chants of “Am Yisrael Chai” — Hebrew for “The people of Israel live.”

None of them attended a rally in nearby Dearborn the next day to show support for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who were being killed or forced from their homes by the Israeli military’s response.

The war between Israel and Hamas has inflamed tensions between Jews and Muslims around the world, including the Detroit area, which is home to several heavily Jewish suburbs and Dearborn, the city with the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the U.S. The strong show of support for Israel by Michigan’s leading Democrats, though, has offended many of their Muslim supporters and could affect how this key bloc votes next fall in the presidential battleground state.

“There is going to be an effort to not support the people who have not supported us. The people that we voted for for such a long time — people that we’ve helped, we’ve donated to and we’ve worked on their campaigns,” said Adam Abusalah, a 22-year-old Palestinian American from Dearborn.

In Dearborn, which borders Detroit, nearly half of the roughly 110,000 residents claim Arab ancestry. Thousands of other Arab Americans live elsewhere in Wayne County, including Hamtramck, which is the country’s first majority-Muslim city and has an all-Muslim city council.

After Donald Trump won Michigan by fewer than 11,000 votes in 2016, Wayne County and its large Muslim communities helped Joe Biden retake the state for the Democrats in 2020 by a roughly 154,000-vote margin. Biden enjoyed a roughly 3-to-1 advantage in Dearborn and 5-1 advantage in Hamtramck, and he won Wayne County by more than 330,000 votes.

Democrats have similarly benefitted from the Detroit area’s heavy support at the state level, regaining full control of the Legislature while already holding the governor’s mansion last year for the first time since 1983.

Ten miles (16 kilometers) north of Dearborn is Southfield, which is home to one of the area’s thriving Jewish communities and where an estimated 2,500 people gathered Oct. 9 for the pro-Israel rally. Among them were a who’s who of Michigan Democrats, including Whitmer, U.S. Sen. Gary Peters, two U.S. House members, the secretary of state and the state attorney general.

Whitmer told the crowd that “we stand with Israel” and that “Israel has a right to defend itself.”

She also acknowledged the Palestinian suffering in an email response the following week, telling The Associated Press, “In Michigan, we have so many families who are feeling the trauma and mourning the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives. Our strength as a state is our ability to bring people together to get through difficult times.”

Robyn Lederman, a Jewish attorney from West Bloomfield Hills who lived in Israel for eight years, said such shows of support are important for the grieving Jewish community. She said her family learned through social media on Oct. 7 — the day Hamas militants rampaged through southern Israel, killing more than 1,400 people and abducting more than 200 others — that a young Israeli woman her family hosted in 2012 was missing. Soon after, they learned that the woman, 25-year-old Maya Puder, was one of the more than 260 people who were killed while at an outdoor music festival.

“This has brought to the forefront where people stand based on their reaction,” said Lederman. “More people must take a stand that is anti-terror against Israel and Jews.”

The state’s Democratic leaders were notably not among the hundreds of people who turned out for the Oct. 10 pro-Palestinian rally at a performing arts center in Dearborn. Three Democratic state representatives spoke at the event, and businessman Nasser Beydoun, a Democratic U.S. Senate candidate whose

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family immigrated to the United States from Lebanon, specifically called out Whitmer, Peters and Lieutenant Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II for missing the event.

"They're not here with us today because they were busy dancing yesterday," Beydoun said as the crowd boomed. "I want you to remember that."

Differences over what's happening in Israel and Gaza were laid bare in the Legislature, where Democrats have been divided over pro-Israel resolutions like those that some other state legislatures have passed with near unanimity.

In the state House, a pro-Israel resolution that was introduced with bipartisan support is no longer expected to pass due to objections from some Democrats. Abraham Aiyash, the Democratic floor leader in the chamber, strongly opposed the resolution. Aiyash, who grew up in Hamtramck after his parents immigrated from Yemen, said that "if we're going to condemn terror, we must condemn the terror and the violence that the Palestinian people have endured for decades."

The state Senate opted to write its own resolution after the House's stalled for more than a week. It was introduced by the chamber's lone Jewish lawmaker, Jeremy Moss, and passed easily with bipartisan support.

Moss, a Democrat whose district includes Southfield and other large Jewish communities, criticized what he called "inflammatory responses from House Democrats on Israel's right to exist." He told the AP that it was important to stand "in solidarity with a community that's really hurt."

The situation in Michigan reflects broader tensions throughout the United States, with smaller disagreements having surfaced among state and local officials in North Carolina, Ohio, Wisconsin and California.

In Congress, the war has forced Democrats back to a familiar place where the establishment's history of unconditional loyalty to Israel is being tested. Biden and other top U.S. officials have pledged broad support for the Israeli government. But some in the party's progressive wing, including U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Detroit, have been calling for cease-fire and a reevaluation of U.S. military aid to Israel over concerns that it could be used to commit war crimes.

Tlaib is the lone Palestinian American in Congress and her grandmother still lives in the West Bank. She has been widely criticized by members of both parties — including fellow Michigan Democrats — who say she hasn't explicitly faulted Hamas for the Oct. 7 attack.

"We're in a really tense political environment and I think leaders are supposed to project calm and ease these tensions," said Moss, whose district Tlaib partially represents. "It's been very troubling to see responses from my congresswoman on this that I think have heightened the tensions."

Those tensions are palpable. Many feared the worst when learning that a Detroit synagogue leader, Samantha Woll, was found stabbed to death outside of her home. Police have since said they've found no evidence of antisemitism as a motive, but her killing has nevertheless stoked worries about people committing hate crimes in the area.

A 41-year-old man was arrested on Oct. 12 for threatening on social media to go to the Dearborn area to "hunt Palestinians," according to police. Days later, community and religious leaders gathered outside Dearborn's police station, where they criticized Biden and other Democrats of neglecting the Muslim and Arab American communities.

"In 2024, Democrats are going to have a problem with Arab Americans. For too long, they've isolated Arab American voices within the party. They've isolated the perspectives of Arab Americans. And on this specific issue, they've denied even recognizing the human rights of Palestinians," Democratic state Rep. Alabas Farhat, of Dearborn, told the AP.



## Business owners in a Ukrainian front-line city adapt even as 'a missile can come at any moment'

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine (AP) — In a city where damaged buildings are everywhere, a destroyed pizzeria stands out as a painful reminder of lives and livelihoods dashed in an instant.

A Russian ballistic missile struck the popular eatery in eastern Ukraine in June, killing 13 people including an award-winning Ukrainian writer and several teenagers. Seven of the victims were staff.

Today, fresh flowers and notes have been placed where the entrance once was. A T-shirt, part of the waitstaff's uniform, hangs near the makeshift memorial with the inscription "We will never forget."

"As an entrepreneur, of course, I regret the loss of property, but there's something that cannot be returned: human lives," said Dmytro Ihnatenko, the owner of RIA Pizza.

The bombed-out building in Kramatorsk underscores the massive risks for businesses in this front-line city in the Donetsk region. But that has not deterred many other business owners who have reopened their doors to customers in the past year.

The city council estimates there are 50 restaurants and 228 shops now open in Kramatorsk, three times the number open at the same period last year. Most are believed to be existing business that closed in the early days of the war and have reopened.

"We understand that this is a risk, and we are taking it because this is our life," said Olena Ziabina, chief administrator of the White Burger restaurant in Kramatorsk. "Wherever we are, we need to work. We work here. This is our conscious choice."

The White Burger chain operated mainly in Donetsk and Luhansk regions before the war. But after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, it could reopen only in Kramatorsk. It launched two new restaurants in the capital, Kyiv, and Dnipro to keep the chain alive.

Kramatorsk's restaurant is the chain's top performer in profitability, even though prices are 20% lower than in the capital's restaurant.

After the attack on RIA Pizza, White Burger's operators didn't consider closing the Kramatorsk restaurant, Ziabina said. "I cried a lot," she said, recalling the day she heard about the attack.

Kramatorsk's economy has adapted to war. The city houses the Ukrainian army's regional headquarters, and many cafes and restaurants are frequented mainly by soldiers as well as journalists and aid workers. Ukrainian women often travel there to reunite for few days with husbands and boyfriends.

Soldiers joke that Kramatorsk is their Las Vegas, providing all the "luxuries" they need like good food or coffee. But restaurants offer only non-alcoholic beer due to the city's proximity to the battlefield.

The city streets are mostly empty except for military cars. The residents who stayed avoid big gatherings and crowded places.

Still, it is a far cry from the war's early days, when Kramatorsk's shops, restaurants and cafes were shuttered. Tens of thousands of people were left without jobs, and factories were closed.

"Probably, thanks to the military, we can still come back to this city," said Oleksandr, who asked to be identified only by his first name because of security concerns.

He is a co-founder of one of the numerous military shops in Kramatorsk serving soldiers. Oleksandr said he marks up prices by only 1 hryvnia (2 cents) above the manufacturer's price. He said the aim isn't to earn money but to provide the military with the necessary equipment.

Many residents cherish new work opportunities brought by the reopening of shops and restaurants.

But there are fewer options for older people, said Tetiana Podosionova, 54. She worked at the Kramatorsk Machinebuilding Plant for 32 years, but the plant closed due to security risks when the war started.

"I had hoped to work at the factory until retirement," Podosionova said. Most jobs are now in restaurants and shops, where she had no experience.

Finally, she found a job at Amazing Fish Aquarium, which resumed operations months after the war began. The aquarium has hundreds of exotic fish and dozens of parrots and remains open to entertain residents, who are often stressed from missile strikes.

But every reopened business carries risk. Ihnatenko, the pizzeria owner, still comes to his destroyed restaurant every day when he's in Kramatorsk. He doesn't know why. He looks tired. His voice is hardly above a whisper.

He, like many business owners, saw Ukraine's successful counteroffensive in the neighboring Kharkiv region last year as a sign that life could return to Kramatorsk.

"It seemed safer here," he explained, standing in the rubble of his restaurant.

He has no plans to rebuild and reopen yet again.

His tragic experience shows the challenges that business owners face while keeping their doors open.

"A missile can come at any moment," he said.

## **Autoworkers reach a deal with Ford, a breakthrough toward ending strikes against Detroit automakers**

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The United Auto Workers union said Wednesday it has reached a tentative contract agreement with Ford that could be a breakthrough toward ending the nearly 6-week-old strikes against Detroit automakers.

The four-year deal, which still has to be approved by 57,000 union members at the company, could bring a close to the union's series of strikes at targeted factories run by Ford, General Motors and Jeep maker Stellantis.

The Ford deal could set the pattern for agreements with the other two automakers, where workers will remain on strike. The UAW called on all workers at Ford to return to their jobs and said that will put pressure on GM and Stellantis to bargain. Announcements on how to do that will come later.

"We told Ford to pony up, and they did," President Shawn Fain said in a video address to members. "We won things no one thought possible." He added that Ford put 50% more money on the table than it did before the strike started on Sept. 15.

UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, the chief negotiator with Ford, said workers will get a 25% general wage increase, plus cost of living raises that will put the pay increase over 30%, to above \$40 per hour for top-scale assembly plant workers by the end of the contract.

Previously Ford, Stellantis and General Motors had all offered 23% pay increases. When the talks started Ford offered 9%.

Assembly workers will get 11% upon ratification, almost equal to all of the wage increases workers have seen since 2007, Browning said.

Typically, during past auto strikes, a UAW deal with one automaker has led to the other companies matching it with their own settlements.

GM said in a statement it is "working constructively" with the union to reach an agreement as soon as possible. Stellantis also said it's committed to reaching a deal "that gets everyone back to work as soon as possible."

Browning said temporary workers will get more in wage increases than they have over the past 22 years combined. Temporary workers will get raises over 150% and retirees will get annual bonuses, he said.

"Thanks to the power of our members on the picket line and the threat of more strikes to come, we have won the most lucrative agreement per member since Walter Reuther was president," Browning said. Reuther led the union from 1946 until his death in 1970.

Fain said that the union's national leadership council of local union presidents and bargaining chairs will travel Sunday to Detroit, where they'll get a presentation on the agreement and vote on whether to recommend it to members. Sunday evening the union will host a Facebook Live video appearance and later will hold regional meetings to explain the deal to members.

While on the picket line at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant west of Detroit Wednesday night, local union leaders invited workers across the road to the union hall for a briefing on the deal. As they trickled out of the building, many were smiling and most were relieved.

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"It's an emotional time for me. I'm emotional," worker Keith Jurgelewicz said as his eyes welled up with tears. "But just super excited that this is over with. I just can't wait to get back to work and just get on with my life."

Jurgelewicz said he is happy that the end of the strike came during his shift on the picket lines, where he has faithfully appeared for all of his shifts.

"Hopefully, GM and Stellantis can get their deals done. ... Historic day for us," he said.

In a statement, President Joe Biden, who had visited GM picketers near Detroit early in the strikes and has billed himself the most union-friendly president in American history, praised the settlement. "I've always believed the middle class built America and unions built the middle class," Biden said. "This tentative agreement is a testament to the power of employers and employees coming together to work out their differences at the bargaining table in a manner that helps businesses succeed while helping workers secure pay and benefits they can raise a family on."

Workers with pensions also will see increases for when they retire, and those hired after 2007 with 401(k) plans will get large increases, Browning said. For the first time, the union will have the right to go on strike over company plans to close factories, he said.

"That means they can't keep devastating our communities and closing plants with no consequences," Browning said. "Together we have made history."

Ford said it is pleased to have reached the deal, and said it would focus on restarting the huge Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville, as well as the Chicago Assembly Plant. The Louisville plant alone employs 8,700 workers and makes high profit heavy duty F-Series pickup trucks and big truck-based SUVs.

In all, 20,000 workers will be coming back on the job and shipping the company's full lineup of vehicles to customers, Ford said.

Ford's statement made no mention of the cost of the contract. Company executives said last week they were at the limit of what they could pay while still being able to invest in new vehicles and the transition from internal combustion to electric vehicles. All three companies have said they don't want to be saddled with high labor costs that could limit their ability to invest in future vehicles and potentially force them to raise prices.

"This agreement sets us on a new path to make things right at Ford, at the Big Three, and across the auto industry. Together, we are turning the tide for the working class in this country," Fain said.

## **Mike Johnson is the new House speaker, but the ally of Donald Trump faces same GOP challenges ahead**

By LISA MASCARO, STEPHEN GROVES, FARNOUSH AMIRI and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Mike Johnson is the new speaker of the House, but the ally of Donald Trump inherits many of the same political problems that have tormented past GOP leaders, tested their grasp of the gavel and eventually chased them out of office.

When the House convenes Thursday it will be a bustle of activity, making up for lost time during the weeks of chaos since the ouster of Kevin McCarthy. But the goodwill toward Johnson blurs the political fault lines challenging the Louisianan's ability to lead the GOP majority as it faces daunting issues ahead.

By Nov. 17, the Congress must fund the government again or risk a federal shutdown. President Joe Biden wants an additional \$105 billion in military and humanitarian aid for Israel and Ukraine. And Republicans are eager to resume their impeachment inquiry into Biden over his son's business dealings.

"This has been a grueling process," Johnson said Wednesday after he took the gavel. "The challenge before us is great but the time for action is now, and I will not let you down."

Johnson, 51, swept through on the first ballot with support from all Republicans anxious to put the past weeks of tumult behind and get on with the business of governing. He was quickly sworn into office, second in line to the presidency.

A lower-ranked member of the House GOP leadership team, Johnson emerged as the fourth Republican nominee in what had become an almost absurd cycle of political infighting since McCarthy's ouster as GOP

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factions jockeyed for power.

While not the party's top choice for the gavel, the deeply religious and even-keeled Johnson has few foes and an important GOP backer: Trump.

"He's a tremendous leader," Trump said Wednesday at the New York courthouse where the former president, who is now the Republican front-runner for president in 2024, is on trial over a lawsuit alleging business fraud. "He's going to make us all proud."

Biden called to congratulate the new speaker and said it's "time for all of us to act responsibly" to fund the government and provide aid for Ukraine and Israel.

"We need to move swiftly," the president said in a statement.

In the House, far-right members had refused to accept a more traditional speaker, and moderate conservatives didn't want a hard-liner. But the affable Johnson, who has been in office less than a decade, drew lawmakers together through his evangelical faith, his conservative roots and Trump's nod after more seasoned leaders had failed.

Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who led the small band of eight hardliners who ousted McCarthy, said, "You watch and see how much this House of Representatives can actually get done under Mike Johnson."

Democrats quickly criticized Johnson as an extreme conservative, a strict opponent of abortion access and an architect of Trump's legal effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election he lost to Democrat Biden.

"Republicans have chosen a MAGA acolyte to push an extreme agenda in the House at the expense of middle-class families," said Rep. Suzan DelBene, the chair of the Democrats' campaign committee, referring to Trump's Make America Great Again campaign slogan.

Anxious and exhausted, Republican lawmakers are desperately trying to move on.

Lawmakers quickly reconvened to get back to work, approving a resolution saying the House "stands with Israel" and "condemns Hamas' brutal war." Next, they turned to a stalled government funding bill.

Rather than take a scheduled work period at home, the Republicans rearranged the House calendar to return to Washington next week and keep pushing through the various government funding bills ahead of the Nov. 17 deadline.

In a letter to colleagues, Johnson outlined priorities that include providing a stopgap government funding bill, into next year, to prevent a November shutdown — almost the same move that led to McCarthy's ouster.

And while Johnson has spoken of the importance of helping fund Israel in the fight against Hamas, he has shown little interest in providing additional money for Ukraine as it battles Russia into the brutal winter months.

Most Republicans voted against the budget deal McCarthy struck with Biden earlier this year, demanding steeper spending cuts than the levels they agreed to. Johnson will need to navigate the far-right demands with the realities of keeping the government functioning.

Similar Republican infighting chased former GOP speakers John Boehner, Paul Ryan and Newt Gingrich to early departures. The difference now is that Republican rules allow any single lawmaker to force a vote to remove the speaker from office, the threat that ultimately ousted McCarthy.

Johnson's rise comes after a tumultuous month, capped by a head-spinning Tuesday that within a span of a few hours saw one candidate, Rep. Tom Emmer, the GOP whip, get nominated and then quickly withdraw after Trump bashed his nomination.

Overnight, the endorsements for Johnson started pouring in, including from the failed speaker hopefuls. Rep. Jim Jordan, the hard-charging Judiciary Committee chairman backed by Trump, gave his support, as did Majority Leader Steve Scalise, the fellow Louisiana congressman rejected by Jordan's wing, who stood behind Johnson after he won the nomination.

A lawyer specializing in constitutional issues, Johnson had rallied Republicans around Trump's legal effort to overturn the 2020 election results.

The congressman, who drew on his Christian beliefs, said to the American people watching, "Our mission here is to serve you well and to restore the people's faith in this House."

## **New US House speaker tried to help overturn the 2020 election, raising concerns about the next one**

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

The new leader of one of the chambers of Congress that will certify the winner of next year's presidential election helped spearhead the attempt to overturn the last one, raising alarms that Republicans could try to subvert the will of the voters if they remain in power despite safeguards enacted after the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Mike Johnson, the Louisiana congressman who was elected speaker of the House of Representatives on Wednesday after a three-week standoff among Republicans, took the lead in filing a brief in a lawsuit that sought to overturn President Joe Biden's 2020 win. That claim, widely panned by legal scholars of all ideologies, was quickly thrown out by the U.S. Supreme Court.

After the 2020 election, Johnson also echoed some of the wilder conspiracy theories pushed by former President Donald Trump to explain away his loss. Then Johnson voted against certifying Biden's win even after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

Johnson's role three years ago is relevant now not only because the U.S. Constitution puts the speaker second in the line of presidential succession, after the vice president. The House Johnson now leads also will have to certify the winner of the 2025 presidential election.

"You don't want people who falsely claim the last election was stolen to be in a position of deciding who won the next one," said Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. On Wednesday, he flagged another worry about Johnson, who is a constitutional lawyer.

"Johnson is more dangerous because he wrapped up his attempt to subvert the election outcomes in lawyerly and technical language," Hasen said.

Last year, Congress revamped the procedures for how a presidential win is certified, making it far harder to object in the way that Johnson and 146 other House Republicans did on Jan. 6, 2021. But there is a conservative school of thought that no legislation can control how Congress oversees the certification of a president's win — all that counts is the Constitution's broad granting of power to ratify the electoral college's votes.

The House in January 2025 will be filled with the winners of the previous November's election, so there's no guarantee a Speaker Johnson would remain in power. To be sure, it would be difficult for the speaker to change any of the results. The vice president -- who would be Democrat Kamala Harris at the time — presides over the joint House and Senate session in a ceremonial role and calls votes if there are enough objections to do so.

Still, the goal of Trump supporters in 2020 was to advance any legal argument against Biden's win to a Supreme Court where conservative justices have a 6-3 edge, three of whom were nominated by Trump. A speaker who supported Trump's last effort to stay in power would be well-positioned to do so again if the former president is the GOP nominee next year and loses the election.

On Tuesday night, after Johnson was nominated to his new post by the House GOP caucus, he smiled and shook his head as the rest of the caucus laughed and booed at a reporter's question about his role in trying to halt certification of the 2020 results. "Next question," Johnson said. "Next question."

Democrats kept the issue center stage as the speaker vote on the floor proceeded Wednesday.

"This has been about one thing," Rep. Pete Aguilar said. "This has been about who can appease Donald Trump. House Republicans have put their names behind someone who has been called the most important architect of the electoral college objections."

"Damn right," someone called from the Republican side of the House.

Later, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., noted that Biden had won the 2020 election. Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene yelled, "No, he didn't."

Johnson's ascension came after Trump on Tuesday torpedoed the candidacy of Rep. Tom Emmer, who signed onto Johnson's brief in the lawsuit to overturn Trump's loss but ended up voting to certify Biden's win after the attack on the Capitol. The former president called Emmer a "RINO" — or Republican In

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Name Only — on his social media platform, Truth Social, and said Emmer “wasn’t MAGA,” a reference to his Make America Great Again slogan.

Johnson is a former attorney for the religious rights group Alliance Defending Freedom who was first elected to the House in 2016, the year Trump won the presidency. An active member of the House Judiciary Committee, he gained notice as one of the leading Republican questioners of witnesses during Trump’s first impeachment in 2019.

He remained one of Trump’s chief defenders through the 2020 election. On Nov. 7, 2020, four days after Election Day, he posted on Twitter that he had told Trump, “Stay strong and keep fighting, sir!” In an interview on a Shreveport, Louisiana, radio station 10 days later, he repeated a debunked claim about an international conspiracy to hack voting machines so Trump would lose.

“In every election in American history, there’s some small element of fraud, irregularity,” Johnson said in the interview. “But when you have it on a broad scale, when you have a software system that is used all around the country that is suspect because it came from Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, when you have testimonials of people like this, it demands to be litigated.”

Johnson then organized more than 100 House Republicans to sign onto an amicus brief filed in support of a lawsuit from Texas’ Republican Attorney General, Ken Paxton, asking the U.S. Supreme Court to invalidate Biden’s wins in four states that gave him his winning margin in the Electoral College — Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Many legal analysts were aghast at the litigation, which was quickly rejected by the high court.

On his social media streaming show, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who is facing charges in Georgia for trying to overturn the election results there, praised Johnson on Wednesday for refusing to accept Trump’s 2020 election loss.

“He seems to be right on everything, including the things I’m interested in, which is he didn’t accept the election rollover,” said Giuliani, who also praised Johnson for supporting the lawsuit by the Texas attorney general.

In an interview with *The New Yorker* in December 2020, Johnson dialed down his election rhetoric.

“I don’t see a grand conspiracy,” he said of the allegations of voter fraud. “What I see is a lot of chaos and confusion across the land, and the result is that this election will have this giant question mark hanging over it.”

On Jan. 6, just before Trump’s supporters overran the Capitol, Johnson tweeted: “We MUST fight for election integrity, the Constitution, and the preservation of our republic! It will be my honor to help lead that fight in the Congress today.”

Hours later, after the attack, Johnson condemned the violence on Twitter. But he still voted with about two-thirds of House Republicans to overturn Biden’s wins in Arizona and Pennsylvania. He remains close to House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan, a fellow Republican who strategized with Trump over how to overturn his defeat before Jan. 6.

Trump’s supporters in trying to overturn the election have not fared well in elections since the violent assault on the Capitol, with a slate of conspiracy theorists attempting to assume positions overseeing elections in key swing states all losing their races last year. Instead, they have excelled at winning internal party contests and taking control of some state parties. Now they also have claimed one of the nation’s most powerful political positions.

Joanna Lydgate, chief executive officer of States United Democracy Center, a nonpartisan group organizing against election deniers, said Johnson’s ascension was alarming: “How can you run the people’s House if you don’t believe in the will of the people?”

Noting the speaker’s role in “the peaceful transfer of power” between presidential administrations, Lydgate warned, “When those in power don’t take our democracy and the will of the people seriously, it can have dire consequences.”

## **UN warns Gaza blockade could force it to sharply cut relief missions as Israeli bombings rise**

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The U.N. warned Wednesday that it is on the verge of running out of fuel in the Gaza Strip, forcing it to sharply curtail relief efforts in the territory blockaded and devastated by Israeli airstrikes since Hamas militants launched an attack on Israel more than two weeks ago.

The warning came as hospitals in Gaza struggled to treat masses of wounded with dwindling resources. Meanwhile, the U.N.'s top official faced backlash from Israel after saying the Hamas massacre that sparked the fighting did not "take place in a vacuum."

Health officials said the death toll was soaring as Israeli jets pounded Gaza. Workers pulled dead and wounded civilians, including many children, out of landscapes of rubble in cities across the territory.

Gaza's Health Ministry, which is controlled by Hamas, said more than 750 people were killed over the past 24 hours. The Associated Press could not independently verify the death toll, and it was not known if the count included any militants.

The Israeli military, which accuses Hamas of operating among civilians, said its strikes killed militants and destroyed military targets. Gaza militants have fired unrelenting rocket barrages into Israel since the conflict started.

The rising death toll in Gaza — following a reported 704 killed the day before — was unprecedented in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even greater loss of life could come if Israel launches an expected ground offensive aimed at crushing Hamas, an Islamic militant group sworn to Israel's destruction.

The Gaza Health Ministry says more than 6,500 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The figure includes the disputed toll from an explosion at a hospital last week.

The fighting has killed more than 1,400 people in Israel — mostly civilians slain during the initial Hamas attack, according to the Israeli government. Hamas also holds some 222 hostages in Gaza.

The warning by the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, over depleting fuel supplies raised alarm that the humanitarian crisis could quickly worsen.

Gaza's population has been running out of food, water and medicine, too, under Israel's seal. About 1.4 million of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have fled their homes, with nearly half of them crowded into U.N. shelters.

In recent days, Israel let a small number of trucks with aid enter from Egypt but barred deliveries of fuel — needed to power generators — saying it believes Hamas will take it.

UNRWA has been sharing its own fuel supplies so that trucks can distribute aid, bakeries can feed people in shelters, water can be desalinated, and hospitals can keep incubators, life support machines and other vital equipment working.

If it continues doing all of that, fuel will run out by Thursday, so the agency is deciding how to ration its supply, UNRWA spokeswoman Tamara Alrifai told The Associated Press.

"Do we give for the incubators or the bakeries? Do we bump clean water or do we send trucks to the borders?" she said. "It is an excruciating decision."

More than half of Gaza's primary health care facilities and roughly a third of its hospitals have stopped functioning, the World Health Organization said.

At Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital, the lack of medicine and clean water have led to "alarming" infection rates, the group Doctors Without Borders said. Amputations are often required to prevent infection from spreading in the wounded, it said.

One surgeon with the group described amputating half the foot of a 9-year-old boy with "slight sedation" on a hallway floor as his mother and sister watched.

A strike Wednesday in the Nuseirat refugee camp killed the wife, son, daughter and grandson of one of Al Jazeera TV's chief correspondents, Wael Dahdouh. Footage aired on the Qatari based network showed the veteran journalist weeping over his son's body on a hospital floor.

"They take vengeance on us through our children?" he sobbed.

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In a swath of Gaza City's Yarmouk neighborhood reduced to splinters, a bleeding man hugged a child after both were dug out of the rubble. A bakery in Deir al-Balah was flattened. In a nearby hospital, medics treated a boy with a mangled, half-severed leg. One worker lifted a dead baby out of the shattered concrete and rebar of 15 homes hit in the southern city of Rafah.

The conflict threatened to spread across the region. The Israeli military said it struck military sites in Syria in response to rocket launches from the country. Syrian state media said eight soldiers were killed and seven wounded.

Strikes in Syria also hit the airports of Aleppo and Damascus, in an apparent attempt to prevent arms shipments from Iran to militant groups, including Lebanon's Hezbollah. Israel has been exchanging near daily fire with Iranian-backed Hezbollah across the Lebanese border.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah met with top Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad officials in their first reported meeting since the war started. Such a meeting could signal coordination between the groups, as Hezbollah officials warned Israel against launching a ground offensive in Gaza.

Hamas' surprise rampage on Oct. 7 in southern Israel stunned the country with its brutality, its unprecedented toll and the failure of intelligence agencies to know it was coming. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a speech Wednesday night that he will be held accountable, but only after Hamas was defeated.

"We will get to the bottom of what happened," he said. "This debacle will be investigated. Everyone will have to give answers, including me."

U.S. President Joe Biden said that after the conflict comes to an end, Israelis, Palestinians and their partners must work toward a two-state solution. He also decried increasing attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, saying they must "stop now."

Settler attacks have been part of swelling violence in the occupied West Bank, including clashes between fighters and Israeli troops and shootings of stone-throwing protesters. At least 104 Palestinians have been killed, health authorities say.

Israel's U.N. ambassador, Gilad Erdan, said his country will stop issuing visas to U.N. personnel after U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that Hamas' attack "did not happen in a vacuum." It was unclear what the action, if implemented, would mean for U.N. aid personnel working in Gaza and the West Bank.

"It's time to teach them a lesson," Erdan told Army Radio, accusing the U.N. chief of justifying a slaughter.

The U.N. chief told the Security Council on Tuesday that "the Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation." Guterres said "the grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas. And those appalling attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people."

Guterres said Wednesday he is "shocked" at the misinterpretation of his statement "as if I was justifying acts of terror by Hamas."

"This is false. It was the opposite," he told reporters.

## A list of mass killings in the United States since January

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest mass killing in the U.S. happened Wednesday night in Lewiston, Maine, when a man opened fire at a bowling alley and a bar, killing at least 16 people, two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press. Dozens of people were also wounded.

The alert for Lewiston was made shortly after 8 p.m. as the sheriff's office reported that law enforcement agencies were investigating "two active shooter events."

The man identified as a person of interest in a mass killing in Maine is a firearms instructor trained by the military and was recently committed to a mental health facility, according to a state police bulletin.

The shooting was the country's 36th mass killing this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. At least 188 people have died in those killings, which are defined as incidents in which four or more people have died within a 24-



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hour period, not including the killer — the same definition used by the FBI.

So far this year, the nation has witnessed the second-highest number on record of mass killings and deaths to this point in a single year. Only 2019 had more mass killings. According to the database, there have been more than 560 mass killings since 2006, in which at least 2,900 people died and at least 2,000 were injured.

Here's what happened in the other U.S. mass killings this year.

ROMEDEVILLE, ILLINOIS: Sept. 17

A couple, their two children — ages 7 and 9 — and three dogs were found fatally shot in their suburban Chicago home. Police were asked to check on the family after one member did not show for work that morning and phone calls went unanswered, authorities said. A 32-year-old man was suspected in the deaths. He died days later after a fiery crash in Oklahoma, along with a passenger, and had a relationship with the victims, police said.

LAKE TOWNSHIP, OHIO: Aug. 24

Five members of a family, including three children, were found dead at a home in Lake Township, Ohio, by police officers performing a welfare check. Authorities say a husband and wife and their two daughters and son died from gunshot wounds and their deaths are being investigated as a domestic dispute that turned deadly. It's unclear who fired the shots.

OKLAHOMA CITY: Aug. 16

Police in Oklahoma City said a 28-year-old man fatally shot three young children — ages 9, 5 and 2 — and his estranged wife before taking his own life. Officers visited the family home following a report of a domestic disturbance. Authorities described the couple as married but separated and said police had never been called to a domestic disturbance at the home before. They added that investigators have not yet determined a motive.

HAMPTON, GEORGIA: July 15

A 40-year-old man is accused of fatally shooting four people, all in their 60s, in a suburb south of Atlanta. Police said the man's motive was not immediately clear. The killings set off a massive search that ended with a shootout that killed the man in another suburb about 15 miles (24 kilometers) away. The exchange of gunfire wounded a sheriff's deputy and two police officers.

SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA: July 4

Multiple males are believed to have exchanged gunfire at an annual Independence Day block party just before midnight, leaving at least four people dead and at least seven others injured, according to police. Suspects were not quickly identified, and arrests were not immediately made.

PHILADELPHIA: July 3

A 40-year-old man is accused of opening fire randomly with an AR-15-style rifle, killing four people and wounding four others, including a 2-year-old, in a southwest Philadelphia neighborhood. Authorities said the man fatally shot another person in a row house the day before.

GREEN POND, SOUTH CAROLINA: July 2

A 33-year-old man was charged with murder in the killings of his sister-in-law and 11-year-old daughter after authorities found six people dead and one person in critical condition at a home while responding to reports of a house fire and stabbings, officials said. They did not immediately identify a motive. The man was later charged in connection with the other four deaths, according to media reports.

KELLOGG, IDAHO: June 18

A 31-year-old man is accused of fatally shooting four members of a neighboring family in their apartment on Father's Day. The man was upset that the neighbor's 18-year-old son had reportedly exposed himself to the man's children, a police document alleges.

SEQUATCHIE, TENNESSEE: June 15

A 48-year-old man is thought to be responsible for killing himself and five others — including three children and his estranged wife — in a home where police responded to a shooting and arrived to find the residence ablaze, authorities said. A seventh person suffered gunshot wounds and was found alive at the

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home after firefighters extinguished the flames.

MESA, ARIZONA: May 26

A 20-year-old man shot four men to death and wounded a woman in a 12-hour crime spree in metro Phoenix, authorities said. He told police that he met the victims at random that day at a range of places, including a park and a convenience store, and became angry when the subject of drugs came up.

NASH, TEXAS: May 23

Authorities jailed an 18-year-old man in connection with the shootings of his parents, sister and brother inside a home. A victim's co-worker who went to the home after one of the victims failed to show up for work told police that the man said "he had killed his family because they were cannibals, and they were going to eat him."

ALLEN, TEXAS: May 6

A 33-year-old man with an arsenal of legally-purchased firearms killed eight people and wounded seven others at a Dallas-area shopping center. He had posted online about his white supremacist and misogynistic views. A police officer fatally shot him within four minutes.

LAKE WALES, FLORIDA: May 2

A 38-year-old man was suspected of fatally shooting a woman and her three children after police were called to an apartment complex where they found the bodies. After an hours-long standoff at a motel, police fatally shot the man.

HENRYETTA, OKLAHOMA: May 1

A 39-year-old man fatally shot his wife, her three children and their two friends before killing himself, authorities said. They were all found dead on his rural property. He was a convicted rapist who had been freed from prison early, despite facing new sex charges in a separate case.

MOJAVE, CALIFORNIA: April 30

Four people were found fatally shot inside an RV in a remote Mojave Desert community, authorities said. There were no immediate arrests, but two people were being sought for questioning as "persons of interest."

CLEVELAND, TEXAS: April 28

A 38-year-old man was arrested after a four-day manhunt. Authorities allege that the man charged into a neighbor's home and killed five people, including a 9-year-old boy, after his neighbors asked him to stop firing his AR-style rifle because a baby was trying to sleep.

BOWDOIN, MAINE: April 18

A 32-year-old man confessed to fatally shooting four people, including his parents, at a home. From there he fled and fired shots at moving vehicles on a highway. Several vehicles were hit by gunfire but the three people injured were a family all in the same car.

DADEVILLE, ALABAMA: April 15

Six suspects — ages 15 to 20 — were charged with reckless murder in connection with a shooting at a Sweet 16 birthday party that killed four people and injured at least 32 others. Two high school seniors were killed. The other two killed were 19 and 23.

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY: April 10

A 25-year-old bank employee armed with a rifle opened fire at his workplace, killing five people — including a close friend of Kentucky's governor — while livestreaming the attack on Instagram, authorities said. Police arrived as shots were still being fired inside Old National Bank and killed the shooter during an exchange of gunfire.

MONROE, LOUISIANA: March 31

A 37-year-old man was arrested on arson and murder charges after a fire killed four people in a home, KNOE-TV reported.

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: March 27

A 28-year-old killed three children and three adults in a shooting at a small Christian elementary school before being killed by police. The shooter was a former student there. Police have said the shooter "was assigned female at birth" but used masculine pronouns on social media.

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SUMTER, SOUTH CAROLINA: March 21

A 42-year-old former soldier shot and killed three children as they slept in their home while their mother frantically sought help, authorities said. He also killed an Army soldier who was at the home before killing himself. The shooter and the children's mother were divorced.

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: March 13 to 14

A 28-year-old man was suspected of killing four people in overnight shootings. Authorities said the man approached a police officer and said he had shot two people in Birmingham and two people in St. Clair County.

DALLAS, TEXAS: March 12

An 18-year-old man and 20-year-old woman were charged in the fatal shootings of four people at an apartment. They told police they'd broken into the home to take money. The man admitted to shooting all of the victims. The woman had dated one of the victims, and they were involved in a custody dispute over their son. An infant was found unharmed at the scene.

MIAMI LAKES, FLORIDA: March 10

Police found three females and two males dead from apparent gunshot wounds inside a home, officials said. The wounds of one man appeared to be self-inflicted, leading investigators to believe the case was a murder-suicide.

COCOA, FLORIDA: March 1

A 36-year-old man was arrested after fatally shooting his teenage daughter, her mother and two other people, authorities said. Deputies responded after one of two surviving children had called a relative for help.

DAPHNE, ALABAMA: Feb. 22

A 21-year-old man was accused of killing his grandparents, his brother and a family friend with a handgun and pickaxe. Their bodies were found in the backyard of his grandparents' home and inside a bedroom in the house, police said.

ARKABUTLA, MISSISSIPPI: Feb. 17

A 52-year-old man shot and killed six people including his ex-wife and stepfather at multiple locations in a tiny rural community, authorities said. The man was armed with a shotgun and two handguns. A family friend said he had a history of mental illness. One victim was shot and killed while sitting in a pickup truck outside a convenience store.

LUTTRELL, TENNESSEE: Jan. 29

A 52-year-old man who complained of having "a devil in his head" fatally shot four children in his home before setting the residence ablaze and shooting himself, according to a prosecutor. The children were ages 5 to 15.

HALF MOON BAY, CALIFORNIA: Jan. 23

A 66-year-old man was charged with killing seven people in back-to-back shootings at two mushroom farms. He pleaded not guilty. Prosecutors said he opened fire at the mushroom farm where he worked, killing four co-workers and wounding another one. They said he then drove to a mushroom farm he was fired from in 2015 and fatally shot three former co-workers.

MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA: Jan. 21

A 72-year-old man opened fire on a mostly elderly crowd at a Lunar New Year dance, killing 11 people and wounding nine. The man later died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. The massacre has been called the deadliest shooting in Los Angeles County history.

GOSHEN, CALIFORNIA: Jan. 16

Authorities announced more than two dozen arrests during a gang crackdown following the fatal shootings of six people — including a teenage mother and her baby — that investigators believe stemmed from a gang rivalry. Two men have pleaded not guilty to the murder charges.

CLEVELAND, OHIO: Jan. 13

A 41-year-old man was accused of fatally shooting his father, sister and nephew as well as another man and critically wounding an 8-year-old girl. The man pleaded not guilty. Police alleged that he shot victims in the head in different rooms of a home, then flagged down a police cruiser and directed officers to the

scene.

HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA: Jan. 7

A 45-year-old man fatally shot his wife and three children and then himself. Authorities said all five lived together in the home. Two others escaped the house. One of the survivors was a relative of the family and another was an acquaintance. Both were in their 20s.

ENOCH, UTAH: Jan. 4

A 42-year-old man fatally shot his five children, his mother-in-law and his wife and then killed himself two weeks after his wife filed for divorce. Child protective services had opened an investigation of the man on child abuse and threats to his family just weeks before the killing.

## Hurricane Otis unleashes massive flooding in Acapulco, triggers landslides before dissipating

By MARK STEVENSON and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — Hurricane Otis tore across Mexico's southern Pacific coast as a powerful and dangerous Category 5 hurricane Wednesday, unleashing massive flooding in the resort city of Acapulco and setting off looting as desperate relatives tired of waiting for help to arrive.

While little is known about possible deaths or the full extent of the damage — Acapulco was still mostly inaccessible by road as of late Wednesday — experts are calling Otis the strongest storm in history to make landfall along the Eastern Pacific Coast.

Many of the once sleek beachfront hotels looked like toothless shattered hulks, after Hurricane Otis blew out hundreds — and possibly thousands — of hotel windows.

Choked with mud and debris, with no electricity or internet service, the Pacific coast resort descended into chaos after the storm, as thousands engaged in massive looting.

The hurricane had dissipated over the mountains by Wednesday afternoon, but left devastation in its wake.

Jakob Sauczuk was staying with a group of friends at a beachfront hotel when Otis hit. "We laid down on the floor and some between beds," Sauczuk said. "We prayed a lot."

One of his friends showed reporters photos of the windowless, shattered rooms in the hotel. It looked as if someone had put clothes, beds and furniture in a blender, leaving a shredded mess.

He complained that his group was given no warning, nor were offered safer shelter, by the hotel.

Pablo Navarro, an auto parts worker who was lodged in temporary accommodations at a beachfront hotel, thought he might die in his 13th story hotel room.

"I took shelter in the bathroom, and thankfully the door held," said Navarro. "But there were some rooms where the wind blew out the windows and the doors."

Navarro said authorities seemed to have been blindsided by the hurricane's rapid intensification.

He stood Wednesday outside a discount grocery and household goods store near the hotel zone, as hundreds of people wrestled everything from packs of hot dogs and toilet paper to flat screen TVs out of the muddy store, struggling to push loaded metal shopping carts onto the mud-choked streets outside.

"This is out of control," he said.

Acapulco's Diamond Zone, an oceanfront area replete with hotels, restaurants and other tourist attractions, looked to be mostly underwater in drone footage that Foro TV posted online Wednesday afternoon, with boulevards and bridges completely hidden by an enormous lake of brown water.

Large buildings had their walls and roofs partially or completely ripped off. Dislodged solar panels, cars and debris littered the lobby of one severely damaged hotel. People wandered up to their waists in water in some areas, while on other less-flooded streets soldiers shoveled rubble and fallen palm fronds from the pavement.

While much of the city was in the dark and without phone service, some people were able to use satellite phones loaned by the Red Cross to let family members know they were OK.

Alicia Galindo, a 28-year-old stylist in the central Mexican city of San Luis Potosí, was one of the lucky

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ones to get such a call. Her parents and brother were staying in Acapulco's Hotel Princess for an international mining conference when Otis hit.

They told her the worst part of the storm was between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. when "windows began to fall, floors broke up, mattresses flew, hallways collapsed, doors fell down ... until everything was gone," she said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. Fortunately, they escaped unhurt, she said.

However, Galindo had yet to hear from her boyfriend, who was attending the same conference but staying in a different hotel.

"Everybody is trying to find something out ... but no one knows anything," she said anxiously.

The main highway into Acapulco was blocked by landslides for most of Wednesday, complicating efforts to reach people and effectively cutting off the city from essential resources. By late Wednesday, the roadway had been cleared only for emergency vehicles, authorities announced.

Flor Campos trudged for more than an hour through mud along a highway outside Acapulco on Wednesday morning before she peeled off her shoes, worried she'd lose them in the muck.

The domestic worker from a small town in Guerrero was among dozens of families, women and children who clambered over tree trunks and other debris left by landslides in the mountainous terrain. It was a daunting escape, but people were desperate to get out.

"We had been waiting since 3 in the morning to get out, so we decided to walk. It was more dangerous to stay." Campos said.

On Tuesday, Otis took many by surprise when it rapidly strengthened from a tropical storm to a powerful Category 5 as it tore along the coast. Researchers tracking the storm told The Associated Press that the storm broke records for how quickly it intensified, at a time when climate change has exacerbated devastating weather events like this one.

"It's one thing to have a Category 5 hurricane make landfall somewhere when you're expecting it or expecting a strong hurricane, but to have it happen when you're not expecting anything to happen is truly a nightmare," said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

Acapulco, Tecpan and other towns along the Costa Grande in Guerrero were hit hard, said Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. He said conditions were so bad that communication with the area had been "completely lost."

Acapulco is a city of nearly 1 million people at the foot of steep mountains. Luxury homes and slums alike cover the city's hillsides with views of the glistening Pacific. Once drawing Hollywood stars for its nightlife, sport fishing and cliff diving shows, Acapulco has in more recent years fallen victim to competing organized crime groups that have sunk the city into violence, driving many international tourists to the Caribbean waters of Cancun and the Riviera Maya or beaches farther down the Pacific coast in the state of Oaxaca.

Damage to the local military airport made it hard for authorities to access the region, López Obrador said. Mexico's Secretary of National Defense told the AP on Wednesday that 7,000 military personnel had been deployed to the area, and that over 1,200 more were on their way. Officials also said they were working to restore power and phone service.

López Obrador noted that Otis was a stronger hurricane than Pauline, which hit Acapulco in 1997, destroying swaths of the city and killing more than 300 people.

## **Averted disaster on Horizon Air flight renews scrutiny on mental health of those in the cockpit**

By CLAIRE RUSH and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — What authorities describe as an off-duty pilot's attempt to shut down the engines of a Horizon Air flight with more than 80 people on board has renewed attention on the mental fitness of those allowed in the cockpit.

Joseph Emerson, 44, had been flying passengers himself just three days before police said he tried to engage an emergency fire suppression system while catching a ride from Washington state to San Fran-

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cisco on Sunday in the extra seat behind the pilot and first officer on Flight 2059. He was subdued by the flight crew, and the plane landed safely in Portland, Oregon.

Emerson, who has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder charges, told police after his arrest that he'd had a nervous breakdown, had been struggling with depression and the recent death of a friend, and hadn't slept for 40 hours, according to charging documents.

Emerson also said he had taken psychedelic mushrooms for the first time about 48 hours earlier. It's not clear whether he took them recreationally or in an attempt to self-medicate, but psilocybin is increasingly being recognized in the U.S. for its potential to aid mental health. The pilots and others who encountered Emerson said he did not appear intoxicated.

Here's a look at some of the issues raised by the harrowing cockpit episode:

## HOW ARE PILOTS SCREENED FOR MENTAL HEALTH?

Airline pilots are required to renew their medical certificates regularly — annually for those younger than 40 and every six months for those older. That includes filling out forms where they are required to disclose if they have experienced depression, anxiety or drug or alcohol dependence, as well as medications they take.

The foundation of that system is trust, said Shawn Pruchnicki, a former pilot who teaches aviation safety at the Ohio State University.

"The idea is that you will confess any diseases or any problems that you have," he said.

Pilots who do so can risk being grounded, at least temporarily, while the Federal Aviation Administration sorts out whether they're fit to fly. Pilots can also be grounded after relatives or coworkers report concerns.

Emerson had his most recent exam in September, according to Federal Aviation Administration records.

The administration started allowing some pilots on medication for mild to moderate depression to continue flying on a case-by-case basis in 2010, and some airlines have introduced confidential programs to help struggling employees. The Air Line Pilots Association also offers a round-the-clock, peer-to-peer stress hotline staffed by volunteer pilots.

"The FAA encourages pilots to seek help if they have a mental-health condition since most, if treated, do not disqualify a pilot from flying," the agency said in an emailed statement.

Some conditions, including bipolar disorder and psychosis, are disqualifying.

Pilots who are struggling should speak up, because even if they're temporarily grounded, it's better than ruining their career and possibly costing lives with a more disastrous episode down the road, said Dr. Warren Silberman, a former Federal Aviation Administration aeromedical certification chief.

Investigators concluded that is what happened on board a Germanwings plane in 2015 when the copilot deliberately crashed the aircraft in the French Alps, killing 150 people.

## WHAT ABOUT DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE?

The U.S. Department of Transportation has a mandatory drug testing program for on-duty pilots or flight attendants, which can include random testing before or after a flight, or testing based on reasonable suspicion. The tests look for opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and some other drugs — but not psychedelics.

The effects of psychedelic mushrooms typically last about six hours. Usually they are no longer detectable in urine 24 hours after ingestion.

Alaska Airlines, which owns Horizon Air, said it has a zero-tolerance policy and that all gate agents and flight attendants are trained to identify signs of impairment.

The flight crew on the Horizon flight and the police who interviewed Emerson afterward said he did not appear to be impaired.

There is no specific guidance regarding pilot behavior off-duty, but Pruchnicki cautioned that drugs can show up in a random test well after the effects have worn off.

"Is that something you want to do on your days off?" he said. "And how does that fit into your mindset as a professional pilot?"

Many pilots get rides in cockpit jump seats every day as a way to shuttle between locations after making flights. Pruchnicki said he didn't think they needed to be subject to random testing because they're

off-duty and not making operational decisions about the flights. Pilots can bar them from the cockpit if they present issues.

"I don't believe that necessarily one extremely rare event means that we need to completely overhaul the entire system," Pruchnicki said.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF PSYCHEDELIC MUSHROOMS?

While psilocybin remains illegal in most of the United States, it has been gaining greater acceptance in the country as a potential therapy. The Food and Drug Administration published draft guidance this summer for researchers designing clinical trials for psychedelic drugs to treat depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance-use disorders and other conditions.

Such hallucinogenic substances have been used by the Indigenous peoples of the Americas to induce altered states of consciousness and healing since pre-Columbian times. Users have described varied experiences, from vivid geometric shapes, patterns and colors to a sense of oneness with the universe.

Oregon became the first state to legalize psilocybin in 2020 after voters approved a measure that allowed for the manufacture and controlled, therapeutic use of psilocybin for people 21 years of age or older.

It's unclear what prompted the episode on Horizon Air — police said Emerson described having been in a dream-like state.

Brian Pilecki, a clinical psychologist in Portland who is involved in research on psychedelic therapeutics, said that for people diagnosed with psychosis or bipolar disorder, "taking a psychedelic like psilocybin can potentially trigger a psychotic episode."

## WHAT'S NEXT IN THE CASE?

Emerson pleaded not guilty in state court Tuesday to 83 charges of attempted murder and one of endangering an aircraft.

He remains in custody and is scheduled to make his first appearance Thursday on a federal charge of interfering with a flight crew, which can carry up to 20 years in prison.

## UN Security Council fails again to address Israel-Hamas war, rejecting US and Russian resolutions

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council failed again Wednesday to address the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza, rejecting rival United States and Russian resolutions.

The council is the U.N.'s most powerful body, charged with maintaining international peace and security, but its divisions have left it impotent and scrambling to try to find a resolution with acceptable language.

The resolution drafted by the United States, Israel's closest ally, would have reaffirmed Israel's right to self-defense, urged respect for international laws — especially protection of civilians — and called for "humanitarian pauses" to deliver desperately needed aid to Gaza.

In Wednesday's vote in the 15-member council, 10 countries voted in favor, Russia, China and the United Arab Emirates voted against, and Brazil and Mozambique abstained. The resolution was not adopted because permanent council members Russia and China cast vetoes.

The Russian resolution, which was then put to a vote, would have called for an immediate "humanitarian cease-fire" and unequivocally condemned Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks in Israel and "indiscriminate attacks" on civilians and civilian objects in Gaza.

In that vote, four countries voted in favor — Russia, China, United Arab Emirates and Gabon. The United States and United Kingdom voted against, and nine countries abstained. The resolution wasn't adopted because it failed to get the minimum nine "yes" votes.

The failure of the two resolutions followed the council's rejections last week of a Russian resolution that didn't mention Hamas and also failed to get nine "yes" votes and a widely supported Brazilian resolution vetoed by the United States that would have condemned the Hamas attacks and all violence against civilians and called for "humanitarian pauses."

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After the votes, Malta's U.N. Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, speaking on behalf of the 10 elected members of the council serving two-year terms, announced they will be working on a new proposal in the coming days.

"As elected members of this council, we also represent the rest of the international community and we have a duty and an obligation to act," she told the council. "There is no time to waste."

Before the vote, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council that last week she had said diplomacy needed to play out before it approved a resolution. She pointed to action by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President Joe Biden, and regional leaders that led to the opening of the Rafah crossing from Egypt to Gaza to the delivery of some desperately needed humanitarian aid, though "much, much more help is needed" as well as the release of four of the more than 200 hostages taken from Israel.

Thomas-Greenfield called this moment a test for the international community and for the council. She accused Russia of introducing a resolution at the last minute "in bad faith" with no consultations, and urged members to vote for the "strong and balanced" U.S. text.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia countered that an immediate humanitarian cease-fire is needed to de-escalate the conflict and reduce the bloodshed and "shocking" Palestinian casualties. He called the U.S. draft "politicized" and claimed the United States doesn't want the Security Council to have any influence on a possible Israeli ground offensive that "would risk provoking an even larger-scale conflict in the region and possibly even beyond."

After the vote, China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun said the U.S. draft contained many elements that went beyond humanitarian needs and were "deeply divisive." He called it "evasive on the most urgent issue of ending the fighting" and said it failed to reflect the world's strong calls for a cease-fire.

United Arab Emirates Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh, the Arab representative on the council who voted against the U.S. resolution and for the Russian draft, said the U.N. and humanitarian organizations have made clear that what is essential is a humanitarian cease-fire, the release of all hostages, and sustained humanitarian access to Gaza.

At a council meeting on the war Tuesday that heard nearly 90 speakers, there were "dozens of statements imploring this council to assign the same value to Palestinian life as it does to Israeli life," Nusseibeh said. "We cannot allow any equivocation on this point."

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan thanked the U.S. and other nations that supported its resolution for condemning "savage genocidal terrorists while standing up for the values of freedom and security."

Those who voted against the resolution showed the world the Security Council is incapable of condemning "terrorists and cannot confirm the right to self-defense of the victim of these heinous crimes."

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, told the Associated Press after the vote "it's disgusting the Security Council is not shouldering its responsibility" to "stop the war."

"You do not start by killing the people and then say that I want to deal with the situation," he said. "We need to save lives. ... That is the most urgent priority."

With the Security Council still paralyzed, the Palestinians are turning to the 193-member General Assembly where there are no vetoes — just as Ukraine did after Russia's February 2022 invasion. The assembly's emergency special session opens Thursday, with 106 speakers on the list, and Arab nations have circulated a draft resolution which Mansour said he expects to be put to a vote on Friday afternoon.

The draft resolution calls for an immediate cease-fire, demands that Israel rescind its order for Gazans to move from the north to the south, calls for maximum restraint, and demands that essential goods including food, water and medicine are provided in the Gaza Strip.



## White House throws lavish state dinner for Australia but turns down pizzazz a notch in time of war

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House turned down the pizzazz for Wednesday's state dinner, but more than 300 guests from politics, business, government and beyond turned out to celebrate close U.S. ties to ally Australia while striking a measured tone in a time of death and suffering in the Middle East.

The celebrity quotient was lower than usual for the fourth state dinner of President Joe Biden's term, but actor John Leguizamo happily represented Hollywood and guessed that he was invited because of his work helping to elect the president.

As for what legislator he'd most like to be cast as, Leguizamo thought for a minute and declared "Schumer" — as in Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer — and joked that he might get a chance to talk it over with the New York Democrat during dinner.

Most women wore gowns in more muted tones for this fall soiree than the eye-popping colors prominent at the state dinner for India earlier this year. Caroline Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador to Australia, stood out in her black lace gown with colorful parrots embroidered on the lower half.

Most guests rushed past a group of reporters watching the arrivals, but some lawmakers approached to offer comments about the Israel-Hamas war or the three-week fight among House Republicans to elect a new speaker so Congress could get back to work.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said as he arrived that it was "absolutely very much on our minds tonight." He commended the Bidens for scrapping plans for rowdy dance music by the B-52s in favor of instrumental songs from military bands.

"I thought it was a good call," he said.

Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, who heads up the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the political parties "have to stand together" because of "what's happening in Israel right now."

With the pairing of what Jill Biden described as "comforting" food along with lower-key entertainment, the White House was intent on honoring Prime Minister Anthony Albanese after the president earlier this year scrapped plans to visit Australia at the last minute due to the debt crisis in Washington.

Wednesday's dinner was something of a Biden family affair: Three of the president's granddaughters attended, as did his sister, Valerie. Jill Biden's sister, Bonny Jacobs, also made the guest list.

Jill Biden turned out in a silver blush gown embroidered with leaf motifs by Reem Acra. Albanese's partner Jodie Haydon wore a tulle gown on loan from Paolo Sebastian that featured embroidered native Australian birds and native flora.

The B-52s, an American new wave band with hits like "Love Shack" and "Roam," had originally been lined up to entertain guests after dinner. But Jill Biden said "a few adjustments" to the entertainment were necessary at a time "when so many are facing sorrow and pain."

Even if they lost a gig, the B-52 band members attended the dinner as guests.

On the menu: farro and roasted beet salad, butternut squash soup and sarsaparilla-braised short ribs, with dessert of hazelnut and chocolate mousse cake and creme fraiche ice cream.

The White House said postponing or canceling Albanese's visit was not an option, casting his overdue engagement with Biden as part of the important diplomatic work that a U.S. president must undertake with allies, even while much of the world's attention is trained on the crisis in the Middle East.

"Nurturing our partnerships and relationships with our allies is critically important, especially in these tumultuous times," the first lady said Tuesday. "Food is comforting, reassuring and healing, and we hope that this dinner provides a little of that as well."

A state visit is the highest diplomatic honor, bestowed only on America's closest allies. Biden also has honored the leaders of France, South Korea and India with state visits.

Dinner was served in a temporary pavilion on the White House lawn decorated in pastel shades and sparkling floral chandeliers meant to evoke the feel of Australian spring, the current season Down Under, and American autumn. Chiffon-like fabric draped the ceiling and walls, and large cloth flowers were af-

fixed to the light cerulean walls.

Biden offered a toast "for our partnership, our mateship and the future we'll create together" with Australia while Albanese said his country "has no greater friend than the United States of America."

Leguizamo, Schumer and two Biden granddaughters, Finnegan and Maisy, were seated at the head table with the president and first lady and Albanese and Haydon.

The first lady continued her practice of collaborating with an outside chef on the menu. She selected Katie Button, chef and co-founder of Curate, an acclaimed restaurant in Asheville, North Carolina, who said the invitation was "an incredible honor and true privilege."

Before dinner, Jill Biden and Haydon toured the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, to see how the National Cancer Institute supports pediatric cancer research, including through collaborations with researchers in Australia.

Albanese's office said the prime minister, during an exchange of gifts at a private dinner Tuesday, gave Biden a painting by Australian artist Katherine Boland and Jill Biden was given a silver leaf brooch along with a silk scarf.

## Florida orders state universities to disband pro-Palestinian student group, saying it backs Hamas

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis's administration is taking the extraordinary step of ordering state universities to ban a pro-Palestinian student organization from campuses, saying it illegally backs Hamas militants who attacked Israel earlier this month.

As Israel's attacks on Gaza have intensified, some college students have expressed solidarity with Palestinians, resulting in swift censure from some Jewish academics and even some prospective employers. But Florida has gone further, saying Students for Justice in Palestine is supporting a "terrorist organization."

State university system Chancellor Ray Rodrigues wrote to university presidents Tuesday at Gov. Ron DeSantis' urging, directing them to disband chapters of SJP. He quoted the national group's declaration that "Palestinian students in exile are PART of this movement, not in solidarity with this movement."

"It is a felony under Florida law to knowingly provide material support ... to a designated foreign terrorist organization," Rodrigues said in the letter.

The U.S. State Department designated Hamas a terrorist group in 1997. The European Union and other Western countries also consider it a terrorist organization.

Hamas won 2006 parliamentary elections and in 2007 violently seized control of the Gaza Strip from the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority, dominated by rival Fatah movement, administers semi-autonomous areas of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

DeSantis, who is running for president, has ramped up his pro-Israel stance since the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks in southern Israel, which led to pro- and anti-Israel demonstrations around the world and prompted Israel to respond with airstrikes. The governor has sent planes to Israel to provide supplies and return Floridians there who want to come back.

He also is supporting a special legislative session to impose new sanctions on Iran, which supports Hamas, and to express support for Israel. So far, no government has presented evidence that Iran was directly involved in carrying out the attacks.

Students for Justice in Palestine has been on U.S. campuses for decades, with frequent protests calling for the liberation of Palestinians and boycotts against Israel. The loosely connected network says it has more than 200 chapters across the United States.

Palestine Legal, a group that provides legal support for pro-Palestinian groups, said the ban on SJP is part of a broader effort by DeSantis to suppress freedom of speech on campuses.

"Florida, particularly under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis, has been actively undermining education, freedom of speech and social justice movements, including by banning anti-racist courses and trying to criminalize protests. It is not surprising that this egregious move to silence the student movement

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for Palestinian rights is being pursued under DeSantis," it said Wednesday in a statement.

Under DeSantis, Florida has limited how race can be discussed in schools, prohibited state universities from spending money on diversity, equality and inclusion programs and taken other actions that critics say limit free speech on campus.

SJP has played a central role in a campus movement known as BDS, calling for the boycott, divestment and sanction of Israel over its treatment of Palestinians. The national group didn't immediately reply to an email seeking comment.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, a free speech group, called Florida's directive unconstitutional and dangerous and said the government does not have the legal authority to force colleges to ban SJP chapters.

"If it goes unchallenged, no one's political beliefs will be safe from government suppression," the group said in a statement.

The ban came after the only Jewish Republican in the state Legislature switched his support in the presidential election from DeSantis to former President Donald Trump, saying DeSantis doesn't back up his pro-Israel words with action.

Rep. Randy Fine, who has advised DeSantis on Israel and Jewish policy, said he had called on the administration to take action against the student group but there was none until he released a strongly worded op-ed explaining his decision to switch his endorsement.

"It shouldn't have taken me endorsing Trump to make it happen. I was begging them for two weeks and was just getting the Heisman at every turn," Fine said, referring to the college football trophy depicting a player holding his arm out to fend off opponents.

The governor's office said the ban was in the works for more than a week, however.

"The action, taken by the administration had nothing to do with Representative Fine. Any implication otherwise is nothing more than political grandstanding. Randy Fine is not the center of our universe," DeSantis spokesman Jeremy Redfern said via email.

Students for Justice in Palestine and several other groups called for a national student walkout on college campuses Wednesday to demand an end to Israeli attacks on Gaza and to U.S. financial backing for Israel. Walkouts were planned campuses from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to the University of California, Los Angeles.

## **Michigan State hearing officer rules Mel Tucker sexually harassed Brenda Tracy, her attorney says**

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

A Michigan State University hearing officer has determined that former Michigan State football coach Mel Tucker sexually harassed and sexually exploited rape survivor and activist Brenda Tracy, according to her attorney, Karen Truskowski.

The hearing officer ruled Tucker was in violation of several terms of his contract, a person familiar with the ruling told The Associated Press on Wednesday. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to comment publicly on the investigation.

Tucker, who was fired nearly a month ago after initially being suspended, has 10 days to file an appeal.

"My first reaction was tears of relief," Tracy told USA Today, which first reported details of the decision.

Messages seeking comment were left by AP with Tucker, his attorney and agent as well as with Tracy.

Tucker was suspended and later fired for acknowledging he had consensual phone sex with Tracy, who was a vendor once paid to speak with the Spartans football team about how to prevent sexual abuse and misbehavior. The school said it terminated Tucker after he subjected the institution to ridicule, breaching his contract and moral turpitude.

Tucker signed a \$95 million, 10-year contract nearly two years ago. If the school gets its way, he will lose about \$80 million he was due to make through Jan. 15, 2032.

Tracy filed a complaint with the school last year, saying Tucker sexually harassed her during a phone

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call in April 2022. Several months later, Tracy filed a complaint with the school's Office for Civil Rights and Title IX Education.

Shortly after Tucker was fired in September, attorney Jennifer Belveal asked university officials and representatives to preserve all documents related to the investigation "in anticipation of litigation" against the university for what she said was an illegal termination.

Tracy's allegations were made public by USA Today on Sept. 10. On the same day that the report was published, Tucker was suspended. She is known for her work with college teams educating athletes about sexual violence and Michigan State paid her \$10,000 to share her story with the football team.

The 51-year-old Tucker asked for a medical leave for "a serious health condition" while he was suspended and the school denied the request, saying it was "unnecessary," according to his attorney. He and his attorneys did not attend a hearing earlier this month.

Tucker began his coaching career with Nick Saban as a graduate assistant for the Spartans in 1997. He returned to the school with one of the biggest contracts in college sports after leading Colorado for one season and serving as an assistant coach at Georgia, Alabama and Ohio State.

Tucker also worked in the NFL, leading the Jacksonville Jaguars as interim coach during the 2011 season and also was an assistant with his hometown Cleveland Browns and Chicago Bears.

He was 20-14 in three-plus seasons at Michigan State, which he led to 11 wins in 2021, and his career record as a college football head coach is 25-21, including one season at Colorado.

The Spartans, who have lost five straight games since Tucker was suspended, play at Minnesota on Saturday.

## **Loyalty above all: Removal of top Chinese officials seen as enforcing Xi's demand for obedience**

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The removal of China's foreign and defense ministers appears to enforce leader Xi Jinping's demand for total obedience and the elimination of any potential rivals within the ruling Communist Party, analysts say.

State media this week confirmed that former defense minister Gen. Li Shangfu and former foreign minister Qin Gang were "no longer serving in office," but offered no details.

The opacity of China's one-party authoritarian system creates huge speculation about why the officials left office and whether they will face legal censure. Both Li and Qin were appointed under Xi's watch, indicating they must have undergone close scrutiny, but later faced doubt over their personal behavior or political alliances.

"It's possible to see the reshuffle either as a manifestation of (Xi's) weakness or a sign of his strength. I lean toward the insecurity side of the explanation," said June Teufel Dreyer, an expert on Chinese politics at the University of Miami in the U.S.

Xi is breaking with precedent by taking down his own powerful appointees, further turning the entire Communist Party "into the Xi faction," said Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

Almost no information has been offered about the fate of Li and Qin, who was removed from office in July amid speculation of his having violated an unwritten code of ethics that is often used as cover for political infighting.

Li, who became defense minister during a Cabinet reshuffle in March and was dispatched to Moscow on a visit to shore up China's backing of Russia, hasn't been seen since giving a speech on Aug. 29.

There is no indication that the disappearances of Qin and Li signal a change in China's foreign or defense policies, which seek to form alliances in opposition to the liberal democratic world order led by the U.S. and its allies.

Li's ouster was likely based on multiple factors, including an anticorruption investigation linked to the equipment development department dating back to 2017, said Meia Nouwens, a China expert with the

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International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"This doesn't look good. They are your close allies, you've only just appointed them and now clearly something has happened that isn't positive for them to take such drastic actions and remove them from their positions in what seems like quite a hasty way," Nouwens said.

At the same time, some could see the move as a sign of Xi's strength, she said.

It shows "weakness in his inner circle, but clearly strength in the sense that he ... can take these decisions quite decisively if he so chooses," she said.

Xi has a reputation for valuing loyalty above all and has relentlessly attacked corruption in public and private, sometimes in what has been seen as a way of eliminating political rivals and shoring up his political position amid a deteriorating economy and rising tensions with U.S. over trade, technology and Taiwan.

Li is under U.S. sanctions related to his oversight of weapons purchases from Russia that bar him from entering the country. China has since cut off contact with the U.S. military, mainly in protest over U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and strongly implied that Washington must lift the measures against Li that Beijing refuses to publicly recognize.

State broadcaster CCTV this week also announced the appointment of new finance minister and science and technology ministers.

China's political and legal systems remain opaque, fueling lively discussion of possible corruption, personal foibles or fallings-out with other powerful figures leading to the downfall of top officials.

China's ruling party is also struggling to revive an economy that has been severely impacted by draconian "zero COVID" measures, an aging population, high unemployment among college graduates and a movement of many of its wealthiest and best educated to more liberal societies abroad.

With his ideology, known as "Xi Jinping Thought," enshrined in the party constitution and with the abolishment of presidential term limits, Xi has structured the system so that he may stay in power for the rest of his life.

The 70-year-old also heads the party and state committees overseeing the People's Liberation Army, the world's largest standing military with more than 2 million personnel on active duty.

## Trump is fined \$10,000 over a comment he made outside court in his New York civil fraud trial

By JENNIFER PELTZ and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump was abruptly called to the witness stand and then fined \$10,000 on Wednesday after the judge in his civil fraud trial said the former president had violated a gag order. It was the second time in less than a week that Trump was penalized for his out-of-court comments.

Before imposing the latest fine, Judge Arthur Engoron summoned Trump from the defense table to testify about his comment to reporters hours earlier about "a person who's very partisan sitting alongside" the judge.

Engoron had already ordered all participants in the trial not to comment publicly about his staff. That restriction from Oct. 3 followed a Trump social media post that maligned the judge's principal law clerk, who sits next to him.

Trump and his lawyers insisted that his comment Wednesday was not about the clerk. They said he was referring to Michael Cohen, a former Trump attorney who had been testifying.

Engoron said Trump's claim was "not credible," noting that he sat closer to the clerk than to Cohen.

"The idea that the statement would refer to the witness," Engoron said, "doesn't make any sense to me."

Five days earlier, Trump had been fined \$5,000 after Engoron learned that the offending social media post from early October had lingered on Trump's campaign website for weeks after being taken down — on the judge's orders — from Trump's Truth Social media platform.

Then, on Wednesday, the Republican presidential front-runner complained in a courthouse hallway that Engoron, a Democrat, is "a very partisan judge, with a person who's very partisan sitting alongside of him, perhaps even much more partisan than he is."

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Under oath on the witness stand, Trump told the judge that the remark was aimed at "you and Cohen." But Trump did not conceal his frustration with the clerk. "I think she's very biased against us. I think we've made that clear," Trump said during his roughly two minutes on the stand.

Three of Trump's lawyers objected to the \$10,000 fine, and they reiterated Trump's claim that the clerk was partial.

Not long after he was fined and moments after one of his lawyers finished questioning Cohen, Trump stood up and walked out of the courtroom, trailed by his son Eric. Donald Trump has attended the trial voluntarily, and he can leave whenever he likes.

The episodes raise questions about whether Trump can abide by court directives that are aimed at reining in his rhetoric while respecting his free speech rights as he campaigns to return to the White House.

Last week in Washington, the judge in Trump's federal election interference criminal case imposed a gag order barring public statements targeting prosecutors, court staff and potential witnesses. U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan's order came after prosecutors raised concerns that Trump's remarks could inspire his supporters to threaten or harass his targets.

Chutkan temporarily lifted the order Friday so she could consider a defense request to pause the restrictions while Trump appeals it.

In the New York case, Cohen returned to the witness stand on Wednesday as the defense team tried to undermine his credibility and question his motives.

After a decade of working as Trump's fixer, Cohen came under federal scrutiny and broke with his boss in 2018. Cohen soon pleaded guilty to and went to prison for tax evasion, making false statements on a bank loan application, lying to Congress and making illegal contributions to Trump's campaign. The contributions were in the form of payouts to women who said they had extramarital sexual encounters with Trump, who denied it.

Cohen became an outspoken Trump foe and a key witness in the New York trial, which stems from a lawsuit brought by the state's attorney general, Letitia James. She alleges that Trump habitually exaggerated the value of his real estate holdings on financial documents that helped him get loans and insurance and make deals.

Trump denies any wrongdoing and says James, a Democrat, is targeting him for partisan reasons.

Cohen testified Tuesday that he and other executives at Trump's company worked to inflate the estimated values of their employer's holdings so his financial statements would match a net worth that Trump had set "arbitrarily."

On cross-examination Wednesday, Trump lawyer Alina Habba confronted Cohen with comments he had made praising Trump, before turning on him, and asked whether he had "significant animosity" toward Trump.

"Do I have animosity toward him? Yes, I do," Cohen replied.

"You have made a career out of publicly attacking President Trump, haven't you?" Habba asked.

After a long pause, Cohen said, "Yes."

Trump's lawyers also emphasized Cohen's federal criminal convictions and worked to portray him as a liar. The defense pounced on Cohen's testimony Tuesday that he had lied when he pleaded guilty to tax evasion and loan application falsehoods — rather, he maintained, his conduct was just a matter of omissions and failure to correct paperwork.

Trump attorney Clifford Robert pressed Wednesday on whether Cohen also lied in congressional testimony in which he said he did not recall being asked by Trump to inflate Trump's net worth.

Cohen repeatedly declined to answer, but eventually said he stood by the earlier testimony. Robert said the state's key witness was not credible and asked the judge immediately to issue a verdict in Trump's favor. Engoron denied the request, and soon Trump left the court.

After Cohen's testimony wrapped up Wednesday, he said outside court that he had seen "a defeated man" when looking at Trump across the courtroom.

Trump, for his part, said Cohen "was caught lying."

Trump is expected to testify later in the trial about the allegations in the lawsuit.

## Dusty Baker tells newspaper he is retiring as manager of the Houston Astros

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Dusty Baker has retired as manager of the Houston Astros, ending an illustrious 26-year career as a big league skipper highlighted by a World Series win last season.

Baker broke the news in an interview with USA Today.

"I'm very grateful and thankful to (owner) Jim Crane and the Houston Astros for giving me this opportunity, and to win a championship," Baker told the newspaper. "I felt like they've been good for me, and I've been good for them.

"What I really appreciate is that Jim has been totally honest and transparent with me on all things."

Baker told the newspaper that he'd like to move into an advisory role in baseball, either with the Astros or a team closer to his Northern California home.

"I've still got a lot to offer; baseball has been my life," said Baker. "I have a lifetime of knowledge, much more than those who have never played the game."

Messages were left by the AP seeking comment from the 74-year-old Baker.

The Astros have scheduled a news conference for Thursday morning that Baker, Crane and general manager Dana Brown are set to attend.

Baker stepped down after his fourth season with the Astros, who came one win shy of reaching the World Series for a third straight year with a loss to the Rangers on Monday night.

The toothpick-chewer and epic storyteller, who seemed to know just about everybody, finished his career ranked ninth with 2,183 victories in 4,046 regular-season games. He was the 12th manager in major league history to reach 2,000 wins and the first Black man to accomplish the feat.

Ten of the other 11 managers who have accumulated at least 2,000 wins are in the Hall of Fame. Bruce Bochy (2,093), who is still managing the Texas Rangers and isn't yet eligible, is the only exception.

"Dusty Baker is a legend in this sport," Houston shortstop Jeremy Peña said Monday night. "I've loved every single day that I've gotten to share with him on this ballclub. He's been great for me. He's shown so much confidence in me. He's been a great manager."

Baker began managing in 1993 after a 19-year playing career as an outfielder. He played with Hank Aaron in Atlanta and won a World Series with the Dodgers in 1981.

Baker managed San Francisco, the Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati and Washington before coming to Houston. He's the only manager in major league history to take five different teams to the postseason.

He came to the Astros to help clean up their image in the wake of their sign-stealing scandal that cost manager A.J. Hinch his job.

Baker posted a 320-226 record with the Astros, leading them to the playoffs in each of his four seasons and winning the pennant twice.

He is one of three Black managers to win a World Series, joining Dave Roberts (Dodgers, 2020) and Cito Gaston (Blue Jays, 1992 and 1993).

Baker made two World Series trips before winning it all with Houston last season. Baker and the Astros fell to the Braves in six games in 2021 after his most crushing defeat in the Fall Classic in 2002.

Baker's San Francisco Giants starring Barry Bonds entered Game 6 against the Angels a win away from a title. As the road team for the last two games of that series, the Giants squandered a five-run lead in a 6-5 loss in the sixth game before the Angels won the title with a 4-1 victory in Game 7.

After being fired by the Nationals following a 97-win season in 2017, Baker wondered if he'd ever get another shot to manage, much less win that elusive title.

Back home in California, as he worked on his wine business and grew collard greens in his garden, he often felt perplexed he had been passed over for interviews so many times as managerial openings came and went, having made inquiries that he said were unanswered over the years.

Then came Crane's call after the sign-stealing scandal, and Baker was back in the dugout.

Baker took over for the 2020 COVID-19-shortened season. The Astros squeaked into the postseason as

a wild card before heating up in the playoffs and coming one win shy of reaching the World Series.

Baker was lifelong friends with Aaron, who died in 2021. He was on deck and among the Braves congregated at the plate to celebrate with Aaron on April 8, 1974, when he hit his 715th home run to pass Babe Ruth for most all-time.

## **Driver in Malibu crash that killed 4 college students pleads not guilty to murder, held on \$4M bail**

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The 22-year-old driver of a BMW that struck and killed four Pepperdine University students in Malibu, California, last week pleaded not guilty Wednesday to four counts of murder, and prosecutors said he was speeding at more than 100 mph moments before the crash.

Fraser Michael Bohm was also charged with four counts of gross vehicular manslaughter, Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón announced at a news conference. Bohm entered not-guilty pleas to the eight felony charges at a court hearing Wednesday, a day after his arrest.

Investigators believe Bohm's car reached 104 mph (167 kph) on a winding stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway where the posted speed limit is 45 mph (72 kph), Gascón said.

"The investigation revealed the defendant knew his actions were dangerous to human life and deliberately acted with a conscious disregard for human life," he said.

The defendant's attorney, Michael Kraut, told The Associated Press the crash occurred as Bohm was being chased following a road rage incident. Bohm had been texting at a stop light when a man in another car began shouting and then pursued him, Kraut said.

"The guy comes into his lane, hits my client's car with his car and forces him off the road," Kraut said.

Bohm passed all field sobriety tests following the crash, Kraut said, and has no criminal record, "not even a traffic ticket."

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Sgt. Jim Arens said at the news conference that investigators had "no evidence" that the crash stemmed from a road rage incident.

Bohm had initially been arrested on suspicion of manslaughter after the Oct. 17 crash but was released a day later while investigators gathered more evidence, according to a statement from the sheriff's department.

"In this specific case, the evidence including toxicology, speed analysis, execution of search warrants, etc. was still pending and took additional time to collect," the statement said.

Bohm's bail was first set at \$8 million and was later lowered to \$4 million, the district attorney's office said.

Pepperdine identified those killed as Niamh Rolston, Peyton Stewart, Asha Weir and Deslyn Williams, all seniors at the school's Seaver College of Liberal Arts.

The four sorority sisters were walking along the road around 8:30 p.m. a few miles from the campus when the driver lost control and sideswiped at least three parked vehicles before crashing into them and hitting two other people, according to authorities. The four women died at the scene and the two others were taken to a hospital with injuries.

"The Sheriff's Department is relentlessly working to ensure we get justice for the victims' families," the agency's statement said.

Weir was from Philadelphia and studying English, while Rolston, from Los Angeles, and Stewart, from New York, were both studying business, according to CBS Los Angeles. Williams was from an Atlanta suburb and considered becoming a veterinarian.

Provost Jay Brewster at a campus prayer service last week called them "bright lights with promise and aspirations."

The crash has renewed calls for increased safety measures on the section of scenic highway west of Los Angeles that some call "Dead Man's Curve."

Bohm, who turned 22 the day before the crash, was a student athlete during high school. A 2017 Los Angeles Times story said the infielder-pitcher at Chaminade Prep was "highly regarded."



If convicted as charged, Bohm could face multiple life sentences, the district attorney's office said.

## Israel accuses UN chief of justifying terrorism for saying Hamas attack 'didn't happen in a vacuum'

By AMY TEIBEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli officials expressed outrage Wednesday over U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' remarks that the deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel "did not happen in a vacuum," saying his comment at a Security Council meeting amounted to a justification for terrorism.

Foreign Minister Eli Cohen canceled a scheduled meeting with Guterres following Tuesday's council meeting, Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan called for Guterres' resignation, and Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial, said the U.N. chief "failed the test."

Guterres responded to the Israeli criticism, telling reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York that he was "shocked" at the misinterpretation of part of his statement to the council, "as if I was justifying acts of terror by Hamas."

"This is false. It was the opposite," he said.

He reiterated the start of his statement on Tuesday: "I have condemned unequivocally the horrifying and unprecedented 7 October acts of terror by Hamas in Israel. Nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians — or the launching of rockets against civilian targets."

The secretary-general said he spoke of the grievances of the Palestinian people and also stated: "But the grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas."

Ambassador Erdan called Guterres' response "a disgrace," saying he didn't retract and apologize for his comments to the Security Council, and again called for the U.N. chief's resignation.

The Israeli envoy said the secretary-general "once again distorts and twists reality," pointing again to his statement Tuesday that the Oct. 7 massacres "did not happen in a vacuum."

"Every person understands very well that the meaning of his words is that Israel has guilt for the actions of Hamas or, at the very least, it shows his understanding for the background leading up to the massacre," Erdan said.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric, asked about Erdan's response, said anyone who listened to the secretary-general in the council Tuesday and earlier Wednesday knows that his position is "there is no justification for ... the horrendous and abhorrent acts of terrorism perpetrated by Hamas on the seventh of October."

Dujarric said Guterres stands by his words and "is not going to respond to one member state's call to step down."

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, told U.N. reporters later Wednesday that Arab nations stand by the secretary-general "against these ridiculous attacks against him."

Mansour called Guterres the symbol of multilateralism and the United Nations who stands on principles and stood at the gate of the Rafah crossing from Egypt into Gaza "calling for help for millions of Palestinians besieged in the Gaza Strip to receive humanitarian assistance and he asked for a humanitarian cease-fire."

"We salute him for that courageous position, and maybe today he is the most popular man under the sun in all corners of the globe, including among the Palestinian people," Mansour said. "We want such decisive leaders ... when it comes for standing for justice, standing for international law, standing for saving human rights."

But Israel was not mollified.

"I will not meet with the U.N. secretary-general. After the October 7 massacre, there is no place for a balanced approach. Hamas must be erased off the face of the planet!" Cohen posted Tuesday on social platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

"We will refuse to grant visas to U.N. representatives. We have already refused to give one to Under-secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths," Erdan told Army Radio, accusing Guterres of

justifying a slaughter. "It's time to teach them a lesson."

Israel historically has had tense relations with the U.N., accusing it of being biased against it.

On Tuesday, Guterres addressed a high-level Security Council meeting on the Israel-Hamas war that was sparked by the militant group's Oct. 7 attack, which left at least 1,400 Israelis dead, and more than 220 taken hostage.

Israeli airstrikes have destroyed large swaths of the Gaza enclave, leaving at least 6,500 Palestinians killed, including over 2,700 children, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry.

While Guterres unequivocally condemned the Hamas attacks, what created an uproar in Israel was his saying that it was important to acknowledge that "the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum."

He then went on to say: "The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing."

Yad Vashem Chairman Dani Dayan said in a statement: "The slaughter of Jew by Hamas on October 7th was genocidal in its intents and immeasurably brutal in its form."

He said that the secretary-general's statement tests the sincerity of world leaders who came to Yad Vashem and pledged "Never Again."

"Those who seek to 'understand,' look for a justifying context, do not condemn the perpetrators, and do not call for the unconditional and immediate release of the abducted – fail the test. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres failed the test."

## Al Jazeera Gaza correspondent loses 4 family members in an Israeli airstrike

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Al Jazeera's chief correspondent in the Gaza Strip, Wael Dahdouh, was helping broadcast live images of the besieged territory's night sky when he received the devastating news: His wife, son, and daughter had all been killed in an Israeli airstrike on Wednesday.

Moments later, the Qatari-based satellite channel switched to footage of Dahdouh entering al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza before giving way to grief as he peered over the body of his dead son.

"They take revenge on us in our children?" he said, kneeling over his son's bloodied body, still wearing his protective press vest from that day's work.

Dahdouh's grandson also was declared dead two hours later, the network reported.

The video was sure to reverberate across the Arab world, where the 53-year-old journalist is well-known as the face of Palestinians during many wars. He is revered in his native Gaza for telling people's stories of suffering and hardship to the outside world.

According to Al Jazeera, Dahdouh's family members were killed by an Israeli airstrike that hit Nuseirat Refugee Camp, located in an area of Gaza where the military had encouraged people to go to stay safe. It said a number of other relatives were still missing, and it remained unclear how many others were killed.

Dahdouh's family were among the more than 1 million Gaza residents displaced by the war, now in its 19th day, and were staying in a house in Nuseirat when the strike hit, the network said.

The Israeli strikes have killed more than 6,500 Palestinians, Gaza's Health Ministry says. The Associated Press could not independently verify the death toll.

The fighting has killed more than 1,400 people in Israel — mostly civilians slain during the initial Hamas attack, according to the Israeli government.

Late Wednesday, Al Jazeera replayed the moment Dahdouh was informed about the deaths. In an audio recording he is heard picking up a phone and telling a frantic caller multiple times: "Who are you with?"

Earlier, Dahdouh was on air, covering the aftermath of a separate strike that had killed at least 26 people, according to local officials. Throughout the war, Dahdouh has remained in Gaza City, despite Israeli calls

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for residents to head south ahead of an expected ground offensive.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled to Nuseirat and other locations in central and southern Gaza, believing them to be safer. But Israeli strikes have continued to pound these areas, which are suffering dire shortages of water, medicine and fuel under an Israeli siege.

"This is the safe area which the occupation army talked about, the moral army," said Dahdouh with bitter sarcasm to a fellow Al Jazeera reporter at the al-Aqsa hospital.

In a statement, Al Jazeera said Dahdouh's family "home was targeted" in an "indiscriminate assault by the Israeli occupation."

The Israeli army had no immediate comment. It says it strikes only Hamas military targets, but the Palestinians say thousands of civilians have died. Israel accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields.

Israel has threatened to shut down Al Jazeera over its coverage of the war. Al Jazeera is a Qatari state-owned media network, and is deeply critical of Israel, particularly its treatment of Palestinians.

Over the last week, the gas-rich nation of Qatar has emerged as a key intermediary over the fate of more than 200 hostages captured by Hamas militants during their Oct. 7 assault. Qatar has hosted Hamas' political office in its capital of Doha for over a decade. The capital, Doha, is home to Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' supreme leader, and also Khaled Mashaal, Haniyeh's predecessor.

Four of the hostages have been released, a mother and daughter on Friday and two more on Monday. In an interview with Sky News this week, Mashaal said all Israeli hostages could be released if Israel stopped its aerial bombardment of the Gaza.

## Mike Johnson, a staunch Louisiana conservative, is elected House speaker as GOP moves past chaos

By LISA MASCARO, STEPHEN GROVES, FARNOUSH AMIRI and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press  
WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans unanimously elected Rep. Mike Johnson as House speaker on Wednesday, eagerly elevating a deeply conservative but lesser-known leader to the major seat of U.S. power and ending for now the weeks of political chaos in their majority.

Johnson, 51, of Louisiana, swept through on the first ballot with support from all Republicans anxious to put the past weeks of tumult behind and get on with the business of governing. He was quickly sworn into office, second in line to the presidency.

"The people's House is back in business," Johnson declared after taking the gavel.

A lower-ranked member of the House GOP leadership team, Johnson emerged as the fourth Republican nominee in what had become an almost absurd cycle of political infighting since Kevin McCarthy's ouster as GOP factions jockeyed for power. While not the party's top choice for the gavel, the deeply religious and even-keeled Johnson has few foes and an important GOP backer: Donald Trump.

"I think he's gonna be a fantastic speaker," Trump said Wednesday at the New York courthouse where the former president, who is now the Republican front-runner for president in 2024, is on trial over a lawsuit alleging business fraud.

Three weeks on without a House speaker, the Republicans have been wasting their majority status — a maddening embarrassment to some, democracy in action to others, but not at all how the House is expected to function.

President Joe Biden called to congratulate the new speaker and said it's "time for all of us to act responsibly" with challenges ahead to fund the government and provide aid for Ukraine and Israel.

"We need to move swiftly," the president said in a statement.

In the House, far-right members had refused to accept a more traditional speaker, and moderate conservatives didn't want a hard-liner. While Johnson had no opponents during a private party roll call late Tuesday, some two dozen Republicans did not vote, more than enough to sink his nomination.

But when GOP Conference Chair Rep. Elise Stefanik rose to introduce Johnson's name Wednesday as their nominee, Republicans jumped to their feet for a standing ovation.

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"House Republicans and Speaker Mike Johnson will never give up," she said.

Democrats again nominated their leader Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, criticizing Johnson as an architect of Trump's legal effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election he lost to Democrat Biden.

With Republicans controlling the House only 221-212 over Democrats, Johnson could afford just a few detractors to win the gavel. He won 220-209, with a few absences.

Jeffries said House Democrats will find "common ground" work with Republicans whenever possible for the "good of the country."

Lawmakers quickly reconvened to get back to work, approving a resolution saying the House "stands with Israel" and "condemns Hamas' brutal war." Next, they turned to a stalled government funding bill.

Overnight the endorsements for Johnson started pouring in, including from the failed speaker hopefuls. Rep. Jim Jordan, the hard-charging Judiciary Committee chairman backed by Trump, gave his support, as did Majority Leader Steve Scalise, the fellow Louisiana congressman rejected by Jordan's wing, who stood behind Johnson after he won the nomination.

"Mike! Mike! Mike!" lawmakers chanted at a press conference after the late-night internal vote, surrounding Johnson and posing for selfies in a show of support.

Anxious and exhausted, Republican lawmakers are desperately trying to move on.

Johnson's rise comes after a tumultuous month, capped by a head-spinning Tuesday that within a span of a few hours saw one candidate, Rep. Tom Emmer, the GOP Whip, nominated and then quickly withdraw when it became clear he would be the third candidate unable to secure enough support from GOP colleagues after Trump bashed his nomination.

"He wasn't MAGA," said Trump, referring to his Make America Great Again campaign slogan.

Attention quickly turned to Johnson. A lawyer specializing in constitutional issues, Johnson had rallied Republicans around Trump's legal effort to overturn the 2020 election results.

Elevating Johnson to speaker gives Louisianians two high-ranking GOP leaders, putting him above Scalise.

Affable and well liked, colleagues swiftly started giving Johnson their support. In no time, his name replaced McCarthy's on the sign outside the speaker's office in the Capitol.

The congressman, who drew on his Christian beliefs, said to the American people watching: "Our mission here is to serve you well and to restore the people's faith in this House."

Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who led a small band of hard-liners to engineer McCarthy's ouster at the start of the month, posted on social media that "Mike Johnson won't be the Speaker the Swamp wants but, he is the Speaker America needs."

Republicans have been flailing all month, unable to conduct routine business as they fight amongst themselves with daunting challenges ahead.

The federal government risks a shutdown in a matter of weeks if Congress fails to pass funding legislation by a Nov. 17 deadline to keep services and offices running. More immediately, President Biden has asked Congress to provide \$105 billion in aid — to help Israel and Ukraine amid their wars and to shore up the U.S. border with Mexico. Federal aviation and farming programs face expiration without action.

Many hard-liners have been resisting a leader who voted for the budget deal that McCarthy struck with Biden earlier this year, which set federal spending levels that far-right Republicans don't agree with and now want to undo. They are pursuing steeper cuts to federal programs and services with next month's funding deadline.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia said she wanted assurances the candidates would pursue impeachment inquiries into Biden and other top Cabinet officials.

In all, some 15 congressmen, but no women, competed for the gavel over the past several weeks.

During the turmoil, the House was led by a speaker pro tempore, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., the bow tie-wearing chairman of the Financial Services Committee. His main job was to elect a more permanent speaker.

Some Republicans — and Democrats — wanted to give McHenry more power to get on with the routine business of governing. But McHenry, the first person to be in the position that was created in the after-

math of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks as an emergency measure, declined to back those overtures. He, too, received a standing ovation.

## Food insecurity shot up last year with inflation and the end of pandemic-era aid, a new report says

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An estimated 17 million households reported problems finding enough food in 2022 — a sharp jump from 2021 when boosted government aid helped ease the pandemic-induced economic shutdown.

A new Department of Agriculture report, released Wednesday, paints a sobering picture of post-pandemic hardship with “statistically significant” increases in food insecurity across multiple categories. Using a representative survey sample of roughly 32,000 American households the report said 12.8% (17 million households) reported occasional problems affording enough food in 2022 — up from 10.2% (13.5 million households) in 2021 and 10.5% (13.8 million households) in 2020.

Analysts and food security professionals point to the dual impact last year of high inflation and the gradual expiration of multiple pandemic-era government assistance measures.

“This underscores how the unwinding of the pandemic interventions and the rising costs of food has taken hold,” said Geri Henchy, director of nutrition policy for the Food Research and Action Center. “It’s like a horrible storm for families.”

The number of households reporting more serious forms of economic hardship also increased. Wednesday’s report by the USDA’s Economic Research Service also tracks families with “very low food security” — a condition it defines as families having to ration food consumption and where “normal eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year because of limited resources.”

Households experiencing this level of hardship in 2022 rose to 5.1% (6.8 million households), up from 3.8% (5.1 million households) in 2021 and 3.9% (5.1 million households) in 2020.

Increased benefits and more relaxed enrollment rules for SNAP — the foundational government assistance program commonly known as food stamps — didn’t end until early this year. But a host of other federal and state-level pandemic aid initiatives wound down last year. One key national change that Henchy highlighted was the end of universal free school lunches for all students, a policy that ended over the summer of 2022.

“These were healthy, nutritious meals because the schools had good standards,” she said. “It was great for the kids. It was stigma-free, and it was huge for people’s budgets.”

These findings broadly mirror real-time anecdotes from late last year, when multiple food banks and charitable groups reported being surprised by the higher-than-expected levels of need entering the 2022 holiday season. In several cases last year, food banks and charities made educated estimates of how much food they would need to distribute, only to find that those predictions were far too low.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack called the survey results “unacceptable” and said the rising level of need “should be a wake-up call to those wanting to further roll back our anti-poverty and anti-hunger programs.”

Vilsack highlighted the increased fruit and vegetable benefits for recipients of WIC — an aid program that specifically targets mothers and young children. The increased WIC benefits package is one of the few pandemic policies that’s continuing, although there have been proposals in Congress to bring those benefits down to pre-pandemic levels.

“The experience of the pandemic showed us that when government invests in meaningful support for families, we can make a positive impact on food security, even during challenging economic times,” Vilsack said in a statement Wednesday. “No child should go hungry in America. The report is a stark reminder of the consequences of shrinking our proven safety net.”

President Joe Biden’s White House echoed Vilsack’s call to maintain WIC funding at its current levels and strengthen the country’s social safety net in multiple ways.

White House spokesperson Jeremy Edwards said: “17 million households experiencing food insecurity in

the richest nation in the world is unacceptable, and exactly why President Biden has continued to call on Congress to fund programs like WIC, as well as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the National School Lunch Program, and restore the enhanced Child Tax Credit that helped cut child poverty in half and helped millions of families afford the basics.”

## 1st major storm of the season drops up to a foot of snow in Montana

By AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — The first major snowstorm of the season dropped up to a foot (30 centimeters) of snow in the Helena, Montana, area by Wednesday, sending an army of snowplows and sand trucks out onto the roads.

Residents woke up to swirling snow and the sound of shovels on sidewalks just days after temperatures rose into the lower 80s. Trees decked out in fall colors and some Halloween decorations were weighed down with snow. Helena Public Schools canceled six school bus routes Wednesday morning, but no schools were closed.

The National Weather Service warned of hazardous travel on snowy mountain passes and ice on some highways when snow initially melts and then freezes as road temperatures drop.

Plows scraped snow off the highways, streets and parking lots and sand was scattered on roads to increase traction as the Montana Highway Patrol responded to dozens of crashes and slide-offs, including jackknifed semi-tractor trailers, according to the patrol’s incident website.

The first snowfall of the season “is always the most dangerous because people just aren’t used to it yet” after driving for months on mostly dry pavement, said Matt Ludwig, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Great Falls. Drivers aren’t used to dealing with less traction, slower speeds and longer stopping distances, he said.

Cold air moving down from northwestern Canada has combined with a moist Pacific weather system, leading to freezing temperatures and expected snowfall amounts up 14 inches (36 centimeters) in Washington’s northern Cascade Mountains and 18 inches (46 centimeters) in the mountains of Montana, the National Weather Service forecasts. Some higher elevations in the northern Rockies could see snow totals of 2 feet (61 centimeters) or more.

After the first wave of snow, it was Helena that saw the most accumulation, with a couple spots reporting 13 inches (33 centimeters) of snow. However, the official site at the airport had half that amount, said Cody Molvan, chief meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Great Falls said Wednesday.

Some towns in central Montana reported 10 inches (25 centimeters) of snow, while other areas along the Rocky Mountain Front had 6 to 8 inches (16 to 20 centimeters) of snow as the storm moved east. There was black ice on roads as the storm moved into the Billings area in southeastern Montana, the state’s Department of Transportation said.

The first wave of snow in western Montana ended at midday Wednesday and a second round — less widespread and with much less accumulation — was forecast from Wednesday night into Thursday morning, the weather service said.

The storm brought a sharp change in weather.

Helena tied record temperatures in the lower 80s (high 20s Celsius) late last week, which is about 25 degrees above average for this time of year, Ludwig said. Great Falls also had a day in the low 80s late last week, before being covered in snow on Wednesday.

Temperatures could fall into the low single digits with wind chill values below zero Wednesday night into Thursday morning in Great Falls, the forecast says.

“If that’s not a shock to your system, I don’t know what is,” Ludwig said.

Helena’s Walmart store still had a display of kayaks outside on Wednesday, their prices nearly covered in snow.

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The snow had also moved across northwestern and north-central North Dakota by early Wednesday, prompting the North Dakota Department of Transportation to advise residents not to travel in five counties, including the Williston area, because of icy roads and areas of near zero visibility. Oversized loads are not allowed to travel through the area.

State law restricts travel for oversized loads when inclement weather causes the vehicle or attachment to swerve, whip, sway or fail to follow the path of towing vehicle, the agency said.

North Dakota state Rep. Jeremy Olson was headed home from the Legislature's adjourned special session in Bismarck to his farm near Arnegard, in the area where the heaviest snowfall amounts are expected. He said he bought 400 pounds (181 kilograms) of rock salt to put over his pickup truck's back axle for extra weight and greater traction on snow and ice.

In the days before the storm, his wife and daughters went shopping for the next week, got shovels ready and prepared a generator in case their power goes out.

"Things we've learned over the past years, a few lessons learned over past experiences gave us a good chance to get prepared for this thing," Olson told The Associated Press.

The area of Williston, Watford City and Minot, in North Dakota's oil field, could receive the heaviest snowfall, potentially 8 inches to a foot (20 to 30 centimeters), said Nathan Heinert, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Bismarck. Bismarck could see 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters) of snow late Thursday after rain on Wednesday, he said.

The snow closed U.S. Highway 14-16-20 outside the east entrance to Yellowstone National Park, according to the Wyoming Department of Transportation. There was no word on when the gate 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Cody, Wyoming, would reopen. The park's east, south and west entrances and nearly all roads in the park are scheduled to close to car and truck traffic for the season next Wednesday.

## **Illinois man who pepper-sprayed pro-Palestinian protesters charged with hate crimes, authorities say**

By CLAIRE SAVAGE Associated Press/Report for America

CHICAGO (AP) — A man accused of pepper spraying pro-Palestinian protesters who gathered near an Israel solidarity rally over the weekend has been charged with hate crimes and aggravated battery, prosecutors said Wednesday.

Zevulun Ebert, 33, of Skokie, Illinois, is charged with two felony counts of aggravated battery and two felony hate crime charges, according to Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx's office. Pepper spray can irritate the eyes and cause a burning sensation and difficulty breathing.

The confrontation broke out as about 1,000 people were gathered Sunday evening at a banquet hall in a northern Chicago suburb to show solidarity with Israel, and several hundred pro-Palestinian demonstrators rallied outside, according to police and event organizers.

The pro-Palestinian protest was wrapping up when the sound of a gunshot cracked through the air, and then a few minutes later, a man pepper sprayed attendees, said organizer Hatem Abudayyeh of the U.S. Palestinian Community Network. "People were running and screaming and very, very afraid," Abudayyeh said. "These charges are good news."

Ebert appeared in court Wednesday and was freed with conditions by Judge Anthony Calabrese. Prosecutors did not ask for him to be detained ahead of a trial.

Under a recent change in Illinois law, state courts can no longer require cash bail as a condition of pretrial release. Judges must assess the risk of releasing defendants charged with certain serious crimes. Ebert was deemed to be low-risk.

A Chicago police officer and two other people sustained minor injuries from being pepper sprayed by an attendee, according to police in Skokie, where the protest took place.

Since the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas earlier this month, a fatal stabbing of a Palestinian-American child in Illinois, a gun pointed at protesters in Pennsylvania, vandalism at synagogues and

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harassment of staff at a Palestinian restaurant all are raising fears that the war is sparking violence in the United States and spiking crimes against Jewish and Muslim communities.

Ebert's lawyer, Hal Garfinkel, told The Associated Press by phone Wednesday that he and his client are "extraordinarily happy" that prosecutors "made the prudent choice" not to pursue pretrial detention, a decision he says shows "that they'll have a very difficult time meeting their burden of 'beyond a reasonable doubt' when we go to court."

Prosecutors alleged that Ebert was not attacked or threatened when — based on his perception of their ancestry — he targeted the protesters with pepper spray, accused Palestinians of killing babies, and made obscene middle finger gestures to Palestinian supporters.

Prosecutors in Cook County earlier this week declined to file charges against another man who fired a gun during the protest. Officials determined that the man "acted in self-defense upon being surrounded by a crowd and attacked by some of those individuals," said a statement released by Foxx's office on Monday.

Abudayyeh called it a "travesty of justice" that the man who shot the gun was not charged, and said he is concerned about the safety of Palestinian communities across the country.

"We're hearing all kinds of horror stories from people in schools, and in workplaces, and in grocery stores, and in the neighborhoods," said Abudayyeh, who is Palestinian American. "I am super concerned for my kid."

The banquet hall event was organized by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Los Angeles-based Jewish human rights group.

Alison Pure-Slovin, director of the group's Midwest regional office, said on Wednesday that the organization would have no comment on the hate crime charges until law enforcement finishes their investigation.

## **Biden calls Australia 'an anchor to peace and prosperity' during state visit from Albanese**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden described Australia as "an anchor to peace and prosperity" while standing alongside Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the White House on Wednesday, part of a state visit intended to deepen an alliance that's increasingly viewed as a critical counterweight to China's influence in the Pacific.

It was the ninth and most high-profile meeting between the two leaders, reflecting their work toward closer ties on climate change, technology and national security. The United States also plans to provide nuclear-powered submarines to Australia in the coming years, part of a collaboration with the United Kingdom.

"We renewed our commitment to defend the values that are at the heart of this alliance," Biden said. "We continue to stand as one to forge a better future for both of us and all of the region."

The state visit, only the fourth since Biden took office, came against the backdrop of escalating fighting between Israel and Hamas. Biden began a joint press conference with Albanese by expressing concern about the violence and calling for renewed dedication toward the eventual creation of a Palestinian state.

"When this crisis is over, there has to be a vision of what comes next," he said. "And in our view has to be a two-state solution."

Biden's remarks also nodded toward the potential for conflict in the the South China Sea, where just days ago Chinese ships blocked and collided with two Philippine vessels.

"I want to be very clear," Biden said. "The United States' defense commitment to the Philippines is iron clad."

Albanese arrived at the White House on Wednesday morning as a military band played and 4,000 guests watched from the South Lawn.

Biden said their alliance is characterized by "imagination, ingenuity and innovation," and they will "race undaunted to a future we know is possible if we work together."

Albanese said the "soul of our partnership" is "not a pact against a common enemy," but "a pledge to a common cause."



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The two leaders said they would work together on supporting economic development among Pacific island nations, a key arena as the U.S. seeks the upper hand in the region. They plan to invest in building maritime infrastructure and laying undersea cables to strengthen internet connectivity.

They also want to have U.S. companies launch space missions from Australia, and Microsoft announced it would spend \$3 billion on cybersecurity, cloud computing and artificial intelligence there.

The initiatives come on top of a previously announced defense arrangement in which the U.S. is developing nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. The collaboration, which also involves the United Kingdom, is known as AUKUS, an acronym for the three countries' names.

"State visits are a big deal," said Charles Edel, a senior adviser and Australia chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "They're filled with plenty of pomp and circumstance, but they also serve as an opportunity to take stock of critical relationships and push them further forward."

Wednesday's events end with a state dinner in a pavilion erected on the South Lawn of the White House. On the menu will be farro and roasted beet salad, butternut squash soup and sarsaparilla-braised short ribs.

The B-52s, a rock group, were originally scheduled to perform, but they've been replaced by military bands.

"We are now in a time when so many are facing sorrow and pain, so we made a few adjustments to the entertainment portion of the evening," first lady Jill Biden said.

The scenes of celebration will be juxtaposed with the crisis in the Middle East, where Israel has increased its bombardment of the Gaza Strip in retaliation against Hamas for its Oct. 7 attack. Hundreds of Palestinians were reported killed in a single day, and more bloodshed is expected as Israel prepares a ground invasion of the densely populated territory.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said there's "no more important time than now" to hold the state visit to demonstrate the strength of the U.S. relationship with Australia.

The outbreak of war "doesn't stop the work that the president has continued to do, whether it's these diplomatic conversations, these important bilateral visits, or whether it's domestic issues right here in this country," she said.

Biden has previously hosted the leaders of France, South Korea and India for state visits.

This one is something of a consolation prize for Albanese after Biden scrapped his earlier plan to visit Australia in May during a standoff with House Republicans over the debt ceiling. The decision forced the cancellation of a meeting of the Quad, which includes the U.S., India, Japan and Australia. A quick stopover in Papua New Guinea was postponed as well.

Albanese touched down in the U.S. late Sunday, and he visited Arlington National Cemetery on Monday to commemorate how Americans and Australians have fought alongside each other over the years.

The Bidens welcomed Albanese and his partner, Jodie Haydon, to the White House on Tuesday evening for a private dinner and to exchange gifts.

Albanese is also tending to Australia's relationship with China. He announced Sunday that he would meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping in November. He will be the first Australian prime minister to visit China in seven years, a reflection of tension between the two countries over trade and security issues.

"It's in Australia's interest to have good relations with China," Albanese told reporters.

Albanese's meeting with Xi would come just weeks before a potential meeting between Biden and Xi during a gathering of Asian leaders in San Francisco. Beijing has not yet announced whether Xi will attend the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, known as APEC.

China's top diplomat arrives in Washington later this week to meet with top U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Congressional chaos is another complicating factor for Albanese's visit. House Republicans finally settled on a new speaker Wednesday, choosing Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana. Although the vote ends weeks of disunity, another potential government shutdown looms in November.

For Australia, that means critical issues could be left in limbo. Officials in both countries are hoping to streamline rules on weapons exports to improve defense collaboration.

Biden also wants \$3.4 billion to expand naval production facilities to help provide Australia with nuclear-

powered submarines. Sullivan described the proposal as "a key component to making our AUKUS agreement a success."

Australia plans to buy up to five U.S. submarines and later build its own. It's the first time in 65 years that the U.S. has shared its nuclear propulsion technology.

John Lee, a Sydney-based senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, said the two countries are straining to make progress on their plans.

"The U.S. and Australia are not on track," he said of their defense partnership.

## France's Macron seeks international support for his proposal to build a coalition against Hamas

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron sought to promote — with little success so far — the creation of an international coalition to fight the armed Palestinian group Hamas, during a two-day trip to the Middle East that started in Israel.

Leaders he met with in Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and Egypt didn't publicly address the issue.

The first response to the devastating Israel-Hamas war is "the fight against terrorism," Macron said Wednesday after his meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi.

"The right response is to cooperate, to draw lessons from the international coalition against the Islamic State group" that intervened in Iraq and Syria, he added.

Macron first made the proposal Tuesday after his meeting with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mentioning the idea of a "regional and international coalition" against the Hamas group that rules the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu did not specifically comment on the French offer.

The French presidency later said the proposal was not about sending troops on the ground, but that it could rather involve sharing intelligence and combating the financing of terrorism.

It will "be up to our partners, and Israel in particular, to express their needs," the French presidency said.

U.S. officials said they are aware of Macron's proposal and that it has been a subject of informal discussion within the administration and with other countries.

However, the officials said it has not reached the point of serious consideration mainly because there doesn't yet appear to be any Arab interest in creating such a force.

The U.S. believes Arab buy-in and actual participation — as there was with the anti-IS coalition — would be essential to the success of any multi-national operation, according to the officials who, spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The U.S. State Department designated Hamas a terrorist group in 1997. The European Union and other Western countries also consider it a terrorist organization.

Over the years, Hamas has received backing from Arab countries, such as Qatar and Turkey. Recently, it has moved closer to Iran and its allies.

During his meeting with Macron, King Abdullah II of Jordan called for the international community to pressure Israel to stop its attacks on Gaza, according to the Jordanian royal court.

El-Sissi didn't address the coalition issue during his joint declaration with Macron.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Egyptian president cautioned his forces against any direct involvement in the war between Hamas and Israel, speaking in front of dozens of tanks in the port city of Suez.

"My message to the army and people is not to make your military power make you rush into wrong decisions," el-Sissi said.

Before leaving Cairo on Wednesday evening, Macron told French reporters he felt both Egypt and Jordan's leaders were "very worried" about their region and said they were willing to work with "some discretion especially regarding top security issues, which I want to respect."

Macron's office said talks with France's partners will continue in the coming days, as the French president

is to take part in a European summit starting Thursday in Brussels.

Macron had said he would travel to Israel only to be "useful," as his visit came after those of U.S. President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italy's Giorgia Meloni and The Netherlands' Mark Rutte.

Héloïse Fayet, a Middle-East researcher at the French Institute of International Relations, told French radio RFI "one wonders what France and other countries ... could bring to Israel, which is one of the most advanced countries in the fight against terrorism."

## **Senate panel OKs Lew to be ambassador to Israel, and a final confirmation vote could come next week**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has approved Jacob Lew to be ambassador to Israel, moving quickly to get him in place during the country's new war with Hamas.

The panel voted 12-9 on Wednesday to move Lew's nomination to the Senate floor for a final vote, which could come as soon as next week. All Republicans on the panel except Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul voted against him.

Lew, a former treasury secretary and budget director under President Barack Obama, told the committee at his confirmation vote last week that "there is no greater mission" at this moment than to help strengthen ties between the United States and Israel. He said he would ensure Israel has what it needs to defend itself in the war, which started after brutal surprise attacks by Hamas earlier this month. He said he would also address the humanitarian crisis facing civilians in Gaza after Israeli military strikes.

The Senate is moving quickly to confirm Lew, who was nominated by President Joe Biden last month after Tom Nides left as ambassador in July. Democrats say Lew's wealth of government experience makes him the right person to fill the post at a critical moment in the two countries' relationship.

Republicans have criticized Lew for his role in the Obama White House when it negotiated the Iran nuclear agreement in 2015, among other foreign policy moves. The deal with Iran — the chief sponsor of Hamas — was later scuttled by President Donald Trump.

Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, the top Republican on the committee, told Lew at the hearing that he had concerns that Lew would not be tough enough on Iran.

Lew defended his work in the Obama White House and called Iran an "evil, malign government."

## **'The Art of War,' Amy Schumer's memoir and many other books are banned in US prisons. Here's why**

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tens of thousands of books are being banned or restricted by U.S. prisons, according to a new report from PEN America. The list includes everything from self-help books to an Elmore Leonard novel.

"The common concept underpinning the censorship we're seeing is that certain ideas and information are a threat," says the report's lead author, Moira Marquis, senior manager in the prison and justice writing department at PEN, the literary and free expression organization.

Timed to the start Wednesday of Prison Banned Books Week, "Reading Between the Bars" draws upon public record requests, calls from PEN to prison mailrooms, dozens of accounts from inmates and PEN's struggles to distribute its guide for prison writing, "The Sentences That Create Us: Crafting A Writer's Life in Prison," which came out last year.

Marquis said that the most common official reasons for bans are security and sexual content, terms that can apply to a very wide range of titles. Michigan's "restricted" list includes Leonard's thriller "Cuba Libre," set right before the 1898 Spanish-American War, and Frederick Forsyth's "The Day of the Jackal," about a professional assassin's attempt to murder French President Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s. Both novels

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were cited as a "threat to the order/security of institution."

"One of the books ('Day of the Jackal') deals with the planned assassination of a political leader/methods for engaging in such activities and the second ('Cuba Libre') deals with an individual engaged in various criminal enterprises," a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Corrections told The Associated Press in an email. "As part of the updated restricted publication process, a new Literary Review Committee has been formed to review items that were previously placed on the restricted publication list, to determine if they should remain or be removed."

Amy Schumer's memoir "The Girl with the Lower Back Tattoo" was flagged by Florida officials for graphic sexual content and for being "a threat to the security, order, or rehabilitative objectives of the correctional system or the safety of any person."

Other books to appear on banned lists: Sun Tzu's "The Art of War," the compilation "Prison Ramen: Recipes and Stories from Behind Bars," Barrington Barber's "Anyone Can Draw: Create Sensational Artwork in Easy Steps" and Robert Greene's self-help best-seller "48 Laws of Power."

"It's a form of control. It's the ultimate form of power of manipulation," Greene said in a statement issued through PEN.

In its report, PEN found parallels between the frequency of prison bans and book bannings in schools and libraries. In Florida, PEN has estimated that more than 40% of all library bans took place in Florida in 2022. Meanwhile, the organization found that more than 22,000 books are banned from Florida prisons — the highest of any state — as of early this year, with some entries dating back to the 1990s. Texas, another frequent site of library bannings, had more than 10,000 prison book bans, second only to Florida.

Incidents of banning are likely much higher than what PEN has compiled, according to "Reading Between the Bars," because record keeping by many prisons is erratic or non-existent. Kentucky and New Mexico are among more than 20 states that do not keep centralized records.

"Prison book programs have mostly tried to raise awareness locally when prisons implement new censorship restrictions for communities they serve," the report reads. "But these programs are largely run by volunteers and struggle to keep up with the demand for books even absent censorship. The upshot is that there have been few nationwide efforts to analyze trends in carceral censorship."

Marquis says that PEN places bans into two categories: content-specific, in which books are banned because of what they say or allegedly say, and content-neutral, in which books are restricted because they are not sent through accepted channels. In Maine, Michigan and other states, prisoners may only receive books through a select number of vendors, whether Amazon.com, a local bookstore or an approved publisher. In Idaho, Amazon and Barnes & Noble are not among the nine approved sellers, which include Books a Million and the Women's Prison Book Project.

Content-neutral restrictions may also apply to the packaging (some federal facilities only permit white wrapping, Marquis says), and against free or used literature "because the intended recipient did not receive permission from a warden — or similar administrator — for each specific title mailed to them before the literature arrived," according to Marquis.

A spokesman for the Idaho Department of Correction told the AP in an email that restrictions on packaging had become necessary because of "an increase in the amount of drug-soaked mail being sent to our residents." He added that inmates can receive books and periodicals free of charge from authorized vendors and publishers.

"We believe our guidelines are a reasonable response to a growing problem that puts the health and safety of the people who live and work in Idaho's correctional facilities at risk," he said.

"Reading Between the Bars" follows a report released late in 2022 by the non-profit newsroom the Marshall Project, which found some 50,000 banned prison titles, based on lists made available by 19 states. In 2019, a PEN report explored different levels of prison bans — from individuals not permitted to receive a given book to state-wide restrictions — and determined that restrictions were both widespread and arbitrary.

"With over two million Americans incarcerated, the book-restriction regulations within the United States carceral system represent the largest book ban policy in the United States," the 2019 study reads in part.

"The reality of book banning in American prisons is systematic and comprehensive. State and federal prison authorities censor content with little oversight or public scrutiny. Often the ultimate decision-maker about a person's right to read is housed in the prison mailroom."

## **Nashville police chief's son, wanted in the shooting of 2 officers, found dead after car chase**

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The estranged son of Nashville's police chief, who was wanted in the shooting of two police officers, was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after leading police on a chase in a stolen car, authorities said.

Nashville Police Chief John Drake issued a statement on Wednesday thanking officers for working to locate his son after John Drake Jr., 38, was accused of shooting and wounding two officers in nearby La Vergne on Saturday.

"It was my prayer that no harm would come to him or anyone else," the elder Drake said. "I am heartbroken and saddened by the outcome. I appreciate the condolences and kind words of support as my family and I privately mourn our loss."

Metro Nashville Police spokesman Don Aaron said in a news conference on Tuesday night that the younger Drake had stolen a car at gunpoint from a home southeast of downtown around 6 p.m. Drake asked a man and woman in front of a home for a ride and when they were unable or unwilling to give him a ride, he pulled out a gun and demanded the car in the driveway, Aaron said.

Officers spotted the car a short time later and followed it to the Edgehill area south of downtown, where it crashed. Drake fled to a shed behind a home and when officers surrounded the area, a gunshot was heard, Aaron said.

Officers found Drake dead with a gunshot wound that was apparently self-inflicted, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation said in a statement posted on social media. TBI will investigate Drake's death at District Attorney Glenn Funk's request and a full autopsy will be performed as a part of the investigation, the agency said.

Drake, who had been wanted on two counts of attempted first-degree murder, was the son of Metro Nashville Police Department Chief John Drake. The chief issued a statement Saturday confirming his son was the suspect in the shooting. He said his son has not been part of his life for some time.

The search began on Saturday when Officers Ashely Boleyjack and Gregory Kern were investigating a stolen vehicle outside the Dollar General store in La Vergne, a city about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southeast of Nashville. They struggled with the suspect, who pulled a handgun and shot them, said La Vergne Police Chief Christopher Moews. Both officers were treated and released from Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

In a statement posted on social media, Moews thanked all the officers involved in Tuesday night's pursuit for their "steadfastness and dedication to seeing this case through" and said their prayers are with Chief Drake and his family.

Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell released a statement calling the younger Drake's death "a tragic end." "Our heart goes out to Chief Drake and his family at this difficult time," he said.

## **Japan's top court strikes down required sterilization surgery to officially change gender**

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that a law requiring transgender people to undergo sterilization surgery in order to officially change their gender is unconstitutional, a landmark verdict welcomed by advocates as a sign of growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights.

The ruling by the top court's 15-judge Grand Bench applies to the sterilization portion of the 2003 law

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only. It does not address the constitutionality of requiring gender-transition surgery in general to obtain a state-sanctioned gender change — a requirement also criticized by international rights and medical groups.

The law forces those who seek a gender change a “cruel choice between accepting the sterilization surgery that causes intense bodily invasion and giving up important legal benefits of being treated according to their gender identity,” the Supreme Court said.

The decision, which requires the government to reconsider the law, is a first step toward allowing transgender people to change their identity in official documents without getting sterilized. But it was not a full victory for the claimant because the Supreme Court sent her case back to the high court to further examine the requirement for gender-affirmation surgery.

The claimant in 2020 sought a gender change in her family registry — to female from assigned male at birth — but her request was turned down by lower courts.

The decision comes at a time of heightened awareness of issues surrounding LGBTQ+ people in Japan and is a partial victory for that community.

The judges unanimously ruled that the part of the law requiring sterilization for a gender change is unconstitutional, according to the court document. The claimant’s lawyers said the decision that did not find the gender-affirmation surgery requirement unconstitutional was regrettable because it delays the settlement of that issue.

The claimant, identified only as a transgender woman in her late 40s living in western Japan, said in a statement read by one of her lawyers Kazuyuki Minami that she was “surprised” by the decision and was “disappointed” that a decision on the gender-affirmation surgery requirement is delayed.

It causes her more ordeal and court sessions for “further scrutiny about the inside of her underpants,” Minami said.

Under the law, transgender people who want to have their gender assigned at birth changed on family registries and other official documents must be diagnosed as having gender dysmorphia and must undergo an operation to remove their sex organs.

Other requirements are that they are unmarried and do not have children under 18.

Kanae Doi, Japan director of Human Rights Watch said it was “great news” that the top court unanimously found the sterilization unconstitutional and that the government now must follow up. “The government is obliged to amend the law to remove the sterilization and gender-affirmation surgery requirements,” she said. “Any invasion of the body against one’s will is a human rights violation.”

LGBTQ+ activists in Japan have recently stepped up efforts to pass an anti-discrimination law since a former aide to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in February that he wouldn’t want to live next to LGBTQ+ people and that citizens would flee Japan if same-sex marriage were allowed.

But changes have come slowly and Japan remains the only Group of Seven member that does not allow same-sex marriage or legal protections, including an effective anti-discrimination law.

The claimant originally filed the request in 2020, saying the surgery requirement forces a huge economic and physical burden and that it violates the constitution’s equal rights protections.

Rights groups and the LGBTQ+ community in Japan have been hopeful for a change in the law after a local family court, in an unprecedented ruling earlier this month, accepted a request by a claimant for a gender change without the compulsory surgery, saying the rule is unconstitutional.

The special law that took effect in 2004 states that people who wish to register a gender change must have their original sex organs, including testes or ovaries, removed and have a body that “appears to have parts that resemble the genital organs” of the new gender they want to register with.

More than 10,000 Japanese have had their genders officially changed since then, according to court documents from the Oct. 11 ruling that accepted Gen Suzuki’s request for a gender change without the required surgery.

Surgery to remove sex organs is not required in most of the approximately 50 European and central Asian countries that have laws allowing people to change their gender on official documents, the Shizuoka ruling said. The practice of changing one’s gender in such a way has become mainstream in many places around the world, it noted.

In a country of conformity where the conservative government sticks to traditional paternalistic family values and is reluctant to accept sexual and family diversity, many LGBTQ+ people still hide their sexuality due to fear of discrimination at work and schools.

Some groups opposing more inclusivity for transgender people, especially to those changing from assigned male at birth to female, had submitted 20,000 petitions Tuesday to the Supreme Court, asking it to keep the surgery requirement in place to keep "women's spaces safe."

Hundreds of municipalities now issue partnership certificates for same-sex couples to ease hurdles in renting apartments and other areas, but they are not legally binding.

In 2019, the Supreme Court in another case filed by a transgender man seeking a gender registration change without the required sexual organ removal and sterilization surgery found the law constitutional.

In that ruling, the top court said the law was constitutional because it was meant to reduce confusion in families and society, though it acknowledged that it restricts freedom and could become out of step with changing social values and should be reviewed later.

## **Leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah holds talks with senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad figures**

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah group held talks on Wednesday in Beirut with senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad figures in a key meeting of three top anti-Israel militant groups amid the war raging in Gaza.

In neighboring Syria, meanwhile, state media said an Israeli airstrike hit the international airport in the northern city of Aleppo on Wednesday, damaging its runway and putting it out of service.

There was no immediate comment from Israel on the reported strike.

Following the meeting in Lebanon, a brief statement said Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah agreed with Hamas' Saleh al-Arouri and Islamic Jihad's leader Ziad al-Nakhleh on the next steps that the three — along with other Iran-backed militants — should take at this "sensitive stage" in the Middle East.

Their goal, according to the statement carried on Hezbollah-run and Lebanese state media, was to achieve "a real victory for the resistance in Gaza and Palestine" and halt Israel's "treacherous and brutal aggression against our oppressed and steadfast people in Gaza and the West Bank".

No other details were provided. The meeting came as the war between Israel and Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that rules the Gaza Strip, is now in its third week. The fighting, triggered by Hamas' deadly incursion into Israel on Oct. 7 that killed more than 1,400 people in Israel, has killed more than 5,700 Palestinians in Gaza.

As the Gaza death toll spirals, tensions have also been rising along the tense Lebanon-Israel border, where Hezbollah members have been exchanging fire with Israeli troops since the day after Hamas' rampage into Israel.

For now, those exchanges remain limited to a handful of border towns and Hezbollah and Israeli military positions on both sides. Lebanese army soldiers and United Nations peacekeeping forces have deployed in large numbers.

Dozens of Hezbollah fighters have been killed in the clashes so far, the group says, while the Israeli military has also announced some deaths among its ranks.

Nasrallah has yet to publicly speak about the war in Gaza and clashes along the Lebanon-Israel border. However, other Hezbollah top officials have warned Israel against its planned ground invasion into the besieged territory.

Israeli officials have said they would retaliate aggressively in case of a cross-border attack by Hezbollah from Lebanon.

"We will cripple it with a force it cannot even imagine, and the consequences for it and the Lebanese state (will be) devastating," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said while visiting Israeli troops along the border with Lebanon on Sunday.

Lebanon's cash-strapped caretaker government, along regional and international figures, has been scrambling to keep the country out of the war.

Hezbollah and Israel fought a monthlong war in 2006 that ended in a tense stalemate. Israel sees Iran-backed Hezbollah as its most serious threat, estimating it has some 150,000 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel.

In its report on the airstrike on Syria's Aleppo, the state-run SANA news agency cited an unnamed military official as saying the strike came from the west, over the Mediterranean Sea near the coastal city of Lattakia. The report did not mention any casualties.

If confirmed, the attack would be the fourth time Israel has targeted the airport in Aleppo, Syria's largest city and financial hub, since the onset of the latest Israel-Hamas war.

The first attack took place on Oct. 12, when Israeli missiles struck international airports in both Aleppo and Syria's capital of Damascus, putting them both out of commission. The Aleppo airport was later repaired.

Israel targets airports and sea ports in government-held parts of Syria in an apparent attempt to prevent arms shipments from Iran to militants backed by Tehran, including Hezbollah. Thousands of Iran-backed fighters from around the region joined Syria's 12-year civil war, helping tip the balance in favor of President Bashar Assad's forces.

Israel has carried out hundreds of such strikes in recent years, including on the Damascus and Aleppo airports, but rarely acknowledges or discusses the operations.

## **City of Orlando buys Pulse nightclub property to build memorial to massacre victims**

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The city of Orlando is moving forward with plans to create a memorial on the property of the Pulse nightclub, where 49 people were massacred seven years ago.

City leaders agreed Monday night to purchase the property for \$2 million. Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer said they plan a collaborative approach, working with families of the victims to create the memorial.

On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen opened fire in the gay nightclub, killing 49 and wounding another 53 people. At the time, it was the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history. But that number was surpassed the following year when 58 people were killed and more than 850 were injured among a crowd of 22,000 at a country music festival in Las Vegas.

A SWAT team killed Mateen, who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, following a standoff.

Plans to build the memorial had been in the works for years, but the nonprofit onePulse Foundation announced earlier this year that it was scaling back plans for a \$100 million memorial following fundraising challenges.

The building still stands, surrounded by a temporary display that honors the victims.

"We look forward to being a part of the discussion with the City of Orlando as this moves forward," a statement from the onePulse Foundation said.

## **Support for Israel becomes a top issue for Iowa evangelicals key to the first Republican caucuses**

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

NEWTON, Iowa (AP) — Steve Rowland peered beneath the brim of his baseball cap and admonished the roughly 500 people at Rising Sun Church of Christ in the Des Moines suburb of Altoona.

It had been three days since Hamas attacked Israel and killed hundreds of civilians. In Iowa, where evangelical Christians dominate the first-in-the-nation Republican presidential caucuses, Rowland and other pastors are delivering a message meant to resonate both biblically and politically.

"What we're seeing in that region is pure evil," Rowland said. "Israel has mobilized their army and they are intent on stamping out evil, and we should be behind them. That's where we should be, and I want you to know that, as a pastor."



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Support for Israel has leapt to a top priority for evangelicals in the leadoff Republican presidential caucuses now less than three months away, according to interviews with more than a dozen Iowa conservative activists. While curbing abortion has for decades energized Christian conservatives like no other issue, the attack by Hamas and Israel's response have put new pressure on Republican candidates to hew not just to traditional Republican support for Israel but to beliefs rooted in the Bible.

Some Christians support Israel due to Old Testament writings that Jews are God's chosen people and that Israel is their rightful homeland. Some evangelicals believe Israel is key to an end-times prophecy that will bring about the return of the Christian messiah.

Since the Oct. 7 attack, Iowa's evangelical pastors, faith leaders and rank-and-file caucus participants have been looking more closely at candidates' statements, while ministers urge their congregations to keep those positions top-of-mind when weighing their options. Several GOP contenders have discussed the conflict in black-and-white terms and accused President Joe Biden of not being tough enough on Hamas or Iran, which has long provided the group with money and training.

"We've got a true war between good and evil, and we have to have a leader that has the moral clarity to know the difference," said Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor and United Nations ambassador, in an interview between Iowa stops this month.

Former President Donald Trump remains dominant in Iowa polls and gets by far the largest crowds at his campaign stops. He attracts many fervent Christian conservatives, some of who have described him as divinely chosen even as critics note that he has been married three times and supported abortion rights in the past.

During one recent Trump event at a downtown Cedar Rapids hotel, a man in an audience of 2,000 shouted from the hotel ballroom floor, "God gave me to you!"

Several activists interviewed by The Associated Press were rankled by Trump's criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attack, and by his suggestion that Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group fighting with Israel on the country's northern border, was "very smart."

Others said they felt Trump deserved credit for his record while in the White House of completing conservative priorities on Israel, notably moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights.

It's a similar dynamic to Trump's handling of abortion. Trump has refused to endorse a national abortion ban, which has led to criticism from some state and national anti-abortion leaders. But others point to his record as president, notably his appointment of three Supreme Court justices who were part of the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Daniel Hummel, author of "Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations," said that Republican support for Israel has become a proxy for other conservative priorities, particularly on immigration.

Trump and several other Republicans have alleged Hamas sympathizers could cross the southern U.S. border, despite there being almost no known examples of unauthorized border crossers staging mass attacks. And Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis — who are battling for second place in many national polls — have argued over who is tougher on refugee issues after the Hamas attack.

"The Arab-Israeli conflict has become part of the culture-war framework," Hummel said. "That's part of the Trump and post-Trump Republican Party, that terrorism and immigration are really deeply linked."

Some of Trump's rivals have directly tied U.S. relations with Israel to Christian tradition. South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, who has invested heavily in Iowa, often speaks of Israel's importance by referencing the Bible.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," Scott told an audience during a campaign stop in Newton this month, quoting from the Book of Psalms. For Israel's enemies, Scott said, "the wrath of God, let them feel it," paraphrasing the Book of Romans.

DeSantis has aggressively tried to win the support of evangelical clergy. One Iowa pastor leaning toward

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supporting DeSantis, Joseph Brown, called Trump's criticism of Netanyahu "a huge turnoff" and questioned his true beliefs on Israel.

"Even though Donald Trump has done amazing things when it comes to Israel, we need some assurances now," said Brown, who leads Marion Avenue Baptist Church in Washington, Iowa. "I don't think he understands the biblical foundation of why we stand with Israel."

Several pastors also have criticized biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, a political newcomer who has lined up with Trump's foreign policy ideas and at times criticized U.S. aid to Israel. Some evangelicals have long questioned whether they could vote for Ramaswamy, who is Hindu but often talks about his affinity for Judeo-Christian beliefs.

"I think he's trying to figure out what conservatives want to hear," said Brad Cranston, the former pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Burlington, Iowa. "And I think he thinks conservatives want a less interventionist foreign policy. But that does not work when it comes to Israel."

Iowa's evangelical voters are not monolithic. One point of debate is whether the U.S. should accept refugees from Gaza, where many of its roughly 2 million residents have been displaced by Israeli airstrikes and face acute shortages of food and water.

Trump and DeSantis have argued the U.S. should not take in any Gaza refugees, with DeSantis saying in one television interview that all people from Gaza were "antisemitic," even though Palestinians and other Arabs are also semitic peoples.

Haley, meanwhile, said in a recent CNN interview that the U.S. could determine which Palestinians "want to be free from this terrorist rule" but that surrounding Arab nations should take them.

Ann Trimble Ray, a conservative from Early, Iowa, said she sided with Haley and was leaning toward supporting her due to her experience and demeanor, but also for what she sees as compassion for Palestinian people.

"There are victims on both sides now," she said. "The terrorists who want to rid the world of Jews struck first and killed innocents, and now Israel is retaliating and there is innocent loss of life on both sides."

Rowland, the pastor who admonished his congregation recently to support Israel, said that for many in his church, a key reason for supporting Israel was biblical prophecy about the return of the Messiah.

"At some point along their way, along their journey, they've heard the end of the world is going to happen," he said. "There's fear that comes into play for a lot of these people. And whatever it is you fear, you pay attention to."

## Today in History: October 26, Amy Coney Barrett confirmed as Supreme Court justice

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Oct. 26, the 299th day of 2023. There are 66 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On October 26th, 2020, Amy Coney Barrett was confirmed to the Supreme Court by a deeply divided Senate, with Republicans overpowering Democrats to install President Donald Trump's nominee days before the election and secure a likely conservative court majority for years to come.

On this date:

In 1774, the First Continental Congress adjourned in Philadelphia.

In 1825, the Erie Canal opened in upstate New York, connecting Lake Erie and the Hudson River.

In 1861, the legendary Pony Express officially ceased operations, giving way to the transcontinental telegraph. (The last run of the Pony Express was completed the following month.)

In 1921, the Chicago Theatre, billed as "the Wonder Theatre of the World," first opened.

In 1979, South Korean President Park Chung-hee was shot to death by the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, Kim Jae-kyu.

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In 1982, the medical drama "St. Elsewhere," which would make stars of Denzel Washington, Mark Harmon and others, premiered on NBC.

In 1984, "Baby Fae," a newborn with a severe heart defect, was given the heart of a baboon in an experimental transplant in Loma Linda, California. (She lived 21 days with the animal heart.)

In 2000, the New York Yankees became the first team in more than a quarter-century to win three straight World Series championships, beating the New York Mets in game five of their "Subway Series."

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the USA Patriot Act, giving authorities unprecedented ability to search, seize, detain or eavesdrop in their pursuit of possible terrorists.

In 2002, a hostage siege by Chechen rebels at a Moscow theater ended with 129 of the 800-plus captives dead, most from a knockout gas used by Russian special forces who stormed the theater; 41 rebels also died.

In 2010, Iran began loading fuel into the core of its first nuclear power plant.

In 2012, after leaving nearly five dozen people dead in the Caribbean, Hurricane Sandy headed toward the eastern United States, with forecasters warning that it would merge with two winter weather systems to create a mega-storm.

In 2018, federal authorities captured a Florida man with a criminal history and accused him of sending at least 13 mail bombs to prominent Democrats. (Cesar Sayoc was sentenced to 20 years in prison by a judge who concluded that the bombs purposely were not designed to explode.)

In 2021, satirist Mort Sahl, who helped revolutionize stand-up comedy during the Cold War with his running commentary on politicians and current events, died at his California home at the age of 94.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jaclyn Smith is 78. TV host Pat Sajak is 77. Hillary Rodham Clinton is 76. Musician Bootsy Collins is 72. Actor James Pickens Jr. is 71. Rock musician David Was is 71. Rock musician Keith Strickland (The B-52s) is 70. Actor Lauren Tewes is 70. Actor D.W. Moffett is 69. Actor-singer Rita Wilson is 67. Actor Patrick Breen is 63. Actor Dylan McDermott is 62. Actor Cary Elwes is 61. Singer Natalie Merchant is 60. Actor Steve Valentine is 57. Country singer Keith Urban is 56. Actor Tom Cavanagh is 55. Actor Rosemarie DeWitt is 52. Actor Anthony Rapp is 52. Writer-producer Seth MacFarlane (TV: "Family Guy") is 50. TV news correspondent Paula Faris is 48. Actor Lennon Parham is 48. Actor Florence Kasumba is 47. Actor Hal Ozsan is 47. Actor Jon Heder is 46. Singer Mark Barry (BBMak) is 45. Actor Jonathan Chase is 44. Actor Folake Olowofoyeku (foh-LAH'-kay oh-low-wow-foh-YAY'-koo) is 40. Olympic figure skater Sasha Cohen is 39. Rapper Schoolboy Q is 37. Actor Beulah Koale is 32.