

Groton Daily Independent

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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.

Monday, Oct. 30

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, peas, pineapple/mandarin oranges, peanut butter cookie, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Chicken fries mashed with gravy.

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

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

FCCLA Blood Drive at High School

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Friday, Oct. 27

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad on croissant, tomato spoon salad, frosted brownies, fruit.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Subs, chips.

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.

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

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

China's former Premier Li Keqiang, a reformist star once seen as the top Communist Party leadership contender, died of a heart attack at the age of 68, state media reported.

The Pentagon said that the U.S. military struck two facilities in eastern Syria linked to Iranian forces and affiliated groups and were carried out to protect U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria and in retaliation to recent attacks on U.S. bases in the region.

The U.S. and China need to resume "in-depth and comprehensive" talks to reduce misunderstanding and stabilize ties, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said alongside Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Wang will be in the U.S. through Oct. 29.

Josh Allen led the Buffalo Bills to a 24-18 victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in Thursday Night Football.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby accused Russia's military of executing soldiers who don't follow orders while serving in Ukraine.

Family members have identified some of the 18 victims of two deadly shootings at a bar and a bowling alley in Lewiston, Maine, where 13 people were also injured. A manhunt for suspect Robert Card continues.

Israel's military claims they hit several militant targets after briefly entering Gaza overnight, amid a looming ground invasion of the region. Meanwhile, European leaders called for "pauses" in fighting and emphasized the need for "rapid, safe, and unhindered" access as the humanitarian crisis deepens.



**RAISING THE ROOFING STANDARDS,
ALL OVER YOUR TOWN!**

FREE HAIL STORM ESTIMATES!

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ALL OVER ROOFING



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

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The first snow

Groton received its first snow of the season last night with about half an inch accumulating. Also, beware while walking and driving - it is slippery outside. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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!

Name Released in Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Single-vehicle crash
Where: 274th St./SD Hwy.17, 4 miles north of Lennox, SD
When: 3:44 p.m., Monday, October 23, 2023

Driver No. 1: Kolby Jennings, 14, Tea, SD, Minor injuries
Vehicle No. 1: 2013 GMC Yukon
Passenger No. 1: Female, 10, Tea, SD, Minor injuries
Passenger No. 2: Female, 6, Tea, SD, Serious Non-Life-Threatening injuries
Passenger No. 3: Male, 4, Tea, SD, Fatal injuries

LINCOLN COUNTY, S.D- A 4-year-old boy has been identified as the person who died Monday afternoon in a single-vehicle crash 4 miles north of Lennox, S.D.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2013 GMC Yukon was driving westbound on 274th St. which is a gravel road. For an unknown reason, just east of SD Hwy 17, the Yukon left the road (274th St.) to the right, entered a ditch, and rolled coming to rest on its roof.

The driver of the GMC Yukon, Kolby Jennings, age 14, of Tea, SD, sustained minor injuries. He was not wearing a seatbelt. Charges are pending.

There were three passengers all from Tea, SD.

The 10-year-old female passenger sustained minor injuries. She was wearing a seatbelt.

The 6-year-old female passenger sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries. She was taken by ambulance to Sanford Hospital. Seatbelt use is under investigation.

The 4-year-old male passenger sustained fatal injuries. He was not wearing a seatbelt.

South Dakota's Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

###

Name Released in Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: US Hwy 16A, Mile Marker 33, 10 miles east of Custer
When: 5:01 p.m., Wednesday, October 25, 2023

Driver 1: Male, 16, Minor injuries
Vehicle 1: 2003 Ford Escape

Driver 2: Male, 66, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 2: 1973 Porsche 911
Passenger in Vehicle 2: Female, 64, Minor injuries

Custer County, S.D.- One person died Wednesday evening in a two vehicle crash in Custer County.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2003 Ford Escape was traveling eastbound on US Hwy 16A near mile marker 33. The Ford was negotiating a left curve, slid on the slick road, and entered the oncoming lane. A 1973 Porsche 911 was traveling westbound at the same time and location. The front of the Ford struck the driver's side of the Porsche.

The Ford spun around and came to rest on the highway. The Porsche entered the ditch and came to rest against a tree.

The 16-year-old male driver of the 2003 Ford Escape sustained minor injuries.
He was wearing a seatbelt.

The 66-year-old male driver of the 1973 Porsche 911 sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene.
He was wearing a seatbelt.

The 64-year-old female passenger of the Porsche sustained minor injuries.
She was wearing a seatbelt.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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Groton Wage Memorial Library

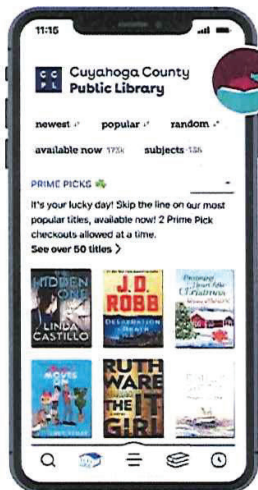


120 N Main St – Groton, SD – (605) 397-8422

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 to get started with Libby today!



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

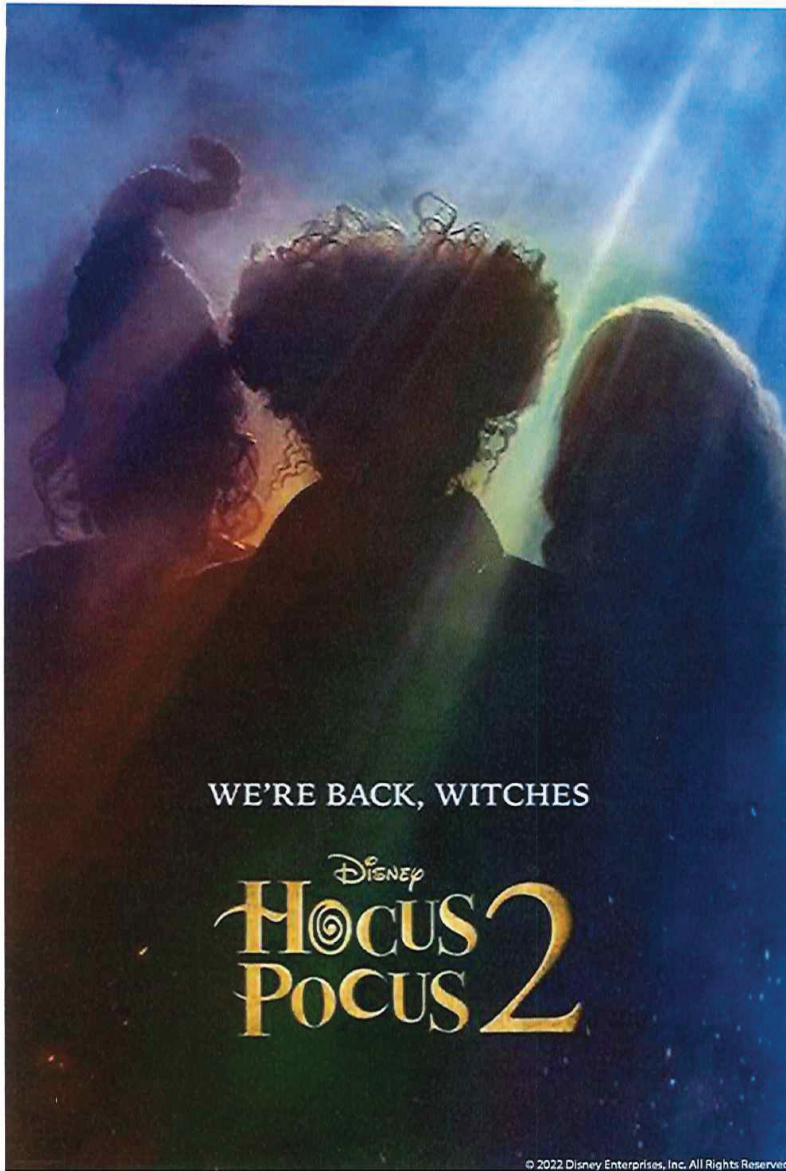
FREE UPCOMING EVENTS: *MUST PREREGISTER BY CALLING LIBRARY*

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

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

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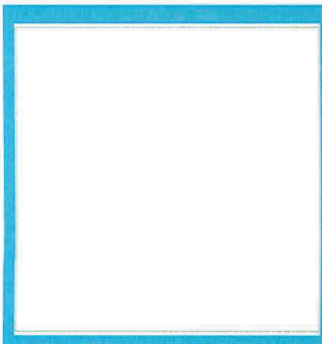
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Groton Wage Memorial
Library
120 N Main Street
Saturday, October 28th
3:00pm-5:00pm

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

FREE SNACKS provided by
Dacotah Bank!



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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Millions of grassland acres lost in Great Plains, new research report says

Cropland expansion is identified as primary culprit

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 26, 2023 2:43 PM

The Great Plains lost 1.6 million acres of grasslands in 2021.

That's according to a World Wildlife Fund report released on Thursday, detailing the loss of grasslands in the U.S. and Canadian Great Plains. From 2012 to 2021, grassland conversion in the Great Plains totaled 32 million acres, or 50,000 square miles.

The Plowprint report identified row-crop expansion as the leading factor in grassland conversion, resulting in a loss larger than the state of Delaware in 2021 alone.

Martha Kauffman, vice president for WWF's Northern Great Plains program, emphasized the significance of preserving grasslands as part of the solution to climate change.

"Let's stop plowing grasslands," Kauffman said in a written statement. "Just allow them to keep storing and sequestering carbon, and providing irreplaceable habitat for wildlife and pollinators as they have done for millennia."

"Sequestering carbon" is a reference to the carbon dioxide — a heat-trapping greenhouse gas — that grass naturally pulls from the air and stores in the soil.

The Northern Great Plains — a region that includes western South Dakota — is one of the last four intact, temperate grasslands globally. It experienced an increase in conversion with 400,000 acres in 2021, up from 385,000 in 2020.

The report said prime lands for agriculture were converted decades ago, meaning recent conversions may not yield significant agricultural returns. The report attributes habitat destruction mainly to economic factors, often driven by government policies that inadvertently promote conversion over protection.

Some farmers and ranchers in South Dakota have pointed out that federal subsidies and insurance for crops like soybeans and corn make cultivation on subpar soils more profitable than preserving them as grasslands.

South Dakota Grassland Coalition Secretary Larry Wagner, of Chamberlain, said modern grassland conversion is "all brought on by federal farm policy," which he said lobbyists for crop commodities have "highjacked."

"And it's not the farmers that benefit," Wagner said, adding that the benefit goes to companies that produce seeds, tractors and fertilizer, who can raise prices in response to higher subsidies for crops.

Wagner said raising livestock on grass is the primary way to keep grasslands intact in South Dakota, and incentives should focus on making that industry financially viable.

The Plowprint report includes several recommendations for the Farm Bill under consideration in Congress. The bill sets federal policy for crop subsidies, conservation and numerous other programs.

The report suggests safeguarding current conservation funding; strengthening Sodsaver, a program that reduces the incentive to convert native grass to farmland; enhancing the Conservation Reserve Program, which pays farmers to keep marginal land out of production; and boosting support for sustainable grazing and conservation programs.

Additionally, the report advises passing the North American Grasslands Conservation Act. It would establish grassland research initiatives and create items including a North American grassland conservation

strategy, a grassland conservation grant program, and national and regional grassland conservation councils. Changes are also suggested for the national Renewable Fuels Standard, which requires the mixing of a minimum volume of renewable fuel, such as corn-based ethanol, into traditional fuels like gasoline. The report says the Environmental Protection Agency should ensure land used to make biofuels has not been recently converted from grasslands.

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.



2023

PLOWPRINT

The destruction of grasslands across the Great Plains continues at an unsustainable pace.

WWF's most recent Plowprint analysis found that **in 2021, the year that this report analyzes, plow-up destroyed 1.6 million acres of grasslands across the US and Canadian portions of the Great Plains.** Within the Northern Great Plains region of the ecosystem—currently one of the world's four most intact temperate grasslands—the number of plowed acres was over 400,000 acres in 2021 alone. **In total, 32 million acres have fallen to the plow since 2012,** when WWF first began tracking grasslands conversion across the region.

1.6 MILLION ACRES PLOWED IN A SINGLE YEAR
(An area larger than the state of Delaware)

There is, however, opportunity to change course: Despite all that has been lost, we still have a lot left to fight for. According to WWF's Plowprint analysis nearly 377 million acres across the Great Plains, much of which is privately owned and stewarded, remains in grass cover. **One of the greatest opportunities we have to ensure that the grasslands of the Great Plains continue to exist, benefiting both people and wildlife, is policy.**

As Congress considers the Farm Bill, increased pro-grasslands policy would shore up resources and develop strategies that can support the livelihoods of producers, incentivize grassland stewardship, and discourage sod busting. In addition to the Farm Bill, the North American Grasslands Conservation Act, if passed, would support the efforts of ranchers who are eager to leave these majestic Great Plains better off through improved grazing management, leading to years of positive outcomes for rural communities and nature.



* Pictured at top: The Greater Prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) is a non-migratory, grassland dependent species.

COMMENTARY

Dusty Johnson wrong about Jordan, right about Republicans

DANA HESS

Let's give Rep. Dusty Johnson the benefit of the doubt, and excuse him for delivering a nominating speech for Rep. Jim Jordan during Jordan's quest to become the speaker of the House. With the way the world is right now, it's easy to believe that Johnson thought it best to get someone, anyone, elected.

As leader of the 67-member Main Street Caucus, Johnson is nothing if not pragmatic. By nominating Jordan, he established a beachhead on the potential speaker's good side. While stepping up to nominate Jordan may have been Johnson's way of moving the process along, it did leave South Dakota's lone representative with egg on his face.

"I should tell you that Jim Jordan has the best chance to unify this conference of any other leader we've got," Johnson said with a straight face during his nominating speech. "Jim Jordan is going to give us the best chance to get things done during the 118th Congress. This is an unruly bunch."

Obviously, nominee Jordan didn't live up to the hype that Johnson offered. It turns out that he couldn't unify all Republicans but he did manage to unify a diverse, determined group of his colleagues who banded together to make sure that Jordan never got near the speaker's gavel. While the members of that group had many reasons for voting against Jordan, they should all receive the thanks of a grateful nation.

In the past, Jordan has had trouble recognizing the truth as one of the most vociferous backers of President Donald Trump's false assertions that the 2020 election was stolen. Jordan was, however, able to see the truth of his own situation as speaker candidate when he withdrew his nomination.

News stories about the speaker candidates generously described Jordan as "fiery" or a "firebrand," noted for his hardball tactics. Those tactics were embraced by his followers, as members of the House who failed to vote for Jordan received death threats. The ultimate irony of Jordan's quest for the speakership, an irony that seems to be lost on Dusty Johnson, is that in his 16 years as a representative from Ohio, Jordan has yet to have a single piece of legislation passed by the House. Maybe that means he'd have more time for his duties as speaker.

As the Republicans lurched toward finding a speaker, at one point there were nine representatives, enough to field a baseball team, who declared their candidacy. This points to the part of Johnson's nominating speech that was truthful: Republicans are, as he described, an "unruly bunch."

While Jordan was not the right guy, apparently Mike Johnson of Louisiana was. Think of him as a kinder, gentler version of Jordan. He's just as MAGA, but without the hardball tactics that made Jordan so unappealing for some members of his party.

Mike Johnson is not just close to Trump, he convinced some of his colleagues to sign on to a Texas lawsuit that questioned the 2020 popular vote in swing states that Trump lost. That lawsuit was shot down by the Supreme Court. He's big on LBGTO restrictions and not a fan of aid to Ukraine. What could go wrong?

After three weeks of stumbling about like a student council that couldn't agree who the cool kids were, Republicans were in lockstep behind Mike Johnson as he garnered votes from every GOP member.

Maybe Dusty Johnson's failed endorsement of Jim Jordan was just a step along the path to ensuring that someone, anyone, be elected speaker of the House. Thankfully, enough Republicans looked past Dusty Johnson's overly optimistic view of Jordan's talents and sent the Ohio representative back to the conspiracy theories that he loves so much.

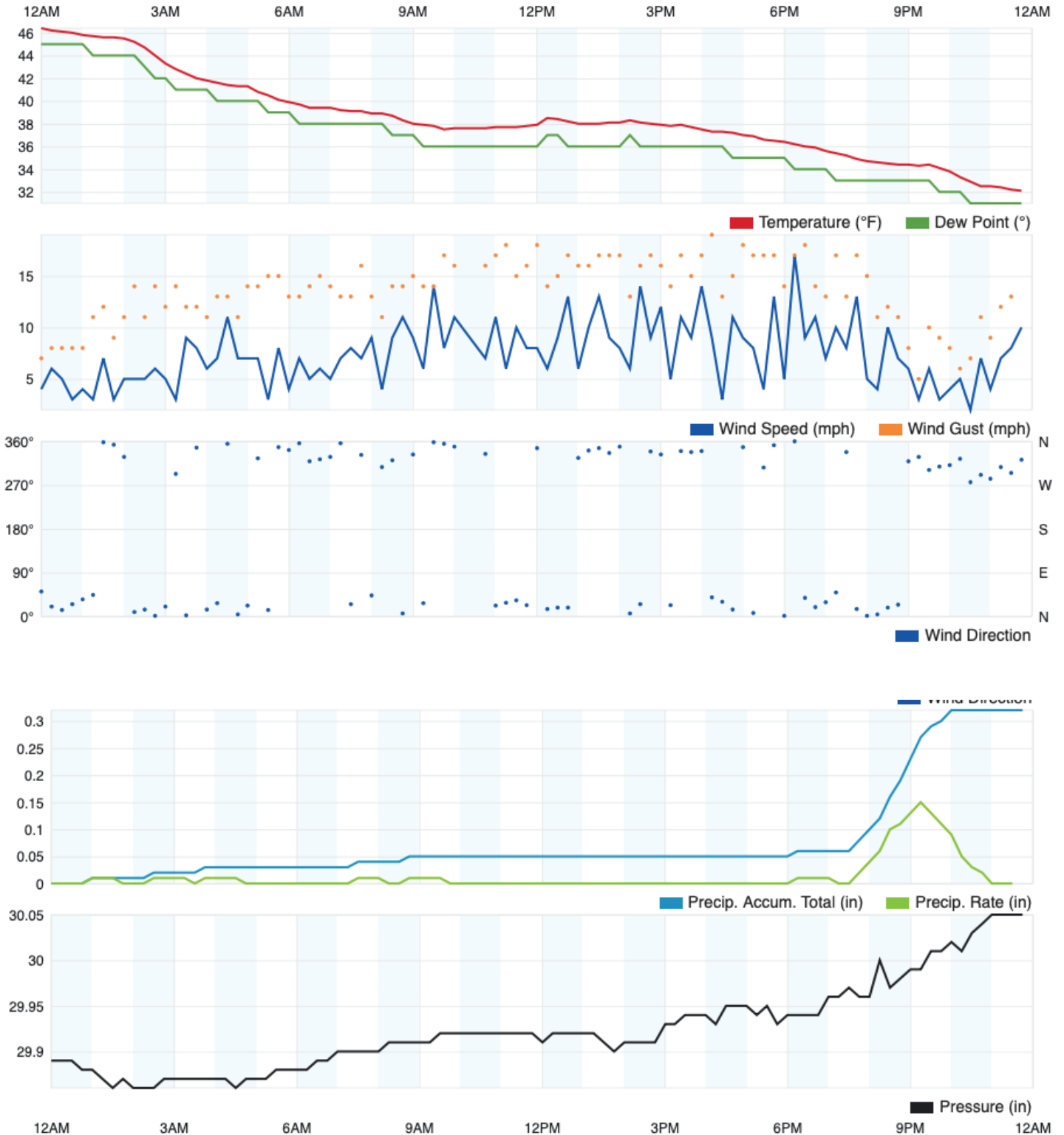
With wars to fund in Ukraine and the Middle East, a mess at this nation's southern border, and a looming government shutdown, it's past time for Republicans to get their half of the House in order. The coming weeks will tell if they will act like statesmen or live up to their billing as an "unruly bunch."

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Fri Oct 27	Sat Oct 28	Sun Oct 29	Mon Oct 30	Tue Oct 31	Wed Nov 1	Thu Nov 2
31°F 17°F	30°F 14°F	31°F 15°F	36°F 15°F	31°F 17°F	40°F 21°F	39°F 28°F
NW 22 MPH	W 8 MPH	WSW 16 MPH	WSW 16 MPH	NW 15 MPH	S 12 MPH	SW 11 MPH



Below Normal Temps Through The Weekend

October 27, 2023
2:56 AM

Friday
➤ Clouds & Wind Diminishing, Highs 26-33°

Saturday
➤ Light Snow, Highs 28-32°
Snow Saturday will be light and accumulations mainly along and south of a line from Mudro, Chamberlain Huron & Brookings

Sunday
➤ Highs 28-34°

Monday
➤ Highs 34-44°

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A cold Canadian airmass has moved into the region and will result in temperatures 10 to 20 degrees below normal for the next several days. A weak system will bring another round of light snow to the southern half of the state for Saturday.

CAUTION



Slippery Conditions

Just a heads up! With wet snow and rain overnight, followed by temperatures falling below freezing on a cold northwest wind this morning, there is the potential for icy roads and walkways. #SDWX

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 32 °F at 11:26 PM

Wind: 21 mph at 1:35 PM

Precip: : 0.32

Day length: 10 hours, 25 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 83 in 1983

Record Low: 1 in 2020

Average High: 53

Average Low: 28

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.94

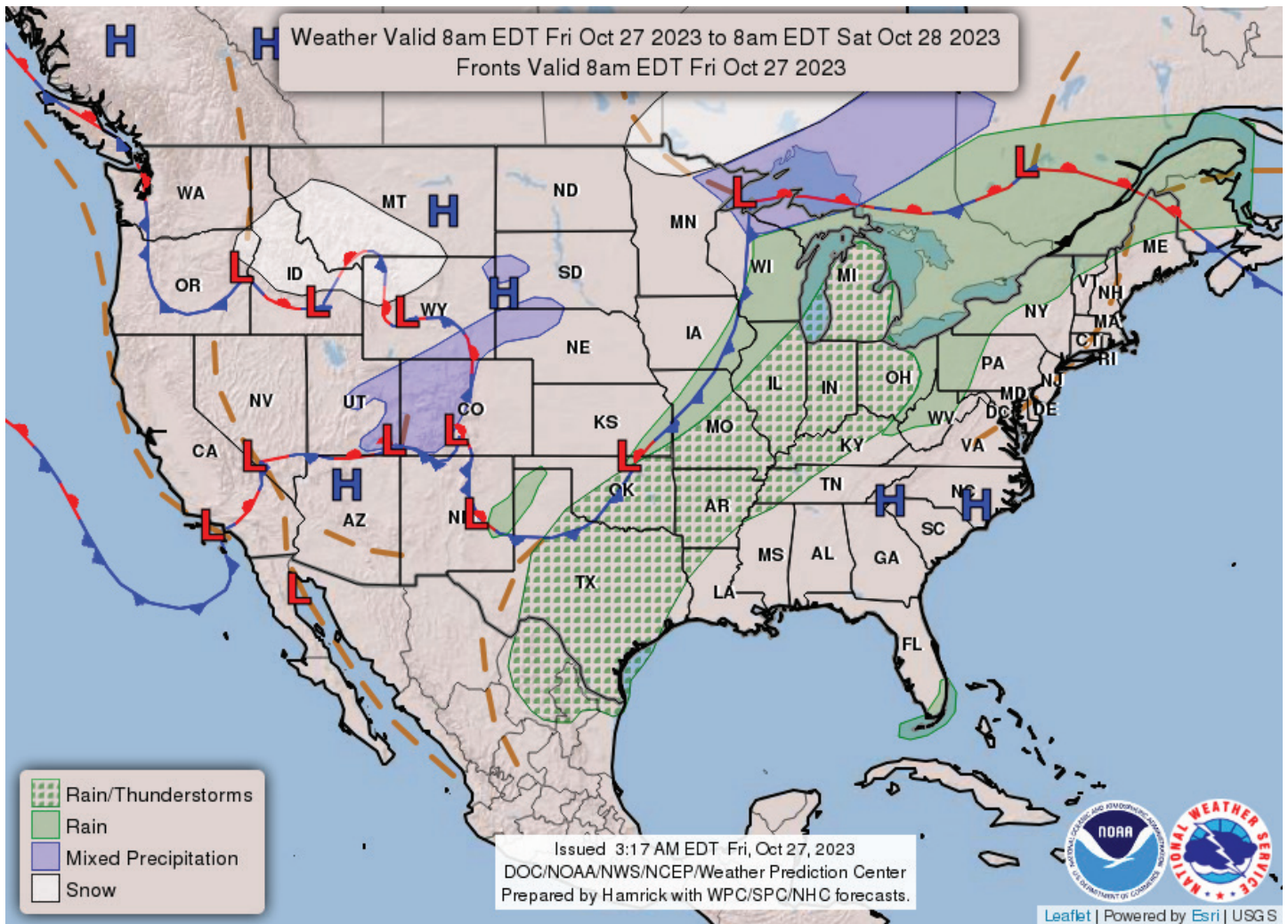
Precip to date in Oct.: 1.21

Average Precip to date: 20.27

Precip Year to Date: 22.98

Sunset Tonight: 6:29:08 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04:45 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 27, 1991: The first winter storm of the season moved across western and northern South Dakota. The storm produced widespread snow and freezing rain. Strong winds also produced blowing snow which caused blizzard conditions. Snow amounts ranged from 3 to 11 inches. Many schools and businesses in western South Dakota were closed. Snow drifts, as high as 6 feet, made many roads impassable. Travel across western South Dakota was extremely difficult, if not impossible. Forty traffic accidents occurred in the Black Hills while five accidents were reported in Pierre. Many major roads were closed due to the snow and visibility. Rapid City airport was closed. Freezing rain downed power and telephone lines in Mobridge, Gettysburg, Belvidere, Midland, and Mission. Ice also broke six power poles in Walworth County. Some rural areas were without electricity for 30 hours.

1764 - A "very remarkable storm of snow with high winds" produced 22 inches at Rutland in central Massachusetts. (David Ludlum)

1913: At least three people died, and more than a hundred people were injured when the Abercynon Tornado struck an area from Edwardsville to Cilfynydd in South Wales.

1929 - A snowstorm dumped 27 inches upon Ishpeming, MI, in 24 hours to establish a state record. (David Ludlum)

1962 - An early season winter storm over New England blanketed northern Maine with 7 to 16 inches of snow, and southeastern New England with up to 3 inches of snow. Worcester MA received a record 4.7 inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rain from Virginia to New York State. Fallen leaves made roads and sidewalks slick, and also clogged sewers. Rainfall totals of 1.55 inches at Newark NJ, 1.54 inches at Harrisburg PA, 1.27 inches at Scranton PA, and 1.22 inches at Atlantic City NJ, were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Low pressure brought snow and gale force winds to the Great Lakes Region, and snow and high winds to the north central U.S. Winds gusted to 47 mph at Lansing MI, and reached 55 mph at Pierre SD. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Wintry weather invaded the northwestern U.S. A storm crossing the Central Rockies produced up to 23 inches of snow in the mountains east of Salt Lake City UT. "Indian Summer" continued in the Lower Ohio Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Afternoon highs of 71 degrees at Marquette MI and 72 degrees at Sault Ste Marie MI were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006: An F1 tornado (waterspout) came ashore and caused significant damage on the west side of Apalachicola Florida.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

MISTAKES ARE NOT FATAL

The new bank president decided that he would meet individually with each employee to introduce himself. He wanted them to know that he was very interested in their work and how important they were to the success of the bank.

After introducing himself to all of the employees, he asked one of them to come to his office. After she sat down, he asked, "How long have you been working here?"

Proudly she responded, "Forty years. And in all that time I've only made one little mistake."

"That's amazing. Wonderful!" he grumbled. "However, be more careful from now on!"

We all make mistakes. And there are at least three things we can do about them:

We can promise never to make another mistake. That, however, is impractical since we know that such a ridiculous promise would be impossible to keep.

We can give up and never do anything else and live like a hermit in a cave for the rest of our lives. And, we know that's impractical because life goes on.

Or, we can learn from our mistakes and profit from them as though they were our teachers. When things do not work out as intended, or our plans go astray and things get "messed up," we need to admit it, look for how and why things "blew-up," seek the help and advice of others, go to God in prayer, and ask for His wisdom which is available upon request.

Prayer: Lord, Your Word assures us that "if we lack wisdom and want to know what to do" all we need to do is ask You. May we seek Your guidance and insight. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. James 1:5-9



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.24.23

16 20 30 54 59 7

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$137,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 44 Mins
DRAW: 26 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 1 Days 14 Hrs 59
DRAW: Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.26.23

9 24 34 39 45 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 14 Mins 26
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.25.23

2 7 10 13 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$34,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.25.23

18 19 38 54 55 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 43
DRAW: Mins 26 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 1 Days 15 Hrs 43
DRAW: Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL= SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class 9A=

State Quarterfinal=

Canistota 70, Gregory 19

Deubrook 14, Alcester-Hudson 10

Philip 46, Chester 15

Warner 56, Castlewood 0

Class 9AA=

State Quarterfinal=

Hamlin 28, Wall 7

Howard 28, Elkton-Lake Benton 8

Parkston 28, Hanson 0

Platte-Geddes 34, Freeman/Marion/Freeman 6

Class 9B=

State Quarterfinal=

Avon 38, Hitchcock-Tulare 14

DeSmet 42, Gayville-Volin High School 0

Faulkton 48, Kadoka Area 0

Potter County 24, Corsica/Stickney 20

Class 11A=

State Quarterfinal=

Dell Rapids 52, Madison 0

Lennox 28, Canton 22

Sioux Falls Christian 24, Dakota Valley 13

West Central 45, Chamberlain 13

Class 11AA=

State Quarterfinal=

Watertown 42, Aberdeen Central 17

Yankton 17, Huron 0

Class 11AAA=

State Quarterfinal=

Brandon Valley 41, Sioux Falls Jefferson 21

Harrisburg 42, Sioux Falls Washington 7

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 46, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 27

Class 11B=

State Quarterfinal=

Elk Point-Jefferson 14, Tri-Valley 7

Hot Springs 49, Sioux Valley 13

Rapid City Christian 13, Deuel 8

Winner 28, Aberdeen Roncalli 0

Snow piles up in North Dakota as region's first major snowstorm of the season moves eastward

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Nearly a foot of snow buried parts of North Dakota on Thursday as the region's first wintry weather of the season swept through the Rockies and into the northern Plains, slowing travel and frustrating some farmers who still have crops left to harvest.

The storm dumped as much as 12 inches (30 centimeters) of snow south of Dickinson, according to the National Weather Service. Eleven inches (28 centimeters) of snow fell near Stanley, North Dakota, in the state's northwest corner, and other areas saw up to 8 inches (20 centimeters), said Matt Johnson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Bismarck.

"Well, it is definitely winter," said Karolin Jappe, the emergency manager for McKenzie County.

Jappe ventured out twice Wednesday to the scene of a semi rollover with hazardous materials and said driving was a challenge. Some motorists had rolled their vehicles or slid into ditches, which Jappe said "is normal" given the conditions.

"You could barely see anything but white. It just kinda scares you," she said.

The storm, an upper-level low from western Canada, came across the northern Rockies and is expected to continue east into Canada as cold Arctic air remains behind into next week, Johnson said. The storm's second wave was expected to impact central and southwestern North Dakota, with the heaviest snow expected later Thursday afternoon, he said.

Below-normal cold temperatures are forecast to follow, as low as single digits and possibly even below zero in low-lying areas, Johnson said. The snowpack will enhance the cold temperatures, he said.

Snow continued falling in Montana on Thursday, with the storm leaving 19 inches (49 centimeters) on the west side of Helena since late Tuesday. Another 17 inches (43 centimeters) had fallen by Thursday morning at a backcountry weather station near the borders of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, the National Weather Service reported. The storm continued moving east, bringing at least a foot of snow to some areas in central Montana.

Schools in western and central North Dakota closed, canceled activities, opened late or held classes virtually, Bismarck station KFYR-TV reported.

In south-central North Dakota, Mandan-area farmer and rancher Stephanie Hatzenbuhler's family prepared for the storm in recent days, rounding up their cattle to keep closer to home, fixing fences, bringing in farm equipment and eyeing their snow removal equipment.

The family still has corn to harvest, "but hopefully it doesn't snow too much and it gets nicer out again to where we can get back at that job," Hatzenbuhler said.

Farmer and rancher Kenny Graner drove to Mandan on Thursday for truck parts and noticed the road conditions go from a trace of snow and mist to more snow accumulating on his route.

"It's unreal, the difference in 15 miles," he said.

Earlier this week, his family began shifting cattle around into pastures with natural protection and springs for water, he said. The family was about 90% done with their corn harvest before the storm.

"It slows you down," Graner said. "There's a lot of fall work farmers and ranchers want to get done before the ground freezes up. This technically slows you down for a week or so until the ground would be dry enough if there's any kind of fall tillage they want to do. That's probably not going to get done or only a little bit."

Laura Davenport was shoveling wet, heavy snow in a Bismarck neighborhood Thursday, the snowfall being "a little bit more than I would expect at this time of year," she said. Snow clung to Halloween

decorations and trees with leaves, some of them still green.

Winter is here, "unfortunately," Davenport said with a laugh.

Most of the state was under a travel alert Thursday, meaning drivers may still travel in the area but should be aware of the wintry conditions that could make traveling difficult.

The state issued a no-travel advisory Wednesday afternoon for highways in several North Dakota counties but those warnings have been lifted. A roughly 30-mile (50-kilometer) stretch of U.S. Highway 85, a major route through North Dakota's oil field in the western part of the state, was closed for more than 12 hours Wednesday evening into Thursday morning.

Live updates | Israeli forces conduct another ground raid in Gaza ahead of expected invasion

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli forces conducted another ground raid in Gaza in advance of an expected invasion of the Hamas-ruled territory. U.S. warplanes, meanwhile, struck targets in eastern Syria after attacks on U.S. forces by Iran-backed fighters, adding to regional tensions fueled by the 3-week-old Gaza war.

The Palestinian death toll passed 7,000 as Israel launched waves of airstrikes in response to the bloody Hamas rampage in southern Israel on Oct. 7. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which tracks the toll, released a detailed list, including names and ID numbers on Thursday. In the occupied West Bank, more than 110 Palestinians have been killed in violence and Israeli raids since Oct. 7.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, mostly civilians slain during the initial Hamas attack. In addition, 229 people — including foreigners, children and older adults — were taken by Hamas during the incursion and remain in captivity in Gaza. Four hostages were released earlier.

Currently:

1. U.S. strikes Iran-linked sites in Syria in retaliation for attacks on U.S. troops
2. How did they get it wrong: Israel-Hamas war has upended years of conventional wisdom
3. Data from the Gaza Health Ministry, questioned after the hospital explosion, has withstood past scrutiny
4. Parts of Gaza look like a wasteland from space. Look for the misshapen buildings and swaths of gray
5. Palestinians plead "stop the bombs" at U.N. meeting, but Israel insists Hamas must be "obliterated."
6. Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

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

A TRICKLE OF AID GETS INTO GAZA AS 'HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE' DEEPENS

The International Committee of the Red Cross says that 10 of its staffers, including a combat surgery team, entered Gaza on Friday, along with six trucks of medical aid and water purification tablets.

The medical supplies are enough to treat between 1,000 and 5,000 people, the ICRC said, and the water purification tablets can treat 50,000 liters of water.

This crucial humanitarian assistance is a small dose of relief, but it's not enough," said Fabrizio Carboni, the ICRC's regional director. "Our surgical team and medical supplies will help relieve the extreme pressure on Gaza's doctors and nurses. But safe, sustained humanitarian access is urgently needed."

"This humanitarian catastrophe is deepening by the hour," he said.

Meanwhile, UNESCO said that since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7, more than 200 schools have been damaged in the Gaza Strip — around 40% of all schools there.

IRAN-BACKED FIGHTERS IN SYRIA FIRE ROCKETS AT OIL FACILITY HOUSING AMERICAN TROOPS
BEIRUT — Syrian opposition activists say Iran-backed fighters fired rockets at an oil facility housing

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U.S. troops in eastern Syria.

The attack came hours after American fighter jets launched airstrikes early Friday on two locations linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Pentagon said the strikes were in retaliation for a slew of drone and missile attacks against U.S. bases and personnel in the region that began early last week.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said six rockets hit al-Omar oil field in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour. The Observatory said it wasn't clear if there were any casualties.

The Observatory said the U.S. strikes earlier Friday wounded seven Iraqi Iran-backed fighters.

RUSSIA DEFENDS HOSTING HAMAS OFFICIAL FOR TALKS

MOSCOW — The Kremlin dismissed criticism of a visit to Moscow by a senior Hamas figure, saying that Russia considers it necessary to maintain contacts with all warring parties.

Russia has tried to maneuver carefully over the Israel-Hamas war as it seeks to expand its global clout. The Israeli Foreign Ministry criticized Moscow for hosting Abu Marzouk, a member of Hamas' political bureau, and urged Russia to expel him.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said it discussed the release of hostages in the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of Russian nationals and other foreign citizens during Thursday's talks with Hamas.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia considers "it necessary to continue contacts with all the parties and we will certainly continue our dialogue with Israel."

He wouldn't comment when asked if Hamas' visit could hurt Russia-Israeli ties.

Also in Moscow on Thursday was Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs, Ali Bagheri Kani, who told Abu Marzouk that Tehran's "priority" in negotiations "is an immediate cease-fire, providing assistance to the people and lifting the repressive blockade of Gaza."

The Iranian official also met with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, who serves as the Kremlin envoy for the Middle East.

4 PALESTINIANS, INCLUDING MILITANT COMMANDER KILLED IN WEST BANK CLASHES OVERNIGHT
RAMALLAH, West Bank — Israeli forces killed four Palestinians in the West Bank during a widescale overnight arrest raid, Palestinian health officials said. A militant commander was among those killed.

Since the Israel-Hamas war erupted on Oct. 7, the death toll in the occupied West Bank has reached 110, making it one of the deadliest periods there in at least a decade.

Palestinian officials said three of the Palestinians were killed when a firefight with local gunmen erupted in the Jenin refugee camp.

The Israeli military said forces responded with live fire when assailants hurled explosive devices and shot at troops in the camp. One of the three killed was a commander for the military wing of the militant Islamic Jihad group, the group said.

Israeli forces killed a fourth Palestinian early Friday morning in the west Bank City of Qalqilya, Palestinian health officials said.

Israeli forces arrested at least 70 Palestinians in the raid, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, which represents current and former prisoners. Since the start of the war, Israeli authorities have made more than 1,530 arrests of Palestinians in the West Bank.

FRANCE'S TOP DIPLOMAT SAYS HAMAS IS HOLDING 'AT LEAST SOME' OF THE 9 FRENCH CITIZENS MISSING SINCE OCT. 7

PARIS — French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna says that at least some of the nine French citizens who have been missing since the Oct. 7 attack on Israel are being held hostage by Hamas militants in Gaza.

In an interview with the French radio station RTL on Friday, she said the nine "disappeared" on Oct. 7.

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"We have no specific news (of them) but some of them we know have been taken hostage," Colonna said and added that the French government is working with Egypt and Qatar to free them.

"We demand the release of all hostages and not just French hostages," she added.

On Thursday, the French foreign ministry said that 35 French citizens have been killed in the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

Hamas and other militants in Gaza are believed to have taken more than 220 people, including an unconfirmed number of foreigners and dual citizens.

HEAD OF UN AGENCY FOR PALESTINIANS SAYS SERVICES IN GAZA COLLAPSING FAST

JERUSALEM — The head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees warned on Friday that remaining public services in Gaza are collapsing fast and that people now face food shortages.

Speaking to reporters in Jerusalem, UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said the international community "seems to have turned its back on Gaza."

He said the agency was very short on fuel in Gaza and needs about 160,000 liters (42,200 gallons) of fuel a day to supply hospitals and bakeries.

As for UNRWA staffers in Gaza, "for the first time ever, they report that now people are hungry," Lazzarini said. "Civil order is collapsing."

Asked how long supplies will last, Lazzarini said "certainly no more than few days." Lazzarini added that 57 employees of the agency in Gaza have been killed since the war started on Oct. 7.

"We cannot turn a blind eye to this human tragedy," he said.

Also Friday in Geneva, Lynn Hastings, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Palestinian territories, said there was "a significant backup of some 150 aid trucks" at the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. More trucks were stalled in the nearby Egyptian city of el-Arish.

Though Israel has blocked all fuel from accessing the Gaza Strip, Hastings said that UNRWA has been able to access a limited amount of fuel to power desalination plants and distribute to bakeries and hospitals.

She said that if desalination plants run out of fuel, raw sewage that is currently being pumped into the sea will begin to spill onto the streets.

MISSILE HITS EGYPTIAN RED SEA CITY NEAR ISRAEL BORDER

CAIRO — A missile that landed in Egypt's Red City of Taba on the Sinai Peninsula early on Friday injured six people, Egyptian state media said.

The source of the missile was not identified. An Israeli army spokesman said that "an aerial threat was identified in the area" of the Red Sea earlier on Friday, forcing Israel to scramble fighter planes.

According to al-Qahera news, which has close ties to Egypt's intelligence service, the missile struck a medical facility where ambulances were parked and a hospital administration building. An investigation is underway.

All six people had minor injuries and were being treated at a hospital, Egypt's Health Ministry said.

An unnamed security source cited by al-Qahera said Egypt reserved the right to respond to the attack. Once the destination for the launch is determined, all options are available, he added.

Taba lies right on the border with Israel, and is some 6 miles, or 10 kilometers, from the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

Israeli Read Adm. Daniel Hagari said "the origin of the hit that occurred in Egypt" appeared to be from the threat over the Red Sea. The issue is under investigation, he said.

"Israel will work with Egypt and the United States and will tighten the defense in the region against threats from the area of the Red Sea," he added.

In a separate incident Friday, al-Qahera news said a "strange object" landed near a power station

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in the Red Sea town of Nuweiba, not far from Taba. Footage broadcasted by the news outlet showed debris and smoke rising from the side of mountain near the town. No further information was available.

US TARGETED 2 SITES TIED TO IRAN-BACKED FIGHTERS, ACTIVISTS SAY

BEIRUT — The U.S. airstrikes on Syria's eastern province of Deir el-Zour targeted two locations where Iran-backed fighters are based, according to Syrian opposition activists.

Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet, said the main target was an area known as the farms just outside the town of Mayadeen. The site had been evacuated and no one was hurt, he said.

The second strike early Friday hit an area known as the "green belt" in the Boukamal area that borders Iraq, he said.

"These strikes were expected because of the repeated provocative acts," said Abu Layla referring to attacks that targeted U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria.

Abu Layal said the farms area is an important point where weapons brought from Iran are stored and then shipped to other areas in Lebanon.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, also reported strikes on the farms area near Mayadeen and Ashara near the border with Iraq. The Observatory said ambulances were seen rushing to the area, but it was not clear if there were casualties.

The Pentagon said the airstrikes targeted two locations linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps in retaliation for drone and missile attacks against U.S. bases and personnel in the region.

UNGA SESSION ON THE WAR RESUMES FRIDAY MORNING

UNITED NATIONS — "Stop the bombs and save lives!" the Palestinian ambassador pleaded at an emotional U.N. meeting Thursday on the war in Gaza. But Israel's envoy was adamant, declaring again, "We will not rest until Hamas is obliterated."

The war sparked by Gaza's Hamas rulers' surprise attacks on Israel on Oct. 7 played out in the vast hall of the 193-nation General Assembly, where Arab nations expected to adopt a resolution Friday calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza after the Security Council's four failed attempts to agree on any action.

At the assembly's resumed emergency special session, speaker after speaker backed the Arab resolution's cease-fire call — except for Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan, who told the 193-member world body, "A cease-fire means giving Hamas time to rearm itself, so they can massacre us again."

The emergency General Assembly meeting resumes Friday morning, with about 100 speakers remaining.

The resolution being putting to a vote in the afternoon calls for an immediate cease-fire and demands that all parties respect international law and protect civilians. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding. But they do reflect world opinion and the size of the vote in favor will be closely watched.

Israel strikes the outskirts of Gaza City during a second ground raid in as many days

By WAFAA SHURAFI and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces backed by fighter jets and drones carried out a second ground raid into Gaza in as many days and struck targets on the outskirts of Gaza City, the military said Friday, as it prepares for a widely expected ground invasion of the Hamas-ruled territory.

U.S. warplanes, meanwhile, struck targets in eastern Syria that the Pentagon said were linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard after a string of attacks on American forces, and two mysterious objects hit towns

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in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, adding to the already high tensions fueled by the three-week-old Gaza war.

The Palestinian death toll has soared past 7,000 as Israel has carried out waves of devastating airstrikes in response to a bloody Hamas incursion into southern Israel on Oct. 7. The Health Ministry in Gaza, which tracks the toll, released a detailed list of names and identification numbers on Thursday. The toll includes more than 2,900 minors and more than 1,500 women.

The overall number of deaths far exceeds the combined toll of all four previous wars between Israel and Hamas, estimated at around 4,000.

More than 1,400 people in Israel, mostly civilians, were slain during the initial Hamas attack, according to the Israeli government. Hamas is holding at least 229 captives inside Gaza, including men, women, children and older adults.

The airstrikes have flattened entire neighborhoods, causing a level of death and destruction unseen in the last four wars between Israel and Hamas. More than a million people have fled their homes, with many heeding Israeli orders to evacuate to the south, despite continuing Israeli strikes across the sealed-off territory.

The military said ground forces raided inside Gaza, striking dozens of militant targets over the past 24 hours. It said aircraft and artillery bombed targets in Shijaiyah, a neighborhood on Gaza City's outskirts that was the scene of an urban battle in the 2014 Gaza war.

The military said the soldiers exited the territory without suffering any casualties. It reported an earlier, hourslong raid into northern Gaza early Thursday.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said the raids enable forces to "uncover the enemy," to kill militants and to remove explosives and launch pads. The aim is "to prepare the ground for the next stages of the war," he added.

The damage to Gaza from nearly three weeks of bombardment showed in satellite photos of several locations taken before the war and again in recent days.

Entire rows of residential buildings simply disappear in the photos, reduced to smears of dust and rubble. A complex of 13 high-rises by the sea was pounded to dust near Gaza City's al-Shati refugee camp, leaving only a few tottering bits of facade, according to the photos by Maxar Technologies.

The military says it only strikes militant targets and accuses Hamas of operating among civilians in an attempt to protect its fighters. The Israeli military said that an airstrike killed one of two masterminds of the Oct. 7 massacre, Shadi Barud, the head of Hamas' intelligence unit.

Palestinian militants have fired thousands of rockets into Israel since the war began.

Hamas' military wing said Thursday that Israeli bombardment has so far killed about 50 of the hostages. There was no immediate comment from Israeli officials, who have denied previous, similar claims.

The conflict has threatened to ignite a wider war across the region.

Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed ally of Hamas in Lebanon, has repeatedly traded fire with Israel along the border, and Israel has carried out airstrikes targeting Iran-linked groups in Syria. The United States has sent two aircraft carrier strike groups to the region, along with additional fighter jets and other weaponry and personnel, in part to deter Iran and its allies from entering the war on the side of Hamas.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the strikes in eastern Syria were "a response to a series of ongoing and mostly unsuccessful attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-backed militia groups that began on Oct. 17." He said the operation was separate from the Israel-Hamas war.

Iran-backed fighters later fired rockets at an oil facility housing U.S. troops in eastern Syria, according to Syrian opposition activists. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the U.S. strikes had wounded seven Iran-backed Iraqi fighters.

Egypt's military said a drone crashed into a building in the Red Sea town of Taba, on the border with

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Israel, slightly wounding six people. State media had initially said it was a rocket. In a separate incident, the state-run Al-Qahera news said a "strange object" landed near a power station in the Red Sea town of Nuweiba, further south. Footage showed debris and smoke rising from the side of a nearby mountain.

Hagari, the Israeli military spokesperson, said "an aerial threat was identified in the area of the Red Sea," which appeared to be the source of the Taba incident. He said that fighter jets were dispatched to the area and that Israel, Egypt and the U.S. were tightening their defenses in the region.

Last week, a U.S. Navy destroyer in the northern Red Sea shot down three cruise missiles and several drones launched toward Israel by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in northern Yemen.

The war has also sparked protests across the region, and more demonstrations were held Friday in cities across the Middle East after weekly Muslim prayers.

In Gaza, supplies of food, medicine and fuel for powering emergency generators are running low. The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, which provides basic services to hundreds of thousands of people, including operating schools turned into shelters, has said it may run out of fuel within days.

Gaza's sole power station shut down because of a lack of fuel days after the start of the war, and Israel has barred all fuel deliveries, saying it believes Hamas would steal them for military purposes.

About 1.4 million of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have fled their homes, with nearly half of them crowding into U.N. shelters. Hundreds of thousands remain in northern Gaza, despite Israel ordering them to evacuate to the south and saying that those who remain might be considered "accomplices" of Hamas.

Over the past week, Israel has allowed more than 80 trucks with aid enter from Egypt through the Rafah crossing, the only entry point into Gaza not controlled by Israel. But aid workers say the convoys meet only a tiny fraction of the territory's mounting humanitarian needs. Before the war, an average of 500 trucks entered Gaza each day, according to the United Nations.

The U.S. has been working with other mediators to send in more humanitarian aid, but Israel is insisting on strict screening procedures for all trucks that enter. Washington says Hamas has refused to open the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing to let hundreds of foreign passport holders leave.

The head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees said that its aid operations were crumbling, citing distressing reports from local staff.

"For the first time ever, they report that now people are hungry." Philippe Lazarini told reporters in Jerusalem. "Civil order is collapsing."

Volunteer youth bowling coach and 'hero' bar manager are among the Maine shooting victims

By HOLLY RAMER, LISA RATHKE and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

A volunteer youth bowling coach known for encouraging children and a bar manager whose father said tried to confront the shooter and died "a hero" were among the at least 18 people killed and 13 injured in two mass shootings in Lewiston, Maine.

According to Maine State Police, seven people died Wednesday night at Just-In-Time Recreation bowling alley. Six were male and one was female. Eight more people, all male, died at Schemengees Bar and Grille. Three others died after being taken to hospitals.

Authorities have not released the victims' names, but their family members have been confirming their deaths.

BOB VIOLETTE:

Retiree Bob Violette, 76, devoted himself to his volunteer job coaching the youth bowling league that

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was practicing Wednesday night, said Patrick Poulin, whose teenage son has been a member for three years.

"He's taught so many people over the years how to bowl, and he wasn't getting paid," he said. "We've really been focused on trying to keep the sport alive, and Bob was really an integral part of that."

Violette's daughter confirmed his death to WBZ-TV. Poulin described him as unfailingly approachable and caring.

"Sometimes kids are having a hard time for whatever reason, discouraged or something," he said. "He was great at picking them up and getting them to move along from that issue and get things going in the right direction."

Two weeks ago, Poulin was at the bowling center with his son and offered him some tips. His son resisted, but eventually took the advice and bowled a great game.

"You gave him some good instructions, so when are you going to get out here and coach with me?" Violette asked him.

Poulin replied that he'd have to think about it. Asked Thursday if he'd consider it now, he said, "Someone's got to step back in."

MICHAEL DESLAURIERS

Michael Deslauriers' father told CBS News that his son was one of those killed at Just-In-Time Recreation. His father, who shares the same name, said his son and a friend both were killed as they charged at the shooter after making sure their wives and several children were safe.

PEYTON BREWER-ROSS:

Peyton Brewer-Ross was a dedicated pipefitter at Bath Iron Works whose death leaves a gaping void in the lives of his partner, young daughter and friends, members of his union said.

Brewer-Ross, 40, was a 5-year member of International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Local S6, the union said in a statement. He graduated from an apprenticeship program last year, the union said.

Brewer-Ross loved cornhole, wrestling and comic book heroes, the union said. He would delight colleagues and friends by frequently quoting "Macho Man" Randy Savage, one of his favorite wrestlers.

"Peyton was not just a fellow pipefitter but a friend to many at Bath Iron Works," said IAM Eastern Territory General Vice President David Sullivan, who is also a Local S6 member and a former Bath Iron Works employee.

Brewer-Ross was a member of the Local S6 Education Committee who loved helping others and was beloved for his good nature and humor, union members said.

"Unfortunately, this horrible tragedy has affected our IAM family in a catastrophic way," said IAM Resident General Vice President Brian Bryant, a Local S6 member and former Bath Iron Works pipefitter. "We will be there for the families, community and our members in every way needed today and into the future."

JOE WALKER:

Joe Walker was the bar manager at Schemengees Bar and Grille. His father, Auburn City Councilor Leroy Walker, told NBC News on Thursday that his son was shot twice in the stomach as he went after the shooter with a butcher knife.

"He died as a hero," he said.

Waiting for confirmation of his worst fears Wednesday night, Walker told the network he felt like his guts and neck were being “squashed.”

“And I don’t know, telling you the truth, what kind of night this is going to be from now until tomorrow when I wake up to the true facts that my son is dead — and I know he’s dead,” he said. “I know it as well as I know I’m standing here telling you because he’s not here and he’s not at any other hospital and he’s not running the streets or he would have called us, because he manages Schemengees, so I know he was there.”

US fighter jets strike Iran-linked sites in Syria in retaliation for attacks on US troops

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. fighter jets launched airstrikes early Friday on two locations in eastern Syria linked to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Pentagon said, in retaliation for a slew of drone and missile attacks against U.S. bases and personnel in the region that began early last week.

The U.S. strikes reflect the Biden administration’s determination to maintain a delicate balance. The U.S. wants to hit Iranian-backed groups suspected of targeting the U.S. as strongly as possible to deter future aggression, possibly fueled by Israel’s war against Hamas, while also working to avoid inflaming the region and provoking a wider conflict.

According to a senior U.S. military official, the precision strikes were carried out near Boukamal by two F-16 fighter jets, and they struck weapons and ammunition storage areas that were connected to the IRGC. The official said there had been Iranian-aligned militia and IRGC personnel on the base and no civilians, but the U.S. does not have any information yet on casualties or an assessment of damage. The official would not say how many munitions were launched by the F-16s.

A senior defense official said the sites were chosen because the IRGC stores the types of munitions there that were used in the strikes against U.S. bases and troops. The two officials briefed reporters after the strikes on condition of anonymity to provide details on the mission that had not yet been made public.

According to the Pentagon, there have now been at least 19 attacks on U.S. bases and personnel in Iraq and Syria since Oct. 17, including three new ones Thursday. Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said 21 U.S. personnel were injured in two of those assaults that used drones to target al-Asad Airbase in Iraq and al-Tanf Garrison in Syria.

In a statement, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the “precision self-defense strikes are a response to a series of ongoing and mostly unsuccessful attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-backed militia groups that began on October 17.”

He said President Joe Biden directed the narrowly tailored strikes “to make clear that the United States will not tolerate such attacks and will defend itself, its personnel, and its interests.” And he added that the operation was separate and distinct from Israel’s war against Hamas.

The senior defense official told reporters that the F-16 airstrikes will have a significant impact on the ability of Iranian proxy groups to continue to attack U.S. forces. Asked what groups were targeted, the official said there are several that can have different names, but the U.S. holds Tehran responsible for funding, arming, equipping and directing the proxies. The official said the airstrikes were not designed to expand the conflict in the region, but to compel Iran to direct the militia groups to cease the attacks on American bases and personnel.

The Biden administration has not accused Iran of having a direct role in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on

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Israel and has said it appears so far that Tehran was not aware of it beforehand. But the U.S. has noted that Iran has long supported Hamas and has raised concerns that Iran and its proxies could turn the conflict into a wider war.

Austin said the U.S. does not seek a broader conflict, but if Iranian proxy groups continue, the U.S. won't hesitate to take additional action to protect its forces.

According to the Pentagon, all the U.S. personnel hurt in the militant attacks received minor injuries and all returned to duty. In addition, a contractor suffered a cardiac arrest and died while seeking shelter from a possible drone attack.

The retaliatory strikes came as no surprise. Officials at the Pentagon and the White House have made it clear for the past week that the U.S. would respond, with Ryder saying again Thursday that it would be "at the time and place of our choosing."

"I think we've been crystal clear that we maintain the inherent right of defending our troops and we will take all necessary measures to protect our forces and our interests overseas," he told reporters during a Pentagon briefing earlier in the day.

Biden said Wednesday that he had warned Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, that if Tehran continues to "move against" U.S. forces in the Middle East, "we will respond."

The latest spate of strikes by the Iranian-linked groups came in the wake of a deadly explosion at a Gaza hospital, triggering protests in a number of Muslim nations. The Israeli military has relentlessly attacked Gaza in retaliation for the devastating Hamas rampage in southern Israel nearly three weeks ago, but Israel has denied responsibility for the al-Ahli hospital blast and the U.S. has said its intelligence assessment found that Tel Aviv was not to blame.

The U.S., including the Pentagon, has repeatedly said any strike response by America would be directly tied to the attacks on the troops, and not connected to the war between Israel and Hamas. Such retaliation and strikes against Iranian targets in Syria after similar attacks on U.S. bases are routine.

In March, for example, the U.S. struck sites in Syria used by groups affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard after an Iranian-linked attack killed a U.S. contractor and wounded seven other Americans in northeast Syria. American F-15 fighter jets flying out of al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar struck several locations around Deir el-Zour.

U.S. officials have routinely stressed that the American response is designed to be proportional, and is aimed at deterring strikes against U.S. personnel who are focused on the fight against the Islamic State group.

U.S. officials have not publicly tied the recent string of attacks in Syria and Iraq to the violence in Gaza, but Iranian officials have openly criticized the U.S. for providing weapons to Israel that have been used to strike Gaza, resulting in civilian death.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, has beefed up air defenses in the region to protect U.S. forces. The U.S. has said it is sending several batteries of Patriot missile systems, a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery and additional fighter jets.

The THAAD is being sent from Fort Bliss, Texas, and the Patriot batteries are from Fort Liberty in North Carolina and Fort Sill in Oklahoma. An Avenger air defense system from Fort Liberty is also being sent.

Officials have said as much as two battalions of Patriots are being deployed. A battalion can include at least three Patriot batteries, which each have six to eight launchers.

Ryder said Thursday that about 900 troops have deployed or are in the process of going to the Middle East region, including those associated with the air defense systems.

Amid massive search for mass killing suspect, Maine residents remain behind locked doors

By DAVID SHARP, ROBERT BUMSTED, HOLLY RAMER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press
LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — Shocked and fearful Maine residents kept to their homes for a second night as hundreds of heavily armed police and FBI agents searched intensely for Robert Card, an Army reservist authorities say fatally shot 18 people at a bowling alley and a bar in the worst mass killing in state history.

Much of Thursday's search focused on a property belonging to one of Card's relatives in rural Bowdoin, where trucks and vans full of armed agents from the FBI and other agencies eventually surrounded a home. Card and anyone else inside were repeatedly ordered to surrender.

"You need to come outside now with nothing in your hands. Your hands in the air," police said through a loudspeaker. In most instances when police execute warrants — even for suspects wanted for violent crimes — they move quickly to enter the home.

But hours later, after repeated announcements and a search, authorities moved off and it was still unclear whether Card had ever been at the location, state police said.

Richard Goddard, who lives on the road where the search took place, knows the Card family. Robert Card, who is four years younger, knows the terrain well, Goddard said.

"This is his stomping ground. He grew up here," he said. "He knows every ledge to hide behind, every thicket."

Several homes were being searched and every lead pursued in the hunt for Card, a 40-year-old with firearms instructor training. Authorities said he should be considered armed and dangerous and not approached.

Card is suspected of opening fire with at least one rifle at a bar and a bowling alley Wednesday in Lewiston, which is about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from Bowdoin and is Maine's second-largest city. The evening shootings killed 18 people and wounded 13 others, with three people still hospitalized in critical condition, authorities said.

The victims of the shootings include Bob Violette, 76, a retiree who was coaching a youth bowling league and was described as devoted, approachable and kind. Auburn City Councilor Leroy Walker told media outlets that his son, Joe, a manager at the bar and grille, died going after the gunman with a butcher knife. Peyton Brewer-Ross was a dedicated pipefitter at Bath Iron Works whose death leaves a gaping void in the lives of his partner, young daughter and friends, members of his union said.

Authorities have not said how many guns were used or how they were obtained.

Schools, doctor's offices and grocery stores closed and people stayed behind locked doors in cities as far as 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the scenes of the shootings. Maine's largest city, Portland, closed its public buildings, while Canada Border Services Agency issued an "armed and dangerous" alert to its officers stationed along the U.S. border.

Streets in Lewiston and surrounding communities were virtually deserted late Thursday night. The occasional truck or police patrol would drive through neighborhoods dotted with illuminated giant pumpkins and ghosts for Halloween.

Schools in Lewiston were to remain closed Friday, while those in Portland would decide in the morning whether to open. Bates College in Lewiston also cancelled classes Friday and postponed the inauguration of the school's first Black president.

April Stevens lives in the same neighborhood where one of the shootings took place. She turned on all her lights overnight and locked her doors. She knew someone killed at the bar and another person

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injured who needed surgery.

"We're praying for everyone," Stevens said through tears.

The attacks stunned a state of only 1.3 million people that has one of the country's lowest homicide rates: 29 killings in all of 2022.

Maine Gov. Janet Mills promised to do whatever was needed to find Card and to "hold whoever is responsible for this atrocity accountable ... and to seek full justice for the victims and their families."

As authorities searched for Card, details about his recent behavior emerged. Card underwent a mental health evaluation in mid-July after he began acting erratically while with his reserve regiment, a U.S. official told The Associated Press.

A bulletin sent to police across the country after the attack said Card had been committed to a mental health facility for two weeks this past summer after "hearing voices and threats to shoot up" a military base.

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. Keeping in mind the strong support for gun rights, lawmakers passed a "yellow flag" law in 2019 that would require police to seek a medical evaluation of anyone believed to be dangerous before then trying to take their guns away. However, critics charged that it was a weaker version of the tougher "red flag" laws that many other states have adopted.

A neighbor, Dave Letarte, said Card's family let them deer hunt on their property and were kind, although Letarte said he noticed Card appeared to have mental problems for a while.

"People have problems, but you don't expect them to go on the deep end like that," Letarte said. "When we saw it on the news last night, I was shocked."

A telephone number listed for Card in public records was not in service. A woman who answered a phone number for one of Card's relatives said Thursday afternoon the family was helping the FBI. She didn't give her name or additional details.

Eight murder warrants were issued for Card after authorities identified eight of the victims, police said. Ten more will likely be issued once the names of the rest of the dead are confirmed, said Maine State Police Col. William Ross.

Three of the 13 people wounded in the shootings were in critical condition and five were hospitalized but stable, Central Maine Medical Center officials said.

The attack started at Just-In-Time Recreation, where a children's bowling league was taking place, just before 7 p.m. Wednesday.

Patrick Poulin was supposed to be at the bowling center with his 15-year-old son, who is in a league that was practicing Wednesday. They stayed home, but he estimates there were probably several dozen young bowlers, ages 4 to 18, along with their parents, in the facility. Poulin's brother was there, he said, and shepherded some of the children outside when the shooting began.

"He's pretty shook up," Poulin said Thursday. "And it's just sinking in today, like, wow, I was very close to being there. And a lot of the people that got hurt, I know."

Less than 15 minutes later, numerous 911 calls started coming in from Schemengees Bar and Grille a few miles away.

The search for Card covered both land and water. The Coast Guard sent out a patrol boat Thursday morning along the Kennebec River, but after hours of searching, they found "nothing out of the ordinary," said Chief Petty Officer Ryan Smith, who is in charge of the Coast Guard's Boothbay Harbor Station.

A car believed to belong to Card had been discovered by a boat launch in the town of Lisbon near

the Androscoggin River, which connects to the Kennebec, and Card's 15-foot (4.5-meter) boat remains unaccounted for, Smith said.

In many past U.S. mass shootings, the suspect was found — whether dead or alive — within minutes. But Card was still on the loose a full day after the shootings.

Lewiston was mostly empty on an unusually warm fall day Thursday. Changeable message signs reminded people to stay behind locked doors.

At Bates College, students stayed in dorms with the blinds closed, said Diana Florence, whose son is a sophomore. She has a daughter who is a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which was locked down twice last month for a shooting and a man with a gun.

"I could not believe it — that this is happening again. It's happening to my son after it just happened to my daughter," she said in a phone interview Thursday.

The shootings mark the 36th mass killing in the United States this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

Many Americans say their household expenses are outpacing earnings this year, AP-NORC poll shows

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — About 2 in 3 Americans say their household expenses have risen over the last year, but only about 1 in 4 say their income has increased in the same period, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

As household expenses outpace earnings, many are expressing concern about their financial futures. What's more, for most Americans, household debt has either risen in the last year or has not gone away.

Steve Shapiro, 61, who works as an audio engineer in Pittsburgh, said he'd been spending about \$100 a week on groceries prior to this past year, but that he's now shelling out closer to \$200.

"My income has stayed the same," he said. "The economy is good on paper, but I'm not doing great."

About 8 in 10 Americans say their overall household debt is higher or about the same as it was a year ago. About half say they currently have credit card debt, 4 in 10 are dealing with auto loans, and about 1 in 4 have medical debt. Just 15% say their household savings have increased over the last year.

Tracy Gonzales, 36, who works as a sub-contractor in construction in San Antonio, Texas, has several thousand dollars of medical debt from an emergency room visit for what she thought was a bad headache but turned out to be a tooth infection.

"They'll treat you, but the bills are crazy," she said. Gonzales said she's tried to avoid seeking medical treatment because of the costs.

Relatively few Americans say they're very or extremely confident that they could pay an unexpected medical expense (26%) or have enough money for retirement (18%). Only about one-third are extremely or very confident their current financial situation will allow them to keep up with expenses, though an additional 42% say they're somewhat confident.

"I've been looking forward to retirement my entire life. Recently I realized it's just not going to happen," said Shapiro, of Pittsburgh, adding that his wife's \$30,000 or so of student debt is a financial factor for his household. The couple had hoped to sell their house and move this past year, but decided instead to hold on to their mortgage rate of 3.4%, rather than facing a higher rate. (The current average long-term mortgage rate reached 7.79% this month.)

About 3 in 10 Americans say they've foregone a major purchase because of higher interest rates in

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the last year. Nearly 1 in 4 U.S. adults have student debt, with the pandemic-era payment pause on federal loans ending this month, contributing to the crunch.

Will Clouse, 77, of Westlake, Ohio, said inflation is his biggest concern, as he lives on a fixed income in his retirement.

"A box of movie candy — Sno-Caps — that used to cost 99 cents is now a dollar fifty at the grocery store," he said. "That's a 50% increase in price. Somebody's taking advantage of somebody."

Americans are generally split on whether the Republicans (29%) or the Democrats (25%) are better suited to handle the issue of inflation in the U.S. Three in 10 say they trust neither party to address it.

Gerri Putnam, 85, of Thomson, Georgia, said she's been following the ongoing auto workers strikes with sympathy for the workers' asks.

"I don't think it's out of line, what they're asking for, when you see what CEOs are making," she said. "I think things have gotten out of control. When you can walk into a store and see the next day, across the board, a dollar increase — that's a little strange. I understand supply and demand, the cost of shipping, et cetera. But it seems to me everyone's looking at their bottom lines."

Putnam also said she sees her six children struggling financially more than her generation did.

"They all have jobs and have never been without them," she said. "They're achievers, but I think at least two or three of them will never be able to buy a home."

A slight majority of all Americans polled (54%) describe their household's financial situation as good, which is about the same as it's been for the last year but down from 63% in March of 2022. Older Americans are much more confident in their current finances than younger Americans. Just 39% of 18- to 29-year-olds describe their household finances as good, compared to a majority (58%) of those who are 30 and older. People with higher levels of education or higher household incomes are more likely than Americans overall to evaluate their finances as solid.

About three-quarters of Americans describe the nation's economy as poor, which is in line with measurements from early last year.

Among those who are retired, 3 in 10 say they are highly confident that there's enough saved for their retirement, about 4 in 10 are somewhat confident, and 31% are not very confident or not confident at all.

Clouse, of Ohio, said the majority of his money had gone towards caring for his wife for the past several years, as she'd been ill. When she passed away this past year, his household lost her Social Security and pension contributions. He sees the political turmoil between Republicans and Democrats as harming the economy, but remains most frustrated by higher prices at the supermarket.

"Grocery products going up by 20, 30, 40%. There's no call for that, other than the grocery market people making more money," he said. "They're ripping off the consumer. I wish Mr. Biden would do something about that."

About 4 in 10 Americans (38%) approve of how Biden is handling the presidency, while 61% disapprove. His overall approval numbers have remained at a steady low for the last several years. Most Americans generally disapprove of how he's handling the federal budget (68% disapprove), the economy (67%), and student debt (58%).

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

Israel-Hamas war upends years of conventional wisdom. Leaders give few details on what comes next

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Just three weeks into the deadliest war between Israel and Hamas, it already is clear that the bloodshed has flipped long-standing assumptions in Israel and the region upside down.

Israel's military and intelligence services were exposed as incompetent and ill-prepared. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decades of attempts to sideline the Palestinians and U.S. efforts to manage the conflict, rather than solve it, badly backfired.

Israelis' sense of personal security was shattered. The international community's traditional approach of urging Israel to withdraw from occupied land in exchange for peace now appears out of the question.

"Many paradigms have collapsed with this murderous attack by Hamas," said Nadav Eyal, a commentator for Israel's Yediot Ahronot newspaper.

Here is a look at how the key players got it wrong.

ISRAELI SECURITY

Over the decades, Israel's military and security agencies built a reputation of near invincibility through sophisticated intelligence-gathering, daring covert operations and deterrence.

Israeli intelligence units kept tabs on Palestinians with sensitive surveillance tools. Travelers in and out of Gaza were subject to deep background checks and interrogations that together with a network of informants gave Israel a massive database.

This was backed by a high-tech military equipped with intelligence so precise a drone could kill a wanted militant in his bed, while leaving the rest of his house intact. The border was fortified with tanks, army bases, a massive separation barrier fitted with cameras and sensors, and an underground wall seen as impenetrable.

Still, on Oct. 7, militants blew through the barrier undetected and moved into Israeli towns without resistance. It took hours for Israeli forces to respond, allowing the militants to kill over 1,400 people, the vast majority civilians, and capture over 200 hostages. It would be days before Israeli security forces regained control, and some two dozen border communities remain evacuated.

The heads of Israel's Shin Bet internal security service and Israeli military intelligence have admitted failure and taken responsibility.

They remain on the job while Israel wages its war. But they could be among a long line of expected resignations and firings when the dust settles.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

Netanyahu has survived his lengthy political career by persuading the nation that he is best qualified to protect them and treating the Palestinians as a side issue.

He has repeatedly resisted attempts to restart peace talks and rejected calls for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Instead, he sought to manage the conflict with a combination of economic incentives to the Palestinians, backed by occasional military operations against Palestinian militants, while expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and maintaining a stifling blockade of Gaza.

Netanyahu exploited the divisions between the rival Palestinian governments in the West Bank and Gaza — a policy that often served to strengthen Hamas at the expense of the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority. This undermined Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and provided an excuse for not pursuing peace talks.

While trying to sideline the Palestinians, he courted wealthy Gulf Arab countries with the belief that

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this would force the Palestinians to accept an arrangement far short of independence. His message was that Israel could be a strong country and citizens could enjoy a Western-style lifestyle while containing the Palestinians with a powerful army and separation walls.

This world view was upended by the Hamas attack, and Netanyahu's lengthy political career now appears in jeopardy as his government faces widespread domestic outrage. Netanyahu, who loves to boast of his country's military and economic successes, will be remembered as the man in charge during the worst attack in Israeli history.

Netanyahu this week acknowledged that he, like many others, "will have to provide answers" to the public — but only after the war is over.

"I simply cannot imagine an Israeli prime minister surviving such a colossal failure — not only in the history of the Zionist movement and the state of Israel, but a colossal failure in Jewish history," said Eyal.

TWO-STATE SOLUTION

Since brokering interim peace accords three decades ago, the United States has pursued two sometimes contradictory goals.

It has repeatedly called for the establishment of a Palestinian state. But with the exception of a handful of short-lived peace plans, it has done little to promote this goal, focusing instead on conflict management, preventing tensions from boiling over and leaving a fragile status quo in place.

In many ways, the latest war is an outcome of this failed approach. It showed that the status quo was not sustainable and had in fact undermined chances of a two-state solution, in part by allowing Israel to expand settlements and deepen its 56-year-old open-ended military occupation.

Israelis, meanwhile, overwhelmingly see their 2005 withdrawal from Gaza as a failure that they believe led to the rise of Hamas and the Oct. 7 disaster.

Mazal Mualem, a commentator for Yediot Ahronot, says there will be no appetite for territorial compromise with the Palestinians after the war. "No one will evacuate even one piece of land in the next generation," she said.

Not that territorial compromise was ever an option. Netanyahu, who has governed with the exception of one year since 2009, never expressed willingness to yield occupied land to the Palestinians.

But Eyal sees increased militarization and little appetite for diplomatic initiatives. "It's almost impossible to take risks," he said.

Israeli historian Tom Segev, who has documented the uprooting of Palestinian communities during the war surrounding Israel's creation, said he could not rule out a mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza.

The Oct. 7 attacks played into deep-seated Israeli fears that the Palestinians are not prepared to accept Israel's existence. While Segev said it's too early to say which way the war is headed, the sentiments are clear.

"People are saying, 'Expel them from Gaza,'" he said.

THE GAZA STRIP

Israel withdrew its settlers and soldiers from Gaza in 2005 after concluding the continued occupation of the densely populated Palestinian territory was untenable. A close adviser to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon famously said the withdrawal was also intended to pack peace efforts "in formaldehyde" and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state with the West Bank at its core.

The withdrawal left a vacuum that Hamas quickly filled. The Islamic militant group won Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, and the following year violently seized control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority.

Israel imposed a blockade, limiting movement in and out of Gaza in hopes of weakening Hamas. It

waged a series of wars and smaller battles with Hamas — a policy known as “mowing the lawn” that was meant to keep the group in check.

In perhaps its biggest miscalculation, Israel concluded that Hamas had morphed from an armed group committed to Israel’s destruction to a more pragmatic organization focused on governing and survival. The Oct. 7 attack proved that Hamas’ military wing was more powerful, better armed and more organized than Israel assumed.

Israel “fell asleep at the wheel,” wrote Amos Harel, a commentator on military affairs for the Haaretz daily. “Israeli society repressed the ramifications of the Palestinian conflict, persuaded itself that it could go on rolling the problem forward without looking for a solution, and sought lucrative real estate and cheap vacations abroad,” he said.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas, but this will not be an easy task against a group with significant public support and an entrenched military presence in Gaza. And even if Israel prevails, it has not presented a clear exit strategy.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has said Israel does not want to be responsible for civilian affairs — indicating that Israel does not want to re-occupy Gaza. He has also called for a “new security regime” without elaborating.

President Joe Biden said Wednesday that “when this crisis is over, there has to be a vision of what comes next.”

“And in our view, it has to be a two-state solution,” he added — repeating the same formula that has been the basis of 30 years of failure.

Former Premier Li Keqiang, China’s top economic official for a decade, dies at 68

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA and KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Former Premier Li Keqiang, China’s top economic official for a decade, died Friday of a heart attack. He was 68.

Li was China’s No. 2 leader from 2013-23 and an advocate for private business but was left with little authority after President Xi Jinping made himself the most powerful Chinese leader in decades and tightened control over the economy and society.

CCTV said Li had been resting in Shanghai recently and had a heart attack on Thursday. He died at 12:10 a.m. Friday.

Li, an English-speaking economist, was considered a contender to succeed then-Communist Party leader Hu Jintao in 2013 but was passed over in favor of Xi. Reversing the Hu era’s consensus-oriented leadership, Xi centralized powers in his own hands, leaving Li and others on the party’s ruling seven-member Standing Committee with little influence.

As the top economic official, Li promised to improve conditions for entrepreneurs who generate jobs and wealth. But the ruling party under Xi increased the dominance of state industry and tightened control over tech and other industries. Foreign companies said they felt unwelcome after Xi and other leaders called for economic self-reliance, expanded an anti-spying law and raided offices of consulting firms.

Li was dropped from the Standing Committee at a party congress in October 2022 and left office in March 2023, despite being two years below the informal retirement age of 70.

The same day, Xi awarded himself a third five-year term as party leader, discarding a tradition under which his predecessors stepped down after 10 years. Xi filled the top party ranks with loyalists, ending the era of consensus leadership and possibly making himself leader for life. The No. 2 slot was filled by

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Li Qiang, the party secretary for Shanghai, who lacked Li Keqiang's national-level experience and later told reporters that his job was to do whatever Xi decided.

Li Keqiang, a former vice premier, took office in 2013 as the ruling party faced growing warnings the construction and export booms that propelled the previous decade's double-digit growth were running out of steam.

Government advisers argued Beijing had to promote growth based on domestic consumption and service industries. That would require opening more state-dominated industries and forcing state banks to lend more to entrepreneurs.

Li's predecessor, Wen Jiabao, apologized at a March 2012 news conference for not moving fast enough.

In a 2010 speech, Li acknowledged challenges, including too much reliance on investment to drive economic growth, weak consumer spending and a wealth gap between prosperous eastern cities and the poor countryside, home to 800 million people.

Li was seen as a possible candidate to revive then-supreme leader Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented reforms of the 1980s that started China's boom. But he was known for an easygoing style, not the hard-driving impatience of Zhu Rongji, the premier in 1998-2003 who ignited the construction and export booms by forcing painful reforms that cut millions of jobs from state industry.

Li was believed to have supported the "China 2030" report released by the World Bank and a Cabinet research body in 2012 that called for dramatic changes to reduce the dominance of state industry and rely more on market forces.

The Unirule Institute, an independent think tank in Beijing, said state industry was so inefficient that its return on equity — a broad measure of profitability — was negative 6%. Unirule later was shut down by Xi as part of a campaign to tighten control over information.

In his first annual policy address, Li in 2014 was praised for promising to pursue market-oriented reform, cut government waste, clean up air pollution and root out pervasive corruption that was undermining public faith in the ruling party.

Xi took away Li's decision-making powers on economic matters by appointing himself to head a party commission overseeing reform.

Xi's government pursued the anti-graft drive, imprisoning hundreds of officials including former Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang. But party leaders were ambivalent about the economy. They failed to follow through on a promised list of dozens of market-oriented changes. They increased the dominance of state-owned banks and energy and other companies.

Xi's government opened some industries including electric car manufacturing to private and foreign competition. But it built up state-owned "national champions" and encouraged Chinese companies to use domestic suppliers instead of imports.

Borrowing by companies, households and local governments increased, pushing up debt that economists warned already was dangerously high.

Beijing finally tightened controls in 2020 on debt in real estate, one of China's biggest industries. That triggered a collapse in economic growth, which fell to 3% in 2022, the second-lowest in three decades.

Li had shown his political skills but little zeal for reform as governor and later party secretary of populous Henan province in central China in 1998-2004.

He earned the nickname "Three Fires Li" and a reputation for bad luck after three fatal fires struck Henan while he was there. A Christmas Day blaze at a nightclub in 2000 killed 309 people. Other officials were punished but Li emerged unscathed.

Meanwhile, provincial leaders were trying to suppress information about the spread of AIDS by a

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blood-buying industry in Henan.

Li's reputation for bad luck held as China suffered a series of deadly disasters during his term as premier.

Days after he took office, a landslide on March 29, 2013, killed at least 66 miners at a gold mine in Tibet and left 17 others missing and presumed dead.

In the eastern port of Tianjin, a warehouse holding chemicals exploded Aug. 12, 2015, killing at least 116 people.

A China Eastern Airlines jetliner plunged into the ground on March 22, 2022, killing all 132 people aboard. Authorities have yet to announce a possible cause.

Li oversaw China's response to COVID-19, the first cases of which were detected in the central city of Wuhan. Then-unprecedented controls were imposed, shutting down most international travel for three years and access to major cities for weeks at a time.

In one of his last major official acts, Li led a Cabinet meeting that announced Nov. 11, 2022, that anti-virus controls would be relaxed to reduce disruption after the economy shrank by 2.6% in the second quarter of the year. Two weeks later, the government announced most travel and business restrictions would end the following month.

Li was born July 1, 1955, in the eastern province of Anhui and by 1976 was ruling party secretary of a commune there.

Studying law at Peking University, he was the campus secretary of the ruling party's Communist Youth League, an organization that launched the political careers of former party leaders Hu Jintao and Hu Yaobang. He was a member of the League's Standing Committee, a sign he was seen as future leadership material.

After serving in a series of party posts, Li received his Ph.D. in economics in 1994 from Peking University.

Following Henan, Li served as party secretary for Liaoning province in the northeast as part of a rotation through provincial posts and at ministries in Beijing that was meant to prepare leaders. He joined the party's Central Committee in 2007.

Li is survived by his wife, Cheng Hong, a professor of English at the Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing. The couple has a daughter, according to earlier state media reports.

Abortion restrictions in Russia spark outrage as the country takes a conservative turn

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Despite its last-minute scheduling, the meeting at a bookstore in Russia's westernmost city of Kaliningrad still drew about 60 people, with many outraged by a lawmaker's efforts to ban abortions in local private clinics.

The weeknight turnout surprised and heartened Dasha Yakovleva, one of the organizers, amid recent crackdowns on political activism under President Vladimir Putin.

"Right now, there is no room for political action in Russia. The only place left is our kitchens," Yakovleva, co-founder of the Feminist Community women's group, told The Associated Press. "And here, it was a public place, well-known in Kaliningrad, and everyone spoke out openly about how they see this measure, why they think it's unjustified, inappropriate."

Although abortion is still legal and widely available in Russia, recent attempts to restrict it have touched a nerve across the increasingly conservative country. Activists are urging supporters to make

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official complaints, circulating online petitions and even staging small protests.

A 'GRADUAL EROSION' OF ABORTION ACCESS

While only a proposal for now in Kaliningrad, private clinics elsewhere have begun to stop providing abortions. Nationwide, the Health Ministry has drawn up talking points for doctors to discourage women from terminating their pregnancies, and new regulations soon will make many emergency contraceptives virtually unavailable and drive up the cost of others.

"It's clear that there is a gradual erosion of abortion access and rights in Russia, and this is similar to what has taken place in the U.S.," said Michele Rivkin-Fish, an anthropologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Last year's U.S. Supreme Court decision rescinding a five-decade-old right to abortion has reshaped American abortion policy, shifting power to states. About half of U.S. states have adopted bans or major restrictions, although not all are being enforced due to legal challenges.

In the Soviet Union, abortion laws meant that some women had the procedure multiple times due to difficulties in obtaining contraceptives.

After the USSR's collapse, government and health experts promoted family planning and birth control, sending abortion rates falling. At the same time, laws allowed women to terminate a pregnancy up until 12 weeks without any conditions; and until 22 weeks for many "social reasons," like divorce, unemployment or income.

That changed under Putin, who has forged a powerful alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church, promoting "traditional values" and seeking to boost population growth. Health Minister Mikhail Murashko has condemned women for prioritizing education and career over childbearing.

WAITING PERIODS, CONSULTS, APPROVAL BY A PRIEST

Over the decades, the number of abortions in Russia fell from 4.1 million in 1990 to 517,000 in 2021.

Only in instances of rape is an abortion legally allowed between 12 and 22 weeks. Some regions hold "Days of Silence," when public clinics don't provide them. Women must wait 48 hours or even a week — depending on what stage of pregnancy — between their first appointment and the abortion, in case they reconsider. They also are offered psychological consultations designed to discourage abortions, according to state-issued guidelines reviewed by AP.

Health authorities have introduced an online "motivational questionnaire" outlining state support if women continue the pregnancy, according to a state clinic gynecologist who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

She said the waiting periods were psychologically hard for some of her patients. "During that week (of waiting), she might start getting nauseous and experience other symptoms of pregnancy," she added. "They don't understand the point."

State clinics in one region referred women to a priest before getting an abortion. Authorities maintained the consultation was voluntary, but some women told the media they had to get a priest to sign off to get an abortion.

RESTRICTING ABORTION PILLS

The anti-abortion push comes as Russian women appear to be in no rush to have more children amid the war in Ukraine and economic uncertainty. Sales of abortion pills in 2022 were up 60%, according to Nikolay Beshpalov, development director of the RNC Pharma analytical company. They fell 35% this year, still higher than pre-2022 levels. Sales of contraceptive medications also have been rising in 2022-23, he said.

A recent Health Ministry decree restricted circulation of abortion pills, used to terminate pregnancies in the first trimester. The decree puts mifepristone and misoprostol, used in the pills, on a registry of

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controlled substances requiring strict record-keeping and storage.

For hospitals and clinics, where the pills are usually dispensed, the move will add more paperwork but not much else, said Dr. Yekaterina Hivrich, head of gynecology at Lahta Clinic, a private clinic in St. Petersburg.

But it will affect the availability of emergency contraceptives, sometimes known as morning-after pills, which are taken within days of unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy. Three out of six brands available in Russia contain mifepristone in a lower dose, meaning they'll be severely restricted once the decree takes effect Sept. 1, 2024.

They will require a special prescription, and not all pharmacies will stock them, said Irina Fainman, an activist in the northern region of Karelia, adding that getting a prescription takes time that women might not have when they need the pills.

The Health Ministry did not respond to questions on whether it will exclude morning-after pills in the decree. Officials earlier promised it won't affect those pills, but some pharmacies already list those with mifepristone as available only under strict prescription conditions.

After the restrictions were announced, Fainman said she and other activists stocked up on the pills to distribute in case of shortages.

Sales of emergency contraceptives soared 71% through August 2023, over the same period last year, according to Bespalov. Those containing mifepristone account for about half the market. New measures likely will increase the cost of unrestricted medications and possibly lead to short-term shortages.

ABORTION BANS IN PRIVATE CLINICS

Senior lawmaker Pyotr Tolstoy said that by spring, lawmakers would strive to adopt a nationwide ban on abortion in private clinics, where about 20% took place in recent years, according to state statistics.

Conservative lawmakers failed to enact such a ban before, but the Health Ministry now says it is ready to consider it.

To Irina Volynets, an abortion opponent and children's rights ombudswoman in the Tatarstan region, "it gives hope that this procedure will be taken out of private clinics" eventually. She also wants increased state support for women with children as an incentive for boosting birthrates.

Regional authorities have tried to get private clinics to stop offering abortions, with varying success. Kaliningrad is mulling a region-wide ban. In Tatarstan, about a third of all private clinics no longer provide them, officials said. In the Chelyabinsk region in the Urals, three clinics agreed to halt them.

"It's important to understand that the pressure on women will be growing" even in the absence of a total ban, said Kaliningrad psychotherapist and activist Lina Zharin, who helped organize the recent bookstore meeting. An online petition against the ban in Kaliningrad has gathered nearly 27,000 signatures.

PRESSURED TO GIVE BIRTH

In seven other regions, the Health Ministry is using another pilot project: having gynecologists try to get women to reconsider having an abortion.

A document obtained by AP and cited by other media outlines language doctors are told to use, including saying pregnancy is "a beautiful and natural condition for every woman," while an abortion is "harmful to your health and a risk of developing complications."

Natalya Moskvitina, founder of Women For Life, which aids women who decide against abortion, said she helped develop the instructions and is introducing similar scripts for doctors in several regions.

Moskvitina made headlines in August after the region of Mordovia adopted a law she helped draft to ban "encouraging" abortions. At least one other region is considering a similar ban. Her program, which instructs doctors to congratulate women on being pregnant and gives baby-themed presents and

information on support resources, has driven the abortion rate down 40% in Mordovia, she and local officials said.

For women with doubts about abortion, such conversations might indeed help them reach a decision but for others, they could be deeply uncomfortable.

Olga Mindolina was contemplating an abortion in 2020, traumatized by an earlier, difficult pregnancy. But when a doctor in a state clinic in the western city of Voronezh asked her what she wanted to do, she said she didn't know — and was told, "In this case, you should give birth."

A clinic psychologist told her that women sometimes regret abortion, advising her to talk to her husband. A lawyer also told her about state benefits she could get if she gave birth. Mindolina decided to continue the pregnancy.

Anastasia, a Muscovite who sought an abortion in 2020, said it "wasn't very pleasant" when a doctor urged her to change her mind.

"I simply don't want any children," she told AP, asking that her last name not be used for fear of reprisals.

Dr. Lyubov Yeroveyeva, a gynecologist who spearheaded family planning projects in the 1990s, believes the key is preventing unwanted pregnancies with education about birth control and making contraceptives widely available.

Instead of talking a woman out of an abortion, authorities should "do everything so she doesn't have to seek one," she said.

Survivors of deadly Hurricane Otis grow desperate for food and aid amid slow government response

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — Survivors of the Category 5 storm that killed at least 27 people and devastated Mexico's resort city of Acapulco are getting desperate amid a slow government response, worrying that the focus will remain on repairing infrastructure for the city's economic engine of tourism instead of helping the neediest.

Despite hopes of incoming aid by many in Acapulco, the coastal city of 1 million once known for its beachside glamour was still in a state of complete chaos by the end of Thursday.

Entire walls of beachside high rises were ripped clean off. Hundreds of thousands of homes remained without electricity. People lacking even the most basic resources were emptying stores out of everything from food to toilet paper.

Miguel Angel Fong, president of the Mexican Hotel Association told the AP that 80% of the city's hotels were damaged.

Dozens of desperate tourists, tired of waiting for buses out of the city, walked along the narrow sidewalks through the long car tunnel under the mountain dividing the port from the rest of the city. They pulled suitcases and some carried children.

The Pacific storm had strengthened with shocking swiftness before slamming into the coast early Wednesday, and the Mexican government deployed around 10,000 troops to deal with the aftermath. But equipment to move tons of mud and fallen trees from the streets was slow in arriving.

Flora Contreras Santos, a housewife from a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, sought help in looking for a 3-year-old girl who was swept away from her mother in a mudslide. She went from soldier to soldier trying to interest any one of them in the tragedy that occurred on her street at the height of the storm.

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"The mountain came down on them. The mud took her from the mother's arms," Contreras said. "We need help, the mother is in bad shape and we can't find the girl."

Even as army bulldozers began clearing knee-deep mud from Acapulco's main boulevards, Contreras' pleas did not appear to move any of the soldiers to action.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador went by road Wednesday after the hurricane hit the iconic city on Mexico's Pacific coast. At least four people remained missing. It was unclear if the 3-year-old girl was counted among them.

The president said Otis had toppled every power-line pole in the zone where it hit on Wednesday, leaving much of the city without electricity. Otis turned from mild to monster in record time, and scientists were struggling to figure out how — and why they didn't see it coming.

Acapulco's municipal water system was down and around half a million homes lost power. López Obrador said that restoring power was a top priority, but by Thursday evening there were still 250,000 homes and businesses with no electricity.

Brown floodwaters extended for miles in some areas. Many residents were taking basic items from stores to survive. Others left with pricier goods, in widespread rampages through the area's stores.

As cell phone signals began to return to some parts of the city, residents organized themselves with the help of friends and relatives living in other parts of Mexico and the United States. They joined together by neighborhood using online messaging platforms like WhatsApp. On Thursday there were some 1,000 people in 40 chats, which only continued to grow in number throughout the day.

They shared photos of flooded neighborhoods and tips for finding cell phone signals, while asking for information about loved ones that they had not heard from. Others share photos of papers full of names of survivors taking refuge in shelters, some with notes reading "Lupita, we are okay. I will call you when we have signal."

Juan Pablo López, 26, had been talking to his wife when their call was cut off early Wednesday as Otis made landfall. She had returned to Acapulco to be with her family and give birth to their son a month ago. Lopez was at home in Cancun.

"I'm very worried for my newborn son," he said.

With no information coming in Wednesday, he created an online chat with friends and family from Guerrero state, where Acapulco is the largest city. He also invited friends who had emigrated to the U.S. and asked them to add their local contacts.

"We started to cross-reference information, to share what we found, almost like a WhatsApp newspaper," Lopez said.

By Thursday afternoon, however, he still had not heard word about his wife and son.

The surreal was commonplace in the storm-wrecked city, as residents emptied the area's stores of goods.

Ricardo Díaz, a self-employed laborer, stood Thursday with two fistfuls of live chickens he clutched by their legs. A chicken company had given him the chickens, Díaz said. A woman nearby pushed an office chair loaded with artificial Christmas wreaths and toilet paper through the streets. Díaz looked on in dismay as people carried armfuls of goods out of a damaged store.

"They're going to close these stores and that hurts Acapulco," Díaz said.

Acapulco's police chief Luis Enrique Vázquez Rodríguez said Thursday they could do little to stop people from emptying local stores or speed up traffic caused by mud and fallen trees, which has left much of the city paralyzed.

"We don't have the capacity to stop looting because there's so many people," he said. "This is a completely extraordinary situation."

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Some residents said it could take a year for Acapulco to recover; with no power, gasoline, little cell coverage and hotels wrecked by the hurricane, the task seemed impossible.

Marketing expert Antonio Esparza was one of the few optimistic ones, even as he sat trapped in the snarled traffic of the aftermath.

"This is going to improve Acapulco, because it will force the government to pay attention," he said.

Large stores that had their merchandise taken were not restocking their shelves, meaning finding goods could become harder. But street-produce vendors were doing a brisk business in some neighborhoods as residents sought fresh food.

Hundreds of trucks from the government electricity company arrived in Acapulco on Wednesday but downed electricity lines were in feet of mud and water.

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, though López Obrador said the plan was to establish an air bridge to move in resources.

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 away many international tourists.

China's top diplomat visits Washington to help stabilize ties and perhaps set up a Biden-Xi summit

By DIDI TANG and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — China's top diplomat is meeting high-level U.S. officials, possibly including President Joe Biden, on a highly watched visit to Washington that could help stabilize U.S.-China ties by facilitating a summit between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, met Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday afternoon, shortly after he landed for the three-day visit and quickly raised hopes that the relationship can be steadied.

Before going into their closed-door meeting, Wang said China would seek consensus and cooperation to "push the relationship as soon as possible back to the track of healthy, stable and sustainable development."

Before the meeting, U.S. officials said they would press Wang on the importance of China stepping up its role on the world stage if it wants to be considered a responsible major international player. The U.S. has been disappointed with China over its support for Russia in the war against Ukraine and its relative silence on the Israel-Hamas war.

"China should use whatever ability it has as an influential power to urge calm" in the Middle East, said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller. "We know China has relationships with a number of countries in the region, and we would urge them to use those relationships, the lines of communication they have, to urge calm and stability."

U.S. officials believe the Chinese have considerable leverage with Iran, which is a major backer of Hamas.

In a readout after the meeting, the State Department said the two men addressed "areas of difference" and "areas of cooperation," while Blinken "reiterated that the United States will continue to stand

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up for our interests and values and those of our allies and partners.”

China’s Foreign Ministry said, “The two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on China-U.S. relations and issues of common concern in a constructive atmosphere.”

Wang is scheduled to meet again Friday with Blinken as well as national security adviser Jake Sullivan. They are expected to urge China to play a constructive role in both the Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine wars.

It’s not yet clear if Wang will meet with Biden. The diplomatic practice of reciprocity suggests it is likely, since Blinken met with Xi when he visited China in June.

Neither side has confirmed whether Biden and Xi will meet next month on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders gathering in San Francisco. But Wang’s trip indicates the likelihood is extremely high, said Scott Kennedy, senior adviser and trustee chair in Chinese business and economics at the Washington-based think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“His visit is most likely about nailing down the agenda and negotiating potential deliverables,” Kennedy said.

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.

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.

Republicans hope the chaos of recent weeks will become a distant memory in next year’s elections

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — “Embarrassing,” “chaotic” and “irresponsible.” And those were just the words that House Republicans used to describe the past three weeks as they removed one speaker from office and splintered over three successive nominees before finally landing on Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La.

Now they hope voters won’t hold the GOP’s infighting against them as they seek to hold onto their exceedingly narrow House majority in next year’s election.

Republicans already had a tough task on their hands. They can afford to lose only four seats to maintain the majority, and 18 of their incumbents are running in districts won by President Joe Biden in 2020. A Supreme Court decision siding with Black voters in a redistricting lawsuit could give Democrats a pick-up opportunity in Alabama. And Republican Rep. George Santos’ extensive legal troubles will make it harder for the GOP to keep that Long Island-based district in the Republican column.

Some Republicans worry the infighting that essentially shuttered the House for three weeks will serve as a further headwind against Republicans in their bid to stay in the majority. Some already sounded resigned to serving in the minority during the past week’s ups and downs in finding a new speaker, while others voiced hopes the passage of time will make the past three weeks a distant memory.

“Look, it’s not going to be great for ‘24. I’m not optimistic about keeping a majority because of the eight individuals’ actions,” said Rep. Max Miller, a first-term Republican from Ohio. “But I just continue to stress that 4% of the conference did this. It’s not indicative of the Republican Party.”

Miller was referring to the eight Republicans who voted with Democrats to oust McCarthy as speaker after just nine months on the job. Republicans also look to put some of the onus for the past three

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weeks on Democrats.

"I think it has damaged the party, but we have to remember who plunged us into chaos. It was eight right-wing, fringe Republicans and every single Democrat," said Rep. Nicole Malliotakis, R-N.Y. "They worked with the very people they tell us to run from to take out a speaker that 97% of our conference supported without zero plan on what to do next."

Rep. Suzan DelBene, the chair of the campaign arm for House Democrats, said candidates in key swing districts will contrast the fractures among House Republicans with a Democratic focus on the need to govern and meet constituents' priorities.

"The No. 1 thing you hear from folks is why don't folks focus on governing? Why is there so much infighting? And this isn't fighting between parties. This is Republicans fighting with Republicans, bullying Republicans, even threatening each other. That's what the American people are seeing right now," DelBene said.

One Republican strategist harkened back to similar turmoil a decade ago to argue that GOP candidates will probably emerge unscathed from the recent House chaos.

In 2013, House Republicans engineered a showdown over the Affordable Care Act, insisting that a spending bill to avoid a shutdown include measures to roll back key parts of then-President Barack Obama's health care law.

The Republican-controlled House passed two spending bills with amendments aimed at crippling the law. The Senate, which was controlled by Democrats, rejected both measures. That left House Republicans with the choice of funding the government or shutting it down over their opposition to the healthcare law, and they chose the latter.

"I remember working in the House in the 2013 shutdown, and part of why we did that was we thought our members needed to touch the hot stove and realize they were going to get burnt," said Doug Heye, who worked under then-House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va. "And the reality is nothing happened. There was no political price for any of those members to pay."

The following year, House Republicans gained 13 seats in the election, giving them their largest majority since President Herbert Hoover's administration. And they gained nine Senate seats, retaking the majority.

That was a midterm election, in which members of the party not in control of the White House tend to perform better. Next year, the nominees for the presidency will be the center of attention for voters, with a likely rematch between Biden and former President Donald Trump. How the eventual nominees fare will go a long way in determining congressional races, as Americans increasingly vote along party lines.

"The only saving grace is that Biden's economic numbers are in the toilet," said Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., who represents one of the more evenly divided districts in the country. "In the end, I think Americans will be more worried about the state of the country, the economy, the foreign policy stuff. But this surely doesn't help us."

Rep. Marc Molinaro, a first-term Republican from New York, said he hopes voters will judge the Republican candidates on the totality of their work.

"The last three weeks were among the most distressing and disappointing, not only for me but among the most distressing and disappointing in the history of that chamber," he said, nodding toward the House side of the Capitol. "We should be judged by not only those three weeks but how we now rebuild moving forward."

Rep. David Schweikert, who represents an Arizona district Biden carried in 2020, said he was going on radio shows and having conversations in Costco to get the message out that the House's dysfunction

was to be blamed on a handful of Republicans acting out of emotion rather than ideology.

"You don't hide from it, you say, 'Look, this is embarrassing,'" he said.

He said the debacle may hurt "generic Republicans" trying to win in swing districts, but also contended that the election is still a far way off and argued it would be a distant memory by next November.

The fractures in the Republican Party that dogged McCarthy during his short tenure aren't going away just because the House has a new speaker. In just a few weeks, House Republicans are going to have to find a way to fund the government at levels that the White House and a Democratic-led Senate will accept, or risk a government shutdown. Further turmoil will only feed into the Democratic argument that House Republicans are incapable of governing.

"Going into the ballot booth in November, I don't think many people are going to remember anything that happened in October of 2023," said Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D. "But if this a foretaste of the feast to come, then we're in massive trouble."

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

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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.

"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.

Twitter takeover: 1 year later, X struggles with misinformation, advertising and usage decline

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — One year ago, billionaire and new owner Elon Musk walked into Twitter's San Francisco headquarters with a white bathroom sink and a grin, fired its CEO and other top executives

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and began transforming the social media platform into what is now known as X.

X looks and feels something like Twitter, but the more time you spend on it the clearer it becomes that it's merely an approximation. Musk has dismantled core features of what made Twitter, Twitter — its name and blue bird logo, its verification system, its Trust and Safety advisory group. Not to mention content moderation and hate speech enforcement.

He also fired, laid off or lost the majority of its workforce — engineers who keep the site running, moderators who keep it from being overrun with hate, executives in charge of making rules and enforcing them.

The result, long-term Twitter watchers say, has been the end of the platform's role as an imperfect but useful place to find out what's going on in the world. What X will become, and whether Musk can achieve his ambition of turning it into an "everything app" that everyone uses, remains as unclear as it was a year ago.

"Musk hasn't managed to make a single meaningful improvement to the platform and is no closer to his vision of an 'everything app,' than he was a year ago," said Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg. "Instead, X has driven away users, advertisers, and now it has lost its primary value proposition in the social media world: Being a central hub for news."

As one of the platform's most popular and prolific users even before he bought the company, Musk had a unique experience on Twitter that is markedly different from how regular users experience it. But many of the changes he's introduced to X has been based on his own impressions of the site — in fact, he even polled his millions of followers for advice on how to run it (they said he should step down).

"Musk's treatment of the platform as a technology company that he could remake and his vision rather than a social network fueled by people and ad dollars has been the single largest cause of the demise of Twitter," Enberg said.

The blue checkmarks that once signified that the person or institution behind an account was who they said they are — a celebrity, athlete, journalist from global or local publication, a nonprofit agency — now merely shows that someone pays \$8 a month for a subscription service that boosts their posts above un-checked users. It's these paying accounts that have been found to spread misinformation on the platform that is often amplified by its algorithms.

On Thursday, for instance, a new report from the left-leaning nonprofit Media Matters found that numerous blue-checked X accounts with tens of thousands of followers claimed that the mass shooting in Maine was a "false flag," planned by the government. Researchers also found such accounts spreading misinformation and propaganda about the Israel-Hamas war — so much so that the European Commission made a formal, legally binding request for information to X over its handling of hate speech, misinformation and violent terrorist content related to the war.

Ian Bremmer, a prominent foreign policy expert, posted on X this month that the level of disinformation on the Israel-Hamas war "being algorithmically promoted" on the platform "is unlike anything I've ever been exposed to in my career as a political scientist."

It's not just the platform's identity that's on shaky grounds. Twitter was already struggling financially when Musk purchased it for \$44 billion in a deal that closed Oct. 27, 2022, and the situation appears more precarious today. Musk took the company private, so its books are no longer public — but in July, the Tesla CEO said the company had lost about half of its advertising revenue and continues to face a large debt load.

"We're still negative cash flow," he posted on the site on July 14, due to a about a "50% drop in advertising revenue plus heavy debt load."

"Need to reach positive cash flow before we have the luxury of anything else," he said.

In May, Musk hired Linda Yaccarino, a former NBC executive with deep ties to the advertising industry in an attempt to lure back top brands, but the effort has been slow to pay off. While some advertisers have returned to X, they are not spending as much as they did in the past — despite a rebound in the online advertising market that boosted the most recent quarterly profits for Facebook parent company, Meta, and Google parent company, Alphabet.

Insider Intelligence estimates that X will bring in \$1.89 billion in advertising revenue this year, down 54% from 2022. The last time its ad revenue was near this level was in 2015, when it came in at \$1.99 billion. In 2022, it was \$4.12 billion.

Outside research also shows that people are using X less.

According to research firm Similarweb, global web traffic to Twitter.com was down 14%, year-over-year, and traffic to the ads.twitter.com portal for advertisers was down 16.5%. Performance on mobile was no better, down 17.8% year-over-year based on combined monthly active users for Apple's iOS and Android.

"Even though the cultural relevance of Twitter was already starting to decline," before Musk took it over, "it's as if the platform no longer exists. And it's been a death by a thousand cuts," Enberg said.

"What's really fascinating is that almost all of the wounds have been self-inflicted. Usually when a social platform, starts to lose its relevance there are at least some external factors at play, but that's not the case here."

Fearful Maine residents stay home amid massive search for suspect in killing of 18 people

By DAVID SHARP, ROBERT BUMSTED, HOLLY RAMER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — Shocked and fearful Maine residents kept to their homes for a second night Thursday as hundreds of heavily armed police and FBI agents searched intensely for Robert Card, an Army reservist authorities say fatally shot 18 people at a bowling alley and a bar in the worst mass killing in state history.

Much of Thursday's search focused on a property belonging to one of Card's relatives in rural Bowdoin, where trucks and vans full of armed agents from the FBI and other agencies eventually surrounded a home. Card and anyone else inside were repeatedly ordered to surrender.

"You need to come outside now with nothing in your hands. Your hands in the air," police said through a loudspeaker. In most instances when police execute warrants — even for suspects wanted for violent crimes — they move quickly to enter the home.

But hours later, after repeated announcements and a search, authorities moved off — and it was still unclear whether Card had ever been at the location, state police said.

Richard Goddard, who lives on the road where the search took place, knows the Card family. Robert Card, who is four years younger, knows the terrain well, Goddard said.

"This is his stomping ground. He grew up here," he said. "He knows every ledge to hide behind, every thicket."

Several homes were being searched and every lead pursued in the hunt for Card, a 40-year-old with firearms instructor training. Authorities said he should be considered armed and dangerous and not approached.

Card is suspected of opening fire with at least one rifle at a bar and a bowling alley Wednesday in Lewiston, which is about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from Bowdoin and is Maine's second-largest city. The evening shootings killed 18 people and wounded 13 others, with three people still hospitalized in critical condition, authorities said.

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Authorities haven't said how many guns were used or how they were obtained.

Schools, doctor's offices and grocery stores closed and people stayed behind locked doors in cities as far as 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the scenes of the shootings. Maine's largest city, Portland, closed its public buildings, while Canada Border Services Agency issued an "armed and dangerous" alert to its officers stationed along the U.S. border.

April Stevens lives in the same neighborhood where one of the shootings took place. She turned on all her lights overnight and locked her doors. She knew someone killed at the bar and another person injured who needed surgery.

"We're praying for everyone," Stevens said through tears.

The attacks stunned a state of only 1.3 million people that has one of the country's lowest homicide rates: 29 killings in all of 2022.

Maine Gov. Janet Mills promised to do whatever was needed to find Card and to "hold whoever is responsible for this atrocity accountable ... and to seek full justice for the victims and their families."

As authorities searched for Card, details about his recent behavior emerged. Card underwent a mental health evaluation in mid-July after he began acting erratically while with his reserve regiment, a U.S. official told The Associated Press.

A bulletin sent to police across the country after the attack said Card had been committed to a mental health facility for two weeks this past summer after "hearing voices and threats to shoot up" a military base.

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. Keeping in mind the strong support for gun rights, lawmakers passed a "yellow flag" law in 2019 that would require police to seek a medical evaluation of anyone believed to be dangerous before then trying to take their guns away. However, critics charged that it was a weaker version of the tougher "red flag" laws that many other states have adopted.

A neighbor, Dave Letarte, said Card's family let them deer hunt on their property and were kind, although Letarte said he noticed Card appeared to have mental problems for a while.

"People have problems, but you don't expect them to go on the deep end like that," Letarte said. "When we saw it on the news last night, I was shocked."

A telephone number listed for Card in public records was not in service. A woman who answered a phone number for one of Card's relatives said Thursday afternoon the family was helping the FBI. She didn't give her name or additional details.

Eight murder warrants were issued for Card after authorities identified eight of the victims, police said. Ten more will likely be issued once the names of the rest of the dead are confirmed, said Maine State Police Col. William Ross.

Three of the 13 people wounded in the shootings were in critical condition and five were hospitalized but stable, Central Maine Medical Center officials said.

The attack started at Just-In-Time Recreation, where a children's bowling league was taking place, just before 7 p.m. Wednesday.

Patrick Poulin was supposed to be at the bowling center with his 15-year-old son, who is in a league that was practicing Wednesday. They stayed home, but he estimates there were probably several dozen young bowlers, ages 4 to 18, along with their parents, in the facility. Poulin's brother was there, he said, and shepherded some of the children outside when the shooting began.

"He's pretty shook up," Poulin said Thursday. "And it's just sinking in today, like, wow, I was very close

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to being there. And a lot of the people that got hurt, I know.”

Less than 15 minutes later, numerous 911 calls started coming in from Schemengees Bar and Grille a few miles away.

The search for Card covered both land and water. The Coast Guard sent out a patrol boat Thursday morning along the Kennebec River, but after hours of searching, they found “nothing out of the ordinary,” said Chief Petty Officer Ryan Smith, who is in charge of the Coast Guard’s Boothbay Harbor Station.

A car believed to belong to Card had been discovered by a boat launch in the town of Lisbon near the Androscoggin River, which connects to the Kennebec, and Card’s 15-foot (4.5-meter) boat remains unaccounted for, Smith said.

In many past U.S. mass shootings, the suspect was found — whether dead or alive — within minutes. But Card was still on the loose a full day after the shootings.

Lewiston was mostly empty on an unusually warm fall day Thursday. Changeable message signs reminded people to stay behind locked doors.

In Bates College in Lewiston, students stayed in dorms with the blinds closed, said Diana Florence, whose son is a sophomore. She has a daughter who is a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which was locked down twice last month for a shooting and a man with a gun.

“I could not believe it — that this is happening again. It’s happening to my son after it just happened to my daughter,” she said in a phone interview Thursday.

The shootings mark the 36th mass killing in the United States this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

At a news conference, the Lewiston shootings prompted Democratic U.S. Rep. Jared Golden in Maine to apologize for opposing a ban on assault weapons in the past. He urged Congress to pass such a law.

“I have opposed efforts to ban deadly weapons of war like the assault rifle used to carry out this crime,” he said. “The time has now come for me to take responsibility for this failure.”

Israeli troops briefly raid northern Gaza to ‘prepare’ for an expected full-scale incursion

By NAJIB JOBAIN, KAREEM CHEHAYEB and AMY TEIBEL Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli troops and tanks briefly raided northern Gaza overnight, the military said Thursday, engaging with Hamas fighters and targeting anti-tank weapons in order to “prepare the battlefield” before an expected ground invasion.

The third Israeli raid since the war began came after more than two weeks of devastating airstrikes that have left thousands dead, and more than 1 million displaced from their homes, in the small, densely-populated territory.

The U.S. military, meanwhile, launched airstrikes early Friday on two locations in eastern Syria linked to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Pentagon said, in retaliation for drone and missile attacks against U.S. bases and personnel in the region that began early last week.

Arab leaders made a joint plea Thursday for a cease-fire to end civilian suffering and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, where Israel has imposed a suffocating siege ever since Hamas’ rampage and hostage-taking in southern Israel ignited the war. Residents are running out of food, water and medicine, and U.N. workers have barely any fuel left to support relief missions.

The rising death toll in Gaza is unprecedented in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said Thursday more than 7,000 Palestinians have died in the

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fighting, a figure that could not be independently verified. Even greater loss of life could come if Israel launches a ground offensive aimed at crushing Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007 and survived four previous wars with Israel.

More than 1,400 people in Israel, mostly civilians, were slain during the initial Hamas attack, according to the Israeli government.

The damage to Gaza from nearly three weeks of bombardment showed in satellite photos of several locations taken before the war and again in recent days.

Entire rows of residential buildings simply disappear in the photos, reduced to smears of dust and rubble. A complex of 13 high-rises by the sea was pounded to dust near Gaza City's al-Shati refugee camp, leaving only a few tottering bits of facade. Just down the street, hardly anything remained in what had been a neighborhood of low-built homes on winding lanes, according to the photos by Maxar Technologies.

New strikes Thursday leveled more than eight homes belonging to an extended family, killing at least 15 people in the southern city of Khan Younis. In the chaotic wasteland of crumbled concrete and twisted metal, rescuers lifted the body of a boy from beneath a slab.

The Israeli military said an airstrike killed one of two masterminds of the Oct. 7 massacre, Shadi Barud, the head of Hamas' intelligence unit. The military says it only strikes militant targets and accuses Hamas of operating among civilians in an attempt to protect its fighters.

Palestinian militants have fired thousands of rockets into Israel since the war began. One struck a residential building in the central city of Petah Tikva, without wounding anyone.

Hamas' military wing said Thursday that Israeli bombardment has so far killed about 50 of the at least 224 hostages the militants abducted during its Oct. 7 assault. There was no immediate comment from Israeli officials, who have denied previous, similar claims.

Family members and Jewish groups are trying to keep the spotlight on the hostages' plight. In Paris, 30 empty baby strollers were displayed in front of the Eiffel Tower — each with a photo of one of the children taken from Israel. A day earlier, blindfolded teddy bears with photos of the abducted children were placed in front of a fountain in Tel Aviv.

The conflict has threatened to ignite a wider war across the region.

Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed ally of Hamas in Lebanon, has repeatedly traded fire with Israel along the border. The United States has sent to the region two aircraft carrier strike groups, along with additional fighter jets and other weaponry and personnel.

In a statement Thursday night, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the strikes in eastern Syria were "a response to a series of ongoing and mostly unsuccessful attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-backed militia groups that began on Oct. 17."

He said President Joe Biden directed the narrowly tailored strikes "to make clear that the United States will not tolerate such attacks and will defend itself, its personnel and its interests." He added that the operation was separate and distinct from Israel's war against Hamas.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' capacity to govern Gaza or threaten Israel again but also says 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 Gaza, 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 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.

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The overnight raid into Gaza was the largest of several known brief incursions. The military said soldiers and tanks killed fighters and destroyed tunnels and anti-tank missile launching positions. The military said no Israelis were wounded. There was no immediate confirmation of any Palestinian casualties.

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

Israel also said it also carried out around 250 airstrikes across Gaza in the last 24 hours, targeting tunnel shafts, rocket launchers and other militant infrastructure. Its reported targeting could not be independently verified.

The figure of 7,000 deaths reported by the Gaza Health Ministry is more than three times the number of Palestinians killed in the six-week-long Gaza war in 2014. The ministry's toll includes more than 2,900 minors and more than 1,500 women.

After Biden said he had "no confidence" in Gaza's casualty figures, the Health Ministry on Thursday countered by releasing a more than 200-page document listing the names of 6,747 dead, including ages and gender. It said another 281 dead had not been identified and that hundreds still missing under rubble were not included in the count.

The warning by the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, over depleting fuel supplies raised alarm that the humanitarian crisis could quickly worsen. Israel is still barring deliveries of fuel — needed to power generators — saying it believes Hamas will take it for military use.

About 1.4 million of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have fled their homes, with nearly half of them crowding into U.N. shelters. Hundreds of thousands remain in northern Gaza, despite Israel ordering them to evacuate to the south and saying that those who remain might be considered "accomplices" of Hamas.

In recent days, Israel has let more than 70 trucks with aid enter from Egypt.

"This is a small amount of what is required, a drop in the ocean," said William Schomburg, an official with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza. "We are trying to establish a pipeline."

Elsewhere, Egyptian state-run media outlet Al Qahera News reported early Friday that an explosion hit the Egyptian resort town of Taba, which is near the border with Israel. Five people were wounded. The cause of the blast was not immediately clear, and The Associated Press could not immediately confirm the details.

Nine Arab countries — including key U.S. allies and nations that have signed peace or normalization deals with Israel — issued a joint statement Thursday calling for an immediate cease-fire and an end to the targeting and death of civilians.

"The right to self defense by the United Nations Charter does not justify blatant violations of humanitarian and international law," said the statement, signed by Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Morocco.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli authorities detained 86 Palestinians, including five women, in multiple raids overnight, bringing the total detained there to more than 1,400, according to the Palestinian Prisoners Club, which represents former and current prisoners. At least 104 Palestinians have been killed in violence in the West Bank.

Hurricane Otis survivors search for friends and necessities in devastated Acapulco

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — Survivors of a Category 5 storm that killed at least 27 people as it devastated Mexico's resort city of Acapulco spent Thursday searching for acquaintances and necessities and

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hoping that aid would come quickly in the wake of Hurricane Otis.

The Pacific storm had strengthened with shocking swiftness before slamming into the coast early Wednesday, and the Mexican government deployed around 10,000 troops to deal with the aftermath. But equipment to move tons of mud and fallen trees from the streets was slow in arriving.

Resentment grew Thursday in impoverished neighborhoods as residents worried that government attention would go to repairing infrastructure for the city's economic engine of tourism rather than helping the neediest.

Flora Contreras Santos, a housewife from a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, sought help in looking for a 3-year-old girl who was swept away from her mother in a mudslide. She went from soldier to soldier trying to interest any one of them in the tragedy that occurred on her street at the height of the storm.

"The mountain came down on them. The mud took her from the mother's arms," Contreras said. "We need help, the mother is in bad shape and we can't find the girl."

Even as army bulldozers began clearing knee-deep mud from Acapulco's main boulevards, Contreras' pleas did not appear to move any of the soldiers to action.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador went by road Wednesday after the hurricane hit the iconic city on Mexico's Pacific coast. At least four people remained missing. It was unclear if the 3-year-old girl was counted among them.

The president said Otis had toppled every power-line pole in the zone where it hit on Wednesday, leaving much of the city of 1 million without electricity. Otis turned from mild to monster in record time, and scientists were struggling to figure out how — and why they didn't see it coming.

"The people sheltered, protected themselves and that's why fortunately there weren't more tragedies, loss of human life," López Obrador said.

Acapulco's municipal water system was down and around half a million homes lost power. López Obrador said that restoring power was a top priority, but by Thursday evening there were still 300,000 homes and businesses with no electricity.

Brown floodwaters extended for miles in some areas. Many residents were taking basic items from stores to survive. Others left with pricier goods, in widespread rampages through the area's stores.

As cell phone signals began to return to some parts of the city, residents organized themselves with the help of friends and relatives living in other parts of Mexico and the United States. They joined together by neighborhood using online messaging platforms like WhatsApp. On Thursday there were some 1,000 people in 40 chats, which only continued to grow in number throughout the day.

They shared photos of flooded neighborhoods and tips for finding cell phone signals, while asking for information about loved ones that they had not heard from. Others share photos of papers full of names of survivors taking refuge in shelters, some with notes reading "Lupita, we are okay. I will call you when we have signal."

When someone joins from a neighborhood they're asked by people outside the city to look for other residents there.

Juan Pablo López, 26, had been talking to his wife when their call was cut off early Wednesday as Otis made landfall. She had returned to Acapulco to be with her family and give birth to their son a month ago. Lopez was at home in Cancun.

"I'm very worried for my newborn son," he said.

With no information coming in Wednesday, he created an online chat with friends and family from Guerrero state, where Acapulco is the largest city. He also invited friends who had emigrated to the U.S. and asked them to add their local contacts.

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"We started to cross-reference information, to share what we found, almost like a WhatsApp newspaper," Lopez said.

By Thursday afternoon, however, he still had not heard word about his wife and son.

The surreal was commonplace in the storm-wrecked city, as residents emptied the area's stores of goods.

Ricardo Díaz, a self-employed laborer, stood Thursday with two fistfuls of live chickens he clutched by their legs. A chicken company had given him the chickens, Díaz said. A woman nearby pushed an office chair loaded with artificial Christmas wreaths and toilet paper through the streets. Díaz looked on in dismay as people carried armfuls of goods out of a damaged store.

"They're going to close these stores and that hurts Acapulco," Díaz said.

Edith Villanueva, holding her daughter, worried about what would happen to Acapulco in the long term. She worked at a cell phone store that had already been cleaned out.

"They already stole all of the phones," she said. "It's one thing to steal food, but people are abusing it."

Acapulco's police chief Enrique Vázquez Ramírez said Thursday they could do little to stop people from emptying local stores or speed up traffic caused by mud and fallen trees, which has left much of the city paralyzed.

"This is a completely extraordinary situation," he said.

Some residents said it could take a year for Acapulco to recover; with no power, gasoline, little cell coverage and hotels wrecked by the hurricane, the task seemed impossible.

Marketing expert Antonio Esparza was one of the few optimistic ones, even as he sat trapped in the snarled traffic of the aftermath.

"This is going to improve Acapulco, because it will force the government to pay attention," he said.

Large stores that had their merchandise taken were not restocking their shelves, meaning finding goods could become harder. But street-produce vendors were doing a brisk business in some neighborhoods as residents sought fresh food.

The once-sleek beachfront hotels in Acapulco looked like toothless, shattered hulks after the Category 5 storm blew out hundreds — possibly thousands — of windows. Miguel Angel Fong, president of the Mexican Hotel Association told the AP that 80% of the city's hotels were damaged.

Hundreds of trucks from the government electricity company arrived in Acapulco on Wednesday but downed electricity lines were in feet of mud and water.

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, though López Obrador said the plan was to establish an air bridge to move in resources.

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 away many international tourists.

Parts of Gaza look like a wasteland from space. Look for the misshapen buildings and swaths of gray

BEIT HANOUN, Gaza Strip (AP) — Apartment buildings are crumpled. Neighborhoods lie in ruins. Terrain is transformed into moonscape.

The destruction of areas of northern Gaza is visible from space in satellite images taken before and after Israeli airstrikes, which followed the raids carried out by Hamas militants on Oct. 7.

In images shot Saturday by Maxar Technologies, four- and five-story buildings in the Izbet Beit Hanoun neighborhood are in various states of collapse. Huge chunks are missing from some, others are broken in half and two large complexes lie in piles of rubble.

The pattern of destruction in the Al Karameh neighborhood can be traced by a widespread pattern the color of ash.

Tightly packed streets in Beit Hanoun look obliterated, with a rare white structure standing out in the gray wasteland.

Israel has carried out thousands of airstrikes since the war began following a cross-border raid that killed 1,400 people in Israel and took over 200 others hostage. Palestinian health officials say over 7,000 people in Gaza have been killed since the fighting erupted.

With the airstrikes continuing around the clock, the full extent of the damage remains unknown. The satellite photos provide a glimpse of the devastation, particularly in the hard-hit northern Gaza Strip.

Arizona Diamondbacks take series of slights into surprise World Series against Texas Rangers

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Before opening the World Series, the Arizona Diamondbacks wanted to recount a series of slights.

Overlooked by oddsmakers and angered by analysts, the Diamondbacks find themselves in a Surprise Series against the also unexpected Texas Rangers. But the mindsets couldn't be more different ahead of Friday night's opener in Major League Baseball's third all-wild card title matchup.

"We just put it on our list and keep those receipts and walk around with a little bit more of a chip on our shoulder," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said Thursday. "It gives you a little bit more motivation. And when you can get a little bit more, you take it."

Diamondbacks closer Paul Sewald has become keeper of the receipts, reminding teammates of what they consider disrespect.

"Maybe I found screenshots that maybe other people didn't," he said, wearing a T-shirt that proclaimed "Snakes Alive." "We took offense to that and we're excited that we're here and people are still not giving us that much credit here."

The Diamondbacks are tracking closely what the public says, with MLB Network a clubhouse constant. Meanwhile, the Rangers insist they pay no attention.

"We don't listen to the outside noise that much," second baseman Marcus Semien said.

Zac Gallen, a 28-year-old right-hander coming off a career-best 17-win season, starts Game 1 for the Diamondbacks, in the Series for the first time since beating the New York Yankees for the franchise's only title in 2001. Texas starts Nathan Eovaldi, a 33-year-old right-hander and a two-time All-Star who has overcome two Tommy John surgeries.

Gallen, who grew up in a Philadelphia suburb, followed the pennant-winning Game 7 victory over the Phillies with a tweet highlighting the losing team's spring training and reminded Philadelphia fans to

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"make sure to get those tix for your next game." When the Phillies led the NLCS 2-0, backup catcher Garrett Stubbs talked about celebrating in the Chase Field pool. Gallen responded to what he said were online direct messages.

"I just figured if they want to talk junk to me, I'll say one back," he said. "And I feel like being from there, I knew how to hit them the hardest."

Both teams worked out Thursday under a closed roof at Globe Life Field, where World Series logos were freshly painted on the turf. Both clubs are two years removed from 100-loss seasons, and the Diamondbacks could become just the second champion with a negative run differential after the 1987 Minnesota Twins.

Arizona went 84-78 during the season and earned the NL's sixth and last postseason berth, finishing with what would be the second-fewest wins for a Series champion behind the 2006 St. Louis Cardinals' 83. The Rangers were 90-72 and got the fifth AL slot.

Texas hasn't won a title since the franchise started play as the expansion Washington Senators in 1961, and odds of a Diamondbacks-Rangers Series were 1,750 to 1 when wagering for the 2023 season opened.

"We weren't concerned with what people thought of us," said first-year Rangers manager Bruce Bochy who led San Francisco to three titles from 2010-14. "We thought we belonged and we thought we could win."

Lovullo, excited about his first Series as a manager, opened his news conference by snapping a photo of assembled media "just to break the ice." He had a message for MLB Network's Chris "Mad Dog" Russo, who promised before Game 6 against the Phillies to "retire on the spot" if Arizona won the pennant.

"You can't back out of that one, Mad Dog. You've got to do something," Lovullo said. "I do like Howard Stern's thought about walking with a billboard saying that I am whatever, a liar ... in Midtown Manhattan for half a day. That will do it for me, but I ain't going to forgive you until you do something unbelievable, maybe show up here and say you're sorry to the entire team."

BETTER NATE THAN NEVER

Eovaldi is 4-0 in this postseason. He was to have started Game 4 of the 2018 Series for Boston but instead relieved in the 12th inning of Game 3 and delivered a memorable performance before giving up Max Muncy's winning home run leading of the 18th for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"I kind of had my moment there," Eovaldi said. "Having Game 1, trying to set a tone for the team, there's a lot of pressure with that, but also a lot of excitement."

GREAT GLOVES

Arizona had the fewest errors in the major leagues during the season (56), one less than Texas. The Diamondbacks have allowed three unearned runs during the postseason and the Rangers one.

MUTUAL ADMIRATION

Lovullo, 58 and in his seventh season as a big league manager, effusively praised the 68-year-old Bochy, in his 26th. Lovullo recalled giving Bochy a gift during his last season with San Francisco in 2019.

"It's been an absolute honor to manage against you. I hope you find your way back to doing this one day," Lovullo recalled saying, adding Bochy responded: "If I do, it will be an honor to be managing against you, as well."

"I couldn't believe he said that to me," Lovullo said. "I was just honored to be in his presence. And I will be for these next nine days."

Maine passed a law to try to prevent mass shootings. Some say more is needed after Lewiston killings

By PATRICK WHITTLE, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MARC LEVY Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Barely four years before a gunman's deadly rampage in Maine, a state that is staunchly protective of gun rights, the governor signed a law aimed at preventing a mass shooting like the one Wednesday night that claimed at least 18 lives.

It was called a "yellow flag" law, different from the "red flag" laws cropping up in other states to seize weapons from gun owners viewed as a threat. In a sign of the pro-Second Amendment mindset in Maine, a gun-rights group helped write the law, and critics said that, while it was a first step toward stronger gun safety measures, the state could save more lives by doing more — like passing a red flag law.

The yellow flag law and permissive gun measures in Maine are coming under greater scrutiny in the aftermath of a massacre that authorities say was carried out by a man who was committed to a mental health facility for two weeks this past summer and had reported "hearing voices and threats to shoot up" a military base.

It was not clear whether anyone had used the yellow flag law in the suspect's case, but gun-control advocates on Thursday blamed the killings on what one called Maine's "weak gun laws."

Vice President Kamala Harris said gun violence is the leading cause of death for children in the U.S. and called on Congress to pass stronger laws, including making background checks universal, passing a red flag law and banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

"It is a false choice to suggest we must choose between either upholding the Second Amendment or passing reasonable gun safety laws to save lives," Harris said in a statement.

In recent years, anti-gun violence groups in Maine have repeatedly failed in pushing for stronger laws, even with Democratic control of the Legislature and governor's office.

On Thursday, they vowed to try again.

At a minimum, the Maine Gun Safety Coalition wants the state to ban assault weapons to prevent more mass shootings, said Cam Shannon, the group's chair.

Elected officials must "stop bowing to the gun lobby and look squarely at the face of what has happened in Maine's second largest city," Shannon said.

Maine is one of about 20 states that allow permitless carry — having a concealed weapon in public without a permit — and the state has a longstanding culture of gun ownership that is tied to its traditions of hunting and sport shooting.

Gun rights advocates have for years held up Maine as an example of a place with unrestrictive gun laws and little violent crime.

Wednesday night's mass shooting is especially difficult to stomach considering the recent failures to strengthen Maine's gun laws, said Lynn Ellis of the Maine Gun Safety Coalition.

"It's infuriating," Ellis said.

Those failures include a statewide referendum in 2016 in which voters defeated a proposal to expand background checks on gun purchases. Earlier this year, lawmakers rejected proposals to require background checks for private gun sales and create a 72-hour waiting period for gun purchases.

Democratic Gov. Janet Mills has also voiced skepticism of some gun control proposals in recent years.

A proposal for a red flag law that more than 20 states have adopted failed in 2019 in favor of the yellow flag law that backers said would stop suicides and protect both the public and the constitutional rights of gun owners.

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The yellow flag law had the support of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, which was instrumental in writing it and viewed other states' red flag laws as unconstitutional. Some also saw the suicide rate as a far bigger concern in Maine than mass shootings.

Under it, law enforcement can detain someone they suspect is mentally ill and poses a threat to themselves or others.

The law differs from red flag laws in that it requires police first to get a medical practitioner to evaluate the person and find them to be a threat before police can petition a judge to order the person's firearms to be seized.

Gun-control advocates had criticized the law as ham-handed and unlikely to be used by families who don't want to traumatize a loved one by having them taken into custody.

Republican U.S. Sen. Susan Collins said she thinks a ban on high-capacity magazines is the best approach to stop this kind of gun violence. She also said at a news conference that from what she has heard, the yellow flag law should have been enforced.

"The fact, the suspect was hospitalized for two weeks for mental illness should have triggered the yellow flag law. He should have been separated from his weapons," Collins said at a news conference Thursday in Lewiston. "I'm sure that after the fact, that it's going to be looked at very closely."

But the limited details released by police don't make it clear whether the yellow flag law should have stopped the suspect in the Lewiston shootings or where he got any guns he used.

It's also not clear whether the suspect's commitment to a mental health facility triggered a federal restriction against possessing guns.

Since the 1960s, federal law and most states have prohibited people from possessing guns if they have been formally committed to a mental health facility, said Lindsay Nichols, policy director at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

Not everyone who stays at a facility is considered formally committed, though. Formal commitment is a court process that's usually required to keep someone at a facility longer than about 14 days, she said.

A judge typically must approve a formal commitment, which is then sent to the background-check system required for gun purchases at licensed firearm dealers. If someone tries to buy a gun after being committed to a facility, it appears on a background check and the gun store won't sell the weapon.

But there have been errors in that system. For instance, authorities don't always submit the correct information about a commitment quickly enough to the national background check system.

And even if a hold is in the system, background checks aren't required at unlicensed or private sellers in many states.

"It is far too easy for people with dangerous histories to get guns," Nichols said. "Policymakers need tighter restrictions so guns can be kept away from people who are dangerous."

Overall, however, people with mental illnesses are not at a significantly higher risk of being violent towards others than those without a diagnosis, she said.

In fact, people with mental illnesses are far more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators, and access to firearms is a big part of the problem, mental health experts say.

On Thursday morning, gun control advocates in the state began organizing and the Maine Legislature's gun safety caucus met. Democratic state Rep. Kristen Cloutier, a former Lewiston mayor, called the shootings "surreal and heartbreaking" and called for stronger measures to prevent gun violence.

"This has only strengthened my own resolve to do whatever I can to help prevent similar tragedies like this from happening again in other communities," Cloutier said.

EXPLAINER: What is Gaza's Ministry of Health and how does it calculate the war's death toll?

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — How many Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the war between Israel and Hamas started?

With Israel besieging and bombing territory at a scale never seen before, arriving at a precise answer isn't easy. Cell service is spotty. Internet and power are out. Airstrikes have pulverized roads and leveled neighborhoods, slowing rescue work.

Doctors scribble on notepads in overflowing morgues and hospital halls, struggling to account for bodies trapped under rubble and tossed in hastily dug mass graves. The chaos has added to the likelihood of errors.

Yet the Gaza-based Ministry of Health — an agency in the Hamas-controlled government — continues to tally casualty numbers. It released its first detailed report on the casualties Thursday, giving names, ID numbers, ages and gender for Palestinians it says have been killed. The total toll is 7,028 Palestinians, including 2,913 minors, according to the ministry.

The ministry is the only official source for Gaza casualties. Israel has sealed Gaza's borders, barring foreign journalists and humanitarian workers. The AP is among a small number of international news organizations with teams in Gaza. While those journalists cannot do a comprehensive count, they've viewed large numbers of bodies at the sites of airstrikes, morgues and funerals.

The United Nations and other international institutions and experts, as well as Palestinian authorities in the West Bank — rivals of Hamas — say the Gaza ministry has long made a good-faith effort to account for the dead under the most difficult conditions.

"The numbers may not be perfectly accurate on a minute-to-minute basis," said Michael Ryan, of the World Health Organization's Health Emergencies Program. "But they largely reflect the level of death and injury."

In previous wars, the ministry's counts have held up to U.N. scrutiny, independent investigations and even Israel's tallies.

But an outlier is the ministry's death toll from an explosion at al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City last week.

There were conflicting accusations of who was responsible, with Hamas officials blaming an Israeli airstrike and Israel saying it was caused by an errant rocket launched by Palestinian militants. U.S. and French intelligence services also concluded it was likely caused by a misfired rocket. An AP analysis of video, photos and satellite imagery, as well as consultation with experts, showed the cause was likely a rocket launched from Palestinian territory that misfired and crashed. However, a definitive conclusion couldn't be reached.

There have also been conflicting accounts of the explosion's death toll. Within an hour, Gaza's ministry reported 500 Palestinians killed, then lowered that to 471 the next day. Israel says the ministry inflated the toll. American intelligence agencies estimate 100 to 300 people killed, but haven't said how they arrived at the numbers.

The confusion has called into question the ministry's credibility in the Hamas-ruled territory.

Here's a look at how Gaza's Health Ministry has generated death tolls since the war started.

HOW DOES THE MINISTRY ARRIVE AT A DEATH TOLL?

Gaza's most widely quoted source on casualties is Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra. From an office at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, al-Qidra receives a constant flow of data from every hospital in the strip.

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Hospital administrators say they keep records of every wounded person occupying a bed and every dead body arriving at a morgue. They enter this data into a computerized system shared with al-Qidra and colleagues. According to screenshots hospital directors sent to AP, the system looks like a color-coded spreadsheet divided into categories: name, ID number, date of hospital entry, type of injury, condition.

Names aren't always available, al-Qidra said. He and colleagues face disruptions because of spotty connectivity but say they call to double-check the numbers.

The ministry collects data from other sources, too, including the Palestinian Red Crescent.

"Every person entering our hospital is recorded," said Atef Alkahlout, director of Gaza's Indonesian Hospital. "That's a priority."

The ministry releases casualty updates every few hours, providing the number of dead and wounded with a breakdown for men, women and minors. The ministry generally doesn't provide names, ages or locations of those killed. That information comes from reporters on the ground or the Hamas-run government media office.

But Thursday, in response to U.S. doubts over its figures, the ministry released a 212-page report listing every Palestinian killed in the war so far, including their names, ID numbers, ages and gender. A copy of the report shared with the AP names 6,747 Palestinians and says an additional 281 bodies have not yet been identified. The list did not provide a breakdown by location.

The ministry never distinguishes between civilians and combatants. That becomes clearer after the dust settles, when the U.N. and rights groups investigate and militant groups offer a tally of members killed. The Israeli military also conducts post-war investigations.

The Health Ministry doesn't report how Palestinians were killed, whether from Israeli airstrikes and artillery barrages or other means, like errant Palestinian rocket fire. It describes all casualties as victims of "Israeli aggression."

That lack of transparency has drawn criticism.

"When the Hamas health agency comes out with the numbers, take it with a pinch of salt," Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, Israeli military spokesman, said in a briefing Thursday. But he repeatedly declined to offer any alternative number of Palestinian casualties.

Israel says more than 1,400 civilians and soldiers were killed and over 200 hostages seized when Hamas invaded Israel. The army has identified 309 of those killed as soldiers so far.

WHO WORKS IN THE MINISTRY?

Hamas, as Gaza's ruling authority, exerts control over the Health Ministry. But it's different than political and security agencies that Hamas runs.

The Palestinian Authority, which controlled Gaza before Hamas overran the area in 2007, retains power over health and education services in Gaza, though it's based in the occupied West Bank. The ministry is a mix of recent Hamas hires and older civil servants affiliated with the secular nationalist Fatah party, officials say.

The Fatah-dominated authority that administers Palestinian cities in the Israeli-occupied West Bank has its own health ministry in Ramallah, which still provides medical equipment to Gaza, pays Health Ministry salaries and handles patient transfers from the blockaded enclave to Israeli hospitals.

Health Minister Mai al-Kaila in Ramallah oversees the parallel ministries, which receive the same data from hospitals. Her deputy is based in Gaza.

The Ramallah ministry said it trusts casualty figures from partners in Gaza, and it takes longer to publish figures because it tries to confirm numbers with its own Gaza staff.

Hamas tightly controls access to information and runs the government media office that offers details

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on Israeli airstrikes. But employees of the Health Ministry insist Hamas doesn't dictate casualty figures. "Hamas is one of the factions. Some of us are aligned with Fatah, some are independent," said Ahmed al-Kahlot, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza. "More than anything, we are medical professionals."

WHAT IS THE TRACK RECORD FROM PAST WARS?

Throughout four wars and numerous bloody skirmishes between Israel and Hamas, U.N. agencies have cited the Health Ministry's death tolls in regular reports. The International Committee of the Red Cross and Palestinian Red Crescent also use the numbers.

In the aftermath of war, the U.N. humanitarian office has published final death tolls based on its own research into medical records.

In all cases the U.N.'s counts have largely been consistent with the Gaza Health Ministry's, with small discrepancies.

— 2008 war: The ministry reported 1,440 Palestinians killed; the U.N. reported 1,385.

— 2014 war: The ministry reported 2,310 Palestinians killed; the U.N. reported 2,251.

— 2021 war: The ministry reported 260 Palestinians killed; the U.N. reported 256.

While Israel and the Palestinians disagree over the numbers of militants versus civilians killed in past wars, Israel's accounts of Palestinian casualties have come close to the Gaza ministry's. For instance, Israel's Foreign Ministry said the 2014 war killed 2,125 Palestinians — just a bit lower than the ministry's toll.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel has killed "thousands" of militants in the current war, without offering evidence or precise numbers.

International news agencies, including AP, as well as humanitarian workers and rights groups, have used the ministry's numbers when independent verification is impossible.

"These figures are professionally done and have proven to be reliable," said Omar Shakir, Human Rights Watch's Israel and Palestine director, adding he remained "cognizant of different blind spots and weaknesses" such as the failure to distinguish between civilians and combatants.

WHAT ABOUT THE HOSPITAL BLAST?

Less than an hour after images of the explosion surfaced on social media, the ministry reported that 200 to 300 people had been killed at al-Ahli Hospital. A half-hour later, the ministry put that toll at a staggering 500. The next day, it revised the number down to 471, without releasing details.

Western intelligence agencies said they believed the toll was considerably lower.

U.S. President Joe Biden said he had "no confidence" in the accuracy of the ministry's reporting. However, the U.S. government's annual human rights assessments from the region frequently cite the Gaza ministry.

Gaza's Health Ministry stands by the 471 figure and includes it in the total death toll. When asked about conflicting accounts, authorities emphasize the difficulties of their work and vigorously deny any fabrication.

"We had a uniquely hard time because the bodies were so dismembered, body parts were everywhere," Health Ministry official Mehdat Abbas said.

Judge says Georgia's congressional and legislative districts are discriminatory and must be redrawn

By JEFF AMY and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A federal judge ruled Thursday that some of Georgia's congressional, state Senate and state House districts were drawn in a racially discriminatory manner, ordering the state to draw an additional Black-majority congressional district.

U.S. District Judge Steve Jones, in a 516-page order, also ordered the state to draw two new Black-majority districts in Georgia's 56-member state Senate and five new Black-majority districts in its 180-member state House.

Jones ordered Georgia's Republican majority General Assembly and governor to fix the maps by Dec. 8, saying he would redraw districts if lawmakers did not. Hours after the ruling, Gov. Brian Kemp issued a call for a special session to begin Nov. 29 to redraw congressional and legislative districts, although a spokesperson for the governor said that is a scheduling decision and doesn't mean the Republican opposes an appeal.

Jones' ruling follows an eight-day September trial in which the plaintiffs argued that Black voters are still fighting opposition from white voters and need federal help to get a fair shot, while the state argued court intervention on behalf of Black voters wasn't needed.

"Georgia has made great strides since 1965 toward equality in voting," Jones wrote. "However, the evidence before this court shows that Georgia has not reached the point where the political process has equal openness and equal opportunity for everyone."

The Georgia case is part of a wave of litigation after the U.S. Supreme Court earlier this year stood behind its interpretation of the Voting Rights Act, rejecting a challenge to the law by Alabama.

Courts in Alabama and Florida ruled recently that Republican-led legislatures had unfairly diluted the voting power of Black residents. Legal challenges to congressional districts are also ongoing in Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Utah.

Jones wrote that he would not allow the 2024 elections to be conducted using districts he has found to be "unlawful." That would require a special session, as lawmakers aren't scheduled to meet again until January.

Jones' order explicitly anticipates an appeal by the state, and such an appeal could slow down that schedule, and maybe even let the maps be used again next year. The U.S. Supreme Court has previously ruled that judges shouldn't require changes to districts too close to an election.

A spokesperson for Republican Attorney General Chris Carr, whose office defended the plans in court, declined comment, saying lawyers were still reading the ruling. Other Republicans want to keep fighting.

"The majority party went to great lengths to draw maps that were legal, fair, compact, and kept communities of interest together," state Senate Republicans led by Majority Leader Steve Gooch of Dahlonega said in a statement. "Obviously we strongly disagree with the ruling and expect that all legal options will be explored to maintain the maps as passed by the legislature."

A new map could shift one of Georgia's 14 congressional seats from Republican to Democratic control. GOP lawmakers redrew the congressional map from an 8-6 Republican majority to a 9-5 Republican majority in 2021. Jones ruled that lawmakers could not eliminate minority opportunity districts elsewhere when they redraw maps.

"I applaud the district court's decision ordering Georgia to draw maps compliant with the Voting Rights Act," said state Senate Minority Leader Gloria Butler, a Stone Mountain Democrat. "We are eager to help

pass fairer maps that comply with federal law.”

Orders to draw new legislative districts could narrow Republican majorities in the state House, where the GOP has a 102-78 edge, and in the state Senate, with a 33-23 edge. But on their own, those changes are unlikely to lead to a Democratic takeover.

Jones wrote that he conducted a “thorough and sifting review” of the evidence in the case before concluding that Georgia violated the Voting Rights Act in enacting the current congressional and legislative maps.

The judge wrote that despite the fact that all of the state’s population increase between 2010 and 2020 was attributable to growth among non-white populations, the number of congressional and state Senate districts with a Black majority remained the same.

That echoed a key contention of the plaintiffs, as one of their lawyers noted after the ruling.

“In 2021, the General Assembly ignored Georgia’s diversification over the last decade and enacted a state legislative map that demonstrably diluted the voting strength of Black voters,” Rahul Garabadu, an American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia attorney, said in a statement. “Today’s decision charts a path to correct that grave injustice before the 2024 election cycle.

Jones wrote in a footnote that his order “in no way states or implies that the General Assembly or Georgia Republicans are racist.” The Voting Rights Act does not require him to find that the challenged maps were passed to discriminate against Black voters or that the Legislature is racist, he wrote. “Nothing in this order should be construed to indicate otherwise.”

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.

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 that 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.

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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 shut-downs.

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. The destruction is so vast that parts of Gaza look like a wasteland from space.

"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 cease-fire.

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

Many Israelis are furious at their government's chaotic recovery efforts after Hamas attack

By RAVI NESSMAN and AMY TEIBEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — More than two weeks after Hamas militants rampaged through a string of sleepy farming towns, many Israelis are furious at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, not just for failing to prevent the attack, but for failing to come to their aid afterward.

While the military is launching unrelenting airstrikes in Gaza that have killed thousands of Palestinians, and hundreds of thousands of Israeli troops are massing for a possible ground offensive, government infighting and lack of help for those in need have left traumatized survivors to mourn on their own and volunteers — many of whom spent the past year protesting the government — to take on recovery efforts.

"It has to be clear. The government is completely incompetent," said Ruvy Dar, a clinical psychologist and Tel Aviv University professor who has been counseling survivors evacuated from their homes.

"Any support that the refugees are getting right now is completely grassroots. Absolutely nothing by the state," he said, adding that even volunteers' hotel rooms are paid for by nonprofit groups.

The backdrop to the outcry is the long-running and contentious plan by Netanyahu and his far-right government to sharply curtail the power of the nation's judiciary, which sparked months of protests and consumed the Cabinet and the nation.

Many believe the government neglected basic functions while it focused its efforts on attacking the Supreme Court, which it accused of being liberal and interventionist.

Critics have accused Netanyahu of recklessly ignoring a raft of issues. The police force is understaffed, and the military was caught off guard on Israel's southern flank as forces were more heavily stationed in the occupied West Bank, home to half a million settlers. The government did little to address the spiraling cost of living and rampant killings in Israel's own Arab communities, while ultra-Orthodox Jewish and pro-settlement coalition partners have received billions of dollars for pet projects.

"Government offices haven't been functioning for a year now, so obviously they can't cope with emergency situations. They wasted a whole year on nonsense," Arnon Bar David, head of Israel's Histadrut trade union, told Army Radio.

The government faced public wrath almost immediately after being caught by surprise by the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that killed more than 1,400 people, the vast majority civilians. It took hours for the stunned military to respond and send troops to counter-attack, a chaotic response that foreshadowed the government's dysfunction.

Some government ministers have been blocked by residents from visiting attacked communities and others have been screamed at while visiting the wounded at hospitals.

Standing just feet from Economy Minister Nir Barkat, Ophir Shai's eulogy for his brother, Yaron, turned into a furious attack on the government.

"You abandoned the soldiers of the IDF. You abandoned the people who live along the Gaza border. You abandoned the state of Israel. You abandoned my beloved brother. I expect you all to take responsibility and resign immediately after the war ends," he said.

"I won't forget, and I won't forgive. I promise to hunt you down forever."

Even after the initial massacre, the government was slow to respond and appeared in disarray. Israel's public diplomacy minister, meant to serve as a spokeswoman to the international media, quit in a huff

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after her responsibilities were turned over to other ministries.

Polls show Netanyahu's already plunging popularity has collapsed. While other members of the government and the heads of the army and the Shin Bet security service have apologized and taken responsibility for the attack, Netanyahu said nothing of the sort for weeks. Only Wednesday night, 18 days after the attack, did he come close to accepting some responsibility.

"This failure will be investigated thoroughly. Everyone will need to provide answers, myself included, but all of this will happen only after the war," he said in a brief nationwide address.

Netanyahu also boasted of government assistance for victims, including mass evacuations from hard-hit border communities. "We will not leave anyone behind," he said.

But Netanyahu has not publicly visited the wounded in hospitals, consoled traumatized evacuated families or gone to a funeral for any of those killed. He has made several public statements, mainly as he greeted world leaders offering support, and he has visited soldiers in the field. But he has not taken questions from Israel's famously combative media.

Asked for comment, a senior Israeli official said the prime minister "met with families and is fully focused on winning the war." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

With over 200 people being held captive by Hamas militants in Gaza, he did not meet with any of their families until more than a week after the attack — two days after U.S. President Joe Biden spoke to families of U.S. citizens being held.

Meanwhile, Israeli media has reported about a string of government turf wars holding up assistance to victims' families and evacuees displaced from their homes.

For two days after the attack, "the government wasn't functioning. We didn't get any help," said Yossi Keren, who became head of the regional council in Sha'ar HaNegev, where many of the attacks took place, after his predecessor was killed confronting Hamas gunmen.

Most residents have evacuated, and their needs — everything from getting schooling for children to replacing computers families left behind — are enormous, he said. The government response is slowly getting better, though he remains wary.

"If the government won't step in, the crisis will be bigger. Much bigger," Keren said.

Danny Danon, a senior member of Netanyahu's Likud Party, acknowledged the government's shortcomings.

"The government agencies were not capable of dealing with the numbers. So it took them some time to come back and to set up and provide the proper services," he said. "Certainly it's legitimate for the families to express their pain and criticism."

He said there would be an inquiry into what went wrong after the war, but right now Israel must remain focused on defeating Hamas. "Netanyahu is very mission-oriented now in the war effort," he said.

Gideon Rahat, a political science professor at Hebrew University, said the dysfunction was a result of a bloated, divisive government that demonized and then pushed out many respected bureaucrats who would have been competent to handle an emergency.

"When you are a populist government and all you do is talk and tweet and write posts instead of doing real things, when you are needed you don't know what to do," he said.

That vacuum in the current crisis has been filled by the government's sworn enemies, opponents of the judicial overhaul who had mobilized tens of thousands of protesters for weekly demonstrations against the overhaul plan.

Less than 12 hours after the Oct. 7 attack, they sent teams of medical volunteers to hospitals to help with the wounded and deliver food to their families, said Oren Shvill, one of the group's organizers. The

next day, they started evacuating families and pairing them up with host families.

"Really fast, we managed to transform our organization from protesting to civilian aid," he said. "Everything we asked for, people just jumped on the mission."

Now, they have 15,000 volunteers a day coordinated from logistics centers in Tel Aviv, near Gaza and in the north, where the army is fighting Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, he said. And they've been lauded as heroes in Israel.

They helped locate missing people; sent equipment to soldiers called to the Gaza border; shipped donated food, clothes, toys and medicine to the evacuees; and began coordinating an informal public relations operation for the country, Shvill said. They sent teachers and therapists to the evacuees' hotels and set up operations there to answer their questions.

This week, they began sending volunteers to milk cows, pick tomatoes and cucumbers and plant potatoes at abandoned farms in the south.

"Everything we are doing should have been done by the government," he said.

Ohio woman indicted on murder charges in deaths of at least four men, attorney general says

By SAMANTHA HENDRICKSON Associated Press/Report For America

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — An Ohio woman has been indicted on murder charges in the deaths of at least four men in the capital city of Columbus, the Ohio Attorney General said Wednesday, though investigators believe there are more victims.

Rebecca Auburn, a 33-year-old from Columbus, is accused of meeting men for sex before fatally drugging them and then robbing them, state Attorney General Dave Yost said in a statement.

A message seeking comment was left with her attorney Thursday. The Columbus Division of Police declined to comment further on the investigation.

"Don't buy sex in Ohio – it ruins lives and could cost you yours," Yost said in a statement.

Four out of five of Auburn's alleged victims died of overdoses between December 2022 and June 2023 and one man survived, authorities said, but they did not identify the victims.

Auburn gave the men fentanyl before robbing them, according to the indictment, which also charged her with involuntary manslaughter, felonious assault and robbery.

She already had been indicted and pled not guilty in September to murder and drug-related charges in the January overdose of one of the men.

Auburn is currently being held in Franklin County jail and an arraignment is scheduled for Friday.

The investigation remains ongoing, according to the attorney general's office and investigators are focusing on her activities in northeast Columbus between between December of last year and August 2023 as they search for more possible victims.

The 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

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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 week 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."

At a Bloomberg event on Thursday, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said, "We're monitoring the economic consequences carefully" regarding the impact of Israel's war against Hamas. "So far we have not yet seen much that has global consequences," she said, but if the war spreads "of course there could be more meaningful consequences."

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, more than 1 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 it 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."

US economic growth accelerated to strong 4.9% rate last quarter as consumers shrugged off Fed hikes

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's economy expanded at a robust 4.9% annual rate from July through September as Americans defied higher prices, rising interest rates and widespread forecasts of a recession to spend at a brisk pace.

The Commerce Department said the economy expanded last quarter at the fastest pace in nearly two years — and more than twice the 2.1% annual rate of the previous quarter.

Thursday's report on the nation's gross domestic product — the economy's total output of goods and services — showed that consumers drove the acceleration, ramping up their spending on everything from cars to restaurant meals. Even though the painful inflation of the past two years has soured many people's view of the economy, millions have remained willing to splurge on vacations, concert tickets and sports events.

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"This is just a very resilient economy that continues to take hit after hit and keep on," said Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM, a tax and consulting firm.

Yet the robust growth may prove to be a high-water mark for the economy before a steady slow-down begins in the current October-December quarter and extends into 2024. The breakneck pace is expected to ease as higher long-term borrowing rates, on top of the Federal Reserve's short-term rate hikes, cool spending by businesses and consumers. Economists have projected that growth could slow to an annual pace of just 1.5% in the final three months of this year.

One sign of the coming slowdown, Brusuelas said, was a 3.8% drop in business spending on new machinery and other equipment last quarter. That pullback likely reflected the higher cost of borrowing to finance such purchases.

And other key drivers of growth in the July-September period could prove short-lived. They include a surge in stockpiled goods that businesses added to their warehouses and store shelves. The buildup in these inventories accounted for about a quarter of last quarter's growth from July to September and isn't considered likely to be repeated.

An increase in house and apartment construction also boosted growth in the third quarter. But as mortgage rates near 8% and sales of existing homes continue to fall, analysts expect housing to weaken the overall economy in the coming months.

"We can already see the drag forming in the final three months of the year," Brusuelas said.

In addition, consumers are spending more of their savings — a drawdown that could eventually weigh on growth. Many, particularly lower- and middle-income Americans, are stepping up their use of credit cards. These cards now carry much higher rates after the Fed boosted its benchmark interest rate to about 5.4%, its highest level in 22 years. Americans, as a whole, saved just 3.8% of their income last quarter, down from 5.2% in the April-June quarter and notably below pre-pandemic levels.

Several Fed officials acknowledged in speeches last week that the most recent economic data showed growth picking up by more than they had expected. Yet most of the policymakers signaled that they will likely keep their key rate, which affects many consumer and business loans, unchanged when they meet next week.

Even consumers who are closely watching their budgets, though, are still willing to treat themselves in many cases. Among them is Danielle Gagliano, who was at Kohl's department store in Ramsey, New Jersey, last week with her 2-year-old son, returning an item and picking up three pairs of pants for her 10-year-old daughter.

Gagliano, 35, said she has been doing more of her food shopping at ShopRite and discounter Aldi and less at Acme, which she feels is more expensive. And she's been looking for more discounts.

Still, Gagliano said she makes room in her budget to go out to dinner with her family a couple times a month.

"I like to support the local restaurants," she said.

A range of factors have helped fuel consumer spending, which accounts for the bulk of the economy's growth. Though many Americans are still feeling under pressure from two years of high inflation, average pay has outpaced price increases and enhanced people's ability to spend.

And inflation is steadily easing, Thursday's report showed. Excluding volatile food and gas prices, core inflation slowed to a 2.4% annual rate in the third quarter, according to the Fed's preferred measure. That is down from 3.7% in the second quarter to the slowest pace in nearly three years.

Smaller price increases likely encouraged some people to spend lavishly on both goods and services last quarter. There were some one-time factors that boosted spending, like blockbuster concert tours by Taylor Swift and Beyonce. Fans spent an average of \$1,500 on air fares, hotel rooms, and concert

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tickets to see Swift's shows, and an average of \$1,800 for Beyonce, according to calculations by Sarah Wolfe, U.S. economist at Morgan Stanley.

Americans, as a whole, also began the year on healthy financial footing, according to a report last week from the Fed. The net worth of a typical household jumped 37% from 2019 through 2022. Home prices shot higher, and the stock market rose in the biggest surge on records dating back more than 30 years.

Even so, consumers are likely reining in their spending in the final three months of the year, and the sluggish housing market is dragging on the economy as well. This month, nearly 30 million people began repaying several hundred dollars a month in student loans, which could slow their ability to spend. Those loan repayments had been suspended when the pandemic struck three years ago.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, in a discussion last week, said he was generally pleased with how the economy was evolving: Inflation has slowed to an annual rate of 3.7% from a four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022. At the same time, steady growth and hiring have forestalled a recession, which was widely predicted at the end of last year.

If those trends continue, it could allow the Fed to achieve a highly sought-after "soft landing," in which it would manage to slow inflation to its 2% target without causing a deep recession.

Still, Fed officials were surprised by a strong government report last week on retail sales, which showed that spending at stores and restaurants jumped last month by much more than expected. Powell has since acknowledged that if the economy were to keep growing robustly, the Fed might have to raise rates further. Its benchmark short-term rate is now about 5.4%, a 22-year high.

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 restaurant, killing at least 18 people, the state's governor announced Thursday. At least 13 people were also wounded.

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

The 40-year-old man identified as a person of interest is a firearms instructor trained by the military and was recently committed to a mental health facility, according to a state police bulletin. Police were still searching for him Thursday.

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 190 people have died in those killings, which are defined as incidents in which four or more people have died within a 24-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

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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 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

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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 search. 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.

SUMTER, SOUTH CAROLINA: March 21

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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

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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.

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 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

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fighters 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.

On Thursday, his lawyers asked the judge to reconsider the larger penalty given Trump’s insistence that he was referring to his former lawyer and fixer, Michael Cohen, not the court clerk, in his hallway comments. Engoron agreed to take a fuller look at what Trump had said, but, after reviewing the video footage, stood by the fine.

But Trump, so far, has capitalized politically on his trials, plastering his mug shot on merchandise that has brought in millions of dollars and fundraising off every development, including Wednesday’s fine. 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

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\$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.

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 Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election 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 then-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 speaker is second in the line of presidential succession, after the vice president. The House Johnson now leads also will have to certify

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the winner of the 2024 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 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.”

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 Council 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

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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 Council 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.

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.

Today in History: October 27 Gunman kills 11 in Pittsburgh synagogue

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 27, the 300th day of 2023. There are 65 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 27, 2018, a gunman shot and killed 11 congregants and wounded six others at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue in the deadliest attack on Jews in U.S. history; authorities said the suspect, Robert Bowers, raged against Jews during and after the rampage. (Bowers was convicted and sentenced to death in 2023.)

On this date:

In 1787, the first of the Federalist Papers, a series of essays calling for ratification of the United States Constitution, was published.

In 1904, the first rapid transit subway, the IRT, was inaugurated in New York City.

In 1914, author-poet Dylan Thomas was born in Swansea, Wales.

In 1941, the Chicago Daily Tribune dismissed the possibility of war with Japan, editorializing, "She cannot attack us. That is a military impossibility. Even our base at Hawaii is beyond the effective striking power of her fleet."

In 1954, U.S. Air Force Col. Benjamin O. Davis Jr. was promoted to brigadier general, the first Black officer to achieve that rank in the USAF.

In 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was shot down while flying over Cuba, killing the pilot, U.S. Air Force Maj. Rudolf Anderson Jr.

In 1971, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was renamed the Republic of Zaire (but it went back to its previous name in 1997).

In 1978, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) were named winners of the Nobel Peace Prize for their progress toward achieving a Middle East accord.

In 1995, a sniper killed one soldier and wounded 18 others at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. (Paratrooper William J. Kreutzer was convicted in the shootings, and condemned to death; the sentence was later commuted to life in prison.)

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch cut through the western Caribbean, pummeling coastal Honduras and Belize; the storm caused several thousand deaths in Central America in the days that followed.

In 2004, the Boston Red Sox won their first World Series since 1918, sweeping the St. Louis Cardinals in four games.

In 2017, golfer Tiger Woods pleaded guilty to reckless driving, resolving charges from an arrest in which he was found passed out in his car with prescription drugs and marijuana in his system.

In 2013, Lou Reed, who radically challenged rock's founding promise of good times and public celebration as leader of the Velvet Underground and a solo artist, died at age 71.

In 2020, Amy Coney Barrett was formally sworn as the Supreme Court's ninth justice, her oath administered in private by Chief Justice John Roberts.

In 2021, investigators in New Mexico said there was "some complacency" in how weapons were handled on a movie set where Alec Baldwin accidentally shot and killed a cinematographer and wounded another person.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian John Cleese is 84. Author Maxine Hong Kingston is 83. Country

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singer Lee Greenwood is 81. Rock musician Garry Tallent (Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band) is 74. Author Fran Lebowitz is 73. Rock musician K.K. Downing is 72. TV personality Jayne Kennedy is 72. Actor-director Roberto Benigni is 71. Actor Peter Firth is 70. Actor Robert Picardo is 70. World Golf Hall of Famer Patty Sheehan is 67. "Duran Duran" singer Simon Le Bon is 65. Country musician Jerry Dale McFadden (The Mavericks) is 59. Internet news editor Matt Drudge is 57. Rock musician Jason Finn (Presidents of the United States of America) is 56. Actor Sean Holland is 55. Actor Channon Roe is 54. Author Anthony Doerr is 50. Actor Sheeri Rappaport is 46. Actor David Walton is 45. Violinist Vanessa-Mae is 45. Actor-singer Kelly Osbourne is 39. Actor Christine Evangelista is 37. Actor Bryan Craig is 32. Actor Troy Gentile is 30.