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Coming up

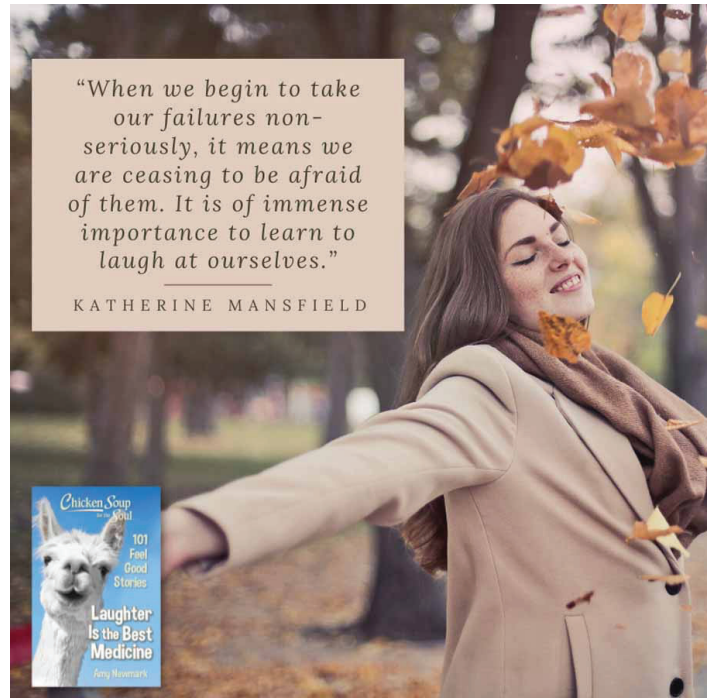
Thursday, Nov. 9

JH GBB at Webster (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)
Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, lemon buttered broccoli, pumpkin bar cookie, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Muffins.
School Lunch: Sloopy joes, fries.

Friday, Nov. 10

Veteran's Day Program, 2 p.m., GHS Arena
Senior Menu: Chili, corn bread, coleslaw, lime pear Jell-O.
School Breakfast: Veteran's Breakfast
School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

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



2024 DOG LICENSES DUE BY 12/29/2023

Fines start January 1, 2024



Spayed/Neutered dogs are \$5 per dog, otherwise \$10 per dog
Proof of rabies shot information is RE-REQUIRED!!

Email proof to city.
kellie@nvc.net, fax to
(605) 397-4498 or bring a copy to City Hall!!
Please contact City Hall as soon as possible if you no longer have a dog(s) that were previously licensed!

Questions call (605) 397-8422

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

World in Brief

Antonio "L.A." Reid, who rose in the industry working with artists including Mariah Carey, Pink, and Usher, was sued by former music executive Drew Dixon over sexual assault and harassment allegations.

Syria Strikes: Two U.S. F-15 fighter jets launched an airstrike on an eastern Syrian weapons storage facility used by Iran's Revolutionary Guard in response to attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria, the Pentagon said.

Apple Founder Hospitalized: Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak has been hospitalized in Mexico, where he was attending the World Business Forum, but the cause of his hospitalization remains undisclosed.

Ivanka Trump Testifies: Ivanka Trump testified in her father's civil fraud trial yesterday and admitted that she and others knew that Donald Trump's net worth requirements related to attaining bank loans were an issue.

Lainey's Triumph: Lainey Wilson dominated the Country Music Association Awards, securing five awards including Entertainer of the Year, at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena.

War in Ukraine: The Institute for the Study of War reported that the Russian General Staff is using outdated maps that do not accurately represent the battlefield situation, with Russian military bloggers pointing out this discrepancy, raising questions about the strategic targeting of Ukrainian forces in frontline areas.

Veteran's Day program tomorrow by Superintendent Joe Schwan

On Friday, November 10, 2023, the Groton Area School District will commemorate Veterans Day 2023. There will be a free veterans breakfast for all vets at the Groton Area Elementary School beginning at 7:30 AM. We welcome all veterans and current members of our armed forces to join us in honor of their selfless service to our country.

At 2:00 PM, we will hold our annual Veterans Day Commemoration program at the GHS Arena. The public is encouraged to attend.

We're grateful for the service of all our men and women of the armed forces, and we hope that you're able to join us for these opportunities.

GHS Interns Series

Kampa interns at T.J. Farms

by Dorene Nelson

Tristan Kampa, a senior at Groton Area High School, is interning with T. J. Harder. "I worked for T.J. last summer so I was already familiar with him, his farm, and the various jobs I'd be doing," Kampa stated.

"T. J. Farms 1400 acres and has a custom haying business too," he explained. "In addition to that, T.J. does baling and hauling for farmers in Harding County."

"There are two ranches in western South Dakota where T.J. does some custom hay work," Kampa said. "These large areas produce a lot of bales!"

"We bale and haul about 5,000 bales on the Harder farm," he explained. "These bales measure about five by six feet and weigh about 1500 pounds each!"

"I decided to do my internship with T. J. Harder since I have worked for him already," Kampa said. "Besides that I really enjoy working with T. J and helping him with his work, including some service work on his equipment."

"The hardest part of this job is working outside in the winter, helping with T. J.'s cattle business," he admitted. "The best part is doing work that I like with someone that I respect and enjoy spending time with."

"When we are out in West River to work on those two ranches, we even find some time to do some hunting!" Kampa said.

Tristan is the son of Scott and Myndi Kampa.



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ALL OVER ROOFING

RAISING THE ROOFING STANDARDS,
ALL OVER YOUR TOWN!
FREE HAIL STORM ESTIMATES!

605.759.0000
1205 6TH AVE SW SUITE 2, ABERDEEN, SD 57401



Frosty is Back!!!

Please check the Groton Daily Independent for daily clues as to who the Groton Area Mystery Frosty is. The unveiling of Frosty will take place at the Groton Area Snow Queen and Talent Contest on Sunday, November 26th at 4:00pm. The Groton Chamber voted to gift Snow Queen \$100 in Chamber Bucks for the winner of the Mystery Frosty competition.



2023 Frosty Clues

I....

9.) Love to jitterbug

Groton Post No. 39 American Legion

Annual Turkey Party

Saturday, Nov. 11, 2023

Starting at 6:30 p.m.

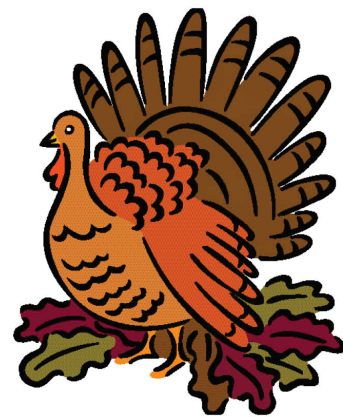
Groton Legion Post Home, 10 N. Main.

Turkey, Ham and Bacon
to be given away

FREE ADMISSION

**DOOR
PRIZE!**

Lunch served
by Auxiliary



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A section of the main sewer line between Railroad Avenue and Second Avenue is in the process of being relined. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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South Dakota Natives Set to Join Wolves Volleyball in 2024

Aberdeen, S.D. – Northern State University head coach Brent Aldridge announced the signing of Avery Goebel (Sioux Falls, S.D.) and Ava Nilsson (Mansfield, S.D.) to the Wolves 2024 volleyball roster yesterday.

“I am stoked to add both Avery and Ava to Wolves volleyball,” noted Aldridge. “They are both very team-first oriented players that will each add to the competitive nature of our gym.”

Avery Goebel – Middle, Sioux Falls, S.D. / Roosevelt HS

Avery Goebel is a 6-foot-1 middle out of Sioux Falls Roosevelt High School. She is a 2-year starter and team captain for the Rough Riders under the direction of head coach Kevin Vanderwal. In the fall of 2023, Goebel has 140 kills, 94 blocks, and 24 service aces. In addition, Goebel is a member of the Kairos Elite Volleyball Club. Her team ranks 27th in the nation and placed fifth at the AAU National Tournament. She is the daughter of Suzie Green and James Goebel.

Aldridge’s Thoughts: “Avery is a very good all-around middle, with her best volleyball ahead of her. She has the ability to terminate off one foot, or two and can hit in multiple zones. I really like her ability to block balls and get to daylight in transition. She also can serve and play defense after the serve; those two skills make her valuable to our defensive package. I had the opportunity to work with Avery last spring at a Kairos Club clinic and loved the fact that she was coachable and was not fazed at all by taking feedback and trying to increase her ability to terminate off one foot at a faster tempo.”

Ava Nilsson – Setter, Mansfield, S.D. / Warner HS

Ava Nilsson is a 6-foot setter out of Warner High School. She is a 5-year starter and team captain for the Monarchs under the direction of head coach Kari Jung. Mid-way through her senior campaign, Nilsson has accumulated 4,682 assists, 1,244 digs, 404 kills, 269 aces, and 183 blocks in her career. She has two 1,000 assist seasons and has won three South Dakota State Championships. In addition, Nilsson is a 4-time all-conference performer, 4-time all-state and state all-tournament team member, 3-time Argus Leader Super-6 selection, and 2-time Midco Sports Player of the Year. In the fall of 2023, Nilsson was named to the AVCA All-Region team and AVCA All-America third team. She is the daughter of Sonya and Carey Nilsson.

Aldridge’s Thoughts: “Ava has been on our radar since she was in fifth grade, because she has the ability to make players better around her. She is a very talented, calm setter who has the ability to set tempo all ready. Technically she is pretty sound at this point. I think her best attribute is she is very competitive and...SHE WINS!! Ava will work to get teams out of system with her serve, and then makes plays offensively by putting her hitters in the right position to terminate. Ava will make our team better immediately when she steps on campus.”

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Rapid City, Sioux Falls law enforcement agencies to silence scanners

SDPB Radio | By C.J. Keene

Published November 6, 2023 at 4:43 PM CST

The public has long had access to the chatter of police radios, but that is changing for the two largest metros in the state.

While law enforcement wants to get ahead of criminals, media advocates say the public also has a right to know police activities.

Soon, police scanners on either end of the state will get a whole lot quieter as law enforcement agencies in Sioux Falls and Rapid City move toward encrypted "P25" radio networks.

Sioux Falls Police Department Chief John Thum said this change, framed as a safety matter, was first advocated by the federal government in the weeks following 9/11.

"Going to encrypted radios which means public scanners will not be available in Minnehaha County or Pennington County starting Nov. 13," Thum said. "This decision was not made lightly, we've talked about a lot of different avenues, engaged our partners in many different ways, and what it comes down to is an officer safety issue and a victim safety issue."

Thum said police in Rapid City and Sioux Falls will continue to be in communication with local media to maintain transparency. He also pointed the public in the direction of public crime logs, which Minnehaha County will now update with a half-hour delay.

David Bordewyk is executive director of the South Dakota NewsMedia Association. He empathized with the need for safety on the ground, but he said something irreplaceable will be lost on delay.

"It's not the unfiltered version of radio traffic coming over the scanner," Bordewyk said. "Not to say that I don't trust what law enforcement is putting into logs – but I'm saying having that unfiltered sort of information coming to a journalist is often very helpful in being able to discern what is happening."

Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead acknowledged the change will make things harder on reporters but says the "bad guys" listening in on police communications interfere with their work.

Bordewyk said reporters and criminals aren't the only people who listen though.

"It's not just news media here that loses, but the public that is served by news media and I believe you have a lot of citizens who are not journalists who monitor scanner traffic on a regular basis," Bordewyk said. "That serves a benefit because if a citizen hears something via scanner, that may allow that citizen to provide input to law enforcement. You lose that now with the encryption."

Further, Bordewyk questioned the level of access the state provides about law enforcement activity and emergency responders before considering the looming removal of scanner chatter.

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, Sec. David Shulkin elected to Sanford Health Board of Trustees

Augustana University president, former Sec. of VA begin term Jan. 1



Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

David J. Shulkin

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — Sanford Health announced today Augustana University President Stephanie Herseth Sandlin and former Veterans Affairs Secretary, The Honorable David J. Shulkin, M.D., have been elected to serve as members of its Board of Trustees. Herseth Sandlin and Sec. Shulkin will begin their terms Jan. 1.

Sanford Health trustees are elected by the full Board and currently serve up to three three-year terms. The Board of Trustees' Nominating and Governance Committee is responsible for identifying, evaluating and recommending potential new members based on their qualifications and experience.

Trustees represent a broad range of backgrounds, with extensive experience in health care, business, finance, technology and the nonprofit sector.

The 11-member Board of Trustees oversees governance for the health system, guiding the pursuit of Sanford's mission and providing oversight of the organization's strategic direction and financial and operational performance.

"Throughout my time in Congress and now as president of Augustana University, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with members of the Sanford Health leadership team. I have always been inspired by their vision, strategic execution and deep commitment to excellence, innovation and community. It is an honor to now serve alongside distinguished community and industry leaders as a member of the Sanford Health Board of Trustees to further advance their mission to transform the health care experience and bring world-class health care to communities near and far," said Herseth Sandlin.

Herseth Sandlin was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2004, where she went on to serve four terms. She was the first woman elected to the U.S. House from South Dakota and the youngest woman serving in Congress during that time. Following her time in Congress, Herseth Sandlin became a partner in a Washington, D.C., law firm and later joined Raven Industries in Sioux Falls, as the company's first general counsel and vice president of corporate development.

She has served as president of Augustana University since 2017. She is the first woman to lead the university since it was established 163 years ago. As a result of her leadership, the university developed and is implementing its transformational Viking Bold: The Journey to 2030 strategic plan — supported by the largest and most comprehensive campaign in Augustana's history.

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"Stephanie is a generational leader who has made a profound impact everywhere she has been – from Congress to the Augustana University community," said Bill Gassen, president and CEO of Sanford Health. "I want to welcome Stephanie to the Board of Trustees and thank her for sharing her talents and experience with our health system. Sanford Health will be a better organization because of her involvement, helping guide our strategic direction and continuing to put our people, patients and residents and communities first."

Sec. Shulkin brings extensive health care experience to the Board of Trustees as both an executive leader and clinician, specializing in internal medicine. From 2015 through 2018, Sec. Shulkin served in various capacities at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, including as Secretary of the VA from 2017-18 and as Under Secretary for Health from 2015-17. Prior to his tenure at the VA, he served in executive leadership positions at Morristown Medical Center, Beth Israel Medical Center, Temple University Hospital, Drexel University School of Medicine, Doctor Quality, Inc. and the University of Pennsylvania Health System and Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

Sec. Shulkin has also previously served as a strategic advisor for Sanford Health in clinical innovation, veterans/military affairs and other areas. He has been instrumental in initiatives that advance research and help veterans receive world class care – such as access to free genetic testing as part of a precision medicine partnership between Sanford Health and the VA.

"It cannot be overstated the value of Sec. Shulkin's counsel to Sanford Health and the expertise he brings to the table," said Gassen. "His desire to always do what is best for our nation's veterans has improved the lives of countless patients throughout our health system and across the country, and his commitment to innovation has helped drive tremendous progress in health care. His experience and insights will be incredibly beneficial on the Board of Trustees, and I look forward to the significant contributions he will continue to make to our organization."

"I was first introduced to Sanford Health while serving in Washington, and their vision to drive innovation and constantly seek new ways to improve the lives of their patients was overwhelmingly clear. Sanford's commitment to veterans and their families matches my passion for our nation's heroes," said Sec. Shulkin. "I am honored to join the Sanford Health Board of Trustees where we can continue to lead this mission-based health system and provide world-class health care to all."

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SoDak 16 Match was second highest viewed on GDILIVE.COM

The most viewed event was the Lake Region Marching Festival this fall with 920 viewers. Number two was the volleyball match Tuesday night with 753 viewers, beating out the football playoff game at Elk Point/Jefferson with 741 viewers.



Senior Anna Fjeldheim - SoDak16
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Senior Sydney Leicht - SoDak16
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Senior Carly Guthmiller - SoDak16
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



This picture says it all. It's Weird, you win big games and the positive feedback and messages is enough to kill a battery on your phone, but everything is so quiet after a loss. We are sad, but we will be OK! We went 20-5 on the season, we had the highest winning percentage in school history. We beat teams our school has never beat. We played multiple girls at different times in big moments and they always succeeded in some way. More than one time even multiple times tonight girls sacrificed themselves for the team. We loved each other, we carried each other and we cried and laughed together. This team and this season has been one for the ages and I am so so proud to have been able to coach this group! We maybe lost tonight... but this team is full of winners and this season will always be a success! Thank you Anna Fjeldheim Sydney Leicht and Carly Guthmiller for trusting the process and being great leaders for our team. You will always be part of the Tiger family and we are so proud of all of you!

- Coach Chelsea Hanson
Posted on Chelsea Hanson Facebook Page



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

2024 ballot question status check: Abortion, open primaries, food sales tax and more

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 8, 2023 5:06 PM

The countdown is on.

The 2024 general election is about a year out, and South Dakota's ballot could be a long one: There are 15 potential ballot questions listed on the Secretary of State's Office website.

One question is already set to be on the ballot. Petitions for about half of the other questions are circulating, while the rest have not yet cleared all the hurdles to begin circulation.

Petitioners have six months to meet the filing deadline of May 7. Initiated measures and referred law petitions need 17,508 signatures from South Dakota registered voters to get on the ballot, while an initiated constitutional amendment needs 35,017 signatures.

The general election is Nov. 5, 2024.

Pronoun measure set for ballot

Update references to officeholders in the state constitution: The Legislature placed this measure on the ballot, and it's the only measure guaranteed to appear on the 2024 ballot so far. Introduced by Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, and accompanying another bill that made similar changes to state laws, the constitutional amendment would remove presumed "he/his" pronouns from the state constitution.

Gov. Kristi Noem issued a press release on the topic last winter.

"Every little girl in South Dakota should realize that she can grow up to do whatever she wants to do — to be whoever she wants to be," Noem said. "We are fixing our laws and South Dakota Constitution so that they reflect the fact that women and men can both attain offices like governor."

Petitions in circulation

Establishing open primaries: The constitutional amendment would establish top-two primaries for governor, Congress, state legislative and county races. All candidates for an office would run in one primary, regardless of their party affiliation.

Currently, South Dakota has separate party primaries. Independent and no-party-affiliation voters (nearly 150,000 South Dakotans) can vote in Democratic primaries but not Republican primaries.

If the open primaries measure passes, South Dakota would join California and Washington as states with a "top two" open primary format on a common ballot. Louisiana has a common ballot, and a candidate who reaches 50% wins the office; if nobody reaches 50%, the top two vote-getters advance to another round of voting. Nebraska legislators run without a party designation. Another 16 states allow voters to participate in either Democratic or Republican primaries without having to register with those parties, and seven others allow unaffiliated voters to vote in party primaries, but don't allow Democrats to vote in Republican primaries, or vice versa.

In a recent campaign update, South Dakota Open Primaries announced that the organization has gathered about 25,000 signatures so far.

Enshrining abortion rights in South Dakota: Abortion is currently banned in South Dakota, except when necessary "to preserve the life of the pregnant female."

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The proposed constitutional amendment would prevent the state from regulating "the abortion decision and its effectuation" during the first trimester (1 to 13 weeks). During the second trimester (14 to 26 weeks), the state could regulate abortion "only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." During the third trimester (when the fetus is viable), abortion could be regulated or prohibited except when it's necessary to preserve "the life or health" of the mother.

The Attorney General's Office recently issued a warning to sponsor group Dakotans for Health after receiving reports that petition circulators were violating state laws by allowing signatures without circulators present, allowing some signers to sign more than once, and providing allegedly misleading information to the public.

Rick Weiland, with Dakotans for Health, said petition circulators have been harassed by anti-abortion protesters and that the charges are "just another attempt to discredit our effort."

The organization has reached the required signatures to submit the petition to the Secretary of State's Office, Weiland said, but the group will continue to gather signatures until it hits its goal of 60,000. The group is about 75% of the way to its goal, and Weiland expects to file ahead of the deadline and potentially by the end of the year.

Eliminating food sales tax: While there are two petitions approved for circulation to eliminate the food sales tax in South Dakota — one by constitutional amendment and the second by initiated law — only the initiated law petition is being actively circulated, Weiland said. Dakotans for Health is spearheading the initiative in addition to its abortion ballot question.

Gov. Kristi Noem supported the idea to repeal the state food sales tax during her re-election campaign in 2022 and backed an unsuccessful bill during the last legislative session to eliminate the tax. But Noem pulled her support for the potential ballot question earlier this year, citing concerns from the Attorney General's Office in his ballot explanation about jeopardizing state revenues from a tobacco litigation settlement and a streamlined sales agreement with other states.

Dakotans for Health has collected close to the required 17,508 signatures for the ballot initiative, Weiland said, but he plans to collect at least 25,000 signatures. He said he's "extremely confident" the group will reach its goal by the end of the year.

Revising legislative term limits: The constitutional amendment would limit state legislator terms to a maximum of eight years in each of the House of Representatives and Senate, capped at 16 years total. South Dakota's current legislative term limits allow legislators to serve indefinitely so long as they switch chambers every four terms or skip a term.

Sen. Brent Hoffman, R-Sioux Falls, introduced a bill during the last legislative session to establish such term limits and bring it to the 2024 ballot. He failed to gather enough support in the Legislature, so he must gather the 35,017 signatures to place the initiative on the ballot.

"We believe term limits are consistent with the constitution and voter intent," Hoffman said in an emailed statement.

Hoffman said his group of volunteers will "eventually get all the signatures" required.

Prohibiting legislative intervention: The constitutional amendment would prohibit the Legislature from amending or repealing voter-approved ballot measures for seven years after their passage. Collin Duprel, former South Dakota congressional Libertarian candidate and co-chair of the Voice of the People organization, said the legislation is about "respecting the will of the people."

Based on the state constitution, the Legislature may repeal an initiated statute with a majority vote. In order to change or repeal a constitutional amendment, lawmakers must place an amendment on the ballot via the ordinary referral process, which consists of a majority vote in each chamber.

The Legislature repealed and later reinstated some parts of Initiated Measure 22 in 2017, months after 51% of South Dakota voters passed the massive ethics, corruption and campaign-finance measure.

"The Legislature can take an initiated measure and decide it's not in the best interest of themselves and get rid of it," Duprel said. "That's what it's all about. It's not as sexy to the media as the marijuana or abortion question, but it's still pretty dang important. It's the constitutional amendment that's out there

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to protect any other initiated measure passed by the people of this state.”

The constitutional amendment would not prevent legislators or South Dakota citizens from referring a question back to the people to amend or repeal the initial ballot question, and it wouldn't prevent the court system from intervening if the passed ballot initiative is illegal.

The seven year timeline “allows the spirit of the law to percolate through the state and still gives an opportunity for voters to overturn any of it,” Duprel said.

Voice of the People started collecting signatures this fall and is closing in on 10,000 of its required 35,017 signatures, Duprel said.

Repealing South Dakota's medical marijuana program: Travis Ismay, the chairman of Concerned Citizens of South Dakota, said the group wants to repeal South Dakota's medical marijuana program because it took away control for local governments.

Examples, he said, include sections of the state's marijuana program that “forced every municipality to allow for at least one dispensary,” according to his interpretation, allow students to take medical marijuana during school hours and allow minors to acquire a medical marijuana card.

“I didn't think that was right,” Ismay said, “and I had a lot of other people I talked to throughout the state who said they regretted voting for it (in 2020), so I thought we should give South Dakota a second chance.”

Ismay said the group isn't quite halfway to its required 17,508 signatures for the initiated measure, but “we are gaining.”

Legalizing the possession, use and distribution of marijuana: This is Matthew Schweich's third attempt to legalize marijuana for recreational use in South Dakota.

Schweich ran the Constitutional Amendment A campaign in 2020, which passed with 54% of the vote and would have legalized recreational cannabis in the state. But the amendment was struck down as unconstitutional.

He also ran the campaign for “Yes on IM 27” in 2022, which would have legalized the possession, distribution and use of marijuana for adults who are 21 years and older. The measure failed to receive majority support, earning 47% of the vote.

Schweich's organization South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws is aiming to put the 2022 ballot question back on the ballot in 2024. The measure would legalize recreational marijuana use but would not implement regulations on sales (to stay true to South Dakota's single subject rule for ballot questions) and would instead leave the regulatory process up to the Legislature.

While the group is circulating its petition, Schweich said the group has “a long ways to go.” The sticking point for the campaign's success, he said, is funding.

“I don't think of it as we get to the end of the signature drive, submit it and then the next chapter begins,” Schweich said. “We have to start raising the funds for the final push now. ... We can't just limp across the finish line in May.”

Petitions not yet in circulation

Sponsors of ballot questions submit a copy of the proposed statute or amendment to the South Dakota Legislative Research Council for review before ballot language is drafted and reviewed by the state attorney general. The attorney general's statement is provided for public comment for 10 days before being finalized. After that, a complete copy of the petition including a list of signatures must be submitted to the Secretary of State's Office.

At least 5% of the submitted signatures must be sampled and verified by the Secretary of State's Office. State law allows any person to file a complaint against the validity of submitted signatures within 30 days of the petition validation.

Six potential ballot questions listed on the Secretary of State's website have not been cleared for circulation yet:

An initiated measure legalizing the sale of recreational cannabis to adults, from a different sponsor than

Schweich.

A constitutional amendment from Ismay preventing legalization of federally banned substances, which would halt the state's medical marijuana program.

A constitutional amendment removing the state's single-subject limitation on ballot questions.

A constitutional amendment regarding election integrity, including banning voting machines and only allowing hand counting of ballots, among other changes.

A constitutional amendment to reserve certain parental rights to their children's education and health records.

A constitutional amendment banning any medical vaccine mandates by state government, local governments and private organizations unless the vaccine has been in circulation for at least 20 years; isn't a ribonucleic acid vaccine (like the COVID shot); or a majority of the state House of Representatives and Senate don't object to the mandate.

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

COMMENTARY

Noem sets budget mood, but are legislators in a mood to follow?

Lawmakers rejected several of governor's proposals last winter

by DANA HESS

With her annual budget address set for Dec. 5, Gov. Kristi Noem used her last weekly newspaper column of October to help set the mood for the coming legislative session. The mood she's going for: overwhelmingly conservative.

For the past few years, the state had enjoyed strong economic growth coupled with a windfall of federal pandemic funds. The federal funds are gone, so Noem is already trying to lower expectations about what to expect from the state government budget in the next year. She wants legislators to know that their spending days are over.

This is a wise move on Noem's part because almost half the legislators who go to Pierre have known nothing but flush years during their service. As Noem noted in her column, 49% of the Legislature's 105 lawmakers have been serving only since 2020.

"These legislators are used to having huge revenues and surpluses to spend on whatever they want," Noem said in her column. "They have not had to do what more and more families across America are having to do — stick to a tight budget."

What those lawmakers will learn is that in most budget years, there are some groups that are typically losers. It's not uncommon, when the budget is tight, for a lack of revenue to leave education, health care and state employee salaries underfunded.

Faced with a lack of funding, it's likely lawmakers will look around for other sources of revenue. Noem was adamant in her column that they should keep their hands off what she refers to as the "tax holiday" implemented in the last session when the Legislature cut the state sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2%.

While this tax cut doesn't provide much relief at the cash register — spend \$100 to save 30 cents — it will account for an estimated \$104 million that won't be flowing into state coffers. It's no wonder that some lawmakers are already talking about putting an early end to the tax holiday.

Aside from the state's regular funding needs, there are new financial challenges on the horizon. A legislative summer study looked at ways to help financially strapped counties. One solution would be for the state to take on some of the cost of tax collection, criminal justice and emergency management. Good luck paying for those added burdens in a normal budget year.

Another summer study sought sustainable models for long-term care. One news report said the committee had developed a dozen recommendations that came with a \$9 million price tag. Finding an extra \$9 million won't be easy now that the federal well has run dry.

Another challenge the Legislature faces is teacher pay. Depending on who is making the national rank-

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ings, South Dakota once again generally ranks close to last in teacher pay. The last time the Legislature tried to do something about that, they ended up raising the sales tax. Just as she was adamant about not ending the tax holiday, Noem's column was just as forceful about not raising taxes.

While Noem is smart to start lowering expectations for lawmakers who are accustomed to spending, in this case she may not be the best voice to offer this particular message. During the last session, lawmakers were less than receptive to her legislative agenda.

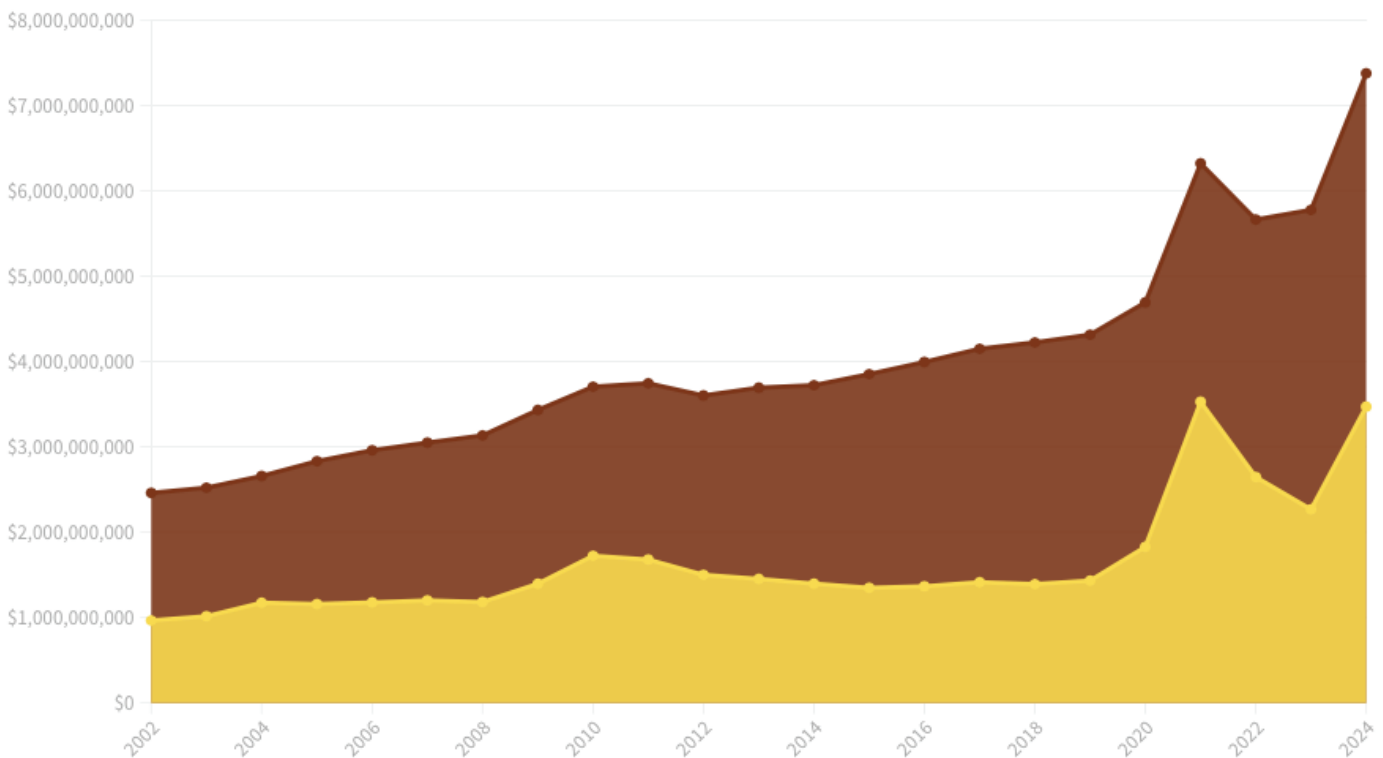
They opted to lower the overall state sales tax rather than endorse the governor's plan to cut the state sales tax on groceries. They didn't approve of her push to add more family leave for state employees, forcing Noem to make the change administratively. She offered a bill that would create a board to vet the sales of agricultural land to foreign countries. Despite the governor's backing, the Legislature said no thanks.

That's not the way anyone would expect a super-majority of Republican lawmakers to treat the leader of their party. While Noem is working to set the mood for the next legislative session, only time will tell if lawmakers are in the mood to follow her lead.

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.

State budgets by year

The total amounts of South Dakota's annual state budgets, including the portion arising from federal funding.



Source: [SD Bureau of Finance and Management](#) • Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight

'Waiting for life to start again': Family agonizes over parental termination

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND ANNIE TODD - NOVEMBER 8, 2023 6:00 AM

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story mentions mental health issues. If you need help or know someone who does, please call 988, the national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, available 24/7 for free and confidential support.



Christian Banley sits in front of her Aberdeen home on Aug. 23, 2023. Banley's parental rights for two daughters were terminated earlier in the summer. (Samantha

Laurey/Argus Leader)

Home is Christian Banley's purgatory.

The tan, unassuming clapboard house with a sagging awning and an overgrown front yard sits across the street from Northern State University in Aberdeen and needs a fresh coat of paint.

Inside, the walls were recently painted black and sunlight struggles to make its way through small, curtained windows.

The atmosphere reflects Christian's pain.

But there is one place that remains brightly lit. A large bay window welcomes the warm afternoon light into Christian's dining room. The sunlight shines directly on the altar Christian has built for her 9- and 10-year-old daughters.

A favorite Pikachu figurine stands guard over the dining room. Sitting next to the altar is a memorial of loved ones who've passed: Christian's stillborn child, close relatives and friends.

A letter colored with every crayon available and peppered with black-marker stars draws the eye.

"I miss you. You are the best mom ever," it reads. "I can't wait to go home."

But the girls aren't coming home.

The girls, who are being named only by initials to protect their privacy and well-being, are enrolled members of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe like their mother and 16-year-old brother. The two, L and J, are part of a growing number of children whose parents' rights have been terminated. Between 2017 and 2021, the number in South Dakota grew by 40%, according to the U.S. Health and Human Services Department.

Those findings are part of an Argus Leader/South Dakota Searchlight investigation examining the issues Native families and children face inside South Dakota's child welfare system. Native American children accounted for nearly 74% of the foster care system at the end of fiscal year 2023 — despite accounting for only 13% of the state's overall child population.

Half of the children who enter foster care in South Dakota are reunited with their parents. For Native American children, that drops to 40%.

Christian's parental rights were terminated in July after a two-year legal process.

The termination is a judge's signature on a piece of paper, permanently cleaving parents from their child. They're not allowed to initiate contact.

They have no idea if their child is up for adoption or if adoptive parents have come to love the child as their own.

The state moves on.

Christian is frozen in place, unwilling to improve her house. While the girls' return is legally impossible until they turn 18, she waits, hoping they'll come home.

"We're not going to sand the floors until we know when L and J are coming home, because what if they don't want to stay here?" she said.

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Arrest separates family

Before her girls were taken, Christian's house was filled with friends cooking and eating around the large wooden dining table. Christian tried to provide a judgment-free refuge for recovering addicts and formerly incarcerated people.

The 32-year-old knew what it was like to be judged by those in the small community. She was a pregnant teenager. Christian's birth mother had been unable to care for her, so she was adopted by her aunt and uncle. She had been in a series of violent relationships. She even ran away as a teen.

By providing a safe place for those in need of a helping hand, Christian wanted to teach her children by example to love people despite their flaws.

"I have a really big soft spot for addicts and prisoners," Christian said. "I can let them live with me and they can be sober because I'm sober. I'm trying to convince myself that I can save people."

J and L understood their non-traditional family was recovering from choices made and consequences that followed. They knew why some "uncles" went to prison, and the girls would challenge them to be better versions of themselves, Christian said.

Christian said she didn't know one of her roommates, living in the locked-off basement of the three-floor house, was using meth and had it in the home.

But on the morning of April 21, 2021, police entered the home with a search warrant.

Meth residue was found on the property and Christian was arrested, according to court documents. Her parents were called to pick up the girls, still at home waiting for homeschooling lessons to start. Their brother Josh, who attended Central High School, was already gone.

Christian was charged with possession of a controlled substance, ingestion and keeping a place for use or sale of a controlled substance, according to court documents. The charges were later dismissed by a Brown County prosecutor.

Then, she was charged with two counts of contributing to the abuse and neglect of a child, triggering a Child Protective Services case.

Journey through the foster system

L, J and Josh moved into a six-bedroom mobile home outside of Aberdeen after Christian was arrested. The place belonged to Thad and Pam Banley, Christian's adoptive parents and biological uncle and aunt.

The girls struggled to adjust to their new environment for a month, waiting for Christian to come pick them up, Pam recalled.

The 48-hour emergency custody hearing, required by law, was held in June, not in April. The Unified Judicial System could not provide an explanation as to why the emergency hearing was delayed, because child abuse and neglect cases are sealed. The hearing happened two days after Thad and Pam had said they couldn't continue to keep J and L and they couldn't find other family members to take the girls.

Thad explained he'd made the call to DSS in June, not because he and Pam didn't want the girls, but because he wanted the girls to be back with their mother.

"Maybe I was wrong, but I wanted Christian to raise her own kids," Thad said. "It's not that we don't want them, but rightfully they belong to their mother. Whatever the state sees right or wrong, those kids need to be with their mother."

Thad's 2021 call to DSS was outlined in a letter sent to the Banleys two years later, notifying them they were not approved to be an adoptive placement for the girls.

While DSS was granted custody of the girls and Josh, they continued to stay with their grandparents during the summer and fall of 2021.

Josh ran away to live with a friend in Nebraska, afraid he would be placed away from his siblings and relatives.

The girls settled into living in the country. Pam recalled the house was filled with quiet conversation and laughter in the evenings while the girls drew at the kitchen table, Pam made supper on the stove and Thad painted birdhouses.

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Thad bought palm-sized birdhouses for the girls to paint. The tiny plywood structures reflect the girls' personalities: L's is simple and orderly, with a purple and pink roof and crisply drawn lines on the side. J used all the colors she could, the house striped in green, orange, pink, blue, white and yellow.

Christian visited the girls once a week in a supervised environment as detailed in her case plan set by DSS and the courts, working toward reunification.

Then Pam suffered a stroke in October 2021. Her son called DSS, asking if L and J could be placed with another foster family nearby as Pam recovered.

But there were no open, long-term foster homes in the Aberdeen area. The girls were able to stay with their youth pastor in an emergency placement in town for a week before being sent together to a foster family in Garretson, 200 miles southeast of Aberdeen.

That didn't last long. The girls were quickly split: L went to the Children's Home Society in Sioux Falls while J was sent to a foster family in Madison.

Suddenly, Christian's 10-minute drive turned into an eight-hour round-trip drive to see her girls weekly. If Christian was late, which she often was because of car trouble or getting pulled over for driving with a revoked license, she would miss the visitation.

She missed seven visits in a 12-month period.

She failed to find steady employment that met the requirements in her case plan, instead relying on her gig work as a cleaner and her OnlyFans account, a paid online platform in the adult entertainment industry. She became isolated from friends and couldn't find people DSS and the courts approved of to list on a safety plan, the ones who could come check on her children when they returned home and report their findings back to the department.

Months passed. Christian married her boyfriend right after her girls were placed with her parents, thinking he could get custody of them as their step-father. That wasn't an option, considering his past history of drug use and incarceration.

She subsequently divorced him, thinking it would improve her chances.

"My marriage is over now because of this entire thing," Christian said. "That was my best friend."

L and J's fathers were unable to take custody of the girls since one of them had died and the other was in prison.

Josh eventually returned and was put into Department of Corrections custody in Aberdeen after he'd missed a parole date while he was living in Nebraska with a friend. As soon as he was released, he went back to living with Christian.

He questioned why his mom, who had always provided the essentials — food, water, electricity and wifi — couldn't get his sisters back. He treasured being a big brother.

Thad and Pam watched as Christian tried to comply with the case plan. Thad, a by-the-book veteran who still keeps his gray hair cut to Army standards, said he grew frustrated as he watched his daughter jump through every hoop put in front of her, without the system caring for her ADHD.

"What it boils down to, for me, is it appears that DSS set her up to fail," Thad said. "She's not entirely at fault. She did what she could."

Thad and Pam now live in a quiet home, void of the chatter of two of their grandchildren.

"Yes, it's sad, and yes, you get upset," Thad said. "Two, three times a week, I sit and I watch TV here all alone because Pam was in bed early. And I cry those two, three times."

For Pam, she can't think about the absence left by her granddaughters.

"I don't want to let the sadness in," she said.

To stave off the feeling, she picked up a plush toy shaped like a Prozac pill from the living room table and squeezed it. The toy let out a peel of laughter and Pam smiled.

"It sounds like my granddaughter's laugh."

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Indian Child Welfare Act adds to case complexity

Adding to the emotional turmoil the Banleys face is their allegation that the state failed to comply with the federal 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act. The law is meant to keep Native American families together. When Native children are placed into the foster care system, the law prioritizes keeping the children near their communities and culture.

The Banleys say ICWA applies to L and J's case since they're enrolled tribal members. The girls' case should have been transferred to the Cheyenne River Sioux tribal court, they say, like Christian's own case when she was a baby.

Christian's mother left her with Thad and Pam, both Cheyenne River Sioux citizens, who were granted temporary custody of her when she was 6 weeks old. Thad and Pam adopted Christian, gaining a daughter in addition to their five sons. But Christian's birth mother still had the right to visit her daughter when she could.

Thad said it was the best case scenario of ICWA working — keeping a Native child with her family. He wants a repeat of that with his granddaughters. Pam has recovered from her stroke and the grandparents believe they can care for the girls.

"To me when they terminate the parental rights, then those children should be given back to the tribe, period, or given back to us," Thad said. "It's tribal custom for the children to be raised not only by their parents, but by the grandparents, by aunts and uncles and so on."

Christian needed a miracle earlier this year. She was a month from having her parental rights terminated and there was no guarantee that Thad and Pam would be eligible to adopt the girls.

Through it all, Christian had been calling the Cheyenne River ICWA office, trying to get someone to look at her girls' case. An email sent by the state notifying the ICWA director of the case bounced back and Christian said nobody was taking her calls.

In late May, an ICWA caseworker called her back.

Frankee Veit had been at the office for less than 100 days. Her case count had grown from 40 when she started up to 57.

"I only had 15 days on that case before they made the decision that it was done. That's probably my most frustrating thing," Veit said, adding she filled out paperwork for a jurisdiction transfer and that Christian's brother in Fargo and parents were still viable kinship placement options. "I don't think I had enough time."

Christian said because of a wrong date on the paperwork, the case was unable to be transferred to tribal court. Christian's rights were terminated in June.

Miscommunication leads to termination

Thad and Pam were notified via letter from DSS in June that they weren't eligible to adopt the girls but could continue to have contact with them. It's a point of contention because the two say the case workers twisted their words.

"They are constantly fabricating information," Thad said. "They will say a lie just to prove themselves right."

In response, DSS said that all case records and files relating to child abuse and neglect reports are confidential in accordance with state law, and the department could not comment on the particulars of this case.

"In South Dakota, CPS does not have the authority to remove children from homes and South Dakota courts maintain jurisdiction and oversight throughout the entirety of an abuse and neglect case," said Emily Richardt, a DSS spokesperson.

In the letter to Thad and Pam, DSS laid out a timeline of moments when the grandparents had expressed they didn't want custody of the girls, including the June 2021 call Thad had made, and their failure to complete paperwork for a home study and a background check.

Pam disputes what's in the letter regarding her discussion with the caseworker and her interest in caring for the girls.

"There was no health professional telling me I couldn't keep my girls," Pam said, as she continued to recover from her stroke. "I was just not ready mentally at the time."

After expressing her anxiety, Pam said she texted the case worker a week after their discussion and

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said she could care for the girls and asked to resend the paperwork for the home study. Instead, they got the rejection letter.

The final goodbye

Christian had 15 minutes to say goodbye to L and J at the Children's Home Society's visitation room in Sioux Falls.

She held herself together as her daughters cried. She couldn't cry, she wouldn't cry. For Christian, this wasn't the final goodbye.

"I'm not concerned," she told her daughters. "I know you're coming home."

As the minutes wound down, case workers stepped into the room. The girls cried harder and fought to stay in her arms, Christian recalled.

She fell to her knees after the door shut, sobbing.

"It took everything inside of me not to cry with them," she said.

Her tears continued as she left the Children's Home Society and went to a nearby park. She contemplated taking her own life.

It was the thought of her son that kept her from walking into the river. Josh became a rock for his mother as she dealt with the fallout of the girls' removal back in 2021. She was depressed. Josh became more of a parent to Christian than she'd been his mother during that time.

"The only reason that I am not as suicidal as I've been most of my life is because how would it look to him that I was so heartbroken over the girls that I left him?" she said.

Christian says she's learned her lesson.

She now understands she put her daughters in danger when she allowed her former roommate to live with them and trusted there wouldn't be drugs in the house.

"I've definitely put them in a very not good environment, but it was not out of malice," she said. "I was just trying to follow my heart to help and show my kids just how you should treat people. I hate that other people would ruin it for me. But at the same time, I can only blame myself because I knew it could go wrong."

She also picked up 16 traffic tickets and three serious charges, such as drug possession and shoplifting, in the last two years, according to court documents — a marked increase from her previous interactions with the court system.

She became isolated, depressed and paranoid, saying the child welfare process made her feel crazy.

"How do you defend yourself for two years? That's not who you are and then you become the monster they want," Christian said.

Each time Thad and Pam enter their bedroom they see the tiny birdhouses the girls decorated. They're reminded of the two missing grandchildren, their lost birds.

Christian is frozen in time at the Aberdeen house. She hasn't painted the outside, for fear the girls won't recognize what it looks like. And she doesn't want to move, for fear the girls won't be able to find her again.

The walls of the girls' bedroom are bare. Stuffed animals, baby blankets and clothes wait in the girls' closet, their scent fading with each passing day.

Josh wants to move, to escape the prison the two have created for themselves. It's tormenting, the memory of when the girls were removed wrapping itself around the mother and son, following them throughout the house.

But still they remain.

"We're both waiting for life to start again," Christian said.

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

GOP presidential candidates brawl in Florida debate, while Trump rallies nearby

BY: JACOB FISCHLER AND ROBIN OPSAHL - NOVEMBER 8, 2023 11:08 PM

Five Republican candidates for president tussled over support for Ukraine and abortion policy at a debate in Miami Wednesday evening, while the leading contender for the nomination, former President Donald Trump, sought Latino votes in an event across town.

Trump, who consistently garners more than 50% in polls of Republican voters, once again declined to participate in what was the third debate of the primary race, holding his own rally in nearby Hialeah instead.

That left five candidates, the fewest of any GOP debate so far this cycle, vying to be the lead alternative to the former president in the two-hour debate aired by NBC News. The moderators were the network's Lester Holt and Kristen Welker, joined by Salem Radio Network's conservative host Hugh Hewitt.

The candidates — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina — largely agreed that the United States should support Israel's war against Hamas, calling for aggressive action from the key U.S. ally in the Middle East.

But they showed sharp divisions on other issues, highlighted by a growing rift between DeSantis and Haley, whose position in the race has improved in recent weeks largely at the expense of the home-state governor, and a continuing quarrel between Haley and Ramaswamy that descended into personal attacks.

At one point, as each accused the other of being too friendly to China, Ramaswamy pointed out Haley's daughter has an account on Chinese-owned TikTok. "You might want to take care of your family first," he said.

"Leave my daughter out of your voice," Haley responded, adding, "You're just scum."

On abortion, all of the candidates declared themselves against abortion rights. But the day after Republicans saw setbacks in state elections where abortion rights were central issues, Haley, Christie and DeSantis said the question would largely be left to states. Scott said he'd support a national ban.

In Hialeah, Trump focused his attention on Biden and Democrats — comparing the current administration to regimes in communist-led countries.

"If you don't want to let the communists destroy America like they destroyed Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and so many other countries, you need to send the message by voting crooked Joe Biden ... and every last Democrat, get them the hell out of office," Trump told the crowd.

Trump's shadow looms

In the first round of the questions, candidates were asked why GOP voters should support them over the race's frontrunner.

DeSantis launched into a short stump speech that touched on inflation and border security.

He then criticized Trump for not appearing at the debates and said Republicans were losing elections with Trump as the most recognizable leader in the party.

"Donald Trump's a lot different guy than he was in 2016," he said. "He owes it to you to be on this stage and explain why he should get another chance. He should explain why he didn't have Mexico pay for the border wall. He should explain why he racked up so much debt. He should explain why he didn't drain the swamp."

Haley said Trump performed well as president, but that new leaders should address new challenges.

"He was the right president at the right time," she said. "I don't think he's the right president now."

Haley also criticized Trump for allowing the national debt to grow and said he "used to be right about Ukraine and foreign issues. now he's gotten weak in the knees."

Christie continued strong criticism of the former president, a consistent message in a campaign that has struggled to gain traction with a GOP electorate still largely loyal to Trump, who is facing criminal indictments in four cases.

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"Anybody who's going to be spending the next year and a half of their life focusing on keeping themselves out of jail and courtrooms cannot lead this party or this country," Christie said.

At the Trump rally 15 miles away, the crowd cheered when the former president asked if it was the right decision to not participate in the debates.

"Somebody said, one of those dumber ones, 'He doesn't have the courage to stand up' – Well, listen, I'm standing in front of tens of thousands of people right now, and it's on television," Trump said. "That's a hell of a lot harder to do than a debate."

The former president said he didn't know who the "best" other Republican presidential candidate was, but said he liked "one of them" — referring to Ramaswamy.

"One of them said ... on the stage – that, 'President Trump is the greatest president in many generations,'" Trump said, referring to a past debate. "I sort of like him. ... I mean, how can I dislike him? He's so nice."

He said he thought it was "okay" that Ramaswamy said he is running for president because he's a younger version of Trump, but that "we want the older version, right?"

He briefly called out DeSantis by name, claiming the Florida governor only won his reelection campaign because of Trump's endorsement.

Israel center stage

Debating for the first time since the Israel-Hamas war began Oct. 7, the candidates spent more time on foreign policy Wednesday.

All five used harsh language to describe what they would tell Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"I will be telling Bibi: Finish the job once and for all with these butchers," DeSantis said. "They're terrorists. They're massacring innocent people."

The other candidates also called for Israel to destroy Hamas and criticized calls for a ceasefire, with Haley also dismissing even a temporary cessation of fighting to allow for humanitarian aid.

But differences emerged on Ukraine's war with Russia.

Scott said he has supported Ukraine's war effort, but said an aid package for both Israel and Ukraine, as President Joe Biden has proposed, was the wrong approach.

"We need to focus specifically on providing Israel with the \$14 billion that they need so that we show the world that we are 100% undeniably standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel," he said.

Aid to Ukraine, he said, should be conditioned on a higher degree of accountability "to understand where the resources have gone."

As he has been since the start of the race, Ramaswamy was the most explicitly pro-Russia, criticizing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and saying the regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded last year are culturally Russian.

"To frame this as some kind of battle between good versus evil: Don't buy it," he said.

He called Haley "the sharpest of the war hawks on Ukraine" who should be held accountable for her position.

Haley responded that Ramaswamy, a 38-year-old with no government experience, was naive about world affairs.

"I'm telling you, Putin and (Chinese) President Xi (Jinping) are salivating at the thought that someone like that could become president," she said.

Ramaswamy also said that U.S. troops should be sent to the border with Mexico.

"We will use our own military to seal our own Southern border," he said. "What we need to do is stop using our military to protect somebody else's border halfway around the world, when we're short right here at home."

Abortion rights

The debate came a day after an Election Day that highlighted Republicans' weakness on abortion rights, an issue that has remained salient in the nearly 18 months since the conservative majority on the U.S.

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Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear won reelection in heavily Republican Kentucky. Democrats in Virginia ran on a pro-abortion-rights message to win both chambers of the General Assembly and Ohio voters approved a measure to protect abortion rights in the state constitution.

All candidates said they were opposed to abortion, but, with Scott as a notable exception, most de-emphasized the role of the federal government and the president.

Scott called himself "100% pro-life," and said as president he would enact a 15-week national ban.

Haley said she would sign any bill to limit abortion rights, but that it was not realistic to make such promises because a federal bill would have to get 60 votes in a U.S. Senate currently controlled by Democrats.

Instead, she said, abortion opponents should work with abortion rights supporters to find consensus on issues to expand access to contraception and adoption.

DeSantis said Republicans had to better contest ballot measures at the state level.

Christie said conservatives have long called for the issue to be decided on a state level, which he said was consistent with the foundations of U.S. democracy.

"The founders were really smart," he said. "And this is an issue that should be decided in each state. I trust the people of this country, state-by-state, to make the call for themselves."

Ramaswamy said it would take a "different generation of leadership to actually lead us forward and unite the country on this."

Haley clashes with DeSantis, Ramaswamy

Haley, running third in most polls behind Trump and DeSantis, trained much of her rhetoric on the only candidate on stage ahead of her.

She said she would end formal trade relations with China until fentanyl was better controlled and noted DeSantis had not taken that position.

DeSantis criticized Haley for, as South Carolina governor, trying to lure Chinese companies to the state.

"She welcomed them into South Carolina, gave them land near a military base, wrote the Chinese ambassador a love letter saying what a great friend they were," he said. "That was like their number one way to do economic development."

Haley said relations with China have worsened in the 10 years since she sought economic development from the country.

She added that as governor, DeSantis has much more recently tried to bring Chinese companies to his state.

She also attacked DeSantis' record opposing fracking in Florida. DeSantis' presidential campaign supports fracking, a controversial part of extracting natural gas, but he has opposed it in Florida. DeSantis said Wednesday he only opposed fracking in the Everglades, but analysis has shown he campaigned on a broader objection.

Ramaswamy, whose isolationist foreign policy has been a central part of his campaign, referred to neoconservatives in the Republican Party who resembled "Dick Cheney in three-inch heels," apparently referring to both Haley and DeSantis.

DeSantis didn't respond to the dig, but Haley later said that her heels were "for ammunition."

Trump holds separate rally

Trump took the stage in Hialeah, 15 miles away from the debate, his campaign declaring Florida is "Trump County."

Trump called for supporters to help him win the Florida primary "for the third straight time." Though the event coincided with the GOP presidential debate, Trump spent most of his time criticizing Biden.

He repeated false claims that Biden and Democrats "cheated" in the 2020 general election, and said that he is often asked by supporters if he expects Biden to try to "cheat again."

"The radical left Democrats rigged the presidential election of 2020 and we're not going to allow them

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to rig the presidential election of 2024," Trump said.

He said that Biden could not win a fair election, saying voters will not support a candidate whose presidency led to high inflation, international conflicts and "open borders."

While Trump said he believed he could win in a rematch against Biden, he also claimed that the upcoming presidential election is the last chance to prevent his political opponents from permanently seizing power.

"This election will decide whether power in America belongs to them forever, or whether it belongs to you, the men and women who make this country great, who make this country run," Trump told the crowd. "2024 is our final battle. Stand with me in the fight."

Biden's campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa released a statement Wednesday saying that Trump continues to lie about the 2020 election "rather than admit he lost — like an adult."

"It would be sad, if it weren't so dangerous," Moussa said. "... The dangerous and erratic ramblings of a loser who can't admit defeat only underscore that Donald Trump is not fit to be president of the United States."

Trump highlights Sanders endorsement

While he briefly criticized DeSantis, Trump also highlighted another Republican governor supporting his campaign: Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

Sanders, who served Trump as press secretary, endorsed her former boss Monday, and told the Florida crowd to help him return to the White House "because our country has never needed Donald Trump more than we do right now."

Sanders said she faced countless attacks and "mean tweets" during her time as press secretary and governor — and that Trump has also faced constant criticism and scrutiny.

"I know that a lot of people may complain that President Trump was too loud, too disruptive, and sometimes even a little too direct," Sanders said. "But to me, that's the very best thing about this president. He tells it like it is."

Sanders was not the only endorser Trump highlighted at the Florida event — he thanked comedian Roseanne Barr and rapper Lil Pump for their support while on stage. He also thanked Florida Republicans who endorsed him. The crowd booed when he thanked U.S. Rep. Carlos Gimenez, a Republican who voted against U.S. GOP Rep. Jim Jordan for House speaker.

"Oh, you don't like him?" Trump asked. "What's going on? Carlos! Come on now. Well, you got to get that straightened out."

The mayor of Hialeah, Esteban Bovo, joined Trump on stage. He thanked Trump for holding an event in the city, and said that he plans to ask the Hialeah city council to authorize naming a street after Trump — holding up a road sign of "President Donald J. Trump Avenue" on stage.

"That's an honor, great honor," Trump said. "I did not know that. Thank you very much."

Thousands attended the event in South Florida, which political analysts say was a strategic location to appeal to Florida Latino voters, including many Cuban Americans. In the most recent census, 95% of Hialeah residents identified as Hispanic or Latino.

Trump told the crowd Biden and Democrats were turning the U.S. into "communist Cuba."

"We have some great Cubans here," Trump said. "And nobody ever did more for Americans who love Cuba than a gentleman named Donald J. Trump when he was president."

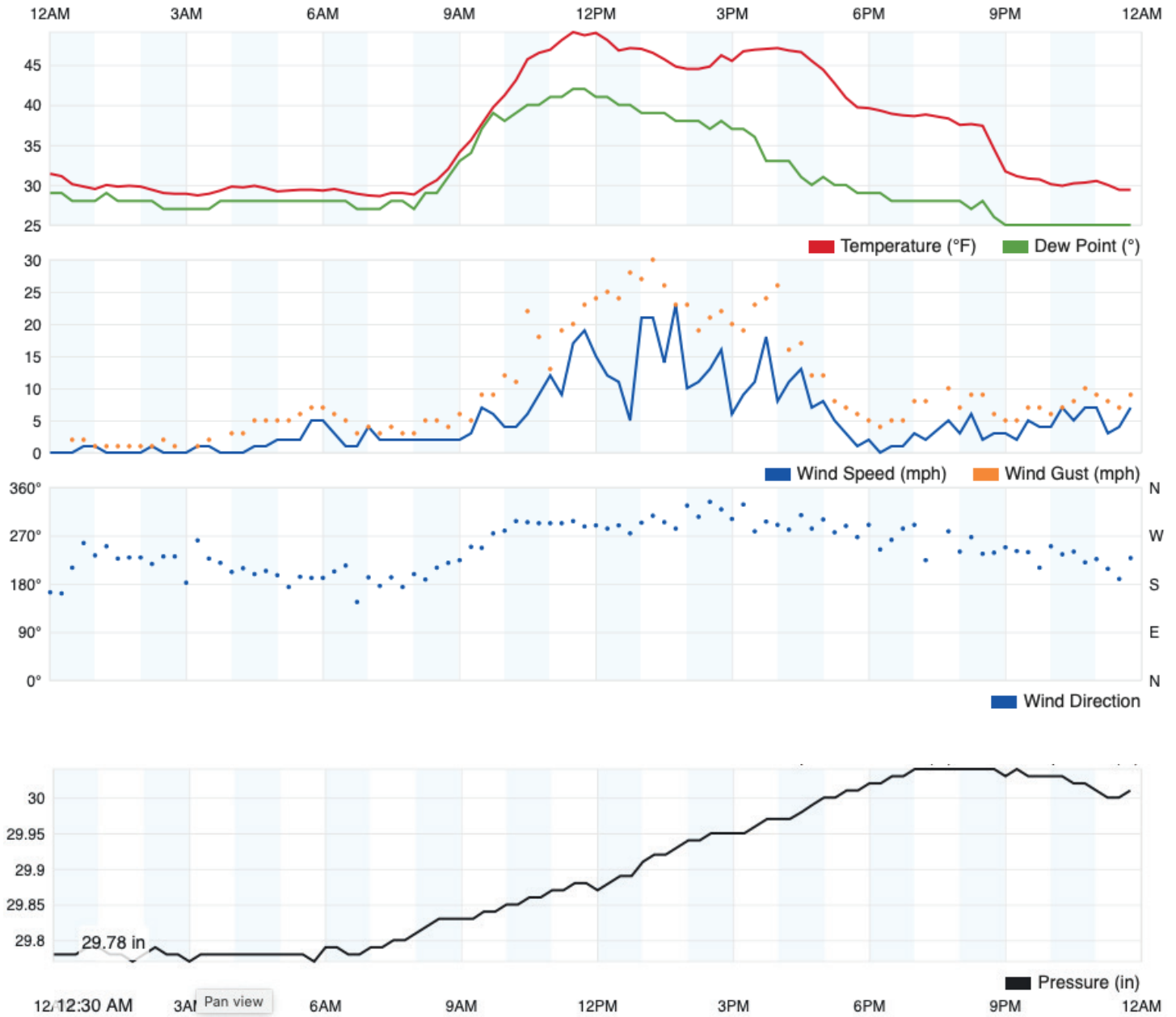
Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Robin Opsahl is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering the state Legislature and politics. Robin has experience covering government, elections and more at media organizations including Roll Call, the Sacramento Bee and the Wausau Daily Herald, in addition to working on multimedia projects, newsletters and visualizations. They were a political reporter for the Des Moines Register covering the Iowa caucuses leading up to the 2020 presidential election, assisting with the Register's Iowa Poll, and reporting on Iowa's 4th District elections.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

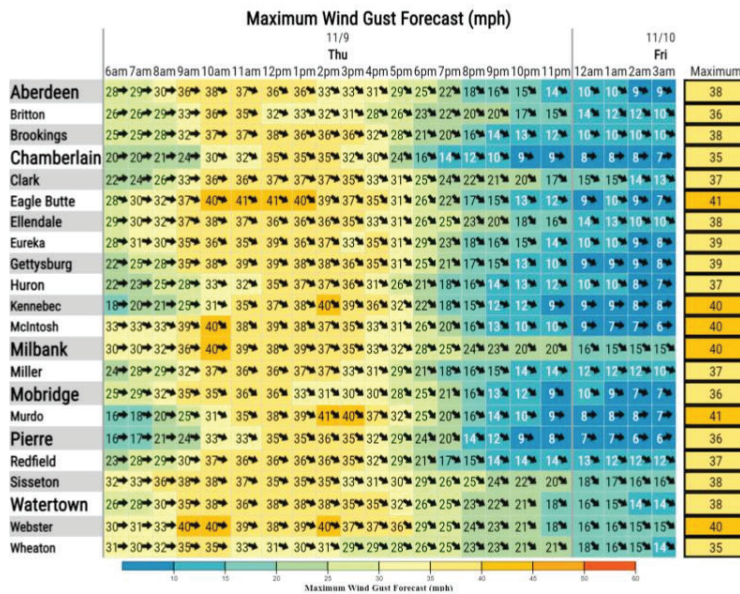
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Thu Nov 9	Fri Nov 10	Sat Nov 11	Sun Nov 12	Mon Nov 13	Tue Nov 14	Wed Nov 15
44°F	41°F	48°F	54°F	58°F	58°F	57°F
27°F	28°F	27°F	31°F	38°F	34°F	38°F
W	WNW	ESE	SSW	S	S	S
28 MPH	6 MPH	16 MPH	13 MPH	17 MPH	13 MPH	11 MPH



Windy Again Today, Warming Up Next Week

November 9, 2023
3:43 AM



Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	11/9	11/10	11/11	11/12	11/13	11/14	11/15
	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
Aberdeen	44	42	48	57	55	60	58
Britton	40	38	46	55	53	58	57
Brookings	46	42	49	54	58	60	59
Chamberlain	49	48	52	58	64	64	63
Clark	42	39	47	55	53	59	58
Eagle Butte	44	43	45	57	55	55	56
Ellendale	42	39	45	55	53	57	56
Eureka	41	41	45	55	54	53	54
Gettysburg	44	43	46	57	56	55	56
Huron	48	44	52	57	61	63	60
Kennebec	48	48	50	60	60	62	60
McIntosh	39	39	42	54	52	53	56
Milbank	45	41	48	57	57	58	61
Miller	46	44	49	57	57	61	57
Mobridge	45	44	47	59	57	56	55
Murdo	48	48	49	59	60	65	61
Pierre	48	48	50	61	60	60	59
Redfield	47	43	50	58	56	61	56
Sisseton	43	38	46	56	55	60	56
Watertown	43	40	47	55	55	61	60
Webster	40	38	45	53	53	57	57
Wheaton	41	38	45	56	53	59	58



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Northwest winds will pick back up again today to 15 to 30 mph with gusts up to 45 mph possible. Temperatures close to normal will maintain today and Friday. A warming trend is forecast to follow, starting Saturday, with readings warming easily into the 50s and 60s from Sunday through at least Wednesday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 12:04 PM

Low Temp: 28 °F at 7:14 AM

Wind: 30 mph at 1:13 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 49 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 70 in 1903

Record Low: 0 in 2018

Average High: 46

Average Low: 22

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.29

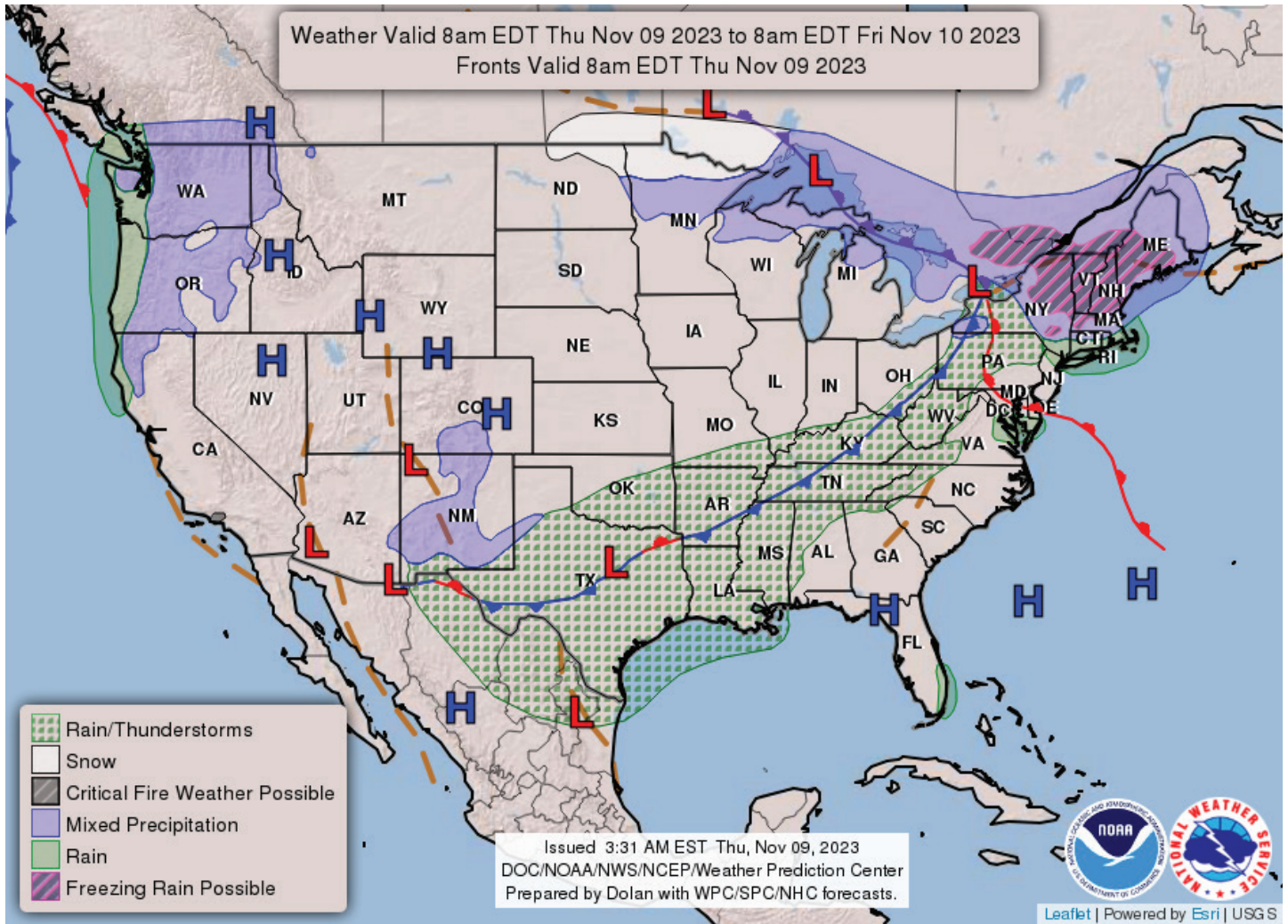
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.17

Average Precip to date: 20.76

Precip Year to Date: 23.15

Sunset Tonight: 5:11:00 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22:48 AM



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Today in Weather History

November 9th, 1977: An intense early winter storm moved northeast from Colorado to Iowa on November 9th and then to Lake Superior by November 10th. In most areas, the precipitation began late on the 8th as rain with temperatures in the 50s, changing to snow early on Wednesday the 9th, with the storm continuing through Thursday. In west-central Minnesota, some freezing rain also occurred before it changed to all snow. As the storm intensified, the winds in the eastern half of South Dakota increased with some gusts as high as 60-70 miles per hour, with widespread visibilities reduced to zero in blowing snow. In west-central Minnesota, north to northwest winds of 60 to 80 mph reduced visibility to zero and piled snow into eight-foot drifts. The temperature dropped rapidly into the 20s. Many roads throughout the eastern part of South Dakota and west-central Minnesota were blocked, and the heavy wet snow immobilized snow plows. Many cars and trucks were snowbound on the roads and highways. Approximately 100 cars and trucks were stalled on Interstate 90, east of Murdo. Near Fergus Falls in western Minnesota, two trucks loaded with turkeys became stuck, and half the birds were frozen. Many schools were closed on the 9th and 10th. Snowfall amounts in the eastern half of the state were more significant than four inches. A band of heavy snow, ten inches or more, extended from Bridgewater to Howard to Clear Lake into parts of west-central Minnesota. The high winds also destroyed a 1400-foot TV tower at Garden City. In addition, there was some loss of the corn crop. Sunflowers comprised the greatest loss because they had not been entirely harvested. Reports of livestock losses were minimal. Some storm total snowfall amounts include; 15 inches in Watertown; 14 inches in Sisseton; 12 inches in Clear Lake and Wheaton; 10.5 inches in Castlewood; and 9 inches near Raymond and Bryant.

1864: On Election Night, a violent tornado strikes a ferry on the Mississippi River near Chester, Illinois, blowing away all but the hull. The boiler and engines are found up the bluff. Half of Chester was destroyed, and twenty died during the storm.

1913 - The freshwater fury , a rapidly deepening cyclone, caused unpredicted gales on the Great Lakes. Eight large ore carriers on Lake Erie sank drowning 270 sailors. Cleveland OH reported 17.4 inches of snow in 24 hours, and a total of 22.2 inches, both all-time records for that location. During the storm, winds at Cleveland averaged 50 mph, with gusts to 79 mph. The storm produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Buffalo NY, and buried Pickens WV under three feet of snow. (9th-11th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1926: An estimated F3 to F4 tornado tore through La Plata, Maryland, killing 14 individuals at a small school. This storm caused 17 deaths and injured 65 others.

1982 - Seven tornadoes touched down in southern California, three of which began as waterspouts. The waterspouts moved ashore at Point Mugu, Malibu, and Long Beach. The Long Beach tornado traveled inland ten miles causing much damage. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Showers and gusty winds associated with a cold front helped extinguish forest fires in the Appalachian Region and clear out smoke in the eastern U.S. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains from eastern Texas to the Tennessee Valley. Longview TX received 3.12 inches of rain, including two inches in two hours, Tupelo MS was soaked with 2.80 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a strong cold front produced severe weather from eastern Oklahoma to central Indiana. Hail more than two inches in diameter was reported around Tulsa OK. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - High winds prevailed along the eastern slopes of the Rockies from the afternoon of the 8th into the early morning hours of the 9th. Winds of 50 to 80 mph prevailed across the northwest chinook area of Wyoming, with gusts to 100 mph. Winds in Colorado gusted to 97 mph at Fritz Peak (located near Rollinsville) the evening of the 8th, and early in the morning on the 9th, gusted to 78 mph west of Fort Collins. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1996 - The Veteran's Day storm of November 9-14, 1996 may be the most severe early season lake effect snow (LES) storm the Great Lakes has witnessed in the past fifty years. At the height of the storm, over 160,000 customers were without power in Greater Cleveland alone, as the storm produced isolated snowfall tallies approaching 70 . As usual with these LES events, the Veteran's Day storm battered snow-belt communities downwind of each of the Great Lakes while nearby towns went unscathed. (University of Illinois WW2010)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ALL TOGETHER, NOW!

One morning on their way to school a group of young boys was walking past a home with a large iron gate. Michael thought he would provide a bit of humor for the group and decided to put his arms and head through the gate and said, "Look at me! My head and hands are on one side of the gate but my heart and body are on the other side."

Before he could get his head and hands out of the gate, one of his friends slammed the gate, and Michael Faraday was badly hurt. He overcame his injuries and became one of the most influential scientists in history for his contributions in the field of electromagnetism.

Later in life, he said, "That experience taught me one thing: My head, heart, and hands should always be on the same side."

This great scientist explained an important truth: there is a path that flows from the head to the heart and from the heart to the hands. Simply stated, what begins in our head usually grows into our heart, and in one way or another, spreads outward and ends up dominating the way we live and what we live for.

God's Word reminds us that we must "not let any part of our body become a tool of wickedness." So, when our eyes are enticed to look at objects that tempt us and may lead to sin, we must immediately look to Him to "deliver us from evil."

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to realize that sin has a way of beginning with an innocent glance that can lead to everlasting destruction. May we keep our eyes focused on You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Romans 6:12-14



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.07.23

3 11 33 42 52 20

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$223,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 41
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.08.23

1 3 23 45 52 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,100,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.08.23

11 25 27 42 45 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 11 Mins 26
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.08.23

9 17 20 27 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$49,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 11
DRAW: Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.08.23

5 20 22 27 63 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 40
DRAW: Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.08.23

14 21 33 39 62 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$220,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 40
DRAW: Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

After Ohio vote, advocates in a dozen states are trying to put abortion on 2024 ballots

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

After Ohio voters on Tuesday approved a constitutional amendment protecting the right to abortion and other forms of reproductive health care, advocates on both sides of the issue are looking at how they can get support on 2024 ballots in at least a dozen states.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that had protected abortion rights nationally, voters in all seven states that held a statewide vote have backed access. That includes Ohio, where voters Tuesday enshrined abortion access in the state constitution.

Constitutional amendments to protect access are already on the ballots for 2024 in Maryland and New York.

Questions are being considered for several other states — some to protect access and some to limit or ban it.

Here's what's happening in the states.

ARIZONA

Abortion access advocates want to amend the state constitution to protect access to abortion until the fetus is viable, generally considered to be around 24 weeks gestational age or later, to protect the life or physical or mental health of the woman.

Supporters have until July 3 to collect nearly 384,000 valid signatures to get the measure on the ballot.

Abortion is banned after 15 weeks of pregnancy, but the Democratic governor signed an executive order in June that bars county prosecutors from bringing abortion-related cases.

COLORADO

Colorado has dueling efforts — one from abortion rights advocates and one from opponents.

Neither side has settled on specific language, but abortion rights advocates want a constitutional amendment that would keep the state from banning abortion and would overturn a 1984 amendment that let the government prohibit insurance coverage for abortion.

Opponents want to ban abortion throughout pregnancy. Colorado currently has no state laws barring abortion at any point in pregnancy.

Both sides have until Aug. 5 to gather more than 124,000 signatures. Any measure would need at least 55% of votes to pass.

FLORIDA

Abortion rights advocates back a constitutional amendment to reverse laws restricting abortion.

Abortion in Florida is now banned at 15 weeks, based on a law that went into effect last year with Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' signature. DeSantis, a Republican candidate for president, this year signed into law a measure to ban abortion after six weeks of pregnancy, with exceptions to save the life of the woman and in cases of rape or incest. The 15-week ban is facing a legal challenge and, in an unusual twist, if it is upheld the six-week ban will go into effect.

The proposed amendment would undo both bans and require that abortion be available until fetal viability, around 24 weeks.

To get it on the ballot, supporters are required to gather nearly 900,000 signatures by Feb. 1.

Republican Attorney General Ashley Moody has asked the state Supreme Court to keep the question off the ballot, arguing that "viability" is too vague.

The amendment would need 60% of votes to pass.

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IOWA

Both chambers of the Republican-controlled legislature have approved an amendment that would declare that there's no right to abortion in the state constitution. Now it needs final approval in the 2023-24 term to go before voters.

This has been at the heart of legal battles already in Iowa.

The state Supreme Court in 2019 upheld a lower court decision that there is a right to abortion in the state constitution. But in 2022, after membership of the court changed, the court reversed itself.

During a special session in July, Republicans passed a new law to ban abortion after cardiac activity can be detected — about six weeks into pregnancy and before women often realize they're pregnant. It was in effect for a few days before a court put enforcement on hold.

MARYLAND

Lawmakers have put an amendment on the ballot that includes the "fundamental right" to reproductive freedom. Abortion is legal in Maryland until viability.

MISSOURI

Intense court battles have already emerged over proposed ballot measures in Missouri, where abortion is currently banned at all stages of pregnancy.

Abortion-rights advocates are pushing for a constitutional amendment that would bar the government from infringing on a person's right to reproductive freedom or ban abortion in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Moderate Republicans are working on an amendment that would be less restrictive than the current law, but not allow the same amount of access the other abortion rights groups want.

Backers of both approaches have submitted several versions of their amendments and will each eventually select one to pursue.

To get it on the ballot, they need more than 171,000 signatures by May 5.

In October, an appeals panel agreed with a lower court judge and rejected the summaries of the ballot questions written by Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft, who is running for governor, as politically partisan. Ashcroft said he would appeal.

NEBRASKA

Abortion rights advocates have submitted language to Nebraska's secretary of state for a ballot question that would expand abortion access.

The exact language has not been approved or made public.

The state bans abortion after the first 12 weeks of pregnancy in most cases.

At least 7% of registered voters statewide must sign a petition by July 5 to put the question on the ballot.

The secretary of state approved ballot language for a referendum to ban abortion throughout pregnancy with a state law, but the backer of the amendment said he had decided not to pursue a petition drive for 2024.

NEVADA

Voters could decide on adding an amendment to establish reproductive freedom, including for decisions about abortion.

A ballot measure pushed by abortion-rights advocates would still allow the state to regulate abortion after viability with exceptions after that for the life and physical and mental health of the woman. The measure would reinforce the state's current policy that allows abortion up to 24 weeks, but further enshrine it in the state constitution and make it more difficult to overturn.

To put the question on the 2024 ballot, supporters have to gather more than 102,000 signatures by June 26.

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NEW YORK

Lawmakers have already placed a question on the 2024 ballot asking voters to add “pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes and reproductive health care and autonomy” as areas where discrimination would be barred. The measure does not mention abortion by name, though it does seek to protect access in a state where it’s now legal until viability.

PENNSYLVANIA

Republican lawmakers might push to add a question to the ballot to amend the state constitution to declare that it doesn’t grant the right to an abortion, or a right to a taxpayer-funded abortion.

Both chambers of the legislature approved the question once, and would need to do it again to get it on the ballot.

There’s drama around whether that will happen during the 2023-24 legislative session. Democrats currently control the lower legislative chamber with a one-vote advantage. As long as that remains the case, the proposal isn’t expected to pass. But it’s possible there could be a vacancy and special election that would flip control — and potentially give new life to the proposed amendment.

Currently, abortion is legal in the state until 24 weeks’ gestational age.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Voters in South Dakota could be asked to amend the state constitution to roll back the state’s ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy with an exception only for the life of the pregnant woman.

Under a proposed constitutional amendment, the state could not restrict abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. It could in the second trimester, except when abortion is necessary to preserve the life or physical or emotional health of the woman. In the third trimester, the state could ban abortion — except when it’s needed to save the woman’s life.

Supporters have until May 7 to gather more than 35,000 signatures to put it on the ballot.

Judges have told two counties to stop restricting gathering signatures on county courthouse campuses.

WASHINGTON

Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee in 2022 pushed for lawmakers to add a question to the ballot to protect abortion access, but so far the legislature has not advanced it.

Currently, abortion is legal until viability.

Associated Press reporters from around the U.S. contributed to this article.

This article has been corrected to show that more than 35,000 signatures are required to get an amendment on the South Dakota ballot, not 17,000.

Israeli strikes pound Gaza City, which tens of thousands have fled in recent days

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes pounded Gaza City overnight into Thursday as ground forces battled Hamas militants in dense urban neighborhoods from which tens of thousands have fled in recent days.

Israeli troops were around 3 kilometers (2 miles) from Shifa Hospital in the heart of downtown, the hospital’s director said. Israel has been vague on troop movements, but officials say Gaza’s largest city is the focus of their campaign to crush Hamas following its deadly Oct. 7 assault inside Israel.

Amid a drumbeat of international concern over dire conditions inside Gaza, mediators were closing in on a possible deal for a three-day cease-fire in exchange for the release of around a dozen hostages held by Hamas, according to two Egyptian officials, a United Nations official and a Western diplomat. The deal

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would also allow a small amount of fuel to enter the territory, which is currently reliant on generators for electricity, for the first time since the war began.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said any temporary cease-fire would have to be accompanied by the release of hostages. Israel has said around 240 hostages are currently held in Gaza. Their plight has galvanized Israeli support for the war despite growing international concerns.

Western and Arab officials gathered in Paris on Thursday to discuss ways of providing more aid to civilians in Gaza, a day after the Group of Seven wealthy democracies, which includes close allies of Israel, called for the "unimpeded" delivery of food, water, medicine and fuel, and for "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting.

The possible cease-fire deal is being brokered by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, a Persian Gulf country that mediates with Hamas.

A senior U.S. official said the Biden administration has suggested Israel tie the length of a pause to a certain number of hostages being released in a formula that could be used for additional pauses. All the officials spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of impacting the delicate, ongoing negotiations.

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen declined to elaborate on any emerging deal in an interview with Israel's army radio, saying "I'd recommend not talking about what we've agreed to — it hurts the negotiations."

BATTLES NEAR SHIFA HOSPITAL

Meanwhile, Israeli ground forces battled near Gaza's largest hospital, Shifa, , where tens of thousands are sheltering alongside patients, according to the hospital's general director, Mohammed Abu Selmia.

The Israeli military says Hamas' main command center is located in and under the hospital complex and that senior leaders are hiding there, using the facility as a shield. Hamas and hospital staff deny the claims and say the military is creating a pretext to strike it.

Scores of wounded people were rushed to Shifa overnight, Abu Selmia told The Associated Press on Thursday. "At dawn, a shell landed very close to the hospital, but thank God only a few people had minor injuries," he said.

"The conditions here are disastrous in every sense of the word," he said. "We're short on medicine and equipment, and the doctors and nurses are exhausted. ... We're unable to do much for the patients."

International journalists who entered the north on a tour led by the Israeli military on Wednesday saw heavily damaged buildings, fields of rubble and toppled trees along the Mediterranean shoreline.

INCREASINGLY DIRE CONDITIONS IN GAZA

The trickle of aid entering Gaza from the south is largely barred from going north, which has been without running water for weeks. The U.N. aid office said all the bakeries there have shut down for lack of fuel, water and flour. Hospitals running low on supplies are performing surgeries without anesthesia.

More than two-thirds of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled their homes since the war began, with many heeding Israeli orders to flee to the southern part of the besieged enclave.

But the conditions there are also dire. Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets all across the territory. New arrivals from the north are squeezing into homes with extended family, or into U.N. schools-turned-shelters where hundreds of thousands are taking refuge.

Still, the exodus from Gaza City and surrounding areas in the north has accelerated in recent days. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said 50,000 people fled south on Gaza's main highway on Wednesday during a daily, hourslong window announced by the Israeli military.

There are clashes and shelling near the road, and evacuees reported seeing corpses alongside it, the U.N. office said. Most are traveling on foot with only what they can carry, many holding children or pushing older relatives in carts.

The Hamas-run Interior Ministry, which has urged Palestinians to stay in their homes, has told media outlets not to circulate footage of people fleeing.

A month of relentless bombardment in Gaza since the Hamas attack has killed more than 10,500 Palestinians — two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. More than 2,300 others are believed to have been buried by strikes that in some cases have

demolished entire city blocks.

Israeli officials say thousands of Palestinian militants have been killed, and blame civilian deaths on Hamas, accusing it of operating in residential areas and using Palestinian civilians as human shields. Gaza's Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its casualty reports.

More than 1,400 people have died in Israel since the start of the war, most of them civilians killed by Hamas militants during their initial incursion. Israel says 32 of its soldiers have been killed in Gaza since the ground offensive began.

Palestinian militants have continued to fire rockets into Israel, and some 250,000 Israelis have been forced to evacuate from communities near Gaza and along the northern border with Lebanon, where Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants have traded fire repeatedly.

The UK's interior minister accuses police of favoring pro-Palestinian protesters

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's interior minister has accused the country's largest police force of being more lenient toward pro-Palestinian demonstrators than other groups, deepening a political feud sparked by the Israel-Hamas war.

In a highly unusual attack on the police, Home Secretary Suella Braverman said London's Metropolitan Police force was ignoring lawbreaking by "pro-Palestinian mobs." She described demonstrators calling for a cease-fire in Gaza as "hate marchers."

Pro-Palestinian protests have been held in London and other British cities every weekend since the war began more than a month ago. The government has criticized organizers for planning a march on Saturday because it is Armistice Day, the anniversary of the end of World War I, when many in Britain pause to remember the victims of war.

The march is a day before the main Remembrance Sunday commemorations, when King Charles III, senior politicians, diplomats, military leaders and veterans attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph war memorial in central London. The planned route does not pass close to the monument, which is steps from Parliament.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has criticized planned protests on Remembrance weekend as "provocative and disrespectful." But after summoning police chief Mark Rowley for talks on Wednesday, Sunak said the government backed "the right to peacefully protest. And the test of that freedom is whether our commitment to it can survive the discomfort and frustration of those who seek to use it, even if we disagree with them."

That appeared to end the dispute, but Braverman escalated it dramatically with an article in Thursday's edition of the Times of London newspaper. She accused the police of acting more leniently toward pro-Palestinian demonstrators and Black Lives Matter supporters than to right-wing protesters or soccer hooligans.

Braverman said "there is a perception that senior police officers play favorites when it comes to protesters," and called demonstrations calling for a cease-fire in Gaza "an assertion of primacy by certain groups," particularly Islamic extremists.

"Terrorists have been valorized, Israel has been demonized as Nazis and Jews have been threatened with further massacres," she said.

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken part in demonstrations every Saturday since the war began organized by left-wing groups and Muslim organizations. There also have been large rallies supporting Israel and demanding Hamas free the hostages it seized in its Oct. 7 attack.

Police say there have been almost 200 arrests across London related to the conflict since Oct. 7, including 98 for suspected antisemitic offenses and 21 for alleged anti-Muslim offenses.

Protests can be banned in Britain only if there is a risk of serious disorder. Police said that threshold has

not been met, though they are worried that "breakaway groups intent on fueling disorder" may show up, including far-right activists.

Opposition Labour Party spokeswoman Yvette Cooper said Braverman was "deliberately undermining respect for the police" and "seeking to create division."

"She is deliberately inflaming community tensions in the most dangerous of ways," Cooper said in the House of Commons.

The home secretary is responsible for law and order and immigration policy, including the government's stalled plan to send asylum-seekers who arrive in Britain in boats on a one-way trip to Rwanda.

Braverman is a divisive figure who has become a favorite of the party's populist authoritarian wing by advocating ever-tougher curbs on migration and a war on human rights protections, liberal social values and what she has called the "tofu-eating wokerati."

Critics say Braverman is trying to position herself for a party leadership contest that could come if the Conservatives lose power in an election that is expected next year. Opinion polls for months have put the party 15 to 20 points behind Labour.

They have called on Sunak to fire her, saying failing to do so shows weakness on his part.

Countries around the world have grappled with how to handle the strong emotions stirred by the conflict. France's interior minister on Oct. 12 issued an order to local authorities nationwide to ban pro-Palestinian protests, citing risks to public order. France's highest administrative authority overturned the blanket ban a week later and said decisions should be made locally based on risks to public order.

Since then, France has seen several pro-Palestinian protests, some authorized and peaceful, some banned and quickly dispersed by police.

Live updates | Macron urges Israel to protect civilians in Gaza, calls for a humanitarian pause

By The Associated Press undefined

French President Emmanuel Macron has opened a Gaza aid conference with an appeal for Israel to protect civilians, saying that "all lives have equal worth" and that fighting terrorism "can never be carried out without rules."

Macron repeated calls a humanitarian pause in Israel's operations against Hamas but also stressed that protecting civilians is "non-negotiable."

France wants Thursday's aid conference that brings together more than 50 nations to address the besieged Palestinian enclave's growing needs including food, water, health supplies, electricity and fuel.

The aid conference coincides with negotiations for a three-day humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza in exchange for the release of about a dozen hostages held by Hamas.

Two officials from Egypt, one from the United Nations and a Western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic efforts, said the negotiations were underway.

The war, now in its second month, was triggered by the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel.

The number of Palestinians killed in the war passed 10,500, including more than 4,300 children, the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza said.

In the occupied West Bank, more than 160 Palestinians have been killed in the violence and Israeli raids. More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, most of them in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that started the fighting, and 239 hostages were taken from Israel into Gaza by the militant group.

Currently:

- Israeli strikes pound Gaza City as ground forces battled Hamas militants in dense urban neighborhoods
- US launches airstrike on site in Syria in response to Iranian-backed militia attacks on bases housing U.S. troops
- Israel pressured by allies over plight of civilians in Gaza as thousands flee enclave's north
- Americans divided over Israel response to Hamas attacks, AP-NORC poll shows
- U.S. House of Representatives censures only Palestinian American in Congress

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— Blinken urges united future Palestinian government for Gaza and West Bank, widening gulf with Israel
— Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

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

MACRON URGES PROTECTION OF GAZA CIVILIANS

French President Emmanuel Macron is appealing for Israel to protect civilians in Gaza and is repeating calls for a humanitarian pause to allow aid to reach those who need it.

Macron told a Gaza aid conference in Paris on Thursday that "all lives have equal worth" and that fighting terrorism "can never be carried out without rules" while protecting civilians "is non-negotiable." b

He said that by attacking Israel on Oct. 7, Hamas "shouldered the responsibility for exposing Palestinians to terrible consequences," and he again defended Israel's right to defend itself.

Officials from Western and Arab nations, the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations are meeting in Paris with the aim of providing urgent aid to civilians in the Gaza Strip. Macron's office said Israeli authorities aren't participating.

More than 1.5 million people — or about 70% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes, and an estimated \$1.2 billion is needed to respond to the crisis in Palestinian areas.

DENMARK BOOSTS HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA

COPENHAGEN, Denmark -- Denmark says it will increase its humanitarian aid to the civilian population in Gaza by 75 million kroner (\$10.7 million).

The country's Development Cooperation Minister Dan Jørgensen on Thursday called the situation "catastrophic and is worsening day by day."

The aid will be channeled via U.N. agencies and the International Red Cross.

TURKEY'S PRESIDENT ACCUSES WEST OF "WEAKNESS"

ANKARA, Turkey - Turkey's president is accusing Western nations of "weakness" in the face of civilian deaths in Gaza and called on Muslim nations to display unity against Israel's actions.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been a vocal critic of Israel's actions in Gaza, made the comments Thursday at a meeting of the 10-member Economic Cooperation Organization in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Erdogan said Western nations and organizations are observing these "massacres by Israel" from afar but are "too weak to even call for a cease-fire, let alone criticize child murderers."

He added: "If we, the Economic Cooperation Organization, as Muslims, are not going to raise our voices today...when will we raise our voices?"

Erdogan also said Turkey would continue with its diplomatic efforts to implement a cease-fire and prevent the spread of the conflict.

The Economic Cooperation Organization regroups five Central Asian nations as well as Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

ISRAELI LABOR MINISTER SAYS NETANYAHU WILL HAVE TO CALL EARLY ELECTIONS

JERUSALEM -- Israel's labor minister says Benjamin Netanyahu will have to call early elections right after the war.

Labor Minister Yoav Bentzur made the unusually public suggestion in remarks quoted Thursday by the Maariv daily.

Bentzur from the ultraorthodox Shas party said Netanyahu "will be forced to go to elections within 90 days, even before a commission of inquiry of some sort (into the war) is established."

He added: "We can't go on like this. The public will have its say, and then we will see if Netanyahu is given the mandate."

Bentzur later tried to walk back the comments, saying they were taken out of context and don't reflect the position of Shas, a close ally of Netanyahu.

Polls show Netanyahu's support has dropped over Hamas' shock attack, which killed more than 1,400 and left over 240 hostage, touching off a devastating Israeli war in the militants' Gaza Strip stronghold.

PROMINENT LEADERS IN ISRAEL'S PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY ARRESTED

JERUSALEM - An advocacy group for Israel's Arab citizens says six prominent leaders in Israel's Palestin-

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ian community has been arrested in route to a protest against the military's war in the Gaza Strip.

The detainees include Mohammed Barakeh, a former lawmaker and head of the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens; and former lawmakers Hanin Zoabi and Sami Abou Shahadeh.

Police said in a statement that the protest in Nazareth was "liable to incite and harm the public's welfare." Police recently banned antiwar protests.

Adalah, the advocacy organization, said Barakeh was detained for questioning after he was followed by an unmarked police car. He had notified police on Wednesday that the committee planned to hold a protest with fewer than 50 people and therefore did not need a permit.

Adalah said Barakeh's arrest was illegal and evidence of a policy "designed to muzzle any dissent and to suppress the freedom to protest of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel."

SCORES WOUNDED AFTER OVERNIGHT ISRAELI SHELLING

The general director of Gaza City's main hospital says scores of wounded people are being treated at the Al-Shifa Hospital following overnight Israeli strikes and shelling.

Dr. Mohammad Abu Selmia told the Associated Press by phone that at least one shell landed very close to the hospital at around dawn Thursday, resulting in only a few people sustaining minor injuries. He said it would've been a "catastrophe" had the shell landed any closer, adding that conditions at the hospital are "disastrous in every sense of the word."

Abu Selmia said the hospital is in short supply of medicine and other medical equipment while doctors and nurses are exhausted, while staff is "unable to do much for the patients."

He said the hospital has also been acting as makeshift shelter for some 60,000 displaced Palestinians.

A convoy of medical aid from the United Nations World Health Organization and the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, reached al-Shifa Hospital Wednesday night. The heads of both agencies said in a joint statement that this the second convoy to reach the hospital since the onset of the Hamas-Israel war on Oct. 7. It did not include fuel, as Israel has banned it in its blockade of the Palestinian enclave.

"It would help us get by for another few hours, not days," Abu Selmia said the aid was enough to help doctors get by "for another few hours, not days", adding that a steady stream of such aid convoys are needed to meet the hospital's needs.

50,000 PALESTINIANS MOVE SOUTHWARD FROM NORTHERN GAZA, UN SAYS

BEIRUT — About 50,000 Palestinians fled southward from northern Gaza on Wednesday, the United Nations said, the largest number of evacuees through an Israeli-controlled corridor that was first opened days ago.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs agency estimated that a total of 72,000 Palestinians have evacuated since Sunday. The Israeli military allowed Palestinians to evacuate from 10am until 3pm.

Clashes between the Hamas militant group that controls the besieged Palestinian enclave and the Israeli military have intensified in Gaza City.

"Clashes and shelling on and around the road reportedly continued, endangering evacuees with reports of corpses alongside the road," UNOCHA said in its daily report. "Most evacuees are moving on foot and Israeli military reportedly forced those evacuees who use vehicles to leave them at the southern edge of Gaza City."

The UN estimates that some 1.5 million Gazans out of the strip's population of 2.3 million have been internally displaced. Many have found shelter in overcrowded hospitals and schools.

2 ISRAELIS SHOT AND WOUNDED IN WEST BANK

JERUSALEM — Two Israelis were shot overnight into Thursday and moderately wounded while driving in the northern West Bank, Israeli media reported. A baby in the back seat of their car was unharmed, they said.

It was the second shooting attack on Israeli drivers in the West Bank in a week. On Nov. 2, an Israeli man was killed after his car was shot at, then crashed and overturned.

NEGOTIATIONS UNDERWAY FOR 3-DAY HUMANITARIAN CEASE-FIRE IN GAZA

CAIRO — Negotiations are underway to reach a three-day humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza in exchange

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for the release of about a dozen hostages held by Hamas. That's according to two officials from Egypt, one from the United Nations and a Western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic efforts.

The deal would enable more aid, including limited amounts of fuel, to enter the besieged territory to alleviate worsening conditions for the 2.3 million Palestinians trapped there. It is being brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, according to the officials and the diplomat.

One of the Egyptian officials says details of the deal were discussed this week in Cairo with the visiting CIA chief and an Israeli delegation. The official said mediators are finalizing a draft deal.

A senior U.S. official said the Biden administration has not put forward any specific time frame for a pause in Israel's military operations but has suggested that Israel consider tying the length of a pause to the release of a certain number of hostages.

If an agreement on the duration of the pause and the number of hostages to be freed can be reached and the deal successfully implemented, the same formula could be revisited for additional pauses and releases, according to the official.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said any temporary cease-fire would have to be accompanied by the release of the hostages who were seized by Hamas during the militant group's Oct. 7 assault on southern Israel. Israel has said around 240 hostages, both Israelis and those with foreign passports, are currently held in Gaza.

A three-day cease-fire would allow the delivery of humanitarian aid across Gaza, including the northern area, the focus of Israel's military campaign to crush the territory's Hamas rulers. Under the proposed deal, some fuel would also enter Gaza for the first time since the start of the war, to be distributed to hospitals and bakeries under U.N. supervision.

Israel has barred fuel shipments to Gaza since the start of the war, arguing Hamas would divert them for military use. Over the past month, only limited amounts of aid, such as medicine, food and water, have entered Gaza. Aid workers say it's not nearly enough to meet mounting needs.

Under the proposed truce deal, Hamas would release a dozen civilian hostages, most of them foreign passport holders, and provide a complete list of hostages to mediators, according to the officials. The International Committee of the Red Cross would be allowed to visit the hostages.

The diplomat said the talks are complex because of the involvement of different parties in the region and in Western capitals.

Associated Press writers Samy Magdy in Cairo and Matthew Lee in Seoul, South Korea, contributed.

UN RIGHTS CHIEF SAYS GAZA TURNED INTO A 'LIVING NIGHTMARE' BY ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

GENEVA — The U.N. human rights chief said collective punishment by Israel of Palestinian civilians and their forced evacuation, as well as atrocities committed by Palestinian armed groups on Oct. 7 and their continued holding of hostages, amount to war crimes.

Volker Türk, standing in front of Egypt's Rafah border crossing into Gaza, told reporters Wednesday: "These are the gates to a living nightmare."

"We have fallen off a precipice. This cannot continue," he said later in Cairo.

Türk said international human rights and humanitarian law must be respected to help protect civilians and allow desperately needed aid to reach Gaza's beleaguered population of some 2.3 million people.

He said the U.N. rights office received reports in recent days about an unspecified orphanage in northern Gaza with 300 children who need urgent help, but communications were down and access were impassable and unsafe, so "we cannot get to them."

"I feel, in my innermost being, the pain, the immense suffering of every person whose loved one has been killed in a kibbutz, in a Palestinian refugee camp, hiding in a building or as they were fleeing," Türk said. "We all must feel this shared pain — and end this nightmare."

GAZA HOSPITALS STRAIN UNDER ISRAELI SIEGE, WITH PREMATURE BIRTHS ON THE RISE

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza City — Hospitals in Gaza are nearing collapse under Israel's wartime siege, which

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has cut power and deliveries of food, fuel and other necessities to the territory.

Inside the maternity department at Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis, the workload has doubled because of the mass displacement from Gaza's north. That's according to neonatal specialist Dr. Asaad al-Nawajha, who said Wednesday his team has seen an increase in premature births as the monthlong war intensifies.

Shouq Hararah is one of those mothers. She says her delivery took place with "no proper birth procedures, no anesthesia, painkillers or anything."

"I gave birth to twins. The boy was discharged, but the girl remains in the maternity ward," she said.

Standing before a row of beeping incubators, al-Nawajha emphasized the war's life-threatening consequences.

"All of our work depends on electricity; all the machines you see here rely on it," the doctor said. "When the electricity is cut, these devices stop working, and all the babies will face certain death."

Associated Press writer Lolita Baldor contributed.

ISRAEL SAYS IT DESTROYED 130 HAMAS TUNNELS IN GAZA AND RELEASES VIDEO FROM INSIDE UNDERGROUND NETWORK

Israel's military released video on Wednesday of what it says are combat engineers locating, entering and blowing up Hamas-built tunnels in the Gaza Strip.

Israel has destroyed 130 tunnels since the war began, according to Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesman.

The videos show a soldier's body camera footage inside what Israel said was a Hamas tunnel, its walls lined with cement and the shaft partially filled with sand. Another clip shows the mouth of what appears to be a tunnel in an open area near damaged buildings. There are clips of armored excavators and bulldozers digging in the dirt, as well as explosions apparently destroying tunnel entrances.

The Israeli military did not provide locations where the videos were filmed, and the images did not include any visible landmarks except for one shot showing the sea in the background, so The Associated Press could not independently confirm the videos.

Hamas is believed to have a massive underground network throughout Gaza, allowing it to transport weapons, supplies and fighters.

Israeli warplanes have bombed crowded urban neighborhoods, saying the strikes target the tunnel system or Hamas commanders. But airstrikes can inflict only limited damage on the subterranean network.

WHITE HOUSE SAYS ISRAEL TO KEEP MILITARY IN GAZA AFTER WAR, BUT RE-OCCUPYING IS A 'MISTAKE'

WASHINGTON: U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said it was likely that Israel would maintain a military presence in Gaza for a "period of time" after the ongoing war, but said the U.S. believes it would be a "mistake" for Israel to re-occupy the territory.

"I think all of us can foresee a period of time after the conflict is over where Israeli forces will likely still be in Gaza and will have some initial security responsibilities," Kirby told CNN on Wednesday. "But for how long and where and to what size and scale and scope, I think it's too soon to know." Kirby said the U.S. was focused on devising a long-term governance structure for Gaza after the current conflict, but said that as yet there has been little prospect of a viable plan.

"I think where we are is: a lot of questions, and not a lot of answers," he said. "We know what we don't want to see in Gaza post conflict, we don't want to see Hamas in control, and we don't want to see a re-occupation by Israel."

He added: "We know that the United States can't solve this alone," and that the U.S. was engaging with regional and international partners on the matter.

The Hollywood strikes are over.

Here's when you could see your favorite stars and shows return

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Missed your favorite actors? After nearly four months of striking, they're coming back.

Wednesday's deal between striking actors and studios and streaming services won't immediately restore filming to its full swing. That will take months.

But the tentative agreement — which both sides say include extraordinary provisions — means that more than six months of labor strife in the film and television industries is drawing to a close. Soon, tens of thousands of entertainment sector workers could get back to work. And popular franchises, like "Deadpool," "Abbott Elementary" and "The Last of Us," will be a step closer to returning to screens.

Hollywood loves a happy ending. The actors strike might provide that, though there's still the chance of strike sequels in the months ahead.

Here's some of what will happen next:

SO IS THE ACTORS STRIKE REALLY OVER?

Picket lines are suspended and the only rallies on the horizon are celebratory ones that the actors union is promising will happen.

There are a couple of steps that need to happen before the deal becomes official. On Friday, the national board of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists will review the agreement and could approve it. Then, the agreement's details will be released and the guild's full membership will vote on it.

But when striking screenwriters — who started picketing May 2 — reached their deal in September, their guild allowed writing work to resume before full ratification of the contract was complete.

While it's possible those votes scuttle the deal, the union's negotiating committee unanimously approved the deal and called off picketing.

WHAT'S IN THE DEAL?

The exact terms of the deal won't be released until later this week, but a few highlights are known.

The union says the deal is worth more than a billion dollars and they've "achieved a deal of extraordinary scope" that includes compensation increases, consent protections for use of artificial intelligence and actors' likenesses and includes a "streaming participation bonus."

The negotiation arm of the studios also says the deal includes historic provisions. The Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers said Wednesday the "tentative agreement represents a new paradigm."

It said the companies are giving "SAG-AFTRA the biggest contract-on-contract gains in the history of the union, including the largest increase in minimum wages in the last forty years; a brand new residual for streaming programs; extensive consent and compensation protections in the use of artificial intelligence; and sizable contract increases on items across the board."

Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, SAG-AFTRA's executive director and chief negotiator, told The Associated Press the gains made the long strike worth it.

"It's an agreement that our members can be proud of. I'm certainly very proud of it," Crabtree-Ireland told The Associated Press in an interview.

WHAT WILL START FILMING FIRST?

The strike put an immediate stop to "Deadpool 3" with Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman, as well as Ridley Scott's "Gladiator" sequel. Those are likely among the first films that will resume production.

The resolution of the writers strike allowed script work to resume on shows like "Abbott Elementary," "The White Lotus" and "Yellowjackets." That head start might help those productions get back on the air sooner once their stars are cleared to work.

Television moves faster than movies, which once filming ends still face a lengthy editing and promotional process.

In recent weeks more shows and movies announced delays — Kevin Costner's final episodes of "Yel-

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lowstone" won't air until next November and the next "Mission: Impossible" film also delayed its release.'

WHAT OTHER CHANGES WILL I SEE NOW THAT THE STRIKE'S OVER?

Actors, lots more actors, will be talking about their work again. Splashy premieres will resume with their stars, as well.

Movies like "Killers of the Flower Moon" and this week's big release, "The Marvels," have been without their stars to promote the film. Strike rules forbid actors from promoting work done for the major studios, which kept Leonardo DiCaprio, Brie Larson and many other actors from doing interviews.

That's prevented many performers, like "Killers of the Flower Moon" breakout Lily Gladstone, from having some big celebratory moments. (For more examples of performances that didn't get as much attention due to the strike, check out this list.)

Some projects have gotten exemptions, such as Michael Mann's upcoming racing drama "Ferrari." That freed stars Adam Driver and Patrick Dempsey to attend the Venice Film Festival — and also allowed Dempsey to do an interview with People when it named him its Sexiest Man Alive.

But as Hollywood heads into its award season, expect to see more glamorous red carpet shots and interviews with stars.

WHAT ABOUT AWARDS SEASON?

Well, it's back on, and it'll be supercharged.

One of the actors strike ripple effects was to push the Emmy Awards from September into January. It'll now join the Grammys, the Screen Actors Guild Awards and the Oscars in Hollywood's traditional awards season. Those shows will all air between Jan. 15 and March 10.

Plans for the Emmys, and the SAG Awards, which will appear on Netflix, were in jeopardy as the strike got closer to 2024.

Still in limbo is the Golden Globe Awards, which is trying to reinvent itself after years of scandal, but doesn't yet have a U.S. broadcast partner.

AFTER TWO MAJOR STRIKES, WHAT'S NEXT?

Another actors strike — this one by video game performers — is possible. Negotiations for that contract are ongoing, but a strike has been authorized.

Actors who work on video games range from voice performers to stunt performers. They, too, have expressed concerns about the use of AI in their industry.

The studios in 2024 will also be negotiating with set workers and their guild, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. From building sets to controlling the lighting and even creating effects, IATSE members are crucial to film and television production. They been severely impacted by the filming shutdown and have joined the picket lines in the writers and actors strikes.

One of the key elements of the actors and writers strikes has been how much streaming has upended the industry, which could also be a key point in the set worker negotiations.

And other sectors of the industry have moved to unionize while this year's dual strikes played out. Some reality television workers are calling for a union, while visual effects artists who work on Marvel films voted to join IATSE.

French President Macron opens Gaza aid conference with appeal to Israel to protect civilians

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron opened a Gaza aid conference on Thursday with an appeal for Israel to protect civilians as it fights Hamas, saying "all lives have equal worth" and that fighting terrorism "can never be carried out without rules."

The gathering in Paris brought together officials from Western and Arab nations, the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations, with the aim of providing urgent aid to civilians in the Gaza Strip that is being pounded by Israel in its war against Hamas. Israeli authorities weren't participating in the talks, Macron's office said.

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Macron reiterated calls for a humanitarian pause in Israel's operations. He said that by attacking Israel on Oct. 7, Hamas "shouldered the responsibility for exposing Palestinians to terrible consequences," and he again defended Israel's right to defend itself.

But Macron also stressed that civilians must be protected. "It's absolutely essential. It is non-negotiable," he said.

"All lives have equal worth and there are no double standards for those of us with universal and humanist values," he said.

"Fighting terrorism can never be carried out without rules. Israel knows that. The trap of terrorism is for all of us the same: giving in to violence and renouncing our values," he added.

More than 1.5 million people — or about 70% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes, and an estimated \$1.2 billion is needed to respond to the crisis in Palestinian areas.

Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides was to present his plan for a humanitarian sea corridor to Gaza which he has said aims for a "sustained, secure high-volume flow of humanitarian assistance to Gaza in the immediate, medium and long term." Ships would deliver the aid from Cyprus' main port of Limassol, about 255 miles (410 kilometers) away.

French officials said they are also considering evacuating injured people to hospital ships in the Mediterranean off the Gaza coast. Paris sent a helicopter carrier off the Cyprus coast and is preparing another with medical capacities on board for that purpose.

Thursday's discussions will also include financial support and other ways to help Gaza's civilians. Over 50 nations were expected to attend, including several European countries, the United States and regional powers such as Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf countries, the French presidency said. Also attending is Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

The head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, the U.N.'s top aid official and the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross are expected to provide details about urgent needs in the Gaza Strip.

France is expected to announce some additional funding. Since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, Paris has provided an additional 20 million euros (\$21.4 million) in humanitarian aid for Gaza through the U.N. and other partners and sent 54 tons of aid via three flights to Egypt.

On Tuesday, the German government said it will provide 20 million euros (\$21 million) in new funding, in addition to releasing 71 million euros (\$76 million) already earmarked for the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees following a review it launched after the Hamas attack.

European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are also attending the conference. The 27-nation bloc is the world's top aid supplier to the Palestinians. It has sent almost 78 million euros (\$83 million) this year.

Amnesty International welcomed the humanitarian conference and called on states "to push for an immediate cease-fire by all parties — as this is a vital precondition to ensure the people of Gaza receive any kind of sustained, effective, and impactful humanitarian aid."

On Wednesday evening, human rights activists from several groups including Doctors Without Borders, Action Against Hunger and Doctors of the World gathered near the Eiffel Tower to call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

"If the parties involved in this conference only discuss technical details such as the number of trucks to be driven through, it will amount to a cosmetic discussion that will delay the real issue, the cease-fire," Michel Lacharité, head of emergency operations at Doctors without Borders France, said in a statement.

A judge is set to hear arguments as Michigan activists try to keep Trump off the ballot

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — A judge in Michigan is expected to hear arguments Thursday on whether Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson has the authority to keep Donald Trump's name off state ballots for president.

Activists are suing Benson in the Michigan Court of Claims to force her to keep Trump's name off ballots and to assess Trump's constitutional qualifications to serve a second term as president.

Meanwhile, attorneys for the former president are demanding that Trump's name be allowed on the 2024 Republican presidential primary ballot.

Arguments were scheduled to begin Thursday morning in Grand Rapids before Judge James Robert Redford.

Activists — in two separate suits — point to a section of the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment that prohibits a person from running for federal office if they have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the U.S. or given aid or comfort to those who have.

Liberal groups also have filed lawsuits in Colorado and Minnesota to bar Trump from the ballot, portraying him as the inciter of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, which was intended to stop Congress from certifying Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election win.

The groups cite a rarely used constitutional prohibition against holding office for those who swore an oath to uphold the Constitution but then "engaged in insurrection" against it. The two-sentence clause in the 14th Amendment has been used only a handful of times since the years after the Civil War.

But the Minnesota Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a lawsuit citing the provision. The court's ruling said its decision applied only to the state's primary.

Free Speech For People, a group representing petitioners before the Minnesota Supreme Court, also represents petitioners in one of the Michigan cases against Benson.

Trump is considered the leading candidate for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination.

Benson already has said in a filing that Michigan's Legislature does not give her the authority to determine whether a candidate for president may be disqualified for the state ballot under the 14th Amendment or to assess a candidate's constitutional qualifications to serve as president.

It's a "federal constitutional question of enormous consequence" whether Trump cannot appear as a presidential candidate on state ballots, Benson wrote. "Michigan courts have held that administrative agencies generally do not have the power to determine constitutional questions."

However, she added that she will follow the direction of the court either way.

Hollywood's strikes are both now over as actors reach deal with studios, return to work with writers

By ANDREW DALTON and KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — On Thursday, for the first time in more than six months, neither Hollywood's actors nor its writers will be on strike.

The long-awaited clearing in the industry's stormiest season in decades comes as a deal was reached late Wednesday to end what was, at nearly four months, the longest strike ever for film and television actors.

The three-year contract must be approved by the board of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and its members in the coming days. But union leadership declared that the strike will end at 12:01 a.m. on Thursday, putting all of the parts of production back into action for the first time since spring.

Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, SAG-AFTRA's executive director and chief negotiator, said the gains made in the deal justified the struggle.

"It's an agreement that our members can be proud of. I'm certainly very proud of it," Crabtree-Ireland

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told The Associated Press in an interview. "We said we would only accept a fair, equitable and respectful deal, and that's precisely what this deal is. So I think our members, as we are able to release more of the details of it, will look at them and say, now this is something that was worth being on strike for."

More than 60,000 SAG-AFTRA members went on strike July 14, joining screenwriters who had walked off the job more than two months earlier. It was the first time the two unions had been on strike together since 1960. The studios and writers reached a deal that brought their strike to an end on Sept. 26.

The union valued the deal at over a billion dollars. Crabtree-Ireland said the deal includes boosts to minimum payments to actors, a greater share of streaming revenue going to performers, a bolstering of benefit plans and protections against the unfettered use of artificial intelligence in recreating performances. Details of the terms will not be released until after a meeting on Friday where board members review the contract.

The AI protections were a sticking point in the negotiations that had moved methodically, with both long breaks for both sides to huddle, since they restarted on Oct. 24.

"It is something that has evolved even while we've been in this negotiation process," Crabtree-Ireland said. "The capabilities of generative AI tools have expanded dramatically. So we have really been focused on making sure that the guardrails that we negotiated for were future-proof or at least future-resistant."

The other side in the negotiations, Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers said in a statement that the "agreement represents a new paradigm. It gives SAG-AFTRA the biggest contract-on-contract gains in the history of the union." The AMPTP said it "looks forward to the industry resuming the work of telling great stories."

Executives from top entertainment companies including Disney, Netflix, Warner Bros. Discovery and Universal had a direct hand in negotiations.

The Writers Guild of America applauded Wednesday's deal. "We're thrilled to see SAG-AFTRA members win a contract that creates new protections for performers and gives them a greater share of the immense value they create," the union said in a statement. "When workers are united, they win!"

Although the writers strike had immediate, visible effects for viewers, including the months-long suspension of late-night talk shows and "Saturday Night Live," the impact of the actors' absence was not as immediately apparent. But its ripple effects — delayed release dates and waits for new show seasons — could be felt for months or even years.

Actors should quickly return to movie sets where productions were paused, including "Deadpool 3," "Gladiator 2" and "Wicked." Other movies and shows will restart shooting once returning writers finish scripts.

And beyond scripted productions, the end of the strike allows actors to return to red carpets, talk shows and podcasts, as Hollywood's awards season approaches.

"The SAG strike is over!! I can finally say it: watch my documentary Saturday night at 8 on HBO/MAX!" actor-director Albert Brooks said on social media moments after the strike ended. "Couldn't say a word until now!!"

The only major awards show directly effected by the strike was the Emmys, which was moved from September to January. Now, the usual fall Oscar campaigns will mobilize.

But any feeling of industry normalcy could prove temporary. The circumstances that brought on the strikes — the shift from traditional theatrical and broadcast media to streaming, and emerging tech like AI — have not been slowed. And the gains made by the strikes may embolden other Hollywood unions, or these same guilds in negotiations that will come up again in three years.

Union leaders treated the strike like a watershed moment from the start, coming as it did amid wider labor fights in other industries.

"I think it's a conversation now about the culture of big business, and how it treats everybody up and down the ladder in the name of profit," SAG-AFTRA President and "The Nanny" star Fran Drescher told AP in August.

The agreement also means a return to sets for thousands of film crew members who were left with nothing to work on during the strikes. SAG-AFTRA sought to offset their hardship by allowing sometimes controversial interim agreements for some smaller productions to proceed, and by making their strike

relief fund available to all workers in the industry.

"The idea that I get to discover if I still remember how to act is very exciting," said actor Ely Henry, who has spent the past months leading pickets outside Paramount Pictures as a strike captain. "I'm just grateful for the fact that so many people are going to get back to work."

The man charged in last year's attack against Nancy Pelosi's husband goes to trial in San Francisco

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The man accused of breaking into former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's San Francisco home, bludgeoning her husband with a hammer and seeking to kidnap her goes on trial Thursday.

Opening statements are scheduled in the federal trial of David DePape who prosecutors say assaulted then-82-year-old Paul Pelosi, sending shockwaves through the political world just days before last year's midterm elections. The attack in the early hours of Oct. 28, 2022, also highlighted how conspiracy theories and misinformation that spread online can fuel political violence.

DePape pleaded not guilty to attempted kidnapping of a federal official and assault on the immediate family member of a federal official. Paul Pelosi is expected to testify next week.

DePape posted rants on a blog and an online forum about aliens, communists, religious minorities, and global elites. He questioned the results of the 2020 election and echoed the baseless, right-wing QAnon conspiracy theory that claims the U.S. government is run by a cabal of devil-worshipping pedophiles. The websites were taken down shortly after his arrest.

A Canadian citizen, DePape moved to the United States more than 20 years ago after falling in love with Gypsy Taub, a Berkeley pro-nudity activist well-known in the Bay Area, his stepfather, Gene DePape said. In recent years, David DePape had been homeless and struggling with drug abuse and mental illness, Taub told local media.

Federal prosecutors say DePape smashed his shoulder through a glass panel on a door in the back of the Pelosis' Pacific Heights mansion and confronted a sleeping Paul Pelosi, who was wearing boxer shorts and a pajama top.

"Where's Nancy? Where's Nancy?" DePape asked, standing over Paul Pelosi around 2 a.m. holding a hammer and zip ties, according to court records. Nancy Pelosi was in Washington and under the protection of her security detail, which does not extend to family members.

Paul Pelosi called 911 and two San Francisco Police officers showed up and witnessed DePape strike Paul Pelosi in the head with a hammer, knocking him unconscious, court records showed.

Nancy Pelosi's husband of 60 years later underwent surgery to repair a skull fracture and injuries to his right arm and hands.

After his arrest, DePape, 43, allegedly told a San Francisco detective that he wanted to hold Nancy Pelosi hostage. He said that if she told him the truth, he would let her go and if she lied, he was going to "break her kneecaps" to show other members of Congress there were "consequences to actions," according to prosecutors.

A backpack DePape was carrying had tape and a rope, in addition to zip ties, according to police.

The assault was captured on the officers' body cameras. U.S. District Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley ruled last month that the jury will be allowed to see footage that shows Paul Pelosi in a pool of his own blood struggling to breathe and the police officers trying to stop the bleeding. Angela Chuang, one of DePape's federal public defenders, had argued that the shocking footage would be prejudicial to her client.

Corley also ruled jurors can listen to portions of a 5-minute call DePape made in January to a television reporter in which he repeated conspiracy theories.

"Freedom and liberty isn't dying, it's being killed systematically and deliberately," he said.

"The tree of liberty needs watering. He needs men of valor, patriots willing to put their own lives on the line to stand in opposition to tyranny," he added.

Katherine Keneally, a senior researcher at the nonprofit Institute for Strategic Dialogue, said the attack

is an example of increasing online hate, conspiracies and false narratives influencing political violence.

"This didn't occur in a vacuum," Keneally said.

Keneally said people who commit such conspiracy-fueled acts of violence often are struggling with mental health or other life crises, such as the death of a family member or a divorce.

"I can't think of a single case where someone engaged in violent behavior where they were solely influenced by the conspiracy theory," she said.

DePape, who lived in a garage in the Bay Area city of Richmond and had been doing odd carpentry jobs to support himself, allegedly told authorities he had other targets, including a women's and queer studies professor, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, actor Tom Hanks and President Joe Biden's son Hunter.

One of those targets is included in the defense's short witness list, though their name has been redacted. The other possible witnesses are DePape, Nancy Pelosi's chief of staff, Daniel Bernal, extremism and antisemitism researcher Elizabeth Yates, and federal public defender Catherine Goulet.

The prosecution's list of potential witnesses contains 15 names, including the surgeon who operated on Paul Pelosi, federal agents, San Francisco police officers and several first responders.

If convicted, DePape faces life in prison. He was also charged in state court with attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon, elder abuse, residential burglary and other felonies. He pleaded not guilty to those charges. A state trial has not been scheduled.

The US and Chinese finance ministers are opening talks to lay the groundwork for a Biden-Xi meeting

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and her Chinese counterpart will meet in San Francisco on Thursday for two days of talks aimed at making progress on a slew of economic issues at a time when competition has markedly intensified between the two countries.

Yellen's talks with Vice Premier He Lifeng are designed to help lay the groundwork for an expected meeting between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping next week on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco, which would be their first engagement in nearly a year.

The White House is not expecting the face-to-face meeting to result in major changes to the relationship between the two nations, according to a person familiar with the planning, although it hopes to see some signs of progress.

Analysts say expectations should be kept low, given the competitive nature of the countries' relationship.

Nicholas Szechenyi, deputy director for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said at a preview event for the APEC summit that "it seems difficult for the United States to credibly emphasize themes such as inclusiveness, interconnectedness — the themes of this year's APEC summit — when the primary driver for U.S. economic strategy in the Indo-Pacific is not economic cooperation, necessarily, but rather economic competition."

"U.S. strategy is very much focused on economic competition with China," he said.

In August, Biden signed an executive order designed to regulate and block high-tech U.S.-based investments going toward China, a move the administration said is based on protecting national security. And last year, the U.S. moved to block exports of advanced computer chips to China.

Earlier this year, U.S. lawmakers held hearings over data security and harmful content with TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew, contemplating whether to ban the hugely popular app due to its Chinese connections.

And tensions between the countries heightened earlier this year when a Chinese surveillance balloon was spotted traveling over sensitive U.S. airspace. The U.S. military shot down the balloon off the Carolina coast after it traversed sensitive military sites across North America. China insisted the flyover was an accident involving a civilian aircraft and threatened repercussions.

With all of the tensions, the two nations have worked to smooth economic ties.

Biden spoke with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the White House for about an hour late last month, when Beijing's top diplomat came to Washington for talks with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Xi similarly met with Blinken in June when the secretary of state traveled to Beijing for talks with Wang. Yellen has met with a host of Chinese officials throughout this year. In January, she had her first face-to-face meeting with former Vice Premier Liu He in Zurich. She traveled to China in July to discuss economic policies between the nations and urged Chinese government officials to cooperate on climate change and other global challenges and not let sharp disagreements about trade and other irritants derail relations.

She said at a July 8 news conference, "I do not see the relationship between the U.S. and China through the frame of great power conflict. We believe that the world is big enough for both of our countries to thrive."

In September, the U.S. Treasury Department and China's Ministry of Finance launched a pair of economic working groups in an effort to ease tensions and deepen ties between the nations.

Nearly half of Democrats disapprove of Biden's response to the Israel-Hamas war, AP-NORC poll shows

By BILL BARROW and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly half of Democrats disapprove of how President Joe Biden is handling the Israel-Hamas conflict, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research — showing a deep divide within his party over the war.

The poll found 50% of Democrats approve of how Biden has navigated the conflict while 46% disapprove — and the two groups diverge substantially in their views of U.S. support for Israel. Biden's support on the issue among Democrats is down slightly from August, as an AP-NORC poll conducted then found that 57% of Democrats approved of his handling of the conflict and 40% disapproved.

The Oct. 7 Hamas attack that killed more than 1,400 people and Israel's responding incursion into Gaza have created a political tightrope for Biden, who has supported Israeli sovereignty since the attack but also pressured Israel's government to try to limit civilian casualties and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. More than 10,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The war could complicate Biden's reelection effort as he faces having to balance factions of his party with very different views on the conflict and who is ultimately responsible.

Nearly 7 in 10 Democrats approving of Biden's management of the conflict think the U.S. provides the right amount of support to Israel currently. Of those who disapprove, 65% say the U.S. is too supportive of Israel. That gap between Democrats who approve and those who disapprove has widened substantially since the poll conducted in August.

Of Democrats who approve of Biden's handling of the conflict, 76% say Hamas has a lot of responsibility for the war and 32% say the same about the Israeli government, according to the AP-NORC poll taken this month. Democrats who disapprove of Biden's handling of the conflict are equally likely to say that the Israeli government (56%) and Hamas (55%) have a lot of responsibility.

Majorities of Democrats younger than 45 (65%) and nonwhite Democrats (58%) say they disapprove of Biden's handling of the conflict. Most Democrats 45 and older (67%) and white Democrats (62%) say they approve.

"Knowing that our tax money could be paying for the weapons that are murdering children by the thousands over there, it's getting harder to be supportive of our president and our country in general," said Brie Williamson, a 34-year-old Illinois resident. Williamson said she "couldn't see voting for a Republican" but would consider other options next year.

But Kelly Taylor, a 52-year-old from Massachusetts, affirmed her support for Biden and his handling of the conflict.

"I think he's doing the best any president could do given the situation," she said.

The poll's findings are the latest reflection of how the war has split Democrats in Washington and across the country.

More than 20 Democrats voted Tuesday to censure Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian American in

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Congress, for her criticisms of Israel and invocation of a phrase that some Jewish groups say advocates for the destruction of Israel. Taib has said she wants a ceasefire in Gaza and called this week for "peaceful coexistence" between Israelis and Palestinians.

In South Florida, many Jews have lauded Biden's support of Israel. Trump won Florida in 2020. In Michigan and Minnesota, both states that Biden won, well-known Democrats and members of large Arab and Muslim populations have spoken out against Biden.

To be sure, the conflict is intense enough to elicit strong opinions from people across the political spectrum.

"I'm as pro-Israel as anyone. They absolutely have a right to protect their interests," said Florida voter John Montalvo, a 69-year-old who said he "leans" Democratic. Still, Montalvo added, "Palestinians have been living like prisoners since 1947," referring to partitions of Palestinian settlements after World War II.

Opinions about Biden's approach do not seem to affect Democrats' support for establishing an independent Palestinian state. Biden, like his Republican and Democratic predecessors, has endorsed a "two-state solution," though no American administration has made genuine strides toward such an accord.

About 4 in 10 Democrats overall say they favor the establishment of an independent Palestinian state that includes the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. Yet both Biden's ardent backers and his critics acknowledge the practical difficulties involved.

Montalvo, the Floridian who cheers Biden, said he "absolutely" supports a two-state agreement. But asked whether a Palestinian state should include Muslim sections of Jerusalem, he balked. "No," he insisted. "Jerusalem is the capital of Israel."

As Biden navigates war abroad and delicate politics at home, he may be left to hope that his Democratic critics are more like Peter Bennett, a 72-year-old from California who said he disapproved of Biden's handling of the conflict and was distressed by what he called a "knee-jerk Israel-first perception in American politics."

But Bennett was also clear about who he would vote for if next year's election is a rematch of 2020.

"I want some real leadership here that I don't think we're getting," he said. "But if it were a choice between Donald Trump and a stray dog, I'll vote for the stray dog."

The poll of 1,239 adults was conducted Nov. 2-6, 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.

GOP candidates hit Trump and back Israel. Here are highlights from the Republican debate

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As they face an increasingly urgent task to emerge as a clear alternative to former President Donald Trump, five Republican presidential candidates gathered Wednesday for the party's latest debate.

Trump, the overwhelming front-runner in the race, skipped the event, as he has the first two, citing his polling advantage. There was no shortage of noteworthy confrontations on stage, as the participants debated the Israel-Hamas war, the future of abortion rights and Trump himself.

But with the Jan. 15 Iowa caucuses approaching, it seemed unlikely that the debate fundamentally changed the presidential nomination fight.

Here are some debate takeaways:

The foreign policy debate

Wednesday marked the first time the presidential candidates gathered on a debate stage since war broke out between Israel and Hamas, resulting in a sharper foreign policy conversation compared to previous forums.

The contenders were unified in offering robust support for Israel and bemoaned antisemitism, especially on liberal college campuses. But they said virtually nothing about protecting Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

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The GOP's familiar foreign policy split, however, resurfaced when the exchanges veered into the war in Ukraine, the possibility of China confronting Taiwan and how to handle Venezuela's oil market.

Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie all sounded traditional GOP notes, backing military aid to Ukraine, calling for vastly increased investment in the military and linking all the global conflicts.

Biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy tried to set himself apart, claiming the rest of the stage was part of a bipartisan foreign policy establishment that blundered into repeated disasters in foreign wars. A longtime critic of aid to Ukraine, he followed up his condemnation of antisemitism by calling that country's Jewish president "a Nazi."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis seemed like he was straddling the divide. At one point, he dodged a question about Ukraine and China by talking about boosting security on the southern border and suggesting he'd deport immigrants from the Middle East.

The candidates all talked tough. But the party divide over the Ukraine war ran subtly through the night and it's not clear they'd each act the same should they actually make it to the Oval Office.

Taking on Trump

All of the candidates are trying to overtake Trump, who is the dominant front-runner in the primary. But for the most part, they've spent the primary campaign avoiding any opportunity to take on the former president.

That became harder during the first debate hosted by a network that wasn't affiliated with the Trump-friendly Fox News. Moderators from NBC News opened by pressing the contenders to articulate why they — and not Trump — should become the Republican nominee.

There was hardly a robust takedown of Trump, who remains popular among the GOP base and hosted a rival event Wednesday. But DeSantis was the most forceful.

"Donald Trump's a lot different guy than he was in 2016," he said, declaring that Trump owed it to Republican primary voters to show up and explain his record.

But even DeSantis' strong words spanned less than 30 seconds. And he stopped short of questioning Trump's "balls" for skipping the debate, as he had in recent days.

The other candidates were less aggressive.

Asked why he's a better nominee than Trump, Ramaswamy went so far as to blame Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel — not Trump — for the GOP's repeated losses in national elections since Trump won the presidency in 2016.

When she was asked about Trump, Haley made a passing reference of the national debt that piled up under his watch. Scott said the GOP needs to win over independent voters. Christie devoted one sentence to highlighting Trump's legal troubles.

The lack of pointed attacks against Trump may underscore the difficulty of attacking someone who's not onstage. But his rivals didn't try hard either. Wednesday's debate is the latest example for why Trump may have been smart to skip the debates altogether.

The Ramaswamy and Haley feud

There were five candidates on the debate stage, but the vendetta between two of them stood out — Haley and Ramaswamy.

The two children of Indian immigrants have collided during previous debates. But the tension intensified Wednesday night with Ramaswamy gleefully playing the role of aggressor. He took several initial digs at Haley — at one point he called her and DeSantis "Cheney in 3-inch heels," a reference to controversial former Vice President Dick Cheney and his daughter Liz, a congresswoman excommunicated from the GOP for her criticism of Trump.

But it was halfway through the debate, after Haley said she'd respond to Ramaswamy's digs rather than answer a question about banning Tik-Tok, that Ramaswamy made his most shocking attack.

Noting Haley hadn't answered the question, Ramaswamy said, "Her own daughter was using the app for a long time, so you might want to take care of your daughter first."

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Haley responded by forcefully telling Ramaswamy to "leave my daughter out of your voice." She later said, "You're just scum."

Ramaswamy has dominated all three of the debates with his pugnacious style. It hasn't necessarily helped him politically — his biting attacks seem to turn off voters — but it drowns out all the other candidates. He's also clearly gotten under the skin of his rivals, who spend precious time going after him.

Ramaswamy has even less of a path to victory than the rest of the very distant field, and each debate he dominates is another lost opportunity for anyone to change the trajectory of the GOP primary.

A path forward on abortion

Republicans have had no answers on abortion ever since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. In election after election, including several this week, Democrats have used the issue to their advantage.

On Wednesday night, Haley, the only woman onstage, tried to give her party a path forward for navigating the delicate political issue.

Haley's approach was decidedly softer and more personal than what the men onstage offered.

"I don't judge anyone for being pro-choice, and I don't want them to judge me for being pro-life," she said, suggesting that she respected the decisions of states to protect abortion rights even if she didn't agree with them.

And she made clear that the next Republican president would not be in position to institute a national ban on abortion without 60 votes in the Senate, which isn't anywhere close to the horizon. Instead, she suggested Republicans in Washington work for what could be achievable: a ban on late-term abortions, policies that encourage adoption and increased accessibility of contraception.

"Let's focus on how to save as many babies as we can and support as many moms as we can and stop the judgment. We don't need to divide America over this issue anymore," Haley said, drawing applause from the crowd.

Meanwhile, the men onstage offered more of the same message that failed to resonate with voters across Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania earlier in the week.

DeSantis attacked Democrats for supporting abortions without any time restrictions. Echoing the criticism, Scott said it was "unethical and immoral" to allow abortions up to the day of birth.

Haley's message might be popular among some suburban women, a group the GOP has struggled with during recent elections, but it's decidedly out of step with many activists that make up the Republican base. Still, her answer Wednesday night is a reminder why some Democratic officials fear her as a possible Biden opponent more than any of the other candidates.

The race for second

After two more hours of likely also-rans arguing over mostly small differences, it seems clear that the Republican presidential contest is mainly a race to finish a distant second.

No one is even close to Trump and no one is trying to catch him. Instead, the candidates seem to be fighting over who can be the best alternative to him in the event the unthinkable happens to sideline the four-times-indicted, constitutionally challenged, 77-year-old front-runner.

Even Christie, whose entire campaign was predicated on him being the only Republican brave enough to attack the former president, stayed quiet on Trump unless asked about him by the moderators.

By now it's clear that no one sees a path to actual victory in the primary. Instead, everyone is acting like their best bet is that the alternative universe of the debates, where Trump is not even on the stage, somehow becomes reality for Republican voters.

That's the only way these debates likely matter anymore. But if there's one thing we've learned in the Trump era, it's that you can never tell what will happen next.

House Republicans subpoena Hunter and James Biden as their impeachment inquiry ramps back up

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans issued subpoenas Wednesday to members of President Joe Biden's family, taking their most aggressive step yet in an impeachment inquiry bitterly opposed by Democrats that is testing the reach of congressional oversight powers.

The long-awaited move by Rep. James Comer, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee, to subpoena the president's son Hunter and brother James comes as Republicans look to gain ground in their nearly yearlong investigation. So far, they have failed to uncover evidence directly implicating the president in any wrongdoing.

But Republicans say the evidence trail they have uncovered paints a troubling picture of "influence peddling" by Biden's family in their business dealings, particularly with clients overseas.

"Now, the House Oversight Committee is going to bring in members of the Biden family and their associates to question them on this record of evidence," Comer, of Kentucky, said in a statement.

The stakes are exceedingly high, as the inquiry could result in Republicans bringing impeachment charges against Biden, the ultimate penalty for what the U.S. Constitution describes as "high crimes and misdemeanors."

The subpoenas demand that Hunter Biden and James Biden as well as former business associate Rob Walker appear before the Oversight Committee for a deposition by mid-December. Lawmakers also requested that James Biden's wife, Sara Biden, and Hallie Biden, the wife of the president's deceased son Beau, appear voluntarily for transcribed interviews.

Hunter Biden's attorney Abbe Lowell called the subpoenas "yet another political stunt" and said the investigation has been full of "worn-out, false, baseless, or debunked claims."

"Nevertheless, Hunter is eager to have the opportunity, in a public forum and at the right time, to discuss these matters with the Committee," he added.

An attorney for James Biden said there was no justification for the subpoena as the committee had already reviewed private bank records and transactions between the two brothers. The committee found records of two loans that took place when Biden was not in office or a candidate for president.

"There is nothing more to those transactions, and there is nothing wrong with them," attorney Paul Fishman said in a statement late Wednesday. "And Jim Biden has never involved his brother in his business dealings."

The White House has continuously dismissed the investigation as a political ploy aimed at hurting the Democratic president. They say the probe is a blatant attempt to help former President Donald Trump, the early front-runner for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination, as he runs again for the White House.

"These subpoenas and interview requests are yet further proof that this sham impeachment inquiry is driven only by the demands of the vengeful and prevaricating Donald Trump," Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the Oversight Committee, said in a statement.

The impeachment inquiry slowed down in early October after Kevin McCarthy was ousted as speaker by a handful of fellow Republicans, stalling legislative business and congressional investigations as the conference spent weeks deliberating his replacement before electing Mike Johnson late last month.

Now settling into the speakership, Johnson, of Louisiana, has given his blessing to the inquiry and has hinted that a decision could come soon on whether to pursue articles of impeachment against Biden.

"I think we have a constitutional responsibility to follow this truth where it leads," Johnson told Fox News Channel recently. He also said in a separate Fox interview that he would support Comer's decision to subpoena the president's son, saying "desperate times call for desperate measures, and that perhaps is overdue."

In a letter to Johnson on Wednesday morning, Lowell had urged the new speaker to rein in the "partisan political games."

Since January, Republicans have been investigating the Biden family for what they claim is a pattern of

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"influence peddling" spanning back to when Biden was Barack Obama's vice president. Comer claims the committee had "uncovered a mountain of evidence" that he said would show how Biden abused his power and repeatedly lied about a "wall" between his political position and his son's private business dealings.

While questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family's international business, no evidence has emerged to prove that Joe Biden, in his current or previous office, abused his role or accepted bribes.

Over the summer, Republicans expanded their investigation to include oversight of the ongoing Justice Department investigation into Hunter Biden and allegations that the case was plagued with interference.

One focus of the congressional inquiry has been whether the now-special counsel overseeing the case, David Weiss, had full authority to bring charges against the president's younger son. In an unprecedented interview Tuesday, Weiss told lawmakers that he was the "decision-maker" in a yearslong case into Hunter Biden's taxes and gun use.

No one at the Justice Department, including U.S. attorneys or the tax division, blocked or prevented him from pursuing charges or taking other necessary steps in the investigation, Weiss said.

The five-year investigation into Hunter Biden had been expected to end with a plea deal this summer, but it imploded during a July plea hearing. Weiss has now charged the president's son with three firearms felonies related to the 2018 purchase of a gun during a period Hunter Biden has acknowledged being addicted to drugs. No new tax charges have been filed.

Donald Trump's rivals vow to back Israel and argue over China and Ukraine at the third debate

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — In their first debate since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, the Republican presidential candidates all declared hawkish support for Israel but squabbled over China and Ukraine as they faced growing pressure to try to catch Donald Trump, who was again absent.

Sparring over several issues were Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley, who has appeared competitive with DeSantis' distant second-place position in some national polls. Much of the debate focused on policy — especially foreign policy issues — rather than Trump and his record.

Haley, the former South Carolina governor and United Nations ambassador, declared she would end trade relations with China "until they stop murdering Americans from fentanyl — something Ron has yet to say that he's going to do." In return, the Florida governor said Haley "welcomed" Chinese investment to her state, referencing a land deal with a Chinese manufacturer while she led South Carolina.

All five candidates face growing urgency, with the leadoff Iowa caucuses just a little more than two months away, to cut into Trump's huge margins in the 2024 primary and establish themselves as a clear alternative. But it's not clear many Republican primary voters want a Trump alternative. And given his dominance in early state and national polls, Trump again skipped the debate to deprive his rivals of attention.

Trump was the subject of the debate's first question, when moderators asked each candidate to explain why they were the right person to beat him.

DeSantis said, "He owes it to you to be on this stage and explain why he should get another chance." He suggested Trump had lost a step since winning the White House in 2016, saying he failed to follow through on his "America First" policies.

Haley, who is pulling some voter and donor curiosity from DeSantis, said Trump "used to be right" on supporting Ukraine but "now he's getting weak in the knees."

But the conversation moved on to policy issues with relatively few head-to-head confrontations. The moderators often declined to call on candidates who were mentioned by others onstage, as is normally the custom.

The DeSantis and Haley campaigns for months have attacked each other on China, long a topic of scorn in GOP primaries. Their allied super PACs have run ads in early primary states alleging the other side is soft on Beijing.

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Haley also accused DeSantis of being a "liberal" on the environment for opposing the extraction of fossil fuels off Florida's coast — a process known as fracking — and dared him to "just own it."

"We are absolutely going to frack, but I disagree with Nikki Haley. I don't think it's a good idea to drill in the Florida Everglades and I know most Floridians agree with me," he responded.

Abortion was also a topic of the debate after Democrats and abortion rights supporters won several statewide races in Tuesday's elections.

DeSantis, who signed a six-week abortion ban in Florida, said anti-abortion activists were "flat-footed" in mobilizing and noted that people who voted for the measures included Republicans who have previously supported GOP candidates.

Haley, long credited by anti-abortion group leaders for how she talks about the issue, called abortion "a personal issue for every woman and every man" and said she doesn't "judge anyone for being pro-choice."

She said Republicans need to acknowledge they don't have the votes in Congress to pass a national abortion ban but should instead work to find some consensus to "ban late-term abortions," make contraception available and ensure that states don't pass laws that punish women for getting abortions.

Also appearing onstage Wednesday were South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy.

Scott frequently referenced the Bible and appealed to the Christian faith of many Republican primary voters, echoing his campaign themes and his singular focus on Iowa, where white evangelical voters are an influential bloc.

Christie defended U.S. support for Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion, saying that for the U.S.: "This is not a choice. This is the price we pay for being the leaders of the free world."

Ramaswamy tried several times to push his way into the center of the debate. Having long styled himself as someone willing to challenge his rivals, Ramaswamy repeatedly went after other candidates, notably Haley, who tussled with him in the first two debates.

Haley seemed to ignore his first barbs, but snapped during a discussion about the social media app TikTok, which many Republicans want banned in the U.S. due to its parent company's ties to China.

Ramaswamy accused Haley's daughter of having had her own TikTok account until recently. Responded Haley, "Leave my daughter out of your voice!" She then told him, "You're just scum."

All the candidates said they were staunchly behind Israel as it mounts an offensive in Gaza following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that killed more than 1,400 people. The candidates did not discuss humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza as the number of Palestinians killed in the war passed 10,500, including more than 4,300 children, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza.

Several also said they would pressure college campuses to crack down on antisemitism.

Trump has retained huge leads despite his efforts to try to overturn his 2020 election loss, his embrace of those jailed for storming the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and his four criminal indictments and a civil fraud case against his businesses, for which he testified in New York this week.

His campaign has worked to overpower DeSantis in their shared home state and publicly said it wants to score blowout wins in early primary states to seal the nomination.

Trump held a rally for several thousand people at a stadium in the Cuban American hub of Hialeah that his campaign designed to demonstrate his strength with Latino voters. He was endorsed by his former White House press secretary, Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Also speaking at the rally were comedian Roseanne Barr and mixed martial arts fighter Jorge Masvidal.

Trump claimed no one was watching the debate and said holding a rally was much harder than going on a debate stage.

One attendee, Paul Rodriguez, said: "I go to all Trump events. I hope common sense returns to America. Donald Trump speaks for us, while Democrats do it for corporations and other countries."

Senior Trump adviser Chris LaCivita issued a statement at the end of the debate calling it a "complete waste of time and money."

Republican National Committee chairwoman Ronna McDaniel told reporters after the debate that she's

discussed the upcoming debates with Trump but doesn't expect him to join.

"I don't think he's going to get on the debate stage. He's made that clear," she said. "He feels as a former president, he shouldn't have to be on the debate stage, that he's going to earn the nomination a different way. We're going to let the process play out and whoever wins the nomination, we're all going to get behind."

Israel-Hamas fighting heats up in Gaza City, accelerating the exodus of Palestinians to the south

By WAFAA SHURAF, JACK JEFFERY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians living in the heart of Gaza's largest city said Wednesday they could see and hear Israeli ground forces closing in from multiple directions, accelerating the exodus of thousands of civilians as food and water become scarce and urban fighting between Israel and Hamas heats up.

The Israeli army has not given specifics on troop movements as it presses its ground assault, vowing to crush Hamas after its deadly Oct. 7 assault inside Israel. But residents said Israeli forces had moved into inner neighborhoods of Gaza City amid intense bombardment all around the surrounding north.

Clashes took place within a kilometer (0.6 miles) of the territory's largest hospital, Shifa, which has become a focal point in the war.

The Israeli military says Hamas' main command center is located in and under the hospital complex and that senior leaders of the group are hiding there, using the facility as a shield.

Hamas and hospital staff deny the claim and say the military is making a pretext to strike it.

For Palestinians in Gaza, the hospital is a symbol of civilian suffering in the war. Like others, it has been overwhelmed by a constant stream of wounded and struggling as electricity and medical supplies run out. Tens of thousands of displaced people have been sheltering in and around the complex.

The Group of Seven wealthy industrial nations issued a statement Wednesday condemning Hamas and supporting Israel's right to self-defense. But the group also called for the "unimpeded" delivery of food, water, medicine and fuel, and for "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has left open the possibility of small pauses to deliver aid, but has ruled out a broader cease-fire unless some 240 hostages taken by Hamas are freed.

"There are no limitations" on how long the war will last, Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's decision-making War Cabinet, said Wednesday.

Gantz acknowledged that Israel does not yet have a vision for the Gaza Strip should it succeed in destroying Hamas rule, but said it will include an Israeli security presence in the territory after the war — a point that echoed comments earlier in the week by Netanyahu, who said Israel would likely maintain security control of Gaza for an "indefinite period."

The prime minister's comments appear to have heightened U.S. concerns. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken called for a united and Palestinian-led government for Gaza and the West Bank after the war ends, as a move toward Palestinian statehood.

The U.S. and Israel agree that the Hamas militant group cannot return to its rule of the Gaza Strip. But none of the ideas that Israeli officials have raised for Gaza's governance after the war have included independent Palestinian rule as a credible possibility.

Support for the war remains strong inside Israel, where the focus has been on the fate of the hostages.

ESCAPING THE NORTH

Over 70% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have already left their homes since the war began but the number fleeing the north has dramatically accelerated.

Throngs of people filled Salah al-Din Street, Gaza's main highway leading south. They appeared to be in greater numbers than Tuesday, when the United Nations said about 15,000 people streamed southward — which in turn was triple the number the day before.

Families walked together, with men and women carrying young children or pushing older people on

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makeshift carts. Most had only a few belongings in backpacks. A few families rode on donkey carts, holding white flags as they approached Israeli tanks.

Israel extended the daily window for them to use the road to five hours.

Israeli forces advancing from the northwest along the Mediterranean coast have been clashing with fighters inside Shati refugee camp, a dense neighborhood adjacent to Gaza City's center, two residents told The Associated Press. The past nights saw heavy bombardment of Shati, which houses Palestinian families who fled from, or were driven out of, what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its establishment.

Other troops entered Gaza City's Zeitoun district. One resident living near Shifa Hospital said he saw Israeli troops battling fighters on a street about 600 meters (yards) from the hospital.

"I'm hearing all kinds of horrible sounds. It is terrifying. There are intense airstrikes," he said. Both residents spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The Israeli army's chief spokesperson, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said Wednesday the ground forces were deepening the offensive into Gaza City. The army said it killed one of Hamas' leading developers of rockets and other weapons, without saying where he was killed.

Israel is focusing its operations on the city, which was home to some 650,000 people before the war and where the military says Hamas has its central command and a labyrinth of tunnels.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have heeded Israeli orders in recent weeks to flee south to get out of the way of the ground assault.

For tens of thousands believed to remain, desperation was increasing.

"We didn't have food or drinking water. ... They struck the bakeries. There is no life in Gaza," said Abeer Akila, a woman fleeing south with her family.

The trickle of aid entering Gaza from the south is largely barred from going north, which has been without running water for weeks. The U.N. aid office said the last functioning bakeries shut down Tuesday for lack of fuel, water and flour. Hospitals running low on supplies are performing surgeries without anesthesia.

Al-Quds Hospital has become completely cut off after all roads around it were bombed, and has had to shut down most of its operations to ration fuel use. A convoy trying to bring medical supplies came under fire by Israeli forces and couldn't reach it, the Palestinian Red Crescent said. More than 14,000 displaced people are sheltering at the hospital, and bread supplies have run out, it said.

Majed Haroun, a teacher who remains in Gaza City, said women and children who lost families go door to door begging for food.

"No words can describe what we are experiencing," he said.

CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH

The new arrivals from the north are squeezing into homes with extended family or in U.N. schools-turned-shelters where hundreds of thousands are taking refuge. At one, 600 people must share a single toilet, according to the U.N. office.

Israeli strikes have continued in the southern zone. On Wednesday, one hit a family house in the Nuseirat refugee camp, killing at least 18 people and wounding dozens of others, according to Iyad Abu Zaher, director of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where the dead and wounded were brought. He said the toll could rise as medics and first responders searched the rubble.

Hundreds of trucks carrying aid have been allowed to enter Gaza from Egypt since Oct. 21.

But "there is an ocean of needs in Gaza right now, and what's been getting in is a drop in the ocean. We need fuel, we need water, we need food, and we need medical supplies," said Dominic Allen of the United Nations Population Fund, speaking from the West Bank.

A month of relentless bombardment in Gaza since the Hamas attack has killed more than 10,500 Palestinians — two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. More than 2,300 others are believed to have been buried by strikes that in some cases have demolished entire city blocks.

Israeli officials say thousands of Palestinian militants have been killed, and blame civilian deaths on Hamas, accusing it of operating in residential areas. Gaza's Health Ministry does not distinguish between

civilians and combatants in its casualty reports.

More than 1,400 people have died in Israel since the start of the war, most of them civilians killed by Hamas militants during their incursion. Israel says 32 of its soldiers have been killed in Gaza since the ground offensive began, and Palestinian militants have continued to fire rockets into Israel on a daily basis.

The war has stoked wider tensions. Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group have been trading fire along the border, and over 160 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank since the war began, mainly during violent protests and gunbattles with Israeli forces during arrest raids. Some 250,000 Israelis have been forced to evacuate from communities along the borders with Gaza and Lebanon.

The U.S. launched an airstrike Wednesday on a weapons warehouse in eastern Syria used by Iranian-backed militias, the Pentagon said, in retaliation for what has been a growing number of attacks on bases housing U.S. troops in the region. This is the second time in less than two weeks that the U.S. has bombed facilities used by the militant groups.

U.S. officials say the groups, many operating under the umbrella of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, have carried out at least 40 attacks since Oct. 17, the day a powerful explosion rocked a Gaza hospital, killing hundreds and triggering protests in a number of Muslim nations. Israel denied responsibility for the al-Ahli Hospital blast, and the U.S. has said its intelligence assessment found that Israel was not to blame.

Funeral home stored bodies for 4 years, deceived families about loved ones' ashes, prosecutors say

By JESSE BEDAYN and MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — The owners of a Colorado funeral home were arrested Wednesday in Oklahoma on charges linked to the discovery of 190 sets of decaying remains at one of their facilities, including some that apparently had been languishing there for four years.

Investigators entered the Return to Nature Funeral Home building in the Rocky Mountain town of Penrose in early October to find "abhorrent" conditions with dozens of stacked bodies, according to a federal affidavit that's under seal in Colorado but available in Oklahoma.

Some bodies had 2019 death dates, according to the document.

"Law enforcement now knows the cremains each family was given could not have been their loved one," reads the documents alleging funeral home owners Jon and Carie Hallford had fled Colorado to avoid prosecution.

The Hallfords were jailed on \$2 million bond on a Colorado arrest warrant alleging approximately 190 counts of abuse of a corpse, five counts of theft, four counts of money laundering and over 50 counts of forgery — after their arrest in Wagoner, east of Tulsa. They're set for an initial appearance on a federal fleeing charge on Nov. 9 in Muskogee.

They couldn't be reached for comment and didn't have attorneys listed in jail records. Neither has a listed personal phone number, and the funeral home's number no longer works.

During a news conference in Colorado Springs announcing the charges Wednesday, District Attorney Michael Allen said authorities wouldn't be releasing many details in order to protect the integrity of the ongoing investigation. He said the charging documents contain information that is "absolutely shocking."

Several families have told The Associated Press that the FBI told them privately that their loved ones were among the decaying bodies, meaning the ashes they were given weren't their family members'. Those families were asked to give samples of the ashes they received to investigators to analyze.

Crystina Page is among the aggrieved relatives of the dead. She went to the news conference clutching a red urn with what Return to Nature told her were the ashes of her 20-year-old son, David, who was shot and killed by law enforcement in 2019. For four years, she carried the urn from the marble halls of the Colorado Capitol to Washington, D.C., as she advocated for police reform.

Her son's actual body was set to be cremated later Wednesday.

"For four years, I've marched all over this country with this urn believing it to be my son," Page said "My son has been laying there rotting for four years. ... It's the most horrendous feeling I've ever had in my life."

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Allen and others described an ongoing process of identifying the remains using fingerprints, dental records, medical hardware and, if necessary, DNA. They have identified 110 of the 190 sets of remains and have returned 25 to those people's families.

The remains of Linda Martinez, 66, who died in 2020, were recently returned to relatives who originally thought they had interred her ashes in a cemetery.

"How do you store almost 200 people?" wondered her grandson, Michael Martinez, of Colorado Springs. "And how do you even stomach that?"

Investigators are in contact with 137 families, and Allen asked for anyone who might have worked for or with the Hallfords or done business with the funeral home going back to September 2019 to come forward. He also asked relatives of the yet-unidentified dead to contact their late loved ones' dentists for records that might help the investigation.

The Hallfords' funeral home business is based in Colorado Springs and has a facility in Penrose, a small town about 100 miles (160 kilometers) south of Denver. Authorities found the remains Oct. 4 while responding to a report of an "abhorrent smell" near the Penrose building.

Officials initially estimated there were about 115 bodies inside, but the number increased to 189 after they finished removing all the remains in mid-October. The total rose to 190 on Wednesday, though authorities didn't explain the increase.

A day after the odor was reported, the director of the state office of Funeral Home and Crematory registration spoke by phone with Jon Hallford. He tried to conceal the improper storage of corpses at his business, acknowledged having a "problem" at the site and claimed he practiced taxidermy there, according to an order from state officials dated Oct. 5.

Relatives of people whose remains were handled by the funeral home have feared that their loved ones weren't cremated and were instead among the remains that authorities found. They said death certificates indicated that the remains were cremated at one of two crematories, but both crematories told the AP that they weren't performing cremations for Return to Nature at the time of the dates on the certificates.

"This was intentional," said Page, who started a private Facebook group for affected families. "And not only did they think about doing this, but they followed through with it, they concealed it and they did this to almost 200 families."

As for the arrests, Page said, it "makes it feel like there's an end in sight."

Retired Army officer Tanya Wilson said her mother's body was identified in the neglected remains found last month and believes the ashes Return to Nature had given her were fake. The bracelet left on the body of her mother, who sometimes three jobs to keep the family afloat, was returned to Wilson's family with a substance left on it.

"I don't think any amount of jail/prison time will justify my brother having to clean my mother's rotting flesh off her bracelet that they gave back to us. Nothing," Wilson said in a text to the AP.

The company, which was started in 2017 and offered cremations and "green" burials without embalming fluids, kept doing business even as its financial and legal problems mounted in recent years. The owners had missed tax payments in recent months, were evicted from one of their properties and were sued for unpaid bills by a crematory that quit doing business with them almost a year ago, according to public records and interviews with people who worked with them.

Colorado has some of the weakest oversight of funeral homes in the nation with no routine inspections or qualification requirements for funeral home operators.

One family has filed a lawsuit accusing Return to Nature and the Hallfords of negligence, fraud, intentionally inflicting emotional distress and violating several Colorado laws, among other allegations.

Ivanka Trump's testimony: She worked on dad's deals, not financial documents key to civil fraud case

By JENNIFER PELTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ivanka Trump didn't want to testify. But on the stand Wednesday in her father's civil fraud trial, she took the opportunity to contend the family business has "overdelivered," even as she kept her distance from financial documents that New York state says were fraudulent.

Former President Donald Trump's elder daughter capped a major stretch in the lawsuit that could reshape his real estate empire. She followed her father and her brothers Eric and Donald Trump Jr. to the witness stand, and the New York attorney general's office rested its case after her testimony. The defense gets its turn now.

Ivanka Trump has been in her father's inner circle in both business and politics, as an executive vice president at the family's Trump Organization and then as a senior White House adviser. But she testified that she had no role in his personal financial statements, which New York Attorney General Letitia James claims were fraudulently inflated and deceived banks and lenders.

"Those were not things that I was privy to," beyond having seen "a few documents and correspondence" that referred to them, Ivanka Trump said.

The ex-president and Republican 2024 front-runner denies any wrongdoing. He insisted in court Monday that his financial statements actually greatly underestimated his net worth, that any discrepancies were minor, that a disclaimer absolved him of liability anyway and that "this case is a disgrace."

In even-tempered testimony that provided a counterpoint to her father's caustic turn on the stand, Ivanka Trump touched on some of the same notes that the ex-president has hammered inside court and out — portraying the Trump Organization as a successful developer of big-dollar projects that satisfied its lenders.

The Doral golf resort in Florida? A "Herculean" renovation undertaken to refurbish a faded treasure that Donald Trump had visited in childhood, his daughter testified.

The company's historic Old Post Office building-turned-hotel in Washington? "A labor of love" to turn a dilapidated building into a super-luxury hotel, while navigating approvals from a raft of different government agencies.

"They were complicated projects, and I believe we overdelivered on every metric," she said.

But when questions about the post office project turned to questions that its government owners raised about some aspects of her father's financial statements, she said she didn't recall that.

The agency overseeing the bidding flagged those concerns in a December 2011 letter to her, and Trump Organization executives looped her in as they prepared a response ahead of a presentation to officials in Washington. An agency document showed the company addressed the issues in its presentation, which she attended.

But Ivanka Trump said she didn't recall "that they discussed financial statements specifically." Rather, she remembered talk of "our vision for the project" and the company's experience, with her father mentioning his renovation of New York's famous Plaza Hotel.

She retained a stake in the Washington hotel lease until its 2022 sale, which netted her \$4 million.

Unlike her father and his adult sons, Ivanka Trump is no longer a defendant in the case, and her lawyers had tried to prevent her from having to testify.

Ordered to do so, she said she largely didn't recall the documents and details she was asked about. During about four hours of polite answers punctuated by broad smiles, she once thanked a lawyer in Attorney General James' office for bringing up the Old Post Office proposal because it "brought back a lot of memories."

"Ivanka Trump was cordial, she was disciplined, she was controlled, and she was very courteous," James, a Democrat, said outside court. But, she added: "This case is about fraudulent statements of financial condition that she benefited from. She was enriched. And clearly, you cannot distance yourself from that fact."

James' legal team and Trump defense lawyers repeatedly tangled Wednesday over the scope of Ivanka Trump's questioning, including whether she could be asked about 2013 emails that included her husband,

Jared Kushner, in discussions about potential Trump company loans.

Kushner — a real estate executive himself — didn't work for the Trump Organization. But he had introduced his wife to a Deutsche Bank banker as the Trumps were seeking financing to buy and overhaul Doral, Ivanka Trump testified. Because he also worked in real estate, they would sometimes exchange ideas and advice, she said.

She became the point person in establishing a lending relationship with Deutsche Bank's private wealth management arm. It eventually extended the Trump Organization hundreds of millions of dollars in loans, with terms that required Donald Trump to submit his financial statements each year.

Amid such assets as Trump Tower, the Mar-a-Lago club in Florida and Doral, the financial statements included a Trump-owned building on New York's Park Avenue. Ivanka Trump leased and had options to buy two apartments there, and the state's lawyers contend that her father offered her a steep discount while claiming on his financial statements that the apartments were worth far more.

She testified that she invested over \$7.5 million in one of the apartments, a penthouse, but never made it her permanent home because she and her family moved to Washington.

She stepped away from her Trump Organization job as her father's 2017 inauguration neared, and she became an unpaid senior adviser. After the Trump administration ended, she and her family moved to Florida.

The non-jury trial will decide allegations of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records — but Judge Arthur Engoron already has resolved the lawsuit's top claim by ruling that Trump engaged in fraud. That decision came with provisions that could strip the ex-president of oversight of such marquee properties as Trump Tower, though an appeals court is allowing him continued control of his holdings for now.

James, a Democrat, is seeking over \$300 million in penalties and a ban on Trump doing business in New York.

With the case now turning to the defense, the Trumps' attorneys plan to argue Thursday that the judge should find in their favor immediately.

"The attorney general rested their case, and it is very clear that they have failed to prove the essential elements of the case," Trump attorney Alina Habba said outside court.

Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr., who are still Trump Organization EVPs, also have professed minimal knowledge of their father's annual financial statements. Donald Trump Jr. testified that he dealt with the documents only in passing; Eric Trump said he relied completely on accountants and lawyers to ensure the documents' accuracy.

5 Republican candidates spar at debate, while Trump holds a rally nearby. Follow live updates

By The Associated Press undefined

Five candidates sparred with one another at a whittled-down third Republican presidential debate in Miami while front-runner Donald Trump held his own event a short drive away.

What to know

What to watch during the Republican debate

Trump looks to upstage the debate with a rally targeting South Florida's Cuban community

GOP presidential candidates unified on Israel but divided on China

Ramaswamy hints at conspiracy theory when talking about Biden

Ramaswamy's final comments onstage at the third presidential debate hinted at far-flung conspiracy theories believed by some far-right Americans, including the idea that Joe Biden isn't the real president.

"End this farce that Joe Biden is going to be your nominee. We know he's not even the president of the United States," he said.

He went on to suggest that Biden is a placeholder for Democrats to put someone else into the candidacy, mentioning former first lady Michelle Obama and California Gov. Gavin Newsom.

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Fact check on Ohio's new abortion amendment

Ramaswamy's claim that Ohio's new abortion amendment "effectively codifies abortion all the way up until the moment of birth without parental consent" needs context.

The language Ohioans voted for in Tuesday's election doesn't change Ohio's existing parental notification and consent law, which requires minors to have parental permission — or a judicial exception in extreme cases — to get an abortion.

To be overturned, that law would have to be challenged in court and struck down by the state Supreme Court, whose conservative majority would likely vote to protect it.

Medical experts also dispute the idea of abortions "until the moment of birth" that Ramaswamy and other candidates on stage are using. Terminations later in pregnancy — which are exceedingly rare — involve medication that induces birth early, which is different from a surgical abortion.

Republicans play up threat of terrorists crossing US border

Ron DeSantis said that "terrorists have come in through our southern border" and that he is going to "shut it down." Vivek Ramaswamy vowed to "smoke the terrorists" out of the U.S. southern border.

What terrorists?

Alex Nowrasteh of the pro-immigration Cato Institute documented nine foreign-born terrorists who entered the United States illegally from 1975 through last year. Three entered Mexico in 1984 when they were 5 years old or younger and were convicted of plotting to attack Fort Dix, New Jersey, in 2007. The other six entered through Canada.

That's not to say it can't happen. The Homeland Security Department said in a national "threat assessment" this year that people with "potential terrorism connections" continue to attempt to enter the country.

Republicans have seized on arrests of people who crossed illegally from Mexico and are on the Terrorist Screening Dataset, known as the "terrorist watchlist," a compilation of names that have aroused suspicion for any number of reasons. It doesn't mean they are terrorists. The number jumped to 172 in the government's budget year ended Sept. 30 from 98 the previous year, 15 the year before that and 11 in the previous four years combined.

Build a wall on the US-Canadian border, Ramaswamy says

There has been a lot of talk about how GOP candidates would handle their concerns related to security at the U.S.-Mexico border, but Vivek Ramaswamy wanted to shift perspective northward.

The biotech entrepreneur said in Wednesday night's debate that he's the only Republican hopeful "who has actually visited the northern border" with Canada, where he said enough fentanyl was captured last year "to kill 3 million Americans."

"Don't just build the wall," Ramaswamy said of the U.S.-Mexico border wall proposal. "Build both walls."

Ramaswamy, who visited the northern border last month, also advocating using U.S. troops to "seal the Swiss cheese" tunnels he said are underneath the northern border.

Mexico will pay for the border wall, Part 2

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis began the debate demanding that Donald Trump come to the stage and explain why he didn't wall off the entire U.S. southern border and have Mexico pay for it as he'd promised to do as president.

As the night wound down, DeSantis went a step farther, making the unlikely claim that he could keep the promise Trump broke.

DeSantis vowed to build a border wall and have Mexico pay for it, a comment that went unchallenged by moderators or other candidates.

Whether DeSantis will get the chance remains to be seen given the commanding early lead Trump has built in the Republican 2024 presidential primary, despite skipping all three debates. But erecting a wall the length of the nearly 2,000-mile border is nearly unthinkable — and the idea that Mexico would fit the bill strains credulity even further.

GOP candidates support raising retirement age

Republican presidential candidates came out swinging with benefit cuts to Social Security in order to preserve the retirement income program. Some also said they could achieve stronger economic growth,

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though past pledges along those lines have fallen flat.

According to a trustee's report, Social Security will be unable to pay full benefits starting in 2033 without changes that could include less benefits or higher taxes.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie said he would raise the retirement age for younger workers, including his 30 year-old son. Christie also tried to shame billionaire Warren Buffet for collecting Social Security, even though the payments would reflect the payroll taxes that he paid over his career.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley would also raise the retirement age and limit payments to wealthy individuals.

Businessman Vivek Ramaswamy suggested he could save the program through drastic spending cuts that would shutter federal agencies and possibly lay off the majority of government workers.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott said he would achieve faster growth, even though former President Donald Trump pledged he could also boost gross domestic product gains and failed to do so. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said he knows a few Social Security recipients in his home state, which has a reputation for catering to retirees, and he, too, would get faster economic growth.

Corrects year that Social Security will stop being able to pay full benefits to 2033, not 2023.

Haley says DeSantis is a 'liberal' on the environment

Haley is accusing Ron DeSantis of being a "liberal" when it comes to the environment.

"You were. You always have been. Just own it if that's the case," she said at Wednesday night's debate.

Haley pointed to the Florida governor's opposition to fracking off the state's coast. He "has opposed fracking, he has opposed drilling," she said.

DeSantis, however, said: "We are absolutely going to frack" — just not in certain parts of his state.

"I don't think it's a good idea to drill in the Florida Everglades," he said.

'Leave my daughter out of your voice'

A question about whether the candidates would ban TikTok for its China ties turned into a searing personal exchange between Haley and Ramaswamy.

Ramaswamy interrupted Haley to accuse her of inconsistency on opposing the app for the inroads it allegedly gives to Chinese interests.

"Her own daughter was actually using the app for a long time," Ramaswamy said.

"You might want to take care your family first," he told Haley, a rebuke that drew loud boos from the debate audience.

"Leave my daughter out of your voice!" Haley answered.

GOP candidates come up short in solutions to inflation

GOP presidential candidates laid out their plans for tackling inflation — and came up somewhat short-changed to address immediate cost pressures.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott said he would increase oil and natural gas production, though domestic oil output recently hit an all-time high under President Joe Biden, according to the Energy Information Administration. The key challenge is that oil is a global commodity and often responds to market issues all over the world, such that cuts in production by Saudi Arabia and other countries tied to OPEC can push up prices.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said workers are removing items from their grocery carts when at the register because prices are too high. He said he would get rid of all of Biden's economic policies and "rein in the Federal Reserve," the U.S. central bank tasked with keeping inflation near a target annual rate of 2%. The Fed has rapidly hiked its benchmark rate in order to tame inflation, causing the pace of consumer price increases to slow to 3.7% from a peak of 9.1% in 2021.

Vivek Ramaswamy said he would just "increase the supply of everything." That includes oil, housing, nuclear energy and coal, even though it can take years for companies to ramp up supplies in a way that can immediately respond to price pressures.

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Trump claims no one is watching debate across town
At his Hialeah rally, Trump made passing reference to the debate across town, saying no one was watching it.

Later, he compared his rally to the debate: "I'm standing in front of tens of thousands of people right now and it's on television. That's a lot harder to do than a debate."

The stadium where he was speaking has a capacity of about 5,200 people and was not full Wednesday.
Haley and DeSantis feud spills over on to debate stage

Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis have been feuding in speeches and ads over China, and now they've done it on the debate stage.

The former United Nations ambassador said as president she would "end all normal trade relations with China until they stop murdering Americans from fentanyl — something Ron has yet to say that he's going to do."

The Florida governor clapped back that Haley as South Carolina's governor had "welcomed" the Chinese into South Carolina, referencing land and economic development deals during her six-year tenure.

Haley had her finger up hoping to respond but was not called on.

Haley again goes after Ramaswamy

Nikki Haley is picking up during Wednesday night's debate where she left off during the last debate — going out of her way to slam Vivek Ramaswamy.

After Ramaswamy finished a lengthy answer about his opposition to U.S. support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, Haley turned and indicated his podium.

"I am telling you, Putin and President Xi are salivating at the thought that someone like that could become president," Haley said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

That recalled the second debate when Haley repeatedly ripped Ramaswamy, including declaring, "Every time I hear you, I feel a little bit dumber."

GOP division over war in Ukraine is on display

The Republican Party's internal division over Russia's war in Ukraine is on display at the debate.

Scott said he's supportive of helping Ukraine. "Every day we get closer to the degradation of the Russian military, and that's good news." However, he said there should be more transparency and accountability for how Ukraine has used American assistance.

Haley also said "we should give them the equipment, the ammunition to win." She portrayed support for Ukraine as a way to deter aggression worldwide.

Christie drew a connection between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the run up to World War II. "This is not a choice. This is the price we pay for being the leaders of the free world."

Ramaswamy suggested areas of Ukraine occupied by Russia should remain in Moscow's hands. He said this is not "some kind of battle between good versus evil."

DeSantis expressed skepticism about some of the funding that the U.S. has sent Ukraine. He added that "we need to bring this war to an end" to focus on border security instead.

Haley and Scott find common ground on Iran

They haven't faced off directly, but the two presidential candidates from South Carolina are finding common ground when it comes to Iran, who Hamas has said helped plan and orchestrate its surprise attack on Israel last month.

Asked during Wednesday night's debate if she supported U.S. military action against Iran, former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley said that "We need to go and take out their infrastructure," adding: "Iran responds to strikes."

Asked what he would say to assure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott seemed to agree, noting, "You have to cut off the head of the snake. And the head of the snake is Iran."

'Do you want Dick Cheney in 3-inch heels?'

Tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy is lashing out at former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley for her more

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hawkish foreign policy stance.

"Do you want a leader from a different generation who's going to put this country first? Or do you want Dick Cheney in 3-inch heels? In which case, we've got two of 'em on stage tonight," Ramaswamy said, invoking the former vice president.

It was a dig at Haley — the only woman on stage — as well as DeSantis, who has been accused of wearing lifts in his boots.

Haley punched back, correcting Ramaswamy. "They're 5-inch heels," she said, adding: "I don't wear 'em unless I can run in 'em."

Earlier, Ramaswamy also lashed out at Republican National Committee chair Ronna McDaniel as he expressed dismay at Republican losses in Tuesday's elections.

"We've become a party of losers," he said, saying he would welcome her resignation.

GOP candidates voice support for Israel at debate

The Republican presidential candidates at Wednesday night's debate competed against one another to sound the toughest on Hamas.

Asked what they would tell Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he wages war on the militant group after its Oct. 7 attack, DeSantis replied, "Finish the job once and for all with these butchers, Hamas."

"Finish them. Finish them," said Haley, who cited what she said was her daily work on behalf of ally Israel as Trump's U.N. ambassador.

Haley broadened the blame to Hamas supporter Iran, and to China and Russia for its economic ties with Iran, calling the three countries an "unholy alliance."

"Smoke those terrorists on his southern border," Ramaswamy relayed as his advice to the Israeli leader.

Trump takes stage shortly after debate begins nearby

Donald Trump took the stage at his rally about 20 minutes after the Republican presidential debate kicked off nearby.

Trump's rally was set to begin at 7 p.m., but he didn't end up speaking until around 8:20 p.m. Wednesday. Already by that time, his rivals at the debate had been asked to weigh in on why they were a stronger 2024 candidate than Trump.

Trump was introduced by Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, his former White House press secretary. She praised his courage, touted his record and called him "my former boss, my friend, and everybody's favorite president."

Sanders says Trump brought patriotism back to the country and would do so again.

"We need him to finish what he started eight years ago," she said.

Moderator asks audience to behave themselves

Moderator Lester Holt reminded audience members twice in the first 10 minutes to behave themselves, perhaps an early sign that NBC will run a tighter ship than Fox did in previous GOP debates, which at times got out of hand.

"Audience, let's not do this," Holt said as the crowd cheered.

NBC also set different rules for the debate than Fox, allowing candidates 90 seconds to answer questions instead of 60 seconds. Follow-ups are at the discretion of moderators and are not given to candidates just because their name was mentioned.

"Continued interruptions may result in loss of additional questions," Holt said while introducing the rules.

Scott sticks to talking points instead of going after Trump

Sen. Tim Scott needs a breakout moment in the third Republican debate, but he has so far has been sticking to his talking points.

The South Carolina Republican on Wednesday night was given an opportunity by moderator Lester Holt of NBC News to contrast his candidacy with that of GOP front-runner Donald Trump.

But instead of drawing bright lines, Scott talked about his optimism for America's future and his own personal narrative, which he says portrays the kind of leadership that American needs.

Candidates asked why they are stronger than Trump

The third Republican presidential debate opened with a sharp question about why the candidates on stage

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were stronger than Donald Trump, who has built a commanding early lead in the party's 2024 primary.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis slammed the former president for skipping all the debates, saying he should be there answering tough questions like why he didn't keep the promise to wall off the entirety of the U.S.-Mexico border and have Mexico pay for it.

DeSantis also said Trump promised the country it'd win enough to get tired of it, adding, "I'm sick of Republicans losing," pointing to Democrats' big night in many key races across the country in Tuesday's election.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who was Trump's ambassador to the United Nations, called him "the right president for the right time," but said he wasn't now, chiding him for running up federal deficits.

Entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy was even more blunt, calling Republicans "a party of losers."

GOP candidates bash own party for 2023 election results

Candidates used their party's poor performance in Tuesday's elections as a punching bag at the start of the debate.

"We've become a party of losers," Ramaswamy said.

"I'm sick of Republicans losing," DeSantis said.

For each of them, it was a chance to pitch himself as the antidote to what ails Republicans. Ramaswamy promised to take on the establishment, while DeSantis bragged about his electoral record in Florida.

It's time for the Miami matchup

The third Republican presidential candidate debate is officially underway in Miami.

It's expected that candidates will be asked about a variety of topics, including abortion and the ongoing war in Israel following Hamas' surprise attack last month.

Five candidates met the Republican National Committee's qualifications to participate in the third matchup: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie.

As he has with previous debates, former President Donald Trump is skipping Wednesday night's matchup, instead holding his own event a short drive away.

Wednesday night's debate comes just one day after the 2023 off-year elections, in which Democrats notched a number of wins the party hopes might portend possible successes in other contests next year.

Thousands gather for Trump rally ahead of debate

Thousands have gathered to show support for former President Donald Trump at a rally in the Miami suburb of Hialeah.

Trump was joined by mixed martial arts fighter Jorge Masvidal and comedian Roseanne Barr, who led the crowd in a profane chant and called him a "MAGA-dor," playing off his "Make America Great Again" slogan.

People showed up in red, white and blue clothes with MAGA hats and Trump 2024 flags. Some also carried the flag of Israel.

Dozens of supporters lined up earlier to get a copy of Trump's photobook "Our Journey Together" signed by the former president's son Donald Trump Jr.

Some speakers addressed the crowd in Spanish and English.

"I go to all Trump events," said Paul Rodriguez, a Cuban American voter who wore a T-shirt bearing Trump's mug shot. "I hope common sense returns to America. Donald Trump speaks for us, while Democrats do it for corporations and other countries."

Absent yet again, Trump gets some good debate night news

He won't be onstage with his GOP rivals, but Donald Trump is getting some good debate night news.

The Minnesota Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a lawsuit seeking to bar Trump from the 2024 primary ballot under a constitutional provision that forbids those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office.

The ruling is the first to come in a series of lawsuits filed by liberal groups seeking to use Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to block the GOP front-runner's candidacy by citing his role in the violent Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.

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Democrats troll 2024 GOP hopefuls in lead-up to debate

Democrats are once again trolling the Republican candidates ahead of their debate.

The Democratic National Committee placed bilingual ads on billboards across South Florida and hired a mobile billboard truck to, in their words "call out their extreme MAGA agendas."

The truck will be driving around the Republican National Committee debate venue, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, on Wednesday night.

The Spanish- and English-language ads cast former President Donald Trump, the GOP front-runner, as an extremist and a liar.

Trump will be holding his own event in nearby Hialeah.

Scott hosting Jewish high school and college students at debate

The ongoing Israel-Hamas war is sure to feature in discussion during Wednesday night's GOP presidential debate, and Sen. Tim Scott is bringing with him some students who might be particularly interested.

Scott's campaign says the South Carolina Republican is hosting more than 20 Jewish students from the University of South Carolina, University of Miami and a local South Florida high school at the debate.

The Republican Jewish Coalition is one of the partners for Miami's debate. Scott was among the GOP contenders who addressed the coalition's leadership summit in Las Vegas.

Scott, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie are taking part in the Wednesday night event.

Israeli military tour of northern Gaza reveals ravaged buildings, toppled trees, former weapons lab

By OHAD ZWIGENBERG Associated Press

INSIDE THE GAZA STRIP (AP) — An Israeli tank rolls across a sandy moonscape, surrounded by rubble. Damaged buildings are visible in every direction. Toppled trees lie along the Mediterranean shoreline.

The Israeli military escorted international journalists into the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday, giving them a glimpse of the aftermath of 12 days of heavy fighting in the area.

Israel has been at war against Gaza's Hamas rulers since the Islamic militant group carried out a bloody cross-border attack on Oct. 7, killing over 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and kidnapping about 240 others. Israel responded with weeks of intense airstrikes before launching a ground operation on Oct. 27.

"It's been a long two weeks of fighting," said Lt. Col. Ido, whose last name was withheld under military guidelines. "We've lost some soldiers."

The initial focus of the operation was northern Gaza, near the Israeli border, before troops moved in on Gaza City, which Israel says is the center of Hamas' military operations.

The Palestinian Health Ministry says 10,500 people have been killed in the Hamas-run territory. Israel says several thousand Hamas militants are among the dead. It also says Hamas uses civilians in residential areas as human shields, and so is responsible for the high death toll. Hamas has denied this.

The drive into Gaza on Wednesday was in a windowless armored vehicle. A screen inside showed images of the shoreline, damaged buildings and downed trees. Israeli tanks and armored vehicles sat motionless as soldiers patrolled the area.

During the tour, the army said it had found ammunition and a weapons-making facility inside one building. Much of the lab had been removed, but the remnants of rockets, thousands of which have been launched at Israel during the fighting, could be seen.

One floor above the lab was what appeared to be a children's bedroom. The bright pink room had multiple beds, a doll and a Palestinian flag.

During the less than two hours they spent inside Gaza on Wednesday, journalists could hear gunfire but did not witness any live fire. Israeli troops instructed the journalists not to move around too much.

The army ordered civilians to evacuate to the southern Gaza Strip ahead of the ground offensive. While about 70% of Gaza's population is believed to have fled their homes, U.N. officials estimate that roughly 300,000 people have remained behind.

But in this corner of northern Gaza, Ido said the order appears to have worked.

"We have not seen any civilians here – only Hamas," he said, adding that militants had been spotted operating aboveground and emerging from their underground tunnel system.

"We gave all the people that live here a good heads-up that we're coming," he added.

Biden administration picks Maryland for new FBI headquarters

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has chosen a location for a new FBI headquarters in Maryland, the General Services Administration confirmed Wednesday, as the suburban Washington location was selected over nearby Virginia following a sharp competition between the two states.

The site is planned for Greenbelt, about 13 miles (20 kilometers) northeast of Washington.

"GSA looks forward to building the FBI a state-of-the-art headquarters campus in Greenbelt to advance their critical mission for years to come," Robin Carnahan, the GSA administrator, said. "Thank you to everyone at GSA, DOJ, FBI, Congress, and others who helped reach this important milestone after a comprehensive, multi-year effort."

The GSA also noted that Greenbelt was determined to be the best site because it came at the lowest cost to taxpayers, provided the greatest transportation access to FBI employees and visitors, and gave the government the most certainty on a project delivery schedule.

Consideration for a new headquarters has been going on for more than a decade, and in recent months the FBI has expressed concern about the site selection process.

Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland said the location in his state was ideal because of access to mass transit and because the cost to taxpayers would be significantly less there.

"We're very happy about this location. We've got a lot more work to do," Cardin said. The choice was first reported by The Washington Post.

In a joint statement, Maryland's elected leaders applauded the decision and said their push to bring the FBI headquarters there was "never about politics" and the new facility would meet a "dire, longstanding need for a new consolidated headquarters."

Democratic Maryland Gov. Wes Moore argued in recent months that building it there would be fast, save taxpayers \$1 billion and meet equity goals raised by President Joe Biden, with a location in the majority-Black Prince George's County.

Most of Maryland's congressional delegation and the governor personally raised concerns to the GSA in March about the process, including extra weight abruptly given in 2022 to proximity to the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia.

News of the choice brought frustrated criticism from Virginia leaders.

Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia told reporters he had not been officially notified of the selection, but if true, "it would be evidence of gross political interference in an established GSA process that both states went through and it would be frankly more reminiscent of the tactics from the last administration."

In a joint statement with Sen. Tim Kaine, he said he was disappointed that the "clear case" for Virginia, home to the FBI Academy, was set aside.

Virginia leaders, including Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin, argued that along with the academy the state has also welcomed Amazon and other big companies in recent years.

In July, the GSA announced changes in criteria for choosing the new location, boosting two potential places in Maryland. The new criteria raised the weight given to cost and social equity concerns to 20% each and reduced proximity to the FBI Academy to 25%, down from 35%.

Plans to replace the FBI's roughly five-decade-old J. Edgar Hoover Building, where nets surround the facility to protect pedestrians from falling debris, have been under discussion for 15 years. Momentum stalled at one point while Donald Trump was president, with discussion centering on rebuilding on the existing site in Washington.

Two other finalists were Springfield, Virginia, and Landover, Maryland. About 7,500 jobs are connected

to the facility.

US launches airstrike on site in Syria in response to attacks by Iranian-backed militias

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. carried out an airstrike on a weapons warehouse in eastern Syria used by Iranian-backed militias, in retaliation for what has been a growing number of attacks on bases housing U.S. troops in the region for the past several weeks, the Pentagon said.

In Wednesday's strike, two U.S. F-15 fighter jets dropped multiple bombs on a weapons storage facility near Maysulun in Deir el-Zour that was known to be used by Iran's Revolutionary Guard, U.S. officials said.

"The President has no higher priority than the safety of U.S. personnel, and he directed today's action to make clear that the United States will defend itself, its personnel, and its interests," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement.

A military official told reporters in a call that people were seen at the warehouse during the day as the U.S. military watched the site for hours, but the number decreased to about "a couple" overnight when the strike occurred. The official said the strike triggered secondary explosions, indicating the presences of weapons, but the U.S. believes that no civilians were killed and any people at the warehouse were tied to the Revolutionary Guard or militia groups.

The strike, said a senior defense official also on the call, was aimed at "disrupting and degrading the capabilities of groups directly responsible for attacking U.S. forces in the region" by specifically targeting facilities associated with the Revolutionary Guard. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide an assessment of the strike.

The precision strike, said the defense official, was deliberate and designed not to escalate the conflict in the region. The military official said a deconfliction phone line linking U.S. military personnel to Russian forces in Syria was used to let them know about the attack.

This is the second time in less than two weeks that the U.S. has bombed facilities used by the militant groups, many operating under the umbrella of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which U.S. officials say have carried out at least 40 such attacks since Oct. 17.

That was the day a powerful explosion rocked a Gaza hospital, killing hundreds and 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 on Oct. 7.

Israel 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. But the Israeli military has continued a ferocious assault on Hamas, with ground troops now deep inside Gaza City in a war that has a staggering death toll of more than 10,000 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry of the Hamas-run territory.

The latest U.S. strike was designed to take out supplies, weapons and ammunition in an effort to erode the abilities of the Iranian-backed militants to attack Americans based in Iraq and Syria. And it reflects 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 further inflaming the region and provoking a wider conflict.

Similar U.S. airstrikes on Oct. 27 also targeted facilities in Syria, and officials at the time said the two sites were affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard. When asked why those locations in Syria were chosen — since many of the attacks have happened in Iraq — officials said the U.S. went after storage sites for munitions that could be linked to the strikes on U.S. personnel.

The U.S. has often avoided bombing sites in Iraq in order to lessen the chances of killing Iraqis or angering Iraq's leaders.

While officials have said the strikes are meant to deter further attacks, they have not had that effect.

Rocket and drone attacks have occurred almost daily, although in nearly all cases they have resulted in little damage and few injuries.

Asked about that, the senior defense official acknowledged that the initial U.S. strike in October did not convince Iran to direct its proxies to stop the attacks. But, the official said, the strikes show America's willingness to use military force.

According to the Pentagon, a total of 45 personnel have been injured and all of those were in attacks on Oct. 17 and 18. Of those, 32 were at al-Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria, with a mix of minor injuries and traumatic brain injuries, and 13 were at al-Asad air base in western Iraq, with four cases of traumatic brain injury and nine of minor injury. One person was injured at Irbil air base in Iraq.

The Pentagon has faced repeated questions about whether deterrence against Iran and its proxies is working because the attacks have only increased.

At the same time, the department has moved a number of air defense systems and other forces into the region to beef up protection for U.S. forces. And on multiple occasions, the systems have intercepted incoming strikes. According to a U.S. official, the number of ships in the Middle East has more than doubled, the number of Patriot air defense missile systems has about tripled, a few more fighter jet squadrons have been added and hundreds of additional troops have been deployed to the region. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss force numbers not yet made public.

Israel says it will maintain 'overall security responsibility' for Gaza. What might that look like?

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu didn't elaborate when he said this week that Israel would maintain indefinite "overall security responsibility" in Gaza once it removes Hamas from power in response to a deadly Oct. 7 cross-border raid by the Islamic militant group.

Experience suggests that any Israeli security role will be seen by the Palestinians and much of the international community as a form of military occupation. This could complicate any plans to hand governing responsibility to the Palestinian Authority or friendly Arab states, and risk bogging Israel down in a war of attrition.

Even if Israel succeeds in ending Hamas' 16-year rule in Gaza and dismantling much of its militant infrastructure, the presence of Israeli forces is likely to fuel an insurgency, as it did from 1967 to 2005. That period saw two Palestinian uprisings and the rise of Hamas.

Benny Gantz, of Israel's three-member War Cabinet, acknowledged Wednesday that there's still no long-term plan for Gaza. He said any plan would have to address Israel's security needs.

"We can come up with any mechanism we think is appropriate, but Hamas will not be part of it," he told reporters. "We need to replace the Hamas regime and ensure security superiority for us."

Here's a look at what a lingering Israeli security role might look like and the opposition it would inevitably generate.

OUTRIGHT OCCUPATION

In the 1967 Mideast war, Israel captured Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories the Palestinians want for a future state. Israel annexed east Jerusalem, home to the Old City and its sensitive religious sites — a move not recognized by the international community — and considers the entire city its capital.

The military directly governed the West Bank and Gaza for decades, denying basic rights to millions of Palestinians. Soldiers staffed checkpoints and carried out regular arrest raids targeting militants and other Palestinians opposed to Israeli rule.

Israel also built Jewish settlements in all three areas. Palestinians and most of the international community consider these settlements illegal.

After two decades of outright military rule, Palestinians rose up in the first intifada, or uprising, in the late 1980s. That was also when Hamas first emerged as a political movement with an armed wing, challenging the secular Palestine Liberation Organization's leadership of the national struggle.

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THE WEST BANK MODEL

Interim peace deals in the mid-1990s known as the Oslo Accords established the Palestinian Authority as an autonomy government in the West Bank and Gaza meant to lead the way toward an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Several peace initiatives by a string of American presidents failed. The Palestinian Authority lost control of Gaza to Hamas in 2007.

That has left the Palestinian Authority in charge of roughly 40% of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Its powers are largely administrative, though it maintains a police force. Israel wields overall security control.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is deeply unpopular, in large part because his forces cooperate with Israel on security even as Palestinian hopes for statehood have all but disappeared. Many Palestinians view the PA as the subcontractor of a never-ending occupation.

Israel keeps tens of thousands of soldiers deployed across the West Bank. They provide security for more than 500,000 Jewish settlers and carry out nightly arrest raids, often sparking deadly gunbattles with militants.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has suggested the Palestinian Authority could return to Gaza after the war. That could further unravel Abbas' legitimacy among his own people, unless it were linked to concrete steps toward Palestinian statehood.

Arab leaders, even those closely tied to Israel, will likely face similar backlash if they step in to help it control Gaza.

THE GAZA MODEL

What about an over-the-horizon presence, with moderate Palestinians maintaining security inside Gaza and with Israel intervening only when it deems absolutely necessary?

That's been tried as well.

In 2005, in the wake of a second and far more violent intifada, Israel withdrew soldiers and over 8,000 settlers from Gaza. The PA administered the territory, but Israel continued to control its airspace, coastline and all but one border crossing.

Hamas won Palestinian elections the next year, leading to an international boycott and a severe financial crisis. Months of unrest boiled over in June 2007, when Hamas drove out forces loyal to Abbas in a week of street battles.

Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade on Gaza, severely restricting trade and travel in what Israel said was an effort to contain Hamas. Palestinians and rights groups considered it a form of collective punishment. It caused widespread misery among the enclave's 2.3 million residents.

Israel, like most Western countries, considers Hamas a terrorist organization. Hamas has never recognized Israel's existence and is committed to its destruction through armed struggle.

But over 16 years that saw four wars, the two entered into various undeclared cease-fires in which Israel eased the blockade in return for Hamas halting rocket attacks and reining in more radical armed groups.

For Israel, the arrangement was far from ideal but preferable to other options and bought yearslong periods of relative calm.

THE LEBANON MODEL

In 1978 and then again in 1982, Israel invaded southern Lebanon in a battle against Palestinian militants.

That led to an 18-year occupation enforced through local ally the South Lebanon Army, which received arms and training from Israel.

In 1982, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah was founded with Iranian backing with the objective of pushing Israeli forces out of the country. It carried out attacks on both the SLA and Israeli troops, eventually leading to Israel's withdrawal in 2000.

The SLA quickly collapsed, creating a vacuum that was filled by Hezbollah. In 2006, the group battled Israel to a stalemate during a monthlong war.

Today, Hezbollah is the most powerful force in Lebanon. With an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles, it's considered a major threat by Israel.

ANOTHER WAY?

Israel has sent mixed messages about evolving plans for Gaza. Leaders say they don't want to reoccupy Gaza. They also say troops need freedom to operate inside Gaza long after heavy fighting subsides.

"On the question of the operation's length -- there are no limitations," Gantz said Wednesday.

That could mean leaving troops stationed inside the territory or along the border.

Some officials have discussed a buffer zone to keep Palestinians away from the border. Others, including the U.S., have called for the Palestinian Authority's return.

In another twist, Gantz suggested any future arrangement for Gaza be contingent on calming Israel's northern front with Hezbollah and the West Bank, where troops regularly battle Palestinian militants.

"Once the Gaza area is safe, and the northern area will be safe, and the Judea and Samaria region will calm down -- we will settle down and review an alternative mechanism for Gaza," said Gantz, using the biblical term for the West Bank. "I do not know what it will be."

Democrats see abortion wins as a springboard for 2024 as GOP struggles to find a winning message

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Voters threw their support behind abortion rights in Ohio, Virginia and elsewhere as Democrats look to springboard off those wins by using the issue to drive turnout and shape next year's races for the White House, Congress and other elections.

Ohio offered the clearest snapshot on Tuesday of the issue's salience more than a year after the U.S. Supreme Court ended the nationwide right to abortion. Voters in the increasingly Republican-leaning state resoundingly approved an amendment to the state constitution to protect abortion access.

Democrats also harnessed the issue in Virginia, riding it to retake control of the Legislature, and in Kentucky, giving Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear a second term after he made abortion rights central to his campaign in the deeply Republican state.

Election night was an energizing moment for Democrats hoping abortion rights will pull voters to the polls in the 2024 presidential election. The campaigning and results for the amendment in Ohio, the only state with an abortion question on the ballot this year, is a precursor to similar ballot measures expected to be put to a vote in several states next year. That includes Arizona and Nevada, which play pivotal roles in the White House race.

Abortion also will sit at the center of a slate of state Supreme Court races in 2024.

For the anti-abortion movement, the latest post-Roe defeat came after its scattershot messaging struggled to win over voters in a state that has become a testing ground. The scope of the victory for abortion access in Ohio suggests that a significant number of Republicans voted in favor of the amendment, signaling deep divisions in the party over their next steps.

Elisabeth Smith, director of state policy and advocacy at the Center for Reproductive Rights, said the anti-abortion movement is "on their heels" after turning to misinformation and fearmongering in Ohio in a losing cause.

"It's become clear that the majority of Americans support abortion rights and want to see abortion remain legal and accessible, and the anti-abortion side knows that," Smith said.

According to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 94,000 voters, 63% of voters in the 2022 midterm elections said abortion should be legal in most or all cases. About one-third of voters said it should be illegal in all or most cases.

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the anti-abortion group SBA Pro-Life America, said Ohio's results "serve as a warning sign for the GOP heading into 2024" and "proved this is not a formula for success."

"The true lesson from last night's loss is that Democrats are going to make abortion front-and-center throughout 2024 campaigns," Dannenfelser said in a statement. "The GOP consultant class needs to wake up. Candidates must put money and messaging toward countering the Democrats' attacks or they will lose every time."

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Anti-abortion groups said the outcome was fueled by millions in campaign donations that abortion-rights supporters poured into the Ohio race, including large donations from out-of-state groups.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which advocates for abortion rights, spent more than \$9 million on races in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia this year, with over \$6 million of that going to Ohio, said the group's chief political and advocacy officer, Deirdre Schifeling.

The messaging problem for anti-abortion groups goes deeper than their loss in Ohio.

In Virginia, Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin tried to rally voters behind GOP legislative candidates by staking out what he and other Republicans felt was a middle-ground approach: a proposal to ban abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy with exceptions for rape, incest and situations where the mother's life was at risk.

Many GOP candidates in swing districts publicly supported the proposal.

It didn't seem to help. Democrats questioned whether Youngkin and Republicans would go further if they ended up controlling the governor's office and the Legislature.

The governor "thought he was going to give a playbook to Republicans, but he actually gave a playbook to Democrats on how to help voters connect the dots between candidates and their abortion policies," said Mini Timmaraju, president and CEO of Reproductive Freedom for All, formerly known as NARAL Pro-Choice America.

Democrats have made clear they plan to make the issue central in races for the presidency and down the ballot next year.

In a fresh sign of the administration trying to link its electoral prospects to the results, Vice President Kamala Harris made a rare appearance before reporters on the White House driveway Wednesday and said: "It was a good night and the president and I obviously have a lot of work to do to earn our reelection. But I'm confident we're going to win."

In the Republican presidential primary, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who signed a six week ban in his state, have said they would support a national abortion ban at 15 weeks. Other candidates have been vaguer on their answers.

Former President Donald Trump, who nominated three Supreme Court justices who helped overturn Roe vs. Wade, has refused to say whether he would sign a national ban and he has warned the issue can be politically difficult to campaign on. Trump has said he could "live with" the procedure being banned by individual states or nationwide through federal action.

In the wake of the Ohio vote, Republican presidential candidate and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy said on CNN that abortion opponents need to speak about the issue differently to gain more support. He has voiced support for states that enacted six-week bans, but also said he would not back a federal abortion ban.

"Our pro-life movement, and I am part of it, needs to be better about the way we discuss this issue, actually talk about greater access to adoption, to child care — further — even go further to sexual responsibility for men," said Ramaswamy, who lives in Ohio.

Ohio Republican Sen. J.D. Vance echoed that, saying Republicans "need people to see us as the pro-life party, not just the anti-abortion party."

Ohio was the seventh state since Roe was overturned to support ballot measures protecting abortion rights or to reject measures aimed at limiting access.

In states where abortion could directly be on the ballot in 2024, abortion rights advocates said they closely watched the Ohio election. Ohio "provided an example" for Arizona for strategizing and building a statewide coalition of advocacy groups, said Chris Love, senior adviser to Planned Parenthood Advocates of Arizona.

In a preview of abortion's impact on races down the ballot, voters in Pennsylvania on Tuesday elected Democrat Dan McCaffery to an open state Supreme Court seat. McCaffery made defense of abortion rights central to his contest with Republican Carolyn Carluccio.

Several anti-abortion groups signaled that how they respond to the string of losses will be among the most crucial political discussions for Republicans heading into 2024. One thing seems certain: They plan

to leverage their clout within the party to make sure the fight for abortion restrictions remains a priority for their candidates.

"We persevered for 50 years to overturn Roe v. Wade," Protect Women Ohio, which led the anti-abortion messaging in that state, said in a statement Tuesday night. "Ours is a movement that has always endured, and always will.

"Tomorrow," the group said, "the work starts again."

'Greed and corruption': Federal jury convicts veteran DEA agents in bribery conspiracy

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal jury convicted two longtime U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration supervisors Wednesday of leaking confidential information to defense attorneys as part of a bribery conspiracy that prosecutors say imperiled high-profile cases and the lives of overseas drug informants.

The Manhattan jury found John Costanzo Jr. and Manny Recio guilty of bribery and honest-services wire fraud after a two-week trial that cast a harsh light on DEA's handling of government secrets, including testimony about one breach so sensitive the judge closed the courtroom to avoid what he called "serious diplomatic repercussions."

"It's about greed and corruption," Assistant U.S. Attorney Emily Deininger said in her closing argument. "What they were doing was wrong, and they knew it."

Recio and Costanzo join a growing list of more than a dozen DEA agents convicted of federal charges in recent years, including one who laundered money for Colombian cartels. Another is scheduled to stand trial in January on charges he took \$250,000 in bribes to protect the Mafia in Buffalo, New York.

The DEA declined to comment on the verdict.

Much of the case turned on text messages and wiretapped phone calls between the longtime lawmen, who remained close after Recio retired from DEA in 2018 and began recruiting clients as a private investigator for Miami defense lawyers.

Recio repeatedly asked Costanzo to query names in a confidential DEA database to keep abreast of federal investigations that would interest his new employers. The two also discussed the timing of high-profile arrests and the exact date in 2019 when prosecutors planned to bring charges against businessman Alex Saab, a top criminal target in Venezuela and suspected bag man for the country's president, Nicolas Maduro.

In exchange, prosecutors said, Recio secretly funneled \$73,000 in purchases to Costanzo, including plane tickets and a down payment on his condo in suburban Coral Gables, Florida.

The scheme relied on middlemen, including Costanzo's father, himself a retired and decorated DEA agent who prosecutors said lied to the FBI. Prosecutors said Costanzo and Recio also used sham invoices and a company listing its address as a UPS store to disguise the bribe payments while deleting hundreds of messages and calls to a burner phone.

"Over and over they concealed and lied," Deininger said. "Recio and Costanzo cared so much about the money that they put people and investigations at risk."

Recio and Costanzo did not testify but have long denied the charges. Their attorneys said prosecutors failed to connect the payments to the leaks, portraying the investigation as speculative and sloppy.

"That is a remarkable failure of proof," defense lawyer Marc Mukasey told jurors in his summation. "In a case about bribery and conspiracy, no one testified about bribery or conspiracy."

The defense also attacked the credibility of key witness Jorge Hernández, a career criminal and snitch who first implicated Recio and wore a wire for the FBI to record him. Hernández, a beefy, bald-headed figure known by the Spanish nickname Boliche – bowling ball – said he had been blacklisted as an informant by the DEA and would be executed within "two hours" should he ever return to his native Colombia.

Recio and Costanzo showed little emotion as they listened to the verdict finding them guilty on four criminal counts each.

"It was a difficult case because we all trust law enforcement," the jury forewoman, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press. "But as a public official, the public expects a certain standard of behavior."

The proceedings were notable for other prominent figures who avoided charges, including Miami defense lawyers Luis Guerra and David Macey, who were mentioned repeatedly yet not called as witnesses.

The attorneys valued advance notice of federal arrests as they courted deep-pocketed clients, usually with the aim of brokering a cooperation agreement with the government. Prosecutors told jurors the "crooked attorneys" had "paid handsomely for DEA secrets" but they have not explained why neither was indicted.

Guerra and Macey have not responded to repeated requests for comment. Nor has the Florida Bar, which lists both attorneys as members in good standing.

"This trial revealed the dark underbelly of the drug defense bar," said Bonnie Klapper, a former federal prosecutor who now defends accused money launderers and drug traffickers. "If the evidence is as was presented during the trial, it is shocking that the attorneys themselves were not charged."

Minnesota Supreme Court dismisses 'insurrection clause' challenge and allows Trump on primary ballot

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former President Donald Trump will stay on the Minnesota primary ballot after the state supreme court on Wednesday dismissed a lawsuit seeking end his candidacy under a rarely-used constitutional provision that forbids those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office.

The Minnesota Supreme Court declined to become the first in history to use Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to prevent someone from running for the presidency. The court dodged the central question of the lawsuit — does Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol disqualify him from the presidency — by ruling that state law allows parties to put whomever they want on the primary ballot.

"There is no state statute that prohibits a major political party from placing on the presidential nomination primary ballot, or sending delegates to the national convention supporting, a candidate who is ineligible to hold office," Chief Justice Natalie Hudson ruled.

The court left open the possibility that plaintiffs could try again to knock Trump off the general election ballot in November. The Minnesota challenge was filed by the liberal group Free Speech For People, which said it will continue its campaign to end Trump's presidential bid.

"We are disappointed by the court's decision," said the group's legal director Ron Fein, who argued before the court at its Nov. 2 hearing on the case. "However, the Minnesota Supreme Court explicitly recognized that the question of Donald Trump's disqualification for engaging in insurrection against the U.S. Constitution may be resolved at a later stage. The decision isn't binding on any court outside Minnesota and we continue our current and planned legal actions in other states to enforce Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment against Donald Trump."

The ruling is the first from a series of lawsuits filed by Free Speech For People and a second liberal group that are seeking to use Section 3 to end the candidacy of the frontrunner in the Republican presidential primary.

On his social media platform, Truth Social, Trump said: "Ridiculous 14th Amendment lawsuit just thrown out by Minnesota Supreme Court." He added, "Congratulations to all who fought this HOAX!"

The provision at issue bars from office anyone who swore an oath to the constitution and then "engaged in insurrection" against it. It was mainly used to prevent former confederates from taking over state and federal government positions after the Civil War.

The plaintiffs in the cases contend that Section 3 is simply another qualification for the presidency, just like the Constitution's requirement that a president be at least 35 years old. They filed in Minnesota because the state has a quick process to challenge ballot qualifications, with the case heard directly by the state's highest court.

Trump's attorneys argued that Section 3 has no power without Congress laying out the criteria and

procedures for applying it, that the Jan. 6 attack doesn't meet the definition of insurrection and that the former president was simply using his free speech rights. They also argued that the clause doesn't apply to the office of the presidency, which is not mentioned in the text.

Parallel cases are being heard in other states, including Colorado, where a state judge has scheduled closing arguments for next week.

Many legal experts expect the issue to eventually reach the U.S. Supreme Court, which has never ruled on Section 3.

Secretaries of State have generally said they don't have the power to determine Trump should not be on the ballot and have sought guidance from courts. Minnesota's Democratic Secretary of State, Steve Simon, said in an interview he was happy to have some clarity.

"I am grateful that the Supreme Court acted quickly in providing Minnesotans with certainty about who will be eligible to appear on the ballot for the presidential nominating primary," Simon said.

Democratic lawmakers want President Biden to protect Palestinians in US from being forced home

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dozens of Democratic lawmakers are urging President Joe Biden to take steps to protect Palestinians in the United States as Israeli forces continue to fight Hamas militants inside Gaza City and thousands flee the area amid increasingly dire humanitarian circumstances.

In a letter Wednesday to Biden, the Democrats call for enacting temporary protections for Palestinians through government programs that shield immigrants from returning to countries that are ravaged by natural disasters or war. The lawmakers cite the rising death toll in Gaza, especially among children, from the month-long Israel-Hamas war and the lack of food and water.

"In light of ongoing armed conflict, Palestinians already in the United States should not be forced to return to the Palestinian territories, consistent with President Biden's stated commitment to protecting Palestinian civilians," the lawmakers wrote in the letter, provided to The Associated Press in advance of its release.

The letter is a notable effort from Democrats to defend and protect Palestinians at a time when leading Republicans, including former President Donald Trump and others vying for the GOP presidential nomination, have called for the U.S. to bar Palestinians attempting to escape the war in Gaza.

Last month, while campaigning in Iowa, Trump threatened to expand a travel ban on Muslims that he issued through an executive order during his presidency. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said the U.S. should not take in any Palestinian refugees trying to leave Gaza because, he insisted, they "are all antisemitic."

Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor, has emphasized that America has "always been sympathetic to the fact that you can separate civilians from terrorists," which prompted DeSantis's super PAC to attack Haley on the issue.

U.S. law gives authorities broad leeway to deny people entry if they present security risks. Cases of extremists crossing into the U.S. illegally are also virtually nonexistent.

The request from Democrats to Biden would apply only to Palestinians who are already in the United States.

The U.S. issued about 7,200 temporary visas to people with Palestinian Authority passports in 2022, according to the State Department. Pointing to that figure, the Democrats argued that "the number of beneficiaries would be small, while the benefit could be lifesaving.

The request, signed by just over 100 lawmakers, is led by Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the second-ranking Senate Democrat and chairman of the Judiciary Committee, which oversees immigration policy. It is also signed by Sens. Jack Reed, who leads the Armed Services Committee, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont. About 70 House Democrats signed, including Reps. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, who chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and Jan Schakowsky of Illinois.

Temporary Protected Status is a program through the Department of Homeland Security that provides

provisional residency, including the ability to work, to non-U.S. citizens currently here whose home countries are deemed too dangerous for them to return. The lawmakers also ask Biden to use Deferred Enforced Departure, a program similar to TPS that is used at a president's discretion.

Similar protections have been issued in the past, the lawmakers say. For instance, the U.S. offered temporary protected status for residents of Kosovo amid armed conflict in 1998. At the time, Kosovo was a province of Serbia and did not declare independence until 2008.

FDA approves new version of diabetes drug Mounjaro for weight loss

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

A new version of the popular diabetes treatment Mounjaro can be sold as a weight-loss drug, U.S. regulators announced Wednesday.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Eli Lilly's drug, named Zepbound. The drug, also known as tirzepatide, helped dieters lose as much as 40 to 60 pounds in testing.

Zepbound is the latest diabetes drug approved for chronic weight management, joining Novo Nordisk's Wegovy, a high-dose version of its diabetes treatment Ozempic. Both are weekly injections.

The FDA approved Lilly's drug for people who are considered obese, with a body mass index of 30 or higher, or those who are overweight with a related health condition, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes. The drug should be paired with a reduced-calorie diet and regular exercise, the FDA said.

In the U.S., at least 100 million adults and about 15 million children are considered obese.

The drugs tirzepatide in Zepbound and Mounjaro and semaglutide in Wegovy and Ozempic work by mimicking hormones that kick in after people eat to regulate appetite and the feeling of fullness. Both imitate a hormone called glucagon-like peptide-1, known as GLP-1. Tirzepatide targets a second hormone, called glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide, or GIP.

FDA's approval was based on two large studies: More than 2,500 participants got different strengths of Zepbound and nearly 1,000 people got dummy shots over 16 months. Participants without diabetes who received the highest dose lost about 18% of their weight, or about 41 pounds (19 kilograms), compared to placebo. Those with diabetes, who have a harder time losing weight, cut about 12%, or nearly 27 pounds (12 kilograms), the FDA said.

In another recent study, the drug helped people lose up to a quarter of their weight, or 60 pounds (27 kilograms), when combined with intensive diet and exercise.

Overall, Zepbound appears to spur greater weight loss than Wegovy. Approved for weight loss in 2021, Wegovy helped people lose about 15% of their weight or 34 pounds (15 kilograms), according to study results.

"This would be the most highly efficacious drug ever approved for the treatment of obesity," said Dr. Fatima Cody Stanford, an obesity medicine expert at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

Touted by celebrities and on social media, semaglutide and tirzepatide drugs have already been in such demand that their manufacturers have struggled to keep up. Both have been listed on the FDA's drug shortage site for months. All strengths of tirzepatide are currently listed as available, but a company spokesperson said that could vary by location and demand.

Side effects of the new weight-loss drug include vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, constipation and other gastrointestinal problems. In the most recent published trial, about 10% of people taking tirzepatide dropped out of the study because of such problems, compared to about 2% of people taking dummy shots.

While experts lauded approval of Zepbound, they worried that it wouldn't necessarily mean greater access to the drug, which has been prescribed "off-label" to help people pare pounds.

"Most patients won't be able to afford Zepbound without insurance coverage and many health plans exclude obesity care," said Dr. Katherine Saunders, an obesity expert at New York's Weill Cornell Medicine and co-founder of company focused on obesity treatment.

Eli Lilly and Co. said the list price will be about \$1,000 a month, the same as Mounjaro. The drug is expected to be available in the U.S. by the end of the year, the company said. Dosing strengths are the same for Zepbound and Mounjaro.

Kelly Burns, 50, of St. Petersburg, Florida, lost nearly 100 pounds (45 kilograms) using tirzepatide after joining a study of the drug to treat obesity in 2021. When testing ended and she no longer had access to the medication, she struggled, but eventually lost another 50 pounds (23 kilograms).

"My whole life is completely different," she said. Her health measurements improved and her confidence soared. Now that it is approved for weight loss, Burns plans to ask her insurance company about coverage. "It would be ridiculous not to," she said, adding: "I want to stay this way as long as I possibly can."

Blinken urges united future Palestinian government for Gaza and West Bank, widening gulf with Israel

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Wednesday for a united and Palestinian-led government for Gaza and the West Bank after the war ends, as a step toward Palestinian statehood. That vision sharpens U.S. differences with ally Israel on what the future should look like for the Palestinian territories once Israel's military campaign against Hamas winds down.

Blinken's outline of what Americans think should come next for Gaza also serves as a check on the postwar scenarios floated by officials of Israel's hard-right government and its supporters. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement Monday that Israel's military would likely maintain security control of Gaza for an "indefinite period" appears to have heightened U.S. concerns.

Any postwar governing plan for Gaza "must include Palestinian-led governance and Gaza unified with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority," Blinken told reporters in Japan.

He and other top diplomats of the Group of Seven leading industrial democracies were gathered in Tokyo for a meeting focused on Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks in Israel and on easing the suffering of the 2.3 million Palestinians trapped in Gaza under Israel's now month-old military offensive and blockade.

Blinken reinforced the Biden administration's rejections of any return of lasting direct Israeli control in Gaza, as well as of a proposal — promoted in a policy report by Israel's intelligence ministry — to push Gaza's Palestinian residents into neighboring Egypt.

"We're very clear on no reoccupation, just as we're very clear on no displacement of the Palestinian population," Blinken said. "And, as we've said before, we need to see and get to, in effect, unity of governance when it comes to Gaza and the West Bank, and ultimately to a Palestinian state."

The U.S. diplomat's remarks highlight the areas of widening daylight between Netanyahu's government and its most important ally on how Israel conducts the war and its postwar relations with the Palestinians.

The U.S. and Israel agree that the Hamas militant group cannot return to its rule of the Gaza Strip. But none of the ideas that Israeli officials have raised for Gaza's governance after the war have included independent Palestinian rule as a credible possibility.

The Palestinian Authority administers semiautonomous areas of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. While internationally recognized, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is widely unpopular among Palestinians even in the West Bank. Netanyahu long has depicted both Abbas and the Palestinian Authority as too incapable to be a credible partner in peace efforts with Israel.

A member of Israel's decision-making War Cabinet on Wednesday acknowledged that Israel does not yet have a vision for the Gaza Strip after its war against Hamas ends, saying the battle plan is open-ended and will include a long-term Israeli security presence in the besieged territory.

The comments by Benny Gantz added new uncertainty to the Israeli campaign in Gaza, which has come under growing international scrutiny because of the heavy civilian death toll and widespread destruction. The Group of Seven, which includes many of Israel's closest allies, called for Israel to do more to improve the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

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Speaking in Israel to international journalists, Gantz, a former defense minister and military chief of staff, said the only certainty in Israeli thinking is that Hamas can have no role in the future of Gaza. But he described a lengthy campaign in Gaza and linked the territory's future to quiet along Israel's northern front with Lebanon and eastern front with the West Bank.

"Once the Gaza area is safe, and the northern area will be safe, and the Judea and Samaria region will calm down, we will settle down and review an alternative mechanism for Gaza," he said, using the biblical term for the West Bank. "I do not know what it will be."

"We can come up with any mechanism we think is appropriate, but Hamas will not be part of it," he added. "We need to replace the Hamas regime and ensure security superiority for us."

Asked how long the war would last, Gantz said, "there are no limitations."

Since Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, successive Israeli governments have pursued a policy of severing links between the West Bank and Gaza, the two territories that, along with east Jerusalem, were to make up a future Palestinian state. The isolation of Gaza deepened after Hamas drove out the forces of Abbas in 2007 and Israel, along with Egypt, imposed a blockade.

Hamas' breakout from Gaza on Oct. 7 and Israel's deepening military response have marked the bloodiest fighting by far in repeated wars. President Joe Biden, whose administration had made a policy of not publicly pushing Netanyahu's coalition to return to long-abandoned talks to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from the first hours after the Hamas attack declared the U.S. would stand by Israel in its military response.

Biden rushed U.S. weapons to Israel and sent warships to the region. The American president flew on Oct. 18 to Israel, where he clasped Netanyahu and Israeli survivors of the Hamas raids, which killed more than 1,400 people, in tight hugs.

The past week, however, has seen increasing private and public U.S. pressure on Israel to alter how it conducts its air, ground and sea campaign against Hamas.

Deaths in Gaza under Israeli bombardment have soared past 10,000, alienating international governments that had endorsed Israel's right of self-defense. Israel blames Hamas for the heavy death toll, accusing the group of using civilians as human shields.

Emerging U.S.-Israeli differences already included Americans pressing for what they call humanitarian pauses in the fighting to allow for greater delivery of aid to Gaza's blockaded residents. Israeli officials have linked any cease-fires to Hamas releasing the more than 240 people it is believed to be holding hostage.

Blinken said Wednesday the time "is now to start the conversation about the future" for Gaza.

"Identifying the longer-term objectives and a pathway to get there will help shape our approach to addressing immediate needs," he said.

GOP's David Owen wins Virginia legislative race over Democratic opponent who livestreamed sex videos

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Republican David Owen defeated Democrat Susanna Gibson in a Virginia House of Delegates race that drew attention after revelations that Gibson engaged in sex acts with her husband on a pornographic website.

Gibson ran against Owen in one of the state's most competitive districts after all 100 seats in the House of Delegates were redrawn to conform with the 2020 Census.

Many political scientists said Gibson's chances in Tuesday's election were doomed after news outlets reported in September about Gibson's participation in livestreamed sex, which included soliciting payments from viewers in exchange for specific acts.

But Gibson, a nurse practitioner, refused to withdraw from the race, and accused Republicans of dirty politics for exposing her conduct. She largely ignored the allegations and, like other Democrats statewide, focused on abortion rights. Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin has been seeking a ban on abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, with exceptions in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother's life is in danger.

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The race had been pegged as one of several that could determine control in the House of Delegates. But even with Owen's win, Republicans lost control of the House of Delegates. Democrats also maintained their narrow margin in the state Senate. Those legislative victories will allow Democrats to block Youngkin's policy agenda, though they will have to work with him to advance their own.

Owen issued a statement on X, the platform previously known as Twitter, thanking voters.

"I will begin work immediately to provide the unity, common-sense leadership, and responsive service that I promised," he said.

Gibson's campaign has not issued any statement since the polls closed. Her campaign manager said late Tuesday night that the campaign expected to issue a statement at some point Wednesday.

In the weeks before Election Day, Republicans had sought to remind voters of Gibson's videos. The Republican Party of Virginia sent mailers out to voters that contained screenshots. The envelopes warned recipients that explicit materials were contained inside and that minors should not open the envelope.

Owen, a residential developer, ran a campaign similar to those of Republicans across the state, focusing on parental rights in education, lower taxes and crime.

Gibson answered the GOP attacks to some extent Monday in an op-ed piece for the left-leaning website Blue Virginia, labeling her GOP attackers as "politicians who feel they have a right to know what goes on in our private lives and the power to control what we do with our bodies."

The 57th District includes parts of Richmond's western suburbs in Henrico and Goochland counties. The nonpartisan Virginia Public Access Project rated it the third most competitive of Virginia's 100 House of Delegates districts, with only a very slight lean toward Republicans, based on recent voting patterns. Virginia voters do not register by party.

Ohtani free agency sweepstakes off to a clandestine start at MLB's general manager meetings

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) — The race to add two-way baseball superstar Shohei Ohtani in a blockbuster free agency deal is off to a clandestine start.

"Special player, that's all I'll say," said Chris Young, general manager of the World Series champion Texas Rangers.

"We're going to be interested in looking at everything that's available that can make us better," New York Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said.

"We may ask some questions, but I can't tell you we're diving all in," Houston Astros general manager Dana Brown said.

All 30 Major League Baseball general managers have gathered this week at baseball's GM meetings in Scottsdale. Privately, they're surely discussing the developing Ohtani sweepstakes, which could cost the winning team upward of \$500 million. But publicly, questions about the potentially historic bidding have been met with careful statements.

Even the team that employed the Japanese sensation the past six seasons — the Los Angeles Angels — doesn't seem to have a good read on his future.

"There's going to be a lot of attention on it and I understand why," Angels GM Perry Minasian said. "Great player. We'll see how the offseason develops. We've got our plan and we're going to try to execute that plan and see where it leads us."

Ohtani is one of the most fascinating cases for baseball's free agency system since it began in 1976.

He's 29 years old and just produced one of the best two-way seasons in MLB history, batting .304 with 44 homers while also having a 10-5 record on the mound with a 3.14 ERA.

It's unclear how much value he'll provide as a pitcher in the coming seasons. He had Tommy John surgery in September for the second time in six years, and the list of pitchers who have successfully returned after having the procedure done twice is fairly short.

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Recent World Series winner Nathan Eovaldi, Jameson Taillon and Daniel Hudson are a handful who have had success. Two-time All-Star Jason Isringhausen had the surgery three times and still came back to have a few more solid seasons. Current Dodgers star Walker Buehler — who recently had his second TJ surgery — hopes to join that group.

Even if Ohtani can't contribute much on the mound, he's one of the game's elite hitters. He's also a good enough athlete that he could be an option for first base or the outfield as he gets older.

There's also an off-the-field component that can't totally be quantified. Ohtani has reached a celebrity status that few other current baseball players can even imagine, and his arrival in any city would undoubtedly mean a huge boost for fan interest.

Instead of setting the free agent market this offseason, Ohtani is a market all his own.

"He brings so much to the game, so much excitement, he's got a fan base, he's an exciting player," said Brown, the Astros GM. "I would love to have him, but are we going to go out and pursue Ohtani? We may ask some questions, but I can't tell you we're diving all in."

Then he said what pretty much every GM in Arizona was saying this week.

"We will definitely ask questions, though."

Ohtani is the crown jewel of this year's free agent class, which appears a little short on franchise-altering players, particularly among hitters. Cody Bellinger is a former MVP who had a great bounce-back year with the Cubs. Four-time Gold Glove winner Matt Chapman is a quality third baseman. Tim Anderson is a two-time All-Star who is looking for a change of scenery.

The pitching scene is a little more robust, with veterans Aaron Nola, Sonny Gray, Jordan Montgomery and Japanese star Yoshinobu Yamamoto on the market

But none of them come close to bringing the juice — on or off the field — that Ohtani provides.

Still, a half-billion bucks? That's a lot of money.

Former Angels teammate Mike Trout has the richest contract in the sport's history at \$426.5 million over 12 years, signed in 2019.

"You don't base an offseason on one single player," Minasian said. "You have to have Plan A, Plan B, Plan C, Plan D, so on and so forth. We're going to work like we always we do. We're going to be aggressive, we're going to have a lot of conversations and see how everything goes."

The Seattle Mariners are among a handful of teams that would seem a logical fit for Ohtani, given the upward trajectory of the franchise, the city's history with former Japanese star Ichiro Suzuki and its relatively large Asian population.

Seattle GM Jerry Dipoto agreed that the Mariners have a lot to offer — though he wasn't specifically talking about Ohtani.

"I think that's with any free agent courtship," Dipoto said. "It's the one time in a baseball player's life that you're recruiting like a college program. You're trying to sell your city, you're trying to sell your vision, you're trying to sell your people."

Fossil fuel interests have large, yet often murky, presence at climate talks, AP analysis finds

By SETH BORENSTEIN and MARY KATHERINE WILDEMAN Associated Press

The badges said they were there to participate in negotiations to curb climate change. They stated affiliations like the government of Brazil, Indigenous organizations of the Amazon, the Climate Registry. But in reality, the livelihoods of these participants were more aligned with what's keeping the problem going: fossil fuels.

Close to 400 people connected in some way or another to fossil fuel industries attended last year's United Nations climate talks in Egypt, a grouping that was larger than all but two of the national delegations sent by countries, according to a data analysis of the more than 24,000 participants by The Associated Press.

As United Nations leaders, scientists and others called for an eventual elimination of coal, oil and natural

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gas, various delegations included attendees who in some way owed part or all of their paychecks to fossil fuel burning. Many of these same people, and possibly even more connected to fossil fuels, will likely be at this year's official climate talks, known as Conference of Parties or COP, being hosted by the United Arab Emirates, a major oil producing country.

"There's outsized influence," said Center for Biological Diversity's Jean Su, who sits on the board that represents civil society and environmental groups at these meetings. "These COPs are often wining-and-dining feasts for fossil fuel corporations that want to profit off of climate."

While the presence is palpable—such as oil countries and companies with huge, flashy stands in the trades pavilions—the influence is hard to quantify because much of the negotiating is done behind closed doors.

These annual meetings, which have occurred since 1995, convene in different cities each year. The host city runs the event and sets the agenda. Because the upcoming summit, COP28, is in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates got to choose the president, picking the CEO of its national oil company, Sultan al-Jaber.

As to be expected at a summit focused on the environment, there are many environmental activists, more than 750 last year, by AP's count. But they say their voices are not being heard, and instead the lobbying of fossil fuel interests are why climate talks have yet to produce an agreement to phase out coal, oil and natural gas, as scientists have repeatedly said must happen to stave off the worst impacts of climate change, like extreme weather events.

"People all over the world are suffering and dying from the consequences of the climate crisis caused by these industries who we allow to meet with our politicians and have privileged access to," climate activist Greta Thunberg said in an October protest in London. "We cannot trust these politicians and we cannot trust the processes of the COPs because the fossil fuel industries are tightening their grip around their processes and dictating their outcomes."

WIDE RANGE OF AFFILIATIONS

The AP analyzed the affiliations of attendees of COP27, reviewing details they offered on their badges. Those details were checked against lists of operators and owners of coal mines, oil fields and natural gas plants, as well as manufacturers of carbon-intensive materials like steel and cement.

Attendees in 2022 included top executives of BP, Shell, Equinor and TotalEnergies. The head of the world's largest oil and gas firm, Saudi Aramco, was at the site on a "sideline" event. And al-Jaber, chief of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, was also there and will be in charge of this year's climate negotiations. The operations and products of those companies and others are huge contributors to climate change: global oil and gas use alone was responsible for more than half of the world's 40.5 billion tons (36.8 billion metric tons) of greenhouse gas emissions in 2022, according to the International Energy Agency.

It wasn't just fossil fuel giants that showed up.

Take Mercuria Energy. The Switzerland-based firm calls itself "one of the world's largest energy traders," with 69% of their 2022 traded volumes in oil and natural gas. The firm is also a part-owner in Vesta Terminals, which operates storage terminals that hold crude oil, petroleum products and other liquids, as well as a marine fuels company called Minerva Bunkering.

Mercuria sent six people to the COP in Egypt. Its chief trader, Magid Shenouda, went as part of the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin. Others from Mercuria went as members of delegations for the Brazilian government, the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Emissions Trading Association and Winrock International, a nonprofit that works to help poorer countries with social, environmental and agricultural issues.

"We attend these events because we believe the world needs to change to a global energy system that is reliable, affordable, and sustainable," firm spokesman Matthew Lauer said in an email.

COMPANIES ATTEND VIA COUNTRY DELEGATIONS

Mercuria was not the only company that sent people with a national delegation. Two employees with the China National Petroleum Company, which is state-owned and one of the largest energy companies in the world, attended as part of the delegation of Niger, the African nation where the company is constructing a pipeline. Thyssenkrupp, a German steelmaker with emissions in 2022 that rivaled those of some oil

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and gas majors, according to data they reported to non-profit CDP, sent four people with three different delegations.

Nearly a quarter of people with connections to fossil fuels in AP's analysis attended with an electric utility. For many of those companies, fossil fuels remain the primary energy source. Take AES Corporation, which sent two people to the conference: More than half of the global company's generation capacity is natural gas or coal, although AES aims to phase out coal by 2025, according to its most recent annual report to investors.

Houston-based Apache Corporation drills for oil and gas in Texas, Britain's North Sea and Egypt, with more than 850 million barrels of oil equivalent in proven but yet-to-be-pumped oil reserves. Apache Executive Vice President David Pursell was at the climate talks, part of the six fossil fuel connected members of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce delegation the AP identified.

"By inviting the oil and gas industry to participate in the conversation, we can create pragmatic solutions to addressing global energy poverty while minimizing our environmental impact," Pursell said in a statement.

Alden Meyer, who has been to all but one COP and is an analyst for the European think-tank E3G, says the big numbers of attendees connected to fossil fuels show these industries see the summits as "either a threat or maybe an opportunity or both for their business," but the system isn't set up to tell motives and lobbying efforts.

Meyer and climate negotiations historian Joanna Depledge of the University of Cambridge in England say the fossil fuel interests have huge influence over the event, but the influence begins ahead of the talks.

"National positions are forged way before governments fly to the COPs," said Depledge.

However, much of the advocating for fossil fuels doesn't come directly from countries or companies. Last year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute sent four employees to the summit. Marty Durbin, the institute's president and former executive of the American Petroleum Institute, says the institute is a "huge" supporter of natural gas, noting that in developing countries natural gas is an alternative to far-dirtier coal.

Durbin says the interests of the chamber's wide business constituency must be represented in the negotiations, adding that chamber officials met with John Kerry at COP27 in support of that view and recently met with COP28 leaders in Abu Dhabi.

"I don't know why we're trying to push people away instead of saying, 'Come in and let's all work on this together,'" said Durbin, speaking from an oil and gas conference in October in Abu Dhabi.

For the upcoming talks in Dubai, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which organizes COPs, has changed its badging process to be more transparent. Attendees will be required to state affiliation and relationship to their delegation.

LEGACY OIL INFLUENCE

Historian Depledge points to the first COP in Berlin for what has happened since. Thanks to oil industry lobbying, when setting its rules the convention decided against adopting decisions by majority rule and instead opted for the much harder consensus, she said. That means if a big player or several nations object, a proposal fails. India scuttled a 2021 proposal to phase out coal, watering the language down.

The No. 2 of the upcoming COP, Adnan Amin, told AP that consensus rule means that an agreement to phase out fossil fuels is unlikely. However, he said that in participating in the talks the oil and gas industry "will understand they need to move much faster than they've been moving" to reduce emissions.

Pedro Pizarro, president of Edison International, a major California utility, is quick to say his firm doesn't burn fossil fuels and he doesn't consider it a fossil fuel company, even though they get at least 40% of the electricity they supply from burning natural gas.

When Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the 2015 Paris climate agreement, which set targets to limit global temperature rise, Pizarro still went to the negotiations, telling AP that "the U.S. was essentially absent; there were a few of us CEOs were there saying, 'Hey, we're still in this'."

Then in 2021, President Joe Biden returned the U.S. to the talks. Pizarro says he met with U.S. Special Climate Envoy John Kerry, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and domestic climate czar Gina McCarthy at those negotiations, talking about transitioning to clean energy and supporting Biden's efforts to pass

legislation.

Pizarro says he hopes that carbon capture and storage technologies will allow some fossil fuel burning to continue. Carbon capture removes carbon dioxide from the source of burning or from the air and is intertwined with fossil fuel businesses because promises to abate emissions are critical to the net-zero pledges of many nations and companies, especially the oil and gas industry. However, the technology is years, if not decades, away from having an impact at scale.

"Right now the problem to solve isn't fossil fuel," Pizarro said. "The problem to solve is climate."

Su disagrees and says all utilities are connected to fossil fuels.

"It's the fox guarding the henhouse and they should not be at the table when it's governments who have the jurisdiction to regulate," Su said. "They are only accountable to shareholders and governments should have full say over what is best for the public."

"The (COP) process is broken," Su said. "It's deeply frustrating."

Librarians turn to civil rights agency to oppose book bans and their firings

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — She refused to ban books, many of them about racism and the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. And for that, Suzette Baker was fired as a library director in a rural county in central Texas.

"I'm kind of persona non grata around here," said Baker, who had headed the Kingsland, Texas, library system until she refused to take down a prominent display of several books people had sought to ban over the years.

Now, Baker is fighting back. She and two other librarians who were similarly fired have filed workplace discrimination claims with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. And as culture war battles to keep certain books from children and teens put public and school libraries increasingly under pressure, their goal is redemption and, where possible, eventual reinstatement.

So far, it's a wait-and-see whether the claims will succeed — and set new precedent — in the struggle between teachers and librarians around the country who oppose book bans and conservative activists who say some books are inappropriate for young minds.

The fight has involved a record number of book-banning efforts; some libraries cutting ties with the American Library Association, which opposes book bans; and even attempts to prosecute librarians for allowing children to access books some consider too graphic.

At least one terminated librarian has gained a measure of success.

Brooky Parks, who was fired for standing up for programs on anti-racism and LGBTQ+ stories she organized for teens at the Erie Community Library north of Denver, won a \$250,000 settlement in September. Reached through the Colorado Civil Rights Division, the settlement requires her former employer to give librarians more say in decisions involving library programs.

Parks' settlement with the High Plains Library District capped a stressful eight-month period without work, when community donations helped her avoid losing her home. And it will likely resolve Parks' claim with the EEOC, said her attorney, Iris Halpern, who represents the three librarians.

"I just wasn't going to back down from it. It was just the right thing to do," said Parks, now a librarian at the University of Denver.

After her firing in 2022, Baker filed an EEOC claim against her employer, the Llano County Library System in Kingsland, Texas. And in September 2023, Terri Lesley, executive director of the Campbell County Public Library System in Gillette, Wyoming, filed a claim over her firing last summer.

Halpern, with the Denver firm Rathod Mohamedbhai, compared the wrongful termination claims to civil rights era legal battles.

"It is honestly sad that we've gotten to this point. But history is a constant struggle and we have to learn from our past," she said.

The 1964 Civil Right Act established the EEOC to enforce laws against workplace discrimination. One legal expert thinks the librarians might be able to prevail on the grounds that, under those laws, employees

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may not be discriminated against for associating with certain classes of people.

"With any case, the devil can be in the details in terms of how the facts come out and what they can present. But these are definitely actionable claims," said Rutgers University law professor David Lopez, a former EEOC general counsel.

An EEOC investigation can take over a year. After that, the EEOC may attempt to reach a settlement with the employer out of court, sue on the employee's behalf or issue a letter saying the employee has grounds to sue on their own.

The librarians haven't yet received an EEOC response and none is expected before the end of next year. "I would love to be optimistic," Baker said. "I know there are a lot of people in this community who are just absolutely behind the library being open and free and equal for all. And there's a lot of people who aren't. So it's a hard, hard situation."

EEOC spokesperson Victor Chen declined to comment on specific filings, adding "we can't even confirm or deny we have these complaints."

The county attorney offices and other representatives of the government officials who fired Parks, Baker and Lesley did not return phone and email messages seeking comment, or declined to comment.

At her Texas library, Baker displayed several books that have been targeted in recent book bans and a sign that read: "We put the 'lit' in literature" — a reference to a Tennessee pastor's recent burning of books.

Baker was fired after refusing to take down the display and signs — the last straw after she resisted book banning in her own library.

In March, a federal judge ordered 17 books returned to Kingsland library shelves while a citizen lawsuit against book banning proceeded. The works ranged from children's books to award-winning nonfiction, including "They Called Themselves the K.K.K: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group," by Susan Campbell Bartoletti; and "It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health," by Robie Harris.

"Content-based restrictions on speech are presumptively unconstitutional and subject to strict scrutiny," Texas U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman wrote in his March 30 ruling. He cited a 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that barred communities from banning signs because of what they say.

The Llano County Commission considered but decided against closing the county's three libraries in response to the ruling. Closing the libraries would have been eerily similar to the history across the U.S. of closing swimming pools rather than desegregating them, Halpern said.

Like Baker, Lesley had trouble finding work after being fired from the library system she directed in Gillette, Wyoming. Her dismissal followed two years of turmoil over challenges to the books available and library programs.

Some of the same county officials who opposed a transgender magician's plans to perform at the library went on to join local residents in seeking to ban books, according to Lesley's EEOC filing.

Baker and Lesley both were fired after local officials appointed new library board members willing to be more aggressive about pulling books.

"Our county commissioners appointed board members who were sympathetic to the people who wanted to remove the books. And it was a long dance to try to get it there. And in the end they had to fire me, I think, in order to be able to meet their goal," Lesley said.

The Campbell County Commission skirted a deputy county attorney's recommendation not to appoint past applicants for the board without re-interviewing them along with new candidates, according to Lesley's EEOC claim.

"I saw this as a well-executed attack on the library by a group of citizens and elected officials. It was an attack on the LGBTQ+ community as well," she said. "And it was an attack on the books."

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The NFL's youth movement at quarterback reaches a new milestone

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Inside the Numbers dives into NFL statistics, streaks and trends each week. For more Inside the Numbers, head here.

The generational shift at quarterback in the NFL reached a new milestone last week.

For the first time ever, every player who threw a pass in the NFL in Week 9 was born in 1990 or later, with 15 of the 28 starting quarterbacks last week age 25 or younger.

The run of quarterbacks born in the 1970s ended with Tom Brady's retirement after last season. Injuries to Aaron Rodgers, Matthew Stafford, Kirk Cousins and Ryan Tannehill, and a bye week for Russell Wilson, kept the QBs born in the 1980s off the field last week. This was the first time since Week 6 of the 2002 season that no quarterback born in the 1980s took the field.

There were seven rookie starters last week — one shy of the non-replacement player record set in Week 16 of the 2019 season — with Arizona's Clayton Tune and Minnesota's Jaren Hall getting their first career starts. That raised the total of rookie starting QBs this season to nine, tying the non-replacement record set in 2019.

The record for most starting rookie QBs since starts began being tracked in 1950 is expected to be set this week after Giants coach Brian Daboll said Tommy DeVito will get the start Sunday against Dallas following Daniel Jones' season-ending injury.

The youth movement at quarterback has played a role in the struggles on offense across the league in the first half of the season, with scoring at its lowest mark through nine weeks since 2007.

More than 70% of games so far this season have featured at least one quarterback age 25 or younger, with the 126 total starts by quarterbacks that young the most ever through nine weeks.

While many of the young QBs have struggled, Houston rookie C.J. Stroud has looked like a polished veteran. He threw for a rookie-record 470 yards in a comeback win over Tampa Bay last week with five TDs and no interceptions.

His 147.8 rating was the highest ever for a rookie with at least 30 attempts, and Stroud became the sixth player ever to throw for at least 450 yards with five TDs and no interceptions, joining Jared Goff, Peyton Manning, Donovan McNabb, Ben Roethlisberger and Y.A. Tittle.

HISTORIC PERFORMANCES

There were a few other notable performances from Week 9, including one that put New Orleans' do-everything tight end Taysom Hill in Hall of Fame company.

Hill caught his 10th career TD pass and threw his 12th in a win over Chicago to go along with the 26 he has on the ground. He became the first player since Hall of Famer Frank Gifford to record at least 10 touchdowns passing, rushing and receiving.

Gifford reached that milestone in 1957, while the only other players to do it reached those marks in the earlier days of the NFL, with Hall of Famers Charley Trippi, Red Grange and Jimmy Conzelman already in the club.

Minnesota's Joshua Dobbs did something that hadn't been accomplished since 1947 when he threw TD passes in his debut for the Vikings a week after doing the same for the Cardinals.

Dobbs was the fifth player since 1947 to throw a pass for two teams in two weeks, according to Spor-tradar, and he joined Paul Governali as the only ones to throw at least two TD passes in both games. Governali did it for the Boston Yanks and the New York Giants.

Stroud's Texans teammate, Dare Ogunbowale, had another noteworthy performance. With Ka'imi Fairbairn injured, Ogunbowale came on in emergency duty and kicked a 29-yard field goal in the fourth quarter.

He became the first nonkicker or punter to make a field goal in a game since Wes Welker did it on Oct. 10, 2004, for Miami against New England, and the first running back to do it since Tony Galbreath kicked two for New Orleans against Green Bay on Sept. 9, 1979.

DIVISIONAL DOINGS

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For the first time since the start of the eight-division era in 2002, every AFC East team left the week a loser.

Miami, Buffalo, the New York Jets and New England all lost this week. The AFC East had been the only division not to have a 0-4 week since 2002. Every division other than the AFC West (two) had at least five of those weeks, led by the NFC West with 10.

The AFC North swept the week, with Baltimore, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati all winning to improve to 5-3 or better — the first time every team in a division had a winning percentage of .600 or better heading into Week 10.

It was the fifth 4-0 week for the AFC North since realignment. The AFC West has the most with 10.

It was a rough week for NFC West teams other than idle San Francisco. Seattle lost 37-3 to Baltimore, Arizona lost 27-0 to Cleveland and the Rams lost 20-3 to Green Bay.

The six points were the fewest scored by a division playing at least three games in a week since the 2002 realignment, beating the previous low of 20 points in three games for the NFC North in Week 14 of the 2012 season.

NEW YUCK, NEW YUCK

The performance so far this season for the New York teams has been rather offensive.

The Jets and Giants are the bottom two teams in the NFL in points scored on offense, with the Giants at 10.4 offensive points per game and the Jets at 14.1.

Both teams scored only eight offensive touchdowns in their first eight games of the season. The only other teams to do that in the past five seasons were the Jets in both 2020 (seven TDs) and 2019 (eight).

The Giants and Jets have combined for 207 points scored on offense so far this season — a mark reached by six other teams individually.

Fossil fuel interests have large, yet often murky, presence at climate talks, AP analysis finds

By SETH BORENSTEIN and MARY KATHERINE WILDEMAN Associated Press

The badges said they were there to participate in negotiations to curb climate change. They stated affiliations like the government of Brazil, Indigenous organizations of the Amazon, the Climate Registry. But in reality, the livelihoods of these participants were more aligned with what's keeping the problem going: fossil fuels.

Close to 400 people connected in some way or another to fossil fuel industries attended last year's United Nations' climate talks in Egypt, a grouping that was larger than all but two of the national delegations sent by countries, according to a data analysis of the more than 24,000 participants by The Associated Press.

As United Nations leaders, scientists and others called for an eventual elimination of coal, oil and natural gas, various delegations included attendees who in some way owed part or all of their paychecks to fossil fuel burning. Many of these same people, and possibly even more connected to fossil fuels, will likely be at this year's official climate talks, known as Conference of Parties or COP, being hosted by the United Arab Emirates, a major oil producing country.

"There's outsized influence," said Center for Biological Diversity's Jean Su, who sits on the board that represents civil society and environmental groups at these meetings. "These COPs are often wining-and-dining feasts for fossil fuel corporations that want to profit off of climate."

While the presence is palpable—such as oil countries and companies with huge, flashy stands in the trades pavilions—the influence is hard to quantify because much of the negotiating is done behind closed doors.

These annual meetings, which have occurred since 1995, convene in different cities each year. The host city runs the event and sets the agenda. Because the upcoming summit, COP28, is in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates got to choose the president, picking the CEO of its national oil company, Sultan al-Jaber.

As to be expected at a summit focused on the environment, there are many environmental activists, more than 750 last year, by AP's count. But they say their voices are not being heard, and instead the lob-

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It wasn't just fossil fuel giants that showed up.

Take Mercuria Energy. The Switzerland-based firm calls itself "one of the world's largest energy traders," with 69% of their 2022 traded volumes in oil and natural gas. The firm is also a part-owner in Vesta Terminals, which operates storage terminals that hold crude oil, petroleum products and other liquids, as well as a marine fuels company called Minerva Bunkering.

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Meyer says the fossil fuel interests have huge influence over the event, but the influence begins ahead of the talks.

Last year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute sent four employees to the summit. Marty Durbin, the institute's president and former executive of the American Petroleum Institute, says the institute is a "huge" supporter of natural gas and the industry should have a voice in the talks.

"I don't know why we're trying to push people away instead of saying, 'Come in and let's all work on this together,'" said Durbin, speaking from an oil and gas conference in October in Abu Dhabi.

Su disagrees, saying: "It's the fox guarding the henhouse and they should not be at the table when it's governments who have the jurisdiction to regulate."

Democrats won big on abortion rights Tuesday. Here's what the results say for the US going into 2024

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats had plenty of good news to celebrate in Tuesday's off-year elections and more evidence that they can win races centered on the national debate over abortion.

Abortion rights supporters won an Ohio ballot measure and the Democratic governor of beet-red Kentucky held onto his office by campaigning on reproductive rights and painting his opponent as extremist. A Democrat won an open seat on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court after campaigning on his pledge to uphold abortion rights. And Democrats took full control of the Virginia statehouse, blocking Republicans from being able to pass new abortion restrictions and delivering a defeat to Gov. Glenn Youngkin that may douse any buzz about a late entry into the GOP presidential primary.

The victories won't be enough to make Democrats feel secure heading into next year's presidential election. The off-year elections have major implications in all of those states and provide a snapshot of

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American politics heading into 2024. But two big names — Joe Biden and Donald Trump — weren't on the ballot this time. How Americans view them will be a huge factor in shaping next year's race.

Here are some key results from Tuesday's voting.

ABORTION REMAINS POTENT FOR DEMOCRATS

Democrats notched two early wins Tuesday night in Kentucky and Ohio, states that voted for Trump in 2020. In both states, abortion was the main campaign issue.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear was reelected in a state that Trump had won by 26 percentage points. Beshear had criticized the abortion views of his Republican challenger, Attorney General Daniel Cameron, in debates and television ads. One Beshear ad featured a woman who miscarried after being raped by her stepfather at age 12 expressing disbelief at Cameron's opposition to abortion in cases of rape and incest.

In Ohio, a ballot measure preserving abortion rights passed in a state that Trump won by eight percentage points in 2020. Republicans had already tried to derail the measure by calling an unusual August referendum to make it harder to pass ballot measures, an initiative that was roundly rejected by Ohio voters.

Later Tuesday, Dan McCaffery won an open seat on Pennsylvania's Supreme Court after positioning himself as a defender of abortion rights. And in Virginia, Democrats held the state Senate and flipped control of the Virginia House of Delegates from the GOP.

The outcomes suggest a transformed political landscape since a conservative majority of the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a federal right to an abortion last year. Abortion rights measures have passed in a plethora of states as some other Republican-run states have instituted new bans on the procedure.

Abortion rights may not be a potent enough issue to swing an election on its own. Several GOP governors who supported new bans cruised to reelection last year, including Ohio's Mike DeWine, Florida's Ron DeSantis and Texas' Greg Abbott.

But abortion was the key issue across the country on Tuesday. And that should worry Republicans in competitive races next year.

GOOD NIGHT FOR DEMOCRATS, BUT MAYBE NOT FOR 2024

It was a good night for Democrats following a series of wins in special elections and comes after a stronger performance in last year's midterms, which are usually crushing for the party in power in Washington.

But none of the races were an up-or-down decision on the incumbent president, Biden. And none featured Trump on the ballot or his ability to turbocharge turnout of infrequent voters.

Democrats have performed well in recent special elections and did better than expected in 2022. It increasingly seems like the party starts from a position of strength. But it's not clear that translates to its 80-year-old president, who faces widespread skepticism about his job performance and whether he is too old to serve a second term.

We'll have to wait until 2024 to see how Biden fares.

YOUNGKIN FALLS SHORT

Glenn Youngkin burst on the political scene in 2021, winning an upset victory to become the Republican governor of Virginia, a state Biden won handily the previous year. Putting a moderate, suburban dad spin on modern Republicanism, Youngkin generated buzz that he could even make a late, surprise entry into the GOP presidential primary after this month's elections.

Instead, Youngkin said he would focus on the 2023 legislative elections and winning full Republican control over Virginia government. Things did not go the way he hoped.

Youngkin raised tens of millions of dollars for Republicans to defend their majority in Virginia's House of Delegates and win control of the Senate, which Democrats narrowly held in 2021. Among the things the legislature could do with that majority, he said, was pass a 15-week abortion ban he favored.

Youngkin didn't really have a path forward in the presidential primary — his window to get on the ballot has already closed in some states. Virginia has an unusual single-term limit for governors, making Youngkin's political future even more of a question.

Whatever he does, he'll have to explain 2023. And he'll face unified Democratic control of the statehouse for the rest of his term.

DEMOCRATS' HEARTBREAK HOTEL

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It was a good night for Democrats, but it could only go so far.

The party invested heavily in an unlikely place: Mississippi, where Brandon Presley, best known as Elvis Presley's second cousin, was challenging Republican Gov. Tate Reeves.

The party hoped that Presley's celebrity and political skills, coupled with the change in a centuries-old provision originally designed to keep Black candidates from winning statewide races, could spell an unlikely victory. But it was not to be.

Reeves won the race. There are limited lessons to draw from a party falling short in a state its 2020 presidential candidate lost by 17 points, except one of the oldest — you can't win 'em all.

HISTORIC FIRSTS

Political candidates broke barriers in a handful of wins Tuesday.

Former Biden White House aide Gabe Amo will become the first Black member of Congress from Rhode Island after winning the special election in that state's first congressional district.

The son of West African immigrants, Amo emerged from a 12-candidate September primary to succeed retiring Rep. David Cicilline. On Tuesday, Amo defeated Republican Gerry Leonard, a Marine veteran, in the heavily Democratic district.

And Philadelphia will have its first female mayor after Democrat Cherelle Parker defeated Republican David Oh in the overwhelmingly Democratic city.

Cheetahs become more nocturnal on hot days. Climate change may trigger fights among predators

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

Cheetahs are usually daytime hunters, but the speedy big cats will shift their activity toward dawn and dusk hours during warmer weather, a new study finds.

Unfortunately for endangered cheetahs, that sets them up for more potential conflicts with mostly nocturnal competing predators such as lions and leopards, say the authors of research published Wednesday in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.

"Changing temperatures can impact the behavior patterns of large carnivore species and also the dynamics among species," said University of Washington biologist Briana Abrahms, a study co-author.

While cheetahs only eat fresh meat, lions and leopards will sometimes opportunistically scavenge from smaller predators.

"Lions and leopards normally kill prey themselves, but if they come across a cheetah's kill, they will try to take it," said Bettina Wachter, a behavioral biologist who leads the Cheetah Research Project at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research.

"The cheetahs will not fight the larger cats, they will just leave," said Wachter, who is based in Namibia and was not involved in the study.

Hunting at different times of the day is one long-evolved strategy to reduce encounters between the multiple predator species that share northern Botswana's mixed savannah and forest landscape.

But the new study found that on the hottest days, when maximum daily temperatures soared to nearly 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit), cheetahs became more nocturnal — increasing their overlapping hunting hours with rival big cats by 16%.

"There's a greater chance for more unfriendly encounters and less food for the cheetahs," said co-author Kasim Rafiq, a biologist at the University of Washington and the nonprofit Botswana Predator Conservation Trust.

For the current study, researchers placed GPS tracking collars on 53 large carnivores — including cheetahs, lions, leopards and African wild dogs — and recorded their locations and hours of activity over eight years. They compared this data with maximum daily temperature records.

While seasonal cycles explain most temperature fluctuations in the study window of 2011 to 2018, the scientists say the observed behavior changes offer a peek into the future of a warming world.

In the next phase of research, the scientists plan to use audio-recording devices and accelerometers —

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"like a Fitbit for big cats," said Rafiq — to document the frequency of encounters between large carnivores. In addition to competition with lions and leopards, cheetahs already face severe pressure from habitat fragmentation and conflict with humans.

The fastest land animal, cheetahs are the rarest big cat in Africa, with fewer than 7,000 left in the wild. "These climate changes could become really critical if we look into the future — it's predicted to become much warmer in this part of Africa where cheetahs live, in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia," said Wachter of the Cheetah Research Project.

Today in History: November 9, East Germany opens its borders

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Nov. 9, the 313th day of 2023. There are 52 days left in the year.

On Nov. 9, 1989, communist East Germany threw open its borders, allowing citizens to travel freely to the West for the first time in decades; joyous Germans danced atop the Berlin Wall.

In 1620, the passengers and crew of the Mayflower sighted Cape Cod.

In 1872, fire destroyed nearly 800 buildings in Boston.

In 1918, it was announced that Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II would abdicate; he then fled to the Netherlands.

In 1935, United Mine Workers president John L. Lewis and other labor leaders formed the Committee for Industrial Organization.

In 1938, Nazis looted and burned synagogues as well as thousands of Jewish-owned stores and houses in Germany and Austria in a pogrom or deliberate persecution that became known as "Kristallnacht."

In 1965, the great Northeast blackout began with a series of power failures lasting up to 13 1/2 hours, leaving 30 million people in seven states and part of Canada without electricity.

In 1970, former French President Charles de Gaulle died at age 79.

In 1976, the U.N. General Assembly approved resolutions condemning apartheid in South Africa, including one characterizing the white-ruled government as "illegitimate."

In 2007, President Gen. Pervez Musharraf (pur-VEHZ' moo-SHAH'-ruhv) of Pakistan placed opposition leader Benazir Bhutto (BEN'-uh-zeer BOO'-toh) under house arrest for a day, and rounded up thousands of her supporters to block a mass rally against his emergency rule.

In 2011, after 46 seasons as Penn State's head football coach and a record 409 victories, Joe Paterno was fired along with the university president, Graham Spanier, over their handling of child sex abuse allegations against former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky.

In 2012, retired four-star Army Gen. David Petraeus abruptly resigned as CIA director after an affair with his biographer, Paula Broadwell, was revealed by an FBI investigation.

In 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton conceded the presidential election to Republican Donald Trump, telling supporters in New York that her defeat was "painful, and it will be for a long time." But Clinton told her faithful to accept Trump and the election results, urging them to give him "an open mind and a chance to lead."

In 2018, President Donald Trump issued an order to deny asylum to migrants who enter the country illegally.

In 2020, President Donald Trump fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper, injecting more uncertainty to a rocky transition period as Joe Biden prepared to assume the presidency.

Today's Birthdays: Baseball Hall of Famer Whitey Herzog is 92. Movie director Bille August is 75. Actor Robert David Hall is 75. Actor Lou Ferrigno is 72. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, is 71. Gospel singer Donnie McClurkin is 64. Rock musician Dee Plakas (L7) is 63. Actor Ion Overman is 54. Rapper Pepa (Salt-N-Pepa) is 59. Rapper Scarface (Geto Boys) is 53. Blues singer Susan Tedeschi (teh-DEHS'-kee) is 53. Actor Jason Antoon is 52. Actor Eric Dane is 51. Singer Nick Lachey (98 Degrees) is 50. Country musician Barry Knox (Parmalee) is 46. R&B singer Sisqo (Dru Hill) is 45. Country singer Corey Smith is 44. Country singer Chris Lane is 39. Actor Emily Tyra is 36. Actor Nikki Blonsky is 35. Actor-model Lio Tipton is 35.