

Groton Daily Independent

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Coming up

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.

Saturday, Nov. 11

Girls JH Jamboree at Roscoe
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.
Groton American Legion Annual Turkey Party 6:30 pm.

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

War in Gaza: Israel has agreed to four-hour humanitarian pauses daily to allow aid into Gaza and for civilians to leave, the U.S. said. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel does not “seek to conquer,” “occupy” or “govern” Gaza after the fighting ends but needs to ensure that the events of Oct. 7 do not repeat.

Trump’s Trials: Donald Trump’s \$250 million civil fraud case in New York faces complications as a prior lawsuit involving a Marvel Entertainment CEO adds complexity to allegations of misleading property valuations in his ongoing trial.

Robert De Niro Lawsuit Verdict: A jury ordered actor Robert De Niro’s company to pay his former assistant \$1.2 million in a lawsuit alleging gender discrimination in the workplace.

Republicans Raise Alarm: Senate Republicans launched an investigation into allegations that the Justice Department previously spied on Congressional lawmakers and staff members, a letter addressed to Attorney General Merrick Garland and obtained by Newsweek showed.

Fetterman Backlash: Senator John Fetterman was booed by veterans supporting an Israel-Hamas ceasefire outside the U.S. Capitol following recent backlash for his pro-Israel stance amid the conflict.

Prince Harry Prevails: Prince Harry’s lawsuit against Associated Newspapers Limited (ANL), claiming unlawful information gathering by the publisher between 1993 and 2011, will proceed to a trial as a London judge rejected ANL’s bid for summary judgment.

War in Ukraine: Russian forces are encircling Avdiivka and Moscow is said to have accumulated around 40,000 troops for a fresh assault on the eastern Donetsk town, as revealed in a new war map by the Institute for the Study of War. Ukrainian President Zelensky described the situation as “particularly tough.”

Veteran’s Day program today 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

McGannon interns with Gibbs in kindergarten

by Dorene Nelson

Shaela McGannon, a senior at Groton Area High School, is interning with Ann Gibbs in kindergarten. "I decided to be an intern, working with little kids," Shaela stated, "because I like being around these little ones."

"I will be on the track team again this year," she explained. "It is my second year on this team. I also joined FFA for the first time this year."

"I started my high school years at Aberdeen Central," Shaela said, "but I wanted to be in a smaller school so my brother and I both come to school in Groton."

"The only problem with that arrangement is that I now have to drive every day," she smiled. "Driving isn't the problem, but the weather can be! I got stuck for the very first time last winter and hope this coming one will be better."

"After I graduate from high school, I plan to attend Northern State University and major in psychology," Shaela stated. "I want to stay close to home and eventually get a job working with kids."

"I really enjoy having my internship with Mrs. Gibbs and her kindergarten class," she admitted. "I especially like helping these children with their various projects."

"My work here has been easy and actually lots of fun! Probably the hardest part is getting these little kids into the right line at dismissal time! After all, you don't want a child in the bus line when he's supposed to be in the pick-up line!"

Shaela is the daughter of Todd McGannon and Jessica Schmieg.



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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....

10.) Dislike cilantro and coconut

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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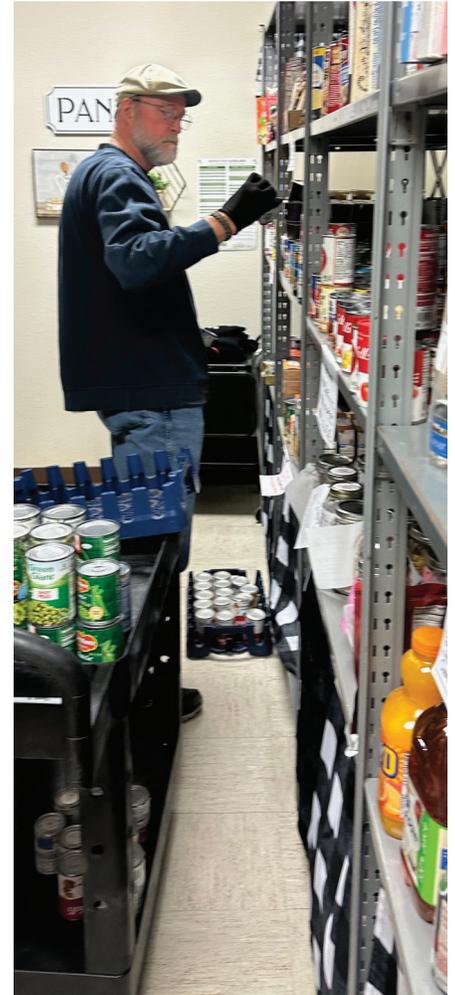
A flock of geese heading south gathered just south of Groton. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Three youth groups went on a food drive this week. Then volunteers of Enrich Groton South Dakota gathered at the community center to sort out the food for The Pantry. Pictured on left, front to back, are Charlotte Martin, Kristie Gibbs, Julie Shilhanek, Pat and David Miller; on the right side, front to back, are Kari Bartling, Nancy Larsen, April Abeln and Diane Warrington. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



David Miller examines the expiration date of a can as he organizes the cans on the shelves. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The Queen of Hearts drawing was held Thursday night. Lena Berreth was drawn. She did not pick the Queen of Hearts. She won \$255. This past week, 510 tickets were sold and the jackpot was \$31,485. The drawing is held each Thursday at the Groton American Legion. Roxy Merkel and Brenda Waage were livestreaming the event with Jake Unzen doing the announcing. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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NSU Wrestling

No. 11 Northern Tallies Six Bonus Point Wins In Opening Dual Victory

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 11 Northern State University wrestling team kicked off the dual seasons with a dominating 35-6 victory over No. 25 Fort Hays State. The Wolves won eight of the ten weights, as well as a 157-pound exhibition match to open the dual.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 35, FHSU 6

Records: NSU 1-0, FHSU 0-1

HOW IT HAPPENED

Cael Larson kicked off the evening for the Wolves with a victory by fall over Charlie Hutson at 2:17 of the 157-pound exhibition bout

Northern rattled off five straight victories to kick-off the scoring portion of the dual, with three matches ending in the first period

Landen Fischer tallied a 5-3 decision win over D'Andre Brown at 125 pounds

Jason Henschel Jr. followed up that performance with a swift technical fall over Kevin Honas; the Wolves 133-pounder scored 15 unanswered points securing the tech at 1:34 in the first

Northern added their third bonus point win at 141, as Braydon Mogle defeated Drew Bell in a 9-1 major decision

No. 1 Wyatt Turnquist matched Henschel's scoring, downing Jacob Mitchell at 2:46 in the match (TF 15-0)

No. 7 Devin Bahr tallied the fastest match of the evening, scoring six team points with a 47 second pin of Justus Hulse

The Tigers broke through at 165-pounds, adding a tiebreaker victory, but the Wolves were not done

Sam Kruger blanked Juan Urbina in a 16-0 technical fall at 4:21, giving Northern a 28-3 lead

No. 12 Treyton Cacek returned to the Wachs Arena mat for the first time in 999 days, notching an 11-2 major decision victory over Bryce Westmoreland

Fort Hays lone ranked wrestler, No. 3 Tereus Henry came away with a 7-5 decision win over Marshall VanTassel at 197-pound

Nathan Schauer closed out the dual with a come from behind 5-2 decision win over Antyony Caldwell

FINAL RESULTS

	NSU	FHSU
125 Landen Fischer (Northern State) over D`Andre Brown (Fort Hays State) (Dec 5-3)	3.0	0.0
133 Jason Henschel (Northern State) over Kevin Honas (Fort Hays State) (TF 15-0 1:34)	5.0	0.0
141 Braydon Mogle (Northern State) over Drew Bell (Fort Hays State) (MD 9-1)	4.0	0.0
149 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern) over Jacob Mitchell (Fort Hays State) (TF 15-0 2:46)	5.0	0.0
157 Devin Bahr (Northern State) over Justus Hulse (Fort Hays State) (Fall 0:47)	6.0	0.0
165 Cody Hicks (Fort Hays State) over Chase Bloomquist (Northern) (TB-2 (RT) 2-2)	0.0	3.0
174 Sam Kruger (Northern State) over Juan Urbina (Fort Hays State) (TF 16-0 4:21)	5.0	0.0
184 Treyton Cacek (Northern) over Bryce Westmoreland (Fort Hays State) (MD 11-2)	4.0	0.0
197 Tereus Henry (Fort Hays State) over Marshall Vantassel (Northern State) (Dec 7-5)	0.0	3.0
285 Nathan Schauer (Northern State) over Anthony Caldwell (Fort Hays State) (Dec 5-2)	3.0	0.0
157 Exb: Cael Larson (Northern State) over Charlie Hutson (Fort Hays State) (Fall 2:17)	0.0	0.0
Dual Meet Score	35.0	6.0

UP NEXT

Northern travels to the DWU Open this Saturday, beginning at 9 a.m. from Mitchell.

South Dakota Department of Health Reports First Flu Death of the 2023-2024 Flu Season

PIERRE, SD – The Department of Health is reporting the first influenza death of the 2023-2024 season, a Minnehaha County resident in the 80-89 age group.

“Influenza can be a very serious illness,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist for the Department of Health. “Taking preventative measures like regularly washing hands, covering your cough, and getting vaccinated against flu will protect you and your family.”

Clayton noted it is still early in the flu season with only 32 lab-confirmed flu cases and three hospitalizations reported; however, an average of 35 South Dakotan deaths are reported each year.

During the flu season, we encourage all South Dakotans to take the following preventative actions to help slow the spread of the flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth;
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; and
- Stay home if you are sick.

In addition to preventative actions, yearly flu vaccinations are recommended for everyone age six months and older. Groups like pregnant women, children younger than five years, people over 65 years, and people with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for flu-related complications. Healthcare workers and household contacts of high-risk populations, such as those with young infants, should also be vaccinated.

A list of participating locations offering flu vaccines in your community can be found online. For more information and the latest resources visit flu.sd.gov.

Influenza is a virus spread by respiratory droplets when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes. Common signs and symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, fatigue, body or muscle aches, and runny or stuffy nose.

At the heart of the Department of Health’s mission is a simple yet profound goal: to protect and improve the health of all South Dakotans. The department is entrusted with the vital task of promoting wellness, preventing disease, and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all South Dakotans across our great state.

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

November 13, 2023 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of October 10, 2023 school board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of October 2023 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of October 2023 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of October 2023 School Lunch Report.
5. Approval of October 2023 School Transportation Report.

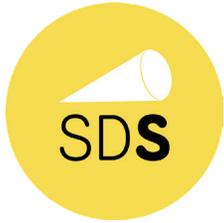
OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Continued Discussion Regarding Potential School District FY2025 Opt-Out.
3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. 2022-2023 District and School Report Card Report.
2. Approve contract for Tanner Pietz, K-12 Vocal Music Teacher.
3. Approve hiring Troy Zoellner, JH Wrestling Coach, for the 2023-2024 season.
4. Approval of volunteer assistants for winter sports season
 - a. Girls Basketball: Becky Hearnen
 - b. Wrestling: Chris Ehresman, Jeremy Krueger
5. Executive session pursuant SDCL 1-25-2(2) student issue.

ADJOURN



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Tackling substance abuse with families in mind to prevent foster care placements

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND ANNIE TODD - NOVEMBER 10, 2023 6:01 AM

Sobriety was a 12-year journey for Toni Handboy.

She tried to protect her children. She sent her daughter to live with her ex-husband in Oregon. Her son was placed with an aunt nearby after being removed by Child Protective Services.

But the impact on her children ran deep.

Even though Handboy tried to make sure her daughter never saw her high or drunk, her daughter was traumatized by her mother's absence and broken promises.

Her son saw her struggle and was exposed to a violent relationship of Handboy's. But he also saw her overcome.

Handboy got sober because of her children. She was determined they wouldn't be placed into foster care like she'd been as a child. But they were also her lifeline; they encouraged her, supported her and kept her going each time she'd stumble on her way to recovery.

"It came full circle, being a child exposed to drugs and then being a mother addicted to it," Handboy said. "I didn't want my children to be exposed to it or suffer what I went through, because it's a cycle, right? It's going to carry through."

Handboy's story is one of many examined as part of an Argus Leader/South Dakota Searchlight investigation into 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.

Nine out of 10 foster care placements in South Dakota involve substance abuse, said state Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff.

But according to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, substance abuse accounted for 57% of all placements in the state in 2021. It's the second largest reason children are placed in foster care in South Dakota, according to the data.

State government officials recognize substance use disorder as a root cause leading to high foster care placements, and they say being proactive and addressing such issues are key to preventing children from entering the system in the first place. That includes stopping drug trafficking and maintaining healthy homes across the state, according to Gov. Kristi Noem, and getting parents into addiction counseling, according to Althoff.

"I don't think it's a lack of laws," Althoff said. "I think it is this reality that we make sure we're chasing the right causation as opposed to the symptoms."

The federal government is already funding preventative measures that address root causes of child removal and family separation through the Family First Prevention Plan. South Dakota is one of the last four states in the nation to create its mandatory three-year implementation plan.

But the state also lacks infrastructure to handle the number of parents seeking treatment. Substance abuse counselors, such as Handboy, and ICWA directors say the state's reunification and parental termination timelines pressure parents and can lead to relapse.

Despite that, officials are positive about where the state can improve, especially regarding substance abuse prevention.

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Rushing recovery timelines lead to relapse, re-entry into foster system

Handboy is now a certified peer recovery specialist and a counselor for Wakpa Waste Counseling Services. It's alarming how many of her addiction clients have lost their parental rights, she said. About 15% of her clients have children in the foster care system.

Substance use disorder clients addicted to methamphetamines need 18 to 24 months of rehabilitation and counseling before they feel confident in their recovery and sobriety, Handboy said.

But the state's goal is to reunify families and discharge children from the foster care system as fast as possible, contradicting the reality parents face in their addiction recovery.

In fiscal year 2022, nearly two-thirds of the state's child welfare reunifications occurred within a year, Althoff said during a legislative committee hearing earlier this year. The average time until reunification in that time period was 287 days.

"They're wanting these mothers to get their lives together within a year, otherwise they'll terminate their rights," Handboy said. "There's no way that's possible."

If they do get their children back in that timeframe without proper support or recovery in place, they're likely to relapse and their children will re-enter the child welfare system. The more times a child enters the child welfare system, the more likely a parent's rights will be terminated.

According to the Children's Bureau, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a quarter of South Dakota children placed into foster care in 2021 were re-entering the system.

Holly Christensen, executive director of the Sioux Falls-based nonprofit The Foster Network, said the state's high re-entry rates are likely due to a lack of support for parents after reunification.

"Relapse is very common," Christensen said. "How do they do that without fear of CPS coming back and taking their kids because they relapsed? Who can they call and be open and honest with and say, 'Look, I relapsed and I need to go to treatment for 30 days.'"

Approaching addiction, keeping families intact

South Dakota only has two providers in the state that offer family-based residential treatment, allowing women to enter the addiction program while pregnant or bring up to two children younger than 8 with them for the duration of their stay.

The two programs are based in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. The Sioux Falls program, New Start, had a waiting list of more than 20 people as of September.

Most clients are referred to the program through the courts, social services or parole recommendations, said Nikkie LaFortune, managing director of residential services with Volunteers of America, Dakotas, which runs New Start.

That means the program is mostly serving families who have already been impacted by the child welfare system in some way, serving as reactive treatment rather than as preventative treatment.

Family-based residential treatment can result in better outcomes for women and their children, both in supporting addiction recovery and keeping children out of the child welfare system.

The treatment combines intensive rehabilitation services with support through parenting, life skills and personal finance classes along with child care.

By ensuring women are able to stay away from drug use during pregnancy and strengthen bonds with their children, the treatment programs improve the health of the woman and increase the likelihood that women will complete treatment. Swap fathers into the picture, and the outcomes are also positive.

"It's an emotional barrier for services," said Becky Deelstra, marketing director for the VOA, Dakotas. "Even though a mom is struggling with addiction, that doesn't mean she loves her kids any less. Being able to keep these moms with their kids is for their own benefit and makes it emotionally easier for them to enter into treatment."

Three months after discharge from treatment, 80% of clients reported they hadn't used drugs in the last 30 days, according to New Start data.

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Despite documented success and research on the family-based residential treatment model, there are no similar programs in South Dakota's rural areas, where nearly 43% of children's families in the foster care system originate.

New Start, which started in 2000, can support 42 women at a time — tripling its capacity during a 2020 building expansion. The program served 408 mothers and 622 children between September 2018 and September 2023. Many clients stay for six months.

But the program is struggling to maintain its staff. As of September, New Start had enough workers to support up to 30 clients.

Reimagining existing programs to treat substance abuse

It is not just "a program and a payment" that will make a difference in the intersection of substance abuse and child welfare, said South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem. There are several programs, facilities and support systems existing to ensure families receive the help they need.

Current preventative programming from the state includes child abuse awareness campaigns, fatherhood programming and parenting education, including a course on Positive Indian Parenting developed with curriculum from the National Indian Child Welfare Association.

The state has expanded access to behavioral health and addiction treatment over the past three years and has planned investments for the next five years.

Noem added that her office is willing to create an agreement with tribal governments regarding outreach services on reservations, such as addiction treatment. Such agreements already exist in law enforcement and Child Protective Services.

"We're more than willing to do creative partnerships with our tribes if they're willing," Noem said.

Federal partnerships are already available. South Dakota is in its first year of creating a Family First prevention plan.

The prevention plans are a new way to use federal Title IV-E funding, which has historically only supplemented the cost of foster care. Instead, states can use a portion of those funds to pay for services that will help prevent children from entering or reentering the foster care system.

The state entered into a \$1.2 million contract with out-of-state consulting firm ICF Inc. in June 2022 to begin developing the state's plan and select evidence-based programs to invest in. There are 13 evidence-based practices in South Dakota that are well supported by scientific research: eight mental health programs, four substance abuse programs and eight parenting programs, according to the state DSS.

Noem's administration and ICF have had meetings with representatives of most of the nine tribes in South Dakota to discuss the prevention plan.

"You've got to have prevention and intervention and training and services for when these families have a crisis," Noem said. "By only talking about these kids when they're already in the foster care system, that will do nothing to guarantee that we're not sitting here in 10 years again."

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.

Annie Todd covers state politics for the Argus Leader in Sioux Falls. She was born and raised in Colorado and graduated from the University of Wyoming.

'Setting the parent up for failure': Reunification barriers reflect root causes of child removal

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND ANNIE TODD - NOVEMBER 10, 2023 6:00 AM

Toni Handboy and Christian Blackbird are constantly telling their clients not to give up.

Handboy, a counselor at Wakpa Waste Counseling Services in Eagle Butte, and Blackbird, the Crow Creek Indian Child Welfare Act director, frequently work with parents trying to get their children back from the foster care system.

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But complying with reunification requirements can be a lot for parents to overcome, the two admit.

"I don't know if a mother can do all those things — get sober, get a job, get their GED and get on a waitlist for a home for their children," Handboy said. "They might be waiting two or three years. I just don't see it happening right away."

An Argus Leader/South Dakota Searchlight investigation examined 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.

About half of the children who enter into the foster care system in South Dakota can expect to be reunited with their parents. But for Native American children, that expectation drops to 40%.

Biological parents, foster parents and experts agree that it's often not for a lack of love if parents fail to achieve reunification with children. Instead, several barriers may contribute to a family's inability to reunify.

Barriers connected to poverty, to a lack of resources in rural areas and to changing expectations set by the state Department of Social Services can make it daunting for parents to get their children back.

Sen. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, brought a bill in the 2023 legislative session to examine the overrepresentation of Native American children in the child welfare system, which included looking at such barriers. The 1978 federal ICWA law applies to Native families after the child has been removed.

"ICWA doesn't address the root cause of what's making families vulnerable to being separated," Foster said.

'Neglect often looks like poverty'

South Dakota is home to six of the top 10 poorest counties in the United States, and all six include reservation or tribal land.

Children in poverty are at risk for neglect, the leading reason children are placed in foster care in South Dakota. They're more likely to miss meals because their parents can't afford them, or more likely to live in overcrowded or inadequate housing.

Child welfare advocates say poverty can be confused for neglect.

Rep. Peri Pourier, D-Pine Ridge and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, pleaded unsuccessfully with lawmakers during the 2023 legislative session to create an Indian child welfare task force.

"Being born and raised in one of the poorest counties in the country, I can tell you that neglect often looks like poverty," Pourier said on the House floor.

While poverty can lead to developmental and health risks for children, the presence of poverty alone doesn't mean a child is unsafe, unloved or uncared for at home, Pourier said.

4 types of neglect

Child neglect is the most common reason children enter the foster care system in the United States. Definitions of neglect vary among states, professions and organizations, though there are common categories recognized by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

Physical neglect: Abandonment, not feeding a child to the point where they are repeatedly hungry for long periods of time, driving intoxicated with a child, or exposing a child to hazards such as drugs, guns, poison or unsanitary household conditions.

Medical neglect: Failure to provide or allow needed care recommended by a health care professional.

Emotional neglect: Persistently ignoring a child's needs for affection, emotional support or attention; permitting drug or alcohol abuse; or exposing a child to chronic or extreme domestic violence.

Educational neglect: Permitting chronic student absenteeism, failing to homeschool or enroll a child in school, or refusing to get proper special education needs for a child.

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Neglect, in most cases, is solvable with guidance or support from agencies, Handboy said, and may not require children to be removed from their home.

"To me, that's an injustice for the children," Handboy said.

'You're setting the parent up for failure': Foster children moved hours across the state

More than 500 foster children in the state are from Pennington County, which is more than one-third of all children in the system, according to data from August.

Yet only 103 foster families are licensed in the county. That means a significant number of children are shipped hundreds of miles across the state, even so far as Sioux Falls.

Not only are the children separated from their families, support systems and cultures, but that distance also makes it harder for families to achieve reunification, said Holly Christensen, executive director of Sioux Falls-based nonprofit The Foster Network.

Parental visits are necessary for reunification. The visits determine a parent's reliability and drive to see their child. It allows social workers to observe how the parent and child interact. And it serves as an incentive for parents to reach expectations set out in their case plan.

For 32-year-old Christian Banley, access to transportation was tenuous. The Aberdeen mother had to travel hundreds of miles to visit her two daughters in foster care: one in Madison and the other in Sioux Falls, 150- and 200-mile drives, respectively.

Banley's car was constantly breaking down. When she did manage to get on the road, she wasn't legally able to drive because her license was revoked for prior tickets. Without a reliable car, Banley would be late to visitations with her daughters each month or miss them altogether.

Even at the end, when Banley's parental rights were terminated — meaning she would be legally cut out of her daughters' lives and uninformed about her daughters' wellbeing or adoption status — she struggled to find a ride to say goodbye in Sioux Falls.

Because of such distance and hurdles for parents, most visits are reduced to virtual meetings, foster parents say.

"How do you interact with a baby on the phone?" Christensen said. "It doesn't give the parents motivation to stay sober or work with their plan, because they're not getting that weekly gratification. Sadly, a lot of that is just because there's not enough foster families out west."

If a parent is able to drive such distances, they might have to take a day or two off work. DSS will reimburse gas and will provide rides as part of ICWA's "active efforts" requirement, but it takes time for the reimbursement to process and some families don't trust case workers enough to work with them.

Parents working on reunification also may need to travel for parenting classes or addiction counseling, said Jewel Bruner, a Cheyenne River tribal member who has custody of her eight grandchildren. But without reliable transportation, missing visits and required classes can hinder the parent's chances to be reunited with their child.

"That's where you're setting the parent up for failure," Bruner said. "If you don't have a ride and you live out in the districts, then you're just S-O-L."

'They impose their systems on our people': Housing requirements inconsistent with tribal customs, elders say

A safe, stable place to live is a top requirement for reunification. Research shows that a lack of stable housing can lead to poor health and educational outcomes for children.

Causes for removal

Living arrangements that can seriously endanger a child's physical health can be a cause for removal, according to the state's SAFE model for foster care entry. That can include:

Physical structure: Decaying or unsound structure in the home, exposed wiring, ineffective heating and cooling systems, broken windows, unlocked storage areas with dangerous items, and inadequate or dangerous sleeping arrangements.

Hygiene: Existence of dangerous bacteria or infestation; ineffective waste disposal; dangerous food

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management and cooking practices; fecal contamination; transmission of infections, parasites and worms from animals; and significant and uncontrolled mildew and mold.

Toxins: Dangerous plants accessible to small children; and dangerous products accessible to children including aerosols, bleach, chlorine, hairspray, perfume, nail polish and remover, oven cleaner, insecticides and lead.

Household items: Accessible alcohol or drugs, unsecured guns and other weapons, accessible matches and lighters, hot stoves and heaters, accessible and faulty ceiling fans, and dangerous tools or equipment.

Surroundings: Natural hazards, water hazards, traffic, man-made hazards, hazardous junk stored or abandoned outside, unsecure or dangerous yards, dangerous animals, and dangerous people or neighborhood.

Home environment: Dangerous people or activity within the home, drug sales or trafficking, drug use by outsiders, drug production, and gang activity.

Even when families have housing, they could be living in a multigenerational household with multiple children to a room or even beds. Multigenerational living situations can appear as overcrowding.

While such living arrangements are culturally accepted, it subverts Western society's mainstream view of what should be acceptable or safe, said Marcella Gilbert, a Cheyenne River elder and former foster village administrator.

"They impose their systems on our people," Gilbert said.

On the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, the waiting list for an affordable home is hundreds of people long.

Federally recognized tribes across the country and in South Dakota can apply for funds to build houses on their land. But Sharon Vogel, the housing director for the Cheyenne River Housing Development Authority, said those dollars aren't guaranteed every year and it's highly competitive.

"You can have a great application but you could lose just on the fact that you won an award the year before," Vogel said.

That leaves families trying to find housing with few options. They may have to leave the reservation, resort to homelessness or crowd together with extended family and grandparents in their homes.

Bruner has 18 family members living in her four-bedroom house. Three of her children lived in her home along with their several children because they couldn't find stable housing.

One of her daughters found housing earlier this year and moved out, leaving a bedroom that was quickly filled by the grandchildren sleeping in the living room.

Changing expectations hurt parental reunification confidence, ICWA directors say

As parents work through their reunification case plans, social service experts say the state DSS or the courts can change or add requirements for parents to complete.

Juanita Scherich, the ICWA coordinator for the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said sometimes it feels like the state wants to drag out the requirements by changing plans.

"When they do that, then it's kind of hard because you have more things you've got to work on," she said, explaining sometimes the state will ask a parent already working one job to find another more suitable job.

Scherich couldn't say how often the state adds or changes requirements to parental case plans.

David Simmons, the government affairs and advocacy director for the National Indian Child Welfare Association, is critical of parental case plans. Parents are set up for failure when they can't access the required training or classes, he said.

Items not tied to the original reason children were removed from their family are oftentimes added to a parent's case plan. And when those expectations and requirements are changed, parents can get discouraged, Blackbird said.

"I try to encourage them more to get in there and tell them, 'You're doing good,'" the Crow Creek ICWA director said. "They need to hear that encouragement."

State officials say if the state does have a role in keeping families together and healthy, then that involves treating root causes to prevent family separation. That includes education and ensuring parents stay committed to the family unit and their children, said state Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff.

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"Just building a more robust foster system seems like we're only treating the symptoms," Althoff 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.
Annie Todd covers state politics for the Argus Leader in Sioux Falls. She was born and raised in Colorado and graduated from the University of Wyoming.

State board awards \$2.38 million in low-interest business loans

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - NOVEMBER 9, 2023 4:16 PM

The state Board of Economic Development approved two business loans this week totaling \$2.38 million. The board met Wednesday and approved a \$1.8 million Revolving Economic Development & Initiative (REDI) loan for Southfork Investments LLC to buy and improve a building, and a \$575,000 SD Worksloan for Harris Machine Co. to buy equipment. Harris Machine, a manufacturing company in Aberdeen, was co-founded by Jay Harris, who's listed in public corporate filings as the organizer of Southfork Investments. The loan programs are administered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development. The REDI Fund offers low-interest loans to promote economic growth and job creation, covering up to 45% of a project's cost. Projects can include land purchases, site improvements, construction, acquisition or renovation of a building, or machinery and equipment purchases. The board has approved five REDI fund loans this year totaling \$8.71 million. The SD Works program offers loans to businesses for construction, buying equipment and general expenses. The board has approved 13 SD Works loans so far this year totaling \$8.04 million.

Veterans' health care coverage expanded by Biden administration

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - NOVEMBER 10, 2023 6:15 AM

Ahead of Veterans Day, Biden administration officials said Friday the Department of Veterans Affairs will expand health care coverage for certain groups of veterans and their families and create new programs meant to make care more accessible.

The VA will make coverage of certain toxic burn pit-related conditions available sooner than anticipated. Family members of veterans who served at North Carolina's Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune from 1953-1987 will be eligible to have the costs of treating Parkinson's disease. And all World War II veterans will be eligible for no-cost health care, including at nursing homes, the department said in a series of news releases.

The administration will also create a new graduate medical education program to help expand health care availability for veterans in rural, tribal and other underserved communities, the department said. And the VA will spend \$5 million on an advertising campaign aimed at having more veterans sign up for services.

"As we head into Veterans Day, we're reminded of the fundamental promise that our country makes to anyone who signs up to serve in the military: If you fight for us, we'll fight for you," Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher told reporters on a Thursday call in advance of the announcements.

The administration announced five changes meant to expand veterans' benefits.

The VA will speed up coverage for burn pit exposure that was part of a bipartisan law passed last year. The law, which provides health care benefits to veterans exposed to toxic chemicals from burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan and certain other veterans, was written to be phased in over no more than 10 years.

But President Joe Biden is directing the VA to make all affected veterans eligible for expanded benefits by early next year, according to a White House fact sheet.

The Camp Lejeune Family Member Program will be expanded to cover Parkinson's disease. The program, which covers a host of conditions related to the contaminated drinking water at the base, did not previously include Parkinson's.

Veterans of World War II who served anytime from Dec. 7, 1941, to the end of 1946, are entitled to no-

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cost VA health care, meaning no co-pays or monthly premiums, the department said. That includes care at nursing homes.

To expand availability, the department is also creating a pilot program to reimburse residents and residency programs, including those outside of VA facilities, that serve veteran patients. The program would fund 100 physicians in rural, tribal and underserved communities, according to a VA news release.

And to encourage veterans to take advantage of their benefits, the department is planning a national advertising campaign focused on "some of the most tangible, cost-saving benefits" veterans are entitled to, according to the VA.

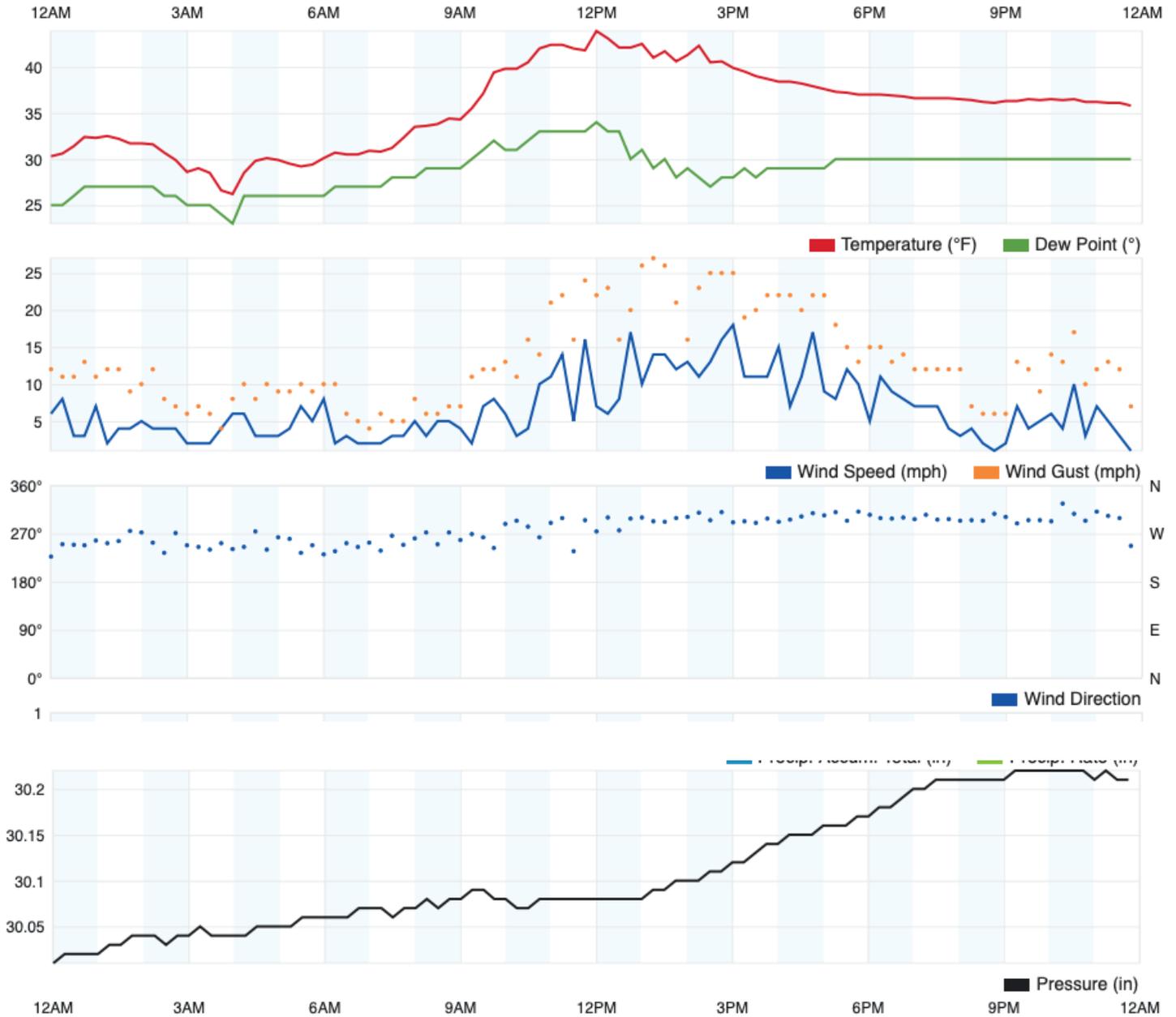
The multimedia campaign will tout the low-cost or no-cost health care, education, home loan and memorial service programs, the VA said.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Fri Nov 10	Sat Nov 11	Sun Nov 12	Mon Nov 13	Tue Nov 14	Wed Nov 15	Thu Nov 16
40°F	49°F	57°F	58°F	63°F	58°F	53°F
26°F	29°F	29°F	42°F	35°F	40°F	33°F
WNW	ESE	SSW	SSE	SSW	S	S
6 MPH	11 MPH	19 MPH	24 MPH	15 MPH	11 MPH	16 MPH



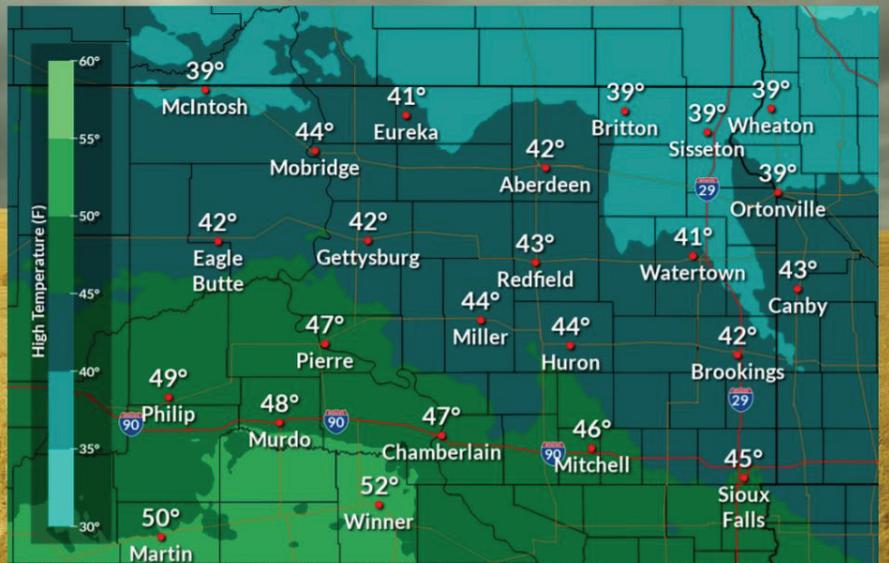
Winds Diminishing Overnight, Cool on Friday

November 9, 2023

1:41 PM

- Winds diminishing this evening and through the overnight hours.
- Isolated snow, sleet, and rain ending later this afternoon.
- Lows in the 20s tonight.
- Highs in the 30s and 40s on Friday
- Warming trend starting on Saturday.
- Highs in the 50s and 60s next week.

High Temperatures on Friday



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The strong northwest winds and isolated wintry precipitation will end later this afternoon and through the overnight hours. Friday will feature less wind but also one more day of cool temperatures. A warming trend starts on Saturday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 44 °F at 12:01 PM

Low Temp: 26 °F at 4:00 AM

Wind: 27 mph at 1:10 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 47 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 69 in 1954

Record Low: -7 in 1896

Average High: 45

Average Low: 22

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.31

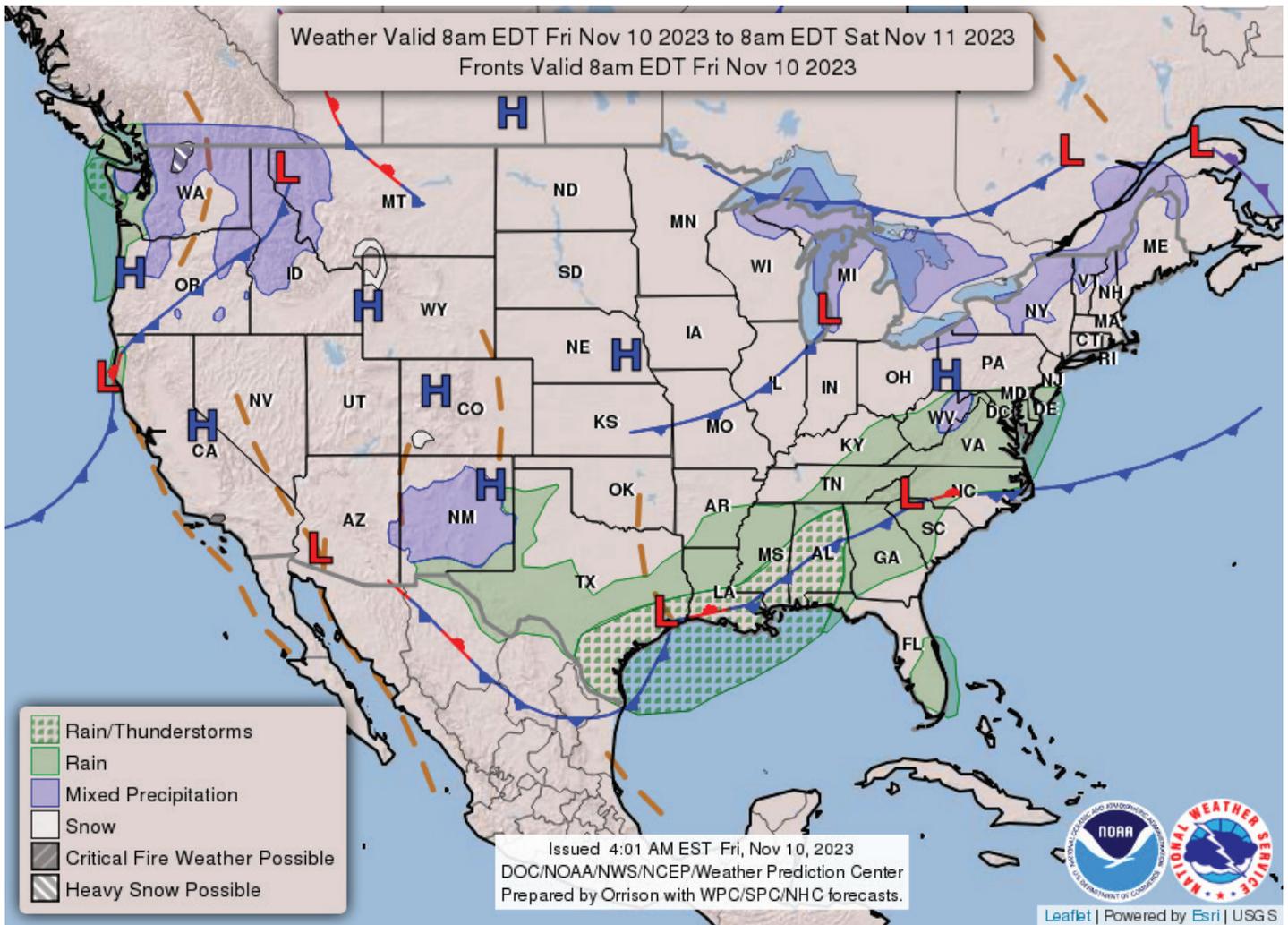
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.17

Average Precip to date: 20.78

Precip Year to Date: 23.15

Sunset Tonight: 5:09:48 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:24:11 AM



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Today in Weather History

November 10th, 1998: Heavy snow fell across central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota from the early morning hours of the 9th into the late afternoon hours of the 10th. Heavy snow also fell across west-central Minnesota from late in the evening on the 9th to the early morning hours of the 10th. Snowfall amounts ranged from 6 to 14 inches. Early in the storm, much of the precipitation fell as rain, freezing rain, and heavy wet snow. During the early morning hours of the 10th, northwest winds increased to 20 to 50 mph and gusted at times to 60 mph. These high winds brought widespread blizzard conditions into the late evening hours of the 10th. On both the 10th and 11th, most area schools were closed, along with many highways, including Highways 12 and 83.

Interstates 29 and 90 were also closed due to slick roads and near-zero visibilities. Hundreds of vehicles were stranded in this storm, with many people needing rescue, and many motorists slid off the streets. There were also numerous accidents, with a few resulting in injuries. Due to the ice buildup from the rain, freezing rain, and wet snow early in the storm, along with the high winds, many tree limbs, some trees, and power lines and poles were brought down, which resulted in multiple power outages across the region. The area most affected by power outages was north of a line from Mobridge to Ipswich, along Highway 212, to the North Dakota border. Some 25 cities were affected by power outages. Hosmer was without power for over 40 hours. At South Shore, a family lost power for 120 hours. A lineman tried to get to the home twice but could not because of the low visibility. A teenager was also lost overnight near South Shore while he was hunting with friends. He was found at 8 am the next morning. In Watertown, two people were injured in an accident. Several of the downed trees across parts of the area blocked traffic for a time. Numerous businesses were closed, and activities were canceled on the 9th and 10th. In Pierre, the strong winds ripped the canopy off the Amoco gas station. The blizzard brought the fifth-lowest barometric pressure on record to Watertown. Some snowfall amounts from this horrible blizzard included; 15.4 inches near Bryant; 12.5 inches in Webster; 12.3 in Pierre; 10.8 in Sisseton; 10.5 inches near Summit; 10.0 inches in Pollock and near Onida; and 9.0 in Blunt and Conde.

1915 - An unusually late season tornado struck the central Kansas town of Great Bend killing eleven persons along its 35 mile track. The tornado destroyed 160 homes in Great Bend killing 11 persons and causing a million dollars damage. Hundreds of dead ducks dropped from the sky northeast of the track's end. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - Another freshwater fury hit the Great Lakes. A large ore carrier on Lake Superior, the Edmund Fitzgerald, sank near Crisp Point with the loss of its crew of 29 men. Eastern Upper Michigan and coastal Lower Michigan were hardest hit by the storm, which produced wind gusts to 71 at Sault Ste Marie MI, and gusts to 78 mph at Grand Rapids MI. Severe land and road erosion occurred along the Lake Michigan shoreline. A popular hit song by Gordon Lightfoot was inspired by the storm. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A cold front brought snow to the Appalachian Region and freezing temperatures to the central U.S. Up to nine inches of snow blanketed Garrett County of extreme western Maryland. Freezing temperatures were reported as far south as El Paso TX and San Angelo TX. Gale force winds lashed the Middle Atlantic Coast and the coast of southern New England. Thunderstorms brought fire quenching rains to Alabama, and produced large hail and damaging winds to eastern North Carolina. Ahead of the cold front, seven cities in Florida and Georgia reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 80s. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1975: The SS Edmund Fitzgerald sinks 17 miles northwest of Whitefish Point, at the northeastern tip of Michigan's Upper Peninsula on Lake Superior. While the sinking cause is unknown, strong winds and high waves likely played a significant role. The crew of 29 members was lost from this event.

2002: The second-largest November tornado outbreak on record over the eastern United States occurred during the Veterans Day weekend of November 9-11th, 2002. Seventy-six tornadoes were reported in seventeen states. Of the 76 tornadoes, almost one out of every six was a killer, resulting in 36 fatalities.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WONDERS AND MIRACLES

Have you ever planted a seed in a jar, placed it in a window where the sun's warmth and light were at work and watched in "wonder" as God brought life to that small "package?" Left in darkness, little, if anything, would have happened. But when the seed was placed in soil, nourished by the sun and the life-giving elements in the soil, its thirst quenched by water, a "miracle" took place. It "did" what God created it to do.

Some might question the difference between the words, "wonder" and "miracle." We often watch in awe when we do not understand what is going on around us. Sometimes things that "amaze" us are easily explained by someone who knows more than we do. Then, when we understand what happened, we may still be filled with wonder, but it is no longer a mystery. It's like God's love for us. We wonder "why" and "how" He loves until we know Jesus.

A miracle, however, is some event or action that cannot be explained. It is an extraordinary event that demonstrates God's power. Without giving us any warning or making any announcement, He "invades what is going on" and unpredictably changes things to let us know "who is in charge!" What has been, no longer is, and what will be cannot be predicted. It was obvious in the journey of the Israelites: God unexpectedly saved and protected them. So, the Psalmist wrote, "Remember His miracles." It was His grace that saved them.

But what about miracles in our lives? "By His grace, we can be saved." Like them, He will save us, too. Now, that's a miracle all can enjoy!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your love, mercy, grace, and salvation. They are so undeserved and yet are such strong evidence of your love. May we never forget these miracles! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced. Psalm 105:5



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 14 Hrs 22 Mins 23
DRAW: 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 1 Days 13 Hrs 37
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.09.23

2 15 22 35 39 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 13 Hrs 52 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.08.23

9 17 20 27 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$49,000

NEXT 1 Days 13 Hrs 52
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.08.23

5 20 22 27 63 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 14 Hrs 21
DRAW: Mins 23 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 1 Days 14 Hrs 21
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class AA=

SoDak 16=

State Qualifier=

Aberdeen Central def. Pierre T F Riggs High School, 24-26, 12-25, 25-23, 25-21, 15-8

Brandon Valley def. Huron, 25-17, 25-17, 25-15

Harrisburg def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-19, 25-17, 25-12

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Douglas, 25-11, 25-18, 25-14

Sioux Falls Lincoln High School def. Brookings, 27-25, 25-13, 25-22

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, 25-23, 18-25, 25-17, 25-13

Sioux Falls Washington def. Yankton, 25-15, 25-18, 25-15

Watertown def. Spearfish, 22-25, 25-11, 25-21, 25-21

PREP FOOTBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class 9A=

Championship=

Warner 76, Deubrook 54

Class 9AA=

Championship=

Parkston 12, Howard 7

Class 9B=

Championship=

Avon 32, Faulkton 30

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

Palestinians stream out of combat zone in north Gaza as Israel opens window for safe passage

By NAJIB JOBAIN, BASSEM MROUE and DAVID RISING Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Thousands of Palestinians streamed onto Gaza's only highway Friday, fleeing the combat zone in the north after Israel announced a window for safe passage, as officials in the enclave said the Palestinian death toll surpassed 11,000 people.

Amid an intensifying campaign of airstrikes and ground battles in Gaza City, the search for safety in the besieged enclave has grown increasingly desperate. Tens of thousands have walked south, where they face the prospect of ongoing bombardment and dire conditions. Others have crowded into and around hospitals, sleeping in operating rooms and wards.

Gaza medical officials accused Israel of striking near hospitals on Friday, though Israel said at least one was the result of a misfired Palestinian rocket.

Gaza's largest city is the focus of Israel's campaign to crush Hamas following its deadly Oct. 7 surprise incursion.

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BATTLES AROUND HOSPITALS

Early Friday, Israel struck the courtyard and the obstetrics department of Shifa Hospital, where tens of thousands of people are sheltering, according to Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesperson at the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. A video at the scene recorded the sound of incoming fire waking people up in their makeshift shelters in the courtyard, followed by screams for an ambulance.

The Israeli army has alleged that Hamas hides in and under hospitals and that it has set up a command center under Shifa — claims the militant group and hospital staff deny.

The director of Shifa said Israel demanded the facility be evacuated, but he said there was nowhere for such a large number of patients to go.

"Where are we going to evacuate them?" Director Mohammed Abu Selmia asked in an interview on the television network Al Jazeera.

The Health Ministry later said one person had been killed at Shifa and several were wounded. Another strike near the Al-Nasr Medical Center, which includes two hospitals for children, killed two people, according to the ministry.

In all, Gaza health officials said strikes were carried out near four hospitals overnight and early Friday.

A senior Israeli security official said that initial findings indicated that one strike at Shifa was the result of a misfire by militants. The military is conducting a review. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

At Shifa, families are sleeping in hospital rooms, emergency rooms, surgical theaters and the maternity ward — or on the streets outside, according to Wafaa Abu Hajjaj, a Palestinian journalist at the hospital, as well as several people who recently left.

Daily food distributions has helped a tiny number for a time, but there has been no bread in recent days, they said. Water is scarce and usually polluted, and few people can bathe.

World Health Organization spokesperson Margaret Harris said 20 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are no longer functioning, including a pediatric hospital where children had been receiving care such as dialysis and life support — "things that you cannot possibly evacuate them safely with."

CIVILIANS FLEE SOUTH

More than two-thirds of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled their homes since the war began. On Friday, a steady stream of civilians used both sides of Gaza's main north-south highway.

Parents walked with small children, some evacuees crammed into covered donkey carts with possessions piled on the roof, and others rode on bicycles.

Since last weekend, the Israeli military has set aside several hours a day to enable civilians to escape northern Gaza, and it announced a six-hour window Friday.

A day earlier, the White House said Israel agreed to implement a brief humanitarian pause each day — in what appeared to be an effort to formalize and expand the process. Israel has also agreed to open a second route for people fleeing, the White House said.

In all, Israel estimated more than 850,000 of the 1.1 people in northern Gaza have left, according to military spokesman Jonathan Conricus, who called the pauses "quick humanitarian windows" that allow southward movement "while we are fighting."

U.N. expert for the Palestinian territories Francesca Albanese called the pauses "cynical and cruel," saying it was just enough "to let people breathe and remember what is the sound of life without bombing, before starting bombing them again."

RISING DEATH TOLLS

More than 10,800 Palestinians have been killed since the war began, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths. Another 2,650 people have been reported missing.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that "far too many" Palestinians have died and suffered and that while recent Israeli steps to try to minimize civilian harm are positive, they are not enough.

Though U.S. President Joe Biden and others have challenged the figures from the Gaza Health Ministry as exaggerated, Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Leaf told American lawmakers this week that it was

“very possible” the numbers were even higher than reported.

More than 1,400 people have been killed in Israel, mainly in the initial Hamas attack, and 41 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza since the ground offensive began.

Palestinian militants have continued to fire rockets into Israel, and an attack on Tel Aviv wounded at least two people Friday, said Yossi Elkabetz, a paramedic with Israel’s rescue services. Hamas claimed credit.

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.

Mroue reported from Beirut and Rising from Bangkok. Associated Press writers Nick Perry in Wellington, New Zealand, Jamey Keaten in Geneva and Julia Frankel in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Full AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Live updates | Blinken says more needs to be done to save Palestinian lives and for more aid

By The Associated Press undefined

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken says “far too many” Palestinians have died and more needs to be done to save lives and get aid where it’s most needed.

Blinken said in New Delhi Friday that the U.S. “appreciates” Israel’s steps to minimize civilian casualties but that’s not enough.

He said the U.S. has proposed additional ideas to the Israelis about how to accomplish that including longer “humanitarian pauses” and expanding the amount of assistance getting into Gaza.

Separately, United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk on Friday called for an investigation into what he called the “indiscriminate effect” of Israel’s bombardment and shelling in densely populated areas in the Gaza Strip.

Turk urged Israel to end “the use of such methods and means of warfare,” adding that high levels of civilian casualties raises “serious concerns that these amount to disproportionate attacks in breach of international humanitarian law.”

Blinken’s and Turk’s remarks come as the Israeli military pushed deeper into dense urban neighborhoods in its battle with Hamas militants.

The fighting is prompting increasing numbers of civilians to flee south, and growing numbers of people have been living in and around hospitals, hoping it will be safer than their homes or United Nations shelters in the north, several of which have been hit repeatedly.

The World Health Organization said Friday that 20 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals are no longer functioning, including a pediatric hospital that has stopped operations after a reported Israeli strike in the area.

Gaza’s largest city is the focus of Israel’s campaign to crush Hamas following its deadly Oct. 7 incursion in southern Israel that set off the war, now in its second month.

The number of Palestinians killed in the war has risen to 11,078 including more than 4,500 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 Hamas attack, and about 240 hostages were taken from Israel into Gaza by the militant group.

Currently:

- Fights in bread lines, despair in shelters: War threatens to unravel Gaza’s close-knit society
- French far-right leader Marine Le Pen raises a storm over her plan to march against antisemitism
- Clashes over Israel-Hamas war shatter students’ sense of safety on US college campuses
- Jewish refugees from Israel find comfort and companionship in a countryside camp in Hungary
- 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:

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HAMAS-RUN HEALTH MINISTRY SAYS 11,078 PALESTINIANS HAVE DIED IN GAZA

The Hamas run-Health Ministry says the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza has to 11,078, including 4,506 children and 3,027 women.

The vast majority have been killed in Israeli airstrikes that have pounded the enclave following Hamas' assault on the enclave.

The ministry said in an online statement Friday that another 27,490 Palestinians in Gaza have been wounded.

GREECE READY TO ASSIST CYPRUS' IN GAZA MARITIME CORRIDOR INITIATIVE

ATHENS, Greece — Greece's prime minister says his country is ready to "tangibly participate" in Cyprus' initiative to set up a maritime corridor shipping a constant flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said after talks with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides Friday that both Greece and Cyprus can act as "credible intermediaries" in the Middle East given their strong relations with both Israel and the Arab world.

Mitsotakis called the Cypriot initiative a "very well thought out" proposal, despite the many technical hurdles that still need to be overcome.

Christodoulides told a Paris aid conference on Thursday that Cyprus' proximity to Gaza of only 241 miles combined with open lines of communication with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt enhance the initiative's chances for success.

The initiative dubbed "Amalthea" is composed of five parts including the collection, inspection and storage of humanitarian aid in Cyprus, its later transfer by ship possibly from Larnaca port and finally its offloading and distribution in Gaza.

Christodoulides told the conference that a specific plan that has already been drafted contains "short, mid and long-term solutions and technical arrangements."

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION SAYS MORE THAN HALF OF GAZA'S HOSPITALS NOT OPERATING

GENEVA — The World Health Organization says 20 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are no longer functioning, including a pediatric hospital that has stopped operations after a reported Israeli strike in the area.

WHO spokeswoman Dr. Margaret Harris said Friday that Rantisi Children's hospital in the north of the enclave was no longer operating, and it was not immediately clear what has happened to the patients inside.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said earlier that Israeli forces had struck overnight the area around Shifa Medical Complex, the largest hospital in Gaza, killing six Palestinians, and bombed areas near several other hospitals including the Rantisi hospital.

Harris said WHO does not try to assign responsibility for strikes.

Harris said some children had been receiving care such as dialysis and life support which doesn't allow for their safe evacuation.

She added that "hospitals never should be a target."

ALBANIAN PRIME MINISTER TO OFFER GAZA PEACE PLAN

TIRANA, Albania - Albania says it will offer a plan at the Paris Peace Forum to end the Gaza conflict "before it spirals out of control."

The office of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama said Friday the country stands firmly with Israel against Hamas but also called on Israel to defend itself "in line with international humanitarian law."

The plan calls for the Arab League and Turkey to secure the safe release of all hostages held by Hamas following a ceasefire. Israel would then withdraw all its forces from Gaza, with an Arab League-led international force assuming control to facilitate reconstruction and the transition of governance from Hamas to the Palestinian Authority.

Rama said the an international donor's conference to refinance Gaza's reconstruction should be organized.

HEZBOLLAH SAYS 7 OF ITS FIGHTERS HAVE BEEN KILLED

BEIRUT — Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group said seven of its fighters have been killed, but didn't specify where they died other than to say that they were "martyred on the road to Jerusalem."

A Hezbollah official and a Lebanese security official said the seven fighters were killed in neighboring

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Syria Friday morning. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Pro-government Syrian media outlets reported an Israeli airstrike on the central province of Homs early Friday.

Hezbollah has been fighting in Syria along with Syrian government forces where they have helped tip the balance of power in his favor during Syria's 12-year conflict.

The Israeli military said earlier Friday that it struck targets in Syria following a drone strike on the Red Sea city of Eilat saying that it was fired from Syria.

Since Oct. 8, they have been exchanging fire with Israeli troops along the Lebanon-Israel border.

The latest deaths raises to 68 the number of Hezbollah fighters who have been killed since the Israel-Hamas war began last month.

By Bassem Mroue in Beirut.

ISRAELI MILITARY SAYS IT HAS ARRESTED 41 PALESTINIANS IN WEST BANK RAID

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military says it has arrested 41 Palestinians in another large-scale raid in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli military said Friday that 14 of those arrested in the previous evening's raid were militants.

The Israeli military said it also destroyed the homes of two militants who it said carried out an attack that killed an Israeli woman and seriously wounded an Israeli man in August. At the time, an offshoot of the secular nationalist Fatah party, the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, claimed responsibility for the attack,

Israeli forces "sealed" a shop in Hebron which they said was used to print "incendiary material for Hamas." They also raided three West Bank refugee camps where they confiscated weapons.

The Israeli military says it has arrested 1,540 Palestinians in the West Bank since the start of the war, identifying 930 of them as affiliated with Hamas. The Palestinian Prisoner's Club, which represents Palestinian detainees, puts the numbers much higher, at 90 detained Thursday night and 2400 arrested in the West Bank since the start of the war.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS CHIEF CALLS FOR PROBE INTO ISRAELI ATTACKS IN POPULATED AREAS

AMMAN, Jordan — United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk is calling for an investigation into what he called the "indiscriminate effect" of Israel's bombardment and shelling in densely populated areas in the Gaza Strip.

Speaking in the Jordanian capital Friday, Turk said Israel "must immediately end the use of such methods and means of warfare and the attacks must be investigated."

He said the high levels of civilian casualties and the wide destruction of civilian infrastructure raises "serious concerns that these amount to disproportionate attacks in breach of international humanitarian law."

Turk pointed to strikes on and near hospitals as being "particularly intense," adding that any use by Palestinian armed groups of civilians or civilian structures to shield themselves from attack contravenes the laws of war.

But he said such conduct by Palestinian armed groups "does not absolve Israel of its obligation to ensure that civilians are spared."

U.N. OFFICIAL SAYS ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR HAS CAUSED SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE IN LEBANON

BEIRUT — The United Nations humanitarian coordinator in Lebanon says the spillover of the Hamas-Israel war has already caused "significant damage" in Lebanon where Hezbollah and allied groups have been clashing with Israeli forces on the border for more than a month.

Imran Riza said in a statement Friday that there have been "concerning signs of escalating tensions" along the border.

Riza said there have been "alarming attacks killing and injuring civilians in South Lebanon, including women, children, and media personnel" and much damage to private property, public infrastructure and farmland which as forces more than 25,000 to be displaced.

On Sunday, an Israeli airstrike hit a car driving between the towns of Ainata and Aitaroun and killed four civilians, including three children and their grandmother, and wounded the childrens' mother. An Israeli

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military statement later said the car had been "identified as transporting terrorists" and that it was reviewing "allegations that there were civilians in the vehicle."

BLINKEN SAYS MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO SAVE PALESTINIAN LIVES

NEW DELHI -- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken says "far too many" Palestinians have died and suffered as Israel wages relentless war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and that while recent Israeli steps to try to minimize civilian harm are positive they are not nearly enough.

Speaking in New Delhi at the end of an intense nine-day diplomatic tour of the Middle East and Asia, Blinken said Friday that the U.S. "appreciates" Israel's formalization of pauses in their military operations to allow Palestinians to move from northern to southern Gaza and its creation of a second safe corridor for them to use to escape harm. But, he said much more needs to be done.

Blinken said Israel's steps "will save lives and will enable more assistance to get to Palestinians in need," but at the same time, "much more needs to be done to protect civilians and to make sure that humanitarian assistance reaches them."

The U.S. top diplomat said "far too many Palestinians have been killed, far too many have suffered these past weeks" and that everything possible should be done to prevent them harm and maximize the assistance they need.

He said the U.S. has proposed additional ideas to the Israelis about how to accomplish that. U.S. officials have said they would like to see Israel introduce longer "humanitarian pauses" that would cover areas wider than just the two corridors as well as exponentially expanding the amount of assistance getting into Gaza from Egypt by increasing the flow of trucks carrying food, water, medicine, shelter and other supplies.

GAZA OFFICIALS SEEK PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN'S HOSPITALS

BEIRUT - The spokesman for the Hamas-run Health Ministry says a main children's hospital is being repeatedly targeted putting the lives of children, staff, and displaced people in danger.

Ashraf al-Qidra said in a statement that ambulances cannot reach Al-Nasr Children's Hospital to evacuate casualties because it is being targeted.

Al-Qidra called on the United Nations and the International Committee to be present in Al-Rantisi Hospital and Al-Nasr Children's hospitals to protect them and make room for ambulances to evacuate the wounded.

He said authorities in Gaza have made all attempts to keep health services running, but that there are only a "few hours" remaining until the hospitals in Gaza and northern Gaza stop providing services.

Al-Qidra appealed for Arab and Muslim countries "and the free people of the world" to take immediate action to bring medical supplies and fuel into hospitals before "the major disaster occurs."

TURKEY URGES FOR MORE AID TRUCKS DAILY INTO GAZA

ANKARA, Turkey - Turkey's president says he told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that the number of aid trucks entering Gaza each day should be increased to at least 500.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told reporters Friday after returning from a trip to Uzbekistan that he raised the issue with Blinken during talks earlier this week.

Erdogan said Blinken's approach to the proposal -conveyed to him by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan in Ankara - was "positive."

Erdogan was quoted as saying by NTV television and other media that the current number of aid trucks crossing into Gaza is "20 to 30 trucks" but that he proposed to increase that to "at least 500 trucks."

Erdogan said Turkey wanted to address a shortage of ambulances in Gaza and was cooperating with other countries to supply food and medicine. He added that Ankara was also ready to treat Gaza civilians with chronic illnesses, such as cancer, in its hospitals.

ISRAEL DEMOLISHES HOME OF FAMILY AFTER BOY ACCUSED OF STABBING

JERUSALEM — Israeli security forces have demolished the east Jerusalem home of a Palestinian family whose 13-year-old son has been accused of stabbing an Israeli police officer earlier this year, a case that has drawn attention to Israel's tactic of punitive demolitions.

The United States Office of Palestinian Affairs condemned the demolition on Friday, saying that "an entire family should not lose their home because of the actions of one individual."

The Zalabani family says that the demolition happened Wednesday. It comes as tensions in Israeli-

annexed east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank surge over Israel's devastating campaign in Gaza and deadly raids against militants in the northern West Bank, such as Thursday's operation in the Jenin refugee camp that killed 13 Palestinians, most of them alleged militants.

Basel Zalabani, Mohammed's father, said that Israeli forces had arrested him and his other 18-year-old son Yazan ahead of the demolition. He was released, he said, after officers beat him repeatedly over several hours. His son remains in custody.

"Of course we've been on edge, anxious and waiting for this to happen for several months," said 45-year-old Zalabani. "But when it happens, it's even harder than you'd expect."

Rights watchdog describe such punitive home demolitions as collective punishment, leaving uninvolved parents, siblings and spouses homeless. Israel's far-right government is more aggressively pursuing the policy, which it defends as a deterrent against militant attacks.

UN RAPPOREUR SAYS 4-HOUR DAILY PAUSE IS CRUEL

ADELAIDE, Australia — Francesca Albanese, the U.N. special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, described Israel's decision to allow a four-hour humanitarian pause each day in combat operations in northern Gaza to allow civilians to flee to the south as "very cynical and cruel."

"There has been continuous bombings, 6,000 bombs every week on the Gaza Strip, on this tiny piece of land where people are trapped and the destruction is massive. There won't be any way back after what Israel is doing to the Gaza Strip," Albanese told reporters in Adelaide, Australia, on Friday.

"So four hours cease-fire, yes, to let people breathe and to remember what is the sound of life without bombing before starting bombing them again. It's very cynical and cruel."

Blinken says 'far too many' Palestinians have died as Israel wages relentless war on Hamas

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that "far too many" Palestinians have died and suffered as Israel wages a relentless war against the militant Hamas group in the Gaza Strip. He urged Israel to minimize harm to civilians and maximize humanitarian assistance that reaches them.

Speaking to reporters in New Delhi, Blinken said recent Israeli moves to improve dire conditions in Gaza as its military pushes deeper into the strip — including pauses in military operations to allow Palestinians to move from northern to southern Gaza and the creation of a second safe corridor — are positive but they are not nearly enough.

"Much more needs to be done to protect civilians and to make sure that humanitarian assistance reaches them," he said. "Far too many Palestinians have been killed, far too many have suffered these past weeks, and we want to do everything possible to prevent harm to them and to maximize the assistance that gets to them."

Blinken spoke as he wrapped up an intense nine-day diplomatic tour of the Middle East and Asia — his second frenetic Mideast trip since the war began with Hamas' deadly incursion into southern Israel on Oct. 7.

The tour focused largely on the Israel-Hamas war amid growing international outrage over the destruction wrought on Gaza and demands for an immediate cease-fire. Neither Israel nor the United States support a cease-fire because they argue Hamas would take advantage of it to regroup and launch new terror attacks.

Blinken said the U.S. has come up with additional proposals how better to protect civilians but did not elaborate.

U.S. officials have said they would like to see Israel introduce longer "humanitarian pauses" in areas beyond the two established safe passage and exponentially expand the amount of assistance getting into Gaza from Egypt by increasing the flow of truck convoys.

The U.S. also remains resolute to secure the release of Israeli and other hostages held by Hamas, get

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all foreigners who want to leave Gaza out, prevent the violence from spreading to the broader region, and to begin planning for what a post-conflict Gaza will look like, Blinken said.

Starting last week, Blinken's marathon mission took him to eight countries — Israel, Jordan, Cyprus, Iraq, Turkey, Japan, South Korea and India — as well as the occupied West Bank. But as he did on his previous Mideast tour last month, he encountered skepticism and outright resistance.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv last Friday rejected the idea of "humanitarian pauses," saying military pressure on Hamas could not be eased.

"We are going full steam ahead," Netanyahu said shortly after Blinken warned that Palestinians were being driven toward further radicalism that could perpetuate the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict and leave Israel at greater risk.

Then, Arab foreign ministers accused Israel of war crimes, demanding nothing less than an immediate full-on cease-fire and dismissing Blinken's call for post-conflict planning as naïve and premature while civilian deaths were rising.

"The Arab countries demand an immediate cease-fire that will end this war," Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi told Blinken in Amman on Saturday.

Diplomatically, things weren't looking much better.

During Blinken's trip, both Jordan and Turkey recalled their ambassadors to Israel in protest and made clear that Israeli envoys to their countries would not be welcomed back until the conflict was over.

Over the weekend, massive pro-Palestinian demonstrations against the war and U.S. support for Israel rocked capitals around the world, fueling fears of unrest amid a global spike in both antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents.

By the time Blinken had visited Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, made a brief stop in Cyprus, and flown on to Iraq and Turkey on Sunday, it appeared he had won little, if any, support for most of his proposals.

Privately, however, U.S. officials said they were making headway with Netanyahu on the humanitarian pauses and increased aid to Gaza and that the Arab states would in the interim support temporary pauses.

Leaving Ankara on Monday, Blinken acknowledged his efforts remained "a work in progress" while U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, insisted prospects for at least some success were not so bleak.

In Tokyo on Tuesday, where Blinken attended a Japanese-hosted meeting of foreign ministers from the Group of Seven leading industrial democracies, there were fears that the bloc, which has overcome differences to remain united against Russia's war in Ukraine, might split over the Middle East.

Both Japan and France, along with the European Union, had taken less forceful stances in support of Israel. The French had voted in favor of a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding a cease-fire that the U.S. has vetoed. The other G7 members had all abstained on a similar but non-binding General Assembly resolution that the U.S. had voted against.

Behind the scenes, U.S. officials said momentum was shifting.

Israeli officials were beginning to warm to the idea that temporary rolling pauses could both benefit Israel militarily and show its willingness to ease civilian hardship. In the meantime, Arab leaders, including Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, were stepping up quiet efforts to keep the conflict from spreading.

After Blinken warned of consequences if Iranian-backed militias continued to attack U.S. facilities in Iraq and Syria on Sunday in Baghdad, al-Sudani had travelled to Tehran and met Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a move U.S. officials suggested was positive.

And, in Tokyo, after a forceful closed-door intervention by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, the G7 coalesced around a strong statement of support for all of Blinken's priorities, including an unequivocal condemnation of Hamas and backing for Israel's right to defend itself.

They also backed humanitarian pauses and corridors, post-conflict planning for Gaza, and an eventual restoration of a process to bring lasting peace through a two-state solution.

As Blinken concluded bilateral talks with South Korean leaders in Seoul and made his way to India, Israel

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announced daily four-hour humanitarian pauses, with a three hours' notice, and the opening of a second safe corridor for Palestinians to leave northern Gaza to seek safety in the south.

"We appreciate the fact that" Israel finally agreed to the pauses, Blinken said as he stopped in New Delhi, more than a week after starting his mission.

"As I've said, from the start, this is a process and it's not always flipping the light switch," he said. "But we have seen progress. We just need to see more of it."

Biden and Xi will meet Wednesday for talks on trade, Taiwan and managing fraught US-China relations

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping will meet Wednesday in California for talks on trade, Taiwan and managing fraught U.S.-Chinese relations in the first engagement between the leaders of the world's two biggest economies in nearly a year, Biden administration officials said.

The White House has said for weeks that it anticipated Biden and Xi would meet on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco, but negotiations went down to the eve of the gathering, which kicks off Saturday.

The officials, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said Friday that the leaders would meet in the San Francisco Bay area but declined to offer further details because of security concerns. Thousands of protesters are expected to descend on San Francisco during the summit.

The meeting is not expected to lead to many, if any, major announcements, and differences between the two powers certainly won't be resolved. Instead, one official said, Biden is looking toward "managing the competition, preventing the downside risk of conflict and ensuring channels of communication are open."

The agenda includes no shortage of difficult issues.

Differences in the already complicated U.S.-Chinese relationship have only sharpened in the last year, with Beijing bristling over new U.S. export controls on advanced technology; Biden ordering the shooting down of a Chinese spy balloon after it traversed the continental United States; and Chinese anger over a stopover in the U.S. by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen earlier this year, among other issues. China claims the island as its territory.

Biden will also likely press Xi on using China's influence on North Korea, during heightened anxiety over an increased pace of ballistic missile tests by North Korea as well as Pyongyang providing munitions to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

The Democratic president is also expected to let Xi know that he would like China to use its burgeoning sway over Iran to make clear that Tehran or its proxies should not take action that could lead to expansion of the Israel-Hamas war. His administration believes the Chinese, a big buyer of Iranian oil, have considerable leverage with Iran, which is a major backer of Hamas.

Biden and Xi last met nearly a year ago on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Bali, Indonesia. In the nearly three-hour meeting, Biden objected directly to China's "coercive and increasingly aggressive actions" toward Taiwan and discussed Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other issues. Xi stressed that "the Taiwan question is at the very core of China's core interests, the bedrock of the political foundation of China-U.S. relations, and the first red line that must not be crossed in China-U.S. relations."

Next week's meeting comes as the United States braces for a potentially bumpy year for U.S.-Chinese relations, with Taiwan set to hold a presidential election in January and the U.S. holding its own presidential election next November.

Beijing sees official American contact with Taiwan as encouragement to make the island's decades-old de facto independence permanent, a step U.S. leaders say they don't support. Under the "One China" policy, the U.S. recognizes Beijing as the government of China and doesn't have diplomatic relations with Taiwan,

but it has maintained that Taipei is an important partner in the Indo-Pacific. Biden intends to reaffirm the U.S. wants no change in the status quo, one official said.

Disinformation experts testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee have warned that Beijing could aim to target the U.S., sowing discord that might influence election results at the local level, especially in districts with large numbers of Chinese-American voters.

The Biden administration has sought to make clear to the Chinese that any actions or interference in the 2024 election "would raise extremely strong concerns from our side," according to one official.

The officials also noted that Biden is determined to restore military-to-military communications that Beijing largely withdrew from after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022.

All the while, the number of unsafe or provocative encounters involving the two nations' ships and aircraft have spiked.

Last month, the U.S. military released a video of a Chinese fighter jet flying within 10 feet (3 meters) of an American B-52 bomber over the South China Sea, nearly causing an accident. Earlier that month, the Pentagon released footage of some of the more than 180 intercepts of U.S. warplanes by Chinese aircraft that occurred in the last two years, part of a trend U.S. military officials call concerning.

The Pentagon has warned that the lack of military-to-military contacts "raises the risk of an operational incident or miscalculation spiraling into crisis or conflict."

The officials also said Biden would underscore U.S. commitment to the Philippines, following a recent episode in which Chinese ships blocked and collided with two Filipino vessels off a contested shoal in the South China Sea.

The Philippines and other neighbors of China are resisting Beijing's sweeping territorial claims over virtually the entire sea.

"I want to be very clear," Biden said in October. "The United States' defense commitment to the Philippines is iron clad."

Both sides appeared to be carefully considering security for the meeting, declining to publicize the venue of the much-anticipated talks.

Thousands of people protesting climate destruction, corporate practices, the Israel-Hamas war and other issues are expected to descend on San Francisco during the summit.

San Francisco Police Department Chief Bill Scott said his department expects several protests a day but doesn't know which ones will materialize where and when. He said the city respects people's right to mobilize peacefully but will not tolerate property destruction, violence or any other crime.

Associated Press writer Janie Har in San Francisco contributed reporting.

Top US and Indian diplomats and defense chiefs discuss security issues, Israel-Hamas war

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The top diplomats and defense chiefs from India and the United States met Friday to discuss security issues in the Indo-Pacific, China and the Israel-Hamas war.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. and India are continuing to "deepen our partnership, deepen our collaboration on everything from emerging technologies to defense to people-to-people ties, as well as our shared diplomacy to try to advance an Indo-Pacific region that's free, that's open, that's prosperous, that's resilient."

He said the two sides discussed the crisis in the Middle East and "we appreciate the fact that from day one India has strongly condemned the attacks of Oct. 7. And as our joint statement makes clear, India and the United States stand with Israel against terrorists."

Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said the situation in the Middle East was a big concern.

While India has condemned the Hamas attack on Israel, it has also tried to balance its position by saying

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that "India has always advocated the resumption of direct negotiations towards establishing a sovereign, independent and viable state of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side-by-side at peace with Israel."

Blinken said he also discussed a diplomatic dispute that erupted when Canada alleged that India was involved in the assassination of a Sikh separatist in Canada.

"These are two of our closest friends and partners and, of course, we want to see them resolving any differences or disputes that they have," Blinken said. "As a friend of both, we think it's very important that India work with Canada on its investigation, and that they find a way to resolve this difference in a cooperative way."

The dispute started when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said there were "credible allegations" of Indian involvement in the killing of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar in suburban Vancouver in western Canada. India rejected the accusation.

Blinken is in Asia engaging in intense diplomacy with regional partners to show unity over Russia's war in Ukraine and other major issues and prevent existing differences on Gaza from deepening.

India and the U.S. have held so-called two-plus-two talks between India's external affairs and defense ministers and the U.S. secretaries of state and defense since 2018 to discuss issues of concern and strengthen bilateral ties.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his Indian counterpart, Rajnath Singh, discussed a roadmap for defense industrial cooperation that will fast-track technology cooperation and co-production of defense systems, India's defense ministry said.

"We're integrating our industrial bases, strengthening our inter-operability, and sharing cutting-edge technology," Austin said in his opening remarks.

Washington expects India to be a leading security provider in the Indo-Pacific region.

Singh said the two countries' partnership is critical for ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States in June, the two sides adopted a policy guide for defense industries to enable them to produce advanced defense systems together and collaborate on research and testing of prototypes.

The two sides also reached an agreement that will allow U.S.-based General Electric to partner with India-based Hindustan Aeronautics to produce jet engines for Indian aircraft in India and the sale of U.S.-made armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones.

Associated Press writer Matt Lee contributed to his story.

Wynn joins Caesars and MGM in reaching tentative deal to avoid a strike by Las Vegas hotel workers

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Over seven months of tense negotiations, mandatory daily room cleanings underscored the big issues that Las Vegas union hotel workers were fighting to address in their first contracts since the pandemic: job security, better working conditions and safety while on the job.

From the onset of bargaining, Ted Pappageorge, the chief contract negotiator for the Culinary Workers Union, had said tens of thousands of workers whose contracts expired earlier this year would be willing to go on strike to make daily room cleanings mandatory.

"Las Vegas needs to be full service," he said last month.

It was a message that Pappageorge and the workers would repeat for months as negotiations ramped up and the union threatened to go on strike if they didn't have contracts by first light on Friday with MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment and Wynn Resorts.

But by dawn Friday, the union had secured tentative labor deals with MGM Resorts, Caesars and Wynn Resorts, narrowly averting a sweeping strike at 18 hotel-casinos along the Strip. Agreements with MGM

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and Caesars — the Strip's two largest employers — came earlier in the week, while the agreement with Wynn Resorts was announced just a few hours before the strike deadline.

In a statement, Wynn Resorts said it was pleased to reach an agreement that "fulfills our shared goal of providing outstanding benefits and overall compensation to our employees in a work environment that is second to none." The agreement covers employees at the company's flagship hotel-casino and Encore Resorts.

Christine Cook, a uniform control attendant at Wynn Resorts, said in a statement provided by the union that her favorite part about the new contract "is the wage increases and the retroactive pay because it will help my family and I have a better future and achieve our dreams."

Terms of the deals weren't immediately released, but the union said in its statement the proposed five-year contracts will provide workers with historic wage increases, reduced workloads and other unprecedented wins — including mandated daily room cleanings.

Before the pandemic, daily room cleanings were routine. Hotel guests could expect fresh bedsheets and new towels by dinnertime if a "Do Not Disturb" sign wasn't hanging on their hotel room doors.

But as social distancing became commonplace in 2020, hotels began to cut back on room cleanings.

More than three years later, the once industry-wide standard has yet to make a full comeback. Some companies say it's because there are environmental benefits to offering fewer room cleanings, like saving water.

MGM Resorts and Caesars didn't respond Thursday to emailed requests for comment about the issue. Pappageorge said this week that, even as negotiations came down to the wire ahead of the union's plans to strike, the union and casino companies were the "farthest apart" on the issue.

A spokesman for Wynn Resorts said they already offer daily room cleanings and did not cut back on that service during the pandemic.

Without mandatory daily room cleanings, Pappageorge has said, "the jobs of tens of thousands of workers are in jeopardy of cutbacks and reduction."

It's a fear that Las Vegas hotel workers across the board shared in interviews with The Associated Press since negotiations began in April — from the porters and kitchen staff who work behind the scenes to keep the Strip's hotel-casinos running, to the cocktail servers and bellman who provide customers with the hospitality that has helped make the city famous.

During the pandemic, the hospitality industry learned how to "do more with less," said David Edelblute, a Las Vegas-based attorney and lobbyist whose corporate clients include gaming and hospitality companies.

And that combination, he said, could be "pretty catastrophic" for the labor force.

Rory Kuykendall, a bellman at Flamingo Las Vegas, said in September after voting to authorize a strike that he wanted stronger job protection against the inevitable advancements in technology to be written into their new union contract.

"We want to make sure that we, as the workers, have a voice and a say in any new technology that is introduced at these casinos," he said.

That includes technology already at play at some resorts: mobile check-in, automated valet tickets and robot bartenders.

Pappageorge, who led the negotiating teams that secured tentative deals this week with the casino giants, said a cut in daily room cleanings also poses health and safety concerns for the housekeepers who still had to reach a daily room quota.

Jennifer Black, a guest room attendant at Flamingo Las Vegas, described her first job in the hospitality sector as "back-breaking."

A typical day on the job, she said, requires her to clean 13 rooms after guests have checked out. Each room takes between 30-45 minutes to clean, but rooms that haven't been cleaned for a few days, she said, take more time to turn over.

"We're working through our lunch breaks to make it," she said. "Our workload is far too much."

96-year-old Korean War veteran still attempting to get Purple Heart medal after 7 decades

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, MARK VANCLEAVE and MELISSA PEREZ WINDER Associated Press
ST. PETER, Minn. (AP) — Earl Meyer remembers in vivid detail when his platoon came under heavy fire during the Korean War -- he still has shrapnel embedded in his thigh.

But over 70 years later, the 96-year-old is still waiting for the U.S. Army to recognize his injury and to award him a Purple Heart medal, which honors service members wounded or killed in combat.

Meyer has provided the Army with documents to back up his assertion that he was wounded in combat in June 1951. Doctors at the Department of Veterans Affairs agreed that his account of the shrapnel coming from a mortar attack was probably true. But few men in his unit who would have witnessed the battle have survived, and he thinks the medic who treated him on the battlefield was killed before he could file the paperwork.

An Army review board in April issued what it called a final rejection of Meyer's request for a Purple Heart, citing insufficient documentation. His case highlights how it can be a struggle for wounded veterans to get medals they've earned when the fog of war, the absence of records and the passage of time make it challenging to produce proof.

"At first I didn't know that I had been wounded," Meyer wrote in a sworn statement that was part of his rejected appeal. "But as my unit advanced from where the mortar rounds were hitting, I noticed that my pants were sticking to my leg. I reached down to correct this and discovered that my hand was covered in blood."

Meyer took the rare step of suing the Department of Defense and the Army in September. The Army's Office of Public Affairs said it doesn't comment on ongoing litigation. But after The Associated Press made requests for comment on Meyer's case, the office of the Army's top noncommissioned officer, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Weimer, said that it's going to take another look.

"The Sergeant Major of the Army's Office is engaging with Mr. Meyer's family and looking into the situation," spokesperson Master Sgt. Daniel Wallace said. "Either way, we're proud of Mr. Meyer's service to our country."

Meyer said in an interview that he wouldn't have pursued the Purple Heart because his injuries were relatively minor compared to those of many men he served with, but his three daughters persuaded him. Growing up, they knew that he had been injured in the war, but like many veterans, he never talked much about it. It's only been in the past decade or so that he's opened up to them, which led them to urge his pursuit of a Purple Heart.

"I think it will provide closure for him. I really do," said his daughter, Sandy Baker, of New Buffalo, Michigan. Tony Cross, a disability claims and appeals specialist with the American Legion, the country's largest veterans' service organization, said the Legion doesn't commonly see cases like Meyer's of medals denied, though it did see one earlier this year. The process is challenging because each military branch has its own approval process and it gets more challenging after a veteran leaves the military, he said.

Meyer's main obstacle has been the lack of paperwork. He told the AP the medic who bandaged his leg told him he would file the forms to show he was wounded in combat. But he never did. Meyer thinks the medic may have been killed in action. Only a few members of his platoon made it out unharmed.

At the time, Meyer wasn't hurt badly enough to leave the battlefield. But Army medical records show he injured his back a few days later when he fell down a hill while carrying a machine gun, and then aggravated it again days later while lifting ammunition. He was evacuated to a MASH unit, then a hospital ship. The records show his treatment included a tetanus shot, apparently for the shrapnel injury.

"I still had the hole in my pants and the blood on it," he said about the time he was hospitalized for his back. He said he still had the patch on his leg. "I should have told them at that time."

But he wasn't thinking then about gathering paperwork for a future medal. His mind was on survival.

"I was just glad to get out of there," he said.

Accidental back injuries generally don't qualify a service member for a Purple Heart, but wounds from

enemy shrapnel can.

Meyer finished out his tour guarding prisoners of war. He was honorably discharged in 1952. His decorations included the Combat Infantryman Badge, which is reserved for those who actively participate in ground combat under enemy fire. He also received the Congressional Gold Medal for his service in the Merchant Marine in World War II.

He still has coffee with fellow veterans a couple mornings a week at the St. Peter American Legion post. He said his leg isn't acutely sore, but it still aches. VA doctors told him they didn't want to risk surgery to remove the shrapnel because it was too close to his sciatic nerve.

In 2005, doctors at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis agreed that his leg injury probably happened in combat. "The scar in the left thigh is at least as likely as not (50/50 probability) caused by or a result of a combat fragment wound," they wrote in one report. "Reasonable doubt has been resolved in your favor," they wrote in another.

Meyer first applied for a Purple Heart in 2020. The Army denied him, saying he needed more documentation.

So U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar's staff then helped him get documents from the National Archives and made numerous follow-up inquiries. But even with the additional evidence, the Army Board for Correction of Military Records turned him down. Klobuchar said this week that she's not giving up.

"Earl Meyer put his life on the line in defense of our freedoms, and we will continue to do all we can to further the work to rightfully honor his service," the Minnesota Democrat said in a statement.

In its most recent rejection letter, the board said he must have "substantiating evidence to verify that he was injured, the wound was the result of hostile action, the wound must have required treatment by medical personnel and the medical treatment must have been made a matter of official record."

The board conceded that "some evidence available for review indicates a possible injury," but that "based on the preponderance of the evidence available for review, the Board determined the evidence presented insufficient to warrant a recommendation for relief."

Meyer's attorney, Alan Anderson, wrote in the lawsuit that review boards have awarded Purple Hearts under similar circumstances — sometimes under court order. He said the board noted the problems of relying solely on medical records when it approved a Purple Heart in a separate 2015 case.

"Under wartime conditions, wounds requiring medical treatment by a medical officer will not always receive such treatment, and, even if a Soldier requiring such treatment receives it, there will be cases where the treatment is not made a matter of official record," the board said in that case. "In such cases, other sources, including credible statements from colleagues, may be useful in establishing the circumstances in which a Soldier was wounded."

Karnowski reported from Minneapolis; Perez Winder reported from New Buffalo, Michigan.

Manchin decision hurts Democrats' Senate hopes and sparks new speculation about a presidential bid

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Joe Manchin's decision not to seek reelection virtually ensures that the Democratic Party will lose his Senate seat next year in deep-red West Virginia, making the party's steep path to retaining its razor-thin Senate majority even more difficult.

Some Democratic officials are also concerned that Manchin's announcement frees him to pursue a third-party presidential bid that could ultimately undermine President Joe Biden's reelection. The 76-year-old Manchin has raised the possibility of a presidential bid in the past, and he made direct reference to national ambitions in the retirement video he posted on social media Thursday.

"What I will be doing is traveling the country and speaking out to see if there is an interest in creating a movement to mobilize the middle and bring Americans together," Manchin said.

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Manchin's sudden announcement injects a new layer of uncertainty for Democratic leaders already anxious about the party's prospects in 2024. Biden is seeking a second term despite persistent concerns about his age and economic leadership from voters in both major parties. At the same time, Democrats are clinging to a 51-49 Senate majority having narrowly lost their House majority last fall.

Just an hour after Manchin's announcement, a Boston-based group filed paperwork with the Federal Election Commission to form a draft committee designed to encourage Manchin and Utah Sen. Mitt Romney to launch a third-party presidential bid. A person with direct knowledge of the group's activities said the committee, which is calling itself "America Back on Track," would launch publicly next week with an initial budget of \$1 million. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning.

The new draft effort was specifically created, the person said, to enable Manchin and Romney to seek the presidential nomination at No Labels' national convention next March in Texas. Romney also declined to run for reelection to the Senate next year.

A Manchin spokesperson declined to comment on the group, while Romney distanced himself from it, despite the involvement of Massachusetts-based attorney Dan Winslow, who served as chief legal counsel to Romney when he served as the state's governor.

"Sen. Romney was not aware of this effort and he is not considering running for president on any ticket," Romney chief of staff Liz Johnson said.

Still, the fact that Manchin is actively being encouraged to seek a presidential run sparked new anxiety among Democratic operatives who were already concerned about the impact of third parties in 2024. Progressive activist Cornel West and Robert Kennedy Jr., an environmental lawyer and leading vaccine skeptic, have already launched independent White House runs.

Yet many Democratic leaders are taking No Labels more seriously. Backed by anonymous donations of tens of millions of dollars, the centrist group has already secured presidential ballot access in a dozen states with many more expected over the coming months. Its officials say it will decide early next year whether to launch a presidential ticket.

"If Joe Manchin runs on the No Labels ticket, he would be responsible for sending Donald Trump back to the White House," MoveOn Political Action executive director Rahna Epting said shortly after Manchin's announcement. "Joe Manchin should set the record straight on whose side he is on and reject any overtures from No Labels' dangerous ploy."

Over the summer, two major Democratic-allied groups, MoveOn and centrist Third Way, hosted Capitol Hill briefings with senior congressional staffers warning of No Labels' presidential ambitions.

"I am sad that he's not running for the Senate, because we're going to lose that seat, obviously," said Matt Bennett, co-founder of Third Way, on Thursday. But Bennett said he was less worried about Manchin running for president on the No Labels banner.

"He wants to be part of the conversation so he's not going to close the door on this (presidential run)," Bennett said. "But I really don't see him doing this."

Manchin has long been friendly with No Labels, which has already begun holding private conversations with potential presidential nominees, Manchin among them. Over the summer, the West Virginia senator spoke at a No Labels event in New Hampshire, which traditionally hosts the nation's opening presidential primary.

No Labels released a statement describing Manchin as "a tireless voice for America's commonsense majority and a longtime ally of the No Labels movement."

"The Senate will lose a great leader when he leaves, but we commend Senator Manchin for stepping up to lead a long overdue national conversation about solving America's biggest challenges, including inflation, an insecure border, out-of-control debt and growing threats from abroad," No Labels said.

Officials with the group insist it would put forward a candidate only as an insurance policy should Biden and Trump secure their party's presidential nominations — and if it is clear that the No Labels' candidates would not unintentionally tip the election in Trump's favor.

Meanwhile, Democrats acknowledge that their path to retaining the Senate majority will now be much more difficult.

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The party in 2024 is defending Democratic-held seats in West Virginia, Montana and Ohio — all states that Trump carried handily in 2020. Democratic incumbents are also on the ballot in swing states Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. And in another swing state, Arizona, Democrats are waiting to see if independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, who receives her committee assignments from Democrats, will launch a third-party reelection bid.

With Democrats fearing that West Virginia is all but lost, they must now win every other Democratic-held seat in the nation to have a chance at holding the Senate majority in 2024. They have very few pickup opportunities — their best being Republican-held seats in Texas and Florida, both states Trump won twice.

David Bergstein, a spokesman for the Senate Democrats campaign arm, insisted that his party still has “multiple pathways to protect and strengthen our Senate majority.”

“In addition to defending our battle-tested incumbents, we’ve already expanded the battleground map to Texas and Florida, where formidable Democratic candidates are out-raising unpopular Republican incumbents and the DSCC is making investments to lay the groundwork for our campaigns’ victories,” he said.

Manchin was able to hold a Senate seat since 2012 thanks to a political brand decades in the making that helped him overcome West Virginia’s strong anti-Democratic bias. But in a state Trump carried by nearly 40 points in 2020, Manchin was quietly considered a significant underdog in a prospective reelection matchup against hugely popular Republican Gov. Jim Justice.

Meanwhile, the White House issued a statement praising Manchin’s dedication to the people of West Virginia and his accomplishments in Washington. Biden said the Manchin family “should feel proud of the Senator’s service to West Virginia and to our country.

“I look forward to continuing our work together to get things done for the American people,” Biden said.

When asked about a prospective Manchin presidential run, Biden’s campaign declined to comment.

Associated Press writer Will Weissert in Washington contributed to this report.

Jewish refugees from Israel find comfort and companionship in a countryside camp in Hungary

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BALATONOSZOD, Hungary (AP) — Zusha Pletnyov left his home in the eastern Ukrainian city of Luhansk in 2014, when Russian-backed rebels seized large swaths of eastern Ukraine. After living some years in the capital, Kyiv, he fled again to Israel when Moscow launched its full-scale invasion in February of last year.

An observant Jew, Pletnyov moved with his wife and five children to Ashkelon, just miles from the Gaza Strip, in the hopes of building a new life. But when Hamas militants from Gaza launched their attacks last month, a new war forced him to take flight for a third time, now to a camp for Jewish refugees in rural Hungary.

“Coming here for me and for my wife is such unimaginable relief,” said Pletnyov, whose apartment building in Ashkelon was hit by a Hamas rocket as the attacks began. “It’s a comforting place to be.”

The 34-year-old and his family are now living in a state-owned resort, disused for nearly two decades, on the shores of the sprawling Lake Balaton in western Hungary.

First opened for Jewish Ukrainian refugees following Russia’s invasion last year, it is now housing around 250 people including some 100 children, most of whom have arrived from Israel in the weeks since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack.

The camp is equipped with detached housing units and a central building where three kosher meals are served per day. The residents are provided with shelter and camaraderie, and can also engage in activities like sports and dancing, and may attend yeshiva for religious studies.

“We make sure people are eating well, make sure they’re healthy, psychologically healthy, mentally healthy,” said Mendel Moscowitz, the rabbi of the camp, adding that the facility is open to all Jews, whether they be Orthodox, secular or non-observing.

“They find their place here because we all share that we’re Jewish and we all share the refugee status

that also brings everybody together," he said.

Eva Kopolovich, 50, a psychotherapist from Shlomi on Israel's Lebanese border, was one of around 160,000 people evacuated from their homes in the north and south by Israeli Defense Forces after the Hamas attacks began. Born in Hungary where she spent the first four years of her life, she fled with her parents and 11-year-old son to Budapest before making their way to the camp.

Two weeks after arriving at the lakeside refuge, Kopolovich said she has taken comfort in being among other Jews who have shared her experiences in being uprooted from their lives.

"We are in the same boat so we understand each other (regarding) stuff that people who are not in our position can never understand," she said. "All of us went through a lot of stuff. I'm not even talking about the Ukrainians, who went from one war to another to another."

Indeed, many current residents of the camp arrived there after having earlier fled to Israel from Ukraine in the wake of Russia's war. Moscovitz, the rabbi, left his hometown of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine when Russia launched its full-scale invasion.

He said his prior experiences of being displaced have helped him to better serve those who have sought refuge in the camp.

"I know their needs, I feel their needs. I know what it's like to run away from war," he said. "Unfortunately, we're having to experience a second war for our families. And thank God, thank God that there is a place where we could go to."

Slomo Koves, the chief rabbi for the Association of Hungarian Jewish Communities, said that more than 3,000 people have resided in the camp since the war in Ukraine began nearly 21 months ago.

While he said he is "proud" of Hungary for providing a place of refuge for Jews who have been forced from their homes, the very need to do so has been hard to digest.

"It's a very sad situation that it has become a famous Jewish refugee camp," he said. "I would never have thought that such a thing would be needed in 21st-century Europe."

While some families that have stayed at the camp have already returned to Israel, many plan to stay for the next few months while waiting for the war to come to an end, Moscovitz said.

"We're hopeful that there will be peace in Ukraine and Israel and the world," he said. "People want to live. People want to live in peace. Nobody's interested in war."

Find AP's war coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

This story corrects the spelling of the first name of the rabbi to Mendel.

Clashes over Israel-Hamas war shatter students' sense of safety on US college campuses

By KEVIN MCGILL, STEPHEN SMITH and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — As a Jewish student, Eden Roth always has felt safe and welcome at Tulane University, where more than 40% of the students are Jewish. That has been tested by the aftermath of last month's Hamas incursion into Israel.

Graffiti appeared on the New Orleans campus with the message "from the river to the sea," a rallying cry for pro-Palestinian activists. Then came a clash between dueling demonstrations, where a melee led to three arrests and left a Jewish student with a broken nose.

"I think that the shift of experience with Jews on campus was extremely shocking," said Roth, who was in Israel last summer for a study-abroad program. "A lot of students come to Tulane because of the Jewish population — feeling like they're supported, like a majority rather than a minority. And I think that's definitely shifted."

Tulane isn't alone. On other campuses, long-simmering tensions are erupting in violence and shattering the sense of safety that makes colleges hubs of free discourse. Students on both sides are witnessing acts of hate, leaving many fearing for their safety even as they walk to classrooms.

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Threats and clashes have sometimes come from within, including at Cornell, where a student is accused of posting online threats against Jewish students. A University of Massachusetts student was arrested after allegedly punching a Jewish student and spitting on an Israeli flag at a demonstration. At Stanford, an Arab Muslim student was hit by a car in a case being investigated as a hate crime.

The unease is felt acutely at Tulane, where 43% of students are Jewish, the highest percentage among colleges that are not explicitly Jewish.

"To see it on Tulane's campus is definitely scary," said Jacob Starr, a Jewish student from Massachusetts.

Within the student Jewish community, there is a range of perspectives on the conflict. The latest war began with an attack on Oct. 7 by Hamas militants who targeted towns, farming communities and a music festival near the Gaza border, killing more than 1,400 people. Israel has responded with weeks of attacks in Gaza, which have killed more than 10,800 people, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza — most of them Palestinian civilians.

Emma Sackheim, a Jewish student from Los Angeles who attends Tulane's law school, said she grew up as a supporter of the Jewish state but now considers herself an opponent of Zionism. Sackheim says she knows students who oppose Israel's policies "but don't feel comfortable to publicly say anything."

"I was standing on the Palestinian side," she said when asked about the Oct. 26 demonstration, which took place along a public New Orleans street that runs through campus.

Still, she said Tulane is where she feels most comfortable as a Jew. "I know that I have so many options of community," she said.

On campuses around the U.S., students on both sides say they have been subjected to taunts and rhetoric that oppose their very existence since the invasion and the subsequent Israeli assault on Hamas in northern Gaza.

They see it in campus rallies, on anonymous message boards frequented by college students, and on graffiti scrawled on dorms and buildings. In one case under police investigation as a possible hate crime, "Free Palestine" was found written this week on a window of Boston University's Hillel center.

Colleges have been scrambling to restore a sense of security for Jewish and Arab students — and stressing messages of inclusion for diverse student bodies. But untangling what's protected as political speech and what crosses into threatening language can be a daunting task.

Tulane's president, Michael Fitts, has described an increased police presence and other security measures on campus. In messages to the campus community, he has lamented the loss of innocent Israeli and Palestinian lives and said the university was reaching out to Jewish and Muslim student groups and religious organizations.

He has faced criticism from people on both sides seeking more forceful statements.

Islam Elrabieey, for example, seeks condemnation of Israel's actions.

"To condemn Hamas is a good thing," said Elrabieey, a native of Egypt and a visiting scholar in Tulane's Middle East and North African Studies program. "But at the same time, if you didn't condemn Israel for committing war crimes, this is a double standard."

As places that encourage intellectual debate, it isn't surprising that colleges have seen heated conflict, said Jonathan Fansmith, a senior vice president for the American Council on Education, an association of university presidents. But when different factions disagree about what crosses the line between free speech and abuse, it puts colleges in a difficult place, he said.

"Everyone should be incredibly sympathetic to Jewish students who feel under threat, and the alarming rise in antisemitic actions is something college universities take very seriously," Fansmith said. "But they have a requirement, a responsibility under the law as well, to balance the free speech rights of people who may disagree, who may have critiques that they find disagreeable or dislike. And finding that line is very, very difficult."

After facing criticism for trying to remain too neutral on the war, Harvard University's president on Thursday condemned the phrase "from the river to the sea," saying it has historical meanings that, to many, imply the eradication of Jews from Israel. Pro-Palestinian activists around the world chanted the phrase in the aftermath of the Hamas raid.

At Tulane, Roth said some Jewish students have been rattled enough to make them think twice about visiting the Mintz Center, the headquarters for the Tulane Hillel organization.

"I don't feel completely safe, but I feel like we have no other choice but to embrace who we are in these times," Roth said in an interview at the building. "I know a lot of my friends are nervous to wear their Star of David necklaces, to wear a kippah or even come into this building. But I think it's critical that we do not let fear consume us."

Lea Jackson, a freshman from New Jersey who describes herself as a modern Orthodox Jew, said she is concerned supporters of a Palestinian state are nervous expressing their views because of the large numbers of Jewish students on campus.

The Hamas raid may have made some people more reluctant to speak even as others become more outspoken, said Jackson, who said she recently spent a "gap year" in Israel and has friends and family there.

"But it's a lot harder to have a civil conversation," Jackson said, "when emotions and tension are so high and so many people are so personally connected to this."

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Internet collapses in war-torn Yemen over 'maintenance' after Houthi attacks targeting Israel, US

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Internet access across the war-torn nation of Yemen collapsed Friday and stayed down for hours, with officials later blaming unannounced "maintenance work" for an outage that followed attacks by the country's Houthi rebels on both Israel and the U.S.

The outage began early Friday and halted all traffic at YemenNet, the country's main provider for about 10 million users which is now controlled by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthis.

Both NetBlocks, a group tracking internet outages, and the internet services company CloudFlare reported the outage. The two did not offer a cause for the outage.

"Data shows that the issue has impacted connectivity at a national level as well," CloudFlare said.

Several hours later, some service was restored, though access remained troubled.

In a statement to the Houthi-controlled SABA state news agency, Yemen's Public Telecom Corp. blamed the outage on maintenance.

"Internet service will return after the completion of the maintenance work," the statement quoted an unidentified official as saying.

An earlier outage occurred in January 2022 when the Saudi-led coalition battling the Houthis in Yemen bombed a telecommunications building in the Red City port city of Hodeida. There was no immediate word of a similar attack.

The undersea FALCON cable carries the internet into Yemen through the Hodeida port along the Red Sea for TeleYemen. The FALCON cable has another landing in Yemen's far eastern port of Ghaydah as well, but the majority of Yemen's population lives in its west along the Red Sea.

GCX, the company that operates the cable, did not respond to a request for comment Friday.

The outage came after a series of recent drone and missile attacks by the Houthis targeting Israel during its campaign of airstrikes and a ground offensive targeting Hamas in the Gaza Strip. That includes a claimed strike Thursday targeting the Israeli port city of Eilat on the Red Sea. The Houthis also shot down an American MQ-9 Reaper drone this week with a surface-to-air missile, part of a wide series of attacks in the Mideast raising concerns about a regional war breaking out.

Yemen's conflict began in 2014 when the Houthis seized Sanaa and much of the country's north. The internationally recognized government fled to the south and then into exile in Saudi Arabia.

The Houthi takeover prompted a Saudi-led coalition to intervene months later and the conflict turned into a regional proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, with the U.S. long involved on the periphery,

providing intelligence assistance to the kingdom.

However, international criticism over Saudi airstrikes killing civilians saw the U.S. pull back its support. The U.S. is suspected of still carrying out drone strikes targeting suspected members of Yemen's local al-Qaida branch.

The war has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more. A cease-fire that expired last October largely has held in the time since, though the Houthis are believed to be slowly stepping up their attacks as a permanent peace has yet to be reached.

Stark UN report on devastation to Palestinian economy shows GDP fell 4% after a month of war

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — A U.N. report paints a stark picture of the devastation of the collapse of the Palestinian economy after a month of war and Israel's near-total siege of Gaza.

The gross domestic product shrank 4% in the West Bank and Gaza in the war's first month, sending over 400,000 people into poverty — an economic impact unseen in the conflicts Syria and Ukraine, or any previous Israel-Hamas war, the U.N. said.

Hamas militants, who rule Gaza, launched a surprise attack on Israel on Oct. 7 killing over 1,400 people, mainly civilians, and kidnapping about 240 others.

More than two-thirds of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled their homes since Israel launched weeks of intense airstrikes followed by an ongoing ground operation, vowing to obliterate Hamas. The Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza said Thursday that 10,818 Palestinians, including more than 4,400 children, have been killed so far.

The rapid assessment of economic consequences of the Gaza war released Thursday by the U.N. Development Program and the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for West Asia was the first U.N. report showing the devastating impact of the conflict especially on the Palestinians.

If the war continues for a second month, the U.N. projects that the Palestinian GDP, which was \$20.4 billion before the war began, will drop by 8.4% — a loss of \$1.7 billion. And if the conflict lasts a third month, Palestinian GDP will drop by 12%, with losses of \$2.5 billion and more than 660,000 people pushed into poverty, it projects.

U.N. Development Program Assistant Secretary-General Abdallah Al Dardari told a news conference that a 12% GDP loss at the end of the year would be "massive and unprecedented." By comparison, he said, the Syrian economy used to lose 1% of its GDP per month at the height of its conflict, and it took Ukraine a year and a half of fighting to lose 30% of its GDP, an average of about 1.6% a month.

At the beginning of 2023, the Palestinian territories — the West Bank and Gaza — were considered a lower middle-income economy with a poverty level of \$6 per day per person, Economic Commission Executive Secretary Rola Dashti said.

In January, Gaza was already grappling with high unemployment of about 46%, three-and-a-half times higher than the West Bank's 13%, the report said.

But just weeks of war has destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs.

"As the war hits the one-month mark, 61% of employment in Gaza, equivalent to 182,000 jobs, is estimated to have been lost," it said. "Around 24% of employment in the West Bank has also been lost, equivalent to 208,000 jobs."

Al Dardari pointed to massive disruption to the economy in the West Bank, which is responsible for 82% of Palestinian GDP, explaining that this is supposed to be the season for olive and citrus farmers to collect their products but they can't because of the war. And "the tourism season is practically gone — and agriculture and tourism represent 40% of the GDP in the West Bank," he said.

In addition, Al Dardari said, there are major disruptions to trade, to the transfer of money from Israel

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to the Palestinian Authority, which controls the West Bank, and no investment.

The Economic Commission's Dashti said "the level of destruction is unimaginable and unprecedented" in Gaza.

"As of November 3, it is estimated that 35,000 housing units have been totally demolished and about 220,000 units are partially damaged," she said. The report said at least 45% of Gaza's housing units have been destroyed or damaged.

If this persists, the majority of Gazans will have no homes and Al Dardari said even if fighting ended now there will be massive long-term displacement, "with all its humanitarian economic development and security consequences."

Al Dardari said it breaks his heart that the Palestinian territories had become lower middle income economies, "because all of that growth and development is going to regress between 11, 16, or even 19 years if the fighting continues. ... We will go back to 2002."

Foreman runs for TD, Bears beat Panthers 16-13 to boost their shot at the top pick in the draft

By ANDREW SELIGMAN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — The Chicago Bears weren't too concerned about appearances. All that mattered was that they came out on top.

D'Onta Foreman ran for a touchdown and the Bears boosted their shot at the top pick in the draft, beating the Carolina Panthers 16-13 on Thursday night.

"At the end of the day, man, all the hard work we put in, even with it not being pretty it still feels amazing," Foreman said. "You know what I mean?"

The prime-time matchup between teams among the bottom five in the NFL delivered about as much drama as expected. But Chicago (3-7) made enough plays to come away with the victory.

The Bears also boosted their chances at the No. 1 pick because they have Carolina's first-rounder in 2024. They acquired the pick along with Moore last March for the top selection this year. The Panthers (1-8) are tied with Arizona — which plays Atlanta on Sunday — for the worst record in the NFL.

Foreman gave the Bears a 16-10 lead in the third quarter with a 4-yard run. Chicago was up by three with 1:40 remaining in the game when Carolina's Eddy Pineiro missed a 59-yard field goal, the ball landing well short of the goal post. The Bears sealed the win when Darnell Mooney caught an 8-yard pass on third-and-seven at the 48.

Moore caught five passes for 58 yards against his former team.

Tyson Bagent completed 20 of 33 passes for 162 yards in his fourth straight start with Justin Fields sidelined because of a dislocated right thumb. The Bears are 2-2 with the undrafted rookie from Division II Shepherd University in West Virginia in the lineup.

Fields hasn't played since he exited a Week 6 loss to Minnesota. Eberflus has said repeatedly he remains the Bears' No. 1 quarterback. But he wouldn't say if he expects Fields to return next week at Detroit.

"We'll see where it is," Eberflus said. "It's a big week to make that evaluation, so we'll see where it is. When Justin's healthy, he'll be our starter."

Cairo Santos kicked three field goals. The Bears got their pass rush going, sacking Bryce Young three times. It was a big improvement for a team with a league-low 10 through the first nine games.

"They got swagger," said defensive end Montez Sweat, who had three quarterback hits in his second game since a trade-deadline deal from Washington. "All these guys, I really love kind of like the plug and play. I'm really going along with them trying to figure out the energy that they're bringing."

PANTHERS FALL

Carolina's Ihmir Smith-Marsette returned a punt 79 yards for a touchdown in the first quarter. But Young, coming off his worst game as a pro, had another rough outing. The No. 1 draft pick this year, he was 21 of 38 for 185 yards with a 68.4 rating, after throwing three interceptions and having two returned for scores in a loss to Indianapolis.

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Adam Thielen caught six passes for 42 yards, and the Panthers fell to 0-5 on the road.

"We have to be better," Young said. "Our defense, great game, start to finish. We have to be better. I have to be better first and foremost. I have to be a lot better."

JUMPING AHEAD

The Bears grabbed a 16-10 lead midway through the third on a 4-yard run by Foreman — who spent last season with Carolina — to cap a 38-yard drive after pinning the Panthers deep in their own territory. Chicago opted not to try a 2-point conversion to go up by seven.

Carolina got a big opportunity late in the third, taking over at the Chicago 40 after Trenton Gill shanked a punt. The Panthers got pushed back 20 yards to start the drive because of back-to-back penalties, then got to the 20 before Pineiro kicked a field goal to make it a three-point game early in the fourth.

SLOW START

The Panthers led 10-9 at halftime even though the Bears outgained them 205 yards to 97. Chicago ran 42 plays, but settled for three field goals by Santos.

Smith-Marsette, who played part of last season in Chicago, gave the Panthers a 7-0 lead in the first quarter when he returned a punt 79 yards for a touchdown. He broke a tackle by Josh Blackwell, cut through the middle and used a hesitation move to get past punter Trenton Gill for his first career TD return.

Chicago answered with a 54-yard field goal by Santos. Former Bear Pineiro kicked a 33-yarder early in the second quarter to make it a seven-point game. Santos booted two more field goals, hitting a 36-yarder with just over three minutes left and 39-yarder as time expired, to make it a one-point game.

INJURIES

Neither team reported an injury.

UP NEXT

Panthers: Host Dallas on Nov. 19.

Bears: Visit Detroit on Nov. 19. ____

AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl>

The Great Grift: COVID-19 fraudster used stolen relief aid to purchase a private island in Florida

By RICHARD LARDNER Associated Press

YANKEETOWN, Fla. (AP) — A freshwater spring bubbles amid the mangroves, cabbage palms and red cedars on Sweetheart Island, a two-acre uninhabited patch of paradise about a mile off the coast of this little Gulf Coast town.

Pelicans divebomb nearby into the cool waters of Florida's Withlacoochee Bay and the open view westward holds the promise of dazzling sunsets.

It may have seemed like an ideal getaway for Florida businessman Patrick Parker Walsh. Instead, he's serving five and half years in federal prison for stealing nearly \$8 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds that he used, in part, to buy Sweetheart Island.

While Walsh's private island ranks among the more unusual purchases by pandemic fraudsters, his crime was not unique. He is one of thousands of thieves who perpetrated the greatest grift in U.S. history. They potentially plundered more than \$280 billion in federal COVID-19 aid; another \$123 billion was wasted or misspent.

The loss represents close to 10% of the \$4.3 trillion the U.S. government has disbursed to mitigate the economic devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to an analysis by The Associated Press.

An AP review of hundreds of pandemic fraud cases presents a picture of thieves and scam artists who spent lavishly on houses, luxury watches and diamond jewelry, Lamborghinis and other expensive cars. The stolen aid also paid for long nights at strip clubs, gambling sprees in Las Vegas and bucket-list vacations.

Their crimes were relatively simple: The government's goal was to get cash into the hands of struggling people and businesses with minimal hassle, particularly during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis.

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Safeguards to weed out the swindlers were dropped. As Walsh's case and thousands of others have shown, stealing the money was as easy as lying on an application.

The thieves came from all walks of life and all corners of the globe. There was a Tennessee rapper who bragged about the ease of stealing more than \$700,000 in pandemic unemployment insurance on YouTube. A former pizzeria owner and host of a cryptocurrency-themed radio show bought an alpaca farm in Vermont with pilfered aid. And an ex-Nigerian government official who grabbed about half a million dollars in COVID-19 relief benefits was wearing a \$10,000 watch and \$35,000 gold chain when he was arrested.

Nearly 3,200 defendants have been charged with COVID-19 relief fraud, according to the U.S. Justice Department. About \$1.4 billion in stolen pandemic aid has been seized.

Investigators won't catch every crook. The scale and scope of the fraud are too large. Pandemic cases often depend on digital evidence, which is perishable, and the financial trail can go cold over time, said Bob Westbrook, former executive director of the federal Pandemic Response Accountability Committee.

"The uncomfortable truth is the federal criminal justice system is simply not equipped to fully address the unprecedented volume of pandemic relief fraud cases, large and small, and involving thousands upon thousands of domestic and foreign actors," Westbrook said.

Top Justice Department officials are undeterred by the enormity of the task. They've created special "strike forces" to hunt down COVID-19 aid thieves and vowed not to give up the chase.

"We'll stay at it for as long as it takes," U.S. Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said in August.

Konstantinos Zarkadas, a New York doctor deeply in debt, joined the rogues' gallery of COVID-19 fraudsters by falsifying at least 11 separate applications for pandemic aid that netted him almost \$3.8 million, according to prosecutors. He bought Rolex and Cartier wristwatches valued at \$140,000 for himself and family members and made a hefty down payment on a yacht, according to court records.

Zarkadas used about \$3 million to pay off part of an earlier civil judgment against him for breaching a real estate lease. His most brazen move was to send \$80,000 of the looted cash back to the government to settle a federal lawsuit alleging he violated the Controlled Substances Act by dispensing more than 20,000 doses of a weight-loss drug without keeping accurate records, prosecutors said.

The state of New York revoked Zarkadas' medical license shortly after he was sentenced to more than four years in prison for swiping the pandemic aid.

The stolen funds financed the high-rolling lifestyle of Lee E. Price III, a Houston resident with prior felony convictions for forgery and robbery. He swindled nearly \$1.7 million by submitting bogus aid applications on behalf of businesses that existed only on paper, according to court records.

Price wasted little time blowing \$14,000 on a Rolex and more than \$233,000 for a flashy white Lamborghini Urus, a luxury SUV that can go from zero to 60 mph in three seconds. He also spent thousands of dollars at the Casanova, a Houston stripclub. Price was sentenced to more than nine years in prison.

Vinath Oudomsine of Georgia also created a fake company that he claimed made \$235,000 a year and had 10 employees. A few weeks after Oudomsine applied for the pandemic aid, the government rushed him \$85,000 to keep his non-existent business afloat.

Oudomsine spent nearly \$58,000 on a 1999 Charizard Pokémon card, which depicts a gold dragon-like creature, jaws wide open, poised to attack.

While not as valuable as rare baseball cards — a mint condition Mickey Mantle card sold for \$12.6 million last year — Pokémon merchandise can command big money as collectors have driven up prices for collectibles issued by the popular franchise.

At Oudomsine's sentencing last year, U.S. District Judge Dudley H. Bowen called Oudomsine's theft "an \$85,000 insult" to a country reeling from the pandemic.

"I feel foolish every time I say it: Pokémon card," Bowen said before sending Oudomsine to prison for three years.

Patrick Walsh's bid to save his aerial advertising businesses started out legitimately but quickly escalated into sizeable fraud.

Walsh operated a small fleet of cigar-shaped blimps that flew corporate logos over crowded venues. In June 2017, one of his blimps crashed and burned on live television at the men's U.S. Open golf tourna-

ment, one of the world's premier sporting events.

"I was teeing off and I looked up and saw it on fire, and I felt sick to my stomach," said professional golfer Jamie Lovemark, according to an Associated Press report. The pilot — the sole passenger — was badly injured but survived, according to a National Transportation Safety Board investigation.

In the wake of the crash, Walsh's clients began to bail, his attorneys wrote in court filings. To stay afloat, he obtained high-interest loans that also allowed him to expand his businesses. By 2019, his companies had sales of \$16 million and had expanded into Latin America and Asian markets.

Then the pandemic hit. "COVID-19 did not slow down business, it killed it," Walsh's attorneys wrote. He panicked.

Between March 2020 and January 2021 Walsh submitted more than 30 fraudulent applications for emergency pandemic aid and received \$7.8 million, according to the Justice Department. Even if Walsh had followed the rules, his companies would have only qualified for a "small subset" of those loans, federal prosecutors alleged.

"His crimes are egregious and the product of greed," prosecutors wrote in court papers. They cited the purchase of Sweetheart Island, undisclosed "luxury goods," oil fields in Texas and a downpayment on a home in tony Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Walsh's attorneys said in a court filing that he wasn't motivated by avarice, but desperation. Walsh was under enormous pressure to rescue his businesses and to support his large family, they wrote. He has 11 children.

U.S. District Judge Allen C. Winsor didn't buy the argument.

This was not "a single moment of weakness," Winsor said in sentencing Walsh in January to more than five years behind bars.

As part of his plea deal, Walsh agreed to return the \$7.8 million he stole and to sell Sweetheart Island, which was among his first purchases with the stolen federal money, according to the court records.

Prosecutors said Walsh used \$90,000 of those funds to help finance the \$116,000 island purchase. Florida property records show that the island was sold for \$200,000 at the end of June.

Walsh's attorneys said he didn't buy the island as a "tropical paradise for entertainment" but as a real estate opportunity. They did not explain how the businessman would have transformed the isolated isle into a profit center.

Withlacoochee Bay is scattered with similar small, uninhabited islands. The only hint that anyone had ever tried to develop Sweetheart Island were a few low, timeworn cinder block walls that extend into the water. There was still a "For Sale" sign posted on a weather-beaten and leafless tree that resembled a scarecrow warning people to stay away.

Germans commemorate 'Night of Broken Glass' terror as antisemitism is on the rise again

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Across Germany, in schools, city halls, synagogues, churches and parliament, people came together Thursday to commemorate the 85th anniversary of Kristallnacht — or the "Night of Broken Glass" — in 1938 in which the Nazis terrorized Jews throughout Germany and Austria.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Germany's main Jewish leader, Josef Schuster, spoke at an anniversary ceremony at a Berlin synagogue that was attacked with firebombs in October.

"Jews have been particularly affected by exclusion for centuries," Scholz said in his speech.

"Still and again here in our democratic Germany — and that after the breach of civilization committed by Germans in the Shoah," they are being discriminated against, the chancellor added, referring to the Holocaust by its Hebrew name.

"That is a disgrace. It outrages and shames me deeply," Scholz said. "Any form of antisemitism poisons our society. We do not tolerate it."

The commemoration of the pogrom comes at a time when Germany is again seeing a sharp rise in anti-

semitism in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war, which started with an Oct. 7 Hamas incursion in southern Israel that killed 1,400 people. Israel responded with a relentless bombing campaign in Gaza that has killed thousands of Palestinians.

On Nov. 9, 1938, the Nazis killed at least 91 people and vandalized 7,500 Jewish businesses. They also burned more than 1,400 synagogues, according to Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.

Up to 30,000 Jewish men were arrested, many of them taken to concentration camps, such as Dachau or Buchenwald. Hundreds more killed themselves or died as a result of mistreatment in the camps years before official mass deportations began.

Kristallnacht was a turning point in the escalating persecution of Jews that eventually led to the killings of 6 million European Jews by the Nazis and their supporters during the Holocaust.

"I was there during Kristallnacht. I was in Vienna back then," Holocaust survivor Herbert Traube said at an event marking the anniversary in Paris on Wednesday.

"To me, it was often repeated: 'Never again.' It was a leitmotif in everything that was being said for decades," Traube said, adding that he is upset both by the resurgence of antisemitism and the lack of a "massive popular reaction" against it.

While there's no comparison to the pogroms 85 years ago, which were state-sponsored by the Nazis, many Jews are again living in fear in Germany and across Europe, trying to hide their identity in public and avoiding neighborhoods that were recently the scene of some violent, pro-Palestinian protests.

Jews in Berlin found the Star of David painted on their homes, and Jewish students in schools and universities across the country have experienced bullying and discrimination.

Schuster, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said that "something has gone off the rails in this country. There is still an opportunity to repair this, but to do so we must also admit what has gone wrong in recent years, what we have been unable or unwilling to see."

He said it's wrong that pro-Palestinian protesters have been able to call for the death of Jews and the destruction of Israel openly in recent weeks across Germany, and said that hatred of Jews by far-right and leftist groups has been on the rise.

"We want to live freely in Germany — in our country," Schuster said.

The German government has been one of Israel's staunchest supporters since the Oct. 7 attack, and Scholz and other leaders have repeatedly vowed to protect Germany's Jewish community.

Still, Anna Segal, manager of the Berlin Jewish community Kahal Adass Jisroel, which was attacked in October in an attempted firebombing, told The Associated Press that not enough is being done to protect them and other Jews in Germany.

She said the community's 450 members have been living in fear since the attack and that authorities haven't fully responded to calls to increase security for them.

"The nice words and the expressions of solidarity and standing by the side of the Jews — we are not very satisfied with how that has been translated into action so far," Segal said. "I think there is a lack of a clear commitment that everything that is necessary is invested in the security of the Jews."

Alex Turnbull contributed to this report from Paris.

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen raises a storm over her plan to march against antisemitism

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French far-right leader Marine Le Pen has set off a cacophony of criticism over her plans to attend a weekend march to protest rising antisemitism in France, with critics saying that her once-pariah party has failed to shake off its antisemitic heritage despite growing political legitimacy.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, numerous political parties and citizens are to attend the Sunday march. Le Pen has said that she and her National Rally party also will be there, in what some see as an attempt to leverage the Israel-Hamas war to make herself more palatable to mainstream voters.

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Party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, her father, was convicted repeatedly of antisemitic hate speech and played down the scope of the Holocaust. Daughter Marine — runner-up in the last two presidential elections and likely a top contender in 2027 — has worked to scrub the party's image, kicking her father out and changing its name from National Front to National Rally.

But the party's current president, Jordan Bardella, said in an interview on BFM TV this week that he doesn't think Jean-Marie Le Pen is antisemitic, a remark that revived the link between past and present.

Government spokesman Olivier Veran said Wednesday that Marine Le Pen's party "does not have a place" at what is dubbed as a "grand civic march." However, he noted that the march is public and that "everyone is free, in his conscience, to participate or not."

The march was called by the leaders of the Senate and parliament's lower house, the National Assembly, amid an alarming increase in anti-Jewish acts in France since the start of Israel's war against Hamas after its Oct. 7 surprise attack on Israel.

As of Wednesday, officials counted 1,159 antisemitic acts since Oct. 7, nearly three times more than all acts against French Jews in 2022, according to the Interior Ministry. France has the largest Jewish population in Europe, but given its own World War II collaboration with the Nazis, antisemitic acts today open old scars.

"Of course I will participate. (Party president) Bardella will be there. All of our elected officials will be there, and I call on all our members, all our voters to come," Le Pen said on RTL radio.

The Jewish umbrella group known as CRIF is among those who say Le Pen is not welcome. House Speaker Yael Braun-Pivet, who called for the march with the Senate leader, said on TF1 television Wednesday night that no political parties had been invited but that she won't march "next to" Le Pen.

There has been less noise around the announced presence at the march of even harder-right politician Eric Zemmour, whose small Reconquest party drained some leading figures from the National Rally, including Le Pen's niece Marion Marechal, who is also to demonstrate.

Both Zemmour's party and Le Pen's take aim at what the far right calls a migrant "submersion," mainly Muslims, and voice fears that the French way of life is being upended.

With 88 National Rally lawmakers in the lower house, Le Pen, now a lawmaker herself, has become a political force to be reckoned with, unlike Zemmour.

Yet distrust clings to Le Pen's party.

"I don't believe at all in the normalization of the National Rally," Borne said in May on Radio J, the Jewish community radio station, saying she considers it has a "dangerous ideology."

"Changing a name does not change the roots," she said, adding when asked, "yes, also an inheritor of Petain," referring to Marshall Philippe Petain, who headed the collaborationist Vichy government in WWII.

In what may be a surprise to Le Pen's critics, famed Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld said in an interview published Thursday in the daily Le Figaro that the presence Sunday of Le Pen and her party is for him "completely positive."

He noted that legal action by his association, the Sons and Daughters of Deported Jews of France, had resulted in convictions of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

"For me, the DNA of the far right is antisemitism. So when I see a big party that grew from the far right abandon antisemitism, negationism and march toward republican values, I rejoice," Klarsfeld was quoted as saying.

French President Emmanuel Macron, addressing the far right without naming anyone, said in a speech Wednesday before the nation's Freemasons that "some pretend to support our Jewish compatriots by confusing the rejection of Muslims and the support of Jews."

This is not the first time the political class has kept Le Pen at arms length during marches. She was effectively shunned from a "unity march" in 2015 that drew world leaders after three terror attacks. Le Pen retreated to a party fiefdom in southern France, Beaucaire, and held a small march there. More recently, in 2019, she joined a huge protest against the government's pension reform — but had to be smuggled out because of protests against her.

Palestinian soccer team prepares for World Cup qualifying games against a backdrop of war

By JOHN DUERDEN Associated Press

Makram Daboub may be struggling to prepare his Palestinian team for the start of 2026 World Cup qualification but he takes some comfort, for now at least, that his players stuck in Gaza are safe.

The national soccer team's head coach wanted to include Ibrahim Abuimeir, Khaled Al-Nabris, and Ahmed Al-Kayed in a training camp in Jordan ahead of World Cup qualifying games against Lebanon next Thursday and Australia on Nov. 21.

But they were unable to make it out of Gaza because of the Israel-Hamas war, now in its second month. "So far they are fine," Daboub told The Associated Press. "Many of their relatives have died, however, as a result of the bombing."

Two players from Gaza, Egypt-based Mohamed Saleh and Mahmoud Wadi, are expected to join the Palestinian team in Jordan.

Daboub, who is from Tunisia, acknowledged it will be difficult for players to focus on football while many have families in danger.

"With the death and destruction in Gaza, the players are in a difficult psychological state," Daboub said.

But for Susan Shalabi, the vice-president of the Palestine Football Association, there's no question that the players and the people want the games to go ahead.

"This is a people that wants to be heard and seen by the rest of the world, wants to live normally like everyone else, so people care about their national team," Shalabi told The AP. "It represents the yearning to be recognized as a free and sovereign nation."

The Palestine Football Association became a full member of FIFA, soccer's international governing body, in 1998 and has had some success at the regional level.

Appearing at the World Cup in 2026 would be a dream for a team that has never come close to reaching the finals via the Asian Football Confederation's qualifying route.

There is a little more hope this time as Asia's automatic qualification allocation has increased from four places in 2022 to eight in 2026, when the tournament will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The Palestinian team, which reached a highest FIFA ranking of 73 in 2018, appeared at the Asian Cup in 2015 and 2019 and has qualified for the 2023 continental tournament coming up in Qatar.

"There is no match that you can win in advance," Daboub said. "But we have a good chance of reaching the next round of the World Cup qualifiers."

To be among the 18 teams that advances into that next stage of Asian qualifying, the Palestinians need to finish in the top two of a group containing Australia – expected to take first spot – Lebanon and Bangladesh. They're currently ranked No. 96, eight places higher than Lebanon and 87 above Bangladesh.

Palestine had initially been drawn to host Australia to start this round of qualifying, but the game has been shifted to a neutral venue in Kuwait.

Preparations have already been interrupted as players were unable to leave to participate in a tournament in Malaysia last month. Now the team is based in Jordan to be sure of being able to travel for games.

A win against Lebanon in the United Arab Emirates next week — the game has also been moved from Beirut because of security concerns — would be a huge step toward the next stage.

"We will do our best," Daboub said. "Football is the most popular game in the world. It brings people together. We aspire to achieve good results and qualify to show the Palestinian identity and that this is a people who deserve life and love peace."

The 2024 Grammy Award nominations are about to arrive. Here's what to know

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Buckle up, music lovers! The nominations for the 2024 Grammy Awards will arrive Friday.

Nominees will be announced during a video stream live on the Grammy website and the Recording Academy's YouTube channel at 8 a.m. Pacific/11 a.m. Eastern.

A host of talent is on deck to announce the nominees, including "Weird Al" Yankovic, Jimmy Jam, Jon Bon Jovi, Kim Petras, Samara Joy and Muni Long.

Only recordings released between Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 15, 2023, are eligible, so don't expect to see album nominations for the Rolling Stones, Bad Bunny, or Drake. (But Drake's 2022 album with 21 Savage, "Her Loss"? That's on the table.) And much to the chagrin of fans of Michelle Williams' reading of Britney Spears' memoir "The Woman in Me," the actor will not be eligible in the best audio book, narration and storytelling recording category this cycle.

The 2024 awards will feature a few changes, including one that inspired a lot of online chatter over the summer: "Only human creators" can win the music industry's highest honor, a decision aimed at the use of artificial intelligence in popular music.

Afterward, Recording Academy CEO and President Harvey Mason jr. told The Associated Press: "AI, or music that contains AI-created elements is absolutely eligible for entry and for consideration for Grammy nomination. Period."

He continued: "What's not going to happen is we are not going to give a Grammy or Grammy nomination to the AI portion."

There are also three new categories: best pop dance recording, best African music performance and best alternative jazz album.

Two existing categories have been moved to the general field, which means that all Grammy voters can participate in selecting the winners: producer of the year, non-classical, and songwriter of the year, non-classical, the latter of which was first introduced this past year.

Previously, the general categories were made up solely of the "Big Four" awards: best new artist, as well as album, record, and song of the year.

The 2024 Grammy Awards will air Feb. 4 live on CBS and Paramount+ from the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.

Judge in Alaska upholds Biden administration's approval of the massive Willow oil-drilling project

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday upheld the Biden administration's approval of the massive Willow oil-drilling project on Alaska's remote North Slope, a decision that environmental groups swiftly vowed to fight.

U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Gleason rejected requests by a grassroots Iñupiat group and environmentalists to vacate the project approval, and she dismissed their claims against Willow, which is in the federally designated National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The administration's approval of Willow in March drew the ire of environmentalists who accused the president of backpedaling on his pledge to combat climate change.

The company behind the project, ConocoPhillips Alaska, has the right to develop its leases in the reserve "subject to reasonable restrictions and mitigation measures imposed by the federal government," Gleason wrote. She added that the alternatives analyzed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management as part of its review were consistent with the policy objectives for the petroleum reserve and the stated purpose and need of the Willow project.

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The groups that sued over the project raised concerns about planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions from Willow and argued that federal agencies failed to consider how increased emissions from the project could affect ice-reliant species such as the polar bear, Arctic ringed seals and bearded seals, which already are experiencing disruptions due to climate change.

Gleason said an agency environmental review "appropriately analyzed the indirect and cumulative" greenhouse gas emissions impacts of the project.

Erik Grafe, an attorney with Earthjustice, which represents several environmental groups in one of the cases, called the ruling disappointing and said an appeal was planned.

Bridget Psarianos, an attorney with Trustees for Alaska, which represents Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic and environmental groups in the other lawsuit, called Gleason's decision "bad news not just for our clients but for anyone who cares about the climate and future generations."

"There is too much at stake to gloss over the harm this project will do," Psarianos said. "We will remain steadfast in working with our clients to protect the Arctic from this devastating project today and in the weeks, months, and years ahead."

The project has widespread political support in Alaska. But climate activists said allowing it to go forward marked a major breach of President Joe Biden's campaign promise to stop new oil drilling on federal lands. The administration's action alienated and outraged some supporters, particularly young activists who launched a TikTok campaign to oppose the project ahead of its approval.

ConocoPhillips Alaska had proposed five drilling sites, but the Bureau of Land Management approved three, which it said would include up to 199 total wells. The project could produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day at its peak. Using that oil would produce the equivalent of at least 263 million tons (239 million metric tons) of greenhouse gas emissions over Willow's projected 30-year life.

The administration has defended its climate record, and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland earlier this year called Willow "a very long and complicated and difficult decision to make," noting that ConocoPhillips Alaska has long held leases in the region and that regulators tried to balance drilling rights with a project that was narrower in scope.

Interior declined to comment on Gleason's decision Thursday.

Connor Dunn, vice president of the Willow project for ConocoPhillips Alaska, said in court documents that it was "highly unlikely" that Willow would proceed if the administration's approval were to be vacated.

Many of the company's leases in the area date to 1999 and are at risk of expiring by Sept. 1, 2029, if oil hasn't been produced by then, Dunn said. There is no guarantee the company, which through July had invested about \$925 million in Willow, would get an extension on its leases, he said.

In April, Gleason rejected efforts to halt cold-weather construction work by ConocoPhillips Alaska while litigation was pending, including mining gravel and using it for a road toward the project. That work ended in May.

Following Gleason's decision Thursday, the company said it intends to proceed with plans for construction work this winter.

Erec Isaacson, president of ConocoPhillips Alaska, said Willow "underwent nearly five years of rigorous regulatory review and environmental analysis, including extensive public involvement from the communities closest to the project site. We now want to make this project a reality and help Alaskan communities realize the extensive benefits of responsible energy development."

The project has been mired in litigation for years.

A prior authorization of Willow, issued in 2020 during the Trump administration, called for allowing ConocoPhillips to establish up to three drill sites, with the potential for two more proposed by the company to be considered later.

But Gleason set that aside in 2021 after finding that the federal review underpinning the decision was flawed and did not include mitigation measures for polar bears. The ruling led to a new environmental analysis and the Biden administration's greenlight in March for what Justice Department attorneys had said was a scaled-back version that resolved concerns raised by Gleason.

Many Alaska Native leaders on the North Slope and groups with ties to the region have argued that Willow is economically vital for their communities. Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy, the state's bipartisan congressional delegation and labor unions have touted Willow as a job creator in a state where major existing oil fields are aging and production is a fraction of what it once was.

"Today's ruling gives us hope for our collective future on the North Slope and in Alaska," said Nagruk Harcharek, president of Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat, a group whose members include leaders from across much of the North Slope region. "Going forward, we hope that key decision makers in the Biden administration and in Congress listen to the voices of those who know these lands better than anyone else: the North Slope Iñupiat."

Some Alaska Native leaders in the community nearest the project, Nuiqsut, have expressed concerns about impacts to their subsistence lifestyles and have said their concerns were ignored.

Election offices are sent envelopes with fentanyl or other substances. Authorities are investigating

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY, GENE JOHNSON and ED KOMENDA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Authorities were hunting Thursday for whoever sent suspicious letters — including some containing fentanyl — to elections offices in at least five states this week, delaying the counting of ballots in some local races in the latest instance of threats faced by election workers around the country.

The letters were sent to elections offices in the presidential battlegrounds of Georgia and Nevada, as well as California, Oregon and Washington, with some being intercepted before they arrived. Four of the letters contained fentanyl, the FBI and U.S. Postal Inspection Service reported in a statement to elections officials Thursday.

"Law enforcement is working diligently to intercept any additional letters before they are delivered," the statement said.

The Pierce County auditor's office in Tacoma, Washington, released images of the letter it received, showing it had been postmarked in Portland, Oregon, and read in part, "End elections now."

In Seattle, King County Elections Director Julie Wise said that letter appeared to be the same one her office got — and that it was "very similar" to one King County received during the August primary, which also contained fentanyl.

Among the offices that appeared to be targeted was Fulton County in Georgia, which includes Atlanta and is the largest voting jurisdiction in one of the nation's most important presidential swing states. Authorities were working to intercept the letter. In the meantime, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said officials were sending the overdose-reversal drug naloxone to the office as a precaution.

"This is domestic terrorism, and it needs to be condemned by anyone that holds elected office and anyone that wants to hold elective office anywhere in America," said Raffensperger, a Republican.

In California, the United States Postal Service intercepted two suspicious envelopes that were headed to election facilities in Los Angeles and Sacramento.

Authorities in Lane County, Oregon, which includes the University of Oregon, were investigating a piece of mail that arrived at the local election office Wednesday. No one who came in contact with it had experienced any negative health effects, said Devon Ashbridge, spokeswoman for the Lane County Elections Office in Eugene.

The incident prompted officials to close the office and delayed an afternoon pickup of ballots. Ashbridge declined to provide further details.

"Someone attempted to terrorize our elections staff, and that's not OK," Ashbridge said.

On Wednesday, authorities in Washington state said four county election offices had to be evacuated as election workers were processing ballots cast in Tuesday's election, delaying vote-counting.

Election offices in King, Skagit, Spokane and Pierce counties received envelopes containing powders. Local law enforcement officials said the substances in King and Spokane counties field-tested positive for fentanyl. In at least one other case, the substance was baking soda.

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Pierce County Auditor Linda Farmer released images of the envelope and letter her office received. The letter contained a warning about the vulnerability of "ballot drops" and read: "End elections now. Stop giving power to the right that they don't have. We are in charge now and there is no more need for them."

The letter featured an antifascist symbol, a progress pride flag and a pentagram. While the symbols have sometimes been associated with leftist politics, they also have been used by conservative figures to label and stereotype the left, and the sender's political leanings were unclear.

Elections offices in two Washington counties — King and Okanogan — also received suspicious envelopes while processing ballots during the August primary, and the letter sent to King County tested positive for traces of fentanyl. Those letters remain under investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and FBI.

Washington Secretary of State Steve Hobbs called the incidents in his state "acts of terrorism to threaten our elections."

White House spokeswoman Olivia Dalton said the Biden administration was aware of the investigation: "We are grateful for the election and poll workers who served this week to ensure the security of our democratic processes."

Fentanyl, an opioid that can be 50 times as powerful as the same amount of heroin, is driving an overdose crisis deadlier than any the U.S. has ever seen as it is pressed into pills or mixed into other drugs. Briefly touching fentanyl cannot cause an overdose, and researchers have found that the risk of fatal overdose from accidental exposure is low.

Jeanmarie Perrone, director of the Center for Addiction Medicine and Policy at the University of Pennsylvania said studies simulating exposure from opening envelopes containing powders showed that very little, if any, of the powder becomes aerosolized to cause toxicity through inhalation.

She noted that factory workers in manufacturing facilities often wear some level of protective equipment, but even incidental nasal exposure has not been found to cause toxicity in those workers.

"We have really good evidence that it wouldn't be exposed through the skin, or through inhalation," Perrone said.

It was not immediately clear how authorities came to suspect that a letter might have been sent to Georgia's biggest election office. Raffensperger said the state alerted all 159 of its counties of the possible threat Wednesday, but believes only Fulton County is being targeted.

It's the latest disruption since the 2020 election to the office that oversees voting in and around Atlanta.

Fulton County Commission Chairman Robb Pitts, speaking at a news conference Thursday with Raffensperger, said the county's election workers had been under threat since at least when two of them were singled out following the 2020 presidential election, with then-Republican President Donald Trump, attorney Rudolph Giuliani and others falsely alleging that election workers were stuffing ballots to aid Democrats. Democrat Joe Biden narrowly won the state.

Part of the Fulton County prosecution that indicted Trump, Giuliani and 17 others includes criminal charges focusing on statements and acts made against election workers.

"There's people out there who want to do harm to our workers and want to disrupt, interrupt, the flow of democracy and free, open and transparent elections, and we're prepared for it," said Pitts, an elected Democrat.

Pitts said he believes that in 2024 Georgia's most populous county will be the "focal point" of election scrutiny.

"So this was a good trial run for us, I hate to say it," he said.

Many election offices across the United States have taken steps to increase the security of their buildings and boost protections for workers amid an onslaught of harassment and threats following the 2020 election and the false claims that it was rigged.

It's a "sad reality" that election officials are still facing threats, said David Becker, a former attorney in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division who works with election officials through the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation & Research.

"While it may be unlikely this attack would cause serious damage, it seems clearly designed to terrorize the public servants in these offices who run elections," Becker said.

Komenda reported from Tacoma, Washington, and Johnson from Seattle. Associated Press writers Jeff Amy in Atlanta; Ali Swenson in New York; Josh Boak in Chicago; Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia; Adam Beam in Sacramento, California; and Lindsay Whitehurst contributed to this report.

Former top prosecutor for Baltimore convicted in perjury case tied to purchase of Florida homes

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. (AP) — A former top prosecutor for the city of Baltimore was convicted on Thursday of charges that she lied about the finances of a side business to improperly access retirement funds during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the money to buy two Florida homes.

A federal jury convicted former Baltimore state's attorney Marilyn Mosby of two counts of perjury after a trial that started Monday.

Mosby served two terms as state's attorney for Baltimore. A federal grand jury indicted her on perjury charges before a Democratic primary challenger defeated her last year.

James Wyda, a lawyer for Mosby, declined to comment, citing a gag order.

The maximum prison sentence for each count of perjury is five years, said a statement from U.S. Attorney Erik L. Barron's office. "We respect the jury's verdict and remain steadfastly committed to our mission to uphold the rule of law, keep our country safe, protect the civil rights of all Americans, and safeguard public property," he said.

Mosby gained a national profile for prosecuting Baltimore police officers after Freddie Gray, a Black man, died in police custody in 2015, which was Mosby's first year in office. His death led to riots and protests in the city. None of the officers were convicted.

Mosby declined to testify before her attorneys rested their case on Wednesday. After the verdict, she said, "I'm blessed" as she left the courthouse and entered a waiting car.

Mosby also faces separate charges of mortgage fraud. A trial date for those charges hasn't been set.

In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, Mosby withdrew \$90,000 from Baltimore city's deferred compensation plan. She received her full salary, about \$250,000 that year.

Mosby's 2022 indictment accused her of improperly accessing retirement funds by falsely claiming that the pandemic harmed a travel-oriented business that she had formed. She used the withdrawals as down payments to buy a home in Kissimmee, Florida, and a condominium in Long Boat Key, Florida.

Prosecutors argued that Mosby wasn't entitled to access the funds under provisions of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. They said her business, Mahogany Elite Enterprises, had no clients or revenue and didn't sustain any "adverse financial consequences" from the pandemic.

"This case is about a lawyer and a public servant who placed her own selfish interests above the truth," Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean Delaney told jurors on Monday during the trial's opening statements.

Mosby made separate withdrawals of \$40,000 and \$50,000 from the city retirement plan. Prosecutors say the money in the account is held in trust and belongs to the city until a plan participant is eligible to make a withdrawal.

One of Mosby's lawyers said she was legally entitled to withdraw the money and spend it however she wanted. Mosby told the truth when she certified on paperwork that the pandemic devastated her business, said federal public defender James Wyda.

During the trial's closing arguments, Wyda said Mosby spent time and money to start a business designed to help "women of color" in business to travel to retreats.

"You know the world stopped when the pandemic hit" in 2020, Wyda told jurors. "What company or business associated with the pandemic didn't stop when the global pandemic hit?"

A. Scott Bolden, a lawyer who initially represented Mosby but later withdrew from the case, has described the charges as "bogus" and claimed the case is "rooted in personal, political and racial animus."

During her tenure as state's attorney, Mosby received national recognition for her progressive policies and became a lightning rod for criticism from those who thought she went too far. Among other high-profile decisions, Mosby stopped prosecuting certain low-level crimes, a practice her successor has reversed.

U.S. District Judge Lydia Kay Griggsby agreed to move Mosby's trial from Baltimore to Greenbelt, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C.

Mosby's attorneys argued that she couldn't get a fair trial in Baltimore after years of negative media coverage. Prosecutors opposed the venue change, saying Mosby had sought and encouraged coverage of the case. ___ This story has been updated to remove an incorrect quote from Marilyn Mosby. A previous version of this story quoted her as saying "I don't know what else to say," when she actually said "I have nothing else to say."

Associated Press writer Lea Skene in Baltimore contributed to this report.

Israel agrees to 4-hour daily pauses in Gaza fighting to allow civilians to flee, White House says

By ZEKE MILLER, ELLEN KNICKMEYER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel has agreed to put in place four-hour daily humanitarian pauses in its assault on Hamas in northern Gaza, the White House said Thursday, as President Joe Biden pressed Israelis for a multi-day stoppage in the fighting in a bid to negotiate the release of hostages held by the militant group.

Biden had asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to institute the daily pauses during a Monday call and said he had also asked the Israelis for a pause of at least three days to allow for hostage negotiations.

"Yes," Biden said, when asked whether he had asked Israel for a three-day pause. "I've asked for even a longer pause for some of them." He added there was "no possibility" of a formal cease-fire at the moment, and said it had "taken a little longer" than he hoped for Israel to agree to the humanitarian pauses.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said a daily humanitarian pause would be announced Thursday and that the Israelis had committed to announcing each four-hour window at least three hours in advance. Israel, he said, also was opening a second corridor for civilians to flee the areas that are the current focus of its military campaign against Hamas, with a coastal road joining the territory's main north-south highway.

Similar short-term pauses have occurred over the past several days as tens of thousands of civilians have fled southward, but Thursday's announcement appeared to be an effort to formalize and expand the process, as the U.S. has pressed Israelis to take greater steps to protect civilians in Gaza.

Asked in a Fox News interview that aired Thursday about the prospect of a daily humanitarian pause, Netanyahu replied that "the fighting continues against the Hamas enemy, the Hamas terrorists, but in specific locations for a given period, a few hours here, a few hours there, we want to facilitate a safe passage of civilians away from the zone of fighting. And we're doing that."

Biden's push for an even longer pause comes as part of a renewed diplomatic push to free hostages taken by Hamas and other militant groups to the Gaza Strip during their Oct. 7 surprise attack on Israel.

Israeli officials estimate that militants still hold 239 hostages, including children and the elderly, from the attack that also saw 1,400 people killed in Israel. U.S. officials say fewer than 10 Americans are among those held captive. More than 10,800 people have been killed in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Kirby told reporters Thursday that pauses could be useful for "getting all 239 hostages back with their families, to include the less than 10 Americans that we know are being held. So if we can get all the hostages out, that's a nice finite goal."

"Humanitarian pauses can be useful in the transfer process," he added.

Indirect talks were taking place in Qatar — which also played a role in the freeing of four hostages

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by Hamas last month — about a larger release of hostages. CIA Director William Burns was in Doha on Thursday for talks with the Qatari prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, David Barnea, according to a U.S. official. The official spoke with The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Qatar is a frequent go-between in international dealings with Hamas, and some top Hamas political leaders make their home in the Gulf country. The U.S. official stressed Burns was not playing a lead role in the negotiations.

Kirby confirmed that the U.S. continues to have "active discussions with partners about trying to secure the release of hostages," noting in particular Qatar's help.

Sen. Ben Cardin, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told the AP that several issues need to be resolved in the negotiations, including whether a more extended pause in fighting or the hostage release would come first, and whether it would be possible to access all the hostages to know how many there were and the state of their health,

Cardin, D-Md., returned to Washington this week after helping lead a congressional delegation to the Middle East for talks with leaders from Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. He and fellow lawmakers met with Biden on Wednesday night to brief him on their talks in the region.

"We have been told in the last several weeks that progress is imminent ... and then nothing happens," he said. He added, "I hope we'll see some progress, but we've been disappointed in the past."

Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, an Israeli military spokesman, said there had been no shift in Israeli tactics. "There's no cease-fire," he told reporters. "These are tactical local pauses for humanitarian aid, which are limited in time and area."

"These evacuation corridors are for civilians to move south to safer areas where they can receive humanitarian aid." Asked about Kirby's announcement, he said: "It's not a shift," though he said Israel would try to expand these humanitarian corridors.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken had warned Israel last week that it risked destroying an eventual possibility for peace unless it acted swiftly to improve humanitarian conditions in Gaza for Palestinian civilians as it intensifies its war against Hamas.

In a blunt call for Israel to pause military operations to allow for the immediate and increased delivery of assistance, Blinken said the situation would drive Palestinians toward further radicalism and effectively end prospects for any eventual resumption of peace talks.

French President Emmanuel Macron had opened a Gaza aid conference on Thursday 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."

Kirby said Uzra Zeya, the State Department's under secretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights; special envoy David Satterfield; and Sarah Charles, who leads the USAID's bureau for humanitarian assistance, were representing the U.S. at the Paris conference. Israel has not been invited by France to the conference.

Satterfield on Thursday described improving aid delivery for central and southern Gaza, but described no such effort in the northern battle zone other than to help civilians flee the intensifying Israeli assault.

He told reporters via an online briefing that the international community had been able to get fuel to turn back on water desalination plants in the south, and that aid into the south was averaging 100 trucks a day. Two pipelines supplying clean drinking water to the south from Israel have been turned back on.

"We do see the ability in the coming days, we hope, to meet the minimum requirements of the population in the south," he said. "And I'm speaking of the south and the center, not of the north, which remains a kinetic area."

AP writers Josh Boak, Colleen Long and Michelle Price in Washington contributed.

First-of-a-kind nuclear project is terminated in a blow to Biden's clean energy agenda

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A project to build a first-of-a-kind small modular nuclear reactor power plant was terminated Wednesday, another blow to the Biden administration's clean energy agenda following cancellations last week of two major offshore wind projects.

Oregon-based NuScale Power has the only small modular nuclear reactor design certified for use in the United States. For its first project, the company was working with a group of Utah utilities to demonstrate a six-reactor plant at the Idaho National Laboratory, generating enough electricity to power more than 300,000 homes.

The project was to come online starting in 2029 and was supposed to replace electricity from coal plants that are closing. When combined with wind and solar, the advanced nuclear technology was intended to help municipalities and public power utilities in several western states eliminate planet-warming greenhouse gas emission from the power sector.

Instead, NuScale and the Utah utilities announced Wednesday they're terminating the project after a decade of working on it. The cancellation comes as two large offshore wind projects in New Jersey were canceled amid supply chain problems, high interest rates and a failure to obtain the desired tax credits.

The announcement by Danish energy giant Orsted was the latest in a series of setbacks for the nascent U.S. offshore wind industry and a blow to President Joe Biden's goal to have 30 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2030, enough to power 10 million homes.

A spokeswoman for the Energy Department called the cancellation "unfortunate news," but said first-of-a-kind deployments are often difficult. Officials believe the work accomplished to date on the project will be valuable for future nuclear energy projects.

"We absolutely need advanced nuclear energy technology to meet (the Biden administration's) ambitious clean energy goals," spokeswoman Charisma Troiano said.

"While not every project is guaranteed to succeed, DOE remains committed to doing everything we can to deploy these technologies to combat the climate crisis and increase access to clean energy."

Timothy Fox, vice president at ClearView Energy Partners, a Washington-based research firm, called NuScale's announcement "a substantial setback" for small nuclear power, but said there is still "a lot of interest out there" in developing the technology at other sites. It was not yet clear whether other projects under development face similar obstacles, he said.

"This was the frontrunner, and the frontrunner has now faltered," Fox said.

The Energy Department under three presidents has provided more than \$600 million since 2014 to support the design, licensing and siting of a small modular reactor power plant near Idaho Falls, Idaho at the Energy Department's Idaho National Laboratory.

In 2020, the Trump administration approved up to \$1.4 billion for the project, known as the Carbon Free Power Project. The agreement serves as a funding vehicle and is subject to future appropriations by Congress.

The cancellation of the Idaho project reminded some critics of the earlier failure of Solyndra, the California solar company that went bankrupt soon after receiving a federal loan from the Obama administration more than a decade ago, costing taxpayers more than \$500 million.

NuScale and the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems said it was unlikely the project will have enough subscriptions from local power providers to continue. The power system serves 50 members, mostly municipalities and public power utilities in Utah and other Western states.

Most prospective subscribers were unwilling to take on the risks associated with developing a first-of-a-kind nuclear project, the Utah group said.

Costs have increased more than 50% in the last two years to \$89 per megawatt hour, the company said. Small reactors are seen as an alternative to more costly, traditional nuclear power that includes large reactors and cost billions of dollars and takes decades to complete.

NuScale President and Chief Executive Officer John Hopkins said the company will continue working with domestic and international customers to bring its technology to the market. The design that was certified by federal regulators is for a 50-megawatt, advanced light-water small modular nuclear reactor. The company is currently seeking certification for an upgraded 77-megawatt design.

NuScale said it can use power plant design plans and the regulatory progress from the cancelled project for other customers and is working to transfer materials with long lead times to other projects.

The Utah power system said it will focus on non-nuclear resources in the near term, and will need additional renewables, primarily solar and wind, as well as new natural gas.

The Nuclear Energy Institute, the industry's trade association, called the cancellation "very disappointing," but said it was understandable because of the difficulties inherent in developing new technologies. NuScale has a design that will deploy and bring clean and reliable energy in the future as the demand for clean energy grows globally, the institute said in a statement.

Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group, an advocacy organization that opposes nuclear power, said the Energy Department under three successive administrations has wasted more than half a billion dollars in taxpayer money.

"It's about time the plug was pulled on this small modular reactor disaster," Cook said in a statement. "What a colossal waste of hundreds of millions in taxpayer dollars, which could have been spent on existing, safe and renewable sources of energy like solar and wind."

While no other small modular reactor or advanced design has been submitted to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for certification, the agency said Thursday that other companies are close to applying and there's a great deal of activity within the industry.

McDermott reported from Providence, Rhode Island.

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Chase on Texas border that killed 8 puts high-speed pursuits in spotlight again

By PAUL J. WEBER and VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The white Honda Civic sped down Highway 57, a rural two-lane corridor that reaches the U.S.-Mexico border, after a Texas sheriff's deputy tried pulling over the car and gave chase when it didn't stop.

High-speed pursuits of migrants and suspected smugglers have become routine in Texas. But Wednesday's chase came to one of the deadliest endings in recent years: a head-on crash that killed eight people, including Honduran citizens and two residents of Georgia.

The mangled wreckage at the scene near La Pryor, a small town about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of San Antonio, laid bare the danger of high-speed pursuits undertaken by an ever-expanding presence of law enforcement at the border. Texas alone has stationed hundreds of additional troopers the past two years in the name of curbing the flow of migrants and drugs.

The crash has also renewed criticism that the pursuits are too fast and have gone on for too long despite chases that have ended in injuries or death. In January, U.S. Customs and Border Protection issued a new policy for vehicle pursuits with an eye toward increasing safety.

For some, changes haven't spread wide enough.

"They can mitigate getting into these issues and these high-speed chases that end in death," said David Stout, a county commissioner in El Paso.

Stout said Texas troopers have engaged in roughly 500 high-speed pursuits in his border county alone this year, more than half of which exceeded speeds of 100 mph (160 kph).

Authorities had still not released identities of the victims Thursday, including the 21-year-old driver of

the Civic and five passengers in the vehicle. The Civic collided with a Chevrolet Equinox, which caught fire with a man and woman inside. Both were killed.

It is not clear the top speeds the cars reached during the pursuit, which began when a Zavala County sheriff's deputy tried pulling the Civic over around dawn. The sheriff's office did not comment Thursday beyond providing a brief report.

The crash is under investigation by the Texas Department of Public Safety, which oversees Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's sprawling border mission known as Operation Lone Star. The department did not immediately provide figures on high-speed pursuits. But Director Steve McCraw did not dispute that his own troopers have been involved in thousands of chases the past two years.

A pursuit can be called off, McCraw said, if "it becomes an unreasonable risk to the public or yourself." He said troopers will also back off if police aircraft arrive to keep an eye on the fleeing vehicle.

"The problem with that is when we've done that, they continue to drive fast," McCraw said in an interview Thursday. "So once the chase is on, it's not like they just slow down."

Last year, the American Civil Liberties Union and another civil rights group sent a complaint to the U.S. Justice Department over high-speed pursuits along the Texas border. Citing news reports, the groups said they had counted 30 deaths and 71 injuries in chases involving state troopers during the first 16 months of Abbott's border mission.

Pedro Rios, a director of the American Friends Service Committee, has studied the policies of federal agents involved in vehicle pursuits and believes the chases should be forbidden altogether.

"What we've called on is for vehicle pursuits to end because the risk to the safety of not only migrants, but also the officers or the agents and other bystanders, such as in this case, could be put in jeopardy," he said.

The Texas crash marked the highest death toll in a crash involving migrants since 13 people died in a collision in remote Holtville, California, in March 2021. Another chase by local police last year near the Texas border also ended in the deaths of four migrants.

McCraw said he has never fired a trooper over their actions during a pursuit.

"I'm sure that we've had some coaching or counseling," he said. "That just happens by nature because it's a fine line between how fast you drive. And sometimes it may not be a risk to the public as much as it's risk to the trooper driving 153 miles an hour down the roadway."

In El Paso, Stout said high-speed pursuits this year have resulted in more than 60 accidents. He recalled one chase that ended with a car crashing on a bridge. When two migrants inside the car got out, Stout said, they fell to their deaths.

"That really sticks out in my mind when I think about these things," he said.

Gonzalez reported from McAllen, Texas. Associated Press reporters Elliot Spagat in San Diego and Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas contributed to this report.

Fights in bread lines, despair in shelters: War threatens to unravel Gaza's close-knit society

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Fistfights break out in bread lines. Residents wait hours for a gallon of brackish water that makes them sick. Scabies, diarrhea and respiratory infections rip through overcrowded shelters. And some families have to choose who eats.

"My kids are crying because they are hungry and tired and can't use the bathroom," said Suzan Wahidi, an aid worker and mother of five at a U.N. shelter in the central town of Deir al-Balah, where hundreds of people share a single toilet. "I have nothing for them."

With the Israel-Hamas war in its second month and more than 10,000 people killed in Gaza, trapped civilians are struggling to survive without electricity or running water. Palestinians who managed to flee Israel's ground invasion in northern Gaza now encounter scarcity of food and medicine in the south, and

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there is no end in sight to the war sparked by Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 attack.

Over half a million displaced people have crammed into hospitals and U.N. schools-turned-shelters in the south. The schools — overcrowded, strewn with trash, swarmed by flies — have become a breeding ground for infectious diseases.

Since the start of the war, several hundred trucks of aid have entered Gaza through the southern Rafah crossing, but aid organizations say that's a drop in the ocean of need. For most people, each day has become a drudging cycle of searching for bread and water and waiting in lines.

The sense of desperation has strained Gaza's close-knit society, which has endured decades of conflict, four wars with Israel and a 16-year blockade since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces.

Some Palestinians have even vented their anger against Hamas, shouting insults at officials or beating up policemen in scenes unimaginable just a month ago, witnesses say.

"Everywhere you go, you see tension in the eyes of people," said Yousef Hammash, an aid worker with the Norwegian Refugee Council in the southern town of Khan Younis. "You can tell they are at a breaking point."

Supermarket shelves are nearly empty. Bakeries have shut down because of lack of flour and fuel for the ovens. Gaza's farmland is mostly inaccessible, and there's little in produce markets beyond onions and oranges. Families cook lentils over small fires in the streets.

"You hear children crying in the night for sweets and hot food," said Ahmad Kanj, 28, a photographer at a shelter in the southern town of Rafah. "I can't sleep."

Many people say they've gone weeks without meat, eggs or milk and now live on one meal a day.

"There is a real threat of malnutrition and people starving," said Alia Zaki, spokesperson for the U.N.'s World Food Program. What aid workers call "food insecurity" is the new baseline for Gaza's 2.3 million people, she said.

Famed Gazan dishes like jazar ahmar — juicy red carrots stuffed with ground lamb and rice — are a distant memory, replaced by dates and packaged biscuits. Even those are hard to find.

Each day families send their most assertive relative off before dawn to one of the few bakeries still functioning. Some take knives and sticks — they say they must prepare to defend themselves if attacked, with riots sporadically breaking out in bread and water lines.

"I send my sons to the bakeries and eight hours later, they've come back with bruises and sometimes not even bread," said 59-year-old Etaf Jamala, who fled Gaza City for the southern town of Deir al-Balah, where she sleeps in the packed halls of a hospital with 15 family members.

One woman told The Associated Press that her nephew, a 27-year-old father of five in the urban refugee camp of Jabaliya in northern Gaza, was stabbed in the back with a kitchen knife after being accused of cutting the line for water. He needed dozens of stitches, she said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The violence has jarred the tiny territory, where family names are linked to community status and even small indiscretions can be magnified in the public eye.

"The social fabric for which Gaza was known is fraying due to the anxiety and uncertainty and loss," said Juliette Touma, a spokesperson for the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees.

Israel cut off water to Gaza shortly after the Hamas attack, saying its complete siege would be lifted only after the militants released the roughly 240 hostages they captured. Israel has since turned on pipelines to the center and south, but there's no fuel to pump or process the water. The taps run dry.

Those who can't find or afford bottled water rely on salty, unfiltered well water, which doctors say causes diarrhea and serious gastrointestinal infections.

"I cannot recognize my own son," said Fadi Ihjazi. The 3-year-old has lost 5 kilograms (11 pounds) in just two weeks, she said, and has been diagnosed with a chronic intestinal infection.

"Before the war he had the sweetest baby face," Ihjazi said, but now his lips are chapped, his face yellowish, his eyes sunken.

At shelters, the lack of water makes it hard to maintain even basic hygiene, said Dr. Ali al-Uhisi, who treats patients at one in Deir al-Balah. Lice and chicken pox have spread, he said, and on Wednesday

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morning alone he treated four cases of meningitis. This week, he's also seen 20 cases of the liver infection hepatitis A.

"What worries me is that I know I'm seeing a fraction of the total number of cases at the shelter," he said.

For most ailments, there is no treatment — zinc tablets and oral rehydration salts vanished the first week of the war. Frustrated patients have assaulted doctors, said Al-Uhisi, who described being beaten this week by a patient who needed a syringe.

Sadeia Abu Harbeid, 44, said she missed a chemotherapy treatment for her breast cancer during the second week of the war and can't find painkillers. Without regular treatments, she says, her chances of survival are dim.

She hardly eats, choosing to give most of the little food she has to her 2-year-old. "This existence is a humiliation," she said.

Across Gaza, rare scenes of dissent are playing out. Some Palestinians are openly challenging the authority of Hamas, which long has ruled the enclave with an iron fist. Four Palestinians across Gaza spoke to AP on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals about what they've seen.

A man who was told off by a Hamas officer for cutting the bread line took a chair and smashed it over his head, according to an aid worker in line. In another area, angry crowds hurled stones at Hamas police who cut in front of a water line and beat them with their fists until they scattered, according to a journalist there.

Over the past few night in Gaza City, Hamas rockets streaming overhead toward Israel have prompted outbursts of rage from a U.N. shelter. In the middle of the night, hundreds of people have shouted insults against Hamas and cried out that they wanted the war to end, according to a 28-year-old sleeping in a tent there with his family.

And during a televised press conference Tuesday, a young man with a dazed expression and bandaged wrist pushed his way through the crowd, disrupting a speech by Iyad Bozum, spokesman for the Hamas-run Interior Ministry.

"May God hold you to account, Hamas!" the man yelled, shaking his wounded hand.

Gaza's future remains uncertain as Israeli tanks rumble down the ghostly streets of Gaza City with the goal of toppling Hamas. Palestinians say it will never be the same.

"The Gaza I know is just a memory now," said 16-year-old Jihad Ghandour, who fled to Rafah. "There are no places or anything I know left."

Taylor Swift's Argentina concert takes political turn as presidential election nears

By DANIEL POLITI and NATACHA PISARENKO Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — As thousands of Taylor Swift fans eagerly lined up Thursday for the superstar's first-ever concert in Argentina, they saw themselves surrounded by posters urging them to not vote in favor of right-wing populist Javier Milei in next week's presidential election.

"A Swiftie Doesn't Vote Milei," read one of the posters, using the term commonly used to describe fans of the 12-time Grammy winner.

Some Swifties agreed. "Taylor defends lots of positions and things that Milei doesn't represent," said 17-year-old Julieta Bracamontes. "That sign is right and I agree with it."

At the bottom of the poster a hashtag read "Milei Is Trump."

Milei, a self-described anarcho-capitalist who holds lots of socially conservative positions including opposition to abortion, has often been described as Argentina's Donald Trump.

"I think Trump is very similar to Milei," said Constanza Trunsky, a psychology student, noting the points in common between Argentina's current political climate and the views Swift has expressed in the past, particularly her support for the LGBT community.

Milei has said he supports marriage equality, which has been the law in Argentina since 2010, but has spoken up against sex education in schools and is opposed to the state devoting funds to assist the trans

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community as well as other minority groups.

Another poster that suddenly appeared in numerous locations around the Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires showed a stylized stencil portrait of Swift holding a tray of cookies of different shapes that read, "Massa 2023," in reference to Economy Minister Sergio Massa, Milei's opponent in the Nov. 19 presidential runoff.

The most hardcore Swifties immediately knew the image made reference to a famous photo of an overalls-wearing Swift holding cookies in favor of President Joe Biden's 2020 candidacy.

Politics first burst into the South American country's Swift fandom late last month, when a fan club issued a news release calling on fans of the superstar singer to vote against Milei.

Milei "represents the antidemocratic right that comes to take away all our acquired rights," the fan club said in a news release.

The group spoke up shortly after Massa received the most votes in the Oct. 22 election, obtaining 37% of the total, almost seven points more than Milei but not enough to avoid a runoff.

But not all Swifties agreed with the fan club meddling in politics.

"I don't think it's something they should get involved in and say that Swifties won't vote (for Milei) because everyone has their personal opinion, and they can't generalize like that," Lucila Losinno, 28, said Thursday while waiting to get into the concert.

Others who had been impatiently waiting for the Eras Tour to arrive in South America were eager to shake off any talk of politics.

"I don't sympathize with any of the politicians, but I don't know, I feel that putting the face of the artist on something political isn't very good," said Malena Garachena, 19. But "it's OK, I don't think she'll see it."

US childhood vaccination exemptions reach their highest level ever

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The proportion of U.S. kindergartners exempted from school vaccination requirements has hit its highest level ever, 3%, U.S. health officials said Thursday.

More parents are questioning routine childhood vaccinations that they used to automatically accept, an effect of the political schism that emerged during the pandemic around COVID-19 vaccines, experts say.

Even though more kids were given exemptions, the national vaccination rate held steady: 93% of kindergartners got their required shots for the 2022-2023 school year, the same as the year before, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a report Thursday. The rate was 95% in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The bad news is that it's gone down since the pandemic and still hasn't rebounded," said Dr. Sean O'Leary, a University of Colorado pediatric infectious diseases specialist. "The good news is that the vast majority of parents are still vaccinating their kids according to the recommended schedule."

All U.S. states and territories require that children attending child care centers and schools be vaccinated against a number of diseases, including, measles, mumps, polio, tetanus, whooping cough and chickenpox.

All states allow exemptions for children with medical conditions that prevents them from receiving certain vaccines. And most also permit exemptions for religious or other nonmedical reasons.

In the last decade, the percentage of kindergartners with medical exemptions has held steady, at about 0.2%. But the percentage with nonmedical exemptions has inched up, lifting the overall exemption rate from 1.6% in the 2011-2012 school year to 3% last year.

Last year, more than 115,000 kindergartners were exempt from at least one vaccine, the CDC estimated.

The rates vary across the country.

Ten states — all in the West or Midwest — reported that more than 5% of kindergartners were exempted from at least one kind of required vaccine. Idaho had the highest percentage, with 12% of kindergartners receiving at least one exemption. In contrast, 0.1% had exemptions in New York.

The rates can be influenced by state laws or policies can make it harder or easier to obtain exemptions, and by local attitudes among families and doctors about the need to get children vaccinated.

"Sometimes these jumps in exemptions can be very local, and it may not reflect a whole state," said O'Leary, who chairs an American Academy of Pediatrics committee on infectious diseases.

Hawaii saw the largest jump, with the exemption rate rising to 6.4%, nearly double the year before.

Officials there said it's not due to any law or policy change. Rather, "we have observed that there has been misinformation/disinformation impacting people's decision to vaccinate or not via social media platforms," officials at the state's health department said in a statement.

Connecticut and Maine saw significant declines, which CDC officials attributed to recent policy changes that made it harder to get exemptions.

Health officials say attaining 95% vaccination coverage is important to prevent outbreaks of preventable diseases, especially of measles, which is extremely contagious.

The U.S. has seen measles outbreaks begin when travelers infected elsewhere came to communities with low vaccination rates. That happened in 2019 when about 1,300 measles cases were reported — the most in the U.S. in nearly 30 years. Most of the cases were in Orthodox Jewish communities with low vaccination rates.

One apparent paradox in the report: The national vaccination rate held steady even as exemptions increased. How could that be?

CDC officials say it's because there are actually three groups of children in the vaccination statistics. One is those who get all the shots. A second is those who get exemptions. The third are children who didn't seek exemptions but also didn't get all their shots and paperwork completed at the time the data was collected.

"Last year, those kids in that third group probably decreased," offsetting the increase in the exemption group, the CDC's Shannon Stokley said.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Ballot shortages in Mississippi created a problem for democracy on the day of a governor's election

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS, MICHAEL GOLDBERG and AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — People in Mississippi's largest county are demanding answers about why some polling places ran out of ballots and voters had to wait for them to be replenished on the day the state was deciding its most competitive governor's race in a generation.

It's unclear how many people left without voting, and activists and local leaders say election officials' failure is shocking, especially in a state where civil rights leaders were beaten or killed in the 1960s and earlier to secure voting rights for Black residents.

"If you can't vote, that's a problem for democracy," said Paloma Wu, a Mississippi Center for Justice attorney who filed one of two lawsuits to keep polling places open later than usual in Hinds County.

Republican Gov. Tate Reeves defeated Democratic challenger Brandon Presley in Mississippi's most expensive gubernatorial race.

Nearly 40% of Mississippi residents are Black. Presley, who's a state utility regulator and second cousin of rock icon Elvis Presley, actively courted Black voters and needed strong support in majority-Black Hinds County, which is home to the capital city of Jackson.

Otis Wells, 51, said he, his wife and their son stood in a long line at a polling place in an old public library in the Jackson suburb of Clinton. He said they voted after waiting about an hour for a sheriff's deputy to deliver ballots. Wells estimated 40 or 45 ballots arrived while about 75 people were waiting — and this was hours before polls closed.

"It's frustrating and it sort of makes you feel like something was being rigged or something," Wells, who is Black, said Wednesday.

An employee in the Hinds County election commissioners' office told The Associated Press that com-

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missioners were not available for interviews Wednesday. All five Hinds County supervisors are Black and Democratic, as are all five of the county's election commissioners.

Hinds County administrator Kenny Wayne Jones said money should not have been the reason for a ballot shortage.

"The election commission had all of the funding to do the election and order all the ballots they needed to order," Jones said Wednesday.

As ballots ran short, groups filed two lawsuits to try to give people more time to vote Tuesday night. One was filed by the nonpartisan group Mississippi Votes, and the Mississippi Republican Party initially supported it. The other was filed by the Mississippi Democratic Party.

In the Democrats' lawsuit, a judge ordered all Hinds County polling places to remain open one extra hour, until 8 p.m. CST. In the other lawsuit, another judge said specific precincts would need to remain open until every voter in line at 7 p.m. had a chance to cast a ballot — something that was already required at precincts statewide.

Wu filed suit on behalf of Mississippi Votes. She said several groups worked together on election observation to protect voters' rights in Hinds County. The groups included Mississippi Votes, Poor People's Campaign, Legal Defense Fund and Mississippi Center for Justice.

Wu said the Mississippi Center for Justice, which focuses on issues of disproportionate disenfranchisement of Black residents, did not check the demographics of the precincts that ran out of ballots to see whether they were majority-Black, majority-white or evenly split.

She said small batches of ballots were delivered to precincts — not enough for the need.

"They weren't actually addressing and fixing the problem," Wu said. "There were just Band-Aids throughout the day."

Circuit Clerk Zack Wallace, the top elections official in Hinds County, said his office started receiving calls about ballot shortages Tuesday afternoon. He said he made a frantic trip to an office supply store as election commissioners scrambled to print more ballots and voters waited.

Secretary of State Michael Watson said one Hinds County precinct opened 15 minutes late, nine ran out of ballots and one conducted emergency balloting for an undisclosed amount of time.

One precinct in Clinton had 100 people in line but only 14 ballots available at 6:45 p.m., while another ran out of ballots three times but only received 100 more each time, according to the court filing by Mississippi Votes.

One precinct in nearby Byram had no ballots for two hours while a second had just 25 to 30 ballots and a long line of voters, the group said. A third location ran out of ballots and poll workers told people to leave because the precinct would not receive more ballots and the workers would not allow voting by affidavit ballot, according to the filing.

Wells said election officials should have expected a large turnout because of the governor's race.

Hannah Hoang, 25, a college student, said she was busy Tuesday and went to vote just before the usual poll-closing time of 7 p.m. She said her watch showed 6:58 p.m. when she arrived at the Fondren Presbyterian Church precinct in Jackson, but poll workers showed her a clock that showed 7:02 p.m. She said they told her she had arrived too late.

Hoang said she knew about the court order requiring polls to remain open until 8 p.m., but she left because the poll workers would not let her vote. She said she went home and called a voter-protection hotline, and a person told her she still had the right to cast a ballot.

She said her precinct was locked when she returned, and she was directed to go to a precinct in another church across the street. That one was open, and Hoang said she voted by affidavit ballot.

Wallace said some polling locations requested as many as 400-500 ballots at a time, he said. But by the time the ballots were delivered, precincts needed more. Eventually, Wallace's printing machine ran out of ink.

"I went to Office Depot, but they didn't have toner cartridges, and we weren't able to print the ballots," Wallace said Wednesday.

Workers ended up making copies of multiple different types of paper ballots.

Wallace said he was busy Tuesday night and did not have time to check how many precincts violated

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the court order to remain open late.

Voting rights activists plan to meet next week to discuss legal recourse around restoring fair access to ballots, said Debbie Pantenburg, spokesperson for the nonpartisan League of Women Voters of Mississippi.

"Our membership is outraged that the lack of ballots happened in a historically underrepresented region of our state," Pantenburg said.

She said the league wants Watson to investigate and publish a report detailing how the problems happened.

The secretary of state's office can randomly audit election results but does not have the authority to investigate how local officials conduct elections, said office spokesperson Elizabeth Holbert Jonson.

"Ultimately, the Election Commission must answer for what they did/didn't do," Jonson said. "At the end of the day, outside of any criminal activity, their constituents are the only ones who can hold them accountable."

Alexander reported from Washington, D.C.

The Associated Press coverage of race and voting receives support from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

The designated hitter hasn't always lived up to its title after 2 full MLB seasons in both leagues

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) — The universal designated hitter has been part of Major League Baseball for two full seasons and, much to the chagrin of some National League traditionalists, the sport has survived and even thrived.

In a somewhat surprising development, though, many teams are struggling to get much production from that spot.

The next generation of big-bopping DHs like David Ortiz, Edgar Martinez and Frank Thomas hasn't materialized, with just three players logging at least 110 games at designated hitter during the 2023 season. That trio includes Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani, Braves slugger Marcell Ozuna and the Nationals' Joey Meneses.

The general consensus at this week's general managers' meetings in Scottsdale, Arizona, is that filling the position — and getting production from it — is harder than it looks.

The American League has had the DH since 1973, while the National League made the full-time switch in 2022. The NL also used the DH in 2020 during the COVID-19 shortened season.

"Most hitters that you encounter don't like to DH," Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto said. "It's an acquired taste. Most would prefer to play a position and not just wait to hit every two or three innings. And I get why — you want to stay active, you want to move around, feel like you're part of the game."

Instead of having one dedicated DH for the majority of the season, most MLB teams seem content to have several, cycling players through who might need rest or are nursing an injury.

A whopping 13 of MLB's 30 teams received production at DH that was below replacement level. The DH is unique for the widely used WAR (wins above replacement) formula because it starts with a deficit for a player providing no value in the field.

The NL champion Arizona Diamondbacks were one of the teams that struggled at DH, with a minus-1.4 WAR total, according to FanGraphs. The spot produced just a .676 OPS during the 162-game regular season, which was well below the team's overall mark of .730.

D-backs GM Mike Hazen agreed he'd like to see more production at DH, but said there are other ways to use the rule that WAR can't completely quantify.

"If you're rotating your fourth outfielder through the DH spot, or one of your primary center fielders through the DH spot to give them a day off, that's what we're using it for now," Hazen said.

"We'll probably still keep doing that because there's value in keeping guys fresh and healthy."

San Francisco Giants president of baseball operations Farhan Zaidi said he would love to have an Ortiz-type player in the DH slot, but it's hard to find that sort of hitter. Ortiz is considered the gold standard, making the Hall of Fame in 2022 after clubbing 541 homers, including 485 as a DH.

The Giants used 10 designated hitters in 2023.

"I think when you get elite, elite hitters that don't have a home defensively, you're willing to pay the price of not having that spot to rotate guys through," Zaidi said. "But that's a relatively small group of players."

Zaidi's point about roster construction is also important, because teams usually carry just 13 or 14 position players. That doesn't leave much room for a player who's not useful in the field.

"I know for us in development, no matter how good a player is offensively, you're always going to look for a home for them defensively," Zaidi said. "We don't want a player anchored to that spot, certainly early in their career."

There are a few hitters in this year's free-agent class who could be candidates for a full-time DH role. Rhys Hoskins has a homer-hitting track record and is returning from ACL surgery. J.D. Martinez, Jorge Soler and Teoscar Hernández are other examples of power bats with middling defensive value who are looking for a home.

The Milwaukee Brewers are among the teams that could use an upgrade at DH. They were the worst team in baseball with a minus-1.6 WAR at that spot.

"I'm not sure there are a lot of David Ortizes out there," Brewers GM Matt Arnold said. "But we're certainly looking for the next one."

AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/mlb>

Pastor's suicide brings grief, warnings of the dangers of outing amid erosion of LGBTQ+ rights

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

SMITHS STATION, Ala. (AP) — After the 2019 suicide of a local teenager, small-town mayor and pastor F.L. "Bubba" Copeland helped students place roadside signs in his Alabama community to try to reach others who might be hurting.

"You are worthy of love." "Don't give up." "You matter."

Those were the same messages friends said they tried to get through to Copeland before he took his own life along one of those county roads two days after a conservative news site exposed social media posts where he appeared in women's clothing, a wig and makeup.

The disclosure bombarded Copeland, 49, with online ridicule and his death, experts said, underscores the dangers of outing people in an era that has seen the erosion of LGBTQ+ rights as states across the country introduce legislation based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Copeland's friends said they hope it prompts a wave of self-examination about how we treat others.

"I just want to ask you people who thought it humorous to publicly ridicule him. Are you happy now? What crime did he commit?" Larry DiChiara, a former school superintendent who knew Copeland from when he served on a county school board, wrote in a pointed Facebook post.

Copeland, the mayor of Smiths Station, a city of 5,300 near the Georgia border, ran a small grocery store and was pastor at First Baptist Church in nearby Phenix City, where a sign proclaims to passersby, "Jesus Loves You. All Are Welcome."

His public social media presence detailed baptisms, family gatherings, homecoming parades and sales at his country store.

State Rep. Jeremy Gray, a legislator from nearby Opelika, said Copeland had been a "steadfast presence" after a 2019 tornado devastated rural sections of the county, killing more than 20 people. Copeland was photographed with then-President Donald Trump when he toured the area.

But Copeland's private online life became public on Nov. 1 when a conservative news blog posted the

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first of several items describing posts he made using an alias on Instagram and Reddit as a “transgender curvy girl” with photos of him wearing women’s clothing and makeup.

After the disclosure, the state Baptist organization said it was aware of allegations of “unbiblical behavior” involving the pastor. And a nationally syndicated radio show said Copeland should be ashamed because the Bible teaches that it is an “abomination” for a man to dress in women’s clothing.

An additional post on Nov. 3, the same day Copeland killed himself, accused him of using the names and photos of local residents, including a minor, without permission in posts, including the real name of a local businesswoman in a fictional story about a man who develops a deadly obsession with taking over her identity.

Copeland told the news site that he donned women’s clothing as a way to release stress but was not transgender. He stood before his congregation on Nov. 1 to apologize and said that the photos taken in the privacy of his own home were an attempt at humor.

“This will not cause my life to change. This will not waver my devotion to my family, to serving my city, to serving my church,” Copeland, a husband, father and stepfather, said in the livestreamed service.

Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said that at the time of the suicide, deputies were attempting a welfare check on Copeland because of concerns he might harm himself.

Friends said Copeland acknowledged he was struggling in the days before his death. DiChiara said he reached out to Copeland by text last Thursday and the mayor responded that “it’s been some very dark days.”

“When this story came out, it was already painful and hurtful just to see it and know that, that this is going to cause a lot of grief for Bubba and his family. But as I read what was out there, it just was getting progressively worse, and I just saw some real ugliness in people and their comments,” DiChiara said.

Jack Drescher, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Columbia University and the author of “Psychoanalytic Therapy and the Gay Man” said outing can be an act of violence and in this case it “precipitated a violent response.”

Drescher said people can have reasons to keep sexual or gender identities and behaviors, such as cross-dressing, secret because they don’t feel like they would be accepted.

“It was probably a great source of shame and embarrassment to be outed like that,” Drescher said.

Chad Peacock, a former Auburn resident, said Copeland was one of the few elected officials to show support for a local Pride event he organized. He said he believed the anti-LGBTQ climate in the state bears some responsibility for Copeland’s suicide.

“You have to fit the box. You can be who you are, but you should be ashamed of who you are if you’re different,” Peacock said of the atmosphere.

Alabama lawmakers have imposed bans on transgender women playing on female sports teams in schools and colleges and approved a ban, now in litigation, on treating transgender minors with gender-affirming hormones or puberty blockers. The state in 2019 changed the process for obtaining a marriage license because several probate judges had refused to issue them after the U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing same-sex couples to marry.

“The unrelenting anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric coming from state legislative houses and high-profile politicians has real life consequences in the form of online and in-person bullying, harassment and violence,” said Sam Lau, vice president of communications for LGBTQ+ advocacy group The Human Rights Campaign.

Lau noted the long history of outing public figures in the U.S., which he said “consistently causes harm — forced outing is a direct attempt to endanger the person being outed.”

Earlier in the week, flowers sat piled in a memorial against a wooden cross outside the church where Copeland’s funeral service was held Thursday. The church, like Copeland, has been targeted with hateful comments on social media, church member Dr. David White said.

“The anonymous nature of the internet seems to make a lot of people without sin. There are people that cast stones from across the horizon that you can’t respond to and you can’t defend. So I hope it makes us all reflect,” White said.

At his funeral, friends and family remembered Copeland as a boisterous man known for saying "ain't God good," doting on his family and going out of his way to spread kindness in their community.

"A person's legacy is not created in a moment of despair. It is defined by his friends and those that love him," White said.

Democrats postpone a subpoena vote in the Supreme Court ethics probe after a blowup with Republicans

By MARK SHERMAN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee abruptly adjourned a meeting on Thursday without holding an expected vote on subpoenas for two conservatives who have helped arrange luxury travel and other benefits for Supreme Court justices.

The panel's Democratic chairman, Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, gaveled out after Republicans on the committee made clear they would call for subpoena votes on a raft of Democratic officials and others, a protest of the planned subpoenas for Republican megadonor Harlan Crow and conservative activist Leonard Leo. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, the top Republican on the panel, warned majority Democrats that the hearing would be contentious.

Jammed with amendments and the possibility of hours of debate, Durbin gaveled out. He said in a statement after the meeting that there were "scheduling issues" but that they would try again.

"We will continue our efforts to authorize subpoenas in the near future," Durbin said. "The highest court in the land cannot have the lowest ethical standards."

The Democrats are planning to subpoena Crow and Leo about their roles in organizing and paying for luxury travel for Supreme Court justices, part of the panel's investigation into Supreme Court ethics. The committee has also pushed to set an ethics code for the court, a move that has been publicly endorsed by three of the nine justices.

Crow has been a benefactor of Justice Clarence Thomas for more than two decades, paying for nearly annual vacations, purchasing from Thomas and others the Georgia home in which the justice's mother still lives and helping pay for the private schooling for a relative.

Leo is a Federalist Society executive who worked with President Donald Trump to move the court and the rest of the federal judiciary to the right.

The committee had also planned to vote on a subpoena for another wealthy Republican donor, Robin Arkley II, who helped arrange and pay for a private jet trip to Alaska for Justice Samuel Alito in 2008. But Durbin said Wednesday that Arkley has "provided information responsive to the panel's requests" and that a subpoena was unnecessary.

Democratic Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island said that Republicans were trying to offer as many as 90 amendments to try to derail the vote. He said that Republicans "jammed the gears of the committee."

"We will still go forward, now that we have seen this strategy, with unified support on the Democratic side for getting to the bottom of what is going on with this pattern of secret billionaire gifts to justices," Whitehouse said.

Republicans are united in opposition to the subpoenas, and all of them voted against legislation passed by the panel in July that would force the justices to abide by stronger ethics standards.

"We all oppose what you're doing," Graham said at Thursday's meeting, warning Durbin that nothing would get done and it would be a "long day" if he proceeded with the subpoenas.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., said she would try to get the committee to issue subpoenas on matters important to Republicans, including "the far-left effort to take down President Trump."

Aides to Justice Sonia Sotomayor also would be targeted, Blackburn said, over efforts to get public universities to buy the justice's books, as reported by The Associated Press.

Responding to the GOP protest, Durbin said at the meeting that the committee is not pursuing a vendetta against conservatives but that "Leonard Leo and Harlan Crow are central players in the ethics challenge

facing the court.”

French President Macron hosts Gaza aid conference and appeals to Israel to protect civilians

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Western and Arab nations, international agencies and nongovernmental groups stressed the urgent need for aid for Gaza civilians at a Paris conference Thursday, held as the humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory worsens amid Israel’s massive air and ground campaign against Hamas.

The gathering ended a few hours before the White House said Israel has agreed to put in place four-hour daily humanitarian pauses in Gaza, starting on Thursday.

The French presidency said the participants’ overall pledges topped 1 billion euros (\$1.07 billion) in funding, though that included some funds already announced earlier, and stressed that the global amount still remains to be finalized.

French President Emmanuel Macron opened the conference with an appeal for Israel to protect civilians, saying that “all lives have equal worth” and urging for pauses in the fighting to allow deliveries of desperately needed aid.

“In the immediate term, we need to work on protecting civilians,” he said. “To do that, we need a humanitarian pause very quickly and we must work towards a cease-fire.”

The conference brought together officials from over 50 countries, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations as the Gaza Strip is being pounded by Israel in its war against Hamas, sparked by the militants’ deadly Oct. 7 incursion into southern Israel.

Israeli authorities were not invited but have been informed of the talks, Macron’s office said. There was no immediate comment from Israel on the conference.

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.

Macron said that since the Oct. 7 attack, Hamas “shouldered the responsibility for exposing Palestinians to terrible consequences,” and again defended Israel’s right to defend itself.

“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.

Longer term, Macron said diplomatic work must resume on bringing peace to the Middle East, with a two-state solution. “We must learn from our errors and no longer accept that peace ... always be pushed back to later.”

Several European countries, the United States and regional powers such as Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf Arab countries attended the conference, as did Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, who urged the international community to “put an end to the war.”

“How many Palestinians have to be killed for the war to end?” Shtayyeh asked. “What Israel is doing is not a war against Hamas, it’s a war against the whole Palestinian people.”

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry stressed that Israel had only allowed limited quantities of humanitarian aid through the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza and urged “the entire international community, and donor countries in particular, to continue supporting the Palestinian people in Gaza.”

“The aid that has already entered Gaza is not enough to meet the needs of the entire population, and the voluntary and deliberate complications imposed by Israel on the delivery of aid only lead to a further deterioration of the situation,” Shoukry said.

Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides outlined his plan for a humanitarian sea corridor to Gaza “to provide continued rapid, safe and unhindered flow of humanitarian aid” and said the plan is being discussed “with all parties concerned, including Israel.” The plan provides options for the short, medium and longer term, with aid shipments possibly from the Cyprus port of Larnaca, 370 km (230 miles) from Gaza, he said.

The initiative includes the collection, inspection and storage of humanitarian aid in Cyprus, it’s later

transfer by ship possibly from Larnaca port and finally it's offloading and distribution in Gaza.

French officials said they are also considering evacuating the wounded to hospital ships in the Mediterranean Sea off the Gaza coast. Paris sent a helicopter carrier, now off Cyprus, and is preparing another with medical capacities on board.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said his country sent a hospital ship that is en route to Cyprus before deploying as close as possible to the conflict zone.

Thursday's discussions also included financial support for Gaza's civilians.

Macron announced France will provide an additional 80 million euros (\$85 million) in humanitarian aid for Gaza civilians, bringing France's funding to a total of 100 million euros (\$107 million) this year.

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.

Denmark has decided to increase its humanitarian aid to the civilian population in Gaza by 75 million kroner (\$10.7 million), to be channeled via U.N. agencies and the International Red Cross.

European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also attended the conference. The 27-nation bloc is the world's top aid supplier to the Palestinians. "We have quadrupled the humanitarian support for Gaza and the West Bank, but it's mostly for Gaza, to 100 million euros (\$107 million)," von der Leyen said.

At a news conference following the conference, rights and aid groups urged for an immediate cease-fire, which they said is crucial for them to be able to work in Gaza.

"We're determined to do everything we can, but if the only thing we get is a day or two without fighting ... that won't be enough," said Isabelle Defourny, president of Doctors Without Borders France.

Jean-François Corty, vice president of Doctors of the World, said the main challenge "is not so much to mobilize aid as to get it" into Gaza.

"What's happening in Gaza is a litany of violations of international law ... not seen since World War II," said Amnesty International's secretary general, Agnès Callamard, and denounced "indiscriminate, disproportionate, deliberate attacks."

Associated Press writers John Leicester in Le Pecq, France; Geir Moulson in Berlin; Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark; Colleen Barry in Milan and Menelaos Hadjicostis in Nicosia, Cyprus, contributed to this report.

Man receives the first eye transplant plus a new face. It's a step toward one day restoring sight

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Surgeons have performed the world's first transplant of an entire human eye, an extraordinary addition to a face transplant — although it's far too soon to know if the man will ever see through his new left eye.

An accident with high-voltage power lines had destroyed most of Aaron James' face and one eye. His right eye still works. But surgeons at NYU Langone Health hoped replacing the missing one would yield better cosmetic results for his new face, by supporting the transplanted eye socket and lid.

The NYU team announced Thursday that so far, it's doing just that. James is recovering well from the dual transplant last May and the donated eye looks remarkably healthy.

"It feels good. I still don't have any movement in it yet. My eyelid, I can't blink yet. But I'm getting sensation now," James told The Associated Press as doctors examined his progress recently.

"You got to start somewhere, there's got to be a first person somewhere," added James, 46, of Hot Springs, Arkansas. "Maybe you'll learn something from it that will help the next person."

Today, transplants of the cornea — the clear tissue in front of the eye — are common to treat certain

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types of vision loss. But transplanting the whole eye — the eyeball, its blood supply and the critical optic nerve that must connect it to the brain — is considered a moonshot in the quest to cure blindness.

Whatever happens next, James' surgery offers scientists an unprecedented window into how the human eye tries to heal.

"We're not claiming that we are going to restore sight," said Dr. Eduardo Rodriguez, NYU's plastic surgery chief, who led the transplant. "But there's no doubt in my mind we are one step closer."

Some specialists had feared the eye would quickly shrivel like a raisin. Instead, when Rodriguez propped open James' left eyelid last month, the donated hazel-colored eye was as plump and full of fluid as his own blue eye. Doctors see good blood flow and no sign of rejection.

Now researchers have begun analyzing scans of James' brain that detected some puzzling signals from that all-important but injured optic nerve.

One scientist who has long studied how to make eye transplants a reality called the surgery exciting.

"It's an amazing validation" of animal experiments that have kept transplanted eyes alive, said Dr. Jeffrey Goldberg, chair of ophthalmology at Stanford University.

The hurdle is how to regrow the optic nerve, although animal studies are making strides, Goldberg added. He praised the NYU team's "audacity" in even aiming for optic nerve repair and hopes the transplant will spur more research.

"We're really on the precipice of being able to do this," Goldberg said.

James was working for a power line company in June 2021 when he was shocked by a live wire. He nearly died. Ultimately he lost his left arm, requiring a prosthetic. His damaged left eye was so painful it had to be removed. Multiple reconstructive surgeries couldn't repair extensive facial injuries including his missing nose and lips.

James pushed through physical therapy until he was strong enough to escort his daughter Allie to a high school homecoming ceremony, wearing a face mask and eye patch. Still he required breathing and feeding tubes, and longed to smell, taste and eat solid food again.

"In his mind and his heart, it's him — so I didn't care that, you know, he didn't have a nose. But I did care that it bothered him," said his wife, Meagan James.

Face transplants remain rare and risky. James' is only the 19th in the U.S., the fifth Rodriguez has performed. The eye experiment added even more complexity. But James figured he'd be no worse off if the donated eye failed.

Three months after James was placed on the national transplant waiting list, a matching donor was found. Kidneys, a liver and pancreas from the donor, a man in his 30s, saved three other people.

During James' 21-hour operation, surgeons added another experimental twist: When they spliced together the donated optic nerve to what remained of James' original, they injected special stem cells from the donor in hopes of spurring its repair.

Last month, tingles heralded healing facial nerves. James can't yet open the eyelid, and wears a patch to protect it. But as Rodriguez pushed on the closed eye, James felt sensation — although on his nose rather than his eyelid, presumably until slow-growing nerves get reoriented. The surgeon also detected subtle movements beginning in muscles around the eye.

Then came a closer look. NYU ophthalmologist Dr. Vaidehi Dedania ran a battery of tests. She found expected damage in the light-sensing retina in the back of the eye. But she said it appears to have enough special cells called photoreceptors to do the job of converting light to electrical signals, one step in creating vision.

Normally, the optic nerve then would send those signals to the brain to be interpreted. James' optic nerve clearly hasn't healed. Yet when light was flashed into the donated eye during an MRI, the scan recorded some sort of brain signaling.

That both excited and baffled researchers, although it wasn't the right type for vision and may simply be a fluke, cautioned Dr. Steven Galetta, NYU's neurology chair. Only time and more study may tell.

Still, the surgery marks "a technical tour de force," said Dr. David Klassen, chief medical officer of the

United Network for Organ Sharing, which runs the nation's transplant system. "You can learn a tremendous amount from a single transplant" that could propel the field.

As for James, "we're just taking it one day at a time," he said.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Canada says it can fight climate change and be major oil nation. Massive fires may force a reckoning

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM and VICTOR CAIVANO Associated Press

FORT MCMURRAY, Canada (AP) — During a May wildfire that scorched a vast swath of spruce and pine forest in northwestern Canada, Julia Cardinal lost a riverside cabin that was many things to her: retirement project, gift from her husband, and somewhere to live by nature, as her family had done for generations.

"That was our dream home," said Cardinal, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, as she scanned the cabin's flattened, charred remains in September. "It's like a displacement."

Thousands of wildfires in Canada this year have incinerated an area larger than Florida, releasing into the atmosphere more than three times the amount of carbon dioxide that is produced by Canada in a year. And some are still burning.

Home to dense forests, sweeping prairies and nearly a quarter of the planet's wetlands, Canadian leaders, including liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, have long insisted the country can exploit its natural resources while protecting biodiversity and leading the global fight against climate change. But the seemingly endless fire season, which created hazardous air in many U.S. states thousands of miles away, is putting a spotlight on two aspects of Canada that increasingly feel at odds: the country's commitment to fighting climate change and its status as the world's fourth-largest oil producer and fifth-largest gas producer — fuels that when used release carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that traps heat in the atmosphere and intensifies the dry conditions for wildfires to swallow millions of acres.

"They're portraying Canada as environmental," said Jean L'Hommecourt, an environmental advocate belonging to the Fort McKay First Nation. "But the biggest source of the carbon is here."

OIL FOCUS AND ADVOCACY

Canada is among roughly 100 nations that have pledged by midcentury to reach "zero emissions," or take as much greenhouse gas out of the atmosphere as it contributes. At last year's U.N. climate conference, known as COP27, it also joined other rich nations to promise more money for developing countries to fight climate change.

Yet to the same conference, Canada brought the second-largest delegation of fossil fuel executives of any country in the world, an analysis by The Associated Press found. Eleven executives from major Canadian oil, gas, and steel companies, including Enbridge and Parkland Corporation attended COP27 — where countries set climate priorities and timelines for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. The only country to send a larger delegation of fossil fuel executives was Russia, AP found.

"We're not there to drive an agenda, but we do have a perspective to offer," said Pete Sheffield, chief sustainability officer at pipeline and natural gas giant Enbridge Inc., echoing what other Canadian energy executives told The AP about their attendance at COP27.

One such perspective is that Canadian oil producers can keep extracting oil at current rates, and with the help of technology, clean up their own operations so the country can still hit its climate targets. But even if Canada's oil producers manage to do so, their plans don't consider the greenhouse gas emissions that result from when customers use their products to power cars, heat homes, take flights, and so forth.

OIL, FIRES AND SMOKE

In the western province of Alberta, where many ferocious wildfires burned, huge deposits of thick crude

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oil, mixed with tarry sand, sit beneath the forest and near the snaking Athabasca River. Extraction from this area, referred to as the "oil sands," uses huge amounts of energy, making Canada's oil — most of which is extracted here — some of the world's dirtiest.

In Alberta, the industry's mark on the landscape is profound: over an area larger than New York City, oil companies have carved chunks of earth into open-pit mines plunging hundreds of feet deep, created lake-sized chemical runoff pools and left otherworldly stacks of neon yellow sulfur byproduct. On the sides of roads in the oil sands, air cannons boom periodically to keep birds away from the vast toxic ponds and scarecrows dressed as oil workers float above them.

On a recent morning, dozens of oil workers boarded a charter plane in Calgary that would take them deep into Alberta's wilderness where black bears, caribou, and moose roam. There, operators boarded buses to oil sands projects, where they would work 7-, 14- or 21-day shifts.

During other weeks, the fires in Alberta burned so close that oil companies had to temporarily shut down oil and gas production, and average Canadians couldn't safely breathe the air. In September, smoke from wildfires in the neighboring provinces of British Columbia and the Northern Territories blanketed Fort McMurray, an Albertan city of 68,000 where community centers bear the names of oil companies. The skies were a hazy, rust color.

"This is to the point where you don't even want to be outside," said Brittnee McIsaac, a school teacher who often had to keep her students inside for recess because it was too dangerous to breathe the smoke-filled air.

McIsaac, whose husband works in the oil industry, said that the smoke this year, combined with a major wildfire in 2016, have made more people in town concerned about climate change, even if many residents get their paychecks from the nearby oil patch.

"It really takes a toll on the mental health; just how dreary it is every day," she said of the smoke.

Still, Canadian producers have no plans to slow down. Since 2009, oil sands extraction has grown. Today, Canada produces about 4.9 million barrels of oil a day, with oil and gas contributing almost a third of the country's emissions in 2021. Oil and gas make up about 5% of Canada's GDP, while in Alberta, the heart of Canadian oil country, the sector accounts for about 21%.

Carmen Lee-Essington, vice president of Cenovus' oil sands operations, said the company plans to extract all the oil below ground at their Sunrise plant. Cenovus estimates that could last until 2070. That is decades after when scientists warn that the world needs to have moved beyond fossil fuels and rely almost entirely on renewable forms of energy.

"When that time comes, we will abandon the facility here. We will decommission it, the metal and all the infrastructure that you see will be shipped off-site," said Lee-Essington.

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?

Part of Canada's reasoning to produce so much oil and gas in the 21st century is that it's a stable democracy with stricter environmental and human rights laws than other oil giants that the West has historically relied upon. Canada is the largest foreign supplier of oil to the U.S., exporting an amount equal to 22% of U.S. consumption.

But climate scientists warn that current levels of oil and gas production will mean Canada won't reach net zero emissions, never mind the additional contributions to climate change from wildfires along the way.

Scientists at Climate Action Tracker, a group that scrutinizes nations' pledges to reduce emissions, label the country's progress as "highly insufficient," stressing that Canada needs to implement its climate policies much faster to reach its own targets. For the high-carbon energy sector, much of the plan rests on the build-out of carbon capture, a technology that pulls in carbon dioxide, either at the source of emissions or from the air. But carbon capture is energy intensive, expensive and years away from operating at scale.

"There's no way Canada can reach our 2050 target if oil and gas doesn't do its fair share," said Steven Guilbeault, Canada's minister of environment and climate change.

The wildfires, which scientists say will burn more and longer as the planet warms, will add to the challenge of cutting emissions. They also pose significant health risks to Canadians and anyone who comes

in contact with the smoke.

In June, a fire got close to the subarctic, mostly indigenous hamlet of Fort Chipewyan, in northern Alberta. A former fur trading settlement, it abuts one of the world's largest inland deltas. In warmer months, the village can only be reached by boat or plane, since the main road into town is made of ice that melts in the spring. When the wildfires approached, residents first tried fleeing by boat, only to realize that water levels at the massive Athabasca Lake had gotten so low, they couldn't leave. Soon after, the Canadian military sent its aircraft to evacuate people to Fort McMurray, where hundreds of people stayed for weeks.

In the blaze, Julia Cardinal and her husband Happy Cardinal would lose their cabin, which was about a 45-minute boat ride from Fort Chipewyan. Several months later, the trauma of the fire is still vivid.

"That was our home," said Julia Cardinal, as she walked over the burned cabin, identifying the pots, pans and nails that survived the blaze. "There are some things we will never, ever replace."

Still, the couple's feelings are complicated. While they understand the role of climate change in the fires, and the impact of oil on the climate and lakes and rivers surrounding them, they are not quick to blame the industry. Happy Cardinal was an oil sands worker until retiring three years ago.

"That's where my money comes from," he said.

AP data journalist Mary Katherine Wildeman contributed to this report.

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Japanese Americans were jailed in a desert. Survivors worry a wind farm will overshadow the past.

By ED KOMENDA and LINDSEY WASSON Associated Press

JEROME, Idaho (AP) — Behind the barbed wire, the little boy pressed his ink-covered index finger onto the mint-green exit card. And a photograph was snapped of his frightened face.

Paul Tomita was four.

It was July 4, 1943. Independence Day at Minidoka, a camp in the vast Idaho desert, where over 13,000 Japanese American men, women and children were incarcerated during World War II as security risks because of their ancestry.

The wallet-sized paper meant the scared boy in the photo could leave after 11 months living in a cramped barracks with his father, mother, two sisters and grandmother.

Eight decades later, he returned with West Coast pilgrims who think the life-changing atrocity should be remembered. But now another government decision looms as a new threat — a wind project the pilgrims worry will destroy the experience they want to preserve.

If approved by the Bureau of Land Management, the Lava Ridge Wind Farm would put up 400 turbines on 118 square miles (306 square kilometers) near Minidoka, where survivors say they are witnessing another attempt to bury the past.

"If Minidoka was a white memorial to white soldiers who died in whatever war it is, do you think that they would offer free land to Lava Ridge to develop their windmills there?" Tomita said. "Hell no."

THE CAMP IN THE DESERT

Two months after the Japan's Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066.

Roughly 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were taken from their homes and incarcerated in camps as a potential threat against the U.S.

Thousands were elderly, disabled, children or infants. Desperate families sold belongings and packed what they could. Luckier ones had white friends care for houses, farms and businesses.

At Minidoka, they lived in wooden, tarpaper-covered barracks, braving summer heat and winter cold on 50 square miles (130 square kilometers) of remote, high desert. In tight quarters without much privacy,

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women waited until nighttime to use latrines. Up to eight family members shared rooms on cots without mattresses. For Christmas dinner, children ate hot dogs.

Under armed guard towers, Minidoka residents worked in fields cultivating crops for little pay. But they built a community in what was essentially a prison camp.

They organized churches and planted gardens. They created city of sorts with stores, watch and radio repair shops, a health clinic, a barbershop, an ice rink, a swimming pool and a baseball diamond.

Today, few original structures remain as reminders of a chapter in U.S. history the government worked to erase before issuing reparations and designating camps national historic sites decades later.

Now, a new project with fences of a different kind is envisioned for the wide-open public land dotted with sagebrush and cheatgrass.

WIND PROJECT OPPOSED

As the Biden Administration aimed to fight climate change by permitting 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands within the decade, a company named Magic Valley pitched a wind farm that would be the second-largest in the U.S. and produce up to 1,000 megawatts.

Lava Ridge would erect towering turbines in parts of three counties and double Idaho's wind energy production.

"There is a tremendous need, a market based need for clean energy in Idaho and across the West ... being requested by utilities, by businesses, by state leaders, and really by many Americans who are trying to get this country toward energy independence," said Luke Papez, project manager at Magic Valley, a subsidiary of New York-based LS Power. "This is a very good site to locate a project."

With global warming, wind farms have been framed as avenues to increased economic activity, new local tax revenues — and a vital tool for the White House's clean energy goals.

"Renewable wind projects are a critical component of the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to confronting climate change, promoting clean air and water for our current and future generations, creating thousands of good-paying union jobs, and jump starting our country's transition to a clean energy future," said Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in a statement.

Magic Valley now hopes to win BLM approval next year and to begin construction in 2025 and start operations by 2026.

But opposition is nearly universal in the high desert where the company would build hundreds of miles of temporary fencing and roads, plus hundreds of concrete slabs for turbines.

There are fears the isolated landscape that draws travelers will be permanently scarred, explosives used for construction will damage an aquifer — and the project will cast shadows on the desert Minidoka survivors visit.

As the BLM nears a final decision, Minidoka survivors and descendants are declaring the site a place of healing that commemorates traumas their families still struggle to unpack and resolve.

"I don't mean to take sides in history," said Idaho Rep. Jack Nelson, a Republican. "But the reason we study history is so we don't do those things again."

THE BOY IN THE PHOTO

During his 11 months at the desert camp, Paul Tomita longed for his Seattle home surrounded by lush greenery. He asked his mother: What did we do wrong to end up here? When are we going home?

"Of course, my mom had to song and dance around it," recalled Tomita, now 84. "Even though I was that young, I knew something was wrong."

Tomita's family and thousands of other Japanese Americans were under control of the Army's War Relocation Authority. "They told us when we could eat, when we could sleep, when we could do anything," he said.

Unrelenting dust in their single room worsened his asthma and sent him repeatedly to the hospital barracks.

When thick desert dust blew through holes in the family's barracks walls, his mother dunked newspaper in water to plaster the biggest ones. But the material dried and crumbled.

"Dust on your face, dust in your ears, dust up your nose, dust in your mouth," Tomita recalled.

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Eventually, Tomita said, U.S. soldiers on the other side of the barbed wire knew the Japanese-Americans at Minidoka were not a threat. "Even if we got through the fences," he said, "where are we going to go?"

LEAVING, BUT NEVER FORGETTING

While Tomita's family was incarcerated, his father applied for an East Coast job with the Office of Strategic Services — a precursor of the CIA.

His assignment: Translating U.S. propaganda into Japanese flyers urging surrender that would be dropped in the South Pacific.

To return to life outside, Tomita, his older sister and his younger sister, then 2, needed a leave card with a fingerprint and photo.

At war's end, the family returned to Seattle, where neighbors had safeguarded typesetting equipment that allowed them to restart the family printing business.

When the children entered high school, their mother presented them with their Minidoka exit cards.

After earning a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling at Oregon State University, Tomita provided consulting and rehabilitation services to companies and government agencies on the West Coast. He and his wife adopted a daughter, now 53 with a child of her own.

In July, Tomita brought a copy of his exit card when he returned to the camp for an annual pilgrimage. He wants future generations to be able to visit this treasured site for Japanese-Americans.

"Because they dumped us there," he said. "Like it or not, it is our sacred land."

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Canada says it can fight climate change and be major oil nation.

Massive fires may force a reckoning

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM and VICTOR CAIVANO Associated Press

FORT MCMURRAY, Canada (AP) — During a May wildfire that scorched a vast swath of spruce and pine forest in northwestern Canada, Julia Cardinal lost a riverside cabin that was many things to her: retirement project, gift from her husband, and somewhere to live by nature, as her family had done for generations.

"That was our dream home," said Cardinal, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. "It's like a displacement."

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Canadian leaders, including liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, have long insisted the country can exploit its natural resources while protecting biodiversity and leading the global fight against climate change. But the seemingly endless fire season is putting a spotlight on two aspects of Canada that increasingly feel at odds: the country's commitment to fighting climate change and its status as one of the world's top oil and gas producers — fuels that when used release carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that traps heat in the atmosphere and intensifies the dry conditions for wildfires to swallow millions of acres.

"They're portraying Canada as environmental," said Jean L'Hommecourt, an environmental advocate belonging to the Fort McKay First Nation. "But the biggest source of the carbon is here."

OIL FOCUS AND ADVOCACY

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OIL, FIRES AND SMOKE

In the western province of Alberta, where many ferocious wildfires burned, vast deposits of thick crude oil, mixed with tarry sand, sit beneath the forest. Extraction from this area, known as the “oil sands,” uses lots of energy, making Canada’s oil — most of which is extracted here — some of the world’s dirtiest.

In Alberta, the industry’s mark on the landscape is profound: over an area larger than New York City, oil companies have carved chunks of earth into open-pit mines plunging hundreds of feet deep, created lake-sized chemical runoff pools and left otherworldly stacks of neon yellow sulfur byproduct.

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Still, Canadian producers have no plans to slow down. Since 2009, oil sands extraction has grown. Today, Canada produces about 4.9 million barrels of oil a day, with oil and gas contributing almost a third of the country’s emissions in 2021.

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE?

Part of Canada’s reasoning to produce so much oil and gas in the 21st century is that it’s a stable democracy with stricter environmental and human rights laws than other oil giants that the West has historically relied upon. Canada is the largest foreign supplier of oil to the U.S., exporting an amount equal to 22% of U.S. consumption.

But climate scientists warn that current levels of extraction will mean Canada won’t reach net zero emissions. Never mind the additional contributions to climate change from wildfires along the way, which scientists say will burn more and longer as the planet warms.

Scientists at Climate Action Tracker, a group that scrutinizes nations’ pledges to reduce emissions, label the country’s progress as “highly insufficient,” stressing that Canada needs to implement its climate policies much faster.

The wildfires will add to the challenge of cutting emissions — and pose significant health risks to Canadians and anyone who comes in contact with the smoke.

In June, a fire got close to the subarctic, mostly indigenous hamlet of Fort Chipewyan, in northern Alberta. In the blaze, Julia Cardinal and her husband Happy Cardinal would lose their cabin, about a 45-minute boat ride away.

While the trauma of the fire is still vivid, the couple’s feelings are complicated. In spite of understanding the role of climate change in the fires, and the impact of oil on the climate and lakes and rivers surrounding them, they are not quick to blame the industry. Happy Cardinal was an oil sands worker until retiring three years ago.

“That’s where my money comes from,” he said.

AP data journalist Mary Katherine Wildeman contributed to this report.

The UK's interior minister sparks furor by accusing police of favoring pro-Palestinian protesters

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's interior minister on Thursday 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."

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was under growing pressure to fire Braverman, a divisive figure popular with the authoritarian wing of the governing Conservative Party. Sunak's spokesperson, Max Blain, said Braverman's article had not been approved by the prime minister's office before publication, but that Sunak still had full confidence in the home secretary.

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 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 are to 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.

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 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, "of the kind we are more used to seeing in Northern Ireland," an apparent reference to demonstrations by Irish republican groups.

More than 3,600 people died in 30 years of violence involving Irish republicans, British loyalists and U.K. security forces in Northern Ireland. Many politicians there called Braverman's comparison insensitive and inaccurate.

Colum Eastwood, leader of the Irish nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party, said Braverman showed "ignorance of the conditions faced by the civilian population in Gaza, ignorance of the role of the Met police, ignorance of the complex history and traditions of marching and protest in Northern Ireland."

"She has managed to offend just about everyone – no mean feat in a divided society," he said.

Opposition politicians said Sunak's unwillingness to fire Braverman showed weakness on the prime minister's part.

"He must know that this isn't the way that a home secretary should behave," said opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer. "He must know in himself that the role of responsible government is to reduce tension and to support police in the difficult decisions they have to make."

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken part in the Saturday demonstrations since the war began, sparked by Hamas' deadly incursion into Israel on Oct. 7. The protests are 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, including 98 for

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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.

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, a 43-year-old lawyer, has become a leader of the party's populist 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 expected next year. Opinion polls for months have put the party 15 to 20 points behind Labour.

Countries around the world have grappled with how to handle the strong emotions stirred by the Middle East conflict. France's interior minister last month 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.

Associated Press writer Angela Charlton in Paris contributed to this report.

Today in History: November 10, U.S. Marines first organized

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Nov. 10, the 314th day of 2023. There are 51 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 10, 1775, the U.S. Marines were organized under authority of the Continental Congress.

On this date:

In 1871, journalist-explorer Henry M. Stanley found Scottish missionary David Livingstone, who had not been heard from for years, near Lake Tanganyika in central Africa.

In 1919, the American Legion opened its first national convention in Minneapolis.

In 1928, Hirohito (hee-roh-hee-toh) was enthroned as Emperor of Japan.

In 1944, during World War II, the ammunition ship USS Mount Hood (AE-11) exploded while moored at the Manus Naval Base in the Admiralty Islands in the South Pacific, leaving 45 confirmed dead and 327 missing and presumed dead.

In 1951, customer-dialed long-distance telephone service began as Mayor M. Leslie Denning of Englewood, New Jersey, called Alameda, California, Mayor Frank Osborne without operator assistance.

In 1954, the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial, depicting the raising of the American flag on Iwo Jima in 1945, was dedicated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in Arlington, Virginia.

In 1969, the children's educational program "Sesame Street" made its debut on National Educational Television (later PBS).

In 1975, the U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution equating Zionism with racism (the world body repealed the resolution in Dec. 1991).

In 1982, the newly finished Vietnam Veterans Memorial was opened to its first visitors in Washington, D.C., three days before its dedication.

In 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a former finance minister of Liberia, claimed victory in the country's presidential election.

In 2009, John Allen Muhammad, mastermind of the 2002 sniper attacks that killed 10 in the Washington, D.C. region, was executed.

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In 2017, facing allegations of sexual misconduct, comedian Louis C.K. said the harassment claims by five women that were detailed in a New York Times report were true, and he expressed remorse for using his influence "irresponsibly."

In 2021, Kyle Rittenhouse took the stand in his murder trial, testifying that he was under attack and acting in self-defense when he shot and killed two men and wounded a third during a turbulent night of street protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin. (He would be acquitted of all charges.)

Today's Birthdays: Blues singer Bobby Rush is 89. Actor Albert Hall is 86. Country singer Donna Fargo is 82. Former Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., is 80. Lyricist Tim Rice is 79. Actor Jack Scalia is 73. Movie director Roland Emmerich is 68. Actor Matt Craven is 67. Actor-comedian Sinbad is 67. Actor Mackenzie Phillips is 64. Author Neil Gaiman (GAY'-mihn) is 63. Actor Vanessa Angel is 60. Actor Hugh Bonneville is 60. Actor-comedian Tommy Davidson is 60. Actor Michael Jai (jy) White is 59. Country singer Chris Cagle is 55. Actor-comedian Tracy Morgan is 55. Actor Ellen Pompeo (pahm-PAY'-oh) is 54. Actor-comedian Orny Adams is 53. Rapper U-God is 53. Rapper-producer Warren G is 53. Actor Walton Goggins is 52. Comedian-actor Chris Lilley is 49. Contemporary Christian singer Matt Maher is 49. Rock singer-musician Jim Adkins (Jimmy Eat World) is 48. Rapper Eve is 45. Rock musician Chris Joannou (joh-AN'-yoo) (Silverchair) is 44. Actor Heather Matarazzo is 41. Country singer Miranda Lambert is 40. Actor Josh Peck is 37. Pop singer Vinz Dery (Nico & Vinz) is 33. Actor Genevieve Buechner is 32. Actor Zoey Deutch (DOYCH) is 29. Actor Kiernan Shipka is 24. Actor Mackenzie Foy is 23.