

Groton Daily Independent

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Coming up

Thursday, Nov. 16

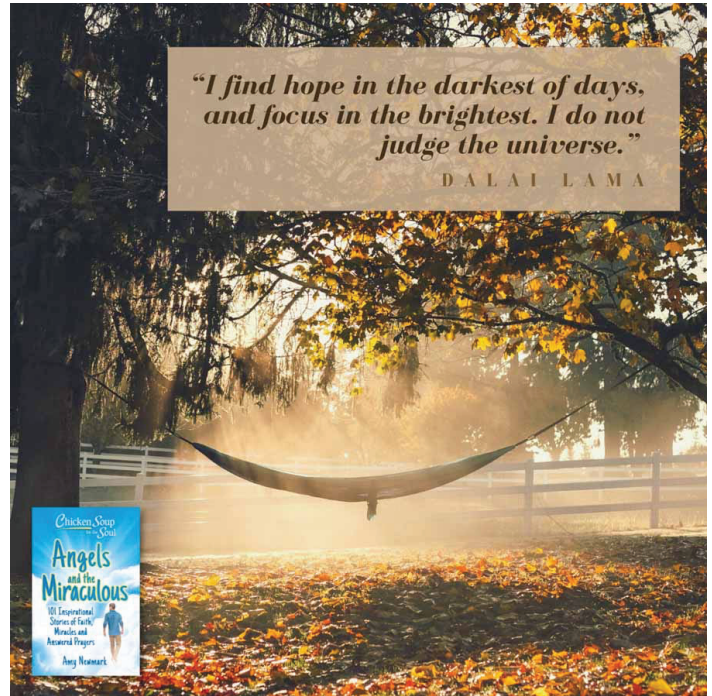
Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA Praise and thanksgiving; Program: Nigeria. Hostess: Sarah., 1:30 p.m.
Blood Drive at the Groton Community Center.
State Volleyball Tournament at Rapid City
Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce.

Friday, Nov. 17

State Volleyball Tournament at Rapid City
JH GBB at Milbank (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)
Senior Menu: BBQ pork driplet on bun, potato salad, mixed vegetables, tropical fruit.
School Breakfast: Cheese omelets.
School Lunch: Chicken noodle soup.

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

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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Saturday, Nov. 18

State Volleyball Tournament at Rapid City
Robotics at Harrisburg
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.

Sunday, Nov. 19

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school and Christmas Practice, 10:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: (Holy Communion) St. John's worship, 9 a.m.; Zion worship, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

level military communication and work to curb fentanyl production. Biden said talks with Xi were "some of the most constructive and productive discussions we've had." Hours later, Biden called Xi a "dictator."

Trump Case Leaked Videos: A Georgia judge suggested he will issue a protective order in the election interference case involving Donald Trump after Jonathan Miller, an attorney for a Trump co-defendant, leaked videos showing conversations between prosecutors and other co-defendants.

Teens charged in death: Eight high school students in Las Vegas, ranging from ages 13 to 17, have been arrested on suspicion of murder following the fatal beating of classmate Jonathan Lewis Jr., police said Tuesday.

Manchin blasts Trump: West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin said Donald Trump will "destroy democracy in America" if he wins another term in the White House, the Associated Press reported, days after the Democrat said he will not run for reelection.

War in Ukraine: Logistical issues are hindering the Russian Black Sea Fleet's regular use of Kalibr cruise missiles, as the redeployment of advanced vessels from Crimea, prompted by Ukrainian attacks on Russian ships in Sevastopol, has restricted their access to the stored missiles, Kyiv says.

Government Funding Bill: The Senate passed a stopgap spending bill to avert a government shutdown. The bill will be sent to President Joe Biden to sign before the current funding expires on Friday.

War in Gaza: Israeli troops deepened their military operations in and around Gaza's biggest hospital, Al-Shifa, and released unverified video of weapons and equipment that were recovered from within the complex.

Biden, Xi Meeting: President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have agreed to resume their high-

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Welcome back to another edition of the Weekly Round[s] Up! As you all know, Veterans Day was this past weekend, a day set aside to honor the brave men and women who have defended our nation. I wanted to take a moment to say thank you to all of our veterans in South Dakota and across the country. It is because of your sacrifice that we are able to enjoy our freedoms in the greatest nation in the world – not just on Veterans Day, but every day of the year. We owe you a debt we can never repay.



As we look to the week ahead, we have a November 17 deadline to fund the government through either appropriation bills or a continuing resolution that would grant us another short-term extension. We continue to meet with South Dakotans, attend hearings and briefings and vote on the Senate floor. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I visited with: Leaders from South Dakota's rural telecommunications companies, including Midstate Communications, West River Cooperative, Alliance, SDN Communications and Golden West; and Butte County Sheriff Fred Lamphere. I also had the honor of speaking at Aberdeen Central High School's annual Veterans Day program this past Friday.

Meetings this past week: Ned Finkle, Vice President of External Affairs at NVIDIA; Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States; Ivan Giraud, CEO of Bel Brands; and Kent Masters, CEO of Albemarle Corporation. I also spoke about AI at a dinner hosted by CNBC.

This past week, I also hosted two more AI insight forums. One forum was on elections & democracy, where we heard from panelists ranging from election officials to representatives from organizations such as Meta/Facebook and Google. The second forum was on privacy and liability, where we spoke with legal experts and scholars on data privacy and accountability in the use of AI. We appreciate all of the panelists who have come to the Senate to talk through the many aspects we need to consider as we look to the future of AI regulation and legislation.

We had our Senate Prayer Breakfast this week, where Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York was our speaker. Senator Gillibrand and I were co-chairs of the National Prayer Breakfast in 2022. Earlier this year, we did an interview with Fox News to talk more about Senate Prayer Breakfast, which you can watch here.

Met with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Belle Fourche, Bison, Garretson, Kimball, Sioux Falls, Wall and Winner.

Headline of the week: How Sen. Mike Rounds wants to reimagine the VA, future of veterans in America: A Q&A – Argus Leader

Votes taken: 16 – Almost all of these were confirmation votes on judges and executive branch positions within the Department of Health and Human Services and the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission. One vote was on a Congressional Review Act (CRA) introduced by my colleague Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) to overturn a Biden administration rule that would waive "Buy America" requirements for electric vehicle manufacturers. Allowing this waiver to go through means more of our taxpayer dollars would be

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sent to China to support the President's woke electric vehicle agenda. I voted to overturn this waiver: if the President wants to spend Americans' hard-earned money on electric vehicle chargers, he can spend it here in America.

Hearings: I attended one committee hearing this week in the Select Committee on Intelligence.

Classified Briefings: I attended three classified briefings this past week. One was related to my work on the Senate Armed Services Committee's Strategic Forces Subcommittee. The other was related to my work on the Senate Banking Committee. I also had a closed briefing with Israeli Ambassador Michael Herzog related to the war in Israel and Gaza.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Britton, Brookings, Deadwood, Highmore, Kennebec, Pierre, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Spearfish, Sturgis and Wall.

Steps taken this past week: 56,109 steps or 27.63 miles

If you or a loved one are a veteran experiencing trouble working with the VA or with receiving a long overdue service medal, please contact one of my offices. We would be honored to help.

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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....

16.) Played in a state championship game in high school

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Robotics compete at the Corn Palace

Groton Robotics went to the Worlds Only Corn Palace on November 4th! What an opportunity... High-lights of the day were the lifting of the Robots! Only 2 teams were able to lift off the ground amongst all the teams that participated (Points are scored if this is accomplished) Team 9050F led by Garrett Schultz and Jamison Penning lifted off the ground - however it tragically fell upon the cutting of the power at the end of the game. Team 9050B led by Logan and Kira Clocksene along with Hayden Zoellner were the only team at the tournament that accomplished this feat! An exciting moment for the whole robotics family. The teams of 9050B and 9050E, led by Corbin Weismantel and Axel Warrington participated in the finals. An exciting day for Groton Robotics!

Our next tournament will be held in Harrisburg on 11-18-2023. Our Groton tournament will be held on 1-6-2024.





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Noem announces second phase of workforce campaign after legislators question first phase

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 15, 2023 5:36 PM

Governor Kristi Noem on Wednesday announced a \$1.5 million second phase of a national workforce recruitment campaign that has featured her as the star, after lawmakers expressed concerns earlier this week about a \$5 million contract for the first phase.

"We are continuing to recruit Freedom-loving Americans from across the country to come live and work right here in South Dakota," Noem said in a press release.

The Freedom Works Here video ads feature Noem taking on the roles of high-demand workers, such as plumbers or welders, while inviting them to the state. South Dakota has a historically low 1.9% unemployment rate, and many employers are looking for workers. Noem said the second phase of the campaign will feature four more ads.

The Governor's Office of Economic Development manages the campaign. Legislators questioned officials from the office during a budget committee hearing Monday in Pierre.

Among other concerns, some legislators expressed frustration about the lack of directly measured results. The Governor's Office has said 1,900 people "are in the final stages of finding their career here" as a result of the campaign. But under questioning from lawmakers, administration officials said that's the number of out-of-state people who have asked for a state-assigned job adviser to help them find work in South Dakota, and the administration does not know how many of those people are directly attributable to the Freedom Works Here campaign.

The Legislature's Executive Board wants to know more about how the Noem administration selected a politically connected Ohio firm to create the campaign. The firm, Go West Media, is a subsidiary of The Strategy Group, whose CEO Ben Yoho also manages Vivek Ramaswamy's Republican presidential campaign.

The Executive Board voted Tuesday to send a letter to the Governor's Office of Economic Development. Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, said the letter will ask for details regarding how the office conducted its request-for-proposals process, the firms that applied, and the criteria used for the selection. The board wants a response by Dec. 18.

"We just want to know how this firm was selected," Karr told South Dakota Searchlight. "As more stories have come out, more questions have been raised and we simply want to know what the truth is."

Karr, who is a member of the Executive Board and Appropriations Committee, said Noem administration officials did not tell legislators about phase two of the campaign during Monday's appropriations meeting. Karr said he learned about phase two from Wednesday's press release.

The press release said the budget for phase two will be approximately \$1.5 million, but did not say who will create phase two of the campaign or where the funding will come from.

Amelia Joy, a spokeswoman for Noem, responded in writing to South Dakota Searchlight questions but did not identify a funding source. She said the administration will continue to work with Go West Media and will provide information to the Legislature's Executive Board as requested.

The \$5 million for the first-phase contract with Go West Media came from the state's Future Fund, which is controlled by the governor and designated by state law for "purposes related to research and economic development."

New supervisor hired for Black Hills National Forest

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - NOVEMBER 15, 2023 2:46 PM

The Black Hills National Forest will soon have a new supervisor, its sixth different leader this year and 11th in the past seven years.

The new supervisor, who's been hired to take the job on a permanent basis, is Shawn Cochran. He'll start Jan. 14 after departing his job as supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia.

Cochran will succeed Acting Supervisor Ivan Green.

Regional Forester Frank Beum said in a news release that the U.S. Forest Service is "happy that Shawn has accepted the position."

"Keeping the important work of the Black Hills National Forest moving forward and meeting the commitments to our communities, tribes, partners, contractors and cooperators is essential and will be the top priority of the new forest supervisor and all forest leadership," Beum said.

Cochran has 22 years of experience with the Forest Service. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology and environmental science from Southern Nazarene University in Oklahoma, and a master's degree in biology from Arkansas State University.

Cochran spent his early years growing up on his parents' cattle farm in Greenwood, Arkansas. He and his wife, Keri Cochran, have three children.

The Black Hills National Forest has experienced high turnover in the supervisor position since the 2016 retirement of Craig Bobzien, who held the job for 11 years.

Congress sends stopgap spending bill to Biden's desk, averting shutdown for now

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 15, 2023 10:47 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators voted 87-11 to approve legislation Wednesday that would fund the government into next year, clearing the measure for President Joe Biden's signature.

The stopgap spending bill, sometimes called a continuing resolution or CR, would fund part of the government until mid-January and the rest of the programs within the annual appropriations process through early February. But many hurdles likely remain before a final deal is reached on full-year spending.

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, said just before the bill passed that she's already turned her attention to "what happens next."

"Because avoiding a shutdown is so very far from mission accomplished," Murray said. "We have a lot of work to do after the dust settles and before the next shutdown deadline comes up. Now is not the time to pat ourselves on the back."

That conference process between the House and Senate, Murray said, will require "listening to the other side, making some tough decisions, leaving out partisan nonstarters and writing a bill that can actually pass into law."

"That is going to make a difference for people we represent at home," Murray said.

The House voted 336-95 to approve the stopgap legislation on Tuesday and Biden is expected to sign it before current funding expires Friday at midnight. House members abruptly canceled further votes and left D.C. for their Thanksgiving recess on Wednesday morning, after far-right members objected to advancing a different spending bill.

More time needed

The stopgap spending bill is intended to give the Republican House, Democratic Senate and White House more time to reach agreement on the dozen full-year spending bills.

Congress was supposed to finish its work by the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1, but is relying on the stopgap spending bill to continue current funding levels until leaders a deal is negotiated.

Reaching agreement is a well-established practice for the four leaders of the Appropriations committees — Senate Chair Murray; Senate ranking member Susan Collins, a Maine Republican; House Chair Kay

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Granger, a Texas Republican; and House ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat.

The four lawmakers have years of experience working out bipartisan deals on spending bills as well as other legislation, but they all often caution against politics or outside influences meddling in those negotiations.

"Appropriators left to their own devices" can reach agreement, they often say.

But, they rarely are left to do their work.

New faces in the talks

Sign-off on the final dozen full-year bills also falls to the four congressional leaders.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, have plenty of experience negotiating spending bills and other consequential legislation with each other.

Joining them at the table this year will be newly elected House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, of New York.

Both are new to forging agreement on the annual appropriations bills, which last year totaled about \$1.7 trillion.

Congress will have until Jan. 19 to come to find compromise on the Agriculture-FDA, Energy-Water, Military Construction-VA and Transportation-HUD spending bills.

They'll have until Feb. 2 to reach a deal on the Commerce-Justice-Science, Defense, Financial Services, Homeland Security, Interior-Environment, Labor-HHS-Education, Legislative Branch and State-Foreign Operations appropriations bills.

The Senate drafted its dozen spending bills to the total spending levels in the debt limit law that Congress approved this summer. But House Republicans wrote their bills more than \$100 billion below those levels and added in dozens of hot-button policy proposals that stand no chance of becoming law.

Collins said Wednesday that she met with Johnson last week to talk about total funding levels and the supplemental spending package that Congress could pass in the coming weeks to fund Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan and U.S. border security.

Ultimately, she said, congressional leaders will be the ones who decide whether to stick to the spending levels in the debt limit law or go in a different direction.

"To me, it should be guided by the numbers in the (Fiscal Responsibility Act), plus the side agreement that was worked out between Speaker McCarthy and President Biden," Collins said, referring to the debt limit deal from earlier this year and former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

In the meantime, she suggested, the Senate could take up a four-bill spending package that includes the Commerce-Justice-Science, Energy-Water, Defense and Labor-HHS-Education spending bills.

"That might be a good four-bill package that we could bring," Collins said.

A senior appropriator, speaking on background, said Wednesday that a proposal was circulating that would have the Senate turn to that exact four-bill spending package once it gets back from the Thanksgiving recess.

The Senate has approved a three-bill package with a broadly bipartisan vote and the House has approved seven without Democrats' support.

Thune: Big difference in spending bills

The House was set to vote on two additional spending bills this week, but Republican leaders announced late Wednesday morning the chamber was done until after the Thanksgiving break.

The canceled votes came after the House was unable to adopt the rule that would have set up debate on the Commerce-Justice-Science spending bill, amid anger on the stopgap spending bill from far-right members of the party.

Senate Republican Whip John Thune, of South Dakota, said Wednesday it will be difficult to work out agreements between the two chambers on the dozen appropriations bills before the new deadlines.

"One of the biggest challenges, obviously, is there's a difference in numbers between the House and the Senate," Thune said, noting the two chambers will have to deal with that when they begin the conference process.

"And I think we have to give that a chance," Thune said. "You've got a new speaker over there. It seems

like people want to cooperate a bit, so let's see if they can move bills."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

VA secretary says agency will cooperate with investigation into veterans crisis line

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 15, 2023 2:07 PM

WASHINGTON — Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough sought to defend the veterans crisis line Wednesday in a letter to the Kansas senator who has raised concerns with how some veterans are treated after calling it.

McDonough wrote in the three-page letter to Republican U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran that the VA "takes any allegations of insufficient care or service very seriously and will investigate thoroughly."

"We also want to reaffirm our appreciation and support for whistleblowers at VA, who raise important issues and help us better serve our nation's heroes," McDonough wrote. "It takes courage to raise concerns, and we at VA are dedicated to building a culture where every employee feels empowered and unafraid to do so."

The Government Accountability Office has opened an investigation into the veterans crisis line after Moran, the top GOP senator on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, asked them to do so in response to multiple whistleblower allegations of "gross mismanagement."

McDonough wrote in the letter that he wanted to share additional information with Moran about why staff members at the veterans crisis line transfer people to the "callers with complex needs" program. That process is at the center of Moran's concerns.

"Callers with complex needs are known callers who display inappropriately abusive behavior (e.g. cursing at responders or being racist toward responders); sexual behavior; or high-frequency calling for a purpose other than crisis support (e.g. calling VCL hundreds of times per day)," McDonough wrote.

"Oftentimes, these callers are not veterans — or those calling on behalf of veterans — and can take up resources that would normally be used to serve veterans in immediate crisis," McDonough added.

The complex needs program, he wrote, was established in the spring of 2018 and consists of more than 100 staff who receive 32 hours of training on "behavior-shaping, boundary-setting and coaching."

"In the rare situation that we come close to capacity for (callers with complex needs) callers during any shift, we will add staff to that shift, using overtime and other tools," McDonough wrote.

Sometimes people transferred to the callers with complex needs unit will receive a "selectively delayed response," which McDonough wrote is a "best practice" that can help those people "modify their behavior by pausing their engagement with a responder."

"While engaged in a delay, the caller hears a caring message about why they are waiting for a response, how to shape their behavior to be removed from a hold, and what to do if in crisis," McDonough wrote. "Crucially, there is always an option for these callers to connect to support immediately if they are experiencing an urgent crisis, and these callers are neither placed on indefinite holds nor involuntarily disconnected."

Those callers also have "extensive records" within the veterans crisis line, meaning that even if they are disconnected from the call for any reason, there is "no break in record retention."

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line provide 24/7 support for anyone thinking about committing suicide by dialing 988. The veterans crisis line is available by dialing 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1 or by sending a text message to 838255.

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Utilities target small transmission upgrades to move wind from Dakotas and Minnesota

BY: FRANK JOSSI - NOVEMBER 15, 2023 9:48 AM

A group of utilities that once went big on building transmission is now going small to open bottlenecks and move more wind power from western Minnesota and the Dakotas.

Grid North Partners, which includes 10 investor- and consumer-owned utilities, will spend roughly \$130 million for 19 transmission upgrades to improve access to wind energy and reduce grid congestion.

Many of its members, including Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power and Great River Energy, are also involved in much larger transmission projects through the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO, which manages the grid in the central portion of the country.

The utility partnership came together in 2004 to begin planning additional transmission lines to tap wind generation in the state's western regions and the Dakotas. The CapX2020 initiative, as it came to be called, developed the largest transmission project in the Upper Midwest in more than 40 years.

Between 2010 and 2017, CapX2020 spent \$2 billion on five projects that created more than 800 miles of new transmission lines. The initiative interconnected 3,600 megawatts of wind energy, enough to power 1.5 million homes annually.

The planning for CapX2020 took place before MISO began extensively planning regional transmission lines. MISO eventually incorporated CapX2020 into a portfolio of projects that decade, a precursor to a current batch of projects announced this year known as "Tranche 1," two of which involve Great River Energy.

Beth Soholt, executive director of the Clean Grid Alliance, said the Grid North projects serve a different purpose. Rather than add a huge volume of new capacity, the projects will create "a bridge until we get the new large transmission lines in place" and create enough capacity to allow utilities to continue adding solar and wind.

Utilities involved seek to "use the existing grid we have better," she said. "You've got a spectrum of smaller things you could do quickly, that are not going to solve your whole problem, but they're going to help and they're going to be quick."

Unlike bigger projects, which will take years, Grid North Partners said the upgrades will be completed over the next three years and be finished by the end of 2026. The partnership of the state's major utilities and cooperatives includes Xcel, Great River Energy, Minnesota Power, Otter Tail Power, Dairyland Power Cooperative, Missouri River Energy Services, Rochester Public Utilities, Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Central Municipal Power Agency and WPPI Energy.

Matthew Ellis, Great River Energy's manager of transmission strategy and development, said big transmission projects take eight to 10 years to build. The generation and transmission cooperative is involved in six Grid North Partners projects in collaboration with other members.

"The goal of this effort was to identify what can be done incrementally to mitigate congestion within the next two to three years," he said.

Congestion blocks the transmission of clean energy generation and has caused the growing problem of wind curtailment in western Minnesota. The projects will allow "cost generation, like wind and solar, to have better access to the transmission grid," he said. "The transmission grid is all interconnected. What these projects directly do is allow better access for clean energy resources."

Grid North Partners conducted the research to determine the location of transmission bottlenecks. Ellis said the experience is a bit like looking at traffic maps and where congestion occurs at different times and places. Electricity from wind and solar generators slows at sites in different parts of the state, he said.

Fixing one part of the grid to reduce congestion sometimes means just adding to another location. "One of the advantages of Grid North Partners is that, by having different utilities partnering up, we can mitigate those downstream impacts," Ellis said. "We can get a lot more bang for our buck and much more synergy."

Ellis said the transmission upgrades mainly focus on replacing old equipment, not on adding lines or new transmission towers. Instead, newer technology allowing them to operate more efficiently will be installed. Grid North Partners said in a news release the project will pay for itself.

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Upfront costs will be paid for by the utilities that will benefit from them. In some projects, several utilities will split costs; in others, the line and work will be owned by one of the partners, Ellis said. The transmission lines affected by the projects span in length from half a mile to 67 miles.

Xcel Energy said in a statement that congestion in western Minnesota caused by wind projects has pushed the existing grid beyond what it can support and forced the utility to use peaking plants to supplement the energy supply at peak demand times. Congestion "limits our efforts to keep costs low for customers," Xcel said.

Xcel will partner or be the sole sponsor on 10 Grid North projects, more than any other utility. Two of the largest Xcel projects add second circuits to the existing CapX2020 transmission lines between eastern South Dakota and Lyon County, Minnesota, and between Scott and Dakota counties. After regulatory approval, the western line will be completed by 2024, with the Scott-Dakota project slated for 2025. Xcel has partners on both projects.

"We estimate hundreds of millions of dollars in benefits to customers following the completion of the project due to reduced congestion costs and increased ability to access renewable energy in the region," Xcel said.

Otter Tail Power's seven Grid North projects involve upgrading substations, adding circuits and replacing electricity poles, said communications director Stephanie Hoff. No new facilities will be added by the utility.

Hoff said Otter Tail has partnered with other regional utilities on two projects in the long-range MISO plan. Although the Grid North Partners initiative does not directly impact Otter Tail's generation assets, including renewables, the investment will help the grid function more effectively, she said.

"New and upgraded transmission helps move electricity from where it's generated to where it's used," Hoff said. "When the transmission system can't move electricity from the most economic energy generators, market prices rise and energy generators may need to be curtailed, resulting in higher electricity costs for customers."

Grid North Partners' budget is tiny compared to projects announced by MISO and Xcel. MISO will spend \$10.3 billion on its first tranche of transmission projects, with more than \$2 billion dedicated to corridors entirely or partially in Minnesota. Xcel Minnesota Energy Connection, linking wind farms in the southwest to a plant in Becker, will cost \$1 billion.

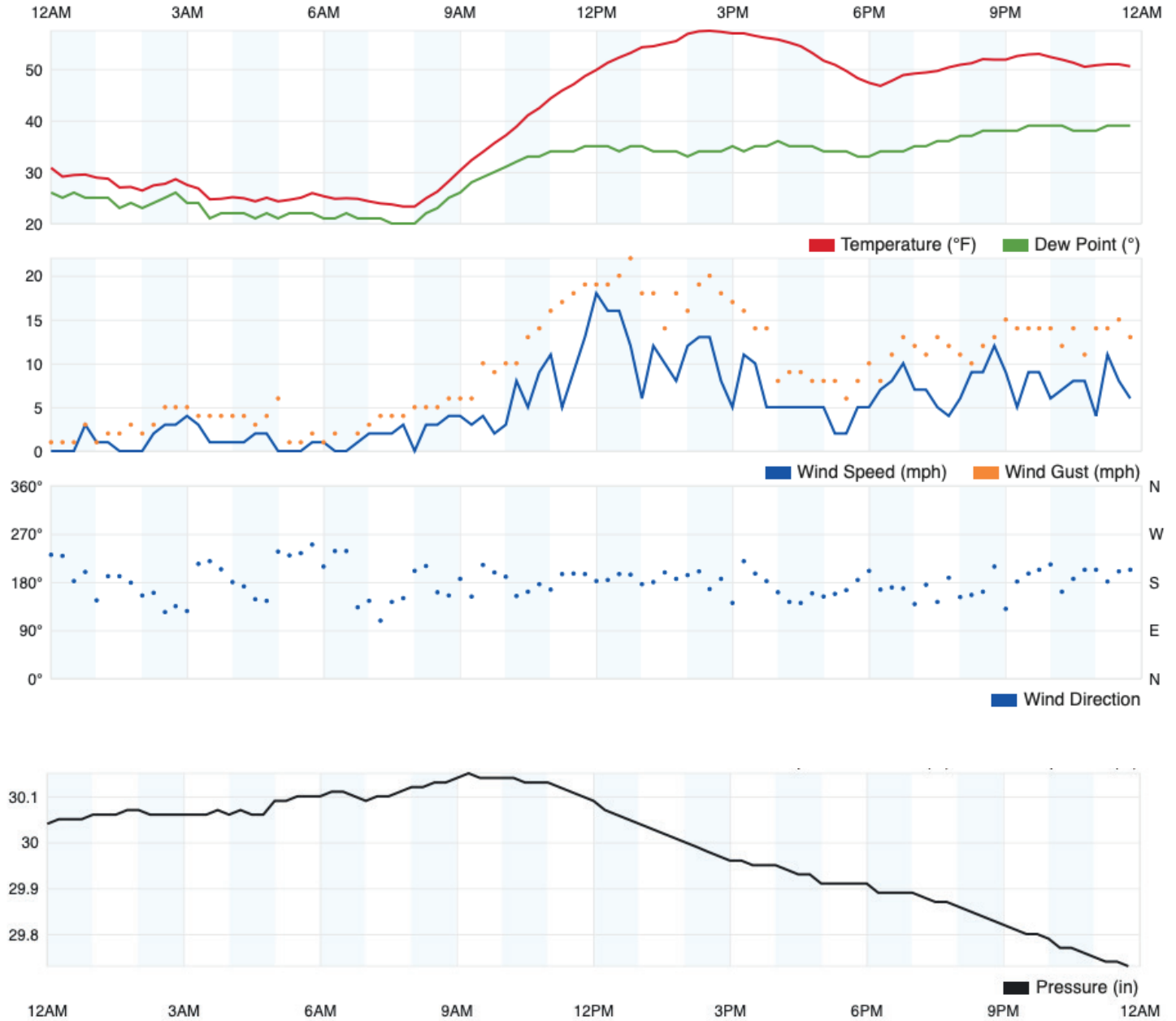
This article first appeared on Energy News Network and is republished here under a Creative Commons license.

Frank is an independent journalist and consultant based in St. Paul and a longtime contributor to Midwest Energy News. His articles have appeared in more than 50 publications, including Minnesota Monthly, Wired, the Los Angeles Times, the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Minnesota Technology, Finance & Commerce and others. Frank has also been a Humphrey policy fellow at the University of Minnesota, a Fulbright journalism teacher in Pakistan and Albania, and a program director of the World Press Institute at Macalester College. Frank covers the state of Minnesota.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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| Thu Nov 16 | Fri Nov 17 | Sat Nov 18 | Sun Nov 19 | Mon Nov 20 | Tue Nov 21 | Wed Nov 22 |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | | | | | |
| 57°F | 48°F | 54°F | 54°F | 46°F | 41°F | 36°F |
| 21°F | 27°F | 32°F | 37°F | 25°F | 22°F | 13°F |
| SSW | SSW | SSW | SE | NW | NW | NW |
| 30 MPH | 18 MPH | 8 MPH | 12 MPH | 16 MPH | 16 MPH | 15 MPH |

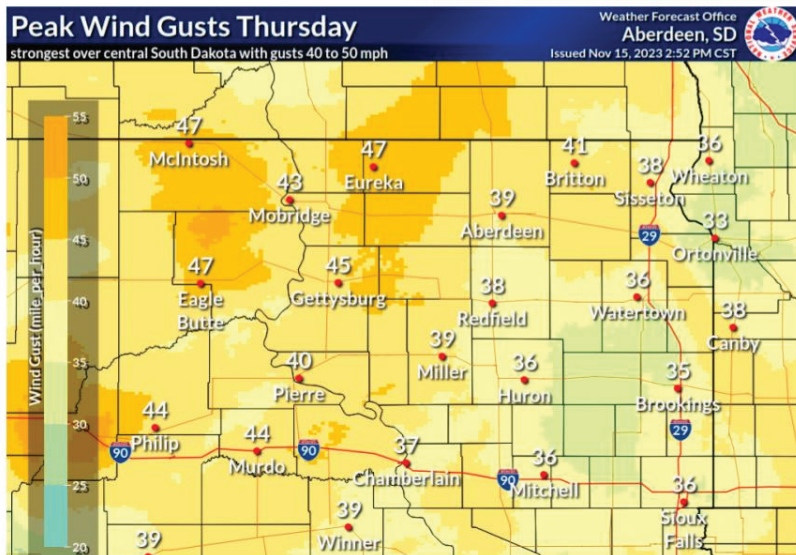


Windy Thursday

November 15, 2023
3:21 PM

Winds switching out of the Northwest and increasing

Expect winds out of the Northwest 25 to 35 mph with **gusts up to 40 to 50 mph** during the day Thursday, **strongest over central South Dakota**



Very High Grassland Fire Danger Index Values Thursday

- Be extra cautious with anything that could cause a spark
- Fires will become difficult to control

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A strong cold front will bring shifting winds out of the northwest on Thursday. Expect winds out of the Northwest 25 to 35 mph with gusts up to 40 to 50 mph during the day Thursday, strongest over central South Dakota. Very High Grassland Fire Danger Index Values are expected Thursday. This means that fires could become dangerous. Be extra cautious with anything that could cause a spark. Fires will become difficult to control.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 2:23 PM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 7:40 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 12:38 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 32 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 2001

Record Low: -12 in 1955

Average High: 42

Average Low: 19

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.44

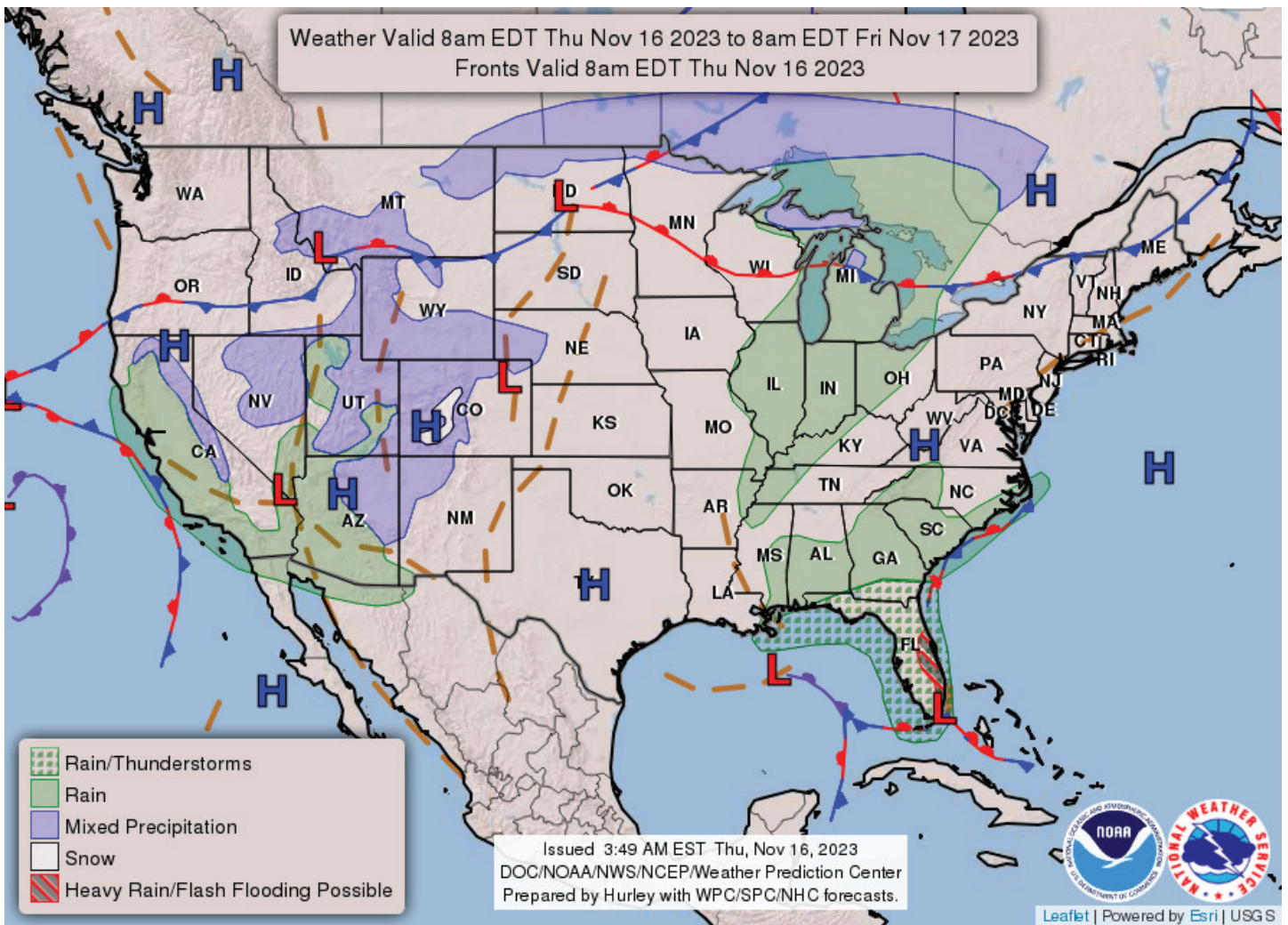
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.17

Average Precip to date: 20.91

Precip Year to Date: 23.15

Sunset Tonight: 5:03:15 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32:25 AM



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Today in Weather History

November 16, 1996: An area of low pressure brought 6 to 9 inches of snowfall to most of central and parts of north-central South Dakota on the 16th, while widespread freezing rain associated with the warm front of the system, along with 4 to 10 inches of snow, fell in northeast South Dakota. Travel was significantly affected, and a few minor accidents occurred during the storm. Several sporting events and activities were postponed or canceled. Strong north winds late on the 16th into early the 17th resulted in near-blizzard conditions across northeast South Dakota. Some storm total snowfall amounts include, 9.0 inches 12SSW of Harrold; 8.5 inches near Highmore; 8.2 inches in Roscoe; 8.0 in Eureka; 7.9 inches near Mellette; 7.0 inches in Waubay; 6.5 inches in Murdo and Redfield; 6.0 inches in Kennebec and Miller; 5.5 inches near Victor; and 5.3 inches in Sisseton.

1958 - More than six inches of snow fell at Tucson, AZ. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1959 - The most severe November cold wave in U.S. history was in progress. A weather observing station located 14 miles northeast of Lincoln MT reported a reading of 53 degrees below zero, which established an all-time record low temperature for the nation for the month of November. Their high that day was one degree above zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - High winds and heavy snow created blizzard conditions across parts of eastern Colorado. Wind gusts reached 68 mph at Pueblo, and snowfall totals ranged up to 37 inches at Echo Lake. In Wyoming, the temperature dipped to 14 degrees below zero at Laramie. Strong thunderstorms in Louisiana drenched Alexandria with 16.65 inches of rain in thirty hours, with an unofficial total of 21.21 inches north of Olla. Flash flooding in Louisiana caused five to six million dollars damage. (15th-16th) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful low pressure system in the north central U.S. produced high winds across the Great Lakes Region, with wind gusts to 60 mph reported at Chicago IL. Heavy snow blanketed much of Minnesota, with eleven inches reported at International Falls. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Snow and gusty winds invaded the north central U.S. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced wind chill readings as cold as 25 degrees below zero, and blizzard conditions were reported in Nebraska during the late morning hours. High winds around a powerful low pressure system produced squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Whitefish Point MI, and snowfall totals in Michigan ranged up to 19 inches at Hart, north of Muskegon. (15th-16th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006: An early morning F3 tornado killed eight people, injured 20 others and left 100 people homeless in Riegelwood, North Carolina. This storm was the second deadliest tornado in the state in the past 50 years.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

POSITIVE THINKING

One warm summer day a snail began climbing an apple tree. As he moved upward, he heard a voice calling, "There's no reason for you to climb this tree. There are no apples up there." Looking around he saw a worm basking in the warmth of the sun.

Returning his attention to the task before him, the snail shouted back, "There will be when I get up there."

A great example of positive thinking was Noah. If you recall, "God warned him about something that had never happened before -and by faith- he built an ark to save his family."

Perhaps no one in history experienced more ridicule and rejection for being different from his neighbors than Noah. God commanded him to build a huge boat in the middle of dry land. This certainly made no sense to him when he got his instructions from God. But, it didn't matter. He did what God asked Him to do! And, although his behavior seemed strange to his neighbors, it made no difference to him. Being obedient to God did.

God often asks Christians to do things that seem strange to those who do not know Him. Being obedient to God often makes what we do look odd, perhaps even weird, to those who do not know the Lord. However, whenever God asks us to do something – even strange - He also gives us the ability and courage to overcome the scorn of the skeptics and succeed.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to keep our eyes on You and on what You call us to do. Give us faith and persistence to do what You call us to do and never waiver. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith. Hebrews 11:7



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.14.23

29 35 59 61 69 22

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$267,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.15.23

15 16 26 34 51 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,250,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.15.23

5 6 15 20 48 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 43 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.15.23

8 18 26 31 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$57,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 43
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.15.23

14 15 30 58 59 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 12
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.15.23

3 4 51 53 60 6

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$280,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 12
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. November 13, 2023.

Editorial: Fighting COVID: It's Mostly Up To You Now Opinion

We all wish we could ignore COVID-19 by this point, but the fact is, we ignore the specter of the coronavirus even now at our own peril.

This is a tale that continues to unfold on many fronts across the nation and the world. It plays out every day in every American state, in every county and every town.

Even now. Even in late 2023. Even more than 3½ years into the pandemic.

Last week's COVID-19 update in South Dakota was a reminder of that. The state posted nine more deaths for the previous week, two of which occurred in Yankton County. The state has seen 17 deaths in the past three weeks, and Yankton County has registered five deaths this fall.

Worldwide, the pandemic has officially seen nearly 7 million COVID-related fatalities, and that number continues to creep upward.

In the United States, nearly 1.19 million people have died and continue to die of COVID. Last week, COVID-19 reportedly accounted for 2.3% of all deaths in this country.

And yet, we no longer treat it as a pressing concern.

Part of the issue, no doubt, is general fatigue. Starting in March 2020, we were placed on high alert as the coronavirus swept across the nation. We saw so many deaths and were impacted by numerous disruptions of public life.

Ultimately, vaccines arrived, as well as a resistance to vaccines that has somewhat undercut the overall effectiveness of the vaccination effort.

Through it all, the public (especially after the arrival of the vaccines) grew weary of the constant threat, and we now generally treat COVID as a fact of everyday life, a seasonal danger (that's actually not so seasonal) that may or may not be addressed.

Because of that, many public officials, even in the health field, have effectively backed off on the threat. The Biden Administration put an end to the COVID emergency last spring, and reporting COVID positive tests is no longer mandatory. Consequently, it's much harder to come up with firm numbers on the actual cases and the deaths from them; both statistics now are most likely undercounted.

In effect, the fight against COVID-19 has mostly been left now to individuals, as government officials at many levels are leery to aggressively delve back into this issue again. Even entities like the South Dakota Department of Health provide very little discussion or disseminate little information on the topic. (Its resumption of weekly COVID updates a couple of weeks ago was done with practically no public announcement.)

COVID-19 is now being treated much like influenza, although there are very big differences. One of them is the growing issue of long COVID, which figures to loom as a matter of public impact even when the pandemic is officially declared at an end. It remains a mystery that could possibly have prolonged and expensive complications for individuals and for society.

So, back to the point: COVID defense is up to you, as the shepherding that guided us through the first couple of years of the pandemic has basically wandered off. It remains important to stay up to date on vaccinations and to still consider wearing a mask and practicing social distancing when and if the situation warrants (such as when you are around people at higher risk of infection).

More than ever, it's up to you. There's still information that can guide you, but it may not be so widely disseminated as it was in the past. That's not the smartest public way to keep the threat from a pandemic in check, but it's the way government officials have seemingly chosen.

Thus, your own education on the issue is more essential than ever.

END

Israel signals wider offensive in Gaza's south, where hundreds of thousands have fled

By NAJIB JOBAIN and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces dropped leaflets warning Palestinians to flee parts of southern Gaza, residents said Thursday, signaling a possible expansion of their offensive to areas where hundreds of thousands of people who heeded earlier evacuation orders are crowded into U.N.-run shelters and family homes.

Meanwhile, soldiers continued searching Shifa Hospital in the north, in a raid that began early Wednesday. They displayed guns they say were found hidden in one building, but have yet to release any evidence of the central Hamas command center that Israel has said is concealed beneath the complex. Hamas and staff at the hospital, Gaza's largest, deny the allegations.

Broadening operations to the south — where Israel already carries out daily air raids — threatens to worsen an already severe humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory. Over 1.5 million people have been internally displaced in Gaza, with most having fled to the south, where food, water and electricity are increasingly scarce.

It's not clear where else they could go, as Egypt refuses to allow a mass transfer onto its soil.

The war, now in its sixth week, was triggered by a wide-ranging Hamas attack into southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which the militants killed over 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and captured some 240 men, women and children. Israel responded with a weekslong air campaign and a ground invasion of northern Gaza, vowing to remove Hamas from power and crush its military capabilities.

More than 11,200 Palestinians have been killed, two-thirds of them women and minors, according to Palestinian health authorities. Another 2,700 have been reported missing, with most believed to be buried under the rubble. The official count does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths, and Israel says it has killed thousands of militants.

The war has inflamed tensions elsewhere. On Thursday, gunmen shot and wounded four people at a checkpoint on the main road linking Jerusalem to Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. Police said three attackers were killed and a search for others was underway.

SOME GUNS, BUT SO FAR NO TUNNELS

Israeli troops stormed into Gaza's largest hospital Wednesday, searching for traces of Hamas inside and beneath the facility, where newborns and hundreds of other patients have suffered for days without electricity and other basic necessities.

Troops searched the underground levels of the hospital on Thursday and detained technicians responsible for running its equipment, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said in a statement.

The military said its soldiers were accompanied by medical teams bringing in incubators and other supplies.

After encircling Shifa for days, Israel faces pressure to prove its claim that Hamas used the patients, staff and civilians sheltering there to provide cover for its fighters. The allegation is part of Israel's broader accusation that Hamas uses Palestinians as human shields.

The military released video from inside Shifa showing three duffel bags it said it found hidden around an MRI lab, each containing an assault rifle, grenades and Hamas uniforms, as well as a closet that contained a number of assault rifles without ammunition clips. The Associated Press could not independently verify the Israeli claims that the weapons were found inside the hospital.

Hamas and Gaza health officials deny militants operate in Shifa — a hospital that employs some 1,500 people and has more than 500 beds. Palestinians and rights groups accuse Israel of recklessly endangering civilians.

Munir al-Boursh, a senior official with Gaza's Health Ministry inside the hospital, said troops ransacked the basement and other buildings, and questioned and face-screened patients, staff and people sheltering in the facility.

Israeli forces battled militants outside the hospital for days, but there were no reports of militants firing from inside Shifa, or of any fighting within the hospital after Israeli troops entered.

At one point, tens of thousands of Palestinians fleeing Israeli bombardment were sheltering at Shifa, but most left in recent days as the fighting drew closer.

The Health Ministry said 40 patients, including three babies, have died since Shifa's emergency generator ran out of fuel Saturday. There was no word on the condition of another 36 babies, who the ministry said earlier were at risk of dying because there is no power for incubators.

LOOKING SOUTH

The leaflets, dropped in areas east of the southern town of Khan Younis, warned civilians to evacuate and said anyone in the vicinity of militants or their positions "is putting his life in danger." Similar leaflets were dropped over northern Gaza for weeks ahead of the ground invasion.

Two reporters who live east of Khan Younis confirmed seeing the leaflets. Others shared images of the leaflets on social media. The military declined to comment.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Wednesday the ground operation will eventually "include both the north and south. We will strike Hamas wherever it is."

The military says it has largely consolidated its control of the north, including seizing and demolishing government buildings. Video released by the army Thursday showed soldiers moving between heavily damaged buildings through holes blown in their walls.

The military said it had blown up a residence belonging to Ismail Haniyeh, a senior Hamas leader based abroad. It was unclear if anyone was inside the building.

With most of Gaza's 2.3 million people crowded into the territory's south, residents say bread is scarce and supermarket shelves are bare. Families cook on wood fires for lack of fuel. Central electricity and running water have been out for weeks.

The worsening fuel shortage threatens to paralyze the delivery of humanitarian services and shut down mobile phone and internet service.

Israel allowed a small amount of fuel to enter Gaza on Wednesday, for the first time since the war began, so that the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees could continue bringing limited supplies of aid.

The fuel cannot be used for hospitals or to desalinate water, and covers less than 10% of what the agency needs to sustain "lifesaving activities," said Thomas White, the agency's Gaza director.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron meets Zelenskyy in first overseas visit as top UK diplomat

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — British Foreign Secretary David Cameron met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his first overseas trip in his new job, pledging that the U.K. would continue providing military support for Ukraine's war effort until it is victorious in its war with Russia.

Cameron, a former prime minister who returned to government in a surprise appointment Monday in a Cabinet shuffle, said he wanted to make Kyiv his first diplomatic destination.

"I admire the strength and determination of the Ukrainian people," he told Zelenskyy, according to a video posted Thursday by the president.

Cameron said the U.K. would continue to provide moral and diplomatic support "but above all, the military support that you need not just this year and next year but however long it takes."

Zelenskyy, who said he wanted to keep the world's focus on Ukraine's fight as attention has turned to the Middle East and Israel's war against Hamas, thanked Cameron for the visit Wednesday.

"A good meeting," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram. "Weapons for the front, strengthening of air defense, protection of our people and critical infrastructure. I am grateful to the UK for its support!"

The U.K. has been one of the strongest supporters of Ukraine in defending itself from Russia.

As of last month, the U.K. said it was second to the U.S. in providing military funds to Ukraine, giving 4.6 billion pounds (\$5.7 billion) worth of assistance and training 30,000 Ukrainian troops on British soil.

"Russia thinks it can wait this war out, and that the West will eventually turn its attention elsewhere," Cameron said in a statement Thursday. "This could not be further from the truth. In my first discussions with President Zelenskyy in my new role, I made clear that the U.K. and our partners will support Ukraine

and its people for as long as it takes for them to achieve victory.”

Live updates | Palestinians in parts of southern Gaza receive notices to evacuate

By The Associated Press undefined

Palestinians in parts of southern Gaza said they received evacuation notices Thursday. The signal that fighting is about to expand in the south comes a day after Israeli forces began searching a north Gaza hospital where they claimed Hamas militants operate — a claim that Hamas and hospital staff deny.

On Thursday, Saudi Arabia condemned the raid on Shifa Hospital, which has become a symbol of the widespread suffering of Palestinian civilians since Israel vowed to wipe out Hamas after the militant group launched its Oct. 7 incursion. Some 1,200 people have died in Israel, mostly during the initial attack, and around 240 were taken captive by militants.

The Israeli military displayed what it said were Hamas weapons and military equipment it uncovered in Shifa, but it has yet to show any evidence of an alleged Hamas command center underneath or in the hospital. The Associated Press could not independently verify the Israeli claims that the weapons were found inside the hospital.

Only a quarter of Gaza’s hospitals are still functioning, either because they have been damaged or because they ran out of fuel, the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

More than 11,200 Palestinians — two-thirds of them women and minors — have been killed since the war began, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths. About 2,700 people have been reported missing.

Currently:

- A protest in Washington calling for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war ends in arrests.
- The Israeli military has set its sights on southern Gaza in its campaign to stamp out Hamas.
- Their families wiped out, grieving Palestinians in Gaza ask why.
- ASEAN defense chiefs call for the fighting in Gaza to cease, but they struggle to address Myanmar.
- Find more of AP’s coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

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

AN OUTDOOR FUNERAL SERVICE IS HELD FOR 28 PALESTINIANS KILLED IN OVERNIGHT BOMBING

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — In the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah, an outdoor funeral service was held for 28 Palestinians killed in overnight bombing, their bodies pulled from the rubble of destroyed buildings. Some of the mourners crouched over bodies wrapped in sheets of white plastic.

POLICE SAY SHOOTERS OPEN FIRE AT A CHECKPOINT IN ISRAEL, WOUNDING 4

JERUSALEM — Shooters opened fire Thursday at a checkpoint south of Jerusalem, wounding at least four people, one critically, Israeli police said.

The attackers arrived by car at the checkpoint on the main road connecting Jewish settlements in the West Bank and southern Jerusalem and opened fire at Israelis, police said, and at least three shooters were killed by security guards at the crossing. Police and bomb disposal units were searching for the area for suspicious activity or any additional shooters.

Tensions have been rising as a result of the war in the Gaza Strip and deadly Israeli military raids in the West Bank. Violence has soared in the Israeli-occupied West Bank since the start of the war, with nearly 200 Palestinians killed, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most were killed during gunbattles triggered by Israeli arrest raids or in violent demonstrations. Israel says it has arrested hundreds of people, mostly suspected Hamas members.

SAUDI ARABIA CONDEMNS ISRAEL’S RAID ON SHIFA HOSPITAL

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia condemned Israel’s raid on Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, calling it a “blatant violation of international law” in a statement Thursday from the Foreign Ministry. It also condemned what it said was shelling near another hospital and called on international bodies to hold Israel accountable.

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Israel says its troops are carrying out a targeted operation in Shifa, where it has long accused Hamas of maintaining an underground command center. Hamas and hospital staff have denied the allegations. Israeli forces searching the medical compound since early Wednesday say they have found guns and other indications that Hamas militants were inside, but have not shown any evidence regarding the alleged command center.

Hospitals can lose their protections under international law if combatants use them for military purposes. Even then, civilians must be given ample time and opportunity to flee and any action must be proportional to the military objective.

Before the war, Saudi Arabia was in talks with the United States over potentially normalizing relations with Israel.

60 MORE NORWEGIANS WILL BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE GAZA

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Another 60 Norwegian citizens will be able to leave Gaza on Thursday, the Foreign Ministry in Norway said, with Scandinavian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre saying that they have received information from relatives that a citizen from the Nordic country was killed in Gaza.

Gahr Støre said that “many countries have several of their citizens in Gaza,” and it’s estimated that of the approximately 250 people with ties to Norway in Gaza, more than half of them are children.

Those able to leave Gaza will be able to enter into Egypt via the border crossing at Rafah. On Wednesday, Norway said it had been informed that 51 Norwegians could leave Gaza through Rafah.

Xi-Biden meeting seen as putting relations back on course, even as issues remain unresolved

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Perhaps just shaking hands and sitting down together can be enough sometimes. At their meeting Wednesday, U.S. President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping didn’t resolve any of the major geopolitical issues dividing the world’s two largest economies and chief rivals for influence, particularly among developing nations.

But it did seem to put a floor beneath a relationship that had been in free-fall over issues from trade to investment to U.S. support for Taiwan, along with human rights in regions from Tibet to Sichuan and the Asian financial hub of Hong Kong, which China administers as a semi-autonomous region while gutting its civil liberties handed over from the former British administration.

The two leaders spent four hours together at a northern California country estate, holding meetings, lunching and taking a garden stroll that seemed intent on showing the world that while they are global competitors they’re not locked in a winner-take-all faceoff.

“Planet Earth is big enough for the two countries to succeed,” Xi told Biden.

Taiwan’s Foreign Ministry appeared to welcome the warming of relations, noting the U.S. had again laid down the bottom line that China must use peaceful means in dealing with the island it claims as its own territory.

Taiwan “affirms Biden’s insistence that there can be no unilateral changes in the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and that differences must be worked out peacefully,” spokesperson Jeff Liu said.

“We express our affirmation and welcome for President Biden again making use of the venue of a meeting with the leader of China to again openly press the strict U.S. position insisting on peace in the Taiwan Strait,” Liu said.

South Koreans watched the meeting with a mixture of hope and skepticism, wondering whether the talks would meaningfully soften an intense rivalry that has left Seoul squeezed between its crucial military and diplomatic ally the U.S. and largest trade partner China.

Facing growing North Korean nuclear threats, South Korea has been primarily focused on strengthening its security in conjunction with its alliance with the United States and expressed frustration over Beijing’s unwillingness at the U.N. Security Council to back stronger sanctions and pressure on Pyongyang over its

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nuclear and missile programs.

There's growing concern in Seoul about North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's efforts to boost the visibility of his partnerships with Beijing and Moscow as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and make Pyongyang part of a unified front against Washington.

But South Korea's heavy reliance on computer chips and other technology products for jobs and exports has also created unease about broadening U.S.-China tensions that also include a trade war over technology.

The Biden administration's steps since last year to restrict the sales of advanced chip technologies to China set off furious lobbying by the South Koreans to minimize the impact on South Korean semiconductor makers like Samsung and SK Hynix. Seoul breathed a sigh of relief when Washington decided last month to allow those companies to send chipmaking equipment to their Chinese plants without special approvals.

In an editorial on Thursday, South Korea's Kookmin Ilbo newspaper said a meaningful improvement in U.S.-China relations would have major consequences to global supply chains and the "composition of the new Cold War between North Korea-China-Russia and South Korea-U.S.-Japan."

Japanese officials are more focused on setting up a meeting between Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Xi and finding ways to resolve Beijing's ban on Japanese seafood resulting from the release of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Kishida told reporters before his departure early Wednesday that possible talks with Xi have not been decided at this point.

"But there is no change to our basic policy of maintaining a constructive and stable Japan-China relationship by mutual effort," he said. "We plan to have various forms of communication."

Along with lingering anti-Japan sentiment in China used to promote loyalty to the ruling Communist Party, Tokyo and Beijing have feuded over ownership of unpopulated East China Sea islands and underwater mineral deposits.

All of those disputes, particularly China's aggressive claim to ownership of virtually the entire strategically vital South China Sea, have been brought into sharp relief by China's economic slowdown since it lifted draconian anti-pandemic restrictions late last year.

Madoka Fukuda, a professor of international politics and China studies at Hosei University in Tokyo, said China's primary intention is to seek an easing of trade restrictions by the United States on cutting-edge technology to re-energize the economy.

China is also portraying the Xi-Biden talks to show its own people and the rest of the world that China is a global power ranking alongside the United States, she said.

"China is stressing to its own people that the country is a global power that serves an important role in the international community, prompting their nationalism at home," she said.

Despite all that, differences on the South China Sea and security in the Taiwan Strait, and over Beijing's backing of Russia's war on Ukraine and its support for the Palestinian cause and American foes such as Iran will remain unchanged, she said.

China's Foreign Ministry on Thursday also registered its objections to Biden's repeated references to Xi as a "dictator."

"Such a remark is extremely wrong and is irresponsible political manipulation," spokesperson Mao Ning said. "It needs to be pointed out that there have always been people with ill intentions who try to sow discord and undermine the China-U.S. relations."

More importantly, Fukuda said, the resumption of military-to-military concepts is "meaningful as a guardrail to prevent accidental encounters."

"The United States places importance on creating a guardrail, and China, in responding to such a dialogue, is expected to ask for an easing of trade restrictions," Fukuda said on TBS radio.

In Beijing, residents said they hoped for a relaxing of tensions with the U.S., where tens of thousands of Chinese students travel to study each year and an untold number have settled down for work.

"I feel that China-U.S. relations have eased, and maybe the next step will be cooperation," said Beijing firefighter Xu Jiaguang, 31. The meeting between the two leaders will be "a great help," Xu said, echoing Biden's comments that only by sitting face-to-face can potential adversaries find common ground.

Poor relations between China and the U.S. have the "biggest impact on ordinary people," said Gao Kexin, 23, a Beijing hospital worker.

"I hope the relationship can be eased, so that people can live a happier life," Gao said.

Overall, expectations for the first meeting between the leaders in roughly a year were low and it remains to be seen whether the momentum for improvement in bilateral ties can be maintained, wrote Dimitar Gueorguiev, director of Chinese studies at Syracuse University in New York State.

"We are still in the middle of U.S.-China relations winter. Though there is reason to celebrate the current thaw, we should be prepared for a cold front to come in soon," Gueorguiev wrote.

Fire at a coal mining company building in northern China kills 26 and injures dozens

BEIJING (AP) — A fire erupted in a coal company building in a northern Chinese city on Thursday, killing 26 people and injuring dozens of others, state media said.

Rescue personnel evacuated 70 people and took 63 others to a hospital, according to state media.

The dead were almost all workers, according to local media outlet Fengmian News.

The fire was under control and rescue work was continuing on Thursday afternoon, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

The building belongs to Yongju Coal Company and is in Lvliang city in northern Shanxi province, a major coal-producing region, CCTV said.

The fire appeared to have started in the shower area of a building with offices and dormitories, local news outlet Hongxing News said.

Coal mine accidents have been relatively common in China, though the government has been working on improving safety.

Shanxi is China's top coal-producing province and is at the center of government efforts to reduce the economy's reliance on coal.

Police and protesters clash outside Democratic HQ during demonstration over Israel-Hamas war

By MIKE PESOLI and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Police and protesters clashed outside Democratic National Committee headquarters on Wednesday night during a demonstration for a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hamas, the latest reflection of boiling tensions over the bloody conflict.

Scores of Democratic representatives and candidates, including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, were inside the building for a campaign reception when it was interrupted by chanting outside. Protesters said they wanted to block entrances and exits to force politicians to encounter their candlelight vigil and their calls for an end to the fighting. Many of them wore black shirts saying "Cease Fire Now."

However, the situation swiftly devolved. U.S. Capitol Police said about 150 people were "illegally and violently protesting" in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington. But protesters blamed police for the violence, saying officers rushed them without warning.

"It is shameful the way that nonviolent protesters and members of our community were met with violence tonight," said Dani Noble, who came from Philadelphia for the demonstration. "It is absolutely shameful."

Noble said police, some of whom were wearing riot gear, started "pulling on folks that are disabled or have have chronic illnesses, pulling people to the ground."

Inside the Democratic headquarters, police rushed into the reception and directed lawmakers to the basement, according to Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Calif. Some were later evacuated in police vehicles.

Capitol Police said six officers were treated for minor injuries and one protester was arrested for assaulting an officer. Video posted on social media showed shoving and scuffles as police moved in.

The Metropolitan Police Department said its officers also responded to the disturbance. Congressional

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staffers received an alert telling them no one would be permitted to enter or exit any House office buildings, but authorities later reopened the entrances.

Sherman accused protesters of trying to break into the Democratic headquarters in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. However, protesters denied that was their intention.

The protest was organized by a coalition of groups, including If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace Action, that have spearheaded other demonstrations in Washington and elsewhere.

Wednesday's clashes were the latest example of roiling tensions over the war between Israel and Hamas.

Last week, a large number of House Democrats joined nearly all Republicans in voting to censure Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian American in Congress, over her criticism of the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians. Tlaib, who has family in the West Bank, came under heavy criticism for not immediately condemning Hamas after the attack. She since has called out the militant group while also calling for a cease-fire.

President Joe Biden has also faced increasing pressure from the Democratic Party's left flank over his support for Israel's military operation. He has resisted calls for a cease-fire, instead saying there should be pauses in the fighting to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the potential extraction of hostages.

Among the participants Wednesday night was Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg, who interrupted Biden's speech at a recent fundraiser in Minneapolis.

She said Democrats are "not listening to the people who they claim to represent," adding that "actions like this are only going to increase."

"We are not slowing down," she said. "The call for a ceasefire is going to keep growing. And our representatives need to take action, yesterday."

Thousands of Starbucks workers are expected to go on a one-day strike

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Thousands of workers at more than 200 U.S. Starbucks stores plan to walk off the job Thursday in what organizers say is the largest strike yet in the two-year-old effort to unionize the company's stores.

The Workers United union chose Starbucks' annual Red Cup Day to stage the walkout since it's usually one of the busiest days of the year. Starbucks expects to give away thousands of reusable cups Thursday to customers who order holiday drinks.

The union said it was expecting more than 5,000 workers to take part in its "Red Cup Rebellion." Around 30 stores also staged walkouts on Wednesday.

Neha Cremin, a Starbucks barista in Oklahoma City, said she was striking to protest understaffing in stores, especially during promotions like Red Cup Day. Cremin said workers are already overwhelmed filling delivery orders, drive-thru orders, mobile orders and in-store orders; promotions add another layer of stress.

"Understaffing hurts workers and also creates an unpleasant experience for customers," Cremin said. "Starbucks has made it clear that they won't listen to workers, so we're advocating for ourselves by going on strike."

Thursday's strike was the fifth major labor action by Starbucks workers since a store in Buffalo, New York, became the first to unionize in late 2021. Workers at 110 stores walked out last year on Red Cup Day; most recently, a strike in June protested reports that Starbucks had removed Pride displays from its stores.

But the strikes have had little impact on Starbucks' sales. For its 2023 fiscal year, which ended Oct. 1, Starbucks reported its revenue rose 12%, to a record \$36.0 billion.

Starbucks downplayed any potential impact of the strike Wednesday, saying it would occur at a "small subset" of the company's 9,600 company-owned U.S. stores.

"We remain committed to working with all partners, side-by-side, to elevate the everyday, and we hope that Workers United's priorities will shift to include the shared success of our partners and negotiating contracts for those they represent," Starbucks said in a statement.

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At least 363 company-operated Starbucks stores in 41 states have voted to unionize since late 2021. The Starbucks effort was at the leading edge of a period of labor activism that has also seen strikes by Amazon workers, auto workers and Hollywood writers and actors. At least 457,000 workers have participated in 315 strikes in the U.S. just this year, according to Johnnie Kallas, a Ph.D. candidate and the project director of Cornell University's Labor Action Tracker.

Starbucks opposes the unionization effort and has yet to reach a labor agreement with any of the stores that have voted to unionize. The process has been contentious; regional offices with the National Labor Relations Board have issued 111 complaints against Starbucks for unfair labor practices, including refusal to bargain. Starbucks says Workers United is refusing to schedule bargaining sessions.

Starbucks noted that it has started bargaining with the Teamsters union, which organized a Starbucks store outside of Pittsburgh in June 2022. But the two sides have not reached a labor agreement. The Teamsters didn't say Wednesday whether workers at the unionized store would also be striking.

Relations between Starbucks and Workers United have grown increasingly tense. Last month, Starbucks sued Workers United, saying a pro-Palestinian post on a union account damaged its reputation and demanding that the union stop using the name Starbucks Workers United. Workers United responded with its own lawsuit, saying Starbucks defamed the union by suggesting it supports terrorism and violence.

Their families wiped out, grieving Palestinians in Gaza ask why

By SAMYA KULLAB and NAJIB JOBAIN Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — The night a blast struck his family's home in the Gaza Strip, Ahmed al-Naouq was more than 2,000 miles away but he still jolted awake, consumed with inexplicable panic.

He reached for his cellphone to find that a friend had written — and then deleted — a message. Al-Naouq called him from London. The words that spilled from the other end of the line landed like world-shattering blows: Airstrike. Everyone killed.

Four nights later, Ammar al-Butta was startled from sleep in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis when the wall of his bedroom collapsed over him. A missile had pierced his top-floor apartment and exploded one floor below.

He lurched over the rubble, shining the light of his cellphone into the wreckage, calling out to his 16 relatives.

"Anyone there?" he cried. There was only silence.

Entire generations of Palestinian families in the besieged Gaza Strip — from great-grandparents to infants only weeks old — have been killed in airstrikes in the Israel-Hamas war, in which the Israeli army says it aims to root out the militant group from the densely populated coastal territory.

Attacks are occurring at a scale never seen in years of Israel-Hamas conflict, hitting residential areas, schools, hospitals, mosques and churches, even striking areas in southern Gaza where Israeli forces ordered civilians to flee.

Israel says the goal of the war is to destroy Hamas following the militant group's deadly Oct. 7 rampage in southern Israel that killed at least 1,200 people, and it maintains that the attacks target militant operatives and infrastructure.

It blames the high death toll — more than 11,000 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry — on Hamas, saying the group endangers civilians by operating among the population and in tunnels underneath civilian areas. Israel says the death toll includes Hamas fighters.

But the scope of the destruction and loss of life in Gaza, with entire families wiped out in a single strike, has raised troubling questions about Israeli military tactics.

GENERATIONS LOST

It would take many hours of horror and mayhem before the truth would settle like the ash from the Oct. 20 explosion that leveled al-Naouq's family's home: 21 relatives killed.

They included his 75-year old father, two brothers, three sisters and their 13 children.

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"I can't believe this actually happened," al-Naouq, a graduate student in London, told The Associated Press. "Because if I calculate what it means, I will be destroyed."

His father, Nasri, had recently told him that his sister Aya's home was destroyed in northern Gaza and she was staying with them in the central city of Deir al-Balah, south of the area Israel had ordered Palestinians to leave.

A home can be rebuilt, al-Naouq recalled replying, all that matters is that she and the children are alive.

But just hours later, they were all dead: Wala'a, the most accomplished of the al-Naouq children with a degree in engineering, and her four children; Alaa and her five children; Aya, known for her wry sense of humor, and her three children; older brother Muhammed; and younger brother Mahmoud, who was preparing to travel to Australia for graduate studies when the war broke out.

Nine of the 21 are still under the rubble; dire fuel shortages prevented civil defense crews from digging them out.

Identifying the dead was another traumatizing endeavor; many bodies were unrecognizable, most were in pieces.

Al-Naouq's sister, Doaa, who was not in the house at the time of the strike, told him she couldn't bear the smell of the rotting flesh of their loved ones under the rubble. Someone showed her body parts retrieved from the site and told her it was one of their sisters.

There were two survivors: Shimaa, al-Naouq's sister-in-law, and Omar, his 3-year-old nephew. His 11-year old niece, Malaka, was taken to al-Aqsa hospital with severe burns but died after doctors gave her ICU bed to another patient with a better chance of survival, his sister Doaa said.

Doctors have to make extraordinarily difficult triage decisions, and severely wounded patients are being left to die because of shortages of beds, medical supplies and fuel, said Dr. Mohammed Qandeel, in Nasser Hospital, Gaza's second-largest.

"We leave most as we don't have ventilators or beds," he said of patients in need of intensive care with complicated blast wounds. "We've reached full collapse."

COMPETING CLAIMS

Israel doesn't say how it chooses targets in densely populated Gaza. But Israeli officials say many strikes on homes are based on intelligence assessments that wanted Hamas operatives are inside. Though it gives few details, Israel says every airstrike is reviewed by legal experts to ensure they comply with international law.

Many Gaza families deny any Hamas targets were operating from their homes.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, but says a majority of Palestinians killed have been minors and women, about 4,500 and 2,200 respectively. At least 304 families have lost at least 10 relatives; about 31 families have lost over 30, according to a Nov. 6 health ministry report. That number is likely higher now as intense Israeli bombardment has continued.

Among the families with the highest number of casualties, many have been children.

The al-Astal family lost 89 relatives, 18 of them children under the age of 10, including three babies not yet a year old, according to an Oct. 26 ministry report. The Hassouna family had 74 killed, including 22 children ranging in age from 1 to 10 years old, it said. The Najjars lost 65 relatives: Nine were under 10 years old and 13 were under 4.

Ammar al-Butta says his relatives were all civilians with no links to Hamas.

The Saqallah family, his cousins known for their sweet shops in Gaza City, had taken shelter with al-Butta's family in their four-story house in Khan Younis, in southern Gaza, heeding Israeli evacuation orders.

The family arrived with trays of confections for their hosts. Joking with his cousins in the family's living room was a rare moment of respite in the fog of war and displacement, the 29-year-old teacher said.

One cousin, Ahmed Saqallah, 42, spoke of rebuilding his family's bomb-damaged home and looked forward to fixing the plumbing and painting.

"Simple, sweet dreams," al-Butta said.

Ten days later all 16 Saqallahs, from 69-year old Nadia to baby Asaad, not yet a year old, were killed in the Oct. 24 pre-dawn attack.

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UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

A question left by al-Naouq in his family's WhatsApp group the night the blast leveled their home — "Tell me, how are you guys?" — remains unanswered.

The distance has made the devastating news all the more surreal. Observing London's peaceful nights, where sounds of mirth resonate from restaurants and bars, al-Naouq imagines the airstrikes lighting Gaza's skies, the screams of panicked residents. His family, lying lifeless under the rubble.

He has no idea where his relatives' bodies are buried. There was no space in the hospital morgue to keep them. They could be in a mass grave, but al-Naouq has no way of knowing.

Al-Butta said the Saqallah family was buried in his family grave in Khan Younis. The entire neighborhood mourned when they were interred. "Our eyes are dry," he said. "There are no tears left."

In the chaos of the war, taking account of the dead is a rushed, heart-rending process.

It begins with relatives scribbling the names of the dead and missing. They dig into the rubble with their hands, calling out for survivors. Hospitals later issue death certificates.

Grieving relatives, who maintain no one in their households had links to Hamas, ask: Why them?

"Why would they kill children and an old man?" asked al-Naouq. "What is the military justification for bombing my house? They were all civilians."

"I wish, one day, I can meet the one who pulled the trigger. I want to ask him: Why did you do it?"

Fresh off meeting with China's Xi, Biden is turning his attention to Asia-Pacific economies

By COLLEEN LONG and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Fresh off his meeting with the leader of China, President Joe Biden on Thursday will address CEOs grappling with the risks to their businesses from world crises and spend time trying to persuade other Indo-Pacific leaders that the U.S. is committed to nurturing economic ties throughout the region.

"We've got a few busy days ahead of us," Biden said during a welcome reception, ticking off a list of concerns and challenges for the leaders to examine. "Our strongest tools to meet those challenges remain the same ... connection, cooperation, collective action and common purpose."

Biden is courting world leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and through his administration's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, a group that includes most of the 21 APEC member economies, and a few others, like India, that aren't members of the larger forum.

The president will also pose for the traditional "family photo" with APEC leaders, host a working lunch and a fancy leaders dinner.

The U.S. hasn't hosted the annual leaders' summit — started in 1993 by President Bill Clinton -- since 2011. The group met virtually in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders did gather in Bangkok last year, but Biden skipped the summit because his granddaughter was getting married and he sent Vice President Kamala Harris in his place.

The annual leaders' conference brings together heads of nations and other top economic and diplomatic leaders. Biden told those who gathered Wednesday evening at a welcome party — including Russia's representative, Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk — that today's challenges were unlike those faced by other APEC leaders.

"How we're going to harness the potential of artificial intelligence to lift up the world, while minimizing the risks and safety concerns of the present?" he asked. "Will we act, with the urgency necessary to dramatically curb carbon emissions and avert a climate catastrophe that threatens us all? Can supply chains be built that are more resilient and secure in the face of threats like natural disasters and pandemics?"

On Thursday, Biden will speak to CEOs who are exploring new technologies and the concept of resilience so that companies can steer through a variety of challenges.

After decades of trade built on the premise of keeping prices low, accessing new markets and maximiz-

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ing profits, many companies are now finding a vulnerable global economy. The Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts aren't helping matters.

The coronavirus pandemic exposed frailties in their supply chains. Climate change has intensified natural disasters that can close factories. The Israel-Hamas war and Ukraine's defense against a Russia invasion have generated new financial risks, and new technologies such as artificial intelligence could change how companies operate and displace workers.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, too, met with American business leaders — at a \$2,000-per-plate dinner Wednesday evening. It was a rare opportunity for U.S. business leaders to hear directly from the Chinese leader as they seek clarification on Beijing's expanding security rules that may choke foreign investment.

"China is pursuing high-quality development, and the United States is revitalizing its economy," he said, according to an English language translation. "There is plenty of room for our cooperation, and we are fully able to help each other succeed and achieve win-win outcomes."

He even signaled that China would send the U.S. new pandas, just a week after three from the Smithsonian National Zoo were returned to China — much to the dismay of Americans. There are only four pandas left in the United States — at the Atlanta Zoo.

Biden and Xi understand that the complicated ties between the two nations have major global impacts. Their meeting Wednesday at a Northern California estate was in part an effort to show the world that while they are global economic competitors, the U.S. and China aren't full-fledged rivals.

With his characteristic optimism, Biden sketched a vision of leaders who manage competition "responsibly," adding, "that's what the United States wants and what we intend to do."

Xi, though, was gloomier about the state of the post-pandemic global economy. China's economy remains in the doldrums, with prices falling due to slack demand from consumers and businesses.

"The global economy is recovering, but its momentum remains sluggish," Xi said. "Industrial and supply chains are still under the threat of interruption and protectionism is rising. All these are grave problems."

White House officials said Biden has been bolstered by signs the U.S. economy is in a stronger position than China's, and that the U.S. was building stronger alliances throughout the Pacific.

Part of those alliances are through the IPEF framework, announced during a May 2022 trip to Tokyo. It came six years after the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade deal that was signed by 12 countries.

The new framework has four major pillars: supply chains, climate, anti-corruption and trade. There won't be any official trade deals to announce — the "framework" label allows Biden to bypass Congress on any agreements reached with the 13 countries.

Chinese president signals more pandas will be coming to the United States

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping signaled late Wednesday that China will send new pandas to the United States, calling them "envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples."

"We are ready to continue our cooperation with the United States on panda conservation, and do our best to meet the wishes of the Californians so as to deepen the friendly ties between our two peoples," Xi said during a dinner speech with business leaders.

The gesture came at the end of a day in which Xi and President Joe Biden held their first face to face meeting in a year and pledged to try to reduce tensions. Xi did not share additional details on when or where pandas might be provided but appeared to suggest the next pair of pandas are most likely to come to California, probably San Diego.

The bears have long been the symbol of the U.S.-China friendship since Beijing gifted a pair of pandas to the National Zoo in Washington in 1972, ahead of the normalization of bilateral relations. Later, Beijing loaned the pandas to other U.S. zoos, with proceeds going back to panda conservation programs.

The National Zoo's three giant pandas, Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and their cub Xiao Qi Ji, eight days ago

began their long trip to China. After their departure, only four pandas are left in the United States, in the Atlanta Zoo.

"I was told that many American people, especially children, were really reluctant to say goodbye to the pandas, and went to the zoo to see them off," Xi said in his speech. He added that he learned the San Diego Zoo and people in California "very much look forward to welcoming pandas back."

Xi is in California to attend a summit of Indo-Pacific leaders and for his meeting with Biden. He made no mention of the pandas during his public remarks earlier in the day as he met with Biden.

When bilateral relations began to sour in the past few years, members of the Chinese public started to demand the return of giant pandas. Unproven allegations that U.S. zoos mistreated the pandas, known as China's "national treasure," flooded China's social media.

But relations showed signs of stabilization as Xi traveled to San Francisco to meet with Biden. The two men met for about four hours Wednesday at the picturesque Filoli Historic House & Garden, where they agreed to cooperate on anti-narcotics, resume high-level military communications and expand people-to-people exchanges.

The National Zoo's exchange agreement with the China Wildlife Conservation Association had been set to expire in early December and negotiations to renew or extend the deal did not produce results.

The San Diego Zoo returned its pandas in 2019, and the last bear at the Memphis, Tennessee, zoo went home earlier this year.

Israel searches for traces of Hamas in raid of key Gaza hospital packed with patients

By NAJIB JOBAIN, JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli troops on Wednesday stormed into Gaza's largest hospital, searching for traces of Hamas inside and beneath the facility, where newborns and hundreds of other patients have suffered for days without electricity and other basic necessities. The forces also pressed on with their wider ground offensive.

Details from the daylong raid remained sketchy, but officials from Israel and Gaza presented different accounts of what was happening at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City: The Israeli army released video showing soldiers carrying boxes labeled as "baby food" and "medical supplies," while health officials talked of terrified staff and patients as troops moved through the buildings.

After encircling Shifa for days, Israel faced pressure to prove its claim that Hamas had turned the hospital into a command center and used patients, staff and civilians sheltering there to provide cover for its militants. The allegation is part of Israel's broader accusation that Hamas uses Palestinians as human shields. Israel released video late Wednesday of weapons it said it found in one building, but so far its search showed no signs of tunnels or a sophisticated command center.

Hamas and Gaza health officials deny militants operate in Shifa — a hospital that employs some 1,500 people and has more than 500 beds, according to the Palestinian news agency. Palestinians and rights groups say Israel has recklessly endangered civilians as it seeks to eradicate Hamas.

As Israel tightens its hold on northern Gaza, leaders have talked of expanding the ground operation into the south to root out Hamas. Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have already crowded into the territory's south, where a worsening fuel shortage threatens to paralyze the delivery of humanitarian services and shut down mobile phone and internet service.

The war between Israel and Hamas erupted after the militant group killed some 1,200 people and seized around 240 captives in an Oct. 7 attack that shattered Israelis' sense of security.

Israeli airstrikes have since killed more than 11,200 people, two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah, which coordinates with the ministry branch in Hamas-ruled Gaza. Another 2,700 have been reported missing, with most believed to be buried under the rubble. The ministry's count does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths.

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ISRAELI RAID INTO SHIFA

Israeli forces launched their raid into the large Shifa compound around 2 a.m. and remained on the grounds after nightfall Wednesday, with tanks stationed outside and snipers on nearby buildings, Munir al-Boursh, a senior official with Gaza's Health Ministry inside the hospital, told The Associated Press. It was not possible to independently assess the situation inside.

Al-Boursh said that for hours, the troops ransacked the basement and other buildings, including those housing the emergency and surgery departments, and searched the grounds for tunnels. Troops questioned and face-screened patients, staff and people sheltering in the facility, he said, adding that he did not know if any were detained.

"Patients, women and children are terrified," he told the AP by phone.

Neither the Palestinians nor the military reported any clashes inside the hospital. The military said its troops killed four militants outside the hospital at the start of the operation. Throughout days of fighting in the surrounding streets in previous days, there were no reports of militants firing from inside Shifa.

The Israeli military said it was carrying out a "precise and targeted operation against Hamas in a specified area in the hospital," and that its soldiers were accompanied by medical teams bringing in incubators and other supplies.

It added that forces were also searching for hostages. The plight of the captives, who include men, women and children, has galvanized Israeli support for the war. Families and supporters of the hostages are holding a protest march from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The video released by the military from inside Shifa showed three duffel bags it said it found hidden around an MRI lab, each containing an assault rifle, grenades and Hamas uniforms, as well as a closet that contained a number of assault rifles without ammunition clips. A laptop was also discovered and taken for study. The AP could not independently verify the Israeli claims that the weapons were found inside the hospital.

"These weapons have absolutely no business being inside a hospital," Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said in the video, adding that he believed the material was "just the top of the iceberg." The military said the search was continuing, but it did not immediately show any sign of tunnels or an extensive military center.

The raid drew condemnation from the U.N., Jordan and the West Bank's Palestinian Authority, which called it a violation of international law. Separately, the U.N. Security Council approved a resolution calling for "humanitarian pauses and corridors" throughout Gaza after four failed attempts to respond to the Israel-Hamas war.

In other developments, U.S. President Joe Biden said he believes the war will stop only when Hamas' ability to kill and injure Israelis is degraded. He also said he urged Israel to exercise caution in its military operations at the hospital.

"I think it's going to stop when Hamas no longer maintains the capacity to murder," Biden said after meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperative conference in California.

Biden said he discussed with Israelis their need to "be incredibly careful" as they worked to clear the hospital.

At one point, tens of thousands of Palestinians fleeing Israeli bombardment were sheltering at the hospital, but most left in recent days as the fighting drew closer. The fate of premature babies at the hospital has drawn particular concern.

The Health Ministry said 40 patients, including three babies, have died since Shifa's emergency generator ran out of fuel Saturday.

There was no immediate word on the condition of another 36 babies the ministry said earlier were at risk of dying because there is no power for incubators.

Hours before Israel's raid, the United States said its own intelligence indicated militants have used Shifa and other hospitals — and tunnels beneath them — to support military operations and hold hostages.

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Under international humanitarian law, hospitals can lose their protected status if combatants use them for military purposes. But civilians must be given ample time to flee, and any attack must be proportional to the military objective — putting the burden on Israel to show it was a big enough military target to justify the siege against it.

A TRICKLE OF FUEL FOR AID WORKERS

Conditions in southern Gaza have been deteriorating as bombardment continues to level buildings. Residents say bread is scarce and supermarket shelves are bare. Families cook on wood fires for lack of fuel. Central electricity and running water have been out for weeks across Gaza.

After refusing to allow fuel into Gaza since the war's start, saying it would be diverted to Hamas, Israeli defense officials early Wednesday let in some 24,000 liters (6,340 gallons).

The fuel will only be used for the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, to continue bringing limited supplies of food and medicine from Egypt for the more than 600,000 people sheltering in U.N.-run schools and other facilities in the south.

The fuel cannot be used for hospitals or to desalinate water, said Thomas White, UNRWA's director in Gaza. The amount is the equivalent of "only 9% of what we need daily to sustain lifesaving activities," he said.

The Palestinian telecom company Paltel, meanwhile, said it was relying on batteries to keep Gaza's mobile and internet network running, and that it expected services to halt later Wednesday. Gaza has experienced three previous mass communication outages since the ground invasion.

LOOKING SOUTH

Israeli troops have extended their control across northern Gaza. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Wednesday the ground operation will eventually "include both the north and south. We will strike Hamas wherever it is."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu echoed the plans, saying Israel's goal is "a complete victory over Hamas in the south and the return of our hostages."

If Israeli troops move south, it is not clear where Gaza's population can flee, as Egypt refuses to allow a mass transfer onto its soil.

The odyssey of asylum-seekers and the failure of EU regulations

By PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

SALERNO, Italy (AP) — Less than 24 hours after setting foot on the pier of a southern Italian port, 60 people who'd survived a perilous boat journey from Libya were served with expulsion orders.

Some came from Bangladesh, others from Syria and Egypt. They'd been at sea for 10 hours in two dangerously overcrowded boats, carrying 258 people in all, when they were picked up by a rescue ship operated by the humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders, 30 miles (50 kilometers) from the Libyan coast, on Oct. 6.

Once on dry ground in Salerno, just south of Naples, they were taken to a migrant processing center and asked to sign papers. Now they gathered in front of the train station, tired and bewildered.

"Did you know what you were signing?" asked a volunteer from the Catholic charity Caritas. "No, no," they replied in unison.

"Did somebody ask you if you want to apply for international protection?" the volunteer asked. Again they replied, "No."

LACK OF INFORMATION

The situation is common for newly arrived migrants and asylum-seekers on European shores. Badly advised by relatives and friends, misled by insufficient official information or poor translation services, many make hasty and often irreversible decisions. They can end up in legal limbo for years, cut off from any government aid.

So far this year, more than 236,000 people have entered European Union borders irregularly, according to International Organization for Migration figures, up 60% from the same time last year. The vast major-

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ity arrived in Italy by boat.

Despite decades of efforts to reform it, Europe's asylum system remains messy and ineffective. Attitudes toward migrants and refugees are hardening throughout the continent, in a difficult balance between protecting borders and respecting human rights.

"He did not apply for asylum," officials wrote in Italian, English and Arabic on Mohammed's crumpled expulsion sheet. The 23-year-old Syrian man, who asked for his full identity not to be revealed, clutched the paper as he sat on a bench in a shelter run by volunteers, in Salerno, his eyes red with lack of sleep.

NORTHERN EUROPE AS LAST DESTINATION

People arriving from Syria are almost always given asylum, but Mohammed decided not to apply.

Italy doesn't want him; he doesn't want to be in Italy. He has siblings in Germany, so that's where he plans to go.

"I want to stay in Germany," said Mohammed. "If I was to apply for asylum in Italy, they would send me back here if I am caught in Germany."

The Italian authorities gave the rescue ship he was on permission to dock in Salerno, three days' sailing away from the open waters of the Mediterranean. Italy has failed to stop the rescue ships from picking up migrants but it forces them to use up fuel and sailing days to reach distant ports.

Those who disembarked in Salerno on Oct. 9 included migrants from Syria, Egypt, Bangladesh, South Sudan, Ghana and Ivory Coast. They were taken to a processing center where they were photographed and fingerprinted.

NO TRANSLATORS AT THE BORDER CONTROLS

Neither Bengali nor Arabic translators were present when they were questioned by border officials, The Associated Press confirmed in official documents and with local authorities.

Migrants often lack information about their rights, in part due to the absence of interpreters during the identification process. According to a study by the International Rescue Committee, an NGO, only 17% of the migrants arriving in Italy receive adequate information about their rights.

When they heard the newly arrived migrants were to be expelled, lawyers and volunteers working for Caritas rushed to Salerno train station in the early hours of the morning to provide food, water and basic legal advice.

"We informed them about their right to appeal the expulsion order," explained Antonio Bonifacio, one of the volunteers at Caritas, "but only Bangladeshi (migrants) and some Egyptians filed the appeal with our lawyers, while all the Syrians left by train as soon as possible to try to reach their destinations in Northern Europe, as they were afraid of being tracked down and getting stuck in Italy."

Among the Syrians planning to head north was a 33-year-old woman from Damascus. This was her third attempt to reach Europe by sea after her brother, a student who opposed the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, was killed in prison.

The AP had no means of verifying her account, which included a second attempt at sea involving a wooden boat with around 350 passengers that began to sink shortly after departing from Tobruk, in northeastern Libya.

She said she swam to the beach. After a brief moment of safety, "I was kept in a Libyan detention center for a week without access to a shower, with my clothing drenched in salt and vomit," she said.

"Now I just want to reach my brother in Germany."

THE FAILURE OF THE EUROPEAN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION SYSTEM

Under European rules, known as the Dublin Regulation, migrants are supposed to apply for asylum in the first EU member state they enter. If they travel to another EU country and get picked up by the authorities, they're supposed to be sent back to their country of arrival or first registration.

This places a huge burden on the countries that have received the most arrivals by sea, such as Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain.

However, in December 2022, Italy unilaterally suspended transfers of migrants and asylum-seekers back to its territory. This means that if Mohammed goes to Germany and gets caught, he can't be sent back to Italy. Instead, he would have to start a new asylum application in Germany.

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ITALIAN GOVERNMENT TOUGHER MEASURES

Premier Georgia Meloni, Italy's first far-right leader since World War II, has acknowledged that migration has been the biggest challenge of her first year in government. In April, her government passed a new fast-track migration procedure, meant to resolve the majority of cases within 28 days.

Those who apply for asylum are held in detention centers until their case can be processed. Those who don't apply, or whose visa application is rejected at the first stage, are served with expulsion orders and given seven days to leave the country. The backlog of asylum applications currently stands at 82,000.

In theory, anyone found on Italian soil after the expiry date of their order risks up to 18 months in a migrant detention center before being expelled. In practice, the detention centers are full, and Italy has no repatriation agreements with many of the countries the migrants come from, leaving of those expelled in a loop of lack of documents and repeated detentions.

MIGRANTS DETENTION CENTRES ARE FULL

Gabindo, a 35-year-old Bangladeshi man, was on the same boat as Mohammed. It was the second time he'd been caught by the Italian authorities without a visa. On the first page of his deportation order, it said, "Detention centers for repatriation are full."

Gabindo, who asked for his full name not to be published for fears of further worsening his legal status in Italy, was allowed to go free. The system was seemingly relying on his goodwill to self-repatriate.

Italy's new fast-track process is causing concern that applicants are being triaged based on their nationality, according to a list of countries that Italian authorities deem safe, such as Morocco, Ivory Coast, or Nigeria, whose nationals would on average see their asylum requests denied.

CONCERNS ON FAST-TRACK ASYLUM PROCEDURE

While the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, agreed in a recent statement that "stronger and faster procedures at the borders" are necessary, it also stressed that people should be given the opportunity to flag an individual situation of insecurity despite their country of origin.

Maurizio Veglio, a lawyer with the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration, called the new fast-track procedures "an attack on the right to receive asylum." He said that "compressing the time for the evaluation will surely affect the quality of the screening."

THE TESTIMONIES OF THE ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Despite the discouraging messages from the Italian government, some migrants decide to stay. Alei Wuch Alei, a 21-year-old from South Sudan, spent five years on the move after leaving his home province of Warrap. He arrived in Salerno on the MSF rescue boat and has applied for asylum.

"I crossed the desert from Sudan to Libya and I tried three times to cross the sea," he said. "Once I spent three days adrift and I was beaten several times in a Libyan detention center. Now I dream to continue studying and to become a doctor."

Outsourcing will remain a key pillar of EU migration policy, with the bloc building partnerships with African and Mideast countries to help stop people from leaving. Those countries deemed safe that do not take back their citizens could find it more difficult to secure European visas.

Albania recently agreed to temporarily shelter thousands of migrants while Italy reviews their requests seeking asylum in Italy, up to 36,000 a year. The deal has caused some concerns from UNHCR on the guarantee of human rights and refugees protection standards.

But for all the chaos and confusion, for some of those reaching Europe there's a happy ending. Jahdh al-Ali, a 58-year-old Syrian refugee from Daraa, was also on the MSF rescue ship. She applied for asylum in Italy but her preferred destination was France.

"I'd like to go and live with my daughter," al-Ali said in Salerno. "She lives in France: she has a baby there and I wish I could stay there next to my daughter and do something for French people."

When the AP caught up with her again a few weeks later, she was with her daughter, reunited after years apart.

Averting government shutdown, Congress approves temporary funding through the holidays

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ending the threat of a government shutdown until after the holidays, Congress gave final approval Wednesday night to a temporary government funding package that pushes a confrontation over the federal budget into the new year.

The Senate met into the night to pass the bill with an 87-11 tally and send it to President Joe Biden for his signature one day after it passed the House on an overwhelming bipartisan vote. It provides a funding patch into next year, when the House and Senate will be forced to confront — and somehow overcome — their considerable differences over what funding levels should be.

In the meantime, the bill removes the threat of a government shutdown days before funding would have expired.

"This year, there will be no government shutdown," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said at a news conference after the bill's passage.

The spending package keeps government funding at current levels for roughly two more months while a long-term package is negotiated. It splits the deadlines for passing full-year appropriations bills into two dates: Jan. 19 for some federal agencies and Feb. 2 for others, creating two deadlines where there will be a risk of a partial government shutdown.

"Everybody is really kind of ready to vote and fight another day," Republican Whip John Thune, the No. 2 Republican, said earlier Wednesday.

The two-step approach was not favored by many in the Senate, though all but one Democrat and 10 Republicans supported it because it ensured the government would not shut down for now. Sen. Patty Murray, the Washington Democrat who chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee, voted for the bill but said it would eventually "double the shutdown risk."

The spending bill also does not include the White House's nearly \$106 billion request for wartime aid for Israel and Ukraine, as well as humanitarian funding for Palestinians and other supplemental requests. Lawmakers are likely to turn their attention more fully to that request after the Thanksgiving holiday in hopes of negotiating a deal.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who crafted the plan, has vowed that he will not support any further stopgap funding measures, known as continuing resolutions. He portrayed the temporary funding bill as setting the ground for a spending "fight" with the Senate next year.

The new speaker, who told reporters this week that he counted himself among the "arch-conservatives" of the House, is pushing for deeper spending cuts. He wanted to avoid lawmakers being forced to consider a massive government funding package before the December holidays — a tactic that incenses conservatives in particular.

But Johnson is also facing pushback from other hardline conservatives who wanted to leverage the prospect of a government shutdown to extract steep cuts and policy demands.

Many of those conservatives were among a group of 19 Republicans who defied Johnson Wednesday to prevent floor consideration of an appropriations bill to fund several government agencies.

GOP leaders called off the week's work after the vote, sending lawmakers home early for Thanksgiving. It capped a period of intense bickering among lawmakers.

"This place is a pressure cooker," Johnson said Tuesday, noting that the House had been in Washington for 10 weeks straight.

The House GOP's inability to present a united front on funding legislation could undercut the Louisiana congressman's ability to negotiate spending bills with the Senate.

Republicans are demanding that Congress work out government funding through 12 separate bills, as the budgetary process requires, but House leadership has so far been forced to pull two of those bills from the floor, seen another rejected on a procedural vote and struggled to win support for others.

When it returns in two weeks, Congress is expected to focus on the Biden administration's requests

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for Ukraine and Israel funding. Republican senators have demanded that Congress pass immigration and border legislation alongside additional Ukraine aid, but a bipartisan Senate group working on a possible compromise has struggled to find consensus.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell in a floor speech pledged that Republicans would continue to push for policy changes on the U.S. border with Mexico, saying it is "impossible to ignore the crisis at our southern border that's erupted on Washington Democrats' watch."

One idea floating among Republicans is directly tying Ukraine funding levels with decreases in the number of illegal border crossings. It showed how even longtime supporters of Ukraine's defense against Russia are willing to hold up the funding to force Congress to tackle an issue that has flummoxed generations of lawmakers: U.S. border policy.

Most Senate Republicans support the Ukraine funding, said Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., but he added, "It is secondary to securing our own border."

But the U.S. is already trimming some of the wartime aid packages it is sending Ukraine as funds run low, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said from San Francisco, where he accompanied President Joe Biden for a summit of Asia-Pacific leaders.

He said the pot of money available for Ukraine is "withering away, and with it will be a deleterious effect on Ukraine's ability to continue to defend itself."

Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., said in a statement that he voted against Wednesday's funding package because it did not include aid for Ukraine.

Schumer said the Senate would try to move forward on both the funding and border legislation in the coming weeks, but warned it would require a compromise and implored the House speaker, Johnson, to once again work with Democrats.

"I hope the new speaker continues to choose the bipartisan approach," Schumer said.

Gerrit Cole a unanimous winner of his 1st AL Cy Young Award. Blake Snell takes the NL prize

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After several close calls, Gerrit Cole finally won his first American League Cy Young Award on the strength of consistent excellence all season.

Blake Snell joined a short list of pitching royalty by turning around a terrible start.

Cole was a unanimous AL winner Wednesday and Snell took home Cy Young honors in the National League — becoming the seventh hurler to claim the prize in both circuits.

Runner-up twice before, Cole easily finished on top this time following an outstanding season for the New York Yankees. The ace right-hander received all 30 first-place votes in balloting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

"I'm very proud of this season. I'm very proud of some of the other seasons where I've made a pretty strong run at this award as well," Cole said on a conference call. "But it's hard to say it wasn't a little different. I mean, there was just a lot of momentum going into this."

Cole allowed no more than two runs in 26 of his 33 starts — best in the majors. He went 15-4 with 222 strikeouts while leading the AL in ERA (2.63) and innings (209). He finished with a flourish, too, throwing a two-hit shutout at Toronto in his final outing.

He became the sixth Yankees pitcher to win a Cy Young and first since Roger Clemens in 2001. Cole and Ron Guidry (1978) were the only unanimous choices.

"It makes me tremendously proud that I feel that I'm holding up my end of the bargain in terms of those great players and those great legacies," said the 33-year-old Cole, who signed a \$324 million contract with New York in December 2019. "I'm contributing to the overall brand of what we do."

Snell was the NL winner after going 14-9 and leading the majors with a 2.25 ERA for the San Diego Padres.

The free-agent lefty was picked first on 28 of 30 ballots. San Francisco Giants right-hander Logan Webb finished second and Zac Gallen of the NL champion Arizona Diamondbacks was third.

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Snell, the AL Cy Young Award recipient in 2018 with Tampa Bay, joined Gaylord Perry, Pedro Martinez, Randy Johnson, Clemens, Roy Halladay and Max Scherzer as pitchers to win in both leagues.

"It feels amazing. I'm not really good at understanding how to accept awards and not look forward," Snell said. "I'm trying to enjoy this more than the first one I won. It's really special.

"In 2018, I was a kid. I thought I was going to win 40 of 'em. I thought I was invincible. I thought winning the Cy Young was just what I was going to do every year. That's just — you're young and that's how you think."

Drafted first overall by Pittsburgh in 2011 out of UCLA, Cole started the All-Star Game this year after earning his sixth selection to the Midsummer Classic. He came in second in Cy Young voting in 2019 and '21, and finished among the top five on three other occasions.

Minnesota Twins right-hander Sonny Gray was the AL runner-up with 20 second-place votes, and Kevin Gausman of the Toronto Blue Jays finished third.

Cole and Snell shined for disappointing teams. Both the Yankees and Padres finished 82-80 despite having two of baseball's three highest payrolls, and neither made the playoffs.

Shaking off a dreadful start to the season, Snell had 234 strikeouts in 180 innings over 32 outings. He was 1-6 with a 5.40 ERA after losing to Boston on May 19, then dominated the rest of the way despite topping the majors with 99 walks this year.

"I just kept telling myself how good I was," Snell explained.

Harnessing his 95-96 mph heater and overpowering curve, he won eight of his last nine decisions and did not allow a run in five of his final six starts — including the last three.

"I understand myself way more. I don't get mad at things that I shouldn't get mad at anymore," said Snell, who has never pitched a complete game in 191 major league starts. "I don't try to be perfect. I just try to be the best version of me. And in doing so, I feel like this year came together pretty magically."

Snell gave up only 5.75 hits per nine innings, by far the best mark in the big leagues. All those stingy numbers while he was on the mound were more than enough to beat out Webb (11-13, 3.25 ERA) and Gallen (17-9, 3.47), who each logged at least 210 innings. Both got one first-place vote.

Snell, a Seattle native who turns 31 next month, became a free agent after the World Series. He rejected a \$20,325,000 qualifying offer from the Padres on Tuesday to pursue a more lucrative contract.

"I'm excited to be a free agent," he said. "I don't really know what to expect."

The four previous San Diego pitchers to win the Cy Young were Randy Jones (1976), Perry (1978), reliever Mark Davis (1989) and Jake Peavy (2007).

Webb's finish marked the first time a starting pitcher with a losing record placed first or second in the balloting.

Seattle right-hander Luis Castillo gets a \$250,000 bonus for coming in fifth in the American League. Gray earned a \$150,000 bonus and Gausman \$100,000.

Las Vegas high school student beaten to death by 10 classmates between 13 and 17, police say

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A 17-year-old high school student in Las Vegas was beaten to death in an alleyway around the corner from campus by 10 of his classmates between the ages of 13 and 17, a prearranged fight that authorities said broke out over a pair of headphones and a vape pen.

But police homicide Lt. Jason Johansson said that detectives think the victim wasn't originally supposed to be involved in the brawl, which the students agreed would take place after classes were done for the day at Rancho High School in eastern Las Vegas.

Jonathan Lewis Jr. walked to the alleyway with his friend, whose headphones and vape pen had been stolen, Johansson said.

The deadly beating on Nov. 1 was captured on cellphone video and widely shared on social media. Jo-

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hansson described the footage as “very void of humanity.”

In the video, he said, the victim is seen taking off his shirt to prepare for the fight, and then the 10 students “immediately swarm him, pull him to the ground and begin kicking, punching and stomping on him.”

Eight of the students were arrested Tuesday by Las Vegas police and the FBI on suspicion of murder. They were not immediately identified because they are under 18.

Las Vegas police said they haven’t yet been able to identify the two remaining students, who will also face murder charges. The police department released images of the teenagers, asking for help from the public to identify them.

On Wednesday afternoon, as classes ended for the day and students were leaving campus, a small memorial with flowers and eight candles sat against a fence in the alleyway where Lewis was killed.

Rancho High School principal Darlin Delgado said in a letter this week to parents that support and resources were available for students and staff members as the beating “has and will continue to impact our school community.”

Scott Coffee, a deputy public defender with 28 years of experience in Las Vegas, said it is unusual to have so many co-defendants of such young ages charged with murder in a single case. Coffee said he had not seen court documents and does not represent any of the defendants.

“When kids are involved in this kind of activity, they take the risk by being involved,” Coffee said. “But the flip side is this: Does it look like anybody intended to kill anyone?”

A family court judge on Wednesday ordered four of the students who are 16 or older to be transferred to the adult court system, the Review-Journal reported. Hearings will be held at later dates to determine if the students under 16 will be charged as adults.

Police and prosecutors will have to measure the level of culpability for each of the 10 defendants as the case moves through the court system, Coffee noted.

“Was there somebody in charge of this group? Was somebody younger just going along with the older folks?” he said, adding that although the students face similar charges at the time of their arrests, “it doesn’t mean the resolutions are necessarily going to be similar.”

After the brawl, a person in the area found the teenager badly beaten and unconscious in the alleyway and carried him back to campus, where school staff called 911, police said.

Lewis was hospitalized with severe head trauma and other injuries until his death a week later. The coroner’s office in Las Vegas ruled the beating a homicide.

The victim’s father, Jonathan Lewis Sr., didn’t respond Wednesday to requests for an interview. But on a fundraising page he created to help with funeral and medical expenses, he wrote that his son was attacked while standing up for his friend.

“Our son is a kind, loving, gentle young man who has the heart of a champion and the brightest loving energy that attracts people to him with love,” the page reads.

UN Security Council adopts resolution calling for urgent humanitarian pauses and corridors in Gaza

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council on Wednesday adopted its first resolution since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, calling for “urgent and extended humanitarian pauses” in Gaza to address the escalating crisis for Palestinian civilians during Israel’s aerial and ground attacks. Israel immediately rejected the resolution.

The vote in the 15-member council was 12-0 with the United States, United Kingdom and Russia abstaining. The U.S. and U.K. abstained because of the resolution’s failure to condemn Hamas’ surprise cross-border attacks into Israel on Oct. 7, and Russia because of its failure to demand a humanitarian cease-fire, which Israel and the United States oppose.

The final draft watered down language from “demands” to “calls” for humanitarian pauses, and for “the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas and other groups.”

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Still, the resolution, which was sponsored by Malta, managed to overcome the serious differences that had prevented the council from adopting four previous resolutions.

"What we have achieved today is an important first step," Malta's U.N. Ambassador Vanessa Frazier said. "We will remain steadfast in our commitment to the protection of civilians and the plight of children in armed conflict that continue to suffer in a disproportionate manner."

The resolution doesn't mention the Oct. 7 attacks in Israel, where Hamas militants killed around 1,200 people and took some 240 others hostage. Nor does it mention Israel's response with airstrikes and a ground offensive in Hamas-ruled Gaza that the territory's health ministry says have killed more than 11,000 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia tried unsuccessfully to amend the resolution just before the vote with language from a resolution adopted Oct. 27 by the 193-member General Assembly. It calls for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities."

The vote on the amendment was five countries in favor, the U.S. opposed, and nine abstentions. It was not adopted because it failed to get the minimum nine "yes" votes.

Nebenzia said he abstained on the resolution because of appeals from the region for council action on the dire humanitarian situation. But he called it a disgrace that the council, which has "a uniquely powerful toolbox" including sanctions and even military action, "finally squeezed out such a weak call."

"As the old saying goes, the mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse," the Russian ambassador said.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said she remains "horrified" that a few council members can't condemn Hamas' "barbaric terrorist attack," and criticized the resolution for not reaffirming every country's right to self-defense. She did note that the resolution is the first ever adopted "that even mentions the word Hamas."

Nonetheless, Thomas-Greenfield called the resolution "a step forward" and said the U.S. supports its calls for humanitarian pauses and the release of hostages.

United Arab Emirates Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh, the Arab representative on the council, said its members supported the resolution, which is the first on the situation in the Palestinian territories since 2016.

"It is difficult geopolitical times, and to bring the unity of the council today to speak with one voice on the subject that has haunted all of us over the last month is, I think, momentous," she said.

The resolution "is a first, important and overdue step" and will change the world's perception that the Security Council "is indifferent," Nusseibeh said. But the world must not lose sight of the urgent goal of a lasting humanitarian cease-fire, she said.

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan issued a statement saying the resolution "is disconnected from reality and is meaningless."

He criticized the council's failure to condemn Hamas, claiming the militants were deliberately allowing the humanitarian situation to deteriorate so the United Nations would pressure Israel to back off of Gaza.

"It will not happen," Erdan said. "Israel will continue to act until Hamas is destroyed and the hostages are returned."

U.N. Security Council resolutions are legally binding, unlike General Assembly resolutions, but in practice many parties choose to ignore the council's requests for action.

Richard Gowan, U.N. director for the International Crisis Group, said the Security Council has called for cease-fires in wars from the Balkans to Syria "with little or no impact."

The General Assembly resolution was approved on Oct. 27 by a vote of 120-14 with 45 abstentions. Since then, Israel agreed Nov. 9 to four-hour pauses. But only limited aid has been delivered to Gaza through the Rafah crossing from Egypt, and a humanitarian catastrophe has been brewing.

Gowan said that the council was able to speak at all gives its member nations "some respite," but would likely not have any significant impact.

"The resolution is drafted in a way that puts no real political pressure on Israel, but the U.S. will likely urge Israel to show more flexibility on aid issues to satisfy global opinion," Gowan told The Associated

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Press. "The council will not move from this text to a call for a cease-fire, unless facts change significantly on the ground."

The resolution calls for humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a "sufficient number of days" for unhindered access by the U.N., Red Cross and other aid groups to get water, electricity, fuel, food and medical supplies to all those in need. It says the pauses also should allow for repair of essential infrastructure and enable urgent rescue and recovery efforts.

It demands that "all parties comply with their obligations under international law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians, especially children."

It also asks U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to report to the council at its next monthly Mideast meeting, on Nov. 28, on implementing the resolution.

Asked afterward about Israel's rejection of the resolution, Malta's Frazier and the UAE's Nusseibeh said it remains legally binding and pointed to Guterres' upcoming report. Nusseibeh said the secretary-general has been asked to bring ideas on what the U.N. would need "for further monitoring and implementation on the ground."

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, said the Security Council should have called for a cease-fire a long time ago, stressing that "Gaza bleeds death, devastation, destruction everywhere." It is "a small, modest resolution," he said.

"Israel considers all of us terrorists," he told the council after the vote. "Israel is not under threat of destruction. It is destroying Palestine. It considers the Palestinian state as a strategic threat. It is against Palestinian rule anywhere."

Mansour said the Palestinians will keep coming back to the Security Council and the General Assembly for action, first and foremost for a cease-fire.

Heavily armed Haitian gang surrounds hospital in capital and traps people inside

By EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A heavily armed gang surrounded a hospital in Haiti on Wednesday, trapping women, children and newborns inside until police rescued them, according to the director of the medical center, who pleaded for help via social media.

The Fontaine Hospital Center in the capital of Port-au-Prince is considered an oasis and a lifeline in a community overrun by gangs that have unleashed increasingly violent attacks against each other and residents. People who live in the capital's sprawling Cite Soleil slum are routinely raped, beaten and killed.

The hospital founder and director, Jose Ulysse, told The Associated Press that gangs were torching homes around the hospital and preventing people inside from leaving. He initially said that it appeared some gang members had entered the hospital but later said they did not go inside.

Ulysse said members of Haiti's National Police force responded to his call for help and arrived with three armored trucks to evacuate 40 children and 70 patients to a private home in a safer part of the city. Among those delicately evacuated were children on oxygen, he said.

"Gangs are in total control of the area," he said.

A spokesman for the National Police did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Ulysse identified those responsible as members of the Brooklyn gang, led by Gabriel Jean-Pierre, best known as "Ti Gabriel." Jean-Pierre also is the leader of a powerful gang alliance known as G-Pep, one of two rival coalitions in Haiti.

The Brooklyn gang has some 200 members and controls certain communities within Cite Soleil, including Brooklyn. They are involved in extortion, hijacking of goods and general violence, according to a recent United Nations report.

"The G-Pep coalition and its allies strongly reinforced cooperation and diversified their revenues, in particular by committing kidnapping for ransom, which has enabled them to strengthen their fighting capacity," the report stated.

When the AP visited the Fontaine Hospital Center earlier this year, Ulysse said in an interview that gangs had targeted him personally twice.

Gangs across Haiti have continued to grow more powerful since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, and the number of kidnappings and killings keeps rising.

Earlier this year, at least 20 armed gang members burst into a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders and snatched a patient from an operating room. The criminals gained access after faking a life-threatening emergency, the organization said.

UK top court says a plan to send migrants to Rwanda is illegal. The government still wants to do it

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government said Wednesday it will still try to send some migrants on a one-way trip to Rwanda, despite the U.K. Supreme Court ruling that the contentious plan is unlawful because asylum-seekers would not be safe in the African country.

In a major blow to one of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's key policies, the country's top court ruled that asylum-seekers sent to Rwanda would be "at real risk of ill-treatment" because they could be returned to the conflict-wracked home countries they'd fled.

Sunak, who has pledged to stop migrants reaching Britain in small boats across the English Channel, said the ruling "was not the outcome we wanted" but vowed to press on with the plan and send the first deportation flights to Rwanda by next spring.

He said the court had "confirmed that the principle of removing asylum-seekers to a safe third country is lawful," even as it ruled Rwanda unsafe.

Sunak said the government would seal a legally binding treaty with Rwanda that would address the court's concerns, and would then pass a law declaring Rwanda a safe country.

Sunak suggested that if legal challenges to the plan continued, he was prepared to consider leaving international human rights treaties — a move that would draw strong opposition and international criticism.

Britain and Rwanda signed a deal in April 2022 to send migrants who arrive in the U.K. as stowaways or in boats to the East African country, where their asylum claims would be processed and, if successful, they would stay.

Britain's government argues that the policy will deter people from risking their lives crossing one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and would break the business model of people-smuggling gangs. No one has yet been sent to the country as the plan was challenged in the courts.

Opposition politicians, refugee groups and human rights organizations say the plan is unethical and unworkable. Charity ActionAid U.K. called the Supreme Court ruling a vindication of "British values of compassion and dignity." Amnesty International said the government should "draw a line under a disgraceful chapter in the U.K.'s political history."

Announcing the unanimous decision, President of the Supreme Court Robert Reed said Rwanda had a history of misunderstanding its obligations toward refugees and of "refoulement" — sending claimants back to the country they had sought protection from.

The judges concluded "there is a real risk that asylum claims will not be determined properly, and that asylum-seekers will in consequence be at risk of being returned directly or indirectly to their country of origin."

"In that event, genuine refugees will face a real risk of ill-treatment," they said.

The U.K. government has argued that while Rwanda was the site of a genocide that killed more than 800,000 people in 1994, the country has since built a reputation for stability and economic progress.

Critics say that stability comes at the cost of political repression. The court's judgment noted human rights breaches including political killings that had led U.K. police "to warn Rwandan nationals living in Britain of credible plans to kill them on the part of that state." They said Rwanda has a 100% rejection record for asylum-seekers from war-torn countries including Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan.

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The Rwandan government insisted the country is a safe place for refugees.

"Given Rwanda's welcoming policy and our record of caring for refugees, the political judgments made today were unjustified," it said in a statement.

Rwandan opposition leader Frank Habineza, however, said Britain shouldn't try to offshore its migration obligations to the small African country.

"The U.K. should keep the migrants or send them to another European country, not to a poor country like Rwanda. I really think it's not right (for) a country like the U.K. to run away from their obligations," Habineza told the AP in Kigali.

Much of Europe and the U.S. is struggling with how best to cope with migrants seeking refuge from war, violence, oppression and a warming planet that has brought devastating drought and floods.

Though Britain receives fewer asylum applications than countries such as Italy, France or Germany, thousands of migrants from around the world travel to northern France each year in hopes of crossing the English Channel.

More than 27,300 have done that this year, a decline on the 46,000 who made the journey in all of 2022. The government says that shows its tough approach is working, though others cite factors including the weather.

The Rwanda plan has cost the British government at least 140 million pounds (\$175 million) in payments to Rwanda before a single plane has taken off. The first deportation flight was stopped at the last minute in June 2022, when the European Court of Human Rights intervened.

The case went to the High Court and the Court of Appeal, which ruled that the plan was unlawful because Rwanda is not a "safe third country." The government unsuccessfully challenged that decision at the Supreme Court.

Sunak took comfort from the court's ruling that "the structural changes and capacity-building needed" to make Rwanda safe "may be delivered in the future." The U.K. government says its legally binding treaty will compel Rwanda not to send any migrants deported from the U.K. back to their home countries.

The prime minister is under pressure from the right wing of the governing Conservative Party to take even more dramatic action to "stop the boats." Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who was fired by Sunak on Monday, has said the U.K. should leave the European Convention on Human Rights if the Rwanda plan was blocked.

Sunak said at a news conference he was prepared to "revisit those international relationships to remove the obstacles in our way."

"I will not allow a foreign court to block these flights," he said.

Legal experts said leaving or ignoring international treaties would be an extreme move. Joelle Grogan, a senior researcher at the U.K. in a Changing Europe think tank, said leaving the European Convention would make Britain "an outlier in terms of its standards and its reputation for human rights protection."

"The only reason in which you would leave the ECHR is if you wanted to start sending asylum-seekers to unsafe countries where they face threats to their life," she said.

Populist Javier Milei is rallying for the Argentine presidency with chainsaws and Comic-Con costumes

By DANIEL POLITI and RODRIGO ABD Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Batman and the Joker, a man decked out in a full-body lion costume, and another whose head and arms have been replaced by chainsaws. This isn't Carnival or Comic-Con, but rather the outlandish campaign rally for Argentine presidential candidate Javier Milei.

In just a few short years, the right-wing populist Milei went from being a television talking head who garnered high ratings with his unrestrained outbursts against a "political caste" he blamed for Argentina's perennial economic woes to a frontrunner for the presidency. He even dabbled in cosplay, dressing up as "General AnCap," short for anarcho-capitalist, at a 2019 event.

Just as his candidacy started as a made-for-television spectacle, his followers picked up the baton and

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have often turned rallies into opportunities to show their devotion to their candidate using props that go viral on social media.

Shortly after he first appeared on television, the self-described libertarian grew a cult-like following among those drawn to his no-nonsense style. His appeal seems to lie in his ability to channel anger that Argentines feel against the ruling class amid red-hot triple-digit inflation and rising poverty.

Once seen as a sideshow in Argentine politics, Milei managed to parlay his success as a talking head into a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, Argentina's lower house of Congress, in 2021. He then launched what looked like a long-shot presidential bid, but rocked Argentina's political establishment when he received the most votes in the country's August primaries, a national contest seen as a massive poll of voter preferences.

Milei was predicted to have an edge for the October vote, but finished second, with 30% of the vote, almost seven points below Economy Minister Sergio Massa.

Milei and Massa are facing off in the Nov. 19 runoff, and pre-election polls show a virtual tie with a large number of undecideds who will be key in deciding the race.

Often called Argentina's Donald Trump, Milei espouses a mixture of love for the ideals of capitalism with socially conservative policies, including an opposition to abortion, which Argentina legalized in 2020.

Many of his followers have embraced the Trump comparison. "Make Argentina Great Again" hats and T-shirts are a common sight at his events, a reference to Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again." That's hardly the only U.S.-inspired reference.

The yellow Gadsden flag with a rattlesnake and the words "don't tread on me" is a historical U.S. symbol often associated with the libertarian right, which Milei and his supporters have adopted.

Some followers also use props to mimic the chainsaw that Milei has often held up at rallies to symbolize what he wants to do with state spending.

"I didn't get involved politically at all in the past," said Martín Argañaraz, a 47-year-old artisan, who carried a chainsaw made out of cardboard at a recent Milei rally in Buenos Aires. "What brought me here is seeing how politicians are getting richer and richer."

Some of Milei's loyalists dress up as him, while others don lion masks, because the candidate often compares himself to the king of the jungle.

Wherever Milei goes, a small army of entrepreneurial street hawkers follow, selling merchandise inspired by the economist whose followers have lovingly nicknamed him "the wig," a reference to his signature unkempt hair.

Polls show that the word Argentines – both his supporters and opponents -- most often associate with Milei is "crazy."

Sebastián Borrego, 51, and his 12-year-old son traveled 21 miles from their hometown to attend a Milei rally in the capital last month. In a show of support, Borrego wore a homemade lion mask.

"We need a leader who can take us to a new way of life that we Argentinians need," Borrego roared. "The fight is just getting started." _____

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Vote on tentative contract with General Motors too close to call as more tallies are reported

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Voting on a tentative contract agreement between General Motors and the United Auto Workers union that ended a six-week strike against the company appears too close to call after the latest tallies at several GM factories were announced Wednesday.

The union hasn't posted final vote totals yet, but workers at several large factories who finished voting in the past few days have turned down the four-year-and-eight-month deal by fairly large margins. However, a factory in Arlington, Texas, with about 5,000 workers voted more than 60% to approve the deal in tallies announced Wednesday.

The vote tracker on the UAW's website Wednesday shows the deal ahead by 958 votes. But those totals

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do not include votes from GM assembly plants in Fort Wayne, Indiana; Lansing Delta Township, Michigan; and a powertrain plant in Toledo, Ohio, which all voted against the agreement, according to local union officials.

In most cases the vote tallies ranged from 55% to around 60% against the contract.

But in Arlington the vote was 63% in favor with 60.4% of production workers approving the deal and nearly 65% of skilled trades workers voting in favor, making the tally tight with GM voting to wrap up on Thursday.

Spokesmen for both the union and General Motors declined comment while the voting continues.

It wasn't clear what would happen next, but local union officials don't expect an immediate walkout if the contract is voted down.

Voting continues at Ford through early Saturday, where the deal is passing with 66.1% voting in favor so far with only a few large factories still counting.

The contract was passing overwhelmingly at Jeep maker Stellantis, where voting continues until Tuesday. The union's vote tracker on Wednesday showed that 79.5% voted in favor with many large factories yet to finish.

Workers at some smaller GM facilities have yet to vote, and final tallies are expected to be announced late Thursday.

Keith Crowell, the local union president in Arlington, said the plant has a diverse group of workers from full- and part-time temporary hires to longtime assembly line employees. Full-time temporary workers liked the large raises they received and the chance to get top union pay, he said. But many longtime workers didn't think the immediate 11% pay raises were enough to make up for concessions granted to the company in 2008, he said.

"There was something in there for everybody, but everybody couldn't get everything they wanted," Crowell said. "At least we're making a step in the right direction to recover from 2008."

The union agreed to accept lower pay for new hires and gave up cost of living adjustments and general annual pay raises in 2008 to help the automakers out of dire financial problems during the Great Recession. GM and Stellantis, then Chrysler, went into government-funded bankruptcies.

In the contracts with all three automakers, long time workers will get 25% general raises over the life of the deals with 11% up front. Including cost of living adjustments, they'll get about 33%, the union said.

The contract took steps toward ending lower tiers of wages for newer hires, reducing the number of years it takes to reach top pay. Many newer hires wanted defined benefit pension plans instead of 401(k) retirement plans. But the company agreed to contribute 10% per year into the 401(k) instead.

At other factories, local union officials said that longtime workers at GM were unhappy that they didn't get larger pay raises like newer workers, and they wanted a larger pension increase.

Tony Totty, president of the union local at the Toledo powertrain plant, said the environment is right to seek more from the company. "We need to take advantage of the moment," he said. "Who knows what the next environment will be for national agreements. The company never has a problem telling us we need to take concessions in bad economic times. Why should we not get the best economic agreement in good economic times?"

At a GM pickup truck factory in Flint, Michigan, which voted 51.8% against the contract, worker Tommy Wolikow said more senior workers should have gotten bigger raises because newer hires and temporary workers got a lot more. "This wage thing, it's just not cutting it," he said. Still, he said the contract is close and he'd go for it with a few small additions.

Wolikow, hired by GM in 2008, said he was happy with a 10% annual company contribution to his 401(k) plan rather than a defined benefit pension.

Thousands of UAW members joined picket lines in targeted strikes against Detroit automakers over a six-week stretch before tentative deals were reached late last month. Rather than striking at one company, the union targeted individual plants at all three automakers. At its peak last month about 46,000 of the union's 146,000 workers at the Detroit companies were walking picket lines.

Of the four GM plants that went on strike, workers at only one, Arlington, Texas, approved the contract. Workers in Wentzville, Missouri; Lansing Delta Township, Michigan; and Spring Hill, Tennessee; voted it down.

Video shows North Carolina officer repeatedly striking a pinned woman during her arrest

By SARAH BRUMFIELD, ERIK VERDUZCO and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press
CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — A video circulating on social media shows a North Carolina police officer repeatedly striking a Black woman during an arrest while several other officers hold her down, and although the department contends that the officer was “intentional” about where he hit the woman to get her to comply, the police chief acknowledged Wednesday that he understands “the outrage.”

At a news conference Wednesday, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police Chief Johnny Jennings said that when officers approached a man and woman who were smoking marijuana at a bus stop Monday and began arresting the man, the woman interfered, an officer tried to stop him and a struggle ensued.

The woman hit an officer multiple times, according to Lt. Kevin Pietrus. During the struggle, an officer who responded as backup struck the woman several times to get her to allow police to take her into custody, which is consistent with his training, Pietrus told reporters.

“After several repeated verbal commands, an officer struck the female subject seven times with knee strikes and 10 closed fist strikes to the peroneal nerve in the thigh to try to gain compliance,” police said in a statement Tuesday. “The officer was intentional about where the strikes were made.”

One bystander video posted online shows four officers kneeling and holding the woman down as a fifth repeatedly strikes her with a closed fist. As it is happening, bystanders shout at the officers to stop. After a few seconds, the officers stand up and lead the woman to a squad SUV with her arms behind her back.

“I get it. I understand the outrage. I understand the emotions that come when you look at a video that involves an officer who is punching a female” police are trying to subdue, Jennings said at the news conference.

Jennings said he has been involved in similar physical struggles during his 32 years of policing.

“I can tell you that I’ve never been involved in using force that has looked pretty and has looked good to the public,” he said. “So these are difficult situations. And all I ask is we continue to let this investigation internally play out.”

The department’s internal affairs bureau is investigating, said Jennings, who speculated that other agencies might eventually conduct their own probes. The officer, identified as Vincent Pistone, has been reassigned temporarily from the patrol division to investigations, Jennings said. A department spokesperson said the department does not release information about officers’ races.

Police contend that the woman, identified in court documents as a 24-year-old Black woman from Charlotte, assaulted an officer. Neither the video that shows the officer striking the woman nor two other videos shot from a different angle by someone else show the beginning of the encounter between police and the people they arrested. The woman’s attorney, Lauren Newton, did not immediately respond to a phone message seeking comment.

Jennings noted Wednesday that the body camera of the officer who he says was hit by the woman was knocked off during the struggle.

The chief said the public has the right to see the bodycam footage and that he believes it will, but that it could take a couple of months because North Carolina law requires a court order to release such video. He said his department has already petitioned the court to allow the release.

As officers took the man into custody, they found a loaded handgun in his bag, police said. The man was charged with carrying a concealed weapon and the woman was charged with assault on a government official. Both were also charged with resisting officers and marijuana possession.

The Bojangles restaurant chain confirmed that the man and woman work at its location near the scene of the arrest. But it said they had already finished their shifts and were off the property when they were

approached by police, news outlets reported.

"Like many other Charlotteans, we were shocked and saddened by the video of an incident between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police and a Bojangles employee," Vice President of Communications Stacey McCray said. "While we wait to learn more of the details of what led to the incident, we plan to cooperate fully with any investigation."

Jennings acknowledged at the news conference that the "optics are bad."

"It shouldn't have happened," he said. "But whose responsibility is the question, right?"

The chief questioned whether the officers should have initiated arrests for marijuana use "even though we can," and whether the woman should have interfered with the man's arrest and struck officers.

"None of that should have happened," he said.

The Israeli military has set its sights on southern Gaza. Problems loom in next phase of war

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — After raiding the Gaza Strip's largest hospital, Israel appears close to completing its takeover of the besieged territory's northern sector, which it has described as the headquarters of the ruling Hamas militant group.

But as the military sets its sights on southern Gaza in its campaign to stamp out Hamas, key challenges loom: International patience for a protracted invasion has begun to wear thin, and with nearly 2 million displaced Gaza civilians staying in overcrowded shelters in the south, a broad military offensive there could unleash a new humanitarian disaster during the cold, wet winter.

Here's a closer look at what could lie ahead in the coming weeks:

TWO PHASES

Israel declared war in response to Hamas' unprecedented cross-border incursion on Oct. 7, when the Islamic militant group killed at least 1,200 people and took some 240 others hostage. Israel has set two goals: a return of all hostages and the destruction of Hamas' military and governing capabilities.

In the first phase, Israel carried out weeks of blistering airstrikes across Gaza on what it said were Hamas military installations, many of them in residential neighborhoods. Nearly three weeks ago, it launched a second phase — a ground operation aimed at destroying Hamas' military capabilities in northern Gaza, including an underground tunnel network used to move its supplies and fighters.

The main focus of this phase has been densely populated Gaza City, where Israel says Hamas' most important military assets are located. After seizing sites such as the former parliament building and police headquarters and the urban Shati refugee camp next to Gaza City, troops early Wednesday raided Shifa Hospital.

The hospital is Gaza's largest and most important, and at the time of the Israeli raid was treating hundreds of patients with serious conditions, including some three dozen premature babies. Israel rejected Palestinian claims that the raid endangered the patients. It says that Hamas hides important command centers inside the hospital. On Wednesday, it unveiled what it said was a collection of weapons and military equipment it found, but it offered no proof of underground bunkers or sophisticated command centers.

Israeli leaders have expressed satisfaction with the pace of the operation so far. But it has come at a great cost: Palestinian health officials in the Hamas-run government say that over 11,200 people have been killed, the vast majority women and minors. Thousands of homes have been destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of people have fled to southern Gaza, where they live in dire conditions. The army says 46 soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive.

While Israel says Palestinian civilians are safer in southern Gaza, it has continued to carry out deadly airstrikes there on what it says are Hamas targets but has also killed many civilians. Conditions could become even more difficult as Israel turns its focus to the south.

WHY THE SOUTH?

Israeli leaders have largely dismissed international concerns about the rising death toll and deteriorating

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humanitarian situation in Gaza and have vowed to press ahead until Hamas is destroyed.

That means a push into southern Gaza, where Hamas' military infrastructure -- including thousands of fighters and an underground tunnel network -- is believed to be intact. Officials also suspect that Hamas' top commanders could be hiding in the area.

"There is no place in Gaza that we will not reach," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Israeli troops along the Gaza border on Wednesday. "There is no hiding, no shelter, no refuge for the murderers of Hamas."

Amir Avivi, a retired general and former deputy commander of the army's Gaza Division, said that calling off the operation now was not an option.

"You cannot really destroy Hamas without taking the whole Gaza Strip," said Avivi, who heads the Israel Defense and Security Forum, a group of hawkish former security commanders. "It's not possible."

TROUBLE AHEAD

A push into southern Gaza poses several challenges for Israel.

With most of Gaza's population now crammed into public shelters or private homes and Hamas embedded in residential neighborhoods, heavy street fighting in the south would likely result in high civilian casualties.

Israel says Hamas is responsible for these casualties and accuses it of using civilians as human shields. But the international community -- even Israel's closest ally, the United States -- has expressed rising concerns about the civilian death toll. The U.S. has not told Israel to wrap up the war, but it has warned the Israelis that international criticism will grow the longer the war lasts.

Avivi said many displaced Palestinians could move to a "humanitarian zone" that Israel is trying to establish in southwest Gaza, or better yet, to neighboring Egypt. "This is the safest place for them," he said.

However, each of these scenarios is problematic. Egypt has repeatedly made clear that it does not want a mass of Palestinian refugees in its territory, and the Biden administration has warned that Palestinians must not be pushed out of Gaza.

The proposed humanitarian area, called Muwasi, is relatively small and underdeveloped, with no infrastructure to support hundreds of thousands of people.

Placing people in tents would provide little shelter during the rainy winter months, when temperatures can dip into the single digits Celsius (mid-40s Fahrenheit).

A tent camp would also revive memories of the Palestinians' greatest trauma. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes in the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948 -- a mass uprooting they call the "nakba," or catastrophe.

Giora Eiland, a retired Israeli general and head of the country's National Security Council, said international pressure would have little influence.

He said there is such broad support in Israel for the war that it will be hard to stop. He said Israel might reconsider if Hamas surrenders or collapses or can be persuaded through international mediators like Qatar to release all of the hostages -- scenarios that seem unlikely.

With Israel expected to take another two or three months to complete the offensive, Eiland said a worsening humanitarian emergency is "inevitable."

"I don't think there is a reasonable way that we can prevent a humanitarian crisis there," he said. "Everybody can expect to see terrible scenes from there. But it is not going to stop Israel."

A key US spy tool will lapse at year's end unless Congress and the White House can cut a deal

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With less than two months until the end of the year, the Biden administration is running out of time to win the reauthorization of a spy program it says is vital to preventing terrorism, catching spies and disrupting cyberattacks.

The tool, Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, will expire at the end of December unless the White House and Congress can cut a deal and resolve an unusually vexing debate that has

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yielded unlikely alliances at the intersection of privacy and national security.

Without the program, administration officials warn, the government won't be able to collect crucial intelligence overseas. But civil liberties advocates from across the political spectrum say the law as it stands now infringes on the privacy of ordinary Americans, and insist that changes are needed before the program is reauthorized.

"Just imagine if some foreign terrorist organization overseas shifts its intentions and directs an operative here who'd been contingency planning to carry out an attack in our own backyard — and imagine if we're not able to disrupt the threat because the FBI's 702 authorities have been so watered down," FBI Director Christopher Wray told lawmakers Wednesday on the House Homeland Security Committee.

The law, enacted in 2008, permits the U.S. intelligence community to collect without a warrant the communications of foreigners overseas suspected of posing a national security threat. Importantly, the government also captures the communications of American citizens and others in the U.S. when they're in contact with those targeted foreigners.

In making the case for the law's renewal, the Biden administration over the last year has cited numerous instances in which intelligence derived from Section 702 has helped thwart an attack, including an assassination plot on U.S. soil, or contributed to a successful operation, such as the strike last year that killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri.

National security officials have also said 59% of articles in the president's daily brief contain Section 702 information, and point to the need for the program at a time when Israel's war with Hamas has led to elevated concerns about attacks inside the U.S.

But while both sides of the debate are in broad agreement that the program is valuable, they differ in key ways on how it should be structured, creating a stalemate as the deadline approaches and as Congress is consumed by a busy year-end agenda, including working to prevent a government shutdown and disputes over border security and war spending.

The White House has already dismissed as unworkable the one known legislative proposal that's been advanced, though additional bills are expected to be introduced.

Another complicating factor for the administration to navigate: the coalition of lawmakers skeptical of government surveillance includes both privacy-minded liberal Democrats and Republicans deeply supportive of former President Donald Trump who still regard the intelligence community with suspicion over the investigation of ties between Russia and the 2016 Trump campaign.

Despite the clear challenges in reaching a compromise, the last-minute scramble between the White House and Congress has come to be expected each time the government's surveillance powers are up for renewal. This particular program was last renewed in January 2018 following a splintered vote in Congress and signed into law by Trump, who in a statement praised the tool's value for having "saved lives" but also cheered a new requirement that was meant to protect privacy.

"A lot of these in the past have gone up to the brink. There is a history here of this brinksmanship when you have these statutory sunsets," said Jamil Jaffer, founder and executive director of the National Security Institute at George Mason University's law school and a senior Justice Department official at the time the law was created.

This year, a key point of contention is the insistence by some in Congress, over the strong objection of the White House, that federal agencies be required to get a warrant before they can access the communications of people in the U.S.

That's been a priority for civil liberties advocates in light of revelations over the past year about improper searches of the intelligence database by FBI analysts for information related to the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the Capitol and the racial justice protests of 2020, as well as about state and federal political figures.

The Biden administration has said compliance errors by the FBI are exceedingly rare given the massive number of overall database queries and that the bureau has made important reforms to minimize the prospect for civil liberties intrusions.

A senior administration official has said that a warrant requirement included in a legislative proposal announced last week would cross a "red line" for the White House given that it would limit officials' ability to detect, and act on, potentially vital intelligence in real time.

The official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said such a mandate would not only be operationally unworkable but also legally unnecessary because it would force officials to get a warrant to examine intelligence that was already lawfully collected.

Wray, in prepared remarks to the House homeland panel, said a warrant requirement would amount to a “de facto ban” in part because of the length of time and amount of resources needed to prepare an application for a court order.

The idea of requiring a warrant or probable cause to access information about people in the U.S. has been advocated by Republican Rep. Jim Jordan, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and one of the most pro-Trump members of Congress, and Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden, a reliable champion of civil liberties and liberal standard bearer for decades.

Wyden last week released a bill with a bipartisan group of lawmakers — including Republican Rep. Andy Biggs, a vocal Trump supporter — that would mandate a warrant except for limited exemptions, such as when officials need to stop an imminent threat or if the subject of the query has consented to the search.

In an interview, Wyden said that though he felt strongly about the need for warrants — they’re “important because the Founding Fathers thought they were important” — he also believed that his team had adopted a measured approach by including significant exceptions to the warrant requirement.

“We’re not negotiating with ourselves,” Wyden said. “We’ve got an open-door policy. If there are concerns from the administration, they ought to come up, make the case and talk them through.”

China leads list of labor abusers, sometimes akin to slavery, detected on fishing vessels worldwide

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Hazardous, forced work conditions sometimes akin to slavery have been detected on nearly 500 industrial fishing vessels around the world, but identifying those responsible for abuses at sea is hampered by a lack of transparency and regulatory oversight, a new report concluded.

The research by the Financial Transparency Coalition, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization that tracks illicit money flows, is the most comprehensive attempt to date to identify the companies operating vessels where tens of thousands of workers every year are estimated to be trapped in unsafe conditions.

The report, published Wednesday, found that a quarter of vessels suspected of abusing workers are flagged to China, whose distant water fleet dominates fishing on the high seas, traditionally lawless areas beyond the jurisdiction of any single country. Vessels from Russia, Spain, Thailand, Taiwan and South Korea were also accused of mistreatment of fishers.

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Forced labor in the seafood industry is a rarely seen but common phenomenon, one increasingly recognized as a “widespread human rights crisis,” according to the report’s authors. The Associated Press in 2015 uncovered the plight of thousands of migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos who were abused while employed on Thai vessels whose catch often ended up in the United States.

Globally, as many as 128,000 fishers face threats of violence, debt bondage, excessive overtime and other conditions indicative of forced labor, according to the U.N.’s International Labor Organization.

U.S. and European companies are under increasing pressure to clean up supply chains in labor-intensive industries where worker abuse is widespread. The Financial Action Task Force set up by the Group of Seven wealthiest democracies has identified illegal logging and mining as a key driver of money laundering and encouraged its members to set up publicly available databases to raise awareness about the financial flows that fuel environmental crimes.

However, the seafood industry has so far escaped the same scrutiny, in part because governments

often lack the tools to regulate what takes place hundreds of miles from land. This week, President Joe Biden's administration decided to abandon a planned expansion of the flagship Seafood Import Monitoring Program used to prevent illegal fishing and forced labor on foreign vessels, which supply about 80% of the seafood Americans eat.

"We are once again seeing the heartbreaking reality of what is happening on some commercial fishing vessels out at sea and it's completely unacceptable," Beth Lowell, vice president in the U.S. for the conservation group Oceana, said about the report, which she had no role in. "Forced labor and other human rights abuses should not be the cost for a seafood dinner."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Tuesday that it decided to shelve the planned expansion after receiving public feedback on the proposed rule changes and would instead focus its attention on improving the impact of the current import monitoring program, which covers around 1,100 species.

Another obstacle to transparency: offenders are frequently licensed by governments like Panama and Belize with reputations for financial secrecy and minimal oversight of their fleets. Of the vessels suspected of abuse and whose ownership could be identified by the Financial Transparency Coalition, 18% flew so-called flags of convenience companies use to avoid careful examination and hide their shareholder structure.

The report identified two Chinese companies — ZheJiang Hairong Ocean Fisheries Co. and Pingtan Marine Enterprises — as the worst offenders, with 10 and seven vessels, respectively, accused of human rights violations. A third company, state-owned China National Fisheries Corp., had five.

None of the companies responded to AP's request for comment. But ZheJiang Hairong in a statement last year to the state-owned Fujian Daily claimed ownership of only five of the 10 vessels that would later appear on the Financial Transparency Coalition's list. Pingtan last year was sanctioned by the Biden administration over allegations of illegal fishing and labor abuse. and later saw its shares delisted from the New York Stock Exchange.

The Financial Transparency Coalition scoured government reports, media accounts and complaints by advocacy groups to come up with a list of 475 individual vessels suspected of forced labor since 2010. Of that amount, flag information was available for only about half of the total — another indication of the need for greater ownership transparency, the group says.

Yemen's Houthis have launched strikes at Israel during the war in Gaza. What threat do they pose?

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — For years, the Houthi rebels controlling northern Yemen have chanted slogans at their mass rallies calling for the destruction of Israel. But they never acted on it until the Israel-Hamas war began on Oct. 7.

Since then, the Iran-backed Shiite Muslim force has launched at least six drone and missile attacks toward southern Israel, causing little to no damage. Most have been intercepted by Israeli air defenses on their journey of over 1,600 kilometers (960 miles) from northern Yemen.

The Houthis said the barrage is in retaliation for the Israeli army's bombardment of Gaza and will continue until "Israeli aggression stops." Here's a look at the attacks and what threat they pose.

THE REBELS WHO SEIZED SANAA

In 2014, the Houthis swept from their stronghold in Yemen's northern mountains and seized the capital, Sanaa, along with other central areas of the country.

The Islamist group follows the Shiite Zaydi faith, a branch of Shiite Islam almost exclusively found in northwest Yemen. The majority of Yemen's population are Sunni Muslim, but Zaydis make up a large minority. The Houthi movement was fueled by decades of marginalization by Yemen's ruling elite.

Their takeover sparked a brutal civil war. Saudi Arabia and its allies formed a military coalition to back the government that was driven out of Sanaa to the south. Yemen became another front in the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The war has killed more than 150,000 people and created one of

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the world's worst humanitarian disasters.

The Houthi movement espouses a hard-line Islamist ideology. Over time, it has hardened its anti-American, anti-Saudi and anti-Israeli rhetoric. Their official slogan reads "God is the greatest, death to America, death to Israel. Curse the Jews, victory to Islam."

WHY ATTACK ISRAEL?

The attacks are a public show of support for Hamas, which is also backed by Iran, but also a reflection of the Houthis' doctrine and ambitions.

They join their allies in the "Axis of Resistance," a collection of Iran-backed groups and governments in the region. Other key members, Hamas and Hezbollah, have kept up a steady fire on Israel since the war began.

Two Houthi officials said the group's leadership is in communication with Hezbollah and Hamas about their military activities but not the Iranian government. The officials refused to elaborate and spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak with the media.

The Houthis' anti-Western sentiment is a driver in itself, said Farea al-Muslimi, a research fellow at Chatham House specializing in Yemen. "Their 'death to America, death to Israel' slogan is not there for electoral and voter reasons," al-Muslimi said. "It is a life and ideology doctrine."

Unlike Hezbollah and Hamas, whose fighters border Israel, distance makes Houthi attacks much harder. Given this, al-Muslimi said he expects the low-level drone and missile fire to continue but not intensify greatly.

"They will hit Israel just enough to say, 'We can hit you too,'" he said,

There are other ways the conflict could escalate. Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the group's supreme leader, said Tuesday his forces would target Israeli ships operating in the Red Sea.

Last week, the Houthis downed a U.S. drone it said was flying above Yemeni territorial waters and spying on its forces. The U.S. State Department acknowledged the attack. The Houthi leader has warned of strikes on American interests in the region if Washington becomes directly involved in the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The Houthi attacks are likely to further complicate their peace talks with the Saudi government, which have gone on for months as neither side is able to achieve victory on the battlefield.

The strikes on Israel "will only further embolden the Houthis and the belief they have the upper hand" against the Saudi coalition, said Nadwa Dawsari, a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute. She points out that renewed clashes have flared along the front lines in Yemen, including in the contested city of Marib and along the northern border.

THE HOUTHIS' MILITARY CAPABILITIES

The Houthis' arsenal has grown in size and variety since 2014.

Analysts and Western intelligence services accuse Iran of arming the group. Tehran denies this. In recent years, U.S. naval forces have intercepted a number of ships packed with rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and missile parts on route from Iran to Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

The Houthis have long-range ballistic missiles, smaller cruise missiles and suicide drones, all capable of reaching southern Israel, weapons experts say. The Houthis are far more open about their arsenal than Hamas and Hezbollah, displaying new ballistic missiles such as the "Tofun" during military parades.

The depth of their arsenal is less known.

The Houthis say they have fired drones and ballistic missiles at southern Israel. In thwarting attacks from the Red Sea, Israel said it used its Arrow missile defense system, which intercepts long-range ballistic missiles.

Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the only way to overcome Israeli defense systems would be to overwhelm them with large numbers of missiles, "and you cannot really do that over 1,600 kilometers." Attacks on closer targets and shipping would be more effective, he said.

There are no clear examples of effective long-range Houthi strikes.

In 2019, cruise missiles and drones struck the center of Saudi Arabia's oil industry in Abqaiq, about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from northern Yemen. The attack temporarily halved the kingdom's production and

spiked global energy prices.

While the Houthis claimed the attack, a United Nations investigation concluded it was too sophisticated to have been carried out by the rebels. Washington later said it was launched from Iran.

Many parents don't know when kids are behind in school. Are report cards telling enough?

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

Nearly nine out of 10 parents believe their child is performing at grade level despite standardized tests showing far fewer students are on track, according to a poll released Wednesday by Gallup and the non-profit Learning Heroes.

Report cards, which many parents rely on for a sense of their children's progress, might be missing the whole picture, researchers say. Without that knowledge, parents may not seek opportunities for extra support for their children.

"Grades are the holy grail," said Bibb Hubbard, founder and president of Learning Heroes. "They're the number one indicator that parents turn to to understand that their child is on grade level, yet a grade does not equal grade-level mastery. But nobody's told parents that."

In the Gallup survey, 88% of parents say their child is on grade level in reading, and 89% of parents believe their child is on grade level in math. But in a federal survey, school officials said half of all U.S. students started last school year behind grade level in at least one subject.

In a report examining grade point averages and test scores in the state of Washington over the past decade, researchers found grades jumped during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many districts had eased their grading policies to account for the chaos and hardship students were experiencing.

Some of that leniency could still be in place, masking gaps in learning that are showing up in standardized tests, but not in grades, said Dan Goldhaber, a co-author of the report and the director of the Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research.

Districts across the U.S. have invested federal pandemic relief money in programs to get students back on track academically, from intensive tutoring to summer academic programs. But often far fewer students show up than the district had planned, Goldhaber said.

For programs like summer school or online tutoring, where the family chooses whether to participate, "what we see is that it's only a fraction of the students that are invited or eligible to that are actually participating," he said.

The Gallup poll findings underscore that trend, pointing to families who may not realize they should take action about their child's academic performance.

In the poll of more than 2,000 parents of K-12 students, half the respondents say they've discussed their child's academic progress with a teacher. But among parents who know their child is behind grade level in math, the percentage skyrockets: 74% have spoken with the teacher.

Report cards generally don't convey enough information, said Sarah Carpenter, director of The Memphis Lift, a parent advocacy organization in Tennessee.

"A report card is really tricky in our opinion, because you're just looking at A's and B's and C's," Carpenter said. Nowhere on the report card does it say "what reading level your baby's on, and that's what's throwing parents for a loop."

By talking to parents about issues like literacy and the nuances of grading, families are better able to advocate for their children in the school system and work in partnership with educators, said Trenace Dorsey-Hollins, a parent and founder of the advocacy group Parent Shield Fort Worth in Texas.

"Knowledge is power," she said. "Parents don't know what they don't know. So we don't want them to blame themselves. But now that you have the information, use the information to demand better and ensure that your child and all children get exactly what they need."

Cuban private grocery stores thrive but only a few people can afford them

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Until recently, the space was the one-car garage of a private home in Cuba's capital, Havana. Today, it is a well-stocked, if small, grocery store whose big board at the gate entices shoppers with such offerings as cooking oil, tomato sauce, Hershey's cocoa powder, Nutella, shampoo, cookies and jam — a treasure trove in a country that is short of supplies.

The nameless shop in the residential neighborhood of El Vedado is one of dozens of tiny grocery stores that have sprung up around Cuba in recent months. Locals refer to them as "mipymes" — pronounced MEE-PEE-MEHS. The name derives from the Spanish words for the small- and medium-sized enterprises that were first allowed to open in 2021.

By allowing the new businesses, the Cuban government hoped to help an economy in crisis and strengthen local production. The almost 9,000 enterprises approved so far include the likes of sewing workshops, fisheries and construction firms, but it is small retail shops like the one in Vedado that seem to be setting up the fastest.

They also have greater visibility among the population because they offer many products not available elsewhere and usually operate out of private homes or garages.

Yet despite their modest setup, their prices are far from affordable, even for a doctor or a teacher, who make about 7,000 Cuban pesos a month (about \$28 in the parallel market).

For example, one kilo (2.2 pounds) of powdered milk from the Czech Republic costs 2,000 Cuban pesos (about \$8). A jar of Spanish mayonnaise goes for \$4. Two and a half kilos (about 5 pounds) of chicken imported from the U.S. cost \$8. There are also less essential goods: a jar of Nutella for \$5, a bottle of bubbly Spanish wine for \$6.

The customers able to use these small shops include Cuban families who receive remittances from abroad, tourism workers, diplomats, employees of other small- and medium-sized businesses, artists and high-performance athletes.

"This is a luxury," Ania Espinosa, a state employee, said as she left one store in Havana, where she paid \$1.50 (350 Cuban pesos) for a packet of potato chips for her daughter. "There are people who don't earn enough money to shop at a mipyme, because everything is very expensive," she added.

In addition to her monthly state salary, Espinosa makes some additional income and receives remittances from her husband, who has lived in the U.S. for a year and a half and previously lived in Uruguay.

A few meters (yards) away, Ingracia Virgen Cruzata, a retiree, lamented the high prices at the shop. "I retired with 2,200 (Cuban pesos a month or \$8.80) last year and I can't even buy a package of chicken," she said.

Most of the products found in these stores are imported directly by the entrepreneurs through state-run import agencies, a system that has also opened the door to the emergence of bigger, better stocked stores.

In recent weeks, a private store, accessible only to those who own a car, opened on the outskirts of Havana, featuring giant shelves full of imported products such as Tide detergent, M&M's candy and Goya brand black beans. Because of its size (it's at least 10 times larger than the store in Vedado) — and diverse offerings — it has come to be known as the "Cuban Costco."

Cuba's retail market has been very limited, and for decades the communist state held a monopoly on most forms of retail sales, import and export, under the argument that it is necessary to distribute products equitably.

The ration books that allow Cubans to buy small quantities of basic goods like rice, beans, eggs and sugar each month for payment equivalent to a few U.S. cents continue to be the basis of the model, allowing families to subsist for about 15 days. The rest of their diet must be acquired through other outlets, including state-owned stores and now the mipymes.

There are also state-run businesses offering a little more variety to complete domestic needs, but they charge in local debit or international credit cards. The novelty is that the small shops like the one in Vedado

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and bigger bodegas like the "Cuban Costco" are entirely private and accept payments in Cuban pesos.

"For the first time in 60 years, small- and medium-sized private corporations are now authorized by law. Now the challenge is for them to prosper in a very arid landscape for private initiative," said Pedro Freyre, an analyst with the Florida-based Akerman Consulting and professor at Miami Law School.

"Cuba is a socialist country. The fundamental ideology has not changed. That's still there. But I think that Cuba is in a very difficult economic moment and that has opened a door," Freyre added.

Today in History: November 16, Oklahoma becomes 46th state

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Nov. 16, the 320th day of 2023. There are 45 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 16, 1907, Oklahoma became the 46th state of the union.

On this date:

In 1914, the newly created Federal Reserve Banks opened in 12 cities.

In 1933, the United States and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations.

In 1960, Academy Award-winning actor Clark Gable died in Los Angeles at age 59.

In 1961, House Speaker Samuel T. Rayburn died in Bonham, Texas, having served as speaker since 1940 except for two terms.

In 1982, an agreement was announced in the 57th day of a strike by National Football League players.

In 1989, six Jesuit priests, a housekeeper and her daughter were slain by army troops at the University of Central America Jose Simeon Canas in El Salvador.

In 1991, former Louisiana governor Edwin Edwards won a landslide victory in his bid to return to office, defeating State Rep. David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader.

In 2001, investigators found a letter addressed to Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont containing anthrax; it was the second letter bearing the deadly germ known to have been sent to Capitol Hill.

In 2004, President George W. Bush picked National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice to be his new secretary of state, succeeding Colin Powell.

In 2006, Democrats embraced Nancy Pelosi as the first female House speaker in history, but then selected Steny Hoyer as majority leader against her wishes.

In 2017, Democratic Sen. Al Franken became the first member of Congress to be caught up in a wave of allegations of sexual abuse and inappropriate behavior, after a Los Angeles radio anchor accused him of forcibly kissing her and groping her during a 2006 USO tour. (Franken would resign weeks later.)

In 2018, a U.S. official said intelligence officials had concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (jah-MAHL' khahr-SHOHK'-jee).

In 2020, President-elect Joe Biden warned of dire consequences if President Donald Trump and his administration continued to refuse to coordinate with his transition team on the coronavirus pandemic and kept blocking briefings on national security policy issues and vaccine plans.

Today's Birthdays: Journalist Elizabeth Drew is 88. Blues musician W.C. Clark is 84. Actor Joanna Pettet is 81. Actor Steve Railsback is 78. Actor David Leisure is 73. Actor Miguel Sandoval is 72. Actor Marg Helgenberger is 65. Rock musician Mani is 61. Former pro tennis player Zina Garrison is 60. Former MLB All-Star pitcher Dwight Gooden is 59. Jazz singer Diana Krall is 59. Actor Harry Lennix is 59. Rock musician Dave Kushner (Velvet Revolver) is 57. Actor Lisa Bonet is 56. Actor Tammy Lauren is 55. Actor Martha Plimpton is 53. Actor Michael Irby is 51. Actor Missi Pyle is 51. Rock musician Corey McCormick (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 47. Olympic gold medal figure skater Oksana Baiul (ahk-SAH'-nah by-OOL') is 46. Actor Maggie Gyllenhaal (JIHL'-ehn-hahl) is 46. Pop singer Trevor Penick is 44. Former NBA player Amare Stoudemire (ah-MAR'-ay STOW'-duh-my-ur) is 41. Actor Kimberly J. Brown is 39. Rock singer Siva Kaneswaran (The Wanted) is 35. Actor-comedian Pete Davidson is 30. Actor Casey Moss is 30. Actor Noah Gray-Cabey is 28.

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