

Groton Daily Independent

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Coming up

Tuesday, Nov. 21

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Senior Menu: Ham and bean soup, egg salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, fruit.
School Breakfast: Waffles.
School Lunch: Chicken Alfredo, cooked carrots.

Wednesday, Nov. 22

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.;
Thanksgiving Eve Service, 7 p.m.
No School - Thanksgiving Break
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult

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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Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken, sweet potatoes, vegetable carpi blend, chocolate pudding with bananas, whole wheat bread.

Thursday, Nov. 23

THANKSGIVING DAY

Community Thanksgiving Dinner at the Groton Community Center, 11:30 a.m.

No School - Thanksgiving Break

Friday, Nov. 24

No School - Thanksgiving Break

Saturday, Nov. 25

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.

The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Israel-Hamas Conflict: Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said today that the group is "close to reaching a deal on a truce" with Israel. Meanwhile, Turkish First Lady Emine Erdoğan told Newsweek that her country is leading efforts to provide humanitarian aid in Gaza and demand a cease-fire.

Voting Rights Act: An appeals court dismissed a case challenging Arkansas' redistricting map and ruled that only the attorney general can bring lawsuits under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination in state/local elections.

Trump Trial: Attorneys for Donald Trump have until Wednesday to explain why he should be immune from prosecution in the federal election meddling case, with federal judge Tanya Chutkan deciding whether the case will continue to trial in 2024.

Student Loans: Training platform Prehired will pay \$30 million to student borrowers for allegations that included making false promises, trapping students with loans that violated the law, and directing debt collectors to borrowers who could not pay.

Sued Over Antisemitism Analysis: Social media platform X sued advocacy group Media Matters for America, saying it released a report on ads running next to neo-Nazi and white nationalist posts to "drive advertisers from the platform and destroy X Corp."

Russia 2024 Election: Detained former Russian commander Igor Girkin announced his intent to run for Russia's presidential election. Experts said this move could spell bad news for Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin.

War in Ukraine: An adviser to a Russian official accidentally revealed the location of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine, prompting an attack by Ukraine's Armed Forces the following day, with no reported injuries, amid Kyiv's ongoing efforts to regain control of occupied areas.



Operation Christmas Child collects 579 boxes

From Tandra Smidt at Operation Christmas Child in Bristol: "As of Monday morning's final count and delivery, We had 27 volunteers that worked a total of 131.5 volunteer hours, that have packed Shoeboxes over a course of eight days, have now packed them into 37 cartons and loaded onto one trailer a total of 579 Gospel Opportunity Shoeboxes with each box having the potential to touch and change nine lives for 5202 souls for the Kingdom. "Praise the Lord" He is so good."

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

November 21, 2023 – 7:00pm

City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Renewal of Solid Waste Facility Permit
4. Wastewater Study Update – Ken Hier from IMEG
5. Park Saferoom Update – Jordan Hintz from NECOG
 - Resolution to Appoint Mayor Hanlon as Applicant Agent for Hazard Mitigation Grant
 - Sign Local Match Commitment Letter for Hazard Mitigation Grant
6. Police Department Vehicle Discussion
7. Sign 3-year Contract with Apptegy
8. Authorization to Enter Into 5-year Lease Agreement with RDO Equipment Co. for 2024 John Deere 544P Payloader
9. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 772 – 2024 Salary Ordinance
10. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 773 – 2024 Appropriations
11. 2023 Swimming Pool Report
12. October Finance Report
13. Minutes
14. Bills
15. Holiday Lighting Contest – December 12th - \$100, \$75, & \$50 Utility Bill Credits to be Given Away
16. City Offices will be Closed on November 23rd and 24th for Thanksgiving
17. Reminder: Skating Rink Employment Applications – Due by December 4, 2023, at 5:00pm
18. Reminder: 2024 Dog Licenses are Due by December 29, 2023.
19. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
20. Adjournment

That's Life by Tony Bender

Farm living is the life for me

I stepped outside the other morning to a cacophonous whine that at first sounded like traffic racing through an underpass. Then I saw them—thousands of snow geese blanketing the corn stubble to the south of my home, others circling above.

I paused and imagined my Grandpa Spilloway pausing to take it all in no matter how much work he had to do. It's a scene that plays out across the prairie generation after generation. That connection to nature. That lifestyle.

Last summer, we had a mama fox and two kits living under the garden shed, not an uncommon occurrence. We've become a refuge for deer, pheasants, eagles, and foxes. I've given up keeping fish in the ponds, however, because raccoons are able anglers. I've yet to beat them to the sweet corn.

At sunset one day I looked out from the deck and saw both kits sitting, meditatively looking south at the same field. We share the same connection.

I was providing some information for paperwork the other day and described my home as "rural Venturia." A blank stare. "Because the hustle and bustle of Venturia is too much." I'm not sure what the population is in Venturia, but Jesus had more disciples.

Up until the last 25 years, I led a relatively transient life, the life of a radio guy. I'm adaptable, so I did fine in the heart of the city, but three times I've been able to live in the country. That's home. Mowing, weeding, and blizzards seem like a modest price to pay. For the geese. For the foxes. To breathe.

As a kid, I typically spent several weeks with my grandparents in Gackle and another stretch with my grandparents in Ashley, picking rocks, hauling bales, feeding calves, and fixing fence.

My Grandpa Spilloway charged me with gopher eradication. Charged. He taught me economics. He paid for the traps and gave me a nickle a gopher tail. I could also use the .22, but I'd have to reimburse him 2¢ per shell. I didn't often miss, but even then, it was considerable overhead. So, I learned to snare gophers. By each summer's end, I'd worked my way through three pastures. Now, I've gone soft. I feel bad if I even run over a gopher.

Economics made me a good shot. My Grandpa Bender would call me outside sometimes to shoot pennies for visitors. Not in midair—don't get excited, I wasn't that good—but out of a board or the top of a corner post. When I told Grandpa Bender that Mom was the best shot in the family, he didn't believe me, so after Easter dinner, he had to see for himself.

She missed the first shot. "This shoots a little high, doesn't it?" she remarked.

"Oh, yeah. I forgot to tell you that."

After that, she hit 21 straight, and as the carnage mounted, he'd slap his thigh. "Golly!" She didn't miss the rest of the day and he beat the heck out of his leg.

Grandpa Spilloway milked about 50 Holsteins and grew a modest amount of corn in that pitiful rocky soil, so he didn't need a lot of horsepower. His tractors were 1940's Allis Chalmers, the kind you hand cranked, and he had a Co-op loader tractor that somehow was enough to clear the yard after the Blizzard of 1966. There was nothing he couldn't do with a tractor, a welder, and a 30-30.

Grandpa Bender had a splendid Oliver tractor and a Farmall. I have absolutely no need for them, but when I see a restored Oliver or the prettiest tractors ever made, Minneapolis-Molines, I am so tempted...

I worked a summer for a local farmer, and he had a new 1070 Case, which I was convinced was the most powerful machine that could ever be built. It was enough to bend a drag (hitched behind a disc) without me noticing. The man had a temper but his dad, who helped out from time to time, took the fall.

I don't remember seeing as many corn piles as I have seen this season. A good year, I think. You'll never get a farmer to tell you that, though. Maybe it's superstition. For the record, I like seeing new pickups and combines in the field. It's good for everyone.

I don't know if I'd make a good farmer, staring up at a blackening sky hovering over a bumper crop. As for those farmers who go to Vegas... well, it seems redundant.

May your bins bulge. Thanks for feeding the geese.

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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....

21.) have a YMCA membership

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Webster, SD

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78th Annual Snow Queen Contest is Sunday

The 78th Groton Area Snow Queen Contest will be held on Sunday, November 26th in the GHS Old Gymnasium at 4:00pm. The contest will feature three high school seniors and six high school freshmen vying for the Senior and Junior Snow Queen Titles, the crowning of a kindergarten prince and princess, a talent contest that will exhibit three senior and four junior talent entries, ice cream refreshments, and the unveiling of the mystery frosty! The Groton Area Snow Queen Committee welcomes all to come and enjoy the show!

Senior Snow Queen Candidates



Ava Wienk
Daughter of Brent
and Lisa Wienk

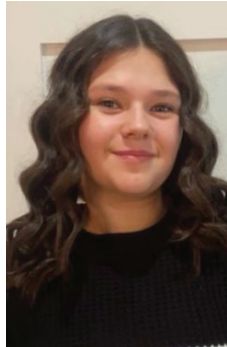


Cadence Feist
Daughter of Jason
and Dannielle
Pullan and
Cory Feist



Faith Flihs
Daughter of
Bret Flihs and
Raechel Otter

Junior Snow Queen Candidates



Avery Crank
Daughter of Tom
and Rachael Crank



Emerlee Jones
Daughter of Jim
and Mendy Jones



Claire Schuelke
Daughter of
Austin and Deb
Schuelke



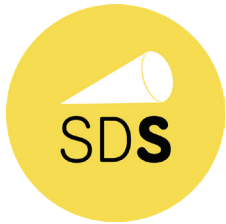
Teagan Hanten
Daughter of Cody
and Sarah Hanten



McKenna Tietz
Daughter of Tom
and Lindsey Tietz



**Ashlynn
Warrington**
Daughter of Jason
and Robyn
Warrington



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

From threatened to managed population: Fourth river otter trapping season concludes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 20, 2023 4:34 PM

The state's fourth river otter trapping season ended last weekend when the legal limit of 20 was reached. That season was unimaginable only a few decades ago when river otters were all but non-existent in South Dakota.

The Game, Fish and Parks Department said Saturday that trappers holding a furbearer license had to report their otter catches to the department within 24 hours. The time window following the season's end allows for the reporting of any last-minute catches, called "incidental takes," which must be handed over to the department.

The history of river otters in South Dakota is a story of decline and restoration.

Before American settlement, river otters were widespread across the Great Plains, including South Dakota. However, by the late 20th century, their numbers had dwindled due to overharvesting, habitat loss and pollution.

Trapping them became illegal in 1978 when the species was classified as "threatened" by GF&P.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe reintroduced about 35 river otters into the Big Sioux River in the late 1990s. That, and better management of wetland and river habitats, played crucial roles in their recovery.

The otters were removed from the state's threatened species list in 2020, signifying a stabilized population. The delisting allowed for river otter trapping seasons to begin that same year.

The GF&P says the trapping season helps to prevent overpopulation and maintain ecological balance. The season also enables more detailed monitoring and research. Data gathered from harvested animals, including age, health and distribution help refine conservation strategies, according to the GF&P.

South Dakota State University researchers are conducting a study on the river otter population. The team has deployed trail cameras across eastern South Dakota's riverbeds and wetlands and is using artificial intelligence to help process the large volume of images.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

COMMENTARY

The cost of free land and either-or history

New book examines the other side of the homesteading narrative

SETH TUPPER

Some white South Dakotans love to talk about their generational connection to the land. I'm one of them: a proud, fifth-generation descendant of Dakota Territory homesteaders.

The federal government awarded nearly 100,000 parcels of free land to South Dakota settlers via the 1862 Homestead Act and successive rounds of related legislation. Modern South Dakotans celebrate that legacy in myriad ways, including an annual State Fair ceremony honoring farms and ranches owned by the same family for 100 or more years.

Too few of us pause to consider how that must sound to Native Americans. Their connection to the land

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spans hundreds of generations and thousands of years. Before any white settler rushed to claim free land in western South Dakota, the federal government broke a treaty that promised to reserve all of that land as a Great Sioux Reservation.

White South Dakotans rarely talk about that side of the homesteading story, because it threatens the independent, self-made pioneer aspect of our ancestral identity. Too many of us hold an either-or view of history, believing it can only be good or bad, not both.

In a new book, "The Cost of Free Land: Jews, Lakota, and an American Inheritance," author and journalist Rebecca Clarren cuts through that worldview like a plow through prairie sod, exposing the roots to scrutiny. She wants the descendants of homesteaders to know they can "hold two things in their heads at once."

"I hope that people living in South Dakota can read this history and not feel attacked by it, and say, 'I do feel proud. My family has really made something of ourselves,'" Clarren told me in an interview. "And now, how do I consider the great harm that these policies cost our Native neighbors, and what can we do about that today?"

Clarren lives in Oregon, but her Jewish ancestors homesteaded in western South Dakota after fleeing persecution in Russia. Utilizing her family's trove of documents and photographs, plus historical research and interviews with her relatives and modern Lakota people whose ancestors crossed paths with hers, Clarren takes readers on three interwoven journeys: her family's odyssey from Russia to South Dakota and beyond; the concurrent fate of Lakota people, who were pushed off their land and onto reservations; and her own journey to absorb that history, make sense of it, and discern what to do about it.

Between colorful tales and character sketches, readers also learn about the forced enrollment of Native American children in boarding schools; federal policies that opened reservation land to non-Native ownership; misguided federal programs that relocated some Indigenous people from reservations to urban areas; and the permanent flooding of fertile reservation bottomlands during the construction of Missouri River dams.

While all of that was happening, Clarren's ancestors were working hard and exercising their freedom to mortgage and remortgage their homesteaded property. They expanded their ranch holdings and moved away to cities, where they converted their land wealth into successful businesses.

By juxtaposing Native and non-Native stories, Clarren shows it wasn't only discrimination against Native Americans that created unequal social and economic conditions in South Dakota. The simultaneous freedoms and advantages extended to non-Native people also played a role, providing what Clarren described as the "platform shoes of social class."

"To look only at one piece of this history," Clarren wrote, "is to ignore the depths of this unfairness."

Yet in South Dakota, we routinely celebrate homesteaders without acknowledging the other side of the story. Clarren eloquently diagnoses the self-defeating causes and effects of that situation.

"Our failure to teach American history in its full and nuanced complexity leads to ignorance, which saps empathy and allows racism and hatred to flourish," she wrote, "which keeps our caste system in place, which keeps marginalized people poor and disenfranchised, which allows the dominant class to maintain a historical narrative that is inaccurate in its simplicity."

So we have to start there, with learning the history. Then what? Clarren's family decided to start a fund with the Indian Land Tenure Foundation, which works to help tribes buy back pieces of lost land.

There are other ideas in the book; more than that, there's encouragement and a road map for descendants of homesteaders to learn their own family history and decide what to do about it.

In the current political climate, I don't know how many South Dakotans are open to Clarren's message. Some will dismiss it as an example of "critical race theory," the academic framework that's become a code phrase for any history that makes white people uncomfortable.

As for this fifth-generation South Dakotan, I think the book aligns with the common sense we claim to have inherited from our pioneer forebears: When you've wronged someone, you should listen and apologize. And then you should try to make amends.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

COMMENTARY

Quiet scanners add another layer of opaqueness to law enforcement

DANA HESS

Police are called on to “protect and serve.” In South Dakota that’s what they do, but they do it on their own terms. Too often those terms lack transparency.

This became apparent again recently with the announcement that on Nov. 13, privately owned police scanners in the state’s two largest counties would go quiet as law enforcement agencies there will encrypt their radio traffic.

The public will be shut out of listening to scanners in Minnehaha and Pennington counties. Officials described the change as an effort to protect law enforcement officers, witnesses and crime victims, according to a Rapid City Journal story about a press conference announcing the change.

“The public has an expectation that if they call the police, we’re going to track down the suspects and apprehend them, and this job is difficult when the bad guy can listen to our playbook on their cell phone,” explained Rapid City Police Chief Don Hedrick.

Keeping information away from the public seems to be baked into the DNA of South Dakota law enforcement. In this state, investigative reports for closed or inactive cases are not considered open records. Neither are calls for service.

In South Dakota there is no requirement for releasing the tapes of 911 calls or body cam or dash cam video. Reporters who move to South Dakota from other states are often astonished at the amount of information that they can’t get from law enforcement.

There have been some strides toward law enforcement transparency. About a decade ago, the Legislature approved allowing public access to a police log of incidents. Typically these are filled out with the sparest of language. What they lack in detail they make up for in brevity.

In 2017, the Legislature approved releasing booking photos, also known as mug shots, for people who have been arrested for felonies. While this is some progress, note that it took new laws approved by the Legislature to provide access to those records. It’s hard to tell what any future attempts to add transparency to South Dakota law enforcement would look like. Republicans, who hold super majorities in both houses, were once known as the law and order party. With their leading candidate for the presidency facing four felony indictments, who’s to say what they believe these days.

One of the largest line items in any city or county budget is law enforcement. Now, at least in Pennington and Minnehaha counties, the people whose taxes pay for that law enforcement will be shut out of knowing what their police agencies are up to when they hear the sirens blare.

Newsrooms, too, traditionally monitor law enforcement scanners. It’s hard to tell people what’s going on in local public safety without the heads-up from scanner traffic.

Recently, when six Brooklyn precincts encrypted their scanners without warning, the New York Daily News editorialized against the move, citing the need for news media access to what’s being said on the airwaves by police. “They hear the first, unfiltered version of crime reports, including police shootings of civilians, which is essential given that when police departments are in sole control of the narrative, they have an understandable incentive to recount events in a way that makes them look good,” the editorial explained.

If this move against transparency continues, perhaps in the name of protecting officers they should all be made to wear plainclothes and drive unmarked vehicles. That way the public won’t be able to hear what they say or know where they are. If law enforcement in South Dakota gets any more opaque, soon the Crime Tips number will be unlisted.

While the change to encrypted transmission may be inspired by increased safety for officers, it’s hard to remember an instance when law enforcement claimed lives were lost or witnesses jeopardized because of what someone heard on a police scanner. Open communication on police scanners has worked for decades, providing important tips for journalists and a window into what’s happening in the community

for curious taxpayers.

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

Three presidential debates, one VP debate scheduled ahead of 2024 election

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 20, 2023 3:19 PM

WASHINGTON — The Democratic and Republican nominees for president would debate three times next year if both candidates agree to a schedule released Monday by the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates.

"The United States' general election debates, watched live worldwide, are a model for many other countries: the opportunity to hear and see leading candidates address serious issues in a fair and neutral setting," co-chairs Frank Fahrenkopf and Antonia Hernández said in a written statement. "This tradition remains unbroken since 1976."

The first presidential debate is scheduled for Sept. 16 at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

That would be followed on Oct. 1 by a debate at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia. And a third presidential debate would be held on Oct. 9 at The University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

The vice presidential candidates are scheduled to have their debate on Sept. 25 at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania.

The debate at Virginia State University would be the first presidential debate hosted by a Historically Black College or University.

The Democratic nominee will likely be President Joe Biden and at the moment former President Donald Trump is leading in the GOP polls, though he has several challengers.

Trump has not attended any of the Republican primary debates, often choosing to hold rallies instead.

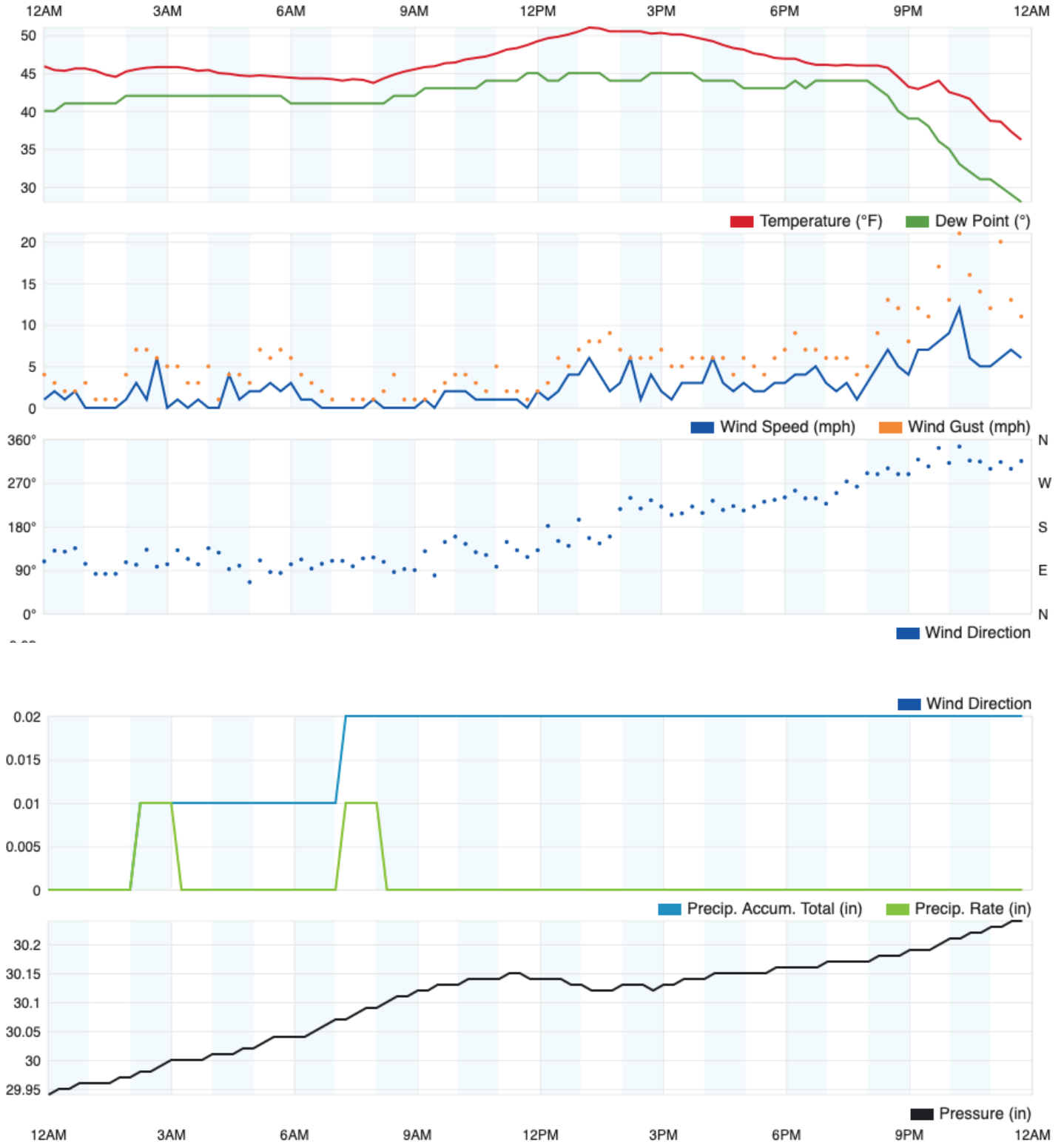
It wasn't immediately clear Monday if any of the candidates running for president had committed to participating in the debates.

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Tue Nov 21	Wed Nov 22	Thu Nov 23	Fri Nov 24	Sat Nov 25	Sun Nov 26	Mon Nov 27
						
40°F 25°F	53°F 22°F	27°F 12°F	26°F 18°F	31°F 20°F	34°F 16°F	32°F 21°F
NNW 15 MPH	SSW 14 MPH	NNE 11 MPH	NE 5 MPH	SSW 12 MPH	WNW 18 MPH	NW 15 MPH

Mild and Dry Today & Wednesday

Today Wednesday Thursday



35 to 48°

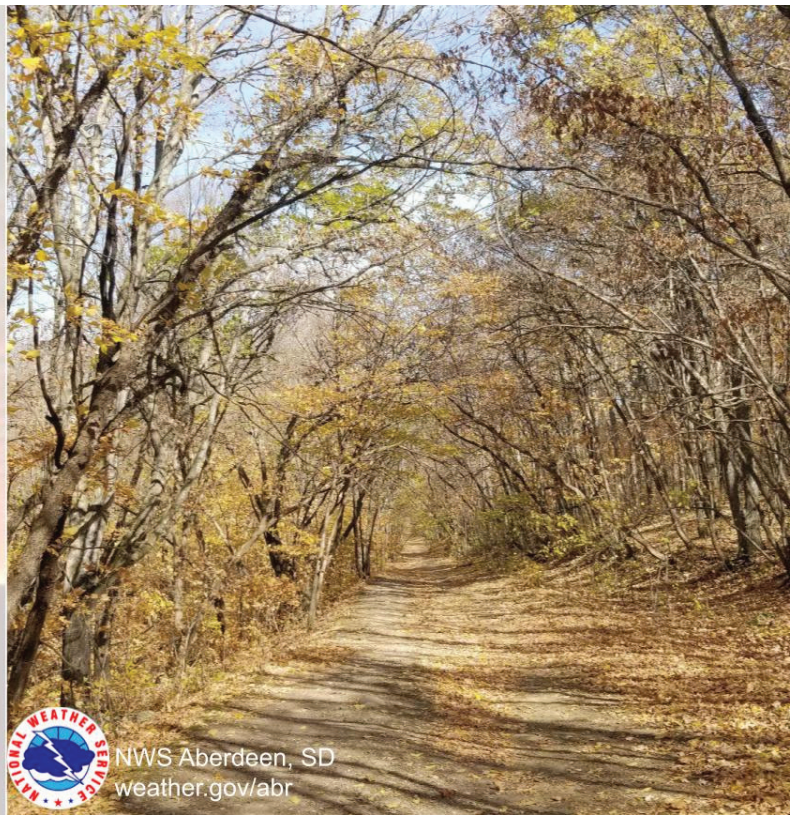
48 to 60°

25 to 35°

Warmest readings across central SD, coolest over the Glacial Lakes region.



Much colder temperatures starting Thursday and lasting into the weekend.



NWS Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

A cold front moved through the region last night, so expect cooler temperatures today in the 30s and 40s, along with dry conditions and sunny skies. Another surge of warmer air will overspread the area on Wednesday, with temperatures soaring into the 50s for most areas. Cold temperatures are in store starting Thursday and looks to persist at least through the weekend.

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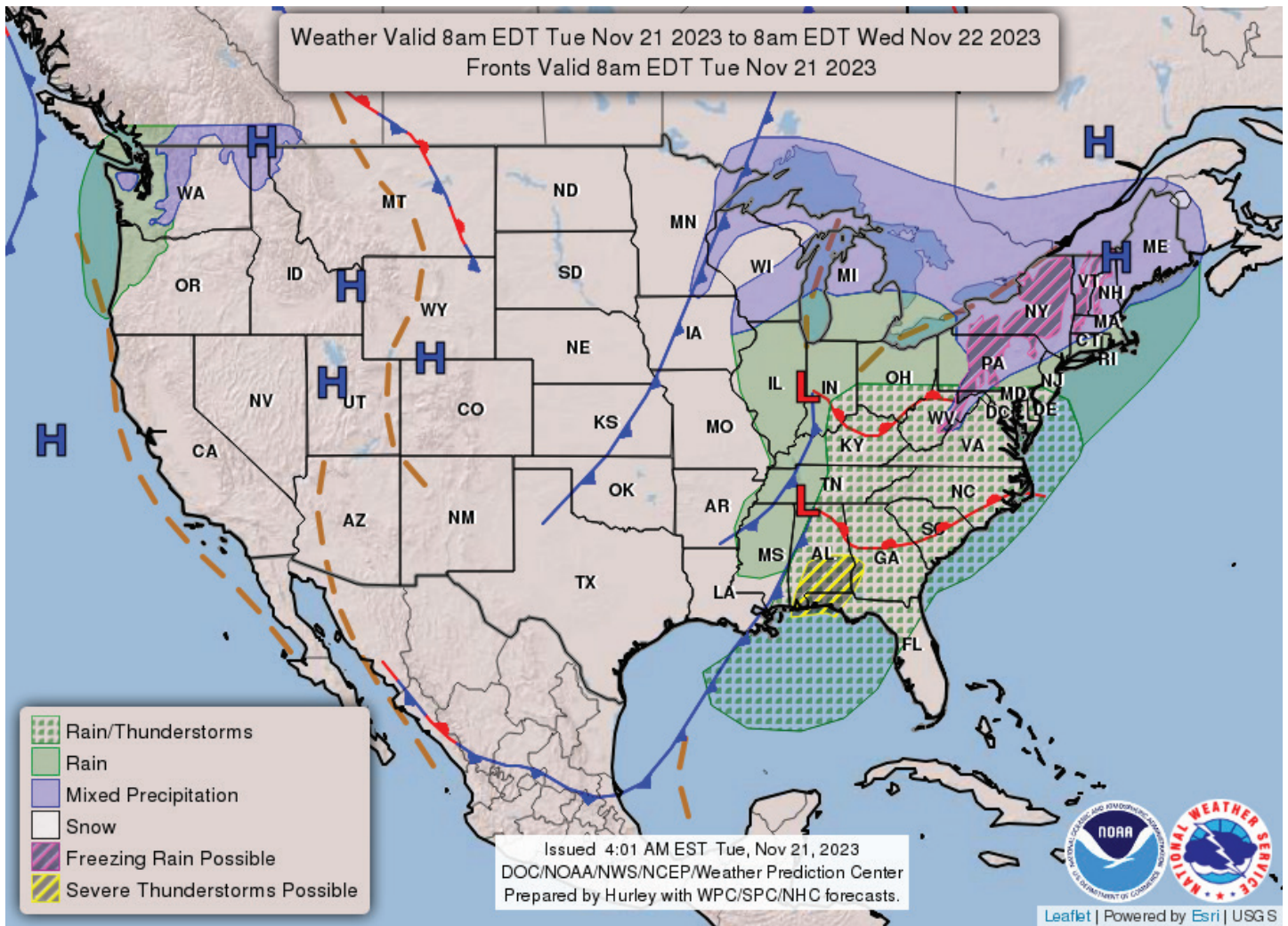
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 51 °F at 1:14 PM
Low Temp: 37 °F at 11:30 PM
Wind: 21 mph at 10:13 PM
Precip: : 0.02

Day length: 9 hours, 21 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 1960
Record Low: -18 in 1964
Average High: 40
Average Low: 17
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.56
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.19
Average Precip to date: 21.03
Precip Year to Date: 23.17
Sunset Tonight: 4:58:45 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58:45 PM



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Today in Weather History

November 21, 1985: Winds gusting to over 40 mph caused blizzard conditions over the western and central parts of South Dakota on the 21st and 22nd. In addition to the existing snow cover, 1-2 inches of new snow fell and when blown by the wind, reduced visibilities to zero at times. Many roads were drifted shut by the blowing and drifting snow in the western part of the state.

November 21, 2003: Heavy snow of 6 to 10 inches fell from the late afternoon to the late evening hours of the 21st and into the early morning hours on the 22nd. Some snowfall amounts included 4 inches in Browns Valley, 2S Ashton, and Britton; 5 inches at Timber Lake, Blunt, 6 SE McIntosh, and Pollock; 6 inches at Clark, McLaughlin, 14 NNE Isabel, 17 WSW Fort Pierre and Miller; 7 inches at Castlewood, 1 W Highmore, and 4 NW Onida; and 8 inches north of Goodwin, at Ree Heights, at Eagle Butte, and near Troy. Thirteen inches of snow fell in Watertown.

1798 - A four day storm was in progress in the northeastern U.S. The storm dropped a foot of snow on New York City and New Haven, and as much as three feet in Maine and New Hampshire. The snowstorm ushered in a long and severe winter, in some places the ground remained covered with snow until the following May. (David Ludlum)

1967 - Excessive rains in southern California caused the most severe flooding and the most damaging mud slides in 33 years. Downtown Los Angeles received eight inches of rain, and 14 inches fell in the mountains. (David Ludlum)

1985 - Hurricane Kate made landfall during the evening hours near Mexico Beach, FL. Wind gusts to 100 mph were reported at Cape San Blas FL. It was the latest known hurricane to hit the U.S. so far north. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region and the Upper Ohio Valley produced 14 inches of snow at Snowshoe WV, and nearly eight inches at Syracuse NY. Eleven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Record lows included 21 degrees at Pinson AL, 9 degrees at Syracuse NY, and 8 degrees at Binghamton NY. Gale force winds lash the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast, and the strong northwesterly winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero. Winds gusting to 60 mph at Trumansburg NY toppled a chimney onto a nearby truck. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds accompanied rain and snow in the northeastern U.S. Caribou ME received eight inches of snow in six hours, and Fort Kent ME was blanketed with a total of fourteen inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - The storm which produced thunderstorms and high winds in the northeastern U.S. the previous day, produced snow and high winds in New England, with blizzard conditions reported in Maine. Winds gusted to 55 mph at Boston MA, and reached 58 mph at Augusta ME, and hurricane force winds were reported off the coast of Maine. Snowfall totals ranged up to 18 inches at Vanceboro ME, with 17 inches at South Lincoln VT. There were thirty-five storm-related injuries in Maine. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992: The November 21st – 23rd tornado outbreak was the 3rd largest outbreak in recorded history and one of the longest continuous outbreaks ever recorded. There was no break in tornado activity from 1:30 pm on the 21st when the tornadoes started in Texas until 7:30 am on the 23rd when the last tornadoes lifted in North Carolina. On this date, severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes within 70 minutes in the Houston metro area in Texas. At one time, there were three on the ground in Harris County. The strongest, an F4, tracked 20 miles through the eastern suburbs of Houston destroying 200 homes and damaging 1,000 more. In total, 23 tornadoes struck Mississippi and Alabama. An F4 tornado killed 12 people on a 128-mile track through 7 Mississippi counties. The deadliest tornado of 1992, an F4 tornado killed 12 people on a 128-mile path through 7 counties in Mississippi, one of the bodies was blown a quarter mile into a tree.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FREE FROM FEAR

The word "freedom" carries with it the idea of being released from any restraints or not being bound by any regulations, rules, or requirements. Nearly everyone wants to live a life with no obligations, no opposition, or no oppression.

Yet, despite everything, all of life is wrapped with boundaries of one nature or another. Highways are divided by traffic lanes, stop signs, caution signs, turning lanes, and many other constraints. Every athletic contest or sporting event has specific lines, certain types of equipment or clothing, and regulations to control the activities and behaviors of the participants enforced by referees. Even something as simple as boiling water has specific criteria.

Rarely, if ever, do we pause to consider life's limits. We take for granted the ability to move about at will, make independent choices, and manage our affairs. But does moving and choosing and managing make us free? Not really. Each of them moving, choosing, managing - has their limits. They all involve constraints in the final analysis. Where, then, do we find freedom?

Paul said, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." God, through Christ, offers us the priceless gift of living each day free from destroying ourselves and free to be and become who He has called us to be and do what He has created us to do. But we must follow His teachings we find in His Word, and allow His Spirit to direct us along the path He has laid out for us. We will only be free if we accept Christ as our Savior and follow the teachings in His word.

Prayer: Lord, may we understand the fact that we are not free if we are self-centered and controlled by sin. Enable us to understand and accept true freedom through Christ, Your Son, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 2 Corinthians 3:17



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: 11.17.23

6 12 31 33 69 17

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$289,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 59 Mins 51
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.23

10 14 24 41 51 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,350,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.23

5 12 16 31 40 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 29 Mins 51
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.18.23

2 7 14 15 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$61,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.23

15 21 39 45 52 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 58
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.23

19 26 30 39 63 13

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$313,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 58
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Cardoso's offense, team defense power No. 1 South Carolina to 78-38 win over South Dakota State

By PETE IACOBELLI AP Sports Writer

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — When the shots wouldn't fall, No. 1 South Carolina relied on its defense, which was more than enough against South Dakota State.

Kamilla Cardoso had 23 points, 10 rebounds and six blocks while Raven Johnson had 18 points and five steals as the Gamecocks overcame a poor early shooting performance to defeat the Jackrabbits 78-38 on Monday night.

South Carolina had only six field goals in the first quarter and 15 by halftime, a 33% showing for a team that came in seventh in the country in shooting at 53.1%.

"When you don't see a shot go in, of course, you get down," Johnson said. "So I think, you go get a steal, go get an easy two points."

That approach turned things around for South Carolina (4-0).

It didn't help the Gamecocks that they were without their most reliable outside shooter in Oregon transfer Te-Hina Paopao, who was sidelined with an ankle injury. Paopao started the first three games and went 10 of 17 on 3s.

Minus Paopao, the Gamecocks missed all 12 of their 3-pointers, their first time without making a 3 since a 76-62 win over Mississippi State in the Southeastern Conference tournament title game on March 8, 2020, when they were 0-for-8 from behind the arc.

"The goal got small for us," coach Dawn Staley said. "But we righted the ship in the second half."

South Carolina took control with relentless rebounding and defense. The Gamecocks had 16 blocks, 15 steals and led the Jackrabbits 21-10 in offensive rebounds.

South Carolina outscored South Dakota State 31-0 on the fast break.

Johnson had six assists and five steals. The 6-foot-7 Cardoso had her third double-double of the season and 19th of her career.

Brooklyn Meyer scored 19 points for the Jackrabbits (2-2), who were the preseason favorites to win the Summit League.

SDSU went up 13-11 after Meyer's basket late in the first quarter. But South Carolina set off on a 19-7 surge to move in front for good.

Jackrabbits coach Aaron Johnson appreciated his team's strong start against the powerhouse Gamecocks, but acknowledged his players got worn down through foul trouble in the second half.

"Foul trouble a little bit and the extra pressure your fouls put on you, the extra rotations," Johnson said. "Things turned really quickly in that third quarter."

BIG PICTURE

South Dakota State: The Jackrabbits made things unusually difficult on South Carolina early. But they ultimately couldn't keep it close against the faster, taller Gamecocks.

South Carolina: The Gamecocks looked a little out of control at times as less experienced players like MiLaysia Fulwiley and Sahnya Jah jacked up several poor shots while Staley stood on the sideline with her arms folded and scowling.

INJURED GAMECOCKS

South Carolina played its second game without versatile freshman Tessa Johnson, who sustained a lower right leg injury at practice. Johnson used a scooter to elevate her leg. Staley was unsure if Johnson or Paopao would be available for South Carolina's next game.

UP NEXT

South Dakota State returns home to face South Carolina State on Friday night.

South Carolina concludes a four-game homestand against Mississippi Valley State on Friday.

Hall leads George Mason to 73-71 OT win over South Dakota State at Jacksonville Classic

By The Associated Press undefined

ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla. (AP) — Keyshawn Hall led George Mason with 21 points, including the game-winning jump shot with 3 seconds left, and the Patriots knocked off South Dakota State 73-71 on Monday night.

Hall also added 15 rebounds for the Patriots (4-1). Darius Maddox scored 14 points while shooting 4 for 14 (2 for 5 from 3-point range) and 4 of 4 from the free throw line. Baraka Okojie had 12 points and shot 4 for 5 (2 for 3 from 3-point range) and 2 of 3 from the free throw line.

Zeke Mayo led the way for the Jackrabbits (1-4) with 22 points, 12 rebounds and five assists. William Kyle III added 14 points for South Dakota State. Luke Appel also put up 13 points.

Analysis: Iran-backed Yemen rebels' helicopter-borne attack on ship raises risks in crucial Red Sea

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The helicopter-borne Houthi attack on an Israel-linked ship in the Red Sea highlights the danger now lurking in one of the world's key shipping routes as the Israel-Hamas war rages, as well as the rebels' tactics mirroring those of its chief sponsor, Iran.

While Tehran has denied aiding the Yemen rebel group in launching their attack Sunday, the targeted ship before the assault passed by an American-sanctioned Iranian cargo vessel suspected as serving as a forward spying base in the Red Sea. The rebels, dressed commando-style in bulletproof vests carrying assault rifles, covered each other and moved in military formation before quickly seizing control of the bridge of the Galaxy Leader.

While their body-camera footage serves as a propaganda coup to bolster their own position in Yemen amid some protests against their rule, it also signals a new maritime front has opened in a region long focused on the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth at the Strait of Hormuz. It also puts new pressure on commercial shippers traveling through those waters, threatens to increase insurance costs that will get passed onto consumers and likely further stretches the U.S. Navy as it tries to serve as the region's security guarantor.

"This has all the signs these people were trained by a professional military, which could clearly be Iran," an American defense official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters. "This looks like something we haven't seen before."

It's not just the U.S. and Israel suspecting Iranian involvement, however.

The risk intelligence firm RANE referred to the tactics employed by the Houthis as reminiscent of those used by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard when seizing vessels in the past over years of tensions regarding Tehran's collapsed nuclear deal with world powers. Ambrey, a private intelligence firm, similarly referred to the operation as an "Iranian-style vessel seizure" that "provides the Houthis with a negotiation lever" in much the same way Hamas' taking of some 240 hostages in their Oct. 7 attack on Israel did.

"The incident displayed a significant increase in the Houthis' capability to disrupt merchant shipping," Ambrey said. "In the past, the Houthis had only used sea mines, missiles and remote-controlled improvised explosive devices in the Red Sea."

It added: "The sophistication of the operation suggests that Iranian involvement is highly likely."

The Galaxy Leader, linked to Israeli billionaire Abraham "Rami" Ungar, also passed by the Iranian cargo vessel Behshad before the attack Sunday, according to satellite imagery first reported by the firm Tanker Trackers.

The Behshad has been in the Red Sea since 2021 off Eritrea's Dahlak archipelago. It arrived there after Iran removed the Saviz, another suspected spy base in the Red Sea that had suffered damage in an attack that analysts attributed to Israel amid a wider shadow war of ship attacks in the region.

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Iran, for its part, denied Monday having anything to do with the attacks.

"Those accusations are void, and a result of the complicated situation the Zionist regime is struggling with," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said. "We have said many times that resistance groups in the region represent their own countries and people, and they make decisions based on the interests of their own countries and nations."

However, Hamas has Iran as one of its main sponsors. The Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah, another Iranian-backed group, has engaged in cross-border fire for weeks with Israel. Iraqi militias have claimed drone attacks on U.S. bases there. Syria, another Iranian beneficiary, has launched sporadic attacks too.

It remains unclear just how much control the Iranians exert over the Houthis. However, the rebel group has seen its ballistic missile and drone program rapidly advance despite being targeted by a yearslong United Nations arms embargo. Analysts attribute that to Iranian weapons shipments, of which some have been previously seized by the U.S. and allied navies.

Houthi weapon sophistication has grown in other ways as well.

The Houthis have been able to fly this year a Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jet over the capital, Sanaa, during a military parade, along with a Northrop F-5 Tiger combat aircraft at another. A Houthi parade also saw Soviet-era Mil Mi-17 helicopters flying through the sky — the same helicopter used in Sunday's attack. A Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthis had targeted Yemen's air force with airstrikes at the start of the war and the Houthis have yet to explain how they got these aircraft flying again.

The Houthis also have shot down an American MQ-9 Reaper drone during the Israel-Hamas war with a surface-to-air missile, as well as have fired drones and missiles toward Israel.

All of this makes the Red Sea, which stretches from Egypt's Suez Canal down to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait separating East Africa from the Arabian Peninsula, increasingly dangerous for shipping. That narrow strait, some 29 kilometers (18 miles) across at its tightest point, is crucial for cargo and energy shipments.

The U.S. has sent more vessels into and through the Red Sea, including the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier and its strike group. The Eisenhower is now in the Gulf of Oman, according to satellite images, meaning there are fewer U.S. Navy assets in the Red Sea to deter any possible new attacks.

And if the next attack sees fatalities — particularly of U.S. or Israeli nationals — that raises the risk of a wider war breaking out on the seas.

"Significant Houthi interference with commercial shipping through the Strait is almost certain to trigger U.S. intervention due to the political and potentially economic implications," the New York-based Soufan Center warned.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jon Gambrell, the news director for the Gulf and Iran for The Associated Press, has reported from each of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Iran and other locations across the world since joining the AP in 2006.

Navy plane overshoots runway and ends up in ocean, but all 9 aboard escape unharmed

By AUDREY McAVOY and BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A Navy plane flying in rainy weather overshoot a runway Monday at a military base in Hawaii and splashed into Kaneohe Bay, but all nine aboard were uninjured, authorities said.

The Coast Guard responded, but rescue operations were quickly called off, said Petty Officer Ryan Fisher, a Coast Guard spokesperson. "It sounds like all parties involved were rescued," he said.

Marine Corps spokesperson Gunnery Sgt. Orlando Perez had no information about what caused the P-8A aircraft to go off the runway at Marine Corps Base Hawaii.

A photo taken by witness Diane Dircks showed the plane in water just offshore, a sight reminiscent of the 2009 "Miracle on the Hudson" when a passenger jet piloted by Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger made an emergency landing on the New York river. All 155 people aboard survived.

The P-8A and the Airbus A320 that Sullenberger piloted are roughly the same size.

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Dircks and her family had just returned to the dock after rainy weather cut their pontoon boat trip short when her daughter noticed the plane in the water.

"We went running over to the end of the dock, and I took some pictures," she said.

Dircks, who is visiting from Illinois, said her daughter keeps a pair of binoculars on her for birdwatching, so she was able to see the plane and the rescue boats arriving.

"It was unbelievable," she said.

The Honolulu Fire Department received a 911 call for a downed aircraft shortly after 2 p.m., spokesperson Malcolm K. Medrano said in an email. It was cloudy and rainy at the time. Visibility was about 1 mile (1.6 kilometers), said Thomas Vaughan, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Honolulu.

The P-8A is often used to hunt for submarines and for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. It is manufactured by Boeing and shares many parts with the 737 commercial jet.

The plane belongs to the Skinny Dragons of Patrol Squadron 4 stationed at Whidbey Island in Washington state. Patrol squadrons were once based at Kaneohe Bay, but now deploy to Hawaii on a rotational basis.

Marine Corps Base Hawaii is about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Honolulu on Oahu. The base houses about 9,300 military personnel and 5,100 family members. It's one of several key military installations on Oahu.

The base sits on Kaneohe Bay, which is home to coral reefs, a breeding ground for hammerhead sharks and a University of Hawaii marine biology research institute.

Israeli troops battle militants across north Gaza, which has been without power or water for weeks

By WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli troops battled Palestinian militants in an urban refugee camp and outside a nearby hospital Tuesday as the army expanded operations across northern Gaza, where residents have been without electricity or reliable access to water, food and other basics for weeks.

The front line of the war, now in its seventh week, shifted to the Jabaliya refugee camp, a dense warren of concrete buildings near Gaza City that houses families displaced in the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. Israel has bombarded the area for weeks, and the military said Hamas fighters have regrouped there and in other eastern districts after being pushed out of much of Gaza City.

Fighting has also intensified outside the nearby Indonesian Hospital, where Palestinian health officials said a strike killed 12 people Monday. They said Tuesday that hundreds of patients and displaced people are trapped inside with dwindling supplies after some 200 were evacuated the day before.

Senior Hamas officials, meanwhile, said they were close to reaching a deal through international mediators to release some of the estimated 240 people taken hostage by the group in its Oct. 7 attack into Israel that triggered the war. The talks have repeatedly stalled and past predictions of a breakthrough proved premature.

In southern Lebanon, an Israeli strike killed two journalists with Al-Mayadeen TV, according to the Pan-Arab network and Lebanese officials. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, which has repeatedly traded fire with the Hezbollah militant group since the outbreak of the war.

DIRE CONDITIONS IN NORTH AND SOUTH

The war has exacted a heavy toll on Palestinian civilians, particularly those who remain in the north after Israel repeatedly called on people to flee south.

It's unclear how many stayed behind, but the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees estimates that some 160,000 people are still in its shelters there, even though it is no longer able to provide services. Some 1.7 million Palestinians, about three-fourths of Gaza's population, have fled their homes, many packing into U.N.-run schools and other facilities across the territory's south.

As shelters have overflowed, people have been forced to sleep on the streets outside, even as winter rains have pelted the coastal enclave in recent days. There are shortages of food, water and fuel for generators across all of Gaza, which has had no central electricity for over a month.

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Israel continues to strike what it says are militant targets throughout Gaza, including in the southern evacuation zone, often killing women and children, and officials have indicated it may soon expand its operations in the south.

FIGHTING IN JABALIYA AND AROUND HOSPITALS

Israel's military said forces are "preparing the battlefield" in the area of Jabaliya, saying they struck three tunnel shafts where fighters were hiding and destroyed rocket launchers. Footage released by the military showed Israeli soldiers patrolling on foot as gunfire echoed around them.

Residents said there had been heavy fighting as Israeli forces tried to advance under the cover of airstrikes. "The (Israeli) occupation is trying to besiege the camp," said Hamza Abu Mansour, a university student. "They are facing stiff resistance."

It was not possible to independently confirm details of the fighting.

In the face of airstrikes and advancing Israeli troops, tens of thousands of Palestinians in the north had sheltered in hospitals, but those have steadily been emptied as the fighting reached their gates, and most are no longer operational.

The hospital situation in Gaza is "catastrophic," Michael Ryan, a senior World Health Organization official, said Monday. In the north, "it is the worst you can imagine."

Munir al-Boursh, a senior Health Ministry official who said he was inside the Indonesian Hospital, told Al-Jazeera television by phone that Israeli forces had besieged it, forcing health workers to bury 50 bodies in the courtyard. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

Palestinian officials said an Israeli shell struck the hospital on Monday, killing 12 people. Israel denied shelling the hospital, but said its troops returned fire on militants who targeted them from inside.

Up to 600 wounded people and some 2,000 displaced Palestinians remain stranded at the hospital, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

A similar standoff played out in recent days at Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, where over 250 patients and medical workers are stranded after the evacuation of 31 premature babies.

Israel has provided evidence in recent days of a militant presence at Shifa. But it has yet to substantiate its claims that Hamas had a major command center beneath the facility, allegations denied by Hamas and hospital staff.

RISING TOLL

More than 12,700 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry in the West Bank. Officials there say another 4,000 are missing. Their counts do not differentiate between civilians and combatants. Israel says it has killed thousands of militants.

The ministry bases its count on information gathered by its counterpart in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which has been unable to fully update casualty figures for more than 10 days because of the breakdown in services and communications in the north.

About 1,200 people have been killed on the Israeli side, mainly civilians during the Oct. 7 attack. The military says 68 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza ground operations.

TALKS ON HOSTAGES

Israel, the United States and Qatar, which mediates with Hamas, have negotiated for weeks over a hostage release that would be paired with a temporary cease-fire and the entry of more aid.

Izzat Rishq, a senior Hamas official, said Tuesday that an agreement could be reached "in the coming hours," in which Hamas would release captives and Israel would release Palestinian prisoners. Hamas' leader-in-exile, Ismail Haniyeh, also said they were close to a deal.

Israel's war Cabinet met with representatives of the hostages' families Monday evening. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told families the government considers the release of hostages and the defeat of Hamas to be equally important, according to a relative who attended.

Udi Goren, whose cousin Tal Chaimi is in captivity in Gaza, said that was "incredibly disappointing," as Israel has said it could take months to dismantle the militant group.

Putin, Xi and UN Secretary-General Guterres to attend virtual meeting on Israel-Hamas war

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leaders from the BRICS bloc of developing countries will hold a virtual meeting on the Israel-Hamas war on Tuesday, with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also participating.

The leaders of fellow BRICS members Brazil, India and South Africa, as well as of Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, which are set to join the bloc in January, will also take part, according to the office of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Ramaphosa will chair the "extraordinary meeting" because of South Africa's position as current chair of BRICS, his office said. It said the leaders are expected to deliver statements on the "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza and will likely adopt a joint statement.

The meeting comes a day after China's top diplomat hosted the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Indonesia in Beijing, their first stop on a tour of U.N. Security Council permanent members. The meeting underlined China's longstanding support for the Palestinians and its growing geopolitical influence.

Russia has adopted a more cautious approach to the Israel-Hamas war, but also has an opportunity to advance its role as a global power broker.

Putin has condemned the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants on towns in southern Israel that sparked Israel's offensive in Gaza. More than 12,700 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry in the West Bank. Officials there say another 4,000 are missing.

But Putin has also warned Israel over its response and against blockading the Gaza Strip.

Russia and China are leading voices in BRICS, which has largely cast itself in recent years as standing against the perceived dominance of the West in global affairs. But it has also struggled to adopt united policies or positions on many issues because of the differing priorities of the five current members.

India, which also wants to be seen as a leader of the developing world, has long walked a tightrope between Israel and the Palestinians and historically has close ties to both.

South Africa has been fiercely critical of Israel over the war in Gaza and has filed a request with the International Criminal Court to investigate it over alleged war crimes. South Africa has for years compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank with the apartheid regime of racial segregation.

South Africa's Parliament is to vote on a motion on Tuesday to shut down the Israeli Embassy and sever ties with the country over the war. Israel on Monday recalled its ambassador to South Africa for discussions.

Live updates | Hamas officials say hostage agreement could be reached soon

By The Associated Press undefined

Senior Hamas officials said Tuesday that an agreement could be reached soon in which the militant group would release hostages and Israel would free Palestinian prisoners.

Israel, the United States and Qatar, which mediates with Hamas, have been negotiating for weeks over a hostage release that would be paired with a temporary cease-fire in Gaza and the entry of more humanitarian aid. Similar predictions of a hostage agreement in recent weeks have proven premature.

Israel's army is widening its operations across northern Gaza, where they battled Palestinian militants on Tuesday in the densely populated Jabaliya refugee camp, the territory's largest.

The military said forces are "preparing the battlefield" in the Jabaliya area, just north of Gaza City, and have killed dozens of militants in recent days. Troops discovered three tunnel shafts where fighters were hiding and destroyed rocket launchers, it said.

It wasn't possible to independently confirm details of the fighting. A strike on a nearby hospital killed 12 people on Monday as Israeli troops and tanks battled militants outside its gates.

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Israel says Hamas uses civilians and hospitals as shields, while critics say Israel's siege and relentless aerial bombardment amount to collective punishment of the territory's 2.3 million Palestinians after Hamas' Oct. 7 rampage into southern Israel.

More than 12,700 Palestinians — two-thirds of them women and minors — have been killed since the war began, according to Palestinian health authorities, who do not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths. About 4,000 people are reported missing.

Some 1,200 people have been killed in Israel, mostly during the Oct. 7 attack, and around 240 were taken captive by militants.

Currently:

- Israel reveals signs of Hamas activity at Shifa, but a promised command center remains elusive
- AP Photos: Babies born prematurely in Gaza have been evacuated to Egypt
- Cyprus' president says his country is ready to ship aid to Gaza
- Ukrainians who fled their country for Israel find themselves again living with war
- 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:

OFFICIALS OF MUSLIM NATIONS VISIT SECURITY COUNCIL PERMANENT MEMBERS TO PUSH FOR CEASE-FIRE

ANKARA, Turkey — Senior officials from eight Muslim countries and territories are visiting the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and other nations in an attempt to secure an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid, a Turkish official said Tuesday.

The official said the group -- made up of representatives of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Qatar, Jordan and the Palestinian territories -- has already visited China and is due in Russia on Tuesday. The secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was also taking part in the talks.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan will participate in the group's visits to London and Paris on Wednesday, said the official, who provided the information on condition of anonymity in line with Turkish government protocol.

The group was formed on Nov. 11 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, during a meeting of the OIC and the Arab League, according to the official.

By Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey.

ISRAELI STRIKE KILLS TWO TV JOURNALISTS ALONG LEBANON-ISRAEL BORDER

BEIRUT -- An Israeli strike in southern Lebanon killed two journalists for Beirut-based Al-Mayadeen TV who were reporting on violence along the tense Lebanon-Israel border, Lebanese Information Minister Ziad Makary and the station said Tuesday.

The Pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV identified the journalists as correspondent Farah Omar and cameraman Rabih Maamari. The station, which is politically allied with the militant Hezbollah group, said the journalists were killed in an Israeli airstrike.

The Israeli military said it was looking into the reports.

Last week, the Israeli government blocked Al-Mayadeen TV from broadcasting in Israel.

The state-run National News Agency said Israel's military struck the outskirts of Teir Harfa and the nearby village of Majdal Zoun.

NNA also reported that an Israeli strike on a home in the border village of Kfar Kila killed an 80-year-old woman, Laiqa Serhan, and wounded her granddaughter.

Israeli shelling of southern Lebanon on Oct. 14 killed Reuters videojournalist Issam Abdallah and wounded other journalists from Agence France-Presse and Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV.

The Lebanon-Israel border has been experiencing daily exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israeli troops. The clashes began a day after the Palestinian Hamas group attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking more than 240 hostages.

IRAN-BACKED YEMEN REBELS' ATTACK ON SHIP RAISES RISKS IN RED SEA

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DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The helicopter-borne Houthi attack on an Israel-linked ship in the Red Sea highlights the danger now lurking in one of the world's key shipping routes as the Israel-Hamas war rages, as well as the rebels' tactics mirroring those of its chief sponsor, Iran.

While Tehran has denied aiding the Yemen rebel group in launching their attack Sunday, the targeted ship before the assault passed by an American-sanctioned Iranian cargo vessel suspected as serving as a forward spying base in the Red Sea. The rebels, dressed commando-style in bulletproof vests carrying assault rifles, covered each other and moved in military formation before quickly seizing control of the bridge of the Galaxy Leader.

While their body-camera footage serves as a propaganda coup to bolster their own position in Yemen amid some protests against their rule, it also signals a new maritime front has opened in a region long focused on the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth at the Strait of Hormuz. It also puts new pressure on commercial shippers traveling through those waters, threatens to increase insurance costs that will get passed onto consumers and likely further stretches the U.S. Navy as it tries to serve as the region's security guarantor.

BRICS NATIONS TO DISCUSS WAR, HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leaders from the BRICS bloc of developing countries will hold a virtual meeting on the Israel-Hamas war on Tuesday, with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also participating.

The leaders of fellow BRICS members Brazil, India and South Africa, as well as of Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, which are set to join the bloc in January, will also take part, according to the office of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Ramaphosa will chair the "extraordinary meeting" because of South Africa's position as current chair of BRICS, his office said. It said the leaders are expected to deliver statements on the "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza and will likely adopt a joint statement.

The meeting comes a day after China's top diplomat hosted the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Indonesia in Beijing, their first stop on a tour of U.N. Security Council permanent members.

PRIME MINISTERS OF SPAIN, BELGIUM TO VISIT MIDEAST FOR TALKS ON WAR

MADRID — Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Belgium's Alexander de Croo will visit Egypt this week after traveling to Israel and the Palestinian territories, the Spanish government said.

The trip is to discuss the impact of the Hamas attack against Israel on Oct. 7, and the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, it said.

Spain currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council and Belgium will take over the presidency in January.

They will meet with Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as the president of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, on Thursday. On Friday they will visit Cairo and meet with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and the secretary general of the Cairo-based Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

Spain, which condemned the Hamas attack and defended Israel's right to protect itself while respecting international humanitarian law, has called for a cease-fire and an international peace conference to resolve the conflict.

HAMAS OFFICIAL SAYS AGREEMENT ON HOSTAGE RELEASE COULD COME SOON

BEIRUT -- Israel, the United States and Qatar, which mediates with Hamas, have been negotiating for weeks over a hostage release that would be paired with a temporary cease-fire in Gaza and the entry of more humanitarian aid.

Hamas has released four hostages, Israel has rescued one, and the bodies of two were found near Shifa.

Izzat Rishq, a senior Hamas official, said Tuesday that an agreement could be reached "in the coming hours" in which Hamas would release captives and Israel would release Palestinian prisoners. Hamas' leader in exile, Ismail Haniyeh, also said they were close to a deal, but similar predictions in recent weeks have proven premature.

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Israel's three-member war Cabinet met with representatives of the hostages' families on Monday evening. A relative of a hostage said the officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told families the government considers the release of hostages and the defeat of Hamas to be "equally important."

Udi Goren, whose cousin Tal Chaimi is in captivity in Gaza, said that was "incredibly disappointing" for the families, as Israel has said it could take months to dismantle the militant group.

"We will not stop fighting until we bring the hostages home, destroy Hamas and ensure that there is no more of a threat from Gaza," Netanyahu said on social media after the meeting.

Hamas gunmen and their allies captured more 240 hostages during their deadly Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel in which they also killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians.

ISRAEL RECALLS AMBASSADOR TO SOUTH AFRICA AHEAD OF VOTE ON FATE OF EMBASSY

JOHANNESBURG — Israel has recalled its ambassador to South Africa, Eliav Belotserkovsky, ahead of a parliamentary vote in the African country to decide the fate of the Israeli Embassy.

Tensions have risen between the two countries over Israel's war in Gaza. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has said his country believes Israel is committing war crimes and genocide in Gaza, where thousands of Palestinians have been killed.

"Following the latest South African statements, the Ambassador of Israel to Pretoria has been recalled to Jerusalem for consultations," Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said late Monday on X, formerly known as Twitter.

South Africa's parliament is to vote on a motion to shut down the Israeli Embassy and cut all ties with Israel until a cease-fire is implemented in Gaza.

The motion introduced by the leftist opposition party Economic Freedom Fighters has the backing of the governing African National Congress and other smaller parties.

South Africa announced last week that it has referred what it called Israel's "genocide" in Gaza to the International Criminal Court for an investigation, with its Cabinet calling on the ICC to issue an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

AWARD-WINNING PALESTINIAN POET ARRESTED BY ISRAELI TROOPS, BROTHER SAYS

TEL AVIV, Israel — The brother of an award-winning Palestinian poet in Gaza says he has been arrested by Israeli troops and his whereabouts are unknown.

Mosab Abu Toha has been contributing pieces to Western media since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, painting a dire image of its toll on civilians through his personal experience. His brother, Hamza Abu Toha, posted on X, formerly Twitter, on Monday that Mosab was arrested while evacuating to southern Gaza, following Israeli military orders. Hamza said his brother's wife and children were allowed to continue south, but "the military detained my brother."

Mosab Abu Toha last posted on X on Nov. 15, writing "Alive. Thanks for your prayers."

The literary and free expression organization PEN said it was concerned about the arrest and demanded to know Abu Toha's whereabouts and the reason for his arrest. The New Yorker magazine, to which Abu Toha has contributed multiple articles, called for his safe return.

The Israeli military said it was looking into the reports.

INDONESIA CONDEMNS ISRAELI ATTACK ON HOSPITAL IN GAZA

JAKARTA, Indonesia -- Indonesia strongly condemns the Israeli attack on the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza which killed a number of civilians, its foreign minister said.

"The attack is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. All countries, especially those that have close relations with Israel, must use all their influence and capabilities to urge Israel to stop its atrocities," Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi said in a statement Monday.

The ministry said it has lost contact with three Indonesian citizens who were volunteers at the Indonesian Hospital, which is funded by Indonesia, and is seeking information about them from the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

About 200 people were evacuated from the hospital after it was caught up in fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas militants on Monday.

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Ashraf al-Qudra, a spokesperson for Hamas' Health Ministry, said the evacuees were taken to southern Gaza in a rescue effort coordinated by the U.N. and Red Cross. Many of the injured evacuees are being treated at al-Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, he said.

Between 400 and 500 more wounded people remain at Indonesian Hospital, al-Qudra said in an interview with Al-Jazeera.

The evacuations came after 12 people were killed when a shell struck the second floor of the hospital, according to the Health Ministry and a medical worker at the hospital. Both blamed Israel, which denied shelling the hospital, saying its troops returned fire at militants who targeted them from inside the compound.

10 years later, a war-weary Ukraine reflects on events that began its collision course with Russia

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — It happens every November, when the cold descends on Kyiv. The change in weather always makes Dmytro Riznychenko think back, and he is overwhelmed by his emotions.

"This is where it truly began," Riznychenko said, walking through central Kyiv's Independence Square recently, reflecting on the uprising that unleashed a decade of momentous change for Ukraine, eventually leading to the current war with Russia.

"Ten years of war and struggle," the 41-year-old psychologist continued, wearily and reluctantly. "And it seems like the blood has only just begun to flow, truly. I regret nothing. But, God, it's just so tiresome."

On Nov. 21, 2013, the Moscow-friendly president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, announced he was shelving an agreement to bring the country closer to the European Union and instead would deepen ties with President Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Outraged crowds soon filled Independence Square for peaceful anti-government protests. Later, after riot police used truncheons and tear gas to disperse the people, demonstrators set up tent camps with barricades, self-defense units and banners with revolutionary slogans. In response to the police violence, hundreds of thousands joined the demonstrations in early December.

The standoff reached a climax in February 2014, when police unleashed a brutal crackdown on the protests and dozens of people were slain between Feb. 18-21, many by police snipers. A European-mediated peace deal between the government and protest leaders envisioned the formation of a transition government and holding an early election, but demonstrators later seized government buildings, and Yanukovich fled to Russia.

The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance said 107 people were killed in the uprising.

Kateryna Gladka was a 23-year-old student when she joined the pro-Western crowds at the time, viewing it as the "revolution of her generation."

"For me, the top priority was the value of freedom, basic freedom, and dignity."

"We had to prevent a totalitarian regime and the return of Soviet things," Gladka said in a telephone interview.

She recalls the police violence and blood staining the street near Independence Square, and "I very clearly understood that we had entered another stage."

After Yanukovich's ouster, Russia responded in March 2014 by illegally annexing Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Then, separatist forces backed by Moscow began an uprising in the eastern Ukraine region known as the Donbas, which grew into a long-running conflict, leaving thousands dead.

Finally, in February 2022, Putin launched his war that continues to this day, with tens of thousands of deaths on both sides amid Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

"Yanukovich was that puppet, a figure for Moscow, which hoped to use him as a person to keep Ukraine on the Russian leash," said Kateryna Zarembo, an analyst at the Kyiv-based think tank, The New Europe Center. "When he fled, it became clear to the Kremlin that they were losing Ukraine."

Asked Tuesday about the 10th anniversary of the start of the uprising in Kyiv, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry

Peskov reiterated Russia's view that it was "a coup, a forceful coup financed from abroad."

Ukrainians in 2013 had wanted the country to enter into a deal with the EU, but Putin pressured Yanukovich to pull out at the last minute. Ukrainian leaders who followed were more eager than ever to bring Kyiv into the Western fold.

"So what we saw in 2022 — that Ukraine had to be either part of Russia or destroyed — those intentions were seen earlier," Zarembo said. "When that didn't happen, Russia intervened militarily."

Despite the calamities, Ukraine has become more united than in its 32 years of independence and has drawn closer to the EU, the United States and the West in general — an outcome Putin had tried to prevent. Today, under President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the country has won widespread support and admiration amid the Russian invasion.

"All of this came at a very high cost," Riznychenko said.

Standing on the Alley of Heavenly Hundred, so named to honor those killed in the uprising, he recalled the sniper fire from a special police unit known as Berkut, which was disbanded in 2014.

"There was a feeling that death had opened its arms," Riznychenko said.

"It was cold, I remember how the dead were lying. I remember them under blankets near the Main Post Office. That I remember," he added.

Now, their portraits are on permanent display on the street honoring those slain in what Ukraine calls its Revolution of Dignity, and Riznychenko said he later memorized the names. In 2014, he volunteered to fight in eastern Ukraine against the Moscow-backed separatists, and was injured in Ilovaik.

Investigations of the shootings are continuing, and the Prosecutor General's Office recently indicted five members of the Berkut police unit, all now living in Russia. Another 35 people are being investigated.

Independence Square today also features a multitude of small blue-and-yellow flags, with each symbolizing a fallen soldier in the war. Their numbers grow daily.

Every year, Gladka gathers with friends at a nearby restaurant, aptly named The Last Barricade, to commemorate the uprising. But after 21 months of war with Russia, the date brings conflicting emotions.

"To be honest, I am personally very tired of the fact that every generation has to die for Ukraine," she said, noting that 10 years of her youth have been stained by violence, and she now wants a "normal and ordinary life."

"This endless struggle is like some closed circle that just lasts for centuries," she said.

Israel recalls ambassador ahead of South African parliamentary vote to shut down Israeli embassy

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Israel has recalled its ambassador to South Africa, Eliav Belotserkovsky, back to Jerusalem "for consultations" ahead of a parliamentary vote in the African country to decide the fate of the Israeli embassy on Tuesday.

The two countries' diplomatic relations have recently witnessed a rise in tensions over the Israeli war on Gaza. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa previously said his country believes Israel is committing war crimes and genocide in Gaza, where thousands of Palestinians have been killed.

"Following the latest South African statements, the Ambassador of Israel to Pretoria has been recalled to Jerusalem for consultations," Israel's ministry of foreign affairs posted late Monday on X, formerly known as Twitter.

This came ahead of a vote in South Africa's parliament on a motion to shut down the Israeli embassy and cut all ties with Israel until a cease-fire is implemented in Gaza.

The motion tabled by the leftist opposition party Economic Freedom Fighters has the backing of the ruling African National Congress and other smaller parties.

South Africa announced last week that it had referred what it called Israel's "genocide" in Gaza to the International Criminal Court for an investigation, with its cabinet calling on the ICC Monday to issue an

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arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Given that much of the global community is witnessing the commission of these crimes in real time, including statements of genocidal intent by many Israeli leaders, we expect that warrants of arrest for these leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, should be issued shortly," South African minister in the presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, told reporters Monday.

Earlier this month, South Africa recalled its ambassador to Israel and withdrew all its diplomatic staff from the country.

The conflict will also be the subject of a virtual meeting of BRICS countries on Tuesday, which will be attended by leaders of the bloc, including Ramaphosa, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The economic bloc was formed by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009 and added South Africa in 2010. Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Egypt and Ethiopia are also set to enter BRICS.

The Israel-Hamas war erupted after the Palestinian militant group's surprise attacks on Israel on Oct. 7 killed about 1,200 people. Israel's retaliatory strikes on Gaza have so far killed more than 12,700 people, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Precious water: As more of the world thirsts, luxury water becoming fashionable among the elite

By MARTHA IRVINE and DAR YASIN Associated Press

SAMTSE, Bhutan (AP) — Monsoon rains have finally passed and floods blocking the lone dirt road have retreated enough for a small truck to climb these Himalayan foothills to a gurgling spring. It spews water so fresh that people here call it nectar.

Workers inside a small plant ferry sleek glass bottles along a conveyer. The bottles, filled with a whoosh of this natural mineral water, are labeled, packed into cases and placed inside a truck for a long ride.

Ganesh Iyer, who heads the operation, watches like a nervous dad, later pulling out his phone, as any proud parent might, to show the underground cavern the waters have formed in this pristine kingdom, the world's last Shangri-La.

This is no ordinary water. It will travel hundreds of miles to some of India's luxury hotels, restaurants and richest families, who pay about \$6 per bottle, roughly a day's wage for an Indian laborer. Millions of people worldwide don't have clean water to drink, even though the United Nations deemed water a basic human right more than a decade ago.

Yet, even as extreme heat dries up more aquifers and wells and leaves more people thirsty, luxury water has become fashionable among the world's privileged, who uncap and taste it like fine wine.

This "fine water" is drawn from volcanic rock in Hawaii, from icebergs that have fallen from melting glaciers in Norway, or from droplets of morning mist in Tasmania.

Connoisseurs, some who study to become water sommeliers, insist this trend isn't about snobbishness. They appreciate the purest of the pure.

"Water is not just water," says Michael Mascha, a founder of the Fine Water Society, a consortium of small bottlers and distributors worldwide. He likens consumers of high-end water to foodies who'd drive miles to find heirloom tomatoes or a rare salt. Some drink fine water instead of alcohol.

"Having the right stemware, drinking at the right temperature, pairing it with food, celebrating with water — all those kinds of things are important."

As a truck rolls out of the Bhutanese bottling plant, operated by Veen Waters India, the 40-some line workers take a tea break along a short row of employee housing. They check their mobile phones and chat, while birds chirp in the background. Laundry hung out to dry flaps in a subtle breeze. It's a steamy day, even at this higher elevation.

Up a hillside behind them is a mineral spring, once a source of fresh water for nearby villagers, who used bamboo rods as pipes to help funnel some of the steadily flowing clear current into buckets they carried

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home. Now that source, which Veen purchased from the previous owner more than a decade ago, is kept behind a locked gate for safekeeping.

Veen's business slowed to a trickle during the pandemic, says Iyer, Veen's managing partner. But now the company is exporting about 20,000 cases — or 240,000 bottles — of the water into India each month, minus the occasional few that break on their bumpy multiple-day trek. He figures they've tapped only about 10% of the potential market so far.

After crossing into India, the trucks carrying the bottled water run through lush green Darjeeling tea plantations, past road signs marking elephant crossings and the occasional cluster of teenage boys cooling off in a rain catchment next to rural villages dotted with banana trees.

Eventually, the cases are delivered to luxury hotels and restaurants many hundreds of miles away in cities like New Delhi, Pune and Mumbai, where Veen is headquartered.

A few wealthy families get weekly shipments. Iyer jokes that the richest of the rich buy so much that they "probably bathe in it."

Market reports predict even greater demand for premium water worldwide in years to come. In India — now the most populous country in the world, with a rising standard of living and growing concerns about water quality — Veen is poised to help satisfy that demand.

For many Indians, however, the story of water is very different, including in Mumbai's Dharavi neighborhood, one of Asia's largest slums, jammed with working families.

There, water arrives in municipal pipelines just once a day, from about 6 to 9 a.m., setting off a flurry of activity as the day's crushing heat arrives in spring and summer.

The three-hour window for water shapes the neighborhood's rituals. Men in shorts or underwear lather up in a bath area. Their upbeat banter is constant as they prepare for the day. Residents of this labyrinth of narrow alleyways and small homes brush their teeth while standing on front porches, spitting toothpaste into water that runs along the uneven blocks of concrete on the ground. They fill up buckets and reclaimed bottles to keep water at home. A few women wash aluminum pots and pans or briskly scrub T-shirts, scarves and other clothing.

Still others are more desperate, such as Rekha Nagesh Pawar, who lives with her four children in a tent made out of blue plastic tarps along a busy Mumbai roadway. The water she gets from a neighbor, when he's feeling charitable, has been siphoned illegally from a public system with a garden hose. She says her husband, a mason, died from a heart attack in 2021, leaving her to beg for money for food.

She frets that there's often not enough water to bathe her children or wash their clothes. "We have to live in filth," the weary-eyed woman says.

It's hard for her to fathom that someone would pay a day's wages for a bottle of fancy water.

Veen is far from the most expensive in the fine water category. The rarest of all, often bottled in collectable glass, sell for hundreds of dollars apiece.

This scene was on full display when members of the Fine Water Society gathered in April at a swanky hotel in Athens, Greece, for their annual international tasting competition and symposium.

With bottles and glasses lined up before them, judges from several countries sampled various brands, swishing gulps of water and sometimes spitting mouthfuls into canisters, as wine tasters do. Spectators seated before them watched intently. Many were bottlers who'd come to compete.

The judges flipped cards to indicate their scores for each entrant: 92, 98, and so on.

"Who wins here? It's really sometimes very hard to predict," says Mascha, who served as a judge. "There's always a sleeper."

Twenty years ago, people mocked his fascination with water, which grew from his doctor's insistence that he quit drinking alcohol. He searched for alternatives that might enrapture him the same way a complex bottle of cabernet once had.

As he tried more waters from small batch bottlers, he discovered like-minded water devotees. That group has only grown.

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They discuss “virginity,” or purity. They learn about “terroir,” the environment in which water originates. They compare the total dissolved solids, or TDS.

Waters with low TDS are more like rainwater that hasn’t touched the earth. Those with high TDS — such as Vichy mineral water from thermal springs in France and Catalan — have robust mineral content that may include calcium, magnesium, potassium or sodium, among others.

A few restaurants in countries such as Spain and the United States now have menus that pair food with particular types of fine water. A bolder mineral water, for instance, might be suggested as a companion for a charbroiled steak. More subtle rainwater might be paired with fish.

This year’s champions in each category, from still water to sparkling and super-low minerality to high, came from Austria, New Zealand, Panama, Scandinavia and other parts of the world.

Awards, however, do not guarantee success in what can be a very competitive business, especially for the mom-and-pop bottlers.

“Every brand has to find its unique selling point,” says Jamal Qureshi, founder of the now-defunct Svalbardi Polar Iceberg Water, based on the far-north Norwegian island of Svalbard. “If it’s just like, ‘Oh, you know, we’re a special water from wherever,’ it’s hard to stand out.”

His company, once a rising star in the fine water scene and winner of awards, sold melted Arctic icebergs, bottled in fancy glass containers, online.

The idea was to harvest small floating remnants of glaciers to tell the story of climate change, the proliferation of greenhouse gases and its direct impact on the disappearing Arctic landscape.

People paid \$100 (US) for a bottle of Svalbardi. Often, the company sold out.

Then in late 2020, a shipment of 15,000 empty bottles from a supplier arrived broken and scratched, forcing the fledgling company to close down.

Without its opulent packaging, the average consumer might fail to taste the difference in these waters. Even sommeliers say it can take months of practice to determine the subtleties.

“Please smell my water and tell me how good or bad it is,” people sometimes tease Iyer, of Veen, when they learn he’s a certified water sommelier — India’s first, he says. He takes no offense.

But Mascha, of the Fine Water Society, is quick to differentiate fine water from “mega-corporations that exploit water.”

Water sold in clear plastic bottles that are ubiquitous the world over is often simply filtered municipal water that’s distilled and bottled from any number of sources. In many instances, Mascha says, a water filter on your tap would produce the same result, with far less impact on the environment.

When it comes to fine water, he says natural spring water, for instance, must come from a single source and be bottled near that source. He calls the bottlers in his society small “water farmers.”

Solutions to the world’s water problems won’t come easily.

That is the reality of life in water-stressed countries like India, a country that has 18% of the world’s population, but only 4% of its water, according to the World Bank.

Water shortages have sparked protests and conflict. Last year, a man was stabbed and killed in a fight over water in the town of Aurangabad, north of Mumbai.

The Indian government has promised that every household will soon have plumbing and running water — a goal set for this year that has yet to be reached.

“But just because we spend money and put the pipes in, doesn’t mean that people will actually have water in their taps,” says Veena Srinivasan, executive director of WELL Labs, a research institution in Bengaluru, India, that studies water sustainability.

Climate change has only worsened droughts and heatwaves and put more pressure on India’s underground aquifers, as well as rivers that also are polluted by industry, farming and sewage.

India is among many countries that have built huge plants to desalinate sea water. Others, including Singapore, are collecting and cleaning up storm and wastewater to try to solve their water woes.

But solutions like those are in their infancy in many countries, if they exist at all.

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That means the commodification of water, and those who profit from it, are likely to become more contentious. Fine water is certainly a commodity too, though its connoisseurs and those who bottle often speak of the importance of respecting and conserving an increasingly precious resource.

Even for them, luxury water is often just that – a luxury.

Iyer only drinks Veen when out at a restaurant. At home, he and his wife consume tap water after boiling it. As many do, he likes to store it in a matka, an Indian red clay pot that is a water cooler. He also still bathes with a bucket, while sitting on a stool, a common Indian custom that also saves water.

“On one hand, we consider water to be holy and divine,” Iyer says. “But we take it for granted. We believe water will always be there.”

In Bhutan, Buddhist prayer flags are a common sight -- squares of five colors, strung along bridges and at meditation stops next to scenic mountain roadways. Blue represents space. Red is for fire; yellow is earth; white is air.

Green symbolizes water, a revered resource in a country known for its environmental stewardship.

It is a common custom to place the purest spring water in bowls as a sacred offering in a home or a temple.

Water also has economic benefits for the kingdom, where an abundance of rivers and a small population of about 700,000 mean there is a surplus of hydroelectricity to export, much of it to neighboring India.

Here, water is both pure, and powerful.

Tshering Bumpa, the longtime manager of the Veen bottling facility, understands the significance.

“We are so proud of our water,” says Bumpa, who has dressed in colorful Bhutanese traditional garments to welcome rare visitors to this remote spot in the jungle.

There is enough water to share. At least for now.

Ukrainians who fled their country for Israel find themselves yet again living with war

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

ASHKELON, Israel (AP) — Tatyana Prima thought she'd left the bombs behind when she fled Ukraine more than a year and a half ago, after Russia decimated her city, Mariupol. The 38-year-old escaped with her injured husband and young daughter, bringing the family to safety in southern Israel.

The calm she was slowly regaining shattered again on Oct. 7, when Hamas militants invaded.

“All these sounds of war that we hear now, they sometimes work as a trigger that brings back memories of what we've gone through in Mariupol,” she said. “It's hard feeling like that you're the one responsible for your child, the one who wants what's best for them, and in some way like you've failed them.”

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, more than 45,000 Ukrainians have sought refuge in Israel, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics and aid groups. Like Prima, most of them were slowly picking up the pieces of their lives and finding ways to cope when the war in Israel erupted. Now they are reliving their trauma. Some have left Israel, but many remain — refusing to again flee a war. Most have lost in-person support systems due to restrictions around gatherings. Others have lost hope of reuniting with loved ones they left behind.

On Oct. 7, when Hamas militants attacked, killing some 1,200 people and taking about 240 hostages, Prima awoke to the sound of alarms. She lives in the coastal city of Ashkelon, a few kilometers (miles) from the Gaza Strip. The thud of airstrikes and shelling is constant as Israel pushes forward with its offensive. She describes it as “deja vu,” reminding her of the morning in Mariupol that forever changed her life.

Mariupol has been one of Ukraine's hardest-hit cities, besieged and bombarded for weeks as people scrounged for food, water and heat and were cut off from the world with no telecommunications. During the war's early weeks, Prima cooked over an outdoor fire, used snow for drinking water, and sheltered with a dozen relatives on the outskirts of the city, she said.

But the shelling intensified, and rockets fell around them. After her husband's hand was blown off fetch-

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ing water, she decided to leave.

"That day marked a descent into hell," she said.

The family joined a convoy of cars fleeing the city, passing corpses as black ash fell from airstrikes. They went through countless Russian checkpoints and by April 2022 arrived in Israel, where her husband's relatives lived in Ashkelon. Many Ukrainians live in the country's south. There's a large Russian-speaking community, and rent is often lower than in bigger, central cities.

Ashkelon residents were accustomed to occasional rockets from Gaza, but attacks have surged in the war. Air raid sirens are a constant sound. While most rockets are intercepted, about 80 have landed since the war in populated areas or empty fields, accounting for nearly one-third of all Hamas rocket incidents in Israel, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

Shelling sounds remind Prima of her agony in Ukraine, yet she remains stoic when speaking about Israel's war, convinced the army and the country's Iron Dome defense system will protect her family.

But the war has intensified feelings of isolation, she said. Her community support groups have moved online — in-person gatherings are restricted to buildings with bomb shelters because of the threat of attacks.

"There is this tremendous hopelessness that these people are facing," said Dr. Koen Sevenants, a mental health specialist with experience in conflict zones. Sevenants and other experts warn that when people who haven't fully recovered from a traumatic incident are revictimized, the triggering event can often be worse, with risk for depression and anxiety.

Refugee organizations have adapted some of their programs, providing financial assistance and bringing food to people who don't feel safe leaving their homes. But they can't do it all, said Rabbi Olya Weinstein of The Keshet Foundation, which helps some 6,000 people who fled the war in Ukraine and brings families groceries or provides food vouchers.

"Under rockets, it's very hard to be available for everyone," said Weinstein, who hears people's concerns for the future. "They're asking what will happen ... what will happen with Israel, will we remain here forever, will we remain alive, what will happen to our kids?"

Some Ukrainians have been forced to move within Israel since the war began. About 100 children sheltering at a Jewish home in Ashkelon fled soon after Hamas attacked to the center of the country, said Yael Eckstein, of The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, a philanthropic organization that supports the children.

It was the second time they were forced from their home in less than two years — they fled a city near Ukraine's capital and evacuated to Israel during the early weeks of that war. They're struggling to process everything, Eckstein said, with one asking: "Since he's now living in a war zone, why can't he go back to Ukraine?"

Other Ukrainians are trapped in Gaza, with 160 evacuated so far, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. It's unclear how many remain in Hamas-ruled Gaza, where more than 12,700 Palestinians, most of them women and minors, have been killed since the war began, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't differentiate between civilian and militant deaths.

In Israel, Veronika Chotari thought she'd see her 18-year-old daughter, Tereza, for the holidays. Her daughter stayed in Ukraine last year when Chotari sought cancer treatment in Israel for her youngest child, moving into the quiet central town of Petah Tikva. Until October, she'd never heard a siren there, she said.

Now, instead of planning to see each other, the two spend hours texting from bomb shelters, making sure the other is alive.

"I'm worried about you mom, please I know it's impossible but let's find another place for you," Tereza wrote. "I'm tired of all this, I hate these wars."

Israel battles Hamas near another Gaza hospital sheltering thousands

By WAFAA SHURAFU, SAMY MAGDY and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces pressed their offensive against Hamas in northern Gaza on Monday, battling militants around a hospital where thousands of patients and displaced people have been sheltering for weeks, and where despite the fighting health officials managed to evacuate some of the wounded.

A medical worker inside the facility and the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said a shell struck the second floor of the Indonesian Hospital, killing 12 people. Both blamed Israel, which denied shelling the hospital, saying its troops returned fire on militants who targeted them from inside the 3.5-acre (1.4 hectare) compound.

The Israeli offensive came as 28 premature babies evacuated from Gaza City's Shifa Hospital by the World Health Organization were transported to Egypt on Monday. Three others were transferred to an Emirati-run hospital in Rafah in southern Gaza, the Red Crescent said. More than 250 critically ill or wounded patients remain stranded at the Shifa compound, which Israeli forces stormed days ago.

Gaza's hospitals play a prominent role in the battle of narratives over the war's brutal toll on Palestinian civilians, thousands of whom have been killed or buried in rubble since the conflict was sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7 rampage into southern Israel. In the wake of the assault, Israeli leaders vowed to eradicate Hamas, destroy its ability to rule Gaza and uproot its militant infrastructure.

Israel says Hamas uses civilians as human shields and that the militants operated a major command hub inside and under Shifa, a claim hospital officials and Hamas deny. Critics say Israel's siege and relentless bombardment amount to collective punishment of the territory's 2.3 million Palestinians.

Israeli troops were battling Hamas fighters in the Jabaliya refugee camp, a densely built-up district on Gaza City's northeastern side that has been heavily hit by bombardment for weeks. The military said that after moving through the center of the city to Shifa, its forces were now working to uproot Hamas fighters from eastern areas.

Dozens of dead and wounded in airstrikes and shelling overnight flowed into Indonesian Hospital, near Jabaliya, said Marwan Abdallah, the medical worker there. He said Israeli tanks were operating less than 200 meters (yards) away and Israeli snipers could be seen on the roofs of nearby buildings. As he spoke on the phone, the sound of gunfire could be heard in the background.

Hamas' Health Ministry spokesperson, Ashraf al-Qidra, said roughly 200 wounded patients and their companions were evacuated from the hospital to southern Gaza in a rescue effort coordinated by the U.N. and the International Committee for the Red Cross. Many of the evacuees were being treated at al-Nasser hospital in the southern town of Khan Younis, he said.

Between 400 and 500 wounded remain at Indonesia Hospital, Ashraf told Al-Jazeera. Some 2,000 displaced Palestinians also are sheltering there.

In a separate development that could relieve some of the pressure on Gaza's collapsing health system, dozens of trucks entered from Egypt on Monday with equipment from Jordan to set up a field hospital. Jordan's state-run media said the hospital in Khan Younis would be up and running within 48 hours.

CLAIMS ABOUT SHIFA

More than 250 patients with severely infected wounds and other urgent conditions remain in Shifa. The complex can no longer provide most of the wounded there treatment after it ran out of water, medical supplies and fuel for emergency generators.

Israeli forces battled Palestinian militants outside its gates for days before entering the facility on Wednesday.

Israel's army said it has evidence that Hamas maintained a sprawling command post inside and under the hospital's 20-acre (8-hectare) complex, which includes several buildings.

On Sunday, the military released a video showing what it said was a tunnel discovered at the hospital, 55 meters (60 yards) long and about 10 meters (33 feet) below ground. It said the tunnel ended at a

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blast-proof door with a hole in it for gunmen to fire out of. Troops have not opened the door yet, it said. Israeli forces also released security camera video showing what they said were two foreign hostages, one Thai and one Nepalese, who were captured by Hamas in the Oct. 7 attack and taken to the hospital. Hamas said its fighters brought them in for medical care.

The army also said an investigation had determined that Israeli army Cpl. Noa Marciano, another captive whose body was recovered in Gaza, had been wounded in an Israeli strike on Nov. 9 that killed her captor, but was then killed by a Hamas militant in Shifa.

The military has previously released images of several guns it said were found inside an MRI lab and said that the bodies of two hostages were found near the complex.

The Associated Press was not able to independently confirm the military's findings.

THREE IN FOUR PEOPLE DISPLACED

Israel has repeatedly ordered Palestinians to leave northern Gaza and seek refuge in the south, which has also been under aerial bombardment. Some 1.7 million people, nearly three quarters of Gaza's population, have been displaced, with 900,000 packing into crowded U.N.-run shelters, according to the U.N.

Strikes in the Nuseirat and Bureij refugee camps Monday killed at least 40 people, according to hospital officials, and residents said dozens more were buried in the rubble. Bundled against a chilly wind from Gaza's approaching winter, a line of men prayed over more than a dozen bodies on the grounds of the nearby morgue in Deir al-Balah before loading them onto a truck.

More than 12,700 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry in the West Bank, which coordinates with officials in the Health Ministry of Hamas-run Gaza. Officials there say another 4,000 are missing. Their counts do not differentiate between civilians and combatants. Israel says it has killed thousands of militants.

Violence also has surged in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where attacks by Jewish settlers are on the rise and where more than 200 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, mostly in gunbattles triggered by Israeli military raids.

About 1,200 people have been killed on the Israeli side, mainly civilians during the Oct. 7 attack, in which Hamas dragged some 240 captives back into Gaza. The military says 66 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza ground operations.

Hamas has released four hostages, Israel has rescued one, and the bodies of two were found near Shifa.

Israel, the United States and Qatar, which mediates with Hamas, have been negotiating a hostage release for weeks. Israel's three-member war Cabinet met with representatives of the hostages' families Monday evening, and a relative of a hostage said the officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told families the government will not prioritize the hostages' release to defeating Hamas.

"What we've heard is that taking down Hamas and bringing the hostages are ... equally important," said Udi Goren, whose cousin Tal Chaimi is in captivity in Gaza. "This is incredibly disappointing because ... we know that taking down Hamas, we keep hearing from them (it) is going to take months or years and it's going to take a long time."

Goren said the war cabinet did not share details about any possible deal to release the hostages.

A Georgia judge will consider revoking a Trump co-defendant's bond in an election subversion case

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A judge in Atlanta is set to hear arguments Tuesday on a request to revoke the bond of one of former President Donald Trump's co-defendants in the Georgia case related to efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis last week filed a motion asking county Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee to revoke the bond of Harrison Floyd. She wrote in her motion that Floyd has been attempting to intimidate and contact likely witnesses and his co-defendants in violation of the terms of his release.

Floyd's attorneys wrote in a court filing that Willis' allegations are without merit and that the motion is

a “retaliatory measure” against their client. Floyd “neither threatened or intimidated anyone and certainly did not communicate with a witness or co-defendant directly or indirectly,” they wrote.

McAfee set a hearing on Willis’ motion for Tuesday afternoon.

The charges against Floyd relate to allegations of harassment toward Ruby Freeman, a Fulton County election worker who had been falsely accused of election fraud by Trump and his supporters. Floyd took part in a Jan. 4, 2021, conversation in which Freeman was told she “needed protection” and was pressured to lie and say she had participated in election fraud, the indictment says.

Floyd, who was a leader in the organization Black Voices for Trump, was one of 18 people charged along with Trump in a sprawling indictment in August. The indictment accuses them all of participating in a wide-ranging scheme to illegally try to keep the Republican incumbent in power even after he lost the presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden.

Four defendants have pleaded guilty after reaching a deal with prosecutors that includes a promise to testify in any trials in the case. Trump and the others have pleaded not guilty. No trial date has been set, but Willis last week asked McAfee to set it for Aug. 5, 2024.

Floyd was the only defendant in the case who spent time in jail after his indictment because he’s the only one who didn’t have a lawyer reach an agreement on bond conditions before he turned himself in at the Fulton County Jail. The conditions of his release include not communicating directly or indirectly about the facts of the case with any of his co-defendants or any known witnesses.

In her motion to revoke Floyd’s bond, Willis cited numerous posts Floyd had made on social media in the previous weeks. They included repeated attacks on Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and numerous mentions of Freeman, both likely witnesses in the case. In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, he also accused attorney Jenna Ellis, a co-defendant who pleaded guilty last month, of lying.

Willis called these and other posts “intentional and flagrant violations” of his bond conditions.

Floyd’s attorneys noted that while Trump’s bond order specifically mentions the use of social media as part of his bond conditions, Floyd’s does not. They included examples of social media posts that Trump made about his White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, a co-defendant, and about attorney Sidney Powell, who pleaded guilty in the case.

“A review of President Trump’s social media posts make the decision to go after Harrison Floyd hard to justify,” they wrote.

They argue that attempting to “indirectly communicate” with anyone by tagging them on social media is analogous to shouting to someone across a crowded stadium. They also argued that Floyd wouldn’t attack Freeman because he views her as a favorable witness for his defense.

They said that Floyd’s posts are political speech protected by the First Amendment and that Willis is retaliating against him for rejecting a plea offer and subpoenaing Fulton County election records, among other things.

Vivek Ramaswamy struggles to gain traction with Iowa Republicans as critics question his path ahead

By MARGERY A. BECK and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa (AP) — Ten minutes before Vivek Ramaswamy was to take the stage in a dated casino hotel in western Iowa, no one was in the conference room except for two staffers from the Iowa GOP, which organized the event, and a group of journalists.

Guests started trickling in at the time the event was scheduled. By the time Ramaswamy began his remarks an hour later, there were about 60 people.

While Ramaswamy is packing his schedule with stops across Iowa, he has failed to move up in the 2024 Republican primary race and is increasingly at risk of becoming an afterthought. He is polling in the mid to high single digits and has left critics asking what his endgame is or if he is staying in the race only to boost former President Donald Trump.

Ramaswamy is falling behind just as the GOP campaign enters the critical final weeks before the Iowa

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caucuses on Jan. 15. After an earlier flurry of attention, the 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur and first-time political candidate is gaining more notice for his provocations in debates than for signs that his campaign is resonating with voters.

"If viability were the reason to stay in a race, he's long since left that behind," said David Kochel, a Republican strategist who advised Jeb Bush in his 2016 presidential bid. "If you like Vivek Ramaswamy and what he is saying in this campaign, you already have a candidate, and his name is Donald Trump."

Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis are increasingly going after each other as they vie for a distant second place, competing for donors and voters open to a Trump alternative. Former Vice President Mike Pence and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott dropped out after running Iowa-focused campaigns that didn't gain traction.

Ramaswamy's campaign said in early November that it would spend up to \$8 million in advertising through the Iowa caucuses on Jan. 15. So far, the campaign has booked just \$162,000 in broadcast and digital ads for the rest of the Iowa campaign, according to data from the media tracking firm AdImpact.

Haley and her allied super PAC have reserved nearly \$3.5 million over that same period, while DeSantis and his allied super PAC have booked more than \$3.3 million.

Tricia McLaughlin, Ramaswamy's campaign spokeswoman, said that events hosted by the campaign are drawing more people lately, noting that a sizable number of eventgoers are not registered as Republicans.

"We are reaching young people," she said. "These people are taking the time and effort to come out. These people are not even being polled because they are not your typical caucusgoer."

Ramaswamy has suggested policy ideas that he says carry on Trump's "America First" legacy without the former president's baggage.

At a Florida GOP event earlier this month, Ramaswamy arguably drew the most cheers when his pitch was that he was the Republican candidate who had been most supportive of Trump.

"I have respected Donald Trump more than anybody else in this race because he was the best president of the 21st century," Ramaswamy said. "I said that before, and I will say it again because it's the right thing to do. We will honor that legacy."

Trump remains dominant, even as he faces four criminal indictments and questions about whether he can beat President Joe Biden after losing to him in 2020.

After the Oct. 7 surprise attack on Israel, Ramaswamy has fielded criticism for not being as staunchly pro-Israel as the other GOP candidates. Two days after Hamas' attack, he suggested the U.S. withhold aid to Israel until its government detailed plans for Gaza. Republican voters align heavily with Israel.

Voters and strategists critical of Ramaswamy bring up his position on Israel, but also his age and faith.

Ramaswamy is Hindu and would be the first non-Christian elected president. Iowa's Republican voters are mostly white and Christian, with evangelicals carrying huge influence in the caucuses.

The gathering in the Council Bluffs hotel kicked off with an opening prayer that ended with "in the name of our savior Jesus Christ." The crowd responded with a collective "amen."

While he was cheered and applauded for some of his remarks, when he opened up about his religion, he was met with silence.

"I'd be the first Hindu president that we had in the United States," he said. "I'll tell you about my faith. I believe in one true God. I believe that God put each of us here for a purpose, that we have a moral duty to live out that purpose."

Ramaswamy did not take questions from either the audience or reporters. Many people in the audience declined to speak to an Associated Press reporter afterward.

Rebecca Wilkerson, a 52-year-old voter from Mondamin, Iowa, said most of her friends and family are still supporting Trump like she did over the past seven years, but she is now looking for a change, saying Trump is too old for the White House at 77. She became a Ramaswamy supporter despite those around her feeling apprehensive about his religion.

"They can't get past the fact that he's Hindu," Wilkerson said. "But I'm not voting based on that. I like his policies, and that's what I care about in a president."

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The next day, Ramaswamy attended a roundtable with Haley and DeSantis hosted by Bob Vander Plaats, an influential Iowa Christian activist. In what was billed as a "family discussion," the three candidates addressed each other by first name and avoided going after each other. Vander Plaats asked each of them faith-related questions.

"I think it's only fair to address what I believe is your highest hurdle from what I'm hearing," Vander Plaats told Ramaswamy. "We don't share the same faith. I'm a Christian. You're a Hindu, and you centered your campaign on truth. So a question a lot of the caucusgoers have is, what truth?"

Ramaswamy said he was grateful for the question. Holding in his lap his 3-year-old son, Karthik, Ramaswamy repeated what he told the room in Council Bluffs, that he believed in one true God and that God "put each of us here for a purpose."

"My faith teaches me that we have a duty, a moral duty, to realize that purpose, that we're God's instruments," he said. "He works through us in different ways, but we are still equal because God resides in each of us."

Ron Bonjean, a GOP strategist and former top congressional aide, noted Ramaswamy has been trying to build off the momentum built in the first debate, when he grabbed the spotlight introducing himself as a skinny guy with a hard-to-pronounce name. He then declared he was the only person on the stage who wasn't bought and paid for.

"He's being aggressive. He's trying to do all the right things to get noticed, to showcase to voters that he's a Trump alternative," Bonjean said, adding his effort is to be seen as a "Trump mini-me."

"He is excellent at debating other candidates on stage, but he can't back it up with real-world leadership and government experience," he added.

Lisa Unnerstall, 63, a Republican voter from Fort Myers, Florida, said she likes Ramaswamy and would like to see him serve in Trump's Cabinet because of his "forward thinking." But she said her first and second choices are Trump and DeSantis.

"I'm concerned with his age," Unnerstall said of Ramaswamy. "I don't think that a person necessarily has to be a long-time politician in order to become president. Obviously, I voted for Trump. He was not a politician. So I really think it's more about life experience."

Rosalynn Carter's advocacy for mental health was rooted in compassion and perseverance

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — The sun was shining in June 1979 as Rosalynn Carter made her way through an enthusiastic crowd in Laconia, New Hampshire.

"She shook my hand!" yelled one delighted participant.

The first lady was in the state for her husband's re-election campaign, but this was no political rally. Instead, she was at a sprawling 75-year-old institution founded for "feeble-minded" children that the U.S. Justice Department had deemed "a classic example of warehousing." She was joined by Gov. Hugh Gallen, a kindred spirit who had been pushing to correct the deplorable conditions there and at the state's psychiatric hospital.

"Going to a place like the Laconia State School and talking not to voters but to people dealing with a very acute issue — well, it doesn't happen very often. It didn't then, and it certainly doesn't at all now," recalled Dayton Duncan, who was there as Gallen's press secretary.

"She could have just given a good speech about what the administration was hoping to do and left it at that," Duncan said. "But the fact that she would go to the Laconia State School and meet with the people who work there, the children who were warehoused there and the parents, was special."

After leaving the White House, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter launched programs that have, among other things, monitored elections in at least 113 countries and nearly eradicated the Guinea worm parasite in the developing world. But the former president has said that The Carter Center would have been a success had it accomplished nothing but his wife's mental health work.

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That's according to Kathy Cade, vice chair of Atlanta-based center and a longtime aide to Rosalynn Carter, and others who know the couple. They spoke to The Associated Press in the months leading up to Rosalynn Carter's death Sunday at age 96.

"I do not think there has ever been another sort of leader in the mental health field who has had as much of an impact on mental health care and access to care and how we think about mental health and mental illness as Mrs. Carter," Cade said. "And I think it has to do with her incredible concern about the issue and her perseverance for more than 50 years."

What evolved into a lifelong crusade began during Carter's 1966 gubernatorial campaign in Georgia. Almost daily, Rosalynn was approached by voters distressed about loved ones housed at an overcrowded psychiatric hospital. Early one morning, she spoke to a weary cotton mill worker who explained that she and her husband worked opposite shifts to care for their mentally ill daughter.

"The image of the woman haunted me all day," Rosalynn Carter wrote in her 2010 book, "Within Our Reach: Ending the Mental Health Crisis." That night, she went to her husband's campaign rally and waited in line to shake his hand.

"I came to see what you are going to do to help people with mental illness when you are governor," she told the surprised candidate.

Jimmy Carter responded by creating a state commission to improve services for those with mental illness. Then, as president, he created a national commission on mental health, which led to the passage of the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980, a major revamping of federal policy that sought to treat people with mental illness in their communities.

Rosalynn Carter was that commission's honorary co-chair and a driving force behind the legislation, traveling around the country to hear from experts and everyday citizens alike and sharing her findings with Congress. Though it was effectively repealed during the Reagan administration, advocates say it created a framework for much of the progress since then.

At The Carter Center, she created a program devoted solely to mental health in 1991 and eventually established fellowships for journalists who cover the topic. Years later, she lobbied Congress to create a landmark law requiring insurers to provide equality in mental health coverage.

Those who worked with her over the decades say Carter's accomplishments were rooted in her compassion and listening skills.

"Her power comes from her heart," said Cynthia Wainscott, a former board chair of Mental Health America, a national nonprofit organization. "She's very, very, very kind, and she listens to people. When you're talking to her, there can be three conversations going on around you, but you know she's keyed on you, and she hears you."

She also was an effective and inspiring mobilizer with sharp instincts, Wainscott said.

Preparing for an annual mental health symposium, Carter once suggested contacting a pollster to refine a key message: that 20% of Americans will have a psychiatric disorder in any given year. The pollster conducted focus groups and found that people didn't believe the statistic, but if it was restated as one in five Americans instead, they did.

"When you hear 20%, you have to visualize 100 people and 20 of them are sick, and it's complex and impersonal. If you say one in five, people think about their workplace, their school, their neighborhood," said Wainscott, who also led the National Mental Health Association of Georgia.

"If she hadn't been in that room, none of us would have thought of asking a pollster to tell us how to phrase it," she said. "It was brilliant."

Journalist Bill Lichtenstein considered Rosalynn Carter "the patron saint of all who are dealing with mental health or behavioral issues."

Lichtenstein, who runs a media production company in Boston, was an investigative reporter for ABC News when he fell ill with manic depression in 1986. He went on to produce award-winning programs on recovery from mental illness, but he still remembers feeling shunned when he disclosed his own struggles. Carter's desire to reduce such stigma is at the heart of her accomplishments, he said.

"At the end of the day, whether it's talking about more money for research or people with a mental health history being on a level playing field when it comes to employment or renting an apartment, the thing that's the most insidious, difficult obstacle to all of it is stigma," he said.

Lichtenstein serves on the board of advisors for The Carter Center's mental health journalism fellowship program, which has provided support to more than 220 journalists from the U.S. and six other countries over the years.

Marion Scher, a freelance journalist and author in South Africa, was awarded a fellowship in 2005. Her first article, headlined "When is it more than just a bad day?" was published in a men's health magazine along with the phone number for a mental health organization. The response, in a country where stigma remains strong, was massive, she said.

"The phone was ringing off the hook for three weeks," she said. "They had to bring in extra counselors to man the phones."

Scher now offers mental health journalism fellowships in South Africa, using local sponsorships. That kind of multiplier effect illustrates the impact of The Carter Center fellowships, and it wouldn't have happened without her tenacity, Cade said.

Carter was a "woman of action" — unsatisfied with just bringing together experts for discussions, she brainstormed ways to change policy by changing attitudes, Cade said, recalling how she'd sit with her advisors and say "What can we do? What else could we be doing?"

California Highway Patrol officer fatally shoots man walking on freeway, prompting investigation

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — State authorities were investigating Monday after a California Highway Patrol officer shot and killed a man over the weekend in the middle of a Los Angeles area freeway during a struggle recorded on video.

Sunday afternoon's deadly encounter occurred after the highway patrol responded to multiple calls of a male pedestrian walking in westbound lanes of Interstate 105 in south LA County, the agency said in a statement. All traffic in that direction was temporarily blocked.

A CHP officer tried to convince the man to get off the freeway but he refused and that led to a struggle, authorities said.

"During the struggle, the pedestrian was able to access a Taser he had in his possession, activated the weapon, and used the Taser against the officer," the CHP said in a later statement. "Following the pedestrian's use of the weapon against the officer, and in fear for his safety, the officer fired his service weapon."

The man was pronounced dead at a hospital.

The Los Angeles County medical examiner's office confirmed the person died but did not provide identification, pending notification of family. A cause of death was not immediately released.

The highway patrol referred inquiries about the investigation to the California Department of Justice, which typically investigates fatal police shootings. The justice department confirmed it was investigating, but provided no additional details.

A minute-long video recorded by a bystander and posted on social media begins with an officer on top of another person as the two grapple in the middle of a closed stretch of freeway. It was not clear who took the original video.

As they struggle, a shot is fired and the officer suddenly jumps to his feet while the other man goes limp on the pavement. The officer immediately fires at least four shots at the prone man, the video shows. For the remainder of the clip, the officer keeps his gun drawn while the man lies motionless.

Ed Obayashi, a use-of-force expert who investigates police shootings for law enforcement agencies in California, cautioned against jumping to conclusions from the video alone.

Obayashi said investigators will want to know why the officer approached the pedestrian without a partner or other backup nearby. "They were able to close the freeway, so presumably there was law enforcement

in the area," he said.

Obayashi said the investigation will focus on whether the man was armed and why the officer felt the need to shoot after standing up and disengaging from the fight.

"Was there a knife? Or a stun gun?" Obayashi said investigators will ask. "We don't know what kind of threat this officer perceived."

Highway patrol officers aren't required to wear body cameras, but the agency uses in-car cameras.

State Sen. Steven Bradford, Assemblymember Mike A. Gipson and Councilmember Tim McOsker, who represent the area where the shooting occurred, released a joint statement calling for transparency by the highway patrol.

"The video of this shooting is deeply disturbing," Bradford said. "This appears to be an unnecessary use of deadly force. The community deserves answers. If the roles were reversed, people would be immediately calling for murder charges. I call on the California Highway Patrol and the Department of Justice to be transparent and for the community to be calm and patient during the investigation."

With patriotic reggaeton and videos, Venezuela's government fans territorial dispute with Guyana

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Middle school student Jeanmaikol Castrillo can quickly point out Venezuela on a map and identify what's around it — the Caribbean Sea and the countries of Colombia, Brazil and Guyana.

But the map with which he is familiar differs greatly from those included in plenty of books, textbooks and even a CIA website. It shows a much larger Venezuela, one that includes a big chunk of Guyana.

Venezuelans hold as self-evident truth that their homeland's eastern end includes Guyana's Essequibo region next to the Atlantic — a territory larger than Greece and rich in oil and minerals. As students, they learn it is subject to a century-old dispute and then, for the most part, forget about it.

These days, however, Venezuela's government wants it to be the focus of their attention.

President Nicolás Maduro and his allies are appealing to Venezuelans' patriotism as they summon voters supposedly to decide the territory's future in a Dec. 3 referendum, although the legal and practical implications of the vote are questionable. They are using leaflets, reggaeton, videos and other content to promote what Jeanmaikol already knows.

"The Essequibo belongs to Venezuela," the 11-year-old said firmly outside his school. He then added that the two South American neighbors are fighting over the territory "because it has gold, a lot of wealth, and oil, too."

Most of Guyana's foreign investment is in the 61,600-square-mile (159,500-square-kilometer) area, which accounts for two-thirds of its territory. Yet, Venezuela has considered Essequibo as its own since gaining independence from Spain in 1811, and it disputes the border decided by international arbitrators in 1899 when Guyana was still a British colony.

Venezuela's commitment to pursue the territorial claim has fluctuated over the years. Its interest piqued again in 2015 when ExxonMobil announced it had found oil in commercial quantities off the Essequibo coast.

But the five questions it plans to ask voters about Essequibo prompted Guyana to urge the International Court of Justice on Nov. 14 to halt parts of the referendum, telling judges it poses an "existential" threat.

Maduro and his allies are encouraging voters to answer "yes" to all the questions, one of which proposes creating a Venezuelan state in the Essequibo territory and granting Venezuelan citizenship to the area's current and future residents.

The government has not explained how it would create the state should voters approve it. The Ministry of Communication and Information did not respond to requests for interviews with Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, who leads the government's Essequibo-related efforts, and Samuel Moncada, Venezuela's ambassador to the United Nations.

"The collective decision called for here involves nothing less than the annexation of the territory in dis-

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pute in this case," Paul Reichler, an American lawyer representing Guyana, told the world court. "This is a textbook example of annexation."

Venezuela considers Essequibo as its own because the region was within its boundaries during the Spanish colony.

The disputed boundary was decided by arbitrators from Britain, Russia and the United States. The U.S. represented Venezuela on the panel in part because the Venezuelan government had broken off diplomatic relations with Britain.

Venezuelan officials contend the Americans and Europeans conspired to cheat their country out of the land and argue that a 1966 agreement to resolve the dispute effectively nullified the original arbitration. Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, maintains the initial accord is legal and binding.

Now, Venezuelan voters will also be asked whether they "agree to reject by all means, in accordance with the law," the 1899 boundary and whether they support the 1966 agreement "as the only valid legal instrument" to reach a solution.

To get people ready, Maduro's government has embarked on what he calls a "pedagogical electoral campaign," and he has become a sort of teacher-in-chief, giving hours-long nationally televised history lessons on Essequibo.

School teachers and parents have taken notice.

"The oldest one has to make a drawing highlighting the Essequibo," Luz Marina Rua said referring to her son's middle school homework. "Yesterday, I had to make a bib for my preschool daughter that represented bauxite, a mineral she was going to play in a sort of performance and say, 'I am the rock that appears in the Essequibo.'"

Rua, 38, remembers learning as a child that the territory is under dispute and being taught to mark it with diagonal lines on any map. But, she said, it wasn't until Hugo Chávez, Maduro's predecessor, became president in 1999 that she noticed the Venezuelan government start "to pay attention to it."

After taking office, Chávez promised to seek redress for the 1899 boundary accord "injustice." He then softened his rhetoric, and Venezuela began supplying oil to Guyana and other countries at preferential rates until a drop in crude prices and mismanagement pushed the nation into a complex economic and political crisis that has not ended.

While ExxonMobil's 2015 discovery fueled the dispute, it also proved to be convenient for Venezuela's government.

"It appears to be something that politicians in Venezuela use every now and then to gin up support, to gin up that sentiment, I guess, over what is Venezuela and what it means to be Venezuelan," said Anthony Cummings, associate professor of geospatial information sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Maduro has agreed with a faction of the opposition to hold a presidential election in 2024, but discontent with his United Socialist Party of Venezuela was underlined in October when over 2.4 million people voted in the opposition's presidential primary.

The turnout exceeded expectations and prompted the government to label the vote as fraudulent. And now, chants and speeches at rallies to drum up attention for the referendum are also in support of Maduro.

Guyana's people believe Essequibo is theirs and see no legal issue in the matter, said Cummings, who has written about the dispute and grew up in Guyana, four miles from the border with Venezuela.

After years of fruitless mediation, Guyana asked the International Court of Justice in 2018 to rule the 1899 border decision as valid and binding. Judges accepted the case last April, rejecting Venezuela's argument that the court could not hear it without the involvement of the United Kingdom, Guyana's colonial master during the disputed decision.

While judges will likely rule within weeks on Guyana's request to halt the referendum, they need a few years to issue a border decision, which would be final and legally binding. Still, a referendum question asks whether Venezuelans agree with their country's "historic position of not recognizing" the world's court jurisdiction in the territorial dispute.

Caracas-based lawyer Rocío San Miguel said that question shows Maduro's government intends to aban-

don the case even though court proceedings will continue regardless of Venezuela's participation. She expects public employees, contractors and others dependent on the government to be "compulsively led to vote" and effectively give the state the cover it needs to make an irrational decision.

"It is as if there is a piece of land that you say is yours, and you decide, 'I am not going to court anymore,'" San Miguel said. "Well, I am going to go, and I am going to demonstrate to the judge that you have no rights. Who loses? You or I? He who does not attend loses."

Biden pardons National Thanksgiving Turkeys while marking his 81st birthday with jokes about his age

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Turkeys Liberty and Bell have new appreciation for the phrase, "Let freedom ring."

The Thanksgiving birds played their part Monday in annual White House tradition that this year coincided with President Joe Biden's 81st birthday: a president issuing a pardon and sparing them from becoming someone's holiday dinner.

First, Biden — the oldest president in U.S. history — wanted to make light of his age.

"By the way, it's my birthday today," the president said, adding that guests in the Oval Office sang "Happy Birthday" to him before the event. "I just want you to know, it's difficult turning 60. Difficult."

He also noted that the presentation of a National Thanksgiving Turkey to the White House has been a tradition for more than seven decades.

"This is the 76th anniversary of this event, and I want you to know I wasn't there at the first one," Biden said. The Democrat's age has become an issue as he seeks reelection next year.

Before issuing the pardons, Biden said that although Liberty and Bell are Minnesota natives, they were named for the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

"These birds have a new appreciation for the word, 'let freedom ring,'" he said, adding that they love Honeycrisp apples, ice hockey, a thousand lakes and the Mall of America — all things the Midwest state is famous for. Minnesota is known as the "land of 10,000 lakes."

They overcame "some tough odds" to get to the White House, Biden continued, saying "they had to work hard, show patience and be willing to travel over a thousand miles." He suggested their feat probably was harder than getting a ticket to Beyonce's Renaissance Tour or "Britney's tour, she's down in, it's kind of warm in Brazil right now." He apparently mixed up his female pop stars; Taylor Swift was in Brazil over the weekend for her Eras Tour; Britney Spears currently is not on tour.

"Look folks, based on their commitment to being productive members of society as they head to their new home at the University of Minnesota ... I hereby pardon Liberty and Bell. Congratulations, birds!" Biden declared.

Hundreds of guests, including Cabinet secretaries and White House staff who brought children, watched from the South Lawn as Biden kicked off the unofficial start of Washington's holiday season. His grandchildren Maisy Biden and Beau Biden watched from the sidelines, and Beau was led over to pet one of the turkeys after the ceremony.

Later Monday, military families joined Biden's wife, first lady Jill Biden, as she accepted delivery of an 18.5-foot (5.6-meter) Fraser fir from the Cline Church Nursery in Fleetwood, North Carolina. It will go on display in the Blue Room as the official White House Christmas tree.

Steve Lykken, chairman of the National Turkey Federation and president of the Jennie-O Turkey Store, told The Associated Press in an interview last week that the pardons are a "great way to kick off the holiday season and really, really a fun honor."

Lykken introduced Liberty and Bell on Sunday at the Willard Intercontinental, a luxury hotel near the White House. The gobblers checked into a suite there on Saturday following their red-carpet arrival in the U.S. capital after a dayslong road trip from Minnesota in a black Cadillac Escalade.

"They were raised like all of our turkeys, protected, of course, from weather extremes and predators, free to walk about with constant access to water and feed," Lykken said Sunday as Liberty and Bell strut-

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ted around the Willard's newly renovated Crystal Room on plastic sheeting laid over the carpet.

The male turkeys, both about 20 weeks old and about 42 pounds (19 kilograms), were hatched in July in Willmar, Minnesota — Jennie-O is headquartered there — as part of the "presidential flock," Lykken said. They listened to music and other sounds to prepare them for Monday's hoopla at the White House.

"They listened to all kinds of music to get ready for the crowds and people along the way. I can confirm they are, in fact, Swifties, and they do enjoy some Prince," Lykken said, meaning Liberty and Bell are fans of Swift. "I think they're absolutely ready for prime time."

The tradition dates to 1947 when the National Turkey Federation, which represents turkey farmers and producers, first presented a National Thanksgiving Turkey to President Harry Truman.

Back then, and even earlier, the gobbler was given for the first family's holiday consumption. But by the late 1980s, the tradition had evolved into an often humorous ceremony in which the birds are given a second chance at life.

In 1989, as animal rights activists picketed nearby, President George H.W. Bush offered a public assurance, saying, "this fine tom turkey, that he will not end up on anyone's dinner table."

Now spared from Thanksgiving dinner, Liberty and Bell will be cared for by the University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences.

Climate change hits women's health harder. Activists want leaders to address it at COP28

By UZMI ATHAR, Press Trust of India undefined

NEW DELHI (AP) — Manju Devi suffered in pain for two months last year as she worked on a farm near Delhi, unable to break away from duties that sometimes had her standing for hours in the waist-deep water of a rice paddy, lifting heavy loads in intense heat and spraying pesticides and insecticides. When that pain finally became too much to bear, she was rushed to a hospital.

The doctors' verdict: Devi had suffered a prolapsed uterus and would need a hysterectomy. She hadn't said a word to her family about her discomfort because of societal taboo over discussing a "women's illness," and with two grown children and three grandchildren looking to the 56-year-old widow to help put food on the table, Devi had relied on painkillers to stay in the fields.

"I endured excruciating pain for months, scared to speak about it publicly. It shouldn't take a surgical procedure to make us realize the cost of increasing heat," she said, surrounded by women who told of undergoing a similar ordeal.

As the annual U.N.-led climate summit known as COP is set to convene later this month in Dubai, activists are urging policymakers to respond to climate change's disproportionate impact on women and girls, especially where poverty makes them more vulnerable.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is part of a series produced under the India Climate Journalism Program, a collaboration between The Associated Press, the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and the Press Trust of India.

Their recommendations include securing land rights for women, promoting women's cooperatives and encouraging women to lead on developing climate policy. They also suggest that countries — especially developing countries like India — commit more money in their budgets to ensure gender equity in climate policies.

Group of 20 leaders who met in New Delhi in September also recognized the problem, calling for accelerating climate action with gender equality at its core by increasing women's participation and leadership in mitigation and adaptation.

Devi is a farm worker in Syaraul, a village of about 7,000 a couple of hours southeast of Delhi in Uttar Pradesh, India's biggest and most populous state. Several other middle-aged and older women from the village described similar injuries leading to hysterectomies.

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The link between phenomena like uterine prolapse and climate change is indirect but significant, said Seema Bhaskaran, who tracks gender issues for the nonprofit Transform Rural India Foundation.

"Women in rural, climate-affected communities often bear the brunt of physically demanding agricultural work, made more strenuous by climate change-related challenges like erratic weather and increased labor needs," Bhaskaran said. "While climate change doesn't directly cause uterine prolapse, it magnifies the underlying health challenges and conditions that make women more susceptible to such health issues."

About 150 kilometers (93 miles) away, in Nanu village, 62-year-old farm worker Savita Singh blames climate change for a chemical infection that cost her a finger in August 2022.

When her husband moved to Delhi to work as a plumber, she was left alone to tend the couple's fields. As rice and wheat yields fell due to shifting climate patterns and a surge in pest attacks, Singh's husband, who retained decision-making power, decided to increase the use of pesticides and insecticides. It was up to Singh, who had opposed the increases, to apply the chemicals.

"With the rise in pest attacks in farms, we have started using more than three times pesticides and fertilizers in our farms and without any safety gears my hand got burned by the chemicals and one of my fingers had to be amputated," she said.

In Pilakhana, another Uttar Pradesh village, 22-year-old wage laborer Babita Kumari suffered stillbirths in 2021 and this year that she attributes to the heavy lifting she endured daily in working a brick kiln for long hours in intense heat. Climate change at least doubled the chances of the heat wave that hit the state this year, according to an analysis by Climate Central, an independent U.S.-based group of scientists that developed a tool to quantify climate change's contribution to changing daily temperatures.

"My mother and her mother all have worked in brick kilns all their lives but the heat was not this bad even though they worked for more than eight hours like me. But for the past six-seven years the situation has worsened and heat has become unbearable to withstand but what option do we have than to endure it," said Kumari, who lives in a makeshift camp with her husband.

Bhaskaran noted that women in India often assume primary roles in agriculture while men migrate to urban areas, which makes the women especially vulnerable to the direct effects of climate change. A government labor force survey for 2021-22 found that 75% of the people working in agriculture are women. But only about 14% of agricultural land is owned by women, according to a government agriculture census.

For Bhaskaran, it adds up to a picture of women sacrificing their health by working long hours in intense heat, exposed to insecticides and pesticides, and with uncertain access to clean water. On top of that, many are undernourished because they "often eat last and least within patriarchal structures," she said.

Poonam Muttreja is a women's rights activist who also directs the Population Foundation of India, a non-governmental organization that focuses on issues of population, family planning, reproductive health, and gender equality. She said it's essential that COP28, the meeting in Dubai, take concrete action to help women.

She said COP28 should go beyond providing financial aid, and actively promote and facilitate the inclusion of gender considerations within all climate-related policies, initiatives, and actions.

"It must prioritize awareness programs that emphasize the specific health challenges women face in the wake of climate change as a critical step towards increasing public knowledge. These efforts will also serve as a call to action for governments, institutions, and communities to prioritize women's health and well-being as a central component of their climate initiatives," she added.

Anjal Prakash, a professor and the research director at the Bharat Institute of Public Policy at the Indian School of Business, coordinated a working group that examined gender for a recent assessment by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He said it will take international pressure to overcome some countries that may quietly oppose gender-sensitive climate policies due to conservative ideologies and political barriers.

Finding money will also be a formidable challenge, he said.

Shweta Narayan, a researcher and environmental justice activist at Health Care Without Harm, said women, children and the elderly are among the most vulnerable to extreme climate events. She saw reason for optimism at COP28 because of a dedicated Health Day at the conference.

"Definitely there is a very clear recognition that climate has a health impact and health needs to be considered more seriously," she said.

Trump, on Biden's 81st birthday, releases doctor's note that says he's in 'excellent' health

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — GOP front-runner Donald Trump marked President Joe Biden's 81st birthday on Monday by releasing a letter from his physician that reports the former president is in "excellent" physical and mental health.

The letter posted on Trump's social media platform contained no details to support its claims — measures like weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels, or the results of any test. Dr. Bruce A. Aronwald, a New Jersey physician who says he has been Trump's doctor since 2021 and most recently examined him in September, reported that Trump's "physical exams were well within the normal range and his cognitive exams were exceptional."

He added that Trump's most recent lab results were "even more favorable than prior testing on some of the most significant parameters" thanks to recent weight loss he credited to "improved diet and continued daily physical exercise, while maintaining a rigorous schedule."

The doctor concluded the 77-year old is "currently in excellent health" and "will continue to enjoy a healthy active lifestyle for years to come."

The report comes as age has emerged as a key issue of the 2024 election, which could find Trump and Biden, the country's oldest president, facing off once again.

While Trump isn't all that much younger than Biden, polls consistently find that Americans view age as more of a liability for the president. An August poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 77% of U.S. adults, including 69% of Democrats, viewed Biden as too old to be effective for four more years, while only 51% of adults — and just 28% of Republicans — said the same about Trump.

Still, Trump's rivals have tried to highlight his age by pointing attention to his own recent flubs, including mixing up the city and state where he was campaigning.

"The presidency is not a job for somebody that's pushing 80 years old," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, one of Trump's rivals, said on CNN Sunday, casting himself as a man "in the prime of my life."

Attestations of Trump's rigor by his doctors have become a genre of their own.

In late December 2015, during his first campaign for the Republican nomination, Trump's campaign released a glowing letter from the late Dr. Harold N. Bornstein that claimed Trump, a known fast food aficionado who eschewed vigorous exercise, would "unequivocally" be the "the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency."

Bornstein later revealed that Trump had dictated the glowing assessment himself, calling it "black humor" and admitting that he had written it in five minutes while a limo sent by the then-candidate waited outside his office.

"I just made it up as I went along," he told CNN in 2018. "It's like the movie ' Fargo.' It takes the truth and moves it in a different direction."

While in the White House, Trump's doctors offered a more complete picture of his health following annual physicals that included numbers and test results.

His physical in 2019, for instance, revealed that he was officially considered obese, while his 2018 exam revealed he had a common form of heart disease.

Still, then-White House Dr. Ronny Jackson offered a glowing report during a lengthy press conference about the exam in which he extolled Trump's "incredible genes" — "it's just the way God made him," he said — and joked that if the then-71-year-old president had eaten a healthier diet over the previous 20 years, "he might live to be 200 years old."

Jackson also said Trump had performed "exceedingly well" on a surprise cognitive screening test de-

signed to detect early signs of memory loss and other mild cognitive impairment. Trump continues to brag about the results to this day.

Aronwald did not immediately return a message left with his office.

A\$AP Rocky must stand trial on charges he fired gun at former friend, judge rules

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Los Angeles judge ruled Monday that there is enough evidence for A\$AP Rocky to stand trial on charges that he fired a gun at a former friend and collaborator on the streets near a Hollywood hotel in 2021.

Superior Court Judge M.L. Villar made the ruling at a preliminary hearing, after hearing roughly a day and a half of testimony from two witnesses. Rocky, who gave no visible reaction to the decision, has pleaded not guilty to two felony counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

The 35-year-old rapper, fashion mogul and two-time Grammy nominee is in a relationship with Rihanna, with whom he has two young sons.

He could get up to 24 years in prison if convicted on all charges, prosecutors said.

Villar said "the totality of the video and testimony" shows there is sufficient evidence for the defendant to go to trial. She emphasized that preliminary hearings have a much lower evidence standard than a trial.

"We're not disappointed, not surprised, we expected to go to trial, we've been planning for trial all along," Rocky's attorney, Joe Tacopina, said outside court. "Rocky is going to be vindicated when all this is said and done, without question."

At the first day of the hearing, which resumed Monday after a long delay, Terell Ephron testified that he and Rocky, a friend since childhood, had belonged to the same collective of musicians and artists at their New York high school.

He said their relationship had started to go sour and resulted in the standoff in Hollywood on Nov. 6, 2021, when he said Rocky first pulled a gun on him, and in a later confrontation fired shots that grazed Ephron's knuckles.

"You need nothing more than Mr. Ephron's testimony by itself," Deputy District Attorney Paul Przelomiec told the judge before her ruling, adding that the surveillance video that captured parts of the incident "corroborates exactly what Mr. Ephron said."

Tacopina countered that "there are some real problems with the testimony of the complainant," adding, "I think there's not enough evidence."

Tacopina established while questioning a police detective earlier Monday that seven officers who searched a sidewalk and street about 20 minutes after the shots were allegedly fired found no evidence of the shooting, and that a pair of 9 mm shell casings in police possession were recovered by Ephron, who returned to the scene about an hour after the standoff.

Tacopina played body camera video of the officers, who searched the ground for about 10 minutes. Ephron, who first went to police to report the incident two days later, turned over the shell casings, which the detective said had no recoverable fingerprints on them.

Prosecutors played a video from near the scene where no people are initially visible, but what sounds like two gunshots can be heard. Then a man comes running around a corner, then slows to a walk. The man's identity is not clear in the video, but LAPD Detective Frank Flores testified they have established it is Rocky.

Flores testified that no 9 mm pistol was recovered when a search warrant was served on Rocky.

Prosecutors showed a still from surveillance video showing a man in a hooded sweatshirt whose face is not visible holding what appears to be a gun, along with another image from the same video showing the face of the man in the sweatshirt, with no gun visible. Flores testified that the images led them to establish it was Rocky.

Tacopina, who is also representing Donald Trump in his New York criminal case, pressed the detective

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on the weapon, suggesting police had no way of knowing whether it was a loaded or even real gun.

"That gun or whatever it was was not tested, right?" Tacopina asked. "No, it was never recovered," Flores said.

Tacopina asked, "You're not sure if it's an operable gun or a non-operable gun or whatever?"

"Without having it, I can't tell you whether it's operable," the detective replied.

Tacopina also tried to cast doubt on the minor injury to Ephron's hand, questioning why he waited until he returned to New York to seek medical treatment.

He showed the detective a photo of the scraped fingers and said, sarcastically, "It's a miracle he survived that shooting."

The judge admonished him, one of several times she told Tacopina to change his tone.

Rocky was arrested at Los Angeles International Airport in the case in April, and charged in August. He arrived in the courtroom Monday morning wearing a dark suit, sunglasses and a face mask, after spending the weekend at the Formula One Las Vegas Grand Prix auto race, where he had a prominent role as Puma's creative director in the clothing brand's partnership with F1.

He has released little music in recent years, and has become better known as the romantic partner, fellow fashion influencer and co-parent of Rihanna, with whom he had a second son in May. His first two studio albums in 2013 and 2015 both went to No. 1 on the Billboard 200.

Asked outside court whether Rocky would ask Rihanna, who did not attend the preliminary hearings, to attend his trial, Tacopina responded, "He would never subject his family, he wants to shield them, he's handling it like Rocky would handle something, he protects his family."

Rocky also became an unlikely cause for then-President Donald Trump, who said he was trying to get the rapper freed and returned to the U.S. when he was jailed after a brawl in Sweden in 2019. He was found guilty of assault at trial but was given a "conditional sentence" that meant no additional jail time.

Federal appeals court deals a blow to Voting Rights Act, ruling that private plaintiffs can't sue

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A divided federal appeals court on Monday ruled that private individuals and groups such as the NAACP do not have the ability to sue under a key section of the federal Voting Rights Act, a decision that contradicts decades of precedent and could further erode protections under the landmark 1965 law.

The 2-1 decision by a panel of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals based in St. Louis found that only the U.S. attorney general can enforce Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires political maps to include districts where minority populations' preferred candidates can win elections.

The majority said other federal laws, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act, make it clear when private groups can sue but said similar wording is not found in the voting law.

"When those details are missing, it is not our place to fill in the gaps, except when 'text and structure' require it," U.S. Circuit Judge David R. Stras wrote for the majority in an opinion joined by Judge Raymond W. Gruender. Stras was nominated by former President Donald Trump and Gruender by former President George W. Bush.

The decision affirmed a lower judge's decision to dismiss a case brought by the Arkansas State Conference NAACP and the Arkansas Public Policy Panel after giving U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland five days to join the lawsuit.

Chief Judge Lavenki R. Smith noted in a dissenting opinion that federal courts across the country and the U.S. Supreme Court have considered numerous cases brought by private plaintiffs under Section 2. Smith said the court should follow "existing precedent that permits a judicial remedy" unless the Supreme Court or Congress decides differently.

"Rights so foundational to self-government and citizenship should not depend solely on the discretion or availability of the government's agents for protection," wrote Smith, another appointee of George W. Bush.

Sophia Lin Lakin, director of the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, called the ruling a "travesty for democracy."

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She had argued the appeal on behalf of the two Arkansas groups.

"By failing to reverse the district court's radical decision, the Eighth Circuit has put the Voting Rights Act in jeopardy, tossing aside critical protections that voters fought and died for," Lakin said in a statement.

It was not immediately clear whether the groups would appeal. A statement from the ACLU said they are exploring their options.

Barry Jefferson, political action chair of the Arkansas State Conference of the NAACP, called the ruling "a devastating blow to the civil rights of every American, and the integrity of our nation's electoral system."

The state NAACP chapter and the public policy group had challenged new Arkansas state House districts as diluting the influence of Black voters. The state's redistricting plan created 11 majority-Black districts, which the groups argued was too few. They said the state could have drawn 16 majority-Black districts to more closely mirror the state's demographics.

U.S. District Judge Lee Rudofsky noted there was "a strong merits case that at least some of the challenged districts" in the lawsuit violate the federal Voting Rights Act but said he could not rule after concluding a challenge could only be brought by the U.S. attorney general.

The Justice Department filed a "statement of interest" in the case saying private parties can file lawsuits to enforce the Voting Rights Act but declined to comment on the ruling.

Monday's ruling applies only to federal courts covered by the 8th Circuit, which includes Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. Meanwhile, several pending lawsuits by private groups challenge various political maps drawn by legislators across the country.

It's likely the case eventually will make it to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the issue was raised in a 2021 opinion by Justice Neil Gorsuch.

"I join the court's opinion in full, but flag one thing it does not decide," Gorsuch wrote at the time, joined by Justice Clarence Thomas. "Our cases have assumed — without deciding — that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 furnishes an implied cause of action under section 2."

Gorsuch wrote that there was no need in that case for the justices to consider who may sue. But Gorsuch and Thomas were among the dissenters in June when the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in another Voting Rights Act case in favor of Black voters in Alabama who objected to the state's congressional districts.

The Gorsuch and Thomas opinion was referenced less than two weeks ago in another federal court decision that came to the opposite conclusion of Monday's ruling by the St. Louis-based court.

On Nov. 10, three judges on the conservative-dominated 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans rejected arguments that there is no private right to sue under the Voting Rights Act. In a Louisiana congressional redistricting case, the panel said the U.S. Supreme Court so far has upheld the right of private litigants to bring lawsuits alleging violations of Section 2, as have other circuit appellate courts.

Fifth Circuit Judge Leslie Southwick, a nominee of George W. Bush, pointed to separate cases from 1999 and 2020 that reaffirmed that right.

Election law experts say most challenges seeking to enforce Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act are brought by private plaintiffs and that the Justice Department has limited resources to pursue such cases. Some voting rights experts also noted the apparent contradiction in the Alabama case decided by the Supreme Court last June and Monday's ruling by the appellate court.

"It doesn't seem to make sense," said Jon Greenbaum, chief counsel for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "If the laws were that private parties couldn't bring these cases, then the Alabama case would have never even gotten off the ground."

Lawsuits under Section 2 have long been used to try to ensure that Black voters have adequate political representation in places with a long history of racism, including many Southern states. Racial gerrymandering has been used in drawing legislative and congressional districts to pack Black voters into a small number of districts or spread them out so their votes are diluted. If only the U.S. attorney general is able to file such cases, it could sharply limit their number and make challenges largely dependent on partisan politics.

It's unlikely Congress will be willing to act. Republicans have blocked recent efforts to restore protec-

tions in the Voting Rights Act that were tossed out by the U.S. Supreme Court a decade ago. In the 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision, justices dismantled an enforcement mechanism known as preclearance, which allowed for federal review of proposed election-related changes before they could take effect in certain states and communities with a history of discrimination.

In a statement, the Congressional Black Caucus noted that private individuals and civil rights groups have been successful in giving Black voters better representation through recent challenges to congressional maps drawn by Republican lawmakers in Alabama, Louisiana and Florida.

"This decision by the appellate court is ill-advised, cannot stand, and should be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which we hope will reaffirm that citizens have a private right of action to bring forward lawsuits under Section 2," the group said.

A man is charged with threatening a Palestinian rights group as tensions rise from Israel-Hamas war

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Utah man has been charged with threatening a Palestinian rights organization in Washington in a case that was unsealed Monday as tensions rise in the U.S. from the devastating war between Israel and Hamas.

Kevin Brent Buchanan, 62, of Tooele, Utah, called the unidentified group at least five times in three days and left profanity-laced messages such as "You're the enemy," "you're being tracked" and "dead person walking," prosecutors wrote in court documents.

The organization reported the messages with the help of another anti-discrimination group. FBI agents tracked the phone number to Tooele, located about 34 miles or 55 kilometers west of Salt Lake City, and linked him to the phone through purchase records, prosecutors said. No attorney was immediately listed for Buchanan.

His wife, Stefanie Buchanan, told The Associated Press he found news about the war upsetting, but the allegations against him came as a shock. Kevin Buchanan had been working long hours with little sleep while acting as her caretaker shortly before his arrest, she said.

The threats began Oct. 31 and continued through Nov. 2, two days before the group had a public demonstration planned. Buchanan was charged with making an interstate threat, which is punishable by a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Threats against Jewish, Muslim, and Arab American communities in the U.S. have increased since the war began with an attack by Hamas in early October. FBI Director Christopher Wray testified before Congress on Oct. 31 that law enforcement is increasingly concerned about the potential of attacks by individuals or small groups.

Company that created ChatGPT is thrown into turmoil after Microsoft hires its ousted CEO

By COURTNEY BONNELL and MATT O'BRIEN AP Business Writers

The company that created ChatGPT was thrown into turmoil Monday after Microsoft hired its ousted CEO and many employees threatened to follow him in a conflict that centered in part on how to build artificial intelligence that's smarter than humans.

The developments followed a weekend of drama that shocked the AI field and fueled speculation about the future of OpenAI, which named a new chief executive on Friday and then replaced her on Sunday. The newest CEO vowed to investigate the firing of co-founder and CEO Sam Altman, who's been instrumental in OpenAI's transformation from a nonprofit research laboratory into a world-renowned commercial startup that inaugurated the era of generative artificial intelligence.

Microsoft, which has been a close partner of the company and invested billions of dollars in it, announced

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that Altman and OpenAI's former president, Greg Brockman, would lead its new advanced AI research team. Brockman, also an OpenAI co-founder, quit in protest after Altman was fired.

Hundreds of OpenAI employees, including other top executives, threatened to join them at Microsoft in an open letter addressed to OpenAI's four-member board that called for the board's resignation and Altman's return.

"If the architects and vision and brains behind these products have now left, the company will be a shell of what it once was," said Sarah Kreps, director of Cornell University's Tech Policy Institute. "All of that brain trust going to Microsoft will then mean that these impressive tools will be coming out of Microsoft. It will be hard to see OpenAI continue to thrive as a company."

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that he was "extremely excited" to bring on the pair and looked "forward to getting to know" the new management team at OpenAI.

Altman later said on X that his top priority with Nadella is to ensure that OpenAI "continues to thrive" and that it is committed to "fully providing continuity of operations to our partners and customers."

OpenAI said Friday that Altman was pushed out after a review found he was "not consistently candid in his communications" with the board of directors, which had lost confidence in his ability to lead the company.

In an X post Monday, OpenAI's new interim chief executive, Emmett Shear, said he would hire an independent investigator to look into Altman's ouster and write a report within 30 days.

"It's clear that the process and communications around Sam's removal" were handled "very badly," wrote Shear, who co-founded Twitch, an Amazon-owned livestreaming service popular with video gamers.

He said he also plans in the next month to "reform the management and leadership team in light of recent departures." After that, Shear said, he would "drive changes in the organization," including "significant governance changes if necessary."

Originally started as a nonprofit, and still governed as one, OpenAI's stated mission is to safely build AI that is "generally smarter than humans." Debates have swirled around that goal and whether it conflicts with the company's increasing commercial success.

The reason behind the board's removal of Altman was not a "specific disagreement on safety," nor does the board oppose commercialization of AI models, Shear said.

OpenAI last week declined to answer questions about Altman's alleged lack of candor. The company's statement said his behavior was hindering the board's ability to exercise its responsibilities.

A key driver of the shakeup, OpenAI's co-founder, chief scientist and board member Ilya Sutskever, expressed regrets for his participation in the ouster.

"I never intended to harm OpenAI. I love everything we've built together and I will do everything I can to reunite the company," he said Monday on X.

The open letter began circulating Monday. According to a copy obtained by The Associated Press, the number of signatures amounted to a majority of the company's 770 employees. The AP was not able to independently confirm that all of the signatures were from OpenAI employees.

"Everyone at @OpenAI is united," one of the signatories, research scientist Noam Brown, said on X. "This is not a civil war. Unless Sam and Greg are brought back, there will be no OpenAI left to govern."

The letter alleged that after Altman's firing, the company's remaining executive team had recommended that the board resign and be replaced with a "qualified board" that could stabilize the company. But the board resisted and said allowing OpenAI to be destroyed would be consistent with its mission, according to the letter.

OpenAI has said since its 2015 founding that its goal is to advance AI in a way that benefits all humanity. A company spokesperson confirmed that the board received the letter.

Microsoft declined to comment on the letter.

After Altman was pushed out, he stirred speculation about coming back into the fold in a series of tweets. He posted a selfie with an OpenAI guest pass Sunday, saying this is "first and last time i ever wear one of these."

Hours earlier, he tweeted, "i love the openai team so much," which drew heart replies from Brockman and Mira Murati, OpenAI's chief technology officer who was initially named as interim CEO.

It's not clear what transpired between the announcement of Murati's interim role Friday and Shear's hiring, though she was among several employees Monday who tweeted, "OpenAI is nothing without its people." Altman replied to many with heart emojis.

The board consists of Sutskever, Quora CEO Adam D'Angelo, tech entrepreneur Tasha McCauley and Helen Toner of the Georgetown Center for Security and Emerging Technology. None of them responded to calls or emails seeking comment. Because of its nonprofit structure, the board differs from most startup boards that are typically led by investors.

Altman helped catapult ChatGPT to global fame based on its ability to respond to questions and produce human-like passages of text in a seemingly natural way.

In the past year, he has become Silicon Valley's most in-demand voice on the promise and potential dangers of artificial intelligence.

Earlier this year, he went on a world tour to meet with government officials, drawing big crowds at public events as he discussed the risks of AI and attempts to regulate the emerging technology.

But as money poured into OpenAI this year, helping to advance its development of more capable AI, it also brought more conflict around whether that fast pace of commercialization fit with the startup's founding vision, said Kreps, the Cornell University professor. But rather than slow that pace, Altman's ouster may simply shift it out of OpenAI.

Altman "really has a walk-on-water aura, and I think a lot of it is well deserved," Kreps said. "He's the one who has attracted the investment, and he'll do that wherever it is."

Microsoft's shares rose 2% on Monday and hit an all-time high.

The AP and OpenAI have a licensing and technology agreement allowing OpenAI access to part of the AP's text archives.

Court seems inclined to keep restricting Trump's trial speech. But gag order could be narrowed

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court appeared inclined Monday to reimpose at least some restrictions on Donald Trump's speech in his landmark election subversion case. But the judges wrestled with how to craft a gag order that doesn't infringe on the former president's free speech rights or prevent him from defending himself on the campaign trail.

The three judges on the panel asked skeptical and at times aggressive questions of attorneys on both sides while weighing whether to put back in place an order from a trial judge that barred Trump from inflammatory comments against prosecutors, potential witnesses and court staff.

The judges raised a litany of hypothetical scenarios that could arise in the months ahead as they considered how to fashion a balance between an order that protects Trump's First Amendment rights and the need to protect "the criminal trial process and its integrity and its truth finding function."

"There's a balance that has to be undertaken here, and it's a very difficult balance in this context," Judge Patricia Millett told Cecil VanDevender, a lawyer with special counsel Jack Smith's office. "But we have to use a careful scalpel here and not step into really sort of skewing the political arena, don't we?"

VanDevender replied that he agreed but said he believed that the gag order imposed last month does strike the appropriate balance.

The court did not immediately rule but its questions left open the possibility that it might narrow the gag order, setting parameters on what Trump, as both a criminal defendant and the leading candidate for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, can and cannot say as the trial date nears. Trump's team has signaled that it will fight any restrictions to the Supreme Court.

No matter the outcome, the stakes are high given the volume and intensity of Trump's public comments about the case, the massive public platform he holds on social media and the campaign trail, and the limited legal precedent for restricting speech of political candidates — let alone for the White House — who

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are criminal defendants.

In a sign of the argument's import, special counsel Smith himself attended, sitting in the front row of the courtroom in a building just blocks from the U.S. Capitol stormed on Jan. 6, 2021, by rioters motivated by Trump's false claims about the election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

Monday's arguments spanned nearly two-and-a-half hours, with Trump lawyer D. John Sauer fielding the majority of questions as he pressed his case that the gag order was overly vague and an unconstitutional muzzling.

"The order is unprecedented, and it sets a terrible precedent for future restrictions on core political speech," Sauer said. He described it as a "heckler's veto," unfairly relying on the theory that Trump's speech might someday inspire other people to harass or intimidate his targets.

"They can't draw a causal line from any social media post to threat or harassment when we have wall-to-wall media coverage of this case," Sauer told the court.

But those points were greeted coolly by the court.

Judge Brad Garcia pressed Sauer to explain why the court shouldn't take preventive steps before violence materializes against potential witnesses or others.

"This is predictably going to intensify as well as the threats, so why isn't the district court justified in taking a more proactive measure and not waiting for more and more threats to occur and stepping in to protect the integrity of the trial?" Garcia said.

Though Sauer contended that prosecutors had not drawn a direct line between Trump's rhetoric and actual harm, VanDevender pointed out that a Texas woman stands charged with making a death threat against the judge in the Trump case, Tanya Chutkan, just one day after Trump in August posted on social media: "If you go after me, I'm coming after you!" Prosecutors cited that episode in its original gag order request, saying Trump's posts had "already influenced the public."

Another judge hearing the arguments, Cornelia Pillard, sharply questioned Sauer over whether he believed any restrictions on Trump's speech were allowed, telling him: "I don't hear you giving any weight at all to the interest in a fair trial."

Judge Millett recoiled at Sauer's argument that Trump was merely engaged in core political speech.

"Labeling it core political speech begs the question if it's political speech or speech aimed at derailing the criminal process," she said.

But the judges also repeatedly wondered where to strike a balance, raising the prospect that the gag order could ultimately be narrowed. Millett at one point expressed incredulity at the idea that Trump would not be able to respond to criticism by rival candidates in a debate.

"He has to speak Miss Manners while everyone else is throwing targets at him?" she asked.

The order has had a whirlwind trajectory through the courts since Chutkan imposed it in response to a request from prosecutors, who cited among other comments Trump's repeated disparagement of Smith as "deranged."

The judge lifted it days after entering it, giving Trump's lawyers time to prove why his words should not be restricted. But after Trump took advantage of that pause with comments that prosecutors said were meant to sway his former chief of staff against giving unfavorable testimony, Chutkan put it back in place.

The appeals court later lifted it as it considered Trump's appeal.

Pillard and Millett are appointees of former President Barack Obama. Garcia joined the bench this year after being nominated by President Joe Biden. Obama and Biden are Democrats.

The four-count indictment against Trump in Washington is one of four criminal cases he faces as he seeks to reclaim the White House in 2024. The case is set for trial next March 4.

He's been charged in Florida, also by Smith's team, with illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida. He's also been charged in state court in New York in connection with hush money payments to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who alleged an extramarital affair with him, and in Georgia with working to subvert the 2020 presidential election in that state.

He has denied any wrongdoing.

No more Thanksgiving 'food orgy'? New obesity medications change how users think of holiday meals

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

For most of her life, Claudia Stearns dreaded Thanksgiving. As a person who struggled with obesity since childhood, Stearns hated the annual turmoil of obsessing about what she ate — and the guilt of overindulging on a holiday built around food.

Now, after losing nearly 100 pounds using medications including Wegovy, a powerful new anti-obesity drug, Stearns says the "food noise" in her head has gone very, very quiet.

"Last year, it felt so lovely to just be able to enjoy my meal, to focus on being with friends and family, to focus on the joy of the day," says Stearns, 65, of Somerville, Massachusetts. "That was a whole new experience."

As millions of Americans struggling with obesity gain access to a new generation of weight-loss drugs, Stearns' experience is becoming more common — and more noticeable at the times of year when cooking, eating and a sense of abundance can define and heighten gatherings of loved ones and friends. Medical experts and consumers say the drugs are shifting not only what users eat, but also the way they think about food.

For some, it means greater mental control over their meals. Others say it saps the enjoyment from social situations, including traditionally food-centric holidays like Thanksgiving, Passover and Christmas.

"It's something that really changes a lot of things in their life," says Dr. Daniel Bessesen, chief of endocrinology at Denver Health, who treats patients with obesity. "They go from food being a central focus to it's just not."

UNDERMINING THE FESTIVITIES?

The new obesity drugs, originally designed to treat diabetes, include semaglutide, used in Ozempic and Wegovy, and tirzepatide, used in Mounjaro and recently approved as Zepbound. Now aimed at weight loss, too, the drugs delivered as weekly injections work far differently than any diet. They mimic powerful hormones that kick in after people eat to regulate appetite and the feeling of fullness communicated between the gut and the brain. Users can lose as much as 15% to 25% of their body weight, studies show.

"That's how it works — it reduces the rewarding aspects of food," explains Dr. Michael Schwartz, an expert in metabolism, diabetes and obesity at the University of Washington in Seattle.

For Stearns, who started treatment in 2020, using the weight-loss medications means she can take a few bites of her favorite Thanksgiving pies — and then stop.

"I would not feel full," she says, "but I would feel satisfied."

Yet such a shift can have broader implications, both religious and cultural, because it alters the experience of festive and religious holidays that are often built around interactions with food — and lots of it.

"I'm Italian. For us, it's like going to church, going to a table," says Joe Sapone, 64, a retiree from Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, who lost about 100 pounds with dieting and Mounjaro. He no longer needs what he called "the food orgy" of a holiday, but he acknowledges it was an adjustment.

"Part of succeeding at this is disconnecting a good time with what you eat," he says. "Am I still going to have fun if I don't eat that much?"

CHANGES IN ENJOYMENT

Many users welcome what they say is greater control over what they eat, even during the emotionally charged holiday season.

"I may be more selective of the items I put on my plate," says Tara Rothenhoefer, 48, of Trinity, Florida. She lost more than 200 pounds after joining a clinical trial testing Mounjaro for weight loss in 2020. "I don't care about the bread as much. I still eat what I enjoy."

But others on the drugs lose their appetites entirely or suffer side effects — nausea, vomiting, diarrhea — that undermine the pleasure of any food.

"I've had a handful of patients over the years who were really miserable because they didn't enjoy food in the same way," says Dr. Katherine Saunders, an obesity expert at Weill Cornell Medicine and co-founder

of Intellihealth, a clinical and software company that focuses on obesity treatment.

But, she added, most people who have turned to weight-loss medications have spent years struggling with the physical and mental burdens of chronic obesity and are relieved to discover a decreased desire for food — and grateful to shed pounds.

When people stop taking the drugs, their appetites return and they regain weight, often faster than they lost it, studies show. One early analysis found that two-thirds of patients who started taking weight-loss drugs were no longer using them a year later.

Part of that may be due to high cost and ongoing supply shortages. But the larger question of what it means to alter a basic human drive like appetite needs to be considered as well, says Dr. Jens Juul Holst of the University of Copenhagen. He is one of the researchers who first identified the gut hormone GLP-1, or glucagon-like peptide 1, which eventually led to the new class of obesity drugs.

Speaking at an international diabetes conference this fall, Holst offered a philosophical critique of the new medications' real-world impact.

"Why is it that you've lost weight? That's because you've lost your appetite. That's because you've lost the pleasure of eating and the reward of having a beautiful meal," Holst told his colleagues. "And how long can you stand that? That is the real, real question."

China welcomes Arab and Muslim foreign ministers for talks on ending the war in Gaza

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's top diplomat welcomed four Arab foreign ministers and the Indonesian one to Beijing on Monday, saying his country would work with "our brothers and sisters" in the Arab and Islamic world to try to end the war in Gaza as soon as possible.

The ministers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Indonesia chose to start in Beijing a tour to permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, a testament to both China's growing geopolitical influence and its longstanding support for the Palestinians.

The ministerial committee stressed Monday the need for an immediate stop to "military escalation" in Gaza and to propel the political process forward with the goal of lasting peace, as well as "hold the Israeli occupation accountable for the blatant violations and crimes in the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank," according to a statement published by the Saudi foreign ministry on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the foreign diplomats that their decision to start in Beijing shows their high level of trust in his nation.

"China is a good friend and brother of Arab and Islamic countries," Wang said in opening remarks at a state guest house before their talks began. "We have always firmly safeguarded the legitimate rights and interests of Arab (and) Islamic countries and have always firmly supported the just cause of the Palestinian people."

China has long backed the Palestinians and been quick to denounce Israel over its settlements in the occupied territories. It has not criticized the initial Hamas attack on Oct. 7 — which killed about 1,200 people — while the United States and others have called it an act of terrorism. However, China does have growing economic ties with Israel.

The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, called for an immediate cease-fire and the entry of humanitarian aid and relief to the Gaza Strip.

"There are still dangerous developments ahead of us and an urgent humanitarian crisis that requires an international mobilization to deal with and counter it," he said.

He added they appreciated the resolution issued by the United Nations Security Council, calling for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses in Gaza, "but we still need more efforts and cooperation."

The visit came after Arab and Muslim leaders condemned the "brutal Israeli aggression" against the Palestinians at a rare joint summit of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation hosted by Saudi Arabia last week.

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The secretary general of the OIC, Hissein Brahim Taha, is also accompanying them on the trip. China — the world's second-largest economy after the U.S. — has become increasingly outspoken on international affairs and even gotten directly involved in some recently, albeit cautiously.

In March, Beijing helped broker an agreement that saw Saudi Arabia and Iran reestablish ties after seven years of tension in a role previously reserved for longtime global heavyweights like the U.S. and Russia.

Israel's retaliatory strikes on the Gaza Strip have so far killed more than 11,500 people, according to Palestinian health authorities. Another 2,700 have been reported missing, believed buried in rubble.

"This isn't Israel's first war against the Palestinian people," said Riyad Al-Maliki, the Palestinian Authority foreign minister. "However, Israel wants this to be its last war, where it takes full control of the Palestinian people's presence on what's left of the historical land of Palestine."

Israel's ambassador to China, Irit Ben-Abba, said Monday, that her country is allowing sufficient humanitarian aid into Gaza in collaboration with international organizations and that "putting pressure on Israel in this regard is politically motivated and is not conducive to the humanitarian assistance which is needed."

She also said that they hoped for "no one-sided" resolution by the Security Council and that they expected a clear statement calling for the "unconditional release of the 240 hostages" who were abducted by Hamas during its attacks, "rather than calling for a cease-fire."

Kelce Bowl: Chiefs' Travis, Eagles' Jason the center of attention in a Super Bowl rematch

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Good luck going anywhere these days without hearing or seeing something that has to do with Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce or his younger brother, Travis Kelce, the star tight end of the Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs.

The former was recently dubbed one of the "Sexiest Men Alive" by "People" magazine. The latter is dating Grammy-winning superstar Taylor Swift.

Together they host one of the hottest podcasts in America, lent their voices to a Philly-centric Christmas album, and have transcended the NFL to become pop culture icons in their own right.

Even the matriarch of their family, Donna Kelce, has become an endorsement powerhouse over the past 12 months.

"It's been a whirlwind," admitted Jason Kelce, who will try once more to beat Travis and the Chiefs for the first time when the Eagles visit Arrowhead Stadium on Monday night for a rematch of the Super Bowl.

"It kind of started last year with the podcast and everything, and I think it continued to grow more and more."

It's been on hyperdrive since the Chiefs rallied to beat the Eagles for the Lombardi Trophy in February.

That is when many football fans began to latch onto their podcast, "New Heights, with Jason and Travis Kelce," where the duo provided a glimpse of their lives behind their facemasks. The Kelces rap on everything from what happened that week in the NFL to what happened in the worlds of TV and entertainment, all with a stunningly disarming sense of humor.

That's also about the time that people began embracing Donna, who has made every effort to show up for both of her boys' games over the years — including those against each other — yet had never been in such a spotlight. She famously wore a half-Eagles, half-Chiefs jersey to the Super Bowl, and there is little doubt she will bring it out again on Monday night.

Suddenly, the Kelce brothers were showing up on late-night TV shows. Playing in made-for-TV golf spectacles.

Raising millions of dollars for charitable causes. And yes, rubbing elbows with singers, actors and the Hollywood elite.

"You just try to take it one game at a time," Jason Kelce said, using that well-worn cliché to describe the way he handles the hullabaloo. "You try to stay grounded with it. You try to stay realistic with it. You try to be the same person you are."

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Even if you are named one of the sexiest men alive.

Then there's Travis Kelce, whose profile began growing the minute he stepped onto the field for his second season with the Chiefs. Since then, he's been an All-Pro four times, selected to eight Pro Bowls, won three AFC championships and two Super Bowl rings — including that one at the expense of his brother.

Travis Kelce didn't become a crossover star, though, until he mentioned his failed attempt at giving Swift one of her famous friendship bracelets during a stop on her Eras Tour.

Undeterred, he invited the songstress to watch him perform at Arrowhead Stadium, and after she took him up on the offer early this season, the two have been seen together all over the world.

That includes Buenos Aires, where last weekend Kelce took advantage of the Chiefs' bye week to drop in on her concert. And in a scene that was all over social media, Swift not only changed one of her lyrics — "Karma is the guy on the screen" became "Karma is the guy on the Chiefs" — she also raced off the stage to kiss him after finishing a song.

"We're learning with the paparazzi just taking photos from all over the place," Kelce admitted. "You have a lot of people that care for Taylor and for good reason. Just got to keep living and learning and enjoying the moments."

On the field, there have been a lot of good ones for both brothers.

The Eagles are 8-1 and were leading the NFC as they entered the weekend, while the Chiefs are 7-2 and atop the AFC. And while both teams have a long way to go, nobody would be surprised if they met again in Las Vegas for the Super Bowl.

The NFL certainly would have no problem with it.

The Kelce brothers — despite playing two of the least-glamorous positions in the game — no doubt have created countless new football fans with their off-the-field endeavors.

After all, how many "Swifties" have tuned in to see whether their hero will show up to the next Chiefs game, then became hooked on what happened between the end zones?

"Listen," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said this week, "ex-players have done a great job once they've gotten done. We know that. But to have the guys still playing and doing it, and still maintaining the support of their teams doing it? That means they are doing it the right way, and not putting coaches and players at risk. There's no threat there. That's when you get in trouble."

Other players have transcended the sport over the years, though usually they play quarterback: Tom Brady, Peyton Manning and, yes, the Chiefs' Patrick Mahomes.

But rarely have they dived so headlong into the myriad of ventures of the Kelce brothers.

That includes "A Philly Special Christmas," which features Jason Kelce singing alongside Eagles teammates Jordan Mailata and Lane Johnson, and with Travis Kelce enlisted to sing "Fairytale of Philadelphia" on their sophomore effort.

It's a lot that could take away from what happens on the field. Yet somehow, the Kelce brothers have thrived while doing it.

"This will continue to grow with other teams," predicated Reid, who has known the family for decades, and even coached Jason Kelce when he was in Philadelphia. "How you handle it is important. And these guys have done a nice job."

The lion, the wig and the warrior. Who is Javier Milei, Argentina's president-elect?

By DAVID BILLER and DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — His legions of fans call him "the madman" and "the wig" due to his ferocity and unruly mop of hair. He refers to himself as "the lion." He thinks sex education is a Marxist plot to destroy the family, views his cloned mastiffs as his "children with four paws" and has suggested people should be allowed to sell their own vital organs.

He is Javier Milei, Argentina's next president.

A few years ago, Milei was a television talking head whom bookers loved because his screeds against

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government spending and the ruling political class boosted ratings. At the time, and up until mere months ago, hardly any political expert believed he had a real shot at becoming president of South America's second-largest economy.

But Milei, a 53-year-old economist, has rocked Argentina's political establishment and inserted himself into what has long been effectively a two-party system by amassing a groundswell of support with his prescriptions of drastic measures to rein in soaring inflation and by pledging to crusade against the creep of socialism in society.

'ANARCHO-CAPITALIST' LIBERTARIAN

At the heart of his economic plan for Argentina is a proposal to replace the local currency, the peso, with the U.S. dollar. He has repeatedly said the only way to end the scourge of inflation, which has topped 140%, is to prevent politicians from continuing to print money. As such, he plans to extinguish the Central Bank.

A self-described "anarcho-capitalist," Milei's libertarianism was a novelty for Argentina. He has spoken in favor of loosening the country's labor laws and promoted a vision of starkly smaller government to boost economic growth. That entails eliminating half of the government ministries, including health and education. As a symbol of the deep cuts he champions, he has at times campaigned with a revving chainsaw in hand.

Reducing the state's size dovetails with his calls for the "political caste" to be purged from Argentina's government, much as former U.S. President Donald Trump spoke of "draining the swamp" in reference to the entrenched establishment. Milei has often drawn comparisons to Trump, a leader he openly admires.

Before entering the public spotlight, Milei was chief economist at Corporación America, one of Argentina's largest business conglomerates that, among other things, runs most of the country's airports. He worked there until 2021, when he won his seat as a lawmaker.

CULTURE WARRIOR

Milei doesn't just see himself as a right-leaning politician, but also as a culture warrior with the mission of shaking up Argentine society. Some of Milei's positions appear to echo more conservative Republicans in the U.S. while his fiery, profanity-laden rhetoric has already lifted him to prominence in the global culture war that at times overwhelms political discourse in the U.S., neighboring Brazil and elsewhere.

Milei opposes feminist policies and abortion, which Argentina legalized in recent years, and has proposed a plebiscite to repeal the law. He also rejects the notion humans have a role in causing climate change. In a television appearance, he denounced Pope Francis, who is Argentine, as an "imbecile" for defending social justice and called the head of the Roman Catholic Church "the representative of malignance on Earth."

In the same vein as Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again," Milei has said he will return the country to an unspecified period of greatness.

"Argentina is going to reclaim the place in the world that it should never have lost," Milei said at his victory rally Sunday. His followers have embraced the comparison, and often wear hats bearing the words "Make Argentina Great Again."

PERSONAL LIFE

The son of a passenger transport businessman and a homemaker, the economist doesn't like to talk much about his childhood and has said his young years were marked by a tense relationship with his father.

A younger Milei played in a Rolling Stones tribute band and served as a goalkeeper in the youth divisions of the Chacarita soccer club. But he decided to put aside soccer during the hyperinflation period of the late 1980s to study economics.

These days, the only family member with whom he has a close relationship is his sister, Karina Milei, who ran his campaign. He calls her "the boss," and has repeatedly characterized her as the architect of his rise to power.

During his repeated television appearances, Milei didn't just talk about economics and politics. He also delved into his personal life and once presented himself as an expert in tantric sex, openly discussing how he had repeatedly participated in group sex and providing tips.

For much of his adult life, Milei did not have a serious romantic partner and he isn't known to have friends. After saying for months that he didn't have time to date, he started a relationship in July with actress and artist Fátima Flórez. She is known for her imitations of Vice President Cristina Fernández de

Kirchner, who was president 2007-2015.

Milei had a deep connection with his English Mastiff, Conan, who passed away. He now has at least four others reportedly cloned using Conan's DNA, all of which are named after economists.

Despite the "wig" nickname, his hair is real.

Georgia deputy who shot absolved man had been fired for excessive force. Critics blame the sheriff

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

When Staff Sgt. Buck Aldridge fatally shot Leonard Cure during a roadside struggle after pulling him over for speeding, it wasn't the first time a traffic stop involving the Camden County sheriff's deputy had spiraled into violence.

Last year, Aldridge dragged a driver from a car that crashed after fleeing the deputy on Interstate 95. Body and dash camera video obtained by The Associated Press show the driver on his back as Aldridge punches him. Records indicate the deputy faced no disciplinary action.

Personnel records show Aldridge was fired in August 2017 by a police department in the same Georgia county after he threw a woman to the ground and handcuffed her during a traffic stop. The Camden County Sheriff's Office hired him nine months later.

Aldridge stopped Cure for speeding Oct. 16 and ended up shocking the 53-year-old Black man with a Taser after he refused to put his hands behind him to be cuffed. Body and dash camera videos show Cure fought back and had a hand at the deputy's throat when Aldridge shot him point-blank.

Relatives have said Cure likely resisted because of psychological trauma from spending 16 years imprisoned in Florida for an armed robbery he didn't commit. Officials exonerated and freed him in 2020.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation is investigating Cure's death and will submit its findings to prosecutors. Aldridge's attorney said the video shows he fired in self-defense. Critics question whether he should have been wearing a badge at all, given his history of aggression.

"This guy should have never been on the force," said Timothy Bessent Sr., president of Camden County's NAACP chapter.

The AP obtained Aldridge's personnel records as well as reports and videos from the June 2022 chase and arrest using Georgia's open records law.

A former U.S. Marine, Aldridge, 41, worked nearly five years for the Kingsland Police Department in Georgia's southeast corner. His file shows Aldridge was disciplined for using unnecessary force in February 2014 and May 2017. The second time he was suspended for three days without pay.

The department fired Aldridge for his third infraction just three months later. Police records say Aldridge was assisting with a traffic stop when he tried to handcuff a woman — not to arrest her, but to keep her outside her car. One deputy told investigators Aldridge cuffed the woman after "picking her up and throwing her on the ground." She was cited for letting an unlicensed person drive her car.

Aldridge was hired by the sheriff's office in May 2018. He disclosed his firing on his job application.

Aldridge's termination wouldn't automatically disqualify him from working for another agency, though some would consider it a huge liability, said retired police Maj. Neill Franklin.

"If someone's terminated from another police department for use of excessive force, they're not getting hired by the Maryland State Police or the Baltimore Police Department," said Franklin, who led training programs for both agencies. "It's just not worth the risk."

Bessent and other advocates say it's an example of Camden County Sheriff Jim Proctor tolerating unnecessary violence.

Proctor, who has been sheriff for a decade, declined to comment. Spokesman Capt. Larry Bruce cited the investigation into Cure's death and pending civil litigation involving other deputies.

Since last year, six Camden County deputies have been indicted on felony charges and fired for violence against jail detainees and a motorist.

In September 2022, jail security cameras recorded guards rushing into the cell of Jarrett Hobbs, who

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was punched in the head and neck and hurled against a wall. Hobbs was charged with assaulting jailers until his attorney obtained the video. His charges were dropped, and three deputies were indicted.

Two more jailers were charged and fired for incidents in March and July. Security video showed one push a detainee to the floor and punch him before another guard intervened. The other deputy shoved a handcuffed detainee headfirst into a door, knocking him unconscious.

"You've got these deputies running wild and doing what they want to do," said Harry Daniels, a civil rights attorney who won a legal settlement for Hobbs. "The consequences have come from the GBI and the district attorney's office. It should not come from an outside agency."

He points to Christine Newman, named "Deputy of the Month" two months after a dash camera recorded her slapping a handcuffed driver across the face and slamming the woman's head into a patrol SUV. The driver had refused to exit her vehicle after being pulled over for a rolling stop Jan. 16, 2022.

Newman was fired a year later after being indicted on charges including aggravated assault and violating her oath of office. She has pleaded not guilty. Newman's attorney, Robert Persse, called her a "loyal deputy" whom he looks forward to defending in court.

The number of deputies facing charges "indicates a culture that may not encourage use of force, but certainly tolerates inappropriate use of force," said retired LaGrange, Georgia, Police Chief Louis Dekmar.

"If folks are held accountable and there are clear lines, you generally don't see that in law enforcement agencies," said Dekmar, a former president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

A spike in claims involving the sheriff's office caused Camden County's government to get dropped by its insurance company in July, said Mike Spiers, the county's risk management director. The county got new policies, he said, but its deductible for liability jumped from \$25,000 per claim to \$250,000.

Aldridge was placed on administrative leave while the GBI investigates Cure's death.

"Buck Aldridge is a fine officer and the video speaks for itself," said Adrienne Browning, Aldridge's attorney. "It's clear his life was in danger and he defended himself."

Video of the fatal confrontation along I-95 shows Aldridge telling Cure he's being charged with reckless driving for speeding in excess of 100 mph (161 kph). Cure argues, but obeys commands to get out and put his hands on his truck. However, he ignores commands to put his hands behind him.

That's when Aldridge fires his Taser into Cure's back. Cure fights back, and video shows them grappling beside the highway. Cure maintains a grip on Aldridge's face and neck after being struck with a baton.

"Yeah, bitch!" Cure says. Then he slumps to the ground after Aldridge fires a single shot.

Dekmar, Franklin and a third expert told AP they believe the shooting was legal, as Aldridge appeared to be in danger when he fired. But they also criticized how Aldridge began the encounter by shouting at Cure and said he made no effort to deescalate.

"He escalated the situation with Mr. Cure," said former Memphis police officer Thaddeus Johnson, a criminal justice professor at Georgia State University and a senior fellow for the Council on Criminal Justice. "He has no control over his emotions."

Johnson said Aldridge showed a similar lack of control during a June 2022 arrest after chasing two speeding cars.

After one car crashes, body and dash camera video shows Aldridge shouting expletives as he approaches with his gun drawn. The driver is on his back when Aldridge starts dragging him headfirst from the car, then punches him.

The driver resists being cuffed but complies after another deputy's dog bites him and Aldridge shocks him with a Taser. The driver was charged with drug trafficking, reckless driving and fleeing an officer.

Aldridge was promoted to staff sergeant two months later. His sheriff's personnel file shows no disciplinary actions.

Johnson said he sees no justification for Aldridge punching the arrested driver. Even if prosecutors don't charge him in Cure's death, he said, "from what I saw in the video, he deserves to be fired."

"We have to hold officers to a higher standard," Johnson said, "even though they are human."

A Montana farmer with a flattop and ample lobbyist cash stands between the GOP and Senate control

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BIGFORK, Mont. (AP) — After 17 years in the U.S. Senate, Democrat Jon Tester is a well-known commodity in Montana — a plain-spoken grain farmer with a flattop and a carefully cultivated reputation as a moderate.

The 67-year-old lawmaker smiled and laughed his way through the crowd at a Veterans Day event in Bigfork, a small town on Flathead Lake where the population has surged in recent years. He chatted with veterans who supported him and some who didn't, then stood behind a lectern in the Bigfork High School gymnasium to promote his biggest recent accomplishment: expanded federal health care for millions of veterans exposed to toxic smoke at military "burn pits."

Tester has survived three close elections and a changed national political landscape to emerge as the lone Democrat still holding high office in Montana. The 2024 election brings possibly his stiffest challenge yet: Republicans, just two seats short of Senate control, are expected to spend tens of millions on attack ads painting him as a Washington insider tainted by lobbyist cash.

Ousting Tester also would cement a Republican lock on a state that voted overwhelmingly for Republican Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election.

Tester entered the Senate after selling Montana voters on his authenticity, and the former high school band teacher's message hasn't changed much. He still mingles comfortably with union members, ranchers and veterans, has a record of working on their behalf, and says his heart remains firmly in his sparsely populated state, a vast expanse that spans from the arid Great Plains to the lush forests of the Pacific Northwest.

Still, authenticity is harder to sell when you've become a top Washington fundraiser. He's taken in almost \$20 million for next year's election, ranking Tester sixth among Senate candidates nationwide, according to Federal Election Commission data through September. Tester insisted that the money hasn't changed him, that he doesn't even know where it all comes from.

"I can't tell you who's donating to me. Even from within the state of Montana, I can't tell you who donates to me because I don't look at that list," he said in an interview. "It's not important. I trust that those people believe in me and I'm going to continue to do the same job."

His campaign reports reveal abundant lobbyist cash, the kind that rarely comes from people who don't want something, and yet the lawmaker's journey from outsider to fundraising behemoth has largely been one of necessity. With West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin's decision against seeking another term, Tester has become a top target for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and his massive fundraising operation.

McConnell's aspirations to again be majority leader could get bogged down if a primary fight develops between his anointed candidate in Montana, U.S. Navy SEAL Tim Sheehy, and U.S. Rep. Matt Rosendale, one of the far-right House members who ousted fellow Republican Kevin McCarthy of California as House speaker. Dozens of state lawmakers have encouraged Rosendale to enter. He ran against Tester in 2018 and lost despite a huge push from then-President Trump.

Republican unity next November would narrow Tester's path to victory, especially if he's branded as a Washington insider. As he's gained seniority and influence — and as election spending nationwide has exploded — the flood of campaign cash that's flowed toward Tester has left him vulnerable to attack.

The potency of the authenticity issue even within his own party was on display during a recent town hall hosted by Tester in the Democratic stronghold of Butte, where a group of activists pressed him repeatedly to call for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. The lawmaker, who heads the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on defense, rebuffed their pleas, saying Israel had a right to defend itself against the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas.

That rankled Noah Sohl of Missoula, who said he twice voted for Tester and supported the Democrat's last reelection by making phone calls and registering voters. The nursing student drew a straight line be-

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tween donations to Tester's campaign by defense industry lobbyists and Tester's opposition to a cease-fire.

After becoming the panel's chairman in 2021, Tester received more than \$160,000 in contributions from employees and committees representing the defense industry. The donations came at a crucial juncture for both the defense budget and Lockheed Martin, which benefited from \$1.8 billion for the F-35 fighter jet that Tester's subcommittee pushed as part of a military spending package.

Sohl pledged not to help Tester this election if he won't change his stance on a cease-fire. Sohl acknowledged that could benefit Republicans.

"They're all licking their chops over the fact that among his (Tester's) constituents, there's a rising group that don't agree with him," Sohl said. "His big thing is, 'I'm not like those Republicans. I'm a true Montanan just going to Washington to fight for the people who voted for me.' But it seems like he lost his footing."

Tester dismissed any notion that campaign donations sway his vote or that he's fundamentally changed since 2006. He also brushed off the increased pressure on him since Manchin's departure.

Veterans issues resound in Montana, which has the second-highest percentage of veterans in the U.S. among the adult civilian population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Tester chairs the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

"I take my cues directly from the veterans of this state," Tester told the assembly at Bigfork High School.

In the front row sat Terry Baker, who served in the Vietnam War and voted against Tester the first time he ran. Tester's backing of veterans converted Baker into a supporter. He said the lawmaker remains the only Democrat he has ever voted for.

"He's been a tremendous asset for all the veterans' groups," said Baker, 72, of Kalispell. "The fact that there are a tremendous amount of veterans in Montana, that will help Tester out."

Montana itself has changed significantly since Tester came to office. There's been an influx of newcomers from Arizona, Washington state, California and Texas. Farmland is yielding to subdivisions even as cities such as Bozeman and Missoula have housing crises.

The state's politics have lurched rightward. When Tester entered the Senate, Democrats held almost every statewide elected office in Montana, from governor, secretary of state and attorney general, to two of the state's three seats in Congress. Since the 2020 election, that's down to Tester's seat.

Republican state lawmakers maneuvered unsuccessfully to hobble his chances for a fourth term this spring. They proposed election rule changes that would have allowed only the top two candidates to advance from next year's Senate primary. That likely would have kept third-party candidates off the general election ballot and could have tipped the election for Republicans.

Past races for Tester's seat were close enough some Republicans blamed third-party candidates for the Democrat's victories. Concern that could happen again can't be discounted. Montana Libertarian Party Chairman Sid Daoud announced Monday that he's entering next year's Senate race, raising Republican fears of a third-party spoiler.

Tester rode to office on the unpopularity of the Iraq war and a specter of scandal that plagued his predecessor, three-term Sen. Conrad Burns, over the Republican's close ties to "super-lobbyist" Jack Abramoff. Abramoff was jailed for conspiracy and fraud. No charges were filed against Burns, a former cattle auctioneer who dismissed criticism over the matter as "old political hooey."

Challenges to Tester's authenticity dogged him during the 2018 election cycle, when he ranked for a time as the top recipient of lobbyist donations among members of Congress. He currently ranks second with \$407,000 in contributions from lobbyists, putting him just behind Washington state Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell, according to the research group OpenSecrets.

Those direct contributions do not include millions of dollars expected to be spent on the race from outside groups, including McConnell's formidable operation and comparable Democratic organizations.

So far, there is nothing to indicate that money flowing Tester's way swayed his decision-making or that he did anything wrong. Still, Republicans have highlighted the ties to lobbyists in an ad campaign launched earlier this month that declares "after nearly two decades in Washington, Jon Tester has changed."

Tester invited anyone who think he's changed to come out and "pick rock" at the farm near the small

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town of Big Sandy that he runs with his wife, Sharla. He said he's still cognizant that in Montana, every connection with voters is vital.

To his way of thinking, that makes authenticity the kind of thing money can't buy.

"This is an eyeball-to-eyeball state," he said.

Today in History: November 21, Las Vegas hotel fire kills 87

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Nov. 21, the 325th day of 2023. There are 40 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 21, 1980, 87 people died in a fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada.

On this date:

In 1789, North Carolina became the 12th state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1920, the Irish Republican Army killed 12 British intelligence officers and two auxiliary policemen in the Dublin area; British forces responded by raiding a soccer match, killing 14 civilians.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Air Quality Act.

In 1969, the Senate voted down the Supreme Court nomination of Clement F. Haynsworth, 55-45, the first such rejection since 1930.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon's attorney, J. Fred Buzhardt, revealed the existence of an 18-1/2-minute gap in one of the White House tape recordings related to Watergate.

In 1979, a mob attacked the U-S Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, killing two Americans.

In 1980, an estimated 83 million TV viewers tuned in to the CBS prime-time soap opera "Dallas" to find out "who shot J.R." (The shooter turned out to be J.R. Ewing's sister-in-law, Kristin Shepard.)

In 1985, U.S. Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Jay Pollard was arrested and accused of spying for Israel. (Pollard later pleaded guilty to espionage and was sentenced to life in prison, but was released in 2015.)

In 1990, junk-bond financier Michael R. Milken, who had pleaded guilty to six felony counts, was sentenced by a federal judge in New York to 10 years in prison. (Milken served two.)

In 1995, Balkan leaders meeting in Dayton, Ohio, initialed a peace plan to end 3 1/2 years of ethnic fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 2001, Otilie (AH'-tih-lee) Lundgren, a 94-year-old resident of Oxford, Connecticut, died of inhalation anthrax; she was the apparent last victim of a series of anthrax attacks carried out through the mail system.

In 2012, Israel and the Hamas militant group in Gaza agreed to a cease-fire to end eight days of the fiercest fighting in nearly four years.

In 2017, Zimbabwe's 93-year-old president Robert Mugabe resigned; he was facing impeachment proceedings and had been placed under house arrest by the military.

In 2020, a federal judge in Pennsylvania tossed out a Trump campaign lawsuit seeking to prevent certification of Joe Biden's victory in the state; in a scathing order, the judge said Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani presented only "speculative accusations."

In 2021, a man drove an SUV into a suburban Milwaukee Christmas parade, leaving six people dead and more than 60 injured. (Darrell Brooks Jr. was convicted of 76 counts, including six counts of first-degree intentional homicide; he would be sentenced to life in prison with no chance of release.)

In 2022, NASA's Orion capsule reached the moon, whipping around the far side and buzzing the lunar surface on its way to a record-breaking orbit with test dummies sitting in for astronauts in the first time a capsule visited the moon since NASA's Apollo program 50 years ago.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Laurence Luckinbill is 89. Actor Marlo Thomas is 86. Actor Rick Lenz is 84. Actor Juliet Mills is 82. Basketball Hall of Famer Earl Monroe is 79. Television producer Marcy Carsey is 79. Actor Goldie Hawn is 78. Movie director Andrew Davis is 77. Rock musician Lonnie Jordan (War) is 75. Singer Livingston Taylor is 73. Actor-singer Lorna Luft is 71. Actor Cherry Jones is 67. Rock musician Brian Ritchie (The Violent Femmes) is 63. Gospel singer Steven Curtis Chapman is 61. Actor Nicollette Sheridan is 60.

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Singer-actor Bjork is 58. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Troy Aikman is 57. R&B singer Chauncey Hannibal (BLACKstreet) is 55. Rock musician Alex James (Blur) is 55. Baseball Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. is 54. TV personality Rib Hillis is 53. Football player-turned-TV personality Michael Strahan (STRAY'-han) is 52. Actor Rain Phoenix is 51. Actor Marina de Tavira is 50. Country singer Kelsi Osborn (SHeDAISY) is 49. Actor Jimmi Simpson is 48. Singer-actor Lindsey Haun is 39. Actor Jena Malone is 39. Pop singer Carly Rae Jepsen is 38. Actor-singer Sam Palladio is 37.