

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Coming up

### Tuesday, Nov. 28

- United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
- James Valley Telecommunications Holiday Open House, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- JH GBB at Redfield (7th at 6:15 p.m., 8th at 7:15 p.m.)
- Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- Senior Menu: Tuna noodle hot dish, peas, California blend, Swedish apple pie square, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Monty Cristo sandwich.
- School Lunch: Scalloped potatoes with ham, corn.



"Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."

MOTHER TERESA

## Wednesday, Nov. 29

- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.
- Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
- Senior Menu: Vegetable beef soup, chicken salad sandwich, mandarin oranges, cookie.
- School Breakfast: Muffins.
- School Lunch: Corndogs, fries.

## Thursday, Nov. 30

- Fall Sports Awards Night, 7 p.m.
- Senior Menu: Baked chicken breast, mashed potatoes with gravy, California blend vegetables, lemon tart bar, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Muffins.
- School Lunch: Corndogs, fries.

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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

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## The Bulletin by Newsweek

### World in Brief

**Congressional Map Battle:** Republicans were dealt a blow after New Mexico's Supreme Court upheld the state's congressional map, which the state GOP argued was overly favorable to Democrats.

**Gershkovich Held:** A Moscow court has extended the detention of Wall Street Journal journalist Evan Gershkovich until January 30. Gershkovich was detained in March.

**Declining Temperatures:** Winter weather has arrived early for many states, with New York, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania bracing for a lake-effect storm that could dump over a foot of snow through Wednesday in some areas, The Weather Channel predicts.

**India's Rescue Efforts:** Authorities said that rescuers are just meters away from 41 construction workers who have been stuck in a collapsed tunnel in the Himalayas since Nov. 12. Senior officials leading the efforts said they are confident that the men will be reached today.

**Russia-Ukraine War:** Russia continued to suffer high losses of troops and equipment, according to Ukraine, as both sides faced challenging conditions due to bad weather. Ukraine's General Staff said Russia lost 860 troops and three tanks in the past 24 hours.

**Unconventional:** Newsweek Editor-at-Large and host of Unconventional Naveed Jamali got to ride along on a pre-deployment training raid with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Watch the latest episode of Unconventional to see how infantry Marines train, take a look inside an Osprey, and more, as Naveed embeds with the unit for 36 hours.

**Israel-Hamas Pause Extended:** Israel announced that 11 more hostages, including three-year-old twins, were released by Hamas in exchange for 33 Palestinian prisoners after both sides agreed to extend a humanitarian truce by two more days. Read more below.

**Carter Memorial:** President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden are scheduled to attend a memorial service for former First Lady Rosalynn Carter today after hundreds of Americans paid their respects at Atlanta's Jimmy Carter Presidential Library on Monday.

**GDILIVE.COM**

Groton Area  
Tigers  
**GT**

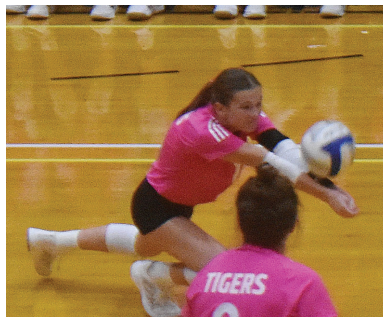
Any interest in any of  
these basketball games on  
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They are \$25 each.

Girls James Valley Christian JV  
Boys Hamlin JV  
Girls Hamlin JV  
Boys Sisseton JV  
Girls Sisseton JV  
Girls Roncalli C  
Girls Roncalli JV  
Boys Roncalli C  
Boys Roncalli JV  
Girls Aberdeen Christian JV

**Text Paul at 605-397-7460**

## Fjeldheim selected as 2023 NEC Volleyball Player of the Year!

Coach Chelsea Hanson said, "Congratulations to Anna Fjeldheim for being selected as the 2023 NEC Volleyball Player of the Year! Player of the year is awarded to one who was unanimously selected to the All-Conference team and then voted upon by all of the coaches. Anna stood next to multiple very talented players on the ballot and I am so proud to have her recognized! She had been a great player and leader for our program and we're so excited to have her represent our school! Great job, Anna!!!"



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## Weekly Vikings Recap - Vikings vs. Bears

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

The Minnesota Vikings welcomed the Chicago Bears to US Bank Stadium for a Monday night matchup. With this being the last Vikings game before the bye week, it looked like the Vikings may have been looking ahead to their time off rather than getting up for the primetime game as they mustered only 242 total yards of offense and 10 total points.

The first half was an absolute snoozefest for both teams as a total of six points was scored thanks to a field goal by each team. Coming into the game, the main storyline for the Vikings was still the magic of Josh Dobbs. However, the first half was anything but magical as Dobbs threw for only 64 passing yards with two interceptions. Much of the success of the Vikings' offense, if that's what you can call it, came from penalties on the Bears' defense. By the end of the first half, the Vikings' offense had amassed an unimpressive 74 yards of offense with a 0% success rate on third downs.

The Vikings' defense, on the other hand, was much more of a success story. Although the Bears dominated the time of possession in the first half, the majority of their plays amounted to limited yardage as the Vikings' defense did a great job of containing Justin Fields' rushing ability. By halftime, Fields (who was the Bears' leading rusher), only had 21 yards on the ground to show for it.

As the second half began, the same woes continued for the Vikings' offense. On their first two drives, they managed to drive to midfield, only to be stopped on fourth-down both times, the second time resulting in Dobbs' third interception of the game. After the Bears kicked a couple of field goals to go up 9-3, the game seemed all but over as Josh Dobbs threw yet another interception, his fourth of the game.

All season long, the difference between a win or loss for the Vikings has come down to turnovers. In head coach Kevin O'Connell's tenure, the Vikings are 3-9 when losing the turnover battle. In the games in which they win the turnover battle, and the team is 16-0. Simply put, turnovers are the main difference between the Vikings being a good to great team.

Nevertheless, all things changed when newly activated defensive lineman, Sheldon Day, recovered a Justin Fields fumble to completely shift the momentum of the game. The Vikings managed to drive down the field for the only touchdown of the game, thanks to a TJ Hockenson catch in the front of the endzone to give the Vikings a 10-9 lead.

Sadly, this would not be the final score, as the Bears got the ball back one more time and drove down the field to kick a game-winning field goal with 10 seconds left.

Vikings 9 - Bears 10

The Vikings now head to the bye week with a 6-6 record. The question will become whether the Vikings keep rolling with Josh Dobbs, who has been a turnover machine the past couple of games or go back with Jaren Hall. Whatever the Vikings do, the room for error has shrunk to almost zero for this team as they cannot afford many more losses if they want to make the playoffs.

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## NSU Women's Basketball

### **Wolves Fall to Rangers in Non-Conference Finale**

Marshall, Minn. – The Northern State women's basketball team dropped a neutral site contest to Wisconsin Parkside on Monday. Northern fell behind early with a 12-point deficit in the first quarter and was unable to make up the difference, despite out-scoring the Rangers in the second half.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 61, UWP 70

Records: NSU 5-2, UWP 1-3

Attendance: 89

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State tallied 14 points in the first quarter, ten in the second, 20 in the third, and 17 in the fourth; the out-scored Parkside 37-27 in the second half

The Wolves notched 35 rebounds, eight steals, five made 3-pointers, and two blocks, as well as a game high 19 assists

They tallied 36 points in the paint, ten points off turnovers, nine points off seven offensive boards, and nine points off the bench

Northern shot 41.3% from the floor, 27.8% from the 3-point line, and 40.0% from the foul line, while Parkside shot 45.2% from the floor, 28.0% from the 3-point line, and 100.0% from the foul line

Madelyn Bragg led the Wolves scoring a career high 28 points and grabbing three steals, while Brynn Alfson dished out a career high seven assists

Bragg and Rianna Fillipi led the team off the glass with eight rebounds each

Alayna Benike followed behind with 13 points, as the only Wolf to record multiple 3-pointers with three in the game

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 28 points (career high), 66.7 field goal%, 8 rebounds, 3 steals (career high)

Alayna Benike: 13 points, 7 rebounds, 2 steals

Rianna Fillipi: 9 points, 8 rebounds, 4 assists

#### UP NEXT

Northern State is back in NSIC action hosting MSU Moorhead from Wachs Arena in a mid-week contest. Tip-off time is set for 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 30 against the Dragons following the Northern State men's contest.

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ALL OVER ROOFING

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## JVT/NVC HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSES

Groton - Tues, Nov. 28th 10am-4pm  
Redfield - Wed, Nov. 29th 11am-2pm  
Aberdeen - Thurs, Nov. 30th 10am-4pm

**DOOR PRIZES - CHRISTMAS TREATS**

Plus, register in stores or online at  
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## Angel Tree Cards Still Left

There are still plenty of cards left on Groton's Angel Trees. The left one is at Lori's Pharmacy on the counter. The right one is at Dollar General right when you walk in.

MEMBER FDIC

# Cookies & CALENDARS OPEN HOUSE

Stop into the Dacotah Bank Lobby for  
cider, coffee, a cookie and a 2024 calendar

**TUES., DEC. 5 9:00 - 4:00 PM**

**7 East US HWY 12 | Groton**

**DACOTAH BANK**





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## This and that

### Prairie fare

It's been a good month for taste buds. With Thanksgiving, November's always going to be a win—with one possible exception, the raging debate over green bean hot dish. I don't think they have green bean hot dish in Switzerland because no one is neutral on that issue.

Politically, we may argue about a lot of things, but if you want to see North Dakotans at odds, try to make green bean hot dish the official hot dish of the state. I like vegetables well enough, but I resent culinary trickery in which duplicitous chefs hide things in the food that are good for you.

I remember my sister Patty, not known as a troublemaker, quietly picking the kidney beans out of her chili every time Mom served it. This was no small act of defiance. We were old school, and if we didn't eat everything we took, my father would warn ominously that "One of these days you're going to have to eat gopher tails. Or green bean salad." He was not to be trifled with, yet, quiet little Patty drew her line in the chili and he never crossed it. I respect that. In our family, even the nice kids are assassins.

I prefer a lard-based diet. On that count, living in North Dakota can be amazing. I stopped at the Sterling Truck Stop last week for lunch and what did I find—fresh Fleischkuekle! A miracle! Especially because it was spelled correctly. Of course, many German delicacies in North Dakota have multiple spellings. That's why you'll never find "Fleischkuekle" on a spelling test. If you use an "F" or even a "PH" they have to count it.

### Minnesota's flag dilemma

Speaking of turmoil, there's a great deal of it emanating from Minnesota as a committee of colorblind myopic subversives has narrowed down the six finalists for the state's new flag. Yes, all art is subjective, but subjectively they're objectively awful. Nondescript. Boring.

Inconceivably, the 2,600 other submissions were even worse. That poor committee is probably traumatized. If there's such a thing as Post-Traumatic Art Syndrome, they've got it. Some of the 13 committee members fussed about some aspects—loons, trees and wildflowers—not being representative of the entire state. Neither is lutefisk in North Dakota, but I'm not willing to die on that hill. I'm an agnostic.

Not that Minnesota should ask North Dakota for advice. Remember when Doug Burgum reinvented our "Legendary" logo with Helvetica? At least it was efficient governance. Awful, but efficient. No committee. Just a bad decision. Bada-bing, we're done here. Living up to the nation's expectations. Simple. Boring.

A man's got to know his limitations. Imagine if he'd have tried to incorporate Fleischkuekle? There is no way possible to make Fleischkuekle look like anything but something that comes out of the south end of a buffalo. Sometimes the best decisions are the decisions we don't make. Or something. (I used to write for Yogi Berra.)

Minnesota should have hired just one artist.

"Excuse me, Mr. Pollock, did you spill paint?"

"Nice soup can, Andy, but couldn't you make it loon soup?"

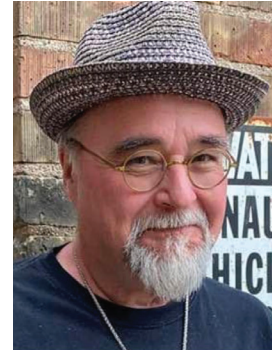
"Uh, Pablo, it's uh... interesting. But I don't think we can have boobs on the state flag. Especially square ones."

### You can put Christmas lights up now

I'm a traditionalist. It just doesn't feel right to see Christmas decorations in stores before Halloween. But now that Thanksgiving is past, have at it.

The kids are hit and miss at Christmas, nowadays, so I don't decorate, mostly because my enthusiasm for decorating is much greater than it is for un-decorating. I think it's seasonal affective disorder. Or as my mom used to call it, laziness.

One year, I kept a long needled Blue Spruce up until Valentines Day. The kittens loved it. That was all well and good because I didn't get a lot of company so I didn't have to explain myself, but I learned my lesson. I tried but didn't get all the needles removed from the carpet so I spent the following months "discovering" the ones I'd missed with my bare feet. It was September before I got them all, which was fortuitous. I'm not saying I nearly bled out, but I was becoming anemic.



## That's Life

by Tony Bender



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Deadwood sports betting has its first million-dollar month

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - NOVEMBER 27, 2023 2:58 PM

Monthly sports wagering in Deadwood topped \$1 million for the first time in October, according to new data from the Deadwood Gaming Association.

Gamblers bet \$1.02 million on sports, a 19% increase over the prior October.

About half the bets were placed on professional football. College football and professional baseball were also big draws, followed by various other sports.

South Dakota voters approved sports betting for Deadwood in 2020, adding it to the city's pre-existing gambling offerings.

Taking all of those offerings into account, October spending on gambling totaled \$132.38 million in Deadwood, down slightly from the prior October. Casinos kept about \$12 million after paying winnings, awarding free play and covering other expenses.

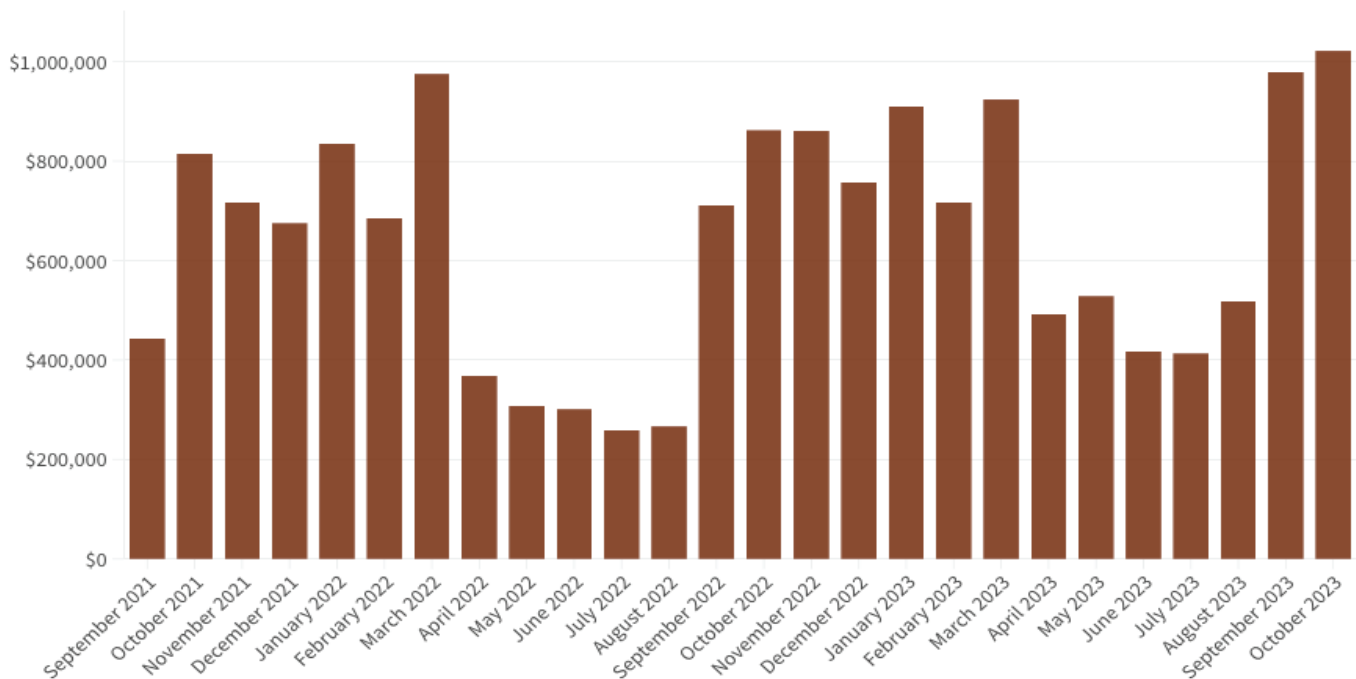
Players put \$123.72 million into slot machines last month, and table-game players bought \$7.63 million worth of chips.

Taxes on Deadwood gambling produced a total of \$1.11 million in October for state government and local governments in Lawrence County.

So far this year, total gambling spending in Deadwood is up 2% to \$1.32 billion.

#### Deadwood sports wagering

Monthly sports betting in Deadwood since it began in September 2021, after being approved by voters in 2020.



Source: [Deadwood Gaming Association](#) • South Dakota Searchlight graphic

## COMMENTARY

# Out-of-state hunters help private landowners provide wildlife habitat

LESLI ALLISON

A disgruntled hunter wrote a Writers on the Range opinion recently about Westerners getting fed up with the many out-of-staters coming in and buying up draw licenses to shoot bull elk, deer, bear and other big game animals.

As a hunter myself, I understand their frustration.

But reducing non-resident tags, as Andrew Carpenter suggests, takes us in the wrong direction. The greatest threat to hunting now and in the future is the loss of habitat.

Private lands provide up to 80% of habitat for all wildlife species, including critical winter range that's the limiting factor for most big game populations. Yet these family farms and ranches are struggling for economic survival and in many places are under immense development pressure.

According to the American Farmland Trust, Colorado is on track to lose approximately a half-million acres of open land in the next two decades. Other states have similarly alarming projections. As these lands disappear, so does the wildlife they support.

Income generated by providing access and outfitting services to out-of-state hunters is one of the few economic lifelines keeping ranches and habitat intact.

As New Mexico rancher Jack Diamond explained, "Without non-resident hunters, we couldn't survive at this point in the ranching business. I don't want to see this place subdivided, but we'd have to consider that as a last resort."

David Olde, also a rancher from New Mexico, concurred: "We ended up with so many elk that we had to reduce our cattle. If I can't sell hunts, what can I do — turn it into ranchettes?"

For the fourth-generation Bramwell family ranch in Colorado, hunting income is an integral part of their operation.

"Our out-of-state clients have been coming here to hunt for generations," Darla Bramwell said. "These migratory animals do not care whose grass they are eating or whose fences they tear down as they come from forest lands to eat in our hay meadows at night. Without the income from the non-resident hunters, something would have to give."

Most states already heavily favor resident hunters, both in draw quotas and license fees. In Colorado, for example, residents are now allocated 75% of licenses while non-residents receive only 25%. Further, non-residents typically pay hundreds of dollars more per license than residents. In Colorado a resident bull elk tag is \$61. A non-resident bull elk tag costs \$760.

Several things happen when non-resident licenses are further reduced. First, it squeezes the bottom line of family farms and ranches that support wildlife and depend on hunting for a portion of their income.

Second, it harms local livelihoods and rural economies. Visiting hunters outspend resident hunters by a large margin, supporting local restaurants, hotels, stores, outfitting services and the local tax base in rural communities.



**A South Dakota duck hunter walks through the tall grass along a wetland with his dog.** (Josh Haiar/South

Dakota Searchlight)

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As Bramwell said, "When our out-of-state hunters come here, they not only support our family but they support our community. They buy local gifts, food, fuel, lodging, meat processing and taxidermy work."

Diamond's operation supports between seven to 10 guides from August through December. "These are good-paying jobs and the money generated is all spent locally in the two counties we live in," he said. "We buy gas, propane, groceries. We also pay state gross receipts tax on the entire hunt."

Third, state wildlife agencies depend on the high license fees they charge out-of-state hunters.

Fourth, the loss of visiting hunters would remove incentives for prospective ranch buyers to invest in conserving and managing land for wildlife.

Finally, it would also mean more hunters crowding public lands and forcing elk to seek refuge on private lands, reducing hunter opportunity and creating a lower-quality hunt experience.

Pulling the economic rug out from under private lands and wildlife isn't the answer. So, what is a better solution?

We need to increase, not decrease, incentives for landowners to conserve habitat and provide hunting opportunities. We should bolster, not undermine, the role of hunting in supporting agricultural lands and rural economies. And we need to improve wildlife habitat on public lands with better management of our forests and rangelands.

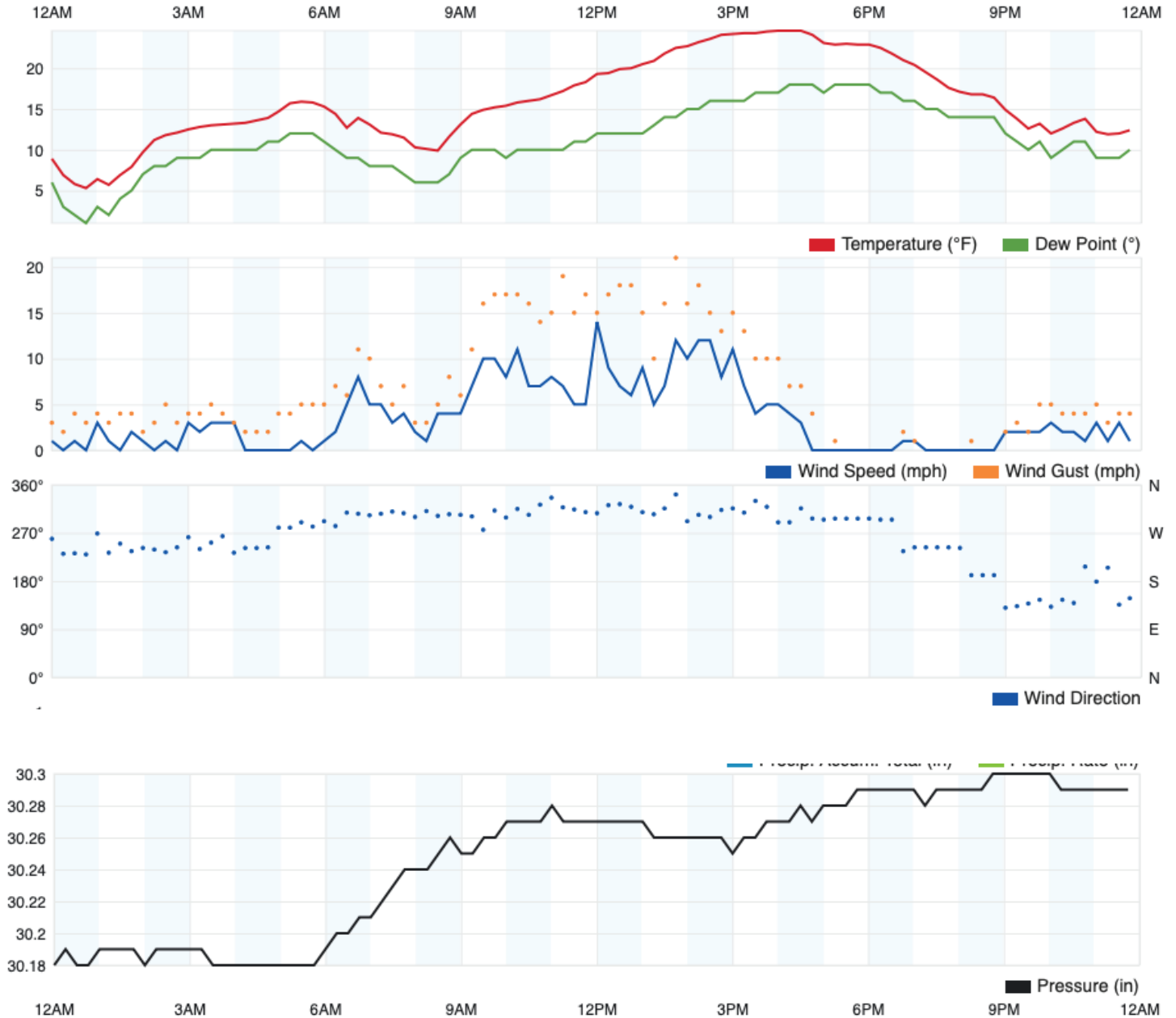
The future of hunting — and wildlife — both depend on landowners and sportsmen working together to sustain our remaining wild and working lands.

*Lesli Allison is a contributor to Writers on the Range, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring conversation about the West. She is CEO of the Western Landowners Alliance, a West-wide, landowner-led organization that supports working lands, connected landscapes and native species: [www.westernlandowners.org](http://www.westernlandowners.org).*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Tue Nov 28	Wed Nov 29	Thu Nov 30	Fri Dec 1	Sat Dec 2	Sun Dec 3	Mon Dec 4
42°F	42°F	35°F	34°F	39°F	41°F	39°F
21°F	20°F	14°F	24°F	22°F	19°F	22°F
S	SSW	NW	S	SE	SE	WNW
13 MPH	8 MPH	11 MPH	10 MPH	12 MPH	7 MPH	6 MPH

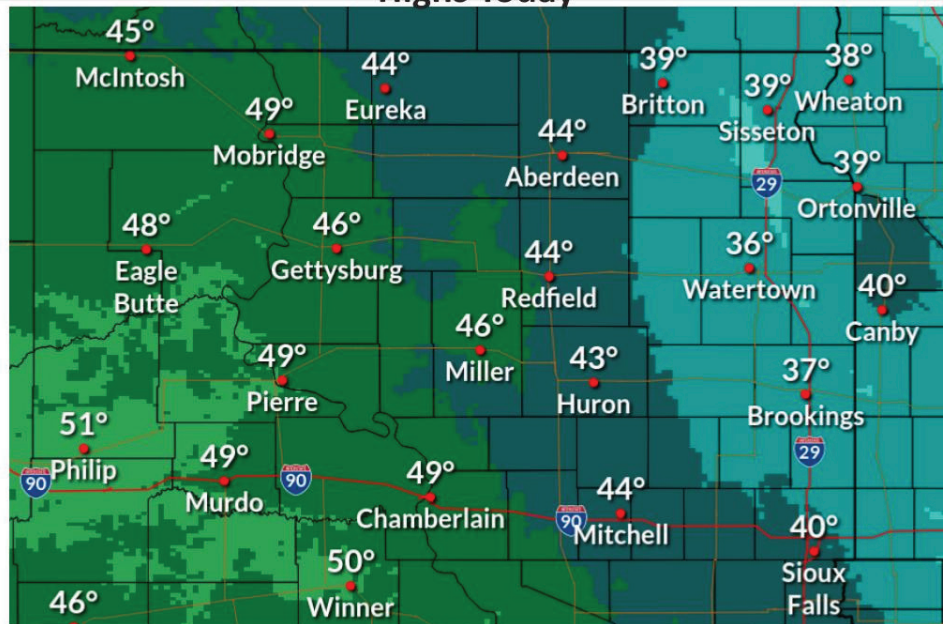


## Dry Through The Work Week

November 28, 2023  
2:40 AM

### Highs Today

- Dry Weather This Week
- Near Average To Above Average Temperatures This Week
- Potentially Light Amounts Of Moisture This Weekend
- Above Normal Temps This Weekend Too...



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Not much weather going on these days. Temperatures through the week will be near to above normal, with just a low chance (around 10-20 percent) for moisture this weekend, though that may go up or down as we get better consistency with some of these weak systems pushing through this weekend.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 25 °F at 4:15 PM

Low Temp: 5 °F at 12:49 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 1:34 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 7 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 2020

Record Low: -21 in 1985

Average High: 36

Average Low: 14

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.70

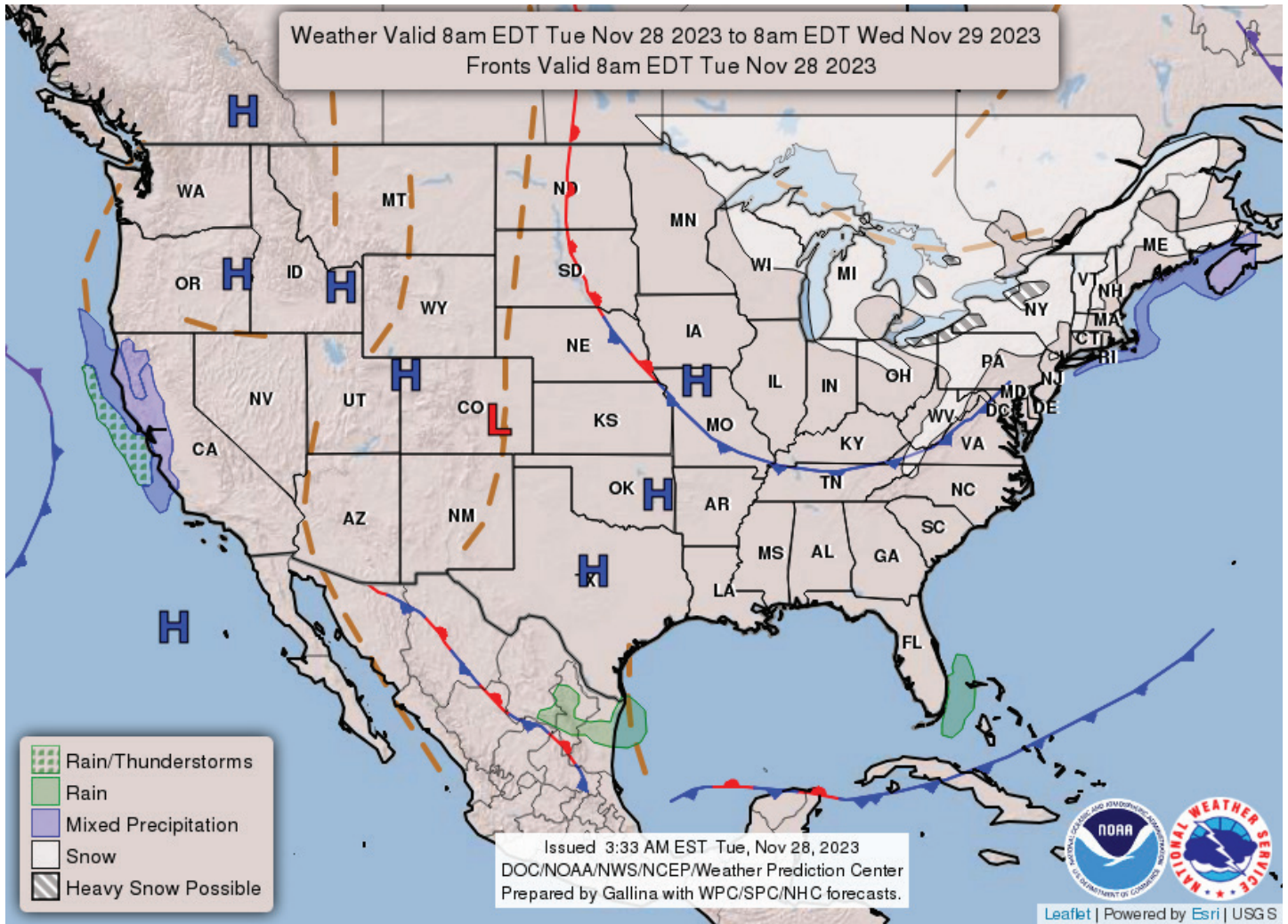
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.19

Average Precip to date: 21.17

Precip Year to Date: 23.17

Sunset Tonight: 4:54:04 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:47:48 AM



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## Today in Weather History

November 28, 2000: Heavy snow of 6 to 9 inches fell across parts of northeast South Dakota, causing travel difficulties and school closings. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Britton, Roy Lake, Webster, Waubay, Summit, and Wilmot; 8 inches at Columbia and south of Bristol; and 9 inches at Houghton.

November 28, 2005: A significant winter storm visited the region on November 27-29, 2005, producing a wide range of wintry precipitation across the area. Snow and blizzard conditions occurred across central and north central South Dakota, while freezing rain and ice accumulations took front stage in northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Across most of central and north central South Dakota, snow began in the late afternoon and early evening hours of the 27th, with significant snowfall accumulations occurring by the time the snow ended later in the day on the 28th. Snowfall accumulations ranged from as little as two inches to as much as 20 inches. Strong northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts to 70 mph, caused widespread blizzard conditions from the early morning until the late afternoon hours of the 28th. Visibilities were reduced to zero many times across the area with snowdrifts of 5 to 10 feet in some places. Some power lines were also brought down in the Pierre and Fort Pierre area due to snow accumulation and high winds. Many roads, including Interstate 90, were closed due to the treacherous travel conditions. Several accidents occurred during the storm, and many motorists were also stranded. Several people had to be rescued. Schools, businesses, government offices, and many other organizations were closed. FEMA, state officials, and the governor surveyed the storm damage. Some of the significant snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Eureka, 8 inches at Onaka, 10 inches at Onida and Fort Thompson, 11 inches near Presho, 16 inches at Highmore, and 21 inches at Kennebec. To the east of this heavy snow and blizzard area, widespread freezing rain began during the morning to early afternoon of the 27th, creating significant ice accumulations of 1 to over 2 inches. The freezing rain changed to snow on the 28th, and northwest winds increased to 30 to 40 mph, gusting to 60 mph. The high winds and heavy ice accumulations caused several thousand power poles (some steel), along with several thousand miles of power lines, to come down, resulting in widespread power outages. The ice and winds also damaged several hundred miles of high-voltage power lines and towers. Some power substations were also shut down by the ice and wind. Thousands of trees were also either damaged or downed due to the heavy ice accumulations and the wind. Many of the fallen trees and branches caused damage to homes and vehicles. The radio station in Milbank went off the air due to its collapsing radio tower. Tens of thousands of people in many communities and rural areas were without power for several days, with some people without power for as long as two weeks. Telephone and cellular phone service was also down for several days. Countless schools, businesses, government offices, and other organizations were closed for several days. FEMA, state officials, and the governor also toured this damaged area, resulting in a presidential disaster declaration. Hundreds of utility workers from South Dakota, Minnesota, and nine other surrounding states worked 14- to 18-hour days in cold conditions to bring power back to the area. The National Guard also helped with getting generators, cots, blankets, and meals to storm shelters. Generators supplied power to many communities and rural areas, while others continued without power. Shelters were set up for those who did not have generator power or another place to go. There were also problems with livestock with the water supplies cut off for some time. One electric cooperative stated that repairs to the infrastructure would continue for months and years to restore a system that took decades to build. Roads were treacherous with many accidents and rollovers, some resulting in injuries. Due to the icy road conditions, many roads were closed, including Interstate 29. Around noon on the 27th, on US Highway 212 two miles west of Zell in Faulk County, a 59-year old man was killed when his car spun out of control and hit an oncoming pickup truck. Around 1:30pm on the 28th, on Day County Road One about two miles south of Waubay, a 17-year old girl was killed and three others were injured when one vehicle spun out of control and struck a truck in the oncoming lane. Air traffic was also brought to a halt across much of the area. This was one of the largest ice storms in the region's history. One electric cooperative said it was the most damage they had in their 65 years of existence. After the icing came snowfall of 2 to 12 inches, which combined with the high winds to bring blizzard conditions and low wind chills to northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota from the morning of the 28th until the early morning of the 29th. Some of the significant snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Watertown, 8 inches at Waubay, 10 inches at Redfield, and 12 inches at Sisseton.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### THE REWARDS OF HONESTY

One of the traits that made Harry S. Truman a great president was his honesty. In fact, it was more important to him than the presidency.

During the presidential campaign against Thomas Dewey, his staff notified him that his campaign funds were running low. When one of his supporters was presented with this information, he approached Truman and said, "I'll give you what you need if, when you become president, you will use your office to get policies that will benefit me."

"Give your money or keep it," said Truman, "but I'm not making any deals."

His response electrified his staff, and they began to work harder than ever. As a result, the money coming into his election committee increased dramatically, and Truman went on to win the election.

We read in Proverbs that, "The Lord hates cheating, but He delights in honesty." That advice is about as straightforward as it gets. And, there is no way to get around it.

Honesty is easy to verify: We are either honest, or we are not honest. We either tell the truth, or we deceive others. There are no "degrees" in honesty. We can't be 99% honest and 1% dishonest or somewhere in between. It's 100% or nothing.

Honesty is necessary for a Christian's integrity.

Prayer: It is so easy, Lord, to compromise the truth when we want to fulfill some worldly desire. Cleanse us from deceit and fill our minds and mouths with the truth. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord hates cheating, but He delights in honesty. Proverbs 11:1



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:  
11.24.23

6 15 45 59 68 1

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$335,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 8 Mins 31  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.27.23

1 8 23 25 50 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,500,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 23  
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.27.23

6 20 22 26 38 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 38 Mins 32  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
11.25.23

10 12 14 26 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$68,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 38  
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.27.23

9 29 51 53 61 20

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 7  
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.27.23

2 21 38 61 66 12

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$374,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 7  
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### South Dakota State earns 92-70 win against Mount Marty

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Luke Appel scored 16 points as South Dakota State beat NAIA-member Mount Marty 92-70 on Monday night.

Appel finished 7 of 12 from the field for the Jackrabbits (3-4). Bubz Alvarez scored 14 points and added three steals. William Kyle III finished with 13 points.

Cole Bowen finished with 22 points for the Lancers. Tash Lunday added 17 points and eight rebounds for Mount Marty. Aiden Jensen also recorded six points.

### Cities crack down on homeless encampments. Advocates say that's not the answer

By CLAIRE RUSH, JANIE HAR and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Tossing tent poles, blankets and a duffel bag into a shopping cart and three wagons, Will Taylor spent a summer morning helping friends tear down what had been their home and that of about a dozen others. It wasn't the first time and wouldn't be the last.

Contractors from the city of Portland had arrived to break down the stretch of tents and tarps on a side street behind a busy intersection. People had an hour to vacate the encampment, one of more than a dozen cleared that July day, according to city data.

Whatever they couldn't take with them was placed in clear plastic bags, tagged with the date and location of the removal and sent to an 11,000-square-foot (1,020 square meter) warehouse storing thousands like them.

"It can get hard," said Taylor, 32, who has been swept at least three times in the four years he's been homeless. "It is what it is. ... I just let it go."

Angelique Risby, 29, watched as workers in neon-yellow vests shoveled piles of litter into black garbage bags. Risby, who has been homeless for two years, said she was prepared for a drill she's done multiple times.

"Everything that I own," she said, "can fit on my wagon."

Tent encampments have long been a fixture of West Coast cities, but are now spreading across the U.S. The federal count of homeless people reached 580,000 last year, driven by lack of affordable housing, a pandemic that economically wrecked households, and lack of access to mental health and addiction treatment.

Records obtained by The Associated Press show attempts to clear encampments increased in cities from Los Angeles to New York as public pressure grew to address what some residents say are dangerous and unsanitary living conditions. But despite tens of millions of dollars spent in recent years, there appears to be little reduction in the number of tents propped up on sidewalks, in parks and by freeway off-ramps.

Homeless people and their advocates say the sweeps are cruel and a waste of taxpayer money. They say the answer is more housing, not crackdowns.

The AP submitted data requests to 30 U.S. cities regarding encampment sweeps and received at least partial responses from about half.

In Phoenix, the number of encampments swept soared to more than 3,000 last year from 1,200 in 2019. Las Vegas removed about 2,500 camps through September, up from 1,600 in 2021.

But even officials at cities that don't collect data confirmed that public camping is consuming more of their time, and they are starting to track numbers, budget for security and trash disposal, and beef up or launch programs to connect homeless people to housing and services.

"We are seeing an increase in these laws at the state and local level that criminalize homelessness, and

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it's really a misguided reaction to this homelessness crisis," said Scout Katovich, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of sweeps and property seizures in a dozen cities, including Minneapolis, Miami, Albuquerque, Anchorage and Boulder, Colorado.

"These laws and these practices of enforcement do nothing to actually alleviate the crisis and instead they keep people in this vicious cycle of poverty," she said.

But California Gov. Gavin Newsom, whose state is home to nearly one-third of the country's homeless population, says leaving hazardous makeshift camps to fester is neither compassionate nor an option.

He is among Democratic and Republican leaders urging the U.S. Supreme Court to take up a controversial 9th Circuit appellate court ruling that prohibits local governments from clearing encampments without first assuring everyone living there is offered a bed indoors.

San Francisco, which was sued by the ACLU of Northern California last year for its sweeps and property seizures, is under a court order to enforce the ruling.

"I hope this goes to the Supreme Court," said Newsom, a former mayor of San Francisco, in a September interview with news outlet Politico. "And that's a hell of a statement coming from a progressive Democrat."

Earlier this month, crews in Denver erected metal fencing as police officers called to residents to leave an encampment covering several downtown blocks. A bonfire blazed against temperatures in the teens and snow covered the ground around tents.

"The word 'sweep' that they use ... that's kind of how it feels, like being swept like trash," said David Sjoberg, 35. "I mean we're not trash, we're people."

He said he and his wife would "wander a couple blocks from here and see if we get yelled at for being there."

David Ehler Jr., 52, left the encampment with his toiletries, a sleeping bag, tent and a propane heater.

Ehler has been homeless in Denver for about two years after a friend kicked him out. He said work was hard to come by in Connecticut, where he lived before Colorado, and the public has no idea how big a problem homelessness is.

"It started ever since the COVID, people losing their jobs, losing their houses, losing their apartments, losing everything," he said. "And this is where they end up."

Sometimes, numbers can't explain what a city is doing.

The city of Los Angeles said its sanitation department responded to more than 4,000 requests a month from the public at the end of 2022 to address homeless encampments, double the amount the previous year.

But the agency would not explain whether that meant the encampment was dismantled or simply cleaned around or how large the encampments were, directing AP to the city attorney's website for definitions. The city defines an encampment as a place where at least one person is living outdoors.

In contrast, Portland clears some 19 encampments every day on average, according to the mayor's office. Crews have shut down nearly 5,000 camps in the city of 650,000 since November 2022, but residents continue to report new clusters that need to be dismantled.

Crews have even found bodies of overdose victims in tents, said Sara Angel, operations manager for the contractor that clears encampments for the city.

"If we never cleaned a camp in the city of Portland, I just don't know what Portland would look like," she said. "I don't think that we're making it better by moving them, but I don't think that we're making it worse."

Removing encampments is costly — an expense more cities, counties and states have to budget for. Several cities queried by the AP provided some cost breakdowns, but officials at others said comprehensive costs were difficult to get given the multiple departments involved, including police, sanitation and public health.

Denver reported spending nearly \$600,000 on labor and waste disposal in 2021 and 2022 to clean about 230 large encampments, some more than once. Phoenix said it spent nearly \$1 million last year to clear encampments.

Despite all that spending, said Masood Samereie, little seems to change on the streets. The San Francisco

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real estate broker has seen businesses lose customers because of people camped on sidewalks, some clearly in mental distress, and he wants tents gone.

"It's throwing money at it without any tangible or any real results," Samereie said.

Being homeless is supposed to be a temporary event, he added. "Unfortunately, it's becoming a way of life, and that is 100% incorrect."

For homeless people, sweeps can be traumatizing. They often lose identification documents, as well as cellphones, laptops and personal items. They lose their connection to a community they've come to rely on for support.

Roxanne Simonson, 60, said she had a panic attack during one of the four times she was swept in Portland. She recalled feeling dangerously overheated in her tent. "I started yelling at them, 'Call an ambulance, I can't breathe.' And then I changed my mind, because if I go, then I would lose all my stuff," she said.

And yet, cities can't stand by and do nothing, said Sam Dodge, who oversees encampment removals for the city of San Francisco. His department, created by the mayor in 2018, coordinates multiple agencies to place people into housing so crews can clear tents.

"Saying, 'This is not working, this is dangerous, you can do better than this, you have a brighter future than this,' I think that's caring for people," said Dodge, who has worked with homeless people for more than two decades. "It seems immoral to me to just ... let people waste away."

One August morning, Dodge and his crew surveyed about a dozen structures and tents, some inches away from vehicles zipping by.

Four outreach workers fanned out, asking people if they had a case manager or wanted shelter indoors. Police officers stood by as Department of Public Works employees, masked and wearing gloves, hauled away a rolled-up carpet. The block was crammed with bicycles, ladders, chairs, mattresses, buckets, cooking pots, shoes and cardboard.

City officials are particularly frustrated by people who have housing, but won't stay in it.

Michael Johnson, 40, has been homeless in San Francisco for six years. Before that, he lived with his pregnant girlfriend and was a driver for a commuter van tech start-up. But he lost his job, and their baby died.

He was assigned a coveted one-room pre-fabricated structure with a bed, desk and chair, a window and locking door. But his friends aren't there and to him, it feels like jail, so he's sleeping in a tent.

At his tent, friends hang out, including Charise Haley, 31, who says shelter rules can make grownups feel like children. She left one shelter because residents weren't allowed to keep room keys and had to ask staff to get in.

"Then you get pushed somewhere else," she said. "There's too many directions. But never an end solution."

There are many reasons why someone might reject shelter, say homeless people and their advocates. Some have been assaulted at shelters, or had their belongings stolen. Sometimes, they don't want to pare down their belongings, or follow rules that prohibit drugs and drinking, officials say.

Of the 20 people at the San Francisco encampment, six accepted temporary housing and seven declined, said Francis Zamora, a spokesperson for the Department of Emergency Management.

Two people already had housing and five wouldn't communicate with outreach workers, Zamora said. The city has connected more than 1,500 people to housing this year. It's unclear, however, if they remain housed.

Many cities say they link camp residents to housing, but track records are mixed. Homeless people and their advocates say there are not nearly enough temporary beds, permanent housing or social services for drug or behavioral health counseling so people caught up in sweeps just get kicked down the road.

In New York City, more than 2,300 people were forcibly removed from encampments from March to November 2022, according to a June report from Comptroller Brad Lander. Only 119 accepted temporary shelter, and just three eventually got permanent housing. Meanwhile, tent encampments had returned to a third of the sites surveyed.

"They just totally failed to connect people to shelter or to housing," Lander, who opposes sweeps, told

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the AP. "If you're gonna help them, you have to build trust with them to move them into housing and services. The sweeps really went in the opposite direction."

A spokesperson for Democratic New York City Mayor Eric Adams, Charles Lutvak, disagreed. He said 70% of camp sites cleared were not re-established and homeless residents accepted offers of shelter at a rate six times higher than under the previous administration.

"Despite the inherent difficulty of this work, our efforts have been indisputably successful," Lutvak said in a statement.

The city of Phoenix cleared out a massive downtown homeless encampment by a court-ordered deadline this month, and said it had helped more than 500 people find beds in shelters and motels.

Encampments were not a serious issue in Minneapolis until the pandemic, when they became more commonplace and much larger, drawing thousands of complaints. In response, the city closed down more than two dozen sites where 383 people were camped from March 2022 until February.

At the same time, Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, launched a program last year aimed at finding short- and long-term housing for homeless people, including some living in encampments.

"We are hyper-focused on housing," said Danielle Werder, manager of the county's Office to End Homelessness. "We're not walking around with socks and water bottles. We're walking around saying, 'What do you need?'"

In Portland, the encampment dismantled in July was cleared again, in September and November. Two dozen newly installed boulders helped keep the camp from being reestablished along parts of the sidewalk.

Kieran Hartnett, who's lived in the neighborhood for seven years, said there was fighting, drug use, open fires and vehicle break-ins around the encampment. Some tents were on grass just outside his house, which was particularly stressful when people started acting in erratic ways.

He hopes the people moved from the site are getting help.

"I understand the argument that clearing them just moves them to somewhere else, and they don't really have a better place to go," he said. "On the same account, I feel like you can't allow things to just fester."

"There's not a good solution to it," he said.

## Israel and Hamas extend their truce, but it seems only a matter of time before the war resumes

By TIA GOLDENBERG and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — A truce between Israel and Hamas entered its fifth day on Tuesday, with the militant group promising to release more civilian hostages to delay the expected resumption of the war and Israel under growing pressure to spare Palestinian civilians when the fighting resumes.

The sides agreed to extend their truce through Wednesday, with another two planned exchanges of militant-held hostages for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. But Israel has repeatedly vowed to resume the war with "full force" to destroy Hamas once it's clear that no more hostages will be freed under the current agreement's terms.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to visit the region later this week for the third time since the start of the war, and is expected to press for an extension of the truce and the release of more hostages.

The Biden administration has told Israel it must avoid "significant further displacement" and mass casualties among Palestinian civilians if it resumes the offensive, and that it must operate with more precision in southern Gaza than it has in the north, according to U.S. officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House.

Meanwhile, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reiterated his call for a long-term cease-fire and the release of all hostages, reflecting broad international support for a cessation of hostilities.

Hamas and other militants are still holding about 160 people, out of the 240 seized in their Oct. 7 assault into southern Israel that ignited the war. That's enough to potentially extend the truce for another two weeks under the existing framework brokered by the Qatar, Egypt and the U.S., but Hamas is expected to make much higher demands for the release of captive soldiers.



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Either way, Israel says it is committed to resuming the war, which is already the deadliest round of Israeli-Palestinian violence in decades. It blames the soaring casualty toll on Hamas, accusing the militants of using civilians as human shields while operating in dense, residential areas.

Israel has vowed to end Hamas' 16-year rule in Gaza and crush its military capabilities. That would almost certainly require expanding the ground offensive from northern Gaza — where entire residential areas have been pounded into rubble — to the south, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people have packed into overflowing United Nations shelters.

## HOSTAGES RELEASED

Hamas freed another 11 women and children on Monday in the fourth and final swap planned under the initial cease-fire agreement, which went into effect Friday. Israel released 33 Palestinian prisoners.

Monday's releases bring to 51 the number of Israelis freed under the truce, along with 19 hostages of other nationalities. So far, 150 Palestinians have been released from Israeli prisons. Israel has said it would extend the cease-fire by one day for every 10 additional hostages released.

The Palestinian prisoners released so far have been mostly teenagers accused of throwing stones and firebombs during confrontations with Israeli forces. Some were convicted by Israeli courts of attempting to carry out deadly attacks. The prisoners are widely seen by Palestinians as heroes resisting occupation.

Most of the freed hostages appeared to be physically well, but an 84-year-old woman released Sunday was hospitalized in critical condition because she had not had access to her medication in captivity. They have mostly stayed out of the public eye, but details of their captivity have started to emerge.

In one of the first interviews with a freed hostage, 78-year-old Ruti Munder told Israel's Channel 13 television that she was initially fed well in captivity but that conditions worsened as shortages took hold. She said she was kept in a "suffocating" room and slept on plastic chairs with a sheet for nearly 50 days.

Israel imposed a total blockade of Gaza at the start of the war and had only allowed a trickle of humanitarian aid to enter prior to the cease-fire, leading to widespread shortages of food, water, medicine and fuel to power generators amid a territory-wide power blackout.

## NORTHERN GAZA IN RUINS

The cease-fire has allowed residents who remained in Gaza City and other parts of the north to venture out to survey the destruction and try to locate and bury relatives. Footage from northern Gaza, the focus of the Israeli ground offensive, shows nearly every building damaged or destroyed.

A U.N.-led aid consortium estimates that over 234,000 homes have been damaged across Gaza and 46,000 have been completely destroyed, amounting to around 60% of the housing stock in the territory, which is home to some 2.3 million Palestinians. In the north, the destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure "severely compromises the ability to meet basic requirements to sustain life," it said.

More than 13,300 Palestinians have been killed since the war began, roughly two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants. More than 1,200 people have been killed on the Israeli side, mostly civilians killed in the initial attack. At least 77 soldiers have been killed in Israel's ground offensive.

The toll on the Palestinian side is likely much higher, as the Health Ministry has only been able to sporadically update its count since Nov. 11, due to the breakdown of the health sector in the north. It also says thousands of people are missing and feared trapped or dead under the rubble.

## FEARS FOR THE SOUTH

Israel's bombardment and ground offensive have displaced more than 1.8 million people, nearly 80% of Gaza's population, with most having sought refuge in the south, according to the U.N. Office for Humanitarian Affairs. Israeli troops have barred people from returning to the north during the cease-fire.

Hundreds of thousands of people have packed into U.N.-run schools and other facilities, with many forced to sleep on the streets outside because of overcrowding. It's unclear where they would go if Israel expands its ground operation, as Egypt has refused to accept refugees and Israel has sealed its border.

The U.N. says the truce made it possible to scale up the delivery of food, water and medicine to the largest volume since the start of the war. But the 160 to 200 trucks a day is still less than half what Gaza

was importing before the fighting, even as humanitarian needs have soared.

Juliette Toma, a spokesperson for the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, said people come to shelters asking for heavy clothes, mattresses and blankets, and that some are sleeping in damaged vehicles.

"The needs are overwhelming," she told The Associated Press. "They lost everything, and they need everything."

## **41 workers trapped in a collapsed tunnel in India for 17 days are on verge of rescue, official says**

UTTARKASHI, India (AP) — Officials in India said Tuesday they were on the verge of rescuing the 41 construction workers trapped in a collapsed mountain tunnel for over two weeks in the country's north, after rescuers drilled their way through debris to reach them.

The workers are to be pulled out through a passageway made of welded pipes which rescuers pushed through dirt and rocks.

"Soon all the laborers brothers will be taken out," Pushkar Singh Dhami, top official in Uttarakhand state, where the accident occurred, posted on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

Kirti Panwar, a state government spokesperson, said about a dozen men had worked overnight to manually dig through rocks and debris, taking turns to drill using hand-held drilling tools and clearing out the muck in what he said was the final stretch of the rescue operation.

Rescuers resorted to manual digging after the drilling machine broke down irreparably on Friday while drilling horizontally from the front because of the mountainous terrain of Uttarakhand. The machine bored through about 47 meters (nearly 154 feet) out of approximately the 57-60 meters (nearly 187-196 feet) needed, before rescuers started to work by hand to create a passageway to evacuate the trapped workers. Authorities on Tuesday said rescuers had managed to drill through over 50 meters in total so far.

Rescue teams have inserted pipes into dug-out areas and welded them together so the workers could be brought out on wheeled stretchers.

The laborers have been trapped since Nov. 12 when a landslide caused a portion of the 4.5-kilometer (2.8-mile) tunnel they were building to collapse about 200 meters (650 feet) from the entrance.

Rescuers on Sunday also began to create a vertical channel with a newly replaced drilling machine as a contingency plan.

What began as a rescue mission expected to take a few days has turned into weeks, and officials have been hesitant to give a timeline for when it might be completed.

"I just feel good. The drilling on top of the mountain is coming along perfectly, in the tunnel, it's coming along very well. I have never said 'I feel good' before," Arnold Dix, an international tunneling expert who is helping with the rescue, told reporters at the site on Tuesday.

Most of the trapped workers are migrant laborers from across the country. Many of their families have traveled to the location, where they have camped out for days to get updates on the rescue effort and in hopes of seeing their relatives soon.

Authorities have supplied the trapped workers with hot meals through a 6-inch (15-centimeter) pipe after days of surviving only on dry food sent through a narrower pipe. They are getting oxygen through a separate pipe, and more than a dozen doctors, including psychiatrists, have been at the site monitoring their health.

The tunnel the workers were building was designed as part of the Chardham all-weather road, which will connect various Hindu pilgrimage sites. Some experts say the project, a flagship initiative of the federal government, will exacerbate fragile conditions in the upper Himalayas, where several towns are built atop landslide debris.

Large numbers of pilgrims and tourists visit Uttarakhand's many Hindu temples, with the number increasing over the years because of the continued construction of buildings and roadways.

## Germany's leader vows fixes for a budget crisis as the economy struggles. But he offers few details

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz vowed Tuesday that his government will work “as fast as possible” to lay out how to solve a budget crisis, but he offered few details on how he would achieve his goals of promoting clean energy after a court decision struck down billions in funding.

With its economy struggling, Germany now is wrestling to fill the gaps in spending set aside for renewable energy projects and relief for companies and consumers facing high utility bills because of Russia's war in Ukraine. Cuts could further slow what is already the world's worst-performing major economy.

Germans “need clarity in unsettled times,” Scholz said in a speech to parliament, adding that the government would not abandon any of its goals, which also include promoting investment in computer chip and battery factories for electric cars to modernize the economy.

He said it would be “a serious, an unforgivable mistake ... to neglect the modernization of our country.”

A cap on consumers' utility bills is no longer needed because energy prices have fallen, although the government would act if they rose again. “You'll never walk alone,” Scholz said, quoting the song title in English.

Details on what could be cut for next year were lacking. On top of that, a long-term solution could take years, possibly until after the next national elections scheduled for 2025. That's because the strict legal limits on borrowing cited in the Nov. 15 court decision are enshrined in the country's constitution, and a two-thirds majority in parliament is required to soften them.

Economists say spending cuts will only add to the challenges facing Europe's largest economy after Russia cut off the cheap natural gas that fueled its factories, squeezing businesses and raising the cost of living for households paying more for energy.

Germany's constitutional court has voided some 60 billion euros (\$65 billion) in spending for this year and next. It said the government could not shift unused funding meant for COVID-19 relief to boost wind and solar projects, help with energy bills and encourage investment in computer chip production.

The constitution limits deficits to 0.35% of economic output, though the government can go beyond that if there's an emergency it didn't create, such as the pandemic.

The ruling also could apply to other national and local spending based on the same now-rejected accounting maneuver, covering as much as 130 billion euros in expected spending through 2027.

Some of the disallowed spending has already been used this year. To comply with the ruling, the government is changing the 2023 budget by declaring an emergency, citing Russia's cutoff of natural gas supplies and higher energy prices.

The question now is next year's budget. The government would have to scramble to cover shortfalls of roughly 30 billion to 40 billion euros — plus 20 billion to 30 billion euros for 2025 — compared with earlier plans, according to Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg bank.

Some spending can be moved to public-private partnerships or taken over by the country's development bank. But those fudges will only go so far. Ultimately, spending may be reduced by as much as 0.5% of annual economic output for the next two budget years, Schmieding said.

The debt limits were enacted in 2009 after the government piled up debt paying to rebuild former East Germany after Germany reunified at the end of the Cold War and when tax revenue dropped during the 2007-2009 global financial crisis and Great Recession.

For years afterward, Germany balanced its budget or even ran small surpluses as the economy lived large on cheap Russian natural gas and booming exports of luxury cars and industrial machinery, with rapidly growing China serving as a major market. Economists say the government skimmed on investment in infrastructure, renewable energy and digitalization — gaps it is now trying to make up.

The fallout has left Germany projected to be the worst-performing major economy this year, shrinking by 0.5%, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Prospects for next year are only a little better. Industry is struggling with energy prices and a lack of

skilled labor, while Chinese automakers are challenging Germany's Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz and have plans to expand sales across Europe.

The budget debate is ironic because Germany has the smallest long-term debt pile of any of the Group of Seven advanced democracies, with debt of 66% of gross domestic product. That compares to 102% in Britain, 121% in the U.S., 144% in Italy and 260% in Japan.

The now-banned spending was aimed at some of the long-term problems plaguing economic growth, such as the need to invest in new sources of affordable renewable energy like wind, solar and hydrogen. That has led to calls from some to loosen the debt limits because they restrict the government's response to new challenges.

But Scholz's coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and pro-business Free Democrats doesn't have the two-thirds majority to do that without the conservative opposition, the Christian Democrats, who brought the legal challenge in the first place.

Yet even some opposition state governors have said the debt limits should be loosened. Berlin Mayor Kai Wegener, a member of the Christian Democrats, said the provision was "a brake on the future."

## California city calls for permanent cease-fire in Israel-Hamas war, urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and ROBERT JABLON Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Oakland's City Council on Monday passed a carefully crafted resolution calling for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war after hours of hearing impassioned rhetoric about the deaths of thousands of civilians in Gaza.

The council in the California Bay Area city voted 8-0 in favor of a motion supporting a congressional resolution for a permanent ceasefire, along with the unrestricted entry of humanitarian assistance into Gaza and a restoration of basic services, as well as "respect for international law" and the release of all hostages.

Before the vote, the council voted 6-2 to reject proposed amendments by member Dan Kalb that specifically condemned killings and hostage-taking by Hamas, whose Oct. 7 attacks in Israel prompted the war that has devastated Gaza.

The motion was met by boos and angry shouts from the packed chamber.

Kalb later went on to vote with the majority, noting that the unchanged resolution also didn't mention Israel.

In fact, councilmember Caroll Fife, who brought the resolution, said it went through four drafts and "intentionally attempted to de-politicize" the issue by "lifting up what we support and not what condemn."

She said the issue of a cease-fire was "deeply, deeply concerning" to Oakland residents and called for a moment of silence for the lives lost on both sides of the conflict.

"I want Jewish children to live as much as I want Palestinian children to live," she said.

The deaths of thousands of children, most of them in Gaza, weighed heavily on councilmembers.

"The number of children who have been killed just since Oct. 7 surpassed the number of children who have been killed in global conflicts over the past four years," council President Nikki Fortunato Bas said.

"I was absolutely mortified by seeing dead babies" on social media," and a ceasefire would be crucial for stopping the killing, councilmember Kevin Jenkins said.

Harsher language was used by most of the dozens of speakers, including Jewish anti-Zionist activists, who argued for passage of the measure. They accused Israel of colonization of Palestine and of apartheid and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

"We've seen the targeting and massacring of civilians, of health care facilities, of hospitals and ambulances," said one speaker, who identified herself as a recent medical school graduate. "Silence in the face of oppression and genocide, I don't think, is an acceptable response."

Others argued that Oakland taxpayers shouldn't be funding weapons for Israel when the money could be used for problems within the city, such as housing the homeless.

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Similar resolutions have passed in three cities in Michigan, where a large percentage of Arab Americans live, as well as in Atlanta; Akron, Ohio; Wilmington, Delaware; and Providence, Rhode Island.

A temporary cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, which Qatar helped broker, is currently in place.

U.S. cities have been adopting resolutions regarding the conflict even though they have no legal role or formal say in the process, said David Glazier, who teaches constitutional law at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

"It raises an interesting question on where they are getting this mandate to speak for the people in their city when nobody elected a city council person because of their stance on Middle East peace," he said.

In the nearby city of Richmond, an approved resolution calling for a cease-fire and accusing Israel of ethnic cleansing prompted more than five hours of heated debate in October. The city of Ypsilanti, near Detroit, approved a peace resolution but rescinded it amid backlash.

Oakland's resolution demands "an immediate ceasefire; release of all hostages, the unrestricted entry of humanitarian assistance into Gaza; the restoration of food, water, electricity, and medical supplies to Gaza; and the respect for international law; and calls for a resolution that protects the security of all innocent civilians."

Cities across the United States have increasingly been speaking up on matters that have long been relegated to diplomatic spheres, even working with local elected leaders abroad on what has been coined city-to-city diplomacy to tackle everything from housing refugees and asylum seekers to dealing with climate change.

Now, city councils are just the latest arena where intense debates over the war and the United States' support for Israel are playing out. Protesters calling for a cease-fire recently shut down traffic on a major bridge into San Francisco during an international economic summit, and the California Democratic Party recently cancelled some events at its fall convention due to demonstrations.

In some cases, the tension has turned violent. A pro-Palestinian protester was charged with involuntary manslaughter this month after a Jewish man died from head injuries following dueling protests in Southern California. He pleaded not guilty. In Vermont, a man has pleaded not guilty to three counts of attempted murder in the non-fatal shooting of three Palestinian men studying in the United States.

Oakland's action comes as Hamas has released some hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack, while Israel has released some imprisoned Palestinians. Israel has said it would extend the cease-fire by one day for every 10 additional hostages released, but that it remains committed to crushing Hamas' military capabilities and ending the group's 16-year rule over Gaza, which would likely mean expanding the Israeli military's ground offensive.

The war started after Hamas broke through Israel's high-tech "Iron Wall" on Oct. 7 and launched an attack that left more than 1,200 Israelis dead. Hamas also took nearly 240 Israelis hostage.

More than 13,300 Palestinians have been killed since the war began, roughly two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry in Gaza.

## **Tensions are bubbling up at thirsty Arizona alfalfa farms as foreign firms exploit unregulated water**

By ANITA SNOW and THOMAS MACHOWICZ Associated Press

WENDEN, Ariz. (AP) — A blanket of bright green alfalfa spreads across western Arizona's McMullen Valley, ringed by rolling mountains and warmed by the hot desert sun.

Matthew Hancock's family has used groundwater to grow forage crops here for more than six decades. They're long accustomed to caprices of Mother Nature that can spoil an entire alfalfa cutting with a down-pour or generate an especially big yield with a string of blistering days.

But concerns about future water supplies from the valley's ancient aquifers, which hold groundwater supplies, are bubbling up in Wenden, a town of around 700 people where the Hancock family farms.

Some neighbors complain their backyard wells have dried up since the Emirati agribusiness Al Dahra

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began farming alfalfa here on about 3,000 acres (1,214 hectares) several years ago.

It is unknown how much water the Al Dahra operation uses, but Hancock estimates it needs 15,000 to 16,000 acre feet a year based on what his own alfalfa farm needs. He says he gets all the water he needs by drilling down hundreds of feet. An acre-foot of water is roughly enough to serve two to three U.S. households annually.

Hancock said he and neighbors with larger farms worry more that in the future state officials could take control of the groundwater they now use for agriculture and transfer it to Phoenix and other urban areas amid the worst Western drought in centuries.

"I worry about the local community farming in Arizona," Hancock said, standing outside an open-sided barn stacked with hay bales.

Concerns about the Earth's groundwater supplies are front of mind in the lead-up to COP28, the annual United Nations climate summit opening this week in the Emirati city of Dubai. Gulf countries like the UAE are especially vulnerable to global warming, with high temperatures, arid climates, water scarcity and rising sea levels.

"Water shortages have driven companies to go where the water is," said Robert Glennon, a water policy and law expert and professor emeritus at the University of Arizona.

Experts say tensions are inevitable as companies in climate-challenged countries like the United Arab Emirates increasingly look to faraway places like Arizona for the water and land to grow forage for livestock and commodities such as wheat for domestic use and export.

"As the impacts of climate change increase, we expect to see more droughts," said Karim Elgendy, a climate change and sustainability specialist at Chatham House think tank in London. "This means more countries would look for alternative locations for food production."

Without groundwater pumping regulations, rural Arizona is especially attractive, said Elgendy, who focuses on the Middle East and North Africa. International corporations have also turned to Ethiopia and other parts of Africa to develop enormous farming operations criticized as "land grabbing."

La Paz County Supervisor Holly Irwin welcomes a recent crackdown by Arizona officials on unfettered groundwater pumping long allowed in rural areas, noting local concerns about dried up wells and subsidence that's created ground fissures and flooding during heavy rains.

"You're starting to see the effects of lack of regulation," she said. "Number one, we don't know how much water we have in these aquifers, and we don't know how much is being pumped out."

Irwin laments that foreign firms are "mining our natural resource to grow crops such as alfalfa ... and they're shipping it overseas back to their country where they've depleted their water source."

Gary Saiter, board chairman and general manager of the Wenden Domestic Water Improvement District, said utility records showed the surface-to-water depth at its headquarters was a little over 100 feet (30 meters) in the 1950s, but it's now now about 540 feet (160 meters).

Saiter said that over those years, food crops like cantaloupe have been replaced with forage like alfalfa, which is water intensive.

"I believe that the legislature in the state needs to step up and actually put some control, start measuring the water that the farms use," Saiter said.

Gov. Katie Hobbs in October yanked the state's land lease on another La Paz County alfalfa farm, one operated by Fondomonte Arizona, a subsidiary of Saudi dairy giant Almarai Co. The Democrat said the state would not renew three other Fondomonte leases next year, saying the company violated some lease terms.

Fondomonte denied that, and said it will appeal the decision to terminate its 640-acre (259-hectare) lease in Butler Valley. Arizona has less control over Al Dahra, which farms on land leased from a private North Carolina-based corporation.

Glennon, the Arizona water policy expert, said he worked with a consulting group that advised Saudi Arabia more than a decade ago to import hay and other crops rather than drain its aquifers. He said Arizona also must protect its groundwater.

"I do think we need sensible regulation," said Glennon. "I don't want farms to go out of business, but I don't want them to drain the aquifers, either."

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Seeking crops for domestic use and export, Al Dahra farms wheat and barley in Romania, operates a flour mill in Bulgaria, and owns milking cows in Serbia. It runs a rice mill in Pakistan and grows grapes in Namibia and citrus in Egypt. It serves markets worldwide.

The company is controlled by the state-owned firm ADQ, an Abu Dhabi-based investment and holding company. Its chairman is the country's powerful, behind-the-scenes national security adviser Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a brother of ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The company did not respond to numerous emails and voicemails sent to its UAE offices and its subsidiary Al Dahra ACX in the U.S. seeking comment about its Arizona operation.

But on its website, Al Dahra acknowledges the challenges of climate change, noting "the continuing decrease in cultivable land and diminishing water resources available for farming." The firm says it considers water and food security at "the core of its strategy" and uses drip irrigation to optimize water use.

Foreign and out-of-state U.S. farms are not banned from farming in Arizona, nor from selling their goods worldwide. U.S. farmers commonly export hay and other forage crops to countries including Saudi Arabia and China.

In Arizona's Cochise County that relies on groundwater, residents worry that the mega-dairy operated there by Riverview LLP of Minnesota could deplete their water supplies. The company did not respond to a request for comment about its water use.

"The problem is not who is doing it, but that we are allowing it to be done," said Kathleen Ferris, a senior research fellow at the Kyl Center for Water Policy at Arizona State University. "We need to pass laws giving more control over groundwater uses in these unregulated areas."

A former director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources, Ferris helped draw up the state's 1980 Groundwater Management Act that protects aquifers in urban areas like Phoenix but not in rural agricultural areas.

Many people mistakenly believe groundwater is a personal property right, Ferris said, noting that the Arizona Supreme Court has ruled there's only a property right to water once it has been pumped.

In Arizona, rural resistance to limits on pumping remains strong and efforts to create rules have gone nowhere in the Legislature. The Arizona Farm Bureau has pushed back at narratives that portray foreign agribusiness firms like Al Dahra as groundwater pirates.

The state is "the wild West" when it comes to groundwater, said Kathryn Sorensen, research director at the Kyl Center. "Whoever has the biggest well and pumps the most groundwater wins."

"Arizona is blessed to have a very large and productive groundwater," she added. "But just like an oil field, if you pump it out at a significant rate, then you deplete the water and it's gone."

## **Cities crack down on homeless encampments. Advocates say that's not the answer**

By CLAIRE RUSH, JANIE HAR and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Tossing tent poles, blankets and a duffel bag into a shopping cart and three wagons, Will Taylor spent a summer morning helping friends tear down what had been their home and that of about a dozen others. It wasn't the first time and wouldn't be the last.

Contractors from the city of Portland had arrived to break down tents and tarps on a side street behind a busy intersection and people had an hour to vacate. Whatever they couldn't take with them was placed in plastic bags, tagged with the date and location, and sent for storage in an 11,000-square-foot (1,020 square meter) warehouse.

"It can get hard," said Taylor, 32, who has been moved at least three times in the four years he's been homeless. "It is what it is. ... I just let it go."

Tent encampments have long been a fixture of West Coast cities, but are now spreading visibly across the U.S. The federal count of homeless people reached 580,000 last year, driven by lack of affordable housing and a pandemic that economically wrecked households. Encampments are also generating more

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controversy because of homeless people with severe mental illness and drug addictions who refuse treatment or don't have access to programs.

Records obtained by The Associated Press show attempts to clear encampments increased in cities from Los Angeles to New York as public pressure grew to address what are dangerous and unsanitary living conditions. But despite tens of millions of dollars spent in recent years, there appears to be little reduction in the number of tents propped up on sidewalks, in parks and by freeway off-ramps.

Homeless people and their advocates say the sweeps are cruel and a waste of taxpayer money. They say the answer is more housing, not crackdowns.

The AP submitted data requests to 30 U.S. cities regarding encampment sweeps and received at least partial responses from about half.

In Phoenix, the number of encampments swept soared to more than 3,000 last year from 1,200 in 2019. Las Vegas removed about 2,500 camps through September, up from 1,600 in 2021.

The city of Los Angeles said its sanitation department responded to more than 4,000 requests a month from the public to address homeless encampments at the end of 2022, double the amount the previous year.

But it would not explain whether that meant the encampments were dismantled or simply cleaned around or even how large the encampments were.

But even cities without data confirmed camping is consuming more time, and they are starting to track numbers, budget for removals, and beef up or launch programs to connect people to housing.

State and local laws criminalizing homelessness are on the rise, said Scout Katovich, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of sweeps and property seizures in a dozen cities, including Miami, Anchorage and Boulder, Colorado.

"These laws and these practices of enforcement do nothing to actually alleviate the crisis and instead they keep people in this vicious cycle of poverty," she said.

But California Gov. Gavin Newsom, whose state is home to nearly one-third of the country's homeless population, says leaving hazardous makeshift camps to fester is neither compassionate nor an option.

He is among officials urging the U.S. Supreme Court to take up a 9th Circuit appellate court ruling that prohibits local governments from clearing encampments without first assuring everyone is offered a bed indoors. San Francisco is under a court order to enforce the ruling.

"I hope this goes to the Supreme Court," said Newsom, a former mayor of San Francisco, in a September interview with news outlet Politico. "And that's a hell of a statement coming from a progressive Democrat."

Earlier this month, crews in Denver erected metal fencing as police officers called to residents to leave a sprawling downtown encampment. A bonfire blazed against temperatures in the teens and snow covered the ground.

"The word 'sweep' that they use ... that's kind of how it feels, like being swept like trash," said David Sjoberg, 35. "I mean we're not trash, we're people."

Removing encampments is costly — an expense more cities, counties and states have to budget for. Several cities queried by the AP provided some costs, but others said comprehensive figures were difficult to get given the multiple departments involved, including police, sanitation and public health.

Still, Denver reported spending nearly \$600,000 on labor and waste disposal in 2021 and 2022 to clean 230 large encampments, some more than once. Phoenix said it spent nearly \$1 million last year to clear encampments.

Despite all that spending, said San Francisco real estate broker Masood Samereie, businesses keep losing customers because of people camped on sidewalks, some clearly in mental distress. "It's throwing money at it without any tangible or any real results," he said.

For homeless people, sweeps can be traumatizing. They often lose identification documents, as well as cellphones, laptops and personal items.

Roxanne Simonson, 60, said she had a panic attack during one sweep in Portland and started yelling for an ambulance. "And then I changed my mind, because if I go, then I would lose all my stuff," she said.

But, cities can't stand by and do nothing, said Sam Dodge, who oversees a San Francisco city department that coordinates multiple agencies to place people into housing so crews can clear tents.



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"Saying, 'This is not working, this is dangerous, you can do better than this, you have a brighter future than this,' I think that's caring for people," Dodge said.

One August morning, his crew surveyed about a dozen structures and tents, some inches away from vehicles zipping by. Outreach workers fanned out, asking people if they had a case manager or wanted a room indoors.

City officials are particularly frustrated by people who have housing, but won't stay in it.

Michael Johnson, 40, was assigned a coveted one-room pre-fabricated structure with a bed, desk and chair, a window and locking door. But his friends aren't there and to him, it feels like jail, so he's sleeping in a tent.

Many cities say they link camp residents to housing, but track records are mixed. For example, a June New York City comptroller's report said more than 2,300 people were forcibly removed from encampments from March to November 2022. Only 119 accepted temporary shelter, and just three eventually got permanent housing.

Advocates for homeless people say there are not enough temporary beds, permanent housing or social services and there are many reasons why someone might reject shelter. Some have been assaulted in one, or say there are too many rules to follow.

But sometimes, they don't want to pare down their belongings, or follow rules that prohibit drugs and drinking, officials say.

Encampments were not a serious issue in Minneapolis until the pandemic, when they became more commonplace and much larger, drawing thousands of complaints. In response, the city closed down more than two dozen sites where 383 people were camped from March 2022 until February.

At the same time, Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, launched a program last year aimed at finding short- and long-term housing for homeless people, including some living in encampments.

"We are hyper-focused on housing," said Danielle Werder, manager of the county's Office to End Homelessness. "We're not walking around with socks and water bottles. We're walking around saying, 'What do you need?'"

## **Freed Israeli hostage describes deteriorating conditions while being held by Hamas**

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — An Israeli hostage freed by Hamas said in an interview that she was initially fed well in captivity until conditions worsened and people became hungry. She was kept in a "suffocating" room and slept on plastic chairs with a sheet for nearly 50 days.

In one of the first interviews with a freed hostage, 78-year-old Ruti Munder told Israel's Channel 13 television that she spent the entirety of her time with her daughter, Keren, and grandson, Ohad Munder-Zichri, who celebrated his ninth birthday in captivity. Her account, broadcast Monday, adds to the trickle of information about the experience of captives held in Gaza.

Munder was snatched Oct. 7 from her home in Nir Oz, a kibbutz in southern Israel. Her husband, Avraham, also 78, was taken hostage too and remains in Gaza. Her son was killed in the attack.

Initially, they ate "chicken with rice, all sorts of canned food and cheese," Munder told Channel 13. "We were OK."

They were given tea in the morning and evening, and the children were given sweets. But the menu changed when "the economic situation was not good, and people were hungry."

Israel has maintained a tight siege on Gaza since the war erupted, leading to shortages of food, fuel and other basic items.

Munder, who was freed Friday, returned in good physical condition, like most other captives. But one of the released hostages, an 84-year-old woman, has been hospitalized in life-threatening condition after not receiving proper care in captivity, doctors said. Another freed captive needed surgery.

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Freed hostages have mostly kept out of the public eye since their return. Any details about their ordeal have come through relatives, who have not revealed much.

Munder, confirming accounts from relatives of other freed captives, said they slept on plastic chairs. She said she covered herself with a sheet but that not all captives had one.

Boys who were there would stay up late chatting, while some of the girls would cry, she said. Some boys slept on the floor.

She said she would wake up late to help pass the time. The room where she was held was "suffocating," and the captives were prevented from opening the blinds, but she managed to crack open a window.

"It was very difficult," she said.

Munder's account emerged as Israel and Hamas agreed to extend their truce. The two sides have been exchanging Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners under a cease-fire deal that has paused the fighting. The deal also includes an increase in aid to Gaza.

Israel declared war after the Islamic militant group's cross-border attack Oct. 7 in which 1,200 people were killed and 240 others taken hostage. An Israeli offensive has left over 13,000 Palestinians dead, according to health authorities in the Hamas-run territory.

Munder said that on Oct. 7, she was put on a vehicle with her family and driven into Gaza. A militant draped over them a blanket her grandson had carried from home, which she said was meant to prevent them from seeing the militants around them. While in captivity, she learned from a Hamas militant who listened to the radio that her son was killed, according to the Channel 13 report.

Still, she said, she held out that hope she would be freed.

"I was optimistic. I understood that if we came here, then we would be released. I understood that if we were alive — they killed whoever they wanted to in Nir Oz."

Two Israeli TV stations, Channels 12 and 13, reported that Hamas' top leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, visited the hostages in a tunnel and assured them they would not be harmed.

"You are safest here. Nothing will happen to you," he was quoted as saying in the identical reports, which did not reveal the source of the account.

This round of releases has seen mostly women and children freed. They have been undergoing physical and psychological tests at Israeli hospitals before returning home.

Mirit Regev, whose 21-year-old daughter, Maya, was freed Sunday, told Israeli public broadcaster Kan that the family has been counseled to "return the power to her" in their interactions by always asking her for permission before things occur, such as leaving the room. Regev's 18-year-old son, Itai, is still being held by Hamas.

Itai Pessach, director of the Edmond and Lily Safra Children's Hospital at Sheba Medical Center, where many of the released children have been treated, said he felt some optimism because the hostages were physically recovering. But he said medical staff had heard "very difficult and complex stories from their time in Hamas captivity," without elaborating.

"We understand that despite the fact that they might seem physically improving, there's a very, very long way to go before they are healed," he said.

In a separate interview, the aunt of a 25-year-old Israeli-Russian hostage who was released Sunday from Gaza said her nephew fled his captors and hid within Gaza for a few days before being recaptured.

"He said he was taken by terrorists, and they brought him into a building. But the building was destroyed (by Israeli bombing), and he was able to flee," Yelena Magid, the aunt of Roni Krivoi, told Kan radio on Monday. "He was trying to get to the border, but I think because he didn't have the resources to know where he was and which direction to flee, he had some trouble."

He told her in a phone conversation he was able to hide himself for around four days before Palestinians in Gaza discovered him, she added.

"One thing that gave us hope from the start is that he's a boy who's always smiling, and he can figure things out in any situation," Magid said.

Israeli media aired video Monday of Ori Megidish, an Israeli soldier who was taken captive, then freed

by the military late last month. She said she was happy and doing well and wished all the captives would return home.

"I'm glad to have my life back," she said.

## Diplomas for sale: \$465, no classes required. Inside one of Louisiana's unapproved schools

By SHARON LURYE Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, La. (AP) — Ariya Martin accepted her high school diploma with relief and gratitude.

It was her ticket to better-paying work, she felt, after getting kicked out of high school and toiling for eight years at factory jobs to support her children.

"This is a new path for me to get on with my life," she said.

But Martin didn't take any classes or pass any tests to receive her degree. She got it in July from a school where students can get a high school diploma for \$465.

Unlike public schools, formal homeschooling programs or traditional private schools, nearly 9,000 private schools in Louisiana don't need state approval to grant degrees. Nearly every one of those unapproved schools was created to serve a single homeschooling family, but some have buildings, classrooms, teachers and dozens of students.

While unapproved schools account for a small percentage of the state's students, those in Louisiana's off-the-grid school system are a rapidly growing example of the nation's continuing fallout from COVID-19: families disengaging from traditional education.

U.S. public school enrollment fell by more than 1.2 million students in the first two years of the pandemic. Many switched to private school or told their state they were homeschooling. Thousands of others could not be accounted for at all, according to an analysis from The Associated Press and its partners.

The students in Louisiana's off-the-grid school system aren't missing. But there's no way to tell what kind of education they're getting, or whether they're getting one at all. Over 21,000 students are enrolled in the state's unapproved schools, nearly double the number from before the pandemic, according to data obtained through a public records request by the AP and The Advocate, a partner news outlet in Louisiana.

To supporters of the system, avoiding state oversight is entirely the point. Advocates say Louisiana's unapproved schools are a natural extension of the doctrine of parental rights.

The place where Martin got her diploma, Springfield Preparatory School, bills itself as an umbrella school for Christian homeschoolers. Most students there do attend the school to work toward an education through actual classes or tutoring.

However, principal Kitty Sibley Morrison is also willing to grant a diploma to anyone whose parents say they were homeschooled, even years earlier.

"Sometimes it takes two or three times to explain to them that they are free," Sibley Morrison said. "Their parents are in charge of them, not the state."

### A HANDS-OFF OPTION FOR HOMESCHOOLING

Sibley Morrison says she is not selling diplomas, but rather lifetime services for homeschooling families.

"We're not here to make money," she said.

Yet a list of prices is taped to the front window of the school building: \$250 for diploma services, a \$50 application fee, \$35 for a diploma cover and \$130 to walk in a cap and gown at a ceremony.

The number of students in unapproved private schools like Springfield has nearly doubled, from around 11,600 in the 2017-18 school year to over 21,000 in 2022-23, according to state records.

There's precious little information available about these schools, which the state calls "nonpublic schools not seeking state approval." To start one, an adult must only report their school's name and address, their contact information and how many students they have. Some schools have whimsical names such as the "Ballerina Jedi Academy" and the "Unicorn Princess School." Others proclaim their independence with names like "Freedom First."

Most of the schools are tiny, single-family home schools. However, last year, 30 of Louisiana's unapproved

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schools reported they had at least 50 children enrolled.

There is no way for the government to verify safety, quality or even whether a school exists, said Laura Hawkins, a former state Department of Education official who worked on its school choice efforts up to 2020.

The department warns parents on its website that it cannot confirm whether these organizations even meet the legal definition of a school.

"We didn't want to give parents or anyone a false sense that we knew anything about these schools, should they exist," Hawkins said, "that we could attest to their safety, that we could attest to their actual educational program, anything."

Louisiana has two options for homeschooling.

Parents who want their child to receive a state-recognized high school diploma can apply for the official home study program. They must submit documentation such as test scores or copies of the student's work to show their child has received 180 days of schooling at the same quality as a public school's. The state-recognized diploma is more widely accepted by colleges and allows students to qualify for a popular in-state scholarship program.

Alternately, families can set up their own private school without asking for state approval. There are no requirements to prove a child is getting an education. In fact, these schools don't even have to submit the names of the students who are attending.

At least two unapproved institutions have had abuse scandals, but the state Department of Education says it has no authority to do anything in response.

"By law, the LDOE does not have oversight over these schools," said Louisiana Department of Education spokesperson Ted Beasley.

One of the most infamous is T.M. Landry in Breaux Bridge. A 2018 New York Times investigation found the school abused kids and made up transcripts to get students into Ivy League schools. It was still open as of last school year with 15 children, according to state records. Another unapproved school in Baton Rouge, Second Chance Academy, has come under scrutiny since its head teacher was arrested on charges of sexually abusing students.

Louisiana's unapproved private schools came into being in 1980 when Christian ministers who ran small private schools joined forces with the budding homeschool movement to push for the deregulation of private education. Lawmakers eliminated the requirement for private schools to have at least 50 students and state-certified teachers.

Opponents have tried on multiple occasions to get the law repealed but faltered in the face of lobbying efforts from Christian homeschool groups.

Today, over a dozen states allow families to open a private school as a form of homeschooling, including California, Illinois and Texas, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association. Around half the states require those schools to teach basic subjects such as math and reading; Louisiana isn't one of them.

'I TAKE THEIR WORD FOR IT'

Springfield Preparatory consists of two low-slung buildings on Springfield's main street. One is an office, the other a former restaurant space where Sibley Morrison's daughter and other teachers lead classes on art, music and more. State records say 250 students attend, though Sibley Morrison said the school doesn't really keep count.

Some homeschooling families come for art or science, others for services like career guidance, test prep and "explanation and support in their parental rights," said Sibley Morrison. Some, such as Arliya Martin, go straight for a diploma.

Kicked out of high school during 10th grade for what she said was self-defense during an altercation, Martin tried a military-style program for at-risk youths, but finished without her GED.

"At 17, I was already by myself. I had my son at 18, and it was just work, work, work," she said.

Then, this summer, she met Sibley Morrison. At 75, Sibley Morrison has been involved in homeschool education since the 1970s and says her mission is to provide an alternative to the "godless" public education system.

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Within days of meeting Sibley Morrison, Martin visited her office and had a diploma in her hand.

The document was backdated to 2015, when she would have graduated high school. It also said she had completed a program for graduation "approved by the Louisiana Board of Education," which isn't true. After inquiries from AP, Sibley Morrison said there had been a mistake and that the document would be corrected.

Signs at the school advertise "state-approved" diplomas, even though the state has not approved anything about the school. Sibley Morrison says she can use those words because she encourages each family in her program to simultaneously sign up for the state-approved home study program.

She says the diploma recognizes the value of educational experiences outside the classroom.

"I think you're working the oil field, you're working the McDonald's, all of that is just as valid as what the classroom was," Sibley Morrison said. "That's my point, and that's why I sleep well at night — because I feel good about the parents having alternatives in raising their children."

After learning later that her diploma is not approved by the state and might not be accepted by some colleges, Martin said she did not feel deterred. Friends and family members have gotten diplomas from the same school and gone on to college and successful careers, she said.

In Sibley Morrison's view, parents are the only people who get to decide if and when someone was sufficiently educated.

"When parents say, 'My child is ready to go into the real world' — I take their word for it," Sibley Morrison said.

Angela Grimberg, the executive director of the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, pointed out Louisiana law states that parents who want state approval must apply within 15 days of starting home-schooling. Backdating a diploma that claims to be state-approved would thus be "fraudulent," Grimberg said.

Beasley, the Department of Education spokesperson, said diplomas generally cannot be awarded retroactively. Asked if any government agency has authority to take action if a school sells diplomas, Beasley suggested making a report to the state attorney general's consumer protection division.

The attorney general's office did not respond to a request for comment.

## SOURING ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

A diverse spectrum of families have come under Springfield Prep's umbrella, united by the feeling that public school just does not work for them. Among others, there are families who want more flexibility and freedom, students sick of unfair discipline and post-pandemic chaos, and conservative parents who disapprove of books assigned in public school.

Jamie Vander Meulen thought public school wouldn't be a good fit for her three daughters, who all have dyslexia, so she started her own unapproved private school. Her girls learn with her in the morning and then take enrichment classes at Springfield, dabbling in everything from harp to Irish dance. They've also participated in a homeschooling co-op hosted at Springfield.

Vander Meulen's 8-year-old girl, Ruby, described school as "really fun," "artsy" and "magical." Her daughter Rose, 12, said she likes that she can learn at her own pace and spend more time on topics she loves, including science and World War II.

"You learn it and you can keep doing it, so it stays in your brain," Rose said.

Some of those science classes are taught by Harper Mumford, another mom in the co-op. Mumford says other parents thought she was crazy when she started homeschooling. But since the pandemic, families have less trust in public school.

"Before, it seemed more of like a cooperation between schools and parents for education," she said. "Then I think when those mandates started happening, it didn't seem so much as a cooperative effort."

Khyli Barbee, 15, celebrated her graduation from Springfield Prep in August with 22 other students. She said her public high school in Biloxi, Mississippi, had become "crazy" since the pandemic, with rampant bullying and drug use.

"I just wanted to hurry up and get out of school," she said. She didn't have to take any classes to get a diploma: "You just paid to walk."

On the July day when Sibley Morrison handed Martin her diploma, she advised her on next steps, describing scholarships she could use to go to community college.

"If you want our help," Sibley Morrison said, "you just come on back over here and we'll help."

"Y'all seem like good people who know how to help," Martin said. "So I will be back."

## Israel and Hamas agree to extend truce for two more days, and to free more hostages and prisoners

By TIA GOLDENBERG, JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel and Hamas agreed to extend their cease-fire for two more days past Monday, raising the prospect of further exchanges of militant-held hostages for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and a longer halt to their deadliest and most destructive war.

Eleven Israeli women and children, freed by Hamas, entered Israel Monday night after more than seven weeks in captivity in Gaza in the fourth swap under the original four-day truce, which began Friday and was due to run out. Thirty-three Palestinian prisoners released by Israel arrived early Tuesday in east Jerusalem and the West Bank town of Ramallah. The prisoners were greeted by loud cheers as their bus made its way through the streets of Ramallah.

The deal for two additional days of cease-fire, announced by Qatar, raised hopes for further extensions, which also allow more aid into Gaza. Conditions there have remained dire for 2.3 million Palestinians, battered by weeks of Israeli bombardment and a ground offensive that have driven three-quarters of the population from their homes.

Israel has said it would extend the cease-fire by one day for every 10 additional hostages released. After the announcement by Qatar — a key mediator in the conflict, along with the United States and Egypt — Hamas confirmed it had agreed to a two-day extension "under the same terms."

But Israel says it remains committed to crushing Hamas' military capabilities and ending its 16-year rule over Gaza after its Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel. That would likely mean expanding a ground offensive from devastated northern Gaza to the south.

Monday's releases bring to 51 the number of Israelis freed under the truce, along with 19 hostages of other nationalities. So far, 150 Palestinians have been released from Israeli prisons.

After weeks of national trauma over the roughly 240 people abducted by Hamas and other militants, scenes of the women and children reuniting with families have rallied Israelis behind calls to return those who remain in captivity.

"We can get all hostages back home. We have to keep pushing," two relatives of Abigail Edan, a 4-year-old girl and dual Israeli-American citizen who was released Sunday, said in a statement.

Hamas and other militants could still be holding up to 175 hostages, enough to potentially extend the cease-fire for two and a half weeks. But those include a number of soldiers, and Hamas is likely to make much greater demands for their release.

### FOURTH RELEASE

The newly released hostages included three women and nine children — including 3-year-old twin girls and their mother — from the kibbutz Nir Oz, a community near Gaza that was hard hit in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. The kibbutz said 49 of its residents remain in captivity, including the father of the twins. The Israeli military said late Monday that the hostages were undergoing initial medical checks in Israel before being reunited with their families.

Most of the hostages freed so far have appeared to be physically well. But 84-year-old Elma Avraham, released Sunday, was airlifted to Israel's Soroka Medical Center in life-threatening condition because of inadequate care, the hospital said.

Avraham's daughter, Tali Amano, said her mother was "hours from death" when she was brought to the hospital. Avraham is currently sedated and has a breathing tube, but Amano said she told her mother of a new great-grandchild who was born while she was in captivity.

Avraham suffered from several chronic conditions that required regular medications but was stable before

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she was kidnapped, Amano said Monday.

So far, 19 people of other nationalities have been freed during the truce, mostly Thai nationals. Many Thais work in Israel, largely as farm laborers.

France said three of the hostages released Monday were French-Israeli dual citizens, two 12-year-olds and one 16-year-old. The French government is "working tirelessly" to free five other French citizens held hostage, the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The Palestinian prisoners released so far have been mostly teenagers accused of throwing stones and firebombs during confrontations with Israeli forces, or of less-serious offenses. But some were convicted in alleged attempts to carry out stabbings, bombings and shootings. Many Palestinians view prisoners held by Israel, including those implicated in attacks, as heroes resisting occupation.

The freed hostages have mostly stayed out of the public eye, but details of their captivity have started to trickle out.

Merav Raviv, who is related to three hostages released Friday, said they had been fed irregularly and lost weight. One reported eating mainly bread and rice and sleeping on a makeshift bed of chairs pushed together. Hostages sometimes had to wait for hours to use the bathroom, she said.

In Washington, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby welcomed the extension of the truce.

"We would, of course, hope to see the pause extended further, and that will depend upon Hamas continuing to release hostages," Kirby told reporters.

## RESPITE IN GAZA

More than 13,300 Palestinians have been killed since the war began, roughly two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants. More than 1,200 people have been killed on the Israeli side, mostly civilians killed in the initial attack. At least 77 soldiers have been killed in Israel's ground offensive.

The calm from the truce allowed glimpses of the destruction wreaked by weeks of Israeli bombardment that leveled entire neighborhoods.

Footage showed a complex of several dozen multistory residential buildings that had been pummeled into a landscape of wreckage in the northern town of Beit Hanoun. Nearly every building was destroyed or severely damaged, some reduced to concrete frames half-slumped over. At a nearby U.N. school, the buildings were intact but partially burned and riddled with holes.

The Israeli assault has driven three-quarters of Gaza's population from their homes, and now most of its 2.3 million people are crowded into the south. More than 1 million are living in U.N. shelters. The Israeli military has barred hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled south from returning north.

Rain and wind added to the hardship of displaced Palestinians sheltering in the compound of Al-Aqsa Hospital in central Gaza. Palestinians in coats baked flatbreads over a makeshift fire among tents set up on the muddy grounds.

Alaa Mansour said the conditions are simply horrendous.

"My clothes are all wet, and I am unable to change them," said Mansour, who is disabled. "I have not drunk water for two days, and there's no bathroom to use."

The U.N. says the truce made it possible to scale up the delivery of food, water and medicine to the largest volume since the start of the war. But the 160 to 200 trucks a day is still less than half what Gaza was importing before the fighting, even as humanitarian needs have soared.

Long lines formed outside stations distributing cooking fuel, allowed in for the first time. Fuel for generators has been brought for key service providers, including hospitals and water and sanitation facilities, but bakeries have been unable to resume work, the U.N. said.

Iyad Ghafary, a vendor in the urban Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, said many families were still unable to retrieve the dead from under the rubble left by Israeli airstrikes, and that local authorities weren't equipped to deal with the level of destruction.

Many say the aid is not nearly enough.

Amani Taha, a widow and mother of three who fled northern Gaza, said she had only managed to get

one canned meal from a U.N. distribution center since the cease-fire began.

She said the crowds have overwhelmed local markets and gas stations as people try to stock up on basics. "People were desperate and went out to buy whenever they could," she said. "They are extremely worried that the war will return."

## **Relatives and a friend of Israelis kidnapped and killed by Hamas visit Australia's Parliament House**

By ROD MCGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Relatives and a friend of Israelis kidnapped and killed by Hamas visited Australia's Parliament House on Tuesday, sharing personal stories in an effort to lobby for international support for all hostages to be freed — and to support Israel's war effort.

The group of five will meet political leaders during a two-day visit in Canberra. They are also expected to share their experiences with members of the community in Sydney and Melbourne during a weeklong Australian trip.

"Our aim first is to get the hostages back, all of them," Elad Levy, 49, told reporters outside the Parliament House. Levy's niece, Roni Eshel, was a 19-year-old soldier initially thought kidnapped during Hamas' Oct. 7 incursion into Israel but confirmed dead weeks later.

"Our second aim is to get the support of the Australian people and the Australian government ... for Israel's actions in wiping out Hamas and in our military actions right now to eradicate Hamas," Levy added.

Australia's major political parties have supported Israel's right to defend itself but have urged Israel to comply with international law by containing non-combatant casualties in Gaza.

Israel has agreed to temporary, humanitarian pauses in its military operations in Gaza in exchange for the gradual release of hostages. The agreement had been due to expire Monday but was extended for an additional two days.

Iris Haim, 57, whose son Yotam Haim, 28, was kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza, described "the process of waiting" as psychological terror for families.

"It's psychological terror because they don't give the names until the last minute. We wait in fear," Haim said.

She said she hoped the cease-fire would hold until all the hostages were released.

Mika Shani, 18, said her mother, Tal Shani, called Tuesday morning to say her kidnapped brother Amit Shani, who turned 16 in captivity, was not listed among the hostages to be freed. The boy was the only family member to be snatched by Hamas during an attack on their home in Kibbutz Be'eri.

"It's been so frustrating. Every day, like, maybe today is the day. Maybe today he's going to get out," Mika Shani said.

Ofir Tamir, 26, said his kidnapped friend, Noa Argamani, who is also 26, had been caring for her mother, Loira Argamani, who suffered incurable brain cancer.

"The mother doesn't have a lot of time or a lot of strength," Tamir said.

Tali Kizhner's 22-year-old son, Segev Kizhner, was killed at the same Nova music festival where Argamani was taken.

"It was not a matter of religion, it was not a matter of gender," Tali Kizhner said. "They simply came to kill everybody," the 50-year-old mom added.



## **Blinken will return to Israel as the US hopes to see further extensions of the Gaza cease-fire**

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will return this week to the Middle East as the U.S. hopes to find a way to extend a cease-fire in Gaza and get more hostages released, the State Department said Monday. It will be his third trip to the region since Israel's war with Hamas began last month.

Blinken will travel to Israel and the West Bank after attending Ukraine-focused meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday in Brussels and Skopje, North Macedonia, where foreign ministers from NATO and the Organization for Peace and Security in Europe are gathering.

Israel has agreed to pauses in its military operations in exchange for the gradual release of hostages taken by Hamas during its Oct. 7 attacks on Israel. The agreement had been due to expire Monday but was extended for an additional two days, meaning the extension will be expiring just as Blinken is arriving in Israel.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Monday the U.S. hopes to see the pause extended further, but it is dependent on Hamas continuing to release hostages.

In Israel and the West Bank, Blinken will "discuss Israel's right to defend itself consistent with international humanitarian law, as well as continued efforts to secure the release of remaining hostages, protect civilian life during Israel's operations in Gaza, and accelerate humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

He said Blinken also will discuss the principles for a post-conflict Gaza, as well as the need to establish an independent Palestinian state and prevent the conflict from widening.

In the occupied West Bank, Blinken is expected to see Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Blinken and other U.S. officials have said they believe the Palestinian Authority should play a significant role in governing post-conflict Gaza.

From Israel and the West Bank, Blinken will travel to the United Arab Emirates for discussions with regional leaders who will be in Dubai to attend the COP28 climate summit.

Blinken has been engaged in furious diplomacy to try to prevent the Gaza conflict from spreading, expand the provision of humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians in the territory, secure the release of hostages and arrange for foreigners and dual nationals to leave Gaza overland to Egypt.

On each of his prior two trips, Blinken has traveled to Israel and Jordan multiple times. Between the two trips, he also made stops in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the UAE.

Blinken will arrive in Israel having just participated in an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe foreign ministers meeting in Skopje. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said he plans to attend the OSCE meeting, possibly setting the stage for a U.S.-Russia confrontation there over Ukraine.

In Brussels, Blinken will attend the two-day NATO gathering, which will include the first foreign minister-level meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council, a body created by alliance leaders at their last summit to improve cooperation and coordination and help prepare Kyiv for eventual membership.

"Allies will continue to support Ukraine's self-defense until Russia stops its war of aggression," said Jim O'Brien, the top U.S. diplomat for Europe.

The NATO meeting will also address the tensions in the Western Balkans, where there are calls for NATO to increase its military presence in response to concerns that hostility between Serbia and Kosovo could escalate to outright conflict.

Violence between the two has broken out twice in recent months, and Western countries fear that Russia could try to foment trouble in the Balkans to avert attention from the war in Ukraine.

Last week, Albania's prime minister urged NATO to further boost its military forces in Kosovo and secure the country's borders with Serbia, warning that recent ethnic violence in Kosovo could potentially trigger a wider Balkan conflict. NATO has already strengthened its military presence in Kosovo — established after the 1999 bombing campaign against Serbia — with about 1,000 additional troops and heavier weaponry, bringing its deployment there to about 4,500 troops.

Blinken will underscore U.S. and NATO support for democracy and stability in the region, including a commitment to back all countries' aspirations to join the European Union, O'Brien said.

Serbia doesn't recognize Kosovo's formal declaration of independence in 2008. Both countries want to join the European Union, which is mediating a dialogue between the former foes. Brussels has warned both that refusal to compromise jeopardizes their chances of joining the bloc.

The NATO ministers will also discuss plans for the alliance's 75th anniversary summit to be held in Washington in July 2024.

## Suspect in shooting of 3 men of Palestinian descent near the University of Vermont pleads not guilty

By LISA RATHKE Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — Three college students of Palestinian descent out for a walk in Vermont were seriously injured over the weekend when a man shot them at close range on a city street — an attack being investigated as a possible hate crime, authorities said Monday.

Jason J. Eaton, 48, made his initial court appearance by video from jail on three counts of attempted murder, and a plea of not guilty was entered on his behalf on Monday. He was ordered held without bail.

The U.S. Department of Justice, along with Vermont authorities, were investigating whether Saturday's shooting was a hate crime amid an increase in threats against Jewish, Muslim and Arab communities across the U.S. since the Israel-Hamas war began, Attorney General Merrick Garland said. "There is understandable fear in communities across the country," he said.

The three men, all age 20, were spending their Thanksgiving break in Burlington, and were out for a walk while visiting one of the victims' relatives when they were confronted by a white man with a handgun, police said.

"They stated that the person had not made any comments to them and had merely approached them while they were walking down the street, essentially minding their own business," Burlington Police Chief Jon Murad told reporters.

Two of the young men were struck in their torsos, while one was hit in the lower extremities, Murad said. All three were being treated at the University of Vermont Medical Center, and one faces a long recovery because of a spinal injury, a family member said.

"I've been with them almost constantly since Saturday evening. I've been listening to them talk to one another and try to process the events, and I'm blown away by their resilience, by their good humor in the face of these difficult times," said Rich Price, the uncle of one of the students.

The Institute for Middle East Understanding, in a statement from victims' families on X, formerly known as Twitter, identified the men as Hisham Awartani, Kinnan Abdalhamid and Tahseen Ali Ahmad.

"We are extremely concerned about the safety and well-being of our children," the statement said. "We call on law enforcement to conduct a thorough investigation, including treating this as a hate crime. We will not be comfortable until the shooter is brought to justice."

The three shooting victims have been friends since first grade at Ramallah Friends School, a private school in the West Bank, and all are "remarkable, distinguished students," said Rania Ma'ayeh, head of the school.

Awartani is studying mathematics and archaeology at Brown University in Rhode Island; Abdalhamid is a pre-med student at Haverford College in Pennsylvania; and Ali Ahmad is studying mathematics and IT at Trinity College in Connecticut, Ma'ayeh said. Awartani and Abdalhamid are U.S. citizens while Ali Ahmad is studying on a student visa, Ma'ayeh said.

"Our students are not safe in their own country because of the occupation. They're studying abroad and have a bright future ahead of them, and look at what happens," she said. "This has deeply shaken us."

Abdalhamid's uncle Radi Tamimi, who flew from California and spoke Monday at the press conference, shared a similar sentiment.

"Kinnan grew up in the West Bank and we always thought that that could be more of a risk in terms of his safety and sending him here would be a right decision," the uncle said. "We feel somehow betrayed

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in that decision here and we're just trying to come to terms with everything."

Eaton moved to Burlington over the summer from Syracuse, New York, and legally purchased the gun used in the shooting, Murad told reporters. According to a police affidavit, federal agents found the gun in Eaton's apartment on Sunday. Eaton came to the door holding his hands, palms up, and told the officers he'd been waiting for them.

Syracuse police said Eaton's name appeared in 37 police reports from 2007 until 2021, but never as a suspect. The cases ranged from domestic violence to larceny, and Eaton was listed as either a complainant or victim in 21 reports, according to Lt. Matthew Malinowski, the department's public information officer.

Price, Awartani's uncle, said the gunman "shot them without saying any words" and that the family suspects they were targets of a hate crime.

"The family's fear is that this was motivated by hate, that these young men were targeted because they were Arabs," Price said.

The victims were speaking in a mix of English and Arabic and two of them were also wearing the black-and-white Palestinian keffiyeh scarves when they were shot, Murad said.

Speaking at a news conference, Sarah George, state's attorney, said law enforcement officials do not yet have evidence to support a hate crime charge, which under Vermont law must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. But, she said, "I do want to be clear that there is no question that this was a hateful act."

Murad echoed George's language.

"Whether or not this is a hate crime by the law, it was a hateful act. It's one that we abhor," he said. "And anybody who steps out from a porch and attacks three random passersby for whatever reason, he's expressing a form of hate."

Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger, who called it "one of the most shocking and disturbing events in the city's history," said he spoke to President Joe Biden on Monday.

Biden said he and his wife were horrified by the shooting and were praying that the students make a full recovery.

"While we are waiting for more facts, we know this: there is absolutely no place for violence or hate in America. Period. No person should worry about being shot at while going about their daily lives," Biden said in a statement.

Burlington has gone from a city that typically saw two shootings per year to one that experienced 26 in 2022, said Murad, who created a task force last year to address the increase.

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont Independent, also denounced the shooting. "It is shocking and deeply upsetting that three young Palestinians were shot here in Burlington, Vermont. Hate has no place here, or anywhere. I look forward to a full investigation," Sanders said in a statement.

Gov. Phil Scott said the shooting was a tragedy, and called on the state's residents to unite and "not let this incident incite more hate or divisiveness."

Demonstrations have been widespread and tensions in the U.S. have escalated as the death toll rises in the Israel-Hamas war. A fragile cease-fire between Israel and Hamas was set to continue for two more days past Monday as 11 more hostages were handed over to the Red Cross in Gaza under what was originally a four-day truce deal.

Last month, an Illinois landlord was charged with a hate crime after being accused of fatally stabbing a 6-year-old Muslim boy and seriously wounding his mother in suburban Chicago. Police and relatives said he singled out the victims because of their faith.

University of Vermont graduate student Jacob Friz-Trillo, who lives down the street from where the weekend shootings took place, said he believes "New England itself has sort of a different type of racism than the rest of the United States," but that the violence was out of character in a city regarded as "super liberal."

Ma'ayeh said the most recent attack shows safety must improve. "This incident is a reminder of the urgency to change the discourse, which has dehumanized Palestinians. They are people who are deserving of empathy, compassion, rights, freedom, happiness and life," she said.

This story has been corrected to reflect the proper spelling of Kinnan Abdalhamid's uncle's last name. It is Tamimi, not Tamini. \_\_\_\_

Associated Press writers Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire; Lindsay Whitehurst in Washington; and David Sharp in Portland, Maine, contributed to this report.

## **Celebrities, politicians among those named in sex abuse suits filed under NY's Adult Survivors Act**

NEW YORK (AP) — For a year, New York's Adult Survivors Act suspended the usual legal deadlines to give sexual assault victims one last chance to file lawsuits over misconduct that occurred years or decades ago.

By the time the law expired last week, more than 3,700 legal claims had been filed, with many of the last few coming against big-name celebrities and a handful of politicians.

The list of the accused contained many familiar names from past #MeToo scandals and a few new ones. A huge number of claims were also made by former prisoners over alleged assaults in jails and prisons.

Here's a guide to some of the more noteworthy lawsuits:

**Donald Trump**

Former president Donald Trump was one of the first to be sued under the law when it took effect last November, by a writer who said he had raped her in a department store dressing room.

E. Jean Carroll, a columnist, had written of the alleged assault in a 2019 book. He rebuffed the accusation, saying it never happened. She initially sued Trump only for defamation because the allegations dated back to the mid-90s and the deadline for filing a legal claim had long since passed. But the Adult Survivors Act cleared the way for a suit claiming sexual assault.

In May, a jury found Trump liable of sexually abusing Carroll, but not raping her. She was awarded \$5 million, including damages for defamation.

**Sean "Diddy" Combs**

Sean "Diddy" Combs, the hip-hop music mogul, was sued this month by three women. The first case was filed in federal court by R&B singer Cassie. She accused Combs of beatings and rape in a long-term relationship, which he denied. They announced a settlement the next day.

Two more women came forward with lawsuits last week, just before the law's expiration. They accuse Combs of sexual abuse in separate incidents dating back to the early 1990s. A spokesperson for Combs denied the allegations.

**Harvey Weinstein**

Harvey Weinstein, already convicted of rape in New York and Los Angeles, was sued in October by Julia Ormond, who accused the movie producer of bringing down her movie career after a sexual assault in 1995.

Weinstein, who is in prison in New York, "categorically" denied the accusations through his attorney.

**Jamie Foxx**

Among the rush of lawsuits filed in the last days of the law was one against performer Jamie Foxx.

A woman who says she asked him for a photo at a New York City rooftop bar in 2015 accuses him of groping her under her clothes.

A representative for the actor said the alleged incident never happened.

**Steven Tyler**

In an accusation dating back to the 1970s, a woman has accused Aerosmith lead singer Steven Tyler of forcibly kissing and groping her.

The woman says she was 17 when she met Tyler in Manhattan in the summer of 1975, and that he assaulted her twice during that day.

Tyler has made no public comment on the accusation.

**Bill Cosby**

Bill Cosby was sued by Joan Tarshis, who said she was a young comedy writer when Cosby drugged and assaulted her on two occasions in the years around 1970. She had first made the accusations in 2014, but her ability to sue him was previously limited due to the statute of limitations.

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A representative for Cosby didn't respond to questions about the claim, instead citing the number of well-known figures named in lawsuits filed under the act and asking, "When is it going to stop?"

Russell Brand

The British comedian and actor was sued under the law by a woman who said she was an extra on the set of the movie "Arthur" in 2010, in which Brand was starring. The woman accused Brand of exposing himself and assaulting her in a bathroom.

He has not commented on the suit, but in connection to claims in British media outlets in September by four women who said he assaulted them, he said his relationships were "always consensual."

L.A. Reid

Antonio "L.A." Reid was sued by a woman who worked for the Grammy-winning music executive when he was the head of Arista Records.

The woman, Drew Dixon, said Reid sexually assaulted her twice in 2001, and derailed what had been a promising career in the music industry. He hasn't commented on the lawsuit, but denied Dixon's claims when she first made them in 2017.

Axl Rose

Guns N' Roses singer Axl Rose was accused by a former model of raping her in 1989 in a New York City hotel room.

Sheila Kennedy said she was diagnosed with anxiety and depression because of the attack, which she has referenced before.

An attorney for Rose said it was a false allegation and never happened.

Mike Tyson

Boxer Mike Tyson was sued by a woman who said he raped her in Albany, New York, in the early 1990s after she met him at a club and was in his limousine. There was no comment from representatives for Tyson.

The heavyweight boxer spent three years in prison after being convicted of rape in 1992.

Andrew Cuomo

Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who resigned in 2021 after being accused of sexual misconduct, was sued by his former executive assistant. Brittany Commisso said she faced sexual harassment and unwanted touching from Cuomo and was punished when she reported the incidents.

Cuomo's attorney called the suit a "cash grab." Cuomo has denied the sexual misconduct allegations. He initially faced a criminal charge but it was dropped by a prosecutor, who cited lack of proof.

Neil Portnow

Former Grammy Awards CEO Neil Portnow faces a lawsuit filed by a woman who said he sexually assaulted her in 2018. His accuser, a musician who wasn't named in the suit, accused Portnow of drugging her in a hotel room and assaulting her.

A representative for Portnow, who stepped down in 2019, called the accusations "completely false."

Rudy Giuliani

Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City and personal attorney for Trump, is being sued by a woman who says he coerced her into sexual activity while she did work off the books for him.

The woman, Noelle Dunphy, said Giuliani made suggestive comments and demanded sex while she worked for him as a business development director and public relations consultant between 2019 to 2021. His spokesperson strongly denied the allegations.

The Associated Press does not typically name alleged victims of sexual assault in stories unless they decide to tell their stories publicly, as Dunphy, Commisso, Kennedy, Dixon, Carroll, Ormond, Cassie and Tarshis have done.

## Deck the White House halls: Jill Biden wants holiday visitors to feel like kids again

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press  
WASHINGTON (AP) — Step inside the White House during the holidays by walking beneath the branches of a Christmas tree. Stroll along a hallway decorated with oversized holiday candy and other sweets. See Santa's sleigh and his eight reindeer suspended above the grand foyer in dramatic fashion.

Jill Biden wants everyone who visits the White House during the holidays to feel like a kid again.

"Each room is designed to capture this pure, unfiltered delight and imagination" so visitors "see this time of year through the wondrous, sparkling eyes of children," the first lady said Monday at the first of a month's worth of holiday receptions. About 100,000 visitors are expected for the holidays.

"Magic, Wonder and Joy" is the theme this year, President Joe Biden's third in the White House.

Jill Biden said it was "so amazing" to see the Christmas tree atop the entrance to the East Wing when they returned Sunday night after spending the Thanksgiving holiday in Nantucket, Massachusetts.

"When Joe and I saw that last night, we were just, like, mesmerized," she said.

The whimsical set of oversized decorations is meant to inspire the feelings of awe and wonder that put children on joyful edge during the holidays, White House aides said.

Throughout two public floors of the White House, the décor features several nods to the 200th anniversary of the publication of the poem and book commonly known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas." (The official title is "A Visit from St. Nicholas.")

The papier-mâché reindeer suspended in the foyer are "so cool," she said. "It's like they're leaping from the storybook's pages. I don't know how you feel about it. I feel it's just breathtaking."

The Library of Congress provided samples of editions of the book from the past 200 years that are on display in protective cases along the ground floor corridor. The traditional gingerbread White House includes a large sugar cookie replica of the book opened to a page that says "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night." Santa's sleigh and reindeer also fly above the cookie White House.

On Wednesday, the first lady will unveil a holiday ice rink on the White House lawn. The White House did not release information about how the rink will be used.

National Guard families, who joined the first lady as part of her Joining Forces initiative to support military families, were among the first members of the public to see the decorations. Children of these and other military families were also treated to a performance by the cast of the North American tour of the Disney musical "Frozen."

One of the first Christmas trees visitors see after entering the White House is decorated with wooden gold star ornaments engraved with the names of fallen service members.

The official White House Christmas tree, an 18.5-foot-tall (5.6-meter-tall) Fraser fir, stands in its usual place in the Blue Room. The massive tree highlights cheerful scenes, landscapes and neighborhoods from across the country. A toy train runs around its base.

The State Dining Room has been transformed into Santa's workshop, with elves' workbenches, stools



**Holiday decorations adorn the Grand Foyer of the White House for the 2023 theme "Magic, Wonder, and Joy," Monday, Nov. 27, 2023, in Washington.**

(AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

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and ladders circling Christmas trees, and tools and gifts-in-progress rounding out the décor.

The dining room is the customary stage for the gingerbread White House, which was assembled using 40 sheets of sugar cookie dough for the book and 40 sheets of gingerbread dough for the house, 90 pounds (41 kilograms) of pastillage, a cake decorating paste, 30 pounds (14 kilograms) of chocolate and 50 pounds (23 kilograms) of royal icing.

The library honors the tradition of bedtime stories with dangling golden moons and shimmering stars; the China Room has been turned into a sweet shop featuring baked goodies, and the Vermeil Room celebrates music with a display of rotating big Marine Band figurines with trumpets.

Glowing candles and stained glass in the Green Room celebrate faith, and holiday craft-making is the theme in the Red Room, where a tradition of featuring cranberries continues.

The official White House Menorah is on display in the Cross Hall connecting the State Dining Room and the East Room, which is decorated with trees and various advent calendars.

The décor also features likenesses of family cat Willow and dog Commander, who was recently sent away after multiple incidents of biting Secret Service personnel.

Ninety-eight Christmas trees, nearly 34,000 ornaments, over 22,000 bells and more than 350 candles were used in the décor, according to the White House. Nearly 142,500 lights illuminate trees, garlands, wreaths and other displays, and nearly 15,000 feet (4,600 meters) of ribbon are part of it all.

Seventy-two wreaths sporting red ribbons adorn the north and south exteriors of the building.

Some 300 volunteer decorators and designers spent a few days last week gathering decorations from a warehouse. They spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday putting the decorations in their proper places.

## Rosalynn Carter tributes highlight her reach as first lady and humanitarian

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

AMERICUS, Ga. (AP) — Hundreds turned out to salute Rosalynn Carter on Monday with the former U.S. first lady and global humanitarian's final journey from her rural hometown to the Jimmy Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta as her family began three days of memorials following her death at age 96.

The former president, who is 99 and has spent the past 10 months in home hospice care, plans to attend a memorial church service Tuesday in Atlanta for his partner of more than 77 years, The Carter Center confirmed. Rosalynn Carter died Nov. 19.

The tributes started Monday morning as Rosalynn Carter's casket traveled by motorcade through the Carters' native Sumter County, where well-wishers gathered along the route in their tiny hometown of Plains and attended a wreath-laying ceremony at the college from which she graduated in 1946.

Lyndea Brown drove to the short ceremony at Georgia Southwestern State University from nearby Albany, saying she wanted to salute "a remarkable woman" who attended local cancer benefits and fought for rural health services.

"They were always real hometown people," Brown said. "We don't get presidents and first ladies like that anymore, people who have true hometown roots and understand what it's like to grow corn and peanuts and whatever else and to struggle over health care."

During the stop at Rosalynn Carter's alma mater, her four children — Jack, Chip, Jeff and Amy — watched as wreaths of white flowers were placed beside a statue of their mother on the campus where she founded the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving to advocate for millions of unpaid caregivers in American households.

Generations of the Carter family — including the former first lady's grandchildren and great-grandchildren — accompanied the hearse to Atlanta, where members of the public paid respects Monday evening as she lay in repose at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.

Two funerals, set for Tuesday in Atlanta and Wednesday in Plains, are for invited guests. President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden, longtime friends of the Carters, lead the dignitaries expected to attend the Atlanta service. Rosalynn Carter's burial Wednesday in Plains is private.

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The schedule, a product of detailed planning that involved the former first couple, reflects the range of Rosalynn Carter's interests and impact. That includes her advocacy for better mental health treatment and the elevation of caregiving, her role as Jimmy Carter's closest adviser and her status as matriarch of Plains and Maranatha Baptist Church, where she and the former president served in various roles after leaving the White House in 1981.

"All over the world, people are celebrating her life," said Kim Fuller, the Carters' niece, while teaching a Bible lesson Sunday at Maranatha. "And of course we're coming into a week now where we're gonna celebrate even more."

Some well-wishers began honoring Rosalynn Carter soon after her death, including an uptick in visitors to the Carter Presidential Center campus.

"Mental health is more openly talked about" because of Rosalynn Carter's work to reduce the stigma attached to the conditions, said Brendan Green, a high school guidance counselor who came from Chicago.

"She was a pioneer in that field," Green said. "What a great legacy."

Elizabeth Laudig, a registered nurse from Dallas, said she drove 12 hours to be in Georgia this week, starting with the wreath-laying ceremony in Americus. She said Rosalynn Carter's emphasis on mental health and caregivers was especially inspiring to her as a nurse.

"She just quietly went about the business of trying to make the world a better place," Laudig said. "You know, she was not a showy or extravagant first lady, but she was humble, you know, kind, hardworking, and got things done for people because she cared about people."

After the motorcade arrived in Atlanta, the family joined staff at the Carter Presidential Center for a short, private service.

The campus near downtown Atlanta includes the library and museum, and The Carter Center. The former first couple founded the center in 1982 to champion democracy, mediate international conflicts and fight disease in the developing world. Their work around the world redefined what former White House occupants can do after ceding political power.

Carter Center CEO Paige Alexander recalled Rosalynn Carter as a tough and fiercely intelligent advocate who in every respect was her husband's "full and equal partner."

"Her compassion, her ability to connect, her political savvy was something that helped build the support for all of our programs over the past 40 years," Alexander told co-workers and the family.

At the public viewing, visitors passed poster boards with quotes by Rosalynn Carter and walked through the museum before being allowed to pay their respects in small groups in front of her casket, which was in the lobby, flanked by members of the Georgia State Patrol Honor Guard.

Teresa Lass, 65, approached the casket with tears in her eyes. She said she was a big admirer of Rosalynn Carter, particularly her work for Habitat for Humanity and her tight bond with Jimmy Carter.

"Rosalynn encouraged him to keep going and not give up," Lass said.

Genevieve Lewis, 76, took a photo of a quote by Rosalynn Carter equating mental illness with physical disease.

"I admire her for taking away the stigma of mental illness," Lewis said.

Gary Jackson, a municipal judge in Atlanta, said he met the Carters when Jimmy Carter was governor and again when he volunteered to work on Carter's presidential campaign. He said he came to admire Rosalynn Carter, wearing a "Carter" pin on his coat that he said was from the campaign.

"She was fiercely determined to help people," he said.

The largest single service will be held Tuesday at Glenn Memorial Church, a Methodist congregation. The Carters married in 1946 at Plains Methodist Church, where Rosalynn Carter attended growing up. She joined her husband as a Baptist throughout their marriage.

Her final services at Maranatha will reflect their small-town Protestant roots: Church members are invited and will eat a funeral meal with the Carter family the day of the service.



## Nikki Haley argues Donald Trump is always followed by 'chaos' before a large South Carolina crowd

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

BLUFFTON, S.C. (AP) — Nikki Haley argued Monday former President Donald Trump causes too much chaos to be successful in a second White House term, reiterating her argument about the GOP front-runner at a large town hall in her home state of South Carolina.

The former governor and United Nations ambassador drew the largest crowd of her primary campaign so far as she tries to close the gap with Trump just weeks before the Iowa caucuses kick off the Republican nominating calendar.

Haley invoked her former boss saying as she has before that she believes Trump was "the right president at the right time" but that the time is now right for a new generation in U.S. leadership.

"I agree with a lot of his policies, but the truth is, rightly or wrongly, chaos follows him," Haley said. "We have too much division in this country, and too many threats around the world to be sitting in chaos once again."

About 2,500 people attended the event at a satellite campus of the University of South Carolina along the state's southern coast. Half that number watched her event from video screens outside the venue after it reached capacity. Hours ahead of Monday's start time, the line for attendees wrapped around the venue, which the campaign said had to be changed from its original location due to demand.

Her staff has cast her campaign as being on a rising trajectory and pointed to growing crowds in recent weeks as she gets new attention from voters and donors looking for a Trump alternative.

Haley remains among a pack of candidates competing for a distant second place with Trump, who has led the GOP field since kicking off his third presidential campaign last year. Later this week, Haley will head back to New Hampshire, where she has stumped heavily. Entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy has more than a dozen events scheduled this week in Iowa. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis campaigns across South Carolina on Friday.

She often notes her ousting of a 30-year state incumbent in the South Carolina House, then beating three initially better-known candidates to become the first woman to serve as South Carolina governor.

The question of how Haley could close the gap with Trump was on the minds of some who gathered to hear her on Monday.

Vincent Francescangeli, who lives on Hilton Head Island, said he is leaning toward supporting Haley but is taking a wait-and-see approach as the election's first votes draw closer, noting that Trump is still on his list of candidates whom he might support.

"The world was a safer place when Trump was in office," Francescangeli said. "But Trump's got a lot of baggage, and you've got to ask yourself — is Trump really electable? I don't know."

Haley hit the usual points of her campaign speech on Monday, drawing applause and cheers following calls to term limit members of Congress, subject politicians to mental competency tests and end trade relations with China "until they stop murdering Americans with fentanyl."

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"I agree with a lot of his policies, but the truth is, rightly or wrongly, chaos follows him," Haley said. "We have too much division in this country, and too many threats around the world to be sitting in chaos once again."

On Monday, Haley riffed on Trump's recent appearance in her home state at Saturday's football rivalry matchup between the University of South Carolina and her alma mater, Clemson University. Trump was a guest of Gov. Henry McMaster, Haley's successor and an alumnus of South Carolina, which lost to Clemson.

"How did it work out for the Gamecocks having Trump show up?" Haley said. "Not so lucky for the Gamecocks, just sayin' — go Tigers."

Asked why he came out to see Haley, Francescangeli said that he had been impressed by her performance in the GOP presidential debates, the sole woman on stage.

"She didn't come across weak," Francescangeli said, referencing her debates. "She came across to me like a powerhouse. She stood up to those guys. These guys are trying to beat her up. She kicked right back. I was impressed."

## **Panthers fire Frank Reich after 11 games and name Chris Tabor their interim head coach**

By STEVE REED AP Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The Frank Reich era in Carolina is over after only 11 games.

The Carolina Panthers fired their coach on Monday following the team's NFL-worst 1-10 start in his first year at the helm.

Panthers owner David Tepper announced the move hours after several news outlets reported that he used a profanity as he was leaving the locker room following a 17-10 loss to the Tennessee Titans on Sunday.

Tepper hired Reich to fix one of the league's worst offenses over the past few seasons and develop Bryce Young, the No. 1 overall pick whom he gave up four draft picks and top wide receiver D.J. Moore to acquire this past offseason in the hopes of winning multiple Super Bowls.

Instead, the Panthers are assured a franchise-record sixth straight losing season.

The Panthers are 30-63 since Tepper bought the team from Jerry Richardson in 2018 for \$2.275 billion and have never made the playoffs.

Special teams coordinator Chris Tabor will take over as interim head coach. Offensive coordinator Thomas Brown will become the team's play caller, with senior assistant Jim Caldwell serving as his special adviser.

Tabor's first move as interim coach was to fire quarterbacks coach Josh McCown and running backs coach Duce Staley, according to a person familiar with the situation. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Monday because the moves have not been announced.

McCown and Staley were handpicked by Reich to be assistants.

When Tepper makes his next head coaching hire after the season, it will be the seventh full-time or interim head coach to serve under him.

Tepper is scheduled to address reporters Tuesday at a news conference at Bank of America Stadium. The Panthers canceled all media access Monday.

Reich is the second NFL head coach to be fired this season, joining Josh McDaniels of the Las Vegas Raiders.

Reich was fired earlier in his tenure than any head coach since Pete McCulley, who went 1-8 with San Francisco in 1978. He is the seventh NFL head coach in the last six years to be fired during or after just one season, joining Lovie Smith (Houston, 2022), Nathaniel Hackett (Denver, 2022), David Culley (Houston, 2021), Urban Meyer (Jacksonville, 2021), Freddie Kitchens (Cleveland, 2019) and Steve Wilks (Arizona, 2018).

Phone calls and text messages sent to Reich seeking comment were not immediately returned.

Tepper has shown a lack of patience as a team owner. Reich is the Panthers' third head coach fired during the season under Tepper.

He also owns the Major League Soccer team in Charlotte and has fired two coaches in the organization's first two years of existence.

On the NFL front, Tepper inherited Ron Rivera as his head coach in 2018 but fired him less than two years later during the season. Perry Fewell finished out the season before Tepper gave Matt Rhule, who previously coached at Baylor, a seven-year, \$63 million contract. But Rhule lasted less than 2 1/2 season before Tepper dismissed him and replaced him with Wilks, the Panthers' defensive coordinator, on an interim basis.

Tepper then hired Reich, who as offensive coordinator of the Philadelphia Eagles helped them win the Super Bowl before becoming head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, who fired him last season. Wilks is now the defensive coordinator for San Francisco.

Carolina still ranks near the bottom of the league in nearly every offensive category. The Panthers are 30th in the league in total offense and 30th in passing yards per game and haven't scored more than 15

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points in a game since the bye week.

Reich had signed a four-year contract with the Panthers that runs through the 2026 season. Tepper will be on the hook for an estimated \$9 million per season over the next three seasons.

Reich had experience running good NFL offenses, but that didn't translate over to the Panthers.

Young has been sacked 40 times this season, and the Panthers' offensive line has allowed 43 overall over in 11 games, fourth most in the NFL. Young has been under heavy pressure most of the season, making it difficult to evaluate his progress as a quarterback.

But the former Alabama product has failed to progress as a quarterback and ranks near the bottom of the league in most statistical categories. He has yet to throw for 250 yards in a game and has nearly as many interceptions (eight) as touchdown passes (nine).

Because of their record, the Panthers could possibly land the No. 1 pick in next year's draft, but that immediately would go to the Chicago Bears because of the trade for Young.

## Cyber Monday marks the year's biggest online shopping day, and one more chance to save on gifts

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

Consumers are scouring the internet for online deals as they begin to cap off the five-day post-Thanksgiving shopping bonanza with Cyber Monday.

Even though e-commerce is now part and parcel of our everyday lives and much of the holiday shopping season, Cyber Monday — a term coined back in 2005 by the National Retail Federation — continues to be the biggest online shopping day of the year, thanks to the deals and the hype the industry has created to fuel it.

Adobe Analytics, which tracks online shopping, expects consumers to spend between \$12 billion and \$12.4 billion on Monday, making it the biggest online shopping day of all time.

For several major retailers, the "Cyber Monday" sale is a days-long event that begins over the weekend. Amazon's, for example, kicked off on Saturday and runs through Monday. Target's two-day event began overnight on Sunday, while Arkansas-based Walmart kicked off its most recent discounts Sunday evening.

Consumer spending for Cyber Week — the five major shopping days between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday — provides a strong indication on how much shoppers are willing to spend during the holiday season.

Shoppers have been resilient this year in the face of stubbornly high inflation, which recently reached its lowest point in more than two years yet remains painfully apparent in areas like auto and health insurance and some groceries, like beef and bread.

Economists, meanwhile, have cautioned strong spending is likely to wane in the coming months.

Stressed consumers are relying on savings to fuel their shopping and are facing more pressure from credit card debt, which has been on the rise along with delinquencies. They've also been embracing "Buy Now Pay Later" payment plans, which allow shoppers to make payments over time without — typically — charging interest.

The National Retail Federation expects holiday shoppers to spend more this year than last year. But the pace of spending will slow, it said, growing 3% to 4% compared to 5.4% in 2022.

A clear sense of consumer spending won't emerge until the government releases sales data for the holiday season, though preliminary data shows some good signs for the retail industry.

According to Adobe, shoppers spent a record \$9.8 billion online Friday — marking a 7.5% jump from last year. Meanwhile, Salesforce, which also tracks online shopping, estimated that Black Friday online sales totaled \$16.4 billion in the U.S. and \$70.9 billion around the world. And Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks in-person and online spending across all payment forms, reported that overall Black Friday sales excluding automotive rose 2.5% from a year ago — a smaller but still notable jump compared to 2022's double-digit growth.

According to the firm, online sales rose 8.5%, while in-store purchases were up just 1.1%. Those numbers

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are not adjusted for inflation, which means that real sales in-stores could have dipped due to high prices.

Other data showed Black Friday saw some increases in store traffic — with large crowds in stores nationwide feeling more similar to pre-pandemic days.

RetailNext, which measures real-time foot traffic in stores, reported that store traffic rose 2.1% on Friday. Sensormatic Solutions, which also tracks store traffic, saw a bigger increase — reporting a 4.6% jump in shopper visits on Black Friday compared to a year ago. That also marks a turnaround from an average decline in store traffic seen throughout 2023 to date, Sensormatic said.

Grant Gustafson, head of retail consulting and analytics at Sensormatic, said that this marked the most significant Black Friday increase that his organization has seen in recent memory.

“This is a really good barometer of what to expect for the remainder of the holiday season,” Gustafson said. “The overall trend that we saw in traffic is a really positive sign for not only physical retail, but also for e-comm retail — that the consumer is willing to spend when they find out (about significant sales).”

Electronics, clothing, toys and jewelry were among the categories that saw the most growth this Black Friday, per Adobe. Health and beauty products as well as sporting goods also saw significant sales increases.

Retailers began offering holiday deals in October this year, continuing a trend that started during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been resurrected multiple times due to supply chain clogs or inflation woes. But many consumers waited to buy until Black Friday.

Mickey Chadha, retail expert and vice president at the credit rating agency Moody’s, believes that discounts will likely be quite strong and continue in the coming days, primarily because inventory, especially in discretionary categories, remains higher than demand. But he said the deals likely won’t be as good as last year, when retailers had more items on hand.

The investment bank Jefferies, which tracked 54 retailers during Black Friday, said Monday that it found that a majority of them offered flat discounts compared to last year. Still, Salesforce’s data showed discount rates rose to 30% in the U.S. on Black Friday, enticing customers to buy.

“They’re once again playing a game — and winning the game -- of discount chicken, where they wait for retailers to discount to where they feel most comfortable,” said Rob Garf, vice president and general manager of Retail at Salesforce. “And that’s what’s happening.”

According to Adobe’s stats, spending exceeded Black Friday during the weekend as consumers spent \$10.3 billion to take advantage of discounts that have been higher than years past. On Thanksgiving Day, Adobe said shoppers had spent another \$5.6 billion, up 5.5% compared to last year. That’s nearly double the amount consumers spent online in 2017, showing the continued shift to online shopping during the gift-giving season.

The resale industry, which has grown in recent years, is also expected to be a significant part of the holiday shopping season. Salesforce predicts 17% of holiday gifts this year will come from resale markets like Facebook Marketplace or ThreadUp, as well as brands like Canada Goose, Patagonia and Coach offering resale options on their sites for environmentally conscious consumers or those who enjoy vintage offerings.

## **Donald Trump is set to return to the witness stand in his civil fraud trial**

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After a pugnacious first turn on the witness stand, former president Donald Trump plans to testify again next month in his civil fraud trial, his lawyers said Monday.

He is to return Dec. 11, defense attorney Christopher Kise said.

Trump had plenty to say during his initial testimony Nov. 6 in the case, which has questioned his net worth, accused him of misleading banks and insurers and threatened his future in business in New York.

The Republican 2024 presidential front-runner denies all the allegations, and he used his first stint on the witness stand to lambaste the case, the judge and New York Attorney General Letitia James, who brought the lawsuit.

“People don’t know how good a company I built. You know why?” Trump complained as one of James’ deputies questioned him. “Because people like you go around and try and demean me and try and hurt

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me, probably for political reasons.”

He called James “a political hack” and dismissed a pretrial ruling against him as a “fraud on behalf of the court.”

The second round of Trump’s testimony could be still more expansive. James’ office led the questioning the first time; next month, that role goes to Trump’s own lawyers, and they can ask about a wider range of subjects than they could during cross-examination before.

When Trump’s son, company Executive Vice President Donald Trump Jr., testified for the defense this month, for instance, he lauded his father, traced the family’s history in business back to the late 1800s and talked the court through a glossy slideshow replete with sumptuous photos of skyscraper views, golf fairways, ballrooms, roof terraces and estates.

Eric Trump, who is Trump Jr.’s brother and fellow EVP, is due to testify for the defense Dec. 6, Kise said. Both Trump sons also testified during the attorney general’s part of the case.

Now finishing its second month, the trial is putting a spotlight on the real estate empire that vaulted Trump into public life and eventually politics. He maintains that James, a Democrat, is trying to damage his campaign.

At the heart of the case are Trump’s 2014 to 2021 annual “statements of financial condition,” which were used to help secure loans and other deals.

A Trump Organization executive testified Monday that the company no longer produces such statements.

The company continues to prepare various audits and other financial reports specific to some of its components, but “there is no roll-up financial statement of the company,” said Mark Hawthorn, the chief operating officer of the Trump Organization’s hotel arm.

He wasn’t asked why the comprehensive reports had ceased but said they are “not required by any lender, currently, or any constituency.”

Messages seeking comment on the matter were sent to spokespeople for the Trump Organization.

Hawthorn, a certified public accountant, has worked since 2016 for the company’s Trump Hotels arm. Trump Jr. testified earlier that Hawthorn is functioning as the entire Trump Organization’s chief financial officer, calling him “the finance guy within Trump world now” and saying the CPA “has taken on all those decisional responsibilities.”

But Hawthorn said it was incorrect to say “all.”

Defense lawyer Clifford Robert used Hawthorn’s testimony to try to show that companies under the Trump Organization’s umbrella have produced reams of financial documents “that no one had a problem with.” A lawyer for James’ office, Andrew Amer, stressed that the suit is about Trump’s overall statements of financial condition, calling the other documents irrelevant.

Trump asserts that his wealth was understated, not overblown, on his financial statements. He also notes that the numbers came with disclaimers saying that they weren’t audited and that others might reach different conclusions about his financial position.

Judge Arthur Engoron, who will decide the verdict in the non-jury trial, has already ruled that Trump and other defendants engaged in fraud. The current proceeding is to decide remaining claims of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records.

James wants the judge to impose over \$300 million in penalties and to ban Trump from doing business in New York — and that’s on top of Engoron’s pretrial order that a receiver take control of some of Trump’s properties. An appeals court has frozen that order for now.

## **Qatar is the go-to mediator in the Mideast war. Its unprecedented Tel Aviv trip saved a shaky truce**

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The deal seemed on the verge of unraveling. Hamas had accused Israel of failing to keep its side of the bargain and Israel was threatening to resume its lethal onslaught on the Gaza Strip.

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That was the point at which a Qatari jet landed at Israel's Ben-Gurion International Airport on Saturday. Negotiators aboard set to work, seeking to save the cease-fire deal between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers before it fell apart and scuttled weeks of high-stakes diplomatic wrangling.

The first public visit by Qatari officials to Israel marked an extraordinary moment for the two countries, which have no official diplomatic relations. It also underscored the major role of the tiny emirate in bridging differences between the enemies.

"This is something we've never seen before," Yoel Guzansky, a senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, said of the Qataris' stay in Israel. "It's the only external actor in the world with that much leverage on Hamas, because of its many years of support."

The weekend mission was successful, and most of the team jetted home. But several Qatari mediators stayed behind to work with Israeli intelligence officials on extending the four-day truce, which was set to end Tuesday morning, according to a diplomat briefed on the visit who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity.

Those efforts apparently paid off, as Qatar's Foreign Ministry announced Israel and Hamas have agreed to extend their cease-fire for two more days past Monday, raising the prospects of a longer halt to the war.

With its close ties to the United States — it hosts the largest American military base between Europe and Japan — its communication with Israel since 1995 and its support of blockaded Gaza to the tune of what estimates suggest is more than \$1 billion since 2014, Qatar is uniquely positioned to break deadlocks in the cease-fire talks, which also involve the U.S. and Egypt.

"We need Qatar," Guzansky said of Israel, noting that other Arab countries increasingly have interests in Israel and are normalizing their relations. "Qatar is seen as the only player in the Arab world that is loyal to the Palestinian cause."

The emirate has hosted an overseas Hamas political office since 2012, allowing Qatar to wield some influence over the militant group's decision-makers. Top Hamas officials, including Hamas political bureau head Khaled Mashaal, live in Qatar.

Qatar says Hamas' political office in its capital, Doha, came about at the request of U.S. officials who wanted to establish a communication channel, just as Doha had hosted Taliban offices during America's 20-year war in Afghanistan.

Qatari officials say they are guided by a desire to reduce conflict, though their ties with a range of Islamist groups, including Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Taliban have drawn criticism from Israel, some U.S. lawmakers and neighboring Arab governments.

"This is soft power on steroids, mobilized for America's interest," said Patrick Theros, a former U.S. ambassador to Qatar. "Hosting organizations which the United States cannot be seen talking to is part of this policy."

The wealthy Gulf Arab state with a native population of just 300,000 has leveraged its strategic location and tremendous natural gas riches to wield political influence and project soft power around the world, including as host of the 2022 World Cup.

In the Israel-Hamas hostage negotiations, Qatari mediators, joined by those from Egypt and the U.S., faced the task of getting the warring sides to put faith in diplomacy when trust was sub-zero.

Over the weekend, Hamas complained that Israel had violated the terms of their cease-fire and said the deal was in danger. Only 137 trucks with badly needed humanitarian aid made it through on Friday, the first day of the truce, and 187 on the second day, according to the U.N. Palestinian refugee agency. Israel had promised to permit 200 a day.

Qatari officials resorted to face-to-face meetings with Israeli officials to try to save the deal, according to the diplomat. A few hours with Mossad officials in Tel Aviv proved crucial on Saturday. Suddenly, the deal was back on. Hamas handed over its second batch of Israeli hostages, families in the West Bank rejoiced over another 39 women and teenagers freed from prison, and Palestinians in Gaza emerged from their shelters to search for fuel and missing family members.

Qatar's minister of state for international cooperation, Lolwah Al-Khater, became the first foreign official to visit the besieged Gaza Strip on Sunday. She used the pause in fighting to survey the disputed influx

of aid, meet wounded Palestinians and talk with Wael al-Dahdouh, Gaza bureau chief of Qatari-funded Al Jazeera, who lost his wife, son and grandchild in an Israeli airstrike. The pan-Arab broadcaster, which has more cameras in Gaza than any other news outlet, has dominated Arabic coverage of the war.

Despite their differences, both Israel and Hamas have an interest in prolonging calm. Even as bigger questions mount over what happens after the war, a Qatari official who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of ongoing negotiations says his country stays focused on what's immediately possible, such as maintaining the cease-fire and preventing a regional war that draws in Hamas' Iranian patrons or Lebanon's Hezbollah militants.

A steady stream of officials have passed through Doha to that end, including Iran's foreign minister, Lebanon's caretaker prime minister and the director of the CIA.

"There is no conflict that began and ended on the battlefield," Majed al-Ansari, spokesperson for Qatar's Foreign Ministry, told The Associated Press on Monday. "Now, as hostages are being released and there are pauses in the fighting, we might be able to find a solution."

## Why do they give? Donors speak about what moves them and how they plan end-of-year donations

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

What motivates people to donate to charities or causes they care about is often deeply personal. Donors name relatives or friends who have survived or died from illnesses. They recount tearful conversations with their children. They point to their aspirations for how their communities and the larger world could be improved.

In advance of GivingTuesday, The Associated Press interviewed people from across the country with a variety of life experiences about why they give, which organizations they choose to support and how they plan their giving throughout the year.

While not all will participate in GivingTuesday, which started in 2012 as a hashtag, the date has become a central part of nonprofit fundraising and a kind of last chance to meet their budget goals for the following year.

These interviews have been edited for length:

HOUSTON — A longtime resident of Houston, Monica Fulton, 51, prioritizes giving to organizations serving the city's residents. She's volunteered with the Houston Food Bank for decades, doing "everything except the cold room. Because I don't like the cold," she joked.

Fulton, who is originally from Panama, sees her giving and volunteering as a way to make a difference, something she has tried to pass on to her children, who are now 18 and 20 years old.

"You look at what's happening in the world and you tend to feel helpless. And what I try to teach my kids instead of feeling helpless is find one little patch of grass that you can make better," she said.

Usually, at the beginning of the year, Fulton sets aside the funds that she intends to give to nonprofits, with the majority going to the food bank, a nonprofit that provides services to people without housing, a women's fund and an arts education organization. But she keeps aside a portion to respond more flexibly, including on GivingTuesday when she seeks out nonprofits that are running matching campaigns.

"My advice for people for Giving Tuesday is, do a little bit of research and see who needs help, who has matching challenges," she said. "And that makes it kind of fun and exciting to think that even though you give something small, it gets doubled or tripled."

CHICAGO — Alicia Bailey said her philanthropic giving was not always intentional.

An executive producer who now works in real estate, Bailey would give \$5 when checking out a store or attending a charity gala when invited by a relative. That changed in 2018 when she joined a group of donors who pool their funds to support small organizations serving women and girls on Chicago's South Side.

Bailey's involvement with philanthropy has since grown to the point where she joined the board of the

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Chicago Foundation for Women, which hosts her giving circle and also makes its own grants.

"To go through the process of understanding and getting educated about the grantmaking process, all the way through to deciding and doing site visits, and seeing and hearing the work that's actually happening in the Chicagoland area and being able to put faces and names and sounds to these women who are making things possible with very little," Bailey said was incredibly beneficial to her.

The giving circle makes relatively small grants to organizations that have budgets of less than \$500,000, where those grants can make a big difference.

"People may have an idea of like, 'My dollars are too small, they wouldn't matter,' right?" Bailey said. "But in these cases, we know that it is because of people giving what they can that it literally has changed the way that organizations are able to do their work. And then that changes lives in the community."

She doesn't plan to mark GivingTuesday specifically for donations because she's already found, through the foundation and the giving circle, ways to pursue her mission of improving the lives of women, girls and gender-nonconforming people in her area.

"I will be doing much of the same work that I've been doing every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday," Bailey said, though she is glad the date will prompt many people to consider how they can make a difference in a cause they care about.

ATLANTA — The amount that Ruben Brooks, 56, will give each year varies, but what doesn't change are the causes he supports: financial literacy, scholarships and mentoring for young people in the African American community.

"If you want a healthier society, if you want a more productive society, a safer society, then it probably behooves all of us to give in an effort to effectuate the desired result," said Brooks, who is the chief operating officer of Atlanta Beltline.

Years ago, he volunteered as a mentor for Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, an organization that he continues to support financially, along with Junior Achievement of Georgia, where he is now a board member. While he has less time to volunteer nowadays, he has extended his network to students who receive scholarships through another nonprofit, the Ezekiel Taylor Foundation, sometimes hosting them at his home.

"Hearing the stories, hearing the challenges, providing solutions, letting them know I'm available, my friends are available, and there are solutions to the problems that they will encounter," Brooks said of his time with those students.

He usually makes his donations in November and December when he has a sense of his income for the year, in part because he will claim tax advantages. While he may donate on GivingTuesday, it's not a priority, Brooks said.

"I want to give on my own terms and what I think is appropriate and not sort of with a commercial day that's sort of put out there," he said.

LAFAYETTE, Colorado — Lynne Garfinkel, 55, and Pam Lowy, 58, met through a mutual friend when they both moved to Lafayette, near Boulder, Colorado, several years ago. During the height of the pandemic, they took an online training through the organization Philanthropy Together about how to run a giving circle. They eventually decided to co-lead a new group, Moving Mountains, in part to deepen their connection to the area.

The members of the group vote on a cause to support and then they research local organizations, including sometimes visiting the nonprofits and asking them questions about how they would use a donation, which has ranged from \$4,000 to \$16,000 depending on the cycle.

"We want a project or something that we know where our money is going to make a bigger impact," Lowy said.

The only requirement for joining the group, which uses an online platform called Grapevine to manage donations and voting, is to donate to the pooled funds. Garfinkel said they have never met some of the members in person.

"They trust that the group is doing the vetting and that their money's going to a good cause. They like



being part of something bigger," she said. "But they don't have the time to do the research themselves, to participate, to volunteer, and that's okay."

For Garfinkel, her contributions to the giving circle represent one of her main charitable donations each year, but she said of GivingTuesday, "I still use that time to pull together all my receipts and what have I given this year? And what did I plan to give? And where do I still have some room in this last month of the year to give?"

## **Assailants in latest ship attack near Yemen were likely Somali, not Houthi rebels, Pentagon says**

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The five armed assailants captured by U.S. forces after seizing a commercial ship near Yemen over the weekend were likely Somali and not Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, the Pentagon said Monday.

Recent attacks on commercial vessels have been conducted by Houthis, seen as part of a rise in violence in the region due to the Israel-Hamas war.

While the Pentagon was still assessing the motives of the latest group, "we know they are not Houthi," Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters. He didn't rule out that the rebels were somehow linked to the attack.

While piracy in the region is down, this "was clearly a piracy-related event," Ryder said.

Yemen's internationally recognized government in Aden had accused the Houthis of attacking the MV Central Park in the Gulf of Aden on Sunday.

The Liberian-flagged tanker, managed by Zodiac Maritime, sent out a distress call and forces from the USS Mason, an American destroyer, responded.

The five assailants attempted to flee in their small boats, but the U.S. forces pursued them and fired warning shots, "resulting in their eventual surrender," Ryder said. They were being held aboard the Mason, he said.

However, a little over 90 minutes later, two ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled Yemen landed about 10 nautical miles (18 nautical kilometers) from the Mason. The U.S. destroyer did not engage or try to intercept the missiles because they were not deemed a threat and splashed into the water, Ryder said.

He said it was still not clear whether the ballistic missiles were aiming for the Mason.

Ryder said there were three Chinese vessels in the area at the time but they did not respond to the Central Park's distress call. The Chinese government has not acknowledged whether it had ships in the area at the time of the attack. According to international maritime law, any ship in the vicinity is required to respond to a distress call.

## **Artist Zeng Fanzhi depicts 'zero-COVID' after a lifetime of service to the Chinese state**

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

SHENZHEN, China (AP) — In one painting, a child sits, mouth wide open, as a worker in white medical garb extends a long cotton swab toward her tonsils. In another, a masked officer and medical workers stand guard in front of an apartment cordoned off with ropes and seals reading "CLOSED," as residents look on with frustration and despair.

These are some of the portraits that Zeng Fanzhi, 85, has painted to commemorate three years of China's strict "zero-COVID" controls, which sparked nationwide protests a year ago. But Zeng, a retired architect living in Shenzhen, is not a critic of the measures, under which millions of people were tested, locked in apartments, or carried off to quarantine centers.

Zeng has spent much of his life in service to the Chinese state, designing monuments in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and coal plants for the Ministry of Coal. He's a member of Shenzhen's state-sponsored

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artist's association and his paintings feature on stamps and win prizes.

The artist has a different perspective from the young protesters — one shaped by early years in China living through war and revolution, and later years witnessing decades of prosperity and growth. To Zeng, China's adherence to "zero-COVID" controls was necessary, and its people's adherence to it heroic.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping "says that artistic creation must be from 'The People's Standpoint,'" Zeng says, explaining his focus on ordinary people. "This means art should reflect the reality of people's lives. The subjects of my paintings are aligned with this direction."

Growing up, Zeng lived through some of the most tumultuous periods in Chinese history. Born to civil servants who fled for Chongqing, China's wartime capital in World War II, Zeng grew up moving from city to city, fleeing the invading Japanese and the Chinese civil war that followed.

The Communist Party's victory in 1949 ended decades of strife in China, bringing some stability to the country. Zeng aspired to be an artist and took art school entrance exams in 1957, but failed twice. His parents encouraged him to study architecture instead.

Soon after, the founder of Communist China, Mao Zedong, launched the Great Leap Forward, an ambitious but disastrous campaign to transform the impoverished country into an industrial power. Millions starved to death, and students across China spent time in political study sessions.

In 1962, fresh from college, Zeng was assigned to work for an architectural team in Beijing and put in charge of drafting designs for Tiananmen Square and the Avenue of Heavenly Peace.

A few years later, Zeng and his wife, a fellow architect, decided to move to Pingdingshan — home to one of the largest coalfields in China, nestled among mountains in the heart of the country.

There, for 20 years, they designed coal separation plants, from coal crushers to worker's dorms.

By the 1980s, the couple was getting antsy. Mao had died and a new reformist leader, Deng Xiaoping, was in charge. China was opening up, and opportunity beckoned on the coasts. They begged to be relocated.

"We felt like we weren't being put to our best use, so we want to jump ship," Zeng said.

College graduates like them were in scarce supply, and jobs were easy to find. They moved to Shenzhen, an experimental economic zone located next to Hong Kong in China's south. The '90s saw China's leaders experimenting with market capitalism, and Shenzhen was rapidly developing. Zeng began working at Shenzhen University, which back then was located in the distant suburbs and built among fields with muddy roads winding up to the entrance.

In the years that followed, Shenzhen boomed, and Zeng's family prospered. Millions came to Shenzhen to work in factories that exported goods to overseas markets. Zeng and his wife designed dozens of Shenzhen's apartments and office towers, which rose like reeds out of empty fields.

Newly affluent, they bought an apartment near the center of the city, while their children went overseas for study. Today, Shenzhen has more skyscrapers than New York or Tokyo.

"We've seen a lot of ups and downs in our life," says his wife, Zhao Sirong. "Shenzhen was a fledging city, and we were pioneers."

It wasn't until Zeng turned 80 that he retired from architecture. Finally, Zeng was able to pursue his true passion: painting.

Despite his old-school training, he learned his new trade in a distinctly 21st-century fashion. Day by day, he watched tutorials of master artists online.

Zeng's art is informed by socialist realism, a style he encountered growing up in Maoist China. He cites works by famed Russian realist painter Ilya Repin as inspiration, such as "Barge Haulers on the Volga," which shows 11 men dragging a barge, exhaustion on their faces. It's an unflinching depiction of back-breaking labor, the quiet heroism of ordinary people in harsh conditions.

"It left a deep impression on me," Zeng said.

Zeng found himself drawn to similar themes. One of his paintings, "Life is Not Easy," portrays a migrant worker bundled in scarves, selling vegetables and shivering as snow swirls around her.

Zhao, Zeng's wife, complains about his rigorous painting routine. Zeng drives to his studio every morn-

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ing, painting till late afternoon. The octogenarian works weekends, leaving his wife with only her plants to keep her company.

"What I want from my husband is that he walks slower and stops acting like a young man," Zhao said, chuckling and sighing. "Why is he working so hard? I don't understand."

But Zhao still supports her husband's craft because she believes regular activity is key to preventing mental decline. They wonder at young people who spend their days idle, swiping endlessly on cellphone videos and whiling away their savings on outdoor games of mahjong in steamy Shenzhen.

"My life is still very fulfilling," Zeng says. "Some say painting must be tiring for you. OK, sure, but is gambling tiring for you?"

As the coronavirus spread, Zeng was fascinated by how it upended daily life around him.

First he painted nurses swabbing residents, then children attending online classes. Then, last year, as controls grew strict and Zeng's compound was locked down, he spent his days sitting on his balcony, painting residents locked in their complexes, guards standing sentry, and masked delivery drivers tossing groceries over fences.

"This was an unimaginable event that's never happened before in the whole world," Zeng says.

Zeng and his wife caught the virus last winter, when controls were abruptly lifted. Though his wife recovered quickly, Zeng spent weeks recuperating. Across China, hundreds of thousands perished as the infected overran hospitals and medication ran out of stock.

"We were all infected," Zhao said. "We struggled through the past three years, and then things suddenly opened up. We weren't psychologically prepared."

Despite the pandemic's historic nature, few depictions of the era exist in China outside official exhibits and state television glorifying the government's role in combatting the virus. Under Xi, the state has tightened controls on artist expression, leading to some going overseas.

At a Beijing art exposition this fall, one of Zeng's paintings was tucked away behind a column. The exposition, he said, deemed it too negative, as it depicted residents confined to their homes.

"We couldn't put it on display," he said with a chuckle, walking out of his booth and gesturing to the painting.

But Zeng sees his art as commemoration, not criticism. He lived through a "great historical event," he says, and he sees his artwork as an observation honoring all the sacrifice and difficulty endured by ordinary people.

For Zeng and Zhao, their government benefits — including public medical care, subsidized food, free public transit, and a pension of 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) a month — is well beyond what they imagined having when they were younger, growing up in a China scarred by war.

"We understand the country's measures," Zhao says. "We all feel that on the whole, our policy was correct, because if we reopened too early, it could have been like the United States, where the death rate was very high."

Today, Zeng is hard at work on a new series portraying Chinese leader Xi Jinping, which he hopes will serve as positive "political promotion". His latest depicts Xi sitting humbly among villagers. He tentatively calls it, "Chairman Xi Taking Us on the Road to Prosperity."

"My work can play a role in promoting the superiority of our distinctive socialist system," Zeng says. "Our current era is a great era, and I want to paint paintings that capture this era."

## Elon Musk visits Israel to meet top leaders as accusations of antisemitism on X grow

By MELANIE LIDMAN and KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Elon Musk, who's been under fire for endorsing an antisemitic conspiracy theory and wider accusations of hatred flourishing on his social media platform X, visited Israel, where he toured a kibbutz attacked by Hamas militants and held talks with top leaders.

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The billionaire met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who scolded him over content on the platform previously known as Twitter, and joined Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a tour of the Kfar Azza kibbutz, a rural village that Hamas militants stormed on Oct. 7 in a deadly assault that launched the war.

Wearing a protective vest and escorted by a phalanx of security personnel as rain fell, Musk used his phone to take photos or videos of the devastation, according to video released by Netanyahu's office. Musk's visit came as Israel and Hamas reached a deal to extend a cease-fire for two more days.

The Tesla CEO and prime minister visited the damaged homes of victims, including the family of Abigail Edan, a 4-year-old girl with dual Israeli-U.S. citizenship who was held hostage by Hamas after her parents were killed. She was released Sunday in the latest round of exchanges during a cease-fire in Gaza set to expire after Monday.

"It was jarring to see the scene of the massacre," Musk said in a conversation with Netanyahu streamed on X. He said he was troubled by video and photos that the prime minister showed him of the killings of civilians, including children.

They spoke broadly about the conflict, the protests it has generated, the Middle East and more but did not touch on antisemitism online. Netanyahu, who urged a rollback of such hatred in a September meeting with Musk, said he hoped the billionaire would be involved in building a better future. Musk replied, "I'd love to help."

Herzog did confront Musk, saying that "the platforms you lead, unfortunately, have a huge reservoir of hatred, hatred of Jews and antisemitism."

The Israeli president was joined in the meeting by some of the families of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, according to a statement from Herzog's office.

"Hatred of the Jews affects the behavior of people in many places around the world, and you have a huge role to play in this," Herzog told Musk.

The X owner responded that it had been a "difficult day emotionally" following the tour and that "we have to do whatever is necessary to stop the hate," according to Herzog's office.

Referring to Hamas militants, Musk said, "It's amazing what humans can do if they're fed lies since they were children. They will think that murdering innocents is a good thing, which shows how much propaganda can affect people's minds."

Musk has faced accusations from the Anti-Defamation League, a prominent Jewish civil rights organization, and others of tolerating antisemitic messages on the platform since purchasing it last year. The content on X has gained increased scrutiny since the war between Israel and Hamas began in October.

A slew of big brands, including Disney and IBM, decided this month to stop advertising on the platform after a report by liberal advocacy group Media Matters said ads were appearing alongside pro-Nazi content and white nationalist posts.

The same week, Musk responded on X to a user who accused Jews of hating white people and professing indifference to antisemitism by posting, "You have said the actual truth." He has faced outcry, including from the White House.

The billionaire, who has described himself as a free-speech absolutist, tweeted during his Israel visit that "actions speak louder than words."

X has since sued Media Matters, saying the Washington-based nonprofit manufactured the report to "drive advertisers from the platform and destroy X Corp."

Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy declined to say whether Musk was invited to the country or came on his own. X, formerly known as Twitter, did not respond to a request for comment.

Israel also settled a spat with Musk over his Starlink satellite internet company, with Starlink agreeing to operate in Gaza only with government approval.

"As a result of this significant agreement, Starlink satellite units can only be operated in Israel with the approval of the Israeli Ministry of Communications, including the Gaza Strip," Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi tweeted.

The two had tangled online previously after Musk promised that Starlink would support connectivity to

internationally recognized aid groups in Gaza, drawing a rebuke from Karhi, who said Israeli would fight it because Hamas would use the service for militant activities.

## Tensions simmer as newcomers and immigrants with deeper US roots strive for work permits

By GISELA SALOMON and SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. (AP) — In New York, migrants at a city-run shelter grumble that relatives who settled before them refuse to offer a bed. In Chicago, a provider of mental health services to people in the country illegally pivoted to new arrivals sleeping at a police station across the street. In South Florida, some immigrants complain that people who came later get work permits that are out of reach for them.

Across the country, mayors, governors and others have been forceful advocates for newly arrived migrants seeking shelter and work permits. Their efforts and existing laws have exposed tensions among immigrants who have been in the country for years, even decades, and don't have the same benefits, notably work permits. And some new arrivals feel established immigrants have given them cold shoulders.

Thousands of immigrants marched this month in Washington to ask that President Joe Biden extend work authorization to longtime residents as well. Signs read, "Work permits for all!" and "I have been waiting 34 years for a permit."

Despite a brief lull when new asylum restrictions took effect in May, arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico topped 2 million for the second year in a row in the government's budget year ending Sept. 30. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of migrants have been legally admitted to the country over the last year under new policies aimed at discouraging illegal crossings.

"The growing wave of arrivals make our immigration advocacy more challenging. Their arrival has created some tensions, some questioning," said U.S. Rep. Jesús "Chuy" García, a Chicago Democrat whose largely Latino district includes a large immigrant population. People have been "waiting for decades for an opportunity to get a green card to legalize and have a pathway to citizenship."

Asylum-seekers must wait six months for work authorization. Processing takes no more than 1.5 months for 80% of applicants, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Those who cross the border on the Biden administration's new legal pathways have no required waiting period at all. Under temporary legal status known as parole, 270,000 people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela arrived through October by applying online with a financial sponsor. Another 324,000 got appointments to enter at a land crossing with Mexico by using a mobile app called CBP One.

The administration said in September that it would work to reduce wait times for work permits to 30 days for those using the new pathways. By late September, it had blasted 1.4 million emails and texts reminding who was eligible to work.

José Guerrero, who worked in construction after arriving 27 years ago from Mexico, acknowledged many new arrivals felt compelled to flee their countries. He says he wants the same treatment.

"All these immigrants come and they give them everything so easily, and nothing to us that have been working for years and paying taxes," Guerrero, now a landscaper in Homestead, Florida, about 39 miles (63 kilometers) south of Miami. "They give these people everything in their hands."

The White House is asking Congress for \$1.4 billion for food, shelter and other services for new arrivals. The mayors of New York, Denver, Chicago, Los Angeles and Houston wrote to Biden last month to seek \$5 billion, noting the influx has drained budgets and cut essential services.

The mayors also support temporary status — and work permits — for people who have been in the U.S. longer but have focused on new arrivals.

"All of the newcomers arriving in our cities are looking for the chance to work, and every day we get calls from business leaders who have unfilled jobs and want to hire these newcomers," the mayors wrote. "We can successfully welcome and integrate these newcomers and help them pursue the American Dream if they have a chance to work."

Many new arrivals are indisputably in dire circumstances, including some who hoped to join relatives and

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friends but find their calls blocked and messages unreturned.

Angel Hernandez, a Venezuelan who walked through Panama's notorious Darién Gap rainforest, where he witnessed corpses, was sorely disappointed when he reached New York. The construction worker said he and his aunt, uncle and their two children left Colombia after more than three years because work dried up.

Hernandez, 20, planned to settle with his uncle's brother, who settled in the United States about a year earlier and lives in a house with a steady job. His job search has been fruitless.

"Everyone is out for themselves," he said outside the Roosevelt Hotel, a Midtown Manhattan property that was closed until the city opened it for migrants in May.

The influx has put many immigrant services groups in a financial bind.

For decades, the Latino Treatment Center has provided help with drug abuse to many immigrants living in Chicago without legal status. It started helping new arrivals sleeping at the police station across the street, fixing a shower in the office for migrants to use a few days a week and offering counseling.

"It is such a unique situation that we weren't set up for," said Adriana Trino, the group's executive director. "This has been a whole different wheelhouse, the needs are so different."

Many organizations deny friction and say they have been able to make ends meet.

"We're trying to keep a balance of doing both — people who have been here for years and people who are arriving, and so far we have been able to serve everybody," said Diego Torres of the Latin American Coalition, which assists immigrants in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In Atlanta, the Latin American Association says it has spent \$50,000 this year on temporary housing and other aid for new arrivals. Santiago Marquez, the organization's chief executive, hasn't sensed resentment.

"Our core clients — most of them are immigrants — they understand the plight," he said. "They've gone through it. They understand."

Still, it's easy to find immigrants with deep roots in the United States who chafe about unequal treatment.

A 45-year-old Mexican woman who came to the United States 25 years ago and has three U.S.-born children said it was unfair that new arrivals get work permits over her. She earns \$150 a week picking sweet potatoes in Homestead.

"For a humanitarian reason, they are giving opportunities to those who are arriving, and what is the humanity with us?" said the woman, who asked that she be identified by her last name only, Hernandez, because she fears being deported.

The Washington rally reflected an effort by advocates to push for work permits for all, regardless of when they came.

"It is a system that has strained our city and, at this moment, it brings conflict between neighbors." Lawrence Benito, head of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, said at a Chicago rally last month.

## President Joe Biden plans to skip U.N. climate talks beginning this week in Dubai

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden plans to skip the annual climate talks in Dubai this week, an event that is expected to draw heads of state and diplomats from roughly 200 nations and the Vatican. He has attended twice before.

The White House said it was sending a climate team, including Special Envoy John Kerry, climate adviser Ali Zaidi and clean energy adviser John Podesta.

"Although we don't have any travel updates to share for the president at this time, the administration looks forward to a robust and productive COP28," said White House spokesman Angelo Fernández Hernández, adding that Biden's team would continue to build on the administration actions "to tackle the climate crisis."

Biden had also pledged to visit Africa before the end of the year, but that trip doesn't appear to be happening, either. The White House offered no reasons, but the president has been deeply engaged in

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both the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict, as well as domestic battles with Congress over government funding.

The two-week COP28 conference begins Thursday and is convened annually by the United Nations. COP stands for "Conference of the Parties" — the nations that agreed to a climate change framework drafted by the U.N. in 1992. It's been held 28 times, so this year it's called "COP28."

Countries that signed the agreement promise to work to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions and prevent "dangerous" human interference with the climate system. Their goal is to move the globe off fossil fuels that are pushing up Earth's temperatures.

This year the United Arab Emirates, the world's fifth-largest oil producer, is hosting the climate talks. The conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East could make cooperation between the nations even more difficult.

And Sultan al-Jaber was appointed as the president-designate, a decision roundly criticized by climate activists because he serves as the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Co., which is seeking to boost its production of carbon-emitting crude oil and natural gas.

Biden has called climate change the "ultimate threat to humanity."

Earlier this month, he released an assessment on the state of climate change in America and said the issue was impacting all regions in the U.S. "Not just some, all," he said. "Anyone who willfully denies the impact of climate change is condemning the American people to a very dangerous future," he said.

Under his tenure, the U.S. passed the Inflation Reduction Act, America's most significant response to climate change, and pushed toward more clean energy manufacturing. The act aims to spur clean energy on a scale that will bend the arc of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

## Today in History: November 28 Boston's Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire kills 492

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Nov. 28, the 332nd day of 2023. There are 33 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 28, 1942, fire engulfed the Cocoanut Grove nightclub in Boston, killing 492 people in the deadliest nightclub blaze ever. (The cause of the rapidly spreading fire, which began in the basement, is in dispute; one theory is that a busboy accidentally ignited an artificial palm tree while using a lighted match to fix a light bulb.)

On this date:

In 1520, Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan reached the Pacific Ocean after passing through the South American strait that now bears his name.

In 1919, American-born Lady Astor was elected the first female member of the British Parliament.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin began conferring in Tehran during World War II.

In 1961, Ernie Davis of Syracuse University became the first Black college football player to be named winner of the Heisman Trophy.

In 1964, the United States launched the space probe Mariner 4 on a course toward Mars, which it flew past in July 1965, sending back pictures of the red planet.

In 1979, an Air New Zealand DC-10 bound for the South Pole crashed into a mountain in Antarctica, killing all 257 people aboard.

In 1990, Margaret Thatcher resigned as British prime minister during an audience with Queen Elizabeth II, who then conferred the premiership on John Major.

In 1994, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer was killed in a Wisconsin prison by a fellow inmate.

In 2001, Enron Corp., once the world's largest energy trader, collapsed after would-be rescuer Dynegy Inc. backed out of an \$8.4 billion takeover deal. (Enron filed for bankruptcy protection four days later.)

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In 2016, the first commercial flight from the United States to Havana in more than 50 years arrived in Cuba as the island began week-long memorial services for Fidel Castro.

In 2018, Democrats overwhelmingly nominated Nancy Pelosi to become House speaker.

In 2020, Pennsylvania's highest court threw out a lower court's order preventing the state from certifying dozens of contests on its Nov. 3 election ballot; it was the latest lawsuit filed by Republicans attempting to undo President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the battleground state.

In 2021, Lee Elder, who broke down racial barriers as the first Black golfer to play in the Masters, died in Escondido, California at age 87.

In 2022, Payton Gendron, a white gunman who massacred 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket, pleaded guilty to murder and hate-motivated terrorism charges in an agreement that gave him life in prison without parole.

Today's Birthdays: Recording executive Berry Gordy Jr. is 94. Former Democratic Sen. Gary Hart of Colorado is 87. Former U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross is 86. Singer-songwriter Bruce Channel is 83. Singer Randy Newman is 80. CBS News correspondent Susan Spencer is 77. Movie director Joe Dante is 76. Former "Late Show" orchestra leader Paul Shaffer is 74. Actor Ed Harris is 73. Former NASA astronaut Barbara Morgan is 72. Actor S. Epatha (eh-PAY'-thah) Merkerson is 71. Former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff is 70. Country singer Kristine Arnold (Sweethearts of the Rodeo) is 67. Actor Judd Nelson is 64. Movie director Alfonso Cuaron (kwahr-OHN') is 62. Rock musician Matt Cameron is 61. Actor Jane Sibbett is 61. Comedian and talk show host Jon Stewart is 61. Actor Garcelle Beauvais (gar-SEHL' boh-VAY') is 57. Actor/comedian Stephnie Weir is 56. R&B singer Dawn Robinson is 55. Actor Gina Tognoni is 50. Hip-hop musician apl.de.ap (Black Eyed Peas) is 49. Actor Malcolm Goodwin is 48. Actor Ryan Kwanten is 47. Actor Aimee Garcia is 45. Rapper Chamillionaire is 44. Actor Daniel Henney is 44. Rock musician Rostam Batmanglij (baht-man-GLEESH') is 40. Rock singer-keyboardist Tyler Glenn (Neon Trees) is 40. Actor Mary Elizabeth Winstead is 39. R&B singer Trey Songz is 39. NHL goalie Marc-Andre Fleury (marhk-ahn-dray FLOOR'-ee) is 39. Actor Scarlett Pomers is 35. Actor-rapper Bryshere Gray is 30.