

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Dec. 7

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, oriental blend vegetables, baked apples, whole wheat bread.

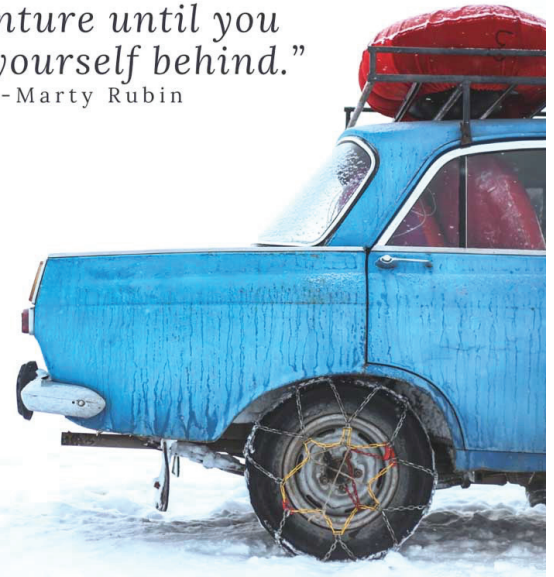
School Breakfast: breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Chicken strips, baked beans.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Middle School/High School Christmas program, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

*"Travel doesn't become
adventure until you
leave yourself behind."
-Marty Rubin*



Friday, Dec. 8

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, broccoli Normandy blend, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Lasagna hot dish, peas.

Basketball Double Header with Hamlin in Groton: (Gym: Boys C, 4 p.m., Girls C, 5 p.m.) Arena: Girls JV, 4 p.m., Boys JV, 5 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow

Junior High Wrestling at Sisseton, 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 9

Santa Claus Day, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Professional Management Services

Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Movie event at Wage Memorial Library, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Elda Stange's 100th Birthday party, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., St. John's Lutheran Church

ACT Testing, 8 a.m. to noon, Groton Area School.

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

CLOSED: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Beijing, warning Xi Jinping about suspected Western moles in senior Chinese ranks, including former foreign minister Qin Gang, Politico reported.

Ukraine Defector Dead: Former Ukrainian lawmaker Illia Kyva, considered to be a traitor for defecting to Russia before the start of its invasion, has been found shot dead, reportedly at the hands of Kyiv's intelligence services.

Crypto Freeze: Issuers of the cryptocurrency Tether have frozen \$225 million worth of alleged fraud proceeds from hundreds of victims, the biggest ever seizure of the suspected profits of online scams, U.S. officials and experts told Newsweek.

War in Ukraine: Russia has reportedly revived the Stalin-era practice of throwing convicted murderers onto the battlefield to support its war in Ukraine, including at least two cannibals.

Gaza Deal: The Palestinian Authority is prepared to take back full control of the Gaza Strip and hold the region's first elections since 2006 as part of a long-term peace deal once the Israel-Hamas war concludes, a senior Palestinian official told Newsweek.

Nikki Haley: Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley maintained the positive momentum she has built up in her presidential campaign during Wednesday night's GOP debate. Read about the winners and losers.

Russia Warning: Putin sent a top Russian diplomat to

The Life of Jerald "Jim" Ackman



Memorial services for Jerald "Jim" Ackman, 86, of Groton will be 2:00 p.m., Saturday, December 9th at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton. Pastor Kari Foss will officiate, assisted by Lori Westby. Inurnment will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Jerald James passed away December 5, 2023 at home surrounded by his wife and three daughters.

Jim, the son of Kenneth and Wilhelmina (Alberts) Ackman was born on March 15, 1937. He grew up in Hazel and Dempster, SD surrounded by four brothers and four sisters.

Needless to say, it was a home filled with fun, commotion and pranks.

He so wanted to serve his country so he signed up with the Navy. Unfortunately because of his hearing loss, he was turned away, which was a very big disappointment for him.

Many years were spent working on road construction. Lake Area Vocational School opened in 1965 and Jim was in the first class, studying electronics. At the completion, he and his family moved to Groton and he worked as a TV repairman. Later, he began working at 3M and worked there until his retirement.

Family and friends were very important to Jim, as well as, his many other interests. Namely, golf, reading, crossword puzzles, history, and sport competitions. Groton Tigers were first and foremost to him.

Jim is survived by his wife, June, daughters, April (Jerry) Madden of Herreid, SD, September (Tim) Kruse of Lakeville, MN, Cassie (Clay) Kuentler of Groton, SD, four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, 3 sisters and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents, grandparents, 4 brothers, one sister, a sister-in-law and his nephew.

Honorary Urn Bearers will be Jim's grandchildren.

Memorials may be directed to the Faith Forever Fund at Emmanuel Lutheran Church or the Groton Transit.

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Columbia Hometown Holiday Party
Saturday, Dec. 9
5-7 p.m. at the Columbia Legion
All ages are welcome!
Christmas Music ~ Hayrides
Crafts and Games
Santa Claus
Free will offering supper will be served
Festive or ugly, wear your favorite Christmas attire!
Home decorating winners will be announced!
Come see the beautifully decorated
Columbia City Park!

**'TIS THE
SEASON TO
SHOP LOCAL**

GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce



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Angel Tree Cards Still Left

There are still a few cards left at the Angel Tree at Dollar General.

GDILIVE.COM

GT
Groton Area
Tigers

Any interest in any of
these basketball games on
GDILIVE.COM?
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

Elda Stange celebrates 100 years



According to Psalm 90:10, "Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty if our strength endures." However, some individuals surpass even that 80 year mark since Elda Stange, Groton, will be celebrating her 100th birthday on December 14, 2023.

"I am the youngest in my family," Elda explained. "There were five girls and one boy who lived to adulthood. One boy and two girls died in infancy."

"My parents, John and Emilie Stange, raised us on a farm five miles west of Groton," she said. "After they passed away, I first lived with my sister Leona and her husband Ed Siek. When Ed passed away in 1960, Leona and I moved into the house where I live today."

"Life was very different and very hard when I was a child," Elda admitted. "On the farm in 1930, there was no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing in our homes."

"Our farm house was heated by a centrally located wood burning heater," she explained. "We loved those warm mornings around the stove!"

"We planted a large garden and raised most of our own food. The only thing we bought from the store was sugar and flour," she listed. "We even churned our own butter and drank the delicious buttermilk that was a by-product of the churning process."

"We milked cows by hand and fed the cattle, pigs, and chickens," Elda said. "We traveled by horse and surrey but also walked a lot."

"The school I attended was one-room with a wood-burning heater in the corner," she explained. "I always thought it was very cold in school! During recess we played kitten ball and tag since there were no swings available."

"Everyone worked hard on the farm, but the hardest part for me was picking the corn off the ground after harvest," Elda reminisced. "It was cold, sometimes snow had fallen, and the work was slow. We also had to stomp down the grain inside the bins. I disliked that job a lot!"

"Of course, we also raised chickens and ducks, for eggs and for roasting for special occasions," she smiled. "Life was harder then, but as I remember it today, it didn't seem so bad at the time. Comparing it to life today makes it seem worse than I remember it being!"

"When I moved into Groton, I found life to be easier but not necessarily without some hard work. I cleaned house for others as well as fixing hair for several ladies," Elda stated. "Now I have help come here to do my vacuuming and mopping of the kitchen floor!"

"I cook my own meals and make desserts and other treats for the Ladies' Aid meetings at St. John's Lutheran Church," she listed. "Since I no longer drive, I receive lots of help with grocery shopping, getting to Aberdeen for doctor's appointments, and to attend church."

"I used to embroider dishtowels and do other kinds of handiwork such as crocheting and knitting," Elda said,, "but I had to quit doing that because my hands have some arthritis now!"

"I still keep busy sewing squares of material together to be made into a quilt top," Elda explained. "When I have a quilt top completed, I take it to church where we quilters add a layer of fill and a piece of material for the back to donate quilts to the Orphan Grain Train."

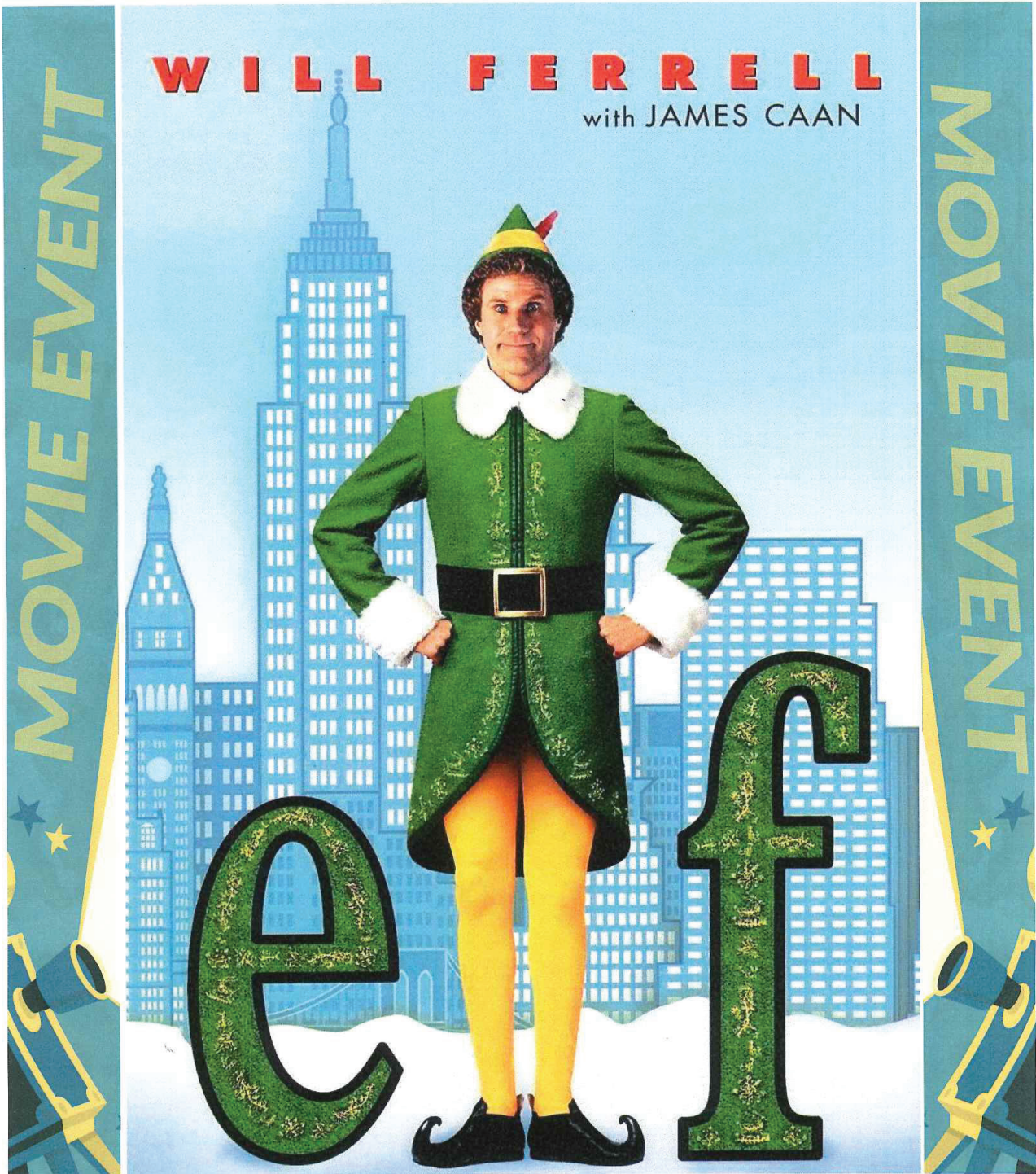
"I am currently a member of the Groton Garden Club, Groton Senior Citizens, and the Lutheran Women's Missionary League," she listed.

"Groton is the perfect size small town to live in," Elda smiled. "I have lots of people who volunteer to help me. Neighbors keep my lawn mowed and my sidewalks clear of ice and snow."

"I have been able to travel to many parts of the country, thanks to Jim and Connie Rose, my nephew and his wife," she added. "I've had a good life and am very content," Elda admitted. "I'm in good health, considering my age, and continue to simply trust in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

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Wage Memorial Library
120 N Main St - Groton SD
MUST Preregister by calling the Library!
(605) 397-8422

Saturday, December 9th
11am-1pm
FREE Admission
Jungle Pizza will be served!

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We're back in Washington for our last weeks of session before Christmas break. We have a busy month ahead as we look to address the National Defense Authorization Act and the National Security supplemental funding request for aid to Israel and Ukraine, as well as policy changes at our southern border. As we work on both of those bills, we continue to

meet with South Dakotans, introduce additional legislation, attend hearings and host artificial intelligence (AI) forums. We have a lot of work to get done before the New Year, but we're ready to bring 2023 to a close before we hit the ground running in January. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I visited with: Matt Schull, CEO of Missouri River Energy Services and Bill Gassen, CEO of Sanford Health.

Meetings this past week: Dan Reed, Chair of the National Science Board; Harry Coker, Nominee to be National Cyber Director; Andrew Shearer, Australia's Director-General of National Intelligence; Philip Jefferson, Vice Chair of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors; Meredith Attwell Baker, CEO of CTIA; Professor Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum; and Amandeep Singh Gill, the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Technology.

This past week, we had another AI insight forum. The topic this week was transparency & explainability and intellectual property & copyright. This past week, we heard from leaders at companies such as Sony, the Motion Picture Association, Spotify and more. As always, we appreciate everyone who takes the time to visit with lawmakers as we look at the future of AI regulation.

Over the weekend, I attended the 2023 Reagan National Defense Forum at the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. I spoke on a panel titled "Supremacy or Parity? Aligning the National Defense Strategy for Techno-Competition with the People's Republic of China" about AI and cybersecurity as it relates to national security. The Reagan National Defense Forum is always a great opportunity to gather with my colleagues in the Senate and House, military leaders and policy experts to discuss national security and defense policies.

We also had our Senate Bible Study (1 Peter 2:13-14 was our verse this past week) and our Senate Prayer Breakfast (Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania was our speaker). I also had the opportunity to attend the Capitol Ministries International Conference which was taking place in Washington this past week. I spoke to over 100 members from all over the world who run Bible studies similar to ours in the legislative bodies in their respective countries.

Votes taken: 12 – all of these were on nominations to positions within the judicial branch, with one in the Department of Labor.

Hearings: I attended one hearing in the Banking committee. We heard from Rohit Chopra, the Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and I asked him questions about overdraft protections for consumers. You can watch a clip of that here.

Legislation introduced: This past week, I introduced the Farmers Freedom Act of 2023, legislation that would address federal overreach by protecting the definition of prior converted cropland in the Biden administration's most recent Water of the United States (WOTUS) rule. This legislation seeks to restore this definition of PCC and prevent further overreach on South Dakota farmers and ranchers, who know their land better than any D.C. bureaucrats.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Beresford, Dell Rapids, Elk Point, Forestburg, Howard, Huron, Jefferson, Madison, Pierre, Sturgis, Watertown and Woonsocket.

Steps taken this past week: 59,922 steps or 29.64 miles.

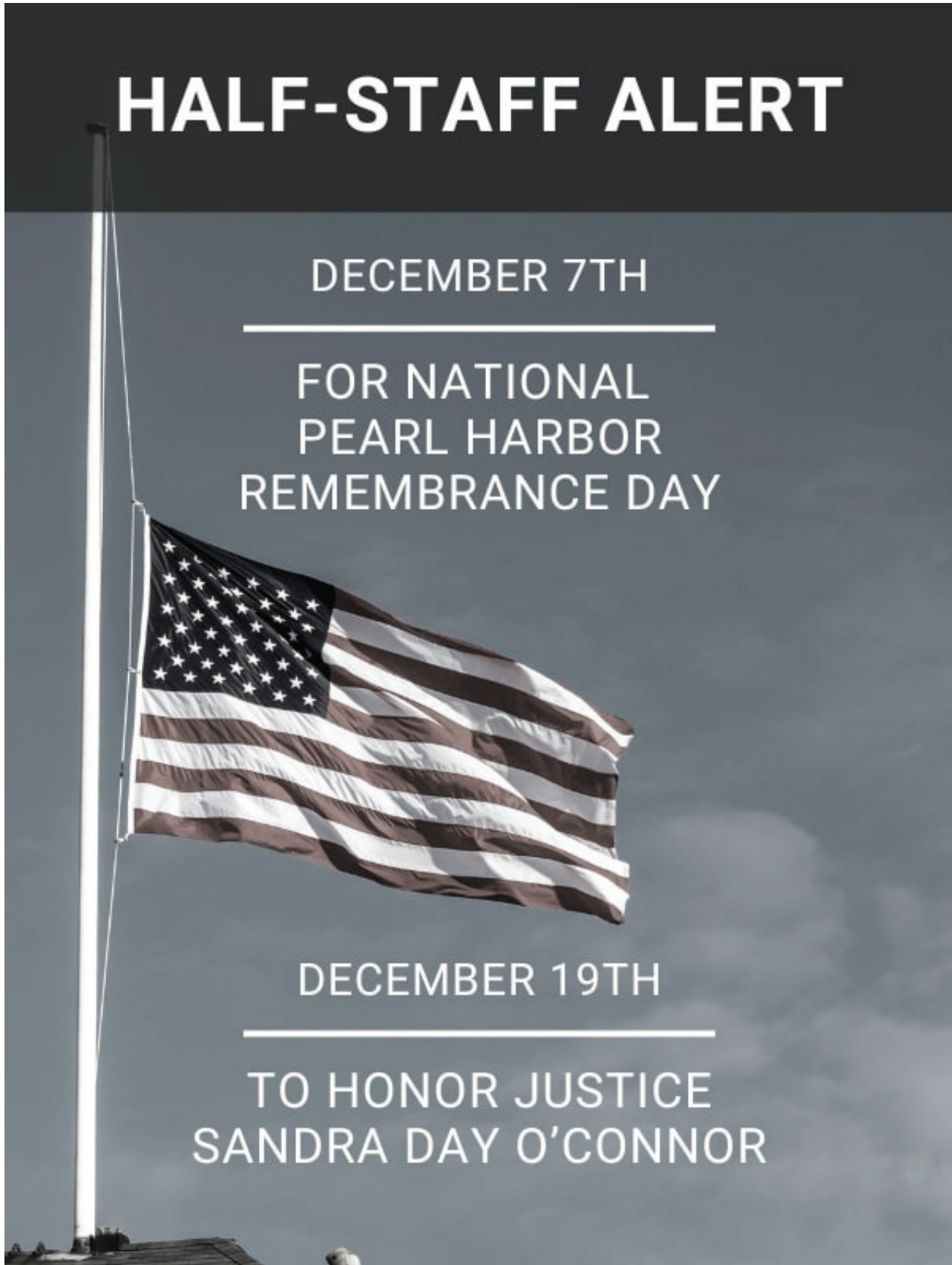
HALF-STAFF ALERT

DECEMBER 7TH

FOR NATIONAL
PEARL HARBOR
REMEMBRANCE DAY

DECEMBER 19TH

TO HONOR JUSTICE
SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR



Davison County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: 397th Ave and Interstate 90, 2 miles south of Mt. Vernon, SD
When: 10:53 a.m., Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Driver 1: Male, 63, No injuries
Vehicle 1: 2014 Caterpillar Highway Maintainer

Driver 2: Male, 24, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 2: 2011 Chrysler 200

Davison County, S.D.- One person died Wednesday morning in a two vehicle crash in Davison County.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2014 Caterpillar highway maintainer was driving northbound on 397th Avenue. A 2011 Chrysler 200 was traveling southbound on 397th Ave at the I-90 overpass.

The driver of the Caterpillar was drifting into the ditch but overcorrected crossing the center line into the path of Chrysler 200. The vehicles collided in the southbound lane of the roadway. The driver of the Chrysler has pronounced deceased at the scene. He was not wearing a seat belt. The driver of the Caterpillar was not injured.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Name Released in Hutchinson County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: 273rd Street at US 81, 5 miles north of Freeman, SD
When: 2:41 p.m., Saturday, December 2, 2023

Driver 1: Megan Ann Rollag, 17, Freeman, SD, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2006 Pontiac G6 GT

Hutchinson County, S.D.- A 17-year-old Freeman, SD female died Saturday afternoon in a single vehicle crash in Hutchinson County.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2006 Pontiac G6 GT driven by Megan Ann Rollag was traveling westbound on 273rd Street near US 81, which transitions from pavement to gravel, when the driver lost control of the vehicle and rolled, coming to rest on the north side of the roadway. The driver was not wearing a seatbelt and was pronounced deceased at the scene.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Abortion rights groups don't support ballot measure that aims to restore abortion access

Language and drafting process are points of contention

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 6, 2023 4:42 PM

Some South Dakota abortion rights groups do not support a potential ballot measure that aims to restore those rights.

The groups say they have concerns about the measure's language and the way it was drafted.

"We are not telling people to donate, or volunteer," said Samantha Chapman, advocacy manager for the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota. "We are staying out of it. We're not telling people to vote no or yes."

Planned Parenthood North Central States expressed a similar position in a written statement. The organization was formerly the only abortion provider in South Dakota.

"Constitutional amendments are serious and expensive undertakings that must be initiated after due diligence and input from those who would be impacted the most," wrote Tim Stanley, Planned Parenthood North Central States vice president of public affairs.

"As the sole abortion provider in South Dakota for more than 30 years," he continued, "Planned Parenthood is acutely aware of the impact policy language can have on patients' lives. We stand with our partners at ACLU of South Dakota and do not support the amendment as drafted because we don't believe it will adequately reinstate the right to abortion in South Dakota."

The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion in a June 2022 decision. When that happened, a trigger law that the South Dakota Legislature had adopted in 2005 immediately banned abortions in the state except when necessary to save the life of the mother.

A ballot-question committee called Dakotans for Health submitted the text of a proposed measure to restore South Dakota abortion rights in June 2022, after the Supreme Court's impending decision had been leaked but before the decision was officially announced. The committee is now collecting petition signatures in hopes of placing the measure on the Nov. 5, 2024, general election ballot.

Rick Weiland, chairman of Dakotans for Health, defended the measure and its drafting process.

"We're getting attacked from the left and the right," he said. "We must be doing something correct."

The ballot measure would amend the state constitution to legalize all abortions during the first trimester of a pregnancy. It would allow regulations on abortion during the second trimester, but only in "ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." In the third trimester, it would allow regulations up to a ban on abortions, with exceptions for the life or health of the pregnant woman.

Advocates critical of Dakotans for Health

Kim Floren is the co-founder and director of the South Dakota Justice Empowerment Network, which helps South Dakotans seeking abortions. She said the drafting of the measure was rushed.

"Advocates wanted to pause and do some research, complete some polling first, figure out the best language for a bill in this state," Floren said. "Dakotans for Health didn't want to wait for any of that."

Kristin Hayward formerly worked for Planned Parenthood and is an abortion rights advocate.

"There is a reason why two giant pro-choice organizations are not out there supporting this bill," Hayward said, referring to the ACLU and Planned Parenthood. If they supported the measure, Hayward added, "There would be billboards, commercials."

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Hayward blames Dakotans for Health.

"We explained how there would need to be a lot of eyes on any ballot measure proposal, and they refused," Hayward said. "We have all seen how state lawmakers mess with what the voters pass. We need to be careful."

Hayward was referring to past examples of South Dakota legislators repealing or amending ballot measures passed by voters. In this case, the constitutional amendment would expressly allow legislators to enact limitations on abortion in the second trimester, and up to a ban in the third trimester with exceptions for the life and health of the mother.

Floren said she will vote for the abortion measure if it makes the ballot, but won't campaign for it. Hayward did not answer similar questions in a follow-up message seeking clarification of her plans.

Dakotans for Health responds

Weiland, chairman of Dakotans for Health, said waiting for polling to help inform the drafting of a ballot measure was unnecessary, because South Dakota voters rejected abortion bans in 2006 and 2008.

"I will tell you, the fact that they wouldn't commit to doing anything here forced us to move ahead," Weiland said of the ACLU and Planned Parenthood. "We've got 450,000 women out here that are living under a trigger law right now, that can't wait until national organizations decide if it's worth it or not. Where does that leave women in South Dakota?"

Weiland pointed to a 2022 poll of 500 registered South Dakota voters showing 65% of them supported having a statewide referendum to determine the state's reproductive rights laws, and 76% supported allowing legal abortion in cases of rape and incest, which are exceptions not currently allowed under South Dakota's law.

Cathy Piersol, a retired Sioux Falls lawyer who's involved with Dakotans for Health, said abortion-rights advocates and abortion-rights groups were offered opportunities to get involved and provide input on the ballot measure language.

"It's simply not true that those groups did not have input," Piersol said.

She said the idea of pursuing a ballot measure with Dakotans for Health came from former South Dakota legislator Jan Nicolay, who helped lead efforts to defeat abortion bans in 2006 and 2008. The 2006 ballot measure would have banned abortions except to save the life of the mother, and the 2008 ballot measure would have banned abortions with exceptions for the life of the mother, rape and incest.

Nicolay felt compelled to take action when the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision was leaked.

"We sat around and waited for someone to surface, to take the lead and go forward," she said.

Early meetings on the ballot measure, according to Nicolay, "included everybody."

"Planned Parenthood was there, ACLU was there," she said. "And we were not there to take over. We were just trying to create some structure for leadership."

Ultimately, Nicolay said, "None of them was willing to take on the ballot measure."

"That includes the ACLU and Planned Parenthood," she said. "Rick Weiland stood up."

Weiland, a Democratic former congressional staffer and candidate, has been involved in numerous ballot question campaigns.

Piersol said "the obvious solution seemed to be to put Roe v. Wade into the state constitution," referring to the 1973 Supreme Court case that established the right to an abortion. "And the language needed to get submitted before the election of Secretary of State Monae Johnson, because we didn't know what she would try to do with it."

Johnson, a Republican, was elected in November 2022 after touting an endorsement from the anti-abortion South Dakota Right to Life organization, and after repeatedly declining to affirm the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election.

ACLU's Chapman alleges lack of consultation

Chapman, of the ACLU, said the ballot measure was initiated by "women who are not of reproductive age" and said "Dakotans for Health is ultimately run by three white men. None of these people are directly affected by this."

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Nicolay disagreed with that assessment.

"No three men led this," Nicolay said. "I'm sorry, but that's very offensive to me and misleading."

Nicolay, who is 81, also said passing the measure "has nothing to do with whether or not I can get pregnant. It's about the right to choose."

The three men Chapman referred to are Weiland, his son Adam, and attorney Jim Leach.

Chapman was formerly married to one of Weiland's other children. She said that has not influenced her views, and the ACLU had analyzed and formed its stance on the potential ballot measure before she was hired in December 2022.

"Were the pro-choice organizations with grassroots knowledge of the current landscape of this state consulted?" Chapman said. "No, they were not. The ACLU believes that in order to do this work effectively and meaningfully, the people most impacted should be directly involved in the decision-making process about the language and direction of the campaign."

Chapman said Michigan is an example of how the process should have worked. There, the ACLU of Michigan partnered with Planned Parenthood and Michigan Voices to form a coalition. That coalition, after getting feedback from relevant stakeholders, initiated a successful campaign to amend that state's constitution, protecting reproductive rights.

Ballot measure's future

Floren and Hayward said they don't believe the measure goes far enough to protect abortion rights. And they worry that if it passes, it could become the final say on the matter. They also have problems with some of the measure's language; for example, "the measure uses the terminology 'women,' which could give the Legislature the ability to exclude minors," Floren said.

Weiland said any abortion rights measure will be attacked by the Republican-dominated Legislature and anti-abortion leaders. The Republican state attorney general's official explanation of the measure already includes the statement, "judicial clarification of the amendment may be necessary."

"Anything could be litigated," Weiland said. "That's the way it works. No one can stop anybody from filing a lawsuit."

Weiland said Dakotans for Health has already reached 50,000 signatures, well ahead of the 35,017 needed from registered voters to put the measure on the ballot. The committee is seeking a cushion of even more signatures.

"We're trying to restore the rights that women have had for the last 50 years," Weiland said. "And that's why we have used the actual language of Roe v. Wade for the amendment. You know, whatever rights women had from Roe back in 1973, they will get when this thing passes and becomes part of our constitution."

Meanwhile, the group hoping to stop the measure has a unified front, according to Dale Bartscher, the executive director of South Dakota Right to Life. He said "it does not surprise us at all" that the abortion rights groups are divided.

"The pro-life coalition is solid, and totally together on this," he said, pointing to groups including Right to Life, Family Voice, South Dakota Catholic Conference, Concerned Women for America and others.

"A real unified front," he said.

Nicolay said if abortion rights advocates don't unify, "That's what's going to kill us at the ballot box. If you don't have a unified voice, you're going to fail."

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

Funding for nursing homes up 25% after state increase

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 6, 2023 4:41 PM

PIERRE — State funding for nursing homes is up an average of 25% statewide since the Legislature and Gov. Kristi Noem approved more money for them last winter.

When nursing home patients can't pay for their own care, they go on Medicaid, which is a joint federal-state health insurance program for low-income people. For the care they provide to Medicaid patients, nursing homes' costs are calculated according to a formula that include occupancy rates, patient needs, and the time patients stay in the facility.

During the last legislative session, Noem and legislators approved 100% reimbursements for those costs. The move, which went into effect in July, was a reaction to 15 nursing homes closing across the state in recent years, in part due to insufficient reimbursement rates.

The Legislature sets reimbursement rates each year. Prior to the increase, the rate stood at 74.5%.

Mark Deak, South Dakota Health Care Association executive director, is hopeful the increase in funding will help nursing homes survive. In 2022, seven nursing homes announced they were closing. In 2023, only one has announced it will close so far (although three have closed in 2023 after previously announcing their closures).

"There certainly are facilities that continue to struggle, but it was a great step in the right direction," Deak said.

Deak explained to South Dakota Searchlight earlier this year that a reimbursement rate of 100% still wouldn't fully cover the costs of providers, because service costs aren't updated frequently enough to address inflation and other factors.

"You hear the idea we're getting 100% costs now through Medicaid, and that's not technically the case. Actually it's 100% of allowable costs, it's a little over 92%," Deak said.

The higher reimbursement rate infused roughly an extra \$49 million into nursing homes in the state.

The investments made last year boosted the average daily state Medicaid patient reimbursement rate in South Dakota from \$212 to \$259, Director of the Executive Management Finance Office Steven Kohler told the legislative Joint Appropriations Committee on Tuesday morning.

That increase in funding, Kohler said, will help nursing homes make more investments into their facilities as well as better hire and retain staff. The statewide occupancy level stood at 82.17% as of the end of November, according to the Department of Human Services monthly occupancy report.

"We're always going to need nursing homes in our state," Kohler said. "... They would want to receive more people in their facilities but they don't have enough funding to hire the people to serve those individuals. There are empty beds in the facilities because there are vacant positions."

While other health care professions have recovered significantly from the pandemic's impact on staffing, such as hospital nurses, nursing homes continue to struggle.

"There are folks that need long term care services in a nursing home but the nursing home can't admit them because they don't have the staff," Deak said.

The funding increases will address that need, but there will be a delay before nursing facilities feel confident in the new funding amounts. Kohler believes it'll take between six and 12 months to see an impact on staffing.

While the state saw 25% average growth in funding, not all facilities received the same increased amounts. Most facilities, 22, received between 20% and 30% increases, though some received less than 10% increases and some saw over 60% increases.

Occupancy "dramatically drives" state funding amounts, Kohler added.

Kohler said he's confident that with the rate increase approved by the state last year that nursing facilities are in a better position to serve South Dakota residents.

Gov. Kristi Noem announced in her budget address Tuesday afternoon that she wants to increase state aid to health care providers by 4% in the 2025 fiscal year budget.

"Given the fact that we have moved to 100% allowable costs, the idea now is to keep up with nursing home inflation," Deak said. "The nursing home inflation rate tends to track higher than the general infla-

tion rate.”

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, pressed Kohler during Tuesday’s Appropriations Committee meeting to understand how nursing homes are each being funded differently, calling nursing homes “quasi-government facilities that are operating based on government assistance.” Karr noted that two nursing homes near each other had significantly different costs to house a resident.

“I think if we do use Medicaid and taxpayer dollars, then we have to have the ability to step in and say, ‘How are you using these? How are you operating?’ So it’s not our job to make sure that somebody is profitable. That’s their job,” Karr said. “They can decide whether or not to take these Medicaid patients. If we’re paying a huge difference, we need to understand exactly what’s driving their costs in the specific areas.”

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

Divided over immigration, U.S. Senate blocks advancing aid for Ukraine, Israel

Thune says measure ‘must address the national security crisis at our border’

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 6, 2023 5:56 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate failed to move forward Wednesday with a \$111 billion spending package that would have bolstered aid to Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and the Southern border amid deep disagreement about immigration policy.

The 49-51 procedural vote, which needed at least 60 senators to advance the bill toward final passage, represents a significant roadblock for providing additional military or humanitarian aid this year as wars continue in Ukraine and Gaza.

With Congress set to leave for its December break at the end of next week, there’s not much time for Democrats and Republicans to get back to the negotiating table and reach agreement.

“The question before the Senate today is simple yet momentous,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said before the vote. “Will senators agree to begin debate, just a debate, on legislation to defend America’s national security on an issue so important it goes to the actual preservation of Western and democratic values in the world?”

Schumer rebuked GOP lawmakers for linking changes to the nation’s immigration system to the spending package.

Schumer said he had offered GOP leaders a vote on an amendment of their choosing on immigration policy, though he said they had “spurned” that proposal.

“This is a golden opportunity for Republicans to present whatever border policy they want and our side will not interfere with the construction of that amendment in any way,” Schumer said.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said Republicans would block the supplemental spending package because it “fails to address America’s top national security priorities in a serious way.”

“Fixing a badly broken asylum and parole system isn’t hijacking the supplemental, it’s strengthening it,” the Kentucky Republican said. “Securing our Southern border isn’t extraneous to our national security, it’s essential.”

McConnell said he would “invite” Democrats, who control that chamber, to resume negotiations with GOP senators on changes to immigration policy to secure approval of aid to Ukraine and Israel.

“If today’s vote is what it takes for the Democratic leader to recognize that Senate Republicans mean what we say, then let’s vote, then let’s finally start meeting America’s national security priorities, including right here at home,” McConnell said.

South Dakota Republican John Thune, the minority whip and No. 2 Senate Republican behind McConnell, said on the Senate floor that the Republican position won’t change.

“The Democrat leader needs to understand that Republicans are serious,” Thune said. “We’ve said all

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along that this national security supplemental must address the national security crisis at our border. And we will continue to hold to that principle."

'We can't let Putin win'

President Joe Biden, speaking from the White House before the vote, urged Congress to approve more aid. Halting military assistance to Ukraine, Biden said, would increase the chances that Russia overtakes that country. That would bring Russia's Vladimir Putin one step closer to conflict with NATO countries, including the United States.

"Make no mistake, today's vote is going to be long remembered and history is going to judge harshly those who turn their back on freedom's cause," Biden said. "We can't let Putin win."

Biden said he was willing to overhaul policy around immigration and the border, but urged GOP lawmakers not to "kneecap Ukraine."

"I am willing to make significant compromises on the border — we need to fix the broken border system," Biden said.

Package grew to \$111 billion

The Biden administration sent Congress an emergency spending request in October that proposed more than \$105 billion in assistance for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and the U.S. border.

The package that stalled Wednesday would have provided nearly \$111 billion for those issues, but it didn't include changes to immigration policy — one of the more complicated and politically charged issues for Democrats and Republicans.

White House budget director Shalanda Young wrote to congressional leaders on Monday to warn that without a new spending bill, the United States would no longer be able to provide Ukraine with weapons.

"There is no magical pot of funding available to meet this moment," Young wrote. "We are out of money — and nearly out of time."

Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, released a two-page letter Tuesday seeking to remind the Biden administration that "Ukraine funding is dependent upon enactment of transformative change to our nation's border security laws."

He also expressed frustration the White House had not provided "answers to our repeated questions concerning: the Administration's strategy to prevail in Ukraine; clearly defined and obtainable objectives; transparency and accountability for U.S. taxpayer dollars invested there; and what specific resources are required to achieve victory and a sustainable peace."

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford, the top GOP negotiator on border policy, said Wednesday he took Biden's comments as a signal that there may be room to restart negotiations.

He said he believes there is time to find agreement before Congress begins its winter break.

"If anything moves this place more than a deadline, I don't know what it would be," Lankford said. "When deadlines come, everyone's undivided attention is there and we realize 'Okay, now it's time to actually solve this.'"

Lankford said he understood very well the signal that it would send if Congress does not approve additional aid for Ukraine and Israel.

"If we walk away at Christmas time, I think it's perceived by Israel and perceived by Ukraine and perceived by China that this is not important when it is," Lankford said. "And so we're trying to be able to resolve it."

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, the top Democrat in negotiations, said Wednesday he was unsure when or how progress would be made on immigration policy talks, but said aid for Ukraine and Israel cannot wait.

"We're handing Ukraine and Europe to Vladimir Putin if we wait until next year," Murphy said, adding he was ready to begin talks again if Republicans are "serious."

"It's terribly unclear to me as to whether they are interested in negotiating or whether they are making non-negotiable demands," he said. "It seems they have not made up their minds on what their strategy is."

Senate Democrats' bill

Senate Democrats released the 167-page emergency spending bill, totaling \$110.5 billion, on Tuesday afternoon.

The package would provide the U.S. Defense Department with \$15.1 billion for military assistance to Ukraine, \$10.6 billion for Israel and \$43.6 billion to "increase U.S. weapons and munitions production capacity, invest in the U.S. submarine industrial base, and enhance U.S. and allied stockpiles," according to a summary of the legislation.

The Defense Department's Office of the Inspector General would get \$8 million to oversee how the funding is spent.

The U.S. State Department would get \$11.8 billion for budgetary support for Ukraine and \$1.7 billion in foreign military financing for Ukraine as well as other regional allies.

The State Department would receive \$3.5 billion for military financing for Israel and \$25 million for "reconciliation programs in the region, including between Palestinians and Israelis," according to the summary.

Another \$2 billion in foreign military financing from the State Department would go toward U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific.

The State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development would receive \$10 billion for humanitarian assistance around the world, including food and shelter.

The bill would provide billions to address border security and the flow of fentanyl into the United States, including \$1.42 billion for the Justice Department to hire immigration judges, court administrators and other legal staff.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation would get \$204 million and the Drug Enforcement Administration would receive \$23.2 million. Another \$11.8 million would go to a joint task force that works to reduce trafficking of drugs and human beings in the Western Hemisphere.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection would receive \$5.3 billion while Immigration and Customs Enforcement would get \$2.4 billion. Another \$755 million would go to Citizenship and Immigration Services "to address processing and adjudication backlogs, including work authorization and asylum programs," according to the summary.

The U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development would receive \$400 million to address "irregular migration in the Western Hemisphere."

The package also includes bipartisan legislation to address fentanyl trafficking that was originally co-sponsored by South Carolina Republican Sen. Tim Scott, Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, Mississippi Republican Sen. Roger Wicker and Rhode Island Democratic Sen. Jack Reed.

That bill has amassed more than 60 additional co-sponsors since it was introduced in June.

— *The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.*

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

Biden meets with leaders of tribal nations, signs order easing access to federal funds

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - DECEMBER 6, 2023 5:06 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden signed an executive order Wednesday that would make it easier for tribal nations to access and invest federal funding on their own terms.

"It's hard work to heal the wrongs of the past and change the course and move forward," Biden said. "But the actions we are taking today are key steps into that new era of tribal sovereignty and self-determination."

Leaders from tribal nations gathered at the Interior Department for the 2023 White House Tribal Summit, where the Biden administration unveiled dozens of new actions from the federal government affecting Native Americans.

They included land stewardship partnerships, cleanup of historical sites and finalization of regulations for the return of human remains and sacred items taken without consent and kept in museums and across federal agencies.

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Biden said that “new era” will be “grounded in dignity and respect that recognizes your fundamental rights to govern and grow on your own terms.”

Pipeline for federal funds

The executive order also creates a “one-stop-shop” for federal funding to be available to tribes and Native American businesses through a database called the Tribal Access to Capital Clearinghouse, which was launched at the Tribal Summit, the White House said.

The order also directs the federal government to address any shortfalls of existing federal funding for tribes.

“As a result of this executive order, Tribes will spend less of their resources cutting through bureaucratic red-tape to apply or comply with federal administrative requirements and use federal dollars more effectively,” the White House said in a fact sheet about the executive order.

“No longer will Tribes be faced with seemingly unnecessary and arbitrary limitations when they are accessing critical funding for public safety, infrastructure, education, energy, and much more.”

Biden also said he is backing an effort by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which is made up of six Nations — the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and Tuscarora Nation — to compete under its own flag in the 2028 Olympics in lacrosse.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy invented the sport more than 2,000 years ago.

“Their ancestors invented the game,” Biden said. “Their circumstances are unique, and they should be granted an exception to field their own team at the Olympics.”

The White House also announced more than 190 new co-stewardships with tribal nations to manage federal lands, waters and resources important to those tribes.

There is a co-stewardship agreement with the Department of Commerce, more than 70 co-stewardship agreements with Interior and more than 120 co-stewardship agreements with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Biden administration announced early steps into a co-stewardship cleanup of a sacred site from nuclear waste. The tribal partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy will manage cleanup at Rattlesnake Mountain, or “Laliik,” in Washington state.

Meat processing grants

The summit also released a progress report that details various actions the Biden administration has taken to strengthen relationships with tribes and the federal government.

At the summit, USDA also announced a partnership to help restore and expand tribal bison. The agency is also announcing its first Indigenous Animals Meat Processing Grant for processing animals such as bison.

The White House also announced a final rule for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which will begin the process of returning Indigenous human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony to tribal nations and Native Hawaiian Organizations.

“The regulatory changes streamline the requirements for museums and federal agencies to inventory and identify human remains and cultural items in their collections,” the White House said in a fact sheet.

U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet secretary, a former member of Congress from New Mexico and a member of the Pueblo of Laguna, said in a statement that the final rule is important in giving Indigenous communities authority in the repatriation process.

“The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act is an essential tool for the safe return of sacred objects to the communities from which they were stolen,” she said. “Finalizing these changes is an important part of laying the groundwork for the healing of our people.”

Senate hearing on fentanyl crisis

Additionally, the U.S. Senate Indian Affairs Committee held a Wednesday hearing about the fentanyl opioid crisis in Indigenous communities, where federal officials detailed how they were working with tribes to address the crisis.

“Native people have the highest overdose death rates from synthetic opioids when you compare them to other racial and ethnic groups in Alaska alone,” the top Republican on the committee, Sen. Lisa Murkowski

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of Alaska, said.

In early November, tribal leaders from the Lummi Nation in Washington state and the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana detailed to senators on the same committee about how the fentanyl crisis was impacting Indigenous communities.

Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma said he has seen the fentanyl crisis play out in Indian Country, where he and his family live. Mullin is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation.

"It's very personal to me," he said.

Mullin, along with Montana Republican Sen. Steve Daines, also criticized the Biden administration for its policies at the Southern border, arguing that fentanyl is coming into the U.S. from Mexico.

Daines asked one of the witnesses, Adam Cohen, the deputy director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, if the Biden administration was doing enough at the Southern border.

"The fact that overdose rates are as high as they are in Indigenous communities is difficult," Cohen said. "We are seizing record amounts of narcotics as it is coming across the border."

Daines pressed him and asked if Border Patrol agents having to process claims of asylum took away from seizing illegal drugs at the border.

"I'm hesitant to conflate border security, immigration policy and narcotics trafficking," Cohen said. "The fact that we are seizing as much as we are seizing is saving American lives, and that's the metric."

Daines said he thinks that is the "wrong metric to look at," because of the high number of encounters with unauthorized people at the border.

Cohen said it was important for the Senate to pass the supplemental funding request to help tribal communities address the impacts of overdoses and the opioid epidemic. In that request, \$250 million would go toward the Indian Health Service for prevention, treatment and recovery for addiction to opioids, Cohen said.

The \$111 billion supplemental legislation, which is mainly global security for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, is currently at an impasse due to immigration changes that Republicans want.

Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada said that of the 28 tribal communities in her state, not all have law enforcement.

"There's not enough of them," she said of law enforcement on tribal lands.

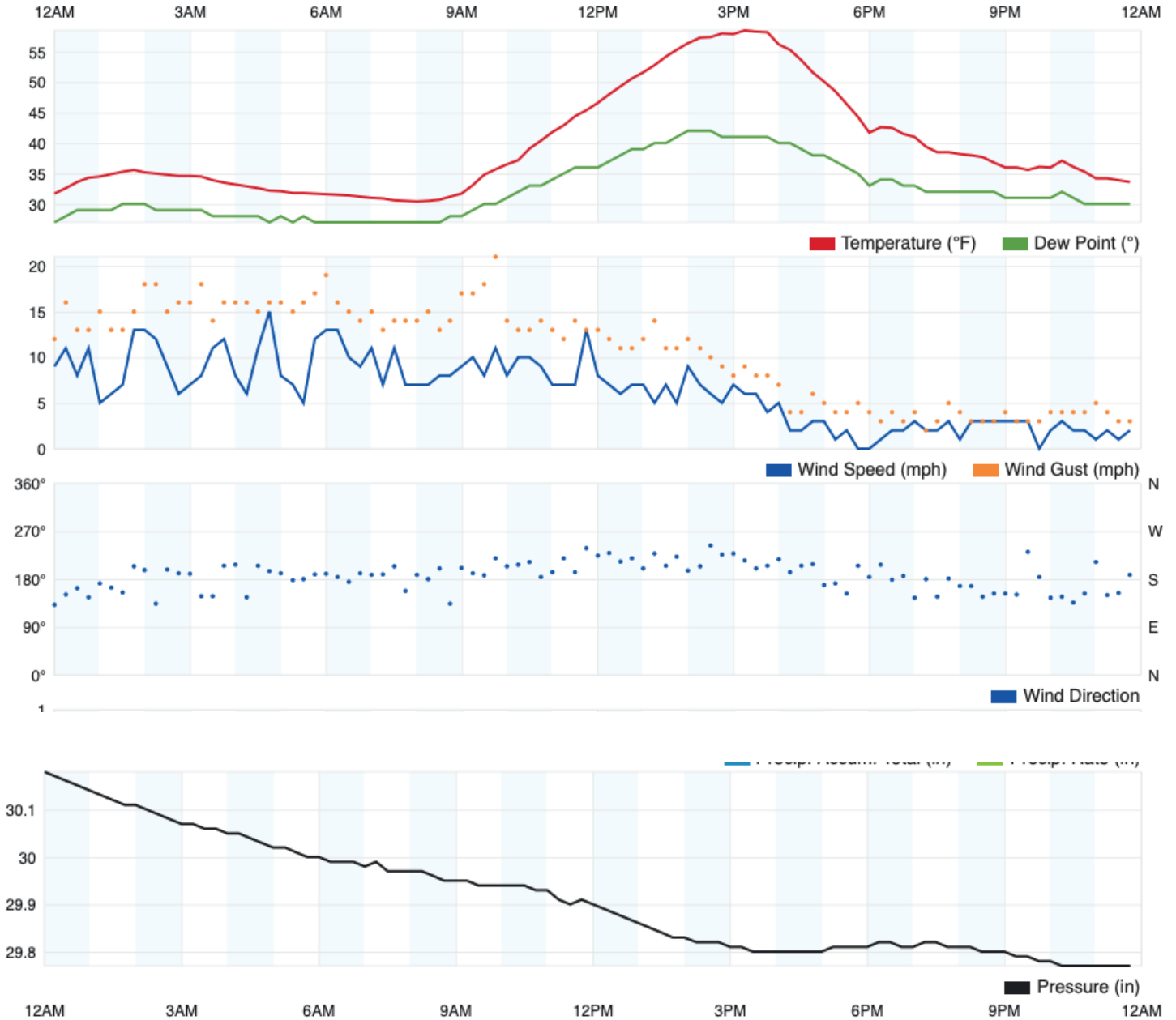
One of the witnesses, Glen Melville, the deputy director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said that the agency has had difficulty with recruiting.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thu Dec 7	Fri Dec 8	Sat Dec 9	Sun Dec 10	Mon Dec 11	Tue Dec 12	Wed Dec 13
						
55°F 38°F	45°F 26°F	32°F 17°F	31°F 19°F	37°F 17°F	32°F 19°F	40°F 26°F
SSE 14 MPH	W 21 MPH	NNW 18 MPH	W 5 MPH	S 10 MPH	WNW 9 MPH	S 18 MPH



Record or near Record Highs Today

December 7, 2023
3:38 AM

Public Information Statement

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

333 AM CST Thu Dec 7 2023 /233 AM MST Thu Dec 7 2023/

...Record or Near Record Max Temperatures Forecast for Thursday
December Seventh...

Listed below are cities with the forecast temperature, the record
temperature, and the year of the record temperature.

City.....	Forecast Temp...	Record Temp...	Year Set
Aberdeen.....	60.....	60.....	1918
Watertown.....	59.....	56.....	1918
Pierre.....	66.....	58.....	2020
Mobridge.....	61.....	62.....	1918
Sisseton.....	60.....	51.....	1990

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 59 °F at 3:36 PM

Low Temp: 30 °F at 7:54 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 9:34 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 54 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1918

Record Low: -27 in 2013

Average High: 32

Average Low: 11

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.14

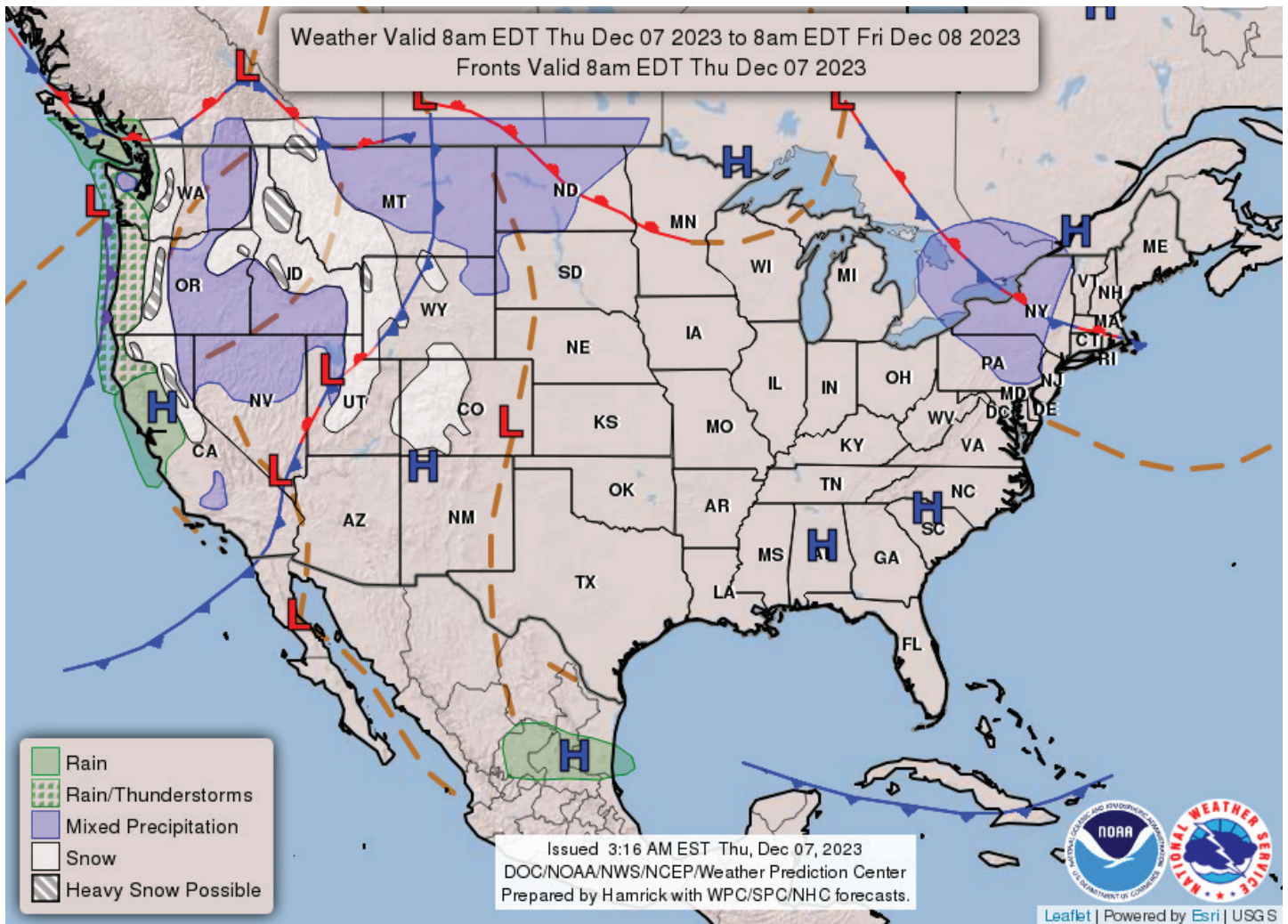
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.35

Precip Year to Date: 23.17

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:04 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57:35 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 7, 1963: Winds of 50 to 60 mph resulted in blowing snow all day on the 7th, which reduced visibilities to near zero and produced snow drifts several feet deep in many areas. Snowfall in eastern South Dakota was generally from 3 to 7 inches with 1 to 2 inches in the western part of the state. Storm total snowfall included 8 inches at Sisseton, 5 inches at Watertown and Wheaton, 4 inches at Aberdeen, and 2 inches at Mobridge.

December 7, 1971: Heavy snow of 7 to 12 inches fell in north-central South Dakota on the 7th. Timber Lake and Eagle Butte each reported 12 inches of snow. Strong winds accompanied the snow and caused extensive drifting. Drifts up to 15 feet were reported in sheltered areas near Lemmon. Seven inches fell at Mobridge, and 11 inches fell at Selby. McIntosh received 4 inches.

December 7, 1740: By all accounts, the Merrimack River in New Hampshire flooded on this day. The flood is likely the first recorded in New Hampshire. "The snow melted, and a freshet occurred in the Merrimack River, nothing like it having been experienced there for seventy years. At Haverhill, the stream rose fifteen feet, and many houses were floated off." (Perley, Sidney, 1891, *Historic storms of New England* p. 49-51).

1935 - Severe flooding hit parts of the Houston, TX, area. Eight persons were killed as one hundred city blocks were inundated. Satsuma reported 16.49 inches of rain. The Buffalo and White Oak Bayous crested on the 9th. (6th-8th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy rain fell across eastern Puerto Rico, with 19.41 inches reported at Las Piedras. Flooding caused five million dollars damage. Another in a series of storms hit the northwestern U.S., with wind gusts above 100 mph reported at Cape Blanco OR. While snow and gusty winds accompanied a cold front crossing the Rockies, strong westerly winds, gusting to 93 mph at Boulder CO, helped temperatures in western Kansas reach the 60s for the sixth day in a row. Freezing drizzle in northeastern slowed traffic to 5 mph on some roads in Morrow County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - An outbreak of cold arctic air brought up to 18 inches of snow to the Colorado Rockies, with 14 inches at Boulder CO, and seven inches at Denver. Heavy snow blanketed New Mexico the following day, with 15 inches reported near Ruidoso. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm moving out of the Central Rocky Mountain Region spread snow across Kansas and Oklahoma into Arkansas and Tennessee. Snowfall totals ranged up to 7.5 inches at Winfield KS. Freezing rain on trees and power lines cut off electricity to 24,000 homes in northeastern Arkansas, and 40,000 homes in the Nashville TN area were without electricity for several hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

December 7, 2006: A rare tornado tore through Kensal Rise in London. This T4 on the TORRO scale, equivalent to an F2 on the Fujita scale, injured six people and damaged 150 homes. According to the BBC, the last tornado which caused significant damage in London was in December 1954, in West London.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

COWS, CUDS, AND MEDITATION

Have you ever watched a cow, lying beneath a tree, quietly looking through its leaves at the puffy clouds that are passing across the soft blue sky? They seem to be concentrating on something far beyond themselves, yet important to them. Their stillness reflects a sense of peace and confidence that "all is well in my world and there's nothing for me to worry about." All the while they are chewing on "cuds" - round balls of grass that they bring up from their stomachs and chew some 30,000 times each day to get all of the nourishment out of them.

Could that not be a picture of meditation for the Christian to adopt? A time when we quietly "chew" on a piece of Scripture that God brings to our minds from His Word that we have hidden in our hearts.

Imagine how our lives would be different if we sat quietly and brought a verse of Scripture from His Word into our minds and then looked to Him to give us all the nourishment that it contains. Imagine the changes that would take place in our lives if we would invest even a small amount of time "chewing" on a verse or two from His Word each day asking Him to "nourish our lives" with its meaning. Imagine the peace and comfort that could be ours if we simply asked His Spirit to use His Word to calm our fears, lift our depression, eliminate our doubts, change our attitudes, and convict us of our sins.

If we can imagine it, we can do it! God troubles our hearts and minds to get our attention. Then we must submit to His Spirit to work in us as we meditate on Him.

Prayer: Lord, speak to our hearts and change our lives as we willingly ask Your Spirit to guide and guard us. Please do in us what we cannot do in ourselves. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: May all my thoughts be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. Psalm 104:34



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:
12.05.23

18 35 40 64 67 18

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$395,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 7
DRAW: Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.06.23

22 24 27 34 43 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,700,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 22
DRAW: Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.06.23

4 9 15 25 40 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 37 Mins 5
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.06.23

17 19 20 21 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$82,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 37
DRAW: Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.06.23

3 23 27 67 68 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 6
DRAW: Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.06.23

2 12 37 56 65 21

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$468,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 6
DRAW: Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. December 4, 2023.

Editorial: SD Daycare Grants Promote New Ideas

Many issues can impact the strength (or lack thereof) of an overall economy. This can range from broad supply-chain issues to more targeted matters which impact a local labor force.

One of the latter is the availability of daycare services for workers with children. The inability to find a daycare provider — affordable or otherwise — can have serious consequences on economic development. For instance, it can cause workers to withdraw from the labor force because either they cannot find daycare for their kids or it's simply more economical to do it themselves rather than pay a provider for the service.

In South Dakota, a childcare planning grant program announced by Gov. Kristi Noem hopes to tackle the issue by offering \$50,000 grants to communities and other entities to develop plans to address their daycare needs. These plans are submitted, and if they are chosen for the next step in the program, the applicants could be eligible for up to \$500,000 to implement their ideas.

To address the issue, many of these entities are discovering they must think outside the box to find new approaches.

Three local grant recipients were featured in Saturday's Press & Dakotan, and each is looking at different approaches to tackle the issue.

For instance, Yankton Thrive is looking for partners to create new daycare opportunities. Thrive CEO Nancy Wenande mentioned, for example, a possibility of offering daycare at The Center, a senior facility that has kitchen operations and space that could be utilized for such a venture.

Wenande said it's just one idea that could be explored.

"Through this process, it might also come together that another entity might be the best partner," she told the Press & Dakotan. "We are open minded to all possibilities. ...

"We'd like to keep our foot on the gas pedal on this one," she added. "Thrive is not intending to run a daycare, but we want to help facilitate the process."

Meanwhile, Sacred Heart Schools is looking to address daycare issues it encounters. To that end, the Yankton school is exploring the idea of establishing a daycare facility in Tabor at the former grade school, which closed last spring.

"We already have several children at our St. Ben's Daycare that are from Springfield, Tyndall and Tabor," Haberman noted. "We did the math. Within a 30-mile radius of Tabor, there are 2.6 children in need of daycare for every one spot available. ... We have a school sitting empty and people trying to figure out what to do with it. It just seems like a no-brainer."

Also, the Gayville-Volin school district is using a planning grant to unite daycare providers from Gayville, Volin and Mission Hill to create broader options for families.

The plan would also offer opportunities for high school students to work with the program and earn a certified daycare assistant designation that could open doors to other positions in the daycare field, thus possibly addressing future labor needs.

"We want to give them that opportunity to get a head start if they're interested in education or daycare career opportunities, and we want to help take some stress off our local daycare providers," said community volunteer Alison Brown.

These efforts are all engaged in broadening horizons in what has been a stubbornly difficult issue for some families, as well as businesses and communities trying to deal with daycare shortages.

"We're all trying to be collaborative and creative with our community partnerships," Wenande said. "Maybe someone will have a better idea than we do. That's what collaboration is all about. In the end, we're all trying to take care of the citizens within our own communities."

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And that makes this program a potentially valuable investment for all involved.
END

Kent State defeats South Dakota State 82-73

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Giovanni Santiago scored 19 points as Kent State beat South Dakota State 82-73 on Tuesday.

Santiago had six rebounds for the Golden Flashes (6-3). Jalen Sullinger was 7-of-13 shooting (3 for 6 from 3-point range) to add 17 points. Chris Payton had 14 points and shot 3 for 10 (1 for 3 from 3-point range) and 7 of 8 from the free-throw line.

Charlie Easley led the way for the Jackrabbits (4-5) with 17 points, six rebounds, five assists and four steals. South Dakota State also got 16 points from William Kyle III. In addition, Zeke Mayo had 12 points and two steals.

Putin moves a step closer to a fifth term as president after Russia sets 2024 election date

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Russian lawmakers on Thursday set the date of the country's 2024 presidential election for March 17, moving Vladimir Putin a step closer to a fifth term in office.

Members of the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, voted unanimously to approve a decree setting the date.

"In essence, this decision marks the start of the election campaign," said Valentina Matviyenko, speaker of the Federation Council. Russia's central election commission is to hold a meeting on the presidential campaign on Friday.

Putin, 71, hasn't yet announced his intention to run again, but is widely expected to do so in the coming days now that the date has been set.

Under constitutional reforms he orchestrated, he is eligible to seek two more six-year terms after his current one expires next year, potentially allowing him to remain in power until 2036.

Having established tight control over Russia's political system, Putin's victory in the March election is all but assured. Prominent critics who could challenge him on the ballot are either in jail or living abroad, and most independent media have been banned.

Neither the costly, drawn-out war in Ukraine, nor a failed rebellion last summer by mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin appear to have affected his high approval ratings reported by independent pollsters.

Who will challenge him on the ballot remains unclear. Imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny in an online statement Thursday urged his supporters to vote for anyone but Putin.

"Putin views this election as a referendum on approval of his actions. A referendum on approval of the war. Let's disrupt his plans and make it happen so that no one on March 17 is interested in the rigged result, but that all of Russia saw and understood: the will of the majority is that Putin must leave," the statement said.

Two people have announced plans to run: former lawmaker Boris Nadezhdin, who holds a seat on a municipal council in the Moscow region, and Yekaterina Duntsova, a journalist and lawyer from the Tver region north of Moscow, who once was a member of a local legislature.

Allies of Igor Strelkov, a jailed hard-line nationalist who accused Putin of weakness and indecision in Ukraine, have cited his ambitions to run as well, but extremism charges levied against him by the Russian authorities render his candidacy unlikely.

Strelkov, a retired security officer who led Moscow-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and was convicted of murder in the Netherlands for his role in the downing of a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet that year, has criticized Putin as a "nonentity" and a "cowardly mediocrity." He was arrested in July and

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has remained behind bars ever since. He is facing five years in prison if convicted.

For Nadezhdin and Duntsova, getting on the ballot could be an uphill battle. Unless one of five political parties that have seats in the State Duma, Russia's lower house, nominates them as their candidate, they would have to gather tens of thousands of signatures across multiple regions.

According to Russian election laws, candidates put forward by a party that is not represented in the State Duma or in at least a third of regional legislatures have to submit at least 100,000 signatures from 40 or more regions. Those running independently of any party would need a minimum of 300,000 signatures from 40 regions or more.

Those requirements apply to Putin as well, who has used different tactics over the years. He ran as an independent in 2018 and his campaign gathered signatures. In 2012, he ran as a nominee of the Kremlin's United Russia party, so there was no need to gather signatures.

At least one party — A Just Russia, which has 27 seats in the 450-seat State Duma — is willing to nominate Putin as its candidate this year. Its leader, Sergei Mironov, a veteran lawmaker and a staunch supporter of Putin, was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying Thursday that the party made the decision months ago and will nominate Putin at its party congress on Dec. 23, even if Putin decides to run as an independent.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the Kremlin agreed to those plans. The party's press service told The Associated Press it was the party's initiative, and the Kremlin did not immediately comment.

Running as an independent is more likely for Putin, said independent political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin. "It will be too much honor for a party, he values himself highly. Therefore, I think he will run as an independent candidate, and will probably collect signatures. This will be a good pretext to promote the campaign in the regions."

Oreshkin, a professor at the Free University in Riga, Latvia, expects that Putin and several other significantly less popular candidates will be on the ballot, for example, longtime Communist Party leader Genady Zyuganov or Nadezhdin.

The central election commission plans online voting in addition to traditional paper ballots in about 30 Russian regions and is considering stretching the voting across three days — a practice that was adopted during the pandemic and widely criticized by independent election monitors.

Those measures on top of restrictions on monitoring adopted in recent years will severely limit the possibility of independent observers, according to Stanislav Adnreychuk, co-chair of Golos, a prominent independent election monitoring group.

Andreychuk told The Associated Press that only registered candidates or state-backed advisory bodies, the Civic Chambers, can assign observers to polling stations, decreasing the likelihood of truly independent watchdogs. There is very little transparency with online voting, and if the balloting lasts for three days, it will be incredibly hard to cover nearly 100,000 polling stations in the country — not to mention ensuring that ballots aren't tampered with at night, he said.

"Regular monitoring (at the polls) poses the biggest problem at this point," Andreychuk said.

"But we will be working in any case" he said of Golos' plans, adding that they will conduct monitoring throughout the campaign and support activists who get to polling stations on election day.

Analyst Oreshkin said the vote will be more of a "ritual" than a competitive electoral process.

"This electoral ritual, electoral rite has a big significance for Putin and his team. It is important because it measures the loyalty of regional elites and (indicates) that the system works," he said.

Strikes on Gaza's southern edge sow fear in one of the last areas to which people can flee

By NAJIB JOBAIN and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces struck the southern Gaza town of Rafah twice overnight, residents said Thursday, sowing fear in one of the last places where civilians could seek refuge after Israel widened its offensive against Hamas to areas already packed with displaced people.

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United Nations officials say there are no safe places in Gaza. Heavy fighting in and around the southern city of Khan Younis has displaced tens of thousands of people in a territory where over 80% of the population has already fled their homes, and cut most of Gaza off from deliveries of food, water and other vital aid.

Two months into the war, the grinding offensive has set off renewed alarms internationally, with U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres using a rarely exercised power to warn the Security Council of an impending "humanitarian catastrophe" and urging members to demand a cease-fire.

The United States has called on Israel to limit civilian deaths and displacement, saying too many Palestinians were killed when it obliterated much of Gaza City and the north. But it has also pledged unwavering support for Israel and appears likely to block any such U.N. effort to halt the fighting.

Israel says it must crush Hamas' military capabilities and remove it from power following the Oct. 7 attack that ignited the war. Troops have pushed into Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city, which Israeli officials have portrayed as Hamas' center of gravity — something they previously said was in Gaza City and its Shifa Hospital.

Israel has ordered the evacuation of some two dozen southern neighborhoods, rather than the entire region as it did in the north, which the military says shows increased concern for civilians.

But the areas where Palestinians can seek safety are rapidly receding. With northern and central Gaza largely isolated and cut off from aid, Palestinians are heading south to Rafah and other areas along the border with Egypt, where family homes are packed tight and makeshift shelters are overflowing.

Even there, safety has proven elusive, as Israel continues to strike what it says are Hamas targets across the coastal enclave.

A strike late Wednesday leveled a home in Rafah, sending a wave of wounded streaming into a nearby hospital. Eyad al-Hobi, who witnessed the attack, said around 20 people were killed, including women and children. Another house was hit early Thursday, residents said.

"We live in fear every moment, for our children, ourselves, our families," said Dalia Abu Samhadaneh, now living in Rafah with her family after fleeing Khan Younis. "We live with the anxiety of expulsion."

The military meanwhile accused militants of firing rockets from open areas near Rafah in the humanitarian zone. It released footage of a strike Wednesday on what it said were launchers positioned outside the town and a few hundred meters (yards) from a U.N. warehouse.

BATTLES IN NORTH AND SOUTH

The U.N. says some 1.87 million people — over 80% of the population of 2.3 million — have already fled their homes, many of them displaced multiple times.

Israel's campaign has killed more than 16,200 people in Gaza — most of them women and children — and wounded more than 42,000, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which says many others are trapped under rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

Doctors Without Borders, the international aid group, said another 115 bodies arrived at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah in a 24-hour period.

"The hospital is full, the morgue is full," it said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The military said Thursday that it struck dozens of militant targets in Khan Younis, including a tunnel shaft from which fighters had launched an attack. It said two of the attackers were killed.

Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war, and took some 240 people hostage. An estimated 138 hostages remain in Gaza, mostly soldiers and civilian men, after 105 were freed during a cease-fire in late November.

A built-up refugee camp inside Khan Younis was the childhood home of Hamas' top leader in Gaza, Yehya Sinwar, and the group's military chief, Mohammed Deif, as well as other Hamas leaders — though their current whereabouts are unknown.

Heavy fighting is also still underway in the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, even after two months of heavy bombardment and encirclement by ground troops. The military said troops raided a militant compound, killing "a number" of fighters and uncovering a network of tunnels.

It was not immediately possible to confirm the latest reports from the battlefield.

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Israel blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas, accusing it of using civilians as human shields when the militants operate in residential areas. But Israel has not given detailed accounts of its individual strikes, some of which have leveled entire city blocks.

The military says 88 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza ground offensive. It also says some 5,000 militants have been killed, without saying how it arrived at its count.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WORSENS

Tens of thousands of people have fled from Khan Younis and other areas to Rafah, on Gaza's southern border with Egypt, the U.N. said. Rafah, normally home to around 280,000 people, is already hosting more than 470,000 who fled from other parts of Gaza.

On the other side of the border, Egypt has deployed thousands of troops and erected earthen barriers to prevent any mass influx of refugees. It says an influx would undermine its decades-old peace treaty with Israel, and it doubts Israel will let them back into Gaza.

For days now, aid groups have only been able to distribute supplies in and around Rafah, and mainly just flour and water, the U.N.'s humanitarian aid office said. Access farther north has been cut off by fighting and Israeli forces closing roads.

The World Food Program said a "catastrophic hunger crisis" threatens to "overwhelm the civilian population."

Gaza has been without electricity since the first week of the war, and hospitals and water treatment plants have been forced to shut down for lack of fuel to operate generators. Israel allows a trickle of aid from Egypt but has greatly restricted imports of fuel, saying Hamas diverts it for military purposes.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel would allow small deliveries of fuel into the southern Gaza Strip "from time to time" to prevent the spread of disease. The "minimal amount" of fuel will be set by the war cabinet, he said.

From SZA to the Stone of Scone, the words that help tell the story of 2023 were often mispronounced

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

Some of the words tied to this year's hottest topics were also among the most mangled when it came to saying them aloud, with stumpers ranging from the first name of "Oppenheimer" star Cillian Murphy to the singer SZA to the name of a sacred slab of sandstone used in the coronation of King Charles III.

This year's lists of the most mispronounced words in the U.S. and Britain were released Thursday by the online language learning company Babbel, which commissions The Closed Captioning Group in the U.S. and the British Institute of Verbatim Reports in the U.K. to identify the top words that news anchors, politicians and other public figures have struggled with.

Going through the lists provides a bit of a year-end review that ranges from scientific discoveries to entertainment to politics. Babbel teacher Malcolm Massey said the diversity of the words struck him, with words coming from several different language.

"I think a lot of it is due to how close our cultures have become because of how globalized things are," Massey said.

SZA, who leads in nominations for the upcoming Grammys and whose "Kill Bill" was the second most-streamed song on Spotify this year, made the U.S. list. Her name is pronounced SIZ-uh, according to the experts at Babbel, who say the first name of another entertainer on the list, the Irish actor who starred in this summer's hit as physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, is pronounced KI-lee-uhn.

Other pronunciations making the U.S. list include:

— The name of biotech entrepreneur and Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, pronounced Vih-VAKE Rah-mah-SWAH-me.

— Two volcanos — Mexico's Popocatepetl, pronounced Poh-poh-kah-TEH-peh-til, and Hawaii's Kilauea, pronounced Kee-lou-EY-uh.

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— The late Karl Lagerfeld's cat, Choupette, pronounced SHOO-pet, who garnered headlines as the Met Gala honored the late Chanel designer.

The coronation of King Charles in May helped put the Stone of Scone, pronounced Stown uhv Skoon, on Britain's list, and get an honorable mention on the U.S. list. The sacred slab on which ancient Scottish kings were crowned was beneath the seat of the Coronation Chair when the crown was placed on Charles' head.

Other pronunciations on the U.K. list include:

— The word padam, pronounced PAD-dahm, which comes from Kylie Minogue's summertime hit "Padam Padam," which refers to the sound of a heartbeat.

— Bharat, pronounced BUH-ruht, an ancient Sanskrit word that means India in Hindi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government this fall has signaled that Indians should shed the name India and instead use its other official name Bharat.

The words listed show the topics people focused on enough over the last year "to really have something to say about it," said Kristie Denlinger, a lecturer in the linguistics department at the University of Texas in Austin. She said being exposed to an unfamiliar word enough can eventually help someone master it.

"Anything that is kind of different from what a speaker is used to, they can learn how to pronounce things in different ways than what they're used to, it just takes more exposure," Denlinger said.

Massey said that as one learns a new pronunciation, it's important to "not stress perfection but progress over time, so practicing these words again and again."

In some cases, the correct pronunciation is in the eye of the beholder. Earning a place on the U.S. list was the last name of Travis Kelce, the Kansas City Chiefs' tight end whose relationship with Taylor Swift has grabbed countless headlines this fall. Whether Kelce should be pronounced with one or two syllables, Kels or KEL-See, has been a topic of discussion even in his own family.

Both the four-time All-Pro tight end and his brother, Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce, pronounce their last name as KEL-see. On an episode of their "New Heights" podcast, they discussed with their father, Ed Kelce, how that pronunciation came to be.

"I got tired of correcting people," said Ed Kelce, who said that his co-workers always called him KEL-see.

Jason Kelce then asks: "Should we go by Kels or KEL-see?" His father replies: "Do whatever you want, I did."

Divides over trade and Ukraine are in focus as EU and China's leaders meet in Beijing

BEIJING (AP) — A top European Union official told Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Thursday that China and the EU must address both the imbalances in their trading relationship and Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The two are divided on both issues. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, meeting Xi in the Chinese capital, said they need to manage their differences responsibly.

"China is the EU's most important trading partner," von der Leyen said in opening remarks posted on the commission's website. "But there are clear imbalances and differences that we must address."

Xi said that China and the EU should handle their differences through dialogue, and pushed back against what his government sees as a shift in European policy on China toward a more strident and competitive approach.

The two sides "should not regard each other as rivals because of different systems, reduce cooperation because of competition, and confront each other because of differences," he said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

The meeting comes a day after EU member Italy announced it was withdrawing from Xi's signature "Belt and Road" initiative that aims to build a global network of Chinese-financed roads, ports and power plants.

Italy became the first G7 country to sign on to the initiative in 2019, when the government at the time promoted it as a way of increasing trade with China while getting investments in major infrastructure projects.

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Neither outcome materialized. In the intervening years, Italy's trade deficit with China has ballooned from 20 billion euros to 48 billion euros (\$21.5 billion to \$51.8 billion.)

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin defended the initiative and appeared to imply that Italy had been influenced by forces hostile to China.

"China firmly opposes smearing and undermining cooperation in building the Belt and Road and opposes stoking bloc confrontation and divisions" Wang said at a daily briefing Thursday.

Von der Leyen and Charles Michel, the president of the EU Council, met Xi in the morning and were meeting with China's No. 2 leader, Premier Li Qiang, later in the day. Von der Leyen, as commission president, heads the day-to-day business of the EU, while Michel chairs the summits of EU leaders.

The European Union is calling on China to improve market access for products from its 27 member countries to address an annual trade imbalance of more than \$200 billion. China exported \$458.5 billion worth of goods to the EU in the first 11 months of this year and imported \$257.8 billion, according to Chinese customs data released Thursday.

The EU has angered China by launching an investigation into the latter's subsidies for electric vehicles to determine whether they give manufacturers in China an unfair competitive advantage in European markets.

"China has never deliberately pursued a trade surplus," spokesperson Wang said ahead of the summit. He noted recent import and supply chain expos that he said encourage foreign companies to sell to the Chinese market of 1.4 billion people.

Wang also took aim at possible EU restrictions on technology exports to China. "I'm afraid it's unreasonable if the EU imposes strict restrictions on the export of high-tech products to China while expecting a significant increase in exports to China," he said.

The EU is looking for better market access for a range of products including cosmetics, infant formula, wine and other alcoholic beverages.

China has angered the EU by taking a neutral stance in what most European countries see as a Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU is calling on China to use its influence with Russia to end the invasion, ensure that exports from or via China are not aiding Russia's war effort and support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace formula.

Von der Leyen said the EU and China have global responsibilities as major powers and a shared interest in peace and security.

"That is why it is essential to put an end to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and establish a just and lasting peace consistent with the U.N. Charter," she said.

Xi said China and the EU should promote political settlements of international hot-spot issues, according to CCTV, which did not include any specific mention of the wars in Ukraine or Gaza.

A milestone for Notre Dame: 1 year until cathedral reopens to public after devastating fire

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — When flames tore into Notre Dame in 2019, people who worked in the cathedral felt orphaned. But as the world-famous Paris landmark's reopening draws closer, they are beginning to picture their return to the place they call home and are impatient to breathe life back into its repaired stonework and vast spaces.

The restoration of Notre Dame hits a milestone Friday: one year until the cathedral reopens its huge doors to the public, on Dec. 8, 2024. French President Emmanuel Macron will don a hard hat and tour the fenced-off reconstruction site where stonemasons, carpenters and hundreds of other artisans are hammering away to meet the 12-month deadline.

When their job is done, they will hand over to Notre Dame's priests, employees, chorists and worshippers. With prayers, songs and devotion, they'll give the cathedral the kiss of life and celebration to nudge aside the pain the April 15, 2019, blaze inflicted on French hearts and Catholic faithful around the world.

Notre Dame is "not the biggest cathedral nor perhaps the most beautiful," the Rev. Olivier Ribadeau

Dumas, its rector, told The Associated Press this week, but "it is the incarnation of a nation's soul."

"The expectations, the preparations for the reopening are a magnificent sign of hope in a difficult world," he said.

Henri Chalet, the principal choir conductor, already has butterflies at the thought. On one hand, he tells himself that in the 850-plus-year history of Notre Dame, its closure is just a blip and he needs to be patient a little longer. But for a human lifetime, "five years is very long," he said, and "unfortunately, in 850 years, it fell on us."

"We are obviously impatient to be able to go back," he said. "It really is our home, in the sense that we were there every evening for services and also for concerts every week.

"Now, we really feel there is light at the end of the tunnel," he said, "with a lot of joy, enthusiasm and a little stress."

On the reconstruction side, recent progress has been remarkable. Huge oak beams, put together using carpentry techniques pioneered when Notre Dame was built in medieval times, have been hoisted skyward so the cathedral can be re-roofed. The towering spire now points once more toward the heavens, rebuilt piece by piece behind 600 tons of scaffolding.

When Macron visits, the name of the retired French general who led the big-budget restoration before his death will be carved in tribute in the wood of the spire. Jean-Louis Georgelin died in August, at 74.

And when Olympic visitors descend on Paris in their millions for the Summer Games opening July 26, the rebuilt spire and roof should be complete, giving the cathedral a finished look from outside.

Work inside will continue. Jobs in the final months will include tuning the cathedral's thunderous 8,000-pipe grand organ, France's largest musical instrument. It survived the fire but had to be dismantled, cleaned of toxic lead dust generated when the roofing burned, and reassembled. Renovations will continue after the reopening.

The cathedral's own workforce also is being scaled back up. It was cut to seven employees because of closure for repairs. Dumas, the rector, said a hiring drive next year will restore the number of full-time employees to nearly 50, to welcome back the 15 million annual visitors and worshippers the Paris diocese is bracing for.

Chorist Adrielle Domerg, who was 10 when she joined Notre Dame's choirs and is now 17, said the cathedral is "almost a person" to her.

"A multitude of people, of dreams, of prayers gave birth to it," said Domerg, who last sang there with her choir days before the blaze and aches to do so again.

"It's going to be very emotional," she said. "The cathedral, in a way, will reawaken and we will pull it out of the shadows."

A nurse's fatal last visit to patient's home renews calls for better safety measures

By DAVE COLLINS and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

WILLIMANTIC, Conn. (AP) — The killing of a Connecticut nurse making a house call in October was a nightmare come true for an industry gripped by the fear of violence.

Already stressed out by staffing shortages and mounting caseloads, health care workers are increasingly worrying about the possibility of a patient becoming violent — a scenario that is too common and on the rise nationwide.

Joyce Grayson, a 63-year-old mother of six, went into a halfway house for sex offenders in late October, to give medication to a man with a violent past. She didn't make it out alive.

Police found her body in the basement and have named her patient as the main suspect in her killing.

Grayson's death has her peers and lawmakers renewing their yearslong pleas for better protections for home health care workers, including sending them out with escorts and providing more information about their patients. The calls come during an era of increasing violence against medical professionals in general.

"I used to go into some pretty bad neighborhoods," said Tracy Wodatch, a visiting nurse and chief ex-

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ective of the Connecticut Association of Healthcare at Home. She said she used to call the police and get an officer to escort her when she felt unsafe. But, because of budget and staffing issues, this is no longer an option, she said.

Grayson, who had been a nurse for over 36 years including the last 10 as a visiting nurse, was found dead Oct. 28 in the Willimantic halfway house. She didn't return from a visit to patient Michael Reese, a convicted rapist. No charges have been filed in the killing yet.

"It's all nurses are thinking about right now, even the hospital nurses because they've had so many close calls," said Connecticut state Sen. Martha Marx, a visiting nurse and New London Democrat who is calling for changes in both state and federal laws.

Marx said she was once sent to a home and didn't find out until she talked to clients there that it was a residence for sex offenders. Often, if a nurse asks for a chaperone, the agency will simply reassign the work to another employee who won't "make waves," she said.

Grayson's death came about 11 months after another visiting nurse, Douglas Brant, was shot to death during a home visit in Spokane, Washington — a killing that also drew calls for safety reforms, including federal standards on preventing workplace violence.

While killings are rare, nursing industry groups say non-fatal violence against health care workers is not. From 2011 to 2018, the rate of non-fatal violence against health care workers increased more than 60%, according to the latest analysis by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In fact, the number of non-fatal injuries from workplace violence involving health care workers has been higher than that of other industries for years, according to the bureau.

In a survey released in late 2022 by the National Nurses United, the largest union of registered nurses in the U.S., 41% of hospital nurses reported an increase in recent workplace violence incidents, up from 30% in September 2021.

"I knew a home health aide who got punched in the stomach," said Ha Do Byon, a former visiting nurse and now a nursing professor at the University of Virginia, who has been studying violence against home health care workers. "Many more nurses got bitten, kicked, or slapped by their patients or family members in the patients' homes. Some were attacked by vicious dogs or were called names or sworn at. Notably, the majority of these workers were female."

Byon said specific statistics on visiting nurses has been lacking and he has been working on improving the data.

"There's no way home health workers should be sent into somebody's home or apartment by themselves," said U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, a Democrat who represents the congressional district where Grayson was killed. "You have to have systems and tools to reduce the risk."

Courtney has been pushing legislation since 2019 that would set up federal regulations requiring health care and social service employers to develop and implement comprehensive workplace violence prevention plans. While several states require such prevention plans, there is no federal law, industry groups say.

He says the problem highlighted by Grayson's case is not just about safety, but also about attracting and retaining health care workers, many of whom feel the job is just too dangerous.

"It's honestly a huge factor in terms of the burnout that employers are so concerned about," Courtney said.

Marx wants to see laws requiring security escorts for nurses in some cases, and for police to provide caregivers regularly updated lists of addresses where violent crime has occurred. She also said patients' charts should be flagged to alert nurses about past incidents of violence, if they're registered sex offenders and other information.

Grayson was a nurse for the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for 26 years before serving as a visiting nurse for over a decade, according to her family. She also was a beloved foster parent, taking in nearly three dozen children and being honored with the state's Foster Parent of the Year award in 2017.

What exactly Grayson knew about Reese and the halfway house in Willimantic is one of many unan-

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swered questions in the case.

Her employer, Elara Caring, said Grayson had Reese's medical file before she went there, but it declined to say what information was in the file, citing medical privacy laws.

Elara, which provides home care for more than 60,000 patients in 17 states, says it is reviewing its safety protocols and talking to employees about what more is needed. Scott Powers, chairman and chief executive, said company workers were shocked and grieving over Grayson's death.

The company said it had safeguards in place when Grayson was killed. This includes working with states to ensure patients, including ex-cons, are deemed safe by state officials to be cared for in the community and training for employees to prepare them for such clients. It declined to go into deeper details about its security protocols, citing the investigation into Grayson's death.

Police still haven't said how Grayson died, and the medical examiner's office said autopsy results remain pending. Willimantic's police chief, Paul Hussey, called the killing one of the worst cases he has seen in his 27 years in law enforcement.

Reese, who was on probation after serving more than 14 years in prison for stabbing and sexually assaulting a woman in 2006 in New Haven, was taken into police custody while leaving the halfway house on the day Grayson was killed. He was released from prison in late 2020 and was sent back to detention two times for violating probation, state records show.

Authorities said he had some of Grayson's belongings, including credit cards, and was charged with violating probation, larceny and using drug paraphernalia. He is detained on \$1 million bail. A public defender listed in court records as representing Reese did not return emails seeking comment.

Grayson's family is devastated and is seeking answers to an array of questions, including if there were failures of oversight by the state Department of Correction, state probation officials and the company that runs the halfway house. They also want to know whether Elara Caring adequately protected her, according to their lawyer, Kelly Reardon, who said a lawsuit is planned.

"They were extremely concerned that it was preventable," Reardon said. "They certainly felt from the get-go that there were failings in the system that led to this and they want that to be investigated."

Vegas shooter who killed 3 was a professor who recently applied for a job at UNLV, AP source says

By KEN RITTER and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Terrified students and professors cowered in classrooms and dorms as a gunman roamed the floors of a University of Nevada, Las Vegas building, killing three people and critically wounding a fourth before dying in a shootout with police.

The gunman in Wednesday's shooting was a professor who had unsuccessfully sought a job at the school, a law enforcement official with direct knowledge of the investigation told The Associated Press. He previously worked at East Carolina University in North Carolina, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release the information publicly.

The attack was the worst shooting in the city since October 2017, when a gunman killed 60 people and wounded more than 400 after opening fire from the window of a room at Mandalay Bay casino on the world-famous Las Vegas Strip only a couple miles from the UNLV campus.

Lessons learned from that shooting — the deadliest in modern U.S. history — helped authorities to work "seamlessly" in reacting to the UNLV attack, Sheriff Kevin McMahon said at a news conference.

At about 11:45 a.m., the gunman opened fire on the fourth floor of the building that houses UNLV's Lee Business School, then went to several other floors before he was killed in a shootout with two university police detectives outside the building, UNLV Police Chief Adam Garcia said.

Authorities gave the all-clear about 40 minutes after the first report of an active shooter.

Three people were killed and a fourth was hospitalized in critical but stable condition, police said.

It wasn't immediately clear how many of the school's 30,000 students were on campus at the time, but McMahon said students had been gathered outside the building to eat and play games. If police hadn't

killed the attacker, "it could have been countless additional lives taken," he said.

"No student should have to fear pursuing their dreams on a college campus," the sheriff said.

Police didn't immediately identify the victims, the attacker or the motive and didn't say what kind of weapon was used, although some witnesses reported hearing as many as 20 shots fired.

UNLV professor Kevaney Martin took cover under a desk in her classroom, where another faculty member and three students took shelter with her.

"It was terrifying. I can't even begin to explain," Martin said. "I was trying to hold it together for my students, and trying not to cry, but the emotions are something I never want to experience again."

Martin said she was texting friends and loved ones, hoping to receive word a suspect had been detained. When another professor came to the room and told everyone to evacuate, they joined dozens of others rushing out of the building. Martin had her students pile into her car and drove them off campus.

"Once we got away from UNLV, we parked and sat in silence," she said. "Nobody said a word. We were in utter shock."

Selena Guevara said she got a phone call from her daughter, Markie Montoya, who was in class in the building and heard "gunshots, screaming and yelling" but wasn't hurt.

"She's hysterical, telling me 'I love you' and so scared," Guevara said.

Another student, Jordan Eckermann, 25, said he was in his business law class in a second-floor classroom when he heard a loud bang and a piercing alarm went off, sending students to their feet. Some ran from the room in panic while others heeded their professor's instructions to stay calm, said Eckermann.

He walked out and locked eyes with a law enforcement officer in a bulletproof vest holding a long gun. Clothing, backpacks and water bottles lay scattered on the floor.

Eckerman said he mouthed to the officer, "Where do I go?"

The officer pointed to an exit.

Minutes later, when he was outside, Eckermann said he heard bursts of gunshots, totaling at least 20 rounds. The air smelled of gun powder. He said he kept walking away from campus, even though he didn't know where to go.

Classes were canceled through Friday at the university, and UNLV's basketball game at the University of Dayton, Ohio, was canceled Wednesday night because of the shootings.

Who are the Houthis and why hasn't the US retaliated for their attacks on ships in the Middle East?

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen launched missiles and hit three commercial ships in the southern Red Sea last weekend, it triggered an immediate question: Will the U.S. military strike back?

The Houthis have sharply escalated their attacks against ships as they sail toward the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait. And U.S. Navy ships have shot down an array of drones headed their way and believed to have been launched by the militant group from territory it controls in Yemen.

But so far, the U.S. has avoided military retaliation — a marked difference from its multiple strikes against Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria that have fired rockets, missiles and drones at bases housing American forces in both countries.

No one has been reported hurt in the Houthi incidents, although the commercial ships suffered some damage. And U.S. officials argue that the Houthis haven't technically targeted U.S. vessels or forces — a subtlety that Navy ship captains watching the incoming drones may question.

Here's a look at the Houthis and their increasing attacks, and why the U.S. believes it is more acceptable to bomb some Iranian-linked targets than others.

WHO ARE THE HOUTHIS AND WHAT'S GOING ON IN YEMEN

Houthi rebels swept down from their northern stronghold in Yemen and seized the capital, Sanaa, in

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2014, launching a grinding war. A Saudi-led coalition intervened in 2015 to try to restore Yemen's exiled, internationally recognized government to power.

Years of bloody, inconclusive fighting against the Saudi-led coalition settled into a stalemated proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, causing widespread hunger and misery in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country. The war has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more.

A cease-fire that technically ended more than a year ago is still largely being honored. Saudi Arabia and the rebels have done some prisoner swaps, and a Houthi delegation was invited to high-level peace talks in Riyadh in September as part of a wider détente the kingdom has reached with Iran. While they reported "positive results," there is still no permanent peace.

ATTACKS ON SHIPS

The Houthis have sporadically targeted ships in the region over time, but the attacks have increased since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas and spiked after an explosion Oct. 17 at a hospital in Gaza killed and injured many. Houthi leaders have insisted Israel is their target.

After the weekend attacks, Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said the group wants to "prevent Israeli ships from navigating the Red Sea (and Gulf of Aden) until the Israeli aggression against our steadfast brothers in the Gaza Strip stops."

One of the commercial ships hit on Sunday — the Unity Explorer — has a tenuous Israeli link. It is owned by a British firm that includes Dan David Ungar, who lives in Israel, as one of its officers. Israeli media identified Ungar as being the son of Israeli shipping billionaire Abraham "Rami" Ungar. But any Israel connections to other ships are unclear.

Sunday's flurry of attacks included missiles that hit the Unity Explorer, the Number 9 and the Sophie II, all bulk carriers. And throughout that day, the USS Carney, a Navy destroyer, shot down three drones that were headed toward the ship and also went to the aid of the commercial vessels. On Wednesday, the USS Mason shot down a drone heading in its direction.

In a statement, U.S. Central Command said, "We cannot assess at this time whether the Carney was a target" of the drones.

THE US CALCULUS

While the U.S. has carried out airstrikes on Iranian-back militias in Iraq and Syria that have targeted American troops in 77 different attacks since Oct. 17, the military has not yet retaliated against the Houthis.

That reluctance reflects political sensitivities and stems largely from broader Biden administration concerns about upending the shaky truce in Yemen and triggering a wider conflict in the region. The White House wants to preserve the truce and is wary of taking action that could open up another war front.

U.S. officials warn that military action is an option and they haven't taken it off the table. But both publicly and privately, officials stress that there is a difference between the Iraq and Syria bombings and the Houthi attacks.

Iran-backed militia have launched one-way attack drones, rockets or close-range ballistic missiles at bases in Iraq 37 times and in Syria 40 times. Dozens of troops have suffered minor injuries — in most cases traumatic brain injuries. In all instances so far, the personnel have returned to work.

In response, the U.S. has retaliated with airstrikes three times in Syria since Oct. 17, targeting weapons depots and other facilities linked directly to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and the militias. And it struck multiple sites in Iraq late last month after a militia group for the first time fired short-range ballistic missiles at U.S. forces at al Asad air base.

The Houthis, meanwhile, have fired missiles at vessels in the Red Sea, launched drones and missiles targeting Israel and sent drones in the direction of Navy ships. Also, last month, Houthis seized a vehicle transport ship linked to Israel in the Red Sea off Yemen, and still hold the vessel. And Houthi missiles landed near another U.S. warship after it assisted a vessel linked to Israel that had briefly been seized by gunmen.

Defending the lack of retaliation for those attacks has forced U.S. officials to dance on the head of a pin.

In one breath, the Pentagon officials say the Navy ships shot down the Houthi drones heading toward them because they were deemed "a threat." But in the next breath officials say the U.S. assesses that

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the ships were not the target. That determination often comes later after intelligence assessments review telemetry and other data.

That, however, is certainly no comfort to sailors on the ships who watch the radar track of incoming drones and must make rapid decisions about whether it represents a threat to the ship.

At the same time, the U.S. has consistently said it wants to protect free navigation of the seas. But the Houthi actions have prompted the International Maritime Security Construct to issue a warning for ships transiting the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb. It says ships should choose routes as far from Yemeni waters as possible, travel at night and not stop, because that makes them an easier target.

This week the U.S. said it was talking with allies about using a naval task force to escort commercial ships in the Red Sea. About 38 countries participate in a similar task force in the region — largely to battle piracy off the coast of Somalia. Officials have to discuss the issue with allies to see who wants to be involved in a new effort.

ESCALATION?

The Biden administration has talked persistently about the need to avoid escalating the Israel-Hamas war into a broader regional conflict. So far, strikes on the Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and Syria have not broadened the conflict, said Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary.

So it's not clear if targeted strikes against Houthi weapons depots or similar sites — which also have Iranian support — would cross a line and trigger a wider war.

"We will continue to consult with international allies and partners on an appropriate way to protect commercial shipping going through that region, and at the same time ensuring we do what we need to do to protect our forces," said Ryder.

Climate talks shift into high gear. Now words and definitions matter at COP28

By SETH BORENSTEIN, DAVID KEYTON, JOSHUA A. BICKEL and SIBI ARASU Associated Press
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The mood is about to shift, the hours grow longer and the already high sense of urgency somehow amp up even more as the United Nations climate summit heads into its final week.

Every sentence, every word — especially those about the future elimination of planet-warming fossil fuels — will matter at the U.N. conference in oil-built Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Professional negotiators who have been working on getting options into shape will turn over their work to senior national officials, many at minister levels, who will have to make the tough political choices.

"We're heading into quite a political process, less access into the negotiating rooms, negotiations will go deep into the night, a number of nights," said David Waskow, international climate initiative director for the World Resources Institute.

Even with the hard work to come, some of those who are about to do it have this sense of optimism, especially because everyone has the day off on Thursday.

"We had a pretty damn good week here in Dubai already. Now, obviously, there are some complicated issues to still resolve. We all know that. Nobody is ducking and nobody is going to pretend about that," U.S. Special Envoy John Kerry said. "The negotiators are basically trying to put together in each section a relevant a set of options. And then we ministers will have the fun and pleasure next week of kind of noodling through those options."

Multilateral negotiations — involving in this case nearly 200 parties — are much different and often more difficult than the horse-trading two countries can do in bilateral talks, said veteran diplomat Adnan Amin, the COP28 CEO.

The key document is called Global Stocktake. It's the first of its kind in U.N. climate negotiations, saying how far the world has come from the 2015 Paris agreement — where nations agreed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since preindustrial times — and what it has to do next. A

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draft came out late Monday and negotiators have been poring over it. Next, officials like Amin will get "a very clear sense by the end of the week where people stand on the text."

Amin said there's a rhythm to these climate talks.

"You start off very hopeful, euphoria," Amin said. "Things are happening. Then the negotiations get hard and people start spreading rumors and conjecture and a little bit of depression, and then things start to come up again. And the clarity of the negotiation process becomes clearer. Then you have the political engagement, and that's where the real intensity and excitement comes."

This is all going the way it should, even if it seems overwhelming, said German special climate envoy Jennifer Morgan.

"There's now a text with many, many brackets (choices), 30 different groups of options for the global stocktake that now needs to be consolidated so that ministers next week can start getting into each of those topics and finding solutions," Morgan said. "There's this moment when one thinks, oh, my gosh, so many texts, so many brackets. But I think, actually the process is going along as it should."

EU negotiators say the core document is in pretty good shape and are confident the key issues are clearly defined. Options remain open for ministers taking over the negotiations which is not often the case at this stage of these difficult multilateral talks.

They expect a new text with the latest amendments to be issued in the early hours of Friday morning, for talks to begin in earnest on Friday at a ministerial level and for a presidential-led process similar to talks Glasgow or Paris.

EU countries, along with small island countries — oft-victimized by climate change — and some progressive Latin American countries are aligned on calling for a phase-out of fossil fuels, negotiators said. While there will be strong resistance to this measure, officials are confident references to fossil fuels will appear in the final text for the first time and within a timeline compatible with U.N. science reports.

Representatives for poor nations and climate advocates are putting a lot of pressure on negotiators for the fossil fuel sections.

"The success of COP28 will not depend on speeches from big stages," said Uganda climate activist Vanessa Nakate. "It will depend on leaders calling for a just and equitable phase-out of all fossil fuels without exceptions and distractions."

Wopke Hoekstra, the European Union climate commissioner said the bloc will make a big push on the issue, "giving it our all."

A phase-out "will cost money," Avinash Persaud, climate envoy for Barbados said, asking who'll pay. "I don't understand why they are pushing for it to be global. United States and Canada are two of the richest countries and largest producers of fossil fuels. Why don't we have phase-out there? It's the cheapest place to phase-out and will have the biggest impacts."

Kerry said he gets that.

"There has to be a fairness in the air here," Kerry said. "You know, we don't want people just coming ... feeling maybe, you know, punched a little bit here."

And it's not just fossil fuel language.

"One way or another, next week is going to be really difficult," said Power Shift Africa policy adviser Amy Gillian-Thorpe. "I think we're leaving the lights on the second week. And that's really unfortunate that we haven't been able to move forward, particularly on adaptation issues."

Kerry said the sense of urgency will win out.

"I'm not telling you that everybody's going to come kumbaya on the table," Kerry said. "But I am telling you we're going to make our best effort to get the best agreement we can to move as far as we can, as fast as we can, and that's what people in the world want us to do. It's time for adults to behave like adults and get the job done."

Democratic support for Biden ticks up on handling of Israel-Hamas war, AP-NORC poll says

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic views on how President Joe Biden is handling the decades-old conflict between Israelis and Palestinians have rebounded slightly, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The shift occurred during a time in which Biden and top U.S. officials expressed increased concern about civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip, emphasized the need for a future independent Palestinian state and helped secure the release of hostages held by Hamas during a temporary truce.

Fifty-nine percent of Democrats approve of Biden's approach to the conflict, a tick up from 50% in November. His latest standing is roughly equivalent to Democrats' 57% approval rating for him on the issue in an August poll, conducted well before the latest war began on Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked Israel.

Still, the issue remains divisive among Democrats, who are less enthusiastic about Biden's handling of the war than his overall job performance. Seventy-five percent of Democrats said Biden is doing well as president, also up slightly from 69% last month. His approval rating among U.S. adults stands at 41%.

Views on the Middle East could shift again now that fighting has resumed in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas is headquartered and thousands of Palestinian civilians have been killed by Israeli strikes.

Greg Baird, 61, said Biden is "doing the best he can with a really, really bad situation."

"It's a high wire act," Baird said. The owner of a print shop in Georgia, he began voting for Democrats after President Donald Trump took office.

"Israel is an ally," Baird said. "Our strongest ally in that part of the world. We have to stand by them."

Ginger Sommers, 47, had a similar view.

"I think what he's doing right now is the best that he can do," said Sommers, a registered Democrat who owns a restaurant in Arkansas.

"If Trump was in office, lord knows what would be going on," she added. "I don't even want to think about that."

Biden has defended his approach to the war, which has included steadfast support for Israel. He's argued that his closeness with Israeli leadership has enabled more humanitarian aid to reach civilians in Gaza. He's also expressed increased reservations about the Palestinian death toll and emphasized the need for an independent Palestinian state.

"I've been very straightforward and blunt with our Israeli friends in private about what I think they have to do and the burden they have and the commitment they have from me and my administration," Biden said at a campaign fundraiser in Boston this week.

Biden has needed to balance several goals during the conflict, some of which could prove to be in contention with each other as fighting between Israel and Hamas continues.

There's wide agreement that it's important for the U.S. to recover hostages being held in Gaza by Hamas. Although some have been released, others remain in Gaza after being kidnapped in Israel. Sixty-seven percent of U.S. adults call freeing hostages an extremely or very important goal, with majorities of Democrats and Republicans in agreement.

There's less unanimity on other issues, however. Sixty-four percent of Democrats said it's at least very important for the U.S. to negotiate a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, as opposed to 35% of Republicans.

Twenty-eight percent of Republicans said it's extremely or very important for the U.S. to provide humanitarian relief to Palestinians in Gaza, versus 65% of Democrats.

Providing aid to Israel's military for fighting Hamas received relatively lower ratings. Only 28% of Democrats said it was highly important, and 49% of Republicans said the same thing.

Rocio Acosta, 35, said she's disappointed that Biden wants to rush aid to Israel.

"I believe that we should stay out of other country's business," said Acosta, a registered Democrat in Nebraska who works as a psychiatric nurse. "There's so much to do here in the United States."

Acosta didn't blame Israel for attacking Hamas, saying "any country would want to defend its people." But she still wants a ceasefire and an end to the fighting.

"I would want both sides to stop," she said.

Republicans remain sharply critical of Biden across the board, including when it comes to the war.

Michelle Harman, 48, complained that "this world is a mess right now."

A financial analyst in New Mexico, she said Biden is doing a poor job as president.

"If he's doing it, I'm not into it," she said.

Centenarian survivors of Pearl Harbor attack are returning to honor those who perished 82 years ago

By AUDREY McAVOY and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii (AP) — Ira "Ike" Schab had just showered, put on a clean sailor's uniform and closed his locker aboard the USS Dobbin when he heard a call for a fire rescue party.

He went topside to see the USS Utah capsizing and Japanese planes in the air. He scurried back below deck to grab boxes of ammunition and joined a daisy chain of sailors feeding shells to an anti-aircraft gun up above. He remembers being only 140 pounds (63.50 kilograms) as a 21-year-old, but somehow finding the strength to lift boxes weighing almost twice that.

"We were pretty startled. Startled and scared to death," Schab, now 103, said at his home in Beaverton, Oregon, where he lives with his daughter. "We didn't know what to expect and we knew that if anything happened to us, that would be it."

Eighty-two years later, Schab plans to return to Pearl Harbor Thursday on the anniversary of the attack to remember the more than 2,300 servicemen killed. He's expected to be one of just six survivors at a ceremony commemorating the assault that propelled the United States into World War II. The actual number may fluctuate depending on how many of the increasingly frail men are able to attend.

The aging pool of Pearl Harbor survivors has been rapidly shrinking. There is now just one crew member of the USS Arizona still living, 102-year-old Lou Conter of California. Two years ago, survivors who attended the 80th anniversary remembrance ceremony ranged in age from 97 to 103. They'll be even older this time.

David Kilton, the National Park Service's interpretation, education and visitor services lead for Pearl Harbor, noted that for many years survivors frequently volunteered to share their experiences with visitors to the historic site. That's not possible anymore.

"We could be the best storytellers in the world and we can't really hold a candle to those that lived it sharing their stories firsthand," Kilton said. "But now that we are losing that generation and won't have them very much longer, the opportunity shifts to reflect even more so on the sacrifices that were made, the stories that they did share."

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs doesn't keep statistics for how many Pearl Harbor survivors are still living. But department data show that of the 16 million who served in World War II, only about 120,000 were alive as of October and an estimated 131 die each day.

There were about 87,000 military personnel on Oahu at the time of the attack, according to a rough estimate compiled by military historian J. Michael Wenger.

Schab never spoke much about Pearl Harbor until about a decade ago. He's since been sharing his story with his family, student groups and history buffs. And he's returned to Pearl Harbor several times since.

The reason? "To pay honor to the guys that didn't make it," he said.

Thursday's ceremony will be held on a field across the harbor from the USS Arizona Memorial, a white structure that sits above the rusting hull of the battleship, which exploded in a fireball and sank shortly after being hit. More than 1,100 sailors and Marines from the Arizona were killed and more than 900 are entombed inside.

A moment of silence will be held at 7:55 a.m., the same time the attack began on Dec. 7, 1941.

The Dobbin lost three sailors, according to Navy records. One was killed in action and two died later of wounds suffered when fragments from a bomb struck the ship's stern. All had been manning an anti-

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aircraft gun.

That Sunday morning had started peacefully for Schab. He was expecting a visit from his brother, who was also in the Navy and was assigned to a naval radio station in Wahiawa, north of Pearl Harbor. The two never did get together that day.

Schab spent most of World War II in the Pacific with the Navy, going to the New Hebrides, now known as Vanuatu, and then the Mariana Islands and Okinawa.

He was never wounded. He told the Best Defense Foundation in an online interview three years ago that he must have had a guardian angel.

"You're scared stiff, but you stagger through the events as they happen and hope everything's going to turn out all right," he said.

After the war, he worked on the Apollo program sending astronauts to the moon as an electrical engineer at General Dynamics. In retirement he volunteered as a state park docent in Malibu, California, explaining the migration patterns of monarch butterflies.

A tuba player in the Navy, Schab stayed close with his bandmates long after the war. For decades, they organized annual reunions, said his daughter Kimberlee Heinrichs.

Schab has slowed down in recent years. But he still gets together each week for cocktails over Zoom with younger members of his fraternity, Delta Sigma Phi. He drinks cranberry-raspberry juice.

These days, he's happiest listening to big band jazz and audiobooks and going out to meet new people, Heinrichs said.

At his age, he's thankful to still be able to return to Pearl Harbor. Heinrichs is going with him, along with caregivers. The family has a GoFundMe account to help them raise money for the pilgrimage.

"Just grateful that I'm still here," Schab said. "That's really how it feels. Grateful."

US military grounds entire fleet of Osprey aircraft following a deadly crash off the coast of Japan

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The military announced late Wednesday it was grounding all of its Osprey V-22 helicopters, one week after eight Air Force Special Operations Command service members died in a crash off the coast of Japan.

The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps took the extraordinary step of grounding hundreds of aircraft after a preliminary investigation of last week's crash indicated that a materiel failure — that something went wrong with the aircraft — and not a mistake by the crew led to the deaths.

The crash raised new questions about the safety of the Osprey, which has been involved in multiple fatal accidents over its relatively short time in service. Japan grounded its fleet of 14 Ospreys after the crash.

Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, head of Air Force Special Operations Command, directed the standdown "to mitigate risk while the investigation continues," the command said in a statement. "Preliminary investigation information indicates a potential materiel failure caused the mishap, but the underlying cause of the failure is unknown at this time."

In a separate notice, Naval Air Systems Command said it was grounding all Ospreys. The command is responsible for the Marine Corps and Navy variants of the aircraft.

The Air Force said it was unknown how long the aircraft would be grounded. It said the standdown was expected to remain in place until the investigation determined the cause of the Japan crash and made recommendations to allow the fleet to return to operations.

In Japan, where U.S. military Ospreys had a non-fatal crash once and a number of incidents, the latest accident has rekindled safety concerns just as the Japanese government builds a new base for its fleet of Ospreys.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters in Tokyo the government has already formally requested that the U.S. military ensure the safety of Ospreys before their flights, but that Tokyo will seek further information from the U.S. side because it also affects the safety of Japan's own Osprey fleet.

"Needless to say, ensuring flight safety is the top priority of aircraft operation," Matsuno said. "Japanese Self-Defense Force also operate Ospreys, and in order to ensure their flight safety, we will continue to ask the U.S. side to share information with us."

The U.S.-made Osprey is a hybrid aircraft that takes off and lands like a helicopter but can rotate its propellers forward and cruise much faster, like an airplane, during flight.

Its unique design has been a factor in multiple incidents. While the investigation into last week's crash has only just begun, it renewed attention on the aircraft's safety record, particularly on a mechanical problem with the clutch that has troubled the program for more than a decade. There also have been questions as to whether all parts of the Osprey have been manufactured according to safety specifications.

In August, the Marines found that a fatal 2022 Osprey crash was caused by a clutch failure, but the root cause was still unknown. In its report on the crash, the Marines forewarned that future incidents "are impossible to prevent" without improvements to flight control system software, drivetrain component material strength, and robust inspection requirements."

Air Force Special Operations Command has 51 Ospreys, the U.S. Marine Corps flies as many as 400 and U.S. Navy operates 27.

The Osprey is still a relatively young aircraft in the military's fleet — the first Ospreys only became operational in 2007 after decades of testing. But more than 50 troops have died either flight testing the Osprey or conducting training flights in the aircraft, including 20 deaths in four crashes over the past 20 months.

An Osprey accident in August in Australia killed three Marines. That accident also is still under investigation.

UN: Russia intensifies attacks on Ukraine's energy facilities, worsening humanitarian conditions

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Intensifying Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy facilities are worsening humanitarian conditions across the war-torn country, where heavy snow and freezing temperatures have already arrived, U.N. officials said Wednesday.

Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenca told the U.N. Security Council that Russia's continuing daily attacks on Ukraine's critical civilian infrastructure have resulted in civilian casualties, and Moscow recently escalated its barrages in populated areas including the capital, Kyiv.

"All attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure must stop immediately," he said. "They are prohibited under international humanitarian law and are simply unacceptable."

Jenca also raised the risks to all four of Ukraine's nuclear power plants.

The Zaporizhzhia plant, which is Europe's largest, suffered its eighth complete off-site power outage since the invasion on Saturday, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Jenca said. And IAEA staff at the Khmelnytsky plant in western Ukraine reported hearing several explosions close by on Nov. 29.

Ramesh Rajasingham, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator, told the council "the deaths, injuries and level of destruction of vital civilian infrastructure is staggering."

"Many people have been left without access to heat, electricity and water, particularly in the east and south," he said. "Amid freezing temperatures, this damage is particularly threatening the survival of the most vulnerable — among them the elderly and those with disabilities."

After more than 21 months of fighting since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Rajasingham said, "millions of children, women and men are now faced with the prospect of yet another winter of severe hardship amid the impact of increased attacks on hospitals, electricity transmission systems, and gas and water supplies."

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood reminded the council that last winter "Russia sought to destroy Ukraine's energy infrastructure and deprive people of heat and electricity at the coldest time of the year."

The United States expects Russia to try again this winter, he said, noting that it has already carried out air strikes "that appear to target defensive systems put in place to protect energy infrastructure."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky accused Western nations of calling the council meet-

ing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine without anything extraordinary happening in order "to spew anti-Russian invective."

The GOP debate field was asked about Trump. But most of the stage's attacks focused on Nikki Haley

By BILL BARROW and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (AP) — Four Republican presidential candidates were given several opportunities Wednesday to criticize former President Donald Trump, who was absent from the debate again. But they mostly targeted each other, with former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley taking the brunt of the attacks as she gets more interest from donors and voters.

With just over a month before the 2024 primary calendar begins, the debate demonstrated how firm Trump's grip remains on the party.

But the focus on Haley reflected how other candidates perceive her as a threat to their chances of taking on Trump directly. Aside from former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, most the candidates have spent more time in debates going after each other than taking aim at Trump, reflecting the former president's popularity among Republicans and what many see as diminishing returns in attacking him.

The last scheduled debate before Iowa's GOP caucuses on Jan. 15 may have limited impact on the race, airing on a lesser-known television network, NewsNation, from a state Republican presidential candidates have carried since 1980.

Trump remains dominant in national and early-state polls. And after holding counterprogramming rallies during the first three debates, he didn't bother this time and instead went to a closed-door fundraiser. His campaign posted an ad during the debate focusing on President Joe Biden as both parties head toward a potential rematch of the 2020 election Trump lost.

Christie repeatedly tore into Trump on Wednesday and challenged Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to answer directly if he believed Trump was fit or unfit to be president again. The crowd at the University of Alabama booed him at one point as he attacked Trump.

"His conduct is unacceptable. He's unfit. And be careful of what you're going to get," warned Christie, who has been alone among leading Republicans in his focus on the race's clear front-runner.

"There is no bigger issue in this race than Donald Trump," he said earlier.

DeSantis suggested Trump, who is 77, is too old for the job.

"Over a four-year period, it is not a job for someone that's pushing 80," DeSantis said. "We need someone who's younger."

Biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy again raised his hand as a candidate who would support Trump even if he were convicted in any of the four felony indictments he faces. Ramaswamy accused his other opponents of bowing to Trump for years to secure political posts or financial gain, but the closest the 38-year-old ever came to criticizing Trump was to call for a new generation of leadership.

Haley stood silently during the extended discussion, and neither the moderators nor her rivals asked for her opinion.

The debate's brief focus on Trump was a reprieve for Haley, who spent most of the debate on the defensive.

DeSantis accused Haley of backing down from media criticism and Ramaswamy suggested she was too close to corporate interests as she gets new attention from donors. He touted his own willingness to pick high-profile fights with his critics and went after Haley just moments into the debate, reflecting the rivalry between the two candidates reflected in dueling early-state television ads.

They also tussled over China, long an animating issue for conservatives worried about Beijing's influence. Later in the debate, Haley credited Trump for taking a hard line with Beijing on trade but said he was too passive on other fronts, including allowing China to capture American technology for its own military use and purchase American farmland.

Interrupting Haley, DeSantis accused her of allowing Chinese investment in South Carolina when she

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was governor and suggested her corporate donors would never allow her to be tough on Beijing.

"First of all, he's mad because those Wall Street donors used to support him and now they support me," Haley retorted before accusing DeSantis of being soft on Chinese investment in Florida.

Ramaswamy, always the most eager to deliver personal barbs on the debate stage, turned a foreign policy discussion into another attack on Haley, seemingly trolling her to name provinces in Ukraine and suggesting she does not understand the country. As he kept piling on, Christie stepped in to declare Haley "a smart, accomplished woman" and dismiss Ramaswamy as "the most obnoxious blowhard in America."

With Trump absent, the atmosphere around the debate lacked some of the buzz sometimes associated with such affairs, especially in ostensibly open primaries. Less than two hours to go before the opening salvo, the media room, which is normally the practice hall for the University of Alabama's Million Dollar Band, was barely half full. The television and radio platforms around the periphery -- the spin room, in debate parlance -- were noticeably quiet, lacking the high-profile surrogates or campaign staffers who might normally be appearing live on cable news or talk radio to pitch on their candidates' behalf.

Outside Moody Music Hall on campus, more buzz came from state high school football championship games being played in Bryant-Denny Stadium.

The debate may have been hard to find for many prospective viewers. It aired on NewsNation, a cable network still trying to build its audience after taking over WGN America three years ago. NewsNation's Elizabeth Vargas moderated alongside Megyn Kelly, a former Fox News anchor who now hosts a popular podcast, and Eliana Johnson of the conservative news site Washington Free Beacon.

The field of invited candidates has shrunk in half since eight were on the stage at the first debate in Milwaukee in August, as the Republican National Committee tightened the criteria to reach the stage each time. For Tuesday, candidates had to get at least 6% in multiple polls and amass 80,000 unique donors.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum have all dropped out of the race after participating in at least one debate. Former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson is continuing his campaign but failed to qualify.

The debate setting in Alabama was another reminder of Trump's strong position — and how he outpaced an even larger Republican field when he first ran and won in 2016. Trump swept Southern primaries from Virginia to Arkansas and Louisiana in his first campaign.

He further demonstrated his hold this week with an endorsement from Alabama Sen. Katie Britt, who ascended in Republican politics from the party's establishment wing but chose the debate in her home state as the right time to align herself with the former president.

Las Vegas shooting suspect was a professor who recently applied for a job at UNLV, AP source says

By KEN RITTER and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The man suspected of fatally shooting three people and wounding another at a Las Vegas university Wednesday was a professor who unsuccessfully sought a job at the school, a law enforcement official with direct knowledge of the investigation told The Associated Press.

The gunman was killed in a shootout with law enforcement, police said. The attack at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas sent shock waves through a city still scarred by the deaths of 60 people in a 2017 mass shooting.

The suspect previously worked at East Carolina University in North Carolina, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release the information publicly.

Police didn't immediately identify the gunman, the victims or a possible motive.

Reports of shots fired at about 11:45 a.m. sent police swarming onto the campus while students and professors barricaded themselves inside classrooms and dorm rooms.

Police said the shooting started on the fourth floor of the building that houses UNLV's Lee Business School. The gunman went to several floors before he was killed in a shootout with two university detec-

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tives outside the building, said UNLV Police Chief Adam Garcia.

Authorities gave the all-clear about 40 minutes after the first report of an active shooter.

Professor Kevaney Martin took cover under a desk in her classroom, where another faculty member and three students took shelter with her.

"It was terrifying. I can't even begin to explain," Martin said. "I was trying to hold it together for my students, and trying not to cry, but the emotions are something I never want to experience again."

Martin said she was texting friends and loved ones, hoping to receive word a suspect had been detained. When another professor came to the room and told everyone to evacuate, they joined dozens of others rushing out of the building. Martin had her students pile into her car and drove them off campus.

"Once we got away from UNLV, we parked and sat in silence," she said. "Nobody said a word. We were in utter shock."

Students and the community were alerted to the emergency by a university post on X that warned: "This is not a test. RUN-HIDE-FIGHT."

Matthew Felsenfeld said he and about 12 classmates barricaded their door in a building near the student union.

"It's the moment you call your parents and tell them you love them," said Felsenfeld, a 21-year-old journalism student.

Another student, Jordan Eckermann, 25, said he was in his business law class in a second-floor classroom when he heard a loud bang that he thought came from a neighboring music class.

But then a piercing alarm went off, sending students to their feet. Some ran from the room in panic while others heeded their professor's instructions to stay calm, said Eckermann.

He walked out and locked eyes with a law enforcement officer in a bulletproof vest holding a long gun. Clothing, backpacks and water bottles lay scattered on the floor.

Eckerman said he mouthed to the officer, "Where do I go?"

The officer pointed to an exit.

Minutes later, when he was outside, Eckermann said he heard bursts of gunshots, totaling at least 20 rounds. The air smelled of gun powder. He said he kept walking away from campus, even though he didn't know where to go.

UNLV's 332-acre (135-hectare) campus is less than 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) east of the Las Vegas Strip.

It wasn't immediately clear how many of the 30,000 students were on campus at the time, but Sheriff Kevin McMahill said students had been gathered outside the building to eat and play games. If police hadn't killed the attacker, "it could have been countless additional lives taken," he said.

"No student should have to fear pursuing their dreams on a college campus," the sheriff said.

The shooting occurred just miles from the location of the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history. In the Oct. 1, 2017, massacre, a gunman opened fire from a high-rise suite at the Mandalay Bay, killing 60 people attending a music festival below and wounding hundreds more.

In response to the campus shootings, the Federal Aviation Administration issued a ground stop of all flights coming into Harry Reid International Airport. The university is roughly 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) north of the airport.

Classes were canceled through Friday at the university, and UNLV's basketball game at the University of Dayton, Ohio, was canceled Wednesday night because of the shootings.

GOP presidential hopefuls target Nikki Haley more than Trump, and other moments from the debate

By STEVE PEOPLES and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

With the Iowa caucuses rapidly approaching, a shrinking field of Republican White House hopefuls gathered Wednesday in Alabama for the fourth presidential debate.

As usual, former President Donald Trump, who is dominating the GOP primary, didn't appear. Instead, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, businessman Vivek Ramaswamy and

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former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie continued their effort to gain a sliver of the spotlight in the race. Here are some takeaways from the final primary debate of 2023.

Fighting Trump for once

The front-runner in the Republican primary has no end of vulnerabilities. He faces 91 criminal charges and just the night before repeatedly refused to rule out abusing power if he returns to office.

But, as has been the pattern, Trump was ignored during much of the debate. There was one great exception in the second hour, when the moderators asked Christie about Trump. The onetime New Jersey governor complained that his three primary rivals have been silent about the threats Trump presents to democracy.

"You want to know why these poll numbers are where they are?" Christie asked. "Because folks like these three people on this stage want to make it seem like his conduct is acceptable."

Christie then began jousting with DeSantis, who confined his criticism of Trump to the former president's age and failure to achieve all of his agenda in his first term. "Is he fit to be president or isn't he?" Christie asked. "Is he fit? Ron, Ron? He's afraid to answer."

Ramaswamy accused his rivals of all "licking Donald Trump's boots," but then proceeded to argue the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol was an "inside job" — hardly distancing himself from the former president and his penchant for lies and misinformation.

Ramaswamy has been particularly adept at pulling fire away from Trump. The 38-year-old political novice and pharmaceutical entrepreneur has specialized in grating, personal attacks that his rivals just can't bring themselves to ignore.

On Wednesday, he challenged Haley to name three Ukrainian provinces that he claimed his 3-year-old could identify, and Christie, who had tried to launch an attack on Trump to open the debate, exploded.

"All he knows how to do is insult good people who have committed their lives to public service," Christie said.

Minutes later, Haley took an unusual swing at Trump for failing to go further than simple trade actions against China. But DeSantis jumped in, attacking Haley for her relationship with China. The two Republicans began snapping at each other, leaving Trump unmentioned.

By the end, the moderators asked the candidates which previous president inspired them. No one named Trump.

Haley under attack

Haley was under attack from the opening seconds of the debate. And it didn't let up for almost 20 minutes, a clear reminder that the former United Nations ambassador's opponents see her as a growing threat in the race.

DeSantis amped up the pressure as he answered the debate's opening question, which was about his struggling campaign.

"You have other candidates up here, like Nikki Haley, she caves every time the left comes after her," DeSantis said, casting himself as a fighter.

The Florida governor then seized on Haley's recent support from Wall Street and at least one major Democratic donor. Ramaswamy soon joined in, highlighting the personal wealth Haley accumulated since leaving the public office.

"That math doesn't add up," Ramaswamy charged. "It adds up to the fact you're corrupt." Minutes later, Ramaswamy called Haley a fascist.

Haley defended herself aggressively. But as the political adage goes, if you're explaining, you're probably losing.

"I love all the attention, fellas, thank you," she said.

And she drew some applause from the crowd when she pushed back against the criticism of her political donations.

"In terms of these donors that are supporting me, they're just jealous. They wish they were supporting them," she said.

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Christie has faced questions about why he's not dropping his struggling campaign and backing Haley, who shares many of his more moderate views. While he's not showing any sign of leaving soon, he took the opportunity to defend Haley, particularly from Ramaswamy's heated critiques.

"This is a smart, accomplished woman," Christie told Ramaswamy during an animated exchange. "You should stop insulting her."

Capitalist contradiction

One candidate was attacked for sitting on a corporate board and being too close to big business. Others fretted about a plot by giant firms to re-engineer the country's politics — and then one said he wants to gut government regulations to free up business.

This wasn't a Democratic debate, dominated by that party's skepticism of corporate titans. The Republican party in the era of Trump is a lot more conflicted about business and industry than in its prior, free-market form.

That was obvious from the first set of questions aimed at Haley, who was asked whether her roles on corporate boards and donations from major companies would sit well with the party's "working-class voters."

DeSantis and Ramaswamy continued to hit Haley over that dynamic, even as Haley quipped they were just "jealous" of her donor support. DeSantis also claimed Haley wanted to let in as many immigrants as "the corporations" desired and boasted about how he withdrew \$2 billion of Florida public pension money from a hedge fund over its use of environmental, social and corporate governance.

"They want to use economic power to impose a left-wing agenda in this country," DeSantis said of some corporations' embrace of ESG, an effort to use progressive principles in investing.

But then Ramaswamy bemoaned the way the government doesn't fully recognize cryptocurrencies as a real financial instrument, and segued into promising to eliminate three-quarters of the government bureaucrats to cut regulations. That is a routine promise of Ramaswamy's, and comes as the U.S. Supreme Court is poised to consider a case that could sharply limit how the federal government can regulate industries, a longtime goal of conservative activists who helped assemble a six-judge majority on the high court.

Later, Ramaswamy took yet another turn, arguing there should be strict bans on the back-and-forth between staffers in business and government. "I don't think that we should want capitalism and democracy to share the same bed anymore," he said. "It's time for a clean divorce."

The GOP's contradictions over corporations weren't an explicit subject of the debate, but they were an undercurrent that won't be resolved for a while.

Split over rights for transgender people

On immigration, on the economy and on China, the candidates on stage largely agreed. One policy area where there were real differences? Transgender rights.

The issue was barely on the national radar in the last presidential election. But in 2024, it is a centerpiece of the GOP's increasing focus on cultural issues.

Haley defended her decision, back when she was governor, to decline to support a law that would have limited bathroom use to a person's gender assigned on their birth certificate.

DeSantis pounced. As Florida governor, he insisted he did more to crack down on transgender rights than anyone on stage.

"I stood up for little girls, you didn't," he chided Haley.

DeSantis also offered a fiery argument for laws that block parents from allowing their children to receive transgender-related medical treatment.

Christie pushed back. He also reminded his rivals that conservatives used to believe in less government, not more.

"These jokers in Congress, it takes them three weeks to pick a speaker... and we're going to put my children's health in their hands?" the former New Jersey governor said. "As a parent, this is a choice I get to make."

The Bizarro primary gets more bizarre

For the past seven months, the political world has watched a sort of Bizarro primary unfold — a number of Republican politicians have insisted they will become the next president while the last one, Trump,

leaves them in the dust.

For those not in the know, Bizarro was a Superman character who came from a world where everything was scrambled. It's been hard to escape that upside-down feeling as, every month, there's another debate that Trump skips where no one does anything to change the trajectory of the race.

Wednesday night was an example. The debate was on NewsNation, a little-viewed upstart cable channel. The debate also aired on CW stations — but only in the eastern and central time zones.

Indeed, one big question was whether the debate's ratings would be surpassed by those of DeSantis' faceoff with California's Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, on Fox News last week. The Republican National Committee is expected to soon announce whether it'll allow further unsanctioned debates. At least one more debate is expected before the Jan. 15 Iowa Caucus.

Perhaps the ultimate Bizarro twist would be if these confrontations mattered in the presidential election. You can never tell when something unexpected might happen in politics. But the time for these debates to matter, if it ever existed, is rapidly running out.

Sheriff: Texas man killed parents, 4 others in trail of violence from San Antonio to Austin

By JIM VERTUNO and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas man killed his parents and four others and wounded two police officers in a daylong trail of violence stretching from San Antonio to Austin, authorities said Wednesday.

Shane James, 34, of San Antonio, was charged with two counts of capital murder after separate attacks in Austin and San Antonio that began Tuesday morning and ended with James crashing his car that evening during a police pursuit.

James has a history of mental health problems and a prior arrest on charges of assaulting family members, authorities said.

His parents, Phyllis James, 55, and Shane James Sr. 56, were found dead in their home in the San Antonio area, Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar said at a news conference. Four more people were found dead in two homes in Austin, more than 80 miles (130 kilometers) away, officials said.

The Austin victims were not immediately identified. James would be charged with murder or capital murder in his parents' deaths as well, Salazar said.

A cyclist in Austin also was shot and wounded, and two police officers were recovering from gunshots, including one who was shot in the leg outside of a high school, Austin interim Police Chief Robin Henderson said.

Henderson said it was unclear what, if any, relationship the man had to the victims in the Austin area.

Online jail records did not indicate whether James has an attorney and several people listed as his relatives in public records did not immediately respond to phone messages Wednesday.

James is a former U.S. Army infantry officer who served from February 2013 to August 2015, according to Lt. Col. Ruth Castro, Army spokesperson. He had no deployments and his last rank was first lieutenant.

James was arrested in January 2022 on charges of misdemeanor assault of his parents and a sibling and taken to jail. Two weeks later, the family told a victim advocates liaison that he had mental health problems and asked that he be released from jail, Salazar said.

James cut off his ankle monitor the day after he was released, prompting a misdemeanor probation violation warrant, Salazar said. Cutting off an ankle monitor has since been upgraded to a felony.

Deputies went to the parents' house in August when James was reported to be naked in the yard and behaving strangely. They went into the home but did not arrest James because he had barricaded himself in a bedroom, Salazar said. Deputies are limited in their use of forced entry on a misdemeanor warrant, the sheriff said.

The deputies told the father to call them when James came out and they would come back to arrest him, but the father never called, Salazar added.

"It's always possible we could have done more, had they been able to safely put hands on him," Salazar

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said. "They were making every effort to avoid a violent confrontation with an unarmed man. That is a no-win situation for them."

Austin police said authorities did not determine the attacks there were connected until the final one at a home, which happened more than eight hours after a school police officer was shot and wounded in a high school parking lot on the other side of the city.

James' parents were found dead after his arrest. Deputies who went to their residence saw water coming out of the home and forced their way inside, Salazar said. He said the deaths appeared to have occurred before the shootings in Austin.

"This occurred, and then the suspect drove to Austin and did what he did there," Salazar said.

In a statement, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said the state would "impose the full weight of law on this criminal for his despicable crimes."

"Texans grieve for the loved ones of the six Texans who were murdered by a hardened criminal who must never see the light of day again," Abbott said.

The attacks were the country's 42nd mass killings this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. At least 217 people have died this year in those killings, which are defined as incidents in which four or more people have died within a 24-hour period, not including the killer — the same definition used by the FBI.

A timeline provided by authorities revealed the wide ground the suspect allegedly covered between the attacks.

Henderson said the Austin school district police officer was shot in the leg about 10:45 a.m. Tuesday outside Northeast Early College High School. Then, around noon, police who responded to a home after getting calls about gunshots found two people with signs of trauma. Police say one was dead and the other died at a hospital.

Daniel Moyer, who lives in the Austin neighborhood, said the area is typically peaceful and he felt shaken Wednesday. The neighborhood in south Austin is more than 10 miles (16 kilometers) miles from the high school where the officer was shot.

"It could have been me and my wife," Moyer said.

Another shooting happened shortly before 5 p.m., when a male cyclist suffered non-life-threatening injuries. About two hours later, police responded to a call of a burglary in progress at another home and found two people dead there. Henderson did not say how the four people in Austin died.

Henderson said that during the call at the last residence, an Austin police officer saw a man in the backyard. The man shot and wounded the officer who returned fire and was taken to a hospital. The officer was subsequently listed in stable condition.

Police said the man, who was not hit, drove away and police chased him. The suspect crashed at about 7:15 p.m. at a highway intersection and was taken into custody. The man had a gun, Henderson said.

She said the officer who was shot and the other officers were wearing body cameras and the video would be released within 10 business days.

Washington's center of gravity on immigration has shifted to the right. Can the parties make a deal?

By SEUNG MIN KIM and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It was a decade ago that Capitol Hill was consumed by an urgency to overhaul the nation's immigration system, fueled in no small part by Republicans who felt a political imperative to make inroads with minority voters by embracing more generous policies.

But nothing ever became law and in the time since, Washington's center of gravity on immigration has shifted demonstrably to the right, with the debate now focused on measures meant to keep migrants out as Republicans sense they have the political upper hand.

Long gone are the chatter and horse-trading between parties over how to secure a pathway to citizenship for immigrants, or a modernized work permit system to encourage more legal migration. Instead,

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the fights of late have centered on how much to tighten asylum laws and restrain a president's traditional powers to protect certain groups of migrants.

Now, Democrats and Republicans are again struggling to strike an immigration deal — and the consequences of failure stretch far beyond the southern border. Congressional Republicans are insisting on tougher border measures as their price for greenlighting billions in additional aid to Ukraine, and the stalemate is putting the future of U.S. military assistance to Kyiv at risk as Russia's invasion of Ukraine nears the two-year mark.

Democrats have "ceded the ground to Republicans on immigration and the border," said Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, policy director at the American Immigration Council, a nonprofit that advocates for immigrant rights. "The administration seems to see no advantage in leading on this issue, but I think that they're shooting themselves in the foot."

The intractable nature of immigration debates is coming into sharp relief this week as a bipartisan group of senators tasked with finding a border deal is running out of time to reach an agreement. The Senate on Wednesday failed to advance a nearly \$106 billion emergency spending request from Biden to cover national security needs including Ukraine, Israel and the border. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is an unwavering backer of Ukraine yet has stressed privately to President Joe Biden that the administration will need to bend on border policy to unlock that money.

In remarks at the White House on Wednesday, Biden made it clear that he was prepared to agree to at least some of the changes Republicans are seeking.

"I am willing to make significant compromises on the border," he said. "We need to fix the broken border system. It is broken."

Behind closed doors, Democrats have resisted demands from Republicans to scale back Biden's executive powers to temporarily admit certain migrants into the country. Yet Democrats privately appear willing to concede to GOP negotiators in other areas, particularly on making it tougher for asylum-seekers to clear an initial bar before their legal proceedings can continue in the United States.

That's a shift in favor of Republicans from even last year: There were similar agreements around asylum among Senate negotiators back then, but that would have been in exchange for a conditional pathway to citizenship for roughly 2 million "Dreamers" who came to the United States illegally as children.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., a perennial negotiator on immigration, stressed that in "every Congress, the foundation for compromise changes."

"The Democrats have to understand we lead one of the two chambers on Capitol Hill," Tillis said. "They have to understand that we rightfully will get something more conservative than some of the deals that are negotiated in the last Congress."

Throughout the Senate border negotiations, the White House has remained visibly hands off, largely trying to replicate its strategy on previously successful legislative talks like those that eventually led to tougher gun restrictions becoming law.

But it's also no secret the border is one issue Biden would prefer to avoid.

Though Biden as vice president spearheaded the Obama administration's diplomatic efforts in Central America, the border specifically is one of the few issues that he did not manage during his 36 years in the Senate nor two terms as vice president.

As president, Biden's aim has been to adopt a foreign policy approach to the border, framing the issue as a hemispheric challenge, not solely a U.S. problem. Biden almost immediately after taking office unraveled some of former President Donald Trump's more hardline policies. And last year, he oversaw the end of Title 42, the pandemic-era health restrictions at the border that had made it easier to deny migrants entry into the U.S.

He has tried to broaden legal pathways while cracking down on illegal border crossings. But the number of migrants at the border, after an initial dip following the end of Title 42, has been climbing dramatically. Now, cities like Chicago, New York and Denver are struggling to manage the migrants who have been relocated to their cities, forcing Democrats in areas far north to confront similar challenges to those long faced by border states.

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Inside the White House, deputy chief of staff Natalie Quillian — tapped initially to oversee implementation of Biden's signature laws, like the massive infrastructure package that just turned two years old — is now coordinating the administration's response to Democratic-led cities and states that have asked for help managing the influx of migrants.

"There is a fundamental shift in the Democratic Party on immigration" that has happened within the past six months, as the number of migrants in those cities has swelled, said Muzaffar Chishti, a senior fellow and director of the Migration Policy Institute office at New York University's law school.

Before, Democrats would bristle at any potential discussion over the border, particularly following Trump. But Chishti added: "That's no longer true. Their backs don't go up when they see someone saying we want to make some changes in the policies at the border."

Aides and allies to Biden have said the president is willing to accept new restrictions on asylum and potentially other Republican-led immigration policy changes, particularly as the numbers at the border continue to rise. His supplemental funding request, which seeks \$14 billion for the border, would hire more asylum officers, increase detention capacity for migrant families and hire more immigration court judges.

There's now a backlog of more than 1 million cases, and it's only increasing. Some migrants are released into the U.S. and wait for years before they are told whether they qualify for asylum.

Arrests at the U.S.-Mexico border in August through October more than doubled over the previous three months as migrants and smugglers adjusted to new asylum regulations following the end of Title 42. Illegal border crossings were at 188,778 in October, down from 218,763 in September, which was the second-highest month on record.

The White House decision to lump additional funding for the border in with Ukraine assistance has given lawmakers, Republicans say, an implicit nod to negotiate policy changes that would otherwise make Democrats feel uncomfortable.

"The fact that they are trying to actually work and figure out what we can do to come up with border security tells me he understands the American people are getting fed up with their current posture," Tillis said of Biden and the White House.

Bolstering the GOP posture even further is a new House Republican majority that is largely resistant to continued Ukraine assistance, making the price of additional aid for the White House that much higher.

And unlike the successful gun talks last year — when Democrats wielded political advantage after mass shootings galvanized public calls for increased restrictions — immigration is largely seen as an issue that is being fought on Republicans' turf.

But in the Democrats' view, Trump and his hard-line immigration policies, coupled with antipathy toward Ukraine aid, continue to loom large, rendering Republicans unable to close any deal that would involve irking portion of their base that remain staunchly opposed to Ukraine aid and anything less than the hard-line policies they've already laid out.

Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., one of the chief authors of the 2013 immigration bill that never became law, said the U.S. immigration system, writ large, still needs an overhaul.

But "we can't do that right now in the context of this Ukraine bill," he said. "It's too complicated. It's too far reaching. And frankly, there's no reason to be attaching the border to Ukraine funding."

Fake Donald Trump electors settle civil lawsuit in Wisconsin, agree that President Biden won

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Ten Republicans who posed as fake electors for former President Donald Trump in Wisconsin and filed paperwork falsely saying he had won the battleground state have settled a civil lawsuit and admitted their actions were part of an effort to overturn President Joe Biden's victory, attorneys who filed the case announced Wednesday.

Under the agreement, the fake electors acknowledged that Biden won the state, withdrew their filings and agreed not to serve as presidential electors in 2024 or any other election where Trump is on the ballot.

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The 10 fake electors agreed to send a statement to the government offices that received the Electoral College votes saying that their actions were "part of an attempt to improperly overturn the 2020 presidential election results."

The settlement marks the first time that any Trump electors have revoked their filings sent to Congress purporting that Trump had won in seven battleground states. Nevada on Wednesday became the third state to criminally charge fake electors, following Georgia and Michigan. Trump faces charges in Georgia and in a federal investigation of his conduct related to the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot.

The settlement was announced by Law Forward, Georgetown University Law Center's Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection and the Madison-based Stafford Rosenbaum law firm.

"Americans believe in democracy and the idea that the people choose their leaders through elections," said Jeff Mandell, one of the attorneys who brought the case on behalf of Democratic voters, including two who served as Biden electors. "The defendants' actions violated those bedrock principles. We brought this case to ensure that they are held accountable."

There is no known criminal investigation ongoing in Wisconsin. Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul has signaled that he is relying on federal investigators to look into what happened in Wisconsin, while also not ruling out a state probe.

Democrats brought the lawsuit last year seeking \$2.4 million in damages from 10 Republicans who submitted a document to Congress falsely declaring Trump as the 2020 election winner in Wisconsin. They also sued two of Trump's attorneys, including one who has already pleaded guilty to other charges stemming from the 2020 election in Georgia.

The case was scheduled to go to a trial by jury in September 2024, two months before the presidential election.

Under the deal, the fake electors don't pay any damages or attorneys fees and there is no admission of wrongdoing or liability.

The Wisconsin GOP electors have long said that they were partaking in the plan in case a court later ruled that Trump had won the state. One of the fake electors, former Wisconsin state Republican Chairman Andrew Hitt, repeated that position in a statement Wednesday.

"The Wisconsin electors were tricked and misled into participating in what became the alternate elector scheme and would have never taken any actions had we known that there were ulterior reasons beyond preserving an ongoing legal strategy," he said. Hitt said he has been working with the Justice Department since May of 2022 and he will not be supporting Trump in 2024.

The fake elector plan hatched in seven battleground states was central to the federal indictment filed against Trump earlier in August that alleged he tried to overturn results of the 2020 election. Federal prosecutors said the scheme originated in Wisconsin.

Fake electors met in Wisconsin and six other states where Trump was defeated in 2020 and signed certificates that falsely stated Trump, not Biden, won their states. The fake certificates were ignored.

One of the attorneys named in the Wisconsin lawsuit, Kenneth Chesebro, pleaded guilty to a felony charge of conspiracy to commit filing false documents after being charged with participating in efforts to overturn Trump's loss in Georgia. Chesebro was charged alongside Trump and 17 others with violating the state's anti-racketeering law.

The Wisconsin lawsuit cites a memo Chesebro sent to Trump's attorney in Wisconsin, Jim Troupis, in November 2020 detailing the elector plan.

Under the settlement, the 10 fake electors promised to assist the Department of Justice with its ongoing investigation. They also agreed to help the Democrats as they continue their lawsuit against Troupis and Chesebro.

Troupis and Chesebro did not return voicemail messages seeking comment.

The fake electors also released nearly 600 pages of documents related to their scheme, under terms of the settlement.

Those show one Republican involved with the fake elector plot texting another one referring to their action declaring Trump the winner of Wisconsin as a "possible steal." The sender said they felt compelled to go

along with the plan or else Trump supporters would be upset and there "would be a target on my back."

Government and outside investigations have uniformly found there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud that could have swung the election from Biden. Trump has continued to spread falsehoods about the 2020 election.

Electors are people appointed to represent voters in presidential elections. The winner of the popular vote in each state determines which party's electors are sent to the Electoral College, which meets in December after the election to certify the outcome.

Fighting between Israel and Hamas rages in Gaza's second-largest city, blocking aid from population

By NAJIB JOIBAIN, JACK JEFFERY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli troops battled Hamas militants Wednesday in the center of the Gaza Strip's second-largest city, the military said. The ground offensive has sent tens of thousands of Palestinians fleeing to the territory's southernmost edge and prevented aid groups from delivering food, water and other supplies.

Two months into the war, Israel's offensive into southern Gaza was bringing to Khan Younis the same fierce urban fighting and intensified bombardment that obliterated much of Gaza City and the north of the territory in recent weeks.

But in the south, the areas where Palestinians can seek safety are rapidly shrinking. Ahead of the assault, Israel urged residents to evacuate Khan Younis, the childhood home of two top Hamas leaders. But much of the city's population remains in place, along with large numbers who were displaced from northern Gaza and are unable to leave or wary of fleeing to the disastrously overcrowded far south.

Cut off from outside aid, people in United Nations-run shelters in Khan Younis are fighting over food, said Nawraz Abu Libdeh, a shelter resident who has been displaced six times.

"The hunger war has started," he said. "This is the worst of all wars."

The U.N. says some 1.87 million people — over 80% of the population of 2.3 million — have already fled their homes, many of them displaced multiple times. Almost the entire population is now crowded into southern and central Gaza, dependent on aid.

Late Wednesday, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres used a rarely exercised power to warn the Security Council of an impending "humanitarian catastrophe" in Gaza and urged members to demand a cease-fire. He invoked Article 99 of the U.N. Charter, a step no U.N. chief has taken in half a century, which says the secretary-general may inform the council of matters believed to threaten international peace and security.

Israel accused the U.N. chief of "a new moral low" and "bias against Israel." The United States signaled it would not support Security Council action.

Earlier Wednesday, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said, "Palestinians in Gaza are living in utter, deepening horror." Speaking at a news conference in Geneva, he said that "my humanitarian colleagues have described the situation as apocalyptic."

Israel's campaign has killed more than 16,200 people in Gaza — most of them women and children — and wounded more than 42,000, the territory's Health Ministry said late Tuesday. The agency has said many are also trapped under rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

Israel has vowed to fight on, saying it can no longer accept Hamas rule or the group's military presence in Gaza after the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took captive some 240 people in that attack.

An estimated 138 hostages remain in Gaza after more than 100 were freed during a cease-fire in late November. Their plight and accounts of rape and other atrocities committed during the rampage have deepened Israel's outrage and further galvanized support for the war.

URBAN WARFARE NORTH AND SOUTH

The refugee camp within Khan Younis was the childhood home of Hamas' top leader in Gaza, Yehya

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Sinwar, and the group's military chief, Mohammed Deif, as well as other Hamas leaders — giving it major symbolic importance in Israel's offensive.

Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said Sinwar is "not aboveground, he is underground," but would not elaborate on where Israel believes him to be. "Our job is to find Sinwar and kill him."

The military said its special forces at Khan Younis had broken through defense lines of Hamas fighters and were assaulting their positions in the city center. It said warplanes destroyed tunnel shafts and troops seized a Hamas outpost as well as several weapons caches. The Israeli accounts of the battle could not be independently confirmed.

Video released by the military showed commandos and troops moving amid sounds of gunfire down city streets strewn with wreckage and buildings with giant holes punched into them. Some took positions behind an earthen berm, while others inside a home fired out through a window, its flowered curtains fluttering around them.

Hagari said heavy fighting was also continuing in the north, in the Jabaliya refugee camp and the district of Shujaiya.

Hamas posted a video it said showed its fighters in Shujaiya moving through narrow alleys and wrecked buildings and opening fire with rocket-propelled grenades on Israel armored vehicles. Several of the vehicles are shown bursting into flames.

Its account could not be independently confirmed. But Hamas' continuing ability to fight in areas where Israel entered with overwhelming force weeks ago signals that eradicating the group while avoiding further mass casualties and displacement — as Israel's top ally, the U.S., has requested — could prove elusive.

Israel accuses Hamas, which has ruled Gaza for 16 years, of using civilians as human shields when the militants operate in residential areas and blames that for the high civilian death toll. But Israel has not given detailed accounts of its individual strikes, some of which have leveled entire city blocks.

The military says 88 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza ground offensive. It also says some 5,000 militants have been killed, without saying how it arrived at its count.

PUSHED TO THE EDGE

Tens of thousands of people have fled from Khan Younis and other areas to Rafah, on Gaza's southern border with Egypt, the U.N. said. Rafah, normally home to around 280,000 people, has already been packed with more than 470,000 who fled from other parts of Gaza.

On the other side of the border, Egypt has deployed thousands of troops and erected earthen barriers to prevent any mass influx of refugees. It says an influx would undermine its decades-old peace treaty with Israel, and it doubts Israel will let them back into Gaza.

Overcrowded shelters and homes are now overflowing, residents say.

"You find displaced people in the streets, in schools, in mosques, in hospitals ... everywhere," said Hamza Abu Mustafa, a teacher who lives near a school-turned-shelter in Rafah and is hosting three families himself.

For the past three days, aid groups have only been able to distribute supplies in and around Rafah — and mainly just flour and water, the U.N.'s humanitarian aid office said. Access farther north has been cut off by fighting and road closures by Israeli forces. The World Food Program warned of the worsening of "the catastrophic hunger crisis that already threatens to overwhelm the civilian population."

Israeli strikes continued in Rafah, where the military has told evacuees to take refuge. One strike Wednesday evening leveled a home in the town's Shaboura district, where hours earlier the military had announced a pause in operations to allow delivery of aid. A wave of wounded flowed into a nearby hospital, including at least six children. Medics carried in the limp form of one little girl, her face bloodied.

"We live in fear every moment, for our children, ourselves, our families," said Dalia Abu Samhadaneh, now living in Shaboura with her family after fleeing Khan Younis. "We live with the anxiety of expulsion."

She said diarrhea was rampant among children, with little clean water available.

A Palestinian woman who identified herself as Umm Ahmed said the harsh conditions and limited access to toilets are especially difficult for women who are pregnant or menstruating. Some have taken to social media to request menstrual pads, which are increasingly hard to find.

"For women and girls, the suffering is double," Umm Ahmed said. "It's more humiliation."

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Gaza has been without electricity since the first week of the war, and several hospitals have been forced to shut down for lack of fuel to operate emergency generators. Israel barred the entry of food, water, medicine, fuel and other supplies, except for a trickle of aid from Egypt.

Israel has greatly restricted shipments of fuel, saying Hamas diverts it for military purposes.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his Security Cabinet has approved small deliveries of fuel into the southern Gaza Strip "from time to time" to prevent a humanitarian crisis and the spread of disease. The "minimal amount" of fuel will be set by the war cabinet, a three-member authority in charge of managing the war against Hamas, Netanyahu said.

The decision comes as Israel faces mounting pressure from the United States to ramp up aid to Gaza.

As Ukraine aid falters in the Senate, Biden signals he's willing to make a deal on border security

By ZEKE MILLER, AAMER MADHANI and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Senate Republicans blocked the advance of tens of billions of dollars in military and economic assistance for Ukraine Wednesday, President Joe Biden berated their tactics as "stunning" and dangerous. Yet he also signaled an openness to what GOP lawmakers ultimately want: border policy changes.

Biden at the White House warned of dire consequences for Kyiv — and a "gift" to Russia's Vladimir Putin — if Congress fails to pass a \$110 billion package of wartime funding for Ukraine and Israel as well as other national security priorities. Hours later, Senate Republicans defiantly voted to stop the package from advancing, something that they had threatened to do all week.

"They're willing to literally kneecap Ukraine on the battlefield and damage our national security in the process," Biden said.

But even as he lashed Republicans for their stance, Biden stressed that he is willing to "make significant compromises on the border," if that's what it takes to get the package through Congress.

That statement has raised at least some hope that progress can be made in the days ahead as the Senate grinds through negotiations on border security, one of the most fraught issues in American politics. Biden's remarks Wednesday were his clearest overture yet to Republicans and came at a critical time, with a path through Congress for the emergency funds rapidly disappearing and America's support for multiple allies in doubt.

"If we don't support Ukraine, what is the rest of the world going to do?" Biden added.

The president's statement came hours after he huddled virtually with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and leaders of the Group of Seven advanced democracies, which have staunchly supported Ukraine against Russia's invasion.

"We need to fix the broken border system. It is broken," Biden said, adding that he's "ready to change policy as well." He did not name specific policy proposals and accused Republicans of wanting a political issue more than bipartisan compromise.

Sen. James Lankford, the Oklahoma Republican who has been leading Senate negotiations over border policy, was encouraged by what he heard, saying it seemed like the president is "ready to be able to sit down and talk."

Senators of both parties acknowledged they will need to move quickly if a deal is to be struck. Congress is scheduled to be in Washington for just a handful more days before the end of the year. The White House, meanwhile, has sounded the alarm about what would happen if they don't approve more funding soon, saying Ukraine's military would be stalled, or even overrun.

"When deadlines come, everybody's undivided attention is there and we realize: 'OK. Now it's time to actually solve this,'" Lankford said.

Democrats involved in the negotiations also said a direct hand from the president, as well as from Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, could be helpful.

"This kind of thorny, difficult problem is exactly what Joe Biden and Mitch McConnell have worked on before. And we could use their help and their leadership on this," said Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., another negotiator.

So far, McConnell, while an ardent supporter of Ukraine aid, has sided with Republicans who are holding firm against the security package unless it includes changes to America's border policies. Every Republican voted against it advancing Wednesday evening.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called the failed test vote a "a sad night in the history of the Senate and our country." He urged Republicans to present a border proposal that is "serious, instead of the extreme policies they have presented thus far."

Republican negotiators were expected to send a new proposal to Democrats after the failed vote.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who has been involved in the negotiations, said the Republicans' hard-charging bargain left little room for agreement and he remained skeptical that a deal can be struck.

"They have to figure out whether they want to negotiate or whether they want to make take-it-or-leave-it demands," Murphy said.

Republicans argue the record numbers of migrants crossing the southern border pose a security threat because border authorities cannot adequately screen them. They also say they cannot justify to their constituents sending billions of dollars to other countries while failing to address the border at home.

So far, senators have found agreement on raising the initial standard for migrants to enter the asylum system. But they've been at odds over placing limitations on humanitarian parole, a program that allows the executive branch to temporarily admit migrants without action from Congress.

But Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican, said the Senate talks were "never going to be able to negotiate the kind of meaningful substantive policy changes" that Republicans want. He called Biden's remarks "positive" and said the negotiations should next include the president, McConnell and House Speaker Mike Johnson.

The president's willingness to directly engage on the issue comes at a political risk. Immigrant advocates and some Democratic senators have sounded alarm about curtailing the asylum system.

Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat who led a statement with 10 other senators last month calling for an increase in legal immigration to be included in negotiations, said he would be watching closely what Biden agrees to on border security.

"Devil's in the details," Padilla said, adding that the direction of the Senate talks have been "concerning from day one."

Even if the president and senators somehow find a way forward on border security, any agreement would face significant obstacles in the House. Hardline conservatives who control the chamber have vowed to block it unless it tacks to a broad set of forceful border and immigration policies.

Johnson, who as speaker has already expressed deep skepticism of funding for Ukraine, has signaled he won't support the aid package if it does not adhere to H.R. 2, a bill that would remake the U.S. immigration system with conservative priorities.

"The American people deserve nothing less." Johnson said in a statement.

Senior UN official denounces 'blatant disregard' in Israel-Hamas war after many UN sites are hit

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees told The Associated Press on Wednesday there is no safe haven in besieged Gaza for civilians — not even in U.N. shelters and so-called "safe zones" designated by Israel.

Philippe Lazzarini, commissioner general of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, also known as UNRWA, said in an interview with the AP that since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, more than 80 U.N. facilities in the Gaza Strip have been hit.

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During the deadly Hamas-led Oct. 7 incursion into southern Israel, the militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took captive some 240 men, women and children. Israel responded with an aerial bombardment and ground offensive inside Gaza that has so far killed more than 16,200 people in the enclave, most of them women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

The U.N. facilities hit "directly or indirectly" in Gaza include sites that have been sheltering civilians, Lazzarini said. UNRWA has said that more than 220 Palestinians were killed in such strikes, and that 130 of its employees also lost their lives in the war.

"There is absolutely no safe place in the Gaza Strip," Lazzarini said, speaking to the AP in Beirut.

While the circumstances of those strikes are difficult to investigate amid the ongoing conflict, he said, "I do believe that the blatant disregard of U.N. premises ... will require an independent investigation in the future."

Israeli officials have said they don't target U.N. facilities, but have also accused Hamas of using U.N. buildings for cover for its military activities.

The U.N. says some 1.87 million Palestinians — over 80% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes. U.N.-run shelters currently house more than 1 million displaced in "totally overcrowded, appalling sanitary conditions," Lazzarini said.

When he visited Gaza shortly before a seven-day cease-fire ended last week, shelters were already overcrowded with those who had fled heavy fighting in the northern half of the territory, he said. As the Israeli ground offensive pushed into the southern part of the strip, civilians have been forced into ever smaller areas along the closed-off border with Egypt.

Lazzarini said UNRWA is focusing on improving conditions in existing shelters, including its network of schools across Gaza.

"We do not want to put the people in places which are not necessarily safer, when at the same time, you have more than 1 million people in existing shelters living in appalling conditions," he said.

Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, an Israeli military spokesman, alleged earlier this week that "there should be pressure on" UNRWA to set up proper facilities. Israel has never explained how it expects that the small area would accommodate such large numbers of displaced people.

Lazzarini called for a new cease-fire and for opening more border crossings to allow aid and commercial goods to enter Gaza. Currently, aid can only enter the strip from Egypt via the Rafah border crossing, causing severe bottlenecks.

The refugee agency's relationship with Israeli authorities has in the past been adversarial at times, with right-wing Israeli politicians accusing UNRWA, which was founded in the wake of the creation of Israel in 1948 to serve hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled or were forced from their homes, of helping perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

UNRWA has pushed back against such claims, saying it is simply carrying out its mandate to serve a vulnerable population.

Lazzarini said that in the current Israel-Hamas war, UNRWA is in "constant coordination" with Israeli authorities. Post-war, he said, the agency is prepared to assist whatever body is governing the strip in restoring services that have halted, including reopening schools.

Lazzarini added that he hopes the devastating conflict will trigger a political process that will lead to a resolution that would make his agency obsolete.

"Will this become a top priority of the region and the international community that once and for all we address the longest unresolved conflict," he asked. "If yes, there can be a trajectory of hope for the people here in the region and the future for UNRWA in fact, would very much depend on that."

Norman Lear, producer of TV's 'All in the Family' and influential liberal advocate, has died at 101

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Norman Lear, the writer, director and producer who revolutionized prime time television with "All in the Family," "The Jeffersons" and "Maude," propelling political and social turmoil into the once-insulated world of TV sitcoms, has died. He was 101.

Lear died Tuesday night in his sleep, surrounded by family at his home in Los Angeles, said Lara Bergthold, a spokesperson for his family.

A liberal activist with an eye for mainstream entertainment, Lear fashioned bold and controversial comedies that were embraced by viewers who had to watch the evening news to find out what was going on in the world. His shows helped define prime time comedy in the 1970s, launched the careers of Rob Reiner and Valerie Bertinelli and made middle-aged superstars of Carroll O'Connor, Bea Arthur and Redd Foxx.

Lear "took television away from dopey wives and dumb fathers, from the pimps, hookers, hustlers, private eyes, junkies, cowboys and rustlers that constituted television chaos, and in their place he put the American people," the late Paddy Chayefsky, a leading writer of television's early "golden age," once said.

"All in the Family" was immersed in the headlines of the day, while also drawing upon Lear's childhood memories of his tempestuous father. Racism, feminism, and the Vietnam War were flashpoints as blue collar conservative Archie Bunker, played by O'Connor, clashed with liberal son-in-law Mike Stivic (Reiner). Jean Stapleton co-starred as Archie's befuddled but good-hearted wife, Edith, and Sally Struthers played the Bunkers' daughter, Gloria, who defended her husband in arguments with Archie.

By the end of 1971, "All In the Family" was atop the ratings and Archie Bunker was a pop culture fixture, with President Richard Nixon among his fans. Some of his putdowns became catchphrases. He called his son-in-law "Meathead" and his wife "Dingbat," and would snap at anyone who dared occupy his faded orange-yellow wing chair. It was the centerpiece of the Bunkers' rowhouse in Queens, and eventually went on display in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Hits continued for Lear and then-partner Bud Yorkin, including "Maude" and "The Jeffersons," both spinoffs from "All in the Family," with the same winning combination of one-liners and social conflict. In a 1972 two-part episode of "Maude," the title character (played by Arthur) became the first on television to have an abortion, drawing a surge of protests along with high ratings. And when a close friend of Archie's turned out to be gay, Nixon privately fumed to White House aides that the show "glorified" same-sex relationships.

"Controversy suggests people are thinking about something. But there'd better be laughing first and foremost or it's a dog," Lear said in a 1994 interview with The Associated Press.

Lear and Yorkin also created "Good Times," about a working class Black family in Chicago; "Sanford & Son," a showcase for Foxx as junkyard dealer Fred Sanford; and "One Day at a Time," starring Bonnie Franklin as a single mother and Bertinelli and Mackenzie Phillips as her daughters. In the 1974-75 season, Lear and Yorkin produced five of the top 10 shows.

All along, he was an active donor to Democratic candidates and founded the nonprofit liberal advocacy group People for the American Way in 1980, he said, because people such as evangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were "abusing religion."

"I started to say, 'This is not my America. You don't mix politics and religion this way,'" Lear said in a 1992 interview with Commonweal magazine.

The nonprofit's president, Svante Myrick, said "we are heartbroken" by Lear's death. "We extend our deepest sympathies to Norman's wife Lyn and their entire family, and to the many people who, like us, loved Norman."

With his wry smile and impish boat hat, the youthful Lear created television well into his 90s, rebooting "One Day at a Time" for Netflix in 2017 and exploring income inequality for the documentary series "America Divided" in 2016. Documentarians featured him in 2016's "Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You," and 2017's "If You're Not in the Obbit, Eat Breakfast," a look at active nonagenarians such as Lear

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and Rob Reiner's father, Carl Reiner.

Lear's business moves, meanwhile, were almost consistently fruitful. By 1986, Lear was on Forbes magazine's list of the 400 richest people in America, with an estimated net worth of \$225 million. He didn't make the cut the next year after a \$112 million divorce settlement for his second wife, Frances. They had been married 29 years and had two daughters.

He married his third wife, psychologist Lyn Davis, in 1987 and the couple had three children.

Lear was born in New Haven, Conn. on July 27, 1922, to Herman Lear, a securities broker who served time in prison for selling fake bonds, and Jeanette, a homemaker who helped inspire Edith Bunker. Like a sitcom, his family life was full of quirks and grudges, "a group of people living at the ends of their nerves and the tops of their lungs," he explained during a 2004 appearance at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston.

Lear began writing in the early 1950s on shows including "The Colgate Comedy Hour" and for such comedians as Martha Raye and George Gobel. In 1959, he and Yorkin founded Tandem Productions, which produced films including "Come Blow Your Horn," "Start the Revolution Without Me" and "Divorce American Style." Lear also directed the 1971 satire "Cold Turkey," starring Dick Van Dyke about a small town that takes on a tobacco company's offer of \$25 million to quit smoking for 30 days.

In his later years, Lear joined with Warren Buffett and James E. Burke to establish The Business Enterprise Trust, honoring businesses that take a long-term view of their effect on the country. He also founded the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication, exploring entertainment, commerce and society and also spent time at his home in Vermont. In 2014, he published the memoir "Even This I Get to Experience."

At tribal summit, Biden says he's working to 'heal the wrongs of the past' and 'move forward'

By COLLEEN LONG, SUSAN MONTROYA BRYAN and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden told Native American nations gathered for a summit Wednesday that his administration was working to heal the wrongs of the past as he signed an executive order that seeks to make it easier for Indigenous peoples to access federal funding, and have greater autonomy over how to spend it.

Biden also threw his support behind a request to allow Haudenosaunee Confederacy to compete under its own flag in the 2028 Olympics in lacrosse, a sport they invented.

Historically, federal policies attacked Native people's rights to self-governance and caused lasting economic damage. Biden said the actions at the summit were "key steps" that would help usher in an new era of tribal sovereignty. "A new era grounded in dignity and respect that recognizes your fundamental rights to govern and grow on your own terms," he said.

"It's hard work to heal the wrongs of the past and change the course, and move forward," Biden said.

Yurok Tribal Council Member Phillip Williams described Biden's speech as inspirational.

"It felt like our highest official in the land acknowledges the crimes of the past," he said. "His contribution to society is to help to heal the tribal nations."

Biden signed the order as members of his administration and tribal nation leaders stood behind him on stage at the Department of the Interior. The order in part creates a clearinghouse for Native American and Alaska native tribes to find and access grants and it requests that federal agencies ensure that funding is accessible and equitable. It also gives them more authority over how to spend the money.

That news was welcomed by Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren, who said the funding they get from the federal government to help the hundreds of thousands of people on their reservation that extends across Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, can be difficult to spend.

"There's so much policies and things that are attached to it and requirements that are attached to it that sometimes it's just overwhelming to try to get it done," he said.

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Tyson Johnston, self governance executive director for the Quinault Indian Nation in northwest Washington state, who is responsible for coordinating the relocation of their villages in the face of dangerous sea level rise, highlighted the importance of this type of autonomy when it comes to climate change.

In July, the Biden administration announced \$120 million in grant funding for tribes in the U.S. to boost their resiliency to climate change.

"All of us are going to have different adaptation strategies and different priorities moving forward. So boxing us in and keeping us in kind of bureaucratic red tape is really not going to work if we want to continue to make meaningful change," he said.

Biden hosted the summit in person last year and virtually the year before. This year, White House officials said, the goal was to provide an opportunity for tribal leaders to have more meaningful conversations directly with members of Biden's Cabinet.

While the federal government has an obligation to consult with tribal governments, some Native American and Alaska Native leaders have complained that federal agencies often treat the process as a check-the-box practice despite efforts by Haaland to make changes.

From Nevada to Alaska, permitting decisions over mining projects, oil and gas development and the preservation of sacred areas, for example, have highlighted what some leaders say are shortcomings in the process.

The Democratic administration also announced more than 190 agreements that allow tribes to manage federal lands, waters and natural resources and a new study to help better interpret and tell the history of Native Americans, particularly during periods of federal reform.

"Yes, there are parts of our history that are painful, but there are also those that we celebrate and that show our resilience, strength and our contributions," said Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna.

Biden said he was throwing his support behind the effort to allow the confederacy to play under its own flag at the Los Angeles Olympics. The International Olympic Committee would have to make an exception to a rule permitting only teams playing as part of an official national Olympic committee to compete in the Games. The Haudenosaunee have competed as their own team at a number of international events since 1990.

The Haudenosaunee Nationals Lacrosse Organization, established in 1983, is among the best in the world. The confederacy is made up of six different nations, the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas and Tuscarora Nation. It spans the border between the U.S. and Canada.

"Their circumstances are unique," Biden said. "They should be granted an exception to field their own team at the Olympics."

The Department of the Interior is also working on final revisions to a rule overhauling how human remains, funerary objects and sacred objects are repatriated. The new rules streamline the requirements for museums and federal agencies to identify possible items for repatriation.

Officials also announced that the White House Council on Native American Affairs, which is co-chaired by Haaland and Tanden, has published a guide outlining best practices and procedures for the management, treatment and protection of sacred sites. The document was recently finalized after taking into account feedback from tribal leaders.

In Nevada, Arlan Melendez, chairman of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, said Tuesday that promises about meaningful consultation haven't materialized as several tribes have fought to halt construction of one of the largest lithium mines in the world. The tribes say the mine is being built illegally near the sacred site of an 1865 massacre along the Nevada-Oregon line.

"Consultation has to happen in the early stages," he said. "If you do consultation after the project is already rolling, it doesn't do you so much good at that point. So we are little bit disappointed in them."

____ Montoya Bryan reported from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Golden reported from Seattle. Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani in Washington and Scott Sonner in Reno, Nevada, contributed to this report.

US announces new weapons aid for Ukraine as Congress is stalled on more funding

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is sending a \$175 million package of military aid to Ukraine, including guided missiles for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), anti-armor systems and high-speed anti-radiation missiles, the Pentagon and State Department announced on Wednesday.

The latest aid comes as Congress remains stalled on legislation that would provide new funding for Ukraine as it battles to push back Russian forces, as well as money for Israel's war with Hamas and other security needs. The Biden administration has said funding to aid Ukraine is running out, and the Pentagon packages of weapons and other equipment for the war have become much smaller in recent months.

In a statement, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that unless Congress approves the supplemental funding, "this will be one of the last security assistance packages we can provide to Ukraine."

The White House is seeking nearly \$106 billion, but the bill has gotten bogged down in negotiations over border security and because of increasing reluctance from Republican lawmakers to approve significant spending on the Ukraine war. GOP lawmakers are insisting on policy changes to halt the flow of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as a condition for the assistance.

As part of the push to break the deadlock, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was scheduled to address U.S. senators by video Tuesday, but Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he had to cancel his appearance.

The latest weapons package will be provided through presidential drawdown authority, or PDA, which pulls weapons from existing U.S. stockpiles and sends them quickly to the war front.

Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, said Tuesday there is about \$1.1 billion left in funding to replenish U.S. military stockpiles for weapons and equipment sent to Ukraine. And he said there is roughly \$4.8 billion in drawdown authority still available.

Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov is scheduled to meet with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at the Pentagon on Wednesday afternoon.

Although the war has been static along most of its more than 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line as wintry weather has set in, both sides have continued to launch airstrikes. Ukraine is working to keep up the pressure over the winter, in order to prevent Russia from solidifying battle lines.

The new aid will also include AIM-9M and AIM-7 missiles for air defense; artillery rounds, vehicles to tow equipment, demolition munitions and other missiles and more than 4 million rounds of ammunition.

To date, the United States has committed more than \$44 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

Trump tells supporters, 'Guard the vote.' Here's the phrase's backstory and why it's raising concern

By ALI SWENSON and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump is urging supporters to "guard the vote" during next year's election, a phrase that has set off alarm bells among pro-democracy advocates who say it signals permission to take extreme measures that could intimidate voters and threaten election workers.

The phrase is a relatively novel one for Trump, though activists in the far-right movement have been setting the groundwork for it to be deployed more widely.

Former national security adviser Michael Flynn has spent months repeating the phrase in posts, speeches and interviews. And Victor Mellor, a close Flynn associate, told The Associated Press he has been setting up a new group called "Guard the Vote" ahead of the 2024 elections. Mellor provided AP a video that showed the group's new "command center" in a Florida building that houses Flynn's offices.

Trump employed the phrase in Ankeny, Iowa, on Saturday, saying his followers need to "guard the vote" because "we have all the votes we need." He encouraged his supporters to "go into" cities including De-

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troit, Philadelphia and Atlanta to "watch those votes when they come in."

Experts in political messaging say the context in which Trump uses "guard the vote" primes his supporters to not only expect fraud in diverse Democratic cities next year, but to intervene to ensure Trump wins.

"It suggests that the outcome of the election is foregone. It's been decided," said Susan Benesch, founder and executive director of the Dangerous Speech Project. "Is it actually guarding the election against fraud, or is it guarding the election against a result in which Trump is not declared the winner?"

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said that by "guard the vote," Trump meant "to stop any instance of voter fraud in areas where fraud happens." He did not elaborate, and didn't answer questions about whether the term referred to efforts by Flynn or Mellor.

"If he's really talking about peaceful, normal, legitimate poll watching, then he should say that," Benesch said.

THE BACKSTORY OF 'GUARD THE VOTE'

The phrase "guard the vote" gained popularity in 2022 when right-wing activist groups, including one in Washington state that called itself Guard the Vote, began monitoring ballot drop boxes to try to identify fraud.

The term resurfaced earlier this year when Trump was filmed using it during a June event at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, and when Flynn began pushing the term repeatedly a few weeks later.

"I was just recently with President Trump probably about two and a half weeks ago, and we talked about this idea, about guarding the vote," Flynn said in a July 6 interview with radio host Eric Metaxas. "It means keeping an eye on every single aspect of the vote that we have from the moment it starts, whether it's 45 days or 30 days prior to the vote, all the way through the counting."

Since then, Flynn has posted or publicly discussed guarding the vote at least eight times. In a speech in Rhode Island in September, he discussed being at ballot boxes "24/7" to videotape people dropping off ballots. In a post on X last month, he referenced "concerned citizen guards" at ballot boxes. On Telegram in July, he wrote "#WeThePeople are going to be checking on all of you and the entire election system from top to bottom, start to finish, sunup to sundown." Flynn did not return an email seeking comment.

In general, partisan poll watchers appointed by political parties or other groups are allowed to observe voting and ballot counting but can't interfere in the election process, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. States have different rules governing their behavior and qualifications.

Mellor, who owns a concrete business and has been politically active in Sarasota County, Florida, told AP this week that he established a group called "Guard the Vote," which would connect members of law enforcement and citizens to do training about elections.

Mellor said when he heard Trump use the phrase "guard the vote" on Saturday, he thought "That's me. I'm 'guard the vote.'"

WILL IT INSPIRE VIOLENCE?

Mellor shared few details about the group's plans but said it would involve "educated Americans, educated law enforcement."

Asked about criticism that the phrase "guard the vote" could encourage violence or endanger the election system, voters or elections workers, Mellor said it would "absolutely not. There will be no weapons. Everything done by the rule of law."

He said there would be "zero intimidation" and that the group was not a right-wing operation. He said he was encouraging Americans of all political backgrounds to join, and that more details would be announced in the coming days.

"This isn't a militant movement. This is an educational movement," he said, adding that it was meant to help people understand what he called a convoluted election process.

While there was no apparent connection to Mellor's effort, right-flank groups began monitoring ballot drop boxes in at least two counties in Arizona during the 2022 midterm elections before a federal judge ordered them to keep their distance from voters. Some were masked and armed, and some were associated with the far-right group Oath Keepers.

Mellor shared with AP a video of what he called his "command center" in a building he owns in Venice,

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Florida, that also houses Flynn's offices and a studio where Flynn frequently does interviews.

The short video showed a large, windowless room surrounded by what appear to be concrete walls with the slogan "GUARD THE VOTE" written on one wall. At the center of the room was a long conference table surrounded by cushioned chairs, with what Mellor said was his handgun atop the table. Asked about the weapon, Mellor told AP he hadn't realized it was in the video and that the gun wasn't sending a message.

"I don't leave home without it," he said.

Another wall displayed an oath of office, surrounded by seals and flags for the military branches. Other walls displayed maps of states including Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Georgia, North Carolina, Alaska, Texas, Florida, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

A whiteboard displayed notes referring to strategy, including a mention of sheriffs and a list of prominent election deniers. One corner of the whiteboard reads, "Fraud Detection," followed by the words, "Don't use word fraud use election security."

A joint investigation by AP and the PBS series "Frontline" last year detailed how Flynn had been working closely with Mellor since 2021. Mellor established a place called The Hollow and turned it into a center of activity for Proud Boys and other activists in Sarasota County's far-right community.

Mellor, a former Marine, posted a photo on his Facebook page showing him and his son outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and told "Frontline" that he was proud to be there that day. He told AP in October 2022 that he and Flynn are "experiencing and nurturing a true grass-roots movement in its purest form."

"I assure you, this is only the beginning," Mellor said then.

THE LANGUAGE OF WAR

Jennifer Mercieca, a historian of political rhetoric at Texas A&M University who wrote a book about Trump's rhetoric, said his use of the word "guard" was notable because it can be a military word, "As if you're an army."

"And so the framing there is interesting in that it isn't the language of democracy and the democratic process. It's the language of warfare," Mercieca said. "And that's how fascism works. You say politics is war and the enemy cheats. It's up to us."

She said Trump's repeated claims that there will be cheating in an election that hasn't happened yet is a way of enlisting his followers into his conspiracy theory. Trump also suggested the elections were rigged against him even before the votes in 2016 and 2020.

"You tell the population that the rules are already broken. Right? They're so corrupt. They are such big cheaters. They are enemies. They are threats. And then you say, And it's up to us to defend it," Mercieca said.

What should Americans think when they hear Trump use such language?

"It's still a part of Trump's Jan. 6 insurrection. He's still 'couping,'" she said.

ELECTION OFFICIALS SAY THEY WON'T BE DETERRED

Election officials in the cities Trump named say they are committed to a safe and secure election in 2024 and won't be intimidated by Trump or anyone else.

"Detroiters are not scaredy cats. We're not chumps, we're not to be picked on," said Detroit City Clerk Janice Winfrey. "So they can come if they want to, absolutely. We're ready."

"This is nothing new, Trump says these things before every election," Philadelphia City Commissioners' Chairwoman Lisa Deeley said in a statement. "In 2016, he said that they had to watch and make sure that people didn't vote five times. In 2020, there was 'Bad Things Happen in Philadelphia'. Each of those elections, 2016 and 2020, were completely fair and accurate and that is what we will continue to deliver in 2024."

Jessica Corbitt, spokesperson for Georgia's Fulton County, declined to respond to Trump's targeting of Atlanta but said election safety is a concern for the county after threats to its workers. She emphasized that "polling places should be safe for everyone."

Officials said they've taken steps to improve election security since 2020. In Detroit, for example, election officials have reinforced their building with bulletproof glass and increased security present during vote-counting.

Jena Griswold, Colorado's secretary of state, said she has led new laws to protect against election threats, including bans on threatening or doxxing election workers, tampering with election equipment, or openly carrying firearms near polling locations.

"With Donald Trump's increasingly extreme rhetoric, he continues his attempts to undermine this nation's free and fair elections," Griswold said. "Every state should follow our lead."

US files war crime charges against Russians accused of torturing an American in the Ukraine invasion

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four Russian men accused of torturing an American during the invasion of Ukraine have been charged with war crimes in a first-of-its-kind case, the Justice Department announced on Wednesday.

It is the first prosecution against members of the Russian armed forces in connection with atrocities during Moscow's war against Ukraine and it is the first time the Justice Department has brought charges under a nearly 30-year-old statute that makes it a crime to subject an American to torture or inhumane treatment during a war.

The charges are largely symbolic for now, given the unlikely prospects of the department bringing any of the four defendants, who are fugitives, into custody. But U.S. officials described the case as a history-making moment in their investigation into Russian war crimes. More charges could be coming.

"This is our first, and you should expect more," Attorney General Merrick Garland said at a news conference.

He said the American people and their government have a long memory. "We will not forget the atrocities in Ukraine. And we will never stop working to bring those responsible to justice," the nation's top law enforcement official said.

The four Russians are identified as members of the Russian armed forces or its proxy units. Two are described as commanding officers.

The Russians are accused of kidnapping an American man from his home in a Ukrainian village in 2022. The American was beaten and interrogated while being held for 10 days at a Russian military compound, before eventually being evacuated with his wife, who's Ukrainian, U.S. authorities said.

The American told federal agents who had traveled to Ukraine last year as part of an investigation that the Russian soldiers had abducted him, stripped him naked, pointed a gun at his head and badly beaten him, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said.

He was also subjected to harsh interrogation methods, threatened with sexual assault and forced to participate in his own mock execution, according to a five-count indictment unsealed Wednesday in the Eastern District of Virginia.

"The evidence gathered by our agents speaks to the brutality, criminality, and depravity of Russia's invasion," Mayorkas said.

Homeland Security and FBI investigators interviewed the American, his family and others who were around the village of Mylove around the time of the kidnapping to identify the four Russians, Mayorkas said.

"Cases like this one are among the most complex the FBI works, but bringing them is essential to deterring crimes like these and showing would-be perpetrators that no one is above the law and the war crimes will not go unpunished," FBI Director Christopher Wray said.

Garland has been outspoken on war crimes in Ukraine since Russia's invasion in February 2022, and his department assigned federal prosecutors to examine the potential of bringing criminal charges.

Independent human rights experts backed by the United Nations have said they have found continued evidence of war crimes committed by Russian forces, including torture that ended in the rape and death of women up to age 83.

The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin in March for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia does not recognize the ICC and considers its decisions "legally void." He called the court's move "outrageous and unacceptable."

The United States is not a member of the ICC, but the Justice Department has been cooperating with it and supporting Ukrainian prosecutors as they carry out their own war crime investigations.

The four defendants are identified as Suren Seiranovich Mkrtchyan and Dmitry Budnik, both of whom are described by prosecutors as commanding officers in Russia's armed forces, as well as two lower-ranking officers identified only by their first names.

All four were fighting on behalf of Russia in its war against Ukraine and are identified in the indictment as either members of the armed forces or military units from the Donetsk People's Republic. After invading Ukraine, Moscow in September 2022 illegally annexed parts of the Donetsk region and three other Ukrainian regions under its control as part of Russia.

The U.S. and Russia do not have an extradition treaty, but the Justice Department has brought repeated criminal cases against Russian nationals, most notably for cyber crimes and including for interference in the 2016 presidential election. In some of those cases, the defendants have been taken into custody by American officials, such as when they've traveled outside Russia.

The charges come as the Biden administration is pressing Congress to approve more military aid for Ukraine's war effort. President Joe Biden said it was "stunning" that lawmakers have yet to approve tens of billions of dollars in military and economic assistance for Ukraine. Failure to act, he said from the White House, would be "gift" to Putin.

The president has requested nearly \$106 billion to fund the wars in Ukraine and Israel and to meet other security needs. Some Republicans have grown tired of providing support to Ukraine after the U.S. has already sent \$111 billion, and other GOP lawmakers are insisting on stiff changes to U.S. border policy as a condition of voting for the package.

The U.S. is expected to announce a \$175 million package of military aid to Ukraine on Wednesday. The Pentagon has said there is about \$1.1 billion left in funding to replenish U.S. military stockpiles for weapons and equipment sent to Ukraine and roughly \$4.8 billion in drawdown authority still available.

Activists say their voices are stifled by increasing rules and restrictions at COP28 climate talks

By LUJAIN JO and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — This year's United Nations climate talks may have seen record numbers registered to attend, but activists who have spent years demonstrating at the annual event say their space to voice their demands is shrinking year on year.

Held in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates — where broad laws tightly restrict speech — climate activists have been protesting at COP28's Blue Zone, which is considered international territory. Demonstrators say there have always been strict regulations for protests at COPs, but they say actions this year have been further limited in terms of the number of people allowed to participate and which climate issues they're allowed to address on any given day. It's a stark contrast, activists say, to the growing presence of the fossil fuel industry, where those linked to the industry number around 1,400, according to an Associated Press analysis.

"There's always been a lot of restriction on civic space inside of COPs, but we are really seeing a trend of it increasing," said Lise Masson, of Friends of the Earth International. "We have to say how loud we're going to be, what's going to be written on the banners. We're not allowed to name countries and corporations. So it's really a very sanitized space."

The U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, who is in charge of climate summits, said in a statement that "space is available for participants to assemble peacefully and make their voices heard on climate-related issues" and their regulations are "in line with longstanding United Nations Climate Change guidelines and adherence to international human rights norms and principles, within the Blue Zone."

Masson stressed that even that though tight country laws meant that protests were limited this year, is

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also a problem activists have come across in Western countries, such as COP26 in Glasgow in 2021.

"We also can't fall into the narrative of global north countries who are coming here, walking the halls of the conference center, saying, 'look how restricted civil society is here.'" she said. "In the global north as well, we're seeing a massive crackdown on civic space in the global north, in Europe, in the U.S. ... Glasgow was the most inaccessible COP we've ever seen because of the violence of borders" like visa restrictions, as well as restrictions on civic space, she said.

COP28 organizers had pledged to make the conference inclusive. A statement from organizers reiterated their goal to have "an inclusive COP" and said it has "dedicated spaces and platforms for all voices to be heard across both the Blue and Green Zone."

"We continue to welcome applications to the COP28 Voice for Action Hub, where people are already assembling peacefully around a variety of topics. Applications in the Blue Zone are reviewed exclusively by UNFCCC under the longstanding guidelines determined by them," the statement said.

But Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a climate activist from the Philippines who's also attend COPs in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt last year and in Glasgow, questioned whether that inclusivity extended to activists.

"When we talk about inclusivity, the question is who are we including? And it's definitely we're seeing more corporations, more fossil fuel lobbyists and more of the fossil fuel industry," Tan said.

COP28 President Sultan al-Jaber, who's also the head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Co., previously said it's important for the oil and gas industry to have a seat at the table when discussing how to slash emissions from their industries. The CEOs of oil and gas majors like TotalEnergies and Exxon attended the talks.

Some of the rules in place have meant that some activists have had minor run-ins with security staff and organizers.

Earlier this week, an animal rights activist wearing a lion costume was ushered aside by security personnel, although not part of a protest. Protests are not allowed in the middle of the day because of the heat, but activists say that's when the lunch crowd is out and paying attention to what demonstrators have to say.

Some action areas have been shut off in recent days, which organizers say is for maintenance reasons, according to activists. The UNFCCC did not address questions sent by The Associated Press on specific claims made by activists.

But Tan asked: "Why did it just so happened to be the best spot to put actual pressure on the world leaders?"

U.N. rules also say flags of nations are not allowed — Masson said this is so criticism is not targeted at any one country — but regulations extend to support of countries as well.

"When we want to fly the Palestinian flag here, it's in solidarity. It's upholding, honoring that flag. And we're still not being allowed," Masson said. Activists replaced the flag with images of a watermelon — a symbol of Palestinian resistance that bears the same colors.

Permits to protest have to be applied for in advance, "and if you don't get the permits, you can get de-badged, you can get kicked out," if you still choose to go ahead, Tan said.

"Sometimes it's not even that they're not approving it, it's just that there's a lot of things and if they're getting a lot of requests, they're not able to get back to you in time for your scheduled protest," Tan said. She had previously applied for a permit for a protest with Filipinas on land defenders and Indigenous rights, but didn't get the permits on time.

Vanessa Nakate, a climate activist from Uganda, said there are hurdles for many — especially those in the global south — to even get to the talks.

"For me, it has been a bit easier, maybe because of the visibility I have and the number of people I'm able to reach. But that has not been the same for my colleagues," Nakate said.

But she urged that activists should persist despite the growing red tape around attending and demonstrating at the summits.

"As much as it's challenging, we need to be in this space to let the world know what is really happening," she said.

Under Putin, the uber-wealthy Russians known as 'oligarchs' are still rich but far less powerful

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the outside world viewed those Russians known as “oligarchs” as men whose vast wealth, ruthlessly amassed, made them almost shadow rulers. A “government of the few,” in the word’s etymology.

The term has persisted well into Putin’s rule, broadening in popular usage to refer to almost any Russian with a substantial fortune.

How much political power any of Russia’s uber-rich now wield, however, is doubtful.

A few hours after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, a televised meeting he held in the Kremlin with top industrialists and entrepreneurs showed how the dynamics had changed: Putin simply told them he had no choice but to invade.

Despite the harsh consequences to their wealth that the tycoons could expect from the war, they had to accept it; the power was his, not theirs.

THE ORIGINAL OLIGARCHS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, astute businessmen who had already begun building operations as government controls loosened under Mikhail Gorbachev’s “perestroika” reform policies took advantage of the privatizing of state industries to quickly establish vast holdings.

Fast-talking mathematician Boris Berezovsky epitomized the breed, becoming the largest dealer for Russia’s largest automaker and managing to buy the vehicles at a loss to the manufacturer. He took over the management of the Sibneft oil company, the national airline Aeroflot and gained control of Russia’s biggest TV channel, then known as ORT.

Somewhat less-colorful than Berezovsky but still prominent figures from the era included media mogul Vladimir Gusinsky, whose NTV channel made him highly influential, and oil tycoons Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Roman Abramovich.

PUTIN’S NEW DEAL

Upon taking office, Putin was well aware of the widespread resentment ordinary Russians felt for the ultra-wealthy who thrived while millions struggled through the economic changes. In the summer of 2000, Putin met in the Kremlin with about two dozen of the men regarded as the top oligarchs. The meeting was closed, but reports later said he made them a sternly clear deal: Stay out of politics and your wealth won’t be touched.

“The guarantee ... was that all the riches amassed before his presidency could be kept by their owners, and this has never changed,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace analyst Alexandra Prokopenko wrote in a commentary this year. “Loyalty is what Putin values above all else.”

By then, Berezovsky had already begun criticizing Putin. Within months, he left Russia for the United Kingdom and was granted asylum in 2003. Ten years later, he was found dead in his home; a disputed post-mortem examination said he appeared to have hanged himself.

Gusinsky, whose media holdings were critical of Putin and even satirized him, was hauled into jail amid an investigation of misappropriated funds; within weeks, he agreed to sell his holdings to an arm of Russia’s state natural gas monopoly, and he left the country.

Khodorkovsky, regarded as Russia’s richest man at the time, lasted longer, establishing the Open Society reformist group and showing increased political ambitions. But he was arrested in 2003 when special forces stormed onto his private plane and spent a decade in prison on convictions of tax evasion and embezzlement before Putin pardoned him and he left Russia.

Putin tolerated the 2012 presidential run against him by Mikhail Prokhorov, who made a fortune in metals, but the bid was widely seen as a Kremlin-supported red herring aimed at creating the impression of genuine political pluralism in Russia.

THE OLIGARCHS’ FUTURE

Despite the blows to their assets as a result of the Ukraine war, most of Russia’s ultra-wealthy have

stayed quiet about the conflict or offered only mild, token criticism.

Banking and brewing entrepreneur Oleg Tinkov was a rare exception, denouncing the war and calling its supporters "morons." He left the country in late 2022 and later renounced his citizenship.

Mikhail Fridman, a co-founder of Russia's largest private bank, called the war a tragedy and for the "bloodshed" to end. He holds Israeli citizenship and had lived in Britain, but reportedly returned to Moscow after fighting between Israel and Hamas began.

"Even as the elites grumble, they continue to show loyalty," Prokopenko wrote.

But she and other analysts suggest that loyalty had not been enough for Putin and that he wants to create a new cadre of hugely wealthy figures who are beholden to him by distributing the assets that the state has seized from foreign companies exiting Russia and through invalidating the privatizations from the 1990s.

Analyst Nikolai Petrov of Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs wrote that Russia is engaged in deprivatization "intended to redistribute wealth to a new generation of less-powerful individuals and shore up the president's own position."

"A new group of quasi-owner state oligarchs is being created, with wealth and control redistributed from the 'old nobles' to the new," he said.

A court filing gives a rare look inside the FBI seizure of a lawmaker's phone in 2020 election probe

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Just how hard did some Republican members of Congress work to keep President Donald Trump in office after his 2020 election loss? A court case is providing a few tantalizing clues.

Snippets and short summaries of texts and emails sent by Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, a top Trump ally, have emerged publicly for the first time as part of a court filing that was unsealed — perhaps inadvertently — by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., as part of a legal battle with federal prosecutors.

The messages reveal more about what investigators want to know, what actions Perry took in the weeks after the election and where Perry may fit in the web of Trump loyalists who were central to his bid to remain in power.

It was Perry's efforts to elevate Jeffrey Clark to Trump's acting attorney general — and likely reverse the Department of Justice's stance that it had found no evidence of widespread voting fraud that would change the election — that have made him a figure of interest to federal prosecutors.

Perry, in the past, has said he merely "obliged" Trump's request that he be introduced to Clark.

But the messages suggest that Perry was a key ally for Clark, providing encouragement as he sought to win Trump's favor. At one point Perry told a nervous Clark that "you are the man" and seemingly helped him prep for an important meeting and secure a higher security clearance.

The court filing with Perry's messages was unsealed last week — then resealed in a move the court has yet to explain. Copies of the filing were downloaded and posted online by news organizations and others.

Perry's cellphone was seized by federal authorities last year as part of the investigation into attempts to subvert the results of the 2020 election and block the transfer of power to Democrat Joe Biden.

Details of the case have remained largely secret. But the filing offered new details about the legal reasoning and arguments in the case that some observers found revealing.

"I would say we learned a great deal from that," said Grayson Clary, a staff attorney at the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, which has pressed for transparency in the case.

What more information, exactly, will emerge from the seizure of Perry's cellphone remains to be seen.

Judges continue to weigh which of Perry's hundreds of texts and emails are constitutionally protected by Perry's status as a member of Congress, and which of them are fair game for the FBI because they fell outside his duties as a member of the legislative branch.

Congressional inquiries have shown that Perry's efforts to promote Clark came as Trump pressured

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members of the Department of Justice to challenge the 2020 election. At the time, Perry was also pressing Justice Department officials to investigate a variety of election fraud claims in Pennsylvania — claims that officials and the courts dismissed as baseless.

In one text exchange on Dec. 30, Perry texted Clark that Trump “seems very happy with your response. I read it just as you dictated,” the unsealed-then-resealed court filing said.

Clark responded, “I’m praying. This makes me quite nervous. And wonder if I’m worthy or ready.” Perry responded, “You are the man. I have confirmed it. God does what he does for a reason.”

The two then discussed when Trump would “pull the trigger on something new” and make an “absolute decision,” the court filing said.

Perry later prepped Clark for a meeting with the director of national intelligence and suggested he knew Trump had moved to boost Clark’s security clearance.

“POTUS is giving you a presidential security clearance,” Perry told Clark in a text.

At the time, Clark was the assistant attorney general of the Environment and Natural Resources Division and served as the acting head of the Civil Division.

Weeks before, Attorney General William Barr had refuted Trump’s campaign of baseless lies about election fraud, telling The Associated Press that the Justice Department had uncovered nothing that could change the outcome of the 2020 election.

But, by Christmas, Barr had resigned and Trump was searching for a like-minded successor to use the Department of Justice to help stall the certification of the election.

To that end, Clark had drafted a letter that he suggested sending to Georgia saying the Department of Justice had “identified significant concerns that may have impacted the outcome of the election in multiple states, including the state of Georgia,” according to the August indictment in that state accusing Trump, Clark and 17 others of trying illegally to keep him in power.

Top department officials refused to sign it or send the letter, prosecutors said, and the showdown over Clark’s plan brought the Justice Department to the brink of crisis.

In a contentious meeting on Jan. 3, 2021 in the Oval Office, Trump toyed with elevating Clark to acting attorney general, but backed down after he was told that it would result in mass resignations at the Justice Department and his own White House counsel’s office.

Clark is now described in the federal indictment of Trump as one of six unnamed and unindicted co-conspirators in an effort to illegally subvert the 2020 election.

Perry has not been charged with a crime and has said investigators told his attorneys that he is not the target of the investigation. Meanwhile, Perry was one of four House Republicans who were referred to the House Ethics committee after they refused to cooperate with subpoenas from the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Amid it all, Perry’s influence in Congress has since grown.

He is now the chairman of the Freedom Caucus, a hardline faction of conservatives that exerts outsize influence on the GOP majority. Several members of the group were instrumental in the ouster of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy this fall, and its members remain closely aligned with Trump.

Perry is also the only sitting member of Congress whose cellphone was seized by the FBI in the 2020 election investigation.

Perry’s lawyer called the court’s unsealing “unfortunate” and argued that the communications should be constitutionally protected from release.

“The communications reflect his efforts to understand real-time information about the 2020 election,” Perry’s lawyer, John Rowley, said in a statement. “They were confidential and intended to address critical business before Congress in service of his constituents.”

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Today in History: December 7, Japan attacks Pearl Harbor

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 7, the 341st day of 2023. There are 24 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an air raid on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as well as targets in Malaya, Hong Kong, Guam, the Philippines and Wake Island; the United States declared war against Japan the next day.

On this date:

In 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1796, electors chose John Adams to be the second president of the United States.

In 1917, during World War I, the United States declared war on Austria-Hungary.

In 1963, during the Army-Navy game, videotaped instant replay was used for the first time in a live sports telecast.

In 1972, America's last moon mission to date was launched as Apollo 17 blasted off from Cape Canaveral.

In 1982, convicted murderer Charlie Brooks Jr. became the first U.S. prisoner to be executed by injection, at a prison in Huntsville, Texas.

In 1988, a major earthquake in the Soviet Union devastated northern Armenia; official estimates put the death toll at 25-thousand.

In 2001, Taliban forces abandoned their last bastion in Afghanistan, fleeing the southern city of Kandahar.

In 2004, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeyeh) was sworn in as Afghanistan's first popularly elected president.

In 2017, Democratic Sen. Al Franken said he would resign after a series of sexual harassment allegations.

In 2018, James Alex Fields Jr., who drove his car into counterprotesters at a 2017 white nationalist rally in Virginia, was convicted of first-degree murder.

In 2020, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Charles "Chuck" Yeager, the World War II fighter pilot ace and quintessential test pilot who in 1947 became the first person to fly faster than sound, died at 97.

In 2022, Aaron Judge signed a nine-year, \$360 million contract – baseball's biggest free agent deal in history to that point – to remain with the New York Yankees.

Today's Birthdays: Linguist and political philosopher Noam Chomsky is 95. Bluegrass singer Bobby Osborne is 92. Actor Ellen Burstyn is 91. Broadcast journalist Carole Simpson is 83. Baseball Hall of Famer Johnny Bench is 76. Actor-director-producer James Keach is 76. Country singer Gary Morris is 75. Singer-songwriter Tom Waits is 74. Sen. Susan M. Collins, R-Maine, is 71. Basketball Hall of Famer Larry Bird is 67. Actor Priscilla Barnes is 66. Former "Tonight Show" announcer Edd Hall is 65. Rock musician Tim Butler (The Psychedelic Furs) is 65. Actor Patrick Fabian is 59. Actor Jeffrey Wright is 58. Actor C. Thomas Howell is 57. Actor Kimberly Hébert Gregory (TV: "Kevin (Probably) Saves the World") is 51. Producer-director Jason Winer is 51. Former NFL player Terrell Owens is 50. Rapper-producer Kon Artis is 49. Pop singer Nicole Appleton (All Saints) is 48. Latin singer Frankie J is 47. Country singer Sunny Sweeney is 47. Actor Chris Chalk is 46. Actor Shiri Appleby is 45. Pop-rock singer/celebrity judge Sara Bareilles (bah-REHL'-es) is 44. Actor Jennifer Carpenter is 44. Actor Jack Huston is 41. MLB first baseman Pete Alonso is 29.