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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. Elementary Basketball Tournament in Groton

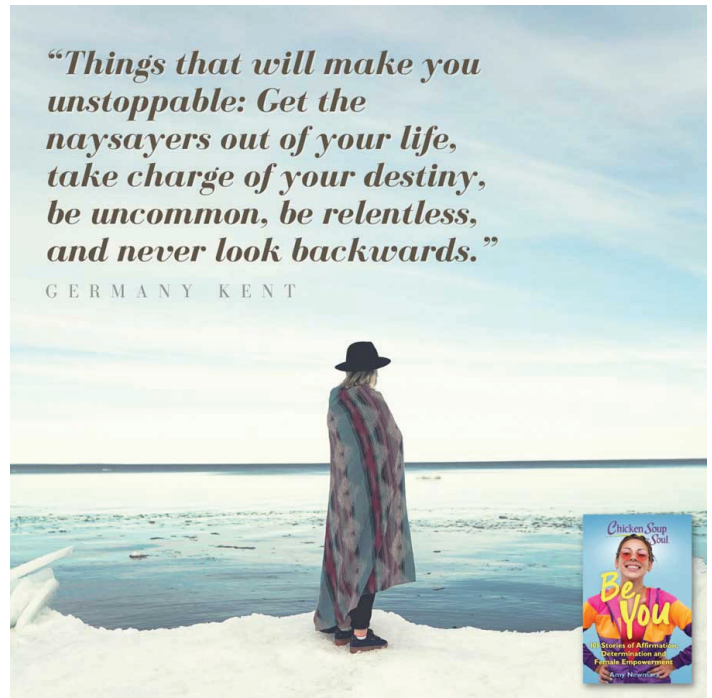
Sunday, Dec. 10

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; choir, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: worship at St. John's 9 a.m., worship at Zion 11 a.m., Sunday school 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship with communion; Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school Christmas program practice, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; PEO meeting

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



"Things that will make you unstoppable: Get the naysayers out of your life, take charge of your destiny, be uncommon, be relentless, and never look backwards."

GERMANY KENT

(outside group), 7 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Monday, Dec. 11

Senior Menu: Hot turkey combo, mashed potatoes with gravy, 7-layer salad, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Boys JV Wrestling Jamboree at Madison, 5 p.m.

Boys Junior High Wrestling at Webster, 4:30 p.m.

Junior High Girls Basketball at Sisseton, 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m.

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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HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY!



Please join us for a birthday party in honor of
Elda Stange

Saturday, Dec. 9
1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran Church
308 N. 2nd St., Groton

RSVP Text/Call Connie Rose at
804-301-7480

If unable to attend, please send greetings to:
Elda Stange, PO Box 305, Groton, SD 57445

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!**

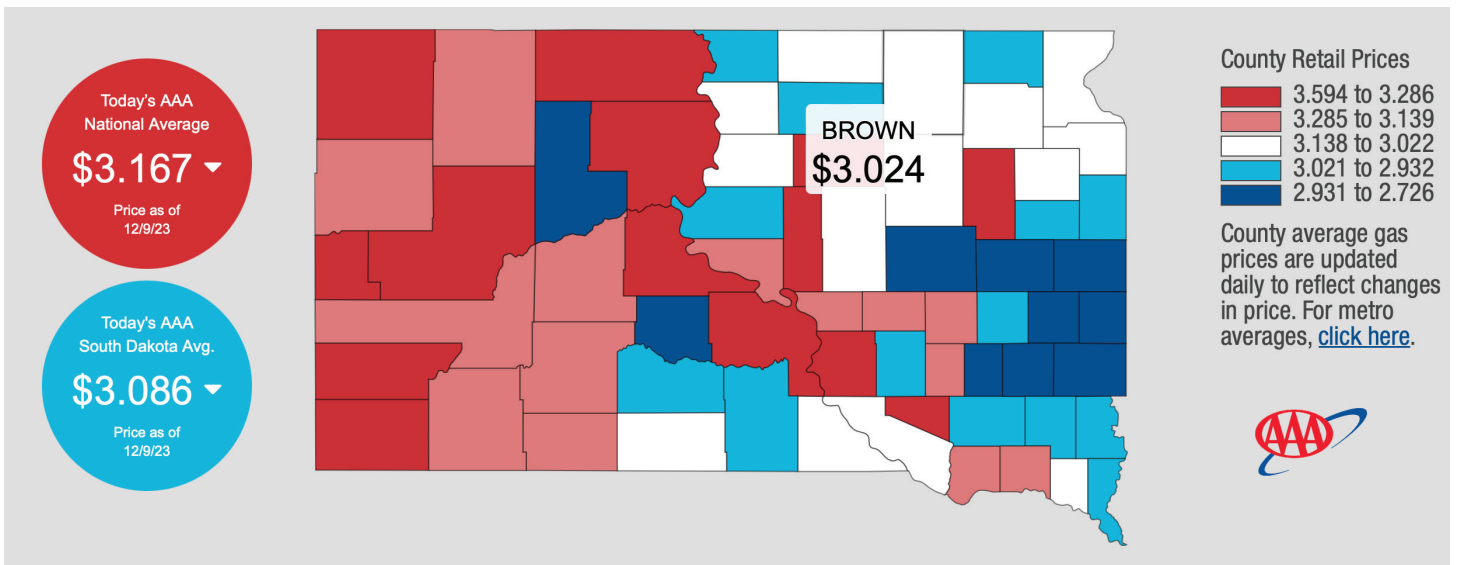
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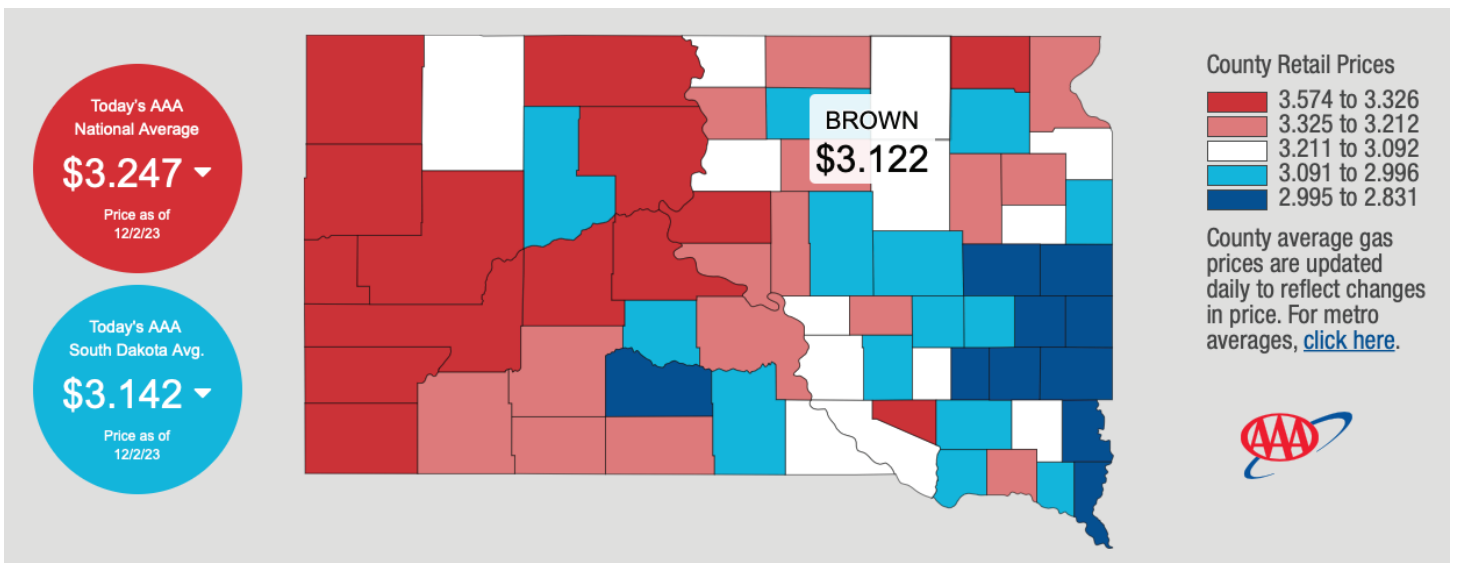
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.086	\$3.254	\$3.735	\$3.914
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.097	\$3.264	\$3.775	\$3.936
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.142	\$3.302	\$3.791	\$4.019
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.347	\$3.511	\$4.001	\$4.314
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.220	\$3.405	\$3.879	\$4.587

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



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'TIS THE
SEASON TO
SHOP LOCAL

GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce



GDILIVE.COM

Groton Area
Tigers
GT

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

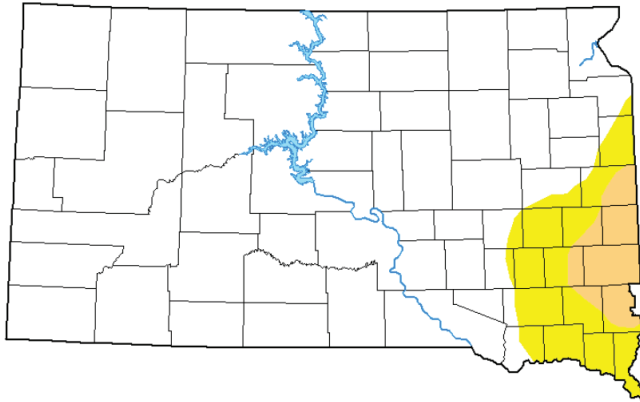
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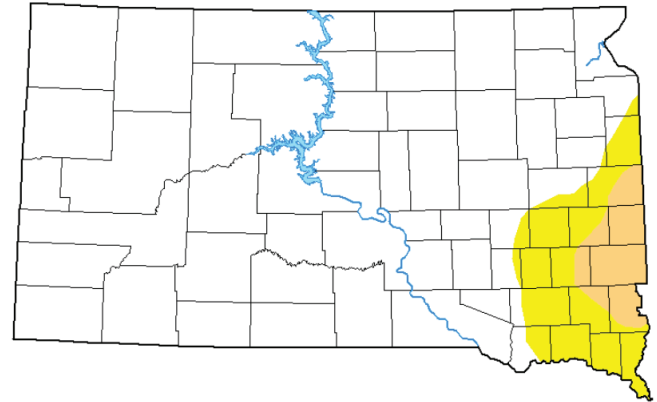
Drought Classification

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

Drought Monitor



December 5



November 28

On this week's map, some widespread one-category improvements were made across southeastern Kansas in response to precipitation during the past 30-60 days. According to the USGS, streamflow levels in the southeastern and east-central part of the state are normal to above normal. Conversely, numerous stream gauges are reporting much below-normal flows (< 10th percentile) in the central part of the state. In the Dakotas, conditions on the map remained status quo. In terms of snowpack conditions, the NWS NOHRSC reports the Upper Midwest Region (which includes the Dakotas, eastern Montana, and northeastern Wyoming) is currently 4.8% covered by snow with a maximum depth of 10 inches. Average temperatures for the week were generally above normal (2 to 10+ degrees F) with the greatest departures observed in the Dakotas. Today (12/5), high temperatures in North Dakota are expected to reach near 60 degrees F.

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Take Down The Huskies in Overtime

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University women's basketball team rallied back forcing overtime versus St. Cloud State Friday evening. The Wolves took control in the OT period out-scoring the Huskies 16-8 for their third league victory of the season.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 67, SCSU 59

Records: NSU 7-2 (3-0 NSIC), SCSU 5-2 (2-1 NSIC)

Attendance: 2023

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State tallied 14 points in the first quarter, eight in the second, ten in the third, 19 in the fourth, and 16 in overtime

The Wolves grabbed 41 rebounds off the glass and added four blocks and nine assists

NSU notched 32 points in the paint, nine second chance points and eight points off the bench, shooting 37.9% from the floor, 18.8% from the 3-point line, and 87.0% from the foul line

The Huskies shot 35.5% from the floor, 31.3% from the 3-point line, and 90.9% from the foul line

Rianna Fillipi led the Wolves offense with 22 points and notched four assists

In addition, Fillipi was the only Wolf to record multiple 3-pointers with two in the win and drained 4-of-4 from the foul line in crucial game moments

Madelyn Bragg was second on the team with 18 points, shooting 53.8% from the floor, and adding a team leading three blocks

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Rianna Fillipi: 22 points, 4 assists

Madelyn Bragg: 18 points, 53.8 field goal %, 5 rebounds, 3 blocks

Alayna Benike: 9 points, 8 rebounds, 2 assists

UP NEXT

Northern State is back in action to finish their home stretch of 2023 against Bemidji State. Tip-off time is set for 6 p.m. on Saturday from Wachs Arena. Join NSU for holiday hoops with free youth admission and free Santa photos. South Dakota Beef is the game sponsor and will give away a pair of beef bundles in addition to a jerky toss. For full game promotions visit nsuwolves.com/promotions.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Career Highs Abound in the Wolves Victory over the Huskies

Aberdeen, S.D. – A pair of career highs and double-double for Jackson Moni propelled the Northern State University men's basketball team past St. Cloud State Friday evening. The 6-point victory moved the Wolves to 2-1 in Northern Sun action.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 83, SCSU 77

Records: NSU 4-5 (2-1 NSIC), SCSU 4-3 (1-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 2292

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves led 41-35 at the half and that 6-point lead held as each team tallied 42 points in the second. Northern shot a game high 43.6% from the floor and 46.9% from the 3-point line with 15 made from beyond the arc.

Despite a one rebound tilt in favor of the Huskies, Northern grabbed a game leading 11 second chance points off eight offensive boards.

In total, the Wolves recorded 37 rebounds, ten assists, six blocks, and six steals.

They scored 16 points in the paint, 14 points off turnovers, and six points off the bench in the win.

Jackson Moni and Josh Dilling led the team scoring 38 and 24 points respectively, with Moni adding a career high 16 rebounds.

The pair shot over 50.0% from the floor and combined for 12 of the team's 15 made 3-pointers.

Michael Nhial led the team with a career high four steals and hit the glass for nine rebounds.

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Jackson Moni: 38 points (career high), 16 rebounds (career high), 50.0 field goal%, 4 assists, 3 blocks

Josh Dilling: 24 points, 72.7 field goal%, 4 rebounds, 3 assists

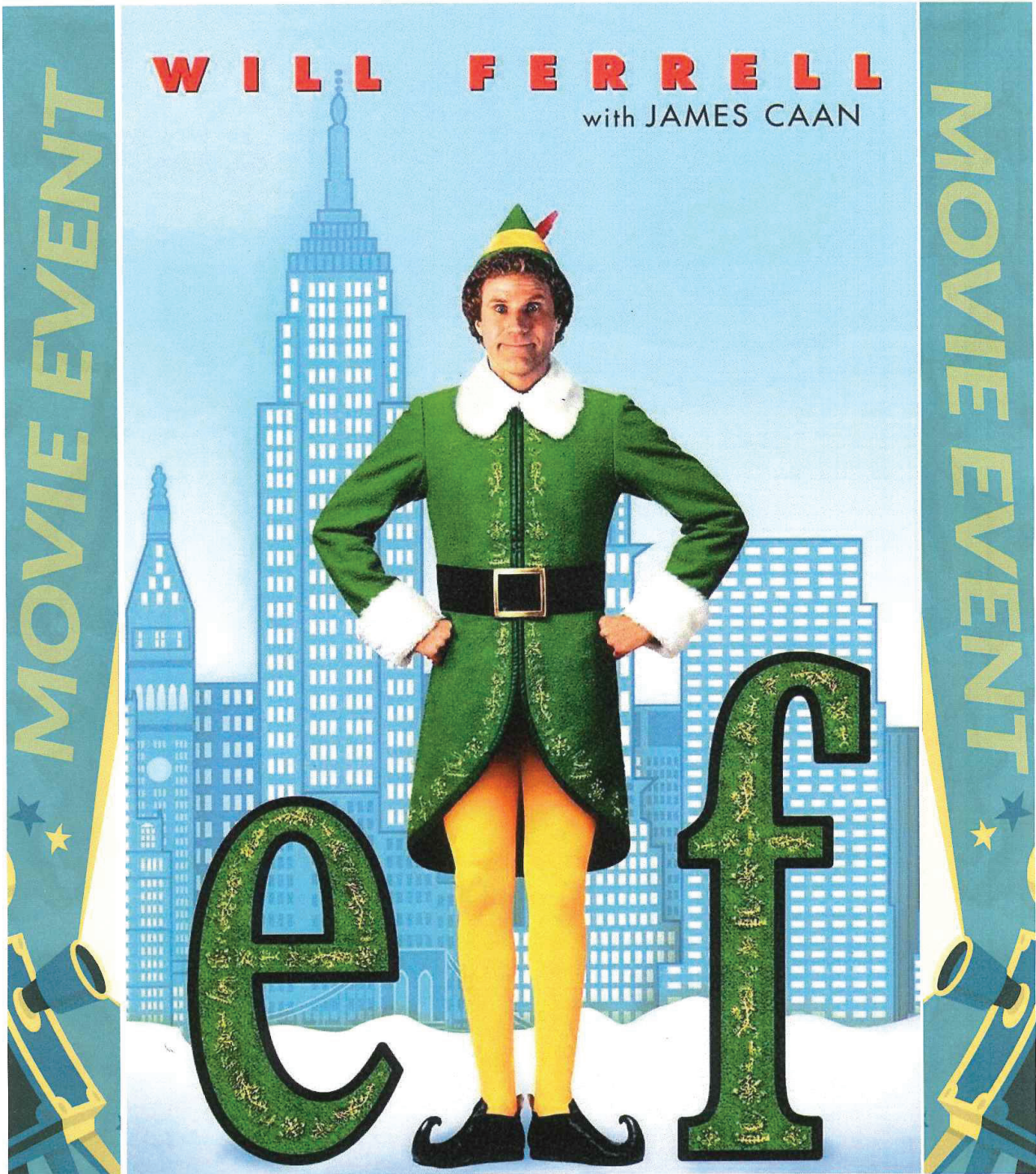
Michael Nhial: 9 rebounds, 6 points, 4 steals

UP NEXT

The Wolves are right back in action this afternoon against Bemidji State. Tip-off time is set for 4 p.m. from Wachs Arena. Join NSU for holiday hoops with free youth admission and free Santa photos. South Dakota Beef is the game sponsor and will giveaway a pair of beef bundles in addition to a jerky toss. For full game promotions visit nsuwolves.com/promotions.

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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!

Grants to support out-of-school time learning

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Education is supporting out-of-school time programs statewide. Such programs are encouraged to submit a Notice of Intent to Apply for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) grants.

The learning centers will provide academic enrichment opportunities and activities during afterschool and summer programs to students from high-poverty and low-performing schools. Grant award amounts range from \$50,000 to \$300,000 per year. The length of a grant is five years.

Funding comes from the federal government in the form of formula grants to the states. Programs that provide care for students outside of the normal school day are encouraged to apply.

The grant application will be online. Applicants must first submit a Notice of Intent to Apply to the South Dakota Department of Education by Jan. 31, 2024. Applicants will then receive the information needed to access the online system. The deadline for the full application is March 22, 2024.

While funds are often awarded to schools, other organizations are also eligible to apply. The grants must specifically support programs offered outside of regular school hours.

The Notice of Intent to Apply and guidelines for filling out the application are now available and can be found at <https://doe.sd.gov/21CCLC/>.

Queen of Hearts goes out

Jackie Krueger was the lucky winner Thursday night of half of the \$40,176 jackpot in Groton's Queen of Hearts. Roger Overacker drew Krueger's name from the 715 tickets that were sold. She picked lucky 13 and that was the Queen of Hearts. This was the 26th week of this board.

According to Brenda Waage, she announced on the Facebook live that they were not sure if there was going to be another game. The boards of the Olive Grove Golf Course and the Groton Amercian Legion Post #39 will be making a decision about it.

GHS Boys and Girls Basketball

Varsity teams lose to Hamlin, sub-varsity teams win

Hamlin's varsity basketball teams posted a pair of wins Friday in games played in Groton. Hamlin rallied to come from behind to win the girls game, 42-39. Hamlin won the boys game, 58-36.

In the girls game, Groton Area had a 16-13 first quarter lead and a 21-13 lead at halftime. The Chargers outscored Groton Area, 20-10, in the third quarter to take a 33-31 lead into the fourth quarter. The game was tied two times down the stretch and the Tigers had a 39-36 lead with 1:28 left, but two turnovers down the stretch turned into points for Hamlin as the Chargers went on for the 42-39 win.

Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with 15 points, and she had two rebounds. Kennedy Hansen had eight points, two rebounds, four assists and three steals. Brooklyn Hansen had six points, four rebounds, one assist, one steal and one block. Rylee Dunker had six points, five rebounds, four steals and one block. Jaedyn Penning had four points, six rebounds and two assists. Jerica Locke had one rebound and four assists. Faith Traphagen had one rebound and Laila Roberts and one assist and one steal. Taryn Traphagen had one block.

Groton Area made five of 25 three-pointers for 20 percent, nine of 19 two-pointers for 47 percent, made both free throws, had 21 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 12 assists, nine steals, 13 team fouls and three blocks.

Addison Neuendorf led the Chargers with 18 points while Marissa Bawdon had 13, Musonda Kabwe and Emma Schultz each had five points and Shayne Fritz had one free throw. The Chargers made 14 of 39 field goals for 36 percent, six of 10 free throws for 60 percent, and 11 turnovers and six team fouls.

Hamlin led at the quarterstops at 12-8, 26-15 and 42-28 en route to a 58-36 win in the boys varsity game. Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 17 points followed by Ryder Johnson with six, Jacob Zak had four, Logan Ringgenberg three and scoring two points apiece were Keegen Tracy, Teylor Diegel and Gage Sippel.

Easton Neuendorf led the Chargers with 23 points followed by Tyson Stevenson with 11, Evan Stormo had eight, Jackson Wadsworth and Dawson Noem each had six points and Zac VanMeeteren had four points.

Groton Area made 12 of 40 field goals for 30 percent while Hamlin was 21 of 48 for 44 percent. From the line, Groton Area made 11 of 14 free throws for 78 percent off of Hamlin's 17 team fouls. Hamlin made 13 of 21 free throws for 62 percent off of Groton Area's 22 team fouls. Groton Area had 15 turnovers in the first half and just two in the second half. Hamlin had seven turnovers in the game.

Both of those games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric and Rix Farms/R&M Farms. Shane Clark provided the play-by-play of the girls game.

Groton Area won both junior varsity games with the boys winning, 50-24, and the girls winning, 35-18.

Scoring for Groton Area in the boys game were Teylor Diegel with 13, scoring six points each were Blake Pauli, Karson Zak, Logan Warrington, Gage Sippel and Easton Weber; Kassen Keough had four points and Jayden Schwan had three points. Hamlin was led by Boden Stevenson with 19 points.

Scoring in the girls game were Mia Crank with eight points while Faith Traphagen had five, McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen and Talli Wright each had four points and Lilia Roberts and Ashlynn Warrington each had two points. Hamlin was led by Paxton Neudendorf with six points.

Both junior varsity games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Ed and Connie Stauch and Bob and Vicki Walter. Shane Clark provided the play-by-play of the girls game.

Groton Area won the boys C game, 38-34. Scoring for Groton Area: Karson Zak 4, Jayden Schwan 10, Easton Weber 6, Logan Warrington 10, Ethan Kroll 2, Jace Johnson 2, and Keegan Harry 4.

Groton Area girls won the C game, 32-21. Scoring for Groton Area: McKenna Tietz 8, Emerlee Jones 4, Kella Tracy 10, Ashlynn Warrington 2, Teegan Hanten 2, Estella Sanchez 2, Brenna Imrie 2, and Sydney Locke 2.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

'Hope for the best': Experience down, turnover up in SD law enforcement

Cities offer sabbaticals and other enticements as rural areas struggle to get applicants

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 8, 2023 3:48 PM

The Corson County Sheriff's Office in north-central South Dakota is constantly cycling through open positions.

The five-man agency has about two open spots a year and struggled to get applications for the latest position, said Sheriff Alan Dale. In years prior, he'd get about a dozen applicants for one position and fill it quickly.

The shift has happened just in the last five or so years and has affected departments across the state and country, law enforcement officials say. Fewer people are applying for jobs. Burnout and turnover is high, meaning less experienced officers are filling public safety roles.

While staffing problems aren't as concerning as other parts of the country, officials are worried the trend is here to stay.

All of that can lead to the "degradation of a community," said Steve Allender, former mayor of Rapid City, former Rapid City police chief and member of the South Dakota Law Enforcement Standards and Training Commission.

"In a time where business is up, we have the least experienced staff and smallest staff per capita that we've probably ever had," Allender said. "That's a bad recipe."

While 2022 crime reports were comparable to years prior, crime is generally up in South Dakota over the last two decades, including murder, rape, simple and aggravated assault, theft from a motor vehicle, drug violations and vandalism. Arson and burglary numbers are lower than 2000 numbers.

Local departments are trying to find ways to recruit and retain officers and deputies. But what can be done is limited by funding and resources, with cities like Sioux Falls and Rapid City better off than rural areas of the state.

Ensuring standards: 'insurance to the taxpayers'

When there are fewer applicants to choose from and more turnover in departments, it creates apprehension, said Andy Howe, Clay County sheriff and member of the South Dakota Law Enforcement Standards and Training Commission.

"Being frank, some agencies don't have a field officer to give new hires 10 to 16 weeks of training. Who will train them when there's just one other officer?" Howe said. "At some point they'll just hand them the car keys and hope for the best."

It's something that worries Staci Ackerman as well, who serves as the executive director of the South Dakota Sheriffs' Association.

"We have safeguards to deal with individuals who shouldn't be in law enforcement," Ackerman said. "If we start getting to the bottom of the barrel — the people we don't want or wouldn't consider applying previously — what would that do to our landscape? We're not there yet, but the applicant pool is getting pretty low."

Officers in South Dakota must complete 13 weeks of basic training in Pierre within their first year unless they have reciprocity from another state or educational institution. Additionally, officers must have a

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minimum amount of training in use of force, domestic violence, mental illness and firearms before they hit the streets. The state requires officers receive a minimum of 40 hours of training every two years.

A couple of years ago, it took Howe a full year to fill a deputy position. That's because law enforcement officers in the state are held to high standards, he said. He'd hire a person, put them through psychological evaluations or find background issues and let the person go.

It's not uncommon to have a handful of applicants yet not hire any of them, he added.

"I believe it's appropriate law enforcement police ourselves and only get good people," Howe said. "We're going to hold out for the good applicants. You work short-handed for a lot longer; you don't just hire the first person through the door."

In Rapid City and Sioux Falls, new police officers won't get on the street by themselves for nearly a year.

"They're run through the ringer, tested and evaluated in every possible way," Allender said. "That's good, it's insurance to the taxpayers. Some departments have had to drop their standards, and I think that creates a bit of liability for the taxpayer."

Pennsylvania lawmakers recently passed a bill lowering police academy fitness requirements, and Illinois department chiefs admitted in a survey they were lowering standards for education and criminal records to achieve bare minimum staffing, according to The Washington Post.

The South Dakota Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission amended its rules earlier this year to allow someone younger than 21 to be an officer in the state — something officials say wouldn't have been considered years ago.

Current shortage isn't unique

When Sioux Falls Police Chief John Thum applied as an entry-level patrol officer in 2005, there were roughly 600 applicants for 16 positions, he recalled.

"Now we don't see that many applicants a year, maybe even a couple of years," Thum said.

Between 2017 and 2021, applicants dropped to between 350 to 400 a year for an average of 28 positions a year. Last year there were just under 300 applicants.

While applications have ticked back up to end the year around 400 this year, according to the department, those numbers are significantly lower than they were a decade ago.

Thum connects it to the political climate across the country, especially after Minneapolis police officers killed George Floyd with unreasonable force during an arrest.

Thum recalled a similar drop in application numbers after 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, and he assumes there was a similar impact after Rodney King was severely beaten by Los Angeles police officers during his arrest in 1991.

"You've got that pendulum swinging back and forth. We're hoping the pendulum will swing back," Thum said. "We're doing better than some of our national competitors, but we feel the strain of not being able to reach that full staff number or get close to it."

Law enforcement isn't the only industry to take a hit in recruitment and retention, Thum said. The pandemic stressed several professions, and they're struggling to rebuild their workforce — especially while the state grapples with record low unemployment rates.

"I think we as a society have to understand when it comes to not only law enforcement but other professions that have taken a beating — teaching and nursing, for example — that we have to support these professions in a variety of ways to keep them desirable for young people to stay in them," Thum said.

Recruitment and retention in urban departments

All it took to keep officers in the department decades ago was a pension plan, officials say. That's not cutting it anymore.

Most Sioux Falls police officers know their retirement date down to the day, and most will leave the profession shortly after. Ackerman said many law enforcement officers across the state retire right after they hit eligibility rather than working toward a promotion like they would years before.

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Departments used to abide by the "rule of 75" retirement plan, which meant officers were eligible for retirement when their years of service and age added up to 75. All law enforcement officers who earn retirement through the South Dakota Retirement System and were hired after 2017 reach retirement age at 57 no matter their years of service.

"For some, a retirement pension was the dangling carrot so to speak," Thum said. "Work enjoyment or workplace comfortability are becoming bigger drivers that we're seeing in this current generation."

Burnout is one of the main retention problems for law enforcement today, Ackerman said. Howe has seen the same with his department. Most of the deputies that have left under his watch in the last few years have left the field entirely rather than moving to another agency like he'd seen before.

The Sioux Falls Police Department has hired a wellness coordinator and therapy dog to combat burn-out. The department also implemented a \$5,000 bonus for officers who make it through their 15-month probationary period.

And as the state increases wages for its Highway Patrol troopers, other departments across the state have to compete with that and higher salaries in surrounding states, Thum said.

In Rapid City, the police department has retooled wages and benefits and added retention programs, including more paid time off, gym memberships and a sabbatical every few years. The city's public safety budget, which includes firefighters, accounts for a little over half of the city's entire budget.

"We're becoming a very expensive law enforcement entity," Allender said. "It's going up faster now than it has in the past."

Early evidence shows those programs are working though, Allender said. The department is hiring more and keeping people longer.

"We have early hope that it's working," he said, though he did add that sustaining such programs would come at the expense of other city services. "Public safety is a priority and it's a priority over and above many things the government does, so that's why it will perhaps result in changing some priority programs."

Efforts and limitations in rural South Dakota

Most departments across South Dakota can't offer sign-on bonuses or sabbaticals for officers.

"There's a financial component that really straps smaller communities because they simply don't have the budget or ability to pay what would be deemed a competitive wage," Thum said. "Some agencies in our state offer starting pay of over \$30 an hour, while others are still near \$18 or \$19 an hour, and that's a difficult hill for them to climb."

Starting officers in Corson County make about \$43,000 salaries (or \$20.67 an hour).

Rural departments used to be stepping stones for officers to gain experience and move on to larger agencies like Rapid City or Sioux Falls. Allender started with the Belle Fourche Police Department before transferring to Rapid City.

But with fewer applicants in those cities, that means almost nothing for rural applications, Ackerman said.

"Why would you want to subject yourself to the traumas of law enforcement when you could go to work for almost that same amount of money at McDonald's and not carry that home with you?" Ackerman said.

Most sheriff's offices across South Dakota have departments of five or fewer yet cover thousands of square miles in their jurisdiction, Ackerman said. She related a situation in McPherson County, where the sheriff's department in Leola is 35 miles from the county's most populated city of Eureka. One of the deputies was on maternity leave and another was on duty with the National Guard, so it was just the sheriff and the other deputy available.

"If that other deputy was unavailable and Eureka had a major call for service, the sheriff would be 35 miles away. How long would that take to respond?" Ackerman said.

For Corson County, the closest jail is about four hours away in Sturgis, and a deputy transports someone to jail a couple of times a week, Dale said. At least 80% of Corson County's inmates are shipped to Sturgis, because other, closer jails are full.

"A DUI stop now is about a 10-hour deal. We operate with one to two officers a shift. If you're transporting to jail, you're looking at eight to nine hours being out of the county. If another call comes in, the

next closest person is at home in bed but you're waking them up to handle the situation. That happens pretty frequently."

Compounding Dale's workload, Corson County has started to respond to more calls on the Standing Rock Reservation because the Bureau of Indian Affairs isn't properly staffed and responding to calls. The Oglala Sioux Tribe sued the federal government in 2022 over police staffing on the reservation, and recently declared a state of emergency due to high rates of homicide, suicide, drug offenses, robbery, rape, aggravated assault, burglary and missing and murdered Indigenous women, according to tribal officials.

"The idea that an agency could function on one to two deputies like in South Dakota is unheard of elsewhere," Howe said.

To make up for the lack of manpower, Dale started a multijurisdictional task force in north-central South Dakota in 2018 made up of seven sheriff's offices and two police departments. The task force rotates operations in each jurisdiction twice a month, lending officers to a designated county to respond to traffic accidents, make arrests for drug or DUI offenses, make arrests for warrants, or search for missing people.

"It's a way for you to get law enforcement you need into your county that isn't costing the taxpayers of your county," Dale said. "We work together and reach a solution together. Everyone is learning all areas of the counties so they're familiar with it if we need to rely on other agencies for assistance."

'The way things are'

Thum is confident the pendulum will swing back toward better recruitment and retention trends for Sioux Falls and other departments across the state.

"However," he said, "we are also dealing with a different workforce."

When Thum joined the police force, he signed up "for the long haul" like other officers in his class. He picked a career and he stuck to it. But now, Thum sees newer generations trying out several jobs before landing in one for an extended period.

That means turnover is going to be higher than before if the trend sticks — and Howe fears that'll be the new normal.

"I think this is all bad, but it might be the way things are," he said.

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

Rounds, Manchin seek back pay for military officers affected by Tuberville holds

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 8, 2023 11:25 AM

Senators from South Dakota and West Virginia want hundreds of military officers to receive back pay after an Alabama senator held up their promotions for most of the year.

Mike Rounds, a South Dakota Republican, and Joe Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat, announced Friday the introduction of the Military Personnel Confirmation Restoration Act of 2023.

The bill comes after Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Alabama, ended holds he had placed on hundreds of military promotions in protest of a Pentagon abortion policy. The policy allows armed services members time off and travel reimbursement if they seek an abortion in a state where it remains legal.

On Tuesday, Tuberville said he would lift all of his holds except for a handful of four-star general nominees.

Rounds said Friday in a news release that he, like Tuberville, disagrees with the Pentagon policy and supports "a member of the Senate's right to hold any nomination."

But, Rounds added, "the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States of America should not be negatively impacted by political squabbles."

"I am pleased to introduce this bipartisan legislation with Senator Manchin to do the right thing and provide military officers and their families with the benefits they have earned for their decades of service

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and sacrifice," Rounds said.

The press release from Rounds included comments from Manchin, who focused on the affected service members and did not address the abortion policy or the right of senators to hold up nominations.

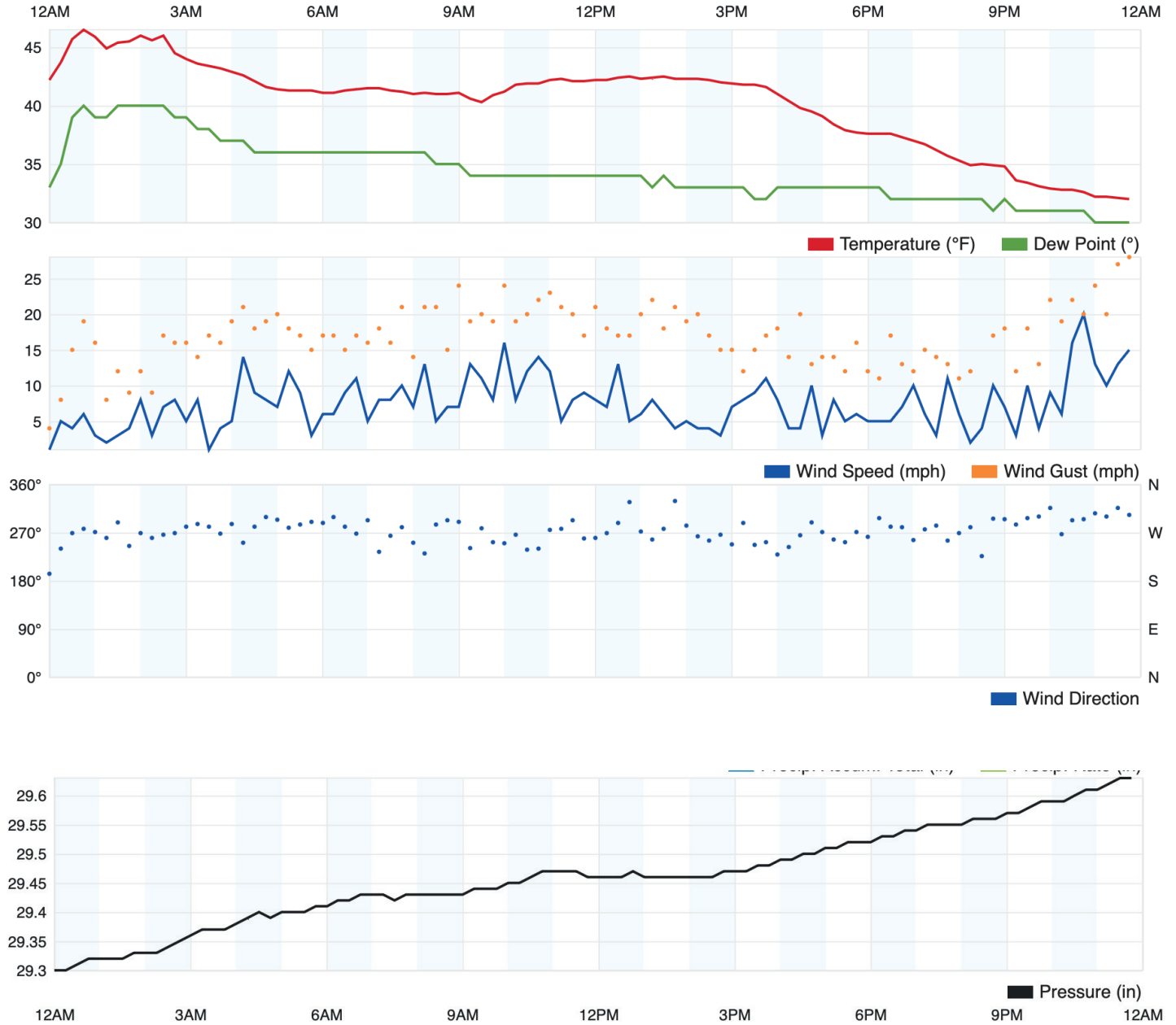
"These men and women are true American heroes and the least we can do in Congress is restore the benefits they have earned and deserve," Manchin said.

The bill co-sponsors include Tuberville. Other co-sponsors are Angus King, I-Maine; Joni Ernst, R-Iowa; Kirsten Gillibrand, D-New York; Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut; and Tim Kaine, D-Virginia.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Sat Dec 9	Sun Dec 10	Mon Dec 11	Tue Dec 12	Wed Dec 13	Thu Dec 14	Fri Dec 15
32°F	32°F	37°F	28°F	40°F	46°F	38°F
18°F	21°F	16°F	18°F	27°F	27°F	22°F
NNW	SW	SSW	NW	S	S	N
22 MPH	5 MPH	8 MPH	8 MPH	10 MPH	16 MPH	14 MPH
20%						



Winds & Timing Snow Departure

December 9, 2023

3:28 AM

	Timing Winds												Timing Precipitation																			
	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm		5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm					
Aberdeen	45	45	46	45	45	44	43	41	39	38	35	31	26	22	20	17	17	16	25%													
Britton	46	46	46	46	45	44	43	41	40	38	36	31	28	25	24	21	18	17	100%	75%	50%	30%										
Brookings	36	37	38	40	40	41	41	41	41	40	39	38	36	33	31	29	28	26	70%	65%	60%	45%	35%	25%								
Chamberlain	45	45	44	44	44	44	43	41	40	38	36	32	26	23	22	20	18	17	30%	20%												
Clark	40	43	45	45	45	45	45	44	41	40	38	35	32	30	28	26	23	22	90%	75%	60%	40%	30%									
Eagle Butte	47	46	45	45	46	44	43	41	40	38	35	31	26	24	24	24	22	20														
Ellendale	48	48	48	47	47	46	46	45	41	40	37	33	30	26	23	21	20	18	25%													
Eureka	46	46	45	45	45	44	44	43	40	38	36	31	28	24	22	21	18	16														
Gettysburg	48	48	46	47	47	47	46	45	43	40	38	35	29	26	23	21	20	18														
Huron	44	44	44	44	44	43	41	40	39	38	37	35	32	30	26	23	21	18														
Kennebec	48	47	47	46	46	46	45	45	44	41	39	35	29	25	24	22	21	20														
McIntosh	47	48	47	46	46	45	43	40	40	38	36	31	26	25	24	23	22	20														
Milbank	40	41	40	40	41	41	43	43	41	39	38	36	33	32	31	30	26	24	70%	70%	70%	70%	50%	30%								
Miller	45	45	45	45	44	43	41	41	39	37	36	33	28	28	25	23	23	21														
Mobridge	47	45	44	43	44	44	43	40	36	36	32	29	25	22	21	20	17	15														
Murdo	45	46	46	45	46	46	44	43	43	40	37	32	29	25	24	23	21	20														
Pierre	44	43	41	41	43	41	40	39	39	37	35	31	26	23	21	18	16	15														
Redfield	43	44	44	43	43	41	41	40	39	37	35	32	29	26	23	22	21	20	50%	35%												
Sisseton	44	44	44	45	45	45	45	44	41	40	39	36	33	32	31	28	26	23	85%	85%	80%	80%	55%	30%								
Watertown	38	41	41	41	43	43	44	44	43	40	39	37	33	32	31	28	26	25	70%	65%	55%	50%	35%									
Webster	45	46	47	46	46	46	46	46	45	44	41	38	35	32	31	29	25	24	90%	80%	70%	55%	40%	20%								
Wheaton	40	40	41	41	41	41	40	40	39	38	36	35	31	30	28	25	24	22	80%	85%	85%	85%	65%	40%								



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We will continue to see windy conditions through the day, though with the band of light snow gradually shifting into Minnesota and weakening around mid-day. Temperatures top out in the 30s.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 12:39 AM

Low Temp: 32 °F at 11:07 PM

Wind: 27 mph at 11:26 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 52 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 61 in 1939

Record Low:-27 in 1955

Average High: 31

Average Low: 10

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.18

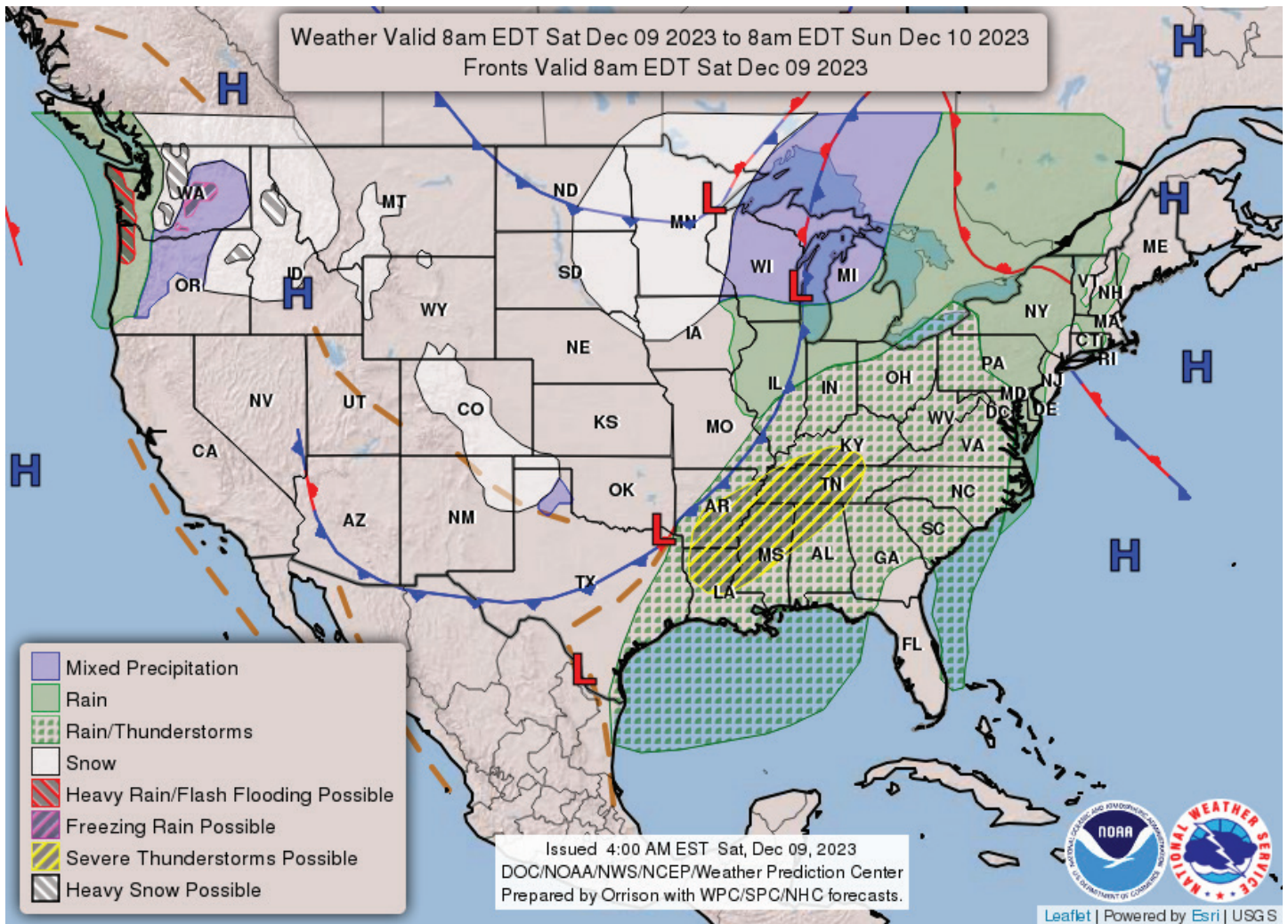
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.39

Precip Year to Date: 23.17

Sunset Tonight: 4:50:54 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:59:28 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 9, 1961: A snowstorm moved through the area and dropped 3 to 6 inches of snow east of the Missouri River and 1 to 3 inches to the west of the river from late afternoon on the 8th through late afternoon on the 9th. The storm was accompanied by high winds, blowing snow, icy highways, and temperatures falling to near zero. Three men were killed and one injured in a two-car crash near Watertown as snow and blowing snow sharply reduced visibilities. A skidding accident on a slippery highway near Winner resulted in an automobile fatality of one man. In a rural area near Vale, in Meade County, one man abandoned his stalled vehicle and was found the next day, frozen to death. 6 inches of snow fell at Sisseton and Wheaton, with 5 inches at Aberdeen and Watertown and 3 inches at Mobridge. Only an inch fell at Pierre.

1786 - A second great snowstorm in just five days brought another 15 inches of snow to Morristown NJ, on top of the eight inches which fell on the 7th and 8th, and the 18 inches which fell on the 4th and 5th. The total snowfall for the week was thus 41 inches. New Haven CT received 17 inches of new snow in the storm. Up to four feet of snow covered the ground in eastern Massachusetts following the storms. (9th-10th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A severe winter storm struck the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes Region. It produced 25 inches of snow and wind gusts to 78 mph at Buffalo NY. The storm produced 26 inches of snow at Vevay IND, with drifts fourteen feet high. By the 16th of the month people could walk across the frozen Ohio River from Vavey into Kentucky. (8th-9th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - The fifth storm in nine days kept the northwestern U.S. wet and windy. Winds along the coast of Washington gusted to 75 mph at Oceans Shores and at Hoquiam, and the northern and central coastal mountains of Oregon were drenched with three inches of rain in ten hours, flooding some rivers. Snowfall totals in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State ranged up to 36 inches in the Methow Valley. High winds in Oregon blew a tree onto a moving automobile killing three persons and injuring two others at Mill City. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter storm blanketed the Southern and Central Appalachians with up to ten inches of snow. Arctic air invaded the north central U.S. bringing subzero cold to Minnesota and North Dakota. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A strong storm produced wind gusts of 40 to 65 mph from the Alaska Peninsula to the North Gulf Coast of Alaska. Southeasterly winds gusted to 75 mph in the Anchorage hillside. Gusty winds associated with a strong cold front caused a power outage across much of the island of Hawaii. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

December 9, 2003: Although it never threatened land, a subtropical storm became Tropical Storm Peter approx. 700 miles WNW of the Cape Verde Islands. Combined with Tropical Storm Odette from earlier in the month, this is the first time since 1887 that two tropical storms formed in the Atlantic Basin in December.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CAN YOU SEE HIM NOW?

It was the very first Christmas that Jo Ann's church had a Nativity scene on the front lawn. Working anxiously, she kept arranging, then rearranging, the figures to make certain they could all be seen.

Finally, she sent her friend, Alice, to the edge of the lawn and asked, "How do they look?"

"Fine, they are all O.K.," came the answer.

Suddenly Jo Ann began to rearrange them once again. "What are you doing? I said they were fine," said Alice grumpily.

"Yes, I heard what you said," responded Jo Ann. "But I just want to make sure that Jesus is visible so all of the people can see Him!"

Often Santa gets more attention than our Savior does during these Holy Days. Children anxiously stand in line waiting their turn to ask for gifts and have their picture taken with him. Rarely, however, do children pose at the manger to have a picture taken with the Baby Jesus. Could it be that He is not visible to most people at Christmas? Do we make any effort at all to make Him visible? Is He lost in the pile of gifts? Is He hidden behind the tree?

Matthew wrote about a group of shepherds who said, "Let's go to Bethlehem...and see this wonderful thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about."

This "wonderful thing," Jesus, is what the world needs to see. Let's be certain He is always visible – especially in our lives!

Prayer: Lord, may we not allow Your Son to be hidden or to be placed behind the "false idols" that so many worship at Christmas. May we make Him visible! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."



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: 12.08.23

21 26 53 66 70 13

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

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 15 Hrs 37 Mins 45
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.08.23

26 28 31 33 37 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 52 Mins 45
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.06.23

17 19 20 21 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$82,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 52 Mins 45
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.06.23

3 23 27 67 68 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 21 Mins 45
DRAW: 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 16 Hrs 21 Mins 45
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 49, Rapid City Central 34
Arlington 58, Colman-Egan 35
Baltic 51, Beresford 32
Bennett County 35, Lead-Deadwood 30
Britton-Hecla 51, Tiospa Zina Tribal 46
Burke 46, Kimball/White Lake 43
Castlewood 38, Waubay/Summit 32
Crow Creek Tribal School 82, Flandreau Indian 27
Deubrook 47, DeSmet 46
Edgemont 30, New Underwood 24
Faith 45, Tiospaye Topa 21
Freeman 55, Viborg-Hurley 47
Great Plains Lutheran 49, St. Joseph Michigan Lutheran, Mich. 16
Hamlin 42, Groton Area 39
Harding County 53, Newell 14
Harrisburg 53, Yankton 30
Hay Springs, Neb. 37, Hot Springs 29
Hill City 47, Kadoka Area 29
Howard 42, Dell Rapids St. Mary 35
Lemmon High School 56, Timber Lake 23
Mitchell 42, Huron 38
Parkston 58, Tri-Valley 54
Rapid City Stevens 63, Pierre T F Riggs High School 35
Sioux Falls Christian 43, Lennox 29
Spearfish 57, Belle Fourche 48
St. Thomas More 47, Thunder Basin, Wyo. 28
Sully Buttes 54, North Central Co-Op 48
Tea Area 63, Dakota Valley 38
Wagner 58, Winner 44
Watertown 58, Brookings 48, OT

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 53, Rapid City Central 40
Aberdeen Roncalli 64, Redfield 25
Baltic 74, Beresford 38
Bridgewater-Emery 45, Corsica/Stickney 40
Canistota 56, Centerville 41
Castlewood 65, Waubay/Summit 51
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 79, Crazy Horse 60
Colman-Egan 64, Arlington 52
Crow Creek Tribal School 75, Flandreau Indian 14
Dakota Valley 68, Tea Area 58
DeSmet 62, Deubrook 49

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Dell Rapids 61, West Central 59, OT
Deuel 50, Florence-Henry 40
Ethan 50, Hanson 45
Flandreau 57, Chester 38
Great Plains Lutheran 71, St. Joseph Michigan Lutheran, Mich. 30
Hamlin 58, Groton Area 36
Harrisburg 55, Yankton 40
Hill City 75, Kadoka Area 59
Iroquois-Lake Preston 64, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 48
Lemmon High School 58, Timber Lake 54
McLaughlin 61, Herreid/Selby Area 42
Mitchell 60, Huron 48
Parkston 64, Tri-Valley 53
Rapid City Stevens 63, Pierre T F Riggs High School 35
Sioux Falls Christian 77, Lennox 53
Sioux Falls Lincoln High School 61, Sioux Falls Washington 32
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 71, Brandon Valley 54
Spearfish 60, Belle Fourche 22
St. Thomas More 47, Thunder Basin, Wyo. 12
Vermillion 76, South Sioux City, Neb. 33
Viborg-Hurley 64, Freeman 35
Watertown 58, Brookings 47
Waverly-South Shore 47, Wilmot 37
Winner 52, Wagner 46

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

Israel presses on with Gaza bombardments, including in areas where it told civilians to flee

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli warplanes struck parts of the Gaza Strip overnight into Saturday in relentless bombardments, including some of the dwindling slivers of land Palestinians had been told to evacuate to in the territory's south.

The latest strikes came a day after the United States vetoed a United Nations resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, despite it being backed by the vast majority of Security Council members and many other nations. The vote in the 15-member council was 13-1, with the United Kingdom abstaining.

"Attacks from air, land and sea are intense, continuous and widespread," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said before the vote. Gaza residents "are being told to move like human pinballs – ricocheting between ever-smaller slivers of the south, without any of the basics for survival."

Guterres told the council that Gaza was at "a breaking point" with the humanitarian support system at risk of total collapse, and that he feared "the consequences could be devastating for the security of the entire region."

Gaza's borders with Israel and Egypt are effectively sealed, leaving Palestinians with no option other than to seek refuge within the territory. The overall Palestinian death toll in Gaza has surpassed 17,400, the majority of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-controlled territory, whose counts do not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, accusing the militants of using civilians as human

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shields, and says it's made considerable efforts with its evacuation orders to get civilians out of harm's way.

On Saturday, the Israeli military said its forces fought and killed Hamas militants and found weapons inside a school in Shijaiyah in a densely populated neighborhood of Gaza City. It said soldiers discovered a tunnel shaft in the same neighborhood where they found an elevator, and in a separate incident, militants shot at troops from an U.N.-run school in the northern town of Beit Hanoun.

Residents reported airstrikes and shelling in Gaza's north and south Saturday, including the city of Rafah, which lies near the Egyptian border and where the Israeli army had ordered civilians to move to.

The main hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah received 71 dead and 160 wounded over the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry said Saturday morning. In the southern city of Khan Younis, 62 dead and another 99 wounded were taken to Nasser Hospital in the past 24 hours, the ministry said.

Israel has been trying to secure the military's hold on northern Gaza, where furious fighting has underscored heavy resistance from Hamas. Tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain despite evacuation orders, six weeks after troops and tanks rolled in during the war sparked by Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 raid targeting civilians in Israel.

About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the Hamas raid, and more than 240 people taken hostage. A temporary truce saw hostages and Palestinian prisoners released, but more than 130 hostages are believed to remain in Gaza.

More than 2,200 Palestinians have been killed since the Dec. 1 collapse of the truce, about two-thirds of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

With only a trickle of humanitarian aid getting into just a few parts of the Gaza Strip, residents were reporting severe shortages of food.

"I am very hungry," said Mustafa al-Najjar, who was sheltering in a U.N.-run school in the devastated Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza. "We are living on canned food and biscuits and this is not sufficient."

While the adults can cope with the hunger, "it's extremely difficult and painful when you see your young son or daughter crying because there are hungry and you are not able to do anything," he said.

Despite growing international pressure, the Biden administration remains opposed to an open-ended cease-fire, arguing it would enable Hamas to continue posing a threat to Israel. Officials have expressed misgivings in recent days about the rising civilian death toll and dire humanitarian crisis, but have not pushed publicly for Israel to wind down the war, now in its third month.

"We have not given a firm deadline to Israel, not really our role," deputy national security adviser Jon Finer told a security forum a day before the U.S. veto in the U.N. Security Council. "That said, we do have influence, even if we don't have ultimate control over what happens on the ground in Gaza."

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant argued that "a cease-fire is handing a prize to Hamas, dismissing the hostages held in Gaza, and signalling terror groups everywhere."

A delegation of foreign ministers from mainly Arab nations and Turkey was in Washington to push the U.S. to drop its objections to an immediate cease-fire. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Friday ahead of a meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Israel's bombardment and siege of Gaza is a war crime that is destabilizing the region.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said the U.S. veto showed Washington's isolation.

"The American political system is now helpless on issues related to Israel. Therefore, Israel acts recklessly on this issue and continues its oppression," Fidan told Turkey's state-run news agency Anadolu and broadcaster TRT.

Fidan and the Palestinian, Saudi, Indonesian, Egyptian, Jordanian, Qatari and Nigerian ministers met with Blinken to press for an end to the fighting, while the group is to meet Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Foreign Minister Melanie Joly on Saturday.

As fighting resumed after a brief truce more than a week ago, the U.S. urged Israel to do more to protect civilians and allow more aid to besieged Gaza. The appeals came as Israel expanded its blistering air and ground campaign into southern Gaza, especially Khan Younis, sending tens of thousands more fleeing.

"It was a night of heavy gunfire and shelling as every night," Taha Abdel-Rahman, a Khan Younis resident,

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said by phone early Saturday.

Airstrikes were reported overnight in the Nuseirat refugee camp, where resident Omar Abu Moghazi said a family home was hit, causing casualties.

Israel has designated a narrow patch of barren coastline in the south, Muwasi, as a safe zone. But Palestinians who have headed there portrayed a grim picture of desperately overcrowded conditions with scant shelter and poor hygiene facilities.

"We didn't see anything good here at all. We are living here in a tough cold. There are no bathrooms. We are sleeping on the sand," said Soad Qarmoot, who was forced to leave her home in the northern town of Beit Lahiya.

"I am a cancer patient," Qarmoot said late Friday as children circled a wood fire for warmth. "There is no mattress for me to sleep on. I am sleeping on the sand. It's freezing."

Imad al-Talateeny, a displaced man from Gaza City, said the area lacks basic services to accommodate the growing number of displaced families.

"I lack everything to feel a human," he said, adding that he had a peaceful, comfortable life before the war in Gaza City. "Here I'm not safe. Here I live in a desert. There is no gas, no water. The water that we drink is polluted water."

US, South Korea and Japan urge a stronger international push to curb North Korea's nuclear program

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The national security advisers of the United States, South Korea and Japan on Saturday called for a stronger international push to suppress North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and missiles, its cybertheft activities and alleged arms transfers to Russia.

The meeting in Seoul came as tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest in years, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un accelerating the expansion of his nuclear and missile program and flaunting an escalatory nuclear doctrine that authorizes the preemptive use of nuclear weapons.

The United States and its Asian allies have responded by increasing the visibility of their trilateral partnership in the region and strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim condemns as invasion rehearsals.

Washington, Seoul and Tokyo have also expressed concerns about a potential arms alignment between North Korea and Russia. They worry Kim is providing badly needed munitions to help Russian President Vladimir Putin wage war in Ukraine in exchange for Russian technology assistance to upgrade his nuclear-armed military.

Speaking after the meeting, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Washington is working with Seoul and Tokyo to strengthen defense cooperation and improve its response to North Korean missile testing and space-launch activities, including a real-time information sharing arrangement on North Korean missile launches that the countries plan to start at an unspecified date in December.

He also said the countries have agreed to new initiatives to more effectively respond to North Korean efforts to bypass U.S.-led international sanctions that aim to choke off funds for its nuclear weapons and missile program.

"This will be a new effort with respect to cryptocurrency and money laundering and how we disrupt North Korea's capacity to gain revenue from the hacking and stealing of cryptocurrency and then laundering it through exchanges," he said.

Sullivan declined to share detailed U.S. assessments on the types and volume of North Korean arms being shipped to Russia and didn't comment on the specifics of his discussions with South Korean and Japanese officials over the issue, but insisted that "there's no daylight among us in terms of the types of weapons transfers that we are seeing. And those continue and they represent a grave concern for us."

South Korean intelligence and military officials have said North Korea may have shipped more than a

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million artillery shells to Russia beginning in August, weeks before Kim traveled to Russia's Far East for a rare summit with Putin that sparked international concerns about a potential arms deal. Both Moscow and Pyongyang have denied U.S. and South Korean claims.

In a joint news conference after Saturday's trilateral meeting, Cho Tae-yong, South Korea's national security office director, said the three security advisers reaffirmed North Korea's obligations under multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that call for its denuclearization and ban any weapons trade with other countries, and agreed to strengthen coordination to ensure that is implemented.

Takeo Akiba, Japan's national security secretariat secretary general, said the "unprecedented frequency and patterns" of North Korean ballistic missile launches necessitate a deeper and more effective partnership between Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

South Korea, the U.S., Japan and Australia have also announced their own sanctions on North Korea over its spy satellite launch last month. North Korea argues it the right to launch spy satellites to monitor U.S. and South Korean military activities and enhance the threat of its nuclear-capable missiles.

During his conversation with reporters, Sullivan said the allies are preparing for the possibility that North Korea will up the ante of its weapons demonstrations and threats in 2024, possibly including the country's seventh nuclear test.

Direct military action is also a concern after the North recently announced it was abandoning a 2018 inter-Korean military agreement on reducing border tensions after the South partially suspended the agreement, which had established border buffers and no-fly zones. Some experts say that has raised the risk of border-area shootings or clashes.

"Look, when a country announces its intent to walk away from a set of measures that are designed to help reduce risk and increase stability, our concern for potential incidents, provocations has to go up," Sullivan said, though he said the full implications of the North's announcement is not immediately clear.

Sullivan held separate bilateral talks Friday with Cho and Akiba and also met with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The U.S., South Korean and Japanese national security advisers last held a trilateral meeting in June in Tokyo.

South Korean intelligence officials have said the Russians likely provided technology support for North Korea's successful satellite launch in November, which followed two failed launches.

North Korea has said its spy satellite transmitted imagery with space views of key sites in the U.S. and South Korea, including the White House and the Pentagon. But it hasn't released any of those satellite photos. Many outside experts question whether the North's satellite is sophisticated enough to send militarily useful high-resolution imagery.

Kim has vowed to launch more satellites, saying his military needs to acquire space-based reconnaissance capabilities.

South Korean officials have also said North Korea-made rocket-propelled grenades and other weapons could have been used by Hamas during its Oct. 7 assault on Israel and that the North could be considering selling weapons to militant groups in the Middle East.

Sullivan said that the United States has not seen any specific evidence of that, but remains vigilant about the possibility.

"I think given North Korea's history of proliferation activities, including to reprehensible actors in other contexts across history, it's a legitimate concern," he said.

Observers see OPEC 'panicking' as COP28 climate talks focus on possible fossil fuel phase-out

By SETH BORENSTEIN, SIBI ARASU and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Veteran negotiators at the U. N. climate talks Saturday said that the push to wean the world from dirty fossil fuels had gained so much momentum that they had poked

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a powerful enemy: the oil industry.

Late Friday, multiple news sources reported that the leader of OPEC, the powerful oil cartel, wrote to member countries earlier this week urging them to block any language that would phase out or phase down fossil fuels. The news had the effect of a thunderclap, shining a light on host and petrostate United Arab Emirates, which clearly has oil interests but also wants to show the world that it can lead the conference toward a substantive result.

Environmental activists, still smarting from 30 years of soft power from oil interests keeping such discussions from seeing the light of day, smirked at signs that the mighty cartel was circling the wagons.

"I think they're panicking," said E3G analyst Alden Meyer. "Maybe the Saudis can't do on their own what they've been doing for 30 years and block the process."

Former Ireland President Mary Robinson said, "They're scared. I think they're worried."

Robinson, co-chair of the retired leaders group The Elders, is now a prominent climate campaigner, said the fact that OPEC is concerned "gives me hope." Last month she clashed publicly with the president of the COP28 negotiations, Sultan al-Jaber, who is also CEO of the Emirates' national oil company.

"It is incredibly brazen of OPEC to come forward with these unreasonable demands," said an infuriated Swedish environment minister Romina Pourmokhtari in a statement. "We will not allow actors who want to continue emitting and polluting the climate to make our negotiations and our work conditional on reaching the agreement to completely phase out fossil fuels."

Germany's climate envoy, Jennifer Morgan, suggested any call for blocking a deal would be felt most by small countries vulnerable of sea level rise caused by global warming.

"Right now, countries here are fighting for their lives. The small islands, and most countries here, are engaging very actively on this discussion in a real way," she said in an interview. "And I think it is obviously not responsible to have a position that could mean — would mean — the life and death of many million people."

"When I listen to the small islands who are in my ear and in my heart, and then I hear about this OPEC letter, I'm deeply concerned about it," she added. "We're seeing very worrying tactics by the Arab groups here."

COP28 Director General Majid al-Suwaidi downplayed the OPEC letter, saying the UAE team running the climate conference has been meeting with negotiators to get an ambitious deal. He said the oil cartel is a different entity than climate negotiations, even though the letter was about the talks themselves.

"I feel confident that we're going to get a good result you're going to be surprised about," Suwaidi told The Associated Press.

The conference presidency has been crowing about deal after deal, many of them involving hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars of pledges, but they've more nibbled the edges of the key issue of cutting emissions. When it comes to reducing the gases that cause climate change, a key group of scientists who analyze pledges, actions and potential temperature increases said in a report on Saturday that all the action so far hasn't really amounted to much.

"The COP28 Presidency has made a very big deal about a whole lot of voluntary initiatives, while adopting an ambiguous and weak position on the central issue of a fossil fuel phaseout," Climate Analytics CEO Bill Hare, co-author of the report, said.

Saturday's firestorm of controversy came as protests at the conference center in Dubai ramped up, with a "Global Day of Action" urging nations to move decisively to stop climate change and officials from various countries talked increasingly urgently at the official meetings. The OPEC letter has added fuel to their fury.

"With current policies, the planet is on track to a 2.9 (degree Celsius, 5.2 degree Fahrenheit above pre-industrial temperature) future. We cannot adapt to temperature rise that high; the loss and damage will be incalculable. It will be our death sentence," Marshall Islands natural resources minister John Silk said.

"We will not go silently to our graves," he said.

A speedy phase-out of fossil fuels has shaped up as the central issue at the talks as they head into their final days. Activists and experts have warned that the world must quickly reduce use of the oil, gas and coal that is causing dangerous warming.

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Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa, called the Dec. 6 letter from OPEC Secretary-General Haitham Al Ghais "shameful" and said "the writing is on the wall for dirty energy."

"The reality is if the world is going to save itself, it cannot be held back by a small band of countries that control the world's oil supply," Adow said in a statement. "Fossil fuels keep power in the hands of the few that happen to have them. Renewables give energy to anyone with a solar panel or a wind turbine."

Climate Analytics' Hare said, "Perhaps if fossil fuel interests hadn't spent the last three decades working hard against climate action, denying and questioning the science, the discussion about fossil fuels today might be quite different."

OPEC didn't immediately respond to messages seeking comment. Protestors Saturday in a flash mob briefly blocked the OPEC exhibit at climate talks, calling for an immediate phase-out of fossil fuels.

Negotiators are fleshing out language in a key document called the Global Stocktake. It will say how much progress the world had made since 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.

New proposed language on how to curb warming released Friday afternoon strengthened the options for a phase-out of fossil fuels that negotiators could choose from. Four of the five options call for some version of a rapid phase-out.

Earlier, Adow had been among environmental advocates who had some qualified optimism about the expanded 27-page draft language.

"The bare bones of a historic agreement is there," Adow said. "What we now need is for countries to rally behind the stronger of the options and strengthen them further."

What is carbon capture and why does it keep coming up at COP28?

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

The future of fossil fuels is at the center of the United Nations climate summit in Dubai, where many activists, experts and nations are calling for an agreement to phase out the oil, gas and coal responsible for warming the planet. On the other side: energy companies and oil-rich nations with plans to keep drilling well into the future.

In the background of those discussions are carbon capture and carbon removal, technologies most, if not all, producers are counting on to meet their pledges to get to net-zero emissions. Skeptics worry the technology is being oversold to allow the industry to maintain the status quo.

"The industry needs to commit to genuinely helping the world meet its energy needs and climate goals — which means letting go of the illusion that implausibly large amounts of carbon capture are the solution," International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol said before the start of talks.

WHAT EXACTLY IS CARBON CAPTURE?

Lots of industrial facilities like coal-fired power plants and ethanol plants produce carbon dioxide. To stop those planet-warming emissions from reaching the atmosphere, businesses can install equipment to separate that gas from all the other gases coming out of the smokestack, and transport it to where it can be permanently stored underground. And even for industries trying to reduce emissions, some are likely to always produce some carbon, like cement manufacturers that use a chemical process that releases CO₂.

"We call that a mitigation technology, a way to stop the increased concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere," said Karl Hausker, an expert on getting to net-zero emissions at World Resources Institute, a climate-focused nonprofit that supports sharp fossil fuel reductions along with a limited role for carbon capture.

The captured carbon is concentrated into a form that can be transported in a vehicle or through a pipeline to a place where it can be injected underground for long-term storage.

Then there's carbon removal. Instead of capturing carbon from a single, concentrated source, the objective is to remove carbon that's already in the atmosphere. This already happens when forests are restored, for example, but there's a push to deploy technology, too. One type directly captures it from the air, using chemicals to pull out carbon dioxide as air passes through.

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For some, carbon removal is essential during a global transition to clean energy that will take years. For example, despite notable gains for electric vehicles in some countries, gas-fired cars will be operating well into the future. And some industries, like shipping and aviation, are challenging to fully decarbonize.

"We have to remove some of what's in the atmosphere in addition to stopping the emissions," said Jennifer Pett-Ridge, who leads the federally supported Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's carbon initiative in the U.S., the world's second-leading emitter of greenhouse gases.

HOW IS IT GOING?

Many experts say the technology to capture carbon and store it works, but it's expensive, and it's still in the early days of deployment.

There are about 40 large-scale carbon capture projects in operation around the world capturing roughly 45 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, according to the International Energy Agency. That's a tiny amount — roughly 0.1% — of the 36.8 billion metric tons emitted globally as tallied by the Global Carbon Project.

The IEA says the history of carbon capture "has largely been one of unmet expectations." The group analyzed how the world can achieve net zero emissions and its guide path relies heavily on lowering emissions by slashing fossil fuel use. Carbon capture is just a sliver of the solution — less than 10% — but despite its comparatively small role, its expansion is still behind schedule.

The pace of new projects is picking up, but they face significant obstacles. In the United States, there's opposition to CO2 pipelines that move carbon to storage sites. Safety is one concern; in 2020, a CO2 pipeline in Mississippi ruptured, releasing carbon dioxide that displaced breathable air near the ground and sent dozens of people to hospitals. The federal government is working on improving safety standards.

Companies can also run into difficulty getting permits. South Dakota regulators this year, for example, rejected a construction permit for a 1,300-mile network of CO2 pipelines in the Midwest to move carbon to a storage site in Illinois.

The technology to remove carbon directly from the air exists too, but its broad deployment is even further away and especially costly.

WHO'S SUPPORTING CARBON CAPTURE?

The American Petroleum Institute says oil and gas will remain a critical energy source for decades, meaning that in order for the world to reduce its carbon emissions, rapidly expanding carbon capture technology is "key to cleaner energy use across the economy." A check of most oil companies' plans to get to net-zero emissions also finds most of them relying on carbon capture in some way.

The Biden administration wants more investment in carbon capture and removal, too, building off America's comparatively large spending compared with the rest of the world. But it's an industry that needs subsidies to attract private financing. The Inflation Reduction Act makes tax benefits much more generous. Investors can get a \$180 per ton credit for removing carbon from the air and storing it underground, for example. And the Department of Energy has billions to support new projects.

"What we are talking about now is taking a technology that has been proven and has been tested, but applying it much more broadly and also applying it in sectors where there is a higher cost to deploy," said Jessie Stolark, executive director of the Carbon Capture Coalition, an industry advocacy group.

Investment is picking up. The EPA is considering dozens of applications for wells that can store carbon. And in places like Louisiana and North Dakota, local leaders are fighting to attract projects and investment.

Even left-leaning California has an ambitious climate plan that incorporates carbon capture and removing carbon directly out of the air. Leaders say there's no other way to get emissions to zero.

WHO'S AGAINST IT?

Some environmentalists argue that fossil fuel companies are holding up carbon capture to distract from the need to quickly phase out oil, gas and coal.

"The fossil fuel industry has proven itself to be dangerous and deceptive," said Shaye Wolf, climate science director at Center for Biological Diversity.

There are other problems. Some projects haven't met their carbon removal targets. A 2021 U.S. government accountability report said that of eight demonstration projects aimed at capturing and storing carbon

from coal plants, just one had started operating at the time the report was published despite hundreds of millions of dollars in funding.

Opponents also note that carbon capture can serve to prolong the life of a polluting plant that would otherwise shut down sooner. That can especially hurt poorer, minority communities that have long lived near heavily polluting facilities.

They also note that most of the carbon captured in the U.S. now eventually gets injected into the ground to force out more oil, a process called enhanced oil recovery.

Hausker said it's essential that governments set policies that force less fossil fuel use — which can then be complemented by carbon capture and carbon removal.

"We aren't going to ask Exxon, 'pretty please, stop developing fossil fuels,'" he said.

Big money, fancy homes, old jokes — inside Joe Biden's fundraisers

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — If you're a Democrat with money to burn and friends in high places, you can spend thousands on tickets to a fundraiser with President Joe Biden. If not, keep reading to see what you're missing.

With an election year around the corner, Biden is accelerating his fundraising to prepare for an astronomically expensive campaign. (Think billions, not millions.) In this rarefied world, money equals access, and supporters regularly pay top dollar for a personal glimpse of the world's most powerful man.

Biden is collecting cash across the Los Angeles area this weekend, and his first stop was a sprawling estate where the host joked "it's just a normal Friday at our house" as hundreds of donors sipped wine in the backyard.

"You're the reason why we're gonna win, God willing, in 2024," Biden told the audience.

Each fundraiser is a little different, but they generally follow a similar script. Here's what it's like inside the presidential money hunt.

The setting

Fundraisers are a rare glimpse at the lives of the country's wealthiest and most influential. Biden's motorcade has rolled up to a mountain villa in Park City, Utah, a townhouse in Manhattan and a sprawling estate at the top of the Hollywood hills.

In an apartment with floor-to-ceiling views of Central Park, reporters were required to slip disposable covers over their shoes before they could enter the living room where donors nibbled on crustless tea sandwiches.

At Friday's fundraiser in Los Angeles, attendees wore colored wrist bands that indicated where they should sit. Ushers held up red, green, blue and orange signs to direct them to the right place.

The press corps can enter fundraisers only to hear Biden's formal remarks, and no cameras are allowed. When he's mingling with supporters or answering their questions, reporters are sequestered in a garage, home gym or spare bedroom. Sometimes they just remain outside on the sidewalk.

The introduction

The lucky host often gets the privilege of introducing the president. Usually, these remarks are predictably laudatory, but sometimes they get spicy.

Randi McGinn, a prominent New Mexico lawyer, joked about the attractiveness of the president's Secret Service detail and referenced Donald Trump's dalliance with a porn star.

Biden smiled — or grimaced, it was hard to tell — and made the sign of the cross as she spoke.

The president always thanks his hosts and any elected officials present. If he spots any children, Biden often jokingly warns them "this is going to be boring, boring, boring for you."

The unexpected

Although fundraisers are often run-of-the-mill occasions, careful reporters know to stay attentive. Biden

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has a history of being more candid than usual when surrounded by deep-pocketed supporters.

Biden upset China in June by describing President Xi Jinping as a "dictator" during a different fundraiser in California. He also said Xi was unaware that a Chinese balloon that floated over the United States was being used for spying.

"The reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with two box cars full of spy equipment is he didn't know it was there," Biden said.

In Park City in August, Biden ruminated about his signature legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act.

"I wish I hadn't called it that," Biden said, "because it has less to do with reducing inflation than it does to do with dealing with providing for alternatives that generate economic growth."

And just Tuesday in Weston, Massachusetts, the 81-year-old president suggested he might not be seeking reelection if it wasn't for Trump's comeback bid.

"If Trump wasn't running, I'm not sure I'd be running," Biden said. "But we cannot let him win, for the sake of the country."

The stories

Donors pay top dollar to hear Biden speak at private events, but reporters can rattle off some of his well-worn lines from memory.

The president says he's "never been more optimistic" about the country as long as we "remember who in hell we are." He rattles off his legislative accomplishments, from limiting prescription drug costs to investing in infrastructure like roads and bridges. He says the rich need to "pay their fair share" of taxes. He warns that the U.S. is at "an inflection point."

He usually talks about meeting with Xi while they each served as vice presidents of their respective countries. In Biden's telling, Xi asked him to define America. "I said, 'I can do it in one word — possibilities,'" Biden says.

A centerpiece of Biden's fundraisers is his story of deciding to run for president against Trump in 2020.

He talks about "people coming out of the woods, carrying torches" during the 2017 marches in Charlottesville, Virginia, and "chanting the same antisemitic bile that was chanted in Germany in the '30s." When Trump said there were "very fine people on both sides" of the violence, Biden says, "that's when I decided I couldn't remain silent any longer."

The attacks

Fundraisers are an opportunity for Biden to rile up his supporters and score points on his opponents in a friendly environment.

He often says "this is not your father's Republican Party," and he warns about "the extreme right, the MAGA movement," referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

Sometimes he avoids mentioning Trump's name by making oblique references to "my predecessor." But given Trump's standing as the clear front-runner for the Republican nomination, Biden has seen little reason to hold back.

He generally warns about the potential for cuts to health care or rollbacks to environmental programs if Trump wins next year. And he always keeps the focus on what he describes as a threat to the country's institutions.

"Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans," Biden said in Minneapolis last month, "are determined to destroy this democracy."

Ukraine aid in growing jeopardy as Republicans double down on their demands for border security

By STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A deal to provide further U.S. assistance to Ukraine by year-end appears to be increasingly out of reach for President Joe Biden. The impasse is deepening in Congress despite dire warnings from the White House about the consequences of inaction as Republicans insist on pairing the

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funding with changes to America's immigration and border policies.

After the Democratic president said this week that he was willing to "make significant compromises on the border," Republicans swiftly revived demands that they had earlier set aside, hardening their positions and attempting to shift the negotiations to the right, according to a person familiar with the talks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

The latest proposal, offered by lead GOP negotiator Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., during a meeting with a core group of senators before they departed Washington on Thursday afternoon, could force the White House to consider proposals that many Democrats will seriously oppose, creating new obstacles in the already fraught negotiation.

Biden is facing the prospect of a cornerstone of his foreign policy — repelling Russia's Vladimir Putin from overtaking Ukraine — crumbling as U.S. support for funding the war wanes, especially among Republicans. The White House says a failure to approve more aid by year's end could have catastrophic consequences for Ukraine and its ability to fight.

To preserve U.S. support, the Biden administration has quietly engaged in Senate talks on border policy in recent weeks, providing assistance to the small group of senators trying to reach a deal and communicating what policy changes it would find acceptable.

The president is treading on delicate ground, trying to both satisfy GOP demands to cut the historic number of migrants arriving at the southern border while alleviating Democrats' fears that legal immigration will be choked off with drastic measures.

As talks sputtered to a restart this week, Democrats warned their GOP counterparts that time for a deal was running short, with Congress scheduled to depart Washington in mid-December for a holiday break.

"Republicans need to show they are serious about reaching a compromise, not just throwing on the floor basically Donald Trump's border policies," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Thursday before Republicans made their counteroffer.

But the new Republican proposal doubled down on policy changes that had previously prompted Democrats to step back from the negotiations, according to the person familiar with the talks. The GOP offer calls for ending the humanitarian parole program that's now in place for existing classes of migrants — Ukrainians, Afghans, Cubans, Venezuelans, Nicaraguans and Haitians — a policy idea that had been all but dashed before. Additionally, those groups of migrants would not be allowed to re-parole if the terms of their stay expire before their cases are adjudicated in immigration proceedings.

GOP senators also proposed monitoring systems like ankle bracelets for people detained at the border who are awaiting parole, including for children. Republicans want to ban people from applying for asylum if they have transited through a different country where they could have sought asylum instead, as well as revive executive authorities that would allow a president to shut down entries for wide-ranging reasons.

Further, after migrant encounters at the border have recently hit historic numbers, the GOP proposal would set new metrics requiring the border to be essentially shut down if illegal crossings reach a certain limit.

Lankford, the lead GOP negotiator, declined to discuss specifics after the Thursday afternoon meeting, but said he was trying to "negotiate in good faith." He added that the historic number of migrants at the border could not be ignored. The sheer number of people arriving at the border has swamped the asylum system, he said, making it impossible for authorities to adequately screen the people they allow in.

"Do you want large numbers of undocumented individuals and unscreened individuals without work permits, without access to the rest of the economy?" Lankford said.

The lead Democratic negotiator, Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, did not quickly respond to the GOP proposal.

Senators had made some progress in the talks before Thursday, finding general agreement on raising the initial standard for migrants to enter the asylum system — part of what's called the credible fear system. The Biden administration has communicated that it is amenable to that change and that it could agree to expand expedited removal to deport immigrants before they have a hearing with an immigration judge, according to two people briefed on the negotiations who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Immigration advocates and progressives in Congress have been alarmed by the direction of the talks, especially because they have not featured reforms aimed at expanding legal immigration.

Robyn Barnard, director of refugee advocacy with Human Rights First, called the current state of negotiations an "absolute crisis moment." She warned that broadening the fast-track deportation authority could lead to a mass rounding up of immigrants around the country and compared it to the Trump administration. "Communities across the country would be living in fear," she said.

But Senate Republicans, sensing that Biden wants to address the historic number of people coming to the border ahead of his reelection campaign, have taken an aggressive stance and tried to draw the president directly into negotiations.

"The White House is going to have to engage particularly if Senate Democrats are unwilling to do what we are suggesting be done," said Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., at a news conference Thursday.

The White House has so far declined to take a leading role in negotiations. White House press secretary Karine-Jean Pierre said Thursday: "Democrats have said that they want to compromise. Have that conversation."

After every single Senate Republican this past week voted to block moving ahead with legislation to provide tens of billions of dollars in military and economic assistance for Ukraine, many in the chamber were left in a dour mood. Even those who held out hope for a deal acknowledged it would be difficult to push a package through the Senate during the remaining days in session.

Even if they reach a deal, the obstacles to passage in the House are considerable. Speaker Mike Johnson has signaled he will fight for sweeping changes to immigration policy that go beyond what is being discussed in the Senate. And broad support from House Democrats is far from guaranteed, as progressives and Hispanic lawmakers have raised alarm at curtailing access to asylum.

"Trading Ukrainian lives for the lives of asylum seekers is morally bankrupt and irresponsible," Rep. Delia Ramirez, D-Ill., posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, as part of a coordinated campaign by Hispanic Democrats.

The unwieldy nature of the issue left even Lankford, who was one of the few senators optimistic that a deal could be reached this year, acknowledging the difficulty of finding an agreement in the coming days.

"There's just a whole lot of politics that have been bound up in this," he said as he departed the Capitol for the week. "Thirty years it hasn't been resolved because it's incredibly complicated."

Polish truck drivers are blocking the border with Ukraine. It's hurting on the battlefield

By HANNA ARHIROVA, KARL RITTER and MONIKA SCISLOWSKA Associated Press
KORCZOWA, Poland (AP) — Pickup trucks and tourniquets bound for Ukraine's battlefield are stuck in a mileslong line at the border with Poland. Components to build drones to fight off Russian forces are facing weeks of delays.

Ukrainian charities and companies supplying the war-torn country's military warn that problems are growing as Polish truck drivers show no sign of ending a border blockade that has stretched past a month. The Polish protesters argue that their livelihoods are at stake after the European Union relaxed some transport rules and Ukrainian truckers undercut their business.

While drones will make it to the front line, they're delayed by two to three weeks, said Oleksandr Zadorozhnyi, operational director of the KOLO foundation, which helps the Ukrainian army with battlefield tech, including drones and communications equipment.

"This means that Russian army will have the ability to kill Ukrainian soldiers and terrorize civilians for several weeks longer," he said.

Truck drivers in Poland have blocked access roads to border crossings since Nov. 6, creating lines that stretch for more than 30 kilometers (19 miles) and last up to three weeks in freezing temperatures. The protesters insist that they're not stopping military transports or humanitarian aid into Ukraine.

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"This is very puzzling to me, even hard to believe because everybody knows — those who order, those who expedite and those who do the transport — that aid for the military passes through without having to wait at all," said Waldemar Jaszczur, a protest organizer.

The Polish truckers, meanwhile, say their Ukrainian counterparts are offering lower prices to haul everything from fish to luxury goods across the European Union since getting a temporary waiver on the 27-nation bloc's transport rules after Russia's invasion in 2022.

Despite Poland and other nearby countries being some of Ukraine's biggest supporters in the war, resentment has built from truckers and farmers who are losing business to lower-cost Ukrainian goods and services flowing into the world's biggest trading bloc. It underscores the challenges of integrating Ukraine into the EU if approved.

Now, the commercial clash is spilling over to the battlefield, the Ukrainian charities say.

About 200 pickup trucks needed to transport ammunition and evacuate the wounded from the front line are blocked at the border because "deliveries have practically stopped," said Ivan Poberzhniak, head of procurement and logistics for Come Back Alive, Ukraine's largest charitable organization providing the military with equipment.

The pickup trucks are easy targets for Russia, so it's impossible to deliver enough of them even normally, he said.

When drivers show documents to the Polish truckers saying the vehicles are for Ukraine's military, "it does not have a significant impact on the protesters," Poberzhniak said.

"We must understand that during wartime, supply is needed on a daily basis in all directions," he said.

Come Back Alive says 3,000 tourniquets also are stuck at the border. It's been able to deliver drones, generators and batteries from what it has in stock, "but that reserve is running out," Poberzhniak said.

The group is exploring alternative supply routes, he says, but there are few options, and the military's unfulfilled requests for equipment are building up.

The protesting truckers assert that not all deliveries declared as military aid are really that. They are urging the EU to reinstate the limits on the number of Ukrainian trucks that can enter the bloc.

Jaszczur, an organizer, said Ukrainian truckers have been doing unauthorized transport services across Europe. They are asking "glaringly low prices" — 35% lower than what Polish truckers charge — and are "driving us out of the market," he said.

The same thing is happening in other countries like Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, he said. Some Slovak truckers staged a protest of their own in recent days at the Ukrainian border.

Jaszczur says many Polish transport companies are going under because of the pressure from Ukrainian competition.

While there is no quick resolution in sight, a change of leadership in Warsaw offers hope.

The new government is expected to be in place in the next week and almost certainly will be led by the pro-EU centrist Donald Tusk. He has criticized the outgoing government's "inaction," offering hope to businesses hurt by the blockade but also to the protesters.

"We will look for solutions that should satisfy Polish transporters, but we will not tolerate any events that threaten Polish security. Who inspired or initiated them?" Tusk said Friday, stressing that Ukraine is a strategic point for Poland as it fights Russia's invasion.

Ukrainian truck driver Ivan Itchenko is one of those eagerly awaiting a resolution. He has been waiting in Poland for days with hundreds of others, trying to stay warm at a highway rest stop until he can bring his load of salmon and herring to Ukrainian supermarkets.

"I clean the truck, clear the snow. Polish customs officers come and ask for documents three times a day," Itchenko said Thursday.

The 61-year-old hopes his turn to drive through the Korczowa-Krakovets crossing comes Saturday.

"I live in Chernihiv (region), near Russia. Every day there are attacks. Now I am stuck at the Polish border. What do they want?"

With temperatures falling, drivers are experiencing difficult conditions, choosing not to heat their trucks

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to save fuel and facing limited access to food and bathrooms, Ukrainian media say.

Polish and Ukrainian officials are negotiating with help from the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, but the protest has only expanded.

"We do not see any light in the tunnel, we do not see any authorities, any government or the EU Commission really giving attention to this," said Dariusz Matulewicz, head of the truckers' association in Szczecin, a city in western Poland.

Poland's outgoing government has "nothing against supporting Ukraine" but it "must not allow the aid activity to be done at the expense of Polish firms," deputy minister for infrastructure, Rafal Weber, said Monday in Brussels.

The EU has pressed Warsaw to find a way to end the blockade but stood by its deal with Kyiv. It's "beneficial to the European market, to Ukraine and to Moldova," said Adina Valean, EU transport commissioner who also threatened sanctions against Poland.

Ukrainian officials say the truckers' protest adds more stress to their economy and only serves Russia's interests.

Ukrainian exports have dropped by 40% through the four blocked border crossings, and the state budget has lost some 9.3 billion hryvnias (\$252,000) due to the shortfall in customs payments, said Danylo Hetmantsev, head of the finance and tax committee in Ukraine's parliament.

"Undoubtedly, this is a powerful blow to our economy and our exports," Hetmantsev said Tuesday on state TV.

DeSantis, Haley and Ramaswamy will appear in northwest Iowa days after a combative GOP debate

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (AP) — Republican presidential candidates will cross paths again in Iowa just days after a fractious debate and as the countdown to the caucuses nears the one-month mark.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy will make their case — this time without the others interrupting — in northwest Iowa, a more rural, conservative corner of the state.

Each will get time onstage with Rep. Randy Feenstra and his wife, Lynette, to discuss faith, family and politics at Dordt University in Sioux Center.

On Friday, DeSantis, Haley and Ramaswamy made stops across Iowa as the pressure mounts to secure an attention-grabbing finish in the Jan. 15 contest that kicks off the Republicans' nominating calendar. Former President Donald Trump, who will not join the Feenstra family on Saturday, continues to sit comfortably atop the field in polls of Republicans in Iowa and nationwide.

DeSantis, Haley and Ramaswamy last appeared together in Iowa ahead of Thanksgiving, at the Family Leader's roundtable discussion, which was an uncommonly friendly affair. The three next look to take the stage at Drake University in Des Moines for a Republican debate just five days before the caucuses.

From urchin crushing to lab-grown kelp, efforts to save California's kelp forests show promise

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

CASPAR BEACH, Calif. (AP) — A welding hammer strapped to her wrist, Joy Hollenback slipped on blue fins and swam into the churning, chilly Pacific surf one fall morning to do her part to save Northern California's vanishing kelp forests.

Hollenback floated on the swaying surface to regulate her breathing before free diving into the murky depths toward the seafloor. There, she spotted her target: voracious, kelp-devouring purple urchins.

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Within seconds she smashed 20 to smithereens. "If you're angry, it's a cathartic way to get it all out," Hollenback joked. "It's ecologically sanctioned mayhem."

The veterinarian who lives in Berkeley, California is part of a crew of volunteers who swim, snorkel and dive armed with pick axes and hammers on a sole mission: To crush purple urchins that largely destroyed 96% of California's iconic bull kelp forests between 2014 and 2020, and with it harmed red abalone and other sea life they supported.

The pilot project off the Mendocino County coast is one of many initiatives California is testing to save such leafy marine ecosystems, which are declining worldwide due to climate change.

Kelp forests play an integral role in the health of the world's oceans, one of the issues being discussed at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai.

Based on early observations, efforts like urchin culling appear to be helping.

Biologists say they have started to see small successes with the experiments started several years ago, offering hope of reversing destruction likened to a rainforest being clear-cut.

Healthy patches of kelp and schools of fish returned this summer to small sections where urchins were crushed at Caspar Cove, 160 miles (200 kilometers) north of San Francisco.

Nearby at Albion Bay, where commercial divers removed many of the urchins in 2021, biologists put tiny kelp grown in a lab on 98-foot (30-meter) lines. In August, they discovered the kelp not only had reached the surface, but was reproducing.

"That's the first time we know of that happening in an open coastal environment," said Norah Eddy of The Nature Conservancy, one of several organizations participating in the experiment. "What we want is for the kelp to start putting out babies. This is showing these methods can be done in these kinds of rugged environments."

There are still huge challenges to overcome before California's bull kelp is on the path to recovery. But scientists say the progress has relieved fears the forests were lost forever.

"This is really setting the system up to hold on to the kelp that we do have until we're in a better place," said Kristen Elsmore, a senior scientist at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Scientists will be collecting data over the next three years to determine what methods are most effective as California builds its first plan to restore and manage kelp.

Kelp was so abundant that the state managed it solely as a fishery, overseeing commercial and recreational harvests. Under the plan, kelp will be managed now as an ecosystem, reflecting the heightened understanding of kelp's importance.

"Kelp forms whole forests that are supporting so many other species and so it just has this cascading effect on the near-shore ecosystem when you lose your kelp," Elsmore said. "You're losing a whole forest, not just one species."

The plan could inform restoration efforts from Australia to Chile, where kelp faces similar threats.

"The ultimate goal is for these systems to really be self-sustaining and the restoration part to really just be giving it a gentle nudge in the right direction," the scientist said.

Kelp has been disappearing as a warming planet raises ocean temperatures.

Along the West Coast, the problem started after 2013 when a warm water mass nicknamed "the blob" developed off Alaska and stretched south, lingering for four years as it wreaked havoc on marine ecosystems all the way to Mexico's Baja California peninsula.

At the same time, a mysterious wasting disease decimated sunflower sea stars, causing their arms to fall off and turning them into gooey masses, killing 90% of the population.

The star fish is the main purple urchin predator. After the disease killed more than 5 billion sea stars, the urchin population exploded, devouring kelp and leaving seascapes with almost nothing but the spiny, globular echinoderms.

The kelp loss prompted the California Fish and Game Commission to close its recreational red abalone fishery in 2018. Commercial harvests of red urchins have also been hurt. Red urchins are favored over the purple urchins because they contain more edible uni or roe inside, but commercial divers say the amount has shrunk with less kelp.

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Bull kelp, an annual seaweed, starts as a microscopic spore that grows up to two feet (.6 meters) per day until it reaches up to 98 feet (30 meters) before dying off in the cooler months. It flourishes in cool, nutrient-rich waters.

California's coast has bull and giant kelp, the world's largest marine algae. Urchins have hurt both species, though giant kelp forests have fared better.

Some believe the only way to restore kelp is to reduce the purple urchins, which can go dormant for years only to remerge and eat new kelp growth. Chefs have started serving purple urchins to build a market.

"Sometime it does feel weird, like you're killing this animal that's a native species, but it's for the greater good," said Morgan Murphy-Cannella of Reef Check Foundation, the kelp restoration coordinator involved in the kelp planting at Albion Bay. Its volunteers monitor kelp forests from Canada to Mexico.

Josh Russo, a former abalone fisher and founder of the Watermen's Alliance, a coalition of spearfishing clubs, helped start the urchin crushing.

The first group was mostly local divers armed with sledgehammers, Russo said, laughing. After struggling to swing them underwater, they turned to small welding and furniture hammers and icepicks.

Volunteers have cleared 80% of purple urchins from a section at Caspar's Cove, Russo said. It is one of two spots where California allows recreational licensed fishers to take an unlimited amount of purple urchins.

But the urchin crushing is not without controversy. Some fear it could spread urchin eggs, exacerbating the problem.

Russo's seen no evidence of that. Instead, he said, the density of urchins has lessened in the 100-by-100 yard (91 by 91 meter) section, where schools of juvenile rock fish swished this summer amid the towering algae.

"This went from being urchin barren to just full of life again," Russo said.

Scientists say nothing can replace natural predators, like the sunflower sea star.

After learning to breed it in captivity, biologists are building a stock to reintroduce it. Sunflower sea stars are at four California aquariums, including the Birch aquarium in San Diego that induced the spawning of three in October.

At least four sunflower star fish also were spotted off the Mendocino coast this year, which Elmore said "is super exciting" since none were seen for years there.

There's still much to learn. Kelp has not come back in all spots cleared of urchins, and scientists don't know why.

But the crushing is helping buy time to find permanent solutions.

Events run April to September and draw people from across Northern California.

On a Saturday in September, volunteers included a paralegal, a factory worker, university students and a landscape contractor whose two Australian shepherds, "Swimmer" and "Breaker," watched patiently from the beach. One artist collected the urchins to make purple dye for clothing.

Hollenback, the veterinarian, started participating in May 2022 after seeing the events on Facebook. She has hammered as many as 82 urchins in the 50 seconds she can hold her breath. On this day the sea was too turbulent at Caspar Cove so the group diverted to a neighboring bay to seek urchins.

"It can feel counterintuitive to kill animals when my job is to save them," she said. "But this is helping to save the entire ecosystem."

With Putin's reelection all but assured, Russia's opposition still vows to undermine his image

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Behind bars in penal colonies or in self-exile abroad, Russian opposition figures vow they will still put up a fight against President Vladimir Putin as he seeks yet another term in office in an election in March.

Although they believe Putin will be declared the winner no matter how voters cast their ballots, they

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say they hope to undermine the widespread public support he enjoys, turn popular opinion against the devastating war he unleashed on Ukraine, and show those who oppose it already that they are not alone.

"No one but us will step into this battle for the hearts and the minds of our fellow citizens. So we need to do it and win," imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said in an online statement relayed from behind bars.

Putin, 71, announced Friday that he will run for president again, to pile another six years onto his two dozen in power. He could even run again in 2030.

The vote is scheduled for March 15-17, with his victory all but assured. The vast majority of opposition figures are either imprisoned or have fled the country, almost all independent news outlets have been blocked, and any criticism has been muted by a slew of repressive laws adopted over the last decade.

"This is, basically, a guarantee that (the Kremlin) can declare any result whatsoever," said Nikolay Petrov, visiting researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, in an interview with The Associated Press.

Some activists agree there is no point in trying to influence the election's outcome. They say they will take advantage of the election campaign to press their views about Putin and his government — a time when "Russians will be more politically active than usual," according to Leonid Volkov, Navalny's top strategist and chief of staff.

"Our task is to make sure that the issues we will be able to raise and bring into the public agenda in January, February, March stick — stick with Russians even after the election," said Volkov, who left Russia several years ago.

To that end, Volkov and his team launched a project called "Navalny's Campaigning Machine." The idea is simple — talk to as many Russians as possible, either by phone or online, and convince them "to turn against the candidates we hate: candidate Putin and candidate 'War,'" as Navalny himself put it in an online post announcing the project in June.

In late October, the project already had about 170 volunteers making the calls, Volkov said, and was conducting a survey to figure out the specific grievances and needs of people in order to tailor talking points they would use in future phone calls.

Volkov said that out of the thousands of calls already made, only a handful of people said they were completely content with everything happening in Russia and beyond.

Others had at least one complaint. "Someone is discontented over the war, someone is discontented with the economic situation, someone is unhappy with the health care system, social justice — lots of things," Volkov said.

There are questions that "the authorities can't answer," and by raising them with the Russians, the team hopes to cause "political problems" for the Kremlin, Volkov said. The authorities' inability to address these issues "will elicit frustration and pain, political problems for Putin that will only grow," he added.

On the eve of Putin's announcement, the team placed a number of billboards — in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other Russian cities — that read "Russia" and "Happy New Year," with links and QR codes leading to a website titled "Russia without Putin." The website urges people "to convince at least 10 people to act against Putin" and talks about various ways to campaign.

The Anti-War Committee — another opposition force that unites prominent activists in exile such as former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, chess legend Garry Kasparov and former lawmakers turned opposition politicians Gennady Gudkov and his son, Dmitry Gudkov — also plans a campaign called "No to Putin!"

Gennady Gudkov told AP that the general goal of the campaign is to explain to Russians "what the future could be like without Putin" — no war, no repressions, with the government focusing on things like the economy, science and education.

A possible election day tactic, Gudkov said, could be to urge Putin critics to go to the polls at a specified time so that long lines form to show how many people oppose him: "If the country, the elites, the world will see long queues of people who clearly disagree with Putin's policies, it will be enough."

One group, however, believes there is mileage in putting forward candidates to challenge Putin at the

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polls. A project called Our Headquarters, launched by several activists helping those fleeing Russia to settle abroad, promises to support “democratic candidates with an antiwar position.”

Project coordinator Andrei Davydov told AP that they can offer help to prospective candidates with the campaign and the procedural side of things, like assembling a group of 500 people required by law to put forward an independent candidate, or with gathering and verifying 300,000 signatures needed to register on the ballot.

To get support from Our Headquarters, a candidate must oppose the war and be willing to release political prisoners and implement democratic reforms in Russia, Davydov said. The project has already endorsed one candidate: Yekaterina Duntsova, a journalist and lawyer from the Tver region north of Moscow, who once was a member of local legislature. Davydov said they were in talks with a few others.

“We need to give people hope, to give people a chance to speak out. There are no other legal possibilities (to speak out) in Russia these days, other than by supporting an antiwar candidate,” he said. “The minimum task is (get) people to understand that there are many of them, and they need to act, to defend their position.”

A more ambitious goal is to register an opposition candidate to challenge Putin on the ballot, Davydov said. “We will work toward a result, a victory, and see what happens,” he added.

Navalny urged his supporters in an online statement to go to the polls on election day and vote “for any other candidate” — a strategy akin to the one he proposed in 2012, when Putin ran for president after a four-year hiatus as prime minister due to presidential term limits. That balloting, as well as an election for parliament months earlier, brought out huge protests that spooked the Kremlin and led to a crackdown on dissent.

Then, in 2018, Navalny called for a boycott of the balloting after he was barred from the race.

Since then, Navalny’s team organized a voting strategy of promoting local candidates with the best chance to defeat those backed by the Kremlin’s United Russia party. It has not yet been used in a presidential election.

Navalny’s ally Ivan Zhdanov told AP the team will propose some other actions on election day, but refused to give details.

Maria Pevchikh, head of the board of Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, urged the European Union, the United States and the United Kingdom to “make Putin’s reelection more painful” by promising sanctions against any celebrities endorsing him.

“It’s one thing to change your profile picture and say you are on the Putin Team. It’s a completely different thing to actually lose everything, including your bank accounts, for participating in Putin’s ‘election’ campaign. We must increase the cost of such a decision,” she said. Governments have not responded publicly to her proposal.

Petrov, the researcher, believes the Kremlin’s biggest fear from the election would be that Putin’s image might be damaged.

The election “must happen quietly, calmly and show that the people accept the authorities the way they are. And in this respect, it is very important to the Kremlin to avoid any hiccups, scandals, that may cast doubt on the result that will be declared,” Petrov said.

Tensions are soaring between Guyana and Venezuela over century-old territorial dispute

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — A century-old territorial dispute deepened by the discovery of oil is boiling over between neighbors Guyana and Venezuela. Steeped in patriotism, the Venezuelan government is seizing on the fight to boost support ahead of a presidential election among a population fed up with a decade-long crisis that has pushed many into poverty.

Venezuelans on Sunday approved a referendum to claim sovereignty over Essequibo, a mineral-rich territory that accounts for two-thirds of Guyana and lies near big offshore oil deposits. Military confrontation

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appears unlikely for now, but several countries have echoed Guyana's concerns over an annexation by its neighbor to the west.

These are some of the key aspects of the growing dispute:

WHY IS THE BORDER UNDER DISPUTE?

Venezuela says it was the victim of a land theft conspiracy in 1899, when Guyana was a British colony and arbitrators from Britain, Russia and the United States decided the boundary. The U.S. represented Venezuela in part because the Venezuelan government had broken off diplomatic relations with Britain.

Venezuelan officials contends Americans and Europeans colluded to cheat their country out of the land. They also argue that an agreement among Venezuela, Britain and the colony of British Guiana signed in 1966 to resolve the dispute effectively nullified the original arbitration.

Guyana maintains the initial accord is legal and binding and asked the United Nations' top court in 2018 to rule it as such, but a decision is years away.

WHAT IS OIL'S ROLE?

In 2015, major oil deposits were first discovered off Essequibo's shore by an ExxonMobil-led consortium, piquing the interest of Venezuela, whose commitment to pursuing the territorial claim has fluctuated over the years.

The consortium began pumping oil in December 2019, converting largely agrarian Guyana into the world's fourth-largest offshore oil producer. Operations generate some \$1 billion a year for the impoverished country of nearly 800,000 people that saw its economy expand by nearly 60% in the first half of this year.

The current daily production of some 380,000 barrels is expected to hit 800,000 barrels in upcoming years. Guyana's crude exports were heading largely to the Netherlands and Panama last month, with much of the oil from Panama then re-exported to the U.S. West Coast, according to S&P Global.

In September, Guyana opened bids for 14 additional offshore oil blocks available for exploration and development, with six companies and groups submitting bids. Among them were ExxonMobil, which teamed up again with U.S.-owned Hess Corp and China National Offshore Oil Corp, and French-owned Total Energies, which partnered with companies in Qatar and Malaysia.

While Guyana's oil industry has boomed, Venezuela's has plummeted. Venezuela has the world's largest proven crude reserves, but its oil industry has been crippled by years of mismanagement and economic sanctions imposed on the state-owned oil company following President Nicolás Maduro's re-election in 2018, which was widely considered fraudulent.

Venezuela's National Assembly has not released the text of the law it will use to try to enforce the referendum results. But a portion lawmakers discussed Thursday would ban local and foreign companies from operating in Venezuela if they also do business in Guyana.

WHY MADURO'S INTEREST IN ESSEQUIBO NOW?

For Maduro and his ruling party, the Essequibo dispute is an opportunity to drum up internal support and to distract Venezuelans from U.S. pressure to release political prisoners and wrongfully detained Americans as well as to guarantee free and fair conditions in next year's presidential election.

Before the Dec. 3 referendum, Venezuelans were bombarded for weeks with Essequibo-themed music, nationally televised history lessons, murals, rallies and social media content.

That appears to have backfired.

The government claims about 10.5 million people — just over half of eligible voters — cast ballots. It says voters approved rejecting "by all means" the 1899 boundary, turning Essequibo into a state, giving area residents Venezuelan citizenship and rejecting the U.N. court's jurisdiction over the dispute. But Associated Press journalists and witnesses at voting centers said the long lines typical of Venezuelan elections never formed.

WHAT'S NEXT?

International security firm Global Guardian expects Venezuela to gradually ramp up tensions and go as far as conducting naval exercises near Guyana, said Zev Faintuch, a senior intelligence analyst at the firm.

"We might even see some sort of very small scale, cross-border activity," he said, adding that he expects activities to escalate until elections are held in Venezuela. "Maduro's interest is to get himself reelected

and get some more of his oil onto oil markets.”

He said that it would be nearly impossible to invade the entire Essequibo region, which is vast, lacks roads and is sparsely populated.

Guyanese Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo on Thursday urged oil companies that have concessions near the Essequibo region to ignore Maduro’s comments and actions and warned Guyana would take any necessary steps to protect its sovereignty.

“Any attempts by his state oil firms or state corporations to explore for petroleum in our area will be viewed as an intrusion by Guyana,” Jagdeo said. “If (Maduro) believes that belligerence and threatening Guyana will lead to the desired bilateral conversations, he is profoundly incorrect.”

The U.N. Security Council held an emergency, private meeting on the issue Friday as world leaders and international organizations backed Guyana. Separately, members of a regional trade bloc known as Caricom also called a closed-door meeting Friday to talk about the dispute.

The Organization of American States said in a statement that the 1899 boundary is “in force and legally binding on all parties under international law.” It also accused Maduro’s government of taking an “aggressive stance” and of “continuing to take and promote unlawful actions against Guyana.”

The organization added that it was profoundly worried about the situation, “which has escalated to a point of significant concern for regional security and constitutes a matter that threatens the stability and territorial sovereignty within our hemisphere.”

Israeli troops round up Palestinian men in northern Gaza as UN warns aid operation is ‘in tatters’

By WAFAA SHURAF, JULIA FRANKEL and LEE KEATH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel said Friday that the military was rounding up Palestinian men in northern Gaza for interrogation, searching for Hamas militants, while desperate Palestinians in the south crowded into an ever-shrinking area, and the U.N. warned that its aid operation is “in tatters.”

The detentions pointed to Israeli efforts to secure the military’s hold on northern Gaza as the war entered its third month. Furious urban fighting has continued in the north, underscoring Hamas’ heavy resistance, and tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain in the area six weeks after troops and tanks rolled in.

The first images of mass detentions emerged Thursday from the northern town of Beit Lahiya, showing dozens of men kneeling or sitting in the streets, stripped down to their underwear, their hands bound behind their backs. Some had their heads bowed. U.N. monitors said Israeli troops reportedly detained men and boys from the age of 15 in a school-turned-shelter.

In other developments, the United States vetoed a United Nations resolution backed by the vast majority of Security Council members and many other nations demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. The vote in the 15-member council was 13-1 with the United Kingdom abstaining.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the council that Gaza is at “a breaking point” and “there is a high risk of the total collapse of the humanitarian support system.”

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas, which rules Gaza, following the group’s Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war.

Israel’s air and ground campaign initially focused on the northern third of Gaza, leading hundreds of thousands of residents to flee south. A week ago, Israel expanded its ground assault into central and south Gaza, where nearly the territory’s entire population of 2.3 million Palestinians are crowded, many of them cut off from humanitarian supplies.

In central Gaza, Israeli planes on Friday dropped leaflets on the refugee camps of Nuseirat and Maghazi with a message for Hamas officials.

“To Hamas leaders: A life for a life, an eye for an eye and whoever started is to blame. If you punish, then punish with the like of that with which you were afflicted,” the leaflet read, cobbling together a popular

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Arabic saying with a verse from the Muslim holy book, the Quran.

The leaflet left out the rest of the verse, which says it is better to patiently endure afflictions without retaliating.

Hours later, a strike shattered a residential building in Nuseirat, killing at least 21 people, according to officials at the nearby hospital. Following the blast, residents were seen digging beneath the rubble, looking for survivors and belongings that could be unearthed.

HUNDREDS ROUNDED UP

Israeli government spokesman Eylon Levy said Friday that those detained in northern Gaza were "military-aged men who were discovered in areas that civilians were supposed to have evacuated weeks ago." Military spokesman Daniel Hagari said that in the past 48 hours, some 200 people have been detained. Dozens have been taken to Israel for interrogation, including Hamas commanders, he said.

Authorities were questioning the detainees to determine whether they were members of the militant group, Levy said, indicating there would be more such sweeps as troops move from north to south.

The London-based news outlet Al-Araby al-Jadeed, or The New Arab, said one of the men seen in the images of the detainees is its Gaza correspondent Diaa al-Kahlout, and that he was rounded up with other civilians.

The Israeli assault has obliterated much of Gaza City and surrounding areas in the north. Still, tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain there, though the U.N. says it cannot confirm exact numbers. Some are unable to move, others refuse to leave their homes, saying the south is no safer or fearing they will not be allowed to return.

Heavy fighting has been underway for days in Jabaliya refugee camp and the Gaza City district of Shujaiya. The U.N. said Jabaliya's Al Awda Hospital — one of two hospitals still operating in the north — was surrounded by Israeli forces and sustained damage from Israeli shelling. It said Israeli sniper fire into the hospital has also been reported.

On Thursday in Shujaiya, a prominent poet and English professor, Refaat Alareer, was killed, along with his brother, sister and her four children, when Israeli shelling hit the house they were staying in, according to colleagues at "We Are Not Numbers," a nonprofit he helped found.

Days earlier, Alareer wrote on X that his walls were shaking from bombing, shelling and gunfire. The last poem he wrote and shared on social media read, "If I must die/ let it bring hope/ let it be a tale."

The military says it makes every effort to spare civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields as the militants fight in dense residential areas.

Early Friday, Israeli troops made an unsuccessful attempt to free Israeli hostages at a location in Gaza. In the ensuing clash with militants, two soldiers were seriously wounded, and no hostages were freed, the military said. Hamas said its fighters fended off the attempt.

Israel says 137 hostages are still in captivity out of the roughly 240 abducted by militants during the Oct. 7 attack.

There has also been a dramatic surge in deadly military raids and an increase in restrictions on Palestinian residents in the occupied West Bank since the start of the war.

Israeli forces stormed into a refugee camp Friday in the West Bank to arrest suspected Palestinian militants, unleashing fighting with local gunmen in which six Palestinians were killed, health officials said.

IMPENDING CATASTROPHE

The continuation of tough fighting in the north raises fears that Israel's move south to uproot Hamas will wreak similar devastation.

Israeli troops have been battling Hamas fighters inside the southern city of Khan Younis, while strikes have continued to pound nearby Deir al-Balah. A strike Friday on a residential building in Zawaida, outside Deir al-Balah, killed at least 20 people from families sheltering there, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.

Tens of thousands of people displaced by the fighting have packed into Rafah, in the far south of the Gaza Strip, and Muwasi, a nearby patch of barren coastline. Israel has designated Muwasi as a safe zone. But the U.N. and relief agencies have called that a poorly planned solution.

"We do not have a humanitarian operation in southern Gaza that can be called by that name anymore," the U.N.'s humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths, said Thursday. The pace of Israel's military assault has left no place safe in the south, where the U.N. had planned to aid civilians. "That plan is in tatters," he said.

Israel's campaign has killed more than 17,400 people in Gaza — 70% of them women and children — and wounded more than 46,000, 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.

Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7 attack and took more than 240 hostages. The military says 93 of its troops have been killed in the ground campaign.

Texas Supreme Court pauses lower court's order allowing pregnant woman to have an abortion

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Texas Supreme Court on Friday night put on hold a judge's ruling that approved an abortion for a pregnant woman whose fetus has a fatal diagnosis, throwing into limbo an unprecedented challenge to one of the most restrictive bans in the U.S.

The order by the all-Republican court came more than 30 hours after Kate Cox, a 31-year-old mother of two from the Dallas area, received a temporary restraining order from a lower court judge that prevents Texas from enforcing the state's ban in her case.

In a one-page order, the court said it was temporarily staying Thursday's ruling "without regard to the merits." The case is still pending.

"While we still hope that the Court ultimately rejects the state's request and does so quickly, in this case we fear that justice delayed will be justice denied," said Molly Duane, an attorney at the Center for Reproductive Rights, which is representing Cox.

Cox's attorneys have said they will not share her abortion plans, citing concerns for her safety. In a filing with the Texas Supreme Court on Friday, her attorneys indicated she was still pregnant.

Cox was 20 weeks pregnant this week when she filed what is believed to be the first lawsuit of its kind since the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling last year that overturned Roe v. Wade. The order issued Thursday only applied to Cox and no other pregnant Texas women.

Cox learned she was pregnant for a third time in August and was told weeks later that her baby was at a high risk for a condition known as trisomy 18, which has a very high likelihood of miscarriage or stillbirth and low survival rates, according to her lawsuit.

Furthermore, doctors have told Cox that if the baby's heartbeat were to stop, inducing labor would carry a risk of a uterine rupture because of her two prior cesareans sections, and that another C-section at full term would endanger her ability to carry another child.

Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton argued that Cox does not meet the criteria for a medical exception to the state's abortion ban, and he urged the state's highest court to act swiftly.

"Future criminal and civil proceedings cannot restore the life that is lost if Plaintiffs or their agents proceed to perform and procure an abortion in violation of Texas law," Paxton's office told the court.

He also warned three hospitals in Houston that they could face legal consequences if they allowed Cox's physician to provide the abortion, despite the ruling from state District Judge Maya Guerra Gamble, who Paxton called an "activist" judge.

On Friday, a pregnant Kentucky woman also filed a lawsuit demanding the right to an abortion. The plaintiff, identified as Jane Doe, is about eight weeks pregnant and she wants to have an abortion in Kentucky but cannot legally do so because of the state's ban, the suit said.

Unlike Cox's lawsuit, the Kentucky challenge seeks class-action status to include other Kentuckians who are or will become pregnant and want to have an abortion.

Saints QB Derek Carr clears concussion protocol, could play vs. Panthers

By BRETT MARTEL AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Saints quarterback Derek Carr cleared the concussion protocol on Friday evening, increasing the likelihood that he'll start on Sunday against the Carolina Panthers.

Carr, who left New Orleans' 33-28 loss to Detroit last week with a concussion as well as shoulder and rib injuries, was listed as questionable on Friday's injury report.

However, he participated — at least on a limited basis — in every practice this week.

"I have felt better, but I'm doing great," Carr, who was concussed twice in 22 days, said after clearing the protocol.

"I don't really have any concerns," Carr added. "Our doctors and the non-affiliated doctor said everything was perfect."

Carr's injury came after he'd been booed repeatedly by the Superdome crowd when taking the field, starting in pre-game warmups and throughout much of last Sunday's game.

Aided by an interception on Carr's first pass of the game, the Lions raced to a 21-0 lead in the first seven minutes. New Orleans got as close as 24-21 before Carr lost a fumble on a fluky play in which guard James Hurst knocked the ball from the quarterback's hands. That turnover set up another Detroit touchdown.

As Carr discussed returning to the Superdome field this Sunday, he shrugged off the negativity emanating from the home crowd.

"It's a part of the game sometimes, especially when you're losing a football game the way we were losing," Carr said. "But I was proud of the way we fought back and turned those things into some loud cheers."

Carr said preparing for this week's game required more of a time commitment than usual because of his various ailments.

"I got my treatment, I did my protocol stuff, but I also, most importantly, made sure that I did everything I need to do to accomplish my job," Carr said. "I always believe to give anything less than your best is to sacrifice your gift, so I'm never going to give anything less."

"The work will get done," Carr continued. "Maybe it will get done a little later than usual, but whatever it takes, you've got to get the work done."

NOTES: Multi-position player Taysom Hill was listed as questionable with hand and foot injuries after not practicing this week. Also questionable was leading receiver Chris Olave, who missed practice on Thursday and Friday with an illness. Saints coach Dennis Allen said Olave was involved in the game plan remotely during meetings, but was asked to stay away from team headquarters to minimize the risk of spreading his illness to teammates.

Europe reaches a deal on the world's first comprehensive AI rules

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — European Union negotiators clinched a deal Friday on the world's first comprehensive artificial intelligence rules, paving the way for legal oversight of AI technology that has promised to transform everyday life and spurred warnings of existential dangers to humanity.

Negotiators from the European Parliament and the bloc's 27 member countries overcame big differences on controversial points including generative AI and police use of face recognition surveillance to sign a tentative political agreement for the Artificial Intelligence Act.

"Deal!" tweeted European Commissioner Thierry Breton just before midnight. "The EU becomes the very first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI."

The result came after marathon closed-door talks this week, with the initial session lasting 22 hours before a second round kicked off Friday morning.

Officials were under the gun to secure a political victory for the flagship legislation. Civil society groups, however, gave it a cool reception as they wait for technical details that will need to be ironed out in the coming weeks. They said the deal didn't go far enough in protecting people from harm caused by AI systems.

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"Today's political deal marks the beginning of important and necessary technical work on crucial details of the AI Act, which are still missing," said Daniel Friedlaender, head of the European office of the Computer and Communications Industry Association, a tech industry lobby group.

The EU took an early lead in the global race to draw up AI guardrails when it unveiled the first draft of its rulebook in 2021. The recent boom in generative AI, however, sent European officials scrambling to update a proposal poised to serve as a blueprint for the world.

The European Parliament will still need to vote on the act early next year, but with the deal done that's a formality, Brando Benifei, an Italian lawmaker co-leading the body's negotiating efforts, told The Associated Press late Friday.

"It's very very good," he said by text message after being asked if it included everything he wanted. "Obviously we had to accept some compromises but overall very good." The eventual law wouldn't fully take effect until 2025 at the earliest, and threatens stiff financial penalties for violations of up to 35 million euros (\$38 million) or 7% of a company's global turnover.

Generative AI systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT have exploded into the world's consciousness, dazzling users with the ability to produce human-like text, photos and songs but raising fears about the risks the rapidly developing technology poses to jobs, privacy and copyright protection and even human life itself.

Now, the U.S., U.K., China and global coalitions like the Group of 7 major democracies have jumped in with their own proposals to regulate AI, though they're still catching up to Europe.

Strong and comprehensive rules from the EU "can set a powerful example for many governments considering regulation," said Anu Bradford, a Columbia Law School professor who's an expert on EU law and digital regulation. Other countries "may not copy every provision but will likely emulate many aspects of it."

AI companies subject to the EU's rules will also likely extend some of those obligations outside the continent, she said. "After all, it is not efficient to re-train separate models for different markets," she said.

The AI Act was originally designed to mitigate the dangers from specific AI functions based on their level of risk, from low to unacceptable. But lawmakers pushed to expand it to foundation models, the advanced systems that underpin general purpose AI services like ChatGPT and Google's Bard chatbot.

Foundation models looked set to be one of the biggest sticking points for Europe. However, negotiators managed to reach a tentative compromise early in the talks, despite opposition led by France, which called instead for self-regulation to help homegrown European generative AI companies competing with big U.S. rivals, including OpenAI's backer Microsoft.

Also known as large language models, these systems are trained on vast troves of written works and images scraped off the internet. They give generative AI systems the ability to create something new, unlike traditional AI, which processes data and completes tasks using predetermined rules.

The companies building foundation models will have to draw up technical documentation, comply with EU copyright law and detail the content used for training. The most advanced foundation models that pose "systemic risks" will face extra scrutiny, including assessing and mitigating those risks, reporting serious incidents, putting cybersecurity measures in place and reporting their energy efficiency.

Researchers have warned that powerful foundation models, built by a handful of big tech companies, could be used to supercharge online disinformation and manipulation, cyberattacks or creation of bioweapons.

Rights groups also caution that the lack of transparency about data used to train the models poses risks to daily life because they act as basic structures for software developers building AI-powered services.

What became the thorniest topic was AI-powered face recognition surveillance systems, and negotiators found a compromise after intensive bargaining.

European lawmakers wanted a full ban on public use of face scanning and other "remote biometric identification" systems because of privacy concerns. But governments of member countries succeeded in negotiating exemptions so law enforcement could use them to tackle serious crimes like child sexual exploitation or terrorist attacks.

Rights groups said they were concerned about the exemptions and other big loopholes in the AI Act, including lack of protection for AI systems used in migration and border control, and the option for de-

velopers to opt-out of having their systems classified as high risk.

"Whatever the victories may have been in these final negotiations, the fact remains that huge flaws will remain in this final text," said Daniel Leufer, a senior policy analyst at the digital rights group Access Now.

Michigan teen gets life in prison for Oxford High School attack

By ED WHITE and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — A judge sentenced a Michigan teenager to life in prison Friday for killing four students and terrorizing others at Oxford High School, after listening to hours of gripping anguish from parents and wounded survivors.

Judge Kwame Rowe rejected pleas from defense lawyers for a shorter sentence and ensured that Ethan Crumbley, 17, will not get an opportunity for parole.

Moments before learning his fate, the teen apologized and appeared to agree with his victims that the stiffest punishment was appropriate.

"Any sentence that they ask for, I ask that you do impose it on me," the shooter said. "I want them to be happy, and I want them to feel secure and safe. I do not want them to worry another day. I really am sorry for what I've done. ... But I can try my best in the future to help other people, and that is what I will do."

Life sentences for teenagers are rare in Michigan since the U.S. Supreme Court and the state's highest court said the acts of minors must be viewed differently than the crimes of adults. But Oakland County prosecutor Karen McDonald said a no-parole order fit the Oxford case.

"It's not a moment to celebrate," McDonald said outside court. "It's tragic. And the voices today, I think, profoundly show that."

Indeed, Rowe's decision followed deeply emotional remarks by families of the deceased and survivors who said the tragedy had irreparably turned their lives upside down.

Crumbley, who was 15 when he committed the shooting, pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and terrorism. He brought a gun to school, but his backpack was never checked, even after his parents were summoned that same day about their son's drawings, which included a gun and words: "The thoughts won't stop. Help me."

"I am a really bad person. I've done terrible things," Crumbley said in court Friday.

The judge said the shooting was planned well in advance, and he noted that the shooter had plenty of time to stop as he walked through school.

Rowe was especially troubled by how victim Hana St. Juliana was repeatedly shot and that another, Justin Shilling, was shot at point-blank range in a bathroom while another student was forced to watch. He described it as "execution" and "torture."

"The court cannot ignore the deep trauma caused to the state of Michigan and the Oxford community," the judge said.

Earlier, Rowe allowed a framed photo of Tate Myre to be placed near him while the slain teen's father spoke.

"We are miserable. We miss Tate," Buck Myre said. "Our family has a permanent hole in it that can never be fixed — ever."

Nicole Beausoleil recalled seeing the body of her daughter, Madisyn Baldwin, at the medical examiner's office, her hand with blue-painted fingernails sticking out from a covering.

"I looked through the glass. My scream should have shattered it," Beausoleil said.

Shilling's mother, Jill Soave, told the shooter that he executed a boy who could have helped him navigate awkward teenage years.

"If you were that lonely, that miserable and lost, and you really needed a friend, Justin would have been your friend — if only you had asked," Soave said.

Kylie Ossege explained how she had urged St. Juliana a "thousand times" to keep breathing while they waited for help on a blood-soaked carpet. Her classmate died.

Ossege, now a college student, was shot and continues to struggle with daily pain from spinal injuries.

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"Being able to swing a leg over my horse is my therapy. It is pure joy," she said of Blaze. "I have not been able to do it for two years."

Crumbley's defense team urged the judge to give him a chance to turn his life around and become eligible for parole. A court-appointed guardian, lawyer Deborah McKelvy, said the teen was not the same person, two years after the murders.

"He is a bright young man," she told the judge. "He is an artist. He is a historian. There are days I have been oblivious sitting in a cell for three hours just talking to him. His life is salvageable."

Defense lawyer Paulette Michel Loftin said Crumbley has improved with medication and mental health care.

"He is remorseful. He has been able to keep out the dark voices and thoughts," Loftin said.

But victims weren't impressed.

"There can be no rehabilitation," St. Juliana's father, Steve St. Juliana, told the judge. "There is absolutely nothing the defendant can do to earn my forgiveness. His age plays no part."

In a journal, the shooter wrote about his desire to watch students suffer and the likelihood that he would spend his life in prison. He made a video on the eve of the shooting, declaring what he would do the next day.

Linda Watson said her son, Aiden, who was shot in the leg, still doesn't go to school for a full day. She recalled the family staying in a hotel because a nail gun being used in her neighborhood sounded like a real gun to him.

"Aiden will be dealing with this for the rest of his life. ... This shooter — this monster — should have to feel everything hard and painful for the rest of his life," Watson said.

Meanwhile, parents Jennifer and James Crumbley are locked up in the county jail. They are awaiting trial on involuntary manslaughter charges, accused of making a gun accessible at home and neglecting their son's mental health.

The shooting happened in Oxford Township, about 40 miles (60 kilometers) north of Detroit. Besides the four students who were killed, six more students and a teacher also were wounded.

The Oxford school district hired an outside group to conduct an independent investigation. A report released in October said "missteps at each level" — school board, administrators, staff — contributed to the tragedy.

Crumbley's behavior in class, including looking at a shooting video and gun ammunition on his phone, should have identified him as a "potential threat of violence," the report said.

Ryan O'Neal, star of 'Love Story,' 'Paper Moon,' 'Peyton Place' and 'Barry Lyndon,' dies at 82

By ANTHONY McCARTNEY AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ryan O'Neal, the heartthrob actor who went from a TV soap opera to an Oscar-nominated role in "Love Story" and delivered a wry performance opposite his charismatic 9-year-old daughter Tatum in "Paper Moon," died Friday, his son said.

"My dad passed away peacefully today, with his loving team by his side supporting him and loving him as he would us," Patrick O'Neal, a Los Angeles sportscaster, posted on Instagram.

No cause of death was given. Ryan O'Neal was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2012, a decade after he was first diagnosed with chronic leukemia. He was 82.

"My father, Ryan O'Neal, has always been my hero," Patrick O'Neal wrote, adding, "He is a Hollywood legend. Full stop."

"He meant the world to me. I loved him very much and know he loved me too," Tatum O'Neal told People magazine in a statement. "I'll miss him forever. and I feel very lucky that we ended on such good terms."

Ryan O'Neal was among the biggest movie stars in the world in the 1970s, working across genres with many of the era's most celebrated directors including Peter Bogdanovich on "Paper Moon" and "What's Up, Doc?" and Stanley Kubrick on "Barry Lyndon." He often used his boyish, blond good looks to play men who hid shadowy or sinister backgrounds behind their clean-cut images.

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O'Neal maintained a steady television acting career into his 70s in the 2010s, appearing for stints on "Bones" and "Desperate Housewives," but his longtime relationship with Farrah Fawcett and his tumultuous family life kept him in news.

Twice divorced, O'Neal was romantically involved with Fawcett for nearly 30 years, and they had a son, Redmond, born in 1985. The couple split in 1997, but reunited a few years later. He remained by Fawcett's side as she battled cancer, which killed her in 2009 at age 62.

With his first wife, Joanna Moore, O'Neal fathered actors Griffin O'Neal and Tatum O'Neal, his co-star in the 1973 movie "Paper Moon," for which she won an Oscar for best supporting actress. He had son Patrick with his second wife, Leigh Taylor-Young.

Ryan O'Neal had his own best actor Oscar nomination for the 1970 tear-jerker drama "Love Story," co-starring Ali MacGraw, about a young couple who fall in love, marry and discover she is dying of cancer. The movie includes the memorable, but often satirized line: "Love means never having to say you're sorry."

The actor had at times strained relationships with three of his children, including estrangement from his daughter, squabbles with son Griffin and a drug-related arrest sparked by a probation check of his son Redmond. The personal drama often over-shadowed his later career, although his attempts to reconcile with Tatum O'Neal were turned into a short-lived reality series.

O'Neal played bit parts and performed some stunt work before claiming a lead role on the prime-time soap opera "Peyton Place" (1964-69), which also made a star of Mia Farrow.

From there O'Neal jumped to the big screen with 1969's "The Big Bounce," which co-starred his then-wife, Taylor-Young. But it was "Love Story" that made him a movie star.

The romantic melodrama was the highest-grossing film of 1970, became one of Paramount Pictures' biggest hits and collected seven Oscar nominations, including one for best picture. It won for best music.

After "Love Story" made him a major movie star, O'Neal was considered for seemingly every major leading role in Hollywood. Paramount even pushed for him to star as Michael Corleone in "The Godfather" before Al Pacino got the part at the insistence of director Francis Ford Coppola.

O'Neal then starred for Bogdanovich as a bumbling professor opposite Barbra Streisand in the 1972 screwball comedy "What's Up, Doc?"

"So sad to hear the news of Ryan O'Neal's passing," Streisand, who also starred with O'Neal in the 1979 boxing rom-com "The Main Event," posted on Instagram. "He was funny and charming, and he will be remembered."

The year after "What's Up, Doc?" Bogdanovich cast him in the Depression-era con artist comedy "Paper Moon."

In it, O'Neal played an unscrupulous Bible salesman preying on widows he located through obituary notices. His real-life daughter, Tatum, played a trash-talking, cigarette-smoking orphan who needs his help — and eventually helps redeem him.

Although critics praised both actors, the little girl's brash performance overshadowed her father's and made her the youngest person in history to win a competitive Academy Award. She was 10 when the award was presented in 1974. (Younger performers such as Shirley Temple have won special Oscars.)

The elder O'Neal's next major film was Kubrick's 18th century epic "Barry Lyndon," in which he played a poor Irish rogue who traveled Europe trying to pass himself off as an aristocrat.

Filming the three-hour movie was tedious work, however, and Kubrick's notorious perfectionism created a rift between him and the actor that never healed.

O'Neal then reteamed with Tatum in Bogdanovich's early Hollywood comedy "Nickelodeon" (1976). But the film was a flop and they never worked together again. An attempt to capitalize on his "Love Story" character, Oliver Barrett, with the sequel "Oliver's Story" (1978) resulted in another flop.

Father and daughter drifted apart as Tatum grew older, with the elder actor learning about his daughter's marriage to tennis great John McEnroe by a belated telegram, Ryan O'Neal wrote in a 2012 book about his relationship with Fawcett.

"A door inside me locked the morning the telegram came, and I am still blindly searching for the key to

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open it," O'Neal wrote in "Both of Us."

O'Neal's career cooled further in the 1980s with the emerald heist drama "Green Ice" (1981) and the 1984 comedy "Irreconcilable Differences," in which he played a busy father in an unhappy marriage whose daughter, played by 9-year-old Drew Barrymore, tries to divorce her parents.

The decade was also a low-point in O'Neal's personal life. His son Griffin faced numerous brushes with the law, including a 1986 boating accident that killed Gian-Carlo Coppola, 23, son of movie director Francis Ford Coppola in Maryland. Griffin O'Neal was convicted of negligently and recklessly operating a boat, received a community service sentence and later served a brief stint in jail as a result.

With his Hollywood status diminishing, Ryan O'Neal began appearing in TV movies and eventually returned to series television opposite then-lover Fawcett with the 1991 sitcom "Good Sports," but the show ran only one season.

Both acknowledged the work put a strain on their relationship.

"We get into fights," O'Neal said in 1991. "She's tough. She expects to be treated well. On a set that can get lost when you're trying to create a moment and you're fighting the clock."

O'Neal began accepting more supporting roles with the 1989 film "Chances Are." He began a second career as a character actor, playing a husband who hires a hitman to kill his wife in "Faithful" (1996) and a mysterious tycoon in the blackmail comedy "Zero Effect" (1998).

By then his relationship with Fawcett had ended, although they remained close and eventually rekindled their romance in the 2000s. The volatile O'Neal family dynamics that had taxed their relationship before, however, remained.

In 2007 the elder O'Neal was arrested in 2007 for alleged assault and firing a weapon in an altercation with Griffin, but charges were never pursued. Their son Redmond was repeatedly arrested, jailed and spent several years in court-mandated rehab.

A probation check on Redmond O'Neal in September 2008 at his father's Malibu home led to the actor's arrest for methamphetamine possession. Ryan O'Neal pleaded guilty to the charge and entered a drug diversion program, but he publicly denied the drugs were his. He said he confiscated them from his son and was trying to protect him.

Charles Patrick Ryan O'Neal was born on April 20, 1941, and was the son of screenwriter Charles O'Neal and actor Patricia Callaghan O'Neal. O'Neal spent time as a lifeguard and an amateur boxer before finding his calling as a performer.

US vetoes UN resolution backed by many nations demanding immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States vetoed a United Nations resolution Friday backed by almost all other Security Council members and dozens of other nations demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. Supporters called it a terrible day and warned of more civilian deaths and destruction as the war goes into its third month.

The vote in the 15-member council was 13-1, with the United Kingdom abstaining. The United States' isolated stand reflected a growing fracture between Washington and some of its closest allies over Israel's monthslong bombardment of Gaza. France and Japan were among those supporting the call for a cease-fire.

In a vain effort to press the Biden administration to drop its opposition to calling for a halt to the fighting, the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were all in Washington on Friday. But their meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken took place only after the U.N. vote.

Along with the vote, the Arab diplomats' mission served to shift responsibility more squarely onto the United States for protecting Israel from growing demands to stop the airstrikes that are killing thousands of Palestinian civilians.

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"What is the message we are sending Palestinians if we cannot unite behind a call to halt the relentless bombardment of Gaza?" United Arab Emirates deputy ambassador Mohamed Abushaha asked after the vote. "Indeed, what is the message we are sending civilians across the world who may find themselves in similar situations?"

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood called the resolution "imbalanced" and criticized the council after the vote for its failure to condemn Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel in which the militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, or to acknowledge Israel's right to defend itself. He declared that halting military action would allow Hamas to continue to rule Gaza and "only plant the seeds for the next war."

"Hamas has no desire to see a durable peace, to see a two-state solution," Wood said before the vote. "For that reason, while the United States strongly supports a durable peace, in which both Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace and security, we do not support calls for an immediate cease-fire."

Israel's military campaign has killed more than 17,400 people in Gaza — 70% of them women and children — and wounded more than 46,000, according to the Palestinian territory's Health Ministry, which says many others are trapped under rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

Abushahab, the UAE diplomat, said before the vote that the resolution, which his country sponsored, had garnered nearly 100 co-sponsors in less than 24 hours, a reflection of global support for efforts to end the war and save Palestinian lives.

After the vote, he expressed deep disappointment at the U.S. veto and warned that the Security Council is growing isolated and "appears untethered" from its mandate to ensure international peace and security.

Ambassador Nicolas De Rivière of France, a veto-wielding permanent council member who supported the resolution, lamented its lack of unity and pleaded "for a new, immediate and lasting humanitarian truce that should lead to a sustainable cease-fire."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky called the vote "one of the darkest days in the history of the Middle East" and accused the United States of issuing "a death sentence to thousands, if not tens of thousands more civilians in Palestine and Israel, including women and children."

He said "history will judge Washington's actions" in the face of what he called a "merciless Israeli blood-bath."

The council called the emergency meeting to hear from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who for the first time invoked Article 99 of the U.N. Charter, which enables a U.N. chief to raise threats he sees to international peace and security. He warned of an "humanitarian catastrophe" in Gaza and urged the council to demand a humanitarian cease-fire.

Guterres said he raised Article 99 — which hadn't been used at the U.N. since 1971 — because "there is a high risk of the total collapse of the humanitarian support system in Gaza." The U.N. anticipates this would result in "a complete breakdown of public order and increased pressure for mass displacement into Egypt," he warned.

Gaza is at "a breaking point," he said, and desperate people are at serious risk of starvation.

Guterres said Hamas' brutality against Israelis on Oct. 7 "can never justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people."

"While indiscriminate rocket fire by Hamas into Israel, and the use of civilians as human shields, are in contravention of the laws of war, such conduct does not absolve Israel of its own violations," he stressed.

The U.N. chief detailed the "humanitarian nightmare" Gaza is facing, citing intense, widespread and ongoing Israeli attacks from air, land and sea that reportedly have hit 339 education facilities, 26 hospitals, 56 health care facilities, 88 mosques and three churches.

Over 60% of Gaza's housing has reportedly been destroyed or damaged, some 85% of the population has been forced from their homes, the health system is collapsing, and "nowhere in Gaza is safe," Guterres said.

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, told the council that Israel's objective is "the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip" and "the dispossession and forcible displacement of the Palestinian people."

"If you are against the destruction and displacement of the Palestinian people, you have to be in favor of an immediate cease-fire," Mansour said. "When you refuse to call for a cease-fire, you are refusing to call for the only thing that can put an end to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide."

After the vote, he called the U.S. veto "disastrous" and said it was "a terrible day for the Security Council." "We reject this result, and we'll continue resorting to every legitimate avenue to stop these abhorrent atrocities," Mansour said.

But Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant thanked the United States for its "bold leadership."

"A cease-fire is handing a prize to Hamas, dismissing the hostages held in Gaza, and signaling terror groups everywhere," he said in a statement. "Stand with Israel in our mission. We are fighting for our future, and we are fighting for the free world."

In Washington, Jordan's top diplomat told reporters that the killings of Palestinian civilians in Israel's bombardment and siege of Gaza were war crimes and threatened to destabilize the region, the U.S. and the world for years to come.

"If people are not seeing it here, we are seeing it," Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said, adding: "We're seeing the challenges that we are are facing talking to our people. They are all saying we're doing nothing. Because despite all our efforts, Israel is continuing these massacres."

Amnesty International's Secretary General Agnès Callamard criticized the U.S. for continuing to transfer munitions to the Israeli government "that contribute to the decimation of entire families."

And Louis Charbonneau, U.N. director at Human Rights Watch, said that by providing weapons and diplomatic cover to Israel "as it commits atrocities, including collectively punishing the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, the U.S. risks complicity in war crimes."

Free toy store in Nashville gives families the dignity of choice while shopping for holiday gifts

By KRISTIN M. HALL Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — When country music star Brad Paisley and his wife, actress Kimberly Williams-Paisley, helped create a free grocery store in Nashville, Tennessee, their goal was to give families in need the ability to choose their own food in a place that felt like a normal store.

This year, The Store is offering that same dignity of choice to parents looking for gifts for the holiday season. During a two-day event starting Friday, 400 families will shop at a free toy store, stocked with brand new toys, video games, stuffed animals, scooters, clothes, makeup and musical instruments.

"The emotional aspect of being able to give your child something your child wanted versus just something to sort of get you through the holidays, that's such a load off the minds of somebody who maybe didn't think they were going to be able to do that," Paisley said.

Nashville resident Stephanie Brodie got enrolled at The Store when she was a caregiver to her mother and they both enjoyed getting to shop for the foods that they needed for their diets. Her mom has since passed and now she's taking care of five grandchildren, including four under the age of 15.

On Friday, Brodie and her granddaughter La'Delegant Hartsfield picked out armloads of toys, musical instruments, beauty products and clothes for the family on Friday, a much-needed blessing when she's trying to save money to replace a broken stove this year.

"It's a very much dignified process and it gives you the freedom of choice," said Brodie, who wore a paisley print dress in honor of the Paisley family. "So we have choice in what we present to our children. And we have choice in what we feed and put on the table, which of course empowers you."

The Paisleys got a sneak peak on Thursday before the free toy store opened, marveling over the stacks of gifts, wrapping station, Christmas trees and holiday decorations. Volunteers and staff from Belmont University and The Store spent hours unpacking and organizing all the donated toys into sections and decorating while listening to Christmas music.

The celebrity couple brought the idea of a free grocery store to Nashville after seeing the concept years

ago at the Unity Shoppe in Santa Barbara, California. When The Store launched in early 2020, it was just weeks after a tornado hit the city and before the global pandemic made food access an immediate problem.

The Store and its staff adapted, turning into a food delivery service for older people and delivering a million meals in the first year of operation. The Store has an enrollment process each year, and to qualify, a household's total annual income has to be at 200% or below the federal poverty line. In addition to the free groceries, Belmont University, where Paisley graduated, now offers additional services to low-income families, including financial literacy events, music therapy and medicine management.

"People come on hard times and we want this to be a safe, welcoming place for everybody, whether you're volunteering or whether you're needing the services," Williams-Paisley said. "It's just a community and we're all in it together."

Brodie said The Store and Belmont gave her a bridge to resources she needed, whether it was a cooking class or homework help, especially when taxes, inflation and real estate prices have made it harder to live in Nashville.

"I love Nashville. I don't want to get pushed out. And this has afforded me to be able to stay here for another year," Brodie said.

The Store received about 2,000 donated items, about half of which came from the Nashville area and the other half from First Responder's Children's Foundation, and raised \$20,000. Parents will be able to drop off their kids at a church next door, where they can play and drink hot chocolate while the adults shop and get gifts wrapped.

There are plans for the toy store to become a recurring event, but Williams-Paisley noted The Store would need year-round donations to keep people fed.

"We're still not serving everybody that we want to serve. Food insecurity is on the rise. The USDA just released its report saying 17 million households in this country are facing food insecurity and that's on the rise from 2021," Williams-Paisley said. "There's so much we want to do. And really like the toy store has shown us that we can keep going and we can keep expanding and growing."

Paisley admits this is his favorite season of the year, even suggesting he might show up at the toy store in a Santa costume.

"I live for this time of year," Paisley said. "Ever since we've had children and possibly even before, I kind of go all out."

Federal judge prohibits separating migrant families at US border for 8 years

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A federal judge on Friday prohibited the separation of families at the border for purposes of deterring immigration for eight years, preemptively blocking resumption of a lightning-rod, Trump-era policy that the former president hasn't ruled out if voters return him to the White House next year.

The separation of thousands of families "represents one of the most shameful chapters in the history of our country," U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw said moments before approving a settlement between the Justice Department and families represented by the American Civil Liberties Union that ended a legal challenge nearly seven years after it was filed.

Sabraw, who was appointed by President George W. Bush, ordered an end to separations in June 2018, six days after then-President Donald Trump halted them on his own amid intense international backlash. The judge also ordered that the government reunite children with their parents within 30 days, setting off a mad scramble because government databases weren't linked. Children had been dispersed to shelters across the country that didn't know who their parents were or how to find them.

As he reminisced and congratulated lawyers on both sides, the judge recalled a sense of horror over initial allegations and how subsequent disclosures left him increasingly dismayed over how the policy was

carried out in 2017 and 2018. He read from an earlier order in which he said the practice was “brutal, offensive and fails to comply with traditional notions of fair play and decency.”

Sabraw referred to another court filing in 2018 that described how many parents were deported without knowing where their children were. “Simply cruel,” he said.

The government and volunteers have yet to locate 68 children who were separated under the policy to determine if they are safe and reunited with family or loved ones, according to the ACLU. Sabraw said those children who are unaccounted for was “always my greatest fear and concern.”

Under the settlement, the type of “zero-tolerance” policy under which the Trump administration separated more than 5,000 children from parents who were arrested for illegally entering the country would be prohibited until December 2031.

Children may still be separated but under limited circumstances, as has been the case for years. They include if the child is believed to be abused, if the parent is convicted of serious crimes or if there are doubts that the adult is the parent.

Families that were separated may be eligible for other benefits — legal status for up to three years on humanitarian parole; reunification in the United States at government expense; one year of housing; three years of counseling; legal aid in immigration court. But the settlement doesn’t pay families any money. In 2021, the Biden administration considered compensating parents and children hundreds of thousands of dollars each, but talks stalled.

As he seeks to return to the White House in next year’s elections, Trump has been noncommittal whether he would try to resume family separations. He defended the results in an interview with Univision last month, claiming without evidence that it “stopped people from coming by the hundreds of thousands.”

“When you hear that you’re going to be separated from your family, you don’t come. When you think you’re going to come into the United States with your family, you come,” Trump said.

The Department of Homeland Security referred Friday to an earlier statement by Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas that the settlement reflects efforts to address a “cruel and inhumane policy, and our steadfast adherence to our nation’s most dearly held values.”

ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt told reporters that the judge’s comments Friday “said it all. This was a tragic episode in our country’s history.”

The Trump campaign did not immediately respond to the ruling Friday.

Six French teens convicted over their roles in an Islamic extremist’s killing of a teacher

By ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A French juvenile court on Friday convicted six teenagers for their roles in the 2020 beheading of a teacher by an Islamic extremist, an attack that shocked the country and shone a light on the real-world dangers of online hate speech.

Samuel Paty, a history and geography teacher, was killed near his school after showing his class cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during a debate on free expression. Attacker Abdoullakh Anzorov, a young Chechen who had become radicalized, was killed by police.

The court found five of the defendants, who were 14 and 15 at the time of the attack, guilty of involvement in staking out the teacher and identifying him for the attacker. The sixth defendant, 13 at the time, was found guilty of lying about the classroom debate in comments that aggravated online anger against the teacher.

After the ruling, the six defendants left the courtroom without speaking. Some had their heads down as they listened to the verdict. One appeared to wipe tears.

The teenagers — all students at Paty’s school — acknowledged wrongdoing, and testified that they didn’t know the teacher would be killed.

One was given a six-month prison term but allowed to serve under house arrest with an electronic

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bracelet. The others were given special suspended sentences of between two and three years requiring them to stay in school or jobs. The sentences included special educative follow-up measures that also involved their families.

Lawyers for Paty's family decried the sentences as too lenient. Lawyers for the teenagers expressed relief. Paty's name was disclosed on social media after the class debate, during which he showed caricatures of Islam's prophet published by the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. The publication had triggered a deadly extremist massacre in the Charlie Hebdo newsroom in 2015.

The cartoon images deeply offended many Muslims in France and around the world, who see them as sacrilegious. But Paty's killing reinforced the French state's commitment to freedom of expression, and its firm attachment to secularism in public life — and especially in schools.

The five who identified Paty to the attacker were convicted of involvement in a group preparing aggravated violence.

The sixth defendant wrongly claimed Paty had asked Muslim students to leave the classroom before he showed the class the cartoons, and said the teacher punished her for accusing him of anti-Muslim sentiment. In fact, she was not in the classroom that day, and later told investigators she had lied. She was convicted of making false allegations.

The girl's father shared the lies in an online video that called for mobilization against the teacher. Now incarcerated, her father and a radical Islamic activist who helped disseminate virulent messages against Paty are among eight adults who will face a separate trial for adults suspected of involvement in the killing, expected late next year.

The girl's lawyer Mbeko Tebula said she "doesn't forgive herself for this lie." "She didn't imagine it would ... turn into so much horror," he said. "She was 13." "She will try to move forward," he said. "She will try to rebuild herself as a woman. To live with this permanent guilt, which will not pass through her but will inhabit her."

Lawyer Virginie Le Roy, representing Paty's family, had tears in her eyes as she described her anger that the punishment was not tougher.

"Yes, I am emotional. I am emotional for this family, also for the memory of Samuel. A man decapitated in the street is not nothing. We are in France. This was in 2020," she said. The sentences are "a bad signal to the family of Samuel, a bad signal to the students, and a bad signal to teachers."

Teachers at the school and Paty's relatives were in the courtroom along with some of the defendants' parents. Family members of the teenagers comforted each other afterward, some looking depleted or resigned. They refused to speak to reporters.

The media are not allowed to disclose the defendants' identities, according to French law regarding minors. The proceedings come weeks after a teacher was fatally stabbed in northern France in October in a school attack by a former student suspected of Islamic radicalization. Another shock hit France last Saturday, when a man with a history of Islamic radicalism and mental illness fatally stabbed a 23-year-old German-Filipino tourist near the Eiffel Tower.

Both killings occurred in a context of global tensions over the Israel-Hamas war, which led French authorities to deploy 7,000 additional soldiers across the country to bolster security and vigilance.

High-profile attacks on Derek Chauvin and Larry Nassar put spotlight on violence in federal prisons

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

Derek Chauvin was stabbed nearly two dozen times at a federal prison in Arizona. Larry Nassar was knifed repeatedly at a federal penitentiary in Florida.

The recent assaults of two high-profile federal prisoners by fellow inmates have renewed concerns about whether the crisis-plagued federal Bureau of Prisons is capable of keeping inmates safe.

In the shadow of gangster James "Whitey" Bulger's 2018 beating death and financier Jeffrey Epstein's

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2019 suicide, the agency is again under scrutiny for failing to protect high-profile prisoners from harm.

Chauvin, 47, the ex-Minneapolis police officer convicted of murdering George Floyd in 2020, was assaulted Nov. 24 in the law library at a medium-security federal prison in Tucson, Arizona — the same complex where an inmate tried to shoot a visitor last year with a contraband gun.

Chauvin's suspected attacker, an ex-gang leader, told correctional officers he would have killed him if they hadn't responded when they did, prosecutors said. He is charged with attempted murder and was moved to a federal penitentiary next door.

Chauvin's family is "very concerned about the facility's capacity to protect Derek from further harm," his lawyer, Gregory Erickson, said.

Nassar, 60, the ex-U.S. women's gymnastics team doctor who sexually abused athletes, was ambushed in his cell on July 9 at a federal penitentiary in Coleman, Florida. Other inmates stopped his attacker before officers arrived.

The attacks are symptoms of larger problems within the Justice Department's largest agency that put all 158,000 federal prisoners at risk. They include severe staffing shortages, staff-on-inmate abuse, broken surveillance cameras and crumbling infrastructure.

The violence has challenged a perception that federal prisons are far safer than state prisons. The inmates suspected of attacking Chauvin and Nassar both have violent histories.

"No one's sentence, regardless of their offense, includes being subjected to violence while they're in prison," said Daniel Landsman, deputy director of policy at Families Against Mandatory Minimums, a criminal justice advocacy group. "The attack on Chauvin is the latest in a long list of incidents that highlight the urgent need for comprehensive independent oversight of our federal Bureau of Prisons."

An ongoing Associated Press investigation has uncovered deep problems within the Bureau of Prisons, including rampant sexual abuse and other staff criminal conduct, dozens of escapes, violence, deaths and understaffing that has hampered responses to emergencies, including inmate assaults and suicides.

The agency, with more than 30,000 employees, 122 prison facilities and an annual budget of about \$8 billion, has drawn increased oversight from Congress and scrutiny from government watchdogs.

Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz has cited management failures, flawed policies and incompetence as factors in Bulger's killing and blamed "negligence, misconduct and outright job performance failures" for Epstein's suicide as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges.

The "serious deficiencies" connected to their deaths were "especially concerning given that the BOP would presumably take particular care in handling the custody and care of such inmates," Horowitz wrote.

Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters said lessons learned would be "applied to the broader BOP correctional landscape." But the agency declined last week to tell the AP what changes have been made, saying it does not "discuss specific security practices."

Peters also promised a security review after the gun breach last year. Asked for an update, the agency said it "does not comment on matters related to investigations."

A spokesperson, Benjamin O'Conne, said the agency "takes seriously our duty to protect the individuals entrusted in our custody, as well as maintain the safety of correctional employees and the community."

"We review safety protocols and implement corrective actions when identified," O'Conne said.

Chauvin began his incarceration in solitary confinement at a maximum-security Minnesota state prison, "largely for his own protection," his former lawyer wrote in court papers.

He transferred to FCI Tucson in August 2022 after agreeing to simultaneously serve all his punishment for Floyd's murder in federal prison — a 21-year federal sentence for violating Floyd's civil rights, later reduced by seven months, and a 22½-year state sentence for second-degree murder.

Chauvin's sentencing judge was optimistic he'd fare better with fewer restrictions in federal prison.

Rather than solitary or protective custody, the Bureau of Prisons placed Chauvin in the "dropout yard" — a housing unit for former police officers, ex-gang members, sexual abusers and other high-risk prisoners.

Though generally thought to be safer for such inmates, those units still see violence, like Nassar's stabbing in a "dropout yard" unit at the U.S. Penitentiary in Coleman, Florida.

Nassar was attacked after purportedly making a lewd comment while watching women's tennis on TV. An

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inmate, identified as Shane McMillan, stabbed him repeatedly before four other inmates pulled him away. McMillan was convicted of assaulting a Louisiana federal prison officer in 2006 and attempting to kill another inmate at the federal Supermax in Colorado, in 2011. He has yet to be charged with attacking Nassar. Court records didn't list a lawyer for him.

Prior to Chauvin's stabbing, there were no public reports of violence toward him — but he too was at risk. John Turscak, a former Mexican Mafia gang leader and one-time FBI informant charged with attacking Chauvin, told investigators he thought about stabbing him before attacking, federal prosecutors said.

Turscak stabbed Chauvin 22 times with an improvised knife, prosecutors said. FCI Tucson has struggled with staffing in the past, but the Bureau of Prisons said nearly every officer position is now filled.

Turscak told the FBI he attacked Chauvin because of his high profile, prosecutors said. Turscak said he chose the day after Thanksgiving — Black Friday — as a symbolic connection to Black Lives Matter and the Mexican Mafia's "Black Hand" symbol, prosecutors said.

Turscak, 52, led a Mexican Mafia faction in the 1990s. He was due to be released from federal prison in 2026 after serving more than 30 years for racketeering and conspiring to kill a gang rival. Court records didn't list a lawyer for him.

Despite Turscak's arrest, Erickson said he and his client's family have more questions — and concerns. "Why was Derek allowed into the law library without a guard in close enough proximity to stop a possible attack? the lawyer said. "His family continues to wonder."

Tax charges in Hunter Biden case are rarely filed, but could have deep political reverberations

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hunter Biden has been hit with new criminal charges in California accusing him of scheming to avoid paying his taxes while spending lavishly on everything from luxury hotels to escorts to exotic cars.

The president's son is also facing separate firearm charges in Delaware, raising the possibility he could be headed toward trial in two different cases as his father, President Joe Biden, campaigns for re-election.

Some of the allegations in the 56-page indictment largely track what's been previously aired about Hunter Biden's life when he was in the throes of drug addiction, but the sordid new details of his personal spending and alleged scheming to avoid tax payments could add to the political complications for his father. Joe Biden looks likely to face a close presidential race where Donald Trump is the leading contender for the GOP nomination.

Defense attorney Abbe Lowell, for his part, said the taxes have since been paid and argued Hunter Biden is being targeted because of his father's political position.

Here's a look at the situation:

How common are cases like this?

Criminal tax cases generally are very rare, said Beverly Moran, a tax law expert at Vanderbilt University. The average American has almost as good a chance of winning the lottery as being criminally prosecuted for tax fraud, she said, based on 2021 data from the Internal Revenue Service.

"Most people who commit tax fraud go through their entire lives without anything happening. They don't audited, they don't get caught, they don't get prosecuted," she said. "But if they get prosecuted, they get convicted."

Of the 665 cases that were referred for prosecution in 2021, about 90% resulted in a conviction, the IRS data shows.

Many tax cases, though, are resolved before charges are filed, said Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor and professor at Loyola Law School.

They can be hashed out in civil court, with fines and penalties, rather than with criminal charges. Trump ally Roger Stone, for example, faced a lawsuit from the Justice Department over nearly \$2 million in income

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tax in 2021. It was settled the following year.

Tax evasion can lead to jail time, however. Actor Wesley Snipes spent three years in prison after being convicted in 2008 of three misdemeanor counts of failing to file tax returns in a case where he owed about \$7 million in back taxes.

Cases against celebrities and other high-profile people can also generate attention that helps convince other people to file their taxes on time, Moran said.

What are the possible political implications?

Hunter Biden has never held political office, but the charges against him are increasingly looking like a thorny political issue for his father.

House Republicans are expected to hold a vote next week on formalizing an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, whom Republicans have sought to link to his son's business dealings. No evidence has so far emerged to prove the president in his current or previous office abused his role or accepted bribes. However, questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the international business dealings of Hunter and the president's brother, James Biden.

The new criminal charges against Hunter Biden are focused on his taxes and don't mention his father.

Still, Republicans have already seized on the salacious details of Hunter's conduct, his murky business dealings and alleged criminal misdeeds to try to harm his father's political standing, and the indictment pushes more detail into the conversation.

It's taken on more urgency as Trump's legal woes play out over his efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election and Republicans aim to undercut Biden's ability to defeat his one-time rival once again. And there are indications that the strategy is working.

An October poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 35% of U.S. adults believe Joe Biden personally has done something illegal concerning the business dealings of his son. An additional 33% say the president acted unethically but did not violate the law. Just 30% say Joe Biden did nothing wrong.

What are the charges?

Hunter Biden was indicted on three felonies and six misdemeanors, including filing a false return and tax evasion felonies, as well as misdemeanor failure to file and failure to pay. Hunter Biden, 53, could receive a maximum of 17 years in prison.

The charges are centered on at least \$1.4 million in taxes Hunter Biden owed between 2016 and 2019. During that time, he schemed to avoid taxes while spending money on "drugs, escorts and girlfriends, luxury hotels and rental properties, exotic cars, clothing ... in short, everything but his taxes," prosecutors wrote.

Joe Biden's tenure as vice president ended in January 2017.

The charges were filed after the implosion of a plea deal over the summer that would have spared him jail time in exchange for guilty pleas to misdemeanor tax charges. The agreement was pilloried as a "sweetheart deal" by Republicans, including Trump.

Solid US hiring lowers unemployment rate in latest sign of a still-sturdy job market

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. employers added a healthy 199,000 jobs last month and the unemployment rate fell, fresh signs that the economy could achieve an elusive "soft landing," in which inflation would return to the Federal Reserve's 2% target without causing a steep recession.

Friday's report from the Labor Department showed that the unemployment rate dropped from 3.9% to 3.7%, not far above a five-decade low of 3.4% in April. The jobless rate has now remained below 4% for nearly two years, the longest such streak since the late 1960s.

Last month's job gain was inflated by the return of about 40,000 formerly striking auto workers and actors, who were not at work in October but were back on the job in November.

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The latest jobs report and other recent data portray an economy and a labor market that, while still sturdy, are downshifting back to pre-pandemic norms. Businesses are hiring but are less desperate to fill huge numbers of jobs. More Americans have come off the sidelines to look for work, and immigration has jumped this year.

As a result, employers are finding it easier to hire, with fewer complaints of worker shortages and less pressure to aggressively raise pay, which can fuel inflation.

"What we wanted was a strong but moderating labor market, and that's what we saw in the November report," said Robert Frick, an economist at the Navy Federal Credit Union.

A cooling job market is also just what the Fed was hoping to achieve as it sought to slow the economy and inflation with its rapid interest rate hikes in the past year and a half. Hiring has averaged just over 200,000 a month in the past three months, down from an average of about 320,000 in the same period last year.

And most of last month's job gains were concentrated in just a few sectors. The health care industry — doctors' offices and hospitals — added 93,000 jobs in November. Hotels and restaurants added 40,000, and governments 49,000, accounting for nearly all the job growth. By contrast, retailers, shipping and warehousing companies, and temporary help agencies all cut jobs.

Still, last month's hiring gain raised the proportion of Americans who are employed to 60.5%, the highest level since the pandemic struck, though it remains below the pre-COVID level of 61.1%.

In the meantime, wages are growing at a slower but still-healthy pace. In November, average hourly pay rose 4% from a year earlier, matching the previous month's figure, which was the smallest since June 2021. Still, average pay is now growing faster than inflation, which should support consumer spending.

And layoffs remain low, according to government data, despite job cuts at such companies as Panera Bread, a restaurant chain, and Spotify, the music streaming platform, which cited higher interest rates as a reason it had to cut about 1,500 jobs globally.

Becky Frankiewicz, president of the staffing giant Manpower Group North America, said more employers are moving workers they may not need in one part of the company to another division rather than laying them off. Many companies still recall the difficulty they had finding workers during the pandemic and want to hold onto staff.

"Everything we see continues to point to a slow glide into a cooler labor market," she said.

Aaron Seyedian, owner of a small cleaning company based in Takoma Park, Maryland, says his business is still growing and hiring. He has enough demand to add five workers to his 30-person staff.

Seyedian's company, "Well-Paid Maids," has just raised its starting pay from \$23 to \$24 an hour. He said he hasn't had any trouble finding people to hire.

"From my perspective," Seyedian said, "the economy is still strong, and people still want to spend money."

For the Fed, Friday's jobs report won't likely alter the near-certainty that it will keep interest rates unchanged for the third straight time when it meets next week. The central bank has raised its key rate 11 times since March 2022, from near zero to roughly 5.4%. The result has been much more expensive mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and business borrowing.

Most economists and Wall Street traders think the Fed's next move will be to cut rates, though the strength in Friday's jobs report could lead the central bank to keep rates at a peak for a longer period. Before the jobs report, Wall Street traders foresaw a 55% likelihood that the Fed would cut rates at its March meeting, according to the CME FedWatch, tool. Now, they don't expect the first cut until May.

Guy Berger, former principal economist at the career website LinkedIn, said the job market's resilience means the Fed can keep rates high to fight inflation without worrying so much about triggering a recession.

"If we're not cooling, what's the rush?" to cut rates, Berger said.

Many of the most recent economic figures have pointed toward a potential soft landing. Companies are advertising fewer job openings, and Americans are switching jobs less often than they did a year ago, trends that typically slow wage growth and inflation pressures.

Most economists expect growth to slow and inflation will continue to decline. The economy is expected to expand at just a 1.5% annual rate in the final three months of this year, down from a scorching 5.2%

pace in the July-September quarter. Cooler growth should help bring down inflation while still supporting a modest pace of hiring.

Inflation has tumbled from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to just 3.2% last month. And according to a different inflation measure that the Fed prefers, prices rose at just a 2.5% annual rate in the past six months — not far above the central bank's 2% target.

Christopher Waller, a key Fed official who typically favors higher rates, buoyed the markets' expectations last week for rate hikes when he suggested that if inflation kept falling, the Fed could cut rates as early as spring.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, though, pushed back against such speculation last Friday, when he said it was "premature to conclude" that the Fed has raised its benchmark rate high enough to quell inflation. And it was too soon, he added, to "speculate" about when the Fed might cut rates.

But Powell also said interest rates are "well into" restrictive territory, meaning that they're clearly constraining growth. Many analysts took that remark as a signal that the Fed is done raising rates.

FDA approves 2 gene therapies for sickle cell. One is the first to use the editing tool CRISPR

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Regulators on Friday approved two gene therapies for sickle cell disease that doctors hope can cure the painful, inherited blood disorder that afflicts mostly Black people in the U.S.

The Food and Drug Administration said the one-time treatments can be used for patients 12 and older with severe forms of the disease. One, made by Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics, is the first approved therapy based on CRISPR, the gene editing tool that won its inventors the Nobel Prize in 2020. The other is made by Bluebird Bio and works differently.

"Sickle cell disease is a rare, debilitating and life-threatening blood disorder with significant unmet need," the FDA's Dr. Nicole Verdun said in a statement announcing the approvals. "We are excited to advance the field especially for individuals whose lives have been severely disrupted by the disease."

The two gene therapies are the first approved in the U.S. for sickle cell. The FDA has previously OK'd 15 gene therapies for other conditions. Some have list prices in the millions of dollars, and the sickle cell therapies will too.

In the U.S., an estimated 100,000 people have sickle cell and about a fifth of them have the severe form. Sickle cell is most common among Black people and 1 in 365 Black babies are born with the disease nationally. Scientists believe being a carrier of the sickle cell trait helps protect against severe malaria, so the disease occurs more often in mosquito-prone regions such as Africa or in people whose ancestors lived in those places.

The disease affects hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen. A genetic mutation causes the cells to become sickle or crescent-shaped, which can block blood flow, causing excruciating pain, organ damage, stroke and other problems.

Current treatments include medications and blood transfusions. The only permanent solution is a bone marrow transplant, which must come from a closely matched donor and brings a risk of rejection.

No donor is required for the gene therapies, which permanently change DNA in the patient's blood cells. The goal of the Vertex therapy, called Casgevy, is to help the body go back to producing a fetal form of hemoglobin that's present at birth — it's the adult form that's defective in people with sickle cell disease. CRISPR is used to knock out a gene in stem cells collected from the patient.

Bluebird's treatment, called Lyfgenia, aims to add copies of a modified gene, which helps red blood cells produce "anti-sickling" hemoglobin that prevents or reverses misshapen cells.

When patients get the treatments, stem cells are removed from their blood and sent to a lab. Before getting the altered cells back, they must undergo chemotherapy. The process requires at least two hospitalizations, one lasting four to six weeks.

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Still, many patients say they'd consider gene therapy given the seriousness of the disease.

Jalen Matthews of Louisville, Kentucky, was diagnosed with sickle cell at birth and had her first pain episode at age 9. Three years later, the disease led to a spinal cord stroke that left her with some paralysis in her left arm and leg.

"I had to learn how to walk again, feed myself, clothe myself, basically learn how to do everything all over again," said Matthews, now 26.

Today, she keeps her sickle cell at bay with transfusions every two months or so, with five units of her blood replaced with healthy cells. She said gene therapy could be a better option and she plans to ask her doctor about it.

"This one-time kind of cure is very much needed," said Matthews.

The FDA's approval is the first for Bluebird's treatment; Vertex has been previously authorized in Britain and Bahrain.

Studies testing the therapies suggest they work well. Of 31 people treated in the pivotal Vertex study with sufficient follow-up, 29 were free of pain crises for at least a year. In the Bluebird study, 28 of 32 patients had no severe pain or organ damage between six and 18 months after the therapy.

But doctors point out there are possible side effects and the long-term outcomes are unknown. For both, the necessary chemotherapy comes with risks such as infertility, hair loss and vulnerability to serious infection.

With the Bluebird therapy, blood cancer has occurred, so the FDA said the label will include a "black box warning" about that risk. With the Vertex therapy, some scientists worry that CRISPR brings the possibility of "off-target effects," which are unexpected changes to a person's genome.

"It's important to be cautious and to be optimistic about this therapy, but also know that there's still not a ton of experience with it," said Dr. Benjamin Watkins, director of the pediatric stem cell and cell therapy program at Children's Hospital New Orleans.

Doctors said they don't expect every medical center to offer the gene therapies because they require so much equipment and coordination between medical specialists. They also don't expect lots of people to seek them right away. Watkins said some may want to wait until more people get the treatments.

Experts also warned that cost could be a hurdle. The list price for Bluebird Bio is \$3.1 million and for Vertex, \$2.2 million. What patients might pay will depend on insurance coverage and other factors. To help cover the cost, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced a plan that aims to establish partnerships with state Medicaid agencies and drug companies.

But eventually, gene therapy "could be transformative and really change the landscape of sickle cell disease," said Dr. Monica Bhatia, who treats children with the disease at NewYork-Presbyterian.

Matthews, who volunteers with The Sickle Cell Association of Kentuckiana, said she's hopeful the treatments will have a big impact.

"It's a blessing," she said. "It will really benefit all of us in the sickle cell community."

Harvard president apologizes for remarks on antisemitism as pressure mounts on Penn's president

By COLLIN BINKLEY and MARC LEVY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Harvard University's president apologized as pressure mounted for the University of Pennsylvania's president to resign over their testimony at a congressional hearing on antisemitism that critics from the White House on down say failed to demonstrate they would stand up to antisemitism on campus.

In an interview Thursday with The Crimson student newspaper, Harvard President Claudine Gay said she got caught up in a heated exchange at the House committee hearing and failed to properly denounce threats of violence against Jewish students.

Meanwhile, lawyers for a major donor to Penn, Ross Stevens, wrote to Penn's general counsel on Thursday to threaten to withdraw a gift valued at \$100 million because of the university's "stance on antisemitism

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on campus" unless Penn President Liz Magill is replaced.

Gay's and Magill's testimony have drawn intense national backlash, as have similar responses from the president of MIT who also testified before the Republican-led House Education and Workforce Committee on Tuesday. Donors, alumni and members of Congress in both parties have called for their resignations.

At issue was a line of questioning that asked whether calling for the genocide of Jews would violate the universities' code of conduct. At the Tuesday hearing, Gay said it depended on the context, adding that when "speech crosses into conduct, that violates our policies."

Gay told The Crimson she was sorry, saying she "got caught up in what had become at that point, an extended, combative exchange about policies and procedures."

"What I should have had the presence of mind to do in that moment was return to my guiding truth, which is that calls for violence against our Jewish community — threats to our Jewish students — have no place at Harvard, and will never go unchallenged," Gay said.

Magill walked back some of her comments Wednesday, saying she would consider a call for the genocide of Jewish people would be considered harassment or intimidation. She also said she would launch a review of Penn's policies, saying they have long been guided by the U.S. Constitution but need to be "clarified and evaluated."

Universities across the U.S. have been accused of failing to protect Jewish students amid reports of growing antisemitism following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel. The three presidents were called before the committee to answer those accusations, but their lawyerly answers drew renewed blowback from opponents.

The White House joined the criticism of Gay, Magill and MIT President Sally Kornbluth, with a spokesperson saying calls for genocide are "monstrous and antithetical to everything we represent as a country."

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, a Democrat, also called Magill's testimony "unacceptable" and urged trustees there to consider Magill's job. On Thursday night, he joined Jewish students at Penn to mark the start of Hanukkah with a menorah lighting on campus.

Penn's trustees remained quiet about Magill's future, although they were scheduled to meet this weekend, Shapiro said Friday.

The episode has marred Gay's early tenure at Harvard — she became president in July — and sowed discord at the Ivy League campus. On Thursday, Rabbi David Wolpe resigned from a new committee on antisemitism created by Gay.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Wolpe said "events on campus and the painfully inadequate testimony reinforced the idea that I cannot make the sort of difference I had hoped." A statement from Gay thanked Wolpe for his work, saying he helped deepen her understanding "of the unacceptable presence of antisemitism here at Harvard."

The Republican-led House committee announced Thursday it will investigate the policies and disciplinary procedures at Harvard, MIT and Penn. Separate federal civil rights investigations were previously opened at Harvard, Penn and several other universities in response to complaints submitted to the U.S. Education Department.

At Penn, some donors and alumni have been critical of the university's response to antisemitic acts on campus — including a swastika drawn inside the design school building and vandalism at the Hillel chapter there — that happened before Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

The gift from Stevens — shares of his Stone Ridge Holdings Group — were given in 2017 to underwrite the Stevens Center for Innovation in Finance. However, in the letter, his lawyers said Penn's "permissive approach to hate speech calling for violence against Jews and laissez faire attitude toward harassment and discrimination" likely violate the donor agreement.

The letter said Stevens and Stone Ridge are open to giving Penn a chance to fix the violations "if, and when, there is a new university president in place."

Russia puts prominent Russian-US journalist Masha Gessen on wanted list for criminal charges

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russian police have put prominent Russian-American journalist and author Masha Gessen on a wanted list after opening a criminal case against them on charges of spreading false information about the Russian army.

It is the latest step in an unrelenting crackdown against dissent in Russia that has intensified since the Kremlin invaded Ukraine more than 21 months ago, on Feb. 24, 2022.

The independent Russian news outlet Mediazona was the first to report Friday that Gessen's profile has appeared on the online wanted list of Russia's Interior Ministry, and The Associated Press was able to confirm that it was. It wasn't clear from the profile when exactly Gessen was added to the list.

Russian media reported last month that a criminal case against Gessen, an award-winning author and an outspoken critic of President Vladimir Putin, was launched over an interview they did with the prominent Russian journalist Yury Dud.

In the interview, which was released on YouTube in September 2022 and has since been viewed more than 6.5 million times, the two among other things discussed atrocities by Russian armed forces in Bucha, a Ukrainian town near Kyiv that was briefly occupied by the Russian forces.

After Ukrainian troops retook it, they found the bodies of men, women and children on the streets, in yards and homes, and in mass graves, with some showing signs of torture. Russian officials have vehemently denied their forces were responsible and have prosecuted a number of Russian public figures for speaking out about Bucha, handing some lengthy prison terms.

Those prosecutions were carried out under a new law Moscow adopted days after sending troops to Ukraine that effectively criminalized any public expression about the war deviating from the official narrative. The Kremlin has insisted on calling it a "special military operation" and maintains that its troops in Ukraine only strike military targets, not civilians.

Between late February 2022 and early this month, 19,844 people have been detained for speaking out or protesting against the war while 776 people have been implicated in criminal cases over their anti-war stance, according to the OVD-Info rights group, which tracks political arrests and provides legal aid.

Gessen, who holds dual Russian and American citizenships and lives in the U.S., is unlikely to be arrested, unless they travel to a country with an extradition treaty with Russia. But Russian court could still try them in absentia and hand them a prison sentence of up to 10 years.

Pressure is also mounting on dissidents imprisoned in Russia. On Friday, supporters of Alexei Gorinov, a former member of a Moscow municipal council sentenced to seven years in prison for speaking out against the war, reported that his health significantly deteriorated in prison and he is not being given the treatment he needs.

Gorinov was sentenced last year and is currently serving time at a penal colony in the Vladimir region east of Moscow. In a post on the messaging app Telegram, his supporters said his lawyer visited him on Friday and said Gorinov "doesn't have the strength to sit up on a chair or even speak." He told the lawyer that he has bronchitis and fever, but prison doctors claim he doesn't need treatment, the post said.

The 62-year-old Gorinov has a chronic lung condition, and several years ago had part of a lung removed, the post said.

Allies of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny were also concerned about his well-being on Friday.

Navalny is serving a 19-year prison term on the charges of extremism in the same region as Gorinov, and for the last three days his lawyers have not allowed to visit him, the politician's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on X, formerly known as Twitter. Yarmysh said that letters to Navalny were also not being delivered to him.

"The fact that we can't find Alexei is particularly concerning because last week he felt unwell in the cell: he felt dizzy and lay down on the floor. Prison officials rushed to him, unfolded the bed, put Alexei on it and gave him an IV drip. We don't know what caused it, but given that he's being deprived of food, kept in a cell without ventilation and has been offered minimal outdoor time, it looks like fainting out of

hunger," Yarmysh wrote.

She added that the lawyers visited him after the incident, and he looked "more or less fine."

Navalny is due to be transferred to a "special security" penal colony, a facility with the highest security level in the Russian penitentiary system. Russian prison transfers are notorious for taking a long time, sometimes weeks, during which there's no access to prisoners, and information about their whereabouts is limited, or unavailable at all.

Navalny, 47, has been behind bars since January 2021. As President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe, he campaigned against official corruption and organized major anti-Kremlin protests. His 2021 arrest came upon his return to Moscow from Germany, where he recuperated from nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin.

Navalny has since been handed three prison terms and spent months in isolation in prison for alleged minor infractions. He has rejected all charges against him as politically motivated.

In a reversal, Starbucks proposes restarting union talks and reaching contract agreements in 2024

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Starbucks said Friday it's committed to bargaining with its unionized workers and reaching labor agreements next year, a major reversal for the coffee chain after two years fighting the unionization of its U.S. stores.

In a letter to Lynne Fox, the president of the Workers United union, Starbucks Chief Partner Officer Sara Kelly said the current bargaining impasse between the two sides "should not be acceptable to either of us." Kelly asked to restart bargaining in January.

"We will set as an ambition and hopeful goal the completion of bargaining and the ratification of contracts in 2024," Kelly wrote in the letter.

In a statement distributed by Workers United, Fox said she is reviewing the letter and will respond.

"We've never said no to meeting with Starbucks. Anything that moves bargaining forward in a positive way is most welcome," Fox said.

Workers United said the last bargaining session between the two sides was May 23.

Saturday marks the two-year anniversary of a Starbucks store in Buffalo, New York, voting to unionize. It was the first company-owned store to join a union in more than three decades.

Since then, at least 370 company-owned U.S. Starbucks stores have voted to unionize, according to the National Labor Relations Board. There are about 9,600 company-owned Starbucks stores in the U.S.

Workers at 19 U.S. Starbucks stores have filed petitions with the NLRB to decertify the union as the bargaining representative at their stores, but none of those stores has voted on whether to remove the union. The NLRB can delay a decertification vote if an employer refuses to bargain.

Unionizing workers say they're seeking higher pay, more consistent schedules and more say in issues like store safety and workload during busy times. Seattle-based Starbucks has said its stores run more efficiently if it can work directly with its employees and not through a third party.

But the process has been contentious. Twice, federal courts have ordered Starbucks to reinstate workers who were fired after leading unionization efforts at their stores. Regional offices of the National Labor Relations Board have issued 120 complaints against Starbucks for unfair labor practices, including refusal to bargain and reserving pay raises and other benefits for non-union workers.

In October, Starbucks sued Workers United in federal court, demanding it stop using the name Starbucks Workers United for the group organizing its workers after that group posted a pro-Palestinian message on social media. Workers United countersued, saying Starbucks defamed the union by suggesting it supports violence. Starbucks said Friday that lawsuit is proceeding.

Starbucks said Friday that its changing stance reflects its wish to support all of its employees. In her letter to Fox, Kelly pledged that the company would respect bargaining participants and refrain from dis-

paraging conduct or language.

But Starbucks may also be shifting its position for business reasons. It reported record revenue in its fiscal fourth quarter, which ended in September, and its full-year revenue climbed nearly 12% to \$35.9 billion.

But the company's stock has fallen 10% since Nov. 16, when 5,000 workers at more than 200 unionized Starbucks stores went on strike. Placer.ai, an analytics company, said that after a strong fall, U.S. holiday visits to Starbucks appear to be down from a year ago.

The company may also be trying to head off an effort by the Strategic Organizing Center, a labor group, to elect three pro-union candidates to Starbucks' board of directors next year.

Putin will seek another term as Russian president, aiming to extend his rule of over two decades

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

Vladimir Putin on Friday moved to prolong his repressive and unyielding grip on Russia for at least another six years, announcing his candidacy in the presidential election next March that he is all but certain to win.

Putin still commands wide support after nearly a quarter-century in power, despite starting an immensely costly war in Ukraine that has taken thousands of his countrymen's lives, provoked repeated attacks inside Russia — including one on the Kremlin itself — and corroded its aura of invincibility.

A short-lived rebellion in June by mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin raised widespread speculation that Putin could be losing his grip, but he emerged with no permanent scars. Prigozhin's death in a mysterious plane crash two months later reinforced the view that Putin was in absolute control.

Putin, who was first elected president in March 2000, announced his decision to run in the March 17 presidential election after a Kremlin award ceremony, when war veterans and others pleaded with him to seek reelection in what Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described as "spontaneous" remarks.

"I won't hide it from you — I had various thoughts about it over time, but now, you're right, it's necessary to make a decision," Putin said in a video released by the Kremlin after the event. "I will run for president of the Russian Federation."

Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center noted that the announcement was made in a low-key way instead of a live televised speech, probably reflecting the Kremlin's spin effort to emphasize Putin's modesty and his perceived focus on doing his job as opposed to loud campaigning.

"It's not about prosperity, it's about survival," Stanovaya observed. "The stakes have been raised to the maximum."

About 80% of the populace approves of Putin's performance, according to the independent pollster Levada Center. That support might come from the heart or it might reflect submission to a leader whose crackdown on any opposition has made even relatively mild criticism perilous.

Whether due to real or coerced support, Putin is expected to face only token opposition on the ballot.

Putin, 71, has twice used his leverage to amend the constitution so he could theoretically stay in power until he's in his mid-80s. He is already the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, who died in 1953.

In 2008, he stepped aside to become prime minister due to term limits but continued calling the shots while his close associate Dmitry Medvedev served as a placeholder president. Presidential terms were then extended to six years from four, while another package of amendments he pushed through three years ago reset the count for two consecutive terms to begin in 2024.

"He is afraid to give up power," Dmitry Oreshkin, a political analyst and professor at Free University of Riga, Latvia, told The Associated Press this year.

At the time of the amendments that allowed him two more terms, Putin's concern about losing power may have been elevated: Levada polling showed his approval rating significantly lower, hovering around 60%.

In the view of some analysts, that dip in popularity could have been a main driver of the war that Putin launched in Ukraine in February 2022.

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"This conflict with Ukraine was necessary as a glue. He needed to consolidate his power," said commentator Abbas Gallyamov, a former Putin speechwriter now living in Israel.

Brookings Institution scholar Fiona Hill, a former U.S. National Security Council expert on Russian affairs, agreed that Putin thought "a lovely small, victorious war" would consolidate support for his reelection.

"Ukraine would capitulate," she told AP earlier this year. "He'd install a new president in Ukraine. He would declare himself the president of a new union of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia over the course of the time leading up to the 2024 election. He'd be the supreme leader."

The war didn't turn out that way. It devolved into a grueling slog in which neither side makes significant headway, posing severe challenges to the rising prosperity integral to Putin's popularity and Russians' propensity to set aside concerns about corrupt politics and shrinking tolerance of dissent.

For the first time, voting in the presidential election will take place over three days from March 15 to 17, 2024, including in four regions of Ukraine partially and illegally annexed by Russia. The election commission argued that the practice of multi-day voting, used in other elections since the COVID-19 pandemic, is more convenient for voters.

Putin's rule has spanned five U.S. presidencies, from Bill Clinton to Joe Biden. He became acting president on New Year's Eve in 1999, when Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned. He was elected to his first term in March 2000.

Although Putin has long abandoned the macho photo shoots of bear hunting and scuba diving that once amused and impressed the world, he shows little sign of slowing down. Photos from 2022 of him with a bloated face and a hunched posture led to speculation he was seriously ill, but he seems little changed in recent public appearances.

Nigel Gould-Davies, former British ambassador to Belarus and senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, noted that it was emblematic that a war veteran whose son was killed in the fighting set Putin's campaign in motion.

"This is taking place in the context of a major war that is imposing material and human constraints and stresses on Russia," Gould-Davies said. "So ultimately, it will be all about the war."

He noted that Putin has built "a system that has become more systemically corrupt, more repressive, and also in foreign policy terms - I think this is really the great historical significance - Russia now is more alienated, isolated from the West than at any time since at least the last years of Stalin."

The key lesson for the West is that "there can be no constructive relationship with Russia while Putin or anyone like Putin is in office," Gould-Davies said.

Chronic fatigue syndrome is not rare, says new CDC survey. It affects 3.3 million U.S. adults

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Health officials on Friday released the first nationally representative estimate of how many U.S. adults have chronic fatigue syndrome: 3.3 million.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's number is larger than previous studies have suggested, and is likely boosted by some of the patients with long COVID. The condition clearly "is not a rare illness," said the CDC's Dr. Elizabeth Unger, one of the report's co-authors.

Chronic fatigue is characterized by at least six months of severe exhaustion not helped by bed rest. Patients also report pain, brain fog and other symptoms that can get worse after exercise, work or other activity. There is no cure, and no blood test or scan to enable a quick diagnosis.

Doctors have not been able to pin down a cause, although research suggests it is a body's prolonged overreaction to an infection or other jolt to the immune system.

The condition rose to prominence nearly 40 years ago, when clusters of cases were reported in Incline Village, Nevada, and Lyndonville, New York. Some doctors dismissed it as psychosomatic and called it "yuppie flu."

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Some physicians still hold that opinion, experts and patients say.

Doctors "called me a hypochondriac and said it was just anxiety and depression," said Hannah Powell, a 26-year-old Utah woman who went undiagnosed for five years.

The new CDC report is based on a survey of 57,000 U.S. adults in 2021 and 2022. Participants were asked if a doctor or other health-care professional had ever told them they had myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome, and whether they still have it. About 1.3% said yes to both questions.

That translated to about 3.3 million U.S. adults, CDC officials said.

Among the other findings: The syndrome was more common in women than men, and in white people compared with some other racial and ethnic groups. Those findings are consistent with earlier, smaller studies.

However, the findings also contradicted long-held perceptions that chronic fatigue syndrome is a rich white woman's disease.

There was less of a gap between women and men than some previous studies suggested, and there was hardly any difference between white and Black people. The study also found that a higher percentage of poor people said they had it than affluent people.

Those misperceptions may stem from the fact that patients who are diagnosed and treated "traditionally tend to have a little more access to health care, and maybe are a little more believed when they say they're fatigued and continue to be fatigued and can't go to work," said Dr. Brayden Yellman, a specialist at the Bateman Horne Center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The report relied on patients' memories, without verifying their diagnoses through medical records.

That could lead to some overcounting, but experts believe only a fraction of the people with chronic fatigue syndrome are diagnosed, said Dr. Daniel Clauw, director of the University of Michigan's Chronic Pain and Fatigue Research Center.

"It's never, in the U.S., become a clinically popular diagnosis to give because there's no drugs approved for it. There's no treatment guidelines for it," Clauw said

The tally likely includes some patients with long COVID who were suffering from prolonged exhaustion, CDC officials said.

Long COVID is broadly defined as chronic health problems weeks, months or years after an acute COVID-19 infection. Symptoms vary, but a subset of patients have the same problems seen in people with chronic fatigue syndrome.

"We think it's the same illness," Yellman said. But long COVID is more widely accepted by doctors, and is being diagnosed much more quickly, he said.

Powell, one of Yellman's patients, was a high school athlete who came down with an illness during a trip to Belize before senior year. Doctors thought it was malaria, and she seemed to recover. But she developed a persistent exhaustion, had trouble sleeping and had recurrent vomiting. She gradually had to stop playing sports, and had trouble doing schoolwork, she said.

After five years, she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue and began to achieve some stability through regular infusions of fluids and medications. She graduated from the University of Utah and now works for an organization that helps domestic violence victims.

Getting care is still a struggle, she said.

"When I go to the ER or to another doctor's visit, instead of saying I have chronic fatigue syndrome, I usually say I have long COVID," Powell said. "And I am believed almost immediately."

Pope Francis makes his first public appearances since being stricken by bronchitis

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis on Friday made his first public appearance outdoors since being stricken by bronchitis two weeks ago, which forced him to cancel a planned trip to the COP-28 climate conference in Dubai.

The pope has been steadily recovering, and for the Dec. 8 holiday devoted to Mary kept a traditional appointment to pray at the Spanish Steps. He arrived in a black car, and blessed a crowd of onlookers before taking a seat in a chair facing a statue of the Madonna.

The pontiff prayed for Mary's mercy for "all the people oppressed by injustice and poverty, tried by war," adding a special prayer for "the tormented Ukrainian people," as well as Palestinians and Israelis "who have fallen back into a spiral of violence."

Francis also addressed violence against women, a topic that has resonated in Italy in recent weeks following the killing last month of a 22-year-old female student in northern Italy. "Mary, we need you as a woman, to entrust all of the women who have suffered violence and those who are still victims in this city, in Italy and in every part of the world," the pope said.

Before his appointment at the Spanish Steps, Francis went to the St. Mary Major basilica to pray before one of his favorite icons to Mary. He entered the basilica in a wheelchair.

Francis earlier addressed the faithful from an open window overlooking St. Peter's Square for the traditional blessing, appearing for the first time to the public since his illness.

Francis, who turns 87 on Dec. 17, came down with the flu on Nov. 25 and was forced to cancel a planned trip to Dubai to participate in the U.N. climate conference. He later revealed he had been diagnosed with an acute case of infectious bronchitis that made breathing difficult.

It was the second time this year he has had a serious case of bronchitis; in spring he was hospitalized for three days to receive intravenous antibiotics.

The Census Bureau wants to change how it asks about disabilities. Some advocates don't like it

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The U.S. Census Bureau wants to change how it asks people about disabilities, and some advocates are complaining that they were not consulted enough on what amounts to a major overhaul in how disabilities would be defined by the federal government.

Disability advocates say the change would artificially reduce their numbers by almost half. At stake are not only whether people with disabilities get vital resources for housing, schools or program benefits but whether people with disabilities are counted accurately in the first place, experts said.

Some also question the timing of the change, which comes just as more people are living with new, long-term conditions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Census Bureau officials say the proposed change on its most comprehensive survey of American life will align the U.S. with international standards, allowing comparisons among countries. They also say it will better capture how disabilities occur in the real world, since they rarely fit neatly into stark yes-or-no boxes that don't account for variations or nuance.

The bureau has spent time, money and energy trying to improve counts of racial and ethnic minorities who have been historically undercounted, but the statistical agency seems willing to adapt questions that will shortchange the numbers of people with disabilities, said Scott Landes, an associate professor of sociology at Syracuse University.

"This, in my mind, is illogical," Landes, who is visually impaired, said in an interview. "There is a piece of me that thinks, 'How dare you — to think that we don't count.' I get offended."

If given final approval, the changes to the American Community Survey questions would be implemented in 2025. The ACS is the most comprehensive survey of American life, covering commuting times, internet access, family life, income, education levels, disabilities and military service, among other topics. The statistical agency was asked to make the change by the National Center for Health Statistics and is accepting public comment on the proposal through Dec. 19.

The existing questions ask respondents to answer "yes" or "no" if they have difficulty or "serious difficulty" seeing, even with glasses, or are blind; hearing, or are deaf; concentrating, remembering or mak-

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ing decisions because of a physical, mental or emotional condition; walking or climbing stairs; dressing or bathing; or performing everyday tasks because of a physical, mental or emotional condition. If the answer is "yes," they are counted as having a disability.

Under the proposed change, respondents would be allowed to answer most of the same questions with four choices: "no difficulty," "some difficulty," "a lot of difficulty" and "cannot do at all." There are tweaks to the language of the questions, and the proposal adds a query on whether respondents have trouble communicating.

But the most significant change involves the threshold beyond which people are determined to have a disability. The international standards being considered by the Census Bureau typically define a person as having a disability if they answer "cannot do at all" or "a lot of difficulty" for any task or function.

During testing last year by the Census Bureau, the percentage of respondents who were defined as having a disability went from 13.9% using the current questions to 8.1% under the international standards. When the definition was expanded to also include "some difficulty," it grew to 31.7%.

Marlene Sallo said her degenerative spine condition presents difficulties on some days, but overall she is able to function on a daily basis, so she worries that she might not be considered as having a disability with the revised questions.

"Right now, it's not inclusive and it will miss many individuals within my community," Sallo, executive director of the National Disability Rights Network, said last month at a meeting of a Census Bureau advisory committee, of which she is a member.

Officials at the Census Bureau and the health statistics agency argue that the change will give officials better information and details about disabilities that can inform how services or resources are provided. Census Bureau officials had two conference calls with disability advocates on the subject this week.

"Forcing a dichotomy masks nuance," Julie Weeks, an official at the National Center for Health Statistics, said during a presentation last month.

The terminology surrounding disabilities has evolved in recent years, moving away from labels that imply inferiority and toward more sensitive language that outlines the specific conditions or circumstances in which individuals or groups live. The Associated Press defers whenever possible to the wishes of people or groups in how they choose to be described but uses neutral language that withholds judgment about a person's condition.

Disability advocates said the international standards were formulated without their input. Last month, the Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee recommended that the statistical agency not adopt the change until it meets further with disability advocates and researchers.

While the proposal may be better for scientific research, the questions, if approved, will be adapted with the needs of agencies and not people with disabilities in mind, Andrew Houtenville, research director at the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire, told members of the National Advisory Committee at last month's meeting.

"This has taken a lot of people by surprise," Houtenville said.

Some experts believe the current questions don't adequately account for people with mental health problems, developmental disabilities or chronic health conditions, like those faced by many people living with long COVID. But they say the proposed change isn't the answer.

"Disability is an evolving concept, and there is a new kind of disability we didn't have five years ago, Long COVID, and we need to be able to account for that and other changes," said Susan Popkin, co-director of the Disability Equity Policy Initiative at the Urban Institute, who has a chronic autoimmune condition.

The proposed change is grating to some advocates since it is occurring at a time when disability has grown to be an identity and a social movement, rather than just a function-based definition of someone's limitations. For instance, a person with limited hearing may be able to function fully with the help of hearing aids but can still identify as having a disability.

"You can be proud of your disability and still not want the pain and symptoms of the conditions that lead to that disability. That is part of a shift in disability as a demographic group," said Bonnielin Swenor,

director of the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center, who has low vision.

"There is a shift of view in disability pride and claiming disability identity as part of who we are ... not as a deficit," Swenor said.

Houston has a population that's young. Its next mayor, set to be elected in a runoff, won't be

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — No matter who wins, Houston will elect the oldest big-city mayor in the U.S. this weekend, choosing between two candidates who each have been in public office longer than the median age of the residents they will govern.

Voters in Saturday's runoff between state Sen. John Whitmire, 74, and U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, 73, will choose a new leader who cuts against demographic trends in America's fourth-largest city. Census figures show Houston is becoming younger, with a median age of around 35 and 25% of the population below 18.

The choices for mayor have frustrated some voters, including younger ones, in the Democratic stronghold at a time when the party is searching for new political stars in Texas who might be able to end 30 years of GOP dominance statewide and as the age of politicians has become an issue nationally.

"I think the main issue is identifying with the politician. A lot of young people can't," said Julian Meza, a 19-year-old history student at Houston Community College who plans to cast a ballot. He added, "I don't really want to vote for them, but I have no other choice."

Fellow student Amanda Estela Portillo, a 19-year-old biology major, agreed that she finds it difficult to connect with older candidates.

"It seems like the older generations ... they kind of just like brush it off and are just like, 'You don't know what you're talking about kid. You're too young.' And I feel like it's a sense of hopelessness that a lot of us feel," Portillo said.

Whitmire and Jackson Lee, who emerged from a crowded field of nearly 20 candidates in the Nov. 7 general election, have both touted their decades of experience in political office. But they also say the perspectives of younger voters are important to them and have promised to make young individuals a part of their administration.

On Sunday, Jackson Lee attended an outreach event co-sponsored by Houston-based Rap-A-Lot Records that featured speeches by candidates and musical performances and aimed to encourage voters, including younger ones, to go to the polls.

"I want this administration to have people saying, 'I'm good because the mayor cares about me. I'm good because City Hall is open to me,'" Jackson Lee said onstage alongside local rappers including Lil Bushwick, the son of Bushwick Bill, a founding member of the iconic Houston rap group the Geto Boys.

Whitmire, for his part, has held various campaign events with organizations for young professionals, telling one gathering in August that "the future of Houston needs a voice at City Hall."

"Why do young people not get involved in city politics? I think a lot of them have given up on the process," Whitmire said Sunday after a mayoral forum. "I understand their cynicism and their frustration. And that's what I'm offering, experience of a can-do candidate."

Von Cannon, 41, who operated a food truck at Sunday's voter outreach event, said advancing age isn't necessarily a problem for a candidate but thinks "authenticity is a big thing that younger voters look for."

Ronda Prince, chief of operations at Rap-A-Lot Records, said experience is important "but you just cannot ignore and leave out the concerns, the issues that young people have. If you want to reach young people, talk to young people."

Getting younger voters to the polls, particularly in local elections, remains a "huge puzzle" in the city and around the country, said Brandon Rottinghaus, a political science professor at the University of Houston.

"Houston is changing. It's becoming much younger and certainly more Latino, and the demographics

in terms of who runs for office and who wins ... doesn't always reflect those changes," Rottinghaus said.

An analysis by Rottinghaus suggested that two-thirds of voters in the Nov. 7 election were over the age of 55. The Harris County Clerk's Office said a review of early voting for the runoff has found an average age of about 62.

Age has been an issue in other political contests — such as next year's presidential race, which seems likely to pit President Joe Biden, 80, against former President Donald Trump, 77. In Texas' general election last month, voters rejected a proposed change to the state Constitution that would have raised the mandatory retirement age for judges by four years, to 79.

One challenge with reaching out to younger people has been making voting more convenient, according to Rottinghaus.

Officials in Democratic-led Harris County, where Houston is located, expanded access during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 with drive-thru voting and 24-hour polling locations, two initiatives popular with younger voters. But those were later banned by the GOP-led Texas Legislature.

Rottinghaus also said some younger voters might not vote because issues they care about often don't factor into local elections.

While the Houston mayoral race has been dominated by discussion of crime, crumbling infrastructure and potential budget shortfalls, other matters that are important to voters like Meza and Portillo, such as supporting reproductive and immigration rights and the LGBTQ+ community, are largely absent.

Kit Delgado, a 19-year-old art student at Houston Community College, said that while a mayor can't really impact those issues much, it's important to younger voters to have someone in office who shares their values.

"If we have a mayor who supports our ideas, maybe we can get a governor who has support of our ideas and then representatives. I think that's a good reason to start voting locally, like for my age group," Delgado said.

Tony Shalhoub returns as everyone's favorite obsessive-compulsive sleuth in 'Mr. Monk's Last Case'

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Fourteen years ago, Tony Shalhoub said goodbye to one of his most beloved creations — the obsessive-compulsive private detective Adrian Monk. Monk's last TV appearance in 2009 was even called "Mr. Monk and the End."

There was talk over the years of a potential reboot and some possible scripts were floated. But Shalhoub said there wasn't enough of a compelling reason to return to his phobia-obsessed character.

Then the pandemic hit.

Monk suddenly wasn't the only germaphobe wiping down their groceries, stocking up on antibacterial wipes and shuddering at the sight of crowded places.

"Monk, in a way, was the canary in the coal mine," Shalhoub tells The Associated Press. "He seemed so out of touch and so neurotic and so forth. The pandemic was the great equalizer. Everybody got to sort of see the world through Monk's eyes."

Viewers have caught up with Monk and so fans get another goodbye with the 90-minute "Mr. Monk's Last Case: A Monk Movie" hitting Peacock on Friday.

Shalhoub reunites on a new murder case with a millionaire as the prime suspect and original stars Ted Levine, Traylor Howard, Jason Gray-Stanford, Melora Hardin and Hector Elizondo.

Shalhoub laughs that when the rock band Eagles got back together in 1994, founding member Glenn Frey said they'd never broke up, they just took a 14-year vacation. "That's how I felt at the first table read when we all got back together again. We just kind of folded right back into it."

Monk helped the San Francisco Police Department solve crimes because his fixations enable him to observe things that others overlook. He walked away after solving his last case — the murder of his beloved wife.

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When we reconnect with Monk, it is present day and he's emerged from the pandemic, having spent most of it in a full protective suit and using in-home rapid tests every 20 minutes. Outside, hand sanitizer use is booming. "Everyone is you," he is told. "They're gonna hate it," he replies.

Monk is in a moody place, no longer detecting and lonely. He wrote a memoir but burned through editors and ghost writers. His obsession with details — including nine pages about a suspect's vacuum cleaner — has prompted his publisher to scrap the book and ask for his advance back. So Monk is reevaluating his life and his career.

"When we're young, everything's in front of us. And then when we're in our middle ages, we feel more settled in the present. But then as we move beyond that, we mostly are looking backwards. We're looking behind us and we're reassessing and reevaluating," Shalhoub says.

"You know, 'What have I done? What has been my footprint and my impact?' And I think that's exactly where Monk is: 'What has all this meant? What have we really accomplished?' That further perpetuates these very dark thoughts that he's having."

Shalhoub collected three Emmy Awards for his work as Monk over eight seasons. After the show ended in 2009, Shalhoub went on to earn three Tony Award nominations, winning in 2018 for "The Band's Visit" and starred in "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," winning another Emmy.

He suspects Monk — an unlikely hero in these Marvel days — has been embraced by legions of fans because he has flaws and insecurities, but manages to push through them.

"He uses them and turns them into an asset. Actually, for Monk, they become this superpower in a way," Shalhoub says. "He doesn't know where he fits into the general society. So he's kind of always sort of like walking alongside of humanity and society. Maybe that also makes him a bit relatable."

He adds: "I always hear about adolescents and young teens relating to him, too, because that's such a time of life being feeling socially awkward and feeling you're not really a child, you're not really a grown up."

Shalhoub also suspects there's a little OCD in all of us, whether it's being annoyed by the placement of something or an odd interaction on the street that sticks in your head.

"Maybe it's a crooked picture frame on a wall. Not all of us may go over and straighten that frame, but good luck trying to keep your eyes off of it, you know?"

The debut of "Mr. Monk's Last Case: A Monk Movie" begs the question — is this really a final goodbye to Monk? Shalhoub isn't sure.

"I thought the door was closed. I really did for a lot of years. But now that we've cracked it open, I'm just going to leave that door open," he says. "I think the next one would have to be called 'Monk's Really, Really Final No Kidding Case – This Time We Mean It' or something like that."

Today in History: 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' premieres

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 9, the 343rd day of 2023. There are 22 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

In 1965, "A Charlie Brown Christmas," the first animated TV special featuring characters from the "Peanuts" comic strip by Charles M. Schulz, premiered on CBS.

On this date:

In 1854, Alfred, Lord Tennyson's famous poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," was published in England.

In 1911, an explosion inside the Cross Mountain coal mine near Briceville, Tennessee, killed 84 workers.

In 1917, British forces captured Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks.

In 1987, the first Palestinian intefadeh, or uprising, began as riots broke out in Gaza and spread to the West Bank, triggering a strong Israeli response.

In 1990, Solidarity founder Lech Walesa (lek vah-WEN'-sah) won Poland's presidential runoff by a landslide.

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In 1992, Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana announced their separation. (The couple's divorce became final in August 1996.)

In 2000, the U-S Supreme Court ordered a temporary halt in the Florida vote count on which Al Gore pinned his best hopes of winning the White House.

In 2006, a fire broke out at a Moscow drug treatment hospital, killing 46 women trapped by barred windows and a locked gate.

In 2011, the European Union said 26 of its 27 member countries were open to joining a new treaty tying their finances together to solve the euro crisis; Britain remained opposed.

In 2012, Mexican-American singer Jenni Rivera, 43, and six others were killed in a plane crash in northern Mexico.

In 2013, scientists revealed that NASA's Curiosity rover had uncovered signs of an ancient freshwater lake on Mars.

In 2014, U.S. Senate investigators concluded the United States had brutalized scores of terror suspects with interrogation tactics that turned secret CIA prisons into chambers of suffering and that it did nothing to make Americans safer after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

In 2020, commercial flights with Boeing 737 Max jetliners resumed for the first time since they were grounded worldwide nearly two years earlier following two deadly accidents; Brazil's Gol Airlines became the first in the world to return the planes to its active fleet.

In 2021, a jury in Chicago convicted former "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett on charges he staged an anti-gay, racist attack on himself and then lied to Chicago police about it.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dame Judi Dench is 89. Actor Beau Bridges is 82. Actor Michael Nouri is 78. Former Sen. Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., is 76. World Golf Hall of Famer Tom Kite is 74. Singer Joan Armatrading is 73. Actor Michael Dorn is 71. Actor John Malkovich is 70. Country singer Sylvia is 67. Singer Donny Osmond is 66. Rock musician Nick Seymour (Crowded House) is 65. Comedian Mario Cantone is 64. Actor David Anthony Higgins is 62. Actor Joe Lando is 62. Actor Felicity Huffman is 61. Empress Masako of Japan is 60. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., is 57. Rock singer-musician Thomas Flowers (Oleander) is 56. Rock musician Brian Bell (Weezer) is 55. Rock singer-musician Jakob Dylan (Wallflowers) is 54. TV personality-businessperson Lori Greiner (TV: "Shark Tank") is 54. Actor Allison Smith is 54. Songwriter and former "American Idol" judge Kara DioGuardi (dee-oh-GWAHR'-dee) is 53. Country singer David Kersh is 53. Actor Reiko (RAY'-koh) Aylesworth is 51. Rock musician Tre Cool (Green Day) is 51. Rapper Canibus is 49. Actor Kevin Daniels is 47. Actor-writer-director Mark Duplass is 47. Rock singer Imogen Heap is 46. Actor Jesse Metcalfe is 45. Actor Simon Helberg is 43. Actor Jolene Purdy is 40. Actor Joshua Sasse is 36. Actor Ashleigh Brewer is 33. Olympic gold and silver medal gymnast McKayla Maroney is 28. Olympic silver medal gymnast MyKayla Skinner is 27.