

# Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 176 ~ 1 of 84

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## **Death Notice: Gordon Nelson**

Gordon Nelson 78, of Groton passed away Saturday, December 16, 2023 at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis.

Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

## **Sunday, Dec. 17**

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sunday school program practice, 9 a.m.; Worship with Sunday school program, 10:30 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion: at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school Christmas

## **Groton Daily Independent**

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

**The shop. cans.**



program practice, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship with Sunday school Christmas program during service, 10:30 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.; Christmas program and dinner, 5 p.m. (everyone welcome to attend)

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. 18**

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, baked potato with sour cream, peas and carrots, pineapple/strawberry ambrosia, cookie, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cheese omelets.

School Lunch: Tater tot hot dish.

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

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

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

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck dinner, Noon.

## **OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

**recycling trailer is located west of the city It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum**

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# Broton Daily Independent

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BROWN COUNTY  
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA  
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

December 19, 2023, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. First Reading of Ordinances:
  - a. Ord. #262 – Rezone
  - b. Ord. #263 – Rezone
  - c. Ord. #264 - Rezone
5. Rachel Kippley, Fair/Fairgrounds/Parks Manager
  - a. Carnival Contract
  - b. Entertainment Contract - Rowan Grace
  - c. Special Events Contract – Randy Buker – Hypnotist
  - d. Discuss Expo Roof
6. Karly Winter, States Attorney
  - a. Discuss Edwards Land Management Board
7. Dave Lunzman, Sheriff & Jon Lemke, Chief Deputy Sheriff
  - a. Award Body Camera & In Car Systems Bid
  - b. Authorize signing of the Brown County Jail & JDC Inmate Housing Agreements with the following counties: Walworth, Edmunds, Spink, Marshall & Jerauld
8. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
  - a. DOT Agreement for Guard Rail at Richmond Lake
9. Judy Dosch, Building Superintendent
  - a. Open the Tuckpointing Bids
10. Consent Calendar
  - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of December 12, 2023
  - b. Claims/Payroll
  - c. HR Report
  - d. Travel Request
  - e. Auditor's Report of Accounts
  - f. Claim Assignment
11. Other Business
12. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
13. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

**Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.**

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

**You can also dial in using your phone.** United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

**Access Code:** 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

**Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at**

<https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

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**Groton Community Transit**  
205 E 2nd Ave., Downtown Groton  
invites you to its  
**Holiday Bake Sale**

**Thursday, Dec. 21, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

**Coffee, cider and Christmas goodies will be served.**

*Groton Transit wishes you all a Merry Christmas and a Blessed Year!*

**If you would like to donate baked goods, please contact  
the Groton Transit dispatch office at 605-397-8661.**

**Any and all donations are welcome!**

**2024 DOG LICENSES DUE BY  
12/29/2023**

**Fines start January 1, 2024**



Spayed/Neutered  
dogs are \$5 per dog,  
otherwise \$10 per dog

Proof of rabies shot  
information is RE-  
QUIRED!!

Email proof to city.  
kellie@nvc.net, fax to

(605) 397-4498 or bring a copy to City Hall!!

Please contact City Hall as soon as possible if you no longer have a dog(s) that were previously licensed!

**Questions call (605) 397-8422**

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## NSU Women's Basketball

### **Wolves Drop to The Golden Eagles in NSIC Match-Up**

Crookston, Minn. – The Northern State women's basketball team fell by one to Minnesota Crookston, 69-68 Saturday afternoon. The Wolves almost recorded the comeback after being outscored by the Golden Eagles by 17 heading into halftime.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 68, UMC 69

Records: NSU 9-3 (5-1 NSIC), UMC 7-5 (4-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 102

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State notched nine points in the first quarter, 15 in the second, 22 in the third, and 22 in the fourth

The Wolves drained 42.2 % of shots from the floor along with 40.0 % from beyond the 3-point line and shot 72.7 % from the free throw line

NSU tallied 40 points in the paint, 35 rebounds, 16 assists, and nine steals in the contest

Madelyn Bragg was the team's leading scorer with 16 points and five rebounds

Morgan Fiedler and Rianna Fillipi both notched double digits points with 14 and ten points respectively; recorded a career-high in points

In addition, Fiedler shot perfect from beyond the arc with two made 3-pointers and made 62.5 % of shots from the floor

Fillipi dished out nine rebounds and five assists to lead the team

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 16 points, 5 rebounds, 2 blocks

Morgan Fiedler: 14 points (career-high), 100.0 3-point %, 62.5 field goal %

Rianna Fillipi: 10 points, 9 rebounds, 5 assists, 4 steals

#### UP NEXT

Northern State concludes the first half of the season and will be back in action against Minnesota State on January 5th and Winona State on January 6th. Tip-off times are set for 7:30 p.m. from Mankato, Minn. against the Mavericks and 5:30 p.m. from Winona, Minn. against the Warriors.

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## **NSU Men's Basketball**

### **Northern Men Drop NSIC Match-up to Minnesota Crookston**

Crookston, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team fell to Minnesota Crookston Saturday afternoon on the road. The Golden Eagles out-scored the Wolves in each half, despite Northern recording a game high 46 points in the paint.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 67, UMC 71

Records: NSU 5-7 (3-3 NSIC), UMC 4-7 (1-5 NSIC)

Attendance: 98

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves preseason woes resurfaced, hitting just 1-of-22 from beyond the arc

Northern shot 45.5% from the floor and 75.0% from the foul line, however the 4.5% from beyond the arc led to their demise

NSU scored 30 points in the first and 34 in the second, notching nine second chance points, six points off turnovers, and two points off the bench

They forced a game high eight turnovers and racked up 33 rebounds, 11 assists, four steals, and three blocks

Josh Dilling led three Wolves in double figures with 23 points, knocking down 11-of-16 from the floor

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Josh Dilling: 23 points, 68.8 field goal%, 6 assists, 2 rebounds, 2 steals

Jacksen Moni: 21 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists

Andrew Bergan: 12 points, 50.0 field goal%, 7 rebounds, 2 assists

#### UP NEXT

The Wolves will remain on the road when they return for competition in 2024. Northern is set to face Minnesota State and Winona State on January 5 and 6. Tip-off times are set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday against the Mavericks and 3:30 p.m. on Saturday versus the Warriors.

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## NSU Wrestling

### **No. 13 Wolves Roll into Day Two of Midwest Classic in the Top-10 with Multiple Advancing**

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 13 Northern State University wrestling team advanced five wrestlers to the second day of competition from the Midwest Classic. No. 1 Wyatt Turnquist leads the Wolves in the semifinal round, while No. 11 Jason Henschel Jr., Braydon Mogle, No. 10 Devin Bahr, and Nathan Schauer will battle through the consolation bracket. Northern sits in ninth overall with 59.0 team points heading into Sunday.

#### ADVANCING WOLVES

Henschel Jr. went 2-1 on the first day with victories over Ben Guillian of Newberry (Fall 1:02) and Gavin Ritter of Findlay (Fall 1:05)

He battled in the quarterfinals, ultimately falling in an 8-7 decision to Elijah Lusk of Lander and will face Evan Binder of Maryville in the consolation semifinals

Mogle rattled off three wins to open his day against Eric Cain of Allen (Maj. 17-4), Kade Millsaps of Lincoln Memorial (TF 15-0), and No. 7 Jake Niffenegger of Mercyhurst (SV-1 8-5)

The 141-pounder fell in the quarterfinal round to Cayden Henschel of Parkside (Dec 10-4) and will face Ronan Schuelke of McKendree in the consolation semifinals

Turnquist heads to the semifinals with a 4-0 record, notching wins over Marcell Dely of Fort Hays State (Fall 6:59), Bret Minnick of Mercyhurst (TF 15-0), Torry Early of Chadron State (Fall 1:32), and No. 12 Dallas Wilson of Mount Olive (Dec 7-5)

He will face Ryan Moore of Thomas More to kick-off his Sunday

Bahr notched a 3-1 record with wins over Carson Freeman of Montevallo (Fall 1:30), John Bamvakais of Maryville (TF 17-1), and Ryan Wilson of Western Colorado (Dec 9-8)

He dropped a 14-5 major decision to Jack Haskin of Lake Erie in the quarters and will face Ben Durocher of Parkside in tomorrow's consolation semifinals

Schauer went 3-1 and will face Daulton Mayer of Thomas More in the consolation semifinals of the 285-pound bracket

He recorded wins over Gavin Shamblin of Glenville State (Fall 6:20), Dustin Swanson of Kutztown (Dec 8-5), and No. 11 Tyler Doyle of Colorado Mesa (Fall 1:56)

#### WOLVES IN COMPETITION

Landon Fischer went 2-2 on the day, notching wins over Nathan Smith of UIndy (Fall 5:59) and Isaac Bourge of Quincy (Dec 3-2)

Chase Bloomquist with 2-2 on the day with wins over Jacob Reinardy of MSU Moorhead (TF 17-2) and Ashton Labelle of Southwest Minnesota State (Dec 5-2)

At 174-pounds, Sam Kruger recorded a 2-2 record with wins over Aaron Taylor of Quincy (Fall 1:01) and Wayne Mellon of MSU Moorhead (Maj 12-0)

Treyton Cacek opened his day with a bye and tallied a second round win over Jacoby Benjamin of Newberry (Maj 12-4) before dropped two matches

Marshall VanTassel rallied back after an opening loss with victories over Josef Pociask of King (TF 23-6) and Garrett Steele of UNC Pembroke (Dec 6-4); however, fell in the consolation quarterfinals

#### UP NEXT

The Wolves will take on the second day of the Midwest Classic tomorrow morning from Indianapolis. Competition kicks off at 8 a.m. (CT) from Nicoson Hall.

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**The Groton Area wrestling team took second place at the Sioux Valley Avalanche Wrestling Tournament held Saturday in Volga.** (Photo from Groton Area facebook page)

## Grapplers take second at Sioux Valley Tournament

Groton Area wrestlers took second place at the Sioux Valley Avalanche Tournament held Saturday in Volga. Wyatt Hagen at 106 pounds and Christian Ehresmann at 150 pounds took first place, Walker Zoellner at 132 pounds and Gavin England at 285 pounds took second, Lincoln Krause at 113 pounds and Karter Moody at 285 pounds took third and Easter Ekern at 165 pounds took fourth place.

Kingsbury County won the tournament with 225 pounds while Groton Area took second with 106, Deuel was third with 94 points followed by West Central with 92, Chamberlain with 81, Sioux Valley with 74, Mitchell with 60, Tri-Valley with 55, Yankton with 34 and Dell Rapids with 24.

### **106: Wyatt Hagen (5-1) placed 1st and scored 20.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-1 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-1 won by decision over Grayson Pischke (West Central) 4-1 (Dec 8-3)

Semifinal - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-1 won in sudden victory - 1 over Chase Henriksen (Kingsbury County) 10-6 (SV-1 9-4)

1st Place Match - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-1 won by decision over Jett Whiting (West Central) 7-3 (Dec 10-6)

### **106: Noah Scepaniak (1-2).**

Champ. Round 1 - Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 1-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Jett Whiting (West Central) 7-3 won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 1-2 (Fall 0:00)

Cons. Round 2 - Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 1-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 1-2 won by fall over Xander Sharpe (Tri-Valley) 1-4 (Fall 0:35)

Cons. Semi - Chase Henriksen (Kingsbury County) 10-6 won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 1-2 (Fall 3:43)

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## **106: Aiden Strom (1-4).**

Champ. Round 1 - Aiden Strom (Groton) 1-4 received a bye () (Bye)  
Quarterfinal - Chase Henriksen (Kingsbury County) 10-6 won by fall over Aiden Strom (Groton) 1-4 (Fall 2:52)  
Cons. Round 2 - Aiden Strom (Groton) 1-4 won by fall over Daltin Coughlin (Kingsbury County) 0-4 (Fall 0:48)  
Cons. Round 3 - Grayson Pischke (West Central) 4-1 won by fall over Aiden Strom (Groton) 1-4 (Fall 0:22)

## **106: Luke Gauer (1-2).**

Champ. Round 1 - Luke Gauer (Groton) 1-2 won by fall over Daltin Coughlin (Kingsbury County) 0-4 (Fall 1:26)  
Quarterfinal - Payton Barrick (Tri-Valley) 4-4 won by fall over Luke Gauer (Groton) 1-2 (Fall 0:50)  
Cons. Round 2 - Xander Sharpe (Tri-Valley) 1-4 won by fall over Luke Gauer (Groton) 1-2 (Fall 3:29)

## **113: Lincoln Krause (3-2) placed 3rd and scored 12.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Lincoln Krause (Groton) 3-2 received a bye () (Bye)  
Semifinal - Noah Bennett (Mitchell) 5-2 won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton) 3-2 (Fall 0:54)  
Cons. Semi - Lincoln Krause (Groton) 3-2 won by fall over Karsten Lerwick (Kingsbury County) 2-5 (Fall 2:04)  
3rd Place Match - Lincoln Krause (Groton) 3-2 won by fall over Bentley Fokken (Deuel) 2-4 (Fall 1:43)

## **126: Donavon Block (3-4) scored 7.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Cody Zell (Kingsbury County) 11-2 won by fall over Donavon Block (Groton) 3-4 (Fall 3:34)  
Cons. Round 1 - Donavon Block (Groton) 3-4 received a bye () (Bye)  
Cons. Round 2 - Donavon Block (Groton) 3-4 won by fall over Stratton VanOverschelde (Mitchell) 0-3 (Fall 3:38)  
Cons. Round 3 - Donavon Block (Groton) 3-4 won by forfeit over Zach Grochow (Dell Rapids) 0-6 (For.)  
Cons. Semi - Ryker Gauger (Deuel) 5-4 won by fall over Donavon Block (Groton) 3-4 (Fall 0:37)

## **132: Walker Zoellner (5-2) placed 2nd and scored 18.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton) 5-2 won by forfeit over forfeit forfeit (Mitchell) 0-4 (For.)  
Semifinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton) 5-2 won by fall over Tyson Hagberg (Deuel) 4-6 (Fall 2:55)  
1st Place Match - Tate Steffensen (Sioux Valley) 15-1 won by fall over Walker Zoellner (Groton) 5-2 (Fall 1:29)

## **150: Christian Ehresmann (5-1) placed 1st and scored 25.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-1 received a bye () (Bye)  
Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-1 won by fall over Owen Shea (Deuel) 2-2 (Fall 1:20)  
Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-1 won by medical forfeit over Blake Jennings (Kingsbury County) 7-5 (M. For.)  
1st Place Match - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-1 won by major decision over Gavin Kloos (Deuel) 8-1 (MD 14-5)

## **165: Easten Ekern (2-4) placed 4th and scored 8.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Kaleb Johnson (Kingsbury County) 9-3 won by fall over Easten Ekern (Groton) 2-4 (Fall 1:06)  
Cons. Round 1 - Easten Ekern (Groton) 2-4 won by decision over Jesus Mendoza (Tri-Valley) 3-7 (Dec 4-0)  
Cons. Semi - Easten Ekern (Groton) 2-4 won by fall over Tyler Glammeier (Dell Rapids) 2-2 (Fall 0:35)  
3rd Place Match - Braxton Huber (West Central) 7-3 won by fall over Easten Ekern (Groton) 2-4 (Fall 0:30)



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## **175: Ben Hoeft (1-4).**

Quarterfinal - Ben Hoeft (Groton) 1-4 received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Chisum Blum (Chamberlain) 4-4 won by fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton) 1-4 (Fall 1:14)

Cons. Semi - Luke Johnson (Sioux Valley) 1-3 won by fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton) 1-4 (Fall 1:15)

## **190: Layne Johnson (1-2).**

Quarterfinal - Layne Johnson (Groton) 1-2 won by fall over Tryker Myers (Yankton) 4-7 (Fall 5:01)

Semifinal - Marshall Holz (Kingsbury County) 7-2 won by fall over Layne Johnson (Groton) 1-2 (Fall 0:41)

Cons. Semi - Xavier Yount (Tri-Valley) 7-6 won by fall over Layne Johnson (Groton) 1-2 (Fall 0:46)

## **190: Isiah Scepaniak (0-4).**

Quarterfinal - Breyten Johnson (Kingsbury County) 9-4 won by fall over Isiah Scepaniak (Groton) 0-4 (Fall 1:10)

Cons. Round 1 - Xavier Yount (Tri-Valley) 7-6 won by fall over Isiah Scepaniak (Groton) 0-4 (Fall 1:40)

## **285: Karter Moody (5-3) placed 3rd.**

Quarterfinal - Karter Moody (Groton) 5-3 won by fall over Charlie Becker (Dell Rapids) 3-5 (Fall 1:09)

Semifinal - Owen Vandeweerd (Sioux Valley) 15-2 won by fall over Karter Moody (Groton) 5-3 (Fall 2:11)

Cons. Semi - Karter Moody (Groton) 5-3 won by fall over Cooper Gerard (Chamberlain) 0-9 (Fall 0:45)

3rd Place Match - Karter Moody (Groton) 5-3 won by fall over Charlie Becker (Dell Rapids) 3-5 (Fall 1:37)

## **285: Gavin Englund (4-2) placed 2nd and scored 16.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Gavin Englund (Groton) 4-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Gavin Englund (Groton) 4-2 won by fall over Raymond Klein (Deuel) 6-6 (Fall 3:06)

1st Place Match - Owen Vandeweerd (Sioux Valley) 15-2 won by decision over Gavin Englund (Groton) 4-2 (Dec 5-1)

## **Krueger takes third at Ashley Tournament**

Liza Krueger took third at the Second Annual Girls` Border Brawl held Saturday in Ashley. There were 31 teams that participated in the tournament. Krueger's place put Groton Area in 24th place.

## **100: Liza Krueger (5-2) placed 3rd and scored 16.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 5-2 won by fall over Marlee Miller (Ellendale/Edgeley/Kulm) 2-3 (Fall 3:06)

Quarterfinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 5-2 won by decision over Brennli Wilkens (Beulah-Hazen) 2-2 (Dec 6-3)

Semifinal - Jennifer Verdin (Hettinger/Scranton) 10-2 won by fall over Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 5-2 (Fall 1:59)

Cons. Semi - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 5-2 won by decision over Kimber Fritel (Stanley) 5-3 (Dec 5-0)

3rd Place Match - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 5-2 won by decision over Eloise Jenner (South Border) 14-8 (Dec 5-0)

## Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash  
Where: I-90, Mile Marker 111, 1 mile east of Wall, SD  
When: 6:48 a.m., Saturday, December 16, 2023

Vehicle 1: 2018 Toyota Corolla  
Driver 1: Male, 34, Fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2018 Honda Odyssey  
Driver 2: Female, 39, Life threatening injuries  
Passenger 1: Female, 43, Serious non-life-threatening injuries

Pennington County, S.D.- One person died Saturday morning in a two vehicle crash in Pennington County.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2018 Honda Odyssey was traveling eastbound on Interstate 90 in the eastbound lanes near mile marker 111. A 2018 Toyota Corolla was traveling the wrong way, heading westbound on I-90 in the eastbound lanes. The vehicles collided head-on and the driver of the Toyota died at the scene.

The driver of the Honda sustained life-threatening injuries and their passenger sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries. Both were transported by ambulance to a local hospital.

All three people were wearing seatbelts. Alcohol and drug use is under investigation.

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

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



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Changes from higher education task force result in increased program terminations, collaborations

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 16, 2023 1:00 PM

BROOKINGS — Four university degrees will be discontinued at South Dakota Board of Regents institutions and two programs will be consolidated, according to a recent program productivity report presented to the board on Thursday.

Those discontinued degrees were flagged due to low enrollment, low graduation and a lack of financial viability. The report has been in effect for years but was updated with recommendations from what came to be known as the Senate Bill 55 task force, which resulted from 2020 legislation that aimed to review “program and administrative efficiencies” at state institutions.

The revised policy mandates annual reviews of programs flagged instead of program reviews every seven years.

With this latest review, the report points toward more decisions to terminate programs or collaborate between universities than in past productivity assessment cycles. A total of 162 academic degrees have been discontinued in the last 12 years.

The policy is working, said Janice Minder, the regents’ vice president for academic policy and planning.

The board’s policy requires program productivity evaluation every three years with a “three-year mid-cycle review.” After analyzing the data, the report is presented before a committee to make final recommendations for the regental board.

“This is the fruit of the work that you see in SB55,” Minder said during the presentation, referencing the 2020 legislation. “... The goal with the annual reviews is to try and avoid or try to enhance that program before it comes up for mid cycle review.”

Among 80 degrees reviewed for productivity during the past year, 21 were flagged and evaluated further. The four degrees to be inactivated include the communications/English program at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, the theatre and government programs at Northern State University in Aberdeen and the atmospheric and environmental science doctoral program at South Dakota Mines in Rapid City.

Five of the programs identified in the review are teacher education programs, which are deemed critical to the state. The programs will be allowed five years to evaluate the workforce needs of the program in South Dakota before they are evaluated again.

The Northern State and Black Hills State Spanish programs will be consolidated and combined with either South Dakota State University in Brookings or the University of South Dakota in Vermillion through online programming, the report indicated.

BHSU President Laurie Nichols told the board Thursday that the university didn’t want to terminate its Spanish degree because she felt students should have access to the foreign language even though the program has had consistently low enrollment for years.

“We can join forces on teaching: We’ll have a lot larger classes and we will do all the things that program productivity should be doing for us,” Nichols said.

SB55 was introduced during the 2020 legislative session by Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel. Maher’s bill originally intended to consolidate the administration of BHSU and South Dakota Mines in the Black Hills, which would in turn help reduce expenditures and tuition costs, he hoped.

Maheer told news outlets at the time he was concerned about falling enrollments at some universities and rising costs across the system. He found precedent for statewide reviews in the 1969 Gibb Report,

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which ultimately led to the closing of a state university in Springfield (now the home of the Mike Durfee State Prison).

The bill morphed into creating a task force, which filed a report of its findings in late 2021.

This August, the Board of Regents requested a report to identify “opportunities and vulnerabilities” of its six universities, including ways to manage and analyze financial and program sustainability. The board said the report “comes in continuation of efficiency actions” such as the earlier task force.

“Once complete, the comprehensive report will summarize the results with clear and actionable recommendations for South Dakota’s public university system,” the board said in a news release. “These measures will focus on improving the financial resilience of the public university system and offering continuing opportunities for students.

*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.*

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## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

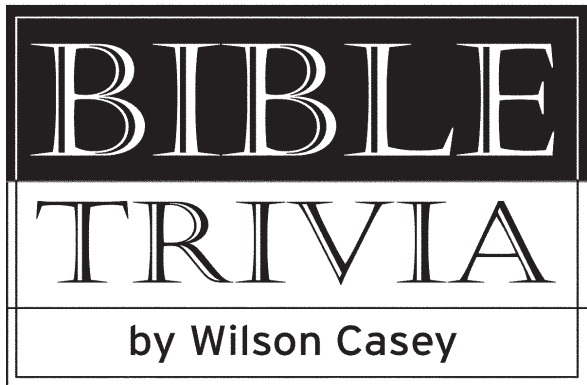
Therefore the Lord Himself  
will give you a sign:  
Behold, the virgin shall  
conceive and bear a Son,  
and shall call His name  
Immanuel. ISAIAH 7:14

"Heilige Nacht" (15th-century woodcut)



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1. Is the book of Immanuel (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. Which Old Testament prophet said the most about the birth of Christ?  
*Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah*

3. From Matthew 1:18, when Mary became pregnant, she and Joseph were ... *Married, Engaged, Just friends, Strangers*

4. In Luke 2:8-11, how did the shepherds learn of Christ's birth? *Magi informed, Joseph announcement, Mighty wind, Angel appearance*

5. Where did the wise men go first when they arrived in the Holy Land? *Nazareth, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron*

6. What does the Bible record as to when Jesus was born? *Late September, Dec. 25, March 17, Does not*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) Isaiah, 3) Engaged, 4) Angel appearance, 5) Jerusalem, 6) Does not

*Comments? More Trivia? Gift ideas? Visit [www.TriviaGuy.com](http://www.TriviaGuy.com).*

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**FLASH GORDON**

Patrol notes: 3/4 light: we spot two strangers in the jungle.

A woman in an Arborian survival suit with a man in a Sky City garment.

Allegiances unclear.

We maintain observation distance.

Half past 3/4 light: The strangers run into trouble.

The Lythebeast.

Man draws blade but has little luck.

We engage.

Lythebeast retreats, alive.

The man - "Flash Gordon" - is wary of our imperial uniforms -

-but relaxes once we explain ourselves.

We are deserters.

Living free of Ming for years in a colony made from our old gunship.

-Airman SOJAS.

DAN SCHKADE 12-17-23

NEXT: INQUEST

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## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

LITTLE REMINDERS CAN SOMETIMES HELP A LOT AT THIS GAME.

FOR INSTANCE DON'T FORGET TO ADDRESS THE BALL WHERE YOU INTEND TO STRIKE IT - THAT IS OPPOSITE THE CENTER OF THE CLUBFACE NOT THE HEEL OR TOE.

ALSO, ADDRESS THE BALL WITH THE TOE OF THE CLUB SLIGHTLY RAISED.

THAT WAY YOU OFFSET THE BOWING OF THE SHAFT THAT LOWERS THE TOE THROUGH IMPACT AND MAKES IT TOUCH DOWN FIRST, THUS LEAVING THE CLUBFACE OPEN.

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## Patient With PBC Needs Calcium Supplements Amid Normal Levels

**DEAR DR. ROACH:** I am a 60-year-old female who was diagnosed with primary biliary cholangitis (PBC) in 2020. At the time, I had a bone density scan that showed osteopenia of the left femoral neck with a T-score of -1.3. My 10-year risk of any fracture was 6.9%, while my risk for hip fractures was 0.5%.

My hepatologist wants me to take a calcium supplement, even though my calcium level has always been normal. I have always been overweight and led a very sedentary way of life. I had vitamin D tests done yearly, but the deficiency was, negligently, never addressed by my doctors.

So my first question is, do I really need to take this supplement? I am concerned that too much calcium may do more harm than good, and my osteopenia may not have been caused by my PBC.

The other question is, would taking vitamin K2 along with vitamin D and calcium help absorb vitamin D better so that it would not accumulate in my kidneys and damage them in the process? — R.Z.

**ANSWER:** PBC is an autoimmune disease where the body attacks the bile ducts. Without treatment, it can cause loss of the bile ducts, eventually leading to cirrhosis and liver failure. Since ursodeoxycholic acid has been available, fortunately the majority of people with this condition have a normal life expectancy. Few develop cirrhosis.

A lesser-known complication of PBC

is osteopenia and osteoporosis. There are several theories as to why this occurs, including decreased growth factors and toxicity to bone-producing cells. Low vitamin D and, possibly, vitamin K2 may play a role as well.

It's important for all people with osteopenia or osteoporosis to have adequate calcium in their diets. Calcium blood tests are not a reliable indicator of calcium stores in the body, since inadequate calcium intake will cause the body to take calcium out of the bones so that the blood levels remain normal. You can be severely deficient in calcium and dangerously osteoporotic with normal calcium blood levels.

Ensuring adequate dietary calcium then becomes of the utmost importance. If you aren't getting 1,000-1,200 mg of calcium in your diet, then changing your diet to add more or taking a supplement is recommended. Kidney stones are a complication of calcium supplementation, and there is controversy surrounding whether the calcification of blood vessels is more likely in people who take calcium supplements. For these reasons, dietary calcium is preferred, if possible.

Many people with osteoporosis need supplemental vitamin D to keep their blood levels in the recommended range, which is 30-48 ng/mL (75-120 nmol/L) for a person with PBC and osteopenia, in my opinion. Although studies in Japan have shown benefit when using vitamin K2 supplementation in people with osteoporosis, I don't generally recommend it, based on multiple other studies that failed to produce a benefit.

However, for bone disease associated with PBC in particular, K2 is reasonable for those who wish to try it. Vitamin K2 works through its mineralization effect on the bone itself. By carefully monitoring vitamin D blood levels, you can avoid the unusual complication of vitamin D excess.

Finally, becoming less sedentary will help, even if it's walking an extra 10-20 minutes a day.

*Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).*



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"Killers of the Flower Moon" (R) -- Director Martin Scorsese's latest release (and 26th feature film) is now available to rent or purchase, following its box-office run of \$154.5 million. With an exemplary cast made up of Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert De Niro, Lily Gladstone, Brendan Fraser and more, this crime drama unpacks a series of targeted murders that occurred in the Osage Nation during the early 20th century. After finding oil in their land, the Osage tribe gains significant wealth that unknowingly draws in a pack of human parasites. Facilitated by a lack of interest from the local government, Osage members begin to die off seemingly without explanation. The film is based on a non-fiction book written by David Grann. (Apple TV+)



**Real-life sisters Kat Sadler, left, and Lizzie Davidson star in "Such Brave Girls."**

of Hulu

Courtesy

"Maestro" (R) -- For the first time since "A Star Is Born," Bradley Cooper had to juggle his acting/directing/writing hats for this biopic about the American composer Leonard Bernstein and his wife, Felicia Montealegre. The triple threat donned a prosthetic nose for his portrayal of the composer, opposite Carey Mulligan ("Promising Young Woman") as Felicia. The film follows Bernstein from 1943, when he was 25 and working as an assistant conductor, well into his old age in 1987 after years of composing successes such as "West Side Story." Amid his triumphant public accomplishments, Bernstein tucks away his hidden attraction to men, forcing himself to live a stifling double life. Directors Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese served as producers for the film, out on Dec. 20. (Netflix)

"Asteroid City" (PG-13) -- Grossing \$54 million worldwide, Wes Anderson's latest comedy drama features an ensemble cast of great Hollywood names like Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Margot Robbie, Steve Carell and more. Ever the witty and unconventional writer, Anderson tells two stories in one, the first being a fictional play called "Asteroid City," which sets up how the film is told and framed. The second plotline, interspersed between the play's scenes, follows the behind-the-scenes events about the playwright, Conrad Earp, and how his creation came to be. Anderson's directing style is right on brand, as always, with a beautiful pastel aesthetic and a clever visual design that feels akin to watching theatre. Out now. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Such Brave Girls" (NR) -- This comedic British sitcom centers on a single mother named Deb and her two daughters, Josie and Billie, played by two real-life sisters. Created by up-and-coming writer Kat Sadler, who stars as Josie, the series is described as a family sitcom about trauma. Through very punchy dialogue, it takes an honest and hilarious approach in showing the crunchy and awkward moments between family members that many people can relate to. The show seems similar to another British show, Phoebe Waller-Bridge's "Fleabag," which also touches on family trauma and finding a place in the world after a shaky upbringing. (Hulu)

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1. Mad Dogs & Englishmen were the backup band for which artist on their 1970 American tour?
2. Which was bigger: Woodstock or Summer Jam at Watkins Glen?
3. Who wrote and released "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag"?
4. To whom did the Beatles write "Dear Prudence"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Now, your daddy don't mind, And your mommy don't mind if we have another dance."

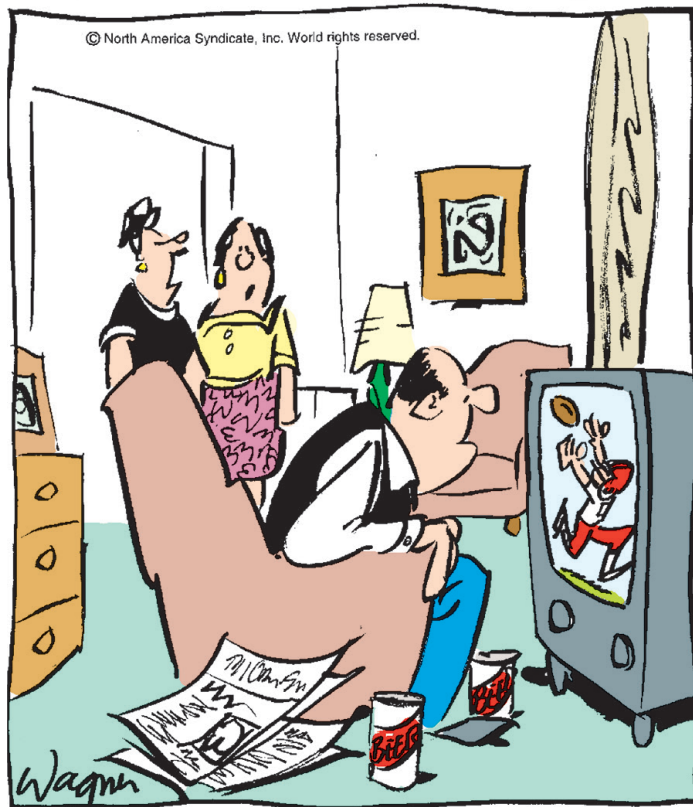
## Answers

1. Joe Cocker. Upward of 20 musicians were in the group. They were named after the Noel Coward song of the same name.
2. Summer Jam, in 1973, saw 600,000 people come through the gates at the Watkins Glen Raceway.
3. Country Joe and the Fish, in 1965. The song was a counterculture protest against the Vietnam War and appeared on their album of the same name.
4. They wrote it to Prudence, the sister of Mia Farrow, who was studying meditation with them in India in 1968, as a way of getting her to stop hiding in her hut.
5. "Stay," by Maurice Williams & the Zodiacs, in 1960. Songwriter Williams wrote the first version of the song as a teen when he tried to convince a date not to go home yet.

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## GRIN and BEAR IT <sup>Wagner</sup>

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"I'll introduce you after the bowl games."

## Just Like Cats & Dogs

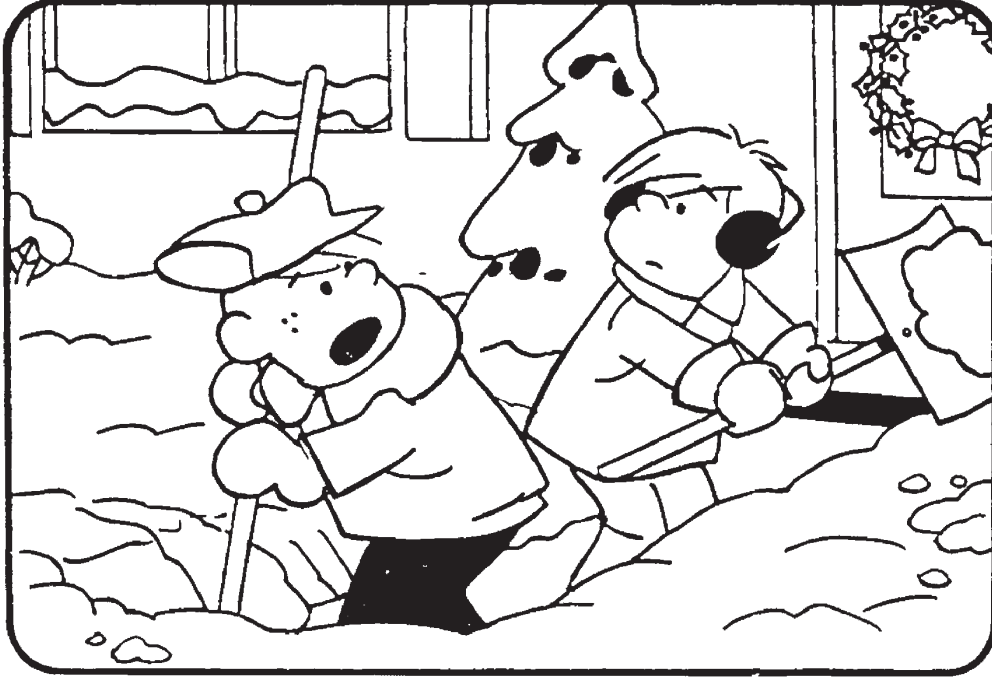
by Dave T. Phipps



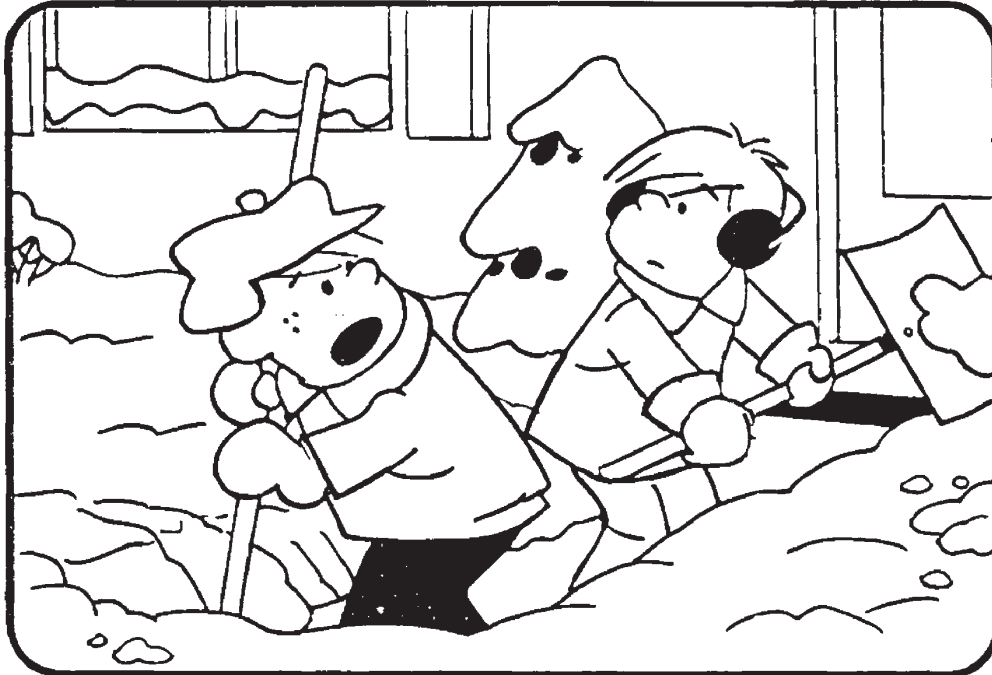
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## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Ear flap is moved. 2. Collar is smaller. 3. Tree is smaller. 4. Arm is moved. 5. Wreath is missing. 6. Shovelful of snow is smaller.

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\* It might be hard to get or stay motivated for exercise once we've dipped into shortened days and lower temperatures. Exercise is so important to your health, so get it any way you can. Did you know that a half-hour snowball fight can burn 100 calories? Get out there and enjoy the winter weather! -- JoAnn

\* If you frequently face snow in your area, invest in a pair of running shoes that are designed for trail running. They have deeper cleats for better traction. Some are even waterproof. This will encourage you to run when it's been snowing!

\* "To help your sneakers dry faster, remove the laces and sock liner and hang separately. Stuff them with newspaper to draw out moisture. Hang them to dry on a sturdy hook or line, but not too close to a heater, as it's possible to break down the support materials that way."

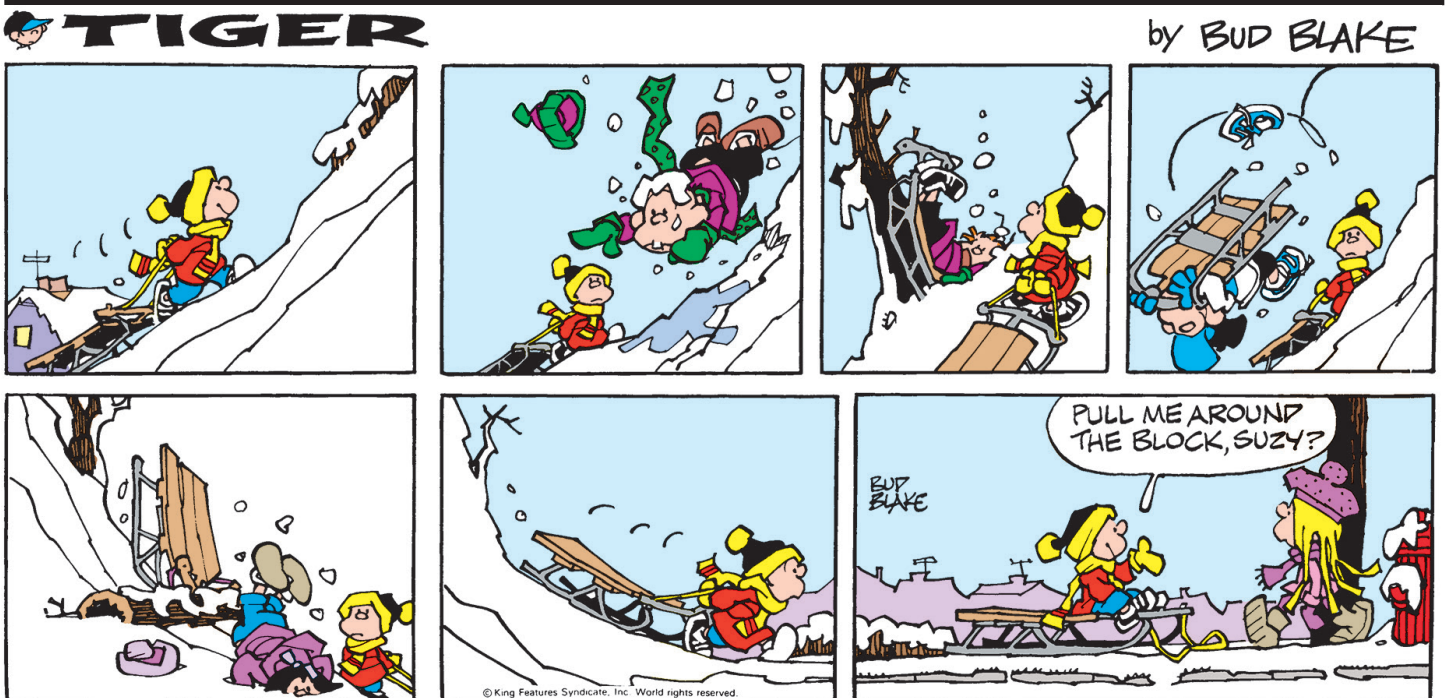
-- E.D. in Minnesota

\* "If you are outdoors on freezing days, you know to dress in layers. When you exercise outside, you do that too, but be prepared to strip off a layer if you get overheated. I have a carabiner clip on my waistband, and I can clip my outer light jacket to it, or even my fleece, through a button hole." -- P.S. in Virginia

\* "Here's a tip about sledding in a pinch: A laundry basket can make a fine sled for a small, sturdy kid, especially if you are blessed with surprised snow! If you attach a rope or belt to one side of the basket, it's easy to pull the kids along." -- M.B. in Missouri

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 TiVo precursor
- 4 Wide
- 9 America's uncle
- 12 Consume
- 13 Heart line
- 14 La-la lead-in
- 15 Gym machine
- 17 And so on (Abbr.)
- 18 Nabokov novel
- 19 Bowling lanes
- 21 Packs tightly
- 24 Go yachting
- 25 Yale grad
- 26 Author Umberto
- 28 Aegean island
- 31 Building wings

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12				13						14		
15				16						17		
				18				19		20		
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31				32		33		34		35		
36				37		38		39		40		
				41				42		43		44
45	46							47				
48				49		50				51	52	53
54				55						56		
57				58						59		

- 33 Farm female
- 35 Steakhouse order
- 36 Rice recipe
- 38 PC key
- 40 Chaney of horror films
- 41 First lady of scat
- 43 Bistro furniture
- 45 Telepathic
- 47 Sushi choice
- 48 Hostel
- 49 Heavy burden
- 54 Memo letters
- 55 Deadly virus
- 56 Schlep
- 57 Air safety org.
- 58 Philly hoopster
- 59 Director Lee
- 10 Bohemian
- 11 Apple computers
- 16 Small batteries
- 20 Tale teller
- 21 Army transport
- 22 "That's — need to know"
- 23 1,000-year spans
- 27 Have debts
- 29 Bassoon's kin
- 30 Taxpayer IDs
- 32 Pretzel topper
- 34 Getty of "The Golden Girls"
- 37 Fireplace flickerers
- 39 Salad type
- 42 Suspect's excuse
- 44 Crunchy sandwich
- 45 Peeve
- 46 "May It Be" singer
- 50 Bagel topper
- 51 Slangy suffix
- 52 Sister
- 53 Silly Putty container

### DOWN

- 1 Animal doc
- 2 Train unit
- 3 Hwy.
- 4 Villain
- 5 Woo
- 6 "... — quit!"
- 7 World record?
- 8 Texas city
- 9 Sheet metal producer

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## — King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

V	C	R		B	R	O	A	D		S	A	M
E	A	T		A	O	R	T	A		T	R	A
T	R	E	A	D	M	I	L	L		E	T	C
			A	D	A		A	L	L	E	Y	S
J	A	M	S	I	N		S	A	I	L		
E	L	I		E	C	O		S	A	M	O	S
E	L	L	S		E	W	E		R	I	B	S
P	I	L	A	F		E	S	C		L	O	N
		E	L	L	A		T	A	B	L	E	S
M	E	N	T	A	L		E	E	L			
I	N	N		M	I	L	L	S	T	O	N	E
F	Y	I		E	B	O	L	A		L	U	G
F	A	A		S	I	X	E	R		A	N	G

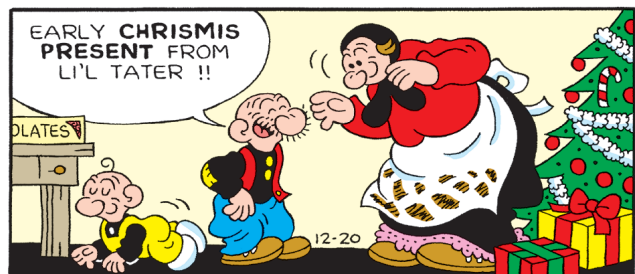
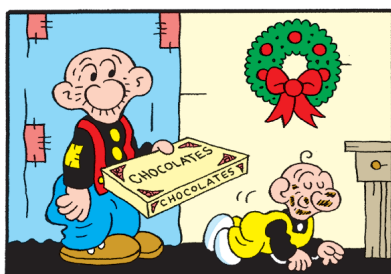
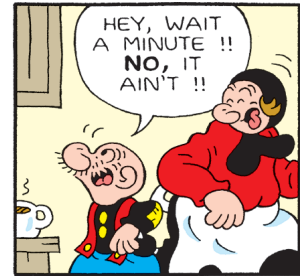
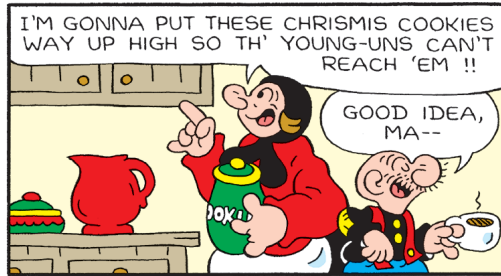
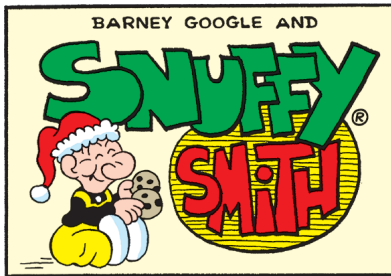
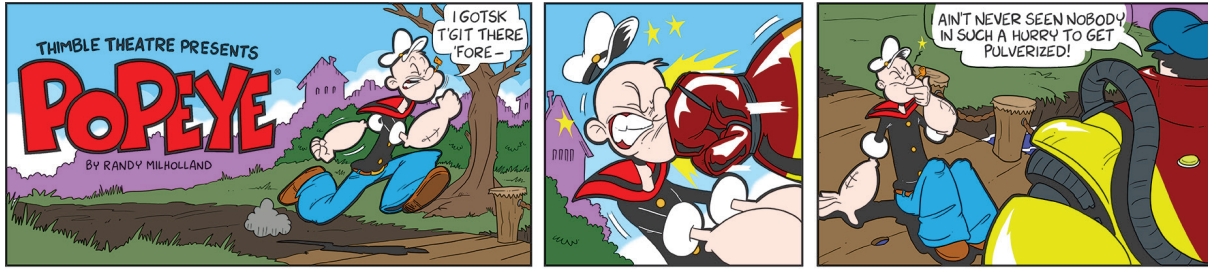
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



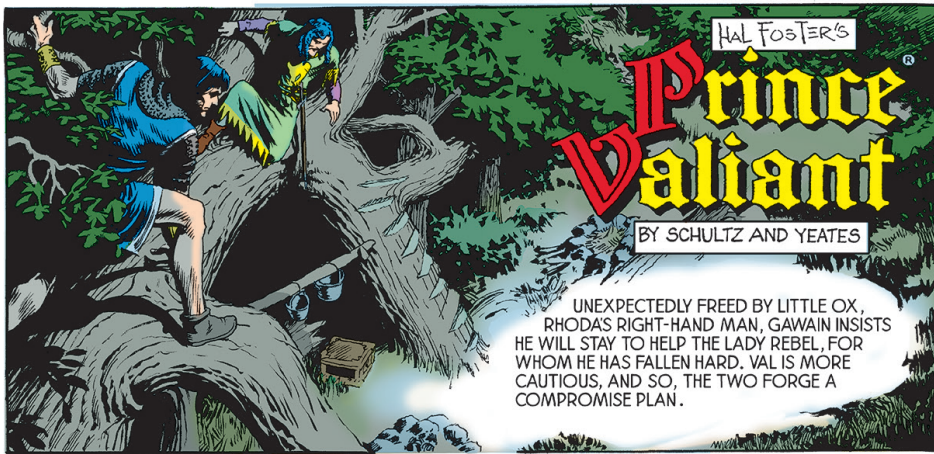
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UNEXPECTEDLY FREED BY LITTLE OX, RHODA'S RIGHT-HAND MAN, GAWAIN INSISTS HE WILL STAY TO HELP THE LADY REBEL, FOR WHOM HE HAS FALLEN HARD. VAL IS MORE CAUTIOUS, AND SO, THE TWO FORGE A COMPROMISE PLAN.



IN STEALTH, THEY CLIMB A STOUT BOUGH DIRECTLY ABOVE THE ENTRANCE TO THEIR FORMER PRISON. THEN, VAL SHATTERS THE NIGHT FOREST HUSH: "THE PRISONERS HAVE ESCAPED! THE PRISONERS HAVE ESCAPED!"

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THE SLEEPING CAMP EXPLODES INTO CHAOS. MUCH AS THE TWO KNIGHTS EXPECTED, RHODA ORDERS HER MEN TO FAN OUT INTO THE FOREST WHILE SHE HEADS FOR THE PRISON, KNOWING FULL WELL SHE WILL FIND LITTLE OX BOUND WITHIN...



... BUT THE REBEL LEADER NEVER REACHES THE ENTRANCE!

BEFORE SHE CAN CRY FOR HELP, A HAND IS CLAMPED OVER HER MOUTH. "I COULD NOT LEAVE YOU," WHISPERS GAWAIN.

NEXT: **Conspiracy**

## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING



## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### Staying Healthy, Staying Home

I've been lax lately in terms of my health. I admit it. While I haven't been at music concerts among thousands of people or riding packed subway cars, I have been going to stores during the daytime when the aisles are full. This was especially true during the holiday shopping season. It's time to stop that -- again -- and start staying home, again.

Respiratory syncytial virus (also known as RSV) is on the rise where I live, and likely elsewhere.

It was only a few months ago that the CDC was advising pediatricians to keep the standard RSV shot they usually give children and save it for the babies that were most vulnerable because supplies were limited. That does not bode well for getting a handle on the spread of RSV. And it's certainly not an illness seniors want.

And then we have Covid ... still with us and never really went away, despite the number of people in stores who were not wearing masks. Seniors don't want that one either.

And then there's the regular, garden variety seasonal flu. The version of the flu shot for seniors this year is a high-dose quadrivalent, which covers two A types as well as two B versions. So we should be protected if we have that shot, they say.

While we were locked down because of the Covid pandemic, flu nearly disappeared. This is because we were staying home, we were washing our hands, we were wearing masks if we had to go out and we were social distancing -- all things to protect against Covid, but it also worked to protect against flu.

I for one am going back to my safety protocols. With three viruses out there right now, I'm better off going back to Zoom calls with friends and the delivery of groceries.

Why take a chance?

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1. Dan Baker has served as the public address announcer for what Major League Baseball team since 1972?

2. What Pro Football Hall of Fame running back announced his retirement from the NFL via a fax letter to "The Wichita Eagle" newspaper in July 1999?

3. Name the American tennis player who won nine Grand Slam women's singles titles in the 1950s and died of ovarian cancer at age 34 in 1969.

4. The Florida Tuskers, Hartford Colonials, Omaha Nighthawks and Virginia Destroyers were teams that competed in what pro football league that operated from 2009-2012?

5. What Italian boxer won two middleweight title fights against Emile Griffith in a trilogy of bouts from 1967-68?

6. Industrialist Tom Yawkey was owner of what Major League Baseball team from 1933-76?

7. What Baseball Hall of Famer from Puerto Rico was National League Rookie of the Year in 1958 and NL MVP in 1967?



by Ryan A. Berenz

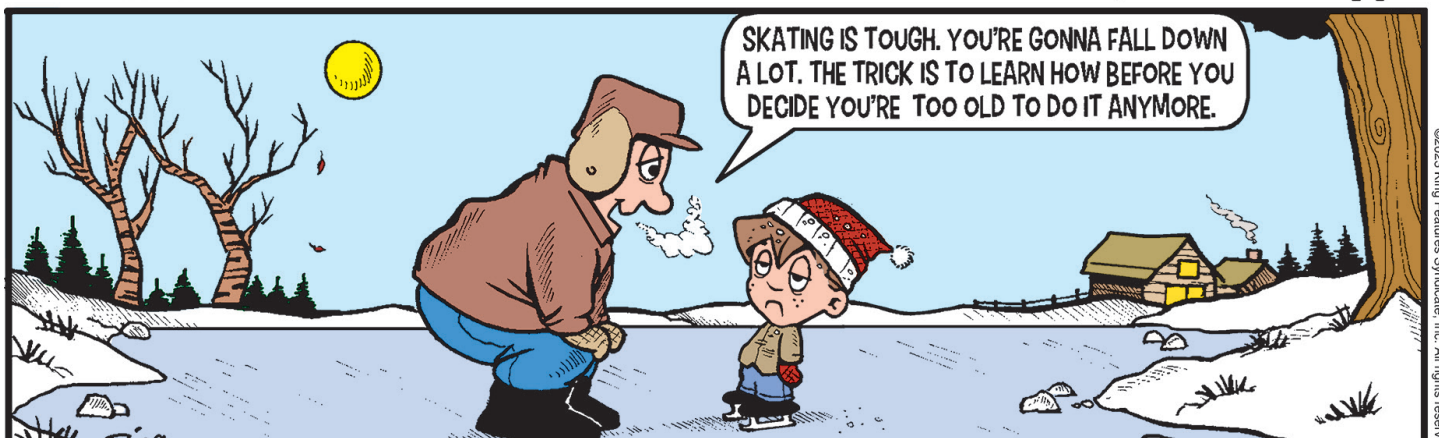
## Answers

1. The Philadelphia Phillies.
2. Barry Sanders.
3. Maureen Connolly.
4. The United Football League (UFL).
5. Nino Benvenuti.
6. The Boston Red Sox.
7. Orlando Cepeda.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





## No Peace on Earth for Visiting Dogs and Cats

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My aunt and uncle insist on bringing their toy poodle, Frank, to the family gathering at my house this Christmas. The trouble is that my cat, Maximilian, cannot stand any dog. Especially Frank. Last year, Maxi chased Frank all around the house and scratched his snout pretty badly. I know they're going to bring Frank again, because they bring him everywhere. I don't want to tell them not to come. How can I have peace in the house this holiday? -- Shane in Hyde Park, New York

DEAR SHANE: I'm already envisioning your aunt and uncle as the sort who let their poodle run rampant throughout the house, clambering on laps and begging for bits of food under the table, right? And they want everyone to think of Frank as a charming little guy.

Maxi's aggression toward Frank isn't surprising. Cats are territorial, and most instinctively don't like dogs. Some barely tolerate other cats. Frank's presence is very stressful for Maxi, and one visit a year will not help the two become more socialized.

Since Frank is coming to the party no matter what, you need to concentrate on reducing Maxi's stress and plan for ways to keep him comfortable and away from the poodle. Designate a room in your house as Maxi's refuge on the day of the family gathering. Place his bedding, toys, food and water in it and keep him there during the event.

What if the gathering takes place over two or more days? You'll need to talk with your aunt and uncle and work out a schedule so that Maxi can roam the house while Frank is placed in a room, and vice versa.

How do you deal with multiple pets at holiday gatherings? Tell us at [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).

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## Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- \* By 2018, more than 100 people living in the U.S. owed at least \$1 million in federal student loans.
- \* A one-euro breakfast featured at an IKEA store in the Netherlands proved so popular that it had to be canceled after it attracted too many customers and even led to highway traffic jams.
- \* Kellogg's All-Bran cereal is actually 87% bran.
- \* Heading for the gym in the new year? Be sure to take some hand sanitizer! A report found that a typical gym's free weights boast 362 times as much bacteria as a toilet seat.
- \* During the Cold War, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to put aside their political differences if Earth was ever invaded by aliens from outer space.
- \* Nicaraguan Catholics who abstain from meat during Lent include iguanas and armadillos in their diet.
- \* In 1978, Equatorial Guinea's President Francisco Macias Nguema, widely considered one of history's most brutal, possibly even insane dictators, tempted fate by changing his country's national motto to "There is no other God than Macias Nguema."
- \* More than four tons of old American paper money is mulched into compost every day.

Thought for the Day: "Your life is your story. Write well. Edit often." --Lisa Nichols

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\* We should all be so lucky as to have vision like that of the mantis shrimp: Not only do its eyes possess four times as many color receptors as a human's, it can see UV, visible and polarized light as well.


\* The rise in global temperatures has led to flowers emitting less scent.

\* Lightning hasn't brought down an airplane since 1963, thanks to engineering that allows a bolt's electric charge to run through and out of the aircraft.

\* Spinraza, a drug prescribed for spinal muscular dystrophy, has a list price of \$750,000.

**The Garden Bug**

**Star of Bethlehem**



*Ornithogalum umbellatum* forms carpets of low-growing foliage that are topped with star-shaped white flowers in the spring. It's great for keeping a sunny bank of soil from eroding away, as an accent in a sunny garden, or for covering exposed roots under trees or shrubs. Its flowers are rich with nectar and pollen and attract bees and other pollinators. - Brenda Weaver

Sources: [www.easytogrowbulbs.com](http://www.easytogrowbulbs.com),  
[www.gardenersworld.com](http://www.gardenersworld.com),  
[www.missouribotanicalgarden.org](http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org)



by Freddy Groves

## What's Up at the VAOIG?

The Office of Inspector General for the Department of Veterans Affairs is always busy, and that's a good thing. Here's what they've been up to lately:

A surviving spouse in Florida lied to the VA and collected benefits he wasn't entitled to receive ... for 30 years. As the surviving spouse of a deceased service member, he collected DIC benefits (dependency and indemnity compensation) to the tune of nearly \$365,000 before it was all over. During all those years he remarried twice and was no longer legally eligible

to receive the benefits. When nabbed, he pleaded guilty. He's looking at 10 years in the pen, as well as forfeiting all the stolen money.

Another case is a double whammy: A woman not only lied to get a VA home loan but then lied to an arms dealer about being the purchaser of firearms when she wasn't. She's nailed with wire fraud for using email to the VA and the lender about the loan. Then, at a gun store, she stated that she was the gun purchaser while in the company of someone who indicated which weapons she should buy and who wasn't allowed by law to purchase firearms. Three years in prison and a \$177,000 fine don't seem like enough.

A pair of house cleaners attracted the attention of several agencies, including the VAOIG, Homeland Security and the Post Office, for their scams against clients. Specifically, they stole personal information by having the mail rerouted from clients' homes and using the info to open lines of credit, get loans and credit cards and steal identities. (Clue to thieves: When you want to steal mail, don't have it rerouted to your home address.) One of the pair is looking at 22 years in prison and a half-million-dollar fine.

And then there was the VA employee who took bribes to approve disability benefits applications. This included extortion of monies and then, when he suspected the game was up, witness tampering.

The VAOIG never rests.

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## Wishing Well®

6	4	5	8	2	5	3	8	3	8	6	5	3
N	B	B	B	Y	E	A	R	C	I	E	D	T
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W	A	H	A	R	L	Y	C	E	O	T	Y	T
2	6	2	8	3	7	2	4	3	2	7	2	7
E	H	N	O	U	Z	C	T	R	O	E	U	A
5	6	2	6	2	7	3	2	5	4	3	4	3
I	O	R	U	A	C	T	G	S	I	H	N	O
7	3	4	7	6	7	8	3	6	2	3	2	8
T	U	G	I	G	O	U	G	H	E	H	D	T
3	6	5	8	7	8	3	6	8	5	8	7	5
T	T	I	L	N	O	S	S	O	V	K	S	E

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. FOOD & DRINK: What is ciabatta?
2. TELEVISION: What is the name of the 1980s cop drama series starring actor William Shatner?
3. HISTORY: In which year did the Gulf oil spill occur?
4. LITERATURE: Who wrote the classic holiday novella "The Cricket on the Hearth"?
5. INVENTIONS: Who invented penicillin?
6. GEOGRAPHY: Monaco is bordered on three sides by which European country?
7. U.S. STATES: Which state's nickname is "The Land of Enchantment"?
8. MOVIES: What is the name of the police chief in the movie "Jaws"?
9. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What does the J.D. stand for in a law degree?
10. MUSIC: Which singer had a breakout hit with "I Kissed a Girl"?

### Answers

1. An Italian bread.
2. "T.J. Hooker."
3. 2010.
4. Charles Dickens.
5. Alexander Fleming.
6. France.
7. New Mexico.
8. Martin Brody.
9. Juris Doctor.
10. Katy Perry.

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# Groton Daily Independent

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South Dakota Governor

**Kristi Noem**



**South Dakota:** *Under God, the People Rule*

## Shining a Light

Jewish people around the world are concluding their celebration of the miracle of Hanukkah. As they do so, I cannot help but think of them and the State of Israel.

Hanukkah celebrates the Maccabees rededicating the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Of course, today, there is no Temple in Jerusalem. And the people of Israel have been facing terror for weeks. Since the October 7th attack on unarmed civilians, the people of Israel have been fighting for their lives – fighting for their right to exist.

Here in the United States, we need to stand with our closest ally in the Middle East. They need our support. The State of South Dakota has long stood with the State of Israel, and we do not plan to stop now.

In 2020, I signed an Executive Order that prohibited South Dakota Executive Branch Agencies from contracting with entities boycotting Israel. I proclaimed November 28th, 2021, "Antisemitism Awareness Week" and February 24th, 2022, "Israel Relations Day." And earlier this year, South Dakota celebrated the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel.

"Breaking Bread" embodies the essence of sharing culture, finding common ground, building community, and preserving traditions. These are all important values to Jewish people all over the world. During Hanukkah, "The Festival of Lights," I declared the week of December 11th, 2023, as "Shine a Light, Breaking Bread Week." I did this to symbolize and celebrate South Dakota's commitment to ensuring all people feel safe to share culture, discuss their beliefs openly in their communities, and are welcomed in our state.

Since the October 7th attack, Jewish people around the world have been facing discriminatory acts of hatred. Violent acts against the Jewish people have even skyrocketed here in the United States. This includes at least 109 rallies explicitly supporting Hamas. Violent acts against Jews have increased 388% over the same period last year. I recently announced that I will be supporting a bill this legislative session to prevent antisemitism in South Dakota.

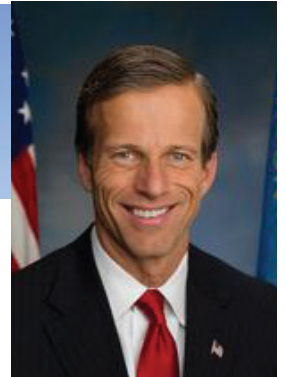
Antisemitism is discrimination against the Jewish people. This bill will support Jews in South Dakota by increasing their protections against antisemitic acts of hate.

I am proud to support this legislation, and we are taking additional steps to ensure Jewish people feel welcome in South Dakota. This week, my Bureau of Human Resources and Administration announced new training to help state employees raise awareness for antisemitic bias and discrimination.

Jewish people never deserve the kind of hate they are receiving today, but especially not during one of their most holy holidays of the year. And as Hanukkah has reminded us to turn our attention to the Jewish people, we must not stop shining a light on them. They deserve to feel safe in their communities. They deserve the Freedom to express and practice their religion. And they deserve our everlasting love and support.

I continue to pray for safety and peace. And South Dakota will continue to stand firm in our resolve to support the people of Israel.

**John Thune**  
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



## It's Time to Get the Border Under Control

Every year of the Biden administration, the number of illegal immigrants crossing the border has set a new record. Lately, the problem has grown worse. In recent weeks, 10,000-12,000 illegal immigrants per day have been caught trying to enter the United States illegally. Without significant policy changes, this concerning trend is likely to continue.

Jeh Johnson, who led the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under President Obama, once said that 1,000 immigrants per day would overwhelm the system. We're now seeing as much as 10 times as many border crossings per day on a regular basis. That means in a year we could see as many as 4 million people trying to cross the border – more than four times as many people who live in South Dakota. Johnson said he couldn't imagine what 4,000 per day would look like, but described it as "truly in a crisis." If 4,000 is a crisis, how do we describe a situation that's now up to three times worse?

The number of individuals trying to enter the country is not only overwhelming Customs and Border Protection. DHS has also warned that the increased number of migrants could facilitate terrorists and criminals entering the United States. In October alone, Border Patrol caught more than 1,500 criminals trying to cross the border – 93 of them had outstanding warrants. Fifty gang members and 12 individuals on the terrorist watch list were also caught. And these are only the individuals being caught. Also in October, an average of 1,000 people per day entered the country without being apprehended.

The border crisis is a national security crisis, which is why my Senate Republican colleagues and I have insisted that substantial border policy changes be included in any national security supplemental spending package. We can't seriously say we are defending our national security interests while allowing the status quo at the border to continue. We have to slow the flow of migrants, and that requires meaningful policy changes. We need to allow Border Patrol to reclaim control of the border, and the federal government must remove incentives that are encouraging high numbers of migrants from around the world to make a dangerous journey to our southern border.

To put it as plainly as possible, this crisis is the result of policy choices made by the Biden administration. It's the predictable result of President Biden choosing to end the policies of his predecessor. As this crisis has grown worse for close to three years, the Biden administration and Democrats in Congress have demonstrated little interest in changing course. My Republican colleagues and I have been sounding the alarm for years about it, and it's long past time to enact meaningful policies – not window dressing – that address this crisis. As recent events have shown, the world is an increasingly dangerous place, and we can't wait any longer to get the southern border under control.

FBI Director Christopher Wray recently said, "I've never seen a time when all the threats or so many of the threats are all elevated at exactly the same time." Amid such dire warnings, the crisis at the southern border is beyond unacceptable. We need to secure the border, slow the flow of migrants, and keep bad actors from taking advantage of the border crisis to get into our country and possibly do Americans harm. My Republican colleagues and I are committed to these goals, and I hope we will soon secure the policy changes that will achieve them.



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CONGRESSMAN  
**DUSTY JOHNSON**  
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



## Laser Focused **BIG Update**

For 11 years, schools across America have been prohibited from serving 2% or whole milk to students. The prohibition began when the Obama administration imposed ill-informed school lunch regulations. Without a variety of milk options, students have turned to drinks with high caffeine and sugar.

This week, House Republicans passed the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act to restore the option for schools to serve 2% and whole milk. I drink milk every day for lunch. It's filled with essential nutrients that help kids succeed in school. Whole milk is healthy. I'm glad I got to help lead this bill and give students a drink option that helps them grow and thrive.

## **BIG Idea**

During the Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit hearing this week, I talked to leaders in the Department of Transportation about a threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party on U.S. infrastructure.

LiDAR, Light Detection and Ranging, is a sensor technology that uses laser lights to map the surrounding environment and is used across our transportation industry, like at intersections, airports, ports, or in autonomous vehicles. Concerns have been raised of China targeting critical U.S. infrastructure for the use of this technology, potentially giving our foreign adversary 3-D images of our infrastructure and the ability to determine precise coordinates and dimensions of the surroundings.

Our investments in infrastructure should not empower our foreign adversaries. While the federal government should deploy this important technology, Congress should take steps to ensure we are not purchasing LiDAR from our adversaries. That would create vulnerabilities in our transportation industry for bad actors like China to exploit.

## **BIG News**

This week, the Select Committee on China (SCC) released its report addressing America's economic and technological competition with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The report included my bill, the PRC Accountability and Divestment Act, that I introduced a couple of weeks ago.

The SCC's report detailed ways to:

RESET: Reset the terms of our economic relationship with the People's Republic of China

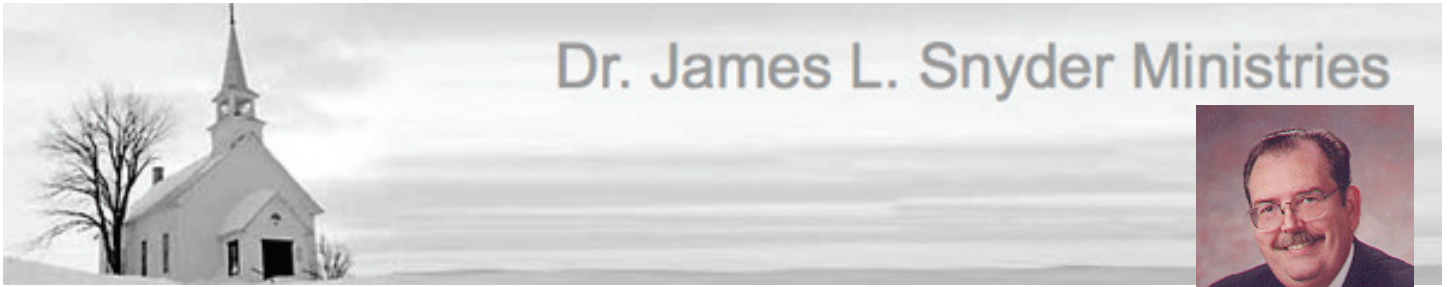
PREVENT: Stem the flow of U.S. capital and technology fueling the People's Republic of China's military modernization and human rights abuses

BUILD: Invest in technological leadership and build collective economic resilience in concert with allies

We must be careful with how we interact with China financially. We cannot bankroll the CCP regime, yet blindly decoupling could cause economic chaos and downturn in America. I'm glad the SCC's report focused on thoughtful and targeted ways to change course to promote our national security. I look forward to the committee's proposals being heard in Congress next year.

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## Cultivating the Fine Art of Listening



If confession is good for the soul, I must confess here, I have not been successful at everything in my life. Oh yes, there are a few things I have been successful at, which I won't mention right now. But many things I have failed to succeed at.

One thing I have failed to succeed at, even though I have tried all my life, is listening.

My ears work, and I can hear many things, but it's listening when I fail.

My first experience in this area of listening was when I met The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. At that time, we were students at a Bible Institute studying for the ministry.

We met in September, and we had become a couple by January.

One night, we were traveling with a group, and she casually asked, "Wouldn't it be nice to get married?"

Having failed in woman-ology and thinking it was just a casual question, I said, "It sure would be nice to get married." I thought that was all there was.

The next day, in the school halls, everybody congratulated me, and for the life of me, I did not know what they were talking about. I just thought I passed a test for the first time.

Later, I realized they congratulated me on my engagement to get married. I was the last one to know.

Sure, I heard what she said, but I wasn't listening to what she said. I have learned through life that there's a big difference between hearing and listening.

Not long after that incident, we married and have been blissfully married for over 53 years.

As a husband, I had to learn many things, and I wasn't very successful.

I assumed when your wife asks a question, she is asking to get an answer. It took me a long time to realize that was never the case.

Early in our marriage, she said, "Correct me if I'm wrong..." Then, she explained the situation from her perspective..

Thinking she was asking for my evaluation, I usually would do what she asked and correct her.

The first time I did this, I was not prepared for the outcome.

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Looking at me, she graciously said, "If I want your opinion, I will ask for it."

I thought that's what she asked for. I was only doing what I thought she said.

It took me a long time to understand her meaning when she said, "Correct me if I'm wrong." And believe me, I paid a heavy price for learning that too slowly. I only wish I would have known it earlier in our marriage.

Early in our marriage, I was busy correcting her when she asked to be corrected.

That's when I began to understand that hearing and listening are two different occupations. I can hear everything she is saying, but I'm not listening to what she is saying. I'm not quite sure how to connect these two things.

Finally, I began to understand what she meant. When she said, "Correct me if I'm wrong," she was not asking for a correction but something completely different. She wanted to hear from me, "My dear, you are absolutely correct."

I remember the first time I responded to her in like fashion. I still see the smile she had on her face when I said it. It was then I realized what she was looking for. She was not looking for my opinion but rather for my approval.

I began to understand what people meant when they said, "A happy wife is a happy family."

It is like the old joke about Abraham Lincoln and his wife. Lincoln's wife came to him and said, "Abe, does this dress make me look fat?" Fortunately, Honest Abe understood hearing and listening.

Throughout life, I have met many people obsessed with always being right. No matter what they are doing, they want to be recognized as doing it right.

Even though I'm still trying to develop a learning curve in this area, I have learned that my happiest days are not when I am right. I used to think they were, but I have graduated to a different understanding.

Recently, I noticed that The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage has used the phrase, "Correct me if I'm wrong," more times than I've ever heard her say that. I'm not sure if it's intentional, but at my level of understanding, I'm going to accept it and say to her every time, "Oh, my dear, you are absolutely correct."

The smile on her face when I say that is very satisfying and worth my effort. I must make a choice in life: her smile or my being right. At my level of experience, I always choose the former.

She asks some other questions that I'm working on, and hopefully, I will accomplish my goal before I die. I will need to learn how to connect my ears with my brain. That will be my challenge for the New Year.

While thinking about this recently I remembered a very wonderful verse in the New Testament. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (James 1:19).

I need to cultivate the fine art of listening. That simply means that I'm going to be slow to speak and only speak when I have thought through what I am hearing.

## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: The holiday season brings so much food and packaging waste. What can I do to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem this year?

-- Bridget Wilson, Philadelphia, PA

We all love the holiday season for its traditions and gift-giving, but environmental advocates worry about the extra waste we generate between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Americans produce 25 percent more trash over the holidays than the rest of the year. So, what's an eco-conscious holiday lover to do?

Reducing waste over the holidays might seem like a lofty goal, yet it's certainly within reach. The most obvious way to reduce waste this year is to rethink gift giving. Instead of buying this year's fad toy or gadget for that loved one, how about giving them an experience, a homemade gift or something made from recycled or upcycled materials? Or give the gift of time—help them reorganize their closet or kitchen, take them to the amusement park, help them set up a new website or teach them how to crochet.

If you do give physical gifts, wrap them creatively with the planet in mind by utilizing reusable materials like fabric, scarves or old maps—or repurpose newspaper or brown paper decorated with natural elements like pine cones or dried flowers. Indeed, some 30 million trees are sacrificed every year just to meet Americans' appetite for holiday wrapping paper, most of which isn't recyclable.

Shop locally or support businesses with sustainable practices. Carry reusable bags while shopping to avoid single-use bags and buy items with minimal packaging or packaging that can be easily recycled.

Another way to green this holiday season is to change up your holiday decor. For one, get a reusable tree if you're not able to compost a real one when its usefulness is over. Select eco-friendly holiday lights that use LED bulbs, which use less energy, and make decorations with natural materials, like pinecones, branches or dried citrus slices.

Food waste is a big issue all year, but especially around the holidays. Plan your holiday meals so as to minimize food waste. Buy local, organic produce with minimal packaging, and try to repurpose leftovers creatively. Make sure to compost food scraps and plant trimmings so such biodegradable items don't clog up landfills meant for garbage.

Another way we are wasteful over the holidays is all of the emissions-intensive air and road travel we indulge in to visit friends and family. Reduce travel emissions by carpooling, using public transportation, or opting for virtual gatherings when feasible. For unavoidable travel, consider carbon offset programs to balance out your emissions.

Yet another way to give without waste is by volunteering time and/or money to charitable causes on your own or on behalf of a loved one instead of a traditional physical gift. Supporting organizations that work toward environmental conservation or helping those in need can be a meaningful way to celebrate without contributing to waste. Indeed, each and every one of us has the power to make the holidays greener and less wasteful this year; it's just a matter of planning and resolve.



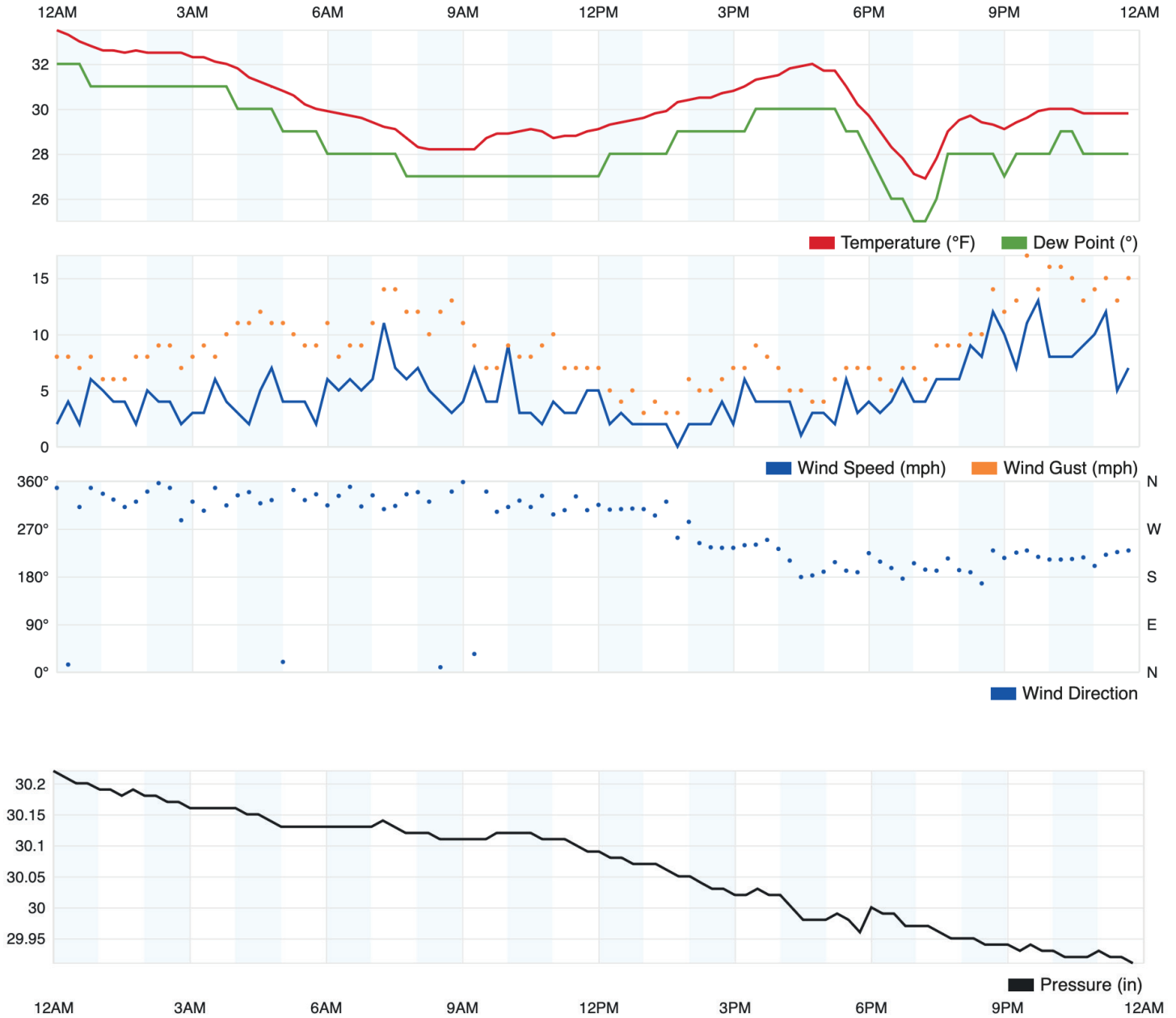
**Each and every one of us has the power to make the holidays greener and less wasteful this year; it's just a matter of planning and resolve.**

Credit: Lucie Liz, Pexels.com.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Dec 17	Dec 18	Dec 19	Dec 20	Dec 21	Dec 22	Dec 23
42°F	30°F	41°F	41°F	44°F	45°F	47°F
18°F	23°F	21°F	26°F	26°F	28°F	32°F
NW	NNW	S	NE	SE	S	SE
23 MPH	11 MPH	13 MPH	5 MPH	7 MPH	8 MPH	6 MPH

## Your Weather Today

### central South Dakota



Highs: 40s

Increasing Winds in the afternoon, out of the northwest with gusts to 35 to 40 mph.

### eastern South Dakota & west central Minnesota



Highs: upper 30s to low 40s

Mainly after 3pm:  
15 to 30% chance of light snow over far northeastern South Dakota & west central Minnesota. Increasing winds through the evening hours, out of the northwest with gusts to 35 to 40 mph.

Aberdeen, SD



[weather.gov/aberndeen](https://weather.gov/aberndeen)

Winds will increase this afternoon over central SD, and expand across eastern SD and western MN after 3pm, out of the northwest with gusts of 35 to 40 mph. While most locations will remain dry, there is a 15 to 30% chance of light snow over far northeastern SD & west central MN from around 3pm into the early evening hours. Light rain showers may mix in at times. Little to no accumulation is expected.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 34 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 27 °F at 7:10 PM

Wind: 17 mph at 9:30 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1939

Record Low: -32 in 2016

Average High: 28

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.32

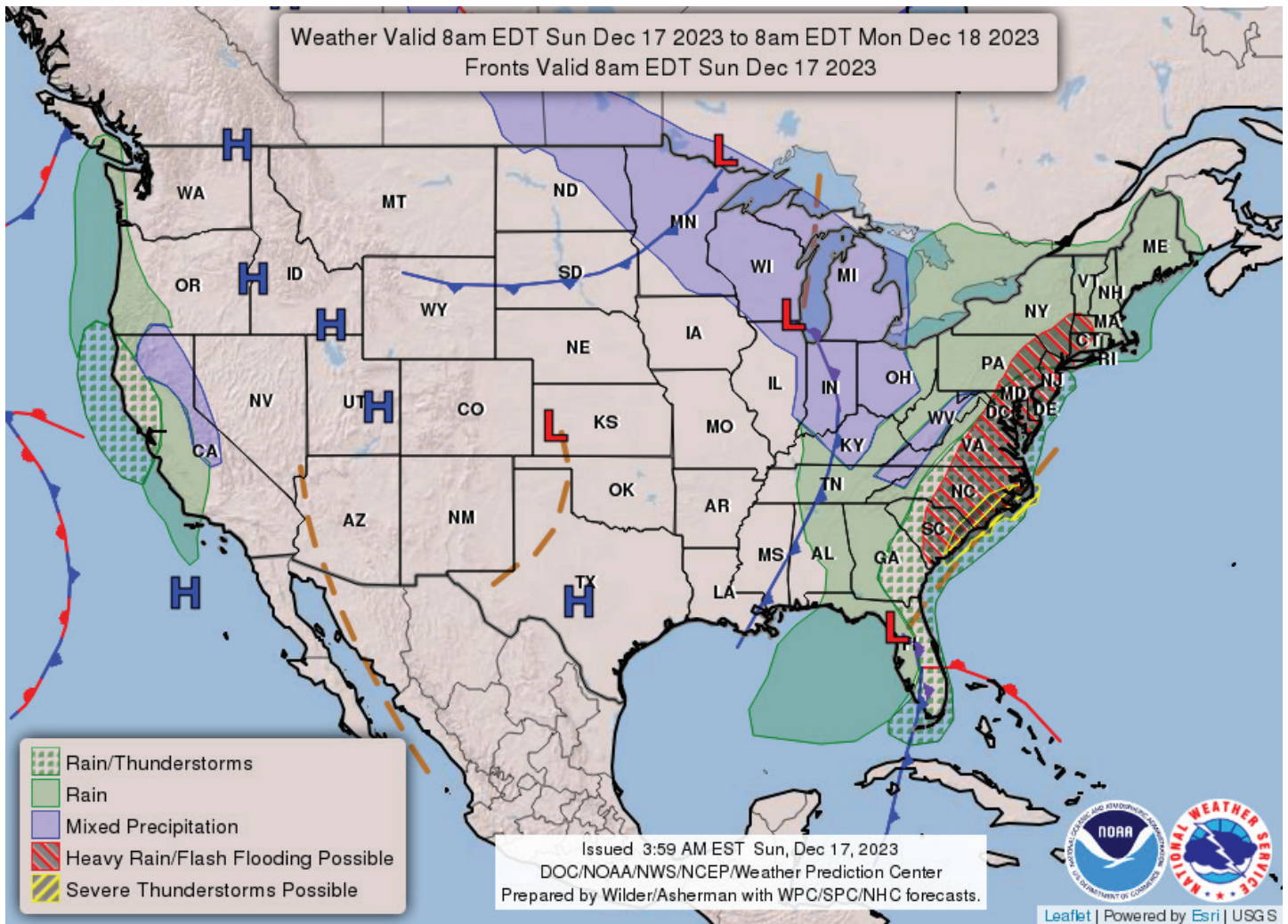
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.53

Precip Year to Date: 23.17

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:58 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05:39 am



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## Today in Weather History

December 17, 1993: A prolonged period of snow occurred from December 15th through the 19th over the western half of South Dakota. Several accidents leading to injuries occurred due to ice on the 15th, and many vehicles slid into ditches. Snowfall amounts were 4 to 10 inches. McIntosh received three inches of snow; Timber Lake, Murdo, and Selby received five inches of snow; and six inches accumulated at McLaughlin. Eagle Butte recorded seven inches of new snow.

December 17, 1903: Wilbur and Orville Wright made four brief flights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina with their first powered aircraft on this day. After having success with their 5-foot biplane kite, the brothers realized the weather conditions in Dayton were not ideal for their flying experiments. They wrote the Weather Bureau in Washington, D.C. requesting a list of suitable places on the east coast where winds were constant. Below is the response the Wright Brothers received from Joseph Doshier, who staffed the Weather Bureau office, wrote in August of 1900 regarding the suitability of Kitty Hawk.

"Mr. Wilbur Wright

Dayton Ohio

Dear Sir,

In reply to yours of the 3rd, I will say the beach here is about one mile wide clear of trees or high hills, and islands for nearly sixty miles south. Conditions: the wind blows mostly from the North and Northeast September and October which is nearly down this piece of land. Giving you many miles of a steady wind with a free sweep. I am sorry to say that you could not rent a house here. So you will have to bring tents. You could obtain frame.

The only way to reach Kitty Hawk is from Manteo Roanoke Island N.C. in a small sail boat. From your letter I believe you would find it here like you wish. Will be pleased at any time to give you any information. Yours very respectfully

JJ. Doshier"

On December 17, with the winds were averaging more than 20 mph, Orville took a flight that lasted 12 seconds for a total distance of 120 feet. You can read more information about the First Flight from the NWS Office in Morehead North Carolina by clicking [HERE](#).

December 17, 1924:

From the Monthly Weather Review, "a severe glaze storm occurred in west-central Illinois on December 17 and 18, the area of great destruction embracing a territory about 75 miles in width and 170 miles in length. In the affected area, trees were badly damaged, wires broken, and thousands of electric poles went down. Electric services were paralyzed, and it required weeks to restore operation and months to permanently rebuild the lines.

The street railway company and the Illinois Traction System resumed complete operation 17 days after the storm. Electric light service was completely restored January 10. The ice had practically disappeared from the trees and wires by January 4, but on January 20, there was still considerable ice on the ground.

The Western Union Telegraph Co. lost 8,000 poles and the Illinois Bell Telephone Co. about 23,000. The total damage to wire service in Illinois probably equaled or exceeded \$5,000,000." If the loss of business, the damage to trees and possible injury to winter grains, the storm may be considered one of the most disastrous of its kind in the history of Illinois."



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### THE PROMISE OF PEACE

A professor stood before his class and boasted, "The Bible is false. It cannot be believed. It says, 'Peace and goodwill toward men.' History cannot account for a time when there were no wars!"

Disturbed, Arthur went to his pastor and related the incident. Calmly, his pastor said, "Art, that's not what the angels said. They said, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased.'"

Politicians speak of peace through treaties and boundaries, threats and sanctions, wars and rumors of wars. But that is not the peace that God speaks of in His Word. His Word speaks of a peace that comes through salvation and surrender to the Prince of Peace. It is a peace that comes from the new heart that He implants within us. It is a peace that Christians enjoy when we open the door to our hearts and allow Him to come in and rule our lives.

The peace that Scripture speaks of will never come from a non-peaceful source. It is a peace that comes through the risen Christ and has its source in God Himself.

We cannot find peace in a turbulent, war-torn world until we make peace with God through Jesus Christ. Only when we go to Him in humility and with faith, trust, and surrender, repent and ask for His forgiveness will He grant us His peace.

Prayer: We pray, Father for Your peace – a peace that comes from the God of all comfort Who gives us His peace that assures us of His presence in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:13-14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"



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: 12.15.23

10 20 28 40 54 12

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$41,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

13 14 23 25 31 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,900,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

12 17 27 36 44 10

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 5 Mins 48 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

2 7 9 13 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$97,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

9 39 41 46 65 3

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

3 9 10 20 62 25

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$543,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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News from the  Associated Press

## Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

### BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 61, Sturgis Brown 58  
Aberdeen Christian 55, Sisseton 38  
Alcester-Hudson 53, West Sioux, Iowa 36  
Andes Central-Dakota Christian 68, Scotland 42  
Banner County, Neb. 42, Edgemont 36  
Brandon Valley 45, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 40  
Cody-Kilgore, Neb. 64, Colome 50  
Dell Rapids 50, Aberdeen Roncalli 31  
Ethan 60, Freeman Academy-Marion 50  
Faith 70, Philip 58  
Hill City 62, Hot Springs 61  
Hitchcock-Tulare 59, Langford 26  
Howard 38, Wessington Springs 33  
Huron 60, Rapid City Stevens 52  
Ipswich 54, Webster 49  
Jones County 69, Bison 27  
Lemmon High School 66, Grant County, N.D. 54  
Lemmon High School 66, Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 54  
Leola-Frederick High School 58, Waubay/Summit 51  
McCook Central-Montrose 56, Bon Homme 23  
Mitchell 58, Rapid City Central 47  
Pierre T F Riggs High School 61, Spearfish 45  
Scottsbluff, Neb. 19, St. Thomas More 18  
Sioux Falls Christian 58, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 39  
Sioux Falls Lutheran 50, Sunshine Bible Academy 42  
Stuart, Neb. 65, Burke 61  
Vermillion 76, Beresford 56  
Warner 51, Potter County 47  
West Central 59, Crofton, Neb. 51  
Winner 61, Sully Buttes 25  
Lakota Nations Invitational=  
He Sapa Bracket=  
Championship=  
Santee, Neb. 55, St. Francis Indian 47  
Fifth Place=  
Wakpala 49, Tiospaye Topa 45  
Seventh Place=  
Takini 48, Oelrichs 45  
Third Place=  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 61, Dupree 48  
Matosica Bracket=  
Championship=  
Tiospa Zina Tribal 57, McLaughlin 37

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Fifth Place=

Custer 60, Red Cloud 30

Wall 57, Todd County 43

Seventh Place=

Crazy Horse 75, Lower Brule 49

Omaha Nation, Neb. 72, Crow Creek Tribal School 66

Third Place=

Marty Indian 74, Little Wound 68

Oceti Sakowin Bracket=

Championship=

Pine Ridge 80, Rapid City Christian 66

Third Place=

White River 62, Lakota Tech 54

Mobridge Rotary Classic=

Timber Lake 67, Strasburg, N.D. 37

Stateline Shootout=

Belle Fourche 63, Newcastle, Wyo. 43

Sundance, Wyo. 61, Lead-Deadwood 52

Tyson Classic=

Dakota Valley 75, Western Christian, Iowa 70

Elk Point-Jefferson 57, North Union, Iowa 51

## **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Central 59, Sturgis Brown 33

Aberdeen Roncalli 64, Northwestern 38

Andes Central-Dakota Christian 82, Scotland 14

Burke 67, Stuart, Neb. 29

Castlewood 54, Madison 35

Centerville 59, West Central 41

Cody-Kilgore, Neb. 44, Colome 24

Colman-Egan 48, Dell Rapids 31

Crofton, Neb. 52, Vermillion 38

Dakota Valley 57, Le Mars, Iowa 55, OT

DeSmet 67, Baltic 32

Deuel 54, Iroquois-Lake Preston 51

Elkton-Lake Benton 61, Chester 52, OT

Ethan 73, Freeman Academy-Marion 13

Faith 52, Philip 40

Flandreau 59, Arlington 42

Garretson 60, Deubrook 49

Grant County, N.D. 62, Lemmon High School 52

Hamlin 54, Estelline-Hendricks 39

Huron 50, Rapid City Stevens 44

Jones County 50, Bison 23

Langford 43, Hitchcock-Tulare 41

Mitchell 73, Rapid City Central 68

Mobridge-Pollock 56, Herreid/Selby Area 43

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 48, Waverly-South Shore 31

Pierre T F Riggs High School 49, Spearfish 46

Redfield 54, Aberdeen Christian 28

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Sioux Falls Jefferson 58, Sioux Falls Lincoln High School 29

Sioux Falls O’Gorman 70, Sioux City, West, Iowa 53

Sioux Valley 66, Dell Rapids St. Mary 44

St. Thomas More 41, Scottsbluff, Neb. 40

Warner 49, Potter County 37

Waubay/Summit 44, Leola-Frederick High School 41

Webster 51, Ipswich 27

Wessington Springs 47, Howard 40

Lakota Nations Invitational=

He Sapa Bracket=

Championship=

Marty Indian 62, Santee, Neb. 44

Fifth Place=

Tiospaye Topa 51, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 44

Seventh Place=

Crazy Horse 54, Takini 17

Third Place=

Wakpala 54, Oelrichs 41

MaKosica Bracket=

Championship=

Crow Creek Tribal School 51, Omaha Nation, Neb. 43

Makosica Bracket=

Fifth Place=

Todd County 66, Pine Ridge 37

Seventh Place=

St. Francis Indian 44, Tiospa Zina Tribal 40

Third Place=

Lower Brule 58, Dupree 54

Oceti Sakowin Bracket=

Championship=

Red Cloud 67, Wall 43

Fifth Place=

White River 54, Custer 32

Seventh Place=

McLaughlin 53, Little Wound 37

Third Place=

Rapid City Christian 49, Lakota Tech 25

Stateline Shootout=

Belle Fourche 71, Newcastle, Wyo. 41

Sundance, Wyo. 59, Lead-Deadwood 23

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

## Keeler’s 22 lead UC Irvine over South Dakota 121-78

By The Associated Press undefined

IRVINE, Calif. (AP) — Dean Keeler’s 22 points helped UC Irvine defeat South Dakota 121-78 on Saturday. Keeler added eight rebounds for the Anteaters (7-4). Devin Tillis scored 16 points and added seven rebounds. Derin Saran finished 7 of 9 from the floor to finish with 15 points.

Jevon Hill finished with 13 points for the Coyotes (7-4). South Dakota also got 12 points from Bostyn Holt. Max Burchill also recorded 11 points.

## Israel presses ahead in Gaza as errant killing of captives adds to concern about its wartime conduct

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel pressed ahead with its Gaza offensive on Sunday after a series of shootings, including of three hostages who were shirtless and waving a white flag, raised questions about its conduct in a 10-week-old war that has brought unprecedented death and destruction to the coastal enclave.

Gaza remained under a communications blackout for a fourth straight day — the longest of several outages over the course of the war, which aid groups say complicate rescue efforts after bombings and make it even more difficult to monitor the war's toll on civilians.

Israel's government meanwhile faced calls for a cease-fire from some of its closest European allies and protests by Israelis demanding it negotiate another hostage release deal with Gaza's Hamas rulers.

It could face even more pressure to scale back major combat operations when U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visits this week. President Joe Biden's administration has expressed growing unease with civilian casualties even as it has provided vital military and diplomatic support to Israel.

The air and ground war has flattened vast swathes of northern Gaza and driven most of the population to the southern part of the besieged territory, where many are packed into crowded shelters and tent camps. Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes.

Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets in all parts of Gaza. It has vowed to continue operations until it dismantles Hamas, which triggered the war with its Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel, in which militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians. Israel has also vowed to return the estimated 129 hostages still held in Gaza.

### SHOOTINGS DRAW SCRUTINY

Military officials said Saturday that the three hostages who were mistakenly shot by Israeli troops had tried to signal that they posed no harm. It was Israel's first such acknowledgement of harming hostages in a war that it says is largely aimed at rescuing them.

The three hostages, all in their 20s, were killed Friday in the Gaza City area of Shijaiyah, where troops are engaged in fierce fighting with Hamas. An Israeli military official said the shootings were against the army's rules of engagement and were being investigated at the highest level.

Israel says it makes every effort to avoid harming civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields. But Palestinians and rights groups have repeatedly accused Israeli forces of recklessly endangering civilians and firing on those who do not threaten them, both in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, which has seen a surge of violence since the start of the war.

At least five Palestinians were killed during an Israeli raid in a built-up refugee camp in the West Bank town of Tulkarem, the Palestinian Health Ministry said Sunday.

Last week, Israel said it was opening a military police investigation after an Israeli rights group posted videos that appeared to show troops killing two men — one who was incapacitated and the second unarmed — during a West Bank raid.

In Gaza, Palestinians on several occasions have said Israeli soldiers opened fire at fleeing civilians. Hamas has claimed other hostages were killed by Israeli fire or airstrikes, without presenting evidence.

The offensive has killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Thursday. It has not been able to update the toll since then because of the communications blackout, and has said for weeks that thousands more casualties are buried under the rubble.

The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but throughout the war has said that most of those killed were women and children.

The military says 121 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive. It says it has killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

### CALLS FOR ANOTHER CEASE-FIRE

In Israel on Sunday, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna called for an "immediate truce" aimed



at releasing more hostages, getting larger amounts of aid into Gaza and moving toward "the beginning of a political solution."

France's Foreign Ministry had earlier said one of its employees was killed in an Israeli strike on a home in the southernmost town of Rafah on Wednesday. It condemned the strike, which it said had killed several civilians, and demanded clarification from Israeli authorities.

The foreign ministers of the U.K. and Germany meanwhile called for a "sustainable" cease-fire, saying "too many civilians have been killed."

"Israel will not win this war if its operations destroy the prospect of peaceful co-existence with Palestinians," British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock wrote in the U.K.'s Sunday Times.

Austin is set to travel to Israel to continue discussions on a timetable for ending the war's most intense phase. Israeli and U.S. officials have spoken of a transition to more targeted strikes aimed at killing Hamas leaders and rescuing hostages, without saying when it would occur.

The plight of Palestinian civilians has gotten little attention inside Israel, where many are still deeply traumatized by the Oct. 7 attack and where support for the war remains strong.

But anger over the mistaken killing of the hostages is likely to ramp up pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to renew Qatar-mediated negotiations with Hamas over swapping more of the remaining captives for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

Scores of protesters set up tents outside the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv on Saturday, saying they would stay until the government resumed hostage negotiations with Hamas. "The hostages are experiencing hell and they are in mortal peril," said Raz Ben-Ami, one of the hostages released in the last exchange. "Israel must offer another hostage-release deal."

Hamas has said no more hostages will be released until the war ends, and that in exchange it will demand the release of large numbers of Palestinian prisoners, including high-profile militants.

Hamas released over 100 of more than 240 hostages captured on Oct. 7 in exchange for the release of scores of Palestinian prisoners during a brief cease-fire in November. Nearly all freed on both sides were women and minors. Israel has rescued one hostage.

## **In Hamas captivity, an Israeli mother found the strength to survive in her 2 young daughters**

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Tantrums, tears, temperature, toilet accidents. These travails of childhood are familiar to any parent. But for Doron Katz Asher, the daily whims of children took on a new, frightening dimension while in Hamas captivity with her two young daughters.

If the girls cried, militants would bang on the door of the room where she was being held. When they were hungry, she didn't always have anything to feed them. She slept with one eye open, always keeping watch over her daughters.

"(I felt) Fear. Fear that maybe because my daughters are crying and are making some noise they'll get some directive from above to take them, to do something to them," Katz Asher told Israel Channel 12 TV in a lengthy interview broadcast Saturday night. "Constant fear."

Her account builds on a growing number of freed captives who are sharing their harrowing stories of weeks in captivity even as roughly 129 hostages remain.

Katz Asher, 34, and her daughters Raz, 4, and Aviv, 2, were visiting family in Kibbutz Nir Oz when Hamas attacked the sleepy farming community on Oct. 7. Katz Asher, her daughters and her mother were put on a tractor and driven to Gaza. An exchange of fire erupted between the militants who snatched them and Israeli forces, killing her mother and leaving her and Aviv lightly wounded, she said in the interview. They were part of some 240 people taken captive that day whose plight has stunned and gripped Israelis.

After they made it to Gaza, Katz Asher said she and her daughters were taken to a family's apartment,

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where her wounds were stitched up without anesthetics on a couch as her girls looked on. She did not say if Aviv was treated.

The father of the house spoke Hebrew, which he said he had learned years earlier working in Israel. A Palestinian mother and two daughters served as their guards for the 16 days they were held in the home. They were told to keep quiet, but were given coloring pencils and paper and passed the time drawing. Katz Asher said she started teaching her 4-year-old how to write in Hebrew. The first word she taught was "aba," or "dad."

As the sounds of the Israeli military's fierce bombing campaign rang out around them, her captors fed her false hope, telling her a deal was imminent for their release. She and her daughters would eventually be freed in a temporary cease-fire deal in late November.

With food running low at the family home, one night she was dressed in Muslim attire that concealed her identity and she and her daughters were forced to walk for 15 minutes to a hospital that was not named in the interview, where they were sealed in a room with other Israeli captives who she recognized. Ten people were locked together in a 130-square-foot (12-square-meter) room with a sink but no mattresses. The window was sealed shut, food was inconsistent and using a toilet hinged on the permission of the captors.

"They could open after five minutes or after an hour and a half," she said, echoing similar testimony from other freed captives. But, she added, "small girls can't hold it."

Katz Asher said one of her daughters had a fever of 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius) for three days straight. To bring it down, she ran cold water over her forehead.

They made a deck of cards and drew the foods they badly missed to pass the time. Katz Asher saved her own small portions of food — pita with spreadable cheese and spiced rice with meat — so that her daughters wouldn't go hungry.

Her daughters had an incessant list of questions about their ordeal, the innocence of a child's curiosity colliding with an inexplicable calamity. "When will we return to dad at home? And when will they return to day care? And why is the door locked? Why can't we just go home? And how will we even know the way home?"

All the while, with dread engulfing her, Katz Asher said she projected calm to her daughters, promising them, and perhaps herself, they would go home soon.

"What helped me survive there was that my daughters were with me," she said. "I had something to fight for."

## Over 60 people have drowned in the capsizing of a migrant vessel off Libya, the UN says

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — A boat carrying dozens of migrants trying to reach Europe capsized off the coast of Libya, leaving more than 60 people dead, including women and children, the U.N. migration agency said.

Saturday's shipwreck was the latest tragedy in this part of the Mediterranean Sea, a key but dangerous route for migrants seeking a better life in Europe. Thousands have died, according to officials.

The U.N.'s International Organization for Migration said in a statement the boat was carrying 86 migrants when strong waves swamped it off the town of Zuwara on Libya's western coast and that 61 migrants drowned, according to survivors.

"The central Mediterranean continues to be one of the world's most dangerous migration routes," the agency wrote on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

Libya has in recent years emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East, even though the North African nation has plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

More than 2,250 people died on the central European route this year, according to Flavio Di Giacomo, an IOM spokesperson.

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It's "a dramatic figure which demonstrates that unfortunately not enough is being done to save lives at sea," Di Giacomo wrote on X.

According to the IOM's missing migrants project, at least 940 migrants were reported dead and 1,248 missing off Libya between Jan. 1 and Nov. 18.

The project, which tracks migration movements, said about 14,900 migrants, including over 1,000 women and more than 530 children, were intercepted and returned to Libya this year.

In 2022, the project reported 529 dead and 848 missing off Libya. Over 24,600 were intercepted and returned to Libya.

Human traffickers in recent years have benefited from the chaos in Libya, smuggling in migrants across the country's lengthy borders, which it shares with six nations. The migrants are crowded onto ill-equipped vessels, including rubber boats, and set off on risky sea voyages.

Those who are intercepted and returned to Libya are held in government-run detention centers rife with abuses, including forced labor, beatings, rapes and torture — practices that amount to crimes against humanity, according to U.N.-commissioned investigators.

The abuse often accompanies attempts to extort money from the families of those held, before the imprisoned migrants are allowed to leave Libya on traffickers' boats to Europe.

## **Japan and ASEAN bolster ties at summit focused on security, economy amid China tensions**

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Leaders from Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, at a special summit on Sunday marking their 50th anniversary of friendship, adopted a joint vision that emphasizes security and economic cooperation while respecting the rule of law amid growing tensions with China in regional seas.

Ties between Japan and ASEAN used to be largely based on Japanese assistance to the developing economies, in part due to lingering bitterness over Japan's wartime actions. But in recent years the ties have focused more on security amid China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, while Japan's postwar pacifist stance and trust-building efforts have fostered friendlier relations.

The leaders, in a joint statement, called for strengthening their "mutually beneficial" partnership and working together for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. They also called to pursue greater prosperity for the region and to promote people exchanges among the younger generations, Kishida told a joint news conference with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, this year's ASEAN chair.

"We affirm the shared view to promote a rules-based Indo-Pacific region that is free and open (and) embraces key principles such as ASEAN's unity and centrality, inclusiveness (and) transparency," according to the joint statement.

The leaders stressed "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means and renunciation of the threat or use of force," but without identifying China.

The leaders adopted an implementation plan for 130 projects. Japan called to step up cooperation in security and defense, while reinforcing support for efforts in climate change and investment, including in the region's automotive industry, he said.

"As divisions and confrontations deepen and the world faces compounded crises, Japan will tackle the issues together with ASEAN, which is the linchpin of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific,'" Kishida said. "Based on our mutual trust, we will tackle new issues, and contribute to peace and prosperity of the region in order to create a world where people can benefit while their dignity is respected."

Japan adopted a new security strategy last year and has been rapidly building up its military and expanding its military partnerships to better counter China's growing assertiveness in the region.

On Saturday, on the sidelines of the Dec. 16-18 summit, Kishida held a series of bilateral talks as Japan seeks to step up bilateral security ties with ASEAN countries.

Kishida and his Malaysian counterpart, Anwar Ibrahim, signed a 400 million yen (\$2.8 million) deal to bolster Malaysia's maritime security capability. It is a new Japanese official security assistance program

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specifically for militaries of friendly nations to help strengthen their law enforcement and security capabilities.

The assistance includes provisions of rescue boats and other equipment to help improve the military capability of Malaysia, which sits at a crucial location on sea lanes connecting the Indian Ocean and East Asia and serves a vital role in warning and surveillance operations for the entire region.

Separately on Saturday, Kishida signed a deal with Widodo, offering a grant of up to 9.05 billion yen (\$63.7 million) to fund Indonesia's maritime security capability advancement plan and includes a Japanese-built large-scale maritime patrol boat.

In November, Japan announced a provision of coastal surveillance radars to the Philippine navy, and the two sides also agreed to start talks for a key defense pact called the Reciprocal Access Agreement designed to smooth their troops' entry into each other's territory for joint military exercises.

Later that month, Japan and Vietnam agreed to elevate the status of their relationship to a top-level comprehensive strategic partnership, under which they will discuss details of a possible deal to broaden their defense cooperation.

But ASEAN countries are not in lockstep in their stance toward China, with which many have strong ties and are reluctant to choose sides. Japanese officials say they are mindful of the situation and not trying to get them to choose sides.

Japan also hopes to push forward energy cooperation with ASEAN leaders at a summit for the Asian Zero Emission Community initiative planned for Monday, when Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is expected to join online.

## **Jungle between Colombia and Panama becomes highway for migrants from around the world**

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Once nearly impenetrable for migrants heading north from Latin America, the jungle between Colombia and Panama this year became a speedy but still treacherous highway for hundreds of thousands of people from around the world.

Driven by economic crises, government repression and violence, migrants from China to Haiti decided to risk three days of deep mud, rushing rivers and bandits. Enterprising locals offered guides and porters, set up campsites and sold supplies to migrants, using color-coded wristbands to track who had paid for what.

Enabled by social media and Colombian organized crime, more than 506,000 migrants — nearly two-thirds Venezuelans — had crossed the Darien jungle by mid-December, double the 248,000 who set a record the previous year. Before last year, the record was barely 30,000 in 2016.

Dana Graber Ladek, the Mexico chief for the United Nation's International Organization for Migration, said migration flows through the region this year were "historic numbers that we have never seen."

It wasn't only in Latin America.

The number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean or the Atlantic on small boats to reach Europe this year has surged. More than 250,000 irregular arrivals were registered in 2023, according to the European Commission.

A significant increase from recent years, the number remains well below levels seen in the 2015 refugee crisis, when more than 1 million people landed in Europe, most fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. Still, the rise has fed anti-migrant sentiment and laid the groundwork for tougher legislation.

Earlier this month, the British government announced tough new immigration rules aimed at reducing the number of people able to move to the U.K. each year by hundreds of thousands. Authorized immigration to the U.K. set a record in 2022 with nearly 750,000.

A week later, French opposition lawmakers rejected an immigration bill from President Emmanuel Macron without even debating it. It had been intended to make it easier for France to expel foreigners considered undesirable. Far-right politicians alleged the bill would have increased the number of migrants coming to the country, while migrant advocates said it threatened the rights of asylum-seekers.

In Washington, the debate has shifted from efforts early in the year to open new legal pathways largely

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toward measures to keep migrants out as Republicans try to take advantage of the Biden administration's push for more aid to Ukraine to tighten the U.S. southern border.

The U.S. started the year opening limited spaces to Venezuelans — as well as Cubans, Nicaraguans and Haitians — in January to enter legally for two years with a sponsor, while expelling those who didn't qualify to Mexico. Their numbers dropped somewhat for a time before climbing again with renewed vigor.

Venezuelan Alexander Mercado had only been back in his country for a month after losing his job in Peru before he and his partner decided to set off for the United States with their infant son.

Venezuela's minimum wage was the equivalent of about \$4 a month then, while 2.2 pounds (a kilogram) of beef was about \$5, said Angelis Flores, his 28-year-old wife.

"Imagine how someone with a salary of \$4 a month survives," she said.

Mercado, 27, and Flores were already on their way when in September the U.S. announced it was granting temporary legal status to more than 470,000 Venezuelans already in the country. Weeks later, the Biden administration said it was resuming deportation flights to the South American nation.

Mercado and Flores hiked the well-trod trail through the jungle, managing to push through in three days. Flores and their son, in particular, got very sick. She believes they were infected by the contaminated water they drank along the way.

"There was a body in the middle of river and the 'zamuros', those black birds, were eating it and picking it apart ... all of that was running in the river," she said.

For Mercado and Flores, the journey accelerated once they left the jungle. In October, Panama and Costa Rica announced a deal to speed migrants across their countries. Panama bused migrants to a center in Costa Rica where they were held until they could buy a bus ticket to Nicaragua.

Nicaragua also seemed to opt for speeding migrants through its territory. Mercado said they crossed on buses in a day.

After discovering that Nicaragua had lax visa requirements, Cubans and Haitians poured into Nicaragua on charter flights, purchasing roundtrip tickets they never intended. Citizens of African nations made circuitous series of connecting flights through Africa, Europe and Latin America to arrive in Managua to start travelling overland toward the United States, avoiding the Darien.

In Honduras, Mercado and Flores were given a pass from authorities allowing them five days to transit the country.

Adam Isacson, an analyst tracking migration at the Washington Office on Latin America, said that Panama, Costa Rica and Honduras grant migrants legal status while they're transiting the countries, which have limited resources, and by letting migrants pass legally the countries make them less vulnerable to extortion from authorities and smugglers.

Then there are Guatemala and Mexico, which Isacson called the "we're-going-to-make-a-show-of-blocking-you countries" attempting to score points with the U.S. government.

For many that has meant spending money to hire smugglers to cross Guatemala and Mexico, or exposing themselves to repeated extortion attempts.

Mercado didn't hire a smuggler and paid the price. It was "very difficult to get through Guatemala," he said. "The police kept taking money."

But that was just a taste of what was to come.

Standing outside a Mexico City shelter with their son on a recent afternoon, Flores recounted all of the countries they had traversed.

"But they don't rob you as much, extort you as much, send you back like when you arrive here to Mexico," she said. "Here the real nightmare starts, because as soon as you enter they start taking a lot of your money."

Mexico's immigration system was thrown into chaos on March 27, when migrants held in a detention center in the border city Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas, set mattresses on fire inside their cell in apparent protest. The highly flammable foam mattresses filled the cell with thick smoke in an instant. Guards did not open the cell and 40 migrants died.

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The immigration agency's director was among several officials charged with crimes ranging from negligence to homicide. The agency closed 33 of its smaller detention centers while it conducted a review.

Unable to detain many migrants, Mexico instead circulated them around the country, using brief, repeat detentions, each an opportunity for extortion, said Gretchen Kuhner, director of IMUMI, a nongovernmental legal services organization. Advocates called it the "politica de desgaste" or wearing down policy.

Mercado and Flores made it all the way to Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, Texas, where they were detained, held for a night in an immigration facility in the border city of Reynosa and then flown the next morning 650 miles (1046 kilometers) south to Villahermosa.

There they were released, but without their cell phones, shoelaces and money. Mercado had to wait for his brother to send \$100 so they could start trying to make their way back to Mexico City through an indirect route that required them to travel by truck, motorbike and even horse.

In late November, they had just made it back to Mexico City again. This time Mercado was unequivocal: They would not leave Mexico City until the U.S. government gave them an appointment to request asylum at a border port of entry.

"It is really hard to make it back here again," he said. "If they manage to send me back again I don't know what I would do."

## Families say autism therapy helped their kids. Indiana's Medicaid cuts could put it out of reach

By ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Shaunna Thompson was running out of childcare options. Her daughter Abbie was expelled from daycare in 2022 because of "all over the place" behavior. Thompson found an in-home provider for the toddler, but was told Abbie was "too much" to watch every day of the week.

The experiences motivated Thompson to seek assistance for her daughter, who also was missing developmental milestones. Abbie, now 3, was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in October of last year.

By March, Thompson enrolled her in applied behavior analysis — a therapy based on learning and behavior focused on improving communicative, social and motor skills — at a local facility in northern Indiana for 40 hours a week. Abbie, nonverbal most of her life, has since said her first word: "Mom."

"It brought tears to my eyes" Thompson said.

But Thompson and other families reliant on Medicaid worry changes coming in January will limit access to the therapy as Indiana attempts to limit the cost and, along with other states, cut the size of the low-income health care program.

Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration said the cost of Medicaid reimbursement for the behavioral therapy, commonly referred to as ABA, has ballooned in recent years because of the growing number of children seeking the services and the amount that providers have billed the state. The state plans a universal, hourly reimbursement rate for the therapy, but the planned amount is lower than what providers have previously received on average.

Advocates and centers worry this will mean accepting fewer patients or even closing, as has happened in other states such as Colorado this year.

"Companies just kept leaving and it just kind of turned into a crisis situation," said J.J. Tomash, who leads an ABA provider in Colorado called BehaviorSpan. He blamed Medicaid reimbursement rates that have not kept up with the cost of living.

Medicaid began covering the services in 2016, and providers in Indiana set their own rates until now. But centers say the new rates are still not enough to keep them running and are far below the previous statewide average of \$97 per hour.

Indiana Act for Families, a coalition opposing the new rates, said the proposal is 10% below providers' operating costs. Although Indiana has said the new rates are aligned with pay in other states, the coalition argued the state used outdated data in their comparison.

Miles Hodge, owner and co-founder of Shine Pediatric Therapy in Indianapolis, said the effects of the

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new rates will take their toll over time. The state said the rates will be up for review every four years, a time frame Hodge said does not keep up with inflation.

"It could leave a lot of people underwater," he said.

About 6,200 children and young adults received the services under Medicaid in 2022, the state said.

With a standard patient to therapist ratio of 1-to-1, ABA is an "extremely staff intensive model," Hodge said. Across the state, he expects staff pay and benefits to be hit, which he said could lead to high turnover and inconsistent care for patients.

Hodge predicted his center will have to take fewer patients who are on Medicaid because of the changes.

The Indiana agency overseeing Medicaid said the therapy is the only major service category that did not have a uniform reimbursement rate, and the rising cost of the services was unsustainable. ABA expenditures increased more than 50% per year for the last three years, according to the agency.

In 2022, ABA claims represented \$420 million in Medicaid spending, the state said. Total Medicaid expenditures in state fiscal year 2022 totaled more than \$16 billion.

The move comes at the same time as states unwind pandemic-era protections that kept millions of people covered by Medicaid. In Indiana, the number of people enrolled in Medicaid steadily grew every month from March 2020 until May 23, when the federal budget law ended the protections.

Indiana's total enrollment has fallen every month since then.

States setting universal rates is common, but low reimbursement endangers access to key services for individuals with disabilities, said Jennifer Lav, senior attorney with the National Health Law Program.

Lower rates in a time of high inflation can lead to staff turnover and shortages, issues that can compound in rural areas, she said.

ABA is not without critics. Zoe Gross, advocacy director at the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, said ABA's goal is to eliminate behaviors considered autistic and teaches children to conform with neurotypical behaviors.

"It teaches you that the way you naturally behave is not OK," she said.

But families who have found it helpful find it hard to imagine a future without access.

In Westfield, a suburb of Indianapolis, 29-year-old Natasha Virgil said her family's ability to participate in activities outside their home markedly improved once 6-year-old Elijah Hill began ABA therapy.

"My biggest thing is making sure that he has a fighting chance to be able to live in this world and have the skills to survive," Virgil said, holding her 4-month-old daughter and watching Elijah play with soap bubbles near the family's Christmas tree.

It's difficult already for parents of children with disabilities to hold jobs between numerous therapy sessions and doctor's appointments, Virgil said.

"I don't think I would ever be able to be where we are if we didn't pursue ABA," she said

Chanel McClure, mother of 2-year-old King, said she has lost sleep over the pending change. She interviewed multiple centers before finding the ABA therapy she wanted for King. He was on a waiting list for another 11 months.

Now almost 3, King is nonverbal and attends speech, occupational and developmental therapy. Since beginning ABA, McClure said he has learned new ways to communicate and is comfortable playing with other children. His therapists are working to address elopement or wandering that can be common in children with autism.

"King just bloomed like a flower," McClure said.

## Can a state count all its votes by hand? A North Dakota proposal aims to be the first to try

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — All election ballots would be counted by hand under a proposal that could go to North Dakota voters, potentially achieving a goal of activists across the country who distrust modern

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vote counting but dismaying election officials who say the change would needlessly delay vote tallies and lead to more errors.

Backers of the proposed ballot measure are far from gathering enough signatures, but if the plan makes the June 2024 ballot and voters pass it, North Dakota would have to replace ballot scanners with hundreds of workers across the state who would carefully count and recount ballots.

It's a change other Republican-led states have attempted unsuccessfully in the years since former President Donald Trump began criticizing the nation's vote-counting system, falsely claiming it was rigged against him.

"We've always done hand counting before we got these machines," said Lydia Gessele, a farmer who is leading the effort to get the measure on the ballot. "They can find the people to do the job, because there are people that are willing to come in and do the hand counting."

Gessele said supporters were motivated by issues they claim occurred in 2022, including inaccurate ballot scanners and an electrical outage that prevented people in Bismarck from voting.

Former Secretary of State Al Jaeger, a Republican who oversaw North Dakota's elections for 30 years through 2022, rejected Gessele's claims, saying, "There was nothing that took place that would have changed the outcome of a vote. Nothing at all."

The North Dakota effort is aligned with a movement among Trump allies who since 2020 have railed against voting machines. Without evidence, they cast the machines as suspicious and fraudulent. In some cases, they even breached voting systems' software in their efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

Earlier this year, Fox News reached a settlement with Dominion Voting Systems to pay \$787.5 million to settle a defamation lawsuit brought over statements broadcast by the network that Dominion machines were rigged against Trump.

The North Dakota ballot measure proposes all voting "shall be done by paper ballots and counted by hand starting on the day of the election and continuing uninterrupted until hand counting is completed."

The move would make North Dakota the first state to mandate hand counts, shifting from the paper ballots and scanners used for most elections, according to Voting Rights Lab, a nonpartisan organization that tracks states' voting legislation.

The measure doesn't specify a process or funding for hand counts. The state pays for election equipment, but North Dakota's 53 counties are each responsible for poll workers and polling locations.

North Dakota Republican Secretary of State Michael Howe said he opposes the proposed measure because hand counts are less standardized than using scanners. He likened it to having a computer rather than a human umpire a baseball game.

"When you hand-count, you bring in the human element of umpiring. You could have a wide strike zone, you could have a narrow strike zone," Howe said. "What you get with a machine is one consistent strike zone every single time."

Officials elsewhere in the country have struggled to implement hand-counting requirements. In Nye County, Nevada, officials in 2022 proceeded with a hand count, but only after polls closed and along with a machine count. In California's Shasta County, a state law prevented officials from forcing a hand count for a Nov. 7 election.

Last year, 317 ballots took more than seven hours to count by hand in Nevada's least populated county. Legislators in at least eight states also proposed prohibitions, in some way, on ballot tabulators.

In April, Arizona Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed a bill that effectively would have mandated hand counts "by prohibiting the use of any known type of electronic tabulator." Arizona's Republican-controlled Legislature passed a similar resolution, but it was deemed non-binding.

Election officials in some of North Dakota's largest counties questioned the proposal.

Hand counting "seems to be extremely error-prone," said Craig Steingaard, the election administrator for Cass County, the state's largest county.

"It would definitely be more difficult for us to administer these elections correctly and then efficiently, too," he said.



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Grand Forks County Finance and Tax Director Debbie Nelson said hand counts must be done “repeatedly to get the correct number. You can’t do it once, and it takes you a very long time to do what the computer can do instantly.”

The measure would allow any U.S. citizen to verify or audit North Dakota elections. The initiative also would mandate that “all voting will be completed only on Election Day,” with allowance for absentee ballots mailed only for voters “who request one for a specific election in writing within a reasonable time period prior to Election Day.” Mail-in ballots would be “otherwise prohibited.”

Nearly 44% of voters participated by early voting or by mail in North Dakota’s November 2022 election.

## As 2023 holidays dawn, face masks have settled in as an occasional feature of the American landscape

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The scene: A crowded shopping center in the weeks before Christmas. Or a warehouse store. Or maybe a packed airport terminal or a commuter train station or another place where large groups gather.

There are people — lots of people. But look around, and it’s clear one thing is largely absent these days: face masks.

Yes, there’s the odd one here and there, but nothing like it was three years ago at the dawn of the COVID pandemic’s first winter holidays — an American moment of contentiousness, accusation and scorn on both sides of the mask debate.

As 2023 draws to an end, with promises of holiday parties and crowds and lots of inadvertent exchanges of shared air, mask-wearing is much more off than on around the country even as COVID’s long tail lingers. The days of anything approaching a widespread mask mandate would be like the Ghost of Christmas Past, a glimpse into what was.

Look at it a different way, though: These days, mask-wearing has become just another thing that simply happens in America. In a country where the mention of a mask prior to the pandemic usually meant Halloween or a costume party, it’s a new way of being that hasn’t gone away even if most people aren’t doing it regularly.

“That’s an interesting part of the pandemic,” says Brooke Tully, a strategist who works on how to change people’s behaviors.

“Home delivery of food and all of those kind of services, they existed before COVID and actually were gaining some momentum,” she says. “But something like mask-wearing in the U.S. didn’t really have an existing baseline. It was something entirely new in COVID. So it’s one of those new introductions of behaviors and norms.”

THE SITUATION NOW IS ... SITUATIONAL

It tends to be situational, like the recent decision from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center hospital system to reinstate a mask mandate at its facilities starting Dec. 20 because it’s seeing an increase in respiratory viruses. And for people like Sally Kiser, 60, of Mooresville, North Carolina, who manages a home health care agency.

“I always carry one with me,” she says, “cause I never know.”

She doesn’t always wear it, depending on the environment she’s in, but she will if she thinks it’s prudent. “It’s kind of like a new paradigm for the world we live in,” she says.

It wasn’t that long ago that fear over catching COVID-19 sent demand for masks into overdrive, with terms like “N95” coming into our vocabularies alongside concepts like mask mandates — and the subsequent, and vehement, backlash from those who felt it was government overreach.

Once the mandates started dropping, the masks started coming off and the demand fell. It fell so much so that Project N95, a nonprofit launched during the pandemic to help people find quality masks, announced earlier this month that it would stop sales Monday because there wasn’t enough interest.

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Anne Miller, the organization's executive director, acknowledges she thought widespread mask usage would become the rule, not the exception.

"I thought the new normal would be like we see in other cultures and other parts of the world — where people just wear a mask out of an abundance of caution for other people," she says.

But that's not how norms work, public safety or otherwise, says Markus Kimmelmeier, a professor of sociology at the University of Nevada, Reno.

In 2020, Kimmelmeier authored a study about mask-wearing around the country that showed mask usage and mandate resistance varied by region based on conditions including pre-existing cultural divisions and political orientation.

He points to the outcry after the introduction of seatbelts and seatbelt laws more than four decades ago as an example of how practices, particularly those required in certain parts of society, do or don't take hold.

"When they first were instituted with all the sense that they make and all the effectiveness, there was a lot of resistance," Kimmelmeier says. "The argument was basically lots of complaints about individual freedoms being curtailed and so forth, and you can't tell me what to do and so forth."

## FIGURING OUT THE BALANCE

In New York City's Brooklyn borough, members of the Park Slope Co-op recently decided there was a need at the longstanding, membership-required grocery. Last month, the co-op instituted mask-required Wednesdays and Thursdays; the other five days continue to have no requirement.

The people who proposed it weren't focused on COVID rates. They were thinking about immunocompromised people, a population that has always existed but came to mainstream awareness during the pandemic, says co-op general manager Joe Holtz.

Proponents of the mask push at the co-op emphasized that immunocompromised people are more at risk from other people's respiratory ailments like colds and flu. Implementing a window of required mask usage allows them to be more protected, Holtz says.

It was up to the store's administrators to pick the days, and they went with two of the slowest instead of the busy weekend days on purpose, Holtz says, a nod to the reality that mask requirements get different responses from people.

"From management's point of view," he says, "if we were going to try and if there's going to be a negative financial impact from this decision that was made, we want to minimize it."

Those shopping there on a recent Thursday didn't seem fazed.

Aron Halberstam, 77, says he doesn't usually mask much these days but wasn't put off by the requirement. He wears a mask on the days it's required, even if he doesn't otherwise — a middle ground reflecting what is happening in so many parts of the country more than three years after the mask became a part of daily conversation and daily life.

"Any place which asks you to do it, I just do it," Halberstam says. "I have no resistance to it."

Whatever the level of resistance, says Kimmelmeier, the culture has shifted. People are still wearing masks in places like crowded stores or while traveling. They do so because they choose to for their own reasons and not because the government is requiring it. And new reasons can come up as well, like when wildfires over the summer made air quality poor and people used masks to deal with the haze and smoke.

"It always will find a niche to fit in with," he says. "And as long as there are needs somewhere, it will survive."

## Chileans to vote on conservative constitution draft a year after rejecting leftist charter

By MARÍA VERZA and PATRICIA LUNA Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Chileans are voting Sunday on whether to approve a new constitution that will replace the country's dictatorship-era charter.

The vote comes over a year after Chileans resoundingly rejected a proposed constitution written by a

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left-leaning convention and one that many characterized as one of the world's most progressive charters.

The new document, largely written by conservative councilors, is more conservative than the one it seeks to replace because it would deepen free-market principles, reduce state intervention and might limit some women's rights.

If the new charter is rejected, the Pinochet-era constitution — which was amended over the years — will remain in effect.

One of the most controversial articles in the proposed new draft says that "the law protects the life of the unborn," with a slight change in wording from the current document that some have warned could make abortion fully illegal in the South American country. Chilean law currently allows the interruption of pregnancies for three reasons: rape, an unviable fetus and risk to the life of the mother.

Another article in the proposed document that has sparked controversy says prisoners who suffer a terminal illness and aren't deemed to be a danger to society at large can be granted house arrest. Members of the left-wing opposition have said the measure could end up benefiting those who have been convicted of crimes against humanity during the 1973-1990 dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

The new proposed document, which says Chile is a social and democratic state that "promotes the progressive development of social rights" through state and private institutions, is also being opposed by many local leaders who say it scraps tax on houses that are primary residences, a vital source of state revenue that is paid by the wealthiest.

It also would establish new law enforcement institutions and says non-documented immigrants should be expelled "as soon as possible."

The process to write a new constitution began after 2019 street protests, when thousands of people complained about inequality in one of Latin America's most politically stable and economically strongest countries.

But in 2022, 62% of voters rejected the proposed constitution that would have characterized Chile as a plurinational state, established autonomous Indigenous territories and prioritized the environment and gender parity.

One of the most recent polls, by the local firm Cadem in late November, indicated 46% of those surveyed said they would vote against the new constitution, while 38% were in favor. The difference was much closer than three months ago when the "no" vote was 20 points ahead of the "yes" side.

In Santiago, the capital, talk before the vote often turned to security rather than the proposed charter. State statistics show an uptick in robberies and other violent crimes, a development that tends to benefit conservative forces.

There appeared to be little enthusiasm for Sunday's vote. Most citizens are exhausted after 10 elections of various types in less than two and a half years but voting is compulsory in Chile.

Malen Riveros, 19, a law student at the University of Chile, said the fervor that was ignited by the 2019 street protests has been lost and for her, the choice on Sunday was between the bad or the worse.

"The hopes were lost with the passing of time," Riveros said. "People have already forgotten why we went into the streets."

## **Black American solidarity with Palestinians is rising and testing longstanding ties to Jewish allies**

By NOREEN NASIR and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

Cydney Wallace, a Black Jewish community activist, never felt compelled to travel to Israel, though "Next year in Jerusalem" was a constant refrain at her Chicago synagogue.

The 39-year-old said she had plenty to focus on at home, where she frequently gives talks on addressing anti-Black sentiment in the American Jewish community and dismantling white supremacy in the U.S.

"I know what I'm fighting for here," she said.

That all changed when she visited Israel and the West Bank at the invitation of a Palestinian American community activist, along with two dozen other Black Americans and Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith

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leaders.

The trip, which began Sept. 26, enhanced Wallace's understanding of the struggles of Palestinians living in the West Bank under Israeli military occupation. But, horrifyingly, it was cut short by the unprecedented Oct. 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas militants. In Israel's ensuing bombardment of the Gaza Strip, shocking images of destruction and death seen around the world have mobilized activists in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Wallace, and a growing number of Black Americans, see the Palestinian struggle in the West Bank and Gaza reflected in their own fight for racial equality and civil rights. The recent rise of protest movements against police brutality in the U.S. has connected Black and Palestinian activists under a common cause.

But that kinship sometimes strains the more than century-long alliance between Black and Jewish activists. Some Jewish Americans are concerned that support could escalate the threat of antisemitism and weaken Jewish-Black ties fortified during the Civil Rights Movement.

"We are concerned, as a community, about what we feel is a lack of understanding of what Israel is about and how deeply Oct. 7 has affected us," said Bob Kaplan, executive director of The Center for Shared Society at the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

"Antisemitism is as real to the American Jewish community, and causes as much trauma and fear and upset to the American Jewish community, as racism causes to the Black community."

But, he added, many Jews in the U.S. understand that Black Americans can have an affinity for the Palestinian cause that doesn't conflict with their regard for Israel.

According to a poll earlier this month from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Black adults were more likely than white and Hispanic adults to say the U.S. is too supportive of Israel — 44% compared to 30% and 28%, respectively. However, Black Americans weren't any more likely than others to say the U.S. is not supportive enough of the Palestinians.

Still, Black American support for the Palestinian cause dates back to the Civil Rights Movement. More recent rounds of violence in the Middle East have deepened ties between the two movements.

During a week-long truce between Israel and Hamas as part of the recent deal to free dozens of hostages seized by Hamas militants, Israel released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Some Black Americans who watched the Palestinian prisoner release and learned about Israel's administrative detention policy, where detainees are held without trial, drew comparisons to racial inequality in the U.S. prison system.

Rami Nashashibi, a Palestinian American community organizer on Chicago's south side, invited Wallace and the others to take part in the trip called "Black Jerusalem" — an exploration of the sacred city through an African and Black American lens.

"My Palestinian identity was very much shaped and influenced by Black American history," Nashashibi said.

"I always hoped that a trip like this would open up new pathways that would connect the dots not just in a political and ideological way, but between the liberation and struggles for humanity that are very familiar to us in the U.S.," he said.

During the trip, Wallace was dismayed by her own ignorance of the reality of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. In observing the treatment of Palestinians at Israeli checkpoints, she drew comparisons to what segregation historically looked like in the U.S.

"Being there made me wonder if this is what it was like to live in the Jim Crow-era" in America, Wallace said.

Over the last decade, Black Americans and the Palestinians have also found growing solidarity.

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer resonated in the West Bank, where Palestinians drew comparisons to their own experiences of brutality under occupation, and a massive mural of Floyd appeared on Israel's hulking separation barrier.

In 2016, when BLM activists formed the coalition known as the Movement for Black Lives, they included support for Palestinians in a platform called the "Vision for Black Lives." A handful of Jewish groups, which had largely been supportive of the BLM movement, denounced the Black activists' characterization of Israel as a purportedly "apartheid state."

None of the members of the "Black Jerusalem" trip anticipated it would come to a tragic end with the

Oct. 7 Hamas attacks in which some 1,200 people were killed in Israel and about 240 taken hostage. Since then, more than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's blistering air and ground campaign in Gaza, now in its third month. Violence in the West Bank has also surged.

Back home in Chicago, Wallace has navigated speaking about her support for Palestinians while maintaining her Jewish identity and standing against antisemitism. She says she doesn't see those things as mutually exclusive.

"I'm trying not to do anything that alienates anyone," she said. "But I can't just not do the right thing because I'm scared."

## **Black American solidarity with Palestinians is rising and testing longstanding ties to Jewish allies**

By NOREEN NASIR and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

Cydney Wallace, a Black Jewish community activist, never felt compelled to travel to Israel, though "Next year in Jerusalem" was a constant refrain at her Chicago synagogue.

The 39-year-old said she had plenty to focus on at home, where she frequently gives talks on addressing anti-Black sentiment in the American Jewish community and dismantling white supremacy in the U.S.

"I know what I'm fighting for here," she said.

That all changed when she visited Israel and the West Bank at the invitation of a Palestinian American community organizer from Chicago's south side, along with two dozen other Black Americans and Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith leaders.

The trip, which began Sept. 26, enhanced Wallace's understanding of the struggles of Palestinians living in the West Bank under Israeli military occupation. But, horrifyingly, it was cut short by the unprecedented Oct. 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas militants. In Israel's ensuing bombardment of the Gaza Strip, shocking images of destruction and death seen around the world have mobilized activists in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Wallace, and a growing number of Black Americans, see the Palestinian struggle in the West Bank and Gaza reflected in their own fight for racial equality and civil rights. The recent rise of protest movements against police brutality in the U.S., where structural racism plagues nearly every facet of life, has connected Black and Palestinian activists under a common cause.

But that kinship sometimes strains the more than century-long alliance between Black and Jewish activists. From Black American groups that denounced the U.S. backing of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory to Black protesters demonstrating for the Palestinians' right to self-determination, some Jewish Americans are concerned that support could escalate the threat of antisemitism and weaken Jewish-Black ties fortified during the Civil Rights Movement.

"We are concerned, as a community, about what we feel is a lack of understanding of what Israel is about and how deeply Oct. 7 has affected us," said Bob Kaplan, executive director of The Center for Shared Society at the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

"Antisemitism has to be seen as a reprehensible form of hate ... as any form of hate is," he said. "Antisemitism is as real to the American Jewish community, and causes as much trauma and fear and upset to the American Jewish community, as racism causes to the Black community, or anti-Asian feeling causes to the Asian community, or anti-Muslim feeling causes in the Muslim community."

But, he added, many Jews in the U.S. understand that Black Americans can have an affinity for the Palestinian cause that doesn't conflict with their regard for Israel.

According to a poll earlier this month from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Black adults were more likely than white and Hispanic adults to say the U.S. is too supportive of Israel — 44% compared to 30% and 28%, respectively. However, Black Americans weren't any more likely than others to say the U.S. is not supportive enough of the Palestinians.

Generational divides also emerged, with younger Americans more likely to say the U.S. is too supportive of Israel, according to the poll. Even within the Jewish American community, some younger and other progressive Jews tend to be more critical of some of Israel's policies.

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Black American support for the Palestinian cause dates back to the Civil Rights Movement, through prominent left-wing voices, including Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Angela Davis, among others. More recent rounds of violence, including the 2021 Israel-Hamas war and now Israel's unprecedented bombing campaign against Gaza shown live on social media have deepened ties between the two movements.

"This is just the latest generation to pick up the mantle, the latest Black folks to organize, build and talk about freedom and justice," said Ahmad Abuznaid, the director of the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights.

During a week-long truce between Israel and Hamas as part of the recent deal to free dozens of hostages seized by Hamas militants, Israel released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. Many were teenagers who had recently been picked up in the West Bank for minor offenses like stone-throwing and had not been charged.

Some Black Americans who watched the Palestinian prisoner release and learned about Israel's administrative detention policy, where detainees are held without trial, drew comparisons to the U.S. prison system. While more than two-thirds of jail detainees in the U.S. have not been convicted of a crime, Black people are jailed at more than four times the rate of white people, often for low-level offenses, according to studies of the American judicial system.

"Americans like to talk about being innocent until proven guilty. But Black folks are predominantly and disproportionately detained in the United States regardless of whether anything has been proven. And that's very similar to Israel's administrative detention," said Julian Rose, an organizer with a Black-run bail fund in Atlanta.

Rami Nashashibi, executive director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network, invited Wallace and the others to take part in the trip called "Black Jerusalem" — an exploration of the sacred city through an African and Black American lens.

They met members of Jerusalem's small Afro-Palestinian community — Palestinians of Black African heritage, many of whom can trace their lineage in the Old City back centuries.

"Our Black brothers and sisters in the U.S. suffered from slavery and now they suffer from racism," said Mousa Qous, executive director of the African Community Society Jerusalem, whose father emigrated to Jerusalem from Chad in 1941 and whose mother is Palestinian.

"We suffer from the Israeli occupation and racist policies. The Americans and the Israelis are conducting the same policies against us and the Black Americans. So we should support each other," Qous said.

Nashashibi agreed, saying: "My Palestinian identity was very much shaped and influenced by Black American history."

"I always hoped that a trip like this would open up new pathways that would connect the dots not just in a political and ideological way," he said, "but between the liberation and struggles for humanity that are very familiar to us in the U.S."

During the trip, Wallace was dismayed by her own ignorance of the reality of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

At an Israeli checkpoint outside the Western Wall, the Jewish holy site, Wallace said her group was asked who was Jewish, Muslim or Christian. Wallace and the others showed IDs issued for the trip, but when an Israeli officer saw her Star of David necklace, she was waved through, while Palestinians and Muslims in the group were subjected to intense scrutiny and bag checks.

"Being there made me wonder if this is what it was like to live in the Jim Crow-era" in America, Wallace said.

Kameelah Oseguera, who grew up in an African American Muslim community in Brooklyn, New York, also said the trip opened her eyes.

At the entrance to the Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem in the West Bank, Oseguera noticed a massive key — a Palestinian symbol of the homes lost in the 1948 creation of Israel, referred to as the Nakba, or "catastrophe." Many kept keys to the homes they fled or were forced out of — a symbol signifying the Palestinian right to return, which Israel has denied.

Oseguera said the key recalled her visit to the "door of no return" memorial in Senegal dedicated to the enslaved Africans forced onto slave ships and brought to the Americas. As a descendant of enslaved

Africans, it brought thoughts of “what the dream of my return would have meant for my ancestors.”

Returning to home, she said, is a “longing that is transmitted through generations.”

Israel’s Law of Return grants all Jews the right to settle permanently in Israel and acquire Israeli citizenship — a concept that drew support from many Black American civil rights leaders, including A. Phillip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Dorothy Height, Shirley Chisholm and Martin Luther King, Sr., the father of the slain civil rights leader.

Over the last decade, however, Black Americans and the Palestinians have also found growing solidarity.

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer resonated in the West Bank, where Palestinians drew comparisons to their own experiences of brutality under occupation, and a massive mural of Floyd appeared on Israel’s hulking separation barrier.

In 2014, protests in Ferguson, Missouri, erupted after the police killing of Michael Brown, a Black teenager, which gave rise to the nascent Black Lives Matter movement. While police officers in Ferguson fired tear gas at protesters, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank tweeted advice about how to manage the effects of the irritants.

In 2016, when BLM activists formed the coalition known as the Movement for Black Lives, they included support for Palestinians in a platform called the “Vision for Black Lives.” A handful of Jewish groups, which had largely been supportive of the BLM movement, denounced the Black activists’ characterization of Israel as a purportedly “apartheid state” that engages in “discrimination against the Palestinian people.”

“There tends to be this doubt or astonishment that Black people care about other oppressed people around the world,” said Phil Agnew, co-director of the national advocacy group, Black Men Build, who has taken four trips to the West Bank since 2014.

It would be a mistake, Agnew said, to ignore significant numbers of Black and Jewish Americans who are united in their support for the Palestinians.

None of the members of the “Black Jerusalem” trip anticipated it would come to a tragic end with the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks in which some 1,200 people were killed in Israel and about 240 taken hostage. Since then, more than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed in Israel’s blistering air and ground campaign in Gaza, now in its third month. Violence in the West Bank has also surged.

Back home in Chicago, Wallace has navigated speaking about her support for Palestinians while maintaining her Jewish identity and standing against antisemitism. She says she doesn’t see those things as mutually exclusive.

“I’m trying not to do anything that alienates anyone,” she said. “But I can’t just not do the right thing because I’m scared.”

## **Trump wants New Hampshire to put him on a path to the nomination before rivals find their footing**

By HOLLY RAMER and BILL BARROW Associated Press

DURHAM, N.H. (AP) — Donald Trump asked New Hampshire voters on Saturday to help him secure the Republican presidential nomination before any rivals find their footing with the 2024 campaign’s opening contest just weeks away.

The appearance in Durham was part of a swing taking the former president through early nominating states as he cites his wide polling lead over a dwindling field of GOP hopefuls. They are trying to block his political comeback as Trump navigates multiple indictments and looks ahead to a potential rematch with President Joe Biden, the Democrat he lost to in 2020.

“We are going to win the New Hampshire primary, then we are going to crush crooked Joe Biden next November,” Trump said, reminding supporters that he ensured their state would continue to host the nation’s first primary after Iowa’s kickoff caucuses.

“New Hampshire is going to weed out the insincere RINOs ... Republicans in name only,” Trump said, referring to rivals Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor who was endorsed by Trump in 2018, and Nikki Haley, Trump’s former U.N. ambassador. Trump warned that his allies-turned-opponents “will betray you

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just like they betrayed me.”

The New Hampshire primary is Jan. 23, eight days after Iowa begins the nominating process on Jan. 15. Nevada and South Carolina come next in the early stages, before Super Tuesday on March 5, when the highest cumulative number of delegates are up for grabs on any single day on the election calendar. The Trump campaign sees a path for him to secure the nomination before the Super Tuesday polls open.

“What’s really important from our standpoint is being able to win the early states,” senior campaign adviser Chris LaCivita told Right Side Broadcasting minutes before Trump stepped on stage. “Winning Iowa, winning New Hampshire, winning Nevada, winning South Carolina – it’s over. That’s our goal.”

Before the rally, Trump’s campaign announced an endorsement from former state Senate President Chuck Morse, who is now running for governor. Morse, who ran for U.S. Senate last year but lost the primary to a candidate more closely aligned with Trump, told the crowd it’s time for Republicans to “rally around a candidate who can not only win but get the job done for our country.”

“He’s done it once, and he’ll do it again,” Morse said.

Gov. Chris Sununu on Tuesday endorsed Haley, who is battling DeSantis to become a plausible alternative to Trump. Sununu, a frequent Trump critic who passed on the 2024 White House race, has argued that Republicans with “no path to victory must have the courage to get out” of their party’s primary in order to stop Trump.

Trump called Sununu a selfish “spoiled brat” who passed up a chance to win a U.S. Senate seat in 2022, then indulged his presidential aspirations but found no traction.

“Now he couldn’t get elected dogcatcher,” Trump said. “He’s endorsed somebody that can’t win, has no chance of winning.”

A New Hampshire poll conducted in November by CNN and the University of New Hampshire found that Haley was in second place, well behind Trump, but slightly ahead of fellow candidates DeSantis and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie.

Trump has won New Hampshire’s GOP primary twice but lost the state in both of his general elections. He is confident enough in his domination of the Republican Party that he spent more time Saturday angling against Biden.

“Under the Trump administration, you were better off, your family was better off, your neighbors were better off, your communities were better off, and our country was better off. America was stronger, richer, safer, and more confident than ever when you had me behind that desk in the Oval Office,” Trump said.

DeSantis, meanwhile, didn’t shy away from mentioning Trump during stops in Iowa Saturday, criticizing him for not finishing the southern border wall and adding trillions of dollars to the national debt.

Trump’s argument in New Hampshire resonated with voters like Brandon Sevey, 25, who was attending his first Trump event from nearby Dover. Sevey said he has worked a variety of retail and fast-food jobs and found it easier to find work when Trump was president. Plus, he likes Trump’s brashness.

“He’s loud and obnoxious and annoys people,” Sevey said. “But that’s what I like about him.”

## **Jake Browning shines again for Bengals, rallying them to 27-24 overtime win over Vikings**

By MITCH STACY AP Sports Writer

CINCINNATI (AP) — Trailing 17-3 late in the third quarter behind an offense that had struggled to move the ball, the Bengals needed Jake Browning to be nearly perfect — and he was.

Browning led Cincinnati to three fourth-quarter touchdowns and directed the winning drive in overtime in his latest extraordinary performance since taking over for the injured Joe Burrow, and the Bengals beat the Minnesota Vikings 27-24 on Saturday to improve their position in the playoff race.

Browning won his third straight start and improved to 3-1 since Burrow suffered a season-ending right wrist injury in a loss at Baltimore. This time, he threw for 184 yards and two touchdowns in the fourth quarter and overtime, becoming the fourth QB in the past two years to throw for at least that many yards



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and two or more scores after three quarters.

"I feel like I need a beer," said Browning, who beat a team that cut him from its practice squad two years ago.

Tee Higgins went high over a Vikings defender to catch a 16-yard pass from Browning and make a twisting move at the goal line for the tying touchdown with 39 seconds left in regulation.

Then, in overtime, a scrambling Browning found Tyler Boyd for a 44-yard completion that got Cincinnati (8-6) into Vikings territory and set up Evan McPherson's game-ending 29-yard field goal.

"Jake's just so steady, you know?" Bengals coach Zac Taylor said. "He really is. He doesn't get rattled by a negative play. He doesn't overreact to it."

Browning was 29 for 42 for 324 yards with two touchdowns — both to Higgins — and an interception. He completed passes to 11 receivers and has a 110.9 passer rating in his four starts.

Nick Mullens, the fourth quarterback to start a game this season for the Vikings, was solid in defeat. He passed for 303 yards with two TDs but threw two interceptions.

"An absolute grind of a football game," Mullens said. "But those are the types of games you want to be in."

Minnesota (7-7) has lost three of four, the only win in that stretch a 3-0 decision at Las Vegas that led to Joshua Dobbs being benched in favor of Mullens, who had more success finding the Vikings' playmakers.

Jordan Addison had six catches for 111 yards and two TDs. Justin Jefferson had seven receptions for 84 yards in his first full game since returning from a hamstring injury. He suffered a chest injury in the Raiders game.

"Nick did a fantastic job today," Jefferson said. "Especially with just a week of preparation of him being the starting quarterback. I feel like he came out today with confidence."

Backup Ty Chandler had a career-high 132 rushing yards and a touchdown for Minnesota. Chandler got the start in place of Alexander Mattison, who has a sprained ankle.

With five teams a half-game behind them in the NFC standings, the Vikings could be out of playoff position by the end of the weekend.

"Very unfortunate," Minnesota coach Kevin O'Connell said. "Come on the road and battle a team that's playing well right now. Felt like we let one slip away."

## TAKE THAT

The Vikings let Browning go from their practice squad in 2021. The Bengals picked him up for their practice squad, and he won the job as Burrow's backup before this season.

"I think right after we made the field goal and won the game, I screamed at camera and said, 'They never should have cut me,'" Browning said.

## LATE-GAME HEROICS

Browning took over the game late in the third quarter, throwing seven straight completions during a 75-yard drive for the Bengals' first touchdown, a 13-yard strike to Higgins.

On the Bengals' next possession, Browning hit Ja'Marr Chase for 24 yards to convert a third-and-21. Joe Mixon's 1-yard TD run on fourth-and-goal tied the game at 17-all.

Minnesota pushed back in front on Addison's second TD catch of the game before Browning and Higgins found a way to tie it.

Higgins finished with four catches for 61 yards.

"All I can say is, we always count on Tee Higgins," Taylor said. "Tee stepped up big for us, and those were two big touchdowns that he scored for us at the end of the game, and he also made some bigger catches across the middle at other points."

## INJURIES

Bengals: DT DJ Reader suffered an injury to his right leg early in the game and was declared out. ... CB DJ Ivey left in the first quarter with a knee injury. ... Chase went out with a shoulder injury in the fourth quarter.

## UP NEXT

Vikings: Host Detroit on Sunday, Dec. 24.

Bengals: At Pittsburgh next Saturday.

## Netanyahu says Israel is as 'committed as ever' to war after soldiers mistakenly killed 3 hostages

By JULIA FRANKEL, NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Three Israeli hostages who were mistakenly shot by Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip had been waving a white flag and were shirtless when they were killed, military officials said Saturday, in Israel's first such acknowledgement of harming any hostages in its war against Hamas.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a nationwide address that the killings "broke my heart, broke the entire nation's heart," but he indicated no change in Israel's intensive military campaign. "We are as committed as ever to continue until the end, until we dismantle Hamas, until we return all our hostages," he said.

Anger over the mistaken killings is likely to increase pressure on the Israeli government to renew Qatar-mediated negotiations with Hamas over swapping more of the remaining captives, which Israel says number 129, for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

A senior Hamas official, Osama Hamdan, reiterated that there will be no further hostage releases until the war ends and Israel accepts the militant group's conditions for an exchange. Netanyahu said Israel would never agree to such demands.

Israel's account of how the three hostages were killed also raised questions about its soldiers' conduct. Palestinians on several occasions have said Israeli soldiers opened fire as civilians tried to flee to safety. Hamas has claimed other hostages were previously killed by Israeli fire or airstrikes, without presenting evidence.

An Israeli military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to brief reporters in line with military regulations, said the hostages likely had been abandoned by their captors or had escaped. The soldiers' behavior was "against our rules of engagement," the official said, and was being investigated at the highest level.

The hostages did everything they could to signal they weren't a threat, "but this shooting was done during fighting and under pressure," Herzi Halevi, chief of the military's general staff, said in a statement.

Halevi added: "There may be additional incidents in which hostages will escape or will be abandoned during the fighting. We have the obligation and the responsibility to get them out alive."

The hostages, all in their 20s, were killed Friday in the Gaza City area of Shijaiyah, where troops are engaged in fierce fighting with Hamas. They had been among more than 240 people taken hostage during an unprecedented raid by Hamas into Israel on Oct. 7 in which around 1,200 people were killed, mostly civilians.

Speaking at a rally in Tel Aviv, Rubi Chen, father of 19-year-old hostage Itay Chen, criticized the government for believing hostages can be retrieved through military pressure. "Put the the best offer on the table to get the hostages home alive," he said. "We don't want them back in bags."

The Israeli military official said the three hostages had emerged from a building close to Israeli soldiers' positions. They waved a white flag and were shirtless, possibly trying to signal they posed no threat.

Two were killed immediately, and the third ran back into the building screaming for help in Hebrew. The commander issued an order to cease fire, but another burst of gunfire killed the third man, the official said.

Israeli media gave a more detailed account. The mass circulation daily Yediot Ahronot said that according to an investigation into the incident, soldiers followed the third man and shouted at him to come out, and at least one soldier shot him when he emerged from a staircase.

The Israeli newspaper Haaretz said the soldiers who followed the third hostage believed he was a Hamas member. Local media reported that soldiers earlier saw a nearby building marked "SOS" and "Help! Three hostages" but feared it might be a trap.

Dahlia Scheindlin, an political analyst, said it was unlikely the killings would massively alter public support for the war. Most Israelis still have a strong sense of why it is being fought and believe Hamas needs to

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be defeated, she said.

"They feel like there's no other choice," she said.

The killings emphasized the dangers hostages face in areas of house-to-house combat like Shijaiyah, where nine soldiers were killed this week in one of the war's deadliest days for Israeli ground forces. The military has said Hamas has booby-trapped buildings and ambushed troops from a tunnel network it built under Gaza City.

On Saturday, the Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum asserted that another hostage, 27-year-old Inbar Hayman, had been killed in Gaza. The group gave no details.

Hamas released over 100 hostages for Palestinian prisoners during a brief cease-fire in November. Nearly all freed on both sides were women and minors. Talks on further swaps broke down.

Hamas seeks the return of all Palestinian prisoners. As of late November, Israel held nearly 7,000 Palestinians accused or convicted of security offenses, including hundreds rounded up since the war began.

The war has flattened much of northern Gaza and driven 85% of the territory's population of 2.3 million from their homes. Only a trickle of aid has been able to enter Gaza. Israel has said it would open a second entry point at Kerem Shalom to speed up deliveries.

The offensive has killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Thursday. It does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

It was the ministry's last update before the latest communications blackout in Gaza. "Now 48 hours and counting. The incident is likely to limit reporting and visibility to events on the ground," said Alp Toker, director of NetBlocks, a group tracking internet outages.

The war has been deadly for journalists. Mourners held funeral prayers for Samer Abu Daqqa, a Palestinian journalist working for broadcaster Al Jazeera who was killed Friday in an Israeli strike. The Committee to Protect Journalists said the cameraman was the 64th journalist to be killed in the conflict: 57 Palestinians, four Israelis and three Lebanese.

In devastated Gaza City, resident Assad Abu Taha reported "violent bombardment" Saturday.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem asserted that two Christian women at a church compound in Gaza City were killed by Israeli sniper fire and that seven other people were wounded. The women were identified as a mother and daughter. Gaza has a small Christian community consisting of about 1,000 people. There was no immediate Israeli comment.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has expressed unease over Israel's failure to reduce civilian casualties, but the White House continues to offer support with weapons shipments and diplomatic backing.

Israel and the U.S. remain far apart on who should run Gaza after the war. Washington wants to see a unified Palestinian government in Gaza and the West Bank as a precursor to eventual Palestinian statehood. A two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enjoys broad international support.

Netanyahu reiterated Saturday that Israel will retain security in a demilitarized Gaza and that a Palestinian state would pose a threat to Israel. "I am proud to have prevented the establishment of a Palestinian state," he said.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin was traveling to Israel to continue discussions on a timetable for winding down the war's intense combat phase. But Netanyahu and military leaders vowed to continue until "complete victory," which the prime minister noted will take time.

## **Latino Democrats shift from quiet concern to open opposition to Biden's concessions in border talks**

By STEPHEN GROVES, LISA MASCARO and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prominent Latinos in Congress looked on quietly, at first, privately raising concerns with the Biden administration over the direction of border security talks.

Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla of California was on the phone constantly with administration officials questioning why the Senate negotiations did not include any meaningful consideration of providing pathways to citizenship for longtime immigrants lacking the proper legal documents.

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New Mexico Democrat Sen. Ben Ray Luján made similar arguments as he tried to get meetings with top-level White House officials.

But when the talks didn't seem to make enough difference, the influential lawmakers started leading the open opposition.

"A return to Trump-era policies is not the fix," Padilla said. "In fact, it will make the problem worse."

Padilla even pulled President Joe Biden aside at a fundraiser last weekend in California to warn him "to be careful" of being dragged into "harmful policy."

The Latino senators have found themselves on shifting ground in the debate over immigration as the Democratic president, who is reaching for a border deal as part of his \$110 billion package for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs, has tried to reduce the historic numbers of people arriving at the U.S. border with Mexico.

The negotiations, which intensified Saturday at the Capitol as bargainers race to draft a framework by this weekend, come as the Biden administration has increasingly endured criticism over its handling of border and immigration issues — not just from Republicans, but from members of the president's own party as well. Democratic cities and states have been vocal about the financial toll that they say migrants have been taking on their resources.

But left off the table in the talks are pro-immigration changes, such as granting permanent legal status to thousands of immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children, often referred to as "Dreamers," based on the DREAM Act that would have provided similar protections for young immigrants but was never approved.

A few days after his conversation with the president, Padilla, Luján and Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., aired their concerns prominently at a Congressional Hispanic Caucus news conference in front of the Capitol.

They slammed Senate Republicans for demanding the border policy changes in exchange for Ukraine aid, and they criticized Biden for making concessions that they say ultimately undermine the United States' standing as a country that welcomes immigrants.

Padilla said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has promised him and several other senators to allow them to see proposals before there is a final agreement. But Latino lawmakers have largely been left outside the core negotiating group.

On Saturday, White House Chief of Staff Jeff Zients spoke on a call with the Hispanic Caucus, and several lawmakers raised concerns, according to two people granted anonymity to discuss the situation.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who had been engaged in talks at the Capitol, also joined the call.

Biden is facing pressure from all sides. He has been criticized about the record numbers of migrants at the border and he is also trying to address the political weakness before a potential campaign rematch next year with Donald Trump, the former Republican president, who has promised to enact far-right immigration measures.

And the issue is now tied to a top Biden foreign policy goal: providing robust support for Ukraine's defense against Russia.

The White House and Senate leaders are pushing for a framework of the border deal by Sunday, in preparation for possible votes in the week ahead.

"We'll need to have some kind of framework by the end of the weekend," Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, the key Republican negotiator, said Saturday during a break in talks.

Recently during the negotiations, the White House has pushed to include provisions that would legalize young immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children, according to two people with knowledge of the closed-door talks. But others said that was quickly taken off the table by Republicans.

Senators said they are running into the complex nature of U.S. immigration law. "Byzantine," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn..

"We're not at an agreement, but as we get closer into an agreement, the details really matter," Murphy said. "The drafting of the text is really hard and difficult."

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The bipartisan group negotiating the package has acknowledged that it expects to lose votes from both the left and right wings of either party.

"Regardless of people's political persuasions, this is a crisis," said Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, an Arizona independent who is part of the core negotiating group. "There is nothing that is humane about having thousands of individuals sitting in the desert without access to restrooms or food or water, no shade, just waiting for days to interact with a Border Patrol agent. That's what's happening in southern Arizona."

But immigration advocates have been rallying opposition to the proposed changes — often comparing them to Trump-era measures.

Using words like "draconian" and "betrayal," advocates argued during a Friday call with reporters that the proposals would undermine U.S. commitments to accepting people fleeing persecution and do little to stop people from making the long, dangerous journey to the border.

One of the policies under consideration would allow border officials to easily send migrants back to Mexico without letting them seek asylum in America, but advocates argue it could just place them into the hands of dangerous cartels that prey on migrants in northern Mexico.

Advocates also say that when the Trump and Biden administrations previously used the expulsion authority on public health grounds during the pandemic, migrants sent back to Mexico didn't return home. Instead they tried over and over again to enter the U.S. because there were no repercussions.

Greg Chen, senior director of government relations for the American Immigration Lawyers Association, said it would just make the border region "more chaotic, more dangerous."

The policies under consideration would also be difficult to implement. Detaining migrants or families would lead to hundreds of thousands of people in custody — at a huge cost.

"These are all things that are extremely, extremely worrying," said Jason Houser, the former chief of staff at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Prominent House Democrats are raising concerns. Reps. Nanette Barragán of California, the chair of the Hispanic Caucus, and Pramila Jayapal of Washington state, chair of the Progressive Caucus, along with Veronica Escobar of Texas, who is a co-chair of Biden's reelection campaign, and Rep. Jerry Nadler of New York, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, all joined the news conference.

Padilla warned that Biden's concessions on border restrictions could have lasting impact on his support from Latino voters.

"To think that concessions are going to be made without benefiting a single Dreamer, a single farm worker, a single undocumented essential worker is unconscionable," he said.

## **Israeli airstrike killed a USAID contractor in Gaza, his colleagues say**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Israeli airstrike killed a U.S. Agency for International Development contractor in Gaza last month, his colleagues said in a statement Saturday. The U.S. development agency noted the death and urged greater protection for humanitarian workers in the fighting there.

Hani Jnena, 33, was killed Nov. 5 along with his wife, their 2-year-old and 4-year-old daughters, and her family, the U.S.-based humanitarian group Global Communities said.

An internet-technology worker, Jnena had fled his neighborhood in Gaza City with his family to escape the airstrikes, only to be killed while sheltering with his in-laws, the group said. His employer was an on-the-ground partner for USAID, the U.S. agency said.

The Washington Post first reported the death.

In a final message to a colleague, Hani had written, "my daughters are terrified, and I am trying to keep them calm, but this bombing is terrifying," Global Communities said.

It was a rare report of the killing of someone with U.S.-government ties in the more than two-month war between Israel and Hamas. Numerous workers with local and international aid agencies, including more than 100 U.N. workers, have been killed in Gaza as Israel bombards areas crowded with civilians and battles with Hamas fighters on the ground.

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Health officials in Hamas-run Gaza say more than 17,000 people have been killed, two-thirds of them women and children. Israel's offensive is in response to an Oct. 7 Hamas assault in Israel that killed about 1,200 people.

USAID employees had been prominent in recent open letters by U.S. government employees objecting to U.S. policy in support of Israel's continued offensive, including President Joe Biden's decision not to join many other governments in calling for a cease-fire.

In an email, USAID spokesperson Jessica Jennings said Saturday, "The USAID community grieves the deaths of the innocent civilians and many humanitarian workers who have been killed in this conflict, including courageous individuals like Hani Jnena."

"In providing assistance and advocating for greater safety for civilian populations and the humanitarians who serve them, we are doing our utmost to honor the dedication, fortitude, and compassion of all humanitarian workers who have been killed," Jennings said.

## Cardinal is convicted of embezzlement in big Vatican financial trial, sentenced to 5½ years

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — A Vatican tribunal on Saturday convicted a cardinal of embezzlement and sentenced him to 5½ years in prison in one of several verdicts handed down in a complicated financial trial that aired the city state's dirty laundry and tested its justice system.

Cardinal Angelo Becciu, the first cardinal ever prosecuted by the Vatican criminal court, was absolved of several other charges and his nine co-defendants received a mixed outcome of some guilty verdicts and many acquittals of the nearly 50 charges brought against them during a 2½ year trial.

Becciu's lawyer, Fabio Viglione, said he respected the sentence but would appeal.

Prosecutor Alessandro Diddi said the outcome "showed we were correct."

The trial focused on the Vatican secretariat of state's 350 million euro investment in developing a former Harrod's warehouse into luxury apartments. Prosecutors alleged Vatican Monsignors and brokers fleeced the Holy See of tens of millions of euros in fees and commissions and then extorted the Holy See for 15 million euros to cede control of the building.

Becciu was accused of embezzlement-related charges in two tangents of the London deal and faced up to seven years in prison.

In the end, he was convicted of embezzlement stemming from the original Vatican investment of 200 million euros into a fund that invested in the London property. The tribunal determined canon law prohibited using church assets in such a speculative investment.

Raffaele Mincione, a London-based Italian broker who managed the fund, was also convicted of embezzlement. His lawyers immediately announced an appeal, saying they were incredulous a broker who took under management Vatican funds from Swiss banks could be convicted and sentenced to 5½ years in prison over an "obscure canonical law" that Mincione said he only learned about on Saturday.

Becciu was also convicted of embezzlement for his 125,000 euro donation of Vatican money to a charity run by his brother in Sardinia and of using Vatican money to pay an intelligence analyst who in turn was convicted of using the money for herself.

The trial had raised questions about the rule of law in the city state and Francis' power as absolute monarch, given that he wields supreme legislative, executive and judicial authority and had exercised it in ways the defense says jeopardized a fair trial.

The defense attorneys did praise Judge Giuseppe Pignatone's even-handedness and said they were able to present their arguments amply. But they lamented the Vatican's outdated procedural norms gave prosecutors enormous leeway to withhold evidence and otherwise pursue their investigation nearly unimpeded.

Andrea Torielli, the Vatican's editorial director, said the verdicts showed the defendants' rights were respected.

"The outcome of this trial tells us that the judges of the tribunal, as is right, acted with full independence

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based on documentary proofs and witnesses, not pre-confectioned theories," he wrote in an editorial in Vatican News.

Prosecutors had sought prison terms from three to 13 years and damages of over 400 million euros to try to recover the estimated 200 million euros they say the Holy See lost in the bad deals.

In the end, the tribunal acquitted many of the suspects of many of the biggest charges, including fraud, corruption and money-laundering, determining in many cases that the crimes simply didn't exist.

But it nevertheless ordered the confiscation of 166 million euros from them and payment of civil damages to Vatican offices of 200 million euros. One defendant, Becciu's former secretary Monsignor Mauro Carlino, was acquitted entirely.

The trial was initially seen as a sign of Francis' financial reforms and willingness to crack down on alleged financial misdeeds in the Vatican. But it had something of a reputational boomerang for the Holy See, with revelations of vendettas, espionage and even ransom payments to Islamic militants.

Much of the London case rested on the passage of the property from one London broker, Mincione, to another in late 2018. Prosecutors allege the second broker, Gianluigi Torzi, hoodwinked the Vatican by maneuvering to secure full control of the building that he relinquished only when the Vatican paid him off 15 million euros.

For Vatican prosecutors, that amounted to extortion. For the defense — and a British judge who rejected Vatican requests to seize Torzi's assets — it was a negotiated exit from a legally binding contract.

In the end, the tribunal convicted Torzi of several charges, including extortion, and sentenced him to six years in prison. Mincione was absolved of, among other things, of inflating the cost of the building when the Vatican bought into it.

It wasn't clear where the suspects would serve their time, if the convictions are upheld on appeal. The Vatican has a jail, but Torzi's whereabouts weren't immediately known and it wasn't clear how or whether other countries would extradite the defendants to serve any sentence.

The former heads of the Vatican financial intelligence agency, Tommaso di Ruzza and Rene Bruehlhart, were absolved of the main charge of abuse of office. They were convicted only of failing to report a suspicious transaction involving Torzi to prosecutors and fined 1,750 euros apiece.

They had argued they couldn't tip off Vatican prosecutors to the transaction because they had initiated their own cross-border financial intelligence-gathering operation into Torzi after Francis asked them to help the secretariat of state get possession of the property.

A Vatican official, Fabrizio Tirabassi, was convicted of extortion along with Torzi and a money-laundering charge. The Vatican's long-time financial adviser, Enrico Crasso was convicted of several charges including embezzlement and sentenced to seven years in prison.

The original London investigation spawned two other tangents that involved the star defendant, Becciu, once one of Francis' top advisers and himself considered a papal contender.

Prosecutors accused Becciu of embezzlement for sending 125,000 euros in Vatican money to a Sardinian charity run by his brother. Becciu argued that the local bishop requested the money to build a bakery to employ at-risk youths and that the money remained in the diocesan coffers.

The tribunal acknowledged the charitable ends of the donation but convicted him of embezzlement, given his brother's role.

Becciu was also accused of paying a Sardinian woman, Cecilia Marogna, for her intelligence services. Prosecutors traced some 575,000 euros in wire transfers from the Vatican to a Slovenian front company owned by Marogna and said she used the money to buy luxury goods and fund vacations.

Becciu said he thought the money was going to pay a British security firm to negotiate the release of Gloria Narvaez, a Colombian nun taken hostage by Islamic militants in Mali in 2017.

The tribunal found both guilty and sentenced Marogna to three years and 9 months in prison.

## No room at the inn? As holidays approach, migrants face eviction from New York City shelters

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It could be a cold, grim New Year for thousands of migrant families living in New York City's emergency shelter system. With winter setting in, they are being told they need to clear out, with no guarantee they'll be given a bed elsewhere.

Homeless migrants and their children were limited to 60 days in city housing under an order issued in October by Mayor Eric Adams, a move the Democrat says is necessary to relieve a shelter system overwhelmed by asylum-seekers crossing the southern U.S. border.

That clock is now ticking down for people like Karina Obando, a 38-year-old mother from Ecuador who has been given until Jan. 5 to get out of the former hotel where she has been staying with her two young children.

Where she will end up next is unclear. After that date, she can reapply for admission to the shelter system. A placement might not happen right away. Her family could wind up getting sent to one of the city's huge tent shelters far from where her 11-year-old son goes to school.

"I told my son, 'Take advantage. Enjoy the hotel because we have a roof right now,'" Obando said in Spanish outside Row NYC, a towering, 1,300-room hotel the city converted into a shelter for migrants in the heart of the theater district. "Because they're going to send us away and we're going to be sleeping on the train, or on the street."

A handful of cities across the U.S. dealing with an influx of homeless migrants have imposed their own limits on shelter stays, citing a variety of reasons, including spiraling costs, a lack of space and a desire to put pressure on people to either find housing on their own, or leave town entirely.

Chicago imposed a 60-day shelter limit last month and is poised to start evicting people in early January. In Massachusetts, Gov. Maura Healey, a Democrat, has capped the number of migrant families in emergency shelters at 7,500.

Denver had limited migrant families to 37 days but paused the policy this month in recognition of winter's onset. Single adults are limited to 14 days.

In New York, the first families were expected to reach their 60-day limits just days after Christmas, but the mayor's office said those migrants will receive extensions through early January. Roughly 3,500 families have been issued notices so far.

Unlike most other big cities, New York has a decades-old "right to shelter" obligating the city to provide emergency housing to anyone who asks.

But officials have warned migrants there is no guarantee they will get to stay in the same hotel, or the same city borough, for that matter.

Adult migrants without children are already subject to a shorter limit on shelter stays: 30 days.

Those who get kicked out and still want help are told to head for the city's so-called "reticketing center" that opened in late October in a former Catholic school in Manhattan's East Village.

Dozens of men and women, many with their luggage and other belongings in tow, line up every morning in freezing weather where they must petition for a renewed stay.

They are offered a free, one-way ticket to anywhere in the world. Most people decline.

Some are able to secure another shelter for 30 days, but many others say they leave empty-handed and must line up again the next day to try their luck.

"I'm scared of dying, sleeping on the street," Barbara Coromoto Monzon Peña, a 22-year-old from Venezuela, said as she spent a second day waiting in line on a recent weekday.

Obando said her eldest son, who is 19, hasn't been able to find a place to rent since he and his wife exhausted their 30 allowed days at the Row NYC hotel.

"As a mother, it hurts," she said, breaking down in tears. "He's sleeping on the train, on the street, in the cold. He's in a lot of pain, and now it's our turn. They told me that this country was different, but for me it's been hell."



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Adams has insisted the city is doing a lot more for migrant families than almost anywhere else. New York is on track to spend billions of dollars opening shelters, paying for hotel rooms, buying meals and offering assistance overcoming bureaucratic hurdles for asylum-seekers.

The mayor also has warned repeatedly that the city's resources are stretched thin, with more than 67,200 migrants still in its care and many more arriving every week.

"We're doing everything in our power to treat families as humanely as possible," said Kayla Mamelak, a spokesperson for Adams. "We have used every possible corner of New York City and are quite simply out of good options."

She stressed that the administration intends to avoid having families sleeping on the streets and said there will be an orderly process for them to request another 60-day stay.

Advocates for immigrants say the end result will still uproot vulnerable families during the coldest months of the year and disrupt schooling for new students just settling into classes.

"It's maybe the most Grinch move, ever," said Liza Schwartzwald, a director at the New York Immigrant Coalition. "Sending families with children out like in the middle of winter right after the holiday season is just cruel."

Adams has stressed that migrant children would not be required to change schools when they move. But some kids could potentially face epic commutes if they are placed in new shelters far from their current schools.

Migrant parents say two months simply isn't enough time to find a job, get kids settled into childcare or school and save up enough for rent.

Obando, who arrived in the U.S. three months ago, said that outside of the odd cleaning job, she has struggled to find consistent work because there is no one to care for her 3-year-old daughter with her husband still detained at the border in Arizona.

"It's not that we Ecuadorians come to take their jobs or that we're lazy," she said. "We're good workers. More time, that's all we ask."

For Ana Vasquez, a 22-year-old from Venezuela who is eight months pregnant, the situation is more urgent.

Her baby is due in late December, but she has until Jan. 8 to leave the Row NYC, where she has been staying with her sister and two young nieces for the past four months.

"They are going to leave me out in the cold," Vasquez lamented in Spanish one chilly morning this month outside the hotel. "We don't have an escape plan. The situation is difficult, even more so with the baby."

## US military leaders press Israel to shift from major combat as Iranian-backed ship attacks escalate

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top two U.S. military leaders are traveling to Tel Aviv to advise the Israeli government on how to transition from major combat operations against Hamas in Gaza to a more limited campaign and prevent a wider regional war. Their trip comes as Iranian-backed militants on Saturday launched a wave of attack drones against ships in the Red Sea and said they would continue until Israel's "aggression" ends.

One of the American warships assigned to the Ford carrier strike group, the destroyer USS *Carney*, "successfully engaged" 14 one-way attack drones launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, U.S. Central Command said in a statement. Britain reported that a Royal Navy destroyer downed another drone that was targeting commercial ships.

It was the latest in a series of attacks threatening commercial and U.S. Navy ships in the Red Sea that have escalated after Israel intensified its response to the Hamas' strike against Israel on Oct. 7. Israel is stinging from the deadliest attack ever on its homefront and has pledged that its offensive will not cease until Hamas is destroyed.

U.S. defense leaders are hoping to prevent the risk of wider regional conflict, both through a sustained

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high level of U.S. military presence and by engaging with the Israelis to get them to move beyond the massive bombardment campaign.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown, who are heading to Israel, served in leadership roles as U.S. airpower and ground forces moved from major combat to lower-intensity counterterrorism operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it is not clear how deeply their advice from lessons learned will resonate with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

Their trip highlights the increased efforts by the Biden administration to convince Israel that it should scale back its offensive, which has flattened much of Gaza's northern region, displaced millions and killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Israel's push has been complicated by the dense urban population and Hamas' network of tunnels, and the militants are accused of using civilians as "human shields." The sustained intensity of Israel's campaign has led President Joe Biden to warn that the U.S. ally is losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing."

U.S. officials have been telling Israel for several weeks that its window is closing for concluding major combat operations in Gaza without risking the loss of even more backing.

In a meeting Thursday, Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, urged Netanyahu to shift to more targeted operations by smaller military teams hunting specific high-value targets, rather than the sustained broad bombardment that has occurred so far. In response, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said his country would continue major combat operations against Hamas for several more months.

There are implications for the tens of thousands of U.S. service members deployed in the region.

Austin on Friday extended the deployment once more of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and a second warship in order to retain a two-carrier presence in the Mediterranean Sea. The ships are seen as vital to deter Iran from widening the Israel-Hamas war into a regional conflict. The approximately 5,000 sailors aboard the Ford were originally due home in early November.

There are 19 U.S. warships in the region, including seven in the eastern Mediterranean. A dozen more stretched down the Red Sea, across the Arabian Sea and up into the Persian Gulf.

The missile and drone attacks have led at least two major shipping companies, Hapag-Lloyd and Maersk, to order their commercial vessels to temporarily pause transits through the strait.

"This is a worldwide problem that affects Israel, too," Gallant said the Houthis blocking shipping in the Red Sea. "We are ready to act. We know what to do. And we will find the right timing to act. We are giving a chance, in the maritime issue, to the international system. If we reach a situation where we are the final option, we will know what to do," he said about a possible military response.

Mohammed Abdel-Salam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesman, wrote on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, that the Houthis would keep targeting Israel-linked vessels "until the aggression stops; the siege on Gaza is lifted; and humanitarian aid continues to flow into the Strip."

Austin is expected also to visit Bahrain and Qatar and further work toward establishing a new maritime mission to provide increased security for commercial ships sailing in the southern Red Sea. Bahrain is the home of the U.S. Navy's Central Command headquarters and the international maritime task force charged with ensuring safe passage for vessels in the region.

Qatar has been vital in helping keep what has been a deadly localized war from boiling over into a regional conflict and negotiating hostage release.

Earlier in his Army career, Austin oversaw the drawdown of forces in Iraq in 2011. He visited Israel days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas and has spoken to Gallant, his Israeli counterpart, more than two dozen times since then.

In his meetings in Israel, he is likely to continue discussions on how Israelis define different military campaign milestones, to be able to assess when they will have sufficiently degraded Hamas to ensure their own security and shift from major combat operations, a senior U.S. defense official told reporters traveling with Austin.

## Under the shadow of war in Gaza, Jesus' traditional birthplace is gearing up for a subdued Christmas

By JULIA FRANKEL and JALAL BWAITEK Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — Bethlehem is gearing up for a subdued Christmas, without the festive lights and customary Christmas tree towering over Manger Square, after officials in Jesus' traditional birthplace decided to forgo celebrations due to the Israel-Hamas war.

The cancellation of Christmas festivities, which typically draw thousands of visitors, is a severe blow to the town's tourism-dependent economy. But joyous revelry is untenable at a time of immense suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, said Mayor Hana Haniyeh.

"The economy is crashing," Haniyeh told The Associated Press on Friday. "But if we compare it with what's happening to our people and Gaza, it's nothing."

More than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed and more than 50,000 wounded during Israel's blistering air and ground offensive against Gaza's Hamas rulers, according to health officials there, while some 85% of the territory's 2.3 million residents have been displaced. The war was triggered by Hamas' deadly assault Oct. 7 on southern Israel in which militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took more than 240 hostages.

Since Oct. 7, access to Bethlehem and other Palestinian towns in the Israeli-occupied West Bank has been difficult, with long lines of motorists waiting to pass military checkpoints. The restrictions have also prevented many Palestinians from exiting the territory to work in Israel.

City leaders fret about the impact the closures have on the small Palestinian economy in the West Bank, already struggling with a dramatic fall in tourism since the start of the war. The Palestinian tourism sector has incurred losses of \$2.5 million a day, amounting to \$200 million by the end of the year, the Palestinian minister of tourism said Wednesday.

The yearly Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem — shared among Armenian, Catholic and Orthodox denominations — are major boons for the city, where tourism accounts for 70% of its yearly income. But the streets are empty this season.

With most major airlines canceling flights to Israel, over 70 hotels in Bethlehem have been forced to close, leaving some 6,000 employees in the tourism sector unemployed, according to Sami Thaljieh, manager of the Sancta Maria Hotel.

"I spend my days drinking tea and coffee, waiting for customers who never come. Today, there is no tourism," said Ahmed Danna, a Bethlehem shop owner.

Haniyeh said that while Christmas festivities have been cancelled, religious ceremonies will take place, including a traditional gathering of church leaders and a Midnight Mass.

"Bethlehem is an essential part of the Palestinian community," the mayor said. "So at Midnight Mass this year, we will pray for peace, the message of peace that was founded in Bethlehem when Jesus Christ was born."

George Carlos Canawati, a Palestinian journalist, lecturer, and scout leader, called his city "sad and heartbroken." He said his Boy Scout troop will conduct a silent march across the city, in mourning of those killed in Gaza.

"We receive the Christmas message by rejecting injustice and aggression, and we will pray for peace to come to the land of peace," said Canawati.

The enthusiasm of Bethlehem's Christmas festivities have long been a barometer of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Celebrations were grim in 2000 at the start of the second intifada, or uprising, when Israeli forces locked down parts of the West Bank in response to Palestinians carrying out scores of suicide bombings and other attacks that killed Israeli civilians.

Times were also tense during an earlier Palestinian uprising, which lasted from 1987-1993, when annual festivities in Manger Square were overseen by Israeli army snipers on the rooftops.

The sober mood this year isn't confined to Bethlehem.

Across the Holy Land, Christmas festivities have been put on hold. There are 182,000 Christians in Israel, 50,000 in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 1,300 in Gaza, according to the U.S. State Department. The vast majority are Palestinians.

In Jerusalem, the normally bustling passageways of the Old City's Christian Quarter have fallen quiet since the war began. Shops are boarded up, with their owners saying they are too frightened to open — and even if they did, they say they wouldn't have much business.

The heads of major churches in Jerusalem announced in November that holiday celebrations would be canceled. "We call upon our congregations to stand strong with those facing such afflictions by this year foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities," they wrote.

At the altar of Bethlehem's Evangelical Lutheran church, a revised nativity scene is on display. A figure of baby Jesus wrapped in a Palestinian keffiyeh is perched atop a pile of rubble. The doll lies underneath an olive tree — for Palestinians, a symbol of steadfastness.

"While the world is celebrating, our children are under the rubble. While the world is celebrating, our families are displaced and their homes are destroyed," said the church's Pastor, Munther Isaac. "This is Christmas to us in Palestine."

## **Order blocking enforcement of Ohio abortion ban stands after high court dismisses appeal**

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The Ohio Supreme Court has dismissed the state's challenge to a judge's order that has blocked enforcement of Ohio's near-ban on abortions for the past 14 months.

The ruling moves action in the case back to Hamilton County Common Pleas, where abortion clinics asked Judge Christian Jenkins this week to throw out the law following voters' decision to approve enshrining abortion rights in the state constitution.

The high court on Friday said the appeal was "dismissed due to a change in the law."

The justices in March agreed to review a county judge's order that blocked enforcement of the abortion restriction and to consider whether clinics had legal standing to challenge the law. They ultimately denied Republican Attorney General Dave Yost's request that they launch their own review of the constitutional right to abortion, leaving such arguments for a lower court.

The clinics asked Jenkins on Thursday to block the abortion ban permanently on the heels of the amendment Ohio voters approved last month that ensures access to abortion and other reproductive health care.

A law signed by Republican Gov. Mike DeWine in April 2019 prohibited most abortions after the first detectable "fetal heartbeat." Cardiac activity can be detected as early as six weeks into pregnancy, before many women know they are pregnant.

The ban, initially blocked through a federal legal challenge, briefly went into effect when the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision was overturned last year. It was then placed back on hold in county court, as part of a subsequent lawsuit challenging it as unconstitutional under the state constitution.

Yost's office referred to a statement from Dec. 7 that "the state is prepared to acknowledge the will of the people on the issue, but also to carefully review each part of the law for an orderly resolution of the case."

The abortion providers asked the lower court that initially blocked the ban to permanently strike it down. They cited Yost's own legal analysis, circulated before the vote, that stated that passage of the amendment would invalidate the state's six-week ban, stating, "Ohio would no longer have the ability to limit abortions at any time before a fetus is viable."

## **A Black woman was criminally charged after a miscarriage. It shows the perils of pregnancy post-Roe**

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio was in the throes of a bitter debate over abortion rights this fall when Brittany Watts, 21 weeks and 5 days pregnant, began passing thick blood clots.

The 33-year-old Watts, who had not shared the news of her pregnancy even with her family, made her first prenatal visit to a doctor's office behind Mercy Health-St. Joseph's Hospital in Warren, a working-class city about 60 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of Cleveland.

The doctor said that, while a fetal heartbeat was still present, Watts' water had broken prematurely and the fetus she was carrying would not survive. He advised heading to the hospital to have her labor induced, so she could have what amounted to an abortion to deliver the nonviable fetus. Otherwise, she would face "significant risk" of death, according to records of her case.

That was a Tuesday in September. What followed was a harrowing three days entailing: multiple trips to the hospital; Watts miscarrying into, and then flushing and plunging, a toilet at her home; a police investigation of those actions; and Watts, who is Black, being charged with abuse of a corpse. That's a fifth-degree felony punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$2,500 fine.

Her case was sent last month to a grand jury. It has touched off a national firestorm over the treatment of pregnant women, and especially Black women, in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump elevated Watts' plight in a post to X, formerly Twitter, and supporters have donated more than \$100,000 through GoFundMe for her legal defense, medical bills and trauma counseling.

Whether abortion-seekers should face criminal charges is a matter of debate within the anti-abortion community, but, post-*Dobbs*, pregnant women like Watts, who was not even trying to get an abortion, have increasingly found themselves charged with "crimes against their own pregnancies," said Grace Howard, assistant justice studies professor at San José State University.

"Roe was a clear legal roadblock to charging felonies for unintentionally harming pregnancies, when women were legally allowed to end their pregnancies through abortion," she said. "Now that Roe is gone, that roadblock is entirely gone."

Michele Goodwin, a law professor at the University of California, Irvine, and author of "Policing The Womb," said those efforts have long overwhelmingly targeted Black and brown women.

Even before *Roe* was overturned, studies show that Black women who visited hospitals for prenatal care were 10 times more likely than white women to have child protective services and law enforcement called on them, even when their cases were similar, she said.

"Post-*Dobbs*, what we see is kind of a wild, wild West," said Goodwin. "You see this kind of muscle-flexing by district attorneys and prosecutors wanting to show that they are going to be vigilant, they're going to take down women who violate the ethos coming out of the state's legislature." She called Black women "canaries in the coal mine" for the "hyper-vigilant type of policing" women of all races might expect from the nation's network of health-care providers, law enforcers and courts now that abortion isn't federally protected.

In Texas, for example, Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton mounted an aggressive and successful defense against a white Texas mother, Kate Cox, who sued for permission to skirt the state's restrictive abortion law because her fetus had a fatal condition.

At the time of Watts' miscarriage, abortion was legal in Ohio through 21 weeks, six days of pregnancy. Her lawyer, Traci Timko, said Watts left the hospital on the Wednesday when, coincidentally, her pregnancy arrived at that date — after sitting for eight hours awaiting care.

It turned out the delay was because hospital officials were deliberating over the legalities, Timko said. "It was the fear of, is this going to constitute an abortion and are we able to do that," she said.

At the time, vigorous campaigning was taking place across Ohio over Issue 1, a proposed amendment to enshrine a right to abortion in Ohio's constitution. Some of the ads were harshly attacking abortions

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later in pregnancy, with opponents arguing the issue would allow the return of so-called "partial-birth abortions" and pregnancy terminations "until birth."

The hospital did not return calls seeking confirmation and comment, but B. Jessie Hill, a law professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland, said Mercy Health-St. Joseph's was in a bind.

"These are the razor's edge decisions that health care providers are being forced to make," she said. "And all the incentives are pushing hospitals to be conservative, because on the other side of this is criminal liability. That's the impact of Dobbs."

Watts had been admitted to the Catholic hospital twice that week with vaginal bleeding, but she left without being treated. A nurse told the 911 dispatcher that Watts returned no longer pregnant on that Friday. She said Watts told her, "the baby's in her backyard in a bucket," and that she didn't want to have a child.

Timko said Watts insists she doesn't recall saying the pregnancy was unwanted; it was unintended, but she had always wanted to give her mother a grandchild. Her lawyer believes Watts may have meant that she didn't want to fish what she knew was a dead fetus from the bucket of blood, tissue and feces that she'd scooped from her overflowing toilet.

"This 33-year-old girl with no criminal record is demonized for something that goes on every day," she told Warren Municipal Court Judge Terry Ivanchak during Watts' recent preliminary hearing.

Warren Assistant Prosecutor Lewis Guarnieri told Ivanchak that Watts left home for a hair appointment after miscarrying, leaving the toilet clogged. Police would later find the fetus wedged in the pipes.

"The issue isn't how the child died, when the child died," Guarnieri told the judge, according to TV station WKBN. "It's the fact the baby was put into a toilet, was large enough to clog up the toilet, left in that toilet, and she went on (with) her day."

In court, Timko bristled at Guarnieri's suggestion.

"You cannot be broadcasting any clearer that you just don't get it," she said in an interview, suggesting Watts was scared, anxious and traumatized by the experience. "She's trying to protect Mama. She doesn't want to get her hair done. She wants to stop bleeding like crazy and start grieving her fetus, what she's just been through."

As chief counsel to the county's child assault protection unit, Assistant Trumbull County Prosecutor Diane Barber is the lead prosecutor on Watts' case.

Barber said she couldn't speak specifically about the case other than to note that the county was compelled to move forward with it once it was bound over from municipal court. She said she doesn't expect a grand jury finding this month.

"About 20% of the cases get no-billed, (as in) they do not get indicted and the case does not proceed," she said.

The size and stage of development of Watts' fetus — precisely the point when abortion crossed from legal to illegal in most cases — became an issue during her preliminary hearing.

A county forensic investigator reported feeling "what appeared to be a small foot with toes" inside Watts' toilet. Police seized the toilet and broke it apart to retrieve the intact fetus as evidence.

Testimony and an autopsy confirmed that the fetus died in utero before passing through the birth canal. In regard to abuse, the examination identified "no recent injuries."

Ivanchak acknowledged the case's complexities.

"There are better scholars than I am to determine the exact legal status of this fetus, corpse, body, birthing tissue, whatever it is," he said from the bench. "Matter of fact, I'm assuming that's what ... Issue 1's all about: at what point something becomes viable."

Timko, a former prosecutor, said Ohio's abuse-of-corpse statute is vague. It prohibits treating "a human corpse" in a way that would "outrage" reasonable family or community sensibilities.

"From a legal perspective, there's no definition of 'corpse,'" she said. "Can you be a corpse if you never took a breath?"

Howard said clarity on what about Watts' behavior constituted a crime is essential.

"For rights of people with the capacity for pregnancy, this is huge," she said. "Her miscarriage was en-

tirely ordinary. So I just want to know what (the prosecutor) thinks she should have done. If we are going to require people to collect and bring used menstrual products to hospitals so that they can make sure it is indeed a miscarriage, it's as ridiculous and invasive as it is cruel."

## **A Black woman was criminally charged after a miscarriage. It shows the perils of pregnancy post-Roe**

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The doctor said that, while a fetal heartbeat was still present, Watts' water had broken prematurely and the fetus she was carrying would not survive. He advised heading to the hospital to have her labor induced, so she could have what amounted to an abortion to deliver the nonviable fetus. Otherwise, she would face "significant risk" of death, records of her case show.

That was a Tuesday in September. What followed was a harrowing three days entailing: multiple trips to the hospital; Watts miscarrying into, and then flushing and plunging, a toilet at her home; a police investigation of those actions; and Watts, who is Black, being charged with abuse of a corpse. That's a fifth-degree felony punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$2,500 fine.

Her case was sent last month to a grand jury. It has touched off a national firestorm over the treatment of pregnant women, and especially Black women, in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump elevated Watts' plight in a post to X, formerly Twitter.

Michele Goodwin, a law professor at the University of California, Irvine, and author of "Policing The Womb," said the case follows a pattern of women's pregnancies being criminalized against them. She said those efforts have long overwhelmingly targeted Black and brown women.

Even before *Roe* was overturned, studies show that Black women who visited hospitals for prenatal care were 10 times more likely than white women to have child protective services and law enforcement called on them, even when their cases were similar, she said.

"Post-*Dobbs*, what we see is kind of a wild, wild West," said Goodwin. "You see this kind of muscle-flexing by district attorneys and prosecutors wanting to show that they are going to be vigilant, they're going to take down women who violate the ethos coming out of the state's legislature."

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Assistant Trumbull County Prosecutor Diane Barber, lead prosecutor on Watts' case, could not speak specifically about the case, other than to note the county is compelled to move forward with it. She doesn't expect a grand jury finding this month.

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## As Trump threatens to repeal Obamacare, these 'insurance godmothers' are signing Florida Latinos up

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Salsa music blares from the food court in a rundown Miami shopping center as Latinos head to a kiosk and an office showing signs for "Obamacare," where they hope to renew their health coverage plans before the year ends.

It's areas near this mall where former Democratic President Barack Obama's health care overhaul is more popular than anywhere in the country, according to federal data. The region has also shifted away from Democrats to Republicans in recent years, with Donald Trump hosting several rallies here as part of his outreach to Latino voters.

Trump, the current front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024, has pledged to renew efforts to repeal and replace the 2010 law — something that would be felt heavily in the region and could possibly reverse some of the GOP shift among South Florida's Latinos, experts say.

President Joe Biden's reelection campaign has already seized on Trump's statements about "Obamacare," which was enacted when Biden was vice president, as part of its broader efforts to shape the widely expected rematch with Trump next year.

"Health insurance is something that is extremely needed for everyone," said Odalys Arevalo, one of the managing partners of a health insurance agency serving Spanish-speaking clients in Miami. "And I know that everybody that supports the Republican Party that has health insurance through Obamacare would not support the fact that it would be taken away from one day to another. That is a fact."

Arevalo and her business partner, Mercy Cabrera, started enrollment centers to help people navigate



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the Affordable Care Act's insurance marketplaces and remember how some Cubans would walk away uttering "no, no, no," after seeing the name "Obamacare," which was coined by Republicans opposing the overhaul as an expensive government takeover of health insurance.

Insurers could no longer deny coverage based on preexisting medical conditions, and that drew many Latinos to consider it, Arevalo says. In the following years, the women started enrolling tens of thousands, earning the nickname of "Madrinas del Obamacare," or "Obamacare" godmothers, evoking the crucial role godparents play in Latino culture.

They have since renamed themselves "Las Madrinas de los Seguros," or "insurance godmothers," because they offer other plans. But they continue to feature the word "Obamacare" on their office walls and in their ads.

"Obamacare" is seen throughout Miami in advertising flags, businesses and bus signs. Federal data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services indicates how widely used it is here.

About 3.4 million Hispanics are signed up with insurance through the health law. Florida leads enrollment with more than 3.2 million consumers selecting a plan during last year's enrollment period from November 2022 to January. Miami-Dade is the county with the most people enrolled, with about 750,000 consumers, or more than one-fourth of the total population.

Florida is also one of 10 states that has resisted expanding Medicaid coverage under a provision of the health law.

The two Zip codes with the most sign-ups last year and this year are in Doral and Hialeah, hubs for the Venezuelan and Cuban communities that are just north of Miami and are common stops for Trump's visits and rallies.

Last month, Trump posted on his Truth Social social media site that "the cost of Obamacare is out of control, plus, it's not good Healthcare." While he said he is looking at alternatives, he has not shared any plans. But Trump said he would not give up on terminating it — recalling when the late Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., blocked the then-president's effort to repeal the law in July 2017.

During Trump's administration, Republicans managed to pass a provision that reduced the penalty for not having health insurance to zero, the most unpopular part of the law and something that people in South Florida say made them feel more at ease with the plans.

The Miami Herald, in a recent editorial, called the plans by Trump — also echoed by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, another 2024 GOP presidential candidate — "exceedingly out of touch with voters."

Biden's campaign quickly mobilized a response and the chair of the Florida Democratic Party, Nikki Fried, specifically mentioned an area where "Obamacare" is popular.

"Miami-Dade County would be hardest hit by Trump's anti-health care agenda," Fried said.

According to a KFF poll conducted in May 2023, 59% of Americans say they have a favorable opinion of the Affordable Care Act. The same poll by the nonprofit organization focused on health policy found that 66% of Hispanics say they have a favorable opinion of the law.

According to APVoteCast, a wide-ranging survey of U.S. voters, 62% of 2022 midterm voters in Florida said it should be the responsibility of the federal government to make sure that all people in the country have health care coverage. About one-third of Florida voters in the 2022 midterm elections said that shouldn't be the government's job. Among Latino or Hispanic midterm voters in Florida, 77% said ensuring health care coverage for all should be the responsibility of the federal government, while 1 in 5 said it should not be.

Zulina Ruiz, a 72-year-old retired lawyer from Venezuela, said she found out about the Affordable Care Act options quickly after arriving in the U.S. in 2017. She said she is particularly grateful for having access to drugs to treat her high blood pressure. Green-card holders, refugees and other migrants who have been granted temporary protected status or who have come recently with humanitarian parole also qualify for coverage under the law.

"This is very important for me. I don't think a candidate can just make this program disappear," she said. "They would leave millions of low-income people without insurance."

Ruiz became a U.S. citizen in May, but has not registered with any party. She does not know whom she will vote for next year.

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"I am still not decided, and we don't have official candidates yet," Ruiz said, adding that she still feels more connected politically to Venezuela. Much of the growing support for Republicans in Miami is owed to Trump's record opposing socialist leaders across Latin America, including imposing White House sanctions on Venezuelan officials.

"But health policy is a top priority for me," Ruiz said.

The Biden campaign has run advertising in battleground states contrasting his efforts to lower drug costs with Trump's renewed promise to repeal the health overhaul. The ad campaign did not include markets in Florida.

Arevalo, one of the "Obamacare godmothers," thinks voters in Miami may not necessarily approve of all the positions of the candidates they ultimately back.

But as far as a local verdict on "Obamacare," and despite initial hesitations about it, the program grew on people in Miami once they understood it, she said.

"When Trump was elected, some people came and said they wanted nothing to do with Obamacare. We said 'Obamacare, Trumpcare, whatever,'" she said of what they told people. "The important thing is that everybody has access to health insurance and that they can take care of their health."

## **Dodgers, Ohtani got creative with \$700 million deal, but both sides still have some risk**

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Once the initial shock wore off on the price tag of Shohei Ohtani's record-shattering \$700 million, 10-year deal with the Los Angeles Dodgers, details about the contract emerged that were nearly as stunning.

A total of \$680 million — 97% of the money — was deferred until 2034-43 with no interest.

Had the Dodgers invented some kind of contract voodoo new to Major League Baseball?

Not really. But it appears to be a team-friendly deal that also has benefits for Ohtani as the Japanese superstar departs the Angels, heads 30 miles up Interstate 5 and establishes a new home with the Dodgers in Chavez Ravine.

"Thanks to his endorsements and other off-the-field revenue streams, he has the luxury to defer compensation," said Michael Rueda, head of the U.S. division of sports and entertainment at Withers law firm. "But there's always some risk."

Part of Rueda's job is giving financial advice to high-profile sports stars and celebrities. He said the Ohtani-Dodgers deal looks like a solid arrangement, even if there are tradeoffs for both sides.

Make no mistake, the 29-year-old Ohtani is a rich man and will be rich long into the foreseeable future, but money promised later is never the same as money in hand.

One example of Ohtani's risk: Former Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Mario Lemieux was out about \$26 million in the 1990s when the franchise was in financial trouble and couldn't pay the money it owed the hockey legend in a deferred deal.

Things eventually worked out. Lemieux converted his deferred salary into equity with the team, then partnered with Ron Burkle to pull the club out of bankruptcy. They eventually made a windfall after selling part of their stake in 2021 — but it's a reminder that financial circumstances can change when 20 years pass. The Dodgers were certainly a fan-drawing juggernaut in 2023, but 2043 doesn't come for a long time. LA, after all, is only 12 years removed from filing for bankruptcy protection itself under former owner Frank McCourt.

There's also at least some risk for the franchise: The New York Mets famously deferred \$5.9 million that slugger Bobby Bonilla was owed in 2000 and — thanks to an 8% interest rate — will end up paying nearly \$30 million total in annual installments until 2035. The Mets have leaned into the self-own in recent seasons, with owner Steve Cohen celebrating the July 1 payment that Bonilla is due each year.

Of course, Ohtani's deferred pay comes with no interest. That's a potentially monstrous savings — we're talking billions — on a deal that could have been much more costly. Ohtani's deal with 8% interest would

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come out to nearly \$3 billion by 2043.

"It's interesting to me that the deferred money comes with no interest, from what I've read" Rueda said. "That's giving up a lot of money."

Ohtani's other potential advantage from the contract is he receives \$680 million of the \$700 million after he's done playing, which means he might not be living in California, where taxes are relatively high. Depending on where he lives from 2034-43, that could lead to sizable savings.

Rueda said the issue isn't black and white and there are lots of variables, particularly if he goes back to Japan.

"Tax is always a big part," Rueda said. "The concept of moving to a different jurisdiction and avoiding the California state tax — yeah, that could be accurate."

For purposes of baseball's luxury tax, the contract is valued as a yearly addition to the Dodgers' payroll of about \$46 million instead of \$70 million. Under the collective bargaining agreement, for the calculation of a team's tax payroll the value of deferred money is discounted at the federal mid-term rate.

Arizona Diamondbacks owner Ken Kendrick — who talked about the contract at length earlier this week — said his understanding is the deal will save the Dodgers somewhere in the neighborhood of \$5 million each season because of the competitive balance tax savings — the exact amount depends on how often the Dodgers exceed the tax threshold and by how much.

"They're playing by the rules," Kendrick said. "They got a great player, who is going to be an addition that makes them more competitive. But the economics are not so tilted in a way that puts them at an incredible advantage over the rest of us."

Kendrick said he believes one major misconception of the deal is that the Dodgers are saving \$68 million each season from 2024-33 that they can use to pursue other free agents. Baseball's labor contract calls for the deferred money to be set aside by the second July 1 after the season it is earned, at the then-current present-day value discounted by at least 5% annually.

Rueda agreed.

"They have to demonstrate that they have that money," Rueda said. "You can't write checks that you can't cash."

## Today in History: December 17, the Wright Brothers' first flight

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Dec. 17, the 351st day of 2023. There are 14 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 17, 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright of Dayton, Ohio, conducted the first successful manned powered-airplane flights near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, using their experimental craft, the Wright Flyer.

On this date:

In 1777, France recognized American independence.

In 1933, in the inaugural NFL championship football game, the Chicago Bears defeated the New York Giants, 23-21, at Wrigley Field.

In 1944, the U.S. War Department announced it was ending its policy of excluding people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast.

In 1957, the United States successfully test-fired the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time.

In 1969, the U.S. Air Force closed its Project "Blue Book" by concluding there was no evidence of extra-terrestrial spaceships behind thousands of UFO sightings.

In 1975, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was sentenced in Sacramento, California, to life in prison for her attempt on the life of President Gerald R. Ford. (She was paroled in August, 2009.)

In 1979, Arthur McDuffie, a Black insurance executive, was beaten by police after leading them on a chase with his motorcycle in Miami. McDuffie died in a hospital four days later. (Four white police officers accused of beating McDuffie were later acquitted, sparking riots.)

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Mexican President

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Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in separate ceremonies.

In 2011, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il died after more than a decade of iron rule; he was 69, according to official records, but some reports indicated he was 70.

In 2012, Newtown, Connecticut, began laying its dead to rest, holding funerals for two 6-year-old boys, the first of the 20 children killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre.

In 2014, the United States and Cuba restored diplomatic relations, sweeping away one of the last vestiges of the Cold War.

In 2017, "The Last Jedi" took in \$220 million in its debut weekend in North America, good for the second-best opening ever and behind only its predecessor, "The Force Awakens."

In 2018, a report from the Senate intelligence committee found that Russia's political disinformation campaign on U.S. social media was more far-reaching than originally thought, with troll farms working to discourage Black voters and "blur the lines between reality and fiction" to help elect Donald Trump.

In 2020, a government advisory panel endorsed a second COVID-19 vaccine, paving the way for the shot from Moderna and the National Institutes of Health to be added to the U.S. vaccination campaign.

In 2022, the Minnesota Vikings completed the biggest comeback in NFL history by erasing a 33-point deficit to beat the Indianapolis Colts 39-36 in overtime.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Armin Mueller-Stahl is 93. Pope Francis is 87. Singer-actor Tommy Steele is 87. Actor Bernard Hill is 79. Actor Ernie Hudson is 78. Comedian-actor Eugene Levy is 77. Actor Marilyn Hasset is 76. Actor Wes Studi is 76. Pop musician Jim Bonfanti (The Raspberries) is 75. Actor Joel Brooks is 74. Rock singer Paul Rodgers is 74. R&B singer Wanda Hutchinson Vaughn (The Emotions) is 72. Actor Bill Pullman is 70. Actor Barry Livingston is 70. Country singer Sharon White is 70. Producer-director-writer Peter Farrelly is 67. Rock musician Mike Mills (R.E.M.) is 65. Pop singer Sarah Dallin (Bananarama) is 62. Country singer Tracy Byrd is 57. Country musician Duane Propes is 57. Actor Laurie Holden is 54. DJ Homicide (Sugar Ray) is 53. Actor Sean Patrick Thomas is 53. Actor Claire Forlani is 52. Pop-rock musician Eddie Fisher (OneRepublic) is 50. Actor Sarah Paulson is 49. Actor Marissa Ribisi is 49. Actor Giovanni Ribisi is 49. Actor Milla Jovovich (YO'-vuh-vich) is 48. Singer Bree Sharp is 48. Singer-songwriter Ben Goldwasser (MGMT) is 41. Rock singer Mikky Ekko is 40. Actor Shannon Woodward is 39. Actor Emma Bell is 37. Actor Vanessa Zima is 37. Rock musician Taylor York (Paramore) is 34. Actor Graham Rogers is 33. Actor-singer Nat Wolff is 29.