

Groton Daily Independent

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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.

Junior High Girls Basketball hosts Webster in the Arena. 7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m.

Boys JV and JH wrestling at McCook Central/Montrorse (Salem), 5 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 19

Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, acini depepi fruit salad.

School Breakfast: Monty Cristo sandwich.

School Lunch: Chicken legs, mashed potatoes.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Angel tree times at church for delivery

Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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"The best advice someone has ever given me was 'do it scared.'"

-Sherri Shepherd



Girls Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli: at the elementary school will be the 8th grade game at 4 p.m. At the High School, C game at 5 p.m. with JV and Varsity to follow.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 20

Senior Menu: Goulash, corn, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: French toast.

School Lunch: Chef salad.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.; Longest Night Service, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Pre-school Christmas Program at 7:00 pm

United Methodist: Community Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Christmas caroling and game night, 6 pm.

Thursday, Dec. 21

FIRST DAY OF WINTER!

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1440

In partnership with smartasset™

Senate negotiators reportedly made progress over the weekend on a suite of border security measures, working under a self-imposed Sunday deadline to reach an agreement. Lawmakers have tied the package to a larger \$110B deal that includes support for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan.

Roman Catholic Cardinal Angelo Becciu was found guilty of three counts of embezzlement and sentenced to five and a half years in prison Saturday, the result of a two-year trial into his and nine others' financial crimes within the Vatican City state. The 75-year-old Italian is the first cardinal to be tried criminally by Vatican courts since the Vatican became an independent state in 1929.

The head of Israel's Mossad spy agency reportedly met with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani over the weekend, looking to renew a cease-fire deal that would see hostages held by Hamas in Gaza released. The talks came a day after the Israeli military killed three hostages after misidentifying them as Hamas militants.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Friends" actor Matthew Perry's cause of death determined to be accidental and due to the acute effects of ketamine

Texas tops Nebraska to win back-to-back NCAA women's volleyball national championships. South Dakota State set to take on Montana for NCAA football championship series national title.

"General Hospital" and "The Kelly Clarkson Show" are top winners at the 50th annual Daytime Emmy Awards; see complete winners list.

Science & Technology

NASA's Cassini spacecraft detects the presence of hydrogen cyanide on Saturn's moon Enceladus; the molecule, lethal to humans, is thought to be a key chemical in the origin of organic life.

Study suggests North America's first humans may have arrived 23,000 years ago via sea ice floating across the Bering Strait; timeframe is roughly 10,000 years earlier than current estimates.

Symptoms of "long flu" identified by researchers; condition can persist following severe cases of influenza, similar to long COVID-19.

Business & Markets

Dow Jones, Nasdaq end up Friday (S&P 500 -0.01%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq +0.4%); Nasdaq closes at highest level since November 2021, all three indexes extend weekly winning streak to seven.

Biotech giant Illumina to divest cancer diagnostics startup Grail after two-year antitrust battle with federal regulators.

Nissan to begin exporting China-developed electric vehicles to global markets; China accounted for about 20% of the Japanese carmaker's total worldwide sales in 2023.

Politics & World Affairs

At least 61 migrants, including women and children, drown after their ship sank off the coast of Libya reportedly en route to Europe. Kuwaiti leader Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah dies at 86.

Former UN ambassador Nikki Haley narrows gap with frontrunner former President Donald Trump in New Hampshire presidential primary polls, trails by 15%; GOP state primary to be held Jan. 23.

Arlington National Cemetery to remove 1914 bronze statue commemorating Confederacy within the week; 40 Republican congressmen recently called for monument to remain in place.

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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

Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 272nd St. and 480th Ave., 11 miles north of Canton, SD

When: 7:37a.m., Sunday, December 17, 2023

Vehicle 1: 1997 Chevrolet CK 107

Driver 1: Male, 27, Fatal injuries

Lincoln County, S.D.- A 27-year-old Brandon, SD man died Sunday morning in a single vehicle crash in Lincoln County.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a man driving a 1997 Chevrolet CK 107 was driving westbound on 272nd Street and ran the stop sign at the T-intersection with 480th Avenue. The vehicle went airborne and struck the embankment. The driver was pronounced deceased at the scene. He was not wearing a seatbelt.

Alcohol 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.

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NSU Wrestling

Turnquist and Bahr Place, Wolves Finish Ninth from Midwest Classic

Indianapolis – The No. 13 Northern State University wrestling team finished the Midwest Classic with a ninth place team finish, scoring 85.5 points. No. 1 Wyatt Turnquist and No. 10 Devin Bahr placed first and third in the respective weights to lead the Wolves.

HOW IT HAPPENED

Jason Henschel Jr., Braydon Mogle, and Nathan Schauer were also in action on day two, dropping their opening matches of the day

Turnquist tallied back-to-back major decision wins in route to the 149-pound championship. He opened his day with a 10-2 victory over Ryan Moore of Thomas More and sealed the top spot with a 15-7 win over No. 7 Jacob Ealy of Pitt-Johnstown

Bahr had a busy day, going 4-0 in the consolation side of the bracket

He notched wins over Ben Durocher of Parkside (Dec 5-1), Guy Deleonardis of Glenville State (Dec 8-6), No. 8 Drew Wiechers of Ashland (Inj. 0:55), and Keegan Roberson of UNC Pembroke (Dec 9-5) in the third place match

Turnquist scored 28.5 team points for the Wolves, while Bahr added 20.0 points

UP NEXT

Northern will return to the mat January 5 and 6 from the NWCA National Duals in Cedar Falls, Iowa. 16 of the top programs in NCAA Division II will compete in dual action.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM

GT
Groton Area
Tigers

Tuesday, Dec. 19
City Council Meeting
7 p.m.



TR

Aberdeen Roncalli Cavaliers

Tuesday, Dec. 19: Girls at Aberdeen Roncalli

C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., Varsity game to follow

Thursday, Dec. 21: Boys hosting Aberdeen Roncalli

C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., Varsity game to follow

If you are not a GDI subscriber, purchase your \$5 ticket at GDILIVE.COM

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Weekly Vikings Recap - Battle of the Backups

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

In a rare Saturday afternoon NFL game, the Minnesota Vikings headed to Cincinnati to face the Bengals in what was a battle of the backup quarterbacks, Nick Mullens and Jake Browning. Coming into the game, both the Bengals and Vikings were 7-6 and needed a win to keep their playoff hopes alive.

The story of the Vikings the last few weeks has been the defense, which before this game had not allowed a touchdown since November 19. That streak continued through the first three quarters on Saturday as the Vikings' defense was able to hold Browning and the Bengals to only three points. And then the fourth quarter happened...

On the offensive side of the ball, the Vikings took the conservative route on Saturday as they relied heavily on the running game. Ty Chandler, who got his first career start with Alexander Mattison out with an injury, showed that he might be the Vikings best running back going forward. Chandler had 132 yards and a touchdown on 23 carries, plus three catches for 25 yards. Saturday's game was the first time a Vikings running back hit 100 rushing yards since week 10 of last season.

The big question coming into the game was how Nick Mullens was going to perform in his first career start with the Vikings. The problem with backup quarterbacks is they tend to make inexcusable mistakes, and Nick Mullens was no different on Saturday. In the second quarter, the Vikings managed to drive down the field down into the red zone on back-to-back drives. Both times those drives ended on a Nick Mullens' interception. For a game where ball control and taking any points you can get was going to win the Vikings this game, Mullens' two interceptions cost the Vikings at least six points in the first half.

Thankfully, after halftime, Kevin O'Connell decided to go back to what gave the Vikings success in the first half and gave the ball to Ty Chandler, who broke out for a 24-yard run on the first play of the second half with the Vikings backed up on their eight-yard line. And, when the Vikings needed a big play on a crucial third down, Mullens made a clutch throw to Jordan Addison for a 37-yard touchdown to give the Vikings a 14-3 lead.

After the Vikings kicked a field goal to extend their lead to 17-3, the Vikings' streak of no touchdowns finally came to an end on a Tee Higgins touchdown at the start of the fourth quarter. With that touchdown, the entire momentum of the game seemed to flip as the Bengals quickly scored another touchdown to tie the game 17-17 with 9:00 remaining in the game.

Although the momentum was on the Bengals' side, luck was on the Vikings' side as on the next drive, Mullens had a pick-six overturned thanks to the Bengals being offside. And, when Mullens made a highly dangerous throw into the endzone, somehow it resulted in a Jordan Addison touchdown to give the Vikings back the lead, 24-17. However, that lead lasted only a few minutes as the Bengals tied the game 24-24 on another Tee Higgins touchdown. For the first time this season, a Vikings game went into overtime.

After stopping the Bengals on their first drive, the Vikings got the ball with only needing a field goal to win the game. However, their drive got stalled at midfield after failing to convert back-to-back quarterback sneaks on third and fourth down. The mindboggling thing for the Vikings was the decision to run the same thing on each play with Brandon Powell, the smallest player on the entire roster, lining up behind Mullens to push him. Unfortunately, the Bengals would immediately drive down the field for the game-winning field goal.

Vikings 24 - Bengals 27

Next week, the final push of the season will start for the Vikings as they host the Detroit Lions on Christmas Eve next week. The Vikings will need to win multiple games over the Lions and Packers if they want to make the playoffs.

Unraveling Medical Myths

Myths are just stories we tell ourselves and others to make sense of the world around us. Myths convey beliefs or values and attempt to tell truths. In their effort to tell the truth, myths may exaggerate or misrepresent things. Sometimes this misrepresentation is innocent, while other times it is used as a tool to regulate or manipulate people. Myths can be used to give a sense of power and control over an overwhelming situation.

Of the many types of myths, ones that deal with medicine are particularly common. A person's life can feel out of control during times of sickness or injury. It is easy to feel powerless when one's body is not feeling or acting normally. A story that helps explain why this is happening can be comforting. A story can assign blame to whom or what caused this. It can also serve as a lesson or a warning to others. In every myth there is usually some small bit of truth that makes it believable.

Look at the myth "going out with wet hair will cause you to catch pneumonia". It serves as a warning; if you do this, you could put your health in danger. Countless college students running late to early morning classes have tested this myth, including me. Science has proven that bacteria or viruses in the air entering your lungs cause pneumonia, not wet hair.

If you Google "Does going out with wet hair make you sick" – you will get over 50 million results in less than a second. If you look long enough, you will find at least one page to support whatever stance you want to take on this. Mayo clinic and Cleveland clinic both have websites stating this is a myth. Some websites say "this is a myth, but..." They go on to hypothesize subtle correlations between having wet hair and lowering nasal passage temperatures just enough to increase susceptibility to a virus that may already be there. Of course, there will always be grandmothers who insist that they are right, regardless of what any doctor, institution, or the internet says.

We live in an age of easy information. With so many answers and opinions, it is very easy to get overwhelmed and not know who or what to believe. This is why we at the Prairie Doc have strived to bring in experts each week to help give health information that is based on Science and built on Trust. We know that without science, we cannot bring you accurate information. More importantly, without trust, it really does not matter what we tell you. We hope that over the last twenty years we have earned that trust. Please continue to tune in to South Dakota Public Television, Facebook, or YouTube and ask those questions. We are here for you and truly look forward to discussing your questions each week. We will help you separate medical myth from fact so you can "Stay Healthy Out There".

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices as a hospitalist in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook and Instagram featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, streaming live on Facebook and SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Jill Kruse, DO



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

Noem channeling Janklow as she struggles with funding teacher pay by Dana Hess

It was New Year's Eve, sometime back near the start of this century. My wife, sons and I were ready for a family party. The pizza had just been delivered. A PG movie was cued up in the VCR. That's when the phone rang. My wife didn't look particularly pleased when she told me, "It's Bill Janklow." She knew from experience that calls at home from the governor were lengthy.

At the time, I was the editor of the Capital Journal in Pierre. Janklow was famous for calling reporters and editors at home to lodge complaints about what he read in their publications. I didn't get that many calls from him, but they were never words of praise for what I'd written.

I told my wife to start the movie and I took the call in another room. Janklow said he was catching up on his reading. He was upset with an editorial I'd written three months prior.

Janklow was of the opinion that school districts, instead of putting their money into reserves, should spend that money on updated equipment or teacher pay. The editorial he took issue with said that it was understandable for school districts to squirrel some money away since it seemed that every legislative session spawned some new ideas about how to "improve" the school funding formula.

According to the governor, I was playing into the hands of school boards that chose to sit on tax dollars rather than spend it on education. "Those people are laughing at you," Janklow said. It was a long phone call. Let's say that no minds were changed and leave it at that.

I got off the phone wondering about the governor's social life. Surely he should have something better to do on New Year's Eve than harangue editors. But then I was the one who was home to take the call. Maybe I'm the one who needed a social life.

Janklow's interest in school budget reserves led to a policy that limited the size of those reserves. Gov. Mike Rounds didn't like that policy and uncapped the reserves. Limiting budget reserves was invoked again by Gov. Dennis Daugaard's Blue Ribbon Task Force. Yes, I feel vindicated for my 20-some-year-old editorial saying that someone in government has always got a better idea about how to fund schools.

I remembered Janklow's call while listening to Gov. Kristi Noem deliver her budget address. While she lacked Janklow's vitriol, she did channel his frustration as she talked about her struggles with getting school districts to make teacher pay a priority.

Noem noted that school funding will have increased 26% since she took office in 2019, if her recent budget proposal is adopted. Meanwhile, the state's average teacher pay increased about 10% from 2019 to this year. That lack of attention to teacher pay has caused South Dakota to once again fall into the basement of national rankings, clocking in at 49th.

"Why should we continue to send money to school administrators and school boards when they don't pass it on to teachers?" Noem asked, and somewhere Bill Jankow was smiling.

Noem was short on specifics but did promise action, saying that she's working with Secretary of Education Joseph Graves to find some method for compelling school districts to invest more of their tax dollars in teacher pay.

To some degree, Noem's task is more challenging than Jankow's. While Janklow wanted school districts to save less and spend more, Noem will seek to have them spend more on a specific line item.

South Dakotans have always been proud of the way that their school boards have local control of their own spending. If Noem is to succeed at getting school districts to invest more in teacher pay, the state may very well have to take over some control of local school budgets.

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

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What's the deal with food dyes in sodas and other drinks? Are they really bad for us, and how can we avoid them if so?

-- Laura C., Pittsburgh, PA

Food dyes have been a controversial ingredient in sodas and various beverages for decades, due to concerns about their potential health risks. These dyes are synthetic color additives used to enhance the visual appeal of foods and drinks. While they serve an aesthetic purpose, their safety and impact on health have sparked considerable debate among consumers and health experts.

The most commonly used food dyes in beverages include Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, and Blue 1. These dyes are derived from petroleum or coal tar sources and undergo rigorous testing by regulatory agencies like the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before approval for use in food and drinks.

Critics argue that these synthetic dyes might be problematic, especially in sensitive individuals. Research has suggested potential links between artificial food dyes and behavioral problems in children, such as hyperactivity and attention issues. However, the scientific evidence remains inconclusive, with some studies supporting these claims while others find no significant impact on behavior.

Moreover, some individuals might experience adverse reactions or allergies to certain food dyes, resulting in skin rashes, digestive problems or respiratory issues. For these people, avoiding products containing artificial dyes may be crucial to feeling their best.

To steer clear of artificial food dyes in beverages, consumers can opt for alternatives that prioritize natural colorants or those that don't use any added dyes. Several brands offer drinks made with natural coloring from fruit or vegetable extracts, such as beet juice, turmeric or spirulina, to achieve vibrant hues without resorting to synthetic dyes. Reading product labels meticulously is vital making the right choices. Furthermore, choosing homemade or freshly squeezed juices, herbal teas or infused water can eliminate exposure to artificial dyes altogether. These options not only ensure a lack of synthetic additives but also provide nutritional benefits and a more wholesome drinking experience.

Maintaining a balanced and varied diet with an emphasis on whole, unprocessed foods will help you steer clear of most troublesome synthetic ingredients. By reducing reliance on heavily processed beverages, individuals can limit their exposure to not just artificial dyes but also excess sugar, artificial sweeteners and other potentially harmful additives commonly found in commercial sodas and drinks.

Nutritionists and public health advocates continue to worry about all the synthetic dyes in our food supply these days and are hoping for more research to clear up whether or not these often-unnecessary additives are doing irreparable harm to our individual bodies and our collective health.

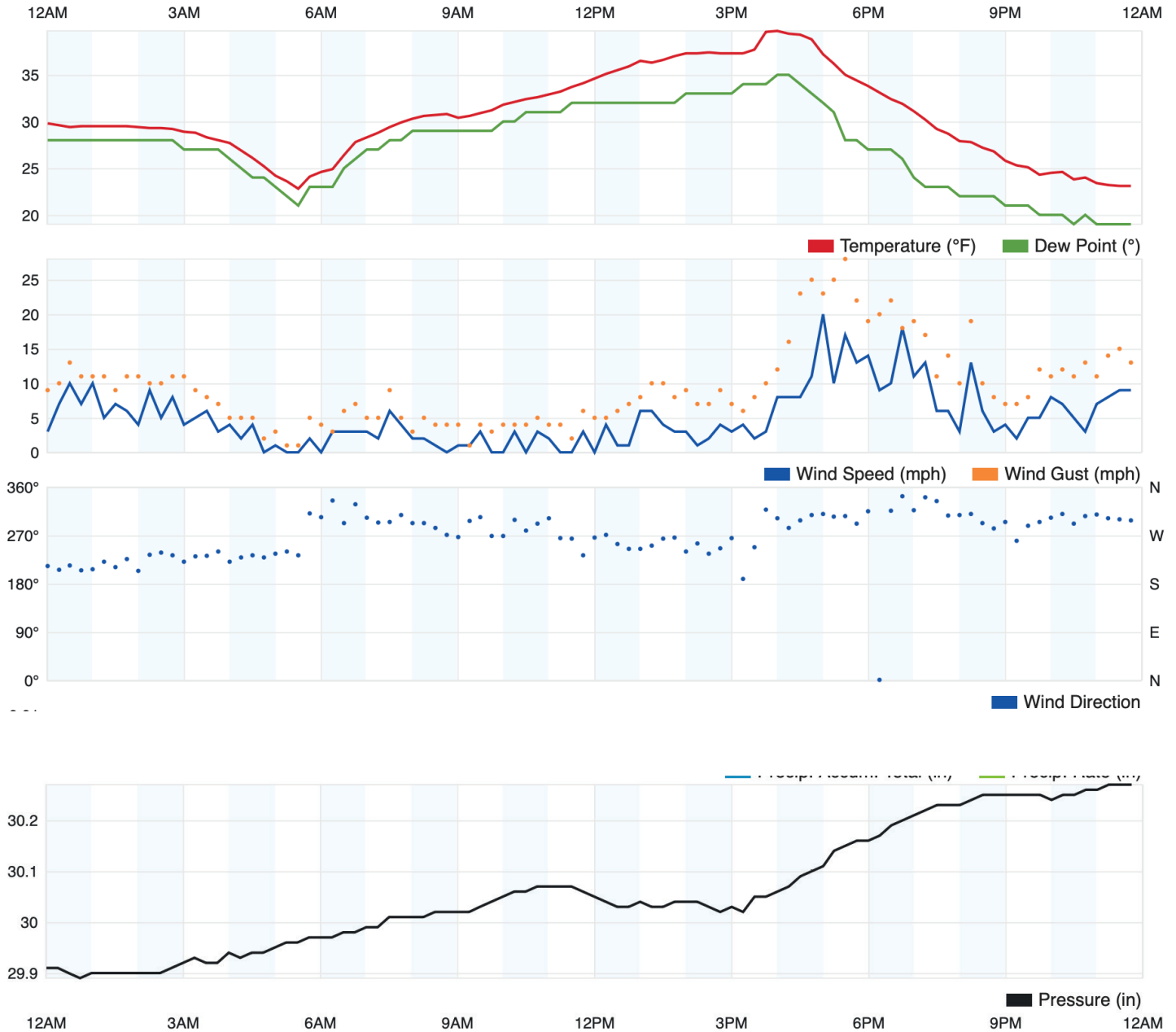


Food dyes in sodas and other drinks can cause health issues for those sensitive to such chemicals. Credit: Robbins Flores, Pexels.com

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Dec 18	Dec 19	Dec 20	Dec 21	Dec 22	Dec 23	Dec 24
						
30°F 23°F	41°F 22°F	41°F 26°F	43°F 27°F	44°F 30°F	50°F 38°F	47°F 31°F
NNW 12 MPH	S 12 MPH	NE 7 MPH	SE 6 MPH	S 7 MPH	SSE 12 MPH	ESE 13 MPH
						40%



Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/aberndeen

3-Day Outlook

Today



30s, except
upper 20s east of
the James River

Tuesday



40s

Wednesday



40s



Well above normal temperatures
Tuesday through at least Christmas

Our dry weather will continue through at least the day Saturday, the 23rd. After a cooler, but still at or above normal day temperature wise today, temperatures will top out 10 to 20 degrees above normal Tuesday through at least Christmas. Expect highs in the 40s to near 50 degrees for much of the work week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 40 °F at 3:53 PM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 5:35 AM

Wind: 28 mph at 5:26 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1979

Record Low: -37 in 2016

Average High: 28

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.34

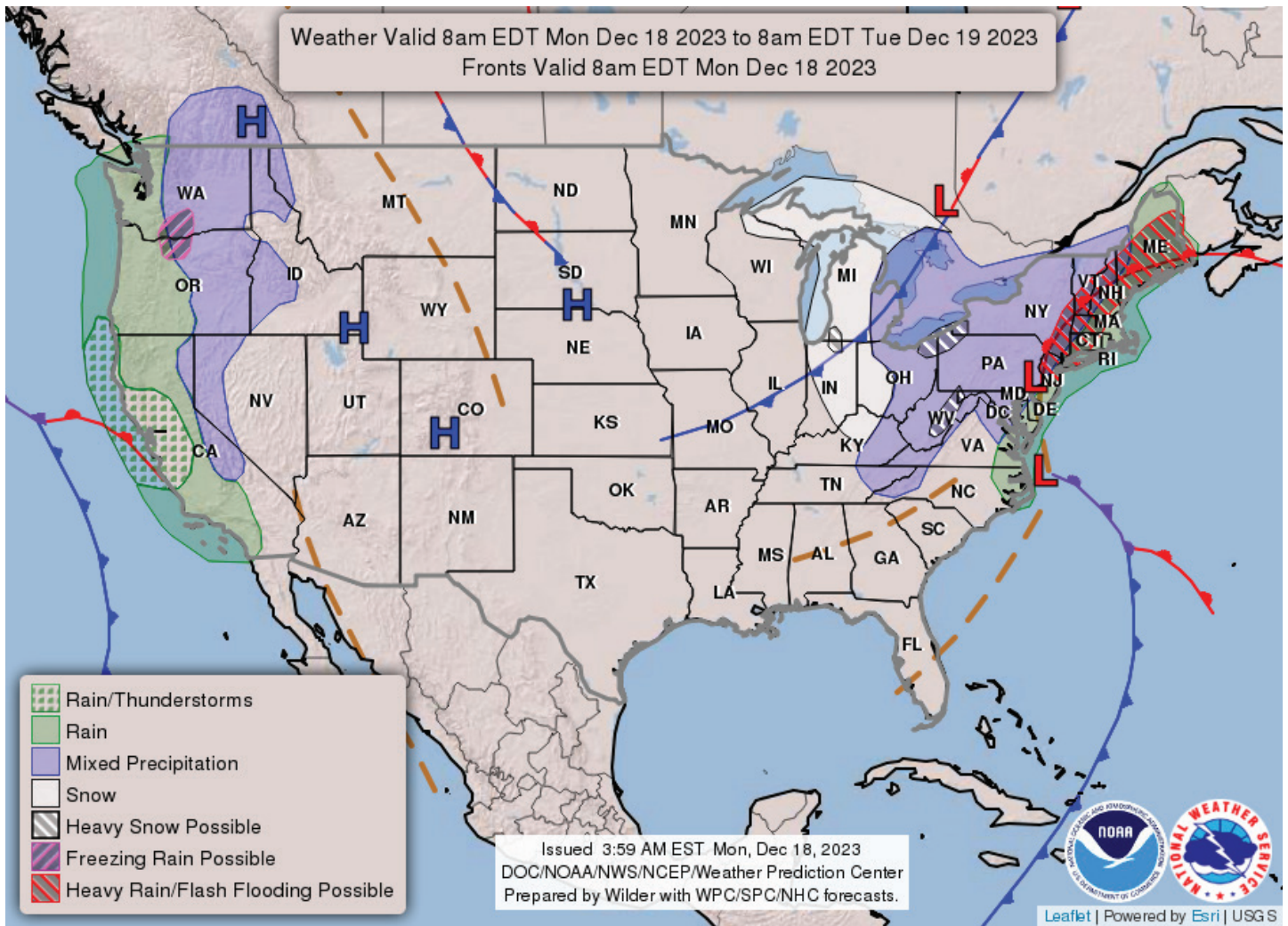
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.55

Precip Year to Date: 23.17

Sunset Tonight: 4:52:18 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06:16 am



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Today in Weather History

December 18, 1985: Bitter cold impacted most places in South Dakota as low temperatures dropped 20 degrees below zero or lower. The coldest temperature was 30 below zero at Huron in Beadle County and Canton in Lincoln County. Aberdeen dropped to 22 below zero, Highmore and Mobridge fell to 23 below zero; Britton fell to 24 below zero, and Summit bottomed out at 25 below.

December 18, 1996: A powerful Alberta Clipper and a slow-moving deep Arctic high-pressure system brought widespread, prolonged blizzard conditions to the entire region from the 16th to the 19th. The clipper dropped from 1 to 5 inches of snowfall on top of the already extensive snow cover of 1 to almost 4 feet. Across central and north-central South Dakota, northerly winds increased to 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 55 mph late in the morning of the 16th. Temperatures also fell, and widespread blizzard conditions and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 70 below zero developed, prevailing through noon on the 18th. Across northeast South Dakota, conditions changed through late on the day of the 16th, with widespread blowing snow, falling temperatures, and dangerous wind chills. Blizzard conditions developed on the morning of the 17th and continued into the evening of the 18th. Conditions changed throughout the afternoon of the 16th in west-central Minnesota, with a full-fledged blizzard by the morning of the 17th.

North winds of 30 to 40 mph gusting to 50 mph brought visibilities near zero and caused heavy drifting, making travel difficult. Many people had to be rescued from their vehicles after getting stuck in massive snowdrifts or going into ditches because of low visibilities. Some people had to wait to be rescued for many hours, for some over a day. Due to the massive amount of blowing snow, widespread heavy drifting occurred across the entire area, blocking roads, making travel difficult, and leaving some people stranded to wait out the storm. Some snowdrifts from the storm were as high as 15 feet, with a few houses almost buried. A Burlington Northern locomotive became stuck in a 12-foot drift near Hazel and had to be dug out. Due to the weight of the snow, the roof of a hangar at the Gettysburg Airport collapsed on an airplane.

All schools were let out early on the 16th, with some schools not reopening until the 20th. Several school buses went into the ditch or got stuck in drifts and had to be pulled out. There were several accidents, most with minor injuries; however, one accident in Dewey County resulted in serious injury. Most of the roads, state highways and Interstate 90 were closed for a day or two until road crews could get to them. Interstate 29 also received heavy drifting, with parts of it closed for a while during the storm. Most snow plows had to be called back because they could not see the roads or the roads would be drifted over shortly after they were plowed. Some county snow removal budgets were already depleted or were close to being consumed. Emergency personnel and road crews were working extended hours to keep up with the storm. Rescue vehicles had a difficult time responding to emergencies. In one case, a lady from Mobridge had to be brought to Aberdeen. The 100-mile trip took six hours. Also, a rural Westport man died because the rescue units could not get to him in time.

Airports were closed, or flights were canceled or delayed. Mail was delayed for some people up to several days with a massive backup of Christmas packages. Some government offices and many businesses were closed for several days. All sports and other activities were postponed or canceled. Farmers and ranchers had a difficult time getting feed to their livestock. Many cattle were loose and had to be found as they walked on snowdrifts over fences. The storm also killed several animals and a countless number of pheasants with some buried in the snow. Several dairy producers had to dump thousands of pounds of milk because trucks could not get to them in time. Fortunately, there were only spotty power outages throughout the storm. For several hours on the night of the 16th in the extreme cold, 3000 people in Pierre were without power for several hours.

December 18th, 2016 An Arctic airmass over the Northern Plains produced bitterly cold temperatures. In South Dakota, both Aberdeen and Watertown broke their record low by several degrees, with both falling to 37 degrees below zero. The Arctic air combined with 10 to 20 mph winds brought wind chills to 35 to 60 degrees below zero across the region.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NEVER QUIT!

"Don't let this be you!" said a coach to his football team after a difficult loss. He was pointing to a picture of a player sitting in front of his locker. His helmet was between his feet. His elbows were on his knees and his head was between his hands with a look of sadness in his eyes. Under his helmet were the words, "I quit!"

As we look into the manger this Christmas, we can rejoice together and say, "Thank You, God, that You didn't quit – that You never gave up!"

Whenever we think of the eternal love that God has for us, we often forget about the disappointments He must have endured. Imagine, if you can, what must have entered into His mind and heart when Adam and Eve rejected His plan and the path before them. Consider, if you will, the many agreements He made with people who promised to obey Him and then abandoned their word when they thought He was out of sight. We will never know the grief He suffered because of the hope He had that people would love Him and be obedient to Him.

But, He never gave up. He never quit. Finally, John wrote, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world!"

All of us have suffered many losses in life. None, however, can ever be compared to God's losses. But He refused to give up even though it cost the life of His one and only Son.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your unfailing love and determination to rescue us. We are overwhelmed when we think that You would sacrifice Your Son for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.



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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 32 Mins 58 Secs

[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: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.17.23

6 14 21 37 43 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

2 7 9 13 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$97,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.16.23

9 39 41 46 65 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 59 Secs

[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: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Eliza Hollingsworth has 17 points and 12 rebounds, No. 21 Gonzaga beats South Dakota St. 83-58

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Eliza Hollingsworth had 17 points and 12 rebounds, Yvonne Ejim scored 16 points and Brynna Maxwell added 15 to help No. 21 Gonzaga cruise to an 83-58 win over South Dakota State on Sunday.

Gonzaga (11-2), which has won five games in a row since an 81-70 loss to No. 18 Louisville on Nov. 26, improved to 1-3 all time against South Dakota State.

Hollingsworth shot 6 of 9 from the field and 3 of 4 from 3-point range and finished with two steals and two blocks.

Mesa Byon and Jenna Popp scored 12 points apiece to lead South Dakota State (6-4).

Ejim scored 10 points on 5-of-5 shooting as the Bulldogs jumped to a 17-4 lead with 4:26 left in the first quarter and South Dakota State trailed by double figures the rest of the way. Madison Mathiowetz converted a three-point play that trimmed the deficit to 12 early in the second quarter but Ejim answered with a bucket in the paint, Maxwell followed with a layup and Hollingsworth hit a 3-pointer to make it 35-14 with 5:41 remaining in the first half.

The Zags shot 67% (20 of 30) from the field, 6 of 11 (55%) from 3-point range, and scored 15 points off eight SDSU turnovers before intermission.

Brooklyn Meyer, who went into the game leading the Jackrabbits — and the Summit League — in scoring (17.0 per game), rebounding (9.8) and blocks (2.3), had just two points, on 1-of-5 shooting, and a rebound at halftime. The sophomore finished with four points and two rebounds — both season lows — in 25 minutes.

South Dakota State wraps up a two-game road trip Thursday at No. 20 Creighton. Gonzaga plays Arizona at the Jerry Colangelo Classic in Phoenix on Wednesday.

Mintz scores 18, Copeland 15 and Syracuse eases past Oregon 83-63

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Judah Mintz scored 18 points, Quadir Copeland had 15 points, nine rebounds and five assists off the bench, and Syracuse defeated Oregon 83-63 on Sunday.

Oregon took an early 14-5 lead but Syracuse stormed back and took a 21-20 lead on a dunk by Benny Williams. The Orange stretched their lead to eight points when Williams dunked off a long lob pass from Mintz with 23 seconds left in the half. Syracuse led 33-25 at the break after outscoring Oregon 28-11 over the final 11 1/2 minutes of the period.

Justin Taylor opened the second half with a 3-pointer for Syracuse and the Orange kept up the pressure, although Oregon got as close as 59-44 when Jermaine Couisnard hit a 3-pointer with 9 1/2 to go. But after a quiet first half, Mintz scored 12 points after halftime and Syracuse led by at least 20 points for most of the final 6 minutes.

Mintz had five assists, four steals and three rebounds, although he committed six turnovers. JJ Starling scored 14 points and Maliq Brown had 13 points and four steals off the bench. The Orange (8-3) shot 56.6%, although they made only 5 of 13 3-pointers.

Kwame Evans Jr. scored 17 points, Jackson Shelstad 16 and Kario Oquendo 11 off the bench for Oregon (7-3). The Ducks shot 36% and made only 4 of 27 3-pointers. Couisnard, their leading scorer at 12.3 ppg, scored six points on 2-of-9 shooting.

Syracuse wraps up nonconference play with a home game against Niagara on Thursday. Oregon, too, finishes nonconference play on Thursday when the Ducks will host Kent State.

Police say a Minnesota officer shot and killed a man who was stabbing a woman

MARSHALL, Minn. (AP) — Police in Minnesota say an officer shot and killed a man early Sunday after spotting him stabbing a woman.

Marshall police said in a news release that the officer responded around 2:40 a.m. to a domestic disturbance. Authorities said the officer used a Taser on the man after seeing the woman was being stabbed. Ultimately, shots were fired, although the news release provided few details.

The news release said the suspect died at the scene and that the woman was flown to a hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in critical condition. Neither of their names were immediately released.

Police asked the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to investigate. The agency confirmed in a message posted on X, formerly Twitter, that it is looking into what it described as a "use-of-deadly-force incident." It provided no other details.

In Israel, the US defense secretary is expected to press for a more targeted approach in Gaza

By TARA COPP, MELANIE LIDMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was expected to press Israel to wind down major combat operations in Gaza on a visit Monday, in the latest test of whether the U.S. can leverage its unwavering support for the offensive to blunt its devastating impact on Palestinian civilians.

France, the U.K. and Germany — some of Israel's closest allies — joined global calls for a cease-fire over the weekend, and Israeli protesters have demanded the government relaunch talks with Hamas on releasing more hostages after three were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops while waving a white flag.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will keep fighting until it removes Hamas from power, crushes its still-formidable military capabilities and returns the dozens of hostages still held by the group after its Oct. 7 attack, which ignited the war.

The U.S. has vetoed calls for a cease-fire at the U.N. and rushed munitions to its close ally while pressing it to take greater steps to avoid harming civilians. More than 100 people were killed in strikes on residential buildings in northern Gaza on Sunday, a Health Ministry official in the Hamas-run territory said. The 10-week-old war has killed over 18,700 Palestinians and transformed much of the north into a moonscape.

Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes, with most packing into U.N.-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the besieged territory.

Austin and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown, who arrived in Tel Aviv on Monday, are expected to press Israeli leaders to transition to a new phase of the war after weeks of heavy bombardment and a ground offensive. American officials have called for targeted operations aimed at killing Hamas leaders, destroying tunnels and rescuing hostages.

Under U.S. pressure, Israel provided more precise evacuation instructions as troops moved into the southern city of Khan Younis earlier this month, though Palestinians say nowhere in Gaza is safe as Israel continues to carry out strikes in all parts of the territory.

Israel reopened its main cargo crossing with Gaza to allow more aid in — also after a request from the U.S. But the amount is still less than half of prewar imports, even as needs have soared and fighting hinders delivery in many areas.

UNPRECEDENTED DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

The war began with an unprecedented surprise attack by Hamas that overwhelmed Israel's border defenses. Thousands of militants rampaged across southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 240 men, women and children.

Hamas and other militants are still holding an estimated 129 captives after most of the rest were freed in return for Israel's release of 240 Palestinian prisoners during a truce last month. Hamas has said no more hostages will be released until the war ends.

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More than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory, which has said most are women and minors, and that thousands more are buried under the rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

Israel's military says 127 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive. It says it has killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, saying it uses them as human shields when it operates in dense, residential areas. But the military rarely comments on individual strikes.

At least 110 people were killed in Israel's bombardment of residential buildings in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza on Sunday, Munir al-Boursh, a senior Health Ministry official, told Al-Jazeera television.

The area has seen heavy fighting in recent days. "No one can retrieve the martyrs or take the wounded to hospitals," said Amal Radwan, who is staying at a U.N. shelter in Jabaliya.

The military meanwhile released pictures of what it said was around \$1.3 million in Israeli currency found in the home of a senior Hamas operative in the camp.

ISRAEL RAIDS ANOTHER HOSPITAL

Heavy fighting around Gaza's hospitals has forced most of them to shut down. Israel accuses militants of sheltering in health facilities and has provided evidence in some cases. Health officials deny the allegations and say the army has recklessly endangered civilians.

The World Health Organization said it was "appalled" by an Israeli raid on northern Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital over the last several days. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said late Sunday that at least eight patients had died, including a 9-year-old, and that several had fled on foot because ambulances could not reach the facility.

The military said troops operating in and around the hospital had detained dozens of suspected militants, some of whom had taken part in the Oct. 7 attack, and had seized "numerous" weapons. It said the hospital had been used as a command center by Hamas, without providing evidence.

A similar standoff unfolded last month at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City — the territory's largest — where hundreds of patients and tens of thousands of displaced people were stranded for days with little food, water or medical supplies. Israel said Hamas concealed a major command center inside the hospital, and revealed what appeared to be a militant hideout beneath the facility before withdrawing days later.

The WHO, which is working to restore services at Shifa and was able to visit on Friday, described its emergency department as a "bloodbath," with hundreds of wounded patients, some being sutured on the floor with little or no pain medicine. It said tens of thousands of people are sheltering in the medical compound despite severe shortages of food and water.

REGIONAL TENSIONS

The war has repeatedly spilled over into other areas of the region.

Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have traded fire along the border nearly every day since the war began, and other Iran-backed militant groups have attacked U.S. targets in Syria and Iraq. Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi rebels have targeted ships in the Red Sea with missiles and drones.

Over 300 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank since the start of the war, including four overnight during an Israeli military raid in the built-up Faraa refugee camp, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

This has been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since 2005. Most have been killed during military raids, which often ignite gunbattles, or during violent demonstrations.

U.S. defense leaders are hoping to prevent a wider regional conflict, both through a U.S. military presence and by urging Israel to scale back operations. President Joe Biden has warned that Israel is losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing."

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said last week that his country would continue major combat operations against Hamas for several more months.

Hallucinations, thirst and desperation: How migrants endured 36 days at sea

By RENATA BRITO and FELIPE DANA Associated Press

FASS BOYE, Senegal (AP) — The voyage from the struggling Senegalese fishing town of Fass Boye to Spain's Canary Islands, a gateway to the European Union where they hoped to find work, was supposed to take a week.

But the wooden boat carrying 101 men and boys was getting blown further and further away from its destination.

No land was in sight. Yet four men believed — or hallucinated — they could swim to shore. They picked up empty water containers and wooden planks — anything to help them float. And one by one, they leapt.

Dozens more would do the same before disappearing into the ocean. The migrants still in the boat watched as their brothers faded. Those who died onboard were tossed into the ocean until the survivors had no energy left and bodies began accumulating.

On day 36, a Spanish fishing vessel spotted them. It was Aug. 14 and they were 290 kilometers (180 miles) northeast of Cape Verde, the last cluster of islands in the eastern central Atlantic Ocean before the vast nothingness that separates West Africa from the Caribbean.

For 38 men and boys, it was salvation. For the other 63, it was too late.

Too often, migrants disappear without a trace, without witnesses, without memory.

As the number of people leaving Senegal for Spain this year surged to record levels, The Associated Press spoke to dozens of survivors, rescuers, aid workers and officials to understand what the men endured at sea, and why many are willing to risk their lives again. Theirs is a rare chronicle of the treacherous migration route from West Africa to Europe.

Senegalese fisherman Papa Dieye was struggling to survive on earnings of 20,000 CFA francs (\$33) a month. "There are no fish left in the ocean," he laments.

Years of overfishing by industrial vessels from Europe, China and Russia had wiped out Senegalese fishermen's livelihoods — pushing them to desperate measures.

"We want to work to build houses for our mothers, little brothers and sisters," he explains.

For the first few days, the voyage proceeded slowly but smoothly. On day five, the winds rebelled.

Tensions on board rose, explains Ngouda Boye, 30, another fisherman from Fass Boye. "When we could almost see Spain, the fuel ran out," Dieye says. It was day 10.

Back in Fass Boye, relatives were beginning to grow anxious. The 1,500-kilometer voyage from Senegal to the Canaries normally takes a week. Ten days later, they had no news.

Migrant arrivals to the Canaries hit a record 35,000 people this year, more than double the previous year. For others, the migration journey has ended in tragedy. Entire boats have gone missing in the Atlantic, becoming what are known as "invisible shipwrecks."

Spanish authorities routinely fly over a massive area of the Atlantic around the Canary Islands looking for lost migrants. But the vast distances, volatile weather conditions and relatively small boats mean they are easily missed.

Massive cargo ships passed the would-be migrants by almost every day, destabilizing their shaky wooden canoe-like boat, known as a pirogue. No one came to their rescue. Under international law, captains are required "to render assistance to any person found at sea in danger of being lost." But the law is hard to enforce.

It didn't take long for passengers to start pointing fingers at the captain, who was not a native of Fass Boye. "He did things like a sorcerer. He spoke gibberish," Dieye recounts. Belief in witchcraft and the power of curses is strong across West Africa.

"They tied him up," Dieye says. "He was the first to die."

Into their third week, they ran out of water. There was nothing left but the ocean. Those who tried to quench their thirst with saltwater died. Those who took only tiny sips survived. The hunger tortured them as much as the thirst.

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"Sometimes I sat at the ledge of the pirogue," Bathie Gaye, a 31-year-old survivor from Diogo Sur Mer, Senegal, recalls, "so if I died, I wouldn't have to tire the others — they could just push me over."

Fernando Ncula, a 22-year-old from Guinea-Bissau, was one of only two foreigners on board. His friend succumbed to thirst and hunger around day 25, Ncula recalls.

When he opened his eyes the next morning, his friend's body was gone. Others had thrown it in the ocean. He was the only outsider left, and became terrified he would be thrown overboard, too.

"Why are you not tired like the rest of us?" Ncula remembers being interrogated. They tied him up.

Unable to move, and without food or water, he fell in and out of consciousness for two days. Finally, an older man took pity on him and cut him loose. His savior later died, too.

Death seemed inevitable; waiting for it was unbearable. As they reached the one-month mark, people started to jump in a desperate attempt to swim to safety, or perhaps to put themselves out of misery. Thirty men and boys died that way, survivors say.

Two nights after the last men jumped, lights appeared in the sky. It was the Zillarri, a Belize-flagged, Spanish-owned tuna fishing support vessel.

"They were so skinny. I saw their eyes and teeth and only bones," Abdou Aziz Niang, a Senegalese mechanic working on the ship, remembers. "How long have you been here?" he asked them.

It had been 36 days. Now these men — who were fleeing for Europe because industrial overfishing had made their livelihoods untenable — were being rescued by a European fishing vessel.

Finally, the ship received instructions: Take the rescued people to the closest port, Palmeira, on the island of Sal in Cape Verde, 290 kilometers (180 miles) away.

They were alive, yes. But at what cost? Relatives had invested in their journey to Europe, selling possessions to pay for their trip, hoping the young men would get jobs and send money back home. Instead, they would return with empty hands and terrible news.

Without jobs, the survivors are back where they started. They are still looking for ways out — even if that means gambling their lives again.

Among them is Boye. Boarding another boat could leave his wife a widow and his two children fatherless. But "when you have no work," he says, "it's better to leave and try your luck."

North Korea conducts first long-range missile test in months, likely firing a solid-fueled weapon

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, likely launching a developmental, more agile weapon, as it vows strong responses against U.S. and South Korean moves to boost their nuclear deterrence plans.

The South Korean government described the missile tested as a solid-fueled weapon, a likely reference to the North's road-mobile Hwasong-18 ICBM whose built-in solid propellants make its launch more difficult for adversaries to detect than liquid-fueled weapons. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un previously called the Hwasong-18 the most powerful weapon of his nuclear forces.

South Korea's military said the North Korean missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. It said the missile was launched on an elevated angle, an apparent attempt to avoid neighboring countries. Japanese lawmaker Masahisa Sato, citing Japan's Defense Ministry, said the missile rose as high as 6,000 kilometers (3,730 miles).

The reported flight details matched those of North Korea's second test of the Hwasong-18 missile in July. The North first test-fired the missile in April.

Since 2017, North Korea has carried out a slew of ICBM tests in a bid to acquire the ability to launch nuclear strikes on the U.S. mainland. But all of its previous tests before April's Hwasong-18 launch involved liquid-propellant ICBMs, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan spoke with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts

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on the phone and condemned the North Korean launch as a violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by the North. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol separately ordered officials to maintain a solid South Korean-U.S. joint defense posture and respond "swiftly and overwhelmingly" to any North Korean provocations against South Korea.

The North's ICBM test was its second weapons firing in less than a day. On Sunday night, it launched a short-range ballistic missile designed to strike South Korea that also splashed in the water off its east coast, according to its neighbors.

Observers said the back-to-back launches were likely to protest announcements by South Korea and the United States that they will bolster their joint nuclear deterrence capabilities in the face of North Korea's evolving nuclear threats.

Senior U.S. and South Korean officials met in Washington on Friday for their second Nuclear Consultative Group meeting. They agreed to update their nuclear deterrence and contingency strategies and incorporate nuclear operation scenarios in their combined military exercises next summer, according to officials in Seoul.

The consultative body is responsible for sharing information on nuclear and strategic weapons operation plans and joint operations, though the U.S. will retain operational control of its nuclear weapons. U.S. officials said the group's establishment and other steps to solidify U.S. security commitment were meant to ease South Korean worries about North Korean provocations while keeping Seoul from pursuing its own nuclear program.

North Korea's Defense Ministry on Sunday called its rivals' decision to include nuclear operation scenarios in their joint drills an open threat to potentially use nuclear weapons against the North. It said any attempt by enemies to use military force against North Korea will be met with "a preemptive and deadly counteraction."

Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University, said North Korea's latest ICBM launch was seen as an effort to improve its military capability to attack the U.S. mainland because it views the South Korea-U.S. nuclear deterrence strategy as a security threat.

Park said the launch was also likely designed to boost Kim Jong Un's military credentials at home ahead of a key ruling party meeting next week as he appeared to lack economic achievements.

Since last year, North Korea has performed about 100 ballistic missile tests in what experts say is an attempt to enlarge its arsenal and wrest greater U.S. concessions. The U.S. and South Korea have responded by expanding their military drills and increased the temporary deployments of strategic U.S. assets such as aircraft carriers, nuclear-capable bombers and a nuclear-armed submarine in and near South Korea.

Du Hyeogn Cha, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said North Korea is expected to continue weapons testing to pressure the U.S. to change its policy on the North.

"No matter whether the Biden administration stays or steps out (of the White House) after the presidential election next year, North Korea will raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula to bring change of the U.S. government's policy on it," Cha said.

Animosities between the Koreas further deepened after North Korea launched its first military reconnaissance satellite into space on Nov. 21 in violation of U.N. bans. South Korea, the U.S. and Japan strongly condemned it as an attempt by the North to improve its missile technology as well as establish a space-based surveillance system.

The U.S., South Korea and Japan are pushing to put into operation the sharing of real-time missile warning data on North Korea within days, South Korea's Defense Ministry said Monday. Ministry officials said the three countries closely shared their information about Monday's launch.

Meeting with reporters in Tokyo, Adm. John Aquilino, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, expressed concerns about North Korea's increasing missile capabilities. But he said that the United States, Japan and South Korea are working more closely than ever and that they were even ready for Monday's launch and had mobilized their missile defense ships forward earlier this week.

"The fact that we were able to predict a launch and then posture forces in advance that was pretty, pretty impressive," Aquilino said, adding that it was not the first time but hard to do.

A gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's soldiers as war with Russia grinds on

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's soldiers nearly two years after Russia invaded their country.

Despite a disappointing counteroffensive this summer and signs of wavering financial support from allies, Ukrainian soldiers say they remain fiercely determined to win. But as winter approaches, they worry that Russia is better equipped for battle and are frustrated about being on the defensive again in a grueling war. Some doubt the judgment of their leaders.

Discontent among Ukrainian soldiers — once extremely rare and expressed only in private — is now more common and out in the open.

In the southern city of Kherson, where Ukraine is staging attacks against well-armed Russian troops on the other side of the Dnieper River, soldiers are asking why these difficult amphibious operations were not launched months ago in warmer weather.

"I don't understand," said a commander of the 11th National Guard Brigade's anti-drone unit who is known on the battlefield as Boxer. "Now it's harder and colder."

"It's not just my feeling, many units share it," said Boxer, who spoke on condition that only his battlefield name would be used.

Russia, which illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, controls about one-fifth of Ukraine. After 22 months of war the two countries are essentially in a stalemate along the 1,000 kilometer-long (620 mile-long) front line.

Russian forces aim to push deeper into eastern Ukraine this winter, analysts say, so that Russian President Vladimir Putin can cite this momentum as he campaigns for reelection, an outcome that is all but certain. Emboldened by recent gains on the battlefield, Putin said last week that he remains fully committed to the war and criticized Ukraine for "sacrificing" troops to demonstrate success to Western sponsors.

In the United States, which has already spent some \$111 billion defending Ukraine, President Joe Biden is advocating for an additional \$50 billion in aid. But Republican lawmakers are balking at more support — just as some lawmakers in Europe are on the fence about providing another \$50 billion to Ukraine, after failing to deliver on promised ammunition.

"The reason the Ukrainians are gloomy is that, they now sense, not only have they not done well this year ... they know that the Russians' game is improving," said Richard Barrons, a former British army general. "They see what's happening in Congress, and they see what happened in the EU."

Ukraine may be on the defensive this winter, but its military leaders say they have no intention of letting up the fight.

"If we won't have a single bullet, we will kill them with shovels," said Serhii, a commander in the 59th Brigade that is active in the eastern city of Avdiivka and who spoke on condition that only his first name be used. "Surely, everyone is tired of war, physically and mentally. But imagine if we stop — what happens next?"

BLEAK MOOD

The fatigue and frustration on the battlefield are mirrored in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, where disagreements among leaders have recently spilled out into the open.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last month publicly disputed the assessment by Ukraine's military chief, Valery Zaluzhny, that the war had reached a stalemate. And the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, has repeatedly lashed out at Zelenskyy, saying he holds too much power.

Disquiet in the halls of power appears to have filtered down to the military's rank and file, who increasingly have misgivings about inefficiency and faulty decision-making within the bureaucracy they depend on to keep them well-armed for the fight.

In the southern Ukrainian region of Zaporizhzhia, where momentum has slowed since the summertime counteroffensive, drones have become a crucial tool of war. They enable soldiers to keep an eye on — and

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hold back — Russian forces while they conduct dangerous and painstaking operations to clear minefields and consolidate territorial gains. But fighters there complain that the military has been too slow in training drone operators.

It took seven months to obtain the paperwork needed from multiple government agencies to train 75 men, said Konstantin Denisov, a Ukrainian soldier.

"We wasted time for nothing," he said. Commanders elsewhere complain of not enough troops, or delays in getting drones repaired, disrupting combat missions.

Defense Minister Rustem Umerov insists Ukraine has enough soldiers and weaponry to power the next phase of the fight.

"We are capable and able to protect our people and we will be doing it," he told the Associated Press. "We have a plan and we are sticking to that plan."

DEFENSIVE SHIFT

The limited momentum Ukraine's forces had during their summertime counteroffensive has slowed — from the forests in the northeast, to the urban centers in the east, to the slushy farmland in the south.

With Russia hoping to take the initiative this winter, Ukraine is mainly focused on standing its ground, according to interviews with a half dozen military commanders along the vast front line.

Despite wet, muddy ground that makes it harder to move tanks and other heavy weaponry around, the Russian army has bolstered its forces in the eastern Donetsk region, where it has recently stepped up offensive maneuvers.

"The main goal for the winter is to lose as few people as possible," said Parker, the Ukrainian commander of a mechanized battalion near Bakhmut who asked to go by his battlefield name to speak freely. Bakhmut is a city in eastern Ukraine that Russian forces took after months of heavy fighting.

"We have to be clear," Parker said. "It's not possible in the winter to liberate Donetsk or Bakhmut, because they have too many (fighters)."

Analysts say Ukraine may even be forced to cede patches of previously reclaimed territory this winter, though Russia is likely to pay a heavy price.

"If Russia keeps on attacking, the most likely outcome is that they'll make some very marginal territorial gains, but suffer enormous casualties in doing so," said Ben Barry, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

DRONES AND MEN

Some Ukrainian commanders across the front line say they lack the fighters and firepower needed to keep Russia's seemingly endless waves of infantrymen at arm's length as they fortify defenses to protect soldiers. That places ever more importance on attack drones — a weapon, they say, that Russia is currently better equipped with.

Indeed, while Ukrainian soldiers have proven to be resourceful and innovative on the battlefield, Moscow has dramatically scaled up its defense industry in the past year, manufacturing armored vehicles and artillery rounds at a pace Ukraine cannot match.

"Yes they're ahead of us in terms of supply," said Boxer, the commander in Kherson, who credited Russian drones with having longer range and more advanced software. "It allows the drone to go up 2,000 meters, avoid jammers," he said, whereas Ukrainian drones "can fly only 500 meters."

This poses a problem for his troops, who have been limited in their ability to strike Russian targets on the other side of the Dnieper River. To eventually deploy heavy weaponry, such as tanks, Ukraine first needs to push Russian forces back to erect pontoon bridges. Until they get more drones, this won't be possible, said Boxer.

"We wait for weapons we were supposed to receive months ago," he said.

To sustain the fight, Ukraine will also have to mobilize more men.

In the northeastern cities of Kupiansk and Lyman, Russian forces have deployed a large force with the goal of recapturing lost territory.

"They are simply weakening our positions and strongholds, injuring our soldiers, thereby forcing them to leave the battlefield," said Dolphin, a commander in the northeast who would only be quoted using his

battlefield name.

Dolphin says he has been unable to sufficiently re-staff. "I can say for my unit, we are prepared 60%," he said.

In Israel's killing of 3 hostages, some see the same excessive force directed at Palestinians

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israelis were left stunned and speechless when three hostages held by Hamas were killed by Israeli forces in the middle of an active war zone after they waved a white flag and screamed out in Hebrew to show they did not pose a threat.

For some, the incident was a shocking example of the ugliness of war, where a complex and dangerous battlefield is safe for no one. But for critics, the incident underscores what they say is the excessively violent conduct of Israel's security apparatus against Palestinians. Except in this case, it cut short the lives of three Israelis trying desperately to save themselves.

"It's heartbreaking but it's not surprising," said Roy Yellin, director of public outreach with the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. "We have documented over the years countless incidents of people who clearly surrendered and who were still shot."

Yellin said the killings violated basic military ethics and international law that prohibit shooting at people trying to surrender, whether combatants or not. But he said it was part of a long trend of largely unpunished excessive force that in recent weeks has ensnared Israelis themselves.

According to a military official, the three hostages, all men in their 20s, emerged from a building close to Israeli soldiers' positions in the Gaza City neighborhood of Shijaiyah, where troops have been battling Hamas militants in intense combat.

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.

The army's chief, Lt. Col. Herzl Halevi, said hostages "did everything possible" to make it clear they did not pose a threat, but that the soldiers acted "during combat and under pressure."

On Sunday, Halevi reviewed the rules of engagement with troops, saying the prohibition against opening fire on those who surrender must also apply to Palestinians.

"When you see two people who do not threaten you, who don't have weapons, who have their hands up and are not wearing shirts, take two seconds," he said in comments broadcast on Israeli TV. "And I want to tell you something that is no less important: if these are two Gazans with a white flag who want to surrender, will we shoot them? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. That is not the IDF (Israel Defense Forces)."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that the killings "broke my heart, broke the entire nation's heart," but he indicated no change in Israel's intensive military campaign. With popular opinion firmly behind the military effort, the hostages' deaths weren't likely to prompt a change in the public mood.

Israel says a number of hostages have died in Hamas captivity. But the deaths of the three hostages struck a nerve because they were killed by the forces trying to rescue them.

Roughly 129 hostages remain in the Gaza Strip, according to the Israeli military, and their plight has gripped the nation, which sees their captivity as the embodiment of the security failure surrounding Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war. The hostages' deaths prompted hundreds of demonstrators to take to the streets in anger.

It also came days after another incident raised questions about Israel's open-fire rules. After Hamas militants shot at a busy Jerusalem bus stop, an Israeli man who had rushed to confront the attackers was gunned down by an Israeli soldier, even though he had raised his hands, knelt on the ground and flung open his shirt to indicate he wasn't a threat. The military has launched an investigation.

Critics see a direct link between a long list of shooting deaths of Palestinians – from the killing of 32-year-

old autistic man Eyad Hallaq, to the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, and many more over the years – to the incidents that led to the deaths of Israelis.

Most recently, B'Tselem accused the army of carrying out a pair of “illegal executions” after releasing video footage that appeared to show Israeli troops killing two Palestinian men — one who was incapacitated and the second unarmed — during a military raid in the occupied West Bank. Military police are investigating, but rights groups say such incidents rarely lead to punitive measures.

Critics say the hostages incident reflects the military’s conduct toward civilians in Gaza. More than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed since the war began, of whom about two-thirds are said to be women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, which does not differentiate between combatants and civilians.

Avner Gvanyahu, who heads Breaking the Silence, a whistleblower group that documents testimonies of former Israeli soldiers, said soldier accounts from previous military engagements in the Gaza Strip showed that once an area was deemed by the military to be cleared of civilians, they were instructed to “shoot everything that moves.”

“The army said this happened in violation of the rules of engagement. I’m skeptical of that, based on what we know of previous operations in Gaza,” he said. “How many Palestinians were shot at like this?”

The military says it does what it can to protect civilians, but says it faces a complex arena where Hamas embeds itself in densely populated civilian areas. Palestinians on several occasions have said Israeli soldiers opened fire in Gaza as civilians tried to flee to safety.

Kobi Michael, a senior researcher with the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank, disputed the comparisons between the hostage deaths to the killings of Palestinians in the West Bank or the killing of the Israeli civilian in Jerusalem. He said each case needed to be seen on its own, rather than as part of a broader trend.

“It shouldn’t have happened but we are in a war and it’s not a sterile environment,” said Michael, who is a former senior official at Israel’s Ministry for Strategic Affairs. “We need to understand the context.”

The killing of Israeli civilians in recent weeks has prompted a reckoning for some Israelis. Nahum Barnea, a leading commentator, wrote in Yediot Ahronot that the hostage incident was a crime and could not be passed over “as if it were nothing.”

Ben Caspit, writing in the daily Maariv, said the rise of Israel’s far-right has helped create an environment that makes it easier for forces to open fire.

He also highlighted a common sentiment among Israel’s hard-line right wing that there are no noncombatants in Gaza. That has fueled concerns among critics that Israeli forces are not being discriminate in their combat.

“In recent years our finger has become too light on the trigger. The recent events have made it even lighter,” he wrote. “There are noncombatants in Gaza, and three of them were killed this weekend by our own soldiers.”

Some Trump fake electors from 2020 haven’t faded away. They have roles in how the 2024 race is run

By GABE STERN Associated Press/Report for America

VIRGINIA CITY, Nev. (AP) — Nearly two years after he signed documents attempting to overturn Donald Trump’s 2020 loss in Nevada, Jim Hindle thanked everyone gathered in a historic Nevada boomtown’s commission chambers and asked them to bear with him while he learned how to oversee elections in rural Storey County.

Hindle was another replacement in what was a revolving door of county election officials across Nevada as the 2022 midterms approached. He had just unseated the interim clerk, who had stepped in after the prior clerk resigned.

But Hindle’s tenure in the heavily Republican county is part of a trend across battleground states where fake electors have retained influence over elections heading into 2024.

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He is among six Republicans who were indicted this month by Democratic Attorney General Aaron Ford for their alleged roles in attempting to overturn the election outcome in the swing state, which Democrat Joe Biden carried by more than 33,000 votes over the GOP president.

Hindle and the others, who are scheduled to be arraigned Monday, coordinated with Trump's team directly, according to transcripts of testimony before the U.S. House committee that investigated the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

Hindle told The Associated Press he will continue running local elections despite the charges. He declined to comment further.

Wisconsin, Arizona and Pennsylvania also have fake electors who are involved in the 2024 election.

The list includes Bob Spindell, who remains on Wisconsin's bipartisan election commission despite calls from Democrats for him to be removed. A Republican legislative leader who appointed Spindell said last week that he will not rescind the appointment, calling the fake elector scheme a "failed legal strategy" and "not a sinister plot to overturn an election."

Spindell and the fake electors in Wisconsin agreed to a settlement this month conceding that their actions were "part of an attempt to improperly overturn the 2020 presidential election results."

In Arizona, fake electors Jake Hoffman and Anthony Kern are Republican legislators with powerful roles. Hoffman is chairman of the Senate Elections Committee, and Kern leads the Judiciary Committee. The Arizona attorney general is investigating the role of fake electors; no one has been charged.

Hoffman's position makes him a gatekeeper for virtually all election-related legislation under consideration. That has become especially contentious in the Western swing state where Republicans have been aggressive in trying to overturn or cast doubt on Democratic victories.

The FBI in 2022 interviewed Sam DeMarco, a member of the three-member election board in Pennsylvania's Allegheny County. Despite the subpoenas served to DeMarco and that state's other GOP electors, they have faced no legal consequences after qualifying their electoral votes as "conditional" in case Trump had prevailed in court. DeMarco has often been critical of Trump's influence on the state party.

Michigan is a rare example where a fake elector has lost influence due to charges. In July, the Michigan Bureau of Elections barred Shelby Township Clerk Stan Grot from running any elections as the state attorney general brought criminal charges against him and 15 other Republicans for their roles as fake electors.

In Nevada, Storey County's 3,750 active registered voters represent a speck of the state's electorate. Even while Hindle and others remain in their roles as elections officials and legislators, state election officials and state and federal courts can provide checks on their authority, said Wendy Weiser, director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice.

Nevada Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar's office, which runs elections across the state, did not respond to questions about whether the indictment could affect Hindle's elections role.

But Hindle's influence does not stop at the county line. He is one of three fake electors involved in the state GOP's organization of a party-run caucus in early February that is scheduled just days after the state-run presidential primary. The Nevada GOP has come under intense scrutiny for confusing voters with the dueling elections and for adopting rules that many say benefit Trump over other Republican candidates.

The Nevada GOP did not respond to a request for comment on whether the indictment affects members' abilities to organize the caucus.

The Nevada Republican chairman, Michael McDonald, one of the indicted fake electors, has said the state party is bypassing the primary because the Democratic-controlled Legislature did not consider the Republican governor's proposals for a voter ID requirement and other measures.

On Sunday, several of Nevada's fake electors attended a Trump rally in Reno, where the former president thanked three of them personally, including Hindle and McDonald, while saying they were treated unfairly. He did not mention the specific charges.

McDonald introduced Trump at the rally, while encouraging the crowd to advocate and vote for Trump at the party-run caucus. He ended the speech with the same pledge he made at an October rally, before his indictment.

"You give us a fair election, I'll give you the next president of the United States — Donald J. Trump," he said.

Study bolsters evidence that severe obesity increasing in young US kids

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A new study adds to evidence that severe obesity is becoming more common in young U.S. children.

There was some hope that children in a government food program might be bucking a trend in obesity rates — earlier research found rates were dropping a little about a decade ago for those kids. But an update released Monday in the journal *Pediatrics* shows the rate bounced back up a bit by 2020.

The increase echoes other national data, which suggests around 2.5% of all preschool-aged children were severely obese during the same period.

"We were doing well and now we see this upward trend," said one of the study's authors, Heidi Blanck of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We are dismayed at seeing these findings."

The study looked at children ages 2 to 4 enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children program, which provides healthy foods and other services to preschool-aged children in low-income families. The children were weighed and measured.

The researchers found that 2.1% of kids in the program were severely obese in 2010. Six years later, the rate had dipped to 1.8%. But by 2020, it was 2%. That translates to about 33,000 of more than 1.6 million kids in the WIC program.

Significant increases were seen in 20 states with the highest rate in California at 2.8%. There also were notable rises in some racial and ethnic groups. The highest rate, about 2.8%, was in Hispanic kids.

Experts say severe obesity at a very early age is nearly irreversible, and is strongly associated with chronic health problems and an early death.

It's not clear why the increase occurred, Blanck said.

When WIC obesity rates dropped, some experts attributed it to 2009 policy changes that eliminated juice from infant food packages, provided less saturated fat, and tried to make it easier to buy fruits and vegetables.

The package hasn't changed. But "the daily hardships that families living in poverty are facing may be harder today than they were 10 years ago, and the slight increases in the WIC package just weren't enough," said Dr. Sarah Armstrong, a Duke University childhood obesity researcher.

The researchers faced challenges. The number of kids in WIC declined in the past decade. And the study period included 2020, the year the COVID-19 pandemic hit, when fewer parents brought their children in to see doctors. That reduced the amount of complete information available.

Despite its limitations, it was a "very well done study," said Deanna Hoelscher, a childhood obesity researcher at the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health, "It gives you a hint of what's going on."

What's happened since 2020 is not yet known. Some small studies have suggested a marked increase in childhood obesity — especially during the pandemic, when kids were kept home from schools, eating and bedtime routines were disrupted and physical activity decreased.

"We are thinking it's going to get worse," Hoelscher said.

Chilean voters reject conservative constitution, after defeating leftist charter last year

By MARÍA VERZA and PATRICIA LUNA Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Voters rejected on Sunday a proposed conservative constitution to replace Chile's dictatorship-era charter, showing both the deep division in the South American country and the inability of political sectors to address people's demands for change made four years ago.

With nearly all votes counted late Sunday, about 55.8% had voted "no" to the new charter, with about

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44.2% in favor.

The vote came more than a year after Chileans resoundingly rejected a proposed constitution written by a 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, was more conservative than the one it had sought to replace, because it would have deepened free-market principles, reduced state intervention and might have limited some women's rights.

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.

Chilean President Gabriel Boric said Sunday night that his government won't try a third attempt to change the constitution, saying there are other priorities.

He admitted he wasn't able to "channel the hopes of having a new constitution written for everyone." On the contrary, he said, after two referendums, "the country became polarized, it was divided."

Javier Macaya, the leader of the conservative Independent Democratic Union party, recognized the defeat and urged the government not to raise the issue again.

"From a perspective of coherence and respect for democracy, we recognize the results," Macaya said.

Now, the constitution adopted during the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet — which was amended over the years — will remain in effect.

That is what former President Michelle Bachelet had hoped for when she voted early Sunday.

"I prefer something bad to something worse," said Bachelet, who campaigned to reject the latest charter proposal.

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

Another article in the proposed document that sparked controversy said 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 said the measure could end up benefiting those who have been convicted of crimes against humanity during the Pinochet's 1973-1990 dictatorship.

The charter would have characterized Chile as a social and democratic state that "promotes the progressive development of social rights" through state and private institutions. It was opposed by many local leaders who said it would scrap a tax on houses that are primary residences, a vital source of state revenue that is paid by the wealthiest.

It also would have established new law enforcement institutions and said irregular immigrants should be expelled "as soon as possible."

César Campos, a 70-year-old taxi driver, turned out early to support the new constitution. He viewed it as a vote against the left, whose ideas largely dominated the first, rejected draft.

"Boric wants everybody to be equal," Campos said of the president. "Why should anyone who studies or works their entire life have to share that?"

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.

In Santiago, the capital, talk before Sunday's 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.

"This whole process has been a waste of government money ... it's a joke," said government employee Johanna Anríquez, who voted against the new constitution, calling "it is very extremist."

"Let's keep the one we have and, please, let's get on with the work of providing public safety," Anríquez said.

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There appeared to be little enthusiasm for Sunday's vote. Most citizens are exhausted after 10 elections of various types in less than 2½ 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."

Haley slams DeSantis for stumping in Iowa with Massie, who's opposed votes condemning antisemitism

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

ALTOONA, Iowa (AP) — Nikki Haley denounced Republican presidential rival Ron DeSantis in Iowa Sunday for campaigning in the state with Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie, the lone House Republican who voted last week against a GOP resolution condemning antisemitism on university campuses.

"You can't be pro-Israel and bring the most anti-Israel Republican into this state, who voted against fighting antisemitism on college campuses," Haley said. "And that's who he brought to your state."

Coming at the end of a campaign event at a suburban Des Moines bar and grill, Haley's criticism of DeSantis for campaigning with Massie on Saturday marks the increased pressure for the two to emerge from Iowa as the stronger alternative to former President Donald Trump.

Trump is the heavy favorite to win Iowa's leadoff caucuses on Jan. 15. Last week at a campaign event in eastern Iowa, Trump stressed that an Iowa blowout would help him rally the party early in the 2024 voting. "The margin of victory is very important, it's just very important," Trump told his audience in Coralville.

DeSantis and Haley have increasingly sparred publicly, as they have during debates, while ads by groups supporting each have sought to stall the other's movement in Iowa with less than a month until the caucuses.

DeSantis campaigned in Iowa with Massie when the two headlined a town hall-style event geared toward gun rights policy in Johnston, Iowa, a northern Des Moines suburb.

Massie has previously critiqued antisemitism-related legislation as restricting free speech, voting against related GOP-sponsored resolutions since the Israel-Hamas war began.

Support for Israel is a top priority for most Republicans, especially evangelical Christians who form an influential bloc in the Iowa GOP and many of whom believe Jews are God's chosen people and that Israel is their rightful homeland.

DeSantis has called for U.S. support of Israel, touted his effort from Florida to deliver medical supplies to the country and evacuate hundreds of Americans from Israel in the wake of the Oct. 7 attack led by Hamas. DeSantis has also called for the destruction of Hamas.

DeSantis' campaign dismissed the criticism of campaigning with Massie.

"Ron DeSantis has been the clearest, most consistent pro-Israel candidate in the race," DeSantis' campaign press secretary Bryan Griffin said. "He has unequivocally supported Israel in exterminating Hamas."

Haley has called on Israel to "finish them," referring to Hamas, the group responsible for the Oct. 7 attack.

James Cook leads dominant rushing attack as Bills trample Cowboys 31-10

By JOHN WAWROW AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) — The Bills' offense has found its legs in time to make a playoff push.

Josh Allen played the role of happy spectator by standing back and watching James Cook run left, right and up the middle as Buffalo ran away with a 31-10 win over the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday.

"I felt like the kid that didn't do anything in a class project but got an A," Allen said after he threw for just 94 yards, with a touchdown passing and one rushing. "But I'll do this 10 times out of 10 times, man."

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Like, keep going.”

A matchup of two of the NFL’s top-scoring quarterbacks — Allen entered the week with 35 total touchdowns, and Dak Prescott was first in passing TDs with 28 — turned into a Bills stampede. Cook finished with 179 yards rushing and 221 yards from scrimmage, both career bests, while scoring on an 18-yard catch and a 24-yard run as the Cowboys’ five-game winning streak was snapped.

“I just let it rip when I get my opportunity,” said Cook, a second-year player who is the younger brother of New York Jets running back Dalvin Cook. “My O-linemen, they were opening it up and I was hitting it. Finding that rhythm.”

The Bills (8-6) won consecutive games for the first time since a three-game winning streak ended on Oct. 1 and gained ground in the AFC playoff race, moving one game ahead of Denver and Pittsburgh.

The Cowboys (10-4) clinched their third straight playoff berth before kickoff thanks to losses by Green Bay and Atlanta on Sunday and Detroit beating Denver on Saturday. But nothing else went right for Dallas, which fell a game behind NFC-best San Francisco.

Buffalo rushed for 266 yards, held the ball for 10 minutes longer than Dallas and had 28 first downs to the Cowboys’ 14.

The NFL’s top-scoring offense was limited to a field goal through 57 minutes. Dallas is 7-0 at home, where it has outscored opponents 279-108, but fell to 3-4 on the road, where it has been outscored 156-152.

“It’s a gap. That’s part of my message. We play so well at home, and there’s just too big of a gap in our road games,” coach Mike McCarthy said. “We are conscious of it. We have a long flight home to continue to talk about, think about (it).”

Dallas, coming off a 33-13 win over Philadelphia, plays two of its last three on the road.

The Bills played keep-away by running the ball in a persistent rain, tripping up a Cowboys offense that finished with a season-low 195 yards.

“They got up on us and continued to control the ball, control the possession, kill the clock. And we didn’t convert on our third downs, which is something we have been great on all year,” Prescott said.

“That’s been our way of winning the games. So they beat us in the formula.”

Buffalo’s injury-depleted defense, missing two more regulars in edge rusher A.J. Epenesa and safety Micah Hyde, had three sacks and limited Prescott to 21 of 34 passing for 134 yards with an interception. And a Cowboys offense that’s scored 40 or more points five times this season punted five times and was limited to eight first downs before gaining six on its final drive.

Four of the Bills’ first five possessions lasted more than 4 minutes, 40 seconds.

Latavius Murray capped Buffalo’s 12-play, 75-yard opening drive with a 2-yard run. The Bills went up 14-0 on Cook’s 18-yard touchdown catch on their third drive, which was extended after Sam Williams was flagged for roughing Bills punter Sam Martin.

The game was essentially over after the Bills’ opening drive of the third quarter, which ate up 8:22 of the clock and ended with Tyle Bass hitting a 23-yard field goal to put Buffalo up 24-3.

Buffalo’s 20 first downs rushing were tied for the second most in team history, and most since 1996. Cook’s rushing total was the highest for a Bills player since Fred Jackson had 212 yards in a 2009 season-ending win over Indianapolis.

The Bills, coming off a 20-17 victory at Kansas City, are trying to secure their fifth straight playoff berth and stay in contention for a fourth consecutive AFC East title.

“It was kind of all systems go today,” center Mitch Morse said. “We still have an uphill battle, but this is a great first step.”

INJURIES

Cowboys: RG Zack Martin did not return after hurting his quadriceps in the first quarter. McCarthy said Martin told him he’s going to be OK.

Bills: DT Jordan Phillips did not return after hurting his wrist.

UP NEXT

Cowboys: At Miami next Sunday.

Bills: At the Los Angeles Chargers on Saturday night.

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Trump says Nevada fake electors treated 'unfairly' during rally in Reno

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and GABE STERN Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump called out three of Nevada's fake electors Sunday, saying they're being treated unfairly less than 24 hours before they are scheduled to be arraigned for signing certificates falsely stating Trump won the state in 2020.

Trump did not directly mention the charges nor the upcoming court date during a rally in Reno, but he cast the fake electors as victims in a brief portion of a speech that spanned more than an hour.

"A tremendous man, tremendous guy, gets treated so unfairly and he loves this country and he loves this state," Trump said of Nevada GOP Chairman Michael McDonald, who was one of six Republicans indicted earlier this month by a Nevada grand jury.

Trump's sympathy for the fake electors who tried to help him cling to power after his 2020 defeat comes amid growing alarm about his authoritarian rhetoric as he looks to return to the White House.

Nevada is the fourth state to choose delegates for the Republican presidential nomination, the first in the West and the first with a sizeable Latino population. But it's gotten little attention from the GOP contenders, who have focused their time in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

Trump, who is overwhelmingly favored in polls, is looking to sweep up all of Nevada's delegates by winning the caucuses with more than 50% as part of his quest to sew up the GOP nomination early and turn his attention to a general election rematch against President Joe Biden. If he falls short of a majority in Nevada's caucuses, he'll have to split the delegates with his rivals.

Trump drew attention to the fake electors as they prepare for a court hearing in Las Vegas on Monday morning.

In December 2020, six Republicans signed certificates falsely stating that Trump won Nevada and sent them to Congress and the National Archives, where they were ultimately ignored. The scheme, which involved several battleground states, was an attempt to create a pretext for Trump to remain president despite his loss.

Trump and his attorneys had a direct hand in the planning and execution of the fake elector scheme, including a conference call with McDonald, transcripts released last year show.

Trump said Clark County GOP Chairman Jesse Law is a "fantastic man" who is "treated very unfairly." He also thanked another fake elector, Jim Hindle, the Storey County clerk and vice chairman of the Nevada GOP, at the rally.

The six fake electors have been charged with offering a false instrument for filing and uttering a forged instrument. Those two categories of felonies have penalties that range from one year up to either four or five years in prison.

McDonald and Law took the rally stage before Trump but both kept their remarks short and did not mention the charges against them. McDonald, the state party chair, spoke for two minutes about the party-run caucus, promising strong turnout would equal a Trump Republican nomination. Law, the Clark County GOP chair, sang the national anthem.

Under McDonald's leadership, the Nevada GOP pushed to hold a caucus despite a state law requiring a primary, which has caused concern among many Republicans — including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis — that the caucus rules would tilt the nominating process in Trump's favor. The dueling contests have split the GOP field, with former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley competing in the primary and the other Republicans competing in the caucus. Only the caucus will result in delegates to the Republican National Convention, which will ultimately choose the party's presidential nominee.

Some Nevada Republicans and Trump rivals argue the setup, with a state-run primary on Feb. 6 and a party-run caucus on Feb. 8, will unnecessarily confuse and anger voters.

In Reno, Trump repeated his pledge to deport immigrants living in the country illegally in record numbers but did not echo his claim from a day earlier that immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country." The remark, which echoes Adolf Hitler's language in his own political manifesto, was widely condemned.

Senate border security talks grind on as Trump invokes Nazi-era 'blood' rhetoric against immigrants

By LISA MASCARO and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Time slipping, White House and Senate negotiators struggled Sunday to reach a U.S. border security deal that would unlock President Joe Biden's request for billions of dollars worth of military aid for Ukraine and other national security needs before senators leave town for the holiday recess.

The Biden administration, which is becoming more deeply involved in the talks, is facing pressure from all sides over any deal. Negotiators insist they are making progress, but a hoped-for framework did not emerge. Republican leaders signaled that without bill text, an upcoming procedural would likely fail.

The talks come as Donald Trump, the Republican presidential front-runner in 2024, delivered alarming anti-immigrant remarks about "blood" purity over the weekend, echoing Nazi slogans of World War II at a political rally.

"They're poisoning the blood of our country," Trump said about the record numbers of immigrants coming to the U.S. without immediate legal status.

Speaking in the early-voting state of New Hampshire, Trump, drew on words similar to Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" as the former U.S. president berated Biden's team over the flow of migrants. "All over the world they're pouring into our country," Trump said.

Throughout the weekend, senators and top Biden officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, have been working intently behind closed doors at the Capitol to strike a border deal, which Republicans in Congress are demanding in exchange for any help for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs. Mayorkas arrived for more talks late Sunday afternoon.

"Everyday we get closer, not farther away," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., as talks wrapped up in the evening.

Their holiday recess postponed, Murphy and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, the Arizona independent, acknowledged the difficulty of drafting, and securing support, for deeply complicated legislation on an issue that has vexed Congress for years. Ahead of more talks Monday, it is becoming apparent any action is unlikely before year's end.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said senators don't want to be "jammed" by a last-minute compromise reached by negotiators.

"We're not anywhere close to a deal," Graham, whose staff has joined the talks, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Graham predicted the deliberations will go into next year. He was among 15 Republican senators who wrote to GOP leadership urging them to wait until the House returns Jan. 8 to discuss the issue.

Top GOP negotiator Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell also signaled in their own letter Sunday that talks still had a ways to go. Lankford said later that the January timeline was "realistic."

The Biden administration faces an increasingly difficult political situation as global migration is on a historic rise, and many migrants are fleeing persecution or leaving war-torn countries for the United States, with smugglers capitalizing on the situation.

The president is being berated daily by Republicans, led by Trump, as border crossings have risen to levels that make even some in Biden's own Democratic Party concerned.

But the Biden administration, in considering revival of Trump-like policies, is drawing outrage from Democrats and immigrant advocates who say the ideas would gut the U.S. asylum system and spark fears of deportations from immigrants already living in the U.S.

The White House's failure to fully engage Latino lawmakers in the talks until recently, or ensure a seat at the negotiating table, has led to a near revolt from leaders of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

"It's unacceptable," said Rep. Nanette Barragan, D-Calif., chair of the Hispanic Caucus, on social media. "We represent border districts & immigrant communities that will be severely impacted by extreme changes to border policy."

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Progressives in Congress are also warning the Biden administration off any severe policies that would bar immigrants a legal path to enter the country. "No backroom deal on the border without the involvement of the House, the House Hispanic Caucus, Latino senators is going to pass," said Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., on Fox News.

White House chief of staff Jeff Zients, along with Mayorkas, heard from leading Latino lawmakers during a conference call with the Hispanic Caucus on Saturday afternoon.

The senators and the White House appear to be focused on ways to limit the numbers of migrants who are eligible for asylum at the border, primarily by toughening the requirements to qualify for their cases to go forward.

The talks have also focused removing some migrants who have already been living in the U.S. without full legal status, and on ways to temporarily close the U.S.-Mexico border to some crossings if they hit a certain metric, or threshold. Arrests of migrants have topped 10,000 on some days.

There has also been discussion about limiting existing programs that have allowed groups of arrivals from certain countries to temporarily enter the U.S. while they await proceedings about their claims. Decades ago, those programs welcomed Vietnamese arrivals and others, and have since been opened to Ukrainians, Afghans and a group that includes Cubans, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans and Haitians.

Meanwhile, Biden's massive \$110 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other security needs is hanging in the balance.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a dramatic, if disappointing, visit to Washington last week to plead with Congress and the White House for access to U.S. weaponry as his country fights against Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion.

Many, but not all, Republicans have soured on helping Ukraine fight Russia, taking their cues from Trump. The former president praised Putin, quoting the Russian leader during Saturday's rally while slamming the multiple investigations against him as politically motivated — including the federal indictment against Trump for conspiring to overturn the 2020 election that resulted in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters.

Ukraine's ambassador to the United States said Sunday she believes in "Christmas miracles" and won't give up hope.

Of Biden's package, some \$61 billion would go toward Ukraine, about half of the money for the U.S. Defense Department to buy and replenish tanks, artillery and other weaponry sent to the war effort.

"All the eyes are on Congress now," the envoy, Oksana Markarova, said on CBS' "Face the Nation."

"We can just only pray and hope that there will be resolve there, and that the deal that they will be able to reach will allow the fast decisions also on the support to Ukraine," she said.

The House already left for the holiday recess, but Republican Speaker Mike Johnson is being kept aware of the negotiations in the Senate.

Storm drenches Florida and causes floods in South Carolina as it moves up East Coast

GEORGETOWN, S.C. (AP) — An intense late-year storm barreled up the East Coast on Sunday with heavy rains and strong winds that shattered rainfall records, forced water rescues from flooded streets and washed out holiday celebrations.

Authorities rescued dozens of motorists stranded by floodwaters in South Carolina's waterfront community of Georgetown, Georgetown County spokesperson Jackie Broach said. More than 9 inches (22.9 centimeters) of rain fell in the area situated between Charleston and Myrtle Beach since late Saturday.

"It's not just the areas that we normally see flooding, that are flood-prone," Broach said. "It's areas that we're not really expecting to have flooding issues...It's like a tropical storm, it just happens to be in December."

The tide in Charleston Harbor hit its fourth highest level on record and was "well above the highest tide for a non-tropical system," according to the National Weather Service.

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Rising sea levels driven by human-caused climate change mean even relatively weak weather systems can now produce storm surges previously associated with hurricanes, said Meteorologist Jeff Masters, co-founder of the Weather Underground. In South Carolina that's worsened by natural subsidence along the coast.

By 2050, Charleston is expected to see another 14 inches (35.6 centimeters) of sea level rise, Masters said. "In Charleston, this is the sixth time this year already that they've had a major coastal flood. Most of those would not have been major flooding 100 years ago, because the sea level has risen that much," he said.

The storm was forecast to gain strength as it tracked along the Georgia and Carolina coasts, producing heavy rain and gusty winds before sweeping into New England by Monday morning, the weather service said. Wind gusts of 35 mph to 45 mph (56 kph to 72 kph) could bring down trees, especially on saturated ground.

There were numerous road closures in Charleston and across South Carolina's Lowcountry, while stranded cars littered streets.

There were no reports of injuries or deaths in Georgetown County, Broach said. Gusty winds were strong enough to topple some signs and trees. Outdoor holiday decorations were tossed about, she said.

Water rescues also took place on Kiawah and Seabrook islands, according to media outlets.

Charleston International Airport had more than 3 inches (8 centimeters) of rain in 24 hours — almost five times the prior record set in 1975, according to the National Weather Service.

Farther up the coast, minor to moderate coastal flooding was expected Sunday, according to the National Weather Service office in Wilmington, North Carolina.

There were more than 31,000 power outages in South Carolina, according to PowerOutage.us, along with over 14,000 in North Carolina and more than 11,000 in Florida.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul warned of a possible 2 to 4 inches (5.1 to 10.2 centimeters) of rain, powerful winds and potential flooding in parts of the state. Flood watches were in effect in many locations in New York City, and high wind warnings were activated around the city and Long Island.

"We will get through this storm, but preparation is the key," New York Mayor Eric Adams said. City officials told residents to expect several hours of rain and possible delays during Monday morning's commute.

Colder air behind the storm will trigger lake-effect snow across the Great Lakes toward the Appalachians and upstate New York into Tuesday, the weather service said.

The storm dumped up to 5 inches (12.7 centimeters) of rain across Florida, inundating streets and forcing the cancellation of boat parades and other holiday celebrations.

The National Weather Service issued flood warnings and minor flooding advisories for a wide swath of the state, from the southwest Gulf Coast to Jacksonville. Major airports remained open, however, at the start of the busy holiday travel season.

"Today is not the day to go swimming or boating!" Sheriff Carmine Marceno of Lee County, on Florida's southwestern coast, said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Coastal advisories were issued for much of Florida as strong winds churned waters in the Gulf and along the north Atlantic coast.

The storm could be good news for residents in southwest Florida who have been facing water restrictions and drought conditions heading into what normally is the region's dry season.

The weather service also warned of 2 to 4 inches (5.1 to 10.2 centimeters) of rain in parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, with the heaviest expected late Sunday night, and possible urban and small stream flooding and at least minor flooding to some rivers through Monday.

Forecasters also warned of strong winds in coastal areas, gale-force winds offshore, and moderate coastal flooding along Delaware Bay and widespread minor coastal flooding elsewhere.

The weather service said there is a slight risk of excessive rainfall over parts of New England through Monday morning, with the potential for flash flooding. Northern New England is expected to get the heaviest rain Monday through Tuesday morning.

Israel faces new calls for truce after killing of hostages raises alarm about its conduct in Gaza

By WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel's government faced calls for a cease-fire from some of its closest European allies on Sunday after a series of shootings, including the mistaken killing of three Israeli hostages, fueled global concerns about the conduct of the 10-week-old war in Gaza.

Israeli protesters are urging their government to renew negotiations with Gaza's Hamas rulers, whom Israel has vowed to destroy. Israel is also expected to face pressure to scale back major combat operations when U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visits Monday. Washington is expressing growing unease with civilian casualties even as it provides vital military and diplomatic support.

The war has flattened large parts of northern Gaza, killed thousands of civilians and driven most of the population to the southern part of the besieged territory, where many are in crowded shelters and tent camps. Some 1.9 million Palestinians — about 90% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes.

They survive off a trickle of humanitarian aid. Dozens of desperate Palestinians surrounded aid trucks after they drove in through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, forcing some to stop before climbing aboard, pulling down boxes and carrying them off. Other trucks appeared to be guarded by masked people carrying sticks.

Israel said aid passed directly from Israel into Gaza for the first time Sunday, with 79 trucks entering from Kerem Shalom, where around 500 trucks entered daily before the war. Another 120 trucks entered via Rafah along with six trucks carrying fuel or cooking gas, said Wael Abu Omar, Palestinian Crossings Authority spokesman.

Aid workers say it's still far from enough. "You cannot deliver aid under a sky full of airstrikes," a spokesperson with the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, Juliette Touma, said on social media, while the agency estimated that more than 60% of Gaza's infrastructure had been destroyed in the war.

Telecom services in Gaza gradually resumed after a four-day communications blackout, the longest of several outages during the war that groups say complicate rescue and delivery efforts.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel "will continue to fight until the end," with the goal of eliminating Hamas, which triggered the war with its Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people that day, mostly civilians, and captured scores of hostages.

Netanyahu has vowed to bring back the estimated 129 hostages still in captivity. Anger over the mistaken killing of hostages is likely to increase pressure on him to renew Qatar-mediated negotiations with Hamas over swapping more of the remaining captives for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel has been defensively striking Hezbollah targets in Lebanon, said Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, an Israel Defense Forces spokesperson. The group has ramped up attacks against Israel, he added, killing civilians and soldiers and displacing more than 80,000 Israelis from their homes.

"Hezbollah — a proxy of Iran — is dragging Lebanon into an unnecessary war that would have devastating consequences for the people of Lebanon," Hagari said in a statement. "This is a war that they do not deserve."

Hagari said Israel will continue to protect its borders "until and unless a diplomatic solution is found and implemented."

CALLS FOR A NEW 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 earlier said an employee was killed in an Israeli strike on a home in Rafah on Wednesday. It condemned the strike, which it said 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.

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"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.

The U.S. defense secretary 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.

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.

The Israeli military said Sunday it had discovered a large tunnel in Gaza close to what was once a busy crossing into Israel, raising new questions about how Israeli surveillance missed such conspicuous attack preparations by Hamas.

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 the war.

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. 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 war began.

A shell struck the pediatric ward of a hospital in the city of Khan Younis in southern Gaza late Sunday, killing a girl, said Dr. Mohammed Abu Lihia, who works in the emergency department.

Footage shared by Gaza's Health Ministry showed a burst ceiling and wall in the Mubarak Hospital for Children and Maternity in the Nasser Hospital complex with bloodstains near children's cots and cribs on the third floor.

The doctor said he helped three others, two older adults and a child, escape the hospital. A videographer filming for The Associated Press said at least 5 people, including children, were wounded. The Israeli military didn't immediately comment.

Israel continues to strike positions across Khan Younis. Palestinians from the north fled there in the early weeks of the conflict.

Also Sunday, five people were killed and many injured after a reported Israeli airstrike hit near a U.N.-run school in Khan Younis where displaced Palestinians were sheltering. A cameraman with AP counted five bodies delivered to a hospital.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said two Christian women at a church compound in Gaza were killed by Israeli sniper fire.

Pope Francis called Sunday for peace, saying "unarmed civilians are being bombed and shot at, and this has even happened inside the Holy Family parish complex, where there are no terrorists but families, children and sick people with disabilities, nuns."

In discussions Saturday between the Israeli military and representatives of the church community, no one reported a strike on the church or civilians being wounded or killed, the military said. It said a review of its initial investigation had supported that.

The offensive has killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Thursday in its last update before the communications blackout. It has said that thousands more casualties are buried under the rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant

deaths, but has said that most of those killed were women and children.

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.

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

Serbia's populists claim a sweeping victory in the country's parliamentary election

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbia's governing populists claimed a sweeping victory Sunday in the country's parliamentary election, which was marred by reports of major irregularities both during a tense campaign and on voting day.

Acting Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said that with half the ballots counted, the governing Serbian Progressive Party's projections showed it won 47% percent of the vote and expected to hold around 130 seats in the 250-member assembly. The main opposition Serbia Against Violence group won around 23%, Brnabic said.

The main contest in the parliamentary and local elections was between President Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressives and the centrist coalition that sought to undermine the populists who have ruled the troubled Balkan state since 2012.

The Serbia Against Violence opposition coalition was expected to mount its biggest challenge for the city council in Belgrade, with analysts saying an opposition victory in the capital would seriously dent Vucic's hardline rule in the country.

Vucic, however, said his party was also leading in the vote in the capital, though he added that post-election coalition negotiations would determine who governs in Belgrade.

"This is an absolute victory which makes me extremely happy," a jubilant Vucic said at his party's headquarters in Belgrade. "We know what we have achieved in the previous period and how tough a period lies ahead."

The main opposition group disputed the election projections from the governing party, claiming there was vote-rigging and saying it would dispute the vote count "by all democratic means."

"People who do not live in Belgrade were brought in buses, vans and cars to vote as if they were citizens of Belgrade," opposition leader Miroslav Aleksic said, also charging that 40,000 identity documents were issued for people who do not live in the capital.

"We will use all available democratic means against the vote rigging in Belgrade and Serbia," he said. "What happened today cannot be something we can accept as the result of a democratic and fair election."

Turnout one hour before the polls closed was around 55%, about the same as during the last election in 2022 when Vucic scored a landslide victory. First official results are expected Monday.

Irregularities were reported by election monitors and independent media. One report alleged ethnic Serbs from neighboring Bosnia gathered to vote at a sports hall in Belgrade that wasn't an official polling station. Another report said a monitoring team was attacked and their car was bashed with baseball bats in a town in northern Serbia.

Observers from the independent Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability expressed "the highest concern" over cases of the organized transfer of illegal voters from other countries to Belgrade, the group said in a statement.

"The concentration of buses, minivans and cars was observed on several spots in Belgrade, transferring voters to polling stations across the city to vote," the group said.

CRTA also reported cases of voters being given money to vote for the governing party and the presence of unauthorized people at polling stations.

Authorities disputed that there was any wrongdoing. Brnabic, the premier, called the accusations "lies that are intended to spread panic."

Several right-wing groups, including pro-Russia parties and Socialists allied with Vucic, ran candidates for

parliament and local councils in around 60 cities and towns as well as regional authorities in the northern Vojvodina province.

The election didn't include the presidency, but governing authorities backed by dominant pro-government media ran the campaign as a referendum on Vucic.

Although he wasn't formally on the ballot, the Serbian president campaigned relentlessly for the SNS, which appeared on the ballot under the name "Aleksandar Vucic — Serbia must not stop!"

Serbia Against Violence, a pro-European Union bloc, includes parties that were behind months of street protests this year triggered by two back-to-back mass shootings in May.

The Serbian president toured the country and attended his party's rallies, promising new roads, hospitals, one-off cash bonuses and higher salaries and pensions. Vucic's image was on billboards all over the country, though he had stepped down as SNS party leader.

Serbia, a Balkan country that has maintained warm relations with Russia and President Vladimir Putin, has been a candidate for European Union membership since 2014, but has faced allegations of steadily eroding democratic freedoms and rules over the past years.

Both Vucic and the SNS denied allegations of campaign abuse and attempted vote-rigging as well as charges that Vucic as president violated the constitution by campaigning for one party.

Vucic called the Dec. 17 early vote only a year and a half after a previous parliamentary and presidential election, although his party holds a comfortable majority in parliament.

Analysts said Vucic is seeking to consolidate power after the two back-to-back shootings triggered months of anti-government protests, and as high inflation and rampant corruption fuel public discontent. Vucic has also faced criticism over his handling of a crisis in Kosovo, a former Serbian province that declared independence in 2008, a move that Belgrade doesn't recognize.

His supporters view Vucic as the only leader who can maintain stability and lead the country into a better future.

"I think it's time that Serbia goes forward with full steam," retiree Lazar Mitrovic said after he voted. "That means that it should focus on its youth, on young people, education and of course discipline."

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

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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.

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."

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"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 necklace depicting her name in Hebrew, 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."

Florida Republican Party suspends chairman and demands his resignation amid rape investigation

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The Republican Party of Florida suspended Chairman Christian Ziegler and demanded his resignation during an emergency meeting Sunday, adding to calls by Gov. Ron DeSantis and other top officials for him to step down as police investigate a rape accusation against him.

Ziegler is accused of raping a woman with whom he and his wife, Moms for Liberty co-founder Bridget Ziegler, had a prior consensual sexual relationship, according to police records.

"Christian Ziegler has engaged in conduct that renders him unfit for the office," the party's motion to censure Ziegler said, according to a document posted on the social media platform X by Lee County GOP Chairman Michael Thomason.

Ziegler tried to defend himself during the closed-door meeting, but the party board quickly took the action against him, Thompson said.

"Ziegler on soap box trying to defend himself, not working," Thompson posted before confirming the votes.

The party's executive committee will hold another vote in the future on whether to remove Ziegler.

The Sarasota Police Department is investigating the woman's accusation that Ziegler raped her at her apartment in October. Police documents say the Zieglers and the woman had planned a sexual threesome that day, but Bridget Ziegler was unable to make it. The accuser says Christian Ziegler arrived anyway and assaulted her.

Christian Ziegler has not been charged with a crime and says he is innocent, contending the encounter was consensual.

The accusation also has caused turmoil for Bridget Ziegler, an elected member of the Sarasota School Board, though she is not accused of any crime. On Tuesday the board voted to ask her to resign. She refused.

The couple have been outspoken opponents of LGBTQ+ rights, and their relationship with another woman has sparked criticism and accusations of hypocrisy.

In addition to DeSantis, Republican Sens. Rick Scott and Marco Rubio, U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz and Florida's Republican House and Senate leaders have all called for Christian Ziegler's resignation.

Israel finds large tunnel adjacent to Gaza border, raising new questions about prewar intelligence

By ARIEL SCHALIT and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

BEIT HANOUN, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Israeli military said Sunday it has discovered a large tunnel shaft in Gaza close to what was once a busy crossing into Israel, raising new questions about how Israeli surveillance missed such conspicuous preparations by Hamas for the militants' deadly Oct. 7 assault.

The entryway to the tunnel is just a few hundred meters from the heavily fortified Erez crossing and a nearby Israeli military base.

The military said that it stretches for more than four kilometers (2½ miles), links up with a sprawling tunnel network across Gaza and is wide enough for cars to pass through. The army said Sunday that the tunnel facilitated the transit of vehicles, militants and supplies in preparation for the Oct. 7 attack.

That day, militants used a rocket-propelled grenade to break past the portion of wall close to the Erez crossing and stormed the base, killing at least three soldiers and kidnapping some back to Gaza, the army said. It was one of several places along the border wall where militants easily blew past Israel's security defenses, entered Israeli territory and killed around 1,200 people and took about 240 others hostage.

The unprecedented attack triggered a devastating war that has raged for more than 10 weeks and claimed

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more than 18,000 lives in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian health officials. Israel says the destruction of Hamas' tunnel network is a major objective and that much of the underground network runs beneath schools, hospitals and residential areas.

Israel's military, intelligence and political officials have come under heavy criticism for failing to detect the attack ahead of time.

Maj. Nir Dinar, a military spokesperson, said that Israeli security services didn't know about the tunnel before Oct. 7 because Israel's border defenses only detected tunnels meant to enter Israel.

"As far as I know, this tunnel doesn't cross from Gaza into Israel and stops within 400 meters from the border, which means the indicators won't indicate that a tunnel is being built," Dinar said. He added that the entrance, a circular cement opening leading to a cavernous passageway, was located under a garage, hiding it from Israeli drones and satellite images.

While the military was aware that Hamas had an extensive tunnel network, Dinar said they didn't think the militants would be able to carry out their plans for a large-scale attack.

"It's no surprise that this was the Hamas strategy all along," Dinar said. "The surprise is that they have succeeded and the size of this tunnel ... was really shocking."

The Erez crossing, a fortress-like facility that processed the movement of Palestinians into Israel for work, medical care and transit to neighboring Jordan, held great symbolic value for Hamas. The massive crossing was protected by security cameras and military patrols and the adjacent military base. The crossing suffered heavy damage on Oct. 7 and hasn't reopened.

The army said its special "Yahalom" unit, which specializes in tunnel warfare, has worked to excavate the tunnel since it was first detected. They say they've found weapons inside.

"At this point, this is the biggest tunnel in Gaza," Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesman, told reporters in a tour of the tunnel's entrance on Friday.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Hagari said troops had discovered at least two other "city-sized" tunnels of similar in scope, which they are still mapping.

"This was a flagship project that was waiting, finished and ready," Hagari told a news conference. He noted that tunnel was in use during the war and that Israeli soldiers had killed Hamas militants inside the tunnel.

The army also showed reporters soldiers' barracks at the nearby base that it said were set ablaze by the militants. They looked like the ashes of a furnace, with blackened walls and smelted bunks. The military announced Friday that it had recovered in Gaza the bodies of two soldiers who were working at the base on Oct. 7.

Dinar, who visited the tunnel Friday, said it was twice the height and three times the width of other tunnels found in Gaza. He said it is equipped with ventilation and electricity and dives 50 meters underground in some points. He said it was clear that millions of dollars as well as a great deal of fuel and workforce had been needed to build and sustain the tunnel.

Hagari said the military planned to destroy the tunnel and continue to "hunt" militants hiding in others.

"We will hunt them even if we need to go down to the tunnels," Hagari said. "We also need to do it with attention to the rescue of our hostages and the understanding that maybe some of them are in the tunnels."

'Wonka' waltzes to \$39 million opening, propelled by Chalamet's starring role

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "Wonka" debuted with \$39 million in box office sales in U.S. and Canadian theaters over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. That made it a strong start for the Timothée Chalamet -starring Willy Wonka musical that underscored the young star's draw.

Musicals have been tough sells in theaters in recent years, so much so that Warner Bros. downplayed the song and dance elements of "Wonka" in trailers. Instead, the studio emphasized Chalamet, the 27-year-old actor who, with "Wonka," notched his second No. 1 movie following 2021's "Dune." The earlier film recorded a \$41 million opening.

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While "Dune" was a sprawling and star-studded sci-fi adventure, "Wonka" relies chiefly on Chalamet's charisma.

"Wonka," which cost about \$125 million to produce and played at 4,203 locations, was also the first big Hollywood release to launch following the end of the SAG-AFTRA actors' strike. Chalamet hosted "Saturday Night Live" just days after the strike ended. In his opening monologue, he sang to the tune of "Pure Imagination" about "returning to this magical world where actors can promote their projects."

"It shows you the power of a star, and it also shows you the power of a star going out and working a movie," said Jeffrey Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "Having him out there after the strikes were over was a win for him and a win for the movie."

Goldstein expects "Wonka" to be the go-to choice from families over the holidays. Its main competition for kids will be Universal Pictures' animated "Migration."

"Wonka," directed by Paul King of "Paddington" and "Paddington 2," is a prequel to 1971's "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," with Chalamet starring as a young Wonka trying to open a candy store. Its ensemble cast includes Hugh Grant, Olivia Colman and Keegan-Michael Key.

Warner Bros. last revived Roald Dahl's classic with the 2005 Tim Burton-directed "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," starring Johnny Depp. It debuted with \$56.2 million and ultimately grossed \$475 million worldwide.

To reach those numbers, "Wonka" will need strong legs through the lucrative holiday moviegoing period. On its side are mostly good reviews (84% "fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes) and positive audience reaction (an "A-" CinemaScore).

Chalamet is also drawing younger ticket-buyers. Moviegoers under the age of 25 accounted for 36% of the audience, which was split evenly between 51% females and 49% males. "Wonka" added \$53.6 million in overseas ticket sales.

"Chalamet is a true movie star who's been developing his craft and his reputation over many years," says Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore. "Everybody's looking for who's the next big movie star. Is it all about the old-school leading men? Chalamet is definitely that."

For Warner Bros., it's the first in a trio of high-profile holiday releases, to be followed by "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" on Dec. 22 and another musical, "The Color Purple" on Dec. 25.

The only other new wide release in theaters was "Christmas With the Chosen: Holy Night," from Christian-theme distributor Angel Studios. It debuted with \$2.9 million in sales through 2,094 theaters.

"The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" again ranked second this week with \$5.8 million in its fifth week of release. The Lionsgate "Hunger Games" prequel, now up to \$145.2 million domestically and more than \$300 million globally, has held strong week after week.

Last week's top film, Hayao Miyazaki's "The Boy and the Heron," dipped to third with \$5.1 million in its second week of release. The latest film from the 82-year-old Japanese anime master has already set records for Miyazaki, Studio Ghibli and its North American distributor GKids.

With holdovers making up most of the top 10 movies in theaters, the weekend's other most notable business was a group of award contenders trying to make their mark following Monday's Golden Globes nominations.

Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things," a surreal Frankenstein-esque fairy tale starring Emma Stone, expanded into 82 theaters and grossed \$1.3 million for Searchlight Pictures. The film, which will expand further in the coming weeks, is nominated for seven Golden Globes, including best comedy or musical.

Cord Jefferson's "American Fiction," starring Jeffrey Wright as a sardonic novelist, debuted in seven theaters in three cities with a \$32,411 per-screen average. MGM's "American Fiction," nominated for two Globes, will expand to 40 theaters next week. It won the audience award at the Toronto International Film Festival in September.

Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest," a chilling Holocaust drama about a Nazi commandant and his family living next to Auschwitz, opened in four theaters with a \$31,198 per-screen average. Nominated for three Globes, it will play in limited release before expanding in January.

Estimated ticket sales are for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

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1. "Wonka," \$39 million.
2. "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," \$5.8 million.
3. "The Boy and the Heron," \$5.2 million.
4. "Godzilla Minus One," \$4.9 million.
5. "Trolls Band Together," \$4 million.
6. "Wish," \$3.2 million.
7. "Christmas With the Chosen: Holy Night," \$2.9 million.
8. "Napoleon," \$2.2 million.
9. "Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé," \$2 million.
10. "Poor Things," \$1.3 million.

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.

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 immune-compromised 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."

Pope Francis' 87th birthday closes out a big year of efforts to reform the church, cement his legacy

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis turned 87 on Sunday, closing out a year that saw big milestones in his efforts to reform the Catholic Church as well as health scares that raise questions about his future as pope.

Francis celebrated his birthday with cake during a festive audience with children Sunday morning, and

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there were "Happy Birthday" banners in St. Peter's Square during his weekly noon blessing.

One early present came Saturday, when a Vatican tribunal handed down a mix of guilty verdicts and acquittals in a complicated trial that Francis had supported as evidence of his financial reforms. The biggest-name defendant, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, was convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to 5½ years in prison.

"It was quite a year for a pope who's obviously thinking about legacy and finishing up," said Christopher Bellitto, professor of history at Kean University in New Jersey.

Only seven popes are known to have been older than Francis at the time of their deaths, according to the online resource Catholic Hierarchy. Francis is fast closing in on one of them, Pope Gregory XII, perhaps best known for having been the most recent pope to resign until Pope Benedict XVI stepped down in 2013.

Gregory was 88½ when he voluntarily stepped down in 1415 in a bid to end the Western Schism, in which there were three rival claimants to the papacy. Francis has said he, too, would consider resigning if his health made him unable to carry on, but more recently he said the job of pope is for life.

Twice this year, however, Francis' less-than-robust respiratory health forced him to cancel big events: In spring, a bout of acute bronchitis landed him in the hospital for three days and made him miss the Good Friday procession at the Colosseum.

More recently, a new case of bronchitis forced him to cancel a planned trip to Dubai to participate in the U.N. climate conference. Francis had part of one lung removed as a young man and seems to be increasingly prone to respiratory problems that make breathing difficult and speaking even more so.

In between those events, he was hospitalized again in June for nine days for surgeons to repair an abdominal hernia and remove scar tissue from previous intestinal surgeries.

The hospitalizations have raised questions about Francis' ability to continue the globetrotting rigors of the modern-day papacy, which is increasingly dependent on the person of the pope, said David Gibson, director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University.

"It's a great improvement from the time when the pope was just a king in his throne surrounded by a royal court," he said. "But with such expectations can any pope govern into his 80s and even 90s and be effective?"

While Francis' health scares punctuated his 87th year, perhaps the biggest milestone of all, and one that is likely to shape the remainder of Francis' pontificate, was Benedict's Dec. 31 death.

Benedict largely stuck to his promise to live "hidden to the world" and allow Francis to govern unimpeded. But his death after 10 years of retirement removed the shadow of a more conservative pope looking over Francis' shoulder from the other side of the Vatican gardens.

His death has seemingly freed up Francis to accelerate his reform agenda and crack down on his right-wing opponents.

For starters, Francis presided over the first stage of his legacy-making meeting on the future of the Catholic Church. The synod aims to make the church more inclusive and reflective of and responsive to the needs of rank-and-file Catholics. The first session ended with "urgent" calls to include women in decision-making roles in the church. The next phase is scheduled for October 2024.

"The effort to change the rigidly top-down nature of governance in Catholicism is the main reform project of the Francis papacy and its success or failure will likely be his chief legacy," said Fordham's Gibson. He said the jury was still out on whether it would succeed, since the transition period is "messy and absolutely exhausting."

"Will the sense of exhaustion overcome the inspiration that invigorates so many?" he asked.

Alongside the synod, Francis this year appointed an unusually progressive theologian as the Vatican's chief doctrine watchdog, and he has already begun setting a very new tone for the church's teachings that could have big effects on the church going forward.

Cardinal Victor Fernandez has issued decrees on everything from how to care for cremated ashes (in a defined and sacred place) to membership in Masonic lodges (forbidden) and whether transgender people can be godparents (they can).

At the same time, Francis has begun hitting back at his conservative critics, for whom Benedict was a

point of reference for the past 10 years.

Francis exiled Benedict's longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, to his native Germany after a series of infractions culminating with a tell-all memoir published in the days after Benedict's death that was highly critical of Francis.

Then, he forcibly removed the bishop of Tyler, Texas, Bishop Joseph Strickland, whose social media posts were highly critical of the pope. And most recently, he cut off the former Vatican high court judge, Cardinal Raymond Burke, after he warned that Francis' reform-minded synod risked dividing the faithful.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee, professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, said the pushback against Burke was less of a "smackdown" and would have little tangible effect, since he has plenty of wealthy backers in the U.S.

But she said it was part of an important year that had as its high point the synod, the conclusion of which will drive Francis at least for another year.

"I think the Pope is thinking about his legacy in a way he hasn't done before. Perhaps that has to do with Benedict's death, maybe it's more a matter of his own mortality becoming more real given his recent illnesses," she said. "The synod is a huge part of that legacy, obviously, and you can see his investment in having it succeed. I'm willing to bet that seeing part 2 of the synod to fruition is a huge motivator for him right now."

Russia and Ukraine launch numerous drone attacks targeting a Russian air base and Black Sea coast

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine reportedly launched mass drone attacks at each other's territories for a second straight day Sunday, one of which apparently targeted a Russian military airport.

At least 35 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight over three regions in southwestern Russia, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a post on the messaging app Telegram.

A Russian air base hosting bomber aircraft used in the war in Ukraine was among the targets, according to a Russian Telegram channel critical of the Kremlin. The channel posted short videos of drones flying over low-rise housing in what it said was the Russian town of Morozovsk, whose air base is home to Russia's 559th Bomber Aviation Regiment.

Vasily Golubev, the governor of Russia's Rostov province, separately reported "mass drone strikes" near Morozovsk and another town farther west, but didn't mention the air base. Golubev said most the drones were shot down and there were no casualties. He didn't comment on damage.

As of Sunday evening, Kyiv didn't formally acknowledge or claim responsibility for the drone attacks. A major Ukrainian newspaper, *Ukrainska Pravda*, cited an anonymous source in the security services as saying that Ukraine's army and intelligence services successfully struck the Morozovsk air base, inflicting "significant damage" to military equipment. It wasn't immediately possible to verify this claim.

Also Sunday morning, Ukraine's air force said it shot down 20 Iranian-made Shahed drones launched overnight by Russian troops in southern and western Ukraine, as well as one X-59 cruise missile launched from the country's occupied south.

A civilian was killed overnight near Odesa, a key port on Ukraine's southern Black Sea coast, after the remnants of a destroyed drone fell on his house, Ukraine's military said.

Stepped-up drone attacks over the past month come as both sides are keen to show they aren't deadlocked as the war approaches the two-year mark. Neither side has gained much ground despite a Ukrainian counteroffensive that began in June.

Russian shelling on Sunday also killed an 81-year-old man in central Kherson, the southern Ukrainian city that was recaptured by Kyiv's forces last fall, according to the head of its municipal military administration.

Ukrainian and Russian forces exchanged fire outside Terebreno, a Russian village just kilometers (miles) from the Ukrainian border, according to Telegram posts by Gov. Vasily Gladkov. He did not provide details,

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but insisted Russian authorities had the situation “under control.”

According to Baza, a Telegram news channel set up by Russian journalists critical of the Kremlin, fighting between Russian troops and a “Ukrainian diversionary group” began around 11 a.m. near Terebreno, home to some 200 people, forcing residents to hide in shelters.

Ukraine’s military security agency, the GUR, said on Sunday evening that Russia-based “armed opponents of the Kremlin regime” were responsible for what it called “armed clashes” near Terebreno. The online statement didn’t say whether the GUR or other Ukrainian bodies had any involvement in or prior knowledge of the fighting.

Hours later, a 69-year-old woman was reported killed in a Ukrainian border village in the northern Sumy region, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Terebreno. According to the Ukrainian regional prosecutor’s office, the woman died after a Russian shell flew into her home. It wasn’t immediately clear whether her death was linked to the reported clashes.

Late on Sunday afternoon, a Ukrainian border force official reported in a video statement that multiple Russian “sabotage and reconnaissance” operatives had crossed into Ukraine’s northern Sumy and Kharkiv regions. Andriy Demchenko said that Ukrainian border guards and territorial defense units succeeded in pushing them back into Russia.

While cross-border raids on Russian territory from Ukraine are rare, the Russian military said in May that it had killed more than 70 attackers, describing them as Ukrainian military saboteurs, in a 24-hour battle. Kyiv portrayed the fighting as an uprising against the Kremlin by Russian partisans.

Ukraine’s foreign minister, meanwhile, welcomed what he called a sea change in Germany’s approach toward Kyiv’s European Union membership bid.

In an interview with Germany’s Bild newspaper, Dmytro Kuleba said that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has won “sincere and well-deserved admiration” among Ukrainians for his role in the EU’s recent decision to open membership talks for Kyiv.

Ukraine has long faced strong opposition in its attempts to join the 27-member bloc from Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has repeatedly spoken of his desire to maintain close ties with Russia.

Scholz said that at an EU summit last week he proposed that Orbán leave the room to enable the summit to launch accession talks with Ukraine, something that the Hungarian leader agreed to do.

“What German Chancellor Olaf Scholz did at the summit to remove the threatened Hungarian veto will go down in history as an act of German leadership in the interests of Europe. The chancellor has this week won a lot of sincere and well-deserved admiration in the hearts of Ukrainians,” Kuleba told Bild.

He also voiced hope that Scholz’ actions would mark a “broader and irreversible shift” in Berlin’s approach towards EU negotiations with Kyiv.

“When I campaigned in Berlin last May to grant Ukraine EU candidate status, my appeals to Germany to take the lead in this process mostly fell on deaf ears. ‘Germany doesn’t want to lead,’ experts and politicians in Berlin told me. I am glad that German political decisions have changed since then,” Kuleba said.

The Ukrainian government has long cast EU and NATO membership as key foreign policy goals, and the EU’s decision to start accelerated negotiations gave Kyiv a major boost — although it could be years before it’s able to join. NATO leaders, meanwhile, haven’t set any clear timeline so far for Kyiv’s membership bid, even as Moscow’s all-out invasion of Ukraine led another of Russia’s neighbors, Finland, to be accepted into the military alliance in April.

Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to build up military units near the Russian-Finnish border. The Kremlin leader declared, without giving details, that Helsinki’s NATO accession would create “problems” for the Nordic country.

“There were no problems (between Russia and Finland). Now, there will be. Because we will create (a new) military district and concentrate certain military units there,” he told Russian state television on Sunday morning.

Finland seeks jailing, probe of Russian man wanted in Ukraine over alleged war crimes in 2014-2015

HELSINKI (AP) — Finnish police on Sunday sought a court order to imprison a Russian man who had been living under an alias in the Nordic country and is accused of committing war crimes against wounded or surrendered soldiers in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and 2015.

Yan Petrovsky, who had been living in Finland under the name Voislav Torden, is already in Finnish custody but authorities are asking that he be formally jailed while they conduct an investigation into his alleged crimes against Ukrainian soldiers. A court ruling on his imprisonment is expected on Monday.

Finland's Supreme Court has ruled that Petrovsky cannot be extradited to Ukraine, where he faces an arrest warrant, due to the risk of inhumane prison conditions there. Sunday's decision indicates Finnish authorities plan to investigate and possibly try the Russian in Finland, which has signed treaties allowing it to try international crimes.

Petrovsky is currently on the European Union's sanctions list against Russia for allegedly being a founding member of the far-right group Rusich that is suspected of terrorism crimes in Ukraine and is connected with Russia's mercenary Wagner Group, the Finnish news agency STT reported.

Petrovsky, who earlier resided in Norway, was taken into custody by Finnish authorities after he was caught at Helsinki Airport in July shortly before he was to fly to Nice, France together with his family.

Media reports said he managed to enter Finland despite a EU-wide entry ban with the help of a new identity and his wife's student status in the Nordic country.

The National Bureau of Investigation - a unit of the Finnish police - provided the imprisonment request for Petrovsky, aged 36, to the Helsinki District Court on Sunday, STT said.

Citing his Finnish lawyer, STT said Petrovsky has denied all war crimes charges against him.

Finland's National Prosecution Authority on Friday said Petrovsky is suspected of war crimes "committed against wounded or surrendered Ukrainian soldiers during the armed conflict in Ukraine" in 2014-2015 before the start of Moscow's ongoing assault on Ukraine in February 2022.

"The crimes will be investigated by Finnish authorities, because the suspect cannot be extradited to Ukraine, and the case, as an international crime, falls under the jurisdiction of Finland," the Finnish prosecutors said in a statement.

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 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 activ-

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ists. 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."

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 wants New Hampshire to help him pocket the Republican presidential nomination before any rivals find their footing with the 2024 campaign's opening contest just weeks away.

His appearance Saturday 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 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."

Trump, who has pledged to "immediately stop the invasion of our southern border" and wants to reimpose his first-term travel ban that originally targeted seven Muslim-majority countries, used harsh rhetoric in saying "we got a lot of work to do" about the rising number of migrants entering the United States. "They're poisoning the blood of our country," he said once more on the campaign trail, echoing Adolf Hitler's language in his own political manifesto.

One of Trump's most prominent critics in the 2024 race, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, told CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday that Trump was "dog-whistling to Americans who feel absolutely under stress and strain from the economy and from the conflicts around the world. And he's dog-whistling to blame it on people from areas that don't look like us."

The focus on immigration comes as the Biden administration and Congress are trying to negotiate a border security deal demanded by Republicans as part of the president's request for wartime aid for Ukraine and Israel. Biden has been criticized about the record numbers of migrants at the border and is trying address a political weakness before a potential rematch with Trump.

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.

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."

How much gerrymandering is too much? In New York, the answer could make or break Dems' House hopes

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York's highest court last week gave Democrats a chance to redraw the state's congressional districts, a major victory as the party tries to win control of the U.S. House next year.

Now the question is how far the state's Democrat-dominated Legislature will try to push the boundaries in crucial battleground districts to give their party an advantage, and how far the courts will let them.

The process will be closely watched for any sign of partisan gerrymandering — drawing lines that give one party an unfair advantage — which is forbidden by state law. And Republicans are expected to challenge the results in court as they try to retain their slim House majority.

But experts say it's unclear where the state's highest court will land on determining what's too partisan.

"There's no hard and fast definition or bright line to define partisan gerrymandering," said New York Law School professor Jeffrey Wice, who focuses on redistricting. "There really is no bright line to know when a plan becomes too much of a partisan gerrymander. That's often based on a panel of experts and the decision of judges."

Part of the uncertainty in New York comes from a decision by the state's highest court last year, when it threw out congressional maps drawn by Democrats that were criticized for oddly shaped lines that crammed the state's Republican voters into a few super districts.

In that ruling, the court focused more on questions over the procedural steps Democrats took to draw the lines and spent only a few paragraphs on whether the districts violated the state's gerrymandering prohibition.

It instead upheld lower court rulings that found "clear evidence and beyond a reasonable doubt that the congressional map was unconstitutionally drawn with political bias" and that "the 2022 congressional map was drawn to discourage competition and favor democrats," based on testimony and analysis of previous maps.

The court then appointed a special master to draw a new set of congressional lines for the last election, which along with strong GOP turnout and dissatisfaction with Democratic policies, led to Republicans flipping seats in the New York City suburbs and winning control of the House.

After the election, Democrats sued to toss the court-drawn maps, arguing that the state's bipartisan redistricting commission should get another chance to draft congressional lines. The court agreed in a decision last week.

The new maps will be first left to the commission, before the Legislature has a chance to approve or alter the lines.

Richard Briffault, a Columbia Law School professor with an extensive background on redistricting and government, said he thinks Democrats might err on the side of caution to avoid another long legal fight

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before the election.

"My guess is they're going to be more careful," Briffault said. "They certainly would be wise to be more careful and not be too aggressive because they will surely be sued."

Democrats had already targeted the state as a battleground for the House next year. The party has set its sights on six seats it wants to flip in New York, with those potential pickups reversing or even exceeding the expected loss of at least three districts in North Carolina after a Republican gerrymander there.

At the same time, redistricting litigation is ongoing in several other states, including Florida, Georgia and Louisiana, where Democrats are hoping to make gains. Democrats also are expected to gain a seat in Alabama, where districts were revised after federal judges ruled that the original map enacted by Republican state officials had illegally diluted the voting power of Black residents.

"The parties are fighting these battles district by district in courtrooms across the country that are aimed at giving Democrats a better chance at the starting gate," said Wice. "Each court victory counts in a major way."

The New York redistricting commission has been tasked with submitting a map to the state Legislature by Feb 28. But Republicans are already crying foul.

"For all their rhetoric about defending democracy, we see what occurred here in New York," said John Faso, a former congressman who is advising other Republicans on redistricting. "The Democrats don't want to win districts at the polls. They want to win them in the backrooms of Albany."

European diplomacy steps up calls for Gaza cease-fire

JERUSALEM (AP) — Some of Israel's closest European allies pressed for a cease-fire in the war with Hamas on Sunday, underscoring growing international unease with the devastating impact of the conflict on Gaza's civilian population.

The concerted push by top European diplomats comes before a visit to Israel on Monday by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who is also expected to put pressure on Israeli leaders to end the war's most intense phase and transition to a more targeted strategy against Hamas.

Western allies of Israel have increasingly expressed concern with civilian casualties and the mass displacement of 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — though the U.S. has continued to provide vital military and diplomatic support to its close ally.

In a joint article in British newspaper The Sunday Times, U.K. Foreign Secretary David Cameron and German Foreign Affairs Minister Annalena Baerbock called for a cease-fire and said "too many civilians have been killed. The Israeli government should do more to discriminate sufficiently between terrorists and civilians, ensuring its campaign targets Hamas leaders and operatives."

"Israel will not win this war if its operations destroy the prospect of peaceful coexistence with Palestinians," they said. They said the cease-fire should take place as soon as possible, but also said it must be "sustainable."

At a news conference with her Israeli counterpart in Tel Aviv on Sunday, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna also pushed for a cease-fire.

"An immediate truce is necessary, allowing progress to be made toward a cease-fire to obtain the release of the hostages, to allow access and the delivery of more humanitarian aid to the suffering civilian population of Gaza, and in fact to move toward a humanitarian cease-fire and the beginning of a political solution," she said.

Britain has previously called for "humanitarian pauses" in the conflict but stopped short of urging an immediate cease-fire. It abstained last week when the U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly voted for a cease-fire.

France and Germany both supported the call for a cease-fire at the U.N., and French President Emmanuel Macron said at the beginning of November that Israel couldn't fight terrorism by killing innocent people.

The increase in diplomatic pressure comes as domestic calls are also likely to grow for renewed negotiations with Hamas, following the killing of three Israeli hostages by the military on Friday.

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The air and ground war has flattened vast swaths 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. The offensive has killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants.

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.

A group of European lawmakers also called for a cease-fire in Gaza following their trip to the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt over the weekend to see how European aid is helping Palestinians in Gaza. The four are centrist members of the European Parliament from Sweden, France, and Ireland.

Abir Al Sahlani of Sweden that said a cease-fire is urgently needed to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

"We found out that no matter how much we are going to send, it doesn't matter, because there is no cease-fire and there is no security as long as there are bombs — Israeli bombs falling on the Palestinian people," Al Sahlani said.

"The only way is political pressure on both sides," she added, urging international players "to pressure, first and foremost, the (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu government and (his) Likud (party) and his right-wing government to stop the bombing of civilians and respect and follow international humanitarian law."

The jungle between Colombia and Panama becomes a 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.

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

Convent-made delicacies, a Christmas favorite, help monks and nuns win fans and pay the bills

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — It's the fortnight before Christmas and all through the world's Catholic convents, nuns and monks are extra busy preparing the traditional delicacies they sell to a loyal fan base even in rapidly secularizing countries.

For many monastic communities, especially those devoted to contemplative life and with vows of poverty, producing cookies, fruitcakes, even beer for sale is the only means to keep the lights on.

But it's also an enticing way to strengthen their ties with lay people who flock to their doors — and in some cases their websites — in the holiday season.

"Our kitchen is a witness to God's love to those outside," said Sister Abigail, one of the 10 cloistered nuns of the Perpetual Adorers of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Mexico City.

"We are in the Lord's presence, and we're always thinking that it will make someone happy, the person who will eat this, or they will gift it and someone will receive it with joy," added the sister, whose convent makes sweets, eggnog and its bestseller, tamales.

Most monasteries have to be financially self-sufficient. Many in countries like Spain have to maintain not only an aging, shrinking cohort of monks and nuns, but also monumental, centuries-old buildings, said Fermín Labarga, a professor of church history at the University of Navarra in Pamplona.

Since the small-scale farming with which they supported themselves for centuries stopped being profitable decades ago, most have turned to crafts, including the wildly popular gourmet food production that uses only homemade ingredients and recipes passed down generations.

"An immense majority of people goes to buy the nuns' sweets," said Pipa Algarra, who in her 90 years in the southern Spanish city of Granada has come to know each of the dozens of convents' specialties. Among the oldest is alfajor, a cookie with roots dating back more than a thousand years when this region was a Muslim kingdom, while this year's novelty is sushi rolls introduced by Filipino sisters.

"The nuns, aside from supporting themselves with this, make really good sweets. And the prayer that comes with it is priceless," added Algarra, who remembers as a child going to convents with her friends to get dough trimmings from the Communion wafers the nuns also produced.

As a cloistered order, the 14 Poor Clares sisters in Carmona, Spain, have to work to earn their daily bread — in their case, making some 300 "English cakes" and 20 other kinds of sweets a month to sell at their 15th-century convent turnstile, said the abbess, Veronicah Nzula.

There's a summer slowdown when southern Spain is so sweltering nobody takes coffee breaks with

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cookies, Nzula quipped. But the production revs up for Christmas as the sweets are also sold at a special market devoted to convent products in nearby Seville.

"While we work, we pray the rosary and we think of the people who will eat each sweet," said Nzula. She learned the recipes from older sisters after arriving more than 20 years ago from Kenya, like all but one of the current sisters.

Most nuns and monks involved in preparing the delicacies are quick to point out that their main mission is to pray, not to cook — and that doing both involves finding a delicate balance.

"We brew to live, we don't live to brew," said Brother Joris, who supervises the brewery at Saint-Sixtus Abbey in Westvleteren, Belgium. "There needs to be equilibrium between monastic life and economic life. We don't want to end up as a brewery with a little abbey on the side."

For that reason, production remains limited even though the beer brings the monks' only income — and it's considered by connoisseurs one of the choicest brews in the world, especially popular as a Christmas and Father's Day gift.

Monks started making it in the 1830s to supply lay workers building the abbey with the daily pint their contract guaranteed. Aficionados still need to come to the abbey or its cafe to get their crate, giving the contemplative order a chance to bear witness too.

"By simply existing, we remind people 'they're still here,'" Brother Joris said.

A fellow Trappist at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky — where the renowned monk and author Thomas Merton once lived — similarly said that producing their bourbon-infused delicacies is just a part of the "ora et labora" (work and pray) commitment under St. Benedict's rule.

"Our ideal is to pray always," said Brother Paul Quenon, who joined the abbey in the late 1950s when the bourbon fruitcake was already being produced, and has worked on the more recently introduced bourbon fudge.

The abbey now makes some 60,000 pounds per year of each, most sold between Thanksgiving and Christmas — when the bakery is so busy that silent prayer becomes a challenge.

To also strike a balance, the two dozen Benedictine sisters at the 15th-century Monastery of San Paio de Antealtares in Santiago de Compostela, one of Europe's top pilgrimage cities, only work on sweets in the morning.

"It's not the purpose of our life, lest we break the equilibrium — rather, it's to turn work into prayer," said the abbess, Almudena Vilariño. "When I'm working, I pray that these sweets may be catalysts of union and peace in the house or office where they will go."

Following the same recipe dating from the late 1700s, the nuns make their signature almond cake known as tarta de Santiago. A few decades ago, local women would bring ingredients to the convent so the nuns could bake cakes in their wooden oven. Today, pilgrims from around the world who have finished their "camino" in the magnificent cathedral across the square are among the crowds ringing the bell by the nuns' simple wooden turnstile.

"The turnstile puts in touch the interior world with the exterior. They're not disconnected," Labarga said.

Back in Mexico City, the sisters preparing their popular Christmas buñuelos — a sort of flat donut made with flour, water and cinnamon — also connect their community labor with their faith. During the Advent season, they pray thousands of Hail Marys as they roll the dough or cover the sweets with sugar.

"This is how we live the liturgy," Sister Abigail said. "This is the objective in our work, and work for people outside the convent — that we feed them, and they help us so we can eat."

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.

The shipwreck, which took place overnight between Thursday and Friday, was the latest tragedy in this

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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 late Saturday that 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.

The European Union's border agency said in a statement Sunday that its plane located the partially deflated rubber boat Thursday evening in Libya's search and rescue zone.

"The people were in severe danger because of adverse weather conditions, with waves reaching heights of 2.5 meters (8.2 feet)," the agency, known as Frontex, said.

Alarm Phone — a hotline for migrants in distress — said in a tweet that some migrants onboard reached out to the volunteer group who in turn alerted authorities including the Libyan coastguard, "who stated that they would not search for them."

A spokesman for the Libyan coast guard was not immediately available for comment.

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.

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 the imprisoned migrants before allowing them to leave Libya on traffickers' boats to Europe.

Today in History:

December 18, Donald Trump is impeached for the first time

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Dec. 18, the 352nd day of 2023. There are 13 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 18, 2019, the U.S. House impeached President Donald Trump on two charges, sending his case to the Senate for trial; the articles of impeachment accused him of abusing the power of the presidency to investigate rival Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 election and then obstructing Congress' investigation. (It was the first of two Trump impeachment trials that would end in acquittal by the Senate.)

On this date:

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, was declared in effect by Secretary

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of State William H. Seward.

In 1892, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet "The Nutcracker" publicly premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia; although now considered a classic, it received a generally negative reception from critics.

In 1917, Congress passed the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors" and sent it to the states for ratification.

In 1940, Adolf Hitler signed a secret directive ordering preparations for a Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. (The invasion, known as Operation Barbarossa, was launched in June, 1941.)

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the government's wartime detention of people of Japanese descent from the West Coast while at the same time ruling that "concededly loyal" Americans of Japanese ancestry could not continue to be detained.

In 1957, the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania, the first nuclear facility to generate electricity in the United States, went on line. (It was taken out of service in 1982.)

In 1958, the world's first communications satellite, SCORE (Signal Communication by Orbiting Relay Equipment), nicknamed "Chatterbox," was launched by the United States aboard an Atlas rocket.

In 1969, Britain's House of Lords joined the House of Commons in making permanent a 1965 ban on the death penalty for murder.

In 1992, Kim Young-sam was elected South Korea's first civilian president in three decades.

In 2003, two federal appeals courts ruled the U.S. military could not indefinitely hold prisoners without access to lawyers or American courts.

In 2011, the last convoy of heavily armored U.S. troops left Iraq, crossing into Kuwait in darkness in the final moments of a nine-year war.

In 2012, Texas A&M quarterback Johnny Manziel became the first freshman to be voted The Associated Press Player of the Year in college football.

In 2020, the U.S. added a second COVID-19 vaccine to its arsenal, as the Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of the shot developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health.

In 2022, Argentina beat France 4-2 in a penalty shootout to claim a third World Cup, the first for star Lionel Messi.

Today's Birthdays: Rock musician Keith Richards is 80. Writer-director Alan Rudolph is 80. Movie producer-director Steven Spielberg is 77. Blues artist Rod Piazza is 76. Movie director Gillian Armstrong is 73. Movie reviewer Leonard Maltin is 73. Rock musician Elliot Easton is 70. Comedian Ron White is 67. R&B singer Angie Stone is 62. Actor Brad Pitt is 60. Professional wrestler-turned-actor "Stone Cold" Steve Austin is 59. Actor Shawn Christian is 58. Actor Rachel Griffiths is 55. Singer Alejandro Sanz is 55. Actor Casper Van Dien is 55. Country/rap singer Cowboy Troy is 53. International Tennis Hall of Famer Arantxa Sanchez Vicario is 52. DJ Lethal (Limp Bizkit) is 51. Pop singer Sia is 48. Country singer Randy Houser is 47. Actor Josh Dallas is 45. Actor Katie Holmes is 45. Actor Ravi Patel is 45. Singer Christina Aguilera is 43. Actor Ashley Benson is 34. NH ,K/L defenseman Victor Hedman is 33. Actor-singer Bridgit Mendler is 31. MLB outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. is 26. Electro-pop singer Billie Eilish is 22. Actor Isabella Crovetti is 19.