

# Groton Daily Independent

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*"You must have long-range goals to keep you from being frustrated by short-range failures."*

-Charles C. Noble



## Thursday, Dec. 28

Senior Menu: Breaded cod, parsley buttered potatoes, creamy coleslaw, rainbow sherbet, whole wheat bread.

No School - Christmas Break

Girls Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian. JV game at 5 p.m. followed by Varsity.

## Friday, Dec. 29

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, buttered carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.

No School - Christmas Break

Boys Basketball at Hoop City Classic in Mitchell: Groton Area vs. Pine Ridge at 12:30 p.m.

Boys and Girls Wrestling at Webster, 9:30 a.m.

## Saturday, Dec. 30

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

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

## Today on GDILIVE.COM

**Girls Basketball at Groton Area**

**vs. Aberdeen Christian**

**JV at 5 p.m., Varsity to follow (6:17)**

**We will be unable to broadcast the Boys Game at Mitchell on Friday due to the Corn Palace having a contract for exclusive livestreaming.**

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

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# 1440

In partnership with [smartasset™](#)

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas traveled to Mexico City yesterday, meeting with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador over a record number of migrants flowing through Mexico toward the US border.

The New York Times sued Microsoft and OpenAI yesterday for mass copyright infringement, estimating damages to be worth billions of dollars. The Times, the first major media company to file a lawsuit against Microsoft and OpenAI, accuses them of using its articles to

train artificial intelligence chatbots without permission.

South Korean actor Lee Sun-kyun was found dead Wednesday of an apparent suicide in central Seoul. His death came amid a national investigation into his alleged drug use, reports he denied and characterized as extortion. He was 48.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NBA approves majority stake sale of Dallas Mavericks from Mark Cuban to casino magnate Miriam Adelson for a reported \$3.5B. Detroit Pistons' losing streak reaches NBA single-season record 27 games.

US domestic box office hauls in \$8.58B in 2023, the highest since the pandemic and a 15% jump from 2022; see year-end box office numbers for each studio.

Tom Smothers, comedian best known as half of the Smothers Brothers musical comedy duo, dies of cancer at 86.

## Science & Technology

Apple Watch ban paused by US appeals court as regulators consider whether proposed software updates are sufficient to end ongoing patent dispute. Series 9, Ultra 2 watches were banned for US sale Tuesday; see previous write-up.

Researchers demonstrate glucose-responsive insulin, capable of regulating blood sugar for up to a week; may eventually provide an alternative to daily injections for patients with Type 1 diabetes.

The Small Magellanic Cloud is likely made up of two separate dwarf galaxies, with one situated behind the other. The galaxies are viewable from the Southern Hemisphere and played a role in the lore of ancient societies; see overview.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.1%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +0.2%); Dow notches new record closing high.

Tesla expected to post record quarter for electric vehicle deliveries in next week's earnings report. Elon Musk incorporates AI startup xAI as a benefit corporation, an entity that prioritizes public good alongside profit-making.

Pizza Hut franchises in California to lay off 1,200 in-house delivery drivers in February ahead of new state law boosting fast-food minimum wage to \$20 an hour.

## Politics & World Affairs

At least 20 people killed after Israeli airstrike hits Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis; Gaza death toll rises above 21,000, according to Hamas-run Health Ministry. UN appoints Dutch diplomat to coordinate Gaza humanitarian aid efforts after last week's Security Council vote.

Michigan Supreme Court rejects bid to remove former President Donald Trump from state's 2024 GOP primary ballot, declines to hear appeal from lower court's ruling. Former Wisconsin businessman and senator Herb Kohl dies at age 88.

At least five people killed in Ukraine's southern city of Kherson after Russia fires nearly 50 drones, knocking out power for 70% of households. The US to deliver \$250M military aid package to Ukraine amid congressional stalemate over future assistance.

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## Groton Community Calendar of Events for January 2024

### Monday, Jan. 1

No School

### Tuesday, Jan. 2

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, pineapple/mandarin oranges, breadstick.

No School

Basketball Doubleheader at Warner: Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow.

JV/JH boys wrestling at Oakes, 4:30 p.m.

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

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

### Wednesday, Jan. 3

Senior Menu: Beef stew, buttermilk biscuit, Waldorf salad, sherbert.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Chicken enchilada pasta, corn

Groton Chamber Meeting, noon, at City Hall

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

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

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

### Thursday, Jan. 4

Senior Menu: Chicken cacciatore, rice pilaf, Italian blend vegetables, apple sauce bars, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pop tarts.

School Lunch: Corn dogs, fries.

Girls Basketball at Clark: (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15, varsity to follow)

Girls and Boys Wrestling at Webster, 6 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

### Friday, Jan. 5

Senior Menu: Baked macaroni and cheese with kielbasa, vegetable normandy. Blend fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Tacos.

Boys Basketball hosts Clark/Willow Lake: (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15, varsity to follow)

JH Boys Wrestling at Milbank, 5 p.m.

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## Saturday, Jan. 6

Robotics at Groton Area Gym, 8 a.m.  
Girls Varsity Wrestling at Lyman.  
Boys JV Invitational at Madison, 9 a.m.  
Boys Varsity Invitational at Garretson, 9:30 a.m.  
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.

## Sunday, Jan. 7

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship with communion: (Conde at 8:30 a.m., Groton at 10:30 a.m.), Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's at 9 a.m. and at Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.

## Monday, Jan. 8

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, glazed carrots, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Cheese omelets.  
School Lunch: Chicken patty, potato wedges.  
JV/JH Wrestling at Groton Area, 5 p.m.  
Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
United Methodist: PEOPLE Meeting (Outside Group), 7 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, Jan. 9

Senior Menu: Ham rotini bake, mixed Monterey blend peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Biscuits.  
School Lunch: Meatballs, mashed potatoes.  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Church Council, 6 p.m.

## Wednesday, Jan. 10

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetable winter bend, carrot bars, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: French toast.  
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.  
School Board meeting, 7 p.m.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

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## **DID YOU KNOW . . .**

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## **Thursday, Jan. 11**

Senior Menu: Hamburger chow mein, chow mein noodles, vegetable stir fry blend, peaches.  
School Breakfast: Muffins.  
School Lunch: Chicken strips, baked beans.  
Basketball double header hosts Tiospa Zina: (Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

## **Friday, Jan. 12**

Senior Menu: Salmon loaf, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, oranges, vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Bagel bites.  
School Lunch: Lasagna hot dish, Corn.  
Girls Varsity Wrestling at Harrisburg, 2 p.m.

## **Saturday, Jan. 13**

Girls Varsity and Boys JH/JV/Varsity Wrestling at Gettysburg, 10 a.m.  
Basketball Doubleheader hosts Dakota Valley (Boys C, 2 p.m., Arena; Girls C, 2 p.m., Gym; Girls JV at 3:15 p.m., Boys JV at 4:30 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)  
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.

## **Sunday, Jan. 14**

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship: (Conde at 8:30 a.m., Groton at 10:30 a.m.), Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m. and at Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.

## **Monday, Jan. 15**

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzine, carrots, pineapple tidbits, bread stick, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.  
School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.  
Boys JV/JH Meet at Redfield, 6 p.m.  
Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

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## Tuesday, Jan. 16

Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, corn, pears, muffin.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Hot digs, chips.

Boys Junior High Basketball at Milbank in the elementary gym (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)

JH Boys Wrestling at Simmons Middle School.

Girls and Boys Varsity Wrestling at Groton Area with Clark/Willow Lake and Hamlin, 6 p.m.

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

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

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

## Wednesday, Jan. 17

Senior Menu: Beef/broccoli stir fry rice, cauliflower, five cup salad, whole wheat bread

School Breakfast: Cereal

School Lunch: Loaded baked potato soup.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Communion at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

## Thursday, Jan. 18

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, sweet potato, vegetable capri blend, chocolate pudding with. Banana, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Sloppy joes, tri taters.

Basketball Double Header hosts Milbank: (Gym: Boys C at 4 p.m., Girls C at 5 p.m.; Arena: Girls JV at 4 p.m.; Boys JV at 5:30 p.m.; Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

## Friday, Jan. 19

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, peas, Mandarin orange salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

Boys Varsity Duals at Deuel, 6 p.m.

Girls Varsity Invitational at Pierre, 4 p.m.

## Saturday, Jan. 20

Girls Basketball hosts Great Plains Lutheran: (C game 1 p.m., JV at 2:15 p.m. with varsity to follow)

Girls and Boys Varsity Wrestling Tournament at Arlington, 10 a.m.

Boys JV Invitational Wrestling at Pierre, 11 a.m.

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

Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.

## Sunday, Jan. 21

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

Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.

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

United Methodist: Worship: (Conde at 8:30 a.m., Groton at 10:30 a.m.), Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Milestones - 6th grade and sophomores; Annual Meeting with brunch following meeting; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.

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## Monday, Jan. 22

Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, mixed vegetables, fruit cocktail, cookie, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.  
School Lunch: Tater tot hot dish.  
Basketball Double Header at Northwestern: (Boys 7th at 4 p.m., Boys 8th at 5 p.m.; Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m.; Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)  
Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at noon.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, Jan. 23

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, biscuit, peas and carrots, pineapple/strawberry ambrosia.  
School Breakfast: Waffles.  
School Lunch: Chicken legs, mashed potatoes.  
Boys JH Basketball at Clark: 7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, jewels series for Lent, 10 a.m.

## Wednesday, Jan. 24

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, oriental blend vegetables, bakes apples, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg bake.  
School Lunch: Chef salad.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m. (Service Project)

## Thursday, Jan. 25

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, frosted brownies, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Pop tarts.  
School Lunch: Pasta with meat balls.  
Boys Basketball hosts Webster: (Gym: 7th at 4:30 p.m., 8th at 5:30 p.m.; Arena: Boys C at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., Varsity to follow)

## Friday, Jan. 26

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad on croissant, tomato spoon salad, Mandarin oranges.  
School Breakfast: Egg wraps.  
School Lunch: Vegetable soup, cheese stick.  
Girls Basketball at Webster: (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., Varsity to follow)

## Saturday, Jan. 27

Boys Basketball at NEC/DAK12 Clash in Madison  
Boys and Girls Varsity Wrestling Tournament at Groton, 10 a.m.  
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.

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## Sunday, Jan. 28

Carnival of Silver Skates, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.  
Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10 a.m., Groton Community Center  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Mass, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.; St. Joseph, Turton, Mass, 6 p.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship: (Conde at 8:30 a.m., Groton at 10:30 a.m.), Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m. and at Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Pastor at Bethesda, Aberdeen.

## Monday, Jan. 29

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, pineapple tidbits, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.  
School Lunch: French bread pizza, peas.  
Girls Basketball hosts Florence/Henry: (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m. followed by Varsity)  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, Jan. 30

Senior Menu: New England ham dinner, fruit, cookie, dinner roll.  
School Breakfast: Biscuits.  
School Lunch: Oriental chicken, rice.  
Boys JH Games hosts Aberdeen Roncalli: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

## Wednesday, Jan. 31

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas, apricots, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: French toast.  
School Lunch: Beef stew with biscuits.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.



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*Happy New Year to our dear friends.  
The staff and residents of the  
Avantara - Groton  
wish the new year brings you  
lots of happiness and joy.  
May God shower His abundant blessings  
upon you all year round.*

*Happy New Year!*



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## **PUC highlights the importance of keeping natural gas meters clear of snow and ice this winter**

PIERRE, S.D. - With winter weather fully upon the state, the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission urges South Dakotans to keep natural gas meters and appliance vents clear of snow and ice.

"Accumulation of snow and ice on gas meters has the potential to contribute to leaks and malfunctions," stated PUC Chairperson Kristie Fiegen. "We want every South Dakotan to be safe and warm this season. Regularly checking to ensure snow and ice is not building up around meters and vents should be part of your regular winter home maintenance," she continued.

Gas meters are designed to withstand extreme temperatures and weather conditions, but snow and ice still have the potential to do serious damage. To remove frozen layers that have gathered on or near important infrastructure, try using a broom, snow brush or your hand. Never kick the meter to break up or clear ice. Do not use snow blowers, blades or shovels to complete the task either. If you find the ice buildup is extremely heavy and you are unable to remove it yourself, call your natural gas provider for assistance.

"Gas equipment requires adequate airflow for safe combustion and proper venting of appliances to prevent a dangerous carbon monoxide situation. When frozen precipitation accumulates on a meter, it can cause the regulator or meter to malfunction, can lead to a gas leak, and is a serious safety risk," explained PUC Vice Chairman Gary Hanson.

Often, the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the warning signs that accompany a natural gas leak is the strong odor of natural gas. There are other signs to be aware of; seeing a mist, white cloud, or dense fog and hearing a hissing or whistling sound coming from the meter should also be red flags. Any of these should alert you to a potentially hazardous situation, lead you to immediately leave the building or area and then call for help. It is also a good idea to consider devices, like carbon monoxide and gas detectors, that can be installed to alert to danger you may not have noticed.

"Another crucial measure parents can take right now is to sit down with kids and talk about natural gas safety. Explain that natural gas smells like rotten eggs. Let them know if they smell gas, they should leave fast. Establish a plan, including where to go and who to call, if something were to happen while a parent is not home," recommended PUC Commissioner Chris Nelson.

Protecting your natural gas meter is essential to ensuring your family and home stay as safe as possible this snowy season. Even without the serious safety risk of natural gas leaks, accumulated snow and ice on meters and vents can lead to service interruptions and affect how well your appliances and furnaces operate.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **State, Minnehaha County agree to pay legal fees after separate First Amendment lawsuit losses**

**BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 27, 2023 11:40 AM**

The state will pay the legal bills for a man who won a First Amendment case in federal court that centered on personalized license plates.

Earlier this month, the state of South Dakota agreed to a settlement with Lynn Hart, who had sued the state over its personalized license plate policy with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota.

The settlement saw the state strike language allowing it to act as a judge of good taste and decency in decisions on whether to approve personalized plates. Instead, the state Division of Motor Vehicles will rely on the Merriam-Webster dictionary to determine if a plate application is too vulgar to affix to a vehicle in South Dakota.

The state will pay just over \$78,000 in total to cover the legal fees for Hart and the ACLU of South Dakota, which called the settlement a victory for free speech when it was announced earlier this month.

The document ordering the payment was signed by U.S. District Judge Roberto Lange on Tuesday.

That was also the day the state's largest county formally signed off on the payment of legal fees in a separate First Amendment Case. Last month, Minnehaha County settled a lawsuit filed by Dakotans for Health, an advocacy group that argued that a county policy restricting the collection of signatures by ballot question petitioners amounted to an unconstitutional restriction of civil rights.

The county had passed a policy that would have boxed petitioners into a small area at the county administration building parking lot, and would have forced them to check in with the county auditor. A judge blocked the policy almost immediately, citing Dakotans for Health's strong likelihood of victory in the case and the need to forgo restrictive changes amid a prime period for pre-election petition gathering.

The settlement came after the county updated its policy, ditching the check-in requirement and creating a small "zone of non-interference" around the building's front door. The rest of the sidewalk outside the high-traffic building remains open for petitioners.

On Tuesday, the Minnehaha County Commission voted to authorize the county to pay about \$54,800 to Dakotans for Health to cover that organization's legal fees.

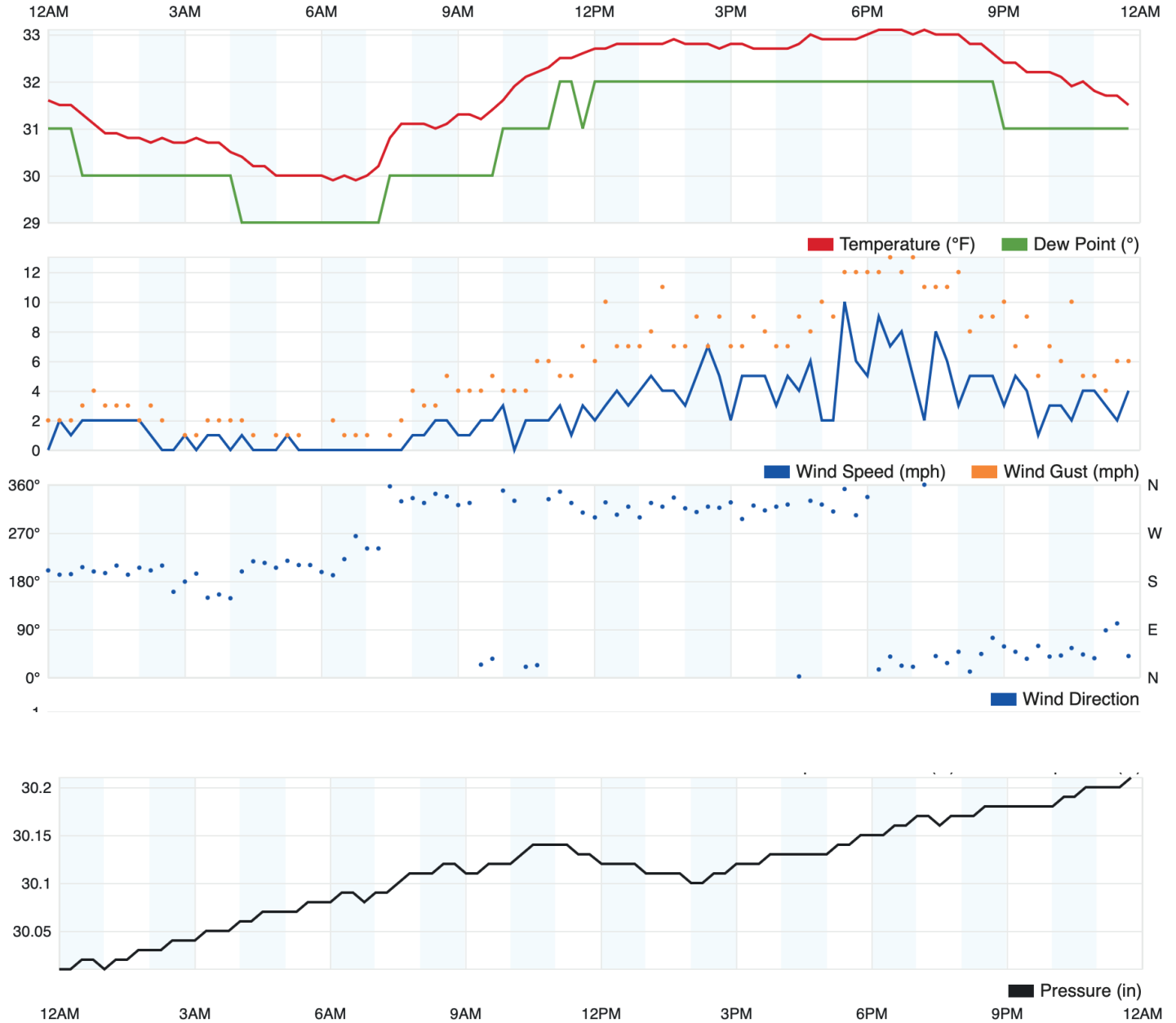
Dakotans for Health also challenged a similar petition-gathering policy in Lawrence County this year. Lawrence County also adjusted its policy in light of the lawsuit, and the advocacy group again asked that the case be dismissed as a result. In that case, Judge Lange signed off on the dismissal of the First Amendment claims on Dec. 14, but noted that Lawrence County "do(es) not agree" that Dakotans for Health is entitled to legal fees.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

# Groton Daily Independent








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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs








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Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
Dec 28	Dec 29	Dec 30	Dec 31	Jan 1	Jan 2	Jan 3
						
36°F 16°F	39°F 22°F	28°F 17°F	23°F 12°F	27°F 17°F	31°F 19°F	28°F 16°F
NNW 8 MPH	WSW 9 MPH	NW 17 MPH	N 14 MPH	SSW 13 MPH	WNW 9 MPH	NW 9 MPH

## Next Few Days

Today	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
				
<i>Highs:</i> 29 to 37°	<i>Highs:</i> 35 to 43° <b>Breezy</b>	<i>Highs:</i> 27 to 33° <b>Breezy</b>	<i>Highs:</i> 19 to 25°	<i>Highs:</i> 24 to 34°

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Dry conditions for the next few days as clouds clear out through the day today. Generally temperatures will continue to remain above average.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 33 °F at 6:31 PM

Low Temp: 30 °F at 5:18 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 5:47 PM

Precip: Storm Total Moisture: 1.85

Day length: 8 hours, 47 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1898

Record Low: -24 in 1924

Average High: 25

Average Low: 4

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.54

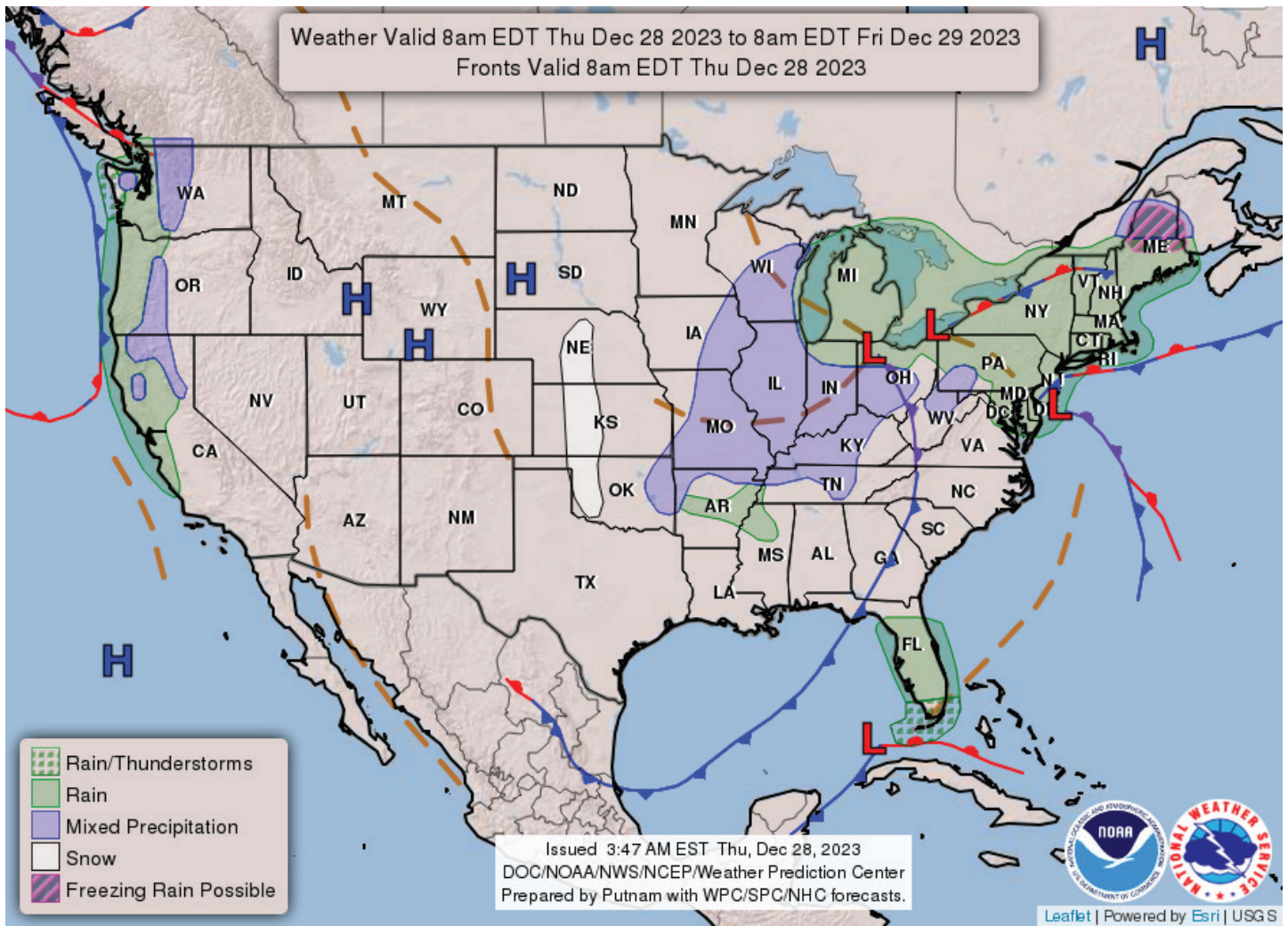
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.85

Average Precip to date: 21.75

Precip Year to Date: 25.02

Sunset Tonight: 4:57:55 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:08 am





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## Today in Weather History

December 28, 2000: Northwest winds of 35 to 50 mph, gusting to around 65 mph, occurred across central and north central South Dakota in the morning. The high winds resulted in blizzard conditions at some locations just east of the Missouri River. Further east, in northeast South Dakota, northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph combined with newly fallen snow to generate blizzard conditions from the morning into the early afternoon hours. Travel was terrible in many places, and many motorists found themselves in ditches. There were also several non-injury accidents.

1839 - The third storm in two weeks hit the northeastern U.S. It brought two more feet of snow to Hartford, CT, and Worcester, MA. Whole gales swept the coast causing many wrecks. (David Ludlum)

1879 - Tay Bridge is the main-line railway across the Tay River in Scotland, between the city of Dundee and the suburb of Wormit in Fife. During the evening hours of December 28, 1879, winds were said to blow at right angles to the bridge. Witnesses said the storm was as severe as they had seen in 20 to 30 years. The winds at Glasgow and Aberdeen were measured at 71 mph. Winds were estimated to be 80 mph in Dundee. A passenger train departed at 7:13 pm was said to disappear three minutes later. The train was found at the bottom of the river, along with the high rafters and much of the ironwork of their supporting piers. There were no survivors. The Court of Inquiry report concluded that "The fall of the bridge was occasioned by the insufficiency of the cross bracing and its fastenings to sustain the force of the gale."

1897 - The temperature at Dayville, OR, hit 81 degrees to establish a state record for December. (The Weather Channel)

1924 - Iowa experienced its coldest December morning of record. Morning lows averaged 25 degrees below zero for the 104 weather stations across the state.

1955 - Anchorage, AK, was buried under 17.7 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1958 - Albuquerque, NM, received 14.2 inches of snow to establish a 24 hour record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Up to twenty inches of snow buried southern Minnesota, and 20 to 40 mph northwesterly winds produced snow drifts six feet high, and reduced visibilities to near zero at times in blowing snow. There were a thousand traffic accidents in Michigan during the storm, resulting in thirty-five injuries. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds behind a cold front claimed three lives in eastern Pennsylvania, and injured a dozen others in eastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Maryland. Winds gusted to 87 mph at Hammon-ton NJ and in the Washington D.C. area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Squalls continued to bring snow to the Great Lakes Region, with heavy snow reported near Lake Superior and Lake Ontario. Syracuse NY received 8.5 inches of snow to push the total for the month past their previous December record of 57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - A severe snow storm hit northern California and southern Oregon. As much as 2 feet of snow fell along Interstate 5 closing a 150-mile stretch of the interstate, stranding hundreds of travelers. Winds from the storm caused power outages to more than 200,000 customers in California and Oregon. One man died of a heart attack after helping other drivers. (CNN)

2004 - Los Angeles (downtown) broke a daily rainfall record for the month of December (5.55 inches). This was the third wettest calendar day in Los Angeles since records began in 1877.

2005 - An outbreak of severe thunderstorms across portions of the southeast United States on the 28th produced hail, high winds and a few tornadoes. The states of Georgia and Tennessee were the most affected. (NCDC)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHY FATHERS MATTER

We rarely think of Joseph when we speak of Mary and her son, Jesus. But Joseph was a very special individual as well.

In describing him, Matthew says that he was a "just" or "righteous" man. And, because of that, he was a "decent," "fair" and "righteous" man. When he was faced with an incredibly difficult decision, an angel appeared and advised him to "go ahead with your marriage to Mary."

Initially, Scripture informs us, "that not wanting to disgrace her, he planned to send her away." He was well aware of the fact that stoning was the legal prescription for what people would think of Mary's being pregnant without being married. If he took Mary to be his wife, he could be humiliated or ridiculed by those around him. But he chose to obey the command of the angel to marry her. As a "righteous" man he was also a "merciful" man, a man willing to listen to, hear from, and obey God. Joseph was a man of great character.

But there is more. Not only was he righteous, merciful, and obedient to the voice of God, but he was a man who was sensitive and discrete. Joseph was open to the voice of God and responded immediately when God spoke to him and protected the reputation and honor of Mary – thereby revealing he was a man of integrity.

Prayer: Lord, we pray for fathers everywhere who will strive to be like the earthly father of Your Son. We ask that You raise up men of integrity to honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 1:18-25 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.



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: 12.26.23

8 10 22 58 64 21

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$92,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 5 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.27.23

3 10 36 47 52 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 20 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.27.23

8 12 36 38 45 1

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 35 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.27.23

11 14 15 19 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 35 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.27.23

14 29 39 66 67 2

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 4 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.27.23

4 11 38 51 68 5

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$760,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 4 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **North Dakota lawmaker who used homophobic slurs during DUI arrest has no immediate plans to resign**

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A North Dakota Republican lawmaker has no plans to immediately resign, despite party leaders' calls for him to step down after he railed against police with profane, homophobic and anti-migrant language during a recent traffic stop that ended in his arrest on a charge of drunken driving. In a statement Wednesday, Republican state Rep. Nico Rios, of Williston, said he is "seriously mulling all aspects" of his future.

"As I weigh my future in the legislature, I am going to spend the next few months addressing my issues with alcoholism and getting the help I need," he said in a statement. "Any decision I make going forward will be made with a sober mind and deliberative clarity. To do so, I will be prioritizing breaking my chemical dependency on alcohol, improving the interpersonal relations I have strained, and listening to our community."

Rios also said he takes responsibility for his "disgusting actions" during the Dec. 15 traffic stop, and apologized "to those I have hurt and disappointed," including law enforcement officers. He added that he is "100% committed to making repairs for my actions and straightening out my life."

Police body camera footage requested by and provided to the AP shows Rios cursing an officer, repeatedly questioning his English accent, and using homophobic slurs and anti-migrant language. He also said he would call the North Dakota attorney general about the situation. He told the officers they would "regret picking on me because you don't know who ... I am."

Rios' statement comes a day after Republican House Majority Leader Mike Lefor and state party officials publicly called on him to resign.

"There is no room in the legislature, or our party, for this behavior," Lefor said Tuesday. The AP left him a phone message on Wednesday seeking comment on Rios' decision.

Rios has said he was leaving a Christmas party before police pulled him over. He was charged with misdemeanor counts of drunken driving and refusing to provide a chemical test. He is scheduled for a pretrial conference on Feb. 5 in municipal court.

Rios, who works in an oil field position involved in the hydraulic fracturing of wells, was elected unopposed in 2022 to a four-year term in the state House of Representatives. He sits on the House Judiciary Committee, a panel that handles law enforcement legislation.

Republicans control the North Dakota House, 82-12.

### **A lifestyle and enduring relationship with horses lends to the popularity of rodeo in Indian Country**

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Kicking up a cloud of dust, the men riding bareback were in a rowdy scramble to be the first to lean down from atop their horses and grab hold of the chicken that was buried up to its neck in the ground.

The competition is rarely on display these days and most definitely not with a live chicken. And yet, it was this Navajo tradition and other horse-based contests in tribal communities that evolved into a modern-day sport that now fills arenas far and wide: rodeo.

With each competition, Native Americans have made them decidedly theirs — a shift from the Wild West shows and Fourth of July celebrations of centuries past that reinforced stereotypes. Rodeo has provided a stage for Native Americans, many of whom had nomadic lifestyles before the U.S. established reservations, to hone their skills and deepen their relationship with horses.

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"It was really a way to bring something good out of a really tough situation and become successful economically and, of course, have some joy and celebration in the rodeo world," said Jessica White Plume, who is Oglala Lakota and oversees a horse culture program for the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in North Dakota.

The sport was born in the mastering of skills that came as horses transformed hunting, travel and welfare. Grandstands often play host to mini family reunions while Native cowboys and cowgirls show off their skills roping, riding and wrestling livestock.

One of those rising stars is Najiah Knight, a 17-year-old who is Paiute from the Klamath Tribes and trying to become the first female bull rider to compete on the Professional Bull Riders tour. Her upbringing in a small town riding livestock is a familiar tale across Indian Country.

Growing up, Ed Holyan's grandma would drop off him and his brother in Coyote Canyon — an isolated and rugged spot on the Navajo Nation — to tend sheep. When they got bored, they'd rope rocks, the Shetland pony and calves with small horns, he said.

"We'd seen my dad rodeo and my older brother rodeoed, so we knew we had the foundation," said Holyan, the rodeo coach at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona. "It was in our blood."

For Kennard Real Bird, who rode saddle broncs for 16 years, horses provided freedom on the Crow reservation in Montana. The river where the Battle of Little Bighorn took place coursed through the land, prairie extended into pine trees and high buttes beckoned with even wider-ranging views.

The ranching life developed into a career as a stock contractor and a reluctant rodeo announcer who deals in observational comedy, including at the Sheridan, Wyoming, rodeo.

No event there is as big of a crowd pleaser than the Indian Relay Races held in July — a contest rooted in buffalo hunts on the Great Plains or raids of camps, depending on who you ask.

A team consists of someone to catch the incoming horse, two people to hold horses and a rider who speeds around the track bareback, twice switching to another horse.

"It's the most fun you can have with your moccasins on," Real Bird, 73, jokingly tells crowds.

Kidding aside, horsemanship is a celebrated part of tribes' history.

On the Crow and Fort Berthold reservations, tribal members compete for the title of ultimate warrior by running, canoeing and bareback horse racing. Back on the Navajo Nation in the Four Corners region, rodeo is still called "ahoochai," derived from the Navajo word for "chicken."

The Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College on the Fort Berthold reservation offers Great Plains horsemanship as a tract in its two-year equine studies program, the only such program at a tribal college or university.

Instructors highlight history like keeping prized horses in an earth lodge and the North Dakota Six Pack, a group of bronc and bull riders that included MHA Nation citizen Joe Chase, who shined on the rodeo circuit in the 1950s, said Lori Nelson, the college's director of Agriculture and Land Grants.

The tribe recently purchased kid-safe mini bulls and has bucking horses to revive rodeo among the youth, said Jim Baker, who manages the tribe's Healing Horse Ranch.

"That's one of our goals to keep the horse culture alive among our people," he said.

The largest stage for all-Native rodeo competitors is the Indian National Finals Rodeo held in Las Vegas. Tribal regalia, blessings bestowed by elders and flag songs that serve as tribes' national anthems are as much staples as big buckles and cowboy hats.

Tydon Tsosie, of Crownpoint, New Mexico, restored the town's moniker to "Navajo Nation Steer Wrestling Capital" when he won the open event there this year as a 17-year-old. In his family, rodeo runs through generations with songs, prayers and respect for horses.

Tsosie plans to continue the tradition, proudly proclaiming, "I see myself doing it for the rest of my life until I get old."

## The number of wounded Israeli soldiers is mounting, representing a hidden cost of war

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

RAMAT GAN, Israel (AP) — Igor Tudoran spent just 12 hours inside the Gaza Strip before a missile slammed into his tank, leaving him with a life-altering injury.

“Already within the tank, I understood from the condition of my leg that I would lose it. But the question was how much of it will I lose,” he said, seated on a bed in the hospital where he has been treated since he was wounded last month.

Tudoran, 27, a reservist who volunteered for duty after the Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel by Hamas that triggered the war, lost his right leg beneath the hip. He has kept up a positive attitude — but concedes that his hopes of becoming an electrician may no longer be possible.

Tudoran is part of a swelling number of wounded Israeli fighters, yet another sizable and deeply traumatized segment of Israeli society whose struggles are emerging as a hidden cost of the war that will be felt acutely for years to come. Given the large numbers of wounded, advocates worry the country is not prepared to address their needs.

“I have never seen a scope like this and an intensity like this,” said Edan Kleiman, who heads the non-profit Disabled Veterans Organization, which advocates for more than 50,000 soldiers wounded in this and earlier conflicts. “We must rehabilitate these people,” he said.

Israel’s Defense Ministry says roughly 3,000 members of the country’s security forces have been wounded since Hamas militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 240 people hostage. Nearly 900 of those are soldiers wounded since Israel began its ground offensive in late October, in which troops have engaged in close combat with Hamas militants. More than 160 soldiers have been killed since the ground operation began.

“They add up,” said Yagil Levy, who teaches civil-military relations at Israel’s Open University, of the wounded. “There could be a long-term impact if we see a big rate of people with disabilities that Israel must rehabilitate, which can produce economic issues as well as social issues.”

The war has also brought unprecedented suffering to Palestinians in Gaza, where more than 21,000 have been killed, close to 55,000 wounded and amputations have become commonplace. Most of the tiny enclave’s population has been displaced.

Israelis still largely stand behind the war’s objectives and it is mostly seen as an existential battle meant to restore a sense of security lost in Hamas’ attacks. The country’s mainstream media hardly cover the hardship endured by Palestinians, and their plight barely registers in Israeli public discourse.

In a country with compulsory military service for most Jews, the fate of soldiers is a sensitive and emotional topic.

The names of fallen soldiers are announced at the top of hourly newscasts. Their funerals are packed with strangers who come to show solidarity. Their families receive generous support from the army.

But historically the plight of the wounded, though lauded as heroes, has taken a backseat to the stories of soldiers killed in battle. After the fanfare surrounding tales of their service and survival recedes, the wounded are left to contend with a new reality that can be disorienting, challenging and, for some, lonely. Their numbers have not had significant bearing on public sentiment toward Israel’s wars in the way that mounting soldiers’ deaths have.

The exceptionally large numbers of wounded in this war, however, will provide a visible reminder of the conflict for years to come.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized their sacrifice during a recent visit to wounded soldiers at Sheba Medical Center, Israel’s largest hospital, which has treated and rehabilitated many of the injured. “You are genuine heroes,” he said.

At Sheba, soldiers and civilians wounded in the war spilled out into the corridors on a recent day and passed the time with their families on an outdoor deck. Soccer paraphernalia adorned the wounded soldiers’ hospital beds as did the ubiquitous Israeli flag.



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One man who had lost a leg after being attacked at the Nova music festival on Oct. 7 lay in the sun on the hospital grounds, his wheelchair parked nearby. The Israeli pop diva Rita handed out hugs to some wounded soldiers. A military helicopter carrying more wounded landed nearby.

The Israeli Defense Ministry said it was working at "full capacity" to assist the wounded, and that it was cutting red tape and hiring employees to deal with the influx.

Jonathan Ben Hamou, 22, who lost his left leg beneath the knee after a rocket-propelled grenade struck the bulldozer he was using to help clear the way for other troops, is already looking forward to the day when he can use a state-funded prosthetic.

Ben Hamou, who mostly uses a wheelchair since the incident in early November, said that he eventually plans to pursue his goal of attending a military commanders' course.

"I'm not ashamed of the wound," said Ben Hamou, who filmed the RPG's moment of impact as well as his evacuation to hospital. "I was wounded for the country in a war inside Gaza. I am proud."

But Kleiman, who himself was wounded in an operation in the Gaza Strip in the early 1990s, said he thinks Israeli authorities are not grasping the severity of the situation.

The disabled veterans group is ramping up efforts to address what he suspects will be the overwhelming needs of a new cadre of wounded soldiers. He said the organization is tripling its manpower, adding therapists and employees to help wounded veterans navigate bureaucracy and upgrade rehab centers.

Kleiman said the number of wounded is likely to stretch close to 20,000 once those diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder are included.

He said if wounded soldiers don't receive the mental and physical care they need, including making their homes or cars accessible, it could stunt their rehabilitation and delay or even prevent their reentry into the workforce.

"There are wounded whose lives have been ruined," said Idit Shafran Gittleman, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv research center. "They will have to contend with their wound their entire lives."

## Israeli strikes across Gaza kill dozens of Palestinians, even in largely emptied north

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces bombarded cities, towns and refugee camps across Gaza overnight and into Thursday, killing dozens of people in an air and ground offensive against Hamas that has widened to most of the territory and forced thousands more to flee from homes and shelters.

The war has already killed over 20,000 Palestinians and driven around 85% of the population of 2.3 million from their homes. Much of northern Gaza has been leveled, largely depopulated and isolated from the rest of the territory for weeks. Many fear a similar fate awaits the south.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas — which is still putting up stiff resistance, even in the north — and bring back more than 100 hostages still held by the militants after their Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel, in which some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed.

Israel has brushed off international calls for a cease-fire — saying it would amount to a victory for Hamas.

The United States — while providing crucial support for the offensive — has urged Israel to take greater measures to spare civilians and allow in more aid. But aid workers say the amount of food, fuel and medical supplies entering is still far below what is needed, and 1 in 4 Palestinians in Gaza are starving, according to U.N. officials.

### STRIKES FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

An Israeli airstrike on a home in the northern town of Beit Lahiyeh — one of the first targets of the ground invasion that began in October — buried at least 21 people, including women and children, according to a family member.

Bassel Kheir al-Din, a journalist with a local TV station, said the strike flattened his family house and severely damaged three neighboring homes. He said 12 members of his family — including three children

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aged 2, 7 and 8 — were buried and presumed dead, and that nine neighbors were missing.

In central Gaza, Israeli warplanes and artillery pounded the built-up Bureij and Nuseirat refugee camps, leveling buildings, residents said. Israel said this week it would expand its ground offensive into central Gaza, and typically launches waves of airstrikes and shelling before troops and tanks move in.

A hospital in the nearby town of Deir al-Balah received the bodies of 25 people killed overnight, including five children and seven women, hospital records showed on Thursday. Nonstop explosions could be heard throughout the night in the town — where hundreds of thousands of people have sought shelter, with many spending cold nights sleeping on sidewalks.

“It was another night of killing and massacres,” said Saeed Moustafa, a resident of the Nuseirat camp. He said people were still crying out from the rubble of a house hit by an airstrike on Wednesday.

“We are unable to get them out. We hear their screams but we don’t have equipment,” he said.

Farther south, in Khan Younis, the Palestinian Red Crescent said a strike near its Al-Amal Hospital killed at least 10 people and wounded another 12. Much of the city’s population has left, but many are sheltering near Al-Amal and another hospital, hoping they will be spared from the bombardment.

## ANOTHER WAVE OF DISPLACEMENT

Rami Abu Mosab, who lives in the Bureij refugee camp, said thousands of people have fled their homes in recent days because of the intense bombardment. He plans to remain there because he doesn’t feel that anywhere in Gaza is safe.

“Here is death and there is death,” he said, “To die in your home is better.”

Bureij and Nuseirat are among several camps across the region that were built to house hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel’s creation. They have since grown into crowded residential neighborhoods.

Some 700,000 Palestinian fled or were driven from their homes during that conflict, an exodus the Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, or catastrophe. Some 1.9 million have been displaced within Gaza since Oct. 7.

As Israel has broadened its offensive, fleeing Palestinians have packed into areas along the Egyptian border and the southern Mediterranean coastline, where shelters and tent camps are overflowing. Even in those areas, Israel continues to strike what it says are militant targets.

The Israeli military blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas, which positions fighters, tunnels and rocket launchers in dense residential areas. But the military rarely comments on individual strikes.

Israel’s offensive in Gaza has already been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than 21,100 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza. The count doesn’t differentiate between civilians and combatants.

The military says it has killed thousands of militants, without presenting evidence, and that 167 of its soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive.

## Texas has arrested thousands on trespassing charges at the border. Illegal crossings are still high

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

EAGLE PASS, Texas (AP) — Before settling in New York City like thousands of other migrants this year, Abdoul, a 32-year-old from West Africa, took an unexpected detour: Weeks in a remote Texas jail on local trespassing charges after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

“I spent a lot of hours without sleeping, sitting on the floor,” said Abdoul, a political activist who fled Mauritania, fearing persecution. He spoke on the condition that his last name not be published for fear of jeopardizing his request for asylum.

Starting in March, Texas will allow police to arrest migrants who enter the state illegally and give local judges the authority to order them out of the country. The new law comes two years after Texas launched a smaller-scale operation to arrest migrants for trespassing. But although that operation was also intended to stem illegal crossings, there is little indication that it has done so.

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The results raise questions about the impact arrests have on deterring immigration as Texas readies to give police even broader powers to apprehend migrants on charges of illegal entry. Civil rights organizations have already sued to stop the new law signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, calling it an unconstitutional overreach that encroaches on the U.S. government's immigration authority.

Since 2021, Texas authorities have arrested nearly 10,000 migrants on misdemeanor trespassing charges under what Abbott has called a "arrest and jail" operation: Border landowners enter agreements with the state authorizing trespassing arrests, clearing the way for law enforcement to apprehend migrants who enter the U.S. through those properties.

The arrests have drawn constitutional challenges in courts, including claims of due process violations. More recently, one landowner asked officials to stop the trespassing arrests on their property, claiming authorities never had permission in the first place.

Abbott had predicted the trespassing arrests would produce swift results. "When people start learning about this, they're going to stop coming across the Texas border," he told Fox News in July 2021, when Texas-Mexico border crossings reached 1.2 million that fiscal year.

That number has ticked up even higher over the past fiscal year, topping 1.5 million.

"They're still coming through here," said Sheriff Tom Schmerber of Maverick County, where Abdoul crossed the border and was quickly arrested in July.

Abbott suggested this month Texas may soon phase out the trespassing arrests as it moves forward with illegal entry charges that can be enforced most anywhere in the state, including hundreds of miles from the border.

The trespassing arrests have been a cornerstone of Abbott's nearly \$10 billion border mission known as Operation Lone Star that has tested the federal government's authority over immigration. Abbott has also sent an estimated 80,000 migrants on buses to Democratic-led cities, strung up razor wire on the border and installed buoy barriers on the Rio Grande. Last week, Abbott sent a flight of 120 migrants to Chicago in an escalation of his busing operation.

The mission is visible in Maverick County, where many of the arrests have taken place. Patrol cars are parked every few miles along the two-lane roads leading to the border city of Eagle Pass. Along the Rio Grande, state troopers from Florida, one of several GOP-led states that have sent National Guard members and law enforcement to the border, work in tandem with Texas officials.

Abdoul was arrested in the city's Shelby Park, a small piece of greenery touching the river with a ramp for boaters. It was the Fourth of July when Abdoul set foot on American soil for the first time. Officers standing nearby asked him a few questions and quickly took him into custody.

He said that he was given small food portions in jail and was so miserable he would say anything to get out. He pleaded guilty to trespassing, a charge that carries a maximum sentence of a year in jail.

It's unknown how many of those arrested on the border for trespassing remain in the U.S., were deported, were allowed to stay to seek asylum, or had their cases dismissed. But Kristen Etter, an attorney who said her legal organization has represented more than 3,000 migrants on the trespassing charges, said the majority of their clients were allowed to stay and seek asylum.

She said many migrants seek out law enforcement at the border because they want to surrender.

"If anything, rather than being a deterrent, it is attracting more people," she said.

The trespassing arrests are spearheaded by the Texas Department of Public Safety, which said the state's border operation has resulted in more than 37,000 total criminal arrests. Spokesperson Ericka Miller said officers have stopped gang members, human traffickers, sex offenders and others from entering the country.

"Had we not been there, all of it likely would have crossed into the country unimpeded," Miller said in an email. "The state of Texas is working to send a message to those considering crossing into the country illegally to think again."

Rolando Salinas, the mayor of Eagle Pass, signed a blanket trespassing charge affidavit to allow arrests like Abdoul's on park grounds during a spike in migrant crossings in July. Following local backlash, he rescinded the affidavit before signing it again weeks later. Ultimately, Salinas said, he supports the operation because it has brought needed law enforcement personnel to the city.

"Our force is not big enough to maintain the peace of Eagle Pass if we have 10-15,000 people coming through," Salinas said.

State Rep. David Spiller, who authored the new arrest law Abbott signed this month, said he believes border crossings would be much higher without the trespassing prosecutions. But he said those cases add to prosecutors' workloads, depend on cooperation from landowners, and, even if defendants are convicted, the offense is not deportable under federal law.

Those charged, Spiller said, are presumably assimilating into the U.S. population.

"We're doing what we can, but we're only slowing down that process," Spiller said. "We haven't stopped anybody."

Abdoul went to New York City after his release, where he said he was allowed to stay at a shelter for a month. He now rents a room with a cousin and is awaiting a work permit. Then, he said, he will get a job and try to go to school until an immigration judge decides his future next spring.

"When everything is finished and my case is guaranteed, I want to go to school because I started school and my dream is to be well educated," Abdoul said.

## Stigma against gay men could worsen Congo's biggest mpox outbreak, scientists warn

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — As Congo copes with its biggest outbreak of mpox, scientists warn discrimination against gay and bisexual men on the continent could make it worse.

In November, the World Health Organization reported that mpox, also known as monkeypox, was being spread via sex in Congo for the first time. That is a significant departure from previous flare-ups, where the virus mainly sickened people in contact with diseased animals.

Mpox has been in parts of central and west Africa for decades, but it was not until 2022 that it was documented to spread via sex; most of the 91,000 people infected in approximately 100 countries that year were gay or bisexual men.

In Africa, unwillingness to report symptoms could drive the outbreak underground, said Dimie Ogoina, an infectious diseases specialist at the Niger Delta University in Nigeria.

"It could be that because homosexuality is prohibited by law in most parts of Africa, many people do not come forward if they think they have been infected with mpox," Ogoina said.

WHO officials said they identified the first sexually transmitted cases of the more severe type of mpox in Congo last spring, shortly after a resident of Belgium who "identified himself as a man who has sexual relations with other men" arrived in Kinshasa, the Congolese capital. The U.N. health agency said five other people who had sexual contact with the man later became infected with mpox.

"We have been underestimating the potential of sexual transmission of mpox in Africa for years," said Ogoina, who with his colleagues, first reported in 2019 that mpox might be spreading via sex.

Gaps in monitoring make it a challenge to estimate how many mpox cases are linked to sex, he said. Still, most cases of mpox in Nigeria involve people with no known contact with animals, he noted.

In Congo, there have been about 13,350 suspected cases of mpox, including 607 deaths through the end of November with only about 10% of cases confirmed by laboratories. But how many infections were spread through sex isn't clear. WHO said about 70% of cases are in children under 15.

During a recent trip to Congo to assess the outbreak, WHO officials found there was "no awareness" among health workers that mpox could be spread sexually, resulting in missed cases.

WHO said health authorities had confirmed sexual transmission of mpox "between male partners and simultaneously through heterosexual transmission" in different parts of the country.

Mpox typically causes symptoms including a fever, skin rash, lesions and muscle soreness for up to one month. It is spread via close contact and most people recover without needing medical treatment.

During the 2022 major international outbreak, mass vaccination programs were undertaken in some countries, including Canada, Britain and the U.S., and targeted those at highest risk — gay and bisexual

men. But experts say that's not likely to work in Africa for several reasons, including the stigma against gay communities.

"I don't think we'll see the same clamoring for vaccines in Africa that we saw in the West last year," said Dr. Boghuma Titanji, an assistant professor of medicine in infectious diseases at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta.

She said that the gay and bisexual men most at risk of mpox might be fearful of coming forward in a broad immunization program. Countries should work on ways to give the shots —if available — in a way that wouldn't stigmatize them, she said.

Dr. Jean-Jacques Muyemba, general director of Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research, said two provinces in Congo had reported clusters of mpox spread through sex, a concerning development.

There's no licensed vaccine in Congo, and it would be hard to get enough shots for any large-scale program, Muyemba said. The country is trying to get a Japanese mpox vaccine, but regulatory issues are complicating the situation, he said.

Globally, only one vaccine has been authorized against mpox, made by Denmark's Bavarian Nordic. Supplies are very limited and even if they were available, they would have to be approved by the African countries using them or by WHO. To date, the vaccine has only been available in Congo through research.

Oyewale Tomori, a Nigerian virus expert who sits on several WHO advisory boards, said African governments probably have too many competing priorities to ask the U.N. health agency or donors for help securing vaccines.

"In Africa, mpox is most likely considered a low-priority nuisance," Tomori said.

He said stronger monitoring, laboratory networks and better availability of diagnostic supplies would be more helpful to the continent than vaccines.

Without greater efforts to stop the outbreaks in Africa, Ogoina predicted that mpox would continue to infect new populations, warning that the disease could also spark outbreaks in other countries, similar to the global emergency WHO declared last year.

"When the HIV pandemic started, it was among gay and bisexual men in the global north, and Africa thought it was not our problem," he said. "Before we knew it, it came to Africa, but we still thought heterosexual populations would be protected."

Women of reproductive age now account for more than 60% of new HIV infections in Africa.

"I worry the same thing will now happen with mpox," he said. "Unless we address these outbreaks in Africa, this virus will keep coming back."

## **Gypsy Rose Blanchard set to be paroled years after persuading boyfriend to kill her abusive mother**

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Gypsy Rose Blanchard, the Missouri woman who persuaded an online boyfriend to kill her mother after she had forced her to pretend for years that she was suffering from leukemia, muscular dystrophy and other serious illnesses, is set to be paroled on Thursday.

The case sparked national tabloid interest after reports emerged that Gypsy Blanchard's mother, Claudine "Dee Dee" Blanchard, who was slain in 2015, had essentially kept her daughter prisoner, forcing her to use a wheelchair and feeding tube.

It turned out that Gypsy Blanchard, now 32, was perfectly healthy, not developmentally delayed as her friends had always believed. Her mother had Munchausen syndrome by proxy, a psychological disorder in which parents or caregivers seek sympathy through the exaggerated or made-up illnesses of their children, said her trial attorney, Michael Stanfield.

"People were constantly telling Dee Dee what a wonderful mother she was, and Dee Dee was getting all of this attention," he said.

Through the ruse, the mother and daughter met country star Miranda Lambert and received charitable donations, a trip to Disney World and even a home near Springfield from Habitat for Humanity.

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Stanfield said Gypsy Blanchard's mother was able to dupe doctors by telling them her daughter's medical records had been lost in Hurricane Katrina. If they asked too many questions, she just found a new physician, shaving the girl's head to back up her story. Among the unnecessary procedures Gypsy Blanchard underwent was the removal of her salivary glands. Her mother convinced doctors it was necessary by using topical anesthetic to cause drooling.

Gypsy Blanchard, who had little schooling or contact with anyone but her mother, also was misled, especially when she was younger, Stanfield said.

"The doctors seem to confirm everything that you're being told. The outside world is telling you that your mother is a wonderful, loving, caring person. What other idea can you have?" Stanfield said.

But then the abuse became more physical, Stanfield said. Gypsy testified that her mother beat her and chained her to a bed. Slowly, Gypsy also was beginning to understand that she wasn't as sick as her mom said.

"I wanted to be free of her hold on me," Gypsy testified at the 2018 trial of her former boyfriend, Nicholas Godejohn of Big Bend, Wisconsin, who is serving a life sentence in the killing. She went on to add: "I talked him into it."

When she took the stand at his trial, prosecutors already had cut her a deal because of the abuse she had endured. In exchange for pleading guilty in 2016 to second-degree murder, she was sentenced to 10 years in prison. The first-degree murder charge she initially faced would have meant a life term.

"Nick was so in love with her and so obsessed with her that he would do anything," Godejohn's trial attorney Dwayne Perry argued in court, saying his client has autism and was manipulated.

Prosecutors, however, argued that he was motivated by sex and a desire to be with Gypsy Blanchard, whom he met on a Christian dating website.

According to the probable cause statement, Gypsy Blanchard supplied the knife and hid in a bathroom while Godejohn repeatedly stabbed her mother. The two ultimately made their way by bus to Wisconsin, where they were arrested. She has been incarcerated since then at a state women's prison in Chillicothe.

"Things are not always as they appear," said Greene County Sheriff Jim Arnott as the strange revelations began to emerge.

Even Gypsy's age was a lie. Her mother had said she was younger to make it easier to perpetuate the fraud, and got away with it because Gypsy was so small: just 4 feet, 11 inches (150 centimeters) tall.

Law enforcement was initially so confused that the original court documents listed three different ages for her, with the youngest being 19. She was 23.

Greene County Prosecutor Dan Patterson described it as "one of the most extraordinary and unusual cases we have seen."

Stanfield recalled that the first time he met Gypsy, she got out of breath walking the 75 yards (69 meters) from the elevator to the room where he talked to her. He described her as malnourished and physically frail.

"I can honestly say I've rarely had a client who looks exceedingly better after doing a fairly long prison sentence," Stanfield said. "Prison is generally not a place where you become happy and healthy. And I say that because, to me, that's kind of the evidence to the rest of the world as to just how bad what Gypsy was going through really was."

Gypsy Blanchard later said it wasn't until her arrest that she realized how healthy she was. But it took time. Eventually, she got married while behind bars to Ryan Scott Anderson, now 37, of Saint Charles, Louisiana.

The bizarre case was the subject of the 2017 HBO documentary "Mommy Dead and Dearest," the 2019 Hulu miniseries "The Act" and an upcoming Lifetime docuseries "The Prison Confession of Gypsy Rose Blanchard." Daytime television psychologist "Dr. Phil" McGraw interviewed her from prison. The novel "Darling Rose Gold" draws upon the story for its premise and Blanchard's own account, "Released: Conversations on the Eve of Freedom" is set for publication next month.

Amid the media storm, corrections department spokeswoman Karen Pojmann said no in-person coverage of her release on Thursday would be allowed "in the interest of protecting safety, security and privacy."

## Mexican officials clear border tent camp as US pressure mounts to stem migrant influx

By VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

MATAMOROS, Mexico (AP) — A ragged migrant tent camp next to the Rio Grande in Matamoros, Mexico, is a long way from the country's National Palace, where a top level U.S. delegation met with Mexico's president seeking more action to curb the surge of migrants reaching the U.S. border.

But as Mexican officials in Matamoros worked with bulldozers Wednesday to clear out what they claimed were abandoned tents, it was probably a sign of things to come.

The United States has given clear signs — by temporarily closing key border rail crossings into Texas — that it needs Mexico to do more to stop migrants hopping freight cars, buses and trucks to the border.

Mexico, desperate to get those crossings reopened to its manufactured goods, is starting to give signs it will crack down a bit.

That was on display in Matamoros as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico City.

Migrants set up the encampment in Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas in late 2022. It once held as many as 1,500 migrants, but many tents were vacated in recent months as migrants waded across the river to reach the United States.

Segismundo Doguín, the head of the local office of Mexico's immigration agency, said, "What we are doing is removing any tents that we see are empty."

But one Honduran migrant who would give only his first name, José, claimed some of the 200 remaining migrants had been practically forced to leave the camp when the clearance operation began late Tuesday.

"They ran us out," he said, saying migrants were given short notice to move their tents and belongings out of the way and felt intimidated by the bulldozers moving through the tents. "You had to run for your life to avoid an accident."

Some migrants moved into a fenced-in area of the encampment where immigration officers said they could relocate, but fear pervaded.

About 70 migrants flung themselves into the river Tuesday night and crossed into the U.S. They remained trapped for hours along the riverbank beneath the layers of concertina wire set up by orders of the Texas governor.

Few options exist for the migrants asked to leave the encampment, said Glady Cañas, founder of a Matamoros-based nongovernmental group, Ayudandoles a Triunfar, or Helping Them Win.

"The truth is that the shelters are saturated," Cañas said.

She was working at the encampment Wednesday afternoon, walking through the tents and encouraging migrants to avoid crossing illegally into the U.S., especially after several people drowned in the last few days attempting to swim the river.

This month, as many as 10,000 migrants were arrested daily on the southwest U.S. border. The U.S. has struggled to process thousands of migrants at the border, and house them once they reach northern cities.

Mexican industries were stung last week when the U.S. briefly closed two vital Texas railway crossings, arguing that border patrol agents had to be reassigned to deal with the surge. A non-rail crossing remained closed at Lukeville, Arizona, and border operations were partially suspended at San Diego and Nogales, Arizona.

Foreign Relations Secretary Alicia Bárcena said following the talks in Mexico City that the Mexican government's priority is getting the United States to reopen border crossings closed because of the migrant surge.

"We spoke about the importance of the border, and about the economic relationship ... the importance of reopening the border crossings, that is a priority for us," Bárcena said following the meeting, which was also attended by U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and homeland security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall.

Mexico already has over 32,000 soldiers and National Guard troopers — about 11% of its total forces — assigned to enforcing immigration laws.

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But the shortcomings of Mexico's effort were on display Tuesday, when National Guard members made no attempt to stop about 6,000 migrants, many from Central America and Venezuela, from walking through Mexico's main inland immigration inspection point in southern Chiapas state near the Guatemala border.

In the past, Mexico has let such migrant caravans go through, trusting they would tire themselves out walking along the highway.

By Wednesday, Lazara Padrón Molina, 46, from Cuba was sick and exhausted. The caravan set out from the city of Tapachula on Sunday and had walked about 45 miles (75 kilometers) through the heat to Escuintla in southern Chiapas state.

"The route is too long to continue walking. Why don't they just give us documents so that we could get a bus or a taxi?" Padrón Molina said. "Look at my feet," she said, showing blisters. "I can't go on anymore."

But wearing the migrants out — by obliging Venezuelans and others to hike through the jungle of the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama or corralling migrants off passenger buses in Mexico — no longer appears to work.

So many migrants have been hopping freight trains through Mexico that one of the country's two major railroads suspended trains in September because of safety concerns. Police raids to pull migrants off rail cars — the kind of action Mexico took a decade ago — might be one thing the American delegation would like to see.

The Texas railway closures put a chokehold on freight moving from Mexico to the U.S. as well as grain needed to feed Mexican livestock moving south.

López Obrador says he is willing to help, but wants the United States to send more development aid to migrants' home countries, reduce or eliminate sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela, and start a U.S.-Cuba dialogue.

## **US companies are picky about investing in China. The exceptions? Burgers, lattes**

By AAMER MADHANI, PAUL WISEMAN and ELAINE KURTENBACH Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's been no shortage of tough news for China's economy as some of the world's biggest brands consider or take action to shift manufacturing to friendlier shores at a time of unease about security controls, protectionism and wobbly relations between Beijing and Washington.

Count Adidas, Apple and Samsung among those looking elsewhere.

But as a tumultuous 2023 for the Chinese economy comes to a close, there has been at least one bright spot for Beijing when it comes to foreign investment: American fast-food chains have decided a market of 1.4 billion people is simply too delicious to pass up.

KFC China's parent company opened its 10,000th restaurant in China last month and aims to have stores within reach of half of China's population by 2026. McDonald's is planning to open 3,500 new stores in China over the next four years. And Starbucks invested \$220 million in a manufacturing and distribution facility in eastern China, its biggest project outside the U.S.

This is surely not what Chinese President Xi Jinping had in mind as he made the case to American CEOs about the upside of China's "super-large market" last month while he was in San Francisco for a summit of world leaders. The investments in fast food and other consumer goods, while Washington is curbing exports of computer chips and other advanced technology, don't fit into China's own blueprint for modernizing its economy.

"As you try to interpret the signals from McDonald's and Starbucks" and other chains, says Phil Levy, chief economist at the supply chain management firm Flexport, "note what the industries are: These are not high-tech burgers."

And while some U.S. companies are increasing investments in the world's second-largest economy, overall foreign investment began falling this year. In the July-September quarter, net foreign direct investment in China sank to a deficit of \$11.8 billion, the first quarterly deficit since Beijing began publishing the data



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in 1998.

As tensions simmer between China and its Western trading partners, many multinational companies are shifting investments to other places, such as Southeast Asia or India, or repatriating their earnings. That has sapped China of a key engine when its economy has yet to fully recover from the disruptions of the pandemic and a property industry crisis that has been a drag on growth.

Beijing puts some of the blame on U.S. government policies.

Commerce Ministry spokesperson Shu Jueting said recently, "The U.S. side has repeatedly politicized economic, trade and technology issues and overstretched the concept of security, abused export control measures, and restricted trade and investment in China by its own enterprises, which is forcing enterprises to give up opportunities in the Chinese market and opportunities for win-win cooperation."

A survey released in September by the U.S.-China Business Council, which represents American companies in China, suggested that the uncertainty has taken a toll: 43% of its members said China's business environment had deteriorated in the past year, and 83% said they were less optimistic about China than they had been three years ago. Twenty-one percent said they were investing fewer resources in China, versus just 10% who were investing more.

Surveys of European and Japanese companies have shown similar results.

While China's market is gigantic, it's ailing. Unemployment among young Chinese rose to over 20% by June, the last time the government released that data. Housing prices are falling and the stock market is down nearly 15% since the summer. That's left many Chinese feeling nervous about spending.

Still, bullishness for China as other industries try to de-risk and detangle from Beijing may be a profit-increasing strategy for the fast-food industry.

"We believe there is no better time to simplify our structure, given the tremendous opportunity to capture increased demand and further benefit from our fastest-growing market's long-term potential," McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski said as the Chicago-based company announced in November it was increasing its minority 20% ownership of its McDonald's licensed stores in China, Macau and Hong Kong to 48%.

Burgers and lattes don't raise the sorts of friction that more high-tech industries have in the complicated U.S.-China relationship. Those strains have persisted under the presidency of Joe Biden, who took office vowing to do more to counter China's expanding military clout and its menacing of neighbors, to improve the country's treatment of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities, and to crack down on intellectual property theft.

Relations hit a low point in February when Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon that traversed the continental United States to be shot down. Beijing, which claims self-governed Taiwan as its own territory, also protested a stopover in the U.S. by the island's president, Tsai Ing-wen, earlier this year. China answered fresh U.S. controls on exports of advanced computer chips and the technology to make them with limits of its own on exports of vital commodities like graphite, gallium and germanium, all metals used in making semiconductors, solar panels, missiles and radar.

The relationship appears to be stabilizing somewhat as 2023 winds down, highlighted by last month's Biden and Xi meeting outside San Francisco. But since then, Biden's top advisers have said there are no plans to shift the strategy of tightening regulations and blocking U.S.-based high-tech investments in China, citing the need to safeguard national security.

Both former President Donald Trump, the 2024 GOP presidential front-runner, and Biden have worried about depending on China, a potential adversary, for supplies of critical materials used in many high-tech products. Both have sought to reduce America's reliance on Chinese factories and have encouraged companies to shift away from China to other countries — so-called "friend-shoring."

Still, Biden administration officials have said they don't want to see a total decoupling of the world's two biggest economies.

"De-risking, yes. Decoupling, no," Nicholas Burns, the U.S. ambassador to China, said at a recent event in Washington. "We want to continue a major trade and investment relationship with China, just not ... in the realm that might help them leapfrog over us sometime in the next 10 years in military technology."

Rosemary Coates, executive director of the nonprofit Reshoring Institute, noted that decisions to expand

or retrench are relatively easy for a company like McDonald's or its fast-food rivals.

Franchises "can be opened or closed," Coates said. "It's not like you're investing in an auto plant or some kind of machine shop."

China's vast market is vital for many foreign companies: At their annual investors day gathering this month, McDonald's executives noted that 70 million of the 150 million customers active in its customer loyalty program are in China.

KFC China says growth in its new outlets has averaged more than 22% over the last five years. The chain Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen relaunched its brand in China in August with a flagship restaurant in Shanghai and plans to open 1,700 stores over the next 10 years.

But for all the promise of China's huge market, U.S. businesses have other reasons to think twice about expanding in China.

In July, the U.S. recommended Americans reconsider traveling to China because of arbitrary law enforcement and exit bans and the risk of wrongful detentions. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo has warned Chinese leaders that U.S. businesses might stop investing in their country if they do not address complaints about worsening conditions due to raids on firms, unexplained fines and unpredictable official behavior.

While insisting that China is keen to have foreign investment, Beijing has given no indication it might change trade, market access and other policies that irk Washington and its other trading partners.

"Where do you draw the line?" asked Levy, a former White House economic adviser in George W. Bush's administration. "Someone might say: For sourcing sensitive computer chips, this has to be done in a place I really trust. ... The other extreme is: We're OK selling them lattes and burgers. But where do you draw the line for the stuff in between — say, automotive parts? What about ball bearings?"

## **Nikki Haley, asked what caused the Civil War, leaves out slavery. It's not the first time**

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley was asked Wednesday by a New Hampshire voter about the reason for the Civil War, and she didn't mention slavery in her response — leading the voter to say he was "astonished" by her omission.

Asked during a town hall in Berlin, New Hampshire, what she believed had caused the war — the first shots of which were fired in her home state of South Carolina — Haley talked about the role of government, replying that it involved "the freedoms of what people could and couldn't do."

She then turned the question back to the man who had asked it, who replied that he was not the one running for president and wished instead to know her answer.

After Haley went into a lengthier explanation about the role of government, individual freedom and capitalism, the questioner seemed to admonish Haley, saying, "In the year 2023, it's astonishing to me that you answer that question without mentioning the word slavery."

"What do you want me to say about slavery?" Haley retorted, before abruptly moving on to the next question.

Haley, who served six years as South Carolina's governor, has been competing for a distant second place to Donald Trump for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. She has frequently said during her campaign that she would compete in the first three states before returning "to the sweet state of South Carolina, and we'll finish it" in the Feb. 24 primary.

Haley's campaign did not immediately return a message seeking comment on her response. The campaign of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, another of Haley's GOP foes, recirculated video of the exchange on social media, adding the comment, "Yikes."

Issues surrounding the origins of the Civil War and its heritage are still much of the fabric of Haley's home state, and she has been pressed on the war's origins before. As she ran for governor in 2010, Haley, in an interview with a now-defunct activist group then known as The Palmetto Patriots, described the war

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as between two disparate sides fighting for "tradition" and "change" and said the Confederate flag was "not something that is racist."

During that same campaign, she dismissed the need for the flag to come down from the Statehouse grounds, portraying her Democratic rival's push for its removal as a desperate political stunt.

Five years later, Haley urged lawmakers to remove the flag from its perch near a Confederate soldier monument following a mass shooting in which a white gunman killed eight Black church members who were attending Bible study. At the time, Haley said the flag had been "hijacked" by the shooter from those who saw the flag as symbolizing "sacrifice and heritage."

South Carolina's Ordinance of Secession — the 1860 proclamation by the state government outlining its reasons for seceding from the Union — mentions slavery in its opening sentence and points to the "increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery" as a reason for the state removing itself from the Union.

On Wednesday night, Cristale Spain — elected this year as the first Black woman to chair South Carolina's Democratic Party — said Haley's response was "vile, but unsurprising."

"The same person who refused to take down the Confederate Flag until the tragedy in Charleston, and tried to justify a Confederate History Month," Spain said in a post on X, of Haley. "She's just as MAGA as Trump," Spain added, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

Jaime Harrison, current chairman of the Democratic National Committee and South Carolina's party chairman during part of Haley's tenure as governor, said her response was "not stunning if you were a Black resident in SC when she was Governor."

"Same person who said the confederate flag was about tradition & heritage and as a minority woman she was the right person to defend keeping it on state house grounds," Harrison posted Wednesday night on X. "Some may have forgotten but I haven't. Time to take off the rose colored Nikki Haley glasses folks."

## **Boebert switches congressional districts, avoiding a Democratic opponent who has far outraised her**

By JESSE BEDAYN and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Republican Rep. Lauren Boebert announced Wednesday she is switching congressional districts, avoiding a likely rematch against a Democrat who has far outraised her and following an embarrassing moment of groping and vaping that shook even loyal supporters.

In a Facebook video Wednesday evening, Boebert announced she would enter the crowded Republican primary in retiring Rep. Ken Buck's seat in the eastern side of the state, leaving the more competitive 3rd District seat she barely won last year — and which she was in peril of losing next year as some in her party have soured on her controversial style.

Boebert implied in the video that her departure from the district would help Republicans retain the seat, saying, "I will not allow dark money that is directed at destroying me personally to steal this seat. It's not fair to the 3rd District and the conservatives there who have fought so hard for our victories."

"The Aspen donors, George Soros and Hollywood actors that are trying to buy this seat, well they can go pound sand," she said.

Boebert called it "a fresh start," acknowledging the rough year following a divorce with her husband and video of her misbehaving with a date at a performance of the musical "Beetlejuice" in Denver. The scandal in September rocked some of her faithful supporters, who saw it as a transgression of conservative, Christian values and for which Boebert apologized at events throughout her district.

She already faced a primary challenge in her district, as well as a general election face-off with Democrat Adam Frisch, a former Aspen city council member who came within a few hundred votes of beating her in 2022. A rematch was expected, with Frisch raising at least \$7.7 million to Boebert's \$2.4 million.

Instead, if Boebert wins the primary to succeed Buck she will run in the state's most conservative district, which former President Donald Trump won by about 20 percentage points in 2020, in contrast to his

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margin of about 8 percentage points in her district. While it's not required that a representative live in the congressional district they represent, only the state the district is in, Boebert said she would be moving — a shift from Colorado's western Rocky Mountain peaks and high desert mesas to its eastern expanse of prairie grass and ranching enclaves.

In 2022, Frisch's campaign found support in the conservative district from unaffiliated voters and Republicans who'd defected over Boebert's brash, Trumpian style. In this election, Frisch's campaign had revived the slogan "stop the circus" and framed Frisch as the "pro-normal" alternative to Boebert's more partisan politics.

In a statement after Boebert's announcement, Frisch said he's prepared for whoever will be the Republican candidate.

"From Day 1 of this race, I have been squarely focused on defending rural Colorado's way of life, and offering common sense solutions to the problems facing the families of Colorado's 3rd Congressional District," he said. "My focus will remain the same."

The Republican primary candidate who has raised the second most behind Boebert in the 3rd District, Jeff Hurd, is a more traditional Republican candidate. Hurd has already garnered support from prominent Republicans in the district, first reported by VailDaily.

Boebert rocked the political world by notching a surprise primary win against the incumbent Republican congressman in the 3rd District in 2020 when she ran a gun-themed restaurant in the town of Rifle, Colorado. She then tried to enter the U.S. Capitol carrying a pistol and began to feud with prominent liberal Democrats like Rep. Ilhan Omar and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

## Democratic mayors renew pleas for federal help and coordination with Texas over migrant crisis

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The mayors of Chicago, New York City and Denver renewed pleas Wednesday for more federal help and coordination with Texas over the growing number of asylum-seekers arriving in their cities by bus and plane.

The mayors' requests come as U.S. cities have struggled to manage the increasing number of migrants sent from Texas and other states. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's busing operation has transported more than 80,000 migrants to Democratic-led cities since last year. His administration recently stepped up the practice with chartered planes.

The mayors sharply criticized Abbott and the effort, saying buses arrive at all hours and outside designated drop-off zones with no details on who is aboard.

"We cannot allow buses with people needing our help to arrive without warning at any hour of day and night," New York City Mayor Eric Adams said at a virtual news conference with the other mayors. "This not only prevents us from providing assistance in an orderly way, it puts those who have already suffered in so much in danger."

Chicago has cracked down on so-called "rogue" buses, with lawsuits, fines and tickets. In recent weeks, buses have tried to avoid penalties by making unscheduled drop-offs in the suburbs, forcing local officials and authorities to step in. Recently, one bus unloaded migrants overnight at a gas station in Kankakee, roughly 70 miles (110 kilometers) from Chicago.

"The lack of care that has been on display for the last year and a half has created an incredible amount of chaos," said Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson. More than 26,000 migrants have arrived in the city since last year.

Adams said New York City would put similar rules in place as Chicago and announced an executive order Wednesday requesting buses arrive only between 8:30 a.m. and noon on weekdays at a single drop-off site, or face fines, lawsuits or buses being impounded. Denver has similar rules on weekday drop-offs during specified hours.

In New York, more than 161,000 migrants have arrived and sought city aid since spring 2022, including

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4,000 just last week, Adams and other officials said earlier in the week.

The Democratic mayors met last month with President Joe Biden, which followed a letter requesting more help. They want more federal funds, efforts to expand work authorization, and a schedule for when buses arrive.

Cities have already spent hundreds of millions of dollars to house, transport and provide medical care for migrants.

"It will crush city budgets around the country," said Denver Mayor Mike Johnston. The city has received more than 35,000 migrants over the last year.

New York City has offered migrants one-way tickets out of town and traveled to Latin America to discourage people from coming to the city. Members of Johnson's administration also went to border cities earlier this year in an attempt to open lines of communication.

Abbott's office didn't immediately return an email message left Wednesday. A spokesman has previously said Abbott's administration will continue "taking historic action" until Biden's administration secures the border.

## Trump ballot ban appealed to US Supreme Court by Colorado Republican Party

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The Colorado Republican Party on Wednesday appealed that state's supreme court decision that found former President Donald Trump is ineligible for the presidency, the potential first step to a showdown at the nation's highest court over the meaning of a 155-year-old constitutional provision that bans from office those who "engaged in insurrection."

The first impact of the appeal is to extend the stay of the 4-3 ruling from Colorado's highest court, which put its decision on pause until Jan. 4, the day before the state's primary ballots are due at the printer, or until an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court is finished. Trump himself has said he still plans to appeal the ruling to the nation's highest court as well.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which was added after the Civil War to prevent former Confederates from returning to government. It says that anyone who swore an oath to "support" the constitution and then "engaged in insurrection" against it cannot hold government office.

The Colorado high court ruled that applies to Trump in the wake of his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, intended to stop the certification of President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election. It was the first time in history that the provision was used to block a presidential contender's campaign.

"The Colorado Supreme Court has removed the leading Republican candidate from the primary and general ballots, fundamentally changing the course of American democracy," the party's attorneys wrote. The filing was posted on the website of a group run by Jay Sekulow, a former attorney for Trump representing the Colorado Republican Party who announced he was filing the appeal Wednesday. Colorado Republican Party chairman Dave Williams also said the appeal was filed Wednesday.

The attorneys added: "Unless the Colorado Supreme Court's decision is overturned, any voter will have the power to sue to disqualify any political candidate, in Colorado or in any other jurisdiction that follows its lead. This will not only distort the 2024 presidential election but will also mire courts henceforth in political controversies over nebulous accusations of insurrection."

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to take the case, either after the Colorado GOP's appeal or Trump's own appeal. If Trump ends up off the ballot in Colorado, it would have minimal effect on his campaign because he doesn't need the state, which he lost by 13 percentage points in 2020, to win the Electoral College in the presidential election. But it could open the door to courts or election officials striking him from the ballot in other must-win states.

Sean Grimsley, an attorney for the plaintiffs seeking to disqualify Trump in Colorado, said on a legal

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podcast last week that he hopes the nation's highest court hurries once it accepts the case, as he expects it will. "We obviously are going to ask for an extremely accelerated timeline because of all the reasons I've stated, we have a primary coming up on Super Tuesday and we need to know the answer," Grimsley said.

More than a dozen states, including Colorado, are scheduled to hold primaries March 5 — Super Tuesday.

To date, no other court has sided with those who have filed dozens of lawsuits to disqualify Trump under Section 3, nor has any election official been willing to remove him from the ballot unilaterally without a court order.

The Colorado case was considered the one with the greatest chance of success, however, because it was filed by a Washington D.C.-based liberal group with ample legal resources. All seven of the Colorado high court justices were appointed by Democrats.

However, the unprecedented constitutional questions in the case haven't split on neatly partisan lines. Several prominent conservative legal theorists are among the most vocal advocates of disqualifying Trump under Section 3. They argue the plain meaning of the constitutional language bars him from running again, just as clearly as if he didn't meet the document's minimum age of 35 for the presidency.

The half-dozen plaintiffs in the Colorado case are all Republican or unaffiliated voters.

Trump has been scathing about the cases, calling them "election interference." He continued that on Wednesday as he cheered a ruling earlier that day by the Michigan Supreme Court leaving him on the ballot, at least for the primary, in that state.

"The Colorado people have embarrassed our nation with what they did," Trump said on Sean Hannity's radio show.

## **US delegation meets with Mexico's government on migrant influx, as officials clear border tent camp**

By MARIA VERZA and EDGAR H. CLEMENTE Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican officials moved to clear a migrant encampment on the banks of the Rio Grande river Wednesday as U.S. officials met with Mexico's president to press for measures to limit a surge of migrants reaching the U.S. southwestern border.

Mexico began clearing tents, both occupied and unoccupied, from the encampment in the border city of Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas, starting Tuesday. The effort, backed by bulldozers and workers with machetes, continued Wednesday as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico City.

López Obrador has said he is willing to help, but he wants to see progress in U.S. relations with Cuba and Venezuela, two of the top sources of migrants, along with more development aid for the region.

But Mexico's top priority appeared to be getting the United States to reopen border crossings that were closed because of the migrant surge.

"We spoke about the importance of the border, and about the economic relationship ... the importance of reopening the border crossings, that is a priority for us," Foreign Relations Secretary Alicia Bárcena said following the meeting in Mexico City, which was also attended by U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and homeland security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall.

This month, as many as 10,000 migrants were arrested daily on the southwest U.S. border. The U.S. has struggled to process thousands of migrants at the border, and house them once they reach northern cities.

Mexican industries were stung last week when the U.S. briefly closed two vital Texas railway crossings, arguing that border patrol agents had to be reassigned to deal with the surge. Another non-rail border crossing remained closed in Lukeville, Arizona, and operations were partially suspended in San Diego and Nogales, Arizona.

The dismantling of the migrant encampment in Matamoros appeared to be a good-will gesture toward the United States. Migrants set up the encampment in late 2022. It once held as many as 1,500 migrants, but many tents were vacated in recent months as migrants waded across the river to reach the United States.

Segismundo Doguín, the head of the local office of Mexico's immigration agency, said, "What we are

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doing is removing any tents that we see are empty.”

But one Honduran migrant who would give only his first name, José, claimed some of the 200 remaining migrants had been practically forced to leave the camp late Tuesday.

“They ran us out,” he said, saying migrants were given short notice to move their tents and belongings out of the way and felt intimidated by the bulldozer moving through the tents. “You had to run for your life to avoid an accident.”

Mexico has assigned over 32,000 soldiers and National Guard troopers — about 11% of its total forces — to enforce immigration laws, and the National Guard now detains far more migrants than criminals.

But the shortcomings of Mexico’s effort were on display Tuesday, when National Guard members made no attempt to stop a caravan of about 6,000 migrants, many from Central America and Venezuela, from walking through Mexico’s main inland immigration inspection point in southern Chiapas state near the Guatemala border.

In the past, Mexico has let such caravans go through, trusting that they would tire themselves out walking along the highway.

By Wednesday, Lazara Padrón Molina, 46, from Cuba was sick and exhausted. The caravan set out Dec. 24 from the city of Tapachula and had walked about 45 miles (75 kilometers) through the heat to Escuintla in southern Chiapas state.

“The route is too long to continue walking. Why don’t they just give us documents so that we could get a bus or a taxi?” Padrón Molina said. “Look at my feet,” she said, showing blisters. “I can’t go on anymore.”

But wearing the migrants out — by obliging Venezuelans and others to hike through the jungle-clad Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama or corralling migrants off passenger buses in Mexico — no longer appears to work.

So many migrants have been hopping freight trains through Mexico that one of the country’s two major railroad companies suspended trains in September because of safety concerns. Police raids to pull migrants off railway cars — the kind of action Mexico took a decade ago — might be one thing the American delegation would like to see.

A few blocks from Mexico City’s main plaza, where Blinken met with López Obrador at the National Palace, migrants stayed at an improvised shelter at a church, gathering strength before continuing north.

David Peña, his two daughters and his pregnant wife, Maryeris Zerpa, hoped to reach the United States before the child is born in about a month.

“The goal is to cross over so the baby will be born there,” Peña said. But with no asylum appointment, he had no idea how the family will enter.

The U.S. has shown that one country’s problems on the border quickly become both countries’ problems. The Texas railway closures put a chokehold on freight moving from Mexico to the U.S. as well as grain needed to feed Mexican livestock moving south.

López Obrador confirmed last week that U.S. officials want Mexico to do more to block migrants at its southern border with Guatemala, or make it more difficult to move across Mexico by train or in trucks or buses.

But the president said that in exchange he wanted the United States to send more development aid to migrants’ home countries and to reduce or eliminate sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela.

“We are going to help, as we always do,” López Obrador said. “Mexico is helping reach agreements with other countries, in this case Venezuela.” He said Mexico has proposed to President Joe Biden that a U.S.-Cuba bilateral dialogue be opened.

In May, Mexico agreed to take in migrants from countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba who are turned away by the U.S. for not following rules that provided new legal pathways to asylum and other forms of migration.

## **US announces new weapons package for Ukraine, as funds dwindle and Congress is stalled on aid bill**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. on Wednesday announced what officials say could be the final package of military aid to Ukraine unless Congress approves supplemental funding legislation that is stalled on Capitol Hill.

The weapons, worth up to \$250 million, include an array of air munitions and other missiles, artillery, anti-armor systems, ammunition, demolition and medical equipment and parts. The aid, provided through the Presidential Drawdown Authority, will be pulled from Pentagon stockpiles.

In a statement, Marine Lt. Col. Garron Garn, a Pentagon spokesman said there is no more funding to replace the weapons taken from department stocks. And the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which provides long-term funding for future weapons contracts, is also out of money.

As a result, Garn said Wednesday, "Without the supplemental funding, there will be a shortfall in replenishing U.S. military stocks, affecting American military readiness."

President Joe Biden is urging Congress to pass a \$110 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs. It includes \$61.4 billion for Ukraine, with about half to replenish Pentagon stocks. It also includes about \$14 billion for Israel as it fights Hamas and \$14 billion for U.S. border security. Other funds would go for security needs in the Asia-Pacific.

Due to an accounting error that overvalued some of the weapons sent to Ukraine over the past year or more, there is still about \$4.2 billion in restored drawdown authority. But since the Pentagon has no money to replenish inventory sent to Kyiv, the department will have to "rigorously assess" any future aid and its implications on the U.S. military's ability to protect America, Garn said.

This is the 54th tranche of military aid taken from department shelves and sent to Ukraine, and it is similar in size and contents to many of the other recent packages.

U.S. defense and government leaders have argued that the weapons are critical for Ukraine to maintain its defense and continue efforts to mount an offensive against Russian forces during the winter months.

In a Pentagon briefing last week, Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder noted the recent letter that the Defense Department comptroller sent to Congress warning that the U.S. will be using up the last of its replenishment funds by the end of the year.

"Once those funds are obligated, we will have exhausted the funding available for us to provide security assistance to Ukraine," said Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary. "We would, again, continue to urge the passage of the supplemental that we've submitted. ... It is imperative that we have the funds needed to ensure that they get the most urgent battlefield capabilities that they require."

The latest aid package comes as the war in Ukraine drags on into its 22nd month. Russia fired almost 50 Shahed drones at targets in Ukraine and shelled a train station in the southern city of Kherson where more than 100 civilians were gathered to catch a train to Kyiv. And a day earlier, Ukrainian warplanes damaged a Russian ship moored in the Black Sea off Crimea as soldiers on both sides are struggling to make much progress along the front lines.

## **Comedian Tom Smothers, one-half of the Smothers Brothers, dies at 86**

By FRAZIER MOORE and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

Tom Smothers, half of the Smothers Brothers and the co-host of one of the most socially conscious and groundbreaking television shows in the history of the medium, has died at 86.

The National Comedy Center, on behalf of his family, said in a statement Wednesday that Smothers died Tuesday at home in Santa Rosa, California, following a cancer battle.

"I'm just devastated," his brother and the duo's other half, Dick Smothers, told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday. "Every breath I've taken, my brother's been around."



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When "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour" debuted on CBS in the fall of 1967 it was an immediate hit, to the surprise of many who had assumed the network's expectations were so low it positioned their show opposite the top-rated "Bonanza."

But the Smothers Brothers would prove a turning point in television history, with its sharp eye for pop culture trends and young rock stars such as the Who and Buffalo Springfield, and its daring sketches — ridiculing the Establishment, railing against the Vietnam War and portraying members of the era's hippie counterculture as gentle, fun-loving spirits — found an immediate audience with young baby boomers.

"We were moderate. We were never out there," Dick Smothers said. "But we were the first people through that door. It just sort of crept in as the '60s crept in. We were part of that generation."

The show reached No. 16 in the ratings in its first season. It also drew the ire of network censors. After years of battling with the brothers over the show's creative content, the network abruptly canceled the program in 1970, accusing the siblings of failing to submit an episode in time for the censors to review.

Nearly 40 years later, when Smothers was awarded an honorary Emmy for his work on the show, he jokingly thanked the writers he said had gotten him fired. He also showed that the years had not dulled his outspokenness.

"It's hard for me to stay silent when I keep hearing that peace is only attainable through war," Smothers said at the 2008 Emmy Awards as his brother sat in the audience, beaming. He dedicated his award to those "who feel compelled to speak out and are not afraid to speak to power and won't shut up."

During the three years the show was on television, the brothers constantly battled with CBS censors and occasionally outraged viewers as well, particularly when Smothers joked that Easter "is when Jesus comes out of his tomb and if he sees his shadow, he goes back in and we get six more weeks of winter." At Christmas, when other hosts were sending best wishes to soldiers fighting overseas, Smothers offered his to draft dodgers who had moved to Canada.

In still another episode, the brothers returned blacklisted folk singer Pete Seeger to television for the first time in years. He performed his song "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," widely viewed as ridiculing President Lyndon Johnson. When CBS refused to air the segment, the brothers brought Seeger back for another episode and he sang it again. This time, it made the air.

After the show was canceled, the brothers sued CBS for \$31 million and were awarded \$775,000. Their battles with the network were chronicled in the 2002 documentary "Smothered: The Censorship Struggles of the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour."

"Tom Smothers was not only an extraordinary comedic talent, who, together with his brother Dick, became the most enduring comedy duo in history, entertaining the world for over six decades — but was a true champion for freedom of speech," National Comedy Center Executive Director Journey Gunderson said in a statement.

Thomas Bolyn Smothers III was born Feb. 2, 1937, on Governors Island, New York, where his father, an Army major, was stationed. His brother was born two years later. In 1940 their father was transferred to the Philippines, and his wife, two sons and their sister, Sherry, accompanied him.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the family was sent home and Maj. Smothers remained. He was captured by the Japanese during the war and died in captivity. The family eventually moved to the Los Angeles suburb of Redondo Beach, where Smothers helped his mother take care of his brother and sister while she worked.

"Tommy was the greatest older brother. He took care of me," Dick Smothers said. "His maturity was amazing. Sometimes you lose part of your childhood."

The brothers had seemed unlikely to make television history. They had spent several years on the nightclub and college circuits and doing TV guest appearances, honing an offbeat comedy routine that mixed folk music with a healthy dose of sibling rivalry.

They would come on stage, Tom with a guitar in hand and Dick toting an upright bass. They would quickly break into a traditional folk song — perhaps "John Henry" or "Pretoria." After playing several bars, Tom, positioned as the dumb one despite being older, would mess up, then quickly claim he had meant

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to do that. As Dick, the serious, short-tempered one, berated him for failing to acknowledge his error, he would scream in exasperation, "Mom always liked you best!"

"It was the childlike enthusiasm through ignorance, and me, the teacher, correcting him — sometimes I'd correct him even if I was wrong," Dick Smothers said. "I was the perfect straight man for my brother. I was the only straight man for my brother."

They continued that shtick on their show but also surrounded themselves with a talented cast of newcomers, both writers and performers.

Future actor-filmmaker Rob Reiner was among those on the crack writing crew the brothers assembled.

"Tommy was funny, smart, and a fighter," Reiner said on social media Wednesday. "He created a ground breaking show that celebrated all that was good about American Democracy."

Other writers included musician Mason Williams and comedian Steve Martin, who presented Smothers with the lifetime Emmy. Regular musical guests included John Hartford, Glen Campbell and Jennifer Warnes.

The brothers had begun their own act when Tom, then a student at San Jose State College, formed a music group called the Casual Quintet and encouraged his younger brother to learn the bass and join. The brothers continued on as a duo after the other musicians dropped out, but began interspersing comedy with their limited folk music repertoire.

"We never wrote anything, we just made it up, and tried to remember what we made up," Dick Smothers said. "I just responded to Tom, if he said something that wasn't in the bit, I wouldn't stick to the script, I would listen."

The brothers' big break came in 1959 when they appeared at San Francisco's Purple Onion, then a hot spot for new talent. Booked for two weeks, they stayed a record 36. They had a similar run at New York's Blue Angel. But to their disappointment, they couldn't get on "The Tonight Show," then hosted by Jack Paar.

"Paar kept telling our agent he didn't like folk singers — except for Burl Ives," Smothers told the AP in 1964. "But one night he had a cancellation, and we went on. Everything worked right that night."

Dick Smothers said Wednesday that "we weren't that good when we were on 'The Tonight Show.' We were just charmingly different."

The brothers went on to appear on the TV shows of Ed Sullivan, Jack Benny and Judy Garland, among others. Their comedy albums were big sellers and they toured the country, especially colleges.

Before their more vaunted show, the duo got a sitcom in 1965. "The Smothers Brothers Show" was about a businessman (Dick) haunted by his late brother (Tom), a fledgling guardian angel. It lasted just one season.

Shortly after CBS canceled the "Comedy Hour," ABC picked it up as a summer replacement, but the network didn't bring it back in the fall. NBC gave them a show in 1975 but it failed to find an audience and lasted only a season. The brothers went their separate ways for a time. Among other endeavors, Smothers got into the wine business, launching Remick Ridge Vineyards in Northern California's wine country.

"Originally the winery was called Smothers Brothers, but I changed the name to Remick Ridge because when people heard Smothers Brothers wine, they thought something like Milton Berle Fine Wine or Larry, Curly and Mo Vineyards," Smothers once said.

They eventually reunited to star in the musical comedy "I Love My Wife," a hit that ran on Broadway for two years. After that they went back on the road, playing casinos, performing arts centers and corporate gatherings around the country, remaining popular for decades.

"We just keep resurfacing," Smothers commented in 1997. "We're just not in everyone's face long enough to really get old."

After a successful 20th anniversary "Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour" in 1988, CBS buried the hatchet and brought them back.

The show was quickly canceled, though it stayed on the air long enough for Smothers to introduce the "Yo-Yo Man," a bit allowing him to demonstrate his considerable skills with a yo-yo while he and his brother kept up a steady patter of comedy. The bit remained in their act for years.

"It was like a great marriage, you go through some rough spots, but you still don't lose that focus," Dick

Smothers said.

They retired in 2010, but returned for a series of shows in 2021 that would be their last before Tom Smothers' illness left him unable to continue.

"The audience exploded," Dick Smothers said of those shows. "It was like a clap of thunder. They were young again."

Smothers married three times and had three children. He is survived by his wife Marcy, children Bo and Riley Rose, and brother Dick, in addition to other relatives. He was predeceased by his son Tom and sister Sherry.

## **On foot and by donkey cart, thousands flee widening Israeli assault in central Gaza**

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Thousands of Palestinian families fled Wednesday from the brunt of Israel's expanding ground offensive into Gaza's few remaining, overcrowded refuges, as the military launched heavy strikes across the center and south of the territory, killing dozens, Palestinian health officials said.

On foot or riding donkey carts loaded with belongings, a stream of people flowed into Deir al-Balah — a town that normally has a population of around 75,000. It has been overwhelmed by several hundred thousand people driven from northern Gaza as the region was pounded to rubble.

Because U.N. shelters are packed many times over capacity, the new arrivals set up tents on sidewalks for the cold winter night. Most crowded onto streets around the town's main hospital, Al-Aqsa Martyrs, hoping it would be safer from Israeli strikes.

Still, no place is safe in Gaza. Israeli offensives are crowding most of the population into Deir al-Balah and Rafah at the territory's southern edge as well as a tiny rural area by the southern coastline. Those areas continue to be hit by Israeli strikes that regularly crush homes full of people.

Israel has said its campaign in Gaza is likely to last for months, vowing to dismantle Hamas across the territory and prevent a repeat of its Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel. Benny Gantz, a member of the country's three-man War Cabinet, said the fighting "will be expanded, according to need, to additional centers and additional fronts."

He and other Israeli officials also threatened greater military action against Lebanon's Hezbollah, hiking fears of an all-out war on that front.

The two sides have exchanged fire almost daily across the border. Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen warned Wednesday that "all options are on the table" if Hezbollah does not withdraw from the border area, as called for under a 2006 U.N. cease-fire.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah "must understand that he's next," Cohen said.

### **DEATH, DISPLACEMENT AND STARVATION**

Israel's offensive in Gaza has already been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than 21,100 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza. The count doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants.

Some 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have fled their homes. U.N. officials say a quarter of Gaza's population is starving under Israel's siege, which allows in only a trickle of food, water, fuel and other supplies.

The latest people to be displaced fled from several built-up refugee camps in central Gaza targeted in the latest phase of Israel's ground assault. One of the camps, Bureij, came under heavy bombardment throughout the night as Israeli troops moved in.

"It was a night of hell. We haven't seen such bombing since the start of the war," said Rami Abu Mosab, speaking from Bureij, where he has sheltered since fleeing his home in northern Gaza.

The Israeli military issued evacuation orders for Bureij and neighboring areas Tuesday. The area was home to nearly 90,000 people before the war and now shelters more than 61,000 displaced people,

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mostly from the north, according to the U.N. Bureij camp, like others in Gaza, houses refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation and their descendants and now resembles other densely populated neighborhoods.

It was not known how many were evacuating. In Deir al-Balah over the past two days, empty lots have filled up with families in tents or sleeping on blankets on the ground.

This was the third move further south for Ibrahim al-Zatari, a daily laborer. First he, his wife and four children moved in with relatives in Gaza City after a strike flattened their home in northern Gaza. Later, they fled to Bureij to escape fighting in the city. On Wednesday morning, they made an hourslong journey on foot to Deir al-Balah, where — like many others — they wandered the streets looking for an empty spot to lie down.

"There is no foothold here," he said. "Where should we go?"

With much of northern Gaza leveled, Palestinians fear a similar fate awaits other areas, including Khan Younis, where Israeli forces launched ground operations in early December. The Israeli military said Wednesday it deployed another brigade in the city, a sign of the tough fighting.

Israeli shelling Wednesday struck a residential building in Khan Younis next to Al-Amal Hospital, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent, which runs the facility.

Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qidra said at least 20 people were killed and dozens more wounded. Footage from the scene showed several torn bodies lying in the street as rescue workers loaded a man whose legs had been severed onto a stretcher.

Despite U.S. calls for Israel to shift to a more precise assault, the military so far appears to be following the same pattern used in earlier phases of the ground offensive in northern Gaza and Khan Younis. Before troops move in, heavy bombardment targets what Israel says is Hamas' tunnels and military infrastructure. Fierce urban fighting follows as troops move block to block, backed by airstrikes and shelling that the military says aim to force out pockets of militants. The resulting devastation has been massive.

Israel has said Hamas must be destroyed after its Oct. 7 attack in which militants broke through Israel's formidable defenses and killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted around 240. An estimated 129 remain in captivity after dozens were freed.

Israel blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll in Gaza because the militants operate in residential areas. Late Wednesday, the army said it destroyed a network of tunnels that stretched for several kilometers in Gaza City and served as a command and control center. Part of it ran under a hospital and had an exit inside a neighboring school, it said.

The military says it has killed thousands of militants, without presenting evidence, and that 164 of its soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive.

## WARNING OVER LEBANON

Cross-border exchanges of fire have escalated between Hezbollah and the Israeli military.

An Israeli strike on a family home in Lebanon overnight killed a Hezbollah fighter, his brother and his sister-in-law, local officials and state media said Wednesday. A day earlier, a Hezbollah strike wounded 11 people in northern Israel.

Since the Gaza war began, the near daily battles have forced tens of thousands of Israelis to evacuate their homes from nearby communities. At least nine soldiers and four civilians have been killed on the Israeli side, and around 150 people on the Lebanese side, mostly fighters from Hezbollah and other groups, but also 17 civilians.

Gantz warned that time for diplomatic pressure was "running out."

"If the world and the Lebanese government will not act to stop the firing on the northern settlements and keep Hezbollah away from the border, the IDF will do so," he said, referring to the Israeli military.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli forces killed at least six Palestinians during an overnight raid in the refugee neighborhood of Nur Shams, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. More than 300 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since the start of the war, mostly in confrontations with Israeli forces during raids and protests.

## The New York Times sues OpenAI and Microsoft for using its stories to train chatbots

By HALELUYA HADERO and DAVID BAUDER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York Times is striking back against the threat that artificial intelligence poses to the news industry, filing a federal lawsuit Wednesday against OpenAI and Microsoft seeking to end the practice of using its stories to train chatbots.

The Times says the companies are threatening its livelihood by effectively stealing billions of dollars worth of work by its journalists, in some cases spitting out Times' material verbatim to people who seek answers from generative artificial intelligence like OpenAI's ChatGPT. The newspaper's lawsuit was filed in federal court in Manhattan and follows what appears to be a breakdown in talks between the newspaper and the two companies, which began in April.

The media has already been pummeled by a migration of readers to online platforms. While many publications — most notably the Times — have successfully carved out a digital space, the rapid development of AI threatens to significantly upend the publishing industry.

Web traffic is an important component of the paper's advertising revenue and helps drive subscriptions to its online site. But the outputs from AI chatbots divert that traffic away from the paper and other copyright holders, the Times says, making it less likely that users will visit the original source for the information.

"These bots compete with the content they are trained on," said Ian B. Crosby, partner and lead counsel at Susman Godfrey, which is representing The Times.

An OpenAI spokesperson said in a prepared statement that the company respects the rights of content creators and is "committed" to working with them to help them benefit from the technology and new revenue models.

"Our ongoing conversations with the New York Times have been productive and moving forward constructively, so we are surprised and disappointed with this development," the spokesperson said. "We're hopeful that we will find a mutually beneficial way to work together, as we are doing with many other publishers."

Microsoft did not respond to requests for comment.

Artificial intelligence companies scrape information available online, including articles published by news organizations, to train generative AI chatbots. The large language models are also trained on a huge trove of other human-written materials, which helps them to build a strong command of language and grammar and to answer questions correctly.

But the technology is still under development and gets many things wrong. In its lawsuit, for example, the Times said OpenAI's GPT-4 falsely attributed product recommendations to Wirecutter, the paper's product reviews site, endangering its reputation.

OpenAI and other AI companies, including rival Anthropic, have attracted billions of dollars in investments very rapidly since public and business interest in the technology exploded, particularly this year.

Microsoft has a partnership with OpenAI that allows it to capitalize on the company's AI technology. The Redmond, Washington, tech giant is also OpenAI's biggest backer and has invested at least \$13 billion into the company since the two began their partnership in 2019, according to the lawsuit. As part of the agreement, Microsoft's supercomputers help power OpenAI's AI research and the tech giant integrates the startup's technology into its products.

The paper's complaint comes as the number of lawsuits filed against OpenAI for copyright infringement is growing. The company has been sued by several writers — including comedian Sarah Silverman — who say their books were ingested to train OpenAI's AI models without their permission. In June, more than 4,000 writers signed a letter to the CEOs of OpenAI and other tech companies accusing them of exploitative practices in building chatbots.

As AI technology develops, growing fears over its use have also fueled labor strikes and lawsuits in other industries, including Hollywood. Different stakeholders are realizing the technology could disrupt their entire business model, but the question will be how to respond to it, said Sarah Kreps, director of

Cornell University's Tech Policy Institute.

Kreps said she agrees The New York Times is facing a threat from these chatbots. But she also argued solving the issue completely is going to be an uphill battle.

"There's so many other language models out there that are doing the same thing," she said.

The lawsuit filed Wednesday cited examples of OpenAI's GPT-4 spitting out large portions of news articles from the Times, including a Pulitzer-Prize winning investigation into New York City's taxi industry that took 18 months to complete. It also cited outputs from Bing Chat — now called Copilot — that included verbatim excerpts from Times articles.

The Times did not list specific damages that it is seeking, but said the legal action "seeks to hold them responsible for the billions of dollars in statutory and actual damages that they owe" for copying and using its work. It is also asking the court to order the tech companies to destroy AI models or data sets that incorporate its work.

The News/Media Alliance, a trade group representing more than 2,200 news organizations, applauded Wednesday's action by the Times.

"Quality journalism and GenAI can complement each other if approached collaboratively," said Danielle Coffey, alliance president and CEO. "But using journalism without permission or payment is unlawful, and certainly not fair use."

In July, OpenAI and The Associated Press announced a deal for the artificial intelligence company to license AP's archive of news stories. This month, OpenAI also signed a similar partnership with Axel Springer, a media company in Berlin that owns Politico and Business Insider. Under the deal, users of OpenAI's ChatGPT will receive summaries of "selected global news content" from Axel Springer's media brands. The companies said the answers to queries will include attribution and links to the original articles.

The Times has compared its action to a copyright lawsuit more than two decades ago against Napster, when record companies sued the file-sharing service for unlawful use of their material. The record companies won and Napster was soon gone, but it has had a major impact on the industry. Industry-endorsed streaming now dominates the music business.

## **Teenager Najiah Knight wants to be the first woman at bull riding's top level. It's an uphill dream**

By ANNE M. PETERSON AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Najiah Knight drops her 100-pound frame onto a snorting 1,300-pound bull and adjusts her ropes, warming the sticky rosin. Music blares across the arena, but Najiah can hear only her dad, in the chute with her, and her mom, cheering from the stands. She nods to indicate she's ready, and a cowboy pulls the door of the chute.

The gate swings open, and Najiah — a 17-year-old gladiator entering a ring where men rule — begins her dance with the bull.

Najiah, a high school junior from small-town Oregon, is on a yearslong quest to become the first woman to compete at the top level of the Professional Bull Riders tour. She can't join until next year, when she's 18, and even then, she'll have to prove she's good enough to qualify. There's fierce competition: Only about 30 of the best riders from around the world reach the top. It takes time, travel, money and, perhaps most of all, guts. The sport is undeniably dangerous, with riders frequently injured and even killed.

None of that fazes Najiah. If there's one quality she doesn't have, it's fear.

"Since I was a little kid, 3 years old, I would tell my dad that this is what I'm gonna do," she said. "I'm going to be a bull rider. I'm going to make it. As I got older, it was 'I'm going to be in the PBR, I'm going to be the first girl.'"

"That is my why. That is my drive," said Najiah, the only woman to qualify in the 16-18 age division for this month's Junior World Finals in Las Vegas.

There, wearing a helmet and mouthpiece, she made adjustments in the chute to the rope circling her bull. She threw her hips forward. Then came the nod — go time. In that moment, there's no emotion,

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just focus.

"You've got to be in the game, you've got to follow the bull," Najiah said. "I'm just trying to stay on and grit it out."

In bull riding, athletes try to stay on the bucking animal for eight seconds while keeping one hand in the air. It's violent and chaotic. Riders cannot touch the bull with their free hand. If eight seconds is achieved, both bull and rider are scored, with 100 points being the highest — though rarely given — total.

Like many of the teens that day, Najiah fell in just a couple of seconds. But she'd get another chance.

"NO TAMING THAT FIRE"

Back home, Najiah is more typical teenager than rodeo star. She lives on the outskirts of Arlington, a blink-and-you'll-miss-it town of 628 people along Interstate 84, which cuts across Oregon. There's a gas station, a small grocery, a hardware store and the Big River Pizza & Grill, with the motto "Eat, Drink and Smile."

Najiah plays volleyball and basketball for Arlington High, which fields combined teams with a nearby school because both are so tiny. You'd never know from looking at her how tough she is, her coach says. But her parents realized from that start that their girl was fearless.

At age 3, Andrew Knight said, Najiah started riding sheep — known as mutton busting. "It was like she had velcro pants on, and she'd stick to them," he said with a laugh. "There was not an inch of movement budging her off, even when she dragged them to the ground."

Her mom, Missi, saw it, too. "There was no taming that fire," she said.

Andrew is also a bull rider, and Missi wanted to be able to treat either in case of injury. So she trained as an EMT, and it's become her career.

When Najiah was 7, she started riding steers. At 9, she was on miniature bulls — and getting attention. From 2018 to 2020, she was ranked among the country's top 15 mini bull riders. In 2020, she was the first girl to ride at Madison Square Garden, in New York. And in the third round, she beat all the boys.

The next year, Najiah broke her arm — she didn't want to believe it happened, but Missi could tell, thanks to her training. It's been one of just a few injuries, and it sidelined Najiah for the junior finals. So did the COVID-19 pandemic. But for some two years now, she has been riding junior bulls — a step below the big bulls. She finished in the top three in her region this year to earn her spot in the Junior World Finals.

At home, after volleyball practice, Najiah trains with Andrew in the driveway, on a barrel set up with springs and levers to simulate a bull ride. He rides a fine line between coach and dad. If he feels fear, he said, his daughter will, too. So his motto is one of positivity.

He jokes with Najiah before she rides to keep her loose, but once she's in the chute, he turns to encouragement.

"You've got this," he tells her.

"THE PERFECT RIDE"

In Las Vegas, two days after her first ride, Najiah got her second attempt in the Junior World Finals.

She stretched and did a little circular dance with her legs bowed. She knelt in prayer. With her dad, she readied for the ride — the duo able to communicate without speaking as Najiah pulled her rope on her bull in line for the chutes.

She nodded, motivated as always. But again, she was tossed by the bull after a few seconds — well short of eight. She wouldn't make the final round.

She was disappointed, but not discouraged. "I wanted it to go perfectly, just the perfect ride, but it doesn't always go that way," she said. "You always have it next time."

Najiah is as direct as ever about what she wants to accomplish: Be the first woman on PBR's top-level tour, Unleash The Beast; be named Rookie of the Year; and win a world championship. Every ride, no matter what happens, is a step toward that goal.

In getting there, Najiah and her family have been strategic in promoting her, with an eye on the long game. They've cultivated her image on social media and courted key sponsorships to help pay for rodeo entry fees and travel. Events that count toward qualifying in her region have taken her to North Dakota, Idaho, California, Colorado and Wyoming just this year.

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Najiah has deals with Cooper Tires and Ariat, the boot and clothing maker, among others. She was the first mini bull rider Ariat sponsored; in the fall, she traveled to Texas for a photoshoot with the company.

A condition of her sponsorships is maintaining good grades. She has a 4.0 GPA and is a member of the National Honor Society. She hopes to attend the University of Oregon, even while trying to reach the Unleash the Beast tour.

Not much scares Najiah. At a mini bull competition in Louisiana, a bull stepped on her, cracking her helmet and sending blood streaming down her face. But she had another ride to go, so she borrowed a helmet and got right back on.

Everyone from experienced riders to casual fans can see Najiah's passion, drive and fearlessness. But it's hard to say how feasible her dream is, according to fellow riders and league officials.

"There is the hopeful side of me that wants her to be a world champion in the next five or six years," PBR CEO Sean Gleason said. "I think I'm a fairly optimistic guy, and so I believe that anything is possible for her. She's been committed. She's been working at it for a long, long time.

"But it's a very difficult sport. The hill to climb is high for anybody that wants to be a top-level professional bull rider — but I honestly don't believe that it's any higher for her than it is for any other person her age, regardless of gender."

"THE ONLY GIRL"

Najiah doesn't see her gender as an obstacle. "I'm just a bull rider," she often says with a shrug.

But she also wants to be a role model for women and for Native Americans. Najiah and her family are Paiute, part of the Klamath Tribes, and she proudly wears a beaded hat band and necklaces before she rides. In Vegas, she and Missi both wore moccasins made by an aunt. Outside the arena, Najiah is active, too — last year, she appeared at a Ride to the Polls event to encourage young Navajo voters in Kayenta, Arizona.

"I'm pretty sure I'm the only woman Native bull rider that I know," she said, even though rodeo is a popular sport in Native American communities.

Najiah looks to women like bull riding pioneer Jonnie Jonckowski as inspiration. Going forward and working off that foundation, Najiah has the potential to bring more fans and attention to bull riding — much as the sensation Danica Patrick brought to auto racing.

Other girls who ride, or aspire to ride, are taking notice, too.

Blayklee Glass, 12, reached the finals in Las Vegas, placing seventh in her age group. She said she admires Najiah. And like Najiah, she's content competing against boys.

"They're like, 'So what, you're a girl,'" said Blayklee, of Prescott, Arkansas. "I like being the only girl."

For Najiah, the Vegas competition hasn't swayed her drive or derailed her dream. When she turns 18, she expects to compete on the Pendleton Whisky Velocity Tour. From there, she'll work to earn the points needed for the top level.

Najiah — and her family, the league and her sponsors — know it's a long road. She long ago accepted the danger of the sport and the challenge to make it to the top. She insists she has what it takes: the passion, the nerve, the confidence, the focus.

"I don't care about what anyone else thinks," she said. "I do this for me."

## Argentina's unions take to the streets to protest president's cutbacks, deregulation and austerity

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Thousands of union members and activists took to the streets of Argentina's capital Wednesday to protest a decree from President Javier Milei that imposes sweeping deregulation and austerity measures meant to revive the country's struggling economy.

Unions had asked a court for a prior injunction to block measures lifting some labor protections, but a judge rejected the appeal, noting the decree had not yet entered into effect. It does so on Friday.

Argentine labor activists question whether Milei, a self-described anarcho-capitalist who has long railed



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against the country's "political caste," can impose the measures by way of an emergency decree bypassing the legislature where his party has few seats.

"We do not question the president's legitimacy ... but we want a president who respects the division of powers, who understands that workers have the need to defend themselves individually and within the framework of justice when there is unconstitutionality," said Gerardo Martínez, general secretary of Argentina's construction workers' union.

The protest went off peacefully, except for a confrontation between a small group of protesters and police. Journalists were caught up in the scuffle as police broke up the group of protesters, and some were beaten by police.

"The country is not for sale!" some protesters chanted, apparently referring to proposals that would allow the privatization of state-run industries.

Since taking office on Dec. 10 following a landslide election victory, Milei has devalued the country's currency by 50%, cut transport and energy subsidies, said his government won't renew contracts for more than 5,000 recently hired state employees and proposed repealing or modifying about 300 laws.

He says he wants to transform Argentina's economy and reduce the size of its state to address rising poverty and annual inflation expected to reach 200% by the end of the year.

The General Labor Confederation read a statement at the march on Wednesday saying Milei's decree "introduces a ferocious, regressive labor reform whose only purpose is to hamstring union activity, punish workers and benefit business interests."

Milei's administration has quickly faced protest. The government had said it will allow demonstrations, but threatened to cut off public aid payments to anyone who blocks thoroughfares. Marchers were also forbidden to carry sticks, cover their faces or bring children to the protest.

Milei, a 53-year-old economist who rose to fame on television with profanity-laden tirades against the political establishment, became president with the support of Argentines disillusioned with the economic crisis.

In a media interview ahead of the protest, he accused those who oppose his reforms of "not being aware of the seriousness of the situation."

His initiatives have the support of Argentina's Business Association which called them a "historic opportunity" to fight the "excessive size of the state" and the negative consequences of decades of budget deficits.

## **Social media companies made \$11 billion in US ad revenue from minors, Harvard study finds**

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and HALELUYA HADERO AP Technology Writers

Social media companies collectively made over \$11 billion in U.S. advertising revenue from minors last year, according to a study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health published on Wednesday.

The researchers say the findings show a need for government regulation of social media since the companies that stand to make money from children who use their platforms have failed to meaningfully self-regulate. They note such regulations, as well as greater transparency from tech companies, could help alleviate harms to youth mental health and curtail potentially harmful advertising practices that target children and adolescents.

To come up with the revenue figure, the researchers estimated the number of users under 18 on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube in 2022 based on population data from the U.S. Census and survey data from Common Sense Media and Pew Research. They then used data from research firm eMarketer, now called Insider Intelligence, and Qustodio, a parental control app, to estimate each platform's U.S. ad revenue in 2022 and the time children spent per day on each platform. After that, the researchers said they built a simulation model using the data to estimate how much ad revenue the platforms earned from minors in the U.S.

Researchers and lawmakers have long focused on the negative effects stemming from social media platforms, whose personally-tailored algorithms can drive children towards excessive use. This year, law-

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makers in states like New York and Utah introduced or passed legislation that would curb social media use among kids, citing harms to youth mental health and other concerns.

Meta, which owns Instagram and Facebook, is also being sued by dozens of states for allegedly contributing to the mental health crisis.

"Although social media platforms may claim that they can self-regulate their practices to reduce the harms to young people, they have yet to do so, and our study suggests they have overwhelming financial incentives to continue to delay taking meaningful steps to protect children," said Bryn Austin, a professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Harvard and a senior author on the study.

The platforms themselves don't make public how much money they earn from minors.

Social media platforms are not the first to advertise to children, and parents and experts have long expressed concerns about marketing to kids online, on television and even in schools. But online ads can be especially insidious because they can be targeted to children and because the line between ads and the content kids seek out is often blurry.

In a 2020 policy paper, the American Academy of Pediatrics said children are "uniquely vulnerable to the persuasive effects of advertising because of immature critical thinking skills and impulse inhibition."

"School-aged children and teenagers may be able to recognize advertising but often are not able to resist it when it is embedded within trusted social networks, encouraged by celebrity influencers, or delivered next to personalized content," the paper noted.

As concerns about social media and children's mental health grow, the Federal Trade Commission earlier this month proposed sweeping changes to a decades-old law that regulates how online companies can track and advertise to children. The proposed changes include turning off targeted ads to kids under 13 by default and limiting push notifications.

According to the Harvard study, YouTube derived the greatest ad revenue from users 12 and under (\$959.1 million), followed by Instagram (\$801.1 million) and Facebook (\$137.2 million).

Instagram, meanwhile, derived the greatest ad revenue from users aged 13-17 (\$4 billion), followed by TikTok (\$2 billion) and YouTube (\$1.2 billion).

The researchers also estimate that Snapchat derived the greatest share of its overall 2022 ad revenue from users under 18 (41%), followed by TikTok (35%), YouTube (27%), and Instagram (16%).

## Amazon Prime ads on movies and TV shows will begin in late January

Associated Press undefined

If you are an Amazon Prime Video user, get ready to see ads on movies and TV shows starting next month.

Prime will include ads beginning on Jan. 29, the company said in an email to U.S. members this week, setting a date for an announcement it made back in September. Prime members who want to keep their movies and TV shows ad-free will have to pay an additional \$2.99.

Amazon is also planning to include advertisements in its Prime service in the United Kingdom and other European countries, as well as Canada, Mexico and Australia next year.

The tech giant follows other major streamers — such as Netflix and Disney — who have embraced a dual model that allows them to earn revenue from ads and also offer subscribers the option to opt out with a higher fee.

Amazon said in its email that it will "aim to have meaningfully fewer ads" than traditional TV and other streaming providers.

The ads, the company said, "will allow us to continue investing in compelling content and keep increasing that investment over a long period of time."

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## Michigan Supreme Court will keep Trump on 2024 primary ballot

By COREY WILLIAMS and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Michigan's Supreme Court is keeping former President Donald Trump on the state's primary election ballot. The court said Wednesday it will not hear an appeal of a lower court's ruling from groups seeking to keep Trump from appearing on the ballot.

It said in an order that the application by parties to appeal a Dec. 14 Michigan appeals court judgment was considered, but denied "because we are not persuaded that the questions presented should be reviewed by this court."

The ruling contrasts with Dec. 19 decision by a divided Colorado Supreme Court which found Trump ineligible to be president because of his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. That ruling was the first time in history that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment has been used to disqualify a presidential candidate.

The Michigan and Colorado cases are among dozens hoping to keep Trump's name off state ballots. They all point to the so-called insurrection clause that prevents anyone from holding office who "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" against the Constitution. Until the Colorado ruling, all had failed.

The Colorado ruling is likely to be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which has never ruled on the rarely used Civil War-era provision.

The plaintiffs in Michigan can technically try again to disqualify Trump under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment in the general election, though it's likely there will be a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the issue by then. The state's high court on Wednesday upheld an appeals court ruling that the Republican Party could place anyone it wants on the primary ballot. But the court was silent on whether Section 3 of the 14th Amendment would disqualify Trump in November if he becomes the GOP nominee.

"We are disappointed by the Michigan Supreme Court's decision," said Ron Fein, legal director of Free Speech for People, the liberal group that filed the suit to disqualify Trump in the state. "The ruling conflicts with longstanding US Supreme Court precedent that makes clear that when political parties use the election machinery of the state to select, via the primary process, their candidates for the general election, they must comply with all constitutional requirements in that process."

Trump hailed the order, calling the effort to keep him off the ballot in multiple states a "pathetic gambit."

Only one of the court's seven justices dissented. Justice Elizabeth M. Welch, a Democrat, wrote that she would have kept Trump on the primary ballot but the court should rule on the merits of the Section 3 challenge. The court has a 4-3 Democratic majority.

Trump pressed two election officials in Michigan's Wayne County not to certify 2020 vote totals, according to a recording of a post-election phone call disclosed in a Dec. 22 report by The Detroit News. The former president's 2024 campaign has neither confirmed nor denied the recording's legitimacy.

Attorneys for Free Speech for People, a liberal nonprofit group also involved in efforts to keep Trump's name off the primary ballot in Minnesota and Oregon, had asked Michigan's Supreme Court to render its decision by Christmas Day.

The group argued that time was "of the essence" due to "the pressing need to finalize and print the ballots for the presidential primary election."

Earlier this month, Michigan's high court refused to immediately hear an appeal, saying the case should remain before the appeals court.

Free Speech for People had sued to force Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson to bar Trump from Michigan's ballot. But a Michigan Court of Claims judge rejected that group's arguments, saying in November that it was the proper role of Congress to decide the question.

Looking ahead to the next 14th Amendment decision, Trump's lawyers on Wednesday asked Maine's Democratic Secretary of State to disqualify herself from deciding whether the former president can be on that state's primary ballot. Shenna Bellows held a public hearing earlier this month on requests to bar Trump from the Maine ballot, and her ruling is expected this week.

Trump's attorneys asked Bellows to step aside, pointing to tweets that she posted after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol calling it an "insurrection" and bemoaning that Trump wasn't convicted by the U.S. Senate after being impeached by the House of Representatives.

## As the Endangered Species Act turns 50, those who first enforced it reflect on its mixed legacy

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — On Dec. 28, 1973, President Richard Nixon signed the Endangered Species Act. “Nothing,” he said, “is more priceless and more worthy of preservation than the rich array of animal life with which our country has been blessed.” The powerful new law charged the federal government with saving every endangered plant and animal in America and enjoyed nearly unanimous bipartisan support.

The Act was so sweeping that, in retrospect, it was bound to become controversial, especially since it allowed species to be listed as endangered without consideration for the economic consequences. In that way it pitted two American values against each other: the idea that Americans should preserve their incredible natural resources (the United States invented the national park, after all) and the notion that capitalism was king and private property inviolate.

The Endangered Species Act was just one in a raft of environmental legislation passed beginning in the mid-1960s that included the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Wilderness Act and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Taken together, it was the most extensive environmental legislation the world had ever seen.

It was a time of widespread support for cleaning up the environment after unchecked greed had polluted our air and water and wiped out some of our most iconic species. Added to the desire for a cleaner natural world was a belief that the federal government could solve our nation’s problems.

The United States’ own national animals, the bison and the bald eagle, had been driven to near extinction. When they started to recover, Americans saw the Endangered Species Act as a success. But when animals that people had never heard of began interfering with development, it was a different story.

Left to navigate this minefield was a group of young biologists in Washington — the first Office of Endangered Species.

### THE SNAIL DARTER

Ichthyologist Jim Williams, the Office of Endangered Species’ first “fish guy,” was hired in 1974, just as things were getting up and running. Williams describes his cohort as “a bunch of conservation-minded biologists that were all on a mission to save every last one of our chosen group of organisms come hell or high water, and, by the way, to hell with the bureaucrats and politicians.”

His unconventional attitude and methods soon became apparent with the listing of the snail darter, a little fish now so notorious it has become synonymous with government overreach. At the time, it had just been discovered and was only known to exist in one stretch of the Little Tennessee River — which the Tennessee Valley Authority was planning to dam.

“I started talking about listing it, and boy, oh boy, did the crap hit the fan,” Williams says. He said the associate director “called me in one day and said, ‘You’re going to cost us the whole damn Act. They’re going to just throw this thing out when you try to list this thing. You can’t do this.’ And I said, ‘Hey, I’m calling them like I see them.’”

Williams did list the snail darter. The Act survived. But it would never again enjoy the support of its earliest days. Whether the government should try to save all species from extinction, or if not, where to draw the line, became a point of conflict that has never been fully resolved.

At one point, administrators implemented a priority system for what animals should be listed. “And literally it would change almost from week to week,” Williams says.

The exasperated biologists put together a fake memorandum listing a different criterion for every single day. Although it was meant as satire, it reflected the reality of what kinds of species were the least controversial to list. It included “things that are warm and fluffy” and “things difficult to step on.”

Williams chafed at this attempt to curtail his work and sometimes relied on allies in the nonprofit world with influence in the Interior Department for help.

“We had our friends in high places. I mean, if you’re right and you did everything right, there’s somebody out there in the conservation community that had our backs,” he says. “And we knew that. And that was

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a good feeling.”

## ‘SAVE KEN DODD AND RATTLESNAKES’

Ken Dodd is a herpetologist who was recruited to the Office of Endangered Species in 1976 for a 30-day appointment that turned into eight years.

“There was not a whole lot of conservation theory at the time to draw on,” he says. “So we were really at the cutting edge of determining what is necessary for conservation. ... So we were — I’m not saying winging it — we were deeply into what an endangered species is, how it is to be determined.”

Like Williams, Dodd regularly butted heads with administrators. He also followed the science where it led without thought for whom it might inconvenience. That included going up against the Purina pet food company (successfully) and Monsanto (not so much).

“I was threatened many times,” Dodd says of his time overall at the Office of Endangered Species. “They were going to get me. ‘They were going to get me fired.’ And this was from companies, not just individuals.”

But the thing that actually got him fired — in 1979 — was not a listing but a letter.

A man named Dominique D’Ermo owned a Washington restaurant that was serving rattlesnake meat he said was from Pennsylvania. That would have violated a law called the Lacey Act. “So I wrote to the restaurant and said, ‘Hey, Dominique, I think you need to get a better source,’” Dodd says.

It turned out Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus was a regular patron of the restaurant. When he learned what Dodd had done, “He fired me — which did not go over real well. ...You can’t just fire a federal employee, you know, just because you don’t like what they did.”

Dodd obtained an attorney. Meanwhile, according to Williams, “We all went down to a T-shirt shop, got shirts that said ‘Save Ken Dodd and Rattlesnakes.’”

The ensuing publicity made an impact. Soon, Dodd was back at work.

## GRAY WOLF SEASON

Ron Nowak joined the office in 1973 after working on surveys of wolves and panthers. The animals he was responsible for were often furry and charismatic, more relatable for most people than a fish or salamander. But Nowak would not suffer fools, which is how he ended up, in the mid-1980s, testifying against his own agency.

In northern Minnesota, the gray wolf was coming back from “just a tiny remnant of a couple hundred animals to maybe several hundred or a thousand” thanks to the Endangered Species Act. “And so what did the Fish and Wildlife Service want to do? They wanted to cooperate with the state of Minnesota and open the gray wolf to public hunting.”

That would require a regulation showing that a hunting season would benefit the wolves and was the only way to control their population.

“They told me, ‘You have to write the regulation,’” Nowak says. “And I said, ‘It would be illegal.’”

The Fish and Wildlife Service found someone else to write the regulation. Conservation groups sued, calling Nowak as a witness. He went out to Minnesota and gave depositions saying the wolves should not have been open to hunting.

The conservation groups won. The government appealed. The conservation groups won again.

Nowak heard his supervisors wanted to fire him but “did not want to create another martyr like Ken Dodd.” His success may have made him overconfident, he says, because he then sought outside help that forced the agency to move on a stalled listing for the Louisiana black bear, the inspiration for the original teddy bear.

“I think that was the breaking point,” he says. By late 1987, his unit had been “dismembered” and he was reassigned.

Today, Nowak has nothing but praise for his colleagues.

“They wanted to show a true reflection of that part of the natural world that was in danger of disappearing,” he says. “You could go there at night or on weekends, and they’d be there, not for any extra pay, but just because they believed in it.

“And you could find them out in the field, sometimes, actually going to just try to look for these animals

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and plants. Really, I think it was a unique place — one that we may never see again.”

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR

LaVerne Smith was hired in 1978 as one of the Office of Endangered Species’ first botanists. Unlike many of her colleagues, she continued to work in the endangered species program for most of her career, through many office reorganizations.

That included a 1987 shuffle that moved the responsibility for listing species to regional offices — a reorg controversial enough that it prompted a eulogy of sorts in *The New York Times*. “The Office of Endangered Species has gone the way of the dusky seaside sparrow and the Sampson’s pearly mussel,” the story read. “Like six of the species that it was created to protect in 1973, it has become extinct.”

When Smith was hired, only nine years earlier, “It still felt very, very new.”

“The agency was just getting hiring people, getting staffed up, trying to figure out what to do with this amazing new piece of legislation,” she says. “So it was it was a pretty exciting time.”

One of the early decisions involved the critically endangered California condor, whose numbers had dwindled to 23 by 1982. Biologists debated if they should they watch the condors go extinct or bring those final birds into captivity and try to breed them. If they did, what would be the likelihood of success?

High, it turned out. “They’re out sailing around in California again. They’re out sailing around the Grand Canyon. And I think anyone who’s seen one — the day I saw one sail over the Grand Canyon, I was like, ‘Oh my God! That was all worth it.’”

Smith later transferred to Alaska, where she led the listing for the polar bear, the first animal to be listed as endangered because of climate change.

“That is a whole new era of challenge for the agency. I think it means a whole lot more species are going to be impacted,” she says. “It means that you’ve got to make decisions much quicker because of the pace that the threat is occurring.”

Smith hopes there is still some resiliency in the natural systems, “like during COVID when everybody sort of stopped, hit the pause button for a while, and all the air cleaned up.”

“People were very worried that we would never be able to do anything for the condor,” she says. “Certainly it still requires a lot of protection and a lot of help, but it’s still out there. ... If you want to be in the conservation business, you have to hang on to hope.”

## MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Marc Imlay studies mollusks. He is a malacologist who began working at the Office in 1971, before the current Endangered Species Act was passed. He was focused on freshwater mussels — which, it turns out, is one of the most critically endangered groups of organisms in the country.

One of their biggest threats was dams. Imlay surreptitiously stopped TVA and the Army Corps of Engineers from building eight of them.

“I decided that they destroyed a lot of habitat, and I would call this guy with the Sierra Club in Missouri and say, ‘Did you know there’s an endangered mussel there?’” It worked. The dam was stopped.

Though the Endangered Species Act prohibits the federal government from doing anything that would harm an endangered species, Imlay says that if he wanted to keep his job, he sometimes had to work around the bureaucracy.

“That’s how I did it. Secretively,” he says. “Oops.”

But many times in his career, he has found solutions that satisfied everyone. “Time and time again, you can work with a developer. Identify high quality land. Leave that alone. So you put the housing where you protect the existing natural areas.”

“I tell young people, I’ve accomplished Mission: Impossible at least a third of the time in my life.”

## THE BOSS

John Spinks was an early chief of the Office of Endangered Species. He had the unenviable task of managing his band of misfit biologists.

“People who really put their heart and soul into those kind of specific studies are special,” he says. “I mean, they bleed for their species. And I was just extremely fortunate to have that group of talented

people. And my main job was to stay out of the way and let them do their job.”

Spinks was apparently aware of the propensity for some of his staff to make end runs around the bureaucracy. At one point there was a particular listing that was being blocked by Interior Department attorneys.

“I wrote a memorandum to someone above me in the agency. And for some reason, that memorandum got leaked to The Washington Post. God only knows how that happened.”

The leak “caused all hell to break loose.”

“This memorandum clearly showed the solicitor’s office as being a deliberate roadblock that kept species from being listed. ... And of course, we were as clean as the driven snow. There was nothing that would ever come back to us. That was many years ago, but I still think about that with great satisfaction.”

## **Trump says he didn’t know his immigration rhetoric echoes Hitler. That’s part of a broader pattern**

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump has centered his unlikely rise from reality television star to onetime — and potentially future — president on the idea that he’s wiser than Washington’s bumbling political class, once going so far as to label himself a “very stable genius.”

But when it comes to one of history’s darkest moments, Trump is professing ignorance.

Facing criticism for repeatedly harnessing rhetoric once used by Adolf Hitler to argue that immigrants entering the U.S. illegally are “poisoning the blood of our country,” Trump insisted he had no idea that one of the world’s most reviled and infamous figures once used similar words. The Nazi dictator spoke of impure Jewish blood “poisoning” Aryan German blood to dehumanize Jews and justify the systemic murder of millions during the Holocaust.

“I never knew that Hitler said it,” Trump told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt on Friday, volunteering once again that he never read Hitler’s biographical manifesto, “Mein Kampf.”

“I know nothing about Hitler,” he insisted. “I have no idea what Hitler said other than (what) I’ve seen on the news. And that’s a very, entirely different thing than what I’m saying.”

Trump’s assertion that he knows so little about one of the 20th century’s most documented figures is notable for someone seeking the presidency, a role steeped in and shaped by history. But claiming ignorance, particularly when it comes to people who espouse racist or antisemitic rhetoric, is a tactic Trump has repeatedly deployed when aiming to distance himself from uncomfortable storylines.

After he was endorsed by former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke during his winning 2016 campaign, Trump insisted he had no knowledge of the white supremacist who had run for office numerous times and is described by the Anti-Defamation League as “perhaps America’s most well-known racist and anti-Semite.”

“Just so you understand, I don’t know anything about David Duke, OK?” he told CNN’s Jake Tapper in February 2016. “I don’t know anything about what you’re even talking about with white supremacy or white supremacists.”

Asked if he would condemn the white supremacists supporting him, Trump said he would “have to look at the group. I mean, I don’t know what group you’re talking about.” He continued to repeat that assertion even after Tapper said he was referring to the KKK.

### **OTHER CASES**

Trump has also pleaded ignorance in other cases. As he ran for reelection in 2020, Trump said he didn’t know much about QAnon, the convoluted conspiracy that alleges Democrats are involved in a satanic pedophilia ring and casts Trump as the nation’s savior — even as he retweeted accounts promoting the conspiracy.

“I know nothing about it,” he said during an NBC town hall. Nonetheless, he refused to rule it out as false. “I don’t know that and neither do you,” he said.

It was the same when Trump was asked to condemn the Proud Boys militia group, which was key in organizing the assault on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Enrique Tarrio and other members of the far-right

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extremist group have been found guilty of seditious conspiracy and other crimes for their part in the attack, which was part of a desperate bid to keep Trump in power after he lost the 2020 election to Joe Biden.

"I don't know who the Proud Boys are," Trump told reporters after instructing the group, during a presidential debate, to "Stand back and stand by."

"I mean, you'll have to give me a definition 'cause I don't really know who they are," Trump said of the group, which was drawing headlines at the time.

Trump has also suggested he was unaware of some of the most consequential periods of American history. At a recent rally in Reno, Nevada, Trump said he had to ask Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to define the post-Civil War era known as Reconstruction as he boasted about his growing popularity with Hispanic voters and Republican wins along the border.

"They say the first time since Reconstruction. You know what Reconstruction means? That means the Civil War," Trump told the audience. "I said, 'Give me a definition, governor, of Reconstruction. You said I'm the first one to win all of these towns since Reconstruction.' He said, 'Well, Reconstruction: since the Civil War.' That's a long time ago. That's pretty good."

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said Trump "has been very clear that he's talking about criminals and terrorists who have crossed the border under Joe Biden's watch. When he's back in the White House, the United States will return to a secure border and a system that places the safety and security of Americans first."

## 'THE MOST SAVAGE CRIME'

The former president's claims about Hitler are particularly notable given his upbringing in New York, home to one of the nation's largest Jewish populations.

Trump has also participated in Holocaust memorial events. He spoke at a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol hosted by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2017, where he denounced Holocaust deniers as accomplices to "horrible evil." And he paid a brief visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial, where he called the Nazi extermination of 6 million Jews "the most savage crime against God and his children."

Trump's insistence that he has not read "Mein Kampf" — an assertion he also made at an Iowa rally last week — evoked a different Hitler book he once allegedly had in his possession.

Journalist Marie Brenner reported in Vanity Fair magazine in 1990 that Trump's ex-wife, Ivana Trump, told her lawyer that, "from time to time her husband reads a book of Hitler's collected speeches, 'My New Order,' which he keeps in a cabinet by his bed."

Trump told Brenner that, "it was my friend Marty Davis from Paramount who gave me a copy of 'Mein Kampf,' and he's a Jew." Davis confirmed to Brenner that he had indeed given Trump "a book about Hitler," but it was "My New Order," a collection of Hitler's speeches. "I thought he would find it interesting," Davis said, adding, "I am his friend, but I'm not Jewish."

"Later, Trump returned to this subject," Brenner wrote. "If I had these speeches, and I am not saying that I do, I would never read them," Brenner wrote.

## HISTORY

Knowing basic American history is important for a president, said Princeton University professor Julian Zelizer, who studies political history.

"We don't need a historian as president, but certainly you want a president with a feel for some of the basic parts of American history, of world history," he said, noting, for instance, that Reconstruction was a "a formative moment for civil rights and race relations."

In "Mein Kampf," Hitler wrote that, "All great cultures of the past perished only because the originally creative race died out from blood poisoning."

Trump told Hewitt his message was "very different" and he had "zero" racist intent.

"I'm not a student of Hitler. I never read his works," he said. "They say that he said something about blood. He didn't say it the way I said it, either, by the way. It's a very different kind of a statement. What I'm saying when I talk about people coming into our country is they are destroying our country."

Still, he repeated "poisoning" references eight times.



Among those references: "They are poisoning our country. They are poisoning the blood of our country. They're coming from all over the world. They're coming from prisons. They're coming from mental institutions and insane asylums. They're terrorists. Absolutely that's poisoning our country. That's poisoning the blood of our country. And that's what's happening."

## **A lifestyle and enduring relationship with horses lends to the popularity of rodeo in Indian Country**

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Kicking up a cloud of dust, the men riding bareback were in a rowdy scramble to be the first to lean down from atop their horses and grab hold of the chicken that was buried up to its neck in the ground.

The competition is rarely on display these days and most definitely not with a live chicken. And yet, it was this Navajo tradition and other horse-based contests in tribal communities that evolved into a modern-day sport that now fills arenas far and wide: rodeo.

With each competition, Native Americans have made them decidedly theirs — a shift from the Wild West shows and Fourth of July celebrations of centuries past that reinforced stereotypes. Rodeo has provided a stage for Native Americans, many of whom had nomadic lifestyles before the U.S. established reservations, to hone their skills and deepen their relationship with horses.

"It was really a way to bring something good out of a really tough situation and become successful economically and, of course, have some joy and celebration in the rodeo world," said Jessica White Plume, who is Oglala Lakota and oversees a horse culture program for the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in North Dakota.

The sport was born in the mastering of skills that came as horses transformed hunting, travel and welfare. Grandstands often play host to mini family reunions while Native cowboys and cowgirls show off their skills roping, riding and wrestling livestock.

One of those rising stars is Najiah Knight, a 17-year-old who is Paiute from the Klamath Tribes and trying to become the first female bull rider to compete on the Professional Bull Riders tour. Her upbringing in a small town riding livestock is a familiar tale across Indian Country.

Growing up, Ed Holyan's grandma would drop off him and his brother in Coyote Canyon — an isolated and rugged spot on the Navajo Nation — to tend sheep. When they got bored, they'd rope rocks, the Shetland pony and calves with small horns, he said.

"We'd seen my dad rodeo and my older brother rodeoed, so we knew we had the foundation," said Holyan, the rodeo coach at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona. "It was in our blood."

For Kennard Real Bird, who rode saddle broncs for 16 years, horses provided freedom on the Crow reservation in Montana. The river where the Battle of Little Bighorn took place coursed through the land, prairie extended into pine trees and high buttes beckoned with even wider-ranging views.

The ranching life developed into a career as a stock contractor and a reluctant rodeo announcer who deals in observational comedy, including at the Sheridan, Wyoming, rodeo.

No event there is as big of a crowd pleaser than the Indian Relay Races held in July — a contest rooted in buffalo hunts on the Great Plains or raids of camps, depending on who you ask.

A team consists of someone to catch the incoming horse, two people to hold horses and a rider who speeds around the track bareback, twice switching to another horse.

"It's the most fun you can have with your moccasins on," Real Bird, 73, jokingly tells crowds.

Kidding aside, horsemanship is a celebrated part of tribes' history.

On the Crow and Fort Berthold reservations, tribal members compete for the title of ultimate warrior by running, canoeing and bareback horse racing. Back on the Navajo Nation in the Four Corners region, rodeo is still called "ahoohai," derived from the Navajo word for "chicken."

The Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College on the Fort Berthold reservation offers Great Plains horsemanship as a tract in its two-year equine studies program, the only such program at a tribal college or university.

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Instructors highlight history like keeping prized horses in an earth lodge and the North Dakota Six Pack, a group of bronc and bull riders that included MHA Nation citizen Joe Chase, who shined on the rodeo circuit in the 1950s, said Lori Nelson, the college's director of Agriculture and Land Grants.

The tribe recently purchased kid-safe mini bulls and has bucking horses to revive rodeo among the youth, said Jim Baker, who manages the tribe's Healing Horse Ranch.

"That's one of our goals to keep the horse culture alive among our people," he said.

The largest stage for all-Native rodeo competitors is the Indian National Finals Rodeo held in Las Vegas. Tribal regalia, blessings bestowed by elders and flag songs that serve as tribes' national anthems are as much staples as big buckles and cowboy hats.

Tydon Tsose, of Crownpoint, New Mexico, restored the town's moniker to "Navajo Nation Steer Wrestling Capital" when he won the open event there this year as a 17-year-old. In his family, rodeo runs through generations with songs, prayers and respect for horses.

Tsose plans to continue the tradition, proudly proclaiming, "I see myself doing it for the rest of my life until I get old."

## Neighboring New Jersey towns will have brothers as mayors next year

GIBBSTOWN, N.J. (AP) — Two neighboring New Jersey towns may feel even closer next year when they're governed by two brothers.

John Giovannitti, 61, will be sworn in Jan. 2 as mayor of Paulsboro, one day before newly-reelected younger brother Vince Giovannitti, 57, is sworn in to a second term as mayor of Gibbstown.

Paulsboro, with a population of 6,300, stretches from Route 130 to the Delaware River, across from Philadelphia International Airport. Gibbstown, with just under 4,000 people in Greenwich Township, is connected to its larger neighbor through the main corridor, Broad Street.

The Paulsboro brothers describe becoming mayors as a "happy coincidence" but also a natural next step after decades serving their communities. They told The Philadelphia Inquirer that being siblings aids the necessary collaboration of mayors of neighboring towns that share certain services.

"We can say things to one another," Vince said, acknowledging that he might be more reserved in dealings with someone else. John says constantly seeing each other at family functions also helps.

Gibbstown and Paulsboro, described by John as "classic American small towns," have families and church and civic groups that span municipal lines. Vince calls them "really one big community" and John adds that he does not know if there are many other communities that are "so intermingled."

The brothers, both Democrats, said they have never lived anywhere else.

"The roots are deep ... " Vince said. "Your friends are here; your family is here."

The Gibbstown mayor's salary is \$12,314 with a three-year term. Paulsboro's mayor has a four-year term and is paid between \$7,000 and \$9,100. John also works as Paulsboro High School's assistant principal and athletic director and Vince was a special-education teacher and guidance counselor in the district before retiring in 2021.

Asked to describe each other, John depicts Vince as thorough and organized and looking at "the big picture for his community." Vince says his older brother is committed to Paulsboro, and he says he's happy for him but "also happy for the residents."

## Deported by US, arrested in Venezuela: One family's saga highlights Biden's migration challenge

By JOSHUA GOODMAN AND ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Pedro Naranjo idolized his father growing up and followed him into the Venezuelan air force to fly helicopters. So deep was their bond that when the older Naranjo feared being jailed for plotting against Nicolás Maduro's socialist government, father and son fled to the United States together.

Now the two have been separated by an overstretched U.S. immigration system that has left the retired Gen. Pedro Naranjo in legal limbo in the U.S. His loyal son, a Venezuelan air force lieutenant, sits in a

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Venezuelan military prison after he was deported by the Biden administration as part of an attempt to discourage asylum-seekers from the turbulent South American country.

"We never had a plan B," the older Naranjo said in a phone interview from Houston. He was released after 10 days in U.S. custody and is now awaiting the outcome of his own asylum request. "It never crossed our mind that the U.S., as an ally of the Venezuelan opposition and democracies over the world, a defender of human rights and freedom, would do what it did to my son."

The Venezuelan diaspora is one of the most vexing migration challenges that awaits Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas when they arrive in Mexico City on Wednesday to discuss unprecedented arrivals at the U.S. border with President Andres Manuel López Obrador.

Last year, Mexico ended visa-free travel for Venezuelans, which had been a ticket to those seeking asylum in the United States. Once arriving at a Mexican border city, Venezuelans could walk across the border in broad daylight and surrender to U.S. agents, avoiding the dangers of traversing Mexico and other countries over land.

Restricting flights to Mexico encouraged walking through the perilous Darién Gap. More than a half-million migrants, predominantly Venezuelan, have traversed the jungle at the border of Colombia and Panama this year.

The resumption for the first time in years of U.S. deportation flights to Venezuela — 11 since October, according to Witness at the Border, an advocacy group that tracks flight data — have failed to stem the surge. Venezuelans were arrested more than 85,000 times crossing the border illegally in October and November, the second-highest nationality after Mexicans.

Little is known about how those deported fare once they are returned home. However, critics and members of south Florida's close-knit community of Venezuelan exiles have blasted the Biden administration for overlooking the grave dangers faced by deportees like Naranjo.

Last week, a group calling itself Independent Venezuelan American Citizens joined Miami Republican Rep. Carlos Jimenez to denounce the younger Naranjo's deportation and subsequent arrest at the hands of Maduro. It said it sent a request to the White House on Dec. 12 seeking to block the deportation but received no response. On Dec. 14, after failing to reverse a deportation order by an asylum officer, the younger Naranjo was deported, according to his father.

Ernesto Ackerman, a member of the group, said the deportation was akin to sending a U.S. drug agent into the hands of a drug cartel.

"It's like taking a DEA agent and sending him to Chapo Guzmán," Ackerman said, referring to the Mexican drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. "I don't see any difference."

Naranjo's deportation comes against the backdrop of U.S. attempts to improve relations with Caracas after the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign failed to topple Maduro. In November, the White House eased oil sanctions on the OPEC nation to support fledgling negotiations between Maduro and his opponents over guarantees for next year's presidential elections. And last week, Biden announced a presidential pardon releasing from prison of a key Maduro ally held for more than three years on U.S. money-laundering charges.

Neither the White House nor U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement commented on the Naranjos' situation.

The father-son saga began in 2018, when Gen. Naranjo was arrested with a handful of other officers for allegedly plotting to assassinate Maduro, sow chaos and disrupt Venezuela's presidential election that year. Naranjo denies his involvement in a barracks uprising dubbed "Operation Armageddon" by Maduro but nonetheless he was court-martialed, along with other alleged plotters, on charges including rebellion and treason.

In 2021, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, Naranjo was hospitalized after suffering a stroke in prison. Under international pressure from Maduro's opponents, including the head of the Organization of American States, he was allowed to complete his sentence at home.

When the government decided to extend the sentence of his co-defendants, he feared the house ar-

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rest order would be reversed and he'd be thrown back into prison. He decided to flee at the end of 2022 and his son, who he says never conspired against the Maduro government, joined him to make sure he arrived safely.

"The only crime he committed was being a good son," said Maria Elena Machado, who has seen her son twice in prison since his return.

The two first crossed the border into Colombia, home to more than 4 million Venezuelans who've abandoned their homes since 2016. But with a leftist ally of Maduro in power, and Marxist rebels still lurking in the countryside, the two felt unsafe, so they decided after a few months to make the perilous trek through the Darién to the U.S. On Oct. 4, they crossed the Rio Grande near Brownsville, Texas, and surrendered to the U.S. Border Patrol.

Crossing illegally from Mexico exposed the Naranjos to tougher standards for passing initial asylum screenings.

A rule introduced in May applies the higher standard to anyone who crosses the border illegally after passing through another country, like Mexico, without seeking protection there. Migrants also must use one of the Biden administration's new legal avenues to asylum, such as a new mobile app for appointments at official crossings.

Illegal crossings across nationalities, including Venezuelans, fell after the rule was introduced but the lull was short-lived.

It's not clear why Naranjo's asylum request was rejected. His father said he appealed the asylum officer's initial determination that he wouldn't face retaliation if returned to Venezuela to a federal immigration judge in Pearsall, Texas, but lost.

The younger Naranjo lacked an attorney throughout the proceedings, according to his father, whose case was assigned to a different judge. Asylum-seekers are entitled to call attorneys before screening interviews, but many advocates complain that those detained get little notice, often at odd hours, and are unable to find help.

Venezuelans who clear screening do relatively well before immigration judges. Their asylum grant rate was 72% in the government's fiscal year ended Sept. 30, compared to 52% for all nationalities, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse.

Upon his arrival to Venezuela, the younger Naranjo was detained again on charges of desertion. He's now being held at the military prison outside Caracas alongside several opponents of the government.

Meanwhile, migration experts warn that other Venezuelans deserving of asylum could suffer the same fate.

"This is not a shocker," said Julio Henriquez, a Venezuelan-born immigration attorney in Boston. "It was bound to happen at any moment."

## Was 2023 a tipping point for movies? 'Barbie' success and Marvel struggles may signal a shift

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Eight years ago, Steven Spielberg predicted that the superhero movie would one day go "the way of the Western."

Spielberg's comments caused a widespread stir at the time. "Avengers: The Age of Ultron" was then one of the year's biggest movies. The following year would bring "Captain America: Civil War," "Deadpool" and "Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice." The superhero movie was in high gear, and showing no signs of slowing down.

But Spielberg's point was that nothing is forever in the movie business. These cycles, Spielberg said, "have a finite time in popular culture." And the maker of "E.T.," "Jurassic Park" and "Jaws" might know a thing or two about the ebbs and flows of pop-culture taste.

As 2023 draws to a close, no one is sounding the death knell of the superhero movie. The Walt Disney Co.'s "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" made \$845.6 million worldwide and Sony's "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" (\$691 million) was one of the most acclaimed films of the year. Marvel is still mightier than

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any other brand in the business.

But more than ever before, there are chinks in the armor of the superhero movie. Its dominance in popular culture is no longer quite so assured. A cycle may be turning, and a new one dawning.

For the first time in more than two decades, the top three movies at the box office didn't include one sequel or remake: "Barbie," "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" and "Oppenheimer." The last time that happened was 2001, when "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," "Shrek" and "Monsters, Inc." topped the box office.

No, it's not exactly a lineup of originality like, say, 1973, when "The Exorcist," "The Sting" and "American Graffiti" led all movies in ticket sales. "Barbie" and "The Super Mario Bros.," based on some of the most familiar brands in the world, will generate spinoffs and sequels of their own.

But it's hard not to sense a shift in moviegoing, one that might have reverberations for years to come for Hollywood.

"There's an inflection point in 2023," says Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for data firm Comscore. "Barbenheimer is just one part of that story. Audiences, they want to be challenged. I think the tried and true is not necessarily working."

Greta Gerwig's "Barbie," from Warner Bros., was the year's runaway hit, with more than \$1.4 billion in ticket sales worldwide. It was a blockbuster like none seen before: an anarchic comedy that set a string of records for a movie directed by a woman.

Nearly as unprecedented was the success of Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer," a three-hour drama that nearly grossed \$1 billion. As different as it and "Barbie" were, they were each original feats of cinema and personal statements by its directors.

At the same time, the Walt Disney Co.'s Marvel, a hit-making machine like none other in movie history, faltered like never before. "The Marvels" marked a new low for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, collecting \$200 million globally. DC Studios, in the midst of a revamp, saw disappointing results for "The Flash" and "Blue Beetle" before watching "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" sink to a \$28.1 million debut.

Both Marvel and DC have already made moves to right their ships. Bob Iger, Disney's chief executive, has called turning around Marvel his top priority. He said the superhero studio has suffered greatly from too many films and series leading to "diluted quality." The James Gunn, Peter Safran-led DC, meanwhile, won't officially launch until 2025 with "Superman Legacy."

In the meantime, something else will have to fill the void. That was a theme in 2023, too, when the writers and actors strikes marred release plans and forced the delay of several films including Warner's "Dune: Part Two," Sony's next "Ghostbusters" movie and MGM's "Challengers."

Those disruptions will continue in 2024. Analysts aren't expecting a banner year for Hollywood in part because films like the next "Mission: Impossible" film and the "Spider-Verse" sequel, both delayed by the strikes, won't make their original dates.

Overall ticket sales in U.S. and Canadian theaters for 2023 are expected to reach about \$9 billion, according to Comscore, an improvement of about 20% from 2022. The industry is still trying to regain its pre-pandemic footing, when ticket sales regularly surpassed \$11 billion. Output of wide-releases in 2023 (88) still trailed those in 2019 (108) by 18.5%.

Hollywood is still coaxing moviegoers back to theaters — something "Barbie," "Oppenheimer" and "Mario" went a long way to helping.

"It reinforced something that we've known for 100 years in the business: People like going to the shared experience out of the home," says Jeffrey Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "They love being entertained. Movies are a good financial proposition and can bring in a mass audience."

"It probably started with 'Mario' last April," adds Goldstein. "I think that showed audiences again that theaters are a fun place to be to. And it showed studios and content creators: Up your game."

If 2023 is any guide, hits will come from increasingly unpredictable places.

That was the case with "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour," a film released just two months after Swift's recorded concerts in a first-of-its-kind distribution deal with AMC Theatres. It grossed \$250 million worldwide, and was followed by the similarly released "Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé," another No. 1 debut.

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More surprising was "Sound of Freedom," a \$15 million film from the independent Angel Studios, which matched Swift with \$250 million worldwide. It was released with a unique "pay it forward" program that allowed people to donate tickets.

Going into 2023, no one was betting "Sound of Freedom" would outgross "The Marvels" or that "Five Nights at Freddy's" would have a bigger opening weekend than "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny."

"There are going to be examples of big-budget, traditional blockbusters that do well," says Dergarabedian. "But for every one of those, there have been two that failed. An audience that's finding a lot of interesting material on streaming is becoming more open to films like 'Godzilla Minus One,' Indian cinema, Japanese anime. There's a shift in audience taste and studios need to get a handle on this."

That poses as much of a challenge as an opportunity to studios. If more-of-the-same no longer has quite the same appeal for moviegoers, an industry that for years has depended on sequels, prequels, reboots and remakes to make up the bulk of its profits may require new creativity.

The Western didn't vanish all at once. After two decades of ubiquity, it began going out of style in the 1960s. And the Western, of course, continues to be rich territory for filmmakers. This year, 81-year-old Martin Scorsese made his first Western in "Killers of the Flower Moon," the three-hour-plus \$200 million epic from Apple Studios.

The superhero movie, likewise, won't ever die. But its heyday might have reached its endgame.

## **Burning Man survived a muddy quagmire. Will the experiment last 30 more years?**

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The blank canvas of desert wilderness in northern Nevada seemed the perfect place in 1992 for artistic anarchists to relocate their annual burning of a towering, anonymous effigy. It was goodbye to San Francisco's Baker Beach, hello to the Nevada playa, the long-ago floor of an inland sea.

The tiny gathering became Burning Man's surrealistic circus, fueled by acts of kindness and avant-garde theatrics, sometimes with a dose of hallucinogens or nudity. The spectacle flourished as the festival ballooned over the next three decades.

Some say it grew too much, too fast.

Things came to a head in 2011 when tickets sold out for the first time. Organizers responded with a short-lived lottery system that left people out of what was supposed to be a radically inclusive event. As Burning Man matured, luxurious accommodations proliferated, as did the population of billionaires and celebrities.

Katherine Chen, a sociology professor in New York City who wrote a 2009 book about the event's "creative chaos," was among those who wondered whether Burning Man "would be a victim of its own success."

Exponential growth led to increasing questions about whether organizers had veered too far from the core principles of radical inclusion, expression, participation and the pledge to "leave no trace."

That last hurdle was never harder to clear than this year as "Burners" tried to leave over Labor Day weekend after torching the 80-foot (24-meter) wooden sculpture that is "the Man."

A rare rainstorm turned the Black Rock Desert into a muddy quagmire 110 miles (177 kilometers) north of Reno, delaying the departure of 80,000 revelers. Once out, organizers had six weeks to clean up under terms of a federal permit.

By the smallest of margins, they passed the test last month, with a few adjustments recommended for the future. The verdict from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management means Burning Man is in line to use federal land again next year.

Debate over the event's future, however, is sure to continue as divisions grow between the aging hippie-types and wealthier, more technologically inclined newcomers. Veteran participants fear the newer set is losing touch with Burning Man's roots.

The event has made a quantum leap from a gathering of hundreds to one that temporarily becomes Nevada's third largest city after metropolitan Las Vegas and Reno. The festival drew 4,000 in 1995 and topped 50,000 in 2010.

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It's no wonder seasoned Burners sound a bit like griping cribbage players on a rural town square when they mutter: "It ain't like it used to be."

"Back then, it was much more raw," said Mike "Festie" Malecki, 63, a retired Chicago mortician turned California sculptor who made his 13th trip this year to the land of colorful theme camps, towering sculptures, drum circles and art cars.

"There are more (people) who come out to party and don't participate. We call them spectators," he said. Senior organizers long have wrestled with whether to become more civilized or remain what co-founder Larry Harvey described as a "repudiation of order and authority."

Ron Halbert, a 71-year-old from San Francisco, has worked support for Burning Man's 90-piece orchestra for 20 years and remains optimistic.

"It's still the gathering of the tribe," he said.

The event is permitted tentatively for the same 80,000 attendance cap next year. Organizers are considering some minor changes, though generally resist making new rules, Executive Director Marian Goodell said.

Critics on social media howled at the mayhem left behind this year, posting photos of garbage piles, abandoned vehicles and overflowing portable toilets while ridiculing the "hippies" and their leave-no-trace mantra.

But that mayhem may have actually helped bring Burning Man back to its roots.

Katrina Cook of Toronto said it forced people to be true to the founding principles of participation and radical self-reliance.

"The rain weeded out the people who didn't want to be there for the right reason," Cook said.

Mark Fromson, 54, was staying in an RV, but the rains forced him to find shelter at another camp where fellow burners provided food and cover. Another principle of Burning Man, he said, centers on unconditional gift giving with no expectation of something in return.

After sunset, Fromson set off barefoot through the muck for a long trek back to his vehicle, slogging through thick clay that clung to his feet and legs. The challenge, he said, was the mark of a "good burn."

Nevertheless, Jeffery Longoria of San Francisco, who marked his fifth consecutive voyage to Burning Man last summer, said its core principles are going to evolve no matter what as a new generation takes over.

"The people that created this community, a lot of them are getting older and retiring and there's a lot of new young people coming in, the kind that have, you know, a couple \$100,000 RVs and are kind of just careless about the environment."

Soren Michael, a Los Angeles technology worker who made his 11th trip this year, said the biggest change has been the ability to communicate with the outside world from the desert.

"It was almost part of the appeal to be disconnected," he said.

Twenty years ago, the psychedelic celebration like none other already was attracting academic scholars — anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists and communications professors — curious about how the makeshift civilization functioned without real-world rules.

Burning Man references started popping up in TV episodes and talk show punchlines. The rich and famous began venturing to Black Rock City, as the festival's temporary metropolis is called.

A full-blown exhibit about the phenomenon debuted in 2018 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington. Even then, veteran Burners complained about the event becoming as much a curiosity to see as to do.

That's in part the problem veterans have with the advent of glamor camping, or glamping, in which private companies provide packaged trips to concierge camps with luxury RVs and lavish meals under chandeliers. Some believe the camps violate Burning Man principles.

The growing number of billionaires and celebrities who fly in on private jets to Black Rock City's temporary airstrip "seems to be everyone's favorite thing to hate," Goodell said. But wealth shouldn't be a cause for shame, she said.

"The question is not about glamping," she said. "Comfort doesn't assume lack of engagement. It's whether you have a glamping camp and you're not really engaging."

Burning Man's purpose remains the same: building a creative, stimulating environment, the essence of

which people can take back to their own communities.

"We thought that from the beginning," Goodell said. "We just didn't know it would be 80,000 people."

## **Nikki Haley has bet her 2024 bid on South Carolina. But much of her home state leans toward Trump**

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

GILBERT, S.C. (AP) — Standing inside a rustic barn a short drive from the state capital, Henry McMaster shocked many South Carolina Republicans seven years ago by backing Donald Trump for president.

Then the lieutenant governor, McMaster became the first statewide-elected official in the country to endorse Trump in 2016. The event was in Lexington County, the adopted political home of then-Gov. Nikki Haley, who had repeatedly criticized Trump and endorsed Florida Sen. Marco Rubio.

Trump would win the 2016 primary in South Carolina and eventually the presidency. After campaigning against him, Haley would accept his nomination as United Nations ambassador, making McMaster governor.

That complicated history is coming to the fore as Haley mounts a spirited effort to become the leading Republican alternative to Trump. Her strategy is centered on a strong showing in next month's Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary before much of the campaign's focus shifts to South Carolina, where the Feb. 24 contest could be the last chance for anyone other than Trump to prove they can survive.

But her home state has shifted closer to Trump in the near-decade since she last ran for state office, threatening her ability to tap into her local roots to notch the victory she has promised.

"Ten years is an eternity when all politics are national," said Matt Moore, a former state GOP chairman. "Trump tapped into thousands of low-frequency voters who have reshaped South Carolina politics. Many of them weren't focused on state-level issues prior, or even now."

Trump's grip on GOP

The former president this time has the endorsement of almost every major South Carolina Republican. Sen. Lindsey Graham, who ran against Trump, suggested he would destroy the Republican Party and openly questioned McMaster's thinking over the 2016 endorsement, is now a close ally of the former president and is co-chairing Trump's state campaign with McMaster.

South Carolina's lieutenant governor, state treasurer, attorney general and three of its six Republican U.S. House members all back Trump. The only congressman to endorse Haley is Rep. Ralph Norman, a longtime ally.

Trump drew an estimated 50,000 people to a sweltering Fourth of July rally in Pickens, South Carolina, in the strongly conservative Upstate. Haley, meanwhile, set a record for her campaign last month with 2,500 people along the state's southern coast, known for its wealthier and more traditional conservative set.

John Reed, a businessman from upscale Hilton Head Island who donated to Haley's 2010 campaign, backed Trump in 2016 and 2020. But he is supporting Haley this time because he says she offers a contrast from Trump's "divisive and disrespectful" tenor.

"I think Nikki's the best of them because she has abilities and experience," said Reed. "Trump's narcissism and pride and arrogance is just too much for the office."

Losing South Carolina would be a huge blow to Haley's campaign, which is counting on outlasting rivals like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and picking up momentum from people open to a Trump alternative. A home state primary loss has devastated previous campaigns, including Rubio, who dropped out of the 2016 primary after a blowout loss to Trump in Florida. Sen. Elizabeth Warren dropped out of the 2020 Democratic race after losing several primaries in one day, including in her home state of Massachusetts.

Lexington County, where McMaster endorsed Trump, is Haley's adopted political home and the area she represented in the state legislature. She came back to the same rustic barn in April to hold a rally for her presidential campaign.

She was little known when she launched a bid for governor against three high-profile candidates — including McMaster — running on a message of fiscal responsibility and going after what she described as entrenched powers in Columbia. She aligned with the "tea party" movement that arose during President Barack Obama's first term.



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Her key endorsement in that race was Sarah Palin, the former Alaska governor who remained a powerhouse in GOP politics after her 2008 vice presidential bid. After also being backed by Mitt Romney, whose 2008 White House run she had supported, Haley nearly won the GOP primary outright and was victorious in the runoff.

Haley's record

Haley points to several accomplishments during her six years as governor, including bringing economic investment and jobs to the state, requiring companies to verify the employment eligibility of their workers, and supporting voter ID laws. She's perhaps best remembered nationally for helping to persuade the Legislature to remove the Confederate battle flag from the Statehouse grounds after a mass shooting in which a white gunman killed eight Black church members who were attending Bible study — although Haley had previously dismissed the need for the flag to come down.

Haley's presidential campaign points toward her previous popularity in South Carolina as a signal she will perform well when it comes time for her home state's voters to make their selection.

"South Carolinians first elected Nikki when she was the anti-establishment, conservative candidate for governor," said Olivia Perez-Cubas. "They know she has what it takes to win because they've seen her beat the odds before — not just once, but twice."

But Trump changed Republican politics in South Carolina and nationally.

That includes Lexington County, where the county GOP has been roiled for months by a legal battle between two people claiming to oversee it, a split within a recently elected slate supportive of Trump's "Make America Great Again" vision.

Michael Burgess, who served as a vice chairman for the Lexington County GOP and described himself as a "never ever, ever Trumper," said he felt the area's shift toward populism in the years after Trump's 2016 election.

"Lexington County is a microcosm of South Carolina," said Burgess, who teaches AP U.S. History at a local high school. "What we've seen since the 2020 election is a concerted effort by MAGA to take over the county party mechanism, and essentially, when they do that, to drive out long-term establishment Reagan Republicans."

Burgess, who said he voted for neither Trump nor Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in 2016 and supported Democrat Joe Biden in 2020, said he had initially backed South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott in the 2024 GOP primary, but now sees Haley as the party's best bet to defeat Trump.

But another person who supported Haley when she ran in 2010 now blames her for criticizing Trump in 2016, even though he supported her work as governor.

"When she came out and said, 'We need to ignore a lot of the loud voices,' that kind of really rubbed me wrong, because it was those voices that got her elected governor," said Allen Olsen, who founded a "tea party" group in South Carolina's capital city of Columbia. "Although I understood what she was doing, it really kind of felt like I got stabbed in the back."

State Rep. RJ May, a leader of the state's House Freedom Caucus, argued Haley is now more of an establishment figure due to her service as governor and then United Nations ambassador.

He said he doesn't see Trump the same way — even though Trump is now a former president running his third campaign for the White House.

"It's hard to take that lane from Donald Trump, considering the weaponization of the federal government that we're seeing," said May, who has not endorsed a candidate in the presidential primary. "One thing I don't think you can call Donald Trump is an insider."

But there are still people in South Carolina who have been waiting for Haley to run for the White House.

At the event in Bluffton, South Carolina, that drew 2,500 people, Veronica Wetzel donned a "Nikki 2024" hat she said she bought years ago. Now, she said she's ready to vote for Haley, in part because she wants to see Republicans win in November.

"I really don't know if Donald Trump can win," said Wetzel, adding she had supported Trump in past contests. "We need to put somebody in there who can win because the last thing we need right now is to lose this election."

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## Today in History: December 28, U.S. Afghan war formally ends

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 28, the 362nd day of 2023. There are three days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 28, 2014, the U.S. war in Afghanistan, fought for 13 bloody years and still raging, came to a formal end with a quiet flag-lowering ceremony in Kabul that marked the transition of the fighting from U.S.-led combat troops to the country's own security forces.

On this date:

In 1612, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei observed the planet Neptune, but mistook it for a star. (Neptune wasn't officially discovered until 1846 by Johann Gottfried Galle.)

In 1895, the Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis, held the first public showing of their movies in Paris.

In 1908, a major earthquake followed by a tsunami devastated the Italian city of Messina, killing at least 70,000 people.

In 1912, San Francisco's Municipal Railway began operations with Mayor James Rolph Jr. at the controls of Streetcar No. 1 as 50,000 spectators looked on.

In 1945, Congress officially recognized the Pledge of Allegiance.

In 1972, Kim Il Sung, the premier of North Korea, was named the country's president under a new constitution.

In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was signed into law by President Richard Nixon.

In 1981, Elizabeth Jordan Carr, the first American "test-tube" baby, was born in Norfolk, Virginia.

In 1991, nine people died in a crush of people trying to get into a rap celebrity basketball game at City College in New York.

In 2007, Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was laid to rest as the country's army tried to quell a frenzy of rioting in the wake of her assassination.

In 2012, Russia's President Vladimir Putin signed a law banning Americans from adopting Russian children.

In 2015, a grand jury in Cleveland declined to indict a white rookie police officer in the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, a Black youth who was shot while playing with what turned out to be a pellet gun.

In 2016, film star Debbie Reynolds, who lit up the screen in "Singin' in the Rain" and other Hollywood classics, died at age 84, a day after losing her daughter, Carrie Fisher, who was 60.

In 2017, Rose Marie, who began her career in show business as a child in the 1920s and co-starred on "The Dick Van Dyke Show" in the 1960s, died at her Los Angeles-area home at the age of 94.

In 2021, former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid died at his Nevada home of complications from pancreatic cancer; the Democrat was 82. Hall of Fame football coach and broadcaster John Madden died at 85.

In 2022, New Orleans music legend Walter "Wolfman" Washington, a cornerstone of the city's musical nightlife for decades, died at age 79.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dame Maggie Smith is 89. Former Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson of South Dakota is 77. Rock singer-musician Edgar Winter is 77. Actor Denzel Washington is 69. TV personality Gayle King is 69. Actor Chad McQueen is 63. Country singer-musician Marty Roe (Diamond Rio) is 63. Actor Malcolm Gets is 60. Actor Mauricio Mendoza is 54. Actor Elaine Hendrix is 53. Political commentator Ana Navarro is 52. Talk show host Seth Meyers is 50. Actor Brendan Hines is 47. Actor Joe Manganiello is 47. Actor Vanessa Ferlito is 46. R&B singer John Legend is 45. Rapper-musician-producer Terrace Martin is 45. Actor Andre Holland is 44. Actor Sienna Miller is 42. Actor Beau Garrett (TV: "The Good Doctor") is 41. Actor Thomas Dekker is 36. Actor Mackenzie Rosman is 34. Pop singer David Archuleta is 33. Actor Mary-Charles Jones (TV: "Kevin Can Wait") is 22. Actor Miles Brown is 19.