

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, Jan. 1 - HAPPY NEW YEAR! 2024
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.

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



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.

GDILIVE.COM

GT
Groton Area
Tigers

Text Paul at
605-397-7460

Any interest in any of these basketball games on GDILIVE.COM? They are \$25 each.

Warner Boys JV
Warner Girls JV
Clark Girls C
Clark Girls JV
Clark Boys C
Clark Boys JV
Tiospa Zina Girls JV
Tiospa Zina Boys JV
Dakota Valley Boys C
Dakota Valley Boys JV
Dakota Valley Girls JV
Milbank Girls JV
Milbank Boys JV
Great Plains Lutheran Girls C
Great Plains Lutheran Girls JV
Northwestern Girls JV
Northwestern Boys JV

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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1440

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Below are some important, interesting, or otherwise fun stories that moved 1440 staff in 2023. What was your favorite? Let us know here.

Women's NCAA basketball championship draws record numbers

I loved the excitement surrounding women's sports this year—particularly the NCAA women's basketball tournament, topped by the Iowa-LSU championship (go Hawkeyes!). —Ashley L.

The hidden power of rituals

As a child of immigrant parents who also moved around a lot, I always felt that the little traditions and habits were what gave us control of otherwise changing and often hectic circumstances. —Mitchell K.

Chicago woman breaks skydiving record at age 104

It's inspiring to witness that age has no barrier; it's about seizing every moment to pursue the passions that ignite your joy in this lifetime. —August M.

Riding with Jimmy Buffett

A captivating narrative about friendship and adventure with the legendary musician that prompts you to reflect on how you're living your own life and how you show up in this world. —Sony K.

Brain-reading devices allow paralyzed people to communicate via thoughts

I studied psychology and brain sciences at Indiana University and the courses focused on our brain were always my favorite. —Erika B.

Justices, actors, activists, and more

The world mourned the deaths of many iconic cultural, political, and sports figures in 2023. Among the most impactful for me were Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Matthew Perry, Harry Belafonte, and Tina Turner. —Bobby A.

A paradigm shift in public perception of UFOs

I was impressed by the shift in public opinion toward UFOs (now called unidentified anomalous phenomena) this year, as leaders in government and science sought to take whatever they are more seriously. —Teddy B.

"Please write me"

I found this story to be so heartwarming and loved how a young girl's message found its way back to her 72 years later! —Michelle D.

Flag football among new Olympic additions

As an avid football fan, finding out that flag football was approved to be an official Olympic sport gave me a thrill. It would be great to see familiar NFL stars competing on the world stage to represent the US, but I would also love to see the enthusiasm for the sport brought by other countries. —Scott J.

Ten-year-old amputee breaks track records

As a mother of a child with a rare disease, it really hits home to hear inspiring stories of children defying the odds and living their best lives. —Kellie S.

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Surprise avian wedding guest tops international photo competition

I got married this year and, in the past, worked for a wedding magazine, so these photos had me feeling nostalgic. They were the perfect treat to scroll through, bringing me back to an incredibly joyous day. —Amanda B.

Brain implant helps revive cognitive functions post-injury

As someone who is always looking to continue learning about the functions of the body, I am always looking to read about how medical science continues to evolve and help people. —Jessica L.

On this day: Harry Houdini's death

The life of Erich Weisz—professionally known as Harry Houdini—is fascinating to me. An icon surrounded by so many feats and myths ultimately succumbed to the common condition of appendicitis (and it may have been caused by a punch to the abdomen). —Lizzie M.

CRISPR therapy approved to treat sickle cell

This breakthrough brings so much hope to thousands of people living with the pain of sickle cell and the knowledge their life expectancy is significantly lower. It's inspiring to see the promise of CRISPR being realized and, for the first time, accessible to people who can benefit from it. —Aaron E-L

Fourteen-year-old's Lego recreation lands him a job on "Spiderman"

I thought this trailer was so impressive, but even more so that his skills were recognized, and he was hired by the filmmakers. —Sam B.

Justice for Neanderthals

I loved this protective view of our hominin brethren, who are often stereotyped as knuckle-dragging dumb dumbs. They were people, they were artists, they were way more similar to us. —Alissa S.

Ten years on, "Batkid" is cancer-free

While the world watches the day-to-day happenings swirl around us, it's good to be reminded that there is good out there, lots of it. —Lauren R.

The world's longest study on happiness reveals key to a fulfilling life

Dr. Robert Waldinger's study on lifelong happiness—which followed thousands of humans over 85 years—found the people who were happiest, who stayed healthiest as they grew old, and who lived the longest were the people who had the warmest connections with other people. Good relationships were the strongest predictor of who was going to be happy and healthy as they grew old. —Tim H.

The rise of Ozempic and other GLP-1 agonists

The downstream effects of the explosion of these antiobesity drugs will be fascinating to watch unfold. Obesity-related ailments account for around \$200B in annual healthcare spending in the US, an industry that accounts for 17% of GDP. These drugs have the potential to not only improve the quality of life for millions but drive a paradigm shift in the economy. —Drew S.

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Weekly Vikings Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

The table was set for another Central Division Collision. The Vikings and Packers needed a big win on Sunday night to keep their slim playoff hopes alive. Earlier in the day, the Pittsburgh Steelers helped them out by winning at Seattle over the Seahawks. How was this game going to transpire?

US Bank Stadium was rockin' and the amazing light show got things started. Kirko Chains lost his shirt and sounded the Gjallarhorn and boom!! Game on.

After each team went three and out, the Packers put together a nice drive to get on the board first with a field goal.

Turnovers continue to plague the Vikings as the Packers capitalized on an interception. An errant pass by rookie Jaren Hall gets tipped by Johnny Mundt only to land in the hands of a Packer defensive back. Just two plays later, Jordan Love hits his receiver over the middle for a 33-yard touchdown and the Vikings are quickly down 10-0.

The Packers put another nice drive together and decide to get aggressive and go for a fourth down inside the Vikings thirty only to be stopped on a dropped pass. Jaren Hall hits a couple of nice long passes to Justin Jefferson and Jordan Addison to set up a 54-yard Greg Joseph field goal.

The Packers offense marches right back down the field and scores on a Jordan Love dive from 3 yards out. The Viking defense was getting handled up front and the defensive backs are playing too far off.

Another turnover by Jaren Hall and the Packers tack on another touchdown with just eight seconds to go. The Packers lead 23-3 at the half and the Vikings get booed off the field.

Nick Mullens time in the second half. He drives the Vikings into the red zone only to come up short on fourth down. Jefferson catches three passes on the drive after having only one in the first half.

Instead of the Vikings scoring they allow the Packers to take it straight down the field for another long drive and touchdown pass by Jordan Love. They head into the fourth quarter down 30-3. A truly embarrassing performance on both sides of the ball.

The fourth quarter starts on a positive as the Vikings punt return gunner blows up the return specialist and recovers the muffed punt.

The Vikings punch it in from eight yards out with a short pass to Johnny Mundt. Can the Vikings pull off another crazy comeback like last year versus the Colts? Nope, the final score was 33-3.

But tonight was a night the defense will want to forget. Outside of some incomplete passes, it felt like the Packers consistently put up positive yardage on almost every play. Aaron Jones averaged over six yards per carry and the Viking's pass rush did not come close to sacking Jordan Love. The Packer play-calling was spot on all night long.

So where does this leave the Vikings? Their record sits at 7-9 and are effectively eliminated from the playoffs. After turning the season around after starting 1-4, they have proceeded to go 1-5 in the last six games and this was seen by many to be the easiest part of their schedule. Yes, they lost some close games but they were games against teams that were struggling and they couldn't finish them off when they needed to.

A lot of talk about the possibility of losing the defensive coordinator Brian Flores to a head coaching job may cease as the Viking defense that played so well during their winning streak has been dismantled by average teams the last three weeks.

So now the Vikings need a ton of help to get to the playoffs next week. If the Packers, Seahawks, Saints, and Falcons all lose, and the Vikings beat the Lions, who have nothing to play for next week, they can sneak in. Crazy things have happened. Happy New Year all!!

"Seizures"

A seizure can be one of the most frightening things for a family member, friend, or anyone to witness. However, for some people with epilepsy, seizures may be fairly common and not unexpected. Roughly 1 in 10 people may have a seizure at some point in their lifetime.

A seizure occurs when there is a burst of uncontrolled electrical activity in the brain. This may cause a sudden change in awareness or full loss of consciousness, unusual sensations or thoughts, or temporary problems in muscle tone or movements, such as stiffness, twitching, or limpness.

The two main types of seizures are focal and generalized. A focal onset seizure starts in one area of the brain and spreads, causing mild or severe symptoms. A generalized seizure occurs when both sides of the brain are affected. Generalized seizures may include:

- Absence - which causes a staring spell, the "petit mal" seizure
- Atonic - which causes someone to go limp suddenly
- Myoclonic - which causes sudden body jolts or increased tone briefly
- Tonic - which causes muscle stiffness
- Clonic - which causes muscles to spasm and jerk
- Tonic-clonic - a combination of jerking and muscle stiffness, the "grand mal" seizure

If you witness someone having a seizure, stay with them until the seizure ends and they are fully awake. Stay calm, it should end in a few minutes. Ease them to the floor and turn the person gently to one side which can help them breathe. Clear the area of anything hard or sharp to help keep them safe. Consider putting something soft and flat like a folded jacket under their head. Consider removing their glasses or sunglasses. Loosen ties or anything around the neck.

Not all people who have a seizure need to go to the hospital. Time the seizure and consider calling 911 if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes. Other reasons to call 911 include if they have never had a seizure before, if they have difficulty breathing or waking after the seizure, if they have another seizure soon after the first, if they get hurt from the seizure, if it happened in water, or if they have a known health condition like diabetes, heart disease, or are pregnant.

Do not hold the person down or try to stop their movements. Never put anything in their mouth or forcefully open a tightly clenched jaw, since that could harm them. It is a myth that someone having a seizure is in danger of swallowing their tongue.

After the seizure, the person is likely to be unconscious or sleepy for a few minutes more. This is the post-ictal phase, when the brain is still very active and trying to contain the electrical impulses. Once someone is alert, they are likely to be sore, confused, or frightened themselves. Tell them what happened in a calm and simple manner.

Seizures can be quite frightening to witness, but with some knowledge, you may be better prepared to help.



Andrew Ellsworth, MD

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Is there really a “snow drought” in parts of the U.S. and how does this negatively affect ecosystems?

-- J.L., Denver, CO

A snow drought occurs when there is a subnormal amount of snow accumulation. Two types of snow droughts are specified by the American Meteorological Society's Glossary of Meteorology: dry snow drought and warm snow drought. Dry snow drought occurs when temperatures are lower than normal. Cold air holds less moisture than warm air, and when temperatures are extremely low, lighter or even no snowfall may result. Meanwhile, warm snow drought is typically the result of elevated temperatures that replace snow with rainfall or cause the snowpack to melt prematurely.

Currently, 2023 stands as the hottest year on record. High surface temperatures of the Pacific Ocean have impacted atmospheric conditions and precipitation patterns, creating a strong El Niño climate pattern. With El Niño, the warmer waters push the Pacific jet stream south of their neutral position, bringing above-average rainfall to the Southern U.S. Contrastingly, areas in the Northern U.S. experience higher temperatures and lower rainfall levels than normal.

Snowfall has been subaverage throughout the Midwest, with some areas of upper Michigan and Minnesota reaching deficits of over 20 inches. In the days of early December 2023, cities like Minneapolis reached almost 50 degrees Fahrenheit, temperatures that are very unusual for that time of year. Similar statistics are being seen in the Pacific Northwest. Cities in the Northeast, like Philadelphia and New York, have experienced nearly 700 days without receiving an inch of snowfall in a single day.

Snow droughts can significantly disrupt an ecosystem's flora and fauna. Without snow as insulation, roots are exposed to cold air, affecting plants' health and survivability. Animals that have evolved to survive in snow, such as lynx and jackrabbits, often have more difficulty hunting prey or hiding from predators during periods of snow drought. The absence of snow cover also contributes to changes in temperature dynamics. Snow reflects sunlight and helps to regulate local temperatures. When snow is scarce, dark surfaces like soil and vegetation absorb more sunlight, leading to increased warming.

Snow droughts also have delayed consequences. Snowpack serves as a natural water reservoir and plays a critical role in regulating the precipitation cycle. When a snow drought occurs, the reduced snowpack leads to reduced snowmelt, impacting the following spring and summer months. Following a snow drought, lower soil moisture can stunt plant and crop growth and increase the likelihood and magnitude of wildfires. The diminished snowmelt weakens stream flows and therefore decreases water quality. Additionally, low flow disrupts aquatic animals' natural migration and reproduction patterns and reduces the supply of drinking and irrigation water. Snow droughts are expected to become increasingly common as global temperatures continue to rise and the repercussions are unmistakably destructive to human activity and wildlife alike.

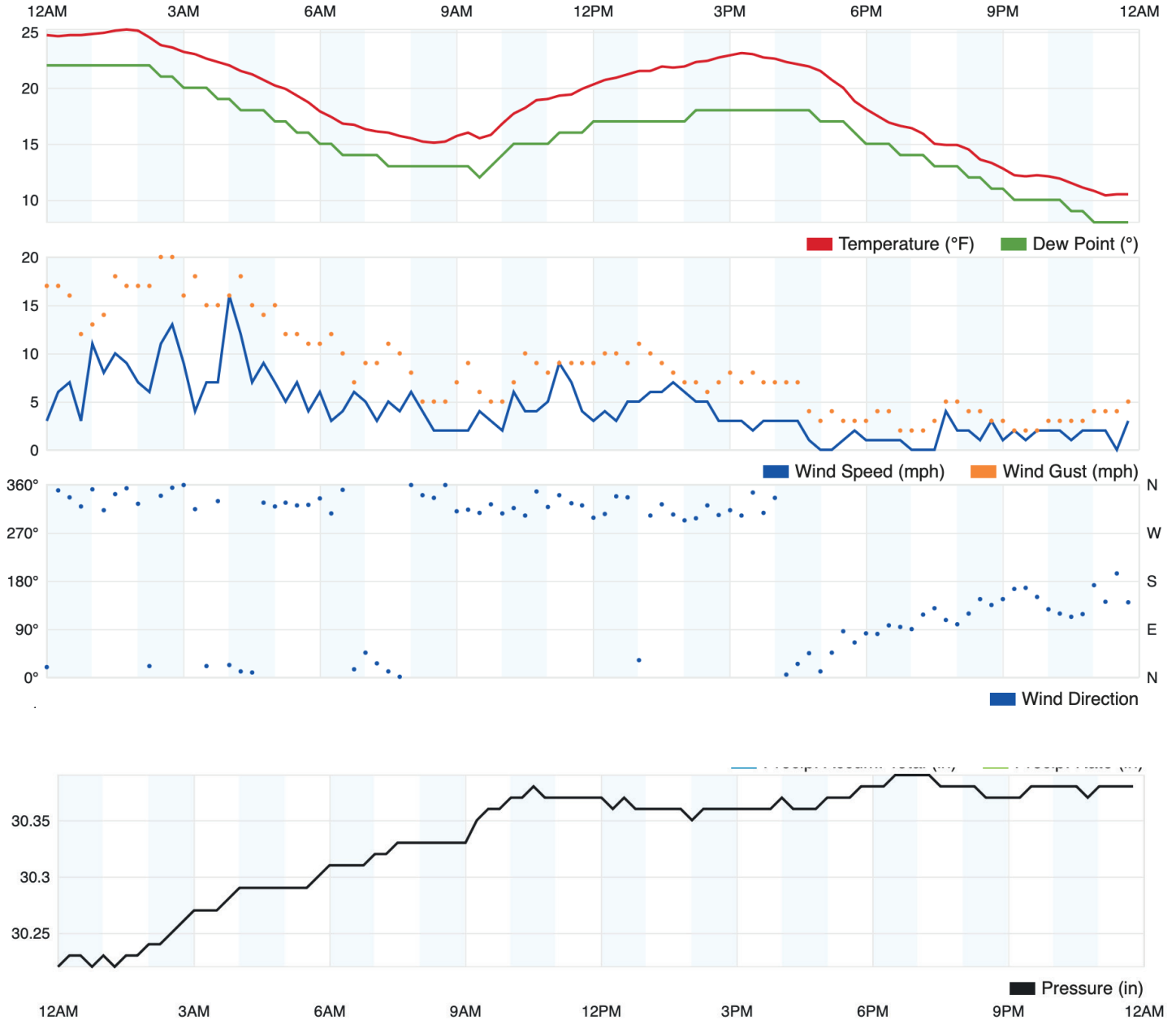


The lack of snow during periods of snow drought can impact everything from water availability to wildlife viability. Credit: Pexels.com.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Mon Jan 1	Tue Jan 2	Wed Jan 3	Thu Jan 4	Fri Jan 5	Sat Jan 6	Sun Jan 7
26°F	30°F	22°F	25°F	27°F	29°F	24°F
19°F	16°F	11°F	21°F	20°F	19°F	10°F
S	WNW	N	S	NNE	SE	NE
15 MPH	10 MPH	9 MPH	14 MPH	10 MPH	12 MPH	15 MPH
					10%	20%



Early Week Forecast

December 31, 2023

2:00 PM

mainly dry, near to slightly above normal temperatures

New Year's Day

- Morning fog then partly cloudy
- Highs 25-45°

Tuesday

- Partly sunny
- Highs 26-38°

Wednesday

- Partly sunny, colder
- Highs in the 20s

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Surface high pressure will bring another cold night, and some fog, to the region. Monday and Tuesday will provide for a slight warm-up.

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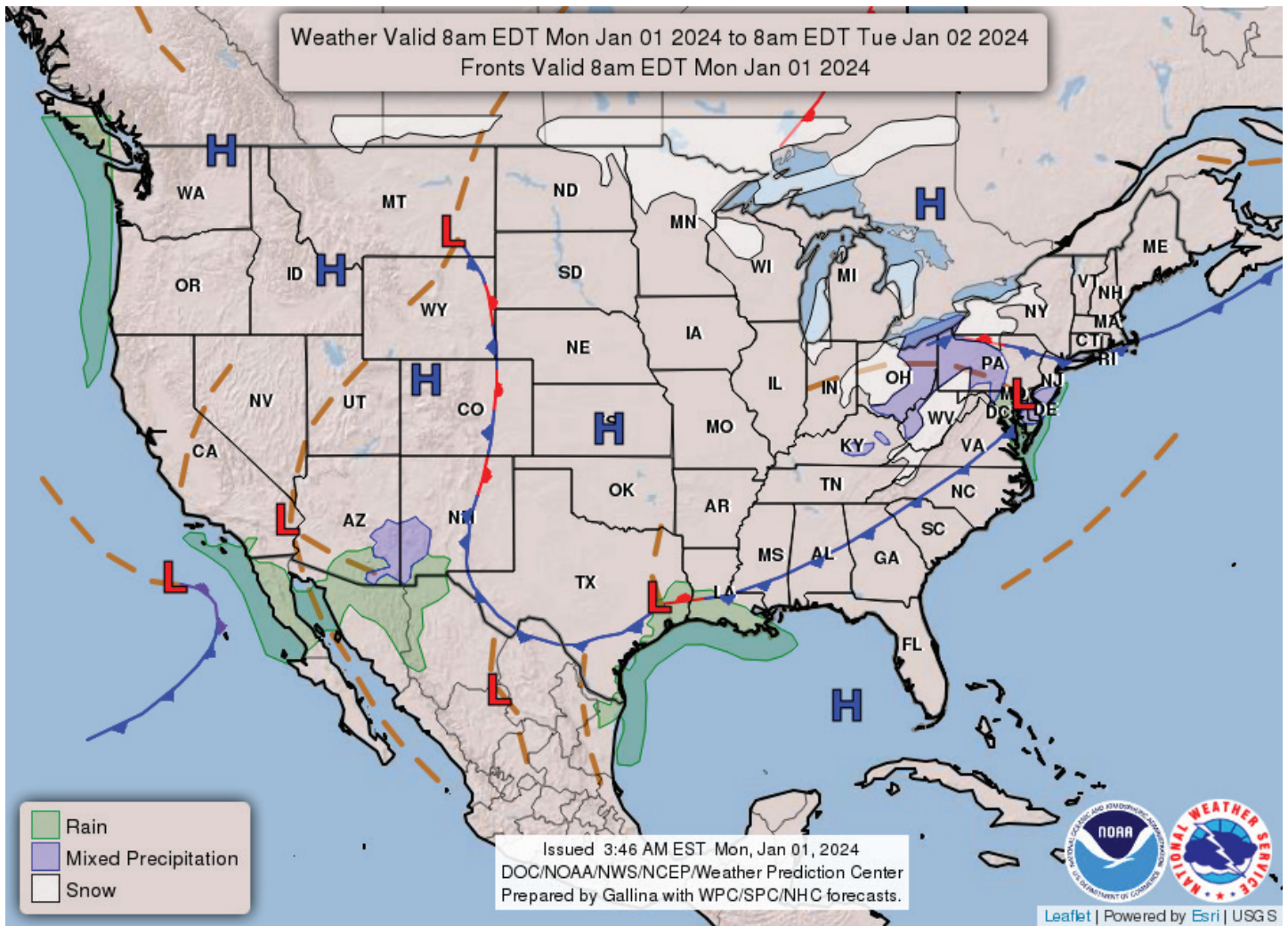
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 25 °F at 1:38 AM
Low Temp: 10 °F at 11:07 PM
Wind: 20 mph at 2:17 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 50 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1998
Record Low: -39 in 1967
Average High: 24
Average Low: 4
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.02
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.02
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:01:14 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:29 am



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Today in Weather History

January 1, 1960: The winter storm began on New Year's Eve as a low-pressure center moved from Colorado northeast to the Great Lakes. Snowfall ranged from 5 to 10 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. High winds on the 1st and 2nd caused low visibilities and drifted highways over affecting holiday travel. There were scattered power and telephone outages due to breakage from wind and ice. The storm winded down in the afternoon of the 2nd.

1767: The morning temperature in Boston was -8°F!

1864: A historic cold blast of air charged southeast from the Northern Plains to Ohio Valley. Chicago had a high temperature of -16°. A farmer near Hometown, Indiana, reported the same high temperature as Chicago, with a low of 21 degrees below zero. He remarked "rough day" in his weather diary. Minneapolis had a temperature of 25 degrees below zero at 2 PM. St. Louis, Missouri, saw an overnight low of 24 degrees below zero. The Mississippi was frozen solid with people able to cross it.

1886: Norway's coldest night on record occurred as the low temperature dropped to -60.5°F at Karasjok. Meteorologisk Institutt.

1888: The Signal Corps office opened in Rapid City, South Dakota, on January 1, 1888. It was located in the Sweeney Building at the corner of 7th and Main Streets. The high and low temperature that day was 6 and -17°F.

1934 - Heavy rain which began on December 30th led to flooding in the Los Angeles Basin area of California. Flooding claimed the lives of at least 45 persons. Walls of water and debris up to ten feet high were noted in some canyon areas. Rainfall totals ranged up to 16.29 inches at Azusa, with 8.26 inches reported in Downtown Los Angeles. (The Weather Channel)

1935: The Associated Press Wire Photo Service made its debut, delivering the great weather maps twice each day to newspapers across the country. The first photo transmitted was a plane crash in the Adirondack of New York on this day. The plane crashed during the evening hours on December 28, but the rescue did not occur until New Year's Day.

1949 - A six day blizzard began over the Northern Rockies and the Great Plains. The storm produced the most adverse weather conditions in the history of the west. (David Ludlum)

1961: A three-day-long ice storm was beginning over northern Idaho, which produced an accumulation of ice eight inches thick, a U.S. record. Dense fog, which blanketed much of northern Idaho from Grangeville to the Canadian border, deposited the ice on power and phone lines, causing widespread power outages.

1964: A snowstorm struck the Deep South on December 31st, 1963, through January 1st, 1964. Meridian MS received 15 inches of snow, 10.5 inches blanketed Bay St Louis MS, and 4.5 inches fell at New Orleans, LA. The University of Alabama Head Football Coach "Bear" Bryant said that the only thing that could have messed up his team's chances in the Sugar Bowl against Ole Miss in New Orleans, LA was a freak snowstorm. Well, much to his chagrin, 4.5 inches of snow fell the night before the big game. Alabama won the game 12-7 anyway. Freezing temperatures then prevailed for New Year's Day.

1979 - The temperature at Maybell CO plunged to 60 degrees below zero to tie the state record set back in 1951 at Taylor Park. (The Weather Channel)

1999: The start of 1999 was ushered in with snow, ice, and freezing weather across central and south-central Nebraska. On New Year's Day, a steady snowfall along and north of Interstate 80 dumped from 1 to 5 inches of snow. By late morning, freezing drizzle developed southeast of Hastings and eventually coated area roads with a layer of ice. Light snow later that evening made travel even more treacherous. Several accidents occurred on the Interstates and Highway 30. Once the ice and snow ended, arctic air spilled across the area abroad 20 to 30 mph north winds. Blowing and drifting of the fallen snow caused reduced visibilities for a time on the 2nd. Temperatures dropped to 5 to 15 below zero through midday the 3rd.

2011: Southern and central Mississippi saw 11 tornadoes during the night of December 31st into the morning hours of January 1st. Of the 11, two were EF-3 with two more EF-2. Six were EF-1 with one EF-0.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NO ONE CAN HIDE

"Ladies Bible Study" was a weekly event when I was a child. My mother always wanted me to be present but with certain limitations. "Larry," she would remind me from time to time, "children are to be seen and not heard." My role, unless called upon to say something, was to sit silently in a chair, smile occasionally, and not wiggle. Impossible for a small child.

But the "be seen" always put pressure on me. I had to wear a shirt and tie, make sure my shoes were shined and my pants had a "sharp crease" in them. And, I still follow those rules to this day whenever I attend a meeting or appear in public. So, things worked then and still do!

"Even small children are known by their actions," wrote Solomon, "so is their conduct really pure and upright?" The word "actions" implies "patterns of behavior that become second nature and last a lifetime." It's called "second nature" for a reason: behaviors become routine and are done without much thinking. And this captures the idea of this verse: What is in our behavior is a reflection of our character. Or, what's on the inside will be seen on the outside.

The words "Even small children" may lead us to the wrong conclusion if we do not look carefully at what Solomon is saying. "Even" means "in addition to" adults. We see patterns in children that reveal what is at the center of their hearts. Without being aware or even thinking about it, our behaviors are very consistent, from childhood through adulthood. They do not vary, and we do what we do because it "gets" us what we want!

When we stand back and look at our lives and ask: "Is my life what I want it to be? Am I pleasing God and honoring Him?" If the answer is "No," - it's time to turn to the Lord and ask for His mercy, grace, and forgiveness. We must never give up on ourselves or others!

Prayer: Lord, help us to focus on how we think and then act. May we be careful in everything we say and do. May we reflect You, Your love, and grace and in all things. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Even small children are known by their actions," wrote Solomon, "so is their conduct really pure and upright? Proverbs 20:11



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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.29.23

11 27 30 62 70 10

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$114,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 9 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.30.23

9 10 11 30 44 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,050,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 24 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.31.23

3 10 31 39 47 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 39 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.30.23

1 15 17 21 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 39 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.30.23

1 4 5 6 42 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 12.30.23

10 11 26 27 34 7

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$810,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Arlington 48, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 39
Baltic 57, Deubrook 37
Brandon Valley 64, Thunder Basin, Wyo. 46
Brookings 53, Yankton 46
Castlewood 71, Madison 39
Clark-Willow Lake 62, Chamberlain 47
Crazy Horse 63, Mitchell Christian 45
DeSmet 52, Chester 24
Elk Point-Jefferson 73, Irene-Wakonda 37
Estelline-Hendricks 60, Deuel 53
Faulkton 55, Burke 53
Flandreau 61, Colman-Egan 40
Garretson 64, Iroquois-Lake Preston 50
Hamlin 73, Dell Rapids 42
Harding County 77, Edgemont 21
Howard 70, James Valley Christian 52
Ipswich 58, Timber Lake 40
Lower Brule 55, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 49
Pierre T F Riggs High School 78, Bismarck, N.D. 73
Potter County 58, Bridgewater-Emery 56
Rapid City Christian 78, Campbell County, Wyo. 61
Rapid City Stevens 64, Rapid City Central 32
Red Cloud 57, Belle Fourche 54
Sioux Falls Lincoln High School 53, Sioux Falls Jefferson 50
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 72, Sioux Falls Washington 49
Sioux Valley 59, Dell Rapids St. Mary 47
Spearfish 47, Hot Springs 46
Thunder Basin, Wyo. 54, Aberdeen Central 49
Waverly-South Shore 53, Elkton-Lake Benton 47
Wessington Springs 67, Jones County 27
West Central 60, Hill City 45
Chadron Holiday Tournament=
Championship=
Custer 62, Chadron, Neb. 55
Mitchell Hoop City Classic=
Mitchell 44, DeLaSalle, Minn. 41
Waconia, Minn. 68, Lennox 65

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

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Omaha earns 67-51 win against South Dakota

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Frankie Fidler scored 27 points as Omaha beat South Dakota 67-51 on Sunday. Fidler had three steals for the Mavericks (7-8, 1-1 Summit League). Marquel Sutton scored 13 points and added six rebounds. JJ White was 5 of 10 shooting (1 for 4 from 3-point range) to finish with 11 points. Lahat Thioune led the Coyotes (8-7, 1-1) in scoring, finishing with 12 points and 15 rebounds. Kaleb Stewart added 12 points for South Dakota. In addition, Isaac Bruns finished with 11 points.

NEXT UP

These two teams both play Wednesday. Omaha hosts Northern Arizona and South Dakota hosts Eastern Washington.

Mayo's 25 help South Dakota State beat North Dakota 80-61

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Zeke Mayo scored 25 points as South Dakota State beat North Dakota 80-61 on Sunday.

Mayo added seven rebounds for the Jackrabbits (7-7, 1-0 Summit League). William Kyle III scored 20 points and added five rebounds. Luke Appel had 17 points.

Tyree Ihenacho finished with 16 points, nine rebounds and two steals for the Fightin' Hawks (8-7, 0-2). Tsothe Tsartsidze added 16 points and nine rebounds.

Russia launches record number of drones across Ukraine as Moscow and Kyiv continue aerial attacks

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a record 90 Shahed-type drones over Ukraine during the early hours of the new year, the Ukrainian air force said Monday, while Russia also reported Ukrainian attacks.

A 15-year-old boy was killed and seven people wounded after falling debris from one of 87 downed drones hit a residential building in the city of Odesa, the head of the region's military administration, Oleh Kiper, said. Debris also sparked a number of small fires, including at the city's port.

In the western city of Lviv, Russian attacks severely damaged a museum dedicated to Roman Shukhevych, a controversial Ukrainian nationalist and military commander who fought for Ukrainian independence during World War II. University buildings in the town of Dubliany were also damaged, although no casualties were reported.

Writing on social media, Lviv mayor Andriy Sadovyi described the strike as "symbolic and cynical," adding, "this is a war for our history."

Meanwhile, four people were killed and 13 more wounded following Ukrainian shelling on Russian-occupied areas of Donetsk, according to the area's Russian-installed leader, Denis Pushilin. Russian state media reported that a journalist was among the victims, but provided no further details.

One person was also killed and another wounded in shelling on the Russian border town of Shebekino, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

The aerial strikes follow a series of heavy aerial bombardments that began on Friday, when Russia unleashed an 18-hour attack that one air force official described as the biggest aerial barrage of the war.

At least 49 people were killed in the bombardment, with rescuers in Kyiv reporting Monday that they had recovered at least eight more bodies from underneath the rubble.

Shelling blamed on Ukraine in the center of the Russian border city of Belgorod Saturday killed 21 people, including three children, local officials reported.

Israel is pulling thousands of troops from Gaza as combat focuses on enclave's main southern city

By TIA GOLDENBERG, NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Thousands of Israeli soldiers are being shifted out of the Gaza Strip, the military said Monday, in the first significant drawdown of troops since the war began as forces continued to bear down on the main city in the southern half of the enclave.

The troop movement could signal that fighting is being scaled back in some areas of Gaza, particularly in the northern half where the military has said it is close to assuming operational control. Israel has been under pressure from its chief ally, the United States, to begin to switch to lower-intensity fighting.

Word of the drawdown came ahead of a visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region and after the Biden administration bypassed Congress for the second time this month to approve an emergency weapons sale to Israel.

But fierce fighting continued in other areas of Gaza, especially the southern city Khan Younis and central areas of the territory. Israel has pledged to charge ahead until its war aims have been achieved, including dismantling Hamas, which has ruled Gaza for 16 years.

The military said in a statement Monday that five brigades, or several thousand troops, were being taken out of Gaza in the coming weeks for training and rest.

In a briefing Sunday that first announced the troop withdrawal without specifying how many forces were leaving, army spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari did not say whether the decision meant Israel was launching a new phase of the war.

"The objectives of the war require prolonged fighting, and we are preparing accordingly," he said.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' military and governing capabilities in its war, which was sparked by the militant group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, which killed 1,200 people. Roughly 240 people were taken hostage.

Israel responded with a blistering air, ground and sea offensive that has killed more than 21,800 people in Gaza, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

Israel says more than 8,000 militants have been killed, without providing evidence. It blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll, saying the militants embed within residential areas, including schools and hospitals.

The war has displaced some 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million residents, sending swells of people seeking shelter in Israeli-designated safe areas that the military has nevertheless bombed. Palestinians are left with a sense that nowhere is safe in the tiny enclave.

BATTLES IN THE SOUTH

In Khan Younis, where Israel is believed to have thousands of troops, residents reported airstrikes and shelling in the west and center of the city. The military and the militant group Islamic Jihad reported clashes in the area.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said on X, formerly Twitter, that it transported several dead and injured following a strike late Sunday in the Beach Street in Khan Younis. It posted nighttime footage showing medics carrying casualties to ambulances.

Combat was also reported in urban refugee camps in central Gaza, where Israel expanded its offensive last week.

"It's our routine: bombings, massacres and martyrs," said Saeed Moustafa, a Palestinian from the Nuseirat camp. He said he could hear sporadic explosions and gunfire in Nuseirat and in the nearby Bureij and Maghazi camps.

"Just as we speak, there is a big explosion not far from my home," he said in a phone call Monday morning.

The military said an airstrike killed Adel Mismah, a regional commander of Hamas' elite Nukhba forces, in the central city of Deir al-Balah.

Hamas fired a large barrage of rockets toward Israel, including at its commercial hub Tel Aviv, as the

clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve.

'A DIFFERENT MODE OF OPERATION'

Israel has said the war will last for months. It has argued that it needs time to clear Gaza of militants' weapons and infrastructure and to prevent Hamas from being able to stage more attacks. Israel has resisted international calls for a long-term cease-fire, saying doing so would amount to a victory for Hamas.

Shlomo Brom, a retired brigadier general once in charge of strategic planning in the Israeli military, said the troop changes may be a result of the U.S. pressure. He said it indicated a shift in how Israel was conducting the war in some areas.

"The war is not stopping," said Brom. "It is the beginning of a different mode of operation."

Israelis still largely support the war's aims, even as the cost in soldiers' lives is mounting.

Over the weekend, the military said that of the soldiers killed since the ground operation began — as of Monday, 172 in total — 18 were killed by friendly fire while another 11 died by weapons or equipment malfunctions or accidents.

Japan issues tsunami warnings after a series of very strong earthquakes shook its western coastline

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan issued tsunami alerts and ordered evacuations following a series of earthquakes on Monday that started a fire and trapped people under rubble on the west coast of its main island.

The Japan Meteorological Agency reported more than a dozen quakes off the coast of Ishikawa and nearby prefectures shortly after 4 p.m., one of them with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6.

The agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of the island of Honshu, as well as the northernmost of its main islands, Hokkaido.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK TV warned torrents of water could reach as high as 5 meters (16.5 feet) and urged people to flee to high land or the top of a nearby building as quickly as possible.

NHK said the tsunami waves could keep returning, and warnings were continuing to be aired hours after the initial alert. Several aftershocks also rocked the region.

Government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said it was critical for people in coastal areas to get away from the oncoming tsunami.

"Every minute counts. Please evacuate to a safe area immediately," he said.

A tsunami of about 3 meters (about 10 feet) high was expected to hit Niigata and other prefectures on the western coast of Japan, and the waves were confirmed to have reached parts of the coastline.

At least six homes were damaged by the quakes, with people trapped inside. A fire has broken out in Wajima city, Ishikawa Prefecture, and electricity is out for more than 30,000 households, Hayashi said.

He said no reports of deaths or injuries had been confirmed, saying the situation was still unclear. Japan's military was taking part in the rescue efforts, he said.

Japanese media footage showed people running through the streets, and red smoke spewing from a fire in a residential neighborhood. Photos showed a crowd of people, including a woman with a baby on her back, standing by huge cracks that had ripped through the pavement.

Bullet trains in the area were halted. Parts of the highway were also closed, and water pipes had burst, according to NHK. Some cell phone services in the region weren't working.

The Meteorological Agency said in a nationally broadcast news conference that more major quakes could hit the area over the next week, especially in the next two or three days.

More than a dozen strong quakes had been detected in the region, with risks of setting off landslides and houses collapsing, according to the agency.

Takashi Wakabayashi, a worker at a convenience store in Ishikawa Prefecture, said some items had tumbled from the shelves, but the biggest problem was the huge crowd of people who had shown up to stock up on bottled water, rice balls and bread.

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"We have customers at three times the level of usual," he said.

Tsunami warnings were also issued for parts of North Korea and Russia. Russian officials issued a tsunami alert for the island of Sakhalin, warning that areas across the island's west coast could be affected by the waves.

In nearby South Korea, the weather agency urged residents in some eastern coastal towns to watch for possible changes in sea levels. Tsunami waves that hit later later can be bigger than the initial ones.

The Japanese government has set up a special emergency center to gather information on the quakes and tsunami and relay them speedily to residents to ensure safety, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters. He reiterated the warning for immediate evacuation in affected areas.

Japan is an extremely quake-prone nation. In March 2011, a major quake and tsunami caused meltdowns at a nuclear plant. Government spokesman Hayashi told reporters that nuclear plants in the affected area had not reported any irregularities on Monday.

New Year's Eve sweeps across the globe, but wars cast a shadow on 2024

By The Associated Press undefined

New Year's Day arrived to cheers from thousands in New York's Times Square where a sparkling crystal ball descended to start 2024 with hope for some, even as the world's ongoing conflicts subdued celebrations and raised security concerns across the globe.

"It's beautiful," Corin Christian of Charlotte, North Carolina, said of the scene seconds past midnight as Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" blared from speakers in the square and many in the crowd held cell phones in the air, trying to capture the spectacle.

"It's going very well so far," said Jacob Eriksson of Salt Lake City, Utah, with the earliest assessment of the New Year.

The march of midnight from time zone to time zone brought 2024 first to places like Australia, where more than 1 million people watched a pyrotechnic display centered around Sydney's famous Opera House and harbor bridge — a number of spectators equivalent to 1 in 5 of the city's residents. It would be another 16 hours before New York finished 2023.

There were snapshots of joy from country to country as the new year was welcomed with optimism that its days will bring more joy than sorrow.

Before midnight arrived in Times Square, December Lee, 26, and Shadayah Lawrence, 25, of Columbus, Ohio, said their New York visit highlighted four years of traveling the globe.

"It is a good way to bring in the new year," Lee said.

Also in Times Square, Tyrell Jacobs, 27, and Sarah Crayton, 26, arrived from New Orleans 15 hours before midnight and got engaged in streets packed with tens of thousands of people counting first the hours and then the minutes until midnight.

"It's definitely a must-see," Crayton said of the colorful cast of strangers nearby in tall hats and blowing noisemakers even before the ball dropped. "At least go once, you know, just to experience the magic."

A small army of thousands of police officers worked to keep New York City safe, just as heightened security had done in the cities midnight hit first. New York has seen near-daily protests sparked by the Israel-Hamas war.

Some 90,000 police and security officers were deployed around France including along Champs-Elysees Avenue, where large crowds took in a multidimensional light show projected onto the Arc de Triomphe showcasing the history of Paris and sports on the menu for next year's Summer Olympics in the city.

While New Year's Eve concerts were plentiful across America on Sunday night, CNN news personality Anderson Cooper followed a tribute to entertainers who died in 2023 by acknowledging the network's jovial New Year's Eve program with co-host Andy Cohen might also be a sad occasion for some viewers.

"There's a lot of people who feel like they can't celebrate," he said in the final minutes of a year that

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claimed the lives of Tina Turner, Tony Bennett, Harry Belafonte, Sinéad O'Connor, Jimmy Buffett, Burt Bacharach and David Crosby, among others.

FIREWORKS LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Stunning fireworks displays bloomed at iconic locations like the Acropolis in Athens, Greece; reflected in the sleek glass walls of the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates; and accompanied a collective cheer filling the air in Nairobi, Kenya.

China celebrated relatively quietly, with most major cities banning fireworks over safety and pollution concerns. Still, people gathered and performers danced in colorful costumes in Beijing, while a crowd released wish balloons in Chongqing. During his New Year address, President Xi Jinping said the country would focus on building momentum for economic recovery in 2024 and pledged China would "surely be reunified" with Taiwan.

In Taipei, Taiwan's capital, the mood was upbeat as revelers gathered for a fireworks show at the bamboo-shaped Taipei 101 skyscraper and at concerts and other events citywide.

In India, thousands of revelers from the financial hub of Mumbai watched the sun set over the Arabian Sea. Fireworks in New Delhi raised concerns that the capital — already infamous for its poor air quality — would be blanketed by a toxic haze on the first morning of the new year.

Across Japan, people gathered at temples such as the Tsukiji Temple in Tokyo, where visitors were given free hot milk and corn soup as they stood in line to strike a massive bell.

About 2 million people gathered at Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach under light drizzle to watch 12 minutes of fireworks in one of the world's most popular locations for New Year's Eve.

POPE HIGHLIGHTS THE HUMAN COST OF WAR

At the Vatican, Pope Francis recalled 2023 as a year marked by wartime suffering. During his traditional Sunday blessing from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square, he offered prayers for "the tormented Ukrainian people and the Palestinian and Israeli populations, the Sudanese people and many others."

"At the end of the year, we will have the courage to ask ourselves how many human lives have been shattered by armed conflict, how many dead and how much destruction, how much suffering, how much poverty," the pontiff said.

GAZA AND UKRAINE WARS GRIND ON

In Russia, the country's military actions in Ukraine overshadowed end-of-year celebrations, with the usual fireworks and concert on Moscow's Red Square canceled, as they were last year. Even without the festivities, people gathered in the square, and some cheered and pointed their phones at a clock counting down the year's final seconds.

After shelling in the Russian border city of Belgorod Saturday killed 24 people, some local authorities across the country also canceled their firework displays, including in Vladivostok. Millions were expected to tune in to President Vladimir Putin's New Year's prerecorded address, in which he said no force could divide Russians and stop the country's development.

Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip killed at least 35 people Sunday, hospital officials said, as fighting raged across the tiny enclave a day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, resisting international calls for a cease-fire, said the war will continue for "many more months."

Skyscrapers in Tel Aviv were lit up in yellow to call for the release of hostages held by Palestinian militants in Gaza for more than 80 days.

"While you are counting down until the new year, our time and our lives stopped," said Moran Betzer Tayar, the aunt of Yagev Buchshtab, a 34-year-old hostage.

In the Gaza Strip, displaced Palestinians huddled around fires in a makeshift refugee camp.

"From the intensity of the pain we live, we do not feel that there is a new year," said Kamal al-Zeinaty, who has lost multiple family members in the conflict. "All the days are the same."

In Iraq, a Christmas tree was decorated with Palestinian flags and symbolic bodies in funeral shrouds, placed beside a liberty monument in central Baghdad. Many Christians in Iraq have cancelled this year's festivities in solidarity with Gaza, and have chosen to limit their celebrations to prayers and rituals.

"We hope that the new year, 2024, will be a year of goodness, prosperity and joy," said Ahmed Ali, a

Baghdad resident.

In Muslim-majority Pakistan, the government banned all New Year's Eve celebrations in solidarity with the Palestinians.

GLOBAL TENSIONS SPUR SECURITY VIGILANCE

New York Mayor Eric Adams said there were "no specific threats" to his city's annual bash. Nevertheless, police said they expanded the security perimeter around the party, creating a "buffer zone" to allow them to head off potential demonstrations. On New Year's Eve 2022, a machete-wielding man attacked three police officers a few blocks from Times Square.

The Las Vegas Strip was closed to vehicle traffic and there was a heavy law enforcement presence with armed officers lining the Strip as thousands of revelers gathered and street musicians played before midnight, when fireworks launched simultaneously from multiple casinos. The city of Las Vegas said more than 400,000 people were expected at the celebration.

German authorities said they detained three more people in connection with a reported threat of a New Year's Eve attack by Islamic extremists on the world-famous Cologne Cathedral.

In Berlin, some 4,500 police officers worked to keep order and avoid riots like those seen a year ago. They also banned a pro-Palestinian protest in the Neukoelln neighborhood of the German capital, which has seen several pro-Palestinian riots.

North Korea's Kim says military should 'thoroughly annihilate' US, South Korea if provoked

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his military should "thoroughly annihilate" the United States and South Korea if provoked, state media reported Monday, after he vowed to boost national defense to cope with what he called an unprecedented U.S.-led confrontation.

North Korea has increased its warlike rhetoric in recent months in response to an expansion of U.S.-South Korean military drills. Experts expect Kim will continue to escalate his rhetoric and weapons tests because he likely believes he can use heightened tensions to wrest U.S. concessions if former President Donald Trump wins the U.S. presidential election in November.

In a five-day major ruling party meeting last week, Kim said he will launch three more military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and develop attack drones this year in what observers say is an attempt to increase his leverage in future diplomacy with the U.S.

In a meeting Sunday with commanding army officers, Kim said it is urgent to sharpen "the treasured sword" to safeguard national security, an apparent reference to his country's nuclear weapons program. He cited "the U.S. and other hostile forces' military confrontation moves," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim stressed that "our army should deal a deadly blow to thoroughly annihilate them by mobilizing all the toughest means and potentialities without moment's hesitation" if they opt for military confrontation and provocations against North Korea, KCNA said.

In his New Year's Day address Monday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said he will strengthen his military's preemptive strike, missile defense and retaliatory capabilities in response to the North Korean nuclear threat.

"The Republic of Korea is building genuine, lasting peace through strength, not a submissive peace that is dependent on the goodwill of the adversary," Yoon said, using South Korea's official name.

At the party meeting, Kim called South Korea "a hemiplegic malformation and colonial subordinate state" whose society is "tainted by Yankee culture." He said his military must use all available means including nuclear weapons to "suppress the whole territory of South Korea" in the event of a conflict.

South Korea's Defense Ministry warned in response Sunday that if North Korea attempts to use nuclear weapons, South Korean and U.S. forces will punish it overwhelmingly, resulting in the end of the Kim government.

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KCNA said North Korean officials held talks on Monday to implement an order by Kim to disband or reform organizations handling relations with South Korea to fundamentally change the principle and direction of the North's struggle against the South. There was no immediate explanation of how that might alter inter-Korean relations, which have been stalled for an extended period.

Experts say small-scale military clashes between North and South Korea could happen this year along their heavily armed border. They say North Korea is also expected to test-launch intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the mainland U.S. and other major new weapons.

In 2018-19, Kim met Trump in three rounds of talks on North Korea's expanding nuclear arsenal. The diplomacy fell apart after the U.S. rejected Kim's offer to dismantle his main nuclear complex, a limited step, in exchange for extensive reductions in U.S.-led sanctions.

Since 2022, North Korea has conducted more than 100 missile tests, prompting the U.S. and South Korea to expand their joint military exercises. North Korea has also tried to strengthen its relationships with China and Russia, which blocked efforts by the U.S. and its partners in the U.N. Security Council to toughen U.N. sanctions on North Korea over its weapons tests.

KCNA said Kim and Chinese President Xi Jinping exchanged New Year's Day messages on Monday on bolstering bilateral ties. North Korea faces suspicions that it has supplied conventional arms for Russia's war in Ukraine in return for sophisticated Russian technologies to enhance the North's military programs.

Estimates of the size of North Korea's nuclear arsenal vary, ranging from about 20-30 bombs to more than 100. Many foreign experts say North Korea still has some technological hurdles to overcome to produce functioning nuclear-armed ICBMs, though its shorter-range nuclear-capable missiles can reach South Korea and Japan.

The Empire State rings in the new year with a pay bump for minimum-wage workers

Associated Press undefined

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York's minimum-wage workers had more than just the new year to celebrate Monday, with a pay bump kicking in as the clock ticked over to 2024.

In the first of a series of annual increases slated for the Empire State, the minimum wage increased to \$16 in New York City and some of its suburbs, up from \$15. In the rest of the state, the new minimum wage is \$15, up from \$14.20.

The state's minimum wage is expected to increase every year until it reaches \$17 in New York City and its suburbs, and \$16 in the rest of the state by 2026. Future hikes will be tied to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, a measurement of inflation.

New York is one of 22 states getting minimum wage rises in the new year, according to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute.

In California, the minimum wage increased to \$16, up from \$15.50, while in Connecticut it increased to \$15.69 from the previous rate of \$15.

This most recent pay bump in New York is part of an agreement made last year between Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul and the state Legislature. The deal came over the objections of some employers, as well as some liberal Democrats who said it didn't go high enough.

The federal minimum wage in the United States has stayed at \$7.25 per hour since 2009, but states and some localities are free to set higher amounts. Thirty states, including New Mexico and Washington, have done so.

Colorado mother suspected of killing her 2 children and wounding a third arrested in United Kingdom

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

A Colorado mother suspected of killing two of her young children and injuring a third was arrested Saturday in the United Kingdom, according to the Colorado Springs Police Department.

Kimberlee Singler's 9-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son were found dead on Dec. 19 when police responded to a report of a burglary at their home. Police later said the report turned out to be unfounded.

Singler, 35, initially cooperated with police but disappeared during the investigation, said Ira Cronin, spokesperson for the Colorado Springs Police Department. Authorities were unable to apprehend her after obtaining an arrest warrant Tuesday on charges of murder and attempted murder, among other allegations.

Singler was not under surveillance and was last seen in Colorado Springs on Dec. 23, said Cronin.

Authorities did not provide further details on the overseas arrest, but said they are working with multiple law enforcement agencies.

Attempts to reach Singler for comment through phone numbers listed for her were unsuccessful. Cronin said he didn't know if she has an attorney.

When police first responded to Singler's home, they found her with minor injuries, the two children's bodies and Singler's 11-year-old daughter hurt. At first, Singler was treated as a burglary victim, said Cronin.

The injured girl was hospitalized for a few days before being released and is recovering in Colorado Springs, said Cronin.

The children's deaths came amid an ongoing legal battle between Singler and her ex-husband over parenting time and other issues, according to court filings.

Lamar Jackson's perfect passer rating helps Ravens rout Dolphins 56-19 to clinch top seed in AFC

By NOAH TRISTER AP Sports Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — Lamar Jackson and the Baltimore Ravens clinched a division title and the top seed in the AFC.

There's no mathematical way to tell if the star quarterback wrapped up the MVP award, too, but his fans made their views on the topic clear.

Serenaded throughout by "MVP!" chants, Jackson threw for 321 yards and five touchdowns as the Ravens eviscerated the Miami Dolphins 56-19 on Sunday. Baltimore won its first AFC North title since 2019, when Jackson was named MVP. He might be closing in on that honor again.

"He played a perfect football game in terms of the passing game," coach John Harbaugh said.

The stat sheet agreed. Jackson went 18 of 21 without an interception. He finished with a perfect passer rating of 158.3.

Jackson missed the end of the past two Baltimore seasons because of injuries. Now the Ravens can rest him voluntarily next week if they want, although Harbaugh was noncommittal on that.

Baltimore (13-3) has won six straight, and the Ravens rolled through a grueling December stretch that included games against the Rams, Jaguars, 49ers and Dolphins.

"I don't know if I've seen a more impressive performance in a game. I'm not sure I've seen a more impressive performance in a season to date," said Harbaugh, whose team will have a first-round bye before hosting its postseason opener. "Obviously we have a lot more to do. We've got a lot of work to do in front of us, but this is a mature football team."

Miami (11-5) is also postseason bound, but now the winner of next weekend's Dolphins-Bills game will take the AFC East. Miami was without two offensive stars in receiver Jaylen Waddle (ankle) and running back Raheem Mostert (knee, ankle).

And now the Dolphins face another potentially significant injury. Linebacker Bradley Chubb — with his

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team down 30 points — had to be carted off with 3:05 remaining after hurting his knee.

That raised obvious questions about why Chubb was still in the game.

"There's times like this one where I would like a time machine for sure," Miami coach Mike McDaniel said.

Jackson had more touchdown passes than incompletions. That's a feat Miami's Tua Tagovailoa also accomplished in a 70-20 win over Denver in Week 3.

Jackson also had a perfect passer rating against Miami in 2019. He joins Tom Brady (against Detroit) as the only quarterbacks with two perfect ratings against the same team, with a minimum of 20 attempts.

"I love the guy," Ravens linebacker Patrick Queen said. "He proved everything he had to prove. If anybody else saying otherwise, they just don't like Lamar. That's what it is. They don't like us, they don't like Baltimore, they don't like Lamar."

This matchup featured Miami's top-ranked scoring offense and Baltimore's top-ranked scoring defense. In the early going, the Dolphins had the upper hand. They scored on the game's first drive when Tagovailoa threw an 8-yard pass to Cedrick Wilson Jr. Jackson answered with a 20-yard scoring strike to Justice Hill.

Miami would have had another touchdown on its second drive, but Tyreek Hill bobbled the ball in the end zone and the Dolphins kicked a field goal.

The Ravens took the lead for good in the second quarter when Gus Edwards capped an 89-yard drive with a 1-yard scoring run. After another Miami field goal, Jackson immediately found Zay Flowers open deep for a 75-yard touchdown that made it 21-13.

The Ravens struck again 94 seconds later thanks to a pair of one-handed catches. The first was an interception by Roquan Smith, the second a 35-yard catch-and-run TD by Isaiah Likely on fourth-and-7.

Justice Hill returned the second-half kickoff 78 yards, setting up Jackson's 7-yard TD toss to Likely that made it 35-13.

Miami trailed 35-14 with under 13 minutes remaining last season before rallying to a 42-38 win over the Ravens. The Dolphins started the fourth quarter with a touchdown this time, a 1-yard pass from Tagovailoa to De'Von Achane, but it was Baltimore that closed strong.

"Last year, the score was looking like that at halftime and third quarter. Then those guys started making plays and we didn't do anything," Jackson said. "The only thing that was on my mind was to finish the game, and today we did it."

The Ravens marched right back down the field and scored on Jackson's 4-yard pass to Patrick Ricard to go up 42-19. Melvin Gordon III added a 7-yard touchdown run, and a Miami fumble led to another TD. Tyler Huntley threw a scoring pass to Charlie Kolar on third-and-goal from the 19.

(That was Huntley's only pass attempt. He also finished with a perfect 158.3 passer rating.)

"We'll look at the film tomorrow, see what we can do better and move on to the Bills," Tagovailoa said. "Everything is still in front of us for what we want to accomplish as a team."

STREAKS AND MILESTONES

The Ravens rushed for at least 100 yards for a 32nd consecutive game and had a sack for a 37th straight. ... Jackson reached 800 yards rushing on the season, becoming the first quarterback in NFL history to do that three times. ... This was the second-highest scoring total in franchise history for the Ravens, behind only their 59-10 win at Miami in that 2019 romp. ... Tyreek Hill surpassed 10,000 yards receiving for his career.

INJURIES

The teams weren't at full strength at the start, and the injuries continued throughout the game. Miami lost CB Xavien Howard (foot). Baltimore CB Marlon Humphrey (calf) went down as well. Ravens NT Michael Pierce and S Daryl Worley were both evaluated for head injuries.

UP NEXT

Dolphins: Host Buffalo next weekend.

Ravens: Host Pittsburgh next weekend.

Chief Justice Roberts casts a wary eye on the uses of artificial intelligence in the federal courts

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chief Justice John Roberts on Sunday turned his focus to the promise, and shortcomings, of artificial intelligence in the federal courts, in an annual report that made no mention of Supreme Court ethics or legal controversies involving Donald Trump.

Describing artificial intelligence as the “latest technological frontier,” Roberts discussed the pros and cons of computer-generated content in the legal profession. His remarks come just a few days after the latest instance of AI-generated fake legal citations making their way into official court records, in a case involving ex-Trump lawyer Michael Cohen.

“Always a bad idea,” Roberts wrote in his year-end report, noting that “any use of AI requires caution and humility.”

At the same time, though, the chief justice acknowledged that AI can make it much easier for people without much money to access the courts. “These tools have the welcome potential to smooth out any mismatch between available resources and urgent needs in our court system,” Roberts wrote.

The report came at the end of a year in which a series of stories questioned the ethical practices of the justices and the court responded to critics by adopting its first code of conduct. Many of those stories focused on Justice Clarence Thomas and his failure to disclose travel, other hospitality and additional financial ties with wealthy conservative donors including Harlan Crow and the Koch brothers. But Justices Samuel Alito and Sonia Sotomayor also have been under scrutiny.

The country also is entering an the beginning of an election year that seems likely to enmesh the court in some way in the ongoing criminal cases against Trump and efforts to keep the Republican former president off the 2024 ballot.

Along with his eight colleagues, Roberts almost never discusses cases that are before the Supreme Court or seem likely to get there. In past reports, he has advocated for enhanced security and salary increases for federal judges, praised judges and their aides for dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and highlighted other aspects of technological changes in the courts.

Roberts once famously compared judges to umpires who call balls and strikes, but don’t make the rules. In his latest report, he turned to a different sport, tennis, to make the point that technology won’t soon replace judges.

At many tennis tournaments, optical technology, rather than human line judges, now determines “whether 130 mile per hour serves are in or out. These decisions involve precision to the millimeter. And there is no discretion; the ball either did or did not hit the line. By contrast, legal determinations often involve gray areas that still require application of human judgment,” Roberts wrote.

Looking ahead warily to the growing use of artificial intelligence in the courts, Roberts wrote: “I predict that human judges will be around for a while. But with equal confidence I predict that judicial work — particularly at the trial level — will be significantly affected by AI.”

Israeli strikes in central Gaza kill at least 35 as Netanyahu says war will continue for months

By WAFAA SHURAF, BASSEM MROUE and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 35 people Sunday, hospital officials said, as fighting raged across the tiny enclave a day after Israel’s prime minister said the war will continue for “many more months,” resisting international calls for a cease-fire.

The military said Israeli forces were operating in Gaza’s second-largest city, Khan Younis, and residents reported strikes in the central region, the latest focus of the nearly three-month air-and-ground war that has raised fears of a regional conflagration.

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The U.S. military said its forces shot and killed several Iran-backed Houthi rebels when they tried to attack a cargo ship in the Red Sea, an escalation in a maritime conflict linked to the war. And an Israeli Cabinet minister suggested encouraging Gaza's population to emigrate, remarks that could worsen tensions with Egypt and other friendly Arab states.

Israel says it wants to destroy Hamas' governing and military capabilities in Gaza, from where it launched its Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. The militants killed some 1,200 people after breaking through Israel's extensive border defenses, shattering its sense of security. They also captured around 240 hostages, nearly half of whom were released during a temporary cease-fire agreement in November.

Just after midnight on New Year's Day, Hamas militants fired a barrage of rockets, setting off air raid sirens in southern and central Israel. No injuries were reported.

Displaced Palestinians found little to celebrate on New Year's Eve in Muwasi, a makeshift camp in a mostly undeveloped area of southern Gaza's Mediterranean coast designated by Israel as a safe zone.

"From the intensity of the pain we live, we do not feel that there is a new year," said Kamal al-Zeinaty, huddled with his family around a fire inside a tent. "All the days are the same."

Another relative, Zeyad al-Zeinaty, who fled with the family from the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, said his wife, brother and grandchildren are among many relatives he has lost in the war.

Israel's unprecedented air and ground offensive has killed more than 21,800 Palestinians and wounded more than 56,000 others, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not distinguish between civilian and combatant deaths.

The war has sparked a humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of Gaza residents facing starvation, according to the United Nations. Israel's bombardments have leveled vast swaths of the territory, displacing some 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million residents.

THE OFFENSIVE GRINDS ON

Israel expanded its offensive to central Gaza this week, targeting a belt of densely built-up communities that house refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation and their descendants.

In Zweida, an Israeli airstrike killed at least 13 people and wounded dozens of others, according to witnesses. The bodies were draped in white plastic and laid out in front of a hospital, where prayers were held before burial.

"They were innocent people," said Hussein Siam, whose relatives were among the dead. "Israeli warplanes bombarded the whole family."

Officials from Al-Aqsa Hospital in central Deir al-Balah said the 13 were among 35 bodies received on Sunday.

The Israeli military said it was battling militants in Khan Younis, where Israel believes Hamas leaders are hiding. It also said its forces operating in the Shati refugee camp, in northern Gaza, found a bomb in a kindergarten and defused it. Hamas continued to launch rockets toward southern Israel.

Israel has faced stiff resistance from Hamas since it began its ground offensive in late October, and the military says 172 soldiers have been killed during that time.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesman, said Sunday that Israel was withdrawing some forces from Gaza as part of its "smart management" of the war. He did not say how many, and held out the possibility they would return at a later point in the war.

Israeli media said up to five brigades, numbering thousands of soldiers, would be withdrawn, but it was not immediately clear if it represented a normal troop rotation or a new phase in the fighting. Hagari also said some reservists would return to civilian life to bolster Israel's wartime economy.

The fighting has pushed much of Gaza's population south, where people have flooded shelters and tent camps near the border with Egypt. Hundreds of thousands have sought shelter in the central town of Deir al-Balah. Israel has continued to carry out strikes in both areas.

Eman al-Masri, who gave birth to quadruplets a week ago at a hospital in Deir al-Balah, is now sheltering with them in a room with 50 other people at a school-turned-shelter. "There is a shortage of diapers, they are not available, and no milk," she said.

ISRAELI MINISTER URGES MASS MIGRATION FROM GAZA

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The scale of the destruction and the exodus to the south has raised fears among Palestinians and Arab countries that Israel plans to drive Gaza's population out and prevent it from returning.

On Sunday, Israel's far-right finance minister said it should "encourage migration" from Gaza and re-establish Jewish settlements in the territory, where it withdrew settlers and soldiers in 2005.

"If in Gaza there were only 100,000 or 200,000 Arabs and not 2 million, the entire discussion about 'the day after' would be completely different," Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich told Army Radio.

Smotrich has been largely sidelined by a war Cabinet that does not include him. But his comments risked worsening tensions with neighboring Egypt, which is deeply concerned about a possible mass influx of Palestinian refugees, along with other friendly Arab countries.

Later Sunday, an official in the prime minister's office said Israel does not want to resettle Palestinians.

"Contrary to false allegations, Israel does not seek to displace the population in Gaza," the official said in a statement to The Associated Press. "Subject to security checks, Israel's policy is to enable those individuals who wish to leave to do so." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

Israel is also at odds with the United States, which has provided crucial military aid for the offensive, over Gaza's future.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel must maintain open-ended security control over the Gaza Strip. At a news conference Saturday, he said the war would continue for "many more months" and that Israel would assume control of the Gaza side of the border with Egypt.

Israel says Hamas has smuggled weapons from Egypt, but Egypt is likely to oppose any Israeli military presence there.

Netanyahu has also said he won't allow the internationally-backed Palestinian Authority, which administers some parts of the occupied West Bank, to expand its limited rule to Gaza, where Hamas drove its forces out in 2007.

The U.S. wants a unified Palestinian government to run both Gaza and parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank as a precursor to eventual statehood. The last Israeli-Palestinian peace talks broke down over a decade ago, and Israeli governments since have been staunchly opposed to Palestinian statehood.

US Navy helicopters fire at Yemen's Houthi rebels and kill several in latest Red Sea shipping attack

BEIRUT (AP) — The U.S. military said Sunday that its forces opened fire on Houthi rebels after they attacked a cargo ship in the Red Sea, killing several of them in an escalation of the maritime conflict linked to the war in Gaza. "We're going to act in a self-defense going forward," a White House official said.

In a series of statements, the U.S. Central Command said the crew of the USS Gravelly destroyer first shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired at the Singapore-flagged Maersk Hangzhou late Saturday, after the vessel reported getting hit by a missile earlier that evening as it sailed through the Southern Red Sea.

Four small boats then attacked the same cargo ship with small arms fire early Sunday and rebels tried to board the vessel, the U.S. Navy said.

Next, the USS Gravelly and helicopters from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier responded to the Maersk Hangzhou's distress call and issued verbal warnings to the attackers, who responded by firing on the helicopters.

"The U.S. Navy helicopters returned fire in self-defense," sinking three of the four boats and killing the people on board while the fourth boat fled the area, the U.S. Central Command said. No harm to U.S. personnel or equipment, or casualties from the cargo ship, were reported.

The Houthis acknowledged that 10 of their fighters were killed in the confrontation and warned of consequences.

In Washington, a spokesman for the White House National Security Council sidestepped a question about the possibility of a preemptive strike against the Houthis to safeguard commercial shipping in the

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vital waterway.

"I won't say what's on or off the table right now," John Kirby told ABC's "Good Morning America," adding, "We're going to do what we have to do to protect shipping." He said the United States has "significant national security interests in the region" and "we're going to put the kind of forces we need in the region to protect those interests and we're going to act in self-defense going forward."

He said the U.S. has made it clear to the Houthis that "we take these threats seriously and we're going to make the right decisions going forward."

The events surrounding the Maersk Hangzhou represented the 23rd illegal attack by the Houthis on international shipping since Nov. 19, the Central Command said. It was the first time the U.S. Navy said its personnel had killed Houthi fighters since the Red Sea attacks started.

For over a month, Iran-backed Houthis have claimed attacks on ships in the Red Sea that they say are either linked to Israel or heading to Israeli ports. They say their attacks aim to end the Israeli air-and-ground offensive in the Gaza Strip that was triggered by the Palestinian militant group Hamas' Oct.7 attack in southern Israel.

However, the links to the ships targeted in the rebel assaults have grown more tenuous as the attacks continue.

The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee called on President Joe Biden "to look at what actions need to be taken in Yemen to be able to prevent the Houthis to continue to put commercial and military vessels at risk."

Noting Iran's support for Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis, Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, told ABC's "This Week" that the Biden administration should be more aggressive "in responding to escalation by Iran."

The Denmark-based shipping giant Maersk, owner of Maersk Hangzhou, said Sunday it would suspend shipping through the Red Sea again after the two attacks on its freighter.

"In light of the (most recent) incident — and to give time to investigate the details of the incident and assess the security situation further — it has been decided that all transits through the area will be postponed for the next 48 hours," Maersk was quoted as saying by the Danish public broadcaster DR.

On Saturday, the top commander of U.S. naval forces in the Middle East said Houthi rebels have shown no signs of ending their "reckless" attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea even as more nations join the international maritime mission to protect vessels in the vital waterway and trade traffic begins to pick up.

Earlier this month, Washington announced the establishment of a new international coalition to protect vessels traveling through the waterway. The United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain are also part of the new maritime security mission.

Since the Pentagon announced Operation Prosperity Guardian to counter the attacks just over 10 days ago, 1,200 merchant ships have traveled through the Red Sea region, and none had been hit by drone or missile strikes, Vice Adm. Brad Cooper told The Associated Press in an interview on Saturday.

Sen. Fetterman says he thought news about his depression treatment would end his political career

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. John Fetterman acknowledges having "dark conversations" about harming himself before he hit "the emergency brake" and sought treatment for depression.

He remembers thinking about his three school-age kids. "I can't be a blueprint for my children. I can't let them be left alone or not to understand why he would have done that," the first-term Pennsylvania Democrat told NBC's "Meet the Press" in a deeply personal and introspective interview taped before the broadcast that aired Sunday.

So he checked himself into Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, last Feb. 15. "There was nowhere else to go," he said, describing how he often felt during his stay that "there wasn't any hope sometimes and like, 'What do I have left?'"

He also wondered whether he would survive politically.

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"When it got released where I was and where it was going, it was a big story. And so, I had assumed that that would be the end of my career," he said

When he sought treatment for clinical depression, Fetterman was still coping with the effects of the stroke he had in May 2022, during his campaign for one of the Senate's most contested seats. "My heart technically stopped, and it was a very touch-and-go situation," said Fetterman, 54. A pacemaker was implanted with a defibrillator to manage two heart conditions, atrial fibrillation and cardiomyopathy.

His victory over Republican Mehmet Oz had helped Democrats keep control of the Senate and made him a national figure. It was the height of his political career. But he couldn't make it out of bed at his home in Braddock, in western Pennsylvania.

"I really scared my kids, and they thought, 'You won, Dad. Why aren't we enough? Why are you still so sad? Why are you even more sad?' And it was hard for — to explain why I was. And, of course, a 9-year-old child wouldn't understand that. And it was awful," Fetterman said.

So much so that he said he "pleaded not to go down to D.C." later that November for orientation sessions in Washington for newly elected lawmakers.

His favorite holiday was nearing, yet he was unable to think about getting Christmas presents for his children and "dreading" his swearing in on Capitol Hill early in the new year.

Within two months, he was at Walter Reed. Aides had described the new senator as being withdrawn and uninterested in eating, discussing work or the usual banter with staff.

"This is a conversation that I've had with myself and anybody that knows they're unable to address their depression, is they start to have dark conversations with themselves about self-harm," Fetterman said. "And things continued to kind of tick off the list. And then I kind of hit the emergency brake."

He added, "I knew I needed help."

Before checking into Walter Reed, Fetterman had never publicly discussed his battle with depression. He has since said that he has experienced it on and off throughout his life.

He left Walter Reed at the end of March after six weeks of inpatient treatment with his depression "in remission," according to a statement from his office.

Doctors describe "remission" as when a patient responds to treatment so that they have returned to normal social function and they are indistinguishable from someone who has never had depression.

Fetterman has since become a visible presence in the Capitol, bantering with reporters, joking with Senate colleagues and speaking up at Senate hearings.

To others who are now "facing a really dark holiday time," Fetterman offered this guidance: "I know that last year's was desolate. And this year's might be desolate. Next year's can be the best ever. And that's what happened for me."

'Wonka' ends the year No. 1 at the box office, 2023 sales reach \$9 billion in post-pandemic best

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hollywood closed out an up and down 2023 with "Wonka" regaining No. 1 at the box office, strong sales for "The Color Purple" and an overall \$9 billion in ticket sales that improved on 2022's grosses but fell about \$2 billion shy of pre-pandemic norms.

The New Year's weekend box office this year lacked a true blockbuster. (This time last year, "Avatar: The Way of Water" was inundating theaters.) Instead, a wide array of films — among them "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," "The Boys in the Boat," "Migration," "Ferrari," "The Iron Claw" and "Anyone But You" — sought to break out over the year's most lucrative box-office corridor.

The top choice, though, remained "Wonka," Paul King's musical starring Timothée Chalamet as a young Willy Wonka. In its third weekend, the Warner Bros. release collected an estimated \$24 million Friday through Sunday and \$31.8 million factoring in estimates for the Monday holiday. That brings the film's domestical total to \$142.5 million.

That bested Warner Bros.' own "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," which, like previous DC superhero

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films, is struggling. James Wan's "Aquaman" sequel starring Jason Momoa took in \$19.5 million in its second weekend to bring its two-week haul to a modest \$84.7 million including New Year's Day estimates.

The original "Aquaman," which ultimately surpassed \$1.1 billion worldwide, had grossed \$215.4 million over a similar period in 2018 – more than double that of the sequel. Internationally, "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" added \$50.5 million.

Weekend sales only tell part of the story this time of year. From Christmas through New Year's, when kids are out of school and many adults aren't working, every day is like Saturday to film distributors.

"The Color Purple," Blitz Bazawule's adaptation of the 2005 stage musical from Alice Walker's novel, debuted on Monday and led all movies on Christmas with \$18 million. Through the week, the Warner Bros. release has grossed \$50 million, including \$13 million Friday through Sunday. That's a strong start for the crowd-pleaser starring Fantasia Barrino, Taraji P. Henson and Danielle Brooks. Audiences gave it an "A" CinemaScore.

The roughly \$100 million production, which boasts Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg and Quincy Jones (all from the 1985 film) as producers, should play well through awards season. It's nominated for several Golden Globes and expected to be in the Oscar mix.

"We saw this opportunity to go wide at Christmas since there were so few movies and we were confident the movie would be well received," said Jeffrey Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "Going into the competitive landscape that's so thin in January and February, the excitement of awards season could really help ignite a bigger box office."

Despite a blockbuster-less holiday frame, the last weekend of the year pushed the industry past \$9 billion in box office for the year in U.S. and Canadian theaters for the first time since before the pandemic. Ticket sales on the year were up 21% from 2022, according to data firm Comscore.

Still, it was a mark that seemed more easily within reach during the summer highs of Barbenheimer when both "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" were breaking box-office records.

The enormous success of those two films changed the trajectory of Hollywood's 2023, but so did the monthslong actors and writers strikes. Those forced the postponement of some top films (most notably "Dune: Part Two"), diminishing an already patchwork fall lineup with few guaranteed ticket-sellers. One exception was the last-minute addition of "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour," which set a new record for concert films.

This year, Hollywood needed Swift and every penny to reach \$9 billion. It crossed that threshold Saturday, with one day to spare. That total, though, still doesn't come close to the \$11 billion-plus years that preceded the pandemic. The number of wide releases in 2023 came about 20 films shy of those released in 2019.

The production delays caused by the strikes could have an even greater impact on 2024. Several top releases have already been postponed until at least the following year, including "Mission: Impossible" and "Spider-Verse" sequels. After a rocky year for Marvel and a string of less predictable hits, Hollywood will have to hope it can adapt to changing audience tastes – and that another "Barbie" is lurking somewhere.

"It's an \$11 billion business. We're climbing our way back," said Goldstein. "This next year is going to be a big challenge because of the strikes. But we're seeing very clearly in 2023, when there are movies out there that people want to see, they come."

Meanwhile, a host of releases sought to capitalize over the holidays – and most succeeded.

"This crop of seven wide releases at the end of the year, they got us over the hump of \$9 billion," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for data firm Comscore. "This final push of the year provided great insight into what audiences are looking for. It's movies big and small. It's different types of movies."

Though "Wonka" won out as the family movie choice for the holidays, Universal Pictures' "Migration" is attracting young audiences, too. The animated movie from "Minions"-maker Illumination notched \$17.2 million in 3,839 theaters in its second weekend, and \$59.4 million since opening.

"The Boys in the Boat," the George Clooney-directed sports drama, grossed \$24.6 million since opening Dec. 25. The Amazon MGM Studios release, about the U.S. men's crew in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, wasn't a smash with critics (58% "fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes) but audiences gave it an "A" CinemaScore. "The Boys in the Boat," which cost about \$40 million to make, could hold well in coming weeks.

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Though romantic comedies have largely migrated to streaming platforms, Sony Pictures' "Anyone But You" is proving the genre can still work in theaters. The film, starring Sydney Sweeney and Glen Powell, collected \$9 million in its second weekend to bring its total to \$27.6 million through Monday.

Sean Durkin's wrestling drama "The Iron Claw" is also performing well. The A24 film, starring Zac Efron, Holt McCallany and Jeremy Allen White, has grossed \$18 million since opening Dec. 22, including \$5 million on the three-day weekend. The film dramatizes the tragic story of the Von Erich family.

Michael Mann's "Ferrari," a project the director sought to make for three decades, took in \$10.9 million since launching in theaters on Monday, including \$4.1 million for the weekend. While that ranks as one of the biggest debuts for indie distributor Neon, it's nowhere near what a movie that cost close to \$100 million to make needs to turn a profit.

The film, starring Adam Driver as Enzo Ferrari, has been celebrated by critics, but appears likely to follow Mann's previous film, 2015's "Blackhat" (\$19.6 million worldwide against a \$70 million budget), as a commercial disappointment.

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

1. "Wonka," \$24 million.
2. "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," \$19.5 million.
3. "Migration," \$17.2 million.
4. "The Color Purple," \$13 million.
5. "Anyone But You," \$9 million.
6. "The Boys in the Boat," \$8.3 million.
7. "The Iron Claw," \$5 million.
8. "Ferrari," \$4.1 million.
9. "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," \$2.9 million.
10. "The Boy and the Heron," \$2.5 million.

Denmark's Queen Margrethe II to step down from throne on Jan. 14

By DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) — Denmark's Queen Margrethe II announced Sunday that she plans to abdicate after 52 years and hand over the throne to her son, Crown Prince Frederik.

The queen, who is Europe's longest-reigning living monarch, announced during her New Year's speech that she would step down on Jan. 14th, which is the anniversary of her own accession to the throne at age 31 following the death of her father, King Frederik IX.

Margrethe, 83, said the back surgery she underwent in early 2023 led to "thoughts about the future" and when to pass on the responsibilities of the crown to her son. "I have decided that now is the right time," she said in her speech.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen paid tribute to her in a statement, offering a "heartfelt thank you to Her Majesty the Queen for her lifelong dedication and tireless efforts for the Kingdom."

Margrethe is the "epitome of Denmark" Frederiksen's statement read, and "throughout the years has put words and feelings into who we are as a people and as a nation."

The 6-foot-tall (1.82-meters-tall), chain-smoking Margrethe has been one of the most popular public figures in Denmark, where the monarch's role is largely ceremonial. She often walked the streets of Copenhagen virtually unescorted and won the admiration of Danes for her warm manners and for her talents as a linguist and designer.

A keen skier, she was a member of a Danish women's air force unit as a princess, taking part in judo courses and endurance tests in the snow. Margrethe remained tough even as she grew older. In 2011, at age 70, she visited Danish troops in southern Afghanistan wearing a military jumpsuit.

As monarch, she crisscrossed the country and regularly visited Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, the two semi-independent territories which are part of the Danish Realm, and was met everywhere by cheer-

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ing crowds.

Denmark has Europe's oldest ruling monarchy, which traces its line back to the Viking king Gorm the Old, who died in 958. Although Magrethe is head of state, the Danish Constitution strictly ruled out her involvement in party politics.

Yet the queen was clearly well-versed in law and knew the contents of the legislation she was called upon to sign.

She received training in French and English from her earliest years, as well as Swedish from her mother. In addition to archaeology, she studied philosophy, political science and economics at universities in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Cambridge along with the London School of Economics and the Sorbonne in Paris.

Ever since his birth on May 26, 1968, Frederik André Henrik Christian has been the heir to the Danish throne.

He is the oldest son of Queen Margrethe and her late French-born husband, Prince Henrik, who died February 2018. Frederik, 55, has a younger brother, Prince Joachim.

Since the age of 18, he has served as regent whenever his mother was outside the kingdom and carried out official duties, shaking hands with thousands and receiving foreign dignitaries.

The queen's announcement made up only a few sentences at the end of her wide-ranging New Year's speech which reflected on the "turbulence and upheaval in the world" amid the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, and the climate crisis.

But she also thanked her nation's people for "the warmth and hospitality I meet with everywhere in Denmark."

While lavishing accolades on the queen, the prime minister also looked to the future.

"In the new year, Crown Prince Frederik will be proclaimed king. Crown Princess Mary will become queen. The kingdom will have a new regent and a new royal couple," he said in his statement. "We can look forward to all of this in the knowledge that they are ready for the responsibility and the task."

Surfer dies after shark "encounter" in Hawaii

Associated Press undefined

PAIA, Hawaii (AP) — A surfer in Hawaii has died after being injured in a shark encounter off Maui's northern shore, according to the Maui Police Department. Authorities stopped short of calling the event an attack and didn't describe the man's injuries.

Ocean Safety Officers grabbed and transported the man by jet ski to shore, where responders performed life-saving measures until medical personnel arrived and took the victim to a hospital for further treatment, police said in a news release.

The man's identity was not immediately released pending the notification of extended family and friends. Authorities did say the man was from Haiku, a small community on Maui's north side.

There were no initial signs of foul play. The investigation is ongoing and an autopsy is scheduled, according to the police department.

The man was injured on Paia Bay, near Haiku, and shark warning signs were placed on beaches one mile on either side of the bay, according to Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Shecky Greene, legendary standup comic, improv master and lord of Las Vegas, dies at 97

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Shecky Greene, the gifted comic and master improviser who became the consummate Las Vegas lounge headliner and was revered by his peers and live audiences as one of the greatest standup acts of his generation, has died. He was 97.

His widow, Marie Musso Green, told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that her husband died early Sunday at their home. She said her husband of 41 years died of natural causes.

Those who saw Greene in his decades of comedy dominance on the Vegas Strip in the 1950s, '60s and

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'70s said that with a mic in his hand he could roam a room and work a crowd like no other.

He couldn't wait to abandon written jokes for the shared thrill of improv.

"I've never had an act," Greene told the Las Vegas Sun in 2009. "I make it up as I go along."

Greene made huge fans of his fellow entertainers including Bob Hope, Johnny Carson, and, most famously, Frank Sinatra, who hand-picked him as his opening act for a stretch. Greene couldn't resist the gig with the biggest star in America at the time, but the two big personalities butted heads frequently, and the relationship ended with the comic taking a beating from the singer's cronies at the Fontainebleau hotel in Miami Beach.

It led to his most famous joke:

"Frank Sinatra once saved my life," Greene would say. "A bunch of guys were beating on me and Frank said, 'OK that's enough.'"

Sinatra wasn't actually there, Greene later said, but the beatdown was real. Also true was the oft-repeated story of Greene driving his Oldsmobile into the fountains at Caesars Palace in 1968, a consequence of what he conceded was a serious alcohol problem and a dangerous desire to go for a drive when he was a few drinks in.

He got a famous joke out of that moment too, later saying that when the cops arrived at his submerged car, whose windshield wipers running, he told them, "No spray wax please!"

With a body like a linebacker's, a wit as quick as lightning and a voice that suggested he could've been a lounge singer instead of a lounge comic, Greene in the course of a night would plow through dozens of impressions, do extended riffs at audience members' tables and turn musical standards into parody songs on the spot.

Tony Zoppi, who for decades was entertainment director of the Riviera Hotel, said Greene was the finest comic mind he ever saw.

"He'll walk out on a stage and do an hour off the top of his head," Zoppi told the Los Angeles Times. "A waitress dropped a glass — he did 15 minutes."

He made appearances in films including 1967's "Tony Rome" with Sinatra, 1981's "History of the World Part I" with Mel Brooks, and 1984's "Splash" with Tom Hanks, showed-up on network sitcoms including "Laverne & Shirley" and "Mad About You," and was a constant guest on talk and variety shows.

But he never really clicked on the screen. He needed a crowd he could interact with, and a whole night to woo them. That meant never becoming as famous as comic contemporaries like Don Rickles, Buddy Hackett or Carson. But he pulled the same six-figure-a-week paychecks as they did for live shows.

Born Fred Sheldon Greenfield, Greene took to singing, acting, making jokes and doing mock accents while growing up on the North Side of Chicago.

He served in the Navy in World War II in the Pacific.

On returning to Chicago, he went to community college and thought he might become a gym teacher, but started doing comedy nightclub gigs for money.

An offer of a two-week gig at the Prevue Lounge in New Orleans turned into a six-years stint.

He did his first show in Las Vegas in 1953. He found he and the Strip were a perfect match, and within a few years he owned the town. In 1956, he opened for a young Elvis Presley at the New Frontier.

"The kid should never have been in there," Greene told the L.A. Times in 2005. "He came out in a baseball jacket. Four or five musicians behind him had baseball jackets on. It looked like a picnic. After the first show they switched the billing, and I headlined."

Greene would remain a Vegas mainstay, his playgrounds places like the Riviera and the Tropicana, for the next 30 years.

From 1972 to 1982 Greene was married to Nalani Kele, a dancer whose show, the Nalani Kele Polynesian Revue, was a long-running nightclub hit. And in 1985, he married Marie Musso, daughter of jazz saxophonist Vido Musso.

Greene gained his share of national fame eventually. He could fill Carnegie Hall, and guest-hosted both Carson's "Tonight Show" and "The Merv Griffin Show."

He grappled with addictions to both drinking and gambling, neither ideal for a man who spent most of

his time in Las Vegas. He also struggled with what were later diagnosed as severe depression and panic attacks, both of which made it increasingly difficult to perform as he got older.

Greene moved to Palm Springs in an attempt at retirement in his late 70s in 2004, but the stage still had appeal, and he returned for a stint in Las Vegas at the Suncoast Hotel and Casino in 2009.

Returning to a city now dominated by the likes of Celine Dion and Cirque du Soleil, Greene found he could stroll through casinos anonymously.

"I'm a legend," he told the Sun in 2009, "but nobody knows me in Vegas anymore."

German officials detain 3 more suspects in connection with a Cologne Cathedral attack threat

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Three more people were detained Sunday in connection with a reported threat of an attack on the Cologne Cathedral over the holidays, German authorities said.

The detentions came only days after a 30-year-old Tajik man was detained in relation to an alleged plot to attack the world-famous cathedral by Islamic extremists in the western German city.

The suspects were detained in the western cities of Duisburg, Herne and Dueren in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and their apartments were also searched there. No details about their identities were released.

All of the detained suspects — including the Tajik who was arrested last week — allegedly belong to a larger network that included people across Germany and in other European countries, according to Cologne police chief Johannes Hermanns, German news agency dpa reported.

The attack was supposed to have been carried out with a car loaded with explosives, local media reported.

Cologne police said in a Sunday news conference that the cathedral's underground parking garage had been searched and that explosives detection dogs had been deployed — but nothing was found. Since the early morning, the entrance and exit of the underground garage had also been checked for suspicious activity.

North Rhine-Westphalia's Interior Minister Herbert Reul called the latest detentions a "success, for which I would like to thank the investigators."

Islamic extremists have always been active, but they are currently more active than usual and the Catholic cathedral was a prime target for them, Reul said, according to dpa. "The police always try to be a few steps ahead," he added.

Police had received information about a planned militant attack on Cologne Cathedral shortly before Christmas. The attack was to be carried out on New Year's Eve.

The city's world-famous cathedral has been under high protection for a week and the threat led to the closure of the house of worship for tourists since Christmas Eve.

Usually, more than 100,000 tourists visit the cathedral in the last week of the year. In recent days, only worshippers were allowed to enter the building for Mass, but they had to go through thorough security checks involving sniffer dogs.

On Sunday evening, around 1,000 police officers were on duty around the cathedral as revelers began celebrating the end of 2023.

Reul, the state interior minister, encouraged people to celebrate and not stay at home despite the attack threat.

"Islamist terror is still a threat on German streets," he said. "We have often suppressed that. And whenever there is a one-off event like this, we are all very electrified again."

However, it would be wrong to panic, said Reul. "I say: Celebrate! Behave yourselves! Take care — and enjoy the transition into the new year."

North Korea's Kim vows to launch 3 more spy satellites and produce more nuclear materials in 2024

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and introduce attack drones in 2024, as he called for “overwhelming” war readiness to cope with U.S.-led confrontational moves, state media reported Sunday.

Kim's comments, made during a key ruling Workers' Party meeting to set state goals for next year, suggest he'll intensify a run of weapons tests ahead of the U.S. presidential elections in November. Observers say Kim believes a boosted nuclear capability would give him another chance for high-stakes diplomacy with the U.S. to win sanctions relief if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House.

During the five-day meeting that ended Saturday, Kim said “vicious” anti-North Korea moves by the United States and its followers “have reached the extremes unprecedented in history,” pushing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of a nuclear war, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. Kim cited the expansion of U.S.-South Korean military exercises and the temporary deployment of powerful U.S. military assets such as bombers and a nuclear-armed submarine in South Korea — the steps the allies have taken in response to the North's weapons testing spree since last year.

Kim called for “the overwhelming war response capability” to deter potential enemy provocations, KCNA said.

He set forth plans to launch three more military spy satellites next year in addition to the country's first reconnaissance satellite launched in November. He underscored the need to establish “a reliable foundation” to build more nuclear weapons, an apparent reference to facilities producing fissile materials like weapons-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium. Kim also ordered authorities to enhance submarine capabilities and develop various types of unmanned combat equipment such as armed drones.

“Pyongyang might be waiting out the U.S. presidential election to see what its provocations can buy it with the next administration,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

“The Kim regime has closed the political door on denuclearization negotiations but could offer rhetorical restraint and a testing freeze in exchange for sanctions relief,” Easley said. “Although North Korea has no intention of giving up nuclear weapons, it might try to extract payment for acting like a so-called responsible nuclear power.”

Kim has been focusing on modernizing his nuclear arsenal since his diplomacy with Trump broke down in 2019 due to wrangling over how much sanctions relief the North could get for a partial surrender of its nuclear program. Experts say Kim likely thinks that Trump, if elected for a second term, could make concessions as the U.S. is preoccupied with the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas fighting.

Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University in South Korea, said if President Joe Biden is reelected, North Korea won't get what it wants. But he predicted a Trump win could revive diplomacy, saying Trump will likely say during his campaign that he can convince North Korea to suspend intimidating weapons tests.

He said Kim's vow to ramp up production of plutonium and uranium is meant to strengthen his negotiating cards. Nam said North Korea will also test-launch more intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the continental U.S. this year.

“North Korea will act to the fullest extent under its timetable for provocation until the U.S. election day,” Nam said.

During his speech at the party meeting, Kim used bellicose, derisive rhetoric against South Korea, calling it “a hemiplegic malformation and colonial subordinate state” whose society is “tainted by Yankee culture.” He said South Korea must not be considered as a partner for reconciliation or unification. He ordered the military to use all available means including nuclear weapons to conquer South Korea in the event of a conflict.

South Korea's Unification Ministry responded by strongly condemning North Korea for pushing to advance its nuclear program and displaying hostility toward its neighbors. A statement said South Korea will try to overwhelmingly deter North Korean threats based on a solid alliance with the United States.

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Some analysts have speculated that limited clashes between the Koreas along their tense border could happen in the coming year. South Korea's spy agency said last week that North Korea will likely launch military provocations and cyberattacks ahead of South Korean parliamentary elections in April and the U.S. presidential election in November.

Kim also maintained that North Korea must solidify cooperation with "anti-imperialist, independent" countries that he said oppose U.S.-led Western hegemony.

Kim didn't name the countries. But North Korea has been seeking to beef up its cooperation with Russia and China, which have repeatedly blocked attempts by the U.S. and its partners to toughen U.N. sanctions on the North over its banned missile tests. The U.S. and South Korea accuse North Korea of supplying artillery and ammunition to Russia in return for high-tech Russian technologies for its own military programs.

Julianne Smith, U.S. permanent representative to NATO, said earlier this month the U.S. assessed that the suspected Russian technologies North Korea seeks are related to fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, armored vehicles, ballistic missile production equipment or materials of that kind. Smith said U.S. intelligence indicates that North Korea had provided Russia with more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions.

South Korean officials said Russian support likely enabled North Korea to put its spy satellite into orbit for the first time on Nov. 21. Many foreign experts are skeptical about the satellite's ability but South Korean Defense Minister Shin Wonsik said in November that Russia could help North Korea produce higher-resolution satellite photos.

Yang Uk, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said that he believes North Korea hasn't yet obtained functioning ICBMs that can launch nuclear strikes on the continental U.S. But he said North Korea's shorter-range nuclear-armed missiles can reach South Korea and Japan, where a total of 80,000 American troops are stationed.

Estimates on the size of North Korea's nuclear arsenal vary, ranging from 20-30 bombs to more than 100. The U.N. atomic agency and foreign experts recently said North Korea appears to have started operating a light-water reactor at its main nuclear complex in a possible attempt to secure a new source for weapons-grade plutonium.

Meanwhile, Kim said during the meeting that North Korea made "eye-opening" economic achievements by fulfilling or exceeding set quotas in major areas such as farming, housing construction and fisheries. Nam, the professor, said the self-praise appears aimed at burnishing Kim's image as a leader who cares about public livelihoods as well as military issues.

California law banning most firearms in public is taking effect as the legal fight over it continues

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A California law that bans people from carrying firearms in most public places will take effect on New Year's Day, even as a court case continues to challenge the law.

A U.S. district judge issued a ruling Dec. 20 to block the law from taking effect, saying it violates the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and deprives people of their ability to defend themselves and their loved ones.

But on Saturday, a federal appeals court put a temporary hold on the district judge's ruling. The appeals court decision allows the law to go into effect as the legal fight continues. Attorneys are scheduled to file arguments to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in January and in February.

The law, signed by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, prohibits people from carrying concealed guns in 26 places including public parks and playgrounds, churches, banks and zoos.

The ban applies regardless of whether the person has a permit to carry a concealed weapon. One exception is for privately owned businesses that put up signs saying people are allowed to bring guns on their premises.

"This ruling will allow our common-sense gun laws to remain in place while we appeal the district court's dangerous ruling," Newsom posted to X, formerly Twitter, after the appeals court acted Saturday.

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"Californians overwhelmingly support efforts to ensure that places like hospitals, libraries and children's playgrounds remain safe and free from guns."

The California Rifle and Pistol Association sued to block the law. When U.S. District Judge Cormac Carney granted a preliminary injunction blocking the law, he wrote that the law was "sweeping, repugnant to the Second Amendment, and openly defiant of the Supreme Court."

Carney wrote that gun rights groups are likely to succeed in proving it unconstitutional, meaning it would be permanently overturned.

The law overhauls California's rules for concealed carry permits in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v. Bruen*, which set several states scrambling to react with their own laws. That decision said the constitutionality of gun laws must be assessed by whether they are "consistent with the nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation."

Newsom has said he will keep pushing for stricter gun measures.

Newsom has positioned himself as a national leader on gun control while he is being increasingly eyed as a potential presidential candidate. He has called for and signed a variety of bills, including measures targeting untraceable "ghost guns," the marketing of firearms to children and allowing people to bring lawsuits over gun violence. That legislation was patterned on a Texas anti-abortion law.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta appealed Carney's decision. Bonta, a Democrat, said that if the district judge's ruling to block the law were allowed to stand, it "would endanger communities by allowing guns in places where families and children gather."

The California Pistol and Rifle Association's president, Chuck Michel, said in a statement that under the law, gun permit holders "wouldn't be able to drive across town without passing through a prohibited area and breaking the law." Michel said criminals are deterred when law-abiding citizens can defend themselves.

Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi is declared winner of election that opposition wants redone

By SAM MEDNICK and JEAN-YVES KAMALE Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi has won reelection with more than 70% of the vote, the country's election commission said Sunday as opposition candidates and their supporters questioned the validity of the results.

The preliminary results of the Dec. 20 election were announced in the capital, Kinshasa, amid demands from the opposition and some civil society groups for the vote to be rerun due to massive logistical problems that they said had undermined the balloting.

Tshisekedi's overwhelming declared victory was likely to fuel those concerns. The second-place candidate was businessman Moise Katumbi, who received 18% of the vote, and Martin Fayulu, who received 5%, finished third. Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, a physician renowned for treating women brutalized by sexual violence in eastern Congo, got less than 1%.

Speaking from his headquarters in the capital after the results were announced, Tshisekedi thanked his supporters for giving him another five-year term.

"You believed in my commitment so that our country can find its place in the concert of nations," he said. "You have embraced my vision of society. I will spare no effort for more jobs, more purchasing power, more access to basic services at all levels."

About 18 million people voted in the election, which had a turnout of more than a 40%, according to the election commission. The results will be sent to the constitutional court for confirmation, election chief Denis Kadima said.

Candidates opposing the results have two days to submit their claims, and the constitutional court then has seven days to decide. The final results are expected on January 10, and the president is scheduled to be sworn in at the end of that month.

Congo has a history of disputed elections that can turn violent, and there's little confidence among many Congolese in the country's institutions. Before the results were announced Sunday, opposition candidates,

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including Katumbi, said they rejected the results and called on the population to mobilize.

The logistical problems included many polling stations being late in opening or not opening at all. Some lacked materials, and many voter cards had smudged ink that made them illegible.

Voting in the election had to be extended into a second day— something local observers and civil society organizations have called illegal — and parts of the country were still casting ballots five days after election day.

“If a foreign country considers these elections to be elections, there’s a problem,” Fayulu said at a news conference in the capital Sunday before the results were announced. “It’s a farce, don’t accept (the results).”

Violence was already flaring in parts of the country before the results were announced. In the eastern city of Goma, youth barricaded some main streets demanding a revote. Earlier this week, clashes erupted between some of Fayulu’s supporters and police officers who fired tear gas at protesters who threw rocks and barricaded themselves inside the opposition headquarters.

“These elections are an example of fraud and ballot-box stuffing, flouting any transparent and credible electoral process and, moreover, democracy,” said Bienvenu Matumo, a member of LUCHA, a local rights group.

Leading up to and during the vote, the election commission was accused of not being transparent enough. The East African Community said its election observer mission was not granted access to Congo, and the European Union canceled its mission after authorities did not authorize the use of satellite equipment by EU monitors.

Congo analysts say the thousands of observers that were in the country were unable to say whether the irregularities had an impact on the overall integrity of the results, leaving it to the election commission.

Tshisekedi already has spent much of his time in office trying to gain legitimacy after a disputed 2018 election that some observers said Fayulu had actually won.

Overall, Tshisekedi’s track record has been spotty. He’s struggled to stem violence in the east, a goal he campaigned on.

Conflict in eastern Congo has raged for decades, with more than 120 armed groups fighting for power, resources and to protect their communities. But the violence has spiked during Tshisekedi’s term with the resurgence of the M23 rebels, who have displaced millions of people and seized swaths of land. The fighting prevented 1.5 million people from registering to vote.

Attempts to quell the violence with an East African Force comprised of troops from neighboring countries have failed. The force is pulling out, along with a U.N. peacekeeping mission that has been in Congo for decades.

Still, Tshisekedi’s initiatives creating free health care for pregnant mothers and babies and providing free primary education has changed the lives of some people living in remote villages.

“My brothers can go to school now without my parents paying, which allows my father to put that money to buying food for the family,” John Nlaza, a resident of a small village in Kongo Central province told The Associated Press.

Congolese analysts said it’s important to view Tshisekedi’s win with caution given the significant uncertainty of the presidential election’s validity.

“The opposition’s contesting of the results is not only a predictable reaction, but it also highlights the persistence of a deeper crisis of legitimacy at the top of the state,” Tresor Kibangula, a political analyst at the Congolese research institute Ebuteli, said. “This battle will depend on (the opposition’s) ability to mobilize the Congolese people for its cause, with a view to reversing the balance of power.”

Russia launches fresh drone strikes in Ukraine after promising retaliation for Belgorod attack

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a fresh drone assault on Ukraine after promising that strikes on the Russian border city of Belgorod that killed 24 people Saturday “would not go unpunished.”

The Ukrainian Air Force said Sunday that it had shot down 21 of 49 drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

The retaliatory Russian attack wounded 28 people in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said. A hotel, kindergarten, apartment buildings, shops and administrative buildings sustained damage, according to the regional prosecutor’s office.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said it had targeted “decision-making centers and military facilities” in Kharkiv. The ministry said the hit on the Kharkiv Palace Hotel had “destroyed representatives of the Main Intelligence Directorate and Ukrainian Armed Forces” involved in the “terrorist attack” in Belgorod.

Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said a British journalist was among the wounded, while public German broadcaster ZDF said Sunday that one of its television crews had been in the hotel. A Ukrainian translator was hit by debris and seriously wounded, and one of the team’s security guards also was injured, ZDF said in a statement.

“This is another attack by Russia on the free press,” ZDF Editor-in-Chief Bettina Schausten said.

In the Kyiv region that surrounds Ukraine’s capital, a Russian drone attack caused a fire at a critical infrastructure facility, local officials said. They did not identify the nature of the facility.

Russian troops additionally shelled the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson on Sunday, killing a 14-year-old boy and leaving a 9-year-old boy hospitalized in critical condition with a brain injury, according to regional Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin.

On Saturday, shelling in the center of Belgorod killed two dozen people, including three children. Another 108 people were wounded in the strike, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Sunday, making the attack one with the most casualties on Russian soil since the start of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine 22 months ago.

Russian authorities accused Ukraine of carrying out the attack, which took place the day after an 18-hour Russian aerial bombardment across Ukraine killed at least 41 civilians.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said it identified the ammunition used in the strike as Czech-made Vampire rockets and Olkha missiles fitted with cluster-munition warheads. It provided no additional information, and The Associated Press was unable to verify its claims.

“This crime will not go unpunished,” the ministry said in a statement on social media.

In an emergency Saturday night meeting of the U.N. Security Council demanded by Russia, envoy Vasily Nebenzya accused Kyiv of a “terrorist attack.” In comments carried by Russian state media, Nebenzya claimed Ukraine had launched “a deliberate act of terrorism directed against civilians.”

Ukrainians are bracing for further attacks. A blistering New Year’s Eve assault by Russia last year killed at least three civilians.

American democracy has overcome big stress tests since the 2020 election. More challenges are ahead

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Over the past three years, the world’s oldest democracy has been tested in ways not seen in decades. A sitting president tried to overturn an election and his supporters stormed the Capitol to stop the winner from taking power. Supporters of that attack launched a campaign against local election offices, chasing out veteran administrators and pushing conservative states to pass new laws making it harder to vote.

At the same time, the past three years proved that American democracy was resilient.

Former President Donald Trump’s attempts to overturn the 2020 election results failed, blocked by the

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constitutional system's checks and balances, and he now faces both federal and state charges for those efforts. Then the voters stepped in. In every presidential battleground state, they rejected all candidates who supported Trump's stolen election lies and were running for statewide offices that had some oversight of elections.

The election infrastructure in the country performed well, with only scattered disruptions during the 2022 midterms. New voting laws, many of which are technical and incremental, had little discernable impact on actual voting.

"Voters have stepped up to defend our democracy over the past few years," said Joanna Lydgate, chief executive officer of States United, which tracks those who refuse to believe in the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election. "State and local officials have done a tremendous job in protecting our free and fair elections."

So why all the worry? As Lydgate and anyone else who works in the pro-democracy field quickly notes, the big test — what Lydgate calls "the Super Bowl" — awaits in 2024.

Trump is running for the White House again and has been dominating the Republican primary as the first votes approach. He has called for pardoning those prosecuted for the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, continues to insist falsely that the 2020 election was "stolen" and says he will use the federal government to seek revenge on his political enemies.

Trump has used increasingly authoritarian rhetoric as he campaigns for the GOP nomination. If he wins, allies have been planning to seed the government with loyalists so the bureaucracy doesn't hinder Trump's more controversial plans the way it did during his first term.

It's gotten to the point that Trump was recently asked by conservative commentator Hugh Hewitt whether he planned to be a dictator: "Not at all," Trump responded. "No, I'm gonna rule as somebody that's very popular with the people."

The 2024 election could cause all sorts of conflict, including scenarios that have notably not materialized despite widespread concern since 2020: violence at the polls, overly aggressive partisan poll watchers or breakdowns in the ballot count.

It seems unlikely, though, that Trump could return to the White House if he loses the election. That's what he failed to accomplish in 2020, and he's in a weaker position now.

His strategy then was to use Republican dominance in swing state legislatures, governorships and secretary of state offices to try to send slates of fake electors to Congress even though Democrat Joe Biden won those states and captured the presidency.

Since then, Republicans have lost two of those swing state secretary of state offices — in Arizona and Nevada — as well as the governor's office in Arizona and control of the state legislatures in Michigan and Pennsylvania. In Congress, lawmakers passed a bipartisan bill closing some of the loopholes in the counting of Electoral College votes that Trump tried to exploit to stay in office, making it harder to challenge state certifications on the House floor.

The upshot is it will be far harder for Trump to try to overturn a loss in 2024 than in 2020. The most likely way he returns to the White House is by winning the election outright.

"It's not to say the risks are gone," said Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. "It's to say we've successfully fought the last war."

History is full of examples of authoritarians who first came to office by winning a legitimate democratic election. But the risk to democracy of someone legitimately winning an election is different than the risk of a candidate trying to overturn an election loss.

When Trump began to falsely claim he had won the 2020 election and urged Republicans to overrule their states' voters and send his electors to Congress, every GOP official with the power to do that refused. The Republican leaders of the Michigan Legislature turned down his request to overrule voters. In Georgia, where the presidential ballots were counted three times and affirmed Biden's win, Gov. Brian Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger earned Trump's fury by rejecting him. So did then- Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey and the Republican leaders of that state's legislature.

Some Republicans did try to aid Trump. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton led a group of 17 GOP at-

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torneys general in filing a lawsuit urging the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the election. The high court swiftly dismissed the case. Trump lost all but one of more than 60 lawsuits he and his allies filed in states to overturn the election, sometimes before judges he had appointed.

Then in November 2022, every swing state candidate who backed Trump's effort to overturn his loss and who was running for a statewide office with a role in elections lost.

"There's little doubt our democracy has gotten dinged up in a couple of moments of late, but we have decided we like it compared to the alternative," said Justin Levitt, who served as adviser for democracy and voting rights for two years in the Biden White House and is now a law professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

Election deniers have been able to make gains in one area — offices where they simply have to win a Republican primary. That's meant they have taken power in local governments in many rural areas, often disrupting elections and embracing conspiracy theories or procedures such as hand-counting, which is less reliable and more time-consuming than tabulating thousands of votes on machines.

They also have been able to expand their power within Republican legislative bodies from statehouses to Congress. U.S. Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, who helped organize a brief supporting the quickly thrown-out lawsuit to overturn Biden's victory, is now the House speaker.

If Johnson retains his speakership in January 2025, he could be in a position to disrupt certification of a Biden victory. Republicans more willing to subvert democracy also could have greater sway in state legislatures.

Then there's the view of Trump backers. They report being even more worried about democracy than those who oppose him. Normally members of the party out of power feels like democracy isn't working as well for them, but Trump's situation is different. He's the first president in history to face prosecution and is promoting the narrative that he's being persecuted by his likely general election opponent.

Trump says the criminal cases and separate attempts to bar him from the ballot under the insurrection clause of the Constitution are a form of election interference.

The Colorado Supreme Court found his role in the Jan. 6 attack was sufficient grounds to remove him from the state's ballot under the 14th Amendment, a ruling Trump's campaign said it will appeal soon to the U.S. Supreme Court, where three of his nominees help form the conservative majority. On Thursday, Maine's Democratic secretary of state struck Trump from that state's primary ballot, becoming the first election official to take such action. Shenna Bellows suspended her ruling until Maine's court system rules on the case.

While campaigning, Trump has adopted an "I'm rubber and you're glue" approach, accusing Biden of being the actual threat to democracy.

A more revealing argument comes from a contention one of the former president's attorneys made before the Colorado Supreme Court. Scott Gessler, a former Colorado secretary of state, was arguing against attempts by a liberal group to boot Trump from the ballot.

"If the entire nation chooses someone to be president, can that be an insurrection or is that a democratic choice?" Gessler asked.

Gessler was addressing the hypothetical case of a former Confederate winning the White House in the 19th century, but it's easy to see how this applies to the election before us.

Or, as Levitt said of American democracy: "It is kind of up to us how resilient we make it."

Maine state official who removed Trump from ballot was targeted in swatting call at her home

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

A fake emergency call to police resulted in officers responding Friday night to the home of Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows just a day after she removed former President Donald Trump from the state's presidential primary ballot under the Constitution's insurrection clause.

She becomes the latest elected politician to become a target of swatting, which involves making a phone

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call to emergency services with the intent that a large first responder presence, including SWAT teams, will show up at a residence.

Bellows was not home when the swatting call was made, and responding officers found nothing suspicious.

Suspects in swatting cases are being arrested and charged as states contemplate stronger penalties.

Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene was the target of a swatting attempt at her Georgia residence on Christmas morning, the congresswoman and local police said.

A man in New York called the Georgia suicide hotline claiming he had shot his girlfriend at Greene's home and was going to kill himself. Police said investigators were working to identify the caller and build a criminal case.

Another New York man was sentenced in August to three months in prison for making threatening phone calls to Greene's office in Washington, D.C.

While the Maine Department of Public Safety did not share a suspected motive for the swatting attempt against Bellows, she had no doubts it stemmed from her decision to remove Trump from the ballot. The swatting attempt came after a conservative activist posted her home address on social media.

"And it was posted in anger and with violent intent by those who have been extending threatening communications toward me, my family and my office," Bellows told The Associated Press in a phone call Saturday.

A call was made to emergency services from an unknown man saying he had broken into a house in Manchester, according to the Maine public safety department.

The address the man gave was Bellows' home. Bellows and her husband were away for the holiday weekend. Maine State Police responded to what the public safety department said ultimately turned out to be a swatting call.

Police conducted an exterior sweep of the house and then checked inside at Bellows' request. Nothing suspicious was found, and police continue to investigate.

"The Maine State Police is working with our law enforcement partners to provide special attention to any and all appropriate locations," the public safety statement said.

Bellows said the intimidation factors won't work. "Here's what I'm not doing differently. I'm doing my job to uphold the Constitution, the rule of law."

Beyond Bellows and Greene, other high-profile politicians who have been swatting call targets include U.S. Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu and Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost.

Bellows said she, her family and her office workers have been threatened since her decision to remove Trump from the ballot. At least one Republican lawmaker in Maine wants to pursue impeachment against her.

"Not only have there been threatening communications, but there have been dehumanizing fake images posted online and even fake text threads attributed to me," said Bellows, who has worked in civil rights prior to becoming secretary of state.

"And my previous work taught me that dehumanizing people is the first step in creating an environment that leads to attacks and violence against that person," she said. "It is extraordinarily dangerous for the rhetoric to have escalated to the point of dehumanizing me and threatening me, my loved ones and the people who work for me."

She said the people of Maine have a strong tradition of being able to disagree on important issues without violence.

"I think it is extraordinarily important that everyone deescalate the rhetoric and remember the values that make our democratic republic and here in Maine, our state, so great," she said.

The Trump campaign said it would appeal Bellows' decision to Maine's state courts, and Bellows suspended her ruling until that court system rules on the case.

The Colorado Supreme Court earlier this month removed Trump from that state's ballot, a decision that also was stayed until the U.S. Supreme Court decides whether he would be barred under the insurrection clause, a Civil War-era provision which prohibits those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office.

More Rohingya refugees arrive in Indonesia despite rejection from locals

By BINSAR BAKKARA Associated Press

MEDAN, Indonesia (AP) — Nearly 150 Rohingya refugees, mostly hungry and weak women and children, have reached a beach in Indonesia's North Sumatra province after weeks at sea, officials said Sunday.

The group of 53 men, 39 women and 55 children arrived on Karang Gadih beach in Langkat district late Saturday, said the village head, Muhammad Amiruddin. A rickety, leaky wooden boat that brought them from Bangladesh was moored on a lighthouse island not far from the village, he said.

Five among the refugees were sick after the long journey and residents gave them food and water while they waited for instructions from immigration and local officials to decide where to take them. Residents do not want the refugees in their communities, however, and last week many protested the recent Rohingya arrivals.

"We helped them as they look very weak from hunger and dehydration," Amiruddin said. "But many residents cannot accept them to live in our village because they will only bring problems later."

He said that one of the refugees told authorities that they sailed from the Cox Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh to Indonesia and became stranded on a lighthouse island.

About 740,000 Rohingya were resettled in Bangladesh after fleeing their homes in Myanmar to escape a brutal counterinsurgency campaign by security forces. But the camps in Bangladesh are squalid, with surging gang violence and rampant hunger, leading many to flee again.

A mob of Indonesian students on Wednesday attacked the basement of a local community hall in Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh province, where 137 Rohingya were taking shelter. The incident drew an outcry from human rights group and the U.N. refugee agency, which said the attack left the refugees shocked and traumatized.

Indonesia's navy said Thursday that it forcibly pushed a boat packed with refugees back to international waters after it approached the shores of Aceh province.

It's unclear whether the refugees who arrived late Saturday in neighboring North Sumatra province were from the same boat that was pushed away by the navy.

Indonesia has appealed to the international community for help and intensified patrols of its waters due to a sharp rise in Rohingya refugees leaving overcrowded camps in Bangladesh since November. Over 1,500 Rohingya have arrived in Aceh and faced some hostility from fellow Muslims.

Indonesia, like Thailand and Malaysia, is not a signatory to the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention so is not obligated to accept the Rohingya. So far, refugees in distress have received at least temporary accommodation.

Xi says China will 'surely be reunified' with self-ruled Taiwan in New Year's address

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping said China would "surely be reunified" with Taiwan during his televised New Year's address, renewing Beijing's threats to take over the self-ruled island, which it considers its own.

Taiwan split from China amid civil war in 1949, but Beijing continues to regard the island of 23 million with its high-tech economy as Chinese territory and has been ramping up its threat to achieve that by military force if necessary.

"China will surely be reunified, and all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait should be bound by a common sense of purpose," Xi said in his annual address, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

China has described Taiwan's Jan. 13 presidential and parliamentary elections as a choice between war and peace.

Beijing considers the presidential front-runner, William Lai, who currently serves as vice president from the ruling Democratic People's Party, a "separatist" and has accused him and Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-

wen of trying to provoke a Chinese attack on the island.

On Saturday, Chen Binhua, spokesman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, called Lai a "destroyer of peace" following a televised debate earlier that day in which Lai defended Taiwan's right to rule itself as a democracy.

Chen said Lai's discourse at the debate was "full of confrontational thinking," adding that the vice president is "the instigator of a potential dangerous war in the Taiwan Strait."

Lai had said during the debate that Taiwan is not subordinate to China and that he was open to communications with Beijing "as long as there is equality and dignity on both sides of the Taiwan Strait." While Lai doesn't describe himself as seeking independence from Beijing, he generally maintains Taiwan is already an independent country.

Lai's election rivals include Hou Yu-ih from the more China-friendly Kuomintang party, and Ko Wen-je from the Taiwan People's Party.

Michigan home explosion heard for miles kills 4 and injures 2, police say

DETROIT (AP) — Four people died and two others were injured Saturday in a Michigan house explosion that could be heard miles away, police said.

The explosion happened before 4 p.m. in Northfield Township, about 45 miles (72.4 kilometers) west of Detroit. The structure was destroyed, leaving only the basement, Northfield Township Police Lt. David Powell told reporters Saturday.

The blast, which could be heard about 9 miles (14.4 kilometers) away, sent debris into the air that landed on both sides of a nearby highway. Neighboring homes were not damaged, Powell said.

Six people were in the home, with four fatalities discovered at the scene and the two surviving victims hospitalized in critical condition. Police did not immediately know if the victims were related, Powell said.

Authorities have not determined the cause of the explosion.

Northfield Township police did not immediately return a message from The Associated Press seeking additional information on Sunday.

Houthis show no sign of ending 'reckless'

Red Sea attacks as trade traffic picks up, commander says

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

CHRISTIANSTED, U.S. Virgin Islands (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels show no signs of ending their "reckless" attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, the top commander of U.S. naval forces in the Middle East says, even as more nations join the international maritime mission to protect vessels in the vital waterway and trade traffic begins to pick up.

Since Operation Prosperity Guardian was announced just over 10 days ago, 1,200 merchant ships have traveled through the Red Sea region, and none had been hit by drone or missile strikes, Vice Adm. Brad Cooper said in an Associated Press interview, although the U.S. military said that one ship reported being struck by a missile late Saturday.

Cooper said earlier that day that additional countries are expected to sign on to the mission. Denmark was the latest, announcing Friday it plans to send a frigate to the mission that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced during a visit to Bahrain, where the Navy's 5th Fleet is based, saying that "this is an international challenge that demands collective action."

The Iran-backed Houthis, who say their attacks are aimed at Israel-linked ships in an effort to stop the Israeli offensive in Gaza, fired on the same container ship in two separate incidents over the weekend, drawing a U.S. military response.

The narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea and then the Suez Canal. The crucial trade route links markets in Asia and Europe. The seriousness of the attacks, several of which have damaged vessels, led multiple shipping companies to order their vessels to hold in place and not

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enter the strait until the security situation improved. Some major shippers were sending their ships around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope, adding time and costs to the journeys.

Currently there are five warships from the United States, France, and the United Kingdom patrolling the waters of the southern Red Sea and the western Gulf of Aden, said Cooper, who heads the 5th Fleet. Since the operation started, the ships have shot down a total of 17 drones and four anti-ship ballistic missiles, he said.

The U.S. military said Saturday it shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired toward a Maersk container ship in the Red Sea after the ship reported it had been hit by a missile. Two Navy destroyers responded to the call for help, and the Denmark-owned vessel was reportedly seaworthy and no injuries were noted, according to a statement from U.S. Central Command. Hours later, four Houthi boats fired at the same ship and tried to board, Central Command said. U.S. forces on two helicopters responded to the distress call and were also fired upon before they sank three of the Houthi vessels and killed the crews, Central Command said. The fourth boat fled the area. No damage to U.S. personnel or equipment was reported.

There have been about two dozen attacks on international shipping by the Houthis since Oct. 19.

Austin discussed the situation with the Dutch defense minister, Kajsa Ollongren, and they condemned the attacks as unacceptable and "profoundly destabilizing" to international order and global commerce, the Pentagon said Saturday.

The U.S. has said that more than 20 nations are participating in the security mission, but a number of those nations have not acknowledged it publicly.

"I expect in the coming weeks we're going to get additional countries," Cooper said, noting Denmark's recent announcement.

Cooper said the coalition is in direct communication with commercial ships to provide guidance on "maneuvering and the best practices to avoid being attacked," and working closely with the shipping industry to coordinate security.

An international task force had been set up in April 2022 to improve maritime security in the region. But Cooper said Operation Prosperity Guardian has more ships and a persistent presence to assist vessels.

Since the operation started, the Houthis have stepped up their use of anti-ship ballistic missiles, Cooper said. "We are cleareyed that the Houthi reckless attacks will likely continue," he said.

The Houthis seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014, launching a grinding war against a Saudi-led coalition that sought to restore the government. The militants have sporadically targeted ships in the region, but the attacks increased since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

The Houthi threatened to attack any vessel they believe is either going to or coming from Israel. That has escalated to apparently any vessel, with container ships and oil tankers flagged to countries such as Norway and Liberia being attacked or drawing missile fire.

The shipping company Maersk had announced earlier that it had decided to re-route its ships that have been paused for days outside the strait and Red Sea, and send them around Africa instead. Maersk announced Dec. 25 that it was going to resume sending ships through the strait, citing the operation. Cooper said another shipping company had also resumed using the route.

"Commerce is definitely flowing," Cooper said.

Today in History: Jan. 1

Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 1, the first day of 2024. There are 365 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that slaves in rebel states shall be "forever free."

On this date:

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In 1892, the Ellis Island Immigrant Station in New York formally opened.

In 1942, the Rose Bowl was played in Durham, North Carolina, instead of Pasadena, California because of security concerns in the wake of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor; in it, Oregon State defeated Duke, 20-16.

In 1953, Hank Williams Sr., among the most important singers and songwriters in country music history, was discovered dead at age 29 in the back seat of his car during a stop in Oak Hill, West Virginia, while he was being driven to a concert date in Canton, Ohio.

In 1954, NBC broadcast the first coast-to-coast color TV program as it presented live coverage of the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California.

In 1959, Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries overthrew Cuban leader Fulgencio Batista, who fled to the Dominican Republic.

In 1975, a jury in Washington found Nixon administration officials John N. Mitchell, H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman guilty of charges related to the Watergate cover-up.

In 1979, the United States and China held celebrations in Washington and Beijing to mark the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In 1984, the breakup of AT&T took place as the telecommunications giant was divested of its 22 Bell System companies under terms of an antitrust agreement.

In 1985, the music cable channel VH-1, intended as a more adult alternative to MTV, made its debut with a video of Marvin Gaye performing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

In 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two new countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

In 2006, the Medicare prescription drug plan went into effect.

In 2013, in Maryland, same-sex marriage became legal in the first state south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

In 2014, the nation's first legal recreational marijuana shops opened in Colorado.

In 2017, California launched legal sales of recreational marijuana.

In 2023, actor Jeremy Renner was left in critical condition with major chest trauma after he was run over by his own snow plow while helping a relative near Lake Tahoe, California.

Today's Birthdays: Documentary maker Frederick Wiseman is 94. Actor Frank Langella is 86. Rock singer-musician Country Joe McDonald is 82. Writer-comedian Don Novello is 81. Actor Rick Hurst is 78. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., is 70. The former head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, is 68. Rapper Grandmaster Flash is 66. Actor Renn Woods is 66. Actor Dedee Pfeiffer is 60. Country singer Brian Flynn (Flynnville Train) is 58. Actor Morris Chestnut is 55. R&B singer Tank is 48. Model Elin Nordegren is 44. Actor Jonas Armstrong is 43. Actor Eden Riegel is 43. Olympic gold medal ice dancer Meryl Davis is 37. Rock musician Noah Sierota (Echosmith) is 28.