

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 1 of 75

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Boys NEC Standings](#)
- [4- Illegally Dumped Snow Causes Safety Issues](#)
- [5- That's Life by Tony Bender: Let those Lions roar](#)
- [6- SD News Watch: Open primaries in South Dakota has early support: Poll](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Former official: Politically connected firm was 'obvious' favorite for Noem ad campaign](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: State Supreme Court signals caution in conflict of interest case](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Hundreds of CO2 pipeline critics converge on Capitol ahead of legislative session](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Hydrogen tax rules draw fire from industry](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: Aberdeen man considers Republican primary challenge to Rep. Dusty Johnson](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: With abortion on the 2024 ballot, campaigns could see millions in funding from familiar players](#)
- [24- SD SearchLight: Climate changing: Research shows times for 'prescribed burns' in the West shifting](#)
- [26- Weather Pages](#)
- [31- Daily Devotional](#)
- [32- Subscription Form](#)
- [33- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [34- News from the Associated Press](#)

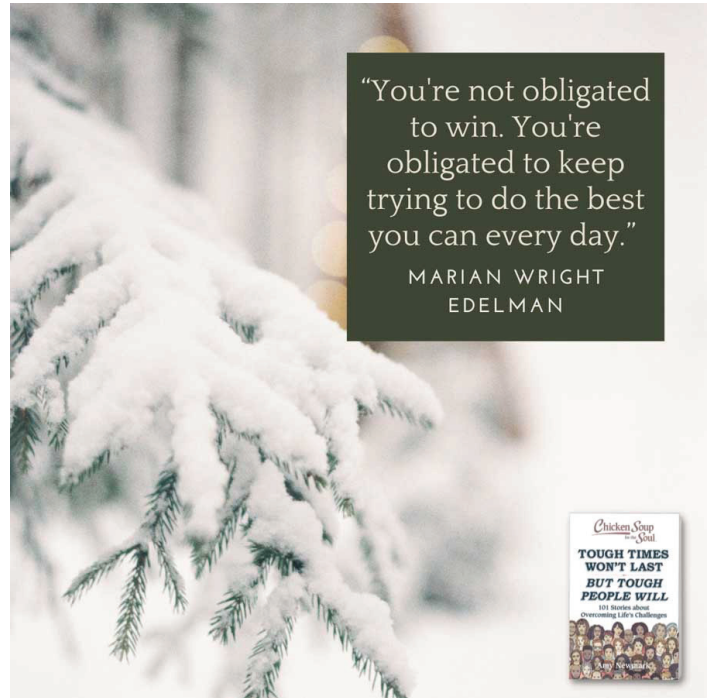
Tuesday, Jan. 9

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

Wednesday, Jan. 10

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetable winter bend, carrot bars, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: French toast.

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



"You're not obligated to win. You're obligated to keep trying to do the best you can every day."

MARIAN WRIGHT
EDELMAN

School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.
School Board meeting, 7 p.m.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 11

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 2 of 75

1440

In partnership with [smartasset™](#)

A NASA-funded robotic lunar mission that would have returned the US to the moon's surface for the first time since 1972 appears to be in jeopardy due to a fuel leak that developed shortly after the private spacecraft's successful launch.

Top-ranked Michigan won the College Football Playoff National Championship last night, dropping the No. 2 Washington Huskies by a score of 34-13. The win marks the program's 10th title, its first since splitting with Nebraska in 1997, and its second since 1948.

Plane manufacturer Boeing saw its stock drop 8% yesterday amid fallout from Friday's near-tragic incident outside Portland, Oregon, where a piece of one of its planes flew off mid-ascent, and the cabin depressurized. The incident prompted US officials to temporarily ground and inspect 171 737 Max 9 aircraft—primarily used by United and Alaska Airlines. United reported an inspection yesterday revealed loose bolts in several aircraft.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Tiger Woods and Nike end partnership after 27 years; Woods reportedly earned \$500M during his tenure with Nike.

Franz Beckenbauer, German soccer legend and two-time winner of the Ballon d'Or award, dies at 78.

Hulu's "Welcome to Wrexham" is big winner at Night 2 of 2023 Creative Arts Emmys with five wins. Prince's "Purple Rain" film to be adapted into Broadway musical.

Science & Technology

Electronics giant LG debuts fully transparent 77-inch high-definition television; reveal comes on the first day of the Consumer Electronics Show.

Experiments suggest diamond rain in the atmosphere of icy planets may form at lower pressures than previously thought, may offer insight into the magnetic fields of Neptune and Uranus.

Tasmanian devil die-off caused by contagious cancerous facial tumors is allowing competing predator species to proliferate and evolve; devil population dropped by 70% between 1996 and 2020.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.4%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq +2.2%) as technology giants drive stock rebound; Nvidia shares close up 6.4%, reaching all-time high of \$522.

Newell Brands, maker of Rubbermaid and Sharpie, to cut office staff by 7% by year end. Johnson & Johnson to acquire cancer drugmaker Ambrx Biopharma for \$2B. JetBlue CEO to step down in February; company's president to become first woman to lead a major US airline.

US office vacancy rates up 19.6% in Q4 from 18.8% a year ago; the figure is the highest level since 1979 when records began. National Association of Realtors president resigns, alleging blackmail threat.

Politics & World Affairs

Israeli airstrike in southern Lebanon kills a senior Hezbollah commander of the militant group's Radwan Force, which is deployed along Israel's border. Over 300 arrested after pro-Palestinian rally blocks New York City tunnel and bridges.

House Oversight Committee releases text of resolution recommending Hunter Biden be held in contempt of Congress for ignoring subpoena for closed-door testimony last month. Dr. Anthony Fauci begins two-day closed-door testimony before House subcommittee on the pandemic.

Former President Donald Trump to attend appeals court hearing today on immunity claims in Georgia election interference case. Florida Republicans oust state party chairman who faces rape allegations. At least 21 injured in downtown Fort Worth, Texas, hotel blast.

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 3 of 75

Groton Area 3-1
Hamlin 58, Groton Area 36
Groton Area 83, Sisseton 38
Groton Area 51, Roncalli 50
Groton Area 84, Clark/Willow Lake 20

Aberdeen Roncalli 2-1
Roncalli 64, Redfield 25
Groton Area 61, Roncalli 50
Roncalli 67, Webster Area 58

Milbank 2-2
Milbank 69, Sisseton 24
Clark/Willow Lake 58, Milbank 53
Hamlin 63, Milbank 43
Milbank 80, Britton-Hecla 17

Redfield 0-4
Roncalli 64, Redfield 25
Deuel 79, Redfield 29
Sisseton 53, Redfield 20
Britton-Hecla 62, Redfield 52

Sisseton 1-2
Milbank 69, Sisseton 24
Groton Area 83, Sisseton 38
Sisseton 53, Redfield 20

Tiospa Zina 2-1
Tiospa Zina 71, Britton-Hecla 33
Tiospa Zina 64, Webster Area 41
Hamlin 81, Tiospa Zina 41

Webster Area 1-4
Webster Area 57, Britton-Hecla 30
Tiospa Zina 64, Webster Area 41
Roncalli 67, Webster Area 58
Deuel 60, Webster Area 58
Clark/Willow Lake 69, Webster Area 58

Clark/Willow Lake 2-1
Clark/Willow Lake 58, Milbank 53
Groton Area 84, Clark/Willow Lake 20
Clark/Willow Lake 69, Webster Area 58

Deuel 3-0
Deuel 79, Redfield 29
Deuel 53, Britton-Hecla 41
Deuel 60, Webster Area 58

Hamlin 3-0
Hamlin 58, Groton Area 36
Hamlin 63, Milbank 43
Hamlin 81, Tiospa Zina 41

Britton-Hecla 1-4
Tiospa Zina 71, Britton-Hecla 33
Webster Area 57, Britton-Hecla 30
Deuel 53, Britton-Hecla 41
Milbank 80, Britton-Hecla 17
Britton-Hecla 62, Redfield 52

Boys NEC Standings

Deuel	3-0
Hamlin	3-0
Groton Area	3-1
Clark/Willow Lake	2-1
Tiospa Zina	2-1
Roncalli	2-1
Milbank	2-2
Sisseton	1-2
Webster Area	1-4
Britton-Hecla	1-4
Redfield	0-4

Jan. 11: Tiospa Zina at Groton Area
Jan. 11: Roncalli at Sisseton
Jan. 11: Redfield at Milbank
Jan. 11: Webster Area at Hamlin

Jan. 12: Clark/Willow Lake at Deuel

Jan. 16: Roncalli at Tiospa Zina

Jan. 18: Milbank at Groton Area
Jan. 18: Clark/Willow Lake at Roncalli
Jan. 18: Deuel at Tiospa Zina
Jan. 18: Hamlin at Redfield

Jan. 19: Sisseton at Webster Area

Jan. 23: Roncalli at Hamlin

Jan. 25: Hamlin at Sisseton
Jan. 25: Milbank at Deuel
Jan. 25: Britton-Hecla at Roncalli
Jan. 25: Webster Area at Groton Area

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 4 of 75

Illegally Dumped Snow Causes Safety Issues

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) reminds the public and commercial snow removal operators that it is illegal to place or dump excess snow on highway right-of-way, which includes driving surfaces, shoulders, and ditches.

"The current snow event affecting South Dakota is depositing a large amount of snow in some areas," said Craig Smith, Director of Operations. "The space within the right-of-way needs to be reserved for future snow that may fall on the road. If the Department's plow operators do not have a place to put that snow, it severely hampers their ability to clear roadways."

Violation of the anti-dumping law is a Class 1 misdemeanor, with a penalty of up to one year in jail, \$2,000 in fines, or both. It is the policy of the SDDOT to remove snow that has been illegally piled within the highway right-of-way that may be a safety hazard. In addition, violators will be billed for the costs of removing illegally dumped snow.

"Piling snow in the state highway right-of-way can be very dangerous," said Smith. "Snow piles can restrict sight distance, as well as present an extreme hazard if a vehicle leaves the roadway. Snow piles that remain adjacent to the road may cause additional drifting and visibility problems posing more safety hazards to travelers, as well as additional expenses for manpower and equipment to remove the illegally dumped snow."

Property owners and access users are reminded it is their responsibility to remove snow from the ends of driveways and around their own mailboxes.

The Department asks landowners and commercial snow-removal operators to keep excess snow on private property or haul it to legal dumping sites.

GDILIVE.COM

GT Groton Area Tigers

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

- Tiospa Zina Girls JV
- Tiospa Zina Boys JV
- 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
- Webster Boys C
- Webster Boys JV
- Webster Girls JV
- Florence/Henry Girls JV
- Deuel Girls JV
- ~~Deuel Boys JV~~
- Vermillion Boys JV

**Text Paul at
605-397-7460**

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 5 of 75

That's Life by Tony Bender: Let those Lions roar

Forgive me, Vikings fans, for I have sinned. I didn't exactly cheer against Minnesota as they belly-flopped in the last game of their season against Detroit, but I felt happy for my dad, who, for some reason unknown to me, was a lifelong Detroit fan. Both the Lions and the Tigers.

With the Lions off to the playoffs, I felt a sense of satisfaction. It's been an extended drought in the Motor City. Dad's up there somewhere gloating.

As for the purple and gold, it was just one of those bumpy years. They'll be just fine, although you wouldn't believe that with all the gnashing of teeth on fan sites. Some of you people have become shameless whiners.

I've always been able to spread my loyalties. It's more fun when one team has a down year. My first team was the Miami Dolphins, an expansion team when I was in grade school, and after living in Denver for a few years, I sort of adopted the Broncos, too, and those abhorrent orange uniforms. One of my best days ever was watching Denver legend John Elway square off against Miami's Dan Marino at the 50-yard line in Mile High Stadium.

I suppose I developed an affinity for the Vikings partially because Dad despised them—that's how fathers and sons roll—but mostly I think it was because of proximity. Plus, they had an old-school cache. Bud Grant, bloody knuckles and defense.

My friends, Whitey, Witte, and Woof Dog, were die-hard Cowboys fans. America's Team had a receiver named Golden Richards in the Seventies, a modest talent, but he had long blonde tresses flowing from the back of the helmet. In Dallas! Under buttoned-up, starched-shirt Tom Landry!

In those years, the guys were as fixated on our hair as the girls, and Golden Richards had that cool factor. My friends and I washed our hair every day before school. It drove my dad nuts. He had a feminist movement in the house, and it wasn't even the girls! Anyway, Golden Richards didn't have to catch a pass to impress anyone. He looked majestic dropping them. That hair was like a superhero's cape. Made him look fast.

My father, the town bookie, took advantage of my Cowboy-enamored friends. One of my childhood memories is of my friends peeling off one dollar bills for Norman the Greek in the living room. If he ever lost a bet to them, I don't remember it. He was uncanny with point spreads. It served a greater purpose, however. We drank less.

I didn't often bet with Dad because he was a poor sport. A terrible sport. The worst ever. He was a gracious, jolly winner, however, so I guess it evened out. The worst thing that could happen was to win a bet on the Vikings against him. The Vikings had a knack for dramatic wins. Blocked kicks, last minute kicks from part-time dentist Fred Cox, magic from above. Dad would leap up from the couch after witnessing the awfulest of miracles, snorting, "Cot damn luck-asses!" It should be engraved on his tombstone.

One Christmas holiday, my sister-in-law Michelle and I placed a bet with him on the Vikings. The game quickly got out of hand in our favor as Dad stewed. And stewed. Michelle and I obtusely hooted and preened with each score.

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," he growled. But the Vikings kept running up the score as Michelle and I walked around clucking like chickens. Bawk! Bawk! We were hilarious. Midway through the third quarter, we backed off. By then he was glowering.

No clucking. We started tip-toeing around. Spoke in hushed whispers. This wasn't even fun.

The next morning when I came downstairs, he met me in the kitchen and began slamming—and I mean slamming—10 dollar bills on the table. It was awful. Like the most ominous war drum ever. Boom! Boom! BOOM!

I suppose being a decades-long Detroit fan can make you surly. The Lions, anyway. The Tigers had some good years, and even though they were rivals of my beloved Baltimore Orioles and the Minnesota Twins, defeats at the hands of Detroit went down easier.

The Vikings and Broncos are done for the year. The Dolphins are injury-ravaged. I'll keep the faith, though. But if by some wizardry, the Lions run the gauntlet, I'll be happy. Cock-a-doodle-doo.



Open primaries in South Dakota has early support: Poll

By Stu Whitney
South Dakota News Watch

Nearly half of registered voters support changing the way primary elections are conducted in South Dakota, but many others remain undecided, according to a state-wide poll co-sponsored by South Dakota News Watch.

The survey of 500 registered voters showed that 49.4% of respondents support a proposed constitutional amendment to establish "top-two" open primaries for governor, Congress and state legislative and county races. The poll showed that 34% oppose the measure.

That leaves 16.6% undecided, which open primary advocates see as an opportunity to sell their vision to voters in the 10 months leading up to the November 2024 election, assuming the measure makes the ballot.

"We're encouraged by these results," said veteran political operative Drey Samuelson, who serves on the board of directors for South Dakota Open Primaries. "It's worth noting that undecideds generally split evenly between voting in favor of a measure and against it, which would put us roughly at 58%. We'd be very happy with that result, obviously."

If successful, the amendment would establish one primary election for each designated office, with all candidates running against each other regardless of party affiliation. The top two vote-getters would advance to the general election.

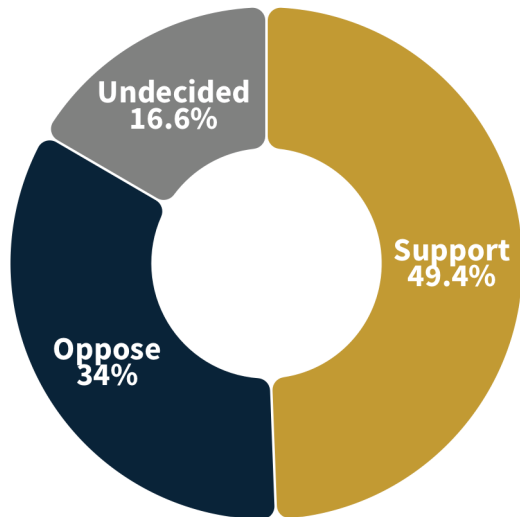
The Attorney General's Statement on the amendment notes that a candidate "may list any party next to their name regardless of party affiliation or registration," meaning a registered Democrat could conceivably be listed on the ballot as a Republican, or vice versa.

Republican state Rep. Aaron Alyward of Harrisburg, S.D., chairman of the conservative South Dakota Freedom Caucus, expressed surprise that so many poll respondents supported open primaries and questioned the reasoning behind the petition effort.



"I Voted" stickers are separated for voters at the downtown Siouxland Public Library branch in Sioux Falls in 2022. A proposed amendment that would open primaries in South Dakota could end up on the 2024 election ballot. (Argus Leader file photo)

Poll: Do you support or oppose the proposed open primaries amendment to South Dakota's constitution?



Source: Source: South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at USD • Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy (Margin of error: +/-4.5%)
Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch

• A Flourish chart

"If this were to go through, we'd essentially have two general elections in South Dakota, which would be completely unnecessary," Alyward said in a statement to News Watch. "If the backers of this amendment are worried about having options at the ballot box, why isn't the focus placed on getting people from all parties ready for the general election, rather than trying to create two general elections in a sense?"

Independents shut out of GOP primaries

Supporters point to the fact that all registered voters would be eligible to participate in open primaries. Currently, Independent voters in South Dakota can vote in Democratic primaries but not Republican contests.

That's a major factor in a state

where the breakdown of registered voters (299,984 Republicans, 145,700 Democrats, 147,968 Independents/No Party Affiliation) makes Independents a formidable voting bloc of 25%. Most races are decided in GOP primaries in a conservative state where no Democratic presidential nominee has prevailed since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964.

Republicans outnumber Democrats 94-11 in the state Legislature, and GOP candidates ran unopposed in 21 of the 35 state Senate races in 2022. The last time a Democratic candidate won a statewide election was 2008.

"I know a fair amount of people who are not Republicans by their general philosophy, but they are Republicans in registration because they know that's where the action is in the primaries," said Samuelson, who served as chief of staff to former Democratic U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson. "In our system, people won't have to be something that they're not to have a vote that's meaningful."

Seeking more balance in politics

The poll was conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy from Nov. 27-29. Respondents were selected randomly from a state voter registration list and were representative of all South Dakota counties, ages, gender and political parties. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.5%. News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at the University of South Dakota sponsored the poll.

The open primaries measure has majority support among Democrats (55.7%) and Independents (55.4%) and plurality support among Republicans, with 43.1% of GOP respondents supporting the change, 40.3% opposing it and 16.5% undecided.

The poll showed the measure with a healthy lead in four geographic regions of the state (Sioux Falls Metro, East River/South, East River/North and West River). West River, often viewed as more conservative than other areas of the state, had the highest support (52.9%) for changing the way primaries are run.

Nicole Heenan, who is helping South Dakota Open Primaries with its petition effort in Rapid City, S.D., switched party affiliation from Independent to Democrat to challenge Republican state Sen. Helene Duhamel in District 32 in 2022. Duhamel won the general election with 56.2% of the vote.

Heenan told News Watch that putting all candidates into a single primary would provide more balance

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 8 of 75

in a state where 90% of legislators are Republican, compared to 50% of voters registered as Republicans.

"That asymmetry is a sign of dysfunction and inefficiency," said Heenan, a mental health therapist who ran for Pennington County Commission as an Independent in 2018. "Democracies are supposed to be flexible and dynamic and quick to the needs of the people, and that's not the system we have right now."

Out-of-state group gets involved

Though nearly half of states have some form of open primary system, only three currently use a top-two primary such as the one proposed for South Dakota.

California and Washington use top-two primaries, with party labels included, in races other than presidential contests, while Nebraska

uses a nonpartisan primary for state legislative races as part of its unicameral system.

Typically, the GOP majority in state politics would be enough to mount a formidable "establishment" response against a ballot measure buoyed by out-of-state interests that threatens the electoral status quo.

Unite America, a nonprofit based in Denver that advocates for election reform, has contributed about \$300,000 to the open primary effort in South Dakota, while about \$400,000 has been raised through in-state donations.

A similar measure in 2016 aimed to circumvent party primaries with nonpartisan races, in which South Dakota voters would consider candidates on an open ballot with no party designations. That effort failed at the ballot but received 44.5% of the vote.

'The stars seem aligned for us'

Supporters of the ballot measure said circumstances have shifted in their favor since then due to a schism in state Republican ranks between moderates and an emergent far-right caucus.

The theory is that open primaries, rather than incentivizing candidates from taking extreme positions to win a partisan primary, will help "lower the volume" to produce officeholders more reflective of the general electorate.

"The stars seem aligned for us because the Republican Party has experienced turmoil," Joe Kirby, a Sioux Falls businessman and government reform advocate who is spearheading the open primary campaign, told News Watch in 2023. "There's less resistance from Republicans to the idea of changing something to broaden the base of voters."

In Democratic-controlled California, where voters approved a top-two primary in 2012, presenting candidates to all voters in primaries has led to more moderates getting elected, forcing far-left legislators to work toward the middle to pass laws.

A 2017 study by the Public Policy Institute of California concluded that open primaries, combined with other shifts such as redistricting reform, can help "draw American parties back toward the center of the ideological spectrum."

For the minority party – Republicans in California and Democrats in South Dakota – the concern is that



Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 9 of 75

candidates will get shut out of the general election in the top-two system, making even more dire the party's lack of representation.

Moving politics toward the middle

Dan Ahlers, executive director of the South Dakota Democratic Party, told News Watch that the SDDP has not yet taken a formal stance on potential 2024 ballot measures. But he noted different approaches to primary elections by the state's political parties.

"South Dakota's Democratic primaries have been open to registered Independent voters since 2010," said Ahlers. "The Republican Party could do this too but has chosen not to open their primaries."

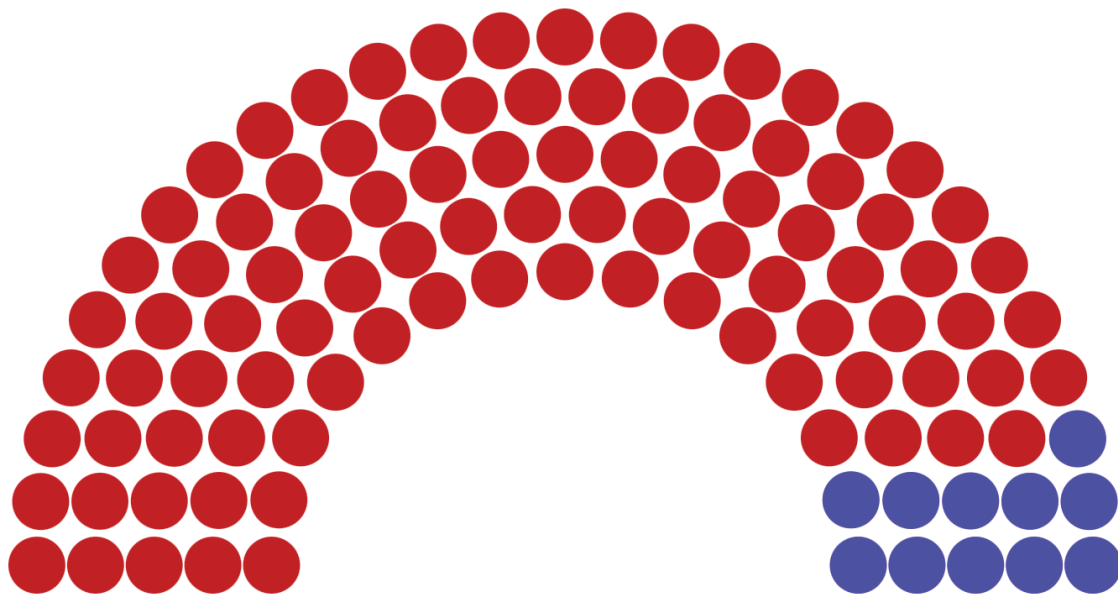
John Wiik, chairman of the South Dakota Republican Party, did not respond to a request for comment. South Dakota Open Primaries needs to collect a minimum of 35,017 signatures to place the constitutional amendment on the 2024 ballot. The deadline to submit signatures is May 7, 2024. Samuelson estimated that the group has collected 35,000 signatures so far, with a goal of 50,000.

Samuelson noted a recent Pew Research Center poll showing that four times as many Americans have unfavorable views of both parties than they did in 2002. He sees that as a sign that people want more candidates who appeal to middle-of-the-road voters rather than to the fringes of either party.

"A lot of moderate Republicans, frankly, don't run in South Dakota because they don't think that they can win the primary," Samuelson said. "So we have these elections that are not contested, and that's not a good thing, no matter what party you're in."

South Dakota Legislature House and Senate combined seats

2023-24 2021-22 2019-20



Party	2023-24	2021-22	2019-20
● Republican Party	94	94	89
● Democratic Party	11	11	16

Graphic: Michael Klinski / SD News Watch



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Former official: Politically connected firm was 'obvious' favorite for Noem ad campaign

Legislator alleges Ohio company's idea was 'clearly stolen' from Sioux Falls agency

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 8, 2024 5:38 PM

PIERRE — A former Noem administration employee told legislators Monday that a politically connected, out-of-state marketing firm seemed predestined for selection to carry out a state advertising campaign.

"It was pretty obvious that was who we would be selecting at the end of this," said Nate Welch. He was marketing director for the Governor's Office of Economic Development before he left the office in May.

While much of Monday's meeting of the Legislature's Executive Board took place behind closed doors for the stated purpose of protecting confidential information, lawmakers used the public portion of the meeting to scrutinize the controversial selection of Ohio-based Go West Media for Governor Kristi Noem's Freedom Works Here workforce campaign.

Go West Media is a subsidiary of The Strategy Group, whose CEO Ben Yoho also manages Vivek Ramaswamy's Republican presidential campaign. Noem is now widely considered to be a potential running mate for Donald Trump in this year's presidential race.

The workforce campaign, which began in June, showcases Noem portraying high-demand workers in television and social media advertisements, as well as on a NASCAR vehicle, to attract workers to South Dakota.

The Legislature's Executive Board is empowered by state law to conduct oversight and management analysis of the executive branch.

Board Vice Chairman Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, highlighted similarities discovered behind closed doors between Go West's campaign and ideas previously developed by Sioux Falls-based Lawrence & Schiller, suggesting potential intellectual property concerns.

"There is an idea that was clearly stolen," Schoenbeck said. "And there isn't anybody with two eyes and a functioning brain that would say Lawrence and Schiller's idea wasn't stolen."

The board asked if the Governor's Office of Economic Development had investigated that particular issue,



Nate Welch, former marketing director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, testifies before the Legislature's Executive Board on Jan. 8, 2024, at the Capitol in Pierre. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 11 of 75

and Tim Engel, the lawyer for the office, said it had "not done that sort of investigation."

A lawmaker asked Welch if stealing ideas and incorporating them into a campaign is normal.

"I've never worked with anyone who would have done that," Welch said.

Schoenbeck said he thinks the board should put the issue to rest because he doesn't think anything illegal occurred, but said he is still troubled by the Governor's Office of Economic Development's actions.

"What's beyond ridiculous here is the level of connivery and misuse of the process when all you had to do was pick the one you wanted," Schoenbeck said.

He added it was "ridiculous" for GOED Commissioner Chris Schilken to testify that Go West's lack of a creative plan in its pitch was normal. Schoenbeck offered similar criticism about Schilken's testimony that the firm was selected because of its analytics. Schoenbeck said Go West didn't include any analytics in its proposal.

Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, said the selection process was problematic.

"This doesn't look like a free, open and transparent process," Nesiba said. "And I don't think we would be here today if it were different."

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, was frustrated upon learning that Schilken, who testified on behalf of GOED, wasn't involved in the selection of Go West.

"The letter was sent for me to appear," Schilken replied.

Karr said later that he wants the board to investigate further and bring in more witnesses.

"We're talking about a circumvention of the competitive bidding process," Karr told South Dakota Searchlight.

But Executive Board Chairman Rep. Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, said the body will not further investigate the issue. He said because the Go West deal is a "personal service contract" rather than a procurement process for items like a vehicle or road construction materials, the Governor's Office acted within its authority.

"You find someone you like, somebody who knows the industry, knows the goal, has an idea how to get there, knows how to get there, and that's the one you go with," Bartels said.

The Freedom Works Here campaign has cost at least \$6.5 million.

Investigative reports by Sioux Falls Live first highlighted the links between Noem and the selected Ohio firm, raising questions about the selection process.

The Noem administration has praised the campaign as "the most successful workforce recruitment campaign in state history." A news release from Noem said the campaign has recruited "Freedom-loving Americans to the state," and more than 8,000 people have expressed interest in moving to South Dakota.

But some lawmakers have expressed frustration about what they've described as a lack of clarity about the campaign's results.

For example, the Governor's Office has said "over 2,000 applicants have advanced to the final stages of moving" through the Freedom Works Here campaign. But under questioning from lawmakers last year, administration officials said that's the number of out-of-state people who have asked for a state-assigned job adviser to help them find work in South Dakota, and the administration does not know how many of those people are directly attributable to the campaign.

Funding for the campaign has come from the Future Fund, which by law is spent at the sole discretion of the governor. It's funded by fees that employers pay in addition to their unemployment payroll taxes. In 2022, the fund amassed \$23 million from over 28,000 employers. This year, Noem has distributed over \$30 million from the fund.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

State Supreme Court signals caution in conflict of interest case Lack of details, hypotheticals bedevil request for advisory opinion on lawmaker ethics

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 8, 2024 3:54 PM

PIERRE — The South Dakota Supreme Court might soon offer clarity on what it means for a lawmaker to have a conflict of interest on state contracts.

Or it won't.

On Monday in Pierre, the justices spent much of a hearing on the matter peppering Attorney General Marty Jackley and lawyers for the governor and Legislature on how they might offer that clarity without a specific conflict to consider.

The hearing came after Gov. Kristi Noem requested an advisory opinion on conflicts last fall. That request followed revelations that former Sen. Jessica Castleberry, R-Rapid City, had accepted more than \$600,000 in COVID relief funds for her preschool after voting on a bill to authorize the distribution of that money.

Castleberry resigned, and is now paying back nearly \$500,000 of that money — the portion that did not directly benefit parents — in monthly installments. Hers is one of two seats that sit vacant as the South Dakota Legislature begins its 99th session this week.

Noem can appoint lawmakers to fill those seats, but has said she won't do that without guidance from the Supreme Court on conflicts. Noem has the power to request an advisory opinion from the court, but the court isn't legally bound to return one.

In this case, each question is tied to a provision in the South Dakota Constitution barring lawmakers from having any interest, "directly or indirectly," in a contract with the state "authorized by any law" passed within a year of their service.

The questions have picked up since Noem revealed Castleberry's situation in a press release over the summer. In November, State Auditor Rich Sattgast told the Legislature's Executive Board that he's fielded questions about at least 20 lawmakers with potential conflicts.

Noem's request presented the justices with nine questions about potential conflict situations. Each was posed as a hypothetical. No names of current lawmakers are attached to her legal brief, and no facts about specific, current contracts are presented.

On Monday at the Capitol, Noem's general counsel, Katie Hruska, told the justices that those questions are "the ones they most often receive" about conflicts.

But Chief Justice Steven Jensen signaled uncertainty on how the court could possibly create guidance broad enough to address all nine at once.

"We're presented nine questions of different scenarios, but there could be facts that might impact those scenarios," Jensen said. "Which gets to the ultimate question of, can we dig into these questions that could be pretty detailed or could be very fact-bound?"

Hruska replied by pointing to another advisory opinion, one Noem requested about the use of COVID relief funds. That opinion involved "a question of the governor's executive power, and did indeed answer that."

Hruska, Jackley and Ron Parsons, the former U.S. attorney for South Dakota who represents lawmakers



The entrance to the South Dakota Supreme Court at the state Capitol in Pierre. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 13 of 75

in this matter, all urged the justices to take up the questions, even if the court is forced to "reformulate" them to narrow the scope of its advice.

As about a dozen current lawmakers looked on, Parsons called the moment of agreement – on the importance of the question, at least – a "historic occasion."

"If it is not the first time, it is certainly one of the very rare times in which each of the three co-equal branches of our state government are represented here in their official capacities in this grand courtroom on the second floor of our state Capitol building," to ask for constitutional clarity, Parsons said. "... the overriding question here today is one that solicits wise guidance from this court."

Lawmakers: Funding alone not enough

For Parsons, that question was "what does the plain meaning of the text of the contracts clause (of the constitution) actually prohibit?"

The key word in that clause for the Legislature, Parsons argued, is "authorized."

If a lawmaker votes to fund government operations as a whole, does that "authorize" any contract a state agency might sign using that money?

It takes more than a funding vote to create a conflict, he argued. Agencies sign and "authorize" contracts, he said. By passing the general appropriations bill that sets annual agency budgets, he said, lawmakers are merely opening the door to the authorization of contracts.

"A payment fulfills the contract," Parsons said. "It does not authorize the contract."

The situation is different with a "special appropriation," which authorizes funding for a specific purpose. One of the votes that ultimately snagged Castleberry in the conflict net was a special appropriation.

The justices challenged that idea several times during Monday's hearing.

Only a handful of prior Supreme Court cases address conflicts of interest for lawmakers, and most square with the notion that a vote to fund the government is a vote to authorize the spending that follows.

One case involved a South Dakota State University professor and lawmaker who lost her wages after voting on the general appropriations bill that paid her salary. Her contract for employment was signed by the Board of Regents, but the high court ruled that her vote was enough to justify the state auditor's refusal to release her paychecks.

At one point, Justice Janine Kern asked, "Can the state enter into a binding contract if the Legislature has not appropriated the necessary funds?"

Justice Mark Salter pointed to South Dakota history, noting that the framers of the state Constitution took care to address conflicts. Only five states have similar clauses.

"There was a strong anti-corruption sentiment," Salter said.

Jensen pushed Parsons on the lawmakers' supposed lack of information or authority on the ultimate destination of the money they vote to spend.

Agencies appear before lawmakers every year with a funding request and a list of projects they'd like to undertake.

"Legislators know, theoretically, what they're funding these various agencies for," Jensen said.

Parsons, however, argued that the previous rulings were either wrong or didn't address the matter of what the word "authorized" actually means.

Voting to possibly fund something isn't enough to "authorize" a contract, Parsons said.

"You can enter into a contract that's never funded, and you could never be paid."

Jackley: Funding votes create conflict

Attorney General Marty Jackley disagrees. The official position from his place in the executive branch is that a vote to fund operations is a vote to authorize contracts.

"The language of the constitution is plain," Jackley said, pointing to prior cases and a series of written opinions from previous attorneys general in South Dakota. "It is intended to remove any suspicion which might otherwise attach to the motives of the members who advocate the creation of new offices, or the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 14 of 75

expenditure of public funds.”

Jackley’s office has proposed a test to determine if a conflict rises to the level of a constitutional problem. It would distinguish between a lawmaker’s “substantial” interest in a contract and a “nominal” one.

He pointed to several of Noem’s questions as ones easily dispatched by such a test. Lawmakers could, for example, be employed by a business accepting Medicaid payments, buy hunting licenses from the state, accept payments to care for foster children, be a part of the state’s retirement system or own a small number of shares in a company that ultimately gets a state contract.

Those situations put lawmakers on equal footing with members of the public, rather than offering “substantial” benefit, Jackley said. When applied to spouses who might contract with the state – “indirect” interests – Jackley said the same standard can be applied to determine how enriched a lawmaker might be through a contract.

Substantial conflicts, pulled from real examples in other states for use in Jackley’s legal brief in the case, could involve a lawmaker whose spouse owns a company that enters into a contract with the state Department of Corrections, or whose spouse owns a printing company that contracts to produce materials for a state agency.

“It’s a very simple standard,” Jackley said. “And that is whether the interest has any tendency to affect the judgment of the legislator. If it does, it’s a conflict and off limits.”

Why now?

The justices zeroed in on whether it’s appropriate for them to issue broad standards without clear facts. Some lines of inquiry aimed to offer solutions that wouldn’t require a legal analysis of hypotheticals about hunting licenses or foster care reimbursement.

Justice Patricia DeVaney asked Hruska if the Governor’s Office would object to the court reformulating her questions to allow for broader guidance.

Hruska, and later Parsons and Jackley, each endorsed that approach as preferable to no opinion. But when DeVaney asked Hruska what those reworked questions might look like, she said “it’s not a question that I had thought of.”

But even a synthesis of previous decisions would be helpful, she said.

During Jackley’s argument, Justice Salter pointed out that each of the previous Supreme Court cases on conflicts involved real questions about real lawmakers. The opinions from previous attorneys general also arose from real situations.

“Is this the right process?” Salter asked.

The Legislature could more clearly define the words in the contracts clause to spell out what might constitute a “direct or indirect” conflict, as lawmakers in Mississippi have done to clear up questions about that state constitution’s contracts clause. Jensen asked Jackley if the state Legislature could do that in Pierre, and Jackley said “yes.”

But Jackley also said “yes” to the question of whether 2024 is the right time to ask for the advisory opinion. The attorney general, the governor and the Legislature have all said “this is the appropriate time,” he said.

“Once and for all, tell us what the standard is,” he said.

Parsons, for his part, told the justices that the idea of a citizen legislature doesn’t work if potential lawmakers are too worried about conflicts to pursue leadership.

“We want regular people to serve in Pierre,” Parsons said.

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

Hundreds of CO2 pipeline critics converge on Capitol ahead of legislative session

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 8, 2024 1:41 PM



Carbon dioxide pipeline critic and farmer, Mark Lapka, of Leola, speaks during a rally at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre on Jan. 8, 2024. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

PIERRE — About 200 landowners braved the winter weather Monday to descend on the state Capitol and demand greater property rights protection and local control in the face of a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline.

The rally occurred one day before Governor Kristi Noem is scheduled to kick off the 2024 legislative session with her State of the State address.

The opponents of CO2 pipelines want lawmakers to pass legislation prohibiting the pipelines from utilizing “eminent domain,” a legal maneuver to access land for a project without landowners’ consent; and to defend the right of counties to set their own pipeline setback ordinances, which determine the

minimum distance required between pipelines and existing structures or features.

“Let’s keep the local control in the hands of the citizens that know their local communities best,” Ed Fischbach, a farmer from rural Aberdeen, told the crowd.

The rally in the rotunda underscored the tensions surrounding the remaining CO2 pipeline proposal in South Dakota.

That project, proposed by Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions, would collect carbon dioxide emissions from 32 ethanol plants, including some in South Dakota, and transport it for underground storage in North Dakota. Doing so would make the project eligible for federal tax credits that incentivize greenhouse gas sequestration and could create access to new ethanol markets, according to proponents. Those include states demanding cleaner ethanol, and new ventures like ethanol-based jet fuel.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission denied Summit a permit last year, citing problems including conflicts with county setback ordinances. Summit plans to resubmit an application.

A recently formed group, South Dakota Ag Alliance — one of several interest groups formed in response to CO2 pipeline proposals — has said it will push to replace the minimum setback distances for carbon pipelines adopted by counties with a statewide standard.

“At the state level, we should talk about setbacks,” the organization’s co-founder, Rob Skjonsberg, told South Dakota Searchlight last year. “You could end up with a complete hodgepodge of setback distances. And if you’re a company, how do you deal with that? It’s nonsense.”

South Dakota Ag Alliance said it would also advocate for reforms of land survey processes, liability protections for landowners, minimum depth requirements for pipelines, and additional recurring compensation

for landowners.

Critics, including landowners present at the rally, argue that the use of eminent domain by the project would infringe on property rights, and a statewide setback law would undermine local control.

Mark Lapka, a farmer from Leola, described those issues as "fundamental principals our state claims to care about."

"South Dakota's soils and topographies are diverse, and no one-size-fits-all approach will be better than what we have," Lapka told South Dakota Searchlight. "Which is to leave it up to the counties who know what's best for the people from there."

Jason Glodt, co-founder of the South Dakota Ag Alliance, responded in an email to South Dakota Searchlight.

"I believe people would be surprised to know that a super majority of landowners on the proposed route see merit in the pipeline project," he wrote. "Unfortunately, that fact is being lost as a result of all of the campaigning that has been going on."

Rural advocate Amanda Radke offered a different take during the rally.

"We are not a small minority that's causing a ruckus," she said. "It's not about just one pipeline. It's that a dozen more projects are waiting in the wings."

Summit Carbon Solutions says it has negotiated voluntary easements with about 70% of landowners along the project's multi-state footprint.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Hydrogen tax rules draw fire from industry

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - JANUARY 8, 2024 6:00 PM

The October announcement that the U.S. Department of Energy had selected seven regional hub projects for billions in federal money to spur the production of clean hydrogen was met with considerable fanfare from the fledgling industry, seen as crucial to helping decarbonize the American economy.

But when the Biden administration's Treasury Department released proposed regulations last month for how a key hydrogen production tax credit will be implemented, the reception from some corners of the industry was a lot less warm.

Frank Wolak, president of the Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Energy Association trade group, said the regulations would place "unnecessary burdens on the still nascent clean hydrogen industry," adding that they fly in face of Congress' intent in the Inflation Reduction Act, the landmark 2022 climate law.

"Congress intended the tax credit to spur domestic clean hydrogen production and allow the United States to maintain an international competitive advantage, not to be an inadvertent backdoor to regulate use of the electric utility grid," Wolak said, adding that the regulations "will unnecessarily hold back our domestic industry, driving investment, manufacturing and technology leadership overseas."

The Edison Electric Institute, which represents investor-owned electric utilities, also criticized the rules, saying they don't "offer sufficient flexibility to allow the scale up that will be necessary to support a U.S. hydrogen economy."

Some Democratic senators have also pushed for looser regulations, including Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Pennsylvania's John Fetterman and Bob Casey. "For an administration that wants to reduce emissions and fight climate change, it makes no sense to kneecap the hydrogen market before it can even begin," U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat, said in a statement.

Environmental groups, other lawmakers and the administration, however, say the restrictions are necessary to ensure hydrogen subsidized by the credits doesn't actually increase greenhouse gas emissions.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 17 of 75

"I'm grateful to see the Biden administration listening to experts to ensure that hydrogen production is adding new clean energy to the grid, protecting consumers and the environment, and expanding clean-energy jobs," said Pennsylvania State Rep. Danielle Friel Otten, a Democrat and a member of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

What the credit does

The hydrogen production tax credit ranges from 60 cents per kilogram of hydrogen produced to \$3 per kilogram, depending on the lifecycle emissions from the facility. Those emissions are determined using a federal model called GREET (Greenhouse Gases, Regulated Emissions and Energy Use in Transportation) and the credit is available for 10 years for projects that begin construction before 2033. The credit starts on the date a hydrogen production facility goes into service, meaning some facilities will be eligible for the credit into the 2040s, the Treasury Department says. That's a lot of potential money at stake.

"It's very lucrative," said Julie McNamara, deputy policy director with the Climate and Energy Program at the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists. "Because there's so much money on the line, this tax credit will shape the hydrogen that ends up getting produced."

For proponents, clean hydrogen has applications in hard-to-decarbonize industrial sectors like steel, cement, long haul transportation and potential natural gas blending in power production. But most hydrogen right now is produced using a process called steam-methane reforming that also releases carbon emissions and other air pollutants.

To qualify as "clean" for the tax credit, facilities using natural gas to produce hydrogen must capture and store most of the carbon produced. However, most of the wrangling and lobbying has been over what proponents call the "three pillars approach" that the Treasury Department included in the draft rule and would affect hydrogen manufactured by electrolysis, which uses electricity to produce hydrogen from water.

The provisions — called additionality (or incrementality), time-matching and deliverability — are intended to ensure that new hydrogen electrolyzers don't create more greenhouse gas emissions by siphoning clean electricity from the grid that must be replaced by ramping up coal and gas power plants.

"It's clean at the point of production," McNamara said. "But it's extremely energy intensive. ... It takes a lot of electricity to produce that hydrogen."

So the proposed tax rules say electrolyzers connected to the grid that are seeking the clean hydrogen production credit must use "energy attribute certificates" to demonstrate their purchase of new clean power, either from a new power facility or from added capacity at an existing plant, provided they are built within 36 months of the electrolyzer coming online. Electric power that is currently being curtailed, meaning it's available but not being used by the grid because of transmission constraints or other reasons,



A general view during the inauguration of a green-tech "RE-FHYNE" hydrogen production plant at the Shell Energy and Chemicals Park Rheinland on July 2, 2021, in Wesseling, Germany. (Andreas

Rentz/Getty Images)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 18 of 75

can also count, McNamara said.

The time-matching provision is intended to ensure the use of electricity by the electrolyzer matches when the power it claims to be using is produced. Until 2028, electrolyzers will only have to match those figures annually. But after that, they'll have to perform hourly matching to qualify for the credit.

McNamara cited the example of Florida, which has abundant solar resources. But an electrolyzer running at night clearly wouldn't be using solar power.

"If you look on an annual basis, there could be a mismatch," she said.

The "deliverability" rules require the power a hydrogen facility claims to be using to be in the same grid region as the electrolyzer.

"Without each of these three requirements, there is a strong likelihood that hydrogen production would result in increased grid emissions and would exceed the maximum emissions intensity permitted to qualify for the credit," the White House said in a statement.

'Not a free buffet'

The rules, which are out for public comment now, do leave some questions open, McNamara said, including a push by the nuclear power industry to have all nuclear power, not just curtailed electricity, count for clean tax credit purposes. Since nuclear plants produce about 20% of U.S. electricity, that could mean more coal and gas plant electricity needed to backfill the power diverted to hydrogen, she said.

"This is an industry play for profit," she said.

Three of the hubs that got initial funding approval from the Department of Energy plan to use nuclear energy, including the Midwest Alliance for Clean Hydrogen (MachH2) hub.

"Today's award is proof positive that DOE and the administration want existing nuclear energy to play a vital role in jumpstarting domestic hydrogen production and we look forward to final Treasury Department guidance," said Joe Dominguez, president and CEO of Constellation Energy, in October. Constellation plans to build a hydrogen facility at its LaSalle County Nuclear Generating Station in Illinois as part of the Midwest hub. There are also questions around plant retirements and relicensing, and how biomethane (for example gas produced from landfills, sewage treatment plants and manure lagoons) should be valued, among other facets of the rule.

"This is not a free buffet for public funds," McNamara said. "It's an intended tax credit to build out the industry we need for the future."

Attempts to reach representatives of the Pacific Northwest, Heartland, Gulf Coast, Mid-Atlantic and Appalachian hubs for comment were unsuccessful.

Jeff Phillips, a spokesman for the Midwest Alliance for Clean Hydrogen, which includes Illinois, Indiana and Michigan, said the hub's leadership and sponsors "are actively reviewing" the Treasury tax guidance.

"We will provide further updates as we are able to," he said.

How to comment

Written or electronic comments must be received by Feb. 26, 2024. The public hearing on the proposed regulations is scheduled for March 25, 2024, at 10 a.m. (ET). Requests to speak and outlines of topics to be discussed at the public hearing must be received by March 4. If no outlines are received by March 4, 2024, the public hearing will be canceled.

Comments may be filed online or mailed to CC:PA:LPD:PR (REG-117631-23), Room 5203, Internal Revenue Service, P.O. Box 7604, Ben Franklin Station, Washington, DC 20044.

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

Aberdeen man considers Republican primary challenge to Rep. Dusty Johnson

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JANUARY 8, 2024 12:39 PM

An Aberdeen businessman says he has formed a committee to consider a run against U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson in the June Republican primary election.

The Toby Doeden for Congress Exploratory Committee issued a news release and a YouTube video over the weekend characterizing Doeden as more closely aligned with former President Donald Trump than Johnson.

"Dusty is a career politician who campaigns on conservative values, but as soon as he's elected, he scampers back to Washington, where he acts like a liberal, talks like a liberal, and worst of all, votes like a liberal," Doeden said in a news release.

A campaign spokesperson for Johnson responded with a statement from the congressman.

"My record speaks for itself. I'm proud of the work I've done in the last five years to secure our border, cut spending, and fix a very broken Washington, D.C."

Johnson has won several past Republican primary races. He won a three-way race in 2018 for the party's nomination to succeed then-Rep. Kristi Noem, who left the U.S. House to become governor. In the 2020 primary election, Johnson beat Republican challenger Liz May, 77% to 23%. In the 2022 primary, Johnson beat Republican challenger Taffy Howard 59% to 40%.

Johnson's campaign finance committee had \$3.28 million on hand as of the end of September.

Doeden is listed on the website of the Aberdeen Chrysler Center as a "dealer principal." He is also listed as president on the website of the Doeden Investment Group, and as founder on the website of the 4J Foundation, a nonprofit billed as supporting the safety and well-being of children and domestic pets.



Toby Doeden in a video announcing his formation of an exploratory committee to consider running for the Republican nomination for U.S. House. (YouTube screenshot)

With abortion on the 2024 ballot, campaigns could see millions in funding from familiar players

BY: KELCIE MOSELEY-MORRIS - JANUARY 8, 2024 11:13 AM

Abortion access has been a central question in at least six state elections since the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2022 Dobbs decision, including ballot questions in California, Michigan and Vermont that added access to abortion care as an explicit right, and 2023's gubernatorial race in Kentucky, a state with a near-total ban where an anti-abortion constitutional amendment failed in 2022.

State supreme court races in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania also spotlighted abortion rights, and the candidates supporting those rights won decisively in April and November.

Throughout the past year, many of the same high-earning individuals and influential special interest groups on both sides of the political spectrum have contributed millions to these initiatives, and will likely be involved in upcoming elections centered around abortion as well, such as citizen-led initiatives in Florida, Missouri, Arizona and Arkansas.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 20 of 75

In Kansas, Ohio and Michigan's elections, and Kentucky's race for governor last year, progressive organizations such as the Sixteen Thirty Fund, Open Society Policy Center, Planned Parenthood and wealthy individuals like former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg all contributed millions to help enshrine abortion access.

In Kansas, Ohio and Kentucky, influential conservative groups including The Concord Fund, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and many powerful Catholic institutions gave millions with a goal of permanently restricting state access to abortion care. But an analysis of campaign finance data shows the latter groups were significantly outspent by special interests as well as individual contributors across the country.



Michelle Black of Columbus (center) listens to Lauren Blauvelt speak during the Ohioans for Reproductive Freedom Bans OFF Columbus rally for Issue 1, Oct. 8, 2023, outside the Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio. (Graham Stokes for Ohio Capital Journal)

Many watch as abortion politics play out in two red states

Two state elections with specific abortion-rights elections garnered more national attention than the others — Kansas and Ohio.

Kansas held its referendum election in August 2022, a little more than a month after Dobbs. It was the opening salvo on post-Roe abortion politics, and the rest of the country was shocked when voters overwhelmingly said no to an amendment that would have expressly added to the state constitution that Kansans had no right to an abortion, that government funding could not be required for abortion, and that only elected state legislators could regulate when abortion would be permitted.

It was called Amendment 2, or the "Value Them Both" amendment, and pre-election polling in mid-July showed it stood a good chance of passing, with 47% in favor and 43% opposed. But instead, it failed by a significant margin, with more than 59% of 1.9 million voters opposed. Turnout was close to 49%.

Jaclyn Kettler, a political science professor at Boise State University in Idaho, is a Kansas native who moved away in 2008, but still has family there. Although Franklin County, where she grew up, voted for former President Donald Trump by 68% in 2020, the county still voted Amendment 2 down, with nearly 56% opposed.

"I was surprised by that, I didn't expect that," she said. "I thought it would be really close, and the margin was higher than I would've expected."

In Ohio last year, voters were first asked whether the state should make it much more difficult for citizen initiatives to qualify for the ballot by requiring signatures from all 88 counties instead of the current 44, removing a 10-day "cure" period to fix issues with signatures, and increasing the margin for an initiative to pass from a simple majority to a supermajority of 60%.

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose said in June that the referendum was "100% about keeping a radical pro-abortion amendment out of our constitution," ahead of an anticipated abortion-rights initiative to do just that. The election for that question, called Issue 1, was held on Aug. 8, and it failed by a wide

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 21 of 75

margin, with 57% opposed.

A few months later, Ohioans were asked to vote again on the question of adding the right for an individual to make and carry out their own reproductive decisions and only allow the state to restrict abortion after fetal viability, with exceptions after that point to protect the pregnant patient's life or health. It was also called Issue 1, and passed by nearly the same margin as the August election, with 56.7% in favor.

In both states, those advocating for abortion rights were campaigning with many more dollars to spare, from special interest groups as well as individuals from across the country.

Michael Kang, a law professor at Northwestern University in Illinois who has an extensive research background in campaign finance, told States Newsroom the historical assumption is that progressives have the advantage in organizing and conservatives have the financial backing, but that's not as true anymore.

"Part of the reason you've got such a financial advantage for progressives and Democrats on this particular issue is because they're on the popular side of this issue," Kang said. "Abortion traditionally had been kind of a catalyzing issue on the right, they had a target to shoot for (with Roe), and now that they got it, I think the tables have switched a little and the energy is on the left in response to Dobbs."

All but .7% of donations to anti-abortion side in Kansas came from in-state contributors

In Kansas, the two groups most involved in the election were Kansans for Constitutional Freedom on the "no" side, and Value Them Both on the "yes" side. According to campaign finance records, Kansans for Constitutional Freedom raised a total of \$10.5 million by the election date, while Value Them Both reported \$6.6 million.

That money differential does matter, Kettler said, although it's unclear how much it helps in each case. But particularly in an election with a constitutional amendment, where it may have been unclear which side a voter should choose, sending out informational mailers, running television and online ads and getting out the vote is crucial.

About 68% of Value Them Both's total came from churches and religious groups from across the state, the largest contributor being the Archdiocese of Kansas City at \$3.18 million. Another \$1.2 million came from large local Catholic institutions, and other local churches collectively contributed another \$85,000, approximately. Chapters of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal organization, contributed nearly \$60,000.

Kansans for Life, an anti-abortion nonprofit organization based in Wichita, and its affiliates provided \$1.25 million for the effort, and Free State PAC, a political action committee based in Kansas, donated \$50,000. Special interests made up about 19% of overall donations, leaving about 12% from individuals and private businesses, which came almost exclusively from Kansans and a small number of donors in 42 other states. Out of the individuals not affiliated with churches or special interests, the highest donation of \$100,000 came from J.B. Hodgdon, whose parents founded Hodgdon Powder Company, a manufacturer of gunpowder for rifles and pistols based in Shawnee, Kansas.

An analysis by States Newsroom showed 99.3% of contributions overall came from within Kansas, making up more than 6,000 of the 6,339 total donations to the campaign.

Kettler said there is often concern about out-of-state spending because there is a fear of outsiders trying to influence a state's policies and elections rather than the people. But ballot measures in particular have been trending that way for years in part because of the nationalization of elections, the ease of donation transactions through online mediums, and organizations soliciting donations from people in other states, she said.

"It's also different when we're talking about individuals making a lot of these donations, or a lot of corporations, or PACs from DC," she said. "That can also influence how citizens are evaluating these trends."

Billionaires donate millions to Kansas election

On the abortion rights side, special interest groups represented more than 61% of donations, while individuals and private businesses made up the remaining 38%, close to 4,500 donations just within the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 22 of 75

U.S. and some coming from other countries.

While the highest number of contributors came from within Kansas, the highest dollar amount of donations came from New York — fueled by \$1.25 million from former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg — and Oklahoma, where Stacy Schusterman, the daughter of an oil executive who founded deepwater drilling company Samson Energy, donated \$1.1 million.

Individuals in 48 other states contributed to the effort, with the second highest number of donors coming from California. Michigan was the lone state to sit out.

“The out-of-state money, whether you’re talking about candidates or issue elections, tends to be more ideological,” Kang said. “Those are donors who are pretty well funded. If you’re taking an interest in politics outside of where you live and do business, you’re motivated by something else, and the political science indicates that it’s ideology that drives that.”

The special interest group that donated the highest amount to defeat the amendment was the Sixteen Thirty Fund, a progressive lobbying and advocacy organization largely funded by undisclosed donors that has poured millions into recent national elections. In 2022, the New York Times reported a foundation backed by George Soros, a billionaire hedge fund manager who has donated billions to progressive causes for decades, contributed \$17 million to the Sixteen Thirty Fund. Along with the nearly \$1.5 million cash infusion, the fund also reported an in-kind contribution of \$85,000 to the Kansas campaign, meaning it donated services or other non-monetary goods valued at that amount. Another \$250,000 came from the Open Society Policy Center, which is part of a network of lobbying groups founded by Soros in 1993.

Nearly \$1.8 million came from Planned Parenthood Action Fund and two affiliates, Planned Parenthood Great Plains and Planned Parenthood Mar Monte in California.

\$3M donation made Oklahoma highest contributing state in Ohio election

Ohio’s election came more than a year after Kansas, and 17 months after the Dobbs decision. But some of the same patterns of donors emerged with even more money flowing from across the country.

The two main political action committees running campaigns in Ohio were Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights advocating for passage of the amendment, and Protect Women Ohio lobbying against it. Between August and November, anti-abortion Protect Women Ohio raised \$14.6 million, while Ohioans United took in more than double with \$39.5 million. According to an analysis by States Newsroom, 1,601 contributions were made to Protect Women Ohio, while 16,979 donations went to Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights. Nearly 74% of the total for the abortion rights campaign came from special interest groups, according to the data.

Notable individual contributions to the campaign advocating for abortion rights included:

\$3 million from Oklahoma resident Lynn Schusterman, whose husband, Charles, founded an oil drilling company, and the two subsequently founded a family philanthropy foundation. She also gave \$1 million to the PAC in June leading up to the August ballot question.

\$1 million from former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg

\$500,000 from Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker

\$1 million from Abigail Wexner, CEO of investment company Whitebarn Associates

\$1 million from Gwendolyn Sontheim Meyer, heir to massive Minnesota-based food production company Cargill

\$100,000 from Hollywood filmmaker Steven Spielberg and his wife, Kate Capshaw

Like Kansas, where in-state contributors played a large role, the highest number of contributions came from Ohio, but Lynn Schusterman’s donations in Oklahoma made it the highest dollar contributing state, followed by New York and California. Individuals in all 50 states donated to the campaign, with the smallest total coming from a singular \$3 donation in North Dakota.

On the opposing side, two of the largest individual contributions were \$250,000 from Joseph Williams III, manager of StoneRiver Management, and \$200,000 from Thomas Jeckering, who is retired.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 23 of 75

Same organizational players in Kansas vastly increased spending in Ohio

The Sixteen Thirty Fund nearly quadrupled its investment in Ohio, giving almost \$5 million directly to Ohioans for Reproductive Rights between August and Election Day in early November, along with a \$2 million contribution to an adjacent PAC called Ohioans for Reproductive Freedom, which then passed the funds along to the main PAC.

The Open Society Policy Center also drastically increased its contribution from \$250,000 in Kansas to \$4 million in Ohio's election. Another progressive nonprofit called the Tides Foundation provided nearly \$3.7 million. Although it is a separate entity from Open Society, the Tides Foundation has received tens of millions from the Soros organization over the past decade, according to Influence Watch.

Planned Parenthood Action Fund and its affiliates contributed more than \$2.6 million, and a nonprofit focused on supporting progressive ballot initiatives called The Fairness Project provided \$2.8 million.

Another nonprofit organization called Advocacy Action Fund Inc. contributed \$1.5 million. That organization was founded by Michael Kieschnick, president and founder of the Green Advocacy Project, in 2021. Advocacy Action reported \$61.3 million in revenue in its most recent tax filing, and says it exclusively supports social welfare causes.

On the anti-abortion side, the largest special interest contributions came from The Concord Fund, a conservative advocacy group that has long dedicated its efforts to influencing judicial appointments across the country. The cumulative total of the Fund's donations from August to November was \$8.36 million. The Concord Fund is part of a network of organizations associated with former Federalist Society vice president Leonard Leo, who was instrumental in the U.S. Supreme Court's ultimate decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, according to ProPublica. The Concord Fund also poured \$3.3 million into Kentucky's November gubernatorial election, where Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear won reelection against Republican Attorney General Daniel Cameron, who strongly supported the state's near-total abortion ban.

Like Kansas, religious organizations infused millions into the anti-abortion side in Ohio, including \$1 million from Catholic-based organization Knights of Columbus, \$400,000 from the Diocese of Columbus and about \$522,000 from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, according to state campaign finance records.

The Concord Fund's investment was far higher than that of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, one of the most influential anti-abortion interest groups. The organization gave a total of \$1.77 million between August and November.

In an emailed statement to States Newsroom, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America President Marjorie Dannenfelser said Issue 1 passed because abortion activists and "outside Democrat donors ran a campaign of fear to Ohio voters" that women would die without the amendment. Dannenfelser said that wasn't true and it deceived voters.

"There have been many valuable lessons learned from Issue 1. Moving forward in states where abortion will be on the ballot in 2024, pro-life, pro-woman coalitions will need to devote more resources to compassionate pro-life messages for women and their children, combating the campaign of fear from the other side," Dannenfelser said.

No matter what happens in 2024, Kettler said she thinks upcoming races around access to abortion will be political hot spots.

"I suspect these measures are going to continue to attract a lot of money, whether it's through individual donations or outside spending," she said.

Stateline reporter Tim Henderson contributed to this report.

Kelcie Moseley-Morris is an award-winning journalist who has covered many topics across Idaho since 2011. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Idaho and a master's degree in public administration from Boise State University. Moseley-Morris started her journalism career at the Moscow-Pullman Daily News, followed by the Lewiston Tribune and the Idaho Press.

Climate changing: Research shows times for 'prescribed burns' in the West shifting

BY: HAYDEN BLACKFORD - JANUARY 8, 2024 9:44 AM

Deciding when and where to conduct prescribed burns is becoming increasingly important as the climate warms, and, according to a recent study, the timing and frequency of appropriate weather will also play a larger role.

Prescribed burns are an essential tool land managers use in reducing fuel availability for extreme wildfires, and conditions favorable to prescribed burns will become far less frequent in much of the West, especially the Southwest, according to a study published in October 2023 in Communications Earth & Environment.

However, the study found that parts of the northern Rocky Mountains will have more days to use prescribed burns, especially during the early and late winter months.

"One of the reasons why some of the northern tiers of the U.S. become more favorable for prescribed fire at times in winter is actually because it gets warmer," said Daniel Swain, lead author and climate scientist for the University of California, Los Angeles. "You're actually warming into this acceptable envelope from being on the low end. In the southern parts of the U.S., you're just already at the upper end of the envelope, and you're getting even warmer and drier."

Though the study forecasts an overall decrease of days acceptable for prescribed fire — as much as a 25% to 31%, during the spring and summer months across the West — northern regions may see an increase in potential burn days during the winter. These opportunities are a silver lining of sorts, as any opportunities to burn forests with low-intensity fire are essential for keeping fuels off the forest floor and leaving larger trees unharmed, Swain said.

"You can't just broad brush the American West," Swain said, of the variability of climate from state-to-state. The study found that if temperatures rose a modest 2 degrees Celsius by 2060, southern U.S. states could see their burn windows shrink by 17% overall. Wildfire conditions are rapidly worsening for parts of central and Southern California, Arizona and New Mexico, Swain said.

Prescribed burns are a risk intervention tool, and not only does prescribed fire reduce wildfire risk but in many places the ecosystem benefits from these fires, which are often less intense than wildfires spurred by climate change and years of fire suppression, Swain said. In a forest where land managers have historically suppressed fire, lower branches create ladder fuels, or fuels that give fire the ability to grow on the ground. And if a fire reaches the tree canopy, it becomes much more intense; it can even create its own weather.

Mariah Leuschen-Longeran, the public affairs specialist for the Forest Service's northern region, said that fire professionals and firefighters make comprehensive plans about where to burn, and they look for optimal weather conditions. One thing they pay close attention to is air quality.

The Forest Service works with local partners, such as the county or state, making them aware of the upcoming fire, she said. Additionally, communication with the National Weather Service plays a big part in



A prescribed burn on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest on Oct. 19, 2023, in Montana. (Photo by

Hayden Blackford)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 25 of 75

the days and weeks leading up to a potential window. Burns require pre-planning that fits local outlines, goals and objectives, but ideally, they also align with larger projects' goals, Leuschen-Longeran said.

In the future, climate conditions could align for prescribed burns earlier in the year, depending on the snowpack, Leuschen-Longeran said. Opportunities may arise in the winter, especially on open slopes facing south — where direct sunlight hits. However, she said the agency follows air quality guidelines set by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

In the winter, accommodating prescribed burns produces its own challenges. And in Western Montana, it's common for a stagnant, low atmosphere to form, which would trap smoke, said Liz Ulrich, the planning supervisor at the DEQ's Air Quality Bureau.

The DEQ views small burns on private land very differently than the large-scale burns typically undertaken by government agencies. Ulrich said Montana has different regulations for the West than the East to accommodate regional differences that may impact air quality.

In addition, for an entity like the Forest Service, the Montana, Idaho Airshed Database tracks potential burns. Even though forest conditions in Montana may align for prescribed burns, that doesn't mean there will be an opportunity to conduct one since the State takes turns using weather windows in coordination with Idaho, Ulrich said. Working with Idaho is imperative because when they burn, the region's dominant wind patterns often bring smoke further into Montana, Ulrich said.

The DEQ's goal is to maintain a healthy airshed and to help mitigate wildfire danger, but the balance is becoming increasingly harder to find as wildfire season grows, she said. The agency is always looking for opportunities to approve burns, but they have had to adjust; when the fire season goes longer than usual, that can mean not approving burns, she said.

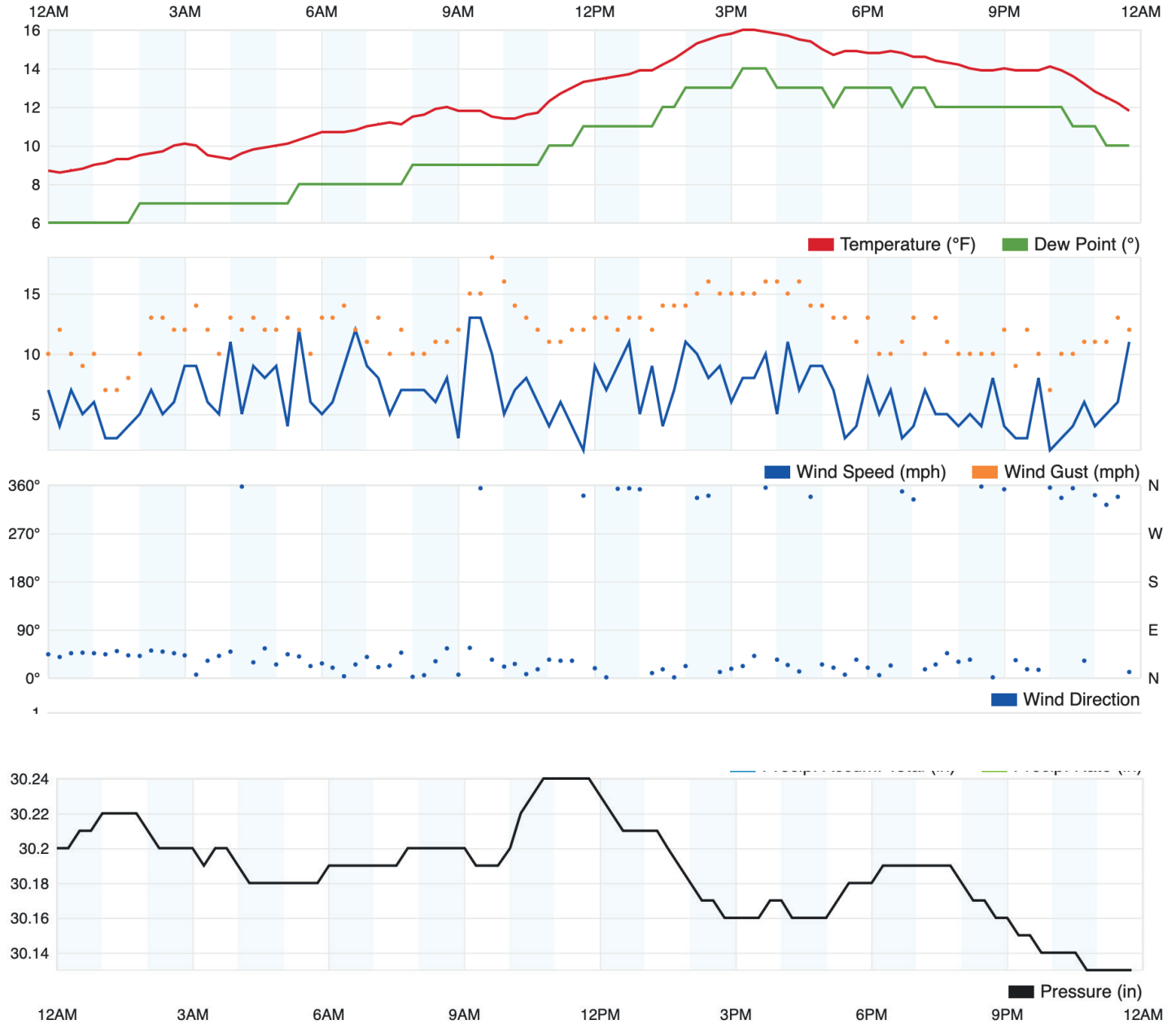
"It is a little bit shorter of a season in the fall, and it is kind of shifting, but our regulations haven't shifted," Ulrich said. "We're seeing the trend of wildfire season just being longer, and in turn, that opportunity for burning isn't as long."

Hayden Blackford is a freelance journalist and photographer based in Missoula, Montana.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 26 of 75

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 27 of 75

Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Jan 9	Jan 10	Jan 11	Jan 12	Jan 13	Jan 14	Jan 15
15°F	25°F	8°F	5°F	-3°F	-6°F	0°F
9°F	4°F	-3°F	-5°F	-15°F	-12°F	-5°F
NNW	S	WNW	N	NNW	NW	WNW
5 MPH	10 MPH	16 MPH	13 MPH	17 MPH	14 MPH	16 MPH
	60%			60%		



Dry Today, Light Snow Wednesday

January 9, 2024

2:31 AM

turning much colder late this week

Today

Decreasing clouds, Highs teens & 20s

Wednesday

Light snow likely (40-60%), Highs 25-35°

Thursday

Colder, Highs 5-15°

Friday

Very cold with light snow possible, Highs in the single digits above zero.

Weekend Outlook

Continued **Cold** with a chance of light snow, Lows in the teens below to 20s below zero, Highs in the single digits above and below zero.

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A system will bring light snow to the region on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the coldest air of the season so far will settle in for the upcoming weekend.

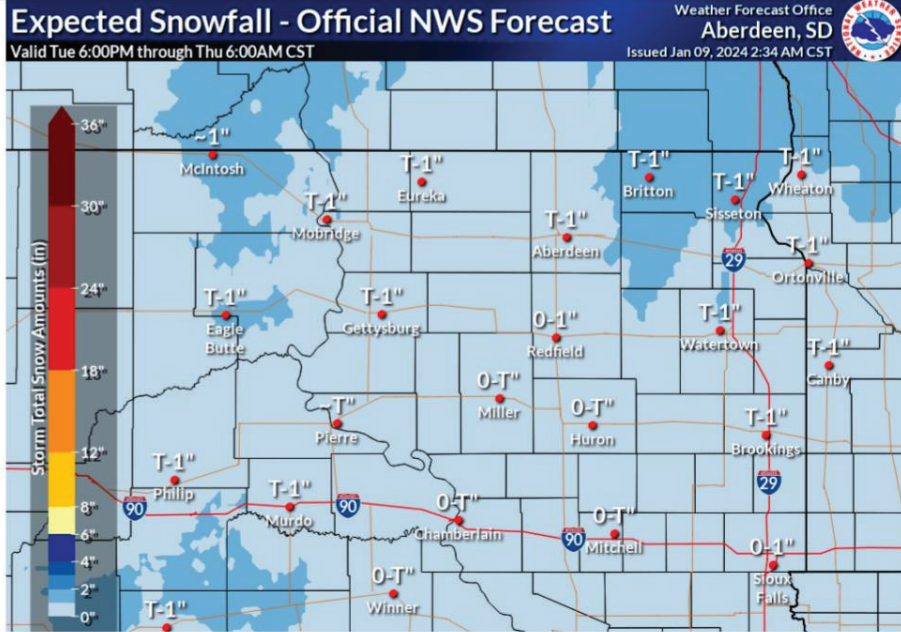
Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 28 of 75



Expected Snowfall Tonight - Wednesday

January 9, 2024
2:39 AM



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

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 29 of 75

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 16 °F at 3:30 PM

Low Temp: 8 °F at 12:22 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 9:49 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 0 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 2012

Record Low: -31 in 2010

Average High: 23

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.19

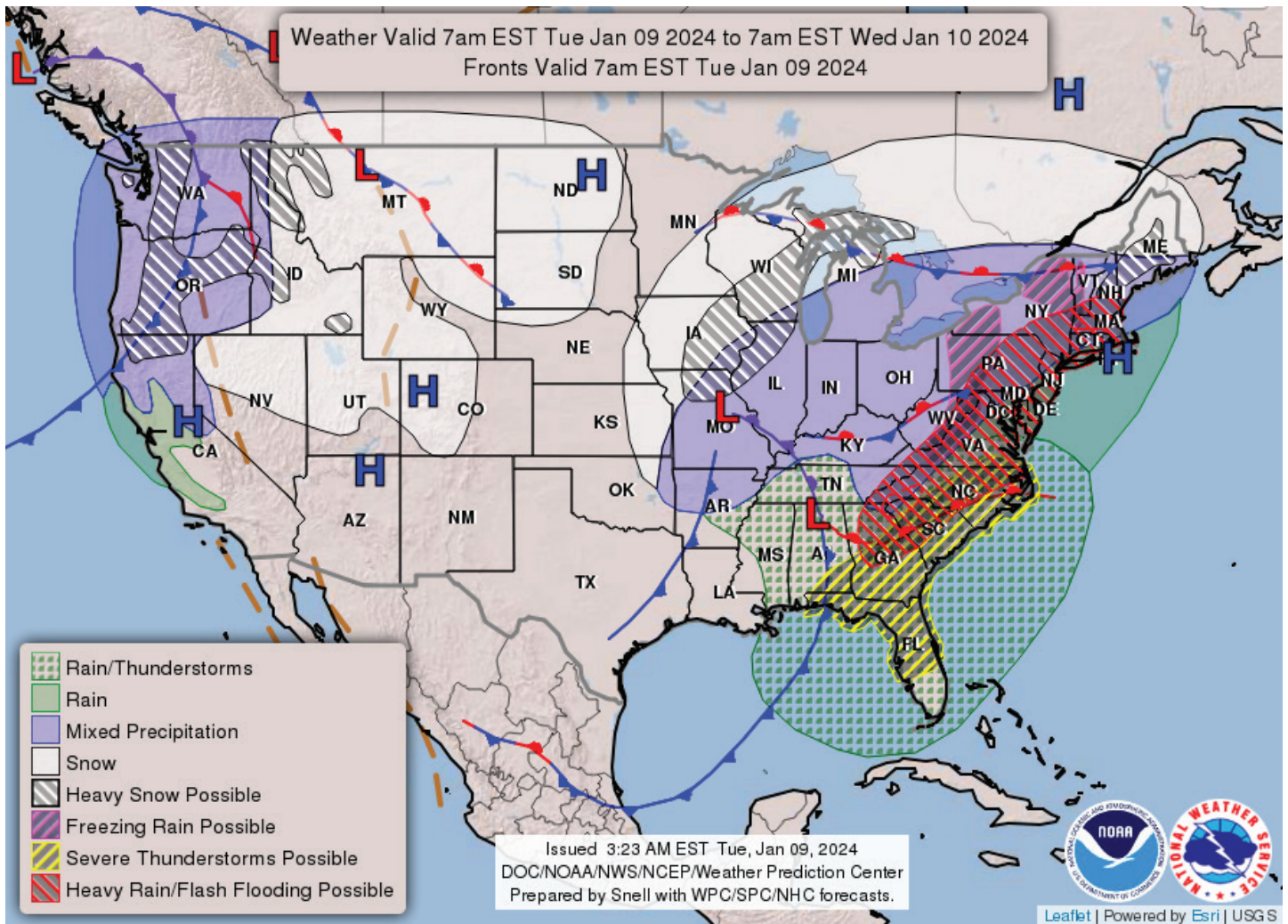
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.19

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:09:25 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:09:04 am



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 30 of 75

Today in Weather History

January 9, 1982: Winds of 20 to 40 mph accompanied by 1 to 3 inches of snow created ground blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills from the 9th through mid-afternoon on the 12th. There were two deaths from the exposure attributed to the storm, including a 69-year old Scotland woman and a woman from Veblen in Marshall County. Both tried to walk after their vehicles stalled. Near zero visibilities and snowdrifts to 5 feet high forced closures of numerous highways. Also, minor power outages were reported.

January 9, 1997: A powerful Alberta Clipper and a deep Arctic High brought widespread and prolonged blizzard conditions, heavy drifting snow, and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 80 below to central and north-east South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. North winds were from 30 to 50 mph gusting to 60 mph. The clipper dropped from 2 to 7 inches of snowfall on top of an already solid 2 to the 5-foot snowpack. As with previous storms, most roads again became blocked by huge snowdrifts. As a result of the blockage and the blizzard conditions, both Interstates 29 and 90 closed along with all state highways leaving hundreds of people stranded to wait out the storm. This winter has been the worst for road closings. Many people became stuck in snowdrifts or went off the road because of low visibility and had to be rescued. One dramatic rescue near Webster, involving tens of rescue workers, occurred after a woman was stranded in her vehicle for nearly 40 hours. A couple with a one-year-old was rescued after spending a night in their car, and they were unharmed. A Wakpala woman died from carbon monoxide poisoning in her stalled pickup on Highway 1806 near Wakpala. Emergency personnel had a tough time responding to emergencies. Some emergencies took up to several hours to go short distances. A rural Leola man died when emergency workers could not get to him in time. In McLaughlin, seven people had to be taken by air ambulance because there was no way out.

All area schools were closed on the 9th and 10th, with most schools at this point in the winter season missing over 7 days. A state record was set when Faulkton School had closed for its 13th day. Mail was delayed, and area airports had flight delays or were closed. Many businesses were also closed and were suffering from economic losses due to this storm and previous storms because customers could not get to them. Many grocery stores ran low or out of bread, milk, and other food necessities. There were some power outages across the area, but they were not widespread. The power was out at Isabel, Timber Lake, and Firesteel for as much as 8 hours. The power outage in Isabel resulted in extensive water pipe breaks at the Isabel School. Willow Lake was without power for over 2 days. Some homes across the area were also without heat for several days in the bitter cold. The majority of ranchers were unable to access feed for cattle, sheep, and hogs. As a result of the extreme conditions and lack of food, over fifty thousand livestock died. Also, many livestock suffered frostbite and were significantly weakened. There was also a lot of wildlife and pheasants killed. As a result, the Emergency Feed Grain Donation Program was activated for the ranchers. One rancher said that he had been ranching in this area for 34 years and had never lost cattle before. Also, some dairy farmers had to dump their milk because trucks could not get them in time.

Some people were trapped in their homes for up to several days as snowdrifts buried their homes and blocked the roads, with some people having to crawl out their windows. In Wilmot, a 12-foot drift covered the community home, where residents had to turn the lights on during the day. As a result of snow removal budget depletions and other storm damages, President Clinton declared all of the counties a disaster area. Snowplows from Iowa, Nebraska, and plows and workforce from the South Dakota National Guard helped break through hundreds of roads. The snowdrifts in some places were packed so hard and were measured at 300 pounds per square inch. Some longtime residents said this had been the worst winter they had seen in their lifetimes. The total damage estimate for this January blizzard and the previous January winter storm is 50 million dollars. This includes the added snow removal costs, livestock losses, building damages, and other economic losses.

1880: A rapidly deepening low-pressure system produced powerful winds along the Pacific Northwest coast. While wind measurements were limited, there were widespread reports of wind damage.

2006: With cold air sweeping in from the Himalayas, New Delhi reports frost for the first time in 70 years with a low temperature of 0.2°C (32.3°F). The cold prompted officials to order all schools to close for three days.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 31 of 75

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

DOING OR BEING

Cathy Rigby was a member of the United States Women's Gymnastics team in the Olympics in Munich, Germany in 1972. Many remember the tragedy caused by terrorists at the Olympics that year. No one remembers Cathy for her one and only desire that year - to win a gold medal.

She trained hard and did very well. But she did not win the gold medal. After her event, she sought out her mother. Weeping uncontrollably, she threw her arms around her and said, "I'm sorry, but I did my best."

"We know that you did, and God knows that you did," replied her mother. She then added, "Doing your best is much better than being recognized for being the best."

Winning an event in track and field, or any other athletic contest requires three things: purpose, determination, and dedication. If an athlete lacks any of the three, victory is doomed.

Paul describes training for and winning a race as a way to illustrate how the Christian life demands the same characteristics that are necessary for an athlete to "win the gold:" self-denial and a grueling training program. As Christians, we are running toward our reward, which we will receive when we arrive in heaven. If we want to "win the race" and receive the prize that God offers us, we must sacrifice the things in life that keep us from placing Him first in our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we all want to "win the prize" You have waiting for us. Give us the courage and willingness to discipline ourselves and become victorious. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27



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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 32 of 75

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 33 of 75



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.05.24

5 23 26 38 44 25

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$165,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 15 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.08.24

12 21 37 39 45 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,250,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 30 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.08.24

9 19 25 33 43 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 45 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.06.24

3 9 22 25 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 45 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.08.24

3 38 55 57 62 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.08.24

7 17 28 40 45 2

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Central US walloped by blizzard conditions, closing highways, schools and government offices

MADISON, Wis, (AP) — A sprawling storm that pelted much of the nation's midsection with more than a half a foot of snow and gusty winds created whiteout conditions that closed parts of two interstate highways and prompted officials to close schools and government offices in several states Tuesday.

Up to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of snow could blanket a broad area stretching from southeastern Colorado all the way to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, including western Kansas, eastern Nebraska, large parts of Iowa, northern Missouri and northwestern Illinois, said Bob Oravec, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.

Nearly 8 inches (19 centimeters) of snow fell in the northern city of Athol, Kansas, on Monday. The weather service office in Lincoln, Nebraska, predicted an additional 3-5 inches (8-13 centimeters) was possible overnight, with winds possibly gusting as high as 40 mph (64 kph).

Whiteout conditions in central Nebraska closed a long stretch of Interstate 80, while Kansas closed Interstate 70 from the central city of Russell all the way west to the Colorado border due to dangerous travel conditions. Several vehicles slid off I-70 in the northeastern part of the state, authorities said.

In Nebraska, federal courts in Omaha and Lincoln closed Monday, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers increased the water flow at a Missouri River dam on the Nebraska-South Dakota border near Yankton to reduce the chance of ice jams forming. Dubuque, on Iowa's eastern border with Illinois, closed its city offices Tuesday. Schools in Cedar Rapids in eastern Iowa were among those also closing.

The weather has already affected campaigning for Iowa's Jan. 15 precinct caucuses, where the snow is expected to be followed by frigid temperatures that could drift below zero degrees (minus 18 Celsius).

It forced former President Donald Trump's campaign to cancel multiple appearances by Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders and her father, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who had been scheduled to court Iowa voters on Trump's behalf Monday.

Parts of northern Missouri braced for up to a foot of snow as the system moved east. Officials in Kansas City, Missouri, said City Hall would be closed Tuesday and municipal courts would operate remotely.

Madison, Wisconsin, was under a winter storm warning until early Wednesday, with as much as 9 inches (23 centimeters) of snow and 40 mph (64 kph) winds on tap. City officials canceled garbage collection to prevent residents from putting trash cans along curbs and making it difficult for snowplows to navigate.

Northwestern Illinois was also under a winter storm warning with forecasts calling for 7 to 12 inches (18 to 30 centimeters) of snow by early Wednesday. The Chicago area as well as Gary, Indiana, were under winter storm advisories, with forecasts calling for up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) of snow and wind gusts of up to 30 mph (48 kph). Snowfall rates could exceed an inch per hour Tuesday, the weather service said.

The Illinois Tollway, a state agency that maintains nearly 300 miles (480 kilometers) of toll roads across 12 northern Illinois counties, urged drives to take a "go it slow" attitude.

Disruptions extended as far south as the Oklahoma panhandle, where Cimmaron County emergency managers asked citizens to stay home. More than a dozen motorists were stranded there Monday afternoon, with whipping winds and blizzard conditions leading to near-zero visibility, said Lea Lavielle, the county's emergency management director.

"At this point in time, we are advising individuals to shelter in place the best they can," Lavielle said.

Another storm was on the way that will affect the Pacific Northwest into the northern Rockies, Oravec said. Blizzard warnings were out for much of the Cascade and Olympic ranges in Washington and Oregon.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 35 of 75

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 54, Sully Buttes 34
Harding County 53, Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 47
South Border, N.D. 54, Herreid-Selby 44
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Arlington vs. Iroquois-Lake Preston, ppd.
Baltic vs. Colman-Egan, ppd.
Sioux Falls Washington vs. Sioux Falls O'Gorman, ppd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 58, Sully Buttes 34
Britton-Hecla 60, Wilmot 42
Chamberlain 35, Crow Creek Tribal School 32
McLaughlin 59, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 21
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Sioux Falls Washington vs. Sioux Falls O'Gorman, ppd.

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

In Israel, Blinken looks to planning for post-war Gaza as bombardment, fighting continue to rage

By MATTHEW LEE, NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken faced tough talks with Israeli leaders on Gaza's post-war future Tuesday, while Israel's military pushed ahead with its offensive in the beleaguered territory. Heavy bombardment and fighting shook refugee camps, sending Palestinians scrambling to find safety and hampering aid groups' efforts to get relief to the population.

Blinken said he was coming to Israel with promises from four Arab nations and Turkey to help in rebuilding Gaza after the war. But those nations also want to see an end to the fighting in Gaza and concrete steps toward the eventual creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, something Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed not to allow.

The U.S. and Israel also remain deeply divided over how Gaza will be run when — and if — its current Hamas rulers are defeated. American officials have called for the Palestinian Authority, which currently governs parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to take the reins in Gaza. Israeli leaders have rejected that idea but haven't put forward a concrete plan beyond an open-ended military control over the territory.

At the same time, Blinken is trying to prevent an all-out war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah. After a presumed Israeli strike last week hit Beirut, killing Hamas's deputy leader, the two sides have stepped up their exchanges. On Tuesday, Hezbollah said its exploding drones targeted the Israeli army northern command in the town of Safed — deeper into Israel than previous fire by the group. The Israeli military said a drone fell at a base in the north without causing damage, suggesting it had been intercepted. It did not identify the base.

"There is lots to talk about, in particular about the way forward," Blinken said after meeting Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

The United States has pressed Israel to scale down its offensive in Gaza to more precise operations targeting Hamas. But the pace of death and destruction has remained largely the same, with several hundred Palestinians killed a day, according to health officials in Gaza. Israel has vowed to keep going until it has destroyed Hamas throughout the territory, in response to the Oct. 7 attack during which militants killed some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, in southern Israel and kidnapped around 250 others.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 36 of 75

Still, after three months of fighting, Hamas continues to put up a fierce fight.

The Israeli military says it has dismantled Hamas infrastructure in northern Gaza, where large swaths of the cityscape have been demolished. But fighting continues there against what Israel says are pockets of militants. The offensive's focus has shifted to the southern city of Khan Younis, where ground troops have been fighting militants for weeks, and a number of urban refugee camps in central Gaza.

"The fighting will continue throughout 2024," military spokesman Daniel Hagari said.

Since the war began, Israel's assault in Gaza has killed more than 23,200 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and children, and more than 58,000 have been wounded, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The death toll does not distinguish between combatants and civilians. Nearly 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have been driven from their homes by the fighting, and a quarter of its residents face starvation, with only a trickle of food, water, medicine and other supplies entering through an Israeli siege.

Throughout the night and into Tuesday morning, warplanes struck multiple areas in and around Khan Younis. Israeli artillery shelling and gunfire echoed through the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, where troops have been pushing in from the north, said one resident, Saeed Moustafa. They were facing heavy resistance from gunmen in the camp, he said.

Like other refugee camps in Gaza, Nuseirat was built to house Palestinians driven out of homes during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, and over the decades it has been built up into a densely populated town housing refugees and their descendants.

Families in Nuseirat's northern neighborhoods were fleeing to other parts of the camp, Moustafa said by phone, with the sound of sporadic gunfire in the background. Some tried to head south on the Gaza's main north-south road but found it blocked by Israeli tanks and turned around, he said. In leaflets, the military had told people evacuating to use another road, along the coast.

The U.N. humanitarian office, known as OCHA, warned that the fighting was severely hampering aid deliveries. Several warehouses, distribution centers, health facilities and shelters have been affected by the military's evacuation orders, it said. Some bakeries in the central city of Deir al-Balah have been forced to shut down. A U.N. warehouse was hit last week, killing a staffer, and five other staffers were detained by the military, with two still held.

The situation is even more dire in northern Gaza, which Israeli forces cut off from the rest of the territory in late October. Tens of thousands of people who remain there face shortages of food and water.

The World Health Organization has been unable to deliver supplies to the north for two weeks. OCHA said the military rejected five attempted aid convoys to the north over that period, including planned deliveries of medical supplies and fuel for water and sanitation facilities.

As Blinken arrived in Israel, exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah continued their spiral since last week's killing of Hamas deputy leader Saleh Arouri in Beirut.

Hezbollah said its drone strike on the base in northern Israel on Tuesday was further retaliation for the killing of Arouri and of a senior Hezbollah commander in an Israeli bombing Monday.

Tuesday morning, an Israeli drone hit a car in southern Lebanon, killing three people inside, security officials in the area and the state news agency said. There was no immediate word on the identities of the three.

Israel has repeatedly warned that time is running out before it launches a campaign to end militants' fire across the border.

U.S. officials have said they expect Blinken's discussions with Netanyahu, the War Cabinet and other officials to be some of the most difficult on his current Mideast tour, his fourth since the war began,

Blinken said Monday that Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey have agreed to begin planning for the reconstruction and governance of Gaza once Israel's war against Hamas ends. Those countries had previously resisted U.S. calls for post-war planning to begin, insisting that there must first be a cease-fire and a sharp reduction in the civilian suffering in Gaza.

Blinken did not offer specifics on potential contributions. Financial and in-kind support from the UAE and Saudi Arabia could be essential to the success of any plan.

Airlines say they found loose parts in door panels during inspections of Boeing Max 9 jets

By DAVID KOENIG, CLAIRE RUSH and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Federal investigators say a door panel slid up before flying off an Alaska Airlines jetliner last week, and they are looking at whether four bolts that were supposed to help hold the panel in place might have been missing when the plane took off.

The comments Monday from the National Transportation Safety Board came shortly after Alaska and United Airlines reported separately that they found loose parts in the panels — or door plugs — of some other Boeing 737 Max 9 jets.

“Since we began preliminary inspections on Saturday, we have found instances that appear to relate to installation issues in the door plug — for example, bolts that needed additional tightening,” Chicago-based United said.

Alaska said that as it began examining its Max 9s, “Initial reports from our technicians indicate some loose hardware was visible on some aircraft.”

The findings of investigators and the airlines are ratcheting up pressure on Boeing to address concerns that have grown since the terrifying fuselage blowout Friday night. A plug covering a spot left for an emergency door tore off the plane as it flew 16,000 feet (4,800 meters) above Oregon.

Boeing has called an online meeting for all employees Tuesday to discuss safety.

The company, which has had problems with various planes over the years, pledged to “help address any and all findings” that airlines make during their inspections of Max 9 jets. Boeing has delivered more than 200 to customers around the world, but 171 of them were grounded by the Federal Aviation Administration on Saturday until the door plugs can be inspected and, if necessary, fixed.

The door plugs are inserted where emergency exit doors would be located on Max 9s with more than about 200 seats. Alaska and United have fewer seats in their Max 9s, so they replace heavy doors with the plugs.

The panels can be opened for maintenance work. The bolts prevent the mechanism from moving upward on rollers when the plane is in flight.

During Alaska Airlines flight 1282 on Friday night, roller guides at the top of one of the plugs broke — for reasons the investigators don’t fully understand yet — allowing the entire panel to swing upward and lose contact with 12 “stop pads” that keep the panel attached to the door frame on the plane, NTSB officials said at a news briefing in Portland.

NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said the safety board was investigating whether four bolts that help prevent the panel from sliding up on rollers were missing when the plane took off from Portland or whether they blew off “during the violent, explosive decompression event.”

The interior of the plane suffered extensive damage, but pilots were able to return to Portland and land safely. Officials say there were no serious injuries among the 171 passengers and six crew members.

The lost door panel was found Sunday near Portland in the back yard of a school teacher’s home. NTSB officials said it will be sent to the agency’s lab in Washington, D.C., for detailed study that might help pinpoint why the plug broke loose.

Alaska and United have canceled hundreds of flights since the weekend because of their grounded planes. Alaska has 65 Max 9s, and United has 79. The airlines waited until Monday before Boeing and the FAA completed instructions for how to inspect their planes.

The jet involved in Friday’s blowout is brand-new, having been put in service in November. After a cabin-pressurization system warning light came on during three flights, the airline stopped flying it over the Pacific to Hawaii. Some aviation experts questioned why Alaska continued using the plane on overland routes until it figured out what was causing the pressurization warnings.

Homendy said Monday, however, that NTSB has seen no evidence to link the warnings with the blowout of the door plug.

The Max is the newest version of Boeing’s 737, a twin-engine, single-aisle plane that debuted in the

late 1960s and has been updated many times. The 737 has long been a workhorse for airlines on U.S. domestic routes.

Shares of Boeing fell 8% and Spirit AeroSystems, which installs the door plugs on Max jets, dropped 11% on Monday.

South Korea's parliament passes landmark ban on production and sales of dog meat

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's parliament on Tuesday passed a landmark ban on production and sales of dog meat, as public calls for a prohibition have grown sharply over concerns about animal rights and the country's international image.

Some angry dog farmers said they plan to challenge the bill's constitutionality and hold protest rallies, a sign of continued heated debate over the ban.

After a three-year grace period, the bill would make slaughtering, breeding and sales of dog meat for human consumption illegal from 2027 and punishable by 2-3 years in prison. It doesn't provide any penalties for eating dog meat.

Dog meat consumption, a centuries-old practice on the Korean Peninsula, is neither explicitly banned nor legalized in South Korea. It has long been viewed as a source of stamina on hot summer days. Recent surveys show more than half of South Koreans want dog meat banned and a majority no longer eat it. But one in every three South Koreans still opposes a ban even though they don't consume it.

The National Assembly passed the bill by a 208-0 vote. It will become law after being endorsed by the Cabinet Council and signed by President Yoon Suk Yeol, considered formalities since his government supports the ban.

"This law is aimed at contributing to realizing the values of animal rights, which pursue respect for life and a harmonious co-existence between humans and animals," the legislation says.

The bill offers assistance to dog farmers and others in the industry in shutting down their businesses and shifting to alternatives. Details are to be worked out among government officials, farmers, experts and animal rights activists.

Dozens of animal rights activists gathered at the National Assembly to celebrate the bill's passage. They carried large photos of dogs, chanted slogans and held placards reading "Dog meat-free Korea is coming."

Humane Society International called the legislation's passage "history in the making."

"I never thought I would see in my lifetime a ban on the cruel dog meat industry in South Korea, but this historic win for animals is testament to the passion and determination of our animal protection movement," said JungAh Chae, executive director of HSI's Korea office.

Dogs are also eaten in China, Vietnam, Indonesia, North Korea and in some African countries. But South Korea's dog meat industry has drawn more attention because of the country's reputation as a cultural and economic powerhouse. It's also the only nation with industrial-scale dog farms. Most farms in South Korea raise about 500 dogs, but one visited by The Associated Press in July had about 7,000.

Farmers were extremely upset by the bill's passage.

"This is a clear case of state violence as they are infringing on our freedom to choose our occupation. We can't just sit by idly," said Son Won Hak, a farmer and former leader of a farmers' association.

Son said dog farmers will file a petition with the Constitutional Court of Korea and hold demonstrations. He said farmers will meet on Wednesday to discuss other steps.

There is no reliable official data on the exact size of South Korea's dog meat industry. Activists and farmers say hundreds of thousands of dogs are slaughtered for meat each year.

The anti-dog meat campaign received a huge boost from the country's first lady, Kim Keon Hee, who has repeatedly expressed her support for a prohibition. She has become the subject of withering criticism and crude insults during demonstrations by farmers.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 39 of 75

The legislation doesn't clearly specify how dog farmers and others in the industry will be supported. Agriculture Minister Song Mi-ryung said Tuesday the government will try to formulate reasonable assistance programs for them.

Ju Yeongbong, an official of the farmers' association, said most farmers are in their 60-80s and hope to continue their businesses until older people, their main customers, die. But Ju said the legislation would "strip them of their right to live" because it would likely end up only offering assistance for dismantling their facilities and for transitions, without compensation for giving up their dogs.

Son said many elderly dog farmers are willing to close their farms if proper financial compensation is provided because of the extremely negative public view of their jobs.

Cheon JinKyung, head of Korea Animal Rights Advocates in Seoul, accused farmers of demanding unrealistically high compensation. She said compensation based on the number of dogs owned by farmers won't be accepted, but acknowledged that payments would likely be a major issue.

Ordinary citizens were split over the ban.

"Dogs are different from cows, chickens and pigs," said Kim Myung-ae, a 58-year-old Seoul resident. "Why would you still eat dogs when they are now seen more as family-like pets than food?"

Another Seoul resident, Jeong Yoon Hee, disagreed, saying whether to eat dog meat is a matter of a personal choice and dietary culture. "Dogs are dogs, not humans," she said.

Live updates | Israeli strike kills 3 in Lebanon as Blinken tries to prevent conflict from spreading

By The Associated Press undefined

An Israeli drone strike hit a car Tuesday morning in southern Lebanon, killing three people inside it, security officials in the area and the state news agency said. The strike on Ghandouriyeh, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border with Israel, came a day after a similar attack killed a commander with the militant Hezbollah group.

On an urgent mission aimed primarily at preventing the Israel-Hamas conflict from spreading into a regional war, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday that Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey would consider participating in post-conflict reconstruction and governance of Gaza, which has been decimated by three months of Israeli bombardment.

The United Nations humanitarian office says the intensifying Israeli offensive in central and southern Gaza has had "devastating consequences," driving up civilian casualties, severely curtailing aid operations in the central region and risking the closure of three major hospitals.

Hamas' Oct. 7 attack from Gaza into southern Israel triggered the war and killed around 1,200 people, and militants took some 250 others hostage. Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza has killed more than 22,400 people, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

Currently:

- Israeli strike kills an elite Hezbollah commander in the latest escalation linked to the war in Gaza.
- The U.S. secretary of state rallies Mideast leaders to prepare for Gaza's post-war future.
- Gaza cease-fire protests block New York City bridges. Over 300 people are arrested.
- San Francisco supervisors will take up resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza.
- Find more of AP's coverage at: <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's what's happening in the war:

A PROJECTILE FALLS AT AN ARMY BASE IN NORTHERN ISRAEL, MILITARY SAYS

TEL AVIV, Israel — The Israeli military says a projectile fell at an army base in northern Israel after Hezbollah said it launched an exploding drone toward the area.

The military said its air defense system was activated to try to intercept a "hostile aircraft," and that the aircraft fell at the base.

The military said no damage was caused to the base Tuesday. It did not specify where exactly the base

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 40 of 75

was located but Hezbollah said it targeted Safed, a city farther away from where the daily Israel-Hezbollah skirmishes have been taking place.

AN ISRAELI DRONE STRIKE HITS A CAR IN LEBANON, KILLING 3, OFFICIALS SAY

BEIRUT — An Israeli drone strike hit a car Tuesday morning in southern Lebanon, killing three people inside it, security officials in the area and the state news agency said.

There was no immediate word on the identities of the three. The strike on the village of Ghandouriyeh came a day after a similar attack killed a commander with the militant Hezbollah group. Ghandouriyeh is about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border with Israel.

Two security officials said Israeli drones carried out three strikes in the area including one that hit the car killing the three instantly. They spoke on condition of anonymity due to briefing regulations.

The state-run National News Agency said the strike in Ghandouriyeh inflicted casualties without giving further details. Hezbollah officials did not immediately respond to calls for comment.

Tuesday's strike is the latest along the Lebanon-Israel border since Hezbollah started attacking Israeli military posts following the deadly Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel by Hamas. Since then, Hezbollah has lost 150 fighters in the near-daily exchanges of fire.

Associated Press writer Bassem Mroue contributed.

ISRAELI ACTOR REPORTEDLY SERIOUSLY WOUNDED IN GAZA

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli media reported Tuesday that an actor on the hit Netflix show "Fauda" has been seriously wounded in the Gaza Strip.

Idan Amedi, 35, was sedated and intubated at an Israeli hospital and covered in shrapnel wounds, the Israeli news site Ynet said. He was in stable condition. Ynet said Amedi has been on reserve duty since Hamas launched its attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 and was wounded Monday.

"Fauda" follows a team of undercover agents from Israel's domestic security agency Shin Bet in their operations against Palestinians. While the show is critically acclaimed, some Palestinians say it trivializes their experience under Israel's open-ended military occupation of the West Bank. Amedi played Sagi Tzur, a rookie undercover agent, during the series' second to fourth seasons, and is also a successful singer-songwriter in Israel.

Israel has enlisted roughly 360,000 reserve soldiers from all walks of life in its war against Hamas.

GROUP WARNS THAT HOSTAGES HELD BY HAMAS FACE HEALTH RISKS

TEL AVIV — A group representing people held hostage by Hamas and other militants in the Gaza Strip warned Tuesday of the detrimental health risks to many of those held captive.

In a report released Tuesday, the medical team of The Hostages and Missing — Families Forum said at least one-third of the roughly 108 hostages said to be alive in captivity suffer from chronic illnesses or conditions like diabetes, cancer or heart disease that require medical care or medication. It said 10% of hostages were over 65 and were vulnerable without nursing assistance. The report also expressed concern for the hostages' mental health and for those who had been wounded during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack against Israel.

"If no medical care is provided urgently for all hostages, the result could be irreversible health problems at best and death at worst," the group said.

Hamas and other militants took some 250 people hostage in their October attack, according to Israeli authorities. Roughly 105 people were freed in a cease-fire deal at the end of November, while around 24 have been killed in captivity.

Central US walloped by blizzard conditions, closing highways, schools and government offices

MADISON, Wis, (AP) — A sprawling storm that pelted much of the nation's midsection with more than a half a foot of snow and gusty winds created whiteout conditions that closed parts of two interstate highways and prompted officials to close schools and government offices in several states Tuesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 41 of 75

Up to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of snow could blanket a broad area stretching from southeastern Colorado all the way to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, including western Kansas, eastern Nebraska, large parts of Iowa, northern Missouri and northwestern Illinois, said Bob Oravec, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.

Nearly 8 inches (19 centimeters) of snow fell in the northern city of Athol, Kansas, on Monday. The weather service office in Lincoln, Nebraska, predicted an additional 3-5 inches (8-13 centimeters) was possible overnight, with winds possibly gusting as high as 40 mph (64 kph).

Whiteout conditions in central Nebraska closed a long stretch of Interstate 80, while Kansas closed Interstate 70 from the central city of Russell all the way west to the Colorado border due to dangerous travel conditions. Several vehicles slid off I-70 in the northeastern part of the state, authorities said.

In Nebraska, federal courts in Omaha and Lincoln closed Monday, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers increased the water flow at a Missouri River dam on the Nebraska-South Dakota border near Yankton to reduce the chance of ice jams forming. Dubuque, on Iowa's eastern border with Illinois, closed its city offices Tuesday. Schools in Cedar Rapids in eastern Iowa were among those also closing.

The weather has already affected campaigning for Iowa's Jan. 15 precinct caucuses, where the snow is expected to be followed by frigid temperatures that could drift below zero degrees (minus 18 Celsius).

It forced former President Donald Trump's campaign to cancel multiple appearances by Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders and her father, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who had been scheduled to court Iowa voters on Trump's behalf Monday.

Parts of northern Missouri braced for up to a foot of snow as the system moved east. Officials in Kansas City, Missouri, said City Hall would be closed Tuesday and municipal courts would operate remotely.

Madison, Wisconsin, was under a winter storm warning until early Wednesday, with as much as 9 inches (23 centimeters) of snow and 40 mph (64 kph) winds on tap. City officials canceled garbage collection to prevent residents from putting trash cans along curbs and making it difficult for snowplows to navigate.

Northwestern Illinois was also under a winter storm warning with forecasts calling for 7 to 12 inches (18 to 30 centimeters) of snow by early Wednesday. The Chicago area as well as Gary, Indiana, were under winter storm advisories, with forecasts calling for up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) of snow and wind gusts of up to 30 mph (48 kph). Snowfall rates could exceed an inch per hour Tuesday, the weather service said.

The Illinois Tollway, a state agency that maintains nearly 300 miles (480 kilometers) of toll roads across 12 northern Illinois counties, urged drives to take a "go it slow" attitude.

Disruptions extended as far south as the Oklahoma panhandle, where Cimmaron County emergency managers asked citizens to stay home. More than a dozen motorists were stranded there Monday afternoon, with whipping winds and blizzard conditions leading to near-zero visibility, said Lea Lavielle, the county's emergency management director.

"At this point in time, we are advising individuals to shelter in place the best they can," Lavielle said.

Another storm was on the way that will affect the Pacific Northwest into the northern Rockies, Oravec said. Blizzard warnings were out for much of the Cascade and Olympic ranges in Washington and Oregon.

Jim Harbaugh delivers a national title. Corum scores 2 TDs, Michigan overpowers Washington 34-13

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Jim Harbaugh raised the championship trophy as gold and white confetti sprayed over his team and "We Are the Champions" blared.

Nine years after he took over at Michigan, Harbaugh delivered on the lofty expectations he brought with him to his beloved alma mater.

Blake Corum ran for 134 yards and two fourth-quarter touchdowns as Harbaugh and the top-ranked Wolverines — undeterred by suspensions and a sign-stealing case that shadowed the program — completed a three-year surge to a national title by beating No. 2 Washington 34-13 Monday night in the College Football Playoff.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 42 of 75

"We're innocent and we stood strong and tall because we knew we were innocent. And I'd like to point that out," Harbaugh said when asked about off-field issues, jumping in to answer a question posed to his players. "And these guys are innocent. And overcome that? It wasn't that hard because we knew we were innocent.

"(The season) went exactly how we wanted it to go. It went exactly how we wanted it to go."

The Wolverines (15-0) sealed their first national title since 1997 when Corum, who scored the winning touchdown in overtime against Alabama in the Rose Bowl, blasted in from the 1-yard line with 3:37 left to put Michigan up by 21 and set off another rousing rendition of "The Victors" from the band.

After a third consecutive playoff appearance, Harbaugh won the championship so many expected when he took over a struggling powerhouse in 2015 — despite missing six regular-season games this season while serving two suspensions.

"That man, he's the reason we're here today," Michigan quarterback J.J. McCarthy said of his coach.

And Harbaugh did it with a team his old coach, Bo Schembechler, would have adored. The Wolverines ran for 303 yards against Washington (14-1), and their rugged defense held Michael Penix Jr. and the Huskies' prolific passing game to just one touchdown while intercepting the Heisman Trophy runner-up twice.

"There are more than 100 Michigan men who are on this team," Harbaugh said. "What they've done is amazing. They will forever be known as national champions."

Penix's remarkable six-year college career ended with maybe his worst performance of the season. Usually unfazed by pressure, Penix was not nearly as precise against a Michigan defense that took away his signature deep throws.

"That was a spectacular game by our defense," Harbaugh said.

The Indiana transfer who came back from two knee surgeries and two shoulder injuries was roughed up by the Wolverines, limping at times, stepped on another time.

Asked how he was feeling, Penix said, still undaunted: "Better than I was three years ago."

Penix finished 27 for 51 for 255 yards and a touchdown as the Huskies had their 21-game winning streak snapped.

"They've given me everything they possible can," coach Kalen DeBoer said of a group of players who went 4-8 just two seasons ago and 25-3 since he took over in 2022.

McCarthy had a modest game, throwing for 140 yards and running for 31. But it was enough for him to improve to 27-1 as a starter for the Wolverines.

Michigan gave Washington a taste of life in the Big Ten, where the Pac-12 champions are heading next season, and the Huskies were up for the grind for a while.

Two long touchdown runs by Donovan Edwards and 229 yards rushing in the first quarter put the Wolverines up 17-3 early in the second and conjured up memories of last year's historic Georgia blowout of TCU.

Washington stabilized and didn't allow the Wolverines another point in the first half. After the Huskies stopped Michigan on a fourth-and-2 from the UW 38 with 4:46 left in the second quarter, Penix went to work.

He found Jalen McMillan on a fourth-and-goal with 42 seconds left for a 3-yard touchdown. After being on the verge of getting buried by the Wolverines, the Huskies fans sang along to "Who Let the Dogs Out," happily down only 17-10 at half.

Will Johnson's interception of Penix on the first play of the second half gave Michigan another opportunity to open up a two-touchdown lead, but the Huskies forced a field goal by James Turner to make it 20-10.

"Today was a complete, complete team effort," Corum said.

Michigan nursed a touchdown lead until halfway through the fourth quarter, when it put together a 71-yard drive, capped by Corum's tackle-breaking 12-yard touchdown that finally gave the Wolverines some room with a 27-13 lead and 7:09 left.

Corum, the engine of the ground-and-pound offense and heart and soul of a team loaded with fourth-, fifth- and even sixth-year players, missed the CFP last year with a knee injury. He was named offensive player of the final national title game in before the College Football Playoff expands from four teams to

12 next season.

"Michigan, this is for you," Corum told the Wolverines fans.

Michigan seemed to be steaming toward a third consecutive Big Ten championship when in October it was revealed the NCAA was investigating the program for potentially breaking rules that prohibit in-person scouting of opponents and using video equipment to attempt to decode opponents' play signals.

The scandal turned Connor Stalions, the low-level Michigan recruiting staffer accused of orchestrating the scheme, into a household name and threatened to derail the Wolverines' season.

The NCAA process will linger well into 2024 and it is unknown what penalties Michigan could face. The Big Ten, though, decided to act quickly and punished Michigan by suspending Harbaugh for the final three games of the regular season, including matchups with Penn State and rival Ohio State.

With offensive coordinator Sherrone Moore taking Harbaugh's place, it became Michigan vs. Everybody and nobody could stop the Wolverines.

Harbaugh returned for the postseason, completed the mission and got to celebrate with his 84-year-old father, Jack — himself a former college football coach — as he accepted the trophy.

Michigan became the first college football program to record 1,000 victories when it beat Maryland in November and won its third national title in January.

"Who has it better than us?" Jack Harbaugh asked the fans during the trophy ceremony. They replied with a boisterous: "Nobody!"

Now the question is whether Harbaugh has coached the team he once quarterbacked for the last time, with the NFL seemingly beckoning again.

Harbaugh said it felt good to no longer be the only coach in the family without a national championship. His father won a Division I-AA title with Western Kentucky and brother John won a Super Bowl with the Baltimore Ravens by beating Jim's San Francisco 49ers 11 years ago.

"I can now sit at the big person's table in the family," Harbaugh said.

As for what's next?

"I just want to enjoy this," he said. "I hope you give me that. Can I have that? Does it always have to be what's next, what's the future?"

Twisted metal, rushing wind: A narrowly avoided disaster as jet's wall rips away at 3 miles high

By TERRY SPENCER and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The loud "boom" was startling enough, and the roaring wind that immediately filled the airline cabin left Kelly Bartlett unnerved. Still, it wasn't until a shaken teenager, shirtless and scratched, slid into the seat next to her that she realized just how close disaster had come.

A section of the Boeing 737 Max 9's fuselage just three rows away had blown out — at 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) high — creating a vacuum that twisted the metal of the seats nearby, and snatched cellphones, headsets and even the shirt off the teenager's back.

"We knew something was wrong," Bartlett told The Associated Press on Monday. "We didn't know what. We didn't know how serious. We didn't know if it meant we were going to crash."

The first six minutes of Alaska Airlines flight 1282 from Portland to Southern California's Ontario International Airport on Friday had been routine, the Boeing 737 Max 9 about halfway to its cruising altitude and traveling at more than 400 mph (640 kph).

Flight attendants had just told the 171 passengers that they could resume using electronic devices — in airplane mode, of course — when it happened.

Then suddenly a 2-foot-by-4-foot (61-centimeter-by-122-centimeter) piece of fuselage covering an unoperational emergency exit behind the left wing blew out. Only seven seats on the flight were unoccupied, and as fate would have it, these included the two seats closest to the blown-out hole.

The oxygen masks dropped immediately, and Bartlett saw a flight attendant walking down the aisle toward the affected row, leaning forward as if facing a stiff wind. Then flight attendants began moving

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 44 of 75

passengers from the area where the blowout occurred.

Among them was the teenage boy moved next to Bartlett.

"His shirt got sucked off of his body when the panel blew out because of the pressure, and it was his seatbelt that kept him in his seat and saved his life. And there he was next to me," she said, adding that his mother was reseated elsewhere.

"We had our masks on, and the plane was really loud so we couldn't talk. But I had a ... notes app on my phone that I was typing on. So I typed to him and I asked him if he was hurt," Bartlett said. "I just couldn't believe he was sitting there and what he must have gone through, what he must have been feeling at the time."

She said the boy typed back that he was OK, but a bit scratched, adding "that was unbelievable" and "thank you for your kindness."

The exit door plug landed in the southwest Portland backyard of high school physics teacher Bob Sauer. Sauer said his heart "did start beating a little faster" when he saw it in the beam of his flashlight Sunday night as he searched for any debris.

"It was very obviously part of a plane," he told a group of reporters outside his home on Monday. "I thought, 'Oh my goodness, people have been looking for this all weekend and it looks like it's in my backyard.'"

Sauer said he and the seven National Transportation Safety Board agents who came to his home to pick up the door plug were amazed it was intact. It appeared that tree branches had broken its fall.

A headrest landed on the patio of Sauer's neighbor, Diane Flaherty. Flaherty didn't realize what the charcoal-colored cushion was until a friend emailed her to say federal agents were looking for airplane parts in her neighborhood. An NTSB agent came by to pick it up.

"What are the chances that a headrest cushion falls out of the sky into your backyard?" she said.

The pilots and flight attendants have not made public statements and their names have not been released, but in interviews with National Transportation Safety Board investigators they described how their training kicked in. The pilots focused on getting the plane quickly back to Portland and the flight attendants on keeping the passengers safe and as calm as possible.

"The actions of the flight crew were really incredible," NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said at a Sunday night news conference. She described the scene inside the cabin during those first seconds as "chaos, very loud between the air and everything going on around them and it was very violent."

Bartlett echoed praise for the crew, saying the entire time she felt like the plane was under control even though the roaring wind was so loud she couldn't hear the captain's announcements.

"The flight attendants really responded well to the situation. They got everyone safe and then they got themselves safe," she said. "And then there was nothing to do but wait, right? We were just on our way down and it was just a normal descent. It felt normal."

Inside the cockpit, the pilot and co-pilot donned their oxygen masks and opened their microphone, but "communication was a serious issue" between them and the flight attendants because of the noise, Homendy said. The pilots retrieved an emergency handbook kept secure next to the captain's seat.

The co-pilot contacted air traffic controllers, declaring an emergency and saying the plane needed to immediately descend to 10,000 feet (3,048 meters), the altitude where there is enough oxygen for everyone onboard to breathe.

"We need to turn back to Portland," she said in a calm voice that she maintained throughout the landing.

In the cabin, the flight attendants' immediate focus was on the five unaccompanied minors in their care and the three infants being carried on their parents' laps.

"Were they safe? Were they secure? Did they have their seat belts on or their lap belts on? And did they have their masks on? And they did," Homendy said.

Some passengers began sending messages on social media to loved ones. One young woman said on TikTok that she was certain the plane would nosedive at any second and she wondered how her death would affect her mother, worrying that she would never recover from the sorrow.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 45 of 75

But she and others said the cabin remained surprisingly calm. One passenger, Evan Granger, who was sitting in front of the blowout, told NBC News that his “focus in that moment was just breathe into the oxygen mask and trust that the flight crew will do everything they can to keep us safe.”

“There were so many things that had to go right in order for all of us to survive,” Granger said.

Video taken by those on board showed flight attendants moving down the aisle checking on passengers. Through the hole, city lights could be seen flickering past.

Evan Smith, an attorney traveling on the plane, told reporters the descent and landing were loud but smooth. When the plane touched down at Portland International about 20 minutes after it departed, the passengers broke into applause. Firefighters came down the aisle to check for injuries, but no one was seriously hurt.

Homendy said that if the blowout had happened a few minutes later, after the plane reached cruising altitude, the accident might have become a tragedy.

Bartlett’s mind also keeps returning to the what-ifs.

“I’m glad that it is not any worse than it was — that’s all. I keep coming back to it,” she said. “Like, how lucky Jack got. That was his name, the kid who sat next to me. His name was Jack, and how lucky he was that he had a seatbelt on.”

On Sunday, a passenger’s cellphone that had been sucked out of the plane was found. It was still operational, having survived its plunge from the sky.

It was open to the owner’s baggage claim receipt.

San Francisco supervisors will take up resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Supervisors in politically liberal San Francisco will vote on a resolution Tuesday calling for a sustained cease-fire in Gaza, although its final wording is uncertain given proposed amendments that reflect historic tensions in the Middle East.

The resolution to be voted on by the Board of Supervisors has no legal authority, and is among dozens that have been considered by local U.S. officials despite their irrelevance in international affairs as the Israel-Hamas war enters its fourth month following a deadly Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants.

The draft resolution introduced in December by Supervisor Dean Preston, who is Jewish, calls for humanitarian aid, the release of all hostages and condemnation of “antisemitic, anti-Palestinian, Islamophobic, and all xenophobic rhetoric and attacks.”

Preston rejected amendments by another supervisor, Matt Dorsey, who wants the resolution to include more explicit condemnation of the attack by Hamas. Dorsey proposed the amendments at the board’s rules committee Monday, which included nearly five hours of impassioned comment from cease-fire supporters who rejected the proposed additions as extremist and racist.

Supervisor Ahsha Safaí said at the end of Monday’s hearing that the conversation has changed from whether the board should approve a cease-fire resolution to what that resolution will look like.

Calls for a cease-fire have swamped the country since pro-Palestinian, Jewish peace and other activist groups have blocked bridges, shut down highways, staged die-ins and earlier this month, forced California’s state Assembly to adjourn moments after convening.

Oakland, which is another politically liberal city in the San Francisco Bay Area, unanimously approved a permanent cease-fire resolution in November after rejecting an amendment that would have added an explicit condemnation of Hamas.

But the Burlington City Council in Vermont last month rejected a cease-fire resolution and the city of Berkeley in California has declined to consider one, with Mayor Jesse Arreguín saying in a statement that such resolutions “fan the flames of hatred” at home while doing nothing to resolve the violence abroad. Both are politically liberal cities.

As has been the case at other public hearings, comment at Monday’s crowded rules committee was im-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 46 of 75

passioned and lengthy. Cease-fire supporters called the resolution a common-sense stand against genocide and a declaration of the value of Palestinian lives.

Manal Elkarra, a San Francisco physician who is Palestinian American, said before Monday's hearing that nearly 100 extended family members have been killed in Gaza and the rest have nothing, their homes destroyed.

"There's no clean water. There's no access to food. There's no access to fuel. There's no access to telecommunications. And this is being done with the support of the United States government. And we're here to say enough," she said.

While largely outnumbered, several speakers urged the board to reject the original resolution or to pass it with Dorsey's amendments. They said they felt unsafe as Jewish people and were horrified by calls for the destruction of Israel.

Tyler Gregory, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Bay Area, was booed loudly when he said at the hearing that the war would be done if Hamas laid down their weapons, but "if Israel puts down its weapons, there will be no more Israel."

After the hearing, he said that cease-fire resolutions are creating a hostile environment and encouraging acts of antisemitism, such as the destruction of a large menorah by Oakland's Lake Merritt last month.

"No matter what happens" Tuesday, he said, "no one's going to win."

The resolution and any amendments will be before the full board Tuesday.

Israeli strike kills an elite Hezbollah commander in the latest escalation linked to the war in Gaza

By BASSEM MROUE, WAFAA SHURAFI and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — An Israeli airstrike killed an elite Hezbollah commander Monday in southern Lebanon, the latest in an escalating exchange of strikes across the border that have raised fears of another Mideast war even as the fighting in Gaza exacts a mounting toll on civilians.

The strike on an SUV killed a commander in a secretive Hezbollah unit that operates along the border, according to a Lebanese security official who spoke on condition of anonymity in keeping with regulations. The commander, Wissam al-Tawil, was a veteran of the Iranian-backed Lebanese force who took part in the 2006 cross-border kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers that triggered the last war between Israel and Hezbollah, an official in the group said.

He is the most senior Hezbollah militant killed since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel triggered all-out war in Gaza and lower-intensity fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which has escalated since an Israeli strike killed a senior Hamas leader last week in Beirut.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is back in the region this week, appears to be trying to head off a wider conflict.

In other developments, Israel said it has largely wrapped up major operations in northern Gaza, though fighting and bombardment there continue. Israeli forces are now focusing on the central region and the southern city of Khan Younis, where thousands more Palestinians fled.

Israeli officials say the fighting will continue for many more months as the army seeks to dismantle Hamas and return scores of hostages taken during the militants' Oct. 7 attack.

The offensive has already killed over 23,000 Palestinians, devastated vast swaths of the Gaza Strip, displaced nearly 85% of its population of 2.3 million and left a quarter of its residents facing starvation.

'SICKENING SCENES' IN GAZA'S OVERWHELMED HOSPITALS

Medics, patients and displaced people fled from central Gaza's main hospital as fighting drew closer, witnesses said Monday. Losing the facility would be another major blow to a health system shattered by three months of war.

Doctors Without Borders and other aid groups withdrew from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, saying it was too dangerous amid Israeli bombardment, drone strikes and sniper fire. That spread panic

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 47 of 75

among people sheltering there. Thousands left, joining the hundreds of thousands who have fled further south, said a hospital staffer, Omar al-Darawi.

Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in Gaza's hospitals, which are struggling to treat the continuous flow of wounded from Israeli strikes. Only 13 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are even partially functional, according to the U.N. humanitarian office.

The Al-Aqsa hospital was struck multiple times in recent days, al-Darawi said. After the pullout, large numbers of patients who cannot be moved were concentrated on one floor to be treated by remaining doctors. "They need special care, which is unavailable," he said.

World Health Organization staff who visited Sunday saw "sickening scenes of people of all ages being treated on blood-streaked floors and in chaotic corridors," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "The bloodbath in Gaza must end."

More dead and wounded arrive at the hospital each day as Israeli forces advance in central Gaza, backed by heavy airstrikes. The military said Monday it had uncovered a large Hamas site for building rockets in the nearby Bureij refugee camp.

Thousands have been fleeing the area, heading south. Fifteen members of the Ayash family crammed into a van with their belongings for the journey. "Along the way there was banging, missiles, bombing, and planes," said Khawla Ayash.

Reaching Muwasi, a coastal area outside Rafah, they unloaded bags, blankets and thin mattresses and began setting up tents alongside other relatives.

The U.N. children's agency UNICEF warned that 90% of Gaza's children under 2 were consuming only bread and milk.

"As the threat of famine intensifies," hundreds of thousands of children face severe malnourished, with some at risk of death, said Catherine Russell, UNICEF's executive director. "We cannot allow that to happen."

DIRE CONDITIONS IN THE NORTH

The situation is even more dire in northern Gaza, which Israeli forces cut off from the rest of the territory in late October.

Entire neighborhoods have been demolished, and most of the population has fled. Tens of thousands who remain face shortages of food and water. The WHO said Sunday it has been unable to deliver supplies to northern Gaza for 12 days because of bombardment and the inability to guarantee safe passage with the Israeli military.

Israel still battles what it describes as pockets of militants.

An airstrike early Sunday flattened a four-story home filled with displaced people in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp, killing at least 70, including women and children, according to Mahmoud Bassal, a spokesman for Gaza's civil defense. There was no immediate confirmation from the Health Ministry, which has struggled to operate in the north.

Since the war began, more than 23,000 Palestinians have been killed, about two-thirds of them women and children, and more than 58,000 have been wounded, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The death toll does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the group operates in populated residential areas, but the military almost never comments on the intended target in strikes that kill large numbers of civilians. The military says it has killed some 8,000 militants, without providing evidence, and says 180 of its own soldiers have been killed in the offensive.

SEEKING TO HEAD OFF A WIDER WAR

Blinken focused on preventing the war from spreading as he held talks in Gulf countries and Jordan over the past two days.

For the past three months, both Israel and Hezbollah have sought to limit their cross-border exchanges. Hezbollah appears wary of risking an all-out war that would bring massive destruction to Lebanon.

But last week's killing of Hamas' deputy political leader, Saleh Arouri, in Beirut threatens to throw the two sides into an escalating spiral.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 48 of 75

A Hezbollah rocket barrage hit a sensitive air traffic base Saturday in northern Israel in one of the group's biggest attacks of the war — an "initial response" to Aroui's killing, Hezbollah said.

Israeli leaders say their patience with Hezbollah rocket fire is wearing thin and that if diplomacy doesn't stop it, they are prepared to go to war. They have expressed particular concern about the Radwan Force, the elite Hezbollah unit in which al-Tawil was a commander, which operates along the border.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, visiting troops near the border, vowed to return security to the north. "We prefer that this be done without a wider campaign, but that won't stop us," he said.

Hezbollah began firing rockets shortly after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, saying it aimed to ease pressure on Gaza. Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people in southern Israel that day, mostly civilians, and took some 250 people hostage, over 130 of whom remain in captivity.

In the cross-border exchanges, nearly 200 people have been killed on the Lebanese side, mostly fighters but also 20 civilians. On the Israeli side, five civilians and 12 soldiers have been killed and more than 150 injured. Tens of thousands of people in both countries have been driven from homes near the border.

How an animated character named Marlon could help Trump win Iowa's caucuses

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

SIoux CENTER, Iowa (AP) — Well before Donald Trump takes the stage, a waiting audience of hundreds of supporters sits captivated as dramatic music begins to swell throughout the room. On projector screens, a rotating Planet Earth appears.

"Making America Great Again starts one place on Earth, and one place only," a deep-voiced narrator begins as the image zooms into the middle of the U.S. "Right here in Iowa."

It's the beginning of a nearly three-minute "Schoolhouse Rock!"-like video featuring an animated character named Marlon, who informs viewers of "everything you need to know about how to successfully caucus for President Trump."

The goal is to generate a commanding win for the former president in Iowa's leadoff caucuses on Jan. 15, setting the stage for a romp through the Republican primary and a strong start to the general election campaign. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley are battling for a notable finish in Iowa that could propel one of them to a head-to-head challenge with Trump for the GOP nomination.

Most campaigns use face time at events to encourage Iowans to caucus for the candidate, and they rely on pledge cards with names, addresses and phone numbers to contact supporters again later. But the Trump campaign doesn't wait until after the voters leave the venue — they are filling in any gaps in knowledge of how the caucuses work on site.

The civics lesson, with its easy-to-follow instructions, is a reflection of just how quirky the caucus process is. Unlike primaries, which allow voters to cast their ballots throughout the day, Iowa caucusgoers are required to show up at a specific time — 7 p.m. Central time on the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday — and at a site that may be different from their usual polling place. Caucusgoers also have to stay put for what can be a lengthy process of protocol and supporting speeches.

And it's often cold, sometimes snowing. Below-zero temperatures are forecast across Iowa on caucus day. "We'd love bad weather," Trump said Saturday in Newton, arguing that it will dissuade other candidates' supporters but not his. "My people will walk on glass."

But it's not only the weather that may make it challenging for people to participate.

Marin Curtis, 25, from North Liberty stood in line for a Trump rally in Coralville, but she has never been to a caucus before and she doesn't know much about it. Besides, she said, she has a toddler and might not be able to make it.

Ron Wheeldon, 64, an undecided truck driver from Newton, Iowa, was scoping out candidates at several campaign events, even though he'll have to work the night shift on the day of the caucuses.

And in Sioux Center last month, Steve and Shari Rehder of Hawarden were attending a forum of some

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 49 of 75

major candidates, including DeSantis and Haley. They said they were interested in an alternative to Trump. But whoever they like won't be getting their vote on caucus night — they'll be out of state on vacation.

The get-out-the-vote efforts by Trump's 2024 campaign are a nod to the lessons learned since 2016, when the political novice acknowledged not knowing the first thing about caucuses. Trump finished second to Texas Sen. Ted Cruz that year in Iowa's leadoff voting, though he would go on to win the next three early states, the GOP nomination and ultimately the presidency.

This year, the former president has been touting his lead in national and early state polls, but he has also warned his supporters not to get complacent and says he isn't taking Iowa for granted. In Sioux Center last Friday, he kicked off the first of at least eight "commit to caucus" events and noted he plans to be back in Iowa on caucus day.

"Look, we gotta get out and vote because, you know, bad things happen when you sit back," Trump said, encouraging the crowd to "really show the strength" of support. "We're voting now, but it's going to make a big difference in November."

Wrapped in a blanket waiting in line for Trump's rally, Josie Zeutenhorst, a 20-year-old from Sioux Center who attends Dordt University, said she wanted to hear from Trump in person instead of on TV. She recognizes how much of an impact voters can have on election results but wasn't planning on participating in a caucus.

"I don't know enough, I guess," she said. "I don't really know how it works."

In a follow-up interview after the rally, Zeutenhorst said she found the caucus instructional video "very helpful" and felt more comfortable having learned the process.

"I really am considering it," she said of participating in the caucuses, though she still isn't sure it'll work with her schedule.

Regan Ronning, 52, who attended a Trump rally back in 2016, said the Trump campaign called him a few months ago to ask if he'd be a caucus captain. Now he's door knocking and making phone calls to people in his area.

"Education's a big part of it," he said. Ronning thinks the videos and volunteers help, since some of the people he talks to are confused about what a caucus is. "I just try to tell them what the process is, that it's nothing scary."

Trump's team has said they've held hundreds of trainings for their volunteers and precinct captains, the individuals representing the campaign within a given precinct on caucus night.

The campaign also has had captains prioritize a new assignment — to bring 10 people to the caucuses who have never participated in one before. The campaign has identified several hundred thousand Trump supporters across Iowa who fit the bill.

It's an approach they hope to replicate in the general election, as they seek to chip away at the Biden coalition and win over voters who have generally supported Democrats.

Meanwhile, Trump's competitors are trying to persuade voters in Iowa that the race isn't over yet.

"This is the most impactful vote you can cast. The number of people that go to these caucuses is 150-, 200,000 people," DeSantis told a crowd in Sioux Center last week. "So if you're coming and you bring neighbors or family members, all that, you're packing a big punch."

Trump to return to federal court as judges hear arguments on whether he is immune from prosecution

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump is set to return for the first time in months to the federal courthouse in Washington as an appeals court hears arguments Tuesday on whether the former president is immune from prosecution on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The outcome of the arguments carries enormous ramifications both for the landmark criminal case against Trump and for the broader, and legally untested, question of whether an ex-president can be prosecuted for acts committed in the White House. It will also likely set the stage for further appeals before the U.S.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 50 of 75

Supreme Court, which last month declined a request to weigh in but could still get involved later.

A swift decision is crucial for special counsel Jack Smith and his team, who are eager to get the case — now paused pending the appeal — to trial before the November election. But Trump's lawyers, in addition to seeking to get the case dismissed, are hoping to benefit from a protracted appeals process that could delay the trial well past its scheduled March 4 start date, including until potentially after the election.

Underscoring the importance to both sides, Trump intends to attend Tuesday's arguments even though the Iowa caucuses are just one week away and despite the fact that there's no requirement that defendants appear in person for such proceedings. It will be his first court appearance in Washington, one of four cities where he faces criminal prosecutions and potential trials, since his arraignment in August.

He's already signaling that he could use the appearance to portray himself as the victim of a politicized justice system. Though there's no evidence that President Joe Biden has had any influence on the case, Trump's argument could resonate with Republican voters in Iowa as they prepare to launch the presidential nomination process.

"Of course I was entitled, as President of the United States and Commander in Chief, to Immunity," he wrote in a social media post, adding, "I was looking for voter fraud, and finding it, which is my obligation to do, and otherwise running our Country."

Former presidents enjoy broad immunity from lawsuits for actions taken as part of their official White House duties. But because no former president before Trump has ever been indicted, courts have never before addressed whether that protection extends to criminal prosecution.

Trump's lawyers insist that it does, arguing that courts have no authority to scrutinize a president's official acts and decisions and that the prosecution of their client represents a dramatic departure from more than two centuries of American history that would open the door to future "politically motivated" cases. They filed a similar motion on Monday in another criminal case against Trump in Georgia.

Smith's team has said presidents are not entitled to absolute immunity and that, in any event, the acts Trump is alleged in the indictment to have taken — including scheming to enlist fake electors in battleground states won by Biden and pressing his vice president, Mike Pence, to reject the counting of electoral votes on Jan. 6, 2021 — fall far outside a president's official job duties.

"Immunity from criminal prosecution would be particularly dangerous where, as here, the former President is alleged to have engaged in criminal conduct aimed at overturning the results of a Presidential election to remain in office beyond the allotted term," Smith's team wrote in a brief.

"A President who unlawfully seeks to retain power through criminal means unchecked by potential criminal prosecution could jeopardize both the Presidency itself and the very foundations of our democratic system of governance," they added.

Prosecutors say that if Trump's view of the law were to be accepted, a president could get away with steering a lucrative government contract in exchange for a bribe; instructing the FBI director to plant incriminating evidence on a political enemy; or selling nuclear secrets to a foreign adversary.

The case is being argued in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit before Judges J. Michelle Childs and Florence Pan, both appointees of President Joe Biden, and Karen LeCraft Henderson, who was named to the bench by former President George H.W. Bush.

It's not clear how quickly the panel will rule, though it has signaled that it intends to work fast. The judges requested that both prosecutors and defense lawyers submit briefs in rapid succession last month, including setting filing deadlines on Saturdays.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is presiding over the case, rejected the Trump team arguments, ruling on Dec. 1 that the office of the presidency does not confer a "get-out-of-jail-free pass." Trump's lawyers appealed that decision, but Smith's team, determined to keep the case on schedule, sought to leapfrog the appeals court by asking the Supreme Court to fast-track the immunity question and rule in the government's favor. The justices declined, without explanation, to get involved.

The appeal is vital to a broader Trump strategy of trying to postpone the election subversion case until after the November election, when a victory could empower him to order the Justice Department to

abandon the prosecution or even to seek a pardon for himself. He faces three other criminal cases, in both state and federal court, though the Washington case is scheduled for trial first.

Trump's lawyers have also cited a constitutional provision against double jeopardy in arguing for immunity, saying that the case concerns similar conduct for which he has already been impeached by the House of Representatives but acquitted by the Senate.

Smith's team has said there's no bar against prosecutors charging someone who's been impeached and acquitted in the Congress, and note their charges are not identical to the ones that Trump faced in his impeachment proceedings.

Explosion at historic Texas hotel injures 21 and scatters debris in downtown Fort Worth

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — An explosion at a historic Texas hotel in Fort Worth on Monday blew out windows, littered downtown streets with large sections of debris from the building and injured 21 people, including one who was in critical condition, authorities said.

The blast flung doors and entire sections of wall onto the road in front of the 20-story hotel, where authorities said rescue crews found several people trapped in the basement. Fifteen people were taken to hospitals, including six whose conditions were described as "semi-critical" by MedStar, which provides ambulances and emergency medical services in Fort Worth.

Authorities did not indicate anyone was missing but fire officials said late Monday that they would continue searching the building.

More than two dozen rooms were occupied at the Sandman Signature Hotel at the time, officials said. Authorities said they believe a gas leak caused the explosion — which happened in the middle of the afternoon at the start of the workweek — and said the hotel had been undergoing construction.

"There was debris. There was insulation. There was office furniture," Charlie Collier, 31, told The Associated Press. He was working nearby when he said he saw a large flash and what sounded like thunder.

"Everything that was in the first couple floors of the building was blown out all over the street," he said.

The Sandman Signature Hotel is in a busy area of downtown about one block from the Fort Worth Convention Center. Footage from news helicopters showed firefighters picking their way through the piles of drywall, shattered glass and mangled metal that coated the street outside the hotel. Authorities urged people to avoid the area.

Craig Trojacek, a spokesman for the Fort Worth Fire Department, said a restaurant in the building had been under construction but said it was not definitive that is where the blast occurred.

Rebecca Martinez was among those in nearby buildings who recalled hearing a loud crack and seeing a wall of dust and debris sweep through the city streets. Stepping outside to see what happened, she came upon a man and a woman leaned up against a fire hydrant.

"The man was all bloody, his face was all bloody," Martinez said. "Then I started smelling natural gas, real intense and I thought, 'I might need to get away from here.'"

Moments later, she said, authorities evacuated her building and some of the surrounding neighborhood.

Paula Snider, a delivery driver for UPS, was doing a pickup nearby when she said she heard a large boom and saw a puff of black smoke. A large piece of metal grating landed under her truck and another dropped nearby.

"I jumped out and took off running," she said.

A grey haze covered normally busy streets of downtown Fort Worth as firefighters walked through layers of debris. Remnants of the building lay scattered across the street and over parked vehicles, and gaping holes could be seen on the ground.

Trojacek said investigators were working with federal investigators to determine the cause of the blast. The scene had left rescue teams unable to immediately reach some parts of the building.

"We had reports of people trapped down in the basement, and because of the explosion that took place,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 52 of 75

some of those access areas were either covered up or it didn't feel safe at that point to get people down into," Trojacek said.

Technicians from Atmos Energy, a Dallas-based natural gas distributor, were examining the blast site Monday. A spokesperson for the Railroad Commission of Texas, the state's oil and gas regulator, said an agency inspector was also on the scene and working with local authorities.

Northland Properties Co., the Canadian company that owns the hotel, said in a statement that it was working with officials to determine how the explosion occurred and how much damage it caused.

"The safety and well-being of our team members and guests is our priority," the company said. "We are working with those who have been injured to fully support them at this time."

According to the hotel website, the Sandman Signature Fort Worth Downtown Hotel has 245 rooms and was built in 1920 as the "Waggoner Building," named after cattle rancher and oilman William Thomas Waggoner. The building has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1979.

At trial, a Russian billionaire blames Sotheby's for losing millions on art by Picasso, da Vinci

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Sotheby's defended itself at a trial Monday against accusations that it helped defraud a Russian oligarch out of tens of millions of dollars, saying it knew nothing of wrongdoing by an art buyer who advised the billionaire on buying works by famed artists like Amedeo Modigliani and Leonardo da Vinci.

Sotheby's attorney Sara Shudofsky told a jury in an opening statement in Manhattan federal court that billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev was "trying to make an innocent party pay for what somebody else did to him."

Shudofsky said the fertilizer magnate, a savvy businessman who has run highly successful businesses, had "good reason to be angry with himself" after spending hundreds of millions of dollars to buy art masterpieces without taking "the most basic steps" to protect himself from a broker who cheated him.

"Sotheby's didn't know anything about those lies," the attorney said. "Sotheby's had no knowledge of and didn't participate in any misconduct."

She spoke after Rybolovlev's lawyer, Daniel Kornstein, insisted that a London-based Sotheby's executive was part of a group of executives who were in on an elaborate fraud.

"As a result of participating in the fraud, Sotheby's made a lot of money," Kornstein said. "Sotheby's had choices, but they chose greed."

The trial is likely to provide a window into how high-stakes transactions involving art enthusiasts worldwide develop and their importance to the operations of auction houses that rely heavily on their reputations as they match up some of the world's wealthiest investors.

Rybolovlev, 57, who bought a Palm Beach mansion from Donald Trump for about \$95 million in 2008, is expected to testify. In 2016, as Trump readied himself to become president, he called the deal "the closest I came to Russia" when he was questioned about his ties to the country.

In one order last March, Judge Jesse M. Furman urged lawyers to work toward a settlement to avert a trial that would be "expensive, risky, and potentially embarrassing to both sides."

The case stems from \$2 billion Rybolovlev spent from 2002 to 2014 to acquire a world-class art collection through purchases by two of his companies: Accent Delight International Limited and Xitrans Finance Limited.

To carry out the purchases for Rybolovlev's home in Geneva, Switzerland, he relied heavily on Yves Bouvier, an art broker who claimed he could save Rybolovlev money by handling negotiations for art in return for a 2% commission, Kornstein said.

Before long, Bouvier became such a trusted friend of the billionaire that he attended small birthday parties for Rybolovlev and his daughter and joined him at soccer matches, the lawyer said.

"Bouvier turned out to be a con man" who bought works of art from Sotheby's and sometimes nearly doubled the price before he resold the art to Rybolovlev, Kornstein said.

"If you're the buyer and operating in darkness, you have no way of learning that unless the auction

house knows about it and can help you out," he said.

In all, Bouvier pocketed \$164 million through his "secret markups" and another \$6.4 million by collecting his 2% commission, Kornstein said.

The lawyer told jurors to look at documents including emails that "don't lie" and would prove that auction house executives knew what was happening. He urged them to ignore what he predicted would be "fairy tales" from Sotheby's witnesses.

A message sent to a lawyer for Bouvier to seek comment on the accusations against him and a settlement Bouvier reached with Rybolovlev several weeks ago in a Swiss court was returned with the message that it had been forwarded to Bouvier's representative.

In all, Rybolovlev had accused Bouvier of defrauding him through sales of 38 art pieces, including Picasso's "Homme Assis au Verre" and Rodin's "Le Baiser," "L'Éternel Printemps" and "Eve," but the judge last year disqualified from the trial many of the dozen or so works bought in private sales through Sotheby's on various legal grounds.

Among the four works at issue in the trial was de Vinci's "Salvator Mundi," a depiction of Christ as "Saviour of the World," which Bouvier bought from Sotheby's for \$83 million, only to resell it to Rybolovlev for over \$127 million, which Kornstein said was a "secret markup" of over \$44 million.

In 2017, Rybolovlev arranged for Christie's to sell it and it went for a historic \$450 million, becoming the most expensive painting ever sold at auction.

Other artworks that Kornstein said involved improper markups that will be addressed at the trial were a Modigliani sculpture and paintings by Gustav Klimt and Rene Magritte.

In 2018, Rybolovlev was included on a list that the Trump administration released of 114 Russian politicians and oligarchs it said were linked to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

However, he was not included on a list of Russian oligarchs sanctioned after Russia attacked Ukraine, and Kornstein told the jury that his client hasn't lived in Russia in 30 years.

Video of 73-year-old boarded up inside his apartment sparks investigation

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

HARVEY, Ill. (AP) — Rudolph Williams says he was home in a Chicago suburb when he realized the doors and windows to his courtyard-style apartment had been boarded up with plywood, locking him inside.

"I didn't know exactly what was going on," the 73-year-old said Monday in describing how he tried to open his blocked door. "What the hell?"

His story — chronicled by his nephew on now-viral videos — has generated a firestorm of criticism about rental conditions at the dilapidated low-income apartment complex in Harvey, Illinois. People are also debating who's to blame; and Mayor Christopher Clark has promised an investigation.

City officials, residents, property owners and the property management company have conflicting accounts about what happened Friday at the 30-unit complex roughly 30 miles (48.28 kilometers) south of Chicago.

It started that afternoon when crews without any logos on their clothing or vehicles started boarding up units. Residents say they weren't warned and that the workers ignored residents telling them people were still inside. City officials say police were on site earlier in the day and performed well-being checks, but not when units were set to be boarded up. The property owners say the tenants claims about residents being boarded inside are false, and the property managers say the units were empty before they started boarding up units at the city's direction.

No injuries were reported.

Genevieve Tyler, who said she was recently laid off from her meat factory job, was home when she heard noises outside and ran for a second door in her apartment looking to escape because she thought it was a break-in. That's when she said she came upon crews boarding up her windows.

"I feel sick," she said, adding that she was too scared to return home for two days. "I'm still sad."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 54 of 75

The complex, which is in clear disrepair, has been on the city's radar for months.

One of the two buildings has no heat, with residents using stoves and space heaters to keep warm. A set of stairs has collapsed and is blocked to pedestrians. There is garbage everywhere: broken furniture, a large dumbbell and liquor bottles.

There have also been numerous safety issues involving drugs and crime. Police were called to the property more than 300 times last year, according to Harvey Police Chief Cameron Biddings.

City officials say the property owners, identified by the city as Jay Patel and Henry Cho, were warned about the unsafe conditions and urged to make changes. The owners were then notified that people had to evacuate by Oct. 28 and had to let residents know.

However, only some residents say they got the message. Others who were notified say they were skeptical of the documents' legitimacy. Some got letters on official city letterhead saying they had to leave due to the safety risk, while others received papers from the property managers that said the building would be shut down.

James Williams, Rudolph's nephew, who lives with him at the property, said a bunch of notices were strewn around the courtyard.

He and other people on site helped free his uncle from the apartment Friday evening, partly by using a drill, he said.

In a joint statement emailed late Monday, the property owners dismissed the residents' "viral allegations." The owners said they tried to negotiate more time with the city for renters to stay and aimed to have required repairs finished by March for the building to reopen.

The owners hired property management company, Chicago Style Management, in November.

Tim Harstead with Chicago Style Management disputed Williams' account, saying crews found one unauthorized person who left before they started boarding up units.

"A lot of people in that area are squatters and trying to stay there," he said.

On Monday, Mayor Clark and other city officials toured the complex, which lies off a busy street in the community of 20,000.

In a series of interviews, Clark reluctantly acknowledged that people were still inside their units when the apartments started being shuttered, but he said he wanted to hear directly from residents rather than via social media videos.

The city played no role in boarding up the apartments, he said, pledging that city police would investigate and might turn the matter over to the state's attorney or Illinois attorney general. Criticism of the city on social media was misdirected, he said.

"It's horrible," Clark said. "What's even more horrible is the fact that they would attribute that to people who are trying to actually help the situation versus the people who actually put them in this situation."

At least one city official, Alderman Tyrone Rogers, told media outlets over the weekend that residents' claims were a "total exaggeration." He did not return messages Monday from The Associated Press.

Some residents, including 34-year-old Loren Johnson, left last month. He said the shutdown notice scared him off as did the broken heating and criminal activity.

"They don't do anything, but they take full rent," he said of the landlords.

Roughly half a dozen residents remained on Monday, saying they look out for each other.

Mary Brooks, 66, lives in one of the few apartments that wasn't boarded up.

She described herself as a cancer survivor with mental health issues who has nowhere else to go. She also said she has tried to reach city officials multiple times about the complex over her nearly four years of living there, a complaint she shared with the mayor when he visited her at home Monday.

"Nobody pays attention to the poor," she said. "Nobody cares until something happens."

Moon landing attempt by US company appears doomed after 'critical' fuel leak

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The first U.S. moon landing attempt in more than 50 years appeared to be doomed after a private company's spacecraft developed a "critical" fuel leak just hours after Monday's launch.

Pittsburgh-based Astrobotic Technology managed to orient its lander toward the sun so the solar panel could collect sunlight and charge its battery, as a special team assessed the status of what was termed "a failure in the propulsion system."

It soon became apparent, however, that there was "a critical loss of fuel," further dimming hope for what had been a planned moon landing on Feb. 23.

Late Monday, the company said the leak was continuing and estimated that the lander would start losing solar power in about 40 hours.

The trouble was reported about seven hours after Monday's predawn liftoff from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. United Launch Alliance's Vulcan rocket provided the lift for Astrobotic's lander, named Peregrine, putting it on a long, roundabout path to the moon.

A propulsion system problem "threatens the ability of the spacecraft to soft land on the moon," the company said. The lander is equipped with engines and thrusters for maneuvering, not only during the cruise to the moon but for lunar descent.

Astrobotic released a photo from a lander-mounted camera, which the company said showed a "disturbance" in a section of thermal insulation. That aligns with what is known so far of the problem, the company said.

Astrobotic was aiming to be the first private business to successfully land on the moon, something only four countries have accomplished. A second lander from a Houston company is due to launch next month. NASA gave the two companies millions to build and fly their own lunar landers.

The space agency wants the privately owned landers to scope out the place before astronauts arrive while delivering tech and science experiments for the space agency, other countries and universities as well as odds and ends for other customers. Astrobotic's contract with NASA for the Peregrine lander was \$108 million and it has more in the pipeline.

Before the flight, NASA's Joel Kearns, deputy associate administrator for exploration, noted that while using private companies to make deliveries to the moon will be cheaper and quicker than going the usual government route, there will be added risk. He stressed that the space agency was willing to accept that risk, noting Monday: "Each success and setback are opportunities to learn and grow."

The last time the U.S. launched a moon-landing mission was in December 1972. Apollo 17's Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt became the 11th and 12th men to walk on the moon, closing out an era that has remained NASA's pinnacle.

The space agency's new Artemis program — named after the twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology — looks to return astronauts to the moon's surface within the next few years. First will be a lunar fly-around with four astronauts, possibly before the end of the year.

Highlighting Monday's moonshot was the long-delayed initial test flight of the Vulcan rocket. The 202-foot (61-meter) rocket is essentially an upgraded version of ULA's hugely successful workhorse Atlas V, which is being phased out along with the company's Delta IV. Jeff Bezos' rocket company, Blue Origin, provided the Vulcan's two main engines.

ULA declared success once the lander was free of the rocket's upper stage, nearly an hour into the flight and before the spacecraft's propulsion system malfunctioned and prevented the solar panel from properly pointing toward the sun.

Landing on the moon has long been a series of hits and misses. The Soviet Union and the U.S. racked up a string of successful moon landings in the 1960s and 70s, before putting touchdowns on pause. China joined the elite club in 2013 and India in 2023. But last year also saw landers from Russia and a private

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 56 of 75

Japanese company slam into the moon. An Israeli nonprofit crashed in 2019.

Next month, SpaceX will provide the lift for a lander from Intuitive Machines. The Houston company's Nova-C lander takes a more direct one-week route to the moon.

Besides flying experiments for NASA, Astrobotic drummed up its own freight business, packing the 6-foot-tall (1.9-meter-tall) Peregrine lander. On board the lander: a chip of rock from Mount Everest, toy-size cars from Mexico and ashes and DNA of deceased space enthusiasts, including "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry and science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke.

The Navajo Nation recently sought to have the launch delayed because of the human remains. saying it would be a "profound desecration" of a celestial body revered by Native Americans. Astrobotic chief executive John Thornton said the December objections came too late but promised to try to find "a good path forward" with the Navajo for future missions.

One of the spaceflight memorial companies that bought room on the lander, Celestis, said in a statement that no single culture or religion owns the moon and should not be able to veto a mission. More remains are on the rocket's upper stage, which was boosted into a perpetual orbit around the sun reaching as far out as Mars.

Cargo fares for Peregrine ranged from a few hundred dollars to \$1.2 million per kilogram (2.2 pounds), not nearly enough for Astrobotic to break even. But for the first flight, that's not the point, according to Thornton.

"A lot of people's dreams and hopes are riding on this," Thornton said days before the flight.

Alaska Airlines' decision not to ground Boeing jet despite warning signs comes under scrutiny

By DAVID KOENIG, TOM KRISHER and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The decision by Alaska Airlines to stop flying one of its planes over the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii due to warnings from a cabin-pressurization system — yet keep flying it over land — is raising questions about whether the jet should have been in the air at all.

The nation's top accident investigator says warning lights were triggered on three flights, including each of the two days before the brand-new Boeing 737 Max 9 suffered a terrifying fuselage blowout Friday night. A plug covering a spot left for an emergency door tore off the plane as it flew 16,000 feet (4,800 meters) above Oregon.

Jennifer Homendy, chair of the National Transportation Safety Board, said maintenance crews checked the plane and cleared it to fly — but the airline decided not to use it for the long route to Hawaii over water so that it "could return very quickly to an airport" if the warning light reappeared.

Friday's flight was headed from Oregon to Southern California, and made it back to Portland without serious injury to any of the 171 passengers and six crew members. But the decision to allow it to fly over land in the first place struck some aviation experts as illogical.

"If you are afraid to take the airplane far from land, what is the reason for that? That has to be answered by Alaska Airlines," said Steven Wallace, an air-safety consultant and commercial pilot who once headed accident investigations for the Federal Aviation Administration.

The FAA grounded all Max 9s operated by Alaska and United and some flown by foreign airlines for inspection after the Friday night flight. The inspections are focused on plugs used to seal an area set aside for extra emergency doors that are not required on United and Alaska Max 9s.

Monday afternoon, United Airlines said it found loose bolts and other "installation issues" on door plugs that were inspected after the Alaska Airlines incident.

"Since we began preliminary inspections on Saturday, we have found instances that appear to relate to installation issues in the door plug — for example, bolts that needed additional tightening," Chicago-based United said.

Boeing, which has had its own share of problems with various planes over the years, pledged to "help address any and all findings" that airlines make during their inspections.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 57 of 75

The FAA declined to comment on whether the Alaska Airlines plane in question should have been allowed to keep flying. The agency said "it would be premature" to comment while the NTSB is investigating the Friday night flight.

Seattle-based Alaska Airlines also declined to comment, saying it would need permission from the NTSB to discuss the plane and its maintenance history. "We will provide information as soon as the NTSB permits us to do so," the airline said.

Alan Diehl, a former crash investigator for both the NTSB and the Federal Aviation Administration, said Alaska should have grounded the plane, period. However, he and other critics said the decision to stop flying the plane to Hawaii might have averted a disaster.

If the blowout had happened halfway to Hawaii, pilots would have been forced to fly low enough so passengers could breathe without oxygen masks, which burns more fuel. And the gaping hole in the fuselage would create drag. The plane might have run out of fuel before reaching land, experts said.

"As far as I'm concerned, there's an angel in Alaska," Diehl said. "Whoever made the decision to do that probably saved a lot of lives."

Other aviation insiders saw nothing unusual in the airline's decision to limit but not ground the plane after the pressurization warnings on flights Dec. 7, Jan 3 and Jan. 4 — the day before the blowout.

"Whatever maintenance they performed on it, (they decided) 'Let's be conservative and not put this thing out over water,'" said John Cox, a former airline pilot and now a safety consultant. He said the intermittent nature of the pressurization warnings — three out of the plane's 145 flights — might have made them suspect a bad sensor or something else.

It's not clear whether the airline would have been required to report the warning lights to the FAA or the fact that it had limited the plane to flying over land. Wallace said rules about such reporting aren't specific.

Homendy, the NTSB chair, cautioned that the pressurization warning light might be unrelated to Friday's incident, which occurred as the plane cruised about 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) over Oregon.

On Monday, the FAA approved guidelines for inspecting the door plugs on other Max 9 jets and repairing them, if necessary. That move could speed the return to service of the 171 planes that the FAA grounded.

Alaska has 64 other Max 9s, and United Airlines owns 79 of them. No other U.S. airlines operate that model.

The NTSB said the lost door plug was found Sunday near Portland in the back yard of a home.

At a news conference Sunday night, Homendy said an explosive rush of air damaged several rows of seats and pulled insulation from the walls. The cockpit door flew open and banged into a lavatory door.

Two cellphones that appeared to have belonged to passengers on Friday's flight were found on the ground. One was discovered in a yard, the other on the side of a road. Both were turned over to the NTSB.

Grounding 171 of 218 Max 9s in operation, including all those used by Alaska and United, led to flight cancellations at both carriers.

Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun called a companywide webcast to talk about the incident with employees and senior leadership for Tuesday.

Alaska Airlines flight 1282 took off from Portland at 5:07 p.m. Friday for a two-hour trip to Ontario, California. About six minutes later, the chunk of fuselage blew out.

Videos posted online by passengers showed a gaping hole where the paneled-over door had been. They applauded when the plane landed safely about 13 minutes after the blowout. Firefighters came down the aisle, asking passengers to remain in their seats as they treated the injured.

It was extremely lucky that the airplane had not yet reached cruising altitude, when passengers and flight attendants might be walking around the cabin, Homendy said.

The Max is the newest version of Boeing's venerable 737, a twin-engine, single-aisle plane frequently used on U.S. domestic flights. The model went into service in May 2017.

Two Max 8 jets crashed in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people. All Max 8 and Max 9 planes were grounded worldwide for nearly two years until Boeing made changes to an automated flight control system implicated in the crashes.

The Max has been plagued by other issues, including manufacturing flaws.

Parents of Iowa teen who killed 1 and wounded 7 in shooting say they had 'no inkling' of his plan

By JOSH FUNK and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

The parents of the 17-year-old who killed a sixth grader and wounded seven others in a shooting at his small-town Iowa high school last week said in a statement Monday that they "had no inkling he intended the horrible violence he was about to inflict."

Dylan Butler's parents said in the statement that they are cooperating with investigators as they try "to provide answers to the question of why our son committed this senseless crime."

"As the minutes and hours have passed since the horrors our son Dylan inflicted on the victims, the Perry School and the community, we have been trying to make sense out of the senseless," Jack and Erin Butler said in the statement. "We are simply devastated and our grief for the deceased, his family, the wounded and their families is immeasurable."

Dylan Butler took his own life after killing one student and wounding Perry High School's principal, two other staff members and four other students on the first day of classes after winter break, leaving some with significant injuries. The family of 11-year-old Ahmir Jolliff is planning to hold his funeral Thursday — one week after the shooting happened.

Investigators have said they are reviewing reams of electronic and physical evidence they've gathered and are interviewing dozens of witnesses to better understand what happened and why. The Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, which is taking the lead in this case, didn't release any updates on the shooting Monday.

An FBI spokesperson said the agency didn't receive any tips or information concerning Dylan Butler through its National Threat Operations Center before the shooting.

Also on Monday, several hundred students and other protesters marched on the state Capitol in Des Moines about 40 miles (64 kilometers) away from Perry to push for tighter gun control laws in the state.

The Butlers said they were grateful for the "grace we have been shown in public and private" since the shooting. There has been an outpouring of support for the family, with some residents offering support on the town Facebook group and volunteers offering to bring them meals.

Scouts in town spent the weekend gathering teddy bears to give to Perry elementary school students as residents eagerly ordered "Perry Stong" T-shirts, car decals and yard signs as they collected money to pay for the medical needs of the shooting victims. At the same time, Dylan's family is being remembered, too. Even by the slain student's family.

In an interview with the Associated Press Friday night, the first words Ahmir's mother, Erica Jolliff, said were mourning the boy who killed her son.

"We send our condolences to the family of Dylan, they're in our prayers and we're truly sorry for his loss as well," she said

Erin Owen, who is the administrator of the town Facebook page and is organizing a fundraiser for the victims, said there has been some pushback in the community to the show of support for the Butler family, but most people accept it.

"I think that there might be some narrow tunnel vision at first. And then as the community kind of chimes in and gives it a different perspective, then it's more widely received." She stressed: "They're suffering loss as well."

The families of school shooters are often villainized, questioned over signs they might have missed that something was amiss.

In Michigan, the parents of a teenager who killed four students at Oxford High School are facing involuntary manslaughter charges. James and Jennifer Crumbley are accused of making a gun accessible to Ethan Crumbley at home and ignoring his mental health needs.

And in the 2012 Sandy Hook School massacre, Nancy Lanza, who legally purchased guns found at the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 59 of 75

scene, is usually excluded from the count of the slain. Her son, Adam Lanza, killed her before fatally shooting 20 first-graders and six educators.

One issue is the growing movement to deny mass killers notoriety after their deaths, limiting the use of their names and images, so posthumous fame won't be a motivating factor for future killings.

Owen thinks it is more pragmatic than some broader statement on forgiveness. Perry has about 8,000 residents, making it small enough that most people were touched somehow, and she said the town has seen other tragic deaths of children in recent years, preparing the community to respond to this tragedy.

Even those not directly affected, either knew someone with a child at the school or were close to Dylan's family. His father is director of the city's airport after serving as its public works director for years, where he won praise helping clean up Perry after a devastating wind storm in 2020. His mother has also owned a small business and served on a city development board.

"Everybody in town knows them and they're the sweetest people and everybody's hurting so everybody is at least trying to come together on a common ground," said Audi Sorber, who signed up to bring a meal next Monday.

The US and UK say Bangladesh's elections extending Hasina's rule were not credible

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — The United States and the United Kingdom said the elections that extended Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rule were not credible, free and fair.

Both countries, which have trade and development ties with Bangladesh, also condemned political violence that preceded Sunday's election in which Hasina's party won more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats while turnout was low and the main opposition party boycotted.

"The United States remains concerned by the arrests of thousands of political opposition members and by reports of irregularities on elections day. The United States shares the view with other observers that these elections were not free or fair and we regret that not all parties participated," State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller said from Washington.

He urged Bangladesh's government to credibly investigate reports of violence and hold those responsible accountable.

The U.K. said the democratic standards were not met consistently in the lead-up to the election.

"Democratic elections depend on credible, open, and fair competition. Respect for human rights, rule of law and due process are essential elements of the democratic process. These standards were not consistently met during the election period. We are concerned at the significant number of arrests of opposition party members before polling day," the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said in the statement.

The U.S. statement said it remains "committed to partnering with Bangladesh to advance our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, to supporting human rights and civil society in Bangladesh, and to deepening our people-to-people and economic ties."

Bangladesh is an important partner of the U.S. interest in the Indo-Pacific region along with neighboring India amid growing influence of China.

China, Russia, India and some other countries congratulated Hasina for the victory and pledged to continue to partner with the South Asian nation.

The statements came after Hasina said at a news conference Monday that the elections were free and fair.

Her ruling Awami League won 222 seats of 299 contested. Independent candidates took 62, while the Jatiya Party, the third largest, took 11 seats and three smaller parties got 3 seats. The result in one seat remained undeclared. The election of one seat was postponed because a candidate died.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and its allies boycotted the election, and voter turnout was a low 41.8%. While election day was relatively calm, a wave of violence preceded the vote.

Zia's party said more than 20,000 supporters had been arrested since Oct. 28 when an anti-government rally turned violent in Dhaka. The government disputed the figures and said arrests were for specific charges such as arson and vandalism.

Bangladesh has a history of political violence, military coups and assassinations. Hasina and Zia governed the country alternately for many years, cementing a feud that has since polarized Bangladesh's politics and fueled violence around elections. This year's vote raised questions over its credibility when there are no major challengers to take on the incumbent.

White House, Pentagon will review Defense Secretary Austin's lack of disclosure on his hospital stay

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, SEUNG MIN KIM and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Both the White House and Pentagon said Monday they would look into why President Joe Biden and other top officials weren't informed for days that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had been hospitalized. A Pentagon spokesman pointed to one reason: A key staffer was out sick with the flu.

Even as the Biden administration pledged to look into what rules or procedures weren't followed, it maintained its silence about why Austin has been hospitalized for a week. Late Monday, the Pentagon issued an update saying Austin "is recovering well."

Some Republicans have demanded Austin's resignation, but the Pentagon said he has no plans to step down.

Austin, 70, went to the hospital on Dec. 22 for what the Pentagon press secretary called an "elective procedure" but one serious enough that Austin temporarily transferred some of his authorities to his deputy, without telling her or other U.S. leaders why. He went home the following day.

He also transferred some of his authorities to Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks after experiencing severe pain and being taken back to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center by ambulance and put into intensive care on Jan. 1. The White House was not informed he was in the hospital until Jan. 4.

Austin, who resumed his duties on Jan. 5, is no longer in intensive care. Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, said his prognosis is "good" but it is not known when he will be released.

The Pentagon said Austin has continued to receive briefings and make calls to senior leaders. On Monday, he spoke to national security adviser Jake Sullivan and got briefings from Hicks; Gen. Erik Kurilla, his top general in the Middle East; and the Joint Chiefs chairman, Gen. CQ Brown Jr.

The failure to properly inform government and defense leaders will be the subject of what John Kirby, the National Security Council spokesman, called a "hotwash" to see if procedures need to be changed.

Kirby, speaking to reporters on Air Force One as Biden traveled to South Carolina, said there is an "expectation" among members of Biden's Cabinet that if one of them is hospitalized, "that will be notified up the chain of command."

Monday night the Pentagon announced in a memo it would review how authorities are transferred and specifically focus on the events and decisions surrounding Austin's hospitalization, to ensure that in the future, "proper and timely notification has been made to the President and White House and, as appropriate, the United States Congress and the American public."

The late Monday memo also vastly expands the circle of people who will be notified in future transfers of authority. During the week of Austin's hospitalization, Hicks and her staff received the transfer of authority notification through email, but it was limited to them and without explanation.

Going forward, any time authority is transferred a wider swath of officials will also be notified, to include the Pentagon's general counsel, the chairman and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Combatant Commanders, service secretaries, the service chiefs of staff, the White House Situation Room, and the senior staff of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense.

On Monday, Ryder acknowledged that he and other public affairs and defense aides were told Jan. 2 that Austin had been hospitalized but did not make it public and did not tell the military service leaders or the National Security Council until Jan. 4.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 61 of 75

"I want to offer my apologies and my pledge to learn from this experience, and I will do everything I can to meet the standard that you expect from us," he said.

Ryder said staff in Austin's front office will review notification procedures, including whether regulations, rules or laws were broken, and will take steps to improve the notification process. Those staff members, however, are among those who did not disclose the secretary's hospitalization.

Austin has taken responsibility for the delays in notification.

"I recognize I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit to doing better," he said, acknowledging the concerns about transparency, in a statement he issued Saturday. "But this is important to say: this was my medical procedure, and I take full responsibility for my decisions about disclosure."

Ryder provided some more detail on who knew about the hospitalization and when they were told.

He said when Austin was taken back to the hospital on Jan. 1 he "was conscious but in quite a bit of pain." He spent that evening undergoing tests and evaluation. The next day, "due to the secretary's condition and on the basis of medical advice," some authorities were transferred to Hicks through a standard email notification that often does not provide the reason for transfer, Ryder said.

Hicks, who was in Puerto Rico, was not told the reason for the transfer of authorities until Jan. 4.

Ryder said Austin's chief of staff, senior military adviser and the Joint Chiefs chairman were notified of the defense secretary's hospitalization on Jan. 2.

Ryder said the chief of staff, Kelly Magsamen, did not inform the White House because she had the flu. He said Magsamen told Hicks on Jan. 4 and they began drafting a public statement and developing plans to notify government and congressional officials that day.

But the congressional notifications did not begin until the evening of Jan. 5, just minutes before the Pentagon issued its first public statement on Austin's status.

Asked who approved the U.S. military strike in Baghdad that killed a militia leader on Jan. 4, Ryder said it was pre-approved by Austin and the White House before Austin was hospitalized.

Sen. Jack Reed, a Democrat from Rhode Island who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, and the only member of Congress Austin contacted about his hospitalization, called it a "serious incident" and said there needs to be accountability from the Pentagon.

New York Rep. Elise Stefanik and Sen. J.D. Vance of Ohio, and Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas, all Republicans, have called for Austin to resign. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell did not answer when asked if Austin should resign.

"This lack of disclosure must never happen again," Reed said in a statement. "I am tracking the situation closely and the Department of Defense is well aware of my interest in any and all relevant information."

Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois said letters requesting additional information from Austin are being sent.

"There's a lot of pressure," Durbin said. "It's not over by a longshot."

Still, White House officials on Monday emphasized that Austin retains Biden's confidence. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden appreciated Austin's statement on Saturday, in which he took responsibility for the lack of transparency.

"There is no plan for anything other than for Secretary Austin to stay in the job and continue the leadership that he's been demonstrating," Kirby said.

Hong Kongers in Taiwan firmly support the ruling party after watching China erode freedoms at home

By KANIS LEUNG and JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — As Taiwan's presidential election approaches, many immigrants from Hong Kong, witnesses to the alarming erosion of civil liberties at home, are supporting the ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

Beijing's crackdown on dissent in the financial hub has cemented their preference for a party committed

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 62 of 75

to preserving Taiwan's de facto independence and democratic values ahead of the Jan. 13 vote.

While Taiwanese immigration policies have been less welcoming than some from Hong Kong anticipated, most remain steadfast in their support for the DPP, largely due to the party's firm stance on autonomy from Beijing, according to interviews with 10 Hong Kongers, over half of whom moved to Taiwan after the 2019 anti-government protests.

Hong Tsun-ming, a protester who feared arrest and moved to Taiwan in 2019, told The Associated Press he looks forward to having a taste of deciding its fate. The election is a cherished voting opportunity he never had in Hong Kong, where the chief executive is picked by a predominantly pro-Beijing committee. He plans to support the DPP.

Hong has thrown himself into local politics, committed to sharing lessons from Hong Kong.

"It's to remind Taiwan not to follow the old path of Hong Kong," said Hong, member of the pro-independence Taiwan Statebuilding Party, which did not field candidates in the presidential race.

Following Beijing's imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong in 2020, Taiwan has stood out as a haven for free speech and liberties in the Chinese-speaking world. Over the last three years, tens of thousands of Hong Kongers have migrated to the self-ruled island, many dismayed by the rapid erosion of freedoms that had been promised to remain intact for 50 years in the former British colony after returning to Chinese rule in 1997.

As these immigrants establish new lives in Taiwan, some confront a reality tinged with frustration. Taiwan's concerns over security risks posed by China, which views the island as a renegade province, have complicated application procedures. That has resulted in residency denials for some, particularly those who worked in government-funded entities or companies with strong ties to Chinese businesses. The opacity and protracted process of securing permanent residency have also drawn criticism.

From January 2020 to November 2023, over 37,100 Hong Kongers secured temporary residency, Taiwan's National Immigration Agency reported. Just 5,700 others obtained permanent residency.

Alvin Tam, a first-time voter in the presidential election, was "a bit" disappointed with the DPP-led government after discovering the obstacles his fellow Hong Kongers face in Taiwan. But Tam, a forest therapist who settled in 2018, acknowledged the political factors involved.

He said national security and economic policy direction are his top considerations in voting for a president, and that led him to support the DPP's ticket of Vice President William Lai and his running mate Bi-khim Hsiao, the former Taiwanese representative to the United States.

"Given our deep-seated resentment stemming from the troubles back home, I can't see myself supporting any political party that is close with China," he said.

Taiwan, with a population of 23 million, has never been governed by the People's Republic of China. But the mainland's ruling Communist Party insists on unification with Taiwan, by force if necessary.

China has warned that "'Taiwan independence' means war." Still, many Taiwan residents are undisturbed by that threat.

The DPP, which favors maintaining de facto independence, has led opponents in most polls. Its primary competitor, the Nationalist Party — also known as the Kuomintang or KMT — concurs with Beijing that both sides belong to a single Chinese nation. Another opponent, the smaller Taiwan People's Party, has advocated resuming dialogue with China.

New immigrant Catherine Lui is unfazed by China's bellicose talk. Lui moved to Taiwan through an investment immigration scheme in 2022, seeking greater freedoms. She was impressed by President Tsai Ing-wen's support for Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement in 2019 and found resonance with the DPP's commitment to democracy and freedom.

Four years ago, Tsai leveraged the Hong Kong protests as an argument against the "one country, two systems" framework that China uses to rule Hong Kong and has suggested for Taiwan. The turmoil in Hong Kong, 720 kilometers (450 miles) away, fortified Tsai's campaign and played a significant role in her re-election.

Although Lui is not yet eligible to vote, she plans to support Lai by attending his campaign rally in Taipei

and has been exploring the island's vibrant political culture.

"If someone doesn't like Tsai Ing-wen, people are free to use very harsh words," she said. "That's impressive."

Bennis So, professor in the department of public administration at Taiwan's National Chengchi University, said even though the DPP has its imperfections, many new Hong Kong immigrants tend to favor the ruling party, driven by concerns that the main opposition party's immigration policies might be less favorable to them if it comes to power.

But the influence of Hong Kongers on the election outcome is likely to be limited as they make up a small percentage of the electorate, So said. Taiwan's total electorate is an estimated 19.5 million. Official data indicate that from 2015 to 2022, 10,440 immigrants from Hong Kong and the neighboring casino hub of Macao have secured voting rights.

Some from Hong Kong are already actively engaged in Taiwan's political landscape.

At 72, Chui Pak-tai, a former Hong Kong pro-democracy district councilor who secured Taiwan residency 11 years ago, is running for legislative office. Although he faces long odds, his campaign draws attention to the immigration challenges of the Hong Kong diaspora.

Chui was guarded about his choice for the presidential election. He spoke ardently, however, about the economic, political, and international relations expertise that Hong Kong immigrants can offer Taiwan. He also highlighted the shared need for willpower among Hong Kongers and Taiwanese in the face of Beijing's pressure.

"Hong Kongers and Taiwanese have common needs," he said. "Even if it's just on a spiritual level."

'King of the NRA': Civil trial scrutinizes lavish spending by gun rights group's longtime leader

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The longtime head of National Rifle Association operated as the "King of the NRA," spending lavishly on himself, punishing dissent and showering allies with country club memberships and no-show contracts, a lawyer for the New York attorney general's office told jurors Monday.

Wayne LaPierre's methods as the NRA's executive vice president and chief executive officer allowed him to operate the powerful gun rights organization "as Wayne's World for decades," Assistant Attorney General Monica Connell argued in an opening statement in a civil trial scrutinizing his leadership and spending at the nonprofit.

LaPierre, who said Friday he is leaving the NRA after leading it since 1991, watched stoically from a seat along a courtroom wall as six jurors and six alternates were seated for the trial, which is expected to take six weeks. He moved to the front of the gallery as Connell spoke, her argument augmented by a slideshow showing the NRA's leadership structure and expenses at issue in the case.

Connell said LaPierre charged the organization more than \$11 million for private jet flights over the years and authorized \$135 million in NRA contracts for a vendor whose owners provided him repeated access to a 108-foot (33-meter) yacht and free trips to the Bahamas, Greece, Dubai and India.

At the same time, LaPierre, 74, consolidated power and avoided scrutiny by hiring unqualified underlings who looked the other way, routing expenses through a vendor, doctoring invoices, and retaliating against board members and executives who questioned his spending, Connell said.

In one example, Connell said, the NRA's former chief financial officer, Craig Spray, found himself unable to log into the organization's computer system after he objected to LaPierre's way of doing business. In a November 2020 email to organization brass, Spray took issue with the boss' authoritarian rule, writing: "There are no 'Wayne said' approvals at the NRA."

LaPierre kept quiet about gifts he received from vendors until the morning he testified in the NRA's failed bankruptcy in Texas in 2021, Connell said. For years before that, she said, he'd been checking "no" on an internal disclosure form that asked if he'd received any gifts worth more than \$300.

LaPierre's actions and that of the "entrenched leadership" that enabled his alleged behavior "breached

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 64 of 75

the trust” of the organization’s five million members, Connell said. Their conduct violated laws governing nonprofit charities and the organization’s internal policies governing travel, expenses, conflicts of interest and whistleblower protections, she said.

“They acted illegally over and over again for years,” Connell told jurors.

New York Attorney General Letitia James sued the NRA, LaPierre and three current or former executives in 2020, alleging they cost the organization tens of millions of dollars from questionable expenditures. In recent years, though, the organization has been beset by financial troubles, dwindling membership and infighting.

LaPierre is accused of setting himself up with a \$17 million contract with the NRA if he were to exit the organization, and spending NRA money on travel consultants, luxury car services and five-star travel.

Defense lawyers are expected to give their opening statements Tuesday. LaPierre has defended himself in the past, testifying in another proceeding that his yacht trips were a “security retreat” because he was facing threats after mass shootings.

The other defendants, NRA general counsel John Frazer and retired CFO Wilson Phillips, have denied wrongdoing. Another ex-NRA executive turned whistleblower, Joshua Powell, settled with James’ office on Friday. He has agreed to testify at the trial, pay the NRA \$100,000 and forgo further nonprofit involvement.

One private jet flight, from Washington, D.C. to Dallas, Texas, with a stop in Nebraska to pick up LaPierre’s niece, cost the NRA \$59,000, Cornell said. Another, with a Nebraska pitstop on the way to Orlando, Florida, cost the organization \$79,000, Cornell said. An NRA policy shown in court said the organization only reimburses for coach-class airline flights. A commercial flight on the same routes would’ve run no more than a few hundred dollars per person, listings show.

James, a Democrat, is the state’s chief law enforcement officer and has regulatory power over nonprofit organizations incorporated in the state, such as the NRA. James initially sought to shut the organization down, but a judge rejected that as a remedy.

Now, James is asking that LaPierre and the other defendants be ordered to pay the NRA back and that they be banned from serving in leadership positions of any charitable organizations conducting business in the state — such as accepting donations from New Yorkers or having state residents as members. That would effectively bar them from any NRA involvement.

The NRA trial is being held in the same Manhattan courtroom as former President Donald Trump’s civil fraud trial. Closing arguments in that case are scheduled for Thursday, forcing the NRA trial to relocate to a different courtroom for a few days.

LaPierre said he would resign at the end of the month. The NRA said he was exiting for health reasons. NRA lawyers argued in a court filing over the weekend that LaPierre’s departure is an example of “clear corrective action” taken by the organization, but state lawyers disputed that.

The NRA was chartered as a nonprofit in New York in 1871 by Union Army officers who wanted to improve marksmanship among soldiers after the Civil War. Some of the organization’s earliest meetings were at an armory about 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) north of the courthouse where the trial is being held.

LaPierre is expected to testify, possibly as early as this week, along with one of his chief nemeses: former NRA board member and president Lt. Col. Oliver North.

A major signal of internal strife roiling the NRA burst onto the public scene in 2019, when North tried to oust LaPierre with damaging allegations about travel expenses and accusations that LaPierre had charged tens of thousands of dollars in wardrobe purchases to his expense account.

LaPierre complained that North had “started to interfere” with his leadership and, with allies among most of the organization’s 76 board members, won the struggle. North was ousted instead.

Pope Francis calls for a universal ban on surrogacy. He says it exploits mother and child

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis called Monday for a universal ban on what he called the “despicable” practice of surrogate motherhood, as he included the “commercialization” of pregnancy in an annual speech listing threats to global peace and human dignity.

In a foreign policy address to ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, Francis lamented that 2024 had dawned at a time in which peace is “increasingly threatened, weakened and in some part lost.”

Citing Russia’s war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, the issue of migration, climate crises and the “immoral” production of nuclear and conventional weapons, Francis delivered a list of the ills afflicting humanity and the increasing violation of international humanitarian law that allows them.

But Francis also listed smaller-scale issues that he said were threats to peace and human dignity, including surrogacy. He said the life of the unborn child must be protected and not “suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking.”

“I consider despicable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother’s material needs,” he said.

Saying a child is a gift and “never the basis of a commercial contract,” he called for a global ban on surrogacy “to prohibit this practice universally.”

Vatican teaching opposes in vitro fertilization, and Francis has previously voiced the Roman Catholic Church’s opposition to surrogacy, or what he has called “uterus for rent.” At the same time, however, the Vatican’s doctrine office has made clear that same-sex parents who resort to surrogacy can have their children baptized.

While commercial surrogacy contracts are common in the United States, including protections for the mothers, guarantees of independent legal representation and medical coverage, they are banned in parts of Europe, including Spain and Italy.

Russia’s war in Ukraine, and the threat to babies born to surrogate Ukrainian mothers, exposed the country’s thriving industry. Ukraine is one of the few countries that allow surrogacy for foreigners.

Critics say commercial surrogacy targets women who are poor and from vulnerable communities. Supporters say surrogacy gives women a chance to provide children to childless couples, and that commercial contracts protect both the surrogates and the intended parents.

On Monday, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops quoted Francis’ words in explaining why the Catholic Church teaches that surrogacy “is not morally permissible.”

“Instead, we should pray for, and work towards, a world that upholds the profound dignity of every person, at every stage and in every circumstance of life,” spokesperson Chieko Noguchi said.

In his geopolitical roundup, Francis singled out Russia by name in noting the “large-scale war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine.” It marked an unusual break with Francis’ usual tendency to spare Moscow direct and public blame for the invasion when expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

Francis was more balanced in his lament of Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza, condemning Hamas’ Oct. 7 assault on southern Israel “and every instance of terrorism and extremism.” At the same time, he said the attack provoked a “strong Israeli military response” that had left thousands dead and created a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

He called for an immediate cease-fire, including in Lebanon, and the liberation of hostages held in Gaza, and reiterated the Holy See’s position seeking a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians and an internationally guaranteed special status for Jerusalem.

In other comments, Francis:

— Lamented various humanitarian and refugee crises in Africa, and without naming names blasted military coups and elections in several African countries marked by “corruption, intimidation and violence.”

— Called for a “respectful diplomatic dialogue” with the Nicaraguan government to resolve what he called a “protracted crisis.” The government’s crackdown on the Catholic Church has resulted in the detention of dozens of priests and bishops. The government has accused the church of aiding popular protests against his administration that he considered an attempted coup.

— Called for the resumption, as early as possible, of Iran nuclear talks “to ensure a safer future for all.” Last month, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had increased the rate at which it is producing near-weapons-grade uranium, reversing a previous slowdown.

Francis also said that the “manufacturing” of nuclear weapons was just as immoral as the possession and use of them. Francis has already changed church teaching to include the possession of nuclear weapons as inadmissible, but on Monday he included the production of such weapons as part of his overall criticism of the weapons industry.

“Perhaps we need to realize more clearly that civilian victims are not ‘collateral damage’ (of war) but men and women, with names and surnames, who lost their lives,” he said. “They are children who are orphaned and deprived of their future.”

Slain Hezbollah commander fought in some of the group’s biggest battles, had close ties to leaders

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The elite Hezbollah commander who was killed in an Israeli airstrike Monday in southern Lebanon fought for the group for decades and took part in some of its biggest battles.

Wissam al-Tawil, a 48-year-old commander in Hezbollah’s secretive Radwan Force deployed along the border with Israel, was killed when the strike hit his SUV in his hometown of Khirbet Silem. The strike was about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border, beyond the villages and towns that have witnessed the two sides exchange fire over the past three months.

Israeli officials have been demanding for weeks that the Radwan Force withdraw from the border area to allow tens of thousands of Israelis displaced by the fighting to return to their homes. During a visit to Israel last month, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said a “negotiated outcome” would be the best way to reassure residents of northern Israel.

Al-Tawil, who joined Hezbollah in 1989, was the highest-ranking official in the group to be killed since the exchange of fire along the Lebanon-Israel border began following the deadly Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel by Hamas, a Hezbollah ally.

After the Israel-Hamas war started three months ago, al-Tawil commanded some “special operations” against Israeli posts along the border, according to a Hezbollah statement.

A Hezbollah official told The Associated Press that al-Tawil had a role in sparking the summer 2006 war with Israel and fought in Syria’s civil war, where he was in charge of coordinating between the Lebanese group and the Syrian army in the battles against the Islamic State group.

On July 12, 2006, al-Tawil was a member of a special Hezbollah unit that crossed into Israel, captured two Israeli soldiers and killed others, triggering a monthlong fight with Israel that killed 1,200 people in Lebanon and 160 in Israel, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Years later, when Hezbollah joined the war in Syria in 2013, fighting alongside Syrian government forces, al-Tawil was a close aide to Hezbollah’s chief commander there, Mustafa Badreddine, who was killed in 2016, the official said.

Al-Tawil, whose two brothers were killed fighting with Hezbollah, participated in dozens of attacks against Israeli forces and their Lebanese allies during Israel’s 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon until it withdrew in 2000. Hezbollah said in its statement that the father of four suffered a serious neck injury during an attack on an Israeli military post in southern Lebanon in 1999.

During his long years with the group, al-Tawil was close to Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah’s military chief from the group’s founding in 1982 until he was killed in a bombing in the Syrian capital in 2008.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 67 of 75

Al-Tawil also had close links with Gen. Qassem Soleimani, head of Iran's Quds Force, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad in 2020.

Judge in Trump's DC election case is targeted by fake emergency call in latest high-profile swatting

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A home owned by the judge overseeing the federal election subversion case against former president Donald Trump was targeted by a fake emergency call Sunday night, the latest in a spate of similar false swatting reports at the homes of public officials in recent days.

Police responded around 10 p.m. to a report of a shooting at a Washington, D.C., home linked in public records to U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan. But officers quickly found out that no shooting happened, the Metropolitan Police Department said Monday.

Chutkan has received numerous threats since she was assigned Trump's case last year. In August, a Texas woman was arrested after calling the courthouse and threatening to kill Chutkan and other officials. Investigators traced her phone number and she later admitted to making the threatening call, according to court documents.

Sunday's incident comes after a spike in swatting directed at high-profile public officials over the holidays. Those whose homes have been targeted include Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, a Democrat who removed Trump from the state's presidential primary ballot under the Constitution's insurrection clause.

State capitols and courthouses in several states were also targeted by bomb threats last week, prompting lockdowns and evacuations. No explosives were found and the FBI called the threats a hoax.

Attorney General Merrick Garland on Friday called the spike in threats "deeply disturbing" in remarks ahead of a private meeting with top Justice Department leaders to address violent crime.

"These threats of violence are unacceptable. They threaten the fabric of our democracy," he said.

Swatting refers to prank calls made to emergency services designed to draw a police response, especially from a SWAT team.

Supreme Court denies Alaska's bid to revive the copper and gold Pebble Mine proposal blocked by EPA

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday rejected Alaska's bid to revive a proposed copper and gold mine that was blocked by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The justices did not comment in turning away the state's attempt to sue the Biden administration directly in the high court over its desire to revive the proposed Pebble Mine in the state's Bristol Bay region.

A year ago, the EPA stopped the mine proposal, citing concerns with potential impacts on a rich aquatic ecosystem that supports the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery.

States can sue each other and the federal government in the Supreme Court, though the justices typically deal with appeals and hear only a few original cases each year.

Alaska still can try to reverse the decision through the more typical process, starting in a lower court and appealing any unfavorable decisions to the Supreme Court.

With each strike, fears grow that Israel, the US and Iran's allies are inching closer to all-out war

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

In the last week alone, an Israeli airstrike has killed a Hezbollah commander in Lebanon, Hezbollah struck a sensitive Israeli base with rockets and Israel killed a senior Hamas militant with an airstrike in Beirut.

Each strike and counterstrike increases the risk of the catastrophic war in Gaza spilling across the region.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 68 of 75

In the decades-old standoff pitting the U.S. and Israel against Iran and allied militant groups, there are fears that any party could trigger a wider war if only to avoid appearing weak. A U.S. airstrike killed an Iran-backed militia leader in Baghdad last week, and the U.S. Navy recently traded fire with Iran-aligned Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.

The divisions within each camp add another layer of volatility. Hamas might have hoped its Oct. 7 rampage across southern Israel that triggered the war in Gaza would drag its allies into a wider conflict. Israelis increasingly talk about the need to change the equation in Lebanon even as Washington aims to contain the conflict.

As the intertwined chess games grow more complicated, the potential for miscalculation rises.

GAZA IS GROUND ZERO

Hamas says its Oct. 7 attack was a purely Palestinian response to decades of Israeli domination. There is no evidence that Iran, Hezbollah or other allied groups played a direct role or knew about it beforehand.

But when Israel responded by launching one of the 21st century's most devastating military campaigns in Gaza, a besieged enclave home to 2.3 million Palestinians, the so-called Axis of Resistance — Iran and the militant groups it supports across the region — faced pressure to respond.

The Palestinian cause has deep resonance across the region, and leaving Hamas alone to face Israel's fury would have risked unraveling a military alliance that Iran has been building up since the 1979 Islamic Revolution put it on a collision course with the West.

"They don't want war, but at the same time they don't want to let the Israelis keep striking without retaliation," said Qassim Qassir, a Lebanese expert on Hezbollah.

"Something big has to happen, without going to war, so that the Israelis and Americans are convinced that there is no way forward," he said.

HEZBOLLAH THREADS THE NEEDLE

Of all Iran's regional proxies, Hezbollah faces the biggest dilemma.

If it tolerates Israeli attacks, like the strike in Beirut that killed Hamas' deputy political leader, it risks appearing to be a weak or unreliable ally. But if it triggers a full war, Israel has threatened to wreak major destruction on Lebanon, which is already mired in a severe economic crisis. Even Hezbollah's supporters may see that as too heavy a price to pay for a Palestinian ally.

Hezbollah has carried out strikes along the border nearly every day since the war in Gaza broke out, with the apparent aim of tying down some Israeli troops. Israel has returned fire, but each side appears to be calibrating its actions to limit the intensity.

A Hezbollah barrage of at least 40 rockets fired at an Israeli military base on Saturday sent a message without starting a war, though it may have triggered Monday's strike.

Would 80 rockets have been a step too far? What if someone had been killed? How many casualties would warrant a full-blown offensive? The grim math provides no clear answers.

And experts say it might not be a single strike that does it.

Israel is determined to see tens of thousands of its citizens return to communities near the border with Lebanon that were evacuated under Hezbollah fire nearly three months ago. After Oct. 7, it may no longer be able to tolerate an armed Hezbollah presence on the other side of the frontier.

Israeli leaders have repeatedly threatened to use military force if Hezbollah doesn't respect a 2006 U.N. cease-fire that ordered the militant group to withdraw from the border.

"Neither side wants a war, but the two sides believe it is inevitable," said Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University. "Everybody in Israel thinks it's just a matter of time until we need to change the reality" so that people can return to their homes, he said.

US DETERRENCE ONLY GOES SO FAR

The U.S. positioned two aircraft carrier strike groups in the region in October. One is returning home but is being replaced by other warships. The deployments sent an unmistakable warning to Iran and its allies against widening the conflict, but not all seem to have received the message.

Iran-backed militant groups in Syria and Iraq have launched dozens of rocket attacks on U.S. bases. The

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 69 of 75

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have attacked international shipping in the Red Sea, with potential consequences for the world economy. Iran says its allies act on their own and not on orders from Tehran.

Washington has struggled to put together a multinational security force to protect Red Sea shipping. But it appears hesitant to attack the Houthis on land when they appear close to reaching a peace deal with Saudi Arabia after years of war.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials have said the window for its allies to get both Hezbollah and the Houthis to stand down is closing.

HOW DOES THIS END?

The regional tensions are likely to remain high as long as Israel keeps up its offensive in Gaza, which it says is aimed at crushing Hamas. Many wonder if that's possible, given the group's deep roots in Palestinian society, and Israel's own leaders say it will take many more months.

The U.S., which has provided crucial military and diplomatic support for Israel's offensive, is widely seen as the only power capable of ending it. Iran's allies seem to believe Washington will step in if its own costs get too high — hence the attacks on U.S. bases and international shipping.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock are all back in the region this week, with the aim of trying to contain the violence through diplomacy.

But the most important messages will likely be sent by rocket.

"The Americans do not want an open war with Iran, and the Iranians do not want an open war with the United States," said Ali Hamadeh, an analyst who writes for Lebanon's An-Nahar newspaper. "Therefore, there are negotiations by fire."

Trump is raising expectations heading into the Iowa caucuses. Now he has to meet them

By STEVE PEOPLES and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

NORTH LIBERTY, Iowa (AP) — When Donald Trump launched his 2024 presidential campaign after a disappointing midterm election for Republicans, his trajectory was something of a mystery. But seven days before Iowa's kick-off caucuses, his standing among the GOP faithful is hardly in doubt.

Voters, campaign operatives and even some of the candidates on the ground here overwhelmingly agree that the Republican former president is the prohibitive favorite heading into the Jan. 15 caucuses — whether they like it or not.

"Everybody sees the writing on the wall," said Angela Roemer, a 56-year-old Republican from Solon, Iowa, as she waited for former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley to arrive for a weekend rally at Field Day Brewing Co. in North Liberty.

"It's a little depressing," Roemer said as her order of tortilla chips arrived, lamenting "all the drama" surrounding Trump. "We don't need another four years. But Trump's going to win."

Just beneath all the perceived certainty about Trump's victory, however, lies serious risks for the front-runner. Trump continues to fuel sky-high expectations, despite questions about the strength of his voter-turnout operation, a closing message clouded by lies about the 2020 election and stormy weather forecasts that could dissuade supporters from showing up.

Few believe such issues will lead to a straight-up loss next week in Iowa, but in the complicated world of presidential politics, a win is not always a win.

Meeting expectations

Should Trump fail to meet expectations with a resounding victory in Iowa, he would enter next-up New Hampshire and South Carolina much more vulnerable. Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis continue to pour millions of dollars into Iowa advertising as they cross the state, backed by well-funded allies with robust get-out-the-vote operations, in a relentless effort to narrow Trump's margin of victory.

At the same time, Trump's team privately acknowledges that it has cut back on its door-knocking, get-out-the-vote operation heading into the final week. They insist they can ensure his loyalists show up on

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 70 of 75

caucus day more effectively by relying on rallies, phone calls and a peer-to-peer text message program. That's even as allies of DeSantis and Haley push ahead with traditional get-out-the-vote plans at voters' doorways.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, who has endorsed Haley and spent the weekend campaigning with her across Iowa, conceded that "it will be tough" to beat Trump here.

"There's obviously a strong implication Trump's gonna likely win the Iowa caucus," Sununu told The Associated Press, even as he insisted momentum was building for Haley that will show up more clearly in New Hampshire's Jan. 23 first-in-the-nation primary. "In New Hampshire, she clearly has a chance to do something no one thought was possible, which was to beat Trump in an early state."

Aware of the risks, the former president's team is scrambling to lower expectations for Iowa.

Trump's advisers in recent days have been quick to remind reporters — at least privately — that no Republican presidential candidate has won a contested Iowa caucus by more than 12 points since Bob Dole in 1988.

The Trump campaign sees Dole's margin as the floor for Trump's victory, a senior adviser told The Associated Press, requesting anonymity to share internal discussions. The adviser described the mood on the campaign as confident but not comfortable, acknowledging questions about the strength of rival organizations and, as always, the weather, which could affect turnout if there is snow or extreme cold.

Frigid forecast

Heavy snowfall, blowing and drifting snow and dangerous travel conditions are expected Monday and Tuesday of this week to be followed by frigid temperatures that could drift below 0 degrees by caucus day.

The weather has already forced the Trump campaign to cancel multiple appearances by Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders and her father, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who had been scheduled to court Iowa voters on Trump's behalf Monday.

Ever defiant, Trump projected confidence as he raced across the state for a series of "commit to caucus" rallies over the weekend before returning to his Florida estate. He's scheduled to return to Iowa on Wednesday for a Fox News town hall.

At every stop over the weekend, he talked about his dominant standing in the polls. He's also frequently repeated lies that the 2020 election was stolen from him by voter fraud, a claim refuted by the courts and his own administration but one that fueled a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Still, weather is the more immediate concern heading into the final full week of campaigning in Iowa.

Trump told an audience of more than 2,000 in Clinton on Saturday night that his aides told him he shouldn't worry about cold weather, although his opponents probably should.

"The other side will never vote, because they don't have any enthusiasm," Trump said. Stoking the crowd, he added, "We won't lose one vote, because our people, they're going to walk on glass."

That's not to say there's no risk.

"The biggest risk is you say, you know, 'We're winning by so much, darling, let's stay home and watch television,'" Trump said the night before in Mason City. "And if enough people do that, it's not going to be pretty."

Trump's risks

Indeed, Trump has a loyal base of support but he's also targeting a significant number of first-time caucus participants who don't necessarily know where to go next Monday or how the complicated caucus process works. The events feature a series of speeches and votes that can span multiple hours, and in many cases, they're not held at regular polling locations.

A Des Moines Register poll conducted in December found that 63% of likely first-time Republican caucus participants say Trump is their first choice.

One of the first-time participants may be William Caspers, a 37-year-old farmer from Rockwell, Iowa. He said he had never attended a political event of any kind before Trump's Mason City event on Friday. While he's supporting Trump "100%" in 2024, he said he was only "pretty sure" he would caucus for him.

"Where is it going to be? Where do I go? I'm kind of confused about that," Caspers said. He noted that he was in the bathroom when a caucus explainer video played at the big screen at the front of the event

hall. Several hundred other voters were still in line outside during the video.

"So, the caucus is this Monday?" Caspers asked an AP reporter, who clarified that it was Monday Jan. 15. Not far away, Jackie Garlock, of nearby Clear Lake, was wearing a white hat indicating her status as one of Trump's "caucus captains." The campaign has promoted its efforts to recruit and train hundreds of such captains, who will represent the campaign within a given precinct on Monday night.

Garlock said she only briefly attended one virtual training on Zoom, which she described as largely a pep rally. She also said that she's not particularly good or experienced at political organizing.

But she's not worried.

"I have a lot of confidence," she said of Trump's chances next week as she scanned the crowded North Iowa Events Center. "I just look at the number of people who are here and I think, how can they all be wrong?"

Haley and DeSantis

Meanwhile, Haley and DeSantis are spending big money to attack each other on Iowa television, although Haley has had a decided spending advantage in the caucus' final days.

Overall, Haley and her allies are on pace to spend more than \$15 million in Iowa television advertising this month alone; DeSantis' team is spending less than \$5 million, according to an AP analysis of data from the media tracking firm AdImpact.

Virtually none of the attack ads from Haley or DeSantis is directed at Trump. That's even as Haley's primary super PAC is running multiple ads describing DeSantis as "a dumpster fire," and one of DeSantis' evolving group of super PACs recently launched an ad campaign calling Haley "Tricky Nikki."

Trump and his allies are spending nearly \$10 million this month in Iowa. And he's shifted some of his attacks away from DeSantis and toward Haley. But he's also investing in ads targeting Democratic President Joe Biden, his likely general election opponent.

Of all the candidates on the ground in Iowa this week, only DeSantis is predicting an outright victory over Trump. He moved his entire campaign leadership to the state in recent months and visited each of Iowa's 99 counties.

"You're going to see an earthquake on Jan. 15," DeSantis told dozens of supporters at a downtown bar in Dubuque.

Boeing jetliner that suffered inflight blowout was restricted because of concern over warning light

By CLAIRE RUSH and DAVID KOENIG Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The Boeing jetliner that suffered an inflight blowout over Oregon was not being used for flights to Hawaii after a warning light that could have indicated a pressurization problem lit up on three different flights, a federal official said Sunday.

Alaska Airlines decided to restrict the aircraft from long flights over water so the plane "could return very quickly to an airport" if the warning light reappeared, said Jennifer Homendy, chair of the National Transportation Safety Board.

Homendy cautioned that the pressurization light might be unrelated to Friday's incident in which a plug covering an unused exit door blew off the Boeing 737 Max 9 as it cruised about three miles (4.8 kilometers) over Oregon.

The warning light came on during three previous flights: on Dec. 7, Jan. 3 and Jan. 4 — the day before the door plug broke off. Homendy said she didn't have all the details regarding the Dec. 7 incident but specified the light came on during a flight on Jan. 3 and on Jan. 4 after the plane had landed.

The NTSB said the lost door plug was found Sunday near Portland, Oregon, by a school teacher — for now, known only as Bob — who discovered it in his backyard and sent two photos to the safety board. Investigators will examine the plug, which is 26 by 48 inches (66 by 121 centimeters) and weighs 63 pounds (28.5 kilograms), for signs of how it broke free.

Investigators will not have the benefit of hearing what was going on in the cockpit during the flight. The

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 72 of 75

cockpit voice recorder — one of two so-called black boxes — recorded over the flight's sounds after two hours, Homendy said.

At a news conference Sunday night, Homendy provided new details about the chaotic scene that unfolded on the plane. The explosive rush of air damaged several rows of seats and pulled insulation from the walls. The cockpit door flew open and banged into a lavatory door.

The force ripped the headset off the co-pilot and the captain lost part of her headset. A quick reference checklist kept within easy reach of the pilots flew out of the open cockpit, Homendy said.

The plane made it back to Portland, however, and none of the 171 passengers and six crew members was seriously injured.

Hours after the incident, the FAA ordered the grounding of 171 of the 218 Max 9s in operation, including all those used by Alaska Airlines and United Airlines, until they can be inspected. The airlines were still waiting Sunday for details about how to do the inspections.

Alaska Airlines, which has 65 Max 9s, and United, with 79, are the only U.S. airlines to fly that particular model of Boeing's workhorse 737. United said it was waiting for Boeing to issue a "multi-operator message," which is a service bulletin used when multiple airlines need to perform similar work on a particular type of plane.

Boeing was working on the bulletin but had not yet submitted it to the FAA for review and approval, according to a person familiar with the situation. Producing a detailed, technical bulletin frequently takes a couple days, said the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe a matter that the company and regulators have not publicly discussed.

Boeing declined to comment.

Without some of their planes, cancellations began to mount at the two carriers. Alaska Airlines said it canceled 170 flights — more than one-fifth of its schedule — by mid-afternoon on the West Coast because of the groundings, while United had scrapped about 180 flights while salvaging others by finding different planes.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington, chair of the Senate's Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, said she agreed with the decision to ground the Max 9s.

"Aviation production has to meet a gold standard, including quality control inspections and strong FAA oversight," she said in a statement.

Before the discovery of the missing plug, the NTSB had pleaded with residents in an area west of Portland called Cedar Hills to be on the lookout for the object.

On Sunday, people scoured dense thickets wedged between busy roads and a light rail train station. Adam Pirkle said he rode 14 miles (22 kilometers) through the overgrowth on his bicycle.

"I've been looking at the flight track, I was looking at the winds," he said. "I've been trying to focus on wooded areas."

Before the school teacher named Bob found the missing door plug, searchers located two cell phones that appeared to have belonged to passengers on Friday's terrifying flight. One was discovered in a yard, the other on the side of a road. Both were turned over to the NTSB, which vowed to return them to their owners.

Alaska Airlines flight 1282 took off from Portland at 5:07 p.m. Friday for a two-hour trip to Ontario, California. About six minutes later, the chunk of fuselage blew out as the plane was climbing at about 16,000 feet (4.8 kilometers).

One of the pilots declared an emergency and asked for clearance to descend to 10,000 feet (3 kilometers), where the air would be rich enough for passengers to breathe without oxygen masks.

Videos posted online by passengers showed a gaping hole where the paneled-over door had been. They applauded when the plane landed safely about 13 minutes after the blowout. Firefighters came down the aisle, asking passengers to remain in their seats as they treated the injured.

It was extremely lucky that the airplane had not yet reached cruising altitude, when passengers and flight attendants might be walking around the cabin, Homendy said.

The aircraft involved rolled off the assembly line and received its certification two months ago, according

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 73 of 75

to online FAA records. It had been on 145 flights since entering commercial service Nov. 11, said Flight-Radar24, another tracking service. The flight from Portland was the aircraft's third of the day.

The Max is the newest version of Boeing's venerable 737, a twin-engine, single-aisle plane frequently used on U.S. domestic flights. The plane went into service in May 2017.

Two Max 8 jets crashed in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people. All Max 8 and Max 9 planes were grounded worldwide for nearly two years until Boeing made changes to an automated flight control system implicated in the crashes.

The Max has been plagued by other issues, including manufacturing flaws, concern about overheating that led FAA to tell pilots to limit use of an anti-ice system, and a possible loose bolt in the rudder system.

North Korea's Kim turns 40.

But there are no public celebrations of his birthday

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and JIWON SONG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un turned 40 on Monday with no announced public celebrations at home, after he entered the new year with artillery barrages into the sea and vows to expand his nuclear arsenal.

Since taking power in late 2011, Kim, the third generation of his family to rule North Korea, is believed to have established an absolute leadership similar to his predecessors. But his birthday has yet to be officially celebrated, unlike his late father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. Their birthdays are two of the North's biggest holidays and are marked with great fanfare, loyalty campaigns and sometimes massive military parades.

On Monday, North Korea's state news agency published a lengthy article extolling Kim's guidance of major construction projects in the past decade. It also reported Kim visited a chicken farm with his daughter the previous day. But it made no mention of his birthday.

Some observers speculate Kim may think he's still relatively too young or needs bigger achievements to hold such lavish birthday festivities. Others say the lack of a public birthday bash may be related to his concerns about attention to his late Japan-born mother.

Kim's headlong pursuit of a bigger nuclear arsenal has invited punishing U.S.-led sanctions, which together with border closures during the pandemic were believed to have badly hurt the North's fragile economy. Kim has subsequently admitted policy failures as his vow that North Korea would "never have to tighten their belts again" remained unfulfilled.

"For Kim, it's still probably politically burdensome to idolize himself as he's still young and hasn't accumulated much achievements," said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs, said it will likely take some time for his birthday to become an official holiday because elderly members of the North's ruling elite would still think he's too young.

Birthdays are central to the mythology of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, who had ruled North Korea with a god-like status since the country's founding in 1948.

Their birthdays — April 15 for Kim Il Sung, and Feb. 16 for Kim Jong Il — are typically celebrated with tributes to their giant statues, dance parties, fireworks and art performances. On some milestone birthdays, North Korea's military holds huge parades with goose-stepping soldiers and powerful weapons capable of targeting the U.S. and South Korea.

Kim Il Sung's birthday was designated as an official holiday in 1968 when he turned 56, according to a website run by South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles relations with North Korea. Kim Jong Il's birthday reportedly became an official holiday in 1982, when he turned 40.

North Korea has never formally commented on Kim Jong Un's birthday. The only time Kim has been honored in public on his birthday was in 2014, when former NBA star Dennis Rodman sang "Happy birthday" before an exhibition basketball game in Pyongyang. The Unification Ministry-run website states that Kim Jong Un was born on Jan. 8.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 74 of 75

There are also views that Kim may be worried about bringing unwanted attentions to his mother, Ko Yong Hui, a Japan-born dancer who was known as his father's third or fourth wife. Ko's links to Japan, which had colonized the Korean Peninsula in the past, and the fact that she wasn't Kim Jong Il's first wife, are considered as disadvantageous for Kim's dynastic rule.

"The fact his mother came from Japan is his biggest weak point that undermines his legitimacy of the Paektu bloodline," Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University, said, referring to the Kim family's lineage named after the country's most sacred mountain.

"When Kim Jong Un's birthday becomes an official holiday, he won't still publicize details about his birth," he said.

Despite no known public birthday events, experts believe Kim Jong Un faces little political challenge and is expected to intensify his run of weapons tests ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November.

In a key ruling party meeting in late December, Kim vowed to enlarge his nuclear arsenal and launch additional spy satellites to cope with what he called unprecedented confrontation led by the U.S. In the past few days, he had his troops fire artillery shells near the disputed sea boundary with South Korea, raising tensions with his rival.

Today in History: January 9, Mississippi secedes from the Union

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Jan. 9, the ninth day of 2024. There are 357 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 9, 1861, Mississippi became the second state to secede from the Union, the same day the Star of the West, a merchant vessel bringing reinforcements and supplies to Federal troops at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, retreated because of artillery fire.

On this date:

In 1788, Connecticut became the fifth state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1793, Frenchman Jean Pierre Blanchard, using a hot-air balloon, flew from Philadelphia to Woodbury, New Jersey.

In 1913, Richard Milhous Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, was born in Yorba Linda, California.

In 1914, the County of Los Angeles opened the country's first public defender's office.

In 1916, the World War I Battle of Gallipoli ended after eight months with an Ottoman Empire victory as Allied forces withdrew.

In 1945, during World War II, American forces began landing on the shores of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines as the Battle of Luzon got underway, resulting in an Allied victory over Imperial Japanese forces.

In 1951, the United Nations headquarters in New York officially opened.

In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his State of the Union address to Congress, warned of the threat of Communist imperialism.

In 1972, reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes, speaking by telephone from the Bahamas to reporters in Hollywood, said a purported autobiography of him, as told to writer Clifford Irving, was a fake.

In 1987, the White House released a January 1986 memorandum prepared for President Ronald Reagan by Lt. Col. Oliver L. North showing a link between U.S. arms sales to Iran and the release of American hostages in Lebanon.

In 2003, U.N. weapons inspectors said there was no "smoking gun" to prove Iraq had nuclear, chemical or biological weapons but they demanded that Baghdad provide private access to scientists and fresh evidence to back its claim that it had destroyed its weapons of mass destruction.

In 2005, Mahmoud Abbas, the No. 2 man in the Palestinian hierarchy during Yasser Arafat's rule, was elected president of the Palestinian Authority by a landslide.

In 2015, French security forces shot and killed two al-Qaida-linked brothers suspected of carrying out the rampage at the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo that had claimed 12 lives.

In 2018, downpours sent mud and boulders roaring down Southern California hillsides that had been

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 199 ~ 75 of 75

stripped of vegetation by a gigantic wildfire; more than 20 people died and hundreds of homes were damaged or destroyed.

In 2020, Chinese state media said a preliminary investigation into recent cases of viral pneumonia had identified the probable cause as a new type of coronavirus.

In 2022, 17 people, including eight children, died after a fire sparked by a malfunctioning space heater filled a high-rise apartment building with smoke in the New York City borough of the Bronx; it was the city's deadliest blaze in three decades.

In 2023, Constantine, the former and final king of Greece, died in Athens at age 82.

Today's birthdays: Actor K Callan is 88. Folk singer Joan Baez is 83. Rock musician Jimmy Page (Led Zep-
pelin) is 80. Actor John Doman is 79. Singer David Johansen (aka Buster Poindexter) is 74. Singer Crystal
Gayle is 73. Actor J.K. Simmons is 69. Actor Imelda Staunton is 68. Nobel Peace laureate Rigoberta Menchú
is 65. Rock musician Eric Erlandson is 61. Actor Joely Richardson is 59. Rock musician Carl Bell (Fuel) is
57. Actor David Costabile is 57. Rock singer-musician Dave Matthews is 57. Actor-director Joey Lauren Ad-
ams is 56. Comedian/actor Deon Cole is 53. Actor Angela Bettis is 51. Actor Omari Hardwick is 50. Roots
singer-songwriter Hayes Carll is 48. Singer A.J. McLean (Backstreet Boys) is 46. Catherine, Duchess of
Cambridge, is 42. Pop-rock musician Drew Brown (OneRepublic) is 40. Rock-soul singer Paolo Nutini is 37.
Actor Nina Dobrev is 35. Actor Basil Eidenbenz is 31. Actor Kerris Dorsey is 26. Actor Tyree Brown is 20.