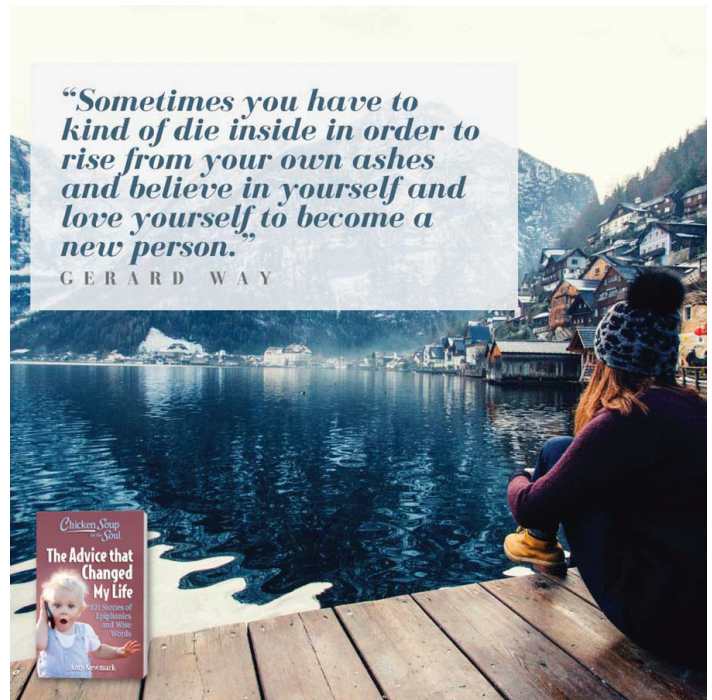


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Sunday, Jan. 14

Groton CM&A: No Sunday School, Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.

Friday, Jan. 12

Senior Menu: Salmon loaf, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, oranges, vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Bagel bites.

School Lunch: Lasagna hot dish, Corn.

Cancelled: Girls Varsity Wrestling at Harrisburg, 2 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 13

Girls Varsity and Boys JH/JV/Varsity Wrestling at Gettysburg, 10 a.m.

Basketball Doubleheader hosts Dakota Valley (Gym: Boys C, 2 p.m., Girls C, 3:15 p.m., Areana: Girls JV at 2:00 p.m., Boys JV at 3:15 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

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

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

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

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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1440

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Annual inflation in the US rose 3.4% in December, a 0.3% rise from November and slightly higher than analysts' expectations, according to new government data released yesterday. Inflation peaked in June 2022 at 9.1% and has remained under 4% since May.

A winter storm is sweeping across the country today and is poised to become a bomb cyclone, bringing blizzard conditions and flooding across much of the country's eastern half. The storm will be followed by a blast of arctic cold air, with as much as 88% of the contiguous

US expected to experience temperatures dropping below freezing by Monday.

Dubbed Winter Storm Gerri, it comes days after a separate winter storm hit the central US and parts of the Plains. Gerri is forecast to make its way from the Four Corners region toward the central and eastern US, with 1-2 feet of snow projected in portions of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Meteorologists say temperatures in Wyoming and Montana could reach between 20 and 30 degrees below zero and potentially below 50 degrees in the Northern Plains. The Southern Plains and Midwest could see temperatures dip into the minus 20s, while the South could see temperatures in the 20s.

The cold air pattern is projected to stay until at least the week of Jan. 22.

Archaeologists have discovered a constellation of ancient Amazonian structures in what is now modern-day Ecuador, according to new research published yesterday. Flourishing for roughly 1,000 years about two millennia ago, the settlements are believed to have been populated by 30,000 residents at their peak—roughly equal to London under the Roman Empire at the same time.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

New England Patriots' Bill Belichick to depart after 24 seasons and six Super Bowl titles with the Patriots; Belichick has racked up 333 wins across his 29 seasons as an NFL head coach.

ESPN reportedly forced to return 37 Emmy Awards for using fake names to win awards for "College Gameday" program. Michael Jackson biopic filmset for April 2025 release.

NFL postseason begins tomorrow with the Wild Card round; see preview and predictions. NFL's 2024 four International Games to include Chicago Bears, Minnesota Vikings, and Jacksonville Jaguars in London, and the Carolina Panthers in Munich; opponents to be named.

Science & Technology

Researchers release open source program to model the increasing density of space debris orbiting the Earth.

Study suggests the largest ape to ever live died off around 250,000 years ago because it failed to adapt its diet as the landscape shifted from dense forest to grasslands.

Paleontologists discover oldest-known fossilized reptile skin; 289-million-year-old specimen predates dinosaurs, was from a now-extinct iguana-like lizard.

Business & Markets

Markets close roughly flat Thursday (S&P 500 -0.1%, Dow 0%, Nasdaq 0%) following higher-than-expected inflation data. Spot bitcoin ETFs begin trading, see \$4.6B in trading volume on first day.

Chesapeake Energy to buy Southwestern Energy for \$7.4B in all-stock deal; acquisition would make Chesapeake the largest US natural gas producer.

Google lays off hundreds of employees in Google Assistant division as company explores integrating AI chatbots into products; company also planning to restructure its 30,000-person ad sales department.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel defends against charges of genocide in Gaza at the International Court of Justice; claims introduced by South Africa. US, UK lead airstrikes against Houthi rebel sites in Yemen. Jewish students sue Harvard, claiming antisemitism on campus violates civil rights.

Closing arguments held in civil fraud trial against former President Donald Trump; proceedings held despite early morning bomb threat made at the home of Judge Arthur Engoron.

Federal Aviation Officials launch probe into whether Boeing followed safety protocols when securing door plugs on 737 MAX-9 models.

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.

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Hoop teams have clean sweep over Tiospa Zina

Groton Area's. Basketball teams had clean sweep over Tiospa Zina in games played Thursday night in Groton.

The girls varsity team won its game, 62-18, leading at the quarter stops at 16-4, 35-13 and 51-16.

Jaedyn Penning led the Tigers with 12 points, nine rebounds, three assists and three steals. Sydney Leicht seen some playing time for the first time in three weeks and made eight points, had one rebound, one assist and two steals. Brooklyn Hansen had eight points, one rebound and two steals. Laila Roberts had seven points, three rebounds, two assists and one steal. Kennedy Hansen had six points, three assists and three steals. Rylee Dunker had five points, four rebounds, two assists and four steals. Jerica Locke had four points, five rebounds, three assists and four steals. Taryn Traphagen had four points, one rebound, two assists and two steals. Emily Clark had two points and one assist. Talli Wright had two points, two rebounds and one steal. Faith Traphagen had two points, six rebounds and one assist. Mia Crank had one rebound. Tiospa Zina's Jesia High Pipe went the wrong way and scored two points for Groton Area.

3-Pointers: Leicht 2, Roberts 1.

Groton Area made 25 of 55 two-pointers for 45 percent, three of eight three-pointers for 38 percent, three of six free throws for 50 percent, had 33 rebounds, eight turnovers, 18 assists, 22 steals and 10 team fouls.

Maya Deutsch led Tiospa Zina with nine points followed by Hannah Ziegler with seven and Jaia Bursheim had two free throws.

Tiospa Zina made five of 26 field goals for 19 percent, six of 13 free throws for 46 percent, had 25 turnovers and nine team fouls.

The junior varsity team won its game, 57-3. Chesney Weber led Groton Area with 12 points followed by Taryn Traphagen and Talli Wright with nine points apiece, McKenna Tietz had eight, Mia Crank six, Faith Traphagen and Kella Tracy each had four, Emerlee Jones three and Laila Roberts two.

Kayleigh Abbey made three free throws for the Wambdi.

The boys varsity team led at the quarter stops at 14-8, 31-21 and 49-35 en route to a 71-44 win. Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 31 points, one rebound, three assists and five steals. Jacob Zak had 14 points, five rebounds, one assist, four steals and three blocks. Kassen Keough had nine points, three rebounds and one assist. Ryder Johnson had seven points, four rebounds and one block. Keegen Tracy had two points, one assist and one steal. Colby Dunker had two points, three rebounds and one assist. Jayden Schwan had two points, Logan Warrington had two points and one rebound, Blake Pauli and Holden Sippel each had one point and two rebounds. Logan Ringgenberg had two rebounds, Turner Thompson and Karson Zak each had one rebound and Easton Weber one rebound and one assist.

Groton Area made 23 of 37 two-pointers for 62 percent, two (Tietz 1, Keough 1) of 13 three-pointers for 15 percent, 19 of 24 free throws for 79 percent, had 26 rebounds, 12 turnovers, eight assists, 10 steals, 19 team fouls and four blocked shots.

Calvin Fish led the Wambdi with 15 points while Nate Thompson had nine, Storm Sierra seven, Ashen Sierra six and Johnny Rivers five.

Tiospa Zina made 16 of 33 field goals for 48 percent, eight of 13 free throws for 62 percent, had 20 turnovers and 20 team fouls.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 53-17, leading at the quarter stops at 20-6, 36=8 and 48-10. Gage Sippel led Groton Area with 17 points while Logan Warrington and Karson Zak with 13 each, Blake Pauli and Turner Thompson each had four, Ethan Kroll had two and Jayden Schwan and Easton Weber each had one point.

Isaac Rodlund led Tiospa Zina with nine points.

All of the events from last night were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. boys junior varsity game was sponsored by Justin and Chelsea Hanson. The girls junior varsity game was sponsored by Adam and Nicole Wright. . The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Krueger Brothers, Locke Electric, The MeatHouse of Andover, Rix Farms/R&M Farms and Spanier Harvesting and Trucking. Paul Kosel and Shane Clark did the play-by-play and Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera.

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Groton Area made six of six free throws in a trio of fouls in one play against Tiospa Zina's Storm Sierra. He had two technical fouls and ended the game with six fouls. Lane Tietz made four of four free throws and Kassen Keough (pictured above) made the final two of two free throws. (Photo by Jenn Gustafson)

Keegen Tracy makes a move to the basket. (Photo by Jenn Gustafson)



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Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 31 points as the game plan was attacking from within the paint. (Photos by Jenn Gustafson)

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Taryn Traphagen
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Emily Clark
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Faith Traphagen, Rylee Dunker and
Jerica Locke.**
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Sydney Leicht keeping her legs warmed up while taking a break.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Brooklyn Hansen battling with a Tiospa Zina player for the basketball. Also pictured is Rylee Dunker.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jerica Locke

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

South Dakota State announces fall 2023 dean's list

BROOKINGS, S.D. (01/11/2024)-- More than 3,400 students were recognized for their outstanding academic performance over the fall 2023 semester at South Dakota State University by being named to the dean's list.

To earn dean's list distinctions in SDSU's colleges, students must have completed a minimum of 12 credits and must have earned at least a 3.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale. Students with F, I, U, RI or RU grades are not eligible regardless of system term GPA attained. Note that this report includes courses that were taken at other South Dakota institutions this term. A minimum of 12 credits within the 100-699 course range must be taken. A student who passes pregeneral education courses may still qualify, if the student has 12 other credits that do fall within the 100-699 range.

Overall, 3,475 students from 39 states and 24 foreign nations are on the list. Nearly 1,500 students received a 4.0 GPA, and those are indicated with an asterisk.

Congratulations to these distinguished scholars on earning this academic achievement.

Kaleb Antonsen of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

Jackson Dinger* of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions

Tessa Erdmann* of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

Chantalle Galbavy of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Nursing

Caleb Hanten* of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

Kaycie Hawkins of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's Jerome J. Lohr College of Engineering

Trista Keith of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions

Tanae Lipp of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Allysa Locke* of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Nursing

Hailey Monson of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Nursing

Sage Mortenson* of Groton, South Dakota (57445) in SDSU's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

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NSU Wrestling

No. 18 Wolves Return to League Action with Double Digit Win over the Dragons

Moorhead, Minn. – With a number of wrestlers taking part in their first league matches of the season, the No. 18 Northern State University wrestling team downed MSU Moorhead 31-6. The Wolves tallied three extra point victories in their second NSIC dual win of 2023-24.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 16, LEC 19

Records: NSU 6-6 (2-1 NSIC), MSUM 1-2 (0-2 NSIC)

HOW IT HAPPENED

Brenden Salfrank opened the dual with a bang, notching a victory by fall over Dane Christopherson at 4:29 and kicked off four straight wins by the Wolves

Teagan Block added a technical fall, defeating Thomas Carillo with a score of 17-0 (5:21) and Northern State quickly led by 11

Braydon Mogle tallied an 11-5 decision victory over Hunter Hayes, while Carter Ban scored early and often defeating Jacob Cole in an 18-2 technical fall (5:10)

MSU Moorhead rallied back in the preceding two weights with a pair of decision wins and trail Northern State 19-6

The Wolves were back on track and 174-pounds as Tyler Voorhees defeated Wayne Mellon in a 12-9 decision

Sam Kruger and Tyson Lien extended NSU's lead with decision wins over Anthony Sykora (13-6) and Isaiah Huus (5-2)

Nathan Schauer added the cherry on top with a hard fought 10-9 decision win over Airin Spell

The Wolves won eight of the ten weights and out-scored the Dragons 106-46 in match points scored

FINAL RESULTS

Summary	MSUM	NSU
125 Brenden Salfrank (Northern State) over Dane Christopherson (MSU Moorhead) (Fall 4:29)	0.0	6.0
133 Teagan Block (Northern State) over Thomas Carillo (MSU Moorhead) (TF 17-0 5:21)	0.0	5.0
141 Braydon Mogle (Northern State) over Hunter Hayes (MSU Moorhead) (Dec 11-5)	0.0	3.0
149 Carter Ban (Northern State) over Jacob Cole (MSU Moorhead) (TF 18-2 5:10)	0.0	5.0
157 Cody Wiene (MSU Moorhead) over Cael Larson (Northern State) (Dec 8-6)	3.0	0.0
165 Jacob Reinardy (MSU Moorhead) over Spencer Roth (Northern State) (Dec 5-3)	3.0	0.0
174 Tyler Voorhees (Northern State) over Wayne Mellon (MSU Moorhead) (Dec 12-9)	0.0	3.0
184 Sam Kruger (Northern State) over Anthony Sykora (MSU Moorhead) (Dec 13-6)	0.0	3.0
197 Tyson Lien (Northern State) over Isaiah Huus (MSU Moorhead) (Dec 5-2)	0.0	3.0
285 Nathan Schauer (Northern State) over Airin Spell (MSU Moorhead) (Dec 10-9)	0.0	3.0
Dual Meet Score	6.0	31.0

UP NEXT

Northern travels to Nebraska Kearney next Saturday for their annual dual meet. Competition opens Saturday, January 20 at 10 a.m. with a rolling schedule. The Wolves will face No. 1 Central Oklahoma, Colorado State Pueblo, and Kearney.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Armed guard requirement for schools defeated in committee

School safety a priority, lawmakers say, but mandate is unworkable

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 11, 2024 1:12 PM

Concerns about staffing, costs and local control combined Thursday morning to spell defeat for a bill that aimed to force schools to employ armed guards.

The 4-2 vote in the Senate Education Committee followed more than an hour of debate on Senate Bill 34, sponsored by Sen. Brent Hoffman, R-Hartford.

Hoffman's proposal and his approach to crafting it were met with considerable gratitude by committee members and opponents, with each in turn noting the level of outreach and research he'd put behind it and thanking him for broaching the topic of school safety.

In the end, uncertainty on the bill's practical application caused the committee to send it to the 41st day of the 38-day session. That effectively defeats a proposal unless a third of the Senate or House of Representatives vote to "smoke-out" the bill and retrieve it for debate.

After the hearing, Hoffman told South Dakota Searchlight he has no plans to push for such a revival this session.

"I respect the decision of the Education Committee," Hoffman wrote in an email. "On behalf of concerned parents, I gave it my best effort to improve school safety statewide and will continue to pray for the safety of our kids."

Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, said just before moving to reject the bill that school safety "is something we should be talking about every year."

Sponsor: Locks, armed guards can prevent tragedy

Locked doors and armed response staff are critical in the prevention of and response to mass shootings, Hoffman said, citing guidance from the National Association of School Resource Officers.

Not enough South Dakota schools follow that guidance, he said.

The bill's sponsor told the committee he'd surveyed schools to find out how many have state-certified school resource officers from local law enforcement agencies or school sentinels, who are trained, armed employees without police credentials.

Without disclosing details on the schools themselves – he said he'd promised confidentiality to obtain the information – he said fewer than 25% of schools have an armed officer or sentinel.

"We can do better," Hoffman said, citing a host of mass shootings in schools that have taken place across the country in 25 years since the now-notorious tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. "We must do better."

The bill would have required locked doors and an on-site monitor during times that school doors are unlocked. It also would have required all school buildings to have armed staff, either in the form of a salaried sentinel or a sworn law enforcement officer, as well as created an anonymous tip line to report threats. Costs would have been shared by schools and local law enforcement.

Hoffman acknowledged that there are multiple ways to address school safety. He also said he knew that costs would be an issue, but that the topic is too important to do nothing.

"If you think there's a perfect solution or bill, I'd like to see it and read it and give you some feedback on it," Hoffman said. "But there isn't."

Amy Bruner, whose children attend school in Sioux Falls, testified virtually to support the bill. She told

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the committee she mourns for the mother of 11-year-old Ahmir Jolliff, shot to death in a Perry, Iowa, mass shooting seven days before the hearing.

"Without an armed protector in our schools, our students are vulnerable to attacks," Bruner said.

Another Sioux Falls parent and the superintendent of the Oglala Lakota County School District also spoke in support.

Schools: Proposal unworkable

Lobbyists for multiple school associations lined up to oppose the bill.

Doug Wermedal of the Associated School Boards of South Dakota said the bill is "a genuine representation of the concern for student safety," but questioned its practicality.

School doors open and close all day long, he said. Schools that install security cameras and hire officers when and where they can are still vulnerable to shooters who hide weapons or could miss threats while dealing with other issues, he said.

"The standard the bill calls for is almost omniscience, not vigilance," Wermedal said.

He also talked about costs. If all schools needed school resource officers, he said, it could cost \$18 million or more "at a minimum." Training teachers or other staff to serve as sentinels would cost far less, he said, but that would still carry additional costs.

Those costs don't factor in potential spikes in insurance premiums, which he said are higher for schools with armed staff on site.

"Underwriters in these other states have, in many cases, stopped writing any policy for schools where armed responses exist," Wermedal said.

More than one opponent pointed to the difficulty of finding qualified school resource officers.

In Pierre, "they've been trying for two years to hire an SRO and can't because that person is needed in law enforcement in the community," said Diana Miller, a lobbyist for the large school group.

"If we can't hire people, and we're actively looking, how can we meet a mandate in state law?" Miller said.

As far as sentinels go, the opponents argued that most teachers would be unwilling to serve.

"A sentinel program places an educator in the position of being a caring, nurturing and stable presence in the lives of our students, while also being prepared to take the life of any of those students," said Ryan Rolfs of the South Dakota Education Association.

The opponents also said it's unworkable to set up a system whereby failure to staff a school with a sentinel or officer would force the doors to close.

"Schools have difficulty finding substitute teachers sometimes," said Rob Monson, director of School Administrators of South Dakota.

Committee: Proposal needs work

In his rebuttal, Hoffman argued that the costs are minimal if they save lives. He then pointed to a host of projects that have cost the state more than \$18 million – a figure he said was unsupported by thorough analysis.

"We spent \$29 million on a livestock and equestrian center complex last year for the State Fair. We spent \$13 million to dig in a couple of additional caverns in the Sanford Underground Research Facility. The Sioux Falls School District alone is receiving \$1.5 million from the DOE this year to address absenteeism," Hoffman said. "If school safety is the highest priority, shouldn't it be funded accordingly?"

Sen. Tom Pischke, R-Dell Rapids, and Sen. Steve Kolbeck, R-Brandon, expressed concerns about costs, but said they were hesitant to vote down the bill without an official cost estimate. Pischke suggested the education committee send Hoffman's bill to the Appropriations Committee without an official endorsement.

"We don't have to say that we like or don't like it," Pischke said. "We can just say, 'Hey, we need to have more information from a fiscal standpoint.'"

Pischke and Kolbeck were the only committee members to vote against Sen. Reed's motion to send the bill to the 41st day.

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Sen. Shawn Bordeaux, D-Mission, voted to defeat the bill, but described his position as a "soft no." Bordeaux lost his wife and unborn child in a drive-by shooting in 1997.

"When gun stuff comes up, it kind of triggers a little bit of something within me," Bordeaux said. "It puts me on a little more alert than the average person."

A discussion with Hoffman the night before Thursday's hearing, Bordeaux said, almost had him convinced to vote for the bill. Like Reed and the other three senators who voted to send the bill to the 41st day – Sioux Falls Democrat Liz Larson, Burbank Republican Sydney Davis and Scotland Republican Kyle Schoenfish – Bordeaux told Hoffman that the issue of school safety should be subject to vigorous and frequent debate.

Some ideas in the bill, they said, are worthy of consideration.

"What I really appreciate about it also was the exploration of evidence-based thinking, and especially around the school entryways and exits," Larson said. "I find that that is very low hanging fruit that is both evidence-based and could be strengthened across our communities at almost no cost."

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.

Permanent sales tax reduction bill flies through committee

Opponents cite state finances inflated by federal funds, worry over food tax ballot measure

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 11, 2024 12:12 PM

A bill to permanently set South Dakota's state sales tax rate at a reduced 4.2% sailed through its first committee hearing Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre with an 11-1 vote.

Prime sponsor Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, told House Taxation Committee members the bill "concludes some unfinished business" from last year's session.

The 2023 legislative session was dominated by tax cut discussions — the Senate originally favored a property tax cut, the governor favored eliminating the state sales tax on groceries, and the House favored an overall cut to the state sales tax.

The general state sales tax cut won out in the end, with the expectation that it'd cost the state about \$104 million, but only in a compromise to automatically revert to a 4.5% sales tax in 2027. Senators urged caution at the time with talk of a potential recession, preferring to wait to make any permanent decisions until after federal pandemic aid is fully spent.

Karr pitched the permanent tax cut to the committee Thursday, citing South Dakota's low unemployment rate, high gross domestic product and personal income growth, as well as significant increases in state revenue in recent years. South Dakota's sales tax collections historically mirror the state's personal income growth.

He also pointed out that in the first six months of fiscal-year sales tax collections, South Dakota was only about \$16 million behind 2023 collections year-to-date. Concerns about a recession have also receded in recent months.

"This is going to be foreseeable strong economic growth," Karr told the committee. "We're going to be able to organically absorb this."

Opponents say federal funding inflates numbers, worry over food tax ballot measure

But opponents said the federal influx of pandemic cash is still inflating South Dakota's budget and financial numbers. Executive Director of the South Dakota Retailers Association Nathan Sanderson pointed out that the state budget has doubled in 10 years, primarily due to federal COVID relief funds.

"It's absolutely true that we're seeing revenues go up, but these revenues won't stay up forever, because that federal money will go away. And that's why we're opposed to HB 1001," Sanderson said. "Because we know this federal money is going to go away and we'll go back to normal at some point."

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Gov. Kristi Noem said in her budget address that the state still has about \$131 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act, which she proposed spending on water projects.

Sanderson added that businesses and retailers across the state aren't seeing increased profits in recent years or after the tax cut, because their costs are still increasing. Inflation has increased significantly in the past few years, with 2023 ending at 3.5% after 8% inflation in 2022 and 4.7% in 2021.

Opponents representing the South Dakota Farm Bureau and the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce also worry that South Dakotans will vote in November to eliminate the state sales tax on anything sold for human consumption, commonly referred to as the grocery tax or food tax. Petitions to place that measure on the ballot are circulating.

Gov. Kristi Noem cautioned legislators last session that a proposed ballot question for the 2024 general election eliminating the food sales tax will likely pass, which could leave lawmakers scrambling for revenue.

A statewide South Dakota News Watch poll released in December showed that 60.6% of registered voters support eliminating the grocery tax.

"Let's pull back a little bit," Sanderson said. "Let's keep the big picture in mind why we're seeing the record revenues that we're seeing and what's going to happen in the next couple of years."

Noem administration supports tax cut, despite initial opposition last session

The state Bureau of Finance and Management expects the state will have surplus revenue for the next budget year — primarily due to higher than expected contractor's excise tax revenue and unclaimed property funds.

Overall, the bureau expects \$115 million in surplus ongoing revenue, which Noem hopes to put toward a 4% increase in funding for education, health care providers and state employees.

Bureau Commissioner Jim Terwilliger told the Taxation Committee that he supports the effort to make the tax cut permanent, since predictable and permanent tax policy is the goal of the state.

He added that South Dakota's rising population will drive economic growth and spending, making the cut affordable. A state demographer predicts the state's population growth will continue over the next decade but at a slower rate than in recent years.

Impact of tax cut explained

The bureau expects South Dakota to receive \$23 million less in sales tax revenue this fiscal year than projected by the Legislature last session. That shortfall is due to a slower growth rate in sales tax revenue than years prior and the implementation of the statewide tax cut.

According to the bureau's presentation to the Joint Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, the tax cut has resulted in a 6.67% net decrease in sales tax revenue for the state so far compared to the same period of the previous year. When accounting for the rate change, sales tax spending has increased by 3.4% in the last six months compared to the same period a year before.

But in order to meet the legislative adopted estimate for sales tax revenue in the current 2024 fiscal year, sales tax receipts would have to grow by 7.4% in the remaining seven months.

That is "more considerable growth than what we've seen for the last 10 to 12 months," State Economist Derek Johnson told lawmakers Tuesday afternoon.

"At this point in time, we don't think that growth will be quite that strong the remaining seven months," he added.

Rep. Roger DeGroot, R-Brookings, was the lone vote against the tax cut bill Thursday morning. He told South Dakota Searchlight after the meeting that he thinks it's best to let the sunset clause run its course, especially given the popularity of the food tax cut initiative so far.

"We have time. It doesn't sunset for another 2.5 years — we're only half a year into it," he said. "If we want to extend that sunset, we can in a couple of years. If the food tax cut doesn't pass, we can give a more meaningful cut from .3% to a half percent. We have options in the future."

Other members of the committee, including Rep. Liz May, R-Kyle, said the House originally voted for a

permanent tax cut last year and would push for one again this year.

"I do think this is an obligation to the taxpayer that we need," May said, "so we need to pass this."

The bill now goes to the full House of Representatives.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

COMMENTARY

Jackley's bill signals resurrection of Open Meetings Commission by DANA HESS

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley made some news last month when he announced the five bills he's backing during the 2024 legislative session. Most of the headlines generated by his announcement concerned the attempt to regulate a livestock tranquilizer being used by drug dealers or outlawing the use of artificial intelligence to create child pornography.

Listed later in the stories was information about a Jackley-backed bill that will be of interest to everyone in the state who cares about open government. Senate Bill 26 calls for allowing assistant state's attorneys to serve on the Open Meetings Commission. Currently, the attorney general appoints five state's attorneys to serve on the commission.

Opening up the commission's membership to assistant state's attorneys is not the big news, however. The news is that Jackley must intend to breathe some new life into a commission that looks like it has been dormant for far too long.

Appealing to the commission is the only real recourse that citizens have when they believe that a local government body has run afoul of the state's open meetings law. Unfortunately, the commission seems to have been inactive since the dark days of Jason Ravensborg's tenure as attorney general.

The nature of Jackley's proposed legislation points toward what must be the difficulty in recruiting state's attorneys to serve on the commission. On the attorney general's website, the last commission meeting minutes posted are from Dec. 31, 2020. From 2011 to 2020, the commission met at least once a year and sometimes as many as four times a year to consider open meetings law violations. That amount of activity shows how important it is to get the Open Meetings Commission up and running again.

The Open Meetings Commission was founded in 2004 when Larry Long was serving as attorney general. The commission, which rules on whether local boards or councils have broken the open meetings law, was created because of the toothless nature of the South Dakota law governing those meetings. Prior to the creation of the commission, citizens who believed that their local board was circumventing the open meetings law had only one recourse: Convince the local state's attorney to take on the case.

Violation of the open meetings law is a Class 2 misdemeanor punishable by 30 days in jail, a \$500 fine or both. No one has been prosecuted for a violation of that law. Ever.

The Open Meetings Commission, while it can't punish the errant city council or school board, can publish a reprimand if it finds that they violated the law. That's what it has come to in South Dakota. We lack the fortitude to punish open meetings law offenders — officials who choose to illegally conduct public business in secret. The best we can do is point out their transgressions in the hopes that they will be shamed into future compliance. Or perhaps they will just be more discreet the next time they break the law.

The lack of prosecution for these offenses has to do with the nature of elected officials. It's hard to imagine the local state's attorney bringing the county commission up on charges for an open meetings law violation since part of the state's attorney's job is advising and working with the county commissioners. In smaller communities, the state's attorney may also act as an attorney for the local school board or city council. It's easy to imagine a state's attorney's hesitance at having to prosecute a steady, lucrative client in a place where clients like that are hard to find.

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It's good news that Jackley is seeking to broaden the membership of the Open Meetings Commission. That can only mean that he wants to get it back in action. This move will be good for open government even if the best the state can do for an open meetings violation is a public shaming.

In a perfect world, these violators wouldn't just be publicly disgraced, they'd be prosecuted. On their own, state's attorneys have been less than valiant when it comes to prosecuting boards that break the open meetings law. Perhaps as a group, on the Open Meetings Commission, they should have the power to enforce the law and punish the offenders. That would do far more for the cause of open government than the light slap on the wrist that offenders currently have to endure.

If that's too great a leap for the current attorney general, perhaps he would consider this: Amend Senate Bill 26 to include the addition of not just assistant state's attorneys but members of the public, open government advocates and members of the media. The membership of the Open Meetings Commission should be open to all South Dakotans since all South Dakotans have a stake in protecting open government.

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

New turmoil over possible shutdown in D.C. amid warnings of a WIC food program shortfall

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND JACOB FISCHLER - JANUARY 11, 2024 5:07 PM

WASHINGTON — Meetings on Thursday between U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson and conservative lawmakers led to speculation he was about to walk away from the bipartisan spending agreement he signed off on just this past weekend — a decision that would greatly increase the chances of a partial government shutdown next week.

Also Thursday, Biden administration officials highlighted another urgent spending problem, warning that the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, better known as WIC, faces a major funding shortfall due to increased costs and participation. The gap in funding could mean states would have to turn to waiting lists for those who want to enroll, administration officials said on a conference call with reporters.

At the Capitol, a small bloc of House GOP lawmakers who are frustrated with Johnson for brokering the spending deal with Democrats met with the speaker on the next steps in the government funding process.

While the spending deal is seen by many as a major step forward in moving toward consensus following months of tumult, certain GOP lawmakers want to see changes or possibly additions.

Those talks led to considerable confusion as to whether Johnson was considering a shift in the spending deal.

"Let me tell you what's going on," Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, told reporters outside his office.

"We're having thoughtful conversations about funding options and priorities. We had a cross section of members in today. We'll continue having cross sections of members in," Johnson explained. "And while those conversations are going on, I've made no commitments. So if you hear otherwise it's just simply not true. We're looking forward to those conversations."

Democrats and some Republican lawmakers expressed concern that Johnson might switch course just days before a government funding deadline that comes more than three months into the fiscal year.

Senate Appropriations Committee ranking member Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, said Thursday afternoon that her staff told her "there are rumors about that," though she hadn't heard from Johnson on the issue.

"I certainly hope that's not true because it increases the chances of a government shutdown," Collins said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said that senators would continue negotiations with the House based on the agreement for total spending levels that he and Johnson announced Sunday.

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"Look, we have a topline agreement," Schumer said. "Everybody knows to get anything done it has to be bipartisan. So we're going to continue to work to pass a CR and avoid a shutdown."

CR stands for continuing resolution, the name often given to the short-term spending bill that Congress approves to give themselves more time to negotiate agreement on the full-year spending bills.

Congress has passed two of those bills so far for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1 and the Senate is on track to vote on a third CR next week ahead of the Jan. 19 funding deadline for some of the annual bills.

Womack: A 'flawed strategy'

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, hadn't heard directly from Johnson about whether he planned to withdraw from the spending agreement as of Thursday afternoon.

"I'm doing my job according to the agreement we have and I'm moving forward," Murray said.

That spending agreement would provide \$886.3 billion in defense and \$772.7 billion in domestic discretionary spending for the current fiscal year, which began back on Oct. 1.

Arkansas Republican Rep. Steve Womack said Thursday afternoon that he expected to hear soon if Johnson was considering walking away from the topline deal, though he said that wouldn't be wise.

"Renegotiating for purposes of appeasing a group of people, 100% of whom you're not going to have, in my opinion, could be a flawed strategy," Womack said, referring to the conservatives who have been calling for Johnson to scuttle the agreement.

That group of especially conservative Republicans, many of whom are members of the far-right Freedom Caucus, rarely, if ever, vote for spending bills. And it's unlikely that they would vote for any full-year bills that can garner support in the Democratic Senate, let alone President Joe Biden's signature.

Maryland Democratic Rep. Steny Hoyer, the former House Democratic leader, said that if Johnson were to walk away from the spending deal it would affect his ability to negotiate agreements in the future.

"You can only do that so many times and have any credibility or respect for the way you do business," Hoyer said.

House Republicans, Hoyer said, have remained a "deeply divided, divisive and dysfunctional party" despite removing their former speaker and electing Johnson to the role.

Congress must pass some sort of spending bill before Jan. 19, otherwise the departments and agencies funded by the Agriculture, Energy-Water, Military Construction-VA and Transportation-HUD spending measures would enter a shutdown.

The remaining departments and agencies funded through the annual appropriations process would shut down on Feb. 2 if the House and Senate haven't come to agreement on either a short-term spending bill or the full-year bills before that deadline.

The Senate is on track to vote on a stopgap spending bill next week that would keep the federal government funded a bit longer. Schumer took steps Thursday to set up a procedural vote Tuesday that will require at least 60 senators to advance it toward final passage. The details of that stopgap spending bill haven't been released.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said during a Thursday press briefing that House Republicans "need to keep their word," on the spending deal agreement that Johnson made with Democrats over the weekend.

"We cannot have a shutdown," she said. "That is their basic duty, to keep the government open."

WIC 'a ship heading towards an iceberg'

Even if Congress does pass a stopgap measure to keep the government open, the federal program to provide nutrition assistance to children would face a considerable funding shortfall that could have disastrous effects for some who depend on the program.

WIC provides nutrition assistance to about 6.7 million infants, young children and pregnant and postpartum women per month, but could not continue that pace without a funding increase, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told reporters Thursday.

State administrators may soon be faced with difficult choices if Congress does not approve additional spending to account for increased food costs and growing participation, Vilsack and Washington state's program director Paul Throne said Thursday.

"With rising caseloads, increased food costs and level funding, WIC is a ship heading towards an iceberg," Throne said.

The federal government spent about \$7.5 billion on WIC in fiscal 2023, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data.

If the USDA and states continued to provide benefits for everyone who qualifies, and Congress does not increase funding, "it would result in a billion-dollar shortfall," about six weeks' worth of the program, Vilsack said.

"A funding shortfall of this magnitude presents states with a difficult and untenable decision in terms of how to manage the program," he said.

To cut costs, states may divert some qualified participants to waiting lists, Vilsack said. Under the program's rules, postpartum women who are not breastfeeding would be the first placed on waiting lists, then children from 1 to 5 years old without high-risk medical issues, followed by all program participants without high-risk medical issues.

Throne said turning away applicants in need would have "serious" consequences, leaving young children hungry and pregnant women without access to health screenings.

The Washington state program needs additional federal funding to meet its needs, Throne said.

"People are spending more of their WIC benefits, which is a good thing," Throne said. "But after nearly four years of rising caseloads, my budget is stretched, and I project that I will soon be asking for more help from USDA to feed our 131,000 participants. I'm afraid that this year I may no longer have the budget to serve everyone."

Vilsack called for Congress to "fully fund" WIC this month.

The first two continuing resolutions of the fiscal year authorized state programs to spend at faster rates to meet the needs of all applicants, but didn't supply any additional funding.

By not updating spending amounts to reflect higher costs, Congress is putting the program on a path to fail, Vilsack said.

"Through the last two recent continuing resolutions, Congress has indicated to the USDA, the states and the WIC beneficiaries that we should spend current funding actually at a faster rate than Congress has provided funding in order to be able to serve everyone who is eligible" through March, he said. "But Congress hasn't provided the funds to cover the program once those resources run out."

A third continuing resolution would keep that imbalance in place for longer, adding to the "major shortages" in funding states would face at the end of fiscal 2024," Vilsack said.

Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Country music singer 'Jelly Roll' pleads with Congress to act on fentanyl crisis

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 11, 2024 3:00 PM

WASHINGTON — Country music star Jason "Jelly Roll" DeFord stepped out of the recording studio and into a Capitol Hill hearing room on Thursday to urge Congress to take action to curb both the supply of illicit fentanyl and the demand for it.

"I could sit here and cry for days about the caskets I've carried of people I've loved dearly, deeply in my soul," he said. "Good people, not just drug addicts — uncles, friends, cousins, normal people, some people

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who just got in a car wreck and started taking a pain pill to manage it, and one thing led to the other.”

“How fast it spirals out of control, I don’t think people truly understand,” he added.

DeFord is a Grammy nominee and winner of New Artist of the Year at the Country Music Awards in November. He has played shows in Sioux Falls and Rapid City and is scheduled to appear at the Sturgis Buffalo Chip campground in August during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

He told senators he wasn’t testifying to “defend the use of illegal drugs.”

“I also understand the paradox of my history as a drug dealer standing in front of this committee,” said DeFord, of Antioch, Tennessee. “But equally, I think that’s what makes me perfect to talk about this. I was a part of the problem. I am here now, standing as a man that wants to be a part of the solution.”

DeFord said that when he was younger he genuinely believed “selling drugs was a victimless crime.”

“My father always told me what doesn’t get you in the wash will get you in the rinse,” he said. “Now I have a 15-year-old daughter whose mother is a drug addict. Every day I get to look in the eyes of a victim in my household of the effects of drugs.”

And every day, DeFord said, he wonders if he will have to tell his daughter “that her mother became a part of the national statistic.”

DeFord as well as Patrick Yoes, national president of the Fraternal Order of Police, and Christopher J. Urben, a retired U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent, all testified before the U.S. Senate Banking Committee during a hearing about addiction and ways to address it.

Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, chairman of the committee, said that no matter where someone lives in the country, they have a story about fentanyl affecting a family member, a friend or a colleague.

“We’ve all lost someone or know someone who’s lost someone,” Brown said. “It’s a crisis that cuts across all geographic lines and certainly across all partisan divides. That’s why it’s been and will continue to be a top priority of this committee.”

The Fend Off Fentanyl Act, a broadly bipartisan bill with 67 co-sponsors, would “reduce the flow of fentanyl into our communities,” he said.

“In this committee, our purview is often money,” Brown said. “We use that authority to hit the cartels and chemical suppliers directly where it hurts — their bank accounts.”

The 42-page bill passed the committee last June but has not gotten a vote on the Senate floor.

South Carolina Republican Sen. Tim Scott, ranking member on the panel, bemoaned the politics around the legislation.

“Unfortunately, we’re here today having another hearing on Fend Off Fentanyl because our friends on the other side of the Capitol — because of the shenanigans at the end of last year — didn’t get the bill included in legislation that would have made this, I believe, law already,” Scott said. “It is incredibly unfortunate that playing politics is still a game played in Washington, especially on something so important.”

Scott noted that fentanyl led to the deaths of 75,000 Americans during 2022, according to preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

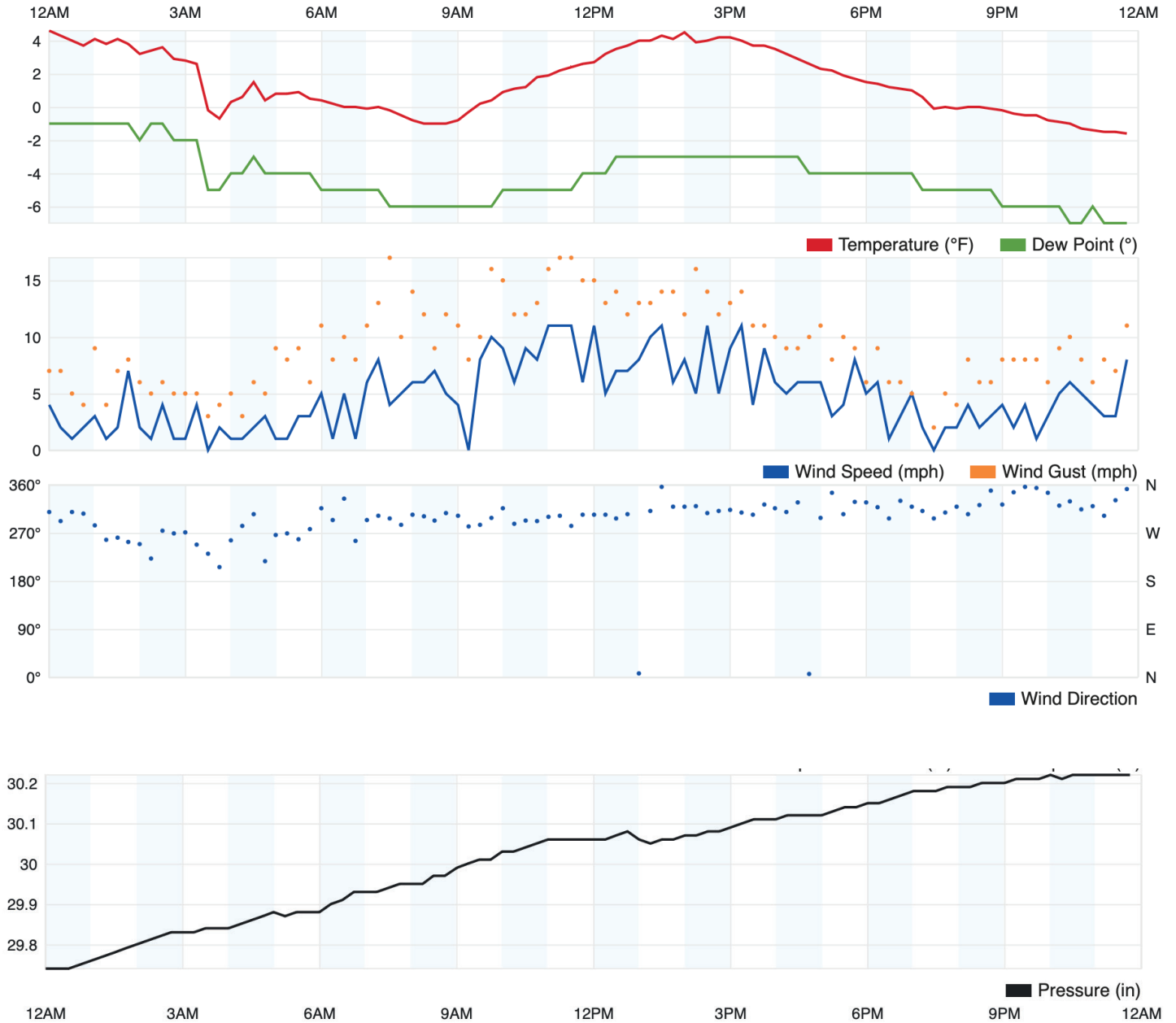
Having the bill stalled without a clear pathway to becoming law at the moment is not just frustrating to members of Congress, Scott said, but “incredibly frustrating to the people of our country who watch the devastation eat away at their communities.”

Jennifer covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Fri Jan 12	Sat Jan 13	Sun Jan 14	Mon Jan 15	Tue Jan 16	Wed Jan 17	Thu Jan 18
2°F -7°F	-5°F -17°F	-6°F -12°F	-2°F -9°F	9°F 3°F	17°F 2°F	10°F -4°F
N 22 MPH	NW 30 MPH 40%	WNW 16 MPH	WNW 16 MPH	W 12 MPH 10%	WNW 13 MPH	NW 16 MPH



Coldest Air of the Season Incoming

January 12, 2024
5:41 AM

Key Messages

- Dangerously cold wind chills of -30 to -45 degrees Friday night through Monday.
- 30 to 60% chance of light snow through Saturday. Less than an inch west of the James Valley; 1 to 2 inches Sisseton Hills east.
- Blowing/drifting snow Friday night and Saturday. Visibility reduced to a half mile or less at times.

NEW

What Has Changed

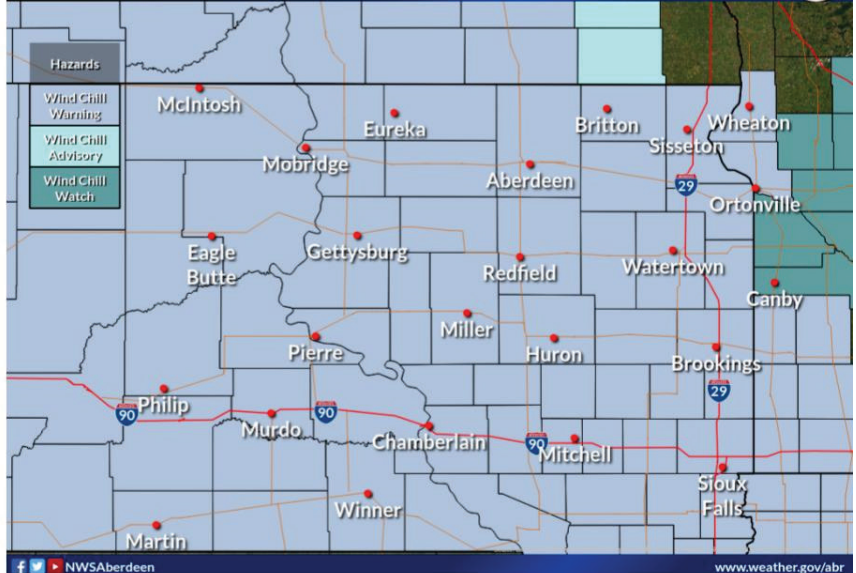
- Added Winter Weather Advisory to central SD for blowing snow impacts

Next Scheduled Update

- Friday afternoon

Wind Chill Headlines

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen/Rapid City/Sioux Falls, SD
Issued Jan 12, 2024 4:31 AM CST



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Dangerously cold wind chills of -30 to -50 degrees will move into the region today and remain through Monday. Some light snow is expected today, accumulations less than an inch for areas west of the James Valley, and closer to 1 to 2 inches for the Sisseton Hills and east.

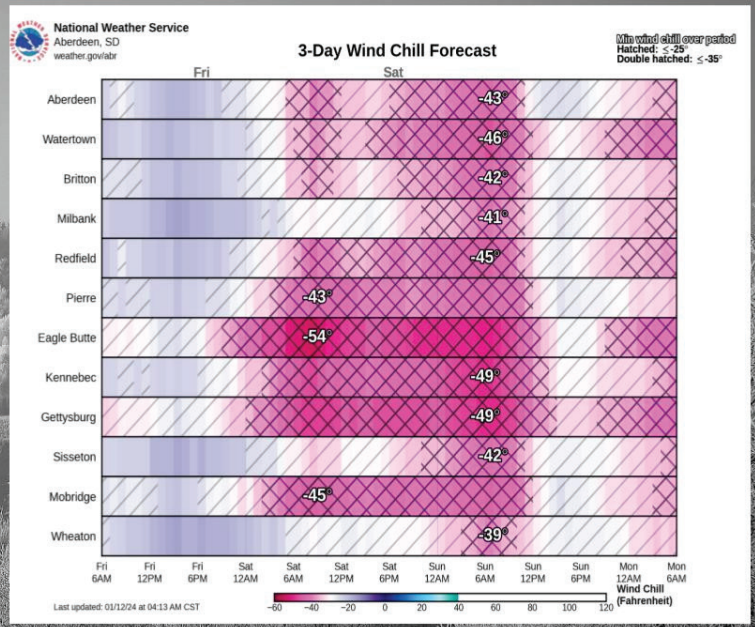
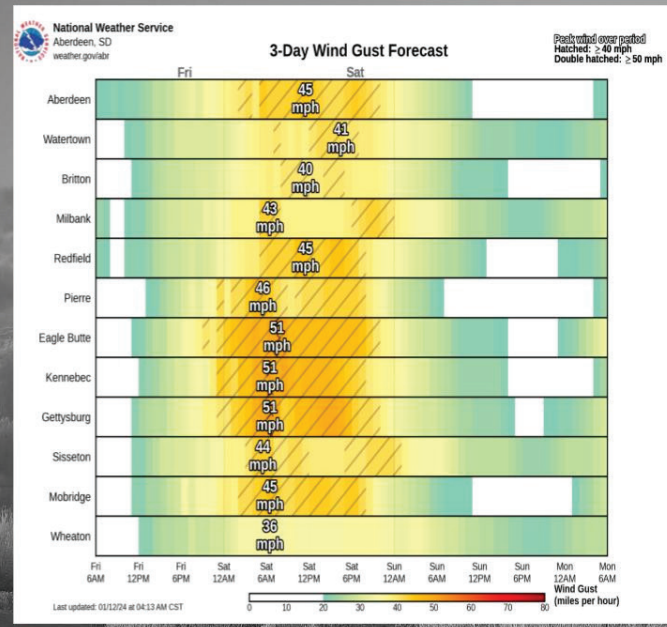
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Dangerously Cold Wind Chills

January 12, 2024
5:46 AM



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

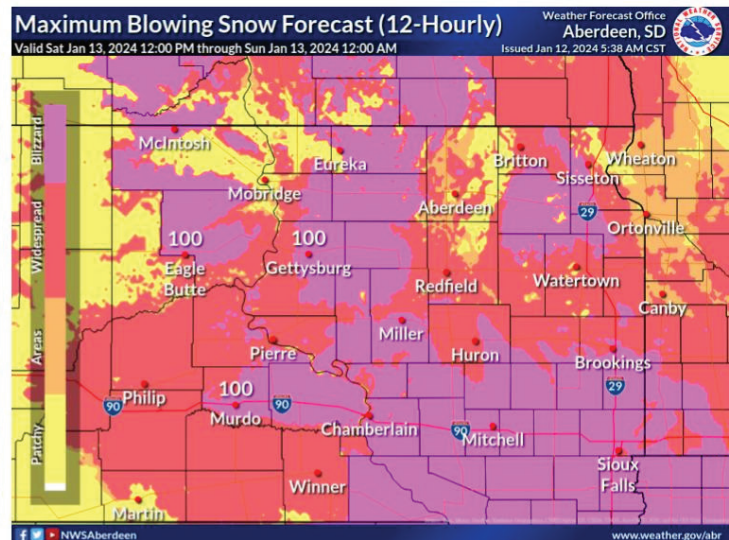
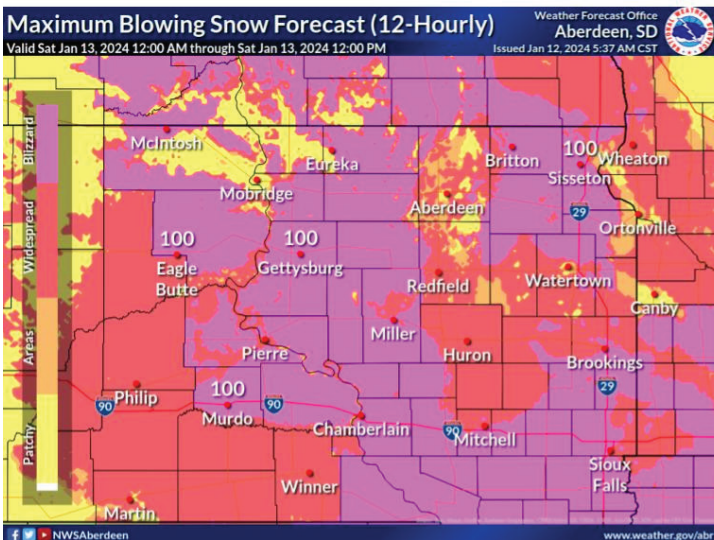
A Wind Chill Advisory is currently in effect for our entire forecast area. Wind chills today are expected to be in the -18 to -35 degree range. Please take precautions if you must go outside today. For tips on how to stay safe, visit www.weather.gov/safety/cold.



Blowing Snow Potential

January 12, 2024
5:51 AM

Expected New Snow Accumulations through Saturday



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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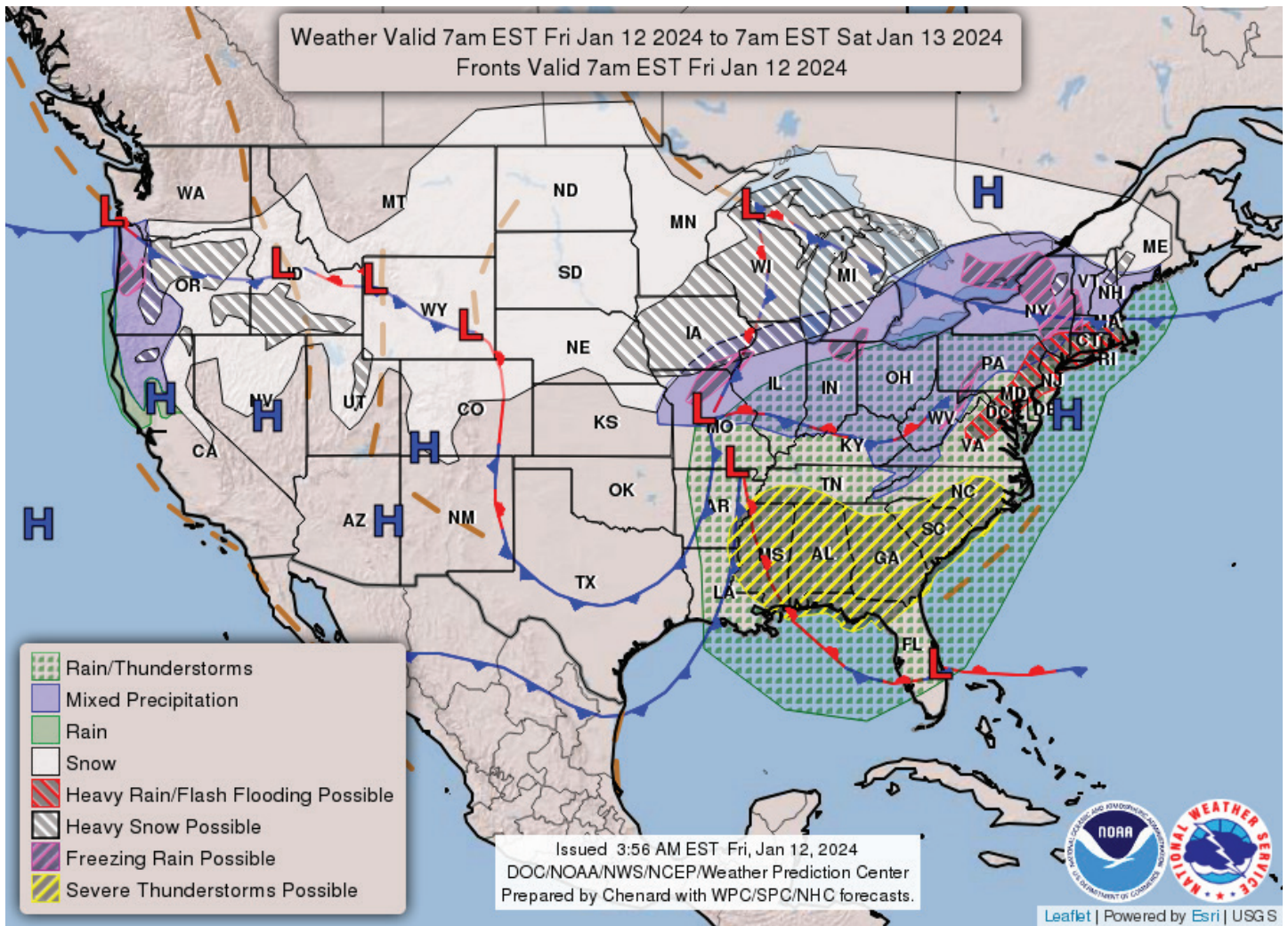
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 5 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: -2 °F at 11:26 PM
Wind: 17 mph at 7:07 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 4 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1987
Record Low: -46 in 1912
Average High: 23
Average Low: 2
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.25
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.25
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:12:56 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07:49 am



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Today in Weather History

January 12, 1912: The all-time coldest temperature ever recorded at Aberdeen and Timber Lake, South Dakota, was 46 degrees below zero on this date in 1912. On February 8th, 1895, 46 degrees below zero was also recorded in Aberdeen. The record low for this date was also set at Watertown, with 38 degrees below zero.

January 12, 1997: On January 12th, 1997, some of the greatest snow depths were recorded across central and northeast South Dakota. Ipswich had 29 inches on the ground, Aberdeen had 30 inches, Timber Lake had 31 inches, Mobridge had 34 inches, and Waubay had 38 inches. Some of the highest snow depths were recorded at Summit, Sand Lake, and Eureka. Summit had 42 inches of snow on the ground on January 12th, Sand Lake had 47 inches, and Eureka had a snow depth of 50 inches. The snow depth at Aberdeen was the all-time record, and Mobridge was just an inch shy of their 35-inch record snow depth.

1886: With a reading of 26 degrees below zero, Bowling Green, Kentucky, recorded its coldest temperature on record.

1888: Children's or Schoolhouse Blizzard occurred on this day. A sharp cold front swept southward from the Dakotas to Texas in just 24 hours spawning a severe blizzard over the Great Plains. Subzero temperatures and mountainous snow drifts killed tens of thousands of cattle. The blizzard killed 235 people, many of whom were children on their way home from school, across the Northern Plains.

1890: A tornado touched down at St. Louis, Missouri, and crossed the Mississippi River, ending just south of Venice. The worst damage from this tornado occurred in St. Louis. Further east and northeast, one tornado in McLean County passed through downtown Cooksville, destroying at least a dozen buildings, while a tornado in Richland County destroyed four homes northeast of Olney. In all, over 100 homes and other buildings were unroofed or damaged. The storm caused four deaths and 15 injuries.

1912 - The morning low of 47 degrees below zero at Washta IA established a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1985: A record snowstorm struck portions of western and south-central Texas. All snowfall records dating back to 1885 were easily broken. Austin measured 3.6 inches, and Del Rio received 8.6 inches. San Antonio saw a record-setting 13.5 inches from this event.

1987 - Twenty-seven cities in the Upper Midwest reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 72 degrees at Valentine NE and 76 degrees at Rapid City SD set records for the month of January. (National Weather Summary)

1988 - Parts of North Dakota finally got their first snow of the winter season, and it came with a fury as a blizzard raged across the north central U.S. Snowfall totals ranged up to 14 inches at Fargo ND, winds gusted to 65 mph at Windom MN, and wind chill readings in North Dakota reached 60 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A dozen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s. Fort Myers FL reported a record high of 86 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Gale force winds produce squalls with heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Totals in northwest Pennsylvania ranged up to eleven inches at Conneautville and Meadville. Barnes Corners, in western New York State, was buried under 27 inches of snow in two days. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: A magnitude 7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti, leaving over 200,000 people dead.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

HUMILITY

A visitor to a monastery asked the monk who greeted him the main ministry of his order.

Offering the visitor a gracious smile, he said, "Well, when it comes to learning and teaching, we cannot compare to the Jesuits. When it comes to good works, we certainly cannot match the Franciscans. And, when it comes to preaching, we are far below the Dominicans. But when it comes to humility, we are at the top of the list."

The apostle Peter is well known for his boldness for his Lord. Yet he once wrote, "You young men...serve each other with humility, for God sets Himself against the proud, but He shows favor to the humble."

We often think that position and status are the marks of greatness. And, it is reasonable to want recognition and to be rewarded for the things that we accomplish. But here, Peter reminds us of a crucial fact: in the final analysis, we must remember that God's recognition and rewards, His blessings and approval, count more than all of the human praise we may ever get.

In His own time, God will honor and bless us for what we do to honor and bless Him. It is not the things that we do to draw attention to ourselves that matter to God. It is what we do to direct others to recognize His love that reflects His goodness and grace, mercy and salvation, and the hope that we have in and through Him. In the final analysis, we must make Him known.

Prayer: Lord, let us be alert for every opportunity to let others know that You are the "main attraction" in our lives. May what we do point others to Christ, our Savior. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. 1 Peter 5:6



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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paypal.me/paperpaul





WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.09.24

12 15 32 33 53 24

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$187,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 45 Mins 5
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.10.24

7 19 27 38 51 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,300,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 5
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.24

9 10 21 24 28 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 15 Mins 5
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.10.24

2 28 30 31 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 15
DRAW: Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.10.24

2 7 27 34 51 19

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 44
DRAW: Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.10.24

25 40 43 48 50 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$77,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 44
DRAW: Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Bison 44, McIntosh 35
Canistota 52, Howard 40
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Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

McBride scores 21 to lead Oral Roberts to 84-66 victory over South Dakota

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Isaac McBride scored 21 points to lead Oral Roberts to an 84-66 victory over South Dakota on Thursday night.

McBride made 8 of 16 shots but missed all five of his 3-pointers for the Golden Eagles (8-8, 2-1 Summit League). Jailen Bedford finished with 17 points and four steals. Kareem Thompson totaled 13 points and 12 rebounds. Freshman Josh Jones scored 10 off the bench on 4-for-5 shooting.

Kaleb Stewart scored 21 points to lead the Coyotes (8-10, 1-2). Paul Bruns pitched in with 13 points and eight rebounds. Lahat Thioune scored 10 with eight boards.

Get poll alerts and updates on AP Top 25 basketball throughout the season. Sign up here.

AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-basketball-poll> and <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball>

Mayo's 25 lead South Dakota State over St. Thomas 81-80

By The Associated Press undefined

SAINT PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Zeke Mayo had 25 points, including a go-ahead jumper with 6.1 seconds left, to help South Dakota State beat St. Thomas 81-80 on Thursday night.

Mayo also added nine rebounds and three steals for the Jackrabbits (9-8, 2-0 Summit League). William Kyle III scored 13 points, shooting 5 of 10 from the field and 3 for 4 from the line. Luke Appel shot 5 of 8 from the field and 2 for 3 from the line to finish with 13 points.

Raheem Anthony finished with 21 points for the Tommies (12-6, 2-1). Drake Dobbs added 18 points for St. Thomas. Kendall Blue also had 17 points. The loss snapped the Tommies' six-game winning streak.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

Live updates | In Day 2 of hearings, Israel rejects South Africa's allegation of genocide

By The Associated Press undefined

As the second day of hearings began Friday at the United Nations' top court, Israel is rejecting allegations levied by South Africa that its campaign against Hamas amounts to genocide against the Palestinian people, saying that, if anything, it is Hamas that is guilty of genocide.

Although the case is likely to take years to resolve, South Africa is asking the International Court of Justice to order an immediate suspension of Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip. It's unclear if Israel would comply with any court order.

Meanwhile, United States and British militaries launched strikes on sites used by the Iran-backed Houthi rebel group in Yemen in retaliation for their attacks on ships in the Red Sea. The Houthis say their attacks are aimed at stopping Israel's war on Hamas, but their targets increasingly have little or no connection to Israel and imperil a crucial trade route linking Asia and the Middle East with Europe.

The Oct. 7 Hamas attack from Gaza into southern Israel that triggered the war killed around 1,200 people and saw some 250 others taken hostage by militants. Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza has killed more than 23,000 people, some 70% 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:

- Israel defends itself at the U.N.'s top court against allegations of genocide.
- Houthi rebels say U.S.-led strikes in Yemen killed 5 people and wounded 6, raising Mideast tensions.
- Blinken sees a path to peace in Gaza, reconstruction and regional security after his Mideast tour.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

GERMANY BACKS THE US-LED STRIKES ON HOUTHİ REBELS

BERLIN — German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Friday that Germany backs the United States-led strikes on Houthi targets in the Red Sea.

"The reaction has our political support," Baerbock said from Kuala Lumpur after a meeting with Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Mohamad Hasan, according to the news agency dpa.

She criticized the Houthis for "contributing to the destabilization of an already tense regional situation" with their attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea, calling on the group to "stop these attacks immediately."

Baerbock said German and European Union leaders are working to quickly determine "how we ourselves can strengthen stabilization in the Red Sea and can contribute to this stabilization."

IN DAY 2 OF HEARINGS, ISRAEL REJECTS SOUTH AFRICA'S ALLEGATIONS OF GENOCIDE

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Israel is rejecting allegations levied by South Africa that its campaign against Hamas amounts to genocide against the Palestinian people, saying that, if anything, it is Hamas that is guilty of genocide.

Israeli representative Tal Becker asked for a dismissal of the case, calling it "a libel" in his opening statement Friday to the International Court of Justice.

He told the court that Hamas started the violence with its surprise Oct. 7 attack on Israel in which more than 1,200 people were killed, while showing the court images of those people slain.

Becker accused Hamas of hiding its fighters and military assets throughout Gaza in densely populated civilian areas, and making use of mosques, homes, U.N. facilities and hospitals. He also showed the court video of Hamas official Ghazi Hamad vowing to continue attacks and annihilate Israel, while discounting the reported death toll of more than 23,000 Palestinians as "unverified statistics provided by Hamas itself."

"If there is a threat to the Palestinian civilians of Gaza, it stems primarily from the fact that they have lived under the control of a genocidal terrorist organization that has total disregard for their life and well-being," Becker, who is the legal adviser to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the court.

ISRAEL ARGUES ITS OFFENSIVE IN GAZA IS LEGITIMATE SELF-DEFENSE, NOT GENOCIDE

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Lawyer Malcolm Shaw defended Israel from the charge of genocide launched

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by South Africa at the International Court of Justice by saying Israel's blistering offensive on Gaza was a legitimate use of armed force in self-defense.

Over 23,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli air and ground offensive, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry, two thirds of whom are believed to be women and children.

Shaw, the second of six members of the Israeli legal team to speak, said that the high death toll does not amount to genocide.

"Armed conflict is brutal and costs lives, particularly when the militia in question targets civilians," Shaw said.

He accused South Africa of cheapening the charge of genocide — which he called the "crime of crimes" — by applying it to the Israeli offensive. He said the "real genocide" occurred when Hamas militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people.

Shaw rebutted South Africa's charge that Israeli officials had displayed genocidal intent by calling the statements referenced by South Africa's legal team "random quotes not in conformity with government policy." He dismissed them as emotional wartime statements without legal significance.

Shaw said that the Israeli war cabinet and military were operating in accordance with international law and trying to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza by referring to statements from top Israeli officials. But he did not provide evidence that such statements were backed up by Israeli policy on the ground.

FRANCE CONDEMNS HOUSHI ATTACKS ON VESSELS IN THE RED SEA

PARIS — France condemned Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and demanded an immediate halt Friday. France has warships in the region that protect commercial vessels and are working with American and British partners.

"Through these armed actions, the Houthis bear an extremely heavy responsibility for regional escalation," the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It noted that this week's United Nations resolution gives countries "the right to react to these attacks."

"France will continue to assume its responsibilities and contribute to maritime security in this zone in conjunction with its partners," it said.

9 PALESTINIANS KILLED IN AN ISRAELI STRIKE IN SOUTHERN GAZA

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Nine members of a Palestinian family have been killed in an Israeli strike in southern Gaza.

Relatives gathered Friday at the Abu Yousef Al-Najar Hospital in Rafah to grieve for their loved ones who were killed the day before, their bodies laid out on the ground covered in white sheets.

Hundreds of people have been killed in recent days in strikes across the territory, including in areas of the far south where Israel has told people to seek refuge. Israeli military operations in Gaza have lately focused on the southern city of Khan Younis and urban refugee camps in the territory's center.

The Israeli military said Friday that, over the past day, it had killed dozens of militants in Khan Younis and the Maghazi camp.

Since the Oct. 7 attack launched by Hamas into southern Israel in which some 1,200 people were killed, at least 23,469 Palestinians have been killed according to the Ministry of Health in Hamas-run Gaza.

Israel has reported 184 soldiers killed since the beginning of its ground operations.

RUSSIA'S FOREIGN MINISTRY CONDEMNS US STRIKES ON YEMEN AS IRRESPONSIBLE

London — Speaking Friday about the strikes on Yemen, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova strongly condemned "these irresponsible actions by the United States and its allies" in the Middle East.

Speaking during her weekly briefing, Zakharova said that "a large-scale military escalation in the Red Sea region could reverse the positive trends that have recently emerged in the Yemeni settlement process, as well as destabilizing the situation throughout the Middle East region." She also said the "U.S. position in the U.N. Security Council on the Red Sea is only a pretext for further escalation of tensions in the region."

NORWAY AND SWEDEN CALL FOR AN END TO ATTACKS IN THE RED SEA BEFORE CONFLICT SPREADS FURTHER

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COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide described the situation in the Mideast as “a low-intensity conflict” that was “now spreading to neighboring countries.”

“The basic conflict is the one we see in Gaza and in the Middle East itself. We must do everything we can to solve it,” Barth Eide said. “At the same time, it is not acceptable that there are regular attacks on shipping through the Red Sea.”

His Swedish colleague Tobias Billström said in a statement to the Swedish news agency TT that the responsibility for the situation “lies with the Houthis. Their attacks in the Red Sea must stop.”

YEMEN'S HOUTHİ REBELS SAY US-LED STRIKES TARGETING THEM KILLED 5 PEOPLE AND WOUNDED 6
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — United States-led airstrikes on Yemen killed at least five people and wounded six others, military spokesperson from the Houthi rebels Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said Friday in a videotaped address.

“The American and British enemy bears full responsibility for its criminal aggression against our Yemeni people, and it will not go unanswered and unpunished,” Saree said.

He described 73 strikes hitting five regions of Yemen under Houthi control. He did not elaborate on what the U.S.-led strikes targeted.

TESLA ANNOUNCES PRODUCTION STOPPAGE DUE TO RED SEA FIGHTING

BERLIN — The electric vehicle company Tesla announced it will halt most of its production for two weeks in its factory near Berlin, from Jan. 29 to Feb. 11, due to the developing conflict in the Red Sea.

“The armed conflicts in the Red Sea and the associated shifts in transport routes between Europe and Asia via the Cape of Good Hope are also affecting production in Grünheide,” Tesla said in a statement Thursday night. “The significantly longer transport times create a gap in the supply chains.”

Normal operations are expected to begin again on Feb. 12, Tesla said in the statement.

Israel defends itself at the UN’s top court against allegations of genocide against Palestinians

By MIKE CORDER and RAF CASERT Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Accused of committing genocide against Palestinians, Israel insisted at the United Nations’ highest court Friday that its war in Gaza was a legitimate defense of its people and said instead that Hamas was guilty of genocide.

Israel described the allegations leveled by South Africa as hypocritical and said that one of the biggest cases ever to come before an international court reflected a world turned upside down. Israeli leaders defend their air and ground offensive in Gaza as a legitimate response to Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack, when militants stormed through Israeli communities, killed some 1,200 people and took around 250 hostage.

Israeli legal advisor Tal Becker told a packed auditorium at the ornate Palace of Peace in The Hague that the country is fighting a “war it did not start and did not want.”

“In these circumstances, there can hardly be a charge more false and more malevolent than the allegation against Israel of genocide,” he added, noting that the horrible suffering of civilians in war was not enough to level a charge of genocide.

South African lawyers asked the court Thursday to order an immediate halt to Israeli military operations in the besieged coastal territory that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians. A decision on that request will probably take weeks, and the full case is likely to last years — though it’s unclear if Israel would follow any court orders.

On Friday, Israel focused on the brutality of the Oct. 7 attacks, presenting chilling video and audio to a hushed audience to highlight what happened that day.

“They tortured children in front of parents and parents in front of children, burned people, including infants alive, and systematically raped and mutilated scores of women, men and children,” Becker said.

South Africa’s request, he said, amounts to an attempt to prevent Israel from defending against that assault.

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Even when acting in self-defense, countries are required by international law to follow the rules of war, and the court must decide if Israel has.

Israel often boycotts international tribunals and U.N. investigations, saying they are unfair and biased. But this time, Israeli leaders have taken the rare step of sending a high-level legal team — a sign of how seriously they regard the case and likely their fear that any court order to halt operations would be a major blow to the country's international standing.

Still, Becker dismissed the accusations as crude and attention-seeking.

"We live at a time when words are cheap in an age of social media and identity politics. The temptation to reach for the most outrageous term to vilify and demonize has become, for many, irresistible," he said.

He said charges of genocide should be targeted at Hamas.

"If there have been acts that may be characterized as genocidal, then they have been perpetrated against Israel," Becker said. Hamas has, he said, a "proudly declared agenda of annihilation, which is not a secret and is not in doubt."

More than 23,000 people in Gaza have been killed during Israel's military campaign, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. Nearly 85% of Gaza's people have been driven from their homes, a quarter of the enclave's residents face starvation, and much of northern Gaza has been reduced to rubble.

South Africa says this amounts to genocide and is part of decades of Israeli oppression of Palestinians.

"The scale of destruction in Gaza, the targeting of family homes and civilians, the war being a war on children, all make clear that genocidal intent is both understood and has been put into practice. The articulated intent is the destruction of Palestinian life," said lawyer Tembeka Ngcukaitobi.

If the court issued an order to halt the fighting and Israel didn't comply, it could face U.N. sanctions, although those may be blocked by a veto from the United States, Israel's staunch ally.

The White House declined to comment on how it might respond if the court determines Israel committed genocide. But National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby called the allegations "unfounded."

The extraordinary case goes to the core of one of the world's most intractable conflicts — and for the second day protesters rallied outside the court. Pro-Israeli demonstrators set up a table near the court grounds for a Sabbath meal with empty seats commemorating the hostages still being held by Hamas. Nearby, over 100 pro-Palestinian protesters waved flags and shouted protests.

The case also strikes at the heart of both Israel's and South Africa's national identities.

Israel was founded as a Jewish state in the wake of the Nazis' slaughter of 6 million Jews during World War II. South Africa's governing party, meanwhile, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Black people to "homelands."

The world court, which rules on disputes between nations, has never judged a country to be responsible for genocide. The closest it came was in 2007, when it ruled that Serbia "violated the obligation to prevent genocide" in the July 1995 massacre by Bosnian Serb forces of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys in the Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica.

Update expected in case of Buffalo supermarket gunman as families await decision on death penalty

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Relatives of victims of a racist mass shooting at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket have been called to federal court Friday for a "substantial update" in the legal case against the gunman, their attorney said.

The meeting between Department of Justice representatives and victims of Payton Gendron will take place ahead of a previously scheduled afternoon status conference, attorney Terrence Connors said.

Connors represents relatives of some of the 10 Black people killed and three other people wounded in the May 14, 2022, attack.

The families have been waiting to hear whether prosecutors would seek the death penalty against Gen-

dron, 20, who is charged in a federal indictment with hate crimes and weapons charges.

Gendron already is serving multiple life sentences with no chance of parole after pleading guilty to state charges of murder and domestic terrorism motivated by hate. New York does not have capital punishment but executions are possible in federal cases.

Gendron's lawyers have said he would plead guilty in the federal case if prosecutors agree not to seek the death penalty. The Justice Department's capital case committee issued its recommendation in the fall of 2023, but the recommendation was not made public, according to attorneys in the case.

Attorneys for Gendron and his parents did not respond to emailed requests for comment, nor did the U.S. Attorney's office in Buffalo.

Those killed at the Tops Friendly Market on Buffalo's largely Black East Side ranged in age from 32 to 86. They included a church deacon, the grocery store's guard, a man shopping for a birthday cake, a grandmother of nine and the mother of a former Buffalo fire commissioner.

The gunman wore bullet-resistant armor and a helmet equipped with a livestreaming camera as he carried out the attack with a semiautomatic rifle. The weapon was purchased legally but had been modified so Gendron could load it with illegal high-capacity ammunition magazines, authorities said.

US, British militaries launch massive retaliatory strike against Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. and British militaries bombed more than a dozen sites used by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen on Thursday, in a massive retaliatory strike using warship- and submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles and fighter jets, U.S. officials said.

The U.S. Air Force's Mideast command said it struck over 60 targets at 16 sites in Yemen, including "command-and-control nodes, munitions depots, launching systems, production facilities and air defense radar systems."

President Joe Biden said the strikes were meant to demonstrate that the U.S. and its allies "will not tolerate" the militant group's ceaseless attacks on the Red Sea. And he said they only made the move after attempts at diplomatic negotiations and careful deliberation.

"These strikes are in direct response to unprecedented Houthi attacks against international maritime vessels in the Red Sea — including the use of anti-ship ballistic missiles for the first time in history," Biden said in a statement. He noted the attacks endangered U.S. personnel and civilian mariners and jeopardized trade, and he added, "I will not hesitate to direct further measures to protect our people and the free flow of international commerce as necessary."

Associated Press journalists in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, heard four explosions early Friday local time. Two residents of Hodieda, Amin Ali Saleh and Hani Ahmed, said they heard five strong explosions hitting the western port area of the city, which lies on the Red Sea and is the largest port city controlled by the Houthis. Eyewitnesses who spoke with the AP also said they saw strikes in Taiz and Dhamar, cities south of Sanaa.

The strikes marked the first U.S. military response to what has been a persistent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. And the coordinated military assault comes just a week after the White House and a host of partner nations issued a final warning to the Houthis to cease the attacks or face potential military action. The officials described the strikes on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations. Members of Congress were briefed earlier Thursday on the strike plans.

The warning appeared to have had at least some short-lived impact, as attacks stopped for several days. On Tuesday, however, the Houthi rebels fired their largest-ever barrage of drones and missiles targeting shipping in the Red Sea, with U.S. and British ships and American fighter jets responding by shooting down 18 drones, two cruise missiles and an anti-ship missile. And on Thursday, the Houthis fired an anti-ship ballistic missile into the Gulf of Aden, which was seen by a commercial ship but did not hit the ship.

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In a call with reporters, senior administration and military officials said that after the Tuesday attacks, Biden convened his national security team and was presented with military options for a response. He then directed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who remains hospitalized with complications from prostate cancer surgery, to carry out the retaliatory strikes.

In a separate statement, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the Royal Air Force carried out targeted strikes against military facilities used by the Houthis. The Defense Ministry said four fighter jets based in Cyprus took part in the strikes.

Noting the militants have carried out a series of dangerous attacks on shipping, he added, "This cannot stand." He said the U.K. took "limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defense, alongside the United States with non-operational support from the Netherlands, Canada and Bahrain against targets tied to these attacks, to degrade Houthi military capabilities and protect global shipping."

The governments of Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand and South Korea joined the U.S. and U.K. in issuing a statement saying that while the aim is to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, the allies won't hesitate to defend lives and protect commerce in the critical waterway.

Russia, however, requested an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on the strikes. France, the current council president, said it will take place Friday afternoon.

The rebels, who have carried out 27 attacks involving dozens of drones and missiles just since Nov. 19, had warned that any attack by American forces on its sites in Yemen will spark a fierce military response.

A high-ranking Houthi official, Ali al-Qahoum, vowed there would be retaliation. "The battle will be bigger ... and beyond the imagination and expectation of the Americans and the British," he said in a post on X.

Al-Masirah, a Houthi-run satellite news channel, described strikes hitting the Al-Dailami Air Base north of Sanaa, the airport in the port city of the Hodeida, a camp east of Saada, the airport in the city of Taiz and an airport near Hajjah.

The Houthis later Friday said the strikes killed five of their troops and wounded six.

A senior administration official said that while the U.S. expects the strikes will degrade the Houthis' capabilities, "we would not be surprised to see some sort of response," although they haven't seen anything yet. Officials said the U.S. used warplanes based on the Navy aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and Air Force fighter jets, while the Tomahawk missiles were fired from Navy destroyers and a submarine.

The Houthis say their assaults are aimed at stopping Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. But their targets increasingly have little or no connection to Israel and imperil a crucial trade route linking Asia and the Middle East with Europe.

Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution Wednesday that demanded the Houthis immediately cease the attacks and implicitly condemned their weapons supplier, Iran. It was approved by a vote of 11-0 with four abstentions — by Russia, China, Algeria and Mozambique.

Britain's participation in the strikes underscored the Biden administration's effort to use a broad international coalition to battle the Houthis, rather than appear to be going it alone. More than 20 nations are already participating in a U.S.-led maritime mission to increase ship protection in the Red Sea.

U.S. officials for weeks had declined to signal when international patience would run out and they would strike back at the Houthis, even as multiple commercial vessels were struck by missiles and drones, prompting companies to look at rerouting their ships.

On Wednesday, however, U.S. officials again warned of consequences.

"I'm not going to telegraph or preview anything that might happen," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters during a stop in Bahrain. He said the U.S. had made clear "that if this continues as it did yesterday, there will be consequences. And I'm going to leave it at that."

The Biden administration's reluctance over the past several months to retaliate reflected political sensitivities and stemmed largely from broader worries about upending the shaky truce in Yemen and triggering a wider conflict in the region. The White House wants to preserve the truce and has been wary of taking action in Yemen that could open up another war front.

The impact on international shipping and the escalating attacks, however, triggered the coalition warning,

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which was signed by the United States, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Transit through the Red Sea, from the Suez Canal to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, is a crucial shipping lane for global commerce. About 12% of the world's trade typically passes through the waterway that separates Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, including oil, natural gas, grain and everything from toys to electronics.

In response to the attacks, the U.S. created a new maritime security mission, dubbed Operation Prosperity Guardian, to increase security in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden, with about 22 countries participating. U.S. warships, and those from other nations, have been routinely sailing back and forth through the narrow strait to provide protection for ships and to deter attacks. The coalition has also ramped up airborne surveillance.

The decision to set up the expanded patrol operation came after three commercial vessels were struck by missiles fired by Houthis in Yemen on Dec. 3.

The Pentagon increased its military presence in the region after the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks in Israel to deter Iran from widening the war into a regional conflict, including by the Houthis and Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.

Who are the Houthis and why did the US and UK retaliate for their attacks on ships in the Red Sea?

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When U.S. and U.K. warships and aircraft launched waves of missiles at Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen early Friday in Sanaa, it capped weeks of warnings to the group to cease their drone and missile attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea or face severe consequences.

Previously the U.S. had withheld striking back, reflecting larger U.S. concerns about upending the shaky truce in Yemen and triggering a wider conflict in the region. But on Tuesday the Houthis launched their largest-ever barrage of 18 one-way attack drones, anti-ship cruise missiles and an anti-ship ballistic missile at a host of international commercial vessels and warships in the Red Sea.

While the U.S. and partner military ships and aircraft now protecting the waterways were able to deflect Tuesday's attack, the scope and severity of the launch drew international condemnation and left few options other than to carry through with international warnings that any further attacks would draw a substantial response.

In response, the U.S. and U.K. struck Houthi missile, radar and drone capabilities to degrade the group's ability to conduct more attacks like Tuesday's barrage.

In response to the strikes, which occurred in Yemen just before Friday 3 a.m. local time, the rebel group has already pledged to retaliate. Later in the day, the Houthis said the strikes killed five of their forces and wounded six.

Here's a look at the Houthis and their increasing attacks, and why the U.S. believes it is more acceptable to bomb some Iranian-linked targets than others.

WHO ARE THE HOUTHIS?

Houthi rebels swept down from their northern stronghold in Yemen and seized the capital, Sanaa, in 2014, launching a grinding war. A Saudi-led coalition intervened in 2015 to try to restore Yemen's exiled, internationally recognized government to power.

Years of bloody, inconclusive fighting against the Saudi-led coalition settled into a stalemated proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, causing widespread hunger and misery in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country. The war has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more.

A cease-fire that technically ended more than a year ago is still largely being honored. Saudi Arabia and the rebels have done some prisoner swaps, and a Houthi delegation was invited to high-level peace talks in Riyadh in September as part of a wider détente the kingdom has reached with Iran. While they

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reported "positive results," there is still no permanent peace.

ATTACKS ON SHIPS

The Houthis have sporadically targeted ships in the region over time, but the attacks have increased since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas and spiked after an explosion Oct. 17 at a hospital in Gaza killed and injured many. That hospital blast marked the beginning of an intense militant campaign against U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria, and on many commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea. The attacks have damaged commercial ships and forced international shipping companies to divert their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope.

As of Thursday the Houthis had launched 27 different attacks on vessels transiting the Southern Red Sea, Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said at a Pentagon press conference.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree has said the group wants to "prevent Israeli ships from navigating the Red Sea (and Gulf of Aden) until the Israeli aggression against our steadfast brothers in the Gaza Strip stops."

But few of the ships targeted have had direct links to Israel. In a recent attack, one of the commercial ships hit — the Unity Explorer — had a tenuous Israeli link. It is owned by a British firm that includes Dan David Ungar, who lives in Israel, as one of its officers. Israeli media identified Ungar as being the son of Israeli shipping billionaire Abraham "Rami" Ungar. But any Israel connections to other ships are unclear.

U.S. officials have argued that the Houthis haven't technically targeted U.S. military vessels or forces — a subtlety that Navy ship captains watching the incoming drones may question.

In response to the attacks, last month Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced Operation Prosperity Guardian, where the U.S. and more than 20 other countries have created a protective umbrella for the commercial vessels that are not re-routing and decide to transit the Red Sea.

If that operation had not provided escort the commercial vessels and intercepted the incoming fire, "we have no doubt that ships would have been struck, perhaps even sunk, including in one case a commercial ship full of jet fuel," a senior administration official told reporters late Thursday, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the strikes. "We've had extremely close calls."

To date Operation Prosperity Guardian has helped more than 1,500 commercial vessels safely transit the Red Sea.

THE U.S. CALCULUS

While the U.S. has carried out airstrikes on Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria that have targeted American troops in 130 different attacks since Oct. 17, until Thursday the military had not yet retaliated against the Houthis.

That reluctance reflects political sensitivities and stems largely from broader Biden administration concerns about upending the shaky truce in Yemen and triggering a wider conflict in the region. The White House wants to preserve the truce and is wary of taking action that could open up another war front.

Iran-backed militias have launched one-way attack drones, rockets or close-range ballistic missiles at bases in Iraq 53 times and in Syria 77 times. Dozens of troops have suffered injuries as a result of the attacks, in many cases traumatic brain injuries.

In response, the U.S. has retaliated with airstrikes multiple times in Syria since Oct. 17, targeting weapons depots and other facilities linked directly to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and the militias. And it struck multiple sites in Iraq late last month after a militia group for the first time fired short-range ballistic missiles at U.S. forces at Al-Asad air base.

But until Thursday, striking the Houthis had been a different calculus.

In one breath, Pentagon officials had said Navy ships shot down Houthi drones heading toward them because they were deemed "a threat." But in the next breath officials said the U.S. had assessed that the ships were not the target. That determination often comes later after intelligence assessments review telemetry and other data.

That, however, is certainly no comfort to sailors on the ships who watch the radar track of incoming drones and must make rapid decisions about whether they represent threats to the ship.

At the same time, the U.S. has consistently said it wants to protect free navigation of the seas. But the

Houthi actions have prompted the International Maritime Security Construct to issue a warning for ships transiting the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb. It says ships should choose routes as far from Yemeni waters as possible, travel at night and not stop, because that makes them an easier target.

The Biden administration has talked persistently about the need to avoid escalating the Israel-Hamas war into a broader regional conflict. So far, strikes on the Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and Syria have not broadened the conflict, said Ryder.

It's not clear if targeted strikes against Houthi weapons depots or similar sites — which also have Iranian support — would cross a line and trigger a wider war.

"We will continue to consult with international allies and partners on an appropriate way to protect commercial shipping going through that region, and at the same time ensuring we do what we need to do to protect our forces," said Ryder.

Houthi rebels say US-led strikes in Yemen killed 5 of their forces, raising Mideast tensions

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S.-led airstrikes on Yemen's Houthi rebels in response to their attacks on Red Sea shipping pulled the world's focus Friday back on the yearslong war raging there, even as tensions rise across a Middle East already torn by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The strikes killed at least five people and wounded six, the Houthis said, without elaborating on what was targeted.

As the bombing lit the predawn sky over multiple sites held by the Iranian-backed rebels, Saudi Arabia quickly sought to distance itself from the attacks as it seeks to maintain a delicate détente with Iran and a cease-fire in the Yemen war from which it hopes to finally withdraw.

The attack also threatened to ignite a regional conflict over Israel's war on Hamas, which the Biden administration and its allies have been trying to calm for weeks.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy acknowledged an attack days earlier on a ship in the far reaches of the Indian Ocean — an attack that may signal Iran's willingness to strike vessels as part of a wider maritime campaign over the Israel-Hamas conflict. Tehran on Thursday separately seized another tanker involved in an earlier crisis over America seizing oil targeted by international sanctions on the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

It remained unclear how extensive the damage from the U.S. strikes were, though the Houthis said at least five sites, including airfields, had been attacked. The United Kingdom described its strikes hitting a site in Bani allegedly used by the Houthis to launch drones and an airfield in Abbs used to launch cruise missiles and drones.

Hussein al-Ezzi, a Houthi official in their Foreign Ministry, acknowledged "a massive aggressive attack by American and British ships, submarines and warplanes."

"America and Britain will undoubtedly have to prepare to pay a heavy price and bear all the dire consequences of this blatant aggression," al-Ezzi wrote online.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesperson, separately described the U.S. and Britain as having "committed foolishness with this treacherous aggression."

"They were wrong if they thought that they would deter Yemen from supporting Palestine and Gaza," he wrote online. Houthi "targeting will continue to affect Israeli ships or those heading to the ports of occupied Palestine," he wrote.

Since the attacks began in November, however, the Houthis have begun targeting vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade.

The Houthis' military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, in a recorded address, said 73 strikes hit five regions of Yemen under their control, killing five and wounding six from the rebels' military forces.

"The American and British enemy bears full responsibility for its criminal aggression against our Yemeni people, and it will not go unanswered and unpunished," Saree said.

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In Saada, the Houthis' stronghold in northwest Yemen, hundreds gathered for a rally Friday. The crowd shouted at times the Houthi slogan: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam."

Yemen has been targeted by U.S. military action over the last four American presidencies. A campaign of drone strikes began under President George W. Bush to target the local affiliate of al-Qaida, attacks that have continued under the Biden administration. Meanwhile, the U.S. has launched raids and other military operations amid the ongoing war in Yemen.

That war began when the Houthis swept into the capital, Sanaa, in 2014. A Saudi-led coalition including the United Arab Emirates launched a war to back Yemen's exiled government in 2015, quickly morphing the conflict into a regional confrontation as Iran backed the Houthis with weapons and other support.

That war, however, has slowed as the Houthis maintain their grip on the territory they hold. The UAE even came under Houthi missile fire multiple times in 2022. After the Emirates left the war, Saudi Arabia reached a Chinese-mediated deal with Iran to ease tensions in hopes of finally withdrawing from the war.

However, an overall deal has yet to be reached, likely sparking Saudi Arabia's expression Friday of "great concern" over the airstrikes.

"While the kingdom stresses the importance of preserving the security and stability of the Red Sea region, ... it calls for restraint and avoiding escalation," its Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Iran, which has supplied weapons and aid to the Houthis, condemned the attack in a statement from Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani.

"Arbitrary attacks will have no result other than fueling insecurity and instability in the region," he said.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, also backed by Iran and engaged in cross-border fire with Israel, criticized the strikes as showing America as being a "full partner in catastrophes and massacres committed by the Zionist entity in Gaza." Hamas as well condemned the attack.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning called on nations not to escalate tensions in the Red Sea, asking all countries and parties to exercise restraint.

"We hope that all parties concerned will play a constructive and responsible role in the security and stability of the Red Sea region, which is in the common interest of the international community," she said.

The Red Sea route is also crucial for energy shipments. Benchmark Brent crude traded up some 2.5% Friday at over \$79 a barrel.

Meanwhile Friday, the U.S. Navy confirmed an attack days earlier near the coasts of India and Sri Lanka. The chemical tanker Pacific Gold was struck Jan. 4 by what the Navy called "an Iranian one-way attack" drone, causing some damage to the vessel but no injuries.

"Iran's actions are contrary to international law and threaten maritime security and stability," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of the Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet.

The Pacific Gold is managed by Singapore-based Eastern Pacific Shipping, a company that is ultimately controlled by Israeli billionaire Idan Ofer. Eastern Pacific, as well as naval officials in India and Sri Lanka, had not responded to multiple requests for comment from The Associated Press over the attack. Eastern Pacific previously has been targeted in suspected Iranian attacks.

A private security official previously acknowledged to the AP that the attack took place. The attack had been first reported by the Lebanese broadcaster Al-Mayadeen, a channel politically affiliated with Hezbollah that has previously announced other Iran-linked attacks in the region. Iran itself has not acknowledged carrying out the attack.

The UK prime minister visits Kyiv to announce more support for Ukraine in its war with Russia

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak traveled to Kyiv on Friday to unveil a new support package for Ukraine, including an increase in military funding for its war with Russia that after 22 months shows no sign of ending.

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The 2.5 billion pounds (\$3.2 billion) in military funding for Ukraine over the next financial year will cover long-range missiles, thousands of drones, air defense, artillery ammunition and maritime security, according to a statement from Sunak's office.

Those are some of the items that Kyiv officials have been urging Ukraine's Western allies to send more of, as the grinding war of attrition brings little change along the front line and both sides turn to long-range strikes.

Ukraine and Russia are seeking to replenish their arsenals this year, military analysts say, in anticipation of possible major ground offensives in 2025.

"I am here today with one message: the U.K. will also not falter," Sunak said. "We will stand with Ukraine, in their darkest hours and in the better times to come."

Sunak first visited Ukraine in November 2022, soon after he became prime minister. Britain has been one of Ukraine's most vocal backers.

Britain is the second-biggest donor of military aid to Ukraine after the U.S., giving a total of 4.6 billion pounds (\$3.3 billion) in 2022 and 2023.

Sunak's visit came hours after the British and U.S. militaries bombed Yemen, hitting more than a dozen sites used by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

Thursday's strikes were a reminder of another war, which has raged for years in the Arab world's poorest nation. The attack also risked triggering a wider regional conflict over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Those concerns have drawn attention away from Ukraine's struggle — a shift that Zelenskyy is trying to counter through diplomacy.

Both Ukraine and Russia are scrambling to restock their armories. The roughly 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line has been largely static during winter, and both Ukraine and Russia require artillery shells, missiles and drones that enable long-range strikes.

Ukraine says Moscow is receiving artillery shells and missiles from North Korea and drones from Iran. On Jan. 4, the White House cited U.S. intelligence officials as saying that Russia acquired ballistic missiles from North Korea and is seeking them from Iran.

Ukraine's leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is pushing Kyiv's Western allies to provide Ukraine with more support on top of the billions of dollars in military aid the country has already received.

This week he visited three small Baltic countries — Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia — in search of new pledges. The eastern European countries, which are also amongst Kyiv's staunchest supporters, promised more missiles, drones, howitzers and artillery shells.

Zelenskyy has warned that Ukraine particularly needs air defense systems to fend off Russian aerial barrages. Recent massive Russian barrages — more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between Dec. 29 and Jan. 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are using up Ukraine's air defense resources and leaving it vulnerable.

Sunak said that the U.K. recognizes that Ukrainian security "is our security," as Kyiv's forces stand up to Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion.

"Today we are going further — increasing our military aid, delivering thousands of cutting-edge drones, and signing a historic new Security Agreement to provide Ukraine with the assurances it needs for the long term," he said.

Support for Ukraine's war effort is sputtering. A plan by the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden to send \$60 billion in new funding to Kyiv is being held up in Congress. Europe's pledge in March to provide 1 million artillery shells within 12 months has also fallen short, with only about 300,000 delivered by the end of last year.

Worried about losing in 2024, Iowa's Republican voters are less interested in talking about abortion

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A man in Iowa stood up at a recent town hall and told Ron DeSantis he had an “easy” question: How would the Florida governor address abortion when it’s sure to be a big issue in the coming 2024 presidential election?

DeSantis said he’d talk about it “the same way I did in Florida. I just articulated kind of, you know, where we were, what we do.”

He continued for nearly four minutes without using the word “abortion.” He instead criticized his rival Donald Trump for failing to appear in debates and Nikki Haley for her campaign trail gaffes.

Abortion has largely been absent as an issue in the lead-up to this year’s Iowa Republican caucuses, a remarkable change in a state that has long backed religious conservatives vowing to restrict the procedure. Part of the change is because Republicans achieved a generational goal when the Supreme Court overturned a federally guaranteed right to abortion. But it also underscores a pervasive fear among Republican candidates and voters alike that vocalizing their desire to further restrict abortion rights in 2024 has become politically dangerous.

Democrats outperformed expectations in the 2022 midterms and several state races last year campaigning on the issue. And President Joe Biden’s reelection campaign plans to make abortion rights central to its strategy this year.

“At this stage, if we’re going to continually lose elections because of that issue, I’d say dump the whole damn thing and let God be the judge,” said Greg Jennings, a 68-year-old retired painting contractor from Clear Lake, Iowa, who was attending a rally for Trump.

In interviews with more than two dozen GOP voters around the state in the past week, almost none cited abortion as one of their top issues this election year, instead pointing to concerns about the border, the economy or America’s standing in the world. That’s not to say there aren’t strong exceptions among some evangelical voters who represent a core segment of the Republican base.

Brian Downes, a Winterset Iowa resident, said abortion is a “huge” issue for him. He said he would only change his plans to caucus for Trump next Monday if the former president reversed course and embraced the pro-choice movement.

Downes urged his party not to ignore their opposition to abortion rights.

“Pro-life presidents have won going, let’s say, going back to Ronald Reagan. Always pro-life. The Bushes, pro-life. Trump pro-life,” he said. “They won. That didn’t cancel any of them. So that’s just an old story that just won’t die.”

But Downes appears to be in the minority.

Cindy Leonhart, a 68-year-old wearing a DeSantis button on her shirt after she heard the governor speak last Friday, said she doesn’t believe that abortion should be legal but said: “It’s not a decisive issue for me.”

Earlier in the Iowa campaign, DeSantis and some others in the primary criticized Trump for refusing to endorse a national abortion ban. Trump has at times highlighted his role as president in appointing the Supreme Court justices who helped overturn Roe v. Wade. But he’s also argued Republicans shouldn’t lock themselves into positions that are unpopular with a majority of the public and argued that the Supreme Court gave abortion opponents the right to “negotiate” restrictions where they live.

DeSantis and other GOP hopefuls now increasingly speak of a need for “compassion” for women. Asked about a six-week ban he signed in Florida, DeSantis this week on Fox News defended the law as protecting life and that it was “compassionate to be able to respect that and to be able to protect that going forward.”

Haley, the former U.N. ambassador and South Carolina governor, has repeatedly said that she would sign any national abortion restrictions passed by Congress if elected president, but that Republicans are unlikely to have enough seats or supportive members in their ranks to pass them.

“The fellas just don’t know how to talk about it. Instead of demonizing this issue, you have to humanize

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this issue," she said in a separate Fox News event this week. Haley is the only woman in the Republican primary field.

Trump, in a Fox News town hall of his own Wednesday night, took credit for having "terminated" Roe and told a woman who opposed abortion and asked about the issue that he "loved" where she was coming from but "we still have to win elections."

He blamed DeSantis' ban at six weeks for the governor's stagnant poll numbers and said, "If you talk five or six weeks, a lot of women don't know that they're pregnant in five or six weeks. I want to get something where people are happy."

Angela Roemer, who attended a Haley event last week, described herself as pro-life but said she doesn't like how ugly the politics of abortion have become.

"It used to be an issue for me," said the 56-year-old from Solon, Iowa. "I guess it's not a real hot-button issue today."

"Women in general are getting smarter about birth control and about how everything works," she said.

At a campaign rally in Newton on Saturday, Trump didn't dive into the issue on stage, but his campaign handed out fliers that touted his appointments to the court and spotlighted a 2020 quote from his former Vice President Mike Pence, calling him "the most pro-life president in history." Pence, whom Trump has repeatedly attacked for refusing to try to overturn his former boss' 2020 election loss, dropped out of the primary last year after criticizing Trump for not endorsing a national abortion ban.

Steve Scheffler, the Iowa GOP's Republican National Committeeman and president of the Iowa Faith and Freedom Coalition, said that if the Supreme Court hadn't overturned Roe, the issue would probably be more pressing in this presidential race.

But Scheffler said Iowa voters may feel that with the court's ruling and a law signed by GOP Gov. Kim Reynolds last year banning abortion after six weeks, the state's Republicans may feel they've "kind of addressed that."

"It's an issue that's very important to these evangelical voters but because that's where we're at here in Iowa, I suppose maybe there's other issues that are really important right now," Scheffler said.

Dan Corbin of Cedar Falls, the voter who put DeSantis on the spot at his town hall, said afterward that whether Republicans want to talk about it or not, Democrats have made it clear they will press the issue in 2024.

Corbin, who plans to caucus for Haley, said he likes the way she speaks about the issue and that Republicans overall "need to have a strategic approach" and not "demonize women that are having to make that decision."

"I don't believe in abortion in any way, shape or form," he said, "But I think it's going to make the Republicans less attractive."

What to know about the abdication of Denmark's Queen Margrethe II

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Queen Margrethe II, Denmark's monarch for more than half a century, stunned her country when she announced on New Year's Eve that she will hand over the throne to her eldest son, Crown Prince Frederik.

Her abdication on Sunday will be the first time a Danish monarch has stepped down voluntarily in nearly 900 years.

Here are five things to know about the abdication of Margrethe, currently the longest-reigning monarch in Europe:

WHY IS DENMARK'S QUEEN MARGRETHE ABDICATING?

Before Margrethe, 83, announced that she would resign, most royal watchers assumed she would live out her days on the throne, as is tradition in Denmark. Margrethe had showed no signs of wanting to retire from her largely ceremonial position. Until recently, she had insisted that she considered being queen a job for life.

Health issues apparently made her reconsider. Margrethe underwent major back surgery last February

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and didn't return to work until April. In her speech, she said the surgery prompted "thoughts about the future" and when to pass on the responsibilities of the crown. "I have decided that now is the right time," she said.

Even the prime minister was unaware of the queen's intentions until just before the announcement.

WHAT IS THE MONARCH'S ROLE IN DENMARK?

Denmark's monarchy traces its origins to 10th century Viking king Gorm the Old. The monarch's powers once were absolute, but today the royal family's duties are largely ceremonial and defined by the constitution. The monarch is Denmark's head of state and a symbol of the nation, but political decision-making rests with the Cabinet and Parliament.

Queen Margrethe is highly popular in Denmark, and so is the monarchy. A recent survey showed 70% of Danes favor it.

Margrethe will retain the title of queen after she steps down.

HOW DOES QUEEN MARGRETHE'S ABDICATION HAPPEN?

Even though no Danish monarch has voluntarily relinquished the throne since King Erik III Lam in 1146, the Danish Act of Succession states that the same provisions apply in an abdication as when the sovereign dies.

The queen will formally sign her abdication on Jan. 14 at a state council, a meeting with the Danish Cabinet at the Christiansborg Palace, a vast complex in Copenhagen that houses the Royal Reception Rooms and Royal Stables as well as the Danish Parliament, prime minister's office and the Supreme Court.

At that meeting, her 55-year-old son will become King Frederik X. His Australian-born wife Mary, 51, will become queen of Denmark and their oldest son, Christian, 18, will take over the title of crown prince. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen will proclaim the new king to the nation on the balcony of the Christiansborg Palace.

Unlike in the United Kingdom, there is no coronation ceremony in Denmark. Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens amusement park says it will celebrate the new king and queen with the biggest fireworks show in the park's 180-year history.

IS MARGRETHE SETTING AN EXAMPLE?

Few royals in European history have given up the throne voluntarily, but things have started to change.

In the Netherlands, it's now the norm for older monarchs to hand over the crown to younger generations: Queen Beatrix abdicated in 2013, following in the footsteps of her mother, Queen Juliana, and grandmother Queen Wilhelmina. Not long after Beatrix, Belgium's King Albert II and Spain's King Juan Carlos I retired and were succeeded by their eldest sons.

However, until Margrethe's announcement, there was no sign their counterparts in Scandinavia would follow suit. Norway's 86-year-old King Harald V, who has been hospitalized several times in recent months, has not indicated he's considering abdicating in favor of his son, Crown Prince Haakon. Neither has Sweden's 77-year-old King Carl XVI Gustaf, who last year celebrated 50 years on the throne.

But Margrethe's unexpected move suggests anything is possible.

WHAT IS MARGRETHE'S LEGACY?

Queen Margrethe was 31 when she ascended the Danish throne on Jan. 14, 1972, just hours after her father, King Frederik IX, died following complications from a lung infection. The chain-smoking queen quickly endeared herself to Danes with her wit and down-to-earth manners.

She traveled the nation and made frequent visits to the semi-autonomous Danish territories of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. A talented artist, she painted and designed ballet costumes, church vestments and dinnerware. She even made illustrations for a limited edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings."

Listening to the queen's televised speech on Dec. 31 became part of New Year's Eve rituals. She often encouraged Danes to treat each other with respect. As Frederiksen put it, the queen put into words "who we are as a people and as a nation."

Margrethe's husband, the French-born Prince Henrik, died in 2018. The couple had two children, Frederik and Prince Joachim, and eight grandchildren.

While Margrethe's reign has been largely free of scandal, she stirred uproar inside the family in 2022

when she stripped Joachim's four children of their royal titles. Her decision was in line with other European royal houses and in keeping with the times. Joachim said he was saddened. Margrethe later apologized but stood by her decision.

In Taiwan's election Saturday, who are the 3 candidates trying to become president?

By SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan is holding its presidential election on Saturday, a race that China has called a choice between war and peace. China considers the self-ruled island about 160 kilometers (100 miles) off its east coast a breakaway province and has threatened to take control over it, by force if necessary.

Taiwan's election is closely watched internationally due to the potential for rising military tensions across the Taiwan Strait. At home, voters are concerned with more practical issues such as the sluggish economy and expensive housing in addition to Beijing's threat.

Here are the three candidates:

LAI CHING-TE

Lai Ching-te, who also goes by William, is currently Taiwan's vice president from the Democratic Progressive Party, which rejects China's sovereignty claims over the island.

Years ago, the 64-year-old described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence," drawing criticism from Beijing.

China bristles at any claims of independence by Taiwanese politicians and opposes Taipei having formal ties with other countries. Beijing has repeatedly rejected offers to hold talks with Lai and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen.

Lai says he remains open to speaking with China without conceding Taiwan's right to rule itself.

"As long as there is equality and dignity on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan's door will always be open," he said in December.

A physician who studied public health at Harvard University, Lai has held public office for the past 25 years, including as a legislator and mayor of the southern city of Tainan.

During his and Tsai's tenure, Taiwan increased arms acquisitions from the United States, which is bound by its law to provide the island with weapons needed to protect itself.

If elected president, Lai has pledged to strengthen national defense and the economy and to continue in the policy direction set by Tsai.

His running mate is former U.S. envoy Bi-khim Hsiao.

HOU YU-ih

Hou Yu-ih is the candidate from Taiwan's main opposition party Kuomintang, or KMT, whose government retreated to the island in 1949 after losing a civil war against the Chinese Communist Party.

The KMT is generally friendlier to China than the DPP, though it strongly denies being pro-Beijing. Traditionally, the party has favored unification with China, though it has shifted its stance in recent years to reflect the vast majority of the population's preference for maintaining the status quo.

Hou served as the head of the island's police force before transitioning to politics in 2010. The 66-year-old is currently the mayor of New Taipei, a position from which he took leave to run for president.

Hou has described himself as an atypical KMT member and said he would not pursue unification with China if elected. He has said that Taiwan's future needs to be decided by its people.

Hou has pledged to strengthen national defense and restart dialogue with Beijing — through cultural and civil society exchanges at first — as part of his "3D strategy," which stands for deterrence, dialogue and de-escalation.

He describes himself as more likely to convince China to hold talks than Lai, whom he accuses of pushing Taiwan to war.

Hou's running mate is former legislator and TV commentator Jaw Shau-kong.

KO WEN-JE

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The third presidential candidate, Ko Wen-je, represents the smaller Taiwan People's Party, which he founded in 2019.

An outspoken surgeon-turned-politician, Ko advocates for a middle road in relations with Beijing. He has said he would be open to holding talks with China, but his bottom line would be that Taiwan must be able to preserve its democracy and civil freedoms.

He describes himself as the only candidate who would be acceptable to both the U.S. and China.

The 64-year-old was mayor of Taipei between 2014 and 2022 and has cooperated in the past with both the DPP and KMT. An initiative to run on the same ticket as Hou in Saturday's election failed after the two couldn't agree on who should be the presidential candidate.

Ko is the most popular candidate among younger voters, who praise his straightforward approach and focus on practical issues such as housing and education.

His running mate is Cynthia Wu, a business executive who hails from one of Taiwan's wealthiest families.

Taiwan prepares to elect a president and legislature in what's seen as a test of control with China

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN and SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan is preparing to elect a president and legislature Saturday in what many see as a test of control with China, which claims the self-governing island republic as its own territory to be unified with force if necessary. The presidential race is tight, and both China and Taiwan's key ally, the U.S., are weighing in on political and economic issues they hope will sway voters.

The election pits Vice President Lai Ching-te, representing the Democratic Progressive Party, against Hou Yu-ih of the main opposition Nationalist Party, and former mayor of the capital Taipei, Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party.

The U.S. strongly backs Taiwan against China's military threats and the Biden administration plans to send an unofficial delegation comprised of former senior officials to the island shortly after the polls. That move could upset efforts to repair ties between Beijing and Washington that plunged in recent years over trade, COVID-19, Washington's support for Taiwan and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which China has refused to condemn at the United Nations.

Along with the tensions with China, much in the Taiwan election hinges on domestic issues, particularly over an economy that was estimated to have only grown by 1.4% last year. That partly reflects inevitable cycles in demand for computer chips and other exports from the high-tech, heavily trade-dependent manufacturing base, and a slowing of the Chinese economy. But longer-term challenges such as housing affordability, a yawning gap between the rich and poor, and unemployment are especially prominent.

Candidates will make their final appeals Friday with campaigning to end at midnight. The candidate with the most votes wins, with no runoff. The legislative races are for districts and at-large seats.

While dinner table issues gather the most attention, China remains the one subject that can be ignored but not avoided. The two sides have no official relations but are linked by trade and investment. With an estimated 1 million Taiwanese spending at least part of the year on the mainland for work, study or recreation. Meanwhile, China has continued flying fighter planes and sailing warships near the island to put teeth behind its pledge to blockade, intimidate or invade.

Those threats were thrown into stark relief in 2022, when Beijing fired missiles over the island and conducted what was seen as a practice run of a possible future blockade of the Taiwan Strait after then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. Chinese President Xi Jinping, at his most recent meeting with President Joe Biden in November, called Taiwan the "most sensitive issue" in U.S.-Chinese relations.

Washington is bound by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself and consider all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern," while remaining ambiguous on whether it would use military forces. Over recent years, the U.S. has stepped up support for Taiwan as Beijing ratchets up military and diplomatic pressure on the island, although the wars in Ukraine and Gaza have drawn down what U.S. military industries can provide to customers and allies.

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The U.S. government insists the differences between Beijing and Taipei be resolved peacefully and opposes any unilateral change to their status quo. While Chinese leaders and state propaganda proclaim unification is inevitable and will be achieved at any cost, Taiwanese have consistently voted in favor of maintaining their de facto political independence.

Lai is considered the front-runner in the race, but Hou trails closely. While the Nationalists formally support unification with China, they say they want to do so on their own terms, a somewhat abstract concept given the Communist Party's demand for total power, but which some consider as a useful workaround to avoid outright conflict.

Beijing has labeled Lai a "Taiwan independence element," an appellation he has not repudiated and which carries little or no stigma in Taiwan. Lai, however, has pledged to continue current President Tsai Ing-wen's policy that Taiwan is already independent and needs to make no declaration of independence that could spark a military attack from China.

While running third in most surveys, the TPP's Ko said during a news conference Friday he would aim to strike a balance between Taiwan and the U.S. that would not upset relations with China.

"The U.S. is the most powerful country in the world and Taiwan's most important ally," he said. "So no matter who is elected, the relationship between Taiwan and the U.S. will not change."

Ko said he is the only "acceptable" candidate for both Washington and Beijing, adding that while there's nothing Taiwan could do to please both China and the U.S., it is important for the island to refrain from "behavior that is intolerable to either side."

The US relationship with China faces a test as Taiwan elects a new leader

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Washington's relationship with Beijing will face its biggest test since the leaders of the two countries met in November, as the United States seeks to keep the Taiwan Straits calm after Taiwanese voters select a new president this weekend.

At stake is the peace and stability of the 110-mile-wide (177-kilometer-wide) strip of water between the Chinese mainland and the self-governed island. Any armed conflict could put Washington head-to-head against Beijing and disrupt the global economy.

China fears that a victory in Saturday's election by the front-runner would be a step toward independence and has suggested to Taiwan's voters that they could be choosing between peace and war.

Washington is prepared to work with both Taipei and Beijing to avoid miscalculations and an escalation in tensions, regardless of which presidential candidate wins, officials and observers say.

A senior White House official said the U.S. will keep channels of communication open with China and will stay in close contact with Taiwan to "reinforce both our support for Taiwan's democratic processes and also our strong commitment to peace, stability and the status quo." The official spoke to reporters on Thursday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the plans.

President Joe Biden plans to send an unofficial delegation of former senior officials to the island shortly after the election. The U.S. has no formal ties with Taiwan and sending an official delegation would enrage Beijing, which considers the island Chinese territory.

Anticipating a "period of higher tensions" ahead, the official said the U.S. is preparing for different reactions from Beijing, depending on the election results, that may range from no response to military actions.

On Saturday, the island of 23 million people will choose a new president to replace Tsai Ing-wen, who has served the limit of two terms. The election has drawn high attention because Beijing is opposed to front-runner Lai Ching-te, the candidate from the governing Democratic Progressive Party, which is known for its pro-independence leanings. This has raised concerns that a Lai win could trigger a military response from the mainland.

Beijing has vowed to unify with Taiwan, by force if necessary. Any military action could draw in the United States, which provides Taiwan with military hardware and technology under a security pact.

Washington, while not taking sides on Taiwan's sovereignty, opposes any unilateral change to the status quo by either side. It has shown no official preference for any candidate.

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Biden, when meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in November in California, stressed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. Xi pressed Biden to support China's peaceful reunification with the island and told him "the Taiwan question remains the most important and most sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations."

No matter who wins Saturday's election, Washington will engage with the new Taiwanese government to strengthen ties and focus on deterring military aggression from Beijing, lawmakers and observers have said.

"The U.S. will exchange notes with Taiwan to preserve stability and for Taiwan to be resilient going forward," said Bonnie Glaser, managing director of the Indo-Pacific program at the German Marshall Fund.

"Regardless of who wins, the American people will stand with the people of Taiwan and the vibrant, beautiful democracy of Taiwan," Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois said Wednesday at a discussion hosted by Politico. "And that's on a bipartisan basis." He is the ranking Democrat on a House select committee regarding strategic competition between the U.S. and the Chinese Communist Party.

Republican Rep. Andy Barr of Kentucky said at the same discussion that the U.S. and all of Taiwan's political parties believe in deterrence. "We will work with whoever wins this election to reestablish and strengthen that deterrence," Barr said.

The overwhelming support among Taiwanese for maintaining the status quo means U.S. policy would largely stay the course regardless of who wins the election, said Scott Kennedy, senior adviser and trustee chair in Chinese business and economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"No one wants to provoke a war, and the current situation is minimally acceptable to almost everyone, whether in Taiwan, mainland China, or the United States," Kennedy said.

All of Taiwan's presidential candidates have come to see a solid relationship with the U.S. as strong deterrence against a hostile takeover of the island by Beijing, said Rorry Daniels, managing director of the New York-based Asia Society Policy Institute.

If elected, Lai is unlikely to rock the boat by taking drastic steps toward statehood, as his party has proved to be prudent and pragmatic under Tsai, observers say.

"Tsai has built a positive image in Washington," said John Dotson of the Washington-based think tank Global Taiwan Institute. "She's turned out to be very moderate in office."

While Tsai has infuriated Beijing by refusing to acknowledge Taiwan as part of China, she also has refrained from moving toward declaring independence. Lai would be expected to follow in her footsteps. Washington would likely see a Lai presidency as a "third Tsai term," Dotson said.

But a Lai win could trigger angry responses from Beijing, including military exercises near the island. Experts say Beijing likely would be restrained because it is eager to protect the U.S.-China relationship, especially after the Biden-Xi meeting in November.

The challenge for Taipei and for Washington would be to manage Beijing's anxiety that Taiwan could be "creeping into independence," said Daniels of the Asia Society Policy Institute.

Lai is closely trailed by Hou Yu-ih, the candidate from the opposition Kuomintang party. Beijing is accused of waging an influence campaign in favor of Hou, whose party sees Taiwan as part of China, although not necessarily under Beijing's rule. Yet a Kuomintang victory would not upend U.S. policy, given that popular opinion on the island overwhelmingly favors the status quo, observers say.

Should Hou be elected, Washington, which has a history of working with the Kuomintang, would be prepared to engage with him to continue strengthening U.S.-Taiwan relations, and any easing in cross-strait tensions that would come with his election could allow the U.S. to focus on other issues, said Brian Hart, a fellow of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

A warmer cross-strait relationship could bring new complexities to U.S.-China relations. "There will be more to coordinate," Daniels said. But as Beijing would likely put pressure on a Kuomintang government to move toward reunification, Washington could help Hou manage that pressure, she said.

The third candidate, Ko Wen-je of the newly minted Taiwan People's Party, could be the biggest challenge for Washington if he were to be elected. His party has yet to be tested and build a relationship with Washington, but observers note that Ko has expressed interest in working with the U.S.

"The Biden administration has gone out of its way to have no preference," Hart said. "There's an opportunity regardless who wins. The U.S. is truly not trying to weigh in on this."

"From the U.S. perspective, what we want Taiwan to do at a higher degree is to invest in its defense, to deter China's aggression," Hart said.

US investigating if Boeing made sure a part that blew off a jet was made to design standards

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating whether Boeing failed to make sure a panel that blew off a jetliner in midflight last week was safe and manufactured to meet the design that regulators approved.

Boeing said Thursday it would cooperate with the investigation, which is focusing on plugs used to fill spots for extra doors when those exits are not required for safety reasons on Boeing 737 Max 9 jetliners.

One of two plugs on an Alaska Airlines jetliner blew out shortly after the plane took off from Portland, Oregon, leaving a hole in the plane.

"This incident should have never happened, and it cannot happen again," the FAA said. "Boeing's manufacturing practices need to comply with the high safety standards they're legally accountable to meet."

The FAA notified Boeing of the investigation in a letter dated Wednesday.

"After the incident, the FAA was notified of additional discrepancies on other Boeing 737-9 airplanes," an FAA official wrote. Alaska and United Airlines reported finding loose bolts on door plugs that they inspected in some of their other Max 9 jets.

The FAA asked Boeing to respond within 10 business days and tell the agency "the root cause" of the problem with the door plug and steps the company is taking to prevent a recurrence.

"We will cooperate fully and transparently with the FAA and the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) on their investigations," said Boeing, which is headquartered in Arlington, Virginia.

Earlier this week, Boeing CEO David Calhoun called the incident "a quality escape." He told employees that the company was "acknowledging our mistake ... and that this event can never happen again."

The door plugs are installed by Boeing supplier Spirit AeroSystems, but investigators have not said which company's employees last worked on the plug on the Alaska plane that suffered the blowout.

The day after the blowout, the FAA grounded Max 9 jets, including all 65 operated by Alaska and 79 used by United Airlines, until Boeing develops inspection guidelines and planes can be examined. Alaska canceled all flights by Max 9s through Saturday.

NTSB investigators said this week they have not been able to find four bolts that are used to help secure the 63-pound door plug. They are not sure whether the bolts were there before the plane took off.

Despite a hole in the side of the plane, pilots were able to return to Portland and make an emergency landing. No serious injuries were reported.

A physics teacher in Cedar Hills, Oregon, found the missing door plug in his backyard two days later. It will be examined in the NTSB laboratory in Washington, D.C.

On Friday, a Seattle law firm filed a class-action lawsuit against Boeing, saying passengers on the Alaska flight suffered physical and psychological injury and emotional distress. It seeks unspecified damages for the treatment of health conditions, travel expenses and the loss of personal items.

Boeing declined to comment on the lawsuit.

The FAA's move to investigate Boeing comes as the agency is again under scrutiny for its oversight of the aircraft maker. Members of Congress have in the past accused the FAA of being too cozy with Boeing.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., chair of the Senate committee that oversees FAA, asked the agency to detail its oversight of the company.

"Recent accidents and incidents — including the expelled door plug on Alaska Airlines flight 1282 — call into question Boeing's quality control," Cantwell said in a letter to FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker. "In short, it appears that FAA's oversight processes have not been effective in ensuring that Boeing produces airplanes that are in condition for safe operation, as required by law and by FAA regulations."

The incident on the Alaska plane is the latest in a string of setbacks for Boeing that began in 2018, with the first of two crashes of Max 8 planes in Indonesia and Ethiopia — and more than four months apart — that killed a total of 346 people.

Justin Green, a lawyer who represents families suing Boeing for the Ethiopia crash, said he was happy to see the FAA ground the Max 9s so quickly after the Oregon incident.

“I would like to think it is because the FAA learned something after its failure to ground the Boeing 737-8 Max” after the first crash, Green said, “but you also need to consider that Alaska Air occurred in the U.S. with a plane full of U.S. citizens and garnered far more attention than the Lion Air crash” in Indonesia.

Max 8 and Max 9 planes were grounded worldwide for nearly two years after the second crash. Since then, various manufacturing flaws have at times held up deliveries of Max jets and a larger Boeing plane, the 787. Last month, the company asked airlines to inspect their Max jets for a loose bolt in the rudder-control system.

A cluster of lost cities in Ecuadorian Amazon that lasted 1,000 years has been mapped

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Archeologists have uncovered a cluster of lost cities in the Amazon rainforest that was home to at least 10,000 farmers around 2,000 years ago.

A series of earthen mounds and buried roads in Ecuador was first noticed more than two decades ago by archaeologist Stéphen Rostain. But at the time, “I wasn’t sure how it all fit together,” said Rostain, one of the researchers who reported on the finding Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Recent mapping by laser-sensor technology revealed those sites to be part of a dense network of settlements and connecting roadways, tucked into the forested foothills of the Andes, that lasted about 1,000 years.

“It was a lost valley of cities,” said Rostain, who directs investigations at France’s National Center for Scientific Research. “It’s incredible.”

The settlements were occupied by the Upano people between around 500 B.C. and 300 to 600 A.D. — a period roughly contemporaneous with the Roman Empire in Europe, the researchers found.

Residential and ceremonial buildings erected on more than 6,000 earthen mounds were surrounded by agricultural fields with drainage canals. The largest roads were 33 feet (10 meters) wide and stretched for 6 to 12 miles (10 to 20 kilometers).

While it’s difficult to estimate populations, the site was home to at least 10,000 inhabitants — and perhaps as many as 15,000 or 30,000 at its peak, said archaeologist Antoine Dorison, a study co-author at the same French institute. That’s comparable to the estimated population of Roman-era London, then Britain’s largest city.

“This shows a very dense occupation and an extremely complicated society,” said University of Florida archeologist Michael Heckenberger, who was not involved in the study. “For the region, it’s really in a class of its own in terms of how early it is.”

José Iriarte, a University of Exeter archaeologist, said it would have required an elaborate system of organized labor to build the roads and thousands of earthen mounds.

“The Incas and Mayans built with stone, but people in Amazonia didn’t usually have stone available to build — they built with mud. It’s still an immense amount of labor,” said Iriarte, who had no role in the research.

The Amazon is often thought of as a “pristine wilderness with only small groups of people. But recent discoveries have shown us how much more complex the past really is,” he said.

Scientists have recently also found evidence of intricate rainforest societies that predated European contact elsewhere in the Amazon, including in Bolivia and in Brazil.

“There’s always been an incredible diversity of people and settlements in the Amazon, not only one way to live,” said Rostain. “We’re just learning more about them.”

Donald Trump defies judge, gives courtroom speech on tense final day of New York civil fraud trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Barred from giving a formal closing argument, Donald Trump wrested an opportunity to speak in court at the conclusion of his New York civil fraud trial Thursday, unleashing a barrage of attacks in a six-minute diatribe before being cut off by the judge.

In an extraordinary move for any defendant, Trump not only sought to make his own summation but then brushed past a question from the judge about whether he would follow rules requiring him to keep his remarks focused on matters related to the trial.

"I am an innocent man," Trump protested. "I'm being persecuted by someone running for office, and I think you have to go outside the bounds."

Judge Arthur Engoron let him continue almost uninterrupted for what amounted to a brief personal summation, then cut him off for a scheduled lunch break.

Trump's in-court remarks, which were not televised, ensured a tumultuous final day for a trial over allegations that he habitually exaggerated his wealth on financial statements, deceiving a bank and insurance companies into giving him plum deals.

Engoron said he hoped to have a verdict by Jan. 31. He is deciding the case because state law doesn't allow for juries in this type of lawsuit.

New York Attorney General Letitia James sued Trump in 2022 under a state law that gives her broad power to investigate allegations of persistent fraud in business dealings. She wants the judge to impose \$370 million in penalties and forbid Trump from doing business in New York.

Adding to the day's tension, the exchanges took place hours after authorities responded to a bomb threat at the judge's house in New York City's suburbs. The scare didn't delay the start of court proceedings, and Engoron didn't mention it in court.

Trump, the leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination, has disparaged Engoron throughout the trial, accusing him in a social media post Wednesday night of working closely with James. Both she and Engoron are Democrats.

The court action came days before the presidential primary season kicks off with the Monday's Iowa caucuses.

Engoron had rejected an unusual plan by Trump to deliver his own closing remarks in the courtroom, in addition to summations from his legal team. The sticking point was that Trump's lawyers would not agree to the judge's demand that he stick to "relevant" matters and not try to introduce new evidence, make a campaign speech or lob personal attacks at the judge, James or the court system.

After three Trump lawyers delivered traditional closing arguments Thursday, one of them, Christopher Kise, asked the judge again whether Trump could speak. Engoron asked Trump whether he would abide by the guidelines.

Trump didn't agree to do so, instead launching into his remarks.

"What's happened here, sir, is a fraud on me," Trump said, claiming he was being targeted by officials who "want to make sure I don't win again." He later accused the judge of not listening to him: "I know this is boring to you."

"Control your client," Engoron warned Kise.

Engoron then told Trump he had a minute left, let him speak a little more, and then adjourned.

James later said she wasn't bothered by Trump's personal attacks.

"This case has never been about politics or personal vendetta or about name-calling," she said outside court. "This case is about the facts and the law. And Mr. Donald Trump violated the law."

A lawyer for her office, Kevin Wallace, had argued in court that "fraud was central to the operation" of Trump's business. Wallace asserted that inflating Trump's fortune led to interest rate savings that "kept the company afloat" for a time when it was spending big on various projects, though Kise objected that there was no testimony to that effect.

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The state insisted that the falsehoods were intentional and that Trump should be held accountable for them.

"Ask yourself: Would any of this persistent fraud have happened, over the course of 11 years, if it wasn't directed from the top by Mr. Trump?" state lawyer Andrew Amer posited during summations.

Trump skipped the state's closing arguments to hold a news conference that served as counter-programming. He reiterated his insistence that "they have no case."

His lawyers had argued as much in their summations. Kise said Trump "should get a medal" for his business acumen instead of a potential punishment he deemed the "corporate death penalty."

While he acknowledged that Trump's financial statements may have made "immaterial" overstatements about some of his holdings, the lawyer maintained that many assets "were undervalued by substantial sums."

The day began with police on Long Island checking out what they called a "swatting incident at Engoron's home. Nassau County police said they found nothing amiss.

The false report came days after a fake emergency call reporting a shooting at the home of the judge in Trump's Washington, D.C., criminal case. The incidents are among a recent spate of similar false reports at the homes of public officials.

Engoron ruled before the trial that Trump had committed years of fraud by lying about his riches on financial statements with tricks like claiming his Trump Tower penthouse was nearly three times its actual size.

The trial involves six undecided claims of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records. Trump's company and two of his sons, Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr., are also defendants. Eric Trump was also in court for closing arguments.

In a ruling last month, the judge suggested he's inclined to find Trump and his co-defendants liable on at least some claims. Assets can be valued in different ways, the judge wrote, "but a lie is still a lie."

However, Engoron asked the state lawyers Thursday what evidence they had that Trump's sons knew of the alleged fraud. "I just haven't seen it," the judge said.

Amer responded that the sons, as top executives, bore responsibility even if they claimed to be unaware of the purported wrongdoing.

Since the trial began Oct. 2, the former president has gone to court nine times to observe, testify and complain to TV cameras about the case.

He clashed with Engoron and state lawyers during 3½ hours on the witness stand in November and remains under a limited gag order after making a disparaging and false social media post about the judge's law clerk.

On Tuesday, he was in court in Washington, D.C., to watch appeals court arguments over whether he is immune from prosecution on charges that he plotted to overturn the 2020 election — one of four criminal cases against him. Trump has pleaded not guilty.

Playoff game behind a Peacock paywall is a new frontier in NFL's embrace of streaming

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

The quarterback matchup between Miami's Tua Tagovailoa and Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes isn't the only major storyline going into their AFC wild card game.

Another question is how many fans will pay to watch one of the NFL's important games of the season being carried exclusively on a streaming platform for the first time.

Saturday night's game will be shown on Peacock after NBCUniversal won the rights last May. The game will be broadcast on the NBC affiliates in Kansas City and Miami, following the NFL's protocol for Thursday night games streamed on Amazon Prime Video.

Everyone else will have to pay for a Peacock subscription — plans start at \$5.99 per month — to watch the game, and some fans are less than thrilled about the NFL putting a playoff game behind a paywall for the first time.

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According to various reports, NBCUniversal paid \$110 million for the rights to the game.

"I mean, the NFL, which prints money — that's got more money than God — they gotta make another \$110 million for that stupid Peacock game," commentator Chris Russo said on ESPN's "First Take" program. "Oh my God, that drove me crazy! That is being a pig! That's what that's being.

"So, the poor person who's 75 years of age, who's followed the Chiefs since (Hank) Stram and Len Dawson, has gotta figure out on his remote where to get the stupid game and pay for the streaming service to see a playoff game!"

Under the NFL's contract, each of its four broadcast partners — NBC, CBS, Fox and ESPN/ABC — gets at least one wild-card game. Of the two remaining games, one rotates each year between NBC, CBS and Fox, while the other will likely be up for bid each year. That means Amazon or ESPN+ could eventually be in the running.

"We're very focused and very committed on broadcast. For us, it's not either/or, it's both. We want to continue to broaden the distribution for our content," said Hans Schroeder, the league's executive vice president of media distribution. "We see the continued evolution in the media landscape, and we want to be where our fans are. We know they're increasingly, especially younger fans, on different screens. So that's why it's important for us, not just for this game, but throughout the year, that we're on these different digital platforms."

ESPN started carrying NFL games in 1987, but it took 27 seasons before it aired its first playoff game. The league's embrace of streaming has been much faster.

Amazon Prime Video became the exclusive home of "Thursday Night Football" last season while ESPN has streamed one international game per season on ESPN+ since 2021.

Peacock had its first exclusive regular-season game when the Buffalo Bills visited the Los Angeles Chargers on Dec. 23.

All playoff games will also be available on mobile devices through the NFL+ package.

According to Prime Video, the median age of its audience was 48.5 years — 6.9 years younger than the median age of viewers watching the NFL on Sundays (55.4).

NBC Sports president Rick Cordella did not share expectations about the number of new Peacock subscribers the company is hoping to gain from streaming a playoff game. He said NBC's top priorities were making sure the production is top-notch and that its streaming technology can handle the influx of viewers.

"We're in the big event business. We've streamed the Super Bowl in the past, World Cup, Olympics, WrestleMania, Premier League each weekend, 'Sunday Night Football' throughout the season," Cordella said. "So, this is not new territory for us, and I have confidence that our product and tech teams will deliver a great experience for the viewers Saturday evening."

Cordella and others at Peacock are also hoping to attract viewers beyond the playoff game.

"There's a lot of content on Peacock. There's a little misconception this is a pay-per-view for \$6. The reality is you're getting a lot of value for \$6 beyond just Saturday night," he said. "So, we look at Saturday night, the audience that came in for that, and what has that audience experienced a month down the road? This is not a success-failure Sunday morning. It's down the road, did people behave how we thought they would behave once they get inside the platform?"

NBC will have three games during the first weekend of the postseason, the first time a network has had that many on a single playoff weekend. Cleveland at Houston will air on NBC Saturday at 4:30 p.m. EST. NBC also has the much-anticipated Sunday night matchup between the Los Angeles Rams and Detroit Lions.

Since the NFL went to an expanded wild-card schedule in 2020, the late Saturday game has been the least viewed twice. Last year's contest between the Los Angeles Chargers and Jacksonville Jaguars averaged 20.61 million viewers.

This season's 16-game package on Prime Video averaged 11.86 million viewers according to Nielsen, a 24% increase over last year's inaugural season. There were 12 games that averaged more than 10 million, doubling 2022.

The record for a streamed NFL game is 15.3 million for the Nov. 30 matchup between the Seattle Se-

ahawks and Dallas Cowboys on Prime Video. The Bills-Chargers game on Peacock averaged 7.3 million. "As we think about it, we're going to take a lot of learnings from it," Schroeder said. "Certainly, viewership will be one of them. That will be just one of the criteria we think about and look at the opportunities we have going forward."

Trump skips much of the final week before Iowa's caucuses to go to court voluntarily instead

By JILL COLVIN and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

URBANDALE, Iowa (AP) — While his rivals contend with snow drifts and frigid temperatures as they make their last-ditch pitch to Iowa voters, former President Donald Trump has spent much of the week before the caucuses in court instead, by choice.

Trump was in Washington, D.C., for a federal hearing Tuesday and attended the closing arguments of his civil fraud trial in New York Thursday, with a brief trip to Iowa in between for a Fox News town hall. He'll only return to Iowa Saturday for a final blitz before the Monday caucuses.

Both court appearances are voluntary and Trump was not required to attend. But his campaign has come to embrace his legal woes as a centerpiece of its strategy — one that has so far, supercharged his candidacy instead of hobbling it.

That may not work in a general election when Trump will need to win over moderate and independent voters who turned from him in 2020 while he fights four separate criminal cases in four jurisdictions. But in the primary, Trump is using his court appearances to cast himself as the victim of a coordinated effort by Democrats to hobble the chances of their chief political rival and to push back against President Joe Biden's assertion that his reelection poses a threat to democracy. He instead calls Biden the real threat.

"I'm an innocent man. I've been persecuted by somebody running for office," Trump told the court at his civil fraud trial in New York Thursday, speaking from the defense table despite having been barred from giving a formal closing argument by the judge. "They want to make sure that I don't win again."

Speaking to reporters later, Trump again complained of "election interference," even though there is no evidence Biden has played any role in the cases playing out in both state and federal courts.

"In a way, I guess you'd consider it part of the campaign," he said, adding: "Every time somebody sees me in court, remember: Joe Biden and his thugs that surround him did it."

Aides have said Trump is deeply invested in the cases, which threaten everything from his control of his business empire to his freedom. And he believes his presence in court helps him there. But the appearances also guarantee Trump the media spotlight, giving him the opportunity to hammer his case, and pulling attention away from his rivals in Iowa as they make their final pitch to voters.

"President Trump is always going to defend himself," senior adviser Jason Miller said. "We're not going to allow any free shots on goal of Joe Biden's legal henchmen trying to commit election interference."

His campaign has also continued to fundraise off the appearances, including one email Monday in which they falsely stated Biden was "forcing" Trump "into a courtroom in our nation's capital to defend my right to presidential immunity."

Since long before the race's final stretch, however, Trump has spent far fewer days campaigning in the state than his chief rivals, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who visited all of the state's 99 counties, and tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, who visited each one twice. The Des Moines Register's candidate tracker this week listed 25 public Trump events in the state since March versus more than 125 for DeSantis, 79 for Nikki Haley and more than 300 for Ramaswamy.

Trump campaign aides argue that because his events draw far more voters than his rivals, he can reach just as many people with fewer events.

The less frantic schedule also doesn't seem to have mattered in a state where Trump maintains a dominant lead over his rivals, with the focus not on whether he will win but his margin of victory.

"Any event that he has is loaded to the hilt," said Dave LaGrange, who owns a financial services business in Winterset, southwest of Des Moines, and plans to caucus for Trump. He said he views the former

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president as more of a "known entity" than his GOP rivals, who might need to spend more time getting out their message.

But others have voiced complaints.

"Where was he earlier, when he had the opportunity to be here?" asked Michael Peiffer, a Winterset farmer and small business owner who supports DeSantis.

"Dude, you're the president," Peiffer said of Trump. "You just farmed everything out to a bunch of other people."

In Trump's absence, his campaign has been holding a series of surrogate events featuring top supporters like his eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, and Ben Carson, Trump's former secretary of housing and urban development. (Events featuring Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders and actor Roseanne Barr were canceled due to weather.)

"I think it's very important that we do continue to put his message out even though he's got a number of people who are trying to do everything they possibly can to interfere," Carson told reporters at an event Wednesday.

Those surrogates could also step in more if Trump's criminal trials force him off the campaign trail for long stretches of time in the coming months. Some of those who have appeared are among those thought to be vying to be considered as Trump's vice presidential pick, giving them a chance to demonstrate their draw.

"They have to fill in where he can't be, to help support," said Philip Hansen, a retired truck driver from Norwalk, who spent Thursday evening at a Machine Shed restaurant in Urbandale at an event featuring Donald Trump Jr., Trump's eldest son.

"He can't go to everything," Hansen said. "You've got take a little time at home or spend a little time with your family. Or go to court," he added with a laugh.

But the absences haven't bothered Hansen, or his wife, Nancy, who blamed Democrats for Trump's predicament.

"It's all politics. It is not because he was guilty of anything," she insisted, adding: "Anybody who will take the stand like he has, he's going to be my candidate. He's sticking up for me."

"Trump is as close to Jesus as he can be," she said. "He really sticks up for us Americans."

The events are also a way for Trump to appeal to different constituencies.

On Wednesday night, Carson drew more than 100 people to a church in Davenport, Iowa — comparable to the number at many DeSantis and Haley events — and preached to the audience about restoring Christian values to the national identity. He drew vocal reactions -- yeas and nays, amens and laughs -- from the friendly room.

Carson reminded those gathered of Trump's strengths, despite his flaws, saying not everyone in the Bible was a "boy scout." His language may be a little "wild," Carson said — and "offensive," he said later to reporters — but his policies are right.

Like Carson, Cindy Brotzman of Davenport said she wanted to see Carson on a cold winter night to join with a community of like-minded people to pray for the country.

Brotzman, a 55-year-old optician who also attended a Trump "commit to caucus" event in Clinton last weekend, said she cried when she saw the former president in person. She would love to see him again but said it doesn't matter to her how often Trump is in Iowa because "he's like anyone else," she said. "He's busy."

"I don't need him to make 55 appearances as long as I know that he's steering our country in the right direction," she said.

A woman was hired to investigate racial harassment after a suicide. Then she encountered it herself

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A Black woman hired by a northern Utah school district to investigate racial harassment complaints the year after a 10-year-old Black student died by suicide says that she, too, experienced discrimination from district officials.

Joscelin Thomas, a former coordinator in the Davis School District's equal opportunity office, alleges in a federal lawsuit that district staff treated her "as if she were stupid," accused her of having a substandard work ethic and denied her training and mentorship opportunities that were offered to her white colleagues.

"From the beginning of her employment, Dr. Thomas was treated differently than her lighter-skinned and non-Black coworkers and was subject to a hostile work environment," the complaint states.

Thomas was part of a wave of new hires in 2022 after the U.S. Department of Justice ordered the district in a settlement agreement to create an office tasked with investigating and addressing reports of racial harassment. The order stemmed from a 2021 federal investigation, which uncovered widespread racial harassment of Black and Asian American students in the district just north of Salt Lake City, including hundreds of documented uses of the N-word and other derogatory epithets over a five-year period.

The civil rights probe found that Black students, who make up about 1% of the district's 74,000 students, had been disciplined more harshly than their white peers for similar behavior. District officials admitted to federal investigators that years of discipline data demonstrated a trend of staff treating students of color differently than white students, but the district had done nothing to correct the disparities, federal investigators said.

Several Black students had also told investigators that their white peers referred to them as apes, made monkey noises at them in class and told them that their skin looked like dirt or feces. Inappropriate comments about slavery and lynching sometimes went unpunished, and Black students recalled being told by their peers, "Go pick cotton" and "You are my slave."

The district's racial issues came to a head just two weeks later when Isabella "Izzy" Tichenor, a Black and autistic fifth grader, died by suicide after her family said she was relentlessly bullied by her classmates at Foxboro Elementary School in North Salt Lake. The 10-year-old's parents blamed her death on what they called an inadequate response by school administrators, whom they said were aware of the bullying but did nothing to stop it.

Tichenor, the only Black student in her class, had kids regularly calling her the N-word, telling her she was smelly and teasing her for being autistic, according to a lawsuit filed by the family. District officials admitted last year that school staff had mistreated the girl and agreed to pay her family a \$2 million settlement after initially defending how it handled the bullying allegations. They also announced a separate \$200,000 settlement shared between three Black students who said they experienced daily racial harassment.

The school district updated its harassment policy following the federal investigation and Tichenor's death, and it launched an anonymous online platform for any student, parent or staff member to report incidents of harassment or discrimination, spokesperson Christopher Williams said on Thursday.

Thomas was among those tasked with investigating the anonymous reports, but her attorney, Katie Panzer, said Thomas' own experiences call into question whether the district has made any real effort to change its culture.

"Our hope is that through our efforts to address the violation of Dr. Thomas' rights, the district will be forced to make systemic change," Panzer said. "The district has an obligation to provide both students and employees a safe environment free from race discrimination. We would like to see them actually fulfill that obligation."

The lawsuit filed in Utah district court accuses Thomas' colleagues of treating her as a subordinate rather than an equal. About a month into her employment, a colleague handed her a pile of garbage and ordered her to clean up the trash during what was supposed to be an opportunity for Thomas to network with other administrators, the complaint states.

Her employment ended June 30, 2023, after administrators decided not to renew her one-year contract, Williams said, declining to explain why. Her photo had not been removed from the district directory as of Thursday.

Thomas said she had scheduled a meeting a couple of months earlier with the district's human resources director to discuss the discrimination she had experienced, but earlier that day, she said, the assistant superintendent placed her on administrative leave with little explanation and told her the district would be investigating her workplace conduct. Her contract soon expired, and she never learned the result.

"Davis School District administrators, teachers and staff stand firmly against any form of harassment or discrimination that affects a child's learning experience in our schools," Williams said, declining to comment on the specifics of the lawsuit. "Our primary duty and responsibility is to create a safe environment for every child, employee and patron."

Haley's frequent reference to new anti-DeSantis website falls flat with some supporters in Iowa

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

ANKENY, Iowa (AP) — Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley revived some of the debate-stage critiques she leveled against Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as she campaigned in Iowa on Thursday, even as some of her supporters said they didn't think her performance the night before had been her strongest.

With just days to go before Iowa's leadoff GOP caucuses, Haley spoke to a gathering of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Summit in Altoona before addressing a packed room of supporters in Ankeny. She was also set to meet with voters in Cedar Rapids on Thursday night.

In Ankeny, as she did multiple times in Wednesday night's one-on-one debate, Haley directed supporters to a new website called DeSantisLies.com. Both Haley, a former South Carolina governor, and DeSantis have repeatedly accused the other of lying and misrepresenting their records.

"There's a lot of lies and everything going on," Haley told the crowd Thursday. "I finally just put it on a website, because I'm like, it's just too big a thing. ... Let's focus on what we're going to do to stop this drama, and to focus on what we need to do for the solutions."

Some attendees said they supported Haley but weren't thrilled with her latest debate performance, which they said ran counter to the above-the-fray style they said she'd maintained up to now.

"I think she did OK, but I think she relied too much on DeSantisLies.com," said Sam Wells, of West Des Moines. "And she got caught into the name calling that she has stayed away from, that's attracted her to a lot of people."

Phyllis Johnson, also of West Des Moines, had the same take.

"I thought it was probably one of the poorest debates, and the reason I did is, I think her and DeSantis did too much back and forth slamming of each other," Johnson said. "There was a little bit too much friction there. And I thought it really hurt both of them."

Johnson, a retiree who said Monday night's caucuses would be her first, said that she remained excited to caucus for the former South Carolina governor.

"I think our country is really headed in the very wrong direction," Johnson said. "So we've got to do something. And I think Nikki would be a good answer to get us back together."

Earlier in the day, DeSantis addressed the renewable fuels group just ahead of Haley, arguing that his on-the-ground campaign experience had driven home for him the need to safeguard the interests of the "hardworking, God-fearing, patriotic folks" whom he had met.

Meanwhile, both Haley and DeSantis were overshadowed by former President Donald Trump, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination. Dominating the political news cycle from 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) away, he appeared for the conclusion of his New York civil fraud trial and unleashed a six-minute diatribe in court before being cut off by the judge.

It was much the same as the day before, when Trump held a Fox News town hall at the same time as Haley and DeSantis were debating on CNN. The Nielsen company said 4.3 million viewers watched the

Trump town hall, compared to just under 2.6 million for the head-to-head debate.

Who was the revered rabbi whose New York synagogue was the scene of a brawl over an illegal tunnel?

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

The basement synagogue that was the scene of a brawl this week between worshippers and New York City police has a long and storied connection with a Brooklyn rabbi who led a global movement and remains revered three decades since his death.

The fight broke out Monday when authorities moved in to seal off a secret tunnel into the Chabad-Lubavitch synagogue, which some worshippers — described by the movement as “a small group of rogue youth” — said was intended to fulfill the wishes of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Here are some details about Schneerson and his impact within and beyond the Chabad-Lubavitch movement of Orthodox Judaism.

WHO WAS SCHNEERSON?

Schneerson led Chabad-Lubavitch from 1951 until his death in 1994. He was the movement’s seventh leader, known as Lubavitcher Rebbe.

He arrived in the United States during World War II after gaining a secular education in Europe, and he quickly set about rebuilding Chabad-Lubavitch and wider Jewish observance following the devastation of the Holocaust.

Schneerson’s voluminous speeches and writings were spread widely and continue to be collated and studied by supporters.

He sought to expand Jewish observance, dispatching emissaries throughout the world, often in places with little to no Jewish presence. And he would encourage people of all faiths to be more observant and to heed universal moral teachings about honoring God and respecting others.

On Sundays, Schneerson would hand out crisp dollar bills to people who lined up for hours to see him. The bills were supposed to be given to charity, but many kept them as souvenirs, according to his 1994 obituary by The Associated Press. Many who met him in person came away with stories of his charisma and his encyclopedic memory for names and details.

“Reverence for the rebbe along those lines is standard” in any Hasidic community, said Ezra Glinter, who is writing a biography of Schneerson for Yale University Press. “But he did have a broader influence than most Hasidic rebbes do. These kinds of stories really did exceed the boundaries of his own community.”

Even before his death, some followers regarded Schneerson as a messianic figure, and some believe now that he hasn’t really died or that he will be resurrected to complete his work.

The Chabad movement disavows any teaching that Schneerson is the messiah. Still, his memory is honored throughout the movement and beyond, and his grave in Queens receives about 400,000 visitors per year, according to Chabad.

WHAT IS CHABAD-LUBAVITCH?

No one has succeeded Schneerson as rebbe in the 30 years since his death, but the movement continues to expand and has become the most outward-looking of Hasidic or strictly observant Orthodox Jewish groups.

The movement’s global headquarters in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, are a deeply revered Jewish site visited by thousands of people a year, including international students and religious leaders. Its Gothic Revival facade has inspired dozens of replicas across the world.

The movement continues to send representatives to college campuses, public squares and other venues to encourage less-pious Jews to become more observant. Its large Hanukkah celebrations have become an annual tradition across the United States and elsewhere, complete with giant menorahs paraded on car rooftops and displayed in other public settings.

Husband-and-wife emissaries, known as shlichim, work around the world, providing a Jewish presence even where it is otherwise sparse. Their massive group photos have become a tradition at annual meet-

ings in New York.

WHAT HAPPENED AT CHABAD?

Officials and locals said some young members of the movement had dug a 60-foot tunnel to the basement synagogue in secret. When the group's leaders tried to seal it off Monday, the men staged a protest that turned violent as police moved in to make arrests.

Within days, New York building officials issued emergency work orders to stabilize the synagogue and its neighboring structures, worrying that the illicit underground tunnel may have caused structural damage. Authorities ordered the evacuation of some of the buildings because of safety concerns and issued citations to the buildings' owners.

Tunnel supporters said they believe Schneerson is the messiah, that he is still alive and that he supports an expansion of the synagogue.

For Schneerson, the Brooklyn complex had "a lot of symbolic and religious significance," as the place where he and his predecessor had taught and worked, Gliner said. The rebbe had goals for an expansion in the 1980s and 1990s, seeing it as "further preparatory act for the messiah's arrival," Gliner said.

That expansion didn't come to fruition, he said. "It seems to me quite likely the people doing this believed they were in fact fulfilling Schneerson's wishes."

Rabbi Motti Seligson, spokesman for Chabad, described those involved in the digging of the tunnel and the subsequent disorder as "young agitators," but conceded that everyone supports an expansion at some point. "This is a small group of rogue youth who have sadly caused an enormous amount of pain and damage," he said.

"This is a place where the rebbe taught and inspired a generation to be kinder, to be better, to become the best version of themselves," Seligson said. "For this to happen in this sacred space is incredibly painful."

Hunter Biden pleads not guilty to federal tax charges after an earlier deal imploded

By STEFANIE DAZIO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — President Joe Biden's son pleaded not guilty Thursday to federal tax charges filed after the collapse of a plea deal that could have spared him the spectacle of a criminal trial during the 2024 campaign.

Hunter Biden has been accused of nine felony and misdemeanor tax offenses. The charges stem from what federal prosecutors say was a four-year scheme to skip out on paying the \$1.4 million he owed to the IRS and instead use the money to fund an extravagant lifestyle that by his own admission included drugs and alcohol.

"We're here today because you've been accused by the United States of a criminal offense," Judge Mark Scarsi said to Biden, who entered the not guilty plea himself.

The judge set a tentative trial date of June 20 during the half-hour-long hearing.

Meanwhile, Hunter Biden has also been charged in Delaware with lying in October 2018 on a federal form for gun purchasers when he swore he wasn't using or addicted to illegal drugs. He was addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He's also accused of possessing the gun illegally and has pleaded not guilty in that case.

The accusations all come from a yearslong federal investigation into Hunter Biden's tax and business dealings that had been expected to wind down over the summer with a plea deal in which he would have gotten two years' probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges. He also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble.

The deal unraveled when a federal judge who had been expected to approve the deal instead began to question it. Now, the tax and gun cases are moving ahead as part of an unprecedented confluence of political and legal drama: As the 2024 election draws closer, the Justice Department is actively prosecuting both the president's son and Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner.

Hunter Biden's original proposed plea deal with prosecutors had been pilloried as a "sweetheart deal"

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by Republicans, including Trump. The former president is facing his own criminal problems — 91 charges across four separate cases, including that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden, a Democrat. He too appeared in court Thursday, in New York for closing arguments in his civil fraud trial.

Hunter Biden's attorney Abbe Lowell referenced the failed deal to the judge on Thursday, suggesting there had been Congressional interference. Lowell had previously accused special counsel David Weiss of "bowing to Republican pressure."

"We had a resolution of this case in the summer of 2023, and then things happened," Lowell told the judge.

Prosecutor Leo Wise told the judge there was no need for additional hearings on the failed deal.

"Pleas fall apart all the time," Wise said, adding that high-profile people face prosecutions often.

The judge also asked Biden to verify his full name on the indictment. Biden stood and said, "Robert Hunter Biden."

Hunter Biden's criminal proceedings are also happening in parallel to so far unsuccessful efforts by congressional Republicans to link his business dealings to his father. Republicans are pursuing an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, claiming he was engaged in an influence-peddling scheme with his son. Hunter Biden defied a congressional subpoena to appear for closed-door testimony, insisting he wanted to testify in public. He made a surprise appearance at a congressional hearing Wednesday as House Republicans took steps to file contempt of Congress charges.

No evidence has emerged so far to prove that Joe Biden, in his current or previous office, abused his role or accepted bribes, though questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family's international business dealings.

In an interview that aired Thursday on MSNBC's "Morning Joe," first lady Jill Biden said she thought the GOP's treatment of her son was "cruel."

"And I'm really proud of how Hunter has rebuilt his life after addiction. You know, I love my son," she said. "And it's had — it's hurt my grandchildren. And that's what I'm so concerned about, that it's affecting their lives as well."

If convicted of the tax charges, Hunter Biden, 53, could receive a maximum of 17 years in prison. Following the collapse of the plea deal, Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel to handle the matter. A special counsel is tapped to handle cases in which the Justice Department perceives itself as having a conflict or where it's deemed to be in the public interest to have someone outside the government step in.

Patriots' 'partnership' with Bill Belichick comes to an end after 24 seasons, 6 Super Bowl titles

By KYLE HIGHTOWER and JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writers

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — Bill Belichick had a vision of building the kind of sustained championship football team that had rarely been seen before in the NFL when he was hired by the New England Patriots.

He walks away feeling like it was a job well done.

The six-time NFL champion agreed to depart as the coach of the Patriots, ending his 24-year tenure as the architect of the most decorated dynasty of the league's Super Bowl era.

"It's with so many fond memories and thoughts that I think about the Patriots," Belichick said on Thursday in a media availability with owner Robert Kraft. "I'll always be a Patriot. I look forward to coming back here. But at this time, we're going to move on. And I look forward, excited for the future."

Neither Belichick nor Kraft took questions, though Kraft said during an availability later in the day that the team missing the playoffs in three of the past four seasons factored into wanting to sever their relationship.

"What's gone on here the last three to four years isn't what we want. So we have a responsibility to do what we can to fix it to the best of our ability," Kraft said.

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Speaking to reporters from the podium where he had given so many terse, non-responsive postgame recaps, Belichick appeared in a jacket and tie and spoke first, followed by Kraft. The coach even smiled a couple of times — including when he conceded respect for the media “even though we don’t always see eye to eye.”

He also thanked the fans for “the sendoffs, the parades, the Sundays.” But most of his time was spent thanking the people throughout the organization, especially the more than 1,000 Patriots players he coached in his time here.

“Players win games in the NFL,” Belichick said. “I’ve been very, very fortunate to coach some of the greatest players to ever play the game.”

Kraft called the relationship a marriage that had required work and had come to an end.

“I’m very proud that our partnership lasted for 24 years,” Kraft said. “Bill has taught me a lot over those years, and we had high expectations for what we could achieve together. I think we were the only ones who had those expectations, and I think it’s safe to say we exceeded them.”

“We did,” Belichick agreed.

“Thanks to you,” Kraft said.

Belichick, 71, became just the third coach in NFL history to reach 300 career regular-season victories earlier this season, joining Hall of Famers Don Shula and George Halas. With 333 wins including the playoffs, Belichick trails only Shula (347) for the record for victories by a coach.

But the Patriots ended this season 4-13, Belichick’s worst record in 29 seasons as an NFL head coach. It supplanted the 5-11 mark he managed in his last year in Cleveland in 1995 and again in his first year in New England in 2000. Including the playoffs, he ends his Patriots tenure with a 333-178 record.

Belichick is expected to resume his pursuit of Shula’s record elsewhere. Kraft alluded to that, saying complete closure for their relationship couldn’t come “while he’s still coaching.”

“But I hope when that’s all over, we can do something that properly honors him and respects him for what he’s done with us,” Kraft said.

With his cutoff hoodies and ever-present scowl, Belichick teamed with quarterback Tom Brady to lead the Patriots to six Super Bowl victories, nine AFC titles and 17 division championships in 19 years. During a less successful — but also tumultuous — stint with the original Cleveland Browns, Belichick earned 37 of his career victories.

Reaction to Thursday’s announcement poured in across social media. It included one from Brady, who responded with three heart emojis to a post on ESPN’s Instagram page that had photos of Belichick and Kraft embracing.

It’s not immediately clear who Kraft will tap to replace the future Hall of Famer, and he declined to get into particulars out of respect for Thursday’s announcement.

“We’ll have a chance to talk about that in the very near future,” Kraft said.

But asked later what kind of coach he’ll seek, he added: “We’re looking for someone who can help us get back to the playoffs and win.”

Patriots linebackers coach Jerod Mayo won a Super Bowl ring playing under Belichick and has interviewed for multiple head coaching vacancies since becoming a New England assistant in 2019. Mayo turned down a few interviews last offseason before signing a contract extension to remain with the Patriots.

Mike Vrabel, who was fired earlier this week by the Tennessee Titans and won three Super Bowls with the Patriots, is also expected to be a candidate.

Belichick had been grooming offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels to replace him before McDaniels left following the 2021 season to become the coach of the Raiders. He has since been fired by Las Vegas.

Belichick’s exit from the Patriots comes just a day after another coaching great and longtime friend Nick Saban announced he’d retire after winning seven college national championships. Saban worked for Belichick’s father, Steve, in the 1980s as a coach at Navy, and Bill Belichick hired Saban as his defensive coordinator when he became Cleveland’s head coach in 1991.

The six Super Bowl wins tie Belichick with pre-merger mentors Halas and Curly Lambeau for the most

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NFL championships. Belichick also won two rings as Bill Parcells' defensive coordinator with the New York Giants.

But the Patriots have stumbled to a 29-39 record since Brady departed following the 2019 season. Beginning in 2001 when Brady became the starting quarterback, the Patriots missed the playoffs only once — when Brady was injured in 2008. This marked New England's fifth consecutive season without a playoff victory.

Belichick's subsequent solutions at quarterback haven't panned out.

Brady's initial replacement, Cam Newton, didn't resemble the player who won the 2015 MVP award and was cut after a 7-9 finish in 2020. Meanwhile, Brady won his seventh Super Bowl ring with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers that same season.

Mac Jones, a 2021 first-round draft choice, was a Pro Bowl selection as a rookie and led New England to the playoffs. But he regressed in Year 2 when Belichick put longtime defensive assistant Matt Patricia in charge of the offense. Jones didn't fare much better this season when Bill O'Brien returned as offensive coordinator. He was benched four times before being replaced as starter by backup Bailey Zappe for the final six games.

That left the Patriots looking at a lengthy rebuild, with no candidate on the roster to bring stability to the sport's most important position.

Belichick, who also served as the de facto general manager with final say on personnel decisions, was celebrated for his ingenuity managing the salary cap during the run of Super Bowl success. It included getting stars like Brady and others to accept cap-friendly contracts or adjust their deals to accommodate the signing of other players.

But that acclaim has waned in the years since Brady left, as a run of draft picks and high-priced free agents didn't live up to expectations. In addition, Belichick has seen several members of his personnel and scouting departments leave for other jobs.

Now it won't be Belichick making the decisions for the Patriots on or off the field.

Belichick, the only child of a World War II veteran who spent three decades as a Navy assistant coach, is a football historian with an encyclopedic knowledge of strategy from the sport's early days to current NFL trends. His players said his attention to detail never left them unprepared.

Belichick has been a master of the NFL rule book, unearthing loopholes in clock operations and offensive line formations that — though entirely legal — cemented his reputation as a mad genius.

But his legacy in New England also includes two major cheating investigations — and other minor ones — that cost him and the team draft picks and more than \$1 million in fines. Opponents accused the Patriots of everything from hacking their headsets to cutting corners on injury reports.

His friendship with former President Donald Trump, which Belichick insisted was not political, landed the coach on the list to receive a Presidential Medal of Freedom in the waning days of the administration. After the outcry against the U.S. Capitol siege, Belichick announced "the decision has been made not to move forward."

South Africa tells top UN court Israel is committing genocide in Gaza as landmark case begins

By MIKE CORDER and RAF CASERT Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — In a case that strikes at the heart of Israel's national identity, South Africa formally accused the country of committing genocide against Palestinians and pleaded Thursday with the United Nations' top court to order an immediate halt to Israeli military operations in Gaza.

Israel, which was founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, has vehemently denied the allegations. As a sign of how seriously they regard the case, Israeli leaders have taken the rare step of engaging with the court to defend their international reputation. Israel often boycotts international tribunals or U.N. investigations, saying they are unfair and biased.

During opening statements at the International Court of Justice, South African lawyers said the latest

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Gaza war is part of decades of Israeli oppression of Palestinians.

The court "has the benefit of the past 13 weeks of evidence that shows incontrovertibly a pattern of conduct and related intention" that amounts to "a plausible claim of genocidal acts," South African lawyer Adila Hassim told the judges and audience in a packed room of the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blasted the case and vowed to continue fighting Hamas, the militant group whose fighters stormed through Israeli communities on Oct. 7 and killed some 1,200 people, mainly civilians.

"This is an upside-down world — the state of Israel is accused of genocide while it is fighting genocide," he said in video statement. "The hypocrisy of South Africa screams to the heavens."

The case is one of the most significant ever heard in an international court, and it goes to the core of one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

South Africa is seeking preliminary orders to compel Israel to stop its military campaign in Gaza, where more than 23,000 people have died, according to the Health Ministry in the territory, which is run by Hamas.

"Nothing will stop the suffering except an order from this court," Hassim said.

A decision on South Africa's request for so-called provisional measures will probably take weeks. The full case is likely to last years.

Israel launched its massive air and ground assault on Gaza soon after the deadly Hamas attack. Three months later, the offensive has driven nearly 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes. With only a trickle of food, water, medicine and other supplies entering through an Israeli siege, a quarter of the territory's residents face starvation. And much of northern Gaza, including Gaza City, has been reduced to a moonscape.

Although the court's findings are considered binding, it was unclear whether Israel would heed any order to halt the fighting. If it doesn't, it could face U.N. sanctions, although those may be blocked by a U.S. veto.

The White House declined to comment on how it might respond if the court determines Israel committed genocide. But National Security Council spokesman John Kirby called the allegations "unfounded."

"That's not a word that ought to be thrown around lightly, and we certainly don't believe that it applies here," Kirby said.

Israel says it is battling a fierce enemy that carried out the deadliest attack on its territory since its creation in 1948. Israeli leaders insist they are following international law and doing their utmost to avoid harm to civilians. The country blames Hamas for the high death toll, saying its enemy operates in residential areas.

In a post on X after the hearing, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat called South Africa's presentation "one of the greatest shows of hypocrisy" and referred to the legal team as "Hamas' representatives in court." He said South African lawyers distorted the reality in Gaza through a series of "baseless and false claims." He did not elaborate.

That reaction came after South Africa insisted Israel committed genocide by design.

"The scale of destruction in Gaza, the targeting of family homes and civilians, the war being a war on children, all make clear that genocidal intent is both understood and has been put into practice. The articulated intent is the destruction of Palestinian life," said lawyer Tembeka Ngcukaitobi.

He said the case's "distinctive feature" was "the reiteration and repetition of genocidal speech throughout every sphere of the state in Israel."

The Oct. 7 attackers also abducted around 250 people, nearly half of whom have been released. Ahead of the proceedings, hundreds of pro-Israeli protesters marched close to the courthouse with banners saying "Bring them home," referring to the hostages still being held by Hamas.

One of the Israeli protesters was Michael Nevy, 42, whose brother was kidnapped by Hamas. "People are talking about what Israel is doing, but Hamas is committing crime against humanity every day," he said.

At a separate demonstration nearby, pro-Palestinian protesters waved flags calling for an end to "Israeli apartheid" and the adoption of a cease-fire.

Chanting by protesters on the streets around the court's manicured grounds could sometimes be heard in the courtroom.

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The case targets the center of Israeli identity and the country's creation as a Jewish state in the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust, which killed 6 million Jews.

It also evokes issues central to South Africa's own identity: Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Blacks to "homelands" before ending in 1994.

The two-day hearing continues Friday, when Israel, which has sent a strong legal team to make its defense, is scheduled to address the court.

South Africa sought to broaden the case beyond the Israel-Hamas war.

"The violence and the destruction in Palestine and Israel did not begin on Oct. 7, 2023. The Palestinians have experienced systematic oppression and violence for the last 76 years," said South African Justice Minister Ronald Lamola.

About two-thirds of the dead in Gaza are women and children, health officials there say. The death toll does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

"Mothers, fathers, children, siblings, grandparents, aunts, cousins are often all killed together. This killing is nothing short of destruction of Palestinian life. It is inflicted deliberately. No one is spared. Not even newborn babies," said South African lawyer Hassim.

The world court, which rules on disputes between nations, has never judged a country to be responsible for genocide. The closest it came was in 2007 when it ruled that Serbia "violated the obligation to prevent genocide" in the July 1995 massacre by Bosnian Serb forces of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys in the Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica.

The nearby International Criminal Court prosecutes individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

The case against Israel revolves around the genocide convention that was drawn up in 1948 following World War II. Both Israel and South Africa were signatories.

Israel will be back on the International Court of Justice's docket next month, when hearings open into a U.N. request for an advisory opinion on the legality of Israeli policies in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Ohio woman who miscarried at home won't be charged with corpse abuse, grand jury decides

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — An Ohio woman facing a criminal charge for her handling of a home miscarriage will not be charged, a grand jury decided Thursday.

The Trumbull County prosecutor's office said grand jurors declined to return an indictment for abuse of a corpse against Brittany Watts, 34, of Warren, resolving a case that sparked national attention for its implications for pregnant women as states across the country hash out new laws governing reproductive health care access in the wake of Roe v. Wade being overturned.

The announcement came hours before about 150 supporters gathered for a "We Stand With Brittany!" rally on Warren's Courthouse Square. The event had been planned before Thursday's announcement of the grand jury's decision.

Watts was among several speakers who addressed the crowd.

"I want to thank my community — Warren. Warren, Ohio. I was born here. I was raised here. I graduated high school here, and I'm going to continue to stay here because I have to continue to fight," she said.

Watts' lawyer said an outpouring of emails, letters, calls, donations and prayers from the public helped her client endure the ordeal of being charged with a felony punishable by up to a year in prison.

"No matter how shocking or disturbing it may sound when presented in a public forum, it is simply the devastating reality of miscarriage," attorney Traci Timko said in a statement. "While the last three months have been agonizing, we are incredibly grateful and relieved that justice was handed down by the grand jury today."

A municipal judge had found probable cause to bind over Watts' case after city prosecutors said she

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miscarried — clogging the toilet and removing some of its contents to an outdoor trash area — then left the house, leaving the 22-week-old fetus lodged in the pipes.

Watts had visited Mercy Health-St. Joseph's Hospital, a Catholic facility in working-class Warren, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of Cleveland, twice in the days leading up to her miscarriage. Her doctor had told her she was carrying a nonviable fetus and to have her labor induced or risk "significant risk" of death, according to records of her case.

Due to delays and other complications, her attorney said, she left each time without being treated. After she miscarried, she tried to go to a hair appointment, but friends sent her to the hospital. A nurse called 911 to report a previously pregnant patient had returned reporting "the baby's in her backyard in a bucket."

That call launched a police investigation that led to the eventual charge against Watts.

Warren Assistant Prosecutor Lewis Guarnieri told Municipal Court Judge Terry Ivanchak the issue wasn't "how the child died, when the child died" but "the fact the baby was put into a toilet, was large enough to clog up the toilet, left in the toilet, and she went on (with) her day."

An autopsy determined the fetus died in utero and identified "no recent injuries."

Timko told Ivanchak that Watts, who is Black, had no criminal record and was being "demonized for something that goes on every day." She also argued that Ohio's abuse-of-corpse statute lacked clear definitions, including what is meant by "human corpse" and what constitutes "outrage" to "reasonable" family and community sensibilities.

When Ivanchak bound the case over, he said, "There are better scholars than I am to determine the exact legal status of this fetus, corpse, body, birthing tissue, whatever it is."

Trumbull County Prosecutor Dennis Watkins said in a statement that county prosecutors "respectfully disagree with the lower court's application of the law," after their follow-up investigation found Watts committed no crime.

In Our Own Voice, a Black reproductive rights group, expressed relief Thursday at the case's outcome.

"What happened to Brittany Watts is a grave example of how Black women and their bodies face legal threats simply for existing," president and CEO Dr. Regina Davis Moss said in a statement. "Her story is one that is becoming alarmingly common: in states with abortion restrictions, Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people are being surveilled, arrested, prosecuted and punished for pregnancy loss."

Ohio Physicians for Reproductive Rights, a key backer of Ohio's successful fall amendment protecting access to reproductive health care, had lobbied Watkins to drop the charge against Watts, which Watkins insisted was not within his power.

On Thursday, the group commended the grand jury and called for the "dangerous trend" of criminalizing reproductive outcomes to be halted.

"It not only undermines women's rights but also threatens public health by instilling fear and hesitation in women seeking necessary medical care during their most vulnerable moments," President Dr. Marcela Azevedo said in a statement.

Watts hopes her story can be an "impetus to change," Timko said.

"Through education and legislation," Timko said, "we can make sure no other woman must set her grief and trauma on a back burner to muster the strength to fight for her freedom."

Emmys will have reunions, recreations of shows like 'Lucy,' 'Martin,' 'Grey's Anatomy' and 'Thrones'

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The 75th Emmy Awards will be studded with cast reunions and recreations of classic moments from a dozen beloved shows throughout television history.

"All in the Family," "Grey's Anatomy," "Game of Thrones," "Martin" and many more series will get the special treatment at Monday night's ceremony at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles, with many getting renditions of their sets, including the bar from "Cheers."

"It was really about, how can we celebrate 75 years of television differently?" the show's executive pro-

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ducer Jesse Collins told The Associated Press.

The first such scene will come within the 10 minutes of host Anthony Anderson's Emmys opening, and the moments will be spread throughout the Fox telecast.

"The core of it," said Dionne Harmon, another executive producer, "is really celebrating television and to honor the shows of yesterday while we honor the shows of today."

Collins, Harmon and Jeannae Rouzan-Clay from Jesse Collins Entertainment are producing the Emmys for the first time, after previously putting on the Oscars, American Music Awards and BET Awards.

With the tribute segments they're seeking to show decades of television in its full variety of styles, formats and periods.

From the Emmys' earliest days in the 1950s will come "I Love Lucy;" from the 1960s, "The Carol Burnett Show," whose title star recently won her seventh Emmy at age 90; from the 1970s, "All in the Family," whose legendary creator, TV legend Norman Lear, died last month at 101.

"Cheers" will represent the '80s. "Ally McBeal" and "Martin" will represent different sides of the '90s. The television-game-changing "Sopranos" will show up from the early 2000s.

Shows still on the air — "Grey's Anatomy" and "American Horror Story" — will also be represented.

Bits featuring "Saturday Night Live" and "The Arsenio Hall Show" will show up for variety and talk.

"We just tried to pick ones that we felt like we could successfully pay tribute to," Collins said. "We have a pretty vast array of comedies and procedural dramas and talk shows, just trying to touch all the different areas."

And the shows come from all four networks and HBO, a perennial Emmys juggernaut that this year has all three of the top nominated shows — "Succession," "The Last of Us" and "The White Lotus," — and was home to the winningest drama of all time, which is also among the classic shows getting honored.

"We have a great 'Game of Thrones' moment," Collins said.

Producers didn't give specifics on who will be appearing, and said not to expect everyone from every show.

Reunions aren't possible for all of them, of course. "I Love Lucy," whose key cast members have all been dead for decades, will get a recreation by actors playing Lucy and Ethel.

Other shows have few left to reunite. "All in the Family" only has two surviving major cast members, Rob Reiner and Sally Struthers. The same is true of "The Carol Burnett Show," with only Burnett and Vicki Lawrence still alive.

They also said not to expect a reunion of the cast of "Friends," though the show will include some tribute to Matthew Perry, who died in October.

Emmy producers said they tried to take a different approach to each of the segments to make sure it doesn't start to feel like a repetitive trope.

"We want to make sure people remain entertained and engaged so you never really know what you're going to see, even with the reunions," Rouzan-Clay told the AP.

While wrangling multiple actors from different eras is never easy, and synching schedules was a tangled thicket as everyone became available again with the end of the writers and actors strikes that pushed the show from September to January, Emmy organizers didn't have to twist many arms to get people to take part.

"People are happy to be back and happy to celebrate," Harmon said. "It is a monumental year. Everybody was really excited to come be a part of this."

Lawsuit filed against Harvard, accusing it of violating the civil rights of Jewish students

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Several Jewish students have filed a lawsuit against Harvard University, accusing it of becoming "a bastion of rampant anti-Jewish hatred and harassment."

The lawsuit filed Wednesday mirrors others filed since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, including

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against The Art Institute of Chicago, New York University and the University of Pennsylvania.

In the Harvard lawsuit, the plaintiffs include members of the Students Against Antisemitism, Inc. They accuse Harvard of violating Jewish students' civil rights and allege that the university tolerated Jewish students being harassed, assaulted and intimidated — behavior that has intensified since the Oct. 7 attack.

"Mobs of pro-Hamas students and faculty have marched by the hundreds through Harvard's campus, shouting vile antisemitic slogans and calling for death to Jews and Israel," according to the lawsuit. "Those mobs have occupied buildings, classrooms, libraries, student lounges, plazas, and study halls, often for days or weeks at a time, promoting violence against Jews."

It was unclear what the reference to mobs in the lawsuit refers to, but the university has been rattled by protests since the Oct. 7 attack. At one point, pro-Palestinian students occupied a campus building for 24 hours.

Marc Kasowitz, a partner at the law firm that brought the suit, Kasowitz Benson Torres, said in a statement that the litigation was necessary because Harvard would not "correct its deep-seated antisemitism problem voluntarily."

"Harvard must be forced to protect its Jewish students and stop applying a double standard when it comes to anti-Jewish bigotry," he added.

A spokesman for Harvard said the school doesn't comment on pending litigation. About a dozen students are potentially facing disciplinary charges for violations of protest rules related to pro-Palestinian activities, but the spokesman said the school couldn't comment on their cases.

Fallout from the Israel-Hamas war has roiled campuses across the U.S. and reignited a debate over free speech. College leaders have struggled to define the line where political speech crosses into harassment and discrimination, with Jewish and Arab students raising concerns that their schools are doing too little to protect them.

The issue took center stage in December when the presidents of Harvard, Penn and MIT testified at a congressional hearing on campus antisemitism. Asked by Republican lawmakers whether calls for the genocide of Jews would violate campus policies, the presidents offered lawyerly answers and declined to say unequivocally that it was prohibited speech.

Their answers prompted weeks of backlash from donors and alumni, leading to the resignation of Liz Magill at Penn and Claudine Gay at Harvard.

Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks killed 1,200 people in Israel, mainly civilians, and abducted around 250 others, nearly half of whom were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Since the war began, Israel's assault in Gaza has killed more than 23,200 Palestinians, roughly 1% of the territory's population, and more than 58,000 people have been wounded, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. About two-thirds of the dead are women or children.

The U.S. Department of Education has repeatedly warned colleges that they are required to fight anti-semitism and Islamophobia on their campuses or risk losing federal money. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said the agency has opened more than 40 investigations at colleges and universities in response to complaints of antisemitism and Islamophobia since the Oct. 7 attacks, including at Harvard, Stanford and MIT.

"No student should feel unsafe on campus," Cardona told The Associated Press on Wednesday, after he met with students. "The Office for Civil Rights takes these cases very seriously. They investigate harassment, or violations for antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Arab sentiment. We take that role very seriously. If any student on campus feels that any protest or messaging makes them feel unsafe, we ask for an investigation."

In November, Gay issued a memo laying out plans to address antisemitism on campus.

The university said it was starting a process to examine "how antisemitism manifests within our community" and developing a plan to address it. It also is implementing a program to educate students and faculty about antisemitism and "redoubling our efforts to make students aware that appropriate avenues exist to report feelings of fear or incidents causing harm" including an anonymous hotline for bias incidents.

Palestinian viewers are captivated and moved by case at UN's top court accusing Israel of genocide

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Palestinians across the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem spent Thursday captivated by the proceedings in a faraway courtroom, closely following the first hearing in an unprecedented case brought by South Africa that accuses Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Friends and family gathered before screens in living rooms and local coffee shops to watch the opening statements at the top United Nations court, located in the Netherlands. Cab drivers used their phones between shifts to tune into the International Court of Justice's livestream from The Hague.

Televisions typically filled with images of bloodshed and destruction in Gaza instead broadcast foreign lawyers and judges holding forth in lofty halls. In at least one cafe in the West Bank city of Ramallah, some cheered as they watched South Africa's justice minister expound on the decades-long "systematic oppression and violence" of Palestinians. Others wept.

"I am amazed at the fact that the international community is trying to hold Israel accountable," Assalah Mansour, a 25-year-old lawyer, said from the northern West Bank city of Nablus. The hearing in The Hague was the talk of the town Thursday, she said.

"For the first time, I felt like this case restored the Palestinian people's hope in the international community," Mansour said.

Israel has vehemently denied the genocide allegations and has chosen to defend itself, in person, for the first time, attesting to the case's symbolic importance. South Africa is seeking binding preliminary orders to compel Israel to stop its current military campaign in Gaza.

Israel declared war on Hamas, the group that rules Gaza, after thousands of militants launched a surprise attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 hostages. The war has killed more than 23,000 people in Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry.

No matter the outcome of the lengthy judicial process, Palestinians hailed Thursday's hearing as a watershed moment for a population that felt forgotten by world powers and betrayed by its own leaders throughout decades of suffering abuses under Israeli occupation.

Since Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza in a 1967 war, Palestinians have endured land-seizing Israeli settlements, army raids on their homes, restrictions on their movements, bars to using their own natural resources and military courts — all entrenching a feeling that the world's hand-wringing about human rights doesn't apply to them.

"Even if nothing comes out of this, the sheer fact that the whole world is listening to our story is a victory," Marwan Mohammed, a coffee shop owner in al-Bireh, a town abutting Ramallah, said.

Nearby, a few dozen Palestinians and senior officials paid tribute to South Africa at a city square named after Nelson Mandela, who led the emancipation of South Africa from white minority rule and regularly discussed the Palestinian people's plight before he died in 2013.

"I proudly salute you, you defenders of human dignity and human rights," Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said, addressing South Africa.

Around the Arab world, many celebrated the proceedings, though some expressed dismay that an Arab country had not filed the case. In Tunisia, a crowd gathered outside the South African Embassy on Thursday.

"We wanted to thank South Africa ... which did what no Arab or Islamic country could do," Naila Al Zougami said at the demonstration as protesters chanted in support of a cease-fire and Palestinian freedom.

Palestinians in the West Bank welcomed the hearing as a rare bright spot despite a growing sense of despair, vulnerability and abandonment. Attacks by Israeli settlers and military raids have surged in the occupied territory since Hamas' brutal attack on southern Israel more than three months ago.

Increased army restrictions on Palestinian movements in the past few months have turned West Bank towns into isolated enclaves.

"In all the wars that have devastated Gaza, in all that we have experienced here with settlement expansion and violence, we have never seen this happen before," Sliman Mukarkar, a 29-year-old from the

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West Bank city of Bethlehem. "We are happy in our hearts because it teaches the world about what's happening to us."

The Rev. Munther Isaac, a Palestinian pastor whose Christmas sermon about Gaza's devastation was quoted in Thursday's opening statement, felt a wave of gratitude for South Africa.

"It's hard to put into words how grateful we feel for their work and courage," he said. "People were in tears. I was moved."

But Isaac said the joy was mixed with frustration over the international community's wider failure to stop the staggering destruction of Gaza; Israeli aerial and artillery strikes continued to kill dozens of Palestinians in the enclave even as the International Court of Justice proceedings unfolded.

"After letting it sink in, you realize you cannot be too happy about this," Isaac said. "It is a deeply sad occasion."

Few in Gaza said they had the time, interest or internet connection to watch the two-day hearing live.

Naseem Hassan, 48, a medic in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis, said he was rushing the bodies of more dead Palestinians into an overwhelmed hospital just a few hundred meters from Israeli tanks.

He pointed to repeated instances of inaction by the United Nations during the war, with the United States vetoing appeals for a cease-fire and a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding an influx of humanitarian aid toothless over two weeks after it passed.

"Israel is above every law and we have no hope," Hassan said, the constant buzz of aerial drones audible through the phone. "Even if the court rules against Israel, this war has shown us that they can do whatever they want."

The Patriots don't just need a new coach. They need a quarterback and talent to put around him

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft will cringe when he turns on the TV — or perhaps even looks at the other Gillette Stadium sideline — and sees Bill Belichick wearing a ratty sweatshirt with another team's colors.

But he has bigger things to worry about now.

The Patriots need a coach for the first time in almost a quarter century, and they need so much more, too: Belichick's failure to develop a quarterback to replace Tom Brady — and surround him with talent — is the biggest reason for the struggles that led to a 4-13 record this season and the end of the Belichick era in New England.

"This is a move that we mutually agreed that is needed at this time," Kraft said in a media availability on Thursday. "I thank coach Bill for his hard work and dedication. It'll be difficult to see him in a cutoff hoodie on the (opposing) sideline, but I will always continue to wish him continued success — except when he's playing our beloved Patriots."

Belichick is the most successful coach in the Super Bowl era, with six NFL championships, nine conference titles and 17 AFC East wins in a 19-year span. His 332 victories is second all-time only to Don Shula.

But the team has also been handicapped by the hubris that convinced Belichick he was the one who turned Brady, the No. 199 pick in the draft, into a future Hall of Famer. Unable to repeat the feat when Brady left, the Patriots posted three losing records in the last four years, and zero playoff wins.

Cam Newton, the 2015 NFL MVP, wasn't the answer. Neither were Jarrett Stidham, Mac Jones or Bailey Zappe — three young quarterbacks that Belichick thought he could mold into a champion as easily as he did with Brady.

Jones, a 2021 first-round draft pick, flamed out spectacularly this season, and Zappe was little better. As for talent at the skill positions, New England was the first team since 1977 to go a full season without either a runner or receiver totaling 100 yards in a game. (There were 186 100-yard receivers and 82 100-yard rushers in the NFL this season.)

In all, the Patriots are 29-39 since Brady left.

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"What's gone on here the last three to four years isn't what we want," Kraft said. "So we have a responsibility to do what we can to fix it to the best of our ability."

Among the possible coaching replacements are fired Titans coach Mike Vrabel, who won three Super Bowls as a New England linebacker and led Tennessee to three playoff appearances in six seasons, including a trip to the AFC championship game in 2019-20. A member of the Patriots Hall of Fame, Vrabel is familiar to and familiar with Kraft.

Also to be considered is current linebackers coach Jerod Mayo, who was being groomed to replace Belichick — but, according to the plan, somewhere farther down the line. Mayo is also a former Patriots player, but he has never been a coordinator.

Minnesota Vikings defensive coordinator Brian Flores is another Patriots product who can boast of head coaching experience. Flores spent more than a dozen years in New England before coaching the Miami Dolphins from 2019-21.

Josh McDaniels had once been the heir apparent to Belichick before flopping as a head coach in Denver and Las Vegas. McDaniels spent 13 years as the Patriots offensive coordinator and was a member of the coaching staff for all six Super Bowl wins.

"We're looking for someone who can help us get back to the playoffs and win," Kraft said. "I am very upset when we don't win games, and it carries the whole week. So I promise you, I'll be focused to do the best I can do to make sure we're putting ourselves in the best long-term position to win for many years."

With his total control of the roster, Belichick was also the team's de facto general manager. Kraft said on Thursday he hadn't had time to think about how the front office will be structured yet, or a timeline for who will be hired first.

No decision has been announced for the rest of the coaching staff, which includes two of Belichick's sons: Steve, who has been working the linebackers coach for the last four seasons, and Brian, who has worked with the safeties for the past four years.

Bud Harrelson, scrappy Mets shortstop who once fought Pete Rose, dies at 79

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Bud Harrelson, the scrappy and sure-handed shortstop who fought Pete Rose on the field during a playoff game and helped the New York Mets win an astonishing championship, died early Thursday morning. He was 79.

The Mets said Thursday that Harrelson died at a hospice house in East Northport, New York after a long battle with Alzheimer's. He was diagnosed in 2016 and publicly shared his struggle two years later, hoping he and his family could help others afflicted.

Throughout his health ordeal, Harrelson stayed involved with his professional pride and joy. He was part-owner of the Long Island Ducks, an independent minor league team located minutes from his home. He called his decades of work with the club — which he was instrumental in starting and running — his greatest achievement in baseball.

The team said Harrelson's family was planning a celebration of his life for a later date.

During a major league career that lasted from 1965-80, the light-hitting Harrelson was selected to two All-Star Games and won a Gold Glove. Known to family and teammates as Buddy, he spent his first 13 seasons with New York and was the only man in a Mets uniform for both their World Series titles.

The first came as the infield anchor of the 1969 Miracle Mets, the other as the club's third base coach in 1986.

In one of the most famous scenes in baseball history, it was a euphoric Harrelson who waved home Ray Knight with the winning run on Bill Buckner's error in Game 6 of the '86 Series against Boston.

Harrelson also managed the Mets for nearly two seasons, guiding them to a second-place NL East finish in 1990 after taking over in late May. He was inducted into the team's Hall of Fame in 1986, joining Rusty Staub as the first two players honored.

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"It was easy to see why the '69 guys loved him. He was great on defense and he was tough," Mets broadcaster Ron Darling, who pitched for the club from 1983-91, told the New York Post in 2018.

In Game 3 of the 1973 NL Championship Series between the Mets and Cincinnati Reds, Rose slid hard into Harrelson at second base on a double play. The two ended up toe-to-toe and then wrestling in the infield dirt at Shea Stadium, triggering a wild, bench-clearing brawl that spilled into the outfield.

Outweighed by more than 30 pounds, the scrawny, gritty Harrelson got the worst of it.

But he didn't back down.

"I have no regrets about going at it with Rose. I did what I had to do to protect myself, and Pete did what he thought he had to do to try to motivate his team," Harrelson wrote in his 2012 memoir, "Turning Two: My Journey to the Top of the World and Back with the New York Mets" co-authored by Phil Pepe. "We fought and that was the end of it."

Sort of.

The game was held up as irate fans hurled objects at Rose, and the Reds were pulled off the field by manager Sparky Anderson until order was restored. Mets skipper Yogi Berra and players including Willie Mays and Tom Seaver went out to left field to calm the crowd.

Cincinnati players apparently were peeved about a comment from Harrelson after Game 2. Making light of his own shortcomings, Harrelson said Mets pitcher Jon Matlack "made the Big Red Machine look like me hitting" after the left-hander tossed a two-hit shutout.

"I didn't think it was all that bad. I was kind of putting myself down a little bit, but I was also putting them down," Harrelson said. "Then I heard that they were going to come after me and all that, so I figured that was it right there. And when Pete hit me after I'd already thrown the ball, I got mad. And we had the little match. He just kind of lifted me up, laid me down to sleep and it was all over."

Harrelson later wrote that Charlie Hustle caught him with "a cheap shot." But the former shortstop would also joke about the fracas, often saying: "I hit him with my best punch. I hit him right in the fist with my eye."

The two became teammates in Philadelphia years later and when their playing days were long over, Harrelson said Rose, baseball's career hits leader, signed a photo of the fight for him and wrote, "Thanks for making me famous."

Harrelson later managed Rose's son with the Ducks, and the elder Rose even attended a couple of games, Harrelson said.

Harrelson was traded to the Phillies in 1978 and spent two years with them before playing his final season for the Texas Rangers. A switch-hitter, he finished his career with a .236 batting average and .616 OPS. He hit seven home runs — never more than one in a season — and stole 127 bases, including a career-high 28 for the Mets in 1971.

Despite his lack of power, Harrelson could be pesky at the plate. He drew 95 walks in 1970 and was always a good bunter. He batted .333 lifetime (20 for 60) against Hall of Famer Bob Gibson, with 14 walks and just three strikeouts for a .459 on-base percentage.

"I have always said I'll take God to three-and-two and take my chances. I might foul two off before He gave me ball four," Harrelson wrote.

Harrelson came off the bench in the 1970 All-Star Game in Cincinnati, getting two hits and scoring twice. He was the National League's starting shortstop the following season at Tiger Stadium and won his only Gold Glove that year.

"He was the best shortstop who played behind me — period," former Mets pitcher Jerry Koosman said in a statement released by the team. "I can't tell you how many runs he saved."

Harrelson went 3 for 17 (.176) with three walks when the Mets beat heavily favored Baltimore in the 1969 World Series. He had a .379 on-base percentage during a seven-game loss to Oakland in the '73 Series, after New York upset Cincinnati in the playoffs.

"We don't win in 1969 without him," teammate Art Shamsky said. "A fighter. The heart of the team. He was such a big part of Mets history."

As manager of the Mets from 1990-91, Harrelson compiled a 145-129 record.

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Derrel McKinley "Bud" Harrelson was born in Niles, California, on D-Day: June 6, 1944. He went to college at San Francisco State and signed with the Mets in June 1963 for \$13,500 even though the New York Yankees offered \$3,000 more.

Harrelson said he was a little intimidated by the Yankees' storied history and worried he might get stuck in the minors with them. He figured the Mets, an expansion franchise in 1962, might provide a faster path to the majors.

Early in his pro career with the struggling club, he tried switch-hitting at Casey Stengel's suggestion and stuck with it.

In 1972, Harrelson authored an instructional book titled "How to Play Better Baseball."

After his diagnosis, Harrelson joined the board of directors of Alzheimer's Association Long Island and worked with his family to raise awareness. He still made it out to Ducks games, eagerly greeting fans as a goodwill ambassador even if he couldn't throw batting practice or coach first base anymore.

"I feel like I'm home when I'm there. I'm with the people I love," Harrelson told the Post.

"I want people to know you can live with (Alzheimer's) and that a lot of people have it," he said. "It could be worse."

Despite his condition, Harrelson was at Citi Field in 2019 for the Mets' 50th anniversary celebration of their 1969 championship. Seaver, his good friend and former roommate, did not attend after the Hall of Fame pitcher was diagnosed with dementia.

"Buddy was more than a teammate and dad's roommate," said Sarah Seaver, Tom's daughter, in a statement released by the Mets. "Dad lovingly called him 'Roomie' for the rest of their lives. And to me, he was Uncle Bud, always quick with a smile and a twinkle in his eye. Dad and Buddy loved to talk baseball together — but more than anything there was laughter, huge smiles and a lot of love between them."

Harrelson is survived by his former wife, Kim Battaglia; daughters Kimberly Psarras, Alexandra Abbatiello and Cassandra Harrelson; sons Timothy and Troy; 10 grandchildren; and three great grandchildren.

St. Paul makes history with all-female city council, a rarity among large US cities

By TRISHA AHMED and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — When St. Paul City Council President Mitra Jalali looked out at her fellow council members at their initial meeting this week, she saw all the members' seats were occupied by women — a first for Minnesota's capital city.

Experts who track women in politics said St. Paul, with a population of about 300,000 people, is the first large U.S. city they know of with an all-female city council. But even as the council members celebrate the milestone, they are expressing more excitement about what the all-female council can accomplish in the coming year.

"We're a multifaith, multicultural group of women. Our professional experiences are what people trusted as much as our personal ones. ... And we have a clear policy vision that we got elected on," Jalali said in an interview.

All seven women are under 40 years old, and six out of the seven are women of color. From civil engineering to nonprofit directing, they have a wide range of professional experiences, which Jalali said helps capture the city's diversity.

"I think that our community is finally reflected by the city council," Jalali said, adding, "The median age of our community is 32.5. We are a majority person-of-color city. We have many major racial and ethnic groups, many of which are now represented on this council."

According to researchers with the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, St. Paul is the largest U.S. city they are aware of to ever have an all-female city council.

The Rutgers data show that women continue to be underrepresented as municipal officials across the country. Jean Sinzdak, associate director of the center, said seven out of 10 municipal office holders across the country are male, and most of them are white.

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"The fact that you have an all-female council and a majority of women of color, it has a long-term effect on young women and girls seeing them and saying, 'I can do this, too,'" Sinzduk said.

Members held their first city council meeting Wednesday after getting sworn in the day before.

Hwa Jeong Kim, the council's vice president, and Jalali said that their top priorities include a comprehensive housing policy, renter protections, climate action, public safety interventions that use police officers less and mental health responders more, and economic development.

"I feel like women and women of color and queer and trans women have been grieving for a long time — not for things that they've lost, but for things that they've never had," Kim said.

The council "lifts up the progressive values of our community more than ever and is committed to doing that difficult work together — not just in a performative way, but in a way that is sustainable and will really make lasting change," Jalali added.

The council is a nonpartisan office, but all seven members are Democrats, she said.

In Minnesota, women made up 35% of the municipal office holders in cities with over 10,000 people, tying the state with Michigan for 16th place among the 50 states, according to the Rutgers data. Alaska and Arizona had the highest proportions of women in municipal office at 45%. North Dakota had the lowest at 20%.

Sinzduk said left-leaning and Democratic communities tend to have more women elected officials because Democratic women outnumber Republican women, so they are more likely to run for office.

"It's not surprising to me that a city like this achieved this milestone first," Sinzduk said.

St. Paul is considered to be a Democratic stronghold.

Karen Kedrowski, director of the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics at Iowa State University, said the number of women elected to legislative, congressional and municipal offices seems to consistently level off around 25% to 30% across the U.S.

"So to have a 100% female city council in a major city in the United States is really significant. If it's not the first one, it's one of the first where this has happened — so it's a big deal," Kedrowski said.

Kedrowski said Minnesota has tended to run ahead of the national average for the participation of women in elected office. Both of its U.S. senators are women, its lieutenant governor is a woman of color, and the Minnesota Legislature has a high percentage of women.

"What's remarkable about this lineup is not just that it's all women, but it's the age of these women and it's the diversity of these women," said Heidi Heitkamp, director of the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago and a former U.S. senator from North Dakota.

"It's going to be a wonderful opportunity to see what diversity produces in terms of public policy, what things will change, because you have different people sitting at the table who traditionally haven't had those roles," Heitkamp said.

South Africa says Israel's campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide. What can the UN do about it?

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Israel is defending itself in the United Nations' highest court Thursday against allegations that it is committing genocide with its military campaign in Gaza.

South Africa asked the International Court of Justice to order Israel to immediately stop the war, alleging it has violated the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was drawn up in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust.

The convention defines genocide as acts such as killings "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

The case will likely drag on for years.

Here are some details on the case and its ramifications.

WHAT IS SOUTH AFRICA'S ARGUMENT?

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South Africa's 84-page filing says Israel's actions "are genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part" of the Palestinians in Gaza.

It asks the ICJ for a series of legally binding rulings declaring that Israel is breaching "its obligations under the Genocide Convention," and ordering Israel to cease hostilities, offer reparations, and provide for the reconstruction of all it has destroyed in Gaza.

The filing argues that genocidal acts include killing Palestinians, causing serious mental and bodily harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions meant to "bring about their physical destruction as a group." And it says Israeli officials have expressed genocidal intent.

During opening arguments, South African lawyers said the latest war is part of decades of Israeli oppression of Palestinians.

Many South Africans, including President Cyril Ramaphosa, compare Israel's policies regarding Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank with South Africa's past apartheid regime of racial segregation. Israel rejects such allegations.

WHAT WAS ISRAEL'S RESPONSE?

Israel, which was founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, has denounced the genocide claim. The Foreign Ministry said South Africa's case lacks legal foundation and constitutes a "despicable and contemptuous exploitation" of the court.

Eylon Levy, an official in the Israeli prime minister's office, accused South Africa of "giving political and legal cover" to the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that left some 1,200 people in southern Israel dead and triggered Israel's campaign.

Levy said Israel's legal team would "dispel South Africa's absurd blood libel."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the war until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 Israeli hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed. He's said that could take several months.

HOW DID ISRAEL REACT TO EARLIER ICJ PROCEEDINGS?

Israel did not attend hearings in 2004 when the ICJ discussed an advisory opinion on the legality of Israel's barrier wall. The court issued a non-binding opinion that the wall was "contrary to international law." Israel sent a written statement telling the court it did not consider it had jurisdiction.

Israel also refused to cooperate with an investigation after the 2008-9 Gaza war, a UN investigation into the 2014 Gaza war, and the ongoing Human Rights Council investigation into alleged abuses against Palestinians.

Israel is not a member of another Hague-based court, the International Criminal Court. Other countries that are not ICC members include major global powers the United States, China and Russia.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

South Africa's filing includes a request for the court to urgently issue legally binding interim orders for Israel to "immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza."

Such orders, known as provisional measures, would remain while the case progresses. They're legally binding but not always followed. In 2022, in a genocide case filed by Ukraine against Russia, the court ordered Moscow to immediately suspend its invasion, but the order was ignored.

The court is the highest judicial body of the United Nations but it does not have a police force to implement its rulings. If a nation believes another member has failed to comply with an ICJ order, it can report that to the Security Council.

The 15-member council is the U.N.'s most powerful body, charged with maintaining international peace and security. Its tools range from sanctions to authorizing military action, but all actions require support from at least nine council nations and no veto by a permanent member — the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

The court is holding public hearings Thursday and Friday, and lawyers representing South Africa and Israel can make arguments. A panel of 15 judges drawn from around the world plus one each nominated by Israel and South Africa could take days or weeks to issue a decision on preliminary measures.

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The court will then enter a lengthy process of considering the full case.

Israel could challenge the jurisdiction and seek to have the case thrown out before lawyers start arguing. Other countries that have signed the genocide convention could also apply to make submissions.

IS THE COURT HEARING SIMILAR CASES?

Two other genocide cases are on the court's docket. The case filed by Ukraine shortly after Russia's invasion accuses Moscow of launching the military operation based on trumped-up claims of genocide and accuses Russia of planning acts of genocide in Ukraine.

Another involves Gambia, on behalf of Muslim nations, accusing Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

In a past case brought by Bosnia, the court in 2007 ruled that Serbia "violated the obligation to prevent genocide ... in respect of the genocide that occurred in Srebrenica in July 1995." The court declined to order Serbia to pay compensation. Croatia also sued Serbia in 2015, but the world court ruled that Serbia didn't breach the convention in that case.

ICJ OR ICC?

The Hague calls itself the international city of peace and justice. It is home not only to the ICJ, but also the International Criminal Court. The two courts have different mandates.

The ICJ, which first sat in 1946, adjudicates cases between nations, often border disputes or disagreements over the interpretation of international treaties.

The ICC was launched in 2002 with the lofty goal of ending global impunity for atrocities. It seeks to hold individuals criminally responsible for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The ICC has an ongoing investigation into the Israel-Palestinian conflict, dating back to the last war in Gaza. So far, it has not issued any arrest warrants. Israel says the ICC has no jurisdiction because Palestinians do not belong to an independent sovereign state.

ICC prosecutor Karim Khan says an investigation into possible crimes by Hamas militants and Israeli forces is a priority. The court could charge political and military leaders.

Palestinian Foreign Affairs Minister Riyad al-Maliki has said the Palestinian Authority would not interfere with an ICC investigation into Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks. "We cannot say 'Investigate here, don't investigate there,'" al-Maliki said.

The ICC last year issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin accusing him of personal responsibility for abductions of children from Ukraine.

WHAT ABOUT PAST U.N. CASES?

Two now-defunct U.N. tribunals also held landmark genocide trials.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia convicted a series of high-ranking Bosnian Serbs, including former President Radovan Karadzic and his military chief Gen. Ratko Mladic, for their roles in the July 1995 massacre of more than 8,000 men and boys in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica.

Karadzic and Mladic were given life sentences.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda convicted a string of leaders involved in the African nation's 1994 genocide when some 800,000 people, mainly ethnic Tutsis, were slaughtered.

Friendly fire may have killed their relatives on Oct. 7. These Israeli families want answers now

By JULIA FRANKEL and ALON BERNSTEIN Associated Press

KIBBUTZ BE'ERI, Israel (AP) — Relatives of civilians killed at a kibbutz in southern Israel during the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas are demanding the military immediately investigate signs that some may have been killed by Israeli security forces as they battled militants holding hostages.

The military has said it will conduct a thorough investigation of everything that went wrong on Oct. 7 and the days that followed once its war on Hamas is over.

But that's not soon enough for some family members of 13 people killed during a violent standoff between

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Hamas and Israeli security forces at Kibbutz Be'eri, along the Gaza border. They fear valuable evidence could be lost as the war — now in its fourth month — drags on with no end in sight.

Representatives of eight bereaved families delivered a two-page letter to the army chief of staff and other officials late last week, demanding an immediate probe and a public release of the findings.

"In light of the seriousness of the incident, we do not think it is right to wait to investigate the incident until the end of the war, when it is not clear when it will end," the letter said. It prodded the military to "start it immediately, when the memory is fresh for all those involved."

Be'eri was one of the communities attacked on Oct. 7, when thousands of Hamas and other militants broke through the Gaza border barrier, rampaging through the small farming towns and cooperatives of southern Israel. By the end of the day, they had killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taken about 250 hostages.

The heavy death toll in Israel, the intelligence failures preceding the attack and the slow response by security forces that day have shattered the public's faith in the country's leadership and fueled calls for an investigation before the war is over.

A finding that Be'eri residents may have been harmed by Israeli security forces could add to that loss in faith — especially as the army deals with a growing number of friendly-fire deaths of soldiers fighting in Gaza. By the end of December — the most updated data provided by Israel's military — 18 soldiers in the Gaza ground offensive were killed by friendly fire, as well as two from "shooting irregularities," and nine from "accidents."

Be'eri was among the hardest hit communities on Oct. 7. More than 95 people were killed there and 30 were taken hostage, according to the community's spokesperson.

The families demanding a military investigation are focused on a standoff that took place at the home of Pesi Cohen, where Hamas militants had taken 15 hostages.

At one point, a Hamas commander asked Yasmine Porat -- one of only two hostages to make it out of the Cohen home alive -- to call the Israeli police. The commander sought to negotiate safe passage to Gaza with the hostages, in exchange for keeping them alive. Porat communicated with the commander with the help of an Arabic-speaking hostage, a Palestinian man from Jerusalem.

After seven or eight phone calls to the police, officers finally arrived outside the home, Porat said.

An hours-long gun battle ensued between some 40 militants and the Israeli forces outside, said Porat. The Israelis attempted to get into the house without killing the hostages, some of whom the militants had placed in the front yard. Porat said she was shot in the leg.

About an hour after the police arrived, the Hamas commander exited the home and surrendered, holding Porat in front of him as a shield. Porat then stayed with the Israeli forces until the end of the battle.

Porat saw a tank arrive, and asked a soldier if they were going to shell the house. He said yes, and that the tank unit wanted to break through the walls of the home.

Israel's Channel 12 news reported on footage and voice recordings it obtained from a police helicopter on October 7 that appear to show a tank firing upon the Cohen house, causing an explosion that sent pillars of smoke into the sky. An officer in the helicopter can be heard exclaiming, "Wow, there was firing!"

The Channel 12 report cited forces on the ground who said that a first tank fired a shot at around 5:30 p.m., about an hour and a half after Israeli forces arrived at the home. That tank sustained damage, prompting another tank to arrive on scene. It was unclear from the Channel 12 report if the second tank fired on the house.

Porat said she did not see the tanks firing at the home, but heard two blasts.

The only other person who survived the standoff at the Cohen house, Hadas Dagan, told Channel 12 she was sure that a tank had fired at the house.

"Suddenly there was a terrible boom," Dagan said. "It was clear to me that there was a tank. I was injured by shrapnel from a tank shell."

It remains unclear how each of the 13 hostages died in the house that day. Porat said she believes that most of the hostages were alive when she exited the house.

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In their letter to the military, the bereaved families of Kibbutz Be'eri asked the army to investigate why the general in charge of the operation, Brig. Gen. Barak Hiram, had ordered a tank to fire at the house despite the risk of civilian casualties. Hiram was quoted by the New York Times as telling the tank commander to "break in" after militants inside fired a rocket-propelled grenade at the forces.

"According to the evidence, the shooting of the tank was fatal and killed many hostages in addition to the terrorists," the families wrote, demanding a "comprehensive and transparent investigation into the decisions and actions that led to this tragic outcome."

The military said commanders had to make difficult decisions in a complex battlefield that day, and that it would investigate the Be'eri incident, and release its findings, "as soon as the operational situation allows."

This week, the kibbutz was set to demolish the home where the hostages were held, said Omri Revach, whose mother-in-law, 78-year-old Chava Ben-Ami, was killed in the standoff. But the families managed to stop the demolition, preserving the home for investigation.

Determining whether the house was shelled by a tank would require an onsite search for weapons debris, said Marc Garlasco, a former Pentagon official and war crimes investigator for the U.N. who reviewed photos of the Cohen home.

The longer the delay, the greater the risk of losing evidence, said Ron Shifroni. Three of his relatives — 73-year-old Ayala Hezroni, and 12-year old twins Liel and Yannai Hezroni — were killed in the incident. The military provided no information about how they had been killed.

Shifroni frets that waiting to conduct an investigation will mean losing the opportunity to determine exactly what happened to Ayala, Liel and Yannai.

"Some of the people involved may now be fighting in Gaza. Some of them may have already been killed. This war keeps claiming lives," he said.

Africa's Catholic hierarchy refuses same-sex blessings, says such unions are contrary to God's will

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — In the greatest rebuke yet to Pope Francis, the Catholic bishops of Africa and Madagascar issued a unified statement Thursday refusing to follow his declaration allowing priests to offer blessings to same-sex couples and asserting that such unions are "contrary to the will of God."

The statement, signed by Congolese Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo on behalf of the symposium of African national bishops conferences, marked the closest thing to a continent-wide dissent from the declaration Francis approved Dec. 18 allowing priests to offer such blessings.

That declaration from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has sent shock waves through the Catholic Church, thrilling LGBTQ+ Catholics as a concrete sign of Francis' message of welcome but alarming conservatives who fear core doctrines of the church are being ignored or violated.

The controversy has deepened a growing chasm between Francis' progressive, reform-minded papacy and the conservative church in much of the world, especially Africa, where the number of Catholics is growing at a faster rate than anywhere else.

The Vatican declaration restated traditional church teaching that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman. But it allowed priests to offer spontaneous, non-liturgical blessings to same-sex couples seeking God's grace in their lives, provided such blessings aren't confused with the rites and rituals of a wedding.

In his statement, Ambongo said it wasn't appropriate for African priests to offer such blessings because of the scandal and confusion it would create. He cited biblical teaching condemning homosexuality as an abomination and the African cultural context, where he asserted that LGBTQ+ unions "are seen as contradictory to cultural norms and intrinsically corrupt."

"Within the church family of God in Africa, this declaration has caused a shockwave, it has sown misconceptions and unrest in the minds of many lay faithful, consecrated persons and even pastors, and has

aroused strong reactions," he wrote.

While stressing that African bishops remain in communion with Francis, he said they believed such blessings cannot be carried out because "in our context, this would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities."

A few weeks ago, Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye said "people of the same sex who marry in this country should be taken to a stadium to be pelted with stones, once discovered." In a radio broadcast Dec. 29, he asked Burundians living abroad who practice homosexuality "not to return home."

Ambongo said the symposium statement was a "consolidated summary" of the positions adopted by individual national bishops conferences, and said it had received the "agreement" of Francis and the doctrine office's new prefect, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández.

The botched rollout of the Dec. 18 declaration has heightened conservative criticism of Fernández, whom Francis appointed to the office over the summer. Fernández apparently published the text with little consultation inside the Vatican and no forewarning to bishops in the rest of the world.

Usually, when such sensitive Vatican documents are being prepared, there is an attempt to at least not blindside local church leaders. Often they are released with an accompanying letter or explanatory note published by Vatican Media, and are given to journalists ahead of time under an embargo to ensure the reporting is accurate and thought through.

No such extra documentation or preparation accompanied *Fiducia Supplicans*, as the text is known, and its rollout was marked by individual bishops and entire national conferences voicing confusion and opposition.

Others have welcomed it. France's bishops conference, for example, said in a statement Wednesday that the declaration encourages pastors to "generously bless the people who come to them humbly asking for God's help."

The document "reminds us that those who are not in a position to commit themselves to the sacrament of marriage are not excluded from the love of God or of his church," the French bishops said.

After its initial publication, Fernández was forced to issue a second explanatory note a few weeks later, insisting there was nothing "heretical" in the document but acknowledging the opposing views. He acknowledged that it may not be applicable to some parts of the world and that further "pastoral reflection" might be necessary.

Efforts to restrict transgender health care endure in 2024, with more adults targeted

By ANDREW DeMILLO and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

Republican-led state legislatures are considering a new round of bills restricting medical care for transgender youths — and in some cases, adults — returning to the issue the year after a wave of high-profile bills became law and sparked lawsuits.

As legislatures begin their work for the year, lawmakers in several states have proposed enacting or strengthening restrictions on puberty-blocking drugs and hormone treatments for minors. Bills to govern the pronouns kids can use at school, which sports teams students can play on, and the bathrooms they can use are back, as well, along with efforts to restrict drag performances and some books and school curriculums.

LGBTQ+ advocates say that most of the states inclined to pass bans on gender-affirming care have done so, and that they now expect them to build on those restrictions and expand them to include adults. With legislatures in most states up for election this year, transgender youths and their families worry about again being targeted by conservatives using them as a wedge issue.

They include Mandy Wong, a mother in Santa Barbara, California, who said she's tired of conservative politicians using transgender children as "campaign fuel." While she doesn't expect such a policy to pass in her Democrat-led state, Wong said, her child and his friends feel emotionally drained.

"It was just heartbreaking to tell him ... I don't think this is going away anytime soon," she said. "All the

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negative attention trans kids, even us as parents, have gotten because of these proposals doesn't seem to be dying down."

In Ohio, House Republicans voted Wednesday to override Republican Gov. Mike DeWine's veto of legislation banning all forms of gender-affirming care for minors. The Senate is expected to follow suit this month. Despite his veto, DeWine signed an order banning the rare occurrence of gender-transition surgeries before adulthood. He also proposed rules mandating a care team for children and adults that critics say could severely restrict access for all patients.

In South Carolina, one of the few Southern states without a ban on gender-affirming care for minors, a House committee voted Wednesday to send a ban to the House floor. The bill, sponsored by the state's Republican House speaker, would also prevent Medicaid from covering such treatments for anyone under age 26. And last week in New Hampshire, the House voted to ban gender-transition surgeries for minors.

At least 22 states have enacted bans on gender-affirming care for children, with most of them approved in the past year. Those who support the bans say they want to protect children and have concerns about the treatments themselves. Major medical groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, oppose the bans and have endorsed such care, saying it's safe when administered properly.

Last year's limits included a Florida law that has made it nearly impossible for many transgender adults in the state to receive gender-affirming care. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has promoted that ban as one of his accomplishments as he seeks the Republican presidential nomination.

"They'll stop at nothing, so we don't know what exactly to anticipate (in 2024)," said Katy Erker-Lynch, executive director of PROMO, an advocacy group in Missouri, where lawmakers have proposed more than 20 bills targeting LGBTQ+ people.

Bills filed in Missouri include efforts to remove two provisions that were key in overcoming a Democratic filibuster to that state's ban on gender-affirming care for youths. The new Missouri Freedom Caucus is prioritizing a bill that would make the ban on gender-affirming care for minors permanent, removing a provision that allows it to expire in 2027. Legislation would also remove a clause that allows minors who began the care before the law went into effect to continue with it.

Republican state Sen. Mike Moon, who is sponsoring bills both to repeal the expiration date on the medical restrictions and to require schools to tell parents if a student wants to go by a name or pronoun other than the one the parent used to register the child for school, compared transgender medical restrictions for minors to age thresholds in laws for smoking, drinking and driving.

"Children, especially younger children, don't make good decisions, and they're not certain exactly what reality is sometimes," Moon said.

LGBTQ+ activists call laws that require schools to tell parents about a student's desire to change names or pronouns "forced outing," saying schools might be the only safe place for a transgender or nonbinary student to express their gender identify.

Missouri's large number of filed bills has drawn attention from activists, but Republican legislative leaders say they don't think there's much of an appetite for revisiting the restrictions and don't want to prioritize them.

"We passed what I thought was a strong and fairly broad bill last year," said Missouri Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden, referring to the medical ban.

In Oklahoma, at least two bills remain active from last year that target gender-affirming care for adults. One proposal would prohibit insurance coverage for the procedures for adults, while another would prohibit public funds from going to any entity that provides such care.

Both measures stalled in the Republican-controlled Legislature last year but could be reconsidered during the legislative session starting in February.

The rules proposed in Ohio by DeWine last week place new limits on adults that advocates say would make treatment difficult, if not impossible, for some people. They include mandating a team for individuals that would consist of at least an endocrinologist, a bioethicist and a psychiatrist. The rules also would

require departments to collect data submitted by medical providers on gender dysphoria and subsequent treatment.

Several bills have been filed in Florida, including a measure to require employees at state agencies or at any entity that receives state funding to use the pronouns consistent with their assigned sex at birth.

Legislation introduced Wednesday in West Virginia would ban gender-affirming care up to age 21 and prohibit mental health professionals from supporting what lawmakers call a transgender patient's "delusion" about their gender identity.

In California, which has offered refuge to transgender youths and their families from states with medical bans, conservatives are mounting a longshot effort to put a measure on next year's ballot targeting the rights of transgender minors.

Nebraska state Sen. Kathleen Kauth, who last year sponsored the state's gender-affirming care ban for those under 19, said partisan politics are not behind her push for bills aimed at LGBTQ+ people. This year she is again pushing a bill she introduced last year that would restrict transgender students' participation in sports and limit their access to bathrooms and locker rooms.

Kauth's medical ban led progressive lawmakers to filibuster nearly every bill of last year's session.

"I don't think it's something that is designed to get reelected because, you know, my district is actually half and half — slightly more are conservative than liberal," Kauth said. "I am about pushing back on federal government overreach, whatever it looks like, and protecting kids."

Nationwide, challenges to laws already in place are moving closer to the U.S. Supreme Court. The American Civil Liberties Union has asked the court to block restrictions on care for youths in Kentucky and Tennessee.

The full 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is also considering Arkansas' request to reverse a ruling that struck down the state's first-in-the-nation ban on gender-affirming care for youths.

Federal rulings against the bans so far have come from judges appointed by both Democratic and Republican presidents.

US pastors struggle with post-pandemic burnout. Survey shows half considered quitting since 2020

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Post-pandemic burnout is at worrying levels among Christian clergy in the U.S., prompting many to think about abandoning their jobs, according to a new nationwide survey.

More than 4 in 10 of clergy surveyed in fall 2023 had seriously considered leaving their congregations at least once since 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and more than half had thought seriously of leaving the ministry, according to the survey released Thursday by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

About a tenth of clergy report having had these thoughts often, according to the survey, conducted as part of the institute's research project, Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations.

The high rates of ministers considering quitting reflects the "collective trauma" that both clergy and congregants have experienced since 2020, said institute director Scott Thumma, principal investigator for the project.

"Everybody has experienced grief and trauma and change," he said. Many clergy members, in open-ended responses to their survey, cited dwindling attendance, declining rates of volunteering and members' resistance to further change.

"I am exhausted," said one pastor quoted by the report. "People have moved away from the area and new folks are fewer, and farther, and slower to engage. Our regular volunteers are tired and overwhelmed."

Some of these struggles are trends that long predated the pandemic. Median in-person attendance has steadily declined since the start of the century, the report said, and with fewer younger participants, the typical age of congregants is rising. After a pandemic-era spike in innovation, congregants are less willing to change, the survey said.

The reasons for clergy burnout are complex, and need to be understood in larger contexts, Thumma said.

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"Oftentimes the focus of attention is just on the congregation, when in fact we should also be thinking about these bigger-picture things," he said. A pastor and congregants, for example, might be frustrated with each other when the larger context is that they're in a struggling rural town that's losing population, he said: "That has an effect on volunteering. It has an effect on aging. It has an effect on what kind of possibility you have to grow."

About a third of clergy respondents were considering both leaving their congregation and the ministry altogether, with nearly another third considering one or the other.

Most clergy reported conflict in their congregations, but those considering leaving their churches reported it at even higher levels and also were less likely to feel close to their congregants.

Those thinking of quitting the ministry entirely were more likely to be pastors of smaller churches and those who work solo, compared with those on larger staffs and at larger churches.

Mainline Protestant clergy were the most likely to think of quitting, followed by evangelical Protestants, while Catholic and Orthodox priests were the least likely to consider leaving.

The percentages of clergy having thoughts of quitting are higher than in two previous surveys conducted by the institute in 2021 and spring 2023, though it's difficult to directly compare those numbers because the earlier surveys were measuring shorter time periods since 2020.

The news isn't all grim. Most clergy report good mental and physical health — though somewhat less so if they're thinking of leaving their congregations or ministry — and clergy were more likely to have increased than decreased various spiritual practices since the pandemic began.

The results are based on a survey in the fall of 2023 of about 1,700 Christian clergy members from more than 40 denominations, including Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox bodies.

The survey echoes similar post-pandemic research. A 2023 Pew Research Center found a decrease in those who reported at least monthly in-person worship attendance, with Black Protestant churches affected the most.

Today in History: January 12 Motown Records is founded in Detroit

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 12, the 12th day of 2024. There are 354 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 12, 1959, Berry Gordy Jr. founded Motown Records (originally Tamla Records) in Detroit.

On this date:

In 1828, the United States and Mexico signed a Treaty of Limits defining the boundary between the two countries to be the same as the one established by an 1819 treaty between the U.S. and Spain.

In 1910, at a White House dinner hosted by President William Howard Taft, Baroness Rosen, wife of the Russian ambassador, caused a stir by requesting and smoking a cigarette — it was, apparently, the first time a woman had smoked openly during a public function in the executive mansion. (Some of the other women present who had brought their own cigarettes began lighting up in turn.)

In 1915, the U.S. House of Representatives rejected, 204-174, a proposed constitutional amendment to give women nationwide the right to vote.

In 1932, Hattie W. Caraway became the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate after initially being appointed to serve out the remainder of the term of her late husband, Thaddeus.

In 1945, during World War II, Soviet forces began a major, successful offensive against the Germans in Eastern Europe. Aircraft from U.S. Task Force 38 sank about 40 Japanese ships off Indochina.

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, unanimously ruled that state law schools could not discriminate against applicants on the basis of race.

In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson said in his State of the Union address that the U.S. military should stay in Vietnam until Communist aggression there was stopped.

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In 1969, the New York Jets of the American Football League upset the Baltimore Colts of the National Football League 16-7 in Super Bowl III, played at the Orange Bowl in Miami.

In 1971, the groundbreaking situation comedy "All in the Family" premiered on CBS television.

In 2000, in a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Illinois v. Wardlow*, gave police broad authority to stop and question people who run at the sight of an officer.

In 2010, Haiti was struck by a magnitude-7 earthquake; the Haitian government said 316,000 people were killed, while a report prepared for the U.S. Agency for International Development suggested the death toll may have been between 46,000 and 85,000.

In 2013, the NHL's four-month lockout finally ended as the league and the players' association completed signing a required memorandum of understanding.

In 2016, Iran detained 10 American sailors and their two small Navy boats after the boats drifted into Iranian waters; the sailors and their vessels were released the following day.

In 2018, sportscaster Keith Jackson, best known as the down-home voice of college football, died; he was 89.

In 2022, Ronnie Spector, who sang 1960s hits including "Be My Baby" as leader of the girl group The Ronettes, died at 78 after a brief battle with cancer.

In 2023, Lisa Marie Presley, the only child of Elvis Presley and a singer-songwriter dedicated to her father's legacy, died at age 54.

Today's birthdays: The Amazing Kreskin is 89. Country singer William Lee Golden (The Oak Ridge Boys) is 85. Actor Anthony Andrews is 76. Movie director Wayne Wang is 75. Legal affairs blogger Ann Althouse is 73. Writer Walter Mosley is 72. Country singer Ricky Van Shelton is 72. Radio-TV personality Howard Stern is 70. Writer-producer-director John Lasseter is 67. Broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour is 66. Actor Oliver Platt is 64. Basketball Hall of Famer Dominique Wilkins is 64. Entrepreneur Jeff Bezos is 60. Rock singer Rob Zombie is 59. Actor Olivier Martinez is 58. Model Vendela is 57. Actor Rachael Harris is 56. Rock singer Zack de la Rocha is 54. Rapper Raekwon (Wu Tang Clan) is 54. Actor Zabryna Guevara is 52. Singer Dan Haseltine (Jars of Clay) is 51. Singer Melanie Chisholm (Spice Girls) is 50. Contemporary Christian singer Jeremy Camp is 46. Actor Cynthia Addai-Robinson is 44. R&B singer Amerie is 44. Actor Issa Rae is 39. Actor Will Rothhaar is 37. Actor Andrew Lawrence is 36. Singer Zayn Malik is 31. Pop/soul singer Ella Henderson (TV: "The X Factor") is 28.