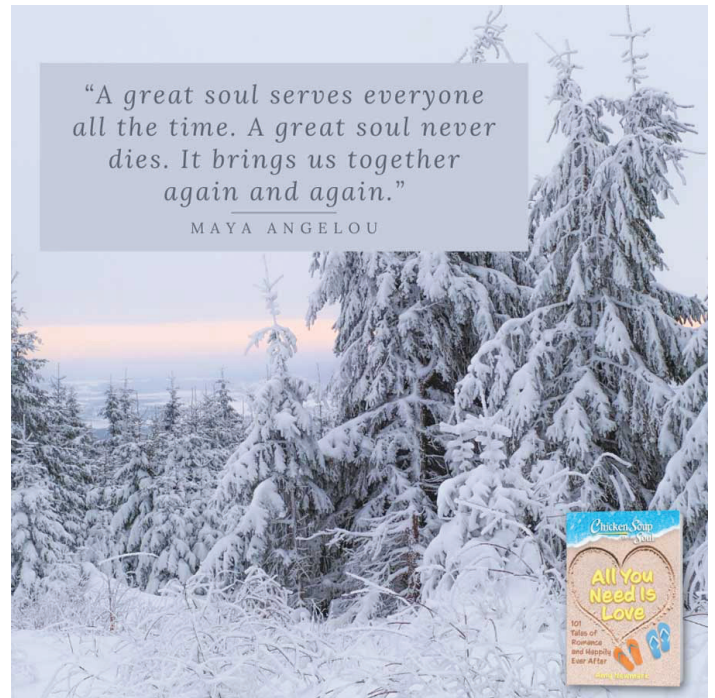


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Home Wrestling Triangular added

Varsity Wrestling Triangular between Groton Area, Britton-Hecla and Canistota will be held on Friday, the 26th of January. It will begin at 6PM.

Wednesday, Jan. 17

Senior Menu: Beef/broccoli stir fry rice, cauliflower, five cup salad, whole wheat bread
School Breakfast: Cereal
School Lunch: Loaded baked potato soup.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Communion at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

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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A federal judge yesterday blocked JetBlue Airways from acquiring Spirit Airlines, ruling the \$3.8B deal would have driven up fares for price-conscious travelers and hurt competition. Spirit's shares closed down 47% yesterday; JetBlue shares closed up 4.9%.

A genetically cloned rhesus monkey has survived into adulthood for the first time, according to new research published yesterday. The healthy 3-year-old named Retro is just the third instance of a cloned primate to reach maturity after two 6-year-old long-tailed macaques

born in 2018.

Long Island murder suspect Rex Heuermann was charged in connection with a fourth murder yesterday for the 2007 killing of Maureen Brainard-Barnes. Prosecutors charged Heuermann with second-degree murder, citing DNA evidence linking the 60-year-old former Manhattan architect to the crime scene. He was previously charged with murder in July for the deaths of three other victims.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 75th Primetime Emmy Awards draws 4.3 million viewers, a 27% drop from the previous Emmys held in September 2022; the lowest TV ratings ever for the awards show.

New York Knicks owner James Dolan accused in lawsuit of sexual assault and trafficking alongside Harvey Weinstein.

Mallory Swanson signs with Chicago Red Stars for a National Women's Soccer League record of \$2M total. 22-year-old British rugby star Louis Rees-Zammit quits rugby to pursue career in NFL via the league's international player pathway.

Science & Technology

Apple overtakes Samsung for first time in global smartphone market share, around 19% to 20%; Samsung has led global sales since 2011.

Researchers wrap yearlong experiment successfully demonstrating the ability to harvest solar energy in space, transform it into microwaves beamed to the Earth's surface.

Breast cancer cells can consume their surroundings, known as the extracellular matrix, when starved of energy; findings suggest a route for potential new anticancer drugs.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq -0.2%) as Wall Street sifts through latest batch of fourth-quarter earnings. Nvidia shares hit new record high; AMD shares rise to highest level in more than two years.

Washington state sues to block Kroger from buying rival grocer Albertsons in \$24.6B deal. Synopsys to acquire graphics software maker Ansys in \$35B deal. Burger King owner Restaurant Brands International Inc. to buy chain's largest US franchisee for \$1B.

Goldman Sachs beats Q4 revenue estimates, reports 51% rise in profits. Morgan Stanley tops Q4 revenue estimates, misses earnings expectations.

Politics & World Affairs

US renews strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, following more attacks on Red Sea commercial vessels. US forces intercept Iranian missiles heading to Yemen; two Navy SEALs reportedly lost at sea during mission.

Supreme Court to hear arguments today challenging 40-year-old ruling that says courts should defer to agencies' "reasonable" interpretations of ambiguous statutes. Defamation case against former President Donald Trump brought by E. Jean Carroll begins.

Congressional leaders reach deal on bipartisan tax package, including a temporary expansion of the Child Tax Credit; unclear whether bill can pass House and Senate.

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

Groton City Council looking to build economic development board

A team of residents will explore gaps and opportunities to promote economic development in Groton. City officials are looking for residents to join a core team that will help launch the Groton Development Corporation.

At Tuesday's meeting, the City Council authorized Mayor Scott Hanlon to sign an agreement with Dakota Resources to support the launch of the economic development group through community coaching.

Dakota Resources, based in Renner, S.D., aims to empower rural leaders, organizations, communities and regions through capital and capacity that creates a path toward thriving rural communities, according to the company's website. The company's work is structured around inclusion, connection, inspiration, empowerment and celebration.

"I feel it's a positive step forward," Hanlon said.

The coaching services costs \$13,000. The South Dakota Community Foundation is funding \$10,000 of that cost.

Two individuals said they would split part of the remainder due to Dakota Resources, Hanlon said. The city will pay \$500 for travel costs, including mileage.

Hanlon said he has a couple people interested in joining the core team that would form the development corporation. He asked the council to put out feelers to see who else in Groton would be interested in joining that group.

Two more to man skating rink

Two more people were hired for skating rink attendants.

Hannah Sandness and Kason Oswald were temporarily hired Jan. 11 per the swimming pool committee, but those positions were formalized Tuesday. The council approved hiring the two additional attendants at minimum wage plus 25 cents per year of experience. Neither Sandness nor Oswald qualify for that 25 cent increase.

Others who were hired in December to work as skating rink attendants include Gretchen Dinger, Emma Davies, Carly Guthmiller, Leah Jones and Kayleigh McGannon. Anna Fjeldheim was hired as skating rink manager.

Wyatt Wambach was hired in December as well, but is no longer able to work at the rink.

- Residents are reminded that some summer work employment applications are due Feb. 6. Those positions include baseball coordinator, softball coordinator, Legion coach, Jr. Legion coach, Jr. Teener coach, day baseball/softball coach and concession manager. Applications for under-eight, under-10, under-12 and under-14 softball coaching positions are also due at that time.

- The council approved a special event alcoholic beverage license for the Chunky Hand-Knit Blanket Class on Jan. 30 at the Wage Memorial Library. Twelve spots were available and were filled within two days of announcing the event, said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich.

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Triangular Wrestling

Groton Area hosted a triangular wrestling match Tuesday with Clark/Willow Lake and Hamlin/Castlewood. Clark/Willow Lake and Groton Area posted wins over Hamlin while Clark/Willow Lake defeated Groton Area.

Clark/Willow Lake 51, Groton Area 30

- 120: Isaac Johnson (Clark/Willow Lake) over John Bisbee (Groton Area) (Fall 1:33)
- 126: Donavon Block (Groton Area) over Damian Severson (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 3:34)
- 132: Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) over Logan Foster (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 3:26)
- 138: Austin Vig (Clark/Willow Lake) wins by forfeit
- 144: Taylor Merkel (Clark/Willow Lake) wins by forfeit
- 150: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) over Bryce Klancke (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 2:38)
- 157: Matt Batchelor (Clark/Willow Lake) over Easten Ekern (Groton Area) (Fall 1:39)
- 165: Elliot Bratland (Clark/Willow Lake) over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) (TB-1 3-1)
- 175: Josh Kannegieter (Clark/Willow Lake) over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) (Fall 0:55)
- 190: Riley Popp (Clark/Willow Lake) over Drew Thurston (Groton Area) (Fall 1:44)
- 215: Charlie Frost (Groton Area) over Collin Gaikowski (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 1:58)
- 285: Karter Moody (Groton Area) over Jerome Enboden (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 2:34)
- 106: Cade Gaikowski (Clark/Willow Lake) over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) (Fall 3:45)
- 113: Cooper Pommer (Clark/Willow Lake) over Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) (Fall 1:09)

Groton Area 60, Hamlin/Castlewood 15

- 106: Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) over Tommy Mullen (Hamlin/Castlewood) (Fall 0:26)
- 113: Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 120: Jaden Buchmann (Hamlin/Castlewood) over John Bisbee (Groton Area) (Fall 0:44)
- 126: Donavon Block (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 132: John Yonker (Hamlin/Castlewood) over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) (Dec 9-4)
- 138: Double Forfeit
- 144: Tate Everson (Hamlin/Castlewood) wins by forfeit
- 150: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 157: Easten Ekern (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 165: Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 175: Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 190: Drew Thurston (Groton Area) over Guillermo Cruz (Hamlin/Castlewood) (Fall 3:38)
- 215: Charlie Frost (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 285: Gaviin Englund (Groton Area) over Noah Smith (Hamlin/Castlewood) (Fall 4:27)

Clark/Willow Lake 60, Hamlin 21

- 120: Jaden Buchmann (Hamlin/Castlewood) over Isaac Johnson (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 4:49)
- 132: John Yonker (Hamlin/Castlewood) over Logan Foster (Clark/Willow Lake) (Dec 10-7)
- 144: Tate Everson (Hamlin/Castlewood) over Taylor Merkel (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 3:58)
- 190: Riley Popp (Clark/Willow Lake) over Guillermo Cruz (Hamlin/Castlewood) (Fall 2:00)
- 285: Noah Smith (Hamlin/Castlewood) over Jerome Enboden (Clark/Willow Lake) (Fall 4:55)
- 106: Cade Gaikowski (Clark/Willow Lake) over Tommy Mullen (Hamlin/Castlewood) (Fall 0:12)

South Dakota Housing awards \$10.6 million for housing infrastructure projects

PIERRE, S.D. (1/16/24) – South Dakota Housing’s Board of Commissioners today awarded \$10.6 million Housing Infrastructure Financing Program (HIFP) funds to assist with 10 housing infrastructure projects.

To date, SD Housing has received 95 applications in total for the HIFP requesting approximately \$139 million of the \$198 million that is available and just over \$106.6 million has been awarded to 67 projects.

Below is information regarding funded recipients:

Housing Infrastructure Financing Program

Development name: Aurora’s Addition

Development location: East Madison and North La Mesa Drive, Sioux Falls

Developer: South Eastern Development Foundation (SEDF)

Additional HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$439,083

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 55 single family lots.

Development name: Abbey Road Apartments

Development location: Pierre

Developer: Stencil Group II, LLC

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$522,435

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 115 multifamily units.

Development name: Camden Heights

Development location: 1725 Camden Drive, Rapid City

Developer: ECG Rapid City, LP

HIFP General Loan Funds approved: \$2,207,539

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 252 multifamily units of affordable housing.

Development name: East 20th Street and South Gary Drive

Development location: 2808 East 20th Street, Sioux Falls

Developer: Affordable Housing Solutions, Inc.

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$115,000

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for eight ownership units in four separate twinhome buildings.

Development name: Eastside Addition – Phase 1

Development location: Estelline

Developer: City of Estelline

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$300,000

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 12 single family lots.

Development name: Ennen Housing Development

Development location: Meadow Ridge Subdivision, Rapid City

Developer: Ennen Development, LLC

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$3,535,707

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 156 single family lots.

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Development name: Homestead Vista – Phase 1

Development location: Neel St, Rapid City

Developer: DTH, LLC

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$784,410

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 156 multifamily units.

Development name: Homestead Vista – Phase 2

Development location: Neel St, Rapid City

Developer: DTH, LLC

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$1,039,222

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 13 single family lots and four multifamily lots that will provide 349 multifamily housing units.

Development name: Sourdough Road Development

Development location: 10899 Sourdough Road, Belle Fourche

Developer: American Contracting & Consulting, LLC

HIFP General Grant Funds approved: \$1,028,393

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 52 single family lots.

Development name: Stanley Township

Development location: Waldron Street, Ft. Pierre

Developer: City of Ft. Pierre

HIFP ARPA Grant Funds approved: \$705,000

Development summary: The project consists of infrastructure development for 25 single family lots and one multifamily lot that will provide eight multifamily housing units.

-30-

About South Dakota Housing

South Dakota Housing was created by the South Dakota Legislature in 1973 with a stated mission to provide opportunities for quality, affordable housing for South Dakotans. South Dakota Housing is a self-supporting, nonprofit entity known for our commitment for providing innovative financing solutions to create and preserve affordable housing. South Dakota Housing utilizes housing bonds, tax credits, and other federal and state resources to fund housing programs which provide mortgage and downpayment assistance, housing construction and rehabilitation, homelessness prevention, rental assistance, and educational opportunities.

Conde National League

Jan. 15 Team Standings: Braves 11, Mets 11, Cubs 9, Tigers 8, Pirates 8, Giants 1

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 201, Chad Furney 190, Ryan Bethke 188

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 509, Chad Furney 499, Butch Farmen 473

Women's High Games: Suzie Easthouse 181, Nancy Radke 166, Sam Bahr 166, Cheryl Reyalts 151

Women's High Series: Sam Bahr 490, Suzie Easthouse 478, Cheryl Reyalts 430

Double Header Basketball Game

Milbank @ Groton Area
Thursday, January 18, 2024

Game Times/Locations:

Main Court in Arena	Main Court in Old Gym
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 4:00PM → Girls JV- 5:00PM → Boys JV- 6:15PM → Girls Varsity<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Halftime Entertainment: HS Drumline- 7:45PM → Boys Varsity<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Halftime Entertainment: MS Drumline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 4:00PM → Boys C- 5:00PM → Girls C <p>*Fellowship of Christian Students will be doing a Split-Pot Fundraiser during the games as well.</p>

*Prior to the Girls Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Lineups to follow.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$6.00 Students: \$5.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

LOCKER ROOM: Milbank will use the two locker rooms down the JH hallway (two doors on the left). Boys Team will be in the first. The Girls' Team will be in the second.

Team Benches – Groton: South Bench
Milbank: North Bench

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

Livestream: GDlive.com (must pay to watch) or NFHS

Old Gym → C Game Officials: Kristi Zoellner, Kevin Bohn, Jordan Carson

Boys C Game Scoreboard: Joe Schwan

Girls C Game Scoreboard: Ryan Tracy

New Gym → JV Officials: Justin Hanson, Jordan Kjellsen, Logan Huber

JV Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

JV Book: Alexa Schuring

Girls JV Shot Clock: Ryan Tracy

Boys JV Shot Clock: Joe Schwan

Varsity Officials: Nic Ahmann, Gregg DeSpiegler, Justin Deutsch

Announcer: Mike Imrie

Varsity Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

Official Book: Alexa Schuring

Shot Clock Operator: Kristi Zoellner

National Anthem: Pep Band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh

Thank you, Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director

The Life of Larry Schelle

Mass of Christian Burial for Larry Schelle, 87, of Groton will be 2 p.m., Friday, January 19, 2024, at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church. Father Gregory Tschakert will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Visitation will be held at the church on Friday beginning at noon.

Larry passed away January 14, 2024 at Avantara Groton.

Lawrence "Larry" Lee Schelle was born on May 20, 1936 to Anna (Meinen) and Henry Schelle. He grew up on a farm in Reliance S.D. where he learned his strong work ethic and life-time love of raising and riding horses. Larry was proud to have been a "Reliance Longhorn" (an athlete in basketball, baseball, and track) graduating from high school in 1954.

Larry married Janice Kickland on October 5, 1955. They've been an incredible example of what it means to build and maintain a strong and loving relationship, having recently celebrated their 68th anniversary. Later in life they enjoyed traveling, especially winter trips to Arizona.

Larry's career began working for his brother-in-law in construction followed by working at several lumber companies. He and his family found their home in Groton after initially teaming up with fellow horseman, Jay Swisher, to open S&S Lumber and Hardware. 2023 marked 50 years for the Schelle family business, now owned and operated by Rick and Ryan Schelle, Larry and Jan's oldest and youngest sons. Larry was the heartbeat of S&S well into his 80s. He was admired and appreciated by so many for his dedication to and knowledge of his business, his ever ready smile and witty conversation, his "do anything for you" customer service, and his honesty and integrity.

Ever blessed and grateful to have had Larry in their lives are his wife, Janice, his seven children, Cherry, Lisa, Loren "Rick" (Dianne), Ron (Heather), Gail, Russell (Rosellen), and Ryan (Jennifer) Schelle, his seven grandchildren, his sister, Helen, his sisters-in-law, Carole and Diane, and his brother-in-law, Ryan "Rocky" (Denisha), and his many nieces and nephews.

Larry was preceded in death by his parents, his brothers Henry "Junior" and Loren, and sisters Louisa May and Rita.

Larry was known by his family, friends, and community as being very dedicated to and proud of his family, strong in his faith, a pillar of the community, and an incredible role model. He was a jokester, kind, easy-going, welcoming to newcomers and genuinely interested in people, always having time for everyone (no matter how busy he was.) Larry was a steady and fun friend, supportive of young people (loved rooting for his kids, grandkids, and others in their activities), a rhubarb dessert lover, and "one of the great ones".

Among his many interests and activities, Larry bred and showed Quarter Horses, was a founding member of the Corn Palace Stampede Rodeo, and a board member for the South Dakota Quarter Horse Association and Youth Advisory Board. He was also an active community member serving on numerous boards including the NW Lumberman's Association, South Dakota Retail Lumberman's Association, and Groton Economic Development and participating in Kiwanis and Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you for helping us celebrate Larry's life and to bid him happy trails...until we meet again.

Memorials may be directed to SEAS Catholic Church, The Food Pantry in Groton, or SPURS in Aberdeen.



Junior high hoop teams split with Milbank

Groton Area seventh graders defeated Milbank in boys basketball action in Milbank on Tuesday, 33-29. The game was tied at five after the first quarter and Groton Area led at half time, 12-9, and after the third quarter, 21-16.

Anthony Gilmore led the Tigers with 13 points followed by Jordan Schwan with 10, Asher Johnson seven, Zach Fliehs two and Connor Kroll one.

Kye Scoular led Milbank with 12 points while Brady Allen had 10, Kale Wenzl five and Logan Dexter two.

Groton Area won the 10-minute seventh grade exhibition game, 11-4. Wesley Borg had seven points while Sam Crank and Wes Morehouse each had two points. Harper Wendland and Cam Stengel each had two points for Milbank.

Milbank led at the quarterstops at 7-0, 18-13 and 27-15 en route to a 29-20 win in the eighth grade game. Jace Johnson led Groton Area with 11 points, Anthony Gilmore had five and Ethan Kroll, Ryder Schelle and T.C. Schuster each had two points.

Lincoln Holscher led Milbank with 15 points while Bennett Hunt had seven, Emmett Snaza four, Will Mullenbach two and Rylan Wendland added one point.



Dalton Locke ran the GDILIVE broadcast table at the Groton Area Tuesday night. He did the commentary for the wrestling triangular in the Arena.

The junior high games at Milbank, the wrestling triangular at Groton Area and the City Council meeting were all broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM last night.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State lacks data to prove trapping program increases the pheasant population, official says

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 16, 2024 6:22 PM

A state official said Tuesday there is no data to show that a predator trapping program has increased the state's pheasant population.

Game, Fish and Parks Secretary Kevin Robling presented information about the program to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and fielded questions from committee members during a hearing at the Capitol in Pierre.

Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, asked, "Do we have any data that this has increased the pheasant population in South Dakota since 2019?"

"No, we do not," Robling replied.

He said "there are so many variables" that impact pheasants, including weather and habitat quality; therefore, conducting a study controlled for one variable is difficult. He added that research elsewhere shows the state's approach "can influence and enhance nest success."

The Nest Predator Bounty Program is designed to control populations of animals including raccoons, skunks, badgers, opossums and red foxes. They prey on ground-nesting birds such as pheasants and ducks, which are important to South Dakota's hunting industry. The program pays trappers \$10 for each tail they turn in from a nest predator.

Robling said the program "has been really successful." Forty-six percent of participants are under 18 (motivated by various prizes offered by the department), and over 240,000 tails have been submitted since the program's inception five years ago.

"This is a fun activity for kids, and it contributes back to wildlife management," Robling said.

Critics have argued that without solid data, it's challenging to justify the program's cost and potential ecological impact.

After her exchange with Robling, Wittman said, "I would love to see data." She referenced the 2019 termination of the state's roadside brood count, which involved GF&P staff driving the same rural routes every year to count broods or hens and extrapolate a total pheasant population estimate.

"I wonder if there's any appetite to have a conversation about bringing that back," Wittman said, "so that we can see the actual impact that this is having on our pheasant population."

The state ended the brood count "to ensure that South Dakota is not unintentionally deterring hunters from coming to our state based on the media headlines reporting of low bird numbers," according to a departmental marketing plan.

Robling said "a brood count will not quantify the impacts of a nest predator bounty program," referring back to his previous point about controlling for variables.

"Bringing back a brood survey will not get you to the answer you are looking for," he said.

Later, Rep. Marty Overweg, R-New Holland, asked Robling to "break down for us" how many of the state's harvested pheasants are birds raised in the wild, versus raised on a farm, like chickens. Those pheasants are later released onto private land or onto a shooting preserve.

"How many were wild and how many were pen-raised?" Overweg asked.

Robling said, "I can't give you an exact number because I don't have it." But he added that 500,000 pheasants were harvested on shooting preserves last year. About 1.2 million total pheasants were harvested in 2023.

Habitat and access

On other topics Tuesday, Robling said the state has a record number of public hunting acres available. He highlighted the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

The program leverages the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which pays landowners for habitat conservation through multi-year contracts. GF&P then offers an additional incentive, the "Enhancement" part, so it can improve habitat quality and guarantee the public access in particular areas of the state.

Robling said the department has 81,838 of those acres enrolled in its James River CREP initiative and has reached 2,509 acres in its new Big Sioux River initiative.

"With this program, we're going to be offering some unbelievable habitat for folks to really utilize up and down the I-29 corridor," Robling said.

Zebra mussels

Robling showed lawmakers a map illustrating how the aquatic invasive species called zebra mussels rapidly spread throughout the region.

"It's not just us," he said. "It's all states."

Robling noted boat inspectors found a 98% compliance rate regarding the department's preventative messaging, encouraging all boaters to "clean, drain, dry, every single time."

Assisting ranchers

Robling said last year's "tough winter" put pressure on the state's deer population, pushing them onto farmers' cropland where they caused a 358% increase in crop damages. He said the department took 655 requests last year from landowners to remove deer from their property, as well as install the infrastructure to keep them off, like fencing.

"We're trying to provide those producers a service," he said.

To assist ranchers during the calving season, Robling said the department's 28 full-time trappers helped kill 11,599 coyotes. That's the most since 2012.

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

Noem appoints current legislator to vacant Rapid City seat

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 16, 2024 6:04 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem has appointed one legislator to replace another, leaving two seats in Rapid City and the surrounding area still vacant.

Becky Drury, currently serving in the House of Representatives for District 32, will replace Jess Olson, who served in the House for District 34 before resigning due to health reasons. Drury bought a house in District 34 last year, she told South Dakota Searchlight on Tuesday.

Drury's seat in District 32 is now vacant, meaning the Rapid City area is still lacking representation for the 2024 legislative session for two seats. The other one was vacated last year when Jessica Castleberry resigned her District 35 Senate seat following allegations that her business improperly received federal pandemic aid.

According to the state constitution, lawmakers have to be a "qualified elector" in their district to serve. That means lawmakers must be at least 21 years of age, live in the state for at least two years prior to their election and be registered to vote in the district they represent.

Drury still owns a house in District 32 and plans to sell it in the spring.

"I just tried to cross all my T's and dot all my I's before I did anything," Drury said.

Castleberry resigned in August after Noem revealed Castleberry's preschool business had received about \$600,000 in COVID-related financial assistance, which Noem alleged was a violation of conflict-of-interest laws. Castleberry inked a settlement with the state to repay \$500,000 of the money that did not directly benefit families.

Noem has since asked for an advisory opinion from the state Supreme Court to clarify what constitutes a conflict of interest. She has said she'll wait to fill the two open legislative seats until then.

"The governor will be prepared to act quickly once the Supreme Court provides their decision," spokesman Ian Fury told South Dakota Searchlight.

The Pennington County Republican Party called on Noem ahead of the current legislative session to fill the positions as soon as possible.

"There needs to be something there that facilitates representation for us," Pennington County GOP Precinct Committeeman Ken Straatmeyer told South Dakota Searchlight last month.

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.

State Senate advances higher cap on insurance company donations to private school scholarships

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 16, 2024 5:48 PM

A bill that would increase tax credits available to insurance companies for helping low-income students attend private school took its next legislative step Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre, passing the Senate on a 25-7 vote.

The legislation would raise the tax credit cap available to insurance companies from \$3.5 million to \$5 million. The tax credits are one-to-one for every dollar donated toward scholarships.

Students must meet the state's free and reduced lunch program requirements to qualify for the scholarship program. Each student receives about \$2,000 per year, according to the bill's prime sponsor, Sen. Jim Stalzer, R-Sioux Falls.

"This bill is a win for everyone," Stalzer told fellow members of the Senate, saying the bill "keeps my taxes low" while giving low-income parents a choice in their kids' education.

Private schools are responsible for ensuring students meet the requirements, according to Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, who has supported the program since its inception in 2016. At the time, the tax credit cap was \$2 million, and insurance companies earned 80% back for every dollar donated.

Sen. Herman Otten, R-Tea, said a \$3.5 million cap is more than enough.

"Where does it stop?" Otten asked.

He said that as public schools lose out on state funding, they'll seek higher local property taxes to make up the gap.

Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, shared similar concerns.

"We want the best public schools in the country, don't we?" Nesiba said. "I want a system that's so good that kids don't feel like they need to go anywhere else. And taking \$5 million out of the general fund is not going to improve public education in South Dakota, and that's the system we're all responsible for."

The names of the insurance companies and how much they are donating is confidential tax information, according to the Department of Labor and Regulation.

The bill now heads to the House of Representatives.

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

U.S. Senate moves to avoid a partial government shutdown, but time running short

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 16, 2024 8:23 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate took a broadly bipartisan vote Tuesday to advance a short-term spending bill, but both chambers of Congress must approve the legislation before a Friday funding deadline to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The 68-13 procedural vote moves the bill toward a final vote in the Senate in the coming days, though without a time agreement that vote could slip until next week.

The U.S. House will have to vote to approve the bill after the Senate passes it. That chamber likely has the votes to clear the bill for President Joe Biden's signature, despite frustration from far-right lawmakers about government spending.

The stopgap bill, sometimes called a continuing resolution or CR, marks the third time this fiscal year lawmakers have leaned on this type of funding measure to extend their deadline for passing the dozen annual government spending bills.

Congress was supposed to wrap up that work before Oct. 1, but has delayed twice before amid disagreements between House Republicans and Senate Democrats over how much to spend during fiscal year 2024, and how much to change policy within those bills.

Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, brokered an agreement earlier this month to spend \$886.3 billion on defense and \$772.7 billion for domestic accounts during the current fiscal year.

The Appropriations committees, however, need more time to work out final agreement on the bills, which is why Congress is trying to pass another continuing resolution this week.

New March 1, March 8 deadlines

This stopgap spending bill would give lawmakers until March 1 to approve the Agriculture-FDA, Energy-Water, Military Construction-VA and Transportation-HUD appropriations bills and until March 8 to approve the other eight funding bills.

The four bills had been due by Friday and the remaining bills were due Feb. 2 under the last continuing resolution.

Schumer said during a floor speech Tuesday the Senate's focus this week will be passing the continuing resolution, or CR, as quickly as possible.

"If both sides continue to work in good faith, I'm hopeful we can wrap up work on the CR no later than Thursday," Schumer said. "The key to finishing our work this week will be bipartisan cooperation in both chambers. You can't pass these bills without support from Republicans and Democrats in both the House and the Senate."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, said during a separate floor speech the CR is essential to keep negotiations progressing on the dozen annual bills.

"Work continues to deliver full-year appropriations through regular order," McConnell said. "Shutting down the government, even part of it, would interrupt this important progress."

"That's why today, the Senate will begin the process of passing a short-term extension of government funding to allow this work to continue," McConnell added.

Johnson, Jeffries back short-term CR

Congress released the 13-page continuing resolution on Sunday with backing from Speaker Johnson and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, of New York.

Johnson said in a written statement the continuing resolution will provide additional time for the House and Senate to broker agreement on the full-year bills.

"Because the completion deadlines are upon us, a short continuing resolution is required to complete

what House Republicans are working hard to achieve: an end to governance by omnibus, meaningful policy wins, and better stewardship of American tax dollars," Johnson said.

Jeffries wrote in a 'Dear Colleague' letter that a third continuing resolution is necessary "to avert a partial shutdown of the government this week."

"This will allow House appropriators, under the principled leadership of Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro, to continue their negotiations with House Republicans and the Senate," Jeffries wrote. "With additional time, we will enact twelve appropriations bills that equitably fund the government at the top line spending number initially agreed to in the Bipartisan Fiscal Responsibility Act and recently reaffirmed by Speaker Mike Johnson."

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.

Small home neighborhood among projects to earn infrastructure awards in January

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 16, 2024 5:21 PM

Another \$10 million of subsidies will flow to various housing projects across South Dakota after Tuesday's meeting of the state's Housing Development Authority Board.

The board has now awarded \$106 million of the \$200 million in loans and grants made available by the Legislature in 2023 to support the construction of roads, street lights and other infrastructure in new housing projects.

Chas Olson, the authority's director, told the board that 95 applications have been submitted since the Housing Infrastructure Financing Program became operational last summer. Taken together, the applications add up to \$139 million in requests.

One of the projects approved for funding Tuesday will see a developer partner with Rapid City real estate agent Rob Poeppel to build out a neighborhood with 82 smaller-than-average homes. Poeppel needed approval from the Rapid City Council to build the homes at the planned size, as the lots for them are smaller than current city zoning allows.

Last fall, Poeppel told South Dakota Searchlight that the plan was to build 165 small homes, which he called affordable options for first-time homebuyers and downsizing retirees.

The current development plan, presented to the board Tuesday in an application for a \$3.35 million infrastructure grant, will include 82 small homes priced between \$140,000 and \$180,000, and 74 average-sized homes priced between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Housing infrastructure awards, January 2024

Aurora's Addition, 55 single family lots, Sioux Falls, \$1.1 million

Abbey Road Apartments, 115 multi-family units, Pierre, \$522,435

Camden Heights, 252 multifamily units, Rapid City, \$2.2 million

East 20th Street and South Gary Drive, eight units in four twin homes, Sioux Falls, \$115,000

Eastside Addition, 12 single-family lots, Estelline, \$300,000

Ennen Housing Development, 74 homes and 82 "tiny homes," Rapid City, \$3.5 million

Homestead Vista Phase 1, up to 156 multi-family units, Rapid City, \$784,410

Homestead Vista Phase 2, up to 349 multi-family units, Rapid City, \$1 million

Sourdough Road Development, 52 single-family homes, Belle Forche, \$1 million

Stanley Township, 25 single-family lots, Ft. Pierre, \$705,000

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.

Bill would tighten residency rules for hunting licenses

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 16, 2024 4:00 PM

A legislative committee in Pierre recommended the adoption of a bill Tuesday that would impose stricter criteria for resident hunting and fishing licenses.

To qualify as a "resident" under existing state law, hunters and anglers must live in South Dakota for at least 90 consecutive days before applying. Additionally, they must not claim residency in another state and are required to have their driver's license and vehicle registrations in South Dakota.

Resident hunters are prioritized over non-residents in the awarding of some limited big-game licenses. Resident licenses are also less expensive and, for some game species, are awarded in greater numbers.

The bill would add clarifications and further stipulations. The bill says people would lose their resident status if they apply for a resident license, register to vote or become a resident in another state, or if they reside outside of South Dakota for a total of 180 days in a year.

Plus, the bill would put into statute that possessing a mailing address in South Dakota, owning property or a business, or being employed in the state is not adequate proof of residency.

The bill was introduced at the request of the Department of Game, Fish, and Parks.

"The addition of these statements protects South Dakota sportsmen and women's ability to obtain highly sought-after tags for elk, bighorn sheep and some of the other limited draw licenses," said Sam Schelhaas, a law enforcement chief for the department. "And it protects it from nonresidents who are wrongfully claiming South Dakota residency."

State law includes exceptions for people like resident students studying in another state and federal employees, like military personnel.

Sen. Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, questioned if the 180 days in a year requirement is too strict.

"How about a retired farmer who has kids back on the homeplace?" Mehlhaff said. "Likes to go back there, but lives in Arizona from October to April?"

"There may be some potential" for those people being left behind, Schelhaas said. But he added that the "intent is to address the individuals trying to fraud the system." He said the 180-day number was inspired by neighboring states that have similar laws.

The South Dakota Wildlife Federation, which lobbies on behalf of resident hunters and anglers, supported the bill.

The bill was unanimously endorsed by the committee and now heads to the full Senate.

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

Drunken driving courts prepare for more action from minimum-sentence law

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 16, 2024 3:21 PM

The state's court system is preparing for a potential spike in DUI court participation after last year's lawmakers attached mandatory minimum prison sentences to felony repeat offenses.

That was among the messages State Court Administrator Greg Sattizahn delivered to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre during an update on the work of the state's Unified Judicial System.

The state has already added DUI court options to two existing drug courts in Watertown and Huron, Sattizahn said, though it's too early to tell how the mandatory minimum law will ultimately impact the workload for those courts.

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Lawmakers and Gov. Kristi Noem passed the bill requiring prison terms for fourth and subsequent DUI convictions in 2023.

The bill allows for the use of DUI courts, however. Those courts function much like treatment programs, but have the force of law to send people to prison for failure to abide by program strictures. Those who do 18- to 24-months in the court without breaking the rules – sobriety, group therapy attendance, employment and parenting classes are among the typical requirements – can avoid prison altogether.

DUI courts are part of South Dakota's specialty courts system, which also includes drug courts, mental health courts and veterans courts. The courts save money over prison and are more effective at reducing repeat offenses, according to state data. The most recent full assessment of the courts in 2020 put graduation rates at about 60%. Last week, Problem Solving Courts Coordinator Noreen Plumage told South Dakota Searchlight that the graduation figure currently stands at 57% – one point higher than the national average.

The mandatory minimums law took effect in July, so Sattizahn said many of the higher-level offenses that would fetch a mandatory minimum sentence and perhaps involve offenders who'd be eligible for a DUI court are unresolved.

"Most of those cases are still in the sentencing or determination-of-guilt phase," Sattizahn said.

Even so, the courts are preparing for a spike. There were 19 more people in DUI court this January than there were in January 2023, though he stressed that it's too early to attribute that to the new law.

Juvenile probation numbers up

Sattizahn's appearance before the committee was about more than DUI courts. His briefing on the court system's recent work and changes to the law that might affect it also touched upon juvenile delinquency, young adults in the court system, indigent legal defense and updates to the state's approach to managing domestic violence through protection orders.

On the juvenile side, Sattizahn said, the state now has more kids on probation than it has at any time since 2015, the year the state reformed the juvenile justice system to keep more kids out of lockdown. There are currently 1,216 children on probation, he said, and the courts are working more closely with schools, along with court and police representatives, to address the increase.

Domestic violence 'lethality assessments'

On domestic violence, Sattizahn said the courts are working to implement last year's Senate Bill 103. That bill ordered the courts to create a pilot program for "lethality assessments," which are designed to find out an alleged abuser's relative risk to hurt their partner again.

The courts have landed on a system from a company called Odara. Police in Minnehaha, Mellette, Day and Yankton counties will soon be trained in how to use the tool, which will consider a series of risk factors in calls involving domestic violence or protection order violations. The results will be forwarded to the courts for use in deciding the terms of a defendant's pretrial release.

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.

Child tax credit expansion, business incentives combined in new congressional tax plan

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 16, 2024 12:30 PM

WASHINGTON — Leading members of Congress released a bipartisan, bicameral tax proposal Tuesday, promising a middle-path deal to help low-income families and provide incentives for businesses as Trump-era tax breaks expire.

The framework led by top tax policy leaders U.S. Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon and Republican Rep. Jason Smith of Missouri would raise the child tax credit incrementally through 2025 and restore tax relief for affordable housing projects.

The three-year proposal would also make exempt disaster payments to wildfire victims and to those who suffered losses after the massive train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio. The deal also aims to extend research and development tax credits, as well as reduce tax burdens on U.S.-Taiwan business relationships, an effort to bolster relations with the autonomous island nation vulnerable to Chinese government aggression.

Wyden, chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, said in a statement that "(f)ifteen million kids from low-income families will be better off as a result of this plan, and given today's miserable political climate, it's a big deal to have this opportunity to pass pro-family policy that helps so many kids get ahead."

Democrats have been pushing to permanently raise the tax credit that low-income families receive per child after a temporary increase during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated significant reductions in child poverty. The current proposal would end in 2025.

Wyden also praised the deal's potential to spur affordable housing construction and said that his goal "remains to get this passed in time for families and businesses to benefit in this upcoming tax filing season, and I'm going to pull out all the stops to get that done."

Smith, chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means, said "American families will benefit from this bipartisan agreement that provides greater tax relief, strengthens Main Street businesses, boosts our competitiveness with China, and creates jobs."

Ending fraud-ridden program

Both lawmakers highlighted the proposal's effort to rein in abuse of the COVID-19-era employee retention tax credit by increasing penalties and the statute of limitations for those committing fraud, and cutting short the overall program by 14 months.

"We even provide disaster relief and cut red tape for small businesses, while ending a COVID-era program that's costing taxpayers billions in fraud. This legislation locks in over \$600 billion in proven pro-growth, pro-America tax policies with key provisions that support over 21 million jobs. I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this legislation," Smith continued in a statement Tuesday.

And for those who file 1099 forms, a provision tucked away in the framework would increase the threshold to file to \$1,000 from the current \$600.

The proposal won praise from across the tax policy spectrum.

Business Roundtable, an advocacy organization representing a wide range of U.S. CEOs, described the deal's pitch to revive expired pro-business policies as "critical to strengthening America's global competitiveness."

"Business Roundtable strongly supports the bipartisan deal to restore three vital pro-growth tax policies that have expired or are being phased out," the organization's CEO Joshua Bolten said in a statement Tuesday. "Reviving immediate research and development expensing, full expensing for purchases of equipment, machinery and technology, and a more sensible business interest deduction would increase domestic investment, bolster U.S. innovation and create American jobs."

Sen. Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat and evangelist for the child tax credit, urged his colleagues to pass the deal, calling it a "win-win for Ohio families and Ohio manufacturers."

"The deal's expansion of the Child Tax Credit will help parents keep up with the rising cost of living and ensure that their hard work pays off. The business provisions will support American companies that invest in our nation's research and manufacturing. The deal also ensures that residents of East Palestine won't get hit with a surprise tax bill for payments they received from Norfolk Southern after last year's derailment," Brown said in a statement Tuesday.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Trump cruises to historic Iowa caucus victory; DeSantis edges past Haley

Ramaswamy suspends campaign after fourth-place finish

BY: ROBIN OPSAHL, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH AND ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 16

Former President Donald Trump was projected to win the Iowa Caucuses Monday night, according to The Associated Press, which calls unofficial results for American elections.

AP called the caucuses for Trump just after 7:30 p.m. Central, just 30 minutes into the Iowa precinct meetings. With more than 95% of the vote reported, Trump was leading in 98 of Iowa's 99 counties.

Trump took the stage at his watch party at the Iowa Event Center in Des Moines surrounded by supporters and family Monday night, celebrating his victory in the Iowa Republican caucuses.

"Iowa, we love you," Trump said as the crowd cheered. "You are beautiful. You just go out and buy larger tractors and more land, don't worry about it."

The Republican front-runner was leading with 51.1% of the vote, nearly 30 percentage points ahead of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis at 21.2%. The margin of victory broke the record of 12 points set by Bob Dole in 1988.

DeSantis, Haley vow to keep competing

"We got our ticket punched out of Iowa," DeSantis said just before 10:30 p.m., saying he would go on to compete in upcoming primaries. DeSantis had predicted early in the campaign that he would win the caucuses.

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who was narrowly leading Trump in Johnson County, was in third place with 19.1%.

Haley said she was going on to New Hampshire later Monday night and continued to predict she would be the last challenger to Trump left standing.

"The pundits will analyze the results from every angle. We get that. But when you look at how we're doing in New Hampshire, in South Carolina and beyond, I can safely say tonight I will make this Republican primary a two person race," Haley said.

Ohio entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, who came in a distant fourth place, suspended his campaign Monday and endorsed Trump. "... There is no path for me to be the next president, absent things that we don't want to see happen in this country," Ramaswamy said.

All other candidates on the ballot — Texas businessman Ryan Binkley, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, each had less than 1% of the vote.

Trump entered the first-in-the-nation nominating contest with a historic lead in the most recent Iowa Poll by The Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom — leading at 48%, with Haley at 20% and DeSantis trailing at 16%.

The DeSantis campaign criticized the projection.

"It is absolutely outrageous that the media would participate in election interference by calling the race before tens of thousands of Iowans even had a chance to vote. The media is in the tank for Trump and

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this is the most egregious example yet," said Communications Director Andrew Romeo.

Trump congratulates rivals

Most of the candidates held Iowa watch parties with supporters and media to track results before heading to New Hampshire and South Carolina, the first and second primaries in the GOP nominating process, to continue their campaigns.

The former president, who has spent much of his time on the campaign trail attacking his opponents for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, gave congratulations to DeSantis and Haley.

"I want to congratulate Ron and Nikki for having a good time together, we're all having a good time together," he said. "And I think they both actually did very well. I really do, I think they both did very well. We don't even know what the outcome of second place is."

He also congratulated Ramaswamy for getting roughly 8% in the Iowa caucuses.

Turnout tops 110,000 despite sub-zero temperatures

Turnout was brisk at precincts across the state despite arctic temperatures and recent winter storms.

According to early results released by the state Republican Party, more than 110,000 Iowans participated in the 2024 GOP caucuses. Though some predicted that high energy going into the nominating cycle could push the 2024 caucuses past the 2016 record of nearly 187,000 caucusgoers, 2024 participation levels fell somewhat short.

That lower participation rate may have been driven by winter weather – snow was falling in some areas of Iowa, and wind chill temperatures kept much of the state in dangerous travel conditions.

Republican Party of Iowa Chairman Jeff Kaufmann thanked the Iowans who braved record-low temperatures following a blizzard to come to the Iowa caucuses to "deliberate with members of their community about the future of our country."

"I could not be prouder to be an Iowan than I am tonight," Kaufmann said in a statement. "... Iowans coming out en masse demonstrates our people's resilience and determination, as well as their confidence in the most transparent democratic process in the country."

Candidates rally voters in final hours before caucuses

In the final hours before the state contest, candidates made their final push to bring Iowans out to caucus. Haley held events in Des Moines, Pella and Newton Monday, while DeSantis traveled to Sergeant Bluff, Council Bluffs, and Cedar Rapids to give his final rallying call.

DeSantis repeated his calls for his supporters to go out despite the cold weather in a Sergeant Bluff stop Monday afternoon. He promised that if Iowans will dedicate a few hours to supporting him on caucus night, he will be "fighting for you for the next eight years."

He also said he believes his supporters are passionate enough about his campaign to show up. The Florida governor thanked volunteers and supporters who travelled to Iowa to phone backers and go door-to-door in the final days before the caucuses, saying it showed the energy behind his campaign.

"The former president, how many people that served that his administration are even willing to publicly support him — much less come in negative temperatures to go door to door?" DeSantis said. "Not a lot. Whereas with us, this is, this is what they want to do."

In a tele-town hall less than two hours before the caucuses start, Haley answered questions from voters on issues from Israel to congressional term limits. The former United Nations ambassador said that as president, she would work to reduce divisiveness in American politics and change the "tone in our country" to bring Americans together.

She thanked Iowans for their kindness during her time on the campaign trail and urged them to go to the caucuses, bringing friends, family and voter ID.

"Make sure you spread the word, because we are going to do something that's going to really make you proud," Haley said. "And I will focus every day on proving that you made the right decision."

Though Trump did not have public events scheduled before the caucuses Monday, he attacked his rival candidates in a post on TruthSocial. The former president called Haley a "Globalist RINO" who would not be supported by "MAGA" Republicans in the general election, adding that "Ron DeSanctimonious, at least, is MAGA-Lite" and that votes for Ramaswamy are "wasted."

"Remember, I think MAGA is almost ALL of the Republican Party," Trump wrote. "... It's not going to happen for her, or DeSanctimonious!"

The Republican Party of Iowa released results on its website Monday night. The party had designated volunteers to record and report results at each precinct site using a web-based application, which will be posted publicly following verification by state GOP staff.

Robin Opsahl is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering the state Legislature and politics. Robin has experience covering government, elections and more at media organizations including Roll Call, the Sacramento Bee and the Wausau Daily Herald, in addition to working on multimedia projects, newsletters and visualizations. They were a political reporter for the Des Moines Register covering the Iowa caucuses leading up to the 2020 presidential election, assisting with the Register's Iowa Poll, and reporting on Iowa's 4th District elections.

Ribbing of lieutenant governor continues with gavel gifts including 'Thor's hammer'

Rhoden's collection grows after heavy-handed accident

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 16, 2024 6:00 AM

Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden has a backup in case he breaks another gavel. In fact, he's got four.

Rhoden is known for his literal heavy handedness on the podium during legislative sessions — he broke his second gavel in as many years in December ahead of Gov. Kristi Noem's budget address. He broke the first — a gift from Noem — ahead of the 2022 budget address.

"Two years in a row," Rhoden said to the legislators gathered on the House floor in December. "There's something about the House."

Between his efforts to fix his homemade gavel — crafted from a black walnut tree on his ranch — and build a new gavel, along with gavels gifted to him in the last week, he should have enough to get him through the rest of his second term as lieutenant governor.

House Speaker Hugh Bartels surprised Rhoden with a new gavel on Tuesday before Noem was introduced for her State of the State address: a (perhaps indestructible?) aluminum gavel, which Rhoden called a "Thor's hammer-type gavel."

Lake Area Technical College President Tiffany Sanderson had surprised Rhoden the night before with an alumni-made hickory gavel, which Rhoden said has a "big old honkin' head." A plaque on the back of the gavel's accompanying striker plate reads "Warranty void if broken by Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden."

"I told them they were hedging their bets writing that on there," Rhoden laughed.

The lieutenant governor said he enjoyed the gifts and a bit of fun.

"I was just tickled pink," he said. "Obviously I like woodwork and metalwork. To get quality gifts like that just made my week."

Rhoden repaired the gavel he broke in December, gluing it back together and wrapping hay bale wire around it. But after his son inquired about it, he passed it on as a Christmas gift.

So, Rhoden crafted a replacement gavel. It's the same wood chopped from a black walnut tree on his ranch near Union Center — a piece of his childhood and a reminder of his family values. He plans to switch between the replacement and the hickory gavel during the legislative session.

The aluminum gavel? That's for display.

So is the last gavel in his roster — or, rather, club.

That gavel is "super sized," with a handle almost 2 feet long and a 6-inch-wide head. Rhoden built it as

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a joke ahead of the State of the State address.

"I got thinking it'd be cute to build a great big gavel," Rhoden said, adding that it takes two hands to swing. "That way I could have a little fun in the Capitol when I got back."

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.

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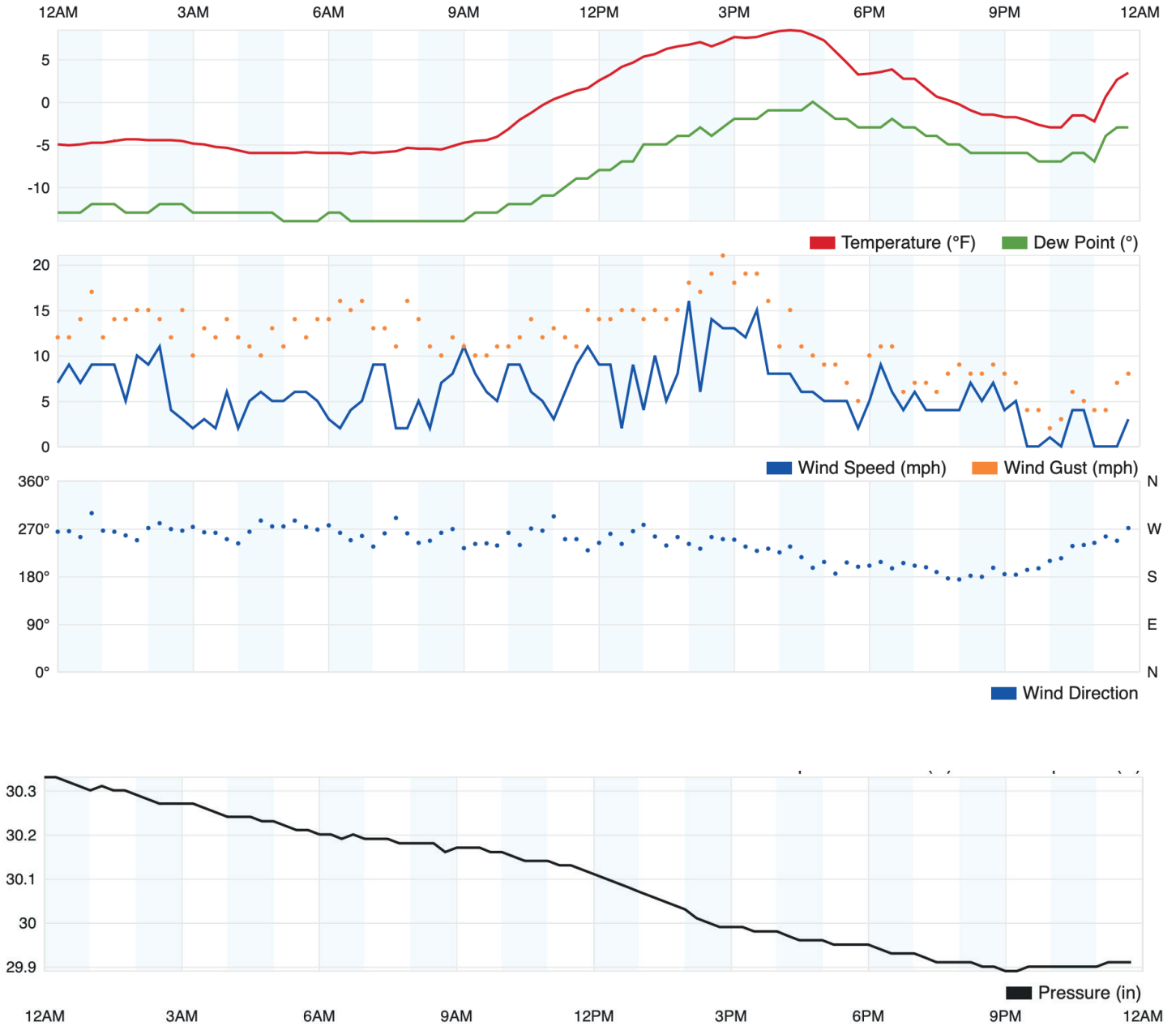
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Redfield Boys C Game
Redfield Girls JV Game
Mobridge-Pollock Boys C Game
Mobridge-Pollock Girls C Game
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Mobridge-Pollock Girls JV Game
Dakota Valley Boys JV
Dakota Valley Girls JV

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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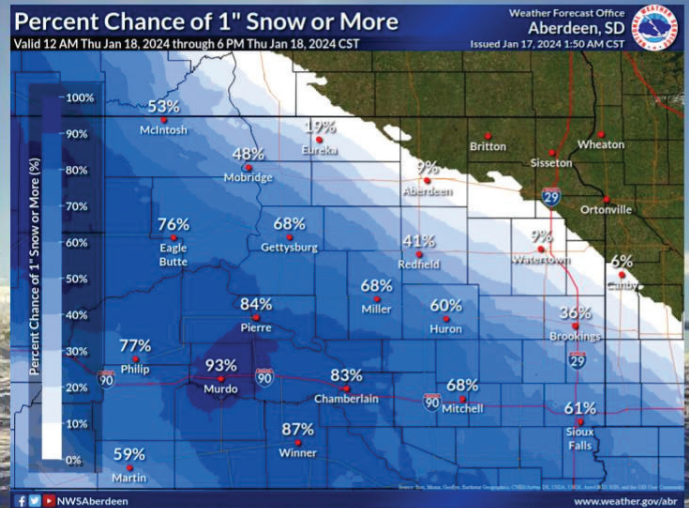
Wed Jan 17	Thu Jan 18	Fri Jan 19	Sat Jan 20	Sun Jan 21	Mon Jan 22	Tue Jan 23
9°F -4°F	4°F -3°F	4°F -10°F	9°F 6°F	24°F 17°F	31°F 21°F	33°F 27°F
W 10 MPH	N 18 MPH 50%	NW 18 MPH	S 21 MPH	S 18 MPH 10%	S 11 MPH	E 10 MPH

Rest of the Week

- ~ Below average temps
- ~ Accumulating snow in central SD (Thurs)
- ~ Patchy blowing snow possible

Weekend into Next Week

- ~ Increasing temperatures
- ~ Dry
- ~ Gusty Saturday



The rest of the work week will feature below average temperatures, some accumulating snow for central SD (1 to 2 inches possible) and some patchy blowing snow. Temperatures will increase into the weekend and we will move into a drier pattern. Winds could gust up to 35 mph on Saturday.

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Timing of Snowfall & Winds

January 16, 2024
3:24 PM

	Thu								Thu								Fri							
	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen			40%	40%	25%	25%			10	12	14	17	21	23	25	25	26	26	26	24	22	20	15	12
Britton			30%	30%	20%	20%			10	10	12	16	20	22	24	24	23	25	26	23	22	20	15	10
Brookings			45%	45%	60%	60%			7	7	9	14	17	20	22	22	22	22	24	24	22	17	12	
Chamberlain			80%	80%	50%	50%			7	10	12	16	22	26	29	33	35	32	32	29	29	24	15	12
Clark			55%	55%	35%	35%			12	12	13	17	21	23	25	26	26	26	26	25	22	16	12	
Eagle Butte	30%	30%	80%	80%	40%	40%			14	17	21	24	32	39	43	43	39	38	38	30	28	23	16	12
Ellendale			30%	30%	15%	15%			10	13	14	18	23	25	29	30	30	30	29	25	23	21	15	12
Eureka			55%	55%	25%	25%			10	12	14	20	26	32	35	35	35	35	33	26	26	22	15	12
Gettysburg	20%	20%	75%	75%	40%	40%			12	14	17	22	28	32	36	36	33	31	32	29	28	24	15	12
Huron			75%	75%	45%	45%			9	9	13	17	21	23	25	26	29	30	25	26	26	24	17	12
Kennebec			80%	80%	45%	45%			9	13	16	21	28	32	33	37	38	36	35	31	30	25	13	10
McIntosh	50%	50%	70%	70%	35%	35%			15	17	21	26	38	41	43	43	43	43	36	31	28	23	14	12
Milbank			25%	25%	25%	25%			10	9	10	15	20	20	21	22	21	24	25	23	24	22	17	13
Miller			75%	75%	45%	45%			9	10	13	17	22	25	28	28	29	30	29	28	26	23	16	12
Mobridge	25%	25%	65%	65%	30%	30%			10	13	16	23	29	33	35	33	31	30	29	24	24	20	13	10
Murdo			85%	85%	45%	45%			13	17	20	24	30	35	43	44	37	36	35	30	30	24	13	12
Pierre	15%	15%	80%	80%	45%	45%			8	13	15	18	26	33	36	36	30	30	28	24	24	22	13	10
Redfield			60%	60%	35%	35%			10	12	14	17	21	25	26	26	26	28	28	26	24	22	16	12
Sisseton			25%	25%	20%	20%			13	10	13	16	20	22	24	25	25	26	26	23	22	22	16	14
Watertown			40%	40%	35%	35%			10	9	9	14	18	22	22	23	23	25	25	24	24	22	17	13
Webster			40%	40%	25%	25%			12	12	13	17	21	25	29	29	29	30	30	26	25	22	17	12
Wheaton			15%	15%					10	10	13	16	18	18	18	18	20	23	23	22	22	22	17	12



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



5-Day Forecast

January 16, 2024
3:36 PM

Wed

Mostly cloudy

HI: 5 to 18°f

Thurs

Light Snow & Increasing Winds & Blowing Snow

(See Previous Slides For Details)

HI: 1 to 7°f

Friday

Clearing & Windy

HI: 0 to 6°f

Sat

Partly Cloudy & Windy

HI: 4 to 22°f

Sun

Partly Cloudy & Warmer

HI: 20 to 30°f



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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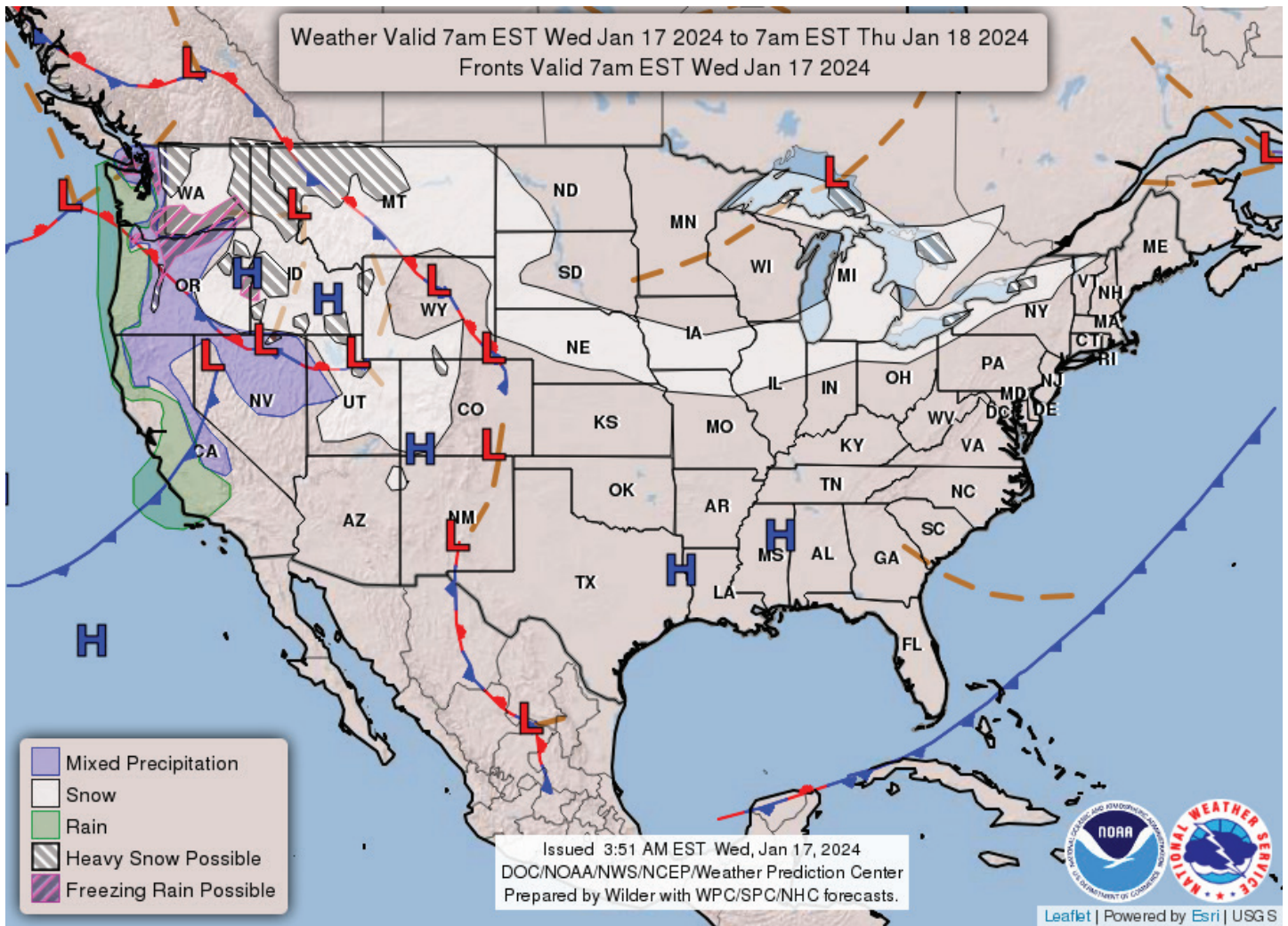
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 8 °F at 4:03 PM
Low Temp: -6 °F at 4:26 AM
Wind: 21 mph at 2:38 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 13 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 48 in 1947
Record Low: -32 in 1997
Average High: 23
Average Low: 1
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.33
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.33
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:19:13 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04:55 am



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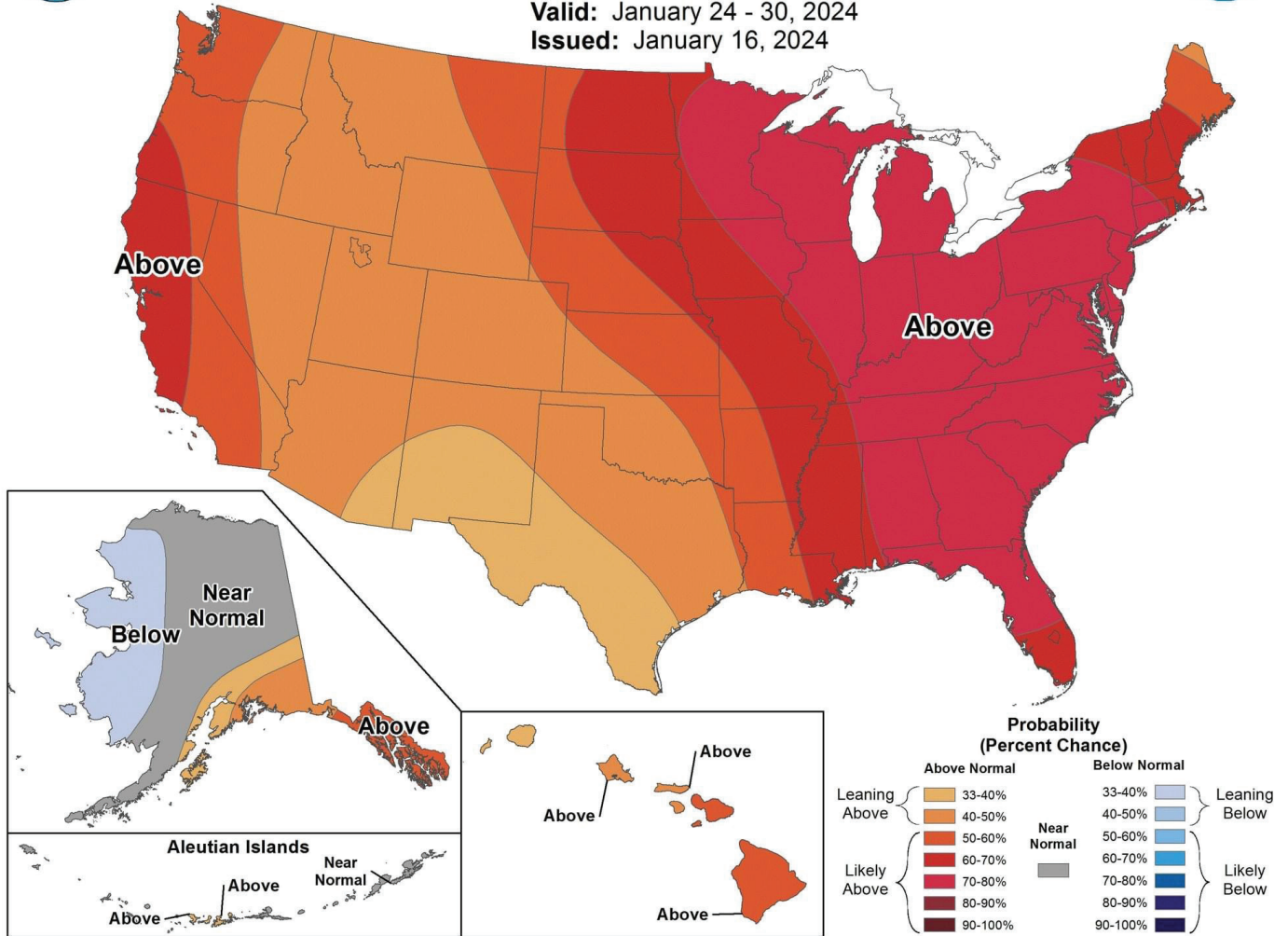
Tired of the extreme cold? A transition to a warmer pattern is expected over the eastern U.S. through the end of January, with above normal precipitation likely to continue east of the Rockies.



8-14 Day Temperature Outlook



Valid: January 24 - 30, 2024
Issued: January 16, 2024



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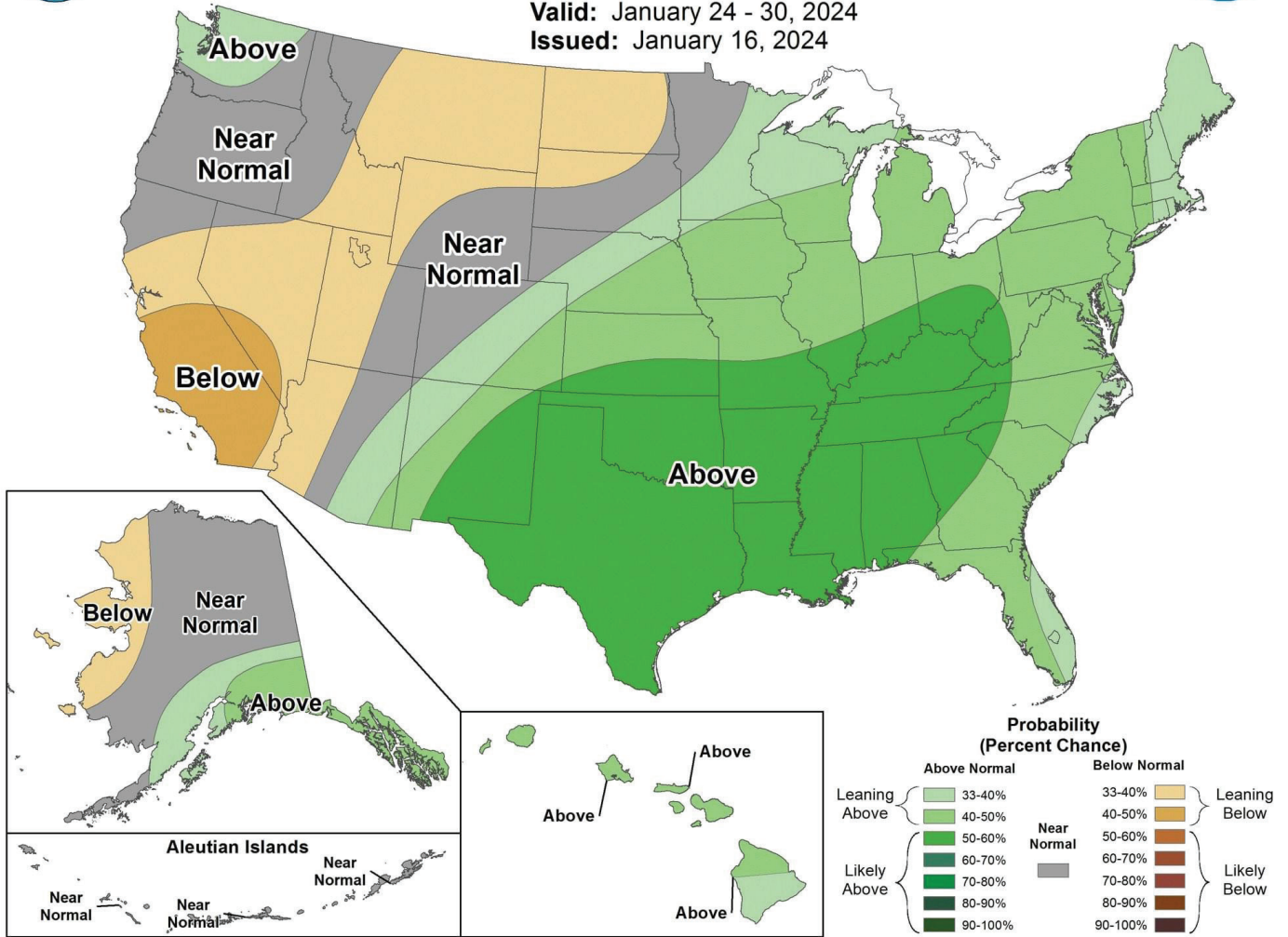


8-14 Day Precipitation Outlook



Valid: January 24 - 30, 2024

Issued: January 16, 2024



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Today in Weather History

January 17, 1996: Two to as much as fifteen inches of snow, high winds from 40 to 60 mph, and cold arctic air resulted in blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills from 40 below to 70 below from the mid-morning of the 17th to the early evening of the 18th. Most schools, federal, state, and county offices were closed. Various activities are also canceled. Travel was challenging due to the near-zero visibility, with some vehicles stranded. Highway 12 from Webster to the Minnesota border and Interstate-29 closed on the 18th. Hundreds of people were stranded, with some people stranded in their vehicles. Some pheasants and wildlife were lost due to the snow-packed so hard they could not dig out. Some snowfall amounts include; 2 inches at Highmore, 3 inches at Pierre and 9NE Reliance, 5 inches at Mobridge, Presho, Roscoe, 10SE Stephan, and Ree Heights, 6 inches at Tulare, 7 inches 12W Tulare and 5E 3S Faulkton, 8 inches 11E 2S Hosmer and at Doland, 9 inches at Mellette, Aberdeen, and Redfield, and 10 inches at Eureka and Britton, and 12 inches at Wilmot, Rosholt, and Ortonville, Minnesota. Fifteen inches occurred at Wheaton, Clinton, and Graceville. The extreme wind chills and some blowing snow continued across central and north-central South Dakota into the early evening of the 18th.

January 17, 2012: Below are some very rare lake effect waterspouts. Chris Westcott took these pictures in the vicinity of Lower Brule. The waterspouts form from the instability created when the air associated with the Missouri River's relatively warm open waters interacts with the frigid air located just above the surface. These types of waterspouts have a very short lifespan and dissipate just as quickly as they form. Chris saw six of them at one time.

1490: On the night of January 17 through the 18th, a "certain fine rain, which froze whilst it fell, and make icicles upon trees" occurred in Florence, Italy. "There was such a quantity of it that the weight bowed the trees down to the ground and broke the branches." The above is from "A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516" by Landucci, Luca.

1706: Scientist, inventor, and founding father Benjamin Franklin was born on this day. He is credited with discovering electricity, inventing lightning rods, and mapping the Gulf Stream. After the Icelandic volcanic eruption of Laki in 1783 and the subsequent harsh winter of Europe in 1784, Franklin connected the causal nature of these two events.

1837: The green flash was first documented by Captain Back of the H. M. S. Terror while in the Arctic during 1836-1837. He wrote: "In the morning, however, at a quarter before ten o'clock while standing on an ice hummock about 17 feet high, and looking toward the east, I had observed the upper limb of the sun, as it filled a triangular cleft on the ridge of the headland, of the most brilliant emerald color, a phenomenon which I had not witnessed before in these regions."

1893: Delaware's coldest temperature of -17 F occurred on January 17th, 1893, in Millsboro.

1916: Reno, Nevada, received 22.5 inches of snow, its greatest 1-day snowfall total ever.

1982: Strong chinook winds caused severe wind damage in Boulder, Colorado. A wind gust of 118 mph was recorded on the roof of the Environmental Research Laboratories (ERL), and a wind gust of 137 mph was measured atop the roof of the NCAR building (in the southwest part of the city, 600 feet above ground level). The high winds uprooted trees and damaged roofs.

1994: On January 17, 1994, at 4:31 a.m. PST, a magnitude 6.7 earthquake centered in Northridge struck the southern California area. Known as the Northridge Earthquake, it caused at least 57 fatalities (a subsequent study put the death toll at 72, including heart attacks) and injured thousands.

1999: An F4 tornado tracked across southern Jacksonville, Tennessee, damaging more than 200 homes and 55 buses. The storm killed six people and injured 106.

2016: A potent storm system developed and tracked quickly eastward across the Gulf of Mexico and toward Florida on Saturday, January 16, 2016. The impacts from this storm reached west-central and southwest Florida during the early morning hours of Sunday, January 17, 2016. A squall line of strong to severe thunderstorms, just ahead of the cold front, produced periodic wind damage and isolated tornadoes as it quickly moved ashore across west-central and southwest Florida and pushed across the state. Two EF2 tornadoes touched down, one near Siesta Key in Sarasota County and the other near Duette in Manatee County. Two adults were killed and four others injured when their mobile home rolled over and was destroyed by the tornado in Manatee County.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

RIGHT FOR GOD'S PLAN

Charlie Brown was sitting behind his desk holding his head between his hands, as his elbows kept them in place. With a worried look on his face he moaned, "The moment I set foot on the stage of life, they took one look at me and said, 'Not right for the part!'"

Not so for the Christian!

Paul, writing to the Ephesians said, "When you believed in Christ, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit." That's God's guarantee that we belong to Him, that He has a unique plan for our lives, and we are just "right for the part."

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, it is the beginning of a new way of living because we have become "new creations" through Christ Jesus. We know that "old things have passed away and all things have become new!" And, whatever "part" God has for us is one that meets His needs and we will certainly be able to fulfill that "part" for His glory because of His plan for us.

We must always remember that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives at this very moment – continually reforming and transforming us into the image and likeness of Christ right now. Often we look at the "end product" - being with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. We must always remember that His power is always at work in us. And, when we look back and see where we were, and look forward and know where we will be, we know He has a "part" for us.

Prayer: We pray, Lord, that we will be as patient with You as You are with us. Shape us and mold us and work with us until we are "right for our part." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When you believed in Christ, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13



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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.16.24

2 10 42 49 54 13

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$236,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.24

28 29 38 41 52 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,400,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.16.24

8 13 21 22 42 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.13.24

15 23 29 30 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$21,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.24

6 16 23 60 62 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 26 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.15.24

13 30 35 49 59 4

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$102,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 26 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Andes Central-Dakota Christian 50, Corsica/Stickney 45
Beresford 45, Madison 23
Canistota 50, Freeman Academy-Marion 23
Castlewood 58, Dell Rapids St. Mary 49
Centerville 73, Freeman 32
Estelline-Hendricks 52, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 46
Ethan 75, Menno 17
Faulkton 58, Aberdeen Christian 43
Flandreau 67, Deuel 14
Florence-Henry 48, Webster 24
Garretson 57, Alcester-Hudson 39
Great Plains Lutheran 46, Waverly-South Shore 10
Hamlin 63, DeSmet 40
Hanson 59, Howard 43
Harrisburg 46, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 42
Highmore-Harold 54, Sunshine Bible Academy 26
Hill City 49, Belle Fourche 42
Huron 54, Brookings 36
Irene-Wakonda 44, Scotland 30
Kimball-White Lake 66, Bridgewater-Emery 39
Langford 41, Hankinson, N.D. 14
Lennox 78, Parker 23
Leola-Frederick High School 50, Ellendale, N.D. 41
Lyman 58, White River 41
McCook Central-Montrose 55, Baltic 26
Milbank 67, Waubay/Summit 36
Miller 55, Crow Creek Tribal School 28
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 54, Redfield 17
New Underwood 48, Philip 14
North Central 45, Ipswich 21
Pierre T F Riggs High School 65, Douglas 44
Red Cloud 84, Little Wound 22
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 44, Hitchcock-Tulare 40
Sioux Falls Christian 56, Parkston 39
Sioux Falls Jefferson 59, Yankton 26
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 64, Aberdeen Central 27
Sioux Valley 61, Chester 55
St. Thomas More 48, Lead-Deadwood 12
Sully Buttes 58, Timber Lake 34
Tea Area 50, Watertown 32
Tri-Valley 60, Deubrook 50
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 50, Bon Homme 46
Vermillion 56, Elk Point-Jefferson 36

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Viborg-Hurley 60, Avon 59
Wagner 66, O'Neill, Neb. 44
Wakpala 52, McIntosh 36
Wessington Springs 41, James Valley Christian 39
West Central 65, Dell Rapids 51
Wolsey-Wessington 47, Hitchcock-Tulare 44
West River Tournament=
Faith 44, Upton, Wyo. 40
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Colome vs. Jones County, ppd.
Elkton-Lake Benton vs. Arlington, ppd.
Marty Indian vs. Pine Ridge, ppd.
Tiospa Zina vs. Aberdeen Roncalli, ppd.

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 52, Faulkton 37
Beresford 59, McCook Central-Montrose 35
Canistota 67, Freeman Academy-Marion 29
Canton 79, Elkton-Lake Benton 62
Castlewood 68, Dell Rapids St. Mary 46
Chester 71, Sioux Valley 42
Corsica/Stickney 46, Andes Central-Dakota Christian 34
Crow Creek Tribal School 68, Miller 64
Dakota Valley 70, West Central 55
Deubrook 65, Tri-Valley 58
Estelline-Hendricks 82, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 55
Ethan 66, Menno 19
Flandreau 60, Deuel 42
Freeman 71, Centerville 63
Garretson 50, Alcester-Hudson 45
Hamlin 64, DeSmet 46
Hanson 54, Howard 49
Highmore-Harrold 65, Sunshine Bible Academy 34
Hill City 57, Belle Fourche 35
Hitchcock-Tulare 57, Iroquois-Lake Preston 37
Huron 67, Brookings 49
Ipswich 52, North Central 26
Irene-Wakonda 64, Scotland 63
Jones County 63, Colome 50
Jones County 63, Kadoka Area 50
Lemmon High School 52, Harding County 24
Lennox 74, Chamberlain 37
Little Wound 64, Red Cloud 54
Lower Brule 73, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 61
Milbank 55, Waubay/Summit 35
Mitchell Christian 64, Sioux Falls Lutheran 54
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 64, Redfield 32
Pierre T F Riggs High School 64, Douglas 37
Platte-Geddes 68, Kimball-White Lake 35
Potter County 69, Herreid-Selby 38

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Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 43, Wolsey-Wessington 36
Sioux Falls Jefferson 63, Yankton 60, OT
Sioux Falls O’Gorman 50, Aberdeen Central 36
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 53, Harrisburg 48
Sisseton 63, Flandreau Indian 10
St. Thomas More 67, Lead-Deadwood 38
Tea Area 63, Watertown 62, OT
Timber Lake 66, Sully Buttes 65
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 50, Bon Homme 31
Vermillion 71, Elk Point-Jefferson 57
Viborg-Hurley 61, Avon 37
Wagner 63, O’Neill, Neb. 57
Wakpala 68, McIntosh 42
Warner 79, Northwestern 49
Waverly-South Shore 45, Great Plains Lutheran 37
Wessington Springs 58, James Valley Christian 56
White River 62, Philip 38
Winner 57, Lyman 28
Panhandle Conference Tournament=
Hyannis, Neb. 58, Edgemont 32
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Tiospa Zina vs. Aberdeen Roncalli, ppd.

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

Oregon braces for freezing rain while cold temperatures elsewhere strain electric grids

By ED WHITE Associated Press

Parts of Oregon braced for freezing rain Tuesday after a weekend of extreme winds knocked down trees and cut power to thousands, while communities across the U.S. also struggled with perilously cold weather that closed schools and put electricity supplies at risk.

Another day of record cold temperatures swept much of the Rockies, Great Plains and Midwest, with wind chills below minus 30 (minus 34.4 Celsius) extending into the mid-Mississippi Valley. On the East Coast, meanwhile, New York City and Philadelphia ended a drought of sorts with enough snow falling for play in both cities.

More than 80,000 U.S. homes and businesses were without power by Tuesday afternoon, most of them in Oregon. Portland General Electric warned that freezing rain could delay restoration efforts. Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity in seven states, asked customers to voluntarily cut back, citing a high demand for power because of the cold. A similar plea came from the grid operator in Texas.

More than 200 residents were evacuated after a broken pipe flooded the first three floors of an apartment building in downtown St. Louis, KSDK-TV reported. An assistant manager at the Mark Twain Building complex said all 213 residents of the building, many of them elderly, were evacuated onto five warming buses.

Schools were closed major cities, including in Portland, Oregon, Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Dallas, Houston, Memphis, Tennessee, across New England and in the Washington, D.C., region. Federal offices in the nation’s capital were closed as roughly 2 inches (5 centimeters) of snow hit the area.

The National Weather Service posted an ice storm warning in parts of Oregon, including Portland, until Wednesday when temperatures were expected to rise to 43 degrees (6.1 C).

“Power outages and tree damage are likely due to the ice. Travel could be difficult,” the weather service

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said.

Rough weather was a challenge across the U.S. More than 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow covered southeast Alaska, sinking six boats in Juneau and causing avalanches. Three of the six boats were saved.

More than 9 inches (23 centimeters) of snow hit Nashville, Tennessee, since Sunday — nearly twice the annual average. The Tennessee Department of Health on Tuesday confirmed six weather-related fatalities.

Maeve McConville said she and her sister were stuck inside an American Airlines plane at the Nashville airport for seven hours Monday after arriving from Washington.

"The pilot came on and said, 'No gates available, and ground operations just told us it's going to be at least an hour,'" McConville told The Associated Press.

But an hour turned into many hours. McConville said portable stairs were considered but they were not used because of a broken part. American said "challenging conditions" made gate arrivals very difficult. Passengers watched hours of TV and movies as they waited to be taken to a gate.

"I've now seen all of season four of 'Friday Night Lights,'" McConville said.

In New Jersey, authorities said two people died when their SUV collided with a snowplow on the slick Garden State Parkway in Monmouth County.

A man in Chicago fought off the Arctic-like cold Tuesday with a fire made from cardboard, splintered pallets and other trash under Interstate 90/94. Others without a secure home sought shelter in more than 20 tents erected nearby.

Forecasters in Buffalo, New York, warned that the region should brace for a foot (30 centimeters) or more of snow through Thursday, on top of a mighty storm that delayed an NFL playoff game for a day.

Armed with only a shovel, Belinda Bonacquisti praised a 14-year-old boy with a snowblower who helped her clear 3 feet (91 centimeters) from her suburban Buffalo driveway Monday.

"I didn't know where he came from or what direction," she told WKBW-TV. "He just really bailed me out."

New York City's Central Park recorded more than an inch (2.5 centimeters) of snow since midnight, the first time since 2022 that it had at least an inch the same day. The weather service said Philadelphia snapped a similar 715-day streak, too.

Despite the threats posed by cold weather, there still was room for frivolity.

In Philadelphia, more than 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) of snow finally fell after a long dry spell. Isaiah Stout said his kids "lost their minds" and wanted to play outside, so they rushed to Target to buy the right clothes.

"It was really crazy in there," Stout said. "Got their snowsuits and their snow boots and now they're excited."

Dan O'Connor, known as the "Great Lake Jumper," did his usual morning flip into Lake Michigan in Chicago where the air temperature was at minus 5 degrees (minus 15 C), according to his social media feed.

In Washington, a friendly snowball fight broke out among a few dozen people on the National Mall. The group even has a name: the Washington DC Snowball Fight Association.

"It's a way just to let off steam," Michael Lipin said, brushing snow off his cap, "bring some childhood memories back."

At Davos, Blinken calls pathway to Palestinian state a necessity for Israeli security

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated the need for a "pathway to a Palestinian state" Wednesday at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in the Swiss resort of Davos, saying that Israel would not "get genuine security absent that."

If Israel can be brought into the fold of the Middle East, Blinken said, the region would be coming together to isolate Iran, which he called "the biggest concern in terms of security," as well as its proxies, which include Yemen's Houthi rebels who have been attacking commercial ships in the Red Sea.

"The problem is getting from here to there, and of course, it requires very difficult, challenging decisions.

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It requires a mindset that is open to that perspective," Blinken said.

He said that what is different now is the mindset of leaders in the Arab and Muslim world on integrating Israel into the region and that he feels "a fierce urgency of now" because "we're in the midst of what is human tragedy in so many ways in the Middle East right now — for the Israelis and Palestinians alike."

His comments come as a key Iranian official graces the same hallways of the glitzy event in the Alpine snows of Davos: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian is sitting down for a one-on-one chat with CNN's Fareed Zakaria later Wednesday.

A day earlier, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said in a Davos panel that his country agreed "regional peace includes peace for Israel" and responded "certainly" when asked if Saudi Arabia would recognize Israel as part of a larger political agreement.

"But that can only happen through peace for the Palestinians, through a Palestinian state," he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leads a right-wing government that is opposed to Palestinian statehood, and Netanyahu himself recently said that his actions over the years prevented the formation of such a state.

Blinken said Israelis would need to decide on its leadership and its direction, saying it's up to them whether the country can "seize the opportunity that we believe is there" and calling this "an inflection point" for the Middle East that requires hard decisions.

The leaders of France, Argentina and Spain also will deliver speeches on a busy second day of the elite gathering, where heads of state mingle with corporate executives, activists and more.

It also takes a turn toward the environmental and climate concerns that have animated plea after plea from U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for the world to come together to take more united action against global warming.

"Let me be very clear — the phaseout of fossil fuels is essential and inevitable," Guterres said in a speech at Davos.

He cited scientists' recent findings that last year was the hottest on record, but forecasts show Earth could grow hotter still.

"As climate breakdown begins, countries remain hellbent on raising emissions," Guterres said. "Our planet is heading for a scorching three-degree increase in global temperatures. Droughts, storms, fires and floods are pummeling countries and communities."

Experts and policymakers at Davos will take up weighty issues like ensuring a sustainable Middle East and North Africa, working to crack down on plastic waste and searching for ways to maintain life on Earth, no less, amid growing threats to biodiversity.

Blinken, after meetings Monday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and others, was asked in a conversation with New York Times columnist Tom Friedman whether Jewish lives matter more than Palestinian lives. He responded, "No, period."

"What we're seeing every single day in Gaza is gut-wrenching, and the suffering we're seeing among innocent men, women and children breaks my heart," he said.

To ease that trauma, the U.S. is pushing to get more humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, to "get better protections and minimize civilian casualties," and impress upon Israel its responsibility to do ensure that is the case every step of the way, Blinken said.

South Africa has formally accused Israel of committing genocide against Palestinians and pleaded with the United Nations' top court to order an immediate halt to Israeli military operations in Gaza.

Israel has responded by calling its war in Gaza a legitimate defense of its people and that it was Hamas militants who were guilty of genocide.

Israel launched its war against Hamas in Gaza after the militant group launched a series of attacks on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capturing around 250. Amid a barrage of bombings and intense fighting, 24,285 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, Gaza's Health Ministry says.

France, along with Qatar, helped mediate the delivery of a shipment of medicine for dozens of hostages

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held by Hamas on Wednesday, the same day French leader Emmanuel Macron will speak in Davos.

Recently reappointed Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Argentina's new president — self-described "anarcho-capitalist" Javier Milei — also will take the podium.

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy shuttled from room to room to meet with CEOs, financiers and political leaders and made a speech blasting his Russian leader Vladimir Putin and seeking more Western support amid signs of war fatigue.

"Please, strengthen our economy, and we will strengthen your security," the Ukrainian leader said.

Qatar and France send medicine for hostages in Gaza as war rages on and regional tensions spike

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — A shipment of medicine for dozens of hostages held by Hamas was en route to Gaza on Wednesday after France and Qatar mediated the first agreement between Israel and the militant group since a weeklong cease-fire in November.

The medicines arrived in Egypt and were on the way to the border. A senior Hamas official said that for every box provided for the hostages, 1,000 boxes would be sent in for Palestinians. The deal also includes the delivery of humanitarian aid to residents of the besieged coastal enclave.

The agreement came more than 100 days into a conflict that shows no sign of ending and which has sparked tensions across the Middle East, with a dizzying array of strikes and counterstrikes in recent days from northern Iraq to the Red Sea and from southern Lebanon to Pakistan.

Palestinian militants are still putting up resistance across Gaza in the face of one of the deadliest military campaigns in recent history. Some 85% of the narrow coastal territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, and the United Nations says a quarter of the population is starving.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas' military and governing abilities to ensure the group can never repeat an attack like the one on Oct. 7 that triggered the war. Militants burst through Israel's border defenses and stormed through several communities that day, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capturing around 250.

Israel also has promised to return more than 100 hostages still held inside Gaza after Hamas in late November released most of the women and children held captive in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. Israel says only military pressure will bring about the release of more captives, who are at increased risk of being killed in Israeli strikes or during rescue operations as the fighting grinds on.

Hamas has said it will not release any more hostages until there is a permanent cease-fire, something Israel and the United States, its top ally, have ruled out.

A WELTER OF STRIKES ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST

In the past few days, a U.S.-led coalition has carried out strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen; Iran has struck what it described as an Israeli spy headquarters in northern Iraq and anti-Iran militants in Pakistan and Syria; and Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have escalated the intensity of their fighting across the border.

Iran's militant allies across the region say they are striking U.S. and Israeli targets to pressure the two countries to halt the Gaza offensive. Iran itself has encouraged the attacks while avoiding direct involvement, but appeared to be flexing its muscles with the strikes in Syria and Pakistan.

The Houthis have vowed to continue attacking international shipping in the Red Sea in what they say is a blockade of Israel, with repercussions for global trade.

Each party appears to be seeking some form of deterrence against its adversaries. But the longer the war in Gaza lasts, the more likely it is that one of them goes a step too far, potentially triggering another war.

The biggest risk is along the Israel-Lebanon border, where Israel has vowed to halt Hezbollah attacks so that tens of thousands of Israelis can return to their homes in communities evacuated in October. Hezbollah hopes to take the pressure off Gaza by tying down Israeli troops in the north.

Tensions are also soaring in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces have conducted near-daily

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arrest raids that often trigger shootouts with Palestinian militants.

Israel said Wednesday that an airstrike in the urban Balata refugee camp in the northern West Bank killed five people. They included a senior militant who was involved in recent attacks on Israelis, the army alleged. Over 350 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since Oct. 7.

HEAVY FIGHTING IN GAZA

Israel said at the start of the year that it had largely dismantled Hamas in northern Gaza and would scale back operations there, focusing on dense urban areas in the center and south of the territory. Additional Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza on Monday, but there has been little apparent letup in strikes, with scores of Palestinians killed every day.

Gaza's Health Ministry says 24,285 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children. Over 60,000 people have been wounded, and less than half of Gaza's hospitals are even partially functioning.

Israel blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it fights in dense residential areas. Israel says its forces have killed roughly 9,000 militants, without providing evidence, and that 190 of its own soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive.

Militants are still fighting in all parts of the territory, and Israel appears no closer to freeing the remaining hostages. The deaths of two more hostages were confirmed Tuesday after Hamas said they were killed in Israeli airstrikes.

AID BOUND FOR HOSTAGES AND PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS

France said it took months to organize the shipment of the medicines. Qatar, which has long served as a mediator with Hamas, helped broker the deal that will provide three months' worth of medication for chronic illnesses for 45 of the hostages as well as other medicine and vitamins. Several older men are among the remaining hostages held in Gaza.

Moussa Abu Marzouk, a senior Hamas official, said in a post on X that the International Committee of the Red Cross will deliver all the medicines, including the ones destined for the hostages, to hospitals serving all parts of Gaza.

An Egyptian official confirmed the shipment had arrived at the el-Arish airport and said the Egyptian Red Crescent rescue service was transporting it to the Rafah border crossing with Gaza. The official was not authorized to brief media and so spoke on condition of anonymity.

Senior U.N. officials have warned that Gaza faces widespread famine and disease if more aid is not allowed in.

Israel completely sealed off Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack and only relented under U.S. pressure. It says there are now no limits on the entry of humanitarian aid and that U.N. agencies could reduce the delays by providing more workers and trucks.

But U.N. officials say aid delivery is hobbled by the opening of too few border crossings, a slow vetting process, and continuing fighting throughout the territory — all of which is largely under Israel's control.

Live updates | A deal to get medicine to Hamas hostages includes aid for Gaza

By The Associated Press undefined

Medicine for hostages was en route to Gaza on Wednesday after Qatar and France mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas — the first agreement between the two since a weeklong cease-fire broke down in November.

The deal came more than 100 days into a conflict that shows no sign of ending and has sparked tensions across the Middle East, with a dizzying array of strikes and counterstrikes in recent days from northern Iraq to the Red Sea and from southern Lebanon to Pakistan.

The United States launched the third strike in recent days against the Houthi rebel group in Yemen, according to a U.S. official. The Houthis have attacked shipping in the crucial Red Sea corridor, saying they

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seek to halt Israel's war in Gaza against Hamas.

In northern Gaza, Palestinian militants battled Israeli forces and launched a barrage of rockets from farther south. The Palestinian death toll rose to 24,285 people, Gaza's Health Ministry said Tuesday. In Israel, around 1,200 people were killed during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war and saw some 250 people taken hostage by the militants.

Currently:

- A freed Israeli hostage relives the horrors of captivity. She fears for her husband, still held in Gaza.
- U.S. Senators reject Bernie Sanders' effort to curb Israel-Hamas war. The vote signals rising unease.
- Iran attacks alleged militant bases in Pakistan. Islamabad says unprovoked strikes kill 2 children.
- A chaotic wave of attacks and reprisals in the Middle East fuel worries of a broader regional war.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

ISRAELI ARMY TRAINS FOR A POSSIBLE OFFENSIVE IN LEBANON

JERUSALEM — The Israeli army has held a training exercise simulating an offensive in southern Lebanon as it continues to exchange fire with Hezbollah fighters along the border.

Maj. Gen. Ori Gordin, head of the army's Northern Command, said in a statement issued Tuesday: "We're more prepared for this than ever before, even for tonight if needed."

More than 2,000 rockets have been fired toward Israel from Lebanon, the home of Hezbollah, since the start of the war in Gaza, killing 12 Israeli soldiers and six civilians, including a mother and son on Monday.

Israel's airstrikes in Lebanon have killed around 150 militants and 20 civilians, according to Hezbollah. Earlier this week, Israel said it stopped an infiltration of militants into the contested Golan Heights.

Gordin says reserve soldiers are spread out along the border to bolster Israel's defenses.

Hezbollah says its attacks are aimed at tying down Israeli forces and will continue until there is a cease-fire in Gaza. Israel has warned of an all-out war if Hezbollah does not pull back from the border in accordance with a U.N. resolution that ended the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

HAMAS OFFICIAL: GAZA RESIDENTS TO GET MEDICINE AS PART OF HOSTAGE AID DEAL

CAIRO — Hamas has provided more details about an agreement brokered by France and Qatar to deliver medicine to Israeli hostages held by its fighters in Gaza.

Senior Hamas official Moussa Abu Marzouk said Wednesday that for each box of medicine provided to the hostages, 1,000 boxes would be sent for use by Palestinian civilians.

In a posting on X, he said the International Committee of the Red Cross would deliver all the medicines, including those destined for the hostages, to hospitals serving all parts of Gaza.

The agreement also includes the delivery of additional food and humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Abu Marzouk says Israeli authorities will not have the chance to inspect the shipments. He says Hamas insisted that Qatar provide the medications and not France because of the European country's support for Israel.

This is the first agreement reached between the warring sides since a weeklong cease-fire in November. Hamas and other militants are still holding around half of the estimated 250 hostages they captured during the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. Most of the rest were freed in November in return for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Those remaining in captivity in Gaza include several older men and others who require medication for chronic illness.

ISRAELI AIRSTRIKE IN WEST BANK KILLS SENIOR PALESTINIAN MILITANT, ARMY SAYS

JERUSALEM — The Israeli army says it killed a senior Palestinian militant in an airstrike in the West Bank.

Ahmed Abdullah Abu Shalal, who the Israeli military said was responsible for infrastructure and had planned multiple attacks against Israelis in Jerusalem, was killed along with four others early Wednesday in the built-up Balata refugee camp in the city of Nablus.

The Palestinian Red Crescent says Israeli forces prevented medics from reaching the site of the strike, saying in a social media post that "gunfire was directed at our teams."

The military alleged that Abu Shalal and his cell planned to carry out an imminent attack and had received

funding and guidance from "Iranian sources." It did not provide evidence for the allegation.

Violence has surged in the Israeli-occupied West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza. Over 350 Palestinians have been killed in the last three months, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry, mainly during Israeli arrest raids and violent protests.

Israel has increasingly used airstrikes in the West Bank as the fighting has grown more intense, but targeted killings are still relatively rare in the territory.

Pakistan condemns Iran over bombing allegedly targeting militants that killed 2 people

By MUNIR AHMED and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan on Wednesday condemned Iran for launching airstrikes the previous day that Tehran claimed targeted bases for a militant Sunni separatist group. Islamabad angrily denounced the attack as a "blatant violation" of its airspace and said it killed two children.

Tuesday's strike on Pakistan's restive southwestern Baluchistan province imperiled diplomatic relations between the two neighbors, but both sides appeared wary of provoking the other. Iran and nuclear-armed Pakistan have long regarded each other with suspicion over militant attacks.

The attack also threatened to further ignite violence in a Middle East unsettled by Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Iran launched strikes late Monday in Iraq and Syria over an Islamic State-claimed suicide bombing that killed over 90 people earlier this month.

In state media reports, which were later withdrawn without explanation, Iran said its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard targeted bases for the militant group Jaish al-Adl, or the "Army of Justice." The group, which seeks an independent Baluchistan and has spread across Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, acknowledged the assault in a statement shared online.

Six bomb-carrying drones and rockets struck homes that the militants claim housed children and wives of their fighters. Jaish al-Adl said the attack killed two children and wounded two women and a teenage girl.

Videos shared by the Baluch activist group HalVash, purportedly from the site, showed a burning building and two charred, small corpses.

A Pakistani intelligence report said the two children killed were a 6-year-old girl and an 11-month old boy. Three women were injured, aged between 28 and 35. The report also said three or four drones were fired from the Iranian side, hitting a mosque and other buildings, including a house.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said it issued a strong protest late Tuesday with Iran's Foreign Ministry, and summoned an Iranian diplomat in Islamabad "to convey our strongest condemnation of this blatant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty."

"The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran," it said.

Jan Achakzai, a spokesperson for the Baluchistan province, also condemned the attack.

"Pakistan has always sought cooperation from all the countries of region — including Iran — to combat terrorism," "This is unacceptable and Pakistan has a right to respond to any aggression committed against its sovereignty."

A senior Pakistani security official, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to talk to reporters, said Iran had shared no information prior to the strike. He said Pakistan reserved the right to respond at a time and place of the country's choosing and such a strike would be measured and in line with public expectations.

"The dangerous precedent set by Iran is destabilizing and has reciprocal implications," the official said.

However, there were signs Pakistan was trying to contain any anger over the strike. The country's typically outspoken and nationalistic media covered the attack Wednesday with unusual restraint.

Iranian state media meanwhile continued not to address the strikes, instead discussing a joint navel drill held by Pakistan and the Iranian navy in the Persian Gulf on Tuesday. Pakistani officials acknowledged the drill, but said it came earlier than Iran's strikes.

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Pakistani defense analyst Syed Muhammad Ali said the government would weigh any potential retaliation carefully.

The country's air defense and missile systems are primarily deployed along the eastern border to respond to potential threats from India. But it might consider taking some measures to respond to such strikes from its western border with Afghanistan and Iran, Ali said.

Jaish al-Adl was founded in 2012, and Iranian officials believe it largely operates in Pakistan. The group has claimed bombings and kidnapped members of Iran's border police in the past. In December, suspected Jaish al-Adl members killed 11 people and wounded eight others in a nighttime attack on a police station in southeastern Iran. Another recent attack killed another police officer in the area.

In 2019, Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing targeting a bus that killed 27 members of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Iran has suspected that Sunni-majority Pakistan is hosting insurgents, possibly at the behest of its regional arch-rival Saudi Arabia. However, Iran and Saudi Arabia reached a Chinese-mediated détente last March, easing tensions. Pakistan, meanwhile, has blamed Iran in the past over militant attacks targeting its security forces.

Iran has fought in border areas against militants, but a missile-and-drone attack on Pakistan is unprecedented.

It remains unclear why Iran launched the attack now, particularly as its foreign minister had met Pakistan's caretaker prime minister the same day at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

After the Islamic State bombings this month, Iran's Intelligence Ministry alleged the two bombers involved in the attack had traveled from Afghanistan into Iran through its southeastern border at the Jalq crossing — meaning they had traveled through Baluchistan.

Pakistan's Baluchistan province, as well as Iran's neighboring Sistan and Baluchestan province, have faced a low-level insurgency by Baluch nationalists for more than two decades. They initially wanted a share of provincial resources, but later initiated an insurgency for independence.

Iran's attack on Pakistan came less than a day after Iranian strikes on northern Iraq that killed several civilians. Iraq recalled its ambassador from Tehran for consultations and summoned Iran's chargé d'affaires in Baghdad on Tuesday in protest. Iran separately struck Syria as well.

Italy's regulations on charities keep migrant rescue ships from the Mediterranean

By PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

BARI, Italy (AP) — The year has gotten off to a slow start for a rescue ship that typically plies the Mediterranean Sea looking for migrants and refugees in distress. The Ocean Viking has been impounded, its crew accused of having deviated from a designated course, as Italy targets charity groups that operate such vessels.

It was the second time in as many months that Italian authorities detained the 69-meter (225-foot) ship, operated by the European group SOS Mediterranee, while enforcing a year-old Italian government decree that regulates maritime rescue charities.

The hard-right-led government of Premier Giorgia Meloni approved the decree as part of efforts to stem the flow of migrants and would-be asylum-seekers trying to reach Europe. Italian maritime authorities now routinely assign privately operated rescue ships to ports in central and northern Italy, hundreds of miles and several days of navigation away from where they find boats in trouble.

Authorities also forbid the aid groups' vessels from carrying out multiple rescue operations without authorization.

The government says the measures are intended to reduce migration pressure on southern Italy and to regulate sea missions that it maintains only encourage more migrants to attempt risky crossings from North Africa.

To date, 13 or 14 charity-run rescue ships have been impounded for various violations. The aid groups

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deny their activities provide an incentive and argue that Italy's procedures take their ships out of operation for days while leaving vulnerable migrants to the whims of the Mediterranean.

The SOS Mediterranee is accused of having deviated from its assigned route to a port in Bari, a city on Italy's Adriatic coast, where the crew was directed after having rescued 244 people at sea. The Ocean Viking went off course on Dec. 27 to respond to a civilian aircraft's report of a boat in distress some 15 nautical miles away.

It resumed its original course to Bari after corrected coordinates showed the boat was too far away and Italian authorities had dismissed Ocean Viking from the mission.

"We are accused of not having followed the orders of the Italian coast guard, and the only fault we have is that of having followed the law of the sea," Alessandro Porro, a senior rescuer and president of SOS Mediterranee's Italy operation.

After arriving as originally scheduled in Bari on Dec. 30, the crew received a 20-day detention order for the ship and a 3,300-euro (\$3,600) fine. The detention order expires Friday, and SOS Mediterranee hopes to set out again as soon as possible, weather permitting.

"We know this is a tactic to try and stop our operation rather than something that is valid in some way," Mary Finn, another Ocean Viking rescuer, said. "And I find it painful to feel that humanity's not on our side or that the authorities aren't on our side, because it's so obvious when you do this work that what we're doing is the right thing to be doing."

Sara Kelany, the migration policy coordinator for Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, agreed that saving lives is a priority. But she said the presence of charity-run ships in the Mediterranean must be limited and strictly regulated.

Kelany alleged that many of the groups that organize humanitarian missions in the Mediterranean also have a stated political objective of changing the European Union's migration policies.

"In essence, they want to be political actors within the dynamics of immigration," she said in an interview. "Immigration is a state's national competence, and we cannot allow private organizations to influence our migration policies with their policies."

More than 60% of the 260,000 people who reached Europe last year by crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa first arrived in Italy, according to U.N. and Italian statistics.

Meanwhile, more than 3,000 people drowned at sea while attempting the journey in 2023, according to the International Organization for Migration, which estimates that more than 28,800 people overall have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean since 2014.

It is unclear what, if any, effect the Italian government's regulation of maritime rescue groups has had on the number of migrants who made it to Europe or were lost at sea. Charity ships rescue only around 8% of the asylum-seekers who reach Italy, down from a peak of 41% in 2017. Most either landed in their own boats or were brought ashore by the Italian coast guard.

After taking office in late 2022, Meloni's government pledged to curb migrant arrivals. Instead, Italy saw them sharply increase, with more than 157,000 in 2023 compared to 105,000 the year before. On one day in September, more than 7,000 migrants arrived on the island of Lampedusa.

Meloni has promoted deals designed to keep people from charting out for Europe and also formulated a development plan for Africa aimed at giving citizens greater economic opportunities so they won't be desperate to leave.

Details of the plan, named for Enrico Mattei, the former president of Italian oil company ENI, which has strategic interests in several North African countries, haven't been released.

Beyond that, Meloni was on hand in Tunisia in June when the president of the EU's executive commission signed an accord with the Tunisian government pledging economic aid in exchange for help preventing departures.

More recently, Meloni reached a bilateral deal with Albania that calls for establishing two centers in the Balkan nation to process the fast-tracked asylum applications of migrants who were rescued by Italian navy, coast guard and border police vessels.

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The Constitutional Court of Albania suspended the deal pending a review, but Prime Minister Edi Rama has said he expects it to go forward.

Analysis: North Korea's rejection of the South is both a shock, and inevitable

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and JIWON SONG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Even for a nation that has perfected the provocative, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's declaration that he would abandon the existential goal of reconciling with rival South Korea was a shock. But a closer look shows it's the almost inevitable culmination of years of building tension.

World powers will now be closely watching to see how one of Kim's biggest foreign policy declarations since he took power in 2011 plays out as he works to gain leverage in a region that holds both promise and danger for his small, impoverished, nuclear-armed nation.

The bombshell came at this week's rubber-stamp parliament, where Kim called for rewriting North Korea's constitution to eliminate the idea of a peaceful unification between the war-divided countries and to cement the South as an "invariable principal enemy."

It's the clearest sign yet of how far inter-Korean relations have fallen since February 2019, when Kim's nuclear diplomacy with former U.S. President Donald Trump imploded in Hanoi, Vietnam. The animosity that followed that highly public setback has been accompanied by an accelerated, and unprecedented, expansion of Kim's nuclear arsenal and by repeated threats of nuclear war against Washington and Seoul.

Kim, who during Monday's Supreme People's Assembly meeting described South Korea as "top-class stooges" of America, may be attempting to diminish South Korea's regional power while moving toward direct U.S.-North Korean nuclear talks.

Kim's new approach to the South comes as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his footing regionally. He is playing off deepening U.S. tensions with Moscow and Beijing over Russia's war in Ukraine and China's assertive foreign policy.

North Korea's recent efforts to boost ties with Russia and China and join a united front against Washington in what Kim calls a "new Cold War" were highlighted by his September visit to Russia for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

North Korea has been recalibrating its regional approach since the collapse of the 2019 Hanoi summit, said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"But now, with advanced nuclear and missile capabilities and the support of Russia and China, Kim feels confident enough to make these changes, which amount to his most consequential proclamations on external affairs since taking power in North Korea," Panda said.

North Korea no longer sees Seoul as a useful middleman to extract concessions from Washington. Instead, its rival is now seen as an obstacle to the North's efforts to carve out a more assertive presence in global affairs, said Hong Min, an analyst at South Korea's Institute for National Unification.

Pyongyang has viciously criticized conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, who since taking office in 2022 has expanded military cooperation with Washington and Tokyo while seeking stronger U.S. assurances that it would swiftly and decisively use its nuclear capabilities to defend its ally in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

In eliminating the idea of a shared sense of statehood between the Koreas, Kim could be reinforcing North Korea's older approach of ignoring South Korea and attempting direct dealings with Washington. The old reasoning in Pyongyang, according to Hong, was that the South wasn't a direct party to the armistice that ended the bloodshed of the 1950-53 Korean War. That ceasefire was signed between the U.S.-led U.N. Command, North Korea and China, which sent troops to fight for the North.

Declaring the South as a permanent adversary, not as a potential partner for reconciliation, could also be aimed at improving the credibility of Kim's escalatory nuclear doctrine, which authorizes the military to launch preemptive nuclear attacks against adversaries if the leadership is under threat, Hong said.

An intensifying campaign to eliminate South Korean cultural influences and to reinforce the North's separate identity may be aimed at strengthening the Kim family's dynastic rule.

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At the assembly, Kim ordered his country to remove past symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation, including a cross-border railway section and a unification monument in Pyongyang he described as an "eyesore," and to "completely eliminate such concepts as 'reunification,' 'reconciliation' and 'fellow countrymen' from the national history of our republic."

"North Korea is aiming to destroy the illusions of unification, inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation that remain in the minds of its people," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Seoul's Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies.

It's the reverse of Kim's approach in 2018, when he initiated diplomacy with South Korea's former liberal President Moon Jae-in, and later used Seoul as a bridge to engage with Trump, part of an ambitious effort to leverage his nukes for badly needed economic benefits.

After the failure in Hanoi, North Korea halted all cooperation with the South, and blew up an empty inter-Korean liaison office in 2020 to display its displeasure toward Seoul.

In recent months Kim has used Russia's war on Ukraine as a distraction to dial up weapons tests to a record pace. The alignment between North Korea and Russia has raised worries about arms cooperation, in which the North apparently provides Russia with artillery shells and missiles to help prolong its warfighting capabilities, possibly in exchange for economic and military assistance.

Both Moscow and Pyongyang have denied U.S. and South Korean accusations of North Korean arms transfers to Russia.

"Russia is in need of North Korean weapons, and that has naturally boosted the North's munitions industry and injected some vitality into its economy, and in return, North Korea (likely) receives energy, food and technology assistance," said Koh Yu-hwan, a scholar at Seoul's Dongguk University and former president of the Institute of National Unification.

Kim's long-term focus is to force Washington into accepting the idea of North Korea as a nuclear power, and he may be intent on driving up tensions in a U.S. election year with a view to eventual talks with whoever wins the November election, according to Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha University.

North Korea for years has mastered the art of manufacturing tensions with weapons demonstrations and threats before eventually offering negotiations aimed at extracting concessions.

Yoon's government also faces crucial parliamentary elections in April.

While some analysts argue that Kim may have made a strategic decision to wage war with the South, others downplay the possibility.

"The risks of an inter-Korean clash cannot be ruled out, but North Korea may choose to test South Korea's thresholds below the threshold of all-out conflict," Panda said. "Political moments in both South Korea and the United States also make this an appealing approach for Kim."

Pacific Northwest hunkers down for ice and freezing rain, while other US regions also battle cold

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Parts of the Pacific Northwest were under an ice storm warning through Wednesday morning, threatening to add to the damage brought by a powerful winter storm that hit the region over the weekend.

Area of southwest Washington and western Oregon — including that state's largest cities of Portland, Salem and Eugene — were expecting to see a quarter-inch to an inch (6 to 25 millimeters) of ice, while freezing rain was forecast in the Seattle area.

Schools were closed in many places, bus service curtailed and warming shelters opened while officials warned of continued treacherous road conditions and the chance of new power outages, even as crews struggled to restore electricity to thousands who have been blacked out for days.

The forecast came as much of the United States coped with bitter weather that in some places put electricity supplies at risk. Another day of record cold temperatures swept much of the Rockies, Great

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Plains and Midwest on Tuesday, with wind chills below minus 30 (minus 34.4 Celsius) extending into the mid-Mississippi Valley. On the East Coast, meanwhile, New York and Philadelphia ended a drought of sorts with enough snow falling for play in both cities.

The Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity in seven states, asked customers to voluntarily cut back, citing a high demand for power because of the cold. A similar plea came from the grid operator in Texas.

In Oregon, transportation officials closed 47 miles (76 kilometers) of Interstate 84, a major east-west highway that runs from Portland through the Columbia River Gorge due the threat of ice.

In the mountains, the National Weather Service warned of heavy snow in the Cascades with winds gusting to 50 mph (80 kph), mixed with freezing rain and ice that could make travel "very difficult to impossible." A storm warning was up through Thursday afternoon.

The Pacific Northwest is more known for rain and wasn't set to experience such Arctic temperatures but the heavily forested region is especially prone to the danger of falling trees and power lines, particularly during ice storms.

"We're lucky to be alive," said Justin Brooks, as he used a chainsaw Tuesday to cut up the trunks of two massive trees that narrowly missed his home in Lake Oswego, Oregon, when they fell on Saturday.

Elsewhere in Lake Oswego on Tuesday, arborist Ryan Cafferky scaled a towering 150-foot (46-meter) tree to start the laborious process of cutting it down. The city had deemed the 120-year-old tree a threat to the public because it was at risk of falling, he said.

As of Tuesday night, about 52,000 people in Oregon still remained without power, according to the website poweroutage.us. Forecasters warned residents to prepare for more power outages.

In the Portland metropolitan area, some two dozen commuter buses had suspended service or were being detoured to avoid dangerous roads since storms walloped the area a few days ago.

Weekend weather that included snow and strong winds was blamed for at least seven deaths, including that of a man killed when a tree struck his house in Lake Oswego and a woman who died when a tree crushed a recreational vehicle in Portland, trapping her and causing a fire, authorities said.

Five people in Oregon were believed to have died of hypothermia, authorities said.

Warmer air was expected to provide some relief from the frigid weather starting later Wednesday.

However, the icy morning forecast prompted Portland Public Schools, the largest district in the state, to cancel classes for a second day on Wednesday, citing concerns about possible power problems, burst pipes and unsafe school walkways and parking lots.

Beaverton School District also canceled Wednesday classes, noting that some buildings still lacked power and heat.

Courts, libraries and parks were also closed in Portland and other parts of Multnomah County.

County officials extended a weather state of emergency until noon Wednesday and decided to keep a record 12 overnight emergency weather shelters open for an additional night. The county said 1,181 people slept in the shelters Monday night, breaking the previous night's record of 1,136.

Officials issued an urgent call for volunteers, citing the high demand for shelter services in an area where thousands of people live outside at risk of cold exposure.

"The real limitation for us right now is staffing," said Dan Field, director of the joint county-city homelessness office. "We have to have enough people to keep the doors open of the emergency shelters."

How watermelon imagery, a symbol of solidarity with Palestinians, spread around the planet

By ANNA FURMAN Associated Press

Over the past three months, on banners and T-shirts and balloons and social media posts, one piece of imagery has emerged around the world in protests against the Israel-Hamas war: the watermelon.

The colors of sliced watermelon — with red pulp, green-white rind and black seeds — are the same as

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those on the Palestinian flag. From New York and Tel Aviv to Dubai and Belgrade, the fruit has become a symbol of solidarity, drawing together activists who don't speak the same language or belong to the same culture but share a common cause.

To avoid repressive censorship, Chinese dissidents once pioneered "algspeak," or creative shorthands that bypass content moderation, recently seen with Winnie the Pooh memes mocking Chinese President Xi Jinping. People around the world began using algspeak to subvert algorithmic biases on TikTok, Instagram and other platforms.

The internet is now teeming with pictorial signs — pixelated images, emoji and other typographical codes — that signal political dissent. The watermelon emoji is the latest example.

Here's how the watermelon went from being a symbol of protest in the West Bank and Gaza to a global sign of solidarity with Palestinians online.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After the 1967 Mideast war, the Israeli government cracked down on displays of the Palestinian flag in Gaza and the West Bank. In Ramallah in 1980, the military shut down a gallery run by three artists because they showed political art and works in the colors of the Palestinian flag — red, green, black and white.

The trio was later summoned by an Israeli officer. According to artist and exhibit organizer Sliman Mansour, an Israeli officer told him, "It is forbidden to organize an exhibition without permission from the military, and secondly, it is forbidden to paint in the colors of the Palestinian flag." The officer mentioned a watermelon as one example of art that would violate the army's rules, Mansour told The Associated Press last week.

In protest, people began to wave the fruit in public.

"There are stories of young men who defiantly walked the streets with slices of the fruit, risking arrest from Israeli soldiers," Jerusalem-born author Mahdi Sabbagh wrote. "When I see a watermelon, I think of the unbreakable spirit of our people."

From the mid-90s, when Israelis and Palestinians reached interim peace deals, until the current nationalist Israeli government took office a year ago, raising the Palestinian flag receded as a major issue. Three decades later, "it became a national symbol" again, Mansour said.

A year ago, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir banned Palestinian flags in public places. This effort was met with fervent opposition. In response, Zazim, an activist group of Arab and Jewish Israelis, plastered taxis in Tel Aviv with large watermelon stickers that read: "This is not a Palestinian flag."

"Our message to the government is clear," the organization said in a written statement. "We'll always find a way to bypass any absurd ban and we won't stop struggling for freedom of expression and democracy — whether this involves the Pride flag or the Palestinian flag."

For some, embracing the colors of the flag is about striving for freedom and equality rather than necessarily statehood.

"I've never cared for flags or nationalism," says Maysoun Sukarieh, an expert in Middle Eastern studies at King's College London. "But when it comes to Palestine, it's a flag of a colonized people who never saw independence. And because it has been banned, it becomes more of a symbol of resistance than it is of nationalism."

WATERMELON EMOJI

Watermelons have long been a staple of food in the region, with some dishes, like a popular salad in southern Gaza, originating with Bedouin Arab tribes.

Increasingly, young activists have adopted the watermelon emoji in calling for a cease-fire in Gaza. Emoji may confuse algorithms that advocates say tech companies deploy to suppress posts with keywords like "Gaza" and even just "Palestinian."

"With the watermelon (emoji), I think this is actually really the first time where I've seen it widely used as a stand-in. And that to me marks a notable uptick in censorship of Palestinian content," says Jillian York, the director for international freedom of expression at the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

The Berlin-based York has analyzed Meta's policies. While "shadow banning," or the limited visibility of certain posts, can be difficult to discern, advocacy and nonprofit organizations studying digital rights in the

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Middle East say they have tracked stark biases, especially on the Meta platforms Facebook and Instagram. Meta hasn't said much directly about this but cites a statement it released in October.

"Censorship is somewhat obvious" on Instagram, York said. In mid-October, people began to notice that if one's Instagram bio said "Palestinian" in English alongside the Palestinian flag emoji and "Praise be to god" in Arabic, the app translated the text to "Terrorist." Meta released a public apology.

Watermelons are not the only symbol to catch on with activists. Other signs of global Palestinian solidarity include keys, spoons, olives, doves, poppies and the keffiyeh scarf. In November, to connect with the peaceful message of Armistice Day, when many Brits traditionally wear red poppy pins, protesters this year passed out white poppy pins, to commemorate victims of all wars. On the holiday, scores of protesters wearing poppy pins marched across London calling for an end to the war in Gaza.

In the United States, Jewish Voice for Peace amplified watermelon imagery in calling for a cease-fire in Gaza last month. The group held signs in New York in the colors of the Palestinian flag and with triangular watermelons, leveraging the triangle symbol of ACT UP, the historic AIDS activist group.

Jason Rosenberg, a member of both organizations, said, "Our reinvented image shows that our fight for liberation and fight to end the epidemic is intrinsically connected to the Palestinian struggle."

SEED IMAGERY

Another reason the watermelon might resonate: It has seeds. There is a saying, often attributed to the Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos, that is popular among activists: "They wanted to bury us; they didn't know we were seeds."

"You might be able to smash a watermelon. You might be able to destroy a fruit, but the seed is a little harder to crush," says Shawn Escarciga, an artist who created the coalition's design. "It's really powerful that life can come out of something so small and something so resilient — and that it can be spread so, so easily."

The image of a watermelon punctuated by bold, triangular seeds was held up at the groups' protest at Manhattan's Lincoln Center, and has since proliferated online. That often happens — art emerges from protest movements and then enters the mainstream.

"Artists have always been at the forefront of revolution, resistance, politics, in varying degrees," Escarciga says. "We're doing this, using this iconic imagery, because AIDS isn't over — and war is obviously not over."

Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza has killed more than 24,000 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.

Throughout, activists around the world have continued to call for peace and a permanent cease-fire. Israel says ending the war now, before Hamas is crushed, would give a victory to the militants who attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7 and killed some 1,200 people and took about 250 hostage.

"We're seeing Palestinian flags being banned, even the emoji online being flagged — and, you know, the word 'Palestine' being censored online," Escarciga said. "But having this image that transcends language, that transcends culture, that transcends algorithms — can really reach people."

Modi's promised Ram temple is set to open and resonate with Hindus ahead of India's election

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and BISWAJEET BANERJEE Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Frenzied preparations were underway Wednesday in India's northern holy city of Ayodhya to mark the opening of a grand temple for Lord Ram, Hinduism's most revered deity.

The Ram Mandir's opening Monday would fulfill a decadeslong Hindu nationalist pledge that is expected to resonate with voters during the upcoming national election expected in April or May.

Several sprawling tent cities were being erected nearby to accommodate tens of thousands of devotees who are expected to attend. Dozens of private jets will fly India's powerful elite, including top industrialists, movie stars and celebrities, to Ayodhya to see the ceremony. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has planned live screenings across the country, as well as at some Indian embassies across the world.

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Modi will be in attendance, alongside several Hindu priests, for the consecration ceremony in which a statue of Ram is to be placed in the temple's inner sanctum.

Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has long campaigned for the temple to replace the 16th-century Babri Mosque that was demolished by Hindu mobs in 1992, sparking nationwide riots that killed more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims. The decadeslong dispute ended in 2019 when, in a controversial decision, India's Supreme Court granted the site to Hindus and gave a different plot of land to Muslims for a mosque.

The temple's opening at one of India's most contentious religious sites ahead of the national polls scheduled for the spring is expected to give major momentum to Modi as he looks to extend his rule for a record third-consecutive term by drawing on the religious sentiments of Hindus, who make up about 80% of India's population.

The temple, a three-story structure clad in pink sandstone, stretches across 2.9 hectares (7.2 acres) in a 28-hectare (70-acre) complex. It will have a 1.3-meter (4.25-foot) idol of Lord Ram, whom Hindus believe was born at the exact site where the razed mosque once stood.

The city, once dotted with tightly packed houses and rundown stalls, is already witnessing an elaborate makeover.

Nearly 7,500 people are expected at the opening ceremony, and by the end of the year a staggering 100,000 devotees per day are predicted to descend on Ayodhya, according to official estimates.

The narrow roads have given way to four-lane pilgrim route, including the newly developed 13-kilometer (8-mile) Ram Path leading to the temple. The city boasts a new airport and a sprawling railway station with a daily passenger capacity of more than 50,000 people. Major hotel chains are building new properties and locals are converting their homes into homestays. Flower sellers and street food vendors, anticipating a surge in demand, have transformed their shops.

Ananya Sharma, a local tour operator, said Ayodhya's transformation gained momentum after the 2020 groundbreaking ceremony of the temple, also attended by Modi.

"Subsequent development initiatives have elevated Ayodhya to a destination of both spiritual and economic significance," Sharma said.

The temple is being built at an estimated cost of \$217 million, but it is far from complete. The site is filled with roaring bulldozers and busy builders still working on the elaborate 46 doors — 42 of which will have a layer of gold totaling around 100 kilograms (220 pounds) — and numerous wall carvings that will form the final architecture of the temple.

At least two head priests from a Hindu sect have refused to go the opening ceremony, saying consecrating an unfinished temple goes against Hindu scriptures. Some top leaders from India's main opposition Congress party have turned down invitations to attend, with many opposition lawmakers calling the temple a political project.

Across India, however, the mood among Hindus has reached a feverish pitch.

Politicians are visiting local temples and mopping the floors, obeying a directive that came directly from Modi. Indian TV channels are running wall-to-wall coverage ahead of the event. And volunteers from Modi's party and other Hindu nationalist groups are going door to door, distributing religious flags and pamphlets.

On a recent afternoon, Om Prakash Bhatia went to house after house in a New Delhi neighborhood inviting people to take part in Hindu ceremonies at local temples. Joined by other volunteers, he passed saffron flags — a color associated with Hinduism — to the residents, who presented him with marigold garlands and smeared vermilion on his forehead.

"Lord Ram is the center of our faith. After slavery and struggle of 500 years, finally the name of Lord Ram is victorious," Bhatia said, referring to the Mughals who ruled India before the British colonized it.

He chanted "Jai Sri Ram," or "Hail Lord Ram," a slogan that has become a battle cry for Hindu nationalists, who claim the Muslim Mughal rulers destroyed Hindu culture. It has prompted Hindu nationalists to seek ownership of hundreds of historic mosques, sparking fears over the status of religious places for India's Muslims, a minority community that has come under attack in recent years by Hindu nationalist groups

who seek to turn officially secular India into an avowedly Hindu nation.

Many others shared Bhatia's feelings about the temple's opening.

"I am very happy," said Gaurav Shourey, a local resident. "While our ancestors saw the temples being destroyed, our generation takes pride in seeing the construction of them."

Ukraine needs money from the US and Europe to keep its economy running. Will the aid come?

By DAVID McHUGH and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's hard-won economic stability is under threat again as the government faces a large budget hole and its two biggest allies and sponsors — the United States and the European Union — have so far failed to decide on extending more aid.

Without pledges of support by the start of February — when EU leaders meet to decide on aid — and if no money arrives by March, that could risk the progress Ukraine has made against inflation. It has helped ordinary people keep paying rent, put food on the table and resist Russia's efforts to break their society's spirit.

The issue was on the minds of U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy when they met at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Tuesday.

"We're determined to sustain our support" for Ukraine, Blinken said, "we're working very closely with Congress in order to do that. I know our European colleagues are doing the same thing."

Here are key things to know about Ukraine's economy and why funding from allies is crucial:

HOW IS UKRAINE'S ECONOMY DOING?

The International Monetary Fund has said Ukraine's economy has showed "remarkable resilience." The first months of the war in 2022 saw the country lose a third of its economic output to occupation and destruction because Russia controls the heartland of Ukraine's heavy industry.

Inflation also soared to a whopping 26% because the central bank had to print money to cover yawning budget gaps.

However, things rebounded last year, with inflation falling to 5.7% and the economy growing 4.9% — more than some major economies like Germany. Ukraine's banking system has kept functioning, schools and health clinics are open, and pensions are being paid.

That's a lifeline for people like Nadiia Astreiko and her 93-year-old mother, who live on their combined pensions of \$170 a month.

"The war has changed everyone's life," said Astreiko, 63. "In terms of money, it's also hard because now I have to count every penny. ... It's very hard for us."

WHY DOES UKRAINE NEED FINANCIAL HELP?

Ukraine spends almost all the money it brings in through taxes to fund the war. That leaves a huge deficit because there are other bills to keep society functioning, like old-age pensions and salaries for teachers, doctors, nurses and state employees.

At the beginning of the war, Ukraine resorted to having the central bank print new money, a dangerous stopgap because it can fuel inflation and destroy the value of the country's hryvnia currency.

As donor contributions became more regular and predictable, Ukraine was able to halt the practice, and the budget passed by parliament in November does not rely on it.

One key accomplishment was adjusting old-age pensions, which can be about the equivalent of \$100 per month, to compensate for inflation, said Hlib Vyshlinsky, executive director of the Center for Economic Strategy, a policy institution in Kyiv.

Printing money again and the resulting inflation "would bring a lot of people into real poverty," he said.

To avoid that again, Ukraine needs "a decision by the start of February, and the money by the beginning of March," Vyshlinsky said.

WHAT'S THE IMPACT ON ORDINARY PEOPLE?

Ukraine is significantly poorer than the rest of Europe. Millions of people are like Astreiko and her mother,

with 80% of their money covering food and the rest going to buy medicines for Astreiko's mother.

The only way to afford things like clothes or shoes is to skimp on food and medicine.

The pair eat fish twice a week, and meat once or twice a week. For vegetables, mushrooms and fruit, Astreiko grows them herself or picks them in the forest and cans or freezes them for winter.

She insists there are bigger worries than the economy — soldiers are dying and frequent missile strikes hit Kyiv, where her grandchildren live.

"We will survive. If only the war would end," Astreiko said.

The economic rebound has helped sustain businesses like Dmytro Felixov's concert.ua website, one of the most widely used in Ukraine for purchasing tickets to plays, concerts and comedy shows. He's been through more than one crisis, including Russia's 2014 seizure of the Crimea Peninsula.

He says the war has led to a "certain cultural renaissance" and sparked heightened interest in Ukrainian culture. He envisions a return to prewar profit levels around 2025, saying, "Our business will survive."

Even the frequent missile attacks no longer significantly affect Felixov's business. During a record number of missile and drone attacks by Russia on Dec. 29, ticket sales dipped by 20%, only to rebound to normal levels the following day, he said.

If before people went to performances for relaxation, now they help people decompress, he said: "They go to concerts to heal."

WHERE DO THINGS STAND NOW?

Ukraine's budget this year calls for \$41 billion in donor money to close the deficit and avoid printing money. Ukraine is counting on \$8.5 billion from the U.S. and \$18 billion from the EU, but that's still uncertain.

EU leaders in December failed to agree on a four-year, \$52 billion package of assistance. Hungary blocked the agreement, which requires unanimity from all 27 EU members. The bloc is working, however, to find a way for the remaining 26 countries to come up with the money ahead of a leaders' summit on Feb. 1.

Less certain is the situation in Washington, where congressional Republicans have tied money for Ukraine to border security measures aimed at preventing illegal entry by migrants. There's no decision yet.

The White House in October asked Congress for \$11.8 billion to provide 12 months of budget support. The money would "ensure that Putin does not succeed in collapsing the Ukrainian economy," Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda D. Young wrote in an Oct. 20 letter to Congress.

Zelenskyy said Tuesday in Davos that he believed it was "a matter of weeks" until the EU and U.S. come through with more aid.

The IMF has played a key role in rallying support, approving a \$15.6 billion, four-year loan program for Ukraine. That money leveraged \$115 billion more from other donors because it imposes conditions to ensure good economic policy and requires Ukraine to improve its legal and tax systems and fight corruption.

There's a debate about seizing some \$300 billion in Russian assets held abroad that have been frozen by governments supporting Ukraine. That money could, in theory, relieve the logjams over taxpayer money in Washington and Brussels — but faces concerns about the legal precedent and economic impact of such a drastic step.

Some New Hampshire residents want better answers from the 2024 candidates on the opioid crisis

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Kristina Amyot's life has drastically improved since the last New Hampshire primary, but she isn't confident the current candidates will help others achieve the same success.

Amyot, 36, spent more than half her life struggling with addiction, mainly to heroin, before joining Hope on Haven Hill, a comprehensive program for pregnant women and mothers that includes residential treatment, transitional housing and a wide array of support services. Today, she's financially independent with a job, apartment and family she loves.

"I will never put myself through that again," she said in an interview last week. "I have self-worth now."

New Hampshire, a small state with an outsized role in presidential politics, has heard from candidates

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promising action on the opioid crisis for several presidential elections now. And some of those closest to the problem here say they're dissatisfied with how the Republicans competing in Tuesday's primary have focused on the border and law enforcement instead of treatment and recovery.

Amyot isn't sure whether she will vote in the presidential primary on Tuesday, in part because she's skeptical that anything will change.

"I feel like every four years it gets talked about, and then it gets lost. We don't really do much with it, and that's something that needs to change because this should be one of the top priorities," she said. "To think that these people don't care about us is really sad."

Starting in the late 1990s with the overprescribing of opioid painkillers, the nation's drug crisis evolved to encompass heroin and then fentanyl, which in recent years often has been cut into other street drugs, often without the users' knowledge. More than 80,000 people died of opioid overdoses in 2022, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In 2015, New Hampshire's drug overdose death rate was the second highest in the nation. And while the state has made progress since then, the numbers have gone back up. The final tally for 2022 — 486 deaths — was only four short of the all-time high for New Hampshire, a state of about 1.4 million people.

"In New Hampshire, we are losing more than a person a day," said Kerry Norton, who co-founded Hope on Haven Hill in Rochester in 2016. "It's so easy for everyone to forget that it's still killing generations of people, and it's still making communities and states and families and friends lose their loved ones."

Republicans who will be on the New Hampshire campaign trail this week have primarily focused on stopping the influx of illegal drugs at the southern U.S. border.

Former President Donald Trump, who once described New Hampshire as a "drug-infested den," has proposed using the military against foreign drug cartels, a view echoed by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley. DeSantis also has said drug smugglers should be shot "stone cold dead," while Haley has proposed cutting off trade with China "until they stop murdering Americans with fentanyl." China is accused by many experts of allowing the export of precursor chemicals used to make synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

But that's only part of the equation, argues Jay Ruais, a Republican who was sworn in this month as mayor of Manchester, New Hampshire's largest city.

"I think we also have to address it on the demand side as well. What are we doing for prevention for kids in schools? What are we doing for those who need more treatment? What are we doing for people who are outside of treatment? And on the recovery side, housing is a big component as well," said Ruais. "It requires a systemic response where we're dealing with everything from A to Z."

During his own campaign, Ruais described how completing a court-ordered rehabilitation program in 2010 after a second drunk driving arrest deepened his sense of empathy for those struggling with addiction.

"It's a deeply personal issue to me. It's why I ran for mayor to begin with," he said. "But I certainly think that any candidate coming to speak in New Hampshire should be talking about this issue."

After two big leaps at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, drug overdose deaths nationally rose 2% in 2022 to nearly 110,000. In New Hampshire, overdose deaths declined significantly before the pandemic and held steady in 2020, in part thanks to the creation of a hub-and-spoke model called "The Doorway," in which hospitals work with local providers to connect patients with services close to home. But the state's 486 deaths in 2022 marked an 11% increase from the previous year.

Norton said above all, she wants a president who recognizes that substance use disorder is a disease and will treat the crisis as a public health emergency. Punitive policies don't help people who end up in the program due to trauma, abuse and lack of connection, she said.

"I'm not an expert in any way on how controlling the border is going to help," she said. "What I do know is helping people have affordable health care, affordable housing, and basic rights and support is what will help here in New Hampshire."

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who led a bipartisan White House commission on opioid misuse during the Trump administration, echoed that approach when he unveiled his national drug policy plan at

Hope on Haven Hill's wellness center in December, a few weeks before dropping out of the race.

"We need an approach that remembers and reflects on the very basic humanity of every single one of those 100,000 victims, as well as the treasures each one of them could have brought to this country," he said.

That message resonated with Amyot, who was in the audience that day and plans to be there when Haley visits the center on Wednesday. Putting a woman in the White House might make a difference, she said.

"The next four years cannot continue the way it has been, because it's going to be so bad," she said. "It's so bad right now, and we're not doing much about it."

Trump sex abuse accuser E. Jean Carroll set to testify in defamation trial over his denials

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Less than a year after convincing a jury that former President Donald Trump sexually abused her decades ago, writer E. Jean Carroll is set to take the stand again to describe how his verbal attacks affected her after she came forward.

Carroll is due to testify Wednesday in the second federal civil trial over her claims against Trump, who denies them all. Because the first jury found that Trump sexually abused Carroll in the 1990s and then defamed her in 2022, the new trial concerns only how much more — if anything — he'll be ordered to pay her for some other remarks. He made them while he was president.

Trump, who is juggling court appearances with campaign stops as he leads the Republican field in this year's presidential race, sat in on jury selection Tuesday. Before opening statements began, he left for a New Hampshire rally.

He declared on social media Tuesday that the case was nothing but "fabricated lies and political she-nigans" that had garnered his accuser money and fame.

"I am the only one injured by this attempted EXTORTION," read a post on his Truth Social platform.

But Carroll, an advice columnist and magazine writer, has said that Trump harmed her deeply. First, she claims, he forced himself on her in a dressing room after a chance meeting at a luxury department store in 1996. Then he publicly impugned her honesty, her motives and even her sanity after she told the story publicly in a 2019 memoir.

"He called me a liar repeatedly, and it really has decimated my reputation. I am a journalist. The one thing I have to have is the trust of the readers," she testified in April at the first trial. "I am no longer believed."

Carroll has maintained she lost millions of readers and her longtime gig at Elle magazine, where her "Ask E. Jean" advice column ran for over a quarter-century, because of her allegations and Trump's reaction to them. Elle has said her contract wasn't renewed for unrelated reasons.

One of Carroll's lawyers, Shawn Crowley, said in her opening statement that the writer also received violent threats from Trump backers.

Trump attorney Alina Habba countered that Carroll was seeking to hold the former president accountable for "a few mean tweets from Twitter trolls." He was "merely defending himself" in his comments about his accuser, Habba said in her opening.

Trump asserts that nothing ever happened between him and Carroll, indeed that he has never even met her. There's a 1987 party photo of them and their then-spouses, but Trump says it was a momentary greeting that "doesn't count."

Trump did not attend the previous trial in the case last May, when a jury found he had sexually abused and defamed Carroll and awarded her \$5 million in damages. The jury said, however, that Carroll hadn't proven her claim that Trump raped her.

Carroll is now seeking \$10 million in compensatory damages and millions more in punitive damages.

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

Palestinians fight in hard-hit areas of Gaza while a deal emerges to deliver medicine to hostages

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinian militants battled Israeli forces in devastated northern Gaza and launched a barrage of rockets from farther south Tuesday in a show of force more than 100 days into Israel's massive air and ground campaign against the tiny coastal enclave.

The fighting in the north, which was the first target of Israel's offensive and where entire neighborhoods have been pulverized, showed how far Israel is from achieving its goals of dismantling Hamas and returning scores of hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war.

In other developments, France and Qatar, the Persian Gulf nation that helped mediate a previous cease-fire, said late Tuesday that they had brokered a deal between Israel and Hamas to deliver medicine to Israeli hostages in Gaza, as well as additional aid to Palestinians in the besieged territory.

France said it had been working since October on the deal, which will provide three months' worth of medication for 45 hostages with chronic illnesses, as well as other medicines and vitamins. The medicines are expected to enter Gaza from Egypt on Wednesday.

It was the first known agreement between the warring sides since a weeklong truce in November.

Meanwhile, Gaza's humanitarian crisis is worsening, with 85% of the territory's 2.3 million Palestinians having fled their homes and United Nations agencies warning of mass starvation and disease. The conflict threatens to widen after the United States and Israel traded strikes with Iranian-backed groups across the region.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' military and governing capabilities to ensure that the Oct. 7 attack is never repeated. Militants stormed into Israel from Gaza that day, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage. With strong diplomatic and military support from the United States, Israel has resisted international calls for a cease-fire.

Nearly half of the hostages were released during the truce, but more than 100 remain in captivity. Hamas has said it will not release any others until Israel ends the war.

STRIKES AND COUNTERSTRIKES ACROSS THE REGION

The longer the war goes on, the more it threatens to ignite other fronts across the region.

Iran fired missiles late Monday at what it said were Israeli "spy headquarters" in an upscale neighborhood near the sprawling U.S. Consulate in Erbil, the seat of Iraq's northern semi-autonomous Kurdish region. Iraq and the U.S. condemned the strikes, which killed several civilians, and Baghdad recalled its ambassador to Iran in protest.

Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and Syria have carried out dozens of attacks on bases housing U.S. forces, and a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad killed an Iranian-backed militia leader in early January.

Elsewhere, Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have resumed their attacks on container ships in the Red Sea following a wave of U.S.-led strikes last week. The U.S. military carried out another strike Tuesday. Separately, it said two Navy SEALs are missing after a raid last week on a ship carrying Iranian-made missile parts and weapons bound for Yemen.

Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group have exchanged fire along the border nearly every day since the war in Gaza began. The strikes and counterstrikes have grown more severe since an Israeli strike killed Hamas' deputy political leader in Beirut this month, raising fears of a repeat of the 2006 war.

MILITANTS KEEP FIGHTING IN GAZA'S HARD-HIT NORTH

In Gaza, the Israeli military said its forces located some 100 rocket installations and 60 ready-to-use rockets in the area of Beit Lahiya, a town on the territory's northern edge. Israeli forces killed dozens of militants during the operation, the military said, without providing evidence.

Mahmoud Abdel-Ghani, who lives in Beit Lahiya, said Israeli airstrikes hit several buildings on the eastern side of the town.

Hundreds of thousands of people fled northern Gaza, including Gaza City, following Israeli evacuation orders in October. Israel shut off water to the north in the opening days of the war, and hardly any aid

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has been allowed into the area, even as tens of thousands of people have remained there.

Residents reached by phone Tuesday described the heaviest fighting in weeks in Gaza City.

"The bombing never stopped," said Faris Abu Abbas, who lives in the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood. "The resistance is here and didn't leave."

Ayoub Saad, who lives near Shifa Hospital downtown, said he heard gunfire and shelling overnight and into Tuesday and saw dead and wounded people being brought to the hospital on carts.

After weeks of heavy fighting across northern Gaza, Israeli officials said at the start of the year that they were scaling back operations there. The focus shifted to the southern city of Khan Younis and built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

But there too, they have encountered heavy resistance. The military said at least 25 rockets were fired into Israel on Tuesday, damaging a store in one of the strongest bombardments in more than a week. Israel's Channel 12 television said the rockets were launched from the Bureij camp in central Gaza.

A SPIRALING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Gaza's Health Ministry said Tuesday that the bodies of 158 people killed in Israeli strikes have been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours, bringing the war's overall death toll to 24,285. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children.

Senior U.N. officials warned Monday that Gaza faces widespread famine and disease if more aid is not allowed in. While they did not directly blame Israel, they said aid delivery is hobbled by the opening of too few border crossings, a slow vetting process, and continuing fighting throughout the territory — all of which is largely under Israel's control.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said U.N. agencies and their partners "cannot effectively deliver humanitarian aid while Gaza is under such heavy, widespread and unrelenting bombardment." At least 152 U.N. staffers have been killed in Gaza since the start of the war.

Israeli officials say they have placed no limits on humanitarian aid and have called on the U.N. to provide more workers and trucks to accelerate delivery.

Israel completely sealed off Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack and only relented under U.S. pressure. The United States, as well as the United Nations, have continued to push Israel to alleviate the flow of aid.

Israel blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it fights in dense residential areas. Israel says its forces have killed roughly 8,000 militants, without providing evidence, and that 190 of its own soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive.

New Hampshire gets its turn after Trump's big win in Iowa puts new pressure on Haley and DeSantis

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, BILL BARROW and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

ATKINSON, N.H. (AP) — After Donald Trump's record victory in the Iowa caucuses, New Hampshire voters now get their turn to decide just how competitive the Republican nominating fight will be as the former president continues to dominate his party.

Trump was eager Tuesday to flaunt his 30-point victory in Iowa a night earlier, as he stepped up the pressure on former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to improve on their distant finishes in the opening votes of the 2024 presidential election. They have a one-week sprint ahead of next Tuesday's primary in New Hampshire, the longtime host of the nation's first Republican presidential primary.

"Our country is dying. ... And I stand before you today as the only candidate who is up to the task of saving America," Trump declared in Atkinson, where hundreds of his supporters cheered the former president's boasts about his standing in polls, attacks on President Joe Biden and sweeping promises to "make our country rich as hell again."

DeSantis, the Florida governor, and Haley, Trump's former United Nations Ambassador and onetime South Carolina governor, were campaigning Tuesday in New Hampshire, as well. DeSantis got about 21% of the vote in Iowa, 30 percentage points behind Trump's narrow majority and 2 points ahead of Haley's

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third-place finish.

New Hampshire's electorate is less religiously conservative and less rural than in Iowa, factors that helped Trump in the caucuses. If DeSantis and Haley cannot capitalize on those differences, they could watch Trump sustain momentum that would render the rest of the Republican primary calendar little more than a formality.

"You must go out and vote," Trump said. "We have to show margins like never before."

Haley, who has sought to build a wide coalition that includes independents, has put great emphasis on New Hampshire, hoping it becomes a springboard to her home-state South Carolina primary next month. DeSantis, who has run more as a Trumpian conservative, put more stock in Iowa, so now must regroup quickly for New Hampshire or risk squandering his second-place finish.

Severe winter weather already is altering campaign schedules and making their tasks harder. DeSantis' campaign had to cancel an afternoon event because of difficult travel conditions.

ABC News, meanwhile, canceled a Thursday debate after it became clear only DeSantis seemed sure to participate. Haley, angling to frame the primary as a battle between Trump and herself, had suggested earlier Tuesday that she would debate only if Trump joined her. Trump has skipped every GOP primary debate so far and said he would take the stage only against a Republican rival who was commensurate with him in the polls.

"We are beating everybody," Trump bragged in Atkinson, where he also showed off an endorsement from Vivek Ramaswamy, the biotech entrepreneur who suspended his campaign after finishing with single-digit support in Iowa. Ramaswamy joined Trump onstage and pledged to help him win in November.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who defeated Trump in the Iowa caucuses in 2016, endorsed the former president Tuesday evening, as well. "At this point, I believe this race is over so I'm proud to endorse Donald Trump," Cruz said on Fox News.

Former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, a harsh Trump critic, also suspended his bid Tuesday, leaving a three-candidate field. Hutchinson pointedly did not endorse Trump.

Trump began his day in New York, appearing at a civil defamation trial stemming from a columnist's claims he sexually attacked her, but used his legal troubles, including four pending criminal cases against him, as part of his pitch, dismissing "bullsh— indictments" as a Biden administration effort to derail his political comeback.

Certainly, Trump's troubles have given some Republicans pause and turned off plenty of independents. According to an APVoteCast survey of more than 1,500 Iowa caucusgoers, about a quarter of caucus participants believe Trump has done something illegal when it comes to at least one of the legal cases he is facing: his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, his alleged attempts to interfere in the vote count in the 2020 presidential election or the discovery of classified documents at his Florida home that were supposed to be in government custody.

Kristen Mansharamani, an independent voter from Lincoln, New Hampshire, said she has never considered backing Trump in 2024 and would back Haley.

"I told my 12-year-old son that I am looking for the person who I think is going to get rid of some of the standstill and the polarization in politics and I think she can do that better than anyone else out there right now," the 48-year-old said.

Yet Haley and DeSantis must contend with hardcore Republicans like Nancy Otovic, a 75-year-old retiree who stood in frigid conditions for hours Tuesday to hear Trump.

"Our world is in a spiral, and he's going to help us," she said, her parka still wet even after she made it indoors. Enduring subfreezing weather, she said, was a necessary sacrifice to see the former president. "Happy to be here," she declared.

The question is whether the electorate next Tuesday has enough voters like Mansharamani. Voters who are registered without a party affiliation make up about 40% of the electorate in New Hampshire and are eligible to cast a Republican primary ballot. New voters can also register at the polls Tuesday.

Haley leaned directly into New Hampshire's reputation for independence, launching a statewide television

ad Tuesday morning that hit both Trump and Biden ahead of her arrival in the state.

"The two most disliked politicians in America," the ad calls them, painting the 81-year-old president and 77-year-old former president together as being "consumed by chaos, negativity and grievance of the past."

DeSantis, meanwhile, opted to start in Haley's home state, where he attacked her rather than Trump. In Greenville, South Carolina, DeSantis dismissed Haley's attempts to frame the campaign as a battle between her and Trump. DeSantis panned Haley's performance as governor and said his Florida record earned more support from Iowa conservatives.

As for Trump, DeSantis acknowledged the former president's advantage, calling him "basically an incumbent," while at the same time trying to minimize his victory margin in Iowa.

"Half the people wanted someone else," DeSantis said. Trump, in fact, stood at 51% with 99% of the vote counted, well outpacing Haley's and DeSantis' combined vote totals.

Haley's and DeSantis' tacks coming out of Iowa nonetheless reflect the support they drew in the caucuses.

According to AP VoteCast data that surveyed more than 1,500 caucus participants, Haley was the top candidate of the most anti-Trump Republicans in Iowa, including those who believe the former president did something illegal in one of the pending criminal cases against him. She was also the top choice for those who voted for Biden in the 2020 election.

In total, less than half of her supporters in Iowa said they voted for Trump in 2020, with the remainder supporting Biden, saying they supported a third-party candidate or they stayed home.

DeSantis, meanwhile, performed best among the caucusgoers who were dissatisfied with Trump but said they would ultimately vote for him in the general election. Most Iowa caucusgoers for either Haley or DeSantis say they would be dissatisfied with Trump as their party's nominee. But unlike DeSantis' backers, two-thirds of Haley's caucusgoers say they would not ultimately vote for Trump in the general election.

If there is an opening for DeSantis and Haley, it could be forecast in Trump's weakness in the Iowa suburbs, where he won only a third of the votes. Iowa's suburbs are more educated and less evangelical than the state's rural and small-town areas Trump dominated. New Hampshire's Republican electorate is more reflective of Iowa's suburban population.

The 3 officers cleared in Manuel Ellis' death will each receive \$500,000 to leave Tacoma police

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Three Washington state police officers who were cleared of criminal charges in the 2020 death of Manuel Ellis — a Black man who was shocked, beaten and restrained facedown on a sidewalk as he pleaded for breath — will each receive \$500,000 to leave the Tacoma Police Department, according to documents released Tuesday.

"This says to the public that these are excellent officers, and it's a shame Tacoma is losing them," said Anne Bremner, an attorney for one of the officers, Timothy Rankine.

A jury acquitted Rankine, 34, and co-defendants Matthew Collins, 40, and Christopher Burbank, 38, in December following a trial that lasted more than two months. Rankine was charged with manslaughter, while Collins and Burbank were charged with manslaughter and second-degree murder.

The city released copies of the "voluntary separation" agreements with the officers Tuesday as police Chief Avery Moore announced findings that none violated the use-of-force policy in effect on March 3, 2020. Collins was found to have violated a policy concerning courtesy.

The use-of-force policy has since been updated. The old one "failed to serve the best interests of the police department or the community," Moore said.

"These agreements support a responsible, constructive path forward for our community and the Tacoma Police Department," City Manager Elizabeth Pauli said in a written statement.

In an email, Matthew Ericksen, an attorney for Ellis' family, called it "perverse" and said the officers were "effectively being rewarded" for his death. He noted that the officers had already been paid about \$1.5 million total while being on leave for nearly four years.

"The worst TPD officers are also the highest paid TPD officers!" Ericksen wrote. "Everyone in the community should be upset by this."

The U.S. attorney's office in Seattle said last week that it is reviewing the case; the Justice Department can bring prosecutions for federal civil rights violations, but the scope of the review was not disclosed.

Ellis, 33, was walking home with doughnuts from a 7-Eleven in Tacoma, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of Seattle, when he passed a patrol car stopped at a red light, with Collins and Burbank inside.

The officers claimed they saw Ellis try to open the door of a passing car at the intersection and he became aggressive when they tried to question him about it. Collins testified that Ellis demonstrated "superhuman strength" by lifting Collins off the ground and throwing him through the air.

But three witnesses testified they saw no such thing. After what appeared to be a brief conversation between Ellis and the officers, who are both white, Burbank, in the passenger seat, threw open his door, knocking Ellis down, they said.

The witnesses — one of whom yelled for the officers to stop attacking Ellis — and a doorbell surveillance camera captured video of parts of the encounter. The video showed Ellis with his hands up in a surrender position as Burbank shot a Taser at his chest and Collins wrapped an arm around his neck from behind.

Rankine was among the many other officers who responded. Ellis was already handcuffed facedown when he arrived. Rankine knelt on his upper back.

Video showed Ellis addressing the officers as "sir" while telling them he couldn't breathe. One officer is heard responding, "Shut the (expletive) up, man."

Attorneys for the officers argued that Ellis died from a lethal amount of methamphetamine that was in his system as well as a heart condition, not from the officers' actions.

Ellis' death became a touchstone for racial justice demonstrators in the Pacific Northwest. But it also coincided with the first U.S. outbreak of COVID-19 at a nursing home in nearby Kirkland and did not garner the attention that the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis did nearly three months later.

The trial was the first under a 5-year-old state law designed to make it easier to prosecute police accused of wrongfully using deadly force.

The Ellis family settled a federal wrongful death lawsuit against Pierce County, which is home to Tacoma, for \$4 million last year.

Oregon braces for freezing rain while cold temperatures elsewhere strain electric grids

By ED WHITE Associated Press

Parts of Oregon braced for freezing rain Tuesday after a weekend of extreme winds knocked down trees and cut power to thousands, while communities across the U.S. also struggled with perilously cold weather that closed schools and put electricity supplies at risk.

Another day of record cold temperatures swept much of the Rockies, Great Plains and Midwest, with wind chills below minus 30 (minus 34.4 Celsius) extending into the mid-Mississippi Valley. On the East Coast, meanwhile, New York City and Philadelphia ended a drought of sorts with enough snow falling for play in both cities.

More than 80,000 U.S. homes and businesses were without power by Tuesday afternoon, most of them in Oregon. Portland General Electric warned that freezing rain could delay restoration efforts. Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity in seven states, asked customers to voluntarily cut back, citing a high demand for power because of the cold. A similar plea came from the grid operator in Texas.

More than 200 residents were evacuated after a broken pipe flooded the first three floors of an apartment building in downtown St. Louis, KSDK-TV reported. An assistant manager at the Mark Twain Building complex said all 213 residents of the building, many of them elderly, were evacuated onto five warming buses.

Schools were closed major cities, including in Portland, Oregon, Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Dallas, Houston, Memphis, Tennessee, across New England and in the Washington, D.C., region. Federal offices in the

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nation's capital were closed as roughly 2 inches (5 centimeters) of snow hit the area.

The National Weather Service posted an ice storm warning in parts of Oregon, including Portland, until Wednesday when temperatures were expected to rise to 43 degrees (6.1 C).

"Power outages and tree damage are likely due to the ice. Travel could be difficult," the weather service said.

Rough weather was a challenge across the U.S. More than 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow covered southeast Alaska, sinking six boats in Juneau and causing avalanches. Three of the six boats were saved.

More than 9 inches (23 centimeters) of snow hit Nashville, Tennessee, since Sunday — nearly twice the annual average. The Tennessee Department of Health on Tuesday confirmed six weather-related fatalities.

Maeve McConville said she and her sister were stuck inside an American Airlines plane at the Nashville airport for seven hours Monday after arriving from Washington.

"The pilot came on and said, 'No gates available, and ground operations just told us it's going to be at least an hour,'" McConville told The Associated Press.

But an hour turned into many hours. McConville said portable stairs were considered but they were not used because of a broken part. American said "challenging conditions" made gate arrivals very difficult. Passengers watched hours of TV and movies as they waited to be taken to a gate.

"I've now seen all of season four of 'Friday Night Lights,'" McConville said.

In New Jersey, authorities said two people died when their SUV collided with a snowplow on the slick Garden State Parkway in Monmouth County.

A man in Chicago fought off the Arctic-like cold Tuesday with a fire made from cardboard, splintered pallets and other trash under Interstate 90/94. Others without a secure home sought shelter in more than 20 tents erected nearby.

Forecasters in Buffalo, New York, warned that the region should brace for a foot (30 centimeters) or more of snow through Thursday, on top of a mighty storm that delayed an NFL playoff game for a day.

Armed with only a shovel, Belinda Bonacquisti praised a 14-year-old boy with a snowblower who helped her clear 3 feet (91 centimeters) from her suburban Buffalo driveway Monday.

"I didn't know where he came from or what direction," she told WKBW-TV. "He just really bailed me out."

New York City's Central Park recorded more than an inch (2.5 centimeters) of snow since midnight, the first time since 2022 that it had at least an inch the same day. The weather service said Philadelphia snapped a similar 715-day streak, too.

Despite the threats posed by cold weather, there still was room for frivolity.

In Philadelphia, more than 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) of snow finally fell after a long dry spell. Isaiah Stout said his kids "lost their minds" and wanted to play outside, so they rushed to Target to buy the right clothes.

"It was really crazy in there," Stout said. "Got their snowsuits and their snow boots and now they're excited."

Dan O'Connor, known as the "Great Lake Jumper," did his usual morning flip into Lake Michigan in Chicago where the air temperature was at minus 5 degrees (minus 15 C), according to his social media feed.

In Washington, a friendly snowball fight broke out among a few dozen people on the National Mall. The group even has a name: the Washington DC Snowball Fight Association.

"It's a way just to let off steam," Michael Lipin said, brushing snow off his cap, "bring some childhood memories back."

Suspect in Long Island's Gilgo Beach serial killings is charged with the death of a fourth woman

By PHILIP MARCELO and DAVID COLLINS Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — A New York architect charged in a string of slayings known as the Gilgo Beach killings was accused Tuesday in the death of a fourth woman, a Connecticut mother of two who vanished in 2007 and whose remains were found more than three years later along a coastal highway on Long Island.

Rex Heuermann was formally charged in the killing of Maureen Brainard-Barnes, months after having been

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labeled the prime suspect in her death when he was arrested in July in the deaths of three other women.

Wearing a dark suit, he remained silent in court as his lawyer entered a not guilty plea on his behalf. He will continue to be held without bail until his next court date on Feb. 6.

Police say the breakthrough came from DNA extracted from hair at the scene. A hair found with Brainard-Barnes' remains is genetically similar to a DNA sample taken from Heuermann's ex-wife. During the period when Brainard-Barnes disappeared in 2007, Heuermann's ex-wife and his daughter were staying out of town at a hotel in Atlantic City, the indictment and her attorney confirmed.

Prosecutors also said in Tuesday's court filing that Heuermann feared getting caught in the months leading up to his arrest.

He obtained data wiping software in an attempt to destroy evidence on his laptops, phones and other electronic devices, they said. Investigators seized hundreds of devices during their lengthy search of Heuermann's home that prosecutors say contained troves of bondage and torture pornography.

Heuermann also scoured the internet for phrases that suggested he was afraid of getting caught, including "How does cell site analysis work," "Gilgo news," "How cell phone tracking is increasingly being used to solve crimes," and phrases with the term "Long Island Serial Killer."

Heuermann's attorney, Michael Brown, said afterward that his client has maintained his innocence from "day one" and looked forward to defending himself in court.

He also called into question some of the evidence touted by prosecutors Tuesday, suggesting new DNA analysis connecting Heuermann to the killing was "problematic" since it was being introduced some 13 years after Brainard-Barnes' body was discovered.

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond Tierney said in response that more sophisticated DNA testing had allowed investigators to more conclusively determine the hairs found with Brainard-Barnes belonged to Heuermann's ex-wife and daughter.

He also said the indictment marks the end of the investigation into the so-called "Gilgo four" victims and provides "some small measure of closure" for their families.

Prosecutors now turn their attention to prosecuting those cases and investigating other bodies found nearby, Tierney added.

Brainard-Barnes left her hometown of Norwich, Connecticut, on July 9, 2007, and headed to Manhattan for sex work, with plans to return the following day, according to friends who became concerned when she uncharacteristically stopped using her phone.

But the 25-year-old never came back.

Nicolette Brainard-Barnes said she was only 7 years old when her mother, who was once employed as a dealer at the Foxwoods Resort Casino, vanished.

"I remember she read to me every night," the now 24-year-old said, surrounded by other family members following Tuesday's court hearing. "Now I can no longer remember the sound of her voice."

Maureen Brainard-Barnes' sister, Melissa Cann, remembered her as a "loving mother and giving friend" who would "never get the chance to show the world how talented she was."

"Maureen was more than how she has been portrayed," the 39-year-old said through tears.

Heuermann was arrested July 14 and charged with killing Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman and Amber Lynn Costello, three women who authorities say also were sex workers. Heuermann's lawyer said he has denied committing the crimes. He previously pleaded not guilty to killing Barthelemy, Waterman and Costello.

Brainard-Barnes was the first of the four women to disappear. Their remains were found along the same quarter-mile (400-meter) stretch of parkway in the Gilgo Beach area of Jones Beach Island in 2010. Additional searching turned up the remains of six more adults and a toddler who was the child of one of the victims.

Investigators also found electronic evidence that Heuermann had accessed Costello's prostitution advertisement Sept. 1, 2010, according to court documents.

Police concluded that an 11th person found dead in a tidal marsh on the same barrier island accidentally drowned.

Investigators have said Heuermann, who lived in Massapequa Park across the bay from where the bodies were found, was probably not responsible for all the deaths. Some of the victims disappeared in the mid 1990s.

Investigators zeroed in on Heuermann when a new task force ran an old tip about a Chevy Avalanche pickup through a vehicle records database. A hit came back identifying one of those make and models belonging to Heuermann, who lived in a neighborhood police had been focusing on because of cellphone location data and call records, authorities said.

With the tip breathing new life into the investigation, authorities charted the calls and travels of multiple cellphones, picked apart email aliases, delved into search histories and collected discarded bottles — and even a pizza crust — for advanced DNA testing, according to court papers. Detectives said Heuermann's DNA on the pizza crust matched a hair found on a restraint used in the killings.

Last summer, Heuermann's ex-wife, stepson and daughter agreed to give DNA samples to prosecutors, according to court documents. Investigators compared them against DNA collected from bottles sipped by Heuermann and tossed into trashcans near his home.

Police said other evidence linked Heuermann to the victims, including burner cellphones used to arrange meetings with the slain women.

After the arrest, investigators spent nearly two weeks combing through Heuermann's home, including digging up the yard, dismantling a porch and a greenhouse and removing many contents of the house for testing.

Senators reject Bernie Sanders' effort to curb Israel-Hamas war but the vote signals rising unease

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a notable test Tuesday, Sen. Bernie Sanders forced colleagues to decide whether to investigate human rights abuses in the Israel-Hamas war, a step toward potentially limiting U.S. military aid to Israel as its devastating attacks on Gaza grind past 100 days.

Senators overwhelmingly rejected the effort, a first of its kind tapping into a decades-old law that would require the U.S. State Department to, within 30 days, produce a report on whether the Israeli war effort in Gaza is violating human rights and international accords. If the administration failed to do so, U.S. military aid to Israel, long assured without question, could be quickly halted.

But the roll call vote begins to reveal the depth of unease among U.S. lawmakers over Israel's prosecution of the war against Hamas. With no apparent end to the bombardment, Israel's attacks against Palestinians, an attempt to root out Hamas leaders, are viewed by some as disproportional to the initial terrorist attack on Israel.

In all, 11 senators joined Sanders in the procedural vote, mostly Democrats from across the party's spectrum, while 72 opposed.

"To my mind, Israel has the absolute right to defend itself from Hamas' barbaric terrorist attack on October 7, no question about that," Sanders told AP during an interview Monday ahead of the vote.

"But what Israel does not have a right to do — using military assistance from the United States — does not have the right to go to war against the entire Palestinian people," said Sanders, the independent from Vermont. "And in my view, that's what has been happening."

The White House has rejected the approach from Sanders as "unworkable" as President Joe Biden's administration seeks a transition from Israel and works to ensure support at home and abroad against a stirring backlash to the scenes of destruction from Gaza.

Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, moved to table the measure, arguing it is "counterproductive" and would make it more difficult for the U.S. to prevent escalation of the expanding conflict.

"We do not believe that this resolution is the right vehicle to address these issues. And we don't think now is the right time. It's unworkable, quite frankly," said a statement from the White House National

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Security Council's John Kirby.

"The Israelis have indicated they are preparing to transition their operations to a much lower intensity. And we believe that transition will be helpful both in terms of reducing civilian casualties, as well as increasing humanitarian assistance," Kirby said.

With repeated overtures to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, including shuttle diplomacy last week by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the Biden administration is pushing Israel to shift the intensity of the battle. Some 24,000 people in Gaza, the majority of them women and children, have been killed and the bombings have destroyed most of the housing units, displacing most of its 2.3 million people in a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Senate action comes as Biden's request for \$106 billion supplemental national security aid for Israel as well as Ukraine and other military needs is at a standstill. Republicans in Congress are insisting on attaching vast policy changes to stop the flow of immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Of that supplemental aid package, more than \$14 billion would go to Israel, including \$10 billion in U.S. military assistance, as it retaliates against Hamas for the Oct. 7 surprise attack, among the most deadly assaults ever. Some 1,200 people were killed and 250 taken hostage, many still being held.

Several key Democratic senators have announced their unease with Israel's war in Gaza, insisting the Biden administration must do more to push the Netanyahu government to reduce civilian casualties and improve living conditions for Palestinians in Gaza.

Going further, Sanders had already announced his refusal to support more military aid to Israel in the package because of the war.

"The time is now for the U.S. Senate to act," Sanders said ahead of the vote, which he vowed was "just the beginning" of his efforts to limit the war's devastation.

Heading toward the vote, Sanders said, what he's trying to do is unprecedented in procedure, and essentially in practice.

"The Congress has always been supportive of Israel in general, and this begins to question the nature of the military campaign," Sanders said.

The resolution is drawn from the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which was amended after the Nixon era, enabling Congress to provide oversight of U.S. military assistance abroad. It requires that any arms or military aid must be used in accordance with international human rights accords.

While senators have voted to try to halt foreign arms sales to other countries in the past, this is an untested mechanism.

The question before the Senate will be whether to ask the State Department for a report on whether human rights violations using U.S. equipment may have occurred during Israel's current campaign against Gaza, according to Sanders' office.

If the resolution were to be approved, it would force the State Department to produce a report of its findings within 30 days or risk the aid being cut off.

While it's not at all certain that U.S. aid to Israel would actually be halted, since Congress could take steps to ensure no interruption, it is enough of a threat that many senators, even the Democrats who have raised concerns about the bombardment of Gaza and the humanitarian crisis, will be unwilling to support the measure.

Republican senators are likely to fully reject Sanders' proposal. Senate Republicans have been almost unanimous in their support for Israel, even as they are blocking Biden's broader national security package because of divisions within the GOP over helping Ukraine as it battles Russia's invasion.

Talks on attaching the U.S.-Mexico border security provisions to the national security aid package are lumbering along, but no quick breakthrough is expected as Republicans push for tougher restrictions on migrants than Democrats are willing to give, particularly for immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S.

Associated Press writer Ellen Knickmeyer contributed to this report.

The JetBlue-Spirit Airlines merger was blocked by a federal judge.

Here's what you need to know

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The prospect of a JetBlue-Spirit Airlines merger took a major hit in court on Tuesday when a federal judge sided with the Biden administration and blocked the \$3.8 billion deal.

The judge ruled that JetBlue's purchase of Spirit, the nation's largest low-cost airline, would harm competition — and increase prices for air travelers as a result. Meanwhile, JetBlue has maintained that it needs such a deal to compete with industry rivals.

Here's a rundown of what you need to know.

WHY WAS THE JETBLUE-SPIRIT MERGER BLOCKED?

It boils down to competition concerns. The Justice Department and several state attorneys general sued to block the merger last year — arguing that it would drive up fares by eliminating low-cost Spirit. U.S. District Judge William Young agreed.

Young, who was nominated for the federal bench by President Ronald Reagan, ruled that the merger would harm competition and violate antitrust law.

"There are no 'bad guys' in this case," the Boston-based judge wrote. "The two corporations are — as they are expected to — seeking to maximize shareholder value. The Department of Justice is — as the law requires — speaking for consumers who otherwise would have no voice."

WHAT'S NEXT?

With no merger in sight, the status quo for both JetBlue and Spirit remains — meaning air travelers shouldn't expect major changes anytime soon.

But JetBlue and Spirit said they disagreed with the ruling and are considering whether to appeal. JetBlue, the nation's sixth-largest airline by revenue, argued that it needs the deal to better compete with larger rivals.

The ruling could also open the door for Frontier Airlines to make another attempt to buy Florida-based Spirit. The two budget airlines announced a cash-and-stock deal back in 2022, but JetBlue made an all-cash offer and won the bidding war.

WHAT'S THE REGULATORY OUTLOOK FOR MERGERS LIKE THESE?

Tuesday's ruling was a victory for the Biden administration, which has moved aggressively to block mergers across several industries — including health care, video gaming and publishing — arguing that such consolidation hurts consumers.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said Tuesday that the Justice Department will "continue to vigorously enforce the nation's antitrust laws to protect American consumers."

The administration's court victory could make it more likely that it will challenge Alaska Airlines' proposal to buy Hawaiian Airlines.

In the past, the Justice Department has faced criticism for greenlighting a wave of mergers. Within air travel, previous administrations allowed a series of deals that consolidated the industry to the point where four carriers — American, Delta, United and Southwest — control about 80% of the domestic market.

HOW DID THE STOCKS OF JETBLUE AND SPIRIT REACT?

Spirit shares plunged 47% Tuesday. JetBlue's stock gained 5%.

Trump glowers and gestures in court, then leaves to campaign as sex abuse defamation trial opens

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump shook his head in disgust Tuesday as the judge in his New York defamation trial told would-be jurors that an earlier jury had already decided the former president sexually abused columnist E. Jean Carroll in the 1990s.

Trump left court before opening statements, jetting to a New Hampshire political rally as Carroll's lawyer

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accused the Republican presidential front-runner of using “the world’s biggest microphone” to destroy her reputation and turn his supporters against her. Trump’s lawyer contended that Carroll has never been more famous and that she is blaming him for “a few mean tweets from Twitter trolls.”

Fresh from a political win Monday in the Iowa caucuses, Trump detoured to a Manhattan courtroom for the start of what amounts to the penalty phase of Carroll’s civil lawsuit alleging he attacked her at a department store in 1996. Trump departed Tuesday after the nine-member jury was selected.

He glared and scowled at times as the jury was being picked, slyly raising his hand at one point when Judge Lewis A. Kaplan asked if anyone felt Trump had been treated unfairly by the court system. The gesture drew laughs from some people in the courtroom and a retort from the judge, who said, “We know where you stand.”

Trump, the former president, and Carroll, the former longtime Elle Magazine columnist, sat at separate tables about a dozen feet (3.7 meters) apart, flanked by their respective legal teams. They didn’t appear to speak or make eye contact.

After Trump left, Carroll’s lawyer Shawn Crowley implored jurors to make him pay — potentially millions of dollars — for comments he made while president in response to her claims in a 2019 memoir that he sexually abused her years earlier at Manhattan’s Bergdorf Goodman store.

Trump “used the world’s biggest microphone to attack Ms. Carroll,” Crowley said in her opening statement. His comments, including claims that Carroll was lying to sell books, humiliated the writer and tore “her reputation to shreds,” the lawyer said.

“He said this from the White House, a place where presidents have signed laws, declared wars and decided the fate of the nation,” Crowley told jurors.

While the trial concerns what Trump must pay for his comments in the immediate aftermath of Carroll’s revelations, Crowley noted that his rhetoric about the writer hasn’t stopped. Trump maintains he never abused Carroll and says her allegations are a partisan smear.

From court Tuesday, Trump fired off a series of social media posts about the case. He wrote on his Truth Social platform that Carroll’s rape allegation was an “attempted EXTORTION” involving “fabricated lies and political shenanigans,” and he accused the judge of having “absolute hatred” for him.

Crowley told jurors their job was to answer the question about Trump: “How much money will it take to make him to stop?”

However, Trump attorney Alina Habba said he was “merely defending himself” and said evidence will show that Carroll’s career has prospered since accusing him. Carroll has been “thrust back into the limelight like she always has wanted,” Habba said in her opening argument.

Responding to Crowley’s assertion that Trump backers have sent Carroll violent threats, Habba said she sympathized with victims of sexual abuse but any backlash Carroll suffered was “simply a byproduct of the digital age.”

“Regardless of a few mean tweets, Ms. Carroll is now more famous than she has ever been in her life, and loved and respected by many, which was her goal,” Habba told jurors.

Testimony will begin Wednesday, when Carroll is expected to take the witness stand.

Trump did not attend the previous trial in the case last May, when a jury found he had sexually abused and defamed Carroll and awarded her \$5 million in damages. The jury said Carroll hadn’t proven that Trump raped her. In light of that verdict, Kaplan said the trial beginning Tuesday would focus only on how much money, if any, Trump must pay Carroll for comments he made about her while president in 2019.

As the day began, Kaplan rejected the defense’s request to suspend the trial on Thursday so Trump could attend his mother-in-law’s funeral — part of a combative exchange in which Trump’s lawyers accused the judge of thwarting their defense with pretrial evidence rulings favorable to Carroll.

“I am not stopping him from being there,” the judge said, referring to the funeral.

Habba responded, “No, you’re stopping him from being here.”

Habba told the judge that Trump plans to testify. Kaplan said the only accommodation he would make is that Trump can testify on Monday, even if the trial is otherwise finished by Thursday. The judge previ-

ously rejected Trump's request to delay the trial a week.

Trump watched attentively as several dozen prospective jurors filed into the courtroom and spent more than an hour responding to questions posed by the judge covering everything from their prior involvement with the judicial system to their political beliefs.

He twisted around in his chair and nodded at two prospective jurors — a man and woman — who stood when asked if they agreed with his false belief that the 2020 election was rigged, and again when three people in the pool indicated they felt the former president was being treated unfairly by the court system.

The process offered a window into the political beliefs of a microcosm of New Yorkers, drawn from a pool that includes Manhattan and northern suburban counties. One woman said she had done publicity for his daughter's company. Another said her father provided moving services for some of Trump's buildings. Neither made the cut.

Jurors selected for the trial will remain anonymous, even to the parties, lawyers and judicial staff, and will be driven to and from the courthouse from an undisclosed location for their safety, Kaplan said.

Trump has increasingly made his courtroom travails — including four criminal cases — part of his run to retake the White House, positioning himself as a victim of partisan lawyers, judges and prosecutors and capitalizing on news coverage that accompanies his court visits. Last week, he attended closing arguments in the New York attorney general's fraud lawsuit against him — and ended up giving a six-minute diatribe after his lawyers spoke.

"I guess you'd consider it part of the campaign," Trump told reporters last week.

Carroll plans to testify about damage to her career and reputation she says resulted from Trump's public statements. She seeks \$10 million in compensatory damages and millions more in punitive damages.

If Trump testifies, he will be under strict limits on what he can say. Because of the prior verdict, Kaplan has said, Trump cannot get on the witness stand and argue that he didn't sexually abuse or defame Carroll.

Trump is appealing and hasn't paid any of that previous award, though he placed \$5.55 million in escrow to cover the verdict and other costs in the event he loses his appeal. One issue that wasn't decided in the first trial was how much Trump owed for comments he made about Carroll while president. That will be the new jury's only job.

Shooter who killed 5 people at Colorado LGBTQ+ club intends to plead guilty to federal hate crimes

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The shooter who killed five people and endangered the lives of over 40 others at an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado Springs plans to plead guilty to new federal charges for hate crimes and firearm violations under an agreement that would allow the defendant to avoid the death penalty, according to court documents made public Tuesday.

Anderson Aldrich, 23, made a deal with prosecutors to plead guilty to 50 hate crime charges and 24 firearm violations, the documents show. Aldrich would get multiple life sentences in addition to a 190-year sentence under the proposed agreement, which needs a judge's approval.

The Jan. 9 plea agreement was unsealed by the court after Aldrich had pleaded not guilty in court during an initial appearance on Tuesday afternoon. The gun charges can carry a maximum penalty of death, according to the agreement.

Aldrich was sentenced to life in prison last June after pleading guilty to state charges of murder and 46 counts of attempted murder — one for each person at Club Q during the attack on Nov. 19, 2022.

Word of the new charges and planned agreement come just days after federal prosecutors revealed they would seek the death penalty in another hate crime case — against a white supremacist who killed 10 Black people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York. The decision doesn't change Attorney General Merrick Garland's moratorium to halt federal executions, but opens a new chapter in the long and complicated history of the death penalty in the U.S.

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Ashtin Gamblin, who was shot nine times and seriously wounded at Club Q, was in court for Tuesday's hearing. She called the shooting a hate crime and said that Aldrich should be labeled as someone who carried one out.

Gamblin also said she told federal prosecutors Aldrich should face the death penalty for what they did, even if the punishment is never carried out.

She said she wanted Aldrich to "sit with the thought of not knowing when" they would die or that they could die at "any day or any time."

Aldrich, who is nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns, also pleaded no contest to state charges for hate crimes under a plea agreement. The plea was an acknowledgment there was a good chance Aldrich would be convicted of those crimes without admitting guilt. The pleas carried the same weight as a conviction.

For Tuesday's hearing, Aldrich appeared by video from an undisclosed location and was represented by David Kraut with the federal public defender's office. Telephone and email messages left with Kraut's office were not immediately returned.

Jeff Aston, whose son Daniel Aston was shot and killed in the attack, listened remotely to the hearing.

This was a hateful, stupid, heinous and cowardly act," Aston said, adding that he'd like to see Aldrich suffer as much as the victims and their family members

After the shooting, Daniel Aston's parents said they found Club Q to be a safe place to be a trans man and a drag queen.

Michael Anderson, who was bartending at Club Q when the shooting erupted, said the federal charges would serve as a deterrent by "sending a message to people who want to commit violent acts against this community, and lets them know this is not something that is swept away or overlooked."

"No matter how much justice is served statewide or federally, it can't undo bullets fired," he said.

At the time of Aldrich's sentencing in state court, Colorado Springs area District Attorney Michael Allen said the possibility of receiving the death penalty in the federal system was a "big part of what motivated the defendant" to plead guilty to the state charges.

Aldrich declined to speak at the sentencing hearing in state court, and haven't said why they hung out at the club, then went outside and returned dressed in body armor. Aldrich began firing an AR-15-style rifle as soon as they came back in.

Prosecutors say Aldrich had visited the club at least six times before that night and that Aldrich's mother had forced them to go.

In a series of telephone calls from jail, Aldrich told The Associated Press they were on a "very large plethora of drugs" and abusing steroids at the time of the attack. When asked whether the attack was motivated by hate, Aldrich said that was "completely off base."

The district attorney called those statements self-serving and characterized the assertion as ringing hollow. He said Aldrich's claim of being nonbinary is part of an effort to avoid hate crime charges, saying there was no evidence of Aldrich identifying as nonbinary before the shooting.

During hearings in the state case in February, prosecutors said Aldrich administered a website that posted a "neo-Nazi white supremacist" shooting training video. A police detective also testified that online gaming friends said Aldrich expressed hatred for the police, LBGTQ+ people and minorities, and used racist and homophobic slurs. One said that Aldrich sent an online message with a photo of a rifle trained on a gay pride parade.

The attack shattered the sense of safety at Club Q, which served as a refuge for the city's LGBTQ+ community. The shooting was stopped by a Navy officer who grabbed the barrel of the suspect's rifle, burning his hand, and an Army veteran helped subdue and beat Aldrich until police arrived, authorities said.

The 2022 attack came more than a year after Aldrich was arrested for threatening their grandparents and vowing to become "the next mass killer " while stockpiling weapons, body armor and bomb-making materials.

Those charges were eventually dismissed after Aldrich's mother and grandparents refused to cooperate with prosecutors.

Last year Aldrich was moved to the Wyoming State Penitentiary due to safety concerns about the high-

profile case, according to Alondra Gonzalez, spokesperson for the Colorado Department of Corrections. ____
Associated Press writers Jesse Bedayn contributed from Denver and Matthew Brown contributed from Billings, Montana.

Shell will sell big piece of its Nigeria oil business, but activists want pollution cleaned up first

By TAIWO ADEBAYO Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Shell said Tuesday it agreed to sell its onshore business in Nigeria's Niger Delta to a consortium of companies in a deal worth \$2.4 billion, the latest move by the energy company to limit its exposure in the West African nation amid long-running complaints of environmental pollution caused by the oil industry.

Shell called it a way to streamline its business in a country it has operated in for decades, facing push-back about oil spills that have fouled rivers and farms and exacerbated tensions in a region that has faced years of militant violence.

"This agreement marks an important milestone for Shell in Nigeria, aligning with our previously announced intent to exit onshore oil production in the Niger Delta," Zoe Yujnovich, Shell's integrated gas and upstream director, said in a statement. This will help in "simplifying our portfolio and focusing future disciplined investment in Nigeria on our deepwater and integrated gas position."

The buying consortium is Renaissance, which consists of ND Western, Aradel Energy, First E&P, Walter-smith and Petrolin, Shell said. After an initial payment of \$1.3 billion, the London-based energy giant said it would receive an additional \$1.1 billion.

The assets that Shell is selling are largely owned by the Nigerian government's national oil company NNPC, which holds a 55% stake. To finalize the agreement, the government must give its approval. Shell operates the assets and owns a 30% stake, with the remaining share held by France's TotalEnergies at 10% and Italy's Eni at 5%.

The assets include 15 onshore mining leases and three shallow-water operations, the company said.

Activists in the Niger Delta, where Shell has faced decadeslong local criticism to its oil exploration, plan to ask the government to withhold its approval if the company does not address its environmental damage.

"It would be a matter of very grave concern if the obvious legacy issues, especially the environmental and decommissioning issues, are not adequately and transparently addressed before and by any eventual divestment," said Ledum Mitee, a veteran environmental activist and former president of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People.

Nigeria heavily depends on the Niger Delta's petroleum resources for its earnings. However, pollution from oil and natural gas production has prevented residents from accessing clean water, hurt farming and fishing, and heightened tensions.

Militants have exploited the situation, and at one time almost halted the oil industry with attacks on facilities and kidnappings of foreign citizens for ransom before a government amnesty package.

Despite joint military operations and a government benefits program for former militants that accompanied the amnesty deal, the Niger Delta remains volatile. The oil industry faces risks of violence, including pipeline vandalism by oil thieves, whom companies often blame for oil spills.

Fyneface Dumnamene, director of the Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre, urged the Nigerian government to require Shell and the new buyers to provide a plan for addressing environmental damage and compensating communities before granting approvals.

Shell told AP in a statement that the sale has been designed to preserve the company's role to "conduct any remediation as operator of the joint venture where spills may have occurred in the past from the joint venture's operations."

If the transaction is approved, Shell will still have at least three subsidiary operations in Nigeria, namely, its Gulf of Guinea deep-water operations, an industrial gas business and solar power for industrial activities.

All are separately incorporated subsidiaries and outside the scope of the transaction with Renaissance, Shell said.

US to relist Yemen's Houthis as specially designated global terrorists, AP sources say

By MATTHEW LEE, AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is expected to soon announce plans to redesignate Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen as specially designated global terrorists, according to two people familiar with the White House decision and a U.S. official.

The move comes as the Houthis have launched dozens of attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. The group says it has attacked the ships in response to Israel's military operations in Gaza in the aftermath of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

The three people familiar with the decision were not authorized to comment and requested anonymity to discuss the matter ahead of the expected formal announcement.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken delisted the Houthis as both a foreign terrorist organization and as specially designated global terrorists in February 2021 as the administration sought to make it easier to get food imports and humanitarian aid into Yemen.

In its waning days, the Trump administration designated the Houthis a foreign terrorist organization over the strong objections of human rights and humanitarian aid groups.

The foreign terrorist designation barred Americans and people and organizations subject to U.S. jurisdiction from providing "material support" to the Houthis, which the groups said would result in an even greater humanitarian catastrophe than what was already happening in Yemen.

Shortly after the Biden administration took office, Blinken removed the designations in a step that was roundly criticized by conservative lawmakers and others but was intended to keep much-needed food, medicine and other aid flowing to Yemen.

Yemen, on the tip of the Arabian Peninsula bordering the Red Sea, is the poorest country in the Arab world. War and chronic misgovernment have left 24 million Yemenis at risk of hunger and disease as of 2023, and roughly 14 million in acute need of assistance, the United Nations says. About two-thirds of Yemenis live in territory controlled by the Houthis.

While supporters of broad sanctions argue it's possible to shape any enforcement mechanisms so to exempt food and humanitarian aid, aid organizations worry that fears of running afoul of U.S. regulation could scare away shippers, banks and other players vital to Yemen's commercial food supply. Arid Yemen imports 90% of its food.

"This designation would add another level of uncertainty and threat for Yemenis still caught in one of the world's largest humanitarian crises," said Scott Paul, an associate director of Oxfam America. "The Biden administration is playing with fire and we call on them to avoid this designation immediately and prioritize the lives of Yemenis now."

The specially designated global terrorists label to be reimposed on the Houthis does not include sanctions for providing "material support" and it does not come with travel bans that are also imposed with the foreign terrorist organization label, steps intended to help prevent the U.S. move from harming ordinary Yemenis.

Meanwhile, a senior White House official said Tuesday that addressing the ongoing threat by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial vessels in the Red Sea is an "all hands on deck" problem that the U.S. and allies must address together to minimize impact on the global economy.

"How long this goes on and how bad it gets comes down not just to the decisions of the countries in the coalition that took strikes last week," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said during an appearance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The Iran-backed Houthi group has launched dozens of attacks since November on vessels in the Red Sea, a vital corridor for the world's shipping traffic, in what they say is an effort to support Palestinians in the war with Israel. U.S. and British forces have responded by carrying out dozens of air and sea strikes

on Houthi targets in Yemen since Friday. The attacks by the Houthis have continued.

Linda Thomas Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said last week that 2,000 ships since November have been forced to divert thousands of miles to avoid the Red Sea. Houthi militants have threatened or taken hostage mariners from more than 20 countries.

The Red Sea attacks have already caused significant disruptions to global trade. Oil prices have edged higher in recent days, though Brent crude futures were down slightly in early trading Tuesday.

The U.S. launched a new strike against the Houthis on Tuesday, hitting anti-ship missiles in the third assault on the Iranian-backed group in recent days. The strike came as the Iranian-backed Houthis claimed responsibility for a missile attack against the Malta-flagged bulk carrier Zografia in the Red Sea. No one was injured.

Sullivan said it was critical that countries with influence on Tehran and other Middle East capitals make it clear "that the entire world rejects wholesale the idea that a group like the Houthis can basically hijack the world."

President Joe Biden's senior adviser acknowledged that the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea as well as groups allied to Iran carrying out attacks in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen pose concerns that the Israel-Hamas war could escalate even as Israeli officials have indicated a shift in intensity in their military campaign.

"We have to guard against and be vigilant against the possibility that in fact, rather than heading towards de-escalation, we are on a path of escalation that we have to manage," Sullivan said.

The comments from Sullivan came after Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, said during an appearance at the Davos forum that the situation in the Middle East is a "recipe for escalation everywhere." He said Qatar believes that ending the conflict in Gaza will stop the Houthis and militant groups from launching attacks elsewhere in the region.

Sullivan on Tuesday met with Al Thani as well as Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, according to the White House.

Iran fired missiles late Monday at what it said were Israeli "spy headquarters" in an upscale neighborhood near the sprawling U.S. Consulate compound in Irbil, the seat of Iraq's northern semi-autonomous Kurdish region, and at targets linked to the extremist Islamic State group in northern Syria.

Iraq on Tuesday called the attacks, which killed several civilians, a "blatant violation" of Iraq's sovereignty and recalled its ambassador from Tehran.

Top Federal Reserve official says inflation fight seems nearly won, with rate cuts coming

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A top Federal Reserve official said Tuesday that he is increasingly confident that inflation will continue falling this year back to the Fed's 2% target level, after two years of accelerating price spikes that hurt millions of American households.

The official, Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's Board of Governors, noted that inflation is slowing even as growth and hiring remain solid — a combination that he called "almost as good as it gets."

Waller's remarks follow recent comments from other senior Fed officials that suggest that the central bank remains on track to begin cutting its benchmark short-term interest rate, likely by mid-year. In December, the policymakers collectively forecast that they would cut their rate three times this year. Wall Street investors and many economists expect the first cut in March.

"The progress I have noted on inflation, combined with the data in hand on economic and financial conditions and my outlook has made me more confident than I have been since 2021 that inflation is on a path to 2%," Waller said in written remarks to the Brookings Institution. The Fed prefers for inflation to be about 2%, which it sees as having little negative effect on the economy.

Consumer inflation, according to the Fed's preferred measure, soared to about 7% in mid-2022, compared with a year earlier. In response, beginning in March 2022 the Fed hiked its key rate 11 times, to its

highest level in 22 years. Year-over-year inflation fell to 2.6% in November, the Fed's measure showed.

Yet in his remarks Tuesday, Waller cautioned that the Fed might not cut rates as urgently as many on Wall Street have envisioned. He noted that the economy is continuing to expand, with the unemployment rate at just 3.7%, not far above a half-century low, while inflation cools.

"But will it last?" he asked.

Fed officials, he added, will want to see further evidence that inflation is still on track to 2% before embarking on rate cuts.

"We can take our time to make sure we do this right," he said.

Before Waller spoke, Wall Street investors had placed a 72% likelihood of a rate cut in March, based on futures prices. according to CME's FedWatch tool. That likelihood slipped to about 65% afterward.

Krishna Guha, an economic analyst at the investment bank Evercore ISI, said that investors might have been disappointed by Waller's remarks after an earlier speech of his in November, when he suggested that falling inflation could lead the Fed to cut rates as early as March.

"We view his comments ... as indicating that he does not expect to push for a March cut and read his arguments in general as more consistent with our baseline of a first cut in May or June," Guha wrote in a note to clients.

Still, Waller noted in his remarks that, "In the end, I am feeling more confident that the economy can continue along its current trajectory."

Waller provided few hints of the likely timetable for Fed rate cuts. He said the timing and pace of the cuts would depend on the path of inflation and other economic data.

Waller did note an important shift in the Fed's focus, from a singular emphasis on fighting inflation to a more balanced stance. The central bank, he said, now must consider both holding inflation in check and keeping employment high. Such a shift suggests that the Fed could cut rates quickly if the economy and hiring showed signs of faltering in the coming months.

"Today, I view the risks to our employment and inflation mandates as being closely balanced," he said.

Waller's comments followed similarly optimistic remarks from John Williams, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, last week. Williams is also seen as a close confidant of Powell's.

"The data indicate that we are clearly moving in the right direction," Williams said. "I expect inflation to continue to slow to about 2 1/4% this year, before reaching our 2% longer-run goal next year."

Iowa Republicans dash Ron DeSantis' expectations, signaling their party belongs to Donald Trump

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' candidacy rolled into Iowa last spring as if it had been designed by a committee of drooling Republican officials in a GOP-leaning state.

A Navy veteran, DeSantis had been whisked into a second term and had a fresh set of conservative measures tucked under his arm and an ambitious \$100-million political machine built with Iowa in mind. At first blush, it seemed to many to be the key to picking former President Donald Trump's lock on the Hawkeye State's Republican base.

The former Yale baseball player would touch them all in Iowa in the months to come, collecting the GOP-beloved governor's endorsement and mimicking senior Sen. Chuck Grassley's annual 99-county pilgrimage, all with his charming young family in tow.

Yet, even after his team in Iowa knocked on more than 940,000 doors and DeSantis himself headlined nearly 140 events, many Iowans simply never warmed to the sometimes dour and lecturing cultural warrior. "He's not that charismatic, but I figured I should see him," said Steve Kessler, a Nikki Haley supporter, at DeSantis' last campaign stop Monday in Cedar Rapids.

From the sweltering August heat of Iowa State Fair campaign stops to the sub-zero trudge Iowans made to their neighborhood caucuses Monday, DeSantis was never able to dip deep enough into that well of GOP voters who like Trump but were open to an alternative. The alternative vote split roughly in two, leaving

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Republican Iowa firmly in Trump's hands as the first ballots of the 2024 presidential contest were cast.

"No one can compete with, not only the record of a better economy during his term, but an America-first message that's much stronger than anyone else's," said Randy Vandenberg, of GOP-heavy Rock Rapids, who said he would have considered supporting DeSantis were Trump not a candidate.

Even in this small sampling of voters — roughly 110,000 of Iowa's 2.2 million people, practically a focus group on the national scale — Trump proved himself to be a daunting hurdle for his party's rivals in a state he'd already carried twice. Many of the thousands who traveled snow-packed roads in below-zero (Fahrenheit) temperatures to register those opinions in the company of their neighbors may have defaulted to Trump in the absence of a next-generation candidate with the look of a winner.

"If there was someone that felt like he or she could be a winner, it might have kept Trump below 50 percent," said Gentry Collins, a Republican strategist who ran Mitt Romney's 2008 second-place caucus campaign. "So now there's not a candidate who looks like a winner."

Former United Nations Ambassador Haley says she's the one, having finished in third place narrowly behind DeSantis on Monday. She sits within striking distance of Trump in recent polls ahead of the Jan. 23 New Hampshire primary, though it's unclear what impact her third-place finish in Iowa will have.

Despite his commanding win in Iowa, the contest exposed vulnerabilities for Trump that Haley suggested she could exploit in what she declared Monday night had become a two-candidate race in New Hampshire, one that doesn't include DeSantis.

Trump does not thrive among suburban voters, a group that cost him nationally in 2020. Only about a third of Iowa Republicans in the suburbs support the former president, according to The Associated Press' VoteCast, a survey conducted by AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research of more than 1,500 voters who said they planned to participate in Monday's Republican caucuses.

Haley, by contrast, beat Trump in Johnson County, Iowa, a burgeoning tract of homes and businesses along Interstate 80 south of Cedar Rapids. She also finished more competitively behind Trump Monday in Dallas County, a suburban stretch that's been among the five fastest-growing counties in the U.S. — and which has more in common with New Hampshire's suburban landscape than vast swaths of Iowa farmland do.

"I just think we need a younger person, and someone with her grit," said Nancy Wildanger, a 58-year-old Republican accountant, who turned out in Sunday's bone-chilling cold to attend an event Haley hosted in Iowa City, the epicenter of Johnson County, Iowa's most Democratic-performing enclave. "It's concerning to me that someone as old as Trump should be running our country. And I believe she has a better chance of beating (President Joe) Biden."

The question for DeSantis, after the more than \$100 million he spent — roughly \$4,200 per vote in Iowa — and his stated expectation he would win after Gov. Kim Reynolds' endorsement in November, is where does he turn now?

Immediately, he was headed for South Carolina for a Tuesday event aimed at planting a flag in Haley's territory. But the bigger question is how does his campaign, low on cash, survive until the South Carolina primary, which remained 39 days away, especially given Trump's relatively easy fundraising and donors who had waited to see strength from Haley begin to come off the fence.

The primary math still favors the former president, just as it did in 2016, when he did not have to win a majority of votes in consecutive contests, just edge his closest rival and advance.

While nearly half of the voters on Monday were looking for someone besides Trump, the former president could easily claim a majority of support in this increasingly conservative state, where Republicans hold all but one statewide elected office, both houses of the legislature and each of six seats in Congress.

As Iowans know better than most, first impressions matter. And with Democrats moving Iowa back on their primary calendar after a counting fiasco marred their own caucuses four years ago, that left the first votes of 2024 solely in the hands of Iowa Republicans — who left the distinct first impression, even amid a turnout lower than in most years, likely due to weather, that their party belongs to Trump.

No matter that nearly half of the caucus-goers voted for someone else on Monday. His big win left the impression Trump desired, that he still dominates the GOP.

As the snow fell along with temperatures in the final days of the campaign, perhaps all some voters needed to see was the line outside Simpson College as the morning sun offered weak comfort to the 100 people waiting in 18-below-zero weather to enter to see Trump's midday event, which would draw more than 1,000 to the Kent Student Center.

A week earlier, Trump volunteer Jackie Garlock looked around a similar hall in Mason City in northern Iowa on a snowy Saturday, convinced Trump would win.

"I just look at the number of people who are here," she said, "and I think, how can they all be wrong?"

US in deep freeze while much of the world is extra toasty? Yet again, it's climate change

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Much of the United States is shivering through brutal cold as most of the rest of the world is feeling unusually warm weather. However strange it sounds, that contradiction fits snugly in explanations of what climate change is doing to Earth, scientists said.

In a map of global temperatures the last several days, big chunks of the world — the Arctic, Asia, parts of Africa, the Middle East and South America — show as dark red, signifying more than a dozen degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 20th-century average. But the United States stands out like a cold thumb — a deep bluish-purple that is just as out of whack but on the frigid side.

Wind chills in parts of North Dakota reached minus 70 degrees (minus 56 degrees Celsius), while the heat index in Miami was more than 160 degrees warmer at 92 (33 degrees Celsius). The fourth-coldest NFL football game took place in Kansas City, while across the globe the thermometer hit a blistering 92 degrees, 12 degrees (6.8 degrees Celsius) warmer than average on Friday during tennis' Australian Open in Melbourne. Warm temperature records fell overnight in Aruba, Curacao, parts of Argentina, Oman and Iran.

Where weather was warmer than usual, it was happening both in the southern hemisphere, which is in summer, and in the northern hemisphere, which is in winter. For example, Oman, in the north, had its warmest January night ever at 79.5 degrees (26.4 degrees Celsius). Argentina, in the south, had a record for warmest January night at 81.1 Fahrenheit (27.3 Celsius).

If it seems as if the world has gone topsy-turvy, in a way it has. Because this all comes from what's happening in the Arctic, where it used to be warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. Now, it's warming three to four times faster.

"When the Arctic is off-the-charts warm (like now), we're more likely to see frigid cold invade places like Texas that are ill-equipped to deal with it," said Jennifer Francis, a Woodwell Research Center climate scientist and a pioneer in the theory of Arctic Amplification, which links the cold outbreaks to climate change. "Rapid Arctic warming is one of the clearest symptoms of human-caused climate change, making winter extremes more likely even as the globe warms overall."

The way the cold is invading is through a weather phrase that is becoming increasingly familiar to Americans: The polar vortex. It's a weather term that goes back to 1853 but has only been frequently used in the past decade or so.

That could be because the icy stabs are happening more often, said winter weather expert Judah Cohen of Atmospheric Environmental Research, a commercial firm outside of Boston.

The polar vortex is strong, icy weather that usually stays over the top of the planet, penned in by strong winds that whip around it, Cohen said.

It's like an ice skater spinning rapidly with her arms tucked in, he said. But when the polar vortex weakens, the arms start flailing out, the skater slips and "all the cold air then gets released away from the center of the polar vortex," Cohen said.

The current cold outbreak is consistent with Arctic change and the polar vortex, Cohen said. "What we found is when the polar vortex stretches like a rubber band, severe extreme winter weather is much more likely in the United States. That's where it tends to be focused and in January we have an extreme case of that stretching of the polar vortex."

This one is stronger and may last longer than most, Cohen said.

Cohen and others have done studies that show the polar vortex outbreaks have become more frequent in recent decades.

The idea is the jet stream — the upper air circulation that drives weather — is wavier in amplified global warming, said University of Wisconsin-Madison climate scientist Steve Vavrus. And those wave changes in the upper air knock the polar vortex out of its place and toward the United States, Cohen said.

It's a theory still debated by climate scientists but growing in acceptance. Initially, Vavrus and Francis theorized it was due to melting Arctic sea ice leading to barometric pressure changes. Now several scientists say it's more complicated, yet still connected to climate change and the supercharged warming in the Arctic, with other factors like Siberian snow cover and other atmospheric waves also playing a role.

"The key takeaway for me right now is that Arctic Amplification is happening and has complex interactions within our climate system. Winter will always bring us cold weather, but like the warm season it may be changing ways that we understand and ways that we are still learning about," said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd. "Unlike the Vegas slogan, what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic."

Think of what's happening as an orchestra making one symphony, and "what's driving all those orchestra instruments is a warming planet," Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini said.

Gensini and Cohen said this cold snap in the United States will fade in several days to be replaced by unusually warm weather, due to climate change. But another polar vortex looks like it's coming at the end of the month, though not as strong as this one, they said.

Despite the U.S. cold, Earth's global average temperature keeps flirting with daily, weekly and monthly records, as it has for more than seven months. That's because the United States is only 2% of Earth's surface, scientists said.

"A place like Chicago or Denver or Lincoln, Omaha, Oklahoma City, Dallas, Houston, I mean we're all experiencing it," said Gensini, who said the temperature outside his window Tuesday was 6 below. "We're one isolated pocket if you look globally."

Why 'viability' is dividing the abortion rights movement

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO and SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Reproductive rights activists in Missouri agree they want to get a ballot measure before voters this fall to roll back one of the strictest abortion bans in the country and ensure access. The sticking point is how far they should go.

The groups have been at odds over whether to include a provision that would allow the state to regulate abortions after the fetus is viable, a concession supporters of the language say will be needed to persuade voters in the conservative state.

It's a divide that's not limited to Missouri.

Advocates say the disagreements there and in other states where activists are planning abortion-rights measures this year have resurfaced long-brewing ruptures among reproductive rights advocates. The divisions are most acute in Republican-leaning or closely divided states, where some worry that failing to include limits related to viability will sink the measures.

The conflict has been especially sharp in Missouri, where dueling strategies have complicated efforts to push ahead with a ballot measure seeking to reinstate the right to abortion.

"The movement is grappling with its value system," said Bonyen Lee-Gilmore, the Kansas City-based vice president of communications for the National Institute for Reproductive Health, which opposes viability clauses.

Viability is used by health care providers to describe whether a pregnancy is expected to continue developing normally or whether a fetus might survive outside the uterus. It's generally considered to be around 23 or 24 weeks into pregnancy but has shifted downward with medical advances. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists opposes viability language in legislation or regulations.

Some say it creates an arbitrary dividing line and stigmatizes abortions later in pregnancy, which are

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exceedingly rare and usually the result of serious complications, such as fetal anomalies, that put the life of the woman or fetus at risk.

The Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision established a constitutional right to abortion but also created a framework that allowed states to regulate abortions at certain points during pregnancy. Since the current court overturned it in 2022, "Roe is the floor, not the ceiling" has become a rallying cry for activists who vowed to rebuild access, especially for marginalized communities, according to Pamela Merritt, executive director of Medical Students for Choice, a group that opposes viability clauses.

Yet measures proposed for this year's ballot in Missouri, Florida and Arizona have been replicating *Roe's* viability framework, as did an Ohio constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to abortion that passed last year.

Shortly after that election, a Black Ohio woman who miscarried in her bathroom was charged with abuse of a corpse. The amendment's viability clause was cited as justification for allowing the case to move forward, though a grand jury ultimately dismissed the case.

The charges are part of a larger effort by anti-abortion forces in Ohio to use the viability clause to limit the reach of the amendment, said Merritt. Many of these efforts will wind up in Ohio's largely conservative court system, she added.

"When you hand them the scalpel, you can't turn around and be surprised when they start cutting," Merritt said.

In South Dakota, the local Planned Parenthood affiliate has pulled out of ballot measure efforts for a proposal that allows lawmakers to restrict abortion after the first trimester. In a statement, the group said the proposal fails to protect abortion rights.

In Oklahoma, viability has been central to conversations about a potential ballot measure to repeal the state's abortion ban, said Rebecca Tong, co-executive director of Trust Women, which provides abortion care. Tong said viability is "not something we want written into the Constitution in Oklahoma."

But Lauren Brenzel, campaign director for Floridians Protecting Freedom, said viability has not been a major focus in conversations around ballot measure language in a state that currently bans the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy. The campaign recently reached the necessary number of verified signatures to qualify an abortion-rights measure for this year's ballot that includes a viability clause.

"Viability is the framework that Florida had used until the legislators started passing abortion bans," Brenzel said. "What we know is that voters understand this, and we see it as clear and concise language that matches with what the standard was in Florida for a long time."

Viability language in Florida's proposed measure has already opened the door to a legal challenge from the state's Republican attorney general, who has asked the state Supreme Court to keep the measure off the ballot because of vagueness over the meaning of the term.

A few states, including California and Vermont, have enshrined abortion rights in their constitutions without viability limits. Proposed amendments in Maryland and New York also don't mention viability.

Missouri has found itself in the center of the national debate over the issue as abortion-rights groups have split over which of 11 versions of a measure to support for the ballot. The petitions have been tied up in court for months after being challenged by Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft.

Complicating the effort is another initiative petition — one proposed by a Republican, strategist Jamie Corley. It would allow abortions up to 12 weeks into pregnancy and include exceptions for rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother until viability.

Corley said those restrictions are what's feasible to pass in Missouri, where Republicans banned abortions except in medical emergencies.

"Pro-life, anti-abortion voters, a lot of them are still OK with legal but limited access," Corley said.

Some reproductive rights groups advocating for versions of a more permissive ballot measure with a viability clause raised concerns that anti-abortion forces would attack proposals without one by saying it was an attempt to legalize abortion "up until birth" or "abortion on demand," terms considered misleading by medical experts.

Sarah Standiford, national campaigns director of Planned Parenthood Action Fund, said reproductive

rights groups must balance their desire for the most expansive access with proposals that can withstand legal challenges and qualify for the ballot.

She acknowledged that such an approach "may ultimately advance a policy that is far short of the ideal."

Other activists say they're increasingly frustrated by compromises they see as based on fear and repeating past mistakes in *Roe v. Wade* that prevented abortion access for the most vulnerable, including people with higher-risk pregnancies, those with lower incomes, people of color and people living in rural communities.

"It is a restriction under the guise of reproductive freedom," said Jennifer Villavicencio, senior director of public affairs and advocacy at the Society of Family Planning.

In Missouri, it's yet to be seen how and if activists divided over viability will come together. To many, there's a sense of urgency to restore at least some rights.

"Real lives are on the line, and that has to be part of these political considerations," said Mallory Schwarz, executive director of Abortion Action Missouri. "We have to consider both what is politically possible and also look at why that is possible in that moment."

Next Republican debate canceled after Nikki Haley says she'll only participate if Donald Trump does

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — ABC News on Tuesday canceled the next Republican presidential debate after Nikki Haley said she wouldn't participate unless former President Donald Trump takes part in it, leaving Gov. Ron DeSantis as the only candidate committed to Thursday's event in New Hampshire.

"We've had five great debates in this campaign," Haley said in a statement, released as she campaigned in New Hampshire. "Unfortunately, Donald Trump has ducked all of them. He has nowhere left to hide. The next debate I do will either be with Donald Trump or with Joe Biden. I look forward to it."

Her statement was released a day after the all-important Iowa caucuses, in which Trump marked a wide margin of victory over both Haley and DeSantis. With the two locked in a heated competition for second place in Iowa, Haley tried to make her electoral argument more about Trump than DeSantis, repeatedly echoing her refrain that her candidacy marks a turnabout from the "chaos" that follows the GOP front-runner.

The move also could be a result of the last debate which featured only Haley and DeSantis, in which Haley didn't perform as well as expected, and DeSantis ultimately ended up beating her for second place in Iowa.

Haley had argued to caucusgoers that picking her gives Republicans a better chance to defeat Biden in November, pointing to survey data showing her with the largest lead among the GOP field in a theoretical general election matchup.

"Our intent was to host a debate coming out of the Iowa caucuses, but we always knew that would be contingent on the candidates and the outcome of the race," ABC News spokesperson Van Scott said in a statement.

Haley's decision also casts doubt on another New Hampshire debate scheduled for Sunday on CNN.

On X, DeSantis said Haley "is afraid to debate because she doesn't want to answer the tough questions." He accused her of "running to be Trump's VP" and said that he looked "forward to debating two empty podiums in the Granite State this week."

Trump spokesman Steven Cheung on Tuesday called Haley a "desperate globalist who wants higher taxes, open borders, and China to dominate the United States," He added, "That's why the only people who are voting for her are Democrats who are trying to interfere in a Republican primary."

Haley went head-to-head with DeSantis in the most recent GOP debate last week in Iowa, a two-hour brawl that left at least some of her supporters feeling that the former South Carolina governor had lost some of the above-the-fray attitude of her campaign thus far. More than a dozen times she referenced a campaign-run website that several caucusgoers said had seemed repetitive and caught Haley in a bout of "name calling" that was off-putting.

With the GOP campaign now shifting to New Hampshire, ahead of that state's primary next week, Haley has projected confidence that her commitment to the state and surveys showing her with support there will provide her campaign with the momentum needed to cut into Trump's strength. After her caucus night party, Haley boarded an overnight flight to New Hampshire, where she planned an event with Gov. Chris Sununu later in the day.

But DeSantis, breaking with tradition, instead flew directly to Haley's home state of South Carolina, saying last week the plan to make a brief appearance there before going to New Hampshire himself was intended to send a message to Haley that he would compete fiercely against her in her home state's primary next month.

Along the campaign trail in Iowa over the past week, reporters had asked Haley when she would commit to participating in Thursday's debate, hosted by ABC and WMUR-TV at Saint Anselm College.

After his caucus win, Trump flew to New York, where he was expected in court for one of his multiple legal challenges, before heading to New Hampshire for a rally later Tuesday. He's skipped all of the primary debates thus far.

After visiting the court, Trump will fly to New Hampshire to hold a rally Tuesday evening.

New Hampshire Republican Party Chairman Chris Ager told AP on Tuesday that invitations had been extended to both Haley and Trump to join DeSantis on stage for the debate.

"We would love to see them all," he said in a text message. "People in NH expect to see a local debate. Candidates who skip do so at their own risk."

A freed Israeli hostage relives horrors of captivity and fears for her husband, still held in Gaza

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

KIBBUTZ NIR OZ, Israel (AP) — Standing in the ruins of her home in the Nir Oz farming village on the Gaza border, Sharon Alony Cunio gazed at the distant skyline of Khan Younis, the Palestinian city where Hamas militants dragged her more than three months ago. Her husband, David, remains captive in Gaza.

He's kilometers away but completely out of reach.

Cunio and her 3-year-old twins were released from Gaza on Nov. 27. They are physically healthy, safe. But she can't stop thinking about her husband's last words to her. He was skinny and frail, wounded in the leg, as the family embraced for a final time in captivity.

"Fight for me. Don't give up," she said he told her. "Please yell what I cannot yell. I'm scared as hell."

David Cunio is among scores of captives believed to be alive in Gaza after 120 hostages, including his wife and daughters, were freed during a weeklong cease-fire.

As days spin by, punctuated by reports that other hostages have died in Hamas captivity, those freed have increasingly spoken out about the conditions they endured in Gaza. With the plight of the remaining hostages gripping the nation's attention, those who survived hope to pressure the government into reaching another deal.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Sharon described the Hamas attack and her time in captivity, most of which she said was spent in a hospital — bolstering Israel's claims that Hamas has abused protected medical locations for military purposes.

Her girls, Emma and Julie, don't yet understand what happened to them after Hamas militants rampaged through southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and kidnapping 250. The Hamas attack prompted a blistering Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip.

In captivity, she told the girls the near-constant sounds of bombardment were just thunderstorms and the militants who guarded their door were their protectors. Now, when it rains in Yavne, the central Israel city where the three are staying with Sharon's parents, the girls ask, "Mommy, where are the booms?"

On the morning Hamas militants attacked their home, the family cowered in their fortified safe room. David Cunio muscled the door shut against the intruders, his wife said, but they eventually flicked on the

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gas and lit the house ablaze.

As smoke poured in, David grabbed Julie and climbed out the window, leaving Sharon and her sister, Danielle, in the safe room with two children. Armed men stood outside.

"I started to lose consciousness," Sharon recalled. "At that point, Danielle shook me and said, 'Let's open the window and get out. It's much better if they shoot us. Then there will be no pain, no suffering, instead of watching us all choke to death in here.'"

But militants didn't shoot them. Instead, they dragged them, with four other hostages, to Gaza on a tractor stolen from the kibbutz. In the melee, the family lost one of the twins — Emma was gone, and they feared it was for good.

Sharon, David and Julie spent 10 days in a Palestinian home, guarded by two Hamas militants. Their captors said they were in Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest city, Sharon said.

"I had a mental breakdown, I had tics, I had panic attacks," she told AP.

On day nine of captivity, the house next door was bombed. As the explosion sent the walls around them crashing in, David and Sharon climbed on top of Julie, protecting her. Glass pierced Sharon's scalp.

Soon after, the captors moved the family. Sharon said militants covered her husband in a white sheet so he looked like a corpse and dressed her in traditional Arab clothes. They wrapped Julie in a cloth and pushed her into Sharon's arms. They packed the family into an ambulance and brought them to a hospital Sharon said she now recognizes from the news as Nasser, in Khan Younis.

Three days later, Sharon said, she heard crying outside their room. She instantly recognized the cries as Emma's.

"This guy just handed me Emma, like she's a box or something. And I was shocked," she said. "I was certain she was dead. She was panicking and crying. I couldn't believe that they brought her back to us."

Reunited, the family spent the next few weeks in a room on the hospital's first floor. Stacked boxes separated the hostage section from the rest of the hospital floor, Sharon said. She described sleeping with the girls on a small bed, using a pillow stained with blood. At one point, she said, 12 hostages were packed in the tiny room.

The family soon found out they were being held near two additional rooms of captives, nearly 30 in total. Captors eventually let the hostages spend time in one another's rooms, Cunio said.

The Israeli military has come under international criticism for the forced evacuations and closures of more than half of Gaza's hospitals during its offensive, leaving the medical system near collapse. Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of storing weapons and hiding hostages in hospitals in an attempt to justify military operations at the facilities.

Cunio said some captives received medical treatment from hospital staff. When one of the captives in her room grew sick, she said, he was taken away, returning with an IV in his arm. Another young hostage underwent leg surgery, she said.

Food didn't come on a regular schedule, but most days captors brought them two meals. Sharon described plates of spicy rice topped with meat, and often-moldy pita bread with feta. Some days, no food came at all. Cunio said the adults often gave up their food to feed the twins. They split the bread into quarters, in case no food came the next day.

Cunio lost 11 kilos (24 pounds) in Gaza and said each member of her family suffered from vomiting and diarrhea at least once.

"A lot of the times, the girls were just crying, saying 'I'm hungry,'" she said. "It was devastating."

When they needed to use the bathroom, they knocked on the door and waited for captors to open it. Sometimes they waited five minutes, other times hours, Sharon said, and the girls sometimes relieved themselves in the sink or trash can of the windowless, humid room. Every time they left, they had to cover themselves with a hijab.

For the last week of captivity, militants moved the hostages into an outer room, with a window. Cunio said she saw rows of displaced Palestinians camped around the hospital.

The captives were told not to make noise. At night, Sharon said, they cracked the window for fresh air. It grew cold, but the hostages had blankets. The girls had been taken captive in underwear and tank tops,

and another hostage fashioned long pajama pants for them out of extra clothing.

Sharon said David, an electrician born and raised in Nir Oz, blamed himself — he was the reason the family lived so close to the Gaza border. Sharon cried all the time, she said, and David once beat himself until he bled inside the mouth. Other times, he managed a bit of levity.

"I would tell him, 'You're the best man I have ever known,'" Sharon said. "And he told me, 'It's about time you figured that out.'"

One day, Sharon said, David was pulled out of the room to speak with a Hamas officer. The man told him Israel had decided to bring back only women and children, Sharon recalled, and David would be taken somewhere with the other men.

"We sat there for three hours, just hugging. Me, him, and the girls," Cunio said. "I'm begging him not to go and begging to stay with him. The girls are crying. 'Why are you leaving? Why are they taking Daddy? Can they take other dads? Why do you have to take ours?'"

Three days later, Red Cross vehicles ferried Cunio and the girls back to Israel.

Now, Sharon said she won't be able to sleep through the night until her husband comes home.

"Everything is full of blame," she said. "Taking a shower, eating hot food, smoking a cigarette, playing with our girls, being outside when he's in the tunnels."

On Monday, Sharon toured Kibbutz Nir Oz — where militants killed some 20 people and took more than 80 hostage — for the second time since her release. She got excited as familiar faces appeared, with neighbors collecting belongings from ransacked houses. Everyone had a story — a son still held hostage, a spouse murdered.

Sharon's old cat, Elvis, sauntered up. He survived the onslaught, nuzzling into Cunio's leg as the two reunited.

Sharon said the family won't return to the kibbutz, whose idyllic flowering paths and orange groves now give way to homes pockmarked by bullet holes. On the horizon, she sees pillars of smoke rising from the place she believes her husband is held.

For now, Sharon sends the girls to preschool each day and hugs them at night, soothing them through their nightmares.

When she gets a moment to herself, she turns to an archive of her husband's voicemails. "I love you, you're the best," he says in the one she can't help but play over and over.

"I promised him I'd fight for him," Sharon said. "I won't stop until he comes back."

Chaotic wave of attacks, reprisals in Middle East fuel worries of a broader regional war

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A barrage of U.S., coalition and militant attacks in the Middle East over the last five days are compounding U.S. fears that Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza could expand, as massive military strikes failed to stall the assault on Red Sea shipping by Yemen-based Houthis.

Even as the U.S. and allies pummeled more than two dozen Iran-backed Houthi locations on Friday in retaliation for attacks on ships, the Houthis have continued their maritime assaults. And Tehran struck sites in Iraq and Syria, claiming to target an Israeli "spy headquarters," then followed that Tuesday with reported missile and drone attacks in Pakistan.

The chaotic wave of attacks and reprisals involving the United States, its allies and foes suggested not only that last week's assault had failed to deter the Houthis, but that the broader regional war that the U.S. has spent months trying to avoid was becoming closer to reality. And underscoring the gravity of the roiling situation, the Biden administration is expected to announce plans to redesignate the Houthis as global terrorists, according to people familiar with the decision who requested anonymity to discuss the matter ahead of its announcement.

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At the White House earlier Tuesday, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby stressed that the U.S. is "not looking for a war. We're not looking to expand this. The Houthis have a choice to make." But in a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned that the expanding array of attacks mean that allies must "be vigilant against the possibility that in fact, rather than heading towards de-escalation, we are on a path of escalation that we have to manage."

Ever since the devastating attack by Hamas on Israel on Oct. 7 triggered a massive air and ground campaign by Israeli forces, the U.S. and other allies have worried about it expanding to a broader regional war. U.S. diplomatic and military officials have shuttled urgently across the Middle East, working to ease tensions but the enormous Palestinian death toll has fueled anger and is being touted as a reason for at least some of the attacks.

Since November, the Houthis have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea, saying they were avenging Israel's offensive against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade.

In rapid succession in recent days, the Houthis fired an anti-ship cruise missile toward a U.S. Navy destroyer over the weekend, but the ship shot it down. The Houthis then struck a U.S.-owned ship in the Gulf of Aden on Monday and a Malta-flagged bulk carrier in the Red Sea on Tuesday. The attacks came despite the bombardment by U.S. and British ships and fighter jets of more than 60 Houthi targets in 28 locations on Friday.

Although the U.S. said that the subsequent Houthi maritime attacks have been smaller, and not as complex as earlier ones, it does appear that the militant group has not been deterred. And Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has praised the group's actions.

According to U.S. Central Command, the U.S. launched a new strike against the Houthis on Tuesday, hitting four anti-ship ballistic missiles that were prepared to launch and presented an imminent threat to merchant and U.S. Navy ships in the region. Hours later, the Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack on the Malta-flagged bulk carrier Zografia. The ship was hit, but no one was injured and it continued on its way.

The attack Monday on the U.S.-owned Gibraltar Eagle also resulted in damage but no injuries, and it too continued on its journey.

The Houthis' military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, said in a pre-recorded statement that it fired at the Zografia after the ship's crew refused to answer warning calls and that the vessel was heading for a port in Israel. According to the shipping tracking website Vessel Finder, Zografia was bound for Suez, Egypt.

While Iran arms and backs the Houthis, its not been clear how much it has helped plan or direct the attacks. But, Tehran launched its own assault on Israel's interests late Monday, firing missiles near the U.S. Consulate in northern Iraq at what it said was a headquarters of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency,

Four civilians were killed and six injured in the strike in Irbil, the seat of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, according to the security council of the Kurdish regional government. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said in a statement that it also fired a number of ballistic missiles at "terrorist operations," including Islamic State targets, in Syria and destroyed them.

And on Tuesday, Iran struck targets inside Pakistan killing two "innocent children" and wounded three other people, the Pakistani government said. Iran described the targets as bases for the militant group Jaish al-Adl, state media reported.

Jaish al-Adl, or the "Army of Justice," is a Sunni militant group which largely operates across the border in Pakistan. Iran has fought the militants in border areas, but a missile-and-drone attack on nuclear-armed Pakistan would be unprecedented for Iran.

Amid the latest attacks, U.S. Navy SEALs seized Iranian-made missile parts and other weaponry from a ship bound for Yemen's Houthi rebels in a raid last week that saw two of its commandos go missing, the U.S. military said Tuesday. The raid marks the latest seizure by the U.S. Navy and its allies of weapon shipments bound for the rebels.

As they were boarding the ship in rough seas, one SEAL got knocked off by high waves and a teammate went in after him. Both remain missing.

The U.S. Navy ultimately sank the ship carrying the weapons and detained the 14 crew members. The Houthis have not acknowledged the seizure, and Iran's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. A United Nations resolution bans arms transfers to Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. Tehran has long denied arming the rebels, despite physical evidence, numerous seizures and experts tying the weapons back to Iran.

Lawmakers announce bipartisan effort to enhance child tax credit, revive tax breaks for businesses

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairmen of the top tax policy committees in Congress announced a bipartisan agreement Tuesday to enhance the child tax credit and revive a variety of tax breaks for businesses, a combination designed to attract support from lawmakers of both political parties.

The roughly \$78 billion in tax cuts would be paid for by more quickly ending a tax break Congress approved during the COVID-19 pandemic that encouraged businesses to keep employees on their payroll.

The agreement was announced by Sen. Ron Wyden, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Rep. Jason Smith, the Republican chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. The lawmakers have been negotiating for months on a tax package that would address an array of priorities before lawmakers turn their focus to election season.

Wyden said his goal is to gain approval of the measure in time for businesses and families to benefit during the upcoming filing season. The Internal Revenue Service will begin accepting and processing tax returns on Jan. 29, so lawmakers are looking to move the bill as quickly as possible.

Meeting that goal may prove difficult as lawmakers are already racing to finish their spending bills and are considering a bill focused on both aiding Israel, and Ukraine and stemming the flow of migrants entering the country at the U.S.-Mexico border. One option would be for leaders in the House and Senate to attach the measure to one of those top-priority bills.

In forging the agreement, Democratic negotiators were focused on boosting the child tax credit. The tax credit is \$2,000 per child, but only \$1,600 is refundable, which makes it available to parents who owe little to nothing in federal income taxes. The bill would incrementally increase the maximum refundable child tax credit to \$1,800 for 2023 tax returns, \$1,900 for the following year and \$2,000 for 2025 tax returns.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal think tank and advocacy group, projected that about 16 million children in low-income families would benefit from the child tax credit expansion.

"Given today's miserable political climate, it's a big deal to have this opportunity to pass pro-family policy that helps so many kids get ahead," Wyden said in a statement announcing the deal.

Republicans were focused on tax breaks for businesses that they said would help grow the economy. The tax breaks in the bill would generally align their expiration date — the end of 2025 — with many of the other tax cuts that were approved in 2017.

Most notably, the bill would give companies of all sizes the ability to deduct research and development costs immediately rather than over the course of five years. It would also allow businesses to fully deduct the purchase of equipment, machinery and technology. And, the bill also provides more flexibility in determining how much borrowing can be deducted.

Smith said the agreement "strengthens Main Street businesses, boosts our competitiveness with China, and creates jobs."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said he supported the tax package and "that there are many things in it both sides can celebrate." He praised the inclusion of an increased tax credit for the construction and rehabilitation of housing for low-income households, and he said he could not have supported the package without it.

"The low-income housing tax credit is one of the most effective tools in existence to increase the supply of affordable housing," Schumer said. "This package will make this credit far more generous and far more easy to access."

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., was expected to meet with Smith on Tuesday to discuss the tax agreement. Some lawmakers have insisted that any tax extensions be paid for so as not to add to projected deficits. The authors of the agreement attempt to do that by speeding up the demise of the employee retention tax credit. Under current law, businesses had until April 15 of next year to claim the credit. The bill would bar additional claims after Jan. 31 of this year. It also would increase penalties for tax preparers failing to undertake due diligence in submitting those COVID-19-related claims.

The tax credit was designed to make it easier for businesses to keep their employees on the payroll at a time when COVID-19 was keeping people at home and away from stores, hotels and restaurants. The IRS in September announced a moratorium in processing new claims through at least the end of the year, following concerns that a substantial share of new claims from the aging program were ineligible.

Iran attacks alleged militant bases in Pakistan; Islamabad says 'unprovoked' strikes kill 2 children

By JON GAMBRELL and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Iran launched attacks Tuesday in Pakistan targeting what it described as bases for the militant group Jaish al-Adl, potentially further raising tensions in a Middle East already roiled by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Pakistan said the strikes killed two children and wounded three others in an assault it described as an "unprovoked violation" of its airspace.

Confusion followed the announcement from Iran as state media reports on it soon disappeared. However, the attack inside of nuclear-armed Pakistan by Iran threatens the relations between the two countries, which long have eyed each other with suspicion while maintaining diplomatic relations.

The attack also follows Iranian strikes on Iraq and Syria less than a day earlier, as Tehran lashes out following a dual suicide bombing this month claimed by the Sunni militant group Islamic State that killed over 90 people.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency and state television had said that missiles and drones were used in the strikes in Pakistan. Press TV, the English-language arm of Iranian state television, attributed the attack to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Jaish al-Adl, or the "Army of Justice," is a Sunni militant group founded in 2012 which largely operates across the border in Pakistan. The militants have claimed bombings and kidnapped Iranian border police in the past.

Iran has fought in border areas against the militants, but a missile-and-drone attack on Pakistan is unprecedented for Iran. Iranian reports described the strikes as happening in the mountains of Pakistan's Baluchistan province.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry issued a strongly worded rebuke of the strikes.

"Pakistan strongly condemns the unprovoked violation of its airspace by Iran which resulted in death of two innocent children while injuring three girls," the statement read. "This violation of Pakistan's sovereignty is completely unacceptable and can have serious consequences."

It added: "Pakistan has always said terrorism is a common threat to all countries in the region that requires coordinated action. Such unilateral acts are not in conformity with good neighborly relations and can seriously undermine bilateral trust and confidence."

Two Pakistani security officials said the Iranian strikes damaged a mosque in Baluchistan's Panjgur district, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) inside Pakistan from the Iranian border. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to journalists.

The attack came even as Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. What

the men discussed was not immediately clear.

Baluchistan has faced a low-level insurgency by Baluch nationalists for more than two decades. Baluch nationalists initially wanted a share of provincial resources, but later initiated an insurgency for independence.

Iran long has suspected Sunni-majority Pakistan as hosting insurgents, possibly at the behest of its regional archrival Saudi Arabia. However, Iran and Saudi Arabia reached a Chinese-mediated détente last March, easing tensions.

Meanwhile, attacks by militants entering from Iran have targeted Pakistani security forces. In April 2023, a militant attack from across the border with Iran killed four Pakistani soldiers in Baluchistan province.

Late Monday, Iran fired missiles into northern Syria targeting the Islamic State group and into Iraq at what it called an Israeli "spy headquarters" near the U.S. Consulate compound in the city of Irbil.

Iraq on Tuesday called the attacks, which killed several civilians, a "blatant violation" of Iraq's sovereignty and recalled its ambassador from Tehran.

Trump leads GOP rightward march and other takeaways from the Iowa caucuses

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's iron grip on the Republican Party has been clear since the day he announced he would make another run for the White House 14 months ago. It can be seen in the party's ideological shift even further to the right on cultural issues and, especially, on immigration policy.

Iowa Republicans were a clear reflection of that on Monday night, delivering the former president an emphatic victory. They channeled his anger, and his view that basically everything President Joe Biden has done has been a "disaster." About 9 in 10 voters said they want upheaval or substantial change in how the government operates, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 1,500 voters who said they planned to take part in the caucuses.

As clear-cut as his win was, though, Iowa has not historically played the role of kingmaker in the Republican nominating process. New Hampshire's voters don't take their cues from Iowa.

Here are some key takeaways:

AN INCUMBENT CAMPAIGN

This was the least suspenseful Iowa caucus in modern memory because Trump has essentially been running as an incumbent president. He's convinced many Republicans he didn't really lose the 2020 election to Biden, repeatedly making false claims, and has dominated the race the way someone still in office does.

He traveled sparingly to the state, holding a modest number of rallies. He spurned candidate debates. He chose to appear at court hearings as a defendant in his legal cases in New York and Washington rather than speak to Iowa voters in the final days before the voting.

The former president, who remains the party's dominant favorite, clearly wants to move on to the general election as quickly as possible. In his victory speech, he tried to portray the race as all but over, and a candidate known for his propensity for division asked his party and the nation to come together, praising rivals he had spent months denigrating. But Iowa winnows the field more than it determines the winner.

TWISTS AND TURNS AHEAD

Inevitable can be a dangerous word, especially in New Hampshire, which holds its primary in eight days.

New Hampshire has famously delivered upsets in both parties. Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley quipped that New Hampshire "corrects" Iowa. George W. Bush felt New Hampshire's sting in 2000 when Senator John McCain defeated him. So did former vice president Walter Mondale when Senator Gary Hart of Colorado scored an upset in the Democratic race in 1984.

With its more moderate, educated electorate, New Hampshire presents Trump's rivals with possibly their best opportunity to slow his march. Haley is hoping for a win there or at least a very strong showing, as is Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who edged Haley out for second place in Iowa but trailed Trump by about

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30 points.

After that comes a weird political lull — with the next major competitive race in South Carolina on Feb. 24. But plenty can happen during that time. The U.S. Supreme Court on Feb. 8 is scheduled to hear arguments in a case challenging whether a constitutional clause banning those who “engaged in insurrection” from holding office applies to Trump. The high court may also weigh in on whether presidential immunity protects Trump from federal charges for trying to overturn his 2020 election loss.

The criminal trial, in that case, is scheduled to start on March 5 — Super Tuesday — when 14 states vote in the presidential nominating process. Trump’s strength among Republican voters is beyond dispute, but the road is long and could be bumpy.

IT’S NOT THE ECONOMY

Iowans had something on their minds, but it wasn’t jobs, taxes or business regulations.

About 4 in 10 caucus-goers said immigration was their top issue, compared to 1 in 3 picking the economy, according to VoteCast. Other priorities like foreign policy, energy and abortion ranked even lower.

Indeed, about two-thirds of caucusgoers said they felt their finances were holding steady or improving. But the voters still want major changes — 3 in 10 want a total upheaval of how the federal government runs while another 6 in 10 want substantial changes. Additionally, as Trump faces multiple criminal charges, 6 in 10 caucusgoers don’t have confidence in the U.S. legal system.

It adds up to a portrait of a slice of the electorate eager to challenge core democratic institutions in the U.S.

DESANTIS’ DISMAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Flush with more than \$100 million in cash and fresh off a blowout reelection victory, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis entered the 2024 Republican presidential contest projecting himself as the heir to a MAGA political brand that a diminished Trump could no longer effectively carry.

Reality soon intruded.

Eight months and tens of millions of dollars later, DeSantis posed little threat to the former president in Iowa. Still, he vowed to continue his campaign and said he had “punched his ticket” out of Iowa with his second-place finish.

Despite more than \$55 million in pro-DeSantis advertising spending, the Florida governor only narrowly bested Haley.

DeSantis has been dogged by negative stories about profligate spending, including DeSantis’ preference for flying private planes.

His next challenge will be whether donors will continue to support him.

THE EDUCATION DIVIDE

More than half of Haley’s voters had at least a college degree and roughly half of DeSantis’ did, according to VoteCast. But only about 2 in 10 of Trump’s did.

Education has been a major dividing line among white voters during the Trump era. Iowa confirms what polling has indicated during the primary — that the education divide is also splitting the GOP.

That hints at a possible weakness for Trump in November, should he be the nominee. A greater share of the voting public has at least a bachelor’s degree now than in 2016, and that share rises every year as degrees become more popular.

Another indication of vulnerability for Trump came in the suburbs, which tend to have the highest levels of education. Only about a third of caucusgoers there supported him. The suburbs were pivotal in Biden’s 2020 victory over Trump.

RAMASWAMY PUNCHED HIMSELF OUT

Abrasive, often grating and very online — Vivek Ramaswamy’s quixotic bid for the White House has come across as a millennial distillation of Trump’s Make America Great Again political movement.

Ramaswamy rapped along to verses of Eminem, delighted in trolling his rivals and often sought to out-Trump Trump with his brash rhetoric. That performative aspect helped the wealthy 38-year-old entrepreneur gain considerable attention in the early days of the Republican White House contest.

But it also proved to wear thin, perhaps summed up best when former New Jersey governor Chris Christie called him the “most obnoxious blowhard in America” during a debate.

As returns from Iowa’s caucus posted, Ramaswamy seemed unlikely to reach double digits, and he suspended his campaign.

A freed Israeli hostage relives horrors of captivity and fears for her husband, still held in Gaza

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

KIBBUTZ NIR OZ, Israel (AP) — Standing in the ruins of her home in the Nir Oz farming village on the Gaza border, Sharon Alony Cunio gazed at the skyline of Khan Younis, the Palestinian city where Hamas militants dragged her more than three months ago. Her husband, David, remains captive in Gaza.

He’s kilometers away but completely out of reach.

Cunio and her 3-year-old twins were released from Gaza on Nov. 27. They are physically healthy, safe. But she can’t stop thinking about her husband’s last words to her. He was skinny and frail, wounded in the leg, as the family embraced for a final time in captivity.

“Fight for me. Don’t give up,” she said he told her. “Please yell what I cannot yell. I’m scared as hell.”

David Cunio is among scores of captives believed to be alive in Gaza after 120 hostages, including his wife and daughters, were freed during a weeklong cease-fire.

As days spin by, punctuated by reports that other hostages have died in captivity, those freed have increasingly spoken out about the conditions they endured. With the plight of the remaining hostages gripping the nation’s attention, those who survived hope to pressure the government into reaching another deal.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Sharon described the Hamas attack and her time in captivity, most of which she said was spent in a hospital — bolstering Israel’s claims that Hamas has abused protected medical locations for military purposes.

Her girls, Emma and Julie, don’t yet understand what happened to them after Hamas militants rampaged through southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and kidnapping 250. The Hamas attack prompted a blistering Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip.

In captivity, she told the girls the near-constant sounds of bombardment were thunderstorms and the militants who guarded their door were their protectors. Now, when it rains in Yavne, the central Israel city where the three are staying with Sharon’s parents, the girls ask, “Mommy, where are the booms?”

On the morning Hamas militants attacked, the family cowered in their fortified safe room. David Cunio muscled the door shut against the intruders, his wife said, but they eventually flicked on the gas and lit the house ablaze.

David grabbed Julie and climbed out the window. Sharon said she started to lose consciousness, and her sister shook her, saying “Let’s open the window and get out. It’s much better if they shoot us. Then there will be no pain, no suffering.”

But militants didn’t shoot them. They dragged them, with four others, to Gaza on a stolen tractor.

The family lost one of the twins — Emma was gone, and they feared it was for good.

Sharon said she, David and Julie spent 10 days in a Palestinian home, guarded by two militants. On day nine, the house next door was bombed. As the walls around them crashed in, David and Sharon climbed on top of Julie. Glass pierced Sharon’s scalp.

Soon, the captors moved the family. Sharon said militants covered her husband in a sheet so he looked like a corpse and dressed her in traditional Arab clothes. They packed the family into an ambulance and brought them to a hospital Sharon now recognizes from the news as Nasser, in Khan Younis.

Three days later, Sharon said, she heard crying outside their room. It was Emma.

“This guy just handed me Emma, like she’s a box or something. And I was shocked,” she said. “She was panicking and crying. I couldn’t believe that they brought her back.”

They spent the weeks in a room on the hospital’s first floor. Stacked boxes separated the hostage sec-

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tion from the rest of the floor, Sharon said. She described sleeping with the girls on a small bed, using a bloodstained pillow. At one point, she said, 12 hostages were packed in the room. Nearby, they learned, were two additional rooms of captives, nearly 30 in total.

The Israeli military has come under international criticism for the forced evacuations and closures of more than half of Gaza's hospitals during its offensive, leaving the medical system near collapse. Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of storing weapons and hiding hostages in hospitals in an attempt to justify military operations at the facilities.

Cunio said some captives received medical treatment from hospital staff. When one in her room grew sick, she said, he was taken away, returning with an IV. One hostage underwent leg surgery, she said.

Food didn't come on a regular schedule, but most days captors brought two meals. Sharon described spicy rice topped with meat, and often-moldy pita bread with feta. Cunio lost 11 kilos (24 pounds) and said they each suffered from vomiting and diarrhea at least once.

"A lot of the times, the girls were just crying, saying 'I'm hungry,'" she said. "It was devastating."

For the last week of captivity, militants moved the hostages into an outer room, with a window. Cunio said she saw rows of displaced Palestinians camped around the hospital.

Sharon said David, an electrician born and raised in Nir Oz, blamed himself — he was the reason the family lived near the Gaza border. He once beat himself until he bled inside the mouth, Sharon said. Other times, he managed a bit of levity.

"I would tell him, 'You're the best man I have ever known,'" Sharon said. "And he told me, 'It's about time you figured that out.'"

One day, Sharon said, David was pulled out of the room to speak with a Hamas officer who told him Israel had decided to bring back only women and children.

"We sat there for three hours, just hugging. Me, him, and the girls," Cunio said. "The girls are crying. 'Why are you leaving? Why are they taking Daddy?'"

Three days later, Red Cross vehicles ferried Cunio and the girls back to Israel.

Now, Sharon said she won't be able to sleep through the night until David comes home.

"Everything is full of blame," she said. "Taking a shower, eating hot food, smoking a cigarette, playing with our girls, being outside when he's in the tunnels."

On Monday, Sharon toured Kibbutz Nir Oz for the second time since her release. Neighbors collected belongings from ransacked houses.

Sharon said the family won't return to the kibbutz, whose idyllic flowering paths and orange groves now give way to homes pockmarked by bullet holes.

Sharon sends the girls to preschool each day and hugs them at night, soothing them through their nightmares.

When she gets a moment to herself, she turns to an archive of her husband's voicemails. "I love you, you're the best," he says.

"I promised him I'd fight for him," Sharon said. "I won't stop until he comes back."

Emmy Moments: 'Succession' succeeds, 'The Bear' eats it up, and a show wraps on time, thanks to Mom

By JOCELYN NOVECK and MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writers

So it be, so it is, as Cousin Greg would say: "Succession" had a fittingly successful sendoff at the Emmys, the addictive saga of the roiling Roy family dynasty winning best drama for a third time and five more awards, including three top acting prizes.

But "Succession" was not the only show to make a ludicrously capacious haul. "The Bear" had a bearish night indeed, fully dominating the comedy category in its first season, winning the top prize and three acting awards.

And the chaotic, darkly humorous "Beef" was the other big victor, winning best limited series, with leads

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Steven Yeun and Ali Wong becoming the first Asian Americans to win in their categories. Also making history: star Quinta Brunson of "Abbott Elementary," the first Black winner in her category since 1981.

It was not a night of upsets, with most predictions holding. But it was not without pleasant surprises, including a series of cast reunions of beloved shows — some more effective than others — like "The Sopranos," "Cheers," "Grey's Anatomy," "Ally McBeal" and more. Natasha Lyonne and Tracee Ellis Ross filled their mouths with bonbons in a throwback to the classic "I Love Lucy" candy assembly line scene.

There was a lot of kid talk on the podium, with John Oliver beseeching the crowd to tell him where to buy Pokemon cards for his kids, Sarah Snook of "Succession" paying tribute to her own newborn daughter, and her co-star Kieran Culkin actually telling his wife he wanted more kids.

Hopefully those kids will be as nice to their mama as host Anthony Anderson, who knew just how to delegate, giving Mom Doris a key job.

For details, and other notable moments of the night, read on:

A SMOOTH HOST...

Anderson had said before the show that the pressure was off. He meant because he wasn't nominated this year, but he could also have meant that his hosting gig had to go more smoothly than that of Jo Koy at the Golden Globes. Indeed it did, perhaps partly because Anderson wasn't trying to roast any celebrities. Plugging into the nostalgia theme of the show's 75th anniversary, Anderson began with his own version of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," hanging up his coat, sitting at a piano and singing themes for TV classics, like "Good Times" and "The Facts of Life." Anderson then asked winners to keep their speeches tight, and introduced his secret weapon.

...AND HIS MAMA!

"When you see my Mama coming, just thank Jesus and your family and wrap it up," the host said. And indeed, Doris Bowman, in the front seats, made appearances throughout the night, the human equivalent of play-off music. Bowman illustrated her power early, interrupting her own son's opening monologue by telling him, "Time's up, baby." Then she certainly seemed to keep winner Jennifer Coolidge in check. Oliver tried to test the new system after winning best scripted variety show: "I'm not leaving without being played off by Anthony Anderson's mom. So I'm going to start reading off the names of the Liverpool football team." When she popped up, he quickly said: "I'd like to thank Jesus and my family. Thank you."

A CLASS REUNION YEAR

Lorraine Bracco and Michael Imperioli from "The Sopranos" celebrated the 25th anniversary of the show's premiere with a moment in a therapist's office. The cast of "Ally McBeal" had a dancing reunion amid bathroom stalls. Some "Grey's Anatomy" cast members — including Ellen Pompeo, Katherine Heigl and Chandra Wilson, but no Sandra Oh and no McDreamy! — gathered in a hospital room for a victory lap as the longest medical drama in TV history. Anderson honored "Game of Thrones" wearing a massive fur-lined cloak. And "Cheers" drew cheers with a reunion of stars Ted Danson, Kelsey Grammer, Rhea Perlman, John Ratzenberger and George Wendt, who was greeted by his signature "Norm!" scream. Also appearing: Rob Reiner and Sally Struthers, the surviving cast members of "All in the Family," and the casts of "Martin" and "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia."

'SUCESSION' COMES OUT ON TOP

It was a seemingly endless succession of "Succession" winners trooping to the stage on a final triumphant night for the HBO drama. Matthew Macfadyen, who played "human grease stain" Tom Wamsbrians, as he described his character at the Globes, won best supporting actor for a second time and kept his speech to thanking Snook and "my other onscreen wife," Nicholas Braun, who played hapless Cousin Greg: "Acting with you has been one of the most wonderful things in my career." Snook, winning best actress as the very, very complicated Shiv Roy, spoke about how being pregnant helped her acting because it sent the hormones flowing, and told her recently arrived baby daughter: "It's all for you, from here on out." Kieran Culkin, in an emotional speech, thanked his wife, Jazz, for two amazing kids, and threw in a tiny request: "And Jazz, I want more. You said maybe, if I win!"

A BIG BEAR HUG, ER, KISS

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Could "The Bear" replicate its success from the Golden Globes? Yes, chef, with Jeremy Allen White and Ayo Edebiri winning for best actor and best supporting actress in a comedy, and Ebon Moss-Bachrach winning a supporting actor award. Onstage, Moss-Bachrach gave costar Matty Matheson a comically long kiss before Matheson saluted the show, which dramatizes the sacrifices people in the restaurant business make: "I just love restaurants so much. The good, the bad. It's rough. We're all broken inside and every single day we gotta show up and cook and make people feel good by eating something and sitting at a table. It's really beautiful."

BURNETT HAILS "PROGRESS"

Big-name actors became fanboys and fangirls in the presence of Carol Burnett, 90, the first woman to host a variety show. A standing ovation greeted the veteran comedienne, who had an immediate zinger: "A lot has changed in the last 46 years. For the better. Progress has been made and it truly warms my heart to see how men are doing in comedy," the seven-time Emmy-winner said. Christina Applegate introduced Burnett by saying she has only one picture of herself framed — with Burnett. "She is more important to me than any of you," Applegate said.

BRUNSON'S HISTORIC WIN

Another star awed by Burnett was the woman who received her prize from her: Brunson, the "Abbott Elementary" star and writer who won best actress in a comedy series, the first Black winner in the category since Isabel Sanford won in Norman Lear's classic "The Jeffersons" in 1981. "I am so happy to be able to live my dream and act out comedy," said Brunson, a previous winner for writing the show. The first hour of the Emmys — held on Martin Luther King Jr. Day — saw three Black women win major awards: Brunson, Edebiri and Niecy Nash-Betts, who won best supporting actress in a limited series for "Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story."

THANKING THE PERSON WHO BELIEVED IN YOU

Many award winners thank the person who first believed in them. Nash-Betts did, too — with blazing honesty — and it was herself. "I'm a winner, baby!" she said. "And you know who I wanna thank? Me, for believing in me and doing what they said I could not do. I want to say to myself, in front of all you beautiful people — Go girl, with your bad self. You did that."

On the Netflix show, Nash-Betts played a neighbor of the serial killer whose complaints to authorities about his behavior go unheeded. "I accept this award on behalf of every Black and brown woman who has gone unheard yet overpoliced, like Glenda Cleveland, like Sandra Bland, like Breonna Taylor," she said. "As an artist, my job is to speak truth to power and baby, I'm gonna do it until the day I die. Mama, I won!"

Today in History: January 17

Eisenhower warns of 'military-industrial complex'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 17, the 17th day of 2024. There are 349 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 17, 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered his farewell address in which he warned against "the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

On this date:

In 1917, Denmark ceded the Virgin Islands to the United States for \$25 million.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces launched the first of four battles for Monte Cassino in Italy; the Allies were ultimately successful.

In 1950, the Great Brink's Robbery took place as seven masked men held up a Brink's garage in Boston, stealing \$1.2 million in cash and \$1.5 million in checks and money orders. (Although the entire gang was caught, only part of the loot was recovered.)

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In 1955, the submarine USS Nautilus made its first nuclear-powered test run from its berth in Groton (GRAH'-tuhn), Connecticut.

In 1966, the Simon & Garfunkel album "Sounds of Silence" was released by Columbia Records.

In 1977, convicted murderer Gary Gilmore, 36, was shot by a firing squad at Utah State Prison in the first U.S. execution in a decade.

In 1994, the 6.7 magnitude Northridge earthquake struck Southern California, killing at least 60 people, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1995, more than 6,000 people were killed when an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2 devastated the city of Kobe (koh-bay), Japan.

In 2016, Iran released three Americans, former U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati, Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian and pastor Saeed Abedini, as part of a prisoner swap that also netted Tehran some \$100 billion in sanctions relief.

In 2020, U.S. health officials announced that they would begin screening airline passengers from central China for the new coronavirus; people traveling from Wuhan, China, would have their temperature checked and be asked about symptoms.

In 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov angrily rejected U.S. allegations that Moscow was preparing a pretext to invade Ukraine, as Russian troops who were stationed near Ukraine's border launched more drills.

Today's birthdays: Actor James Earl Jones is 93. Talk show host Maury Povich is 85. Pop singer Chris Montez is 82. Actor Joanna David is 77. Actor Jane Elliot ("General Hospital") is 77. Rock musician Mick Taylor is 76. Singer Steve Earle is 69. Singer Paul Young is 68. Actor-comedian Steve Harvey is 67. Singer Susanna Hoffs (The Bangles) is 65. Movie director-screenwriter Brian Helgeland is 63. Actor-comedian Jim Carrey is 62. Actor Denis O'Hare is 62. Former first lady Michelle Obama is 60. Actor Joshua Malina is 58. Singer Shabba Ranks is 58. Actor Naveen Andrews is 55. Electronic music DJ Tiesto is 55. Rapper Kid Rock is 53. Actor Freddy Rodriguez is 49. Actor-writer Leigh Whannell is 47. Actor-singer Zooey Deschanel is 44. Dancer Maksim Chmerkovskiy (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 44. Singer Ray J is 43. Actor Diogo Morgado is 43. Country singer Amanda Wilkinson is 42. Former NBA player Dwyane Wade is 42. Actor Ryan Gage is 41. DJ-singer Calvin Harris is 40. Folk-rock musician Jeremiah Fraites is 38. Actor Jonathan Keltz is 36. Actor Kelly Marie Tran (Film: "Star Wars: The Last Jedi") is 35. Actor Kathrine Herzer is 27.