

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 1 of 60

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- JV/C Game Sponsorships](#)
- [4- Groton Area has super clean sweep over Milbank](#)
- [6- SD SearchLight: State electric vehicle charger plan is four short of target](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: Lawmaker's second attempt to tax lithium mining passes first test](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Permanent tax cut bill tabled in Senate committee, but discussion continues](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Congress speeds through short-term government funding bill before Friday shutdown deadline](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: 20 South Dakota schools participating in esports pilot season](#)
- [12- Weather Pages](#)
- [17- Daily Devotional](#)
- [18- Subscription Form](#)
- [19- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [20- News from the Associated Press](#)



Sunday, Jan. 21

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

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, Jan. 19

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

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

Boys Varsity Duals at Deuel, 6 p.m.

Girls Varsity Invitational at Pierre, 4 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 2 of 60

1440

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platform to do so since 2019. The filing is expected in February, with the IPO likely completed by the end of March.

Panama Canal officials announced Wednesday they would reduce the daily number of vessels allowed to transit the shipping passage to 24, down from the average of 36 this time last year, amid severe drought conditions. Estimated losses from the cutbacks are expected to cost Panama nearly \$700M this year and have domino effects on global shipping.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NFL postseason continues this weekend with the divisional round; see full preview and schedule for all four matchups. Country star Reba McEntire tapped to perform the national anthem at the Super Bowl.

Atlanta's Spelman College receives \$100M donation, the largest-ever single donation to a historically Black college or university.

"Oppenheimer" leads all film nominees for the 2024 British Academy Film Awards, or BAFTA Awards.

Science & Technology

Apple confirms it will drop blood oxygen sensing technology from flagship Apple Watch models to avoid import ban following IP battle loss.

Researchers recreate the life travels of a woolly mammoth that lived roughly 14,000 years ago by analyzing the composition of its tusk; study suggests hunter-gathers established settlements along known mammoth routes.

Engineers demonstrate a robot that grows like a vine in response to light and pressure, may have applications in disaster response and rescue missions.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.9%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +1.4%), shaking off three-day slump as technology shares drive rebound; shares of world's largest chipmaker Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. rise nearly 10%.

US weekly jobless claims drop to 187,000; figure from last week is lowest since September 2022. US average 30-year fixed mortgage rate drops to 6.6% per Freddie Mac's weekly reading, lowest level since May 2023.

Macy's to cut 2,350 jobs, or about 3.5% of workforce, amid slowing sales. Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei establishes new smart car unit.

Politics & World Affairs

Georgia judge to hold Feb. 15 hearing on claims Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is engaged in an improper relationship with a top prosecutor in the election interference case against former President Donald Trump.

At least nine people killed after Pakistani airstrikes in Iran targeting a militant separatist group pushing for independence in Pakistan's Balochistan region. Follows Iranian strikes in Pakistan Tuesday targeting Jaish Al-Adl, a militant Islamist group operating near the two countries' border.

Congress passes short-term extension ahead of Saturday's federal funding deadline, sends bill to White House for signature; legislation punts deadlines on the two-tiered package to March 1 and March 8.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 3 of 60

GDILIVE.COM



Groton Area
Tigers

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

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

Milbank Girls JV
Milbank Boys JV
Great Plains Lutheran Girls C
Great Plains Lutheran Girls JV
Northwestern Girls JV
Webster Boys C
Webster Boys JV
Webster Girls JV
Florence/Henry Girls JV
Deuel Girls JV
Vermillion Boys JV
Redfield Boys C Game
Redfield Girls JV Game
Mobridge-Pollock Boys C Game
Mobridge-Pollock Girls C Game
Mobridge-Pollock Boys JV Game
Mobridge-Pollock Girls JV Game
Dakota Valley Boys JV
Dakota Valley Girls JV

Groton Area has super clean sweep over Milbank

Tiger defense discombobulates Milbank

Groton Area's girls' basketball stunned Milbank Thursday night with a 42-39 Northeast Conference win. Milbank held a 14-8 lead after the first quarter and a 20-14 lead at halftime. In the third quarter, the Tiger defense went to work and put the Milbank team in disarray as Groton Area scored 13 straight points to take a 31-26 lead. The Tigers led, 31-29 after three quarters. Groton Area gained a six point advantage and it was enough to hold off a Milbank rally at the end.

Sydney Leicht led Groton Area with 11 points, two rebounds and one steal. Jaedyn Penning had nine points and one assist. Jerrica Locke had six points, five rebounds, seven assists and five steals. Faith Traphagen had four points, two rebounds and one steal. Taryn Traphagen had four points, three rebounds and one block shot. Rylee Dunker had three points, four rebounds, three steals and one block shot. Kennedy Hansen had two points, one rebound and two assists. Laila Roberts had two points and one steal. Brooklyn Hansen had one point, three rebounds and one steal.

3-Pointers: Leicht 3, T. Traphagen 1.

Groton Area made 12 of 26 two-pointers for 46 percent, four of 21 three-pointers for 19 percent, six of 17 free throws for 35 percent, had 20 rebounds, 15 turnovers, 10 assists, 12 steals, 16 team fouls and two block shots.

Isabella Anderson led Milbank with 13 points while Tyra Berry had 10, Siera Wenzl six, Claire Snazzy four, Avery Schuneman three, Josie Riveland two and Belle Pauli one.

Milbank made 13 of 36 field goals for 36 percent, nine of 13 free throws for 69 percent, had 20 turnovers and 18 team fouls.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 37-31. Faith Traphagen led the Tigers with eight points followed by Laila Roberts and Mia Crank with six each, Taryn Traphagen five, Talli Wright four, Sydney Leicht and Chesney Weber each had three and McKenna Tietz added two points.

3-Pointers: F. Traphagen - 2, T. Traphagen - 1, Locke - 1.

Groton Area won the C game game, 31-25.

The Tiger defense overwhelmed Milbank in the boys game as the Tigers had 11 steals with Milbank's 16 turnovers to help post a 61-28 Northeast Conference win.

Milbank started out making two free throws with four seconds gone off the clock before Groton Area made 16 straight points to take an 18-5 lead after the first quarter. Groton Area led 34-16, at half time and 56-36 after the first three quarters.

Lane Tietz led Groton Area with 24 points, three rebounds, one assist and one block. Jacob Zak had nine points, one rebound, five assists and three steals. Ryder Johnson had nine points, six rebounds, one assist and two steals. Teylor Diegel had six points, two rebounds, one assist and one steal. Logan Ringgenberg had five points and one rebound. Keegen Tracy had four points, six rebounds, one assist and two steals. Colby Dunker had four points, two rebounds and one assist. Blake Pauli, Gage Sippel and Turner Thompson each had one rebound. Kassen Keough had one rebound, two assists and two steals.

Groton Area made 19 of 28 two-pointers for 68 percent, six of 15 three-pointers for 40 percent, five of seven free throws for 71 percent, had 25 rebounds, 14 turnovers, 14 assists, 11 steals, 19 team fouls and one block shot.

Three-Pointers: Tietz-3, Johnson-1, Diegel-2.

Garrett Mertens led Milbank with eight points followed by Jaxson Wildung and Esteban Abrego with seven each and Braylen Bowsher and Yohana Ajwanga each had two points.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 41-35. Milbank held a 9-8 lead after the first quarter and an 18-16 lead at halftime. Groton Area took a 31-26 lead into the fourth quarter.

Teylor Diegel led the Tigers with 14 points (2-3pointers), followed by Gage Sippel with nine, Turner Thom-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 5 of 60

son had seven (1 3-pointer), Kasssen Keough five (1 3-pointer), Easton Weber four and Karson Zak two. Esteban Abrego led Milbnak with nine points followed by Ryan Keeton with eight, Braylen Bowsher seven, Jack Howard six, Emmett Hanson four and Mason Meister added one point.

Groton Area won the C game, 53-37, leading at the quarter stops at 12-5, 30-18 and 40-28.

Logan Warrington led Groton Area with 16 points followed by Ethan Kroll with 13, Easton Weber made three-pointers and finished with 10 points, Karson Zak made one three-pointer and finished with nine points, Jace Johnson made one three-pointer and finished with five points.

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



The middle school drum line (below) and the high school drum line (above), performed during the games last night.





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State electric vehicle charger plan is four short of target

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 18, 2024 5:25 PM

A pool of settlement money from Volkswagen has helped add four new fast-charging stations for electric vehicles in South Dakota, with another two under construction.

But four promised charging stations have been scratched from the state's list of lawsuit-funded EV infrastructure.

The Board of Minerals and Environment, which oversees the disbursement of South Dakota's \$8.1 million in Volkswagen cash, got its annual update on what's been funded thus far during a Thursday meeting in Pierre.

Volkswagen settled an Environmental Protection Agency legal action in late 2016 and early 2017 over lies about emissions tests for its vehicles. The settlement payouts were earmarked to help states address and mitigate the impact of the carmaker's flawed testing.

The lion's share of South Dakota's portion of that funding – about 85% – has been dedicated to subsidizing the purchase of newer, cleaner-running buses and freight trucks. About 15% was earmarked for EV charging stations in the state, offering up to 80% rebates for station construction.

Most EV charging happens at an owner's home, but drivers need charging stations for longer trips. EV enthusiasts and utility companies in South Dakota see the state's spare charging station infrastructure as a chicken-and-egg problem: There aren't enough EVs to justify the cost of building stations, but EV sales are depressed by their absence.

Just 1,400 electric vehicles are registered in South Dakota, according to the state Department of Transportation. The figure has grown in recent years, but remains a tiny fraction of registered vehicles.

Thursday's update on Volkswagen settlement funding came from Program Administrator Barb Regynski of the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. One year ago, there were 10 EV stations planned across South Dakota through the Volkswagen funding. Several of those stations were to be located along Interstate 90 between Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

"Four of the projects have dropped out," Regynski said.

One of those scuttled stations is on the route to Rapid City. It would have been in Chamberlain. The other canceled stations were planned for Huron, Aberdeen and Yankton. All four were planned by North-Western Energy. The company did not immediately respond to a request for comment on its reasons for abandoning plans in those cities.

The completed stations are located in Vermillion, Murdo, Brookings and Spearfish. The city of Vermillion was reimbursed for the project in its city. The subsidized stations in the other three cities were sponsored by a company called Red E Charging after initial applicants withdrew.

Projects in Pierre from Oahe Energy Cooperative and Mitchell from NorthWestern are under construction, Regynski said.

When Pierre, Murdo and Michell stations are complete, the state will have "at least decent coverage along the interstate," Regynski said.

Fast charging stations in Sioux Falls and Rapid City were in place prior to the Volkswagen program's commencement in South Dakota in 2020.

People who drive Teslas can use that company's "supercharger" stations in Sioux Falls, Mitchell, Oacoma, Murdo, Wall, Rapid City, Custer and Spearfish, but those stations cannot be used to charge other vehicles. Tesla has opened up a large number of its nationwide supercharging stations for use by other electric

vehicles, but none of the South Dakota Tesla stations offer that option.

Applications for the third round of Volkswagen program funding for all allowable purposes are open until Feb. 16.

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.

Lawmaker's second attempt to tax lithium mining passes first test

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 18, 2024 1:30 PM

A bill to impose a tax on lithium mining cleared its first hurdle Thursday at the state Capitol in Pierre.

Lithium is a key metal for modern batteries in electric vehicles and other consumer items, and mining claims have rapidly spread in the Black Hills. Rep. Kirk Chaffee, R-Whitewood, the bill's main sponsor, wants to see a lithium tax in place before the mining starts.

The bill would classify South Dakota lithium as a precious metal – like gold and silver – and place a 10% tax on company profits from lithium mining. The tax would include deductions for costs including transport, marketing and refining.

Supporters of the bill include the Izaak Walton League, Sierra Club, South Dakota Association of County Commissioners, and lobbyist Brett Koenecke, who spoke as a resident of Custer.

"If you're going to take something from us, you should pay for that," Koenecke told the committee. He said lithium claims are abundant in the Black Hills.

"There is something happening," Koenecke said. "I'm not against the something, but I do think we ought to put a tax on it for the benefit of, especially the counties, and probably the state as well."

Twenty percent of the tax revenue would go to the county where the mining occurs, and 80% would go to the state, as with taxes on other precious metals. Counties are also capped at \$1 million per company, with all additional revenue going to the state, according to Jason Evans with the state Department of Revenue.

Last year, Chaffee sponsored a similar effort to classify lithium as an energy mineral, which would have subjected it to a tax. That bill passed the House of Representatives but was rejected in the Senate.

Thursday, Chaffee told the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee that "the gorilla" in the global lithium battery market is China. The country's lithium-ion battery market share could be as high as 80%. Therefore, Chaffee argues the bill is a tax on China, since he believes much of the lithium mined in the U.S. will end up there.

Opponents last year argued lithium is not an energy mineral and the bill's proponents should go back to the drawing board. Some of the bill's opponents said last year they did not oppose taxing lithium, but didn't think last year's bill was the right approach.

This year, opponents are making a similar argument.

Kwinn Neff, president of South Dakota Mineral Industries Association, said lithium is more of a "critical mineral" than a precious one. He said the federal government classifies lithium as a critical and strategic mineral.

Critical minerals are those pivotal for economic and national security. In contrast, the significance of precious minerals is rooted in rarity and market demand, rather than industrial necessity. Neff said the distinction is important for shaping government policies.

Chaffee said critical minerals are not taxed in the state, and that's why he's now trying to classify lithium as "precious."

Neff said the industry doesn't oppose a tax, but 10% is too high, especially given there is no company currently making money on South Dakota lithium.

"Claims are nothing to be alarmed about," Neff said. "Any citizen in America can stake a claim for \$240."

Multiple companies are exploring for lithium in the Black Hills.

The bill passed the committee with 12 yes votes and one member excused. It now heads to the full 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.

Permanent tax cut bill tabled in Senate committee, but discussion continues

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 18, 2024 12:28 PM

PIERRE — A bill to permanently keep South Dakota's state sales tax rate at a reduced 4.2% was tabled Thursday at the Capitol by the Senate Committee on Appropriations on a 7-2 vote.

Senators questioned the impact of federal pandemic relief funds inflating the state budget and revenues, and the impact of a potential elimination of the state's sales tax on anything sold for human consumption, commonly referred to as the grocery tax or food tax. Petitions to place that measure on the November ballot are circulating.

"Our appropriators, I think, were pretty clear based on that vote where they think things are overall," said Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree during Thursday's Republican leadership press conference.

The House passed a state sales tax reduction from 4.5% to 4.2% last legislative session before a sunset clause was added in the Senate to make the tax cut expire in 2027. Senators urged caution at the time with talk of a potential recession, preferring to wait to make any permanent decisions until after hundreds of millions of federal pandemic aid is fully spent.

Senators see keeping the sunset as the most "prudent and smart" decision, Crabtree said, adding that the Senate intends to make the tax cut permanent when the sunset lifts, unless something unforeseen happens.

"We have no intention of that going way," Crabtree said. "We're just being cautious and careful with the taxpayer dollar moving forward."

Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger told legislators that the food tax accounts for about 7% of the state's sales tax base, adding that the elimination of the food tax would present "some challenges" and would have to "be dealt with through the budget process" if the ballot measure passes.

Gov. Kristi Noem supports the permanent sales tax cut and opposes the food tax elimination effort, despite campaigning on eliminating the food sales tax in 2022. The switch is due to concerns expressed by Attorney General Marty Jackley in his official ballot explanation released last year, including that the measure could impact funds from a tobacco litigation settlement.

The bill to make the tax reduction permanent sailed through the House of Representatives last week on a 54-12 vote. House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Fort Pierre, countered Crabtree on Thursday, saying that the measure is "by far the most prudent way" to permanently cut taxes.

Prime sponsor of the bill Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, said it's too early in the session to say if the permanent tax cut discussion will be revived.

"I do think that in the Senate there's a good portion who have made it clear they're not interested in talking about repealing the sunset this year, but I've talked with several others who've said they support it," Karr told South Dakota Searchlight after the appropriations meeting. "It really comes down to the Senate."

A few other tax cut bills have been introduced so far this session, including a property tax relief bill, and a bill that would eliminate the sales tax on baby food, infant formula and children's diapers. The property tax bill was withdrawn last week and the other bill has not yet had a hearing.

Aside from the permanent sales tax cut, which Mortenson said the House still has an appetite for, both Republican leaders say lawmakers are interested in a public university tuition freeze. Mortenson said a tuition freeze is "the closest thing to a tax cut."

This would be a fourth consecutive tuition freeze. Crabtree said freezes benefit South Dakota families

and the economy, and serve as a workforce development tool.

"That is one that I'd like to keep looking at and talking about going forward," Crabtree said.

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.

Congress speeds through short-term government funding bill before Friday shutdown deadline

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 18, 2024 5:16 PM

WASHINGTON — Congress will have until early March to finish work it was supposed to complete last fall — and will avert a partial government shutdown — under a bill both chambers approved with broad bipartisan support Thursday.

The 77-18 vote in the Senate and 314-108 vote in the House sent the bill to President Joe Biden, and he is expected to sign it before a Friday midnight deadline.

The short-term government funding bill will keep federal departments and agencies running under the spending levels and policies last approved during unified Democratic control of Washington.

The stopgap measure, often called a continuing resolution, or CR, is meant to give the Republican House and Democratic Senate more time to broker agreement on the dozen full-year appropriations bills that were supposed to become law by the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, said she hoped this would be the last continuing resolution Congress uses during the current fiscal year.

"Passing this measure will allow us the time we need to hammer out those funding bills for fiscal year '24 after many months of needless delays," Murray said.

"I think we all want this to be a drama-free and reliable process, so I hope House Republicans will work with us to make that possible now too, which means leaving extreme partisan demands at the door," she added.

House Appropriations Chair Kay Granger appeared to reject that sentiment during debate on the continuing resolution in that chamber.

The Texas Republican noted that "finding common ground will not be easy" since the GOP plans to press to include their conservative policy riders in the dozen full-year spending bills.

"I want to be clear, as we begin to conference these bills, House Republicans are committed to fighting for meaningful policy changes," Granger said.

Agreed-upon spending levels

Appropriators in the House and Senate will negotiate those dozen bills under spending levels agreed to earlier this month when Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, and Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, reached agreement to spend \$886.3 billion on defense and \$772.7 billion for domestic accounts.

But the chairs and ranking members in the House and Senate tasked with working out bicameral agreement on the dozen full-year government funding bills need more time to agree how much should be spent on each.

They'll also need to decide what to do about spending policy amid the thorny disagreements.

So Congress drafted its third CR of the fiscal year with a new deadline of March 1 to approve the Agriculture-FDA, Energy-Water, Military Construction-VA and Transportation-HUD spending bills.

The other eight bills will need to become law by March 8 under the CR.

Rand Paul, Roger Marshall amendments rejected

Two Republican senators attempted to change the continuing resolution before it went to the House, though they were unsuccessful.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 10 of 60

The Senate voted 44-50 to reject an amendment from Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul that would have barred "any direct United States assistance, loan guarantee, or debt relief to the Palestinian Authority or any other Palestinian governing entity in the West Bank and Gaza."

The provision included several carve outs that would allow aid to continue if the Palestinian Authority or another Palestinian governing body in the West Bank or Gaza were to take seven steps, including if it "formally recognized the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state" and removed "all individuals with terrorist ties from security services."

"All American aid should be conditioned on recipients' practice of protecting basic human rights," Paul said.

Maryland Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin spoke against the amendment, saying Paul's proposal would have compromised the United States' ability to "work to make sure there's a future for the Palestinian people living in peace with Israel."

"Our ally Israel is at war to destroy Hamas terrorists, not in a war against the Palestinian people" Cardin said.

Kansas Sen. Roger Marshall was unsuccessful in getting his colleagues to go along with a so-called motion to commit, which would have sent the bill to the Appropriations Committee and required that panel to rewrite it to last through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30. That vote was 13-82.

"A full-year CR through September 30, would result in a spending cut of \$73 billion, bringing our total discretionary spending down to \$1.56 trillion; a significant cut from the \$1.66 trillion funding deal that's in the works currently," Marshall said. "This is the fiscally responsible decision that the American people deserve and Congress has an obligation to make."

Murray and Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, ranking member of the Appropriations Committee, both rejected the idea, saying it would undo all the work their committee has done on the annual government spending bills.

"Adopting this motion would wipe out the work of the Appropriations Committee that led to 12 standalone bills being reported last summer with overwhelming bipartisan support," Collins said. "It would also lock in dangerously inadequate funding levels for our national security and lead to cuts in other vital programs serving our veterans, older Americans and low income families."

'Congress has much more work to do'

During House floor debate, Granger urged her fellow GOP lawmakers to vote for the continuing resolution. "While we have made progress in our efforts to finish fiscal year 2024 bills, Congress has much more work to do, and more time is needed to negotiate bills on both sides," Granger said.

Connecticut Democratic Rep. Rosa DeLauro, ranking member on the Appropriations Committee, also backed the stopgap spending bill, but said she hopes it will be the last one and that Congress will next be voting on the overdue full-year bills.

"I hope the current pace and tone will result in swiftly finalizing all 2024 funding bills in a bipartisan fashion," DeLauro said.

House Freedom Caucus Chair Bob Good, a Virginia Republican, rebuked members of his own party for not pressing for a partial government shutdown in order to get policy wins.

"We're going to pass another major piece of legislation predominantly with Democrat votes, minority votes, when we have the House majority," Good said. "This is a loser for the American people. It's a loser for the country."

Republicans, Good said, should have used the Friday funding deadline and chances of a partial government shutdown to press for their preferred border and immigration policy.

"We could have utilized that momentum to attach border security to this continuing resolution and dare the Senate to vote against it and dare the Senate to vote against funding the government and securing the border," Good said. "And we failed to do even that."

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.

20 South Dakota schools participating in esports pilot season

BY: DANA HESS - JANUARY 18, 2024 10:30 AM

PIERRE — A pilot season for esports in South Dakota is helping high schools work out the technical kinks as well as building a foundation of mentors for the future.

At its meeting Wednesday, the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors heard an update on the pilot season from Kaleb Dschaak, CEO of Fenworks. That company was chosen by the board to provide assistance for esports.

Dschaak told the board that there are 20 schools participating in the esports pilot season with 217 students competing in online games.

"We've really had a good launch to the season," Dschaak said.

There were originally 24 schools in the pilot season, Dschaak said, noting technical problems at four schools forced them to drop out. He hopes to have those problems worked out by the next school year when esports starts its first real season.

The 20 teams all have coaches, known in esports as general managers.

"We have a foundation of mentors," Dschaak said, explaining that those 20 general managers will be there to help when more teams are added next season.

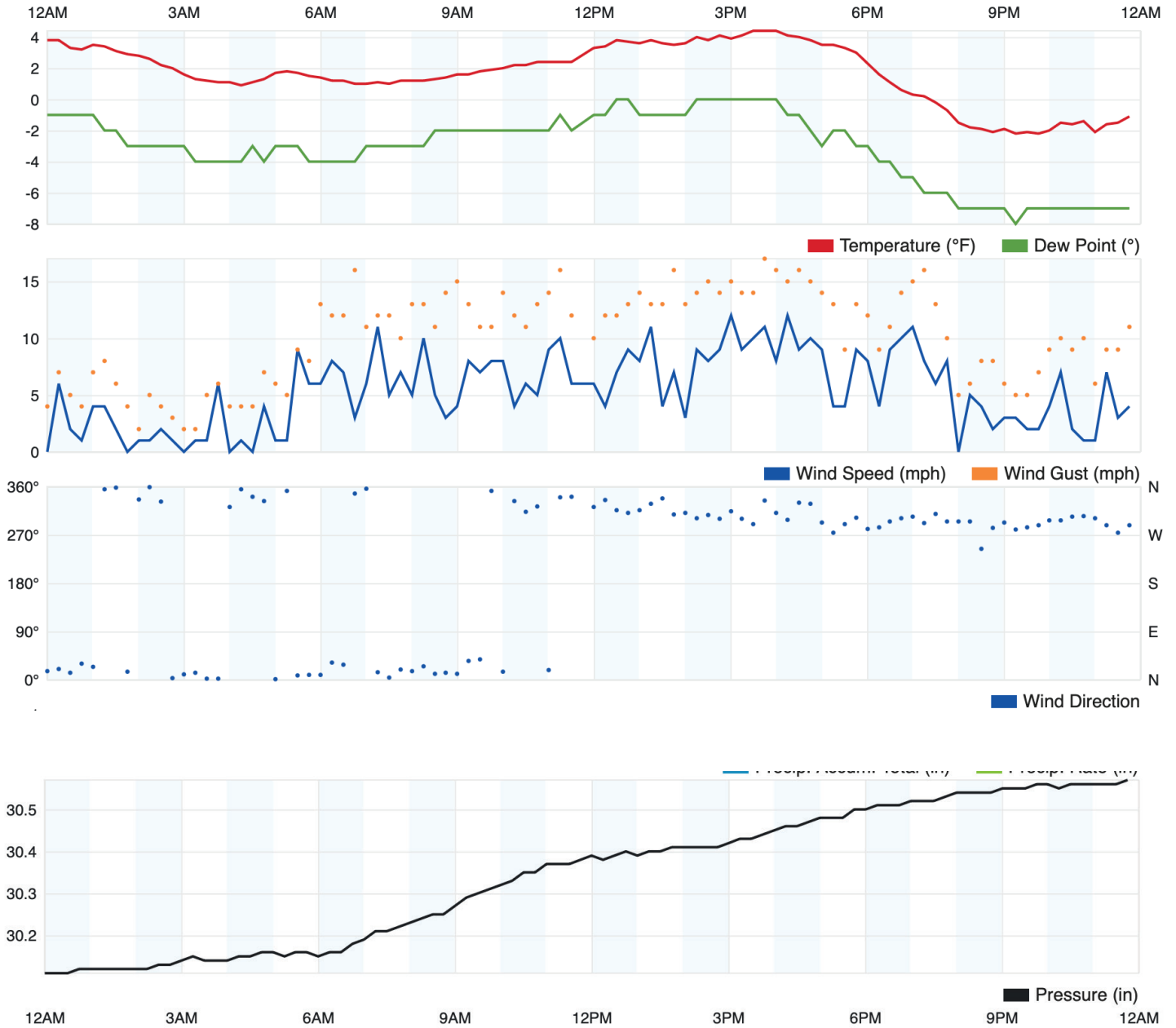
The pilot season will end with a tournament hosted by South Dakota State University in Brookings. Since it won't be sanctioned by SDHSAA, Dschaak is calling it a "community" tournament rather than a state tournament.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 12 of 60

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 13 of 60

Fri Jan 19	Sat Jan 20	Sun Jan 21	Mon Jan 22	Tue Jan 23	Wed Jan 24	Thu Jan 25
5°F -15°F	8°F 3°F	22°F 14°F	24°F 18°F	30°F 23°F	35°F 26°F	33°F 24°F
NW 19 MPH	S 29 MPH	S 30 MPH	N 10 MPH	ENE 9 MPH	S 12 MPH	W 9 MPH
10%		10%		10%		

Wind Chills...



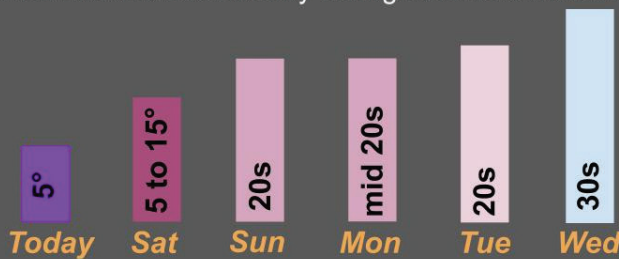
This Morning: -20 to -30°

This Afternoon: -10 to -20°

Tonight into Saturday Morning: -20 to -35°

Warmer Temperatures Ahead

After highs in the single digits above zero today, high temperatures will increase into the 20s and 30s Sunday through the next work week.



NWS Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/aberdeen



Wind chills this morning will remain in the -20 to -30 degree range, before improving to -10 to -20 degrees this afternoon. Cold air and light winds will combine tonight to bring wind chills back to -20 to -35 degrees tonight into Saturday morning. After a period of very cold air, high temperatures will rebound into the 20s and 30s from Sunday through the next work week.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 14 of 60



Strong Winds Saturday afternoon into Sunday morning

January 19, 2024
4:12 AM

Winds out of the south gusting 35 to 50 mph

- Winds out of the south **gusting 35 to 50 mph**, strongest over eastern South Dakota

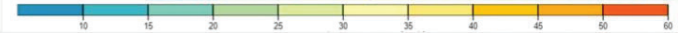


- Patchy **Blowing Snow** over central South Dakota Saturday to expand and increase in intensity over eastern South Dakota Saturday night into Sunday morning



Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	1/20 Sat						1/21 Sun							
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	18↑	24↑	29↑	36↑	41↑	41↑	41↑	39↑	39↑	35↑	28↑	20↑	15↑	9↑
Britton	12↑	20↑	29↑	31↑	40↑	45↑	44↑	43↑	43↑	35↑	30↑	22↑	16↑	13↑
Brookings	3↑	10↑	18↑	23↑	31↑	36↑	39↑	43↑	43↑	39↑	36↑	33↑	33↑	32↑
Chamberlain	10↑	20↑	28↑	31↑	36↑	38↑	37↑	37↑	37↑	31↑	28↑	18↑	13↑	10↑
Clark	12↑	21↑	28↑	33↑	40↑	47↑	49↑	49↑	49↑	47↑	43↑	33↑	28↑	22↑
Eagle Butte	26↑	32↑	36↑	41↑	41↑	35↑	28↑	21↑	14↑	10↑	8↑	10↑	10↑	12↑
Ellendale	14↑	25↑	31↑	33↑	40↑	43↑	41↑	38↑	36↑	29↑	23↑	17↑	12↑	8↑
Eureka	17↑	29↑	36↑	38↑	38↑	38↑	35↑	32↑	26↑	18↑	16↑	13↑	10↑	8↑
Gettysburg	20↑	30↑	36↑	40↑	44↑	44↑	39↑	37↑	32↑	25↑	18↑	10↑	10↑	10↑
Huron	10↑	20↑	26↑	33↑	39↑	39↑	41↑	44↑	43↑	38↑	35↑	29↑	26↑	20↑
Kennebec	17↑	24↑	33↑	38↑	40↑	41↑	41↑	38↑	38↑	30↑	23↑	15↑	12↑	12↑
McIntosh	29↑	39↑	44↑	44↑	40↑	36↑	29↑	20↑	12↑	8↑	5↑	7↑	9↑	10↑
Milbank	7↑	12↑	17↑	20↑	28↑	32↑	33↑	33↑	33↑	30↑	30↑	23↑	21↑	16↑
Miller	15↑	25↑	29↑	35↑	41↑	43↑	41↑	43↑	43↑	38↑	30↑	21↑	14↑	10↑
Mobridge	18↑	28↑	32↑	37↑	38↑	35↑	30↑	26↑	18↑	13↑	10↑	8↑	8↑	8↑
Murdo	23↑	31↑	37↑	40↑	45↑	45↑	37↑	35↑	29↑	22↑	15↑	12↑	10↑	12↑
Pierre	17↑	24↑	32↑	39↑	41↑	40↑	30↑	29↑	22↑	17↑	14↑	10↑	9↑	7↑
Redfield	13↑	24↑	29↑	38↑	43↑	43↑	43↑	43↑	43↑	40↑	33↑	25↑	18↑	14↑
Sisseton	8↑	14↑	20↑	24↑	33↑	38↑	38↑	35↑	33↑	28↑	28↑	23↑	17↑	14↑
Watertown	7↑	16↑	23↑	28↑	36↑	41↑	46↑	48↑	48↑	44↑	43↑	33↑	28↑	23↑
Webster	10↑	20↑	29↑	37↑	45↑	49↑	49↑	49↑	49↑	46↑	39↑	31↑	25↑	18↑
Wheaton	8↑	14↑	20↑	23↑	28↑	31↑	31↑	31↑	28↑	26↑	26↑	24↑	22↑	18↑



Winds will be on the increase Saturday into Sunday morning, with gusts peaking at 35 to 50 mph. The strongest winds will be over the higher elevations of eastern South Dakota. Patchy blowing snow over central South Dakota Saturday will expand and increase in intensity over eastern South Dakota (particularly the Sisseton Hills area) Saturday night into Sunday morning.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 15 of 60

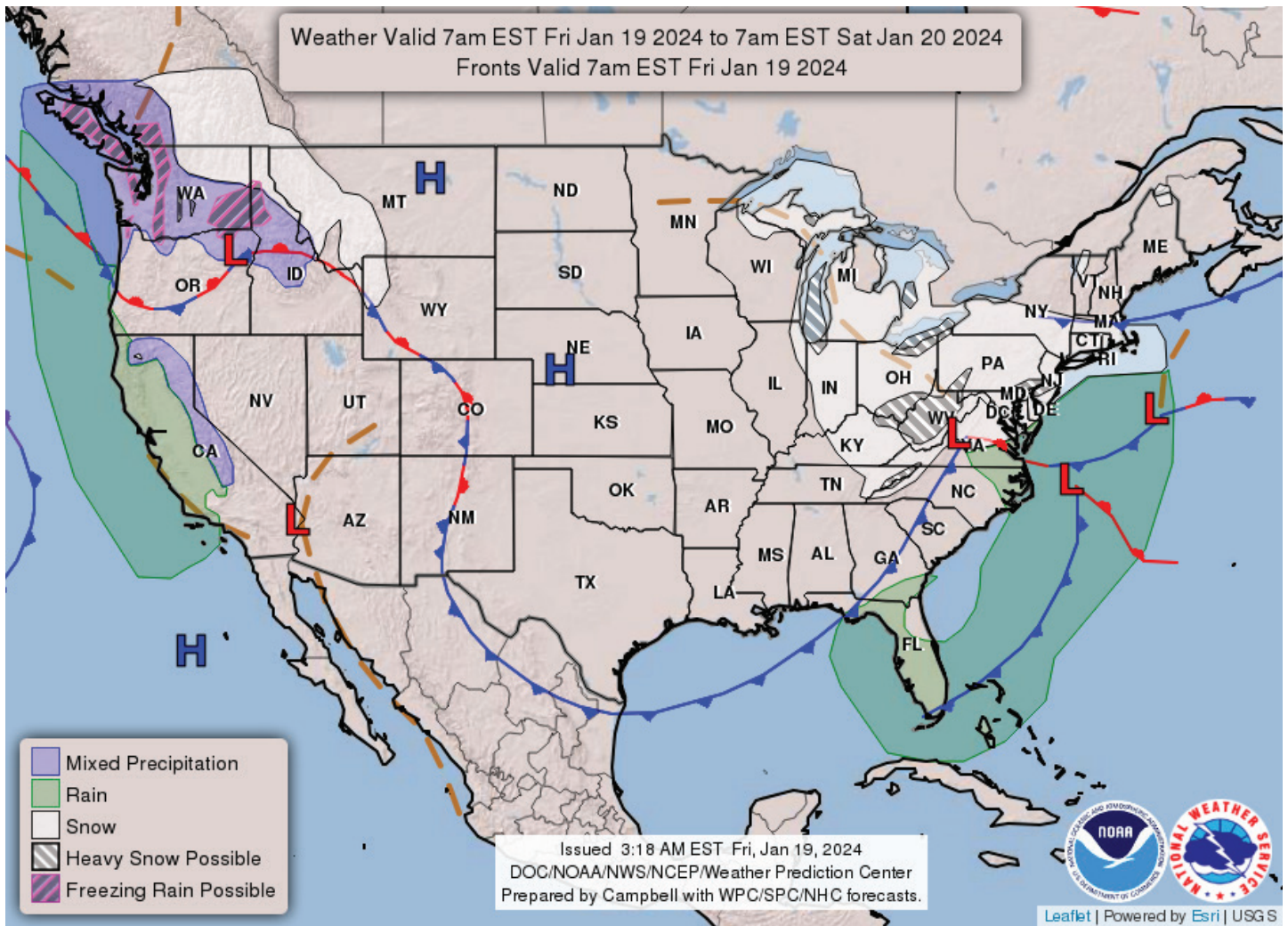
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 5 °F at 3:26 PM
Low Temp: -2 °F at 8:50 PM
Wind: 18 mph at 4:20 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 17 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1921
Record Low: -36 in 1943
Average High: 23
Average Low: 1
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.36
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.36
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:21:51 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03:28 am



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 16 of 60

Today in Weather History

January 19, 1970: An extremely cold air mass was over settle over South Dakota and western Minnesota. After a frigid night, daytime high temperatures struggled to reach the single digits below zero. Overnight low temperatures across the area were from 25 below to 34 below zero, with daytime highs from 3 above at Sisseton to 12 degrees below zero at Pierre. Record low temperatures were set at Wheaton, Watertown, Pierre, and Kennebec. The temperature fell to 32 degrees below zero at Pierre, 33 degrees below zero at Watertown and Wheaton, and 34 degrees zero at Kennebec. Aberdeen fell to 35 degrees below zero, Sisseton dropped to 26 degrees below zero, Mobridge fell to 25 degrees below zero, Sisseton fell to 26 degrees below zero, and Timber Lake fell to 27 degrees below zero.

1810 - The famous "cold day" in New England. Gale force winds wrecked homes, and accompanied a sudden overnight drop in temperature of 50 degrees. Tragedy struck Sanbornton NH where three children froze to death. (David Ludlum)

1839: An Aurora Borealis observed at Bossekop, Norway, on January 19th, 1839. Illustration from 'Electricity and Magnetism' by Amedee Guillemin (1826-1893), published in London in 1891.

1883: The steamers of Cimbria and Sultan collided in the North Sea due to dense fog. This collision resulted in the death of over 350 people.

1933 - Giant Forest CA received 60 inches of snow in just 24 hours, a state record, and the second highest 24 hour total of record for the U.S. (David Ludlum)

1961: Eight inches of snow fell and caused crippling traffic jams around the Washington D.C. area on the eve of John Kennedy's inauguration. The president-elect had to cancel dinner plans and, in a struggle to keep other commitments, reportedly had only 4 hours of sleep. Former President Herbert Hoover was unable to fly into Washington National Airport due to the weather, and he had to miss the swearing-in ceremony.

1977: Snow fell in South Florida for the first time in recorded history.

1987 - A storm tracking toward the northeastern U.S. produced up to 14 inches of snow in northern Indiana. Peru IN reported a foot of snow. Six cities in Florida reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 88 degrees at Miami equalled their record for the month of January. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A powerful storm hit the central U.S. producing blizzard conditions in the Central High Plains, and severe thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Snowfall totals ranged up to 36 inches at Wolf Creek Pass CO, with 31 inches at Elsmere NE. Tornadoes claimed five lives in Tennessee, and a tornado at Cullman AL injured 35 persons. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - The high temperature for the day at Fairbanks, AK, was a frigid 41 degrees below zero, and the morning low of 24 degrees below zero at Anchorage AK was their coldest reading in fourteen years. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in eastern Texas and Louisiana. Tornadoes at Garland TX and Apple Springs TX each injured one person. Heavy snow spread from the Southern and Central Rockies into the Great Plains. Storm totals in New Mexico reached 36 inches at Gascon. Totals in the Central Plains ranged up to 15 inches near McCook NE and Garden City KS. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: An unusual series of Pacific storm systems tracked across Arizona from January 6th through the 19th, producing heavy and prolonged precipitation across the state. These heavy rains caused the most widespread and severe flooding in Arizona since the turn of the century. The protracted rainfall over the 2 weeks caused multiple flood peaks on most streams and rivers. A large garbage landfill and portions of the new Mill Avenue Bridge under construction were washed away by the raging Salt River. The Gillespie Dam west of Phoenix was damaged as high water spread throughout low-lying areas. One man drowned while trying to cross the Agua Fria River. The image below is from Storm Data.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 17 of 60

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

DO OUR WORDS REALLY MATTER?

It was the mid-week prayer service. The crowd was small but the singing loud. The final hymn before the Bible study was "For You I Am Praying."

A visitor turned to a member of the church who was standing next to him and asked, "For whom are you praying?"

"No one, really," came the response. "I'm just singing."

Often the hymns we sing and the words we speak are completely disconnected from the lives we live. Sometimes our faith is so frail that we fail Him.

But if our relationship with God is what He expects it to be, we must give Him our love and our lives, our heads and our hearts, our desires and our dreams. And, we must ask Him to empower us, by His grace and goodness, to live lives that will be pleasing to Him.

God's first expectation of us is that we totally commit our lives to Him. Paul, writing to the Romans said, "I beg you, in view of all that God has done for you, to make a decisive decision to present all that you are or have to God as a living sacrifice - which is only reasonable."

If we do that - make that decisive decision to surrender our lives to Him - the songs we sing and the words we speak will be obvious in our lives and consistent with His expectations.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to be certain that our walk matches our words and that we behave what we say we believe. Give us Your courage to be consistent. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I beg you, in view of all that God has done for you, to make a decisive decision to present all that you are or have to God as a living sacrifice - which is only reasonable. Romans 12:1



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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 18 of 60

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 19 of 60



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: 17 Hrs 17 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.17.24

9 14 16 23 40 5

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,450,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 32 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.18.24

20 23 24 34 47 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.17.24

3 15 17 24 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$24,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.17.24

14 38 51 53 55 25

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.17.24

18 22 43 61 65 2

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$120,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 20 of 60

News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Brandon Valley 50, Pierre T F Riggs High School 46
Colman-Egan 50, Elkton-Lake Benton 38
Dell Rapids St. Mary 51, Chester 47
Deuel 63, Tiospa Zina 28
Groton Area 42, Milbank 39
Hamlin 66, Redfield 33
Harrisburg 53, Sioux Falls Jefferson 43
Langford 44, Waverly-South Shore 27
Lennox 46, West Central 35
Leola-Frederick High School 50, Northwestern 38
Little Wound 68, Crazy Horse 13
Marshall, Minn. 58, Sioux Falls Washington 51
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 72, Sioux Falls Lincoln High School 29
Sisseton 69, Webster 29
Spearfish 47, Douglas 16
Waubay/Summit 43, Aberdeen Christian 35
281 Conference Tournament=
Champion=
Wessington Springs 40, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 38, OT
Third Place=
James Valley Christian 61, Iroquois-Lake Preston 46
Fifth Place=
Wolsey-Wessington 52, Highmore-Harrold 47
Seventh Place=
Hitchcock-Tulare 49, Sunshine Bible Academy 24
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Baltic vs. Viborg-Hurley, ppd.
Canton vs. Parker, ppd. to Feb 12th.
Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Akron-Westfield, Iowa, ppd.
Tea Area vs. Aberdeen Central, ppd. to Feb 12th.
Winner vs. Belle Fourche, ppd.

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 56, Waubay/Summit 28
Brandon Valley 54, Pierre T F Riggs High School 47
Dell Rapids 55, Madison 53
Deuel 66, Tiospa Zina 55
Elkton-Lake Benton 66, Colman-Egan 65, 2OT
Groton Area 61, Milbank 28
Hamlin 83, Redfield 19
Lennox 49, West Central 43
Leola-Frederick High School 69, Northwestern 31
Mitchell 57, Sioux Falls Lincoln High School 53

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 21 of 60

Sioux Falls Washington 57, Marshall, Minn. 42
Sioux Valley 75, Deubrook 65
281 Conference Tournament=
Champion=
Wessington Springs 61, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 47
Third Place=
Wolsey-Wessington 64, James Valley Christian 49
Fifth Place=
Highmore-Harrold 67, Hitchcock-Tulare 53
Seventh Place=
Iroquois-Lake Preston 66, Sunshine Bible Academy 61, OT
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Aberdeen Central vs. Tea Area, ppd.
Baltic vs. Viborg-Hurley, ppd.
Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Akron-Westfield, Iowa, ppd.

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

Thioune scores 18 as South Dakota downs St. Thomas 74-73 in OT

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Lahat Thioune had 18 points in South Dakota's 74-73 overtime victory over St. Thomas on Thursday night.

South Dakota's Jevon Hill made a jumper with five seconds left in regulation that forced overtime tied 68-all. Hill then made a 3-pointer with 1:10 left in the extra period before Bostyn Holt's layup capped the scoring with 31 seconds left.

Thioune added 10 rebounds for the Coyotes (9-10, 2-2 Summit League). Max Burchill scored 17 points, going 6 of 8 (5 for 7 from 3-point range). Holt added 15 points and Hill finished with 12.

The Tommies (13-7, 3-2) were led by Parker Bjorklund, who recorded 17 points and seven rebounds. Raheem Anthony added 14 points, six rebounds, five assists and two steals for St. Thomas. In addition, Kendall Blue had 13 points.

Mayo's 21 lead South Dakota State past Omaha 90-87

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Zeke Mayo scored 21 points and Charlie Easley hit two free throws with helped South Dakota State defeat Omaha 90-87 on Thursday night.

Mayo also contributed five rebounds for the Jackrabbits (10-9, 3-1 Summit League). Charlie Easley added 17 points and nine rebounds while going 4 of 11 from the floor, including 0 for 5 from 3-point range, and 9 for 9 from the foul line. Matthew Mims shot 5 for 6, including 4 for 5 from beyond the arc to finish with 14 points.

Marquel Sutton led the way for the Mavericks (10-10, 3-2) with 20 points, 10 rebounds and two steals. Omaha also got 20 points, eight rebounds, four assists and two steals from Frankie Fidler. In addition, JJ White had 17 points.

Sutton missed a potential tying 3-point shot with about a second left.

North Dakota lawmaker who insulted police in DUI stop gets unsupervised probation and \$1,000 fine

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A North Dakota lawmaker who insulted police with vulgar, homophobic and anti-migrant comments during an arrest last month for drunken driving was sentenced to serve nearly a year of unsupervised probation and to pay \$1,000.

Republican state Rep. Nico Rios, of Williston, received the sentence on Jan. 8, when he pleaded guilty to drunken driving, court records show. His sentence includes a 10-day suspended jail sentence, a mandatory evaluation and a victim impact panel. A misdemeanor charge of refusing a chemical test was dismissed. He must also pay \$50 for an open container violation.

Text and email messages were sent to Rios seeking comment Thursday. A phone message was also left with his attorney.

Rios' sentence is consistent with others for similar offenses, said criminal defense attorney Mark Friese, a long-time practitioner in DUI cases. He noted that Rios' driving privileges will be suspended automatically for 91 days.

"It does not appear that he was treated more harshly than other people in similar situations," Friese said. "My guess is that the judge recognizes ... there are multiple entities here that are going to hold Mr. Rios to account."

Police body-camera footage from the Dec. 15 traffic stop, requested by and provided to the AP, shows Rios cursing an officer, repeatedly questioning his English accent, and using homophobic slurs and anti-migrant language. He also said he would call the North Dakota attorney general about the situation. He told the officers they would "regret picking on me because you don't know who ... I am."

He has faced growing calls from his party to resign, including the House majority leader and state and local Republican Party officials.

Last week, Republican House Majority Leader Mike Lefor removed him from the Legislature's interim Judiciary Committee, saying it wouldn't be fair for law enforcement officers to testify in front of a committee of which Rios is a member. The House-Senate panel meets between legislative sessions for studies of topics related to law enforcement and the legal system for future or potential legislation.

Rios has said he is "seriously mulling all aspects" of his future, and plans to seek help for alcoholism, but he has made no plans to resign. He also previously said he takes responsibility for his "disgusting actions," and apologized "to those I have hurt and disappointed," including law enforcement officers.

Rios has said he was leaving a Christmas party before police pulled him over.

Rios, who works in an oil field position involved in the hydraulic fracturing of wells, was elected unopposed in 2022 to a four-year term in the state House of Representatives. Republicans control the House, 82-12.

Indiana bill defining antisemitism advances to state Senate

By ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The Indiana House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill Thursday that defines antisemitism as religious discrimination in the state education code, repeating a 2023 vote after a similar bill died in the state Senate.

Backers hope the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks on Israel and ensuing war in Gaza have spurred renewed support for the bill this legislative session. State lawmakers across the country are expected to use annual legislative sessions for various symbolic and policy proposals centered on the war.

Indiana House Republicans included the bill, House Bill 1002, as one of their five priorities for the 2024 session. The legislation — largely aimed at higher education — would define antisemitism as religious discrimination and "provide educational opportunities free of religious discrimination."

At a committee hearing this month, lawmakers heard passionate testimony from dozens of people, including high schoolers, undergraduate and graduate students in Indiana.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 23 of 60

Advocates for the bill said instances of antisemitism have increased at college campuses in Indiana since the Oct. 7 attack, when militants stormed into Israel from Gaza, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capturing around 250 people.

Supporters of the legislation say a working definition of antisemitism in the state education code has been wanting long before October. Opponents of the bill worry it will be used to silence support for Palestinians and criticism of Israel.

The language of the bill currently says antisemitism "does not include criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country." Critics say the provision is vague and will not adequately protect students, faculty and others who are critical of Israel military operations in Gaza, where more than 24,000 people have been killed since Oct. 7.

About 30 people gathered outside of the House chamber Thursday to protest the measure, and one protestor was removed from the gallery before the vote.

Yaqoub Saadeh, 21, president of the Middle Eastern Student Association at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, said the legislation will infringe on academic freedom and his ability to speak out against Israel.

"I don't need to feel like as a student I'm going to be either censored or attacked or harassed," he said.

The House unanimously passed a bill with the same language during the 2023 legislative session. The 2024 bill now goes to the Senate, where it failed to get a committee hearing last year.

House Speaker Todd Huston, a Republican, told reporters Thursday he was "thrilled" about the unanimous vote.

"We feel good about what the House has done and we'll leave it up to our Senate colleagues," he said.

Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray, a Republican, has said his caucus would take a look at the bill should it pass to his chamber.

"The world's a little bit of a different place than it was even last year," he told reporters at a press conference Jan. 11.

In at least eight statehouses across the country, both Democratic and Republican lawmakers — sometimes working together — have introduced measures to define antisemitism. Some of the measures were introduced after the Oct. 7 attack. Others were on the agenda before that: Arkansas passed such a law early last year and one chamber of legislatures in both Georgia and South Carolina did, too.

Bills are also pending in at least Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey and South Dakota.

Lawmakers have also introduced scores of resolutions condemning the Oct. 7 attacks and supporting Israel. Some have pushed bills that would go further. For example, a measure being pushed in Florida would require students who "promote a foreign terrorist organization" to pay out-of-state tuition at public universities. New Jersey lawmakers have proposed reimbursing state residents who left Israel after the attacks.

In Iowa, a resolution to reaffirm support for Israel passed by voice vote Thursday in the House, as other states have done. The Republican-led act condemned Hamas, saying Israel should "oppose any pressure to enact a ceasefire before the State of Israel has secured its safety."

State Rep. Sami Scheetz, an Arab American of Syrian and Palestinian descent whose district includes Cedar Rapids, Iowa, said the resolution will not change the outcome of the conflict. Scheetz said he voted against the resolution that the "hyper-partisan" Republican majority brought without any consultation with Democrats.

"This is not justice that will lead to a lasting peace," Scheetz said, citing statistics on the more than 24,000 Palestinians killed and millions displaced. "Republicans in the Legislature stood for partisanship and exclusion instead of peace, justice and nonviolence for all."

Iowa passed a law in 2022 to enshrine the definition of antisemitism in the state code. Thursday's resolution in the House includes a call for law enforcement to "remain vigilant" in protecting Israeli Americans.

The South Dakota Senate on Thursday approved a resolution affirming the Republican-controlled Legislature's support of Israel, days after the House adopted the measure, both with overwhelming support.

Nevada Supreme Court panel won't reconsider 'Dances With Wolves' actor Nathan Chasing Horse case

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A panel of Nevada Supreme Court justices won't reconsider former "Dances With Wolves" actor Nathan Chasing Horse's request to dismiss a sprawling indictment that accuses him of leading a cult, taking underage wives and sexually abusing Indigenous women and girls.

"Rehearing denied," two of three justices who heard oral arguments last November said in a terse order dated Tuesday. Justice Douglas Herndon dissented. Chasing Horse still can seek a hearing before the full seven-member court.

The state high court decision means prosecutors in Las Vegas can proceed with their 18-count criminal case after months of Chasing Horse legal challenges. The 47-year-old has been in custody since his arrest in January 2023 near the North Las Vegas home he is said to have shared with five wives.

Chasing Horse has pleaded not guilty to charges including sexual assault of a minor, kidnapping and child abuse. A hearing is scheduled next Wednesday in Clark County District Court.

His lawyers argued the case should be dismissed because, the former actor said, the sexual encounters were consensual. One of his accusers was younger than 16, the age of consent in Nevada, when the alleged abuse began, authorities said.

Kristy Holston, a deputy public defender representing Chasing Horse, also argued the indictment was an overreach by the Clark County district attorney's office and that some evidence presented to the grand jury, including a definition of grooming, had tainted the state's case.

Holston declined Thursday to comment about the state Supreme Court decision.

Chasing Horse is known for his portrayal of Smiles a Lot in the 1990 film "Dances with Wolves."

Law enforcement authorities say in the decades since starring in the Oscar-winning movie, Chasing Horse became a self-proclaimed medicine man among tribes and traveled around North America to perform healing ceremonies. They say he used his position to gain access to vulnerable girls and women starting in the early 2000s.

The abuse allegations cross multiple U.S. states, including Nevada, where he was living when he was arrested, as well as Montana and South Dakota, according to the indictment.

One of the victims identified in the Nevada case was 14 when Chasing Horse told her the spirits of their ancestors had instructed him to have sex with her, according to court documents and prosecutors.

A push for a permanent sales tax cut in South Dakota is dealt a setback

By JACK DURA Associated Press

A bill to make a temporary sales tax cut permanent in South Dakota met a setback Thursday when Senate budget writers tabled the measure. But that likely isn't the end of the issue.

"That would generally be the end, but nothing in the Legislature is ever truly dead," said Republican Rep. Tony Venhuizen, a top House budget writer.

On Friday, the Republican-led House of Representatives had passed the bill in a 54-12 vote. The bill would make permanent a four-year sales tax cut passed last year. Bill sponsor and Republican Rep. Chris Karr cited the state's healthy economy and said excess state tax revenue should go back to taxpayers.

Gov. Kristi Noem supports a permanent sales tax cut. Sales taxes are the biggest contributor to South Dakota's state revenues.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree told reporters Thursday that the Senate's budget writers include some of the Legislature's most conservative members, who are "extremely careful and cautious with the taxpayer dollar."

"They feel that right now keeping that (temporary tax cut) in place is prudent and smart," Crabtree said.

Republican House Majority Leader Will Mortenson said the Legislature can take care of the state's financial obligations this year. The House is still behind a permanent tax cut, he said.

"I don't think the appetite for that has gone away in the House," Mortenson told reporters. A tuition freeze or cut has interest, too, he said.

South Dakota lawmakers still have several days for drafting and introducing legislation this session.

Noem urged the Legislature last month to make the four-year sales tax cut permanent. She campaigned for reelection in 2022 on a promise to repeal the state's grocery tax, but the Legislature opted for the sales tax cut of 0.3%, or \$104 million annually.

A proposed 2024 ballot measure would repeal the state's grocery tax.

Rifts emerge among top Israeli officials over how to handle the war against Hamas in Gaza

By JULIA FRANKEL, NAJIB JOBAIN and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Rifts are emerging among top Israeli officials over the handling of the war against Hamas in Gaza. A member of the country's War Cabinet cast doubt over the strategy for releasing hostages, and the country's prime minister rejected the United States' calls to scale back its offensive.

Only a cease-fire deal can win the release of dozens of hostages still held by Islamic militants in Gaza, and claims they could be freed by other means was spreading "illusions," said former army chief Gadi Eisenkot, one of four members of the War Cabinet, in his first public statements on the course of the war.

Eisenkot's comments late Thursday were the latest sign of disagreement among political and military leaders over the direction of Israel's offensive on Hamas, now in its fourth month.

Sparked by an unprecedented Oct. 7 Hamas raid into Israel that killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and saw about 250 others taken hostage, the Israeli assault has pulverized much of the Gaza Strip, home to some 2.3 million people. Israel has said more than 130 hostages remain in Gaza, but not all of them are believed to be alive.

Israel's offensive, one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, has killed nearly 25,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities, and uprooted more than 80% of the territory's population.

Israel has also cut off all but a trickle of supplies into the besieged Gaza Strip, including food, water and fuel. Several dozen trucks with critical supplies now enter the territory each day, just a fraction of the pre-war volume of about 500 trucks. Both the United States and United Nations have said more aid needs to be delivered.

A communications blackout in the territory was in its seventh day Friday, the longest such blackout since the war began. The lack of communications hampers the coordination of aid deliveries and rescue efforts.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has provided strong military and political support for the campaign, but has been increasingly calling on Israel to scale back its assault and take steps toward establishing a Palestinian state after the war — a suggestion Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has soundly rejected.

Speaking during a nationally televised news conference Thursday, Netanyahu reiterated his longstanding opposition to a two-state solution, arguing that a Palestinian state would become a launchpad for attacks on Israel.

Israel "must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River," Netanyahu said, adding: "That collides with the idea of sovereignty. What can we do?"

The U.S. has said the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which governs semi-autonomous zones in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, should be "revitalized" and return to Gaza. Hamas ousted the authority from Gaza in 2007.

Washington has also called for steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Palestinians seek Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem for their state. Those areas were captured by Israel in 1967.

Speaking Wednesday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Blinken said the two-state solution was the best way to protect Israel, unify moderate Arab countries and isolate Israel's arch-enemy, Iran. He said that without a pathway to a Palestinian state, Israel would not "get genuine security."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 26 of 60

At the same conference, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said the kingdom is ready to establish full relations with Israel as part of a larger political agreement. "But that can only happen through peace for the Palestinians, through a Palestinian state," he said.

A spokesperson for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who heads the Palestinian Authority, said late Thursday that there can be "no security and stability in the region" without a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have said the fighting will continue until Hamas is crushed, and argue that only military action can win the hostages' release.

Hamas seeks an end to the war before discussing hostage releases, and has demanded the release of thousands of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel in exchange for those held captive in Gaza.

Commentators have begun to question whether Netanyahu's objectives are realistic, given the slow pace of the offensive and growing international criticism, including genocide accusations at the United Nations world court, which Israel vehemently denies.

Netanyahu's opponents accuse him of delaying any discussion of postwar scenarios in order to avoid looming investigations of governmental failures, keep his coalition intact and put off elections. Polls show that the popularity of Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption charges, has plummeted during the war.

Eisenkot, whose son was killed in December in Gaza, told the investigative program "Uvda" on Israel's Channel 12 television station late Thursday that "the hostages will only return alive if there is a deal, linked to a significant pause in fighting." He said dramatic rescue operations are unlikely because the hostages are apparently spread out, many of them in underground tunnels.

Claiming hostages can be freed by means other than a deal "is to spread illusions," he said.

In a thinly veiled criticism of Netanyahu, Eisenkot also said strategic decisions about the war's direction must be made urgently, and that a discussion about an endgame should have begun immediately after the war began.

He also dismissed suggestions that the military has delivered a decisive blow against Hamas.

Gallant has said troops disabled the Hamas command structure in northern Gaza, from where significant numbers of troops were withdrawn earlier in the week, and that the focus is now on the southern half of the territory.

"We haven't yet reached a strategic achievement, or rather only partially," Eisenkot said. "We did not bring down Hamas."

The militant group has continued to fight back across Gaza, even in the most devastated areas, and launched rockets into Israel.

The former army chief said he is examining every day whether he should remain in the War Cabinet, which includes Netanyahu, Gallant and former Defense Minister Benny Gantz. Eisenkot is a member of parliament in the opposition National Unity alliance headed by Gantz. Both joined Netanyahu to help lead the war.

"I know what my red line is," Eisenkot said when asked at what point he would quit. "It's connected to the hostages, that is one of the objectives, but it's also connected to the way in which we need to run this war."

The war has rippled across the Middle East, with Iranian-backed groups attacking U.S. and Israeli targets. Fighting between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon threatens to erupt into all-out war, and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to target international shipping despite U.S.-led airstrikes.

The United States conducted a fifth strike against Houthi rebels in Yemen on Thursday, even as President Joe Biden acknowledged that bombing the militants has yet to stop their attacks on shipping in the crucial Red Sea corridor.

North Korea says it tested a nuclear-capable underwater drone in response to rivals' naval drills

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Friday it has tested a nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by South Korea, the United States and Japan this week, as it continues to blame its rivals for raising tensions in the region.

The test of the drone, purportedly designed to destroy naval vessels and ports, came days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared he is scrapping his country's long-standing goal of a peaceful reunification with South Korea and that his country will rewrite its constitution to define South Korea as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have risen to their highest point in years, with Kim accelerating his weapons testing and threatening nuclear conflict. The United States and its Asian allies have responded by strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim calls rehearsals for an invasion.

The underwater drone, which North Korea said it first tested last year, is among a broad range of weapon systems demonstrated in recent years as Kim expands his arsenal of nuclear-capable weapons. South Korea's military says North Korea has exaggerated the capabilities of the drone.

North Korea's military said it conducted the test in the country's eastern waters in response to a naval drill by the U.S., South Korea and Japan which ended Wednesday in waters south of Jeju island. It did not say when the test occurred.

"Our army's underwater nuke-based countering posture is being further rounded off and its various maritime and underwater responsive actions will continue to deter the hostile military maneuvers of the navies of the U.S. and its allies," North Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

"We strongly denounce the U.S. and its followers for their reckless acts of seriously threatening the security of (North Korea) from the outset of the year and sternly warn them of the catastrophic consequences to be entailed by them," it said.

South Korea's Defense Ministry denounced North Korea's recent tests as a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions and a threat to "peace in the Korean Peninsula and the world." It said in a statement that the U.S. and South Korean militaries were maintaining a firm defense posture against possible North Korean provocations.

North Korea in recent months has tested various missile systems designed to target the United States and its Asian allies, and announced an escalatory nuclear doctrine that authorizes the military to conduct preemptive nuclear strikes if North Korea's leadership is under threat.

North Korea conducted its first ballistic missile test of 2024 on Sunday. State media described it as a new solid-fuel, intermediate-range missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead, likely intended to target U.S. military bases in Guam and Japan.

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Thursday, South Korea urged the council "to break the silence" over North Korea's escalating missile tests and threats. Russia and China, both permanent members of the Security Council, have blocked U.S.-led efforts to increase sanctions on North Korea over its recent weapons tests, underscoring a divide deepened over Russia's war on Ukraine. South Korea is serving a two-year term on the council.

NATO holds its biggest exercises in decades next week, involving around 90,000 personnel

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO will launch its biggest military exercises in decades next week with around 90,000 personnel set to take part in months of drills aimed at showing the alliance can defend all of its territory up to its border with Russia, top officers said Thursday.

The exercises come as Russia's war on Ukraine bogs down. NATO as an organization is not directly involved in the conflict, except to supply Kyiv with non-lethal support, although many member countries

send weapons and ammunition individually or in groups, and provide military training.

In the months before President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022, NATO began beefing up security on its eastern flank with Russia and Ukraine. It's the alliance's biggest buildup since the Cold War. The war games are meant to deter Russia from targeting a member country.

The exercises – dubbed Steadfast Defender 24 – “will show that NATO can conduct and sustain complex multi-domain operations over several months, across thousands of kilometers (miles), from the High North to Central and Eastern Europe, and in any condition,” the 31-nation organization said.

Troops will be moving to and through Europe until the end of May in what NATO describes as “a simulated emerging conflict scenario with a near-peer adversary.” Under NATO's new defense plans, its chief adversaries are Russia and terrorist organizations.

“The alliance will demonstrate its ability to reinforce the Euro-Atlantic area via transatlantic movement of forces from North America,” NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, U.S. General Christopher Cavoli, told reporters.

Cavoli said it will demonstrate “our unity, our strength, and our determination to protect each other.”

The chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, said that it's “a record number of troops that we can bring to bear and have an exercise within that size, across the alliance, across the ocean from the U.S. to Europe.”

Bauer described it as “a big change” compared to troop numbers exercising just a year ago. Sweden, which is expected to join NATO this year, will also take part.

U.K. Defense Secretary Grant Shapps has said that the government in London would send 20,000 troops backed by advanced fighter jets, surveillance planes, warships and submarines, with many being deployed in eastern Europe from February to June.

Live updates | Only a cease-fire deal can win hostages' release, an Israeli War Cabinet member says

By The Associated Press undefined

A member of Israel's War Cabinet says that only a cease-fire deal can win the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. Gadi Eisenkot added that those claiming hostages can be freed through military pressure were spreading illusions.

The former army chief's comments, broadcast on Israel's Channel 12 television station late Thursday, were the latest sign of a growing rift among political and military leaders over the direction of Israel's war on Hamas.

Across the Gaza Strip, Hamas militants are putting up stiff resistance. The conflict, now in its fourth month and showing no sign of ending, has also inflamed tensions across the Middle East.

Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 24,400 Palestinians have died, and the United Nations says a quarter of the 2.3 million people trapped in Gaza are starving. In Israel, around 1,200 people were killed during the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that sparked the war and saw some 250 people taken hostage by militants.

Currently:

- EU Parliament adopts a resolution calling for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, but says Hamas must go.
- Mexico and Chile ask International Criminal Court to investigate possible crimes in Gaza.
- Snubbed by Netanyahu, the Red Cross toes a fine line trying to help civilians in the Israel-Hamas conflict.
- Another Turkish soccer club ends its contract with an Israeli player over his posting on Gaza hostages.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

A MEMBER OF ISRAEL'S WAR CABINET SAYS LOUD OBJECTIONS PREVENTED A 'STRATEGIC MISTAKE' EARLY IN THE WAR

JERUSALEM — A member of Israel's War Cabinet confirmed reports that, early in the war against Hamas,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 29 of 60

an Israeli preemptive strike against Lebanon's Hezbollah militia was called off at the last minute.

Gadi Eisenkot, a former army chief, said he was among those arguing against such a strike in what he described as a stormy Oct. 11 Cabinet meeting that left him hoarse from shouting.

Such a strike would have been a "strategic mistake" and would likely have triggered a regional war, Eisenkot said in a wide-ranging interview late Thursday with the investigative program "Uvda" on Israel's Channel 12 TV. The interview marked the first time Eisenkot spoke in public about the handling of the war.

Eisenkot said loud objections raised by him and others during the Cabinet session were key to preventing the strike.

Since the Oct. 7 start of the war, Israel and Hezbollah have traded cross-border strikes with gradually escalating intensity. Neither side is believed to seek an all-out war which is bound to devastate both countries. Hezbollah is believed to have tens of thousands of missiles that can reach any target in Israel.

NETANYAHU'S REJECTION OF A TWO-STATE SOLUTION GOES AGAINST THE OSLO ACCORDS, NORWAY'S FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide told Norway's news agency NTB that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection of a two-state solution was "completely contrary to the agreements Israel and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) entered into in Oslo."

"The Israeli Prime Minister's statements are out of step with an almost unified international community," Barth Eide said in a statement to NTB.

The Norwegian foreign minister said that "a real political solution is needed" to solve the situation.

"Norway believes that there is no credible alternative to a two-state solution, just like the Palestinians themselves, the USA, the EU, the U.N. and the neighboring Arab countries," Barth Eide said.

A MEMBER OF ISRAEL'S WAR CABINET SAYS ONLY A CEASE-FIRE DEAL CAN BRING HOSTAGES HOME
JERUSALEM — A member of Israel's War Cabinet said that only a cease-fire deal can win the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza and that those claiming they can be freed through military pressure are spreading illusions.

Former army chief Gadi Eisenkot, whose son was killed several weeks before while fighting in Gaza, told the investigative program "Uvda," broadcast on Israel's Channel 12 television station late Thursday, that "the hostages will only return alive if there is a deal, linked to a significant pause in fighting."

He said dramatic rescue operations are unlikely because the hostages are apparently spread out, many of them in underground tunnels. Claiming hostages can be freed by means other than a deal "is to spread illusions."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have said the fighting will continue until Hamas is crushed, and argued that only military action can win the release of the hostages.

In a thinly veiled criticism of Netanyahu, Eisenkot also said strategic decisions about the direction of the war, now in its fourth month, must be made urgently, and that a discussion about an endgame should have begun immediately after fighting started Oct. 7 in response to the deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel.

THERE CAN BE NO SECURITY WITHOUT A PALESTINIAN STATE, THE PRESIDENT'S SPOKESPERSON SAYS
RAMALLAH, West Bank — The spokesperson for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas says there can be "no security and stability in the region" without a Palestinian state.

The remarks come in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection Thursday of calls by the United States to take steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state after the war.

"Without the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the borders of 1967, there will be no security and stability in the region," Palestinian state news agency Wafa quoted Abbas' spokesperson Nabil Abu Rdeineh as saying Thursday. The Palestinians seek Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem — which were captured by Israel in 1967 — for their state.

East and West coasts prepare for new rounds of snow and ice as deadly storms pound US

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Storms that have turned roads into icy death traps, frozen people to death from Oregon to Tennessee and even sent a plane skidding off a taxiway were expected to sock both coasts with another round of weather chaos on Friday.

New York City — which only on Tuesday saw its first snow in more than two years — was in the headlights as the National Weather Service laid out warnings of a possible 3 to 5 inches (7.6 to 12.7 centimeters) of snow through Friday in the state and portions of New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

On Thursday, an American Airlines plane slid off a snowy taxiway in Rochester, New York, after a flight from Philadelphia. No injuries were reported.

On the West Coast, Oregon's governor declared a statewide emergency Thursday night after requests for aid from multiple counties "as they enter the sixth day of severe impacts" from weather marked by freezing rain.

Thousands of residents have been without power since Saturday in parts of Oregon's Willamette Valley after an ice storm caused extensive damage.

"We lost power on Saturday, and we were told yesterday that it would be over two weeks before it's back on," said Jamie Kenworthy, a real estate broker in Jasper in Lane County.

"We do have a generator that we got last year, and right now it's running an oil plug-in heater," she said. "We also have a natural gas stove, and I've been running two of the burners to try to help heat up the house."

In the past two weeks, storms have blasted much of the U.S. with rain, snow, wind and frigid temperatures, snarling traffic and air travel and causing at least 45 deaths.

That included three people electrocuted Wednesday by a downed power line in Portland, Oregon. A man trying to get out of a parked car covered by the line died with a baby in his arms after slipping on the icy driveway and hitting the live wire. The baby survived.

His pregnant 21-year-old girlfriend and her 15-year-old brother died when they tried to help. Their father, Ronald Briggs, told KGW-TV that he helplessly watched their deaths.

"I have six kids. I lost two of them in one day," he said.

Crews had made steady progress restoring power to tens of thousands of customers in Oregon after back-to-back storms, but by Thursday night more than 79,000 were without electricity, according to the website poweroutage.us.

Portland Public Schools canceled classes for the fourth straight day amid concerns about icy roads and water damage to buildings, and state offices in Portland were also ordered closed Friday.

Bitter weather continued in the South, where a new layer of ice formed over parts of Tennessee on Thursday — part of a broader bout of cold sweeping the country.

Authorities blamed at least 14 deaths in Tennessee on the system, which dumped more than 9 inches (22.8 centimeters) of snow since Sunday on parts of Nashville, a city that rarely see such accumulations. Temperatures also plunged below zero (minus 17.7 Celsius) in parts of the state, creating the largest power demand ever across the seven states served by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The dead included a box truck driver who slid into a tractor-trailer on an interstate, a man who fell through a skylight while cleaning a roof, and a woman who died of hypothermia after being found unresponsive in her home.

On Thursday, Will Compton of the nonprofit Open Table Nashville, which helps homeless people, stopped his SUV outside the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to hand out warm hats, blankets, protein drinks and socks as icy rain fell.

"People who are poor and people who are homeless are getting hit the hardest," Compton said.

Aaron Robison, 62, has been staying at one of the city's warming centers and said the cold wouldn't have

bothered him when he was younger. But now with arthritis in his hip and having to rely on two canes, he needed to get out of the cold.

"Thank God for people helping people on the streets. That's a blessing," he said.

In Mississippi's capital city, an estimated 12,000 customers were dealing with low water pressure Thursday, another setback for Jackson's long-troubled water system.

Pipe breaks accelerated Wednesday when the frozen ground began to thaw and expand, putting pressure on buried pipes, Jackson water officials said. The water system experienced increased pressure due to a spike when people filled their bathtubs in response to what officials called a "deliberate misinformation campaign" on social media about the city's water supply, Jackson water manager Ted Henifin said.

Since extreme cold weather set in last week, more than 60 oil spills and other environmental incidents have been reported in North Dakota's Bakken oil fields, where regulators say wind chills as low as minus 70 degrees (minus 56.6 C) have strained workers and equipment, making accidents more likely.

In Washington state, five people — most of them presumed homeless — died from exposure to cold in just four days last week in Seattle as temperatures plummeted to well below freezing, the medical examiner's office said.

In Kansas, authorities were investigating the death of an 18-year-old whose body was found Wednesday in a ditch not far from where his vehicle had become stuck in snow.

Angst over LGBTQ+ stories led to another canceled show. But in a Wyoming town, a play was salvaged

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

WHEATLAND, Wyo. (AP) — Oliver Baez spent two months rehearsing a scene for a school play in which his character confronts another student about bullying a gay student who takes his own life.

After much preparation, the 12-year-old's small scene turned into a big problem among school officials in Wheatland, Wyoming. At the last minute they canceled the anti-bullying play, saying it did not conform to school values and leaving the young cast without a stage.

"It was awful," Baez said. "For the school to cancel it, it's like saying that 'LGBTQ should not be included in a society.' Which is really awful and cruel."

Twenty-five years after a watershed moment for the gay rights movement — the murder of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old student in a university town not far from Wheatland — the canceled performances of "The Bullying Collection" show how far the LGBTQ+ community still has to go to gain acceptance in Wyoming and elsewhere.

Wyoming is one of just two states without a hate crimes law; South Carolina is the other. Libraries around the country are facing community pressure to pull children's books with LGBTQ+ stories, drag shows have been banned in some places and a University of Wyoming sorority was sued for admitting a transgender woman.

Meanwhile, Wyoming lawmakers are preparing to consider a bill this session that would strictly define gender as one's biological sex at birth, restricting the lives of trans and nonbinary residents.

Located on the eastern Wyoming plains, Wheatland is a small farming and ranching community with about 3,500 residents. There are few restaurants, no department stores — not even a local Walmart — and few performance venues besides Wheatland High School.

A local theater group, the Platte County Players, has permission to perform there and salvaged the rights to the play and sponsored the performance a month later at the high school, as originally planned.

The students performed last week before a small gathering of people who braved icy roads and subzero temperatures to see the delayed show. But if they still grow up to have bad feelings about the whole thing, they would have fair reason.

Community apathy, combined with snowy weather and extreme cold, made for a sparsely attended performance. Only about 50 people showed up, including half a dozen LGBTQ+ advocates and allies from Cheyenne, 70 miles (110 kilometers) away.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 32 of 60

Parents were thrilled to see the play ultimately performed after weeks of practice and then delay. It was sad the principal couldn't stand up for what was right and got misguided by "old mindsets," Oliver's mom, Cassie Baez, said in an email.

In a changing world, such limited mindsets are harmful for children after they grow up and venture away from small-town life, Cassie Baez added.

"As a kid who has been bullied, Oliver knew this was important. So he was sad and even mad that the school still wasn't backing him on a very important topic," Cassie Baez wrote.

The principal had the backing of school district leadership, however.

"The board supports the administration," school board chairperson Lu Lay said in an emailed statement, citing zero "negative" comments from the public on the cancellation decision.

To the district's superintendent, John Weigel, the play seemed more appropriate for high schoolers than middle schoolers. He said he hadn't seen the play himself but heard from the principal that it confused some kids and some middle school teachers supported cancellation.

The play featured 10-minute skits about bullying, including politicians and parents belittling one another and a teen being teased for carrying tampons at school. It also touched on a wide range of topics, including the risk of suicide for LGBTQ+ youths and students describing what it's like to experience a school shooting.

For school administrators, a scene in which a student eulogizes another student who killed himself was especially problematic. Baez walked onto the stage from the audience to chastise the girl for not mentioning the boy was gay and how she had participated in bullying him.

"In my view, a play is supposed to be entertaining, that's why I go," Weigel said. "It seems to me this is more of a kind of, stir up some social issues, maybe, instead of kind of like being more entertaining."

When he canceled the show, Principal Robert Daniel worsened the sting by giving each cast member a \$5 gift card to a Maverik convenience store, along with an apology letter saying they had done a "great job." Daniel did not return phone messages seeking comment.

One student tore up the letter and gave the card back. Another, Erica Biggs, 14, who played the role of the main bully opposite Baez, described the principal's gesture as demeaning after all of their hard work.

"We all kind of took it like they were trying to bribe us to feel better and not be mad about the play. But it didn't really help," Biggs said.

Among attendees Friday night was Sara Burlingame, director of the LGBTQ+ advocacy group Wyoming Equality, who drove from Cheyenne to show support.

"They're doing exactly what we hope all students would, which is take very seriously how bullying affects their peers," Burlingame said. "The irony is the people who are supposed to be their exemplars become their bullies."

This isn't the first time kids in Wheatland have dealt with this. Just last spring, a high school performance of "Mean Girls" was canceled and the same local theater group stepped in to help produce the show to a full house.

A decade earlier, the school board voted 4-3 to take down banners that read "No Place for Hate" in schools, because the Gay and Lesbian Fund of Colorado was among the sponsors of the campaign.

"Here we go again," said Jeran Artery, a former Wyoming Equality director who grew up in the town. "If there's anything in Wheatland that has any kind of resemblance to any kind of association with the LGBTQ movement, it's like, 'This must come down immediately. Our kids must not see this.'"

More than three decades ago at the high school, Artery practiced for the play "The Lion In Winter," which was canceled over the existence of one gay character.

"Just because there was a reference to homosexuality, there was an uproar in town, letters to the editor and things. And the drama director said, 'This is not worth the hassle, I'm just going to cancel the play,'" Artery recalled.

Yet some parents said they still weren't sure why "The Bullying Collection" was canceled because school officials never explained the decision.

"I read it all through," said Melissa Rukavina, whose two daughters were in the play. "Unless you're super

closed-minded, I don't see why you would do that."

Drama coach Stephanie Bradley, who also attended the high school, challenged the decision.

"I was told that promoting the LGBTQ community is not in line with values of the school," she said.

"Most people in this part of Wyoming don't come out early," Bradley said of LGBTQ+ teens on the state's rural plains. "They wait until they can escape, where they'll be safe. I just want it to be a safe place for everybody." _____

This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988.

An Oregon teen saw 3 people die after they slid on ice into a power line. Then she went to help

By CLAIRE RUSH and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Majiah Washington noticed a flash outside her home this week in Portland, where a dangerous storm had coated the city with ice. Opening her blinds, she saw a red SUV with a downed power line on it and a couple who had been putting their baby in the car.

The woman screamed to her boyfriend to get the baby to safety, and he grabbed the child and began to scramble up the driveway on concrete so slick it was almost impossible to walk. But before he made it halfway, he slid backward and his foot touched the live wire — "a little fire, then smoke," Washington said.

The mother, six months pregnant, tried to reach the baby, but she too slipped and was electrocuted. So was her 15-year-old brother, when he came out to help.

Washington, 18, was on the phone with a dispatcher when she saw the baby, lying on top of his father, move his head — the 9-month-old was alive. Having just seen three people shocked to death, she decided to try to save the boy.

She kept a low crouch to avoid sliding into the wire as she approached, she said at a news conference Thursday, a day after the deaths. As she grabbed the baby she touched the father's body, but she wasn't shocked, she said.

"I was concerned about the baby," said Washington, who recognized the woman as her neighbor's daughter. "Nobody was with the baby."

Portland Fire and Rescue spokesman Rick Graves praised Washington for her heroism but confessed he didn't understand how she and the baby weren't also electrocuted. The baby was examined at a hospital and is fine, authorities have said.

"We do have fortunately with us a toddler that is going to be able to thrive and do what they possibly can as they move forward," Graves said. "And they are here, in part, because of the heroic acts of a member of our community."

The snow, freezing rain, ice and frigid temperatures that hammered the Pacific Northwest in the past week have now been blamed for at least 10 deaths in Oregon, from hypothermia and falling trees or utility poles, along with five from hypothermia in the Seattle area.

Oregon's governor declared a statewide emergency Thursday night after requests for aid from multiple counties "as they enter the sixth day of severe impacts" from the weather.

The ice weighs down trees and power lines making them prone to snap, especially in strong winds. That appears to be what caused the electrocution deaths: A large branch broke from a tree, landed on utility wires and pushed one onto the vehicle.

Washington's neighbor, Ronald Briggs, declined to speak with The Associated Press beyond confirming that his 21-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son had been killed.

But he told Portland television station KGW that his daughter had come over to use the internet after hers went out. He and his wife had just gotten in their own car to run an errand when they heard the boom and saw the SUV apparently on fire.

He watched as the couple slid to their deaths — and then told his 15-year-old son, Ta'Ron Briggs, a high

school sophomore, to keep his distance, to no avail.

"I told him, 'Don't go down there — try to get away from them.' And he slid, and he touched the water, and he, and he died too," Briggs said. "I have six kids. I lost two of them in one day."

"It just hurt," he said. "Being a good father cannot solve this right now."

Netanyahu says he told the US that he opposes a Palestinian state in any postwar scenario

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, NAJIB JOBAIN and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday rejected calls from the United States to scale back Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip or take steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state after the war, drawing an immediate scolding from the White House.

The tense back and forth reflected what has become a wide rift between the two allies over the scope of Israel's war and its plans for the future of the beleaguered territory.

"We obviously see it differently," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said.

Netanyahu spoke just a day after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Israel would never have "genuine security" without a pathway toward Palestinian independence. Earlier this week, the White House also announced that it was the "right time" for Israel to lower the intensity of its devastating military offensive in Gaza.

In a nationally televised news conference, Netanyahu struck a defiant tone, repeatedly saying that Israel would not halt its offensive until it realizes its goals of destroying Gaza's Hamas militant group and bringing home all remaining hostages held by Hamas.

He rejected claims by a growing chorus of Israeli critics that those goals are not achievable, vowing to press ahead for many months. "We will not settle for anything short of an absolute victory," Netanyahu said.

Israel launched the offensive after an unprecedented cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7 that killed 1,200 people and took some 250 others hostage. Roughly 130 hostages are believed by Israel to remain in Hamas captivity. The war has stoked tensions across the region, threatening to ignite other conflicts.

Israel's assault, one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, has killed nearly 25,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities, caused widespread destruction and uprooted over 80% of the territory's 2.3 million people from their homes.

The staggering cost of the war has led to increasing calls from the international community to halt the offensive. After initially giving Israel wall-to-wall support in the early days of the war, the United States, Israel's closest ally, has begun to express misgivings and urged Netanyahu to spell out his vision for postwar Gaza.

The United States has said the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which governs semi-autonomous zones in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, should be "revitalized" and return to Gaza. Hamas ousted the authority from Gaza in 2007.

The U.S. has also called for steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Palestinians seek Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem for their state. Those areas were captured by Israel in 1967.

Speaking Wednesday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Blinken said the two-state solution was the best way to protect Israel, unify moderate Arab countries and isolate Israel's arch-enemy, Iran.

Without a "pathway to a Palestinian state," he said, Israel would not "get genuine security."

At the same conference, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said the kingdom is ready to establish full relations with Israel as part of a larger political agreement. "But that can only happen through peace for the Palestinians, through a Palestinian state," he said.

Netanyahu, who leads a far-right government opposed to Palestinian statehood, repeated his longstanding opposition to a two-state solution. He said a Palestinian state would become a launching pad for attacks on Israel.

He said Israel "must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River," adding:

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 35 of 60

"That collides with the idea of sovereignty. What can we do?"

"This truth I tell to our American friends, and I put the brakes on the attempt to coerce us to a reality that would endanger the state of Israel," he said.

The comments prompted an immediate rebuke from the White House. Kirby said that President Joe Biden would "not stop working" toward a two-state solution.

Before Oct. 7, Israeli society was bitterly divided over Netanyahu's plan for a judicial overhaul. Since the attack, the country has rallied behind the war. But divisions have once again begun to surface over Netanyahu's handling of the war.

Families of the hostages and their many supporters have called for a new cease-fire that could bring them home. Hamas released over 100 hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Dozens of people attended a somber gathering in Tel Aviv in solidarity with the family of Kfir Bibas, the youngest Israeli hostage, marking his first birthday. The red-haired infant and his 4-year-old brother Ariel were taken hostage along with their mother, Shiri, and their father, Yarden. All four remain in captivity.

Commentators have begun to question whether Netanyahu's objectives are realistic, given the slow pace of the offensive and growing international criticism, including genocide accusations at the United Nations world court, which Israel vehemently denies.

Netanyahu's opponents accuse him of delaying any discussion of postwar scenarios to avoid looming investigations of governmental failures, keep his coalition intact and put off elections. Polls show that the popularity of Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption charges, has plummeted during the war.

MEDICINES BOUND FOR HOSTAGES ENTER GAZA

There was no word Thursday on whether medicines that entered the territory as part of a deal brokered by France and Qatar had been distributed to dozens of hostages with chronic illnesses who are being held by Hamas.

The agreement was the first to be brokered between the warring sides since November. The deal includes large shipments of medicine, food and humanitarian aid for Palestinian civilians as well.

Qatar confirmed late Wednesday that the medicine had entered Gaza, but it was not yet clear if it had been distributed to the hostages, who are being held in secret locations, including underground bunkers.

The International Committee for the Red Cross, which helped facilitate the hostage releases, said it was not involved in distributing the medicine.

FIGHTING IN GAZA

Hamas has continued to fight back across Gaza, even in the most devastated areas, and launch rockets into Israel. It says 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.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have heeded Israeli evacuation orders and packed into southern Gaza, where shelters run by the United Nations are overflowing and massive tent camps have gone up.

Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets in all parts of Gaza, often killing women and children. Early Thursday, medics said an Israeli airstrike on a home killed 16 people, half of them children, in the southern Gaza town of Rafah.

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 193 of its own soldiers have been killed since the Gaza ground offensive began.

On Thursday, the Israeli army said it had destroyed "the heart" of Hamas' weapons manufacturing industry near a major north-south road in central Gaza. It said the complex included weapons factories and an extensive tunnel network used to ship arms throughout Gaza.

WAR REVERBERATES ACROSS REGION

The war has rippled across the Middle East, with Iranian-backed groups attacking U.S. and Israeli targets. Low-intensity fighting between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon threatens to erupt into all-out war, and Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to target international shipping despite United States-led airstrikes.

The Israeli military said it fired an interceptor at a "suspicious aerial target" — likely a drone or missile

— approaching over the Red Sea on Thursday, triggering air raid sirens in the southern city of Eilat. The Houthis have launched drones and missiles toward Israel that mostly fell short or were intercepted and shot down.

Meanwhile, Iran has launched a series of missile attacks targeting what it described as an Israeli spy base in Iraq and militant bases in Syria.

Uvalde families renew demands for police to face charges after a scathing Justice Department report

By ACACIA CORONADO and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Families of the children and teachers killed in the Uvalde, Texas, school massacre are renewing demands for criminal charges after a scathing Justice Department report again laid bare numerous failures by police during one of the deadliest classroom shootings in U.S. history.

"I'm very surprised that no one has ended up in prison," said Velma Lisa Duran, whose sister Irma Garcia was one of the two teachers killed in the May 24, 2002, shooting. "It's sort of a slap in the face that all we get is a review ... we deserve justice."

The release of the nearly 600-page report Thursday — roughly 20 months after the shooting — leaves a criminal investigation by Uvalde County prosecutors as one of the last unfinished reviews by authorities into the attack at Robb Elementary School. Nineteen students and two teachers were killed inside two fourth-grade classrooms, while highly armed police officers waited in the hallways for more than an hour before going inside to confront the gunman.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland called the police response "a failure that should not have happened."

But the report is deliberately silent on the question that still burns in the minds of many victims' families: Will anyone responsible for the failures be charged with a crime?

President Joe Biden said Thursday that he had not yet read the full findings. "But I don't know that there's any criminal liability," he said.

Since the shooting, at least five officers have lost their jobs, including two from the Texas Department of Public Safety and the on-site commander, then-school district police chief, Pete Arredondo. But no one has been charged in the criminal investigation that was led by the Texas Rangers. The Justice Department report says the FBI has assisted the Rangers but is not doing its own investigation.

The Rangers — part of the Texas DPS, which had more than 90 officers on the scene of the shooting — submitted their initial findings at the start of 2023. Uvalde County District Attorney Christina Mitchell initially said she hoped to bring the case to a grand jury by the end of last year. But she pushed back that timeline in December and said Thursday that she will need time to review the voluminous Justice Department report.

"I am a working DA with a small office," Mitchell said in an email. "It is going to take me awhile to go through this report. I am hopeful that it was informative for the community."

The pace of the criminal investigation has long frustrated families of the victims, Uvalde's former Republican mayor and a Democratic state senator who represents the small South Texas town and has called for the head of the Texas state police to be fired.

"Twenty months later, there's no end in sight for this local district attorney to be able to do anything," state Sen. Roland Gutierrez said. "We don't know if she's going to indict anybody at all. It's really a shame where we are now."

In the report, federal officials detailed "cascading failures" by police, from waiting for more than an hour to confront and kill the gunman to repeatedly giving false information to grieving families about what had happened.

Produced by a Justice Department office that supports local police, the document is among the most comprehensive accountings to date of what went wrong. It says training, communication, leadership and technology problems extended the crisis, even as agonized parents begged officers to go in and terrified students called 911 from inside a classroom where the gunman had holed up.

Uvalde is a close-knit city of 15,000 about 85 miles (140 kilometers) southwest of San Antonio. Parents of children killed in the shooting grew up and went to school with some of the officers they now blame, and they feel abandoned by local and state leaders who they see as intent on moving past the massacre.

"We need our community," said Brett Cross, who was raising his 10-year-old nephew, Uziyah Garcia, when the boy was killed in the shooting. "It is hard enough waking up every day and continuing to walk out on these streets, walk to a (grocery store) and see a cop who you know was standing there when our babies were murdered and bleeding out."

Cross is among those who hope the Justice Department report will unify Uvalde around a common set of facts and spur criminal charges. During a news conference in the city, Garland stopped short of saying if charges should be filed, leaving that to Mitchell.

The Department of Justice report faults state and local officials with undercutting the public's trust in law enforcement by repeatedly releasing false and misleading information about the police response. That includes Gov. Greg Abbott, who initially praised the officers' courage "running toward gunfire."

As what happened has become clear, Jesse Rizo has been among those left looking for more accountability. Rizo, whose niece Jacklyn Cazares was among the shooting victims, still hopes Mitchell will bring charges, but he has little faith in those in power.

"You hope for the best," he said, "but the past will tell you basically what your outcome is going to be."

The police response to the Uvalde shooting was riddled with failures, a new DOJ report says

By ERIC TUCKER, ACACIA CORONADO, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Police officials who responded to the deadly Uvalde, Texas, elementary school shooting waited far too long to confront the gunman, acted with "no urgency" in establishing a command post and communicated inaccurate information to grieving families, according to a Justice Department report released Thursday that identifies "cascading failures" in law enforcement's handling of the massacre.

The report, the most comprehensive federal accounting of the maligned police response to the May 24, 2022, shooting at Robb Elementary School, catalogs a sweeping array of training, communication, leadership and technology problems that federal officials say contributed to the crisis lasting far longer than necessary. All the while, the report says, terrified students inside the classrooms called 911 and agonized parents begged officers to go in.

"Had law enforcement agencies followed generally accepted practices in active shooter situations and gone right after the shooter and stopped him, lives would have been saved and people would have survived," Attorney General Merrick Garland said Thursday at a news conference in Uvalde after Justice Department officials briefed family members on their findings. The Uvalde victims, he said, "deserved better."

Even for a mass shooting that has already been the subject of intense scrutiny and in-depth examinations — an earlier report by Texas lawmakers, for instance, faulted law enforcement at every level with failing "to prioritize saving innocent lives over their own safety" — the nearly 600-page Justice Department study adds to the public understanding of how officers failed to stop an attack that killed 19 children and two staff members.

The flawed initial response was compounded in the following days by an ineptitude that added to family members' anguish, according to the report.

One family member spent hours pulling glass out of an injured son's body because some of the surviving children had not been screened for medical care. A county district attorney told families that they would need to wait for autopsy results before death notifications were made, prompting some to yell: "What, our kids are dead? No, no!"

Hospital staff "untrained in delivering painful news" told some family members that their loved ones had died, while in other cases, families received incorrect information suggesting that a child had survived when they had not. At one point, an official told waiting families that another bus of survivors was coming, but that was untrue.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 38 of 60

"Mirroring the failures of the law enforcement response, state and local agencies failed to coordinate, leading to inaccurate and incomplete information being provided to anxious family and community members and the public," said Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta.

The law enforcement response was massive, comprising at least 380 personnel from 24 local, county, state and federal agencies.

But the problems began almost immediately with a flawed assumption by officers that the shooter was barricaded, or otherwise contained, even as he continued to fire shots. That "mindset permeated throughout much of the incident response" as police, rather than rushing inside the classrooms to end the carnage, waited more than an hour to confront the gunman in what the report called a costly "lack of urgency."

The gunman, Salvador Ramos, was killed roughly 77 minutes after police arrived on the scene, when a tactical team finally went into the classroom to take him down.

"An active shooter with access to victims should never be considered and treated as a barricaded subject," the report says, with the word "never" emphasized in italics.

In other errors, the report says, police acted with "no urgency" in establishing a command center, creating confusion among police about who was in charge. The then-school district police chief, Pete Arredondo, discarded his radios on arrival, deeming them unnecessary.

Though he tried to communicate by phone with officers in the school hallway, "unfortunately, on multiple occasions, he directed officers intending to gain entry into the classrooms to stop, because he appeared to determine that other victims should first be removed from nearby classrooms to prevent further injury," the report says.

Uvalde, a community of more than 15,000 about 85 miles (140 kilometers) southwest of San Antonio, continues to struggle with the trauma left by the killings and remains divided on the issue of accountability. Uvalde County District Attorney Christina Mitchell has said she's still considering whether to bring criminal charges.

President Joe Biden said in a statement Thursday that the report identified "multiple points of failure that hold lessons for the future" and that "no community should have to go through" what Uvalde did.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott initially praised the officers' courage, saying the reason the shooting was "not worse is because law enforcement officials did what they do" and that they had been brave in "running toward gunfire for the singular purpose of trying to save lives."

But that narrative crumbled under scrutiny, as a report from a panel of state lawmakers and investigations by journalists laid bare how a mass of officers went in and out of the school with weapons drawn but didn't enter the classroom where the shooting was taking place.

"The actions of the responding officers, combined with the 'heroic' storyline that started with (a spokesperson for the Texas Department of Public Safety) and continued the next day during the Governor's and director's news conference, dealt a serious blow to public confidence in local and state law enforcement," the report states.

The city of Uvalde said in a statement that it had requested the federal investigation and fully cooperated with it and had "already implemented changes in leadership, new personnel, new training, and new equipment."

The report intentionally omits the identity of the gunman or any explanation of a possible motive. But it does include page-long remembrances of each of the victims, including 10-year-old Jose Flores Jr., who loved cars and the Houston Astros, and Amerie Jo Garza, who on the morning of the shooting had celebrated her appointment to the honor roll.

And it highlights anguished and panicked quotes from a 911 call by students trapped in the classroom — "Help!" "Help!" "Help!" "I don't want to die. My teacher is dead" — experiencing "unimaginable horror" while officers stood just outside in the hallway.

"I hope that the failures end today," said Kimberly Rubio, whose daughter Lexi Rubio was killed in the shooting. "My child, our children are named in this report because they are dead." Of the officers who failed, she said: "They should be named."

Velma Lisa Duran, whose sister Irma Garcia was one of the teachers killed, said before the release of

the report that she was daunted by the prospect of reliving the circumstances of her sister's death and what she really wanted was criminal charges.

"A report doesn't matter when there are no consequences for actions that are so vile and murderous and evil," said Duran. "What do you want us to do with another report? ... Bring it to court," she said.

The federal review was launched just days after the shooting. Since then, how police respond to mass shootings around the country has come under closer scrutiny.

The families of some of the Uvalde victims have blasted police as cowards and demanded resignations. At least five officers have lost their jobs, including two Department of Public Safety officers and the on-site commander, Arredondo.

No one has been charged with a crime.

US forces strike Houthi sites in Yemen as Biden says allied action hasn't yet stopped ship attacks

By ZEKE MILLER, AAMER MADHANI and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. forces on Thursday conducted a fifth strike against Iranian-backed Houthi rebel military sites in Yemen as President Joe Biden acknowledged that the American and British bombardment had yet to stop the militants' attacks on vessels in the Red Sea that have disrupted global shipping.

The latest strikes destroyed two Houthi anti-ship missiles that "were aimed into the southern Red Sea and prepared to launch," U.S. Central Command said in a statement posted to X, formerly known as Twitter. They were conducted by Navy F/A-18 fighter aircraft, the Pentagon said.

Biden said the U.S. would continue the strikes, even though so far they have not stopped the Houthis from continuing to harass commercial and military vessels.

"When you say working, are they stopping the Houthis, no. Are they going to continue, yes," Biden said in an exchange with reporters before departing the White House for a domestic policy speech in North Carolina.

Hours after Biden spoke, Houthi Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said in a prerecorded statement that its forces had carried out another missile attack against the Marshall Islands-flagged, U.S.-owned cargo ship Chem Ranger. Saree said the attack took place in the Gulf of Aden, the waters just south of Yemen.

That attack did not affect the ship, U.S. Central Command said in a statement late Thursday.

"The crew observed the missiles impact the water near the ship," there were no reported injuries or damage and the ship continued on its way, Central Command said.

The continued harassment of the ships has driven the U.S. and international partners to take extraordinary steps to defend them through a joint mission named Operation Prosperity Guardian, in which the consortium is trying to create a protective umbrella for the vessels by intercepting any missiles or drones that target them. It has also led the U.S. and British militaries to take measures to knock out missile sites, radars and air defense systems to try to tamp down the Houthis' ability to attack.

On Wednesday the U.S. military fired another wave of ship- and submarine-launch missile strikes against 14 Houthi-controlled sites. That same day, the administration put the Houthis back on its list of specially designated global terrorists. The sanctions that come with the formal designation are meant to sever violent extremist groups from their sources of financing, while also allowing vital humanitarian aid to continue flowing to impoverished Yemenis.

"These strikes will continue for as long as they need to continue," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Thursday, adding, "I'm not going to telegraph punches one way or another."

Despite sanctions and military strikes, including a large-scale operation carried out Friday by U.S. and British warships and warplanes that hit more than 60 targets across Yemen, the Houthis keep harassing commercial and military ships. The U.S. has strongly warned Iran to cease providing weapons to the Houthis.

"We never said the Houthis would immediately stop," the Pentagon's deputy press secretary, Sabrina Singh, said at a briefing, when asked why the strikes have not seemed to stop the Houthis. Since the joint

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 40 of 60

U.S. and British operation got underway last Friday, hitting 28 locations and struck more than 60 targets in that initial round, the Houthis' attacks have been "lower scale," Singh said.

For months, the Houthis have claimed attacks on ships in the Red Sea that they say are either linked to Israel or heading to Israeli ports. They say their attacks aim to end the Israeli air-and-ground offensive in the Gaza Strip that was triggered by the Palestinian militant group Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel. But the links to the ships targeted in the rebel assaults have grown more tenuous as the attacks continue.

The attacks have also raised questions as to whether the conflict between Israel and Hamas has already expanded into a wider regional war.

"We don't seek war, we don't think we are at war. We don't want to see a regional war," Singh said.

Icy winter blast gripping US blamed for deaths from coast to coast

By JONATHAN MATTISE, ADRIAN SAINZ and KRISTIN M. HALL Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A new layer of ice formed over parts of Tennessee on Thursday after a deadly storm blanketed the state in snow and sent temperatures plummeting earlier this week — part of a broader bout of bitter cold sweeping the country from Oregon to the Northeast.

Authorities said at least 14 deaths in Tennessee alone are blamed on the system, which dumped more than 9 inches (23 centimeters) of snow since Sunday on parts of Nashville, a city that rarely see such accumulations. Temperatures also plunged below zero (minus-18 Celsius) in parts of the state, creating the largest power demand ever across the seven states served by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Thursday's freezing rain compounded problems, adding a thin glaze of ice in some areas ahead of another expected plunge in temperatures over the weekend. Many schools and government offices have closed, and the state Legislature also shut down, canceling in-person meetings all week.

Near Portland, Oregon, ice slowly began to melt in areas south of the city as warmer temperatures and rain arrived Thursday. But a National Weather Service advisory through Friday warned of freezing rain and gusting winds of up to 40 mph (65 kph) for parts of the state. Most Portland-area school districts canceled classes for a third straight day because of slick roads and water damage from burst frozen pipes.

On Wednesday, a power line fell on a parked car in northeastern Portland, killing three people and injuring a baby during an ice storm that made driving in parts of the Pacific Northwest treacherous.

More than 40 deaths nationwide have been attributed to the frigid weather in the past week.

The dead in Tennessee included a box truck driver who slid into a tractor-trailer on an interstate, a man who fell through a skylight while cleaning a roof, and a woman who died of hypothermia after being found unresponsive in her home. The deaths occurred in nine Tennessee counties spanning more than 400 miles (640 kilometers).

The Tennessee Highway Patrol said it also investigated three fatal car wrecks caused by the storm, more than 200 wrecks involving injuries and more than 600 others without injuries.

Shelby County, which includes Memphis and is the state's largest county, has had the most deaths, five. But officials have declined to release many details about the deaths, citing privacy concerns for the families involved. Tennessee's Department of Health also refused to confirm accounts provided by local authorities of deaths likely tied to the 14-death total.

Across the country in Washington state, five people died from hypothermia over a four-day span that saw temperatures plummet to well below freezing in Seattle, the King County Medical Examiner's office said.

Three of those who died between Jan. 11 and Jan. 15 were presumed homeless, said Kate Cole, a spokesperson for Public Health — Seattle and King County, in an email. One other person was temporarily housed, and one lived in a private residence. She cautioned that since reporting and investigating deaths takes time, the toll could still rise.

And in western New York, the icy weather was blamed for three deaths in three days. Then on Thursday, an American Airlines plane slid off a snowy taxiway in Rochester, New York, after a flight from Philadelphia. No injuries were reported.

Five people were struck and killed by a tractor-trailer on Interstate 81 in northeastern Pennsylvania after

they left their vehicles following a separate crash on slick pavement.

In Kansas, authorities were investigating the death of an 18-year-old whose body was found Wednesday in a ditch not far from where his vehicle had become stuck in snow.

And in Mississippi, where officials reported five winter weather-related deaths, an estimated 12,000 customers in the capital city of Jackson were dealing with low water pressure Thursday. It was the latest setback for the city's long-troubled water system.

Pipe breaks accelerated Wednesday when the frozen ground began to thaw and expand, putting pressure on buried pipes, Jackson water officials said.

Memphis' power and water company, meanwhile, asked customers to avoid nonessential water use because of high demand and low pressure, citing leaks. Memphis, Light, Gas and Water said it had repaired 27 broken water mains since Saturday.

Joshua Phillips was walking his dog Thursday in Memphis as cars crawled by, skidding and sliding. He said he had shoveled snow off of his back patio and driveway but they were now covered in a thin coat of ice. Parts of the city saw nearly 5 inches of snow from the earlier storm.

Phillips said he helped a man push his car, which was stuck in the ice.

"What I'm more concerned about are the people who are unhoused and are outside in storms like this and don't have any place to go," he said.

In Nashville, Will Compton of the nonprofit Open Table Nashville, which helps homeless people, was canvassing downtown for people needing supplies or rides to warming centers or shelters.

On Thursday, he stopped his SUV outside the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to hand out warm hats, blankets, protein drinks and socks to some men standing outside as icy rain fell.

"People who are poor and people who are homeless are getting hit the hardest," said Compton. He added: "A cold spell kind of predictably happens once a winter at least, and yet we're still kind of caught scrambling and finding enough shelter beds for people."

Aaron Robison, 62, has been staying at one of the city's warming centers and said the cold wouldn't have bothered him when he was younger. But now with arthritis in his hip and having to rely on two canes, he needed to get out of the cold.

"Thank God for people helping people on the streets. That's a blessing," he said.

Fani Willis accuses estranged wife of special prosecutor of 'interfering' with Trump election case

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is accusing the estranged wife of a special prosecutor she hired of trying to obstruct her criminal election-interference case against former President Donald Trump and others by seeking to question her in the couple's divorce proceedings.

A motion filed last week by a defense attorney in the election case alleges that Willis was involved in a romantic relationship with attorney Nathan Wade. A lawyer for Willis wrote in a filing Thursday that lawyers for Wade's wife, Joycelyn Wade, served a subpoena to the district attorney last week.

The filing says that the subpoena is being sought "in an attempt to harass and damage" Willis' professional reputation and accuses Joycelyn Wade of having "conspired with interested parties in the criminal Election Interference Case to use the civil discovery process to annoy, embarrass, and oppress" the district attorney.

The attempt to question Willis is "obstructing and interfering" with an ongoing criminal case, lawyer Cinque Axam wrote in the court filing Thursday seeking to quash the subpoena.

Andrea Hastings, a lawyer for Joycelyn Wade, said they want to help her "resolve her divorce fairly and privately" and that any response to Willis' motion will come in a filing with the court.

Willis was served with the subpoena the same day that defense attorney Ashleigh Merchant, who represents former Trump campaign staffer and onetime White House aide Michael Roman, filed a motion alleging an inappropriate relationship between Willis and Nathan Wade. She asserted that their alleged

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 42 of 60

actions created a conflict of interest and led to Willis profiting personally from the prosecution. The motion seeks to have the indictment thrown out and to have Willis and Wade removed from the case.

Willis' office has said they will respond to Merchant's motion in a court filing but have not provided a timeline for that. Her filing on Thursday in the divorce case does not address whether she and Wade have been romantically involved.

The district attorney's lawyer wrote that Nathan and Joycelyn Wade have been separated for more than two years and are involved in "an uncontested no-fault divorce" and there is an "absence of any relevant basis" to question Willis.

Merchant has not provided any solid proof to support her allegations of an inappropriate relationship. She mentioned "sources close" to Willis and Wade without elaborating.

Merchant's motion also mentions that filings in Wade's pending divorce are sealed but that she has filed a motion to unseal them. A coalition of news organizations, including The Associated Press, filed a motion Tuesday to gain access to those filings.

"Ms. Willis alleges that her deposition is being sought in an attempt to harass and damage her professional reputation. Why would her truthful testimony risk damaging her reputation?" Merchant wrote in an email Thursday.

She accused Willis of trying "to create a conspiracy where none exists," noting that she filed her motion on the deadline for pretrial motions in the election case.

"We believe her filing in Cobb County is just another attempt to avoid having to directly answer the important questions Mr. Roman has raised," Merchant wrote.

Merchant wrote in her motion last week that Wade has been paid large sums and has used some of his earnings to take Willis on vacation to Napa Valley, Florida and the Caribbean. She said that amounts to the pair "profiting significantly from this prosecution at the expense of the taxpayers."

Merchant said she can find no evidence that Wade — whose law firm website touts his experience in civil litigation, including car accident and family law cases — has ever prosecuted a felony case. She questioned his qualifications to try this case.

Willis defended her hiring of Wade and his qualifications during an address at a church in Atlanta on Sunday but has not commented publicly on the allegation of a romantic relationship. Among other things, she cited Wade's 10 years of experience as a municipal court judge and 20 years in private practice.

"Because the parties agree that the marriage is irretrievably broken and the concept of fault is not at issue, there is no information that District Attorney Willis could provide that might prove relevant to granting or denying the divorce," the filing says.

Also Thursday, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee set a Feb. 15 hearing on Merchant's motion and ordered prosecutors to file their response by Feb. 2.

Trump and Roman were indicted by a Fulton County grand jury in August along with 17 others. They're accused of participating in a wide-ranging scheme to try to illegally overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. Four of those charged have already pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors. Trump, Roman and the others who remain have pleaded not guilty.

Roman was the director of Election Day operations for the Trump campaign and also had worked in the White House.

Prosecutors say he helped coordinate an effort to contact state lawmakers on Trump's behalf to encourage them to "unlawfully appoint presidential electors."

He is also alleged to have been involved in efforts to have Republicans in swing states that Trump lost, including Georgia, meet on Dec. 14, 2020, to sign certificates falsely saying Trump had won their states and that they were the electors for their states. He was in touch with local Republican officials in several states to set up those meetings.

Hunter Biden agrees to private deposition with Republicans after months of defiance

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hunter Biden has agreed to appear before House Republicans for a private deposition next month, ending months of defiance from the president's son, who had insisted on testifying publicly.

The House Oversight Committee announced Thursday that the two parties have agreed for Hunter Biden to sit for a deposition on Feb. 28.

"The president's son is a key witness in this investigation and he's gonna be able to come in now and sit down and answer questions in a substantive, orderly manner," Rep. James Comer, chair of the Oversight Committee, told reporters. He added that Hunter Biden will be able to testify publicly sometime after his deposition.

News of the agreement was confirmed by Hunter Biden's legal team Thursday night.

Republicans had been set to advance a contempt resolution against him to the House floor this week but called it off Tuesday to give the attorneys additional time to negotiate. If they had voted on the contempt resolution, the referral would have been sent to the Justice Department where the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia would have had to decide whether to prosecute Hunter Biden.

The agreement concludes months of contentious back-and-forth between President Joe Biden's son and Republicans who have been investigating his overseas business dealings for over a year in a so far futile effort to connect it to his father.

Republicans, led by Comer and Jordan, first subpoenaed the younger Biden in November, demanding that he appear before lawmakers in a private setting by mid-December. Biden and his attorneys refused to comply with the private interview, saying that it would allow information to be selectively leaked and manipulated by House Republicans and insisted that he would only testify in a public setting.

When Republicans denied those terms, Hunter Biden and his attorneys made two separate appearances at the U.S. Capitol, further angering congressional investigators. In both instances, Biden again refused to testify privately, instead delivering statements to the press where he defended his business affairs and castigated the yearslong investigations into him and his family.

"There is no evidence to support the allegations that my father was financially involved in my business because it did not happen," the president's son said in remarks outside the Capitol in December.

He added, "There is no fairness or decency in what these Republicans are doing — they have lied over and over about every aspect of my personal and professional life — so much so that their lies have become the false facts believed by too many people.

But Hunter Biden and his legal team appeared to shift gears late last week when they sent a letter to Comer and Rep. Jim Jordan, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, indicating a willingness for the first time to come in for a private deposition.

Abbe Lowell, Hunter Biden's attorney, wrote in a letter Friday that his client's cooperation is dependent on the committee issuing a new subpoena, which they will now do given the updated deposition date. They had argued that the two subpoenas sent in last year were not legitimate because they were issued before the full House authorized the impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden.

The impeachment inquiry into the president, which began in September, has focused heavily on Hunter Biden and his international business affairs, questioning whether the president profited from that work. It has so far failed to uncover evidence directly implicating Joe Biden in wrongdoing involving his son's work.

Meanwhile, Hunter Biden is currently facing criminal charges in two states from the special counsel investigation. He's charged with firearm counts in Delaware, alleging he broke laws against drug users having guns in 2018, a period when he has acknowledged struggling with addiction. Special counsel David Weiss filed additional charges last month, alleging he failed to pay about \$1.4 million in taxes over three years.

He has pleaded not guilty in both cases.

A first-ever experiment shows how pigs might one day help people who have liver failure

By The Associated Press undefined

Surgeons externally attached a pig liver to a brain-dead human body and watched it successfully filter blood, a step toward eventually trying the technique in patients with liver failure.

The University of Pennsylvania announced the novel experiment Thursday, a different spin on animal-to-human organ transplants. In this case, the pig liver was used outside the donated body, not inside — a way to create a “bridge” to support failing livers by doing the organ’s blood-cleansing work externally, much like dialysis for failing kidneys.

Animal-to-human transplants, called xenotransplants, have failed for decades because people’s immune systems rejected the foreign tissue. Now scientists are trying again with pigs whose organs have been genetically modified to be more humanlike.

In recent years, kidneys from genetically modified pigs have been temporarily transplanted into brain-dead donors to see how well they function, and two men received heart transplants from pigs although both died within months.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is considering whether to allow a small number of Americans who need a new organ to volunteer for rigorous studies of either pig hearts or kidneys.

Some researchers also are looking to use pig livers. A liver has different complexities than kidneys and hearts: It filters blood, removes waste and produces substances needed for other bodily functions. About 10,000 people are currently on the U.S. waiting list for a liver transplant.

In the Penn experiment, researchers attached a liver from a pig — one genetically modified by eGenesis — to a device made by OrganOx that usually helps preserve donated human livers before transplant.

The family of the deceased, whose organs weren’t suitable for donation, offered the body for the research. Machines kept the body’s blood circulating.

The experiment, conducted last month, filtered blood through the pig liver-device for 72 hours. In a statement, the Penn team reported that the donor’s body remained stable and the pig liver showed no signs of damage.

There’s lots of work into developing liver dialysis-like machines, and experiments using pig livers were tried years ago — before today’s more advanced genetic techniques, said Dr. Parsia Vagefi of UT Southwestern Medical Center, who wasn’t involved in the new experiment but is closely watching xenotransplantation research.

“I applaud them for pushing this forward,” Vagefi said, calling this combination pig-device approach an intriguing step in efforts toward better care for liver failure.

Potential problems with New Hampshire’s aging ballot scanners could prompt conspiracy theories

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

When New Hampshire voters cast their ballots in Tuesday’s first-in-the-nation primary, many will do so using scanners that are at least 15 years old — with some potentially dating back to Bill Clinton’s presidency.

Election experts say the aging AccuVote ballot tabulators in use across roughly half the state’s towns and cities don’t pose additional security risks. The concern is their age.

With a dwindling supply of replacement parts, breakdowns could create Election Day headaches for local election officials, who might be forced to count ballots by hand — a process that could delay reporting their results. Malfunctions and ballot-counting delays in other states in recent years have sometimes been used to promote conspiracy theories that undermine public confidence in the vote, despite no evidence of any widespread problems with voting machines.

Franklin, a small city about 20 miles north of the state capital, has no wiggle room if something goes awry with its scanners.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 45 of 60

"We have three machines and three polling places. That's it, no backup," said Olivia Zink, a member of the Franklin City Council who also is executive director of the voter advocacy group Coalition for Open Democracy. "If one goes down, we hand count."

Zink, who will be working at her local polling place Tuesday, said she is less worried about hand counting even if turnout is robust among the 4,500 registered voters because the ballot contains only the presidential primary. She urged everyone to be patient if results are delayed. One potential glitch: If it's snowy or rainy, damp ballots can mess up a ballot scanner.

"If it's a sunny, beautiful day, we're in great shape," Zink said.

Reducing the chances of a major disruption is the ballot itself, with just a single race and a state requirement that vote counting continue uninterrupted until finished. New Hampshire will hold primaries for state and local races later in the year.

All New Hampshire voters mark their ballot by hand, but how those ballots are counted depends on the city or town. Just under half opt to hand count and have done so for years, but those are among the least populated in the state. The most populous towns and cities use machine tabulators, so most ballots cast in the state are counted electronically using the AccuVote scanners.

The same type of ballot scanners are used by local voting jurisdictions in five other states, according to Verified Voting, a nonpartisan group that tracks U.S. voting equipment.

"You could say it's primitive technology. You could say it's simple and reliable technology. Both of those things can be true," said Mark Lindeman, the group's policy and strategy director.

He said New Hampshire's tabulators have been kept in good condition and that the biggest challenge for election officials is finding replacement parts. He sees the worst-case scenario as local election officials having to resort to hand counting because a tabulator has failed and they don't have access to a backup.

"As worst cases go, that's a pretty good one," Lindeman said. "The ballots are safe. This will not prevent New Hampshire voters from voting or prevent New Hampshire voters from having their votes counted."

Even so, any problems with voting machines or ballot counting devices provide an opening for those who want to cast doubt on the outcome. Former President Donald Trump, who won this week's Iowa caucuses but faces a potentially tougher test in New Hampshire, regularly signals that an anticipated close election will be "rigged."

His false claims about widespread fraud in the 2020 election, which he lost to Joe Biden, has produced a tsunami of conspiracy theories about voting machines.

"If there are major failures and results come really late, and if there is not information ahead of time to the public that we might be hand-counting and what that involves — in a worst-case scenario the vacuum that leaves could allow folks to come forward with conspiracy theories and question what the results are," said McKenzie St. Germain with the voter advocacy group America Votes NH.

In Derry, south of Manchester, Town Clerk Tina Guilford tested her eight tabulators this week to ensure they were working properly and counting ballots correctly. It's a process being repeated across the state as local election officials prepare for the primary.

Derry's tabulators are roughly turn-of-the-century technology — each about 20 to 22 years old, Guilford said. The town agreed to buy replacements that officials hope will be in place by March when new tabulators will be certified for use in the state.

Derry, with its nearly 20,000 registered voters, doesn't need all eight AccuVote scanners running at the same time, so they have options if one were to be taken out of service, Guilford said. It has happened before, when hand sanitizer gummed up a machine in 2020 during the pandemic.

"I don't foresee any issues," she said.

Secretary of State David Scanlan, New Hampshire's top election official, said he has been encouraging local officials to make sure they have enough staff to handle any hand counting that may be necessary.

It's expected that every jurisdiction will have to count some ballots by hand given Biden's decision to skip the state's primary in favor of a revamped Democratic schedule that elevated South Carolina over Iowa and New Hampshire. That has prompted a write-in campaign for him, and any ballots with write-in candidates will have to be tallied by hand.

In recent years, hand counting has gained favor among those pushing conspiracy theories about the 2020 election as they seek to ban voting machines and electronic tabulators. While hand counting is used in some parts of the country, it usually occurs in small jurisdictions where the process is manageable.

Last year, New Hampshire lawmakers rejected a proposal that would have required all votes to be counted by hand.

Experts say not only are machines faster, but studies have shown they are more accurate. Many election officials do rely on some measure of hand counting as part of their post-election process to verify that the machines worked correctly.

Scanlan said he has been encouraging voters to understand that it's not unusual for some machines to have problems and stressed that election officials have plans to deal with it, even if it means a delay in releasing results.

"That just happens in any election," he said. "I would expect that this election is going to be no different than any other election we've conducted in the past."

Largest deep-sea coral reef to date is mapped by scientists off the US Atlantic coast

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have mapped the largest coral reef deep in the ocean, stretching hundreds of miles off the U.S. Atlantic coast.

While researchers have known since the 1960s that some coral were present off the Atlantic, the reef's size remained a mystery until new underwater mapping technology made it possible to construct 3D images of the ocean floor.

The largest yet known deep coral reef "has been right under our noses, waiting to be discovered," said Derek Sowers, an oceanographer at the nonprofit Ocean Exploration Trust.

Sowers and other scientists, including several at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, recently published maps of the reef in the journal *Geomatics*.

The reef extends for about 310 miles (499 kilometers) from Florida to South Carolina and at some points reaches 68 miles (109 kilometers) wide. The total area is nearly three times the size of Yellowstone National Park.

"It's eye-opening — it's breathtaking in scale," said Stuart Sandin, a marine biologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, who was not involved in the study.

The reef was found at depths ranging from 655 feet to 3,280 feet (200 meters to 1,000 meters), where sunlight doesn't penetrate. Unlike tropical coral reefs, where photosynthesis is important for growth, coral this far down must filter food particles out of the water for energy.

Deep coral reefs provide habitat for sharks, swordfish, sea stars, octopus, shrimp and many other kinds of fish, the scientists said.

Tropical reefs are better known to scientists — and snorkelers -- because they're more accessible. The world's largest tropical coral reef system, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, stretches for about 1,430 miles (2,301 kilometers).

Sowers said it's possible that larger deep-sea reefs will be discovered in the future since only about 75% of the world's ocean floor has been mapped in high-resolution. Only 50% of U.S. offshore waters have been mapped. Maps of the ocean floor are created using high-resolution sonar devices carried on ships.

Deep reefs cover more of the ocean floor than tropical reefs. Both kinds of habitat are susceptible to similar risks, including climate change and disturbance from oil and gas drilling, said Erik Cordes, a marine biologist at Temple University and co-author of the new study.

Congress votes to avert a shutdown and keep the government funded into early March

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress sent President Joe Biden a short-term spending bill on Thursday that would avert a looming partial government shutdown and fund federal agencies into March.

The House approved the measure by a vote of 314-108, with opposition coming mostly from the more conservative members of the Republican conference. Shortly before the vote, the House Freedom Caucus announced it “strongly opposes” the measure because it would facilitate more spending than they support.

Nevertheless, about half of Republicans joined with Democrats in passing the third stopgap funding measure in recent months. The action came a few hours after the Senate had voted overwhelmingly to pass the bill by a vote of 77-18.

The measure extends current spending levels and buys time for the two chambers to work out their differences over full-year spending bills for the fiscal year that began in October.

The temporary measure will run to March 1 for some federal agencies. Their funds were set to run out Friday. It extends the remainder of government operations to March 8.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the president would sign the resolution and urged Republicans to quit wasting time on partisan spending bills.

“House Republicans must finally do their job and work across the aisle to pass full-year funding bills that deliver for the American people and address urgent domestic and national security priorities by passing the President’s supplemental request,” Jean-Pierre said.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has been under pressure from his right flank to scrap a \$1.66 trillion budget price tag he reached with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer earlier this month for the spending bills. Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said the continuing resolution passed Thursday will facilitate that agreement, and urged colleagues to vote against it.

“It’s Groundhog Day in the House chamber all the time, every day, yet again spending money we don’t have,” Roy said.

Johnson has insisted he will stick with the deal, and centrists in the party have stood behind him. They say that changing course now would be going back on his word and would weaken the speaker in future negotiations.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said Americans expect Congress to govern and work in a bipartisan fashion.

“Some of my colleagues would see that this government would shut down and don’t care how hurtful that would be,” DeLauro said.

House Republicans have fought bitterly over budget levels and policy since taking the majority at the start of 2023. Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., was ousted by his caucus in October after striking an agreement with Democrats to extend current spending the first time. Johnson has also come under criticism as he has wrestled with how to appease his members and avoid a government shutdown in an election year.

“We just needed a little more time on the calendar to do it and now that’s where we are,” Johnson said Tuesday about the decision to extend federal funding yet again. “We’re not going to get everything we want.”

Most House Republicans have so far refrained from saying that Johnson’s job is in danger. But a revolt of even a handful of Republicans could endanger his position in the narrowly divided House.

Virginia Rep. Bob Good, one of eight Republicans who voted to oust McCarthy, has been pushing Johnson to reconsider the deal with Schumer.

“If your opponent in negotiation knows that you fear the consequence of not reaching an agreement more than they fear the consequence of not reaching an agreement, you will lose every time,” Good said this week.

Other Republicans acknowledge Johnson is in a tough spot. “The speaker was dealt with the hand he

was dealt," said Kentucky Rep. Andy Barr, noting the constraints imposed by the party's slim majority.

In Thursday afternoon's vote, 107 House Republicans voted to keep federal agencies funded and 106 voted against the measure. To almost lose the majority of his conference underscores the challenges facing the new speaker and signals the difficulty he will have in striking a deal that will not alienate many of his GOP colleagues. They are clamoring for deeper non-defense spending cuts and myriad conservative policy mandates.

Meanwhile, 207 Democrats voted for the resolution and only two voted against.

The short-term measure comes amid negotiations on a separate spending package that would provide wartime dollars to Ukraine and Israel and strengthen security at the U.S.-Mexico border. Johnson is also under pressure from the right not to accept a deal that is any weaker than a House-passed border measure that has no Democratic support.

Johnson, Schumer and other congressional leaders and committee heads visited the White House on Wednesday to discuss that spending legislation. Johnson used the meeting to push for stronger border security measures while Biden and Democrats detailed Ukraine's security needs as it continues to fight Russia.

Biden has requested a \$110 billion package for the wartime spending and border security.

What to know about the Justice Department's report on police failures in the Uvalde school shooting

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

A Justice Department report released Thursday details a myriad of failures by police who responded to the shooting at a school in Uvalde, Texas, when children waited desperately for over an hour before officers stormed a classroom to take the gunman down.

The federal review, which was launched just days after the May 2022 shooting, provides a damning look at the missteps by police after a gunman opened fire at Robb Elementary School. It was not a criminal investigation but one of the most exhaustive reviews of law enforcement's failure to stop the attack. Nineteen students and two teachers died in the shooting.

"The victims and survivors of the shooting at Robb Elementary on May 24, 2022, deserved better," Attorney General Merrick Garland told reporters in Uvalde.

Local officials are still weighing whether to bring charges.

Here are some of the major takeaways from the report:

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FAILURE

The Justice Department concluded that the chief failure was that police didn't treat the crisis as an active shooter situation and engage the gunman quickly. Initially, several officers did approach the classrooms where students were trapped inside with the gunman, but retreated after he fired at them.

Law enforcement then treated the situation as if the gunman was barricaded, dead or otherwise contained, focusing on calling for more SWAT equipment and evacuating surrounding classrooms instead of engaging the shooter and saving lives.

"First responders on the scene, including those with specific leadership responsibilities, did not coordinate immediate entry into the classrooms, running counter to generally accepted practices for active shooter response to immediately engage the subject to further save lives," the report said.

The report includes excerpts from a 911 call from terrified 9- and 10-year-old children trapped with the shooter while law enforcement waited just outside the classrooms. "I don't want to die. My teacher is dead," one of them said. At that point, the students and their teachers had been trapped in classrooms with the shooter for 37 minutes. It was another 13 minutes after the call ended before survivors were rescued.

There were numerous signs that should have prompted police leaders to send officers in sooner, the report states, including the victims' injuries and the gunman firing about 45 rounds "in law enforcement officer presence."

"For 77 agonizing, harrowing minutes, children and staff were trapped with an active shooter," the report

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 49 of 60

said, "They experienced unimaginable horror. The survivors witnessed unspeakable violence and the death of classmates and teachers."

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The report includes a slew of recommendations, including that officers responding to such a crisis must prioritize neutralizing the shooter and aiding victims in harm's way.

"An active shooter with access to victims should never be considered and treated as a barricaded subject," it says. Evacuations should be limited to those who are immediately in danger and "not at the expense of the priority to eliminate the threat," the Justice Department said. And officers must be prepared to engage the shooter "using just the tools they have with them," even if they only have a standard issue firearm, it said.

Garland said if law enforcement had followed best practices, "lives would have been saved and people would have survived."

Other recommendations address coordination between agencies responding to shootings, the release of information to the public, and providing proper support and trauma services.

ERRORS COMPOUNDING TRAUMA

The Justice Department also outlined failures in communication, including instances of incomplete, inaccurate or disjointed releases of information that led to lingering distrust in the community.

The report cites the county district attorney telling family members that authorities had to wait for autopsy reports before death notifications could be made. Family members who had not been told that children had died, yelled back: "What, our kids are dead? No, no!"

Other examples included injured children, some with bullet wounds, being loaded onto a bus as the building was being cleared; parents spending hours removing glass shards from their children because they had not been screened before being released; an adult victim who was carried to a walkway outside the school to receive medical attention who then died; and untrained hospital staff telling family members that their loved ones had died.

The report also highlights misinformation from authorities, including blaming a staff member for an open door that allowed the shooter to enter the building — later proving false. Some officers told frantic families that a shooter was in custody when that was not the case.

WHAT ARE VICTIMS' FAMILIES SAYING?

Family members, many of whom had been briefed on the federal report before its release, had mixed reactions. Some told news outlets they were grateful that the federal investigation supported their criticisms, but many had hoped the report would include a recommendation for federal charges against those criticized most heavily.

President Joe Biden, when asked about the report Thursday, said the federal government would do its best to implement the recommendations, "But I don't know that there's any criminal liability."

Velma Lisa Duran, whose sister Irma Garcia was one of the teachers killed, told The Associated Press Thursday that she was grateful for the federal agency's work but disappointed that local prosecutors have yet to bring any charges.

"A report doesn't matter when there are no consequences for actions that are so vile and murderous and evil," said Duran. "What do you want us to do with another report? ... Bring it to court," she said.

Health announcements about King Charles III and Kate mark a departure for the tight-lipped UK royals

By SYLVIA HUI and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The double health announcements from the United Kingdom's royal family — on Kate, the Princess of Wales' abdominal surgery and King Charles III's prostate treatment — have put a spotlight on the private lives of senior royals.

Details of royal health are always a tricky issue in the U.K., because members of the monarchy are private individuals but also, in a sense, public property. Charles, 75, is head of state, and Kate, 42, is destined to

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 50 of 60

be queen when her husband Prince William succeeds his father on the throne.

The brief media statements on the health scares were so unusual that they dominated Thursday's newspaper front pages, with headlines calling them "royal health bombshells."

The disclosure of Charles' and Kate's health details was seen by some royal observers as a sign that the monarchy is adapting to modern communications after centuries of staying tight-lipped about health matters.

WHAT WAS ANNOUNCED?

Royal officials announced Wednesday that Kate had undergone "planned" abdominal surgery and was expected to remain in The London Clinic, a private hospital, for 10 to 14 days. She isn't expected to resume public duties until April.

The princess' office at Kensington Palace didn't offer further details, but said that her condition wasn't cancerous. Though she has generally experienced good health and is seen as fit and sporty, Kate was hospitalized during her pregnancies because of severe morning sickness.

William also has postponed some official duties so that he can devote time to his wife and their three children. He visited his wife on Thursday, and British media reported that the Princess of Wales was "doing well."

Soon after the announcement of Kate's hospitalization, Buckingham Palace said that Charles will undergo a "corrective procedure" for an enlarged prostate next week. The palace said the king's condition is benign. Queen Camilla said Thursday that Charles was "fine" and "looking forward to getting back to work."

A HISTORY OF SECRECY

When U.K. monarchs had real power, news of illness was withheld for fear it might weaken their authority. The habit of secrecy lingered after royals became constitutional figureheads.

The British public wasn't told that Charles' grandfather, King George VI, had lung cancer before his death in February 1952 at the age of 56, and some historians have claimed that the king himself wasn't told he was terminally ill. The public death announcement said only that the king had "passed peacefully away in his sleep."

His father, King George V, died in 1936 after suffering from heart and lung disease. A half-century later, diary extracts were published revealing that the king's physician had injected the terminally ill monarch with morphine and cocaine to speed his death — partly so it could be announced in the morning newspapers "rather than the less appropriate evening journals."

GREATER OPENNESS?

The U.K. and international media have been focused on the health of Britain's senior royals in recent years as the late Queen Elizabeth II faded from public view during the last months of her 70-year reign.

Even then, few specific details were released about the late monarch's condition. The public was told only that the queen was suffering from "mobility issues." The cause of her death in September 2022 at the age of 96 was listed on the death certificate simply as "old age."

Wednesday's announcements gave more details than the public would have expected in the past.

Some royal experts said that while the latest statement on Kate was coy and shrouded in some secrecy, the one on Charles showed that the monarch was keen to try a new and more open kind of communication.

The publicity was seen as a decision by Charles to help boost awareness of prostate health, and encourage other men to have their prostates checked.

"I think it symbolizes the kind of campaigning king that Charles is — he wants to put this issue on the agenda by being quite open and candid," Ed Owens, a royal historian and author, told The Associated Press. "We know that King Charles wants to talk about issues of personal significance — and there's nothing more significant or personal to him than his health."

Releasing the news about both royals on the same day was also about news management, Owens added. While Kate's condition sounded more serious, the king's can be seen as a "positive news story to complement a more complicated one in the case of Catherine's health," he said.

"It means that we haven't got the story rolling on about what exactly (Kate's) been suffering from. Rather, we are instead talking about King Charles III and him wanting to set a good example to other

men his age," Owens said.

'KING'S PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGE'

One headline dubbed the release of Charles' health details the "King's public health message." It's worked: Prostate Cancer UK, a charity that promotes public awareness of prostate health, says there has been a surge of interest in its work thanks to the royal announcements.

"We have been receiving lots of calls from men and women that are concerned about them and their loved ones, wanting to talk about their prostate problems and signs and symptoms," said Sophie Smith, a senior specialist nurse at the charity.

An enlarged prostate is common in men over age 50. The condition affects how one urinates, and isn't usually a serious health threat. It's not cancer and doesn't lead to an increased risk of developing prostate cancer.

"It's about getting that conversation started," Smith added. "We know that men often don't talk about it, they don't sit with their mates and say, 'I've getting problems going to the toilet.' It's something quite personal, a bit taboo."

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

While Charles's condition wasn't worrying, the announcements that the monarch, Kate and William would all be out of action in one way or another in the coming days did lead to larger questions about what happens to matters of state in more serious cases.

This is especially of interest because Charles presides over a much more "slimmed-down" monarchy than his predecessors, with just four royals under 65 years old: William, Kate, Charles's younger brother Prince Edward and his wife Sophie.

When monarchs can't undertake their duties on a temporary basis, "Counsellors of State," who include senior royals like Queen Camilla and Prince Harry, can stand in and deputize if needed.

"It points to a fundamental question — how does the king get the monarchy ready for the middle of the 21st century with this smaller family in tow?" Owens said. "I think it points to the fact that he has to reduce the amount of engagements, the amount of work that is being undertaken by this family."

Wastewater tests can find mpox, study finds. Expect more bugs to be tracked that way

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wastewater testing does a good job at detecting mpox infections, U.S. health officials said in a report Thursday that bolsters a push to use sewage to track more diseases.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researchers found that over the course of a week, there was a 32% likelihood the tests would detect the presence of at least one person infected with mpox in a population ranging from thousands to millions.

Amy Kirby, who oversees the CDC's wastewater surveillance work, said initially they didn't know if the tests would work for a rare infection like mpox.

"It turns out it worked really very well," she said.

The chance that the tests could detect infections rose as more people were infected. When there were 15 or more people infected in a community, there was a 76% chance wastewater testing could find mpox.

The water that goes down a sink, shower drain or toilet can carry bits of viruses or bacteria that come off the skin or are excreted in urine or poop. Studies have shown wastewater testing can be an early warning system, signaling a bug has hit a community even before doctors start reporting cases.

Whole cities can be watched from a single sample, said Joshua Levy, a researcher at the Scripps Research Institute in California who has studied wastewater monitoring and develops related technology.

"Almost every kind of virus that we've gone looking for is detectable," Levy said.

The U.S. monitoring system is growing but still a patchwork. Currently, 863 of the nation's 3,143 counties — roughly a quarter — are reporting wastewater data to the CDC. Those are larger counties that are

home to most of the U.S. population, but it misses a lot of rural homes that aren't hooked up to municipal sewage systems.

This approach to disease tracking rose to prominence in 2020, when health officials began testing wastewater for genetic evidence of the coronavirus. It has grown into a mainstay of the CDC's COVID-19 tracking as fewer nasal swab test results are reported.

In 2022, the CDC began working with a small group of cities to also look for polio in wastewater. That same year also saw a new effort to look for mpox, previously known as monkeypox, which erupted in outbreaks in the U.S. and other countries.

In the new study, the CDC looked at wastewater samples from 89 sites in 16 states, taken from August 2022 through May 2023. When mpox DNA was detected, the researchers checked cases reported by doctors "to basically see if we were seeing the same thing," said the CDC's Carly Adams, the lead author of the report.

It not only worked, the approach appears to be more sensitive for detecting mpox than COVID-19, CDC officials said. CDC officials, however, cautioned it is difficult to do head-to-head-comparisons, because of differences among germs and how well doctors are diagnosing and reporting cases of various diseases.

The CDC has also begun collecting data for flu and RSV — about 40 states have been testing for those viruses and reporting that data. The agency isn't yet posting it publicly as officials work through the best ways to display it, though Kirby said it should go live by next fall.

The agency also plans to start tracking germs that are resistant to antibiotics. And Kirby said by early next year the agency would start monitoring some food poisoning bugs.

"Wastewater surveillance is outperforming everyone's expectations," Kirby said. "We are really excited to see where else we can apply this new tool to help us understand disease in communities."

Anti-abortion activists brace for challenges ahead as they gather for annual March for Life

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

A year ago, anti-abortion activists from across the U.S. gathered for their annual March for Life with reason to celebrate: It was their first march since the Supreme Court, seven months earlier, had overturned the nationwide right to abortion.

At this year's march, on Friday, the mood will be very different — reflecting formidable challenges that lie ahead in this election year.

"We have undeniable evidence of victory — lives being saved," said John Seago, president of Texas Right to Life. "But there is also a realization of the significant hurdles that our movement has right now in the public conversation."

Participants at the march in Washington will salute the 14 states enforcing bans on abortion throughout pregnancy. They will proclaim that thousands of babies have been born who otherwise might have been aborted, even as studies show the total number of abortions provided in the U.S. rose slightly in the year after that enforcement began.

Moreover, anti-abortion leaders know that their side has a seven-state losing streak in votes on abortion-related ballot measures. Even in red states such as Ohio, Kansas and Kentucky, the outcomes favored keeping abortion access legal.

In this year's election, several more states are expected to have abortion-rights ballot measures, and Democratic candidates in many races, including President Joe Biden, will be highlighting their support for abortion access.

"We have been around for more than 50 years, and I don't know of any year that was easy," said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee.

"But it definitely got harder after Dobbs," she added. "We have a lot of work ahead of us."

Tobias was referring to the Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling in

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 53 of 60

June 2022, overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

The key consequence of Dobbs was to return decision-making on abortion policy to individual states. Some Democratic-governed states — such as California, New York and New Jersey — have strengthened protections for abortion access. Roughly 20 states with Republican-controlled legislatures have either banned abortion or sought to impose new restrictions.

After Dobbs, “I didn’t want anyone to get the false sense that we were at the end of our work,” said Brent Leatherwood, an abortion opponent who heads the Southern Baptist Convention’s public policy wing.

“We’ve gone from a focal point at the federal level to 50 different focal points,” he said. “It may be another 50 years before we truly establish a culture of life, where preborn lives are saved and mothers are supported.”

Even the current claims of lives being saved due to the Dobbs decision are subject to question. While abortions have decreased to nearly zero in states with total bans, they have increased elsewhere — notably in states such as Illinois, Florida and New Mexico, which are near those with more restrictions.

Anti-abortion leaders are keenly aware that their opponents in the abortion debate depict the wave of state bans as an infringement on women’s rights and a potential danger to their health.

Thus the theme of this year’s March for Life strives to convey support for women facing unexpected pregnancies: “Pro Life: With Every Woman, For Every Child.”

“Pregnancy care centers and maternity homes are the very backbone of our movement,” March for Life president Jeanne Mancini wrote in a recent opinion piece.

She and her allies have encouraged states to offer support programs for new mothers in need — helping them find housing, jobs and health insurance.

Among the scheduled speakers at the march is Jean Marie Davis, executive director of Branches Pregnancy Resource Center in Brattleboro, Vermont. Davis says a similar center in New Hampshire helped her break free several years ago after she became pregnant while ensnared in a sex-trafficking operation.

Other scheduled speakers include House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., a co-chair of the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus.

Mancini said last year’s march drew tens of thousands of people; she’s hoping this year’s march will be bigger.

The participants, she said, will be in a “persevering mood.”

J.J. Straight, part of an American Civil Liberties Union team working to protect and broaden abortion access, says her side also feels determined, especially in light of the recent ballot-measure results.

“We’ve seen a tremendous pushback to the anti-abortion agenda,” she said. “There’s a huge coalition of folks, regardless of their party and other demographics, who absolutely draw the line at this kind interference in their health care.”

Among the reasons for uncertainty for all parties in the debate is the inconsistent way that federal and state courts have adjudicated abortion-related cases. There have been numerous legal challenges to the various state laws banning or restricting abortion, some failing and others succeeding at least temporarily.

There’s a pending lawsuit in Texas filed by women who say the state’s abortion ban forced them to continue pregnancies despite serious risk to their health.

In an even higher profile Texas case, Kate Cox, a mother of two, sought an abortion after learning the baby she was carrying had a fatal genetic condition. Her request for an exemption from Texas’ ban — one of the country’s strictest — was denied by the state Supreme Court, and Cox left Texas to seek an abortion elsewhere.

For abortion-rights activists, Cox’s case was a powerful illustration of how abortion bans could be dangerous for women with pregnancy complications.

“Never in our history have we had such overwhelming reaction to any case,” said Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights. “We got phone calls, emails, snail-mail. Over and over, people talked about her with awe, her courage in going public.”

Seago, the Texas Right to Life president, defended Texas’ abortion ban. He said the Cox case and the pending lawsuit simply underscored the need for Texas health authorities to clarify what doctors are and

aren't allowed to do in dealing with problem pregnancies.

Carol Tobias acknowledged there can be difficult pregnancies.

"But I don't think hard circumstances should be used to establish state laws," she said. In such cases, she added, "the doctors have two patients. They need to take care of both of them to best of their ability."

All the new bans make an exception to allow abortion if deemed necessary to save the life of the mother. There are divides within the anti-abortion movement over additional exceptions — for example, in cases of rape and incest, or when severe fetal abnormalities are diagnosed.

Other divisions have surfaced over who should be criminalized by the new laws.

Among leading anti-abortion activists, there's a general consensus that women should not be prosecuted for seeking or obtaining an abortion. But there is support for criminal penalties against doctors and others who help people get an abortion; some states, including Texas and Idaho, seek to deter people from traveling out of state to get abortions or obtaining abortion pills by mail.

Dr. Jamila Perritt, an abortion-rights supporter who is president of Physicians for Reproductive Health, worries that abortion opponents in states with bans will criminalize people who seek abortions outside the formal medical system.

"The impact of their campaign has been devastating — and it will get worse," she said. "I'm worried about many more people being arrested and prosecuted."

One of the biggest unknowns, heading toward to Election Day on Nov. 5, is how power in Washington will be divided between the two major parties.

Abortion-rights supporters fear a Republican sweep of Congress and the White House might trigger a bid to impose a federal abortion ban. Conversely, some abortion opponents — including Chris Smith — fear a Democratic sweep might lead to a law overriding the state abortion bans that are now in effect.

Such legislation — as modeled in the unsuccessful Women's Health Protection Act of 2021-22 — would be "an existential threat," Smith said.

Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., has introduced a bill proposing to ban most abortions nationwide after 15 weeks of gestation. SBA Pro-Life America, a prominent anti-abortion group, supports the bill, according to its state policy director, Katie Glenn Daniel. But the measure has vehement critics on both sides of the abortion divide.

A Russian border city cancels Orthodox Epiphany events due to the threat of Ukrainian attacks

By The Associated Press undefined

A Russian city near the Ukrainian border canceled its traditional Orthodox Epiphany festivities on Friday due to the threat of attacks as Kyiv's forces pursue a new strategy with the war approaching its two-year milestone.

The city of Belgorod has scrapped events in which the faithful plunge into ponds and pools through holes in the ice on the feast of Epiphany every Jan. 19, the state news agency Tass reported, citing the regional emergencies ministry. The annual celebrations are widespread in Russia.

Cross-border attacks have become increasingly frequent in recent weeks in Belgorod, the largest Russian city near the border with about 340,000 people, and can be reached by relatively simple and movable weapons such as multiple rocket launchers. It is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

On Dec. 30, shelling in the center of Belgorod killed 21 people and wounded 110, regional officials said, in what was one of the deadliest attacks on Russian soil since the start of Moscow's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

Border villages have been targeted sporadically during the war by Ukrainian artillery fire, rockets, mortar shells and drones launched from dense forests, where they are hard to detect. But until Thursday, no major public events were known to have been called off.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 55 of 60

In Moscow, meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed a U.S. proposal to resume a dialogue on nuclear arms control, saying it's impossible while Washington offers military support to Ukraine.

Speaking at an annual news conference, Lavrov accused the West of fueling global security risks by encouraging Ukraine to ramp up strikes on Russian territory and warned that Moscow will achieve its goals in the conflict despite Western assistance to Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged to hit more targets inside Russian border regions this year. The goal is to disrupt life and unsettle Russians, especially ahead of a March 17 election in Russia when President Vladimir Putin is seeking another six years in power.

Ten rockets fired from Ukraine were shot down, with one woman injured by falling wreckage, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said Thursday.

Long-range cross-border missile, drone and artillery strikes have been a feature of the war, especially when fighting on the front line eases off during winter.

Russian forces have repeatedly blasted civilian areas of Ukraine. On Thursday, a multistory building was hit in Kupiansk, in the eastern Kharkiv region, killing a 57-year-old woman and wounding two men, according to regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov.

Near Kupiansk, Russian troops also shelled the village of Maly Burluk, killing an elderly woman, Ukraine's presidential office said. A 10-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl were wounded, it said.

In the southern city of Kherson, shelling killed a driver in his car and a passerby on the street. Seven people were wounded in the region, including an 81-year-old woman, according to the presidential office.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's battlefield claims.

Ukraine's air force said it intercepted 22 out of 33 Shahed drones launched by Russia overnight. The Kremlin's forces also fired two S-300 missiles at the Kharkiv region for the second night in a row, officials said.

Ukraine has urged its Western allies to step up its weapon and ammunition supplies so it can keep up the battlefield pressure on Moscow.

France on Thursday announced more planned deliveries of its Caesar artillery system to Ukraine and said it is speeding up weapons manufacturing as it seeks to avoid depleting its own military stocks while continuing to support Kyiv.

"The logic of ceding materiel taken from the armies' stocks is reaching its end," French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu told *Le Parisien*. "From now on, the solution is to directly connect French defense industries with the Ukrainian army."

France also launched a drive to fund the delivery of 78 Caesar self-propelled 155 mm howitzers to Ukraine this year. Ukraine has already paid for six of the guns itself and France will provide 50 million euros (\$54 million) to deliver 12 more, Lecornu said separately in a speech. France is also seeking 280 million euros (\$305 million) from other allies of Ukraine to pay for the 60 other Caesars, he said.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov said Russian forces are firing five times more artillery shells — 10 times more in some places — than Kyiv's forces along the front lines, and stronger artillery "is one of our key needs to win this war."

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, meanwhile, toured a plant near Moscow that designs and manufactures cruise missiles as part of an effort to bolster the Kremlin's long-range arsenal.

Shoigu told factory managers who reported increasing the range of one type of missile to 250 kilometers (150 miles) that it should be increased even more, according to the Defense Ministry.

Boris Obnosov, the head of the state corporation overseeing the production of tactical missiles, said a new variant of the weapon has a range of 310 kilometers (190 miles).

"Now we need to make sure we have enough of such missiles," Shoigu said, according to the ministry. "We spend them and score hits daily."

The Vatican's top expert on AI ethics is a friar from a medieval Franciscan order

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Friar Paolo Benanti wears the plain brown robes of his medieval Franciscan order as he pursues one of the most pressing issues in contemporary times: how to govern artificial intelligence so that it enriches — and doesn't exploit — people's lives.

Benanti is the Vatican's go-to person on the technology and he has the ear of Pope Francis as well as some of Silicon Valley's top engineers and executives.

With a background in engineering, a doctorate in moral theology and a passion for what he calls the "ethics of technology," the 50-year-old Italian priest is on an urgent mission that he shares with Francis, who, in his annual peace message for 2024, pushed for an international treaty to ensure the ethical use of AI technology.

"What is the difference between a man who exists and a machine that functions?" said Benanti in an interview this week with The Associated Press during a break at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where he teaches courses such as moral theology and bioethics to students preparing for the priesthood. "This is perhaps the greatest question of these times, because we are witnessing a challenge that every day grows more profound with a machine that is humanizing."

Benanti is a member of the United Nations' Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence as well as head of an Italian government commission tasked with providing recommendations on how to safeguard journalism from fake news and other disinformation. He is also a consultant to the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life.

Benanti says he helps "better clarify the more technical terms for the Holy Father" during their encounters. His knowledge came in handy for a 2023 meeting at the Vatican between Francis and Microsoft President Brad Smith that focused on how AI could help or hurt humanity.

Francis and Smith had also discussed artificial intelligence "at the service of the common good" during a meeting a few years earlier, according to the Vatican. With a papacy heavily attentive to those who live on society's margins, Francis has made clear his concern that AI technology could limit human rights by, say, negatively impacting a homebuyer's mortgage application, a migrant's asylum bid or an evaluation of an offender's likelihood to repeat a crime.

"It's clear that if we choose some data that aren't sufficiently inclusive, we will have some choices that aren't inclusive," said Benanti, whose religious order was founded in the early 13th century by St. Francis of Assisi, who renounced earthly riches and promoted charitable works.

Microsoft first reached out to Benanti several years ago for his thoughts on technology, the friar said. In 2023, Smith did a podcast with Benanti in Rome, describing the friar as bringing "one of the most fascinating combinations in the world" in terms of his background in engineering, ethics and technology, to the AI debate.

Benanti, who was one year shy of obtaining his engineering degree at Rome's Sapienza University when he forsook the degree — and also his girlfriend — to join the Franciscans in his 20s, described how AI could be a "really powerful tool" in bringing down the cost of medicine and empowering doctors to help more people.

But he also described the ethical implications of a technology that could have the same capabilities as a human — or perhaps even more.

"It is a problem not of using (AI) but it is a problem of governance," the friar said. "And here is where ethics come in — finding the right level of use inside a social context."

Benanti noted that much of the data that informs AI is fed by low-wage workers, many in developing countries entrenched in a history of colonialism and an exploited workforce.

"I don't want this to be remembered as the season in which we extract from the global South cognitive resources," he said. If one examines "the best tools that we are producing in AI" in the West, one sees that AI is "trained with underpaid workers from English-speaking former colonies."

How to govern AI is an issue that countries all over the globe are trying to resolve. The European Union

became a trailblazer late last year when negotiators secured a deal that paves the way for legal oversight of AI technology.

In Italy, Premier Giorgia Meloni, who worries that AI could lead to job losses, will make the technology a focus of this year's G-7 summit being hosted by Italy. As part of those efforts, Meloni on Thursday met with visiting Microsoft founder Bill Gates in Rome, an encounter that was attended by Benanti.

For his part, the friar told AP that regulating artificial intelligence shouldn't mean limiting its development. "It means keeping them compatible with that fragile system that is democracy, that today seems to be the best system," Benanti said.

Trump, blending legal battles and campaign, tops long day in court with rambling New Hampshire rally

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. (AP) — Dan Steele knows what a long day in court is like. So he was extra appreciative on Wednesday that former President Donald Trump journeyed to New Hampshire after spending the day in a New York courtroom, where he sat defiantly during his trial to determine damages for defaming a magazine writer after she accused him of sexual assault.

A retired trial lawyer for the Justice Department, Steele said he hasn't dug into the details of the wide array of cases against Trump. That includes four prosecutions — including two by Steele's former employer — plus the defamation lawsuit, which comes on the heels of a \$5 million verdict for E. Jean Carroll in her initial sexual assault lawsuit against Trump, plus a fraud case filed by the New York Attorney General's office. But Steele dismissed them as "all campaign interference by the Democrats because they can't beat him any other way."

"Every time he goes into a courtroom," Steele, 75, who retired in 2016, said approvingly of Trump, "he always comes out with more support."

Steele and a few hundred other supporters spent hours waiting for Trump, who delayed his New Hampshire appearance to hold a late-afternoon news conference after court concluded in which he slammed the judge in the case as "a radical Trump-hater."

The former president spoke more than two hours later than scheduled in a location that was much smaller than his normal venue — a hotel ballroom that could only accommodate some 300 people. He concluded his long day with a rambling speech that lasted more than an hour.

He mocked his rivals in the primary, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley. Then he quickly went off-message, touting a cognitive test he took as president, his administration's campaign against the Islamic State group and other familiar themes. Eventually he came around to bemoaning his legal woes.

"You know I've been indicted more than Al Capone," Trump told the crowd. "You ever heard of Al Capone? Probably the greatest mobster of them all."

The scene in New Hampshire was a somewhat surreal early look at the coming campaign, in which the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination is still scheduled to face his first criminal trial on March 5, which is also known as Super Tuesday because 14 states vote in the nominating contest. While that trial start date may be delayed, Trump will have to juggle stump speeches and his legal defense throughout the year as he did on Wednesday.

Trump has made his legal woes a centerpiece of his presidential primary campaign, and his voters don't seem fazed by his increasingly confrontational approach to the U.S. justice system. Last week, as his rivals crisscrossed first-in-the-nation Iowa before Monday's caucuses, Trump largely stayed in New York and Washington, attending legal proceedings in two cases against him and making sure his voters saw him as fighting back against persecution. He won Iowa with 51% of the caucus vote.

New Hampshire is the next state in the Republican nominating contest, and Trump seems intent on mixing court with campaigning. On Wednesday, Trump was warned by the judge in the case that he'd be tossed from the courtroom if he kept talking while Carroll testified.

"I would love it," Trump replied.

The crowd in New Hampshire cheered wildly as Trump came onstage and hooted warmly at some of his standard campaign lines. Trump was in an obvious good mood, enjoying back and forth with a receptive crowd after a day of being forced to sit still and admonished to keep quiet in court.

"Would you trust Joe Biden to run your store while you go off to New Hampshire to find a small hill to go skiing?" Trump asked at one point, riffing on his likely Democratic rival in November like a standup comic.

Later, he quipped about former President Jimmy Carter, who is currently in hospice care in Georgia with terminal cancer. "He's happy because his presidency is now considered brilliant in comparison to Joe Biden," Trump said.

At one point, after Trump quoted praise from his former White House physician, now a Republican congressman from Texas and a fierce Biden critic, the crowd burst out laughing. "That's Ronny Jackson of Texas," Trump said, as if he was crediting a fellow performer on stage.

Eventually, as Trump's speech extended past an hour, the ballroom grew stuffy and people began to trickle out.

Attendees had waited outside for hours in 20-degree New Hampshire weather before having to wait hours more inside. But they were sympathetic to Trump, echoing his often-repeated arguments about what he contends is his legal persecution.

"I think it's disgusting what they're doing to him, but he's doing what he has to do," said Beverly Rider, who traveled from next-door Maine to the Portsmouth hotel Wednesday morning to begin waiting for Trump. "He's doing it for us."

Power line falls on car during Oregon ice storm, killing 3 and injuring a baby, authorities say

By CLAIRE RUSH and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A power line fell on a parked car in northeast Portland, Oregon, on Wednesday, killing three people and injuring a baby during an ice storm that turned roads and mountain highways treacherous in the Pacific Northwest.

Shortly before noon, dispatchers started receiving frantic calls about a downed power line and people appearing to be electrocuted, according to a statement from the city's fire department. A branch had fallen on a power line, causing it to fall onto an SUV, the statement said.

As the chaotic situation unfolded, a resident grabbed the baby from one of the people lying in the street in a bid to save its life, according to the statement. The three killed — two adults and one teenager — were found dead upon firefighters' arrival, and the baby was taken to a hospital. It is believed the victims were electrocuted after they got out of the vehicle, the statement said.

The power company later deenergized the line, the statement added without specifying which company.

Around Portland, driving and even walking were virtually impossible as slick ice coated roads and sidewalks. Icicles dangled from roofs and cars, and ice encased branches, plants and leaves like thick glass.

A large swath of the region was under warnings Wednesday for as much as 1 inch (2.5 centimeters) of ice, promising only to add to the damage wrought by a deadly, powerful storm that hit over the weekend. The warning area was reduced later in the morning to parts of southwest Washington and northwest Oregon, including Portland, and further limited to the western edge of the Columbia River Gorge in the afternoon.

Freezing rain could return to the region Thursday evening through Friday morning, the National Weather Service said. The areas most likely to be impacted include the eastern Portland metro area and the western Columbia River Gorge.

Portland transportation officials asked the public to stay off the roads through Thursday morning, and numerous school districts, including Oregon's largest, canceled classes for a third straight day as roads remained slick.

The three deaths Wednesday added to at least seven deaths linked to fallen trees and suspected hypothermia during the previous weekend's storm.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 59 of 60

Daniel Buck, who lives just a few steps from where the deaths took place in northeast Portland, told The Associated Press he heard an explosion and then saw a person running out of a car with a downed power line laying on top in flames. When he got closer, he said, he saw that person and two others on the ground about 35 feet (10.7 meters) away from the car, where the rest of the power line had fallen. He said he saw one of the victim's pant legs on fire.

"All of them were making contact with the live wire, so nobody could touch them to help," said Buck, who described the victims as residents of a nearby apartment. "It was just terrible."

Diane Flaherty, resident of a forested neighborhood in southwest Portland, said her home has been without power since Saturday. That day, she left her house to stay with her brother-in-law when she saw the large tree in her front yard start swaying in the strong wind.

"It was like a war zone," she said, describing the sound of trees cracking as they toppled onto her neighbors' cars and homes. "We were absolutely stunned."

The storm canceled or delayed flights, including in Vancouver, British Columbia, where heavy snow blanketed the city and snarled traffic, The Canadian Press reported.

The storm hit the northwest corner of the U.S. as much of the rest of the country coped with bitter weather that in some places put electricity supplies at risk. Some 90,000 homes and businesses across the U.S. — mostly in Oregon — did not have power as of late Wednesday, according to PowerOutage.us.

Freezing temperatures spread as far south as North Florida on Wednesday morning, the National Weather Service said.

It was 5 degrees in Chicago (minus 15 Celsius) and 6 degrees (minus 14.4 Celsius) in Detroit — significantly colder than Alaska's capital of Juneau, where it was 18 degrees (minus 7.8 Celsius). Some Midwesterners managed to find a bright side.

"It's probably the most beautiful time in Chicago, ever," Richard Wineberg said as he admired the snow-covered landscape.

In western New York, the weather was blamed for three deaths in three days. Two people were apparently stricken while clearing snow, and a third was struck by a vehicle while brushing snow from his car, officials said Wednesday.

Five people were struck and killed by a tractor-trailer on Interstate 81 in northeastern Pennsylvania after they left their vehicles following a separate crash on slick pavement. Investigators were still determining the exact cause.

Heavy lake-effect snow was forecast in Buffalo, with up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) an hour expected through the afternoon. The blast came days after a storm that delayed an NFL playoff game for a day.

Early Wednesday, Patrick Sahr shoveled snow from his car and driveway in Buffalo after at least 18 inches (45.7 centimeters) of snow fell overnight — on top of 3 feet (1 meter) over the weekend.

"I just want to keep up with it," he said during a lull.

On the Crow Creek Sioux Reservation near Fort Thompson, South Dakota, about three dozen people stayed in a shelter and the tribe paid to put up about 40 families in a motel. The tribe also provided propane and wood for home heating, and plastic to cover drafty windows, for what tribal Chairman Peter Lengkeek called "substandard government homes."

It's expensive, but "you can't put a price on life and suffering," Lengkeek said.

In Tennessee, health officials have confirmed at least 14 weather-related deaths. Memphis-Shelby County Schools, the state's largest public school system with about 100,000 students, canceled Thursday classes.

The Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity to seven Southern states, reported a preliminary all-time record for peak power demand Wednesday morning as the region dropped to an average of 4 degrees (minus 15.5 Celsius).

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 209 ~ 60 of 60

Today in History: January 19

Lucille Ball gives birth, on TV and in real life

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 19, the 19th day of 2024. There are 347 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

In 1953, CBS-TV aired the widely watched episode of "I Love Lucy" in which Lucy Ricardo, played by Lucille Ball, gave birth to Little Ricky. (By coincidence, Ball gave birth the same day to her son, Desi Arnaz Jr.)

On this date:

In 1853, Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Il Trovatore" premiered in Rome.

In 1915, Germany carried out its first air raid on Britain during World War I as a pair of Zeppelins dropped bombs onto Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn in England.

In 1942, during World War II, Japanese forces captured the British protectorate of North Borneo. A German submarine sank the Canadian liner RMS Lady Hawkins off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, killing 251 people; 71 survived.

In 1944, the federal government relinquished control of the nation's railroads to their owners following settlement of a wage dispute.

In 1966, Indira Gandhi was chosen to be prime minister of India by the National Congress party.

In 1987, Guy Hunt became Alabama's first Republican governor since 1874 as he was sworn into office, succeeding George C. Wallace.

In 2005, the American Cancer Society reported that cancer had passed heart disease as the top killer of Americans age 85 and younger.

In 2009, Russia and Ukraine signed a deal restoring natural gas shipments to Ukraine and paving the way for an end to the nearly two-week cutoff of most Russian gas to a freezing Europe.

In 2012, Rupert Murdoch's media empire apologized and agreed to cash payouts to 37 people who'd been harassed and phone-hacked by its tabloid press.

In 2013, death claimed baseball Hall-of-Famers Stan Musial at age 92 and Earl Weaver at age 82.

In 2018, Olympic gold medalist Aly Raisman joined dozens of other women and girls in confronting her former doctor, Larry Nassar, at his sentencing hearing for multiple sexual assaults; she warned him that the testimony of the "powerful army" of survivors would haunt him in prison.

In 2023, the Supreme Court said an eight-month investigation failed to reveal who leaked a draft of the court's opinion overturning abortion rights.

Today's birthdays: Actor Tippi Hedren is 94. Former PBS newsman Robert MacNeil is 93. Movie director Richard Lester is 92. Actor-singer Michael Crawford is 82. Actor Shelley Fabares (fab-RAY') is 80. Country singer Dolly Parton is 78. Former ABC newswoman Ann Compton is 77. TV chef Paula Deen is 77. Rock singer Martha Davis is 73. Singer Dewey Bunnell (America) is 72. Actor Desi Arnaz Jr. is 71. Actor Katey Sagal is 70. Comedian Paul Rodriguez is 69. Conductor Sir Simon Rattle is 69. Rock musician Jeff Pilson (Foreigner) is 66. Actor Paul McCrane is 63. Actor William Ragsdale is 63. Basketball coach and commentator Jeff Van Gundy is 62. International Tennis Hall of Famer Stefan Edberg is 58. Rock singer Whitfield Crane (Ugly Kid Joe) is 56. Singer Trey Lorenz is 55. Actor Shawn Wayans is 53. Rock singer-musician John Wozniak (Marcy Playground) is 53. Actor Drea (DRAY-uh') de Matteo is 52. Comedian-impressionist Frank Caliendo is 50. Actor Drew Powell is 48. Actor Marsha Thomason is 48. Actor Bitsie Tulloch is 43. Actor Jodie Sweetin is 42. U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg is 42. Movie director Damien Chazelle is 39. Actor Shaunette Renee Wilson is 34. Actor Briana Henry is 32. Actor Logan Lerman is 32. Olympic gold medal gymnast Shawn Johnson is 32. Rapper Taylor Bennett is 28. Actor Lidya Jewett is 17.