

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Monday, Jan. 22

Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, mixed vegetables, fruit cocktail, cookie, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Tater tot hot dish.

Basketball Double Header at Northwestern: (Boys 7th at 4 p.m., Boys 8th at 5 p.m.; Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m.; Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at noon.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, Jan. 23

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, biscuit, peas and carrots, pineapple/strawberry ambrosia.

School Breakfast: Waffles.

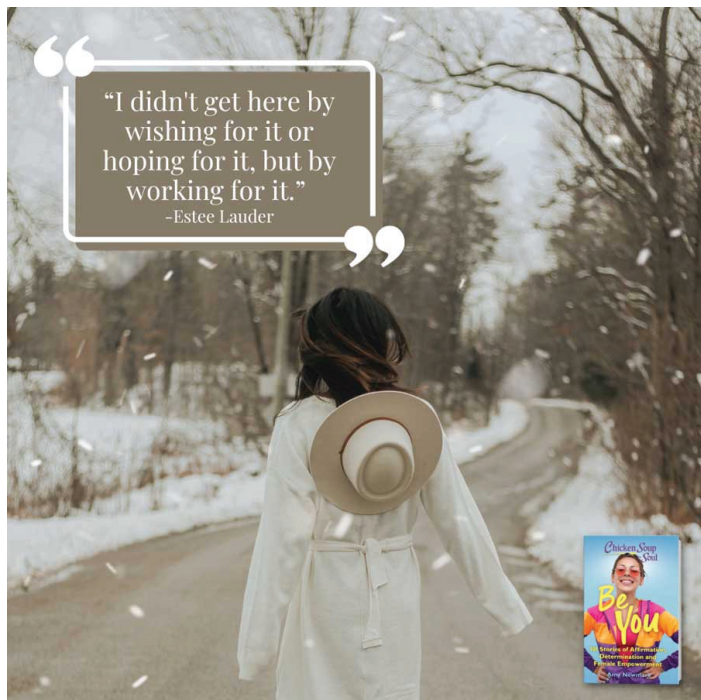
School Lunch: Chicken legs, mashed potatoes.

Boys JH Basketball at Clark: 7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.

Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, jewels series for Lent, 10 a.m.



## Wednesday, Jan. 24

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, oriental blend vegetables, bakes apples, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Chef salad.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m. (Service Project)

## Thursday, Jan. 25

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, frosted brownies, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pop tarts.

School Lunch: Pasta with meat balls.

Boys Basketball hosts Webster: (Gym: 7th at 4:30 p.m., 8th at 5:30 p.m.; Arena: Boys C at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., Varsity to follow)

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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# 1440

In partnership with [smartasset™](#)

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis ended his Republican presidential campaign Sunday, two days before the New Hampshire primary. DeSantis, who came in second behind former President Donald Trump in last week's Iowa caucuses by 30 percentage points, announced his exit on X (formerly Twitter) while endorsing Trump.

The fallout from the ongoing Israel-Hamas war continued to roil the Middle East over the weekend. Israeli airstrikes near a Lebanese army checkpoint in south Lebanon killed a Hezbollah member Sunday, while five senior members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps were killed Saturday in Syria. Iran vowed to retaliate against Israel, which it claims was behind the attack in Syria; Israel hasn't confirmed or denied involvement. In western Iraq, US and Iraqi troops were wounded after Iranian-backed militants known as the Islamic Resistance fired at an air base.

Over 80 people died amid a nationwide cold snap over the past week as arctic air pushed south as far as Texas and Florida. Frigid temperatures and ice storms are expected in much of the eastern two-thirds of the country today before a rapid rise in temperatures later in the week, a weather seesaw likely to prompt flooding.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Baltimore Ravens, Kansas City Chiefs, San Francisco 49ers, and Detroit Lions

advance to NFL conference championships; Lions reach NFC Championship for first time since 1991 season.

Mary Weiss, the Shangri-Las lead singer best known for hit song "Leader of the Pack," dies at 75.

Stanford women's coach Tara VanDerveer wins 1,203rd game, passing Duke's Mike Krzyzewski for most coaching wins in NCAA basketball history. Novak Djokovic advances to Australian Open quarterfinals, matching Roger Federer's record in reaching 58 Grand Slam quarterfinals.

## Science & Technology

OpenAI suspends maker of a ChatGPT-based bot mimicking Democratic presidential nominee Dean Phillips, its first action against politically oriented applications on its platform.

Engineers fold DNA into the equivalent of a tiny electrical motor; first-of-its-kind structure is powered by liquid flowing through pores roughly one-billionth of a meter in size.

Researchers discover molecular sensor telling tardigrades—also known as "water bears"—to enter a nearly indestructible dormant state.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher Friday (S&P 500 +1.2%, Dow +1.1%, Nasdaq +1.7%); S&P 500 closes at all-time high. US consumer sentiment index increases in January to the highest reading since July 2021.

Wayfair to lay off 1,650 employees, or 13% of its workforce; job cuts are part of Wayfair's third restructuring since summer 2022 and are expected to save the online goods retailer roughly \$280M annually.

JetBlue Airways, Spirit Airlines appeal federal court ruling blocking their \$3.8B merger.

## Politics & World Affairs

At least 27 killed, 25 wounded after missile strikes a market in Russian-held Donetsk city in Ukraine Sunday, according to local authorities; source of strike unclear, Russia blames Ukraine.

Hundreds of thousands protest across Germany in response to reports members of far-right party Alternative for Germany participated in event where mass deportation plans were discussed. Germans debate ban of Alternative for Germany.

Indian officials to inaugurate Hindu Ram Mandir temple today in northern city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh; 5-acre, \$217M "Hindu Vatican" built on contested holy site significant to both Muslims and Hindus

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

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## NEC Boys' Basketball

### Groton overtakes TZ in Region 1A

Deuel defeated Tiospa Zina and Groton Area continues to be on a roll with a four game winning streak to shake up the top spot in the Region 1A standings. Groton Area now is over one point ahead of Tiospa Zina.

Hamlin remains in the top spot in the Northeast Conference race with four teams fighting for the second spot with one loss each - Groton Area, Deuel, Ronalli and Clark/Willow Lake.

Hamlin defeated Dakota Valley on Saturday, 84-62. Dakota Valley had a 62-game winning streak - just two games shy of tying Armour's 64 game winning streak in 1980. Groton Area will take on Dakota Valley at the Dak12-NEC Clash Saturday in Madison.

### Boys NEC Standings

	NEC	Overall
Hamlin	5-0	9-2
Groton Area	5-1	7-2
Deuel	4-1	7-5
Roncalli	3-1	6-4
Clark/Willow Lake	3-1	5-5
Milbank	2-3	7-3
Tiospa Zina	2-3	6-4
Webster Area	2-5	4-7
Sisseton	1-3	3-8
Britton-Hecla *	1-4	1-10
Redfield	0-6	1-8

\* Class B Team

Jan. 18: Groton Area 61, Milbank 28

Jan. 18: Deuel 66, Tiospa Zina 55

Jan. 18: Hamlin 83, Redfield 19

Jan. 19: Webster 67, Sisseton 44

Jan. 23: Roncalli at Hamlin

Jan. 25: Hamlin at Sisseton

Jan. 25: Milbank at Deuel

Jan. 25: Britton-Hecla at Roncalli

Jan. 25: Webster Area at Groton Area

Jan. 26: Clark/Willow Lake at Redfield

Jan. 30: Sisseton at Britton-Hecla

Jan. 30: Roncalli at Tiospa Zina

Feb. 1: Webster Area at Redfield

Feb. 1: Groton Area at Deuel

Feb. 2: Milbank at Roncalli

Feb. 2: Milbank at Roncalli

Feb. 2: Clark/Willow Lake at Sisseton

Feb. 6: Milbank at Sisseton (Conference game)

Feb. 8: Deuel at Hamlin

Feb. 8: Redfield at Groton Area

Feb. 8: Britton-Hecla at Clark/Willow Lake

Feb. 9: Sisseton at Tiospa Zina

Feb. 12: Clark/Willow Lake at Roncalli

Feb. 13: Clark/Willow Lake at Tiospa Zina

Feb. 13: Sisseton at Deuel

Feb. 13: Sisseton at Deuel

Feb. 13: Britton-Hecla at Hamlin

Feb. 15: Hamlin at Clark/Willow Lake

Feb. 15: Roncalli at Deuel









Feb. 16: Redfield at Tiospa Zina

Feb. 16: Britton-Hecla at Groton Area

Feb. 16: Milbank at Webster Area

Feb. 23: Tiospa Zina at Milbank

### Region 1A Standings

		Season			Seed Pts
#	Name	W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Groton Area	7	2	.778	44.556
2	 Tiospa Zina	6	4	.600	43.500
3	 Milbank	7	3	.700	42.200
4	 Waubay/Summit	7	5	.583	41.167
5	 Aberdeen Roncalli	6	4	.600	41.100
6	 Webster Area	4	7	.364	39.455
7	 Sisseton	3	8	.273	37.636
8	 Redfield	1	8	.111	35.222

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## NEC Girls' Basketball

### Milbank handed second loss

Sisseton and Hamlin still remain undefeated in the Northeast Conference title race, but Sisseton will host Hamlin on Thursday. Groton Area knocked Milbank out of the number two spot by handing the Bulldogs their second loss. Deuel and Roncalli each have one loss.

Sisseton remains undefeated and in the top spot of the Region 1A standings while Roncalli and Groton are a distance second and third.

### Girls NEC Standings

Sisseton	4-0	10-0
Hamlin	5-0	8-3
Deuel	4-1	6-6
Roncalli	4-1	9-1
Milbank	4-2	7-4
Groton Area	2-3	7-4
Redfield	2-4	4-7
Webster Area	2-5	4-8
Clark/Willow Lake	1-4	3-9
Britton-Hecla *	1-4	3-8
Tiospa Zina	0-6	0-11

\* Class B Team

Jan. 18  
Groton Area 42, Milbank 39  
Hamlin 66, Redfield 33  
Sisseton 69, Webster 29  
Deuel 63, Tiospa Zina 28

Jan. 20  
Roncalli 56, Clark/Willow Lake 24

Jan. 23: Roncalli at Hamlin

Jan. 25  
Milbank at Deuel  
Redfield at Clark/Willow Lake  
Hamlin at Sisseton

Jan. 26  
Roncalli at Britton-Hecla  
Groton Area at Webster Area

Jan. 29: Roncalli at Tiospa Zina

Jan. 30: Sisseton at Britton-Hecla

Feb. 1  
Roncalli at Milbank  
Groton Area at Deuel  
Sisseton at Clark/Willow Lake

Feb. 2: Redfield at Webster Area

Feb. 6: Milbank at Sisseton

Feb. 8  
Tiospa Zina at Sisseton  
Britton-Hecla at Clark/Willow Lake  
Deuel at Hamlin









Feb. 9: Groton Area at Redfield

Feb. 13  
Deuel at Sisseton  
Clark/Willow Lake at Tiospa Zina  
Britton-Hecla at Hamlin

Feb. 15  
Roncalli at Deuel  
Webster Area at Milbank  
Hamlin at Clark/Willow Lake

Feb 16  
Britton-Hecla at Groton Area  
Redfield at Tiospa Zina

### Girls Region 1A Standings

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Sisseton	10	0	1.000	47.000
2	 Aberdeen Roncalli	9	1	.900	45.000
3	 Groton Area	7	4	.636	42.455
4	 Milbank	7	4	.636	41.636
5	 Waubay/Summit	7	4	.636	40.818
6	 Redfield	4	7	.364	40.000
7	 Webster Area	4	8	.333	38.667
8	 Tiospa Zina	0	11	.000	34.636

## Even In Darkness You can be Found

"I've lost everything...but I just can't stop". "Once I take that first drink that is all I think about". "I use to take the pain away". These are some of the many things you might hear someone who struggles on a daily basis with an addiction say. Addiction is a chronic disease that can physically and mentally change a person from who they once were.

When we hear the word addiction, we might automatically go to 'the person on the street looking to score their next fix', but these are people who struggle every minute of their day to make the unconscious choice to feed this compulsion without thinking of the consequences of what

this might do to them or their family. Addiction doesn't pick and choose, have a 'type' or have a criteria, so anyone from any gender, class, race etc. can fall victim to this disorder. In my time at various jobs, I have heard addiction described as their own worst enemy, their best (and only) friend, or the one thing they wish they could take back from their life. Now don't forget, addiction doesn't just stop at substances. You will see a wide range including gambling, shopping, eating, pornography and this is only just naming a few that can consume a persons every waking thought.

As hopeless as addiction might feel, the good news is there is hope and recovery is possible. Now there might not be a cure for addiction, but with the right tools, you can certainly make positive changes to help maintain prolonged sobriety. Now, I can sit here and say these words quite easily, but the road is far from that. These words are not said to discourage or make you scared, but to give a real perspective that it takes a lot of work, time, dedication and change, but with that, recovery is possible. Whether you choose treatment, AA/NA (and others), other peer support groups, or taking your recovery into your own hands, there are some core components that need to happen to gain a better chance of being successful. You can start doing this by surrounding yourself with positive supports, changing your playgrounds by not frequenting the same places, gaining healthy coping skills and taking it one day at a time. To finish, I always tell my patients, make sure you are addressing your mental health as well as your substance use. A beautiful life is waiting for you, but you just need to take that first step in admitting to yourself you have a problem and asking for help.

*Nicola Park LAC, LPC-MH is a licensed mental health professional/counselor (LPC-MH) and a licensed addictions counselor (LAC) at Avera Behavioral Health in Sioux Falls. She have been in the counseling field since 2011 and have worked in both inpatient, outpatient, and residential school settings. Ms. Park has a masters in clinical mental health counseling and my bachelors in addictions counseling and psychology. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.*



By Nicola Park LAC, LPC-MH

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## Dak XII/NEC Conference Clash

Boys Event – January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### SCHEDULE (MAIN GYM)

Time	Seed	Dak XII Team		NEC Team
11:00am	#6 Seeds	Tea Area (41.778)	vs.	Clark/Willow Lake (41.5)
12:30pm	#5 Seeds	Dell Rapids (42.111)	vs.	Milbank (42.2)
2:00pm	#4 Seeds	Lennox (42.125)	vs.	Tiospa Zina (43.5)
3:30pm	#3 Seeds	Vermillion (42.889)	vs.	Parkston (43.6)
5:00pm	#2 Seeds	Dakota Valley (45.0)	vs.	Groton Area (44.556)
6:30pm	#1 Seeds	Sioux Falls Christian (47.0)	vs.	Hamlin (45.545)

### SCHEDULE (AUXILIARY GYM)

Time	Seed	Dak XII Team		NEC Team
11:45am	#11 Seeds	Tri-Valley (39.333)	vs.	Redfield (35.222)
1:15pm	#10 Seeds	Elk Point-Jefferson (40.273)	vs.	Sisseton (37.636)
2:45pm	#9 Seeds	West Central (40.545)	vs.	Webster Area (39.455)
4:15pm	#8 Seeds	Canton (41.0)	vs.	Deuel (40.917)
5:45pm	#7 Seeds	Madison (41.5)	vs.	Aberdeen Roncalli (41.1)

- All games played at Madison High School and Middle School Gymnasiums
- Seed points calculated for all games played through Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024
- Ticket Prices (\$7 adults, \$5 students)
- Games will not start early.

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## Groton Area Second Quarter Honor Roll

### Seniors:

**4.0 GPA:** Claire Heinrich, Hannah Monson, Emily Clark, Camryn Kurtz, Lydia Meier, Anna Bisbee, Kyleigh Englund, Anna Fjeldheim, Abigail Jensen, Holden Sippel, Sydney Leicht, Ashlyn Sperry

**3.99-3.50:** Faith Flihs, Karsyn Jangula, Lane Tietz, Lexi Osterman, Emma Schinkel, Cadence Feist, Carly Guthmiller, Shea Jandel, Logan Ringgenberg, Colby Dunker, Ava Wienk

**3.49-3.00:** Dillon Abeln, Bryson Wambach, Bradin Althoff, Elijah Lich

### Juniors

**4.0 GPA:** Gretchen Dinger, Elizabeth Flihs, Axel Warrington, Faith Traphagen, Emma Kutter, Payton Mitchell, Blake Pauli

**3.99-3.50:** Diego Eduardo Nava Remigio, Laila Roberts, Logan Pearson, Kaden Kampa, Brooklyn Hansen, Kennedy Hansen, Jeslyn Kosel, Emily Overacker

**3.49-3.00:** Easten Ekern, Kayla Lehr, Carter Simon, Kellen Antonsen, Turner Thompson, Riley Carman, Korbin Kucker, Divya Pelmelay, Karrah-Jo Johnson, Emma Bahr, Brevin Flihs

### Sophomores

**4.0 GPA:** Mia Crank, Rylee Dunker, Carly Gilbert, Jaedyn Penning, Nathan Unzen

**3.99-3.50:** Karsten Flihs, Ryder Johnson, Jerica Locke, Gage Sippel, Talli Wright, London Bahr, De Eh Tha Say, Lucas Carda, Raelee Lilly, Nathalia Warrington, Keegen Tracy, Aiden Meyers

**3.49-3.00:** Paisley Mitchell, Hannah Sandness, Breslyn Jeschke, Karter Moody, Cambria Bonn, Jayden Schwan, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Logan Warrington, Benjamin Hoeft, Garrett Schultz, Gentry Pigors

### Freshmen

**4.0 GPA:** Liby Althoff, Kira Clocksene, Teagan Hanten, Carlee Johnson, Emerlee Jones, Brody Lord, Ashlynn Warrington

**3.99-3.50:** Colt Williamson, Halee Harder, Kella Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Leah Jones, McKenna Tietz, Blake Lord, Avery Crank, Aiden Strom, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Brenna Imrie, Gavin Kroll

**3.49-3.00:** Hailey Pauli, Hayden Zoellner, Walker Zoellner, Claire Schuelke, Alyssa Beauchamp, Logan Clocksene, Dylan McGannon, Zander Harry, Dylan Alexander Lopez Marin, Ashton Holmes

### Eighth Graders

**4.0 GPA:** Makenna Krause, Thomas Schuster

**3.99-3.50:** Elizabeth Cole, Kyleigh Kroll, Layne Johnson, Sydney Locke, Ryder Schelle, Rylen Ekern, Addison Hoeft, Mya Feser, Taryn Thompson, Chesney Weber, Easton Weber, Ethan Kroll, Rylie Rose, Jace Johnson, Brayden Barrera

**3.49-3.00:** Wyatt Wambach, Karson Zak, John Bisbee, Ryelle Gilbert, Gracie Pearson, Alex Abeln, Kinsley Rowen, Brysen Sandness, Journey Zieroth, Braeden Flihs, Kason Oswald

### Seventh Graders

**4.0 GPA:** Neely Althoff, Kolton Antonsen, Wesley Borg, Tevan Hanson, Novalea Warrington

**3.99-3.50:** Aspen Beto, Zachary Flihs, Madison Herrick, Asher Johnson, Abby Fjeldheim, Brooklyn Spanier, Lincoln Shilhanek, Madison Little, Logan Olson, Tenley Frost

**3.49-3.00:** Samuel Crank, Kaedynce Bonn, Connor Kroll, Wesley Morehouse, Adeline Kotzer, Savannah Beauchamp, Arianna Dinger, Aurora Washenberger, Jordan Schwan, Sydney Holmes, Kenzey Anderson

### Sixth Graders

**4.0 GPA:** Axel Abeln, Hudson Eichler, Amelia Ewalt, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson, Liam Lord, Asher Zimmerman

**3.99-3.50:** Sophia Flihs, Jameson Penning, Ryder Schwan, Trey Tietz, Illyanna Dallaire, Aubrie Lier

**3.49-3.00:** Peyton Castles, Andi Gauer, Haden Harder, Rowan Patterson, Trayce Schelle, Keegan Kucker

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**The Sugar Babes (above) and Sweet Sensations (below) performed at halftime of the Groton Area-Great Plains Lutheran girls' basketball game on Saturday.** (Photos by Paul Kosel)





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## Weekly Vikings Recap - Divisional Round

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

### **Baltimore Ravens 34 - Houston Texans 10**

After receiving a bye in the Wild Card Round, the Baltimore Ravens finally began their playoff journey in a Divisional Round Matchup against the Houston Texans. The week-off seemed to have caused some rustiness for the Ravens as they had a subpar performance in the first half in which they had four three-and-out drives and went into halftime tied 10 -10. However, that rust quickly wore off in the second half as the Ravens blew the game wide open, scoring a touchdown on their first three drives of the second half. Thanks to a Ravens' rushing attack that ran for 229 yards, the Texans' magical upstart season finally came to an end on Saturday. For the first time in their history, the Ravens will host the AFC Championship game at home next week against the Kansas City Chiefs.

### **San Francisco 49ers 24 - Green Bay Packers 21**

Leading up to the Divisional Round Matchup between the San Francisco 49ers and Green Bay Packers, there was a lot of discussion about the similarities of Jordan Love to Aaron Rodgers, given Love's dominant performance against the Cowboys. Those similarities can continue to be discussed as Love followed in the footsteps of Rodgers by falling to the 49ers on Saturday. And to make even more comparisons to former Packer quarterbacks, Jordan Love's game-clinching interception looked exactly like the interception Brett Favre threw against New Orleans in the 2009 NFC Championship.

However, the one comparison we cannot make is that Brock Purdy is on the level of Joe Montana and Steve Young. The talent of this 49ers' team is so vast that it covers up many of Purdy's flaws, one of which is his tendency to make a lot of turnover-worthy throws. Although Purdy finished the game with zero interceptions, it felt like the Packers' defense left a couple of interceptions on the table. Thankfully for the 49ers, they will face a Detroit Lions' defense in the NFC Championship next week that does not have a great pass defense.

### **Detroit Lions 31 - Tampa Bay Buccaneers 23**

For only the second time in the Super Bowl era, the Detroit Lions are heading to the NFC Championship game after their victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Coming into the game, the Buccaneers defense had not allowed a rushing touchdown in their last five games. However, that streak was snapped on Sunday thanks to two rushing touchdowns by the Lions, one by Jahmyr Gibbs and the other by Craig Reynolds. Gibbs, who was the Lions' first pick in this past year's draft, is starting to feel like the Lions' best offensive weapon. The question now will become whether the Lions will decide to try to ride Gibbs to the Super Bowl next week. Gibbs has only amassed over 20 carries in one game this season, but the Lions might decide to get Gibbs as many touches in the run game as they can, given there might be no tomorrow. The biggest question for the Lions next week though will be their health as multiple starters, including two of their starting offensive linemen, seem to have nagging injuries that could affect their performance.

### **Kansas City Chiefs 27 - Buffalo Bills 24**

For the sixth straight season, Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs are heading to the AFC Championship. Unlike their past five trips, this one will be on the road as they will have to head to Baltimore to face the Ravens. This was yet another tough loss for the Bills as they won the time-of-possession battle, the total yards battle, and the turnover battle, yet fell short to the Chiefs thanks to a missed field goal by Tyler Bass. Contrary to their prior playoff matchups, this was more of a game played via the rushing attack. Both teams combined for a total of 328 rushing yards on 63 attempts and neither Patrick Mahomes nor Josh Allen had a great game through the air. Next week, the Chiefs may struggle to utilize their rushing attack against a Ravens' defense that held the Texans to only 38 rushing yards.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Shelters and victim service providers struggle as federal funding plummets

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 21, 2024 7:00 AM

Children no longer have to sit in the Sioux Falls Police Department lobby for hours — with nowhere to go and no one to comfort them — after a parent is arrested for domestic violence.

Years ago, police officers had to balance watching those children, finding a safe place for them to stay and handling the continuous line of intakes for the jail, recalled Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead.

"It was a terrible place for children who'd been through that, to sit at the front desk of the police department, to be babysat by a police officer who was also dealing with reports or drunk people coming in or handling other services," Milstead told South Dakota Searchlight. "It was a bad situation."

That changed after the Children's Inn, now Children's Home Shelter for Family Safety, opened in 1977. The shelter provided a safe place for families and children, as well as resources for recovery.

Law enforcement in Sioux Falls and across the state have become "extremely dependent" on shelters, using victim services on a daily basis to provide critical resources for the community, Milstead said.

But South Dakota provides minimal funding for what Milstead and other victim service professionals view as a necessary piece of public safety. Cities and counties provide limited funding as well.

Instead, the state depends heavily on federal funding.

That's become a problem as federal funding declines, leaving victim services and shelters with limited funds to operate. Although the state Legislature approved \$5 million in one-time funding in 2022, that money quickly ran out.

"It's a huge step backward if those shelters would have to close or cut to bare bones services," Milstead said. "It's a step backward for the safety of these people. It's a huge step backward for public safety."



**A sculpture of a guardian angel comforting a sleeping child stands outside the Children's Home Shelter for Family Safety in Sioux Falls. The sculpture represents the care and protection people receive at the shelter, said Program Director Amy Carter. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)**

#### Federal funding cut in half from 2018 to 2023

There are 28 victim shelters and crisis centers across South Dakota, according to Krista Hereen-Graber, executive director of the South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault.



**The Children's Home Shelter for Family Safety is located in northeast Sioux Falls. The shelter serves primarily the Sioux Falls area and surrounding counties.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Most South Dakota shelters budgets' exist on federal funding. Any entity providing victim services receives funding from the federal Victims Of Crime Assistance (VOCA) program – ranging from shelters to abuse counseling to human trafficking agencies.

There are 51 organizations in South Dakota that receive funding from VOCA and other federal and state victim service funding.

South Dakota received a record amount of VOCA funding in fiscal year 2018, but a shift in Department of Justice practices resulted in a 70% decrease in the fund nationally. The last award the state received for victim services from the federal government, for fiscal year 2024, was \$4.5 million — \$8.2 million short of what the state requested. State funds supplemented \$2.27 million.

Data visualization made with Flourish

In 2021, Congress and President Joe Biden passed the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act. All three of South Dakota's congressional delegates supported the bill, but

the fund hasn't built up as quickly as hoped or expected, Heeren-Graber said.

That's due to less federal fines and fees being paid to the Crime Victims Fund and VOCA. The fund depends on deposits of fines and penalties paid by people convicted in federal cases. Federal prosecutors are increasingly entering into agreements with defendants instead of prosecuting cases, which means those fines and fees go toward the U.S. Treasury instead of the Crime Victims Fund.

But the need for services has increased. The number of victims served in South Dakota has risen from 12,763 in 2017 to 15,375 in 2023. The number of victims sheltered has remained steady, but is expected to increase by hundreds by 2025, according to the governor's latest budget.

While organizations in larger areas like Sioux Falls or Rapid City have access to more fundraising opportunities, most victim services entities in South Dakota heavily rely on government funding.

"That absolutely limits these organizations' ability to provide any services past the basic emergency services — which just isn't enough," Heeren-Graber said.

## **A public safety role: 'Victims are going to have nothing'**

About 60% to 70% of the Redfield crisis shelter's budget depends on public funding. The small shelter, called Jenny's Safe House, can serve up to 10 people and fields two to three calls a week on its 24/7 emergency line, according to Executive Director Robin Harty.

Due to decreased funding, the shelter has had to cut back hours, relying mostly on volunteer work from staff to cover Hand, Spink and Faulk counties. The organization has reduced travel, training and advertising budgets as well, though two of the three newspapers that serve the region offered to continue running the shelter's ads for free because they deem it a public service.

"We're already being told that next year's funding could be worse," Harty said. "Without that funding, our doors are going to close. That'll leave these people with nowhere else to go. These victims are going to have nothing."

The closest shelter to Redfield is 42 miles north in Aberdeen.

The shelter primarily fields calls for resources and guidance, since there is still a stigma in the rural north-

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eastern South Dakota region for seeking shelter, Harty said. Employees will also travel to communities on a weekly basis to present to schools and organizations and provide in-person support.

In Sioux Falls, larger facilities serve more clients but the majority of the budget comes from fundraising. Only 15% of the Children's Home Shelter for Family Safety's budget comes from government funding. The organization is lacking funding for 40.7% of its budget expenses this year.

"We've gotten the fundraising and we've made this huge expansion happen, but we all know that can get tapped out while the number of individuals seeking shelter and the population of the county continues to grow," said Deanna Larson, Chief Operating Officer of Children's Home Society.

It's frustrating for victim service providers because their work reduces the burden on law enforcement and the courts, but they're not financially treated as part of those systems.

Minnehaha County funding for the Children's Home Shelter used to be listed in the sheriff's budget, Milstead said, because it was considered a piece of public safety. The funding was moved to a group of other nonprofits years ago.

Having proper resources and services in place to not only shelter people in crisis but help them recover — finding affordable housing and offering counseling — helps reduce the chance that they'll have to use those services again. It also reduces the likelihood of family separation and children being placed in foster care.

"More violence and more harm impacts the whole judicial system," Larson said. "By being there and removing individuals from those dangerous situations, we are reducing those calls and needs and financial burdens on the judicial system."

## Legislative push for more state funding

Harty said victim services need to be funded better.

"It's like you go home, lock your doors, draw your shades closed and pretend the rest of the world doesn't exist," Harty said. "That's what it feels like. It feels like the state and the federal government are pretending these victims don't exist."

After the Legislature approved one-time funds for agencies in 2022 — helping organizations offset costs in 2022 and 2023 — state funding for fiscal year 2024 dropped by \$4.1 million. And federal funding has not returned to what it was.

That left victim service providers with a 69% cut in state funds from 2023 to 2024. The overall cut in funding was 38%.

"That money did help us get by but, unfortunately, the need is great," Hereen-Graber said, referring to the extra state aid. "You go from \$10 million in VOCA to approximately \$3 million, and that money will go quickly."

The state's contribution to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault programming, which is another funding source for victim services, has remained at \$225,000 annually for over a decade — \$25,000 less than what the fund started at in 1993 — and was not affected by the one-time influx of state funds.

The 2022 legislation was a hard lift, recalled Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls.



**Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, listens to testimony during a Joint Appropriations meeting during the 2024 legislative session.**

(Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Sioux Falls Republican lawmakers Sen. Jack Kolbeck and Rep. Taylor Rehfeld sponsored the legislation, which died in the House Committee on Appropriations before being recalled and passed without recommendation. The bill sailed through the House on a 56-13 vote before being signed into law by Gov. Kristi Noem.

This year, Duba is looking for a small bite out of the state's remaining \$131 million of federal American Rescue Plan Act funding, to fund victim services. Noem announced in her December budget address that she'd like a majority of the money to go toward water projects.

"She's got her ideas of what she wants to do with that money, but the Legislature also gets to take a swing at it," Duba said. "These are marginalized individuals who are in some of the most desperate situations of their lives. We have to help them."

That one-time funding would create a pot of money to help victim services and shelters remain afloat until federal funding increases again — a similar plan to the 2022 legislation.

But Duba is wary about reliance on federal funding. If the decreased federal funding continues, that will mean South Dakota would have to spend more to supplement funding or risk losing these services.

"This is putting people over programs," Duba said, echoing a line from Noem's budget address.

*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.*

## Today on GDILIVE.COM

### **Basketball Doubleheader at Northwestern**

**4:00: Girls JV sponsored by Adam & Nicole Wright**

**5:15: Boys JV sponsored by Crystal Strom**

**6:00: Girls Varsity Game**

**7:30: Boys Varsity Game**

## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What are some all-natural ways to control insects and rodents? – P.L., Trenton, NJ

Natural pest control has become increasingly popular given the slew of health and effectiveness issues with conventional pesticides derived from synthetic chemicals. Since synthetic pesticides became popular after World War II, toxic chemicals have infiltrated nearly 90 percent of U.S. waterways. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), Americans carry around some 43 different pesticides in their bloodstreams. These chemicals can trigger a wide range of symptoms, like nausea, vomiting and headaches, and cause bigger health problems like lung damage, cancers and reproductive issues. These pesticides are especially dangerous to kids, who are typically less resilient to the chemicals. Out of all the cases of pesticide poisoning in the U.S., around half are in kids under the age of six.

And these pesticides aren't always 100 percent effective. They often can't get rid of entire infestations as they are unable to target pests at every stage of their life. A pesticide might target adult fleas but not be able to target flea eggs. In some instances, pesticides can make issues worse, like spurring ant colonies to divide into multiple colonies and increase reproduction. Bugs can also grow resistant to certain pesticides.

So, what are some other options to deal with pests besides spraying toxic chemicals? One strategy, integrated pest management (IPM), focuses on preventing infestation before it starts and only uses pesticides as a last resort. The main tenets of IPM include preventing vermin from entering the home, keeping the home clean, picking your battles by only killing dangerous bugs, and going green by killing or trapping pests without using pesticides.

There are a few natural pest repellants that you may have already in your home. Dish soap can keep ants away and be sprayed where ants have been seen in your house. Lime and lemon juice keep spiders away, and salt can get rid of fleas. Vinegar also works well at keeping away many types of pests, including ants, fruit flies and mosquitos. Mixing vinegar with an orange peel, tea tree oil or lemon rind oil will make it even stronger. But if you already have a major infestation in the home, these remedies usually won't make them go away. These are more preventative measures to stem the chances of pests infiltrating your home.

Finding effective natural repellents on the market can be tough. Natural repellents that avoid synthetic chemicals and instead use active ingredients like lemongrass or rosemary oil are regulated differently than other repellent products. Because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deems the chemicals used in natural repellents harmless, they do not test them for effectiveness. This loophole allows companies that sell natural repellents to avoid needing to prove that their product actually works. There are plenty of ways to limit pesticide use, and natural ingredients are a great option to prevent pests from entering your home. However, when looking for "natural repellants" on the market, be sure to do your research to be sure what you are buying will actually work.

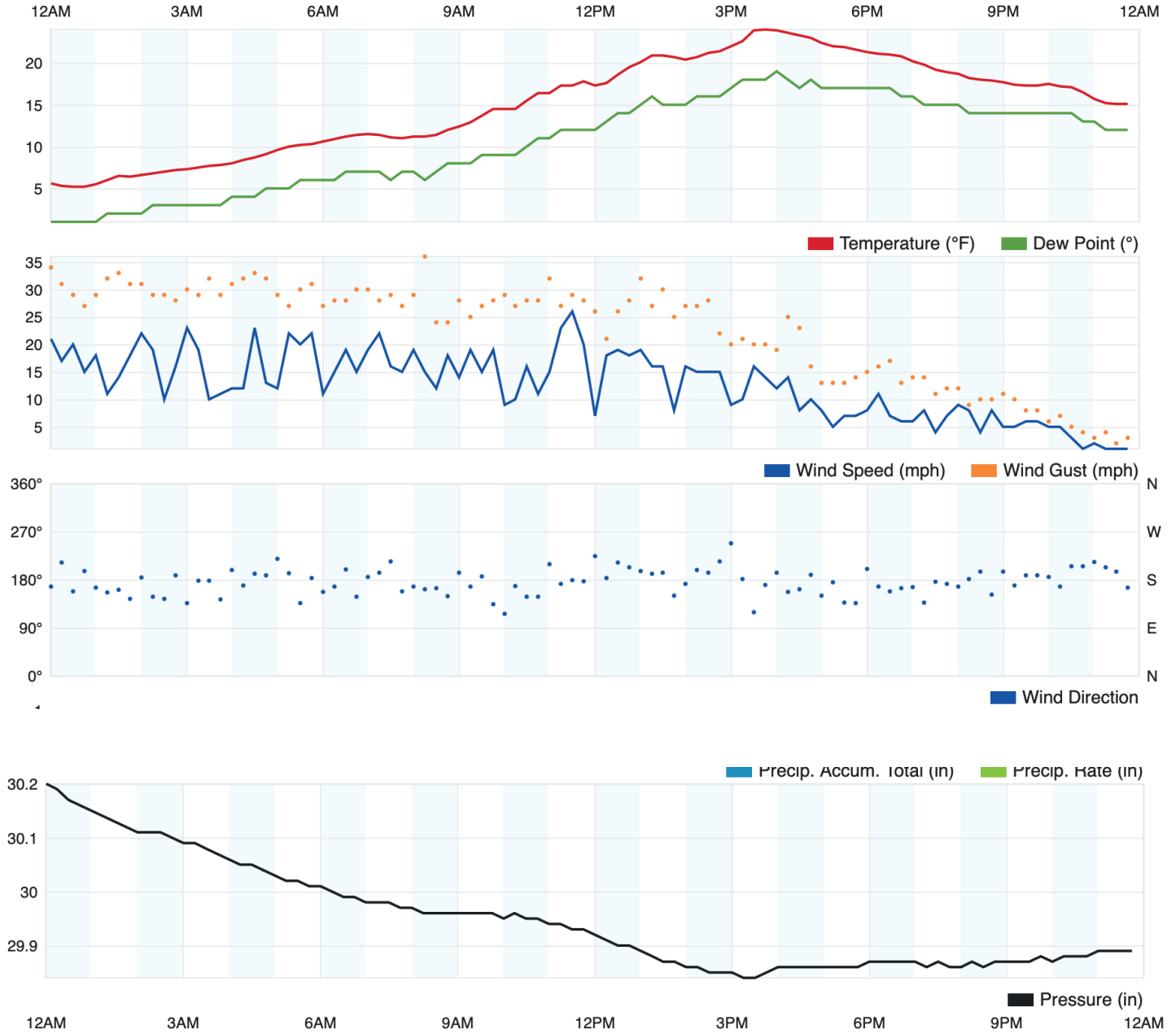


**Conventional chemical pesticides are less and less effective these days and all-natural versions are turning out to be a better solution.** Credit: Pexels.com.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Mon Jan 22	Tue Jan 23	Wed Jan 24	Thu Jan 25	Fri Jan 26	Sat Jan 27	Sun Jan 28
23°F	31°F	36°F	33°F	33°F	32°F	35°F
13°F	26°F	26°F	24°F	21°F	22°F	24°F
NNW 10 MPH	ENE 9 MPH	S 13 MPH	NNW 7 MPH	SW 10 MPH	WNW 10 MPH	SSW 13 MPH



## Warmer Air To Continue Through The Entire Week!

January 21, 2024  
2:37 PM



- Seasonal temperatures Monday to become above normal by Wednesday
- Highs mainly in the **20s** Monday, **near 30** Tuesday, warming into the **30s and 40s** for the weekend

	1/22 Mon	1/23 Tue	1/24 Wed	1/25 Thu	1/26 Fri	1/27 Sat	1/28 Sun
Aberdeen	26	30	36	34	34	32	37
Britton	23	30	35	32	32	31	35
Brookings	27	29	34	34	33	31	33
Chamberlain	28	29	35	34	35	33	38
Clark	24	29	34	31	31	29	32
Eagle Butte	27	28	36	33	37	32	39
Ellendale	23	28	34	32	33	32	37
Eureka	25	28	34	32	34	33	39
Gettysburg	26	30	32	30	34	32	37
Huron	26	29	35	34	34	31	35
Kennebec	27	31	35	32	35	33	38
McIntosh	24	27	37	32	36	33	44
Milbank	26	30	37	35	34	33	37
Miller	24	30	34	32	33	31	35
Mobridge	27	27	34	33	36	32	42
Murdo	28	31	34	32	36	35	40
Pierre	29	32	34	33	37	36	42
Redfield	25	30	35	33	32	31	35
Sisseton	24	29	37	34	34	32	37
Watertown	26	29	34	32	31	30	33
Webster	23	28	34	31	31	29	32
Wheaton	24	29	36	34	34	32	37

The weather pattern over the next 7 days (and beyond) will support a steady warming pattern. Once temperatures this week start warming into the 30s and perhaps into the 40s by the end of the upcoming weekend, expect low clouds and perhaps areas of fog to become a periodic portion of the forecast.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 24 °F at 3:40 PM

Low Temp: 5 °F at 12:17 AM

Wind: 36 mph at 8:07 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 24 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1942

Record Low: -30 in 1937

Average High: 24

Average Low: 1

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.41

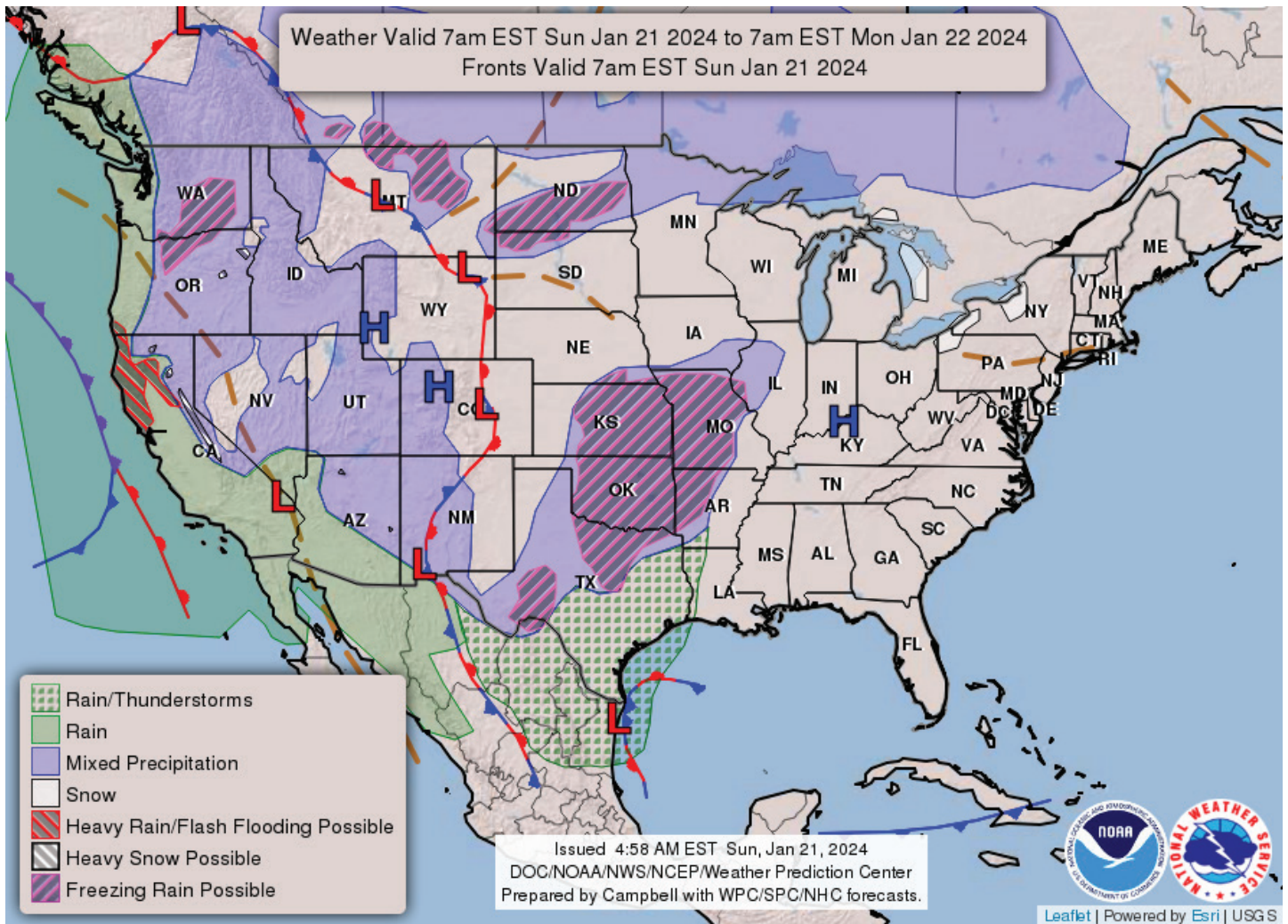
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.41

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:25:55 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:01:01 am



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## Today in Weather History

January 21-22, 1952: A significant winter storm impacted South Dakota, bringing snow, bitter cold temperatures, snow with snowdrifts of 10 to 15 feet. The cold temperatures and drifting snow claimed eight lives. At least 2,500 cattle were lost. Many roads were blocked for three to five days.

January 22, 1973: During the early morning hours, Chinook winds caused the temperature at Spearfish, South Dakota, to rise from 4 below zero to 45 above in just two minutes, the most dramatic temperature rise in the world. An hour and a half later, the mercury plunged from 54 above to 4 below zero in 27 minutes.

January 22, 1982: A winter storm lasting three days from the 22nd to the 24th virtually paralyzed South Dakota with snowfall of 6 to 20 inches. Subzero temperatures statewide coupled with strong winds of 30 to 50 mph brought wind chills of 50 to 70 below zero. One woman died of exposure near her home in Aurora County. Snow drifted as high as 15 feet. Blowing snow caused a reduction in visibility to near zero for most of the duration of the storm. Hundreds of motorists were stranded. Numerous traffic accidents occurred due to near zero visibilities. Some power outages occurred. Major highways, interstates, and airports were closed. Multiple businesses and schools were closed for several days.

January 22, 2010: A powerful mid-season winter storm moved northeast out of the four corners region of the United States and into the Northern Plains. Ahead of this system, warm and moist air streamed northward, creating widespread fog and freezing fog conditions during the days leading up to the event. Heavy riming frost began to accumulate on power lines and tower guide wires, placing a heavy strain on them when the freezing rain arrived in the late morning and afternoon hours on Friday, January 22nd. Along with the freezing rain, southeast winds gusting to 30 mph also strain sagging power lines. Scattered power outages were reported as early as Tuesday, January 19th, due to the frost-covered lines. Still, most of the power lines and power pole damage occurred during the evening of the 22nd and the morning of the 23rd. The freezing rain that arrived during the afternoon and evening of the 22nd was the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back." By the time the rain, freezing rain, and snow ended Saturday morning, January 23rd, nearly every power cooperative across central and northeast South Dakota suffered large power pole and power line damage. Also, several radio and television towers were downed by the icing and strong winds. The heavy icing and strong winds downed over 5000 power poles and 21,000 miles of power lines across South Dakota, leaving thousands of households without power. Several homes sustained substantial damage caused by broken water pipes. Power was still not restored for many customers until several weeks after the event. Power line crews from Minnesota, Kansas, and Oklahoma were called upon to help restore power. Several counties, along with the state emergency operations center, opened emergency shelters for people to stay. Forty-one National Guard members were on active duty across the state, helping to restore power. Many flights were delayed or canceled at several airports. The ice and the wind also helped topple a canopy at a truck stop at Highway 20 and 212. On January 23rd, a radio and television transmission tower northwest of South Shore was downed along with a tower north of Reliance and a radio tower southwest of Marvin. The hardest-hit area with this storm was the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Sioux reservations in central and north-central South Dakota. With no electricity, residents depended on donations of food, bottled water, blankets, heat and light sources, toiletries, and cots. The rural water system serving the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe was shut down, resulting in the state EOC shipping water to the reservation. The Governor asked for a presidential disaster declaration for most of the counties and three reservations. The request was for both public and individual assistance for total damages estimated over 20 million dollars for the state.

1904: An unusual estimated F4 tornado leveled the northern part of Moundville, Alabama, just after midnight, killing 37 people. The tornado reportedly had a phosphorescent glow. An engineer on a northbound Great Southern train saw the destruction right after it occurred and backed his train 12 miles in reverse to the town of Akron, where he sent a telegram for help.

1937: Low of 9 degrees above zero in Las Vegas froze many pipes. Schools had trouble keeping warm, and coal was in short supply in the city. January 1937 was the coldest month on record for Las Vegas, with an average temperature of 31.2 degrees, 17.5 degrees below normal.

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Grandmother had just finished reading the story of Creation to her beloved four-year-old granddaughter, Beth. Sitting quietly in her lap, she noticed that Beth seemed to be in deep thought.

"Beth," she asked, "what do you think of that story?"

"I love it, Grandmother!" she replied.

"Love it? Why?" Grandmother wondered.

"Well," she replied carefully, "you just never know what God's going to do next!"

While life is unpredictable, God isn't. Even though we do not know what God is going to do next, He certainly does. And, one thing we who are Christians know for sure is this: whatever He brings into our lives is in our best interest to mold us and shape us into His likeness.

Whatever we face, we know that God will be with us and never abandon us. As life comes and goes, He does not pick and choose when He will be available to help us. He will not step back from the pain we may be enduring nor the problems we are forced to face and resolve. No, the Eternal One guides us, guards us, and guarantees His presence and power in our lives so that we can accept and overcome every obstacle and challenge.

Whether life is joyous or seemingly unjust, God will never give up on us, never fail us, or ever abandon us. When times are difficult and life seems horrible, we need to focus on Him.

Prayer: Lord, help us to trust in You and on You and know that You will never leave us or forsake us. May we always seek and sense Your will and way in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6



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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.19.24

1 9 16 17 30 17

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$262,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 16  
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.20.24

7 11 23 24 44 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,500,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 31 Mins 48  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.21.24

11 14 16 32 42 11

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 46 Mins 47  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.20.24

6 7 11 27 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$27,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 46  
DRAW: Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.20.24

13 26 30 40 50 13

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 15 Mins 47  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.20.24

16 31 34 47 65 10

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$133,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 15 Mins 47  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### 'Burn, beetle, burn': Hundreds of people torch an effigy of destructive bug in South Dakota town

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — In what's become an annual winter tradition, hundreds of people carrying torches set fire to a giant wooden beetle effigy in Custer, South Dakota, to raise awareness of the destructive impact of the mountain pine beetle on forest land in the Black Hills.

Custer firefighters prepared and lighted the torches for residents to carry in a march to the pyre Saturday night in the 11th Burning Beetle fest, the Rapid City Journal reported.

People set the tall beetle effigy on fire amid drum beats and chants of "Burn, beetle, burn." Firefighters kept watch, warning participants not to throw the torches, even as some people launched the burning sticks into pine trees piled at the base of the beetle. Fireworks dazzled overhead.

The event, which includes a talent show and "bug crawl," supports the local arts.

The U.S. Forest Service calls the mountain pine beetle "the most aggressive, persistent, and destructive bark beetle in the western United States and Canada." The Black Hills have experienced several outbreaks of the beetle since the 1890s, the most recent being from 1996-2016, affecting 703 square miles (1820 square kilometers), according to the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



**Fireworks go off while the beetle goes up in flames after being set on fire during the 11th annual Burning Beetle event on Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024, at Pageant Park in Custer, S.D. The event was created in response to the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation a few years ago and continues to bring awareness to the impact of the beetles.** (Matt Gade/Rapid City Journal via AP)

### Poland's prime minister visits Ukraine in latest show of foreign support for the war against Russia

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk arrived in Ukraine's capital Monday for talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on how Poland can keep supporting the country's almost two-year war with Russia and resolve a dispute between the neighboring nations over grain shipments and trucking.

Tusk, who returned to power in Poland last month and is keen to show that a change in government won't bring a change in Ukraine policy, was also due to meet with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal.

"There are some conflicts of interest, we know it well and we will talk about them, but not only in the spirit of friendship, which is obvious, but with the attitude to solve these problems as soon as possible, not to maintain or multiply them," Tusk said, according to comments posted on X, formerly Twitter, by his office.

"For me, it is very important to build the feeling that Poland is the most reliable, most stable ally of Ukraine in this deadly clash with evil," Tusk said.

His visit took place the day after Moscow-installed officials in eastern Ukraine reported that Ukrainian shelling killed at least 27 people on the outskirts of a Russian-occupied city. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry

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Peskov called the shelling outside Donetsk a “monstrous terrorist act,” and the Russia-backed local authorities declared a day of mourning.

The Ukrainian military, however, denied it had anything to do with the attack.

It was not immediately possible to verify either side’s claims.

Ukraine’s allies have in recent weeks sought to reassure the country that they are committed to its long-term defense against the Kremlin’s forces amid concerns that Western support could be sagging. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and France’s new foreign minister also traveled to Kyiv recently.

Located on NATO’s eastern flank, Poland has been one of Ukraine’s strongest allies in its fight to defeat Russia. The government in Warsaw has provided weapons and humanitarian aid, and opened its borders to Ukrainian refugees since Moscow’s troops invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.

But relations soured last year as economic competition from Ukrainian food producers and truckers angered Poles who said their livelihoods were under threat.

Polish farmers and truckers blockaded border crossings, causing backups and threatening the flow of some aid going into Ukraine.

Polish farmers complained that imports of Ukrainian foods had caused prices to fall, hurting their incomes, while truckers said they were being undercut by their Ukrainian counterparts. The issue surfaced during the war as Ukrainian ports were blocked and food producers turned to road routes through Europe to get their products to market.

At one point, Poland and some other European nations banned Ukrainian grain imports because of the trade dispute.

Poland’s farmers and trucks have ended their protests for now, but Tusk is seeking ways of addressing their concerns. He has said that his country wants to help Ukraine economically but not at the expense of Polish businesses. He has suggested that Ukraine needs to better regulate its trucking industry.

Tusk was also scheduled to honor Ukrainian fighters and attend observances of the Day of Ukraine’s Unity, which marks Ukraine’s long struggle to be independent from both its eastern and western neighbors.

In other war-related developments, Ukraine’s air force said it intercepted all eight Shahed drones that Russia launch overnight over southern and central regions of Ukraine.

Debris from three drones shot down over the central Dnipropetrovsk region started a fire at an unnamed business but no human casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, major Ukrainian digital banking platform Monobank said it came under a massive denial-of-service (DoS) attack by unidentified hackers.

The attack was successfully repelled, the bank said, with no major consequences. Monobank is one of Ukraine’s biggest banks.

## **Saudi Arabia’s top diplomat says it won’t recognize Israel without a path to a Palestinian state**

By MELANIE LIDMAN and WAFAA SHURAFSA Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Saudi Arabia’s top diplomat has said the kingdom will not normalize relations with Israel or contribute to Gaza’s reconstruction without a credible pathway to a Palestinian state — a non-starter for Israel’s government.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan’s remarks in an interview with CNN broadcast late Sunday were some of the most direct yet from Saudi officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — who faces mounting domestic pressure over the plight of Israeli hostages, including an angry protest inside a parliamentary committee meeting on Monday — has rejected Palestinian statehood and described plans for open-ended military control over Gaza.

The dispute over Gaza’s future — as the war still rages with no end in sight — pits the United States and its Arab allies against Israel and poses a major obstacle to any plans for postwar governance or reconstruction of the impoverished coastal enclave that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians.

Before the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel that triggered the war, the U.S. had been trying to broker

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a landmark agreement in which Saudi Arabia would normalize relations with Israel in exchange for U.S. security guarantees, aid in establishing a civilian nuclear program in the kingdom, and progress toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In September, Netanyahu had said Israel was on "the cusp" of such a deal, which he said would transform the Middle East.

In the interview with "CNN's Fareed Zakaria GPS," the host asked: "Are you saying unequivocally that if there is not a credible and irreversible path to a Palestinian state, there will not be normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel?"

"That's the only way we're going to get a benefit," Prince Faisal replied. "So, yes."

Earlier in the interview, when asked if oil-rich Saudi Arabia would finance reconstruction in Gaza — where Israel's offensive has caused unprecedented destruction — Prince Faisal gave a similar answer.

"As long as we're able to find a pathway to a solution, a resolution, a pathway that means that we're not going to be here again in a year or two, then we can talk about anything," he said. "But if we are just resetting to the status quo before Oct. 7, in a way that sets us up for another round of this, as we have seen in the past, we're not interested in that conversation."

The Palestinians seek a state that would include Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

Israel views all of Jerusalem as its capital and the West Bank as the historical and biblical heartland of the Jewish people. It has built scores of settlements across both territories that are home to hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers. The last of several rounds of peace talks broke down nearly 15 years ago.

## OVER 25,000 KILLED IN GAZA

The current war between Israel and Hamas — the fifth and by far deadliest — began when Palestinian militants broke through Israel's defenses and rampaged through several nearby communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, taking around 250 people hostage and shattering Israelis' sense of security.

Israel's offensive has killed at least 25,105 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded more than 60,000, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children.

The Israeli military says it has killed around 9,000 militants, without providing evidence, and blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it positions fighters, tunnels and other militant infrastructure in dense residential areas.

Some 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled their homes, seeking elusive shelter in the south as Israel continues to strike all parts of the besieged enclave. U.N. officials say one in four people in Gaza are starving as the fighting and Israeli restrictions hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The war has also stoked tensions across the region, with Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen attacking Israeli and U.S. targets.

## NETANYAHU UNDER MOUNTING PRESSURE FROM ALL SIDES

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "complete victory" over Hamas and to return all of the remaining hostages after more than 100 were released in a cease-fire deal in November in exchange for scores of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

But Israelis are increasingly divided on the question of whether it's possible to do both.

Hamas is believed to be holding the hostages in tunnels deep underground and using them as shields for its top leaders. Israel has only successfully rescued one hostage, while Hamas says several have been killed in Israeli airstrikes or during failed rescue operations. Those claims could not be independently confirmed.

On Monday, dozens of family members of the hostages stormed into a Finance Committee meeting in Israel's Parliament, yelling: "You won't sit here while they are dying there!"

Families of the hostages, as well as other protesters, have set up a tent camp outside Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem and vowed to remain until a deal is reached to bring the rest of the hostages home. Other protests have called for new elections.

Hamas has said it will only free more captives in exchange for an end to the war and the release of



thousands of Palestinian prisoners. Netanyahu has ruled out such an agreement and says military pressure is key to securing the release of more hostages.

The long-serving prime minister, whose popularity has plummeted since Oct. 7, faces pressure from the U.S. — Israel's top ally — to shift to more precise military operations, do more to facilitate humanitarian aid and embrace postwar plans with broad support across the region.

But Netanyahu's governing coalition is beholden to far-right parties that want to step up the offensive, encourage the "voluntary" emigration of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Gaza, and re-establish Jewish settlements there.

## India's Modi opens a controversial Hindu temple in Ayodhya in a grand event ahead of national polls

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE, SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

AYODHYA, India (AP) — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday opened a controversial Hindu temple built on the ruins of a historic mosque in the northern city of Ayodhya, delivering on a crucial Hindu nationalist pledge that his governing party hopes will catapult him to a record third successive term in upcoming elections.

The temple, which is still under construction, is dedicated to Hinduism's Lord Ram and fulfills a long-standing demand by millions of Hindus who worship the revered deity. Modi's party and other Hindu nationalist groups who seized on the demand have portrayed the temple as central to their vision of reclaiming Hindu pride, which they say was stifled by centuries of Mughal rule and British colonialism.

Modi, dressed in a traditional kurta tunic, led the opening ceremony as Hindu priests chanted hymns inside the temple's inner sanctum, where a 1.3-meter (4.3-foot) stone sculpture of Lord Ram was installed last week. A conch was blown by a priest to mark the temple's opening and Modi placed a lotus flower in front of the black stone idol, decked in intricate gold ornaments and holding a golden bow and arrow. He later prostrated before the idol.

"Our Lord Ram has arrived after centuries of wait," Modi said in a speech after the ceremony, receiving a resounding applause from thousands of attendees. He said the temple was built after "countless sacrifices" and is testament to a rising India "breaking the shackles of slave mentality."

"Jan. 22, 2024, is not merely a date but marks the dawn of a new era," Modi said.

Millions of Indians watched the ceremony on television, with news channels running non-stop coverage of the event, portrayed as a religious spectacle.

"Ram Rajya (rule) begins," a TV news headline said. Ram Rajya is a Sankrit phrase that means just and ethical governance in Hinduism, but has also been used by Hindu nationalists to signify Hindu domination in an officially secular India.

Nearly 7,500 people, including elite industrialists, politicians and movie stars, witnessed the ritual on a giant screen outside the temple as a military helicopter showered flower petals.

Modi has been the face of an unprecedented and unapologetic fusion of religion and politics in India. Ahead of the temple opening, he set the tone by visiting numerous Ram temples over 11 days as part of a Hindu ritual.

Analysts and critics see Monday's ceremony as the start of the election campaign for Modi, an avowed Hindu nationalist and one of India's most consequential leaders who has sought to transform the country from a secular democracy into a distinctly Hindu state in his nearly 10 years in power. They say the pomp-filled display led by the government shows the extent to which the line between religion and state has eroded under Modi.

"Prime ministers prior to Modi have also been to temples, been to other places of worship, but they went there as devotees. This is the first time that he went there as somebody who performed the ritual," said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, an expert in Hindu nationalism and author of a book on Modi.

The temple, located at one of India's most vexed religious sites, is expected to embolden Modi's chances of clinching a record third successive term by drawing on the religious sentiments of Hindus, who make

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up 80% of India's population of 1.4 billion.

Ayodhya, once crowded with tightly packed houses and rundown stalls, has undergone an elaborate makeover in the lead up to the temple's inauguration. Narrow roads have been turned into a four-lane pilgrimage route leading to the temple, tourists are arriving at a new airport and sprawling railway station, and major hotel chains are building new properties.

Jubilant devotees from across the country have arrived to celebrate the opening, with groups of them dancing to religious songs that blare from speakers on roads bedecked with flowers. Huge cut-outs of Lord Ram and billboards of Modi are ubiquitous across Ayodhya, where the borders have been sealed to prevent more people from coming in. Some 20,000 security personnel and more than 10,000 security cameras have been deployed.

The moment will be remembered as momentous and historic by many of the country's Hindu citizens.

"I am here to see history unfolding before our eyes. For centuries, the story of Lord Ram has resonated in the hearts of millions," said Harish Joshi who arrived in Ayodhya from Uttarakhand state four days before the ceremony.

Built at an estimated cost of \$217 million and spread over nearly 3 hectares (7.4 acres), the temple lies atop the debris of the 16th-century Babri Mosque, which was razed to the ground in 1992 by Hindu mobs who believed it was built on temple ruins marking the birthplace of Lord Ram.

The site has long been a religious flashpoint for the two communities, with the demolition of the mosque triggering bloody riots across India that killed 2,000 people, mostly Muslims.

The dispute ended in 2019 when, in a controversial decision, India's Supreme Court called the mosque's destruction "an egregious violation" of the law but granted the site to Hindus while giving Muslims a different plot of land.

The fraught history is still an open wound for many Muslims, who see the construction of the temple as a testament to Modi's Hindu-first politics.

Officials say the temple, a three-story structure made of pink sandstone, will open to the public after the ceremony and they expect 100,000 devotees to visit daily. Builders are still working to finish 46 elaborate doors and intricate wall carvings.

The inauguration has morphed into a massive national event.

Modi's government planned live screenings across the country and even movie theaters in some cities showed the event while offering free popcorn. Governing party workers have gone door to door handing out religious flags, while Modi encouraged people to celebrate by lighting lamps at homes and in local shrines. Government offices were closed for half a day on Monday, and many states declared it a public holiday. Even the stock and money markets were closed for the day.

But not all are rejoicing. Four key Hindu religious authorities refused to attend, saying consecrating an unfinished temple goes against Hindu scriptures. Some top leaders from India's main opposition Congress party are also boycotting the event, with many opposition lawmakers accusing Modi of exploiting the temple for political points.

## **Abortion fight puts Vice President Harris at center of 2024 election campaign**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris is taking center stage in the Democrats' renewed push for abortion rights during this year's election and she will mark the 51st anniversary of the Roe v. Wade ruling on Monday in Wisconsin.

It will be the first in a series of events hosted by Harris, and it comes one day before she joins President Joe Biden at another campaign event focused on abortion in Virginia. First lady Jill Biden and second gentleman Doug Emhoff are also expected to be there.

In her speech in Wisconsin, Harris plans to hammer former President Donald Trump for saying he is "proud" to have helped overturn Roe v. Wade, which he enabled by nominating three conservative justices to the U.S. Supreme Court during his term.

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"Proud that women across our nation are suffering?" Harris will say, according to excerpts released by her office. "Proud that women have been robbed of a fundamental freedom? That doctors could be thrown in prison for caring for patients? That young women today have fewer rights than their mothers and grandmothers?"

Back in Washington, Biden on Monday will convene a meeting of his reproductive health care access task force to discuss threats to emergency care and new steps for implementing executive orders on the subject.

The Democratic president said in a statement that "tens of millions of women now live in states with extreme and dangerous abortion bans," and "because of Republican elected officials, women's health and lives are at risk."

The administration plans to announce new steps to strengthen access to contraception and help file complaints under a law that's intended to ensure emergency health care access. The law is the subject of another legal battle that will be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, which will consider whether it requires providing abortions in situations where a woman's health is at risk.

"President Biden and Vice President Harris stand with the vast majority of Americans who believe that the right to choose should be fundamental, and that healthcare decisions should be made by a woman with the help of her doctor — not politicians," White House gender policy adviser Jen Klein said in previewing the effort. "We've shown and will continue to show that commitment by decisively taking action to protect access to reproductive health care."

Although the loss of *Roe v. Wade* was a historic defeat for Democrats, the party successfully harnessed anger over the decision during the 2022 midterm elections, and they hope to do the same thing this year as Biden runs for a second term.

The White House has repeatedly turned to Harris, the first woman to serve as vice president, to make its case.

"One does not have to abandon their faith or deeply held beliefs to agree that the government should not be telling her what to do with her body," she said in a recent appearance on ABC's "The View." "If she chooses she will talk with her priest, her pastor, her rabbi, her imam. But it should not be the government telling her what to do."

Harris also suggested that too many people took *Roe v. Wade* for granted before it was overturned.

"We kind of believed that it was always going to be there," she said. "And look what happened."

Harris' outspokenness on abortion contrasts with Biden's more reticent approach. Although he is a long-time supporter of abortion rights, he mentions less often and sometimes avoids using the word abortion even when he discusses the issue.

"I think the real star from a messaging standpoint is the vice president," said Mini Timmaraju, head of Reproductive Freedom for All, the activist organization formerly known as the National Abortion Rights Action League. "Look, Joe Biden picked Kamala Harris. Joe Biden has asked Kamala Harris to lead on this issue. This is going to set us up for a great contrast with the other side."

After Harris' appearance on "The View," she received a notable assessment from Kayleigh McEnany, a former Trump spokeswoman who co-hosts a show on Fox News.

"She brought up abortion again and again and again," McEnany said. No matter the topic, "she pivoted right back to abortion because she knows what is true, which is the GOP has lost every single abortion ballot initiative post-Roe."

McEnany described herself as pro-life, but said "what Kamala is doing, right or wrong, is very powerful among young women."

While Harris and Democrats have embraced abortion as a campaign issue, Republicans are shying away or calling for a truce.

Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor who is running for the Republican presidential nomination, recently made a plea to "find consensus" on the divisive issue.

"As much as I'm pro-life, I don't judge anyone for being pro-choice, and I don't want them to judge me for being pro-life," she said during a primary debate in November.

Trump has taken credit for helping to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, but he has balked at laws like Florida's ban

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on abortions after six weeks, which was signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, another Republican candidate.

"You have to win elections," Trump said during a recent Fox News town hall.

Harris' team is still working out the schedule for the rest of her events focused on abortion. Each stop is likely to feature a speech and a more intimate conversation with healthcare providers or women who have been affected by restrictions.

Wisconsin, Harris' first stop, is a key battleground state with an ongoing legal battle over abortion. When Roe v. Wade was overturned, Republicans argued that an 1849 law that was still on the books would effectively ban the procedure except in situations where a mother's life was at risk.

"These extremists want to roll back the clock to a time before women were treated as full citizens," Harris plans to say in her speech on Monday.

Clinics across the state stopped offering abortions until a court ruled the law did not apply to abortions. Republicans have appealed the decision, and the case will likely be decided by the state supreme court.

Abortion has reshaped Harris' tenure as vice president after earlier struggles when dealing with intractable issues like migration from Central America.

Jamal Simmons, a former communications director for Harris, said abortion "focused her attention and her office in a way that nothing had before."

"Focusing on abortion rights tapped into the vice president's legal background, her political values and her substantive knowledge in a way that I saw no other issue do while I was there," he said.

Vice presidents are rarely decisive figures in reelection campaigns. However, Harris has faced additional scrutiny because of Biden's age — he would be 82 at the start of a second term — and her status as the first woman, Black person and person of South Asian descent to serve in her position.

The battle over abortion will also bolster her visibility.

"The president and the vice president appeal to different parts of the party," Simmons said. "They're stronger as a team."

## **Benito the giraffe leaves extreme weather at Mexico's border and heads to a more congenial home**

By ALICIA FERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP) — After a campaign by environmentalists, Benito the giraffe left Mexico's northern border and its extreme weather conditions Sunday night and headed for a conservation park in central Mexico, where the climate is more akin to his natural habitat and already a home to other giraffes.

Environmental groups had voiced strong complaints about conditions faced by Benito at the city-run Central Park zoo in Ciudad Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas, where weather in the summer is brutally hot and temperatures plunge during the winter.

A crane carefully lifted a container holding the giraffe onto a truck while city dwellers in love with the animal said a bittersweet goodbye. Some activists shouted, "We love you, Benito."

"We're a little sad that he's leaving. but it also gives us great pleasure ... The weather conditions are not suitable for him," said Flor Ortega, a 23-year-old who said she had spent her entire life visiting Modesto the giraffe, which was at the zoo for two decades before dying in 2022, and then Benito, which arrived last May.

The transfer could not have come at a better time, just when a new cold front was about to hit the area.

Benito was heading on a journey of 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) and about 50 hours on the road to his new home, the African Safari park in the state of Puebla. Visitors travel through the park in all-terrain vehicles to observe animals as if they were on safari.

The container, more than five meters high (16.5 feet), was specially designed for Benito, and the giraffe was allowed to become familiar with it during the weekend, said Frank Carlos Camacho, the director of the park.

The animal's head sticks up through the top of the big wooden and metal box, but a frame allows a tarp to cover over Benito and insulate him from the cold, wind and rain as well as from noise and the sight of

landscape speeding by.

"The giraffe has huge, huge eyes and gains height to be able to look for predators in the savannah and we have to inhibit that so that it does not have any source of stress," Camacho said in a video posted on social media.

Inside the container is straw, alfalfa, water and vegetables, and electronic equipment will monitor the temperature and allow technicians to even talk to the animal.

Outside, Benito will be guarded by a convoy of vehicles with officers from the Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection and the National Guard.

"He's going to be calm, he's going to travel super well. We've done this many times," Camacho said.

## **Much of US still gripped by arctic weather as Memphis deals with numerous broken water pipes**

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Subfreezing conditions and treacherous roadways have contributed to dozens of deaths this month across the U.S., where states as far south as Texas and Florida remain gripped by deadly arctic weather Sunday. But the numbing cold is expected to ease up in the coming days.

Nationally, winter storms have claimed at least 72 lives around the U.S. this January, many involving hypothermia or road accidents.

On Sunday, crews in Memphis, Tennessee, continued to work around the clock to find and fix broken pipes that were causing low water pressure throughout the system. Memphis Light, Gas and Water President and CEO Doug McGowen told reporters Sunday afternoon that crews are making progress and he expects most of the 700,000 people the utility services to have water restored over the next 24 hours.

"If we remain on this very positive path, and we are on a positive path, I believe that by Wednesday we will have pressure sufficient for us to take samples of our water system," he said. "Assuming good results, we think that means a Thursday for lifting of the boil water advisory."

McGowen also asked people to stop dripping their faucets to help build pressure in the system.

Memphis Light, Gas and Water was repairing 10 water main breaks on Sunday afternoon, and McGowen said he expects to see more as the ground continues to thaw. The utility said it previously repaired 41 broken water mains and located more than 4,000 leaks at homes and businesses.

Rhodes College, in Memphis, began sending students living there home on Saturday and moving those who could not return home to hotels. The school was planning virtual classes on Monday and Tuesday.

"We ask that you NOT come to campus either day due to the ongoing water situation and the hazards that creates," the school announcement said.

Sam Roth is a junior majoring in politics, philosophy and economics who drove back home to Nashville rather than staying in a hotel where he would still be required to boil water.

"Our faucets stopped working, and they said not to use any of the restrooms on our floor, and our showers were not working very well either," he said of the situation in his dormitory.

Restaurants and bars were using bottled water to serve customers on Sunday. Some restaurants remained closed, citing the water issue, while others had a modified menu.

Memphis was the largest, but not the only, water system in Tennessee to experience problems from the unusually cold weather. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency said on Saturday night that 28 water systems have issued boil water notices.

In Tipton County, the fire department in Mason warned residents on Saturday to be prepared for a multiday water outage. Fire officials said in a Facebook post that water crews were working at all hours to try to isolate and repair leaks.

The mayor acknowledged in an interview with WMC-TV that the town has had water issues in the past due to a system that "nobody took care of for a long time" and is need of updates.

"The whole town has been without water for five days," said exasperated Mason resident Christina Ray. The fire department is handing out water throughout the town of 1,300 residents, but is limiting it to one

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case per day, per household. That's not enough for her family, which was collecting snow to flush the toilets. "It's hard to cook. It's hard to flush toilets. It's hard to do dishes. We can't wash laundry," she said.

With warmer temperatures predicted this week, Ray now says she's faced with another worry: the potential of bursting pipes.

The continued cold weather is also responsible for at least 27 deaths in Tennessee, according to the Tennessee Department of Health.

Just south in Mississippi, the state's Emergency Management Agency said Sunday that 11 people have died of causes related to frigid weather since Jan. 14.

Elsewhere, freezing rain, sleet and high wind gusts later Sunday would make traveling in parts of Kansas and Oklahoma particularly treacherous, the National Weather Service said. Wind chills in Iowa made it feel like minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 7 degrees Celsius) in some parts.

But the end of subzero temperatures — which blasted into the U.S. on Friday — was in sight for parts of the country. The daily high temperatures in Iowa's capital of Des Moines, for example, were expected to stay above freezing starting Monday.

"With no additional replenishment of arctic air from Canada, a steady warm-up is in store for the mid-section of the country," the weather service said.

In western New York, Buffalo Bills fans were getting ready for another home playoff game Sunday evening against the Kansas City Chiefs, with temperatures forecast around 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 7 degrees Celsius), winds around 10 mph (16 kph) and a slight chance of snow showers. On Friday and Saturday, hundreds of people showed up at Highmark Stadium in Orchard Park to help shovel snow out of the stands for the second week in a row, earning \$20 an hour.

The Erie County Sheriff's Office was urging fans Sunday to not throw snowballs in the stadium or trespass on the new stadium construction site.

In Vermont, temperatures in the single digits to low teens didn't stop ice anglers and snowmobilers from their sport, and young ski jumpers braved the cold as they competed in northern New Hampshire. But 23 skiers and snowboarders had to be rescued in frigid temperatures on Saturday after becoming lost in the backcountry in Killington, Vermont, police said.

On the West Coast, more freezing rain was forecast in the Columbia River Gorge and the area was expected to remain near or below freezing through at least Sunday night. Trees and power lines already coated with ice could topple if they get more, the National Weather Service warned.

"Stay safe out there over the next several days as our region tries to thaw out," the weather service said. "Chunks of falling ice will remain a hazard as well."

Heavy rain forecast for Southern California on Sunday and Monday prompted the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management to issue an evacuation warning near Topanga Canyon effective through Tuesday morning due to possible mud or debris flows.

The Los Angeles office of the National Weather Service reported possible rain totals up to 1.5 inches (3.8 centimeters) and up to 2.5 inches (6.3 centimeters) across the area's foothills through Monday night.

## **A temple to one of Hinduism's holiest deities has opened in Ayodhya, India. Here's what it means**

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE and VINEETA DEEPAK Associated Press

AYODHYA, India (AP) — About 80 chartered flights have landed at the new international airport of India's holy city of Ayodhya for Monday's partial opening of the controversial grand temple for one of Hinduism's most revered deities, Lord Ram.

Ayodhya's airport can barely accommodate the influx of private jets. "The planes will depart after dropping guests," airport manager Saurabh Singh said.

The temple was built over a razed mosque, and most political opposition leaders are boycotting the temple's opening, saying it doesn't befit a secular India.

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However, the attendees are some of India's most influential people: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, and Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan.

Ahead of the upcoming general election, Modi's Hindu nationalist party is using the elaborate consecration ceremony to lobby the country's Hindu majority.

## THE LEGEND OF RAM, THE PRINCE OF AYODHYA

The temple will be the sacred abode of one of the Hindu pantheon's most popular gods, Ram, who Hindus believe was born at the exact site in Ayodhya.

Millions of Hindus worship Lord Ram with an intense belief that chanting his name in times of adversity will bring peace and prosperity, and most of those who practice Hinduism keep idols of Ram in their homes. Major Hindu festivals like Dussehra and Diwali are associated with mythological tales of Ram extolling the virtues of truth, sacrifice and ethical governance.

The mythological Hindu epic "Ramayan," which tells the story of Ram's journey from prince to king, has often been adapted in popular culture. One of the most-viewed fabled shows is the TV series "Ramayan" created in the 1980s, which continues to have a faithful audience.

Ram's divinity is not only a dominant religious force in India but also part of the cultural heritage in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Malaysia.

## A TEMPLE RISES

Spread over nearly 3 hectares (7.4 acres), the temple — which is still being built — has an estimated cost of \$217 million. It's made with pink sandstone, adorned with intricate carvings, and has 46 doors — 42 of which will have a layer of gold.

Anil Mishra, a member of the trust overseeing the construction, said the temple blends traditional design with cutting-edge technology and is "crafted without the use of iron, steel, or cement."

A 1.3-meter (4.25-foot) dark stone sculpture depicting Ram was installed in the temple's inner sanctum for Monday's consecration. The religious ritual of "Pran Pratishtha," which signifies giving life to the idol, will be conducted according to Hindu Vedic scriptures. The deity can then receive and bless devotees.

After the ceremony, the temple will open to the public and an estimated 100,000 devotees are likely to visit daily, authorities say.

## AYODHYA, PAST AND PRESENT

The city known for its narrow lanes crowded with Hindu pilgrims and shops selling miniature Ram idols, has been given a facelift with modern infrastructure and services. Ayodhya's modest airstrip has grown into an expansive international airport with a 2.2-kilometer (about 1.4-mile) runway in the first phase. The clean railway station has a daily passenger capacity of about 50,000 people.

"The historical and spiritual significance of Ayodhya makes it a compelling destination," and a huge surge in demand is anticipated, said Ravi Singh, a representative of the Indian Hotels Company Limited.

## THE CONTROVERSY

Ayodhya has been at the center of India's turbulent politics and the Hindu majoritarian quest to redeem the country's religious past for decades. Its diverse, multicultural past was overrun by strident Hindu nationalism after mobs demolished the 16th-century Babri mosque in 1992.

Hindus won a prolonged legal battle in 2019, allowing them to build the temple. Hindus make up about 80% of India's population but the country is also home to some 200 million Muslims who have frequently come under attack by Hindu nationalists.

Modi has been the face of an unprecedented — and unapologetic — fusion of religion and politics in India and led the temple's groundbreaking ceremony in 2020.

Critics say the idea of a diverse, constitutionally secular state leading a Hindu religious ritual is deplorable. Most opposition leaders have declined the invitation, saying the event is being used for political campaigning by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, which promised to build a Ram temple as part of its election strategy.

Modi has asked people to publicly celebrate the consecration by lighting lamps at homes and temples. The message is clear: Mobilization of Hindu voters will be a key issue in the upcoming national election as Modi looks to extend his rule for a record third-consecutive term.

## In Pennsylvania's Senate race, McCormick elevates Israel-Hamas war in bid for Jewish voters

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A Republican running for the U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania is escalating criticism of Democrats over the Israel-Hamas war and has traveled to the Israel-Gaza border to make the case that the Biden administration hasn't backed Israel strongly enough since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas.

The criticism by GOP candidate David McCormick reflects the delicate political challenge facing both President Joe Biden and incumbent Democratic Sen. Bob Casey in a state Democrats can't afford to lose in 2024.

Biden, who is seeking a second term as president, has been criticized from the left for being too pro-Israel in his response to its war on Hamas and for not doing enough to address the burgeoning humanitarian crisis among Palestinians in Gaza.

McCormick's attacks echo those voiced on the GOP's presidential campaign trail where candidates have portrayed Biden's policy on Iran — a key financial backer of Hamas — as too weak to frighten what the U.S. calls the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.

McCormick said the U.S. should impose sanctions to cut off Iran's oil sales and mount a more muscular response to attacks on U.S. targets in the Middle East to restore an order upended by what he called Biden administration mistakes going back to an incompetent withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"The key to America's role in the world is peace through strength," McCormick said in an interview Thursday. "And so I think what we're seeing is the failure of deterrence. I think what we're seeing is a belief, across the world, among our adversaries, that America's a little flat-footed. America's weak."

Neither Casey nor McCormick are likely to face serious opposition in Pennsylvania's April 23 primary before facing off against each other in November's general election.

McCormick's focus on the issue comes as a barrage of U.S., coalition and militant attacks in the Middle East are compounding U.S. fears that Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza could expand.

The Biden administration's support for Israel has been complicated politically in other states the president is counting on in his reelection bid. In Michigan, for example, Democrats worry that losing support among the state's large Arab-American population over the war could damage their prospects. Michigan also has an open Senate seat on the ballot this year.

Pennsylvania and Michigan, along with Wisconsin, are indispensable parts of a "blue wall" of Rust Belt states that helped Biden defeat former President Donald Trump in 2020 after Trump won those states in 2016.

In the Senate, Democrats maintain a narrow majority, one that became more perilous late last year with the retirement of West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin. That makes Casey's seat even more pivotal to his party's efforts to maintain control of the chamber.

McCormick's effort to highlight his support for Israel is unique thus far in this year's high-profile Senate contests, and it could become a test case for Republicans in fall general election contests.

McCormick hopes to peel off not only swing voters in Pennsylvania, but also members of the state's relatively large Jewish community who vote predominantly Democratic — but could make a difference in a close election.

Even though the war has divided both Democrats and Jews, taking votes from Casey poses a formidable challenge. The incumbent senator is well-regarded by Pennsylvania's Jewish community and has been a reliable ally in Congress for Israel and its fight against Hamas.

Vowing solidarity with Israel, McCormick took a two-day trip to Israel where he visited a kibbutz that was attacked by Hamas and met with government officials, hostage families and survivors of the Oct. 7 attacks.

McCormick, a former hedge fund CEO, told reporters that the fight against Hamas is between "the West versus evil." He followed the trip with a media blitz and a letter to what his campaign said were tens of thousands of "persuadable" voters in Pennsylvania.



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In the letter, McCormick quotes an orthodox rabbi known for his outreach to secular Jews and the Jewish scholar Hillel.

"Israel needs America's firm and unequivocal support," McCormick wrote. " Hamas must be destroyed. The lesson of October 7 is clear — the Middle East respects strength and that is why Israel must win. America's mission must be to help Israel win. It's that simple."

McCormick did not mention Casey in the two-page letter. But he separately accused Casey and Biden of "appeasement" of Iran, going back to what he called the "original sin" of Casey's support for the Iran nuclear deal under President Barack Obama in 2015 that critics say gave Iran the cash it needed to fund terror.

Casey countered that he has fought for years to back Israel in its fight against Hamas and that the Iran nuclear deal had been working — until Trump withdrew the U.S. from the agreement.

"That's the type of reckless policy my opponent supports," Casey said in a statement.

On policy, Casey's and McCormick's positions on Israel have a lot in common.

They both support military aid to Israel, backing Israel's mission to destroy Hamas and putting aside allegations of Israeli war crimes, saying they are convinced Israel has gone to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties.

Both have slammed the savagery of the Hamas attack, and accused it of using civilians as human shields. Arab nations that publicly criticize Israel's counterattack on Gaza privately tell their Israeli, U.S. and European counterparts that they want Hamas gone, Casey said on CBS News' podcast "The Takeout."

"They're all saying, 'please take out Hamas,'" Casey said.

Casey has not joined some of his Democratic colleagues in calling for a ceasefire, putting conditions on U.S. military aid to Israel or criticizing Israel for a bombing campaign that the the Hamas-controlled government says has killed more than 24,000 Palestinians. He also has not echoed Biden administration unease over the scale of Israel's military operation.

Casey, running for a fourth-term, is endorsed by the fundraising powerhouse, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and the former chairman of a Foreign Relations subcommittee on the Middle East has visited Israel six times over his 17-year Senate career.

In recent days and weeks, Casey visited a Jewish Community Center in Pittsburgh, attended the "March for Israel" on Washington's National Mall and spoke at a synagogue in Philadelphia to denounce antisemitism.

For McCormick, foreign policy is a strength of his and a cornerstone of his campaign, something of a rarity in the current era. The decorated Army veteran held senior posts in the administration of President George W. Bush, including deputy national security adviser for international economic policy, and served on a defense policy board under Trump.

Republicans see Pennsylvania as a battleground state with a significant enough Jewish population — around 400,000, by their estimate — to swing an election decided by tens of thousands of votes.

For Jewish voters, Israel is not the only issue they care about, but it is a higher priority after the attack by Hamas, said Christopher Borick, director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion in Allentown.

Jewish voters typically vote overwhelmingly Democratic, and Democrats right now are trying to balance their interest in protecting Israel with that of younger voters, who have been sympathetic to Palestinians, he said.

"That's something, of course, Democrats have to address in keeping their coalition together," Borick said. "Jewish voters have been one of their most loyal supporter groups. Although not a gigantic segment of the population, it's nonetheless crucial given the nature of tight elections in Pennsylvania."

## Trump may testify in sex abuse defamation trial, but the court has limited what he can say

By JENNIFER PELTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump has told the public for years what he thinks of E. Jean Carroll, the writer who claims he sexually assaulted her in the 1990s. Now he has a chance to talk to a jury about her — but within limits he might well test.

Trump could testify as soon as Monday in the defamation trial over his 2019 comments branding Carroll a liar who faked a sexual attack to sell a memoir. He plans to be in court as the New York trial resumes after a weekend break.

Because a different jury found last year that Trump sexually abused Carroll, U.S. District Judge Judge Lewis A. Kaplan has ruled that if the former president takes the stand now, he won't be allowed to say she concocted her allegation or that she was motivated by financial or political considerations.

But even while just watching the proceedings, the voluble ex-president and current Republican front-runner hasn't checked his contempt for the case.

While Carroll testified last week, he complained to his lawyers about a "witch hunt" and a "con job" loudly enough so that the judge threatened to throw Trump out of the courtroom if he kept it up. Trump piped down and stayed in court, then held a news conference where he deplored the "nasty judge."

"It's a disgrace, frankly, what's happening," Trump told reporters, repeating his claim that Carroll's allegation was "a made-up, fabricated story."

Besides tangling with Kaplan, Trump bucked the New York state judge in his recent civil business fraud trial involving claims that he inflated his wealth. Trump, who denies any wrongdoing, delivered a brief closing argument of sorts without committing to rules for summations and assailed the judge from the witness stand. He also was fined a total of \$15,000 for what the judge deemed violations of a gag order concerning comments about court staffers. Trump's attorneys are appealing the order.

In Carroll's case, her lawyers have implored the judge to make Trump swear, before any testimony, that he understands and accepts the court's restrictions on what he can say.

"There are any number of reasons why Mr. Trump might perceive a personal or political benefit from intentionally turning this trial into a circus," attorney Roberta Kaplan wrote in a letter to the judge, who is no relation.

Trump is contending with four criminal cases as well as the civil fraud case and Carroll's lawsuit as the presidential primary season gets into gear. He has been juggling court and campaign appearances, using both to argue that he's being persecuted by Democrats terrified of his possible election.

Trump is expected to travel after Monday's court session to an evening campaign event in New Hampshire, which holds its Republican presidential primary Tuesday.

His trips to court at times also have amplified media coverage of developments that he likes — such as an accounting professor's testimony for Trump's defense in the fraud trial — and his criticisms of developments that he doesn't.

He regularly addressed the news cameras waiting outside the fraud trial in a New York state court. Cameras aren't allowed in the federal courthouse where the Carroll trial is taking place, so he at one point left and held a news conference at one of his New York buildings even as his accuser continued testifying against him.

"I'm here because Donald Trump assaulted me, and when I wrote about it, he said it never happened. He lied, and he shattered my reputation," Carroll, a former longtime *Elle* magazine advice columnist, told jurors and Trump while he was still in court.

Trump doesn't have to attend or give testimony in the civil case. He stayed away last year from the prior trial, where a different jury awarded Carroll \$5 million after deciding that Trump sexually abused her in 1996 and made defamatory comments about her in 2022. Trump is appealing that verdict.

For complex legal reasons, Carroll's defamation claims were divided between two lawsuits. Hence the second trial, where she's seeking over \$10 million in damages.

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Trump has said his lawyers advised him not to dignify the first trial by attending it. He's attending the second one, he's said, because of what he views as the judge's animus.

Trump lawyer Alina Habba told the court in a letter that he might take the stand because, even with the judge's restrictions, "he can still offer considerable testimony in his defense."

Among other things, he can testify about his state of mind when he made the statements that got him sued and about how his comments came as Carroll was doing media interviews and journalists were asking him about her, Habba wrote.

She also suggested he could "show his lack of ill will or spite" by talking about how he "corrected" his initial denial of having ever met Carroll.

The revision happened after a reporter called Trump's attention to a 1987 photo of him, Carroll and their then-spouses at a charity event. Trump responded that he was "standing with my coat on in a line — give me a break."

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

## Cameroon starts world's first malaria vaccine program for children

By The Associated Press undefined

Cameroon will be the first country to routinely give children a new malaria vaccine as the shots are rolled out in Africa.

The campaign due to start Monday was described by officials as a milestone in the decades-long effort to curb the mosquito-spread disease on the continent, which accounts for 95% of the world's malaria deaths.

"The vaccination will save lives. It will provide major relief to families and the country's health system," said Aurelia Nguyen, chief program officer at the Gavi vaccines alliance, which is helping Cameroon secure the shots.

The Central Africa nation hopes to vaccinate about 250,000 children this year and next year. Gavi said it is working with 20 other African countries to help them get the vaccine and that those countries will hopefully immunize more than 6 million children through 2025.

In Africa, there are about 250 million cases of the parasitic disease each year, including 600,000 deaths, mostly in young children.

Cameroon will use the first of two recently approved malaria vaccines, known as Mosquirix. The World Health Organization endorsed the vaccine two years ago, acknowledging that that even though it is imperfect, its use would still dramatically reduce severe infections and hospitalizations.

The GlaxoSmithKline-produced shot is only about 30% effective, requires four doses and protection begins to fade after several months. The vaccine was tested in Africa and used in pilot programs in three countries.

GSK has said it can only produce about 15 million doses of Mosquirix a year and some experts believe a second malaria vaccine developed by Oxford University and approved by WHO in October might be a more practical solution. That vaccine is cheaper, requires three doses and India's Serum Institute said they could make up to 200 million doses a year.

Gavi's Nguyen said they hoped there might be enough of the Oxford vaccines available to begin immunizing people later this year.

Neither of the malaria vaccines stop transmission, so other tools like bed nets and insecticidal spraying will still be critical. The malaria parasite mostly spreads to people via infected mosquitoes and can cause symptoms including fever, headaches and chills.

## With Trump closing in on nomination, the effective audition to become his vice president is underway

By JILL COLVIN and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — As she addressed a crushing crowd of volunteers and media at Donald Trump's New Hampshire headquarters on Saturday, New York Rep. Elise Stefanik received a welcome chant. "VP! VP! VP!" one man shouted across the room.

While vice presidential candidates typically aren't picked until after a candidate has locked down the nomination, Trump's decisive win in last week's Iowa caucuses and the departure of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis from the race have only heightened what had already been a widespread sense of inevitability that he will be the Republican nominee. That has given the campaign trail stops by Stefanik and other Republicans the feel of a public tryout reminiscent of Trump's days as a reality TV host.

Many Republicans covet a spot on the presidential ticket with Trump as a chance to serve in a high-profile role that has elevated many ambitious politicians from relative obscurity.

That interest comes despite the fate of Trump's first vice president, Mike Pence. For four years, Pence was Trump's most loyal defender, advocating for him at every turn. But in the final months of their administration, Trump turned on Pence, casting him as disloyal for refusing to go along with his unconstitutional effort to block President Joe Biden's win.

Pence's role in certifying the 2020 election not only threatened his life during the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol but also sidelined his political career. He would end his own bid for this year's GOP presidential nomination in October after failing to get traction. Many of Trump's supporters still believe the former president's lies about the election and view Pence as a traitor.

The Trump campaign has held several events in both Iowa and New Hampshire with high-profile surrogates.

Beyond serving as opportunities to display their loyalty and star power to Trump's team, the events serve as a reward for volunteers as well as a recruiting tool that brings in new faces, senior Trump officials said.

Stefanik joined Trump on stage at his Friday night rally in New Hampshire and stopped by his campaign headquarters the next morning to thank volunteers and make calls. In both appearances, she stressed that she was the first member of Congress to endorse Trump's comeback bid.

"I'm proud to be one of his strongest supporters, particularly at key moments," she told reporters. Asked if she would consider being his running mate, Stefanik said, "Of course I'd be honored, I've said that for a year, to serve in a future Trump administration in any capacity."

Others who have appeared in Iowa and New Hampshire on Trump's behalf include Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, Arizona Senate candidate Kari Lake and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia. Lake was at a rally Sunday night taking pictures with supporters and holding a baby in the crowd.

Former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy appeared with Trump on stage in New Hampshire a day after dropping out of the race, also drawing "VP" chants from the crowd as he delivered a fiery speech.

And at the same rally where Stefanik spoke, Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, Trump's former rival in the presidential race, announced his enthusiastic endorsement in what sounded like his own audition.

"We need Donald Trump!" said Scott, leading the crowd in an impassioned call-and-response full of the fervor many of his own campaign appearances seemed to lack. Trump stood behind him grinning.

Trump, too, has been stoking the speculation, saying during a recent Fox News town hall that he already knows "who it's going to be." He told Fox News host Bret Baier over the weekend that "there's probably a 25% chance" that he would ultimately pick the person he had in mind, adding: "The person that I think I like is a very good person, pretty standard. I think people won't be that surprised."

Jason Miller, a senior campaign adviser, declined to address vice presidential prospects or speculation about potential running mates. But he said those who have campaigned on Trump's behalf in Iowa and New Hampshire "have drawn massive crowds and have all done a fantastic job of energizing voters to turn out for President Trump. So we're very happy and very excited with both the jobs that they've all done but as well, the reception that they've all received," he said.

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Trump has been talking through potential choices since well before he formally launched his campaign, throwing out names, peppering friends and Mar-a-Lago members for feedback, and keeping a close eye on those jockeying for the post.

In those conversations, he has often indicated his interest in selecting a woman. Allies also say that while loyalty — and having a dependable attack dog who can effectively defend him — is paramount, Trump is also cognizant that he would enter a second term as a lame duck president and wouldn't want a second-in-command who might overshadow him with immediate 2028 speculation.

Among those considered high on the list is Stefanik, a member of House Republican leadership who has seen her profile rise after her aggressive questioning of a trio of university presidents over antisemitism set in motion two of their resignations.

Mindful that aggressively angling for the job risked backfiring, the once-Trump critic has tried to position herself as a trusted ally of the former president, defending him in both of his impeachments and filing an ethics complaint in New York against the judge hearing his civil fraud case.

During a recent appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press," Stefanik referred to those imprisoned for crimes committed on Jan. 6 as "hostages."

At a roadside country western saloon last week in the small town of Kingston, Vance, the senator from Ohio, offered a robust endorsement of Trump to a small crowd seated on bar tables nestled between whiskey barrels.

Vance once called himself a "never-Trump guy" and labeled Trump an "idiot." But like so much of his party, he has rallied to Trump's side. He says the two are now "very close" and talk "all the time." And while he said he would "help out however I can" if he was offered the vice presidential ticket, he said Trump would also need allies in Congress.

"I think that's the best place for me is to actually be an advocate of the agenda in the United States Senate. But certainly if the president asked, I would have to think about. I want to help him out in however I can," he said.

Vance said he wouldn't pretend to give Trump advice on the decision, but that Nikki Haley, Trump's last remaining major Republican rival, would be a poor choice. "Stefanik's great. Kristi Noem's great. I think all these people are great. Tim Scott's a very, very good dude and would make a great vice president," he said.

Trump has already effectively ruled out Haley. He said at a rally in Concord last week that his former U.N. ambassador is "not presidential timber."

Haley is staunchly opposed by many in Trump's "MAGA" base, including his son, Donald Trump Jr., who said he would go to "great lengths" to prevent her from being offered the job.

Other potential contenders mentioned by Trump allies include Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, his former press secretary, Tennessee Sen. Marsha Blackburn, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, who recently endorsed Trump after dropping his own White House bid, Florida Rep. Byron Donalds and Fox News host Tucker Carlson.

Susan Ingrahm-Kelly, 64, from Bedford, New Hampshire, visited Trump's campaign headquarters to see Stefanik in person Saturday and raved about the congresswoman's questioning of Ivy League presidents.

"Oh, I think she's fabulous!" she said. "I absolutely love what she did, this whole thing with the Harvard."

Ingrahm-Kelly, who is leaning toward voting for Trump on Tuesday, said she also likes the idea of another woman vice president. "I like to see strong, educated, articulate women, don't we? I think she's fantastic."

## **Kelce scores twice and Chiefs beat Bills 27-24 to advance to face Ravens in AFC championship**

By JOHN WAWROW AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) — No matter the setting — Arrowhead Stadium or Orchard Park — Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs keep finding ways to beat Josh Allen and Buffalo Bills in the playoffs.

Mahomes threw two touchdown passes to Travis Kelce and the defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs advanced to their sixth straight AFC championship game with a 27-24 win over the Bills on Sunday night.

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The Chiefs move on to Baltimore to face Lamar Jackson and the conference's top-seeded Ravens, who beat Houston 34-10 on Saturday.

Kansas City is 0-1 in the playoffs against the Ravens, following a 30-7 loss in the 2010 wild-card round. Baltimore defeated Kansas City 36-35 in their most recent regular-season matchup in Week 2 of the 2021 season.

"There's no weakness there," Mahomes said of the Ravens. "It's going to take our best effort. Defense, offense, special teams, they do it all. It's always a great challenge and that stadium's going to be rocking, so we're excited for the challenge."

Mahomes passed his first test by winning his first true road playoff game — not including Super Bowl neutral sites — and improving his postseason record to 13-3.

"First of all, this is a great environment, man," Mahomes said of Buffalo. "It really is. We did hear it all week, man, about playing a road game, and we're here to prove a point and show that we can play anywhere."

The Chiefs are accustomed to ending the Bills' season, having done it now in three of the past four playoffs, with the first two wins coming at home in the 2020 AFC championship game and the 2021 divisional round.

"All-time classic again. Any time we play Sean's teams, it comes right down to the end," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said, referring to Bills coach Sean McDermott.

The Chiefs scored on five of their first six possessions, not including a kneel down at halftime, and went ahead for good on Isiah Pacheco's 4-yard touchdown run 40 seconds into the fourth quarter.

Neither team led by more than seven points and they traded leads five times. The outcome was decided when Buffalo kicker Tyler Bass missed a potential game-tying field goal wide right from 44 yards, allowing the Chiefs to run out the remaining 1:47.

"Ultimately, completely on me," said Bass, who had a field goal blocked and missed from 27 yards in a playoff-opening 31-17 win over Pittsburgh last week. "I feel terrible. I love this team, man. It hurts. This one hurts bad."

Allen blamed himself for having Buffalo's final drive stall at the Chiefs 26 following two incompletions — the last a throwaway after he was flushed out of the pocket.

"I wish he wouldn't have been put in that situation. You win as a team you lose as a team. One play doesn't define a game, doesn't define a season," Allen said. "Losing sucks. Losing to them, losing to anybody."

The Bills keep finding different ways to lose to the Chiefs. After being blown out 38-24 at Kansas City in the 2020 season AFC championship game, Buffalo came up short in a 42-36 overtime loss in the divisional round a year later.

The game has since been dubbed "13 Seconds" because that's how much time was left for Mahomes to march the Chiefs 44 yards on two plays to set up Harrison Butker's 49-yard field goal. Mahomes then clinched the win with a 9-yard touchdown pass to — who else? — Kelce.

The tight end didn't stick around to address reporters after this win, as he was perhaps busy rushing out to visit with girlfriend, pop music superstar Taylor Swift, and his brother Jason, who celebrated watching his two-TD outing from a suite.

Travis Kelce celebrated his first touchdown catch — a 22-yarder — by making a heart gesture with his hands and directed toward Swift's suite at the opposite end of the field. And Jason Kelce celebrated the touchdown shirtless while holding a can of beer.

Mahomes was 17 of 23 for 215 yards, and the two TD passes to Kelce were the 15th and 16th times they've combined for scores in the playoffs. They have one more than Tom Brady and Rob Gronkowski for the NFL record for most playoff TDs for a quarterback-receiver combination.

"It speaks to Travis and his work, to be able to go out there and make plays in big games," Mahomes said. "Passing anything that has Brady and Gronk in it is special. Because those are two of the greatest players."

Allen went 26 of 39 for 186 yards and a touchdown, and also ran for two scores. His team-leading 72 yards rushing increased his career playoff total to 563, the second most among NFL quarterbacks in league history and trailing only Steve Young (594).

It was another disappointing finish for a Bills team that won its fourth consecutive AFC East title, and was on a six-game roll since a 20-17 win at Kansas City on Dec. 10.

"Just lost in the playoffs to a team that's kicked us out," safety Jordan Poyer said. "It's tough. You work so hard throughout the season to fight and claw back, our backs against the wall, everybody doubting us midway through the season and we get here and just that close."

## Washington state lawmaker pushes to ban hog-tying by police following Manuel Ellis' death

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Washington state lawmakers are expected to consider a proposal Monday to prohibit police from hog-tying suspects, nearly four years after Manuel Ellis, a 33-year-old Black man, died face-down with his hands and feet cuffed together behind him in a case that became a touchstone for racial justice demonstrators in the Pacific Northwest.

The restraint technique has long drawn concern due to the risk of suffocation, and while many cities and counties have banned the restraint technique, it remains in use in others.

Democratic Sen. Yasmin Trudeau, who sponsored the bill, said she doesn't want anyone else to experience the "dehumanization" Ellis faced before his death.

"How do we move through the need for folks to enforce the laws, but do it in a way where they're treating people the way we expect, which is as human beings?" she said.

In the last four years, states across the U.S. have rushed to pass sweeping policing reforms, prompted by racial injustice protests and the death of George Floyd and others at the hands of law enforcement. Few have banned prone restraint, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

California prohibited law enforcement in 2021 from using techniques that "involve a substantial risk of positional asphyxia," in which the body's position hinders the ability to breathe. That same year, Minnesota banned correctional officers from using prone restraint unless "deadly force is justified."

The U.S. Department of Justice has recommended against the practice since at least 1995 to avoid deaths in custody, and many local jurisdictions bar it.

The attorney general's office in Washington recommended against using hog-tying in its model use-of-force policy released in 2022. At least four local agencies continue to permit it, according to policies they submitted to the attorney general's office that year.

The Pierce County Sheriff's Department said it still allows hog-tying but declined to comment on the bill. One of the department's deputies was involved in restraining Ellis, whose face was covered by a spit-hood when he died.

Ellis was walking home in March 2020 when he passed a patrol car with Tacoma police officers Matthew Collins and Christopher Burbank, who are white. Burbank and Collins said Ellis tried to get into a stranger's car and then attacked the officers when they confronted him in the city about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of Seattle.

Witnesses said the officers jumped out of their car as Ellis walked by and knocked him to the ground.

He was shocked and beaten. Officers wrapped a hobble restraint device around his legs and linked it to his handcuffs behind his back while he remained in the prone position, according to a probable cause statement filed by the Washington attorney general's office.

After the hobble was applied, Ellis stopped moving, the statement said.

A medical examiner ruled his death a homicide caused by lack of oxygen. Collins, Burbank and a third officer, Timothy Rankine, were charged with murder or manslaughter. Defense attorneys argued Ellis' death was caused by methamphetamine intoxication and a heart condition, and a jury acquitted them in December.

Trudeau, who represents Tacoma, said she made sure Ellis' sister, Monet Carter-Mixon, approved of her efforts before introducing the bill.

Democratic Sen. John Lovick, who worked as a state trooper for more than 30 years, joined Trudeau in

sponsoring the bill.

Republican Rep. Gina Mosbrucker, a member of the House public safety committee, said she looked forward to learning more about the legislation.

"If it does turn out that this form of restraint for combative detainees is dangerous in any way, then I think the state should put together a grant and some money to buy and train on alternative methods to make sure that the officer and the person arrested is safe," she said.

The bill comes a few years after a wave of ambitious police reform legislation passed in the state in 2021.

The legislation included requirements that officers could use force only when they had probable cause to make an arrest or to prevent imminent injury, and required them to use appropriate de-escalation tactics if possible.

The following year, Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee approved bills fixing some elements of that legislation, including making it clear officers may use force to help detain or transport people in behavioral health crises.

## Trump celebrates DeSantis' decision to drop out, ending a bitter feud that defined the 2024 campaign

By BILL BARROW and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Donald Trump set aside months of criticism and mockery of Ron DeSantis on Sunday night, celebrating his onetime Republican rival as his newest supporter after the Florida governor ended his presidential campaign and endorsed the former president.

For Trump, it's become a familiar ritual to welcome the backing of someone who tried to take him on. Nonetheless, it was notable at Sunday's rally in New Hampshire to see Trump praise DeSantis without calling him "DeSantimonious" or "DeSanctus," putting an end to perhaps the most bitter rivalry of Republicans' 2024 campaign.

"I just want to thank Ron and congratulate him on doing a very good job," Trump said at the outset of his remarks. "He was very gracious, and he endorsed me. I appreciate that, and I also look forward to working with Ron." Trump described DeSantis as "a really terrific person."

Earlier in the day, DeSantis said via video that he would be ending his campaign two days before New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation GOP primary. But, Trump's glee Sunday night aside, it wasn't the warmest of endorsements.

"It's clear to me that a majority of Republican primary voters want to give Donald Trump another chance," DeSantis said, offering matter-of-fact analysis through a forced smile, without adding plaudits for Trump.

"I signed a pledge to support the Republican nominee, and I will honor that pledge," he continued, before adding a dig at the remaining contender, Nikki Haley. DeSantis described the former U.N. ambassador and onetime South Carolina governor as a stand-in for "the old Republican guard of yesteryear, a repackaged form of warmed-over corporatism."

Seemingly unbothered by DeSantis' approach, Trump struck a tone of camaraderie as fellow political combatants. "I will tell you it's not easy," Trump said Sunday night in Rochester. "They think it's easy doing this stuff, right? It's not easy."

Then Trump quickly moved on to his typical rally speech, mixing freewheeling attacks on President Joe Biden, the political media, "the deep state" and "warmongers" in Washington, and the criminal justice that has indicted him four times, with 91 felony charges pending in multiple trials.

He devoted more time to criticizing Haley than to praising DeSantis, casting her as a tool of the political establishment he has flouted. He made sweeping promises of peace and prosperity, pledging without offering any detailed plans that he would reverse inflation and end Russia's war in Ukraine. And he repeated his lies that his defeat to Biden in 2020 was due to fraud.

A boisterous crowd at the historic opera house in Rochester laughed, chanted and roared throughout.

"The great silent majority is rising like never before," Trump answered.

DeSantis joins other failed GOP hopefuls, including South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, in endorsing the former president. Trump critics Chris Christie, the former New Jersey



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governor, and Asa Hutchinson, the former Arkansas governor, declined to endorse Trump after suspending their campaigns; Hutchinson endorsed Haley on Saturday.

Brenda Moneypenny, a 64-year-old from Alton, waited in the cold for two hours to see Trump on Sunday night. Moneypenny, who whipped out her driver's license to prove her last name, said she has considered Haley, especially because of the chance to elect the first woman to the presidency. But the Republican-leaning independent said she never considered DeSantis.

"Too flim-flamsy," Moneypenny said of the governor. "He needs better campaign people. He doesn't have anybody that's doing him any favors right now."

Ultimately, she settled on Trump: "Tried and true," she said.

The former president seemed to revel in skewering DeSantis throughout the campaign, often making clear it was a personal grudge because he considered the governor's decision to run in the first place an act of disloyalty. Trump endorsed DeSantis, then a congressman, in a competitive 2018 GOP primary for Florida governor. DeSantis went on to win the nomination and the general election. By the time DeSantis won a landslide reelection four years later, though, he was positioning himself for his own White House campaign.

As recently as November, Trump came to Florida and addressed a boisterous crowd at a state GOP meeting standing in front of a sign that read: "Florida is Trump Country." That evening, Trump did not mention DeSantis until more than 30 minutes into his speech. Even then, it was to brag about polls showing his advantages over the governor.

"I endorsed him, and he became a rocket ship in 24 hours," Trump said, claiming that DeSantis had begged for his endorsement. "Now he's like a wounded falling bird from the sky."

Trump never did debate DeSantis or any other 2024 rival. He has said he wouldn't until one proves they are a legitimate threat to him winning the nomination.

DeSantis concentrated his campaign in recent months in Iowa, where he finished in second place in last week's caucuses — 30 percentage points behind Trump and barely ahead of Haley. Haley, meanwhile, has long prioritized New Hampshire as a potential springboard ahead of her home-state South Carolina primary next month.

In Iowa, APVoteCast surveys of caucusgoers suggested DeSantis's supporters were much more likely than Haley's to consider themselves conservatives who would back Trump no matter what if he wins the nomination and faces President Joe Biden in November. If that trend holds in New Hampshire, then Trump could expect at least some boost from DeSantis dropping out, and whatever he gets could stretch out his margin and frustrate Haley's ability to claim any momentum. Indeed, Trump's aides have said they expect DeSantis' support around the country will shift heavily to Trump.

Trump noted Sunday that he won New Hampshire's 2016 primary by about 20 points. He lost the battleground state twice in general elections.

In the closing hours of the New Hampshire campaign, Trump will be juggling his legal troubles with the demands of seeking another term. On Monday, Trump will be in New York at a civil defamation trial stemming from a columnist's claims he sexually attacked her. Then he is scheduled to return to New Hampshire for an evening rally in Laconia.

"I don't have to be there," he said of the court proceedings. "I could use your prayers. But look, it is what it is."

His first criminal trial, stemming from charges that he is responsible for his supporters' Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, is scheduled to begin the day before the Super Tuesday primary slate on March 5.

"It's a disgrace," Trump said.

## Stanford's Tara VanDerveer now winningest coach in major college basketball, passing Mike Krzyzewski

By JANIE McCAULEY AP Sports Writer  
STANFORD, Calif. (AP) — Only Her.

Tara VanDerveer's face shined in every corner of Maples Pavilion with that very message. Yes, the Stanford Hall of Famer now stands atop major college basketball as the winningest coach of all time.

"Today was just so wonderful," VanDerveer said. Even though she had to text her 96-year-old mother Rita they'd need to cancel a scheduled bridge game because of all the postgame festivities to celebrate her.

"... It is a big number and I'm very appreciative of the great players I've coached and the great places I've been and the attention it's brought to women's basketball."

Just as those who love her so hoped it would turn out, VanDerveer passed former Duke and Army coach Mike Krzyzewski with her 1,203rd career victory at home in Maples when No. 8 Stanford beat Oregon State 65-56.

And it never fails that VanDerveer always takes a minute to thank everybody for coming to the game, and that includes offering her immense gratitude to the Stanford band. On Sunday, moments after her latest remarkable milestone in a career filled with them, she politely asked the band to stop playing. VanDerveer took the microphone and began with her words of appreciation once more.

"I'm overwhelmed," she told the crowd. "I'm not usually lost for words but it's pretty impressive, all these people here, all the former players coming back."

A head coach since age 24, VanDerveer celebrated with thousands of supporters and a couple dozen former players on hand to cheer her on for yet another triumph in a decorated 45-year career featuring so many memorable accomplishments.

And for a nearly full arena, this was also a chance for fans to show their love to the Hall of Fame coach who has been shining her light on women's basketball for 4 1/2 decades.

"Tara! Tara!" they yelled in the closing seconds before the celebration began.

"This is a tremendous accomplishment for Tara VanDerveer, who is already one of the most accomplished coaches in the history of basketball," Krzyzewski said in a statement. "This is yet another milestone to add to an amazing legacy. More important than all the astounding numbers and career accomplishments, she's positively impacted countless lives as a coach and a mentor. Tara remains a true guardian of our sport."

A video tribute with messages from everyone from Billie Jean King to Steve Kerr, Dawn Staley and Coach K himself showed on the big screen.

It was tense at times, with VanDerveer standing with arms crossed and pacing the sideline as Kiki Iriafen and her supporting cast made the big plays when it mattered most — including Iriafen's first 3-pointers. Stanford was missing All-American Cameron Brink because of a lower left leg injury suffered in Friday's win over Oregon.

"I want to bring attention to the beauty of women's basketball and the wonderfulness of these players that work so hard," VanDerveer said. "I'm so jealous because I never got to do what they get to do and I'm able to watch a little girl's dream play out through them."

Iriafen contributed a career-high 36 points on 16-for-26 shooting and 11 rebounds and Talana Lepolo 14 points and six assists for the Cardinal (17-2, 6-1 Pac-12). The game drew a near-capacity crowd of 7,022 at Maples Pavilion, which holds 7,233.

VanDerveer improved to 1,203-267 overall and 1,051-216 over 38 seasons at Stanford. A 17-time Pac-12 Coach of the Year with five national Coach of the Year honors, VanDerveer has captured three NCAA titles with Stanford — 1990, '92 and 2021 — and coached the 1996 U.S. Olympic team to a gold medal at the Atlanta Games during a year away from Stanford.

Stanford led 28-22 at the break having shot just 12 of 34 but was willed in the second half as former star players such as Jennifer Azzi, Chiney Ogwumike, Ros Gold-Onwude and Jayne Appel-Marinelli were among those in attendance along with former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice supporting the beloved coach.

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"What does it mean to me? It means everything. It's like your family member getting married or someone had a baby, Coach is making history, we all come back and we celebrate," Ogwumike said. "It's just a part of our life now. Showing up for Tara is the same way you show up for a sister, an aunt, a brother. She's family to all of us."

VanDerveer received warm ovations at every chance, from the moment she walked out onto the court during pregame warmups and again for introductions. She credited the Beavers for their grace in offering congratulations in the hand-shake line after the final buzzer.

Raegan Beers scored 18 points to lead Oregon State (15-3, 4-3), which had won three straight games.

Stanford missed 10 straight shots during a first-quarter funk before Brooke Demetre connected from deep at the 1:50 mark.

Oregon State coach Scott Rueck credits VanDerveer for elevating the entire conference over the decades.

"The most remarkable thing about her is she's done it for so long and she's remained at such a high level of excellence," Rueck said. "And that's her preparation, her attention to detail is the separator."

Azzi offered a sentiment that hundreds of other former VanDerveer players would certainly share:

"I got to play for the greatest coach of all-time."

**BIG PICTURE**

**Oregon State:** The Beavers dropped to 1-35 all-time on Stanford's home floor and coach Scott Rueck is 3-22 vs. Stanford. Oregon State has lost the last 13 in the series dating to a 50-47 victory on Feb. 24, 2017, in Corvallis.

**Stanford:** VanDerveer, who didn't have the playing opportunities growing up before Title IX, has considered herself so fortunate to get an early start in coaching at Idaho in 1978-79. She turned around the Vandals program and did so next at Ohio State then Stanford. She earned her 1,000th win Feb. 3, 2017, and became winningest women's coach on Dec. 15, 2020, by passing the late Tennessee coach Pat Summitt (1,098).

**UP NEXT**

Oregon State: Hosts Colorado on Friday night.

Stanford: At Arizona State on Friday night.

## **Jared Goff throws 2 TD passes, Lions advance to NFC title game with 31-23 win over Buccaneers**

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Jared Goff is good enough for Detroit, as his coach recently reminded him.

Cast away by the Los Angeles Rams three years ago in a trade for Matthew Stafford, the quarterback was welcomed by the Lions and has since become a fan favorite at Ford Field, where the crowd chanted his name during a second straight home playoff triumph for the long-downtrodden franchise.

Goff threw his second touchdown pass with 6:22 left and the Lions beat the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 31-23 in the divisional round on Sunday, lifting Detroit into the NFC championship for the first time in 32 years and just the second time in franchise history.

He took a knee on three straight snaps to run out the clock, giving him a chance to enjoy the sights and sounds as fans stood, screamed and twirled white towels.

"I knew it would be the last one in front of our home fans this year, and I took it all in," Goff said.

The Lions (14-5) won two playoff games in a season for the first time since 1957, the last year they won the NFL title, and had two postseason games at home for the first time.

Now they have to travel to face San Francisco, the NFC's top seed, next Sunday for a spot in the Super Bowl — a game they have never played in.

"I envisioned that we would have a chance to compete with the big boys, and that's where we're at," said coach Dan Campbell, who was hired shortly before Goff was acquired.

Jahmyr Gibbs ran through a huge hole for a tiebreaking, 31-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter, and Goff made it a two-TD lead when he connected with Amon-Ra St. Brown for a 9-yard score.

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Goff finished 30 of 43 for 287 yards and directed an efficient second-half offense for the Lions, who had long touchdown drives on three consecutive possessions. St. Brown had eight catches for 77 yards, and his TD catch capped a masterful 10-play, 89-yard drive.

"Goff in that fourth quarter, he really showed up and made some big throws," said Campbell, who told Goff he was good enough for Detroit last week when he gave him a game ball after beating his former team in a wild-card game.

Gibbs, an electric rookie Tampa Bay didn't have to face when it lost to Detroit in the regular season, had 74 yards rushing on nine carries and four receptions for 40 yards.

The Lions, and their desperate-for-a-winner fans, hope their second appearance in the NFC title game works out better than the first when Washington routed them 41-10 on Jan. 12, 1992.

Baker Mayfield threw three TD passes for Tampa Bay (10-9), including a 16-yard toss to Mike Evans that got the Bucs within one score with 4:37 left.

Detroit couldn't run out the clock on offense, giving Tampa Bay one last chance, but Mayfield's pass over the middle was intercepted by linebacker Derrick Barnes, the quarterback's second pick of the day.

Mayfield was 26 of 41 for 349 yards. His early pick went off Mike Evans' hands, and his late one was an ill-advised throw.

"It comes down to minimizing mistakes and I didn't do that," Mayfield said.

Evans had eight receptions for 147 yards and a touchdown.

Rachaad White had 55 yards rushing on nine carries, a total coach Todd Bowles may lament wasn't higher, and four catches for 36 yards.

"Anything short of the Super Bowl is a disappointment," Bowles said.

Detroit and Tampa Bay traded field goals and touchdowns to enter the fourth quarter in a 17-all tie.

The Lions went ahead for a third time with 3:48 left in the third quarter, when Campbell went for it on fourth-and-goal from the 1 and Craig Reynolds ran up the middle for a score that ended a 10-play, 64-yard drive.

Mayfield and the Bucs bounced back again with the crafty veteran, who resurrected his career this season, avoiding sacks before connecting with White on a 12-yard pass to make it 17-all late in the third.

Gibbs started left and cut back to the right on his tiebreaking touchdown run.

The NFC North champion Lions were fortunate to score first.

C.J. Gardner-Johnson picked off Mayfield's pass that went through Evans' hands to end Tampa Bay's first drive. Goff almost gave it back, underthrowing a pass into the end zone that defensive back Jamel Dean dropped, and two snaps later, Michael Badgley made a 23-yard field goal.

Mayfield answered, converting a third down with an 18-yard pass to Evans and throwing a 23-yard pass to Trey Palmer on consecutive plays to set up Chase McLaughlin's 43-yard kick.

Goff converted a third down with a 9-yard touchdown pass to Josh Reynolds early in the second quarter.

Mayfield used his feet and arm to pull the Bucs into a tie just before halftime. He ran for 14 yards — the longest run by a Tampa Bay quarterback in a playoff game — on a third down and then connected with Evans for 27- and 29-yard passes to set up a 2-yard TD pass to Cade Cotton.

In the end, the NFC South champions came up short, ending a season in which they surpassed modest expectations.

That wasn't of much consolation.

"It feel like my heart just got ripped out," Mayfield said.

## INJURIES

Bucs: S Kaevon Merriweather (ankle) was injured in the third quarter and was carted off the field. Dean limped off the field in the fourth.

Lions: G Jonah Jackson (knee) was injured in the first half and didn't return. TE Brock Wright (forearm) was knocked out of the game in the second half.

## Protests against Germany's far right draw hundreds of thousands — in Munich, too many for safety

BERLIN (AP) — A protest against the far right in the German city of Munich Sunday afternoon ended early due to safety concerns after approximately 100,000 people showed up, police said. The demonstration was one of dozens around the country this weekend that drew hundreds of thousands of people in total.

The demonstrations came in the wake of a report that right-wing extremists recently met to discuss the deportation of millions of immigrants, including some with German citizenship. Some members of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, or AfD, were present at the meeting.

In the western city of Cologne, police confirmed "tens of thousands" of people showed up to protest on Sunday, and organizers spoke of around 70,000 people. A protest Sunday afternoon in Berlin drew at least 60,000 people and potentially up to 100,000, police said, according to the German news agency dpa.

A similar demonstration Friday in Hamburg, Germany's second-largest city, drew what police said was a crowd of 50,000 and had to be ended early because of safety concerns. And Saturday protests in other German cities like Stuttgart, Nuremberg and Hannover drew tens of thousands of people.

Although Germany has seen other protests against the far right in past years, the size and scope of protests being held this weekend — not just in major cities, but also in dozens of smaller cities across the country — are notable. The large turnout around Germany showed how these protests are galvanizing popular opposition to the AfD in a new way.

The AfD is riding high in opinion polls: recent surveys put it in second place nationally with around 23%, far above the 10.3% it won during the last federal election in 2021.

In its eastern German strongholds of Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia, the AfD is leading the polls ahead of elections this fall.

The catalyst for the protests was a report from the media outlet Correctiv last week on an alleged far-right meeting in November, which it said was attended by figures from the extremist Identitarian Movement and from the AfD. A prominent member of the Identitarian Movement, Austrian citizen Martin Sellner, presented his "remigration" vision for deportations, the report said.

The AfD has sought to distance itself from the extremist meeting, saying it had no organizational or financial links to the event, that it wasn't responsible for what was discussed there and members who attended did so in a purely personal capacity. Still, one of the AfD's co-leaders, Alice Weidel, has parted ways with an adviser who was there, while also decrying the reporting itself.

Prominent German politicians and elected officials voiced support for the protests Sunday, joining leaders from major parties across the spectrum who had already spoken out.

"The future of our democracy does not depend on the volume of its opponents, but on the strength of those who defend democracy," German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in a video statement. Those turning out to protest, he added, "defend our republic and our constitution against its enemies."

## Ron DeSantis ends his struggling presidential bid before New Hampshire and endorses Donald Trump

By STEVE PEOPLES, THOMAS BEAUMONT and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press  
MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended his Republican presidential campaign on Sunday, ending his 2024 White House bid just before the New Hampshire primary while endorsing his bitter rival Donald Trump.

The decision leaves Trump and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley as the last major candidates remaining in the race ahead of Tuesday's New Hampshire primary. This is the scenario Trump's foes in the GOP have long sought, raising the stakes for this week's contest as the party's last chance to stop the former president who has so far dominated the race.

But as some Trump critics cheered, DeSantis nodded toward Trump's primary dominance — and attacked Haley — in an exit video he posted on social media.

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"It's clear to me that a majority of Republican primary voters want to give Donald Trump another chance," DeSantis said in the straight-to-camera video, delivered in a cheerful tone.

He continued: "I signed a pledge to support the Republican nominee and I will honor that pledge. He has my endorsement because we can't go back to the old Republican guard of yesteryear, a repackaged form of warmed-over corporatism that Nikki Haley represents."

Haley spoke at a campaigning stop in Seabrook, New Hampshire, just as DeSantis announced his decision. "He ran a great race, he's been a good governor, and we wish him well," she told a room packed with supporters and media. "Having said that, it's now one fella and one lady left."

DeSantis' decision, while perhaps not surprising given his 30-point blowout loss last week in Iowa, marks the end of an extraordinary decline for a high-profile governor once thought to be a legitimate threat to Trump's supremacy in the Republican Party. After months of contentious exchanges, Trump struck a more conciliatory tone late Sunday during a rally in Rochester, New Hampshire, calling DeSantis a "really terrific person."

"I also look forward to working with Ron" to win the general election, Trump said.

His record wasn't enough to overcome Trump

DeSantis entered the 2024 presidential contest with major advantages in his quest to take on Trump, and early primary polls suggested DeSantis was in a strong position to do just that. He and his allies amassed a political fortune well in excess of \$130 million, and he boasted a significant legislative record on issues important to many conservatives, like abortion and the teaching of race and gender issues in schools.

Such advantages did not survive the reality of presidential politics in 2024. From a high-profile announcement that was plagued by technical glitches to constant upheavals to his staff and campaign strategy, DeSantis struggled to find his footing in the primary. He lost the Iowa caucuses — which he had vowed to win — by 30 percentage points to Trump.

His departure was days in the making

DeSantis' allies said that private discussions began shortly after Iowa to decide how to bow out of the race gracefully.

The Florida governor notified top donors and supporters of his decision through a series of phone conversations and text messages between senior campaign officials to top donors and supporters on Sunday afternoon, according to two people who received such communications. They spoke on the condition of anonymity to disclose the private conversations.

DeSantis had returned to Florida by then after a roller-coaster weekend that included stops in South Carolina ahead of an event in New Hampshire Sunday evening that was ultimately canceled. The campaign also canceled a series of national television appearances earlier in the day, blaming the cancellation on a miscommunication with DeSantis' super PAC.

DeSantis was physically worn after spending weeks on the campaign with little, if any, time off, even as he stormed across frigid Iowa and New Hampshire, often without a winter coat.

A bitter rivalry comes to a meek end

He ultimately decided that he needed to endorse Trump given his popularity in the party despite the deeply personal feud between them.

"While I've had disagreements with Donald Trump, such as on the coronavirus pandemic and his elevation of Anthony Fauci, Trump is superior to the current incumbent, Joe Biden. That is clear," said DeSantis, who is in his second and final term as Florida's governor, which ends in January 2027.

The endorsement was a stunning tail-between-his-legs moment for DeSantis, whom Trump has mercilessly and relentlessly taunted in deeply personal terms for the better part of a year now.

For Trump, whose team includes many former DeSantis staffers, the attacks have often felt more like sport than political strategy. Trump and his aides have blasted the governor as disloyal for running in the first place, mocked his eating habits and his personality, and accused him of wearing high heels to boost his height.

DeSantis' team joined Trump in attacking Haley as news of his departure rippled across the political

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landscape. Some doubt Haley, who was seen as splitting Republican votes and preventing a head-to-head matchup between Trump, would benefit from DeSantis' decision.

"She will not be the nominee," key DeSantis supporter Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, told AP. "She will not be the president of the United States."

Trump had already shifted his focus to Haley in recent weeks, but minutes after DeSantis' announcement, the former president's campaign released a new memo highlighting the pressure on Haley to win New Hampshire.

"Now that we are a mere 48 hours from the primary, the tone has shifted mightily. We see it, you see it, but make no mistake, if Nikki Haley loses in New Hampshire — there are only two options," wrote senior advisers Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles.

"Option A: Nikki Haley drops out, unites behind President Trump, and commits to defeating Joe Biden," they wrote. "Option B: Nikki Haley prepares to be absolutely DEMOLISHED and EMBARRASSED in her home state of South Carolina," which votes on Feb. 24.

"Now, for some important advice," they continued. "Choose wisely."

Trump himself addressed DeSantis' departure shortly after it was announced during a stop at Manchester campaign headquarters, according to a video shared by his staff.

"We just got some word that one of our opponents, very capable person, is dropping out of the race — Ron DeSantis. And Ron is dropping out and, in doing so, he endorsed us," Trump said to cheers, before a "Trump!" chant broke out in the room of volunteers.

Asked if he would be using the nickname "Ron DeSanctimonious": "I said that name is officially retired," he said to loud cheers.

At roughly the same time not far away, DeSantis' dejected supporters gathered privately in the Manchester restaurant where he had been scheduled to speak.

Rep. James Spillane, of Deerfield, said he had initially backed Trump, switched to DeSantis and will now vote for Trump.

"I had a suspicion this morning, and I had talked to some friends of mine saying the way I was hearing things shake out, I thought this was going to happen, and I was right," he said. "Unfortunately, DeSantis is not going to be able to make it forward. However, in the future, hopefully we can have a viable way forward in 2028."

## Milan keeper Maignan wants stronger action after racist abuse.

### FIFA president eyes tougher sanctions

MILAN (AP) — AC Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan says too many people are "complicit" in allowing racism to continue blighting soccer, and urged authorities to take stronger action after he suffered racist abuse on Saturday night. And FIFA President Gianni Infantino suggested "an automatic forfeit" for any team "whose fans have committed racism."

Maignan, who is Black, walked off after being abused by Udinese fans during a top-tier Italian league game, prompting the match to be suspended briefly during the first half. Maignan later told DAZN that he had been subjected to monkey noises.

On Sunday, he delivered a strongly worded response.

"It's not the player who was attacked. It's the man, it's the father. It's not the first time it's happened to me and I'm not the first person it's happened to," Maignan wrote in French on X, formerly known as Twitter. "We've had statements, publicity campaigns, protocols and nothing has changed. Today it's a whole system that must take responsibility."

Maignan said there still isn't enough being done to eradicate racial abuse.

"The authorities and the prosecutor, with everything that's happening, if you don't act then you will also be complicit," he wrote.

The 28-year-old Maignan, who is France's No. 1 goalie, said that those who witnessed the racist incidents should have called out the perpetrators, and that Udinese should have acted more firmly at the time.

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"The fans in the stands, who saw everything, who heard everything but decided to stay quiet, you are complicit," Maignan continued on X. "The club Udinese, who spoke only of interrupting the game, as if nothing had happened, you are complicit."

Maignan had also told the referee about monkey chants earlier during the match. After being stopped, the Serie A game resumed about five minutes later.

There have been numerous racist incidents in Italian and European soccer for years, with cases in Italy aimed at Kevin-Prince Boateng, Mario Balotelli and Romelu Lukaku among others.

Infantino called the latest incident "totally abhorrent and completely unacceptable" and said world soccer's governing body could initiate tougher punishments.

"We need ALL the relevant stakeholders to take action, starting with education in schools so that future generations understand that this is not part of football or society," he wrote in a statement on X.

"As well as the three-step process (match stopped, match re-stopped, match abandoned), we have to implement an automatic forfeit for the team whose fans have committed racism and caused the match to be abandoned as well as worldwide stadium bans and criminal charges for racists."

Maignan's France teammate Kylian Mbappé posted a message of support for Maignan.

"We are all with you," Mbappé wrote on X. "Always the same problems and still no solution. Enough is enough."

Maignan, whose brilliant performances helped Milan win the Serie A title in 2022, praised those who helped him to cope.

"I would like to say thanks once again to my club AC Milan, to my teammates, to the referee, to the Udinese players who sent me messages, who called me, who supported me privately and publicly," Maignan said, before concluding. "It's a difficult fight, which will take time and courage. But it's a fight that we'll win."

Udinese also issued a statement on Sunday.

"Udinese deeply regrets and condemns every act of racism and violence," the club said. "We reaffirm our aversion to any form of discrimination and express our profound solidarity with the AC Milan player Mike Maignan in light of Saturday's deplorable incident at our stadium."

"Udinese will collaborate with all investigating authorities to ensure immediate clarification of the incident, with the aim of taking any necessary measures to punish those responsible. As an institution, we will continue to work diligently, as we always have, to promote diversity and integration of all ethnicities, cultures and languages among our players, staff, fan base and city."

## **In small-town Wisconsin, looking for the roots of the modern American conspiracy theory**

By TIM SULLIVAN AP National Writer

APPLETON, Wis. (AP) — The decades fall away as you open the front doors.

It's the late 1950s in the cramped little offices — or maybe the pre-hippie 1960s. It's a place where army-style buzz cuts are still in fashion, communism remains the primary enemy and the decor is dominated by American flags and portraits of once-famous Cold Warriors.

At the John Birch Society, they've been waging war for more than 60 years against what they're sure is a vast, diabolical conspiracy. As they tell it, it's a plot with tentacles that reach from 19th-century railroad magnates to the Biden White House, from the Federal Reserve to COVID vaccines.

Long before QAnon, Pizzagate and the modern crop of politicians who will happily repeat apocalyptic talking points, there was Birch. And outside these cramped small-town offices is a national political landscape that the Society helped shape.

"We have a bad reputation. You know: 'You guys are insane,'" says Wayne Morrow, a Society vice president. He is standing in the group's warehouse amid 10-foot (3-meter) shelves of Birch literature waiting to be distributed.

"But all the things that we wrote about are coming to pass."

—



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Back when the Cold War loomed and TV was still mostly in black and white, the John Birch Society mattered. There were dinners at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York and meetings with powerful politicians. There was a headquarters on each coast, a chain of bookstores, hundreds of local chapters, radio shows, summer camps for members' children.

Well-funded and well-organized, they sent forth fevered warnings about a secret communist plot to take over America. It made them heroes to broad swaths of conservatives, even as they became a punchline to a generation of comedians.

"They created this alternative political tradition," says Matthew Dallek, a historian at George Washington University and author of "Birchers: How the John Birch Society Radicalized the American Right." He says it forged a right-wing culture that fell, at first, well outside mainstream Republican politics.

Conspiracy theories have a long history in the United States, going back at least to 1800, when secret forces were said to be backing Thomas Jefferson's presidential bid. It was a time when such talk moved slowly, spread through sermons, letters and tavern visits.

No more. Fueled by social media and the rise of celebrity conspiracists, the last two decades have seen ever-increasing numbers of Americans lose faith in everything from government institutions to journalism. And year after year, ideas once relegated to fringe newsletters, little-known websites and the occasional AM radio station pushed their way into the mainstream.

Today, outlandish conspiracy theories are quoted by more than a few U.S. senators, and millions of Americans believe the COVID pandemic was orchestrated by powerful elites. Prominent cable news commentators speak darkly of government agents seizing citizens off the streets.

But the John Birch Society itself is largely forgotten, relegated to a pair of squat buildings along a busy commercial street in small-town Wisconsin.

So why even take note of it today? Because many of its ideas — from anger at a mysterious, powerful elite to fears that America's main enemy was hidden within the country, biding its time — percolated into pockets of American culture over the last half-century. Those who came later simply out-Birched the Birchers. Says Dallek: "Their successors were politically savvier and took Birch ideas and updated them for contemporary politics."

The result has been a new political terrain. What was once at the edges had worked its way toward the heart of the discourse.

To some, the fringe has gone all the way to the White House. In the Society's offices, they'll tell you that Donald Trump would never have been elected if they hadn't paved the way.

"The bulk of Trump's campaign was Birch," Art Thompson, a retired Society CEO who remains one of its most prominent voices, says proudly. "All he did was bring it out into the open."

There's some truth in that, even if Thompson is overstating things.

The Society had spent decades calling for a populist president who would preach patriotism, oppose immigration, pull out of international treaties and root out the forces trying to undermine America. Trump may not have realized it, but when he warned about a "Deep State" — a supposed cabal of bureaucrats that secretly controls U.S. policy — he was repeating a longtime Birch talking point.

A savvy reality TV star, Trump capitalized on a conservative political landscape that had been shaped by decades of right-wing talk radio, fears about America's seismic cultural shifts and the explosive online spread of misinformation.

While the Birch Society echoes in that mix, tracing those echoes is impossible. It's hard to draw neat historical lines in American politics. Was the Society a prime mover, or a bit player? In a nation fragmented by social media and offshoot groups by the dozens, there's just no way to be sure. What is certain, though, is this:

"The conspiratorial fringe is now the conspiratorial mainstream," says Paul Matzko, a historian and research fellow at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute. "Right-wing conspiracism has simply outgrown the John Birch Society."

Their beliefs skip along the surface of the truth, with facts and rumors and outright fantasies banging

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together into a complex mythology. "The great conspiracy" is what Birch Society founder Robert Welch called it in "The Blue Book," the collection of his writings and speeches still treated as near-mystical scripture in the Society's corridors.

Welch, a wealthy candy company executive, formed the Society in the late 1950s, naming it for an American missionary and U.S. Army intelligence officer killed in 1945 by communist Chinese forces. Welch viewed Birch as the first casualty of the Cold War. Communist agents, he said, were everywhere in America.

Welch shot to prominence, and infamy, when he claimed that President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the hero general of World War II, was a "dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy." Also under Kremlin control, Welch asserted: the secretary of state, the head of the CIA, and Eisenhower's younger brother Milton.

Subtlety has never been a strong Birch tradition. Over the decades, the Birch conspiracy grew to encompass the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, public education, the United Nations, the civil rights movement, The Rockefeller Foundation, the space program, the COVID pandemic, the 2020 presidential election and climate-change activism. In short, things the Birchers don't like.

The plot's leaders — "insiders," in Society lexicon — range from railroad baron Cornelius Vanderbilt to former President George H.W. Bush and Bill Gates, whose vaccine advocacy is, they say, part of a plan to control the global population. While his main focus was always communism, Welch eventually came to believe that the conspiracy's roots twisted far back into history, to the Illuminati, an 18th-century Bavarian secret society.

By the 1980s, the Society was well into its decline. Welch died in 1985 and the society's reins passed to a series of successors. There were internal revolts. While its aura has waned, it is still a force among some conservatives — its videos are popular in parts of right-wing America, and its offices include a sophisticated basement TV studio for internet news reports. Its members speak at right-wing conferences and work booths at the occasional county fair.

Scholars say its ranks are far reduced from the 1960s and early 1970s, when membership estimates ranged from 50,000 to 100,000. "Membership is something that has been closely guarded since day one," says Bill Hahn, who became CEO in 2020. He will only say the organization "continues to be a growing operation."

Today, the Society frames itself as almost conventional. Almost.

"We have succeeded in attracting mainstream people," says Steve Bonta, a top editor for the Society's New American magazine. The group has toned down the rhetoric and is a little more careful these days about throwing around accusations of conspiracies. But members still believe in them fiercely.

"As Mr. Welch came out with on Day One: There is a conspiracy," Hahn says. "It's no different today than it was back in December 1958."

It can feel that way. Ask about the conspiracy's goal, and things swerve into unexpected territory. The sharp rhetoric re-emerges and, once again, the decades seem to fall away.

"They really want to cut back on the population of the Earth. That is their intent," Thompson says.

But why?

"Well, that's a good question, isn't it?" he responds. "It makes no sense. But that's the way they think."

## **Palestinian death toll in Gaza surpasses 25,000 while Israel announces the death of another hostage**

By NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Palestinian death toll from the war between Israel and Hamas has soared past 25,000, the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip said Sunday, while Israel announced the death of another hostage and appeared far from achieving its goals of freeing more than 100 others and crushing the militant group.

The war's deaths, destruction and displacement are without precedent in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The war has divided Israelis while the offensive threatens to ignite a wider conflict involving

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Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that support the Palestinians.

Furious with the Israeli government and demanding the release of remaining hostages, relatives and others set up a tent camp outside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem and vowed to stay until a deal is reached.

Netanyahu, in a defiant new statement, said he stressed in his conversation Friday with U.S. President Joe Biden that he rejects Hamas demands for a cease-fire, Israeli forces' withdrawal and the release of Palestinians held by Israel in exchange for the remaining hostages. He said that agreeing means another devastating Hamas attack "would only be a matter of time."

Netanyahu also rejects calls from U.S, its closest ally, for postwar plans that would include a path to Palestinian statehood. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the refusal to accept a two-state solution unacceptable.

"The Middle East is a tinderbox. We must do all we can to prevent conflict igniting across the region," Guterres added. "And that starts with an immediate humanitarian cease-fire to relieve the suffering in Gaza."

## GAZA DEATH TOLL CLIMBS

The war began with Hamas' attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took about 250 hostages back to Gaza.

Israel's military announced the death of 19-year-old Sgt. Shay Levinson, who was among the hostages. His date of death was given as Oct. 7, but there were no further details. According to Israeli media, his body is still in Gaza.

Israel has responded to the Oct. 7 attack with a bombing campaign and ground invasion that laid waste to entire neighborhoods in northern Gaza and spread south, striking some areas where it told civilians to seek refuge. Ground operations are now focused on the southern city of Khan Younis and built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

"The plumes of smoke from tanks, artillery and the planes of the air force will continue to cover the sky over the Gaza Strip until we will achieve our goals," Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said.

Since the war started, 25,105 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, while another 62,681 have been wounded, the Health Ministry said. The toll included the 178 bodies brought to Gaza's hospitals since Saturday, Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra said.

The overall toll is thought to be higher because many casualties remain buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot reach, Al-Qidra said.

The Health Ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures but says about two-thirds of the people killed in Gaza were women and minors. The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government, but its casualty figures from previous wars were largely consistent with those of U.N. agencies and even the Israeli military.

The Israeli military says it has killed around 9,000 militants, without providing evidence, and blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it positions fighters, tunnels and other militant infrastructure in dense neighborhoods. The military released footage of a tunnel under a residential neighborhood in Khan Younis where the army believes at least 20 hostages were kept at different times.

Israel's military said the demolition last week of a key building at Israa University in Gaza was under review, and asserted that preliminary findings indicated Hamas had used the compound for military purposes. The university has said the "attack" came weeks after Israeli forces occupied the building.

The war has displaced some 85% of Gaza's residents, with hundreds of thousands packing U.N.-run shelters and camps in the south. U.N. officials say a quarter of the population of 2.3 million is starving as a trickle of humanitarian aid reaches them because of the fighting and Israeli restrictions.

Israel said 260 trucks of aid entered Gaza on Sunday, the highest number since the war began. About 500 entered daily before that, according to the U.N.

"Bread does not suffice for one hour," said Ahmad Al-Nashawi, who accepted donated food at a tent camp in the southern city of Rafah. "You can see how many children we have other than women and men. What matters most for a child is to eat."

## ISRAELIS INCREASINGLY DIVIDED

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At the new protest camp outside Netanyahu's Jerusalem residence, hostages' families urged the government to act.

"It's not logical that you're telling us the war must continue, and you keep saying that because of military pressure we will release them, but we don't see a single one released because of this pressure," said Gilad Korengold, the father of hostage Tal Shoham.

Some top Israeli officials have begun to acknowledge that Netanyahu's goals of "complete victory" over Hamas and returning the remaining hostages might be mutually exclusive.

A member of Israel's War Cabinet, former army chief Gadi Eisenkot, said last week that the only way to free the hostages was through a cease-fire.

But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners push him to step up the offensive, with some calling for the "voluntary" emigration of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Gaza and the re-establishment of Jewish settlements there.

Hamas is believed to be using the hostages as shields for its top leaders. Israel has rescued one hostage, and Hamas says several have been killed in Israeli airstrikes or during failed rescue operations.

Hostages' families want an exchange like the one during a weeklong November cease-fire. Other Israelis are frustrated by the security failures ahead of the Oct. 7 attack and by Netanyahu's handling of the war.

Near the site of an Oct. 7 massacre during a music festival, families of Israeli victims planted trees.

"What happened after 109 days? Nothing. We're just still waiting," said one father, Idan Bahat.

## **Nikki Haley tries to draw New Hampshire's independents without alienating voters who backed Trump**

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Richard Anderson drove through a snowstorm last week to see his preferred candidate in New Hampshire's Republican primary. But he's not sure how far he'll go to support her if she wins the nomination.

Anderson, a 73-year-old independent voter from Jackson, liked what he heard from Nikki Haley at the Mount Washington Hotel. But he disagrees with the former U.N. ambassador's plan to pardon former President Donald Trump if he is convicted of any of the crimes he's been charged with.

"That bothers me," he said. "I'll still vote for her in the primary, but I'll wait to see if she's still saying that in the general election."

Haley's best shot at shaking Trump's grip on the Republican nomination rests with her ability to attract New Hampshire's independent voters — including some who might not stick with her in November — without alienating too many conservatives. Other Republicans have hit the right balance here, notably John McCain in two GOP primary victories. But those wins came long before Trump's rise in politics and the Republicans' rightward shifts both in the state and nationally.

"It's a very difficult needle to thread," said Nathan Shrader, an associate professor of politics at New England College, "because if she makes too much of an overt play for the independent voters, that could be a turnoff for some of the Republicans who we know in the Trump era are more conservative than they might have been a generation ago."

Democrats can't vote in the GOP primary, but voters unaffiliated with a party — who make up nearly 40% of registered voters in New Hampshire — can. That makes them a key target, though they aren't a monolith.

A CNN/University of New Hampshire poll released Sunday found that a majority of registered Republicans likely to vote in the primary — 67% — said they planned to vote for Trump. But a majority of those registered as undeclared — 58% — said they support Haley.

The poll, taken Tuesday through Friday, also found more registered Republicans in the state view Haley unfavorably (47%) than favorably (31%). Trump, meanwhile is viewed favorably by 76% of registered Republicans and unfavorably by just 16%.

Haley was viewed favorably by 42% of people who have registered themselves as undeclared, while

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32% viewed her unfavorably. Just 34% of the same group, by contrast, views Trump favorably, compared with 59% unfavorably.

The poll was published before Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis dropped out of the race Sunday afternoon.

Some Haley supporters interviewed at her events are left-leaning voters who have little ideological overlap with Haley but are intent on stopping Trump. Others lean Republican and agree with her policies.

Corinne Pullen is a blend of both. Pullen, a retired 68-year-old nurse from Canterbury, said she's impressed with Haley's "strict and strong" foreign policies and her plans to decrease federal spending. She considers Trump a "narcissistic braggadocio buffoon."

"When I compare these two candidates, it is a no-brainer who I would feel comfortable and safe having in the White House," she said.

Trump has turned that crossover appeal into an attack line, suggesting that Haley is being propped up by "radical left Democrats." The former president's campaign argues Haley will struggle with conservatives in closed primaries like that of her home-state South Carolina, where the Feb. 24 primary is the next big matchup for her and Trump.

"Her entire focus at this point in time ... has been about turning out Democrats and behavioral Democrats to hijack the Republican primary in New Hampshire," Trump senior advisor Chris LaCivita told reporters this month.

As if to underscore that point, Trump on Saturday arranged for South Carolina's current governor, lieutenant governor, and several other elected leaders to come to New Hampshire to campaign with him. The day before, he won a rousing endorsement from South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, whom Haley appointed to the Senate when she was governor.

Haley, however, dismissed that move.

"I won South Carolina twice as governor," she said recently. "I think I know what favorable territory is in South Carolina. We are going to South Carolina. We're going to be strong in South Carolina." She added: "The road is never going to stop here in New Hampshire, that's always been the plan."

Dante Scala, a political science professor at the University of New Hampshire, is skeptical that Haley can pull together a strong and diverse enough coalition to top Trump in Tuesday's primary. Even if she did, "how do you duplicate that elsewhere?" he asked. "The answer is, you don't. I don't think you can pull off that magic trick in state after state."

Unlike McCain, who openly appealed to "Republicans, independents, Democrats, Libertarians, vegetarians, all of them," Haley doesn't mention independents in her stump speech. But the super PAC backing her is filling its mailboxes with fliers citing her endorsement from New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, a Trump critic, and her plans on the economy and debt reduction.

Haley described herself to reporters Thursday as "a conservative that knows how to talk to moderates and independents and not make them feel bad, but make them feel included."

At the same time, she pushed back against criticism from Trump and DeSantis that she isn't conservative enough.

"Show me where I'm moderate, because I'm not," she said.

That didn't stop Vermont Gov. Phil Scott, a moderate Republican who voted for Biden in 2020, from endorsing her on Saturday and urging New Hampshire voters to "showcase their deep-rooted independent streak." And it doesn't bother independent voter Kristen Mansharamani, who described herself as "further left" than Haley on abortion, education and other issues but said she believes Haley would be a unifying leader.

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

In Iowa, Haley was the top candidate for the most anti-Trump Republicans, including those who said the former president did something illegal in one of the pending criminal cases against him, according to data from AP VoteCast, a wide-ranging survey of likely Iowa voters before they entered the caucuses..

Two-thirds of Haley's caucusgoers said they would not ultimately vote for Trump in the general election. In New Hampshire, some anti-Trump independents supporting Haley say they aren't sure whether they'd back her in a general election either.

Amy Watson, a 59-year-old oral surgeon from Hollis, praised Haley's tenure as U.N. ambassador and governor but said Haley's views on environmental issues may be a dealbreaker in November.

"As things transpire, I think I'm going to consider what she has to say," she said. "I'm very much concerned about global warming, so that's one area where she may lose me."

## Can Trump be stopped? Key questions ahead of New Hampshire after DeSantis drops out of race

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Donald Trump's effort to march to the Republican presidential nomination faces perhaps its greatest challenge on Tuesday when voters in New Hampshire hold the first-in-the-nation primary.

With Ron DeSantis ending his 2024 campaign and endorsing Trump on Sunday, the primary becomes the first one-on-one matchup between Trump and Nikki Haley.

The former president enters the contest emboldened by his record-setting performance in last week's Iowa caucuses. But New Hampshire has a more moderate political tradition and primary rules that allow unaffiliated voters to participate in the race. Trump-backed MAGA candidates have struggled here in recent years.

Haley, the former U.N. ambassador and onetime South Carolina governor, is hoping to capitalize on those vulnerabilities, especially now that she is the only major candidate left in the GOP primary aiming to defeat Trump outright. DeSantis, even before dropping out altogether, had effectively surrendered New Hampshire to focus instead on South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary. But he did have supporters in New Hampshire who now must decide what to do.

A Haley victory would usher in a more competitive phase of a primary that Trump has so far dominated. A Trump win, however, could create a sense of inevitability that he would become the GOP nominee for the third consecutive time.

Don't forget Democrats have a primary, too. President Joe Biden is not on the ballot, having made South Carolina the first formal stop on the Democratic primary calendar. But New Hampshire is sticking to tradition and hosting its own Democratic primary anyway.

Here's what we're watching for on Tuesday:

### CAN TRUMP BE STOPPED?

If Haley can't beat him in New Hampshire, she may not be able to stop him anywhere else, even in her home state of South Carolina.

The one-on-one fight between Trump and Haley is exactly what Trump's Republican critics have been clamoring for. Haley appears competitive and enjoys support among moderate voters and independents. She's also earned the backing of popular New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu.

Still, Trump remains the favorite.

Sensing a knock-out blow, the former president has called in his growing army of prominent supporters in recent days to help demonstrate his strength. South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, Trump's former opponent, endorsed Trump at a New Hampshire rally over the weekend. New York Rep. Elise Stefanik and Ohio Sen. JD Vance stumped for Trump on Saturday before an appearance from South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster.

A significant number of New Hampshire Republicans insist they will never support Trump. And without a competitive Democratic primary in the way, many left-leaning unaffiliated voters could decide to support Haley. But that doesn't change the fact that Republican primary elections are typically decided by Republicans, and Trump's grip on the base appears stronger than ever.

Still, New Hampshire loves a comeback story (just ask Bill Clinton), so we wouldn't rule anything out.

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## WHERE DO DESANTIS SUPPORTERS GO?

DeSantis was seen as a distant third-place finisher in New Hampshire even before ending his campaign Sunday.

The Florida governor visited the state for the first time as a major 2024 primary candidate in June. After his 30-point drubbing in Iowa, where DeSantis had committed most of his time and resources, he surrendered New Hampshire before a single vote was cast. DeSantis actually spent the weekend campaigning in South Carolina, which hosts its primary election in five weeks.

But dismal poll numbers don't mean DeSantis had no support at all in New Hampshire. With him having aimed for the most conservative factions in the GOP coalition and then endorsing Trump, it's possible his formal departure adds votes to the former president's vote totals. Could that be the difference between Trump managing a narrow victory over Haley or garnering a clear majority that he then uses to declare the nomination a done deal before Haley gets her home-state shot at him?

## HOW MUCH DOES ELECTABILITY REALLY MATTER?

Publicly and privately, Democratic leaders have repeatedly acknowledged that they fear Haley much more than Trump in a prospective general election matchup against Biden. We're about to find out whether Republican primary voters agree.

Haley has spent months telling voters that, without Trump's chaos and political baggage, she would be better positioned to defeat Biden in November. That argument didn't help her much in Iowa, where she finished just behind DeSantis.

She's betting that voters in swing-state New Hampshire will place more value on her longer-term political appeal. Sununu, New Hampshire's popular GOP governor, has been at Haley's side for weeks reminding voters of Trump's dismal record in national elections ever since he entered the White House.

It's unclear if the message has resonated.

If it doesn't, it'll be because Trump has effectively convinced Republican voters that he — not Haley — is the most electable general election candidate. That's a risky bet, given his extraordinary legal problems, the attack he inspired on the U.S. Capitol and his demonstrated record of alienating suburban voters in successive elections.

Biden's unpopularity is no doubt muddying the issue.

Still, New Hampshire voters have an opportunity to cast a strategic vote Tuesday based on the one issue that seems to matter more than all else in today's politics: the ability to beat the other side.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT TURNOUT

The end result may be tied most to who actually shows up to vote on Tuesday.

Iowa saw one of its lowest turnouts in recent history in last week's caucuses. Low turnout elections typically favor the candidate with the strongest support among the party's base. And in 2024, that's Trump.

But Haley, with arguments about Trumpian chaos and electability, has been trying to appeal to independents and less-ideological moderate Republicans and independents.

New Hampshire law allows unaffiliated voters to participate in either party's nomination contest. Democrats are not allowed to vote in the GOP primary, although voters had an opportunity to change their registration before an October deadline.

Haley needs a large turnout, driven by those unaffiliated voters, to have a chance.

New Hampshire Secretary of State David M. Scanlan predicted that 322,000 voters would participate in the GOP primary, which would be a record high. On the Democratic side, he's expecting just 88,000 given there's virtually no competition.

## A PRESIDENTIAL EMBARRASSMENT?

It may not be the headline, but New Hampshire Democrats are voting for their presidential nominee as well. As much as Biden's team wants you to think they don't care about the outcome, they're paying attention.

Biden won't be on New Hampshire ballot, of course.

He's avoiding New Hampshire altogether after pushing the Democratic National Committee to award the nation's opening primary to South Carolina, a much more diverse state that's set to vote on Feb. 3.

Furious about Biden's decision, the "Live Free or Die" state ignored the president's wishes and will host an unsanctioned Democratic primary anyway.

There are several lesser-known Democrats on the ballot, including Rep. Dean Phillips, D-Minn., and progressive activist Marianne Williamson. Eager to demonstrate Biden's strength despite his absence, the president's allies in the state have been encouraging voters to write in Biden's name.

The outcome will have no bearing on the number of delegates needed to secure the Democratic nomination. But an underwhelming finish, even in a write-in campaign, would represent an unwanted embarrassment as Biden tries to improve his political standing heading into the fall campaign.

## **Strike kills Hezbollah fighter, civilian in Lebanon, amid seeming Israeli shift to targeted killings**

By MOHAMMED ZAATARI and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

SIDON, Lebanon (AP) — An Israeli airstrike hit two vehicles near a Lebanese army checkpoint in south Lebanon on Sunday, killing a Hezbollah member in one car and a woman in the other and wounding several other people, Lebanese state media and health officials reported.

The strike appeared to be part of a shift in Israeli strategy toward targeted killings in Lebanon after more than three months of near-daily clashes with Hezbollah militants on the border against the backdrop of the war in Gaza.

Hezbollah announced that one of its members, identified as Fadel Shaar, had been killed in the strike in the town of Kafra.

Several hours later, Lebanon's National News Agency reported that a civilian woman wounded in the strike, Samar al-Sayyed Mohammed, had died of her injuries.

Local civil defense and hospital officials said several others were wounded.

Video from the scene showed a passenger sedan in flames next to a small truck stopped in the middle of the road.

The Israeli military did not comment on the strike.

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7, Hezbollah forces have engaged in near-daily clashes with Israeli troops along the border.

While the clashes had previously been limited mainly to a narrow strip within a few kilometers (miles) from the border, Israel in recent weeks appears to have moved to a strategy of targeted killings of figures from Hezbollah and allied groups, sometimes hitting in areas relatively far from the border, as was the case in Sunday's strike.

On Saturday, another strike near the Lebanese port city of Tyre killed two people in a car — one of them a Hezbollah commander — and two people in a nearby orchard. The commander, Ali Hudruj, was buried Sunday in south Lebanon. The other occupant of the car, tech sector businessman Mohammad Baqir Diab, was identified as a civilian and was buried in Beirut on Sunday.

On Jan. 2, a presumed Israeli airstrike killed a top Hamas official, Saleh Arouri, in a suburb of Beirut, the first such strike in Lebanon's capital since Israel and Hezbollah fought a brutal one-month war in 2006.

Speaking at Hudruj's funeral Sunday, Hezbollah Member of Parliament Hussein Jeshi said Israel had "re-sorted to the method of assassinating some members of the resistance" to compensate for being unable to reach a military victory against Hamas after more than 100 days of war in Gaza.

The Lebanese militant group said in a statement later Sunday that it had launched an attack against the town of Avivim in northern Israel in retaliation for the strike in Kafra and for other "attacks that targeted Lebanese villages and civilians."

Israel did not comment on the strike specifically but announced it had struck Hezbollah targets in several locations in Lebanon on Sunday. It later said that an anti-tank missile had hit a house in Avivim and no injuries were reported.

With dangers of a regional conflict flaring on multiple fronts, officials from the United States and Europe



have engaged in a flurry of shuttle diplomacy in recent weeks between Israel and Lebanon, attempting to head off an escalation of the conflict into a full-on war on the Lebanese front.

## Inside Pitchfork's absorption into GQ: When 'music media' becomes 'men's media,' what's lost?

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Nearly three decades after it was established, Pitchfork, the most influential music publication of the internet age with the power to make or break an artist, is being absorbed by another entity — a men's fashion and style magazine.

The website, beloved for being one of modern music's true centers of gravity and renowned for its daily record reviews scored 0.0 to 10.0, will be folded into GQ, parent company Condé Nast announced Wednesday.

At least 12 staffers were laid off, three people involved in the situation told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they said the situation was still fluid. Ten of those were editorial layoffs, leaving a permanent editorial staff of eight.

The decision was made after what Anna Wintour, chief content officer for Condé Nast, called "a careful evaluation of Pitchfork's performance." Wintour called the move "the best path forward for the brand so that our coverage of music can continue to thrive within the company."

As Pitchfork moves into its new configuration, it's worth asking: If many view song discovery as music journalism's primary function, what is the role of insightful culture writing about music when people can find their favorite artists by following recommendations on social media or by playing 15 seconds of a song on a popular playlist?

### FROM MUSIC TO MEN'S MEDIA

Record store clerk Ryan Schreiber founded Pitchfork in 1996 as an indie music blog inspired by fan zines and grew it into "the most trusted voice in music," as its tagline reads.

Pitchfork began in the era of CDs and — with discerning tastes and unrivaled curation — shepherded voracious music fans into the mp3 and peer-to-peer file-sharing age of Napster and into the streaming era beyond. In that time, its voice moved from snarky to incisive (often both at once) and the scope of its coverage adapted to meet the current moment. Schreiber sold Pitchfork to Condé Nast in 2015.

"In the late 2000s, alternative culture was going overground and an artisanal, small-batch approach to life was taking over from the sheeny mass-production of the previous decade," says Laura Snapes, The Guardian's deputy music editor and a longtime Pitchfork contributor.

"Pitchfork was well placed to lead and mirror that shift," Snapes says. "They became the go-to chroniclers of this moment and had legitimacy ... you could see the long roots of this culture in the site."

Ann Powers, NPR's music critic, says Pitchfork plays a crucial role in 21st-century media because it is a music-specific publication and not simply a generalist site with a music section. That means its expert writers have been able to go deeper in coverage and criticism, highlighting "intelligent and engaged, truly passionate music writing for the music fan," instead of focusing solely on what would appeal to a general interest audience — particularly at a time where music-specific press is atomizing.

"Pitchfork also became a beautiful space for diversity," Powers says. "It grew into a space where there were a lot of amazing women writers, people of color, covering pop, R&B, experimental and global music with the same passion and dedication that it was covering the kind of indie rock from which it was born."

The choice to move the publication under GQ, she says, reminds her of '90s music magazine culture, where advertisers classified publications like SPIN, Rolling Stone, Vibe, and Blender as men's interest. "It truly feels like a setback," Powers says.

Says Snapes: "Music is so much more than a 'men's interest' or leisure pursuit. Pitchfork paid close, longform critical attention to so many different types of music, and so many different niches. I'm not sure how that will live alongside ecommerce pieces on stick vacuums."

### THE MOMENT PITCHFORK CHANGED

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Early Wednesday afternoon, most of the Pitchfork staff were sent a link to a mandatory, 15 minute all-hands with Wintour at 1:30 p.m., three people with involved in the situation told AP. That set off a chain of events in which most affected were told their last day would be Friday.

In screenshots of a public Slack channel accessible by Condé Nast staff, obtained by AP, Melissa Consorte, a Condé Nast vice president, wrote on Wednesday, "Pitchfork is not going away as a brand."

"This is not a terrible thing for us — GQ and P4K were getting in each other's lanes and this makes it easier for us to use them in a complementary fashion," she said, using the popular shorthand for Pitchfork. "I think this will only help P4K feel bigger and more recognizable in the long term."

On Thursday, Consorte followed up: "Pitchfork is not being shut down or rebranded as GQ — from a client and user perspective, everything will look the same." And in another public Slack channel, Joanna Melissakis, Head of Sales, Beauty at Condé Nast, wrote that "Pitchfork will remain a standalone brand but the internal reporting structure is changing."

A representative for Condé Nast did not agree to speak to The Associated Press on the record. However, one Condé Nast audience development editor shared on X that "by volume, Pitchfork has the highest daily site visitors of any of our titles ... despite scant resourcing, esp from corporate."

## AN EVOLVING MUSIC MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Gareth Paisey, singer of the Welsh indie band Los Campesinos!, is one of many musicians who posted about Pitchfork following the layoff news. His band has received favorable reviews from the publication, but even those with low scores found themselves eulogizing the entity.

"There was a period of time where if Pitchfork said something was good, I thought it was good. And if they panned something, I probably wouldn't bother listening to it," he says. "I think that speaks to its power — how it was able to push the needle and single-handedly make something seem relevant."

In 2021, guitarist Yasmin Williams says she was almost ready to give up her career pursuits when a positive review from Pitchfork reignited her hope. "I was ready for the next level and it wasn't happening," she recalls. Then Pitchfork's Sam Sodomsky reviewed her album, "Urban Driftwood."

"Then there's a flood of press. I really think it's because of Sam's review," Williams says. She says musicians are concerned about the future of the site because "people trust Pitchfork more than other outlets."

When it comes to his band, Paisey says Pitchfork informed how they were regarded by the public. "We've never been a cool band," he says. "And then for Pitchfork to back us from the start, I think it really did reframe how people thought about us."

He theorizes independent musicians will lose out on coverage in this new editorial shift.

"This sounds trite, but Taylor Swift isn't tweeting her disappointment that Pitchfork is closing, right? It's 5,000-follower emo bands that got a 7.6 review and has been proud of that for the past two years," he says. "It's the independent, experimental artists that are going to suffer."

## At least 27 people are reported killed in an attack on Donetsk in Russian-occupied Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Moscow-installed officials said Ukrainian shelling killed at least 27 people and wounded 25 on Sunday at a market on the outskirts of Donetsk, a Russian-occupied city in the eastern part of the country.

Among the injured in the suburb of Tekstilshchik were two children, said Denis Pushilin, the local leader.

Ukrainian officials in Kyiv did not comment on the incident, and the claims could not be independently verified by The Associated Press. Both sides have increasingly relied on longer-range attacks this winter amid largely unchanged positions on the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line in the nearly 2-year-old war.

The artillery shells that hit the area had been fired from the area of Kurakhove and Krasnohorivka to the west, Pushilin said, adding that emergency services responded to the scene.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "strongly condemns all attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including today's shelling of the city of Donetsk in Ukraine," according to a U.N. spokesperson, adding that all such attacks are prohibited under international humanitarian law.

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Donetsk is one of four regions in Ukraine that Russia annexed illegally in 2022, months after Moscow launched its full-scale invasion.

Russia's Foreign Ministry also blamed Ukraine and described the strike as a "terrorist attack."

Also on Sunday, a fire broke out at a chemical transport terminal at Russia's Ust-Luga port following two explosions, regional officials said. Local media said the Baltic Sea port, 165 kilometers (about 100 miles) southwest of St. Petersburg, had been attacked by Ukrainian drones, causing a gas tank to explode.

The blaze was at a site run by Russia's second-largest natural gas producer, Novatek.

In a statement to Russian media outlet RBC, the company blamed the fire on an "external influence," saying operations at the port were paused.

Yuri Zapalatsky, the head of the Kingisepp district on the Gulf of Finland where the port is located, said there were no casualties but the area was on high alert.

News outlet Fontanka reported that two drones had been detected flying toward St. Petersburg on Sunday morning, but were redirected toward the Kingisepp district. AP could not independently verify the reports.

Russia's Defense Ministry did not report any drone activity in the Kingisepp area in its daily briefing. It said that four Ukrainian drones had been downed in Russia's Smolensk region, and that two more were shot down in the Oryol and Tula regions.

Russian officials previously confirmed a Ukrainian drone had been downed on the outskirts of St. Petersburg on Thursday.

In fighting on the front line, Russia's Defense Ministry said Moscow's forces had taken control of the village of Krokmalne in Ukraine's Kharkiv region. Ukrainian forces confirmed the settlement had been occupied, but described its capture as temporary.

Ukrainian Ground Forces Command spokesman Volodymyr Fityo said Kyiv's troops had been pulled back to reserve positions from the village, which had a population of about 45 people before the start of the war.

"That's five houses, probably," he was quoted as saying by Ukrainian news outlet Hromadske. "Our main goal is to save the lives of Ukraine's defenders."

Recent Russian attacks have tried to find gaps in Ukraine's defenses by using large numbers of missiles and drones in an apparent effort to saturate air defense systems.

The massive barrages — more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between Dec. 29 and Jan. 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are also using up Ukraine's weapons stockpiles.

## Democrats believe abortion will motivate voters in 2024.

### Will it be enough?

By COLLEEN LONG and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump said recently that he was "proud" to have a hand in overturning the abortion protections enshrined in Roe v. Wade, Democratic pollster Celinda Lake took it as a political gift, thinking to herself, "Oh my God, we just won the election."

It may not be that simple, but as the 2024 race heats up, President Joe Biden's campaign is betting big on abortion rights as a major driver for Democrats in the election. Republicans are still trying to figure out how to talk about the issue, if at all, and avoid a political backlash.

"A vote for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris is a vote to restore Roe, and a vote for Donald Trump is a vote to ban abortion across the country," said Julie Chavez Rodriguez, Biden's campaign manager. "These are the stakes in 2024."

Since Roe was overturned in 2022, voters have pushed back by approving a number of statewide ballot initiatives to preserve or expand the right to abortion. Support for abortion rights drove women to the polls during the 2022 midterm elections, delivering Democrats unexpected success. For many people, the issue took on higher meaning, part of an overarching concern about the future of democracy, according to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 94,000 voters in the midterm elections.

Democrats have since worked to broaden how they talk to voters about the Supreme Court's decision, delivered by a conservative majority that included three justices nominated by Trump, and what it means

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for people's access to health care and their personal freedoms.

The Biden campaign is launching a nationwide political push this coming week centered on Monday's 51st anniversary of the 1973 decision that codified abortion rights. Vice President Kamala Harris, the administration's chief messenger on this, will hold the first event Monday in Wisconsin.

On Tuesday, Biden, Harris, first lady Jill Biden and second gentleman Doug Emhoff head to Virginia for a campaign stop focused on the issue. More events featuring top Democrats in battleground states are also in the works.

The campaign on Sunday released a advertising campaign scheduled to run all week, including during "The Bachelor" season premiere and the NFL conference championships. The spot features Dr. Austin Dennard, an OB-GYN in Texas who had to leave her state to get an abortion when she learned that her baby had a fatal condition called anencephaly.

"In Texas, you are forced to carry that pregnancy, and that is because of Donald Trump overturning Roe v. Wade," she said.

Focusing on abortion will not be a silver bullet for Democrats. The economy, foreign policy, immigration and inflation are major issues, too, as is concern about Biden's age as he tries to overcome low poll numbers. Many voters are simply turned off by the prospect of a likely 2024 Trump-Biden rematch.

Still, Democrats believe abortion will be a key motivator for base voters and help expand their coalition. Biden aides and allies point to recent elections that have overwhelmingly shown that, when voters can choose, they have chosen to safeguard abortion rights.

The issue isn't vanishing from the headlines anytime soon, either. The Supreme Court will decide whether to restrict access to medication prescribed for abortion and to treat other reproductive issues. And there is an ongoing stream of stories about the impact of abortion bans, such as the mother who had to sue, then flee, her home state to end her doomed pregnancy.

Democrats spent decades trying to calibrate their message, always defending the right to choose while also making overtures to voters who are conflicted about the issue. President Bill Clinton's mantra was that abortion should be "safe, legal and rare."

But the loss of federal abortion protections has been a catalyst for a broader and bolder message about abortion and reproductive rights after the historic setback from the decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization that overturned Roe.

"We know that if we talk about this issue as a fundamental freedom, we are able to resonate across demographics — older voters, younger voters, people of color, folks in rural areas," said Mini Timmaraju, head of Reproductive Freedom for All, formerly NARAL Pro-Choice America.

Biden aides said the strategy is to let the president be who he is — an 81-year-old Catholic man who doesn't use the word abortion much, preferring to talk instead about the issue in the context of personal freedom.

The White House often frames the fight as part of a larger battle that involves book bans, voting rights and other social issues. For more aggressive talk about abortion and how the ripple effects of the decision are affecting maternal health, there's Harris.

Timmaraju said those "different messages resonate with different parts of the electorate."

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Democrat and vocal advocate for abortion rights, said it would be good if Biden spoke more forcefully on the topic.

"I think people want to know that this is a president that is fighting," Whitmer told CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday. "To use maybe more ... blunt language, maybe that would be helpful."

Since the high court overturned Roe, roughly 25 million women now live in states with some type of ban in effect. The impacts are increasingly felt by women who never intended to end their pregnancies, yet have had emergency medical care denied or delayed because of the new restrictions.

According to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll, among Democrats, nearly nine in 10 say abortion should generally be legal. Four in 10 say it should be legal in all cases, and nearly half say it should be legal in most cases.

As for Republicans, the topic was largely absent in the lead-up to this year's Iowa caucuses, a remarkable

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change in a state that has long backed religious conservatives vowing to restrict the procedure. Part of the change is because Republicans achieved a generational goal with the overturning of Roe. But it also underscores a fear among Republican candidates and voters alike that vocalizing their desire to further restrict abortion rights might be politically dangerous.

"I am calling the time period we are in now 'the new fight for life,'" said Benjamin Watson, a former NFL player who is now an anti-abortion advocate. "Roe is done, but we still live in a culture that knows not how to care for life. Roe is done, but the factors that drive women to seek abortions are ever apparent and ever increasing."

Overall, opinions on abortion remain complex, with most people believing it should be allowed in some circumstances and not in others. About two-thirds of U.S. adults say abortion should generally be legal, but only about one-quarter say it should always be legal and only about 1 in 10 say it should always be illegal.

Trump has waffled on the topic. During a recent Fox News town hall, he expressed support for limited exceptions and criticized state laws that ban abortion after six weeks. But he also has promoted his own role.

"For 54 years they were trying to get Roe v. Wade terminated, and I did it and I'm proud to have done it," he said.

The Biden administration is nearing the limits of what it can do to preserve access to abortion absent congressional legislation. In the immediate aftermath June 24, 2022 Supreme Court decision, the administration quickly tried to flex its regulatory muscle to fight back against Republican efforts to severely restrict abortion. Many efforts have been challenged in court.

Biden had invited states with robust abortion access to apply for Medicaid waivers that would help pay for women to travel for the care. But so far, only California has applied to unlock federal money for the effort.

The top U.S. health official, Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, is on a three-day East Coast tour to talk with doctors and medical students about access to abortion and birth control.

"This is the beginning of an effort to reach out to all Americans," Becerra said, and "say to the American people how important it is that we stand up at a crucial time."

## North Korea stresses alignment with Russia against US and says Putin could visit at an early date

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Sunday that Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his willingness to visit the North at an unspecified "early date" as the countries continue to align in the face of their separate, intensifying confrontations with the United States.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry highlighted Putin's intent for a visit following North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui's meetings with Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow last week. The ministry said in a statement published by state media that the two countries agreed to further strategic and tactical cooperation with Russia to establish a "new multi-polarized international order," a reference to their efforts to build a united front against Washington.

Putin had already confirmed his willingness to visit the capital, Pyongyang, at a convenient time during his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Russia's Far East in September. One of the few world leaders openly supporting Putin's war on Ukraine, Kim has been actively boosting the visibility of his ties with Russia in an attempt to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his footing, as he navigates a deepening nuclear standoff with Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

In a separate statement on Sunday, the North's Foreign Ministry condemned the U.N. Security Council for calling an emergency meeting over the country's latest ballistic test, which state media described as a new intermediate-range solid-fuel missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead. The ministry said the test-firing on Jan. 14 was among the country's regular activities to improve its defense capabilities and that it didn't pose a threat to its neighbors.

South Korea on Thursday urged the Security Council "to break the silence" over North Korea's escalat-

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ing missile tests and threats. Russia and China, both permanent members of the 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.

The alignment between Pyongyang and Moscow has raised international concerns about alleged arms cooperation, in which the North provides Russia with munitions to help prolong its fighting in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for badly needed economic aid and military assistance to help upgrade Kim's forces. Both Pyongyang and Russia have denied accusations by Washington and Seoul about North Korean arms transfers to Russia.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry, in comments published by state media, said Choe and the Russian officials in their meetings expressed a "strong will to further strengthen strategic and tactical cooperation in defending the core interests of the two countries and establishing a new multi-polarized international order."

Russia expressed "deep thanks" to North Korea for its "full support" over its war on Ukraine, the North Korean ministry said. It said Choe and the Russian officials expressed "serious concern" over the United States' expanding military cooperation with its Asian allies that they blamed for worsening tensions in the region and threatening North Korea's sovereignty and security interests.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, after Kim in recent months used Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a distraction to ramp up his weapons tests and military demonstrations. The United States, South Korea and Japan have responded by strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, and sharpening their deterrence plans built around nuclear-capable U.S. assets.

In the latest tit-for-tat, North Korea on Friday said it conducted a test of a purported nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by the United States, South Korea and Japan last week, as it continued to blame its rivals for tensions in the region.

Choe's visit to Moscow came as Kim continues to use domestic political events to issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict.

At Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament last week, Kim declared that North Korea is abandoning its long-standing goal of a peaceful unification with war-divided rival South Korea and ordered the rewriting of the North's constitution to cement the South as its most hostile foreign adversary. He accused South Korea of acting as "top-class stooges" of the Americans and repeated a threat that he would use his nukes to annihilate the South if provoked.

Analysts say North Korea could be aiming to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and eventually force direct dealings with Washington as it looks to cement its status as a nuclear weapons state.

## Latest EPA assessment shows almost no improvement in river and stream nitrogen pollution

BY MELINA WALLING and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The nation's rivers and streams remain stubbornly polluted with nutrients that contaminate drinking water and fuel a gigantic dead zone for aquatic life in the Gulf of Mexico, according to a recently released Environmental Protection Agency assessment.

It's a difficult problem that's concentrated in agricultural regions that drain into the Mississippi River. More than half of the basin's miles of rivers and streams were in poor condition for nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizer that drains into waterways, the agency found. For decades, federal and state officials have struggled to control farm runoff, the biggest source of nutrient pollution that is not typically federally regulated.

It's a problem only expected to get harder to control as climate change produces more intense storms that dump rain on the Midwest and South. Those heavy rains flood farm fields, pick up commercial fertilizers and carry them into nearby rivers.

"It's really worrying that we are clearly not meeting the goals that we've set for ourselves," said Olivia

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Dorothy, director of river restoration with the conservation group American Rivers.

The assessment is based on samples collected in 2018 and 2019 and it allows experts to compare river conditions from previous rounds of sampling, although different sampling sites were used. It takes years for the agency to compile the results and release the report, which is the most comprehensive assessment of the nation's river and stream health. Phosphorus levels dipped slightly while nitrogen levels remained almost exactly the same.

About half of all river miles were found to be in poor condition for snails, worms, beetles and other bottom dwelling species that are an important indicator of biological health of the river. About a third were also rated as having poor conditions for fish based on species diversity.

"Controlling pollution is a big job. It is hard work," said Tom Wall, director of watershed restoration, assessment and protection division at EPA. "Things are not getting worse, despite the tremendous pressures on our waterways. And we would like to see more progress."

Water pollution from factories and industry is typically federally regulated. The Biden administration recently proposed toughening regulations on meat and poultry processing plants to reduce pollution, Wall said.

When nutrient pollution flows into the Gulf of Mexico, it spurs growth of bacteria that consume oxygen. That creates a so-called "dead zone," a vast area where it's difficult or impossible for marine animals to survive, fluctuating from about the size of Rhode Island to the size of New Jersey, according to Nancy Rabalais, professor of oceanography and wetland studies at Louisiana State University.

That affects the productivity of commercial fisheries and marine life in general, but nutrient pollution is also damaging upstream. Too much nitrate in drinking water can affect how blood carries oxygen, causing human health problems like headaches, nausea and abdominal cramps. It can especially affect infants, sometimes inducing "blue baby syndrome," which causes the skin to take on a bluish hue.

The EPA established the hypoxia task force in the late 1990s to reduce nutrient pollution and shrink the dead zone, but it relies on voluntary efforts to reduce farm runoff and hasn't significantly reduced the dead zone.

Anne Schechinger, Midwest director with the Environmental Working Group, said new regulations are needed, not voluntary efforts. She said the Biden administration has done a lot to improve drinking water, but not enough to reduce agricultural runoff.

Methods to prevent runoff include building buffers between farmland and waterways, creating new wetlands to filter pollutants and applying less fertilizer.

It's a politically fraught issue, especially in major Midwest farming states that significantly contribute to the problem. Many of those states cite their voluntary conservation programs as evidence they're taking on the problem, yet the new EPA data shows little progress.

Minnesota is one of the few states that has a so-called "buffer law" that requires vegetation to be planted along rivers, streams and public drainage ditches. But because groundwater and surface water are closely connected in much of the Upper Midwest, nutrient pollution can end up leaching underground through farm fields and eventually bypass those buffers, ending up in streams anyway, said Gregory Klinger, who works for the Olmsted County, Minnesota soil and water conservation district.

There should also be a focus on preventing over-fertilizing – about 30% of farmers are still using more than the recommended amounts of fertilizer on their fields, said Brad Carlson, an extension educator with the University of Minnesota who communicates with farmers about nutrient pollution issues.

Martin Larsen, a farmer and conservation technician in southeast Minnesota, said he and other farmers are interested in practices that reduce their nutrient pollution. He's broken up his typical corn and soybean rotation with oats and medium red clover, the latter a kind of plant that can increase nitrogen levels in the soil naturally. He's been able to get by with about half as much fertilizer for a corn crop that follows a clover planting as compared to a corn-corn rotation.

Growing oats and red clover as cover crops improves soil, too. But Larsen said it's difficult for many farmers to plant them when they often rely on an immediate payback for anything they grow. Cover crops are planted on just 5.1% of harvested farmland, according to 2017 data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Larsen said since regulations are so unpopular, more should be done to incentivize better practices. For example, he said that could include companies shifting the makeup of feed they use for animals, giving farmers an opening to plant some crops that use less fertilizer. Or government programs that do more to subsidize things like cover crops.

He said that many farmers in his community acknowledge the need to do things differently. "But we also feel very trapped in the system," he said.

## **Alabama plans to carry out first nitrogen gas execution. How will it work and what are the risks?**

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama is preparing to use a new method of execution: nitrogen gas.

Kenneth Eugene Smith, who survived the state's previous attempt to put him to death by lethal injection in 2022, is scheduled to be put to death Thursday by nitrogen hypoxia. If carried out, it would be the first new method of execution since lethal injection was introduced in 1982.

The state maintains that nitrogen gas will cause unconsciousness quickly but critics have likened the never-used method of execution to human experimentation.

### **WHAT IS NITROGEN HYPOXIA?**

Nitrogen hypoxia execution would cause death by forcing the inmate to breathe pure nitrogen, depriving him or her of the oxygen needed to maintain bodily functions.

### **HAS IT EVER BEEN USED?**

No state has used nitrogen hypoxia to carry out a death sentence. In 2018, Alabama became the third state — along with Oklahoma and Mississippi — to authorize the use of nitrogen gas to execute prisoners.

Some states are looking for new ways to execute inmates because the drugs used in lethal injections, the most common execution method in the United States, are increasingly difficult to find.

### **HOW IS IT SUPPOSED TO WORK?**

Nitrogen, a colorless, odorless gas, makes up 78% of the air inhaled by humans and is harmless when breathed with proper levels of oxygen.

The theory behind nitrogen hypoxia is that changing the composition of the air to 100% nitrogen will cause Smith to lose consciousness and then die from lack of oxygen.

Much of what is recorded in medical journals about death from nitrogen exposure comes from industrial accidents — where nitrogen leaks or mix-ups have killed workers — and suicide attempts.

### **WHAT DOES THE STATE PLAN TO DO?**

After Smith is strapped to the gurney in the execution chamber, the state said in a court filing that it will place a "NIOSH-approved Type-C full facepiece supplied air respirator" — a type of mask typically used in industrial settings to deliver life-preserving oxygen — over Smith's face.

The warden will then read the death warrant and ask Smith if he has any last words before activating "the nitrogen hypoxia system" from another room. The nitrogen gas will be administered for at least 15 minutes or "five minutes following a flatline indication on the EKG, whichever is longer," according to the state protocol.

The state heavily redacted sections of the protocol related to the storage and testing of the gas system.

The Alabama attorney general's office told a federal judge that the nitrogen gas will "cause unconsciousness within seconds, and cause death within minutes."

### **WHAT ARE THE CRITICISMS?**

Smith's attorneys say the state is seeking to make him the "test subject" for a novel execution method.

They have argued that the mask the state plans to use is not air tight and oxygen seeping in could subject him to a prolonged execution, possibly leaving him in a vegetative state instead of killing him. A doctor testified on behalf of Smith that the low-oxygen environment could cause nausea, leaving Smith to choke to death on his own vomit.

Experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council earlier this month cautioned that, in



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their view, the execution method would violate the prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.

The American Veterinary Medical Association wrote in 2020 euthanasia guidelines that nitrogen hypoxia can be an acceptable method of euthanasia under certain conditions for pigs but not for other mammals because it creates an "anoxic environment that is distressing for some species."

IS THIS THE SAME AS THE GAS CHAMBER?

Not exactly. Some states previously used hydrogen cyanide gas, a lethal gas, for executions. The last prisoner to be executed in a U.S. gas chamber was Walter LaGrand, the second of two German brothers sentenced to death for killing a bank manager in 1982 in southern Arizona. It took LaGrand 18 minutes to die in 1999.

WHO IS THE INMATE?

Smith was one of two men convicted of the 1988 murder-for-hire of a preacher's wife. Prosecutors said Smith and the other man were each paid \$1,000 to kill Elizabeth Sennett on behalf of her husband, who was deeply in debt and wanted to collect insurance money.

Alabama attempted to execute Smith in 2022 by lethal injection. He was strapped to the gurney in the execution chamber being prepared for lethal injection, but the state called off the lethal injection when execution team members had difficulty connecting the second of two required intravenous lines to Smith's veins. Smith was strapped to the gurney for nearly four hours, according to his lawyers, as he waited to see if the execution would go forward.

ARE THERE LEGAL CHALLENGES?

The question of whether the execution can proceed will end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard arguments Friday in Smith's request to block the execution. After the court rules, either side could appeal.

Smith has argued that the state's proposed procedures violate the ban on cruel and unusual punishment. He has also argued that Alabama violated his due process rights by scheduling the execution when he has pending appeals and that the face mask will interfere with his ability to pray.

In a separate case, Smith is arguing it would violate the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment for the state to make a second attempt to execute him after he already survived one execution attempt. Lawyers for Smith on Friday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to stay the execution to consider that question.

WHAT IS POTENTIALLY AT STAKE?

Lethal injection is the most commonly used execution method in the United States, but death penalty states have struggled at times to obtain the needed drugs or encountered other problems in connecting intravenous lines.

If the Alabama execution goes forward, other states may seek to start to using nitrogen gas.

If the execution is blocked by the court or botched, it could halt or slow the pursuit of nitrogen gas as an alternative execution method.

## Today in History: January 22

### Supreme Court declares right to abortion with Roe v Wade

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 22, the 22nd day of 2024. There are 344 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its Roe v. Wade decision, declared a nationwide constitutional right to abortion.

On this date:

In 1901, Britain's Queen Victoria died at age 81 after a reign of 63 years; she was succeeded by her eldest son, Edward VII.

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In 1938, Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town" was performed publicly for the first time in Princeton, New Jersey.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces began landing at Anzio, Italy.

In 1947, America's first commercially licensed television station west of the Mississippi, KTLA-TV in Los Angeles, made its official debut.

In 1953, the Arthur Miller drama "The Crucible" opened on Broadway.

In 1995, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy died at the Kennedy compound at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, at age 104.

In 1997, the Senate confirmed Madeleine Albright as the nation's first female secretary of state.

In 1998, Theodore Kaczynski pleaded guilty in Sacramento, California, to being the Unabomber responsible for three deaths and 29 injuries in return for a sentence of life in prison without parole.

In 2006, Kobe Bryant scored 81 points, the second-highest in NBA history, in the Los Angeles Lakers' 122-104 victory over the Toronto Raptors.

In 2008, actor Heath Ledger, age 28, was found dead of an accidental prescription overdose in a New York City apartment.

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp within a year. (The facility remained in operation as lawmakers blocked efforts to transfer terror suspects to the United States; President Donald Trump later issued an order to keep the jail open and allow the Pentagon to bring new prisoners there.)

In 2012, longtime Penn State coach Joe Paterno, who'd won more games than anyone in major college football but was fired amid a child sex abuse scandal that scarred his reputation, died at age 85.

In 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line bloc fared worse than expected in a parliamentary election, forcing Netanyahu to negotiate a broad coalition deal.

In 2020, Chinese health authorities urged people in the city of Wuhan to avoid crowds and public gatherings after warning that a new viral illness that had infected hundreds of people and caused at least nine deaths could spread further. Health officials in Washington state said they were actively monitoring 16 people who'd come in close contact with a traveler to China, the first U.S. resident known to be infected with the virus.

In 2023, a 72-year-old gunman killed 10 people at a Southern California ballroom dance studio amid Lunar New Year celebrations then tried but failed to target a second dance hall before killing himself as police approached him.

Today's birthdays: Celebrity chef Graham Kerr (TV: "The Galloping Gourmet") is 90. Author Joseph Wambaugh is 87. Singer Steve Perry is 75. Country singer-musician Teddy Gentry (Alabama) is 72. Movie director Jim Jarmusch is 71. Actor John Wesley Shipp is 69. Actor Linda Blair is 65. Actor Diane Lane is 59. Actor and rap DJ Jazzy Jeff is 59. Celebrity chef Guy Fieri is 56. Actor Olivia d'Abo is 55. Actor Katie Finneran is 53. Actor Gabriel Macht is 52. Actor Balthazar Getty is 49. Actor Christopher Kennedy Masterson is 44. Jazz singer Lizz Wright is 44. Pop singer Willa Ford is 43. Actor Beverley Mitchell is 43. Rock singer-musician Ben Moody (Evanescence) is 43. Actor Kevin Sheridan is 42. Actor-singer Phoebe Strole is 41. Rapper Logic is 34. Tennis player Alizé Cornet (uh-LEEZ' kohr-NAY') is 34. Actor Sami Gayle is 28.