

# Groton Daily Independent

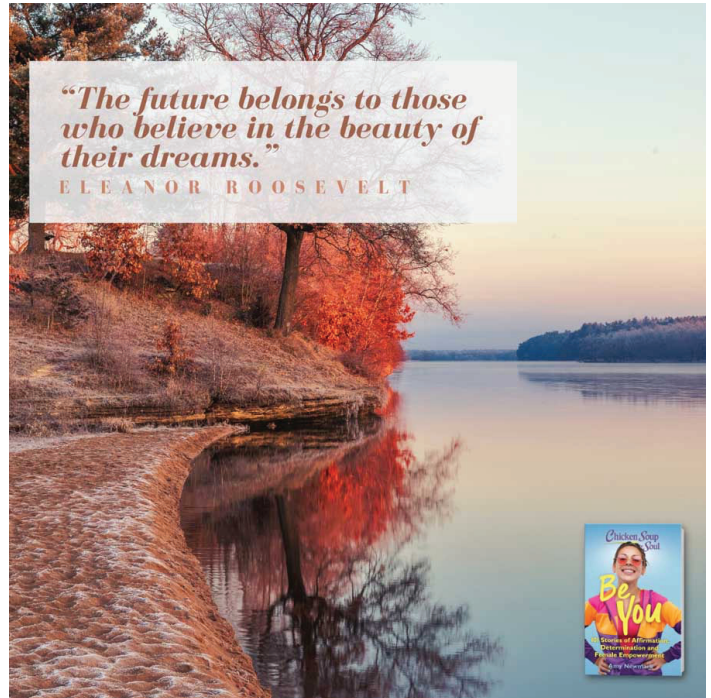
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## Tuesday, Jan. 23

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.

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



## Wednesday, Jan. 24

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, oriental blend vegetables, baked 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™](#)

The second nominating contest of the 2024 presidential election cycle takes place today in New Hampshire.

The Republican primary has whittled down to a match between former President Donald Trump and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley following Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' exit from the race. An average of all New Hampshire polls shows Trump with about 52% of the vote, while Haley trails behind him with close to 37%. The state's primary is also open to independent voters, whom Haley is hoping to woo.

Cameroon initiated the world's first routine malaria vaccine program for children yesterday amid a resurgence of the mosquito-borne disease in recent years. More than 250,000 children over the age of 5 months are expected to receive the four-dose vaccine this year, as 19 other African countries make plans to follow suit.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a Hindu temple in the city of Ayodhya yesterday, with the dedication ceremony acting as an unofficial launch to the Hindu nationalist leader's reelection campaign ahead of scheduled general elections this year.

## **Sports, Entertainment, & Culture**

The 2024 Academy Award nominations announced this morning (8:30 am ET); see how to watch livestream. Sexual assault complaint against French actor Gérard Depardieu dismissed due to statute of limitations.

Baseball Hall of Famer Ryne Sandberg reveals prostate cancer diagnosis. Dexter Scott King, Martin Luther King Jr.'s youngest son, dies at 62.

Sony terminates planned \$10B merger with Indian media giant Zee; merger would have combined 70 TV channels, two streaming services, and two film studios.

## **Science & Technology**

Google, AT&T, and Vodafone invest more than \$200M in AST SpaceMobile, a startup seeking to compete with Starlink's recently unveiled satellite-to-smartphone service.

Repurposed cancer drug shown to reduce kidney cysts, may offer new treatment for polycystic kidney disease; heritable condition affects around 12 million people worldwide, typically requires dialysis or organ transplant.

Brain study suggests forgetting memories is an active process, with neurons encoding specific memories put into a dormant state that can be revived or updated.

## **Business & Markets**

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.2%, Dow +0.4%, Nasdaq +0.3%); S&P 500 and Dow climb to new all-time highs as stock rally continues.

Archer Daniels Midland shares fall 24% after chief financial officer placed on leave amid accounting probe. Macy's rejects \$5.8B takeover bid from investment firms Arkhouse Management, Brigade Capital Management.

Federal Aviation Administration recommends door plug inspections on Boeing 737-900ER model (roughly 350 US-operated planes) due to similarities to 737 Max 9 model involved in Alaska Airlines blowout.

## **Politics & World Affairs**

Israel proposes two-month pause in fighting in Gaza as part of multiphase deal to release all remaining hostages in Hamas' captivity. Two US Navy SEALs presumed dead after going missing during operation to intercept Iranian missiles. US, British forces strike Houthi sites in Yemen.

Supreme Court grants Biden administration request for Border Patrol agents to remove state-built razor wire along Texas-Mexico border. Biden administration announces initiatives to expand reproductive healthcare access. North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum (R) won't seek third term.

> California Faculty Association, representing 29,000 faculty members of the 23-campus California State University system, begins five-day strike over pay; walkout is the largest university faculty strike in US history

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.



**The Carnival of Silver Skates scenery was put up by the Groton City Public Works Department.**

## Groton to hold 86th Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

Groton, SD -- Groton will host the 86th annual Carnival of Silver Skates, featuring over 90 figure skaters, on Sunday, January 28. Two performances of this unique outdoor ice skating show will be held at the Groton ice rink at 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. All are invited to attend.

The warm temps in early January made it difficult for skaters to get on the ice early in the skating season, but that did not stop these young skaters! Groups gathered in parking lots, gyms, and the community center to choreograph and practice their routines.

The theme for this year's 86th celebration is "Rhythm on the Rink." As the audience watches the Groton skaters from pre-school through high school age, they will enjoy a wide variety of music. There will also be several specialty acts from local skaters, and there will be two acts performed by members of the Watertown Figure Skate Club.

The show promises to be entertaining and inspiring, with beautiful costumes and memorable music. Spectators will enjoy a wide variety of music from multiple eras and genres. New spectators to the show each year marvel at the beautiful, professional-looking costumes.

Following tradition, the 2024 Carnival of Silver Skates Queen will be crowned during the 2:00 PM performance. The 2023 Queen Anna Fjeldheim will crown the new queen. This year's queen candidates are seniors Cadence Feist, Carly Guthmiller, Hannah Monson, Emma Schinkel, and Ashlyn Sperry. There is one junior candidate, Emily Overacker.

Admission for the show is just \$3 for those 13 and older, \$2 for ages 6-12, and free for children 5 and under. Plan now to attend the Carnival of Silver Skates in Groton on January 29 at 2 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. The rink is located on the west side of town, near the baseball complex. Watch from the comfort of your own vehicle, listening to music and narration from your radio. There will be plenty of parking, with only cars allowed on the ice and larger vehicles allowed on upper tiers. Attendees are asked to limit vehicles to one per family, please. Parking on the ice will begin at noon on Sunday for the first show and again at 4:30 p.m. for the evening show. You may prefer to dress for the weather of the day and enjoy the show from the bleachers, which will be provided.

Come be a part of this long-standing community tradition in Groton as you experience the Carnival of Silver Skates!



## Government support means equity in the arts

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

One of the questions that arises each year about this time, especially among arts advocates, is the question of government support for cultural activities and programs. I've heard from some people who think that private individuals, foundations and companies should provide the funding that keeps the arts accessible throughout the state, with no public dollars included in the mix. The problem is that, especially in states like South Dakota, that scenario would practically guarantee that most of our schools, towns and populations would have far less access to creative experiences.

Public funding is an essential element for a wide range of services that we take for granted. Could philanthropic sources and private corporations make education for all Americans a reality? Could we have effective public safety without tax dollars working to fund police departments? What about public libraries, fire departments or enforcement of building codes? We rely on government support to provide a standard of living that we consider reasonable for our citizens—and access to the arts is a vital part of that quality of life.

Public funding assures equity of access. While some cities in our country may have private resources to keep cultural programs strong and growing, smaller and more rural states like South Dakota simply don't have the population base or the private sources of revenue to make sure we can all experience the arts. We do have generous local and regional philanthropic citizens and organizations, but those benefactors are also supporting medical research, scientific exploration and so many other causes in addition to creative components.

The government-funded South Dakota Arts Council supports only the arts, often with small grants that get artists and arts organizations started and provide seed money for programming statewide. The first dollars come from government-supported SDAC grants, making possible matching funds in the form of private contributions. Public funding provides credibility, viability and visibility to encourage and enhance private support.

Economically challenged communities, counties and populations should not have lesser arts opportunities. Government support for the arts ensures equal access to the arts for all South Dakotans.

To learn more about the importance of public support for the arts, go to [artssouthdakota.org](http://artssouthdakota.org).



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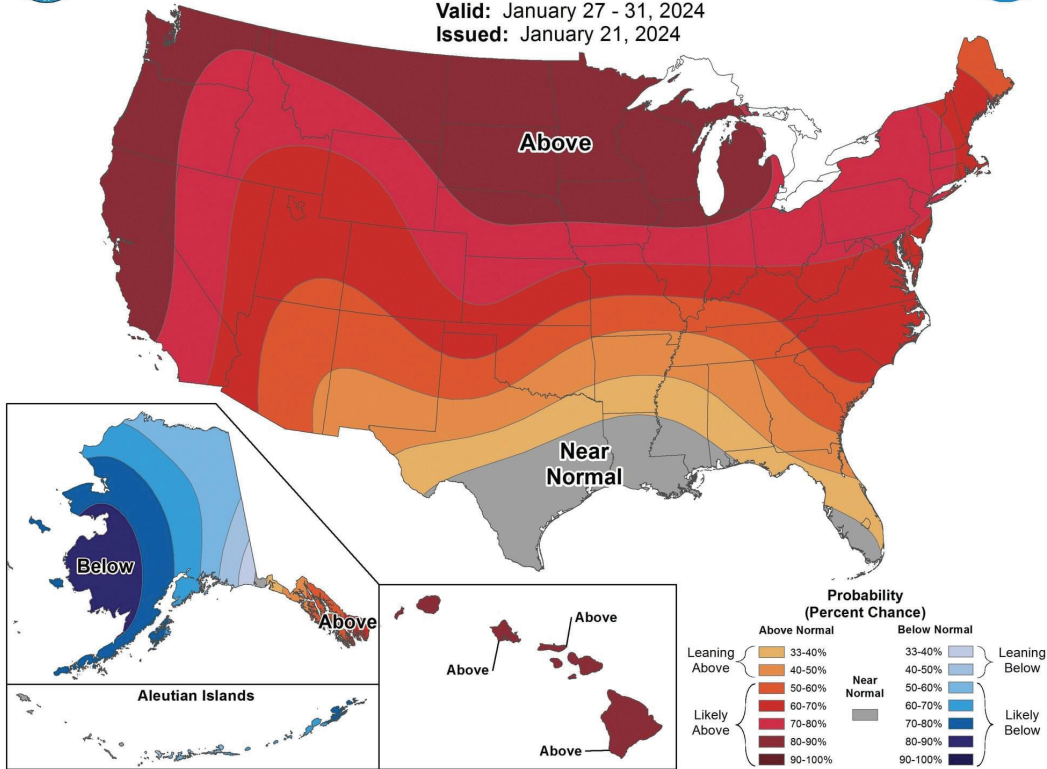
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## 6-10 Day Temperature Outlook



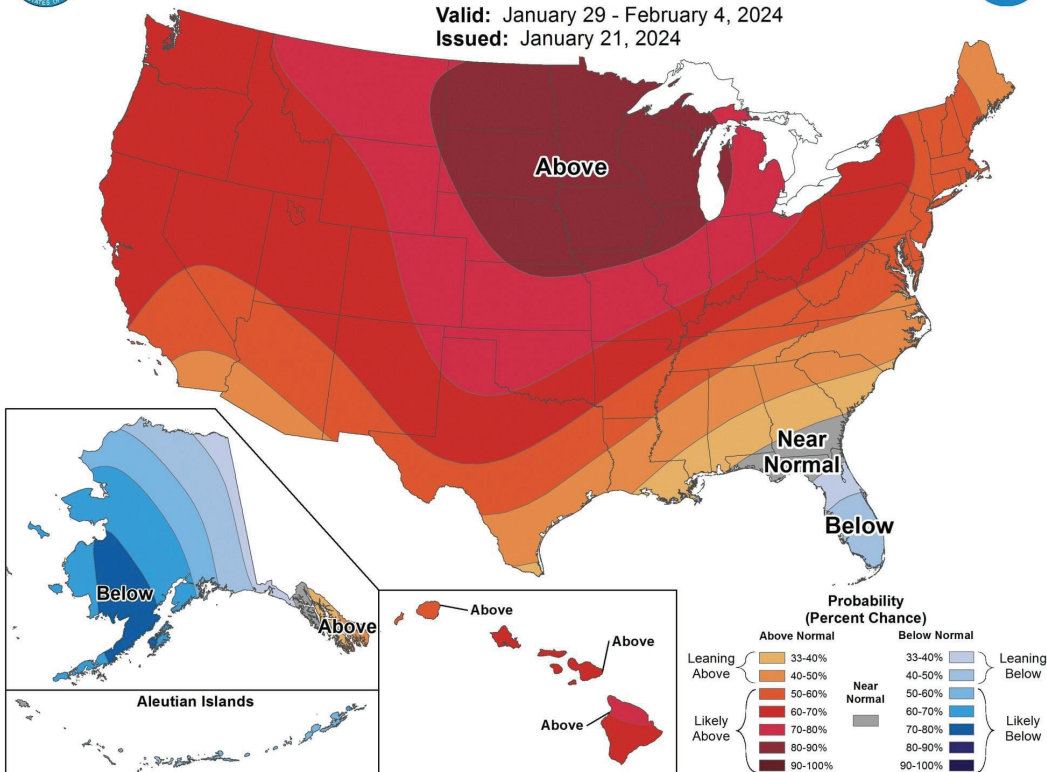
Valid: January 27 - 31, 2024  
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## 8-14 Day Temperature Outlook



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## That's Life by Tony Bender: And yet, I'm optimistic

I remain optimistic. I also have a buttload of gummies if anyone needs any.

For the record, a buttload is unit of measurement equalling 48 bushels, half of which would be a hogs-head. I think it's part of the metric system. This has been the educational portion of our column.

Sure, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are galloping full-tilt toward us, one of the riders is the Fat Lady, and she's singing "It's the End of the World As We know It," yet, I feel fine.

Did I mention I have gummies?

I'm an unabashed optimist and patriot. I find the Constitution is visionary although cracks in the system have been exposed in the way a mouse finds its way inside in November. I fly a flag in my yard and I stand for the national anthem but mostly because if I kneel I might not be able to get up. I'm not convinced my right hip was American made.

Funny, isn't it, psychologically I feel the need to validate myself because even though I consider myself a moderate, in North Dakota, that makes me Che Guevara. Plus, I'm a journalist. That's three strikes. According to the Derek Zoolander Center for Kids That Can't Do Math Good.

Some Republicans have convinced themselves that they're the only true patriots while Democrats are a bunch of gummie-eating welfare-queen woke gun-haters intent on destroying America. I'd call loving your country enough to want to make it better the highest order of patriotism. Everyone's got ideas. Compromising is called democracy.

I'm a fiscal conservative, a social liberal—but fiscally conservative in that I believe in investment in infrastructure and education because it pays off economically and with a more civil society. Of course, educated Americans are not in the best interest of some.

Democrats remain pitiful with their narrative. Biden hasn't completely gotten the car out of the economic ditch but unemployment is low, inflation is slowing, retail spending is up, and the first major infrastructure bill since Eisenhower was passed with bipartisan support. You don't hear about Democratic success stories much. Yet, most benefits to working families—Social Security, Medicare, the ACA, social safety nets—have come from Democrats. Try taking them away.

Tearing down 250 years of political evolution and norms ("The Deep State"), filling positions with unblinking sycophants, eliminating judicial and congressional checks and balances while echoing violent Hitlerisms... I dunno, based on civics classes, history, and current events, it doesn't feel like it would pencil out well. I wonder if this election will be America's much needed wakeup call or if we'll keep hitting the snooze button.

The law. That's where it all lies for me. Let the judicial system work. There are abundant checks and balances. If a Democrat is corrupt, let there be consequences. Bob Menendez oozes slime, and his case should move forward quickly and publicly. Credit to Republicans for moving decisively to excommunicate Congressman and former Super Bowl MVP George Santos.

Republicans have typically supported law enforcement and the American military, two institutions undermined and attacked by Trump because lawbreakers don't appreciate law enforcement.

Republicans miscalculated, and created a monster, thinking they could control him. They could if they united behind the rule of law. A long list of former members of the Trump Administration have warned about him, exposed corruption and ineptitude, but only after leaving their positions. They're right, but with less to lose, less credible. Then, there's Trump's obvious cognitive decline, his criminal psychosis, and his violent intentions to defy the Constitution and become a dictator. It's not speculation. He's saying it. I can't believe a majority of American voters will support that.

Yet, I remain optimistic. Probably because I have gummies.

Every fever breaks. Or it kills you.

Ronald Reagan warned that the loss of democracy was always a generation away. Well, here we are. We're approaching a pivotal moment. It could end us. But it could also rouse us from our complacency, reinvigorate civic involvement, and ultimately strengthen our democracy. A close call often inspires us to take stock. The state of the nation ultimately comes down to us. It will be a harrowing ride. But I have faith in the majority of American voters.

## Lady Tigers come from behind for a thrilling overtime win over Northwestern

Groton Area's Lady Tigers overcame a 12-point deficit to tie the game at the end of the fourth quarter and made four free throws in the overtime for a 49-45 win.

The Lady Tigers had a tough time getting into the groove of the game, trailing 15-7 after the first quarter and 26-16 at halftime. Northwestern opened up a 12-point lead in the third quarter at 31-19. Then the tide changed.

Sydney Leicht lit the nets on fire with two three-pointers and Jerica Locke made a three-pointer and completed a three-point play. Groton Area closed to within four, 34-30, going into the fourth quarter.

The Wildcats scored first in the fourth quarter. Leicht was fouled while attempting a three-pointer and she made all three free throws. Laila Roberts was fouled while trying to make a basket and she made both free throws to tie the game at 39 with 3:26 left. Locke would make one of two free throws and the Tigers took the lead, 40-39. Northwestern, plagued with five turnovers in the fourth quarter, were suddenly trading, 42-39. But the Wildcats rallied and took the lead, 44-41, with one minute left. Laila Roberts would steal the ball and made the assist to Locke who threw the ball high in the air under the basket which went in to tie the game at 44 with 24 seconds. Northwestern's Tara Blachford was fouled while attempting a three-pointer with 17 seconds left. She made one of three free throws. Locke was on the line for the Tigers with 16 seconds left and she made one of two free throws to tie the game at 45 and the game went into overtime.

Northwestern went scoreless in the overtime as the Tigers made four of four free throws to get the win.

Locke led the Tigers with 16 points, six rebounds, five assists and four steals. Leicht had 14 points, two rebounds, one assist and one steal. Jaedyn Penning had seven points, seven rebounds, three assists and three steals. Rylee Dunker had six points, seven rebounds, one assist and two steals. Roberts had six points, four rebounds, two assists and two steals. Brooklyn Hansen had two rebounds, two assists and two steals.

Three-Pointers: Leicht - 3, Locke - 1.

Groton Area made 12 of 42 two-pointers for 29 percent, four of 19 three-pointers for 21 percent, 13 of 21 free throws for 62 percent, had 35 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 15 assists, 15 steals and 13 team fouls.

Tara Blachford led Northwestern with 18 points followed by Adriana Ratigan with 12, Ella Boedelheide had five, Ashley Haven four and Breelyn Satter and Josie Sparling each had three points.

Three-Pointers: Satter - 1, Boedelheide - 1, Blachford 3, Sparling - 1.

Northwestern made 17 of 54 field goals for 31 percent, five of 11 free throws for 45 percent, had 20 turnovers and 17 team fouls.

Groton Area's girls junior varsity team led at the quarterstops at 11-2, 17-2 and 29-4 en route to a 35-6 win.

Laila Roberts led Groton Area with eight points and nine steals while Talli Wright had six points, Faith Traphagen had five, McKenna Tietz and Ashlynn Warrington each had four points, Emerlee Jones and Mia Crank each had three points and Kella Tracy had two points.

Molly Van Hatten, Kyara Ratigan and Natalie Schipke each had two points for Northwestern.



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## Groton Area's defense stops Northwestern

Groton Area outscored Northwestern, 25-13, in the second quarter to post a boys varsity win, 66-37. Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 18-4, 44-17 and 61-26.

Jacob Zak had 14 points, two rebounds, four assists and one steal. Ryder Johnson had 14 points, six rebounds, one assist and one steal. Keegen Tracy had 11 points, two rebounds, one assist and four steals. Gage Sippel had nine points and two rebounds. Lane Tietz had seven points, two rebounds, two assists and one steal. Blake Pauli had three points, two assists and one steal. Colby Dunker had two points, one rebound and one assist. Jayden Schwan had two points, one rebound and one steal. Karson Zak had two points and one rebound. Logan Ringgenberg had one point, three rebounds and one assist. Holden Sippel had one point and two rebounds. Teylor Diegel had two rebounds, two assists and one steal. Kassen Keough had one assist and one steal. Turner Thompson had two assists, one steal and one block shot. Logan Warrington had five rebounds and one steal. Easton Weber had one steal.

Groton Area made 20 of 35 two-pointers for 57 percent, six of 22 three-pointers for 27 percent, eight of 15 free throws for 53 percent, had 29 rebounds, 13 turnovers, 17 assists, 14 steals, 12 fouls and one block shot.

Nathan Melius led Northwestern with 13 points followed by Lincoln Woodring and Jack Hansen with five each and Carson Ewalt and Dawson Ward each had two points.

Northwestern made 10 of 30 field goals for 33 percent, six of nine free throws for 67 percent, had 17 turnovers and 13 team fouls.

The boys junior varsity team led at the quarterstops at 10-4, 28-4 and 41-6 en route to a 52-8 win.

Gage Sippel led the Tigers with 12 points followed by Karson Zak and Teylor Diegel with eight each, Kassen Keough had seven, Jayden Schwan, Logan Warrington and Turner Thompson each had four, Easton Weber had two and Blake Pauli added two points.

Ty Boekelheide led Northwestern with four points while Eli Miller and Kayden Drobny each had two points.

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





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **\$3.2 million coming to SD as part of federal energy and fertilizer funds**

**BY: KYLE DUNPHEY, UTAH NEWS DISPATCH - JANUARY 22, 2024 9:46 PM**

SALT LAKE CITY — U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack was in Utah on Monday where he announced millions in funding for renewable energy and domestic fertilizer projects, with about \$3.2 million headed to South Dakota.

Vilsack spoke during the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention and trade show, which was in downtown Salt Lake City this year, where he touted the Inflation Reduction Act while sounding the alarm over the loss of small operations and wealth consolidation in the agricultural industry.

Since 1981, Vilsack said the country has lost 437,300 farms and over 141 million acres of farmland.

"Those are farm families that are no longer in the farming business, which means that in all likelihood their families are no longer in those small communities," Vilsack said. "The question I ask all of you today is whether we're OK with that?"

And despite what Vilsack called the best three years in net farm cash income ever in the U.S., small and midsize operations are not seeing the success of their large, industrialized counterparts.

About 7.5% of American farms received 89% of the income last year; which means the remaining farms, which Vilsack estimated at about 2 million, had to share 11% of income generated by agriculture.

"What we're doing here is creating opportunities for that 92% of farmers to be able to have multiple revenue streams," Vilsack said as he announced the new round of funding.

The federal dollars are coming through the Rural Energy for America and the Fertilizer Production Expansion programs, which direct about \$207 million to projects in 42 states, according to the department. Roughly \$94 million of that comes from the Inflation Reduction Act.

The funds announced Monday will support 682 projects, most of them aimed at reducing emissions and renewable energy.

The program provides grants and loans to farmers and rural small businesses to expand the use of wind, solar and other clean energy sources, which according to the USDA helps them "increase their income, grow their businesses, address climate change and lower energy costs."

Vilsack called it "a voluntary, incentive-based market-driven system" that has become popular among farmers.

"I know that farmers and ranchers and producers are taking advantage of this because the programs are oversubscribed. The demand is great," he said. "Farmers are now going to be paid, encouraged, incented, rewarded, for taking those steps to become more sustainable."

*Kyle Dunphey covers politics, public safety and the environment for Utah News Dispatch. He was named Best Newspaper Reporter by the Utah Society of Professional Journalists in 2023 for his work on crime and immigration at the Deseret News. Kyle moved to Utah in 2013 from his home state of Vermont and has degrees from Salt Lake Community College and the University of Utah.*

## State: Bowing to local zoning in prison dispute 'would be an absurd result'

### Landowners challenge legitimacy of state's ability to bypass county rules

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 22, 2024 7:41 PM

CANTON — The notion that the state of South Dakota needs county permission to build a state penitentiary is absurd, a lawyer representing the state Department of Corrections said Monday.

That argument from Assistant Attorney General Grant Flynn came during a Monday hearing at the Lincoln County Courthouse in a lawsuit that aims to scuttle construction of a new state penitentiary on the state's selected site 15 miles south of Sioux Falls.

The state has asked Judge Jennifer Mammenga to dismiss the lawsuit from a group called "Neighbors Opposed to Prison Expansion," or NOPE.

The lawsuit was born of opposition to the rural Lincoln County location of the planned 1,500-bed penitentiary, but the case could have serious, long-term implications for state capital projects if the landowners succeed.

For decades, the state has worked from the understanding that it has no legal need to comply with county or city rules when building on its own property.

But the landowners say that understanding is built upon a weak legal history.

The "general rule" giving the state the power to ignore localities has its roots in an advisory opinion from former Attorney General Bill Janklow. The landowners are challenging that opinion's validity, as there is no state law or Supreme Court case explicitly exempting the state from adhering to local zoning rules.

But law and order is a "sacred" duty of the state in its constitution, Flynn said. The state also has a law on the books that grants condemnation power to the DOC for the purpose of building prisons. A ruling for landowners, who want the state to ask the county for a conditional use permit to build on its chosen site, "would be an absurd result," Flynn said.

Blocking a prison in an area filled with farmsteads and acreages in the interest of protecting the county's zoning master plan "may be a noble goal," Flynn said, but it's not a solid basis for a legal claim.

Counties only exist as a government entity because the state created them.

"The master cannot be beholden to its creation," he said.

Flynn also referred to counties as "children" of the state at one point, a line that elicited audible gasps from many of the 40-odd NOPE supporters packed into an overflow room for the hearing.

The courtroom was full long before the hearing began at 3:30 p.m.

Ernest Stratmeyer, whose 95-year-old mother lives on a family farm about 2 miles from the proposed penitentiary site, said afterward he felt "belittled" by that line of argument.

Stratmeyer said he's not sure what will become of his family's land if the prison is built, but "the value of it will change."

"What you get around a penitentiary is not high-end," Stratmeyer said.

### Landowners: State should make its case to county

The state already owns the land it has selected for the new prison, which will replace the aging state penitentiary in Sioux Falls. DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko has described the building, which predates statehood, as outdated and unsafe for inmates and staff alike.

The land in dispute had been leased to farmers until last year, when the Department of Corrections took ownership of the property by way of a payment to the previous deed-holder, the state Office of School and Public Lands.

The landowners argue that the fields should stay fields, and point to the county's zoning plan as proof. It lists the area as agricultural for the foreseeable future.

A.J. Swanson, the lawyer representing the Lincoln County landowners, told Judge Mammenga that none of the laws or court decisions presented by Flynn give DOC Secretary Wasko carte blanche to ignore the

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county.

Flynn pointed to House Bill 1017 from the 2023 legislative session, for example. That bill allocated funds for the prison project, but Swanson said it didn't clear a path for Wasko to disregard Lincoln County's regulatory framework.

"She has not been given the authority to ignore local zoning," Swanson said.

As to the law giving the DOC condemnation power for prisons, Swanson said "so what?" Eminent domain, he said, "has nothing to do" with what the proper zoning test for a state project ought to be.

In his rebuttal, Flynn said every response to the state's arguments amounted to "so what? We still don't want a prison here."

Outside of the zoning sphere, he said, there is plenty of legal precedence that says state law trumps local law. There may not be a Supreme Court case in South Dakota directly tied to zoning, but the state's high court has ruled that state laws overrule local laws that are more lenient or strict than state law provides.

"Disregard and disinterest do not change the reality of the laws we live under," Flynn said.

Even setting aside the issue of which government entity is subordinate in matters of zoning, Flynn argued that the landowners have no legitimate cause of action against the state at this point.

No one has been hurt by the prison, he said, which hasn't been built and won't be for years. The landowners say property values will decline, he told the judge, but did not offer any proof.

"This is not supported by any data or analysis," Flynn said.

The prison might not be welcome, he said, but it takes more than that to restrict the state's duty to provide for law and order.

"No one wants a prison in their backyard," he said. "But no one wants to live in a state without a prison."

## Opponents react

Tyler and Krista Johnson were among those listening to the hearing from the overflow room. The Johnsons are building a home about a mile from the prison site, and they said they'd saved up more than a decade to buy the land.

"We're not even done yet," Tyler Johnson said.

It took more than savings to secure a place in the Lincoln County countryside, they said. Land in the area – especially land with a building eligibility – is snatched up quickly. Krista said it's "a prime location," in part because it offers a slice of rural life to those who live there.

"That's why we chose the place we did," she said. "It was zoned for agriculture."

Madeline Voegeli, who leads NOPE, said after the hearing that the group intends to appear at the Lincoln County Commission meeting Tuesday morning to call on commissioners to support a statement of support for a different prison site.

The issue of overriding local authority, Voegeli said, has drawn concerned citizens to the group from well outside the 3-mile radius of the prison site.

The state's "lack of transparency" troubles the prison's potential neighbors, but Voegeli said the issue of sidestepping locals is larger than one building project.

"We're asking questions that are important and need to be answered," she said.

Judge Mammenga said she would issue a written ruling in the coming weeks.

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



## Fuel tax refund to incentivize higher ethanol blends passes state Senate

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 22, 2024 3:45 PM

PIERRE — A bill to incentivize the sale of more ethanol passed through the state Senate on Monday with 33 yes votes and no opposition.

The legislation outlines a new tax refund that would be in effect from 2025 to 2030. It would allow gas stations to claim a fuel tax refund of up to 5 cents per gallon of E15 fuel sold.

E15 is 15% ethanol and 85% gasoline, which is a higher portion of ethanol than the typical E10 blend. Ethanol is made primarily from corn.

To pay for it, the bill would use an existing ethanol fund overseen by the Governor's Office of Economic Development. That fund receives 1.5% of a tank inspection fee charged to fuel sellers.

The initiative would be a boost to the ethanol industry in South Dakota, according to Tim Dougherty, who lobbies for POET Biofuels, a major ethanol producer headquartered in Sioux Falls. He testified during the bill's initial committee hearing earlier this month.

The existing Ethanol Infrastructure Incentive Fund was created in 2011 to support the installation of ethanol fuel pumps and storage facilities at gas stations. The fund awarded up to \$25,000 for an ethanol fuel pump installation, and up to \$10,000 for each additional pump. The state is not currently accepting applications for those installations.

Dougherty said there's about \$1 million in the fund.

If the bill passes in the House and is signed into law by Gov. Kristi Noem, gas stations would need to apply for a refund each year, and the amount would depend on how much money is available in the fund. If there's not enough money for everyone to receive 5 cents per gallon, available credits would be evenly allocated to eligible applicants.

On the floor of the Senate, the lawmaker sponsoring the bill, Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, called the bill a "win-win" for South Dakota.

"By encouraging gas stations to carry or expand E-15 at their pumps, we can keep our homegrown fuels closer to home and closer to consumers," he said, "which will increase profits for corn growers, while at the same time reducing fuel costs for consumers."

Sixty-four percent of the corn grown in South Dakota goes to ethanol plants, Crabtree said, supporting 11,000 farms and 30,000 jobs in the state.

The bill includes a five-year sunset on the program.

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

## Noem joins letter to Biden pushing back on call for battery powered cars

BY: MCKENZIE ROMERO, UTAH NEWS DISPATCH - JANUARY 22, 2024 5:31 PM

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is among a group of 16 Republican governors who wrote to President Joe Biden urging a change to his administration's push to put more battery powered vehicles on the road, citing concerns for U.S. consumers and infrastructure.

In their letter issued Monday, the governors asked that in lieu of a federal mandate that 2 out of every 3 vehicles be battery electrics by 2032, consumers be left to make their own decisions.

"While we are not opposed to the electric vehicle marketplace, we do have concerns with federal government mandates that penalize retailers and do not reflect the will of the consumer. Even with deep price

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cuts, manufacturers' incentives, and generous government funding, federal mandates on electric vehicles are unrealistic," the letter states.

The governors also pointed to the need for capable and reliable energy grids and ample charging stations to support EV drivers, as well as a call for more domestic EV battery production.

"Bolstering the domestic critical minerals industry is an essential step to realizing any long-term, responsible electric vehicle battery production. Given China's current action atop the global electric vehicle production, mandating electric vehicle use too quickly can also present a national security risk," the governors wrote.

According to a December 2023 fact sheet released by the White House, under Biden "EV sales have tripled and the number of publicly available charging ports has grown by nearly 70%."

Other governors signing the letter were:

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders

Idaho Gov. Brad Little

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson

Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen

Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon

*McKenzie is the editor of Utah News Dispatch. She is a dedicated journalist with more than a decade of experience, and a passionate advocate for open meetings and records, ethical reporting and the future of journalism.*

## State lawmakers reject expansion of free school meals

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 22, 2024 12:26 PM**

PIERRE — Lawmakers narrowly rejected a bill Monday that would have given more low-income students free school meals.

The state House Education Committee voted 8-7 to defeat the legislation.

"These are South Dakota's most vulnerable families and kids," the bill's prime sponsor, Rep. Kadyn Witman, D-Sioux Falls, told the committee. She said 7,580 South Dakota children would have been helped by the legislation.

The bill would have prohibited charging students who qualify for federal reduced-price meals. Those students' parents or guardians make as little as \$25,636 to \$36,482 annually. Children of parents making less already qualify for free meals.

The bill also would have required school districts to ensure parents or legal guardians of eligible students complete and submit a federal school meal application annually. Proponents said doing so would ensure children eligible for federal programs are benefitting from them.

The state Department of Education would have been responsible for reimbursing school districts for the cost of providing the additional meals. The annual cost would have been about \$579,000, according to the state Legislative Research Council.

The bill's proponents described that as a price worth paying.

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"It's our responsibility as leaders and human beings to ensure that no child in South Dakota has to learn on an empty stomach," testified Jesse Severson, with Hungry Hearts, a nonprofit helping low-income families.

Gay Anderson, the child nutrition coordinator for the Sioux Falls School District, and Krista Leischner, the student nutrition manager for Rapid City Area Schools, also testified in favor of the bill.

"Food insecurity is a reality in our state," Leischner told the committee. "Food insecurity is not something students should experience in school walls. While I do not see this bill as 'the' answer, I do see this bill as a step in the right direction."

Governor Kristi Noem's Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger testified that "the goals of this bill are well-intentioned" but "there is no free lunch, meaning someone still has to pay."

Terwilliger said the school lunch programs are "already heavily subsidized by the federal government." He said the bill takes a burden currently being lifted by nonprofits and philanthropists and puts it on the shoulders of state taxpayers. Across the state, private efforts have helped cover unpaid school lunch bills; for example, 1,800 students' lunch debts in the Sioux Falls School District were paid off by donations.

Terwilliger said the bill's proponents would continue to push for more free meals if the bill passed.

"I believe this would just be the first step," he said. "And more steps would be coming in the future."

Wittman countered, saying that "if we want South Dakota to pull ahead in terms of test scores, lowering absenteeism, having better health outcomes for our kids, I can't think of a better investment."

Rep. Phil Jensen, R-Rapid City, motioned to defeat the bill. He said it's the responsibility of the church to care for the needy, not the government.

"We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus, and by doing so, we can meet the needs of this effort," Jensen said. "I think if anybody wanted to donate money, they could donate money to this cause. And as a Republican, I believe in less government and less intrusion in our lives. Nowhere in the constitution or state constitution does it say anything about feeding school children."

Retired educator Rep. Roger DeGroot, R-Brookings, said his fellow lawmakers on the committee were losing sight of the point of the bill.

"Somehow we got involved in all kinds of different rabbit holes," he said. "I don't think it's the responsibility of somebody running a public school program to run around and work with churches to raise money."

Rep. Tim Reisch, R-Howard, expressed fiscal concerns.

"I don't think it's the state's obligation to shore up something when the federal government already has a program in place," he said.

Reisch said the federal debt is a "bigger burden to the youth of this nation than, probably, shortcomings in meal programs."

Wittman said she does not plan any attempts to revive the bill this legislative session.

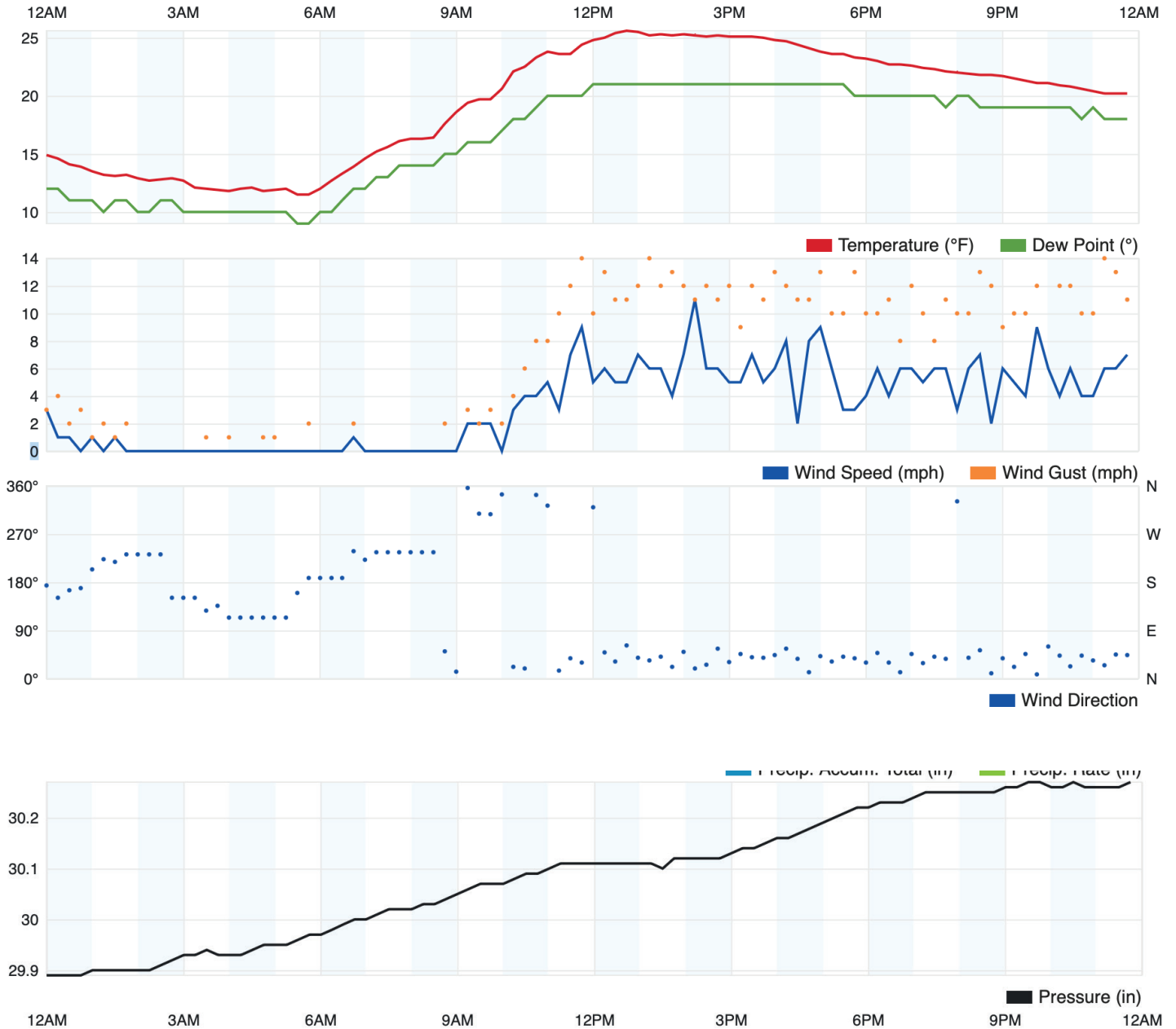
*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist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



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Jan 23	Jan 24	Jan 25	Jan 26	Jan 27	Jan 28	Jan 29
						
31°F	34°F	32°F	33°F	33°F	36°F	38°F
25°F	25°F	25°F	22°F	21°F	23°F	26°F
E	S	WSW	W	WSW	SSW	WSW
9 MPH	12 MPH	4 MPH	9 MPH	9 MPH	12 MPH	11 MPH

**Today**  
Patchy Fog  
Highs: near 30°

**Wednesday**  
Patchy Fog, locally dense in the morning  
Highs: 30s


**Thursday**  
Highs: near 30°

**Friday**  
Highs: 30s



**!** Locations that experience Dense Fog may have slick roads, as morning temperatures remain below freezing

Aberdeen, SD  
weather.gov/aberndeen



Highs for the rest of the week will mainly top out mainly in the 30s, under a cloudy sky. Watch for fog. Temperatures below freezing and dense fog could result in slick roads during the morning hours. Keep your low beam headlights on and slow down if you encounter fog.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 26 °F at 12:57 PM

Low Temp: 12 °F at 5:31 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 11:46 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 26 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

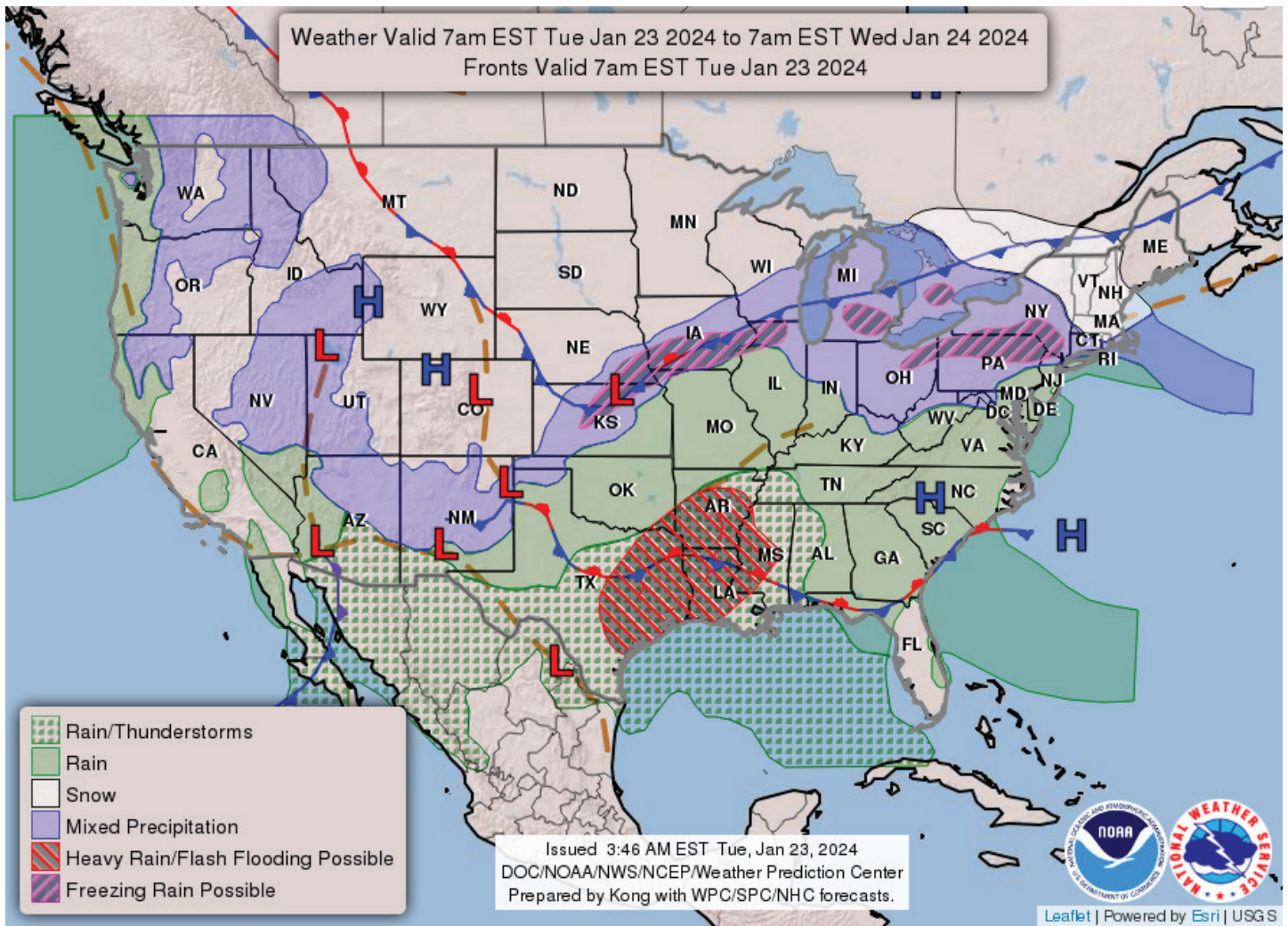
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.41

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:27:17 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:00:08 am





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## Today in Weather History

January 23, 1969: Intermittent freezing rain on the 20th to the 22nd changed to snow on the 22nd, which continued through the 24th. Snowfall of 2 to 6 inches fell across Minnesota and far northeast South Dakota. Blizzard conditions developed on the 23rd and 24th with 30 to 45 mph winds and temperatures dropping to below zero by the 24th. Most of the traffic was halted, with many roads blocked from snow drifting. Some rural roads had been blocked for 3 to 4 weeks. Stranded motorists were common in the area. Some snowfall amounts included 2 inches at Wilmot and Victor, 3 inches at Milbank and Artichoke Lake, and 4 inches at Clear Lake.

1556: An earthquake in Shaanxi, China, kills an estimated 830,000 people. The estimated 8.0 to 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck in the middle of a densely populated area where many homes were a form of an earth shelter dwelling known as a yaodong. Much is known about this disaster as a scholar named Qin Keda survived the earthquake and recorded the details.

1780 - The coldest day of the coldest month of record in the northeastern U.S. A British Army thermometer in New York City registered a reading of 16 degrees below zero. During that infamous hard winter the harbor was frozen solid for five weeks, and the port was cut off from sea supply. (David Ludlum)

1812: A second major series of earthquakes was felt as part of the New Madrid Shocks of the winter of 1811-1812. Many observers reported that the January 23 shocks were as strong as the main earthquake on December 16th of the preceding year.

1916: Browning, Montana, saw the temperature plummet 100 degrees in 24 hours on January 23-24, from a relatively mild 44 to a bone-chilling 56 degrees below zero.

1969: An F4 tornado cut a 120-mile long path from Jefferson through Copiah, Simpson, Smith, Scott, and Newton Counties in Mississippi, killing 32 and injuring 241 others. Property damage was estimated at \$2 million. An inbound Delta Airlines aircraft reported a hook echo on its scope with this storm.

1971: Alaska, and the US, lowest official temp, -80F (-62.2C), was set at Prospect Creek, a Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline construction camp. Fun fact: the low was initially recorded as -79F but adjusted after thermometer calibration.

1987 - Strong winds ushered bitterly cold air into the north central U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in northwest Lower Michigan ranged up to 17 inches in Leelanau County. Wind chill temperatures reached 70 degrees below zero at Sault Ste Marie MI and Hibbing MN. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Northeastern Colorado experienced its most severe windstorm in years. A wind gust to 92 mph was recorded at Boulder CO before the anemometer blew away, and in the mountains, a wind gust to 120 mph was reported at Mines Peak. The high winds blew down a partially constructed viaduct east of Boulder, as nine unanchored concrete girders, each weighing forty-five tons, were blown off their supports. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure brought heavy snow to Wyoming, with 18 inches reported at the Shoshone National Forest, and 17 inches in the Yellowstone Park area. Gunnison CO, with a low of 19 degrees below zero, was the cold spot in the nation for the twelfth day in a row. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A Pacific cold front brought strong and gusty winds to the northwestern U.S. Winds in southeastern Idaho gusted to 62 mph at Burley. Strong winds also prevailed along the eastern slopes of the northern and central Rockies. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 74 mph in Goshen County. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### TAKE TIME TO PREACH

Saint Francis is remembered for his greatness and goodness in spreading the Gospel of Christ – His Lord. His writings still inspire people today.

One day he said to a fellow “brother” who lived with him in the monastery, “Let’s go to town and preach to the people.”

As they walked the dusty road, they stopped to talk to people and play games with the children. Tired and hungry, St. Francis turned to his young companion and said, “Let’s return to the monastery.”

“But,” protested his young colleague, “when do we preach to the people?”

“Every step we took,” said St. Francis, “and every word we spoke and every smile we shared with the people and everything we did was our sermon. We have been preaching all day!”

The only sermons some people will ever hear are the words that come from our lips, and the only preaching that many will “listen” to is what they see in our lives. For many, we are what we say, and our lives demonstrate what we believe.

John wrote, “Those who say they live in God should live as Christ did.” To live as Jesus did, we must obey His teachings and follow His example, and do as He did – show others God’s love.

Years ago, a hymn writer asked most effectively: “Can others see Jesus in you?”

Prayer: Father, may the disturbing words of that hymn trouble our minds and hearts and force us to examine our lives and then make changes that will please You. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Those who say they live in God should live as Christ did. 1 John 2:6



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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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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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 DRAW: 17 Hrs 3 Mins 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.24

18 22 31 39 50 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,550,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 18 Mins 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.24

7 26 30 31 38 3

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 33 Mins 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.20.24

6 7 11 27 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$27,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 33 Mins 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.24

17 31 34 54 63 13

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.24

24 25 43 52 63 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$145,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



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## News from the Associated Press

### Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Alcester-Hudson 57, Irene-Wakonda 54  
Castlewood 48, DeSmet 40  
Chamberlain 58, Bon Homme 54  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 79, Todd County 62  
Clark-Willow Lake 42, Great Plains Lutheran 40  
Corsica/Stickney 39, Kimball-White Lake 35  
Crazy Horse 74, St Francis 62  
Dell Rapids 64, Milbank 45  
Estelline-Hendricks 65, Wilmot 34  
Ethan 59, Canistota 57  
Freeman 47, Parker 41  
Gregory 72, Burke 49  
Groton 66, Northwestern 27  
Jones County 87, Colome 65  
Lennox 82, Platte-Geddes 40  
Marty 86, Omaha Nation, Neb. 73  
Pine Ridge 72, Vermillion 64  
Richardton-Taylor, N.D. 64, McIntosh 36  
Scotland 65, Avon 57  
Upton, Wyo. 60, New Underwood 48  
Viborg-Hurley 56, Baltic 55

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Alcester-Hudson 41, Irene-Wakonda 37  
Avon 62, Scotland 24  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 59, Todd County 53  
Corsica/Stickney 50, Bridgewater-Emery 38  
Ethan 70, Canistota 31  
Freeman 65, Parker 34  
Groton 49, Northwestern 45  
Herreid-Selby 69, South Border, N.D. 33  
Jones County 50, Colome 25  
Lennox 56, Platte-Geddes 30  
Madison 54, Baltic 38  
Milbank 66, Dell Rapids 43  
Mobridge-Pollock 74, Potter County 57  
Richardton-Taylor, N.D. 78, McIntosh 21  
Sioux Falls Christian 59, West Central 38  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 52, Yankton 26  
Webster 43, Waverly-South Shore 8  
Winner 49, Crow Creek Tribal School 18

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

## 21 Israeli troops are killed in the deadliest attack on the military since the Gaza offensive began

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and NAJIB JOBAIN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinian militants carried out the deadliest single attack on Israel's forces since the Hamas raid that triggered the war, killing 21 soldiers, the military said Tuesday, a significant setback that could add to mounting calls for a cease-fire.

Hours later, the military announced that ground forces had encircled the southern city of Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest. That marked a major advance, but it was unclear how much closer it would bring Israel to defeating Hamas or freeing Israeli hostages — two central war aims that have proved increasingly elusive — or what impact it would have on cease-fire talks that appear to be gathering pace.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mourned the soldiers but vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "absolute victory" over Hamas. But Israelis are increasingly divided on whether such a victory is possible — and whether it is compatible with bringing back the hostages. In previous conflicts, large numbers of casualties have pressured Israel to halt military operations.

A senior Egyptian official said Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which the hostages would be freed in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and top Hamas leaders in Gaza would be allowed to relocate to other countries.

The official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said Hamas rejected the proposal and is insisting that no more hostages will be released until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws from Gaza. Israel's government declined to comment on the talks.

The official said Egypt and Qatar — which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas — were developing a multistage proposal to try to bridge the gaps. Families of the hostages have called for Israel to reach a deal with Hamas, saying time is running out to bring their relatives home alive.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas crossed the border Oct. 7, killing over 1,200 people and abducting some 250 others. More than 100 were released in November during a weeklong cease-fire.

The offensive has caused widespread death and destruction, displaced an estimated 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people and left one-quarter facing starvation.

The war has heightened regional tensions, with Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen attacking United States and Israeli targets in support of Palestinians. The U.S. and Britain launched another wave of strikes Monday against Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have targeted international shipping in the Red Sea.

### DEADLY FIGHTING IN THE CENTER AND SOUTH

Hamas is believed to have suffered heavy losses but has continued to put up stiff resistance in the face of one of the deadliest air and ground offensives in recent history. Militants are still battling Israeli forces across the territory and launching rockets into Israel.

On Monday, Israeli reservists were preparing explosives to demolish two buildings in the built-up Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, when a militant fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank nearby. The blast triggered the explosives, causing both two-story buildings to collapse on the soldiers inside.

At least 217 soldiers have been killed since the ground offensive began in late October, including three killed in a separate event Monday, according to the military.

Netanyahu acknowledged it was "one of the hardest days" since the war began and said the military would launch an investigation. "In the name of our heroes, and for our own lives, we will not stop fighting until absolute victory," he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Meanwhile, Gaza's Health Ministry said Tuesday that the bodies of 195 people killed in Israeli bombardments were brought to hospitals in the previous 24 hours. Hospitals also received 354 wounded, it said.

The fatalities brought the death toll in the strip to 25,490 since the war began, the ministry said. Another 63,354 were wounded, it added. The ministry's count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

Israel claims to have killed thousands of militants and to have largely defeated Hamas in northern Gaza

in operations that caused widespread destruction to that part of the territory, including Gaza City. In recent weeks the offensive has focused on Khan Younis and refugee camps in central Gaza, including Maghazi, that date back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

The military said its forces had killed dozens of militants in Khan Younis in recent days and had encircled the city, without providing evidence. It was not possible to independently confirm those claims.

Israel believes Hamas commanders may be hiding in vast tunnel complexes beneath Khan Younis, the hometown of the group's top leader in Gaza, Yehya Sinwar, whose location is unknown. Hamas leaders are also believed to be using hostages as human shields, further complicating any rescue efforts.

#### PRESSURE FOR A CEASE-FIRE

The growing death toll and dire humanitarian situation have led to increasing international pressure on Israel to scale back the offensive and agree to a path for the creation of a Palestinian state after the war. The United States, which has provided crucial military aid for the offensive, has joined those calls.

But Netanyahu, whose popularity has plummeted since Oct. 7 and whose governing coalition is beholden to far-right parties, has rebuffed both demands.

Instead, he has said Israel will need to expand operations and eventually take over the Gaza side of the border with Egypt — an area where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who have fled from other areas are packed into overflowing U.N.-run shelters and sprawling tent camps.

That drew an angry protest from Egypt's government, which rejected Israeli allegations that Hamas smuggles in weapons across the heavily guarded frontier.

Diaa Rashwan, head of Egypt's State Information Service, said Monday that any Israeli move to occupy the border area would "lead to a serious threat" to relations between the two countries, which signed a landmark peace treaty over four decades ago. Egypt is also deeply concerned about any potential influx of Palestinian refugees into its Sinai Peninsula.

Rashwan said Egypt was in full control of the border after taking a number of measures in recent years, including the creation of a 5-kilometer (3-mile) buffer zone and the construction of barriers above and below ground.

## **Suspect in killing of 8 people in suburban Chicago has fatally shot himself in Texas, police say**

By KATHLEEN FOODY and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A man suspected of shooting and killing eight people in suburban Chicago fatally shot himself after a confrontation with law enforcement officials in Texas, police said late Monday.

Police in Joliet, Illinois, said on Facebook that at about 8:30 p.m. Central time 23-year-old Romeo Nance was located by U.S. Marshals near Natalia, Texas, and that Nance shot himself after a confrontation.

The Medina County Sheriff's Office in Texas said on Facebook that the agency received a call about a person suspected in the Chicago killings heading into the county on Interstate 35. A standoff then occurred between Nance and police from multiple agencies at a gas station, where Nance shot himself, the sheriff's office said.

Nance is suspected of fatally shooting eight people at three locations in the Chicago suburbs, sparking a search that left neighbors on edge earlier Monday as police warned he was still on the loose and should be considered "armed and dangerous."

Police in Will County in Illinois and Joliet previously said they did not know of a motive for the killings, but said Nance knew the victims. The FBI's fugitive task force had been assisting local police in the search for the suspect, Joliet Police Chief William Evans said.

The victims were found Sunday and Monday at three separate residences, authorities told reporters at a news conference earlier Monday evening.

One of the people killed was found Sunday in a home in Will County. Seven others were found Monday at two homes on the same block in Joliet, located about about 6 miles (9.6 kilometers) northwest of the scene police discovered first.

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Authorities said they also believe Nance was connected to another shooting in Joliet that wounded a man on Sunday but would not discuss their evidence.

"I've been a policeman 29 years and this is probably the worst crime scene I've ever been associated with," Evans said during a news conference outside the Joliet homes Monday evening.

Will County Chief Deputy Dan Jungles said during the Monday news conference that deputies had been staking out one of the houses since Sunday evening in case Nance, the suspect in the first fatal shooting they discovered, returned to them. Nance's last known address was one of the homes, police said.

When no one showed, deputies finally went to the door of one of the houses. No one answered so they crossed the street to the other house, which they knew was linked to the first house and found the first bodies. Five bodies were found in one house and two bodies were found in the other.

Jungles said he didn't have any indication yet of how long the people in the houses had been dead. He said that autopsies were pending.

Evans said the victims found Monday in the houses were family members. Asked if the victims were members of the suspect's family, Jungles said he couldn't comment except to say that the suspect knew them.

Teresa Smart lives about a block away from where seven of the victims were found and had said she was worried she and her family wouldn't be able to sleep Monday night.

"This is way too close to home," she said, adding that police cars had been blocking streets throughout the neighborhood.

"I keep looking out the window and double checking my doors," she said. "It's super scary."

Joliet Police said in a Facebook post earlier on Monday afternoon that they were investigating "multiple" people found dead and shared Nance's photo and images of a vehicle. Authorities identified the vehicle as a red Toyota Camry.

Earlier Monday, the Will County Sheriff's Office shared images of the same car via Facebook and said it had been seen at the scenes of two separate shootings Sunday afternoon.

## Russian missiles target Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv, killing at least 6 and wounding dozens

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missiles targeted Ukraine's two biggest cities on Tuesday morning, damaging apartment buildings and killing at least six people after Moscow shunned any deal to end the almost two-year war that is backed by Kyiv and its Western allies.

The Russian barrage included more than 40 ballistic, cruise, anti-aircraft and guided missiles, officials said. It injured at least 20 people in four districts of Kyiv, the capital, including a 13-year-old boy, according to Mayor Vitalii Klitschko.

In Kharkiv, in northeast Ukraine, the onslaught injured 42 people as the missiles damaged around 30 residential buildings and shattered nearly a thousand apartment windows in icy weather, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said the temperature in the city was minus 7 Celsius (19 Fahrenheit).

An entire section of a multi-story residential building was destroyed, trapping an unknown number of people there, Terekhov said.

Lying about 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the border with Russia, Kharkiv has often felt the brunt of Russia's winter campaign of long-range strikes that commonly hit civilian areas.

The attacks keep Ukrainians on edge while the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line has barely budged. Both sides' inability to deliver a knockout punch on the battlefield has pushed the fighting toward trench and artillery warfare. Analysts say the Kremlin's forces stockpiled missiles at the end of last year to press a winter campaign of aerial bombardment.

There appeared to be scant chance of an end to the war any time soon. Russia's foreign minister defied the United States and other Ukraine supporters at a U.N. meeting Monday, ruling out any peace plan they



support.

Sergey Lavrov, Russia's top diplomat, claimed that Ukrainian forces have been "a complete failure" on the battlefield and are "incapable" of defeating Russia.

The attacks on Kyiv and Kharkiv came two days after Moscow-installed officials in eastern Ukraine claimed that Ukrainian shelling killed 27 people on the outskirts of Russian-occupied Donetsk. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called it a "monstrous terrorist act."

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

The Ukrainian civilian deaths have helped stir international outrage over Russia's invasion of its neighbor, and Ukrainian officials have pointed to the attacks in their efforts to secure further military aid from the country's allies.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk on Monday was the latest foreign leader to visit Ukraine and announce a new aid package that includes a loan to buy larger weapons and a commitment to find ways to manufacture them together.

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

But the United States, Ukraine's main supplier, is currently unable to send Ukraine any ammunition or weapons.

While waiting for Congress to pass a budget and potentially approve more money for Ukraine's fight, the U.S. will be looking to allies to keep bridging the gap.

## Live updates | 21 Israeli soldiers are killed in Gaza as criticism of war's handling rises at home

By The Associated Press undefined

The Israeli army said Tuesday that 21 soldiers were killed in the Gaza Strip in the deadliest attack on its troops since the war began, as criticism grows over the government's handling of the 3-month-old war against Hamas.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead until Israel crushes the ruling Hamas militant group and wins the freedom of over 100 hostages held captive in Gaza. Israelis are increasingly divided on the question of whether it's possible to do either. On Monday, hostages' family members disrupted a committee meeting in Israel's parliament, yelling, "You won't sit here while they are dying there!"

Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip pounded the southern city of Khan Younis on Monday, pushing thousands of Palestinians to flee even further south. The war has displaced some 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million residents, and one in four of them are starving, the United Nations says.

The Health Ministry in Gaza says more than 25,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, which erupted on Oct. 7 when militants from Gaza attacked southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages.

Currently:

- Families of Israeli hostages storm Knesset, demanding a deal for their release.
- Twenty-one Israeli soldiers are killed in the deadliest single attack on the army since the war began.
- The European Union pushes for Palestinian statehood, rejecting Israeli leader's insistence that it's off the table.
- U.S. and British militaries launch a new round of joint strikes against multiple Houthi sites in Yemen.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

ISRAEL SAYS IT HAS ENCIRCLED KHAN YOUNIS CITY

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military says its forces have encircled the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis. The territory's second largest city has seen heavy fighting in recent days, with dozens of Palestinians

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killed and wounded.

Israeli officials have said top Hamas leaders may be hiding in tunnels in the city.

The military said its forces have killed dozens of militants in Khan Younis in recent days and has encircled the city. It did not provide evidence, and it was not possible to independently confirm details about the fighting there.

Khan Younis is the hometown of Yehya Sinwar, Hamas' top leader in Gaza, whose whereabouts are unknown. The military announced the encirclement in a statement on Tuesday.

## NETANYAHU MOURNS LOSS OF 21 SOLDIERS

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has mourned the loss of 21 soldiers in the deadliest single attack in Gaza and says the army will fight on until "absolute victory."

In a posting on X, formerly known as Twitter, Netanyahu said Monday was "one of the hardest days since the outbreak of the war."

He said the army will launch an investigation into the attack, in which a militant fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank, setting off a secondary explosion that brought two buildings down on the soldiers.

It was the deadliest single attack on Israeli forces in Gaza since the ground operation began.

In the posting on Tuesday, Netanyahu wrote: "In the name of our heroes, and for our own lives, we will not stop fighting until absolute victory."

## OFFICIAL SAYS ISRAEL HAS PROPOSED A 2-MONTH CEASE-FIRE

CAIRO — A senior Egyptian official says Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which Hamas would release Israeli hostages in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Under the proposal, Yehya Sinwar and other top Hamas leaders in Gaza would be allowed to relocate to other countries.

The official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said Hamas has rejected the proposal. The militant group is insisting on a permanent cease-fire before any further release of hostages. Israel's leaders have thus far ruled that out.

The official said Hamas leaders have also refused to leave Gaza and are demanding that Israel fully withdraw from the territory and allow Palestinians to return to their homes.

The official said Egypt and Qatar, which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas, are developing a multi-stage proposal to try to bridge the gaps. The proposal would include ending the war, releasing the hostages and putting forth a vision for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli media have also reported on the diplomatic efforts, describing the same general outline of a potential agreement.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office declined to comment on any possible talks, citing potential risks to the hostages. Qatari officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the proposal.

White House senior adviser Brett McGurk is in the region this week to meet with Egyptian and Qatari officials to discuss hostage negotiations. The White House has also declined comment.

In Washington, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said Monday that a temporary pause in fighting was critical to winning the release of more hostages.

"You can't enact safe passage for hostages out of a danger zone if people are shooting at each other," Kirby said. "We don't support a general cease-fire, which is usually put in place in the expectation that you're going to end a conflict."

## 21 ISRAELI SOLDIERS KILLED IN GAZA

JERUSALEM — Israel's army says a total of 21 soldiers were killed in an attack in central Gaza, making it the largest single loss of life for the military since the war began.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesperson, made the announcement Tuesday, updating an earlier toll. He said the soldiers were preparing explosives to demolish two buildings on Monday when a militant fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank nearby, setting off the explosion prematurely. The buildings collapsed on the soldiers.

The heavy death toll could add new momentum to calls for Israel to pause the offensive or even halt it altogether. Large numbers of Israeli casualties have put pressure on Israel's government to halt past

military operations.

**EGYPT WARNS ISRAEL NOT TO SEIZE CONTROL OF LAND THAT SEPARATES THEM**

CAIRO — Egypt has warned Israel that any attempt to seize security control of the strip of land that separates Gaza and Egypt will result in a “serious threat” to relations between the neighboring countries.

The Philadelphi corridor is a 14-kilometer (nine-mile) -long slither of land that separates Egypt from Gaza. “It must be strictly emphasized that any Israeli move in this direction will lead to a serious threat to Egyptian-Israeli relations,” Diaa Rashwan, head of Egypt’s State Information Service, said in an online statement Monday.

Israeli leaders have talked about taking control of the corridor to prevent possible weapons smuggling into Gaza.

Egypt fears that a military operation on the border could push large numbers of Palestinians into its territory.

Rashwan said Gaza’s western border was secure and that Israeli claims that weapons were being smuggled from Egypt into Gaza were false. The war has greatly tested relations between Israel and Egypt.

Troop deployments on either side of the Egypt-Gaza border are regulated in bilateral agreements between Israel and Egypt.

The two countries have maintained diplomatic ties since 1980, with Egypt having brokered a number of cease-fire deals during recent conflicts in Gaza.

Throughout the current war, Egypt has accused Israel of plotting to nullify Palestinian demands for statehood by driving Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt. Israel denies this is part of its plan.

**NEW ZEALAND WILL SEND A TEAM TO ASSIST IN THE RED SEA**

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — New Zealand announced Tuesday it was sending a six-member team to join an international maritime security coalition in the Red Sea.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said the country’s defense personnel will contribute to protecting ships in the Middle East from operational headquarters in the region and elsewhere.

“Houthi attacks against commercial and naval shipping are illegal, unacceptable and profoundly destabilizing,” Luxon said in a written statement Tuesday.

The deployment is mandated to conclude no later than July 31.

## **Japan is rich, but many of its children are poor; a film documents the plight of single mothers**

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The women work hard, sleeping only a few hours a night, as they juggle the demands of caring for their children and doing housework — all while suffering from poverty.

The award-winning independent documentary film “The Ones Left Behind,” released last year, tells the story of such single mothers in Japan, weaving together interviews with the women and experts, and showing the other side of a culture whose ideal is for women to get married and become stay-at-home housewives and mothers.

“This is a topic that no one wants to really touch. In Japan, it’s very taboo,” Australian filmmaker Rionne McAvoy said Tuesday. “I think it’s a very apt title because I feel that single mothers and their children have really been left behind in society.”

One woman in the film says she works from 8:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m., while earning less than 200,000 yen (\$1,350) a month.

Tomiko Nakayama, another woman in the film, says: “I have to do everything on my own.”

Despite being one of the world’s richest nations, Japan has one of the highest rates of child poverty among OECD countries, with one in every seven children living in poverty. About half of single-parent households live below the poverty line.

Japanese society also tends to favor full-time male workers, and women often receive lower wages and fewer benefits, even when they are working full-time and overtime.

Another woman in the film is near tears as she describes how her child stopped asking her about take-your-parent-to-school days. She knew her mom was too busy and couldn't attend.

McAvoy's wife, Ayuri, who produced the film, was formerly a single mother. But both deny that's why Rionne McAvoy made the film. Initially, she wasn't interested in getting involved in his filmmaking.

What makes the story so "Japanese," according to Rionne McAvoy, is how the country's conformist culture makes many women accept their hardships, too ashamed to ask for help, "keeping their public face and private face separate," he told The Associated Press.

"The Ones Left Behind" was the Best Documentary Winner at the Miyakojima Charity International Film Festival last year and an official selection at the Yokohama International Film Festival.

Despite repeated promises by the Japanese government to provide monetary assistance to people with children, action has been slow, said Akihiko Kato, a professor at Meiji University who appears in the film.

That's partly why the birth rate is crashing in Japan from 1.2 million births in the year 2000 to below 700,000 today. Japan also lacks a system that can force fathers to pay child support, according to Kato.

In the past, grandparents, neighbors and other members of the extended family helped look after children. In the modern age of the nuclear family, the single-parent household is often on its own.

What this means for the children is sobering, said Yanfei Zhou, a social science professor at Japan Women's University who appears in the film. The gap between the haves and have-nots is growing, and the children are destined to inherit the cycle of poverty, she said.

The story of the underclass, including those who are forgotten and don't have a voice, has long fascinated McAvoy. His next film will be about young people driven to suicide in Japan. He said that being an outsider allows him to tell stories with a fresh perspective and without bias.

"It's one thing we can do more of in society: to try recognize people's cries for help," McAvoy said.

## **The Pentagon has no more money for Ukraine as it hosts a meeting of 50 allies on support for Kyiv**

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time since Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin established the international group to support Ukraine in April 2022, the United States will host the monthly gathering of about 50 countries out of money, unable to send the ammunition and missiles that Ukraine needs to fend off Russia.

While waiting for Congress to pass a budget and potentially approve more money for Ukraine's fight, the U.S. will be looking to allies to keep bridging the gap.

Tuesday's meeting will focus on longer-term needs, deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters Monday.

"Even though we aren't able to provide our security assistance right now, our partners are continuing to do that," Singh said.

The meeting will be virtual because Austin is still recuperating at home from complications of treatment for prostate cancer.

The Pentagon announced its last security assistance for Ukraine on Dec. 27, a \$250 million package that included 155 mm rounds, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and other high-demand items drawn from existing U.S. stockpiles.

The U.S. has not been able to provide additional munitions since then because the money for replenishing those stockpiles has run out and Congress has yet to approve more funds.

More than \$110 billion in aid for both Ukraine and Israel is stalled over disagreements between Congress and the White House over other policy priorities, including additional security for the U.S.-Mexico border.

Meanwhile, Russia has shown no willingness to end its conflict in Ukraine, and on Monday the United Nations ruled out any peace plan backed by Kyiv and the West.

The U.S. has provided Ukraine more than \$44.2 billion in security assistance since Russia invaded in February 2022. About \$23.6 billion of that was pulled from existing military stockpiles and almost \$19 billion was sent in the form of longer-term military contracts, for items that will take months to procure. So even



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though funds have run out, some previously purchased weapons will continue to flow in. An additional \$1.7 billion has been provided by the U.S. State Department in the form of foreign military financing.

The U.S. and approximately 30 international partners are also continuing to train Ukrainian forces, and to date have trained a total of 118,000 Ukrainians at locations around the world, said Col. Marty O'Donnell, spokesman for U.S. Army Europe and Africa.

The United States has trained approximately 18,000 of those fighters, including approximately 16,300 soldiers in Germany. About 1,500 additional fighters are currently going through training.

## Trump seeks control of the GOP primary in New Hampshire against Nikki Haley, his last major rival

By HOLLY RAMER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Donald Trump is aiming for a commanding victory Tuesday in New Hampshire, securing a sweep of the first two Republican primary races that would make a November rematch with President Joe Biden look more likely than ever.

The biggest question is whether Trump's last major rival, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, will be able to eat into his margin — or pull off an upset outright. Haley has dedicated significant time and financial resources to New Hampshire, hoping to appeal to its famously independent-minded electorate.

In the first results released early Tuesday, all six registered voters of tiny Dixville Notch cast their ballots for Haley over Trump. The resort town is the only one in New Hampshire this year that opted to vote at midnight.

Trump won New Hampshire's Republican primary big during his first run for president in 2016, but some of his allies lost key races during the midterms two years ago. Haley also has to contend with an opponent who has a deep bond with the GOP base and has concentrated on winning the state decisively enough that it would effectively end the competitive phase of the Republican primary.

If successful, Trump would be the first Republican presidential candidate to win open races in Iowa and New Hampshire since both states began leading the election calendar in 1976 — a clear sign of his continued grip on the party's most-loyal voters.

Trump's allies are already pressuring Haley to leave the race and those calls will intensify if he wins New Hampshire easily. Were she to drop out, that would effectively decide the GOP primary on its second stop, well before the vast majority of Republican voters across the country have been able to vote.

Haley has been campaigning with New Hampshire's popular Republican governor, Chris Sununu, a Trump critic. She insists she's in the race for the long run, telling supporters at a VFW hall in Franklin on Monday that "America does not do coronations."

"This is about, do you have more of the same, or do you want someone who's going to take us forward with new solutions," Haley told reporters, also saying that, "We can either do the whole thing that we've always done and live in that chaos world that we've had, or we can go forward with no drama, no vendettas and some results for the American people."

"This is a two-person race," she added.

Haley and Trump were both hoping to capitalize on high-profile recent departures from the race. Haley could get a lift from some supporters of former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who campaigned around decrying Trump but ended his bid shortly before Iowa's caucus last week. Trump, meanwhile, may be able to consolidate support from conservative voters who were supporting Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who dropped his White House bid on Sunday.

Trump, who appeared at a pre-primary rally in Laconia with one of his former primary rivals, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, was already looking ahead to being the race's last Republican candidate. Asked during a Monday interview with Newsmax about Haley possibly abandoning her campaign after New Hampshire, the former president said he'd never call on her to do that but added, "Maybe she'll be dropping out Tuesday."

Scot Stebbins Sr., who attended Trump's rally in a Make America Great Again baseball cap, called him

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"the greatest president we've had since Abraham Lincoln" adding that Trump "has done nothing but good for our nation."

Stebbins said he thought the four criminal cases and 91 felony counts Trump is facing constituted "a witch hunt" and said Trump would "get rid of all the corrupt politicians who have been in there too long that are getting paid off."

"He can't be bought," Stebbins said. "He's a true American. He always has been."

Democrats were also holding a primary Tuesday, but it was unlike any in recent memory.

Biden championed new Democratic National Committee rules that have the party's 2024 primary process beginning on Feb. 3 in South Carolina, rather than in Iowa or New Hampshire. He argued that Black voters, the party's most reliable constituency and a critical part of his win in South Carolina that revived his 2020 primary campaign after three opening loses, should have a larger and earlier role in determining its nominee.

New Hampshire's Democrats, citing state laws dictating that their state hold the nation's first primary after Iowa's caucus, defied the revamped order and pushed ahead with their primary as scheduled.

Biden didn't campaign here and his name won't be on the ballot, meaning the state's Democrats can vote for the president's two little-known major primary challengers, Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips and self-help author Marianne Williamson. Still, many of New Hampshire's top Democrats backed a write-in campaign that they expect Biden to handily win.

Some voters who might otherwise back Democrats could also vote in the more-competitive Republican primary if they are undeclared.

Karen Padgett is an undeclared voter who saw Haley on Monday. She said she'd voted for Trump in the last two elections but didn't plan to do so again but also is "really annoyed with Joe Biden that he kind of wrote New Hampshire off."

"Her statement is everybody's so old there, they're so entrenched," Padgett said of Haley's promises to shake up Washington in ways that Trump pledged to, but never did. "Let's get some new people in there."

Instead of focusing on New Hampshire, Biden was joining Vice President Kamala in northern Virginia for a rally in defense of abortion rights, which Democrats see as a winning issue for them across the country in November.

There's nonetheless a growing sense of inevitability around November being a reprisal of Biden versus Trump. Both men have been criticized by their opponents over age — Biden is 81, Trump 77 — and each has painted the other as woefully unfit for another White House term.

Public opinion polls suggest most Americans oppose a rematch. An AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll in December found that 56% of U.S. adults would be very or somewhat dissatisfied with Biden as the Democratic nominee — and 58% felt the same about Trump as the GOP pick.

Some New Hampshire voters expressed similar frustration.

Jeff Caira, 66, a Republican from Sanbornton, said he was undecided in the primary but that he wanted a candidate who will tackle "the issues, rather than address the baggage that the other two candidates seem to have."

He said he was "disappointed" that as large as the U.S. is, "the two front-runners are the best we have to offer."

## Alabama calls nitrogen execution method 'painless' and 'humane,' but critics raise doubts

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama, unless stopped by the courts, intends to strap inmate Kenneth Eugene Smith to a gurney and use a gas mask to replace breathable air with nitrogen, depriving him of oxygen needed to stay alive, on Thursday in the nation's first execution attempt with the method.

The Alabama attorney general's office told federal appeals court judges last week that nitrogen hypoxia is "the most painless and humane method of execution known to man." But what exactly Smith, 58, will

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feel after the warden switches on the gas is unknown, some doctors and critics say.

"What effect the condemned person will feel from the nitrogen gas itself, no one knows," Dr. Jeffrey Keller, president of the American College of Correctional Physicians, wrote in an email. "This has never been done before. It is an experimental procedure."

Keller, who was not involved in developing the Alabama protocol, said the plan is to "eliminate all of the oxygen from the air" that Smith is breathing by replacing it with nitrogen.

"Since the condemned person will not be breathing any oxygen, he will die," Keller said. "It is little different than putting a plastic bag over one's head."

The state of Alabama has predicted in federal court filings that the nitrogen gas will "cause unconsciousness within seconds, and cause death within minutes."

The state plans to place a "full facepiece supplied air respirator" over Smith's face. The nitrogen would 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 execution would be the first attempt to use a new method since lethal injection was introduced in 1982. Three states — Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma — have authorized nitrogen hypoxia as an execution method. Some states are exploring new methods as lethal injection drugs have been difficult to find.

The American Veterinary Medical Association wrote in 2020 euthanasia guidelines that nitrogen hypoxia is not an acceptable euthanasia method for most mammals because the anoxic environment "is distressing." And experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council cautioned they believe the execution method could violate the prohibition on torture.

Dr. Joel Zivot, an anesthesiologist who as one of four professionals who filed the U.N. complaint that led to the warning, said Smith is at risk for seizures and choking to death on his own vomit. He said any leak under the mask could prolong the execution.

"A leak will do two things. It will potentially endanger people around. ... Air could then get under the mask as well," Zivot said. "And so the execution could be prolonged or maybe he might never die, he just could get injured."

Much of what is recorded about death from nitrogen comes from industrial accidents — where leaks or cannister mix-ups have killed people — and from suicide attempts. The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board found 80 people were killed by nitrogen asphyxiation between 1992 and 2002.

Smith was one of two men convicted of the 1988 murder-for-hire of a preacher's wife. Prosecutors said the men were paid \$1,000 to kill Elizabeth Sennett, 45, on behalf of her husband, who wanted to collect on insurance. The coroner testified Sennett was stabbed repeatedly. Her husband killed himself when he became a suspect. John Forrest Parker, the other man convicted, was executed in 2010.

The victim's son, Charles Sennett Jr., said in an interview with WAAY-TV that Smith "has to pay for what he's done." He and other family members plan to witness the execution.

"And some of these people out there say, 'Well, he doesn't need to suffer like that.' Well, he didn't ask Mama how to suffer?" the son told the station. "They just did it. They stabbed her — multiple times."

Smith's initial conviction was overturned. He was convicted again in 1996. The jury recommended a life sentence by 11-1, but a judge sentenced Smith to death. Alabama no longer allows a judge to override a jury's sentencing decision in death penalty cases.

Smith is one of few people to survive a prior execution attempt. The state attempted a lethal injection in 2022, but the prison system called it off before the drugs were administered because the staff had difficulty connecting the two required intravenous lines.

Smith's attorneys are asking courts to block the nitrogen execution, arguing that its unconstitutional for the state to make a second attempt to execute him and that the state's plan violates the ban on cruel and unusual punishment and at least merits more scrutiny before it is used.

"It's indefensible for Alabama officials to simply dismiss the very real risks this untested method presents and experiment on a man who has already survived one execution attempt," Robin M. Maher, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, said.

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The Alabama attorney general's office noted that Smith, when previously fighting lethal injection, had suggested nitrogen as an alternative execution method. Courts require inmates challenging their execution method to suggest an alternative method.

"Now that the State is prepared to give Smith what he asked for, he objects," the attorney general's office said in a Monday statement.

The inmate's spiritual adviser said Smith is afraid of what is about to happen to him.

"Presently, Kenny is sickened, deeply pained and horrified at the nitrogen hypoxia experiment that is to come," the Rev. Jeff Hood, a death penalty opponent, said. "Despite the darkness that has descended, he tries very hard to fill every second he might have left with as much love as he can muster."

Several protests are planned in the state. A group of faith leaders delivered a petition to the state's governor on Monday asking her to halt the execution. "Prisoners are not guinea pigs," the Rev. Shane Isner of First Christian Church said on the Capitol steps.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey told The Associated Press last week that the state was ready to proceed.

"Execution by that method was passed in 2018," Ivey said. "The attorney general's office and the Department of Corrections has assured us that all the protocols are in place, and we will carry out that law."

## **Almost 80 years after the Holocaust, 245,000 Jewish survivors are still alive**

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Almost 80 years after the Holocaust, about 245,000 Jewish survivors are still living across more than 90 countries, a new report revealed Tuesday.

Nearly half of them, or 49%, are living in Israel; 18% are in Western Europe, 16% in the United States, and 12% in countries of the former Soviet Union, according to a study by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also referred to as the Claims Conference.

Before the publication of the demographic report, there were only vague estimates about how many Holocaust survivors are still alive.

Their numbers are quickly dwindling, as most are very old and often of frail health, with a median age of 86. Twenty percent of survivors are older than 90, and more women (61%) than men (39%) are still alive.

The vast majority, or 96% of survivors, are "child survivors" who were born after 1928, says the report "Holocaust Survivors Worldwide. A Demographic Overview" which is based on figures that were collected up until August.

"The numbers in this report are interesting, but it is also important to look past the numbers to see the individuals they represent," said Greg Schneider, the Claims Conference's executive vice president.

"These are Jews who were born into a world that wanted to see them murdered. They endured the atrocities of the Holocaust in their youth and were forced to rebuild an entire life out of the ashes of the camps and ghettos that ended their families and communities."

Six million European Jews and people from other minorities were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust.

It is not clear exactly how many Jews survived the death camps, the ghettos or somewhere in hiding across Nazi-occupied Europe, but their numbers were a far cry from the pre-war Jewish population in Europe.

In Poland, of the 3.3 million Jews living there in 1939, only about 300,000 survived.

Around 560,000 Jews lived in Germany in 1933, the year Adolf Hitler came to power. At the end of World War II in 1945, their numbers had diminished to about 15,000 — through emigration and extermination.

Germany's Jewish community grew again after 1990, when more than 215,000 Jewish migrants and their families came from countries of the former Soviet Union, some of them also survivors.

Nowadays, only 14,200 survivors still live in Germany, the demographic report concluded.

One of them is Ruth Winkelmann, who survived by hiding with her mother and sister in a garden shed on the northern outskirts of Berlin. Her father was killed in the Auschwitz death camp. Her younger sister Esther died of illness, hunger and exhaustion in March 1945, just weeks before the liberation of Berlin by



the Soviet Red Army.

Winkelmann, who is 95 and still lives in Berlin, said there hasn't been a day in her life when she didn't remember her beloved father.

"It always hurts," she said. "The pain is there day and night."

For its new report, the Claims Conference said it defined Holocaust survivors "based on agreements with the German government in assessing eligibility for compensation programs."

For Germany, that definition includes all Jews who lived in the country from Jan. 30, 1933, when Hitler came to power, to May 1945, when Germany surrendered unconditionally in World War II.

The group handles claims on behalf of Jews who suffered under the Nazis and negotiates compensation with Germany's finance ministry every year. In June, the Claims Conference said that Germany has agreed to extend another \$1.4 billion, (1.29 billion euros), overall for Holocaust survivors around the globe for 2024.

Since 1952, the German government has paid more than \$90 billion to individuals for suffering and losses resulting from persecution by the Nazis.

The Claims Conference administers several compensation programs that provide direct payments to survivors globally, provides grants to more than 300 social service agencies worldwide and ensures survivors receive services such as home care, food, medicine, transportation and socialization.

It has also launched several educational projects that illustrate the importance of passing on the Holocaust survivors' testimonies to younger generations as their numbers become smaller and antisemitism is on the rise again.

"The data we have amassed, not only tells us how many and where survivors are, it clearly indicates that most survivors are at a period of life where their need for care and services is growing," said Gideon Taylor, the president of the Claims Conference.

"Now is the time to double down on our attention on this waning population. Now is when they need us the most."

Winkelmann, the Berlin survivor, didn't talk to anyone for decades about the horrors she endured during the Holocaust, not even her husband.

But in the 1990s, she was one day approached by a stranger who looked at her necklace with a Star of David pendant, asked if she was a Jewish survivor and whether she could talk about her experience to her daughter's school class.

"When I started talking about the Holocaust for the first time, in front of those students, I couldn't stop crying," Winkelmann told The Associated Press last week. "But since then I've talked about it so many times, and every time I shed less tears."

While she said there can never be any closure for the terror she and all the other survivors lived through, Winkelmann has now made it her mission in life to tell her story. Even at 95, she still visits schools across Germany — and has a message for her listeners.

"I tell the children that we all have one God, and although we gave him different names and have different prayers for him, we shouldn't look at what separates us, but what unites us," she said.

"And even if we disagree, we should never stop talking to each other."

## **Business owners thought they would never reopen after Maine's deadliest shooting. Then support grew**

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — Immediately after Maine's deadliest mass shooting, the owners of the bowling alley and the bar in Lewiston where the gunman killed a total of 18 people were certain their doors were closed for good.

Yet as time passed, they came to the same conclusion: They had to reopen.

In interviews with The Associated Press, Just-In-Time Recreation co-owner Samantha Juray and Schemengees Bar & Grille co-owner Kathy Lebel spoke about their businesses, the Oct. 25 shooting, and how

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their thinking shifted after support began to build from their families, the Lewiston community, and from across the country.

Kathy Lebel loved to play pool. But she couldn't fit a full table in her house and spent way too much money at local pool halls.

Then one night in bed, her husband, David, mentioned that one of her haunts, Schemengees, was up for sale. Lebel immediately sat up and said they should buy it.

"He looks at me and says, 'We're not going to buy that,'" Lebel says. "I'm like, 'Are you kidding me? I'm going to buy it. I don't know what it takes, but I want that pool hall.'"

Lebel got her way. After buying it 25 years ago, she relocated the business and expanded it to become Schemengees Bar & Grille.

She also ignored the advice to change the name — a nickname of the previous owner — amused that people struggled to pronounce or spell it correctly.

After her husband was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 12 years ago, Lebel became increasingly responsible for the bar's day-to-day management. She also had her own health crisis, surviving inflammatory breast cancer.

Lebel came to rely most on Joe Walker, whom she jokingly called her work husband. Together, they opened a second restaurant in Lewiston just as COVID-19 hit but managed to survive the downturn.

"He's my biggest cheerleader," Lebel says. "And he don't give up."

On Oct. 25, Lebel took a rare night off to celebrate her husband's birthday. At the bar, Walker was sitting down near the cornhole board when gunman Robert Card walked in.

Lebel's phone lit up. She read as far as "mass shooting."

"I just stood up, and I said, 'Joe's dead,'" Lebel says. "Because I always knew how Joe was."

According to witnesses, Walker tried to stop the shooter but was killed.

Hours later, Lebel posted a message on Facebook: "My heart is crushed."

Lebel told herself: "I'm done. I quit. It's over." She didn't even want to leave her house.

Eventually, though, she read some of the messages that were pouring in. They included questions about her plans from Lewiston's deaf community, four of whom were killed at the bar while playing a cornhole tournament. She realized how much they wanted to return. Some of her relatives implored her not to let it end like this.

"I finally decided that I have to reopen," Lebel says.

It will need to be at a new location to help erase the memory of that night, she said. She doesn't know how long it will take.

But one thing is for sure: She's keeping the name.

Justin and Samantha Juray are further along with their plans to reopen Just-In-Time Recreation, the first place that Card opened fire. They have been ripping up floors, repainting, and putting in new seating.

"We're just trying to change it a bit so that when people come in, it's not a complete reminder of prior," Samantha Juray says. "Or of the event."

Juray says that at first, Justin was "dead set" against reopening.

"Within a week after, we knew that we had to reopen," Juray says. "Because the community kept asking us, and we knew that everybody kind of needed it."

They got support from the Bowling Proprietors' Association of America, which waived its annual fees, provided equipment upgrades and sent employees Christmas gift cards.

"We're like Americana. A lot of small towns, we're the place where everybody goes to hang out," said Frank DeSocio, the association's executive director.

Other businesses where mass shootings have occurred have taken various approaches afterward. In Aurora, Colorado, a movie theater where 12 people were killed in 2012 later reopened under a new name. The city of Orlando, Florida, last year agreed to buy the Pulse nightclub site to create a memorial to the

49 people killed there in 2016.

The Jurays hope to reopen in March or April. They also plan to keep the name. When they bought the bowling alley nearly three years ago, the owner was days away from shutting it down. Hence Just-In-Time, which also fit with Justin's name.

"It was a place — or it is a place — where people get to come together, and spend time with friends and family, or create friends and family," says Samantha Juray. "It's a safe place."

Two of their employees died in the shooting. The other 17 are all coming back, she says.

One is 69-year-old Tom Giberti, who has worked at the bowling alley for 20 years and is credited with saving at least four children that night.

Giberti recalls that he had just grabbed a screwdriver and was working near the back of the bowling alley when he heard the shots, which he initially thought were bowling balls thudding into the back of the lanes. He saw the panic on people's faces and the flashes from a gun muzzle.

"I ran up to the kids and I got behind them," Giberti says. "And I and got them back through the door, and as I turned to go through the door is when he shot me."

One bullet remains wedged behind his left knee. A second blew clean through the side of his right leg, somehow missing bones and arteries. Giberti says he also took shrapnel in both legs, as bowling balls and machinery exploded around him.

Despite having surgery, and then treatment for a subsequent infection, Giberti looked spritely as he walked around greeting friends at a concert in Lewiston this month that was organized by local musician Ken Goodman to raise money for the two businesses.

How is Giberti even walking?

"It's amazing. I can't tell you why," he says. "I've seen what it did to the machinery. I've seen what it did to others. I don't know. My legs should have been blown right off. Either one of them."

Giberti says it took him a few visits before he could bring himself to go back to the area where he was shot. Now, he can't wait for the reopening.

"I'm really excited for it," Giberti says. "It's going to be huge for the community."

## Could Georgia's Fani Willis be removed from prosecuting Donald Trump?

By JEFF AMY and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Accusations that Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis had an inappropriate relationship with a special prosecutor she hired to seek convictions of Donald Trump and others for interfering in Georgia's 2020 election have led to renewed calls to remove Willis from the case.

Willis has defended her hiring of Nathan Wade, who has little prosecutorial experience, and has not directly denied a romantic relationship. The allegations were first made public in a motion filed earlier this month by defense attorney Ashleigh Merchant, who represents former Trump campaign staffer and White House aide Michael Roman.

Merchant alleges that Willis' office paid Wade large sums and that Willis improperly benefited when Wade then paid for the two of them to go on vacations. Merchant has not offered any proof of the alleged relationship. But a filing last week by Wade's wife in their divorce case includes credit card records that show that Wade bought plane tickets for Willis to travel with him to Miami and San Francisco.

Willis, an elected Democrat, has shown no signs of stepping down, but there are ways she could be removed. Here's a look at some options:

WHAT CAN THE JUDGE DO?

Merchant's motion asks Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee to remove Willis and Wade and their offices from any further prosecution of the case. McAfee has the power to do that.

In fact, another judge, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney, took that step in July 2022 when he was presiding over the special grand jury investigation that preceded the indictment in the election case.

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Then-Sen. Burt Jones, one of 16 Georgia Republicans who signed a certificate falsely stating that Trump had won the election and declaring themselves the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors, had been told he was a target in the election case. He argued that Willis had a conflict of interest because she had hosted a fundraiser for his Democratic opponent in the lieutenant governor's race.

McBurney ruled in Jones' favor, writing that the situation had gone beyond bad optics and had created "a plain — and actual and untenable — conflict." He prohibited Willis and her office from prosecuting Jones in the case.

If McAfee decides to take similar action and to remove Willis and her office from the election case, it would be up to the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia to find another prosecutor to take the case. That person could continue on the track that Willis has taken, could choose to pursue only some charges or could dismiss the case altogether.

Finding a prosecutor willing and able to take on the sprawling case could be difficult, former Gwinnett County District Attorney Danny Porter said. Only a few district attorneys in the state — all around Atlanta — have the resources to handle such a case, he said.

## COULD WILLIS STEP AWAY FROM THE CASE IN ORDER TO SAVE IT?

If Willis were to recuse herself, it's likely her whole office would have to step away from the case, Porter said. In that scenario, too, it would be up to the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council to find someone to take it on.

Attorney Norm Eisen, who served as former President Barack Obama's ethics czar, said in a press briefing Saturday that based on what he knows so far, "there is absolutely no legal basis under Georgia law" for Willis or Wade to be disqualified.

But, Eisen said, "the wise thing to do at this point is for Mr. Wade to voluntarily end his time on this case." Even though he is not legally required to do so, Eisen said, "at this point, the conversation about these issues has become a distraction" from the "overwhelming amount of evidence justifying the decision to prosecute Mr. Trump and his co-conspirators."

## COULD AN OVERSIGHT COMMISSION REMOVE HER?

Many Republicans would like to see Willis investigated by Georgia's new Prosecuting Attorneys Qualification Commission. That body was created last year to discipline and remove prosecutors. But it hit a snag after the state Supreme Court refused to approve the commission's rules.

Lawmakers this year are seeking to remove the court's required approval, allowing the commission to begin operating. The commission would be able to remove district attorneys from office or discipline them for a conflict of interest, "conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice which brings the office into disrepute" or for "willful misconduct in office."

However, it's unlikely that the commission could remove Willis just from the Trump case, unless she agreed to step aside in a negotiated settlement.

## COULD STATE LAWMAKERS IMPEACH WILLIS?

A few lawmakers have proposed impeaching and removing Willis, an idea Trump endorsed over the summer. However, Georgia's General Assembly hasn't impeached anyone in more than 50 years. And a two-thirds majority of the state Senate is required to convict. That's a tough hurdle because Republicans currently control less than two-thirds in the 56-seat Senate. A Republican is likely to win a vacant seat, bringing the GOP majority back to 33. Even then, five Democrats would have to vote to convict.

Also working against an impeachment proceeding: All of Georgia's lawmakers are up for reelection this year. Taking up impeachment could keep them in session and off the campaign trail.

State Sen. Colton Moore of Trenton tried to persuade fellow Republicans to call themselves into special session over the summer to go after Willis, but never got close.

## COULD THE STATE BAR STEP IN?

The State Bar of Georgia, which regulates lawyers, adopted special rules in 2021 governing prosecutorial misconduct. But those rules dealt with a prosecutor's duty to disclose evidence that might prove someone's innocence.

If Willis were to face consequences from the bar, she would have to be disciplined under the rules ap-



plying to all lawyers. The bar has rules against conflicts of interest, but they are mostly geared to private lawyers who may mistreat clients. It's unclear how those rules might apply to this case.

## ARE THERE OTHER CONSEQUENCES?

A Fulton County commissioner, Republican Bob Ellis, sent Willis a letter Friday demanding information on how she spent county money and "whether any payments of county funds to Mr. Wade were converted to your personal gain in the form of subsidized travel or other gifts." Commissioners could cut Willis' budget in the future, but Democrats hold a majority on the commission. Fulton County's government has a code of ethics, but the county doesn't appear to prohibit consensual relationships. The county Board of Ethics could fine and reprimand Willis, but doesn't have the power to remove her.

Republican state Sen. Greg Dolezal of Cumming on Monday proposed a special Senate committee to investigate Willis, saying a "thorough and impartial examination" would "ensure transparency, accountability and the preservation of the integrity of our justice system." Dolezal's proposed resolution suggests legal or budget changes could follow any inquiry.

## Biden, Harris team up to campaign for abortion rights in Virginia

By COLLEEN LONG and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will share the stage on Tuesday in Virginia as they campaign for abortion rights, a top issue for Democrats in an election expected to feature a rematch with Donald Trump, the former Republican president.

Biden and Harris will be joined by their spouses, first lady Jill Biden and second gentleman Doug Emhoff. It's the first time the four of them have appeared together since the campaign began, a reflection of the importance that Democrats are putting on abortion this year.

Harris was in Wisconsin in Monday to mark the 51st anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion nationwide. The decision was overturned two years ago, and Trump helped pave the way by nominating three conservative justices to the court during his term. He recently said he was "proud" of his role.

"Proud that women across our nation are suffering?" Harris said. "Proud that women have been robbed of a fundamental freedom? Proud that doctors could be thrown in prison for caring for their patients? That young women today have fewer rights than their mothers and grandmothers?"

Wisconsin was Harris' first stop on what's expected to be a nationwide tour focused on abortion, which she described as an integral part of the country's tradition of personal liberty.

"In America, freedom is not to be given. It is not to be bestowed. It is ours by right," she said. "And that includes the freedom to make decisions about one's own body — not the government telling you what to do."

Harris shared stories of women who have miscarried in toilets or developed sepsis because they were denied help by doctors concerned about violating abortion restrictions.

"This is, in fact, a healthcare crisis," she said. "And there is nothing about this that is hypothetical."

Abortion is also the focus of Biden's new television advertisement featuring 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," Dennard said.

Although Democrats want to restore the rights that were established in Roe v. Wade, there's no chance of that with the current makeup of the Supreme Court and Republican control of the House. However, they've been successful in state-level campaigns when the topic of abortion is on the ballot.

"We need the American people to keep making their voices heard," Biden said at a meeting of his reproductive rights task force on Monday.

The White House is pushing against the limits of its ability to ensure access to abortion. On Monday, it announced the creation of a team dedicated to helping hospitals comply with the federal Emergency

Medical Treatment and Labor Act, which requires hospitals receiving federal money to provide life-saving treatment when a patient is at risk of dying.

The Department of Health and Human Services said it would beef up training at hospitals concerning the law and publish new information on how to lodge a complaint against a hospital.

Some advocacy groups have criticized HHS for not responding aggressively enough to such complaints. Last week, The Associated Press reported that federal officials did not find any violation of the law when an Oklahoma hospital instructed a 26-year-old woman to wait in a parking lot until her condition worsened to qualify for an abortion of her nonviable pregnancy.

While Harris and Democrats have embraced abortion as a campaign issue, Republicans are shying away or calling for a truce, fearful of sparking more backlash from voters.

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 on abortions after six weeks, which was signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, who dropped out of the Republican nomination race over the weekend.

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

The White House has repeatedly turned to Harris, the first woman to serve as vice president, to make its case on abortion. Her outspokenness contrasts with Biden's more reticent approach. Although he is a longtime supporter of abortion rights, he mentions the issue less often and sometimes avoids using the word abortion even when he discusses the issue.

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

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

## Families of hostages held in Gaza storm Israel's parliament meeting demanding deal for release

By MELANIE LIDMAN and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Dozens of family members of hostages held by Hamas stormed a committee meeting in Israel's parliament Monday, demanding a deal to win their loved ones' release, as European foreign ministers joined growing international calls for Israel to negotiate on the creation of a Palestinian state after the war.

The developments showed the increasing pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has dug in on both fronts. He has insisted to the Israeli public that pursuing the devastating offensive in Gaza is the only way to bring the hostages home. At the same time, he has rejected the United States' vision for a postwar resolution, saying he will never allow a Palestinian state.

The dispute over Gaza's future pits Israel against its top ally and much of the international community. It also poses a major obstacle to plans for postwar governance or reconstruction of the coastal territory, large parts of which have been left unlivable by Israeli bombardment.

As fears grow that Israel's war in Gaza will spark a wider regional conflict, the U.S. and British militaries bombed eight locations in Yemen used by the Houthi rebels. It's the eighth time the U.S. has bombed Houthi sites since Jan. 12, U.S. officials said late Monday, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a military operation. The Iranian-backed Houthis have attacked shipping in the region's waterways, saying they aim to end the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip.

In southern Gaza, Israeli strikes and shelling intensified in and around the city of Khan Younis, sending Palestinian families fleeing south in pickup trucks and donkey carts loaded with possessions.

In the city, which has been a battle zone for weeks, people dug graves for the dead inside the yard of

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Al-Nasser Hospital as staff struggled to deal with dozens of newly killed and wounded, including children. Health care workers said strikes hit at least four schools sheltering displaced people on the city's western edges, including two inside a coastal strip that Israel had declared a safe zone for people fleeing.

Gaza's internet and phone networks collapsed again Monday for the 10th time during the war. The repeated blackouts severely hamper distribution of aid that's essential for the survival of the territory's population of 2.3 million, U.N. officials said. The loss of service also prevents Palestinians from communicating with each other and the outside world.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "complete victory" over Hamas and to return all remaining hostages after the Oct. 7 rampage in southern Israel that triggered the war. In that attack, some 1,200 people were killed and Hamas and other militants abducted around 250 people.

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

Around 100 hostages were freed under a weeklong cease-fire deal in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Around 130 remain captive, but a number have since been confirmed dead. Hamas has said it will free more captives only in exchange for an end to the war and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

Netanyahu has ruled out such an agreement, but anger is rising among hostages' families. Relatives and other protesters set up a tent camp outside Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem, vowing to remain until a deal is reached.

On Monday, dozens of family members of the hostages stormed into a gathering of the Knesset's finance committee, holding up signs and yelling, "You won't sit here while they are dying there!"

"These are our children!" they shouted. Some had to be physically restrained, and at least one person was escorted out.

## OVER 25,000 KILLED IN GAZA

Israel's offensive has killed at least 25,295 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded more than 60,000, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children.

Residents in Khan Younis reported bombardment on all sides of the city. At Nasser Hospital, Ayman Abu Abaid, the head of surgery, told Al Jazeera TV early Monday that at least 50 dead and more than 100 wounded had been brought to the facility.

Ashraf Al-Qudra, spokesman for the Health Ministry, said Israeli troops had stormed Al-Khair Hospital and detained the medical staff, the latest hospital that troops have seized during the conflict. The hospital is just inside the safe zone at Muwasi, a rural coastal strip west of Khan Younis, where the Israeli military had said it would not carry out operations.

Volunteers with the Red Crescent said strikes hit four schools west of Khan Younis — two of them inside the Muwasi zone — causing an unknown number of casualties. They said the organization's ambulances couldn't reach the sites.

Families streamed out of Khan Younis along the coastal highway, some walking, some loading blankets and possessions into vehicles. They headed toward Rafah, the tiny sliver at the extreme southern end of Gaza where well over 1 million people are already crowded, many living in tents that have filled the streets.

As he fled Khan Younis with his family, Ahmad Shurrab said he had been displaced multiple times. "Where should I go? Should I go to Rafah? Rafah is like one street. What do they want from us?" he shouted.

Some 85% of the Gaza population has been driven from their homes by the war. United Nations officials say 1 in 4 people in Gaza is starving as the fighting and Israeli restrictions hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid. Only 15 bakeries are working across the Gaza Strip, all of them in either Rafah or the central town of Deir al-Balah, the U.N. said.

The Israeli military says it has killed around 9,000 militants in its offensive, without providing evidence, and blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it operates in dense residential areas.

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

Netanyahu, whose popularity has plummeted since Oct. 7, faces pressure from the U.S. to shift to more precise military operations and do more to facilitate humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The United States is also calling for a reformed Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza after the war and for negotiations to start on a two-state solution. The authority currently governs pockets of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and was ejected from Gaza in 2007 when Hamas took power.

Netanyahu has rejected both the entry of the Palestinian Authority and the creation of a Palestinian state. His governing coalition is beholden to far-right parties that want to step up the offensive, encourage the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Gaza and reestablish Jewish settlements there.

At a meeting in Brussels, European Union foreign ministers added their voices to the calls for a Palestinian state, saying it was the only way to achieve peace.

French Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Sejourne said Netanyahu's rejection of statehood was "worrying. There will be a need for a Palestinian state with security guarantees for all."

"Which are the other solutions they have in mind?" EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said of Israel. "To make all the Palestinians leave? To kill them off?"

In an interview with CNN late Sunday, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said the kingdom will not normalize relations with Israel or contribute to Gaza's reconstruction without a credible path to a Palestinian state. His comments were notable because before the war, the U.S. had been trying to broker a landmark normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The Palestinians seek a state including Gaza, the West Bank and Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Peace talks broke down nearly 15 years ago.

## **AI-generated robocall impersonates Biden in an apparent attempt to suppress votes in New Hampshire**

By ALI SWENSON and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

The New Hampshire attorney general's office on Monday said it was investigating reports of an apparent robocall that used artificial intelligence to mimic President Joe Biden's voice and discourage voters in the state from coming to the polls during Tuesday's primary election.

Attorney General John Formella said the recorded message, which was sent to multiple voters on Sunday, appears to be an illegal attempt to disrupt and suppress voting. He said voters "should disregard the contents of this message entirely."

A recording of the call reviewed by The Associated Press generates a voice similar to Biden's and employs his often-used phrase, "What a bunch of malarkey." It then tells the listener to "save your vote for the November election."

"Voting this Tuesday only enables the Republicans in their quest to elect Donald Trump again," the voice mimicking Biden says. "Your vote makes a difference in November, not this Tuesday."

It is not true that voting in Tuesday's primary precludes voters from casting a ballot in November's general election. Biden is not campaigning in New Hampshire and his name will not appear on Tuesday's primary ballot after he elevated South Carolina to the lead-off position for the Democratic primaries, but his allies are running a write-in campaign for him in the state.

It's not known who is behind the calls, though they falsely showed up to recipients as coming from the personal cellphone number of Kathy Sullivan, a former state Democratic Party chair who helps run Granite for America, a super-PAC supporting the Biden write-in campaign.

Sullivan said she alerted law enforcement and issued a complaint to the attorney general after multiple voters in the state reported receiving the call Sunday night.

"This call links back to my personal cell phone number without my permission," she said in a statement. "It is outright election interference, and clearly an attempt to harass me and other New Hampshire voters who are planning to write-in Joe Biden on Tuesday."

It was unclear how many people received the call but a spokesperson for Sullivan said she heard from at



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least a dozen people who received it. The attorney general's office encouraged anyone who has received the call to email the state Justice Department's election law unit.

Gail Huntley, a 73-year-old Democrat in Hancock, New Hampshire, who plans to write in Biden's name on Tuesday, said she received the call at about 6:25 p.m. on Sunday.

She instantly recognized the voice as belonging to Biden but quickly realized it was a scam because what he was saying didn't make sense. Initially, she figured his words were taken out of context.

"I didn't think about it at the time that it wasn't his real voice. That's how convincing it was," she said, adding that she is appalled but not surprised that AI-generated fakes like this are spreading in her state.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre confirmed Monday that the call "was indeed fake and not recorded by the president." Biden's campaign manager, Julie Chavez Rodriguez, said in a statement that the campaign is "actively discussing additional actions to take immediately."

"Spreading disinformation to suppress voting and deliberately undermine free and fair elections will not stand, and fighting back against any attempt to undermine our democracy will continue to be a top priority for this campaign," she said.

The apparent attempt at voter suppression using rapidly advancing generative AI technology is one example of what experts warn will make 2024 a year of unprecedented election disinformation around the world.

Generative AI deepfakes already have appeared in campaign ads in the 2024 presidential race, and the technology has been misused to spread misinformation in multiple elections across the globe over the past year, from Slovakia to Indonesia and Taiwan.

"We have been concerned that generative AI would be weaponized in the upcoming election and we are seeing what is surely a sign of things to come," said Hany Farid, an expert in digital forensics at the University of California, Berkeley, who reviewed the call recording and confirmed it is a relatively low-quality AI fake.

As AI technology improves, the federal government is still scrambling to address it. Congress has yet to pass legislation seeking to regulate the industry's role in politics despite some bipartisan support. The Federal Election Commission is weighing public comments on a petition for it to regulate AI deepfakes in campaign ads.

Though the use of generative AI to influence elections is relatively new, "robocalls and dirty tricks go back a long ways," said David Becker, a former U.S. Department of Justice attorney and election law expert who now leads the Center for Election Innovation and Research.

He said it's hard to determine whether the main intent of the New Hampshire calls was to suppress voting or simply to "continue the process of getting Americans to untether themselves from fact and truth regarding our democracy."

"They don't need to convince us that what they're saying, the lies they're telling, are true," he said. "They just need to convince us that there is no truth, that you can't believe anything you're told."

Katie Dolan, a spokeswoman for the campaign of Rep. Dean Phillips of Minnesota, who is challenging Biden in the Democratic primary, said Phillips' team was not involved and only found out about the deepfake attempt when a reporter called seeking comment.

"Any effort to discourage voters is disgraceful and an unacceptable affront to democracy," Dolan said in a statement. "The potential use of AI to manipulate voters is deeply disturbing."

The Trump campaign said it had nothing to do with the recording but declined further comment.

## Haley hopes to stop Trump's march to nomination in New Hampshire: 'America does not do coronations'

By STEVE PEOPLES, MICHELLE L. PRICE, HOLLY RAMER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press  
LACONIA, N.H. (AP) — As the last major challenger in Donald Trump's way to the Republican nomination, Nikki Haley is hoping New Hampshire voters feel so strongly about keeping the former president away from the White House that they turn out to support her in large numbers.

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"America does not do coronations," Haley said at a VFW hall in Franklin, joined by her daughter and son-in-law. "Let's show all of the media class and the political class that we've got a different plan in mind, and let's show the country what we can do."

It's an uphill battle for the former U.N. ambassador and South Carolina governor. Most conservatives want to give Trump another chance at beating President Joe Biden despite Trump's 2020 election loss and the 91 felony charges he faces in four separate indictments.

With voting about to begin in New Hampshire, almost every top Republican has lined up behind Trump. Polls in New Hampshire suggest he leads Haley in a state uniquely suited to her strengths, though his lead is narrower than the 30-point blowout he scored in the Iowa caucuses.

Haley told reporters on Monday that she is expecting a stronger outcome than Iowa.

"This is a building game for us. This has always been that," she said. "We feel very good about it."

Trump held what he said would be his last rally before the election Monday night. He started the day in New York for his defamation trial after an earlier jury determined he had sexually abused a columnist in the 1990s, but the session was canceled due to a juror's illness.

Trump was joined onstage Monday night by three of his former opponents who have now endorsed him: South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum. The show of force -- interrupted several times by climate change protesters, who were shouted down and removed -- is part of a broader effort by Trump's team to lock up the primary and demonstrate the party is rallying around him.

"Every day the Republican Party is becoming more and more unified," Trump told several hundred people in a steamy, packed hotel ballroom just hours before the first votes were to be cast. "Now is the time for the Republican Party to come together. We have to unify."

He alluded to former Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' departure from the race on Sunday but didn't name him.

"And I think one person will be gone, probably tomorrow," he said, alluding to Haley.

Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, Florida Rep. Byron Donalds and Arizona Senate candidate Kari Lake also spoke before Trump took the stage.

On paper, Trump had seemed more vulnerable in New Hampshire than in any other early voting state on the primary calendar. Though voters here supported him by a wide margin in 2016, the state has long been known for its moderate tradition, including allowing unaffiliated voters to participate in GOP primaries. And Haley had been on the rise, prompting Trump's campaign and its allies to spend millions trying to blunt her momentum.

Thalia Floras, a former Democrat who manages retail stores, changed her voter registration to undeclared last fall and plans to vote in New Hampshire's Republican presidential primary against Trump. She says she would support Haley over Biden if given the chance, even though she has never before voted for a Republican presidential candidate.

But she said she was worried the primary was "a long shot" with not enough support for Haley among traditional conservatives to beat Trump.

"What do the Republicans want?" Floras asked at a packed Haley rally over the weekend. "Are they diehard Trump or do they want the White House?"

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspending his bid turned the state into the one-on-one contest between Trump and Haley that she and a long line of anti-Trump Republicans had said they wanted.

But some evidence suggests Trump could be better positioned to capitalize on DeSantis' exit than Haley. According to AP VoteCast, DeSantis supporters in Iowa overwhelmingly described themselves as conservative and Trump outperformed Haley 53% to 13% among that group.

"Be careful what you wish for," Trump senior adviser Chris LaCivita told The Associated Press about Haley making it to a two-person race.

DeSantis immediately endorsed Trump upon dropping out, saying it was clear to him Republican voters preferred the former president.

Never before has a presidential candidate won primary contests in both Iowa and New Hampshire and

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failed to secure the party's presidential nomination.

"If she doesn't win here, there's no path for her whatsoever going forward," said James Blair, national field director for the Trump campaign. "Republicans control the nominating process. They are with Donald Trump, growing every day. We see consolidation all over the place since Iowa."

To help get out the vote, Trump's team says it has amassed a team of 2,000 volunteers, including 250 town captains throughout the state.

"If it's a double-digit win, then, I mean, that is a New Hampshire blowout of epic proportions, especially given all of the time and money she spent here," Blair said.

Haley's campaign has been lowering expectations for New Hampshire after insisting for weeks that an outright victory against Trump was possible.

"Beating Donald Trump is not easy. He is a juggernaut," Haley campaign manager Betsy Ankney said at a weekend event hosted by Bloomberg. "But how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. We have to continue to show incremental growth and progress. We are the last man — woman — standing against him."

Trump's confidence comes even as influential Republicans in the state like New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu warn of dire political consequences.

"I'm tired of losing, I'm tired losers and I'm sure as hell tired of Donald Trump!" Sununu shouted late Sunday at Haley's rally in the town of Exeter.

On Monday, Haley spoke on "New Hampshire Today" with host Chris Ryan and compared Trump to Biden, bringing up how Trump has confused her with former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, mistakenly said he ran against former President Barack Obama, and warned about Biden leading the country into World War II, which was fought between 1939 and 1945.

"When you have two 80-year-olds running for president, you are going to see decline," she said. "It's natural. It's what happens."

Still, the thousands of voters who have packed into Trump's New Hampshire rallies in recent days don't seem to be worried and he makes little effort to lower expectations.

Eric Holmstrom, a 43-year-old Republican from Goffstown who supports Trump, said he sees the former president's back-and-forth travel from the courtroom to campaign events as a sign of why he's the best person to be the party's nominee.

"I mean, this guy's stamina is unmatched. And that's — we need strength," Holmstrom said. "We need unity. We need strength. And we need stamina. And right now, the unity isn't there but it's happening."

## Supreme Court allows federal agents to cut razor wire Texas installed on US-Mexico border

By MARK SHERMAN and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A divided Supreme Court on Monday allowed Border Patrol agents to resume cutting for now razor wire that Texas installed along a stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border that is at the center of an escalating standoff between the Biden administration and the state over immigration enforcement.

The 5-4 vote clears the way for Border Patrol agents to cut or clear out concertina wire that Texas has put along the banks of the Rio Grande to deter migrants from entering the U.S. illegally. Some migrants have been injured by the sharp wire and the Justice Department has argued the barrier impedes the U.S. government's ability to patrol the border, including coming to the aid of migrants in need of help.

None of the justices provided any explanation for their vote. The one-page order is a victory for the Biden administration while the lawsuit over the wire continues.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott had authorized the wire, one of a series of aggressive measures the three-term Republican has taken on the border in the name of curbing illegal crossings from Mexico. His spokesman said the absence of razor wire and other deterrents encourages migrants to risk unsafe crossings and makes the job of Texas border personnel more difficult.

"This case is ongoing, and Governor Abbott will continue fighting to defend Texas' property and its con-

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stitutional authority to secure the border," Abbott spokesman Andrew Mahaleris said.

The White House applauded the order, which was handed down after a federal appeals court last month had forced federal agents to stop cutting the concertina wire.

"Texas' political stunts, like placing razor wire near the border, simply make it harder and more dangerous for frontline personnel to do their jobs," White House spokesperson Angelo Fernández Hernández said.

The concertina wire stretches for roughly 30 miles (48 kilometers) near the border city of Eagle Pass, where earlier this month the Texas Military Department seized control of a city-owned park and began denying access to Border Patrol agents.

Eagle Park has become one of the busiest spots on the southern U.S. border for migrants illegally crossing from Mexico. Abbott has said Texas won't allow Border Patrol agents into Shelby Park anymore, having expressed frustration over what he says are migrants illegally entering through Eagle Pass and then federal agents loading them onto buses.

Abbott also has authorized installing floating barriers in the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass and allowed troopers to arrest and jail thousands of migrants on trespassing charges. The administration also is challenging those actions in federal court.

In court papers, the administration said the wire impedes Border Patrol agents from reaching migrants as they cross the river and that, in any case, federal immigration law trumps Texas' own efforts to stem the flow of migrants into the country.

Texas officials have argued that federal agents cut the wire to help groups crossing illegally through the river before taking them in for processing.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Ketanji Brown Jackson, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor sided with the administration. Justices Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas voted with Texas.

## **Norman Jewison, acclaimed director of 'In the Heat of the Night' and 'Moonstruck,' dead at 97**

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Norman Jewison, the acclaimed and versatile Canadian-born director whose Hollywood films ranged from Doris Day comedies and "Moonstruck" to such social dramas as the Oscar-winning "In the Heat of the Night," has died at age 97.

Jewison, a three-time Oscar nominee who in 1999 received an Academy Award for lifetime achievement, died "peacefully" Saturday, according to publicist Jeff Sanderson. Additional details were not immediately available.

Throughout his long career, Jewison combined light entertainment with topical films that appealed to him on a deeply personal level. As Jewison was ending his military service in the Canadian navy during World War II, he hitchhiked through the American South and had a close-up view of Jim Crow segregation. In his autobiography "This Terrible Business Has Been Good to Me," he noted that racism and injustice became his most common themes.

"Every time a film deals with racism, many Americans feel uncomfortable," he wrote. "Yet it has to be confronted. We have to deal with prejudice and injustice or we will never understand what is good and evil, right and wrong; we need to feel how 'the other' feels."

He drew upon his experiences for 1967's "In the Heat of the Night," starring Rod Steiger as a white racist small-town sheriff and Sidney Poitier as a Black detective from Philadelphia trying to help solve a murder and eventually forming a working relationship with the hostile local lawman.

James Baldwin condemned the film's "appalling distance from reality," and thought the director trapped in a fantasy of racial harmony that would only heighten "Black rage and despair." But The New York Times' Bosley Crowther was among the critics who found the movie powerful and inspiring and in a year featuring such landmarks as "The Graduate" and "Bonnie and Clyde," Jewison's production won the Academy Award for best picture while Steiger took home the best actor Oscar. (Jewison lost out for best director



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to Mike Nichols of "The Graduate").

Among those who encouraged Jewison while making "In the Heat of the Night": Robert F. Kennedy, whom the director met during a ski trip in Sun Valley, Idaho.

"I told him I made films and he asked what kind I make," he recalled in a 2011 interview with The Hollywood Reporter. "So I told him that I was working on 'In the Heat of the Night' and that it's about two cops: one a white sheriff from Mississippi and the other a black detective from Philadelphia. I told him it was a film about tolerance. So he listened and nodded and said 'You know, Norman, timing is everything. In politics, in art, in life itself.' I never forgot that."

He received two other Oscar nominations: For "Moonstruck," the beloved romantic comedy for which Cher won an Academy Award, and "Fiddler on the Roof," the classic musical about a Jewish village in Russia that Jewison has said was offered to him under the mistaken belief he was Jewish.

His other notable films included the Cold War spoof "The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming," the Steve McQueen thriller "The Thomas Crown Affair" and a pair of movies featuring Denzel Washington: the racial drama "A Soldier's Story" and "The Hurricane," starring Washington as wrongly imprisoned boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter.

A third project with Washington never made it to production. In the early 1990s, Jewison was set to direct a biography of Malcolm X, but backed out amid protests from Spike Lee and others that a white director shouldn't make the film. Lee ended up directing.

Five Jewison films received best Oscar nominations: "In the Heat of the Night," "The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming," "Fiddler On the Roof," "Moonstruck" and "A Soldier's Story."

Jewison and his wife Margaret Ann Dixon (nicknamed Dixie) had three children, sons Kevin and Michael and daughter Jennifer Ann, who became an actress and appeared in the Jewison films "Agnes of God" and "Best Friends." The Jewisons were married 51 years, until her death in 2004. He married Lynne St. David in 2010.

Jewison, honored by Canada in 2003 with a Governor General's Performing Arts Award, remained close to his home country. When he wasn't working, he lived on a 200-acre farm near Toronto, where he raised horses and cattle and produced maple syrup. He founded the Canadian Film Centre in 1988 and for years hosted barbecues during the Toronto Film Festival.

The Toronto-born Jewison began acting at age 6, appearing before Masonic lodge gatherings. After graduating from Victoria College, he went to work for the BBC in London, then returned to Canada and directed programs for the CBC. His work there brought offers from Hollywood and he quickly earned a reputation as a director of TV musicals, with stars including Judy Garland, Danny Kaye and Harry Belafonte. Jewison shifted to feature films in 1963 with the comedy "40 Pounds of Trouble," starring Tony Curtis and Suzanne Pleshette.

The director's light touch prompted Universal to assign him to a series of comedies, including "The Thrill of It All," which paired Day with James Garner, and "Send Me No Flowers," starring Day and Rock Hudson. Wearying of such scripts, Jewison used a loophole in his contract to move to MGM for 1965's "The Cincinnati Kid," a drama of the gambling world starring McQueen and Edward G. Robinson. He followed with "The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming," which starred Carl Reiner and Eva Marie Saint and was the breakthrough film for Alan Arkin.

His other films included "F.I.S.T.," a flop with Sylvester Stallone as a Jimmy Hoffa-style labor leader; "... And Justice for All" (1979), with Al Pacino fighting a crooked judicial system; and "In Country," featuring Bruce Willis as a Vietnam War veteran. His most recent work, the 2003 thriller "The Statement," starred Michael Caine and Tilda Swinton and flopped at the box office.

"I never really became as much a part of the establishment as I wanted to be," he told The Hollywood Reporter in 2011. "I wanted to be accepted. I wanted people to say 'that was a great picture.' I mean I have a big ego like anyone else. I'm no shrinking violet. But I never felt totally accepted — but maybe that's good."

## Floridians wait to see which version of Ron DeSantis returns from the presidential campaign trail

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — When Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis first took office in 2019, he surprised many with actions indicating he'd be a much more moderate leader than anticipated: He corrected a decades-old racial injustice, took the side of medical marijuana supporters over GOP leaders and hired a liberal Democrat for a key state position.

But then he set his eyes on the White House and veered far to the right as he rolled to a 2022 reelection blowout and entered the presidential race. His message was loud and relentless and focused on how he had beaten down the "woke mob" with policies that upset Black and LGBTQ+ Floridians. Not even Republicans dared stand up to his iron-fisted governing style for fear of being punished.

Now that he's dropped out of the presidential race and is returning to govern Florida for another two-plus years, which DeSantis will Floridians see? It's a question Tallahassee insiders are speculating about, but one that likely won't be answered immediately.

"When you go through a life-changing event like running and losing a presidential primary, it gives you an opportunity to look at who is it that I really want to be and how do I get there," said Jamie Miller, a Florida-based Republican political strategist. "And if that answer is still, 'I want to be president,' I think the one thing he may have learned is what worked for you in 2022 didn't work for you in 2024."

In the last three years, DeSantis built his national reputation through a well-publicized fight with Disney World over anti-LGBTQ+ legislation; his effort to limit discussions on race and inclusion; and his work with conservatives to keep the themes of gender identity and sexual orientation out of classrooms and school libraries.

The Florida Legislature is already in the third week of its annual 60-day session, and unlike most years, DeSantis has done little to set out a roadmap for the Republican supermajority to follow. Of course, as everyone else in the process was preparing for session, he was traipsing across Iowa.

"I thought that it was good that he was preoccupied and let us do our job," said Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book. "It was very clear we were a distant afterthought. ... Hopefully they've learned a lesson that maybe you just don't pile on on culture wars."

While it's not too late for DeSantis to put his imprint on the session, he might let the Legislature keep running its current course, where there's less talk about abortion and guns and more focus on the priorities of the House speaker and Senate president. Those include improved health care access and restricting minors' use of social media.

"Our Republican colleagues did not enjoy being told what to do and having his agenda shoved down their throats," said Democratic Sen. Tina Polsky. "I just don't think he has the power anymore to require them to follow his agenda. They may agree with some of the policy things and the culture garbage, but I don't think it will be at the same level."

Because DeSantis will consider running for president again in 2028, he's likely to think about why the rest of the country, or at least Iowa, wasn't impressed enough with the way he ran Florida to help him beat former President Donald Trump.

"The real flaw for him is he hired a bunch of people who listened to him and he hired no one that he listened to," Miller said. "You have to have those people who push you and it didn't seem like he had any one who did anything but really go along with anything he had to say."

It's not clear if DeSantis is going to appear with Trump, or even if the two have spoken since the governor suspended his campaign. Emails to his state and campaign staff asking about his plans weren't immediately returned.

DeSantis has shown at least a hint of self-reflection. The idea of him admitting he made a mistake is as rare as snow in Florida, but as the campaign wound down, he acknowledged he shouldn't have shut out mainstream media when he launched his presidential bid.

That's the same governor who ran 2022 political ads showing him belittling reporters and hired and

defended a communications staff that relentlessly and publicly attacked reporters and encouraged supporters to do the same.

"It's probably one of the first time Floridians have heard him admit that maybe he was wrong about something," Miller said. "This has been a growing process for him. Which I think that's positive."

As governor, DeSantis has shown, however briefly, that he could reach beyond his base.

In one of his first acts as governor, he posthumously pardoned four African American men falsely accused of raping a white woman in a 1949 case now seen as a racial injustice.

## Judge orders the unsealing of divorce case of Trump special prosecutor in Georgia accused of affair

By KATE BRUMBACK and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

MARIETTA, Ga. (AP) — A judge on Monday ordered court records to be made public in the divorce involving a special prosecutor hired in the election case against Donald Trump and others and accused of having an affair with Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis.

The newly unsealed court records, however, didn't include any references to the affair allegations that have roiled the case that charges Trump and 18 allies of working to overturn his 2020 election loss in the state.

The judge ordered the unsealing of the divorce case involving special prosecutor Nathan Wade after a request brought by a defense attorney who alleges an inappropriate relationship between Willis and Wade. The judge also put off a final decision on whether Willis will have to sit for questioning in the divorce case, but delayed her deposition that had been scheduled for Tuesday.

Willis has defended her hiring of Wade, who has little prosecutorial experience, and has not directly denied a romantic relationship. She has accused Wade's estranged wife of trying to obstruct her criminal election interference case against Trump and others by seeking to question her in the couple's divorce proceedings.

The affair allegations threaten to taint the prosecution, with the Republican primary front-runner and others seizing on the claims to attack the case and Wade's qualifications as a prosecutor. Trump has pleaded not guilty, denied any wrongdoing and called the charges politically motivated.

Willis was served with the subpoena to sit for a deposition in the divorce case the day that defense attorney Ashleigh Merchant, who represents former Trump campaign staffer and onetime White House aide Michael Roman, filed a motion earlier this month alleging the romantic relationship between Willis and Wade.

Documents filed in court show Wade bought plane tickets in Willis' name, and Joycelyn Wade's lawyer has argued there "appears to be no reasonable explanation for their travels apart from a romantic relationship." Joycelyn's Wade's lawyer, Andrea Dyer Hastings, told the judge on Monday that they believe Willis has some "unique personal knowledge" related to the divorce case and should be subject to questioning.

"She's trying to hide under the shield of her position," Hastings said of Willis.

Cinque Axam, a lawyer for Willis, said the issue before the court is how to divide the marital assets, and the determination of how that should be done has nothing to do with Willis, who doesn't share any accounts with Nathan Wade and doesn't determine how he spends money.

During a brief hearing in the Cobb County Superior Court, Judge Henry Thompson said he can't rule on whether Willis should have to sit for a deposition in the divorce case until after Wade himself is questioned later this month. In ruling that court documents in the divorce case must be made public, he said a previous judge improperly ordered the case to be sealed without holding a hearing.

Joycelyn Wade's lawyer wrote in court papers filed Friday that Nathan Wade has taken trips to San Francisco and Napa Valley, Florida, Belize, Panama and Australia and has taken

Caribbean cruises since filing for divorce and that Willis "was an intended travel partner for at least some of these trips as indicated by flights he purchased for her to accompany him."

The filing includes credit card statements that show Nathan Wade — after he had been hired as special prosecutor — bought plane tickets in October 2022 for him and Willis to travel to Miami and bought tickets in April to San Francisco in their names.

It's one of four cases Trump is facing as he vies to return to the White House. Prosecutors are using a

statute normally associated with mobsters to accuse the former president, lawyers and other aides of a "criminal enterprise" to keep him in power. Four people have already pleaded guilty in the Georgia election case after reaching deals with prosecutors. The remaining 15, including Trump and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, have pleaded not guilty.

## **US, British militaries launch new round of joint strikes against multiple Houthi sites in Yemen**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. and British militaries bombed multiple targets in eight locations used by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen on Monday night, the second time the two allies have conducted coordinated retaliatory strikes on an array of the rebels' missile-launching capabilities.

According to officials, the U.S. and U.K. used warship- and submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles and fighter jets to take out Houthi missile storage sites, drones and launchers. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a military operation, said Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands contributed to the mission, including with intelligence and surveillance.

In a joint statement, the six allied nations said the strikes specifically targeted a Houthi underground storage site and locations associated with the Houthis' missile and air surveillance capabilities. They added, "Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, but let us reiterate our warning to Houthi leadership: we will not hesitate to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways in the face of continued threats."

Britain's Ministry of Defense confirmed that four Royal Air Force Typhoon jets struck "multiple targets at two military sites in the vicinity of Sanaa airfield" with precision-guided bombs. The strikes, said Defense Secretary Grant Shapps, were "aimed at degrading Houthi capabilities" and would "deal another blow to their limited stockpiles and ability to threaten global trade."

One senior U.S. military official told reporters the strikes dropped between 25 and 30 munitions and hit multiple targets in each location, adding that the U.S. "observed good impacts and effects" at all sites, including the destruction of more advanced weapons in the underground storage facility. The official said this is the first time such advanced weapons were targeted.

The official also said fighter jets from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier conducted strikes, and other ships involved included the USS Gravelly and USS Mason, both naval destroyers, and the USS Philippine Sea, a cruiser.

The joint operation comes about 10 days after U.S. and British warships and fighter jets struck more than 60 targets in 28 locations. That was the first U.S. military response to what has been a persistent campaign of Houthi drone and missile attacks on commercial ships since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October.

The Houthis' media office said in an online statement Monday that raids targeted Sanaa, Yemen's capital. And Jamal Hassan, a resident from south Sanaa, told The Associated Press that two strikes landed near his home, setting off car alarms in the street. An Associated Press journalist in Sanaa also heard aircraft flying above the skies of Sanaa overnight Monday.

Al-Masirah, a Houthi-run satellite news channel, said there were raids on three areas of Sanaa: al-Dailami Air Base just north of the capital, Sarif, northeast of the city center, and al-Hafa, which is south of Sanaa.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke with President Joe Biden earlier Monday. Sunak's office said the two leaders agreed to take "as needed, targeted military action to degrade Houthi capabilities."

The latest barrage of allied attacks marks the eighth time the U.S. has conducted strikes on Houthi sites since Jan. 12. And it follows an almost-daily assault on Houthi missile launchers by U.S. fighter jets and ship-based Tomahawks over the past week. The rapid response missions, which officials said go after launchers that are armed and ready to fire, demonstrate the military's increasing ability to watch, detect and strike militant activities in Yemen.

The chaotic wave of attacks and reprisals involving the United States, its allies and foes suggests that



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the retaliatory strikes haven't deterred the Houthis from their campaign against Red Sea shipping, and that the broader regional war that the U.S. has spent months trying to avoid is becoming closer to reality.

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

The U.S. and allies warned of retaliation for weeks, and the White House and a host of partner nations issued a final warning on Jan. 3 to the Houthis to cease the attacks or face potential military action.

That threat, however, had little noticeable effect. The Houthis continued to attack ships in the region, including at times appearing to target U.S. Navy and U.S.-owned ships, in addition to the wide range of commercial vessels.

Of the eight strike missions on Yemen this month, all but the two with Britain were conducted by the U.S. military alone. Five of the latest strikes were labeled self-defense to take out missiles ready to fire. The most recent, on Saturday, struck and destroyed a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed into the Gulf of Aden and was prepared to launch, according to Central Command.

The Biden administration has also put the Houthis back on its list of specially designated global terrorists. The sanctions that come with the formal designation are meant to sever violent extremist groups from their sources of financing, while also allowing vital humanitarian aid to continue flowing to impoverished Yemenis.

U.S. defense officials have said they believe the strikes have degraded the Houthis' weapons and strike capabilities. But Biden and others have acknowledged that the rebels are well-equipped by Iran and are likely to continue the attacks.

The Houthis, meanwhile, have made it clear that they have no intention of scaling back their assault. In the wake of the first U.S. and British joint attack, Hussein al-Ezzi, a Houthi official in their Foreign Ministry, said, "America and Britain will undoubtedly have to prepare to pay a heavy price and bear all the dire consequences of this blatant aggression."

The continued harassment of the ships has driven the U.S. and international partners to take extraordinary steps to defend them through a joint mission named Operation Prosperity Guardian, in which they provide a protective umbrella for vessels traveling the critical waterway that runs from the Suez Canal down to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

About 400 commercial vessels transit the southern Red Sea at any given time. And the ongoing violence has prompted companies to reroute their ships, sending them around Africa through the Cape of Good Hope instead — a much longer and less efficient passage.

## **After stalling in 2023, a bill to define antisemitism in state law is advancing in Georgia**

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A bill to define antisemitism in Georgia law stalled in 2023 over how it should be worded. But a revised version won unanimous endorsement from a key Senate committee Monday, backed by Republican support for Israel in its war with Hamas and a surge in reported bias incidents against Jewish people in the state.

"I think the whole world saw what happened on Oct. 7 and the fallout to Jewish communities around the world," said Democratic state Rep. Esther Panitch of Sandy Springs, the only Jewish member of Georgia's legislature. She is a co-sponsor of the measure that won the support of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

But fears of opponents who say House Bill 30 would be used as a shield to block criticism of Israeli war crimes against Palestinians are stronger than ever, showing how what was already a fraught topic in early 2023 has become downright raw with the Israel-Hamas war. Some protesters chanting "Free Free Palestine!" were dragged from the committee room by police officers after the vote. Other opposition

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witnesses told lawmakers they were privileging political support for Israel.

"What it does do is weaponize attacks and hatred against my community and to silence Palestinian and Muslim Georgians, making threats against me somehow more important than threats against my own neighbors and implying that my safety can only come at their expense," said Marissa Pyle, who said she is Jewish. "Making other people less safe does not help me."

The bill already passed the House last year and Monday's vote signals the measure is likely to pass the state Senate and be signed into law by Gov. Brian Kemp. The Republican governor has previously said he supports the measure.

The committee also advanced Senate Bill 359 on a split vote. The measure attempts to target the distribution of antisemitic flyers in residential neighborhoods by adding littering, illegal sign placement, loitering, misdemeanor terroristic threats, disorderly conduct and harassing communications to the list of crimes that draw enhanced sentences under Georgia's hate crimes law. The law would also make any two crimes subject to Georgia's hate crimes law eligible for prosecution under the state's expansive anti-racketeering statute.

In at least eight states nationwide, lawmakers are working on measures to define antisemitism, part of an upsurge of legislation motivated in part by the Israel-Hamas war. Arkansas passed such a law last year, and like in Georgia, a South Carolina measure passed one chamber in 2023. New bills are pending this year in Indiana, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey and South Dakota.

Sponsors say a definition would help prosecutors and other officials identify hate crimes and illegal discrimination targeting Jewish people. But some critics warn it would limit free speech, especially in criticizing the actions of Israel. Others don't oppose a law, but object to the measure defining antisemitism by referring to a definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

"When can we anticipate the legislature moving forward on a bill that addresses Islamophobia?" said Asim Javed of the Georgia Muslim Voter Project. Javed added that the bill "stifles our First Amendment rights by censoring any criticisms of Israel."

But the warnings of free speech harms by the opponents were met by personal stories of harms suffered by the supporters, including Rabbi Elizabeth Baher of Macon's Temple Beth Israel. She recounted how an antisemitic group hung a Jew in effigy outside the synagogue as worshipers were arriving for services in June.

"We the people of Georgia stand united against bigotry and discrimination. Our diverse tapestry is woven with threads of resilience, understanding and mutual respect," Baher said.

Also among those who testified was David Lubin. He's the father of Rose Lubin, who grew up in suburban Atlanta but moved to Israel, becoming a staff sergeant in the Israeli army before she was stabbed to death in Jerusalem on Nov. 6. Lubin said that when her daughter was a student at suburban Atlanta's Dunwoody High School, she reported a student making antisemitic remarks and making "Heil Hitler" salutes.

"We need laws in place to deter the threat and convict those who commit the actions of hatred," David Lubin said.

## Memphis residents endure day 4 of water problems as freezing weather bursts pipes across the South

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Memphis residents spent their fourth day boiling water for drinking, brushing their teeth and preparing food on Monday as repair crews worked to fix broken pipes in hopes of easing the stress caused by a week of subfreezing temperatures, snow and ice in this southern city.

The city's water company issued a boil water notice on Friday to the more than 600,000 people it serves because low pressure in the system and breaks in water mains could allow harmful bacteria to contaminate the water supply.

"It's frustrating for us homeowners, especially old folks, to have to deal with the snow and the water problem," said 81-year-old William Wilkerson, who lost all water service between Thursday and Sunday.

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Memphis was the largest, but not the only, water system in Tennessee to experience problems from the unusually cold weather that has caused dozens of deaths around the U.S. this month, many involving hypothermia or road accidents. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency said on Sunday night that 28 other water systems were under boil water notices and 19 counties were reporting operational issues with their water utilities.

Meanwhile, the Tennessee Department of Health reported 34 weather-related fatalities across the state as of Monday.

Several days of below-freezing temperatures have also caused water problems for multiple cities around Arkansas, where freezing rain on Monday led to warnings of possible power outages as well.

In Tennessee, the several inches of snow and unusually low temperatures led the Tennessee Valley Authority to ask the 10 million people in its service area to conserve energy to avoid rolling blackouts. The utility saw its highest demand for electricity ever last week but the system remained stable.

Memphis, Light, Gas and Water CEO Doug McGowen told reporters Sunday that crews are making progress with repairs, and he expects most customers to have water service restored on Monday and Tuesday. They will still have to boil water, likely through Thursday, though.

Sarah Houston, executive director of Protect Our Aquifer, in Memphis, said she lost water service on Sunday night and still had no running water on Monday morning.

"I had filled up pitchers and water bottles and have some backup supply just for drinking," she said. "Everybody's going through it. It's just unfortunate."

While the majority-Black city is known more for its warm climate than freezing, icy weather, it has experienced winter storms in the past. But the storm last week was the fourth in past three years, showing that the city, like so many others, is feeling direct effects of climate change, Houston said.

"The first thing to recognize is that, having snow and multi-day deep freezes every year, is not normal," she said.

Houston, known in Memphis as the city's "water warrior," said that water infrastructure in the South is not built for heavy snow, large ice accumulations and days of subfreezing temperatures.

"Our water lines are not buried beneath the frost line. They're not insulated. And, they're old," she said. "If we had building codes like up North, they bury the lines deeper. Everyone's plumbing is in the center of the house. Everything is insulated."

She noted that Memphis Light, Gas and Water has poured at least \$60 million into the water system since 2021 and said the situation would have been even worse without those improvements.

Earlier this year, the Environmental Defense Fund and Texas A&M University released the U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index. It found that Shelby County, which includes Memphis, is among the most vulnerable in the U.S. The measurements included food, water and waste management.

The Rev. Earle Fisher, a community activist and the pastor at Abyssinian Missionary Baptist Church, said poorer neighborhoods have suffered years of infrastructure neglect.

"Even though the snowstorm exacerbates some of these issues, many of these issues have also been faced if there is a severe windstorm, if there was a severe rainstorm," he said.

Fisher acknowledged severe weather can compound other problems poor people face. They may suffer if they lose workdays to road and business closures. If the cold weather makes them sick, they may not have access to health care. A lack of money and transportation could make it difficult to buy water or pick it up from a distribution center, he acknowledged.

In Tipton County, the fire department in Mason warned residents on Sunday to be prepared for a multiday water outage.

"There is no current time table on how long it will be before water services will be fully restored to all customers," fire officials said in a Facebook post.

The recent winter storm was the fourth since 2021 to hit Memphis. Storms in February 2021 led to a week-long boil water advisory after water mains broke, wells failed, reservoirs froze, and motors at pumping stations overheated in a system with some parts dating to the 1930s.

An icy February 2022 storm spared the water system but led to more than 140,000 homes and busi-

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nesses losing power in Tennessee. Some residents spent six days either staying with friends or family, in hotels, or huddled in their cold homes during the outage.

Ten months later, a December storm led to rolling blackouts and a long boil-water advisory in Memphis that also was caused by broken water mains in the city.

Memphis resident Pamela Wells had been without any water since Thursday morning when she noticed a trickle coming through on Sunday night.

"We kept praying that it was a sign that water was on the way," she said. Family and friends have helped them over the past several days by delivering bottled water, she said, but she really missed things that she normally takes for granted like being able to wash her hands in the sink or take a shower.

She woke up Monday morning to find water pressure restored to about 40% of normal. "Hopefully we're on our way to full restoration of our water."

## What to know about abortion rulings, bills and campaigns as the US marks Roe anniversary

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling on Jan. 22, 1973, the time around the anniversary has always been marked by rallies, protests and political pledges.

This time, after the 2022 ruling that overturned the nationwide right to abortion that Roe provided, there's a flurry of activity as state policy gets decided by courts, lawmakers and voters.

It's also giving Democrats, including President Joe Biden's reelection campaign, a chance to rally voters around abortion access.

Abortion opponents also rallied last week in Washington with a context that's different from past editions of the annual March for Life. There's no longer a nationwide right to abortion and 14 states have bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy. But the political fallout has boosted their opponents more than them.

There were still some traditional anti-abortion rallies, including one in St. Paul, Minnesota, where an estimated 2,000 people attended, with many placing life-size models of fetuses on the steps of the state Capitol in protest of policies that protect abortion access.

Here's what to know about several developments.

**BALLOT DRIVE LAUNCHES IN COLORADO,**

**CAMPAIGN IN MARYLAND**

At least a hundred people gathered on the steps of the Colorado Capitol on Monday to launch a signature campaign for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state's constitution. A cardboard sign read, "Someone you love has had an abortion," as state lawmakers and the Colorado attorney general bunched around a microphone and the crowd cheered.

Colorado's legislature passed abortion protections last year, but "if we don't enshrine it in the constitution, we will be at the whim of lawmakers," said Nicole Hensel, executive director of New Era Colorado, one of the coalition of groups behind the Coloradans for Protecting Reproductive Freedom campaign.

Colorado has become an island of abortion protections as surrounding states installed restrictions after Roe was overturned. The Cobalt Abortion Fund based in Colorado spent six times the amount helping people get abortions in 2023 as they did in 2021.

Advocates in Maryland also used Monday's Roe v. Wade anniversary to begin their campaign to support the ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution that's already on the ballot there for November.

The only other state where a statewide vote on abortion rights in 2024 is sure to happen is New York, where the proposed amendment includes protecting reproductive freedom.

But similar votes are under consideration in more than a dozen states.

Since 2022, abortion rights supporters have prevailed on all seven statewide ballot measures.

**LAWMAKERS IN WISCONSIN, MAINE CONSIDER BALLOT MEASURES**



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Lawmakers in two states scheduled hearings for Monday as first steps to ask voters to change abortion policy. Both face uphill battles.

In Maine, Democrats are pushing for a measure that would protect reproductive autonomy in the state constitution.

Democrats control both chambers of the Legislature and the governor's office and, under state law, abortion is allowed at any point throughout pregnancy, if it's deemed necessary by a doctor.

But advancing a measure to voters would require the approval of two-thirds of both legislative chambers. To reach that, several Republicans would have to vote in favor of asking the public to vote.

In Wisconsin, a GOP proposal would ban abortion after 14 weeks of pregnancy.

Republicans control the legislature there, but Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, would likely veto the measure if it passed.

Currently, abortion is available in Wisconsin until fetal viability, but there's litigation over whether an 1849 law that conservatives interpreted as banning abortion should apply.

## MISSOURI ACTIVISTS CHOOSE AN AMENDMENT TO SUPPORT

A coalition of abortion rights supporters in Missouri decided last week which of 11 amendment proposals to support.

They went with one that would allow lawmakers to restrict abortion access only after viability — generally considered to be around 23 or 24 weeks gestation age — when a fetus might survive outside the uterus.

The decision from groups including the state ACLU chapter and Planned Parenthood chapters is one solution to a debate advocates have been having on whether to support measures that allow some abortion restrictions.

The Missouri measure would allow abortion later in pregnancy to protect the life and physical and mental health of the woman.

Some moderate Republicans are pushing a competing amendment, which would allow abortion up to 12 weeks in most cases, and between then and viability only in pregnancies resulting from rape or incest or in medical emergencies.

Under Missouri law, abortion is banned at all stages of pregnancy, with an exception to protect the life of the woman — but not in cases of rape or incest.

## BIDEN ADMINISTRATION SIDES WITH OKLAHOMA HOSPITAL

In a decision made in October but not revealed publicly until last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that an Oklahoma hospital did not violate federal law when doctors told a woman with a nonviable pregnancy to wait in a parking lot until her condition declined enough for her to qualify for an abortion under the state's strict ban.

The ruling was the latest in what's emerged as a major legal question as most Republican-controlled states have imposed abortion bans: When do exceptions apply?

In other situations, the same federal agency has maintained that hospitals would violate federal law by turning away women seeking an abortion amid medical emergencies.

Pending lawsuits from women who assert they were wrongly denied an abortion address the issue.

Even as the Biden administration ruled in favor of the hospital in the Oklahoma case, it's planning to help people file complaints under the law that's intended to ensure emergency health care access.

## Expected Trump testimony in sex abuse defamation trial postponed to Wednesday after juror falls ill

By JENNIFER PELTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — With former President Donald Trump expected to soon take the witness stand, a juror's illness abruptly forced a two-day delay Monday of a defamation trial over his comments about E. Jean Carroll, the writer he called a liar after she claimed he sexually assaulted her in the 1990s.

The trial will resume Wednesday. The change in plans came after the court asked for COVID-19 tests

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on all the jurors. One of Trump's lawyers also hasn't been feeling well but tested negative, and his team wanted to postpone the Republican presidential front-runner's next appearance until after Tuesday's New Hampshire primary.

There was no indication that Trump himself wasn't feeling well, and he didn't wear a mask in court as he watched Monday's brief proceeding. U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan announced that one of the nine jurors was sent home to take a coronavirus test after he reported feeling hot and nauseous.

Trump attorney Alina Habba also reported that at least one of her parents has COVID-19 and that she ran a fever in the last two days after having dinner with them and her law partner, Michael Madaio. Both attorneys tested negative for the virus Monday, and neither wore a mask in court.

Habba said didn't want to continue with a trimmed-down, eight-person jury and suggested that a day's delay "will be better." She later asked to postpone Trump's testimony until Wednesday because of the New Hampshire primary, while Carroll's lawyer pressed for the trial to resume Tuesday, if possible.

The judge didn't immediately rule, but the court system later announced that the trial was off until Wednesday, without specifying why.

Whenever it may happen, Trump's testimony stands to allow him — within limits that he might well test — to explain to a jury why he not only denied Carroll's claims but branded her a liar who faked a sexual attack to sell a memoir.

Because a different jury found last year that Trump sexually abused Carroll, 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.

Last week, the voluble ex-president and current Republican front-runner sat at the defense table while Carroll testified, complaining to his lawyers about a "witch hunt" and a "con job" loudly enough 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.

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.

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.

## **Death on the Arabian Sea: How a Navy SEAL fell into rough waters and another died trying to save him**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under the darkness of night, in the roiling high seas off the coast of Somalia, members of the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team 3 began to climb aboard an unflagged ship that was carrying illicit Iranian-made weapons to Yemen.

As Navy Special Warfare Operator 2nd Class Nathan Gage Ingram began climbing the ladder onto the boat, he slipped, falling into a gap the waves had created between the vessel and the SEALs' combatant craft. As he went under, Navy Special Warfare Operator 1st Class Christopher J. Chambers jumped into the gap to try to save him, according to U.S. officials familiar with the incident.

It was an instinctive act, honed by years of training, one teammate going to another's aid. But weighed down by their body armor, weapons and heavy equipment, the two SEALs plunged into the depths of the Arabian Sea and died, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details of the Jan. 11 raid.

The mission came as the interdiction of weapons to Yemen takes on new urgency. The Yemen-based Houthis have been conducting a campaign of missile and drone attacks against commercial and Navy ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. And U.S. retaliatory strikes have so far not deterred their assaults.

The 11-day search and rescue mission to locate the two SEALs was called off on Sunday and became a recovery effort. And on Monday, the Navy released their names, after their families were notified.

"Chris and Gage selflessly served their country with unwavering professionalism and exceptional capabilities," said Capt. Blake Chaney, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 1, which oversees SEAL Team 3. "This loss is devastating for NSW, our families, the special operations community, and across the nation."

At the White House, President Joe Biden said in a statement that, "Jill and I are mourning the tragic deaths of two of America's finest — Navy SEALs who were lost at sea while executing a mission off the coast of East Africa last week." He said the SEALs represent "the very best of our country, pledging their lives to protect their fellow Americans. Our hearts go out to the family members, loved ones, friends, and

shipmates who are grieving for these two brave Americans.”

The U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet is conducting an investigation into the incident. That probe is expected to examine whether the SEALs were properly equipped and trained for the mission, whether procedures were followed, and any decisions regarding the timing and approval of the raid, including the weather and the state of the seas.

According to officials, the commandos launched from the USS Lewis B. Puller, a mobile sea base, and they were backed up by drones and helicopters. They loaded onto small special operations combat craft driven by naval special warfare crew to get to the boat. It was the type of boarding for which SEALs train routinely, and illegal weapons moving from Iran to Yemen-based Houthis have been a persistent concern, particularly as the rebels continue to target commercial vessels in the region.

The team boarding the dhow was facing more than a dozen crew members. They ultimately seized an array of Iranian-made weaponry, including cruise and ballistic missile components such as propulsion and guidance devices and warheads, as well as air defense parts, Central Command said.

The raid was the latest seizure by the U.S. Navy and its allies of weapon shipments bound for the rebels, who have launched a series of attacks now threatening global trade in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The seized missile components included types likely used in those attacks.

Chambers and Ingram, who were assigned to a West Coast-based SEAL unit, “were exceptional warriors, cherished teammates, and dear friends to many within the Naval Special Warfare community,” said Chaney.

Chambers, 37, of Maryland, enlisted in the Navy in 2012, and graduated from SEAL training in 2014. His awards include the Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal with Combat “C” and three Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medals. Ingram, 27, of Texas, enlisted in 2019, and graduated from SEAL training in 2021.

## **Iran is ‘directly involved’ in Yemen Houthi rebel ship attacks, US Navy’s Mideast chief tells AP**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Iran is “very directly involved” in ship attacks that Yemen’s Houthi rebels have carried out during Israel’s war against Hamas, the U.S. Navy’s top Mideast commander told The Associated Press on Monday.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of the Navy’s 5th Fleet, stopped short of saying Tehran directed individual attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

However, Cooper acknowledged that attacks associated with Iran have expanded from previously threatening just the Persian Gulf and its Strait of Hormuz into waters across the wider Middle East.

“Clearly, the Houthi actions, probably in terms of their attacks on merchant shipping, are the most significant that we’ve seen in two generations,” he told the AP in a telephone interview. “The facts simply are that they’re attacking the international community; thus, the international response I think you’ve seen.”

Iran’s mission to the United Nations and the Houthi leadership in Yemen’s capital, Sanaa, didn’t respond to a request for comment. However, the Houthis later claimed to have attacked a U.S.-flagged vessel, something that the 5th Fleet dismissed as “patently false.”

Since November, the Iranian-backed Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading up to Egypt’s Suez Canal, a vital route for energy and cargo coming from Asia and the Middle East onward to Europe.

The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that’s held Sanaa since 2014 and been at war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen’s exiled government since 2015, link their attacks to the Israel-Hamas war. However, the ships they’ve targeted increasingly have tenuous links to Israel — or none at all.

In recent days, the U.S. has launched seven rounds of airstrikes on Houthi military sites, targeting air bases under the rebels’ control and suspected missile launch sites.

However, risks for the global economy remain as many ships continue to bypass that route for a longer trip around Africa’s southern tip. That meant lower revenue for Egypt through the Suez Canal, a vital source of hard currency for the country’s troubled economy, as well as higher costs for shipping that could push



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up global inflation.

As Cooper took command of the 5th Fleet in 2021, the threat to shipping focused primarily around the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all oil traded passes. A series of attacks blamed on Iran and ship seizures by Tehran followed the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers.

In his interview with the AP, the Navy commander acknowledged the threat from Iran's proxies and that its distribution of weapons extended from the Red Sea out to the far reaches of the Indian Ocean. The U.S. has blamed Iran for recent drone attacks on shipping, and a U.S.-owned cargo vessel came under attack from the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden last week.

So far, Iran hasn't become directly involved in fighting either Israel or the U.S. since the war in Gaza began on Oct. 7. However, Cooper maintained Iran had been directly fueling the Houthi attacks on shipping. "What I'll say is Iran is clearly funding, they're resourcing, they are supplying and they're providing training," Cooper said. "They're obviously very directly involved. There's no secret there."

Cooper described the ship attacks striking the Mideast as the worst since the so-called Tanker War of the 1980s. It culminated in a one-day naval battle between Washington and Tehran, and also saw the U.S. Navy accidentally shoot down an Iranian passenger jet, killing 290 people in 1988.

Back then, American naval ships escorted reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers through the Persian Gulf and the strait after Iranian mines damaged vessels in the region. Cooper said authorities had no current plans to reflag ships and escort them past Yemen.

Instead, the U.S. and its allies employ a "zone defense, and every once and a while we shift to a one-on-one," he said.

Cooper's reference to the tensions from more than three decades ago underlines just how precarious the situation in the wider Mideast has become as worries of a regional conflict over the Israel-Hamas war grow.

Monday night, Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, in a recorded address, claimed an attack in the Gulf of Aden on the Ocean Jazz, a U.S.-flagged ship managed by Seabulk, a company in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The firm declined to comment when reached by the AP. The Ocean Jazz had been in the Red Sea heading south four days ago, according to tracking data.

The 5th Fleet issued an online statement dismissing the Houthi claim.

"The Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists' report of an alleged successful attack on M/V Ocean Jazz is patently false," it said. The 5th Fleet "has maintained constant communications with M/V Ocean Jazz throughout its safe transit."

Cooper spoke to the AP from the sidelines of a drone conference in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. Under his command of the 5th Fleet, the naval force has created Task Force 59, a drone fleet to bolster its patrol of waterways in the region.

Today, a variety of drones provide the 5th Fleet coverage across about 10,000 square miles (25,900 square kilometers) of Mideast waters that the Navy otherwise wouldn't have eyes on, Cooper said. That helps its efforts to interdict suspected drug and weapons shipments.

U.S. forces seized Iranian-made missile parts and other weaponry this month from a ship bound for the Houthis in a raid that saw two Navy SEALs go missing. The U.S. military's Central Command said Sunday it now believes the SEALs are dead.

While not directly saying his fleet's drones played a part in the seizure, Cooper hinted at it.

"They are specifically designed to conduct interdiction operations," he said. He added: "There's no squeaking anything by it."

Cooper's command is set to end in February with the upcoming arrival of Rear Adm. George Wikoff in Bahrain. He noted that the Navy and merchant shippers still face a serious threat from the Houthis as he prepares to leave.

"What we need is a Houthi decision to stop attacking international merchant ships. Period," Cooper said.

## Plagiarism probe finds some problems with former Harvard president Claudine Gay's work

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Harvard University has shed fresh light on the ongoing investigation into plagiarism accusations against former president Claudine Gay, including that an independent body recommended a broader review after substantiating some of the complaints.

In a letter Friday to a congressional committee, Harvard said it learned of the plagiarism allegations against its first Black female president on Oct. 24 from a New York Post reporter. The school reached out to several authors whom Gay is accused of plagiarizing and none objected to her language, it said.

Harvard then appointed the independent body, which focused on two of Gay's articles published in 2012 and 2017. It concluded they "are both sophisticated and original," and found "virtually no evidence of intentional claiming of findings" that were not her own.

The panel, however, concluded that nine of 25 allegations found by the Post were "of principal concern" and featured "paraphrased or reproduced the language of others without quotation marks and without sufficient and clear crediting of sources." It also found one instance where "fragments of duplicative language and paraphrasing" by Gay could be interpreted as her taking credit for another academic's work, though there isn't any evidence that was her aim.

It also found that a third paper, written by Gay during her first year in graduate school, contained "identical language to that previously published by others."

Those findings prompted a broader review of her work by a Harvard subcommittee, which eventually led Gay to make corrections to the 2012 article as well as a 2001 article that surfaced in the broader review. The subcommittee presented its findings Dec. 9 to the Harvard Corporation, Harvard's governing board, concluding that Gay's "conduct was not reckless nor intentional and, therefore, did not constitute research misconduct."

Gay's academic career first came under the scrutiny following her congressional testimony about anti-semitism on campus. Gay, Liz Magill of the University of Pennsylvania and MIT's president, Sally Kornbluth, came under criticism for their lawyerly answers to New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, who asked whether "calling for the genocide of Jews" would violate the colleges' codes of conduct.

The three presidents had been called before the Republican-led House Committee on Education and the Workforce to answer accusations that universities were failing to protect Jewish students amid rising fears of antisemitism worldwide and the fallout from Israel's intensifying war in Gaza.

Gay said it depended on the context, adding that when "speech crosses into conduct, that violates our policies." The answer faced swift backlash from Republican and some Democratic lawmakers, as well as the White House.

The House committee announced days later that it would investigate the policies and disciplinary procedures at Harvard, MIT and Penn.

The corporation initially rallied behind Gay, saying a review of her scholarly work turned up "a few instances of inadequate citation" but no evidence of research misconduct. The allegations of plagiarism continued to surface through December and Gay resigned this month.

## Federal officials recommend that airlines inspect door plugs on some older Boeing jets as well

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Aviation Administration recommends that airlines inspect the door plugs on certain Boeing 737s that are older than the Max 9 jetliner that suffered a blowout of a similar panel during a flight this month.

The FAA said door plugs on one older version of the 737, called the 737-900ER, are identical in design to those on the Max 9, and some airlines "have noted findings with bolts during the maintenance inspections."

The FAA issued a safety alert late Sunday. As soon as possible, airlines should visually inspect four places

where a bolt, nut and pin secure the door plug to the plane, the agency said.

The door plugs are panels that seal holes left for extra doors when the number of seats is not enough to trigger a requirement for more emergency-evacuation exits. From inside the plane, they look like a regular window.

The FAA said that 737-900ERs have logged 3.9 million flights without any known issues involving the door plugs. By contrast, the Max 9 that suffered the blowout had made only 145 flights.

One of the two door plugs on an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max 9 flew off the plane in midflight on Jan. 5. Passengers and investigators have described a violent decompression as air rushed out of the pressured cabin at 16,000 feet over Oregon.

The plane made an emergency landing with a hole in its side, and no serious injuries were reported. On a mostly full plane, no one was sitting in the two seats nearest the panel that blew out.

The FAA has grounded all Max 9s with door plugs instead of regular doors in the back of the cabin. Alaska and United Airlines are the only U.S. carriers to use the plane.

Besides grounding 171 Max 9 jets, the FAA is investigating quality-control measures at Boeing and its suppliers and has increased its oversight of the aircraft maker. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the Oregon incident.

"We fully support the FAA and our customers in this action," a Boeing spokeswoman said in a statement Monday.

Boeing delivered about 500 737-900ERs between 2007 and 2019 – mostly to three U.S. airlines -- and about 380 have door plugs instead of exits.

Alaska said Monday that it began inspecting its 737-900ERs "several days ago" and has turned up no issues. The Seattle-based airline, which has canceled hundreds of flights because of the Max 9 grounding, said it expects no disruption from the inspections of its 737-900ERs.

United said it began inspecting the earlier Boeing model last week and expects to finish the reviews this week with no disruptions for passengers. Delta Air Lines, with 130 planes affected by the new FAA recommendation, said it was inspecting all 130 of its 737-900ERs and did not expect any impact on operations.

## **Modi opens Hindu temple built on ruins on razed mosque, in political triumph for prime minister**

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE, SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

AYODHYA, India (AP) — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened a controversial Hindu temple Monday that was built on the ruins of a razed historic mosque — a political triumph for the populist leader who is seeking to transform the country from a secular democracy into a Hindu state.

The temple, dedicated to Hinduism's Lord Ram, sits on a site in the northern city of Ayodhya where Hindu mobs tore down a mosque three decades ago. Its fraught history is still an open wound for many Muslims, who have increasingly come under attack by Hindu nationalist groups. Some see the temple as the biggest example yet of the rise of Hindu supremacy under Modi's tenure.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party and other Hindu nationalist groups have portrayed the temple's consecration as central to their vision of reclaiming Hindu pride, which they say was suppressed during centuries of Mogul rule and British colonialism. He and his party hope that opening the temple — which millions of Hindus who worship the deity had demanded — will help catapult the prime minister to a record third successive term in elections expected this spring.

But with the temple still under construction, critics accuse Modi of a hurried opening to woo voters.

And analysts say the pomp-filled display led by the government marks a key moment in India's history, showing the extent to which the line between religion and state has eroded under Modi. That distinction was seen by India's founding fathers as crucial to maintaining the country's communal cohesion.

On Monday, the prime minister, 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 priest blew a conch to mark the temple's opening, and Modi placed

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a lotus flower in front of the black stone statue, decked in intricate gold ornaments and holding a golden bow and arrow. He later prostrated before it.

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.

"Our Lord Ram has arrived after centuries of wait," Modi said in a speech after the ceremony, receiving 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.

Modi's government turned the event into a national occasion by organizing live screenings across the country and closing offices for half a day. Saffron flags — the color of Hinduism — adorned the streets of various cities where government party workers had gone door to door handing out religious pamphlets.

Television news channels ran nonstop coverage of the event. Some movie theaters broadcast it live with complimentary popcorn. Many states declared the day a public holiday. In a rare step, stock and money markets were closed for the day.

"Ram Rajya (rule) begins," a TV news headline said. Ram Rajya is a Sanskrit 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.

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.

"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 buoy Modi's chances of returning to power by drawing on the religious sentiments of Hindus, who make 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. Some 20,000 security personnel and more than 10,000 security cameras have been deployed.

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.

"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.

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 also boycotted the event, with many accusing Modi of exploiting the temple for political points.

Neighboring Pakistan said a temple built on the site of a demolished mosque would remain a blot on India's democracy.

"There is a growing list of mosques (in India) facing a similar threat of desecration and destruction," Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It urged the international community to help save Islamic heritage sites in India from "extremist groups" and ensure that minority rights are protected.

Built at an estimated cost of \$217 million — all raised through donations from the public — 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 mosque's demolition triggered 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.

At least three historical mosques in northern India are embroiled in court disputes following claims by Hindu nationalists who say they were built over temple ruins. Hindu nationalists have also filed cases in Indian courts seeking ownership of hundreds of historic mosques.

## **In Pennsylvania's Senate race, McCormick elevates the Israel-Hamas war in a 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. Casey, meanwhile, has been a staunch Israel ally in Congress.

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

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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.

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."

## **A temple to a top Hindu deity was built over a destroyed mosque in India. Here is why it matters**

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.

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

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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.

## After stalling in 2023, a bill to define antisemitism in state law is advancing in Georgia

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A bill to define antisemitism in Georgia law stalled in 2023 over how it should be worded. But a revised version won unanimous endorsement from a key Senate committee Monday, backed by Republican support for Israel in its war with Hamas and a surge in reported bias incidents against Jewish people in the state.

"I think the whole world saw what happened on Oct. 7 and the fallout to Jewish communities around the world," said Democratic state Rep. Esther Panitch of Sandy Springs, the only Jewish member of Georgia's legislature. She is a co-sponsor of the measure that won the support of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

But fears of opponents who say House Bill 30 would be used as a shield to block criticism of Israeli war crimes against Palestinians are stronger than ever, showing how what was already a fraught topic in early 2023 has become downright raw with the Israel-Hamas war. Some protesters chanting "Free Free Palestine!" were dragged from the committee room by police officers after the vote. Other opposition witnesses told lawmakers they were privileging political support for Israel.

"What it does do is weaponize attacks and hatred against my community and to silence Palestinian and Muslim Georgians, making threats against me somehow more important than threats against my own neighbors and implying that my safety can only come at their expense," said Marissa Pyle, who said she is Jewish. "Making other people less safe does not help me."

The bill already passed the House last year and Monday's vote signals the measure is likely to pass the state Senate and be signed into law by Gov. Brian Kemp. The Republican governor has previously said he supports the measure.

The committee also advanced Senate Bill 359 on a split vote. The measure attempts to target the distribution of antisemitic flyers in residential neighborhoods by adding littering, illegal sign placement, loitering, misdemeanor terroristic threats, disorderly conduct and harassing communications to the list of crimes that draw enhanced sentences under Georgia's hate crimes law. The law would also make any two crimes subject to Georgia's hate crimes law eligible for prosecution under the state's expansive anti-racketeering statute.

In at least eight states nationwide, lawmakers are working on measures to define antisemitism, part of an upsurge of legislation motivated in part by the Israel-Hamas war. Arkansas passed such a law last year, and like in Georgia, a South Carolina measure passed one chamber in 2023. New bills are pending this year in Indiana, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey and South Dakota.

Sponsors say a definition would help prosecutors and other officials identify hate crimes and illegal discrimination targeting Jewish people. But some critics warn it would limit free speech, especially in criticizing the actions of Israel. Others don't oppose a law, but object to the measure defining antisemitism by



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referring to a definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

"When can we anticipate the legislature moving forward on a bill that addresses Islamophobia?" said Asim Javed of the Georgia Muslim Voter Project. Javed added that the bill "stifles our First Amendment rights by censoring any criticisms of Israel."

But the warnings of free speech harms by the opponents were met by personal stories of harms suffered by the supporters, including Rabbi Elizabeth Baher of Macon's Temple Beth Israel. She recounted how an antisemitic group hung a Jew in effigy outside the synagogue as worshipers were arriving for services in June.

"We the people of Georgia stand united against bigotry and discrimination. Our diverse tapestry is woven with threads of resilience, understanding and mutual respect," Baher said.

Also among those who testified was David Lubin. He's the father of Rose Lubin, who grew up in suburban Atlanta but moved to Israel, becoming a staff sergeant in the Israeli army before she was stabbed to death in Jerusalem on Nov. 6. Lubin said that when her daughter was a student at suburban Atlanta's Dunwoody High School, she reported a student making antisemitic remarks and making "Heil Hitler" salutes.

"We need laws in place to deter the threat and convict those who commit the actions of hatred," David Lubin said.

## Today in History: January 23

### 24th Amendment bans poll taxes in federal elections

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Jan. 23, the 23rd day of 2024. There are 343 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 23, 1964, the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution, eliminating the poll tax in federal elections, was ratified as South Dakota became the 38th state to endorse it.

On this date:

In 1368, China's Ming dynasty, which lasted nearly three centuries, began as Zhu Yuanzhang (zhoo whan-zhang) was formally acclaimed emperor, following the collapse of the Yuan dynasty.

In 1789, Georgetown University was established in present-day Washington, D.C.

In 1845, Congress decided all national elections would be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

In 1932, New York Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1950, the Israeli Knesset approved a resolution affirming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

In 1962, Jackie Robinson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon announced an accord had been reached to end the Vietnam War, and would be formally signed four days later in Paris.

In 1977, the TV mini-series "Roots," based on the Alex Haley novel, began airing on ABC.

In 1998, fighting scandal allegations involving Monica Lewinsky, President Clinton assured his Cabinet during a meeting that he was innocent and urged them to concentrate on their jobs.

In 2002, John Walker Lindh, a U.S.-born Taliban fighter, was returned to the United States to face criminal charges that he'd conspired to kill fellow Americans. (Lindh was sentenced to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to providing support for the Taliban; he was released in May 2019 after serving more than 17 years.)

In 2012, in a rare defeat for law enforcement, the Supreme Court unanimously agreed to bar police from installing GPS technology to track suspects without first getting a judge's approval.

In 2018, LeBron James, at 33, became the youngest player in NBA history with 30,000 career points.

In 2020, Chinese state media said the city of Wuhan would be shutting down outbound flights and trains, trying to halt the spread of a new virus that had sickened hundreds of people and killed at least 17. The

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World Health Organization said the viral illness in China was not yet a global health emergency.

In 2021, Hal Holbrook, the actor who toured the world for more than 50 years as Mark Twain in a one-man show and appeared as "Deep Throat" in "All the President's Men," died at 95, and Larry King, known for decades of broadcast interviews with world leaders, movie stars and ordinary Joes, died at 87.

Today's birthdays: Actor Chita Rivera is 91. Actor-director Lou Antonio is 90. Jazz musician Gary Burton is 81. Actor Gil Gerard is 81. Sen. Thomas R. Carper, D-Del., is 77. Actor Richard Dean Anderson is 74. Rock musician Bill Cunningham (The Box Tops) is 74. Rock singer Robin Zander (Cheap Trick) is 71. Former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa (vee-yah-ry-GOH'-sah) is 71. Princess Caroline of Monaco is 67. Singer Anita Baker is 66. Reggae musician Earl Falconer (UB40) is 65. Actor Peter Mackenzie is 63. Actor Boris McGiver is 62. Actor Gail O'Grady is 61. Actor Mariska Hargitay is 60. R&B singer Marc Nelson is 53. CBS Evening News anchor Norah O'Donnell is 50. Actor Tiffani Thiessen is 50. Rock musician Nick Harmer (Death Cab for Cutie) is 49. Actor Lindsey Kraft is 44. Singer-actor Rachel Crow is 26.