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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)

Friday, Jan. 26

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad on croissant, tomato spoon salad, Mandarin oranges.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Vegetable soup, cheese stick.

Girls Basketball at Webster: (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., Varsity to follow)

Groton Area Wrestling Triangular, 6 p.m. (Britton-Hecla and Canistota)

Saturday, Jan. 27

Boys Basketball at NEC/DAK12 Clash in Madison
Boys and Girls Varsity Wrestling Tournament at Groton, 10 a.m.

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



Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 28

Carnival of Silver Skates, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.
Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10 a.m., Groton Community Center

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

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

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

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Pastor at Bethesda, Aberdeen.

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

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A Russian military transport plane crashed yesterday in Belgorod, Russia, near the border with Ukraine, according to a video shot from a cellphone (see here; sensitive content). Russian military officials claimed Ukraine shot down the plane, killing 74, including 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war en route to a planned prisoner swap. Ukrainian officials did not confirm the reports, and the number and identity of the victims were not yet independently verified.

The first US execution using nitrogen gas is expected to be carried out today in Alabama after the Supreme Court rejected arguments that the procedure was at risk of being carried out incorrectly. The inmate, 58-year-old Kenneth Smith, was convicted in a 1988 murder-for-hire plot.

Scientists have achieved the world's first in vitro fertilization of a southern white rhino, according to an announcement yesterday. The procedure paves the way to save a closely related endangered species, the northern white rhino, whose population has dwindled in central and east Africa due to poaching.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Jon Stewart to return to "The Daily Show" after nine years as Monday night host and executive producer. Netflix confirms 2024 release, exact date to be determined, for "Squid Game" season 2.

Jim Harbaugh departing Michigan after nine seasons to take head coaching job with NFL's Los Angeles Chargers. Five NHL players from Canada's 2018 world junior team take leave of absence amid inquiry into alleged sexual assault.

James Beard Foundation announces 2024 James Beard Awards semifinalists for the nation's best restaurants and chefs.

Science & Technology

National Science Foundation launches initiative to link cutting-edge AI tools with academic research institutions around the country; partnership includes Nvidia, Amazon, Meta, and more.

Chronic stress reduces certain gut bacteria that protect against pathogens, new study finds; results reveal details of one link between stress and inflammatory bowel disease.

Scientists construct the most complete genomic map of the Arabica coffee bean, which accounts for close to 60% of global coffee production; findings may lead to more disease- and drought-resistant strains.

Business & Markets

In partnership with The Ascent

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.1%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq +0.4%); S&P 500 continues to hit fresh all-time high. Microsoft surpasses \$3T in market value, becoming the second company ever after Apple to cross the threshold.

eBay to lay off 1,000 full-time jobs, or about 9% of its global workforce; CEO says company's current headcount and expenses outpaced business growth.

Tesla misses Q4 revenue and profit estimates on weak automotive revenue, partly due to worldwide price cuts of its vehicles. Tesla reportedly planning to build new compact crossover electric vehicles in June 2025.

Politics & World Affairs

Houthi militants fire ballistic missiles at US-owned and -operated cargo ship in Red Sea, continuing its attacks despite rounds of US airstrikes. UN top court to issue preliminary ruling Friday on South Africa's request to halt Israel's Gaza offensive.

Ohio lawmakers override Gov. Mike DeWine's (R) veto of legislation banning gender-affirming care for youth and barring transgender women and girls from participating on female school sports teams.

Johnson & Johnson to pay \$149.5M to Washington state to settle claims it helped fuel opioid crisis.

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.

Taking Care of Veterans, an Unending Legacy

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) is an essential advocate for veterans, offering personal case development and tracking state and federal claims for benefits that veterans have earned. We focus on our core mission of providing professional-level representation to obtain federal and state benefits, reinforcing our reputation as one of the most educated and experienced team of advocates.

We have seen a significant increase in claims filings over the last three years. SDDVA and our partners obtained more than \$378 million in compensation and pension payments for veterans and their survivors in 2023.

In the military, personnel do not leave until the mission is complete. So, although we have secured great benefits for our veterans, there is always more to be done.

SDDVA has a new program called "What's Brewing." This program is a great opportunity for our leadership team to visit with veterans and hear first-hand about the issues they are experiencing, as well as allow for the opportunity for veterans to hear about new benefits and services. As the advocate for South Dakota veterans, we need to know what challenges our veterans and their families are facing.

You will also find our outreach team at such events as Veterans Day programs, Congressional forums, the State Fair, County Fairs, Memorial Day programs, VA sponsored events, Stand Downs, and Yellow Ribbons.

We encourage veterans to join our outreach events for conversation, information, and resources on benefits. Veterans can check out our calendar for outreach events in their area at <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/publicaffairs/upcomingevents.aspx>.

We have also launched another new program, Operation VNF (Veterans Never Forgotten). VNF affords us the opportunity to communicate with our veterans in long term care facilities. This battle plan has three pathways – to visit with veterans, connect veterans with their local county or tribal veterans service officer, and educate the administrators about the need for VA approved rooms for veterans.

At the end of each day, our true measure of success will be the timeliness, the quality, and the consistency of the services provided to our veterans. They deserve nothing less.

To all those who have faithfully served, we thank you!

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



Greg Whitlock,
Secretary
South Dakota
Department of
Veterans Affairs



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

'Critical threat' to medical marijuana falls as lawmakers consider nine cannabis bills

Bill to force patients to get cards through primary care docs was among proposals for 2024

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 24, 2024 5:19 PM

A Senate panel chaired by a member of the state's Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee shot down a bill Wednesday with far-reaching implications for cannabis patients.

Among nine bills that would adjust South Dakota's medical cannabis laws this legislative session in Pierre, seven remain alive, including bills to hike the price of a dispensary license, allow police to search dispensaries and force prescribers to notify a patient's primary care provider about their receipt of a card.

The now-scuttled Senate Bill 82 was the most concerning for cannabis advocates, according to Jeremiah Murphy, a lobbyist for the Cannabis Industry Association of South Dakota.

It would have required citizens to get medical marijuana cards from their primary care provider, or through a referral from that provider, and defined what constitutes a primary care provider. Opponents argued it cleared a simpler path to criminal charges for doctors who prescribe marijuana.

"Senate Bill 82 was absolutely the most critical threat out of what's out there," Murphy told South Dakota Searchlight after the bill's 5-2 defeat in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. "They got a lot of feedback from patients on that one. They poked the beehive, and bees came out."

That threat of criminal charges for doctors was a deciding factor for Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner. Tobin is a nurse by trade and chairs the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. She also sits on the Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee with the bill's sponsor, Sen. Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre.

That oversight committee discussed but did not endorse a host of ideas during its 2023 meetings. Mehlhaff and Tobin have each carried cannabis bills into the 2024 session, but the pair were split on SB 82.

The bill's attempt to define the term "primary care provider" in a profession where provider roles are too malleable to fit snugly into legal terminology was especially problematic for Tobin.

Some people see cardiologists for primary care, she said. Others see doctors who may be unwilling to refer patients to a specialist for a marijuana card. Many don't have a primary care doctor at all and get care through a clinic.

During his testimony, Murphy noted that 30% of Americans have no primary care doctor.

Tobin argued Wednesday that medical professionals with questions about the legal veracity of their role as primary care doctors might be unlikely to prescribe medical cannabis to otherwise qualifying patients.

"If there's a questionable piece to this, doctors are just going to pull out," Tobin said.

Sponsor: System is not working

Mehlhaff has been peppered with feedback over his bill, he said. Most of it was some form of a reference to the ballot question that legalized medical marijuana four years ago, such as, "you're trying to undo the will of the people," he said.

"That is not the case," Mehlhaff said. "That is not what I'm doing."

He presented the bill as a curative to "pop-up clinics" and satellite medical offices that offer patients a pathway to a medical marijuana card outside of a traditional clinic setting.

The initiated measure that legalized medical cannabis was endorsed by 74% of voters in 2020. Its verbiage foresaw medical cards flowing to patients through the conduit of a provider with whom the patient

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has a "bona fide doctor-patient relationship," via a direct prescription from the doctor or a referral.

Mehlhoff's bill would have struck that language, added a definition of "primary care provider," and made clear that doctors who write pot prescriptions without a previous relationship to a patient are in line for a class 2 misdemeanor.

The current language hasn't prevented abuse of the system, Mehlhoff said.

"It's not being followed," Mehlhoff said of the law's requirement for doctors to have a "bona fide" doctor-patient relationship before writing a pot prescription.

"I think a lot of times, they're preying on people's addictions," Mehlhoff said.

Dr. Tamara Grove, a lobbyist for the anti-cannabis group Protecting South Dakota Kids, told the committee that nearly three times as many people than expected now have medical marijuana cards in South Dakota. There are 13,150 approved patient cards in the state.

That people could be getting cards to use recreational marijuana, Grove said, means that the will of voters has not been respected.

"The people of South Dakota did indeed vote for medical marijuana to be law," Grove said. "What they did not vote for is recreational marijuana."

Mehlhoff said the bill would simply put the ability to prescribe marijuana in the hands of primary care doctors, which, he argued, is how medical decisions ought to be made.

"That's all that we're asking for: that medical marijuana be treated like any other medication that's dispensed by professionals," he said.

Opponents: Pitch could quash access for patients

Tobin's concerns focused on the issue of defining primary care providers, as well as on SB 82's potential for unintended consequences. Other opposing committee members zeroed in on a lack of data to prove that people are abusing the system, as well as the impact to patients without primary care physicians and veterans who get their primary care through the Veterans Affairs Health System.

VA doctors are prohibited from prescribing medical marijuana.

"I understand the spirit of what we're trying to accomplish with this bill, but I have concerns about its realistic application," said Sen. Sydney Davis, R-Burbank.

Davis also challenged the notion that the bill would create parity between marijuana and other medications. Doctors needn't be primary care providers, which she referred to as "PCPs," to write a prescription for opioids, Davis said.

"We don't do that for anything else in health care," Davis said. "Whether that's a pain medicine, or a painkiller, we don't do that. We don't require you to have a PCP."

Sen. Shawn Bordeaux, D-Mission, pointed to the difficulty Native American citizens have finding a primary care doctor on reservations. In many cases, he said, overbooked doctors at the Indian Health Service (IHS) are the only realistic health care option on reservations.

The IHS, like the VA, bars its doctors from prescribing marijuana, a substance legal in the majority of states but illegal under federal law.

"The IHS is an issue," Bordeaux said. "For many people in my community and communities like mine, it's hard to find a primary care doctor. Many times it's the emergency room."

Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, said he's not convinced there's enough proof of abuse to clamp down on access for legitimate cannabis patients. When questioned by Reed, Mehlhoff admitted that there is no data to back claims of widespread abuse.

"Some people are going to slip through this process," Reed said. "But the idea is to make this accessible. When you talk about the will of the people, they want it to be accessible."

Other pot bills still alive

Just before the committee voted down SB 82, Tobin reminded the committee that several other cannabis bills are still alive.

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She specifically noted SB 10, which would require any provider signing off on a medical marijuana card to tell a patient's primary care provider about it. Tobin is the prime sponsor of that bill, and said Monday on the Senate floor that such an information exchange is part of the standards of care for medical practitioners.

"Primary care provider" may not have a statutory definition, but Tobin told South Dakota Searchlight after Wednesday's committee hearing that current medical cannabis law already expects patients to have a relationship with a provider before getting a card, or to get a referral to another provider through a doctor they know and work with.

"There should have been some communication from someone leading up to that visit," Tobin said. "I know that's not always happening, but that's the way it should happen."

The federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) prevents the disclosure of personal information by medical professionals, but Tobin said that act is tied to medical care covered by insurance.

"Marijuana does not go through those routes," Tobin said. "I would say if I had a clinic, I would make sure that there were policies and procedures in place to ensure confidentiality. But is it a HIPAA requirement? I don't know the exact answer to that. I would say probably not because it's going through a different path."

SB 10 passed the full Senate on a 30-3 vote.

Murphy told South Dakota Searchlight that his group's opposition to that bill hasn't been tied to issues of data privacy. It's because the group finds it redundant in the face of another bill that would put medical cardholders into a prescription drug monitoring database accessible by all doctors in the state.

"Our objection to that was that it was superfluous," Murphy said.

None of the other cannabis-related bills currently on the legislative docket aim to place restrictions on marijuana card access to the degree of SB 82. One, SB 11, forbids a practitioner from referring a patient to a clinic in which they or their family have a financial stake, but does not attempt to adjust the definition of a primary care provider or otherwise amend current law on doctor-patient relationships.

That bill also sailed through a Senate committee and passed on the Senate floor.

Other 2024 marijuana bills

House Bill 1024: Requires applications for medical pot cards to note that federal law bars the ownership of firearms by people who "use or are addicted to marijuana." HB 1024 succeeded on the House floor by a vote of 68-1. It passed the Senate Health and Human Services on Wednesday and now heads to the Senate floor.

House Bill 1036: Requires marijuana dispensaries to post a notice on the potential for marijuana use to affect their firearms rights. HB 1036 passed the full House 42-27, but the Senate Health and Human Services Committee rejected it.

Senate Bill 12: Allows employers in safety sensitive jobs to bar marijuana use by employees. SB 12 passed the full Senate 32-1. The bill's next hearing will take place in the House Judiciary Committee.

Senate Bill 42: This bill includes several changes to existing medical cannabis law, including adjustments to probation policies for dispensaries that run afoul of regulations. The biggest change, however, would require the names of medical cannabis cardholders to be added to the state's prescription drug monitoring program. Currently, anyone prescribed a narcotic is listed in that database, used by providers to check for doctor-shopping by addicts. SB 42 passed the Senate 29-4. It's now set for a hearing by House Health and Human Services.

Senate Bill 43: Increases the state fee for a dispensary license application from \$5,000 to \$14,000, allows fines of up to \$10,000 for misbehaving dispensaries and allows the Department of Health to terminate a dispensary's license for repeated and serious regulatory violations. SB 43 passed the Senate 22-11 and now heads to the House Health and Human Services Committee.

Senate Bill 71: Repeals a provision in South Dakota's medical marijuana statute barring law enforcement from inspecting dispensaries, manufacturing facilities, or testing facilities, or from seizing their cannabis. The Senate passed SB 71 on a 26-7 vote on Tuesday. The bill will next appear in the House Health and Human Services Committee.

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.

Medicaid work requirement authorization takes first step toward the ballot

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 24, 2024 2:54 PM

PIERRE — South Dakota legislators took the first step Wednesday toward asking voters for the authority to impose work requirements on some Medicaid recipients.

The Senate State Affairs Committee voted 7-1 to send the resolution to the full Senate. If passed by that body and the House of Representatives, the measure will be placed on ballots statewide in the Nov. 5 general election.

Voters would be asked to put authority into the state constitution for the state to impose work requirements on Medicaid recipients who have not been diagnosed as physically or mentally disabled. Medicaid is a federal-state health insurance program for eligible low-income adults, children, pregnant women, elderly adults and people with disabilities.

South Dakota voters approved a constitutional amendment in the 2022 general election to expand Medicaid income eligibility, making South Dakota the 39th state to expand the program. Current data from the state Department of Social Services says nearly 126,000 South Dakotans are enrolled in Medicaid.

Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff testified that the number of expansion enrollees has reached about 18,000 since expansion began in July.

The proposed resolution, if approved by voters, would add an exception to the voter-approved amendment, which currently prohibits the state from imposing "greater or additional burdens or restrictions" on eligibility.

Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, is sponsoring the resolution in the House. He testified that the amendment does not mandate a work requirement but opens the possibility for it.

"We're honoring the will of the voters because we're going back to the voters," Venhuizen said. "We're asking a clarifying question."

Venhuizen said getting capable people to work is something that the state should incentivize with its social programs. He said exemptions from work requirements for people on cancer treatment or for a new mother are examples of things "we all agree about." He said those exemptions are details that can be ironed out later.

However, opponents, including several health organizations, argued that Venhuizen could not guarantee those exemptions would be put in place. They said the amendment would threaten access to health care for some Medicaid recipients.

Governor Kristi Noem's former Department of Health secretary, Kim Malsam-Rysdon, lobbied on behalf of Avera Health against the bill.

Malsam-Rysdon said most people on Medicaid are already working. She said "work requirements just don't work" if the goal is to increase the labor pool.

Malsam-Rysdon said there is evidence, however, that work requirements may cause some people to lose their health care coverage.

Deb Fischer-Clemens, lobbying on behalf of the Catholic Presentation Sisters, who sponsor Avera, said the organization sees the potential effects of the proposed amendment "as a problem with ensuring people can get preventative care."

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.

Lawmaker lacks proof for claim that private school scholarships save millions for state

Committee advances bill that would raise program cap to \$5 million

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 24, 2024 12:36 PM

PIERRE — A legislator lacked evidence Wednesday for his claim that private school scholarships funded by tax credits save millions of dollars for state government.

The scholarship program is South Dakota Partners in Education. It gives insurance companies credits against state taxes on their premiums, equal to the amount of their donations to the program and up to a statewide cap of \$3.5 million. Legislation under consideration at the state Capitol would raise the cap to \$5 million.

State Sen. Jim Stalzer, R-Sioux Falls, told a legislative committee that the program saves the state \$7.5 million annually. He said that's the amount of state aid that would be required to send the program's 2,500 students to public rather than private schools. Families of students in the program are required to meet low-income qualifications based on free and reduced price school lunch guidelines.

After the committee hearing, South Dakota Searchlight asked Stalzer for the source of the financial data. He said it's based on multiplying the number of scholarship-supported students by \$3,000, which is an estimate Stalzer said he obtained from state officials of the amount of state aid that would otherwise support each student at a public school.

But in response to South Dakota Searchlight questions, Stalzer said he does not know how many of the scholarship students switched from a public school to a private school, or how many were already attending private schools when they began receiving a scholarship from the program.

South Dakota Partners in Education's Executive Director Robert Satter also lacked that information but said the program saves the state money.

Meanwhile, a House committee approved raising the cap on the program to \$5 million, voting 10-5 to send the bill to the full House of Representatives for its final step in the legislative process. But later Wednesday, the House sent the bill to the House Appropriations Committee — which helps draft the annual state budget — for its consideration first.

About 45 private schools are currently participating in the program, according to Stalzer.

"Of course, most of those are religious-based schools," he said.

Dianna Miller, a former educator and current lobbyist for large public schools in the state, criticized South Dakota Partners in Education during her testimony to the committee Wednesday, calling it a "veiled voucher program." That's a reference to school vouchers — authorized in some other states but not South Dakota — that use public funds to support children attending private schools.

Stalzer disagreed with that assessment.

"This money belongs to the scholarship program, not the state of South Dakota," he told the House Education Committee.

Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said the money used for the scholarships never reaches the state's budget.

"'Voucher' is not a dirty word," Odenbach added. "I'm tired of hearing that, like that's some scare-tactic word."

Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, is sponsoring the bill in the House of Representatives. He said it's self-evident that low-income families want the program, based on the demand for it.

"Without an increase in that cap, families will be put on waitlists," Hansen said.

Opponents expressed concern about the program's reduction in premium tax revenues to the state, and its potentially negative impact on public school enrollment, which can impact the amount of state funding paid to public schools.

Rob Monson, executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota, called it hypocritical for the committee to pass the bill after defeating a separate bill Monday that would have expanded free-lunch

programs for low-income students in public schools at an annual cost of \$579,000.

"How can we have it both ways?" Monson said.

Stalzer said if public school advocates had it their way, "everyone would go to a public school."

The Legislature created the scholarship program in 2016. The participating private schools are responsible for ensuring families meet the required income threshold, according to bill proponents. The names of the insurance companies and how much they donate are treated as confidential tax information by the state Department of Labor and Regulation.

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.

UAW delivers rousing presidential endorsement for Biden over 'scab' Trump

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 24, 2024 5:32 PM

WASHINGTON — The United Auto Workers of America endorsed the re-election of President Joe Biden Wednesday, just months after he became the first sitting U.S. president to walk a picket line with striking autoworkers in Michigan.

Speaking at the UAW's biannual political conference in Washington, D.C., Biden told the crowd "I was so damn proud to stand on that picket line with you" — a moment that seemed to lock in the union's coveted endorsement, crucial in the swing state of Michigan.

The president delivered the keynote address to hundreds of UAW leaders one day after winning a write-in campaign in the New Hampshire primary, where former President Donald Trump scored a second win for the Republican side.

"If I'm gonna be in a fight, I want to be in a fight with you, the UAW," Biden told the crowd at the Marriott Marquis in downtown D.C. "I mean it, we have a big fight in front of us. We're fundamentally changing the economy of this country, and everybody's getting a little worried about it, the very powerful."

In a rousing endorsement speech to his members, UAW President Shawn Fain laid out a binary scenario for November.

"Rarely as a union do you get so clear of a choice between two candidates," Fain said at the conference themed "Stand Up For Our Future," a nod to the union's historic "Stand Up" strike in September against the nation's three big automakers.

"It's not about who you like, it's not about your party, it's not about this b—— about age. It's not about anything but our best shot at taking back power for the working class," Fain said.

"Donald Trump is a scab," Fain said to loud applause and whistling. "Donald Trump is a billionaire and that's who he represents. If Donald Trump ever worked in an auto plant, he wouldn't be a UAW member. He'd be a company man, trying to squeeze the American autoworker.

"Donald Trump stands against everything the UAW stands for. When you go back to our core issues — Wages. Retirement. Health care. Time. That's what this election is about," Fain said.

The union's board voted unanimously to endorse Biden, Fain told reporters after the event.

When asked if he spoke to Trump before issuing the endorsement, Fain said he didn't think there was a need.

"Because I know what he said, I know what his track record has been. And he has never stood for working class people. And, you know, talk is cheap, actions speak louder. We saw what he did prior to being president. We saw what he did when he was president, and what he continues to do."

Biden's support of UAW strikers

UAW workers walked off the job in September after contract negotiations with Ford Motor Company,

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Stellantis and General Motors collapsed. The labor dispute stretched across more than 20 states, with Michigan at the epicenter.

Fain invited Biden to address the striking workers on Sept. 26 in the Detroit suburb of Belleville, where the president told them, "You deserve what you've earned, and you've earned a hell of a lot more than what you're getting paid now."

Trump delivered remarks a day later at a non-unionized auto parts manufacturer in Macomb County, an event he planned to counter the second televised Republican presidential debate.

There he asked for support, saying "hopefully your leaders at the United Auto Workers will endorse Donald Trump," despite the event being unaffiliated with the labor organization.

Fain and Biden on Wednesday both recounted the former president's speech at the non-union location during one of the largest labor strikes in recent U.S. history.

The strike ended in November after the union struck agreements with the three big automakers.

Fain also faulted Trump for what he described as disparaging comments about the recovery of the auto industry after the 2008 financial collapse and said Trump "stood by" as the General Motors plant in Lordstown, Ohio, closed in 2019.

"Instead of talking trash about our union, Joe Biden stood with us," Fain said.

The UAW leader told reporters that he expects his membership to engage in political actions like rallying, door knocking and phone banking in the coming year.

Israel-Hamas

When asked if he had concerns about Biden not calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, Fain said "the alternative's even worse. Trump moved the (Israeli) embassy when he was president. Obviously he's not going to do anything."

The UAW has formally called for a ceasefire, and Fain said the union will continue to do so.

A handful of protesters unfurled a Palestinian flag and shouted "ceasefire now" during Biden's speech Wednesday. Biden paused briefly as large swaths of the crowd began shouting "UAW" to drown out the protesters as security escorted them out of the room.

Fain said he was not concerned about members "exercising their voice." It was the second day in a row that protesters interrupted a Biden event.

Other union endorsements

In addition to the UAW's endorsement, Biden has picked up several others, including from the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the United Farm Workers, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the American Federation of Teachers.

As of Wednesday evening Trump's campaign had not released a statement in response to the UAW's endorsement of Biden.

However, the campaign released images of September posts on X by @TeamTrump stating that "PRESIDENT TRUMP is a great champion of American workers. He SAVED the American auto industry once, and he will do it again."

On Truth Social, Trump's social media platform where he posts daily, the former president had only posted Wednesday about his caucus and primary wins in Iowa and New Hampshire.

He also posted in all capital letters Wednesday just before 4 p.m. Eastern: "MASSIVE PROSECUTORIAL MISCONDUCT BY CROOKED JOE AND THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AGAINST HIS POLITICAL OPPONENT!"

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

Overdraft fees, late fees could be slashed as White House continues attack on junk fees

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - JANUARY 24, 2024 9:00 AM

The cost of overdrawing your bank account could ease considerably under a rule proposed last week by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The proposed regulation is in line with a larger effort that the Biden administration has championed the past few years to crack down on "junk fees," which are tacked onto everything from ticket prices to hotel bills.

The agency says roughly 23 million households use overdraft fees each year and while most consumers' overdrafts on debit cards are less than \$26, they usually have to pay overdraft fees around \$35. Regulators are proposing instead three options for banks: They could offer overdraft loans that comply with lending laws, set a fee that reflects the actual cost or charge a standard fee set by the agency. And while regulators haven't settled on that benchmark fee yet, amounts being considered range from a low of \$3 to a high of \$14.

The overdraft rule would apply to insured banks and credit unions with more than \$10 billion in assets. The regulation, which has to go through a review and public comment period, would likely take effect in October 2025.

President Joe Biden called on federal agencies to come up with a plan for lowering and disclosing junk fees at a White House Competition Council meeting in September 2022, and in February of 2023, Biden devoted a portion of his State of the Union speech to his agenda on lowering junk fees. He said that although these costs may seem small to some, they are burdensome to many households. In financial services, these fees may include onerous overdraft fees or credit card late fees that the CFPB says are often profit-driven.

Marc Jarsulic, a senior fellow and the chief economist at the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank, said deceptive and unfair fees are prevalent and that this is backed up by estimates of the cost to consumers when they can't easily understand prices and compare them to other options.

"There's a second kind of cost aside from this, the search cost, which is when you can't figure out easily what the price of something is and what the price of alternatives or substitutes might be. ... They can spend limited income on things that they normally wouldn't if they knew what the relative prices were," he said.

Although regulators and policymakers have been aware of the problems with junk fees for a decade or more, the prominence of this issue for the Biden administration and the awareness it brings to consumers is unusual, and putting it all into one non-industry specific effort is a substantial change from previous approaches, said Sharon Tennyson, an economist and a professor at Cornell University in the department of policy analysis and management.

"We're all aware that we're facing these fees and they're a big annoyance but to actually get consumers to realize that, hey, this might even be an illegal practice, I think is an important advance of what we're seeing in the new policy environment," she said.

Tennyson said it's fairly rare to see presidents talk about consumer rights.

"It's highly unusual for presidents in these high level speeches to focus on citizens as consumers at all," she said.

Credit card regulations, banking fines

The new overdraft regulations follow a rule proposed last year that aims to bring down credit card late fees, which the CFPB estimates cost Americans \$12 billion each year. The rule, which could be finalized as soon as this month, could reduce those fees by \$9 billion each year, the CFPB says. Under current regulations, a credit card company can charge \$30 for a first late payment and \$41 for subsequent ones, and up to 100% of the required payment, if it can prove the costs it incurs are higher than \$41. But under the CFPB's proposal, the late fee could never be more than \$8 or 25% of the required payment, if the credit card issuer proves that its costs exceed \$8.

Banking groups, including the American Bankers Association and Consumer Bankers Association, oppose the rule, claiming that it will make it harder for consumers to obtain credit cards and that consumers will be forced to turn to payday loans, which will end up costing them more money.

The agency also has released guidance for banks on what it calls "surprise depositor fees" and "surprise overdraft fees," which they said may be illegal under the Consumer Financial Protection Act.

The crackdown on these types of fees has already had an effect on banks' behavior.

"There have been financial penalties on individual banks that have caused banks to change their behavior and we'll know more about that as the CFPB continues to monitor reports of abusive treatment of customers," Jarsulic said.

In July, Bank of America was fined and ordered by the CFPB to stop charging customers repeat non-sufficient fund fees. Wells Fargo paid more than \$2 billion to customers and \$1.7 billion as a civil penalty in December 2022 for surprise overdraft fees and freezing accounts based on mistaken fraudulent activity. As a result, Wells Fargo has been ordered not to charge overdraft fees to banking customers who had money at the time of their transaction. The agency took a similar enforcement action against Regions Bank in 2022 for its surprise overdraft fees.

Regulating wallet apps

In addition to monitoring banks, regulators say they want to make sure that non-banking companies' fees and other business activity adheres to the law as well. In November, the CFPB proposed a rule to apply the same banking safeguards it provides to banks — such as deposit insurance — to businesses like Venmo and Apple Pay that provide "digital wallets." Under the regulations, the agency would be able to monitor these companies to make sure consumers' rights to privacy and the transfer of money are being protected.

"What they're saying is there are potentially deceptive practices, and that there is some risk that people are being surveilled by the operators of these apps in ways they might not like and that those data can be misused potentially by big digital firms to manipulate consumers algorithmically or otherwise try to influence their behavior," Jarsulic said. "That proposal is essentially a beginning step to get the data that's needed and figure out what's going on in an area that is itself not transparent."

Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.

State lawmaker seeks study of child care costs and unused subsidies

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 24, 2024 7:00 AM

The families of roughly 27,000 infants and toddlers qualify for income-based child care assistance in South Dakota, but only 7% actually receive the subsidy, according to a study from South Dakota Kids Count. Another 31,000 school-age children are eligible, yet only 5% receive the subsidy.

The majority of child care providers in South Dakota are unregulated by the state — either because they don't meet qualifications to be state licensed or choose not to be, meaning they don't have access to subsidy dollars. Of those who are state licensed, some opt out of the child care assistance program.

There isn't a financial incentive for providers to participate in the program, because the subsidy doesn't always cover their costs, said Kayla Klein, director of Early Learner South Dakota.

Child care providers already struggle to keep their doors open, Klein added, often not charging families enough to cover the full cost of care, leading to closures, or not charging enough to retain employees, leading to heavy turnover in the industry.

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Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, has introduced a bill to require a statewide study analyzing the cost of child care and developing a new payment model for the subsidy program. He hopes those efforts will improve the participation rate for the state's child care assistance program, which is primarily funded through federal grants.

South Dakota's child care subsidies are currently based on a market rate analysis every two years. But if child care providers are already keeping tuition prices too low, then the market rate may not be an accurate indicator of what it actually costs to successfully run a child care business.

"We need to understand this," Reed said. "Today's child care costs too much for parents. We still can't be sustainable. So what will it cost to be sustainable and increase capacity?"

Switching to a "true cost" model for subsidies can stabilize child care providers' bottom lines and keep increases in cost from being shouldered by non-subsidized families, Klein added.

All states in the country set subsidy rates on a market analysis except for New Mexico, which switched to a cost model in 2022. Other states, such as Nebraska, Michigan and Washington, have explored cost modeling studies to inform reimbursement rates.

A representative with the state Department of Social Services told lawmakers at a budget meeting last week that there are several factors leading to South Dakota having a lower participation rate compared to surrounding states and the national average.

"The department recognizes there is a need to get more providers and enable those providers to be willing to take up subsidies," said Alex Mayer, chief of the department's Division of Children and Family Services. "We're well on our way toward a solution to help child care providers and families."

The department recently changed its child care assistance program from an attendance-based policy to enrollment-based, which child care advocates say will better support providers by paying them for a full day of caring for a child even if a parent picks up the child early.

Reed said he's in the process of discussing his bill with the department.

The study required by the bill would include the cost of keeping and retaining workers alongside the impacts of inflation, population growth and business growth on child care providers. The study would also require the department to develop a cost estimation model for the child care assistance program.

The bill would provide \$250,000 for the study and require a report to the Legislature by the end of October, so lawmakers will have information on hand for possible policy decisions during the 2025 legislative session.

South Dakota suffers an estimated \$329 million loss in productivity due to its inadequate child care landscape, according to a study from ReadyNation, a nonprofit organization focused on business and economic development across the country. South Dakota businesses aren't "producing what they want to produce" because of child care limitations, Reed said.

The focus for Reed, who leads the Brookings Economic Development Corporation, is on strengthening South Dakota's workforce – both for the child care industry and for working families.

A report from the Low Income Investment Fund explored economics and child care in South Dakota, highlighting that child care is both "too expensive, and not expensive enough" in the state. The report found that in Pennington County, providers were reimbursed at a higher amount than the cost of care for preschoolers, while providers were reimbursed at a lower-than-cost rate for infants and toddlers.

Understanding the cost of child care will open opportunities for public-private partnerships in South Dakota, Reed said, pointing to the John T. Vucurevich Foundation's tri-share pilot program in Rapid City where the cost of child care tuition is split between parents, the provider and the nonprofit.

"We know we're going to have businesses involved in this, so we have to be able to tell them what it costs," Reed said. "We have to have this information to drive some ideas on how we can bring businesses, the state and parents into this."

Additionally, some legislators are working to create a funding assessment through the Department of Social Services, so lawmakers can understand what sources of funding, both federal and state dollars, there are for child care and how they're handled. The assessment, through the Hunt Institute, is planned to be completed by March, said Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls.

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"We want to identify gaps and opportunities to be able to create a plan for the future," Rehfeldt said. "The assessment is complimentary to the DSS cost analysis bill."

Overall, a change to the subsidy program might not make a significant difference in stabilizing the state's child care landscape right away, Reed said. The subsidy program makes up a small portion of children enrolled in child care.

"A lot of times the child care industry keeps talking about turnover: 'we have so much turnover' and 'what are we going to do about turnover?' It's pay. That's what it is," Reed said. "I don't think there's really other things we can do. We have to figure out how to pay more or you're just not going to get the capacity from them."

The push for improved state involvement comes after a pandemic-era influx of federal funding for child care providers ended last year, creating "a cliff effect," Klein said.

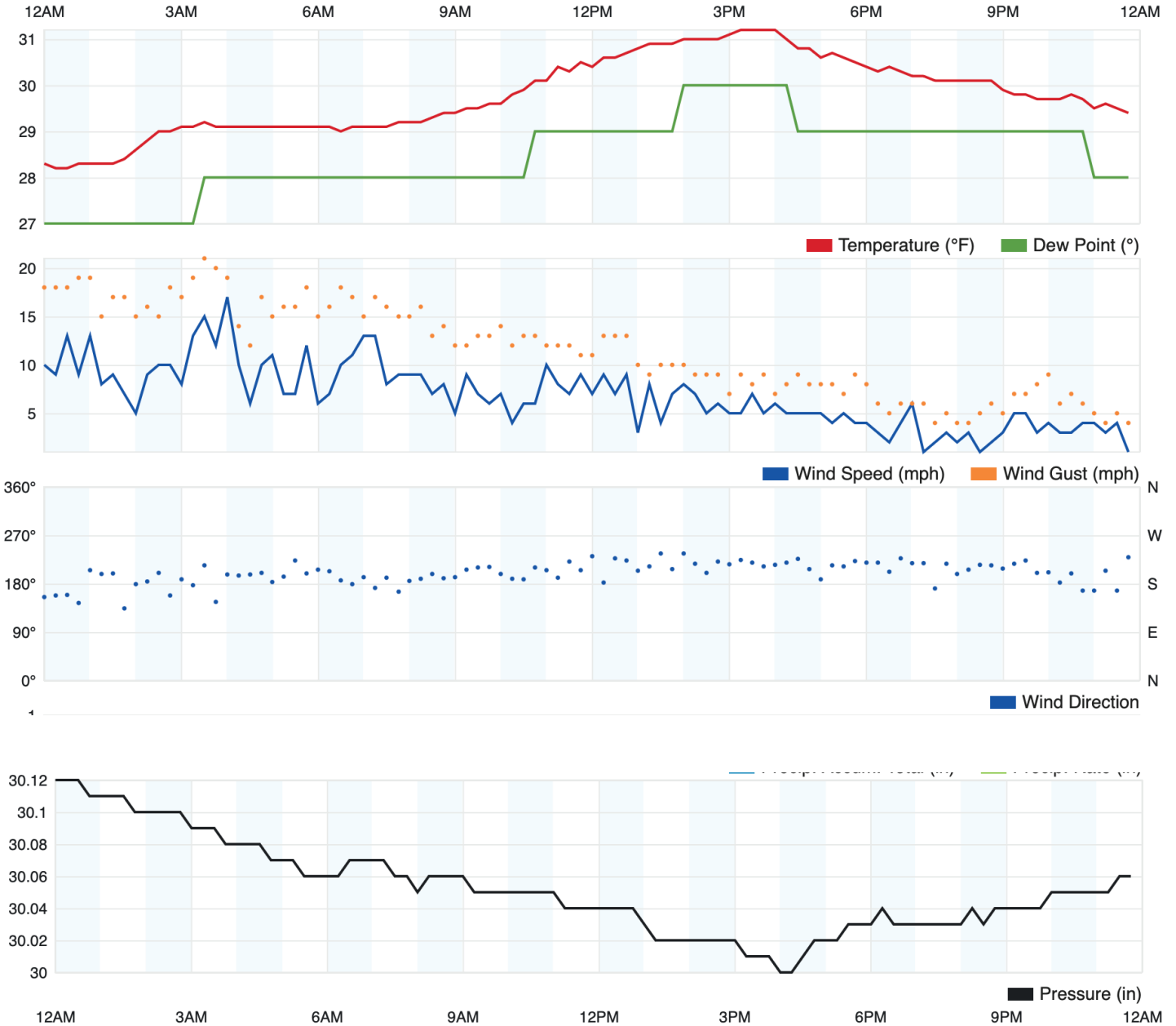
"These funds were helping providers to keep their doors open and now that funding is totally gone," Klein said. "So we will continue to see closures happening more and more."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
Jan 25	Jan 26	Jan 27	Jan 28	Jan 29	Jan 30	Jan 31
32°F	32°F	33°F	33°F	38°F	42°F	43°F
25°F	20°F	19°F	22°F	27°F	28°F	28°F
NNW	SSW	W	SSW	WSW	SW	WSW
3 MPH	10 MPH	6 MPH	12 MPH	9 MPH	12 MPH	12 MPH




5-Day Forecast

January 25, 2024
4:07 AM

Lingering Fog Followed By A Slow Steady Warmup

Today	Friday	Sat	Sun	Monday
Fog With Partial Clearing	Fog With Partial Clearing	Clearing		
HI: 30 to 34°f	HI: 30 to 40°f	HI: 31 to 41°f	HI: 33 to 45°f	HI: 35 to 50°f



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Lingering fog will persist through the day and into Friday. A shift in the pattern will mean warmer temperatures to come however.

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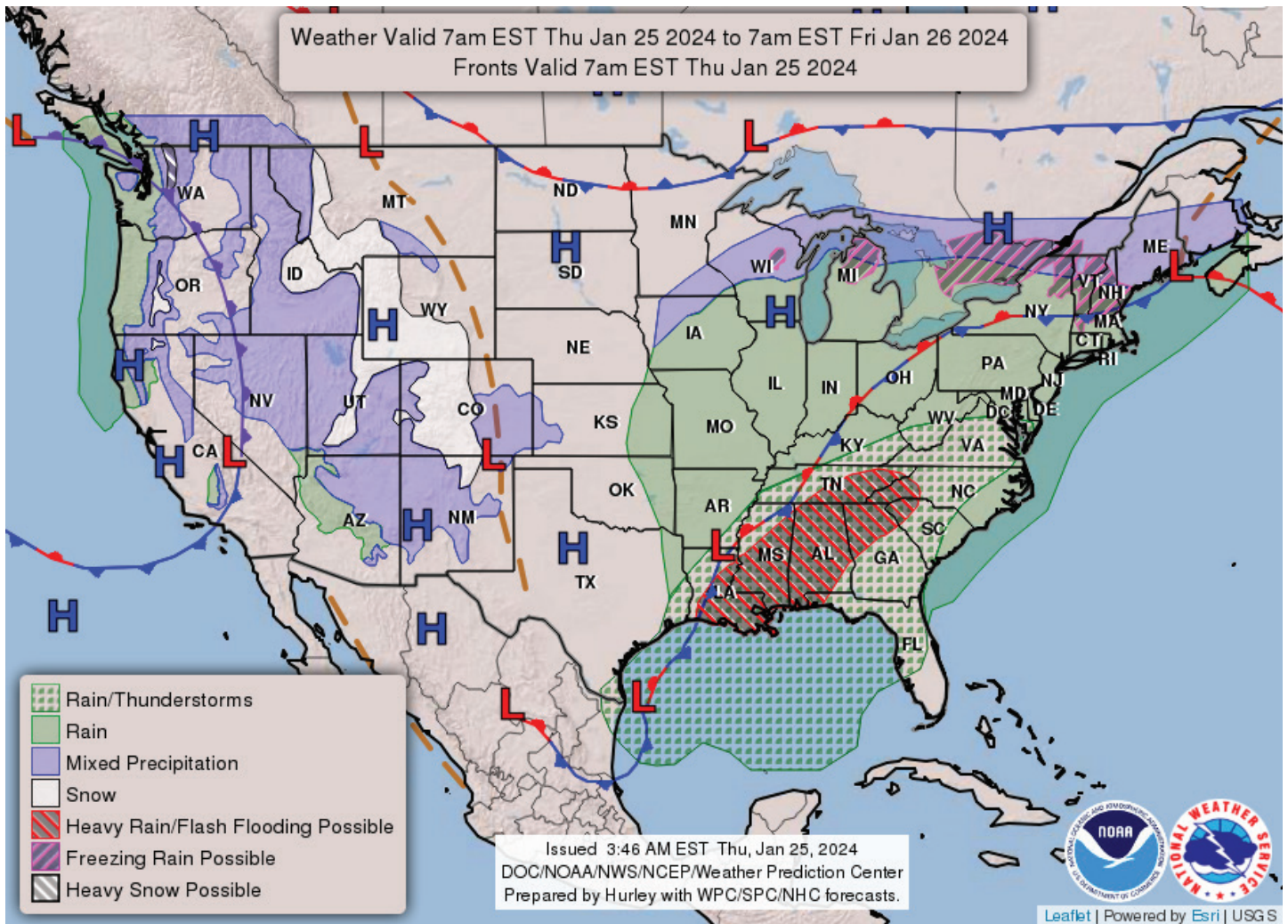
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 31 °F at 3:16 PM
Low Temp: 28 °F at 12:03 AM
Wind: 22 mph at 2:35 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 30 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 54 in 1942
Record Low: -33 in 1904
Average High: 24
Average Low: 1
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.45
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.45
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:30:05 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58:14 am



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Today in Weather History

January 25, 2010: A large upper-level low-pressure area combined with a cold surface high-pressure area building in from the north brought light snow and extreme winds creating widespread blizzard conditions across north-central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 1 to 4 inches combined with north winds of 25 to 40 mph gusting up to 55 mph, created frequent whiteout conditions across the area. Travel was significantly affected or halted, and several schools were closed. Interstate-29 was closed from the North Dakota border and south on the 25th until the morning of the 26th. The blizzard hampered efforts to restore power to the thousands of customers from the previous winter storm. The snowfall began in the morning hours from 6 to 10 am and ended when the blizzard conditions subsided.

1821 - The Hudson River was frozen solid during the midst of the coldest winter in forty-one years. Thousands of persons crossed the ice from New York City to New Jersey, and refreshment taverns were set up in the middle of the river to warm pedestrians. (David Ludlum)

1837 - At 7 PM a display of the Northern Lights danced above Burlington, VT. Its light was equal to the full moon. Snow and other objects reflecting the light were deeply tinged with a blood red hue. Blue, yellow and white streamers were also noted. (The Weather Channel)

1937: Las Vegas, Nevada dropped to 8 degrees above zero, setting a record low for the city.

1949: Las Vegas, Nevada, recorded 4.7 inches of snow. This brought the monthly snowfall total to 16.7 inches which still ranks as their snowiest month on record.

1965 - Alta, UT, was in the midst of a storm that left the town buried under 105 inches of snow establishing a record for the state. (David Ludlum)

1987 - The second major storm in three days hit the Eastern Seaboard producing up to 15 inches of snow in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. Up to 30 inches of snow covered the ground in Virginia following the two storms. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds created blizzard conditions in the mountains of Colorado. Winds gusted to 109 mph at Echo Lake, and a wind gust to 193 mph was reported atop Mount Evans. A "nor'easter" moving up the Atlantic Coast spread heavy snow from the Carolinas to New England, with as much as 16 inches reported in the Poconos of eastern Pennsylvania. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Bitter cold air, coming down from Alaska, settled over the Northern Rockies. Wilson WY reported a morning low of 48 degrees below zero. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. One thunderstorm in north central Texas spawned a tornado which injured three persons at Troy. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure developed explosively over east central Missouri and moved into Lower Michigan producing high winds and heavy snow across parts of Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. Wind gusts to 60 mph and up to a foot of snow created near blizzard conditions in southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Wind gusts in Indiana reached 76 mph at Wabash. Thunderstorms associated with the storm produced wind gusts to 54 mph at Fort Madison IA. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2000 - Heavy snow fell from the Carolinas to New England, with up to 20 inches of snow and five deaths reported. (NCDC)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FAITH OR FEAR?

When Mario Marini, a famous Italian painter and sculptor, was young, he fashioned a series of figures of men on horses. The first one he sculpted appeared young, strong, fierce, formidable, and triumphant: all were expressions of extreme confidence. But, as he continued his series of bronze figures, each rider and horse appear to become less confident and certain of being victorious. The last characters in the series portray a rider and his horse frozen in terror.

When asked about the way his series changed from triumph to terror, he replied, "That is because I believe that we are approaching the time of a sorry end to this world."

How different for the Christian! Rather than fear, we have faith. In place of horror, we have hope. Because of our God, we know that we shall be given eternal life through Christ our Savior and Lord, and we will be with Him throughout eternity.

How blest we are to have the words of the Psalmist: "Even though I will walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I do not need to be possessed by fear, for You, Creator of life, are with me to protect me!"

Our Savior will guide us and guard us and grant us victory when days are dim and dark. But, thankfully, one day, we will also say with the Psalmist, "Your goodness and unending kindness has been with me all of my life, and afterward, I will live with You in Your home - forever!"

Prayer: Grant us, Father, Your peace that passes all understanding, and the assurance that You are the God of all comfort, so that we will not fear the threats of life or death. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.23.24

21 28 58 69 70 20

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$285,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

10 13 15 29 47 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,600,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 15 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

2 3 13 19 34 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 30 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

6 17 27 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$30,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 30 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

7 28 46 47 58 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 59 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

1 5 32 50 64 8

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$164,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 59 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Wednesday's Scores

The Associated Press
BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=
Cody-Kilgore, Neb. 63, Oelrichs 17

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

Montana man convicted of killing eagles is sentenced to 3 years in prison for related gun violations

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A Montana felon previously convicted of killing eagles to sell their parts on the black market was sentenced to three years in federal prison on Wednesday for related gun violations.

U.S. District Judge Susan Watters in Billings sentenced Harvey Hugs, 60, after he pleaded guilty in September to being a felon in possession of firearms. Prosecutors said the Hardin, Montana, man used the guns to shoot federally protected eagles over more than a year and then sold the birds' parts to an informant for profit.

A 2021 search of Hugs' home and vehicles found eagle parts, two rifles and ammunition, according to court documents. Investigators recovered parts of 21 different eagles, the U.S. Attorney's Office said.

"While it is unknown how many eagles Hugs took by shooting or trapping, the location, type, and amount of evidence reflect his criminal enterprise was expansive and protracted," prosecutors wrote in recommending a prison sentence.

Hugs was sentenced last June in Rapid City, South Dakota, to three years in federal prison after being convicted by a jury for trafficking golden eagle feathers, wings and tails in violation of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

The two sentences will be served concurrently, according to court documents. Hugs public defender in the Montana case, attorney Edward Werner, did not immediately respond to telephone and email messages seeking comment.

Hugs has an extensive criminal record including convictions for involuntary manslaughter, obstruction of police and criminal trespassing. In 2012, he was sentenced in federal court in Montana to six months in custody for coordinating the illegal purchase of eagle feathers, tails and wings and two hawk tails, court documents show.

His latest prison sentence comes weeks after two men were indicted in Montana over another alleged eagle-killing scheme that authorities said resulted in the deaths about 3,600 birds, including golden and bald eagles on and around the Flathead Indian Reservation.

One of the defendants in that case, Simon Paul, is being sought by authorities after he failed to show up for a January 8 initial court appearance, prompting a judge to issue an arrest warrant.

It's illegal to possess, use, or sell eagles or their parts in the U.S., though there are exceptions for cultural institutions and Native Americans using them in religious ceremonies. Federal officials operate a clearinghouse that makes eagle feathers and other parts available to tribal members, authorized zoos and museums.

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Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. January 22, 2024.

Editorial: Property Tax Relief: Different Approaches

The topic of high property taxes is weighing on the minds of lawmakers in Pierre this winter, as evidenced by some of the discussion at Saturday's District 18 legislative forum.

Of course, that's also been a big issue in Nebraska, where the property tax burden has been a frustrating matter for years.

South Dakota property taxes have escalated in recent years, fueled in part by an influx of new people into the state. As District 18 Rep. Mike Stevens noted Saturday, people have come to this state from places where property values were higher (sometimes, much higher), and they were more inclined to pay the local, higher-end asking prices for properties. That, in turn, raised property valuations and, as a consequence, the property taxes that people are paying.

A Press & Dakotan story last March noted property valuations were up across the state. At that point, Yankton County's valuation was up 1.3% from the previous year, which was relatively small compared to the 25% increase in Pennington County, the approximately 21% hike in Lincoln County and the 18% boost in Minnehaha County.

What can be done? That will be a storyline to watch in Pierre this winter.

Meanwhile, it will also be interesting to watch how this matter plays out in Lincoln, where Nebraska lawmakers are considering what is turning into a controversial approach to sales tax relief that (for the moment) presents a stark contrast to what's been happening in Pierre.

In Nebraska, Gov. Jim Pillen has vowed to lower property taxes by 40%, but he proposes doing that with a two-cent increase in the state sales tax, or a removal of the exemptions for certain food items. According to a Nebraska Examiner story, it would raise the state's sales tax to 7.5 cents, which would be the highest in the nation.

There has been considerable pushback. Several conservative groups oppose the plan, saying it merely results in a tax shift. There have also been concerns that such a plan moves the financial burden away from property owners to those who, in some cases, are less able to shoulder it.

And this DOES contrast from South Dakota, where lawmakers are having discussions about making the sales tax cut that was passed last year a permanent fixture. As it stands now, it's set to sunset in two years. Late last week, the proposal to make the cut permanent was defeated in committee, but the issue may not go away so quickly. (And, as mentioned in this space last week, the prospect of a repeal of the South Dakota food tax at the ballot box also adds a level of complexity and concern to this situation.)

So, if nothing else, we are left in a position of possibly watching two different approaches to property tax relief play out at the state level in both South Dakota and Nebraska. Can it be done by shifting the tax burden to other areas, or can it be done by, one must assume, cuts in spending?

This issue probably won't be solved this winter in either Pierre or Lincoln, but it will be intriguing to see which way the two states eventually go in this process.

END

Trump White House official convicted of defying Jan. 6 congressional subpoena to be sentenced

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Trump White House official convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to cooperate with a congressional investigation into the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol is set to be sentenced Thursday.

Prosecutors are asking a judge to sentence Peter Navarro to six months behind bars and impose a \$200,000 fine. He was the second Trump aide to face contempt of Congress charges.

Navarro was found guilty of defying a subpoena for documents and a deposition from the House Jan. 6

committee. Navarro served as a White House trade adviser under then-President Donald Trump and later promoted the Republican's baseless claims of mass voter fraud in the 2020 election he lost.

Navarro has vowed to appeal the verdict, saying he couldn't cooperate with the committee because Trump had invoked executive privilege. A judge barred him from making that argument at trial, however, finding that he didn't show Trump had actually invoked it.

Justice Department prosecutors say Navarro tried to "hide behind claims of privilege" even before he knew exactly what the committee wanted, showing a "disdain" for the committee that should warrant a longer sentence.

Defense attorneys, on the other hand, said Trump did claim executive privilege, putting Navarro in an "untenable position," and the former adviser should be sentenced to probation and a \$100 fine.

Navarro was the second Trump aide to face contempt of Congress charges. Former White House adviser Steve Bannon was convicted of two counts and was sentenced to four months behind bars, though he has been free while appealing his conviction.

Navarro's sentencing comes after a judge rejected his bid for a new trial. His attorneys had argued that jurors may have been improperly influenced by political protesters outside the courthouse when they took a break from deliberations. Shortly after their break, the jury found him guilty of two misdemeanor counts of contempt of Congress.

But U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta found that Navarro didn't show that the eight-minute break had any effect on the September verdict. No protest was underway and no one approached the jury — they only interacted with each other and the court officer assigned to accompany them, he found.

Live updates | Death toll rises to 12 with dozens injured in a strike on a crowded Gaza shelter

By The Associated Press undefined

The death toll from a strike on a crowded shelter in Gaza has risen to 12, with over 75 wounded, according to Thomas White, a senior official with the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA. The update Thursday said the attack the previous day involved two tank shells.

The agency did not directly blame Israel, which is the only party to the conflict that has tanks. The Israeli military said it has "currently ruled out" that the strike was carried out by its aircraft or artillery but was still investigating. It says the building might have been hit by a Hamas rocket.

The fighting in Khan Younis has isolated its two main hospitals, stranding hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people inside. A third hospital was evacuated overnight, White said. Thousands of people rushed to escape farther south in recent days, crowding into shelters and tent camps near the border with Egypt.

The Health Ministry in Gaza says more than 25,700 people have been killed and another 63,000 wounded in the enclave since the Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel, when militants from Gaza killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages.

Currently:

- Cease-fire efforts for the Israel-Hamas war gain steam. But an agreement still appears elusive.
- Freed Israeli hostage says she met Hamas' leader in a tunnel, where she was kept in dire conditions.
- U.N. court will issue a ruling Friday on South Africa's request for an order to halt Israel's Gaza offensive.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

DEATH TOLL RISES TO 12 WITH DOZENS WOUNDED AFTER A STRIKE ON A CROWDED GAZA SHELTER, UN OFFICIAL SAYS

JERUSALEM — A United Nations official says the death toll from a strike on a crowded shelter in Gaza has risen to 12, with over 75 wounded.

Thomas White, a senior official with the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, said Thursday that 15 of those wounded were in critical condition. UNRWA says two tank shells hit a building in

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a shelter housing thousands of displaced Palestinians on Wednesday in the southern city of Khan Younis, which has seen heavy fighting in recent days. The building caught fire, it said.

It did not directly blame Israel, which is the only party to the conflict that has tanks.

The Israeli military said it has "currently ruled out" that the strike was carried out by its aircraft or artillery but was still investigating. It says the building might have been hit by a Hamas rocket.

The fighting in Khan Younis has isolated its two main hospitals, Nasser and Al-Amal, stranding hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people inside.

White says a third hospital was evacuated overnight, and that among the patients who departed were women who had just undergone cesarean sections.

BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY APPEALS TO NETANYAHU FOR AN IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE DURING HIS MIDEAST TRIP

LONDON — British Foreign Secretary David Cameron says he has told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that there should be an "immediate humanitarian pause" in the fighting in Gaza that can lead to a permanent cease-fire.

Cameron is due to visit Qatar later Thursday to push for more aid to get into Gaza. A consignment of 17 tonnes (19 tons) of tents from the United Kingdom was due Thursday to be flown from Qatar to Egypt on its way to the territory.

The U.K. is a strong ally of Israel but is increasingly critical of its conduct of the war against Hamas.

Cameron said that "the scale of suffering in Gaza is unimaginable. More must be done, faster, to help people trapped in this desperate situation." He called for Israel to fully restore water, fuel and electricity supplies to Gaza. "We need an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, followed by a sustainable cease-fire, without a return to hostilities."

Flight recorders reportedly found from plane that Russia says crashed with Ukrainian POWs aboard

By The Associated Press undefined

Investigators have found the flight recorders of a Russian military transport plane that crashed in a border region near Ukraine, Russian media reported Thursday, a day after Moscow accused Kyiv of shooting down the aircraft, which it said was carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war.

The Il-76 crashed in a huge ball of flame in a rural area of Russia on Wednesday, and authorities said all 74 people on board were killed. Ukraine's president has demanded an international investigation.

Russian officials accused Kyiv of shooting down the plane with two missiles and said Ukrainian prisoners of war were on board and headed for an exchange. They offered no evidence for their claim.

The Associated Press could not independently confirm who was aboard or how the plane was downed.

Ukrainian authorities confirmed a prisoner exchange was due to happen Wednesday, and that it was called off, but said they had no information about who was on the plane.

Kyiv officials gave no direct response to the Russian accusation, though they noted that Russian aircraft were legitimate targets and that Moscow had requested no safe passage in the context of the prisoner swap.

The discovery of the plane's flight recorders was reported Thursday by the state-owned RIA Novosti news agency, citing emergency services.

However, there is slim hope that the circumstances of the crash and the Russian allegations will be clarified. The war has often featured claims and counterclaims, used as ammunition in the bid to sway opinion at home and abroad.

As the conflict approaches the two-year mark, the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line has been largely static amid a second winter of fighting. With both sides seeking to replenish their weapons stockpiles, the war recently has focused on long-range strikes.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Thursday repeated the allegation that Ukraine had downed the plane, describing it as "a totally monstrous act."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy didn't directly address Moscow's allegation but said Ukraine would push for an international investigation.

"It is necessary to establish all the facts, as much as possible, considering that the plane crash occurred on Russian territory — beyond our control," he said in his nightly video address late Wednesday.

"It's obvious Russians are playing with lives of Ukrainian POWs, with the feelings of their relatives and the emotions of our society," Zelenskyy said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council, which was expected to take place on Thursday afternoon in New York.

Trump could testify as trial set to resume in his legal fight with E. Jean Carroll

By JENNIFER PELTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump could return to a New York courtroom Thursday to defend himself against a lawsuit seeking more than \$10 million for things he said about advice columnist E. Jean Carroll after she accused him of sexual assault.

Trump's first visit to court on Monday ended abruptly because a juror was ill. The trial has been suspended since then.

Carroll's lawyers are expected to finish presenting their case in the morning. If everything goes as planned, Trump could be on the witness stand before a lunch break. Trump is fresh off big victories in the New Hampshire primary on Tuesday and the Iowa caucus last week.

Carroll, 80, testified at a trial last year in the same courtroom that she was attacked by Trump in the dressing room of a midtown luxury department store in spring 1996. A jury last year agreed that it happened and awarded Carroll \$5 million in damages for sexual abuse and defamation.

Trump denies ever knowing Carroll and says she made up her claims to sell a memoir. He did not testify at or attend last year's trial, a decision he now says he regrets.

Judge Lewis A. Kaplan ruled that last year's jury conclusions meant that a new jury chosen last week only needs to decide how much more money, if any, Trump owes Carroll for disparaging her and calling her a liar in 2019 while he was president.

Thus, Kaplan has ruled, Trump will be barred from testifying about subjects that would conflict with last year's verdict. He will not, for instance, be permitted to say she made up her sexual assault claims or that she was motivated by her book deal or for political reasons.

Trump, 77, attended the trial two of three days last week and let the jury know — through muttered comments and gestures like shaking his head — that he was disgusted with the case against him.

Trump has already tested the judge's patience. After he complained to his lawyers about a "witch hunt" and a "con job" within earshot of jurors, Kaplan threatened to eject him from the courtroom if it happened again. "I would love it," Trump said. Later that day, Trump told a news conference Kaplan was a "nasty judge" and that Carroll's allegation was "a made-up, fabricated story."

When not in court, he has repeatedly made pronouncements on his social network similar to statements at stake in the trial. Carroll's attorneys have put some of those statements before the jury, arguing that the only way to stop Trump from defaming Carroll is to hit him in a big way financially.

Trump's attorneys have tried to show the jury through their cross-examination of witnesses that Carroll has gained a measure of fame and financial rewards through taking on Trump that outweighs the death threats and other venom slung at her through social media.

One of Trump's lawyers, Alina Habba, has told the judge that he might testify 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.

Before he testifies, Carroll's attorneys are expected to rest their case after calling a final witness whose testimony will likely last less than an hour and show snippets of a deposition that Trump underwent in October 2022.

The current trial is in addition to four criminal cases Trump faces as the presidential primary season heats up. He has been juggling court and campaign appearances, using both to argue that he's being persecuted by Democrats terrified of his possible election.

How To Tech: Why it's important to turn on Apple's new Stolen Device Protection

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — You're in a crowded bar when a thief watches you unlock your iPhone with your passcode, then swipes it. That sinking feeling hits when you realize it's gone, along with priceless photos, important files, passwords on banking apps and other vital parts of your digital life.

Apple rolled out an update to its iOS operating system this week with a feature called Stolen Device Protection that makes it a lot harder for phone thieves to access key functions and settings. Users are being urged to turn it on immediately.

Here's how to activate the new security option and why it's so important:

SHOULD I TURN ON STOLEN DEVICE PROTECTION?

The software update for iPhones and iPads includes the essential new feature designed to foil thieves from wiping phones for resale or accessing Apple ID or other important accounts. Stolen Device Protection is a new setting that's included with the latest iOS release, version 17.3.

Apple says the feature, buried in your iPhone's settings, adds an extra layer of security for users. It addresses a vulnerability that thieves have discovered and exploited: allowing them to lock victims out of their Apple accounts, delete their photos and other files from their iCloud accounts and empty their bank accounts by accessing passwords kept in the Keychain password manager.

Apple is introducing the feature as anecdotal evidence suggests phone thefts are surging. Stories of stolen phones abound on Reddit groups and in news articles in places from Los Angeles to London, where police say pickpocketing, "table surfing" and moped snatching are common tactics.

The Wall Street Journal reported last year how criminals watched people use their passcodes to gain access to their personal information after stealing their phones.

HOW DOES STOLEN DEVICE PROTECTION WORK?

Stolen Device Protection keeps track of a user's "familiar locations," such as their home or workplace, and adds extra biometric security hoops to jump through if someone tries to use the device to do certain things when it's away from those places.

It also reduces the importance of passcodes, which thieves can steal by peering over someone's shoulder or threatening and forcing victims to hand them over, in favor of "biometric" features such as faces or fingerprints that are a lot harder to duplicate.

Let's say the bar thief that snatched your iPhone tries to erase its contents and settings to sell it. With Stolen Device Protection turned on, the phone will now require a Face ID or Touch ID scan to verify that person is the rightful owner.

And that's the only way — the new feature doesn't let someone use the passcode or any other backup method.

Other actions that will trigger this feature if it's not at a familiar place include using passwords saved in Keychain or payment methods saved in Safari, turning off Lost Mode, applying for a new Apple Card or using the iPhone to set up a new device.

There's also a second layer designed to slow down thieves trying to access critical security settings. If someone tries to, say, sign out of an Apple ID account, change the passcode or reset the phone while it's

in an unfamiliar location, they'll have to authenticate using Face ID or Touch ID, wait an hour, then do a second facial or fingerprint scan.

Changing an Apple ID password, updating Apple ID security settings, adding or removing Face or Touch ID, and turning off the Find My device feature or Stolen Device Protection also will trigger this feature.

"The security delay is designed to prevent a thief from performing critical operations so that you can mark your device as lost and make sure your Apple account is secure," the company said. "When your iPhone is in a familiar location, these additional steps will not be required and you can use your device passcode like normal."

HOW DO I ACTIVATE STOLEN DEVICE PROTECTION?

It's simple — if you know where to look.

First, download and update your iPhone or iPad with the latest iOS update. Then go to your settings, scroll down to "Face ID & Passcode" or "Touch ID & Passcode" and enter your passcode. Scroll down and you'll see Stolen Device Protection.

Depending on your iPhone model, you'll need to tap or toggle to turn it on or off. Make sure you've first activated two-factor authentication and Find My device for your Apple ID account, or it won't show up.

WHAT DEVICES DOES IT APPLY TO?

iPhone XS and newer models, including second- and third-generation SE models.

A rhino got pregnant from embryo transfer, in a success that may help nearly extinct subspecies

By TOM ODULA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — A rhinoceros was impregnated through embryo transfer in the first successful use of a method that conservationists said might later make it possible to save the nearly extinct northern white rhino subspecies.

In testing with another subspecies, the researchers created a southern white rhino embryo in a lab from an egg and sperm that had been previously collected from other rhinos and transferred it into a southern white rhino surrogate mother at the Ol-Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya.

"The successful embryo transfer and pregnancy are a proof of concept and allow (researchers) to now safely move to the transfer of northern white rhino embryos — a cornerstone in the mission to save the northern white rhino from extinction," the group said in a statement Wednesday.

However, the team only learned of the pregnancy after the surrogate mother died of a bacterial infection in November 2023. The rhino was infected when spores from the clostridium strain were released from the soil by floodwater, and the embryo was discovered during a post-mortem examination.

Still scientists are very optimistic about their findings.

"Now we have the clear evidence that an embryo that is frozen, thawed, produced in a test tube can produce new life and that is what we want for the northern white rhino," Professor Thomas Hildebrandt is lead researcher and the head of the Department of Reproduction at BioRescue .

Roughly 20,000 southern white rhinos remain in Africa. That subspecies as well as another species, the black rhino, are bouncing back from significant reduction in their populations due to poaching for their horns.

However, the northern white rhinoceros subspecies has only two known members left in the world.

Najin, a 34-year-old, and her 23-year-old offspring, Fatu, are both incapable of natural reproduction, according to the Ol-Pejeta Conservancy where they live.

The last male white rhino, Sudan, was 45 when he was euthanized in 2018 due to age-related complications. He was Najin's sire.

Scientists stored his semen and that of four other dead rhinos, hoping to use them in in vitro fertilization with eggs harvested from female northern white rhinos to produce embryos that eventually will be carried by southern white rhino surrogate mothers.

Some conservation groups have argued that it is probably too late to save the northern white rhino with in vitro fertilization, as the species' natural habitat in Chad, Sudan, Uganda, Congo and Central African

Republic has been ravaged by human conflict. Skeptics say the efforts should focus on other critically endangered species with a better chance at survival.

Witness says fatal shooting of American-Palestinian teen in the occupied West Bank was unprovoked

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

AL-MAZRA'A ASH-SHARQIYA, West Bank (AP) — The fatal shooting of an American-Palestinian teen driving a pickup truck in the occupied West Bank was unprovoked, the sole passenger told The Associated Press, describing apparent Israeli fire hitting the back of the vehicle before it overturned several times on a dirt road.

At least 10 bullets struck the truck, which was seen by The Associated Press after Israeli investigators examined it. Most hit the back windshield and truck bed, supporting 16-year-old Mohammed Salameh's account of the incident that killed his friend, Tawfic Abdel Jabbar, 17, a Louisiana native.

In an initial statement, Israeli police said Friday's shooting targeted people "purportedly engaged in rock-throwing activities along Highway 60," a main West Bank thoroughfare. Police didn't identify who fired the shots but described the incident "ostensibly involving an off-duty law enforcement officer, a soldier and a civilian."

Salameh denied suggestions he and Abdel Jabbar had been throwing stones and said there had been no attempt to arrest him.

Salameh — interviewed Tuesday along with Abdel Jabbar's father, Hafeth, in the family's ancestral village of Al-Mazra'a Ash-Sharquiya — said he and his friend were driving on a dirt road several hundred meters from Highway 60. He said shots suddenly hit the back of the truck, striking Abdel Jabbar.

Salameh said the pickup overturned several times, and he managed to get out and run back to the village for help.

Hafeth Abdel Jabbar said that when he arrived, he found his son's lifeless body in the pickup, amid shattered glass and blood stains. He rejected claims that his son had thrown stones as "a big lie." Even if the teens had thrown rocks, he said, they posed no imminent threat — to police, military, or civilians — as they drove through the brush.

An Israeli police official told AP on Wednesday that the witness account and bullet holes in the back of the truck represented only one side of the story and that the investigation is ongoing. He declined to comment further. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the case with news outlets.

The White House has demanded a transparent investigation into the death, which came after repeated U.S. warnings that Israel must rein in rising violence against Palestinians in the territory. The teen's family said U.S. embassy officials visited the village, photographed the car and interviewed relatives.

ON THE SCENE

Salameh said the events leading to the shooting began Friday afternoon, when he and Abdel Jabbar decided to have a picnic in the family's fields — a typical thing to do on sunny days.

They jumped in the family truck and headed out, he said, but realized they'd forgotten charcoal. Abdel Jabbar turned the car around, heading back to the village on a dirt road perpendicular to the highway — that's when shots began hitting the back windshield, Salameh said.

He said he ducked as bullets pounded the vehicle, the fourth one hitting Tawfic in the head. The car skidded off the road and flipped several times before coming to a stop, Salameh said.

Hafeth Abdel Jabbar said that when he and other relatives arrived, Israeli soldiers trained their guns on them and made two of them take their shirts off to show they weren't a threat.

He said he ignored the soldiers and ran to the car, which had landed upright. He described his son's body as splayed on the passenger side of the car, where blood pooled onto the floor and spread to the backseat. He said he and others began extricating his son's body, loading him into an ambulance.

Tawfic Abdel Jabbar was pronounced dead upon arrival at a Ramallah hospital. Video his father provided

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shows the car about 500 meters from the highway.

"It's a scene that I hope never happens again," Hafeth said Tuesday. "You have six or seven Israeli soldiers pointing the gun at you. Telling you not to go see your son. Your 17-year-old son is inside the car, dead from them, shot from the back."

IN THE VILLAGE

The killing shocked the village, where most inhabitants carry American passports and split their time between the West Bank and the U.S.

The Abdel Jabbar family's roots there run back almost 200 years. Tawfic's parents, Hafeth and Mona, grew up in the village. They moved to Gretna, Louisiana, where they married. The extended family owns a chain of shoe stores in the U.S.

The family returned frequently to their ancestral home, an ornate stone compound perched on a village hilltop. During summers, Tawfic and his siblings took part in traditional village life.

He was in his senior year in high school when he was killed. Studying remotely over the past few months, he hoped to finish in February and eventually attend college in the U.S, his father said.

Immediately after the shooting, Palestinian health officials identified the teen as Tawfiq Ajaq, but his parents said the family goes by the last name Abdel Jabbar and their son's first name is Tawfic, an unusual spelling.

After Israeli investigators examined the vehicle Saturday, the family took it back to the village, where it sat under tarp. AP saw the truck Tuesday. Bullet holes had been marked with Hebrew stickers left by a police forensics team. Later Tuesday, investigators took the truck, Abdel Jabbar said.

According to figures from the Israeli watchdog Yesh Din, killings of Palestinians in the West Bank rarely result in investigations — and when they do, indictments are uncommon.

Also Tuesday, Abdel Jabbar said, he accompanied Salameh to provide witness testimony to Israeli investigators.

AFTER SHOCK, ANGER

Four days after the shooting, friends and relatives clustered into the family home to pay their respects, piling hummus and falafel onto platters and gathering around fires with cups of Arabic coffee.

Tawfic's uncle, Rami, said that in Louisiana, Tawfic had refused to work in the family's shoe stores — spending time instead studying. Abdel Jabbar said his son wanted to become an engineer.

His mother, 36-year-old Mona, said she wants to see those who killed her son prosecuted and punished in Israel, and added that she's furious at U.S. President Joe Biden's administration.

"How many children have to get killed for the U.S. to stop supporting Israel?" she said.

Biden's administration has provided military and diplomatic support for Israel's war against Hamas. Over 25,000 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, in which the militants killed about 1,200 people and took 250 hostages.

The administration has condemned rising violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. Since Oct. 7, 370 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire, according to Palestinian health officials. Most have been killed in clashes during near nightly Israeli army raids aimed at suspected militants.

"My son, he was killed by — I don't want to say American bullets, but at least by American money," Mona Abdel Jabbar said. "We live there, we work there. Our business is there, we pay in taxes there. So my taxes are going to the bullet that killed my son."

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Alabama set to execute inmate with nitrogen gas, a never before used method

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama will attempt to put an inmate to death with nitrogen gas on Thursday night, a never before used execution method that the state claims will be humane but critics call cruel and experimental.

Kenneth Eugene Smith, a 58-year-old convicted killer whose 2022 lethal injection was called off at the last minute because authorities couldn't connect an IV line, is scheduled to be executed at a south Alabama prison.

Alabama plans to put an industrial-type respirator mask over Smith's face and replace his breathing air with pure nitrogen gas, causing him to die from lack of oxygen. The execution will be the first attempt to use a new execution method since the 1982 introduction of lethal injection, now the most common execution method in the United States.

Attorneys for Smith have waged a legal battle to halt the execution, arguing that the state is seeking to make Smith the "test case" for the new execution method that merits more legal scrutiny before it is used on an inmate.

"It's an experiment," said the Rev. Jeff Hood, Smith's spiritual advisor and a death penalty opponent.

The U.S. Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected Smith's argument that it would be unconstitutional to make another attempt to execute him after the failed lethal injection. The U.S. 11th Circuit Court of Appeals on Wednesday night also declined to halt the the execution, saying Smith had not sufficiently supported claims the new execution method would violate the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment. His attorneys are expected to appeal that decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Smith is one of two men convicted in the 1988 murder-for-hire slaying of Elizabeth Sennett. Prosecutors said he and the other man were each paid \$1,000 to kill Sennett on behalf of her pastor husband, who was deeply in debt and wanted to collect on insurance.

Alabama plans to strap Smith to a gurney in the execution chamber — the same chamber where he was strapped down for several hours during the lethal injection attempt — and place a "full facepiece supplied air respirator" over his face. After he is given a chance to make a final statement, the warden, from another room, will activate the nitrogen gas. The nitrogen will be administered through the mask for at least 15 minutes or "five minutes following a flatline indication on the EKG, whichever is longer," according to the state protocol.

Some states are looking for new ways to execute inmates because the drugs used in lethal injections, the most common execution method in the United States, are increasingly difficult to find. Three states — Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma — have authorized nitrogen hypoxia as an execution method, but no state has attempted to use the untested method until now.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said Wednesday night that he believes the courts will allow the execution to proceed.

"My office stands ready to carry on the fight for Liz Sennett. Two courts have now rejected Smith's claims. I remain confident that the Supreme Court will come down on the side of justice, and that Smith's execution will be carried out," Marshall said.

The victim's son, Charles Sennett Jr., said in an interview with WAAY-TV that Smith "has to pay for what he's done."

"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 said. "They just did it. They stabbed her — multiple times."

The state has predicted the nitrogen gas will cause unconsciousness within seconds and death within minutes. A state attorney told the 11th Circuit that it will be "the most painless and humane method of execution known to man,"

But some doctors and organizations have raised alarm about the state's plan.

"It's indefensible for Alabama officials to simply dismiss the very real risks this untested method presents

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and experiment on a man who has already survived one execution attempt," said Robin M. Maher, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center.

Much of what is known about death by nitrogen gas comes from industrial accidents or suicide attempts. Dr. Philip Nitschke, a euthanasia expert who designed a suicide pod using nitrogen gas and appeared as an expert witness for Smith, said nitrogen can provide a peaceful, hypoxic death, but said he has concerns about Alabama's proposal to use a mask.

Nitschke told The Associated Press that Smith's facial hair, jaw movements and involuntary movements as he feels the effect of the nitrogen could impact the seal. If there are leaks, Smith could continue to draw in enough oxygen, "to prolong into what could be a very rather macabre, slow process of slowly not getting enough oxygen," Nitschke said. He said he could envision scenarios where the execution goes quickly or seriously awry.

Marshall's office noted in court filings that Smith previously suggested nitrogen as an alternative method when fighting attempts to execute him by lethal injection. Courts require inmates challenging execution methods to suggest another available alternative. Alabama at the time had not developed a nitrogen protocol. Robert Grass, an attorney for Smith, told federal courts that they are challenging the specific way the state plans to administer the nitrogen. They argued the use of a gas mask puts Smith at risk for a prolonged and painful death or choking to death on his own vomit.

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

Sennett, 45, was found dead March 18, 1988, in her home in Colbert County with eight stab wounds in the chest and one on each side of her neck, according to the coroner. Her husband, Charles Sennett Sr., killed himself when the investigation focused on him as a suspect, according to court documents. John Forrest Parker, the other man convicted in the slaying, was executed in 2010.

Smith's 1989 conviction was overturned. He was convicted again in 1996. The jury recommended a life sentence by 11-1, but a judge overrode the recommendation and sentenced Smith to death. Alabama no longer allows a judge to override a jury's death penalty decision.

Qatar, a key mediator in sensitive Israel-Hamas talks, lashes out at Netanyahu over critical remarks

By NAJIB JOBAIN, JACK JEFFERY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Qatar said it was appalled Wednesday by leaked remarks made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in which he criticized the country's mediation efforts with Hamas, complicating already arduous negotiations meant to halt the hostilities in exchange for a hostage release.

In a meeting with families of hostages held by Hamas, Netanyahu said Qatar's role in the mediation was "problematic." Qatar, a key mediator that also has deep ties to the militant group and hosts some of its exiled leaders, said Netanyahu's remarks were "irresponsible and destructive."

The public spat came as sensitive talks were underway in an effort to advance a potential agreement that might offer some respite in the devastating 3-month-old war. The fighting has killed more than 25,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, displaced some 85% of the territory's 2.3 million people and triggered a humanitarian catastrophe that has spread hunger, malnutrition and disease across the embattled coastal enclave.

As the diplomacy continued, fierce fighting still raged, especially in southern Gaza, where the United Nations said an Israeli tank strike on a U.N. facility killed at least nine people and wounded dozens.

Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "complete victory" against Hamas, which started the war with its Oct. 7 assault across the border, killing some 1,200 people in Israel and abducting 250 others.

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Israel says it is fighting in self-defense, but it faces charges that it is committing genocide at the U.N. world court at The Hague, which announced that it would issue a decision Friday on South Africa's request for an interim order telling Israel to halt the hostilities.

A 'PROBLEMATIC' MEDIATOR

Qatar has been a critical link in negotiating efforts between Israel and Hamas.

In Netanyahu's leaked remarks, which were broadcast Tuesday on Israeli Channel 12 television, he also told the families that he has intentionally not thanked Qatar for its mediation efforts, claiming it could put more pressure on the Islamic militant group.

"Qatar in my opinion is no different, in essence, from the U.N. It is no different, in essence, from the Red Cross, and in some ways it is even more problematic," he said. Israel views those organizations with suspicion, seeing them as biased against it and not helpful enough in securing the hostages' freedom.

Netanyahu also said in the leaked audio that he had expressed anger at the United States for renewing a military base in the Gulf state. He said he told the Americans to put pressure on Qatar to put pressure on Hamas.

Qatar helped secure a weeklong truce in November in which over 100 hostages were released. It also is involved in efforts to broker a new deal to bring home the roughly 130 hostages that remain in captivity.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari said his government was "appalled" by the reported remarks by Netanyahu but that they were "not surprising."

"If the reported remarks are found to be true, the Israeli PM would only be obstructing and undermining the mediation process, for reasons that appear to serve his political career instead of prioritizing saving innocent lives, including Israeli hostages," al-Ansari said.

Qatar, along with Egypt, is working on a new agreement that could set free more hostages. The White House's Middle East envoy, Brett McGurk, was in Doha on Wednesday, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said. The visit came a day after McGurk met with officials in Egypt in hopes of establishing a temporary truce between Israel and Hamas.

But officials say the gap between the two sides is still wide, and the spat between Netanyahu and Qatar could rattle the negotiations.

FIGHTING RAGES IN SOUTHERN GAZA

Since the last truce ended in late November, fighting has intensified. The second-largest city of Khan Younis has been the latest focus of the war. The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, said at least nine people were killed when tank rounds struck a U.N. training center where 800 people were sheltering, according to the agency's Gaza director, Thomas White.

The number of deaths was likely to climb, agency head Philippe Lazzarini wrote on X. He said the compound was clearly marked and its coordinates shared with Israeli authorities.

"Once again a blatant disregard of basic rules of war," he wrote. The agency said the same site was also hit earlier in the week, killing six.

The military said it had "currently ruled out" that its aircraft or artillery had carried out the latest strike but was still investigating. Israel has accused Hamas of fighting near U.N. shelters and of endangering civilians by positioning fighters and militant infrastructure in dense residential areas.

Earlier Wednesday, Israel battled Palestinian militants outside of the city's main Nasser Hospital, where medics said 850 patients and thousands of displaced people were trapped by the fighting because the surrounding roads were inaccessible or too dangerous.

Thousands of people fled south Tuesday from Khan Younis toward the town of Rafah on Tuesday. The U.N. says some 1.5 million people — around two-thirds of Gaza's population — are crowded into shelters and tent camps in and around Rafah, which is on the border with Egypt.

Even there, Palestinians have found little safety, with Israel regularly carrying out strikes in and around the town. At least five people were killed when a strike hit a mosque Wednesday in Rafah, according to Associated Press journalists who viewed the bodies at a nearby hospital.

At least 210 Palestinians have been killed in the past 24 hours, bringing the total death toll from the war to 25,700, according to the Health Ministry. The agency's count does not differentiate between civilians

and combatants, but it says most of the dead are women and minors.

A TEMPORARY BUFFER ZONE

Hamas was still attacking Israeli forces, even in some of the most devastated areas, and firing rockets into Israel. An attack Monday near the border killed 21 Israeli soldiers as they were preparing explosives for a controlled demolition. It was the military's biggest loss of life in a single attack since Oct. 7.

Israeli media said the troops were working to create an informal buffer zone about a kilometer (half a mile) wide along the border to prevent militants from attacking Israeli communities near Gaza. Two TV channels ran footage showing what appeared to be a controlled demolition of several structures near the border, which the broadcasters said was done in the area of the attack.

An Israeli government official said the country was considering the idea of a temporary buffer zone.

"In the context of demilitarizing Gaza, a temporary security buffer zone may be established," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity pending a formal decision.

Man sentenced to death for arson attack at Japanese anime studio that killed 36

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese court sentenced a man to death after finding him guilty of murder and other crimes Thursday for carrying out a shocking arson attack on an anime studio in Kyoto, Japan, that killed 36 people.

The Kyoto District Court said it found the defendant, Shinji Aoba, mentally capable to face punishment for the crimes and announced his capital punishment after a recess in a two-part session on Thursday.

Aoba stormed into Kyoto Animation's No. 1 studio on July 18, 2019, and set it on fire. Many of the victims were believed to have died of carbon monoxide poisoning. More than 30 other people were badly burned or injured.

Judge Keisuke Masuda said Aoba had wanted to be a novelist but was unsuccessful and so he sought revenge, thinking that Kyoto Animation had stolen novels he submitted as part of a company contest, according to NHK national television.

NHK also reported that Aoba, who was out of work and struggling financially after repeatedly changing jobs, had plotted a separate attack on a train station north of Tokyo a month before the arson attack on the animation studio.

Aoba plotted the attacks after studying past criminal cases involving arson, the court said in the ruling, noting the process showed that Aoba had premeditated the crime and was mentally capable.

"The attack that instantly turned the studio into hell and took the precious lives of 36 people, caused them indescribable pain," the judge said, according to NHK.

Aoba, 45, was severely burned and was hospitalized for 10 months before his arrest in May 2020. He appeared in court in a wheelchair.

Aoba's defense lawyers argued he was mentally unfit to be held criminally responsible.

About 70 people were working inside the studio in southern Kyoto, Japan's ancient capital, at the time of the attack. One of the survivors said he saw a black cloud rising from downstairs, then scorching heat came and he jumped from a window of the three-story building gasping for air.

The company, founded in 1981 and better known as KyoAni, made a mega-hit anime series about high school girls, and the studio trained aspirants to the craft.

Japanese media have described Aoba as being thought of as a troublemaker who repeatedly changed contract jobs and apartments and quarreled with neighbors.

The fire was Japan's deadliest since 2001, when a blaze in Tokyo's congested Kabukicho entertainment district killed 44 people, and it was the country's worst-known case of arson in modern times.

Commission probing response to Maine mass shooting will hear from sheriff's office

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine (AP) — A commission investigating a mass shooting that killed 18 people in Maine last year is scheduled to hear Thursday from a police agency that had contact with the shooter before he committed the killings.

Democratic Gov. Janet Mills and state Attorney General Aaron Frey assembled the commission to review the events that led up to the shootings at a bowling alley and a restaurant in Lewiston on Oct. 25. Commissioners, who are holding their second meeting Thursday, are also tasked with reviewing the police response.

The meeting will be public and will allow commissioners to speak to members of the Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Department, a spokesperson for the commission said.

Lawyers for some of the victims' families have pointed to missed opportunities to prevent Army reservist Robert Card, 40, from committing the shootings and was found dead afterward from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Police videos obtained by The Associated Press and other news agencies showed that police declined to confront Card in the weeks beforehand, fearing it would worsen an already volatile situation. Card's declining mental health was known to police, Army officials and family members, according to numerous interviews.

Mills and Frey said Wednesday that they have introduced legislation to grant subpoena authority to the commission as it investigates, a power that commissioners have said they will need.

"This legislation, which comes at the request of the Independent Commission, will ensure that the commission has the tools it needs to fully and effectively discharge its critical mission of determining the facts of the tragedy in Lewiston," Mills and Frey said in a statement.

Thursday's commission meeting is the first of four in which there will be an open forum for comments. Meetings with victims, Maine State Police and the Army are also scheduled.

The commission has said it "will conduct its work in public to the greatest extent possible and issue a formal public report detailing its findings upon the conclusion of its investigation." Members have said they hope to produce a full report by early summer.

Police were alerted last September by Army Reserves officials about Card, who had been hospitalized in July after exhibiting erratic behavior during training. Officials warned police that he had access to weapons and had threatened to "shoot up" an Army Reserve center in Saco.

An independent report by the Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Office after the shooting found that local law enforcement knew Card's mental health was declining and that he was hearing voices and experiencing psychotic episodes. The report cleared the agency's response to concerns about Card, but several legal experts have said it revealed missed opportunities to intervene.

The commission meeting Thursday is chaired by Daniel Wathen, former chief justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. Other members include Debra Baeder, the former chief forensic psychologist for the state, and Paula Silsby, a former U.S. attorney for the District of Maine.

Trump racks up endorsements from Republicans in Congress as any resistance that once existed fades

By LISA MASCARO and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Long before Donald Trump announced his campaign to retake the White House, he launched a quieter campaign to rack up Republican endorsements.

In early 2021, after Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden and inspired a mob of supporters to attack the Capitol trying to overturn the 2020 election, the defeated president started laying the groundwork for the

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support in Congress he would need for a return.

With lavish three-hour dinners hosted at his private clubs, telephone town-hall fundraisers, rides on his private jet and endorsements of his own up and down the ballot, Trump schmoozed and strategized and wined-and-dined his way to the GOP lawmakers' support.

By the time of the first 2024 caucus in Iowa this month, Trump had secured endorsements from 120 House Republicans and nearly half the Republicans in the Senate. On Wednesday, after Trump won the New Hampshire primary, the number of endorsements climbed even higher, with a solid majority of Republicans in both chambers of Congress.

"It's past time for the Republican Party to unite around President Trump," said Speaker Mike Johnson, setting the tone after Trump's New Hampshire victory.

It's a remarkable turnaround for Trump, whose campaign is being powered not only by loyal voters but also by elected Republicans in Congress. And those lawmakers appear unwilling or unable to stop his rise, almost ensuring Trump has no institutional roadblocks to the eventual party nomination and a potential return to power.

Trump himself marveled at those standing behind him on election night in New Hampshire, where he was trying to drive his remaining rival, Nikki Haley, out of the race with a show of endorsements from her home state of South Carolina. He singled out Sen. Tim Scott, suggesting he "must really hate" Haley, the state's former governor.

The senator, once a Republican presidential candidate himself, stepped up to correct Trump, gushing: "I just love you."

The race for endorsements, years in the making, has been painstakingly orchestrated as a way to bring a certain official Washington legitimacy to Trump, who was twice impeached by the House, including for the insurrection at the Capitol. Trump now faces federal charges of defrauding voters in the run-up to the Capitol attack, among dozens of other charges in several different court cases.

Once facing pockets of resistance in Congress, Trump has essentially won over all segments of the Republican Party on Capitol Hill — the House GOP leadership team, including Whip Tom Emmer who had voted to certify Biden's election, to the chairman of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, Rep. Bob Good of Virginia, who quickly switched sides last week when Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended his presidential campaign.

The Republicans in the Senate, who have provided a stable of Trump skeptics, some more vocal than others, are also falling in line, save for a few. Trump is even picking up backing from a New York lawmaker in a House district that Biden won last time, with more swing-district Republicans expected to join.

What becomes glaring now are the hold-outs, most notably Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, and a few top Republican senators, who appear deeply wary of Trump's return and have yet to give him the nod.

"I don't have any announcement to make on the presidential election, in fact, you all may recall I've stayed essentially out of it," said McConnell ahead of New Hampshire. He had issued a scathing indictment of Trump in 2021, blaming the defeated president for the Capitol attack, but voted to acquit him during the Senate impeachment trial.

While McConnell has signaled he would support the eventual Republican nominee, the same comment the second-ranking Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota made Wednesday to reporters at the Capitol, that's usually not good enough for Trump.

For Trump, a supportive nod is not sufficient. He wants a full-throated endorsement.

The "Big E," as some have said he calls it.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a key Trump ally, said it's a moment of "true change" for the GOP. Any Republican who isn't willing to adapt to his policies, "we are completely eradicating from the party."

"It's true!" she wrote later on social media, posting her interview remarks.

So far, Trump has received endorsements from 30 of the Republican senators and some 120 Republican members of the House — far and away beyond those for Haley or even DeSantis, a former congressman who suspended his campaign after a disappointing finish in Iowa. He later endorsed Trump.

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Experts have warned that democracies that face threats like Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election have a better chance at survival when the political parties stand up for the results of free and fair elections — rather than fuel false conspiracy theories of fraud, as Trump and allies in Congress, have done.

That's not happening, as Trump keeps collecting endorsements on his march to the GOP nomination.

"People want to get behind the nominee," lamented Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, the only senator who voted to convict Trump on both impeachments, including on the charge of inciting the insurrection at the Capitol.

"Just like four years ago and four years before that —people say pretty strong things," Romney said. "And then when he becomes a nominee, they just kiss the ring, as Donald Trump has said."

And you?

"Oh, I'm not going to be doing that," Romney said.

Trump's team says winning over the holdouts has been easier than one might think, insisting there are no pressure campaigns, sticks to go with the carrots that Trump uses to court lawmakers over phone calls and long dinners at his Mar-a-Lago and Bedminster clubs.

In fact, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz and Sen. Josh Hawley, who helped lead Trump's effort to overturn the 2020 election but had yet to endorse, faced Trump's warning on social media to be "very careful" of their own political campaigns. Hawley endorsed soon thereafter.

Cruz told AP that while he and Trump "beat the living daylights" out of each other in the 2016 race — when Trump savaged the senator's wife and family with verbal assaults — he made his way to Trump Tower afterward, becoming Trump's "strongest" Senate ally.

"And if he's reelected in November, and I hope he is, I will again be Donald Trump's strongest ally in the Senate," Cruz said.

At times the lawmakers are not speaking directly to Trump but his team working on the endorsements, led by former White House Political Director, Brian Jack, who remains his top liaison to Capitol Hill.

Jack, now a senior adviser to the campaign, said securing the endorsements has been "not hard at all, given the hundreds and hundreds of hours President Trump has invested in relationship development and the deep connections he maintains across the party."

One longtime Trump backer, GOP Sen. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, said after making her endorsement in time for Iowa she expects to meet with Trump within 30 days to talk about her priorities in her state.

To those who are still holding out, Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla, told the AP at Trump's victory party in Nashua it's "not about the train leaving the station or one of those political cliches everybody likes to use. It's about having a united Republican Party and winning back the White House in 2024."

Rep. William Timmons was among the South Carolina lawmakers that Trump's campaign brought to New Hampshire to appear at a rally in a display of force.

South Carolina's primary is next month, and Timmons said he was working to win over Republican colleagues, "putting the hard press" on those who had previously backed Scott.

His message to those who have yet to endorse Trump: "Come on in. The water's fine," he said.

Biden, eager for a 2020 rematch in November, is quick to anoint Trump as his 2024 rival

By SEUNG MIN KIM and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is zeroing in on an expected rematch against Donald Trump after this week's New Hampshire primaries, eager to sharpen the contrast with his predecessor.

Ten months from Election Day, Biden's write-in victory in a New Hampshire race he didn't formally contest put a fork in any plausible path to deny him a second turn at the Democratic nomination. Now Biden and his team want to clarify the choice voters will face, believing that the stakes of the election, and Trump's solidifying grip on the GOP, will appeal to voters in the center and reinvigorate his base.

While many in the country have hoped for different choices in November, Biden decidedly is not one of them. He sees a rematch with Trump as both his easiest path to reelection and a validation of his deci-

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sion, at 81, to seek another four-year term.

Biden wasted no time trying to anoint Trump as his head-on rival after the Republican's decisive victory in the New Hampshire primary, which came on the heels of a romp in the Iowa caucuses a week earlier.

Presidential historian Julian Zelizer of Princeton University said the Biden campaign believes it can paint Trump as a very real threat because of the Republican's past record in the Oval Office.

"He's not an incumbent, but he was president," said Zelizer. "You have a traditional incumbent saying Opponent X is dangerous for the country, it's all theoretical. Here, you're talking about someone who's been in the White House."

Biden faces no shortage of headwinds going into the general election season — low approval ratings, widespread concern about his age, multiplying tensions abroad and plenty of discontent at home, including from disenchanted young people and minorities who were key to his first victory. But his campaign has crafted a rejoinder to each count — the answers often circling back to Trump himself.

Indeed, Biden's team has long anticipated that the upcoming contest would be an even more bruising rematch of the 2020 race and they have largely ignored other GOP White House aspirants. On Tuesday, he shifted two key aides from the White House to the campaign to oversee the effort against Trump and scored an endorsement from the United Auto Workers union Wednesday with no shortage of jobs at his predecessor.

They've launched campaign ads and raised money heavily off the prospect of another Trump presidency, and aides say that's only a preview of an even more intensive effort to come to remind Americans of what life was like under Trump's presidency and what he would do with another four years.

Biden campaign officials are confident that Trump will not win back voters he lost last time, particularly as the former president continues to deny the results of the 2020 election, defends those who perpetrated violence against police officers during the Jan. 6 insurrection and advocates what Democrats have framed as extremist tendencies and rhetoric.

"His agenda is toxic and voters aren't buying what he's selling," Biden deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks said Wednesday. "Trump performed worse among suburban and college-educated Republicans, the group of voters that have been pivotal to Democratic victories in 2020, 2022 and 2023. He failed to increase his vote share among voters under 30, a group that will be key to the outcome in November."

While Biden's team sees Trump's coalition as fraying, they're focused on stitching together their own coalition around issues like abortion access, health care and gun control. They're also hoping that fears about Trump returning to power will paper over real differences on issues like Biden's support for Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

Asking how he would maintain Arab-American support in light of his staunch support for Israel, Biden told reporters last week: "The former president wants to put a ban on Arabs coming into the country." He added that the campaign will make sure people "understand who cares about the Arab population."

The Biden campaign has spent much of its early energy working out how to motivate what it has termed its "sporadic" voters — those who are traditionally supportive of Democrats in a presidential year yet at this point in the contest, have not been focused on day-to-day political news and machinations.

Those voters, the Biden campaign believes, will ultimately back the incumbent president once the stakes of a Biden-Trump rematch are made clear. And that task, according to campaign officials, will be fundamentally easier because they don't have to conjure up what a hypothetical president would do. Instead, Trump has an actual record they can point to.

"I mean, this is not an election of nuance or subtlety. It's the old, you know, good versus evil," said Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa. "All voters know what Trump is, who he is, and what he stands for, and the way he behaves."

While Trump won in Iowa and New Hampshire, the contests exposed his vulnerabilities with the broader electorate, according to data from AP Vote Cast. He lagged in support among college graduates, people living in the suburbs and self-identified moderates. In New Hampshire, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley won 6 in 10 college graduates. She also won 6 in 10 moderates and split the suburbs with Trump.

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Trump "has a rock-solid base of about 40%, but to win, you have to get to 51," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a co-chairman of Biden's reelection campaign. "I think the outcome of the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primaries shows real challenges for Trump in the months ahead."

The other major plank of the Biden campaign strategy is to continue to promote the president's legislative achievements during his first term, and ensure that voters can connect tangible changes such as cheaper insulin costs and infrastructure investments in their communities to Biden himself.

"There's always the concern that a rematch is like a rerun; it's never as exciting as the first time," said Democratic Rep. Mark Pocan of Wisconsin, a battleground state that Biden will visit on Thursday. But "the president has real accomplishments that I haven't seen a president have in recent memory."

Highlighting that work is also the campaign's main strategy to combat voter concerns and political attacks about Biden's age. Campaign officials, clearly unable to reverse the president's advanced age, are making a bet that voters will ultimately care more about what Biden has done than when he was born.

Ahead of the primaries, there were concerns that the economy would be a drag on Biden in the election. But as inflation has eased and job growth continues, voters are starting to feel better about Biden's handling of the U.S. economy.

Roughly 8 in 10 Democratic voters in the New Hampshire primary favored his economic leadership, according to the AP VoteCast survey. That approval marked a slight increase among Democrats surveyed previously by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs.

Nine in 10 Democratic voters in New Hampshire said they would vote for Biden in November, compared to just 6 in 10 Republicans in the state who said they would vote for Trump in the general election.

North Korea says it tested a cruise missile, flaunting new nuclear-capable weapon

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and JIWON SONG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Thursday it conducted its first flight test of a new cruise missile, as it expands its military capabilities in the face of deepening tensions with the United States and neighbors.

The report in state media came a day after South Korea's military said it detected the North firing several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast. It didn't immediately provide more details about the numbers of missiles fired or their flight characteristics.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said the Pulhwasal-3-31 missile is still in its development phase and that the launch did not pose a threat to neighbors. It described the missile as "strategic," implying an intent to arm them with nuclear weapons.

Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the missiles flew a shorter distance than previous North Korean cruise missile launches, which he said suggested that the North was trying to improve the performance of existing systems.

The cruise missile launches were North Korea's second known launch event of the year, following a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its lineup of weapons targeting U.S. military bases in Japan and Guam.

Yang Uk, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said North Korea is trying to highlight its diversifying arsenal of nuclear-capable weapons to increase pressure on rivals. But the recent displays of new weapons systems came amid a slowdown in tests of short-range ballistic missiles, which could indicate inventory shortages as North Korea continues its alleged arms transfers to Russia, Yang said.

U.S. and South Korean officials have accused North Korea of providing artillery shells, missiles and other supplies to Russia for its war in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for economic assistance and military technology.

Kim, who traveled to a Russian space launch center in September for a summit with Putin, has been taking aggressive steps to strengthen ties with Moscow as he tries to break out of isolation and join a united front against Washington.

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Both Pyongyang and Moscow have denied that North Korea was sending weapons to Russia.

North Korea's cruise missiles are among its growing arsenal of weapons aimed at overwhelming missile defenses in South Korea and Japan. They supplement the country's huge lineup of ballistic missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the U.S. mainland.

While North Korean cruise missile activities aren't directly banned under U.N. sanctions, experts say those weapons potentially pose a serious threat to South Korea and Japan. They are designed to be harder to detect by radar, and North Korea claims they are nuclear-capable and their range is up to 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles), a distance that would include U.S. military bases in Japan.

Since 2021, North Korea has conducted at least 10 rounds of tests of what it described as long-range cruise missiles fired from both land and sea.

Tensions in the region have increased in recent months as Kim continues to accelerate his weapons development and make provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the United States and its Asian allies. In response, the United States, South Korea and Japan have been expanding their combined military exercises, which Kim condemns as invasion rehearsals and has used as a pretext to further ramp up his military demonstrations.

There are concerns that Kim could dial up pressure in an election year in the United States and South Korea.

South Korean experts and officials say Kim's weapons drive has put further strain on a broken economy, crippled by decades of mismanagement and U.S.-led sanctions over his nuclear ambitions.

In a separate report, KCNA said Kim during a two-day ruling party meeting held through Wednesday criticized officials for failing to provide enough of "basic living necessities including condiments, foodstuff and consumption goods" to people living in the countryside and less developed cities and towns.

Kim called the meeting to discuss a 10-year project he announced last week to promote more balanced regional development, which includes a goal of building modern factories in every county nationwide.

Satellite images analyzed by The Associated Press this week suggest North Korea has torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with South Korea, a week after Kim dismissed decades of hopes for peaceful reunification with the war-divided peninsula's south.

Kim last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary. He accused South Korea of acting as "top-class stooges" of the Americans and repeated a threat that he would use his nukes to annihilate the South if provoked.

Analysts say North Korea could be aiming to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and eventually force direct dealings with Washington as it looks to cement its nuclear status.

'Honored to have your back, and you have mine': Biden endorsed by United Auto Workers in election

By TOM KRISHER, FATIMA HUSSEIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden picked up an endorsement from the United Auto Workers union Wednesday, an important boost to the Democratic president's reelection bid as he pushes to sway blue-collar workers his way in critical auto-making swing states such as Michigan and Wisconsin.

"I'm honored to have your back and you have mine," Biden said to the cheering crowd. "That's the deal."

Biden spoke as the union closed out a three-day gathering in Washington to chart its political priorities. The event follows Tuesday's primary vote in New Hampshire, where Republican front-runner Donald Trump cemented his hold on core Republican voters with a victory and Biden scored a write-in win.

Biden has long billed himself as the most labor-friendly leader in American history, and went so far as to turn up on a picket line with union workers at a GM parts warehouse in the Detroit area during a strike last fall.

The president is hoping to cut into the advantage that Trump has enjoyed with white voters who don't

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have a college degree. Labor experts said that the UAW usually endorses candidates later as it has a mix of Democratic, Republican and unaffiliated voters.

"The days of working people being dealt out of a deal are over in this country as long as I'm president," Biden told the crowd. "I want to say to all of you thank you, thank you. I could not be more proud."

Union president Shawn Fain had demurred even earlier this week, but on Wednesday said Biden had earned the endorsement, contrasting what he said was the president's obvious support with Trump's trash talk and anti-union stance.

"He heard the call and he stood up and he showed up," Fain said of Biden's historic picket line appearance.

But when UAW went on strike against GM in 2019, Trump, then president, was silent. "He said nothing. He did nothing. Not a damn thing because he doesn't care about the American worker," Fain said.

Fain called Trump a "scab," a derogatory term for workers who cross union picket lines and work during a strike.

"This November we can stand up and elect someone who stands with us and supports our cause, or we can elect someone who will divide us and fight us every step of the way. That's what this choice is about," Fain said.

Among union members, support for Biden has varied from enthusiastic to uncertainty about whether to even vote come Election Day.

Caroline Loveless, a Waterloo, Iowa, resident and retired UAW member, said she would enthusiastically vote for Biden, recalling his appearance on a picket line during last fall's strike. She said his appearance should remind union members that Biden is on their side.

"I hope they don't get amnesia," Loveless said, "come Election Day."

William Louis, of Groton, Connecticut, another member, said that while he is "fed up with politicians" he will reluctantly vote for Biden, though he said the president had not fully earned members' vote given the current state of the economy.

Louis said Biden would get his vote because Trump, the likely Republican nominee, "was a terrible president."

Leo Carrillo, a member from Kansas City, said Biden's appearance on the picket line showed that "he was there for us," and helped him to decide to vote for Biden in November.

"For me it meant a lot" that a sitting president would show that level of solidarity to autoworkers, Carrillo said. "But there's more work to be done," he said, pointing to the PRO Act — proposed legislation that would make it easier to unionize on a federal level. The legislation advanced to the U.S. Senate but does not have enough support to survive in case of a filibuster.

Biden could run into dissent, however, over his support for Israel in its war on Hamas in Gaza. Some younger members of the union were less enthusiastic about the president for that reason, and there were scattered protests during his speech.

Johannah King-Slutzky, a Columbia University graduate student and member of the student workers union within the UAW, was one of several attendees who chanted "ceasefire now" during Fain's afternoon speech Monday. The union called for a ceasefire in Gaza in December.

"Right now he's done nothing to earn my vote," King-Slutzky said, because "he has not acted with urgency to stop the genocide in Gaza."

Fain, the first UAW president directly elected by members, took office after a huge bribery and embezzlement scandal that ended with two union presidents serving prison time. So he's making sure to follow union procedures on the endorsement and show that members made the decision, even though there's no way the UAW would have backed Trump, said Brian Rothenberg, a former union spokesman.

The UAW, with roughly 380,000 members, is normally one of the last unions to endorse presidential candidates, Rothenberg said. For example, the union didn't endorse Biden in 2020 until April 21.

In a November interview with The Associated Press, Fain made clear that he personally supports Biden, as he railed against Trump.

Fain pointed to Biden's trip to the GM parts warehouse, which is believed to be the first time a sitting

president appeared with union picketers.

About that same time, Trump held a rally at a nonunion auto parts maker near Detroit, which Fain said was odd. Biden's administration also supported the union's bid to persuade Stellantis to reopen a shuttered plant in Belvidere, Illinois, and joined Fain in the city 70 miles (113 kilometers) northwest of Chicago to celebrate its reopening, Fain said.

Internal UAW polling typically shows that in the spring and early summer, 30% of members support the GOP, 30% support Democrats and the remaining 40% swing between parties, he said. By Election Day, members and UAW retirees usually vote 60% Democratic, said Rothenberg, now a public relations consultant in Columbus, Ohio.

The endorsement may also sway nonunion blue-collar white males, who have been voting more for Republicans than in the past, Rothenberg said.

Federal court says Alabama can carry out first nitrogen gas execution; Supreme Court appeal expected

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama will be allowed to put an inmate to death with nitrogen gas, a federal appeals court ruled Wednesday, refusing to block what would be the nation's first execution by a new method since 1982.

A divided panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected Kenneth Eugene Smith's request for an injunction to stop his execution by nitrogen hypoxia Thursday night. Smith's lawyers, who have argued the state is trying to make him the test subject for an experimental execution method, are expected to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in a final bid to halt the scheduled execution.

The judges said in a 2-1 decision there is "no doubt that death by nitrogen hypoxia is both new and novel" but that Smith had failed to establish how it would violate the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment. Circuit Judge Jill A. Pryor dissented from the decision, saying there are, "real doubts" about the protocol and what Smith will experience.

"He will die. The cost, I fear, will be Mr. Smith's human dignity, and ours," Pryor wrote in a dissent.

Robert Grass, an attorney for Smith, declined to comment Wednesday night.

Smith, 58, is one of two men convicted in the murder-for-hire slaying of a preacher's wife in 1988 that rocked a small north Alabama community. Prosecutors said he and the other man were each paid \$1,000 to kill Elizabeth Sennett on behalf of her husband, who was deeply in debt and wanted to collect on insurance.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall praised the decision to let the execution proceed.

"Two courts have now rejected Smith's claims," Marshall said. "I remain confident that the Supreme Court will come down on the side of justice, and that Smith's execution will be carried out tomorrow."

The new execution method involves putting a respirator-type face mask over the nose and mouth to replace breathable air with nitrogen, causing death from lack of oxygen. The state predicted in court filings that the gas will cause an inmate to lose consciousness within seconds and cause death within minutes.

Critics of the untested method say the state can't predict what will happen and what Smith will feel after the warden switches on the gas. His attorneys said he is at risk for a prolonged suffering and choking to death on his own vomit.

Some states are looking for new ways to execute death row inmates because the drugs used in lethal injections, the most common execution method in the United States, have become difficult to find. Three states — Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma — have authorized nitrogen hypoxia as an execution method, but no state has attempted to use it so far. If carried out, it will be the first time a new execution method has been used since lethal injection was introduced in 1982.

The appeals court ruling comes after oral arguments in which the Alabama attorney general's office and Smith's lawyer presented diverging accounts of the humaneness and risks execution by nitrogen hypoxia.

Smith's attorneys said it is riddled with unknowns and potential problems in violation of a constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

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"This is the first time this will ever be attempted. There is no data on exactly what's going to happen and how this will go forward," Grass told the court.

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

Alabama Solicitor General Edmund LaCour had urged the judges to let the execution proceed, saying, "Alabama has adopted the most painless and humane method of execution known to man."

Dr. Philip Nitschke, a long-time advocate of the right-to-die movement — based on the concept that people, such as those with terminal illnesses, are entitled to opt to end their lives — testified before Huffaker for Smith's legal team. He told The Associated Press that he is concerned about Alabama's proposal. He said it's possible the execution could proceed quickly or become a "macabre" situation. Nitschke, who created a suicide pod using nitrogen gas, said one issue that could arise if is the seal not maintained on the mask.

If there are leaks — caused by a poor fit, Smith's facial hair or his movements — then Smith could continue to draw in enough oxygen "to prolong into what could be a very rather macabre, slow process of slowly not getting enough oxygen," Nitschke said.

Alabama previously tried to execute Smith by lethal injection in 2022 but called it off before the drugs were administered because authorities were unable to connect the two intravenous lines to his veins. Smith's attorneys said he was strapped to the gurney for nearly four hours.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Supreme Court denied Smith's request for a stay, rejecting his argument that it would be unconstitutional for the state to attempt a second execution after he survived the first.

Sennett, 45, was found dead March 18, 1988, in her home in Colbert County with eight stab wounds in the chest and one on each side of her neck, according to the coroner. Her husband, Charles Sennett Sr., killed himself when the investigation focused on him as a suspect, according to court documents.

Smith's initial 1989 conviction was overturned on appeal, but he was retried and convicted again in 1996. The jury recommended a life sentence by a vote of 11-1, but a judge overrode that and sentenced him to death. Alabama no longer lets judges override jury decisions in death penalty cases.

John Forrest Parker, the other man convicted in the slaying, was executed in 2010.

Washington state reaches a nearly \$150 million settlement with Johnson & Johnson over opioid crisis

By MANUEL VALDES and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — The Washington state attorney general announced a \$149.5 million settlement Wednesday with drugmaker Johnson & Johnson, more than four years after the state sued the company over its role in the opioid addiction crisis.

"They knew what the harm was. They did it anyway," Attorney General Bob Ferguson told reporters Wednesday.

The attorney general's announcement came as opioid overdose deaths more than doubled from 2019 to 2022, with 2,048 deaths recorded in 2022, according to the most recent numbers from the Washington State Department of Health.

Under the deal, the state and local governments would have to spend \$123.3 million to address the opioid crisis, including on substance abuse treatment, expanded access to overdose-reversal drugs and services that support pregnant women on substances. The rest of the money would go toward litigation costs.

The harm is "left now to policymakers to grapple with," the attorney general said, "or families and individuals who grapple in a very different way with the real tragedy of addiction."

The settlement agreement still requires approval from a judge. If approved, the deal would send over \$20 million more to respond to the opioid crisis than if the state had signed onto a national settlement in 2021 involving Johnson & Johnson, the attorney general's office said.

Since the 2000s, drugmakers, wholesalers, pharmacy chains and consultants have agreed to pay more

than \$50 billion to state and local governments to settle claims that they played a part in creating the opioid crisis.

Under the agreements, most of the money is to be used to combat the nation's addiction and overdose crisis.

Drug overdoses caused more than 1 million deaths in the U.S. from 1999 through 2021, and the majority of those involved opioids. At first, the crisis centered on prescription painkillers that gained more acceptance in the 1990s, and later heroin. Over the past decade, the death toll has reached an all-time high, and the biggest killers have been synthetic opioids such as fentanyl that are in the supply of many street drugs.

Washington state's Democratic attorney general sued Johnson & Johnson in 2020, alleging that it helped drive the pharmaceutical industry's expansion of prescription opioids. He also claimed that the company made a distinct mark on Washington's opioid crisis by deceiving doctors and the public about the effectiveness of opioids for chronic pain and the risk of addiction.

The attorney general's office noted that in 2015 the company was the largest supplier in the country of the active pharmaceutical ingredients that go into opioid drugs.

Johnson & Johnson said in a written statement Monday that Duragesic, its fentanyl patch, and its Nucynta opioid accounted for less than 1% of opioid prescriptions in the state and the U.S., adding that it has not sold prescription opioid medications in the country in years.

"The Company's actions relating to the marketing and promotion of important prescription opioid medications were appropriate and responsible," according to the statement.

Funds will be awarded by the end of this fiscal year, which means that the Legislature can earmark the money during the current legislative session. Half of the money will go to a state account, while the other half will go to an account for local governments, according to the attorney general's office.

Democratic Sen. June Robinson said Wednesday that her children have lost friends to addiction and that she has known parents who have lost children in similar ways.

"The fact that these lawsuits have played out since then, they can't unfortunately bring back the lives that we lost," she said. "But they are bringing resources to our communities and to our state that we are able to invest in ways that will help people recover and hopefully help to prevent future addiction and future crises like the one that we're seeing right now."

The deal comes about two years after the nation's three largest opioid distributors agreed to pay the state \$518 million, with the vast majority being directed toward easing the addiction epidemic.

FAA approves inspection process that could clear the way for grounded Boeing planes to fly again

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Federal regulators have approved an inspection process that will let airlines resume flying their Boeing 737 Max 9 jetliners, which have been grounded since a side panel blew out of a plane in midflight earlier this month.

The head of the Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday that his agency's review of the scary incident on board an Alaska Airlines Boeing jet gave him confidence to clear a path for the planes to fly again.

The official, Mike Whitaker, said the FAA would not agree to any Boeing request to expand production of Max planes until the agency is satisfied that quality-control concerns have been addressed.

"This won't be back to business as usual for Boeing," Whitaker vowed.

The production limits will apply only to the Max, of which there are currently two models, the 8 and the 9. Boeing builds about 30 a month but has wanted to raise production for some time.

Boeing said it will work with the FAA and the airlines to get the grounded planes back in the air.

"We will continue to cooperate fully and transparently with the FAA and follow their direction as we take action to strengthen safety and quality at Boeing," the company said. "We will also work closely with our airline customers as they complete the required inspection procedures to safely return their 737-9

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airplanes to service.”

A panel called a door plug blew off an Alaska Max 9 as it flew 3 miles (5 kilometers) above Oregon on Jan. 5. The blowout left a hole in the side of the plane, but pilots were able to return to Portland and land safely.

The FAA grounded most Max 9s the next day. Alaska and United Airlines — the only U.S. carriers with Max 9s — have canceled hundreds of flights since then, and United said this week that it will lose money in the first three months of this year because of the grounding.

The CEOs of both airlines vented their frustration at Boeing earlier this week.

The FAA will require airlines to conduct “detailed visual inspections” of door plugs and other components, adjust fasteners and fix any damage they find before putting Max 9s back into service. The agency said the process was developed using data from inspections of 40 grounded planes.

United, which has 79 MAX 9s, more than any other airline, said it has already done “preliminary preparations and inspections” of its planes, and it expects to put them back into service beginning Sunday.

United said the process involves removing an inner panel, two rows of seats and a sidewall liner before technicians can open the door plugs. They will inspect the plug and surrounding hardware, fix anything they find amiss, and resecure the panel.

The plugs seal places used for extra emergency doors on planes with more seats than Alaska and United Max 9s.

The FAA decision came on the same day that a key senator indicated that Congress will join the scrutiny of Boeing.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., met with Boeing CEO David Calhoun to discuss incidents, including the one this month involving the Alaska Airlines plane. Cantwell said she told Calhoun that quality engineering and safety must be the company’s top priorities.

“The American flying public and Boeing line workers deserve a culture of leadership at Boeing that puts safety ahead of profits,” said Cantwell, who represents the state where Boeing assembles 737s.

Cantwell said the Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee, which she chairs, will hold hearings “to investigate the root causes of these safety lapses.” No dates were announced.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the accident involving the Alaska Airlines jet. NTSB officials have said they are looking into whether bolts that help secure the door plug were missing before the plane took off.

An NTSB investigator will return to Boeing’s 737 assembly factory in Renton, Washington, on Friday as the probe continues, a spokesman for the board said. Investigators are building a timeline of the door plug that failed, from the early stages of its production to the flight on which it blew off the plane.

The Federal Aviation Administration is looking into whether Boeing and its suppliers followed proper safety procedures during manufacturing.

Experimental gene therapy allows kids with inherited deafness to hear

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Gene therapy has allowed several children born with inherited deafness to hear.

A small study published Wednesday documents significantly restored hearing in five of six kids treated in China. On Tuesday, the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia announced similar improvements in an 11-year-old boy treated there. And earlier this month, Chinese researchers published a study showing much the same in two other children.

So far, the experimental therapies target only one rare condition. But scientists say similar treatments could someday help many more kids with other types of deafness caused by genes. Globally, 34 million children have deafness or hearing loss, and genes are responsible for up to 60% of cases. Hereditary deafness is the latest condition scientists are targeting with gene therapy, which is already approved to treat illnesses such as sickle cell disease and severe hemophilia.

Children with hereditary deafness often get a device called a cochlear implant that helps them hear sound.

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"No treatment could reverse hearing loss ... That's why we were always trying to develop a therapy," said Zheng-Yi Chen of Boston's Mass Eye and Ear, a senior author of the study published Wednesday in the journal Lancet. "We couldn't be more happy or excited about the results."

The team captured patients' progress in videos. One shows a baby, who previously couldn't hear at all, looking back in response to a doctor's words six weeks after treatment. Another shows a little girl 13 weeks after treatment repeating father, mother, grandmother, sister and "I love you."

All the children in the experiments have a condition that accounts for 2% to 8% of inherited deafness. It's caused by mutations in a gene responsible for an inner ear protein called otoferlin, which helps hair cells transmit sound to the brain. The one-time therapy delivers a functional copy of that gene to the inner ear during a surgical procedure. Most of the kids were treated in one ear, although one child in the two-person study was treated in both ears.

The study with six children took place at Fudan University in Shanghai, co-led by Dr. Yilai Shu, who trained in Chen's lab, which collaborated on the research. Funders include Chinese science organizations and biotech company Shanghai Refreshgene Therapeutics.

Researchers observed the children for about six months. They don't know why the treatment didn't work in one of them. But the five others, who previously had complete deafness, can now hear a regular conversation and talk with others. Chen estimates they now hear at a level around 60% to 70% of normal. The therapy caused no major side effects.

Preliminary results from other research have been just as positive. New York's Regeneron Pharmaceuticals announced in October that a child under 2 in a study they sponsored with Decibel Therapeutics showed improvements six weeks after gene therapy. The Philadelphia hospital — one of several sites in a test sponsored by a subsidiary of Eli Lilly called Akouos — reported that their patient, Aissam Dam of Spain, heard sounds for the first time after being treated in October. Though they are muffled like he's wearing foam earplugs, he's now able to hear his father's voice and cars on the road, said Dr. John Germiller, who led the research in Philadelphia.

"It was a dramatic improvement," Germiller said. "His hearing is improved from a state of complete and profound deafness with no sound at all to the level of mild to moderate hearing loss, which you can say is a mild disability. And that's very exciting for us and for everyone."

Columbia University's Dr. Lawrence Lustig, who is involved in the Regeneron trial, said although the children in these studies don't wind up with perfect hearing, "even a moderate hearing loss recovery in these kids is pretty astounding."

Still, he added, many questions remain, such as how long the therapies will last and whether hearing will continue to improve in the kids.

Also, some people consider gene therapy for deafness ethically problematic. Teresa Blankmeyer Burke, a deaf philosophy professor and bioethicist at Gallaudet University, said in an email that there's no consensus about the need for gene therapy targeting deafness. She also pointed out that deafness doesn't cause severe or deadly illness like, for example, sickle cell disease. She said it's important to engage with deaf community members about prioritization of gene therapy, "particularly as this is perceived by many as potentially an existential threat to the flourishing of signing Deaf communities."

Meanwhile, researchers said their work is moving forward.

"This is real proof showing gene therapy is working," Chen said. "It opens up the whole field."

Despite 2 losses, Nikki Haley tries to claim victory thus far in the Republican presidential race

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Despite losing both Iowa and New Hampshire to Donald Trump, Nikki Haley is nevertheless trying to frame those losses as a victory and vowing to head off a "coronation" of Trump as the 2024 Republican nominee.

The path through the next states to vote, however, may not be any easier.

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"We were thrilled," Haley said during a rally before hundreds of sign-waving fans on Wednesday night in North Charleston, South Carolina, casting her second-place New Hampshire finish as a win given how little support her campaign had in its early days.

"We got out there, and we did our thing and we said what we had to say, and then Donald Trump got out there and just threw a temper tantrum," Haley added, referencing Trump's primary night remarks in which the former president repeatedly insulted her in a speech far angrier than his remarks after his Iowa victory.

Haley did perform better in Tuesday's New Hampshire primary than she had in the Iowa caucuses a week earlier, where she finished third, well behind Trump and only slightly down from Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has since shuttered his campaign.

But Haley had been banking on a stalwart showing in New Hampshire, a state where her attempt to appeal to independents and more moderate-leaning Republicans appeared to take root. Trump still won by double-digits on Tuesday night, leaving some to wonder whether she would keep going.

Haley has affirmed that she will do just that, speaking virtually to Republican voters in the U.S. Virgin Islands — which hold their caucuses Feb. 8 — before flying from New Hampshire to South Carolina.

The Wednesday night event served two purposes for Haley. It was a welcome-home gathering for the South Carolina resident and an opener for her campaign in the first-in-the-South GOP voting state, which has historically been influential in determining the party's nominee. Since 1980, only one winner of South Carolina's Republican balloting has lost the nomination.

Since his 2016 primary win there helped cement Trump's dominance in that year's race, South Carolina has stayed loyal to him. For the 2024 campaign, he boasts endorsements from all but one of the state's U.S. House Republicans, as well as the governor, lieutenant governor and both U.S. senators.

"Trump is in a commanding position in South Carolina," one of those senators, Lindsey Graham, said Wednesday at the U.S. Capitol, commending Haley's effort but forecasting her loss in their home state. "I think for all practical purposes, the primary is over."

Outside Haley's rally, several dozen Trump supporters waved flags and made their presence known, albeit from a marked-off zone away from the ballroom entrance.

Ahead of New Hampshire's vote, the super PAC supporting Haley's candidacy was quick to point out that President Joe Biden, the Democrat she hopes to face in the general election, hadn't been successful in the first several contests of his 2020 bid, but ultimately won the nomination.

That comparison, however, doesn't take into account the fact that Black voters propelled Biden's ultimate victory once he reached the South, a factor not expected to weigh heavily in the GOP primary.

Nonetheless, during a call with reporters on Wednesday, Mark Harris, chief strategist for that super PAC, SFA Inc., insisted that Haley "has a path" to the GOP nomination, regardless of Trump's two early wins.

Casting South Carolina as the campaign's next "battleground" of the Trump-Haley direct matchup — Nevada's GOP caucuses are Feb. 8, but Trump has already claimed victory there since Haley isn't participating — Harris noted that its open primary means that any Democrats who opt not to participate in their party's Feb. 3 contest can choose to support Haley in the Feb. 24 vote.

"We're going to do everything we can to encourage those conservative-leaning and Republican-leaning independents to vote in the primary," Harris said, noting that the super PAC would join the campaign in running "millions of dollars" in TV ads in South Carolina over the next month, also sending out mailers, knocking on doors and doing other outreach.

Asked about conversations with donors after the New Hampshire results, Harris said that the group was confident that it would have the necessary resources.

"Our donors have been in this for the long haul," Harris said. "Our strategy was to narrow the field by two by South Carolina."

He said he was encouraged by the enthusiasm he was seeing.

"People are jazzed up, and I'm very confident we'll have the resources we need to continue to fight."

As she wrapped Wednesday night's rally, Haley said she had raised \$1 million since giving her post-primary speech in New Hampshire the night before, money she said had come in from all 50 states, and the vast

majority of which was donations of \$200 or less.

After Haley's event, Trump posted to his social media platform an intimidating remark to any of his opponent's donors.

"Anybody that makes a 'Contribution' to Birdbrain, from this moment forth, will be permanently barred from the MAGA camp," Trump wrote, using the nickname he has crafted for Haley and the abbreviation for his "Make America Great Again" slogan. "We don't want them, and will not accept them, because we Put America First, and ALWAYS WILL!"

As he waited for Haley, North Charleston resident Sammy Penniger said he identified with the underdog persona that the candidate often ascribes to herself.

"She said last night, 'I'm not going to give up,'" the 25-year-old said, referencing Haley's post-New Hampshire primary comments. "I kind of love that fighter mentality — that's inspiring for a young person like me."

Freed Israeli hostage says she met a Hamas leader in a tunnel, where she was kept in dire conditions

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A 72-year-old Israeli woman held captive by Hamas militants for nearly 50 days told an Israeli TV channel Wednesday that she was held at length in a dark, humid tunnel where she met a Hamas leader and helped pass the time with an informal lecture series by her knowledgeable fellow hostages.

Adina Moshe was taken captive from Kibbutz Nir Oz, a hard-hit communal farming village, on Oct. 7. She was freed in late November as part of a deal that saw roughly 100 hostages, mostly women and children, released in exchange for a temporary cease-fire and the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Her account to Israeli Channel 12 TV comes as efforts are underway to bring about a new deal that could free the remaining 100 or so captives. It also sheds new light on the difficult conditions that hostages endured while in Hamas captivity, where Yehya Sinwar, Hamas' top leader in Gaza, visited Moshe and a group of fellow hostages deep underground, she said.

"Hello. How are you? Everything OK?" Moshe said Sinwar told them in the Hebrew he had learned during a long incarceration in Israel. She said the hostages bowed their heads and did not respond. Another visit followed three weeks later, she said.

Moshe said militants raided the home she shared with her husband, David, who was shot in the leg. They snatched her out from the window of her house's safe room and another militant went back in to shoot her husband dead, she said. Before being killed, he blew her a farewell kiss, she said.

She was then taken into Gaza on a motorcycle flanked by two armed militants. She said one of them painfully ripped an earring from her ear and that before he could swipe the other one she offered it up. He took all her jewelry and a passerby stole her glasses, she said.

Moshe and a group of other hostages were marched into Hamas' extensive tunnel network, walking for five hours down five underground flights through dark and airless shafts until they reached a subterranean room where they were told they'd be released in the coming days.

"We believed them. We believed that would be the first thing Israel would do," she said.

It ended up taking nearly 50 until she was freed.

"I told all the guys, 'We'll be here for at least two months and not because of Hamas,'" she said, indicating she harbored anger toward Israel for not securing her release earlier.

Moshe spent her days with other hostages — men, women and children — as armed guards stood by. They ate small portions of canned goods and rice that dwindled with time, she said. The room was lit only by a small LED light.

To pass the time, she said three male hostages, including a Jewish history buff, a film connoisseur and an Arabic speaker, offered to give lectures to the other captives. When the lectures about the Holocaust became too hard to hear, they moved on to the persecution of Spanish Jews in the Middle Ages, another topic too difficult to process under the conditions. The three men are still in captivity.

Moshe, who speaks some Arabic, said she asked the gunmen to lower their rifles, saying they were scaring

a child captive, and they agreed. She also asked to be able to walk through the tunnel, saying her heart condition required it, and they also agreed to that. It was on one of those walks that she discovered two male hostages held in cells because, they said, they had fought back against the militants.

From so deep underground, she did not hear Israel's massive bombardment. But she said she could tell they were happening because it felt like the tunnels were moving.

Moshe was shaking and broke down in tears during the interview. She said she is haunted by images of tunnels released by the army where she believes her fellow hostages have been taken.

"I have a feeling that some of them aren't alive, because I know that they are no longer in the place where I was," she said. "They took them from there. I've seen the pictures."

Russia says a plane with Ukrainian POWs crashes, killing all aboard, and accuses Kyiv of downing it

By The Associated Press undefined

A Russian military transport plane crashed Wednesday in a border region near Ukraine, and Moscow accused Kyiv of shooting it down, saying all 74 people aboard were killed, including 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war headed for a swap. Russia offered no evidence and Ukraine didn't immediately confirm or deny it.

Video of the crash on social media from the Belgorod border region of Russia showed a plane falling from the sky in a snowy, rural area, and a huge ball of fire erupting where it apparently hit the ground.

The Associated Press couldn't confirm who was aboard or other details on what brought the plane down.

Throughout the 700-day war, Russia and Ukraine have traded conflicting accusations, and establishing the facts has often been difficult, both because of the constraints of a war zone and because each side tightly controls information.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement that the Il-76 transport plane was carrying 65 POWs, a crew of six and three Russian servicemen. Russian radar registered the launch of two missiles from Ukraine's Kharkiv region that borders Belgorod, the statement said.

"We've seen the reports, but we're not in any position to confirm them," U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

Separately, a U.S. official said it was not clear that there were actually Ukrainian POWs aboard the aircraft that crashed. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details that haven't been announced publicly.

Hours after the crash, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine made no mention of the crash in a statement. But it added that Ukraine targets Russian military transport planes believed to be delivering missiles, especially near the border.

Russia lost two warplanes and two helicopters in its own airspace in one day in May 2023. Kyiv officials initially denied involvement, but later said they had used Patriot missiles to hit the aircraft.

The Kharkiv and Belgorod regions have long been a focus of the fighting between the neighbors, including airstrikes with missiles and drones.

The Russian military said the POWs were being flown to the region for a prisoner swap when the plane was downed at 11:15 a.m. local time. The Il-76 is designed to carry up to 225 troops, cargo, military equipment and weapons, according to Russia's military export agency.

Ukrainian military intelligence confirmed a swap was due to take place, but said it had no information about who was on the plane. Moscow didn't ask for specific airspace to be kept safe for a certain length of time, as has happened in past exchanges, it said in a statement.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine would push for an international investigation of what happened. "It is necessary to establish all the facts, as much as possible, considering that the plane crash occurred on Russian territory — beyond our control," he said in his nightly address.

"It's obvious Russians are playing with lives of Ukrainian POWs, with feelings of their relatives and emotions of our society," Zelenskyy said.

At a news conference at the United Nations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for an

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emergency meeting later Wednesday of the U.N. Security Council, saying he had "no concern" about the international community believing Moscow's allegations.

But the Security Council already had a meeting scheduled to hear from many countries that didn't get to speak at Tuesday's ministerial meeting on the Israeli-Hamas war, and France, which holds the council's presidency, indicated the emergency Ukraine meeting would take place Thursday afternoon.

Russian officials and lawmakers questioned whether there should be further prisoner swaps between Moscow and Kyiv. The most recent one, brokered by the United Arab Emirates, took place this month and was the biggest to date, with 230 Ukrainian POWs returning home and 248 Russians released. It was the first in almost five months and the 49th of the war.

Russia has largely ensured its air dominance during the war against Ukraine's fleet of Soviet-era warplanes. But Russia has suffered a series of crashes that some observers have attributed to a higher number of flights amid the fighting in Ukraine.

At the same time, Kyiv has boasted of shooting down two Russian command and control planes, which would be a major feat for Ukraine if true. Cross-border attacks on Russia's Belgorod region also have increased, with the deadliest one killing 25 people in December.

Shortly before the crash, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on his Telegram channel that a "missile alert" had been triggered in the region.

Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War said that it was looking into the crash, but didn't immediately provide any information. Instead, it cautioned against sharing "unverified information."

"We emphasize that the enemy is actively conducting information special operations against Ukraine aimed at destabilizing Ukrainian society," it said in a statement on Telegram.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters in the morning that he couldn't comment on the crash, because he didn't have enough information about it. There was no comment from the Kremlin later in the day.

The 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line in the war has been largely static amid a second winter of fighting. As both sides seek to replenish their weapons stockpiles, the war recently has focused on long-range strikes.

Earlier, Ukraine's president said that a major Russian missile attack Tuesday had killed 18 people and injured 130 others.

The barrage, employing more than 40 ballistic, cruise, anti-aircraft and guided missiles, hit 130 residential buildings in three Ukrainian cities, "all ordinary houses," Zelenskyy said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Russia's onslaught, which included targets in Kyiv and the second-largest city of Kharkiv, was the heaviest in weeks and lent weight to Zelenskyy's appeals for Western allies to provide more military aid.

"This year, the main priority is to strengthen air defense to protect our cities and towns, as well as defend front-line positions," Zelenskyy tweeted Tuesday.

Analysts say Russia has stockpiled missiles to pursue a winter of aerial bombardment, while Ukraine has sought to strike inside Russia with new types of drones.

Russia may have employed decoy missiles in Tuesday's attack in an effort to open up holes in Ukraine's air defenses, a U.S. think tank said.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said that Moscow is likely trying to acquire more ballistic missiles from foreign countries, including Iran and North Korea, because they may be more effective in some circumstances.

A further barrage of Russian S-300 missiles struck residential districts of Kharkiv late Tuesday, wounding nine people and damaging residential buildings, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

Russia denies its forces strike civilian areas, although there is substantial evidence to the contrary.

Also on Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that its air defenses shot down four Ukrainian drones in the Oryol region of western Russia. Oryol Mayor Yuri Parakhin said that several drones were downed over the city with no casualties.

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Another Ukrainian drone was downed early Wednesday over the Belgorod border region, according to Gladkov. He said that there were no casualties or damage.

Two Ukrainian drones were downed over the Bryansk region in the evening, Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said. Ukraine's allies have promised more military aid even though their resources are stretched. Help from the United States, by far Ukraine's single biggest provider, has also hit political snags.

The German Defense Ministry said Wednesday that it plans to send six Sea King Mk41 helicopters to Ukraine.

Trump's live appearances pose a riddle that news executives still haven't solved

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Even as Donald Trump seeks his third straight Republican presidential nomination, his live appearances still present an unsolved riddle for many news outlets: How do you cover him?

The question hung in the air as CNN, MSNBC and some streaming outlets started — then stopped — showing Trump's speech following Tuesday's New Hampshire primary. There was little hand-wringing at Fox News Channel and Newsmax, networks that appeal to Trump supporters. They carried the former president's remarks in full.

Outlets weigh whether an event's newsworthiness justifies live coverage when there's a risk Trump will make false statements that are difficult, if not impossible, to correct in real time — or go completely off script with something entirely unexpected.

And as a year of campaign and courtroom events loom, news executives will face similar decisions again and again.

WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA?

MSNBC pointedly opted out of carrying Trump after the Iowa caucuses a week ago, as Rachel Maddow said "there is a cost to us as a news organization of knowingly broadcasting untrue things." But after New Hampshire, MSNBC starting showing him, Maddow noting Trump's Iowa speech had been mild-mannered by Trump standards.

Only minutes after he began, MSNBC cut out to correct Trump's misstatements about his past electoral performances and who could vote in New Hampshire.

"We'll try again," Maddow said. It didn't last much longer. As Trump continued to speak, MSNBC spent part of its time on a live interview with former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

CNN cut away after Trump began giving his microphone to others, with Jake Tapper reaching back to the 1970s to compare Vivek Ramaswamy to Drew "Bundini" Brown, former trainer and "hype man" for Muhammad Ali. The network also offered fact checks on TV and its website.

Broadcast networks did not offer live New Hampshire coverage. ABC and NBC's streaming services carried a part of Trump live, then left and corrected some of what Trump said.

"I heard him reporting some of the 2020 falsehoods that we've heard him talk about before," ABC anchor Linsey Davis said, "but it seems like people are eating it up in the room."

There was comparatively less at stake when networks began opting out of Trump speeches while he made unfounded accusations of voter fraud following the 2020 election. He was a defeated candidate, soon to leave office, and most ex-presidents fade into irrelevance.

This one didn't. The stakes are much different now with the increasing likelihood of Trump being the 2024 GOP nominee, and journalists faced with the responsibility of giving a potential future president the chance to be heard.

A disastrous town hall event with Trump on CNN last spring reminded everyone in news about the implications of airing his appearances live. Fact-checking on the fly can be extraordinarily hard, and many of Trump's supporters are more inclined to believe what comes out of the former president's mouth than what a news organization declares is true.

News executives are generally loath to talk about their decision-making processes, although internal

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debate within CNN about this topic recently received some attention. It's sensitive politically, and also difficult to make hard-and-fast rules about.

"I think that we will continue to have these conversations and make the decisions on a case-by-case basis, based on what the event is," said Mary Hager, executive editor for politics at CBS News. It's a healthy discussion to have, but "I don't know why anyone has to take him live," said Jonathan Klein, a news consultant and former CNN president, in an interview.

Instead, responsible news organizations should monitor what he says and later use material that eliminates or corrects falsehoods, he said.

"I'm not saying don't air it," Klein said. "I'm just saying make sure what you air is truthful, accurate and that you're able to offer perspective."

NOT AS EASY AS IT MIGHT SEEM

It takes discipline, however. Live coverage of events is the go-to move for cable networks, which thrive on a sense of urgency. Network producers who decide to delay face enormous pressure, particularly if control-room monitors tuned to their competitors show them going live.

Producers need reminders that most viewers don't watch news coverage with a remote ready to click away just because another network is carrying something live, Klein said.

Networks may face a particularly hard decision if Trump wins the GOP nomination. A party nominee's convention acceptance speech is a political rite of passage on a summer night, traditionally carried live by broadcast and cable news networks as a campaign kickoff.

Trump has also tested networks by holding live news conferences following court appearances in some of the cases against him, taking advantage of the fact that court proceedings are behind closed doors and he can quickly set a narrative. "Saturday Night Live" opened its show last week with a spoof of one of those news conferences.

Trump and his supporters have also served notice that they're watching the decisions that networks make.

Fox News' Sean Hannity and Jesse Watters both did segments on rivals' decisions not to show Trump's Iowa speech in full. "Media censors democracy," was the onscreen message on Watters' show last week.

"I am worried that the media has a plan, and we saw it play out last night, to just censor this man," Kayleigh McEnany, former White House press secretary under Trump and now a Fox analyst, said to Hannity the night after the Iowa caucuses last week.

On MSNBC Wednesday, Trump's speech received far more attention on "Morning Joe" than it had the night before. After Trump spoke on Tuesday, NBC News reporter Vaughn Hillyard gave a short synopsis on MSNBC.

"So that's what we missed when we cut away," said host Lawrence O'Donnell. "Does anyone here regret cutting away?"

2 US-flagged ships with cargo for US Defense Department come under attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Two American-flagged ships carrying cargo for the U.S. Defense and State departments came under attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday, officials said, with the U.S. Navy intercepting some of the incoming fire.

The attacks on the container ships Maersk Detroit and Maersk Chesapeake further raise the stakes of the group's ongoing attacks on shipping through the vital Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The U.S. and the United Kingdom have launched multiple rounds of airstrikes seeking to stop the attacks.

Meanwhile, Qatar, one of the world's top exporters of liquified natural gas, warned that its deliveries were affected by ongoing Houthi attacks over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Danish shipper Maersk, in a statement to The Associated Press, identified two of its vessels affected by the attacks as the U.S.-flagged container ships Maersk Detroit and Maersk Chesapeake. It said the U.S. Navy was accompanying its ships at the time.

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"While en route, both ships reported seeing explosions close by and the U.S. Navy accompaniment also intercepted multiple projectiles," Maersk said. "The crew, ship, and cargo are safe and unharmed. The U.S. Navy has turned both ships around and is escorting them back to the Gulf of Aden."

Maersk said both vessels carried cargo belonging to the U.S. Defense and State Departments, as well as other government agencies, meaning they were "afforded the protection of the U.S. Navy for passage through the strait."

The ships were operated by Maersk Line, a U.S. subsidiary of Maersk that is "suspending transits in the region until further notice," the company said.

The U.S. military's Central Command in an online statement blamed the Houthis for the attack, saying they fired "three anti-ship ballistic missiles."

"One missile impacted in the sea," the statement said. "The two other missiles were successfully engaged and shot down by the USS Gravelly," an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer.

Central Command did not respond to further questions from the AP.

The Houthis, who have been launching attacks on ships since November over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, later claimed the attacks in a prerecorded statement by their military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree. He vowed the Houthis would continue their attacks.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea, saying they were avenging Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade.

The U.S. and the U.K. have launched rounds of airstrikes targeting suspected missile storage and launch sites used by the Houthis in their attacks. The rebels now say they'll target American and British ships as well.

Meanwhile, Qatar announced its shipments of liquified natural gas had been affected by the Houthi attacks. Previous shipments had been delayed previously before heading through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

Qatar, which has served as a key mediator between Hamas and Israel, has yet to see any of its ships attacked, however. A statement from its state-owned QatarEnergy producer said that its "production continues uninterrupted, and our commitment to ensuring the reliable supply of LNG to our customers remains unwavering."

"While the ongoing developments in the Red Sea area may impact the scheduling of some deliveries as they take alternative routes, LNG shipments from Qatar are being managed with our valued buyers," the statement said.

The statement suggests QatarEnergy's cargos now are traveling around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, likely adding time to their trips.

British billionaire Joe Lewis pleads guilty in insider trading case

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — British billionaire Joe Lewis, whose family trust owns the Tottenham Hotspur soccer club, pleaded guilty Wednesday to insider trading and conspiracy charges in New York, saying he knew that sharing nonpublic information about publicly traded companies was wrong and that his crimes have left him "so embarrassed."

The 86-year-old businessman entered the plea in Manhattan federal court six months after he was charged in the case. He had been free on \$300 million bail, with a yacht and private plane serving as collateral.

He told Judge Jessica G.L. Clarke that he agreed in 2019 to share secrets he knew about publicly traded companies with two other people who bought stock in those companies. He said that he shared confidential tips with another person in July and September of the same year and that individual bought stocks in the companies.

"I knew that I was violating a legal duty not to make those recommendations because the nonpublic information had been entrusted to me in confidence," he said. "I knew at the time what I was doing was

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wrong, and I am so embarrassed and I apologize to the court for my conduct.”

Lewis did not speak as he left court, and he was shielded from photographers by his aides, a lawyer and an umbrella.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said the plea deal includes the largest financial penalty for insider trading in a decade.

A guilty plea was also entered for Broad Bay Limited, which Lewis owns. The company and Lewis will pay more than \$50 million in financial penalties, the prosecutor said in a release.

“Today’s guilty pleas once again confirm — as I said in announcing the charges against Joseph Lewis just six months ago — the law applies to everyone, no matter who you are or how much wealth you have,” Williams said.

He said Lewis abused inside information he gathered from corporate boardrooms to tip off his friends, employees and romantic interests.

Federal sentencing guidelines call for a prison sentence of between 18 and 24 months, though Lewis can seek less than that. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for March 28.

As part of the guilty plea, Lewis and Broad Bay Limited have agreed that Lewis and his companies will resign and surrender control over board seats and participation in board meetings for any corporation publicly traded in the United States. They also agreed to quit ownership of certain investments over the five-year period of probation and to cooperate with the U.S. government’s ongoing investigation and prosecution.

Lewis has a fortune that Forbes estimates at \$6.1 billion and assets in real estate, biotechnology, energy, agriculture and more. He bought an interest in Tottenham Hotspur, one of England’s most storied soccer clubs, in 2001.

Under his ownership, the Premier League club built a state-of-the-art stadium at an estimated cost of more than \$1 billion.

Today, a trust benefiting members of Lewis’ family is the majority owner of ENIC, the holding company that owns the team. Lewis himself is not a beneficiary of that trust and relinquished operational control of the club in October 2022, according to corporate filings.

Lewis’ Tavistock Group owns all or parts of over 200 companies worldwide, according to its website, and his art collection boasts works by Picasso, Matisse, Degas and more. His business connections include Tiger Woods, Ernie Els and Justin Timberlake, with whom he built a Bahamian oceanside resort that opened in 2010.

According to the indictment against him, Lewis’ investments in various companies gave him control of board seats, where he placed associates who let him know what they learned behind the scenes. Prosecutors said Lewis improperly shared confidential information between 2019 and 2021 to his chosen recipients and urged them to profit from the tips.

UN court to issue ruling Friday on South Africa’s request for order to halt Israel’s Gaza offensive

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The United Nations’ top court will issue a decision Friday on South Africa’s request for interim orders in a genocide case against Israel, including that Israel halt its offensive in Gaza.

The decision is a preliminary stage of a case filed by South Africa at the International Court of Justice alleging that Israel’s military action in its war with Hamas in Gaza amounts to genocide. Israel strongly rejects the accusation and has asked the court to throw out the case.

The court in The Hague, Netherlands, announced the timing of the interim ruling on Wednesday. South Africa’s Foreign Ministry said Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor would travel to The Hague to represent the country at Friday’s ruling.

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Israel launched its massive air and ground assault on Gaza soon after Hamas militants stormed through Israeli communities on Oct. 7 and killed some 1,200 people, mainly civilians.

Israel often boycotts international tribunals and U.N. investigations, saying they are unfair and biased. But the country's leaders sent a high-level legal team to two days of hearings earlier this month. That was a sign of how seriously they regard the case and an indication of likely concerns that any court order to halt operations would be a major blow to the country's international standing.

If the court grants some or all of South Africa's eight requests for so-called provisional measures, it is unclear if Israel will comply.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "complete victory" against Hamas, which started the war with its assault across the border on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people and abducting another 250.

Gaza's Health Ministry says the offensive has killed at least 25,490 people — the majority women and children — and wounded another 63,354. Its count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants. U.N. officials have expressed fears that even more people could die from disease, with at least one-quarter of the population facing starvation.

Israel's attacks have driven nearly 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes. Much of northern Gaza, including Gaza City, has been reduced to rubble.

Friday's ruling will not be on the merits of South Africa's claims. Israel can still challenge the court's jurisdiction and the admissibility of the case before any hearings on the legal merits of the case.

For it to order so-called "provisional measures," the 17-judge panel must decide that the court appears to have jurisdiction in the case, that there is a dispute between South Africa and Israel about the 1948 Genocide Convention and that there is an urgent need to order emergency measures while the case continues.

At hearings earlier this month, South African lawyers said that acts by Israel's military and statements by senior officials demonstrated intent to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

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

He said the case's "distinctive feature" was "the reiteration and repetition of genocidal speech throughout every sphere of the state in Israel."

Malcolm Shaw, part of Israel's legal team at hearings in The Hague, rejected the accusation of genocidal intent and called remarks cited by South Africa "random quotes not in conformity with government policy."

Israeli legal advisor Tal Becker told the court that the country is fighting a "war it did not start and did not want."

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

The case strikes at the national identity of Israel, which was founded as a Jewish state after the Nazi slaughter of 6 million Jews during World War II.

South Africa's own identity is key to it bringing the case. Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Black people to "homelands" before ending in 1994.

Cease-fire efforts for Israel-Hamas war gain steam. But an agreement still appears elusive

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

Efforts to reach a new cease-fire between Israel and Hamas appear to be gaining steam.

Egyptian and U.S. officials confirmed this week that they are actively pursuing ways to halt a war that has raged for over 110 days. An Egyptian official said that Israel has presented a proposal for a pause in fighting, while the White House said it dispatched a senior envoy to the region for consultations with

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Egypt and Qatar.

Any deal would have to include a pause in fighting, an exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel and large quantities of desperately needed humanitarian assistance for the war-battered Gaza Strip.

But finding a formula acceptable to both sides has been elusive. The gaps between Israel and Hamas remain wide, and the chances of an agreement anytime soon still appear slim.

"There are contacts all the time but they have not yielded results," said an Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were discussing behind-the-scenes negotiations. "There is a long road ahead."

Here is a closer look at the cease-fire efforts:

AN INITIAL DEAL

Israel declared war following a surprise cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7 that killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. An Israeli air and ground offensive has since left over 25,000 Palestinians dead, displaced an estimated 85% of Gaza's population and caused widespread destruction and humanitarian suffering, according to local health officials and international aid agencies.

Israel has vowed to press ahead until it destroys Hamas' military and governing capabilities and frees all hostages.

In late November, the sides agreed to one-week cease-fire. Hamas released over 100 of the 250 hostages it was holding, mostly women and children, while Israel freed 240 Palestinian prisoners.

The sides blamed each other for the failure to extend the deal, and fighting has worsened since then.

WHAT DOES EACH SIDE WANT?

Israel believes Hamas is still holding about 110 hostages, in addition to the bodies of some 25 others who were killed on Oct. 7 or died in captivity. It wants all hostages and remains to be returned as part of any deal. Israel also is offering a temporary pause in fighting, but says it will continue the broader war until all of its goals are accomplished.

Hamas wants Israel to release all of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners it is holding. These include prisoners convicted in deadly attacks on Israelis as well as hundreds of Hamas militants who participated in the Oct. 7 massacre. It also wants Israel's offensive to end and a permanent withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza.

WHAT HAS BEEN PROPOSED?

According to the Israeli official, several proposals are floating around. But the sides remain at odds over the length of any pause in fighting, the pace of the hostage releases and the scope of any prisoner release.

A senior Egyptian official said Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which 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 spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media, said Hamas rejected the proposal and insists no more hostages will be released until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws from Gaza. He also said Hamas' leaders in Gaza do not want to go into exile.

Israel's government declined to comment on the talks.

Egypt and Qatar — which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas — were developing a multistage proposal to try to bridge the gaps, the official said.

The White House's national security spokesman, John Kirby, said Tuesday that a senior envoy, Brett McGurk, was in Cairo for talks on a "humanitarian pause" that would include a hostage deal.

"That's definitely on the agenda," he said.

McGurk continued to Qatar on Wednesday, Kirby said.

COULD A TRUCE BRING AN END TO THE WAR?

In the short term, that appears unlikely.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will continue with the offensive until a "final victory" achieves all of its goals. He expects the war to last throughout 2024 and has resisted calls from the U.S.

and other allies to lay out a clear postwar plan for Gaza.

But a sustained pause could make it difficult for Israel to resume the fighting, especially as the world learns more about the full extent of the damage to Gaza's people and infrastructure. Mediators also hope it could provide a foundation for further understandings between the enemies.

Israel's public has overwhelmingly supported the war effort so far. But the slow pace of the offensive and mounting death toll of Israeli soldiers risks softening that support.

While Israel says it has killed over 9,000 Hamas militants, the group continues to put up fierce resistance. On Tuesday, Israel said 21 soldiers had been killed in an explosion in central Gaza. It was the deadliest single attack since Israel sent ground troops into Gaza in October.

Nahum Barnea, a veteran columnist for Israel's largest daily, Yediot Ahronot, wrote Wednesday that he believes the public remains in favor of what is seen as a just war, but that people are beginning to weigh the costs and benefits of the campaign.

"I don't think that the number of casualties on Monday changed the degree of the Israeli public's support for the war; but looking ahead, the price will begin to have an impact," he wrote.

Americans' economic outlook brightens as inflation slows and wages outpace prices

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — After an extended period of gloom, Americans are starting to feel better about inflation and the economy — a trend that could sustain consumer spending, fuel economic growth and potentially affect President Joe Biden's political fortunes.

A measure of consumer sentiment by the University of Michigan has jumped in the past two months by the most since 1991. A survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that Americans' inflation expectations have reached their lowest point in nearly three years. And the same survey, released last week, found that the proportion who expect their own finances to improve a year from now is at its highest level since June 2021.

Economists say consumers appear to be responding to steadily slower inflation, higher incomes, lower gas prices and a rising stock market. Inflation has tumbled from a peak of around 9% in June 2022 to 3.4%. According to the Federal Reserve's preferred price gauge, inflation has reached the Fed's annual 2% target when measured over the past six months.

What's more, paychecks have outpaced inflation over the past year, thereby easing Americans' adjustment to a higher cost of living. Weekly earnings for the typical worker — halfway between the highest and lowest earners — rose 2.2% last year after adjusting for inflation, the government reported last week. By that measure, inflation-adjusted pay is 2.5% higher than before the pandemic.

"While falling inflation took some time to feed through to consumer sentiment, it appears the good news is finally getting through," said Grace Zwemmer, an analyst at Oxford Economics.

Consumers' inflation expectations are important because they can become self-perpetuating: When people expect inflation to stay high, they often change their behavior, by accelerating purchases before prices rise further, which can, in turn, fuel more inflation. By contrast, lower inflation expectations can reverse that dynamic and help cool inflation.

Even with the steady slowdown in inflation, prices are still nearly 17% higher than they were three years ago, a source of discontent for many Americans. Though some individual goods are becoming less expensive, overall prices will likely remain well above their pre-pandemic levels.

That dichotomy — a rapid fall in inflation with a still-elevated cost of living — will likely set up a key question in the minds of voters, many of whom are still feeling the lingering financial and psychological effects of the worst bout of inflation in four decades. Which will carry more weight in the presidential election: The dramatic decline in inflation or the fact that most prices are much higher than they were three years ago?

Consider the price of food, one of the items people encounter most frequently. Grocery inflation has plummeted from a year-over-year peak of 13.5% in August 2022 to just 1.3%. Yet a typical basket of groceries

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still costs 20% more than it did in February 2021, just before inflation began to accelerate. On average, chicken prices are up 25%. So, too, is bread. Milk is 18% more expensive than it was before the pandemic.

The cost to rent an apartment has also soared and is still rising faster than before the pandemic. Rental costs are up 6.5% from a year earlier, nearly twice the pre-pandemic pace. At their peak in early 2023, rents were rising nearly 9% annually.

Sharply higher costs for such necessities as food and rent still represent a heavy burden for people like Romane Marshall, a 30-year-old software engineer who lives on the outskirts of Atlanta.

In late 2020, Marshall took computer coding classes to try to move beyond the warehouse and customer service jobs he had previously held. When he was hired by a professional services consulting firm in April 2021, he was "ecstatic." After he completed an apprenticeship program the next year, his pay jumped from \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Yet his expenses kept rising, too. When he moved to a new apartment to be closer to work as his company shifted from full-time remote work to a hybrid schedule, his rent doubled to \$1,475 a month, from the \$700 he'd paid for a room in a friend's house.

Marshall says his typical grocery bill is now about \$120 to \$130, up from just \$70 to \$80 three years ago. To keep his electricity costs down, he only occasionally turns on the heat in his apartment.

"There have been some positive changes, it's just that things got expensive," he said. "The only thing I notice is that the price of food is still high."

Some Americans do have a cheerier outlook now. Hiring has remained solid, with the unemployment rate remaining below 4% for nearly two years, the longest such stretch since the 1960s.

Dana Smith, a software developer, says he's optimistic that the economy is improving. He and his wife have both received pay raises that have helped offset the price spikes of the past three years.

Smith, 40, lives in Matthews, North Carolina, about a half-hour from Charlotte, where he and his wife bought a home about three years ago. It has since risen about 30% in value, boosting their household wealth.

"My perception," he said, "is that the economy is getting better and better."

The public's growing optimism about the economy could point to newfound enthusiasm for Biden's candidacy this year, after weak polling has defined much of his time in office. Still, Ryan Cummings, an economist who has analyzed consumer confidence and how it's affected by political views, cautioned that politics might limit how much public sentiment can improve.

Americans' economic outlooks, he said, are increasingly driven by political partisanship rather than by the economy's underlying performance.

"As the election goes on," Cummings said, "and it becomes more clear that the 2024 race will be Trump vs. Biden, Republicans might dial up their pessimism more than Democratic sentiment is increasing, pulling sentiment back down, regardless of economic fundamentals."

The University of Michigan survey found that consumer sentiment among Democrats jumped a sharp 11.8% in January, the second-largest such increase on record. (The biggest increase among Democrats occurred immediately after Biden's presidential victory in 2020.)

Many Americans might still favor having the government take steps not only to slow inflation but also to try to reduce overall prices to where they were before the pandemic. In a classic 1997 research paper, the Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Shiller found that two-thirds of respondents to a survey he conducted agreed that the government should try to reverse a 20% spike in prices.

Economists, though, uniformly caution that any attempt to do so would require a significant weakening of the economy, resulting from either sharp interest rate hikes by the Fed or tax increases. The likely consequence could be a recession that would cost millions of jobs.

David Andolfatto, an economist at the University of Miami and a former Fed economist, said it is better for wages to rise over time to allow people to adjust to higher prices.

"The cost of living is higher, the wages are higher," he said. "Let's just move ahead. There's no need for (the government) to bring the price level back down. It would be too painful."

Claudia Sahm, founder of Sahm Consulting and also a former Fed economist, acknowledged that "people

are angry" about higher prices.

"But then, the next question is, can you afford it?" she asked. "Not everybody can say yes to that question. But over time, more and more people will be able to say yes."

A Texas school's punishment of a Black student who wears his hair in locs is going to trial

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

ANAHUAC, Texas (AP) — A judge ordered Wednesday that a trial be held next month to determine whether a Black high school student in Texas can continue being punished by his district for refusing to change a hairstyle he and his family say is protected by a new state law.

Darryl George, 18, has not been in his regular classroom in Barbers Hill High School in Mont Belvieu since Aug. 31. Instead, he has either been serving in-school suspension or spending time in an off-site disciplinary program.

His Houston-area school district, Barbers Hill, has said George's long hair, which he wears in neatly tied and twisted locs on top of his head, violates a district dress code that limits hair length for boys. The district has said other students with locs comply with the length policy.

George, a junior, said Wednesday that he has felt stress and frustration over what he sees as unfair punishment, but that he was grateful to soon be getting his day in court.

"I'm glad that we are being heard, too. I'm glad that things are moving and we're getting through this," George said after the hearing in Anahuac, with his mother, Darresha George, standing next to him.

State District Judge Chap Cain III in Anahuac set a Feb. 22 trial in a lawsuit filed by the school district regarding whether its dress code restrictions limiting the length of boys' hair violates the CROWN Act. The new Texas law, which took effect in September, prohibits race-based hair discrimination and bars employers and schools from penalizing people because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including Afros, braids, locs, twists or Bantu knots.

Darresha George said she was disappointed the judge did not consider granting a temporary restraining order, which would have halted her son's punishment until next month's trial.

"I have a son, 18 years old, that wants to go to school, that wants to get his education, and y'all messing with him. Why?" she said.

In an affidavit filed last week in support of the temporary restraining order, Darryl George said he is being subjected to "cruel treatment."

"I love my hair, it is sacred and it is my strength," George wrote. "All I want to do is go to school and be a model student. I am being harassed by school officials and treated like a dog."

A spokesperson for the school district didn't speak with reporters after the hearing and didn't immediately reply to an email seeking comment.

In a paid ad that ran this month in the Houston Chronicle, Barbers Hill Superintendent Greg Poole maintained the district is not violating the CROWN Act.

In the ad, Poole defended his district's policy and wrote that districts with a traditional dress code are safer and had higher academic performance and that "being an American requires conformity."

"We will not lose sight of the main goal — high standards for our students — by bending to political pressure or responding to misinformed media reports. These entities have 'lesser' goals that ultimately harm kids," Poole wrote.

The two Texas lawmakers who co-wrote the state's version of the CROWN Act — state Reps. Rhetta Bowers and Ron Reynolds — attended Wednesday's hearing and said the new state law does protect Darryl George's hairstyle.

The district "is punishing Darryl George for one reason: his choice to wear his hair in a protective style which harms no one and causes no distraction in the classroom," Bowers said.

George's family has also filed a formal complaint with the Texas Education Agency and a federal civil rights lawsuit against Gov. Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton, along with the school district,

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alleging they failed to enforce the CROWN Act. The lawsuit is before a federal judge in Galveston, Texas. Barbers Hill's policy on student hair was previously challenged in a May 2020 federal lawsuit filed by two other students. Both students withdrew from the high school, but one returned after a federal judge granted a temporary injunction, saying the student showed "a substantial likelihood" that his rights to free speech and to be free from racial discrimination would be violated if not allowed to return to campus. That lawsuit remains pending.

The primaries have just begun. But Trump and Biden are already shifting to a November mindset

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Barely 400,000 votes have been cast in two rural Republican primaries over the span of eight days. But both Donald Trump and Joe Biden are behaving like their parties' nominees already.

Trump's double-digit victory Tuesday in independent-minded New Hampshire, where he was considered more vulnerable than perhaps anywhere else, was a rhetorical tipping point for both Democrats and Republicans.

"It is now clear that Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee. And my message to the country is the stakes could not be higher," President Joe Biden said hours after Trump's victory Tuesday night.

Trump's team largely agreed, even as he raged about former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley's unwillingness to leave the race altogether.

"I say the general election begins tonight," said Trump-adversary-turned-advocate Vivek Ramaswamy, who was standing at the former president's side during his New Hampshire victory speech. "And this man will win it in a landslide."

What comes next for a potential matchup many voters don't want

The bluster is just a sliver of what's to come over the next 10 months. Both parties are building out sprawling political operations backed by billions of dollars in advertising to shape the all-but-certain general election rematch between the current president and his predecessor.

It is a matchup that many voters and some elected officials did not want. Both Biden and Trump have loud detractors within their parties and glaring political liabilities. Yet no other Republican presidential candidate in history has won the first two contests on the primary calendar, as Trump polished off Tuesday night, and failed to clinch his party's nomination. And Biden, who won New Hampshire's Democratic primary without even appearing on the ballot, is facing only token opposition in his bid for the Democratic nomination.

Hours before Biden's New Hampshire win was official, the president shifted two key aides from the White House to his Delaware-based campaign. On Wednesday, Biden served as the keynote speaker at a United Auto Workers political convention in Washington, where he accepted the group's endorsement. The auto workers' decision marks a significant step in the president's push to win over blue-collar workers in critical Midwestern swing states.

Trump heads to Phoenix on Friday to address Republicans in a swing state that Biden won by 10,000 votes in 2020.

Nikki Haley vows to continue

As much as Trump's team would like to shift its full focus toward Biden, one Republican rival is still standing. And at least for now, Haley is still consuming a significant amount of Trump's attention.

The former president's campaign unveiled a new anti-Haley website on Wednesday as Trump railed against her repeatedly on social media.

"Could somebody please explain to Nikki that she lost — and lost really badly," Trump wrote on his social media network. "She also lost Iowa, BIG, last week. They were, as certain non-fake media say, 'CRUSHING DEFEATS.'"

Haley's team vowed on Wednesday to continue fighting Trump for the GOP nomination, even with the prospect looming of an embarrassing home-state primary defeat in South Carolina on Feb. 24.

"New Hampshire is first in the nation. It is not last in the nation," Haley declared before leaving Tuesday

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night. "This race is far from over. There are dozens of states left to go."

Indeed, primary contests are scheduled in every U.S. state and territory over the next five months ahead of each party's summertime national conventions. The earliest either Trump or Biden could clinch enough delegates to become his party's presumptive nominee in March.

Eyes on South Carolina and the race ahead

Haley's campaign launched a new \$4 million advertising campaign in South Carolina on Wednesday, describing the prospect of a Biden-Trump general election as "a rematch no one wants."

"Biden – too old. Trump – too much chaos," the narrator says. "There's a better choice for a better America."

Haley was to campaign in Charleston on Wednesday evening in what her campaign said was the beginning of her "first-in-the-South swing." She began Wednesday by addressing Republicans via Zoom in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where caucuses on Feb. 8 will decide nine Republican delegates.

"Nikki Haley is the happy warrior," Mark Harris, who leads the major pro-Haley super PAC, said Wednesday.

Harris said his organization would join the campaign in running millions of dollars in TV ads in South Carolina over the next month in addition to sending out mailers, knocking on doors and doing other outreach. As Trump seeks to expand his coalition among elected officials, Harris said Haley's team is more focused on the voters.

"It will not be politicians, it won't be party insiders," Harris said. "Voters get to make this decision. That's the beauty of American democracy."

Early next week, Haley is scheduled to do a fundraising tour that includes stops in New York, Florida, California, Texas and South Carolina. She's expected to continue to draw continued donor support, despite Trump's grip on the nomination, because significant forces within the GOP do not want him to represent their party on the general election ballot.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she was glad Haley is staying in the race, but she's not willing to endorse her.

"I think the more people see her particularly since she appears to be the only alternative to Donald Trump right now, the more impressed that they will be," Collins said.

General election concerns

Trump's critics openly fear that he would struggle to win in November and would drag down Republican candidates in other elections. Republicans have struggled in every national election since Trump first captured the White House in 2016.

Indeed, there were new warning signs about Trump's broader political standing tucked within New Hampshire's results that raised questions about his strength in the general election.

Haley beat Trump on Tuesday among Republican primary voters who identified as either moderates or independents, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate. She also beat Trump among voters with college degrees.

About half of the state's Republican primary voters also said they are very or somewhat concerned that Trump is too extreme to win the general election. And about one-third believe that Trump broke the law — in his alleged attempt to interfere in the vote count in the 2020 presidential election, his role in what happened at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, or with the classified documents found at his Florida home after he left the White House.

In a conference call Wednesday, the Biden campaign signaled it was eager to take on Trump, while highlighting the Republican former president's apparent weakness with general election swing voters.

"We have been prepared for this since the launch of this reelection last year," Biden spokesman Michael Tyler said of Trump's grip on the GOP nomination. "We are full steam ahead heading into the general election."

Trump flew back to his Florida estate late Tuesday as he prepared for another series of court appearances.

Still, for all of Trump's baggage, there were new signs following his New Hampshire victory that his party was accepting the reality of his dominance. A new series of elected officials endorsed him, including Texas Sen. John Cornyn, who has publicly disagreed with Trump before and told reporters in May, "We need to

come up with an alternative.”

Cornyn tried to project confidence in Trump as he spoke to reporters on Capitol Hill on Wednesday even as he acknowledged the former president’s need to expand his appeal heading into the next phase of the campaign.

“You can’t win with just your own base,” Cornyn said. “But President Biden’s got serious problems. I mean, all the polling shows that even Democrats aren’t excited about his candidacy. So, I like President Trump’s chances.”

Zverev ousts Alcaraz to move into Australian Open semis against Medvedev. Zheng into 1st semifinal

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — After backhanding the ball into the crowd when Carlos Alcaraz sent his service return too long, Alexander Zverev screamed. He shook both arms in a victory celebration and again he screamed, a mix of triumph and relief.

Any self-doubt that he could contend for major titles again were expunged in a 6-1, 6-3, 6-7 (2), 6-4 quarterfinal win on Wednesday over the brightest rising star in tennis, earning Zverev a spot in the Australian Open semifinals against Daniil Medvedev.

He’d missed a chance to serve it out in straight sets but didn’t waste his second opportunity.

A serious ankle injury at the 2022 French Open and the ensuing layoff made him wonder if he really was good enough to win a Grand Slam title.

A pending trial in a German court over an assault allegation dating back to 2020 has had critics questioning his status on the tour. He has denied the accusations and declined comment on the judicial proceedings scheduled for May.

Alcaraz won Wimbledon last year and was the only player to beat 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic in a Grand Slam match in 2023.

Zverev went through Alcaraz’s credentials as he digested Wednesday’s win: No. 1 or No. 2 in the world, two major titles, etc, etc.

“Look, I’m playing one of the best players in the world,” Zverev said. “Then when you start winning, obviously your brain starts going. It’s not always helpful but I’m happy I got it at the end.”

Speaking in a news conference at almost 3 a.m. local time, Zverev considered the win over Alcaraz as his most important since the ankle surgery.

“I was on top of my game before the injury happened,” he said. “I’m extremely happy to be back where I am and winning these kind of matches, giving myself the chance again. Because last year ... I wasn’t a Slam contender.”

Alcaraz missed the 2023 Australian Open with injury and was into the quarterfinals here for the first time, completing a Grand Slam set.

He had dropped only one set and spent five fewer hours on court than Zverev in the four previous rounds.

“I’m sad with my level today, because I have been playing good tennis,” Alcaraz said. “Obviously quarterfinal of a Grand Slam is a good run. It’s not what I’m looking for, but is not bad.”

Medvedev, a two-time finalist in Australia, outlasted ninth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 to make it to the semifinals here for the third time in four years.

“I’m so destroyed right now,” No. 3-ranked Medvedev, the 2021 U.S. Open winner, said of his tough run in Melbourne that included a nearly 4 1/2-hour, five-set second-round win that finished at 3:39 a.m.

In the other semifinal Djokovic, on a 33-match winning streak at the Australian Open, will play Jannik Sinner, who beat him twice in three matches at the end of last year.

Zverev was on top of Alcaraz early, winning all but two points on serve in a 29-minute first set. Two service breaks in the second gave the Olympic gold medalist a surprisingly comfortable lead.

Just after midnight, Zverev was serving for a straight sets win at 5-3 when Alcaraz broke for the first time. Alcaraz got back to 5-5 when he chased a shot into the doubles alley and knocked a backhand down

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the line, beaming a big smile and shaking his racket in a gesture that suggested: "Hello, still here."

He won the last seven points of the tiebreaker to make it 2-1.

But after an exchange of service breaks to open the fourth and some energy-sapping rallies that had both players sprinting side-to-side to make incredible shots, Zverev got another chance to close out after breaking in the ninth game.

He clinched it about 1:20 a.m. local time.

The women's semifinal lineup was completed when No. 12 Zheng Qinwen won 10 of the last 11 games to fend off Anna Kalinskaya 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-1 on Wednesday and Dayana Yastremska beat Linda Noskova 6-3, 6-4.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka and U.S. Open winner Coco Gauff will meet in the other semifinal.

Zheng, a U.S. Open quarterfinalist last year, regained control after Kalinskaya won six of the last seven points to take the first in a tiebreaker.

"Really excited. First time for me," Zheng said. "Of course I'm proud of myself. But this is just the beginning — I still need to play tomorrow."

No. 93-ranked Yastremska won three matches in the qualifying tournament and became only the second qualifier to reach the women's singles semis in Australia in the Open era.

"It's nice to make history because at that time I was not born," she said. "I'm super happy (but) very tired."

Noskova beat top-ranked Iga Swiatek on her way to her first Slam quarterfinal but struggled against Yastremska.

After the match, Yastremska wrote a message on a TV camera lens and later explained it was "about the Ukrainian fighters, that I'm very proud of them. They really deserve a huge respect."

She said she's inspired by representing her country, which has been at war for nearly two years since the Russian invasion.

"It's my mission here," she said. "If I do well, I can get — tough to express. I'm just trying to give the signal to Ukraine that I'm really proud of it."

Great Basin tribes want Bahsahwahbee massacre site in Nevada named national monument

By BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press

ELY, Nev. (AP) — White attackers turned a lush, high desert oasis in eastern Nevada, with its bubbling springs and a rare stand of Rocky Mountain junipers, into killing fields. They massacred hundreds of Native people there in the 1800s — a horrific history once retold in hushed tones behind closed doors.

That was until tribal members reluctantly found themselves defending the valley's historical significance in state hearings. In the 2000s, they shared their painful past with authorities weighing whether to divert substantial amounts of groundwater that feeds the valley their relatives have long considered sacred.

To tribal members, Bahsahwahbee — Shoshoni for "Sacred Water Valley" — is where the spirits of their dead live on in the trees growing among the open graves, the final resting place of ancestors who remained where they were slain.

Now they want to tell their story on their own terms. The Ely Shoshone, Duckwater Shoshone, and the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation — a coalition representing about 1,500 enrolled tribal members — are lobbying the federal government to designate nearly 40 square miles (100 square kilometers) as Bahsahwahbee National Monument.

"The goal is to commemorate what happened there to protect the memory of that place," said Warren Graham, the Duckwater Shoshone chairman.

This lush section of the valley was visited by Shoshone and Goshute people, who were all related and called themselves "Newe," for centuries, serving as a sacred site for healing and celebration. It was desecrated at least three times. In the mid-1800s, federal soldiers carried out two massacres at Bahsahwahbee in retaliation for alleged attacks on settlers and their property.

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During the final massacre in 1897, two girls were away on a walk during the fall harvest. Upon return, they found vigilantes killing their family and friends.

One of those girls was Laurene Mamie Swallow, grandmother to 86-year-old Delaine Spilsbury, an Ely Shoshone elder who has worked for years on federal recognition of the sacred site.

"The people that were killed here were left here," said Spilsbury, sitting at dusk in a camp chair nestled among the trees. "Their spirits, their bodies are in those trees. And so we darn sure are going to protect those people."

For more than a century, the history of the massacres was recounted on a need-to-know basis. Charlene Pete's mother closed the doors and drew the blinds the day she told her children about the violence against their Goshute ancestors — trained from her days at a boarding school to believe she'd face punishment for recalling her heritage.

"That's the first time I'd ever seen my mom emotional like that," Pete said, recounting a wailing sound she later learned was customary for mourning. It was one of the few traditions her mother recalled from a time before the government forced her to attend a boarding school established to assimilate Native American children into white society.

When Las Vegas, which nearly doubled its population from 1990 to 2000, pursued a pipeline in the early 2000s to divert groundwater from the Bahsahwahbee area and pump it 300 miles to the burgeoning desert city, tribal members felt compelled to speak up.

"It came to a point where we had to start talking to save it," said Ely Shoshone elder Alvin Marques. He testified in a multi-decade legal battle alongside ranchers, local officials and environmental groups who all opposed the project by the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

College of Southern Nevada biology professor David Charlet said the trees likely wouldn't last more than a half-century with a depleted water table.

"It can take cold, but it can't take the heat and lack of water during the summer," Charlet said of the rare stand of trees.

Rocky Mountain junipers — known locally as swamp cedars for the springs they rely on to survive hot summers — are usually found thousands of feet higher on mountains. Birds likely dispersed their seeds, and they thrived because of the valley's shallow springs that fed the soil, according to Charlet.

Ultimately, the Nevada Division of Water Resources denied the Southern Nevada Water Authority's applications to pump water based on the protection of the cultural resource, said state engineer Adam Sullivan, who worked for the department during the ruling and later was appointed to lead it.

Protecting water for sacred trees is not something the agency had previously done, Sullivan said. In permitting projects, "we look broadly at what is in the public interest, and that has evolved."

The water agency appealed to a state district court, but was rebuffed and withdrew its permit requests in 2020.

Even if the land becomes a national monument, the water beneath Bahsahwahbee would remain under the state's jurisdiction. Today, there are no major water permit applications in the valley, and any future applications to extract significant amounts of water would face high scrutiny, Sullivan said.

But the land and its heritage would be managed by the National Park Service, whose mission it is to preserve them, explained Neal Desai of the National Parks Conservation Association.

The designation would send a message that "we have decided as a country that this place is absolutely essential and we will commit to doing our best to ensure that this place, this story, the reasons that it's important, that it will be preserved and interpreted for the benefit of future generations," he said.

Bahsahwahbee is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places — a mostly symbolic title. It remains under the Bureau of Land Management, whose focus is in managing public land for multiple users. In becoming a monument, the land would transfer to the National Park Service, which would work alongside tribes to preserve the place and its history.

Tribal members involved in the monument effort say having enough water for the sacred trees is important, but the designation is really an opportunity to tell their story on their terms.

"They don't teach about what happened to the Native American people in history enough," said Graham.

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The Southern Nevada Water Authority supports a monument designation that allows for the continuation of existing ranching and agricultural activities, said Bronson Mack, water authority spokesman. The agency maintains a working ranch in the valley with limited water rights to support the operation.

As a national monument, its story would join the ranks of other painful American memories elevated on the national stage, including Japanese internment camps, sites associated with lynching of African Americans, and places where other massacres of Native people occurred.

It would also join Avi Kwa Ame, a stretch of biologically rich mountains and valleys in southern Nevada, and Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni, an expanse of canyons, plateaus and streams in northern Arizona — both sacred to Native people in those areas. They are two of five national monuments President Joe Biden created in 2023, using his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906.

The designation has broad support from the three tribes as well as the Nevada Legislature and the state's U.S. senators, Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen, both Democrats who have lobbied Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on the issue. Cortez Masto's office said the senator expects to soon introduce a bill in Congress to designate the monument.

A monument would be an important step toward reconciliation after more than 150 years, explained Monte Sanford, the tribes' monument campaign director.

"There has never been an effort by the United States government to reconcile and recognize what happened to the Newe people at Bahsahwahbee," he said.

Looking at the trees grown from the same soil where her ancestors died, Spilsbury said she hopes the monument would help people heal, no matter who they are. She knows locals in nearby Ely whose ancestors were involved in the vigilante killing her grandmother witnessed.

"I know that if they could go and say, this is where we made amends with these folks, that it would be just as important to them as it is to me," she said. "Or maybe more."

Mother of disabled girl who was allegedly raped in Starbucks bathroom sues company, school district

By CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

The mother of an intellectually disabled girl who was allegedly led from school grounds by three male students and sexually assaulted in a Starbucks bathroom and a nearby empty building filed a lawsuit Wednesday accusing Starbucks, Pittsburgh Public Schools and a property management company of negligence.

The lawsuit alleges that school personnel at Taylor Allderdice High School failed to provide adequate supervision and care of the girl during school hours and during transportation to and from school. It alleges that both the property management company 101 Kappa Drive Associates #1 and Starbucks managers were aware of the increasing crime issues near their businesses and failed to provide security or training for employees on how to respond to and report criminal activities.

"Pittsburgh Public Schools failed to create a safe environment for my client to go to and from school when it knew that she needed one. And Starbucks and Kappa failed to protect my client from the violence of others when they knew their businesses were causing criminal activity to occur. The painful result was her sexual assault," said attorney Alec Wright, who represents the girl and her mother in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit alleges that the then 15-year-old girl, whose name was withheld in the lawsuit, was led off campus by three male students in October 2022. The lawsuit alleges that Starbucks employees witnessed the male students taking turns entering the bathroom with the girl and did not intervene. The alleged assailants then took her to an empty building managed by Kappa, where the third boy sexually assaulted the girl, according to the lawsuit filed in Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas.

At first, the girl was unable to communicate to her mother what happened to her. But days later the mother said she was notified by the school that the girl was found crying at a lunchroom table alone because of a rumor that three boys had sex with her. The mother said she met with school officials who were then notified that the incident occurred at Starbucks, and not at the school as officials initially suspected.

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The mother took the girl for a medical exam that she said showed positive signs of sexual assault. She reported the assault to police, but more than a year later police have not filed charges.

A spokesperson for the Pittsburgh Department of Public Safety said the case had been closed and that the county district attorney's office had determined it would not pursue charges.

"When we learned of these allegations, we acted with extreme urgency to support law enforcement throughout their investigation," a spokesperson for Starbucks wrote in an emailed statement. "Our goal is always to keep our stores safe for our partners and our customers. Due to the sensitive nature of this matter, and out of respect for all involved, we cannot comment further right now."

A phone number was not available for Kappa, but The Associated Press left a message with a real estate company that handles rentals at several Kappa properties. A spokesperson for Pittsburgh Public Schools said the district does not comment on pending litigation.

Pittsburgh Public Schools provides public transportation bus passes to high schoolers who live within 2 miles (3 kilometers) of their school and to younger students who live within 1.5 mile (2.4 kilometers) of their school. At Taylor Allderdice High School, district officials had negotiated with Pittsburgh's public transportation authority to move the public transit bus stop that many students use to the location in front of the Starbucks.

The girl's mother notified school officials that her daughter would need help adjusting to high school and with taking public transportation to school, according to the lawsuit. The lawsuit notes the girl's IQ during evaluation was determined to be around 65, and then below 60 on a second test, placing her in the lowest 1% of students intellectually.

However, the lawsuit alleges that during her first months at the high school, the girl was left unsupervised and allowed to either wander the halls or hide in the bathroom during her classes. The tardy and attendance policy was not enforced because of her disabilities, and staff failed to address her leaving class or provide any safety monitors for her during school hours or enroute to and from the bus stop, according to the lawsuit.

"It just makes me feel angry to know that there was such little oversight or protection for my daughter. If she leaves in the morning to go to school, then she should return home from school safe," the girl's mother said. "Taylor Allderdice let her be lured off campus, and Starbucks let her be attacked in its bathrooms. It's all just so frustrating and disheartening. It's just very hard to describe."

The Associated Press does not name victims of sexual assault or abuse unless they come forward publicly. The names of both the girl and her mother were withheld from the lawsuit to protect the girl's identity.

The lawsuit alleges the male teens were given unrestricted access to the girl when they were able to lead her off campus to the Starbucks bus stop, where school officials did not provide any safety monitors during prime transportation hours despite knowing about increased incidents of student-based violence and other negative activities.

The month before the sexual assault occurred, a large group of students got into a fight at the bus stop. A police officer was injured while trying to break up the fight and police shocked two students with Tasers during the incident.

Owners of businesses in the same building as the Starbucks have reported harassment of customers, a storefront window being broken, students challenging business owners to fights and other issues with drugs and vandalism. At least one business owner has asked the school district to move the bus stop during school board meetings.

The lawsuit alleges that Starbucks and Kappa failed to respond to the widely known issues with crime, violence and mischief by not creating policies or conducting trainings for employees on how to keep themselves or patrons safe, and by not providing security measures like guards during high traffic times.

The lawsuit alleges that Starbucks employees allowed students largely unrestricted access to its bathrooms partly because the students increased the store's sales.

Ichiro Suzuki arrives on next year's Hall of Fame ballot; Sabathia and Hernandez eligible too

By NOAH TRISTER AP Baseball Writer

It was a little past 8 a.m. in Tokyo when the newest inductees to the Baseball Hall of Fame were announced.

Next year there could be some big celebrations over breakfast in Japan.

Ichiro Suzuki headlines the group of players who are eligible for voting a year from now. That ballot is also expected to include Cy Young Award winners CC Sabathia and Félix Hernández — and the final chance for reliever Billy Wagner, who fell five votes short this time.

Adrián Beltré, Todd Helton and Joe Mauer were voted in this year by members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. The results were announced Tuesday night in the eastern U.S. The time change between the Hall's location in Cooperstown, New York, and Suzuki's home country of Japan should be quite relevant in 2025.

The outfielder appears to be a lock for induction after surpassing 3,000 hits in the major leagues and becoming one of the greatest Asian stars to play in America, a couple of decades before Shohei Ohtani took the sport by storm.

What's less clear is how Sabathia and Hernández will fare. Sabathia surpassed 250 wins and 3,000 strikeouts. Hernández didn't pitch nearly as long but had a better ERA and WHIP than Sabathia.

The BBWAA hasn't elected a pitcher since 2019, when Roy Halladay, Mike Mussina and Mariano Rivera went in. With starters shouldering lower workloads these days, it will be interesting to see how voters adjust. Justin Verlander figures to have a good shot after he retires. For Sabathia and Hernández, that's less clear.

"I think Sabathia is probably going to be a pretty strong first-year guy," said Ryan Thibodaux, whose online Hall of Fame ballot tracker reveals votes as they're made public both before and after the announcement of the results. "I don't know if he gets all the way in his first year."

ONE MORE CHANCE

Wagner's approval rate increased from 68.1% to 73.8% this year, but he still fell short of the 75% threshold for election. Next year is his last one on the ballot, and candidates in that spot often receive a bump. He won't need much of one to get in.

LESS CROWDED?

In addition to Beltré, Helton and Mauer, Gary Sheffield will be off the ballot next time. This was his 10th and final year, and he ended up at 63.9%. With only one obvious favorite for induction arriving — Suzuki — various holdover candidates could have a good chance to move closer to 75%.

Overall, 1,237 "yes" votes were taken up this year by players who won't be in the ballot for 2025. Last year that number was only 483, which may explain why candidates like Andruw Jones (61.6%), Bobby Abreu (14.8%) and Andy Pettitte (13.5%) seemed to tread water a bit this time.

Carlos Beltrán did make it to 57.1%, an increase of over 10%.

Thibodaux pointed out that the "middle tier" of newcomers to the ballot next year — like Hernández, Dustin Pedroia, Ian Kinsler, and Troy Tulowitzki — could garner a decent number of votes, even if they aren't elected. Candidates need to reach 5% to stay on the ballot.

"I think we might have more people who kind of make 5% than usual among next year's candidates," Thibodaux said. "I think overall, though, it should be a year where (holdover) candidates do have an opportunity to gain some votes. This was kind of not one of those years."

IT'S GETTING LATE

Chase Utley received only 28.8% approval on his ballot debut, but he has plenty of time to build on that. Abreu, Pettitte and Jimmy Rollins (14.8%) are further along in the process.

Abreu has been on the ballot five years — halfway to the 10-year limit — and Pettitte has been on for six. This was the third year for Rollins.

"If (Abreu) is going to make a move, it probably is going to need to be now," Thibodaux said. "Sheffield,

he started to make his first big jump around this time. Obviously, it wasn't enough for him. It would be kind of now or never to start showing signs of progress."

Thousands still shelter in freezing weather after 7.1 quake in western China killed key livestock

By KEN MORITSUGU and NG HAN GUAN Associated Press

UCHTURPAN, China (AP) — Aftershocks from a magnitude 7.1 earthquake continued to rock western China on Wednesday, while more than 12,000 displaced people relying on tents and shelters lit bonfires to fend off freezing weather.

The quake early Tuesday in a remote part of China's Xinjiang region killed three people and left five injured, owing both to the sparse population and efforts in recent years to improve the durability of housing around the epicenter in Uchturpan county, near the border with Kyrgyzstan.

But at least several hundred livestock, key to local livelihoods, were killed.

Footage shown by state broadcaster CCTV showed evacuees eating instant noodles in tents, with bonfires providing heat. Local officials said they planned to check houses for stability before people could return.

Towns and villages were scattered across an otherwise barren landscape. A two-lane highway runs about 125 kilometers (78 miles) from the nearest city of Aksu, with power lines and an occasional cement factory virtually the only signs of human presence.

The area is populated mostly by Kyrgyz and Uyghurs, ethnic Turkic minorities who are predominantly Muslim and have been the target of a state campaign of forced assimilation and mass detention. The region is heavily militarized, and state broadcaster CCTV showed paramilitary troops moving in to clear rubble and set up tents for those displaced.

Two of the three people who died were members of a Kyrgyz sheep herding family who had brought their flock up a mountain and spent the night in their rest hut, said Shi Chao, the Communist Party head of Kulansarlike township.

Rescuers found the family of three, including a 6-year old girl, and brought them down the mountain but only the father survived, Shi said.

The township has been replacing the huts with sturdier structures partially subsidized by the government, he said.

The third death happened elsewhere in Akqi county, where 7,338 residents were evacuated.

In Kizilsu Kirgiz prefecture, the earthquake caused damage of various degrees to 851 buildings, causing the collapse of 93 structures near the epicenter, according to the prefecture deputy party secretary, Wurouziali Haxihaerbayi.

The quake's epicenter was in a mountainous area about 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) above sea level, according to Zhang Yongjiu, the head of Xinjiang Earthquake Administration.

In the township of Yamansu, about 115 people were staying in a Communist Party meeting hall on Wednesday. Medical staff checked on older residents.

Outside, men chatted around a large wood-burning cooker, with chunks of meat and vegetables in containers sitting on weathered desks. A light layer of snow covered the ground as temperatures remained well below freezing.

Resident Nurahun Osman said his family's home almost collapsed when the earthquake struck.

"The situation was particularly horrific," he said, adding that the family's sheep and chickens were left without shelter. "It has brought a lot of difficulties to our life."

State broadcaster CCTV said 1,104 aftershocks, including five above magnitude 5.0, were recorded as of 8:00 a.m. Wednesday. The largest registered at magnitude 5.7.

Mountainous Uchturpan county is recording temperatures well below freezing, with the China Meteorological Administration forecasting lows reaching minus 18 degrees Celsius (just below zero Fahrenheit) this week.

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The county had a population of around 233,000 in 2022, according to Xinjiang authorities. Tremors from Tuesday's quake also were felt hundreds of kilometers (miles) away in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Today in History: January 25, Jury convicts Charles Manson

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 25, the 25th day of 2024. There are 341 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 25, in 1971, Charles Manson and three women followers were convicted in Los Angeles of murder and conspiracy in the 1969 slayings of seven people, including actor Sharon Tate.

On this date:

In 1533, England's King Henry VIII secretly married his second wife, Anne Boleyn, who later gave birth to Elizabeth I.

In 1915, America's first official transcontinental telephone call took place as Alexander Graham Bell, who was in New York, spoke to his former assistant, Thomas Watson, who was in San Francisco, over a line set up by American Telephone & Telegraph.

In 1924, the first Winter Olympic Games opened in Chamonix (shah-moh-NEE'), France.

In 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first community to add fluoride to its public water supply.

In 1981, the 52 Americans held hostage by Iran for 444 days arrived in the United States.

In 1993, Sears announced that it would no longer publish its famous century-old catalog.

In 1994, maintaining his innocence, singer Michael Jackson settled a child molestation lawsuit against him; terms were confidential, although the monetary figure was reportedly \$22 million.

In 2004, NASA's Opportunity rover zipped its first pictures of Mars to Earth, showing a surface smooth and dark red in some places, and strewn with fragmented slabs of light bedrock in others.

In 2017, Mary Tyler Moore, who created one of TV's first career-woman sitcom heroines in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," died at the age of 80. Actor John Hurt died at 77.

In 2020, President Donald Trump's defense team opened its arguments at his first Senate impeachment trial, casting the effort to remove him from office as a politically motivated attempt to subvert the 2016 election and the upcoming 2020 contest.

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed an order reversing a Pentagon policy that largely barred transgender people from military service.

In 2022, the Navy said it had discharged 23 active-duty sailors for refusing the coronavirus vaccine; it marked the first time the Navy had thrown currently-serving sailors out of the military over the mandatory shots.

Today's birthdays: Actor Leigh Taylor-Young is 80. Actor Jenifer Lewis is 67. Country musician R&B singer Kina is 55. Actor China Kantner is 53. Actor Ana Ortiz is 54. Drummer Joe Sirois (sih-ROYS') (Mighty Mighty Bosstones) is 52. Musician Matt Odmark (OHD'-mark) (Jars of Clay) is 50. Actor Mia Kirshner is 49. Actor Christine Lakin is 45. R&B singer Alicia Keys is 44. Actor Michael Trevino is 39. Pop musician Calum Hood (5 Seconds of Summer) is 28. Actor Olivia Edward is 17.