

Groton Daily Independent

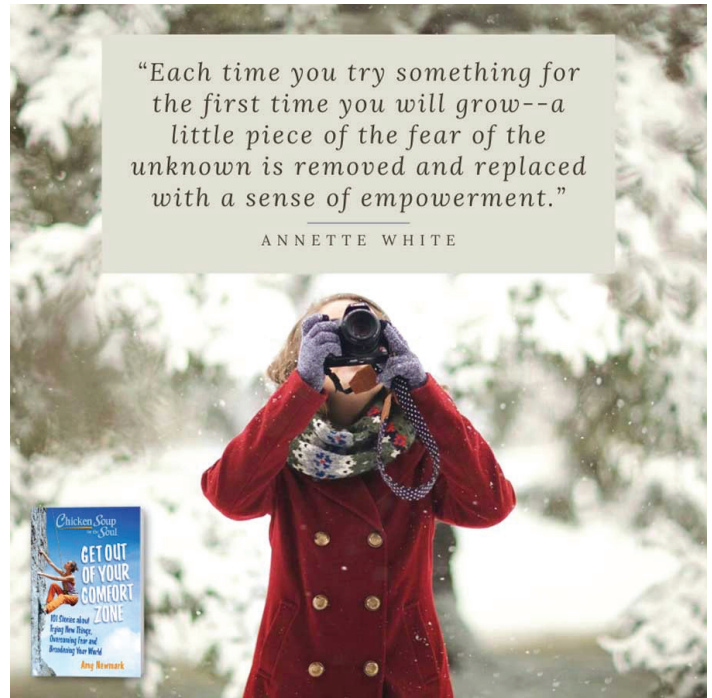
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Tuesday, Jan. 30

Senior Menu: New England ham dinner, fruit, cookie, dinner roll.
School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Oriental chicken, rice.
Boys JH Games hosts Aberdeen Roncalli: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Special School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

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



Wednesday, Jan. 31

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas, apricots, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: French toast.
School Lunch: Beef stew with biscuits.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

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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US officials said yesterday American air defenses failed to intercept a weekend drone strike in northeast Jordan that killed three US troops because the incoming drone was mistaken for an American one. A US drone had been scheduled to return to the military base, known as Tower 22, following a surveillance mission at the same time as the incoming hostile drone, a preliminary report found.

A Hong Kong court has ordered Chinese real estate giant Evergrande Group to undergo liquidation following multiple failed debt restructuring attempts. The company has over \$300B in liabilities and hundreds of unfinished apartment complexes nationwide.

Federal police in Brazil conducted raids of homes and offices belonging to former President Jair Bolsonaro and his son, Carlos, yesterday, amid allegations the former leader's administration spied on political enemies using high-tech intelligence software. The news follows similar raids last week of Bolsonaro's former top intelligence official Alexandre Ramagem, who is alleged to have run the clandestine espionage program.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Suits" hauled in 57.7 billion viewing minutes in 2023, breaking the single-year record held by "The Office"; "Moana" led all films with 11.6 billion minutes viewed

Russia to lose 2022 Olympics team figure skating gold medal to the US after Russian star Kamila Valieva was disqualified, two years after a positive test for a banned drug

N. Scott Momaday, novelist and first Native American to win Pulitzer Prize, dies at 89

Science & Technology

Neuralink CEO Elon Musk says the company has completed its first implantation of a brain-computer interface in a human subject

Scientists discover a new type of organism inside the human microbiome made from short strings of genetic code; may bridge the gap between simple molecules and complex viruses

Inner ear fossil from 6-million-year-old ape suggests upright walking evolved in ancient human ancestors via three phases.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq +1.1%) with S&P 500 closing at another record high ahead of this week's Big Tech earnings reports and latest batch of economic indicators

Amazon scraps proposed \$1.7B deal to buy iRobot—robotics maker of popular Roomba vacuum—amid regulatory scrutiny in Europe; Amazon to pay iRobot \$94M termination fee. iRobot laying off 31% of workers following news

Philips Respironics, maker of over 5 million recalled sleep apnea machines, agrees to halt US sales of the devices as part of agreement with regulators that could cost the company \$400M

Politics & World Affairs

Former IRS contractor sentenced to five years in prison for leaking federal tax returns of America's wealthiest people, including former President Donald Trump, Warren Buffett, and Jeff Bezos.

Justice Department charges Iranian, two Canadian nationals in murder-for-hire plot against two people in Maryland. FBI report finds one in 10 hate crimes occur at schools, with crimes up from 500 in 2020 to over 1,300 in 2022. Judge denies new trial for Alex Murdaugh, who was convicted of killing his wife and son.

French farmers block major Paris roads as part of weekslong protest over pay, working conditions, taxes, and regulation.

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GHS Girls' Basketball

Groton Area upsets Florence/Henry

Groton Area never trailed in a thrilling upset win over Florence/Henry Monday night in Groton, 39-34. The game featured the Falcons, who were sixth in the state ratings with a 12-2 record, and the Tigers, who were 21st in the state with a 9-4 record.

The Tiger defense left Florence/Henry scoreless from the field in the first quarter as Groton Area led, 12-1, after the first period. The Falcons battled back and made it a three-point game at halftime, 16-13. Groton Area's lead was down to two at 19-17, but the Tigers scored six unanswered points to take a 28-19 lead into the fourth quarter. Florence/Henry closed to within one three times in the fourth quarter, but was unable to gain the lead. Jerica Locke made four of four free throws in the final 30 seconds to quench the win for the Tigers.

Coach Matt Locke said, "It was a hard fought victory, one we've been searching for. Let's beat someone who people don't think we can beat and we did it tonight. Jaedyn (Penning) and Rylee (Dunker) did a hell of a job on that Kelly girl. It was a great team win. The kids battled. We had some big time shots by different kids and Jerica did a heck of a job with the free throws down the stretch."

Locke led the Tigers with 10 points, five rebounds and three steals. Brooklyn Hansen had eight points, three rebounds and one assist. Taryn Traphagen had eight points, one rebound and one assist. Jaedyn Penning had four points, five rebounds, one assist and one steal. Faith Traphagen had three points, three rebounds and one assist. Sydney Leicht had two points, two rebounds and one assist. Rylee Dunker had two points and four rebounds. Laila Roberts had two points and two rebounds.

Groton Area made 11 of 23 two-pointers for 48 percent, three of six three-pointers for 50 percent, eight of 12 free throws for 67 percent, had 26 rebounds, 17 turnovers, five assists, four steals and 14 team fouls. Three-pointers: Hansen - 2, Taryn Traphagen - 1.

Caylin Kelly led Florence/Henry with 20 points while Taylor Watson had six, Ashlynn Vavruska had three, Haley Hlavacek and Reese Schmidt each had two points and Ashley Klitzke added one point.

Florence/Henry made 13 of 45 field goals for 29 percent, six of 14 free throws for 43 percent, had five turnovers and 14 team fouls.

Three-pointers: Vavruska - 1, Kelly - 1.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 34-19. Groton Area held a 10-6 lead after the first quarter, trailed, 16-12 at halftime, then scored the first 13 points of the third quarter to take a 25-19 lead after the third period.

Taryn Traphagen led the Tigers with 10 points followed by Faith Traphagen with six, Laila Roberts three, McKenna Tietz and Emerlee Jones each had two points and Ashlynn Warrington had one point.

Ashlynn Vavruska and Griffin Muller each had six points for the Falcons while Myles Sumner had three and Ember Morris and Ashley Klitzke each had two points.

Groton Area made it a clean sweep with a 33-24 C game win. The Tigers led at the quarterstops at 12-6, 19-11 and 27-20.

Kella Tracy led Groton Area with 13 points followed by Brenna Imrie with six, Ashlynn Warrington four, and adding two points apiece were McKenna Tietz, Emerlee Jones, Addison Hoffman and Teagan Hanten.

Mashia McQuin led Florence/Henry with seven points followed by Lucy Bloom with five, Addison Byer four, Ana Byer and Rebecca Fleming each had three and Avari Gusso added two points.

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

- Paul Kosel

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Groton Area's Rylee Dunker looks for someone to pass to during Monday night's game.

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Brooklyn Hanson passes the ball during Monday night's game.

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Brooklyn Hansen passes the ball to Jerica Locke.

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Jaedyn Penning attempts a shot while Florence/Henry's Caylin Kelly tries to block during Monday night's game.

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Rylee Dunker grabs the ball and looks to pass during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Florence/Henry's Caylin Kelly and Groton Area's Jaedyn Penning fight for the ball during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



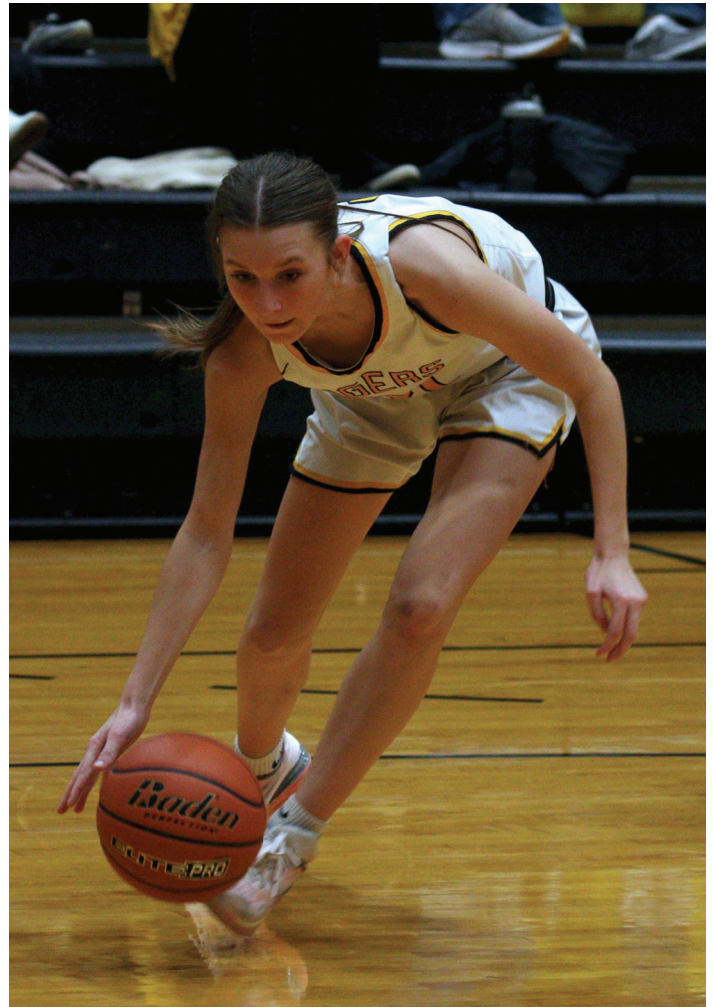
Groton Area's Brooklyn Hanson looks for someone to pass to during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Florence/Henry's Caylin Kelly shoots while Groton Area players attempt to block during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Taryn Traphagen grabs a loose ball during Monday night's game against Florence/Henry. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Jerica Locke fights to keep the ball during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Brooklyn Hanson looks for someone to pass to during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area and Florence/Henry players look to get the rebound during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Jerica Locke looks toward the basket during Monday night's game against Florence/Henry. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Brooklyn Hanson moves the ball down the court during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area and Florence/Henry players look to get the rebound during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area and Florence/Henry players look to get the rebound during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area and Florence/Henry players look to get the rebound during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Florence/Henry's Caylin Kelly tries to make room to shoot during Monday night's game in Groton as she is guarded by Jaedyn Penning.

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Brooklyn Hansen battles for the rebounds with Florence/Henry's Resse Schmidt.

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Faith Traphagen tries to grab the ball during Monday night's game against Florence/Henry. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area and Florence/Henry players look to get the rebound during Monday night's game. Pictured are Rylee Dunker and Taryn Traphagen. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Faith Traphagen looks to do a layup during Monday's game against Florence/Henry. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Jaedyn Penning shoots while Florence/Henry's Caylin Kelly looks to block the shot. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Taryn Traphagen looks for someone to pass to during Monday night's game against Florence/Henry. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Rylee Dunker prepare to shoot the ball while Florence/Henry's Haley Hiavacek attempts to block during Monday night's game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Florence/Henry's Caylin Kelly shoots a final shot during the game Monday in Groton. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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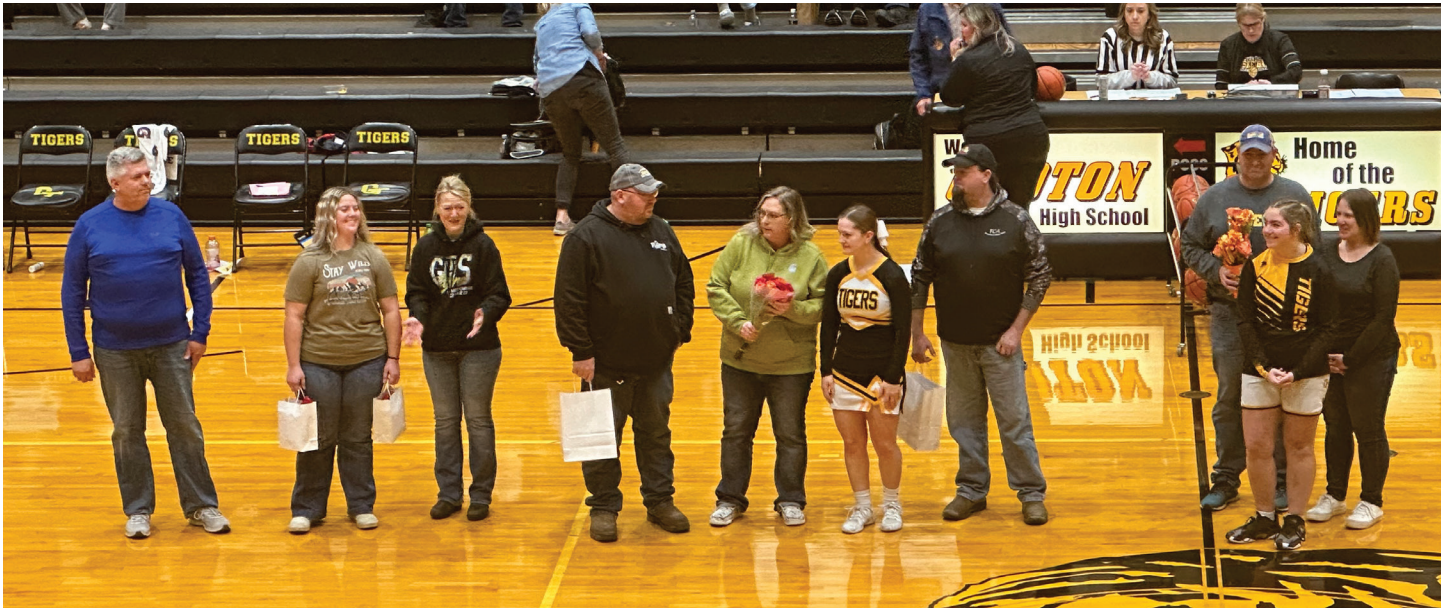
Jaedyn Penning celebrates by high-fiving No. 55 Mia Crank after the final buzzer during the Groton Area team's win Monday. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Jaedyn Penning celebrates by hugging No. 11 Jerica Locke after the final buzzer during the Groton Area team's win Monday. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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(Photo by Paul Kosel)



(Photo from Dez Yeigh's Facebook Page)

Senior band members recognized

The three senior band members were recognized at the girls' basketball game last night with their parents. The seniors are Emily Clark, Cadence Feist and Faith Fliels.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Poet's ethanol plants shift to remaining carbon dioxide pipeline proposal

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 29, 2024 4:56 PM

An ethanol production company headquartered in Sioux Falls announced Monday it will partner with the remaining company looking to build a carbon capture pipeline in South Dakota.

Poet will collaborate with Summit Carbon Solutions to implement carbon capture technology at 17 Poet ethanol plants, including five in South Dakota and 12 in Iowa. The South Dakota plants are located near Big Stone City, Chancellor, Groton, Hudson and Mitchell.

"As the world seeks low-carbon energy solutions, carbon capture ensures that ag-based biofuels will remain competitive for decades to come," said Poet founder Jeff Broin in a news release.

The decision comes after Poet's former partner, Navigator CO2 Ventures, failed to obtain a permit in South Dakota and withdrew its pipeline project. That project aimed to transport liquefied carbon dioxide to a storage site in Illinois.

Sabrina Zenor, a spokesperson for Summit, said the addition of Poet became "an inevitability" after Navigator's proposal ended.

"We are the only carbon capture and sequestration pipeline in this project footprint, and in order for these plants to remain viable, they need to have carbon capture and sequestration," Zenor said.

A Poet spokesperson declined to say why the company initially elected to partner with Navigator rather than Summit. The companies' agreements with ethanol producers differ. Navigator would have charged plants to transport carbon dioxide based on how much it was transporting, whereas Summit has preferred profit-sharing agreements.

The Summit pipeline was previously planned to capture carbon dioxide emissions produced by 34 ethanol plants in five states, and transport it for underground storage in North Dakota. The 17 Poet plants would increase the number to 51. Carbon dioxide traps heat in the atmosphere, contributing to climate change, and federal tax credits are available for sequestering carbon.

The Summit project has faced regulatory challenges and has suffered permit rejections in North Dakota and South Dakota. A permit decision is imminent in Iowa. The company has said it is working to refine its proposal to meet South Dakota requirements and plans to resubmit an application.

Summit estimates about 4.7 million tons of carbon dioxide will be captured from the 17 Poet plants.

Zenor said the pipeline will not have to be bigger in diameter to handle the additional liquid CO2. She did not immediately reply to a question about how the addition of Poet plants will impact the project cost, which had been estimated at \$5.5 billion.

Meanwhile, some landowners on the former Navigator route who were opposed to that project are not excited to hear they may now have to deal with Summit.

"It's certainly not a surprise," said Jason VanDenTop, who farms near Canton. "I knew that was not going to be the end of the deal. They invested too much time and money."

— Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter Jared Strong contributed to this report.

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.

Fee for returned check could rise to \$60

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 29, 2024 4:51 PM

PIERRE — A returned check written to a South Dakota business could soon cost its account owner \$20 more.

Senate Bill 38 would update the fee businesses can charge people for a bad check from \$40 to \$60. It would be the first increase since 2007.

The bill passed the Senate unanimously on Jan. 12 and landed on the House of Representatives floor on Monday with a single “no” vote to its name. That vote came from Rep. Bill Shorma, R-Dakota Dunes, during the bill’s Jan. 24 appearance in the House Commerce and Energy Committee.

Shorma rose to oppose the fee hike again before the full House, and 15 other representatives joined him. The bill passed 50-16 and now awaits consideration by Gov. Kristi Noem.

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Lynn Schneider, R-Huron, told his fellow lawmakers that the fee is necessary to help businesses cover the cost of processing the bad check.

No one should ever be hit with the fee, said Schneider, a retired banker.

“This is a fee that is totally avoidable,” he said.

But any business that might accept a bad check made the choice to accept checks, Shorma countered.

“The business is taking the risk when they accept checks,” Shorma said.

Schneider said the fee is likely still smaller than it ought to be, even with the increase.

“The actual cost that the merchant has to collect, this probably still won’t cover it,” Schneider said.

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.

Short staffing leaves prisons running on overtime

Two officers sometimes guard 400 inmates due to workforce vacancies

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 29, 2024 3:46 PM

PIERRE – For every pay period, the average correctional officer in a South Dakota prison works an average of 14 overtime hours.

That’s an hour more than the last fiscal year and four more than 2022.

Those hours will continue to pile up until the Department of Corrections can cut the workforce vacancy rate at the state’s prisons – a rate that’s scarcely budged since 2022 despite multiple pay raises, referral bonus offers and recruitment efforts.

That was one of the messages delivered by Department of Corrections officials on Monday during a budget hearing at the Legislature’s Joint Appropriations Committee.

DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko said the overtime problem was amplified by a short-lived staffing decision.

When Wasko first arrived in 2022, staff were working 12-hour shifts. They demanded a return to 8-hour shifts. Wasko signed off on the idea, but the change only held for six months.

“People were working disgusting hours of overtime,” Wasko told the committee. “People were literally working 70 and 80 hour weeks.”

Overtime keeps growing

Overtime payments dropped by about \$441,000 between fiscal years 2022 and 2023, but average overtime hours still climbed by one during the same time frame.

Vacancies climbed as high as 30% in 2022, according to the DOC’s budget presentation, with a high of 156 missing staff. At the end of 2023, the vacancy rate was 27%.

Brittni Skipper, the DOC’s director of finance and administration, also told the committee that the figures could be worse. Workforce challenges are common in corrections, she said. Tennessee has a similar rate

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for correctional officer vacancies, she said, and two Wisconsin prisons had vacancy rates between 41% and 55%.

"We're not the worst in the nation," Skipper said.

The DOC has taken several steps to address the issue. In July of 2022, the starting salary for a correctional officer jumped to \$20 an hour. The pay stepped up again twice thereafter, landing at a starting salary of \$25.15 an hour last July.

Appropriations Committee Co-Chair Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, asked why the monthly vacancy rates fluctuated in 2023 in spite of the pay raises.

"Those two spikes that we had to vacancy rates was when the schedule changed," Skipper said.

Wasko told Hunhoff that the change to an 8-hour shift wasn't sustainable because of the overtime hours. Had the change continued, staff likely would have wound up leaving anyway.

"I gave it six months, and I wasn't going to put the risk of staff burnout on the facilities," Wasko said.

Addressing the issue

In addition to the pay raises, there's a \$1,500 referral bonus for current staffers. Those who choose the night shift get an extra \$2 an hour, and nursing staff get an extra \$5 an hour. Nursing staff can get help paying off student loans, as well.

Recruitment has also become a more serious focus. The DOC contracted with a firm called RCI Advanced Recruitment Solutions to create targeted social media advertising, as well as billboards and ads in movie theaters this fall. The 45-day campaign focused on the Sioux Falls area, and Skipper said that made a difference at the South Dakota State Penitentiary.

"We were able to hire 20 correctional officers in that time frame, and 16 of them are still with us," Skipper said.

The agency has since extended the contract to target potential employees in Springfield, the location of Mike Durfee State Prison, and Pierre, the site of the South Dakota Women's Prison.

The DOC is also now tracking reasons for employee departures. Skipper told the committee that 74% of those who left the DOC last year did so voluntarily, but most were shorter-term employees. Just 13% of those departing had five years or more of experience, she said.

Of those who completed an exit survey, the majority said they left because they'd reached retirement. Another seven people cited working conditions, six mentioned agency leadership and the others mentioned relocation, working conditions or health reasons.

Next steps

When asked by Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, what else the DOC will do with the data, Wasko suggested that a new focus on training supervisors should be helpful. Sen. Jack Kolbeck, R-Sioux Falls, told Wasko that the correctional officers he's spoken to have complained consistently about a lack of communication from their superiors.

It's a "hard job," Wasko said, but she said better communication and open channels have become more of a priority since her arrival in 2022. The DOC has noticed that certain supervisors lose more of their staffers than others, for example, and the agency is working to address what could be an underlying lack of training.

"It's really allowed us to focus on where we need to spend more time mentoring supervisors," Wasko said.

Overtime hours and short-staffing are also a security concern for staff and inmates. There are times when two officers are supervising 400 inmates at a time – one in a control room, or "bubble," and another on the floor.

Wasko said she's working more closely with supervisors at the DOC's various facilities to manage operations during short-staffed periods.

"If I have one person in the bubble and one person on the floor, it means inmates are not coming out of their cells, because that's not safe," Wasko said. "But many times we found staff trying to maintain

normal operations with that decrease. And what that did was it burned them out, and frankly, it scared some people.”

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.

U.S. House Republicans set to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 29, 2024 3:32 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House Homeland Security Committee is gearing up for only the second impeachment in U.S. history of a Cabinet member.

The Republican-led committee on Tuesday will mark up articles of impeachment against Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, for what Democrats say is no more than a difference in immigration policy between the two parties.

House Republicans Sunday released the text of two articles of impeachment for “high crimes and misdemeanors” allegedly committed by Mayorkas, which they will mark up and vote on as a substitute amendment to H. Res. 863, first introduced by Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene last year.

The first article accuses Mayorkas of a “willful and systemic refusal to comply with the law” in terms of “immigration and border security.”

The second article cites a “breach of public trust.” It says that Mayorkas has stated in his testimony to Congress that the U.S. Southern border is “secure.” Republicans disagree, and they argue that other statements made by Mayorkas are false.

Only one Cabinet member in U.S. history has been impeached, William W. Belknap, in 1876 for corruption. The former Iowa state legislator was charged with five articles of impeachment for “criminally disregarding his duty as Secretary of War and basely prostituting his high office to his lust for private gain.” Although the House voted articles of impeachment against him, he was tried and acquitted by the Senate.

The move to impeach Mayorkas comes as immigration remains a major focus for Congress, with the Senate finalizing the details of a bipartisan immigration deal to manage the U.S.-Mexico border. However, House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana has not indicated that he would bring that piece of legislation to the floor if the Senate passes it.

The current GOP front-runner, Donald Trump, has also lobbied congressional Republicans to reject the bipartisan deal, though negotiators so far have resisted that demand.

Text on the bipartisan agreement in the Senate is expected this week, according to lead negotiators.

‘Illegitimate exercise’

The White House and congressional Democrats have slammed House Republicans for moving forward with impeachment, calling the move “political games.”

“Beyond being an illegitimate exercise unworthy of the job Members of Congress were actually sent to Washington to do, the (Committee on Homeland Security) Republicans’ impeachment effort is baseless,” a DHS spokesperson said.

The White House has also argued that President Joe Biden is ready to make concessions on U.S. border policy. Hard-line immigration policies being finalized as part of the bipartisan Senate deal would make changes to asylum law and curb his administration’s use of parole authority used to grant temporary protections to migrants.

“What’s been negotiated would – if passed into law – be the toughest and fairest set of reforms to secure the border we’ve ever had in our country,” Biden said in a statement Friday. “It would give me, as

President, a new emergency authority to shut down the border when it becomes overwhelmed. And if given that authority, I would use it the day I sign the bill into law."

House Republicans also accuse Mayorkas in their articles of impeachment of abusing his parole authority by granting it to migrants at the U.S. border as well as creating parole for certain nationals such as Afghans, Ukrainians, Cubans, Haitians and Venezuelans, among others.

Parole authority has existed since the 1950s.

Homeland Security Chair Mark Green of Tennessee held several hearings about impeachment proceeding for Mayorkas. In one hearing, Green had state attorneys general from Montana, Oklahoma and Missouri appear as witnesses. They argued that Mayorkas failed to fulfill his oath of office, often citing the high number of migrants claiming asylum at the Southern border, and therefore should be impeached.

The top Democrat on the committee, Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, said in a statement that the articles of impeachment were a "sham."

"What is glaringly missing from these articles is any real charge or even a shred of evidence of high crimes or misdemeanors — the Constitutional standard for impeachment," he said. "They are abusing Congress' impeachment power to appease their MAGA members, score political points, and deflect Americans' attention from their do-nothing Congress."

Green held another hearing in which the witnesses included two mothers who said the Biden administration's immigration policies played a role in their daughters' deaths.

The push to oust Mayorkas has been spearheaded by Georgia Rep. Greene. Since Greene came to Congress in 2021, she's introduced articles of impeachment for Biden, Mayorkas, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, FBI Director Christopher Wray and Attorney General for the District of Columbia Matthew M. Graves.

The Constitution gives Congress the authority to remove the president, vice president and federal civil officers "for treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

Noem to address Legislature on 'potential South Dakota response' to Mexico border situation

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JANUARY 29, 2024 3:14 PM

Governor Kristi Noem will address a joint session of the South Dakota Legislature at 2 p.m. Central on Wednesday about her recent trip to the Texas-Mexico border.

Noem has repeatedly applied the word "warzone" to the border and did so again in a Monday news release.

In a letter to legislators, Noem wrote, "I will address the joint session of the Legislature on the current situation at the border and the potential South Dakota response. Because of the dire situation, it is pertinent that we have this conversation quickly."

The news release said the joint session would "make South Dakota the first state in the nation to take the rare step of calling a joint session to support Texas."

Noem visited the border on Friday. Her office has not responded to South Dakota Searchlight questions about how she got there, how much the trip cost, or who paid for it.

The trip came on the heels of a statement Noem signed earlier last week with 24 other Republican governors. The statement expressed support for actions taken at the border by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

The border has dominated national politics in recent weeks. The federal Border Patrol made 249,785 arrests for illegal border crossings in December, which was an all-time high. Meanwhile, Congress has been attempting to negotiate border policy legislation, and the issue has taken centerstage in the presidential campaign. Noem is widely considered to be a potential running mate for the leading Republican presidential candidate, former President Donald Trump.

Committee rejects bill to study and potentially redesign South Dakota state flag

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 29, 2024 11:38 AM

A bill that would create a commission to study and possibly propose a new state flag design to the Legislature and Governor's Office failed in the Senate State Affairs Committee in a 5-3 vote on Monday.

Proponents of the bill, which was introduced by Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba from Sioux Falls, said a redesign could increase awareness of the state and bolster pride and unity among South Dakotans.

South Dakota fails four out of the five guidelines for "good flag design" put forth by the North American Vexillology Association, said Zach DeBoer, an educator and artist from Sioux Falls.

South Dakota's flag has 17 words (more than any other state, and with South Dakota spelled out twice) and includes an intricate state seal on a blue background.

Such a wordy and complicated design prevents the state flag's use on merchandise, DeBoer argued, and deters South Dakotans from identifying with and flying the flags themselves.

"People aren't using our flag to show how proud they are of being from South Dakota. That's not happening," DeBoer told lawmakers. "You don't see it on shirts or hats. You can't find flag merch at Wall Drug or Reptile Gardens. You definitely won't see anyone getting it tattooed on their body."

Legislators who voted against the bill said the current state flag does its job well enough.

"Tradition is important," said Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner. "I don't feel we need to modernize our flag for reasons of PR."

While Nesiba is term-limited in the Senate and does not plan to run for the House this year, constituents that brought the bill to his attention say they hope the discussion will continue in future sessions.

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.

U.S. Supreme Court schedules March 26 oral arguments in abortion pill access case

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 29, 2024 10:57 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments on March 26 in the case that could significantly curtail access to a prescription drug used for both abortions and miscarriage care.

The case centers on when and how patients can access mifepristone, a pharmaceutical the U.S. Food and Drug Administration originally approved in 2000.

Mifepristone is currently approved for use up to 10 weeks gestation and accounts for more than half of abortions in the United States when used in combination with a second pharmaceutical called misoprostol.

Doctors also often use the two-drug regimen to provide treatment following a miscarriage.

Lawsuit history

The original lawsuit, brought by the anti-abortion legal organization Alliance Defending Freedom, asked the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas to overturn the FDA's original approval of mifepristone.

If the judge didn't agree to that, the organization requested the court revert prescribing and dosage of mifepristone to what was in place before the FDA began implementing changes in 2016.

Judge Matthew Joseph Kacsmaryk stayed the FDA's original approval of mifepristone in an April 2023 ruling that was later put on hold by the U.S. Supreme Court pending appeal.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in May 2023 before issuing its ruling a few months later, in August.

That three-judge panel said that mifepristone could remain legal in the United States, but that prescribing and dosage guidelines should go back to what was used before changes began taking effect in 2016.

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That ruling is on hold pending the Supreme Court's decision in this case.

That ruling, should it ever take effect, would lower the maximum gestational age from 10 weeks to seven weeks and remove the option for mifepristone to be prescribed via telehealth appointments and mailed to patients' homes.

Patients would once again be required to attend three in-person doctor's office visits to complete a medication abortion.

Only doctors would be able to prescribe mifepristone, instead of health care providers who are authorized to prescribe medications.

Dosage and timing of mifepristone and the second drug used in medication abortion, misoprostol, would need to be administered under guidelines that went out of use more than seven years ago.

Briefs filed

Dozens of medical organizations and pharmaceutical groups have filed briefs with the Supreme Court, urging it to decide one way or another.

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America wrote in its 28-page brief that if the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling is left in place it "could invite boundless litigation to FDA drug approvals."

"Congress created an FDA approval process that is both rigorous and thorough, and pharmaceutical companies invest billions of dollars in research and development to meet FDA's scientific standards," they wrote.

If the appeals court's ruling is allowed to take effect, they wrote, it "threatens to stifle pharmaceutical innovation by disrupting industry's reasonable investment-backed expectations."

Several medical organizations, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Medical Association, wrote in a 36-page brief to the Supreme Court that "[n]o patient should be denied treatment for miscarriage or other early pregnancy loss because of Respondents' hypothetical fears or personal beliefs."

When it comes to abortion access, they wrote that patients "in states where abortion remains legal and protected should not be denied the ability to safely and privately seek to exercise that right through safe and effective medication abortion."

"Restricting access to mifepristone — the safety of which is proven by decades of rigorous scientific study and millions of uses — in ways that are not medically necessary or scientifically sound would seriously increase risk for hundreds of thousands of patients, while protecting none," they wrote.

"For already vulnerable populations (particularly those living in areas with limited access to OB/GYN care) the rollback approved by the Fifth Circuit promises to be especially devastating and to further perpetuate racial and socioeconomic inequalities," they added.

Alliance Defending Freedom Senior Counsel Erin Hawley said in a written statement released last week that she urged "the Supreme Court to hold the FDA accountable and require the agency to reinstate its safety standards."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Agriculture built these High Plains towns. Now, it might run them dry.

As the Ogallala Aquifer dwindles, rural towns try to keep their sole water source.

BY: KEVIN HARDY, STATELINE - JANUARY 29, 2024 9:37 AM

This story, the first in an occasional series about water challenges facing the American heartland, is a partnership between Stateline and the Kansas Reflector.

MOSCOW, Kan. — Brownie Wilson pulls off a remote dirt road right through a steep ditch and onto a farmer's field.

He hops out of his white Silverado pickup, mud covering nearly all of it except the Kansas Geological Survey logo stuck on the side with electrical tape. Dry cornstalks crunch under his work boots as he makes his way to a decommissioned irrigation well.

He unspools a steel highway tape measure a few feet at a time and feeds it into the well until gravity takes over. He keeps a thumb on it to control the speed.

How much of the tape comes out wet lets him calculate how much water has been lost here.

Wilson crisscrosses western Kansas every January to measure wells and track the rapid decline of the Ogallala Aquifer, which contains the nation's largest underground store of fresh water.

Last year, some wells had dropped 10 feet or more because of the severe 2022 drought. But this year, they stayed about the same or dropped a couple feet. Some of these wells have dropped more than 100 feet since Wilson started working for the agency in 2001, he said.

"Some of our issues looking forward look gargantuan," Wilson said. "But I do think we can peck away at it and make some headway."

The Ogallala Aquifer, the underground rock and sediment formation that spans eight states from South Dakota to the Texas Panhandle, is the only reliable water source for some parts of the region. But for decades, states have allowed farmers to overpump groundwater to irrigate corn and other crops that would otherwise struggle on the arid High Plains.

Now, the disappearing water is threatening more than just agriculture. Rural communities are facing dire futures where water is no longer a certainty. Across the Ogallala, small towns and cities built around agriculture are facing a twisted threat: The very industry that made their communities might just eradicate them.

Kansas Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly acknowledges some communities are just a generation away from running out of water. But she said there's still time to act.

"If they do nothing, I think they're going to suffer the consequences," Kelly said in an interview.

Today, the aquifer supports 20% of the nation's wheat, corn, cotton and cattle production and represents 30% of all water used for irrigation in the United States.

Depletion is forcing aquifer-dependent communities across the region to dig deeper wells, purchase expensive water rights from farmers, build pipelines and recycle their water supplies in new ways to save every drop possible.

Since the mid-20th century, when large-scale irrigation began, water levels in the stretches of the Ogallala underlying Kansas have dropped an average 28.2 feet farther below the surface, far worse than the eight-state average of 16.8 feet.

Water levels in Texas, where the Ogallala runs under the state's panhandle, have dropped 44 feet. New Mexico has seen a 19.1-foot decline.

In Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Wyoming, the water level has declined less than the eight-state average, while in South Dakota it has risen.

While the Ogallala Aquifer presents distinct circumstances, tensions over groundwater are growing across the country, said climate scientist and author Peter Gleick, who founded the Pacific Institute, a global water think tank.

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"You're not alone," Gleick told Kansas irrigators and policymakers at the Governor's Conference on Water, held in November in Manhattan, Kansas. "A lot of the issues that you're dealing with in Kansas, they're dealing with in Arizona, and the Colorado [River] basin."

Without drastic measures, some communities may not survive.

"I think, without a doubt, we will see some communities dry up," Gleick said in an interview. "We've seen that historically, where communities outgrow a natural resource or lose a natural resource and people have to move to abandon their homes."

'We're running out of water'

When Micheal Shannon got his start in local government over 40 years ago, water supplies were not top of mind.

Those days are gone.

"We're running out of water," said Shannon, the interim city manager in Guymon, Oklahoma. "We're pumping our maximum. And the water levels keep coming down."

The largest city in the Oklahoma Panhandle, Guymon relies on 18 wells to draw water from the Ogallala. But dropping water levels have forced the city of about 13,000 to explore new wells outside of town.

The city has already committed some \$4.5 million to study and drill new wells, but there's no guarantee the wells will produce a reliable water supply.

"There's always that what if," he said. "There could not be any water."

The city's largest water user and employer is a massive pork plant that slaughters and processes more than 20,000 hogs per day. The plant has voluntarily reduced water usage by nearly half during times of shortened supply.

Shannon said the city, industry and agricultural producers must work together.

"We all still want to be here the next 35, 40 years," he said. "We know farmers are going to have to produce ag products. And the citizens of Guymon are going to have to have water."

More than 200 miles away, several New Mexico communities are banking on more drastic measures.

A new pipeline, expected to cost more than \$800 million, will bring water from the Canadian River's Ute Reservoir to four municipalities and Cannon Air Force Base.

"This is our future, no doubt about it," said Orlando Ortega, administrator of the Eastern New Mexico Water Utility Authority. "Without this project, none of these communities could exist for very long."

The pipeline is being funded largely by the federal government, though four participating communities have been paying dues to the water authority for years. Officials aim to have the pipeline operational by the end of the decade.

Even so, communities will still need to get more aggressive about conserving water, said Michael Morris, who leads the water authority board and is mayor of Clovis, one of its member communities.

Morris is active in agricultural efforts to decrease pumping — such as conservation programs in the region that pay producers to stop pumping. And the city is working to expand water recycling efforts.

But he said the situation is even more dire than locals realize. Few know how close Clovis has come to seeing its water demand outpace the underground supply.

"So is there another option?" he said. "No."

Decades of state inaction

In Kansas, the Ogallala Aquifer supplies 70% to 80% of the water residents use each day. But for decades, the state's regulation of water benefited its largest user and its largest industry: agriculture.

The once-abundant water allowed farmers to grow cheap cattle feed, attracting the feedlots, and increasingly, dairy farms, that dot southwest Kansas.

But that feed is cheap, partly because — aside from the fuel costs associated with running a well — the water is free. A report commissioned by the Kansas legislature in 1955 warned of a future without it.

"Ground-water mining is a serious problem," the report says.

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After the grave 1955 warning, however, the state legislature only made it easier to pump the water, according to Burke Griggs, a water law professor at Washburn University in Topeka.

Griggs, formerly a water lawyer for the state, criticized Kansas lawmakers' decadeslong posture that depletion would best be solved locally. He said it is a stance held by every governor since the 1980s.

"They want it to be voluntary. And they want it to be cooperative. They want to have local-based solutions," Griggs said. "These are the catchwords you hear. None of them have achieved much."

Kelly follows the same line. The second-term governor recently signed a law mandating more reporting and planning from groundwater management districts and created a new subcommittee to coordinate water issues across agencies. But she hasn't wavered from her position that water conservation efforts are most effective when they are voluntary.

"Things are more likely to work out in the long run and succeed if there is local buy-in, and local commitment and the idea is generated locally — rather than the state wielding that heavy hammer," Kelly said.

But even some farmers want the state to step in, water policy watchers say.

"Many families who are trying to make a living from farming, and who would like to keep farming on their own land, are just waiting for the state to step in and help them fix this. Most people agree that we need fair, enforceable and transparent rules to get this turned around," said Lucas Bessire, a professor of anthropology at the University of Oklahoma who grew up in southwest Kansas.

Voluntary efforts in action

For the first time since their father dug an irrigation well in the dusty sandhills of southwest Kansas more than 50 years ago, Gina and Marc Gigot's farm isn't growing corn.

The sibling farmers are trying to preserve the precious water below their land outside Garden City.

For decades, the Gigot family has benefited from drawing groundwater to the surface to grow bright green circles of crops where the sandy soil is otherwise so dusty it might blow away.

As Marc's pickup bumps along the farm's private roads, he and Gina point to the electric systems and water pipes laid by their father. Some of the massive center pivot systems use the same parts he installed 50 years ago.

To extend the life of the aquifer, the siblings are opting for fewer water-intensive crops and grazing cattle. The farm has historically been among Kansas' largest water users, irrigating 9,000 acres, but they've cut their usage in recent years and committed to another 10 years of voluntary water conservation.

In exchange, they get more flexibility in how they use the water. As long as they hit their five-year goal, they can pump more water in drought years.

Beyond that, they're partnering with Garden City, the largest city in southwest Kansas and a major agricultural hub. Garden City's municipal water wells sit right next door to the Gigot farm, which can directly impact the city's ability to supply drinking water.

To keep more water underground, Garden City will soon divert treated wastewater to the Gigot farm — rather than continuing to dump it into the bone-dry bed of the Arkansas River. That will allow the farm to turn off some wells.

"It's not really a situation where either the city gets what they need or the irrigators get what they need. It is way more symbiotic," said Fred Jones, who oversees Garden City's water.

In northwest Kansas, a group of farmers voluntarily cut their water usage by 20% through a five-year conservation program with the state. They switched from corn to wheat or grain sorghum and used irrigation more strategically. Farmers in the area exceeded their goal and cut use, on average, 23.1% over the initial five-year period and slowed the decline of the aquifer from 2 feet per year to less than half a foot.

Still, the Gigots said the state must force other producers to cut back.

Even Kansas Farm Bureau President Joe Newland said he's fearful that voluntary efforts aren't enough.

Newland, a former Kansas Republican legislator, offered an amendment in 2022 that effectively sank a massive bill designed to make the aquifer a higher priority in state government, impose more requirements on local groundwater officials, and give communities a greater voice in decisions over water.

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In Kansas, the agricultural industry, led in part by Newland, has largely pushed back against aggressive water restrictions, instead calling for voluntary conservation measures. But Newland worries that those voluntary measures haven't saved enough water, which could eventually push the state to hand down strict mandates.

"I'm always hopeful and prayerful that people realize just how important it is that we're doing this on a voluntary basis and not ever have to go through a mandatory situation," he said. "But that's going to be determined in the near future how this works, because, as I said, we don't have decades to fix this problem."

Kansas towns take the lead

Few places evoke the Old West like Dodge City, where Wyatt Earp patrolled the lawless streets rife with gambling, saloons and shootouts.

Today, the city proudly displays remnants of those days at the Boot Hill Museum, which contains a reproduction of the legendary Long Branch Saloon and an Old West photo booth for visitors.

But the former frontier outpost has embraced some of the state's most progressive water strategies.

"We were recycling before recycling was cool," said City Manager Nick Hernandez, who highlighted water reuse efforts that began in the 1980s.

Effluent from one of the city's wastewater treatment plants keeps a golf course green. Another plant sends about 1.8 billion gallons of treated wastewater to irrigate 3,000 acres of crops at a nearby farm, reducing the need for aquifer pumping.

Another project aims to directly recharge the aquifer with treated wastewater. That will not only help protect the city's quantity of water, but also prevent contamination from agricultural runoff like nitrates by keeping the hydraulic pressure up in city wells, he said.

That project is expected to cost \$60 million. Dodge City, home to about 28,000 people, is seeking federal and state assistance for the effort. But even without grants, Hernandez said that would prove cheaper than buying water rights and digging new wells.

All those projects are building toward treating the city's sewage directly into drinkable water — still an emerging idea in most parts of the country. That would allow the city to decrease demand on groundwater by continually reusing its water.

"We all have a concern about the stability of the aquifer because that's our lifeline," said Ray Slattery, the city's director of engineering services. "But I feel very good about where the city is, and what we've done in the past to conserve. We knew it was important and so we took steps way before it became a problem."

Communities such as Dodge City offer a glimpse into the future of municipal water supplies in the region, said state Rep. Jim Minnix, a Republican who represents part of western Kansas and leads the House Water Committee.

Minnix, who raises cattle and farms both dryland and irrigated crops, said cities and farms alike must adapt. Cities need to continue embracing water recycling efforts, reduce lawn watering and encourage more efficient appliances. Farmers, he said, should embrace new technologies such as more efficient irrigation systems and drought-resistant crops.

"You'd be amazed at the water quantity that's actually being saved out there from what had been done 40, 50 years ago," he said. "As a farmer myself, I know a lot of little things add up to something that's really worthwhile. And to maintain our aquifer and our economy out here is absolutely worthwhile."

But the way Connie Owen, director of the Kansas Water Office, sees it, change is coming to both agricultural and municipal water users one way or another.

"If we don't adapt to different behaviors, it will run dry," she said. "And that will cause the economic devastation that everyone fears with restrictions."

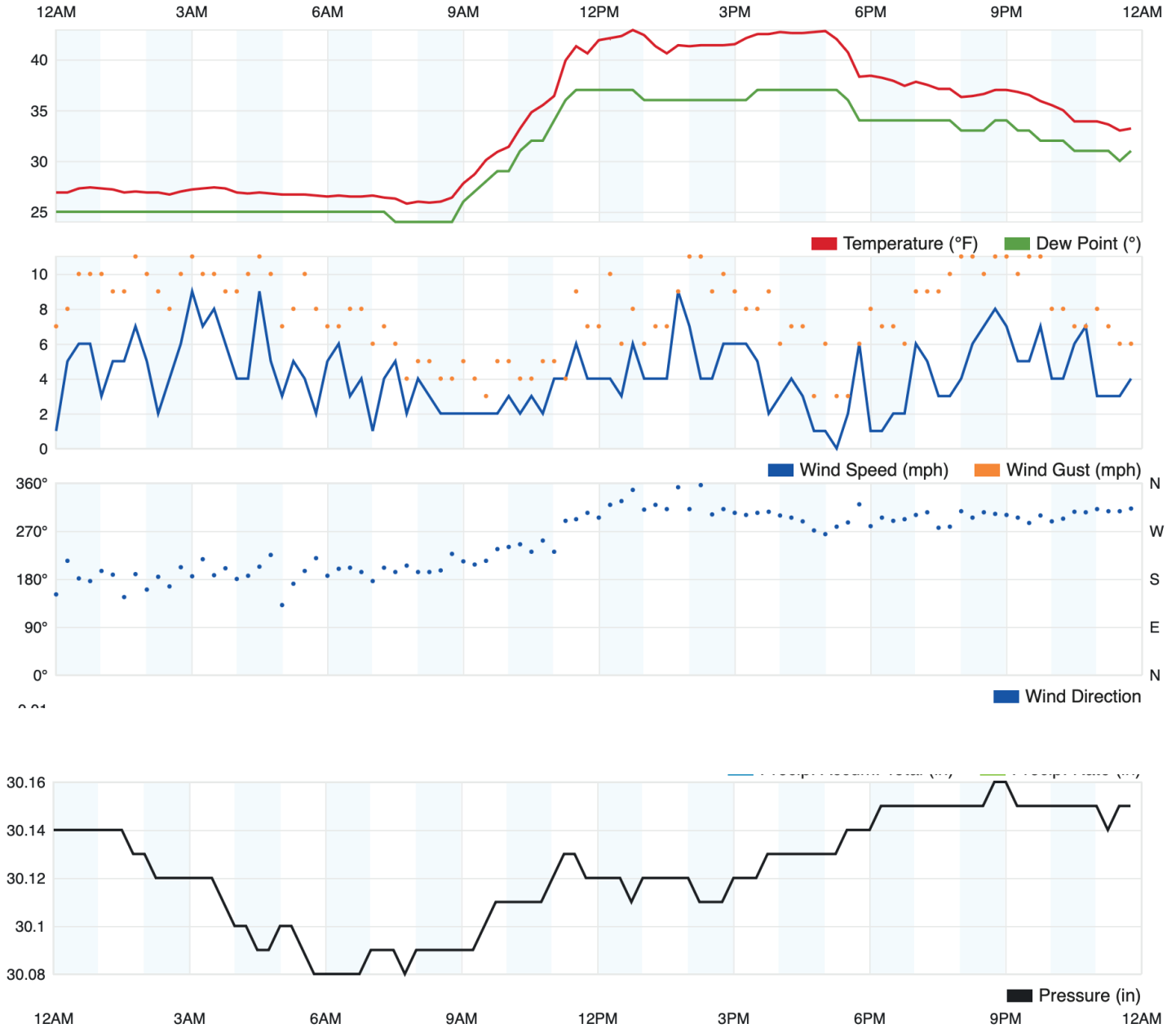
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Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Tue Jan 30	Wed Jan 31	Thu Feb 1	Fri Feb 2	Sat Feb 3	Sun Feb 4	Mon Feb 5
43°F	47°F	43°F	42°F	45°F	44°F	42°F
28°F	27°F	29°F	34°F	32°F	28°F	34°F
W	SSW	NE	ESE	ESE	E	SE
12 MPH	9 MPH	10 MPH	13 MPH	13 MPH	11 MPH	10 MPH
			10%	30%	20%	10%

Mild and Dry Through Mid-Week

Today Wednesday Thursday

37 to 58° 45 to 60° 35 to 47°

Warmest readings in snow free areas West River & ne SD/wc MN. Coolest temps in snow covered areas.

Mild, well above normal temperatures continue through the end of the week into the weekend.

Increasing Precipitation Chances Friday night through Sunday. Temps warm enough to mainly be in the form of rain.



NWS Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

Temperatures will continue to remain well above normal for late January and early February. Dry conditions will also prevail through the end of the work week. Warmest temperatures will be felt in areas free of snow cover. Cloudy and increasing rainfall chances by the start of the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 43 °F at 12:44 PM

Low Temp: 26 °F at 7:47 AM

Wind: 12 mph at 4:19 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 55 in 1931

Record Low: -37 in 2019

Average High: 25

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.53

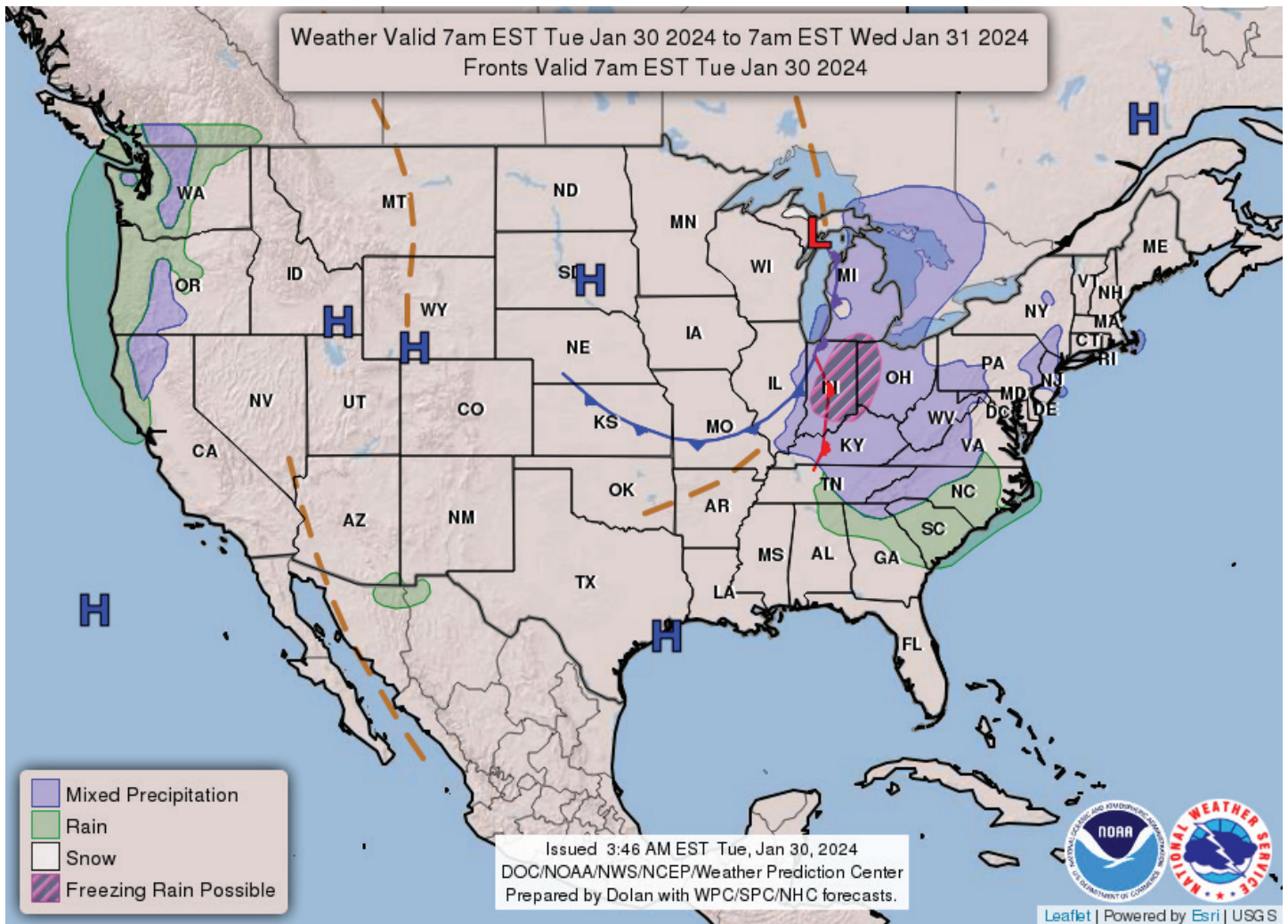
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.53

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:37:11 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:52:56 am



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Today in Weather History

January 30, 2001: Widespread freezing rain, accumulating from 1/8 to 1/2 inch, changed over to snow late in the evening of the 29th. The snow accumulated from 6 to 12 inches over much of central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. The combination of ice and snow caused significant travel problems, school and flight cancellations and delays, business closings, and numerous vehicle accidents. Several highways were closed along with large portions of Interstates 29 and 90. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Murdo, 14 SSW Hayes, and 8 E of Eden, 7 inches at Castlewood and 5 NE of Peever, 8 inches at Miller, Gann Valley, Iona, Watertown, Ortonville, and 2 NW Stephan. Nine inches of snowfall accumulated 18 S of Harrold with 10 inches at Tulare and Kennebec, 11 inches at Clark, Clear Lake, and Wheaton, 12 inches at Carpenter, Willow Lake, Milbank, and Browns Valley, and 13 inches at Wilmot.

January 30, 2011: Heavy snow of 6 to 9 inches fell across part of northeast South Dakota from the afternoon of the 30th to the 31st. Travel was disrupted, especially along Interstate-90. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Webster, Summit, and Clear Lake; 7 inches at Watertown and Milbank; 8 inches at Wilmot and Sisseton; and 9 inches at Bryant, Waubay, and Andover.

1607: The Bristol Channel floods in England resulted in the drowning of many people and the destruction of a large amount of farmland and livestock. Recent research has suggested that the cause may have been a tsunami. Cardiff was one of the most badly affected towns, with the foundations of St. Mary's Church destroyed.

1936 - Birmingham, AL, established a single storm record and 24 hour record with 11 inches of snow. (29th-30th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1954: A tornado touched down near White Point Beach, Nova Scotia. A great deal of hail and lightning was reported along the coast near Liverpool, Nova Scotia.

1966: The Blizzard of 1966 impacted New York and paralyzed the region. The train service was disrupted. Numerous highways, the New York State Thruway from Albany to the Pennsylvania state line, and the Buffalo Airport and other airports throughout western and central New York were closed. The Syracuse-Oswego area's hardest hit, where Bob Sykes, a meteorology professor at the State University of New York at Oswego, reported a whopping 102.4 inches! Some schools in Orleans County were closed for the entire week following the blizzard. Economic loss from the storm was estimated at \$35 million. Winds gusting to 60 mph and temperatures in the teens, and heavy and blowing snow created severe blizzard conditions.

1977 - The great "Buffalo Blizzard" finally abated after three days. The storm added a foot of new snow to 33 inches already on the ground. Winds gusting to 75 mph reduced visibilities to near zero, produced snow drifts twenty-five feet high, and kept wind chill readings 50 degrees below zero. The blizzard paralyzed the city, and caused 250 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A winter storm brought more heavy snow to the North Atlantic Coast Region, with 13.6 inches reported at Hiram ME. January proved to be the snowiest of record for much of Massachusetts. Worcester MA reported an all-time monthly record of 46.8 inches of snow. (National Weather Summary)

1988 - Strong southerly winds, gusting to 53 mph at Kansas City MO, spread warm air into the central U.S. Nineteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Snow and strong northwest winds ushered cold arctic air into the north central states. The temperature at Cutbank plunged from 54 degrees to a morning low of 7 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - The temperature at McGrath, AK, dipped to 62 degrees below zero, and Fairbanks reported a reading of 51 degrees below zero, with unofficial readings in the area as cold as 75 degrees below zero. The massive dome of bitterly cold air began to slide down western Canada toward the north central U.S. Strong southwest winds ahead of the arctic front pushed the temperature at Great Falls MT to 62 degrees, and gusted to 124 mph at Choteau MT, overturning trucks and mobile homes, and a dozen empty railroad cars. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A major winter storm produced heavy snow from Indiana to New England. It was the biggest storm in two and a half years for eastern New York State. Snowfall totals in the mountains of Maine ranged up to 20 inches at Guilford and Lovell. Other heavy snowfall totals included 17 inches at Utica NY, and 19 inches at Bethel VT, Ludlow VT, and New London NH. The storm claimed three lives in eastern New York State, and four lives in Vermont. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

KNOWING AND DOING

A young, energetic salesman approached a wise, old farmer and offered to sell him a set of newly published books on "Farming: Things You Need to Know."

"If you buy them, read them carefully, and study them thoroughly," said the confident young man, "you'll farm twice as good as you do now."

"Listen, young fellow," said the farmer, "I ain't farming half as good as I know how now!"

It's not what I do not know or understand about the Bible that troubles me; it's what I know about the Bible and often do not apply its teachings as I go about my daily responsibilities.

At the conclusion of one of His lessons about applying His teachings to their lives, Jesus said to His disciples, "You know these things - now do them! This the path to a happy life."

Often we are anxious to purchase a new Bible that promises to provide new insights and knowledge about the teachings of Scripture. And, it seems as though there are more new study Bibles published every month that promise "easy-to-understand" interpretations of difficult passages. Other editions promise to teach the reader how to study the Bible "inductively" or "deductively." Others focus on timelines and prophecies, culture and geography.

What is most helpful, however, is to simply read the Bible every day, think about what we have read, meditate on its content, and ask God, through His Holy Spirit, to teach us His ways.

Prayer: Father, help us to understand the teachings of Your Word. May we look to You for Your guidance and insights that will enable us to live lives that please You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. 2 Timothy 3:16



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: 01.26.24

14 31 34 50 61 13

MegaPlier: 3x

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\$311,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 19 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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5 9 15 50 51 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,700,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 34 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.24

14 16 28 30 43 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 49 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.24

3 6 15 22 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$33,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 49 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.24

31 44 45 63 64 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.24

39 41 43 49 64 4

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$188,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Avon 65, Freeman Academy 63
Centerville 61, Sioux Falls Lutheran 53
Chester 53, Colman-Egan 51
Corsica/Stickney 59, Bon Homme 32
DeSmet 54, Canistota 36
Dell Rapids 57, Parker 46
Faith 63, Dupree 48
Gayville-Volin High School 54, Mitchell Christian 49, OT
Hamlin 71, Castlewood 47
Howard 68, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 31
Miller 65, Chamberlain 51
Mobridge-Pollock 65, Timber Lake 41
Potter County 57, Lyman 42
Red Cloud 60, St Francis 47
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 58, Yankton 40
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 41, Andes Central-Dakota Christian 39
Vermillion 61, Madison 60
Waverly-South Shore 63, Arlington 40
Winner 55, Gregory 48

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 63, Tiospa Zina 23
Avon 40, Freeman Academy-Marion 15
Bennett County 65, Crazy Horse 20
Bon Homme 58, Bridgewater-Emery 44
Burke 54, Gayville-Volin High School 42
Chamberlain 43, Miller 42, OT
Dell Rapids 58, Baltic 33
Dupree 63, Bison 20
Groton 39, Florence-Henry 34
Howard 48, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 36
Kadoka 57, Philip 29
Lyman 73, Potter County 60
Red Cloud 78, St Francis 11
Sioux Valley 60, McCook Central-Montrose 31
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 45, Andes Central-Dakota Christian 43
Waubay/Summit 52, Langford 47
Winner 54, Corsica/Stickney 22

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

Northern Ireland political party agrees to end 2-year boycott that caused the government to collapse

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Northern Ireland's largest British unionist party has agreed to end a boycott that left the region's people without a power-sharing administration for two years and rattled the foundations of the 25-year-old peace. The breakthrough could see the shuttered Belfast government restored within days.

After a marathon late-night meeting, Democratic Unionist Party leader Jeffrey Donaldson said Tuesday that the party's executive had backed proposals to return to the government. He said agreements reached with the U.K. government in London "provide a basis for our party to nominate members to the Northern Ireland Executive, thus seeing the restoration of the locally elected institutions."

The breakthrough came after the U.K. government last week gave Northern Ireland politicians until Feb. 8 to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and executive or face new elections.

"All the conditions are in place for the Assembly to return," Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said. "The parties entitled to form an executive are meeting today to discuss these matters, and I hope to be able to finalize this deal with the political parties as soon as possible."

The DUP walked out in February 2022 in a dispute over post-Brexit trade rules. Ever since, it has refused to return to the government with the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein. Under power-sharing rules established as part of Northern Ireland's peace process, the administration must include both British unionists and Irish nationalists.

The walkout left Northern Ireland's 1.9 million people without a functioning administration to make key decisions as the cost of living soared and backlogs strained the creaking public health system. Amid mounting public frustration, teachers, nurses and other public sector workers staged a 24-hour strike this month calling on politicians to return to the government and give them a long-delayed pay raise.

The British government has agreed to give Northern Ireland more than 3 billion pounds (\$3.8 billion) for its public services, but only if the executive in Belfast gets back up and running.

The political impasse in Northern Ireland stems from the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union and its borderless trading bloc after decades of membership. The DUP quit the government in opposition to new trade rules put in place after the U.K. left the EU in 2020 that imposed customs checks and other hurdles on goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the U.K.

The checks were imposed to maintain an open border between the north and its EU neighbor, the Republic of Ireland, a key pillar of the peace process that ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland. The DUP, though, says the new east-west customs border undermines Northern Ireland's place in the U.K.

In February 2023, the U.K. and the EU agreed on a deal to ease customs checks and other hurdles for goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the U.K. But it was not enough for the DUP, which continued its government boycott.

Donaldson said further measures agreed by the British government will "remove checks for goods moving within the U.K. and remaining in Northern Ireland and will end Northern Ireland automatically following future EU laws."

The DUP's decision faces opposition from some hard-line unionists, who fiercely guard Northern Ireland's place in the U.K. and say even light-touch post-Brexit checks create a de facto internal trade barrier. Dozens of protesters gathered outside the DUP meeting venue outside Belfast late Monday, waving placards saying, "Stop DUP sellout."

Details of the supposedly private five-hour meeting were live-tweeted by Jamie Bryson, editor of the Unionist Voice newsletter, who is opposed to Donaldson's attempts at compromise.

Donaldson said last week that he had received threats over his attempts to negotiate a return to the government.

"I think my party has displayed far more courage than those who threaten or try to bully or try to misrepresent us," he said Tuesday. "We are determined to take our place in taking Northern Ireland forward."

The situation has been complicated by Northern Ireland's changing political landscape. Unionists were

the largest force in the Northern Ireland Assembly from its establishment in 1998 until 2022, when Sinn Fein won the most seats in an election.

That gives the nationalist party, which seeks to take Northern Ireland out of the U.K. and unite it with the republic, the right to hold the post of first minister. The DUP would fill the post of deputy — a bitter pill for some unionists to swallow.

Sinn Fein President Mary Lou McDonald said she was optimistic the Belfast government could return before the Feb. 8 deadline.

“It is vital there is political stability to address the scale of the crisis across our public services,” she said. “Let’s now focus minds on the job at hand and to the solutions required to support workers and families who want and deserve functioning government.”

Pakistani court convicts jailed ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan of revealing secrets ahead of elections

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A Pakistani court convicted former Prime Minister Imran Khan of revealing official secrets on Tuesday and sentenced him to 10 years — the latest in a slew of legal cases that supporters say are meant to sideline the imprisoned former cricket star just days ahead of parliamentary elections.

The Islamist politician, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in 2022, is not on the ballot because he is already serving a three-year prison term — and more than 150 other cases are still pending against him. He nonetheless remains a potent political force because of his grassroots following and anti-establishment rhetoric.

However, Pakistan saw violent demonstrations after Khan’s arrest last year, and authorities have cracked down on his supporters and party since then, making them wary of staging rallies.

The Feb. 8 elections come at a sensitive time in Pakistan, which is mired in an economic crisis that Khan’s successor, Shehbaz Sharif, has struggled to manage. Sharif was only able to get a bailout from the International Monetary Fund by agreeing to a substantial increase in tariffs on gas and electricity that led to alarming price hikes on everyday goods and made his party unpopular.

On Tuesday, Khan was convicted in what is popularly known as the cipher case, in which he was accused of exposing state secrets by waving a confidential document at a rally. The document has not been made public but is believed to be diplomatic correspondence between the Pakistani ambassador to Washington and the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad.

Khan claimed the document was proof he was being threatened and that his ouster was a U.S. conspiracy, allegedly executed by the military and the government in Pakistan. American and Pakistani officials have denied the claim.

A special court at the prison in the garrison city of Rawalpindi where Khan is being held announced the verdict, according to Zulfiqar Bukhari, chief spokesman for Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, or PTI.

A senior official in the party, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who was accused of manipulating the contents of the diplomatic cable to gain political advantage, was also convicted and received a 10-year sentence.

Khan has maintained his innocence, saying he didn’t disclose the exact contents of the cable. His party dismissed the trial as a sham, and his legal team plans to appeal the conviction before the Islamabad High Court on Wednesday.

Other charges against Khan range from contempt of court to terrorism and inciting violence.

Despite discontent with the government, analysts say turnout in the upcoming election may remain low since Khan is the only one in his party who had the charisma to attract the masses.

“The dejected and disappointed supporters of Imran Khan will stay away from the voting because they have a fear in their mind that their party is not going to win the elections,” said Azim Chaudhry, a political analyst, calling PTI a “leaderless party.”

Pakistan’s human rights commission has said there is little chance of a free and fair parliamentary election since so many candidates from Khan’s party have been rejected.

Khan's party said in a statement that it stands with Khan and Qureshi, "who defended Pakistan and stood for real independence." It described the proceedings as a "sham trial" and said the judge did not even allow Khan's and Qureshi's lawyers to defend them.

However, the party asked his supporters to remain peaceful and not resort to violence.

"We should harness and channel these energies for the polling day" to ensure that Khan's candidates win the vote "with a thumping majority," said Omar Ayub, a longtime supporter.

Hong Kong begins work on its own National Security Law, years after a similar law crushed dissent

By KANIS LEUNG and ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong began public consultation on a local National Security Law on Tuesday, more than three years after Beijing imposed a similar law that has all but wiped out dissent in the semi-autonomous city.

The new law could expand the government's ability to prosecute residents for offenses like collaborating with foreign forces to influence legislation or "publish misleading statements," and to close down civil society organizations. Some of its provisions threaten criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.

Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, calls for the city to enact a national security law, but it's been delayed for decades because of widespread public opposition based on fears it would erode civil liberties. In 2003, an attempt to pass a version of the law sparked street protests that drew half a million people, and the legislation was shelved.

But the city's crackdown on political opposition likely clears the way for the bill to pass easily. Since 2020, many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists have been arrested, silenced or forced into exile. Dozens of civil society groups have been disbanded, and outspoken media outlets like Apple Daily and Stand News have been shut down.

The draft text will be written later based on input from public consultation, which will begin Tuesday and will end Feb. 28. But the city released a 110-page document Tuesday outlining its plans for the legislation.

City leader John Lee called the legislation a "constitutional responsibility."

"We shouldn't wait any longer," he said during a news conference. "The threats to national security, they are real. We have experienced all these threats. We have suffered from them badly."

Both the Hong Kong and Beijing governments have hailed the previous National Security Law for restoring stability after the massive pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Lee said a local version is still necessary to keep Hong Kong safe against "potential sabotage" and "undercurrents that try to create troubles," in particular surviving ideas about Hong Kong independence. Lee also said that some foreign agents may still be active in Hong Kong.

He said other countries, including the U.S., U.K. and Singapore, have similar laws to safeguard security and Hong Kong would draw from them.

Critics worry authorities will use a domestic national security law as another tool to crack down on dissidents, further eroding freedoms that were promised to the former British colony when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The Beijing-imposed security law criminalized subversion, advocating secession, and collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs as well as terrorism, but did not cover all the offenses authorities wanted to target.

Eric Lai, a research fellow at the Georgetown Center for Asian Law, said that the one-month public consultation was shorter than the three months typical for important laws, saying it appeared to be "window dressing."

Highlights of the package include a ban on "threatening national security by collaborating with external forces to interfere in the affairs of our country or the HKSAR through improper means." The document also suggested that colluding with an "external force" to publish a misleading statement with the intent

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of endangering national security could be considered an espionage offence.

It also bans inciting public officials to abandon the Basic Law or their allegiance to Hong Kong and China, expanding an existing law that only covered members of the police and other security forces.

Lee promised that people could still criticize the Hong Kong government and express opinions, as long as they do not intend to endanger national security.

The government has already muzzled most dissent using existing laws. Hundreds of people have been arrested under the 2020 law.

Some 47 people were charged under the 2020 law for participating in an unofficial primary election, and two were convicted during the same time under an older sedition law for clapping in court and insulting a judge during a trial.

Lee said that the law will not provide for suspects to be transferred to mainland China for trial, unlike the 2020 law.

Security chief Chris Tang said the legislation would cover the use of computers and electronic systems to endanger national security, as well as disclosing state secrets and espionage, treason and sedition. The proposal includes an expanded definition of state secrets that covers the "economic and social development of Hong Kong," as well as defense and diplomatic activities.

The leader of the city's largest pro-democracy party called for clarification about how the law will define state secrets. Democratic Party Chairman Lo Kin-hei asked if journalists could be liable when reporting on inside information from the government in the public interest.

The proposal also seeks to revise and update several existing laws covering treason, theft of state secrets and espionage. Parts of the proposed law are to be applied beyond Hong Kong's borders.

The government suggested it may use the new law to cancel the passports of fugitives overseas, citing a similar U.S. law.

Such laws could affect the many activists who went into exile fearing arrest. The Hong Kong police have offered bounties of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (\$128,000) on at least 13 activists abroad, including former lawmakers Nathan Law and Ted Hui, who they accuse of colluding with external forces to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

The new law could also make it harder for civil society groups to operate in Hong Kong. The city's security chief would gain new powers to shut down such organizations in order to safeguard security.

Following the consultation period, the proposed legislation will be drafted as a bill that will be scrutinized by the Legislative Council. Once the proposed law reaches the legislature, lawmakers are expected to pass the domestic national security law without much opposition in the three readings given a lack of opposition lawmakers following an overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system.

Lee did not give a timeline for enacting the law, other than that it should be done "as soon as possible."

Under Hong Kong's constitution, the city is required to enact laws "on its own" to prohibit seven types of acts: treason, secession, sedition, subversion against China's central government, theft of state secrets, foreign political organizations conducting political activities in the city, and local political organizations establishing ties with foreign political groups.

House GOP is moving quickly to impeach Mayorkas as border security becomes top election issue

By LISA MASCARO and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are moving swiftly toward impeaching Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas over what they call his "willful and systematic" refusal to enforce immigration laws, but in a personal appeal he argued they should instead be working with the Biden administration on U.S.-Mexico border security.

The Homeland Security Committee is scheduled to vote Tuesday on two articles of impeachment against Mayorkas, a former federal prosecutor, as border security becomes a top issue in the 2024 elections.

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Republicans are making GOP presidential front-runner Donald Trump's hardline deportation approach to immigration their own.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said the House is moving ahead with Mayorkas' impeachment "by necessity" with a full House vote "as soon as possible."

Rarely has a Cabinet member faced impeachment's bar of "high crimes and misdemeanors," and Democrats called the proceedings a "sham" that could set a chilling precedent for other civil servants. It would be the first impeachment of a Cabinet official in nearly 150 years.

The House's impeachment proceedings against Mayorkas have created an oddly split-screen Capitol Hill, as the Senate has been working intently with the secretary on a bipartisan border security package that is now on life support.

The package being negotiated by the senators with Mayorkas could emerge as the most consequential bipartisan immigration proposal in a decade. Or it could collapse in political failure as Republicans, and some Democrats, run from the effort.

Trump, on the campaign trail and in private talks, has tried to squelch the Senate's border security deal. "I'd rather have no bill than a bad bill," Trump said over the weekend in Las Vegas.

President Joe Biden, in his own campaign remarks in South Carolina, said if Congress sends him a bill with emergency authority he'll "shut down the border right now" to get it under control.

In a pointed letter ahead of the hearing, Mayorkas provided a rebuttal to the charges against him.

Mayorkas defended his work at the department and his negotiations with the Senate, and he urged the House to focus on updating the nation's "broken and outdated" immigration laws for the 21st century and an era of record global migration.

"We need a legislative solution and only Congress can provide it," Mayorkas wrote to the panel's Republican chairman, Mark Green of Tennessee.

Mayorkas, who never testified on his own behalf during the impeachment proceedings — he and the committee couldn't agree on a date for his appearance — drew on his own background as a child brought to the U.S. by his parents fleeing Cuba, and his career spent prosecuting criminals.

"Your false accusations do not rattle me and do not divert me" from public service, he wrote.

The articles charge that Mayorkas "willfully and systematically refused to comply with Federal immigration laws" and that he has "breached the public trust" in his claims to Congress that the border is secure.

The Republicans are focused on the secretary's handling of the southern border, which has experienced a record number of migrants over the past year, and what they describe as a crisis of the administration's own making.

Republicans contend that the administration and Mayorkas specifically either got rid of policies in place under Trump that had controlled migration or enacted policies of their own that encouraged migrants from around the world to come to the U.S. illegally via the southern border.

They also accused Mayorkas of lying to Congress, pointing to comments about the border being secure or about vetting of Afghans airlifted to the U.S. after military withdrawal from the country.

"It's high time," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who called Mayorkas the "architect" of the border problems. "He has what's coming to him."

The House impeachment hearings against Mayorkas sprinted ahead in January while the Republicans' impeachment inquiry into Biden over the business dealings over his son, Hunter Biden, dragged.

Democrats argued that Mayorkas is acting under his legal authorities at the department, and that the criticisms against him do not rise to the level of impeachment.

"House Republicans have produced no evidence that Secretary Mayorkas has committed an impeachable offense," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

Jeffries called the impeachment proceedings a "political stunt" ordered up by Trump and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., a Trump ally, who pushed the resolution forward toward the votes.

It's unclear if House Republicans will have the support from their ranks to go through with the impeachment, especially with their slim majority and with Democrats expected to vote against it.

Last year, eight House Republicans voted to shelve the impeachment resolution proposed by Greene rather

than send it along to the committee, though many of them have since signaled they would be open to it.

If the House does agree to impeach Mayorkas, the charges would next go the Senate for a trial. In 1876, the House impeached Defense Secretary William Belknap in 1876 over kickbacks in government contracts, but the Senate acquitted him in a trial.

Israeli undercover forces dressed as women and medics storm West Bank hospital, killing 3 militants

By AREF TUFAHA and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JENIN, West Bank (AP) — Armed Israeli forces disguised as women and medical workers stormed a hospital Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored the spillover of deadly violence to the territory during the war in Gaza.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces opened fire inside the wards of the Ibn Sina Hospital in the town of Jenin. The ministry condemned the raid and called on the international community to pressure Israel's military to halt such operations in hospitals. A hospital spokesperson said there was no exchange of fire, indicating that it was a targeted killing.

The military said the militants were using the hospital as a hideout. It alleged that one of those targeted in the raid had transferred weapons and ammunition to others for a planned attack, purportedly inspired by the Hamas assault on southern Israel on Oct. 7. The military did not provide evidence backing that claim.

Footage said to be security camera video from the hospital that circulated on social media showed about a dozen undercover forces, most of them armed, dressed as women with Muslim headscarves or hospital staff in scrubs or white doctor's coats. One in a surgical mask carried a rifle in one arm and a folded wheelchair in the other. The forces were seen patting down one man who kneeled against a wall, his arms raised.

Israel has come under heavy criticism for its raids on hospitals in Gaza, which have acted as a shelter for displaced people and also as a critical yet struggling lifeline for the tens of thousands of Palestinians wounded in the war. Gaza's health care system, which was already feeble before the war, has been on the verge of collapse, buckling under the scores of patients, the lack of resources — including fuel and medical necessities blocked by Israeli restrictions — and the repeated fighting surrounding and inside hospitals.

Israel says militants use hospitals, especially in Gaza, to hide out or to launch operations from. The military has found underground tunnels in the vicinity of hospitals, and says it has located weapons and vehicles used in the Oct. 7 attack on hospital grounds.

The war was triggered by Hamas' attack, when hundreds of militants stormed across the border, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting about 250 others.

The attack set off a blistering air, sea and ground offensive that has killed more than 26,000 people in Gaza and wounded more than 65,000, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The ministry count does not distinguish between fighters and noncombatants, but it says about two-thirds of the dead are women and minors.

The fighting has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe, displacing 85% of the tiny coastal enclave's population, leveling vast swaths of it, and pushing a quarter of residents to starvation, according to the United Nations. That crisis may soon be exacerbated, the U.N. has warned, over a spate of funding freezes to the main aid provider to Palestinians in Gaza following Israeli claims that a dozen of its workers participated in the Oct. 7 assault.

Since Oct. 7, violence in the West Bank has also surged as Israel has cracked down on suspected militants, killing more than 380 Palestinians, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most were killed in confrontations with Israeli forces during arrest raids or violent protests.

The Israeli military says it has arrested nearly 3,000 Palestinians in the West Bank over the past four months.

The military said Tuesday that forces killed Mohammed Jalamneh, 27, who it said was planning an imminent attack. The two other men killed, brothers Basel and Mohammed Ghazawi, were hiding inside the

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hospital and were involved in attacks, the military claimed.

The military did not provide details on how the three were killed. Its statement said Jalamneh was armed with a pistol, but made no mention of an exchange of fire.

Hospital spokesperson Tawfiq al-Shobaki said there was no exchange of fire and the three were killed by Israeli forces in a targeted killing. He said the Israelis attacked doctors, nurses, and hospital security during the raid.

"What happened is a precedent," he said. "There was never an assassination inside a hospital. There were arrests and assaults, but not an assassination."

He said Basel Ghazawi had been a patient in the hospital since October with hemiplegia, or partial paralysis.

Hamas claimed the three men as members, calling the operation "a cowardly assassination."

The raid took place in Jenin, long a bastion of armed struggle against Israel, where the internationally-backed Palestinian Authority and its security forces have little of a foothold. The city had been the frequent target of Israeli raids even before the war began. Israeli operations there and in an adjacent built-up refugee camp have left vast destruction.

Israel occupied the West Bank, along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. More than half a million Israelis now live in settlements in the West Bank.

Israel withdrew troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but imposed a stifling blockade on the territory, along with Egypt, when Hamas came to power in a violent takeover in 2007.

The Palestinians claim those territories as part of their future independent state, hopes for which have increasingly dimmed since the war began.

Qatar, Egypt and the United States were trying to strike a new deal between Israel and Hamas that could lead to a pause in fighting and see the release of dozens of hostages still held in Gaza.

Progress on the deal still remained elusive.

Israel said cease-fire talks held Sunday were constructive but that "significant gaps" remained in any potential agreement.

Hamas spokesperson Osama Hamdan told reporters in Beirut that discussions are continuing but that the group was still insisting on a more permanent cease-fire before releasing any more hostages.

The prime minister of Qatar, which has served as a key mediator with Hamas, was more upbeat, saying U.S. and Mideast mediators had reached a framework proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release to present to the militant group. Speaking at the Atlantic Council in Washington, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said the mediators had made "good progress."

Israeli forces were meanwhile still battling Palestinian militants in different parts of Gaza, even in areas where the army has been operating for months.

Israel issued an evacuation order to residents in the western part of Gaza City, urging them to head south. The military also said it had battled militants and carried out airstrikes in recent days in other parts of northern Gaza, which was pummeled in the first weeks of the war and where Israel has claimed to have largely dismantled Hamas.

Brazil, facing calls for reparations, wrangles with its painful legacy of slavery

By ELÉONORE HUGHES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The executive manager for institutional relations at a Brazilian state bank took the microphone before roughly 150 people at a forum on slavery's legacy in his country, which kidnapped more Africans for forced labor than any other nation.

"Today's Bank of Brazil asks Black people for forgiveness," André Machado said to the mostly Black audience at the Portela samba school in Rio de Janeiro.

"Directly or indirectly, all of Brazilian society should apologize to Black people for that sad moment in our history," he said, reading a statement to audience members who sat watching from plastic chairs, their eyes fixed upon him.

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Brazil — where more than half the population self-identifies as Black or biracial — has long resisted reckoning with its past. That reluctance has started loosening.

Public prosecutors have begun probing Bank of Brazil, Latin America's second-largest financial institution by assets, with \$380 billion, for its historical links to the slave trade. Their investigation could yield a recommendation, an agreement or filing of legal action, and they invited Bank of Brazil to start a dialogue with Black people at the Portela school in the working-class Madureira neighborhood.

Ghyslaine Almeida e Cunha, a spiritual leader of the Afro-Brazilian religion Umbanda, traveled from the Amazonian city of Belem for what she called "an historic moment." She welcomed the apology and announcement of measures, though the bank stopped short of pledging compensation.

"I came to say — on Portela's sacred soil — that, yes, we do want reparations," said Cunha.

Brazil enslaved more people from Africa than any other country; nearly 5 million kidnapped Africans disembarked in Brazil, more than 12 times the number taken to mainland North America, according to estimates from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade database. Brazil was the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, in 1888.

Valongo Wharf in Rio, which UNESCO calls "the most important physical trace of the arrival of African slaves on the American continent," was only excavated in 2011.

Discrimination remains, and Black and biracial Brazilians are more likely to be poor, imprisoned and die violently. Fewer than a third of managerial positions are held by those groups, and they comprise one quarter of representatives in Brazil's Lower House of Congress.

On Dec. 7, a Senate committee heard experts arguing that Brazil needs to prioritize compensation. And when Carnival kicks off next week, a samba school parading before tens of thousands of spectators and millions more TV viewers will present the story of a Black man whose family is seeking reparations.

Brazil's nascent clamor for reparations joins existing movements abroad. In the U.S., New York, California and Illinois have established task forces on the issue. In November, the African Union partnered with Caribbean countries to form a "united front" to persuade European nations to pay for "historical mass crimes". Institutions such as Harvard University and the Bank of England have been confronting their historical ties to the slave trade, although neither has endorsed direct financial reparations.

And in 2021, President Joe Biden expressed support for a federal commission to study a national plan for reparations for Black Americans, but he has not supported any of the efforts at the state level.

Such discussions in the U.S. inspired Brazilian nonprofit Educafro to sue the federal government in May 2022, Irapuã Santana, the lawyer who filed the suit, told The Associated Press. The organization, which fights for better access to education for Black and biracial Brazilians, is demanding an apology and a fund to combat racism, among other measures.

Brazil long projected itself as a inclusive democracy that had left racism behind. Only in recent decades has there been a concerted effort to publicly debunk that myth. The country has so far mostly dealt with slavery's legacy through affirmative action, particularly its 2012 law obliging public universities to reserve a certain number of spaces for Black people.

But many on the right argue the past is irrelevant, and deny that any compensation is due. They are likely to fight any widespread push for reparations.

"What debt? I have never enslaved anyone in my life," Jair Bolsonaro said in a TV interview in 2018, months before he won the presidency. The former leader and current standard-bearer for the right has questioned the basis for quotas, saying Black and white people should be treated equally. In October, his son proposed ending race-based quotas, and almost one-third of senators supported the measure.

Advocates for further atonement disagree.

"Faced with the horror of 350 years of slavery, quotas are insufficient. We need to expand the discussion on reparations," said lawyer Humberto Adami, president of the Racial Equality Commission of the Brazilian Lawyers Institute.

That demands for reparations are for the first time being heard in public, prominent places is partly a reflection of the political climate ushered in by leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who took office

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in January 2023. Last year, prosecutors started investigating Bank of Brazil, which is cooperating.

Its largest shareholder at one point was José Bernardino de Sá, a slave trader responsible for transporting around 19,000 Africans to Brazil, according to historical research that sparked prosecutors' investigation. João Henrique Ulrich, who in 1842 was caught running a slave barracks in Angola's capital, was a bank director for almost a decade.

Beyond individual ties, the institution allowed clients to declare enslaved Black people as financial assets to guarantee loans that built the economy — one example of how "slavery is central to Brazil's formation," said Thiago Campos Pessoa, one of the historians.

In addition to apologizing, Bank of Brazil announced measures to facilitate jobs for Black people and said it "works intensely to confront structural racism."

Bank of Brazil declined a request for an interview, instead referring AP to its Nov. 18 statement read at Portela and its recent initiative to finance projects benefiting Black women.

Lula appointed Tarciana Medeiros to lead the bank, and she is its first-ever Black president. He has pledged to further racial equality, and created the country's first ministry dedicated to the issue.

The family of João Cândido, who served in the navy two decades after Brazil abolished slavery, hope a more receptive executive branch will finally hear their pleas.

After witnessing a sailor's flogging, Cândido led a revolt against regular whipping by officers in 1910. He and fellow mutineers were tortured, and only two survived — including Cândido. Kicked out of the navy, he and his family missed out on pension benefits and promotions, then he fell into poverty, according to prosecutor Julio Araujo, who also leads the Bank of Brazil probe.

Cândido's family is demanding compensation from the federal government. They also want him inducted into the nation's official pantheon of heroes, Adalberto Cândido, 85, the sailor's only living son, said in an interview in Sao Joao de Meriti, on Rio's outskirts.

Reparations "would make a difference because we are a modest family. We've always earned the minimum wage, which in this country is a joke," said Cândido, who started working at 14. He spoke in front of Cândido's last home, where a colorful mural depicts his story.

That story will take center stage in one of the top Carnival parades. In the warehouse where samba school Paraiso do Tuiuti is constructing its giant floats and fashioning gold-sequined sailor costumes, references to slavery abound — such as a print of French painter Jean-Baptiste Debret's depiction of a slave being whipped.

Jack Vasconcelos, who created the school's parade theme, said he decided to honor Cândido because violence reminiscent of slavery continues to occur. He cited a Black delivery man's whipping with a dog leash by a white woman in Rio last year.

That delivery man will perform as Cândido during the parade, which aims to help society remember slavery — one form of reparation, Vasconcelos said.

"But we also need to fight for tangible reparations, not just contributing to memory," Vasconcelos added.

5 suspects arrested in California desert killings in dispute over marijuana, sheriff's officials say

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (AP) — The six men found dead at a remote dirt crossroads in the Southern California desert last week were likely shot to death in a dispute over marijuana, sheriff's officials said Monday as they announced the arrests of five men suspected in the violence.

Authorities discovered the bodies Tuesday in the Mojave Desert outside El Mirage after someone called 911 and said in Spanish that he had been shot, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Sgt. Michael Warrick said during a news conference.

All the victims were likely shot to death, and four of the bodies had been partially burned together, Warrick said. A fifth victim was found inside a Chevy Trailblazer, and the sixth was discovered nearby the following day, he said.

"It looks like illicit marijuana was the driving force behind these murders," Sheriff Shannon Dicus said, adding that the area is known for illegal marijuana growing operations.

The scene showed a "level of violence" reminiscent of a drug cartel, but investigators couldn't immediately confirm that cartels were involved, officials said.

Five men, ranging in age from 24 to 34, were arrested, and eight firearms were seized after deputies served search warrants Sunday in the Adelanto and Apple Valley areas of San Bernardino County and the Pinyon Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles County, Warrick said at a news conference.

Officials said investigators believe all the suspects in the case are in custody. They were held without bail.

Authorities identified four of the victims as: Baldemar Mondragon-Albarran, 34, of Adelanto; Franklin Noel Bonilla, 22, of Hesperia; Kevin Dariel Bonilla, 25, of Hesperia; and a 45-year-old man whose name was withheld pending family notification. Coroner's officials were trying to identify the remaining two men.

Investigators believe Franklin Bonilla was the man who called 911, Warrick said.

California voters legalized recreational marijuana in 2016, and the state has become the world's largest legal cannabis marketplace since then, with billions in annual sales. But the illegal market continues to thrive.

Dicus called the black market "a plague" that results in violence, and he called on lawmakers to reform cannabis laws to "keep legalization but revert to harsher penalties for users of illegal pot."

Overhead footage from TV stations last week showed a dark blue SUV with a passenger window blown out and another door open, with part of the image blurred. The footage also showed numerous yellow evidence markers in the scrubby desert.

The area, some 50 miles (80 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles, is so remote that the sheriff's department called in help from the California Highway Patrol's Aviation Division to find the scene.

In 2020, seven people were fatally shot at an illegal marijuana growing operation in a small, rural town in neighboring Riverside County. More than 20 people lived on the property, which had several makeshift dwellings used for the production of honey oil, a potent cannabis concentrate.

Illinois election board to consider whether to boot Trump from ballot over insurrection amendment

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois' election board on Tuesday is scheduled to consider whether to keep Donald Trump on the state's primary ballot after a recommendation that he be removed over the Constitution's insurrection provision.

The meeting of the Illinois State Board of Elections, which is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans, comes a little more than a week before the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in a similar case from Colorado. That state's highest court found the 14th amendment barred Trump from the ballot over his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

After brief arguments last week, a hearing officer for the Illinois board said it should be up to the courts, rather than election officials, to decide Trump's eligibility because of the complicated constitutional issues involved. But the opinion from Clark Erickson, a retired judge and a Republican, concluded that a "preponderance of the evidence" presented proved that Trump engaged in insurrection and should be barred from the ballot.

The petition was filed by five voters who argued Trump is ineligible under Section 3 of the 14th amendment, a Civil War-era provision that bars anyone who took an oath to support the Constitution and then "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" from holding office.

The attempt to keep Trump's name off Illinois' March 19 primary ballot by raising federal constitutional questions is similar to efforts in several other states. The push has notched successes in Colorado and in Maine, where the Democratic secretary of state also recommended removing Trump from the ballot. That decision is on hold pending an eventual ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court.

Free Speech for People, a national voting rights group that is helping lead the Illinois effort, praised the

recommendation as "significant" and argued that Illinois law allows the board to make the ballot decision. "We expect that the board and ultimately Illinois courts will uphold Judge Erickson's thoughtful analysis of why Trump is disqualified from office, but — with the greatest respect — correct him on why Illinois law authorizes that ruling," Ron Fein, legal director for the group, wrote in a Sunday statement.

Trump's campaign has not returned messages seeking comment.

The eight-member Illinois election board is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans. To side with the objectors and remove Trump's name, a majority has to vote in favor. If the vote is tied 4-4, the effort fails and Trump's name would remain on the ballot.

China sees two 'bowls of poison' in Biden and Trump and ponders who is the lesser of two evils

By DIDI TANG and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — As the U.S. presidential campaign moves closer to a Donald Trump-Joe Biden rematch, China is watching uneasily.

First, there are concerns about the campaign itself, where candidates are likely to talk tough on China. That could threaten the fragile improvements in U.S.-China relations seen in recent months.

Then there's the outcome of the November vote. Neither candidate is particularly appealing to Beijing. While Biden has looked for areas of cooperation with China, Beijing is concerned about his efforts to unite allies in the Indo-Pacific in a coalition against China. It's also nervous about his approach to Taiwan after he has repeatedly said he would have U.S. troops defend it in a conflict with China.

Trump, with his isolationist approach to foreign policy, might be more hesitant to defend Taiwan. But nothing can be ruled out given his unpredictability and his tough rhetoric on China, which he blames for the COVID-19 outbreak that dogged the end of his term. He also could deepen a trade war that hasn't eased since his presidency.

"For China, no matter who won the U.S. presidential election, they would be two 'bowls of poison,'" said Zhao Minghao, a professor of international relations at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Even with the slight improvement in relations, tensions remain high, particularly over Taiwan. The question of who is in the White House could have enormous consequences not only for U.S.-China relations but for peace in the Asia-Pacific region.

Zhao's views are echoed by a number of analysts in both countries, who suggest Beijing may find Biden the lesser of two evils for his steadiness over Trump's unpredictability but also point out that the Chinese government agonizes over Biden's success in building partnerships to counter China.

"No matter who takes office, it will not change the overall direction of America's strategic competition with China," said Sun Chenghao, a fellow at the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University. "China doesn't have any preference for who will win the presidential election because China has experience dealing with either of them for four years."

In China's social media, many commentators appear to be favoring Trump, whom they see not only as a businessman up for a deal but also a disruptive force that undermines American democracy and U.S. global leadership to the benefit of Beijing. Trump's policies and remarks as president earned him the nickname of Chuan Jianguo, or "Trump, the (Chinese) nation builder," an implication that he was helping Beijing.

Trump's recent accusation that Taiwan took the chip-making industry from the U.S. has been seen as a sign that Trump, a businessman at heart, may not be willing to defend the self-governed island that Beijing considers to be Chinese territory.

Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Washington-based Stimson Center, cautioned against nationalistic sentiments in China that could be at odds with government officials and elites. "With Trump, there is no floor to U.S.-China relations, and Trump poses great risks and uncertainties, including the possibility of a military conflict," Sun said, adding China in 2020 was convinced that Trump could attack Taiwan to win reelection.

"There might be some benefit associated with Trump's potential to damage alliances and partnerships,

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shaking the world's confidence in America's leadership, but the benefit for China will not be able to offset the even more significant damage he would impose on the relationship with China," she said.

Trump started off on the wrong foot with China when he took a congratulatory call on his 2016 election victory from the president of Taiwan, angering the government in Beijing, which opposes any official contact between Taiwan and foreign governments.

Relations appeared to get back on track in 2017, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Trump at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida in April and, six months later, hosted the U.S. president in Beijing with a dinner at the Forbidden City, the former imperial palace.

But in 2018, Trump started a trade war by imposing tariffs on Chinese imports. China retaliated with tariffs on U.S. goods, and the tariffs on both sides remain to this day.

The COVID-19 outbreak in China in 2020 pushed Trump's relationship with the country to the point of no return. As the virus spread to the United States, he tried to deflect criticism of his handling of the pandemic by blaming China, drawing strong rebukes from Beijing.

When Biden and Trump squared off in 2020, U.S. intelligence agencies reported before the election that China viewed Trump as "unpredictable" and opposed his reelection. A subsequent assessment issued months after the election said that China ultimately had not interfered on either side and "considered but did not deploy" influence operations intended to affect the outcome.

Experts say the Chinese also are unlikely to interfere with the U.S. presidential election this year, partly because they are unwilling and partly because they have yet to build up the capabilities. If Beijing is to interfere, it is more likely to try to discredit U.S. democracy, amplify partisan discord, and undermine faith in the election process, they say.

Once elected, Biden kept his predecessor's China policy. Not only did he keep the tariffs but Biden also limited access by Chinese companies to advanced technologies, sanctioned Chinese officials over human rights violations and expanded restrictions on China-bound U.S. monies.

Biden's secretary of state, Antony Blinken, in 2022 called China the "most serious long-term challenge to the international order."

Then in early 2023, tensions spiked again when the U.S. shot down a Chinese spy balloon. It took months of diplomacy to set up a meeting between Biden and Xi that resulted in some modest agreements and a vow to stabilize relations.

Miles Yu, director of the China center at the Hudson Institute, said the U.S. has come to a bipartisan agreement on China, with the two parties sharing "pretty much the same China policy." In response, China's ruling Communist Party has a new U.S. policy, he said.

"It doesn't matter if it's a black cat or a white cat, as long as it's an American cat, it's a bad cat," Yu said, borrowing from the famous saying by China's reformist politician Deng Xiaoping that encouraged market reforms regardless of ideology.

But several experts expressed a guarded preference for Biden because of his steadiness, which they say Beijing may appreciate in managing the already-fraught relations.

"Trump is by nature volatile and cruel and is a person hard to be familiar with," said Shi Yinhong, international relations professor at Renmin University of China. While Beijing can expect its relationship with Washington to stay the course if Biden is reelected, it may not wish to deal with Trump's hysteria toward China and possibly drastic changes if he returns to the White House, Shi said.

Wang Yiwei, director of the Institute of International Affairs at Renmin University of China, said Beijing is more worried about Trump's hostility toward globalization than Biden's worldwide efforts to build alliances. "We don't expect any one of them would be better for China, but the key (for China) is to continue its opening and reforms, and high-quality development," Wang said.

But Shi Sushi, a veteran commentator in Beijing, said it is easier for China to handle Trump, who just wants to cut a deal, than Biden, who has a values-based approach to governing.

"Biden's toughness is something few Chinese understand," Shi said. "He is an establishment politician. He is a defender of American values. He is engaged in 'friends-circle diplomacy' to form a circle of friends

that integrates the power of the West to (counter) China. From this point of view, I can bluntly say that Biden is more difficult to deal with.”

The RNC will meet privately after Trump allies pull resolution to call him the ‘presumptive nominee’

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

The Republican National Committee is meeting behind closed doors this week as some allies of Donald Trump had hoped to put the group’s stamp on the former president early in the 2024 GOP presidential nominating campaign.

But a proposed resolution to declare Trump the presumptive nominee has been removed from the agenda before the committee is scheduled to meet in Las Vegas this week, party officials said.

The reversal comes as the first two early-state contests have winnowed the Republican campaign down to two major candidates, with Trump as the heavy favorite and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley vowing to continue her uphill challenge.

What was expected to be an uneventful RNC winter meeting in Las Vegas this week briefly gained heightened attention last week after the resolution, introduced by Maryland Committeeman David Bossie, to name Trump the presumptive nominee became public.

Bossie was Trump’s deputy campaign manager in 2016 and advised his team when Congress pursued a second impeachment after the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Within hours of the resolution’s leak, Trump batted down the proposal, which some members of the committee criticized publicly as premature.

“While they have far more votes than necessary to do it, I feel, for the sake of PARTY UNITY, that they should NOT go forward with this plan,” Trump posted on his social media platform Truth Social.

There is no formal RNC rule barring the party from declaring a presumptive nominee. And there is precedent for such a move. In 2016, then-RNC Chairman Reince Priebus declared Trump the presumptive nominee after the Indiana primary, though that was in May and Trump had battled Texas Sen. Ted Cruz for three months since Cruz finished first in the leadoff Iowa caucuses ahead of second-place Trump.

The Associated Press only uses the term once a candidate has captured the number of delegates needed to win a majority vote at the national party conventions this summer.

That point won’t come until after more states have voted. For both Republicans and Democrats, the earliest it could happen is March.

Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel suggested last week that Haley had no path to the nomination in light of Trump’s majority vote totals in the Jan. 15 Iowa caucuses and the Jan. 23 New Hampshire primary.

“We need to unite around our eventual nominee, which is going to be Donald Trump, and we need to make sure we beat Joe Biden,” McDaniel said in a Fox News interview the night of the New Hampshire primary.

Haley said Sunday during an appearance on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that the RNC was “clearly not” an honest broker “if you’re going to go and basically tell the American people that you’re going to go and decide who the nominee is after only two states have voted.”

“The American people want to have their say in who is going to be their nominee,” she said. “We need to give them that. I mean, you can’t do that based on just two states.”

What happens to Olympic medals now that Russian skater Valieva has been sanctioned for doping?

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

The highest court in sports sanctioned Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva for doping violations at the 2022 Beijing Olympics. The ruling means U.S. skaters will receive gold medals after they finished second behind Valieva and her teammates in the team competition.

The case rocked the Olympics when, about 24 hours after she led Russia to the victory in the team event, details about a sample taken six weeks earlier at Russia's national championships revealed there was a banned heart medication in her system.

More than a half-dozen proceedings and appeals took place over the ensuing 23 months, culminating in Monday's decision by the Court of Arbitration for Sports, which is essentially the supreme court for international sports events.

A look at the case, and what happens next:

ABOUT THE MEDALS

Several hours after the CAS decision, the IOC notified the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee that the gold would be going to the U.S. skaters and that the two would coordinate to "organize a dignified Olympic medal ceremony."

What happens to silver and bronze is less certain. Japan finished third and would be in line to get the silver. Depending on how a scoring rule is interpreted, Russia could still finish third — ahead of Canada — even after deducting Valieva's points from the two events she skated in during the team event.

How and where the medals will be presented is still anyone's guess. Sometimes, national Olympic committees hold ceremonies in conjunction with big events in their countries to give the Olympians a feel of what it might have been like to receive those medals at the games themselves. Other times, the medals are handed out at international championships. Figure skating's next world championships are set for March 18-24 in Montreal.

Regardless, pretty much everyone agrees that athletes who get their medals months or years after the contest have been cheated out of not just their moment, but also any post-Olympics benefit, both financial and emotional, that comes from bringing home that medal in the days after they've won it.

"I think two years is too long for this decision to be made, and we may never know why it has taken this long," said U.S. ice dancer Evan Bates, who was on the team in Beijing, and who partnered with Madison Chock for their fifth U.S. title over the weekend. "We're just looking forward to getting some closure after a long waiting period."

VALIEVA'S FUTURE

In many circles, Valieva was seen as the most helpless victim. She was 15 when the positive test was discovered, and evidence pointed to people in her entourage who were giving her the drug trimetazidine, which can be administered to prevent angina attacks but is also known to increase blood flow efficiency and improve endurance.

Days after her case exploded, she skated in an error-filled free skate in the individual event and the reaction of her coach — "Why did you stop fighting? Explain it to me, why?" — was cringeworthy. Even IOC president Thomas Bach weighed in, saying her entourage showed "a tremendous coldness, it was chilling to see this."

Russia invaded Ukraine less than a week after the Olympics ended, and figure skating's international federation has since banned Russian skaters from its events. Valieva, who turns 18 in April, has skated in Russian national competitions, but is no longer considered the invincible force she was heading into Beijing.

It's not unheard of for world-class skaters to fall off the radar, then return to their former glory, though clearly there is more involved in Valieva's future — for instance, Russia's standing in international sports — than simply her ability and desire to return.

RUSSIA AND THE OLYMPICS

Technically, Valieva's case was not part of the doping scandal that has prevented Russia from competing

under its own flag at the Olympics since 2016. In 2022, Valieva was technically competing as a member of the "ROC" — short for Russian Olympic Committee, not for Russia itself — because of sanctions stemming from the state-sponsored doping scandal designed to help Russians win more medals at their home Olympics in Sochi in 2014.

But what the Valieva case exposed was the fact that, even 10 years after Sochi, things are still not back to "normal" in Russia.

The country's anti-doping agency remains noncompliant with World Anti-Doping Agency rules. And the fact that the CAS case was an appeal of a Russian anti-doping tribunal decision that would've awarded the gold medal to Valieva is a sign that Russia still isn't completely on the same page with international regulators.

The war in Ukraine has only added to the confusion.

Some sports, such as track, aren't allowing Russians to compete at this year's Paris Olympics under any circumstances. Others will allow them in, but only as "Individual Neutral Athletes" because of the war — a status not unlike what existed from 2016-22 because of the doping.

Ukraine's strikes on targets inside Russia hurt Putin's efforts to show the war isn't hitting home

By The Associated Press undefined

The wail of air raid sirens is commonplace in Belgorod, a Russian border city whose residents are on edge following a Ukrainian missile attack on a New Year's holiday weekend that left dozens of people dead and injured.

A spectacular explosion rocked a huge fuel export terminal on the Baltic Sea southwest of St. Petersburg this month from a Ukrainian drone, forcing the energy company Novatek to suspend operations for several days.

Last week, an apparent drone attack in the Black Sea port of Tuapse in the southern Krasnodar region hit one of Russia's largest refineries and ignited a fire, while another big refinery in the Volga River city of Yaroslavl, north of Moscow came under attack early Monday, but officials said there was no damage.

There also have been strikes on a gunpowder factory in the Tambov region and arms producers and military facilities in the Bryansk, Smolensk and Tula regions.

Attacks like these are dealing a heavy blow to President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely untouched by the nearly 2-year-old war.

"Ukraine has increased its capacity to strike back against Russia," Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment, said in a recent podcast.

"You see increased Ukrainian attacks against Russian critical infrastructure, retaliatory attacks against cities like Belgorod and greater strikes against Russian military base in Crimea," he said.

As Putin ramps up his campaign ahead of the presidential election in March, he wants to maintain an air of normalcy. But the increasingly frequent Ukrainian attacks have raised the visibility of the war on Russian soil, and there are other signs the conflict is increasingly challenging the Kremlin's tight control of the political scene.

Thousands across Russia have signed petitions supporting the longshot presidential bid of liberal politician Boris Nadezhdin, who has made ending the war his main campaign issue. Wives of some soldiers rounded up in a partial mobilization in 2022 have pushed for their discharge. And despite a tight ban on protests, hundreds rallied in Bashkortostan province, clashing with police to protest the jailing of a local activist.

Certainly the Dec. 30 strike on Belgorod marked a bloody escalation in the minds of many Russians. A barrage of missiles struck the city of 340,000, which is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the Ukrainian border, on a holiday weekend when people were out shopping, ice skating and watching New Year's festivities. Officials said 25 people were killed, including five children, and over 100 were injured.

Residents described seeing victims with horrific injuries and pools of blood staining the sidewalks. One resident told the RBC news outlet he saw a baby carriage hit by shrapnel, the bloodied parents lying next

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to it. A drug store clerk said injured pedestrians ran into his pharmacy, seeking help.

"I'm seeing requests on social networks from people who write: 'We are scared, please help us get to a safe place!'" said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov, adding that several hundred people were evacuated, including over 1,000 children heading to camps in neighboring regions.

Holiday and religious festivities were muted or canceled entirely.

The shelling damaged nearly 600 apartments and scores of private homes, and shrapnel peppered over 500 cars. Bus stops are being reinforced with concrete blocks and sandbags.

Residents say they flinch at any loud noise these days and are afraid to go outside. Schools in the city and near the border have switched to online classes until mid-February.

It's not the first time Belgorod has been touched by the war, with drone strikes and other attacks early in the conflict. In April 2023, a bomb accidentally released by a Russian warplane exploded in a street, gouging a huge crater and injuring two people.

On Jan. 24, the Defense Ministry said a military transport plane was shot down in the Belgorod region while carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war, killing all 74 people aboard. Although Russia has released what it called evidence that it said proved Ukrainian POWs were aboard, officials in Kyiv disputed it and instead blamed Moscow for trying to use the incident to hurt Ukrainian morale.

Putin said the Dec. 30 shelling of Belgorod left him "boiling with anger," describing it as an act of desperation by Kyiv following the failure of Ukraine's counteroffensive.

"They want to show their people and their sponsors who give them money, weapons and ammunition that they can retaliate against Russia's action," he said. "They want to show that they can also do something, but instead of fulfilling military tasks, they use barbaric methods and strike peaceful settlements with indiscriminate weapons."

Throughout the war, the Kremlin claims Russia has hit only military targets in Ukraine — despite widespread evidence to the contrary and heavy civilian casualties in places like Kyiv, Mariupol and Kharkiv.

Ukrainian officials rarely comment on strikes inside Russia but they emphasize their right to use all means to counter Moscow's aggression.

At a news conference in August, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia had launched over 6,500 missiles and 3,500 drones since the war began, most of them at civilian targets. In a New Year's address to the nation, he vowed: "The one who brings hell to our land will one day see it from their own window."

Russian hawks have pointed to Belgorod as a turning point for the Kremlin to raise the stakes in the war.

Alexander Dugin, a nationalist ideologue whose daughter was killed in a car bombing blamed on Ukraine in August 2022, argues that Russia should respond by escalating the fighting and declaring a broad mobilization.

"I would like to believe that Russia now will take off the white gloves and start fighting for real," he wrote. "Should we abide by the rules at a time when a gateway to hell opens? Our task for 2024 is to restructure the state and society to put it on military footing and throw all our resources to achieve victory."

Russian military bloggers note the challenges of spotting Ukrainian rocket launchers moving to positions under 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the border, emphasizing the need for better surveillance. Many lamented Russia's withdrawal from the area in September 2022 amid Kyiv's swift counteroffensive, arguing that more Ukrainian territory should be captured to secure Belgorod and other border regions.

With fighting largely frozen along the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line during winter, the missile and drone attacks inside Russia have demonstrated Ukraine's long-range strike capability that is stretching Moscow's security assets.

"Continued Ukrainian strikes in deep rear areas in Russia may thus increase pressure on Russia's air defenses overall," the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said in a recent analysis.

If this is Kyiv's plan, it's similar to what Russia did a year ago by targeting Ukraine's power grid in the hope that repairs would take time. In the end, Ukraine managed to get enough spare parts and make quick fixes so that Moscow's campaign failed. Now, it's Russia that needs to find a coping strategy.

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Sergey Vakulenko, an energy analyst at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said it could be challenging for Russian refineries to fix the damage quickly.

While Ukraine's small drones can't cause major destruction, he said "they can damage not just pipelines, but also compressors, valves, control units, and other pieces of equipment that are tricky to replace because of sanctions."

"If we are seeing the beginning of a wave of attacks on western Russia's oil refineries, the consequences will be serious," Vakulenko said in a commentary.

Biden to soak up sunshine and campaign cash in Florida trip

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will spend Tuesday raising money in Florida, a onetime swing state that has since become a Republican stronghold and the home turf of Republican front-runner Donald Trump.

One fundraiser is scheduled to take place in Jupiter, about a half hour north of Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort, and the other in Miami.

Biden has been buoyed by positive economic news as fears of a recession have faded. Now he's eager to stockpile campaign cash to help him promote his record and target Trump in what is expected to be a grueling and expensive election year.

Biden's campaign and the Democratic National Committee reported raising more than \$97 million in the final three months of last year.

Although Florida's wealthy donors make the state an important stop for Biden, it's unlikely to swing his way in November. President Barack Obama won Florida in 2008 and 2012, but Trump carried the state in 2016 and 2020.

In addition, Republicans routed Democrats in Florida in the 2022 midterm elections, when they won campaigns for governor, U.S. Senate and other statewide positions by about 20 percentage points across the board. Voter registration, which favored Democrats by 600,000 a little more than a decade ago, now shows Republicans with an 800,000-voter margin.

Florida's rightward lean reflects the arrival of retirees from the Midwest and Northeast who generally favor Republicans, but also the political preferences of the state's Latino population, which makes up 18% of its electorate.

AP VoteCast found that Biden won just 54% of the state's Latino voters in 2020, down substantially from his national average of 63%. He performed especially poorly among people of Cuban descent, who made up 5% of Florida's voters.

These lower margins among Latinos also resulted in Biden performing worse in some of the state's most populous and wealthiest counties compared to previous Democratic nominees. For example, Biden won Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties in 2020, but by lower margins than Hillary Clinton did in 2016.

Inflation is also much more of a challenge in Florida, where residents tend to drive more and the economy depends on tourism. Although consumer sentiment has improved and inflation has eased, higher prices have been a persistent weight on Biden's approval numbers. The consumer price index for the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach area jumped 5.7% in December from a year ago, compared to 3.4% nationally, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Kevin Wagner, a Florida Atlantic University political science professor who runs the Palm Beach County school's polling operation, said Biden has a chance in Florida given the high number of independents, who make up about a quarter of the electorate.

Wagner also said the inability of Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, Trump's former rival for the GOP nomination, and the Legislature to rein in the state's skyrocketing housing prices and insurance rates could cost the party votes.

"The issues people are focused on are going to be different, the candidates are going to be different" than 2022, he said. "The assumption that Florida will necessarily be an easy victory for Republicans is questionable."

Both Florida parties have been hit by infighting. The Republicans recently ousted their state party chair, Christian Ziegler, after he got caught up in a sex scandal.

"President Biden can keep visiting Florida all he wants, but I hope while he is here he learns from the policies here that are working. We look forward to retiring him and his failed administration in November," the party's new chair, Evan Power, said in a statement.

The state Democratic Party has long been plagued by disorganization. After the 2020 election, party employees learned that their medical insurance had not been paid, leaving them uncovered and some with significant doctor bills.

Former state agriculture commissioner Nikki Fried was elected party chair last year in response to the 2022 trouncing. Fried is the only Democrat to win a statewide race in the last decade when she won in 2018, but so far hasn't been able to stem the party's voter registration slide.

Fried said she believes Biden will win Florida this year. Proposals that would restrict abortion and legalize marijuana could be on the ballot, driving up turnout among Democrats and left-leaning independents.

"Florida is in play and is worth fighting for," Fried said.

US to receive gold medals in wake of figure skater Valieva's Olympic DQ

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

Members of the U.S. Olympic figure skating team learned late Monday they will receive gold medals now that Russian skater Kamila Valieva has been disqualified for doping at the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee received word that the IOC would award the gold to the U.S. for the team competition, which was thrown into turmoil after Valieva's positive test from six weeks before the competition was revealed.

The Associated Press obtained a copy of an email sent from the IOC to the USOPC saying it "is now in position to award the medals in accordance with the ranking, which has to be established by the International Skating Union" — the federation in charge of running the event at the Olympics.

The USOPC confirmed that CEO Sarah Hirshland had received the news that the Americans were declared the winners.

The IOC said it had "great sympathy with the athletes who have had to wait for two years to get the final results of their competition. The IOC will contact the respective (national Olympic committees) in order to organize a dignified Olympic medal ceremony."

Still uncertain is how Valieva's disqualification will affect the silver and bronze medals. Japan finished third and is likely to move to second. Depending on how a scoring rule is interpreted, Russia could still finish third — ahead of Canada — even after deducting Valieva's points from the two events she skated in during the team event.

The Americans to receive the gold medals are Evan Bates, Karen Chen, Nathan Chen, Madison Chock, Zachary Donohue, Brandon Frazier, Madison Hubbell, Alexa Knierim and Vincent Zhou.

It has been a long two years for all involved. Last summer, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Museum marked the 500-day milestone since the Olympics by displaying the empty boxes the skaters received that were supposed to contain medals that were not handed out in Beijing.

Over the weekend, Chock and Bates won their fifth U.S. title and were asked about the pending decision.

"I think two years is too long for this decision to be made, and we may never know why it has taken this long," Bates said. "We're just looking forward to getting some closure after a long waiting period."

There was no immediate word on where a medals ceremony might take place. The USOPC said it was starting the process of finding a suitable time and place to award its skaters the gold. Skating's world championships are in Montreal in March.

Valieva will end up empty-handed. The decision earlier in the day by the Court of Arbitration for Sport banned the Russian for four years dating back to Dec. 25, 2021 — the date of the positive test. The sanction vacates Valieva's results after that date; it will end about two months before the next Winter Games

in Italy.

Russian authorities criticized the ruling.

"Of course, we don't agree with this. From my point of view, of course, it's politicized," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

The IOC decided against having a medals ceremony in Beijing, where Valieva, who was 15 at the time, was the star performer only hours before her positive test for a banned heart medicine was revealed.

The case triggered legal chaos, in part because her sample had been taken six weeks earlier at the Russian championships but was not reported as a positive test until Feb. 7, 2022.

Multiple appeals and hearings ensued and have been ongoing for the nearly two years since the Olympics. A Russian sports tribunal had cleared Valieva of any blame because she was a minor. The CAS upheld appeals led by the World Anti-Doping Agency, which asked the court to disqualify Valieva from the Olympics and ban her.

The judges decided that, according to Russian anti-doping rules, Valieva could not get leniency for having been a minor at the time of the positive test.

There was "no basis under the rules to treat them any differently from an adult athlete," said the court, which did not publish its detailed verdict pending a review of confidentiality issues.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, the international skating federation barred Russians from international competitions. Valieva, who turns 18 in April, has skated on an expanded Russian national circuit and in TV events and ice shows. But she has twice been beaten by younger Russians from the training group run by her coach, Eteri Tutberidze.

Enemy drone that killed US troops in Jordan was mistaken for a US drone, preliminary report suggests

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, AMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. forces may have mistaken an enemy drone for an American one and let it pass unchallenged into a desert base in Jordan where it killed three U.S. troops and wounded dozens more, officials said Monday.

Details of the Sunday attack emerged as President Joe Biden faced a difficult balancing act, blaming Iran and looking to strike back in a forceful way without causing any further escalation of the Gaza conflict.

As the enemy drone was flying in at a low altitude, a U.S. drone was returning to the small installation known as Tower 22, according to a preliminary report cited by two officials, who were not authorized to comment and insisted on anonymity,

As a result, there was no effort to shoot down the enemy drone that hit the outpost. One of the trailers where troops sleep sustained the brunt of the strike, while surrounding trailers got limited damage from the blast and flying debris. While there are no large air defense systems at Tower 22, the base does have counter-drone systems, such as Coyote drone interceptors.

Aside from the soldiers killed, the Pentagon said more than 40 troops were wounded in the attack, most with cuts, bruises, brain injuries and similar wounds. Eight were medically evacuated, including three who were going to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. The other five, who suffered "minor traumatic brain injuries," were expected to return to duty.

Asked if the failure to shoot down the enemy drone was "human error," Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh responded that the U.S. Central Command was still assessing the matter.

The Pentagon identified those killed in the attack as Sgt. William Jerome Rivers, 46, of Carrollton, Georgia; Spc. Kennedy Ladon Sanders, 24, of Waycross, Georgia; and Spc. Breonna Alexsondria Moffett, 23, of Savannah, Georgia.

The three U.S. Army Reserve soldiers were assigned to the 718th Engineer Company, 926th Engineer Battalion, 926th Engineer Brigade in Fort Moore, Georgia.

The explanation for how the enemy drone evaded U.S. air defenses came as the White House said Mon-

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day it's not looking for war with Iran even as Biden vows retaliatory action. The Democratic administration believes Tehran was behind the strike.

Biden met with national security advisers in the White House Situation Room to discuss the latest developments and potential retaliation.

"There's no easy answer here," said National Security Council spokesman John Kirby. "And that's why the president is meeting with his national security team weighing the options before him."

The brazen attack, which the Biden administration blames on Iranian-based proxies, adds another layer of complexity to an already tense Mideast situation as the Biden administration tries to keep the Israel-Hamas war from expanding into a broader regional conflict.

"The president and I will not tolerate attacks on U.S. forces, and we will take all necessary actions to defend the U.S. and our troops," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said as he met at the Pentagon with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

The drone attack was one of dozens on U.S. troops in the Middle East since Hamas launched attacks on Israel on Oct. 7, igniting the war in Gaza. But it's the first in which American service members have been killed.

Biden promised on Sunday to "hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner (of) our choosing" but said the U.S. wasn't seeking to get into another conflict in the Middle East.

Kirby also made clear that American patience has worn thin after more than two months of attacks by Iranian proxies on U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria and Jordan and on U.S. Navy and commercial vessels in the Red Sea. The proxy groups — including Yemen's Houthi rebels and Iraq based Kataeb Hezbollah — say the attacks are in response to Israel's ongoing military operations in Gaza.

"We are not looking for a war with Iran," Kirby told reporters. "That said, this was a very serious attack. It had lethal consequences. We will respond, and we respond appropriately."

Iran on Monday denied it was behind the Jordan strike.

"These claims are made with specific political goals to reverse the realities of the region," Iran's state-run IRNA news agency quoted foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani as saying. Iran regularly denies involvement in attacks linked back to it through the militias it arms across the wider Mideast.

Kirby said that U.S. officials are still working through determining which militant group was behind the attack. He noted that Iran has longed equipped and trained the militias.

Republicans have laid blame on Biden for doing too little to deter Iranian militias, which have carried out approximately 165 attacks on U.S. troops in the region since the start of the war.

Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump on Sunday called the attack "yet another horrific and tragic consequence of Joe Biden's weakness and surrender."

The attack hit a U.S. military desert outpost in the far reaches of northeastern Jordan known as Tower 22. The installation sits near the demilitarized zone on the border between Jordan and Syria along a sandy, bulldozed berm marking the DMZ's southern edge. The Iraqi border is only 10 kilometers (6 miles) away.

The base began as a Jordanian outpost watching the border, then saw an increased U.S. presence after American forces entered Syria in late 2015. The small installation includes U.S. engineering, aviation, logistics and security troops, with about 350 U.S. Army and Air Force personnel deployed.

Iraq's government condemned the drone strike. Spokesman Bassem al-Awadi said in a statement that Iraq was "monitoring with a great concern the alarming security developments in the region" and called for "an end to the cycle of violence." The statement said that Iraq is ready to participate in diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation.

An umbrella group for Iran-backed factions known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed dozens of attacks against bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria since the Israel-Hamas war began. On Sunday, the group claimed three drone attacks against sites in Syria, including near the border with Jordan, and one inside of "occupied Palestine" but so far hasn't claimed the attack in Jordan.

John Bolton, who served as national security adviser to Trump, said Iran hasn't paid a price for the havoc that its proxies have unleashed in the region. He suggested the Biden administration could send a strong

message to Tehran with strikes on Iranian vessels in the Red Sea, Iranian air defenses along the Iraqi border, and bases that have been used to train and supply militant groups for years.

"So until Iran bears a cost, you're not going to reestablish deterrence, you're not going to put the beligerence on a downward slope."

The attack came as U.S. officials were seeing signs of progress in negotiations to broker a deal between Israel and Hamas to release the more than 100 remaining hostages being held in Gaza in exchange for an extended pause in fighting. While contours of a deal under consideration would not end the war, Americans believed that it could lay the groundwork for a durable resolution to the conflict.

Qatar's prime minister said Monday that senior U.S. and Mideast mediators had achieved a framework proposal to present to Hamas for freeing hostages and pausing fighting in Gaza.

Prime Minister Mohammed al-Thani's comments at the Atlantic Council in Washington came after talks Sunday in Paris among U.S., Israeli, Qatari and Egyptian officials seeking a new round of hostage releases and a cease-fire in Gaza.

What is Tower 22, the military base that was attacked in Jordan where 3 US troops were killed?

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A little-discussed United States military desert outpost in the far reaches of north-eastern Jordan has become the focus of international attention after a drone attack killed three American troops and injured at least 34 others there.

The base, known as Tower 22, sits near the demilitarized zone on the border between Jordan and Syria along a sandy, bulldozed berm marking the DMZ's southern edge. The Iraqi border is only 10 kilometers (6 miles) away.

The area is known as Rukban, a vast arid region that once saw a refugee camp spring up on the Syrian side over the rise of the Islamic State group's so-called caliphate in 2014.

At its height, over 100,000 people lived there, blocked by Jordan from coming across into the kingdom at the time over concerns about infiltration by the extremist group. Those concerns grew out of a 2016 car bomb attack there that killed seven Jordanian border guards

The camp has dwindled in the time since to some 7,500 people because of a lack of supplies reaching there, according to United Nations estimates.

The base began as a Jordanian outpost watching the border, then saw an increased U.S. presence there after American forces entered Syria in late 2015. The small installation includes U.S. engineering, aviation, logistics and security troops with about 350 U.S. Army and Air Force personnel deployed there.

The base's location offers a site for American forces to infiltrate and quietly leave Syria. A small American garrison at al-Tanf in Syria is just 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of Tower 22. That base is along a Syrian highway leading into Iraq and ultimately Mosul, once a prominent base of the Islamic State group. It's also a potential weapons shipment route over the road for Iran.

U.S. troops long have used Jordan, a kingdom bordering Iraq, Israel, the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, Saudi Arabia and Syria, as a basing point. Some 3,000 American troops typically are stationed across Jordan.

However, the U.S. presence in Jordan risks angering a population that's already held mass demonstrations against Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip over civilian casualties in a conflict that's already killed over 26,000 Palestinians. Estimates suggest some 3 million of Jordan's 11.5 million people are Palestinian.

Widespread unrest could threaten the rule of King Abdullah II, a key American ally. Jordan initially denied the Tower 22 base existed within its border after the attack Sunday.

Bullfighting resumes in Mexico City before a full crowd while activists protest outside

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — With protesters outside a full arena, bullfights resumed in Mexico City on Sunday after the country's highest court temporarily revoked a local ruling that sided with animal rights defenders and suspended the events for more than a year and a half.

The resumption of bullfights in the Plaza México, the largest bullfighting arena in the world, raised expectations of fans in the face of a lengthy legal battle between enthusiasts and opponents, who argue the practice violates animal welfare and affects people's rights to a healthy environment.

Bullfighting is still allowed in much of Mexico. In the capital, the legal fight for its future is full of twists and turns.

The first bullfighter to enter the ring was the renowned Mexican matador Joselito Adame, with thousands of people cheering the return of "fiesta brava," as bullfighting is also known in Spanish. "Long live freedom," some shouted as the first bull entered an arena jammed with spectators.

In all, six bulls were fought Sunday, and all were killed.

Outside, hours before the formal beginning, about 300 people gathered in front of Plaza México to protest against bullfights. Some activists yelled "Murderers!" and "The plaza is going to fall!" while others played drums or stood with signs reading "Bullfighting is sadism."

Police with shields stood by. The protest was mainly peaceful, although there were some moments of tension when some activists threw plastic bottles and stones.

"Why the bullfights were allowed to return when there is so much evidence of all the damage they do to a living being, such as the bull," questioned activist Guillermo Sánchez, who was holding up a sign that read "Sadism disguised as culture, sport and tradition."

Alfredo Barraza, another protester, said allowing bullfighting is a "setback in the fight for animal rights." Barraza, who had his face covered with a paper mask in the shape of a bull, said he hopes Mexico City will at some point "be free of violent spectacles."

Inside the Plaza, the mood was festive, with people eating, drinking and taking photos.

"I'm very excited," said Aldo Palacios, who brought his two children and other relatives to the arena, not only to see the inaugural bullfight, but also to celebrate his 42nd birthday.

In May 2022, a local court ordered an end to bullfighting activities at Plaza México in response to an injunction presented by the civil organization Justicia Justa, which defends human rights. But the activities were set to resume Sunday because the nation's Supreme Court of Justice in December revoked the suspension while the merits of the case are discussed and a decision is reached on whether bullfights affect animal welfare.

Another civil organization filed an appeal Friday on animal welfare grounds in a last-ditch effort to prevent the activity from resuming. A ruling was not expected before Sunday's event.

Animal rights groups have been gaining ground in Mexico in recent years while bullfighting followers have suffered several setbacks. In some states such as Sinaloa, Guerrero, Coahuila, Quintana Roo and the western city of Guadalajara, judicial measures now limit the activity.

Ranchers, businessmen and fans maintain that the ban on bullfights affects their rights and puts at risk several thousand jobs linked to the activity, which they say generates about \$400 million a year in Mexico. The National Association of Fighting Bull Breeders in Mexico estimates that bullfighting is responsible for 80,000 direct jobs and 146,000 indirect jobs.

The association has hosted events and workshops in recent years to promote bullfights and find new, younger fans.

Israel military operation destroys a Gaza cemetery. Israel says Hamas used the site to hide a tunnel

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Islamic cemetery in southern Gaza was demolished, graves ex-cised from the earth. A skull with no teeth rested atop the sandy, churned rubble.

The neighborhood of Bani Suheila in the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, which soldiers showed foreign journalists Saturday, was obliterated, transformed by the military's search for underground Hamas tunnels. An Associated Press journalist saw a destroyed mosque and — where the cemetery had once been — a 140-meter-(yard)-wide pit that gave way to what the army called a Hamas attack tunnel under-neath. The military said Monday that combat engineers had demolished part of the network, releasing a video showing massive explosions in the area.

As Israel moves forward with a ground and air campaign in Gaza that health officials in the besieged enclave say has claimed over 26,000 Palestinian lives, the military's destruction of holy sites has drawn staunch criticism from Palestinians and rights groups, who say the offensive is also an assault on cultural heritage. Under international law, cemeteries and religious sites receive special protection — and destroy-ing them could be considered a war crime.

Israel says Hamas uses such sites as military cover, removing them of these protections. It says there is no way to accomplish its military goal of defeating Hamas without finding the tunnels, where they say the militants have built command and control centers, transported weapons and hidden some of the 130 hostages it is believed to be holding. They say digging up the tunnels involves unavoidable collateral dam-age to sacrosanct spaces.

"We're not naive anymore," said Israeli Brig. Gen. Dan Goldfus, who led journalists around the site Sat-urday.

Israel has made similar arguments in operations in and around Gaza hospitals.

Goldfus brought journalists inside a tunnel shaft he said stretched underneath the mosque and the cemetery. The journalists walked down a long concrete tunnel that branched in multiple directions and arrived at a small collection of rooms soldiers alleged were used by Hamas militants as a command and control center.

It included three domed rooms — one with four chairs, one with a desk, and a kitchen with empty cans of beans and a spice rack. A military commander said the tunnel, which contained a power transformer, fans, piping with wires and light switches, stretched 800 meters (yards) and was connected to a larger tunnel network in southern Gaza.

The army says it has found similar warrens of rooms in tunnels all over the Gaza Strip. It alleged the quarters shown to journalists Saturday included the office of a Hamas commander, an operations room, and living quarters for senior members of Hamas. It said the tunnel was used to plan attacks against the military.

The demolished cemetery, according to a satellite analysis, appears to have been the Shuhadaa Bani Suheila graveyard.

Since Israel declared war against Hamas on Oct. 7, it has repeatedly accused the Islamic militant group of using Gaza's civilian sites as cover for military use. It says that military operations — from raiding hospitals to digging up cemeteries and destroying holy sites — are necessary to dismantle the militants' command centers and bunkers.

On Oct. 7, Hamas militants poured into southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and dragging some 250 hostages back to Gaza. Over 100 hostages were exchanged for Palestinian prisoners during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Israel's retaliatory offensive on Gaza has displaced most of the 2.3 million population. According to a U.N. monitor, the military has damaged 161 mosques in the course of its operations. The agency said it has not tracked the number of cemeteries that were damaged.

On Saturday, Goldfus swept his gloved hand across the moonscape surrounding him. The golden dome

of the mosque was cracked and off-kilter, slumping down onto its shattered walls.

Goldfus said that Israeli forces destroyed the mosque after militants fired at them from within its grounds. Footage circulated on Israeli media showed soldiers using explosives to blow out the mosque's first floor walls, collapsing it.

UNESCO has called on both Hamas and Israel to refrain from attacking culturally important sites.

Under the Rome Statute, the 1998 treaty that established the International Criminal Court, cemeteries and mosques receive special protection as "civilian property." The destruction of these sites can be considered a war crime, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Israel argues the sites lose their protection when they are used for military purposes, and when the operational gain from targeting them outweighs the loss of civilian life and infrastructure.

Goldfus said that forces had found other traces of Hamas activity in the area, from confiscated AK-47s to a map of the border between Gaza and Israel that he said Hamas might have used for the Oct. 7 attack.

He said destroying the mosque and digging up the cemetery was integral to locating some 60 tunnel shafts in the area. The journalists were shown only one shaft.

Dismantling the tunnel network, Goldfus said, posed a "riddle" to forces. He said it is difficult to operate in the area without harming sacred sites and even human remains.

"We try to move them aside as much as possible," he said when asked about the excavated bodies. "But remember, when we are fighting in this place, and your enemy is flanking you again and again and again, and using these compounds to hide in, there's not much you can do."

Nikki Haley's dilemma in South Carolina: winning over voters who like her, but love Trump

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

CONWAY, S.C. (AP) — For South Carolina's conservatives, deciding whether Nikki Haley's record warrants a promotion to the Oval Office seems less about her experience and abilities and more about the man standing in her way: Donald Trump.

"Ms. Haley did some fine things as governor — but Donald Trump is the man!" declared Doug Roberts, a retired electrician who came to a recent Haley rally wearing a Trump T-shirt. "Donald Trump is just not a regular man."

Haley, Trump's last major Republican rival, faces a make-or-break stretch ahead of South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary that could be Trump's last obstacle to a third consecutive Republican nomination. While Haley has talked about her comfort running in her home state, interviews with almost two dozen South Carolina Republicans since the New Hampshire primary suggest Haley is struggling to win over conservatives who backed her twice for governor but haven't soured on Trump for president.

Debra Weiss, a 66-year-old from heavily Republican Myrtle Beach, demonstrates Haley's difficult path. Sitting among the 1,500 or so who heard Haley on Sunday at Coastal Carolina University, Weiss lauded the candidate as a "true conservative" and dismissed Trump's quips that Haley is a Democratic stand-in. Weiss criticized Trump's rhetoric generally but said she is not concerned Trump could become a convicted felon.

Most critically for Haley, though, Weiss remains undecided.

"I wonder if Nikki would have more sway in Washington without all his baggage. I want to see whether she is strong enough. We know Donald Trump is strong," Weiss said. "I hope Nikki can do it, make it close. ... But I do still love Trump."

The winner of South Carolina's Republican primary has won the nomination all but one time since 1980. This year's contest is an unusual one-on-one matchup between a former president and a generally popular home-state figure.

Both were once launched by the same conservative primary electorate. Haley, as a state legislator in 2010, trounced older, more established candidates in a Republican primary on her way to winning two gubernatorial elections. In 2016, Trump swept South Carolina's 50 delegates after closer outcomes in Iowa and New Hampshire. It was his springboard to a dominating Super Tuesday performance that gave him

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an insurmountable delegate lead.

On paper, South Carolina offers the broad Republican coalition Haley has sought. It has a larger presidential primary electorate than other early nominating states; turnout was 740,000 in 2016 — almost 200,000 more than Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada combined. South Carolina has a large presence of every Republican faction: evangelicals and social conservatives; anti-tax Tea Party activists; national security hawks; business-minded traditionalists.

But Trump's campaign remains confident of another victory, with his top advisers releasing a memo Monday to supporters and media predicting a "humiliation at home" for Haley.

The pressure to convert Trump voters was evident in Haley's first South Carolina campaign swing since outlasting Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and finishing second in New Hampshire.

At two weekend rallies, Haley attacked Trump as too old, calling him "the other 80-year-old" in the race besides 81-year-old President Joe Biden. (Trump is actually 77.) She said Trump is too embroiled in "chaos and drama."

She insisted she doesn't "keep up with" Trump's legal travails but slipped in references to "four cases and ... 91 charges." She mocked him for throwing "a temper tantrum" because she has not yet dropped out and urged him again to join her on a debate stage. She hammered him as vengeful for threatening to punish anyone who supports her: "You can't be president of the United States and not serve everyone."

The bulk of her 45-minute speech, though, mixed conservative domestic policy ideas with tough national security talk and highlights of her South Carolina record, especially in recruiting business.

"By the time I left, they called us the 'beast of the Southeast,'" she said, pausing for hearty applause.

Her supporters appreciate the carefully crafted message.

"She has been the most articulate candidate in this campaign," Ralph Carter, a Southern Baptist pastor in Greer, said before a rally outside Greenville.

Carter backed Trump in 2016 and 2020. He said he knew "both times" that Trump did not reflect his personal values, but Carter said he wanted a Republican administration. The Jan. 6 insurrection, he said, was a breaking point. Carter declined to speculate what he would do this November if Trump is nominated again; he said Haley offers Republicans the obvious solution to avoid that choice.

For Daniel Schroder, a 38-year-old father of three, "It's about character." As his family stood along a barrier to meet Haley, Schroder called Trump "bad for democracy" and said Haley "wants to have actual dialogue and debate."

Haley insists South Carolina is not a must-win but another steppingstone from her nearly 20% share in Iowa and 43% share in New Hampshire — finishes that she noted have her at 17 delegates, compared to Trump's 32, with 1,215 required to win the nomination.

"This is a long way from over," she said over the weekend in her first campaign swing back home since outlasting Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and narrowing Trump's lead in New Hampshire.

But her backers understand the stakes.

"As a traditional Republican, we just have to stop Trump here," said Michael Gardner, a 54-year-old engineer from Anderson. "I've never even come to political events before like this but I'm in. I'm giving it right back to Trump friends and talking to everybody I can."

Gardner said his only convert so far has been his wife, a Democrat. Said Schroder: "Most of my friends, most of my family are still with Trump."

Beyond her range of supporters, Haley also must navigate polar factions Trump generates among potential Republican primary voters.

"I'm sure she's a lovely person, but she seems like another puppet on a string," said Michele Kuzma, a 60-year-old retiree who moved from New Jersey after Haley's tenure as governor. In an interview, Kuzma repeated conspiracy theories and far-right claims that Haley's campaign is "paid for by the Democrats."

Victor Morgan, a 41-year-old independent, said he wants to vote for Haley but only if she goes more directly at Trump. South Carolina voters do not register by party and choose which major party primary to participate in each election cycle.

He loosely quoted Trump on the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape released in the last weeks of the

2016 general election, saying, "I want her to grab him by the crotch."

"I want her to give him back everything he's been giving out," Morgan said.

One attendee at a Haley event — a participant in the insurrection — explained why she thinks Haley ultimately holds back.

Pam Hemphill served a federal prison term for her part in the insurrection. She has since recanted her views and come out against Trump. She waited alongside the stage Sunday to ask Haley whether she would pardon participants in the Jan. 6 Capitol attack.

Hemphill said Haley initially avoided her question. So, Hemphill waited and asked again. "That time she said clearly, 'No,' she wouldn't pardon them," Hemphill said.

Asked about Hemphill's account, a Haley aide pointed to a recent interview with NBC News and the Des Moines Register in which Haley distinguished between those who did not breach the Capitol and rioters like Hemphill who did.

"The ones that went in, the ones that broke the law, those are the ones — you have to hold them accountable," Haley said. "You have to make sure they pay the price."

Hemphill said she understands why Haley typically takes such stands only when asked — and not in her prepared speeches or paid campaign advertisements.

"It would hurt her with Trump voters," Hemphill said. "She needs them."

At trendy Japanese cafés, customers enjoy cuddling with pigs

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — First there were cafés that allowed pets. Then came cat cafés, where lattes took second place to feline interaction. The latest craze in Japan: The pig café.

"It was wonderful. Very relaxing and enjoyable," said Brad Loomis, a software engineer from Pullman, Washington, after visiting Tokyo's Mipig Café with his 21-year-old daughter, Paige.

They were among dozens of customers on a recent morning, taking selfies and breaking into huge smiles. The pigs, a miniature breed, trotted about the room, looking for a cozy lap to cuddle up.

The pigs are surprisingly quiet, although they do snort now and then. They don't like to be alone, making for great companionship. Unlike the stereotype, they're very clean and don't smell.

Customers pay 2,200 yen (\$15) for the first 30 minutes in the company of the pigs. A reservation is required.

"Each pig is unique. Each one has his or her own personality. You may notice one may be strong-headed, and another may be gentle," said Shiho Kitagawa, an executive at Mipig who refers to the pigs as "butasan," using an honorific.

The Mipig Café in fashionable Harajuku is among 10 such pig cafes the operator has opened around Japan. The first one opened in Tokyo in 2019. Two more are in the works for later this year.

The animals, known as "micro pigs," don't get bigger than a corgi dog, even as adults. The cafés also feature adorable baby pigs the size of toy poodles.

Pig lovers say they make great pets. They can be purchased for about 200,000 yen (\$1,350) from Mipig, have already been toilet-trained and are used to being with people. Micro pig food is also for sale. Mipig says it has sold 1,300 pigs as pets.

A drink dispensing machine is in the corner of the café, but hardly anyone was bothering to get a drink, being too occupied with the pigs.

Foreign tourists visiting the café said they found out about it on Instagram and other social media. The café does not invest in advertising. They made sure to include a visit during their trip to Japan, along with the usual tourist spots like the ancient capital of Kyoto, they said.

Australian Ben Russell smiled when a pig finally climbed into his lap. Although this was his first encounter with a real pig, they have always been his favorite animal, he said, although he wasn't sure exactly why.

Sophie Mo'unga from New Zealand, in Japan with her husband and two children, was a big hit with the pigs, with several of them fighting over her lap.

"They were cute. I think they were all keeping each other warm," she said.

The pig café is the latest in a series of animal coffee shops that have popped up in Japan, including ones that feature owls, hedgehogs, birds and even snakes.

Some people have raised ethical questions about whether the animals enjoy the experience as much as the humans.

"It must be stressful to be touched and fondled by a bunch of strangers," said Sachiko Azuma, head of Tokyo-based PEACE, which stands for Put an End to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation.

"The animals have become tools for a money-making business," she said.

Her group mainly opposes animal experiments and "petting zoos." Cafés tend to be tiny and don't provide enough of a natural environment for cats or small pigs, and those that entrap wildlife are abhorrent, Azuma said. She approves of cafés run by shelters trying to find owners for abandoned pets.

Dr. Bruce Kornreich, professor of clinical sciences at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca, N.Y., said interacting with animals can lower one's blood pressure and reduce headaches and the risk of cardiovascular disease. It also enhances a sense of well-being and helps people cope with stress, he said.

"How they do these things, I'm not sure we know the answer," said Kornreich, who is also part of the Cornell Feline Health Center, which advocates the study and well-being of cats.

"There is mounting evidence that associating with and owning pets can provide mental health and physical health benefits for people," he said in a Zoom interview.

Even with dogs, it's not clear if it's walking the dog that helps the owner's health or being in the presence of a friendly animal.

Whatever it is, with dogs or pigs, people are soothed and happy.

"Very cute and very sleepy," Paige Loomis said of the pigs. "They made me sleepy."

Under bombing in eastern Ukraine and disabled by illness, an unknown painter awaits his fate

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine (AP) — Mykola Soloviov, 88, is a painter the world does not know. His landscapes of eastern Ukraine, records of a lost time, lie tucked away in a modest home under threat of Russian attack.

Soloviov can't hear or walk and barely speaks. Disabled since a 2017 stroke, he spends his days bedridden in an apartment in Sloviansk, a city 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the front line in the region of Donetsk.

Waves of Russian missile attacks have continued to pound civilian areas across Ukraine as the war approaches its second anniversary next month, killing scores of Ukrainian civilians, often in their own homes. Eastern Ukraine, where troops live among the civilian population, is often hit the hardest.

But his wife, Liudymla, doesn't want Mykola and his paintings to die in anonymity. She wants the world to know he's not just another civilian caught in the middle of a war.

From the sofa where he lies motionless for much of the day, Mykola's lively eyes are fixed on the window, his only view into the changing world he can no longer comprehend.

He'd paint the same scenes again and again. "It's not about what you paint, it's about how you paint it," he used to tell his wife when she asked why.

Employed for much of his life as a painter in a factory, Mykola would spend hours by the window, gazing at the view and producing his works. Liudymla, 78, held up a painting of that view: expertly layered soft colors bring out the purity of fresh winter snow.

On Saturday, the window was a hole framed by shattered glass, showing emergency crews cleaning up debris from the kindergarten across the yard. Men in military fatigues picked their way across ground pockmarked by artillery craters and covered in debris left in the wake of a Russian air attack.

Earlier that day, a Russian Iskander missile hit a ceramics workshop a few meters away from the Soloviovs' home, leveling it and shattering their windows.

The blast jolted Liudymla awake, who ran to her paralyzed husband's side and covered him with blankets

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as bitterly cold air wafted in.

"How can I feel? There is no joy in my life," she said. "We are living on needles." Her mind is occupied with all the things she must do for her husband. "I already changed (the blankets) and cooked for him, but it is cold inside my house."

Sloviansk was never a luxurious place but it had allowed the couple to build a life. Both were the children of parents who moved to the city, known for its factories and riverside resorts, looking for work. Mykola's family came from Russia, and Liudmyla's from western Ukraine. When she was 16, she helped her father build them a house, making cinder blocks and planing boards after school.

On Saturday, she watched as workers sliced wooden boards to cover the holes left when the Russian attack shattered windows in dozens of apartments.

The Associated Press asked her about the explosion, but she changed the subject back to her husband's paintings.

Liudmyla leafs through an old photo album containing images of Mykola's paintings, the closest thing he has to an artist's monograph, and then brings out a few of the originals she's packed away for safe-keeping.

The paintings are unknown in Sloviansk, let alone the world. An old newspaper clipping contains a short article, describing a gallery of 60 of his works "charming" and "cleverly composed."

Occasionally Mykola glances at her holding up his paintings, his face brightening.

"He has been drawing since childhood," she said, "but stopped when he got sick."

Soloviov often returned to the banks of the Kazenny Torets River to capture the changing seasons. "He was painting this river all the time, in summer, winter," Liudmyla said, her voice trailing off.

Mykola never aimed for realism, but his paintings captured the feeling of the pastoral landscapes, waterways and abundant greenery that defined Sloviansk's landscape before the war. His loose and fluid brush work convey vibrancy and nostalgia for the passing seasons; vivid colors show his deep attachment to the land.

In 2014, Sloviansk was a flashpoint in the war against Russia's invasion and one of the first cities to be seized by Moscow's forces. Liudmyla's sister was badly wounded by shrapnel during the fighting, dying of complications four years later.

By the time of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Mykola was too sick to be moved. His family, including his 49-year-old son Vitallii, stayed in Sloviansk, despite rapidly deteriorating conditions.

"There are places to go, for example, to western Ukraine or the Vinnytsia region, where my cousin lives," Liudmyla said, "but it is very problematic because he cannot move around on his own. And now I don't know what to do and where to go."

In recent months a missile strike destroyed Vitallii's home and he moved in with his parents.

"I will never leave my father," he said, rolling cigarettes in the kitchen. "No matter the bombs."

Outside, the screech of a saw cutting wood rang out. Her neighbors were still in line, waiting for their turn to seal off their homes from the elements.

Internet searches yield no results for Mykola's name, or his art, but Liudmyla preserves his paintings and his clippings as though they were important historical documents.

Just then, Vitallii tells her the heating system is damaged.

"One problem after another," she sighs.

Soloviov has not uttered a word throughout the interview. His shriveled hand motions for the blanket, but his gaze is fixed on that window.

Dissolving Trump's business empire would stand apart in history of NY fraud law

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Within days, Donald Trump could potentially have his sprawling real estate business empire ordered "dissolved" for repeated misrepresentations on financial statements to lenders, adding him to a short list of scam marketers, con artists and others who have been hit with the ultimate punishment

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for violating New York's powerful anti-fraud law.

An Associated Press analysis of nearly 70 years of civil cases under the law showed that such a penalty has only been imposed a dozen previous times, and Trump's case stands apart in a significant way: It's the only big business found that was threatened with a shutdown without a showing of obvious victims and major losses.

Lawyers for the state in Trump's monthslong civil trial have argued that the principles of fair play in business alone are enough to justify a harsh penalty, but even they aren't calling for the prospect of liquidation of his businesses and properties raised by a judge. And some legal experts worry that if the judge goes out of his way to punish the former president with that worst-case scenario, it could make it easier for courts to wipe out companies in the future.

"This is a basically a death penalty for a business," said Columbia University law professor Eric Talley. "Is he getting his just desserts because of the fraud, or because people don't like him?"

AP's review of nearly 150 reported cases since New York's "repeated fraud" statute was passed in 1956 showed that nearly every previous time a company was taken away, victims and losses were key factors. Customers had lost money or bought defective products or never received services ordered, leaving them cheated and angry.

What's more, businesses were taken over almost always as a last resort to stop a fraud in progress and protect potential victims. They included a phony psychologist who sold dubious treatments, a fake lawyer who sold false claims he could get students into law school, and businessmen who marketed financial advice but instead swindled people out of their home deeds.

In Trump's case, his company stopped sending exaggerated financial figures about his net worth to Deutsche Bank and others at least two years ago, but a court-appointed monitor noted that was only after he was sued and that other financial documents continued to contain errors and misrepresentations.

And though the bank offered Trump lower interest rates because he had agreed to personally guarantee the loans with his own money, it's not clear how much better the rates were because of the inflated figures. The bank never complained, and it's unclear how much it lost, if anything. Bank officials called to testify couldn't say for sure if Trump's personal statement of worth had any impact on the rates.

"This sets a horrible precedent," said Adam Leitman Bailey, a New York real estate lawyer who once successfully sued a Trump condo building for misrepresenting sales to lure buyers.

Added University of Michigan law professor William Thomas, "Who suffered here? We haven't seen a long list of victims."

'DISSOLUTION' OF AN EMPIRE?

Trump, the Republican presidential frontrunner, has focused his ire at potentially losing his business at both the Democratic New York attorney general who brought the case and the judge presiding over it.

In an order last September that's currently under appeal, State Supreme Court Judge Arthur Engoron said Trump had indeed committed fraud and should have the state certificates needed to run many of his New York companies revoked. He said Trump should then be stripped of control over those companies, which are the official owners of his Fifth Avenue headquarters and other marquee properties, and have them turned over to a receiver who will manage the "dissolution" of them.

What the judge left unclear is what he meant by "dissolution," whether that referred to the liquidation of entities that control properties or the properties themselves. Asked specifically in court whether Trump's buildings would be literally sold off as in a bankruptcy, Engoron said he would clarify at a later date.

In a worst case, as interpreted by legal experts, Engoron could decide dissolution means stripping the real estate mogul of not only of his New York holdings such as Trump Tower and his 40 Wall Street skyscraper, but his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, a Chicago hotel and condo building, and several golf clubs, including ones in Miami, Los Angeles and Scotland.

For her part, New York Attorney General Letitia James has asked that Trump be banned from doing business in New York and pay \$370 million, what she estimates is saved interest and other "ill-gotten gains." But she never asked for a property sale and may not even want one. Said one of her lawyers, Kevin Wallace, in his closing argument, "I don't think we are looking for anything that would cause the

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liquidation of business.”

Engoron has indicated that within the next couple of weeks he will issue a ruling expected to decide on the cash penalty and business ban and clarify his “dissolution” order.

A HISTORY OF PUNISHMENTS

Notably, New York’s anti-fraud statute, known as Executive Law 63(12), is clear that a finding of fraud does not require intent to deceive or that anyone actually gets duped or loses money. The attorney general must only show “repeated fraudulent or illegal acts.”

But the AP analysis, based on a search of reported 63(12) cases in legal databases LexisNexis and Westlaw, found that victims and losses were factors when it came to deciding whether to take over a business.

A breast cancer nonprofit was shut down a dozen years ago, for instance, for using nearly all its \$9 million in donations to pay for director salaries, perks and other expenses, instead of funding free mammograms, research and help for survivors.

A private equity firm faking big investment success was closed down after stealing millions of dollars from thousands of investors.

A mental health facility was shuttered for looting \$4 million from public funds while neglecting patients.

There may be more dissolved companies than AP found. Legal experts caution that some 63(12) cases never show up in legal databases because they were settled, dropped or otherwise not reported.

Still, the only case the AP found of a business dissolved under the anti-fraud law without citing actual victims or losses was a relatively small company closed in 1972 for writing term papers for college students. In that case, the attorney general said the victim was “the integrity of the educational process.”

This is not Trump’s first run-in with New York’s anti-fraud law. His nonprofit Trump Foundation agreed to shut down in 2018 over allegations he misused funds for political and business interests. And his Trump University was sued under the law in 2013 for allegedly misleading thousands of students with false promises of success but it had closed before it could be shuttered by the courts. Trump eventually settled this and related cases for \$25 million.

Decades of 63(12) legal history also showed many cases where defendants socked customers with big losses and still got to keep running their businesses.

A judge in 2001 declined to appoint a receiver to take over a porn site despite millions of dollars of illegal credit card charges to hundreds of customers who thought they were getting “free tours.” In fact, the owners tried to cover up their tricks and shifted money overseas. Still, the judge said appointing a receiver was an “extraordinary remedy” that should be used sparingly and that a preliminary injunction was good enough. Years later, prosecutors in a separate criminal case said the Gambino mob family was running the business and put several operators in prison.

An auto lender that allegedly charged hidden, usurious interest rates got to stay in business last year if it paid a fine and didn’t commit fraud in the future.

And a judge refused a request to shut down a river rafting company in 2011 after a customer drowned and the attorney general showed it was repeatedly using unlicensed guides or none at all. Instead, he ordered only that the owner post a \$50,000 bond and clean up his act. The company is still being run, under a different name, by the same family today.

TRUMP’S CASE

Trump’s case involved 11 years of financial statements with values based on disputed and sometimes outright false descriptions of properties used as collateral should his loans go bust.

Among them: Trump exaggerated the size of his Manhattan penthouse apartment by three times. He listed unfinished buildings as if they were complete, and apartments under rent-control as if they were free of such rules. He showed restricted funds as if they were liquid cash. And Trump valued Mar-a-Lago as a single residence, though he had signed away rights to develop it as anything but a club.

In making her case against Trump, Letitia James called to the stand a lending expert who estimated that Deutsche Bank gave up \$168 million in extra interest on its Trump loans, basing his calculations as if Trump never offered a personal guarantee.

But Trump did offer a guarantee, even if his estimate of his personal wealth was exaggerated. In fact,

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the bank made its own estimates of Trump's personal wealth, at times lopping billions from Trump's figures, and still decided to lend to him.

And testimony from Deutsche officials responsible for the loans suggested that deciding the right rate at which to lend, even absent Trump's personal guarantee, isn't so simple.

The Deutsche unit making the Trump business loans wasn't the typical lending unit, but its private wealth division. That group often lends to rich clients not only to earn interest but to help its chances of winning the lucrative business of managing their vast personal investments and getting them to buy other bank services — something that testimony showed Deutsche was clearly hoping to do with the ex-president.

Trump has repeatedly said in impromptu rants at his trial that the case is a meritless, political "witch hunt" because he is richer than the statements sent to banks suggest, and lenders didn't care about those figures anyway because they always did their own analysis, always got paid back in full and continued to lend to him.

"What's happened here, sir, is a fraud on me. I am an innocent man," Trump said in a six-minute statement in court earlier this month before the judge cut him off.

A POTENTIAL COMPROMISE

To be sure, the attorney general's office has argued that there are larger issues than victim losses at play in Trump's case.

When big loans are issued with an inaccurate picture of risk, said state lawyer Kevin Wallace, it damages the public and business community, "distorts the market" and "prices out honest borrowers."

Plus, Wallace suggested, letting such lies to banks slide if those banks don't take legal action on their own would amount to saying, "if you are rich enough, you are going to be allowed to do it."

Or as New York lawyer and Fordham University adjunct law professor Jerry H. Goldfeder put it, "Just because no one is complaining doesn't mean there hasn't been a fraud."

In a footnote in a 94-page summary document filed earlier this month, Letitia James suggested a compromise decision for Engoron: Appoint an independent monitor to oversee Trump's operations for five years, after which the court could decide whether to revoke his business certificates and possibly put him out of business.

University of Michigan's Thomas says he thinks Engoron may pull back from his shutdown order, but he is still concerned.

"Those who want to see Donald Trump suffer by any means necessary," he said, "risk ignoring the very commitment to a rule of law that they accuse him of flouting."

Prisoners in the US are part of a hidden workforce linked to hundreds of popular food brands

By ROBIN McDOWELL and MARGIE MASON Associated Press

ANGOLA, La. (AP) — A hidden path to America's dinner tables begins here, at an unlikely source — a former Southern slave plantation that is now the country's largest maximum-security prison.

Unmarked trucks packed with prison-raised cattle roll out of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, where men are sentenced to hard labor and forced to work, for pennies an hour or sometimes nothing at all. After rumbling down a country road to an auction house, the cows are bought by a local rancher and then followed by The Associated Press another 600 miles to a Texas slaughterhouse that feeds into the supply chains of giants like McDonald's, Walmart and Cargill.

Intricate, invisible webs, just like this one, link some of the world's largest food companies and most popular brands to jobs performed by U.S. prisoners nationwide, according to a sweeping two-year AP investigation into prison labor that tied hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of agricultural products to goods sold on the open market.

They are among America's most vulnerable laborers. If they refuse to work, some can jeopardize their chances of parole or face punishment like being sent to solitary confinement. They also are often excluded

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from protections guaranteed to almost all other full-time workers, even when they are seriously injured or killed on the job.

The goods these prisoners produce wind up in the supply chains of a dizzying array of products found in most American kitchens, from Frosted Flakes cereal and Ball Park hot dogs to Gold Medal flour, Coca-Cola and Riceland rice. They are on the shelves of virtually every supermarket in the country, including Kroger, Target, Aldi and Whole Foods. And some goods are exported, including to countries that have had products blocked from entering the U.S. for using forced or prison labor.

Many of the companies buying directly from prisons are violating their own policies against the use of such labor. But it's completely legal, dating back largely to the need for labor to help rebuild the South's shattered economy after the Civil War. Enshrined in the Constitution by the 13th Amendment, slavery and involuntary servitude are banned – except as punishment for a crime.

That clause is currently being challenged on the federal level, and efforts to remove similar language from state constitutions are expected to reach the ballot in about a dozen states this year.

Some prisoners work on the same plantation soil where slaves harvested cotton, tobacco and sugarcane more than 150 years ago, with some present-day images looking eerily similar to the past. In Louisiana, which has one of the country's highest incarceration rates, men working on the "farm line" still stoop over crops stretching far into the distance.

Willie Ingram picked everything from cotton to okra during his 51 years in the state penitentiary, better known as Angola.

During his time in the fields, he was overseen by armed guards on horseback and recalled seeing men, working with little or no water, passing out in triple-digit heat. Some days, he said, workers would throw their tools in the air to protest, despite knowing the potential consequences.

"They'd come, maybe four in the truck, shields over their face, billy clubs, and they'd beat you right there in the field. They beat you, handcuff you and beat you again," said Ingram, who received a life sentence after pleading guilty to a crime he said he didn't commit. He was told he would serve 10 ½ years and avoid a possible death penalty, but it wasn't until 2021 that a sympathetic judge finally released him. He was 73.

The number of people behind bars in the United States started to soar in the 1970s just as Ingram entered the system, disproportionately hitting people of color. Now, with about 2 million people locked up, U.S. prison labor from all sectors has morphed into a multibillion-dollar empire, extending far beyond the classic images of prisoners stamping license plates, working on road crews or battling wildfires.

Though almost every state has some kind of farming program, agriculture represents only a small fraction of the overall prison workforce. Still, an analysis of data amassed by the AP from correctional facilities nationwide traced nearly \$200 million worth of sales of farmed goods and livestock to businesses over the past six years – a conservative figure that does not include tens of millions more in sales to state and government entities. Much of the data provided was incomplete, though it was clear that the biggest revenues came from sprawling operations in the South and leasing out prisoners to companies.

Corrections officials and other proponents note that not all work is forced and that prison jobs save taxpayers money. For example, in some cases, the food produced is served in prison kitchens or donated to those in need outside. They also say workers are learning skills that can be used when they're released and given a sense of purpose, which could help ward off repeat offenses. In some places, it allows prisoners to also shave time off their sentences. And the jobs provide a way to repay a debt to society, they say.

While most critics don't believe all jobs should be eliminated, they say incarcerated people should be paid fairly, treated humanely and that all work should be voluntary. Some note that even when people get specialized training, like firefighting, their criminal records can make it almost impossible to get hired on the outside.

"They are largely uncompensated, they are being forced to work, and it's unsafe. They also aren't learning skills that will help them when they are released," said law professor Andrea Armstrong, an expert on prison labor at Loyola University New Orleans. "It raises the question of why we are still forcing people to work in the fields."

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A SHADOW WORKFORCE WITH FEW PROTECTIONS

In addition to tapping a cheap, reliable workforce, companies sometimes get tax credits and other financial incentives. Incarcerated workers also typically aren't covered by the most basic protections, including workers' compensation and federal safety standards. In many cases, they cannot file official complaints about poor working conditions.

These prisoners often work in industries with severe labor shortages, doing some of the country's dirtiest and most dangerous jobs.

The AP sifted through thousands of pages of documents and spoke to more than 80 current or formerly incarcerated people, including men and women convicted of crimes that ranged from murder to shoplifting, writing bad checks, theft or other illegal acts linked to drug use. Some were given long sentences for nonviolent offenses because they had previous convictions, while others were released after proving their innocence.

Reporters found people who were hurt or maimed on the job, and also interviewed women who were sexually harassed or abused, sometimes by their civilian supervisors or the correctional officers overseeing them. While it's often nearly impossible for those involved in workplace accidents to sue, the AP examined dozens of cases that managed to make their way into the court system. Reporters also spoke to family members of prisoners who were killed.

One of those was Frank Dwayne Ellington, who was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after stealing a man's wallet at gunpoint – a result of Alabama's habitual offenders act. In 2017, Ellington, 33, was cleaning a machine near the chicken "kill line" in Ashland at Koch Foods – one of the country's biggest poultry-processing companies – when its whirling teeth caught his arm and sucked him inside, crushing his skull. He died instantly.

During a yearslong legal battle, Koch Foods at first argued Ellington wasn't technically an employee, and later said his family should be barred from filing for wrongful death because the company had paid his funeral expenses. The case eventually was settled under undisclosed terms. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined the company \$19,500, saying workers had not been given proper training and that its machines had inadequate safety guards.

"It's somebody's child, it's somebody's dad, it's somebody's uncle, it's somebody's family," said Ellington's mother, Alishia Powell-Clark. "Yes, they did wrong, but they are paying for it."

The AP found that U.S. prison labor is in the supply chains of goods being shipped all over the world via multinational companies, including to countries that have been slapped with import bans by Washington in recent years. For instance, the U.S. has blocked shipments of cotton coming from China, a top manufacturer of popular clothing brands, because it was produced by forced or prison labor. But crops harvested by U.S. prisoners have entered the supply chains of companies that export to China.

While prison labor seeps into the supply chains of some companies through third-party suppliers without them knowing, others buy direct. Mammoth commodity traders that are essential to feeding the globe like Cargill, Bunge, Louis Dreyfus, Archer Daniels Midland and Consolidated Grain and Barge – which together post annual revenues of more than \$400 billion – have in recent years scooped up millions of dollars' worth of soy, corn and wheat straight from prisons, which compete with local farmers.

The AP reached out for comment to the companies it identified as having connections to prison labor, but most did not respond.

Cargill acknowledged buying goods from prison farms in Tennessee, Arkansas and Ohio, saying they constituted only a small fraction of the company's overall volume. It added that "we are now in the process of determining the appropriate remedial action."

McDonald's said it would investigate links to any such labor, while Archer Daniels Midland and General Mills, which produces Gold Medal flour, pointed to their policies in place restricting suppliers from using forced labor. Whole Foods responded flatly: "Whole Foods Market does not allow the use of prison labor in products sold at our stores."

Bunge said it sold all facilities that were sourcing from correction departments in 2021, so they are "no longer part of Bunge's footprint."

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Dairy Farmers of America, a cooperative that bills itself as the top supplier of raw milk worldwide, said that while it has been buying from correctional facilities, it now only has one "member dairy" at a prison, with most of that milk used inside.

To understand the business of prison labor and the complex movement of agricultural goods, the AP collected information from all 50 states, through public records requests and inquiries to corrections departments. Reporters also crisscrossed the country, following trucks transporting crops and livestock linked to prison work, and tailed transport vans from prisons and work-release sites heading to places such as poultry plants, egg farms and fast-food restaurants. A lack of transparency and, at times, baffling losses exposed in audits, added to the challenges of fully tracking the money.

Big-ticket items like row crops and livestock are sold on the open market, with profits fed back into agriculture programs. For instance, about a dozen state prison farms, including operations in Texas, Virginia, Kentucky and Montana, have sold more than \$60 million worth of cattle since 2018.

As with other sales, the custody of cows can take a serpentine route. Because they often are sold online at auction houses or to stockyards, it can be almost impossible to determine where the beef eventually ends up.

Sometimes there's only one way to know for sure.

In Louisiana, an AP reporter watched as three long trailers loaded with more than 80 cattle left the state penitentiary. The cows raised by prisoners traveled for about an hour before being unloaded for sale at Dominique's Livestock Market in Baton Rouge.

As they were shoved through a gate into a viewing pen, the auctioneer jokingly warned buyers "Watch out!" The cows, he said, had just broken out of prison.

Within minutes, the Angola lot was snapped up by a local livestock dealer, who then sold the cattle to a Texas beef processor that also buys cows directly from prisons in that state. Meat from the slaughterhouse winds up in the supply chains of some of the country's biggest fast-food chains, supermarkets and meat exporters, including Burger King, Sam's Club and Tyson Foods.

"It's a real slap in the face, to hear where all those cattle are going," said Jermaine Hudson, who served 22 years at Angola on a robbery conviction before he was exonerated.

He said it's especially galling because the food served in prison tasted like slop.

"Those were some of the most disrespectful meals," Hudson said, "that I ever, in my life, had to endure."

THE RISE OF PRISON LABOR

Angola is imposing in its sheer scale. The so-called "Alcatraz of the South" is tucked far away, surrounded by alligator-infested swamps in a bend of the Mississippi River. It spans 18,000 acres – an area bigger than the island of Manhattan – and has its own ZIP code.

The former 19th-century antebellum plantation once was owned by one of the largest slave traders in the U.S. Today, it houses some 3,800 men behind its razor-wire walls, about 65 percent of them Black. Within days of arrival, they typically head to the fields, sometimes using hoes and shovels or picking crops by hand. They initially work for free, but then can earn between 2 cents and 40 cents an hour.

Calvin Thomas, who spent more than 17 years at Angola, said anyone who refused to work, didn't produce enough or just stepped outside the long straight rows knew there would be consequences.

"If he shoots the gun in the air because you done passed that line, that means you're going to get locked up and you're going to have to pay for that bullet that he shot," said Thomas, adding that some days were so blistering hot the guards' horses would collapse.

"You can't call it anything else," he said. "It's just slavery."

Louisiana corrections spokesman Ken Pastorick called that description "absurd." He said the phrase "sentenced with hard labor" is a legal term referring to a prisoner with a felony conviction.

Pastorick said the department has transformed Angola from "the bloodiest prison in America" over the past several decades with "large-scale criminal justice reforms and reinvestment into the creation of rehabilitation, vocational and educational programs designed to help individuals better themselves and successfully return to communities." He noted that pay rates are set by state statute.

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Current and former prisoners in both Louisiana and Alabama have filed class-action lawsuits in the past four months saying they have been forced to provide cheap – or free – labor to those states and outside companies, a practice they also described as slavery.

Prisoners have been made to work since before emancipation, when slaves were at times imprisoned and then leased out by local authorities.

But after the Civil War, the 13th Amendment's exception clause that allows for prison labor provided legal cover to round up thousands of mostly young Black men. Many were jailed for petty offenses like loitering and vagrancy. They then were leased out by states to plantations like Angola and some of the country's biggest companies, including coal mines and railroads. They were routinely whipped for not meeting quotas while doing brutal and often deadly work.

The convict-leasing period, which officially ended in 1928, helped chart the path to America's modern-day prison-industrial complex.

Incarceration was used not just for punishment or rehabilitation but for profit. A law passed a few years later made it illegal to knowingly transport or sell goods made by incarcerated workers across state lines, though an exception was made for agricultural products. Today, after years of efforts by lawmakers and businesses, corporations are setting up joint ventures with corrections agencies, enabling them to sell almost anything nationwide.

Civilian workers are guaranteed basic rights and protections by OSHA and laws like the Fair Labor Standards Act, but prisoners, who are often not legally considered employees, are denied many of those entitlements and cannot protest or form unions.

"They may be doing the exact same work as people who are not incarcerated, but they don't have the training, they don't have the experience, they don't have the protective equipment," said Jennifer Turner, lead author of a 2022 American Civil Liberties Union report on prison labor.

Almost all of the country's state and federal adult prisons have some sort of work program, employing around 800,000 people, the report said. It noted the vast majority of those jobs are connected to tasks like maintaining prisons, laundry or kitchen work, which typically pay a few cents an hour if anything at all. And the few who land the highest-paying state industry jobs may earn only a dollar an hour.

Altogether, labor tied specifically to goods and services produced through state prison industries brought in more than \$2 billion in 2021, the ACLU report said. That includes everything from making mattresses to solar panels, but does not account for work-release and other programs run through local jails, detention and immigration centers and even drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities.

Some incarcerated workers with just a few months or years left on their sentences have been employed everywhere from popular restaurant chains like Burger King to major retail stores and meat-processing plants. Unlike work crews picking up litter in orange jumpsuits, they go largely unnoticed, often wearing the same uniforms as their civilian counterparts.

Outside jobs can be coveted because they typically pay more and some states deposit a small percentage earned into a savings account for prisoners' eventual release. Though many companies pay minimum wage, some states garnish more than half their salaries for items such as room and board and court fees.

It's a different story for those on prison farms. The biggest operations remain in the South and crops are still harvested on a number of former slave plantations, including in Arkansas, Texas and at Mississippi's notorious Parchman Farm. Those states, along with Florida, Alabama, South Carolina and Georgia, pay nothing for most types of work.

Most big farms, including Angola, have largely mechanized many of their operations, using commercial-size tractors, trucks and combines for corn, soy, rice and other row crops. But prisoners in some places continue to do other work by hand, including clearing brush with swing blades.

"I was in a field with a hoe in my hand with maybe like a hundred other women. We were standing in a line very closely together, and we had to raise our hoes up at the exact same time and count 'One, two, three, chop!'" said Faye Jacobs, who worked on prison farms in Arkansas.

Jacobs, who was released in 2018 after more than 26 years, said the only pay she received was two rolls of toilet paper a week, toothpaste and a few menstrual pads each month.

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She recounted being made to carry rocks from one end of a field to the other and back again for hours, and said she also endured taunting from guards saying "Come on, hos, it's hoe squad!" She said she later was sent back to the fields at another prison after women there complained of sexual harassment by staff inside the facility.

"We were like 'Is this a punishment?'" she said. "We're telling y'all that we're being sexually harassed, and you come back and the first thing you want to do is just put us all on hoe squad."

David Farabough, who oversees the state's 20,000 acres of prison farms, said Arkansas' operations can help build character.

"A lot of these guys come from homes where they've never understood work and they've never understood the feeling at the end of the day for a job well-done," he said. "We're giving them purpose. ... And then at the end of the day, they get the return by having better food in the kitchens."

In addition to giant farms, at least 650 correctional facilities nationwide have prisoners doing jobs like landscaping, tending greenhouses and gardens, raising livestock, beekeeping and even fish farming, said Joshua Sbicca, director of the Prison Agriculture Lab at Colorado State University. He noted that corrections officials exert power by deciding who deserves trade-building jobs like welding, for example, and who works in the fields.

In several states, along with raising chickens, cows and hogs, corrections departments have their own processing plants, dairies and canneries. But many states also hire out prisoners to do that same work at big private companies.

The AP met women in Mississippi locked up at restitution centers, the equivalent of debtors' prisons, to pay off court-mandated expenses. They worked at Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen and other fast-food chains and also have been hired out to individuals for work like lawn mowing or home repairs.

"There is nothing innovative or interesting about this system of forced labor as punishment for what in so many instances is an issue of poverty or substance abuse," said Cliff Johnson, director of the MacArthur Justice Center at the University of Mississippi.

In Alabama, where prisoners are leased out by companies, AP reporters followed inmate transport vans to poultry plants run by Tyson Foods, which owns brands such as Hillshire Farms, Jimmy Dean and Sara Lee, along with a company that supplies beef, chicken and fish to McDonald's. The vans also stopped at a chicken processor that's part of a joint-venture with Cargill, which is America's largest private company. It brought in a record \$177 billion in revenue in fiscal year 2023 and supplies conglomerates like PepsiCo.

Though Tyson did not respond to questions about direct links to prison farms, it said that its work-release programs are voluntary and that incarcerated workers receive the same pay as their civilian colleagues.

Some people arrested in Alabama are put to work even before they've been convicted. An unusual work-release program accepts pre-trial defendants, allowing them to avoid jail while earning bond money. But with multiple fees deducted from their salaries, that can take time.

The AP went out on a work detail with a Florida chain gang wearing black-and-white striped uniforms and ankle shackles, created after Brevard County Sheriff Wayne Ivey took office in 2012. He said the unpaid work is voluntary and so popular that it has a waitlist.

"It's a win-win," he said. "The inmate that's doing that is learning a skill set. ... They are making time go by at a faster pace. The other side of the win-win is, it's generally saving the taxpayers money."

Ivey noted it's one of the only remaining places in the country where a chain gang still operates.

"I don't feel like they should get paid," he said. "They're paying back their debt to society for violating the law."

Elsewhere, several former prisoners spoke positively about their work experiences, even if they sometimes felt exploited.

"I didn't really think about it until I got out, and I was like, 'Wow, you know, I actually took something from there and applied it out here,'" said William "Buck" Saunders, adding he got certified to operate a forklift at his job stacking animal feed at Cargill while incarcerated in Arizona.

Companies that hire prisoners get a reliable, plentiful workforce even during unprecedented labor shortages stemming from immigration crackdowns and, more recently, the coronavirus pandemic.

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In March 2020, though all other outside company jobs were halted, the Arizona corrections department announced about 140 women were being abruptly moved from their prison to a metal hangar-like warehouse on property owned by Hickman's Family Farms, which pitches itself as the Southwest's largest egg producer.

Hickman's has employed prisoners for nearly 30 years and supplies many grocery stores, including Costco and Kroger, marketing brands such as Egglard's Best and Land O' Lakes. It is the state corrections department's largest labor contractor, bringing in nearly \$35 million in revenue over the past six fiscal years.

"The only reason they had us out there was because they didn't want to lose that contract because the prison makes so much money off of it," said Brooke Counts, who lived at Hickman's desert site, which operated for 14 months. She was serving a drug-related sentence and said she feared losing privileges or being transferred to a more secure prison yard if she refused to work.

Counts said she knew prisoners who were seriously hurt, including one woman who was impaled in the groin and required a helicopter flight to the hospital and another who lost part of a finger.

Hickman's, which has faced a number of lawsuits stemming from inmate injuries, did not respond to emailed questions or phone messages seeking a response. Corrections department officials would not comment on why the women were moved off-site, saying it happened during a previous administration. But a statement at the time said the move was made to "ensure a stable food supply while also protecting public health and the health of those in our custody."

Some women employed by Hickman's earned less than \$3 an hour after deductions, including 30 percent taken by the state for room and board, even though they were living in the makeshift dormitory.

"While we were out there, we were still paying the prison rent," Counts said. "What for?"

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

The business of prison labor is so vast and convoluted that tracing the money can be challenging. Some agricultural programs regularly go into the red, raising questions in state audits and prompting investigations into potential corruption, mismanagement or general inefficiency.

Nearly half the agricultural goods produced in Texas between 2014 and 2018 lost money, for example, and a similar report in Louisiana uncovered losses of around \$3.8 million between fiscal years 2016 and 2018. A separate federal investigation into graft at the for-profit arm of Louisiana's correctional department led to the jailing of two employees.

Correctional officials say steep farming expenditures and unpredictable variables like weather can eat into profits. And while some goods may do poorly, they note, others do well.

Prisons at times have generated revenue by tapping into niche markets or to their states' signature foods.

During the six-year period the AP examined, surplus raw milk from a Wisconsin prison dairy went to BelGioioso Cheese, which makes Polly-O string cheese and other products that land in grocery stores nationwide like Whole Foods. A California prison provided almonds to Minturn Nut Company, a major producer and exporter. And until 2022, Colorado was raising water buffalo for milk that was sold to giant mozzarella cheesemaker Leprino Foods, which supplies major pizza companies like Domino's, Pizza Hut and Papa John's.

But for many states, it's the work-release programs that have become the biggest cash generators, largely because of the low overhead. In Alabama, for instance, the state brought in more than \$32 million in the past five fiscal years after garnishing 40 percent of prisoners' wages.

In some states, work-release programs are run on the local level, with sheriffs frequently responsible for handling the books and awarding contracts. Even though the programs are widely praised – by the state, employers and often prisoners themselves – reports of abuse exist.

In Louisiana, where more than 1,200 companies hire prisoners through work release, sheriffs get anywhere from about \$10 to \$20 a day for each state prisoner they house in local jails to help ease overcrowding. And they can deduct more than half of the wages earned by those contracted out to companies – a huge revenue stream for small counties.

Jack Strain, a former longtime sheriff in the state's St. Tammany Parish, pleaded guilty in 2021 in a scheme involving the privatization of a work-release program in which nearly \$1.4 million was taken in and

steered to Strain, close associates and family members. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison, which came on top of four consecutive life sentences for a broader sex scandal linked to that same program.

Incarcerated people also have been contracted to companies that partner with prisons. In Idaho, they've sorted and packed the state's famous potatoes, which are exported and sold to companies nationwide. In Kansas, they've been employed at Russell Stover chocolates and Cal-Maine Foods, the country's largest egg producer. Though the company has since stopped using them, in recent years they were hired in Arizona by Taylor Farms, which sells salad kits in many major grocery stores nationwide and supplies popular fast-food chains and restaurants like Chipotle Mexican Grill.

Some states would not provide the names of companies taking part in transitional prison work programs, citing security concerns. So AP reporters confirmed some prisoners' private employers with officials running operations on the ground and also followed inmate transport vehicles as they zigzagged through cities and drove down country roads. The vans stopped everywhere from giant meat-processing plants to a chicken and daiquiri restaurant.

One pulled into the manicured grounds of a former slave plantation that has been transformed into a popular tourist site and hotel in St. Francisville, Louisiana, where visitors pose for wedding photos under old live oaks draped with Spanish moss.

As a reporter watched, a West Feliciana Parish van emblazoned with "Sheriff Transitional Work Program" pulled up. Two Black men hopped out and quickly walked through the restaurant's back door. One said he was there to wash dishes before his boss called him back inside.

The Myrtles, as the antebellum home is known, sits just 20 miles away from where men toil in the fields of Angola.

"Slavery has not been abolished," said Curtis Davis, who spent more than 25 years at the penitentiary and is now fighting to change state laws that allow for forced labor in prisons.

"It is still operating in present tense," he said. "Nothing has changed."

When a white supremacist threatened an Iraqi DEI coordinator in Maine, he fled the state

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

SOUTH PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The diversity, equity and inclusion coordinator of public schools in South Portland, Maine, has resigned and left the state, saying he fears for his family's safety after receiving a threatening letter from a white supremacist.

The attack on Mohammed Albehadli, who came to the U.S. a decade ago from Iraq after it became too dangerous, comes at a time when many Republicans are opposed to DEI initiatives that include recruiting and retaining faculty and students of color.

Albehadli said he knows from experience in Iraq how threats can escalate: "You hear something first. And the next thing, an action follows."

He decided not to wait to find out what the action might be.

The Dec. 29 letter, released to The Associated Press under a freedom of information request, contains racist epithets and indicates the New England White Network told Albehadli that he should "go back to the Middle East where you belong."

Superintendent Timothy Matheney described the letter as the "most vile email message I have seen in my 35 years in education."

Albehadli, who announced his resignation a week ago, was "an exemplary staff member" who was making a "positive impact" on city schools, Matheney said.

"Because we deeply value the diversity of our students and staff members, this situation has saddened all of us who seek to ensure safe and welcoming schools. Nevertheless, we will continue to pursue diversity, equity and inclusion here because the importance of that work is even more evident and urgent to us now," he said in a statement.

South Portland Police Chief Dan Ahern said a school resource officer and detectives are investigating

and consulting with state and county prosecutors to determine if a crime was committed.

Similar emails from the same sender have gone to other people of color — including Portland, Maine, city councilors Victoria Pelletier and Pious Ali, who recently ran for mayor. In 2022, an email to state Rep. Charlotte DiLorenzo in New Hampshire was investigated by the state attorney general's office. Recently, another email to a mayor in New Hampshire called the mayor's gay son an "abomination."

"Quite honestly, these attacks take a toll. How could they not?" Ali wrote in a statement about the incident. But Ali vowed that he wouldn't be intimidated and urged people to come together to stand up against racism.

The emails' sender, Ryan Murdough, the New Hampshire founder of the New England White Network, is active on Gab, a social networking website popular with white nationalists, where he said that he has received a no-trespass notice for school property in South Portland along with a police officer's warning that hate speech can be viewed as a threat.

"Honestly, I don't care about Mohammed," Murdough told The Associated Press in an email. Murdough claims that by targeting diversity efforts, he's speaking up for white families.

Murdough has been involved in other white supremacist groups and launched the New England White Network in 2022, and ran unsuccessfully for a New Hampshire legislative seat in 2010, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

Albehadli, who holds degrees from Trinity College and Boston University and already has left Maine, said he understands that Murdough has free speech rights. Still, he said, there should be penalties for crossing a line and making him feel unsafe, and for causing him to uproot his family, flee a state he loves and start from scratch in a new job.

He said he loved Maine, where he lived for six years, and didn't want to leave the state.

"If he feels smart to walk a fine line on the law, if he's able to navigate the system and say whatever he can say, then I'm sort of losing faith," Albehadli said. "There should be legal consequences"."

Alex Murdaugh is denied new double-murder trial after judge hears jury tampering allegations

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A South Carolina judge on Monday denied Alex Murdaugh's bid for a new trial after his defense team accused a clerk of court of tampering with a jury.

Judge Jean Toal said she wasn't sure if Colleton County Clerk Becky Hill was telling the truth that she never spoke to jurors about the case, saying she was "attracted by the siren call of celebrity."

But Toal said the 12 jurors who testified all said any comments did not directly influence their decision to find Murdaugh guilty.

Toal said after reviewing the full transcript of the six-week trial, she couldn't overturn the verdict based "on the strength of some fleeting and foolish comments by a publicity-seeking clerk of court" because they didn't actively change the jurors' minds.

All 12 jurors took the 90-mile (145-kilometer) trip from Colleton County to Columbia to give what was typically about three minutes of testimony, mostly yes-or-no questions from the judge's script. Murdaugh, now a convicted killer, disbarred attorney and admitted thief serving a life sentence, wore an orange prison jumpsuit as he watched with his lawyers.

Hill also testified, denying she ever spoke about the case or Murdaugh at all with jurors.

"I never talked to any jurors about anything like that," Hill said.

Toal questioned her truthfulness after Hill said she used "literary license" for some things she wrote about in her book about the trial, including whether she feared as she read the verdict that the jury might end up finding him not guilty.

"I did have a certain way I felt," Hill said.

Murdaugh's defense later called Barnwell County Clerk Rhonda McElveen, who helped Hill during the trial. McElveen said that Hill suggested before the trial that they write a book on the case together, "because

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she wanted a lake house and I wanted to retire,” and that a guilty verdict would sell more books.

Under cross-examination, McElveen said she didn't reach out to the trial judge because she didn't think any of Hill's comments or behaviors rose to the level of misconduct.

Hill was also questioned about why she told people hours before the jury received the case that she expected deliberations to be short. The clerk said it was a gut feeling after years in a courtroom.

The unusual hearing was prompted in part by a sworn statement from the first juror called to the stand Monday.

She affirmed what she said last August, repeating Monday that Hill told jurors to note Murdaugh's actions and "watch him closely" when he testified in his own defense.

"She made it seem like he was already guilty," the woman, identified only as Juror Z, said. Asked whether this influenced her vote to find him guilty, she said, "Yes ma'am."

In later questioning, the juror said she also stands by another statement she made in the August affidavit: that it was her fellow jurors, more than the clerk's statements, that influenced her to vote guilty.

"I had questions about Mr. Murdaugh's guilt but voted guilty because I felt pressured by other jurors," she said.

The rest of the jury filed in one by one and said their verdicts weren't influenced by anything outside the trial. One said he heard Hill say "watch his body language" before Murdaugh testified, but said Hill's comment didn't change his mind.

"You have 11 of them strong as a rock who said this verdict was not influenced," prosecutor Creighton Waters said. "The evidence is overwhelming from the people who mattered."

Defense attorney Jim Griffin said Toal's belief that Hill was not credible will eventually be a win in an appeals court and Murdaugh's conviction will be overturned.

"The innocent man was wrongly convicted — we didn't think she would say that," Griffin said outside court.

Murdaugh's fall from his role as an attorney lording over his small county to a sentence of life without parole has been exhaustively covered by true crime shows, podcasts and bloggers.

Toal set a difficult standard for Murdaugh's lawyers. She ruled the defense must prove that potential misconduct by Hill directly led jurors to change their minds to guilty.

Toal was Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court for 15 years before retiring. She was appointed by the current high court justices to rule on the juror misconduct allegations.

Toal also limited what could be asked of Hill, ruling out extensive questions about a criminal investigation into whether the elected clerk used her office for financial gain, emailed prosecutors with suggestions on how to discredit a defense expert, conspired with her son who is charged with wiretapping county phones, or plagiarized part of her book using a passage from a BBC reporter who accidentally emailed her instead of her boss with a similar address.

Hill admitted lifting the writing of the BBC reporter during her Monday testimony.

Even if Murdaugh, 55, gets a new murder trial he won't walk out free. He's also serving 27 years after admitting he stole \$12 million from his law firm and from settlements he gained for clients on wrongful death and serious injury lawsuits. Murdaugh promised not to appeal that sentence as part of his plea deal.

Murdaugh has remained adamant that he did not kill his younger son Paul with a shotgun and his wife Maggie with a rifle, since the moment he told deputies he found their bodies at their Colleton County home in 2021. He testified in his own defense.

Even if this effort fails, Murdaugh hasn't even started the regular appeals of his sentence, where his lawyers are expected to argue several reasons why his murder trial was unfair, including the judge allowing voluminous testimony of his financial crimes. They said this enabled prosecutors to smear Murdaugh with evidence not directly linked to the killings.

Document spells out allegations against 12 UN employees Israel says participated in Hamas attack

By TIA GOLDENBERG, NAJIB JOBAIN and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — An Israeli document obtained Monday spelled out allegations against a dozen U.N. employees the country says took part in Hamas' Oct. 7 assault — claiming seven stormed into Israeli territory, including one who participated in a kidnapping and another who helped to steal a soldier's body.

The allegations against staffers with the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees prompted the United States and several other countries to freeze funds vital for the body, which is a lifeline for desperate Palestinians in Gaza. The White House indicated that funding could be restored depending on the agency's investigation and subsequent actions.

The U.N. condemned "the abhorrent alleged acts" and fired nine of the accused workers, who include teachers and a social worker. Two are reportedly dead, and the last is still being identified.

The accusations come after years of tensions between Israel and the agency known as UNRWA over its work in Gaza, where it employs roughly 13,000 people.

UNRWA is the biggest aid provider in Gaza, where Israel's war against Hamas has displaced the vast majority of the population within the besieged territory and plunged it into a humanitarian catastrophe. U.N. officials say a quarter of the population is starving.

With the majority of its budget in doubt, and because UNRWA spends contributions as they come in throughout the year, the agency says it will be forced to halt operations within weeks if funding isn't restored.

'SIGNIFICANT GAPS' REMAIN IN CEASE-FIRE TALKS

The threat to the U.N. agency came as Israel said cease-fire talks held Sunday were constructive but that "significant gaps" remained in any potential agreement. The talks are meant to bring about some respite to war-torn Gaza and secure the release of more than 100 hostages still held in the territory.

Hamas spokesman Osama Hamdan told reporters in Beirut that discussions are continuing but that the group is still insisting on a more permanent cease-fire before releasing any more hostages.

The prime minister of Qatar, which has served as a key mediator with Hamas, was more upbeat, saying U.S. and Mideast mediators had reached a framework proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release to present to the militant group. Speaking at the Atlantic Council in Washington, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said the mediators had made "good progress."

Israeli forces are meanwhile still battling Palestinian militants in different parts of Gaza, even in areas where the army has been operating for months.

Israel issued an evacuation order to residents in the western part of Gaza City, urging them to head south. The military also said it had battled militants and carried out airstrikes in recent days in other parts of northern Gaza, which was pummeled in the first weeks of the war and where Israel has claimed to have largely dismantled Hamas.

Militants also fired a barrage of around 15 rockets at central Israel for the first time in weeks. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The war was sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, which killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and saw some 250 people taken captive, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel responded with an intense air, sea and ground offensive that has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, most of them women and minors, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count.

The war has also threatened to set off a wider regional conflict. In the latest example of high tensions, the U.S. announced that three of its troops were killed in a strike blamed on Iran-backed militias in Jordan.

DETAILED ALLEGATIONS AGAINST UNRWA WORKERS

The Israeli document, which has been shared with U.S. officials and was obtained by The Associated Press, lists 12 people, their alleged roles in the attack, job descriptions and photos. The findings detailed in the document could not be independently confirmed.

The document said intelligence gathered showed that at least 190 UNRWA workers were Hamas or

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Islamic Jihad operatives, without providing evidence.

It said of the 12 workers, nine were teachers and one a social worker. Seven of the employees were accused of crossing into Israel on Oct. 7. Of those, one was accused of taking part in a kidnapping, another of helping to take away a dead soldier and three others of participating in the attacks.

Ten were listed as having ties to Hamas and one to the Islamic Jihad militant group. Two of the 12 have been killed, according to the document. The U.N. previously said one was still being identified.

The allegations have stoked longstanding tensions between Israel and UNRWA. Israel says Hamas uses the agency's facilities to store weapons and launch attacks. UNRWA says it does not knowingly tolerate such behavior and has internal safeguards to prevent abuses and discipline any wrongdoing.

Even before the latest allegations, the agency's commissioner, Philippe Lazzarini, had announced that he was ordering an external review of the agency's operations and its safeguards.

Israel has long been critical of the agency and accuses it of helping to perpetuate the 76-year-old Palestinian refugee crisis. Foreign Minister Israel Katz said he canceled a Wednesday meeting between Israeli officials and Lazzarini, and called on the UNRWA head to resign.

CALLS TO RESUME FUNDING

The U.N. says the entire agency should not be penalized over the alleged actions of the dozen workers, who it says will be held accountable. It has called for the donors to resume funding.

A coalition of 20 aid groups, including the Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam and Save the Children, also called for funding to be restored, saying UNRWA's delivery of humanitarian assistance "cannot be replaced."

The United States, the agency's largest donor, cut funding over the weekend, followed by more than a dozen other countries. Together, they provided more than 60% of UNRWA's budget in 2022.

But National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said it would be wrong to "impugn the good work of a whole agency because of the potential bad actions here by a small number," He appeared to leave the door open for a resumption of aid.

"I think a lot of it's going to depend on what the investigation finds and what accountability measures and corrective measures UNRWA is willing to make," he said.

UNRWA provides basic services for Palestinian families who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding the country's creation. Refugees and their descendants now number nearly 6 million across the Middle East. In Gaza, they are a majority of the population.

UNRWA is unique in the U.N. system because it is only focused on one national group, with refugees from other conflicts falling under the purview of the agency known as UNHCR.

Since the war began, most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have come to depend on UNRWA's programs for "sheer survival," including food and shelter, Lazzarini said.

Communications Director Juliette Touma warned that the agency would be forced to stop its support in Gaza by the end of February.

President Biden has said he'd shut the US-Mexico border if given the ability. What does that mean?

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has made some strong claims over the past few days about shutting down the U.S.-Mexico border as he tries to salvage a border deal in Congress that would also unlock money for Ukraine.

The deal had been in the works for months and seemed to be nearing completion in the Senate before it began to fall apart, largely because Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump doesn't want it to happen.

"A bipartisan bill would be good for America and help fix our broken immigration system and allow speedy access for those who deserve to be here, and Congress needs to get it done," Biden said over the weekend. "It'll also give me as president, the emergency authority to shut down the border until it could get back under control. If that bill were the law today, I'd shut down the border right now and fix it quickly."

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A look at what Biden meant, and the political and policy considerations at play:

WHERE IS BIDEN'S TOUGH TALK COMING FROM?

Biden wants continued funding for Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion. Senate Republicans had initially said they would not consider more money for Kyiv unless it was combined with a deal to manage the border.

As the talks have progressed, Biden has come to embrace efforts to reach a bipartisan border security deal after years of gridlock on overhauling the immigration system. But his statement that he would shut down the border "right now" if Congress passed the proposed deal is more about politics than policy.

He is seeking to disarm criticism of his handling of migration at the border as immigration becomes an increasing matter of concern to Americans in the leadup to the presidential election.

WOULD THE BORDER REALLY SHUT DOWN UNDER THE DEAL?

No. Trade would continue, people who are citizens and legal residents could continue to go back and forth.

Biden is referencing an expulsion authority being negotiated by the lawmakers that would automatically kick in on days when illegal crossings reached more than 5,000 over a five-day average across the Southern border, which is currently seeing as many as 10,000 crossings per day. The authority shuts down asylum screenings for those who cross illegally. Migrants could still apply at ports of entry until crossings dipped below 3,750 per day. But these are estimates, the final tally hasn't been ironed out.

There's also an effort to change how asylum cases are processed. Right now, it takes several years for a case to be resolved and in the meantime, many migrants are released into the country to wait. Republicans see that as one reason that additional migrants are motivated to come to the U.S.

The goal would be to shrink the resolution time to six months. It would also raise the standards for which migrants can apply for asylum in the first place. The standard right now is broad by design so that potential asylum seekers aren't left out, but critics argue the system is being abused.

DIDN'T TRUMP ALSO THREATEN TO SHUT DOWN THE BORDER?

Yes. Trump vowed to "shut down" the U.S.-Mexico border entirely — including to trade and traffic — in an effort to force Mexico to do more to stem the flow of migrants. He didn't follow through, though. But the talk was heavily criticized by Democrats who said it was draconian and xenophobic. The closest Trump came was during the pandemic, when he used emergency authorities to severely limit asylum. But trade and traffic still continued.

The recent echoes of the former president by Biden, who had long argued that Trump's border policies were inhumane, reflect the growing public concern about illegal migration. But Biden's stance threatens to alienate progressives who already believe he has shifted too far right on border policies.

DOES BIDEN ALREADY HAVE AUTHORITY TO SHUT DOWN THE BORDER?

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Trump ally and critic of the proposed deal, has argued that presidents already have enough authority to stop illegal border crossings. Biden could, in theory, strongly limit asylum claims and restrict crossings, but the effort would be almost certainly be challenged in court and would be far more likely to be blocked or curtailed dramatically without a congressional law backing the new changes.

"Congress needs to act," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "They must act. Speaker Johnson and House Republicans should provide the administration with the policy changes and funding needed."

WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK FOR THE PROPOSED DEAL?

Prospects are dim.

A core group of senators negotiating the deal had hoped to release detailed text this week, but conservatives already say the measures do not go far enough to limit immigration.

Johnson, R-La., on Friday sent a letter to colleagues that aligns him with hardline conservatives determined to sink the compromise. The speaker said the legislation would have been "dead on arrival in the House" if leaked reports about it were true.

As top Senate negotiator, James Lankford, R-Okla, said on "Fox News Sunday," that after months of

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pushing on border security and clamoring for a deal tied to Ukraine aid, "when we're finally getting to the end," Republicans seem to be saying; "Oh, just kidding, I actually don't want a change in law because of the presidential election year."

Trump is loath to give a win to Biden on an issue that animated the Republican's successful 2016 campaign and that he wants to use as he seeks to return to the White House.

He said Saturday: "I'll fight it all the way. A lot of the senators are trying to say, respectfully, they're blaming it on me. I say, that's okay. Please blame it on me. Please."

WHAT HAPPENED TO BIDEN'S BORDER EFFORTS SO FAR?

Biden's embrace of the congressional framework points to how the administration's efforts to enact a broader immigration overhaul have been stymied.

On his first day in office, Biden sent a comprehensive immigration proposal to Congress and signed more executive orders than Trump. Since then, he has taken more than 500 executive actions, according to a tally by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute.

His administration's approach has been to pair new humanitarian pathways for migrants with a crackdown at the border in an effort to discourage migrants from making the dangerous journey to the U.S.-Mexico border on foot and instead travel by plane with a sponsor. Some policies have been successful, but the number of crossings has continued to rise. He's also sought to make the issue more regional, using his foreign policy experience to broker agreements with other nations.

Biden's aides and allies see the asylum changes as part of the crackdown effort and that's in part why they have been receptive to the proposals. But they have resisted efforts to take away the president's ability to grant "humanitarian parole" -- to allow migrants into the U.S. for special cases during emergencies or global unrest.

A Palestinian is killed while with a group waving a white flag. Israel says it will look into it

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's military announced it would review the shooting of a Palestinian man who was killed in the Gaza Strip while walking in a group of people waving a white flag, saying footage of the episode raised concerns of possible wrongdoing by soldiers.

A video shows a group of five men walking slowly down a street in an area west of the southern city of Khan Younis, a current focus of Israel's ground offensive.

As clouds of dark smoke billow overhead, the men hold their hands in the air. One waves a white flag, an international symbol of surrender.

Suddenly, shots ring out, killing Ramzi Abu Sahloul, a 51-year-old Palestinian shopkeeper, who was part of the group.

The shooter is not seen in the video. But before the shots are fired, the camera pans, showing what looks to be an Israeli tank positioned nearby. Ahmed Hijazi, a citizen journalist who filmed the episode, told The Associated Press that an Israeli tank fired on the group.

"After the soldiers shot him, I rushed to help, but the firing continued toward us," Hijazi said.

An Israeli military official said Sunday that the army was reviewing the shooting, which took place Jan. 22.

The official said the video, first broadcast by CNN, had helped authorities understand that there were military forces in the area and that there might be possible wrongdoing by soldiers. The British channel ITV earlier had aired a similar video.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity because there had not yet been an announcement, would not say whether a formal investigation would take place.

The military says forces take great care to verify targets before they strike.

In the video, Hijazi interviewed Abu Sahloul shortly before he was shot. Abu Sahloul said that the group of men was trying to reach relatives whom they had left behind earlier in the day while evacuating their home in southern Gaza.

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"The Israelis came to us and told us to evacuate, but they didn't let my brother out," Abu Sahloul says. "We want to go and try to get them, God willing."

Within seconds, Abu Sahloul is shot dead. The other men quickly grab his body and rush back in the direction from which they came. The men declined to be interviewed for fear of retribution.

Palestinians and human rights groups have accused the Israeli military of using disproportionate or indiscriminate force in its Gaza offensive, leading to heavy civilian casualties. They say that even when such killings are caught on video, military investigations rarely result in indictments of the soldiers involved.

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, over 26,000 Palestinians have been killed by a blistering Israeli ground and air offensive, according to health officials in Hamas-run Gaza. They do not differentiate between civilians and combatants but say two-thirds of the dead are women and minors.

Israel launched the offensive in response to an Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel in which militants killed 1,200 Palestinians and brought some 250 hostages back to Gaza.

Israel says that Hamas fighters have embedded themselves within civilian infrastructure, making it difficult to destroy the militant group without harming civilians. It says over 9,000 militants have been killed, though it hasn't released evidence to back the claim.

Abu Sahloul's widow, 50-year-old Hanan Abu Sahloul, said that in the hours before last week's shooting, the army had entered a building where the family was sheltering along with over 300 others. She said that Israeli forces ordered residents to leave without their belongings.

"When I tried to take my bag, a soldier aimed his gun at my head and ordered me to leave it," she said.

In the video taken by Hijazi, Hanan Abu Sahloul can be seen running toward her husband, screaming, while the group of men hastily haul his limp body back toward safety.

As gunshots continue to ring out, a bloodstain quickly spreads over her husband's chest, dark red quickly enveloping the white flag that one of the other men placed on his chest.

"He was immediately killed — without even a few breaths to say goodbye," Hanan Abu Sahloul said.

Inflation has slowed. Now the Federal Reserve faces expectations for rate cuts

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chair Jerome Powell will enter this week's Federal Reserve meeting in a much more desirable position than he likely ever expected: Inflation is getting close to the Fed's target rate, the economy is still growing at a healthy pace, consumers keep spending and the unemployment rate is near a half-century low.

A year ago, most economists had envisioned a much darker outlook. As the Fed raised interest rates at the fastest pace in four decades to fight high inflation, most economists warned of a recession, possibly a painful one, with waves of layoffs and rising unemployment. Even the Fed's own economists had projected that the economy would sink into a recession in 2023.

The unexpectedly rosy picture — one that's sure to be subject to heated debate in the 2024 presidential race — may have left some Fed officials saddled by uncertainty. With their frameworks for assessing the economy upended by the pandemic and its aftermath, it's hard to know whether the economy's healthy conditions can endure.

"It almost feels like what we saw in the second half of last year was too good to be true," said Nathan Sheets, chief global economist at Citi and a former Fed economist. "When things are too good to be true, you want to try to scratch the surface and say, how durable is this?"

Some Fed officials have raised similar questions and expressed caution about their next moves. When they last met in December, the Fed's 19 policymakers who participate in interest-rate decisions said they expected to cut their benchmark rate three times this year. Yet the timing of those rate cuts, which would lead to lower borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, remains uncertain.

Most economists say they expect the first rate cut to occur in May or June, though a cut at the Fed's

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March meeting is not off the table. The timing of rate cuts will almost certainly be the top issue at the Fed's two-day meeting, which ends Wednesday. The Fed is all but sure to announce after the meeting that it's leaving its key rate unchanged at about 5.4%, where it's stood since July, its highest point in 22 years.

The Fed's consideration of rate cuts is taking place against an intensifying presidential campaign as President Joe Biden seeks re-election with the economy a polarizing issue. Rate cuts have the potential to provoke an attack from former President Donald Trump, who nominated Powell to be Fed chair but later publicly assailed him for raising rates during the Trump presidency and demanded that he lower them. Trump might view any Fed rate cuts carried out this year as aiding Biden's prospects in November.

At a news conference last month, Powell said: "We don't think about politics. We think about what's the right thing to do for the economy."

On Wednesday, the Fed's policymakers could signal that they're close to cutting rates by adjusting the language in the statement they issue after each meeting. In December, the statement still suggested that the officials were willing to consider more rate increases. Removing or altering that language in this week's statement would signal that they're shifting to a new approach, focused on rate cuts.

The Fed's aggressive streak of 11 rate hikes, beginning in March 2022, was intended to tame inflation, which peaked in June 2022 — according to the central bank's preferred gauge — at 7.1%. But data released Friday showed that over the past six months, inflation has fallen all the way back to the Fed's 2% annual target level. In the past three months, year-over-year inflation that excludes volatile food and energy costs has dropped to just 1.5%.

Yet Fed officials are expected to wait for at least a few months, to try to build confidence that inflation has been truly beaten, before they start reducing rates.

Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's governing board, sounded a note of caution in a recent speech.

"Inflation of 2% is our goal," he said. "But that goal cannot be achieved for just a moment in time. It must be sustained."

Waller has previously referred to having been "head-faked" on inflation. On more than one occasion, when initial government reports had indicated that inflation was falling, subsequent revisions to the data showed that price increases actually remained high. In his speech, Waller mentioned the government's upcoming revisions of inflation data, to be released on Feb. 9, as a report he will be watching closely.

It's possible that inflation could stay undesirably high, especially if the economy remains strong, which could cause the Fed to leave rates unchanged. Fed officials have said that as long as the economy stays healthy, they can take time before cutting rates.

Average paychecks are still increasing at about 4% to 4.5% annually, and apartment rental prices are still rising faster than they did before the pandemic. Officials expect rent prices to cool as a slew of new apartment buildings are completed. But that has yet to show up in the official data. And some prices in the service sector, such as for restaurant meals, are still accelerating.

"We would argue we're not out of the woods yet," said Tiffany Wilding, a managing director and economist at PIMCO. "The Fed does not want to be Arthur Burns," she added, referring to the Fed chair from the 1970s who is widely blamed for cutting rates too soon and allowing inflation to become more deeply entrenched in the economy.

At the same time, the Fed is grappling with an equivalent risk in the other direction: That it might keep its key rate too high for too long and potentially trigger a recession. Consumers spent at a healthy pace in the final three months of last year, but they could eventually pull back in the face of higher borrowing costs and prices that are still well above where they were three years ago.

"They run the risk of overstaying their welcome at high rates and slowing the economy down in a way that really isn't necessary," said Bill English, a finance professor at the Yale School of Management and a former Fed economist.

Still, the Fed could also accelerate its rate cuts later this year if the economy does weaken, just as it rapidly raised rates after waiting too long to start boosting them in 2022, said Claudia Sahm, founder of

Sahm Consulting and a former Fed economist.

"I fully expect them to wait as long as humanly possible to cut rates," she said. "The Fed excels at being behind the curve."

X pauses some Taylor Swift searches as deepfake explicit images spread

By The Associated Press undefined

Elon Musk's social media platform X has blocked some searches for Taylor Swift as pornographic deepfake images of the singer have circulated online.

Attempts to search for her name without quote marks on the site Monday resulted in an error message and a prompt for users to retry their search, which added, "Don't fret — it's not your fault."

However, putting quote marks around her name allowed posts to appear that mentioned her name.

Sexually explicit and abusive fake images of Swift began circulating widely last week on X, making her the most famous victim of a scourge that tech platforms and anti-abuse groups have struggled to fix.

"This is a temporary action and done with an abundance of caution as we prioritize safety on this issue," Joe Benarroch, head of business operations at X, said in a statement.

Unlike more conventional doctored images that have troubled celebrities in the past, the Swift images appear to have been created using an artificial intelligence image-generator that can instantly create new images from a written prompt.

After the images began spreading online, the singer's devoted fanbase of "Swifties" quickly mobilized, launching a counteroffensive on X and a #ProtectTaylorSwift hashtag to flood it with more positive images of the pop star. Some said they were reporting accounts that were sharing the deepfakes.

The deepfake-detecting group Reality Defender said it tracked a deluge of nonconsensual pornographic material depicting Swift, particularly on X, formerly known as Twitter. Some images also made their way to Meta-owned Facebook and other social media platforms.

The researchers found at least a couple dozen unique AI-generated images. The most widely shared were football-related, showing a painted or bloodied Swift that objectified her and in some cases inflicted violent harm on her deepfake persona.

The Swift images first emerged from an ongoing campaign that began last year on fringe platforms to produce sexually explicit AI-generated images of celebrity women, said Ben Decker, founder of the threat intelligence group Memetica. One of the Swift images that went viral last week appeared online as early as Jan. 6, he said.

Most commercial AI image-generators have safeguards to prevent abuse, but commenters on anonymous message boards discussed tactics for how to circumvent the moderation, especially on Microsoft Designer's text-to-image tool, Decker said.

Microsoft said in a statement Monday that it is "continuing to investigate these images and have strengthened our existing safety systems to further prevent our services from being misused to help generate images like them."

Decker said "it's part of a longstanding, adversarial relationship between trolls and platforms."

"As long as platforms exist, trolls are going to try to disrupt them," he said. "And as long as trolls exist, platforms are going to be disrupted. So the question really becomes, how many more times is this going to happen before there is any serious change?"

X's move to reduce searches of Swift is likely a stopgap measure.

"When you're not sure where everything is and you can't guarantee that everything has been taken down, the simplest thing you can do is limit people's ability to search for it," he said.

Researchers have said the number of explicit deepfakes have grown in the past few years, as the technology used to produce such images has become more accessible and easier to use.

In 2019, a report released by the AI firm DeepTrace Labs showed these images were overwhelmingly

weaponized against women. Most of the victims, it said, were Hollywood actors and South Korean K-pop singers.

In the European Union, separate pieces of new legislation include provisions for deepfakes. The Digital Services Act, which took effect last year, requires online platforms to take measures to curb the risk of spreading content that breaches "fundamental rights" like privacy, such as "non-consensual" images or deepfake porn. The 27-nation bloc's Artificial Intelligence Act, which still awaits final approvals, will require companies that create deepfakes with AI systems to also inform users that the content is artificial or manipulated.

Key points from AP analysis of Trump's New York civil fraud case

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump could potentially have his real estate empire ordered "dissolved" for repeated misrepresentations on financial statements to lenders in violation of New York's powerful anti-fraud law.

But an Associated Press analysis of nearly 70 years of similar cases showed Trump's case stands apart: It's the only big business found that was threatened with a shutdown without a showing of obvious victims and major losses.

Some legal experts worry if the New York judge goes ahead with such a penalty in a final ruling expected within the next couple of weeks, it could make it easier for courts to wipe out companies in the future.

"This sets a horrible precedent," said Adam Leitman Bailey, a New York real estate lawyer who once sued a Trump condo building.

Here is what the AP analysis found:

TRUMP'S CASE STICKS OUT

A finding of fraud under the New York's statute, known as Executive Law 63(12), does not require any misrepresentations or flat-out lies result in anyone getting duped or losing money. But AP's review of nearly 150 cases reported in legal databases found that in the dozen cases calling for "dissolution," victims and losses were key factors.

The AP review turned up a breast cancer nonprofit shut down a dozen years ago for using nearly all its \$9 million in donations to pay for director salaries, perks and other expenses instead of funding free mammograms, research and help for survivors as promised.

A private equity firm faking big investment success was closed down after stealing millions of dollars from thousands of investors.

And a mental health facility was shuttered for looting \$4 million from public funds while neglecting patients.

Other businesses shut down included a phony psychologist who sold dubious treatments, a fake lawyer who sold false claims he could get students into law school, and businessmen who marketed financial advice but instead swindled people out of their home deeds.

There may be more dissolved companies than AP found. Legal experts caution that some 63(12) cases never show up in legal databases because they were settled, dropped or otherwise not reported.

Still, the only case the AP found of a business dissolved under the anti-fraud law without citing actual victims or losses was a relatively small company closed in 1972 for writing term papers for college students. In that case, the attorney general said the victim was the "integrity of the educational process."

WHAT THE JUDGE SAID ABOUT TRUMP

New York Supreme Court Judge Arthur Engoron ruled last year that Trump had committed fraud in sending 11 years of allegedly inflated estimates of his net worth to Deutsche Bank and others. The New York attorney general who filed the lawsuit, Letitia James, said that helped the ex-president receive lower interest rates.

Among Trump's many false claims that allegedly ripped off the bank: His penthouse apartment was stated three times larger than its actual size.

But if the fraud is obvious, the impact is not.

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Banks and others have not complained, and it's unclear how much they lost, if anything.

"This is basically a death penalty for a business," said Columbia University law professor Eric Talley about Trump possibly getting shut down. "Is he getting his just desserts because of the fraud, or because people don't like him?"

The judge's ruling last year calling for a "dissolution" is under appeal.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S VERSION

James called to the stand a lending expert who estimated that Deutsche Bank gave up \$168 million in extra interest on its Trump loans, basing his calculations as if Trump never offered a personal guarantee.

But Trump did offer a guarantee, even if his estimate of his personal wealth was exaggerated.

In fact, the bank made its own estimates of Trump's personal wealth, at times lopping billions from Trump's figures, and still decided to lend to him. And bank officials called to testify couldn't say for sure if Trump's personal statement of worth had any impact on the rates.

HOW 'DISSOLUTION' WOULD WORK

The judge said last year that state certificates needed to run many of Trump's New York companies should be revoked and the companies turned over to a receiver who will manage the "dissolution" of them.

What the judge left unclear is what he meant by "dissolution," whether that referred to the liquidation of companies that control properties or the properties themselves.

In a worst case, as interpreted by legal experts, Engoron could decide dissolution means stripping the real estate mogul of not only of his New York holdings such as Trump Tower and his 40 Wall Street skyscraper, but his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, a Chicago hotel and other properties.

A DELAYED PUNISHMENT?

Notably, attorney general James never asked for a dissolution and sale.

Instead, she has recommended that Trump be banned from doing business in New York and pay \$370 million, what she estimates is saved interest and other "ill-gotten gains."

One solution: Delay.

In a footnote in a 94-page summary document filed earlier this month, James suggested the judge appoint an independent monitor to oversee Trump's operations for five years, after which the court could decide whether to revoke his business certificates and possibly put him out of business.

University of Michigan law professor William Thomas says he is worried the order might stick.

"Those who want to see Donald Trump suffer by any means necessary," he said, "risk ignoring the very commitment to a rule of law that they accuse him of flouting."

France's protesting farmers encircle Paris with tractor barricades, vowing a 'siege' over grievances

By SYLVIE CORBET and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

JOSSIGNY, France (AP) — Protesting farmers encircled Paris with traffic-snarling barricades Monday, using hundreds of lumbering tractors and mounds of hay bales to block highways leading to France's capital to pressure the government over the future of their industry, which has been shaken by repercussions of the Ukraine war.

The blockading of major thoroughfares around Paris — host of the Summer Olympics in six months — and protests elsewhere in France promised another difficult week for new Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, less than a month into the job.

Protesters said Attal's attempts last week at pro-agriculture measures fell short of their demands that producing food should be more lucrative, easier and fairer.

Farmers responded with the deployment Monday of convoys of tractors, trailers and even rumbling harvesters in what they described as a "siege" of Paris to gain more concessions. Some protesters came with reserves of food and water and tents to stay at barricades if the government doesn't cede ground.

"We've come to defend French agriculture," said Christophe Rossignol, a 52-year-old farmer of organic

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orchards and other crops. Tractors at the barricade east of Paris were parked so they formed what looked like an ear of wheat when seen from the air.

"We go from crisis to crisis," Rossignol said. Some vehicles carried placards declaring "No food without farmers" and "The end of us would mean famine for you."

The barricades highlighted gulfs in economic and social opportunity between town and country in France. Protesters said they felt ignored by government ministers they accused of rarely venturing to farms and getting their shoes dirty.

The government announced a deployment of 15,000 police officers, mostly in the Paris region, to stop any effort by protesters to enter the capital. Officers and armored vehicles also were stationed at Paris' hub for fresh food supplies, the Rungis market.

Paris region traffic authorities reported blockages on the A1 highway just north of the city's main international airport, on the A4 near the Disneyland theme park east of the capital and on other usually busy highways.

"Our goal isn't to bother or to ruin French people's lives," Arnaud Rousseau, president of the influential FNSEA agricultural union, said on RTL radio. "Our goal is to put pressure on the government to rapidly find solutions out of the crisis."

Farmers in neighboring Belgium also set up barricades to stop traffic reaching some main highways, including into the capital, Brussels. Most protests are happening in the French-speaking part of the country.

A farmer from Tournai in western Belgium, Clemente Glorieux, said agricultural producers are "fed up. At some point, rules and constraints are imposed on us, whether administrative or financial. This has been harmful for a while now, so we're starting to ask ourselves questions about our future."

Glorieux and farmers at barricades around Paris said they aim to keep protesting at least until Thursday, when leaders from the European Union's 27 nations are to meet in Brussels for a summit focused on financial support for Ukraine.

"We have everything we need to eat, barbecues, and a wall of hay to shield ourselves from the wind. We have the equipment and we're settling in alright!" said Paris-region farmer and protester Jean-Baptiste Benoit.

The movement in France is another manifestation of a global food crisis worsened by Russia's nearly two-year full-scale war in Ukraine, a major food producer.

French farmers assert that higher prices for fertilizer, energy and other inputs for growing crops and feeding livestock have eaten into their incomes.

Protesters also argue that France's massively subsidized farming sector is over-regulated and hurt by food imports from countries where agricultural producers face lower costs and fewer constraints. Rousseau used Ukrainian sugar producers as an example, saying their soaring exports to Europe since Russia invaded in February 2022 are "untenable" for European counterparts.

Taxi drivers with other grievances also organized drive-slow protests Monday, adding to the traffic chaos in the Paris area and other parts of the country. Authorities recommended that road users switch to public transport if possible.

Takeaways from the AP's investigation into how US prison labor supports many popular food brands

By MARGIE MASON and ROBIN McDOWELL Associated Press

In a sweeping two-year investigation, The Associated Press found goods linked to U.S. prisoners wind up in the supply chains of a dizzying array of products from Frosted Flakes cereal and Ball Park hot dogs to Gold Medal flour and Coca-Cola. They are on the shelves of most supermarkets, including Kroger, Target, Aldi and Whole Foods.

Here are takeaways from the AP's investigation:

PEOPLE OF COLOR DISPRORTIONATELY AFFECTED

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The U.S. has a history of locking up more people than any other country – currently around 2 million – and goods tied to prison labor have morphed into a massive multibillion-dollar empire, extending far beyond the classic images of people stamping license plates or working on road crews.

The prisoners who help produce these goods are disproportionately people of color. Some are sentenced to hard labor and forced to work – or face punishment – and are sometimes paid pennies an hour or nothing at all. They are often excluded from protections guaranteed to almost all other full-time workers, even when they are seriously injured or killed on the job. And it can be almost impossible for them to sue.

And it's all legal, dating back largely to labor demands as the South struggled to rebuild its shattered economy after the Civil War. In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawed slavery and involuntary labor— except as punishment for a crime. That clause is being challenged on the federal level, and efforts to remove similar language from state constitutions are expected to reach the ballot in about a dozen states this year.

WIDE RANGE OF BUSINESSES BENEFIT FROM PRISON LABOR

The AP sought information from all 50 states through public records requests and inquiries to corrections departments, linking hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of transactions to agriculture-based prison labor in state and federal facilities over the past six years. Those figures include everything from people leased out to work at private businesses to farmed goods and livestock sold on the open market. Many of these goods came from large operations in the South, though almost every state has some sort of agriculture program.

Reporters also found prison labor in the supply chains of giants like McDonald's, Walmart and Costco – and in the supply chains of goods being shipped all over the world via multinational companies, including to countries that have been slapped with import bans by Washington in recent years for using prison and forced labor themselves.

WIDE RANGE OF JOBS

Almost all of the country's state and federal adult prisons have some sort of work programs, employing around 800,000 people, according to a 2022 report by the American Civil Liberties Union. The vast majority of those jobs are tied to tasks like maintaining prisons, laundry or kitchen work. Some prisoners also work for states and municipalities, doing everything from cleaning up after hurricanes and tornadoes to picking up trash along bustling highways.

But they also are contracted out to private companies either directly from their prisons or through work-release programs. They're often hired in industries with severe labor shortages, doing some of the country's dirtiest and most dangerous jobs like working in poultry plants, meat-processing centers and sawmills.

The AP found that prisoners with just a few months or years left on their sentences work at private companies nationwide. Unlike work crews picking up litter in orange jumpsuits, they go largely unnoticed, often wearing the same uniforms as their civilian counterparts.

Incarcerated people also have been contracted to companies that partner with prisons. In Idaho, they've sorted and packed the state's famous potatoes, which are exported and sold to companies nationwide. In Kansas, they've been employed at Russell Stover chocolates and Cal-Maine Foods, the country's largest egg producer. Though the company has since stopped, in recent years they were hired in Arizona by Taylor Farms, which sells salad kits in many major grocery stores nationwide and supplies popular fast-food chains and restaurants like Chipotle Mexican Grill.

WHAT DO THE COMPANIES SAY?

While prison labor seeps into the supply chains of some companies through third-party suppliers without them knowing, others buy direct. Mammoth commodity traders that are essential to feeding the globe like Cargill, Bunge, Louis Dreyfus, Archer Daniels Midland and Consolidated Grain and Barge have been scooping up millions of dollars' worth of soy, corn and wheat straight from prison farms.

The AP reached out for comment to the companies it identified as having connections to prison labor, but most did not respond.

Cargill acknowledged buying goods from prison farms in Tennessee, Arkansas and Ohio, saying they constituted only a small fraction of the company's overall volume. It added that "we are now in the process

of determining the appropriate remedial action.”

McDonald’s said it would investigate links to any such labor, and Archer Daniels Midland and General Mills, which produces Gold Medal flour, pointed to their policies in place restricting suppliers from using forced labor. Whole Foods responded flatly: “Whole Foods Market does not allow the use of prison labor in products sold at our stores.”

Bunge confirmed it had purchased grain from corrections departments but said it sold the facilities sourcing from them in 2021, so they are “no longer part of Bunge’s footprint.”

WHAT DO THE PRISONS SAY?

Corrections officials and other proponents note that not all work is forced and that prison jobs save taxpayers money. They also say workers are learning skills that can be used when they’re released and given a sense of purpose, which could help ward off repeat offenses. In some cases, labor can mean time shaved off a sentence. And the jobs provide a way to repay a debt to society, they say.

“A lot of these guys come from homes where they’ve never understood work and they’ve never understood the feeling at the end of the day for a job well-done,” said David Farabough, who oversees Arkansas’ prison farms.

While most critics don’t believe all jobs should be eliminated, they say incarcerated people should be paid fairly, treated humanely and that all work should be voluntary.

“They are largely uncompensated, they are being forced to work, and it’s unsafe. They also aren’t learning skills that will help them when they are released,” said law professor Andrea Armstrong, an expert on prison labor at Loyola University New Orleans.

The Super Bowl is set: Mahomes and the Chiefs will face Purdy and the 49ers

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Patrick Mahomes, Travis Kelce and the Kansas City Chiefs are heading to Las Vegas with a chance for a rare repeat while facing the San Francisco 49ers in a Super Bowl rematch from four years ago.

The Chiefs beat Lamar Jackson and the No. 1-seeded Baltimore Ravens 17-10 in the AFC championship game Sunday to advance to the Super Bowl for the fourth time in five years. A few hours later, Brock Purdy rallied the No. 1-seeded 49ers to a 34-31 victory over the Detroit Lions in the NFC title game.

The Chiefs (14-6) are aiming to become the first back-to-back champions since Tom Brady and the New England Patriots did it following the 2003-04 seasons.

Purdy — who was still two years away from being the last pick of the 2022 NFL draft the last time the teams played in the Super Bowl — will try to lead the 49ers (14-5) to a record-tying sixth title in their eighth appearance.

The teams meet at Allegiant Stadium on Feb. 11. The 49ers opened as 2 1/2-point favorites, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Mahomes and the Chiefs overcame a 20-10 fourth-quarter deficit and beat the 49ers 31-20 to give coach Andy Reid his first Super Bowl victory on Feb. 2, 2020. Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers spoiled Kansas City’s repeat bid the following year.

The Chiefs will become just the third team to play in four Super Bowls over a five-year span. Only the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s, the Dallas Cowboys in the 1990s and the Patriots in the 2000s and 2010s won three Super Bowls in a five-year span.

Mahomes rallied the Chiefs for a 38-35 comeback win over the Philadelphia Eagles in the Super Bowl last year. They beat Miami 26-7 in the wild-card round and defeated the Bills 27-24 in Buffalo last week in Mahomes’ first career playoff game on the road besides Super Bowls.

The 49ers were dominated by the Eagles in the NFC title game last year in a game that saw Purdy suffer a significant elbow injury that required surgery. He returned for the season opener and helped them earn a first-round bye. Purdy led a 24-21 comeback win over Green Bay last week and brought the Niners back from a 17-point deficit against the Lions.

Only New England and Pittsburgh have more Super Bowl wins than the San Francisco 49ers, which last won it following the 1994 season.

Reid will lead a team in the Super Bowl for the fifth time, moving into a tie with Tom Landry for third most behind Bill Belichick's nine and Don Shula's six. Reid coached the Eagles when the Patriots beat them to repeat 19 years ago.

Niners coach Kyle Shanahan returns to the Super Bowl after losing to Reid in his first crack at it. Shanahan was Atlanta's offensive coordinator when the Falcons blew a 28-3 lead against Brady and the Patriots in Super Bowl 51.

Mahomes, a two-time NFL and Super Bowl MVP, will start in his fourth Super Bowl, tied with Joe Montana, Terry Bradshaw, Peyton Manning, Roger Staubach and Jim Kelly for third-most behind Brady's 10 and John Elway's five.

The biggest question is whether Taylor Swift will make it to Las Vegas to watch her boyfriend in the Super Bowl on Feb. 11. Swift, who celebrated with Kelce on the field after the victory over the Ravens, is scheduled to perform in Japan just 24 hours before kickoff.

What is UNRWA, the main aid provider in Gaza that Israel accuses of militant links?

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Israel's allegations that 12 employees of a United Nations agency were involved in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack have led the United States and several other countries to cut off funding and reignited debate over Gaza's biggest humanitarian aid provider.

The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, employs thousands of staffers and provides vital aid and services to millions of people across the Middle East. In Gaza, it has been the main supplier of food, water and shelter to civilians during the Israel-Hamas war.

Israel — whose allegations were detailed in a document obtained by The Associated Press on Monday — has long railed against the agency, accusing it of tolerating or even collaborating with Hamas and of perpetuating the 76-year-old Palestinian refugee crisis. The Israeli government has accused Hamas and other militant groups of siphoning off aid and using U.N. facilities for military purposes.

UNRWA denies those allegations and says it took swift action against the employees accused of taking part in the attack. The United States and other top donors that together provided more than half of UNRWA's budget in 2022 nevertheless suspended their funding to the agency.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says 2 million Palestinians in Gaza, or 87% of the population, rely on UNRWA services that would be scaled back as soon as February if the money is not restored.

WHAT IS UNRWA AND WHY WAS IT CREATED?

The U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East was established to provide aid to the estimated 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding the country's creation.

The Palestinians say the refugees and their descendants, who now number nearly 6 million across the Middle East, have the right to return to their homes.

Israel has refused because if the right of return were to be fully implemented it would result in a Palestinian majority inside its borders. The fate of the refugees and their descendants was among the thorniest issues in the peace process, which ground to a halt in 2009.

UNRWA operates schools, health clinics, infrastructure projects and aid programs in refugee camps that now resemble dense urban neighborhoods in Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. It has 13,000 employees in Gaza alone, the vast majority of them Palestinians.

In Gaza, where some 85% of territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, over 1 million are sheltering in UNRWA schools and other facilities.

WHAT DO ISRAEL AND OTHER CRITICS SAY ABOUT UNRWA?

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Israel accuses UNRWA of turning a blind eye as Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, siphons off aid intended for civilians and fights from in and around U.N. facilities, several of which have been struck during the war.

Israel also has exposed Hamas tunnels running next to or under UNRWA facilities and accuses the agency of teaching hatred of Israel in its schools.

UNRWA denies that it knowingly aids Hamas or any other militant group and says it has internal safeguards. It says it thoroughly investigates any allegations of wrongdoing and holds staff accountable, and that it provides lists of all of its staff to Israel and host countries.

The Israeli document spelled out allegations against the dozen U.N. employees it says participated in Hamas' assault. It said seven of them stormed into Israel, including two who participated in kidnappings.

The document said that according to intelligence, roughly 190 UNRWA employees were members of militant groups, without providing evidence.

In the surprise Oct. 7 attack, Hamas fighters from Gaza overran Israel's extensive border defenses. Other militants joined in the subsequent rampage through nearby communities, which left 1,200 people dead, mostly civilians. Around 250 others, including children, were captured and dragged into Gaza.

U.N. chief Guterres said nine of the accused UNRWA employees were immediately terminated. He said all would be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution. The Israeli document said two of the accused employees had been killed, and the U.N. previously said one still needed to be identified.

Evidence supporting the allegations has not been made public and the AP could not immediately verify the identities of those named in the document.

UNRWA has condemned the Oct. 7 attack and called for all the hostages to be freed. Before the latest allegations, the agency's commissioner-general, Philippe Lazzarini, announced an external review to determine which previous accusations by Israel and its supporters were "true or untrue," and what was "politically motivated."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the agency should be shut down. But his government has continued to allow UNRWA to operate in the West Bank and Gaza, where it provides basic services that might otherwise be the responsibility of Israel, which occupies the West Bank and imposes a blockade along with Egypt on Gaza.

No other entity would be able to quickly fill the void if UNRWA ceased operations.

WHAT DO THE FUNDING CUTS MEAN FOR GAZA?

The United States, which was the first country to suspend funding, is the biggest donor to UNRWA, providing it with \$340 million in 2022. Several other countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, Japan and Italy, have also suspended aid. All told, the donors provided more than 60% of UNRWA's funding in 2022.

It was not immediately clear when or how the suspension of aid would affect the agency's day-to-day operations. Norway and Ireland said they would continue funding UNRWA.

The war has plunged Gaza into a severe humanitarian crisis. One in four Palestinians in the territory faces starvation, according to U.N. officials, who say aid operations are hampered by the fighting and Israeli restrictions.

"Our humanitarian operation, on which 2 million people depend as a lifeline in Gaza, is collapsing," Lazzarini posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

He expressed shock that countries would suspend aid "based on alleged behavior of a few individuals and as the war continues, needs are deepening & famine looms."

The war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, most women and children, and wounded more than 64,400 others, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza. It does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its toll.

The death toll includes more than 150 UNWRA employees, the most aid workers the U.N. has lost in a single conflict.

An Israeli strike on a Damascus area where Iran-backed groups operate caused casualties, Syria says

By ALBERT AJI and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — An Israeli airstrike on a Damascus suburb on Monday killed and wounded several people, the Syrian military said in a statement carried by state media. Opposition activists said the area hit was a stronghold of Iran-backed groups.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said the strike hit a farm housing members of Lebanon's Iran-backed militant Hezbollah group and other Iran-backed factions.

It said the strike killed seven people, including four Syrians, one of whom was the bodyguard of a member of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. It did not give the nationalities of the others.

The strike comes amid rising tension in the Middle East with the ongoing Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza and a drone attack on Sunday that killed three U.S. troops and injured dozens more in northeastern Jordan, near the Syrian border.

Days earlier, an Israeli strike on Damascus destroyed a building used by the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, killing at least five Iranians.

The Syrian military said in its statement that Israeli missiles were fired from the direction of Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, hitting "some points south of Damascus." The statement added that "the aggression left several civilians martyrs and wounded."

Earlier in the day, the pro-government Dama Post said the strike hit the area of Sayida Zeinab without providing further details.

Earlier, an official with one of the Iranian-backed groups, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss military activities, said two Syrian citizens were killed in Monday's strike on Aqraba on the edge of Sayida Zeinab.

No Hezbollah members or Iranian advisers were hurt, the official said.

None of the reports could not be independently confirmed.

Last month, a presumed Israeli airstrike on Sayida Zeinab killed Iranian Gen. Seyed Razi Mousavi, a long-time adviser of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in Syria. Israel has also targeted Palestinian and Lebanese operatives in Syria over the past years.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of war-torn Syria in recent years.

Israel rarely acknowledges its actions in Syria, but it has said that it targets bases of Iran-allied militant groups, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has sent thousands of fighters to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

Earlier in January, a strike said to be carried out by Israel killed top Hamas commander Saleh Arouri in Beirut.

China Evergrande has been ordered to liquidate. The real estate giant owes over \$300 billion

By KANIS LEUNG and ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — A Hong Kong court ordered China Evergrande, the world's most heavily indebted real estate developer, to undergo liquidation following a failed effort to restructure \$300 billion owed to banks and bondholders that fueled fears about China's rising debt burden.

"It would be a situation where the court says enough is enough," Judge Linda Chan said Monday. She said it was appropriate for the court to order Evergrande to wind up its business given a "lack of progress on the part of the company putting forward a viable restructuring proposal" as well as Evergrande's insolvency.

China Evergrande Group is among dozens of Chinese developers that have collapsed since 2020 under official pressure to rein in surging debt the ruling Communist Party views as a threat to China's slowing

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economic growth.

But the crackdown on excess borrowing tipped the property industry into crisis, dragging on the economy and rattling financial systems in and outside China.

Chinese regulators have said the risks of global shockwaves from Evergrande's failure can be contained. The court documents seen Monday showed Evergrande owes about \$25.4 billion to foreign creditors. Its total assets of about \$240 billion are dwarfed by its total liabilities.

"It is indisputable that the company is grossly insolvent and is unable to pay its debts," the documents say.

About 90% of Evergrande's business is in mainland China. Its chairman, Hui Ka Yan, who is also known as Xu Jiayin, was detained by authorities for suspected "illegal crimes" in late September, further complicating the company's efforts to recover.

It's unclear how the liquidation order will affect China's financial system or Evergrande's operations as it struggles to deliver housing that has been paid for but not yet handed over to families that put their life savings into such investments.

Evergrande's Hong Kong-traded shares plunged nearly 21% early Monday before they were suspended from trading. But Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng index was up 0.9% and some property developers saw gains in their share prices.

China's largest real estate developer, Country Garden, initially gained nearly 3% but was flat. Sunac China Holdings rose 2.4%.

The Shanghai Composite index dropped 0.9% while Shenzhen's A-share index fell more than 2%.

The Hong Kong court gave Evergrande a reprieve in December to allow it time to "refine" a new debt restructuring plan.

But Chan, the judge, said Evergrande "has not demonstrated that there is any useful purpose for the court to adjourn the petition — there is no restructuring proposal, let alone a viable proposal which has the support of the requisite majorities of the creditors."

In remarks published online, she lambasted the company for putting out only "general ideas" about what it may or may not be able to put forward as a restructuring proposal. The interests of creditors would be better protected if Evergrande is wound up by the court, she said.

Fergus Saurin, a lawyer representing an ad hoc group of creditors, said Monday he was not surprised by the outcome.

"The company has failed to engage with us. There has been a history of last-minute engagement which has gone nowhere," he said.

Saurin said that his team worked in good faith during the negotiations. Evergrande "only has itself to blame for being wound up," he said.

Tiffany Wong, one of two liquidators appointed by the court from global services firm Alvarez & Marsal, said that their priority was to ensure that "as much of the business as possible (is) retained, restructured and remains operational."

"We will pursue a structured approach to preserve and return value to the creditors and other stakeholders," Wong said. That includes considering any viable restructuring proposals, she said.

Evergrande CEO Shawn Siu told Chinese news outlet 21Jingji that the company feels "utmost regret" at the liquidation order.

He emphasized that the order affects only the Hong Kong-listed China Evergrande unit and that the group's domestic and overseas units are independent legal entities. Siu said that Evergrande will strive to continue smooth operations and deliver properties to buyers.

Real estate drove China's economic boom, but developers borrowed heavily as they turned cities into forests of apartment and office towers. That has helped to push total corporate, government and household debt to the equivalent of more than 300% of annual economic output, unusually high for a middle-income country.

Evergrande first defaulted on its financial obligations in 2021, just over a year after Beijing clamped down on lending to property developers to cool a property bubble.

As a former British colony, Hong Kong operates under a legal system that is separate, though increasingly influenced by, communist-ruled China's. In some cases, mainland courts have recognized bankruptcy rulings in Hong Kong but analysts say Evergrande's is something of a test case.

Brock Silvers, managing director at Kaiyuan Capital, said the liquidation order was likely to have more of an immediate impact on foreign investors and their confidence in China's financial markets than on Evergrande's operations in mainland China.

"So onshore, Evergrande tomorrow will look a lot like Evergrande yesterday, there won't be a lot of noticeable difference," he said.

Regulators need to restructure Evergrande and other struggling property developers, but it will be a complex and difficult process, said David Goodman, director of the China Studies Center at the University of Sydney.

"If the government could see simple answers to these problems, it would have reached them two to three years ago," Goodman said.

Biden is marking the 15th anniversary of landmark pay equity law with steps to help federal workers

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is marking Monday's 15th anniversary of a landmark federal pay equity law with new action to help close gaps in pay for federal employees and employees of federal contractors.

Despite progress since the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was signed into law in January 2009, President Joe Biden said women who work outside the home are still paid an average of 84 cents for every dollar earned by a man, and that the pay disparities are greater for many women of color.

The Democratic president said the "common-sense" steps announced Monday "will help pay millions of workers fairly, close gender and racial wage gaps and yield tangible benefits for the federal government and federal contractors."

The Office of Personnel Management is issuing a final rule to bar the government from considering a person's current or past pay when determining their salary for federal employment. Administration officials said this step will help limit pay discrimination and ensure compensation is based on an applicant's skills, experience and expertise.

A similar proposal will offer protections to those employed by federal contractors.

The Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council is issuing a proposal to prohibit federal contractors and sub-contractors from seeking and considering information about a job applicant's compensation history when hiring or setting pay for anyone who works on a government contract.

The proposal also requires contractors and subcontractors to disclose salary ranges in job postings.

Administration officials said the proposal would help federal contractors recruit, diversify and retain talent, improve job satisfaction and performance and reduce turnover.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was the first bill then-President Barack Obama signed into law after taking office in 2009. Biden was vice president.

Ledbetter's discovery that she was earning less than her male counterparts for doing the same job at a Goodyear plant led to a Supreme Court lawsuit and eventually the legislation bearing her name.

Shalanda Young, director of the White House budget office, said the law created important protections against pay discrimination and helped close persistent gender and racial wage gaps.

"But we still have more work to do," she told reporters on a conference call arranged by the White House to preview the announcements.

Kiran Ahuja, director of the federal personnel office, said on the same call that the government "does a pretty decent job" on wages compared with the private sector.

In 2022, the federal government had a 5.6% pay gap compared with 16% nationwide. The difference in pay in the most senior ranks of the federal government is below 1%, Ahuja said.

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"The federal government is proud of this progress we've made," she said. "But we also realize that any gap is unacceptable."

The National Partnership for Women and Families said the 84 cents that women earn for every dollar paid to a man results in a gap of \$9,990, a sum that could help a working woman pay for approximately 64 weeks of food, seven months of mortgage and utility payments, about nine months of rent or more than a year of additional child care.

Today in History: January 30, Hitler becomes German chancellor

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Jan. 30, the 30th day of 2024. There are 336 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On Jan. 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany.

On this date:

In 1649, England's King Charles I was executed for high treason.

In 1911, James White, an intellectually disabled young Black man who had been convicted of rape for having sex with a 14-year-old white girl when he was 16, was publicly hanged in Bell County, Kentucky.

In 1945, during World War II, a Soviet submarine torpedoed the German ship MV Wilhelm Gustloff in the Baltic Sea, killing 9,000, most of them war refugees; roughly 1,000 people survived.

In 1948, Indian political and spiritual leader Mohandas K. Gandhi, 78, was shot and killed in New Delhi by Nathuram Godse (neh-too-RAHM' gahd-SAY'), a Hindu extremist.

In 1968, the Tet Offensive began during the Vietnam War as Communist forces launched surprise attacks against South Vietnamese towns and cities.

In 1969, The Beatles staged an impromptu concert atop Apple headquarters in London that would be their last public performance.

In 1972, 13 Roman Catholic civil rights marchers were shot and killed by British soldiers in Northern Ireland on what became known as "Bloody Sunday."

In 1993, Los Angeles inaugurated its Metro Red Line, the city's first modern subway.

In 2005, Iraqis voted in their country's first free election in a half-century; President George W. Bush called the balloting a resounding success.

In 2006, Coretta Scott King, widow of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., died in Rosarito Beach, Mexico, at age 78.

In 2017, President Donald Trump fired Acting U.S. Attorney General Sally Yates after she publicly questioned the constitutionality of his controversial refugee and immigration ban and refused to defend it in court.

In 2020, health officials reported the first known case in which the new coronavirus was spread from one person to another in the United States.

Today's birthdays: Actor Gene Hackman is 94. Actor Vanessa Redgrave is 87. Country singer Jeanne Pruett is 87. Country singer Norma Jean is 86. Horn player William King of The Commodores is 75. Musician Phil Collins is 73. Actor Charles S. Dutton ("Roc") is 73. Actor Ann Dowd ("The Handmaid's Tale") is 68. Comedian Brett Butler ("Anger Management," "Grace Under Fire") is 66. Singer Jody Watley is 65. Actor Wayne Wilderson ("Veep") is 58. Country singer Tammy Cochran is 52. Actor Christian Bale is 50. Guitarist Carl Broemel of My Morning Jacket is 50. Actor Olivia Colman is 50. Singer Josh Kelley is 44. Actor Wilmer Valderrama ("That '70s Show") is 44. Actor Mary Hollis Inboden ("The Real O'Neals") is 38. Actor Kylie Bunbury ("Big Sky," "Pitch") is 35. Actor Jake Thomas ("Lizzie McGuire," "AI") is 34. Actor Danielle Campbell ("Tell Me A Story," "The Originals") is 29.