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Thursday, Feb. 8

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, sweet potatoes, vegetable capri blend, acini depepi fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Corn dogs, baked beans.

Boys Basketball hosts Redfield: (JH game in Gym at 4 p.m.) C game at 6 p.m., Varsity game at 7:15 p.m. (No JV Game)

Groton Lions Club Meeting, 6 p.m. at 104 N Main



"The only way to have a friend is to be one."

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Friday, Feb. 9

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle hot dish with peas, California blend vegetables, Swedish apple square, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

Junior High Basketball at Roncalli (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)

Girls Basketball at Redfield: C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., Varsity at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 10

Girls Wrestling at Brandon Valley.

Junior High State Wrestling at Pierre, 9 a.m.

Basketball Double Header with Mobridge-Pollock at Groton Area: Gym: Boys 7th at noon, Boys 8th at 1:00. Arena: Girls C game at noon, Girls JV at 1 p.m., Boys JV at 2 p.m., Girls Varsity at 3:15 p.m., Boys Varsity at 4:45 p.m.

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

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

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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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday rejected a counterproposal from Hamas for a cease-fire and hostage-release plan, saying Israel would continue its military operations in Gaza until an "absolute victory" is reached against Hamas. Israel claims to have dismantled 18 of Hamas' 24 battalions so far and is preparing to move its forces into Rafah near Egypt's border, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have been residing.

Pakistanis will cast ballots today in a twice-delayed parliamentary election, the first since former cricketer Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party ascended in 2018. The popular Khan, who has been jailed since last year and recently received three more jail sentences, was ousted in 2022 after losing support from the country's military.

The Senate failed to advance legislation combining border security provisions and supplemental foreign aid yesterday in a 49-50 vote, ending a monthslong effort by a small bipartisan group of senators to forge a compromise package. Sixty votes were needed to move the package forward.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Disney announces "Moana 2" release for Nov. 27. "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" concert film to be released exclusively on Disney+ March 15.

Standalone ESPN streaming platform to launch in fall 2025. PGA Tour outlines plan to distribute \$1.5B in equity to former, current, and future players.

Kevin Spacey to pay "House of Cards" production company \$1M to settle sexual harassment case.

Science & Technology

Scientists discover a new type of immune cell that remembers allergies and produces antibodies that trigger reactions; findings may lead to new treatments for common allergies.

Robotics firm Boston Dynamics demonstrates its Atlas robot performing tasks similar to working in an auto factory, including lifting 30-pound components.

Researchers identify single mutation that may allow engineered T cells to effectively target solid tumors; current CAR-T therapies largely focus on blood cancers.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +0.4%, Nasdaq +1.0%); S&P 500 notches another record close.

Uber posts first full-year profit since going public in 2019, reports better-than-expected 4Q revenue and earnings. Arm shares rise more than 35% in after-hours trading after British chipmaker raises annual and quarterly sales forecast. Disney shares rise 7% in after-hours trading after raising fiscal year forecast and announcing \$1.5B equity stake in Fortnite-maker Epic Games.

US imports of goods from Mexico surpass US imports from China for the first time in two decades, according to latest government data.

Politics & World Affairs

US Supreme Court to hear arguments over whether former President Donald Trump is ineligible for Colorado's GOP primary ballot; plaintiffs argue Trump's role in events of Jan. 6, 2021, bar him from running under the 14th Amendment's insurrection clause.

Search underway for five US Marines after their missing helicopter was found outside San Diego amid California's historic storm. Death toll related to California's storm rises to nine; storm damage expected to reach \$11B.

Russia fires missiles and drones across six regions in Ukraine, killing at least five people and injuring 50. Sweden closes investigation into Nord Stream pipeline explosions

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

Region 4 Small Group Music Contest



Emily Clark and Carlee Johnson (Photo from Desiree

Yeigh Facebook Page)

Results from Contest:

Instrumental:

I+ Solos: Gretchen (Flute), Carlee (Piano/
Horn)

Superior Solos: Becca Poor (Flute)

Excellent Solos: Emily Clark (Piano)

Superior Ensembles: Woodwinds,
Percussion, and Brass

Vocal:

I+ Solos: Anna (Vocal)

Superior Ensembles: Chamber Choir

Excellent Plus Solo: Becca Poor

Excellent Solos: Axel Warrington, Ashlyn
Feser

Excellent Duets: Anna/Natalia, Kira/Gentry

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Carlee Johnson, Brody Lord, Logan Clocksene, Addison Hoffman, Isaiah Scepaniak, Blake Lord, Nathan Unzen, Jackson Hopfinger then in the front it's Gavin Kroll and Jayden Schwan.

(Photo from Desiree Yeigh Facebook Page)

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Emily Clark, Teagan Hanten, Lincoln Krause, Faith Fliehs, Gentry Pigors, Axel Warrington and Corbin Weismantel. (Photo from Desiree Yeigh Facebook Page)



Jeslyn Kosel, Kira Clocksene, Gretchen Dinger, Emerlee Jones, Becca Poor, in front is Ash-lynn Warrington, Cadence Fiest, Kayla Lehr, Natalia Warrington. (Photo from Desiree Yeigh Facebook Page)

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January 22 - February 4,
2024

Welcome back to another edition of the Weekly Round[s] Up! As many of you may know, I attend the Senate Prayer Breakfast with my colleagues nearly every week when I'm out here in Washington. Once a year in early February,

we have the National Prayer Breakfast, where our typical small group of 15 or so expands well into the hundreds. We welcome several guests to the Capitol, including the President, to join us for a morning of prayer and fellowship. The National Prayer Breakfast is an important example of elected officials coming together from both sides of the aisle, putting politics aside for one morning to pray for the good of our nation. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I met with: Students from Lincoln High School visiting Washington D.C.; the South Dakota Chiropractors Association; the South Dakota Wheat Growers Association; and South Dakota members of the Merchants Payments Coalition. I was in Rapid City for the Black Hills Stock Show, and I traveled to Watertown to present United States Army veteran Clifford Lindner with the Atomic Veterans Commemorative Service Medal.

Visited with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Dakota Dunes, Lead, Miller, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, St. Lawrence and Watertown.

Other meetings: Admiral Samuel Paparo, nominee to be Commander of United States Indo-Pacific Command; Judy Faulkner, CEO of Epic Systems; David Maurstad, FEMA's Assistant Administrator of the Federal Insurance Directorate and the senior executive of the National Flood Insurance Program; Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google; Jacob Helberg, Senior Policy Advisor at Palantir; Ramush Haradinaj, former Prime Minister of Kosovo; Jason Kelly, Chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology; President Paul Kagame of Rwanda; Azarias Ruberwa, former Vice President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Senate Bible Study, where we studied Philippians 1:9.

In addition to the National Prayer Breakfast, we had our Senate Prayer Breakfast, where I was our speaker this past week. There is a sign that hangs in the Washington Monument with a quote from George Washington in 1785 that reads "My first wish... is to see the whole world in peace, and the inhabitants of it as one band of brothers, striving who should contribute most to the happiness of mankind." I had a copy of it made to put in my Washington D.C. office. I spoke about this quote at prayer breakfast this past week.

Votes taken: 21 – These were on nominations for judge positions across the United States, as well as several executive branch positions, including on the Amtrak Board of Directors and at the Environmental Protection Agency.

Hearings: I attended seven hearings over the past two weeks. Three in the Select Committee on Intelligence, two in the Senate Armed Services Committee and one in the Senate Banking Committee. I also attended one hearing in the Senate Banking Committee's Housing, Transportation, and Community Development Subcommittee on AI in Housing.

Classified briefings: I had four classified briefings these past two weeks, three of which were related to my work on the Senate Armed Services Committee. One was our bi-weekly cyber education seminar.

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Legislation introduced: I introduced legislation that would ban fake meat products from being served in school lunches. The School Lunch Integrity Act of 2024 would prohibit the use of cell-cultivated meat under the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. You can read more about this bill here.

I also introduced legislation with Senator Bill Hagerty (R-Tenn.) that would work to make certain that only U.S. citizens are factored into the count for congressional districts and the Electoral College map that determines presidential elections. You can read more about the Equal Representation Act here.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Fort Pierre, Huron, Madison, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Watertown.

Steps taken this past week:

Week 1: 53,838 steps or 26.71 miles

Week 2: 58,804 steps or 29.19 miles



ROSEHILL
CHURCH

Women's Gathering

IF: 2024

IF2024.COM



12099 Rose Hill Road
Langford, South Dakota

February 23, 2024 | 6 - 10 pm

February 24, 2024 | 9 am - 4:30 pm



Flags at Half-Staff Statewide Today in Honor of Chief Deputy Ken Prorok

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem ordered that flags be flown at half-staff statewide from sunrise until sunset on Thursday February 8, 2024, in honor of Moody County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Ken Prorok, who was killed in the line of duty on February 2.

"We are grateful for the life and service of Chief Deputy Prorok – he is a true hero," said Governor Noem. "My prayers are with Chief Deputy Prorok's family, friends, and the entire community."

Visitation for Chief Deputy Prorok will be from 5:00-8:00pm CT on Wednesday February 7 at the Chester Area High School Gymnasium (101 2nd Ave, Chester, SD, 57016). Funeral services will be held at 1:00pm CT on Thursday February 8 at Dakota Prairie Playhouse (1205 Washing Ave N, Madison, SD, 57042).

Questions arise over skating rink closure, proposed daycare center

Discussion of the city's ice skating rink closure took the stage early in Tuesday's Groton City Council meeting.

Chris Frost, who lives near the rink on West Third Avenue and Garfield Street, said he thinks the city is moving in the wrong direction by closing the ice rink at the end of January.

The city announced on Facebook that the rink would be closed for the season due to warm conditions. It's the second year the city has closed the rink just after the Carnival of Silver Skates, Frost said, and it's a disservice to the community.

"If we continue to just have it open for two weeks and close it, we won't have a skating program," he said "Kids aren't going to know how to skate. ...And it gives kids something to do during the winter."

Frost volunteered to take over caring for the ice if the city could provide him a key to the warming house.

"I just feel like we give up on it way too soon," he said. "I'm volunteering my time to take care of it, make it smooth."

He pointed out that it doesn't seem flat as the center melts before the edges. And the more effort that is made to take care of the ice and get a good base in the area before flooding it, the better the conditions will be out there.

It has been a tough year for the ice, said Mayor Scott Hanlon.

"When it's cold, we always have it open because we have good ice," he said.

Talk shifted to ways to make the rink more manageable, including possibly shrinking the size of the ice rink.

The city won't be able to reopen the rink this season, though, said Wastewater Superintendent Dwight Zerr, as there was a sewer line collapse in that area just before the rink was closed for the season.

Child care options discussed

Groton residents Keith Wipf and Charity Hinman approached the council Tuesday with a plan to build a child care center and teen center in town.

"We're in dire need," Wipf said.

Wipf asked the council to consider selling a piece of property south of the Community Center for the venture with a contract spelling out that his company Ringneck Construction, Inc. could not sell the land for a set amount of time and that it needed to become a day care facility.

Currently there isn't a state-licensed day care in Groton, Hinman told the council. Hinman had owned the last state-licensed facility, Teddy Bear Daycare, before selling the business in 2022.

A big problem with that business was the building it was housed in, she said. A new building would allow for a new child care facility and preschool.

Wipf said Hinman would manage the day care, while Ringneck Construction, Inc. would build and own the building. The idea, he added, is "not to be a money-maker," but rather fill a gap that the community has.

"The idea would be, if we can get that property for a decent price, we could keep the project cost down," he said.

Council members asked about financial figures and making sure the cost of having a child in the day care would be manageable.

"I would hate to see this fail," said Councilman Jason Wambach. "There's a lot of kids in town, and if you had a day care facility it would be more attractive to move here."

Mayor Scott Hanlon agreed.

"We need a day care. Bottom line," he said. "We should see if we can get something going."

Councilman Kevin Nehls asked for the city to put the idea out to the community to see if there are any conflicts and if the proposed location on the lot south of the Community Center would be a workable spot.

City contracting for new online bill program

There may soon be a new way to pay.

The City Council approved contracting with a new company that would handle online utility bill and other fee payments.

The web-based software, Payment Service Network, is compatible with the city's utility software, and residents will be able to log in to see their bills, what they've paid in the past and billing history, said Assistant Finance Officer Kellie Locke. They will still have credit card and E-Check fees similar to what is in place now, but it would be an easier system to use and will save money for the city.

It may take up to six weeks for the new system to be put in place once a contract is signed.

- While initial appearing to go up, cost adjustments on a new park saferoom/bathroom are set to lower what the city will pay for the new tornado shelter. It was discovered \$81,000 in contingency and engineering costs are reimbursable by the federal government. The city has submitted an application for Federal Emergency Management Agency funds to cover 75 percent of the project. A letter that will be signed by the mayor totals the local match, but doesn't include money the state will cover for the project.

- The council approved vacating portions of West Seventh Avenue and North Lincoln Street. "It's a road to nowhere," said Councilman Brian Bahr. Council members said they were fine vacating the property as long as there are no easements on the property. Councilman Jon Cutler abstained from the vote.

- The council approved purchasing a wastewater camera to film inside underground pipes throughout town. The camera costs \$16,500. "It will be a great tool for us," said Wastewater Superintendent Dwight Zerr.

- As a way to bring in more revenue for baseball and softball, the city has upped the price of advertising on banner placed at the fields. The city has charged \$200 per year or \$600 for four years for Vinyl signs at the field. That also includes the price of printing the signs through Geffdog. In an attempt to raise additional revenue to offset summer recreation costs, the council approved raising the rate to a yearly rate of \$250 for a sign at the big field only or \$750 for all three fields at the baseball/softball complex. The four-year rate would be \$750 for a sign at the big field or \$2,250 for signs on all three fields.

- The council tabled discussion about summer salaries and hiring summer baseball/softball employees.

- Elizabeth Varin

McCook County Double Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle double fatal crash
Where: SD Hwy 38, Mile marker 331, 1 mile west of Salem, SD
When: 11:03 a.m., Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 72, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 1991 GMC Pick up
Seat Belt Used: No

Driver 2: Male, 77, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 2: 1994 Oldsmobile Cutlass
Seat Belt Used: No

McCook County, S.D.- Two people died late this morning in a two-vehicle crash in McCook County.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 1991 GMC pickup was headed westbound on SD Hwy 38 and the driver of an eastbound 1994 Oldsmobile Cutlass collided in the westbound lane near mile post 331.

The drivers of both vehicles were not wearing seatbelts and both sustained fatal injuries. There were no passengers in either vehicle.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Statement of opposition to abortion-rights ballot measure passes legislative committee

Meanwhile, Sioux Falls lawmaker introduces bill to provide clarity on legal abortion, reproductive care

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 7, 2024 4:56 PM

PIERRE — Republican lawmakers declared their opposition Wednesday to a potential November ballot question that would reinstate abortion rights.

Rep. Gary Cammack, R-Union Center, introduced a resolution raising concerns about the ballot measure, hoping to “elevate the conversation,” he told lawmakers during a House State Affairs Committee hearing. Eighty-three of the Legislature’s 92 Republicans are sponsoring the resolution.

Proponents and opponents presented lawmakers with emotional testimony and conflicting interpretations of not only the proposed ballot question but also interpretations of what constitutes an abortion under state law.

“What bothers me is that it gives the guise that it takes care of women,” said Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls, of the ballot question. “What I mean by that is that they’re trying to tell you that it’s taking care of women but it’s not.”

The resolution passed the committee 11-1, only opposed by Democratic Sioux Falls Rep. Erin Healy, who argued that access to abortion is a health care issue that is “politicized to the detriment” of South Dakotans. The full House of Representatives will debate the resolution next.

Petitions are circulating to place the abortion ballot question, which would amend the state’s constitution, before voters in the Nov. 5 election.

Safety standards and ‘back alley’ abortions

The proposed constitutional amendment would prohibit the state from regulating abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy. Opponents of the amendment said Wednesday that the amendment would therefore also prohibit the state from setting safety standards for abortions in the first trimester.

The U.S. Supreme Court overruled *Roe v. Wade* in its *Dobbs* decision in 2022, and a state trigger law took effect outlawing abortion except in cases to “preserve the life” of a pregnant woman. Before that, South Dakota had laws requiring legal abortions to be performed at a licensed abortion facility, such as a hospital or a Planned Parenthood clinic.

That law among others would no longer be in force, allowing for unregulated abortions in the first trimester, opponents of the amendment testified. One opponent said the amendment would legalize “back alley abortions.”

Most abortions performed in the United States are medication abortions, that involve two different pills. The other form of abortion in the first trimester is vacuum aspiration, which is typically performed up until 14 weeks of pregnancy or the end of the first trimester. Medication abortion requires a prescription order by a physician, and a vacuum aspiration is a form of surgery.

Dakotans for Health is circulating the petitions to place the constitutional amendment on the ballot. Executive Director Rick Weiland confirmed to South Dakota Searchlight that the constitutional amendment would not allow the Legislature to implement safety regulations during the first trimester, though it could for the second trimester, but only “in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the preg-

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nant woman," according to the measure's text. The amendment would allow the state to ban abortions in the third trimester, with exceptions for the life and health of the mother.

He challenged the notion that the amendment would lead to "back alley abortions" and said that OB-GYNs are regulated by their own professional and internal facility standards that would ensure safety standards for patients.

"Do not be afraid to let the people decide. Do not put your political thumb on the scale of their decision with a resolution filled with falsehoods," Weiland said in testimony to the legislative committee. "They know our state's motto is 'Under God The People Rule.'"

Lawmakers also raised concerns about the amendment's lack of required parental consent for minors seeking an abortion, though Weiland said the Legislature could implement parental consent regulations.

"They can pass any laws they want as long as they fit in the construct of the language of this constitutional amendment," Weiland told reporters during a press conference.

Physicians split on what legal abortions are

Two OB-GYNs offered conflicting testimony during the resolution's hearing about what an abortion is and what care physicians can provide patients. Rep. Rehfeldt asked both if they would consider an induction an abortion.

Katherine Degen, a Rapid City-based OB-GYN, said an induction – which is when a health care provider uses medicine or other methods to induce labor and end a pregnancy – could meet the state's definition of an abortion when babies die from complications.

"Therefore their life is terminated in the process of labor induction," she said. "... I'm placing the mother's life ahead of this very viable baby."

The medical definition of an abortion, according to Harvard Medical School, is "the removal of pregnancy tissue, products of conception or the fetus and placenta from the uterus."

But the state's legal definition of abortion is "the intentional termination of the life of a human being in the uterus."

Patti Giebink, a Chamberlain-based OB-GYN, argued that such a definition significantly limits the scope of what is a legal abortion in South Dakota because it questions the physician's intent.

Only elective abortions, Giebink said, are illegal based on state law.

"I take care of the patient, and this South Dakota trigger ban does not bind my hands," Giebink said. "It doesn't tell me that I can't take care of a miscarriage or an ectopic pregnancy complication."

Separate bill would provide guidance

Rehfeldt hopes to offer clarification to physicians across South Dakota in a separate bill she introduced this session. The bill would instruct the state Department of Health to create informational material describing what constitutes an abortion under state law and what the standards of care are for treating pregnant patients experiencing life- or health-threatening medical conditions.

The department would work with physicians and the Attorney General's Office to provide clarification.

Attorney General Marty Jackley previously told South Dakota Searchlight he would not be able to offer interpretations of abortion exceptions until a case appears in court. This bill would force that conversation forward, Rehfeldt said.

"The part that concerns me the most is that I hear providers are hesitant to provide care, and we can't wait until a bad scenario happens before we get that clarification," Rehfeldt told South Dakota Searchlight. "I think the time is now to make sure we are clarifying and make sure physicians know they can take care of women."

This will be Rehfeldt's second attempt at clarifying when physicians can provide abortions under the state's trigger ban. She tabled a bill last legislative session that would have expanded the trigger law to the health of the mother, in addition to the life of the mother.

"How do those two definitions interchangeably work together so people know what is appropriate or

what's not?" Rehfeldt said. "That's why I think providers get so confused, especially with all the noise and the politics of it."

Rehfeldt said she hopes the conversation surrounding abortion in the Legislature will encourage voters to further analyze the ballot measure and its interpretation.

"Taking care of women shouldn't be a political issue," Rehfeldt added. "Taking care of women should just be the standard."

Rehfeldt's bill is not scheduled for a hearing yet.

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.

Expansion of reduced price school meals heads to budget committee

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 7, 2024 3:51 PM

A bill that would expand the number of students eligible for reduced price meals is headed to a legislative budget committee for further consideration.

The South Dakota House Education Committee endorsed the bill 8-6 on Wednesday.

Currently, students from families making 130% to 185% of the federal poverty level qualify for federally funded reduced price meals, and students from families making less than that qualify for free meals. The bill would raise eligibility for reduced price meals to 209% of the federal poverty level and use state funds to pay the additional costs.

Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger estimates the annual cost to be between \$1 million and \$1.5 million.

Rep. Tyler Tordsen, R-Sioux Falls, introduced the bill.

"I think this is a small price for a very big impact," Tordsen said.

He also supported a separate school lunch bill that failed earlier this legislative session. That bill would have expanded free school meals.

The new bill is supported by the American Heart Association and Feeding South Dakota. Former Democratic state representative Deb Fischer-Clemens lobbies on those entities' behalf. She said over 13% of South Dakota children suffer food insecurity, which increases the odds of multiple chronic health conditions, increasing health care costs.

Additionally, Fischer-Clemens said the state has relatively low test scores, and she is "concerned that it may be because these kids are food insecure."

Terwilliger said he is concerned about going "a step above and beyond a federal program."

"This is a very bad precedent," Terwilliger said.

Tordsen replied, "That doesn't scare me, going above and beyond for our kids."

In response to concerns about using state money, Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, introduced an amendment. It would use the governor's Future Fund to pay for the expanded lunch program.

The Future Fund gets its money from South Dakota employers, whose payments to the fund are tied to payroll taxes for unemployment benefits. Unlike other funds administered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development, Future Fund expenses don't have to go through a board of citizen appointees for vetting or approval. Governor Kristi Noem spent over \$30 million from the fund last year on everything from a rodeo in Sioux Falls to her "Freedom Works Here" workforce recruitment campaign.

"We spend a lot of money from the Future Fund on a lot of fat cats," Odenbach said. "So, let's fatten up the kids with a little bit of that money."

Terwilliger replied, "I don't think that would be a proper use of those funds."

The amendment failed 4-10.

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.

Full Senate to take up pre-election regulation of 'deepfake' misinformation

Media groups concerned about potential liability if bill becomes law

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 7, 2024 1:34 PM

Opposition from media organizations wasn't enough to stop a bill that would require the labeling of "deepfakes" within 90 days of an election.

On a 5-3 vote Wednesday, lawmakers on the Senate State Affairs Committee chose to send Senate Bill 960n to a full debate on the Senate floor.

"I doubt it's going to be on the governor's desk this year, but this is an important discussion," said Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, a committee member who serves as Senate president pro tempore.

The bill is one of two drafted by Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, and Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City. Johnson's bill, which hasn't yet had a hearing, targets deepfakes used to defame or harass; Larson's SB 96 narrowly focuses on elections.

"Deepfakes" include computer-generated images, videos and audio clips designed to mimic real people, typically produced using artificial intelligence technologies. Voice-to-text technology hinges on artificial intelligence, as do photo editing programs that can erase people from digital photos with the swipe of a finger.

Concerns about the potential of deepfakes to spread misinformation have grown steadily over the past year or so, and they've already worked their way into the 2024 presidential campaign.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley was among the state officials to send a letter to a company called Life Corporation, which allegedly used artificial intelligence to produce robocalls offering election day misinformation to New Hampshire primary voters in the deepfaked voice of President Joe Biden.

Jackley called on Congress to act in a Tuesday press release.

"This scam provides fake voting information that threatens our election system and deserves action," he said.

Trump voice: 'I'm joining the Democrats'

Larson offered several examples of deepfakes to the committee members, including a fake image of Pope Francis in a high-fashion "puffer" jacket and images of civil unrest altered by Amnesty International to shield the identity of Columbian anti-government protesters.

At one point, she played an audio clip she said she'd asked for from a Republican friend Tuesday night, in which a voice all but indistinguishable from that of former President Donald Trump said "I'm here to give a big tremendous shout out to my good friend, Liz Larson."

"But hold on to your hats," the recording continued. "Because I'm about to drop a bombshell that will have you saying 'you're kidding.' Brace yourselves. I'm crossing the aisle. That's right. I'm joining the Democrats."

The clip was meant to showcase the simplicity of misinformation, Larson said.

"These are words that are typed into a computer model and spit out in Donald Trump's voice," Larson said. "It could be done for anyone in this room, because we all have enough audio of us in the public domain."

She described the bill as a "South Dakota-sized" approach to regulation. Unlike some other proposals on the state level, the bill wouldn't ban deepfakes. Instead, it would require disclosure of the use of AI by the deepfake's producer or presenter, directly on or in the deepfake itself, at any time within 90 days before an election. The requirements would apply for material that "a reasonable person would believe ... depicts the speech or conduct of an actual individual who did not in fact engage in the speech or conduct."

Those who do not would be guilty of a class one misdemeanor and open to civil damages.

Satirical deepfakes would be exempt from penalties. There are also exceptions for news stories on deepfakes, and for broadcasters that make "a good faith effort" to verify that a paid ad does not contain deepfakes.

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'Arbiters of reasonableness'

The verbiage of those exceptions drew the ire of two lobbyists for media organizations.

Steve Willard of the South Dakota Broadcasters Association applauded Larson for her willingness to raise the issue and for her collaborative approach to writing the bill.

Even so, Willard said, he's concerned that broadcasters would be placed in the uncomfortable position of deciding if paid political ads include phony images, video or audio in a world where deepfakes are evolving quickly enough that a "reasonable person" could easily be fooled.

Broadcasters would need to become "arbiters of reasonableness," Willard said.

"First, we'd have to decide whether or not it's a deepfake ... Second, you have to determine whether that's parody or satire," he said.

The bill also has an emergency clause, which would make it law with the governor's signature. Larson's goal is to have it take effect before this year's primaries, but Willard said that timeline would make it all but impossible for broadcasters to "staff up" and be ready to evaluate the veracity of ads.

"We're not sure we can accomplish what we're setting out to accomplish," Willard said.

The bill as written would almost certainly result in lawsuits against newspapers, according to Justin Smith, a lobbyist for the South Dakota NewsMedia Association.

Like Willard, Smith thanked Larson for bringing the bill. But he also joined Willard in his worries about publishers being asked to be more discerning about possible deepfakes than the general public in order to avoid liability.

"How much manipulation crosses the line to become a deepfake?" Smith said.

A former legislative candidate named Michael Boyle agreed that he wouldn't want to hear his voice saying things he hadn't in a radio ad, but worried that the bill could sweep in speech protected by the First Amendment.

"The definition of deepfake is way too broad," Boyle said.

Committee: Discussion necessary

Larson countered that the bill aims to target the producers of deepfakes, and that the exemptions found within it are meant to shield well-meaning media operators.

Newspapers shouldn't be the arbiters of reasonableness, she said. If media organizations "want other language in there" to protect them from unjustified lawsuits, "I'd be happy to work with them."

Sen. Schoenbeck, in spite of his doubts about the legislation's future in the 2024 session, argued that AI technology is advancing so rapidly that a discussion on its possible electoral impact ought to happen on the Senate floor.

Schoenbeck talked about a recent conference at which presenters suggested that soon no one will trust the news because it could become impossible to tell human-generated truth from computer-aided fakery.

"This is coming, big time," Schoenbeck said.

One senator, Winner Republican Erin Tobin, cast her vote to advance the bill just after announcing to the committee that she was able to produce an argument for her position by asking the text generator ChatGPT to do it for her as she listened to testimony on SB 96.

The discussion needs to start somewhere, she said, and the sooner the better.

"We know that we will be behind the game, always," Tobin 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.

U.S. Senate kills immigration overhaul, hits stalemate on Israel, Ukraine aid

Thune, Rounds vote no on motion to advance legislation

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 7, 2024 6:28 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate was stuck over whether to begin debate on an emergency spending bill Wednesday night that would provide \$95.3 billion in assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan — after senators blocked a sweeping larger package that would have overhauled immigration law for the first time in decades.

Republicans said last year that in order to get their support for military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, they needed Democrats to also broker a deal on changes to immigration law.

GOP leaders, however, rejected that deal after it was released Sunday, leading Democrats to instead back separate assistance for the trio.

The global-aid-only alternative remained on hold Wednesday evening as Republicans and Democrats attempted to broker agreement over amendments.

Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn said GOP senators still want to address border security and immigration law, despite rejecting the package that included those provisions.

“Well, our side is not willing to give up the border fight. So some relating to the border,” Cornyn said.

Republicans are also hoping to get votes on amendments clarifying exactly who gets access to U.S. foreign assistance.

“I think possibly some related to the way the Ukraine money and the Israel money is distributed, some concerns about who might get their hands on it,” Cornyn said.

Senate Minority Whip John Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said before leaving the Capitol on Wednesday evening there are a lot of undecided issues.

“Well, those are all really good questions, and none of which have good answers at the moment,” Thune said.

Immigration deal cast aside, Thune and Rounds vote no

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell had announced Tuesday that the immigration elements of the larger bill were unlikely to get enough support to become law, after strong objections from Republicans, and pressed for assistance for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan to move forward on its own.

Senators still took a procedural vote on whether to advance the bill that included the long-anticipated immigration overhaul but it failed, 49-50. Sixty votes were needed for it to continue to move ahead, so it fell far short. South Dakota’s Republican Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds both voted no.

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford, Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy and Arizona independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema spent the last four months negotiating the changes to immigration law that were scrapped within two days of the bill’s release.

Senate passage of the slimmed-down bill could come after an amendment process that Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Wednesday morning would be “open and fair.”

The New York Democrat also urged Republican leaders in the House to put the bill up for debate in that chamber, should it pass the Senate.

“It doesn’t behoove the speaker well to block everything because 30 hard-right-wing people just want chaos like Donald Trump,” Schumer said.

It was not clear whether that would happen. The GOP-controlled House on Tuesday night failed to pass a standalone bill with \$17 billion in aid for Israel.

House GOP leaders had also expressed strong opposition to the combined Senate immigration-global aid deal and said they would not bring it up for debate, adding more fuel to the opposition that torpedoed the package.

The former president, the front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, has pressed hard for Re-

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publicans to reject immigration legislation.

Johnson: 'A mess what happened here'

Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said Wednesday he would wait to see what the Senate can pass before deciding what he might bring to the floor next in that chamber.

"We're allowing the process to play out and we'll handle it as it is sent over," Johnson said. "I have made very clear that you have to address these issues on their own merits."

Johnson appeared to press for standalone aid to Israel, even though the House was unable to pass its Israel bill this week.

"Israel desperately needs the assistance, everyone knows that," Johnson said. "Things have changed pretty dramatically since we passed that first Israel package in the House three months ago. Everyone knows the tensions escalated and we need to support it."

Johnson also sought to rebuff criticism from some fellow Republicans that his inexperience is one of the reasons the House spectacularly failed to pass the Israel bill as well as two articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Tuesday night.

"It was a mess what happened here, but we're cleaning it up," Johnson said. "I don't think that this is a reflection on the leader, it's a reflection on the body itself and the place where we've come in this country."

While the process is "messy sometimes," Johnson said, "the job will be done."

Fentanyl bill backed by Jelly Roll included

The Biden administration said Wednesday it supports Congress moving forward with legislation providing assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan while leaving off changes to immigration law.

"We support this bill which would protect America's national security interests by stopping Putin's onslaught in Ukraine before he turns to other countries, helping Israel defend itself against Hamas terrorists and delivering live-saving humanitarian aid to innocent Palestinian civilians," said White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates.

"Even if some congressional Republicans' commitment to border security hinges on politics, President Biden's does not," Bates added. "We must still have reforms and more resources to secure the border. These priorities all have strong bipartisan support across the country."

The revised bill the Senate could begin debating soon would provide more than \$60 billion in assistance for Ukraine, \$14 billion for Israel, \$9 billion for humanitarian aid in Ukraine, Gaza, the West Bank, East Africa, South Asia and elsewhere, and \$4.8 billion for "regional partners" in the Indo-Pacific region that would include Taiwan.

An additional \$2.4 billion would go to U.S. Central Command "to replace combat expenditures for weapons in the Red Sea," according to a summary of the bill.

The package also includes the Fentanyl Eradication and Narcotics Deterrence or Fend Off Fentanyl Act, a bipartisan bill from Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown and South Carolina Republican Sen. Tim Scott.

Country music star Jason "Jelly Roll" DeFord advocated for Congress to pass legislation to address both the supply and the demand for fentanyl during a hearing in January.

Lankford: 'We have to sit down together'

During debate on Wednesday, senators involved in negotiations or writing the broader bill that included changes to immigration law urged their colleagues to support the bipartisan compromise.

Lankford called on his colleagues to do something to address the nation's border security and immigration laws, noting that neither party has the support to go at it alone on legislation.

"This very divided nation brings to us a very divided Congress," Lankford said. "Currently we have a Republican two-vote majority in the House of Representatives and a Democratic one-vote majority in the United States Senate. It doesn't get much closer than that."

"That means if we're going to solve something we have to sit down together and solve it. That's how it

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works when you make law," Lankford added. "You can do press conferences without the other side, but you can't make law without the other side in the United States Senate."

The Oklahoma Republican detailed the border security and immigration measures he and his two fellow negotiators agreed on following complex talks over several months.

He said that some Republicans voted against advancing the bill with border and immigration changes because they wanted more time to read it, that others voted no because they had policy differences and that some voted no due to political disagreements.

"Some of them have been very clear with me, they have political differences with the bill," Lankford said. "They say it's the wrong time to solve the problem or let the presidential election solve this problem."

There was a "popular commentator" who told Lankford four weeks ago that if he reached a bipartisan agreement to address border security and immigration law during an election year the commentator would do whatever they could "to destroy" Lankford.

"By the way, they have been faithful to their promise and have done everything they can to destroy me in the past several weeks," Lankford said, without disclosing the name of the commentator.

Sinema: Border security became 'a talking point for the election'

Sinema said she, Lankford and Murphy worked through weekends and holidays for months, "negotiating in good faith" to reach a compromise on border security and immigration.

"We produced a bill that finally, after decades of all talk and no action, secures the border and solves the border crisis," Sinema said. "Our bill was ready for prime time, we were ready to bring the bill to the floor, open it up for debate and amendments. You know, how the Senate is supposed to work."

"But less than 24 hours after we released the bill, my Republican colleagues changed their minds — turns out they want all talk and no action," Sinema added. "It turns out border security is not actually a risk to our national security, it's just a talking point for the election."

Sinema said she had a "very clear message for anyone using the southern border for staged political events."

"Don't come to Arizona, take your political theater to Texas," she said.

Murray: GOP telling allies 'our word can't be trusted'

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, urged Republicans to take the issues in the bills seriously and not as a "game," pointing to the wars in Ukraine and Israel, as well as the Southwest border.

"By voting it down, Republicans will be telling our allies, our word cannot be trusted. Telling dictators, like Putin, that our threats are not serious, telling the world American leadership has been hollowed out by Republican obstructionism," Murray said.

"And let's be clear, they will be telling the American people they don't want to solve the crisis at the border, they want to campaign on it," Murray added. "Because if you genuinely believe something is a crisis you take any step you can to address it, you don't let a fire burn because Donald Trump wants to campaign on ashes."

Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.

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.

Bill to open puberty blockers to trans kids with parental approval fails in committee

Supporters say 2023 ban took away parental rights

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 7, 2024 1:04 PM

An effort to open up certain kinds of medical care for transgender youth whose parents consent to the treatment failed in a state Senate committee on Wednesday morning.

Parents of trans kids told lawmakers that the passage of House Bill 1080 in 2023 robbed them of their parental rights and hurt their kids. That bill, which became law with a signature from Gov. Kristi Noem, banned puberty blockers, hormone therapy and surgical transitions for minors.

Last year's backers of HB 1080 became opponents to Senate Bill 216 on Tuesday. They argued that parents ought not be allowed to encourage their children to take part in "irreversible" treatments.

As written, SB 216 would have allowed children to access puberty blockers and hormone therapy with their parents' consent. Parents ought to have the right to make decisions for their kids, according to the bill's prime sponsor, Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls.

South Dakota is "forcing some parents to seek care outside of our state to be able to get access to life-giving care for their children," Nesiba told the committee.

Parent, student testify in favor

Carrie Soto, the Sioux Falls parent of a transgender child, told the committee that lawmakers had taken away her right to do what's best for her child with HB 1080.

"You told all parents of transgender youth, and those looking in from the outside, that they must be harming their children, not helping them," Soto said. "All of this was done without knowing me or my child."

Children do not flippantly "choose" a transgender identity, said Elliott Morehead, a 17-year-old trans student who attends Lincoln High School in Sioux Falls.

"Being trans isn't a quirky, trendy thing ... I would not choose an identity where I have to strategically plan out my day because I can't use the bathroom, because I either feel like I'm going to get hate-crimed or have security called on me," Morehead said.

Morehead said it was troubling to lose access to treatment through legislative fiat.

"I no longer had the opportunity to be my authentic self, with my parents, with my doctor, and by myself," Morehead said.

Morehead and Soto were among 13 supporters of SB 216. The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota argued that South Dakota is setting itself up for costly legal challenges by removing decision-making authority from parents and doctors.

"There are legal costs to decisions like this. There are also personal costs, which you've heard about here," said Samantha Chapman, director of the ACLU of South Dakota.

Opposition: 'Wait till they're a little older'

Opponents urged the committee to keep the law in place as-is.

Norman Woods of Family Voice Action told the committee that the use of puberty blockers advances "a dangerous lie being whispered in the ears of the youth."

The lie is "that 'you are a mistake,'" Woods said.

"We know every child is fearfully and wonderfully made."

The bill would not have legalized surgical interventions, but Woods argued that kids who use puberty blockers are more likely to ultimately seek surgical interventions, which he called irreversible and too impactful to allow minors to get.

Lisa Janeiro of Concerned Women for America told the committee that young people are often confused about their identity. She said she was a tomboy as a kid, one who rejected traditional "female" activities, but that she "grew to enjoy being a woman."

"We're not saying that we want people not to get these surgeries if they want to, if that's what they would like," Janeiro said. "But we're just asking for people to wait till they're a little older, get through puberty."

A pastor from Parkston named Michael Boyle said "our gender is part of what's given to us by God," and that parents and children ought not be free to make decisions based on "wants."

"We have to have a moral standard that's outside of just what I want and what you want," Boyle said. The state shouldn't allow parents to make decisions that could harm their children, Boyle added.

Bill rejected 5-1

Three others opposed SB 216, including a representative for South Dakota Catholics, a former school counselor who now represents South Dakotans for Liberty and Rep. Bethany Soye, R-Sioux Falls, who sponsored HB 1080 last year.

In his rebuttal, Nesiba railed against the idea that a tomboy is comparable to a person with gender dysphoria, and the notion that the law bars parents from letting children make decisions they might regret.

"A 16-year-old in the state of South Dakota, with parental consent, can get married," Nesiba said. "You're saying they can get married, but they can't get puberty blockers?"

The bill failed quickly after Nesiba's rebuttal, however. Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, said she has too many concerns about the long-term impact of gender-affirming care.

"We don't know enough about what happens when a minor has been given hormones. What happens when they're 60 or 70?" Tobin said. "We don't necessarily have that research."

The bill was rejected 5-1. Sen. Shawn Bordeaux, D-Mission, was the lone dissenting vote.

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

Lawmaker tries again to create civics center, less ideological this time

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 7, 2024 12:56 PM

A bill proposing the creation of a civic engagement center at Black Hills State University in Spearfish cleared its first hurdle on Wednesday after a similar bill was defeated last year.

The South Dakota House Education Committee unanimously voted to forward the bill to a legislative budget committee for further review.

The center would be named in honor of the late Dr. Nicholas W. Drummond, who was a BHSU political science professor. The legislation says the center's purpose would be to prepare students for active and informed participation in political and civic life.

According to the bill, the center would incorporate a variety of disciplines such as communications, economics, history, philosophy, political science and sociology.

BHSU would work with the state Board of Regents and Northern State University in Aberdeen — which has its own Center for Public History and Civic Engagement — to develop curricula, host civic events and offer learning opportunities.

Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, introduced the bill.

"Whatever their major, they're going to be our future citizens and leaders," Odenbach said of the state's university graduates.

Odenbach said Drummond, who died at age 43 on Dec. 12, "made a big impact on the lives of his students."

That was made clear as numerous BHSU students testified in favor of the bill. Morgan Plucker, a BHSU senior, said, "Without Dr. Drummond, I would not have been able to realize my passion in life."

Odenbach said the bill would leverage the \$880,000 and three new full-time employees the Board of

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Regents is already requesting to establish such a center.

"We need to make this a priority as a state," Odenbach said.

That was echoed by BHSU student body president Isabella Rowe, who said few of her peers care about politics and civics.

"I am fearful for my generation and the generations after me," Rowe said.

Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, who sits on the budget committee that will now consider the bill, also supports it. He said when he looks around at the nation's universities, "You see institutions that have really gone off the rails."

"I think it's a problem for this country if we're not teaching young people why America is an affirmative good," Venhuizen said.

The initial success of this bill contrasts with Odenbach's failure to pass a similar piece of legislation last year. That bill would have created a "Center for American Exceptionalism." That center would have been required to develop college courses comparing communist and socialist countries to Western-style democratic countries and comparing command-style socialist economies to free-market capitalist economies throughout history.

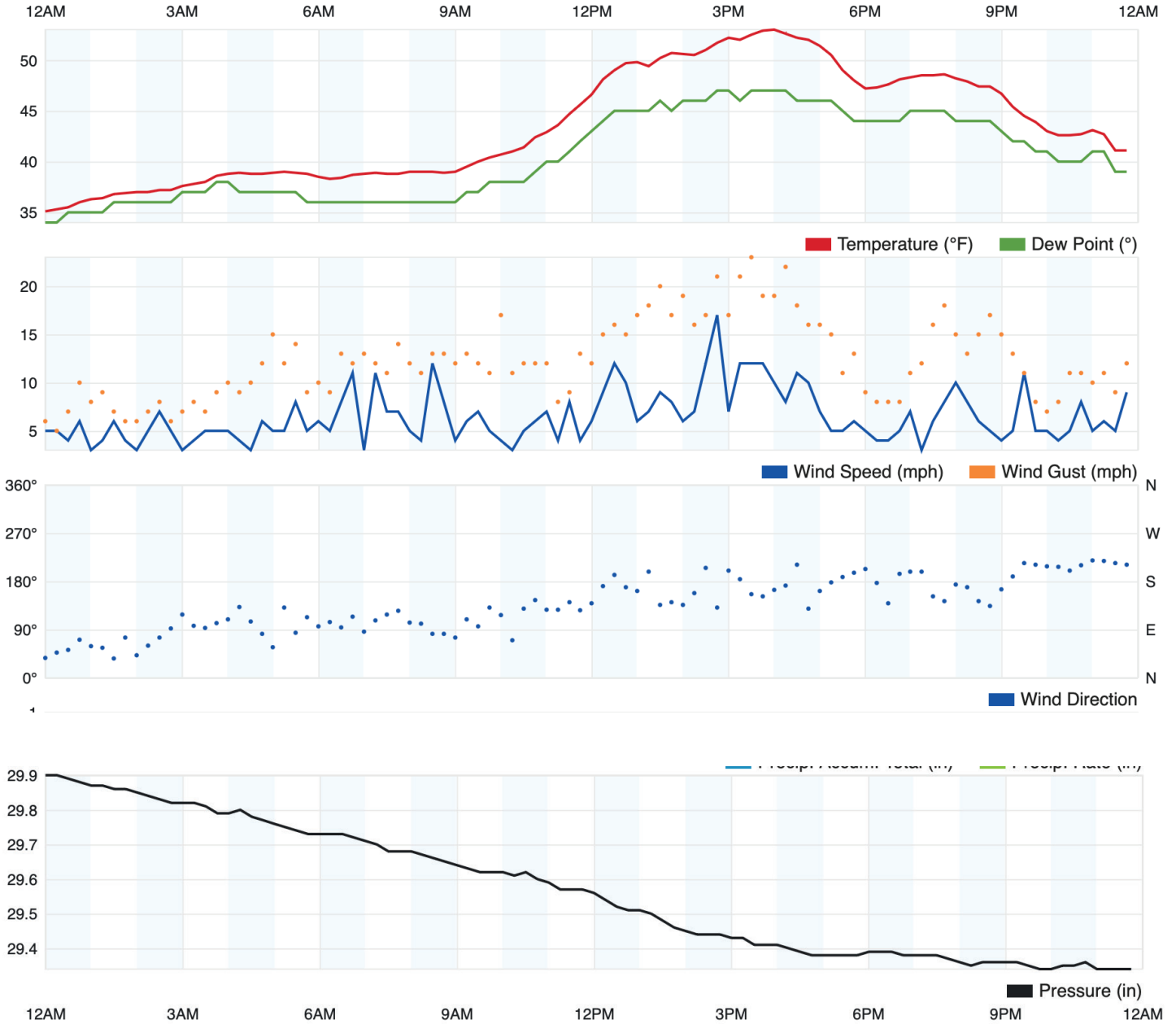
Those and other similar provisions have been removed from this year's bill.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thu Feb 8	Fri Feb 9	Sat Feb 10	Sun Feb 11	Mon Feb 12	Tue Feb 13	Wed Feb 14
						
42° F 28° F	34° F 23° F	33° F 19° F	37° F 21° F	38° F 23° F	40° F 23° F	37° F 22° F
NW 19 MPH	NW 17 MPH	NW 12 MPH	W 11 MPH	W 12 MPH	SW 13 MPH	NW 13 MPH
60%	10%					

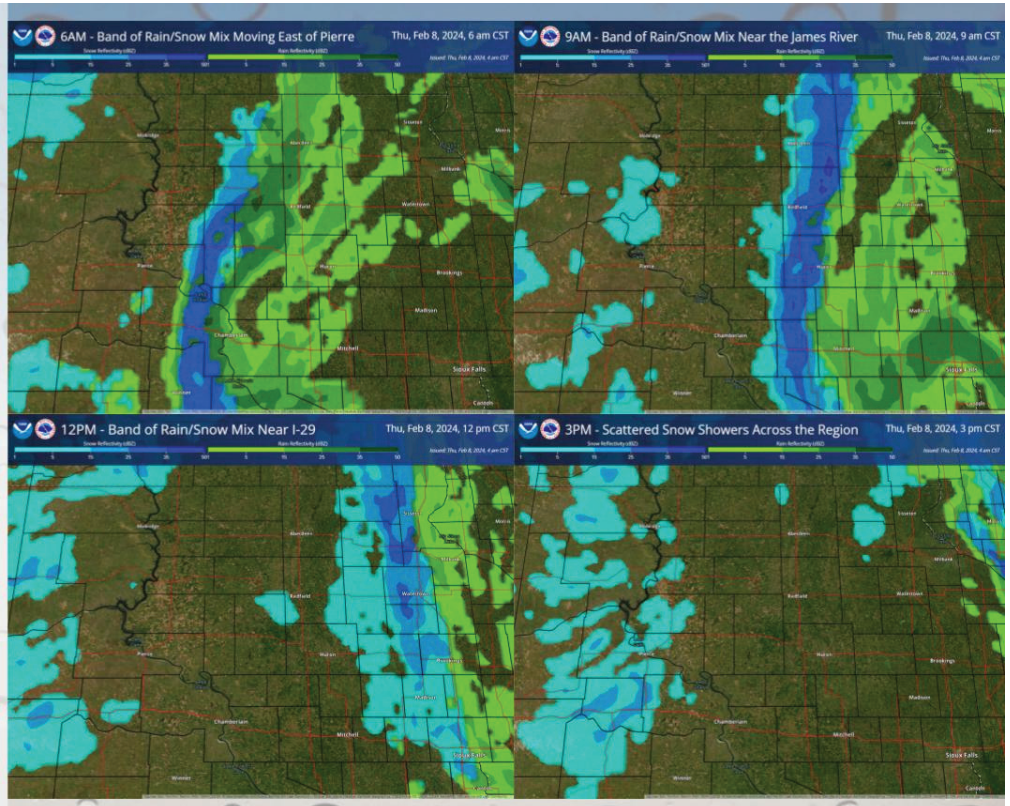


Today & Tonight:

- Rain/snow mix moves east across the area today.
- Scattered snow showers this afternoon/tonight.

Snow Accumulations:

- Generally less than 1 inch.
- Locally higher amounts around 1 inch under heavier band of snow.



An area of low pressure moving northeast across the region will bring rain and snow. Precipitation amounts will generally remain on the light side, with snow accumulations generally under 1 inch. Although, locally higher amounts around 1 inch are possible under a band of moderate snowfall as it moves east this morning.

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Today

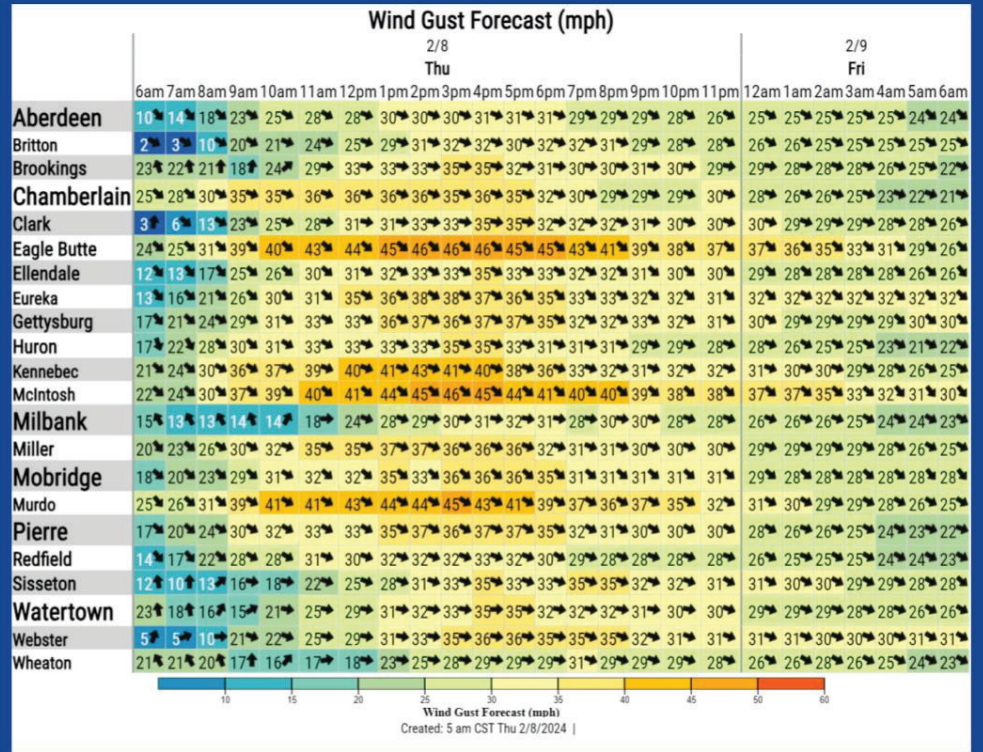
Becoming windy from west to east.

Tonight

Winds slowly diminishing, but still breezy.

Friday

Continued breezy.



As low pressure moves through the area today, winds on the back side of the low will become breezy and gusty from west to east.

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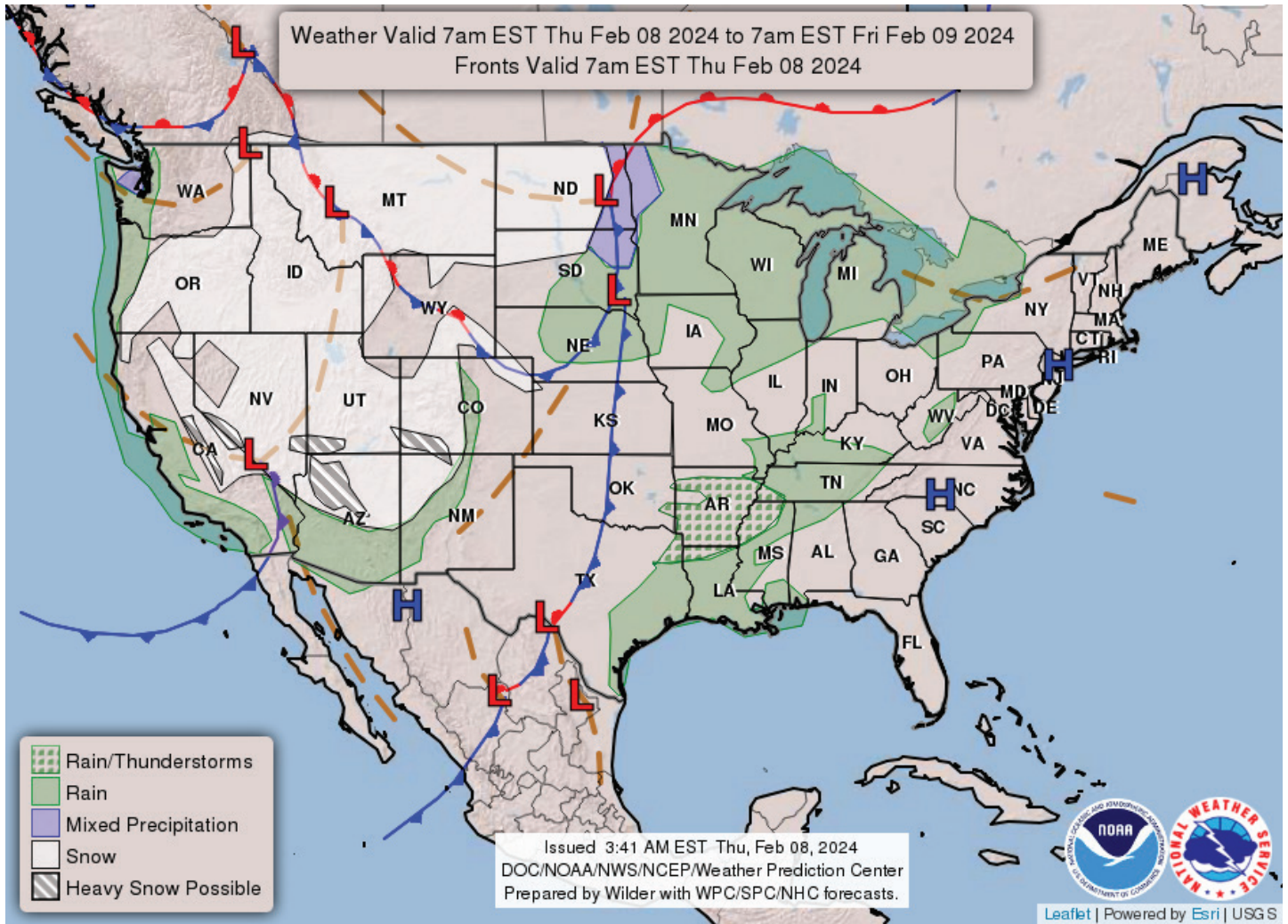
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 53 °F at 3:54 PM
Low Temp: 35 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 3:23 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 7 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 2000
Record Low: -46 in 1895
Average High: 27
Average Low: 4
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.16
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.71
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:50:13 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:41:27 am



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Today in Weather History

February 8-9, 1909: Sioux Falls and the surrounding area experienced one of the largest snowfalls on record. Officially the storm dropped 21" of snow in Sioux Falls. Unfortunately, the snowfall was accompanied by high winds, which created large drifts.

February 8, 2000: A very warm air mass was over central and northeast South Dakota, where record highs were set in Aberdeen, Pierre, and Sisseton. Aberdeen rose to 62 degrees, Sisseton rose to 53 degrees, and Pierre rose to a warm 69 degrees.

1835 - A severe cold wave gripped the southeastern U.S. The mercury dipped to 8 above at Jacksonville FL, and to zero at Savannah GA. Orange trees were killed to the roots. (David Ludlum)

1936 - The temperature at Denver CO plunged to a record 30 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1956: From February 1-8, heavy snow fell over the Panhandle of Texas. Snowfall amounts include 43 inches in Vega, 24 inches in Hereford, and 14 inches in Amarillo. The storm caused 23 deaths and numerous injuries. It snowed continuously for 92 hours in some locations.

1968: The highest 1-day snow at the Savannah Airport in South Carolina occurs on this date when 3.6 inches of snow fell. Records began in 1871.

1985 - Blue Canyon, CA, set a 24-hour February snowfall record by receiving 42 inches of snow from February 7th-8th.

1987 - A powerful storm produced blizzard conditions in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 86 mph at Janesville WI and Cleveland OH received 12 inches of snow. North winds of 50 to 70 mph raised the water level of southern Lake Michigan two feet, and produced waves 12 to 18 feet high, causing seven million dollars damage along the Chicago area shoreline. It was the most damage caused by shoreline flooding and erosion in the history of the city of Chicago. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Arctic air invaded the north central U.S. Hibbing MN reported a morning low of 30 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A winter storm over California produced snow from the beaches of Malibu to the desert canyons around Palm Springs, and the snow created mammoth traffic jams in the Los Angeles Basin. Sixteen cities in the western U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Marysville CA reported an all-time record low reading of 21 degrees above zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Unseasonably mild weather prevailed across the south central and eastern U.S. Twenty-two cities, including five in Michigan, reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 53 degrees at Flint MI surpassed their previous record by ten degrees, and the high of 66 degrees at Burlington IA exceeded their old record by eight degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2005: Snow falls on the Jordanian capital and surrounding regions, blocking roads and closing schools. Parts of northern Iran and Tehran were paralyzed after being hit by several days of record snowfall, with dozens of flights canceled and critical roads also cut off.

2009 - Snow falls at levels above elevations of 11,000 feet on the Big Island's Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The Weather Doctor

2013 - A nor'easter produced heavy snowfall over the New England states. In Boston, Massachusetts, total snowfall reached 24.9 inches, the fifth-highest total ever recorded in the city. New York City officially recorded 11.4 inches of snow at Central Park, and Portland, Maine, set a record of 31.9 inches. Hamden, Connecticut, recorded the highest snowfall of the storm at 40 inches.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

LET GOD BE THE JUDGE

Young Anthony was ending his prayers before leaving for school. "And, finally, God, thank You for this beautiful day that You have given us. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

"But, Anthony," protested his mother, "this is not going to be a beautiful day. Large thunderstorms are approaching."

"I know, Mom," replied Anthony. "Never judge a day by its weather," he said as he ran out the door.

The Psalmist proclaimed, "This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it!"

Sometimes when we get halfway through a day, we feel that there is nothing to rejoice about or to be thankful for. Our problems mount, and their solutions evade us. Our plans are interrupted by meaningless demands that make no sense at all. Our decisions seem to be wrong, no matter how hard we tried to get them right. Our sorrow overwhelms us, and our guilt appears beyond God's forgiveness. What then? Rejoice? Makes no sense to most people.

But, according to the Psalmist, that's the best thing we can do. When we read the Psalms carefully and allow God to speak to us clearly, we will discover that the authors were open and honest with God about their difficulties. And, when they talked to God sincerely, by the time they came to the close of their prayers, they ended them by giving Him praise. Give Him facts. He'll help!

Prayer: Thank You, God, for always being with us in all of our difficulties. Help us to know and hear Your voice and then accept Your grace as a solution to our problems. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24-28



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:

02.06.24

2 10 31 44 57 10

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$394,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.07.24

2 5 17 20 25 9

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,900,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 46 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.07.24

14 23 45 47 48 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 1 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.07.24

2 5 9 27 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$44,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 1 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.07.24

8 17 36 56 62 23

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 30 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.07.24

12 21 62 67 69 17

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$248,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 30 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

More Republicans back spending on child care, saying it's an economic issue

By MORIAH BALINGIT AP Education Writer

Like a lot of mothers, North Dakota state Rep. Emily O'Brien struggled to find infant care when her daughter Lennon was born in 2019. So O'Brien, a Republican who represents the Grand Forks region, brought Lennon along to meetings with local leaders and constituents.

O'Brien had her second daughter, Jolene, in 2022, not long before legislators were due to meet. Wanting more time to bond before returning to work, O'Brien brought the newborn with her to Bismarck, where she snoozed through Gov. Doug Burgum's State of the State address on her mother's desk.

Not long after, O'Brien persuaded her colleagues to back a plan to invest \$66 million in child care, an unprecedented sum for a state that had, like others with Republican leadership, long resisted such spending. But O'Brien argued it could help the state's workforce shortage by helping more parents go to work and attracting new families to the state.

"It was definitely not, you know, an easy sell, because this is probably somewhere where you don't want the government to get involved," O'Brien said. "But it's a workforce solution. We have people that are willing and able to work, but finding child care was an obstacle."

Republicans historically have been lukewarm about using taxpayer money for child care, even as they have embraced prekindergarten. But the pandemic, which left many child care providers in crisis, underscored how precarious the industry is and how many working parents rely on it.

In 2021, Congress passed \$24 billion of pandemic aid for child care businesses, an unprecedented federal investment. Now, as that aid dries up, Republican state lawmakers across the country are embracing plans to support child care — and even making it central to their policy agendas.

To be sure, the largest investments in child care have come not from Republicans but from Democratic lawmakers. In New Mexico, the state is covering child care for most children under 5 using a trust funded by oil and natural gas production. In Vermont, Democratic state lawmakers overrode a Republican governor's veto to pass a payroll tax hike to fund child care subsidies.

Red states are following suit with more modest — but nonetheless historic — investments in child care.

In Missouri, Republican Gov. Mike Parson has proposed spending nearly \$130 million to help low-income families access child care once the pandemic relief money dries up and to create tax credits to support child care providers.

Republican state Rep. Brenda Shields, who sponsored the tax credit bill, said she tells conservative colleagues that child care accessibility is critical to grow the state's economy.

"Child care is a critical infrastructure, just like roads and bridges and ports and trains," Shields said. "Businesses have been saying, 'What are you doing about child care?' So I'm trying to be part of the solution."

Elsewhere, Louisiana last year approved an unprecedented \$52 million for child care subsidies for low-income families. Alabama provided \$17 million worth of incentives for child care providers to get licensed. And Texas voters approved a property tax cut for some day care centers.

More Republicans have pledged to tackle the child care crisis this year. In Missouri, Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden, a Republican, said he hoped the Statehouse would focus less on culture war issues — like criminalizing drag shows and censoring library books — and more on expanding access to child care and school choice. Nebraska and Indiana have both pitched programs to make child care free for child care workers. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican who ran on a conservative education agenda, pitched boosting the state's child care and education spending by \$180 million.

Child care advocates say the investments are not enough and called on Congress to authorize a new round of money to keep the child care industry afloat. Already, day care centers report they are raising

tuition and losing workers because they are no longer receiving federal subsidies. Some have folded.

GOP resistance to child care spending dates to the 1970s, when President Richard Nixon vetoed a bill to establish a national child care system, invoking fears of communism and saying it had “family-weakening implications.” Many of those arguments persist. Some conservative lawmakers have panned child care funding as “socialist,” arguing that people who can’t afford day care should not have children. Two years ago, an Idaho state lawmaker apologized after he opposed federal early childhood money because it encouraged women to “come out of the home and let others raise their children.”

The new and expanded funding reflects a growing sentiment that the nation’s broken child care system will not be fixed without public support. Families have long faced issues finding affordable, reliable child care. But during the pandemic, many child care workers left the industry for better-paying jobs, and some child care centers closed for good, exacerbating the problem.

Child care is a labor-heavy enterprise — in some states, one person may only care for four infants at once. Even before the pandemic, child care providers often had razor-thin margins. When families kept their children home during the pandemic, many day cares were barely hanging on.

Many parts of the country do not have enough child care providers to offer slots for all children. Even when slots are available, the cost is out of reach for many families. It’s a problem that disproportionately affects women, who are typically the primary caregivers for children.

But a lack of child care access is also keeping people from the workforce, contributing to a labor shortage in many states. Many industries have started lobbying for states to invest more in child care. One of the strongest proponents is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, which surveyed a dozen states and estimated they lost billions of dollars in economic activity because of child care gaps.

Resistance persists in many parts of the country. While North Dakota passed ground-breaking measures to support child care, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem in South Dakota said she opposed proposals to spend state dollars helping families pay for child care.

“The one thing ... that I’m not willing to do is to directly subsidize child care for families,” Noem recently told KWAT News in Watertown, South Dakota. “I just don’t think it’s the government’s job to pay or to raise people’s children for them.”

What to know about South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem’s banishment from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation

By GRAHAM BREWER and TRISHA AHMED Associated Press

For the second time as governor of South Dakota, Kristi Noem has been banished from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Last week, the Oglala Sioux Tribe said the Republican governor was no longer welcome on tribal lands, and its leaders referred to her rhetoric linking immigration and crime as opportunistic and dangerous.

“Our people are being used for her political gain,” said Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out.

After Noem suggested last week that the state send razor wire and security personnel to Texas to deter crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border, Star Comes Out accused her of trying to garner favor from former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Noem also said drug cartels are responsible for murders on the reservation and that they’re affiliated with a gang called the “Ghost Dancers” — which takes its name from a Native American religious ceremony. Historically, U.S. and state officials viewed the Ghost Dance as a threat of violence and sought to ban it, prompting a painful period of history.

Star Comes Out said the reservation has cartel and gang problems, but singling out a gang with that particular name and history felt like another insult to his people. Noem’s mention of the gang, he said, was the first time he had heard of it or its possible presence on the reservation.

Ian Fury, a spokesperson for Noem’s office, said in a Tuesday email, “All the Governor did was say the name of a gang that in fact exists and is in fact committing the crimes she referenced. She didn’t choose the name of the gang — they named themselves.”

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Federal and tribal authorities have criminal jurisdiction on the reservations in South Dakota, and Star Comes Out wants more funding from the U.S. for law enforcement. Noem has previously pushed to expand the state's jurisdiction. In 2018, as a U.S. House Representative, she proposed legislation that would allow federal authorities to arrest people on tribal lands for state crimes. It was widely opposed by tribal leaders, who saw it as a threat to tribal sovereignty.

Here are key questions and answers about the governor's contentious relationship with the tribe.

WHAT IS THE GANG THAT NOEM REFERENCED?

Tony Mangan, a spokesperson for the South Dakota Attorney General's office, said the Ghost Dancers are affiliated with a motorcycle gang called the Bandidos. The office does not know if the group is connected to drug cartels, nor does it know if the Ghost Dancers are present on the reservation, Mangan said.

Noem has cited cartels as responsible for homicides on the reservation, though her office didn't share recent examples. Fury, the governor's spokesperson, pointed to a 2016 murder on the reservation that was related to a drug cartel, but he declined to provide any information on other gang or cartel-related murders or any connection to the Ghost Dancers.

"Murders are being committed by cartel members on the Pine Ridge reservation and in Rapid City, and a gang called the 'Ghost Dancers' are affiliated with these cartels," Noem said last week in a speech to state lawmakers. "They have been successful in recruiting tribal members to join their criminal activity."

Star Comes Out, president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said he had not heard of a gang called the Ghost Dancers until Noem mentioned it in her speech, and that he was unaware of any presence by this gang on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

WHAT IS THE GHOST DANCE?

The Ghost Dance was a religious movement that spread across Native American communities in the U.S. in the late 1800s, after a Paiute elder had a vision that their homelands would be restored and they would be reconnected with their ancestors if they practiced it. He also foresaw the removal of white settlers, whose violence and spread of disease had devastated tribes.

For many, the practice represented resiliency in the face of the tremendous loss brought on by colonization.

The dance involves holding hands and moving in a circle while singing throughout the night. In the early 1890s, U.S. political and military leaders tried to outlaw the Ghost Dance, fearing the movement was a precursor to an uprising in communities it subjugated. Around the country, tribal nations adopted the practice, and in South Dakota it became part of one of America's most infamous massacres.

In 1890, hoping to stop the spread of the Ghost Dance, federal agents went to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to arrest Chief Sitting Bull, who they believed was behind its influence there. After a dispute, agents shot and killed Sitting Bull and several other tribal members. Following this, a group of about 300 Lakota men, women and children left Standing Rock hoping to reach safety at the nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The group was intercepted by U.S. troops, who killed hundreds of Lakota people in what would become known as the Wounded Knee Massacre.

WHY WAS NOEM BANISHED BEFORE?

Multiple times since taking office in 2019, Noem has been at odds with tribal governments.

In response to her support for anti-protest legislation following the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests at Standing Rock, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council unanimously voted to ban the governor from the reservation in 2019.

Months later, the council lifted the ban after Noem and the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota reached a settlement, ensuring the state would not enforce parts of the "riot boosting" laws that Noem had crafted.

She also clashed with several tribes during the COVID-19 pandemic when they set up coronavirus checkpoints at reservation borders to keep out unnecessary visitors. When Noem was unsuccessful in getting the checkpoints dismantled, she turned to the Trump administration for help.

Nick Estes, an assistant professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota and a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe in South Dakota, said he sees Noem's adversarial relationship with tribal

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nations as an attempt to seize a political opportunity and position herself as a strong Republican leader. "It's obvious signaling to Trump," he said.

Noem is considered a top contender for Trump's vice president pick in his re-election campaign.

Star Comes Out said Noem is the first person he has banished since becoming the tribe's president in 2022. The ban restricts Noem from visiting the reservation.

IS CRIME A PROBLEM ON THE RESERVATION?

Yes. Star Comes Out declared a state of emergency on the reservation in November because of rampant crime that he said hasn't been curbed due to the U.S. government's inadequate funding for law enforcement. The state of emergency is still in effect, he said this week.

Last year, a federal judge ruled the U.S. government has a treaty obligation to support law enforcement on the reservation, but didn't determine a specific amount of funding.

Star Comes Out said conditions on the reservation have worsened since the ruling, prompting him to sign an emergency proclamation, which said the U.S. government has failed "to fulfill the United States' treaty, statutory and trust responsibilities to provide adequate law enforcement on the Reservation."

Gun violence, drug offenses and sexual violence have become increasingly common on the Pine Ridge reservation, which is more than 2.1 million acres (849,839 hectares) or at least 4% of the state. Roughly 33 officers and eight criminal investigators are responsible for more than 100,000 emergency calls each year across the reservation, which is about the size of Connecticut, tribal officials have said.

Oglala Sioux officials have contended the tribe is entitled to federal funding for 120 fully equipped officers for the reservation, something the federal government has disputed.

The tribal nation filed a second lawsuit against the U.S. government last month to put pressure them to act.

____ Graham Brewer is a member of AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow him on social media.

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Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. February 5, 2024.

Editorial: Distracted Driving: Facing The Inevitable

An effort to toughen South Dakota's distracted driving laws went down to defeat recently.

This decision by the House Transportation Committee will likely be seen in hindsight as delaying the inevitable.

In the meantime, what kind of impact will it leave in place on drivers in this state? Or, to put it more bluntly, how many close calls will happen — how many people will be injured or even die — because some motorists didn't take the state's laws seriously enough ...?

That may well be overreaction on this issue, but the statistics and lifestyle trends speak for themselves.

First, some background. Two weeks ago, the aforementioned committee took up House Bill 1107, which aimed to elevate South Dakota's distracted driving laws from a secondary offense — meaning they can only be enforced if connected to another traffic violation — to a primary offense, meaning people can be pulled over and ticketed specifically for driving while on a smartphone, for example. Changing the penalty would allow law enforcement to more actively administer the law, thus driving the point home more forcefully.

During the hearing, lawmakers heard from insurance lobbyists and members of the public asking them to pass the measure. No one testified against it.

And yet, HB1107 lost by a 10-2 vote. One reason cited for the rejection, according to a KELO story, was the fact that no one from law enforcement showed up to testify in support of the bill.

Meanwhile, the trend of distracted driving continues to grow as smartphones have become practically an indispensable device in people's lives.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), distracted driving has become

the leading cause of all vehicular crashes in the U.S. "Much of the distraction on the roads is attributed to texting while driving," the Forbes news site reported.

In 2020, the NHTSA reported, texting while driving — probably the most dangerous activity one can do with a smartphone — was a factor in 13% of all distracted driving accidents that resulted in a death.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization noted recently that drivers using mobile phones are roughly four times more likely to be involved in an accident than drivers not using such devices.

The trend will likely increase as the mobile phones continue to upgrade and also become even more ubiquitous in our society, if that's possible. With nearly 97% of all Americans now owning mobile phones, the potential is already near a saturation point.

And with it comes the temptation to use the devices while driving.

As we said, the committee's decision probably just delays what will inevitably happen in this state. According to the Governors Highway Safety Association, 49 states now ban texting while driving, and only six of those have their bans listed as a secondary offense. This could suggest, of course, that the laws are not having a great impact on the rate of distracted driving accidents and fatalities. But it also shows that states are taking the threat seriously.

A stronger stand on distracted driving rules wouldn't eliminate accidents, but it might be a step toward reinforcing a message whose importance will grow stronger in the years to come.

Blinken ends latest Mideast mission after new Israeli snub of proposed Gaza cease-fire plan

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken left the Middle East on Thursday with public divisions between the United States and Israel at perhaps their worst level since Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza began in October.

Wrapping up a four-nation Mideast trip — his fifth to the region since the conflict erupted — Blinken was returning to Washington after getting a virtual slap in the face from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said the war would continue until Israel is completely victorious and appeared to reject outright a response from Hamas to a proposed cease-fire plan.

Relations between Israel and its main international ally, the United States, have been tense for months, but Netanyahu's public dismissal of a plan the U.S. says has merit, at least as a starting point for further negotiation, highlighted the divide.

Yet Blinken and other U.S. officials said they remained optimistic that progress could be made on their main goals of improving humanitarian conditions for Palestinians civilians, securing the release of hostages held by Hamas, preparing for a post-conflict Gaza and preventing the war from spreading.

Officials said Blinken's optimism was based on his first four post-Oct. 7 trips to the Middle East. None of those visits resulted in immediate visible successes, but they brought limited but significant improvements in the delivery of humanitarian aid and a weeklong cease-fire in November in which scores of hostages were released.

"Clearly there are things that Hamas sent back that are absolute non-starters," Blinken said of the response the militant group delivered Tuesday to a cease-fire and hostage release proposal that was endorsed last month by Egypt, Qatar, the U.S. and Israel itself.

"But, at the same time, we see space to continue to pursue an agreement," Blinken said late Wednesday. "And these things are always negotiations. It's not flipping a light switch. It's not 'yes' or 'no.' There's invariably back and forth."

Shortly before Blinken spoke, though, Netanyahu took direct aim at the Hamas response, calling it "delusional" and vowing that Israel would fight on to achieve "absolute victory" over the militant group, no matter what.

Compounding Blinken's dilemma, Netanyahu also appeared to dismiss concerns from the U.S. and oth-

ers about expanding Israel's military operations in southern Gaza, particularly in Rafah, the area on the Egyptian border to which over a million Palestinians have fled.

"On all of my previous visits here and pretty much every day in between, we have pressed Israel in concrete ways to strengthen civilian protection, to get more assistance to those who need it. And over the past four months, Israel has taken important steps to do just that," he said. "And yet ... the daily toll that its military operations continue to take on innocent civilians remains too high."

Netanyahu also called for the dismantlement of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, which is the main distributor of international assistance to Gaza, because of its alleged hostility toward Israel and allegations that a dozen of its employees took part in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that ignited the war.

The U.S. and other donor nations have suspended new assistance to UNRWA pending completion of a U.N. investigation into the allegations, but Blinken has nonetheless said the agency's role is critical to getting desperately needed humanitarian supplies into Gaza.

Blinken appealed to Netanyahu and other Israelis still reeling from the Hamas attack not to allow vengeance to dictate their continued response.

"Israelis were dehumanized in the most horrific way on October 7," he said. "And the hostages have been dehumanized every day since. But that cannot be a license to dehumanize others."

Blinken came to Israel just hours after the receipt of the Hamas counter-proposal to the framework cease-fire agreement put forward late last month. That proposal includes a three-phase plan to de-escalate the conflict.

In Qatar on Tuesday, both Qatar's prime minister and Blinken said the proposal had promise as a starting point for further negotiation.

And Blinken talked up Saudi Arabia's interest in normalizing relations with Israel, provided the Gaza war ends and the Palestinians are given a clear, credible and time-bound pathway to an independent state.

"We remain determined as well to pursue a diplomatic path to a just and lasting peace, and security for all in the region, and notably for Israel," Blinken said in Tel Aviv.

However, Netanyahu is opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state and has said Israel will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza.

Israeli strikes kill 13 in a southern Gaza town that could be the next target in the war

By NAJIB JOBAIN, WAFAA SHURAFI and KARÉEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes killed over a dozen people overnight and into Thursday in Rafah in the Gaza Strip, hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected Hamas' cease-fire terms and vowed to expand the offensive into the southern Gaza town.

More than half of strip's population has fled to Rafah, on the mostly sealed border with Egypt, which is also the main entry point for humanitarian aid. Egypt has warned that any ground operation there or mass displacement across the border would undermine its four-decade-old peace treaty with Israel.

The overnight strikes killed at least 13 people, including two women and five children, according to the Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. At the scene of one of the strikes, residents used their cell-phone flashlights as they dug through the rubble with pick-axes and their bare hands.

"I wish we could collect their whole bodies instead of just pieces," said Mohammed Abu Habib, a neighbor who witnessed the strike.

Israel's four-month-old air and ground offensive — among the most destructive in recent history — has killed over 27,000 Palestinians, driven most people from their homes and pushed a quarter of the population toward starvation.

Netanyahu has said the offensive will continue and expand until "total victory" over Hamas, which started the war by launching a wide-ranging attack into southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostage.

Israel has also vowed to bring back the over 100 captives still held by Hamas after most of the rest were

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freed during a cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

But both of those goals appear increasingly elusive, as Hamas re-emerges in parts of northern Gaza, which was the first target of the offensive and suffered widespread destruction. Israel has only rescued one hostage, while Hamas says several have been killed in airstrikes or failed rescue missions.

ALARM GROWS AS ISRAEL EYES RAFAH

Netanyahu said preparations were underway to expand the offensive into Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of people who fled from other areas are crowded into squalid tent camps and overflowing U.N.-run shelters.

The Palestinian death toll from four months of war has already reached 27,840, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures but says most of the dead have been women and children.

International aid organizations have warned that any major operation in Rafah would compound what is already a humanitarian catastrophe in the besieged coastal enclave.

"If they aren't killed in the fighting, Palestinian children, women and men will be at risk of dying by starvation or disease," said Bob Kitchen, of the International Rescue Committee. "There will no longer be a single 'safe' area for Palestinians to go to."

Outside the hospital where bodies from the overnight strikes were brought, relatives wept as they said farewell to their loved ones. Warda Abu Warda said she felt helpless.

"Where do we go after Rafah? Do we go to sea?" she asked.

GAPS REMAIN IN TALKS OVER CEASE-FIRE AND HOSTAGE RELEASE

The United States, Qatar and Egypt are trying to broker another cease-fire agreement to ensure the release the remaining hostages. But Hamas has demanded an end to the war, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including high-profile militants.

Netanyahu rejected those demands as "delusional" on Tuesday and said Israel would never agree to any deal that leaves Hamas in partial or full control of the territory it has ruled since 2007.

But visiting Secretary of State Antony Blinken said an agreement was still possible and that negotiations would continue, the latest sign of a growing divide between the two close allies on the way forward. A Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo on Thursday for more negotiations.

Netanyahu is under mounting pressure from families of the hostages and the wider public to bring them home, even if it requires a deal with Hamas. At least one senior Israeli official has acknowledged that saving the captives and destroying Hamas might be incompatible.

Hamas is still holding over 130 hostages, but around 30 of them are believed to be dead, with the vast majority killed on Oct. 7. The group is widely believed to be holding the captives in tunnels deep underground and using them as human shields for its top leaders.

The Supreme Court hears landmark election case seeking to kick Trump off ballot over Capitol attack

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday will hear former President Donald Trump's appeal to remain on the 2024 ballot, the justices' most consequential election case since *Bush v. Gore* in 2000.

The court will be weighing arguments over whether Trump is disqualified from reclaiming the White House because of his efforts to undo his loss in the 2020 election, ending with the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The case marks the first time the justices will be considering a constitutional provision that was adopted after the Civil War to prevent former officeholders who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office again.

It sets up precisely the kind of case that the court likes to avoid, one in which it is the final arbiter of a political dispute.

The Colorado Supreme Court ruled that Trump incited the riot in the nation's capital and is ineligible to be president again. As a result, he should not be on the ballot for the state's primary on March 5, the court

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ruled. It was the first time that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment was applied to a presidential candidate.

Trump's lawyers argue that the amendment can't be used to keep Trump off the ballot for several reasons.

For one thing, they contend the Jan. 6 riot wasn't an insurrection, and even if it was, Trump did not participate. The wording of the amendment also excludes the presidency and candidates running for president, they say. Even if they're wrong about all of that, they argue that Congress must pass legislation to reinvigorate Section 3.

The lawyers for Republican and independent voters who sued to remove Trump's name from the Colorado ballot counter that there is ample evidence that the events of Jan. 6 constituted an insurrection and that Trump incited it. They say it would be absurd to apply Section 3 to everything but the presidency or that Trump is somehow exempt. And the provision needs no enabling legislation, they argue.

A definitive ruling for Trump would largely end efforts in Colorado, Maine and elsewhere to prevent his name from appearing on the ballot.

A decision upholding the Colorado decision would amount to a declaration from the Supreme Court that Trump did engage in insurrection and is barred by the 14th Amendment from holding office again. That would allow states to keep him off the ballot and imperil his campaign.

The justices could opt for a less conclusive outcome, but with the knowledge that the issue could return to them, perhaps after the general election in November and in the midst of a full-blown constitutional crisis.

Trump is separately appealing to state court a ruling by Maine's Democratic secretary of state, Shenna Bellows, that he was ineligible to appear on that state's ballot over his role in the Capitol attack. Both the Colorado Supreme Court and the Maine secretary of state's rulings are on hold until the appeals play out.

The court has signaled it will try to act quickly, dramatically shortening the period in which it receives written briefing and holds arguments in the courtroom.

People began lining up outside the court on Wednesday hoping to snag one of the few seats allotted to the public. "This is a landmark decision and I want to be in the room where it happened, to quote 'Hamilton,'" said Susan Acker of Cincinnati, Ohio, who was in line with two friends.

The issues may be novel, but Trump is no stranger to the justices, three of whom Trump appointed when he was president. They have considered many Trump-related cases in recent years, declining to embrace his claims of fraud in the 2020 election and refusing to shield tax records from Congress and prosecutors in New York.

Before the Supreme Court is even finished deciding this case, the justices almost certainly will be dealing with another appeal from Trump, who is expected to seek an emergency order to keep his election subversion trial on hold so he can appeal lower-court rulings that he is not immune from criminal charges.

In April, the court also will hear an appeal from one of the more than 1,200 people charged in the Capitol riot. The case could upend a charge prosecutors have brought against more than 300 people, including Trump.

The court last played so central a role in presidential politics in its 5-4 decision that effectively ended the disputed 2000 election in favor of George W. Bush.

Justice Clarence Thomas is the only member of the court who also took part in Bush v. Gore. Thomas has ignored calls by some Democratic lawmakers to step aside from the case because his wife, Ginni, supported Trump's effort to overturn the 2020 election results and attended the rally that preceded the storming of the Capitol by Trump supporters.

Live updates | Israeli airstrikes kill 13 in Rafah after Netanyahu rejects Hamas' cease-fire terms

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli airstrikes killed at least 13 people overnight into Thursday in Rafah, on the border with Egypt, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected Hamas' cease-fire terms and said he would expand the offensive into the southern Gaza town.

Rafah is the main entry point for humanitarian aid and more than half of Gaza's population has fled

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there seeking refuge. Egypt has said any operation there or mass displacement across the border would undermine its four-decade-old peace treaty with Israel.

Two women and five children were among those killed in the airstrikes, according to the Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies.

Israel's military has so far ordered Palestinians to evacuate two-thirds of the tiny coastal enclave. Many of the displaced are living in squalid tent camps near Gaza's southern border with Egypt and in overflowing U.N.-run shelters. A quarter of Gaza's residents are starving.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken left the Middle East on Thursday with public divisions between the United States and Israel at perhaps their worst level since the Israel-Hamas war began.

The Palestinian death toll has surpassed 27,000 people, the Health Ministry in Gaza said.

The war began with Hamas' Oct. 7 assault into Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Hamas is still holding over 130 hostages, but around 30 of them are believed to be dead.

Currently:

- Blinken ends latest Mideast mission after new Israeli snub of proposed Gaza cease-fire plan
- Israel and Hamas are far apart on a Gaza cease-fire and hostage deal. What are the sticking points?
- Drone strike in Baghdad kills a high-ranking militia commander, officials say
- How the 'squad' is fighting back against pro-Israel PACs with record fundraising
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

ISRAEL SAYS A MISSILE ATTACK FROM LEBANON WOUNDED 3 SOLDIERS

TEL AVIV, Israel — The Israeli military says a missile attack from Lebanon wounded three soldiers, one of them severely.

The Israeli military says it struck infrastructure and a military compound linked to the Hezbollah militant group in retaliation for Thursday's attack, which involved an anti-tank missile.

Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have traded fire on a daily basis since the start of the war in Gaza. Hezbollah, an ally of Hamas, says it's pressuring Israel in support of the Palestinians.

In Israel, 18 people have been killed and more than 170 wounded in attacks from Lebanon. More than 200 people, mostly Hezbollah fighters but also more than 20 civilians, have been killed on the Lebanese side. Tens of thousands have been displaced on both sides. There are no immediate prospects for their return.

Israeli political and military leaders have warned Hezbollah that war is increasingly probable unless the militants withdraw from the border, though neither side wants to be dragged into a wider conflict.

EGYPT URGES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO 'SHOULDER' RESPONSIBILITY FOR A CEASE-FIRE

NICOSIA, Cyprus — Egypt's foreign minister says the international community must "shoulder its responsibility" to push for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and to turn up the pressure on getting larger quantities of much needed humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry says the international community and especially aid donor countries should also throw their full support behind UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees whose role in providing assistance and services to Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere in the region is "indispensable."

Shoukry said after talks Thursday with Cypriot counterpart Constantinos Kombos that his country believes the UNRWA's role "should not be tainted by any misactions of the few" that resulted in restricting support for the organization.

The U.S. and other donor nations have suspended new assistance to UNRWA pending completion of a U.N. investigation into Israeli allegations of alleged hostility toward Israel and that a dozen of its employees took part in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that ignited the war.

Replying to a question by the Associated Press, Shoukry said providing humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza prior to any cease-fire is of "fundamental importance." But that shouldn't detract from the necessity to enact an immediate cessation of hostilities which would help expedite delivery of larger aid quantities.

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Egypt's top diplomat said the displacement of 1.3 million Palestinians to the south of Gaza is compounding conditions of famine, lack of medical supplies and deteriorating sanitary conditions. He cited figures from the U.N. agency for children, UNICEF, which said that 17,000 children in Gaza have lost either one or both parents.

BLINKEN LEAVES THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER A 4-DAY TRIP

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken left the Middle East on Thursday with public divisions between the United States and Israel at perhaps their worst level since Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza began in October.

Wrapping up a four-nation trip — his fifth to the region since the conflict erupted — Blinken was returning to Washington after getting a virtual slap in the face from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said the war would continue until Israel is completely victorious and appeared to reject outright a response from Hamas to a proposed cease-fire plan.

Relations between Israel and its main international ally, the United States, have been tense for months, but Netanyahu's public dismissal of a plan the U.S. says has merit, at least as a starting point for further negotiation, highlighted the divide.

Yet Blinken and other U.S. officials said they remained optimistic that progress could be made on their main goals of improving humanitarian conditions for Palestinians civilians, securing the release of hostages held by Hamas, preparing for a post-conflict Gaza and preventing the war from spreading.

UN MIDEAST ENVOY SAYS ISRAELI OFFENSIVE INTO SOUTHERN GAZA WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations' top Mideast envoy is warning of "catastrophic" consequences from a looming Israeli offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which would cut off the only working entry point for humanitarian aid.

Tor Wennesland told a U.N. news conference that intense discussions are taking place between Israel and Egypt on what can be done along the Philadelphia Corridor, a tiny buffer zone on Gaza's border with Egypt. The corridor is demilitarized under the terms of the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace accord.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last month that Hamas continues to smuggle weapons under the border — a claim Egypt vehemently denies — and that the war cannot end "until we close this breach," referring to the corridor.

Wennesland said he sees no way of getting out of this dispute than having the two parties sitting and talking, adding that he is certain this issue was on the agenda of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's recent visit to Cairo and current talks in Israel.

The U.N. special coordinator for the Middle East peace process said any agreement on a lasting ceasefire in Gaza "will be incredibly difficult to set up" because of the details and arrangements that need to be worked out.

Wennesland said he will be talking to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Security Council permanent members in New York and then go to Washington for meetings with U.S. officials on "how we can chart a way out of this crisis" and overcome the serious impediments to an agreement.

A volcano in Iceland is erupting for the 3rd time since December, spewing lava into the sky

By MARCO DI MARCO Associated Press

GRINDAVIK, Iceland (AP) — A volcano in southwestern Iceland erupted for the third time since December on Thursday, sending jets of lava into the sky and triggering the evacuation of the Blue Lagoon spa, one of the island nation's biggest tourist attractions.

The eruption began at about 0600 GMT (1 a.m. EST) along a three-kilometer (nearly two-mile) fissure northeast of Mount Sundhnukur, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said. The site is about 4 kilometers (2½ miles) northeast of Grindavik, a coastal town of 3,800 people that was evacuated before a previous eruption on Dec. 18.

The Meteorological Office said that lava was flowing to the west and there was no immediate threat to

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Grindavik, or to a major power plant in the area. Civil defense officials said that no one was believed to be in the town at the time of the eruption.

"They weren't meant to be, and we don't know about any," Víðir Reynisson, the head of Iceland's Civil Defense, told Icelandic national broadcaster RUV.

The nearby Blue Lagoon thermal spa was closed when the eruption began and all the guests were safely evacuated, RUV said. A stream of steaming lava later spread across a road beside the spa.

The Icelandic Met Office earlier this week warned of a possible eruption after monitoring a buildup of magma, or semi-molten rock, below the ground for the past three weeks. Hundreds of small earthquakes had been measured in the area since Friday, capped by a burst of intense seismic activity about 30 minutes before the latest eruption began.

Dramatic video from Iceland's coast guard shows fountains of lava soaring more than 50 meters (165 feet) into the darkened skies. A plume of vapor rose about 3 kilometers (1½ miles) above the volcano.

Iceland, which sits above a volcanic hot spot in the North Atlantic, averages an eruption every four to five years. The most disruptive in recent times was the 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which spewed huge clouds of ash into the atmosphere and led to widespread airspace closures over Europe.

This is the third eruption since December of a volcanic system on the Reykjanes Peninsula, which is home to Keflavik, Iceland's main airport and several large towns. There was no disruption reported to the airport on Thursday.

Dave McGarvie, a volcanologist who has worked extensively in Iceland, said it's highly unlikely the "gentle, effusive" eruption will disrupt aviation because it produces only a tiny amount of ash.

Grindavik, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) southwest of Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, was evacuated in November when the Svartsengi volcanic system awakened after almost 800 years with a series of earthquakes that opened large cracks in the earth to the north of the town.

The volcano eventually erupted on Dec. 18, sending lava flowing away from Grindavik. A second eruption that began on Jan. 14 sent lava towards the town. Defensive walls that had been bolstered since the first eruption stopped some of the flow, but several buildings were consumed by the lava.

No confirmed deaths have been reported, but a workman is missing after falling into a fissure opened by the volcano.

Both the previous eruptions lasted only a matter of days, but they signal what Icelandic President Gudni Th. Johannesson called "a daunting period of upheaval" on the Reykjanes Peninsula, one of the most densely populated parts of Iceland.

It's unclear whether the residents of Grindavik will ever be able to return permanently, McGarvie said.

"I think at the moment there is the resignation, the stoical resignation, that, for the foreseeable future, the town is basically uninhabitable," he said.

He said that after centuries of quiet, "people thought this area was fairly safe."

"It's been a bit of a shock that it has come back to life," he added, "Evidence that we gathered only quite recently is that eruptions could go on for decades, if not centuries, sporadically in this particular peninsula."

Oyez, oyez, oyez: A listener's guide to Supreme Court arguments over Trump and the ballot

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court hears arguments Thursday over whether former President Donald Trump can be kept off the 2024 ballot because of his efforts to overturn the 2020 election results, culminating in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

The justices will wrestle with whether a provision of the 14th Amendment aimed at keeping former officeholders who "engaged in insurrection" can be applied to Trump, the leading candidate in the race for the Republican presidential nomination.

The Supreme Court has never looked at the provision, Section 3, since the 14th Amendment was ratified

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in 1868. But Trump appealed to the high court after Colorado's Supreme Court ruled that he could be kept off the state's primary ballot.

WHEN DOES THE SESSION START?

The court marshal will bang her gavel at 10 a.m. EST, but the livestream won't start immediately. The justices will issue opinions in one or more cases argued earlier this term. It could be a few minutes before Chief Justice John Roberts announces the start of arguments in Trump v. Anderson, as the case is called. The livestream won't kick in until then.

The court has allotted 80 minutes for arguments, but in a case of such importance, the session easily could last two hours or more.

WHERE DO I FIND THE LIVESTREAM?

There are no cameras in the courtroom, but since the pandemic, the court has livestreamed its argument sessions. Listen live on apnews.com/live/trump-supreme-court-arguments-updates or the court's website at www.supremecourt.gov. C-SPAN also will carry the arguments at www.c-span.org.

SENIORITY RULES

Almost everything at the Supreme Court is based on seniority, with the chief justice first among equals. But after the lawyers make opening remarks, the next voice listeners will hear almost certainly will be the gravelly baritone of Justice Clarence Thomas. He has served longer than any of his colleagues and for years rarely participated in the arguments, saying he disliked the free-for-all and constant interrupting.

But when the court began hearing arguments remotely during the pandemic, Thomas began asking questions and hasn't stopped. By informal agreement, the other justices stay silent to give Thomas first crack at the lawyers when the questioning begins.

In a second round, the justices ask questions in order of seniority, with Roberts leading off. Not everyone will necessarily have more to ask by this point.

Once both sides present their arguments, the lawyer for the party that appealed to the court gets a short, uninterrupted rebuttal.

APPEAL TO HISTORY

The current court, especially the conservative justices, places a lot of weight on the meaning of laws and constitutional provisions at the time they were adopted. All the parties argue that history favors their reading of the provision, but they will face lots of questions from the court.

TERMS OF ART

The discussion is likely to focus on several terms in the provision as the justices try to parse their meaning. The lawyers will put forth competing versions of whether Trump "engaged in insurrection." They also will offer their views on whether the presidency is an "office ... under the United States" and whether the president is an "officer of the United States." A phrase that doesn't appear in the amendment also might get bandied about. Trump's lawyers and allies argue that Section 3 is not "self-executing," and that Congress must pass legislation before the provision can be applied.

SALMON CHASE

Salmon Chase, the 19th-century chief justice and politician, could get some air time during the arguments because of his views on whether Congress must act. In the space of a few months, Chase offered seemingly contradictory opinions that Section 3 needed no further action, in a case involving ex-Confederate President Jefferson Davis, and that it did, in the case of a Black man who unsuccessfully sought to overturn a criminal conviction.

How the 'squad' is fighting back against pro-Israel PACs with record fundraising

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They were warned that criticism of Israel's conduct during its war on Hamas in Gaza could cost them politically. But in the four months since Israel's blistering offensive was ignited by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, progressives in Congress who have called for a cease-fire are seeing record fund-

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raising dollars as they fight to remain in office.

Members of the "squad" — a group of liberals in the House — are being singled out by pro-Israel PACs like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, better known as AIPAC. The groups have pledged or plan to spend tens of millions of dollars to try to defeat them in Democratic primaries and the general election this year, turning the otherwise safely Democratic districts into election battlegrounds.

The cohort of Black and brown lawmakers is facing what they see as an "existential threat" to their political careers. It's a struggle that raises significant questions about who can be a Democrat in Congress, what positions are permissible about Israel and the Palestinians, and what role outside groups should have in determining both.

Unlike in previous cycles, progressives are being bolstered more and more by Arab American and Muslim groups who are organizing in record numbers to ensure their voices are heard on Capitol Hill.

"The fact that amidst these AIPAC attacks, amidst us having a viable challenger, we have record-breaking fundraising quarter is because the Muslim community has felt erased and dehumanized throughout this process," Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y., told The Associated Press in an interview last month.

AIPAC has defended its track record, telling the AP in a statement that "it is entirely consistent with progressive values to stand with the Jewish state," and that the group has a history of supporting members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Congressional Democrats have long been sensitive about the divisions around Israel, with even lawmakers aligned with AIPAC declining to discuss the situation on the record.

Bowman, who is among a group of 19 Democrats who have called for a cease-fire in Gaza, is facing a Democratic challenger backed by AIPAC. The group, which has historically yielded immense clout in Washington, has shifted strategy in the last several years, transitioning from strictly a lobbying organization to helping elect centrist, pro-Israel Democrats. In 2022, it began challenging Democratic incumbents in primaries.

Ahead of November, the group and PACs connected to its ethos have once again begun contributing to candidates running against members of the squad. In addition to Bowman, the Democrats facing challengers include Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Summer Lee of Pennsylvania and Cori Bush of Missouri, all of whom have not only called for a cease-fire but have demanded an end to U.S. aid to Israel as its bombardment of Gaza is estimated to have killed more than 25,000 Palestinians since October.

Progressive groups are closely watching the campaign as they track the unprecedented flow of money into congressional district races at a level usually seen for battleground Senate seats.

NEVER GOING TO BE A 'FAIR FIGHT'

In 2022, AIPAC spent around \$27 million targeting progressive candidates. Its war chest this cycle is expected to be more than twice that amount.

In the last quarter alone, the group was the largest donor to George Latimer, Bowman's opponent in the Democratic primary. AIPAC gave the Westchester County executive more than \$600,000, representing more than 40% of his \$1.4 million in contributions so far, according to campaign finance reports filed Wednesday.

Bowman, meanwhile, managed to raise more than \$730,000 in total last quarter — the majority of which his campaign says came from grassroots Arab and Muslim groups and individual donors.

"(Muslim and Arab groups) are building an infrastructure that is financial and political and social, to fight back against AIPAC and to fight back against entities that continue to demonize them as Muslims as Arabs and as brown people," Bowman said.

It marks a record-breaking quarter for the educator-turned-congressman who in December 2021 had barely managed to raise \$200,000 in contributions. But outside groups like Justice Democrats say the challenge ahead is considerable, with AIPAC having the ability to drop more than half a million on a candidate in one quarter.

"This is versus candidates, black and brown candidates, who come from working-class backgrounds, who represent working-class districts, who do not take corporate PAC money, who rely on grassroots fundrais-

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ing. So this is not a fair fight," said Usamah Andrabi, the communications director for Justice Democrats. "It has never been a fair fight."

LOOKING FOR CANDIDATES

Beyond the four members of the squad — Bowman, Lee, Omar and Bush — who are already facing both primary and general election challenges, pro-Israel groups are still searching for candidates to take on some other vocal Palestinian advocates in Congress.

One progressive who is no stranger to AIPAC-backed challenges since coming to Washington is Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, the only Palestinian serving in Congress.

While there has been an active effort to recruit an opponent against her this cycle, no candidate has accepted the appeals from various groups to take her on. Nonetheless, Tlaib has raised nearly \$3.7 million since the start of the war in Gaza, record fundraising for the third-term congresswoman who has faced constant attacks from both sides for her criticism of Israel. She was censured by the House in November for her remarks about the war.

Tlaib's massive fundraising haul can largely be attributed to a grassroots effort, with the campaign saying that donations in the three months came from 32,600 people. More than 20,000 of those people were first-time donors and the average donation was less than \$75, according to the campaign.

"We are proud of our grassroots campaign that is bringing people together to fight for justice for all, no matter where you live or who you are," said Carolina Toro-Román, Tlaib's co-campaign manager.

Tlaib has easily defeated primary opponents in the past, in part because her district includes parts of Dearborn and one of the largest Arab American communities in the nation.

Hussein Dabajeh, a Dearborn resident and Democratic consultant, said there's been an active effort in the community to financially support not only Tlaib, but any lawmakers who have called for a cease-fire in Gaza.

"Whether it be chats on WhatsApp, Facebook groups, coordinated emails from different organizations, text message campaigns, calls, or town halls: There are efforts that are coming in from the community," Dabajeh said. "Not only in Dearborn or in Detroit, but from across the country."

MESSAGE TO VOTERS AND DEMOCRATIC ESTABLISHMENT

Before November, progressive members and the outside groups supporting them are looking beyond fundraising tactics to challenge AIPAC's standing with the Democratic Party.

Candidates being targeted by the group are trying to raise awareness for what they say is AIPAC's toxic role in Democratic primaries. In recent years, several major Republican donors have helped fund the group's effort to target candidates critical of Israel. In 2022, the majority of the money spent in the Democratic primary between then-Rep. Andy Levin and Rep. Haley Stevens in Michigan came from GOP donors.

After the last Israel-Hamas war in 2021, Levin, a self-proclaimed Zionist and former synagogue president, renewed his calls for a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. That, in addition to redistricting in Michigan, resulted in a perfect storm against Levin, who faced an organized campaign by AIPAC that would funnel an unprecedented amount of money — over \$4 million — to Stevens, a centrist, pro-Israel member. Stevens won the primary, helping push Levin and his vocal criticism of Israel out of Congress.

"I think this is really a structural issue for democracy in general and an existential issue for the Democratic Party," Levin told the AP last month. "What kind of a party are we, if we allow Republicans to come in and determine who we pick in a Democratic primary to run against the other side?"

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Progressive Caucus who is also a target of AIPAC this year, said she has been talking with Democrats who still receive money from the group about the damage it could do to the party and their efforts to regain the House.

"This is hurting the Democratic Party to challenge our incumbents," Jayapal said. "Our goal as a unified Democratic Party is to make sure that Joe Biden stays in the White House, and that we take back the House and make Hakeem Jeffries our speaker and that we expand our ranks in the Senate."

And AIPAC, she says, has become a major obstacle to that goal.

Pakistan votes for a new parliament as militant attacks surge and jailed leader's party cries foul

By MUNIR AHMED and RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistanis braved cold winter weather and sporadic violence to vote for a new parliament Thursday, a day after twin bombings claimed at least 30 lives in the worst election-related violence ahead of the balloting.

Tens of thousands of security forces were deployed at polling stations and authorities suspended mobile phone services across the country to prevent disruptions and flash protests. Pakistan's Interior Ministry said the decision was made to maintain law and order. It did not say when the suspension would be lifted.

There were a handful of attacks that appeared aimed at disrupting the vote.

In the northwestern district of Dera Ismail Khan, gunmen set off a bomb and then opened fire at a police van, killing five officers and wounding two others, local police official Khalid Khan said. The officers were assigned to security duty during the elections.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack but the area is a former stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban who often target police forces.

Also in the northwest, gunmen fired on troops in the town of Kot Azam, killing a soldier, police official Fiyyaz Khan said. Again, no one immediately claimed responsibility for that attack.

Unidentified assailants threw hand grenades at two polling stations in restive southwestern Baluchistan province, where twin bombings hit separate election offices on Wednesday, killing at least 30 people and wounding more than two dozen others. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for both bombings.

The grenades on Thursday caused panic among voters but no one was hurt, police said.

Voters headed to the polls in heavy snowfall in the ski resort of Murree, near Islamabad, and lined up to vote in snow-covered plains in eastern Punjab province and the mountains of southern Sindh province.

The election has also been marred by allegations from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan that its candidates were denied a fair chance at campaigning.

The cricket star-turned-Islamist politician — ousted in a no-confidence vote in parliament in 2022 — is behind bars and banned from running in the election. He has a huge following but it's unclear if his angry and disillusioned supporters will turn up at the polls in significant numbers.

Khan's party called the suspension of the mobile phone services "a severe assault on democracy" and a "cowardly attempt by those in power to stifle dissent, manipulate the election's outcome, and infringe upon the rights of the Pakistani people."

The election comes at a critical time for this nuclear-armed nation, an unpredictable Western ally in a region rife with hostile boundaries and tense relations. Pakistan's next government will face huge challenges, from containing unrest, overcoming an intractable economic crisis to stemming illegal migration.

As many as 44 political parties are vying for a share of the 266 seats that are up for grabs in the National Assembly, or the lower house of parliament. An additional 70 seats are reserved for women and minorities in the 336-seat house.

After the election, the new parliament will choose the country's next prime minister. The deep political divisions make a coalition government seem more likely. If no single party wins a simple majority, the first-placed gets a chance to form a coalition government, relying on allies in the house.

The top contender is the Pakistan Muslim League party of three-time former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who returned to the country last October after four years of self-imposed exile abroad to avoid serving prison sentences at home. Within weeks of his return, his convictions were overturned, leaving him free to seek a fourth term in office.

After voting in the eastern city of Lahore, an upbeat Sharif said he wasn't thinking about a coalition government but looking forward to his party winning a majority in parliament.

With his archrival Khan sidelined and in prison, Sharif seems on a sure path to the premiership, backed by his younger brother, former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The younger Sharif, who is likely to have a role in the next Cabinet, told Geo news channel on Wednesday that his brother would become prime

minister if their party gets a majority of the vote.

The only other strong contender is Pakistan People's Party. It has a power base in the south and is led by a rising star in national politics — Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the son of assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. He issued a statement, demanding restoration of the mobile phone service.

The Sharifs and Bhutto-Zardari are traditional rivals but have joined forces against Khan in the past, and Bhutto-Zardari served as foreign minister until last August, during Shehbaz Sharif's term as premier.

President Arif Alvi, who has a mostly ceremonial role in Pakistan, cast his ballot in the southern port city of Karachi. He urged people to vote, saying it's their duty as citizens.

If Khan's supporters stay away from the polls, analysts predict the race will come down to the parties of Nawaz Sharif and Bhutto-Zardari, both eager to keep Khan's party out of the picture. As Bhutto-Zardari is unlikely to secure the premiership on his own, he could still be part of a Sharif-led coalition government.

For Khan, convicted on charges of graft, revealing state secrets and breaking marriage laws — and sentenced to three, 10, 14 and seven years, to be served concurrently — the vote is a stark reversal of fortunes from the last election when he became premier.

Candidates from Khan's party have been forced to run as independents after the Supreme Court and Election Commission said they can't use the party symbol — a cricket bat on voting slips — to help illiterate voters find them on the ballots.

Separately, elections are also taking place Thursday for the nation's four provincial assemblies.

On Tuesday, the United Nation's top human rights body warned of a "pattern of harassment" against members of Khan's party, which claims it has been prevented from holding rallies like Sharif's party. Authorities deny the allegations.

Pakistanis, like people in many other impoverished nations, grapple with sustained high inflation, rising poverty levels, daily gas outages and hourslong electricity blackouts.

Since Khan's ouster, Pakistan has relied on bailouts to resuscitate its spiraling economy, with a \$3 billion package from the International Monetary Fund and wealthy allies like China and Saudi Arabia jumping in with cash and loans.

Ukraine needs more troops fighting Russia. Hardened professionals from Colombia are helping

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and MANUEL RUEDA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Melodic Colombian Spanish fills a hospital treating soldiers wounded fighting Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine's ranks are depleted by two years of war. As it battles the Russian war machine, Ukraine is welcoming hardened fighters from one of the world's longest-running conflicts.

Professional soldiers from Colombia bolster the ranks of volunteers from around the world who have answered Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's call for foreign fighters to join his nation's war with Russia.

A 32-year-old from the city of Medellín was trying to save a colleague wounded in three days of heavy fighting with Russian forces. Russian drones attacked the group and shrapnel from a grenade dropped by one pierced his jawbone.

"I thought I was going to die," said the man, who goes by the call sign Checho. The fighters insisted on being identified by their military call signs because they feared for their safety and that of their families.

"We got up and decided to run away from the position to save our lives," Checho said. "There was nowhere to hide."

Colombia's military has been fighting drug-trafficking cartels and rebel groups for decades, making its soldiers some of the world's most experienced.

With a military of 250,000, Colombia has Latin America's second-largest army, after Brazil's. More than 10,000 retire each year. And hundreds are heading to fight in Ukraine, where many make four times as much as experienced non-commissioned officers earn in Colombia, or even more.

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"Colombia has a large army with highly trained personnel but the pay isn't great when you compare it to other militaries," said Andrés Macías of Bogotá's Externado University, who studies Colombian work for military contractors around the world.

Retired Colombian soldiers began to head overseas in the early 2000s to work for U.S. military contractors protecting infrastructure including oil wells in Iraq. Retired members of Colombia's military have also been hired as trainers in the United Arab Emirates and joined in Yemen's battle against Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

Colombia's role as a recruiting ground for the global security industry also has its murkier, mercenary corners: Two Colombians were killed and 18 were arrested after they were accused of taking part in the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse.

At the military hospital normally treating wounded Ukrainian soldiers, a group of about 50 Colombian fighters spend most of their time staring at their phone screens — calling home, browsing the internet and listening to music in between meals and medical procedures, most for light injuries.

In a battlefield stalemate with Russia, Ukraine is expanding its system allowing people from around the world to join the Ukrainian army, said Oleksandr Shahuri, an officer of the Department of Coordination of Foreigners in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

In early 2022, authorities said 20,000 people from 52 countries were in Ukraine. Now, in keeping with the secrecy surrounding any military numbers, authorities will not say how many are on the battlefield but they do say fighters' profile has changed.

The first waves of volunteers came mostly from post-Soviet or English-speaking countries. Speaking Russian or English made it easier for them to integrate into Ukraine's military, Shahuri said.

Last year the military developed an infrastructure of Spanish-speaking recruiters, instructors and junior operational officers, he added.

Hector Bernal, a retired ex-combat medic who runs a center for tactical medicine outside Bogotá, says that in the last eight months he's trained more than 20 Colombians who went on to fight in Ukraine.

"They're like the Latin American migrants who go to the U.S. in search of a better future" Bernal said. "These are not volunteers who want to defend another country's flag. They are simply motivated by economic need."

While generals in Colombia get around \$6,000 a month in salaries and bonuses, the same as a government minister, the rank and file gets by on a much more modest income.

Corporals in Colombia get a basic salary of around \$400 a month, while experienced drill sergeants can earn up to \$900. Colombia's monthly minimum wage is currently \$330.

In Ukraine any member of the armed forces, regardless of citizenship, is entitled to a monthly salary of up to \$3,300, depending on their rank and type of service. They are also entitled to up to \$28,660 if they are injured, depending on the severity of the wounds. If they are killed in action, their families are due \$400,000 compensation.

Checho says principle drove him to travel to Kyiv last September. He estimates that in his unit alone, there were around 100 other fighters from Colombia who had made the same journey.

"I know that there are not many of us, but we try to give the most we have in order to make things happen and to see a change as soon as possible," he said.

In Colombia, word about recruitment to the Ukrainian army spreads mostly through social media. Some of the volunteers who already fight in Ukraine share insights on the recruitment process on platforms such as TikTok or WhatsApp.

But when something goes wrong, getting information about their loved ones is hard for relatives.

Diego Espitia lost contact with his cousin Oscar Triana after Triana joined the Ukrainian army in August 2023. Six weeks later, the retired soldier from Bogotá stopped posting updates on social media.

With no Ukrainian embassy in Bogotá, Triana's family reached out for information from the Ukrainian embassy in Peru and the Colombian consulate in Poland — the last country Triana passed through on his way into Ukraine. Neither responded.

"We want the authorities in both countries to give us information about what happened, to respond to

our emails. That is what we are demanding now," Espitia said.

The Associated Press tracked down a Colombian fighter who uses the call sign Oso Polar — Polar Bear — and says he was the last person to see Triana alive on October 8, 2023. He says Triana's unit was ambushed by Russian forces in the Kharkiv region, after which his fate was unknown.

The Ukrainian military unit where Triana was serving confirmed to The Associated Press that Triana is officially missing, but would not disclose any details surrounding the circumstances in which he disappeared.

Espitia, his cousin, says he's not sure what motivated Triana to fight in Ukraine. But the 43-year-old had served in the Colombian army for more than 20 years and leaving it had been "mentally difficult," Espitia said.

"It could've been for the money, or because he missed the adrenaline of being in combat. But he didn't open up very much about his reasons for going," Espitia said.

After almost three weeks in the hospital, Checho has returned to Ukraine's front line. So have more than 50 other Colombian fighters who were treated in the same facility.

"The situation here is hard," Checho told AP. "We are under constant bombardment, but we will keep fighting."

Biden determined to use stunning Trump-backed collapse of border deal as a weapon in 2024 campaign

By COLLEEN LONG, ZEKE MILLER and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — How it began: President Joe Biden was urgently seeking more money from Congress to aid Ukraine and Israel. He took a gamble by seizing on GOP demands to simultaneously address one of his biggest political liabilities — illegal migration at the U.S.-Mexico border.

How it ended: Biden came close to succeeding, before it all fell apart spectacularly. Now the president is trying to make the best of it after a major congressional deal was scuttled once Republican front-runner Donald Trump got involved. And Biden is intent on showing that the former president and his "Make America Great Again" Republican acolytes in Congress aren't really interested in solutions.

In between: There is a story of a president willing to anger his own party's activist class in an election year, rare hope for bipartisan progress on one of the third rails of American politics, and a sudden, stunning collapse publicly engineered by Trump that Biden's team now sees as a political gift.

This account of Biden's big gamble is based on interviews with more than a dozen White House aides, lawmakers, Biden administration officials and congressional aides, some of whom spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the back and forth over the collapsed deal, and what happens next.

The bipartisan legislative deal announced Sunday evening was the culmination of more than four months of negotiations that started with Senate Democrats and Republicans, and later included top Biden aides and Cabinet officials. It came after Republicans, led by then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, backed a temporary spending deal that kept the government operating but delivered no new funding for Ukraine.

McCarthy had insisted to the White House that any effort to continue U.S. funding for Ukraine needed to be linked to significant steps to secure the U.S.-Mexico border, long a GOP priority. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Biden's most valuable Republican ally when it came to Ukraine aid, also began appealing to senior administration officials for the spending measure to include border provisions.

Inside the White House, there was no shortage of grumbling that Republicans were insisting on unrelated policy changes and holding up badly needed money for the Ukrainian armed forces.

But Biden and his advisers saw a potential upside as well, at a time when the president's handling of immigration was one of his biggest political vulnerabilities and there were chaotic scenes at the border and in major Democratic-run cities where migrants are sleeping in police station foyers, bus stations and hotels.

Before long McCarthy was ousted and it took weeks to elect a replacement. New House Speaker Mike Johnson, elected Oct. 25, made clear that he, too, wanted to pair border security with any new Ukraine funding.

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While the House was in disarray, a group of bipartisan senators quietly got to work.

The White House kept its distance until senior officials felt it was the right time to get directly involved, but there was also pressure from Republicans for them to join the talks. GOP lawmakers insisted it was necessary for Biden to expend some political capital and embrace a border compromise that could be unpopular with parts of his own party.

On Dec. 12, the White House dispatched senior officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, to join the negotiations. The idea was to underscore Biden's seriousness about cutting a deal with Republicans.

"Immediately after the Republicans demanded that the administration show up, they showed up," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., one of the negotiators.

Difficult negotiations stretched into 2024. But there were signs of progress and Biden was optimistic. So much so that on Jan. 18, he said he didn't think there were any sticking points left.

In an effort to push the bill forward, Biden even adopted Trump's own language saying he'd "shut down the border" if given the power — a stunning admission from a Democrat that was quickly and loudly condemned by activists in his own party.

The deal that emerged would have overhauled the asylum system to provide faster and tougher immigration enforcement, as well as given presidents new powers to immediately expel migrants if authorities become overwhelmed with the number of people applying for asylum. It also would have added \$20 billion in funding, a huge influx of cash.

It was never entirely clear what the White House strategy was to advance the border compromise in the House should it make it out of the Senate. Johnson repeatedly voiced resistance to how the agreement was shaping up. Asked why the administration was choosing to hash out a deal with the Senate and not the House, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre regularly pointed out that House Republicans left for the holidays in mid-December while talks were ongoing.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Ala., said it was a mistake that the White House didn't negotiate with House Republicans directly, but that even so, if the deal "actually sealed the border, it could've sailed through."

Enter the former president. He had been occupied for weeks by a defamation trial in New York City and fending off GOP challenges from Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley in Iowa and New Hampshire.

At a rally in Nevada on Jan. 27 — after solidifying his position as the far and away GOP front-runner — he said his piece: "As the leader of our party, there is zero chance I will support this horrible open borders betrayal of America. I'll fight it all the way."

"A lot of the senators are trying to say, respectfully, they're blaming it on me," Trump added, followed by the 10 words that made Biden aides light up: "I say, that's OK. Please blame it on me. Please."

By the time the text of the bill was released last Sunday, the pile-up of Republicans willing to block it already appeared insurmountable. GOP lawmakers claimed Biden already could fix the situation at the border with existing authority. But some in Congress publicly echoed Trump in saying they didn't want to give Biden a political win on an issue that they see as key to their 2024 hopes.

With that, the deal that the White House and many in the Senate thought would pass was headed for failure. In a stern address this week, the president vowed to make sure that voters understand why it foundered.

"I'll be taking this issue to the country, and the voters are going to know that just at the moment we were going to secure the border and fund these other programs, the MAGA Republicans said 'no' because they're afraid of Donald Trump," Biden said.

The rapid collapse of Republican backing for the border compromise stunned even those who worked most closely on the agreement. Murphy said that even as late as Sunday, he had counted 20 to 25 GOP senators as potential votes in favor of the deal.

"I am still shocked at how every single one of these Republicans, including many Republicans that were like, literally in the room with us — like, hours after helping us try to get the final product, they were declaring they were against it," Murphy said. "I've never seen anything like this in my time in Washington."

To Biden aides, it was public validation of the argument the president had been making about Trump and his allies — that they had their own interests at heart, not the country's.

Even in failure, the bipartisan agreement in principle was the closest Washington has come to significant revisions to border policy in two decades. And Biden allies are intent on making Republicans take the hit for any further scenes of chaos at the border.

It's far from assured that Biden's efforts to pin the blame on Trump will stick. His GOP critics will no doubt continue their relentless efforts to saddle the current Oval Office occupant with the country's immigration woes. And the president still has to contend with sore feelings among progressive Democrats who feel the president sold them out by going all-in on tougher measures and language that had previously been a nonstarter for the party.

Biden, though, has his plan: "Every day between now and November, the American people are going to know that the only reason the border is not secure is Donald Trump and his MAGA Republican friends."

Nevada's Republican caucuses give Trump another chance to demonstrate his grip on the GOP base

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, JONATHAN J. COOPER and GABE STERN Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Donald Trump is expected to sweep Nevada's GOP caucuses on Thursday, which would give the former president a third straight win in the Republican presidential race and display his dominance over the Republican Party.

His last major Republican challenger, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, rejected the caucuses as rigged and decided to instead run in Tuesday's purely symbolic GOP primary — where she was overwhelmingly beaten by the "none of these candidates" option chosen by Trump supporters and disaffected voters.

Republicans are increasingly converging behind Trump while he faces a deluge of legal problems, including 91 criminal charges in four separate cases. Trump is flexing his influence both in Congress — where Republicans rejected a border security deal after he pushed against it — and at the Republican National Committee, as chairwoman Ronna McDaniel could resign in the coming weeks after he publicly questioned whether she should stay in the job.

Trump still faces unprecedented jeopardy for a major candidate. A federal appeals panel ruled this week that Trump can face trial on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, rejecting his claims that he is immune from prosecution. And on Thursday, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in a case trying to keep Trump from the 2024 presidential ballot over his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss.

But none of those developments seem to be hurting his standing among Republicans, including in Nevada.

Nevada's GOP decided to bypass a primary election prescribed by the Legislature and instead hold caucuses to determine which candidate will receive its delegates, a decision Trump's team supported.

The resulting system allowed the party more control over who participates and gave Trump a greater advantage than he already would have had, but it left some voters confused. The state GOP required candidates to choose running either in the caucuses or the primary.

Trump is the only major candidate left in the caucuses and expected to win all 26 of Nevada's Republican delegates. He is in a strong position heading into March, when the Republican calendar ramps up, to collect the 1,215 delegates he needs to secure the nomination.

While Trump and Haley won't have a showdown in Nevada on Thursday, they will compete in the Republican caucuses in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with the hope of picking up the territory's four delegates.

Caucuses require candidates to cultivate more grassroots support and spend resources organizing in order to ensure they get voters to show up at an appointed time and location in the evening to show their support. The system tends to benefit Trump, with his years of backing from the party base along with the years he and his team have spent cultivating local party members.

Trump visited Nevada last month and is expected to return to the state Thursday to celebrate his victory.

His campaign has said their early efforts are groundwork for when Nevada will be a political swing state in November.

"Nevada is a battleground state in the general election and everything that we do for the caucus and organizing now will pay dividends in the weeks ahead as we begin the general election against Joe Biden," Trump's senior campaign adviser Chris LaCivita said.

How a grieving mother tried to 'build a bridge' with the militant convicted in her son's murder

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After hours of talking about faith and family, redemption and war, the grieving American mother had an additional question for the Islamic militant convicted in her son's murder.

Do you know, Diane Foley asked, where my son is buried?

The exchange is described in a new book by Foley that recounts face-to-face encounters she had with the British-born Islamic State fighter who was charged in connection with the brutal beheading in Syria of her son James, a freelance journalist.

Sitting in a windowless courthouse conference room with the man who contributed to her son's death, Foley said in an interview, was meant as a "tiny step" toward reparation — "for him to begin to kind of understand where we were coming from and for me to try to hear him."

The conversations afforded Foley an opportunity to memorialize a son everyone knew as Jim — curious, full of energy, possessed of strong moral bearing. Across the table, Alexandra Kotey, his ankles shackled, conveyed compassion for the Foley family's suffering but also made clear his resentment over U.S. actions in the Middle East and remained resolute that he'd been acting as a soldier during a time of war.

He couldn't say where Jim's body was buried — he wished he knew, he said, but he didn't — but for Foley, the conversations were nonetheless profoundly worthwhile.

"I just kind of wanted to somehow build a bridge, that's all," Foley said. "The pain and hatred continues unless you take the time to try to listen to one another."

It's highly unusual for a victim's relative to have meaningful interactions with someone convicted of harming their loved one. But this case has never been ordinary — and was also never even a sure thing.

Jim Foley was among a group of mostly Western journalists and aid workers held hostage and ultimately killed by a group of British-born Islamic State militants in Syria during a reign of terror that also involved waterboarding and mock executions. The captors came to be known by the incongruously lighthearted nickname of "the Beatles" because of their accents.

It wasn't until nearly four years after Foley's 2014 murder at the age of 40 that Kotey and a future co-defendant, El Shafee Elsheikh, were captured by a Kurdish-led, U.S. backed militia. An American drone strike killed the militant actually responsible for Foley's killing, Mohammed Emwazi, known by the moniker "Jihadi John."

After legal wrangling, the pair was brought to the U.S. for prosecution in 2020 after the Justice Department agreed to forgo the death penalty as a possible punishment.

The book traces that saga but also delves into Diane Foley's dismay over what she portrays as a coldly bureaucratic U.S. government response to her son's disappearance, two years before his death.

The captors reached out with a multimillion-dollar ransom demand, but the Obama administration warned her she could face prosecution if she paid one. Officials struggled to communicate meaningful, up-to-date information.

The first indication something terrible may have happened to her son, Foley says, was a call not from the government but from a reporter — though in retrospect a possible clue came earlier that morning when two FBI agents arrived at her New Hampshire house to request Jim's DNA.

President Barack Obama announced her son's death and later called the family, insisting the administration had done everything possible to save Jim and even revealing to them an unsuccessful military operation to rescue the hostages. But the Foleys were unconvinced and during a subsequent White House visit,

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Foley says she bristled at Obama's assurance that Jim was his highest priority, telling him the hostage families had felt abandoned.

Foley channeled that grief into action, pressing the government to do better. The administration in 2015 overhauled its approach to dealing with hostage cases, with Obama saying he'd heard "unacceptable" feedback from families about the government's interactions with them. An FBI-led hostage recovery team was created, along with a new State Department special envoy position.

But the heart of "American Mother," written with Irish author Colum McCann, is about Foley's interactions with Kotey — conversations mandated under Kotey's 2021 plea agreement. (El Sheikh was convicted at trial).

Inside a conference room at a federal courthouse in Virginia, Foley asked Kotey to describe what he thought of Jim — a "typical white American" was the response, plus naive and optimistic. He was a truth-seeker, she told him, a teacher, a journalist. In another world, she said, you and Jim could have been friends.

Kotey shared details of his own life, too, pulling out photos of his daughters in bright blue and pink dresses that were taken in a Syrian refugee camp. Foley felt instantly moved by the girls' beauty.

He acknowledged his role in Jim's captivity but in a limited way; yes, he had punched him and written the message Jim delivered on camera before his murder. But he said he wasn't present for the killing itself. The indictment doesn't spell out specific roles for the defendants in the deaths of the Western hostages. What he had done, Kotey said, was what he'd been directed to do as a soldier in war.

At one point, he opened a tissue package, wiping his eyes as he described being moved by an HBO documentary he'd seen about Jim's life, especially at the sight of his weeping father. He said he was sorry for causing the family pain.

But, he said, he wanted Foley to understand how he came by his resentment.

He told a story of once pulling the remains of a baby from the rubble of an American drone strike, lamenting how no one had been interested in making a documentary about that child as was done for Jim since she was not white or American.

The first two conversations occurred over two days in October 2021, weeks after Kotey's guilty plea. She returned the following spring, weeks before he was to start his life sentence, after receiving two handwritten letters from him.

He wrote about his "compassion and sympathy for your collective anguish and grief as a family" but also his ambivalence upon learning that Jim's brother was a U.S. military pilot — something he said he'd been reluctant to bring up in their earlier meetings.

He said he had "struggled to detangle" the "sins of the U.S. government" from "our own misguided and unjust responses towards these grievances" but that he now saw things with "greater clarity."

In their final meeting, they returned again to the question of regret. He said he wished he had not done certain things he'd been ordered to do, and teared up as he recalled the look on Jim's face during one particular beating.

He told her his wife and children had left the refugee camp and were now in Turkey and that he hoped he'd be able eventually to serve out his sentence in England. Foley extended her hand and he shook it. She said she would pray for him and wished him peace.

By the end of their time together, Diane Foley said in the interview, the sadness in the room was palpable. Everyone, she says, had lost.

She had lost her son; Kotey, even younger than Jim, "lost his freedom, his family, his country — all of it too."

"To me," she said, "that was incredibly poignant, and yet by listening to one another, I think there was a bit more understanding somehow."

Nikki Haley hunts for California votes, shrugs off snub in Nevada presidential primary

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — After a symbolic snub in Nevada's primary, Nikki Haley's presidential campaign headed Wednesday to California, where she faces another longshot bid against former President Donald Trump and again sought to tamp down any talk that she might leave the race.

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm in this for the long haul," Haley said to cheers during an indoor rally in Los Angeles' historic Hollywood neighborhood, where she did not mention the embarrassing Nevada outcome.

With mail voting underway in California, supporters who turned out on a rainy night were eager for Haley to continue her one-on-one rivalry with Trump and shrugged off the Nevada setback as insignificant and soon to be forgotten.

"I hope she fights," said Democratic voter Steven Whiddon, who works in film and TV production. Though he can't vote in the state GOP primary, which is open only to registered Republican voters, he's backing Haley because "she's sane, she's practical."

The Nevada vote was "completely rigged by Trump supporters," he said. Haley "didn't lose a thing."

As the GOP contest has winnowed to two major candidates, Haley has embraced the role of defiant Trump foil and self-styled establishment outsider. Another Trump term in the White House, she warns, would bring the nation "chaos."

A day earlier, the former U.N. ambassador — the last major rival contesting Trump's ascent to the nomination — was stung in Nevada, where GOP voters overwhelmingly chose a "none of these candidates" option on the ballot, bypassing Haley in what amounted to a public rebuke.

It was a token vote, however — the primary didn't award any delegates needed to secure the GOP nomination and Haley did not campaign in Nevada after contending that Trump allies rigged the rules in his favor.

Haley supporter Sheldon Kay said she needs to change direction and try to engage Trump supporters on issues like immigration and the economy, rather than relentlessly criticize the former president. He said the friction with Trump supporters was behind her finish in Nevada.

She "needs to peel away some of the Trump loyalists," said Kay, a retired psychologist. Her message "is falling on deaf ears with the people she needs to persuade."

"She needs to do that to have any chance," he added.

Wayne Watkins, who lives in Upland, east of Los Angeles, said he changed parties from independent to Republican to vote for Haley, drawn to her moderate brand of politics. He said he recognizes she faces long odds but worries that Trump's legal problems could doom a general election campaign.

For Haley, "Quitting gets you nothing at this point," said Watkins, who also is volunteering for the campaign. By staying in the race there is the "possibility of success."

Her campaign says it raised \$16.5 million in January and argues that she, not Trump, would be the stronger general election candidate.

Trump didn't compete in the Nevada primary and instead focused on the state's Thursday caucuses, where he is expected to claim all 26 of delegates in play.

Trump also is strongly favored in California, where the primary election concludes March 5 — so-called Super Tuesday, when the state will be among more than a dozen holding elections. It's possible he could sweep the state's trove of 169 delegates, the biggest prize in the nominating contest.

Heavily Democratic California probably will be an afterthought in November 2024 — the state's lopsided electorate makes it a virtual lock for Democrats on Election Day. The last Republican presidential nominee to carry the state was George H.W. Bush in 1988.

Mexico overtakes China as the leading source of goods imported by US

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time in more than two decades, Mexico last year surpassed China as the leading source of goods imported by the United States. The shift reflects the growing tensions between Washington and Beijing as well as U.S. efforts to import from countries that are friendlier and closer to home.

Figures released Wednesday by the U.S. Commerce Department show that the value of goods imported by the United States from Mexico rose nearly 5% from 2022 to 2023, to more than \$475 billion. At the same time, the value of Chinese imports tumbled 20% to \$427 billion.

The last time that Mexican goods imported by the United States exceeded the value of China's imports was in 2002.

Economic relations between the United States and China have severely deteriorated in recent years as Beijing has fought aggressively on trade and made ominous military gestures in the Far East.

The Trump administration began imposing tariffs on Chinese imports in 2018, arguing that Beijing's trade practices violated global trade rules. President Joe Biden retained those tariffs after taking office in 2021, making clear that antagonism toward China would be a rare area of common ground for Democrats and Republicans.

As an alternative to offshoring production to China, which U.S. corporations had long engaged in, the Biden administration has urged companies to seek suppliers in allied countries ("friend-shoring") or to return manufacturing to the United States ("reshoring"). Supply-chain disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic also led U.S. companies to seek supplies closer to the United States ("near-shoring").

Mexico has been among the beneficiaries of the growing shift away from reliance on Chinese factories. But the picture is more complicated than it might seem. Some Chinese manufacturers have established factories in Mexico to exploit the benefits of the 3-year-old U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, which allows for duty-free trade in North America for many products.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said this week that the trade status gives Mexico new leverage, saying it would make it hard for the U.S. to close the two countries' border to limit immigration, as suggested in negotiations on a border bill in the U.S. Senate.

"The negotiation is proposing closing the border," he said. "Do you think Americans, or Mexicans, but especially the Americans, would approve that? The businesses wouldn't take it, maybe one day, but not a week."

Some industries — especially auto manufacturers — have set up plants on both sides of the border that depend on each for a steady supply of parts.

Derek Scissors, a China specialist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, noted that the biggest drops in Chinese imports were in computers and electronics and chemicals and pharmaceuticals — all politically sensitive categories.

"I don't see the U.S. being comfortable with a rebound in those areas in 2024 and 2025," Scissors said, predicting that the China-Mexico reversal on imports to the United States likely "is not a one-year blip."

Scissors suggested that the drop in U.S. reliance on Chinese goods partly reflects wariness of Beijing's economic policies under President Xi Jinping. Xi's draconian COVID-19 lockdowns brought significant swaths of the Chinese economy to a standstill in 2022, and his officials have raided foreign companies in apparent counterespionage investigations.

"I think it's corporate America belatedly deciding Xi Jinping is unreliable," he said.

Overall, the U.S. deficit in the trade of goods with the rest of the world — the gap between the value of what the United States sells and what it buys abroad — narrowed 10% last year to \$1.06 trillion.

Saturn's Death Star-looking moon may have vast underground ocean

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronomers have found the best evidence yet of a vast, young ocean beneath the icy exterior of Saturn's Death Star lookalike mini moon.

The French-led team analyzed changes in Mimas' orbit and rotation and reported Wednesday that a hidden ocean 12 to 18 miles (20 to 30 kilometers) beneath the frozen crust was more likely than an elongated rocky core. The scientists based their findings on observations by NASA's Cassini spacecraft, which observed Saturn and its more than 140 moons for more than a decade before diving through the ringed planet's atmosphere in 2017 and burning up.

Barely 250 miles (400 kilometers) in diameter, the heavily cratered moon lacks the fractures and geysers — typical signs of subsurface activity — of Saturn's Enceladus and Jupiter's Europa.

"Mimas was probably the most unlikely place to look for a global ocean — and liquid water more generally," co-author Valery Lainey of the Paris Observatory said in an email. "So that looks like a potential habitable world. But nobody knows how much time is needed for life to arise."

Results were published in the journal Nature.

The ocean is believed to fill half of Mimas' volume, according to Lainey. Yet it represents only 1.2% to 1.4% of Earth's oceans given the moon's petite size. Despite being so small, Mimas boasts the second largest impact crater of any moon in the solar system — the reason it's compared to the fictional Death Star space station in "Star Wars."

"The idea that relatively small, icy moons can harbor young oceans is inspiring," SETI Institute's Matija Cuk and Southwest Research Institute's Alyssa Rose Rhoden wrote in an accompanying editorial. They were not part of the study.

Believed between 5 million and 15 million years old, too young to mark the moon's surface, this subterranean ocean would have an overall temperature right around freezing, according to Lainey. But at the seafloor, he said the water temperature could be much warmer.

Co-author Nick Cooper of Queen Mary University of London said the existence of a "remarkably young" ocean of liquid water makes Mimas a prime candidate for studying the origin of life.

Discovered in 1789 by English astronomer William Herschel, Mimas is named after a giant in Greek mythology.

Climate change is fueling the disappearance of the Aral Sea. It's taking residents' livelihoods, too

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

MUYNAC, Uzbekistan (AP) — Toxic dust storms, anti-government protests, the fall of the Soviet Union — for generations, none of it has deterred Nafisa Bayniyazova and her family from making a living growing melons, pumpkins and tomatoes on farms around the Aral Sea.

Bayniyazova, 50, has spent most of her life near Muynak, in northwestern Uzbekistan, tending the land. Farm life was sometimes difficult but generally reliable and productive. Even while political upheaval from the Soviet Union's collapse transformed the world around them, the family's farmland yielded crops, with water steadily flowing through canals coming from the Aral and surrounding rivers.

Now, Bayniyazova and other residents say they're facing a catastrophe they can't beat: climate change, which is accelerating the decades-long demise of the Aral, once the lifeblood for the thousands living around it.

The Aral has nearly disappeared. Decades ago, deep blue and filled with fish, it was one of the world's largest inland bodies of water. It's shrunk to less than a quarter of its former size.

Much of its early demise is due to human engineering and agricultural projects gone awry, now paired with climate change. Summers are hotter and longer; winters, shorter and bitterly cold. Water is harder

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to find, experts and residents like Bayniyazova say, with salinity too high for plants to properly grow. "Everyone goes further in search of water," Bayniyazova said. "Without water, there's no life."

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the second piece in an AP series on the once-massive Aral Sea, the lives of those who've lived and worked on its shores, and the effects of climate change and restoration efforts in the region. The AP visited both sides of the Aral, in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to document the changing landscape.

HISTORY AND DEMISE

For decades, the Aral — fed by rivers relying heavily on glacial melt, and intersecting the landlocked countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — held meters-long fish, caught and shipped across the Soviet Union.

The region prospered, and thousands of migrants from across Asia and Europe moved to the Aral's shores, for jobs popping up everywhere from canning factories to luxury vacation resorts.

Today, the few remaining towns sit quiet along the former seabed of the Aral — technically classified as a lake, due to its lack of a direct outlet to the ocean, though residents and officials call it a sea. Dust storms whip through, and rusted ships sit in the desert.

In the 1920s, the Soviet government began to drain the sea for irrigation of cotton and other cash crops. By the 1960s, it shrunk by half; those crops thrived. By 1987, the Aral's level was so low it split into two bodies of water: the northern and southern seas, in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, respectively.

The United Nations Development Program calls the destruction of the Aral Sea "the most staggering disaster of the 20th century." It points to the Aral's demise as the cause of land degradation and desertification, drinking water shortages, malnutrition, and deteriorating health conditions.

National governments, international aid organizations and local groups have tried — with varying degrees of effort and success — to save the sea. Efforts range from planting bushes for slowing the encroaching dunes to building multimillion-dollar dams.

But experts say climate change has only accelerated the death of the Aral, and will continue to exacerbate residents' suffering.

"ONLY US LOCALS"

Without the moderating influence of a large body of water to regulate the climate, dust storms began to blow through towns. They whipped toxic chemicals from a shuttered Soviet weapons testing facility and fertilizer from farms into the lungs and eyes of residents, contributing to increased rates of respiratory diseases and cancer, according to the U.N.

Fierce winds caused dunes to swallow entire towns, and abandoned buildings filled with sand. Residents fled. A dozen fish species went extinct, and businesses shuttered.

Madi Zhasekenov, 64, said he watched as his town's once-diverse population dwindled.

"The fish factories closed, the ships were stranded in the harbor, and the workers all left," said Zhasekenov, former director of the Aral Sea Fisherman Museum in Aralsk, Kazakhstan. "It became only us locals."

Dust storms, rising global temperatures, and wind erosion are destroying the glaciers the sea's rivers rely on, according to a U.N. report. The remaining water is getting saltier and evaporating faster.

Melting ice and changing river flows may further destabilize drinking water supply and food security, the report warns, and hydropower plants could suffer.

During a recent summer in the small desert village of Tastubek, Kazakhstan, farmer Akerke Molzhigitova, 33, watched as the grass her horses fed on dried up from extreme heat. To try and save them — a major source of income and food — she moved them 200 kilometers (125 miles) away.

Still, dozens died. Her neighbors, fearing the same fate, sold their animals.

CONTRAST ALONG THE ARAL

Near Sudochoye Lake in Uzbekistan, Adilbay and his friends fish in the Aral's remaining water pockets. Their catch is tiny.

He holds his arms wide, the size of fish from years ago. "Now there is nothing," said Adilbay, 62, who

goes by only one name.

As the water disappeared, a nearby fish processing warehouse closed. Adilbay's friends and relatives moved to Kazakhstan, seeking new jobs.

There, fisherman Serzhan Seitbenbetov, 36, and others find success. Sitting in a boat rocking in gentle waves, he pulled his net. In an hour, he hauled in a hundred fish, some 2 meters (6.5 feet) long. He'll make 5000 Kazakhstani Tenge (\$10.50), he said — five times his previous daily pay as a taxi driver in a neighboring city.

"Now all the villagers make good money being fishermen," he said.

That's the result of an \$86 million dike project led by Kazakhstan, with assistance from the World Bank, completed in 2005.

Known as the Kokaral Dam, the dike cuts across a narrow stretch of the sea, conserving and gathering water from the Syr Darya River. The dike surpassed expectations, leading to an increase of over 10 feet in water levels after seven months.

That helped restore local fisheries and affected the microclimate, causing an increase in clouds and rainstorms, according to the World Bank. Population grew.

But it couldn't replicate life before the water started drying up, said Sarah Cameron, an associate professor at the University of Maryland who's writing a book about the Aral.

"It does not support the same amount of people and the fishing industry in the same way," Cameron said.

And building the dike in Kazakhstan cut off the south part of the sea in Uzbekistan from its crucial water source.

Uzbekistan has been less successful in restoration efforts. The government hasn't undertaken large projects like the Kokaral. Instead, the country planted saxaul trees and other drought-resistant plants to help prevent erosion and slow dust storms.

Agriculture, especially the export of water-intensive cotton, continued to be a main staple of the economy. Millions of people worked — for years in forced-labor campaigns — in the cotton-picking industry, which further sapped water resources.

The discovery of oil and natural gas in the Aral's former seabed brought the building of gas production facilities — and shows Uzbekistan has little interest in restoration, experts said.

"While there has been some restoration," said Kate Shields, assistant professor in environmental studies at Rhodes College, "there was a sort of an acceptance that ... the sea was not coming back."

Government officials from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan didn't respond to questions emailed by AP about restoration efforts, water scarcity and the effects of climate change.

"BARELY SURVIVING"

On her Uzbekistan farm, Bayniyazova's family has dug an earthen well, hoping to hold on to the precious little water that's left.

"If there is no water, it will be very difficult for people to live," Bayniyazova said. "Now people are barely surviving."

She doesn't plan to leave her farm yet but knows more hardships are likely ahead. Her family will dig deeper wells, see smaller harvests. They'll do whatever it takes to hang on to the only life they've known.

"We'll do everything we can," she said. "Because what else can we do?"

Marianne Williamson suspends her presidential campaign, ending long-shot primary challenge to Biden

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Self-help author and spiritual guru Marianne Williamson on Wednesday announced the end of her long-shot Democratic challenge to President Joe Biden.

The 71-year-old onetime spiritual adviser to Oprah Winfrey contemplated suspending her campaign last month after winning just 5,000 votes in New Hampshire's primary, writing that she "had to decide whether now is the time for a dignified exit or continue on our campaign journey."

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Williamson ultimately opted to continue on for two more primaries, but won just 2% of the vote in South Carolina and about 3% in Nevada.

"I hope future candidates will take what works for them, drinking from the well of information we prepared," Williamson wrote in announcing the end of her bid. "My team and I brought to the table some great ideas, and I will take pleasure when I see them live on in campaigns and candidates yet to be created."

Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips is the last nationally known Democrat still running against Biden, who has scored blowout victories in South Carolina and Nevada and easily won in New Hampshire — despite not being on the ballot — after his allies mounted a write-in campaign.

Biden is now more firmly in command of the Democratic primary. That's little surprise given that he's a sitting president, but it also defies years of low job approval ratings for Biden and polls showing that most Americans — even a majority of Democrats — don't want him to run again.

Williamson first ran for president in 2020 and made national headlines by calling for a "moral uprising" against then-President Donald Trump while proposing the creation of the Department of Peace. She also argued that the federal government should pay large financial reparations to Black Americans as atonement for centuries of slavery and discrimination.

Her second White House bid featured the same nontraditional campaigning style and many of the same policy proposals. But she struggled to raise money and was plagued by staff departures from her bid's earliest stages.

She tweaked Biden, an avid Amtrak fan, by kicking off her campaign at Washington's Union Station and campaigned especially hard in New Hampshire, hoping to capitalize on state Democrats' frustration with the president.

That followed a new plan by the Democratic National Committee, championed by Biden, that reordered the party's 2024 presidential primary calendar by leading off with South Carolina on Feb. 3.

Williamson acknowledged from the start that it was unlikely she would beat Biden, but she argued in her launch speech in March that "it is our job to create a vision of justice and love that is so powerful that it will override the forces of hatred and injustice and fear."

The DNC isn't holding primary debates, and Biden's challengers' names may not appear on the Democratic primary ballots in some major states.

A Texas native who now lives in Beverly Hills, California, Williamson is the author of more than a dozen books and ran an unsuccessful independent congressional campaign in California in 2014. She ended her 2020 presidential run shortly before the leadoff Iowa caucuses, announcing that she didn't want to take progressive support from Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who was ultimately the last candidate to drop out before Biden locked up the nomination.

In exiting this cycle's race she wrote Wednesday that "while we did not succeed at running a winning political campaign, I know in my heart that we impacted the political ethers."

"As with every other aspect of my career over the last forty years, I know how ideas float through the air forming ever new designs," Williamson said in an email to supporters announcing that she was no longer running. "I will see and hear things in different situations and through different voices, and I will smile a small internal smile knowing in my heart where that came from."

Globe breaks heat record for 8th straight month. Golfers get to play in Minnesota's 'lost winter'

By SETH BORENSTEIN and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — For the eighth straight month in January, Earth was record hot, according to the European climate agency. That was obvious in the northern United States, where about 1,000 people were golfing last month in a snow-starved Minneapolis during what the state is calling "the Lost Winter of 2023-24."

For the first time, the global temperature pushed past the internationally agreed upon warming threshold for an entire 12-month period, with February 2023 to January 2024 running 2.74 degrees Fahrenheit (1.52

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degrees Celsius) hotter than pre-industrial levels, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service of the European Space Agency. That's the highest 12-month global temperature average on record, Copernicus reported.

The globe has broken heat records each month since last June.

January 2024 broke the old record from 2020 for warmest first month of the year by 0.22 degrees Fahrenheit (0.12 degrees Celsius) and was 3 degrees Fahrenheit (1.66 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 1800s, the base for temperatures before the burning of fossil fuels. Even though it was record hot in January, the level above normal was lower than the previous six months, according to Copernicus data.

Climate scientists blame a combination of human-caused warming from the burning of fossil fuels and a natural but temporary El Nino warming of parts of the Pacific, saying greenhouse gases have a much bigger role than nature. This is the time of year that El Nino warming often peaks, said Texas A&M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler.

"This is both disturbing and not disturbing. After all, if you stick your finger in a light socket and get shocked, it's bad news, sure, but what did you expect?" Dessler said.

Just because the globe exceeded the 1.5-degree warming threshold for 12 months, that's not what scientists mean by reaching the warming limit of 1.5 degrees, said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, co-author of a United Nations science report about the harms of exceeding more than 1.5 degrees. The 1.5-degree limit, adopted by the 2015 Paris climate agreement, is more about 30-year averages.

"These are much more than numbers, ranks and records — they translate to real impacts on our farms, families and communities from unprecedented heat, changing growing seasons and rising sea levels," said North Carolina State Climatologist Kathie Dello.

International Falls, a Minnesota city on the Canadian border that proudly bills itself as the "icebox of the nation," recorded its first-ever 50-degree high for January on Jan. 31, when the temperature hit 53 Fahrenheit (11.7 Celsius). Minneapolis has already set a record for the number of 50-degree days for a winter.

About 70% of the Minnesota currently has bare ground, with most of the state so far getting less than 25% of normal snowfall.

Authorities have rescued dozens of ice anglers from normally solid northern Minnesota lakes after ice floes broke off and carried them along. The annual Art Shanty Projects festival on Lake Harriet in Minneapolis in January had to be cut short due to open water and unsafe ice.

The Montgomery National Golf Club, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) south of Minneapolis, should be blanketed under a thick layer of snow this time of year. Instead, it's doing a booming business.

"We did about a thousand golfers in January. If we had had just one golfer, that would have been a record," owner Greg McKush said. "After today, we will have had about a thousand golfers for February, which is unheard of."

McKush said he reopened two Saturdays ago and figures he might be able to stay open all winter if temperatures continue to reach at least into the 40s.

It seems like the fairways are trying to green up, he said, and a lot of the frost has come out of the ground. Most golfers are telling him conditions are "better than expected."

In Wisconsin, fourth in the U.S. in maple syrup production, the mild winter weather prompted many farms in the state's northern and central regions to begin tapping their trees in mid-January — up to two months earlier than normal, depending on the area, said Theresa Baroun, executive director of the Wisconsin Maple Syrup Producers Association.

"There's a wide range of the state that are tapped and cooking syrup already. It's very unusual. This is one of the most abnormal weather patterns for starting out the maple season we've seen," she said Wednesday. "For maple trees to run, it needs to be freezing at night, above freezing during the day. And this weather has been perfect for the maple trees to run."

Baroun, whose family has about 1,200 maple trees at their Maple Sweet Dairy in De Pere, Wisconsin, just south of Green Bay, said the farm began cooking sap this week and that's the earliest her family can

remember since production began in 1964.

The February sturgeon season on Michigan's Black Lake was canceled for the first time due to lack of ice for safe fishing.

At Isle Royal National Park, an island in Lake Superior between Michigan, Minnesota and Canada, scientists couldn't conduct their annual wolf and moose count because the ice was so weak they couldn't land ski-planes on it to get there.

One of the stranger consequences has been the early emergence of ticks. The Metropolitan Mosquito Control District in Minnesota reported its first deer tick of 2024 on Monday, posting a creepy photo on social media of a tick in a vial against the backdrop of Feb. 5 on a calendar. District officials said they haven't found any mosquito larvae yet -- but it's not from a lack of searching.

Rescue of Marine helicopter with 5 aboard is challenged by snowy California mountains

By JULIE WATSON and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Rescuers were battling heavy snow Wednesday to reach a Marine Corps helicopter carrying five troops that went down in the mountains outside San Diego.

The CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter — the largest helicopter in the military, designed to fly in harsh conditions — had gone missing as an historic storm dumped heavy snow and record rain over California.

Civilian authorities searching on ground and by air located the aircraft just after 9 a.m. Wednesday near the mountain community of Pine Valley, about a 45-mile (72-kilometer) drive from San Diego, but snowy conditions were making it challenging to gain access on the ground, officials said. The fate of those aboard wasn't immediately known.

The Marines were flying from Creech Air Force Base, northwest of Las Vegas, where they had been doing unit-level training and were returning home to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego, defense officials said.

It was not immediately known what time the helicopter left Creech nor what time they were due to arrive. Waves of heavy downpours hit the area throughout the night and heavy snow fell in the mountains in Southern California.

The last known contact with the helicopter was at about 11:30 p.m. Tuesday, Cal Fire's spokesperson Mike Cornette told CBS 8 news. That location was based on a "ping" reported to a Cal Fire dispatch center. The agency sent several engines and an ambulance to the area overnight.

Cal Fire officials said the military helicopter was reported missing in an area north of Interstate 8 and Kitchen Creek Road, located southeast of Pine Valley, which is at about 3,700 feet (1,127 meters) in elevation in the Cuyamaca Mountains.

Pine Valley was experiencing light rain and wind between about 11 p.m. and 1 a.m., said Casey Oswant, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, San Diego. Weather data from the region is relatively sparse, she said.

Snow likely began around 6 a.m., with 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 centimeters) accumulating within a matter of hours, according to another nearby weather station.

The area includes San Diego County's second highest mountain, Cuyamaca Peak, at 6,512 feet (1,985 meters), and is also near the Cleveland National Forest, which covers 720 square miles (1,860 square kilometers) with much of it steep, rocky and with limited trails.

The five U.S. Marines were assigned to Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, the military said in a statement.

Additional resources were brought in because of the heavy snowfall Wednesday in the sparsely populated mountains, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, known as Cal Fire, said in a statement on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Cal Fire said it was coordinating with the military, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Border Patrol, San Diego sheriff's department and the state Civil Air Patrol.

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The National Weather Service in San Diego called for 6 to 10 inches (15 to 25 centimeters) of snow in the mountains above 5,000 feet (1,524 meters) and gusty winds late Wednesday. On Tuesday afternoon a tornado warning was issued but quickly canceled with the weather service saying the storm was not capable of forming a twister.

President Joe Biden was briefed on the missing Marines, said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, who answered questions as the president flew to New York City for campaign fundraisers.

"We're watching this closely and again our thoughts are for the best," National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

In 2018, four Marines died when their CH-53E Super Stallion crashed in the same general area during a training mission. The Marine Corps ruled out pilot error for the accident near El Centro. The victims' families later sued two companies they alleged provided a defective part that they blamed for the crash.

About 99 feet (30 meters) long, the CH-53E Super Stallion can move troops and equipment over rugged terrain in bad weather, including at night, according to the Marine Corps website. It is also nicknamed the "hurricane maker" because of the amount of downwash generated from its three engines.

Two CH-53E helicopters were used in the civil war-torn capital of Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1990 to rescue American and foreign allies from the U.S. embassy.

A Super Stallion also went down in a sandstorm in Iraq in 2005, killing 31 people on board. The accident, blamed on pilot error, was the single deadliest loss of U.S. troops during the war.

US drone strike in Baghdad kills high-ranking militia leader linked to attacks on American troops

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA, LOLITA C. BALDOR and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press BAGHDAD (AP) — A U.S. drone strike blew up a car in the Iraqi capital Wednesday night, killing a high-ranking commander of the powerful Kataib Hezbollah militia who is responsible for "directly planning and participating in attacks" on American troops in the region, the U.S. military said Wednesday.

The precision blast hit a main thoroughfare in the Mashtal neighborhood in eastern Baghdad, attracting a crowd as emergency teams picked through the wreckage. It came amid roiling tensions in the region, and will likely further anger Iraqi government leaders, who U.S. officials said were not notified in advance of the strike.

Security forces closed off the heavily guarded Green Zone, where a number of diplomatic compounds are located, and there were concerns about social media postings urging protesters to storm the U.S. embassy.

There were conflicting reports on the number of those killed, with U.S. officials saying the initial assessment was one, and saying there were no civilians hurt or killed. But two officials with Iran-backed militias in Iraq said that three died, including Wissam Muhammad Sabir Al-Saadi, known as Abu Baqir Al-Saadi, the commander in charge of Kataib Hezbollah's operations in Syria. Kataeb Hezbollah later announced his death "following the bombing of the American occupation forces" in a statement.

Those officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to journalists.

In a statement, U.S. Central Command said "there are no indications of collateral damage or civilian casualties at this time." It added that the U.S. "will not hesitate to hold responsible all those who threaten our forces' safety."

The strike — which came at 9:30 p.m. local time — is certain to inflame already seething relations between Washington and Baghdad. It comes just days after the U.S. military launched an air assault on dozens of sites in Iraq and Syria used by Iranian-backed militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in retaliation for a drone strike that killed three U.S. troops and injured more than 40 others at a base in Jordan in late January.

The U.S. has blamed the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a broad coalition of Iran-backed militias, for the attack in Jordan. President Joe Biden and other top leaders have repeatedly warned that the U.S. would continue to retaliate against those responsible for the Jordan attack. And officials have suggested that key militia leaders would be likely targets.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has regularly claimed strikes on bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria against the backdrop of the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, saying that they are in retaliation for Washington's support of Israel in its war in Gaza that has killed more than 27,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

There have been nearly 170 attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria since Oct. 18, but the latest drone strike in Jordan — the only one in that country so far — was the first to take American troops' lives. The U.S., in response, has struck back about a half dozen times since Oct. 27, targeting weapons storage sites, command and control centers, training facilities and other locations used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iranian-backed groups, including Kataib Hezbollah.

Wednesday's U.S. strike in Iraq's capital drew comparisons to the 2020 drone strike in Baghdad that killed Iran's Quds Force leader Gen. Qassem Soleimani, in response to attacks on U.S. bases there and an assault on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. That bombing also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iran-backed militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces. And it enraged Iraqi leaders, triggering demands for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country.

Kataib Hezbollah had said in a statement that it was suspending attacks on American troops to avoid "embarrassing the Iraqi government" after the strike in Jordan, but others have vowed to continue fighting.

On Sunday, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a drone attack on a base housing U.S. troops in eastern Syria killed six fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led group allied with the United States.

The latest surge in the regional conflict came shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday rejected terms proposed by Hamas for a hostage-release agreement that would lead to a permanent cease-fire, vowing to continue the war until "absolute victory."

Also on Wednesday, the media office of the Houthi rebels in Yemen reported two airstrikes in Ras Issa area in Salif district in Hodeida province.

Blinken says a Hamas-Israel deal is still possible even though the sides remain far apart

By MATTHEW LEE, TIA GOLDENBERG and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that a cease-fire and hostage-release agreement between Israel and Hamas was still possible, despite the two sides being far apart on the central terms for a deal.

Blinken was in the region trying to broker an arrangement that could bring some respite in Israel's war against Hamas, which is entering its fifth month after killing more than 27,000 Palestinians, displacing much of the territory's population and sparking a humanitarian catastrophe.

Those diplomatic efforts were rattled earlier in the day when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a detailed, three-phase plan by Hamas that would unfold over 4 1/2 months. The plan stipulated that all hostages would be released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including senior militants, and an end to the war.

Netanyahu, who called Hamas' plan "delusional," dismissed any proposal that leaves the militant group in full or partial control of Gaza. Netanyahu said military pressure was the best way to free the roughly 100 hostages held in the Gaza Strip, where they were taken after Hamas' cross-border rampage into southern Israel on Oct. 7, which sparked the war.

Israel has made destroying Hamas' governing and military abilities one of its wartime objectives, and Hamas' proposal would effectively leave it in power in Gaza and allow it to rebuild its military capabilities.

But Blinken downplayed the posturing, saying it was part of the arduous negotiating process. "It's not flipping a light switch. It's not yes or no," he said.

"While there are some clear non-starters in Hamas' response, we do think it creates space for agreement to be reached, and we will work at that relentlessly until we get there," he said.

Blinken is trying to advance the cease-fire talks while pushing for a larger postwar settlement in which

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Saudi Arabia would normalize relations with Israel in return for a "clear, credible, time-bound path to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

But the increasingly unpopular Netanyahu is opposed to Palestinian statehood, and his hawkish governing coalition could collapse if he is seen as making too many concessions.

HAMAS SPELLS OUT DEMANDS FOR HOSTAGE DEAL

Hamas' statements came in response to a proposal drawn up by the United States, Israel, Qatar and Egypt. The militants' reply was published in Lebanon's Al-Akhbar newspaper, which is close to the powerful Hezbollah militant group.

A Hamas official and two Egyptian officials confirmed its authenticity. A fourth official familiar with the talks later clarified the sequencing of the releases. All spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media on the negotiations.

In the first 45-day phase, Hamas would release all remaining women and children, as well as older and sick men, in exchange for an unspecified number of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Israel would also withdraw from populated areas, cease aerial operations, allow far more aid to enter and permit Palestinians to return to their homes, including in devastated northern Gaza.

The second phase, to be negotiated during the first, would include the release of all remaining hostages, mostly soldiers, in exchange for all Palestinian detainees over the age of 50, including senior militants.

Israel would release an additional 1,500 prisoners, 500 of whom would be specified by Hamas, and complete its withdrawal from Gaza.

In the third phase, the sides would exchange the remains of hostages and prisoners.

VICTORY IN 'A MATTER OF MONTHS'

At the news conference earlier, Netanyahu rejected Hamas' demands, saying they would lead to a disaster for Israel.

"Surrendering to Hamas' delusional demands that we heard now not only won't lead to freeing the captives, it will just invite another massacre," Netanyahu said in a nationally televised evening news conference.

Netanyahu said the Israeli military had achieved many of the goals it set out and that victory was "a matter of months" away.

He said forces had dismantled 18 of Hamas' 24 battalions, destroyed tunnels and killed militants, and that military pressure on Hamas was the best way to bring about the release of the hostages. He said preparations were underway for the military to move into the southern Gaza border town of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have crammed to flee the fighting.

"We are on the way to an absolute victory," Netanyahu said. "There is no other solution."

That stands in contrast to some Israeli officials, who say Israel's two goals of destroying Hamas's capabilities and freeing the hostages are incompatible and that only a deal can lead to their release.

Meanwhile, Hamas has continued to put up stiff resistance across the territory, and its police force has returned to the streets in places where Israeli troops have pulled back.

Netanyahu ruled out any arrangement that leaves Hamas in control of any part of Gaza. He also said that Israel is the "only power" capable of guaranteeing security in the long term.

At a news conference held immediately after his appearance, hostages freed in a late November deal said they were worried Netanyahu was taking too hard a line and that the remaining hostages and their families would pay the price.

"If you continue in this approach of seeking the collapse of Hamas, there won't be any hostages to free," said a tearful Adina Moshe, who was freed nearly 50 days into her captivity. Hamas is still holding over 130 hostages, but around 30 of them are believed to be dead, with the vast majority killed on Oct. 7.

MISERY DEEPENS IN DEVASTATED GAZA

There is little talk of grand diplomatic bargains in Gaza, where Palestinians yearn for an end to fighting that has upended every aspect of their lives.

"We pray to God that it stops," said Ghazi Abu Issa, who fled his home and sought shelter in the central town of Deir al-Balah. "There is no water, electricity, food or bathrooms."

Those living in tents have been drenched by winter rains and flooding. "We have been humiliated," he said. New mothers struggle to get baby formula and diapers, which can only be bought at vastly inflated prices if they can be found at all. Some have resorted to feeding solid food to babies younger than 6 months old despite the health risks it poses.

While Blinken said Israel's response to the Oct. 7 attack was "fully justified," and he ruled out any role for Hamas in postwar Gaza, he also criticized some of Israel's responses.

Blinken said the daily toll of Israel's military operations on innocent civilians "remains too high."

"Israelis were dehumanized in the most horrific way on October 7. And the hostages have been dehumanized every day since. But that cannot be a license to dehumanize others," he added.

The Palestinian death toll from four months of war has reached 27,707, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. That includes 123 bodies brought to hospitals in just the last 24 hours, it said Wednesday. At least 11,000 wounded people need to be urgently evacuated from Gaza, it said.

The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures but says most of the dead have been women and children.

The violence in Gaza has drawn the attention of the United Nations' top court, which last month ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza. But the panel stopped short of ordering an end to the offensive.

Special counsel investigating Biden's handling of classified documents has completed probe, AG says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department special counsel investigating President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents has completed his inquiry and a report is expected to be released soon to Congress and the public, Attorney General Merrick Garland told lawmakers in a letter Wednesday.

Garland did not detail the conclusions of the report from special counsel Robert Hur, but said he was committed to disclosing as much of the document as possible once the White House completes a review for potential executive privilege concerns. That process is expected to be completed by the end of the week, said Ian Sams, a spokesman for the White House counsel's office.

The yearlong investigation centered on the improper retention of classified documents by Biden from his time as a U.S. senator and as vice president. Sensitive records were found at his Delaware home and at a private office that he used in between his service in the Obama administration and becoming president.

The resolution of the investigation arrives in a pivotal year for the president as he pursues reelection in a deeply polarized political climate. Though the probe's outcome is expected to lift a legal cloud over Biden, criticism of his handling of classified records could blunt his ability to attack Donald Trump — his presumptive opponent in November — over a pending indictment charging the former president with hoarding top-secret files at his Mar-a-Lago estate and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back.

Trump and other Republicans are likely to challenge the legitimacy of the investigation by noting that it was launched by the Biden Justice Department.

But Garland sought to insulate the department from claims of bias and conflicts of interest by last year appointing Hur, a former U.S. attorney for Maryland during the Trump administration, to handle the Biden investigation and by naming a different special counsel, Jack Smith, to oversee investigations into Trump.

While the Trump investigation resulted in dozens of felony charges against the ex-president last year, the outcome of the Biden probe is expected to be different. Justice Department policy prohibits the indictment of a sitting president and, unlike in the Trump investigation, no evidence has emerged to suggest that Biden engaged in comparable conduct or willfully held onto records he wasn't supposed to have.

Even so, the White House's response to the discovery of classified documents early last year was delayed and incomplete.

The White House did not disclose the Justice Department's investigation until January 2023, when it acknowledged the discovery two months earlier of a "small number" of classified documents by Biden

lawyers as they closed an office at the Penn Biden Center, a think tank affiliated with the Ivy League school. Biden has said he was surprised by the initial trove discovered by his lawyers.

The FBI subsequently conducted a 13-hour, top-to-bottom check of his Wilmington, Delaware, home, where agents located documents with classified markings from his time as a vice president and senator and took possession of some of his handwritten notes. Biden's personal lawyers have also revealed that they had found a document bearing classified markings while searching the Wilmington property but said they had not found others during a separate inspection of his Rehoboth Beach home.

The looming conclusion of the investigation had been foreshadowed last fall when Biden sat for a voluntary interview at the White House with Hur's team. Interviews of key subjects in an investigation are often done near the end.

Justice Department regulations require Congress to be notified of any investigative steps or proposed actions by a special counsel that were rejected by department leadership. There were no such actions, Garland wrote.

Trump's presidential bid hangs in the balance in a Supreme Court case that's broken new legal ground

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The fate of former President Donald Trump's attempt to return to the White House is in the hands of the U.S. Supreme Court.

On Thursday, the justices will hear arguments in Trump's appeal of a Colorado Supreme Court ruling that he is not eligible to run again for president because he violated a provision in the 14th Amendment preventing those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office.

Many legal observers expect the nation's highest court will reverse the Colorado ruling rather than remove the leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination from the ballot. But it's always tricky to try to predict a Supreme Court ruling, and the case against Trump has already broken new legal ground.

Some of the main issues involved in the 14th Amendment cases:

WHAT DID TRUMP POTENTIALLY VIOLATE?

It's called Section 3 and it's pretty brief. It reads:

"No Person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two thirds of each House, remove such disability."

Nice and simple, right?

Not so fast, Trump's lawyers say.

TRUMP'S DEFENSE

Trump's lawyers say this part of the Constitution wasn't meant to apply to the president. Notice how it specifically mentions electors, senators and representatives, but not the presidency.

It also says those who take an oath to "support" the United States, but the presidential oath doesn't use that word. Instead, the Constitution requires presidents to say they will "preserve, protect and defend" the Constitution. And finally, Section 3 talks about any other "officer" of the United States, but Trump's lawyers argue that language is meant to apply to presidential appointees, not the president.

That was enough to convince the Colorado district court judge who initially heard the case. She found that Trump had engaged in insurrection, but also agreed that it wasn't clear that Section 3 applied to the president. That part of her decision was reversed by the Colorado Supreme Court.

The majority of the state's highest court wrote: "President Trump asks us to hold that Section 3 disqualifies every oath-breaking insurrectionist except the most powerful one and that it bars oath-breakers from

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virtually every office, both state and federal, except the highest one in the land.”

OTHER TRUMP ARGUMENTS

Trump’s lawyers contend that the question of who is covered by a rarely used, once obscure clause should be decided by Congress, not unelected judges. They contend that the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol wasn’t an insurrection. They say the attack wasn’t widespread, didn’t involve large amounts of firearms or include other markers of sedition. They say Trump didn’t “engage” in anything that day other than in exercising his protected free speech rights.

Others who have been skeptical of applying Section 3 to Trump have made an argument that the dissenting Colorado Supreme Court justices also found persuasive: The way the court went about finding that Trump violated Section 3 violated the former president’s due process rights. They contend he was entitled to a structured legal process rather than a court in Colorado trying to figure out if the Constitution applied to him.

That gets at the unprecedented nature of the cases. Section 3 has rarely been used after an 1872 congressional amnesty excluded most former Confederates from it. The U.S. Supreme Court has never heard such a case.

Arguments about legal precedents go back to a lone 1869 opinion from Chief Justice Salmon Chase, who was hearing an appeal as a circuit judge rather than for the high court.

The Trump case is historic and is expected to create new law.

ISN’T THIS JUST A PARTISAN CASE?

Not really. A lot of Democrats are rooting for Trump to get kicked off the ballot and a lot of Republicans are angry about the campaign against him. The case was filed by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a left-leaning group.

But some of the most vocal proponents of removing Trump from the ballot are conservative legal scholars who believe in following the strict words of the Constitution. There’s no way around the insurrection disqualification for Trump, they argue, adding it’s there in the plain text and was intended by the authors. The plaintiffs in Colorado are all Republicans or unaffiliated voters.

All seven of the justices on Colorado’s Supreme Court were appointed by Democrats. But they split 4-3 on the decision, a stark demonstration that this case doesn’t divide neatly along partisan lines.

The majority quoted a ruling from Neil Gorsuch, one of Trump’s conservative Supreme Court nominees, from when he was a federal judge in Colorado. He ruled then that the state properly kept a naturalized citizen born in Guyana off the presidential ballot because he didn’t meet the constitutional qualifications.

In Maine, the Democratic secretary of state also removed Trump from the ballot. But in Illinois, a Republican retired judge serving as a hearing officer for the state Board of Election suggested keeping Trump on, but only because he thought courts should decide on eligibility. The retired judge found it was likely Trump was disqualified due to Section 3, making him a notable Republican to side with those trying to remove the former president.

The U.S. Supreme Court is comprised of six justices nominating by Republican presidents, including three by Trump. Partly because this is completely new legal ground, it’s hard to predict how individual justices will rule based on their ideology.

WHAT COULD THE COURT DO?

Several outcomes are possible but they generally fall into three areas.

The first is the court could uphold Colorado’s ruling. That would require wins for the plaintiffs on the whole array of Trump’s defenses.

The second is the court could rule that Trump cannot be disqualified under Section 3, period. There are a lot of ways the court could do this, but the result would be to end the case against him, as well as dozens of similar challenges filed across the country.

The third possibility unnerves a lot of legal experts. The court could effectively punt and not make a final decision on whether Trump is qualified to serve as president. That could kick the question down the road to Jan. 6, 2025, if he wins the election and Congress has to decide whether to certify his victory.

It also would keep alive many of the challenges across the country. A number of them are on hold because

state courts are waiting to see what the U.S. Supreme Court will do. Places where a Trump challenge could be rekindled if the high court doesn't squelch it include Illinois, Minnesota and Oregon. It could add further pressure to challenge Trump's position on the ballot in other Democratic strongholds such as California and New York, where there have been pushes to invalidate his candidacy that have been comparatively muted.

While the Trump campaign says more than 60 Section 3 cases have been filed nationally, most are by low-profile figures and have generally been dismissed for procedural issues. Uncertainty from the nation's highest court could encourage a new wave of cases in those states, too.

The lack of a clear ruling also could create counter-challenges. Republicans have warned that Section 3 also can be applied to Democrats.

Some already have proposed filing against Biden under the theory that his inability to stem the flow of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border amounts to providing "aid and comfort" to the country's enemies. Vice President Kamala Harris also could be targeted under the theory that her raising bail money for people arrested during the protests over George Floyd's 2020 murder by Minneapolis police amounts to "engaging in insurrection."

Unless the high court shuts this down, they warn, Trump's case might only be the start.

Senate Republicans block bipartisan border package, then scramble to find support for Ukraine aid

By STEPHEN GROVES and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wartime aid for Ukraine was left hanging in the Senate Wednesday after Republicans blocked a bipartisan border package that had been tied to the funding, then struggled to coalesce around a plan to salvage the aid for Kyiv.

After GOP senators scuttled months of negotiations with Democrats on legislation intended to cut back record numbers of illegal border crossings, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer tried to push ahead to a crucial test vote on a \$95 billion package for Ukraine, Israel and other U.S. allies — a modified package with the border portion stripped out.

But a deeply divided Republican conference was scrambling to find support for the wartime funding, even though it has been a top priority for Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell. It was the latest sign of the longtime Republican leader's slipping control over his conference and underscored how the traditional GOP tenet of robust foreign involvement is giving way to Donald Trump's "America First" nationalism. At stake is the future of Ukraine's defense against Russia.

The Senate floor settled into an hours-long stall Wednesday night as Republicans huddled to see if they could gain the votes necessary to push it through the chamber. Schumer then closed the floor, saying he would "give our Republican colleagues the night to figure themselves out" ahead of a crucial test vote Thursday.

Republicans planned to meet in the morning to plot a path forward.

Some GOP senators have grown skeptical of sending money to Ukraine in its war with Russia, but Schumer warned earlier Wednesday that "history will cast a permanent and shameful shadow" on those who attempt to block it.

"Will the Senate stand up to brutish thugs like Vladimir Putin and reassure our friends abroad that America will never abandon them in the hour of need?" Schumer asked as he opened the Senate.

The roughly \$60 billion in Ukraine aid has been stalled in Congress for months because of growing opposition from hardline conservatives in the House and Senate who criticize it as wasteful and demand an exit strategy for the war.

"We still need to secure America's borders before sending another dime overseas," Republican Sen. Mike Lee of Utah wrote in a post on X.

The impasse means that the U.S. has halted arms shipments to Kyiv at a crucial point in the nearly two-year-old conflict, leaving Ukrainian soldiers without ample ammunition and missiles as Russian President Putin has mounted relentless attacks.

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Ukraine's cause still enjoys support from many Senate Republicans, including McConnell, but the question vexing lawmakers has always been how to craft a package that could clear the Republican-controlled House.

A pairing of border policies and aid for allies — first proposed by Republicans — was intended to help squeeze the package through the House, where archconservatives hold control. But GOP senators — some within minutes of the bill's release Sunday — rejected the compromise as election-year politics set in.

Many Republicans said the compromise wasn't enough and they would rather allow the issue be decided in the presidential election. Supporters of the bill insisted it represented the most comprehensive bipartisan border proposal in years and included many Republican priorities.

The vote failed 49-50 — far short of the 60 ayes needed to take up the bill — with four Republicans voting to move forward with the legislation and six Democrats, some of whom said the border compromise went too far, voting against it.

The bipartisan group of senators who negotiated the compromise for the last four months said it was a missed opportunity to try to make some progress on one of the most intractable issues in American politics.

In a speech on the Senate floor just before the vote, Republican Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, who crafted the proposal, said it was a chance for the Senate to decide "if we're going to do nothing, or something."

"It's an issue that's bedeviled, quite frankly, this body for decades," Lankford said. "It's been three decades since we've passed anything into law to be able to change border security."

Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona blamed Republicans for not giving the bill a chance.

"Finally, it seemed, we had the opportunity to solve the nightmare my state has lived for over 40 years," she said, scolding Republicans for using the border for "campaign photo ops" but rejecting the chance to enact law.

"Turns out they want all talk and no action," she said. "It turns out border security is not a risk to our national security. It's just a talking point for the election."

The White House said President Joe Biden believes there should be new border policy but would also support moving the aid for Ukraine and Israel alone, as he has from the start.

"We support this bill which would protect America's national security interests by stopping Putin's onslaught in Ukraine before he turns to other countries, helping Israel defend itself against Hamas terrorists and delivering life-saving humanitarian aid to innocent Palestinian civilians," said White House spokesman Andrew Bates.

The standalone \$95 billion package would invest in domestic defense manufacturing, send funding to allies in Asia, and provide \$10 billion for humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, Israel, Gaza and other places.

The revamped package includes legislation to authorize sanctions and anti-money laundering tools against criminal enterprises that traffic fentanyl into the U.S. A separate section of the compromise border legislation that would have provided a long-awaited pathway to residency for tens of thousands of Afghan refugees was dropped in the slimmed-down bill.

Still, it was not clear whether the new plan, even if it passed the Senate, would gain support from House Speaker Mike Johnson. House Republicans are still insisting on a border plan, even though they rejected the deal negotiated in the Senate as insufficient.

"We'll see what the Senate does," Johnson told reporters Wednesday morning. "We're going to allow the process to play out."

Some were skeptical that a standalone aid package would be viable in the House.

"I don't see how that moves in this chamber. I don't know how the speaker puts that on the floor," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Ala., said, adding that he still wanted tougher border policies attached.

After Donald Trump, the likely Republican presidential nominee, eviscerated the Senate's bipartisan border proposal, Johnson quickly rejected it. Trump has also led many Republicans to question supporting Ukraine, suggesting he could negotiate an end to the war and lavishing praise on Russian President Vladimir Putin, including after Moscow's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Johnson said this week he wanted to handle wartime aid for Israel and Ukraine in separate packages,

but a bill he advanced that only included funds for Israel failed on the House floor Tuesday night.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries was still hoping the House could take up the comprehensive package next week.

"That is the only path forward," he said.

Ignitable cakes, sweatshirts and more. Travis Kelce, Taylor Swift gear flies off store shelves

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, NICK INGRAM and MARK VANCLEAVE Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — An ignitable cake burns away a Kansas City Chiefs logo to reveal pop superstar Taylor Swift 's image underneath. Prayer candles feature the Grammy winner and her star tight end boyfriend Travis Kelce. Sweatshirts are emblazoned with "Kelce's Best Catch" and "Go Kansas City Swiftie."

With the Chiefs preparing to face off against the San Francisco 49ers in Kansas City's fourth Super Bowl appearance in five years, stores can hardly keep in stock any of the caps, sweatshirts and other odds and ends (some odder than others) commemorating the sports and pop crossover romance.

Highlights of their courting are featured in the merch. On tour in Buenos Aires, for instance, Swift changed a lyric in her song "Karma" from "Karma is the guy on the screen" to "Karma is the guy on the Chiefs." Now Karma sweatshirts are proliferating, part of the surge of Chiefs merchandise hitting store shelves in Kansas City and far beyond.

"I think it's amazing," said Katie Mabry van Dieren, owner of Shop Local KC, which sells merchandise made by local artists, including the Karma sweatshirts. "I have never shipped so many items from our stores to different states."

She said she thought the busiest weekend would be when Kansas City hosted the NFL draft in April. But she said Swift's The Eras Tour concert stop at Arrowhead Stadium over the summer blew that away.

The July concert also was what set the stage for the relationship. Kelce was thwarted in his effort to woo the superstar with a friendship bracelet. But the romantic gesture, and public admission of defeat on his "New Heights" podcast, caught Swift's attention nonetheless. It also fueled a hot market for Chiefs-themed friendship bracelets.

"I hope Taylor and Travis stay together forever," van Dieren said. "That would be great for us."

About 73% of adults say they plan to watch the game this year, about 10% higher than in recent previous years. And the romance that has been dominating headlines throughout the NFL season might be helping drive interest.

The "Taylor Bowl" is what Maddie Schmitz, owner of Something Sweet by Maddie Lou in the Minneapolis suburb of Coon Rapids, is calling this Sunday's contest in Las Vegas.

The self-described Swiftie is behind the ignitable, so-called burn-away cakes. She uses an edible image printer with edible inks to print the Chiefs- and Swift-themed images on two sheets of — you guessed it — edible paper.

"A lot of women are ordering these, in secret and then bringing them to the Super Bowl party to surprise their husbands because it is a whole Chiefs-themed cake on the outside, but then on the inside reveals the Taylor Swift love that all of the females seem to have for her," Schmitz said.

She isn't the only romance confectioner. Dolce Bakery, in the suburb of Prairie Village, Kansas, has an entire "Swiftie Collection" of heart-shaped cakes it is hawking.

Pre-game news conferences are sprinkled with questions about the songstress.

After Swift earned her fourth career Grammy for album of the year on Sunday, Kelce vowed that he has to "bring home some hardware." Even NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell was asked a few times about Swift, who was front-and-center in the stands when Kelce scored a touchdown while leading the Chiefs to a 17-10 victory over the Baltimore Ravens in the AFC title game.

Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas said the city has been lucky to have experienced the economy jolt. "She is welcome," he said in a pre-playoff statement, "to stay forever."

Anything Swift wears is particularly hot. For instance, a ring bearing Kelce's jersey No. 87 is backordered

after it was spotted on Swift's finger.

The ring's maker, Emily Bordner, from eb & Company, suspects that Donna Kelce bought the ring for her son's star-studded sweetheart. The Kansas City store also gave the superstar of NFL moms (her oldest son, Jason Kelce, is a center for the Philadelphia Eagles) a pair of sold-out earrings bearing her youngest's number on a Chiefs jersey. Swift has since been spotted wearing those, too.

It's been all hands on deck ever since, with Bordner's husband, mother and all her friends enlisted to help out.

"Bananas," she said. "It's been absolutely bananas. I don't think I've ever worked this hard in my entire life, hands down. Absolutely not."

At Westside Storey, it all started when Swift placed an order last fall. She later was spotted wearing a hat and sweatshirt the Kansas City boutique sent her, recalled Chris Harrington, the store's owner. He said he initially thought the flood of business would be short-lived, just a fun story to share when the mania ebbed.

"People talk about the Taylor Swift effect, and you hear about it or read about it or whatever, but to like, personally experience it, you know, is is another level," he said, adding that it is "almost becoming like an identity of the store."

The store generally does well when the Chiefs do, but this year is far busier than other recent Super Bowl years. Harrington credits the couple's star power, saying it has elevated everything to a "global level." Often, he added, customers are on a mission.

"They were sent from their sister in Philadelphia to just buy a product in the store that Taylor shopped at," he said. "So it's crazy."

He acknowledges that "everybody has an opinion" on the romance. But, he adds: "I love it for a million reasons."

Broken Congress: It can't fix the border, fund allies or impeach Mayorkas as GOP revolts.

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas was not, in fact, impeached by the House. A border security package instantly collapsed in the Senate. And foreign aid for Ukraine as its fights Russia is stubbornly stalled.

The broken US. Congress failed in stunning fashion this week as Republicans in both the House and the Senate revolted in new and unimaginable ways against their own agenda. Lawmakers will try to do it all over again — as soon as next week.

"This is the mob rule right now in Congress — and I'm ready for mob rule. ... But it's not a way to govern," said Republican Rep. Victoria Spartz of Indiana.

Just 48 hours put on display a spectacular level of dysfunction even for a Congress that has already set new standards for infighting, disruption and chaos after last year's historic election, then ouster, of the Republican House Speaker, Kevin McCarthy.

It shows how deeply the Republican Party, under Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, is by choice or by force, turning away from its traditional role as a working partner in the U.S.'s two-party system to a new one that is rooted in Donald Trump's vision of the GOP.

In dramatic back-to-back scenes this week — a closed-door shouting match of Senate Republicans testing McConnell's slipping hold on power late Monday and Speaker Johnson presiding glumly over failures in the chamber he could not control Tuesday — provided new entries for the history books.

"Politics used to be the art of the possible. Now it's the art of the impossible," said Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, the party's 2012 presidential nominee.

"Let's put forward proposals that can't possibly pass — so we can say to our respective bases, Look how I'm fighting for you," said Romney, explaining the current mindset. "We've gone from the sublime to the ridiculous."

The next steps are highly uncertain as an emboldened generation of hard-right lawmakers allied with

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Trump are energized by the disruption, eager to carry on with their emerging agenda despite the GOP's slim majority in the House that forces Johnson to partner with Democrats to have any hope on most big issues.

The House is expected to try again to impeach Mayorkas, possibly next week, if Republicans can boost their numbers over what was essentially a tie vote Tuesday.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who led the Mayorkas impeachment drive, is determined to see it to the finish as Republicans rebuke the Biden administration's handling of a historic surge of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Crazy time," said Rep. Hal Rogers who, at 86, is dean of the House as its senior most member, as he returned to Washington to vote for impeaching Mayorkas after suffering injuries in a car crash.

"I was hoping for something better," he acknowledged.

Mayorkas, facing two articles of impeachment over allegations of refusing to abide by immigration laws and breaching the public trust, called the charges baseless.

"I'm focused on the work," Mayorkas said at a press conference in Las Vegas, where his department is coordinating security around the Super Bowl.

Republicans lost the impeachment by one vote not only because three Republican lawmakers dissented, but also because one Democrat, Rep. Al Green of Texas, surprised colleagues by leaving his hospital bed where he had undergone surgery to come vote, tipping the outcome.

It's the kind of miscount many longtime Congress watchers said would have rarely, if ever, happened under the laser-focused leadership of Nancy Pelosi, the former Democratic speaker.

To up their tally, House Republicans are counting on either winning a special election to replace the ousted GOP Rep. George Santos in New York or waiting for Majority Leader Steve Scalise, who has been receiving cancer treatment, to return to Washington.

"They're unable to rally behind anything but extremism," said Democratic Whip Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts.

In the Senate, McConnell faced a separate revolt over the border security package he had reluctantly agreed to pursue as a way to appease hard-right demands to link national security aid for Ukraine to an almost politically impossible compromise on immigration.

As soon as the bipartisan package was unveiled it encountered fierce blowback from fellow Republicans led by Sen. Mike Lee of Utah, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, and others, forcing McConnell into an abrupt about-face to abandon the effort.

It was the second time McConnell, who has championed the national security aid for Ukraine, was forced to retreat, as he did last fall when GOP senators rejected his advice and refused more overseas aid.

"Time to disband The Firm," Lee wrote on social media, a mocking reference to McConnell and Senate Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Republicans shelved the border package, filibustering, on a party-line vote Wednesday, though senators did begin discussing a smaller \$95 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and allies. Final passage, though, is uncertain.

Trump, the former president and now frontrunner for the party's nomination, orchestrated from afar, celebrating the collapse of the border package as the death of "dumbest bill I've ever seen" and disparaging McConnell, who is one of the few remaining GOP leaders yet to endorse his bid to return to the White House.

The two men have not spoken since December 2020, once it was clear Biden won the presidential race that Trump had lost. In unusually scathing speech after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, McConnell laid blame for the insurrection squarely on Trump for spinning "wild" claims of a stolen election, distancing the two sometime allies.

Now, without naming Trump, McConnell says he will support the Republican Party's eventual nominee for president, though it's clear the two have a deteriorated relationship.

Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state implores her colleagues to understand the stakes, criticizing Republicans for realigning with Trump after "we all had to flee or be barricaded ourselves into

our offices" during the Jan. 6 attack by his mob of supporters.

"What is the point of being a senator if you let Donald Trump make all of the decisions for you?"

First-term Republican Rep. Cory Mills of Florida acknowledged the week's setbacks were not why he came to Congress after a military career.

But he said as he left the Capitol on Wednesday, "We're definitely seeing a shift in politics."

A Trump supporter, Mills explained how this Congress "went from kind of the old guard" to more of an "American First agenda" he said, referring to Trump's approach.

"We're not done fighting," Mills said. "I think next week, there'll be a whole new thing."

Bombings at Pakistani political offices kill at least 30 a day before parliamentary elections

By ABDUL SATTAR and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — Bombs ripped through two separate political offices in southwestern Pakistan on Wednesday, killing at least 30 people, officials said, a day before the country was set to elect a new parliament.

The attacks in Baluchistan province — home to a low-level insurgency and various militant groups — have raised concerns ahead of the balloting in the troubled Western ally where many voters are already disillusioned by political feuding and a seemingly intractable economic crisis.

Violence ahead of elections and on the day of polling is common in Pakistan, which has struggled to rein in militancy. Tens of thousands of police and paramilitary forces have been deployed across the country following a recent surge in attacks, especially in Baluchistan.

Hours later, the Islamic State group's branch in Pakistan claimed Wednesday's second attack.

At least 18 people were killed in the first attack at independent candidate Asfandiyar Khan's election office in the Pashin district, Jumadad Mandokhel, a government official, said.

Shortly after, another bombing killed at least 12 people at the Jamiat Ulema Islam party office in Qilla Saifullah, about 130 kilometers (80 miles) away, according to Jan Achakzai, the spokesman for the provincial government. He said the elections would not be delayed despite the bombings.

The attacks, which left more than two dozen people wounded, drew condemnation from almost all political parties.

Later Wednesday, police official Arfan Bahadur said a man prematurely detonated a hand grenade in the southern port city of Karachi, killing himself and two passersby. He said it was not clear how the man got a hold of the grenade.

Jamiat Ulema Islam — a leading radical Islamist party that has close ties with Afghanistan's Taliban — has been attacked by the Islamic State group and other militants in recent years. At least 54 people were killed in July when a suicide bomber blew himself up at a party rally. An Afghan branch of the Islamic State group claimed that attack.

Party president Fazlur Rehman and scores of candidates from the party are contesting the elections throughout the country.

Baluchistan, a gas-rich province on the border with Afghanistan and Iran, has been the scene of an insurgency for more than two decades by Baluch nationalists who are seeking independence.

The nationalists typically attack security forces — not civilian or political targets in the province. The outlawed Baluchistan Liberation Army has been behind multiple attacks on security forces, including one on Jan. 30 that killed six people.

The Pakistani Taliban, along with other militant groups, also have a strong presence in Baluchistan and have targeted civilians in recent years, though the Pakistani Taliban pledged not to attack election rallies ahead of the vote.

Abdullah Khan, an analyst at the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, said more violence could not be ruled out on election day. He said any of a number of groups could be behind the latest bombings, including the splinter groups within the Pakistani Taliban, Islamic State, Baluch nationalists or

al-Qaida.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-Haq-Kakar denounced the attacks and conveyed his condolences to the families of those who died. He vowed that "every attempt to sabotage the law and order situation will be thwarted" and said the government is committed to holding elections Thursday in peace.

Achakzai, the provincial government spokesman, announced a three-day mourning period but emphasized that "the elections will take place on Thursday as per the schedule, and we urge people to exercise their right to vote to defeat those who wanted a delay in the elections."

In 2007, Pakistan's two-time prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, was killed in a gun and bomb attack, minutes after she addressed an election rally in the garrison city of Rawalpindi. Her son, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, has led the campaign for her Pakistan People's Party amid tight security.

NFL's first Super Bowl in Las Vegas has plenty of storylines plus an interesting football matchup

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The first Super Bowl in Las Vegas has everything the imaginary NFL scriptwriters could've wanted.

There's Patrick Mahomes and the underdog Kansas City Chiefs (14-6) aiming to become the first repeat champions in 19 years and trying to solidify their claim to a dynasty with a third Super Bowl title in five years.

There's Brock Purdy returning from a significant injury after rising from "Mr. Irrelevant" to now lead the San Francisco 49ers (14-5) to the brink of a record-tying sixth Super Bowl title that would etch his name alongside Pro Football Hall of Famers Joe Montana and Steve Young.

Of course, there's the glitz and glamour of America's showcase city and the irony of playing a Super Bowl in this gambling capital, an idea that used to be taboo for the NFL.

Did we mention Taylor Swift yet?

Make room for the Grammy-winning superstar to jet into town just in time to see her boyfriend, Travis Kelce, try to win another ring. Swift is expected to fly in for Sunday's game at Allegiant Stadium from Japan after her concert on Saturday.

Kelce, the four-time All-Pro tight end, is focused on limiting the distractions despite fielding numerous questions this week about Swift and their relationship that has captivated millions and attracted a new audience of football fans.

"Show up every day thinking about the now and not too much the future," Kelce said. "Obviously, you gotta prepare for what's ahead but not harp on the past is the biggest thing ... I think we would never try and tie in what we did last year to this year. Every single year is really its own journey."

For the Chiefs, nothing less than hoisting another Vince Lombardi trophy is acceptable so they have the most pressure.

"That expectation has become a demand at this point," Kelce said. "I know the years that we haven't won since we won our first one have felt like the biggest losses of my life. So it's just having that mentality year in, year out, and putting the expectations on yourself, making sure that no one puts higher expectations on us more than us. We're here to win this thing, baby. That's for sure."

Mahomes, the two-time NFL and Super Bowl MVP, is already drawing comparisons to Tom Brady, who won seven Super Bowl rings. Brady won three in his first four seasons as a starter. Mahomes is going for No. 3 in his sixth season.

Even if he wins, it's too early to have the conversation.

"I'm not even close to halfway, so I haven't put a lot of thought into it," Mahomes said. "I mean, your goal is to be the best player that you can be. I know I'm blessed to be around a lot of great players. And so, right now, it's doing whatever I can to beat a great 49ers team and try to get that third ring. And then if you ask me that question in 15 years, and I'll see if I can get close to seven. But seven seems like a long ways away still."

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This is a rematch of the game the Chiefs won four years ago to give coach Andy Reid his first championship. Niners coach Kyle Shanahan has been close to winning twice before only to see his teams blow big leads.

He was Atlanta's offensive coordinator when Brady and the Patriots rallied from a 28-3 second-half deficit to win the Super Bowl in 2017. His 49ers team led the Chiefs 20-10 entering the fourth quarter only to watch Mahomes rally Kansas City to a 31-20 win in Miami in 2020.

"Both of them are heartbreaking," Shanahan said. "Those things last awhile. But it's all about getting back there again, and that's what I'm excited for."

Shanahan's dad, Mike, lost two Super Bowls as an offensive coordinator with Denver before going to San Francisco and winning one in 1995. He then won two more as the head coach of the Broncos.

"I remember seeing my dad after those Super Bowls when he was a coordinator in Denver when I was younger and how hard it was on him," Shanahan said. "So I think anytime you get that close and you lose the last one, that's definitely the hardest."

Jimmy Garoppolo was the team's quarterback last time around. Now, it's Purdy, an AP NFL MVP finalist who overcame all the odds and continues to make critics look foolish.

Purdy isn't concerned with proving doubters wrong. He has rare maturity for a 24-year-old that helps him play with confidence and maintain his composure.

"It comes down to how do I do my job really well for three hours against the Kansas City Chiefs' defense," Purdy said.

"That's where my mindset's at. I want to do everything I can to help my team win. I'm focusing on the plays. I'm focusing on what we're trying to do for this week, not getting caught up in all the paparazzi and all that kind of stuff outside."

Russia says former Fox News host Tucker Carlson has interviewed Vladimir Putin

By DAVID BAUDER and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been interviewed by former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, the Kremlin confirmed Wednesday. It is Putin's first interview to a Western media figure since his full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago.

Carlson had released a video from Moscow on Tuesday in which he said he would be interviewing Putin. Carlson claimed that Western journalists had interviewed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy multiple times but could not be "bothered" to interview the Russian president.

The interview will be posted Thursday, according to Justin Wells, head of programming at Carlson's streaming network. It's not known what was said in the interview.

Putin has heavily limited his contact with international media since he launched the war in Ukraine in February 2022. Russian authorities have cracked down on media, forcing some independent Russian outlets to close, blocking others and ordering a number of foreign reporters to leave the country. Two journalists working for U.S. news organizations — The Wall Street Journal's Evan Gershkovich and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Alsu Kurmasheva — are in jail on charges they reject.

Western journalists were invited to Putin's annual press conference in December — the first since the war began — but only two were given the chance to ask a question.

WHY TUCKER CARLSON?

Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters that Carlson was chosen for the interview because "he has a position which differs" from other English-language media.

Before his exit from Fox, Carlson repeatedly questioned the validity of U.S. support for Ukraine following the Russian invasion, and he's wondered why Americans are told to hate Putin so much. His commentaries were frequently circulated on Russian state-run media.

In his video this week, Carlson denounced "corrupt" American media outlets for "fawning pep sessions" with Zelenskyy that he said were designed to get America into a war with eastern Europe and pay for it.

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Peskov also rejected Carlson's suggestion that no Western journalists had submitted requests to interview Putin. He said the Kremlin has received many requests from large Western television channels and newspapers which, he asserted, "take a one-sided position." Carlson's position, Peskov said, "is in no way pro-Russian, nor pro-Ukrainian, but rather pro-American."

The Associated Press is among the outlets that has requested an interview with Putin.

"Does Tucker really think we journalists haven't been trying to interview President Putin every day since his full scale invasion of Ukraine?" CNN's Christiane Amanpour said on X. "It's absurd — we'll continue to ask for an interview, just as we have for years now."

Carlson's trip comes as he has planted himself on former President Donald Trump's side in a growing split in the Republican party over Putin and the Ukraine war. Trump has pushed to cut off aid to Ukraine, and the GOP majority controlling the House of Representatives has complied.

While many Republicans are critical of the Russian president and his invasion, Trump and others have argued the United States has no interest helping Ukraine defend itself.

Carlson has also traveled to interview Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has fashioned himself into an icon for conservative populists across the globe and been Putin's closest ally in the European Union.

HOW THE INTERVIEW WILL BE DISTRIBUTED

The interview with Putin, Carlson said in his video, will be distributed for free on his website and on X, formerly known as Twitter. Carlson, who was fired by Fox News in April, announced he was starting his own streaming service in December.

Fox has offered no explanation for firing Carlson, who was its top-rated personality at the time. Like many people who leave the network that is conservative America's most popular news outlet, he has struggled to remain in the public eye.

Carlson worked at Fox News for more than a decade and hosted a show where he discussed conspiracy theories about Russia and the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Russian state media on Wednesday extensively covered Carlson's visit.

Vladimir Solovyev, one of Russia's most famous television hosts, said the interview would "break through the blockade and the narrative that exists" in Western media which, he said, focuses on "Putin's unprovoked, brutal invasion of Ukraine."

Solovyev, whose show is often critical of Western media, said Carlson is "feared" because he does not align with that narrative.

Haley pushes forward after Trump's allies in Nevada ensured her loss to 'none of these candidates'

By GABE STERN and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Even without Donald Trump on Nevada's Republican ballot, Nikki Haley was denied her first victory.

The indignity of a distant second-place finish behind "none of these candidates" was a fresh blow for Haley, facilitated by the staunch Trump allies who lead Nevada's GOP. They had already maneuvered to ensure Trump has a lock on the state's 26 delegates, who will be awarded in caucuses on Thursday where he faces only token opposition.

Rarely has a none-of-the-above campaign had such muscle behind it.

Formally, the Trump campaign told supporters only to worry about Thursday, but many of his allies in state and local GOP committees made it known that they could still show support for Trump by registering their opposition to Haley.

Haley, the former U.N. ambassador and South Carolina governor, did not campaign in Nevada, saying Trump's allies had rigged the rules in his favor.

"At the end of the day, the disrespect that Nikki Haley showed us, she just got reciprocated," Nevada GOP Chairman Michael McDonald said Tuesday night.

With 86% of the expected votes counted, "none of these candidates" was leading Haley by more than

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a 2-to-1 margin.

Haley was pressing ahead with a West Coast fundraising swing and rally Wednesday night in Los Angeles before California's primary on March 5, when a large number of states vote on what is known as Super Tuesday. Haley announced new campaign leadership in Massachusetts, another state with a March 5 primary.

She posted on X, formerly Twitter, about how "Republicans keep doing the same thing and getting the same result: chaos."

"A vote for Trump is a vote for more chaos," she added, echoing a line she routinely delivers at campaign speeches.

Nevada lawmakers added "none of these candidates" as an option in all statewide races in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal as a way for voters to participate but express dissatisfaction with their choices. "None" can't win elected office but came in first in primary congressional contests in 1976 and 1978. It also finished ahead of both George Bush and Edward Kennedy in Nevada's 1980 presidential primaries for their respective parties.

McDonald said it was left to each county GOP chair to decide if they wanted to promote "none of these candidates" on the ballot.

"I stand behind them 1,000%," he said of the GOP chairs. "When I was asked, I said 'Look, I can't tell you how you vote, (but) I can tell you how I'm voting.'"

McDonald is fiercely loyal to Trump and is one of six so-called "fake electors" indicted by a Nevada grand jury for submitting certificates to Congress falsely declaring him the winner of the 2020 presidential election in the state.

Nevada, the third state in the 2024 field after Iowa and New Hampshire, was set to hold a state-run primary election instead of party-run caucuses after Democrats controlling the Legislature changed the law to try to boost participation.

But Nevada Republicans chose to hold party-run caucuses instead, saying they wanted certain rules in place, like a requirement that participants show a government-issued ID.

The caucuses on Thursday are the only Nevada contests that count toward the GOP's presidential nomination. But they were seen as especially skewed in favor of Trump because of the intense grassroots support they require from candidates and new state party rules that benefit him further.

Haley certainly thought so. Her campaign criticized the process, refused to pay the \$55,000 fee to compete in the caucuses, and made no effort to campaign in Nevada, opting instead to go all out in her home state of South Carolina, where Republicans vote later this month.

The state GOP barred candidates who registered for the primary from competing in the caucuses. Election officials reported widespread confusion as voters expecting to vote for Trump did not see him on their ballots.

"I noticed that the Trump name was excluded from this particular ballot, which really disappointed me," said David Casipit, after poll workers told him the primary was not connected to any delegates.

"I didn't want to vote for anybody who was opposing (Trump)," he added at Fernley City Hall, a city of 23,000 in rural Lyon County.

Washoe County GOP Chair Bruce Parks, who pushed the decision to favor caucuses, said in an interview that he told voters who called his office — and Trump supporters — to participate in the primary by voting for "none of these candidates" over Haley.

"They basically told us 'they don't care about us,'" Parks said in an interview Tuesday night. "By marking 'none of these candidates,' we respond in kind — we don't care about you either."

Trump campaigned in Nevada 10 days before the primary and urged his supporters to focus on the caucuses, saying the primary "doesn't mean anything."

"Don't waste your time on the primary," he said.

But his supporters in the state ensured voters knew how to support him anyway.

"My job as a party boss is to get people to vote," said Leo Blundo, Nye County GOP chairman. "So we

kept it simple for people--just vote none of the above. If you want to vote for Trump, vote none of the above, that's it. And that keeps people voting."

Prince Harry's visit to see King Charles III didn't bring reconciliation with William

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry flew more than 5,000 miles (8,000 kilometers) to see his father after King Charles III was diagnosed with cancer. But Harry did not see his estranged brother, William, during a visit that lasted scarcely 24 hours.

The royal brothers remain emotionally and physically an ocean apart.

British media published photos of Harry at Heathrow Airport on Wednesday afternoon, just a day after he arrived at the same airport on a flight from Los Angeles.

He appeared headed back to life in California after a U.K. visit in which he spent less than an hour with his father at Clarence House, the king's London home. Any meeting between the brothers would typically be confirmed by palace officials.

William, meanwhile, returned to public duties for the first time since his wife, Kate, was admitted to a London hospital on Jan. 16 for abdominal surgery. She spent almost two weeks at the private London Clinic and is recovering at home. William handed out medals to notables and local heroes at a Windsor Castle ceremony in the morning and was due to attend a charity dinner on Wednesday evening for London's air ambulance service.

Images from the day are more grist for the popular British media tropes: dutiful William, flyaway Harry.

Behind that simplistic summary are two royal brothers — bonded in bereavement by the death of their mother, Princess Diana, when William was 15 and Harry was 12 — whose paths have diverged dramatically.

While William, the heir, was destined from birth to be king, Harry, who is fifth in line to the throne behind his brother and William's three children, has often appeared to struggle with the more ambiguous role of "spare."

He chose "Spare" as the title of his 2023 memoir, which recounted a lifetime of sibling grievances — from William getting the bigger bedroom at Balmoral Castle to a ferocious argument in which Harry claims William ripped his necklace and knocked him down onto a dog bowl.

In the book, Harry alleged that the British media treated him and his wife, Meghan — also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex — as villains compared with virtuous William and Kate, and accused palace officials of lying to protect his elder brother.

The Sussexes cited the media's racist treatment of Meghan, who is biracial, and a lack of support from the palace as reasons for their decision in 2020 to quit royal duties and move to the U.S.

In an explosive interview with Oprah Winfrey in 2021, the couple portrayed the royal family as indifferent to Meghan's mental health struggles, and suggested an unnamed family member had made a racist comment to Harry before the birth of their son, Archie. Harry described his relationship with William as "space at the moment."

The brothers' interactions since then have been formal, and brief. They were seen temporarily putting their fraught relationship aside to attend the funeral of their grandfather Prince Philip at Windsor Castle in 2021. The pair did not walk side-by-side behind Philip's coffin, but were pictured chatting and walking together after the service.

In September 2022 the brothers walked side-by-side behind the coffin of their grandmother Queen Elizabeth II before she lay in state. William later said it had evoked memories of doing the same at Princess Diana's funeral in 1997.

Harry traveled to the U.K. for his father's coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey in May. He was assigned to sit two rows behind his brother, arrived at the abbey alone and left alone. The brothers were not seen speaking or even acknowledging each other.

Harry's campaign to tame Britain's tabloid press has also placed him at odds with his relatives. He broke from the royal family tradition of not engaging in litigation by filing several lawsuits against the news media for hacking his phone and other privacy violations.

Harry claimed in court filings that Charles had directed palace staff to order him to drop his litigation because it was bad for the family. He also said William had secretly settled his own hacking claims against Rupert Murdoch's publications for a "huge sum of money" in 2020.

In "Spare," Harry claims that their father implored them after Philip's funeral: "Please, boys — don't make my final years a misery."

Royal biographer Sally Bedell Smith said rifts within the royal family would take more than a single visit to heal.

"I don't think we should engage in too much magical thinking about this," said Bedell Smith, author of "Prince Charles: Passions and Paradoxes of an Improbable Life."

"There are some very, very deep, hurts (Harry) has inflicted on the family," she said. But, she added: "King Charles, by nature, he wants to heal not only the world, but I think his impulse would be to try and heal the family."

Paxlovid can lessen the chance of a severe COVID-19 illness. Why is it underused?

By KENYA HUNTER AP Health Writer

Tens of thousands of Americans are hospitalized with COVID-19 every week. Thousands die from it every month. And yet, an antiviral treatment proven to lessen the chances of severe outcomes is going underused.

The drug, Paxlovid, is lauded by experts as a powerful tool that can prevent hospitalization and death from COVID-19. But the high price and doctors' hesitation to prescribe the pills mean the five-day treatment isn't getting to everyone who would benefit from it.

"When you read in your local newspaper that in this hospital, they've got this many COVID patients, most of those are preventable hospitalizations," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at Johns Hopkins University who sees Paxlovid as a useful tool to treat COVID-19.

One Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that Paxlovid can decrease hospitalization risks among adults by 51%. The drug is recommended for older people and other adults with certain underlying conditions and can be prescribed for kids as young as 12.

When Paxlovid was first authorized for emergency use in the U.S. in December 2021, it was free for anyone who needed it. Once the government stopped funding the treatment, Pfizer set a list price of \$1,390.

The drug remains free for people on federal insurance programs like Medicaid and Medicare through the end of this year, and uninsured people also can get it for free. But many of those people must go through a patient assistance program run by Pfizer to get the discounts. People on commercial insurance with high out-of-pocket costs can also get financial help through a separate co-pay assistance program.

Independent pharmacy owners find Paxlovid is expensive to carry because of reimbursement rates from commercial insurers, said Kurt Proctor, a senior vice president at the National Community Pharmacists Association.

"If you're losing 5% on a \$10 prescription, it's very different than losing 5% on a \$1,400 prescription product," he said.

The high list price also is turning off some patients.

When Celise Ballow, of Junction, Utah, got COVID-19 recently, she never got the medication.

Ballow said her doctor declined to write her a prescription after telling her it wouldn't be covered by her insurance. Now she wonders if she could have avoided some of the infection's worst effects if she had been able to get the medication.

"I'm going on a month and a half and I'm still having nebulizer treatments. ... I'm still exhausted," Bal-

low said.

Another factor hurting uptake appears to be the long list of medications that shouldn't be taken with Paxlovid. Many doctors may simply decide the risk of drug interactions isn't worth it.

"If people are on four or five different medications, it does tend to be a pain to double check 'is there an interaction here?'" said Dr. Sarah George, an infectious diseases professor at St. Louis University. Seeing a possible significant drug interaction "tends to put a physician off from prescribing a drug, even if there is a workaround," she said.

Paxlovid isn't the only antiviral medication for COVID-19. Merck's Lagevrio is another available pill, though it's proven to be less popular in the U.S. than Paxlovid. A third drug, Gilead's Veklury, is given via infusion.

The people most likely to benefit from Paxlovid were the least likely to get it in 2022, according to a recent study.

The study by Harvard researchers found that Paxlovid was disproportionately given to Medicare patients with lower risk of severe infection. If it had been properly utilized, the authors concluded, more than 16,000 COVID-19 deaths could have been prevented.

Dr. Michael Barnett, a Harvard health policy researcher who co-wrote the study, said it shouldn't be that way.

"There are very few medications and very few patients whose potential medication interaction with Paxlovid is so severe that they're better off not taking Paxlovid," he said. "Very few of them are important enough that it's a big risk to stop for a week."

Las Vegas, where the party never ends, prepares for its biggest yet: Super Bowl 58

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Las Vegas proposed to the NFL in December 2021.

"Let's just marry these brands, and let's bring the Super Bowl here," Steve Hill, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, recalled telling a room of NFL franchise owners.

They said yes.

The betrothal culminates Sunday in a not-so-intimate ceremony at Allegiant Stadium, where the city will host its first-ever Super Bowl. Officials expect it to draw more than 330,000 visitors and generate \$600 million in revenue. New records are predicted for hotel room rates, ticket prices and sports betting.

Already known for its lavish blowouts — including New Year's Eve fireworks set off from multiple casinos at once — the big game has Las Vegas going all out.

Elvis Presley impersonators and showgirls, both Vegas stalwarts, welcomed the San Francisco 49ers and Kansas City Chiefs when they arrived last weekend. A towering replica of the Vince Lombardi Trophy floats in the Bellagio fountains. Mock field goal posts buttress pedestrian bridges on the Strip.

Among the biggest parties planned is the Maxim Casino Royale Experience, which includes an "Ace of Spades" package. It's a \$1 million weekend with transportation by private jet, \$75,000 in gambling credits and \$10,000 a night in dining credit at Resorts World restaurants. Guests will also enjoy game seats on the 50-yard line.

"There's no bigger stage in the world," said Seth Kaplan, a 15-year veteran of global event planning and production. The company he founded and leads, unKommon Events, is orchestrating the Maxim bash.

Celebrities, pro athletes and social media influencers are among the 5,000 people on the guest list, Kaplan said. On Monday, his team of 300 began round-the-clock shifts to build the party venue inside Resorts World's 80,000-square-foot facility. Rappers 21 Savage and 50 Cent are headlining.

In a city where everything is bigger, better and brighter, Kaplan said he knew he needed to build a venue from scratch to meet expectations. He set out to create a place guests have never been before and will never be able to visit again.

And if Maxim's \$1 million weekend isn't in the budget, Guy Fieri is hosting a free tailgate near the Strip's

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giant ferris wheel. Or for \$580, the Little Vegas Chapel offers the chance to dress in team jerseys and be wed by an officiant in referee garb.

Off the Las Vegas Strip, \$149 tickets are already gone for a game day party at the Jackpot Bar & Grill, a pub designed for and by a Kansas City Chiefs' fan.

Through the third quarter of the game, ticket holders can guzzle unlimited drinks and scarf down staples like chicken wings and sliders. But the big draw is a whole roast pig.

Flashing a grin, pub owner Jeff Frederick said party passes have been sold to people from all corners of the U.S. and from as far away as Australia.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us," he said.

He isn't alone in his excitement: Parking spots for private jets in and around Las Vegas have all been spoken for. Game tickets have topped \$12,000 apiece and are still climbing. As of Tuesday, the average weekend room rate at some casinos, including the Bellagio and Aria, had surpassed \$1,400 a night for Friday through Sunday. And all 37,000 rooms at 12 MGM Resorts International properties were sold out for Saturday night.

"It's incredible," said Clark County Commissioner Michael Naft. "I grew up in this community and grew up at a time when professional sports teams in Las Vegas were only a pipe dream."

Now, he says, "the world has embraced Las Vegas as a sports capital."

Officials in Nevada began planning for their first Super Bowl before construction on Allegiant Stadium was even complete. Unlike other host cities, Las Vegas sited the stadium very close to the city center. The futuristic-looking facility, affectionately nicknamed the Death Star by Las Vegas Raiders owner Mark Davis, is a 10-minute drive from the airport and sits within walking distance of the Strip. It's accessible by a massive pedestrian-only bridge.

Strolling across that span after a major event like the Super Bowl makes for a memory that can't be recreated, Naft said.

"If your team won, and you're walking across that bridge with 40,000 other fans," he said, "that's a pretty special experience."

From Uber Eats' 'Friends' reunion to Bud's Clydesdales, here are the buzziest Super Bowl ads so far

By MAE ANDERSON and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — If you watch the Super Bowl for the commercials, you no longer have to wait until the big game to see what advertisers have in store for viewers.

Many companies now release ads ahead of the game in the hope of capitalizing on the buzz that builds as the game approaches. They hope to recoup some of the reported \$7 million that's the going rate for a 30-second spot by capturing pre-game attention.

It's a big challenge to stand out among the 50-plus advertisers that will be vying for the eyes of the more than 100 million people expected to tune in this year to CBS (and Paramount+ and Nickelodeon) on Super Bowl Sunday (Feb. 11). Last year's broadcast on Fox was watched by a record 115.1 million viewers, according to Nielsen.

So advertisers pull out all the stops. In the ads released ahead of the game so far, Budweiser focuses on its iconic Clydesdales, Michelob Ultra capitalizes on the iconic star power of soccer legend Lionel Messi, and Uber Eats goes for laughs with an ad where Jennifer Aniston forgets she starred in "Friends" with David Schwimmer. Many more commercials are expected to be released ahead of the game.

Of course, not all advertisers release their ads ahead of the game, so there will be surprises. Big advertisers like Amazon have stayed mum on ad plans so far. And while there have been no indications of such, it remains to be seen whether advertisers will capitalize on this year's Taylor Swift buzz in some way.

Here are some of the buzziest ads that have been released so far:

BOOKING.COM

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Actress Tina Fey has so many choices on the online travel agency booking.com site she has to hire body doubles: an influencer type played by her 30 Rock co-star, Jane Krakowski, to stay at a fancy hotel, a bigfoot handled by another 30 Rock co-star, Jack McBrayer, to stay at a cabin, and even actress Glenn Close, who stays on a farm.

BUD LIGHT

The Bud Light genie grants wishes — like giving someone '80s metal hair and someone else a giant bicep — to Bud Light drinkers. NFL legend Peyton Manning, rapper Post Malone and more also appear on screen.

BUDWEISER

Budweiser is bringing back familiar characters to its gameday slot. In the beer brand's nostalgic ad, a snowstorm threatens to derail a delivery to a small-town bar. But a team of Clydesdales and a Labrador retriever team up to help Budweiser make the delivery.

DORITOS DINAMITA

Two grandmotherly women ("Dina" and "Mita") chase after "Top Gun: Maverick" actor Danny Ramirez, who took the last bag of Doritos Dinamita from a store shelf, leaving actress Jenna Ortega behind.

DOVE

Dove's ad begins seemingly whimsically showing young girls having mishaps playing sports to the tune of "It's the Hard Knock Life." But the ad cuts starkly to a girl looking self-consciously in the mirror. The message: low body-confidence leads to girls quitting sports, not the mishaps.

GOOGLE

Google's heartstring-pulling ad follows a blind man as he uses "Guided Frame" — Google's AI-powered accessibility feature for the Pixel camera that uses a combination of audio cues, high-contrast animations and tactile vibrations — to take pictures of the people and places in his life.

HELLMANN'S

In an ad for Hellmann's, Kate McKinnon makes an unusual discovery: her cat can talk. Well, sort of. Her furry friend can say one word, "may-ow" — which skyrockets her to celebrity status and causes a mayonnaise-buying frenzy. The "Mayo Cat" becomes so famous that she even dates (and soon dumps) Pete Davidson.

MICHELOB ULTRA

Lionel Messi's Super Bowl debut shows off his soccer mastery and apparent loyalty to Michelob Ultra. In the ad, the soccer star also gets an assist from NFL legend Dan Marino and nod from "Ted Lasso's" Jason Sudeikis.

MTN DEW BAJA BLAST

Aubrey Plaza is always having a blast, whether she is stuck in an elevator or being abducted by aliens — or reuniting with her "Parks and Rec" co-star Nick Offerman while riding dragons.

M&M'S

Retired Miami Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino, Buffalo Bills' Bruce Smith and wide receiver Terrell Owens never got a Super Bowl ring, but M&M's and Scarlett Johansson present the "Almost Champions" ring to the almost winners.

OREO

According to Oreo, the key to making life's biggest decisions is to "twist on it." An ad for the iconic sandwich cookie suggests that even Kris Jenner used the tactic before agreeing to start "Keeping Up With The Kardashians" back in 2007.

PRINGLES

After a gas station clerk points out Chris Pratt looks like the man in the Pringles logo, he goes viral and stars in a movie about "Mr. P."

STARRY

PepsiCo's year-old lemon-lime soda's debut Super Bowl ad features rapper Ice Spice dealing with a breakup by spending time with the Starry lemon and lime spokescharacters — the message: "It's time to see other sodas."

T-MOBILE

Jason Momoa shows off his singing chops in an ad that shows Scrubs duo Zach Braff and Donald Faison singing about T-Mobile home internet to the tune of "Flashdance ... What a Feeling." "Flashdance" star Jennifer Beals pops in to spray Momoa with water and ask him to sing it again — without his shirt.

UBER EATS

When someone tells Jennifer Aniston they didn't know you could order a wide variety of products on Uber Eats, Aniston tells them, "In order to remember something, you've got to forget something else." That prompts a wave of forgetting: David and Victoria Beckham forget Victoria Beckham used to be Posh Spice, and Jennifer Aniston forgets she starred in "Friends" with David Schwimmer.

'Puppy Bowl' celebrates a big anniversary this year, one that shelter and rescue pups will cheer

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The annual "Puppy Bowl" turns 20 this year, well over middle age in dog years. But does the sheer cuteness of it really ever get old?

"Who doesn't want to watch dogs play all day long?" asks Laurie Johnson, the director of Florida Little Dog Rescue in St. Cloud, Florida, who has been part of "Puppy Bowl" for a decade.

There are some changes this year to the canine football telecast: Four previous puppy players return to be inducted in the new Puppy Bowl Hall of Fame and the show, which has grown to include armadillos, hedgehogs and chickens, will focus on dogs.

"What we've done this year to flip the whole script is because it's sort of a celebration of the fact that it's the 20th year," says "Puppy Bowl" referee Dan Schachner. "We've decided to go all in on puppy, making it the "most puppiest 'Puppy Bowl' ever."

The "Puppy Bowl" made its debut as counter-programming to the Super Bowl in 2005. Dogs score touchdowns on a gridiron carpet when they cross the goal line — any goal line — with a toy.

The show is really just an excuse to spend time watching adorable, clumsy pups in colorful sweaters play with chew toys, wag their tails furiously and lick the camera. A deeper reason is to encourage animal adoption.

"We always say the same message every year: Adopt, don't shop," says Schachner. "There are responsible breeders out there, but it kind of defies logic that somebody who's searching for a dog would look beyond their local shelter or rescue."

According to the ASPCA, approximately 390,000 shelter dogs are euthanized each year and 2 million shelter dogs are adopted. Schachner says the number of animals languishing in shelters is back up after falling during the pandemic. "It's worse than ever," he says.

Florida Little Dog Rescue, which like all puppy groups is vetted by Animal Planet, sent seven pup players and two Hall of Fame inductees this year. Johnson, who volunteers her time, says it's an honor that Animal Planet picks her pups year after year.

"It does bring attention to our rescue, which helps some of our other dogs get adopted. But, honestly, for us, the biggest excitement is that we're helping dogs all over the country get into homes, because rescue is not a competition, it's a cooperation," says Johnson.

Most of the puppies are usually adopted by airtime, since the show is filmed in the fall. But the point is to show that animals just like the ones on the show can be found at any shelter at any time.

Schachner also has some advice for anyone who falls for a particular pup on the broadcast: "That animal is probably likely part of a litter, right? So there's probably siblings out there that are still up for adoption or their parents — their mom, their dad — is in the shelter looking for a forever home."

Florida Little Dog Rescue was the first to send a Shar Pei to the "Puppy Bowl" — the pup, Wrinkles, was quickly adopted by a crew member at the taping — and Johnson says many viewers might not know that all kinds of breeds — Corgis, Westies, Doodles and Cavapoos, included — are available at shelters and rescue groups.

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The inaugural "Puppy Bowl" was watched by nearly 6 million viewers. Last year, 13.2 million viewers tuned in, the largest reach for the event in five years. In comparison, The Emmy Awards telecast on Fox this year reached just 4.3 million viewers. This year's show will be simulcast across Animal Planet, Discovery, TBS, truTV, Max and Discovery.

The dogs are split into two teams — Team Fluff and Team Ruff — and each dog is given a nickname — like "Slick Rick" or "J-Paw" — and a specialty, like "Epic end zone dance."

They are free to frolic, but may face penalties for things like "unsportlike dog conduct" and "trash barking." Awards are given to Most Valuable Puppy and, new this year, an Underdog Award for the more introverted pup.

This year's broadcast is built on the work of dozens of volunteers, as well as 600 pee pads, 200 poop bags, 10 bags of treats, 30 water bowls and 18 cameras. The cat halftime show will also return.

Schachner started refereeing 13 years ago, when there were 59 dogs invited. "I'll never forget that because I thought that was a tremendous amount of dogs to be trying to officiate in one place."

That number has by now more than doubled, with this year's broadcast featuring 131 puppies. "The scope and the size of this show from the time I started 13 years ago to now is just very impressive."

The canine entries this time come from 73 shelters and rescue groups across 36 states and territories. The entrance requirements include being healthy and sturdy enough to be on the field with playmates, between 3-6 months old and having no training.

"We don't want dogs that are show dogs, that are sitting there with a trainer. We want to see them in all their puppy glory. Part of that is to show what puppies are in their true state," says Schachner.

"They are playful, they are curious, they're going to get into trouble, they're going to do crazy things. And from time to time, they're going to score touchdowns and really impress you."

Score one for red, the color, thanks to Taylor, Travis and the red vs. red Super Bowl

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Lifestyles Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Ever-present on the lips of Taylor Swift and the uniforms of both Super Bowl teams. In streetwear and along the Gucci runway. Amid the sea of Valentine's Day goods and in bright, dopamine home decor.

The color red has gone boom as loud as TNT.

Not that TNT. We're talking TNT as in Taylor and Trav. The phenom that is Taylor Swift at boyfriend Travis Kelce's Kansas City Chiefs games was a red-hued wonder of a lead-up to Super Bowl LVIII. Media feast barely covers it.

The Chiefs and their opponents, the San Francisco 49ers, sport red during the regular season, just as they did ahead of their 2020 Super Bowl matchup. But this time around, it's the Tay factor that's been a score for classic red and other hues in its family.

Power, passion, seduction. Luxurious and royal. Red is one of those colors that's both aspirational and proletarian at the same time. It can also symbolize anger or danger.

It's a color Kelce's paramour is intimately familiar with. We've got Swift's albums "Red" and "Red (Taylor's Version)," of course, and her weekslong game-day Chiefs gear, and we've always had her signature and remarkably immovable red lip color. Which lip brands she wears she usually keeps to herself, but we're looking at you Pat McGrath Labs.

FOOTBALL AS A PLATFORM FOR RED

That aside, color experts consider football a perfect place for red.

"Red in sport, no surprise. It's speed, it's energy, it's confidence building, it's power. So who wouldn't want that, especially if you're playing in the Super Bowl?" said Laurie Pressman, vice president of the Pantone Color Institute, a consulting service that keeps a sharp eye on trends.

But red is so much more, and has been since the dawn of red-blooded humankind and their big brains. Because of its sharpness, our eyes pick up on red more quickly than they do other colors, said Stuart

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Semple, a British artist who creates and sells his own line of affordable paint. "We're hardwired to look out for danger in our environment. At the moment, we're seeing red just about everywhere."

RED ON THE RISE IN FASHION AND BEAUTY

Klarna, the Swedish buy now, pay later service, clocked a 254% increase in September over the same month the year before in red lipstick purchases. Red heels enjoyed an 86% boost in the same period, along with red blouses (a 161% rise) and red dresses (a 71% hike), said Erin Jaeger, head of the company for North America.

"Red has always been an 'it' color and a classic statement look, but it's had a resurgence on runways and in mainstream culture over the past few months. What really makes red a go-to color is its versatility. You can wear red accessories to add color to a more neutral look or throw on a red lip or red nail polish. Right now, people are turning to red as a winter statement color, worn both casually or in a more dressed-up look," she said.

THE RED VS. RED SUPER BOWL

The 49ers have some skin in the red fashion game, too, in running back Christian McCaffrey's fiancée, Olivia Culpo, and in Kristin Juszczyk, fullback Justin Juszczyk's wife.

Kristin, a designer, landed an NFL licensing deal to use league logos on apparel after creating a custom Chiefs puffer for Swift.

"Ahead of the red vs. red Super Bowl matchup, my eyes are going to be on the fashion we see from the players' walk-in looks, fans and WAGs," Jaeger said, using sports speak for wives and girlfriends. "I'm expecting some really fun red-centric looks with hints of black and white."

RED ON FASHION WEEK RUNWAYS

Red made a splash on Paris runways, and Vogue declared it the color of 2023 in street style. In Milan, Gucci's new creative director, Sabato De Sarno, debuted his vision for the house in September, introducing Gucci Rosso, a rich shade of oxblood that teeters on burgundy.

Another of red's attributes is that some people have convinced themselves they can't wear it.

"Historically, a lot of people have stayed away from red, particularly redheads and others who feel like it's not their color. I truly think anyone can wear it. It's just a matter of finding the right hue for you," Jaeger said.

Bianca Betancourt, the digital culture editor at Harper's Bazaar, sees a lot less divisiveness over red these days.

"Red has always been credited as a power color and not meant for the sartorially shy, which is why seeing it as a leading trend is so fascinating. The answer to what women want to wear right now is clear: They simply just want to be seen. Wearing red accomplishes that," she said.

RED THROUGHOUT HISTORY

The color is among the oldest natural pigments. Red ochre, an iron oxide, dates to prehistoric times and drawings on cave walls. Red has been used to adorn the body in many cultures, including the ancient Egyptians, Mayans, Roman generals and during the Renaissance. It is the symbolic color of communism and socialism. In China, India and other Asian countries, red expresses happiness and good fortune.

Semple, who went to war with fellow artist Anish Kapoor over the latter's exclusive rights to the world's blackest of blacks, made his first red when he was 17. It's called Raygun.

"I made it in my garden shed with a bag of cadmium red and some linseed oil. It's probably really toxic. I shouldn't have done it. It still uses cadmium to this day, which is why it carries such a strong warning when artists use it. But honestly, I can't find a better pigment," he said.

Goethe, the great German writer, had his own take on red, according to Michel Pastoureau's book "Red: The History of a Color."

"A bull becomes furious only if he is presented with a red cloth; a philosopher, on the other hand, goes into a rage as soon as the color is mentioned."

House vote to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas fails, thwarted by Republican defections

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a dramatic setback, House Republicans failed to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, forced to shelve a high-profile priority — for now — after a few GOP lawmakers refused to go along with the party's plan.

The stunning roll call Tuesday fell just a single vote short of impeaching Mayorkas, stalling the Republicans' drive to punish the Biden administration over its handling of the U.S.-Mexico border. With Democrats united against the charges, the Republicans needed almost every vote from their slim majority to approve the articles of impeachment.

A noisy, rowdy scene erupted on the House floor as the vote was tied for several tense minutes, 215-215. Several Republican lawmakers — led by the impeachment's chief sponsor, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia — surrounded one of the holdouts, Wisconsin Republican Mike Gallagher, who refused to change his vote.

With the tally stuck, Democrats shouted for the gavel to close out the vote.

"Frustrated," said Rep. Mark Green, R-Tenn., the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, "but we'll see it back again."

House Speaker Mike Johnson's spokesman Raj Shah said they "fully intend" to reconsider the articles of impeachment against Mayorkas "when we have the votes for passage."

But next steps are uncertain. In the end, three Republicans opposed the impeachment, and a fourth Republican switched his vote so the measure could be revisited. The final tally was 214-216.

The outcome was another dismal result for the House Republicans who have repeatedly been unable to use their majority power to accomplish political goals, or even to keep up with the basics of governing.

Johnson, who could afford only a few defections from his ranks, had said earlier he had personally spoken to Gallagher and another GOP holdout, acknowledging the "heavy, heavy" vote as he sought their support.

"It's an extreme measure," said Johnson, R-La. "But extreme times call for extreme measures."

Not since 1876 has a Cabinet secretary faced impeachment charges and it's the first time a sitting secretary is being impeached — 148 years ago, Secretary of War William Belknap resigned just before the vote.

The impeachment charges against Mayorkas come as border security is fast becoming a top political issue in the 2024 election, a particularly potent line of attack being leveled at President Joe Biden by Republicans, led by the party's front-runner for the presidential nomination, Donald Trump.

Record numbers of people have been arriving at the southern border, many fleeing countries around the world, in what Mayorkas calls an era of global migration. Many migrants are claiming asylum and being conditionally released into the U.S., arriving in cities that are underequipped to provide housing and other aid while they await judicial proceedings which can take years to determine whether they may remain.

The House Democrats united against the two articles of impeachment against Mayorkas, calling the proceedings a sham designed to please Trump, charges that do not rise to the Constitution's bar of treason, bribery or "high crimes and misdemeanors."

"A bunch of garbage," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass. He called Mayorkas "a good man, a decent man," who is simply trying to do his job.

Even if Republicans are able to impeach Mayorkas, he is not expected to be convicted in a Senate trial since Republican senators have been cool to the effort. The Senate could simply refer the matter to a committee for its own investigation, delaying immediate action.

"This baseless impeachment should never have moved forward," said Mia Ehrenberg, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security.

If House Republicans are "serious about border security, they should abandon these political games," she said.

The impeachment of Mayorkas landed quickly onto the House agenda after Republican efforts to impeach Biden over the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden, hit a lull, and the investigation into the Biden

family dragged.

The Committee on Homeland Security under Chairman Green had been investigating the secretary for much of the past year, including probing the flow of deadly fentanyl into the U.S. But a resolution from Georgia Rep. Greene pushed it to the fore. The panel swiftly held a pair of hearings in January before announcing the two articles of impeachment against Mayorkas.

Unlike other moments in impeachment history, the afternoon's debate played out to an almost empty chamber, without the fervor or solemnity of past proceedings.

Greene, who was named to be one of the impeachment managers if there is a Senate trial, rose to blame Mayorkas for the "invasion" of migrants coming to the U.S.

Republican Rep. Eli Crane of Arizona said Mayorkas had committed a "dereliction of duty."

Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said the Mayorkas impeachment vote was a stunt designed by Republicans to sow "chaos and confusion" and appease Trump — rather than to govern.

"No reasonable American can conclude that you're making life better for them by this sham impeachment," Jeffries said.

It was only as the roll call came to a standstill that the chamber burst into an angry, boisterous scene as tempers flared and the vote failed.

The three Republicans opposing impeachment were Gallagher, Rep. Ken Buck of Colorado and Tom McClintock of California. Republican Rep. Blake Moore of Utah was the Republican who switched his vote on procedural grounds.

At one point, Democratic Rep. Al Green of Texas, who had missed votes earlier in the day, arrived from the hospital to cast his vote against the impeachment. Green told NBC News that he had gone to the emergency room and had surgery.

McClintock, in a memo, said the charges "fail to identify an impeachable crime that Mayorkas has committed." He said the articles of impeachment from the committee explain the problems at the border under Biden's watch. But, he said, "they stretch and distort the Constitution."

Tuesday's vote arrived at a politically odd juncture for Mayorkas, who has been negotiating a bipartisan border security package in the Senate, earning high marks from a group of senators involved.

But that legislation, which emerged Sunday as one of the most ambitious immigration overhauls in years, collapsed Tuesday as Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell acknowledged that the deal was dead. Trump had sharply criticized the bipartisan effort and Speaker Johnson said it was "dead on arrival."

Impeachment, once rare in the U.S., has been used as both a constitutional check on the executive and increasingly as a political weapon.

Experts have argued that Mayorkas has simply been snared in a policy dispute with Republicans who disapprove of the Biden administration's approach to the border situation.

Three former secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, Janet Napolitano and Jeh Johnson, said in a letter Tuesday that impeaching the Cabinet official over policy disputes would "jeopardize our national security."

Trump as president was twice impeached — first in 2019 on abuse of power over his phone call with the Ukrainian president seeking a favor to dig up dirt on then-rival Biden, and later on the charge of inciting the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol. He was acquitted on both impeachments in the Senate.

What's next as Trump tries to stave off his 2020 election trial? All eyes are on the Supreme Court

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In Donald Trump's federal 2020 election interference case, all eyes are on the Supreme Court, whose next moves could determine whether the former president stands trial in Washington before the November election.

An appeals court panel on Tuesday unanimously rejected Trump's claims that he is immune from pros-

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education, with the judges saying they cannot accept the idea that former presidents are “above the law for all time” once they leave the White House.

The ruling forces Trump to move quickly to ask the conservative-majority Supreme Court to intervene in the landmark case accusing Trump of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss to President Joe Biden. Otherwise, the case — which has been on hold since December — will be re-started at the trial court level, and special counsel Jack Smith’s team has strongly pushed for jurors to hear it this year.

What happens next is of paramount importance to both sides.

Trump’s lawyers have tried at every opportunity to delay the proceedings, for obvious reasons: A Trump victory over Democrat Biden in November would make him head of the executive branch and give him the authority to potentially order his new attorney general to dismiss the federal cases against him that he faces, or issue a pardon for himself. The Republican presidential primary front-runner has denied any wrongdoing in the case, and has characterized all the cases against him as politically motivated.

Here’s a look at Trump’s options and what the Supreme Court might do:

WHAT ARE TRUMP’S OPTIONS NOW?

The ruling doesn’t immediately send the case back to U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan. The appeals court is giving Trump until Feb. 12 to ask the Supreme Court to stay — or put on hold — the decision.

A Trump campaign spokesman said Tuesday that the former president would appeal the ruling “in order to safeguard the Presidency and the Constitution.” Trump argues that all the allegations in the indictment were “official acts” taken as president, therefore he can’t be prosecuted.

Trump could also potentially ask the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to consider his immunity claims, but the panel said that such a request would not prevent the case from returning to the trial court and resuming in the meantime.

WHAT WILL THE SUPREME COURT DO?

It’s hard to say. Any untested legal question involving separation of powers and the scope of presidential authority is indisputably a consequential one. But lower court judges — nominated to the bench by presidents from both political parties — have suggested that this particular case is not a close call in rulings that have roundly rejected Trump’s immunity arguments.

Five of the nine justices must agree to grant a stay in order to prevent the case from resuming in the trial court. And at least four justices must agree in order for the court to hear arguments in any case.

The justices declined an earlier request from the special counsel’s team to get involved in the immunity dispute and to issue an expedited ruling. But they could jump into the fray now and use the case as an opportunity to make a definitive ruling on whether the immunity from lawsuits that former presidents already have for their official actions should be extended into the criminal realm as well.

The Supreme Court is already weighing some other politically charged cases. The justices, for instance, are hearing arguments this week in a legal dispute stemming from the push by Republican and independent voters in Colorado to kick Trump off the state’s Republican primary ballot because of his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Biden.

WHEN MIGHT THE TRIAL BEGIN?

Judge Chutkan had initially scheduled the case for trial on March 4, but canceled that date last week. A new date wasn’t immediately set.

The timing now depends on the Supreme Court and its willingness to take up the case. There’s no timetable for any of that, though the justices are likely to seek the input of Smith’s team before deciding whether to keep the legal ruling against the former president on hold.

A decision by the court to refuse Trump’s plea for a stay would enable Chutkan to restart the proceedings, and to do so fairly quickly. But if the court grants the Trump team’s request to take up the case, all eyes will be on whatever timetable the court establishes in determining the next steps.

If the court grants Trump's request without accelerating the appeals process, Trump would likely have until early May before he even needs to file his full appeal. But the justices could also set much quicker deadlines for reaching a final decision.

The case has been effectively frozen since December by the Trump team's appeal, meaning that if and when it restarts, Chutkan will give both sides an additional opportunity to respond to pending motions and arguments.

WHAT ABOUT TRUMP'S OTHER CASES?

The Washington trial being put on hold has opened the door for a separate case in New York, charging Trump in connection with hush money payments to a porn actor, to proceed first on March 25. That case, however, has long been viewed by experts as the least legally perilous of the four indictments Trump faces.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon in Florida has set a May 20 trial date in the other case brought by Smith that accuses Trump of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Florida estate and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back. But Cannon has also pushed back multiple other deadlines and signaled an openness to revisiting the trial date during a pivotal pretrial conference set for March.

No trial date has been set yet in Fulton County, Georgia, where the district attorney's office has charged Trump with trying to subvert that state's 2020 election.

Cough? Sore throat? More schools suggest mildly sick kids attend anyway

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AP Education Writer

Trenace Dorsey-Hollins' 5-year-old daughter was sick a lot last year. Dorsey-Hollins followed school guidelines and kept her home when she had a cough or a sore throat — or worse — until she was completely better.

Near the end of the year, the school in Fort Worth, Texas, called her in to talk about why her daughter had missed so much school.

During the pandemic, schools urged parents and children to stay home at any sign of illness. Even though the emergency has ended, she said no one has clarified that those rules have changed.

"It's extremely confusing," she said.

"In the past, if the child didn't have a fever over 100, then it's okay to send them to school," said the mother of a 5- and 13-year-old. "But now it's like if they have a cough or they're sneezing, you might want to keep them home. Which is it?"

Widely varying guidance on when to keep children home has only added to the confusion, which many see as a factor in the nationwide epidemic of chronic school absences. Some advocates and school systems — and the state of California — are now encouraging kids to come to class even when they have the sniffles or other nuisance illnesses like lice or pinkeye.

Families need to hear they no longer must keep kids home at any sign of illness, said Hedy Chang, the executive director of Attendance Works. The national nonprofit aimed at improving attendance has issued its own guidance, urging parents to send kids to school if they can participate in daily activities.

"We have to now re-engage kids and families and change their thinking about that," Chang said.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends staying home when there's fever, vomiting or diarrhea, or when students "are not well enough to participate in class."

But many districts go far beyond that, delineating a dizzying array of symptoms they say should rule out attendance. Fort Worth Independent School District, where Dorsey-Hollins' youngest daughter attends kindergarten, advises staying home if a child has a cough, sore throat or rash. A student should be "fever-free" for 24 hours without medication before returning to school, per district guidelines.

Austin Independent School District in Texas lists "eye redness," "undetermined rash" or "open, draining lesions" as reasons to stay home. Kids with lice can't attend class in New York City schools. Maryland's Montgomery County recommends keeping a child home with a stomachache, "pale or flushed face" or "thick yellow discharge from the nose."

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Finding the right balance is difficult, and it's understandable that different places would approach it differently, said Claire McCarthy, a pediatrician at Boston Children's Hospital and professor at Harvard Medical School.

"Each school or school district has a different tolerance for illness," said McCarthy.

It all leaves many parents feeling puzzled.

"It's a struggle," said Malika Elwin, a mother of a second grader on New York's Long Island.

She doesn't want to expose other children or burden the teacher with her daughter's runny nose, so she's kept her daughter home longer even though she's feeling better because she still has cold symptoms. "Then I regret that because she just runs around here all day perfectly fine," she said.

For those who test positive for COVID-19, the CDC still calls for staying home and isolating for at least five days. But guidance from states and individual schools varies widely. In some school systems, guidance allows for students who test positive to go to school as long as they are asymptomatic.

Trenace Dorsey-Hollins said it is hard for parents like her to keep track.

"Is it actually OK to sit in school with a cough if you don't have a fever and haven't tested positive for COVID?" she said.

When schools closed during the pandemic, kids fell behind academically — and continued chunks of school absences have made it harder for them to catch up. So some authorities have re-evaluated their tolerance for illness. During the 2021-2022 school year, more than a quarter of students missed at least 10% of the school year, up from 15% before the pandemic.

Missing that much school puts students at risk of not learning to read or graduate. Absent students also lose out on meals, socialization with peers and caring adults, physical exercise, and access to mental health counseling and health care. In other words, missing school has its own health effects.

And when a class sees high levels of chronic absenteeism, it hurts the students who are there because a teacher has to spend time reorienting the students who've been away.

The state of California, where 25% of students last year missed 10% of the school year, took a new approach to sick-day guidance this fall. Instead of only saying when a child should stay home, the guidance describes circumstances when a child might be slightly unwell but can come to school.

Overall, students should stay home when their symptoms "prevent them from participating meaningfully in routine activities." But coming to school with diarrhea is all right as long as a child can make it to the toilet in time. Going to school with mild cold symptoms, sore throat, mild rash or pinkeye are all "OK."

What's more, California doesn't insist on waiting 24 hours after a fever or vomiting before returning to school. Going fever-free or without vomiting overnight is enough.

Boston Public Schools took a similar stance in its online recommendations for parents. "Respiratory infections are common," reads the online guidance. "If the child does not have fever, does not appear to have decreased activity or other symptoms, it is not necessary for the child to stay home."

The shift in guidance could have a disproportionate impact on low-income communities and people of color, said Noha Aboelata, who leads the Roots Community Health Center in Oakland, California. People in those communities might be more likely to live in multigenerational homes, take crowded public transportation or have poor ventilation in their homes, she said. When people are out and about while sick, vulnerable loved ones could be put at risk.

She had hoped the pandemic's lessons about staying home when contagious and taking care of yourself and your family when sick would outlast the public health emergency. Instead, she said, "it feels like the pendulum is swinging fiercely back in the other direction."

But changing the culture around school absences goes beyond just issuing guidance.

Some schools in San Diego County seem unaware of California's new guidance allowing kids to attend school while mildly sick, said Tracy Schmidt, who oversees attendance for the county Office of Education.

Still, others have adopted it and have begun talking through symptoms with parents who call to report their children are sick, urging them to bring them in and see how it goes. It gives her hope that as more schools and parents learn about this guidance, students will miss less school.

"The most important place for our kids to be is school," she said. "We need to leave behind this mindset

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that we had to adopt during the pandemic because we were in a public safety emergency.”

Today in History: February 8, Mary, Queen of Scots beheaded

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 8, the 39th day of 2024. There are 327 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 8, 1587, Mary, Queen of Scots was beheaded at Fotheringhay Castle in England after she was implicated in a plot to murder her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I.

On this date:

In 1693, a charter was granted for the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg in the Virginia Colony.

In 1910, the Boy Scouts of America was incorporated.

In 1922, President Warren G. Harding had a radio installed in the White House.

In 1924, the first execution by gas in the United States took place at the Nevada State Prison in Carson City as Gee Jon, a Chinese immigrant convicted of murder, was put to death.

In 1952, Queen Elizabeth II proclaimed her accession to the British throne following the death of her father, King George VI.

In 1960, work began on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, located on Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street in Los Angeles.

In 1965, Eastern Air Lines Flight 663, a DC-7, crashed shortly after takeoff from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport; all 84 people on board were killed.

In 1968, three Black students were killed in a confrontation between demonstrators and highway patrolmen at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg in the wake of protests over a whites-only bowling alley.

In 1971, NASDAQ, the world's first electronic stock exchange, held its first trading day.

In 1973, Senate leaders named seven members of a select committee to investigate the Watergate scandal, including its chairman, Democrat Sam J. Ervin of North Carolina.

In 2007, model, actor and reality TV star Anna Nicole Smith died in Hollywood, Florida, at age 39 of an accidental drug overdose.

In 2020, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing said a 60-year-old U.S. citizen who'd been diagnosed with the coronavirus had died on Feb. 5 in Wuhan; it was apparently the first American fatality from the virus.

In 2021, longtime NFL coach Marty Schottenheimer died in North Carolina at 77.

In 2022, "The Power of the Dog" topped the 2022 Oscar nominations with 10. (It would go on to win just one, best director for Jane Campion.)

In 2023, Rescue teams in Turkey and Syria searched for signs of life in the rubble of thousands of buildings toppled by a catastrophic earthquake. The confirmed death toll from the world's deadliest quake in more than a decade approached 12,000 and eventually would be more than 50,000.

Today's birthdays: Composer-conductor John Williams is 92. Broadcast journalist Ted Koppel is 84. Actor Nick Nolte is 83. Comedian Robert Klein is 82. Actor-rock musician Creed Bratton is 81. Singer Ron Tyson is 76. Actor Brooke Adams is 75. Actor Mary Steenburgen is 71. Author John Grisham is 69. Retired NBA All-Star and College Basketball Hall of Famer Marques Johnson is 68. Actor Henry Czerny is 65. Rock singer Vince Neil (Motley Crue) is 63. Former Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa P. Jackson is 62. Movie producer Toby Emmerich is 61. Actor Missy Yager is 56. Actor Mary McCormack is 55. Basketball Hall of Famer Alonzo Mourning is 54. Actor Susan Misner is 53. Dance musician Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo (Daft Punk) is 50. Actor Seth Green is 50. Actor Joshua Morrow is 50. Rock musician Phoenix (Linkin Park) is 47. Actor William Jackson Harper is 44. Actor Jim Parrack is 43. Folk singer-musician Joey Ryan (Milk Carton Kids) is 42. Actor-comedian Cecily Strong is 40. Rock musician Jeremy Davis is 39. Hip-hop artist Anderson.Paak is 38. Actor Ryan Pinkston is 36. NBA star Klay Thompson is 34. Professional surfer Bethany Hamilton is 34. Actor Karle Warren is 32.

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Boys Basketball Game

Redfield @ Groton Area
Thursday, February 8th, 2024

Game Times/Locations: Main Court in Arena

- 5:00PM → 7th Grade Boys
- 6:00PM → Boys C
- 7:30PM → Boys Varsity
 - o *Halftime Entertainment: Little Leaders Cheer Camp*

Prior to the Boys Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

LOCKER ROOM: Redfield will use the far back locker room down the JH Locker Room Hallway.

**Team Benches – Groton: South Bench
Redfield: North Bench**

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

Livestream: GDlive.com (must pay to watch) or NFHS

C Game Book: Krissi Zak

JH Game Officials: Kristi Zoellner, Marty Weismantel

Varsity Officials: Eric Donat, Paul Rozell, Daren Lorenz

Announcer: Mike Imrie

Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

Official Book: Alexa Schuring

Shot Clock Operator: Marty Weismantel

National Anthem: Groton Area Middle School Pep Band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh

Thank you, Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director