

Groton Daily Independent

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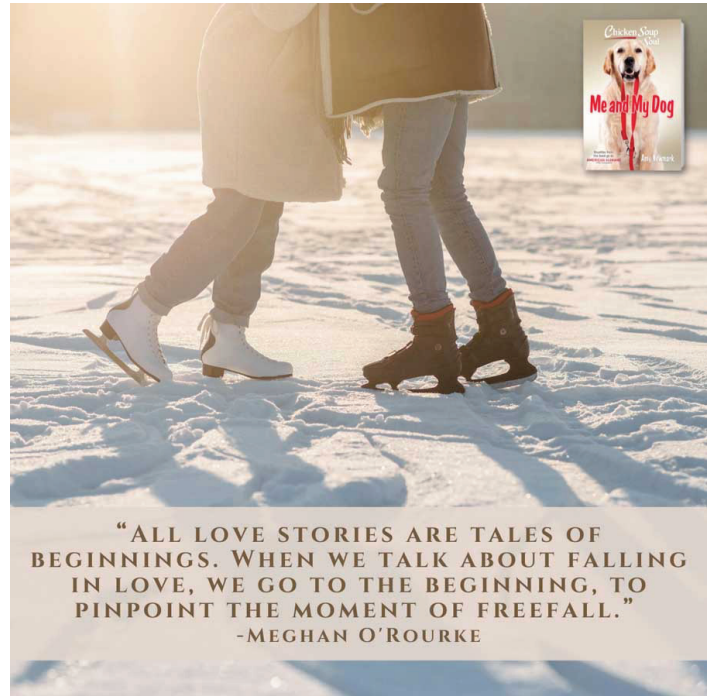
Monday, Feb. 12

Senior Menu: Autumn soup, peas, chicken salad on croissant, cinnamon apple sauce.
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.
School Lunch: Chicken patty, sweet potato fries.
School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.
Boys Junior High Basketball: Sisseton at Groton Area in the Arena: 7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m.
Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 13

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, pineapple and mandarin oranges, breadstick.
School Breakfast: Waffles.
School Lunch: Meatballs, tiny whole potatoes.
Junior High Boys Basketball at Waubay: 7th at 4

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



"ALL LOVE STORIES ARE TALES OF BEGINNINGS. WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FALLING IN LOVE, WE GO TO THE BEGINNING, TO PINPOINT THE MOMENT OF FREEFALL."
-MEGHAN O'ROURKE

p.m., 8th at 5:15 p.m.

Girls Basketball hosts Dakota Valley: JV game at 4:30 p.m., Varsity at 5:45 p.m.

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Council, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 14

Senior Menu: Beef stew, buttermilk biscuit, Waldorf salad, sherbert.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Tuna noodle hot dish, peas.

Ash Wednesday

Emmanuel Lutheran: Soup supper (WELCA executive board serving), 6 p.m.; Worship with communion, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Ash Wednesday service, 7 p.m.

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

United Methodist: Community coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Lent Bible Study, 7 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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The Kansas City Chiefs won Super Bowl LVIII last night, beating the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 in a dramatic overtime finish. It marked just the second overtime game in Super Bowl history and the first time a team has won back-to-back titles since the New England Patriots in 2003-04.

Egyptian officials threatened yesterday to suspend its peace treaty with Israel should the country's forces advance into the border city of Rafah. The warning comes as Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated plans to move into the city, saying evacuation routes were being established for civilians.

Sony Music Group has reportedly bought half of the late Michael Jackson's recording and publishing rights for \$600M after a year of negotiations. The deal, if finalized, values the iconic pop artist's music catalog at \$1.2B, the richest to date.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Mariah Carey, Cher, Lenny Kravitz, and Mary J. Blige highlight 15 nominees for 2024 class of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Kelvin Kiptum, current marathon world record holder, dies at 24 in car crash. Iowa's Caitlin Clark scores 31 but falls eight points short of breaking NCAA women's career scoring record in loss to Nebraska; will have next attempt at record Thursday.

Christopher Nolan wins top prize for "Oppenheimer" at 76th Directors Guild of America; see full list of winners. Movie box office has worst Super Bowl weekend in more than three decades, with films only bringing in \$40M combined.

Science & Technology

Asteroid fragments that landed near Berlin in late January recovered; rocks revealed to be aubrite, a rare mineral potential originating from the planet Mercury.

North Carolina aquarium reports potential asexual reproduction in a stingray; birth expectedly shortly, researchers say the ray may also have been impregnated by a bamboo shark.

Researchers pinpoint genetic mutation allowing people from the Peruvian Andes to better function in low oxygen environments; adaptation is similar to that seen in Tibetan populations and some deep-sea fish species.

Business & Markets

Markets end Friday mixed (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq +1.25%), but all three indexes notch fifth straight winning week; S&P 500 finishes above 5,000 for the first time in index history.

Google One, the company's bundled consumer cloud storage service, hits 100 million paid subscribers; Google-owned YouTube Premium passed 100 million paid users Feb. 1.

Moody's credit rating agency downgrades Israeli debt from A1 to A2, citing economic toll of war in Gaza. CEO of Nigeria's Access Bank, the largest in Africa by total customers, dies in California helicopter crash.

Politics & World Affairs

US Senate clears procedural vote on \$95B foreign aid bill in rare Super Bowl Sunday session, final vote expected this week; similar bill with border-related funding failed Wednesday. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin hospitalized Sunday with bladder issue; Austin failed to inform White House of previous extended stay last month.

Independent supporters of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan win most seats in Pakistani parliamentary elections, followed by military-backed party. Center-right candidate Alexander Stubb wins Finland presidential election. Three dead in protests over delayed presidential elections in Senegal.

Two wounded, including a young child, after woman opens fire at celebrity pastor Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston Sunday; assailant reportedly shot and killed by two off-duty officers.

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NEC Boys' Basketball

Waubay/Summit moves to number 2 in Region 1A

An interesting shift in the number two spot in Region 1A. Both Milbank and Waubay/Summit had two wins in the past week, but Milbank fell to third and Waubay/Summit moved from fourth to second in Region 1A.

Boys NEC Standings

	NEC	Overall
Hamlin	8-0	15-3
Groton Area	8-1	12-4
Clark/Willow Lake	6-1	9-7
Roncalli	5-3	10-7
Milbank	5-3	11-5
Deuel	4-4	7-11
Webster Area	3-6	8-10
Tiospa Zina	3-4	8-6
Britton-Hecla *	2-6	4-13
Sisseton	1-8	3-13
Redfield	0-9	1-15

* Class B Team

Milbank 72, Sisseton 53
 Hamlin 85, Deuel 34
 Groton 66, Redfield 22
 Clark-Willow Lake 63, Britton-Hecla 35
 Tiospa Zina 64, Sisseton 34

Feb. 12: Clark/Willow Lake at Roncalli

Feb. 13: Clark/Willow Lake at Tiospa Zina

Feb. 13: Sisseton at Deuel

Feb. 13: Britton-Hecla at Hamlin

Feb. 15: Hamlin at Clark/Willow Lake

Feb. 15: Roncalli at Deuel









Feb. 16: Redfield at Tiospa Zina

Feb. 16: Britton-Hecla at Groton Area

Feb. 16: Milbank at Webster Area

Feb. 23: Tiospa Zina at Milbank

Region 1A Standings

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Groton Area	12	4	.750	43.312
2	 Waubay/Summit	11	5	.688	41.875
3	 Milbank	11	5	.688	41.688
4	 Tiospa Zina	8	6	.571	41.643
5	 Aberdeen Roncalli	10	7	.588	40.882
6	 Webster Area	8	10	.444	39.722
7	 Sisseton	3	13	.188	36.938
8	 Redfield	1	15	.062	34.625

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NEC Girls' Basketball

Nothing changes in the conference race and nothing changes in the Region 1A standings. The regional tournaments will begin next weekQ

Sisseton 63, Milbank 34
 Sisseton 51, Tiospa Zina 13
 Clark-Willow Lake 69, Britton-Hecla 44
 Hamlin 56, Deuel 30
 Groton 61, Redfield 37

Girls NEC Standings

Sisseton	9-0	14-1
Hamlin	7-1	9-6
Roncalli	7-2	12-3
Milbank	5-4	9-6
Groton Area	6-3	11-5
Deuel	4-4	6-10
Webster Area	3-6	6-10
Clark/Willow Lake	3-5	6-10
Redfield	2-7	5-10
Britton-Hecla *	1-7	6-10
Tiospa Zina	0-8	0-13









* Class B Team

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

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

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

Girls Region 1A Standings

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Sisseton	16	1	.941	46.000
2	 Aberdeen Roncalli	15	3	.833	44.500
3	 Groton Area	12	6	.667	42.833
4	 Milbank	9	9	.500	40.667
5	 Waubay/Summit	9	8	.529	39.882
6	 Webster Area	7	12	.368	38.632
7	 Redfield	5	13	.278	38.056
8	 Tiospa Zina	1	16	.059	34.882

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Name Released in Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: I-29, Mile marker 66, 6 miles south of Tea, SD
When: 4:08 p.m., Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Driver 1: Lucus Alan Reimers, Male, 39, from Brandon, SD, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2023 Ram 2500 Tradesman
Seat Belt Used: Under investigation

Lincoln County, S.D.- A 39-year-old Brandon, SD man died Wednesday afternoon in a single vehicle crash in Lincoln County.

Preliminary crash information indicates Lucus A. Reimers of Brandon, SD was the driver of a 2023 Ram 2500 Tradesman and was traveling northbound on I-29 near Tea, SD. For reasons unknown, the vehicle left the roadway to the east, entered onto the shoulder and struck the guard cables and guard rail before going airborne into the overpass pillar. Reimers died at the scene. There were no passengers in the 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.

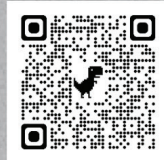


ROSEHILL
CHURCH

Women's Gathering

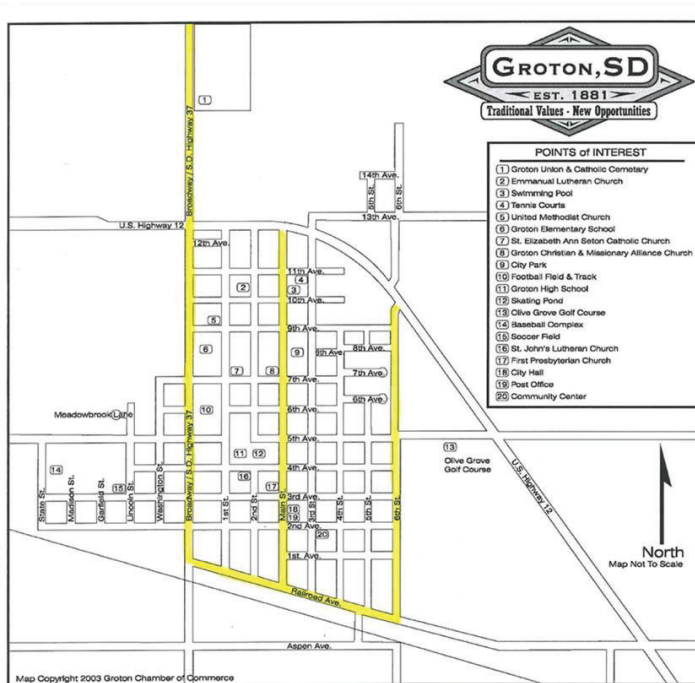
IF: 2024

IF2024.COM



12099 Rose Hill Road | February 23, 2024 | 6 - 10 pm
Langford, South Dakota | February 24, 2024 | 9 am - 4:30 pm

Notice of Garbage Pickup- Effective the week of February 12th



To help preserve our streets, Groton residents are asked to bring their garbage to the following locations until further notice:

Railroad Avenue, Main Street, Sixth Street, & Highway 37

Residents of the Broadway Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to **Highway 37**.

Residents north of 13th Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Developments) need to bring their garbage to the **Bus Barns**.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated during the spring thaw.

Please bring your garbage bags and/or cans to these locations for Tuesday pickup!

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Groton Tuff Tigers Youth Tournament Results for Groton Tuff Tigers

Tots 6 & Under 32-33: Watson Herron's place is 3rd.

Round 1 - Bentley Rush (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Watson Herron (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:18)

Round 3 - Camdyn Huffman (Webster) won by fall over Watson Herron (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:30)

Tots 6 & Under 36-38: Hayden Perkins's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Sutton Howard (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Hayden Perkins (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:15)

Round 2 - Armour Waletich (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Hayden Perkins (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 1:03)

Round 3 - Jackson Meyer (Webster) won by fall over Hayden Perkins (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:08)

Tots 6 & Under 37-40: Barrett Vedvei's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Hudson Sandve (Warner/Northwestern) won by tech fall over Barrett Vedvei (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 19-4)

Round 2 - Kolt Olson (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) won by forfeit over Barrett Vedvei (Groton Tuff Tigers) (FF)

Round 3 - Eric Shoultz (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Barrett Vedvei (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:27)

Tots 6 & Under 38-42: Laiken Neigel's place is 2nd and has scored 12.0 team points.

Round 1 - Laiken Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Lorena Geditz (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Dec 15-13)

Round 2 - Laiken Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Talon Sichmeller (Webster) (Fall 0:10)

Round 3 - Austin Carlson (Milbank) won by fall over Laiken Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 2:30)

Tots 6 & Under 40-43: Brooks Sombke's place is 1st and has scored 19.5 team points.

Round 1 - Brooks Sombke (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Fletcher Hoyle (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Fall 0:12)

Round 2 - Brooks Sombke (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by tech fall over Grady Peterson (Dakota Boyz) (TF 15-0)

Round 3 - Brooks Sombke (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Weston Nilson (Border West) (Fall 0:24)

Tots 6 & Under 43-44: Ryker Herron's place is 1st and has scored 20.0 team points.

Round 1 - Ryker Herron (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Kowen Frericks (Warner/Northwestern) (Fall 0:29)

Round 2 - Ryker Herron (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Greg Johnson (LaMoure Loboos) (Fall 2:15)

Round 3 - Ryker Herron (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Archer Hoyle (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Fall 0:23)

Tots 6 & Under 47-49: Brooks Vedvei's place is 2nd and has scored 13.5 team points.

Round 1 - Kyson Anderson (Lyman raiders) won by tech fall over Brooks Vedvei (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 15-0)

Round 2 - Brooks Vedvei (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Tommie Feldhaus (Huron) (Fall 2:21)

Round 3 - Brooks Vedvei (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by tech fall over Reece Breitbart (Jamestown) (TF 24-9)

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Tots 6 & Under 49-51: Vic Flihs's place is 1st and has scored 18.0 team points.

Round 1 - Vic Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Renlee Shryock (Redfield) (Dec 9-8)
Round 2 - Vic Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by forfeit over Liam Sandve (Warner/Northwestern) (FF)
Round 3 - Vic Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Jr O`Neill (Dakota Boyz) (Fall 3:52)

Tots 6 & Under 49-52: Huntley Frost's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Bexten Batty (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Huntley Frost (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:25)
Round 2 - Wesley Nightingale (Dakota Boyz) won by tech fall over Huntley Frost (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 17-2)
Round 3 - Lincoln Peckham (Warner/Northwestern) won by fall over Huntley Frost (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:57)

Tots 6 & Under 52-54: Claire Erickson's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Westen Lechner (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Claire Erickson (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:11)
Round 2 - Cody Carey (Webster) won by tech fall over Claire Erickson (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 20-5)
Round 3 - Emma Wacholz (Warner/Northwestern) won by fall over Claire Erickson (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:39)

Tots 6 & Under 57-61: Kase Ronning's place is 1st and has scored 20.0 team points.

Round 1 - Kase Ronning (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Amelia Wacholz (Warner/Northwestern) (Fall 0:09)
Round 2 - Kase Ronning (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Granger Hansen (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:27)
Round 3 - Kase Ronning (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Dylan Vinagera (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:42)

Tots 6 & Under 57-61: Granger Hansen's place is 3rd and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Dylan Vinagera (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Granger Hansen (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 3:58)
Round 2 - Kase Ronning (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Granger Hansen (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:27)
Round 3 - Granger Hansen (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Amelia Wacholz (Warner/Northwestern) (Fall 1:55)

Bantam 7 & 8 47-49: Miakoda Neigel's place is 3rd and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Miakoda Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Zachary Sherman (Redfield) (Fall 0:28)
Round 2 - Miles Edgar (Faulkton Trojans) won by fall over Miakoda Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:57)
Round 3 - Julian Beltran (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Miakoda Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:12)

Bantam 7 & 8 48-50: Andy Clark's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Gavin Rithmiller (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Andy Clark (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:12)
Round 2 - Sophia Hargens-Flores (Miller) won by fall over Andy Clark (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:12)
Round 3 - Zach Vrchota (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Andy Clark (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:10)

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Bantam 7 & 8 48-51: Landry Johnson's place is 3rd and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Elliott Kallas (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) won by tech fall over Landry Johnson (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 16-1)

Round 2 - Garrett Johnson (Dakota Boyz) won by fall over Landry Johnson (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 3:56)

Round 3 - Landry Johnson (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Henry Lesnar (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:31)

Bantam 7 & 8 50-52: Destry Neigel's place is 3rd and has scored 7.0 team points.

Round 1 - Destry Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Roper Hansen (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Dec 14-13)

Round 2 - Hayes Frericks (Warner/Northwestern) won by fall over Destry Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:09)

Round 3 - Jameson Marx (Clark/Willow Lake Cyclones) won by fall over Destry Neigel (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:38)

Bantam 7 & 8 52-54: Levi Davis's place is 1st and has scored 18.0 team points.

Round 1 - Levi Davis (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Liliana Hargens-Flores (Miller) (Fall 0:52)

Round 2 - Levi Davis (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Henry Schaffner (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Dec 8-5)

Round 3 - Levi Davis (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Colter Johnson (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Fall 0:58)

Bantam 7 & 8 55-59: Roman Bahr's place is 1st and has scored 20.0 team points.

Round 1 - Roman Bahr (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Zak Kanizar (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Fall 0:20)

Round 2 - Roman Bahr (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Brodie Waltman (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:14)

Round 3 - Roman Bahr (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Jemma Olson (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Fall 0:40)

Bantam 7 & 8 74-80: Kroy Khali's place is 4th and has scored 6.0 team points.

Round 1 - Kroy Khali (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Oakley Town (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:31)

Round 2 - Nolan Graves (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by forfeit over Kroy Khali (Groton Tuff Tigers) (FF)

Round 3 - Andrew Hieb (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by forfeit over Kroy Khali (Groton Tuff Tigers) (FF)

Midget 9 & 10 52-57: Bennett Iverson's place is 2nd and has scored 14.0 team points.

Round 1 - Bennett Iverson (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Zane Hubsch (Webster) (Fall 0:39)

Round 2 - Bennett Iverson (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Andrew Currence (Dakota Boyz) (Fall 3:22)

Round 3 - Tag Edgar (Faulkton Trojans) won by fall over Bennett Iverson (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 4:09)

Midget 9 & 10 59-60: Carter Zoellner's place is 3rd and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Peyton Jandel (Warner/Northwestern) won by fall over Carter Zoellner (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:38)

Round 2 - Grayson Nightingale (Dakota Boyz) won by fall over Carter Zoellner (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:39)

Round 3 - Carter Zoellner (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Logan Bartz (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:39)

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Midget 9 & 10 61-67 B: Bo Flihs's place is 2nd and has scored 14.0 team points.

Round 1 - Grady Rithmiller (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Bo Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 1:25)

Round 2 - Bo Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Bowdrey Logan (Doland) (Fall 1:25)

Round 3 - Bo Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Corven Schmieg (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Fall 1:08)

Midget 9 & 10 67-74: Braxten Sombke's place is 1st and has scored 19.0 team points.

Round 1 - Braxten Sombke (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by major decision over Hesten Edgar (Faulkton Trojans) (Maj 11-0)

Round 2 - Braxten Sombke (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Quentin Mitzel (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 2:31)

Round 3 - Braxten Sombke (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Ivan Acosta (Dakota Rattlers) (Fall 1:07)

Midget 9 & 10 67-71: Micah Krause's place is 2nd and has scored 14.0 team points.

Round 1 - Micah Krause (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Alyssa Kanizar (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Fall 1:16)

Round 2 - Rusty Hanson (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Micah Krause (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 1:15)

Round 3 - Micah Krause (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Treyton Hutson (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Fall 2:16)

Midget 9 & 10 68-75: Jagger Penning's place is 3rd and has scored 7.0 team points.

Round 1 - Jagger Penning (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Jaxon Arndt (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Dec 11-6)

Round 2 - Hendrix Heath (Warner/Northwestern) won by fall over Jagger Penning (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:32)

Round 3 - Briggs Uzzle (Redfield) won by fall over Jagger Penning (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:38)

Midget 9 & 10 71-79: Samuel Flihs's place is 3rd and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Samuel Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Ryder Long (Warner/Northwestern) (Fall 1:08)

Round 2 - Oliver Suther (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Samuel Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 4:01)

Round 3 - Paxten Anderson (Milbank) won by fall over Samuel Flihs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 3:55)

Midget 9 & 10 76-80: Elsy Hagen's place is 3rd and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Sawyer Adler (Milbank) won by fall over Elsy Hagen (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:29)

Round 2 - Jaxson Hansen (Webster) won by tech fall over Elsy Hagen (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 16-1)

Round 3 - Elsy Hagen (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Eli Wacholz (Warner/Northwestern) (Fall 0:57)

Midget 9 & 10 81-85: Huntley Overacker's place is 1st and has scored 20.0 team points.

Round 1 - Huntley Overacker (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Dreyzen Barse (Dakota Boyz) (Fall 0:12)

Round 2 - Huntley Overacker (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Kora Klapperich (Warner/Northwestern) (Fall 1:13)

Round 3 - Huntley Overacker (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Jacob Powell (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:13)

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Midget 9 & 10 85-92: Rosalyn Block's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Theodore Hadrick (Faulkton Trojans) won by fall over Rosalyn Block (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 3:36)

Round 2 - Dylan Haas (CLAW) won by fall over Rosalyn Block (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 3:46)

Round 3 - Kade Ellingson (Dakota Boyz) won by decision over Rosalyn Block (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Dec 7-4)

Midget 9 & 10 107-114: Keenan Moody's place is 1st and has scored 20.0 team points.

Round 1 - Keenan Moody (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Emersyn Eimers (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Fall 0:34)

Round 2 - Keenan Moody (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Bennett Richmond (Lisbon wrestling club) (Fall 0:21)

Round 3 - Keenan Moody (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Michael Escarcega (Dakota Boyz) (Fall 0:16)

Novice 11 & 12 71-76: Bentley Ehresmann's place is 2nd and has scored 14.0 team points.

Round 1 - Bentley Ehresmann (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Brekken Frost (Madison) (Fall 0:53)

Round 2 - Bentley Ehresmann (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Anderson Braun (Warner/Northwest-ern) (Fall 0:19)

Round 3 - Hunter Marx (Clark/Willow Lake Cyclones) won by tech fall over Bentley Ehresmann (Groton Tuff Tigers) (TF 15-0)

Novice 11 & 12 76-81: Brayson Hubbs's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Colton Biel (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Brayson Hubbs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 1:18)

Round 2 - Carter Lane (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Brayson Hubbs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 2:29)

Round 3 - Josie Feldhaus (Huron) won by fall over Brayson Hubbs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 2:34)

Novice 11 & 12 81-82: Preston Hinkelman's place is 1st and has scored 18.0 team points.

Round 1 - Preston Hinkelman (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Eddie Acosta (Dakota Rattlers) (Fall 3:37)

Round 2 - Preston Hinkelman (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Jeremyah Heidzig (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:28)

Round 3 - Preston Hinkelman (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Gavin Marx (Clark/Willow Lake Cyclones) (Dec 6-4)

Novice 11 & 12 82-89: Adam Fliehs's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Tilden Edgar (Faulkton Trojans) won by fall over Adam Fliehs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:40)

Round 2 - Landon Schaffner (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Adam Fliehs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:45)

Round 3 - Eddie Acosta (Dakota Rattlers) won by fall over Adam Fliehs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:23)

Novice 11 & 12 86-93: Parker Zoellner's place is 1st and has scored 16.0 team points.

Round 1 - Parker Zoellner (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Cayden Maunu (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) (Dec 6-2)

Round 2 - Parker Zoellner (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Breven Schmiege (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Dec 2-0)

Round 3 - Parker Zoellner (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Draycen Easterby (Ipswich Area Youth Wrestling) (Fall 1:26)

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Novice 11 & 12 137-145: Hank Fliehs's place is 3rd.

Round 1 - Rowan Clark (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by decision over Hank Fliehs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Dec 9-7)

Round 2 - Tristan Powell (Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club) won by fall over Hank Fliehs (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:36)

Schoolboy 13 &14 96-101: Luke Gauer's place is 1st and has scored 7.0 team points.

Round 1 - Luke Gauer (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by decision over Carter Grobe (Britton Youth Wrestling) (Dec 3-2)

Round 2 - Luke Gauer (Groton Tuff Tigers) won by fall over Yancy Cook (Dakota Boyz) (Fall 3:14)

Schoolboy 13 &14 108-117: Maddie Little's place is 3rd.

Round 1 - Kylan Saker (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Maddie Little (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 4:03)

Round 3 - Kooper Wookey (Clark/Willow Lake Cyclones) won by fall over Maddie Little (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 2:36)

Schoolboy 13 &14 124-139: Brantley Belden's place is 3rd.

Round 1 - Blayden Downs (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Brantley Belden (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 1:28)

Round 2 - Colt Hansen (Britton Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Brantley Belden (Groton Tuff Tigers) (Fall 0:27)

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Anyone interested in sponsoring the junior high games Monday on GDILIVE.COM? The 2 games would be \$50. Text Paul at 605-397-7460

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

For just the second time in Super Bowl history, Sunday's contest between the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers needed extra time to determine the winner. For a matchup featuring some of the best offensive players in the league, like quarterback Patrick Mahomes and running back Christian McCaffrey - and two of the best offensive minds coaching from the sidelines - this game came down to defense and special teams. Ultimately, the Chiefs were able to win the game in overtime 25-22.

The Super Bowl was a snooze fest until halfway through the second quarter. The first eight drives of the game ended with a: fumble, punt, punt, punt, field goal, fumble, punt, punt. Finally, with four minutes and twenty-three seconds left in the half, San Francisco found the endzone to extend their lead 10-0. Kansas City responded with a 13-play drive but had to settle for a field goal, and the first half ended with a score of 10-3.

The second half started much like the first, with dominant defenses forcing punts on five of the first seven drives. The only points scored in that time was a field goal for the Chiefs, cutting their deficit to four points. With less than three minutes left in the third quarter, a 49ers special team miscue gave the Chiefs a short field and it only took Patrick Mahomes one play to reach the end zone and take a 13-10 lead.

At this point, the floodgates opened and it became a back-and-forth game.

San Francisco responded to the Chiefs' score with a touchdown of their own, but their kicker missed the extra point. The next three drives all ended with field goals, punctuated by a KC field goal with three seconds left to tie the game. And for just the second time in history, the Super Bowl was going to overtime.

The 49ers won the coin toss and elected to receive the ball. They marched down the field with a 13-play, 66-yard drive but stalled in the redzone and they had to settle for three points. Kansas City then got the ball and responded with their own 13-play drive. However, the Chiefs were able to punch it in for a touchdown. And with that, the Kansas City Chiefs' dynasty was confirmed, as they won their second Super Bowl in a row and third in the last five years.

With the Super Bowl over and a champion crowned, it's time to turn our attention to the 2024 season. We'll evaluate the roster, identifying strengths and weaknesses, before digging into free agency and the NFL draft. This is a key offseason for the Minnesota Vikings, with some big questions looming at quarterback and what the team will do with Justin Jefferson nearing the end of his contract

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Can you explain the concepts of additionality, permanence and leakage with regard to carbon offsets?
-- Paul. C., Houston, TX

As global temperatures rise, finding methods to decrease carbon emissions and decarbonize has become a focal point among businesses and institutions. Phasing out fossil fuels in favor of renewable energy has been a significant shift toward achieving carbon emission reduction.

However, given the limits of our current technology and resources, there are still emissions that are 'inevitable' or 'un-abatable.' This is where carbon offsets come into play whereby companies and other organizations can enter a 'voluntary carbon market' and buy credits for their excesses that theoretically enable the removal of carbon emissions through investments in environmental projects.

For the carbon emission reductions achieved by an offset project to be genuine, they must exceed, or be additional, to the amount of carbon that would have been removed if the carbon offset credit market did not exist. For instance, an emissions reduction project that a company undertakes to adhere to a government-imposed carbon cap would not be deemed additional because the reduction would have happened irrespective of whether or not the company was able to purchase carbon offset credits. A quality offset credit represents one that permanently removes at least one metric ton of additional carbon emission that has not been previously claimed and does not derive its removal through activities that cause significant social or environmental harm to local communities or biodiversity.

Without this additionality, credits could be awarded for activities that would have occurred regardless, resulting in emissions rising without any actual reduction elsewhere. Beyond additionality, addressing the issues of permanence and leakage control is also vital, or there is a risk that the carbon stored or reduced by offset projects could be released back into the atmosphere, leading to the re-emission of greenhouse gasses and undermining the environmental benefits achieved. Permanence is therefore key to maintaining trust and legitimacy among stakeholders who rely on carbon offsets to achieve their sustainability goals.

Leakage control pertains to the potential unintended consequences of offset projects. One example of carbon offset leakage with land use involves a reforestation project aimed at sequestering carbon dioxide by planting trees in a specific area. While the project may successfully reduce emissions within its designated boundaries, it could inadvertently lead to deforestation or land conversion in neighboring regions. This indirect land-use change can result in emissions leakage, as the carbon stored in the newly planted trees may be offset by the carbon released from deforested or converted areas outside the project boundaries.

In the future, implementing more rigorous standards and comprehensive monitoring may be essential to avoid carbon offsets being exploited as a way for organizations to portray themselves as environmentally responsible without implementing more direct measures to reduce their carbon emissions. However, for the time being, additionality, in combination with permanence and leakage control, are the keys to maintaining an effective voluntary carbon market.



For the carbon emission reductions achieved by an offset project to be genuine, they must exceed, or be additional, to the amount of carbon that would have been removed if the carbon offset credit market did not exist. Credit: Pexels.com.

“Fundamental Functions: Ear, Nose, Throat”

I confess that occasionally even doctors get squeamish. Or perhaps more honestly, this doctor does. My personal list has gotten pretty short, but one of the things that still makes me squirm is something I nevertheless frequently recommend to my patients.

So what is this mysterious and rather ominous medical recommendation? Nasal saline irrigation.

The practice of rinsing the nose out with liquid probably originated centuries ago in India, and it remains part of spiritual ritual as well as traditional medicine around the world. However, it isn't something I learned about in medical school. Western medical research into it began in earnest perhaps 25 to 30 years ago.

How does this rather torturous sounding practice help? It physically removes germs, allergen and irritant particles, it loosens thick mucous, and it helps the cilia — the tiny hairs lining our airways— clean things out.

Although the practice is generally safe for almost everyone, there is one very important caveat. Your equipment must be clean, and the solution used prepared with sterile or distilled water, to prevent a very rare, but highly deadly, infection.

When I tell someone I think they should flush a cup or so of salt water into one nostril and out the other one, and then do it again from the other side, they usually react with dismay. I freely admit that the idea sounds pretty awful, and that it makes my toes curl every time I suggest it. Then I tell them a story.

I first recommended this for a patient who was all of 7 years old. Her horrible allergies and chronic sinus problems triggered frequent asthma attacks. She had a collection of inhalers and pills from the allergist, her dad had torn up the carpet, and the family dog was bathed twice a week and banished to the back yard. Parents, child, and doctor were all a little desperate. When I rather hesitantly suggested nasal saline irrigation, her mom was willing to try it.

A month later, my little patient came dancing down the hallway, announcing with glee “Dr. Deb, Dr. Deb, I love my Netti Pot!” The simple act of regularly rinsing the allergens and irritants out of her nose had improved her symptoms so much that she could play outside with her dog. Now I tell my reluctant patients that if a literal child can do it, we can borrow some of her courage and try it too.

If you suffer from chronic sinus problems, or even just the next time a cold or allergies has you stuffed up and miserable, ask your doctor if you should grit your teeth and give it a try.

Debra Johnson, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust for 22 Seasons, streaming live on Facebook and on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Debra Johnston, MD

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Democratic Leadership Column: GOP Chooses Corporations Over People Minority Leader Sen. Reynold Nesiba

Greetings from the South Dakota Capitol! We are past the half way point of the 2024 Legislative Session. This week saw Democrats, Republicans and the Governor working together to give people who have been incarcerated a second chance. Senate Bill 57 allows people with a criminal history to still receive a professional or occupational licensure. This will open the doors for people who have served their sentence to get good paying jobs and become productive citizens. It was Democratic votes that helped get the bill passed in Senate committee and on the Senate floor. When Republicans give us good bills, Democrats are eager to work with them. We're happy that Governor Kristi Noem signed it into law this week.

Unfortunately, Republicans did not work with Democrats on other bills to better protect hard working South Dakotans. I brought three bills this week to Senate Commerce and Energy that all failed. One would have given workers more time to report an injury in order to receive workers' compensation. The Smithfield plant is in my district and we have employees getting repetitive motion injuries, but they only have three days to file a claim. My bill would have given workers 15 days, which would still be one of the shortest in the nation. Another bill would have recognized hair discrimination as unfair in the workplace. The South Dakota Chapter of the NAACP gave compelling testimony of how often black and brown people are discriminated against at work because of their hair. And the third would have put more protections in place for warehouse distribution center employees. Representatives from Teamsters testified in support of my bill, citing many of the issues that have come to light with Amazon's distribution centers. Instead, Republicans sided with corporations and insurance companies to kill all three bills.

Democrats also stood with parents to give them back their rights when it comes to their child's health-care. Senate Bill 216 would have allowed transgender children to receive gender-affirming care if they have parental consent. This is an amendment to House Bill 1080 from last year that bans all gender-affirming care for trans youth. My bill was about bodily-autonomy and who gets to make decisions surrounding healthcare. I tried to amend the proposal to only allow for puberty-blockers, but I still couldn't get enough support. Instead, Republicans listened to the false information about these life-saving treatments and vote against my bill. It's sad that the GOP think it's okay for a 16-year-old to get married with parental consent, but that same person can't get a puberty-blocker to live as their authentic self.

We did see some positive discussions this week in the Senate. Sen. Shawn Bordeaux proposed renaming South Scalp Creek Lakeside Use Area in Gregory County because of the offensive language used. He gave a masterclass on how legislation can lead to good conversations for change, even though the bill failed. Sen. Bordeaux was able to talk with Game, Fish and Parks to start the process of renaming the area. Also, Sen. Liz Larson's bill to prevent deepfakes from influencing elections in South Dakota passed out of committee. She did an amazing job in Senate State Affairs explaining to everyone about the threats of deepfakes. She even played audio of what sounded like former President Donald Trump saying he supports Sen. Larson and was becoming a Democrat. What her bill does is require someone who produces a deepfake to disclose that it is a deepfake 90 days before the election. I believe she found a South Dakota sized approach to protect our elections.

Thank you for continuing to stay up to date on the legislative session. We have one more week until cross-over day, so it will be a busy few days to meet that deadline. Democrats have several more bills coming this week to improve the lives of South Dakotans and we hope our Republican colleagues support these pieces of legislation.

Thank you

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Assistant Minority Leader Rep. Erin Healy

Week five of the Legislative Session was productive for many members of the Democratic caucus as we presented even more of our bills in committees. Rep. Kameron Nelson brought legislation to provide new protections for vulnerable and marginalized populations. Unfortunately, several of our Republican colleagues chose to be hypocrites and voted against it despite supporting a similar bill to protect the Jewish community. Rep. Kady Wittman passed a bill out of House Judiciary that creates a civil course of action for victims of stealthing, which is when a person removes a condom without consent during sex. I brought a bill that would eliminate out of pocket expenses for people who need diagnostic and/or supplemental breast examinations, however too many Republicans voted against it.

One of the main topics of conversation this week came out of House State Affairs. HCR 6008 is a resolution Republicans introduced opposing an initiated measure to place the right to an abortion in the state Constitution. This is the Republicans' way to politicize abortion in our state legislature. South Dakotans have the right to make direct change through citizen-led ballot initiatives. They deserve to vote on important issues that impact their lives. Legislators should respect the initiated measure process and not use their elected position to intervene. Opposing initiatives that South Dakotans are working hard to put on the ballot is a dangerous precedent to set and legislators should be encouraging citizens to participate in democracy—not utilize their position to make a political statement.

This week we also voted on a few pipeline bills that addressed landowner rights. Our caucus voted in favor of landowners. The two bills would put in new protections and concessions for rural landowners. They state that companies and utilities with eminent domain authority must provide detailed notice to landowners and pay property owners \$1 for every linear foot of pipeline built on their land.

As we move onto week six, House Democrats will continue to look out for hardworking South Dakotans. Rep. Peri Pourier is introducing a bill to create a two-year task force that would study Native American child welfare and expands ICWA into our state law.

Please reach out to us if you have any questions about current legislation—we enjoy hearing from our constituents!

Thank you

For questions, you can contact the SDDP Executive Director Dan Ahlers at dan@sddp.org or contact the state party office by phone at 605-271-5405 or 605-940-3071.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Legislative Roundup: zombie bills, teacher pay, lithium tax, pipelines and more

BY: JOHN HULT, MAKENZIE HUBER AND JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 11, 2024 8:00 AM

One of the effects of a faster start to this year's legislative session in Pierre has been the prevalence of "zombie bills," given new life after an initial defeat.

Rather than allowing the first week of session to pass with little action, as was often the case in years past, lawmakers jumped right into bill hearings. The earlier start gave some ideas extra time to rise again after death.

Early in January, Rep. Tyler Tordsen, R-Sioux Falls, unsuccessfully sponsored a resolution that would have asked voters if they'd like to choose candidates for attorney general, secretary of state, state treasurer and other "constitutional" state offices through primary elections. Party leaders currently pick those candidates at conventions.

Tordsen's second attempt took the form of a bill to create primaries for attorney general and secretary of state, and to allow governor candidates to choose their own running mates without needing approval at a convention. The House rejected that bill on Wednesday.

Another example: Sen. Brent Hoffman, R-Sioux Falls, sponsored a school safety bill that was rejected Jan. 11 during the first week of the session. He filed a new bill cutting the requirement for armed guards at every school, but the bill failed in the Senate on Jan. 31.

And another example: A committee rejected a bill targeting drag performances at college campuses 7-4 on Jan. 24. The next day, a new bill with a different sponsor popped up, targeting drag performances more broadly. That second bill is scheduled for its initial hearing this week.

Democratic Assistant Minority Leader Erin Healy, from Sioux Falls, called the multiple bills targeting drag shows "an abuse of the system."

"It's just unfortunate that we're sitting here having to listen to these bills again, having to listen from opponents and proponents who've already testified, people who have to come back into town to be here for these pieces of legislation," Healy said.

Republican leaders countered that revived ideas and reworked bills are part of a healthy process. Senate Republican Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, from Madison, said they haven't delayed the overall pace of the session.

"That is the most important thing to people in South Dakota, which is productivity," Crabtree said. "That's what the session's been on the House and Senate side, being very focused on business and tackling tough issues because we were prepared when we came here."

Teacher pay

Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, withdrew his minimum teacher salary bill last week, leaving the Department of Education's accountability bill as the only teacher pay bill standing. But Venhuizen's push for a minimum teacher salary hasn't died. House Speaker Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, is proposing an amendment to the department's bill that would effectively combine the two.

The amendment would require a statewide minimum teacher salary of \$48,000, which would increase each year based on the percent increase in state education funding. School districts would also have to meet average teacher salaries aligned with legislative funding increases. There is no new funding for

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schools in the bill.

House Bill 1048 is scheduled for a hearing in the House Education Committee on Monday.

Statewide public defender office

A bill to establish a statewide public defender office passed the House on Thursday with a 60-4 vote. The office would cost \$1.4 million annually and would help alleviate the financial burden counties face in providing legal representation to criminal defendants who can't afford an attorney. Counties would still shoulder much of the burden, with the state office take on only some types of cases. An amendment-passed by the House establishes 12-year term limits for members of the commission that would oversee the office. The bill's next stop is a Senate committee.

Making it easier for communities to become cities

A House bill making it easier for some communities to become incorporated cities passed through the Senate Local Government committee Wednesday on a 5-2 vote. The bill, which was motivated by the community of Black Hawk, now heads to the Senate floor. In Black Hawk's case, the bill would retain a requirement for Black Hawk to petition Rapid City for annexation before trying to become a city in its own right, but would remove a requirement for Black Hawk to additionally petition the city of Summerset.

Registering to vote with tribal ID cards

A bill that would allow Native Americans in South Dakota to register to vote using their tribal identification cards passed the Senate with a 29-3 vote Monday after being amended to go into effect in 2025 – after the election this November. The bill now goes to a House committee.

Policies on 'obscene' books

A bill that would require school districts and public libraries to publish policies on restricting minors from accessing obscene materials or books is sailing through the legislative process. The bill received unanimous support from the House last week and now heads to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Child pornography

A bill to ban the production, possession and distribution of computer-generated child pornography passed the House of Representatives on Monday on a 64-1 vote. The bill also separates child porn cases into categories by severity, with production being the most severe and possession being the least, and adds mandatory minimum sentences. Its next stop is the governor's desk.

Higher price for bad checks

On Monday, the governor signed a bill hiking the maximum fee for a returned check. Come July 1, businesses will be allowed to charge up to \$60. The previous limit was \$40.

Overdose deaths

The full Senate passed a bill 32-0 on Monday to stiffen the penalties for selling drugs that later kill their users. The harshest penalty listed in the bill – up to life in prison – is attached to the crime of selling fentanyl to a minor if that minor dies from an overdose. The bill is headed to a House committee.

No pot for forklift drivers

A bill to allow employers to penalize or fire medical cannabis users who work in safety-sensitive jobs and fail drug tests was delivered to the governor on Thursday. The House of Representatives passed it 58-7 on Monday.

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Lithium mining tax

A bill to impose a tax on lithium mining failed in the Senate by one vote Thursday, 23-9 (with two senators excused), needing a two-thirds majority of 24 votes to pass. A procedural motion to reconsider the bill has kept it alive for the time being, with potential further action this week. Companies are exploring for lithium in the Black Hills to feed the growing need for lithium-based batteries in electric vehicles and devices.

911 surcharges

A bill to increase funding for 911 call centers by raising phone customers' monthly surcharge from \$1.25 to \$2 per line passed a Senate committee in a 4-2 vote on Thursday and now the full Senate. In 2023, the existing surcharge generated about \$12.47 million in revenue. With the proposed increase and assuming no change in the number of service lines, the projected revenue is approximately \$19.95 million. The surcharge has not been increased since 2012.

SDSU dairy

A bill that would repeal \$7.5 million in state funding for South Dakota State University to construct a new dairy research and training facility passed the House of Representatives 48-16 on Thursday and now heads to a Senate committee. The original funding bill, which passed in 2021, was intended to support the development of a state-of-the-art dairy facility, but the university was unable to raise enough matching donations to construct the facility.

\$500 for land surveys

A bill stipulating that any person or entity looking to conduct an examination or survey on private property must have a pending or approved siting permit application with the state passed the House of Representatives on Thursday, 47-17. Additionally, entities seeking to enter private property for surveys would have to make a one-time payment of \$500 to the property owner as compensation for entry. The bill, which is a response to a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline, now heads to a Senate committee.

Pipeline payments

A bill specifying that carbon dioxide pipeline easement agreements would not be allowed to exceed 50 years and would automatically terminate if not used for the transportation of carbon dioxide within five years from their effective date passed the House of Representatives on Monday, 40-24. Landowners would be entitled to annual compensation for granting the easement, set at a minimum of \$1 per foot of pipeline each year the pipeline is active. The bill now heads to a Senate committee.

Recouping landowner legal fees

A bill requiring entities using eminent domain to cover some legal costs for landowners under certain conditions passed the House of Representatives on Thursday, 61-3. It says that if the final amount awarded to the property owner to access land is at least 20% higher than the offer made when the entity sued the landowner, the entity must reimburse the landowner for attorney fees. The bill is a response to a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline.

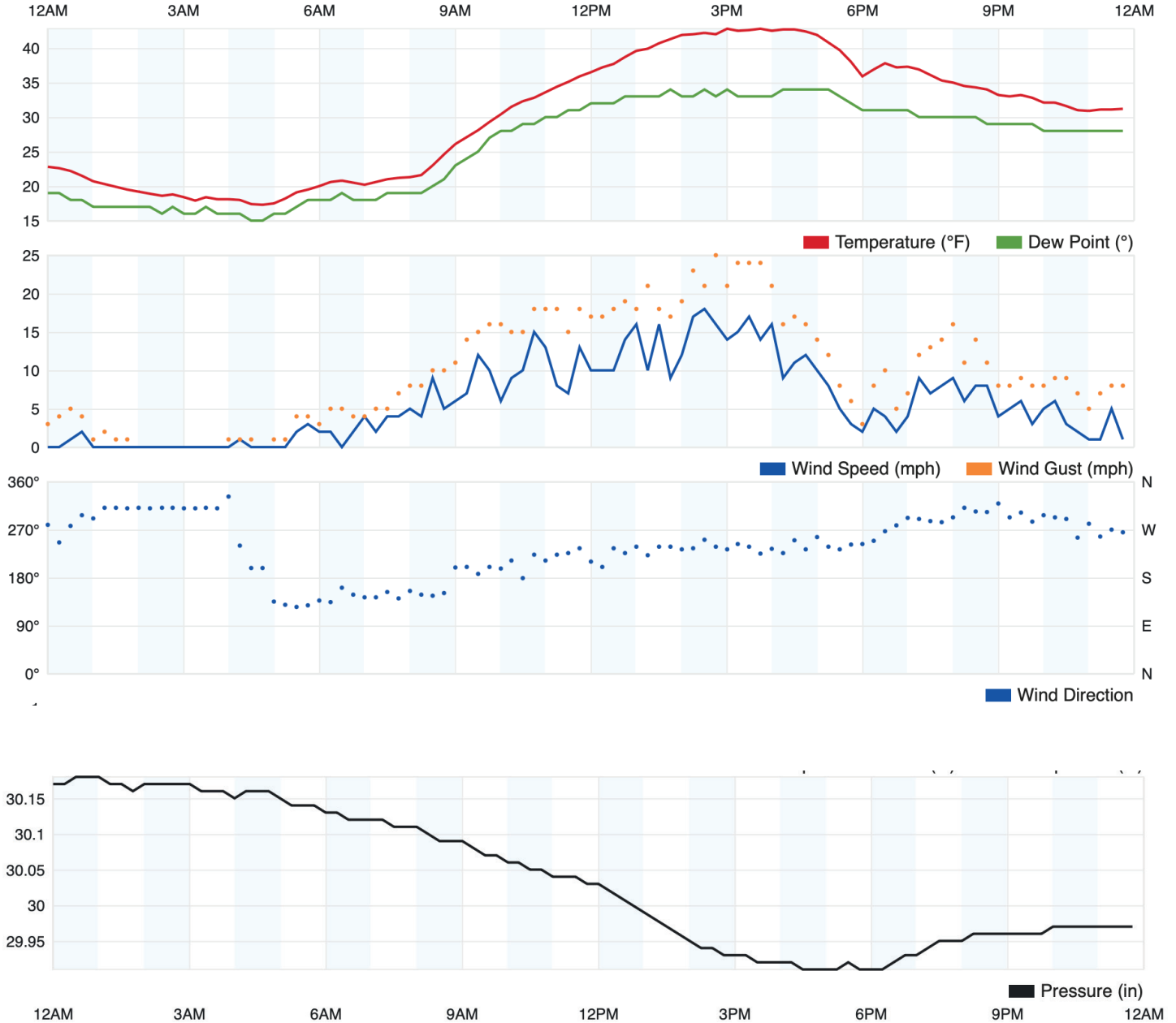
Hunting and fishing residency

Senate Bill 54 imposes stricter criteria to qualify for resident hunting and fishing licenses. The governor signed the bill Monday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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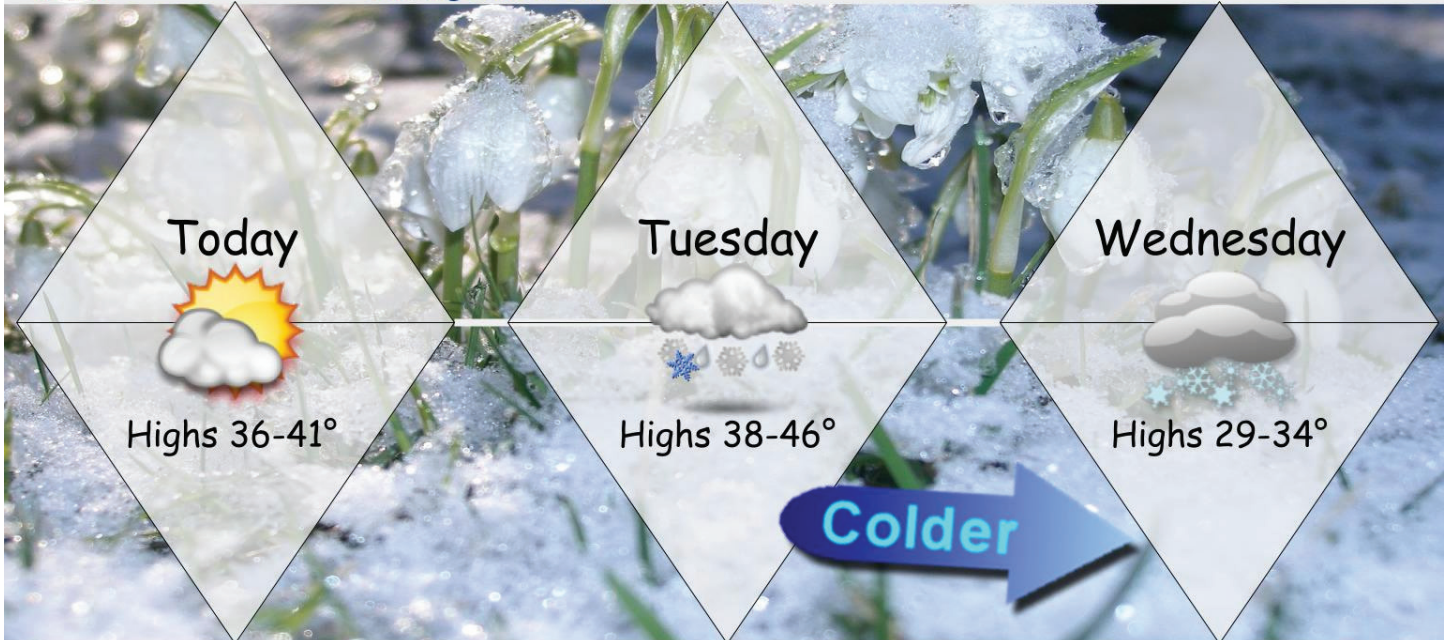
Mon Feb 12	Tue Feb 13	Wed Feb 14	Thu Feb 15	Fri Feb 16	Sat Feb 17	Sun Feb 18
38°F 25°F	39°F 23°F	32°F 20°F	25°F 12°F	17°F 9°F	25°F 16°F	25°F 15°F
W 7 MPH	S 10 MPH	WNW 10 MPH	NNW 13 MPH	N 12 MPH	W 16 MPH	NW 16 MPH
	20%	30%		10%		




3 Day Outlook

turning colder and more active

February 12, 2024
4:23 AM




Today




Highs 36-41°

Tuesday





Highs 38-46°

Wednesday



Highs 29-34°





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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Weak low pressure will bring light rain and snow to portions of central SD tonight. Patchy freezing rain may mix in as temperatures fall into the 20s tonight. More significant snow is possible Wednesday along and south of Hwy 14 as highs top out closer to average.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 43 °F at 3:02 PM

Low Temp: 17 °F at 4:34 AM

Wind: 25 mph at 2:36 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 18 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1921

Record Low: -36 in 1905

Average High: 28

Average Low: 5

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.24

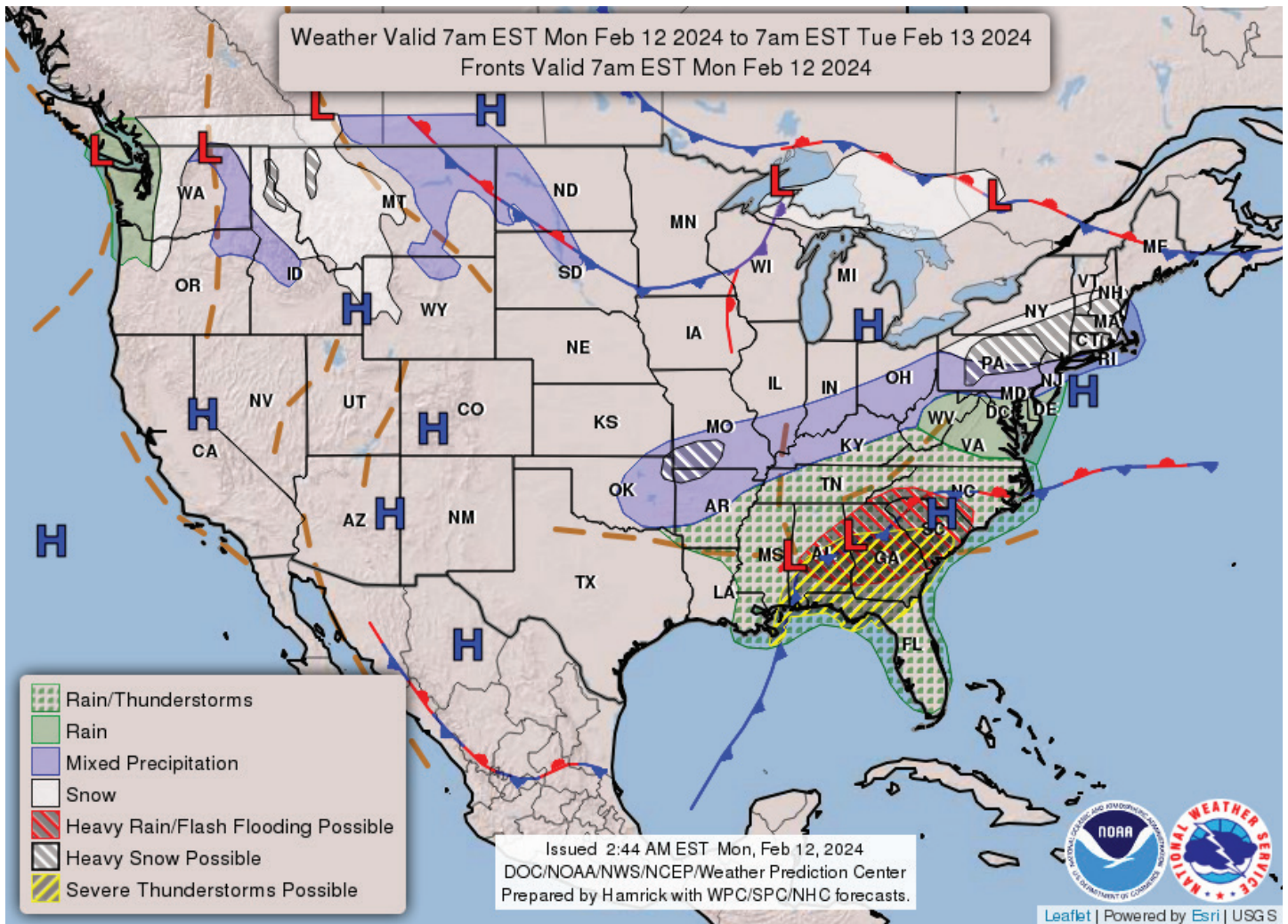
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 0.79

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 5:56:01 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:35:40 am



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Today in Weather History

February 12, 1905: On this date in weather history, record low temperatures occurred across northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, with lows in the 30s below zero. Sisseton, Aberdeen, and Watertown all had record lows. Sisseton fell to 31 degrees below zero, Watertown saw 35 degrees below zero, and Aberdeen dropped to 36 degrees below zero in 1905. In central South Dakota, Kennebec fell to 34 degrees below zero.

1784: Ice floes were spotted in the Gulf of Mexico after passing out the Mississippi River in February 1784. Ice blocked the river in New Orleans, Louisiana. The ice in New Orleans is one of two times that this occurred during the Great Arctic Outbreak of 1899. The eruption of Laki in Iceland from June 8, 1783, through February 7, 1784, is the likely cause for the severe winter of 1783 - 1784.

1899: The bitter cold outbreak of February 1899 continued across the southern Plains, Texas, and the Deep South. The mercury dipped to 8 degrees below zero at Fort Worth, Texas, and 22 degrees below zero at Kansas City, Missouri. Nebraska's temperature at Camp Clarke plunged to 47 degrees below zero to establish a state record. The all-time record low for Oklahoma City was set when the temperature fell to a frigid 17 degrees below zero, breaking the previous record low of 12 below zero, set on the previous day. Washington D.C. hit 15 degrees below zero, while Charleston, SC, received a record four inches of snow. Snow was also reported in Fort Myers, Tampa, and Tallahassee in Florida.

1958: Snow blanketed northern Florida, with Tallahassee reporting a record 2.8 inches. A ship in the Gulf of Mexico, 25 miles south of Fort Morgan, Alabama, reported zero visibility in heavy snow on the afternoon of the 12th.

1960 - A snowstorm in the Deep South produced more than a foot of snow in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm in the eastern U.S. produced high winds from North Carolina to Maine. A storm in the western U.S. produced up to thirty inches of snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A classic "nor'easter" formed off the Carolina coast and intensified as it moved up the Atlantic coast bringing heavy snow to the northeastern U.S. Totals ranged up to 26 inches at Camden NY and Chester MA. Arctic cold gripped the north central U.S. Duluth MN was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 32 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably mild weather prevailed across Alaska. Morning lows of 29 degrees at Anchorage and 31 degrees at Fairbanks were actually warmer than those in northern Florida. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Strong southerly winds ahead of an arctic cold front pushed temperatures into the 70s as far north as Iowa and Nebraska. Twenty-one cities in the central U.S., seven in Iowa, reported record high temperatures for the date. Lincoln NE reported a record high of 73 degrees, and the afternoon high of 59 degrees at Minneapolis MN smashed their previous record for the date by twelve degrees. Springfield IL reported a record forty-eight consecutive days with above normal temperatures. (The National Weather Summary)

2006 - An intense snow squall off of Lake Michigan cuts visibility to zero along a section of US 31. The resulting whiteout causes 96 cars to pile up. 25 were injured.

2017: There was an imminent failure of the auxiliary spillway on the Oroville Dam in California.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ANGER IN ACTION

A college professor was having a difficult time getting his students to do their required assignments. As the class was about to end, he said emphatically, "When you come to class tomorrow, it would be wise to have your assignment completed and ready for my review."

The next day when class began, he said in a loud, threatening voice, "Hold up your papers with your right hand!" All of the students complied with his demand except one. He held up his paper with his left hand.

Incensed, the professor shouted, "Right hand stupid, not your left hand. Don't you know the difference?"

"Yes, sir, I do, sir," said the student. "But I lost my right hand in combat."

The Greeks had a particular phrase for anger. They called it "a brief madness." It seems appropriate. When we become angry, we lose control of ourselves, and we often say things that are hurtful, hateful, and harmful.

David, the Psalmist, was wise when he wrote, "Stop your anger! Turn from your rage....it only leads to harm."

Anger and rage are toxic, destructive emotions that reveal a desire to dominate and destroy and control others. That is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to concentrate on God and His love, mercy, and grace in our lives and find peace as we trust Him to control us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to turn our anger into affection and our frustration into faith - knowing that You will turn our trials into triumphs if we surrender to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper - it only leads to harm. Psalm 37:8



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:
02.09.24

17 22 29 46 69 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$425,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 25
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.24

1 3 18 21 42 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,950,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 40 Mins 3
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.11.24

1 2 11 24 36 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 55 Mins 3
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.24

4 7 23 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$48,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 55
DRAW: Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.24

12 15 32 50 64 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 24 Mins 4
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.24

27 28 34 37 44 8

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$270,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 24 Mins 4
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

News from the Associated Press

More than 12,300 Palestinian minors have been killed in Israel's war in Gaza, health officials say

By NAJIB JOBAIN, JOSEF FEDERMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — More than 12,300 Palestinian minors have been killed in Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Monday.

Minors made up about 47% of the total number of 28,176 Palestinians killed so far, the ministry said. About 8,400 women were also among those killed.

The ministry provided the breakdown of minors and women at the request of The Associated Press.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces rescued two hostages early Monday, storming a heavily guarded apartment in the southern Gaza Strip and extracting the captives under fire in a dramatic raid that was a small but symbolically significant success for Israel. The operation killed at least 67 Palestinians, including women and children, according to Palestinian health officials in the beleaguered territory.

To assist the rescue forces, heavy airstrikes pounded the area near the apartment in Rafah, a city on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip where 1.4 million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting elsewhere in the Israel-Hamas war.

The raid was celebrated in Israel as a victory in the sluggish battle to free the hostages, with more than 100 captives still held by Hamas and other Gaza militants, and briefly lifted the spirits of a nation still reeling from Hamas' cross-border raid last year. But in Gaza, where civilians have borne a staggering toll since the war erupted on Oct. 7, the operation unleashed another wartime tragedy, with many Palestinians killed or wounded.

The plight of the hostages has profoundly shaken Israelis and the government has made freeing the dozens of remaining captives a top aim of its war, along with destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities. But as the fighting drags on, now in its fifth month, their freedom remains elusive and rifts have emerged in Israel over the best approach to end their ordeal.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted persistent military pressure will bring about their freedom — a position he repeated on Monday — even as other top officials have opposed this, saying a deal is the only way to secure their release.

Israel has described Rafah as the last remaining Hamas stronghold in Gaza and signaled that its ground offensive may soon target the densely populated city. On Sunday, the White House said President Joe Biden had warned Netanyahu that Israel should not conduct a military operation against Hamas in Rafah without a "credible and executable" plan to protect civilians.

The army identified the rescued hostages as Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, abducted by Hamas militants from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak in the Oct. 7 cross-border attack that triggered the war. Netanyahu's office said they also hold Argentinian citizenship.

They were among roughly 250 taken captive during Hamas' stunning cross-border raid, when an estimated 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed, according to Israeli authorities. Israel's retaliatory air and ground offensive has killed over 28,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, displaced over 80% of the population and set off a massive humanitarian crisis.

Over 100 hostages were freed during a weeklong cease-fire in November. Israel says about 100 hostages remain in Hamas captivity, and Hamas also holds the remains of roughly 30 others who were either killed on Oct. 7 or died in captivity. Three hostages were mistakenly killed by the army after escaping their captors in December.

"Only the continuation of the military pressure, until total victory, will bring about the release of all of our captives," Netanyahu said in a statement.

A DRAMATIC RAID

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Israeli military spokesman Read Adm. Daniel Hagari said special forces broke into a second-floor apartment in Rafah under fire at 1:49 a.m. Monday, accompanied a minute later by airstrikes on surrounding areas. He said the hostages were being guarded by armed Hamas militants and that members of the rescue team shielded the hostages with their bodies as a heavy battle erupted in several places at once with Hamas gunmen.

The hostages were taken to a nearby "safe area," given a quick medical check and airlifted to Sheba Medical Center in central Israel. Their medical condition was reported to be good. They are just the second and third hostages to be rescued safely; a female soldier was rescued in November.

The rescue, which Hagari said was based on precise intelligence and planned for some time, is a morale booster for Israelis but a small step toward winning the release of the remaining hostages, who are believed to be spread out and hidden in tunnels, likely in poor condition.

Har and Marman were kidnapped from a home in southern Israel along with three other relatives who were freed in the late-November deal. No other family members of theirs remain in Gaza, Israeli media reported.

Har's son-in-law, Idan Begerano, who saw the released captives at the hospital, said the two men were thin and pale, but communicating well and aware of their surroundings. Begerano said Har told him immediately upon seeing him: "You have a birthday today, mazal tov."

DOZENS KILLED IN STRIKES

The airstrikes that backed up the Israeli forces hit the jam-packed Rafah in the middle of the night and dozens of explosions could be heard around 2 a.m. Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, said at least 67 people were killed in the strikes.

Al-Qidra said rescuers were still searching the rubble; an Associated Press journalist counted at least 50 bodies at the Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah.

Footage circulating on social media from Rafah's Kuwaiti hospital showed dead or wounded children. The footage could not immediately be verified but was consistent with AP reporting.

The wounded were seen lying on the hospital floor as medics tried to treat them. One wounded man was on the ground with two bloodied children lying beside him. "Rescue the girl," he screamed.

A young man was also seen carrying the body of an infant who he said was killed in the attacks. He said the girl, the daughter of his neighbor, was born and killed during the war.

"Let Netanyahu come and see: is this (infant) your bank of targets?" he said. "For what is she to blame?"

CONCERNS ABOUT RAFAH

Netanyahu has said sending ground troops into Rafah is essential to meeting Israel's war goals. Biden has urged Israel to exercise extreme caution before moving in. More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population is now crammed into Rafah, where hundreds of thousands live in sprawling tent camps and overcrowded U.N. shelters.

Biden's remarks, made in a phone call with Netanyahu late Sunday, were his most forceful language yet on the possible operation.

Discussion of the potential for a cease-fire agreement took up much of the call, a senior U.S. administration official said, and after weeks of diplomacy, a "framework" is now "pretty much" in place for a deal that could see the release of remaining hostages held by Hamas in exchange for Palestinian prisoners and a halt to fighting.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss negotiations, acknowledged that "gaps remain," but declined to give details. The official said military pressure on Hamas in the southern city of Khan Younis in recent weeks helped bring the group closer to accepting a deal.

Netanyahu's office declined to comment on the call. Hamas' Al-Aqsa television station earlier quoted an unnamed Hamas official as saying any invasion of Rafah would "blow up" the talks mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

Biden and Netanyahu spoke after two Egyptian officials and a Western diplomat said Egypt threatened to suspend its peace treaty with Israel if troops are sent into Rafah. The Camp David peace accords have been a cornerstone of regional stability for over 40 years. Egypt fears a mass influx of Palestinian refugees

who may never be allowed to return.

What to know about a shooting at Joel Osteen's megachurch in Texas during Sunday services

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A woman's motive for opening fire in celebrity pastor Joel Osteen's megachurch remained unclear Monday, a day after the shooting sent worshippers rushing for safety in between busy services.

Police say two off-duty officers working security at Osteen's church, one of the largest megachurches in the U.S., shot and killed the suspect. Two other people were also shot and injured, including a 5-year-old boy who entered the church with the shooter and was taken to a hospital in critical condition.

Osteen said the violence could have been worse if the shooting had happened during the earlier and larger late Sunday morning service.

Here's what to know about the shooting:

HOW DID THE SHOOTING UNFOLD?

The sound of gunshots inside the massive church, which was formerly the home of the NBA's Houston Rockets, startled worshippers just before 2 p.m. Sunday, around the time many people were getting ready to later watch the Super Bowl.

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner did not identify the suspect at a news conference Sunday while standing near Osteen. He described the shooter as a woman in her early to mid-30s, saying she entered the church wearing a trenchcoat and backpack and armed with a long rifle, though he did not specify the exact weapon.

Finner said the woman entered the church with the young boy but did not describe their relationship. The woman began shooting and was confronted by two off-duty officers, a Houston police officer and an agent with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, who returned fire. Finner said the woman told officers after being shot there was a bomb but a search found no explosives.

He and other authorities at the scene praised the officers for taking down the shooter.

"She had a long gun, and it could have been worse," Finner said. "But they stepped up and did their job."

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Authorities have not released the identities of anyone involved in the shooting.

It remained unclear how the the young boy, who was taken to a Houston children's hospital, was struck by gunfire. When asked whether the boy was shot by one of the off-duty officers returning fire on the suspect, Finner said he did not want to speculate but added: "That female, that suspect, put that baby in danger. I'm going to put that blame on her."

Authorities described the other victim as a man in his 50s who was wounded with an injury to his hip.

HOW DID WORSHIPPERS INSIDE REACT?

Alan Guity, whose family is from Honduras, has been a member of the church since 1998. He said he heard gunshots while resting inside the church's sanctuary as his mother was working as an usher.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom. And I yelled, 'Mom,'" he said.

Guity, 35, said he ran to his mother and they both laid flat on the floor as the gunfire continued. Guity said he and his mother prayed and stayed on the floor for about five minutes until someone told them it was safe to leave the building. As he was led outside, Guity could see people were afraid and crying and looking for loved ones.

Guity said he and his mother tried to calm people down by worshiping and singing in Spanish, "Move in me, move in me. Touch my mind and my heart. Move within me Holy Spirit."

WHO IS JOEL OSTEEEN?

Osteen, 60, took the helm of Lakewood Church after John Osteen, his father and the church's founding pastor, passed away in 1999. The church has grown dramatically under Joel Osteen and is regularly attended by 45,000 people weekly, making it the third-largest megachurch in the U.S., according to the

Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Osteen is a leader of what is known as the prosperity gospel, a belief that God wants his followers to be wealthy and healthy. He is the author of several best-selling books, including, "Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential."

His televised services reach about 100 countries and renovating his church's arena cost nearly \$100 million.

After Hurricane Harvey flooded Houston in 2017, Osteen opened his church to those seeking shelter after social media critics slammed the televangelist for not offering to house people in need.

Egypt is threatening to void its decades-old peace treaty with Israel. What does that mean?

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — It was a warm handshake between the unlikeliest of statesmen, conducted under the beaming gaze of President Jimmy Carter. Sunlight streamed through the trees at Camp David, Maryland, as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin solidified a landmark agreement that has allowed over 40 years of peace between Israel and Egypt. It has served as an important source of stability in a volatile region.

That peace has held through two Palestinian uprisings and a series of wars between Israel and Hamas. But now, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowing to send Israeli troops into Rafah, a city in Gaza on the border with Egypt, the Egyptian government is threatening to void the agreement.

Here's a look at the history of the treaty and what could happen if it is nullified.

HOW DID THE TREATY ORIGINATE?

It was 1977, and Begin, Israel's new prime minister, opposed ceding any of the land Israel had conquered a decade earlier in the 1967 Mideast war. Those lands included Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

Egypt and Israel had fought four major wars, most recently in 1973. So it shocked the world when Egypt's Sadat broke with other Arab leaders and decided to engage with the Israelis.

The talks culminated in the Camp David Accords in September 1978 and a peace treaty the following year.

Under the peace treaty, Israel agreed to withdraw from the Sinai, which Egypt would leave demilitarized. Israeli ships were granted passage through the Suez Canal, a key trade route. The countries established full diplomatic relations in Israel's first peace agreement with an Arab country.

"The Camp David Accords were led by three brave men who took a bold stance because they knew the lasting effects for peace and security, both then and for the future. We need the same kind of leadership today, and that is currently lacking," said Paige Alexander, chief executive of the Carter Center.

WHAT IS EGYPT'S CURRENT POSITION?

Two Egyptian officials and a Western diplomat told The Associated Press on Sunday that Egypt may suspend the peace treaty if Israeli troops invade Rafah.

Netanyahu says Rafah is Hamas' last remaining stronghold after more than four months of war and that sending in ground troops is essential to defeat the group.

But Egypt opposes any move that could send desperate Palestinians fleeing across the border onto its territory. Rafah also serves as the besieged territory's main entry point for humanitarian aid, and an Israeli attack could stifle the deliveries of key supplies.

Rafah's population has swelled from 280,000 people to an estimated 1.4 million as Palestinians flee fighting elsewhere in Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of those evacuees are living in sprawling tent camps.

Netanyahu has ordered the military to prepare a plan to evacuate all Palestinian civilians before the offensive starts. But it is unclear where they will go.

Netanyahu said Sunday that they would be able to return to open spaces farther north. But those areas have been badly damaged by the Israeli offensive.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE TREATY IS VOIDED?

The treaty greatly limits the number of troops on both sides of the border, though the countries have agreed in the past to modify those arrangements in response to specific security threats. This has allowed

Israel to focus its military on other threats.

Along with the war in Gaza, Israel has engaged in near-daily skirmishes with the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon while its security forces deploy heavily in the occupied West Bank.

If Egypt were to nullify the agreement, it could mean that Israel can no longer rely on its southern border as an oasis of calm. Bolstering forces along its border with Egypt would no doubt challenge an Israeli military already thinly stretched.

But it would bear serious ramifications for Egypt as well. Egypt has received billions of dollars in U.S. military assistance from the U.S. since the peace agreement.

If the agreement is voided, it could jeopardize that funding. A massive military buildup would also strain Egypt's already struggling economy.

Alexander said any step that could draw Egypt into the hostilities "would be catastrophic for the entire region."

Khan supporters and other Pakistani parties block highways to protest election results

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — Thousands of supporters of Pakistan's imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan and members of other political parties blocked key highways and started a daylong strike in the volatile southwest Monday to protest alleged rigging of last week's elections.

Candidates backed by Khan won more seats than the political parties who ousted him from power nearly two years ago, according to the final tally published Sunday. However, no party won a majority, so the parties will have to hold talks on forming a coalition government. The new parliament chooses the country's next prime minister.

Thursday's vote to choose a new parliament was overshadowed by the vote-rigging allegations, an unprecedented mobile phone shutdown, and the exclusion of Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, or PTI, from the vote.

While election winners were celebrating victory, PTI and other parties refused to accept their defeat in dozens of constituencies. Dozens of Khan's supporters were briefly detained in the eastern city of Lahore over the weekend while protesting alleged vote-rigging.

Jan Achakzai, a government spokesman in the southwest province of Baluchistan, urged protesters to "show grace" by accepting defeat and moving away from the highways.

Khan could not run in the election because of the criminal convictions against him that he says are politically motivated.

Candidates aligned with Khan secured 101 out of 266 seats in the National Assembly, or lower house of parliament.

The Pakistan Muslim League-N party led by three-time premier and ex-felon Nawaz Sharif secured 75. Sharif is currently in talks with allies to form a coalition government.

The Pakistan People's Party, or PPP, led by Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, came in third with 54 seats. One result has been withheld and another vote was postponed because of a candidate's death. The campaign to kick Khan out of office in 2022 was led by the PML-N and the PPP.

Pakistan's military has always cast itself as the ultimate arbiter of who becomes prime minister, and Sharif was marked out as the powerful security establishment's preferred candidate because of his smooth return to the country last October.

Sharif spent four years in exile to avoid serving prison sentences but his convictions were overturned within weeks of his arrival in Pakistan.

Nearly half of the world's migratory species are in decline, UN report says

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly half of the world's migratory species are in decline, according to a new United Nations report released Monday.

Many songbirds, sea turtles, whales, sharks and other migratory animals move to different environments with changing seasons and are imperiled by habitat loss, illegal hunting and fishing, pollution and climate change.

About 44% of migratory species worldwide are declining in population, the report found. More than a fifth of the nearly 1,200 species monitored by the U.N. are threatened with extinction.

"These are species that move around the globe. They move to feed and breed and also need stopover sites along the way," said Kelly Malsch, lead author of the report released at a U.N. wildlife conference in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Habitat loss or other threats at any point in their journey can lead to dwindling populations.

"Migration is essential for some species. If you cut the migration, you're going to kill the species," said Duke University ecologist Stuart Pimm, who was not involved in the report.

The report relied on existing data, including information from the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List, which tracks whether a species is endangered.

Participants of the U.N. meeting plan to evaluate proposals for conservation measures and also whether to formally list several new species of concern.

"One country alone cannot save any of these species," said Susan Lieberman, vice president for international policy at the nonprofit Wildlife Conservation Society.

At the meeting, eight governments from South America are expected to jointly propose adding two species of declining Amazon catfish to the U.N. treaty's list of migratory species of concern, she said.

The Amazon River basin is world's largest freshwater system. "If the Amazon is intact, the catfish will thrive — it's about protecting the habitat," Lieberman said.

In 2022, governments pledged to protect 30% of the planet's land and water resources for conservation at the U.N. Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, Canada.

Patrick Mahomes rallies the Chiefs to second straight Super Bowl title, 25-22 over 49ers in overtime

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Patrick Mahomes, Travis Kelce and Andy Reid have made the Kansas City Chiefs a dynasty.

They're already thinking three-peat.

First, they had to become the first back-to-back Super Bowl champions in 19 years.

Mahomes made sure of it, leading another super comeback on the NFL's biggest stage in America's showcase capital.

Mahomes threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Mecole Hardman in overtime, and the Chiefs rallied to beat the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 on Sunday, becoming the NFL's ninth repeat Super Bowl champs.

With pop star Taylor Swift watching boyfriend Kelce from a suite, the Chiefs captured their third title in five years, a run that puts them among the league's greatest franchises.

"Well, you know the goal has always been to get three," Kelce screamed on stage after sharing a kiss with Swift. "But we couldn't get here without getting that two, and having that target on our back all year. ... How about that. We get a chance to do it three times in a row."

The NFL's first Super Bowl in Las Vegas was a sloppy, mistake-filled affair that was mostly boring until the back-and-forth fourth quarter and OT. It was the second of 58 Super Bowls to be tied after regulation, and the first played under new overtime rules that ensured both teams got the ball.

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The Chiefs (15-6) trailed 22-19 after Jake Moody kicked a 27-yard field goal on the first possession of overtime, but Mahomes rallied the Chiefs, completing another impressive comeback in a rematch of the Super Bowl four years ago.

Mahomes ran 8 yards on fourth-and-1 to keep the Chiefs' chances alive and then scrambled 19 yards to set up the winning score, which came 14:57 into the extra period — just before what would have been the second OT.

"With all the adversity we've been through this season to come through tonight. ... I'm proud of the guys," said Mahomes, who earned his third Super Bowl MVP award. "This is awesome. Legendary."

After he connected with a wide-open Hardman, the Chiefs ran on the field as red-and-yellow confetti fell onto the turf.

Mahomes and Reid are now halfway to Tom Brady and Bill Belichick, who won six championships in 20 years together with the New England Patriots and were the most recent team to go back-to-back following the 2003-04 seasons.

The 28-year-old Mahomes becomes the fourth starting QB to win three Super Bowls — joining Brady, Joe Montana, Terry Bradshaw and Troy Aikman — and second-youngest.

"I am going to celebrate tonight, celebrate at the parade and then work my way to get back in this game next year," Mahomes said. "I am going to do whatever I can to be back in this game next year. Three-peat."

The most excitement in the first half came when a frustrated Kelce bumped Reid on the sideline, knocking the Chiefs' 65-year-old coach a few steps back after teammate Isiah Pacheco fumbled inside the red zone during the second quarter.

"You guys saw that?" Kelce said. "I'm going to keep it between us unless my 'mic'd up' tells the world. I was just telling him how much I loved him."

The action picked up after a crucial blunder by San Francisco's special teams set up Mahomes' 16-yard TD pass to Marquez Valdes-Scantling for a 13-10 lead.

Brock Purdy and the 49ers (14-6) answered but they couldn't make enough plays, denying Mr. Irrelevant an opportunity to go from last pick in the 2022 NFL draft to Super Bowl champion.

"We have the offense to score touchdowns and I failed to put the team in position to do that," Purdy said.

Niners wide receiver Jauan Jennings threw a TD pass and caught one, joining Eagles quarterback Nick Foles six years ago as the only players to do both in the Super Bowl.

After Moody's 53-yard field goal gave the Niners a 19-16 lead with 1:53 remaining, Mahomes and Kelce went to work. Mahomes connected with Kelce for a 22-yard gain to set up Harrison Butker's tying kick, a 29-yarder with 3 seconds left.

A holding call on Kansas City's Trent McDuffie extended San Francisco's opening drive of overtime and Purdy made key throws to drive the 49ers to the Chiefs 9. But San Francisco settled for a field goal.

Purdy, Christian McCaffrey and the Niners jumped ahead 10-0, but that's no big deal for Mahomes and the Chiefs in the Super Bowl. They've trailed by 10 points in all three of their victories, including last year's 38-35 win over Philadelphia.

Mahomes wasn't at his best early and threw an interception. But with the game on the line, he was a magician once again. He finished 34 of 46 for 333 yards and two TDs.

The Chiefs were hardly dominant during the regular season and entered the playoffs as the AFC's No. 3 seed. They won at Buffalo and at Baltimore in the postseason — the first road playoff games of Mahomes' career — and entered the Super Bowl as 2 1/2-point underdogs, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

"The Kansas City Chiefs are never underdogs. Just know that," Mahomes said.

They became the first team to win consecutive Super Bowls as underdogs; the Philadelphia Eagles were slight favorites a year ago.

The game turned when San Francisco's Ray-Ray McCloud couldn't scoop a punt that hit teammate Darrell Luter Jr.'s leg and the Chiefs recovered at the 49ers 16, leading to Mahomes' go-ahead TD pass to Valdes-Scantling.

The Niners answered on the next possession with Purdy tossing a 10-yard TD pass to Jennings for a

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16-13 lead. Moody's extra point was blocked.

Niners coach Kyle Shanahan gambled on fourth-and-3 from the Chiefs 15, passing up a chance for a tying field goal. Purdy hit George Kittle for a 4-yard gain and then found Jennings for the score.

Shanahan resorted to trickery for the only touchdown of the first half.

Jennings, a wide receiver who had never thrown a pass in an NFL game, tossed a 21-yard TD to McCaffrey. He was hit as he threw a wobbly pass across the field, but McCaffrey snagged it and sprinted to the end zone.

Shanahan fell to 0-2 as a head coach in Super Bowls and 0-3 overall, including a loss when he was offensive coordinator for Atlanta. That was the game in which Brady and the Patriots rallied from a 28-3 deficit to win in OT.

"When you go against guys like Tom Brady and Pat Mahomes, you never feel comfortable with a lead. Those guys are two of the best to ever play the game," Shanahan said.

There were plenty of stars in the building as the NFL brought its biggest game to this gambling mecca — once a taboo idea. Jay-Z, LeBron James and Paul McCartney were among the celebrities in the crowd.

Post Malone sang "America the Beautiful," Reba McEntire performed the national anthem and Usher electrified the crowd at halftime. He brought out a number of guests, including Alicia Keys, H.E.R., Jermaine Dupri, Lil Jon and Ludacris.

Attendance was announced at 61,629 at the relatively compact Allegiant Stadium, the smallest crowd in Super Bowl history except for the pandemic game in Tampa, Florida, three years ago.

It didn't start out well, but thanks to Mahomes, those fans ended up seeing one of the best Super Bowl finishes.

Fans will get to celebrate the Chiefs on Wednesday, Valentine's Day. The Kansas City Sports Commission released the official route and timing late Sunday night, KMBC-TV reported. The parade will begin at 11 a.m.

Rio's Carnival parade makes urgent plea to stop illegal mining in Indigenous lands

By DIANE JEANTET and FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Carnival dancers took the biggest stage in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday night with their faces painted red in a traditional Indigenous manner, while percussionists had "Miners out" written across the skins of their drums.

It was part of Salgueiro's samba school's tribute to the Yanomami, Brazil's largest Indigenous group, with its giant floats, costumes and songs based on the group's ancient culture and traditions.

"My Salgueiro is the arrow for the people of the forest," the parade participants sang out as they marched through the Sambadrome, delivering their message to more than 70,000 revelers at the Sambadrome and millions watching live on television. "The chance that's left for us is an Indigenous Brazil."

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is under pressure to deliver on promises to eradicate illegal mining, particularly amid a recent backslide in efforts. Sunday's parade comes as Brazil celebrates one year since Lula declared a public health emergency for the Yanomami people in the Amazon, who are suffering from malnutrition and diseases such as malaria as a consequence of illegal mining.

"Ours is a cry for help from Brazil and the world in general," said Davi Kopenawa, a Yanomami leader and shaman who advised the samba school on how to remain truthful to his people, and paraded with Salgueiro. "My hope is that the world, upon hearing our call, will put pressure on the Brazilian government to remove all the miners, destroyers of our mother Earth, who are soiling the water and killing fish."

Kopenawa paraded with feathered armbands and headdress, plus a beaded necklace depicting a jaguar. He was joined by 13 other Yanomami who flew across the country to participate in Salgueiro's parade. One of the first floats consisted of a severed tree trunk, with a performer depicting a Yanomami mother seeking to protect her child as invaders drew close, and other floats featured massive sculptures of Yanomami people.

Through this homage to Yanomami history and culture, Salgueiro sought to draw attention to the dev-

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astating effects brought by illegal mining inside Yanomami territory, including widespread river contamination, famine and disease.

Some 30,000 Yanomami live in Brazil's largest Indigenous territory, spanning more than 9 million hectares (22 million acres) in the northern area of the Amazon rainforest, along the border with Venezuela.

Three weeks after assuming the presidency, Lula declared a public health emergency and sent the armed forces, doctors, nurses and food. Still, over 300 Yanomami died of various causes in 2023, according to the health ministry.

Lula swiftly created a dedicated inter-ministerial task force to fight illegal mining and in 2023, Brazil's environmental agency destroyed a record 33 aircraft found on or near Yanomami territory. The agents also wrecked or apprehended mining barges, fuel, chainsaws, Starlink internet units and campsites. Government officials say that since the beginning of the operation, areas with illegal mining inside Yanomami territory have dropped 85% and that Yanomamis' health has improved.

But after the operation's initial success, prosecutors, law enforcement and employees of federal environmental agencies say illegal miners are returning.

"There has been a significant reduction, but mining hasn't ended. We reckon that the miners are exploiting as much as possible, because they assess they eventually will have to leave," Jair Schmitt, head of environmental protection at Brazil's environmental agency Ibama, told The Associated Press.

Schmitt said miners have adapted to escape law enforcement and satellite detection by working at night, setting camp under the forest canopy and choosing old mining pits instead of clearing forest to open new ones.

Humberto Freire, director of the newly created Amazon and environmental unit of the federal police, said officers also noticed miners have begun working in a much smaller, artisanal way, and that government agencies need to take stronger action.

"We need, for example, the air force to effectively control the airspace over Yanomami land. We need the navy to control the flow of people on rivers. We need the army to do a quality job, too," Freire said. "The federal police can do more, the armed forces can do more, as well as Ibama and Funai (the Indigenous affairs agency.)"

One of the parade's wings featured dancers dressed in the dark-green garb of army uniforms. Following behind was a float featuring two giant army hats with skulls, an explicitly critical element of the parade.

Lula had said the armed forces would play a key role in the fight, providing logistical support and security to public workers and federal agents on the ground who say they increasingly fear for their lives.

But it isn't the military's responsibility to engage in direct combat, according to political scientist João Roberto Martins Filho. Still, the big question is why the army, which has three permanent bases inside Yanomami territory, didn't sound the alarm under Lula's predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

"There was nearly a massacre of an unprotected population. Why did the army let this happen instead of denouncing it to the federal government or reaching out to the press?" Martins Filho, a professor at the Federal University of Sao Carlos, told the AP. "In a certain way, they were accomplices."

In a written response to the AP, the army said that illegal mining and the health crisis within the Yanomami territory "are complex issues involving the legal jurisdiction of various government agencies," and that the army is "always prepared to fulfill its strategic missions." That includes providing support to federal agencies through logistical, communication, and intelligence activities, such as those being conducted in the Yanomami territory, the statement said.

Illegal planes are essential for transporting prospectors and equipment to far-flung reserves, as shown in a 2022 Associated Press investigation in Roraima state, where most mining affecting the Yanomami takes place. Without unauthorized aircrafts, officials and experts have said illegal mining operations would collapse.

After a Jan. 2023 presidential decree ordered the air force to close the airspace over Yanomami territory, the situation on the ground improved significantly, authorities and Indigenous people told the AP.

In a written response to the AP, Brazil's air force said it has been patrolling the so-called Air Defense

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Identification Zone over the Yanomami Territory. Under this rule, an aircraft may be shot down for failing to obey orders to change route. The force claims the measure led to a 90% reduction in illegal flights.

"It's highly efficient. We would find landing strips, but no planes," said André Luiz Porreca Ferreira Cunha, a federal prosecutor who oversees cases linked to illegal mining across the western Amazon.

But some on the ground suggest the armed forces are no longer sufficiently involved in operations, and that illegal miners started coming back as a result.

In a joint statement last month, the associations representing federal workers in environmental and Indigenous affairs accused the armed forces of "failing to fulfill their mission of supporting and facilitating the work of other agencies" combating illegal mining. The association alleged that the military denied use of aircraft for transporting personnel and equipment, haven't collaborated in the destruction of mining machinery and airstrips and instead shut down support points for refueling environmental agency aircraft.

Ferreira Cunha, the prosecutor, said violent attacks of Ibama agents and members of the federal police are becoming more frequent, with some cases of attempted murders. Government health teams have also been targeted, and are unable — or unwilling — to reach certain communities, said Júnior Hekurari, a member of the group and president of Condisi-Y, the local health council.

"Some are heavily armed, the health teams are scared," he said.

"This state of emergency cannot solve the problem. We need something permanent, for all the communities," Hekurari added. "If they (government authorities) don't stay, the miners will return tomorrow."

Woman killed after she opened fire in Joel Osteen's megachurch, boy with her shot, hospitalized

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A woman in a trenchcoat opened fire with a long gun Sunday inside celebrity pastor Joel Osteen's megachurch in Texas, sending worshippers rushing to find safety while two off-duty officers confronted and killed the shooter. Two other people were shot and injured, including a 5-year-old boy who was in critical condition.

The violence erupted shortly before the Houston church's 2 p.m. Spanish service was set to begin, just as the rest of the country was preparing for the Super Bowl. The woman entered the enormous Lakewood Church — a building with a 16,000-person capacity that was previously an arena for the NBA's Houston Rockets — with the boy who was later hurt in the shootout with police. A man in his 50s was also wounded.

Details of the confrontation remain unclear in the hours after the tragedy, and police have not released the woman's identity or a possible motive. It's also unknown what relationship, if any, the woman had to the boy, and who actually shot him and the man.

"I will say this," Houston Police Chief Troy Finner told reporters during a news conference outside the church. "That female, that suspect, put that baby in danger. I'm going to put that blame on her."

The boy was in critical condition at a children's hospital, while the man was stable at a different hospital with a hip wound.

The shooting happened between services at the megachurch that is regularly attended by 45,000 people every week, making it the third-largest megachurch in the U.S., according to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Osteen said the violence could have been much worse if it had happened during the earlier, larger 11 a.m. service.

Witnesses told reporters that they heard multiple gunshots. Christina Rodriguez, who was inside the church, told Houston television station KTRK that she "started screaming, 'There's a shooter, there's a shooter,'" and then she and others ran to the backside of a library inside the building, then stood in a stairway before they were told it was safe to leave.

Longtime church member Alan Guity, whose family is from Honduras, said he was resting inside the church's sanctuary before the Spanish service as his mother was working as an usher when he heard gunshots.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom and I yelled, 'Mom,'" he told The Associated Press.

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The 35-year-old ran to his mother and they both laid flat on the floor and prayed as the gunfire continued. They remained there for about five minutes until someone told them it was safe to evacuate. Outside, Guity said, he and his mother tried to calm people down by worshipping and singing in Spanish, "Move in me, move in me. Touch my mind and my heart. Move within me Holy Spirit."

Despite the chaos, Finner said the tragedy "could have been a lot worse" if the two officers had not "engaged" the woman when she opened fire. They had been working security at the church on Sunday, and Finner praised them for their quick actions.

The officers work for the Houston Police Department and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, respectively. Both have been placed on protocol-mandated administrative duty.

After she was shot, the woman told police that she had a bomb, but authorities said no explosives were found when her vehicle and backpack were searched. First responders continued to search the mega-church for hours afterwards.

Osteen said Sunday that his congregation is "devastated." He added that he would pray for the victims and for the woman who did the shooting and their families. It was not clear where he was at the time of the shooting.

"We're going to stay strong and we're going to continue to, to move forward," he said during the news conference with police. "There are forces of evil, but the forces that are for us -- the forces of God -- are stronger than that. So we're going to keep going strong and just, you know, doing what God's called us to do: lift people up and give hope to the world."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued a statement saying "our hearts are with those impacted by today's tragic shooting and the entire Lakewood Church community in Houston. Places of worship are sacred."

The church has grown tremendously over the past 25 years since Joel Osteen took over after his father's death in 1999 and introduced an upbeat style of Christian televangelism that has captured a following of millions. His televised sermons reach about 100 countries. The elder Osteen founded the church in a converted feed store in 1959.

Yemen's Houthi rebels suspected of missile attack targeting a ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A ship came under attack by two missiles in the key Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Monday, the latest assault believed to have been carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

No one was wounded in the attack and the ship was continuing on its journey, the British military's United Kingdom Trade Operations center said in a statement.

It wasn't clear how much damage was done to the ship.

The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack, but it often takes the rebels several hours to acknowledge their assaults.

The rebels have been attacking ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since November over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. That has disrupted shipments through the waterways and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects them.

Taylor Swift kisses Travis Kelce on the field after his Chiefs beat the 49ers in the Super Bowl

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — With the run she's having, how could Taylor Swift be on anything other than the winning side?

She embraced her boyfriend Travis Kelce and the couple locked lips on the field at Allegiant Stadium after his Kansas City Chiefs beat the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 in the Super Bowl.

Moments earlier, Swift smiled with her eyes looking misty from tears as she stood next to Kelce's mother

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while he held aloft the Lombardi Trophy, shouting "Chiefs nation!" and bellowing a chorus of "Viva Las Vegas."

Minutes before that, she was smothered by celebrity suite mates, who at various points included Blake Lively, Ice Spice and Lana Del Rey, when the Chiefs scored the winning touchdown in overtime, set up by a key reception by Kelce for a first down.

It was the second straight Super Bowl win for the Chiefs, but the first since Swift became fan-in-chief. She and Kelce began dating shortly before the season started.

It completes an epic stretch for Swift, who won album of the year a week earlier for a record fourth time at the Grammys, where she also announced a new album dropping in April before jetting off to Japan for a series of stadium shows.

Soon after flying halfway around the world to get to the game, she strolled through security to enter the stadium along with Lively, Ice Spice and her mom, Andrea Swift. She cuddled with Lively during Post Malone's performance of "America the Beautiful" and won what appeared to be a beer chugging contest, slamming her cup down to an appreciative roar from the fans.

She was spotted talking to Kelce's brother, Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce, and NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell in one of the private boxes that reportedly cost more than \$1 million. Del Rey joined the celeb-packed suite in time to catch Usher's halftime show.

Swift flew on a private plane across nine time zones and the international date line from the last of four shows at the Tokyo Dome to arrive about two hours before kickoff. The time change allowed her to land in Los Angeles and make the final hop to Las Vegas.

The 14-time Grammy winner walked in wearing a black outfit with a red jacket slung over her shoulder, apparently getting the memo from Kelce and many of the Chiefs. He wore a shimmering black suit, quarterback Patrick Mahomes wore a sharp black suit of his own, and even Chiefs coach Andy Reid wore a black blazer as the Chiefs leaned into the role of the villains.

"Anti-Hero" also happens to be the lead single from Swift's Grammy-winning album, "Midnights."

"She's unbelievable. She's rewriting the history books herself," Kelce said a day after the Grammys. "I told her I'll have to hold up my end of the bargain and come home with hardware, too."

Swift began dating Kelce after he said on his "New Heights" podcast that he had tried and failed to give her a friendship bracelet during her performance at Arrowhead Stadium. Kelce then invited her to watch him perform at the home of the Chiefs, and she surprisingly showed up for their Week 2 game against Chicago.

Swift soon became a regular at games, both home and away, frequently sitting with Brittany Mahomes, the wife of Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes. Swift occasionally brought along friends, including Lively and her husband, Ryan Reynolds.

"Having Taylor as a new Chiefs fan is very unique," Chiefs owner Clark Hunt said during Super Bowl week. "I don't ever do an interview without someone asking me about it. I think a lot of players and coaches on the team are in the same boat. The most important thing is we're happy for the two of them that they have found each other and have such a special relationship."

There was plenty of star power besides Swift for the NFL's marquee night. Usher's halftime show included guest performers Alicia Keys, Ludacris and Lil Jon. Reba McEntire sang the national anthem. Beyoncé, who was also at the game, appeared in a commercial and dropped a pair of new songs in the second half.

Few were under a brighter spotlight than Swift, though. Her dash from Tokyo, where she promised fans that "we're all gonna go on a great adventure," had Swifties around the world watching online flight trackers, while her boyfriend seemed to get as many questions about his relationship as the game during the run-up to kickoff.

Asked to explain the intense interest, Kelce replied: "I think the values we stand for and just who we are as people — we love to shine light on others, shine light on the people that help and support us, and on top of that, I think we both just love life."

Kelce and Swift won't have a whole lot of time together to celebrate. She is due back across the Pacific later this week. The international leg of her Eras Tour resumes Friday night in Australia with the first of

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three shows at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"This week is truly the best kind of chaos," she posted Wednesday on Instagram.

A defense minister and 2 former governors vie for Indonesia's presidency

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesians on Wednesday will elect the successor to popular President Joko Widodo, who is serving his second and final term.

It is a three-way race for the presidency among current Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and two former provincial governors, Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo.

Subianto, who is widely seen as the front-runner, has picked Widodo's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as his running mate.

About 205 million people are eligible to vote in the world's third-largest democracy and the most populous Muslim-majority nation.

Here is some information about the candidates and their running mates.

PRABOWO SUBIANTO

Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto is the only candidate with links to the 1967-98 Suharto dictatorship, when he was a lieutenant general.

A longtime commander in the Kopassus special forces, he was dishonorably discharged in 1998 after Kopassus soldiers kidnapped and tortured political opponents of Suharto, his then-father-in-law. Of 22 activists kidnapped that year, 13 remain missing. Subianto never faced trial, although several of his men were tried and convicted.

He went into self-exile in Jordan for several years before returning and founding the Gerindra Party in early 2008. He ran for the presidency twice, losing to current President Joko Widodo both times.

He refused to acknowledge the results but accepted Widodo's offer of the defense minister position in 2019, a bid for unity.

Polls show 72-year-old Subianto well ahead of his two rivals, though perhaps not with the majority needed to avoid a runoff. While he is the oldest candidate, his running mate is the youngest: 36-year-old Surakarta Mayor Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Widodo's son.

Raka is below the statutory minimum age of 40 but was allowed to run under an exception created by the Constitutional Court — then headed by Widodo's brother-in-law — allowing current and former regional governors to run at age 35.

Subianto has had close ties with hard-line Islamists whom he used to undermine his opponents.

He has vowed to continue Widodo's economic development plan, in what experts view as an attempt to draw on Widodo's popularity. He is strongly opposed by human rights activists, who associate him with torture and disappearances during the final years of the Suharto dictatorship.

GANJAR PRANOWO

Ganjar Pranowo is the governing party candidate, but does not have the support of Widodo, who has distanced himself from the party's campaign and is seen as implicitly backing Subianto and Raka, his son.

Pranowo was a national legislator for the governing Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle for 10 years before being elected in 2013 for the first of two terms as Central Java governor.

While governor, he refused to allow Israel to participate in the Under-20 FIFA World Cup to be held in his province. FIFA subsequently dropped Indonesia as host of the games, triggering a backlash against Pranowo from soccer fans. Israel and Muslim-majority Indonesia do not have diplomatic ties.

He has been a less enthusiastic backer of Widodo's policies than Subianto.

"We want to develop Indonesia faster and continue the good things that have been done by the current government, to fix what is not good enough and to leave the bad ones," Pranowo said.

His running mate is Mohammad Mahfud, who resigned as security minister to focus on campaigning. He is also a former defense minister, justice minister and chief justice of the Constitutional Court.

ANIES BASWEDAN

Anies Baswedan, the former head of an Islamic university, served as governor of Jakarta until last year after winning a divisive election in 2017 against an ethnic Chinese Christian incumbent backed by Widodo.

Baswedan, a former Fulbright scholar, had been education and culture minister from 2014 to 2016, when Widodo removed him from the Cabinet.

Backed by conservative Muslim groups, he galvanized hundreds of thousands to take to the streets in 2016 against the Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who was then imprisoned on blasphemy charges after quoting the Quran in a speech. Baswedan was seen as using the controversy to successfully run for governor.

His use of religious identity politics in the 2017 election distanced him from moderate Muslims. His choice of Muhaimin Iskandar as his running mate in Wednesday's election is viewed as an attempt to rebuild that support.

Iskandar's Islam-based National Awakening Party has strong ties with Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, which boasts over 45 million members.

Baswedan opposes Widodo's signature plan to move Indonesia's capital from Jakarta to Nusantara on the island of Borneo, about 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) away, which involves constructing government buildings and housing from scratch.

He said in an interview with The Associated Press last month that democracy in Indonesia is declining, referring to Subianto's choice of Widodo's son as his running mate, and pledged to get it back on track.

"This means that there is a decline in trust, it means that our democracy is experiencing a decline in quality, it means that many legal rules are being bent," he said.

Biden welcomes King of Jordan as framework for hostage deal is decided in Israel-Hamas conflict

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is hosting Jordan's King Abdullah II in Washington Monday and the two leaders are expected to discuss the ongoing effort to free hostages held in Gaza, and growing concern over a possible Israeli military operation in the port city of Rafah.

It is the first meeting between the allies since three American troops were killed last month in a drone strike against a U.S. base in Jordan. Biden blamed Iran-backed militias for the fatalities, the first for the U.S. after months of strikes by such groups against American forces across the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

The meeting with King Abdullah II comes as Biden and his aides are working to broker another pause in Israel's war against Hamas in order to send humanitarian aid and supplies into the region and get hostages out. The White House faces growing criticism from Arab-Americans over the administration's continued support for Israel in the face of growing casualties in Gaza.

It appeared a deal for another pause in the fighting was getting close. A senior U.S. administration official said Sunday that after weeks of shuttle diplomacy and phone conversations, a framework was essentially in place for a deal that could see the release of the remaining hostages held by Hamas in Gaza in exchange for a halt to fighting.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, acknowledged that gaps remained but declined to specify what they are. The official said Israeli military pressure on Hamas in Khan Younis over the last several weeks has helped bring the militant group closer to accepting an agreement. The potential for an agreement took up the majority of Biden's call Sunday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The official said the two leaders also had a significant back and forth about the potential expansion of Israeli military operations into Rafah and that Biden reiterated U.S. opposition to the idea under the "current conditions" while more than 1.3 million people are sheltering there.

It was the most forceful language yet from the president on the possible operation. Biden, who last

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week called Israel's military response in Gaza "over the top," also sought "urgent and specific" steps to strengthen humanitarian aid. Israel's Channel 13 television said the conversation lasted 45 minutes.

The official said the Israelis "made clear they would not contemplate an operation" in Rafah without safeguarding the civilian population. The official said the U.S. is not sure there is a feasible or implementable plan to relocate civilians out of Rafah to allow military operations to take place.

Jordan and other Arab states have been highly critical of Israel's actions and have eschewed public support for long-term planning over what happens next, arguing that the fighting must end before such discussions can begin. They have been demanding a cease-fire since mid-October as civilian casualties began to skyrocket.

Biden had planned to visit Jordan during his trip to Israel in October shortly after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, but the trip was scrapped. On his way home from Israel, Biden announced he'd helped broker the first deal to pause fighting temporarily and to open the crossing in Rafah to humanitarian aid.

In the months since, members of his administration have made repeated trips to the region to engage with leaders there.

Republicans work to recruit female, minority candidates even as they criticize diversity programs

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are critical of diversity and inclusion programs within the federal government and elsewhere, but they see recruiting women and minority candidates, along with veterans, as key to expanding their slim majority in November.

Rep. Richard Hudson, the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, recently listed for reporters a slew of candidates that he described as fitting the "formula" for the GOP expanding their ranks in November.

There was Prasanth Reddy, a cancer doctor who immigrated to the U.S. from India and joined the military after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He's running for a congressional seat in northeast Kansas. Then there was Alison Esposito, a gay former police detective running for a seat in New York.

Another example Hudson cited was George Logan, whose parents came to the U.S. from Guatemala and is running for a seat in Connecticut. Also, there's Kevin Lincoln, an African-American and Hispanic mayor in Stockton, Calif., and Mayra Flores, who is making another run. She made history by becoming the first Mexican-born congresswoman, but she subsequently lost in the 2022 mid-terms.

"These are not run-of-the-mill generic Republicans," Hudson said.

Republicans are hoping the gains they made in the 2022 mid-term elections will continue with their latest slate of candidates. House Democrats have a sizeable advantage when it comes to minority voters and don't intend to cede any ground, announcing a \$35 million investment last month focused on reaching out to voters of color through polling, organizing and ads. The contest to appeal to female and minority voters will certainly be one of the factors determining which party controls the House next year.

Hudson noted that in the last presidential election, prognosticators were predicting that Republicans would lose seats.

"We beat 15 Democrats and every one of those we beat with a woman, a minority candidate or a veteran," Hudson said. "That's really been the playbook for the last two cycles. And so we're using that same formula."

When asked what she makes of the House Republican focus on recruiting females and minorities, the chair of the campaign arm for House Democrats was skeptical.

"I think they say a lot of things, but I think their actions really are what folks should look at," said Rep. Suzan DelBene, the chair of the campaign arm for House Democrats. "And their actions have been the opposite. They mock diversity and equity, and they put forward policies that go against diverse communities across the county."

DelBene is referring in part to the scores of policy mandates that House Republicans have included in

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spending bills. Most of the bills sought to prohibit taxpayer dollars from going to offices and programs related to diversity, equity and inclusion, which focus on ensuring fair treatment and participation of all people, especially those that have been subject to discrimination.

It's not just House Republicans seeking to end such programs. Republican lawmakers in at least 17 states have proposed some three dozen bills to restrict or require public disclosure of DEI initiatives, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

Hudson sidestepped on whether the focus on attracting female and minority candidates as House Republican candidates clashes with efforts to clamp down on diversity and inclusion programs within the federal government and elsewhere. He described it as "apples and oranges" and saying "I just haven't given a lot of thought to that."

"The motivation is we want our Congress to reflect America. And we believe that if we have dynamic candidates with compelling life stories, then they can win any district because they are not generic Republicans," he said.

Hudson will see early test results on the GOP strategy as soon as Tuesday in a New York special election to replace Republican Rep. George Santos, who was booted from office by colleagues in December. Tom Suozzi is the Democratic candidate, seeking a return to the seat he held for three terms before making an unsuccessful run for governor.

The Republican candidate is Mazi Pilip, an Ethiopian immigrant, former Israeli paratrooper and mother of seven. Hudson said she an example of the type of candidate he believes can break through to voters with a compelling life story.

"She's a mom. She's a soldier. She's an immigrant. It's the American dream," Hudson said.

The emphasis on diversity that Hudson noted, the recruiting of minorities and females, makes sense politically given the increased racial and ethnic diversity of U.S. voters.

According to the Pew Research Center, the number of Hispanics eligible to vote has increased by about 12% over the past four years and the number of Asian Americans eligible to vote has grown by about 15%. The number of Blacks eligible to vote has grown by 7%. That's compared to an overall increase in eligible voters of 3%.

Another example of the Republican outreach to women is Rep. Elise Stefanik's E-Pac, which was launched after the 2018 mid-terms to support and increase the number of women in Congress. The PAC's website notes that in the 2020 elections, 11 out of the 15 districts that flipped to Republicans were won by women endorsed by the PAC, and that it supported a record number of Hispanic women in the 2022 elections.

"They have their own DEI offices. They don't like to call them that," said Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., specifically citing the PAC. "But the Republican Party is full of their own DEI initiatives because they actually find that their performance, like many other organizations, can sometimes stand to benefit from diverse perspectives."

Stefanik said she was proud of helping expand the ranks of female Republicans in the House, and "we're going to win with the strongest candidates."

Steven Horsford, the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, said he was glad Republicans were acknowledging the importance of recruiting women and minorities.

"They also need to acknowledge it in their agenda," Horsford said. "They cannot be speaking in one voice and then doing in another something that's weakening the very things that help create an inclusive environment for everybody."

Republicans have made gains in increasing their minority and female members, but still lag Democrats on most fronts.

Republicans doubled their number of Black members in the House to four in the last election, while there are 55 Black Democratic members. The Hispanic and Latino ranks in the House include 15 Republicans and 37 Democrats.

Women make up 126 members of the House, with 92 being Democrats and 34 being Republicans. The statistics don't include those delegates and the resident commissioner for Puerto Rico, who cannot vote on the final passing of bills but are members of Congress.

Virginia's Youngkin aims to bolster mental health care, part of national focus after the pandemic

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — John Clair, the police chief of a small Appalachian town in southwest Virginia, spends his days consumed by a growing problem: the frequency with which his officers are tapped to detain, transport and wait in hospitals with people in the throes of a mental health crisis.

Officers from Clair's 21-member Marion Police Department crisscross the state to deliver patients for court-ordered treatment, sometimes only to discover the hospital where they were sent has no available beds. Patients end up boarding in waiting rooms or emergency rooms, sometimes for days on end, while under the supervision of Clair's officers.

It's a problem for law enforcement agencies around Virginia, one that advocates, attorneys and leaders like Clair say ties up policing resources and contributes to poor patient outcomes. In the past five years, these types of transports have become the largest single category of case the Marion department handles.

"We are against the wall," said Clair, an Army veteran and former lay pastor who sometimes shuttles patients himself, and did so last month on a nearly 15-hour round trip to a coastal city on the other side of the state.

The problem underscores a widely held consensus that Virginia's mental health care system is in urgent need of reform, due to what Gov. Glenn Youngkin's administration says is an overreliance on hospitalization at a time of growing need.

About a year ago, Youngkin, a Republican, rolled out an ambitious initiative that aims to transform the way psychiatric care is delivered by creating a system that allows people to get the treatment they need without delay, in their own community and not necessarily in the confines of a hospital, easing the burden on both patients and law enforcement.

While Virginia's struggles may be particularly acute, Youngkin is not alone in his focus on the issue. Improving mental health care became a priority in the U.S. like never before as the pandemic brought new levels of isolation, fear and grief, in addition to pre-existing crises such as rising drug overdose deaths and the struggles burdening teen girls. Survey data from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that in 2022, about half of adults with any mental illness did not receive treatment.

"We know that there's a lot of partisan divide across the country, but what we've found is whether it's red states or blue states, there's a lot of support for behavioral health at this point," said Brian Hepburn, executive director of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors.

Youngkin's emphasis on mental health developed during his 2021 campaign, when person after person — from doctors to local officials to police — pleaded with him to make it a priority, according to John Littel, the cabinet secretary overseeing the Virginia initiative.

"It was just so clear that people were really struggling," Littel said.

Youngkin has since won bipartisan support for his "Right Help, Right Now" initiative and praise from advocates, though some worry about the pace at which things are moving. The governor — whose press office says the initiative is exceeding key milestones — cannot seek a second consecutive term and leaves office in two years.

The initiative's wide-ranging goals include building up the behavioral health care workforce and working to stem the tide of overdose deaths, which claimed the lives of an average of seven Virginians a day in 2022. Youngkin has signed dozens of related bills into law and has secured hundreds of millions in new funding, with more proposed.

The "foundational" part of the plan, as Littel describes it, is creating a system that delivers same-day help to individuals in crisis, which should also relieve some of the burden on police departments like Clair's that are charged with transporting most patients a court deems a risk to themselves or others.

Youngkin's administration hopes to build up that continuum of care by increasing the number of mobile crisis teams with clinicians to respond to mental health emergencies and creating more short-term stabilization centers for patients to avoid the need to take them hours away from their homes for care.

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A recent report from the state's legislative watchdog emphasized the need.

Virginia had more than 20,000 temporary detention orders in fiscal year 2023, according to a recent presentation to lawmakers. Some 8,538 of those individuals experienced delays receiving psychiatric treatment after they had been deemed an imminent risk to themselves or others, the report found.

The report also raised concerns about law enforcement "drop offs," where officers or sheriff's deputies leave patients before they're accepted by a hospital or other facility. Recent testimony in a legislative hearing suggested drop-offs put some of those patients at risk of death.

Elsewhere in the U.S., states' policy concerns and approaches to improving mental health care have varied.

States have used federal coronavirus pandemic relief funds to bolster access to care, and most governors have talked about mental health in their state of the state addresses in the last few years. Mental health was listed as a budget priority in most states in an analysis by the National Association of State Budget Officers.

Will that emphasis continue?

"It's a marathon, it's not a sprint," said Katherine McGuire, chief advocacy officer of the American Psychological Association, "and our daily hope is that the states especially after the public health emergency was rescinded will realize they have to stay at it, they have to stick with it."

Virginia's lawmakers are considering bills on the intersection of law enforcement and mental health this year.

Clair said he hoped that speaking with candor about his department's experiences will help them see the urgency of the problem. But he's worried that the part-time General Assembly, also grappling with controversial gambling and sports arena deals, may rush through something that falls short of what's needed.

The patient Clair transported across the state, costing his department thousands of dollars, has had around 15 mental health encounters with his agency in a year and a half, he estimates. One involved a suicide attempt.

The patient dropped off a handwritten thank-you note for the chief after their long ride. A short time later, she was back in his department's custody.

Clair said both police and patients in need — whose crises can be exacerbated by time spent detained in the back of a police car — deserve better.

"We're just setting ourselves up for tragedy over and over again," he said.

Will Biden and Trump face one another in presidential debates?

There's no commitment yet

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nikki Haley is challenging Donald Trump to debate. Trump is challenging Joe Biden to debate. And Biden is laughing Trump off, at least publicly.

But there are real questions about whether any of them will confront each other on a stage this year.

Biden's reelection campaign has repeatedly declined to commit to joining debates with Trump, his likely opponent in the November general election. Trump, meanwhile, has feuded with the Republican National Committee and refused to join its primary debates. In 2020, he objected to the rules of the nonpartisan commission that has hosted general election debates since 1976.

While any disputes could be resolved by the fall, the uncertainty reflects how both Biden and Trump are increasingly choosing to reach voters in environments they control at the expense of nonpartisan interviews or events where they might face unfriendly questions. Both the 81-year-old Biden and 77-year-old Trump have at times confused names and countries and face widespread doubts from voters about their age and readiness.

There's also lingering animosity over how their debates went four years ago.

Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, a longtime Biden confidant, noted that he was in the room for the chaotic September 2020 debate when Trump repeatedly interrupted Biden and moderator Chris Wallace.

Lowering his voice to a whisper, Coons said: "That was bad."

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He then questioned whether a general election debate this year would be worth it.

"It's challenging to imagine, given that the RNC and the Trump campaign have said they will have nothing to do with the Commission on Presidential Debates and given his previous conduct, it's hard to imagine it being productive," Coons said. "But this is ultimately a judgment call for President Biden."

Debates are not mandatory, but they are considered a traditional test for candidates where they have no aids or teleprompters. The first televised presidential debate was in 1960 between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy, but it didn't become a recurring event until 1976 when the League of Women Voters began sponsoring presidential debates. They are now sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates, a nonprofit established in 1987 that outlines the rules for each debate and selects the location, dates and moderators.

Frank Fahrenkopf, co-chair of the commission, says it's too early to entirely write off the prospect of debates in 2024.

"There's a history of candidates not being happy," he said. "Despite that, it's been part of American culture since 1976. There's no question the American people expect the men and women who want to be president of the United States to appear on the stage and answer questions and debate."

Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), a member of the Biden campaign's national advisory board, also said Biden and Trump should debate.

"They're about democracy," Khanna said of the debates. "And it's important for the American people to understand the different visions of the candidates. Absolutely, the president should debate in the three fall debates that are traditional, and Donald Trump should debate and not be afraid of that."

While many political observers are looking ahead to a Biden-Trump rematch, Haley is still trying to get the former president's attention in the Republican primary. The former U.N. ambassador has challenged Trump to "man up" for what she calls the "ultimate mental competency test," referencing the exam for early onset dementia and other cognitive disorders that he took while in the White House. Her campaign has had someone dressed in an inflatable chicken costume appear at events holding a sign reading, "Trump Too Chicken To Debate."

But the Republican National Committee stopped scheduling primary debates after the fourth debate in Alabama in December. The last one-on-one debate between Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was hosted by CNN on Jan. 10 in Iowa.

Trump is pushing Haley to drop out of the primary and taunting Biden instead. He called on Biden to start debating now "for the good of the country" despite the general election being eight months away.

"I'd like to debate him now because we should debate. We should debate for the good of the country," Trump said last week on The Dan Bongino Show, saying that Biden "can't do it because he can't talk."

Biden in response laughed and said, "If I were him I'd want to debate me too. He's got nothing else to do."

Biden's staff has repeatedly declined to commit to his participation in debates. His campaign visited Alabama before the last GOP primary debate to hold a press conference. Asked then if Biden himself would debate in the fall, deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks said officials would "look at the schedule."

"We will have those conversations," Fulks said. "But right now," Fulks added, "our focus is on making sure we continue to build out a campaign and infrastructure that's going to be able to be competitive in 2024."

Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, who was the GOP's 2012 nominee and participated in three debates against President Barack Obama, said "of course" Trump and Biden should debate.

"This is a democracy of the United States of America. We need to hear from the people who want to be president and see if they have mental capacity and see what their positions are on issues," Romney said. "It's one thing to say you passed a competency test. But it's another thing to actually have the American people listen to you debate. I want to hear both President Biden and President Trump."

Romney dismissed Trump's vendetta against the debate commission, as well as the Biden campaign's noncommittal position on debates, as "excuses."

"People always find excuses for why they don't want to debate," Romney said. "But you got a couple of old guys that don't want to have people see how old they are."

There's at least one example — albeit in a key swing state rather than a national election — of a Demo-

crat skipping debates and winning the election anyway.

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs refused to debate Republican Kari Lake in 2022 on the grounds that Lake, a former television news anchor well-known for her polished presence on screen, had spread falsehoods about elections, with her staff labeling Lake a "conspiracy theorist." Hobbs won a tight race anyway.

In addition to his rallies where he speaks to cheering supporters sometimes for two hours at a time, Trump has also tried to pursue viral moments — visiting a fraternity before a college football game, going to a sports bar, and frequenting mixed-martial arts events.

Biden, meanwhile, has done fewer larger rallies and instead focused on small events like recent stops at a boba tea shop and a family's kitchen. His team argues that's more effective in a changed media landscape because TikTok videos and Instagram stories from those events reach more voters than television ads and speeches.

Patrick Stewart is a political science professor at the University of Arkansas who wrote a book titled "The Audience Decides: Applause-Cheering, Laughter, and Booing during Debates in the Trump Era." He said debates are perhaps even more necessary in the era of deepfakes, where manipulated video or digital representation is generated by artificial intelligence.

"I trust my eyes if I can go ahead and watch it in real time," Stewart said. "That's why they matter very much because the viewers can make up their own mind by watching the candidates."

But Jacob Thompson, 29, a firefighter and constable from Knoxville, Tennessee, who recently stopped by a Trump rally in Las Vegas, said Trump doesn't really need to debate anymore as voters are familiar with his views and platform.

"We all know the real Donald Trump. And we're all very proud of him," he said. "People get offended by things that he says. And there's a lot of things that he says that I wish he didn't. However, I'm basing my opinion off of what he has done."

Defense Secretary Austin hospitalized with bladder issue, transfers powers to his deputy

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was hospitalized again Sunday to address a bladder issue as he continues to recover from prostate cancer and has transferred authorities to his deputy, the Pentagon said.

Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer in December and continues to deal with complications from his treatment.

At about 2:20 p.m. Sunday, he was transported by his security detail to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center "to be seen for symptoms suggesting an emergent bladder issue," Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement.

While Austin initially intended to retain the "functions and duties of his office," at about 5 p.m. Sunday he transferred those authorities to Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks. As of Sunday evening, he remained hospitalized.

A statement from Walter Reed medical officials late Sunday said Austin was admitted into the critical care unit for supportive care and close monitoring. Dr. John Maddox, the trauma medical director, and Dr. Gregory Chesnut, director of the Center for Prostate Disease Research of the Murtha Cancer Center, said while it was unclear at this time how long Austin will remain hospitalized, "the current bladder issue is not expected to change his anticipated full recovery."

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was notified, as well as the White House and Congress.

Austin was scheduled to depart Tuesday for Brussels to hold a meeting of the Ukraine contact group, which he established in 2022 to coordinate military support for Kyiv after Russia's invasion. After that, Austin was scheduled to attend a regular meeting of NATO defense ministers.

It was not immediately clear if this hospitalization would change those plans.

Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer in December and underwent a procedure called a prostatectomy to treat it on Dec. 22.

Over the following week, he developed complications and on Jan. 1, in extreme pain, he was taken to Walter Reed by ambulance where he was admitted to the intensive care unit. Austin remained at Walter Reed until Jan. 15. He then continued to recover and work from home, and he returned to the Pentagon Jan. 29.

His doctors have previously said his prognosis against the cancer is "excellent" and that no further treatments will be needed.

Austin has gone back to Walter Reed for follow-ups since his hospitalization but this is his first unscheduled trip due to continued complications from his cancer treatments.

Austin did not tell President Joe Biden, Congress or his deputy defense secretary of his December cancer diagnosis or initial hospitalization for weeks. That secrecy has become the subject of an inspector general investigation and a Pentagon internal review. He has previously said he never instructed his staff to keep his hospitalization a secret.

Beyoncé drops new songs 'Texas Hold 'Em' and '16 Carriages.' New music 'Act II' will arrive in March

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Beyoncé is back with two new country tracks — "Texas Hold 'Em" and "16 Carriages."

After a Verizon commercial starring Beyoncé aired during the Super Bowl ended with the superstar saying "They ready, drop the new music," the question became — was she serious? Later, a cryptic Instagram video with country iconography appeared on her page, teasing "act ii" on March 29. (Beyoncé's 2022 album "Renaissance" is frequently referred to as "Act I: Renaissance.")

At the end of the clip, a plucky acoustic guitar riff plays, and Bey's unmistakable voice kicks in. She sings, "This ain't Texas / Ain't no hold 'em / So lay your cards down down down," in a Southern twang.

It appears on her official website as well. Under the "music" tab, two titles were listed — "Texas Hold 'Em" and "16 Carriages," which later appeared as full songs on Tidal, YouTube and Spotify. The first is an uptempo country and western stomp. She sings in the earworm bridge: "And I'll be damned if I cannot dance with you / Come pour some liquor on me honey, too / It's a real-life boogie, and a real life hoedown / Don't be a bitch, come take it to the floor now."

The second, "16 Carriages" is a soulful slow-burn with ascendent organs and steel guitar, Beyoncé singing an ode to hard work and legacy. "I miss my kids / Overworked and overwhelmed," she sings in the pre-chorus. "Still workin' on my life, you know / Only God knows, only God knows." A quick examination of the credits shows she may be working closely with Tony! Toni! Toné! 's Raphael Saadiq.

In a mostly fictional Verizon commercial that aired moments before the Instagram announcement, Beyoncé tried several tactics to try to break the internet.

With former "Veep" star Tony Hale playing an adviser, she opens a "Lemonade" stand, releases a saxophone album called "Let's Get Saxy," does her own version of the "Barbie" movie called "BarBey," sells a cyborg version of herself, runs for "Beyoncé of the United States," and blasts off in a rocket to become the first woman in space.

After Hale tells her none of that worked, she says on the space ship intercom, "OK, Bey ready: drop the new music."

Beyoncé was also shown soon on the telecast soon after at Allegiant Stadium watching the Super Bowl with husband Jay-Z.

Review: Usher shines at star-studded 2024 Super Bowl halftime show

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Usher emerged at Las Vegas' Allegiant Stadium for the Super Bowl halftime show seated on a throne, joined by a marching band and a trove of Vegas performers — but stayed its center. It was an immediate confirmation of his position as the ideal halftime performer: one with timeless, well-known hits, masterful choreography, and a devoted audience.

He started with "Caught Up," moving into "U Don't Have to Call," "Superstar," and "Love in the Club."

Then Alicia Keys joined in front of bright red piano for her song "If I Ain't Got You," which morphed into "My Boo," Usher losing a glove in an apparent tribute to Michael Jackson — notable for a performance during Black History Month.

"They said I wouldn't make it," he told the crowd, dedicating the set to his "mama."

Across 13 minutes during the halftime show sponsored by Apple Music, Usher brought out a number of guests including H.E.R., Jermaine Dupri, Lil Jon (for "Turn Down for What," which became "Yeah!" — and included a guest appearance from Ludacris).

Across three decades, the R&B superstar had an endless treasure trove of hits to pull from — and did so with costume changes, and a rolling performance of "OMG" while wearing roller skates — at one moment, sliding between will.i.am's legs.

His album "Confessions" ranks among one of the best-selling music projects of all time and turned 20 this year; "Burn" became an easy performance highlight.

Over the past two years, Usher, 45, has made Vegas a home for his unique talents, with his sold-out residency, "Usher: My Way," at Dolby Live at Park MGM making him the perfect pick for Sunday's game.

The eight-time Grammy award winner is also no stranger to the Super Bowl stage — he made a guest appearance with Black Eyed Peas frontman will.i.am in 2011.

"I got a chance to see a bit of what it felt like," Usher told The Associated Press in a recent interview. In his first Super Bowl performance, he descended from the stadium ceiling to perform "OMG" in Arlington, Texas.

"Don't take the moments for granted because you only get 13 of them," he said in advance of his 2024 performance, referring to the usually allotted 13-minute run time. "The hardest part is trying to figure out how to squeeze it all in when you actually have a large catalog, or a lot of records people celebrate and love."

With a doubt — he figured out exactly how to do just that.

Russia launches barrage of 45 drones over Ukraine as Kyiv changes more military leaders

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces launched 45 drones over Ukraine in a five-and-a-half-hour barrage Sunday, officials said, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continued the reshuffle of his war cabinet as the war enters its third year.

In a statement, the Ukrainian air force said it had shot down 40 of the Iranian-made Shahed drones over nine different regions, including on the outskirts of the country's capital, Kyiv.

The attack targeted agricultural facilities and coastal infrastructure, officials for Ukraine's southern defense forces wrote on Telegram. They said that a strike in the Mykolaiv region had injured one person, sparking a fire and damaging residential buildings.

Another person was injured in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region when a blaze broke out due to falling debris from a destroyed drone, said the head of the region's military administration, Serhiy Lysak.

Border police in Moldova also said Sunday that fragments of a "Shahed-type drone" were found near the southern town of Etulia close to the border with Ukraine, but that the debris posed no danger to communities nearby.

"There is a suspicion that the detected drone debris is one of the drones shot down by the Ukrainian

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anti-aircraft system," the border police said in a statement, referencing overnight attacks launched on Friday by Russian forces on Ukraine's Izmail region.

The distance between Etulia and Izmail is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) as the crow flies. Authorities said access to the impact site has been restricted.

Moldovan President Maia Sandu posted on the social media platform X, that "Russia's war on Ukraine hits close to home in Moldova — again."

"The discovery of Shahed drone debris in southern Moldova today serves as another stark reminder of the grim reality we face," she said. "Russia's aggression endangers the entire continent. Support for Ukraine must continue."

The strikes come as Zelenskyy continues his shakeup of military commanders in a bid to maintain momentum against attacking Russian forces.

Kyiv announced Sunday that former deputy defense minister Lt. Gen. Alexander Pavlyuk would become the new commander of Ukraine's ground forces. The post was previously held by Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyy, who was named Thursday as the replacement for Ukraine's outgoing military chief, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

New presidential decrees also named Yurii Sodol, the former head of Ukraine's marine corps, as the new commander of Ukraine's combined forces; Brig. Gen. Ihor Skibiuk as commander of Ukraine's air assault forces; and Maj. Gen. Ihor Plahuta as commander of Ukraine's territorial defense forces.

Incoming commander-in-chief Syrskyy has signaled that his immediate goals include improving troop rotation at the front lines and harnessing the power of new technology at a time when Kyiv's forces are largely on the defensive.

STARLINK CONCERNS

Ukraine's military intelligence service said Sunday that attacking Russian forces had been found using Starlink terminals to aid their attack. It released what it said was a recording of an intercepted conversation between two Russian soldiers as proof.

Starlink terminals, which use a series of satellites run by Elon Musk's company Space X to provide high-speed communications, have been vital in giving Ukraine's military an edge over invading Russian troops.

However, multiple reports of Russian troops using Starlink on the front line in occupied Ukraine had begun to surface in the Ukrainian media in recent weeks.

They prompted Space X to release a statement on social media on Feb. 8, saying that it did not "do business of any kind with the Russian government or its military."

However, Western tech components have regularly been found among Russia's arsenal as Moscow has become more skilled at evading sanctions, often importing goods via third countries.

In a statement on Telegram on Saturday, Zelenskyy said that he hoped to "reboot" the upper levels of Ukraine's armed forces with experienced combat commanders.

"Now, people who are well-known in the army and who themselves know well what the army needs are taking on new responsibilities," he said.

Israeli strikes hit Rafah after Biden warns Netanyahu to have 'credible' plan to protect civilians

By NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — A series of Israeli strikes early Monday hit Rafah, the city on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip where 1.4 million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting elsewhere in the four-month Israel-Hamas war.

Israel has been signaling its ground offensive in Gaza may soon target the densely populated city on the Egyptian border. On Sunday, the White House said President Joe Biden had warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel should not conduct a military operation against Hamas in Rafah without a "credible and executable" plan to protect civilians.

The strikes hit around Kuwait Hospital early Monday morning, an Associated Press journalist in Rafah

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said. Some of those wounded in the strikes had been brought to the hospital.

The Israeli military said it struck "terror targets in the area of Shaboura" — which is a district in Rafah. The military statement said the series of strikes had concluded, without elaborating on the targets or assessing the potential damage or casualties.

Palestinian health officials did not immediately offer any casualty information.

Biden's remarks were his most forceful language yet on the possible operation. Biden, who last week called Israel's military response in Gaza "over the top," also sought "urgent and specific" steps to strengthen humanitarian aid. Israel's Channel 13 television said the conversation lasted 45 minutes.

Discussion of the potential for a cease-fire agreement took up much of the call, a senior U.S. administration official said, and after weeks of diplomacy, a "framework" is now "pretty much" in place for a deal that could see the release of remaining hostages held by Hamas in exchange for a halt to fighting.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss negotiations, acknowledged that "gaps remain," but declined to give details. The official said military pressure on Hamas in the southern city of Khan Younis in recent weeks helped bring the group closer to accepting a deal.

Netanyahu's office declined to comment on the call. Hamas' Al-Aqsa television station earlier quoted an unnamed Hamas official as saying any invasion of Rafah would "blow up" the talks mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

Biden and Netanyahu spoke after two Egyptian officials and a Western diplomat said Egypt threatened to suspend its peace treaty with Israel if troops are sent into Rafah, where Egypt fears fighting could push Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula and force the closure of Gaza's main aid supply route.

The threat to suspend the Camp David Accords, a cornerstone of regional stability for nearly a half-century, came after Netanyahu said sending troops into Rafah was necessary to win the four-month war against Hamas. He asserted that Hamas has four battalions there.

Over half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled to Rafah to escape fighting in other areas, and they are packed into tent camps and U.N.-run shelters. Egypt fears a mass influx of Palestinian refugees who may never be allowed to return.

Netanyahu told "Fox News Sunday" that there's "plenty of room north of Rafah for them to go to" after Israel's offensive elsewhere in Gaza, and said Israel would direct evacuees with "flyers, with cellphones and with safe corridors and other things." But the offensive has caused widespread destruction, with little capacity to take in people.

The standoff between Israel and Egypt, two close U.S. allies, took shape as aid groups warned that an offensive in Rafah would worsen the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. Around 80% of residents have fled their homes, and the U.N. says a quarter of the population faces starvation.

A ground operation in Rafah could cut off one of the only avenues for delivering food and medical supplies. Forty-four trucks of aid entered Gaza on Sunday, said Wael Abu Omar, a spokesman for the Palestinian Crossings Authority. About 500 entered daily before the war.

WHERE WOULD CIVILIANS GO?

Officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief reporters on the sensitive negotiations. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries have also warned of severe repercussions if Israel goes into Rafah.

"An Israeli offensive on Rafah would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell wrote on X. Human Rights Watch said forced displacement is a war crime.

Israel and Egypt fought five wars before signing the Camp David Accords, brokered by the U.S., in the late 1970s. The agreement includes provisions governing the deployment of forces on both sides of the heavily fortified border.

Egyptian officials fear that if the border is breached, the military would be unable to stop a tide of people fleeing into the Sinai Peninsula.

The United Nations says Rafah, normally home to fewer than 300,000 people, now hosts 1.4 million

more and is "severely overcrowded."

Inside Rafah, some displaced people packed up again. Rafat and Fedaa Abu Haloub, who fled Beit Lahia in the north earlier in the war, placed their belongings onto a truck. "We don't know where we can safely take him," Fedaa said of their baby. "Every month we have to move."

Om Mohammad Al-Ghemry, displaced from Nuseirat, said she hoped Egypt would not allow Israel to force Palestinians to flee into the Sinai "because we do not want to leave."

112 BODIES TAKEN TO GAZA HOSPITALS IN A DAY

Heavy fighting continues in central Gaza and Khan Younis.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Sunday that the bodies of 112 people killed across the territory had been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours. The death toll is 28,176 since the start of the war. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and fighters but says most of those killed were women and children.

The war began with Hamas' attack into southern Israel on Oct. 7, when Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted around 250. Over 100 hostages were released during a cease-fire in November.

Hamas won't release more unless Israel ends its offensive and withdraws from Gaza. Netanyahu has ruled out both demands.

NATO leader says Trump puts allies at risk by saying Russia can 'do whatever the hell they want'

By VANESSA GERA and LORNE COOK Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The head of the NATO military alliance warned Sunday that Donald Trump was putting the safety of U.S. troops and their allies at risk after the Republican presidential front-runner said Russia should be able to do "whatever the hell they want" to NATO members who don't meet their defense spending targets.

"Any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the U.S., and puts American and European soldiers at increased risk," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in a statement.

Speaking Saturday at a rally in Conway, South Carolina, Trump recalled how as president he told an unidentified NATO member that he would "encourage" Russia to do as it wishes in cases of NATO allies who are "delinquent."

"You didn't pay? You're delinquent?" Trump recounted saying. "No I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay. You gotta pay your bills."

Trump's remarks caused deep concern in Poland, which was under Russian control in past centuries, and where anxieties are high over the war Russia is waging just across the Polish border in Ukraine.

"We have a hot war at our border," Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Sunday, voicing concerns about whether the United States will show "full solidarity with other NATO countries in this confrontation that promises to last for a long time with Russia."

"We must realize that the EU cannot be an economic and civilizational giant and a dwarf when it comes to defense, because the world has changed," he argued in a town hall speech marking the start of his party's campaign for local elections this spring.

In 2014, NATO allies pledged to move toward spending 2% of GDP on defense by 2024. According to NATO estimates in early 2023, 10 of its 30 member states at the time were close to or above the 2% mark, while 13 were spending 1.5% or less.

No country is in debt to any other, or to NATO.

In a statement, Trump senior adviser Jason Miller said that Trump would be able to more effectively force allies to increase their NATO spending compared to President Joe Biden, and that "when you don't pay your defense spending you can't be surprised that you get more war."

Stoltenberg said he expects that, "regardless of who wins the presidential election, the U.S. will remain a strong and committed NATO ally."

The German government did not officially comment on Trump's remarks, but its foreign office pointed

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out NATO's solidarity principle in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

"'One for all and all for one.' This NATO creed keeps more than 950 million people safe," it said.

Trump's comments were of particular concern to NATO's front-line countries, like Poland and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were either under the control of Moscow or fully incorporated into the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Fears there run especially high given Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Polish President Andrzej Duda, who is allied with the right-wing opposition, and who was seen as friendly to Trump during his presidency, tweeted that the Polish-U.S. alliance must be strong "regardless of who is currently in power in Poland and the USA."

He warned: "Offending half of the American political scene serves neither our economic interests nor Poland's security."

In an editorial Sunday, German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung also called for European nations to spend more on defense.

It said that if Trump wins the presidency again, statements like the one he made on Saturday night "will increase the risk of Putin expanding his war. Europeans can only do one thing to counter this: finally invest in their military security in line with the seriousness of the situation."

Trump's tenure, which was marked by his open admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, became a near-existential challenge for NATO, an organization largely controlled by the United States. The prospect that Trump might return to power remains a deep concern among allies.

Stoltenberg was praised for his diplomatic skills in keeping NATO together during the Trump years, but the former Norwegian prime minister is stepping down. His successor is likely to be announced by the time allied leaders meet in Washington for NATO's 75th anniversary summit in July.

Under NATO's mutual defense clause, Article 5 of its founding treaty, all allies commit to help any member who comes under attack. The article has only ever been activated once – by the U.S. in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

NATO has undertaken its biggest military buildup since the Cold War since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Senators push forward with Ukraine aid package as their leaders say the world is watching

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As former President Donald Trump and a growing number of Republicans oppose U.S. aid to Ukraine, the Senate's leaders argued in strong terms on Sunday that the money is crucial to pushing back against Russian President Vladimir Putin and maintaining America's global standing.

In the Capitol for a rare weekend session, the Senate voted again to move forward with the assistance as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky issued stark warnings about the consequences of abandoning longtime U.S. allies in Europe.

"Today it's no exaggeration to say that the eyes of the world are on the United States Senate," McConnell said. "Our allies and partners are hoping that the indispensable nation, the leader of the free world, has the resolve to continue."

Sunday's 67-27 vote to move forward on the \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other countries comes as former President Donald Trump, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, is trying to kill the assistance and has escalated his attacks on the NATO military alliance.

Trump posted on his social media platform over the weekend that the U.S. should consider loaning Ukraine money, not giving it to them, saying that "The United States of America should be 'stupid' no longer!"

And the former president said Saturday at a campaign rally in South Carolina that Russia should be able to do "whatever the hell they want" to NATO members who do not meet their defense spending targets. He recounted a story he has told before about an unidentified NATO member who confronted him over his threat not to help them.

While McConnell has made helping Ukraine a top issue, an increasing number of members in his GOP

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conference have followed Trump's lead and are opposing the aid, which Senate leaders have been trying to pass for months.

Without mentioning Trump by name, McConnell said in his opening remarks Sunday that "American leadership matters, and it is in question."

Schumer said that if America doesn't assist Ukraine, "Putin is all too likely to succeed."

"The only right answer to this threat is for the Senate to face it down unflinchingly by passing this bill as soon as we can," Schumer said before the vote.

Amid shortages on the battlefield, the package would provide \$60 billion for Ukraine, mostly to purchase U.S.-made defense equipment, including munitions and air defense systems that authorities say it desperately needs as Russia batters the country. It includes \$8 billion for the government in Kyiv and other assistance.

It would also provide \$14 billion for Israel's war with Hamas, \$8 billion for Taiwan and partners in the Indo-Pacific to counter China, and \$9.2 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza.

The Senate is pushing through several procedural votes on the slimmed-down package after an attempt to pair it with legislation to stem migration at the U.S. border collapsed. Objections from Republicans adamantly opposed to the aid have delayed quick action, forcing the weekend votes as negotiations continue over potential amendments to the legislation.

Senators were still trying to negotiate a deal on amendments Sunday but it was uncertain whether they could come to an agreement that would move up a final vote. If there continue to be objections, a final vote could come midweek.

Schumer has said he is open to amendments -- most of which would be likely to fail -- but he forced senators to stay in session through the weekend to try and speed up the process.

"I can't remember the last time the Senate was in session on Super Bowl Sunday," Schumer said as he opened the session. "But as I've said all week long, we're going to keep working on this bill until the job is done."

In Sunday's vote, 18 Republicans voted to move forward with the measure — giving supporters optimism that it will eventually pass. But the debate over the aid has deeply divided the Senate GOP conference, with McConnell digging in to support it while some of the most adamant opponents of sending money to Ukraine have increasingly criticized the party leader.

"America is being invaded every day at our southern border," Florida Sen. Rick Scott posted on X, formerly Twitter, as voting got underway. "Why would we vote to send money and resources to secure Ukraine's border before we secure our own?"

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul said the debt is a huge problem, "and yet they're wanting to pass a bill to send money we don't have. So it's not a sign of strength, and it's a sign of weakness."

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said that he can understand the reservations that voters have about voting for foreign aid, but that U.S. senators, who are privy to classified briefings, should understand "what's at stake if Putin wins."

"And so some people around here if they really are being driven just by the perceptions of their base, they should grow a spine," he said.

Even if the Senate does pass the package, its future is deeply uncertain in the House, where a large majority of GOP lawmakers are firmly allied with Trump. Speaker Mike Johnson has been noncommittal on the aid and has said he wants the Senate process to play out.

Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma, a former House member who voted to move forward on the aid, noted that some members of the House have threatened to try and remove Johnson, as they did his predecessor Kevin McCarthy, if he holds a vote on Ukraine.

Still, "Speaker Johnson is now sitting in classified briefings that he hadn't had the privilege to sit in" before he was speaker, Mullin said.

NYC imposing curfew at more migrant shelters following recent violent incidents

NEW YORK (AP) — New York is expanding a curfew to additional migrant shelters after violent incidents attributed to migrant shelter residents gained national attention in recent weeks.

Mayor Eric Adams' administration will impose an 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew at 20 migrant shelters starting Monday, after initially placing the restrictions at four other locations, spokesperson Kayla Mamelak said Sunday.

The curfew impacts about 3,600 migrants, with the largest of the emergency centers housing nearly 1,000 migrants in Long Island City, Queens, according to a listing provided by the mayor's office.

City officials initially placed a curfew on four shelters last month in response to neighborhood complaints. Mamelak said the curfews are in line with restrictions already in place at NYC's traditional homeless shelters and allow for "more efficient capacity management" of migrants in the city's care.

"New York City continues to lead the nation in managing this national humanitarian crisis, and that includes prioritizing the health and safety of both asylum seekers in our care and New Yorkers who live in the communities surrounding the emergency shelters we manage," she said in an emailed statement.

The additional curfews come after a spate of migrant-related violence and crime has prompted increasingly dire rhetoric from city and police officials.

A 15-year-old teen from Venezuela was arrested Friday for opening fire in Times Square while fleeing from police after being stopped by security for suspected shoplifting. The shooting injured a tourist from Brazil.

A video showing a group of migrants brawling with police in Times Square last month also went viral and led to several arrests.

The total of 24 migrant shelters now subject to the restrictions represents a fraction of the more than 200 such facilities the city operates to house some 66,000 newly arrived asylum seekers.

Former PM Alexander Stubb wins Finnish presidency, narrowly defeating ex-top diplomat Pekka Haavisto

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb won Finland's election runoff Sunday against ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto in a close race for the presidency and the task of steering the Nordic country's foreign and security policy now that it is a member of NATO, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

With all votes counted, center-right candidate Stubb of the National Coalition Party had 51.6% of the votes, while independent candidate Haavisto from the green left got 48.4% of the votes.

The 55-year-old Stubb, who was prime minister in 2014-2015 and started his political career as a lawmaker at the European Parliament in 2004, will become the 13th president of Finland since the Nordic country's independence from the Russian empire in 1917.

Haavisto conceded defeat after a projection by the Finnish public broadcaster YLE showing a win for Stubb was released Sunday night. He shook Stubb's hand and congratulated him at Helsinki City Hall, where the candidates and the media were watching the results come in.

The months' long election campaign was polite and non-confrontational in line with consensus-driven Finnish politics with no below-the-belt attacks from any of the candidates - something that Stubb noted in his speech to Haavisto.

"This has been a fair, great race," Stubb told Haavisto after the result was clear. "I'm proud that I have been able to run with you in these elections. Thanks for a good race."

Stubb and Haavisto, 65, were the main contenders in the election where over 4 million eligible voters picked a successor to hugely popular President Sauli Niinistö, whose second six-year term expires in March. He wasn't eligible for reelection.

Sunday's runoff was required because none of the original nine candidates got more than half of the votes in Jan. 28 first round. Stubb emerged at the top with 27.3%, with Haavisto the runner-up on 25.8%.

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Several polls indicated Stubb, who has also served as Finland's foreign, finance and European affairs minister, was the favorite to win the presidency.

Initial voter turnout was 70.7%, markedly lower than during the first voting round when it was 75%.

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government, especially concerning countries outside the European Union such as the United States, Russia and China.

During the election campaign, Stubb and Haavisto largely agreed on Finland's foreign policy and security priorities. These include maintaining a hard line toward Moscow and Russia's current leadership, strengthening security ties with Washington, and the need to help Ukraine both militarily and at a civilian level. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia.

The head of state also commands the military — particularly important in Europe's current security environment and the changed geopolitical situation of Finland, which joined NATO in April 2023 in the aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine a year earlier.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was among the first foreign dignitaries to send "sincere congratulations" to Stubb, a staunch supporter of Kyiv, on his win.

Zelenskyy said in message on X, formerly known as Twitter, that "Ukraine and Finland, in solidarity with other partners, are strengthening the security of the entire Europe and each nation on our continent. I look forward to advancing our relations and our shared vision of a free, united, and well-defended Europe."

The Finnish president is expected to remain above the fray of day-to-day politics and largely to stay out of domestic political disputes.

Haavisto was Finland's top diplomat in 2019-2023 and the main negotiator of its entry into NATO. A former conflict mediator with the United Nations and a passionate environmentalist, this was his third bid for the presidency.

Israel's West Bank settler population grew nearly 3%. Supporters say Gaza war could give new push

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The population of Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank grew nearly 3% in 2023, according to a new report based on population statistics from the Israeli government.

The report, released Sunday by the pro-settler group WestBankJewishPopulationStats.com, found the settler population jumped to 517,407 as of Dec. 31, from 502,991 a year earlier.

The settler population has grown over 15% in the last five years, the report said. Last year, it passed the half-million mark, a major threshold.

This year's report predicted "accelerated growth" in the coming years, claiming the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, which triggered the current war in Gaza, persuaded many Israelis who were formerly opposed to settlement-building on occupied land to change positions.

"Serious cracks have indeed developed in the wall of opposition to Jewish settlement of the West Bank," it said.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek all three areas for an independent state.

The international community overwhelmingly considers Israel's settlements to be illegal and obstacles to peace by occupying land the Palestinians seek for their state. Israel considers the West Bank to be "disputed" and says the territory's fate should be decided in negotiations. The Biden administration recently sanctioned four settlers for violence against Palestinians and activists in the West Bank.

The report projected that if the growth rate over the past five years continues, the settler population in the West Bank will exceed 600,000 before 2030.

The report did not include population figures for east Jerusalem, where more than 200,000 Israelis live in settlements that Israel considers to be neighborhoods of its capital. The Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as their would-be capital.

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Israel's government is dominated by settler leaders and supporters. The Israeli watchdog group Terrestrial Jerusalem says that since the start of Israel's war in Gaza on Oct. 7, three settlement plans were either approved or are about to be approved in east Jerusalem.

Terrestrial Jerusalem called the speed of settlement approval processes over the last few months "frenetic."

The report comes as a spasm of violence grips the West Bank.

Since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, Israel has held the West Bank under a tight grip — limiting movement and conducting frequent raids on what it says are militant targets.

Palestinian health officials say 391 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank during that period. Most have been killed in clashes with Israeli forces. But the Israeli rights group Yesh Din says settlers shot and killed nine Palestinians in just the first month and a half of the war, among 225 incidents of Israeli civilian violence the group documented during that time.

Allies fear the US is becoming less reliable, with growing concern over a possible Trump return

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — As chances rise of a Joe Biden-Donald Trump rematch in the U.S. presidential election, America's allies are bracing for a bumpy ride.

Many worry that a second term for Trump would be an earthquake, but tremors already abound — and concerns are rising that the U.S. could grow less dependable regardless of who wins. With a divided electorate and gridlock in Congress, the next American president could easily become consumed by manifold challenges at home — before even beginning to address flashpoints around the world, from Ukraine to the Middle East.

French President Emmanuel Macron's recent verdict was blunt: America's "first priority is itself."

The first Trump administration stress-tested the bonds between the U.S. and its allies, particularly in Europe. Trump derided the leaders of some friendly nations, including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Theresa May, while praising authoritarians such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. He has called China's Xi Jinping "brilliant" and Hungary's Viktor Orbán "a great leader."

In campaign speeches, Trump remains skeptical of organizations such as NATO, often lamenting the billions the U.S. spends on the military alliance whose support has been critical to Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion.

He said at a rally on Saturday that, as president, he'd warned NATO allies he would encourage Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to countries that didn't pay their way in the alliance. Trump also wrote on his social media network that in future the U.S. should end all foreign aid donations and replace them with loans.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned that Trump risked endangering U.S. troops and their allies. "Any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the U.S., and puts American and European soldiers at increased risk," he said in a statement Sunday.

Biden, meanwhile, has made support for Ukraine a key priority and moral imperative. But Biden's assertion after his election in 2020 that "America is back" on the global stage has not been entirely borne out. Congressional Republicans have stalled more military aid for Ukraine, while America's influence has been unable to contain conflict in the Middle East.

Thomas Gift, director of the Centre on U.S. Politics at University College London, said that whoever wins the presidential race, the direction of travel will be the same — toward a multipolar planet in which the United States is no longer "the indisputable world superpower."

Most allied leaders refrain from commenting directly on the U.S. election, sticking to the line that it's for Americans to pick their leader.

They are conscious that they will have to work with the eventual winner, whoever it is — and behind the scenes, governments will be doing the "backroom work" of quietly establishing links with the contenders'

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political teams, said Richard Dalton, a former senior British diplomat.

But many of America's European NATO allies are worried that with or without Trump, the U.S. is becoming less reliable. Some have started to talk openly about the need for members to ramp up military spending, and to plan for an alliance without the United States.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he was "currently on the phone a lot with my colleagues and asking them to do more" to support Ukraine. Germany is the second-largest donor of military aid to Kyiv, behind the U.S., but Scholz recently told German weekly Die Zeit that the country couldn't fill any gap on its own if "the U.S.A. ceased to be a supporter."

Trump's comments on Saturday about NATO rang alarm bells in Poland, which shares a border with Ukraine. "We have a hot war at our border," Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Sunday.

He warned: "We must realize that the EU cannot be an economic and civilizational giant and a dwarf when it comes to defense, because the world has changed."

Russia, meanwhile, is busy bolstering ties with China, Iran and North Korea and trying to chip away at Ukraine's international support.

Macron also suggested American attention was focused far from Europe. If Washington's top priority is the U.S., he said its second is China.

"This is also why I want a stronger Europe, that knows how to protect itself and isn't dependent on others," Macron said at a January news conference.

Trump does have supporters in Europe, notably pro-Russia populists such as Hungary's Orbán. But former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson raised some eyebrows when he argued recently that "a Trump presidency could be just what the world needs."

Johnson is a strong supporter of Ukraine in its struggle against Russian invasion, whereas Trump has frequently praised Putin and said he'd end the war within 24 hours. However, Johnson said in a Daily Mail column that he didn't believe Trump would "ditch the Ukrainians," but instead would help Ukraine win the war, leaving the West stronger "and the world more stable."

Bronwen Maddox, director of the international affairs think tank Chatham House, said arguments like that underestimate "how destabilizing" Trump has been, and likely would continue to be if reelected.

"For those who say his first term did not do much damage to international order, one answer is that he took the U.S. out of the JCPOA, the deal to curb Iran's nuclear program. Iran's acceleration of its work since then has left it a threshold nuclear weapon state," she said during a recent speech on the year ahead.

Biden was a critic of Trump's Iran policy but hasn't managed to rebuild bridges with Tehran, which continues to flex its muscles across the region.

Dalton, a former U.K. ambassador to Iran, said prospects for the Middle East would be "slightly worse" under Trump than Biden. But he said divergence on the region's main tensions — the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iran's ambitions — would be limited.

"No U.S. administration is going to make a serious effort to resolve differences with Iran through diplomacy," Dalton told The Associated Press. "That ship sailed quite some time ago."

Palestinians and their supporters, meanwhile, implore Biden to temper U.S. support for Israel as the civilian death toll from the war in Gaza climbs. But hard-liners in Israel argue the U.S. is already restraining the offensive against Hamas too much.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's far-right national security minister, recently said Biden was not giving Israel his "full backing" and that "if Trump was in power, the U.S. conduct would be completely different."

Much like its allies, America's rivals are not openly expressing a preference for the election outcome.

Trump developed a strong rapport with Turkey's Erdogan, calling them "very good friends" during a 2019 meeting at the White House.

Yet Turkey-U.S. relations were fraught during his tenure. The Trump administration removed Turkey from its F-35 fighter jet project over Ankara's decision to purchase Russian-made missile defense systems, while Trump himself threatened to ruin Turkey's economy.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told CBS in January that he doesn't "believe there will be any difference" between a Trump and a Biden presidency. He argued that Russia-U.S. relations have been

going downhill since George W. Bush's administration.

China, where leaders' initial warmth toward Trump soured into tit-for-tat tariffs and rising tensions, little changed under Biden, who continued his predecessor's tough stance toward the United States' strategic rival.

Zhao Minghao, a professor of international relations at Fudan University in Shanghai, said that for China, the two candidates were like "two bowls of poison."

Gift, from University College London, said the move to a more fractured world is "going to happen regardless of whether Donald Trump or Joe Biden is elected."

"It's just sort of a reality," he said.

Biden's legal team went to Justice Dept. over what they viewed as unnecessary digs at his memory

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden's personal attorney said Sunday he went to both the special counsel and the attorney general to register concerns over what he viewed to be pejorative and unnecessary digs at the president's memory.

"This is a report that went off the rails," Bob Bauer said on CBS' Face the Nation Sunday. "It's a shabby work product."

The special counsel was investigating whether the president mishandled classified documents during his previous positions as vice president and senator, and found this week that no criminal charges were warranted.

But in building his argument for why no charges were necessary, Special Counsel Robert Hur, who was appointed by Attorney General Merrick Garland, detailed in part that Biden's defense of any potential charges could possibly be that: "Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview of him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

And then he went on to cite examples where investigators said the president's memory lapsed, including over when his older son Beau had died. In particular, the comments about Beau Biden enraged the president, who has been very open about his grief over his son's death, speaking often of him.

"How the hell dare he raise that," Biden questioned angrily following the report's release. "Frankly, when I was asked the question, I thought to myself, was it any of their damn business?"

Biden's age has already been a concern for voters. Democrats are now answering the widespread questions about the 81-year-old president's age and readiness by affirming that Biden is capable of being commander in chief and trying to discredit people who portray him feeble. First lady Jill Biden wrote a letter to donors Saturday questioning whether those comments were politically motivated; it fetched the most money in donations of any email since Biden launched his campaign.

Bauer, who is married to Biden's top White House aide Anita Dunn, said he raised concerns over the inclusion of these details to both Hur and Garland, which he viewed to be a violation of the Justice Department norms that essentially work to avoid prejudicing the public against people who are not charged with a crime. But the appeal failed.

"It's evident that he had committed to make the report public the way that the special counsel had written it," said Bauer.

Former Trump Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein defended the report on CNN's "State of the Union" Sunday.

"When you conduct a criminal investigation, some of the information that you uncover and some things that you evaluate don't necessarily put the subject in a favorable light. And, ordinarily, that's not publicized. And I think that's a good thing," he said. "It's unfortunate that the special counsel process results in public reports that expose things that otherwise would remain sealed in Department of Justice files."

The president sat down with investigators over several hours just as the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas

happened. He said he answered the questions truthfully and to the best of his knowledge.

Bauer argued that what didn't make it into the report were moments when the president deconstructed questions by investigators and when the special counsel notes that he'd be taking Biden through "events that are many years ago," and notes that he should just give his best recollection.

He said the special counsel made a decision "to cherry pick in a very misleading way" what references made it in and what didn't.

Bauer, too, suggested there was political pressure on the Justice Department, which is prosecuting former President Donald Trump for refusing to turn over a trove of classified documents as well as his role in the Jan. 6 violence at the U.S. Capitol and has been excoriated by Trump and others as biased and that his prosecution represents a "two-tiered system of justice."

Hur is a Republican, and a former U.S. attorney under Trump.

"So you have to wonder with those pressures impinging on the investigation from the outside knowing the attacks that Republicans have levied on the law enforcement process, did he decide we would have to ask that we reach the only legal conclusion possible and then toss in the rest of it to placate a certain political constituency?" Bauer asked.

The Justice Department has not commented on the criticism.

Trump says he once told a NATO ally to pay its share or he'd 'encourage' Russia to do what it wanted

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump said that, as president, he warned NATO allies that he "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to countries that are "delinquent" as the front-runner for the Republican nomination ramped up his attacks on foreign aid and long-standing international alliances. NATO's leader said Trump's words could undermine security and put American and European forces at risk.

Speaking at a rally Saturday in Conway, South Carolina, Trump recounted a story he has told before about an unidentified NATO member who confronted him over his threat not to defend members who fail to meet the trans-Atlantic alliance's defense spending targets.

But this time, Trump went further, saying had told the member that he would, in fact, "encourage" Russia to do as it wishes in that case.

"You didn't pay? You're delinquent?" Trump recounted saying. "No I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay. You gotta pay your bills."

NATO allies agreed in 2014, after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, to halt the spending cuts they had made after the Cold War and move toward spending 2% of their GDPs on defense by 2024.

NATO's secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, said in a statement Sunday that "any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the U.S., and puts American and European soldiers at increased risk." The defense minister in Poland, which has been under Russian control more often than not since the end of the 18th century, "no election campaign is an excuse for playing with the security of the alliance."

Earlier, White House spokesperson Andrew Bates responded to Trump's comments by saying that "encouraging invasions of our closest allies by murderous regimes is appalling and unhinged – and it endangers American national security, global stability, and our economy at home."

Trump's remarks come as Ukraine remains mired in its efforts to stave off Russia's 2022 invasion and as Republicans in Congress have become increasingly skeptical of providing additional aid money to the country as it struggles with stalled counteroffensives and weapons shortfalls.

Trump also called for the end of foreign aid "WITHOUT "STRINGS" ATTACHED," arguing that the U.S. should dramatically curtail the way it provides money.

"FROM THIS POINT FORWARD, ARE YOU LISTENING U.S. SENATE(?), NO MONEY IN THE FORM OF FOREIGN AID SHOULD BE GIVEN TO ANY COUNTRY UNLESS IT IS DONE AS A LOAN, NOT JUST A GIVE-

AWAY," Trump wrote on his social media network in all-caps letters.

Trump went on to say the money could be loaned "ON EXTRAORDINARILY GOOD TERMS," with no interest and no date for repayment. But he said that, "IF THE COUNTRY WE ARE HELPING EVER TURNS AGAINST US, OR STRIKES IT RICH SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE, THE LOAN WILL BE PAID OFF AND THE MONEY RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES."

During his 2016 campaign, Trump alarmed Western allies by warning that the United States, under his leadership, might abandon its NATO treaty commitments and only come to the defense of countries that meet the alliance's guidelines by committing 2 percent of their gross domestic products to military spending.

Trump, as president, eventually endorsed NATO's Article 5 mutual defense clause, which states that an armed attack against one or more of its members shall be considered an attack against all members. But he often depicted NATO allies as leeches on the U.S. military and openly questioned the value of the military alliance that has defined American foreign policy for decades.

"NATO has been a success story for the last 75 years," said GOP presidential rival Nikki Haley, who was Trump's U.N. ambassador. She told CBS' "face the Nation" on Sunday that after the 9/11 attacks, "we needed a lot of friends. We can never get into the point where we don't need friends. Now, we do want NATO allies to pull their weight. But there are ways you can do that without sitting there and telling Russia, have your way with these countries."

As of 2022, NATO reported that seven of what are now 31 NATO member countries were meeting that obligation — up from three in 2014. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has spurred additional military spending by some NATO members.

Trump has often tried to take credit for that increase, and bragged again Saturday that, as a results of his threats, "hundreds of billions of dollars came into NATO"— even though countries do not pay NATO directly.

'Lisa Frankenstein' fails to revive North American box office on a very slow Super Bowl weekend

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

"Lisa Frankenstein" didn't come to life at the North American box office in its first weekend in theaters. The horror comedy written by Diablo Cody and starring Kathryn Newton and Cole Sprouse earned \$3.8 million, according to studio estimates Sunday. It debuted in second place on a very slow Super Bowl weekend, behind the spy thriller "Argylle."

Matthew Vaughn's "Argylle" got first place with only \$6.5 million, which brings its running domestic total to \$28.8 million in two weekends. The \$200 million production is Apple's first major theatrical flop. Universal Pictures oversaw the North American release for the streamer, where it is playing in 3,605 locations. Globally, it's earned \$60.1 million to date.

Focus Features released "Lisa Frankenstein" in 3,144 locations. A 1980s-set teenage riff on Mary Shelly's classic tale, "Lisa Frankenstein" was the directorial debut of Robin Williams' daughter Zelda Williams. Reviews overall were mixed to negative with a 49% on Rotten Tomatoes. AP's Mark Kennedy wrote in his review that it was "a real monster — stitched together from previous movies, painfully incoherent and deeply, deeply dumb."

Audiences were mostly female (61%) and under the age of 35 (71%), according to exit data. But while the opening weekend was low, the production budget was also relatively modest at a reported \$13 million.

The movie is set in the same universe as "Jennifer's Body," which was written by Cody and directed by Karyn Kusama. That film underwhelmed on its release in 2009 with critics and audiences but has gained appreciation and a cult cache in the past 15 years.

"The Beekeeper" landed in third place in its fifth weekend with an additional \$3.5 million. The faith-based "The Chosen" series, showing its fourth season's first three episodes, placed fourth with \$3.2 million while "Wonka" rounded out the top five with \$3.1 million.

Overall, it's likely to be the slowest weekend of the year to date with around \$40 million industry-wide

down nearly 25% from last year. The big football game isn't entirely to blame either — in the years prior to the pandemic, the same weekend was able to generate over \$75 million. In 2009, the Liam Neeson movie "Taken" went head-to-head with the Super Bowl and made \$24.7 million. And in 2015, "American Sniper" brought in \$30.7 million.

But this year is different. Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore, attributes this to a number of factors, including the unique attention on this year's game which, he said, "has become the center of attention for the world of entertainment."

"There was only one new movie and there's been so little momentum in this movie marketplace," he said. "It should come as no surprise that, at least in the modern era, this is the lowest grossing Super Bowl weekend that we've seen."

Dergarabedian added: "I don't think anyone wanted to take a chance releasing a big wide release this weekend."

This week brings two bigger movies to theaters, "Bob Marley: One Love" and "Madame Web," but things aren't likely to pick up significantly until "Dune: Part Two" opens on March 1.

"This is the natural ebb and flow of things for theaters," Dergarabedian said. "The box office will recover."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Argylle," \$6.5 million.
2. "Lisa Frankenstein," \$3.8 million.
3. "The Beekeeper," \$3.5 million.
4. "The Chosen," \$3.2 million.
5. "Wonka," \$3.1 million.
6. "Migration," \$3 million.
7. "Anyone But You," \$2.7 million.
8. "Mean Girls," \$1.9 million.
9. "American Fiction," \$1.3 million.
10. "Poor Things," \$1.1 million.

Art exhibit honors fun-loving man killed in mass shooting in Maine

WINSLOW, Maine (AP) — Peyton Brewer-Ross was the life of the party, with wraparound sunglasses and an outlandish Randy "Macho Man" Savage Slim Jim jacket. He also was a Navy shipbuilder, the father of a 2-year-old girl, and engaged to be married.

Brewer-Ross, one of the 18 people killed in the deadliest mass shooting in Maine history, was remembered during a weekend art exhibit dubbed, "There Goes My Hero: Chapter One: Peyton Brewer-Ross." The 40-year-old was playing cornhole with friends when he was gunned down on Oct. 25 in Lewiston. Another 13 people were injured.

His fiancée, Rachael Sloat, said she curated the art exhibit "to shed a little light on just how fun and eclectic a man he truly was, and most importantly the hero he was and will always be to our daughter Elle."

"I want Peyton to be remembered for all that he was and not boxed into any particular category, most especially this recent tragedy. Some people will remember him from cornhole, some will remember him as a pipe fitter, some will remember him for his Slim Jim jacket. Peyton was all of those things and so much more," she wrote.

Sloat was a student of art professor Peter Precourt at the University of Maine at Augusta, who owns the gallery, Art:Works on Main. Sloat inspired Brewer-Ross to take an art class at Southern Maine Community College.

She said she thought it'd be fun for people to see some of his paintings, and for others to join in. The artwork included a cornhole board decorated in Brewer-Ross' honor and drawings depicting him in his homemade, tasseled jacket that paid tribute to the flamboyant professional wrestler "Macho Man," who appeared in ads for Slim Jim, one of Brewer-Ross' favorite snacks.

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And Brewer-Ross' own work was also on display: his painting of a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer signed with his initials "PBR"; self-portrait in sunglasses and a cowboy hat; and, in a nod to his own sense of humor, a man holding aloft a pair of men's white underwear.

Precourt offered up his gallery because he felt he needed to do something after the tragedy, and he's willing to continue the series to honor others. "I'm committed as long as people are interested in keeping this conversation going," he said.

Pricey Super Bowl: Some NFL fans pass on expensive tickets and just have 'a good time' in Vegas

By SPENCER RIPCHIK Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Super Bowl ticket prices remain out of reach for many fans who made travel reservations months ago to come to Las Vegas this week, so they'll likely be watching on TV like millions of others.

That's just fine with more than a few of them. They're finding other ways to enjoy themselves.

The NFL Experience looked like a fan convention with throngs of ticket-less people decked out in the jerseys of the Packers, Bengals, Steelers, Eagles and more.

They typically had the same story. Their team looked as if it might have a title shot, so they booked a Super Bowl trip to Las Vegas. Their team didn't make it, but they came anyway. To buy tickets days before the game can be costly. This year they're going for roughly \$7,700 — though that is about \$2,000 less than they were two weeks ago.

Carl Bray, a Cincinnati fan, booked his trip to the Super Bowl two months ago as his Bengals made a little run despite quarterback Joe Burrow sustaining a wrist injury.

"I don't have tickets yet, but I got the hotel flight, and I thought 'Welp, if I lock into something, I'll go,'" Bray said. "If not, I'll just go to MGM or someplace and watch it."

By Saturday, Bray still couldn't find for a ticket for steal, so was going to watch the game at a Super Bowl party at the M Resort Spa Casino in nearby Henderson.

Historically, Super Bowl tickets have slowly but steeply increased in price, from \$12 for a spot in the Los Angeles Coliseum in 1967 (\$108 today), to surpassing \$1,000 for the 2009 tilt between the Steelers and Cardinals in Tampa.

This week, the average purchase price on Tick Pick reached \$9,815 before settling back to \$7,684 Saturday morning.

That's still too steep for Chiefs fan Rick Goff.

He and his young son Zach came from Kansas City to the desert, and were decked out Chiefs gear at the NFL Experience, but they are not going to be watching their favorite team in person.

"We're working people," Rick said, "who can't afford it."

Not that he is complaining.

The Goffs decided to come to Vegas right after the Chiefs knocked off the Baltimore Ravens in the AFC championship, making the trip to be surrounded by fellow Kansas City fans for the week with no real expectation of going to the game.

Eric and Stephanie Hubbard are only a three-hour drive from their home in Southern California and booked their trip after the two teams were decided. Eric is a 49ers fan and Stephanie is a Chiefs fan causing what describe as a "civil war" for the couple — but the perfect Super Bowl matchup to see in person.

To make that happen, they say they'll need a good day at one of the casinos.

"Unless we win \$6,000 gambling tonight" that's not happening, Eric said Wednesday.

"No, no, no," Stephanie interjected, "we need \$17,000 to get tickets to the game."

The couple didn't hit a jackpot and left on Friday to watch the game at home on the couch.

Traveling long distances just to watch the big game at one of the casinos isn't new. Las Vegas has had around 300,000 visitors for past Super Bowls, according to the research center at the Las Vegas Convention Visitors Authority.

This weekend, Las Vegas is expected to have 330,000 visitors for the Super Bowl — roughly five times

the capacity of Allegiant Stadium — driving \$600 million in economic activity to Southern Nevada.

Delmas Crum, like many, planned the trip before knowing who was going to be in the Super Bowl. He's a New York Jets fan and booked his trip before Week 1 and Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers' season-ending Achilles injury.

Crum came with his father, Troy, who is an Indianapolis Colts fan. They aren't going to pay the price to watch the Super Bowl in person, but still came because of the lure of Las Vegas and sports betting.

"If nothing else, it's a vacation to Vegas," Delmas said. "A trip to Vegas and also there's a Super Bowl happening here, so we can bet on it, watch it and have a good time taking in the atmosphere."

First lady questions whether special counsel referenced son's death to score political points

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — First lady Jill Biden said in an email to campaign donors that she didn't know what the special counsel was trying to achieve when he suggested President Joe Biden could not remember when his son Beau died.

"We should give everyone grace, and I can't imagine someone would try to use our son's death to score political points," she wrote in the email Saturday. "If you've experienced a loss like that, you know that you don't measure it in years -- you measure it in grief."

It was an emphatic defense of her husband in a note to supporters as Biden's team worked to alleviate Democratic concerns over the alarms raised by a special counsel about Biden's age and memory, in a report determining that Biden would not be charged with any criminal activity for possessing classified documents after he left office.

Biden campaign officials said Sunday that Jill Biden's message was the best-performing email since the president's initial email launching his campaign on April 25, though they would not say how much money had been raised because of it.

Special counsel Robert Hur found the president should not face charges for retaining the documents, and described as a hypothetical defense that the 81-year-old president could show his memory was "hazy," "fuzzy," "faulty," "poor" and having "significant limitations," and added that during an interview with investigators that Biden couldn't recall "even within years" when his oldest son Beau had died.

Hur was appointed to the job by Attorney General Merrick Garland, who is also investigating Trump and Biden's younger son, Hunter. Hur earlier served as the top federal prosecutor in Maryland after being nominated by Trump.

"Believe me, like anyone who has lost a child, Beau and his death never leave him," Jill Biden said.

It was an unusually personal observation for a special counsel investigating the president's handling of classified documents. Beau Biden died in 2015 from a brain tumor. It's something that Biden speaks of regularly, and cites as both a reason why he didn't run in 2016 and a later motivator for his successful 2020 run.

"May 30th is a day forever etched on our hearts," Jill Biden said in a note to supporters about the day Beau Biden died. "It shattered me, it shattered our family. ... What helped me, and what helped Joe, was to find purpose. That's what keeps Joe going, serving you and the country we love."

The references to Beau Biden in Hur's report enraged the president, who later said: "How in the hell dare he raise that?"

Biden mentioned that he had sat for five hours of interviews with Hur's team over Oct. 8-9, "even though Israel had just been attacked on Oct. 7 and I was in the middle of handling an international crisis."

Voters have been concerned about his age. In an August poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs, 77% of U.S. adults said Biden is too old to be effective for four more years. It was one of the rare sources of bipartisan agreement during a politically polarized era, with 89% of Republicans and 69% of Democrats saying Biden's age is a problem.

"Joe is 81, that's true, but he's 81 doing more in an hour than most people do in a day. Joe has wisdom,

empathy, and vision," Jill Biden said. "His age, with his experience and expertise, is an incredible asset and he proves it every day."

54 people are confirmed dead in a landslide that buried a gold-mining village in south Philippines

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The death toll from a massive landslide that hit a gold-mining village in the southern Philippines has risen to 54 with 63 people still missing, authorities said Sunday.

The landslide hit the mountain village of Masara in Davao de Oro province on Tuesday night after weeks of torrential rains.

Davao de Oro's provincial government said in a Facebook post that 54 bodies had been recovered. At least 32 residents survived with injuries but 63 remained missing, it said. Among those missing were gold miners who had been waiting in two buses to be driven home when the landslide struck and buried them.

The search operation has been hampered by poor weather and fears of more landslides. More than 1,100 families have been moved to evacuation centers for their safety, disaster response officials said.

The area has been swamped by heavy rains in the weeks before the landslide struck. Earthquakes also damaged houses and buildings in the region in recent months, officials said.

Israel's finance minister blasts Moody's downgrade of the the country's credit rating

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel's finance minister on Sunday slammed the decision by financial ratings agency Moody's to downgrade Israel's credit rating, saying the announcement is a "political manifesto" that "did not include serious economic claims."

Moody's dropped the rating on Israel's debt on Friday, warning that the ongoing war in Gaza and a possible war in the north with Hezbollah could adversely affect Israel's economy.

It is the first time Moody's has lowered Israel's credit rating, which is used by investors to measure the riskiness of investing in a global entity or government. Moody's downgraded Israel from A1 to A2 and said the outlook for the country's economy was "negative." The A2 rating nonetheless continues to carry relatively low risk, according to Moody's.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich angrily dismissed the decision. The announcement "reflects a lack of confidence in Israel's security and national strength, and also a lack of confidence in the righteousness of Israel's path against its enemies," he said in a statement from his office.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that Israel's economy was strong and "the downgrade is entirely due to the fact that we are at war." He vowed that once the war ended, the rating would go up once again.

Still, Israeli officials fear that the Moody's downgrade could lead other major agencies also to downgrade Israel's outlook.

That could impact Israel's economy because it will make it harder for the government to raise money by selling bonds, said Michel Strawczynski, a professor of economics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the former director of the research department at the Bank of Israel.

"If the war is long, it will have an impact, but if it's not too long, the impact will be much less," he said.

Israel's economy bounced back after previous wars with Hamas, but the current war is much longer than any of those. It has included huge military expenditures as well as massive callups of reservists, straining the economy by removing them from the work force.

Bank of Israel Gov. Amir Yaron said on Sunday in response to Moody's announcement that the Israeli economy was resilient and already showing signs of recovery in November, the month after the war broke out.

Even before then, though, Israel — an entrepreneurial dynamo with an economy rivaling countries in

Western Europe — was struggling. Concerns about Israel's governance, rising inflation and a worldwide slowdown in tech investments last year also weighed on the economy.

Its coffers, once swollen by tech investments, were also hit by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposed judicial overhaul, which attempted to dilute the powers of the country's courts.

Moody's had raised concerns that the plan could weaken Israel's investment climate. The report released on Friday praised the "strong checks and balances" that led to the shelving of the judicial overhaul in January.

'They are shooting at us.' A fleeing Gaza family is killed along with the medics sent to find them

By The Associated Press undefined

JERUSALEM (AP) — The sound of gunfire crackled over the phone as the teenage girl hid in the car and spoke. An Israeli tank was near the vehicle as she and her family were trying to heed Israel's call to evacuate their home in Gaza.

Israeli troops were firing on the car, the teen said in terrified calls to relatives and emergency services. Everyone in the vehicle was killed except her and her 5-year-old female cousin, Hind, she said.

"They are shooting at us," 15-year-old Layan told the Palestinian Red Crescent. "The tank is next to me." And then there was a burst of gunfire. She screamed and fell silent.

That call on Jan. 29 began a desperate rescue attempt by medics with the Palestinian Red Crescent, one of many during the war in Gaza. But after the organization sent an ambulance, it lost contact with the crew.

On Saturday, 12 days later, the ambulance was discovered, blackened and destroyed.

The two medics were dead. The Palestinian Red Crescent accused Israeli forces of targeting the ambulance as it pulled up near the family's vehicle. The organization said it had coordinated the journey with Israeli forces as in the past.

The family car was found as well with six bodies, including Layan's and Hind's.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Movement around the tiny enclave carries deadly risk as Israel presses its ground and air offensive. Israel's prime minister has announced plans for a ground invasion of the cramped southern city of Rafah and said well over a million people would need to move.

The Health Ministry in Gaza says about two-thirds of more than 28,000 people killed since the start of the war have been children and women. The ministry does not distinguish in its count between civilians and combatants.

Israel says it strikes Hamas targets and holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties because the militants fight from civilian areas.

The Hamada family was among more than 80% of Gaza's population evacuating their homes. On Jan. 29, near a gas station in Gaza City, in an area designated by Israel as a combat zone, the family encountered a tank.

The circumstances of the shooting remain unclear.

But in a frantic call to her father's brother, Omar, the teen Layan said troops were firing on them, Omar told the AP. Her great-uncle Bashar Hamada, his wife and two of their children were killed. Layan was wounded.

She pleaded with Omar to send an ambulance. He connected her with the Palestinian Red Crescent office in Ramallah, which hoped to instruct her how to save herself and anyone else alive.

It was too late.

The Palestinian Red Crescent dispatched an ambulance after Layan went silent. Hours later, it lost contact with the medics, Yousef Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun, as they arrived at the scene.

For days, the organization shared the story of Hind, her family and the missing medics on social media — even posting audio of the phone call with Layan — in a plea for help.

On Saturday, after Israeli troops withdrew from the area and civilians told the Palestinian Red Crescent

about the bodies, it shared video of the ambulance, crumpled and burned. Nearby was a car said to be the family's, smashed and riddled with bullet holes.

Nicaragua's crackdown on Catholic Church spreads fear among the faithful, there and in exile

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Nineteen priests kicked out of the country, dozens of incidents of harassment and church desecrations, rural areas lacking worship and social services: the situation for Catholic clergy and faithful in Nicaragua is only worsening in 2024, according to exiled priests, laypeople in the Central American country and human rights advocates.

The fear of the ongoing crackdown by President Daniel Ortega — on the Catholic Church in particular but not sparing evangelicals — has become so pervasive that it is silencing criticism of the authoritarian government and even mentions of the repression from the pulpit.

"All the time the silence gets deeper," said Martha Patricia Molina, a Nicaraguan lawyer who fled to the United States. Her work recording hundreds of instances of church persecution recently won her an International Religious Freedom Award from the U.S. State Department.

"If it's dangerous to pray the rosary in the street, it is exceedingly so to report attacks," Molina said.

"Many priests believe that if they make reports, there will be more reprisals against the communities. We as laypeople would like for them to speak, but the only alternatives are cemetery, prison or exile."

She counted 30 church desecrations in the past year, only a few reported to authorities. Recently, she heard of a priest who went to the police after a theft in his church — only to be cursed at and told he was a suspect.

"Life in Nicaragua is hell, because surveillance is brutal. You can't say anything that's against the government," said an exiled priest. Like him, most exiles interviewed for this story spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity out of fear of retribution against their families or communities in Nicaragua.

"People now keep their heads down, as they wonder, 'If they do this to the priests, what will they do with us?'" the clergyman added. He was barred from returning to Nicaragua, where he, like many priests and nuns, drew the government's ire for providing shelter and first aid to those injured when the Ortega government violently repressed massive civic protests in 2018.

The unrest then, which started against proposed social security cuts, broadened to demand early elections and to accuse Ortega of authoritarian measures after hundreds of demonstrators were killed by security forces and allied civilian groups.

Like several Latin American governments tracing their roots back to socialist revolutions, Nicaragua's has had an uneven relationship with faith leaders for decades. But those protests triggered an escalating and systematic targeting of the church in what the U.S. government's Commission on International Religious Freedom calls a "campaign of harassment and severe persecution."

Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo, who also is the vice president, blame "terrorist" clergy for supporting the civil unrest they claim amounts to plotting a coup against them. Clergy and lay observers say the government is trying to quash the church because it remains the rare critic in Nicaragua that dares to oppose state violence and whose voice is respected by many citizens.

The "unprecedented exiling of critical voices" — from religious leaders to journalists and artists — in Nicaragua amounts to a "total censorship plan," said Alicia Quiñones, who leads the freedom of expression organization PEN International in the Americas.

It's become nearly impossible to do independent reporting in Nicaragua, she added, citing last year's imprisonment of a journalist on the charge of "fake information" after he covered an Easter celebration when public Catholic feasts have largely been barred.

"The pressure is becoming unsufferable," said one priest now in the United States. Like others, he says Mass-goers have started noticing people in the pews they have never seen before and fear they're there to report on any whiff of opposition to the government, even if only a prayer for the safety of clergy im-

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prisoned in often dangerous conditions.

In a country where more than 80% of the population is Christian – about 50% Catholic and more than 30% evangelicals, according to the U.S. religious freedom commission – the repression cuts deep both spiritually and materially.

It has hit not only clergy and religious orders but college students, minority and marginalized populations, even tiny businesses in rural towns that relied on now often prohibited or indoors-only religious processions and patron saints' feasts for their income.

In November, Molina said many priests were even prevented from celebrating traditional Masses in cemeteries for the Day of the Dead, an important holiday across Latin America.

Nicaragua's congress, dominated by Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front, has shuttered more than 3,000 nongovernmental organizations, including Mother Teresa's charity, creating a major gap in social services especially in rural areas. In addition to many diocesan assets, the government confiscated the prestigious University of Central America, whose Jesuit leaders had opened the doors to student protesters fleeing police and paramilitary attacks.

Despite the growing fear, many faithful continue to attend church services – where they remain available. Especially in rural areas, parishes and chapels are left without priests, though the seminaries still have students so some faithful hope they will be able to eventually replace those exiled or forced to flee.

Many of the senior leaders of the Catholic Church, including Bishop Rolando Álvarez who was jailed for more than a year, were released from prison and sent overseas in negotiations with the Vatican last month. A dozen jailed priests had similarly been sent to the Vatican in October.

The Holy See has offered little public comment on the situation other than calling for dialogue. The Vatican spokesman didn't respond when asked by the AP if Nicaragua's highest-ranking cleric, Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes, is in Rome, as some Nicaraguan sources reported.

Managua's Auxiliary Bishop Silvio Báez has been one of the most outspoken critics of Nicaragua's repression from the Miami area, where he is based after the pope asked him to leave his country to avoid violent threats. In late January, he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that he was at the Vatican to meet with Pope Francis, who had "shown his interest and love for Nicaragua."

Many exiles argue that while negotiating to release priests and other political prisoners marks progress, sending them into exile cannot become an acceptable practice.

"Exile cannot be normalized," said Dolly Mora, who was forced to flee to the United States, where she's helping campaign against the practice alongside other Nicaraguan activists. "It's as unjust as prison. The international community cannot say it's okay that they're expelled."

Without stronger protests from the Vatican and foreign governments, many exiles fear that any church representatives left in Nicaragua will be cowed into accommodating the Ortega government, which now only a minority of clergy supporters.

So they hope that continuing to call out the repression and to document each beaten-up priest, each desecrated tabernacle will eventually lead to justice.

"The dictatorship, what it wants is to completely eliminate the Catholic faith, because they haven't succeeded in making the church kneel before them," Molina said. "And they will not succeed."

Today in History: February 12

Composer and pianist Eubie Blake dies at 96

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Feb. 12, the 43rd day of 2024. There are 323 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 12, 1983, composer and pianist Eubie Blake, who wrote such songs as "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and "Memories of You," died in Brooklyn, New York, at 96.

On this date:

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In 1554, Lady Jane Grey, who had claimed the throne of England for nine days, and her husband, Guildford Dudley, were beheaded after being condemned for high treason.

In 1809, Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, was born in a log cabin in Hardin (now LaRue) County, Kentucky.

In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, was founded.

In 1912, Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, abdicated, marking the end of the Qing Dynasty.

In 1914, groundbreaking took place for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. (A year later on this date, the cornerstone was laid.)

In 1973, Operation Homecoming began as the first release of American prisoners of war from the Vietnam conflict took place.

In 1999, the Senate voted to acquit President Bill Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice.

In 2000, Charles M. Schulz, creator of the "Peanuts" comic strip, died in Santa Rosa, California, at age 77.

In 2002, former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic went on trial in The Hague, accused of war crimes (he died in 2006 before the trial could conclude).

In 2006, figure skater Michelle Kwan effectively retired from competition as she withdrew from the Turin Olympics due to injury (she was replaced on the U.S. team by Emily Hughes).

In 2012, Adele emerged as the top winner at the Grammy Awards, winning six trophies, including record and song of the year for "Rolling in the Deep" and album of the year for "21", in a ceremony shadowed by the death of Whitney Houston the day before.

In 2013, the manhunt for a rogue ex-Los Angeles cop Christopher Dorner, who was seeking revenge for his firing, came to an end with his apparent suicide in a mountain cabin following a gunbattle with law enforcement; authorities blamed him for killing four people, including two officers.

In 2017, at the Grammy Awards, Adele took home all five awards she was nominated for, including album of the year for "25" as well as record and song of the year for "Hello."

In 2019, Mexico's most notorious drug lord, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, was convicted in New York of running an industrial-scale smuggling operation. (Guzman is serving a life sentence at the federal supermax prison facility in Florence, Colorado.)

In 2021, lawyers for Donald Trump defended him against impeachment at his Senate trial by accusing Democrats of waging a campaign of "hatred" against the former president and manipulating his words in the lead-up to the deadly siege of the U.S. Capitol.

In 2023, Patrick Mahomes was the MVP as the Kansas City Chiefs beat the Philadelphia Eagles to win their third NFL championship in four years at Super Bowl LVII in Glendale, Arizona.

Today's birthdays: Movie director Costa-Gavras is 91. Actor Joe Don Baker is 88. Author Judy Blume is 86. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is 82. Country singer Moe Bandy is 80. Actor Maud Adams is 79. Actor Cliff DeYoung is 78. Actor Michael Ironside is 74. Rock musician Steve Hackett is 74. Rock singer Michael McDonald is 72. Actor Joanna Kerns is 71. Actor Zach Grenier is 70. Actor-talk show host Arsenio Hall is 68. Actor John Michael Higgins is 61. Actor Raphael Sbarge is 60. Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh is 59. Actor Christine Elise is 59. Actor Josh Brolin is 56. Singer Chynna Phillips is 56. Rock musician Jim Creegan (Barenaked Ladies) is 54. Actor Jesse Spencer is 45. Rapper Gucci Mane is 44. Actor Sarah Lancaster is 44. Actor Christina Ricci is 44. Actor Jennifer Stone is 31. Actors Baylie and Rylie Cregut (TV: "Raising Hope") are 14.