

Groton Daily Independent

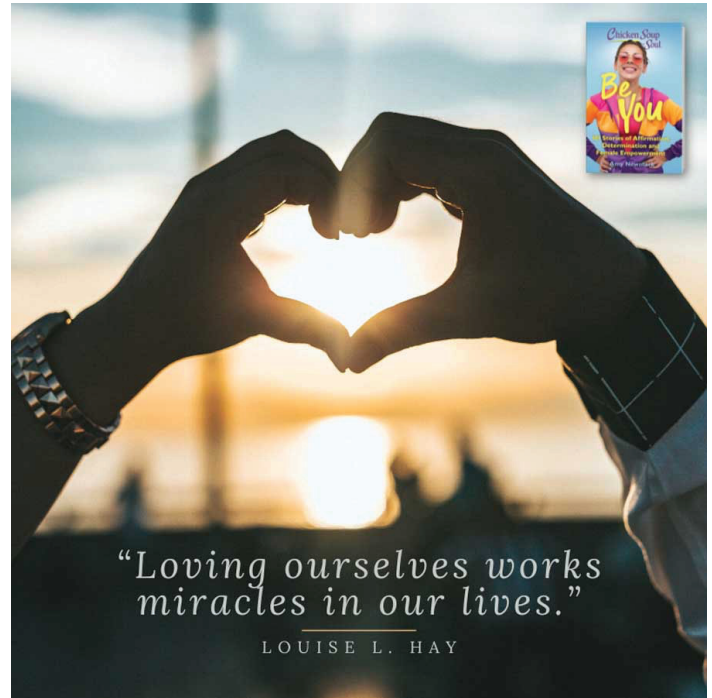
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Tuesday, Feb. 13

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 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.

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



"Loving ourselves works miracles in our lives."

LOUISE L. HAY

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

In partnership with [smartasset](#)

A special election takes place today in New York's 3rd Congressional District in which Republican Nassau County legislator Mazi Pilip will face off against former Democratic congressman Tom Suozzi to replace former Rep. George Santos (R), who was expelled from Congress. The winner will serve the remaining 11 months of Santos' two-year term.

Oil producer Diamondback Energy announced yesterday it will acquire Endeavor Energy Resources in a \$26B cash-and-stock deal expected by the end of the year. The merger, which creates the third largest

oil producer in the shale-rich Permian Basin, follows similar acquisitions from energy giants Chevron and ExxonMobil last year.

Cities around the world are set to celebrate Mardi Gras today, the final day before the Christian fasting and religious observance period of Lent begins. Mardi Gras is the culmination of Carnival season, which officially begins Jan. 6 every year—the 12th day after Christmas—and ends the day before Ash Wednesday.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Tiger Woods unveils "Sun Day Red" clothing brand partnership with TaylorMade Golf; Woods left Nike in 2023 after 27 years with the brand.

Bob Edwards, National Radio Hall of Famer and longtime host of NPR's "Morning Edition," dies at 76.

Beyoncé's "Act II" album to be released March 29; the country-themed album is a sequel to 2022's "Renaissance".

Science & Technology

Scientists discover a universal set of roughly 20 microbes responsible for the decomposition of dead bodies, regardless of location or environmental factors.

Risk of dementia linked to elevated levels of four specific proteins in the blood, new study finds; results may allow early diagnosis up to 15 years in advance of noticeable symptoms.

First-ever report on the state of migratory animals finds more than 40% of protected species show population decline; one in five is threatened with extinction.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.1%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq -0.3%); Dow notches record close. Bitcoin surpasses \$50K for first time in two years on rising demand for bitcoin exchange-traded funds.

Judge orders Elon Musk to testify for third time in US Securities and Exchange Commission probe of his \$44B purchase of Twitter (now X) in 2022. Build-A-Bear and Jazwares, Berkshire Hathaway-owned maker of popular Squishmallows plush toys, sue each other over intellectual property rights.

General Motors' autonomous vehicle unit Cruise names former Ford and Apple executive as safety chief; move comes as US regulators investigate Cruise over October collision with pedestrian. Uber, Lyft, DoorDash drivers to strike nationwide tomorrow over fair pay.

Politics & World Affairs

President Joe Biden hosts Jordan's King Abdullah II for talks on Israel-Hamas war. Dutch appeals court orders Netherlands to halt exports of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel, citing risk of violating international law.

Former President Donald Trump asks Supreme Court to delay federal election interference trial, appeals lower court's ruling on presidential immunity claim. Child injured in Sunday shooting at celebrity pastor Joel Osteen's Houston church identified as son of shooter, who police say had history of mental illness; motive remains unclear.

Winter Storm Lorraine to transition to nor'easter, bringing heavy snowfall and rain to northeastern US through today, with up to 12 inches of snow and wind gusts of up to 40 mph in some areas.



Computer coding error snags South Dakota voter rolls

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – More than 10,000 voter registrations in South Dakota weren't properly transferred to voter rolls due to a computer coding error dating back to 2022, South Dakota News Watch has learned.

Letters were sent to impacted voters in late January saying that state officials "discovered some registrations were not fully transmitted" due to a "technical programming error" that kept new and updated registrations from entering the system. The letter added that the problem has been fixed and "your ability to cast a ballot in an election was not impacted by this error."

Those affected were people who renewed their driver's license online through the Department of Public Safety and didn't "opt out" of the voter registration section, according to Brad Reiners, director of communications for DPS.

A coding discrepancy resulted in a failure of "just over 10,500" registrations from transferring properly to the Secretary of State's office," Reiners told News Watch in an emailed statement.

Only residents of South Dakota's nine largest counties were impacted because of the state's numbering system for counties based on population, he added.

"The DPS driver license online renewal system created a single-digit county designator code which was forwarded to the Secretary of State's office," Reiners said. "Their system looked for a two-digit code, so it did not recognize the records of counties (1 through 9). Once detected, the programming error was fixed immediately, and voter registrations have been properly received by the Secretary of State."

Voter registration forms changed after federal lawsuit

The letter to impacted voters was signed by John Broers, director of driver licensing for DPS, and Rachel Soulek, election divisions director for the Secretary of State's office.

Secretary of State Monae Johnson did not respond to an interview request.

Soulek told News Watch the issue stemmed from changes made to voter registration forms following a federal court settlement in September 2022. A judge determined that South Dakota had violated portions of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) under then-Secretary of State Steve Barnett.



A coding discrepancy resulted in a failure of "just over 10,500" registrations from transferring properly to the Secretary of State's office," according to the Department of Public Safety.

(Photo by Element5 Digital)



Minnehaha County Auditor Leah Anderson said she learned about the voting registration system error on Jan. 18.

(Photo: KELO-TV file photo)

18, said she plans to bring in seasonal election staff to process registrations and update voter rolls, after which acknowledgments will be sent to new or updated registrants.

"I do have concerns about this error," she told News Watch. "It's creating a large workload at a busy time of year."

Pennington County Auditor Cindy Mohler estimated that 2,700 voters were impacted in the Rapid City area and said she is working through updates with her staff.

Mohler, who became auditor in 2019 but has worked in the office since 2009, was asked if she recalled a voter registration programming error impacting this many people in the past.

"No, I do not," she said.

Election integrity faces scrutiny

Mohler is careful to distinguish between a programming error and unfounded allegations of voter fraud or election hacking stemming from the 2020 presidential election. South Dakota has seen a rise in electoral activism from citizen groups demanding access to voting records and pointing to alleged vulnerabilities in state election software.

"We know that's where a lot of people's minds have gone right now," Mohler said. "Hopefully this doesn't lead to any more of that. I don't believe that we've gotten feedback from any voters (referencing fraud) when they received the letter."

Lincoln County Auditor Sheri Lund said there is a "checks and balances" system that caught the discrepancy at the state level. She and other auditors have questions about the issue stemming back to 2022 and how that affected registration lists.

News Watch reviewed a letter received by a voter who renewed their driver's license online in 2022 and received the letter Jan. 30, 2024, confirming some registrations were not properly processed for at least a calendar year.

"DPS states that it did not impact voters' (ability to cast a ballot)," said Anderson, who was elected Minnehaha County's auditor in 2022. "I am not able to confirm that information."

The "motor voter" issue was part of a lawsuit filed by the Rosebud Sioux and Oglala Sioux tribes accusing South Dakota of violating portions of the NVRA, which was signed by President Bill Clinton in 1993 and took effect in 1995.

The law requires state officials to provide voter registration information and guidance to eligible voters when they renew their driver's license through DPS or when receiving public assistance at the Department

As part of the settlement with the Rosebud Sioux and Oglala Sioux tribes, the state changed the wording on driver's license applications so that the form requires a person to opt out of voter registration, rather than require them to opt in.

"DPS adjusted their system to be compliant with those required changes and that is when the coding error happened," said Soulek. "This began prior to Secretary Johnson taking office. Our current staff discovered there was an error and within a day of finding out the coding error, DPS had a fix in place."

South Dakota county auditors concerned about mixup

Minnehaha County Auditor Leah Anderson said that 5,153 total registrations were impacted in the state's largest county. Of those, 684 were new registrations and 4,469 were people who updated voting information or didn't realize they needed to opt out, so they updated with no changes.

Anderson, who learned about the system error on Jan.

of Social Services and other state agencies.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Piersol granted a summary judgment saying the tribes had "supported their claims of improper implementation of the NVRA by the Secretary of State, Department of Public Safety and Department of Social Services," adding that Barnett as the chief elections officer "contributed to these failings through inadequate training and oversight."

As part of the September 2022 settlement, South Dakota named a state NVRA coordinator to oversee the training and oversight process, which includes public reporting of voter registration data. The state also changed the wording on driver's license applications to make it easier for eligible residents to register to vote.

"Unless citizens opt out, they are automatically processed through the voter registration process system as an update or new," said Anderson. "We were told that most of the 'updates' that were part of the programming error had no change in record but are still regarded as updated registrations and will receive an acknowledgment card in the mail."

There have been issues in the past with voters whose registration didn't process from when they updated their driver's license, but it didn't keep anyone from voting, said Lund. She said that is likely the case with those involved in this recent programming error.



ROSEHILL
CHURCH

Women's Gathering

IF: 2024

IF2024.COM

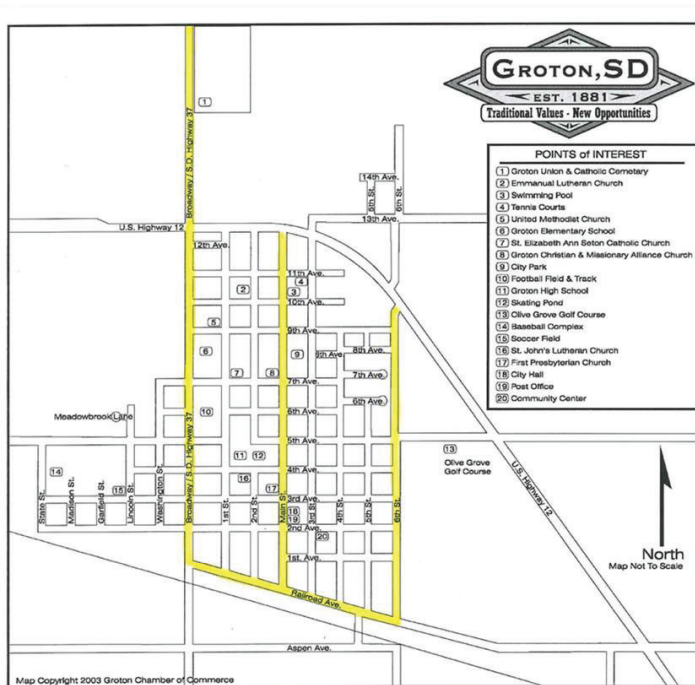


12099 Rose Hill Road
Langford, South Dakota

February 23, 2024 | 6 - 10 pm

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

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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Girls Basketball Game

Dakota Valley @ Groton Area

Tuesday, February 13th, 2024

Game Times/Locations: Main Court in Arena

- 4:30PM → Girls JV
- 5:45PM → Girls Varsity

Prior to the Girls Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

LOCKER ROOM: Dakota Valley will use the far back locker room down the JH Locker Room Hallway.

**Team Benches – Groton: South Bench
Dakota Valley: North Bench**

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

Livestream: GDlive.com (must pay to watch) or NFHS

JV/Varsity Officials: Craig Cassens, Brent Koens, Greg Stroh

Announcer: Mike Imrie

Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

Official Book: Alexa Schuring

Shot Clock Operator: Kristi Zoellner

National Anthem: TBD

Thank you, Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director

Groton Area, Langford renew football cooperative discussion

Will the Tigers bring a few Lions into the jungle?

The Groton Area School Board continued discussion about a possible cooperative with the Langford Area School District for football.

At its Monday morning meeting, the Langford school board voted 6-1 to formally approach the Groton district for a football co-op, Groton Superintendent Joe Schwan said to the Groton school board at its Monday evening meeting.

"The next step, I believe, for us is to form our committee or group and get together in a face-to-face kind of meeting with representatives from their district and work through what the details of that might look like," Schwan said, "including all those things that we have on that sheet and what changes we want to make to that. I think it would be most efficient if we were all in the same room at the same time."

Schwan presented the board with questions previously discussed between the two districts.

Questions posed included

- whether Groton would be willing to include the Langford name in the football co-op
- if Groton would be willing to change its uniform colors or team name
- if Langford could host a game for homecoming
- thoughts on practice times and locations
- whether there is an opportunity for Langford kids to try out for football cheerleading
- would it be possibly for Langford to have a coach on the high school and junior high staff
- what are Groton official's thoughts on co-oping in other sports in the future
- how would the financial cost of the sport be divided up

Groton board members at a previous meeting had asked about academic eligibility rules for student-athletes and athletic trainer availability.

At Monday evening's meeting, school board members Kara Pharis and Tigh Fliehs asked to be part of the group discussing a possible cooperative. Vice President Marty Weismantel, who was not at the meeting, had been a part of discussion about a cooperative a few years ago, and will likely continue to be part of the discussion, Schwan said. Possible meeting dates were also discussed.

"The sooner the better so we can figure out what we're going to do," Schwan said.

The date to request a cooperative for the 2024-2025 school year has already passed, but it could be a special request to the South Dakota High School Activities Association, said Board President Deb Gengerke.

- Fourth grade teacher Sue Fjeldheim discussed her classes, including working in tandem with fellow fourth grade teacher Joel Guthmiller, the positive aspects of utilizing laptops for each student in class and science experiment week taking place toward the end of February. Guthmiller and fifth grade teachers Janel Lone and Shelby Hendrickson were scheduled to discuss their programs as well, but were unable to attend the meeting.

- The board declared a 2016 Chevy van surplus. The van was stolen on a school trip to Sioux Falls in early January. "It was found, but not in a condition we want it back in," said Superintendent Joe Schwan. The board had to declare the van as surplus as part of the insurance claim.

- The board accepted the resignation of Sadie Hanna, elementary special education teacher, effective at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. That brings the number of open positions at the district to five, two positions with immediate vacancies (maintenance director and sign language interpreter) and three positions needed at the end of the 2023-2024 school year (elementary special education teacher, first grade teacher and ag education teacher/FFA adviser).

- The board had the first reading of edits to the maintenance director job description.

- The board had its first reading of the district's wellness policy. Most of the policy is dictated by federal program, but the district did draft wellness goals. The first goal includes reducing/eliminating consumption of high-sugar caffeinated beverages and energy drinks during the school day. The second goal includes

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studying the feasibility of offering additional physical education courses at the high school. The third goal includes making the school facility available for recreational activities not sponsored by the district.

- The board declared 15 auto fundamental textbooks as surplus. The books are instructional technology teacher Don Donley's old books. They have to be declared surplus in order to throw them away.
- The high school will be adding BIO II courses every year. Currently that class is offered every other year, alternating with physics, said Middle School/High School Principal Shelby Edwards. With the new CTE lab, school officials decided to schedule the class every year. Physics will continue to be scheduled every other year.

- Elizabeth Varin

DIRECTOR OF NURSING

\$10,000 Sign-On Bonus

REGISTERED NURSE

\$5,000 Sign-On Bonus

LPN - NIGHTS

\$5,000 Sign-On Bonus

CNA

\$3,000 Sign-On Bonus

Starting at \$18 up to \$25 an hour



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Contact Clay at 605-492-3615 or clayb@sundialmanor.com

Sun Dial Manor is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer
(0214.0221)

Finance Officer Wanted

The Town of Andover is seeking a Finance Officer. This is a part time position. Must know word and excel. Resume can be sent to P O Box 35,

Andover, SD 57422, or email to bsmith@nvc.net. A complete job description is available by call 605-265-0236. EOE. (0214.0221)



Junior high teams beat Sisseton

Groton Area's junior high boys basketball teams defeated Sisseton in action played Monday in Groton. The seventh grade team won, 44-12. Scoring for Groton Area: Anthony Gilmore 17, Asher Johnson 9, Jordan Schwan 7, Connor Kroll 4, Colton Antonsen 2, Ian Kutter 2, Wes Morehouse 2, Zach Fliehs 1.

Scoring for Sisseton: Dawson had 6, Owen 2, Hank 2, Dacian 2.

Groton Area won the eighth grade game, 45-20. Scoring for Groton Area: Ethan Kroll 16, Ryder Schelle 9, Alex Abeln 8, Asher Johnson 5, Anthony Gilmore 3, Jace Johnson 2, Jordan Schwan 2.

Scoring for Sisseton: Derek Flute 8, Luke Nielson 7, JJ Hamm 5.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Dorene Nelson.

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#CLEARDUTY - the citizens WILL have an election!

Sturgis, South Dakota – The 2+ year court battle between the City of Sturgis and its citizens concluded last week when all five Justices of the South Dakota Supreme Court agreed that Sturgis City Finance Officer Faye Bueno and the Sturgis City Council violated their “clear duties” by refusing to schedule an election on the proposition of whether Sturgis should continue to have a City Manager position as part of its government structure.

In the February 7, 2024 Supreme Court Opinion Bohn v. Bueno, Tammy Bohn, Justin Bohn, and Brenda Vasknetz (“Petitioners”) finally triumphed against Sturgis city officials who ignored their “clear duties” and refused to schedule an election. The Supreme Court unanimously agrees that “neither the finance officer nor the city council had the authority to delay the scheduling of an election to vote on the submitted petition.” The election should have been held in April 2022!

Since December 2021, Petitioners’ attorney, Kellen B. Willert, has been advocating that Bueno had a duty to certify the 900+ signatures on the Petition and the city council had a duty to schedule the election. The Supreme Court agreed, ruling that:

- 1) Bueno “had a clear duty to compare the petition submitted with the form provided in the ARSD. Performance of that clear duty could lead to no other conclusion but that the petition was in the ‘form required by this chapter.’”
- 2) “Bueno had a clear duty to act under the regulation to certify the petition and present it to the city council.”
- 3) “... the city council had a clear duty to schedule an election.”

Despite complete and utter defeat, Sturgis Mayor Mark Carstensen stated in a February 8, 2024 press release asserts that “the city is ... researching when an election on the matter may be held.” The Supreme Court specifically ruled “...the election must be held using the process and timing requirements identified in SDCL 9-10-1,” which requires the ballot “be presented at the next annual municipal election or the next general election, whichever is earlier.” There is no research – the citizens are entitled to cast their votes on this issue at the next annual municipal election on April 9, 2024! Petitioners call for Sturgis Mayor Mark Carstensen to immediately resign.

Because Petitioners have justifiable concerns about Sturgis continuing to use delay tactics to avoid an election on this issue, Petitioners call on Sturgis to do the right thing at the next regular council meeting on February 20, 2024 at 6:30 PM: schedule this election to be held on April 9, 2024. #CLEARDUTY.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Second run at lithium tax fails on the state Senate floor

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 5:28 PM

The second time was not a charm for a proposed lithium tax.

Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, moved to reconsider his proposal to tax the mineral, used in batteries for smartphones, laptops and electric vehicles, on Monday on the Senate floor.

House Bill 1043 failed last week in the Senate by a single vote.

As it involves a new tax, it needed a two-thirds majority to pass. The Senate voted 27-6 to back Deibert's motion to reconsider the proposal, but it once again failed to garner enough support to earn a trip to the governor's desk.

The bill had already passed the House of Representatives and earned the support of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources. A similar bill last year passed the House and failed in a Senate committee.

The bill would have placed a tax on company profits from lithium mining. Deibert pointed out that several companies are working to find lithium in the Black Hills. No lithium mines are operational, but "if they are there exploring, they're probably going to be mining," he said.

But Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City, argued that a preemptive tax would discourage lithium mining. It's a business South Dakota ought to support, he said, not stifle.

"What this bill does is put up a big banner that says 'tax, tax, tax,' and it's going to be a disincentive to future mining in South Dakota," Johnson said.

Sen. Brent Hoffman, R-Hartford, disagreed with the idea of taxing lithium as a precious metal.

"Lithium is not a precious metal. Factual, objective, scientifically proven. This is redefining it as a precious metal," Hoffman said.

One senator who missed the initial Senate floor vote last week voted in favor of the bill Monday. Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller, R-Rapid City, said she's generally loath to support any kind of tax increase, but that the residents of Custer and Fall River County want a framework for monetizing any potential lithium wealth generated by out-of-state or foreign companies.

"There are claims all over up there," Frye-Mueller said. "They want this, because we're not extracting our own resources."

The bill failed on a 21-12 vote, needing 24 votes to pass.

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

Lawmakers seek compromise in teacher pay accountability bill

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 5:16 PM

A proposed compromise between bills to improve teacher pay in South Dakota is being considered by the House Education Committee this week in the Capitol.

Two bills were introduced earlier this legislative session that approached teacher pay differently. One bill introduced by the state Department of Education was too heavy handed, according to education lobbyists, while the other bill setting a minimum teacher salary didn't address an impending deadline for the state board tasked with holding school districts accountable for raising teacher salaries.

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The amendment passed by the committee Monday morning combines the two, said Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Tony Venhuizen. The committee plans to vote on the bill on Wednesday after hearing more testimony from supporters and opponents.

The amendment sets a "sweet spot" statewide minimum salary for teachers at \$45,000 a year and raises that amount annually by the Legislature-approved increase in state aid toward education, Venhuizen said. For example, if the Legislature passes Gov. Kristi Noem's proposed 4% increase in state aid, then the minimum teacher salary will increase to \$46,800 the next school year.

It also requires school districts to reach an average teacher compensation goal each year specific to each district, which will align with the same legislative increases in state aid. Compensation for teachers includes benefits, such as insurance plans, paid time off and retirement plans.

The switch from average salary to average compensation gives school districts the flexibility to prioritize between salaries and benefits, Venhuizen explained, while the minimum salary is directed toward driving up average salary over time.

Lawmakers, state officials, education lobbyists and school district superintendents worked on the amendment for weeks before making the proposal to the committee.

"I think we're getting close to something that'll work," Venhuizen told South Dakota Searchlight after the hearing.

Thirty-seven school districts wouldn't currently hit the intended minimum salary requirement, said Watertown Republican Rep. Hugh Bartels, who helped shape the compromise. But school districts would have until the 2027 school year to comply with the requirements. Thirteen of the schools are less than \$1,000 away from the minimum salary goal.

"When we see state aid increases, we want to make sure that's finding its way into teachers' pockets," Venhuizen said. "That can create management challenges in the districts, but it's a message from the state that we expect them to prioritize teacher salaries."

Watertown Superintendent Jeff Danielsen said the proposed amendment is the best version he's seen so far, though he is concerned about how the changes would affect school districts with declining enrollment. Enrollment in the Watertown School District dropped 80 students this school year, which led to the district closing an elementary school and considering cutting teaching positions in the district.

Tying a minimum teacher salary or average teacher compensation to legislative state aid can be difficult for school districts with declining enrollment, he said. That's because state aid is driven by enrollment, so individual school districts can lose state aid even when the Legislature improves a statewide increase.

"Educators aren't shying away from accountability," Danielsen said. "We just want it to be a well-rounded look at how we should be accountable and through a system that is attainable with the dollars we're granted from the state and have at our disposal."

The amendment does not include new funding for schools beyond the yearly increases in state aid. It sets a fiscal consequence for school districts that don't reach their district-specific average compensation goal or the minimum teacher salary, with the Department of Education decreasing state funding to the district by \$500 for each teacher employed by the district.

But it also allows the state Department of Education to work with school districts as they make necessary budget cuts and changes to comply with the law or apply for a waiver from the School Finance Accountability Board, which was created to track if state aid increases went toward teacher salaries. That state board expires this year, unless legislation extends the life of the board.

This compromise, said state Department of Education Secretary Joseph Graves, will keep the promises made by the Blue Ribbon Task Force in 2016 while also respecting local control.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force legislation passed a half-percent state sales tax increase in 2016 to boost the state's last-in-the-nation ranking for average teacher pay. That infusion raised average teacher pay by about 12% in its first year of implementation and bumped South Dakota from last to 47th, but the state has since fallen back to 49th in average teacher salaries (out of 51 states, due to the inclusion of Washington, D.C.).

"The Blue Ribbon Task Force focused on teachers. The money was given for teachers," Graves told

lawmakers. "... Had the education group said at the time, 'We will give this money to teachers unless we need it for other employee groups or utility costs or something else,' it's my opinion the Blue Ribbon Task Force legislation would not have passed."

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

Another attempt to block carbon pipelines from using eminent domain fails

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 4:15 PM

PIERRE — Another legislative attempt to stop a proposed carbon sequestration pipeline from using eminent domain failed Monday.

"It is up to us to defend South Dakotans' property rights," said Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, the prime sponsor of the bill.

The legislation was rejected by the House Commerce and Energy Committee in a 7-6 vote. Similar legislation failed during last year's legislative session.

An Iowa company, Summit Carbon Solutions, is proposing a multi-billion-dollar pipeline to transport carbon dioxide emitted by ethanol plants in multiple states, including South Dakota, to an underground storage site in North Dakota for long-term containment. The project would capitalize on federal tax credits that incentivize the sequestration of heat-trapping gasses, including carbon dioxide.

The legislation, if passed, would have prohibited the use of eminent domain by carbon dioxide pipelines if more than half of the transported carbon dioxide is intended for sequestration rather than commercial uses such as carbonated beverages or enhanced oil recovery. That's when carbon dioxide is injected into aging oil wells to make it less thick, help it flow better, and cause the oil to expand toward the wells.

Eminent domain allows entities to forcibly buy access to private land for public projects — typically infrastructure such as roads, utilities and pipelines that serve the broader public interest.

Hansen argued that carbon sequestration does not meet the traditional definition of "public use."

"None of us use buried carbon," Hansen said. "The whole point is to not use it."

He said the bill would not ban carbon pipelines outright, "as long as the main purpose is to use it for something that the public uses."

Some critics of the Summit pipeline have alleged the CO2 will eventually be used for enhanced oil recovery in North Dakota.

The bill's opponents said it would negatively impact the state's ethanol industry and corn farmers if the pipeline isn't built. Two-thirds of corn grown in South Dakota is sold to ethanol plants, and ethanol producers have said they need the project to stay viable in markets that require fuels to reduce their environmental impact.

David Owen, of the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry, argued carbon sequestration has already been determined to serve a public use because of its role in fighting climate change.

"We have decided as a nation that we don't want carbon dioxide in the environment because of concerns about climate change," Owen said. "I understand some of us in South Dakota would like to argue with that."

Numerous entities worldwide, including the United Nations, World Health Organization, World Bank, International Energy Agency, and national governments including the U.S. have declared fighting climate change a critical priority.

Rep. Carl Perry, R-Aberdeen, asked Owen to explain why more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is concerning.

"I suggest the information is generally available," Owen said.

Also Monday, the committee rejected a bill that would have required the pipeline project to have voluntary easements with landowners on 90% of the route before attempting to use eminent domain for the rest.

Some other bills addressing carbon sequestration pipelines are currently making their way through the Legislature. Those bills aim to add protections for landowners rather than stop pipeline projects.

One of those bills stipulates 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. 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.

Another bill specifies that carbon dioxide pipeline easements 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. 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.

Yet another bill requires entities using eminent domain to cover some legal costs for landowners under certain conditions. 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.

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

Trump asks U.S. Supreme Court to pause federal trial over presidential immunity question

BY: JACOB FISCHLER AND ASHLEY MURRAY - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 6:59 PM

WASHINGTON – Former President Donald Trump asked the U.S. Supreme Court on Monday to further delay his federal criminal trial on charges he attempted to subvert the 2020 election, contending his actions were protected by presidential immunity.

In a 40-page application to the Supreme Court late Monday, Trump and his attorneys asked the justices to pause pretrial activities in federal district court for the case brought by Special Counsel Jack Smith accusing Trump of lying to and encouraging supporters who turned violent on Jan. 6, 2021 and attacked the U.S. Capitol.

Trump's application comes just days after the Supreme Court justices heard arguments in a separate case involving the former president, this time about whether Colorado could bar him from the 2024 presidential primary ballot because he violated the Constitution's 14th Amendment. The justices met the argument with skepticism.

Trump, the front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, plans to challenge a three-judge panel appeals court ruling last week that said he could not claim presidential immunity to escape the criminal charges accusing him of conspiring to overturn his loss in the 2020 presidential election.

Trump's team said in the Monday application that they plan to appeal "en banc," meaning to the full D.C. Circuit appeals court, and also to the U.S. Supreme Court, "if necessary," Trump's lawyers wrote.

Smith had asked the Supreme Court in December to fast-track Trump's immunity question, essentially leapfrogging the federal appeals process, but the justices declined the request.

The brief cited Trump's schedule ahead of November's presidential election, saying a long trial would keep him off the campaign trail and deprive "tens of millions of American voters, who are entitled to hear President Trump's campaign message as they decide how to cast their ballots."

"Conducting a months-long criminal trial of President Trump at the height of election season will radically disrupt President Trump's ability to campaign against President Biden — which appears to be the whole point of the Special Counsel's persistent demands for expedition," Trump's lawyers said.

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A majority of justices would have to vote to grant a stay for it to take effect.

Immunity argument

Trump is likely to win a high court case, his lawyers said Monday, because he was representing an essential aspect of presidential power. Allowing presidents to be prosecuted would create a constant threat of prosecution for every future president, making the job virtually unmanageable.

"This threat will hang like a millstone around every future President's neck, distorting Presidential decisionmaking, undermining the President's independence," Trump's attorneys wrote. "Without immunity from criminal prosecution, the Presidency as we know it will cease to exist."

All the allegations in the four-count indictment stemmed from actions Trump took in his official capacity as president as a good-faith effort to reverse widespread election fraud, the brief said.

Prosecutors say Trump knew there was not determinative voter fraud, but nonetheless pressured state officials, Department of Justice leaders, Vice President Mike Pence, and others to illegally use the claim to overturn the election results.

The pressure campaign eventually led to the deadly storming of the Capitol by Trump's supporters on Jan. 6, 2021, according to prosecutors and the U.S. House committee that investigated the matter.

Shortly after he left office, the U.S. House impeached Trump for his role in the attack. But with only seven Republican senators joining all Democrats in voting to convict Trump, the former president was acquitted in a Senate trial.

That should also protect Trump from court prosecution under the principle of double jeopardy that says a person cannot be tried twice for the same crime, Trump's lawyers argued to the Supreme Court.

Four of the Supreme Court's nine justices would have to agree to hear the case. Trump appointed three of them.

Original trial date postponed

Although Trump has not succeeded in having the case thrown out over presidential immunity, the issue has gobbled up months of court time and delayed his trial.

U.S. District Judge Tanya S. Chutkan, who is the trial judge in the case, said last month she would postpone the original trial start date of March 4. She has not set a new date.

In October, Trump made a pretrial motion to throw out the charges based on his presidential immunity theory.

Chutkan denied the motion, and Trump appealed her decision to the D.C. Circuit.

A panel of the appeals court ruled last week to uphold Chutkan's decision, and gave Trump until Monday to take the case to the Supreme Court.

In early January, Trump's lawyer D. John Sauer argued before federal appeals judges Karen LeCraft Henderson, Florence Y. Pan and J. Michelle Childs that the former president has absolute immunity from criminal prosecution because presidents cannot be tried for "official acts" taken while in office.

When asked by the judges about hypothetical criminal acts including ordering the assassination of a political rival or selling military secrets, Sauer notably argued that if presidents are not impeached and convicted, they would be immune from criminal prosecution.

In the unanimous unsigned federal appeals opinion on Feb. 6, the judges dismissed Trump's arguments as "unsupported by precedent, history or the text and structure of the Constitution."

"We cannot accept former President Trump's claim that a President has unbounded authority to commit crimes that would neutralize the most fundamental check on executive power — the recognition and implementation of election results," they wrote.

The three-judge federal appeals panel comprised appointees from both Democrat and Republican administrations — Henderson, appointed by George H.W. Bush, and both Pan and Childs were appointed by President Joe Biden.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Committee advances bill banning 'obscene live conduct' at universities

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 3:08 PM

PIERRE — A bill that would ban "obscene live conduct" at state universities raised concerns Monday among opponents who view it as a veiled attempt to target drag shows.

"Who decides what is considered obscene?" said Samantha Chapman, of the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, in an emailed statement. "It's impossible to define obscene in a way that isn't hopelessly vague and subjective, and government officials cannot impose their personal moral values on others."

The bill's prime sponsor, Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, said his intent is not to ban drag shows outright but to prohibit performances deemed obscene.

"I never mentioned drag shows," Karr said. "I never mentioned drag."

The bill, which does not include specific references to drag shows, passed the House State Affairs Committee in an 11-2 vote. It now moves to the full House of Representatives.

A drag show features performers, known as drag queens or drag kings, who dress in clothing and makeup traditionally associated with the opposite gender to entertain an audience. The performances may include singing, dancing, comedy and other forms of entertainment.

In response to public concerns surrounding a student group's drag show in 2022 at South Dakota State University in Brookings, the state Board of Regents has implemented a "minors on campus" policy. That policy also does not mention drag shows but was developed in reaction to the drag show at SDSU, which a student group advertised as "kid friendly." The policy says non-student minors need a valid purpose or express permission to be in university facilities, and that any programming attended by them should not include activities of a sexual nature, obscene live conduct or anything deemed harmful to minors.

Last year, Karr cosponsored a bill that would have banned "lewd or lascivious" content at state institutions and public schools. That bill failed due to constitutional concerns about potentially banning an artistic expression.

This year's bill would ban "obscene live conduct." Under a separate, existing state law, that term is defined as "any physical human body activity" where the dominant theme "appeals to a prurient interest," where the conduct is "patently offensive because it affronts contemporary community standards relating to the description or representation of sexual matters," and the conduct is "without serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value."

Michael Garofalo, president of the South Dakota Student Federation, testified against the bill. He said the group opposes it and students are ready to "close the chapter here and move past this discussion," referring to the SDSU drag show controversy.

That view is shared by Yvonne Taylor with the South Dakota Advocacy Network for Women.

"It's time to move on," Taylor said. "This isn't a problem."

The bill also ensures legal representation by the attorney general at no charge for the state Board of Regents, its institutions, or employees should lawsuits or complaints arise. The state would also cover any related legal expenses, including attorney fees and costs.

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

Noem appoints business owner, former sheriff's deputy to state Senate seat

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 3:00 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem has filled the state's last remaining legislative vacancy.

Marine Corps veteran, longtime former law officer and current small business owner Mike Walsh will fill the District 35 state Senate seat left open by the departure of Jessica Castleberry. District 35 includes the far eastern side of Rapid City and most of Box Elder.

Castleberry resigned last year in light of news she'd accepted federal COVID relief funding for her child care business after voting on legislation that set up the program and gave the state the authority to spend the money. She is now paying back about \$500,000 to the state in monthly installments. Former Rep. Jess Olson, also a Rapid City-area lawmaker from District 34, resigned shortly after Castleberry for health reasons.

Noem decided not to fill the seats until the state Supreme Court offered an advisory opinion on the extent of the state constitution's prohibition on conflicts of interest, which meant that two seats went unfilled in the state Capitol for more than half of the 2024 legislative session.

The court ruled Friday in that case. The court decided it's acceptable for lawmakers to have contracts with the state if those contracts flow through the general appropriations bill, as that bill merely allocates funding to agencies that later decide how to spend it. Lawmakers who vote on bills that allocate funding directly to programs cannot be paid to provide services through those programs.

The day after the decision's release, Noem appointed former lawmaker Kristin Conzet to fill a District 32 seat in the House of Representatives (which Rep. Becky Drury vacated recently when she moved and was appointed to fill Olson's seat in District 34).

The announcement of Walsh's appointment to the open District 35 Senate seat came Monday. In a press release announcing his selection, Noem lauded his years in the military and law enforcement, and his status as a small business owner who "understands the challenges of creating a successful enterprise, providing a strong work product, and supporting employees."

Walsh, a Republican, has also been involved with the Fraternal Order of Police and serves as a key spouse for Ellsworth Air Force Base. Key spouses offer support and resources to the spouses of military members, and work to communicate family concerns to military leadership.

He retired as a captain with the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office in 2021.

The newly appointed senator owns Walsh Polygraph, a Rapid City-based firm that provides lie detector services to clients in North and South Dakota and Wyoming, according to the company's website.

Walsh has contracts with the state Department of Corrections to provide polygraph services for inmates, and a contract with the state Department of Public Safety to provide the same as part of the background check process for law enforcement officers.

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

Are Americans really committed to democracy in the 2024 election?

BY: ZACHARY ROTH - FEBRUARY 12, 2024 6:00 AM

With former President Donald Trump having all but wrapped up the GOP presidential nomination, one issue looks set to be at the center of the general election campaign: the threat to democracy.

In a major campaign speech in Pennsylvania in January, President Joe Biden detailed Trump's lies about the 2020 election, his efforts to use violence to hold on to power, and his promises of "revenge" and "retribution" against political enemies.

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"Trump's assault on democracy isn't just part of his past," Biden declared. "It's what he's promising for the future."

To combat the charge, Team Trump has sought to muddy the waters by claiming, without evidence, that in fact it's the president who threatens democracy. Trump says the criminal indictments in four cases brought against him are the proof — though there's no evidence that Biden influenced prosecutors in any of them. Trump also points to a case pending before the Supreme Court, in which Biden also has no involvement, that would rule Trump ineligible for the ballot.

"They've weaponized government, and he's saying I'm a threat to democracy," Trump said at an Iowa rally last month, accusing Biden of "pathetic fearmongering."

All of which brings up a question: How do ordinary Americans regard democracy? Some people might assume that, though voters are deeply divided over just about everything, there is agreement on democracy as the way to resolve differences.

And yet, nearly half the electorate say they plan to vote for a candidate who already has gravely undermined democracy, and promises to do so again if re-elected. Does that suggest Americans' commitment to democracy — not just to holding elections, but to the norms that undergird liberal democracy, like the rule of law and an impartial justice system — isn't as ironclad as we'd like to think?

Recently, a trove of information has emerged to shed light on the question. A series of polls, surveys, focus groups, and other analyses — many released since the start of the year — has aimed to gauge Americans' views on democracy: how important it is, how well it's working, and whether there are times when democratic values should be jettisoned.

The findings are varied and not easy to summarize, but a few themes stand out: Dissatisfaction with how democracy is performing is sky-high across the political spectrum. Large majorities say democracy is at risk. And, perhaps most importantly: A growing share of Americans appears willing, in our ultra-polarized times, to put partisan or ideological loyalties ahead of democracy.

"When you are living in a more polarized time, it is going to be more likely that people are going to find excuses for their principles to be pushed to the side, because in that moment their political identity is more important than almost any other identity," said Joe Goldman, the president of the Democracy Fund, a pro-democracy advocacy organization, and a co-author of a long-term study released this month by the group on Americans' views of democracy.

That's a highly dangerous situation, democracy advocates say. A clear and cross-partisan pro-democracy consensus among the public could act as a crucial bulwark against the kind of authoritarian steps that Trump has said he'll take if re-elected — and could make it harder for him to win in the first place. Without that consensus, the threat to democracy will continue to grow.

Questioning of democracy

Going back to the founding, there's been a strain of thinking that distrusted democracy as a system that can lead to mob rule and tyranny.

"It's pretty clear that our founders hated democracy," said Michael Schudson, a professor at Columbia Journalism School, who has studied the history of American civic life. "They were trying to get away from it. Democracy was a form of government from the past that led to, essentially, anarchy."

Even today, many leading conservatives insist on calling the U.S. not a democracy but a republic.

"By the way, the United States is not a democracy," Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., now the House speaker, said in a 2019 church sermon. "Do you know what a democracy is? Two wolves and a sheep deciding what's for dinner. You don't want to be in a democracy. Majority rule: not always a good thing."

But there's no question that recent years have seen a rise in the number of Americans who say democracy isn't working well — or even who question it as a system and express support for alternatives.

A Jan. 10 analysis by the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, which summarized results from seven high-quality recent polls, found broad agreement that "American democracy is not working."

One typical poll included in the UVA analysis, released this month by Gallup, found just 28% of respon-

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dents, a new low, said they were satisfied with how democracy is functioning.

An overwhelming number of respondents to a PRRI survey from last year — 84% of Democrats, 77% of Republicans, and 73% of independents — said that U.S. democracy is at risk. And 2 out of 3 respondents to a Jan. 31 Quinnipiac poll said U.S. democracy is in danger of collapse.

Challenges for Democrats

A set of focus group conversations with mostly undecided voters in Georgia, Wisconsin, and Nevada, conducted Jan. 24 by the progressive polling firm Navigator Research and viewed by States Newsroom, found similar views. But the focus groups also underscored the challenges that Democrats might have in convincing voters that Trump is to blame for democracy's troubles.

Participants almost universally said, when asked, that U.S. democracy is not working well. One Nevada man described it as a corpse, an assessment that many other participants appeared to agree with.

But asked why, almost no one pointed to Trump and his lies about the 2020 election, his role in the violence of Jan. 6, or his promises to govern as an authoritarian. Many participants, instead, talked about feeling that their vote doesn't matter because politicians on both sides ignore the views of regular people — concerns that existed long before the tumult of the Trump era.

"It's self-interest on both sides," said a Georgia woman. "From the lobbyists, from the politicians, to make it the way they want instead of the way we want."

"Both sides are trying to say (democracy is under attack), but they're trying to just point at the other side and make everyone believe it's the other side," said a Wisconsin man. "I tend to think it's more about the entities that are in power just wanting to remain in power. And that's the best way to do that, is to make sure that we think it is under attack, but from the other side."

The Stony Brook University political scientist Stanley Feldman summed up the challenge in an interview with the New York Times.

"Voting to protect democracy isn't as straightforward as it may seem. Democracy is an abstraction to many voters," said Feldman. "To many Republicans, bringing criminal charges against Trump at this point looks like the Biden administration is trying to subvert democracy by getting rid of a candidate who can win in November."

'Preserving democracy' still seems urgent

Still, at least in the abstract, people appear to value democracy and to see preserving it as important.

When the Quinnipiac poll asked people to choose which of 10 issues was the most urgent, the top choice, at 24%, was "preserving democracy". Over 80 percent of participants in the Democracy Fund study, who were surveyed at different times from 2017 to 2022, said democracy is a fairly or very good political system. And only 8 percent were found to be "consistently authoritarian" in their responses.

But when Democracy Fund asked a series of questions aimed at gauging support for key tenets of liberal democracy — including about authoritarian rule, about using violence to advance political goals, and about accepting election results — only 27% always gave the pro-democracy answer.

Perhaps even more troubling, this willingness to deprioritize democracy corresponded closely to partisan interests. For instance, in September 2020, 81% of Republicans said it would be important for the loser of that year's election to acknowledge the winner. In November — the month when the election was called for Biden, and Trump refused to concede defeat — that figure was 31%.

"The results show that support for foundational principles of liberal democracy are discouragingly soft and inconsistent," the study's authors conclude, adding: "There is a significant segment of the population that may be willing to embrace or accept the cause of authoritarian figures if and when it is in their partisan and political interests."

Plenty of other polling evidence points toward the same conclusion. A CNN poll from October found that 67% of likely Republican primary voters in South Carolina said Trump's efforts to overturn the election, if true, are not relevant to his fitness for the presidency.

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An AP/NORC poll released in December found that 87% of Democrats said a Trump win in 2024 would damage democracy, while 82% of Republicans said the same thing about a Biden win.

And a University of Virginia poll released in October found that 41% of Biden supporters and 38% of Trump supporters said the other side is so extreme that it's OK to use violence to stop them. The same poll found that 31% of Trump supporters and 24% of Biden supporters thought the U.S. should explore non-democratic forms of government.

"Support for various aspects of liberal democracy has always been spongier than we'd like to think," said Lee Drutman, a senior fellow at the New America think tank and a co-author of the Democracy Fund report. "But what's distinct to this moment is that one party has elevated leaders that show no restraint and no respect for these foundational aspects of liberal democracy."

"(So) you have people who are willing to tolerate tremendous incursions on the foundations of democracy as long as it's their side that's doing it," Drutman continued, "and you have a party with leaders who are willing to take advantage."

How to reduce polarization

There are some reasons for hope. Last June, a Stanford University project convened a nationally representative sample of 600 registered voters of all political stripes for lengthy deliberative conversations, in groups of 10, on issues affecting U.S. democracy, including voter access, election administration, and campaign finance.

The organizers consistently found that the conversations led participants to become less polarized across partisan lines in their opinions, with Republicans moving towards Democrats and vice versa.

For instance, only 30% of Republicans started out supporting the idea of letting people register to vote online. But after the conversations, a majority joined most Democrats in backing the idea.

Conversely, only 44% of Democrats started out liking the idea of requiring audits of a random sample of ballots to ensure that votes are counted accurately. After the conversations, 58% joined most Republicans in support.

Views even on seemingly more controversial ideas like having nonpartisan officials, not partisan lawmakers, draw district lines, or restoring voting rights to ex-felons, changed dramatically, especially among Republicans, said James Fishkin, a Stanford political scientist who helped organize the conversations.

Fishkin said the results suggest to him that once the campaign focuses more squarely on the threat to democracy, voters will start to grasp the need to protect it.

"The norms that make democracy work do matter to people, and the idea that democracy might come to an end is such an awesome threat that people haven't really thought about it," said Fishkin. "They're thinking about inflation and the so-called crisis at the border, they're not thinking about the end of democracy as we know it. I think once the public focuses on it, you may well get a different answer."

But to Drutman, the threat will persist as long as the nation remains hyper-polarized, with one party willing to trample democratic norms.

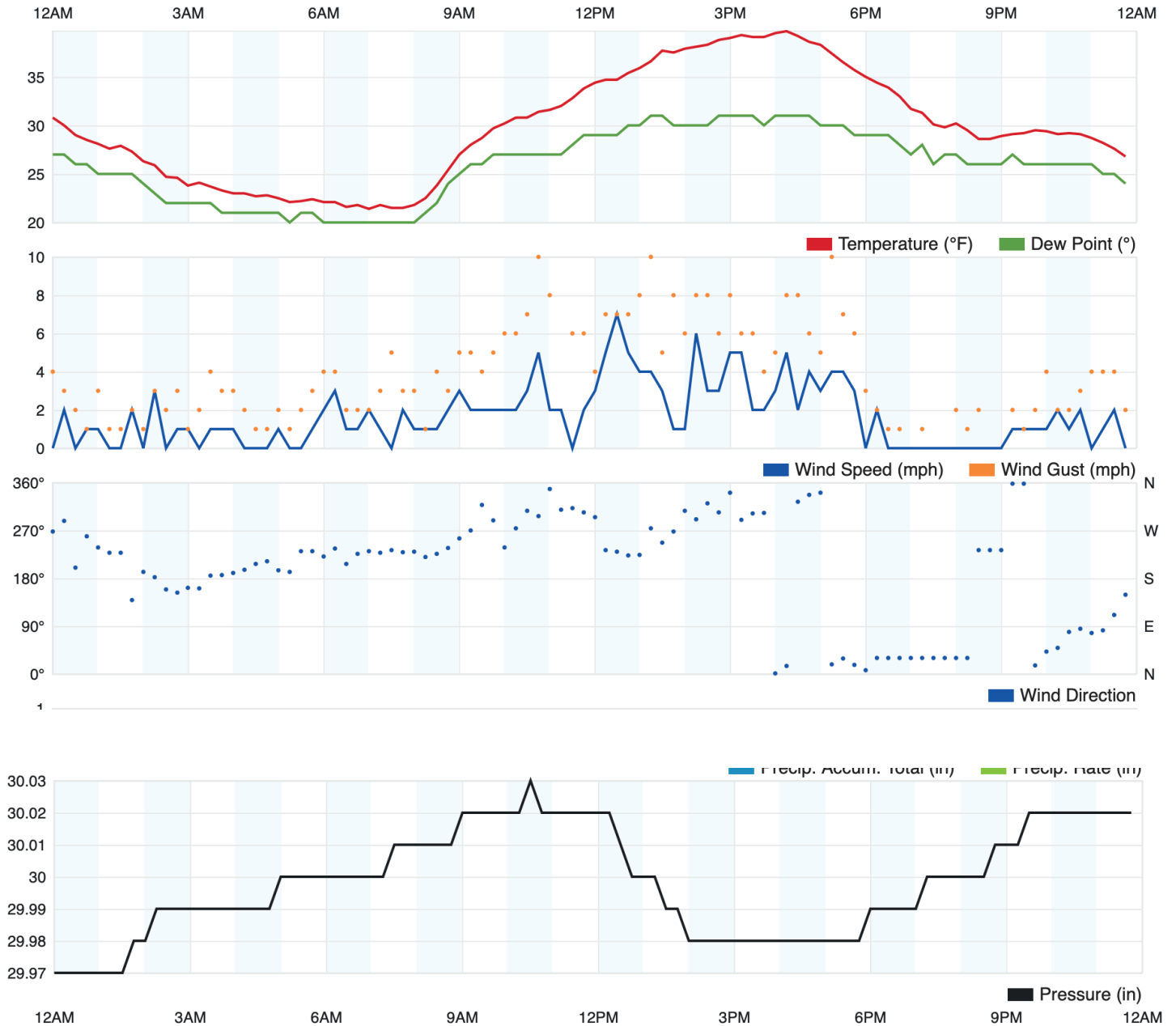
"One argument is that there is an anti-MAGA majority out there of people who are committed enough to democracy that some small sliver of the electorate will continue to elect Democrats," Drutman said. "But democracy can't fundamentally depend on one party winning forever."

Zachary Roth is the National Democracy Reporter for States Newsroom.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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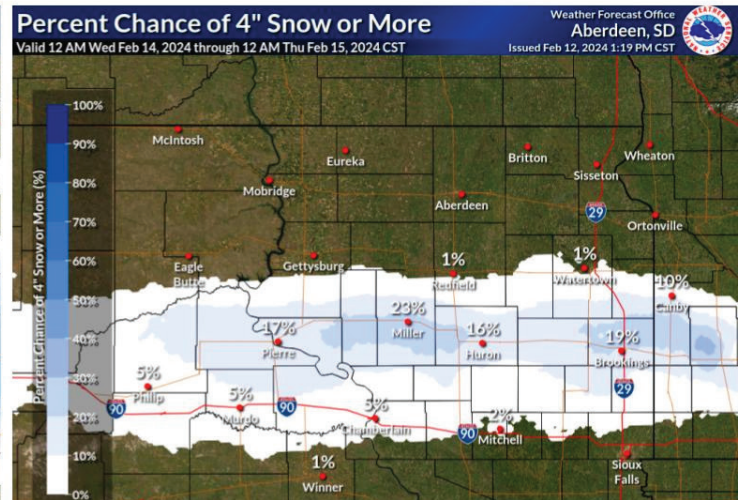
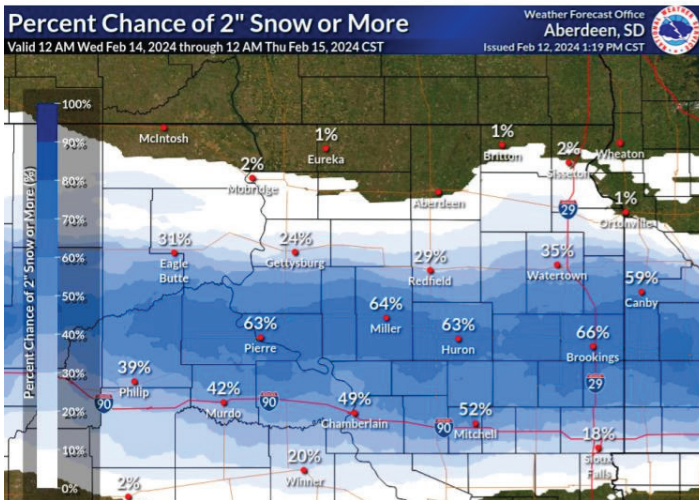
Tue Feb 13	Wed Feb 14	Thu Feb 15	Fri Feb 16	Sat Feb 17	Sun Feb 18	Mon Feb 19
39°F 25°F	32°F 16°F	31°F 10°F	20°F 11°F	30°F 17°F	33°F 15°F	27°F 21°F
SSE 13 MPH	NW 10 MPH	NNW 10 MPH	NNW 17 MPH	W 17 MPH	SW 11 MPH	NNE 12 MPH
20%	20%	20%				



Accumulating Snow Probability

February 13, 2024
3:11 AM

- 30-70% chance of **greater than 2" of snow** Wednesday into early Wednesday evening, mainly in a swath between US Highway 212 and the South Dakota/Nebraska border.
- **Travel impacts expected.** Keep an eye on the forecast and plan for slower travel Wednesday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A frontal boundary will track across the region today, bringing some light rain and snow. A more potent band of snow will set up south of Highway 212 on Wednesday with the potential for more than two inches of accumulations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 40 °F at 4:06 PM

Low Temp: 21 °F at 7:44 AM

Wind: 10 mph at 10:39 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 21 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1901

Record Low: -34 in 1905

Average High: 28

Average Low: 5

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.26

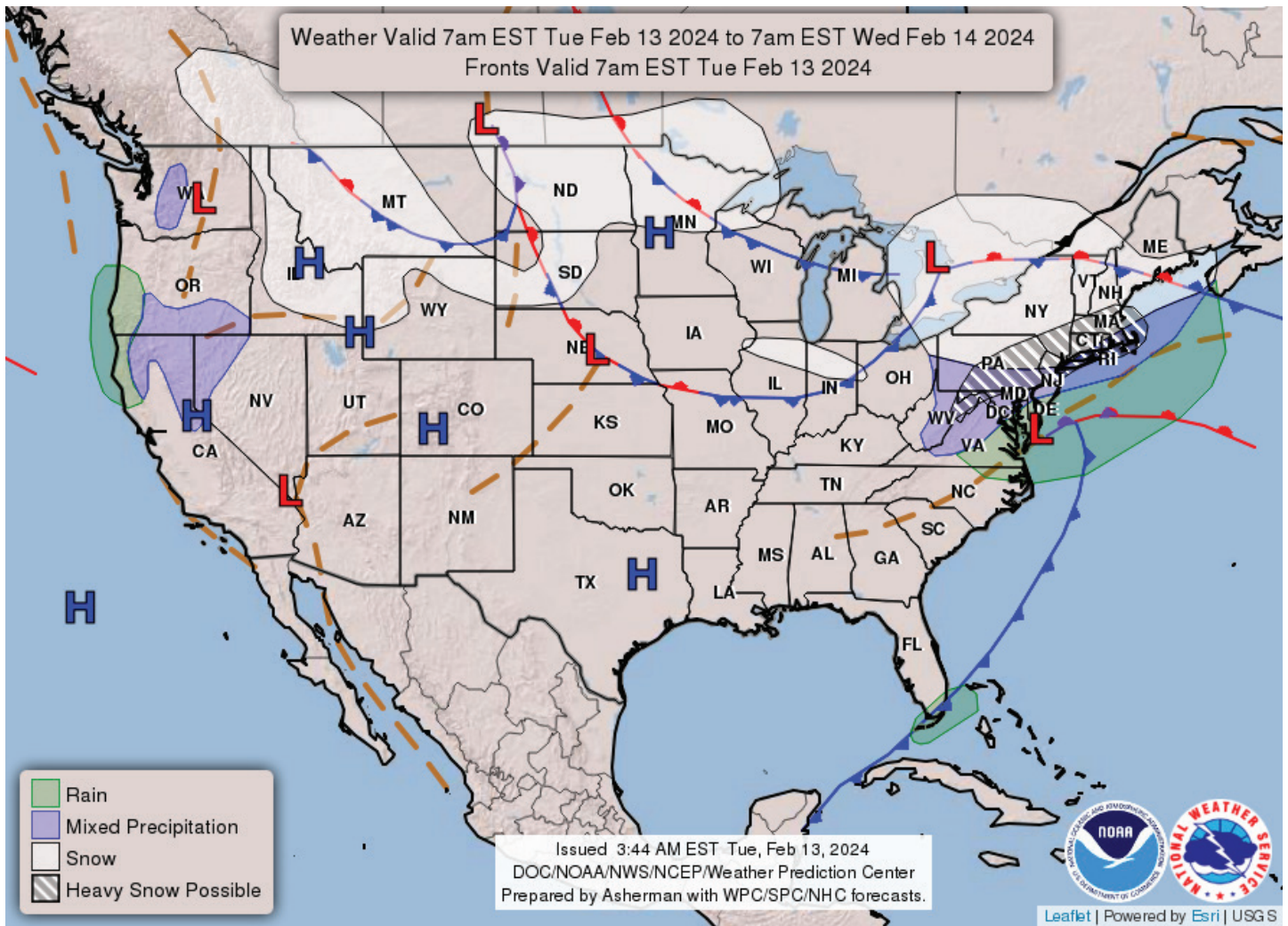
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 0.81

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 5:57:28 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34:09 am



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Today in Weather History

February 13, 1995: Snow fell over a broad strip from southwest to northeast South Dakota. The snow began as freezing rain in the northeast, and there were several vehicle accidents attributed to the icing. The most substantial snow was at Custer in the Black Hills, with 14 inches. A few six to eight inches amounts were reported over the southwest, central, and northeast South Dakota plains. In addition, strong winds caused some blowing and drifting snow in northeastern South Dakota.

1784 - Ice floes blocked the Mississippi River at New Orleans, then passed into the Gulf of Mexico. The only other time this occurred was during the "Great Arctic Outbreak" of 1899. (David Ludlum)

1885 - The "Friday the 13th" avalanche at Alva, UT, killed sixteen persons, and left thirteen others buried for twelve hours before being rescued. (David Ludlum)

1889 - It was the coldest morning of record along the Gulf Coast. The temperature dipped to 7 above zero at New Orleans LA and Pensacola FL, and plunged to -1 degree at Mobile AL. The mercury dipped to -2 degrees at Tallahassee, the coldest reading of record for the state of Florida. (David Ludlum)

1905: Freezing temperatures were recorded over the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. Morning lows of 29 degrees below zero at Gravette, Arkansas, 40 below at Lebanon, Kansas, and 40 below at Warsaw, Missouri, established all-time records for those three states.

The low temperature at Vinita, Oklahoma, plummeted to 27 degrees below zero. The temperature would be tied at Watts in January 1930 and Blackwell and Medford in February 2011. The negative 27-degree reading is cold enough to be the 2nd lowest temperature on record in Oklahoma. The coldest is currently 31 degrees below zero, recorded at Nowata on February 10, 2011.

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain over central California. Chews Ridge reported nearly eleven inches of rain in 24 hours, and extensive flooding occurred in San Benito County. The Mount Rose ski resort in Nevada experienced a "white-out" with 60 mph winds and 36 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds in the wake of a storm in the northeastern U.S., gusting to 60 mph at Oswego NY, produced six foot snow drifts in northeastern Ohio. High winds in the mountains of Utah, gusting to 106 mph at the Snowbird ski resort, contributed to a forty car pile-up on Interstate 15, near the town of Bluffdale. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rain and flash flooding from central Texas to western Pennsylvania. Up to ten inches of rain deluged western Kentucky in two days, with five day totals ranging up to 13.16 inches at Gilbertsville Dam KY. Flooding caused tens of millions of dollars damage, including 18 million dollars damage at Frankfort KY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A slow moving cold front brought heavy snow to Utah, Colorado and Wyoming. Big Horn WY reported 15 inches of snow, and up to 22 inches was reported in Utah. In Colorado, 8 to 12 inches of snow fell over the northwest suburbs of Denver, while 16 to 22 inches was reported in the high mountain elevations west of Fort Collins. Strong winds accompanied the heavy snow, and bitter cold weather followed in its wake. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: A National Weather Service Survey Team concluded a weak (F1) tornado occurred at the General Motors Desert Proving Grounds facility in Mesa, Arizona. Moderate damage was observed. A roof was damaged, and about 20 vehicles were destroyed and moved around. One car was lifted, moved several feet, and set down inside a roped-off area containing solar exposure equipment. The tornado traveled northeast and lasted about five minutes. The image below is from the February 1995 Storm Data.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

PRAY OR WORRY: WHICH?

Each morning Josie and her Mom prayed together before she left for school. One morning after they prayed, Josie noticed a look of distress and worry on her Mom's face.

Concerned, she said, "Mom, we just prayed together and thanked the Lord for everything we had and then told Him about everything we needed. I thought that if we prayed, we wouldn't have to worry. I didn't know that we could do both at the same time."

Worry and faith are incompatible. If we have faith, there is no need to worry, and if we worry, we do not need to pray. One seems to cancel out the other.

Many would argue that it is impossible not to worry at least some of the time. But, listen to Paul: "Don't worry about anything," he said. "Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and then thank Him for all He has done" and is going to do!

Maybe that's the key to avoid worrying: When we thank God for all that He has done for us, we can see His hand at work in our lives. And, rather than worrying about what might or might not happen, we can see that what has happened has benefitted us in one way or another. When we have this attitude, we will realize that God is protecting us and providing for our every need.

Paul advised the church members at Philippi to turn their worries into prayers. He wanted them to have a strong faith, deep trust, and sincere belief in the Lord for all things. And, think of this: If our faith and trust belief are weak, worrying won't help.

Prayer: Lord, increase our faith to exceed the size of our fears and our trust to be large enough to combat the uncertainties of life. May we become steadfast and sure. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Philippians 4:6



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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 16 Hrs 4 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.12.24

13 14 22 31 52 2

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$3,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 19
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.12.24

3 12 18 39 44 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 34 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.24

4 7 23 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$48,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 34
DRAW: Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.12.24

29 49 51 61 66 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.12.24

17 36 43 53 67 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$285,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the Associated Press

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Andes Central-Dakota Christian 48, Menno 37
Bridgewater-Emery 46, Howard 40
Britton-Hecla 62, Waubay/Summit 61
Burke 55, Platte-Geddes 49
Canton 54, Parker 47
Centerville 48, Elk Point-Jefferson 42
DeSmet 44, Canistota 42
Elkton-Lake Benton 54, Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. 48
Ethan 58, Corsica/Stickney 32
Gregory 56, Colome 39
Hanson 63, Beresford 45
Harding County 65, Bison 23
Hitchcock-Tulare 41, Aberdeen Christian 32
Lemmon High School 37, Dupree 33
Little Wound 69, Lower Brule 54
McLaughlin 63, Standing Rock, N.D. 40
Parkston 64, Estelline-Hendricks 30
Scotland 37, Freeman Academy-Marion 33
Tea 63, Aberdeen Central 35
Tri-Valley 42, McCook Central-Montrose 40
Vermillion 51, Lennox 40
Viborg-Hurley 66, Baltic 55
Wall 70, Philip 37

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 72, Hitchcock-Tulare 44
Aberdeen Roncalli 58, Clark-Willow Lake 35
Alcester-Hudson 56, Sioux Falls Lutheran 43
Andes Central-Dakota Christian 56, Menno 36
Canton 75, Parker 42
Colman-Egan 71, Iroquois-Lake Preston 49
Elkton-Lake Benton 54, Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. 48
Ethan 66, Corsica/Stickney 64
Florence-Henry 64, Langford 24
Freeman Academy-Marion 57, Scotland 37
Hankinson, N.D. 64, Wilmot 38
Highmore-Harrold 60, Potter County 57
Lennox 66, Vermillion 46
Marty 69, Lakota Tech 63
Milbank 78, Estelline-Hendricks 58
Parkston 48, Bon Homme 45
Ponca, Neb. 56, Elk Point-Jefferson 50
Tea 63, Aberdeen Central 35

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Timber Lake 74, Dupree 60
Tiospa Zina 79, Crow Creek Tribal School 71
Wagner 66, Burke 58
Wakpala 71, North Central 41
Wall 60, Kadoka 58
Waubay/Summit 72, Britton-Hecla 34

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

Noem fills 2 legislative seats after South Dakota Supreme Court opinion on legislator conflicts

By JACK DURA Associated Press

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has filled two legislative seats, one of them empty for months as she sought and awaited a state Supreme Court opinion on legislator conflicts of interest.

Last fall, Noem had asked the high court to weigh in on legislator conflicts of interests related to state contracts after a state senator resigned her seat and agreed to a settlement to pay back about \$500,000 of federal coronavirus aid she received for her preschool business.

The court heard oral arguments last month in a rare meeting of the three branches of state government, and issued its opinion on Friday, backed 4-1 by the justices.

Justice Mark Salter wrote: "The contract restriction stated in (the South Dakota Constitution) is not a categorical bar on all contracts funded by the State. Instead, it prohibits a legislator, or former legislator within one year following the expiration of the legislator's term, from being interested, directly or indirectly, in contracts that are authorized by laws passed during the legislator's term."

Top Republicans in South Dakota's GOP-led Legislature welcomed the opinion for providing clarification. They don't expect upheaval for the Legislature.

"It looks to me like a sound decision rooted in the plain meaning of (the constitutional provision)," said Republican House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, an attorney. "It means that legislators can still have driver's licenses, they can still get park passes, and that it's still illegal for the Legislature to pass a law and then turn around and get a contract based on it."

Republican Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, also an attorney, said he isn't aware of a lawmaker who has a conflict under the court's opinion.

In a statement Friday, Noem said: "The court acted swiftly to provide clarity for both the executive and legislative branches, and we are grateful for their work."

On Saturday, Noem named former state representative Kristin Conzet, a business owner in Rapid City, to a vacant House seat. On Monday, the governor appointed Mike Walsh, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and retired law enforcement officer in Box Elder who runs a polygraph examinations and background investigations business, to the Senate seat.

South Dakota's ongoing legislative session began last month.

Senate passes \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan after rare all-night session

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate early Tuesday passed a \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, pushing ahead after months of difficult negotiations and amid growing political divisions in the Republican Party over the role of the United States abroad.

The vote came after a small group of Republicans opposed to the \$60 billion for Ukraine held the Senate floor through the night, using the final hours of debate to argue that the U.S. should focus on its own problems before sending more money overseas. But more than a dozen Republicans voted with almost all

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Democrats to pass the package 70-29, with supporters arguing that abandoning Ukraine could embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin and threaten national security across the globe.

"It's been years, perhaps decades, since the Senate has passed a bill that so greatly impacts not just our national security, not just the security of our allies, but also the security of western democracy," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who worked closely with Republican Leader Mitch McConnell on the legislation.

The bill's passage through the Senate was a welcome sign for Ukraine amid critical shortages on the battlefield. Yet the package faces a deeply uncertain future in the House, where hardline Republicans aligned with former President Donald Trump — the front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, and a critic of support for Ukraine — oppose the legislation.

Speaker Mike Johnson cast new doubt on the package in a statement Monday evening, making clear that it could be weeks or months before Congress sends the legislation to President Joe Biden's desk — if at all.

Still, the vote was a win for both Senate leaders. McConnell has made Ukraine his top priority in recent months, and was resolute in the face of considerable pushback from his own GOP conference.

Speaking directly to his detractors in a floor speech on Sunday, McConnell said that "the eyes of the world" were on the U.S. Senate.

"Will we give those who wish us harm more reason to question our resolve, or will we recommit to exercising American strength?" McConnell asked.

Dollars provided by the legislation would purchase U.S.-made defense equipment, including munitions and air defense systems that authorities say are desperately needed as Russia batters the country. It also includes \$8 billion for the government in Kyiv and other assistance.

In addition, the legislation would 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 bill's passage followed almost five months of torturous negotiations over an expansive bill that would have paired the foreign aid with an overhaul of border and asylum policies. Republicans demanded the trade-off, saying the surge of migration into the United States had to be addressed alongside the security of allies.

But a bipartisan deal on border security struck by Republican Sen. James Lankford fell apart just days after its unveiling, a head-spinning development that left negotiators deeply frustrated. Republicans declared the bill insufficient and blocked it on the Senate floor.

After the border bill collapsed, the two leaders abandoned the border provisions and pushed forward with passing the foreign aid package alone — as Democrats had originally intended.

While the slimmed-down foreign aid bill eventually won enough Republican support to pass, several GOP senators who had previously expressed support for Ukraine voted against it. The episode further exposed divisions in the party, made more public as Trump dug in and a handful of lawmakers openly called for McConnell to step down.

Sen. J.D. Vance, an Ohio Republican, argued that the U.S. should step back from the conflict and help broker an end to it with Russia's Putin. He questioned the wisdom of continuing to fuel Ukraine's defense when Putin appears committed to fighting for years.

"I think it deals with the reality that we're living in, which is they're a more powerful country, and it's their region of the world," he said.

Vance, along with Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul and other opponents, spent several hours on the floor railing against the aid and complaining about Senate process. They dug in their heels to delay a final vote, speaking on the floor until daybreak.

Supporters of the aid pushed back, warning that bowing to Russia would be a historic mistake with devastating consequences. In an unusually raw back-and-forth, GOP senators who support the aid challenged some of the opponents directly on the floor.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis angrily rebutted some of their arguments, noting that the money would only help Ukraine for less than a year and that much of it would go to replenishing U.S. military stocks.

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"Why am I so focused on this vote?" Tillis said. "Because I don't want to be on the pages of history that we will regret if we walk away. You will see the alliance that is supporting Ukraine crumble. You will ultimately see China become emboldened. And I am not going to be on that page of history."

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., became emotional as he talked about the drudgery of the Senate and spending time away from his family to get little done. "But every so often there are issues that come before us that seem to be the ones that explain why we are here," he said, his voice cracking.

Moran conceded that the cost of the package was heavy for him, but pointed out that if Putin were to attack a NATO member in Europe, the U.S. would be bound by treaty to become directly involved in the conflict — a commitment that Trump has called into question as he seeks another term in the White House.

At a rally Saturday, Trump said that he had once told a NATO ally he would encourage Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to members that are "delinquent" in their financial and military commitments to the alliance. The former president has led his party away from the foreign policy doctrines of aggressive American involvement overseas and toward an "America First" isolationism.

Evoking the slogan, Moran said, "I believe in America first, but unfortunately America first means we have to engage in the world."

While the vast majority of House Republicans have opposed the aid and are unlikely to cross Trump, a handful of GOP lawmakers have signaled they will push to get it passed.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Turner, R-Ohio, traveled to Ukraine last week with a bipartisan delegation and met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Turner posted on X, formerly Twitter, after the trip that "I reiterated America's commitment to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia."

But Speaker Johnson is in a tough position. A majority of his conference opposes the aid, and he is trying to lead the narrowest of majorities and avoid the fate of his predecessor, former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who was ousted in October.

Johnson, R-La., said in a statement Monday that because the foreign aid package lacks border security provisions, it is "silent on the most pressing issue facing our country." It was the latest — and potentially most consequential — sign of opposition to the Ukraine aid from House GOP leadership, who had rejected the bipartisan border plan as a "non-starter," contributing to its rapid demise.

"Now, in the absence of having received any single border policy change from the Senate, the House will have to continue to work its own will on these important matters," Johnson said. "America deserves better than the Senate's status quo."

Rep. Abigail Spanberger, a Virginia Democrat, traveled to Kyiv last week with Turner and other House members. She said the trip underscored to her how Ukraine is still in a fight for its very existence.

As the group traveled through Kyiv in armored vehicles, she said, they witnessed signs of an active war, from sandbagged shelters to burned-out cars and memorials to those killed. During the meeting with Zelenskyy, she said the U.S. lawmakers tried to offer assurances that the American people still stand with his country.

"He was clear that our continued support is critical to their ability to win the war," Spanberger said. "It's critical to their own freedom. And importantly, it's critical to U.S. national security interests."

Israel and Hamas are making progress in cease-fire and hostage release talks, officials say

By SAMY MAGDY, NAJIB JOBAIN and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Israel and Hamas are making progress toward a deal that aims to bring about a cease-fire and free hostages held in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, according to two officials with direct knowledge of the talks, as key meetings continue Tuesday between the sides in the Egyptian capital.

Talks are moving forward even after Israel intensified its offensive in the southern Gaza town of Rafah, where 1.4 million displaced Palestinians have fled to seek shelter from fighting elsewhere. A brazen Israeli hostage rescue mission freed two captives held in the town along the Egyptian border, a raid that killed at least 74 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and left a trail of destruction.

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A deal would give people in Gaza a desperately needed respite from the war, now in its fifth month, and offer freedom for at least some of the 100 people still held captive in Gaza. With the war grinding on, efforts mediated by Qatar, the U.S. and Egypt to bring about a deal have been hobbled by the starkly disparate positions of Hamas and Israel.

Israel has made destroying Hamas' governing and military capabilities and freeing the hostages the main goals of its war, which was launched after thousands of Hamas-led militants rampaged through southern Israel, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking roughly 250 people captive, including women and children, according to Israeli authorities. Tens of thousands of Israelis were displaced from destroyed communities.

The war has wrought unimaginable destruction in the Gaza Strip, with more than 28,000 people killed, more than 70% of them women and minors, according to local health officials. Vast swaths of the territory have been flattened by Israel's offensive, around 80% of the population has been displaced and a humanitarian catastrophe has pushed more than a quarter of Palestinians in Gaza toward starvation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press on until "total victory," and has insisted that strong military pressure will secure the hostages' freedom — an idea his allies say was bolstered by the successful rescue mission. But the rescued hostages, Fernando Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, were just the second and third captives to be freed by the military since the war erupted.

Other Israeli officials have said only a deal can bring about the release of so many hostages.

A deal in late November brought about a brief truce in exchange for the release of about 100 hostages. About 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel were also freed as part of the deal. Israel says about 30 captives are believed to have died or been killed while in captivity, with their bodies still in Gaza. Three hostages were killed erroneously by Israeli forces in December and one female Israeli soldier was freed in a rescue mission in the early weeks of the war.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

A senior Egyptian official said mediators have achieved what he described as "relatively significant" progress in the negotiations between Israel and Hamas ahead of a scheduled meeting in Cairo on Tuesday of representatives from Qatar, U.S. and Israel. Israeli media reported the head of the Mossad, David Barnea, was in Cairo.

The Egyptian official said the meeting would focus on "crafting a final draft" of a six-week cease-fire deal, with guarantees that the parties would continue negotiations toward a permanent cease-fire.

A Western diplomat in the Egyptian capital also said a six-week deal was on the table but cautioned that more work is still needed to reach an agreement.

He said the meeting Tuesday would be crucial in bridging the remaining gaps to get the two sides to agree on a six-week truce and embark on talks for a final cease-fire deal.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

OUTLINES FOR A DEAL

While the officials did not disclose the precise details of the emerging deal, the sides have been discussing varying proposals for weeks.

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

Hamas rejected those terms. It laid out a three-phased plan of 45 days each in which the hostages would be released in stages, Israel would free hundreds of imprisoned Palestinians, including senior militants, and the war would be wound down with Israel withdrawing its troops. That was viewed as a nonstarter for Israel, which wants to topple Hamas before ending the war.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken indicated last week on a visit to the region that there was hope the talks might lead to a deal, and on Monday, President Joe Biden also signaled they were heading closer to fruition.

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"The key elements of the deal are on the table," Biden said alongside visiting Jordanian King Abdullah II, adding, "there are gaps that remain."

He said the U.S. would do "everything possible" to make an agreement happen.

DEATH TOLL MOUNTS

The signs of progress came despite ongoing fighting.

Palestinians were still counting the dead after Israel's hostage rescue mission, with the death toll climbing to 74 on Tuesday. Residents and displaced Palestinians in Gaza were searching through the rubble from Israeli airstrikes that provided cover for the Israeli forces.

While concerns have grown over Rafah because it is sheltering such a massive influx of Palestinians, fighting was continuing throughout the Gaza Strip, with the Israeli military saying troops were battling militants in Gaza's second largest city, Khan Younis, and in central Gaza. It said Tuesday that three soldiers were killed in combat, raising the death toll among troops since the Gaza ground operation began in late October to 232.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza says the bodies of 133 people killed in Israeli strikes were brought to hospitals over the past day. The fatalities brought the death toll in Gaza to 28,473 since the war began on Oct. 7, according to the ministry, which says more than 68,000 people have been wounded.

Antisemitism and safety fears surge among US Jews, survey finds

By TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

Nearly two-thirds of American Jews feel less secure in the U.S. than they did a year ago, according to a new national survey.

The American Jewish Committee, a prominent advocacy organization, conducted the survey last fall just as the Israel-Hamas war began on Oct. 7. The number of American Jews who say they feel less secure in the U.S. jumped 22% from last year's survey.

"This year's study shows us very clearly that antisemitism that was really just a simmering flame is now, especially since Oct. 7, a five-alarm fire," Ted Deutch, CEO of AJC, told The Associated Press.

The survey released Tuesday found one quarter of American Jews said they have been the target of antisemitism in the past year. Almost half of American Jews responding to the survey said they had altered their behavior during the past year to avoid antisemitism – changing what they wore, what they posted online or where they went so other people wouldn't know they were Jewish.

"I live in a rural area and my home is most likely the only Jewish home in a 30-mile radius," a 62-year-old woman is quoted as saying in the survey report. "We don't tell people and outside the home do not show that we are Jewish."

That reticence is "an enormous challenge for the Jewish community," Deutch said. "But it really represents a challenge for all of our society."

The survey comes as Jewish and Muslim civil rights and advocacy groups have reported large increases in harassment, bias and physical attacks against their members in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war.

Brian Levin, founding director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, said he has seen a surge in anti-Jewish and Islamophobic internet searches since last fall, including "eliminationist" and homicidal language.

Levin, who is not affiliated with the AJC survey, said anti-Jewish hate crimes hit a record high last year in several major cities. "As Jews are understandably feeling more insecure, police and social science data back up why," he said.

The AJC began its survey five years ago, after the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh, the deadliest antisemitic attack on American soil. Since then, most Jews and more than half of Americans say they think antisemitism has increased, according to the AJC.

This year's primary survey collected data from 1,528 Jewish adults in the U.S., while its companion survey collected data from 1,223 U.S. adults. The surveys, conducted by the polling firm SSRS, had margins of error of 3.5% and 3.6% respectively.

Jews between 18 and 29 were more likely to report being the victim of antisemitism. As universities grapple with antisemitism, around a quarter of Jewish college students or recent graduates reported hiding their Jewish identity or refraining from speaking about Israel on campus.

Most American Jews (85%) say the statement "Israel has no right to exist" is antisemitic. A 52-year-old male respondent is cited in the report as saying, "Criticizing Israel's political policies (ex: treatment of non-Jews in the country, Palestinians for example) is not antisemitic. Saying that Israel should not exist, as a result of these practices, IS antisemitic."

Most Americans who witnessed antisemitism saw it online or on social media, but only 5% said they reported it. More than one in five American Jews said an online incident made them feel physically threatened.

"So it's not just some of the memes or jokes," said Holly Huffnagle, the AJC's U.S. director for combating antisemitism. "This is real, vitriolic antisemitism that's affecting them, that's making them feel physically unsafe."

There is a growing awareness of antisemitism. Most American Jews and three-fourths of the general public now believe antisemitism is a problem in the U.S, according to the AJC. That number increases for non-Jews who know someone who is Jewish. About 90% of Americans said everyone is responsible for fighting antisemitism.

"That's a good news piece," Huffnagle said. "I think the question is, 'How do we empower the general public who sees the problem now in ways they hadn't four years ago?'"

Last year, the Biden administration released a national strategy to combat antisemitism, and the AJC is encouraging further action on those recommendations. Deutch, a former Democratic member of Congress, said they will keep working with the government to implement the national strategy.

"But ultimately," Deutch said, "we're really looking to our friends, our allies in other faith communities, in our places of work, in our schools, to stand with us, to understand how we feel and to work together to fight antisemitism and in turn to fight hatred of all kinds."

Live updates | Bodies of 133 people killed in Israeli strikes brought to Gaza hospitals

By The Associated Press undefined

Bodies of 133 people killed in Israeli strikes have been brought to hospitals in the Gaza Strip over the past day, health officials there said as the Palestinian death toll from an Israeli hostage rescue operation in Rafah rose to 74 on Tuesday.

The raid took place early Monday 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. Women and children were among those killed in the airstrikes, Palestinian officials said.

The overall Palestinian death toll from the war in Gaza has surpassed 28,000 people, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza. A quarter of Gaza's residents are starving.

The war began with Hamas' assault into Israel on Oct. 7, in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Israel says about 100 hostages remain in Hamas captivity, while Hamas is holding 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.

Currently:

- Biden says 'key elements' of a Gaza deal are on the table as he meets with Jordan's King Abdullah
- The Israeli military says it has rescued 2 hostages from captivity in the Gaza Strip.
- Timeline of the Israeli raid in Gaza that rescued two hostages and killed dozens of Palestinians
- Egypt is threatening to void its decades-old peace treaty with Israel. What does that mean?
- UN Palestinian aid agency says it's 'critical' to receive EU aid soon, but EU wants an audit first.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

TEL AVIV, Israel — A relative of one of the hostages Israel rescued in a daring mission this week in the

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Gaza Strip says he never received medicines that were part of a Qatar- and French-mediated deal meant to deliver treatment to sick captives held by Hamas in exchange for more aid for Palestinians.

Maayan Sigal-Koren told Israeli Army Radio on Tuesday that Louis Har, her mother's partner who was freed, was sent a hearing aid, glasses and medication which he said he never received.

Har, 70, has diabetes and hypertension for which he needs medication, among other conditions, according to the Hostage and Missing – Families Forum, an advocacy group supporting the families of the hostages.

Sigal-Koren said the fact that Har didn't have the meds compounded the challenges of being held captive. "It added to other difficulties there, the psychological difficulties, the difficulty that his freedom was taken away," she said.

Israeli hospital officials said Har and fellow freed captive Fernando Marman were in good physical shape upon their release.

The Qatar- and France-mediated deal was meant to provide a three-months' supply of medications for 45 of the hostages. Qatar announced nearly a month ago that the medications had arrived in Gaza but there was never any confirmation that they had reached the hostages.

TURKEY'S ERDOGAN LASHES OUT AGAINST ISRAEL, DEMANDS IT HALT THE WAR IN GAZA

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has offered blistering criticism of Israel, demanding it immediately recognize an independent Palestinian state and halt its war in the Gaza Strip against Hamas.

"Before the region is exposed to harsher threats, we need to stop the massacre in Gaza now," Erdogan said before the World Governments Summit in the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday.

He criticized Israeli settlers taking land in the West Bank as some in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government called for settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Erdogan said setting aside Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel that killed some 1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage, "the source of the crisis today is the sustaining of the settlements on the Palestinian lands."

"If Israel wants a permanent peace in the region, the proliferation-related vision should be stopped once and for all," Erdogan said. "A free and independent Palestinian state should be recognized within the 1967 borders."

He described Turkey as "living in a circle of fire" in the region. He also called on funding to immediately resume for the United Nations' agency for Palestinians, known as UNRWA. Some nations have cut funding to the agency over Israeli accusations that some of its employees took part in the Oct. 7 attack.

CHINA CALLS ON ISRAEL TO STOP MILITARY OPERATIONS IN GAZA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

BEIJING — China has called on Israel to halt military operations in Gaza as soon as possible following a raid that rescued two hostages and killed at least 74 Palestinians.

The Foreign Ministry in Beijing added in a brief statement on Tuesday that Israel should "do everything possible to avoid casualties among innocent civilians and prevent a more devastating humanitarian disaster in Rafah."

Israel has signaled its ground offensive may soon target Rafah, the town in the Gaza Strip where the hostages were freed by the raid.

China has consistently opposed the Israeli offensive, calling from the start for a cease-fire and talks to find a permanent solution to the crisis.

HEALTH MINISTRY IN GAZA SAYS 133 BODIES BROUGHT TO HOSPITALS IN THE PAST DAY

CAIRO — The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza says the bodies of 133 people killed in Israeli strikes have been brought to hospitals in the war-wrecked territory over the past day.

Hospitals also received 162 wounded patients, the ministry said.

Also Tuesday, the death toll from an Israeli hostage rescue operation in the town of Rafah rose to 74, according to Dr. Marawan al-Hams, director of the local Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital. Israeli forces conducting the operation, which freed two hostages, were backed by heavy airstrikes on the town, to where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have fled.

The fresh fatalities brought the death toll in Gaza to 28,473 since the war began on Oct. 7, according

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to the ministry.

The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says more than 70% of the dead are women and minors. Israel says its forces have killed 10,000 Hamas fighters without providing evidence. It blames Hamas for the death toll, saying it embeds in civilians areas, putting non-combatants at risk.

More than 68,000 people have been wounded in the war, of them 11,000 who need urgent evacuation for treatment out of Gaza, the ministry said.

The ministry said many of the dead remain under the rubble of destroyed buildings and on roadsides with first responders unable to reach many areas and collect the bodies.

ISRAELI FORCES KILL PALESTINIAN MAN IN WEST BANK, PALESTINIAN OFFICIALS SAY

CAIRO — Palestinian health officials say Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Health Ministry identified the man as 20-year-old Mohammed Sherif Hassan Selmi and said he was shot in his chest, shoulders and head.

The Israeli military said Tuesday that forces were operating in the West Bank city of Qalqilya when the man allegedly attempted to run over soldiers, who opened fired and killed the man. The military said it was not aware of whether any soldiers were wounded.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, an armed offshoot of the secular Fatah party, said its fighters clashed with the Israeli forces but did not claim Selmi as a member.

The West Bank has seen a surge of violence since the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza broke out in October. The Health Ministry says more than 380 Palestinians have been killed during that time. The Israeli military says it has arrested more than 3,000 Palestinians in the West Bank since the war began.

ARAB LEAGUE SECRETARY-GENERAL WARNS ISRAEL AGAINST FORCEFULLY DISPLACING PALESTINIANS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The secretary-general of the Arab League has warned Israel against policies he described as forcefully displacing Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Ahmed Aboul Gheit decried what he called an "Israeli mentality" to try and seize land the Palestinians want for their future state. He warned any seizure of the Gaza Strip or the West Bank by Israel would mean "a confrontation for the next thousand years."

"The United States must order Israel to stop these policies or otherwise the Middle East will explode in an unprecedented way," he said.

He also called on Israel to "empty the settlements" in Palestinian land as well.

Aboul Gheit, a former ambassador to the United Nations and Egypt's last foreign minister under ousted president Hosni Mubarak, spoke at the World Government Summit in Dubai.

COUNCIL MEETS ON GAZA TOLL AND ISRAEL'S EXPECTED MOVE INTO RAFAH

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council held an emergency closed meeting on the escalating civilian death toll in Gaza and Israel's plans to move its offensive to Rafah where some 1.5 million Palestinians have fled hoping to find safety.

China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun told The Associated Press after Monday's late meeting that there was "a loud cry" among council members about the need for urgent action -- to deal with the "unfolding humanitarian catastrophe," Israel's announced intentions in Gaza, and further spillover of the war.

Algeria, the Arab representative on the 15-member Security Council who called the meeting, has circulated a draft resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in the war that began after Hamas invaded Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostage. More than 28,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's offensive, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza.

Zhang said the "very strong and overwhelming position of council members" is for the Security Council to act but one member — a clear reference to Israel's closest ally the United States — "worries about the complication of Security Council action with the bilateral efforts" it is undertaking.

The Chinese envoy said discussions on the Algerian draft resolution are still taking place, and he expressed hope "that eventually the council will be demonstrating our united position."

Why thousands of Indian farmers are protesting again

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Tens of thousands of Indian farmers are marching toward the capital to demand guaranteed crop prices, renewing a movement from two years ago that succeeded in getting the government to repeal contentious new agricultural laws.

On Tuesday, police used tear gas, detained a number of farmers and heavily barricaded border points to block the protesters from entering New Delhi.

Authorities are determined to control the new demonstrations to avoid a repeat of the 2021 protests, in which tens of thousands of farmers camped outside the capital for over a year, enduring a harsh winter and a devastating COVID-19 surge.

WHY ARE FARMERS PROTESTING AGAIN?

The farmers, who rode on tractors and trucks from neighboring Haryana and Punjab states, say the government has failed to meet some of their key demands from the previous protests.

In 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi repealed a set of agricultural laws that had triggered the first round of protests from farmers, who said the legislation would hurt their incomes.

But farmer groups that are leading the current march say that since then, the government hasn't made progress on other important demands such as guaranteed crop prices, a doubling of farmers' income and loan waivers.

The demand for guaranteed minimum support prices is at the heart of their protests.

Currently, the government protects agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices by setting a minimum purchase price for certain essential crops, a system that was introduced in the 1960s to help shore up food reserves and prevent shortages. But the farmers are demanding that this be extended to all farm produce, and not just essential crops.

WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME?

In November 2021, Modi's announcement that his government would quash the controversial laws was widely seen as a win for the farmers and a rare retreat by the populist leader.

The government had defended the laws as necessary reforms to modernize Indian farming, but farmers feared the government's move to introduce market reforms in agriculture would leave them poorer.

The protests, which began in northern India, triggered nationwide demonstrations and drew international support. Dozens of farmers died due to suicides, bad weather conditions and the pandemic.

Political commentators said the protest movement was the biggest challenge until that time for the Modi government, which then tried to paint its decision to scrap the laws as a move that prioritized farmers.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MODI'S GOVERNMENT?

The protests come at a crucial time for the governing party and Modi, who is widely expected to sweep upcoming national polls and secure a third successive term.

In 2021, Modi's decision to do away with the laws was seen as a move to appease farmers ahead of crucial state polls.

Farmers form the most influential voting bloc in India and are often romanticized as the heart and soul of the nation.

Politicians have long considered it unwise to alienate them, and farmers are also particularly important to Modi's base. Northern Haryana and a few other states with substantial farmer populations are ruled by his party.

If the protests were to gain the same kind of momentum as last time, it could pose a new test for Modi and his government just a few months before the general election.

Russia puts Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas on a wanted list but doesn't specify the charges

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has put Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas on a wanted list, an official register showed Tuesday, as tensions soar between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

Kallas' name appeared on the Interior Ministry's register of people wanted in connection with criminal charges. It didn't specify what charges Kallas was facing.

It is the first time the ministry has put a foreign leader on a wanted list.

Kallas has been a strong supporter of Ukraine, spearheading efforts to increase military assistance to Kyiv and tighten sanctions against Russia.

She also has angered Moscow by pushing for the removal of monuments to Soviet World War II soldiers. Russia has laws criminalizing the "rehabilitation of Nazis" that include clauses punishing the desecration of war memorials.

Estonian Secretary of State Taimar Peterkop was also put on the wanted list, according to the register.

The moves appear to reflect an attempt by Moscow to up the ante as it faces pressure from NATO allies as fighting in Ukraine nears the two-year mark, but means little in practical terms as Russia-West contacts have been frozen during the conflict.

There was no immediate reaction to the move from the Estonian authorities.

For rights campaigner in Greece, same-sex marriage recognition follows decades of struggle

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Years before starting a family of her own, Stella Belia was already waging a tireless campaign for legal recognition. Her fight may finally be over this week — a few months shy of her twin boys' 17th birthday.

Greek lawmakers are expected to legalize same-sex marriage in a parliament vote Thursday, with a rare display of cross-party collaboration.

Approval would make Greece the first Orthodox Christian country to take that step, clearing multiple legal hurdles for gay couples who already have or want to have children.

"I've been fighting for this ever since I figured out who I was," says Belia, a 57-year-old drama teacher with a gruff voice and an easy laugh.

"And it's a great relief to say we've finally made it," she said. "But it is tiresome, very tiresome to fight for something that's an obvious right — to suffer for something that other people are just handed — and have to fight so hard to get it."

Belia split with her female partner when her sons were aged 11 but she considers her to be the boys' other mother.

Although civil partnerships were extended to gay couples in Greece nearly a decade ago, only the biological parents of children in those relationships are currently recognized as legal guardians.

The issue of children's rights, including the publicized plight of cancer survivors in a same-sex relationship, helped nudge public opinion toward narrowly favoring the bill that was sponsored by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' conservative government.

But it also triggered a strong reaction from the country's Orthodox Church. Representing Greece's dominant faith, the Church argues the marriage bill would confuse parental roles and weaken the traditional family.

The Church petitioned lawmakers to reconsider in a public appeal also read out at Sunday services.

Several prominent bishops have taken a tougher line, warning that they will refuse to baptize the children of gay couples. They allied with far-right political parties and traditionalist groups to stage public demonstrations.

Protester Chara Giannakantonaki said she felt compelled to attend a rally held in front of parliament last Sunday.

"Every minority already has its rights guaranteed. There is no issue. They don't need (same-sex) marriage. They just want to desecrate whatever has remained sacred in Greece: Our Church, our families and our children," she said. "But children are a red line and we will never accept this."

The Mitsotakis government is facing dissent among conservatives over the bill and will need support from the centrist and left-wing opposition to secure the 151-vote minimum in the 300-member parliament.

Dimitris Mavros, managing director of the market research firm MRB Hellas, said the timing of the bill appeared to be carefully calculated: Backing a measure that props up Mitsotakis' centrist credentials but with the controversy likely to blow over before the European Union-wide elections in June.

Greeks in 2024, Mavros said, have shown a sharp rise in financial anxiety, their worries reflected in recent strikes and ongoing farmers' protests.

"I think the farmers' (protests) and high prices — and issues that hurt people's pockets — are going to overshadow the same-sex couples issue," he said. "We're probably going to get past this calmly."

Chrysa Gkotsopoulou and Elena Kotsifi, both engineers, for years told their families and colleagues they were roommates and only came out as a couple after moving to England for work in 2015.

They now have a young daughter, Ariadne, and all three travel to Greece using their U.K. passports.

"We quickly realized that England offered us prospects as a couple that we had never previously imagined." Kotsifi, 38, said. "We could be ourselves."

They flew to Athens at the weekend to celebrate the bill's expected approval, and said that for the first time in nearly a decade, they now view returning home as a possibility.

They hope to join the activist Belia and others Thursday night in the public gallery in parliament and celebrations set to follow.

"If there's room for us (in parliament), we'd like to go," Gkotsopoulou said. "We feel joy, joy and pride that Greece is moving to the right side of history." ____ Theodora Tongas in Athens contributed.

Israeli forces rescue 2 hostages in dramatic Gaza raid that killed at least 67 Palestinians

By NAJIB JOBAIN, JOSEF FEDERMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces rescued two hostages early Monday, storming a heavily guarded apartment in a densely packed town in the Gaza Strip as airstrikes carried out to cover the raid killed more than 60 Palestinians, including women and children.

The rescue in Rafah briefly lifted the spirits of Israelis shaken by the plight of the dozens of hostages held by Hamas. The nation is still reeling from the militant group's cross-border raid last year that started the war.

The overnight bombardment brought devastation in Rafah, which is packed with some 1.4 million people, most of whom fled their homes elsewhere in Gaza to escape fighting. Associated Press footage showed a large area of flattened houses, tattered tents and lines of bloodied bodies brought into nearby hospitals.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians in the territory, displaced over 80% of the population and set off a massive humanitarian crisis.

More than 12,300 Palestinian children and young teens have been killed in the conflict, Gaza's Health Ministry said Monday. About 8,400 women were also among those killed. That means children and young teens make up about 43% of the dead, and women and minors together make up three quarters.

The ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, provided the breakdown at the request of the AP. Israel claims to have killed about 10,000 Hamas fighters but has not provided evidence.

In Hamas' cross-border raid on Oct. 7, an estimated 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed, and militants took 250 people captive, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel has described Rafah as the last remaining Hamas stronghold in the territory and signaled that its ground offensive may soon target the town on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip.

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Israel says about 100 hostages remain in Hamas captivity after dozens were freed during a cease-fire in November. Hamas also holds the remains of roughly 30 others who were either killed on Oct. 7 or died in captivity.

The government has made freeing the hostages a top aim of its war, along with destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities. But as the fighting drags on, rifts have emerged in Israel over how to retrieve them.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says persistent military pressure will bring about the captives' freedom even as families of the hostages and many of their supporters have called on the government to make another deal with Hamas.

A DRAMATIC RAID

Israeli military spokesman Rear 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 Hamas militants were guarding the captives and that members of the rescue team shielded the hostages with their bodies as the battle erupted.

The army identified those rescued as Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, who were abducted from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak on Oct. 7. They also hold Argentinian citizenship. They are among just three hostages to be rescued; 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.

Har's son-in-law, Idan Begerano, who saw the released captives at the hospital where they were airlifted, 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." The men held long, tearful embraces with their relatives at the hospital, according to video released by Netanyahu's office.

DOZENS KILLED IN STRIKES

The airstrikes hit 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, said at least 67 people, including women and children, 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.

Mohamed Zoghroub, a Palestinian living in Rafah, said he saw a black jeep speeding through the town followed by clashes and heavy airstrikes.

"We found ourselves running with our children, from the airstrikes, in every direction," he said, speaking from an area flattened by the bombardment.

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.

A young man could be 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 one of your designated targets?" he said.

CONCERNS ABOUT RAFAH

Netanyahu has said sending ground troops into Rafah is essential to meeting Israel's war goals. On Sunday, the White House said President Joe Biden had warned Netanyahu that Israel should not conduct a military operation there without a "credible and executable" plan to protect civilians.

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, 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. administra-

tion official said. The official said that 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.

House GOP will try again to impeach Mayorkas after failing once. But outcome is still uncertain

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Having failed to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas the first time, House Republicans are determined to try again Tuesday, but it’s not at all certain the do-over vote will produce a better tally after last week’s politically embarrassing setback.

The evening vote is expected to be tight with Speaker Mike Johnson’s threadbare GOP majority unable to handle many defectors or absences in the face of staunch Democratic opposition to impeaching Mayorkas, the first Cabinet secretary facing charges in nearly 150 years.

Despite the expected arrival of Majority Leader Steve Scalise, who will bolster the GOP numbers after being away from Washington for cancer care, even one other missing or weather-delayed lawmaker could imperil the Mayorkas impeachment. If the vote pushes later into the week, the outcome of Tuesday’s special election in New York to replace ousted Rep. George Santos could tip the balance further.

Johnson posted a fists-clenched photo with Scalise, announcing his remission from cancer, saying, “looking forward to having him back in the trenches this week!”

The GOP effort to impeach Mayorkas over border security has taken on an air of political desperation as Republicans try to make good on their priorities after last week’s mishap and after Republicans rejected a bipartisan Senate border security package.

Border security has shot to the top of campaign issues, with Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner for the presidential nomination, insisting he will launch “the largest domestic deportation operation in American history” on day one if he retakes the White House.

In stark language over the weekend, Trump debased immigrant arrivals, even going so far as to suggest without evidence they bring disease into the U.S. Trump reiterated his plans of a second-term roundup to remove potentially millions of newcomers from the U.S., a spectacle practically unseen in modern times.

“We have no choice,” Trump said at a rally in South Carolina.

The House, which launched an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden over his son’s business dealings, has instead turned its attention to Mayorkas after Trump ally Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia pushed the debate forward.

If the House succeeds in impeaching Mayorkas, the charges against him would go to the Senate for a trial, but neither Democratic nor Republican senators have shown interest in the matter and it may be indefinitely shelved to a committee.

After a months-long investigation, the House Homeland Security Committee filed two articles of impeachment against Mayorkas — arguing that he “willfully and systematically” refused to enforce existing immigration laws and that he breached the public trust by lying to Congress and saying the border was secure.

Never before has a sitting Cabinet secretary been impeached, and it was nearly 150 years ago that the

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House voted to impeach President Ulysses S. Grant's secretary of war, William Belknap, over a kickback scheme in government contracts. He resigned moments before the vote.

Mayorkas, who did not appear to testify before the impeachment proceedings, put the border crisis squarely on Congress for failing to update immigration laws during a time of global migration.

"There is no question that we have a challenge, a crisis at the border," Mayorkas said over the weekend on NBC. "And there is no question that Congress needs to fix it."

Johnson and the Republicans have pushed back, arguing that the Biden administration could take executive actions, as Trump did, to stop the number of crossings — though the courts have questioned and turned back some of those efforts.

"We always explore what options are available to us that are permissible under the law," Mayorkas said in the interview.

Last week's failed vote to impeach Mayorkas — a surprise outcome rarely seen on such a high-profile issue — was a stunning display in the chamber that has been churning through months of GOP chaos since the ouster of the previous House speaker.

As the clock ticked down, three Republicans opposed impeaching Mayorkas, leaving the tally at razor's edge. With a 219-212 majority and Scalise absent, Johnson had just a few votes to spare.

One Democrat, Rep, Al Green of Texas, who had been hospitalized for emergency abdominal surgery, made a surprise arrival, wheeled into the chamber in scrubs and socks to vote against it — leaving the vote tied.

One of the Republican holdouts, Rep. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, who had served as a Marine and is now a committee chairman, was quickly encircled by colleagues, including the impeachment's chief sponsor, Georgia's Greene. He refused to change his vote.

Gallagher announced over the weekend he would not be seeking reelection in the fall. Once a rising star as a next generation of the GOP, he now joins a growing list of serious-minded Republican lawmakers heading for the exits.

Republicans are hopeful the New York special election will boost their ranks further, but the outcome of that race is uncertain.

Democrat Green of Texas is now out of the hospital and recuperating from surgery, and was amazed at how critics suggested he was sneaked into the Capitol to vote. He described the painstaking effort to get from his hospital bed to the House floor.

"Obviously, you feel good when you can make a difference," said Green. "All I did was what I was elected to do, and that was to cast my vote on the issues of our time, using the best judgment available to me."

He plans to be there again this week to vote against Mayorkas' impeachment.

Inflation might have dropped below 3% last month for 1st time in 3 years, a milestone for Biden

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation may have fallen below a 3% annual rate last month, which would be the lowest level in nearly three years and a potentially significant milestone as the Biden administration seeks to bolster Americans' views of the economy before the November elections.

Economists have estimated that when the government issues the latest consumer price index Tuesday, it will show that prices rose just 0.2% from December to January for a third month in a row, according to forecasts compiled by data provider FactSet. Falling gas prices are expected to have slowed overall inflation.

And compared with a year earlier, inflation is thought to have cooled to 2.9%, down sharply from 3.4% in December. That would be the lowest year-over-year inflation figure since March 2021, when prices began spiking as a result of pandemic-related supply disruptions and higher consumer spending fueled by stimulus checks.

A decline in inflation below 3% would provide President Joe Biden with an opportunity to claim that price increases are steadily cooling even as the economy continues to grow and unemployment remains near a

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half-century low. Still, many Americans remain frustrated that the pandemic-related inflation surge — the worst in 40 years — has left average prices about 19% higher than they were when Biden took office.

Tuesday's data, if it proves to be as mild as expected, may also contribute to the "greater confidence" that Federal Reserve officials have said they need to conclude that inflation is sustainably declining to their 2% target level, allowing them to start cutting interest rates from their current high levels.

Still, not all the inflation measures that will be reported Tuesday are expected to be so favorable. Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called "core" inflation could look stickier. Core inflation is watched closely because it typically provides a better read of where inflation is likely headed.

Core prices are forecast to have risen 0.3% in January for a third straight month. Though that figure would reduce annual core inflation from 3.9% to 3.7%, it would still be well above the level the Fed would like to see.

One factor that probably kept core prices up last month is that January is when many businesses impose price increases. While the government seeks to adjust its inflation data for such seasonal factors, it doesn't always do so perfectly.

Economists at Goldman Sachs have forecast that such adjustments will raise prices, in particular, for car insurance, prescription drugs and health care services. Other analysts have projected that the costs of hotel stays and airline fares jumped from December to January.

Because such figures will likely show that inflation remains elevated, most economists think the Fed will want to wait until May or June to begin cutting its benchmark rate from its 22-year-high of roughly 5.4%. The Fed raised its key rate 11 times, from March 2022 to July of last year, in a concerted drive to defeat high inflation. The result has been much higher borrowing rates for businesses and consumers, including for mortgages and auto loans.

Tuesday's data will also shed light on a concern of the Fed, which Chair Jerome Powell highlighted during a recent news conference: Most of the decline in inflation so far has stemmed from falling prices for goods, including used cars, furniture and appliances, which have dropped in six of the past seven months.

The costs, though, of services — auto repairs, health care, hotel rooms, concerts and other entertainment — are still rising at a brisk pace. Core services prices, which exclude energy, jumped 5.3% last year. By contrast, goods excluding food and energy rose just 0.2%. The Fed will want to see some cooling in services prices to become more assured that inflation is declining.

A rate cut by the central bank typically lowers the costs of mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and other consumer and business borrowing, and could bolster the economy. But a stronger economy could also pose a challenge for the Fed because faster growth can accelerate wages and consumer spending. If businesses aren't able to keep up with greater customer demand, they can respond by raising prices, which would worsen inflation.

In the final three months of last year, the economy grew at an unexpectedly rapid 3.3% annual rate. There are signs that growth remains healthy so far in 2024. Businesses engaged in a burst of hiring last month. Surveys of manufacturing companies found that new orders rose in January. And services companies reported an uptick in sales.

Super Bowl thriller was the most-watched program ever, averaging 123.4 million viewers

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

The longest Super Bowl game will also go down as the most-watched program in television history.

According to Nielsen and Adobe Analytics, Kansas City's 25-22 overtime victory over San Francisco on Sunday night averaged 123.4 million viewers across television and streaming platforms. That shattered last year's mark of 115.1 million for Kansas City's last-play victory over Philadelphia and is a 7% increase.

The game was televised by CBS, Nickelodeon and Univision and streamed on Paramount+ as well as the NFL's digital platforms.

Nielsen also said a record 202.4 million watched at least part of the game across all networks, a 10%

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jump over last year's figure of 183.6 million.

The CBS broadcast averaged 120 million. The network's previous mark for its most-watched Super Bowl was 112.34 million for the 2016 game between the Denver Broncos and Carolina Panthers.

Some of the increase can be attributed to a change in the way viewers are counted. Nielsen began including out-of-home viewers in its ratings in 2020, but only from limited markets. That measurement expanded to all 50 states beginning this year.

Sunday's game was only the second of the 58 Super Bowls to go to overtime. The previous one was in 2017, when New England rallied from a 28-3 deficit and beat Atlanta 34-28.

"I was managing my expectations, but I had a bit of hope that it would happen," CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus said of overtime, which was set up when San Francisco kicker Jake Moody had an extra point blocked in the fourth quarter, which kept it a three-point game. "I can't imagine a Super Bowl any better or more exciting than this."

Kansas City sent it to overtime on Harrison Butker's field goal. After the 49ers kicked a field goal on the opening possession of OT, the Chiefs won when Patrick Mahomes threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Mecole Hardman.

This Super Bowl had the added attraction of Taylor Swift in attendance. The pop superstar is dating Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, a romance that has brought new fans to the NFL.

It was the second straight year the Super Bowl averaged more than 100 million viewers after a period where four of the five games before 2023 had fallen short of that number because of cord-cutting. That included 95.2 million for the 2021 Super Bowl between Tampa Bay and Kansas City, which was the game's lowest TV-only average since 2007.

Univision averaged more than 2.2 million viewers, the highest Super Bowl viewership on record for a Spanish-language network. The Super Bowl has been televised in Spanish in the United States since 2014.

The NFL playoffs averaged 38.5 million viewers the first three weekends, a 9% increase over last year.

That followed a regular season that averaged 17.9 million, tied for the second highest since averages were first tracked in 1995.

House speaker casts doubts on Ukraine and Israel aid package as senators grind toward final vote

By STEPHEN GROVES and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson late Monday sharply criticized a \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other countries, casting serious doubts about the future of the package just as Senate leaders were slowly muscling it toward a final vote.

Senate leaders, trying to send a message that the U.S. remains committed to its allies, were looking to overcome marathon speeches from a determined group of Republican senators and hold a vote to pass the bill in the early morning hours Tuesday.

But Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said in a statement the package lacked border security provisions, calling it "silent on the most pressing issue facing our country." It was the latest — and potentially most consequential — sign of opposition to the Ukraine aid from conservatives who have for months demanded that border security policy be included in the package, only to last week reject a bipartisan proposal intended to curb the number of illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Now, in the absence of having received any single border policy change from the Senate, the House will have to continue to work its own will on these important matters," Johnson said. "America deserves better than the Senate's status quo."

The mounting opposition was just the latest example of how the Republican Party's stance on foreign affairs is being transformed under the influence of Donald Trump, the likely Republican presidential nominee.

Even if the package passes the Senate, as is expected, it faces an uncertain future in the House, where Republicans are more firmly aligned with Trump and deeply skeptical of continuing to aid Ukraine in its war against Russia.

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As Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and 17 other GOP senators have provided the votes to ensure the foreign aid package stays on track to clearing the Senate, Johnson has shown no sign he will put the package up for a vote.

Support for sending military aid to Ukraine has waned among Republicans, but lawmakers have cast the aid as a direct investment in American interests to ensure global stability. The package would allot roughly \$60 billion to Ukraine, and about a third of that would be spent replenishing the U.S. military with the weapons and equipment that are sent to Kyiv.

"These are the enormously high stakes of the supplemental package: our security, our values, our democracy," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer as he opened the chamber. "It is a down payment for the survival of Western democracy and the survival of American values."

Schumer worked closely with McConnell for months searching for a way to win favor in the House for tens of billions of dollars in aid for Ukraine. But after the carefully negotiated Senate compromise that included border policy collapsed last week, Republicans have been deeply divided on the legislation.

Sen. J.D. Vance, an Ohio Republican, argued that the U.S. should step back from the conflict and help broker an end to the conflict with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He questioned the wisdom of continuing to fuel Ukraine's defense when Putin appears committed to continuing the conflict for years.

"I think it deals with the reality that we're living in, which is they're a more powerful country, and it's their region of the world," he said.

Vance, along with Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul and other opponents, spent several hours on the floor railing against the aid and complaining about Senate process. They dug in to delay a final vote.

"Wish us stamina. We fight for you. We stand with America," Paul posted on social media as he and other senators prepared to occupy the floor as long as they could.

Paul defended his delays, saying "the American people need to know there was opposition to this."

But bowing to Russia is a prospect some Republicans warned would be a dangerous move that puts Americans at risk. In an unusually raw back-and-forth, GOP senators who support the aid challenged some of the opponents directly on the floor.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis angrily rebutted some of their arguments, noting that the money would only help Ukraine for less than a year and that much of it would go to replenishing U.S. military stocks.

"Why am I so focused on this vote?" Tillis said. "Because I don't want to be on the pages of history that we will regret if we walk away. You will see the alliance that is supporting Ukraine crumble. You will ultimately see China become emboldened. And I am not going to be on that page of history."

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., became emotional as he talked about the drudgery of the Senate and spending time away from his family to get little done. "But every so often there are issues that come before us that seem to be the ones that explain why we are here," he said, his voice cracking.

Moran conceded that the cost of the package was heavy for him, but pointed out that if Putin were to attack a NATO member in Europe, the U.S. would be bound by treaty to become directly involved in the conflict.

Trump, speaking at a rally Saturday, said that he had once told a NATO ally he would encourage Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to members that are "delinquent" in their financial and military commitments to the alliance. The former president has led his party away from the foreign policy doctrines of aggressive American involvement overseas and toward an "America First" isolationism.

Evoking the slogan, Moran said, "I believe in America first, but unfortunately America first means we have to engage in the world."

Senate supporters of the package have been heartened by the fact that many House Republicans still adamantly want to fund Ukraine's defense.

Rep. Abigail Spanberger, a Virginia Democrat, traveled to Kyiv last week with a bipartisan group that included Reps. Mike Turner, an Ohio Republican who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, as well as French Hill, R-Ark., Jason Crow, D-Colo. and Zach Nunn, R-Iowa.

Spanberger said the trip underscored to her how Ukraine is still in a fight for its very existence. As the group traveled through Kyiv in armored vehicles, they witnessed signs of an active war, from sandbagged

shelters to burned-out cars and memorials to those killed. During a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the U.S. lawmakers tried to offer assurances the American people still stood with his country.

"He was clear that our continued support is critical to their ability to win the war," Spanberger said. "It's critical to their own freedom. And importantly, it's critical to U.S. national security interests."

The bipartisan group discussed how rarely used procedures could be used to advance the legislation through the House, even without the speaker's support. But Spanberger called it a "tragedy" that the legislation could still stall despite a majority of lawmakers standing ready to support it.

"The fact that the only thing standing in the way is one person who does or doesn't choose to bring it to the floor," she said. "The procedure standing in the way of defeating Russia — that's the part that for me is just untenable."

Shooter entered Texas megachurch with young son and used AR-style rifle in the attack, police say

By JUAN LOZANO, ACACIA CORONADO AND JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The shooter at a Texas megachurch on Sunday had a history of mental illness and brought their young son to the attack that was carried out using an AR-style rifle and ended in an exchange of gunfire with two off-duty officers, authorities said Monday.

Houston police identified the shooter as Genesse Ivonne Moreno, 36, who they say wore a trenchcoat and carried a backpack upon entering Lakewood Church, which is led by the pastor Joel Osteen. Moreno used both male and female aliases, but investigators who looked at past police reports found that Moreno identified as female, Houston Police Commander Chris Hassig said.

The attack happened in between services at the Houston megachurch — located in a former NBA arena — and sent worshippers scrambling for safety.

During the shooting, Moreno's 7-year-old son was shot in the head and remained in critical condition Monday, authorities said. Moreno, who was killed by the officers, was not a known member of Osteen's congregation, said church spokesman Don Iloff.

Police and FBI investigators said they have not established a motive for the shooting but were looking into a dispute involving Moreno and the family of Moreno's ex-husband. Hassig and others said Moreno had a history of mental illness, including being placed under emergency detention in 2016, but provided no additional details.

Investigators found antisemitic writings by the shooter, Hassig said, noting Moreno's former in-laws are Jewish. The rifle also had a "Palestine" sticker on the buttstock. Hassig described Moreno as a "lone wolf" who acted alone.

Police searched Moreno's residence in Conroe, a city more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of the church. Court records show that Moreno had prior arrests and was involved in a divorce and child custody battle in 2022, in which Moreno's ex-mother-in-law indicated she had sought advice from pastoral staff at Lakewood.

The court documents do not indicate which staff the woman contacted. Iloff said he had not found anyone familiar with the contact described in the legal filings.

Moreno appeared to have legally purchased the rifle used in the attack in December, and investigators were looking into how Moreno obtained it, officials said. Moreno also carried a .22 caliber rifle into the church, police said.

Investigators said Moreno and the boy entered the church building shortly before the 2 p.m. Spanish service after Moreno pointed a gun at an unarmed security guard.

Moreno began firing once inside, and the guards inside the building — off-duty Houston police officer Christopher Moreno and Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission Agent Adrian Herrera — returned fire and killed the shooter, investigators said. Christopher Moreno is not related to Genesse Moreno, Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said.

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All the gunfire took place in a church hallway, and none of the violence spilled into the main sanctuary, Hassig said, describing the confrontation as a "gun battle" that lasted several minutes.

"They held their ground in the face of rifle fire at point blank range," Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission Chairman Kevin Lilly said of the security guards. "They were a wall that existed between worshippers and terror."

Both officers fired their weapons, but investigators do not yet know if Moreno's son was accidentally shot by one of them, Finner said. Police said a 57-year-old man who was shot in the hip was discharged from the hospital.

Finner said the shooter told officers after being shot that there was a bomb, but a search found no explosives.

Records in Harris County, where Houston is located, showed that Moreno, under the names Jeffery Escalante-Moreno or Jeffery Escalante, was charged in six criminal cases from 2005 to 2011.

The charges ranged from forging a \$100 bill, to stealing socks, hats and makeup, to assault for kicking a detention officer. The August 2009 assault conviction sent Moreno to jail for 180 days.

In a rambling 2022 application for a protective order against Moreno's ex-mother-in-law that Moreno wrote without help from an attorney, Moreno complained of being threatened and followed and claimed to have had received text messages from FBI Director Christopher Wray.

In a separate court filing seeking to be named conservator of Moreno's son, the ex-mother-in-law alleged that Moreno was mentally ill and that the child was being neglected and abused.

Telephone messages seeking comment from members of Moreno's family were not returned Monday.

Lakewood 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 said the violence could have been worse if the shooting had happened during the earlier and larger late Sunday morning service. Iloff said Osteen was inside the church but was on the first floor during the shooting, which happened on the second floor.

The gunfire terrified worshippers.

Alan Guity 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.

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 his leadership.

Osteen is a leading promoter 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.

On Super Bowl broadcast, 'He Gets Us' ads featuring Jesus stand out for change-of-pace message

By TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

For the second year in a row, a religious Super Bowl ad campaign promised viewers that Jesus "gets us."

Two commercials shown Sunday night centered Jesus' message to love your neighbors — even across ideological divides. In one, people of different races, classes and gender expressions have their feet washed, including a woman outside a family planning clinic.

"Our goal is to really show that Jesus loved and cared for anyone and everyone," He Gets Us campaign spokesperson Greg Miller told The Associated Press on Monday. He said the campaign's website received 715,000 views in the previous 24 hours.

On social media, the ads drew criticism across the ideological spectrum. Some conservatives contended they were overly “woke.” Other critics noted that the campaign’s welcoming and progressive messages seem at odds with some of its Christian funders, who have also supported anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-abortion causes.

Last year’s ads were overseen by the Servant Foundation, also a donor to Alliance Defending Freedom, a prominent conservative legal organization that helped overturn *Roe v. Wade* — the ruling establishing a nationwide right to abortion — and has represented clients challenging same-sex marriage and transgender rights.

The family behind Hobby Lobby also contributed to “He Gets Us.” They previously won a Supreme Court case challenging requirements to cover some birth control for employees on anti-abortion grounds.

The “He Gets Us” campaign is now under a new charitable organization, Come Near, meaning the Servant Foundation is no longer overseeing it. The nonprofit says it is “committed to sharing the life and love of Jesus in thought-provoking new ways.”

On its website, the campaign notes that “probably the most common questions” received are about its stance on the LGBTQ+ community. “So let us be clear in our opinion. Jesus loves gay people and Jesus loves trans people ... No matter who you are, YOU are invited to explore the story of Jesus and consider what it means for your life.”

The “He Gets Us” campaign says it plans to advertise during other major cultural moments over the next year, including the Paris Olympics, the NFL draft, and the Republican and Democratic conventions.

Other faith-based ads at this year’s Super Bowl included a spot from Scientologists, inviting viewers to “see for yourself who we are.” An ad for the Catholic prayer app Hallow, featuring actor Mark Wahlberg, also broadcast in select markets during the game.

This is the 12th consecutive year the Church of Scientology has premiered a new ad during the Super Bowl, said spokesperson Erin Banks.

Banks said the ad “brings viewers inside a church alongside other curious people who want to learn more about the world’s youngest major religion” while highlighting the religion’s “spiritual technology” and its humanitarian campaigns.

Scientology is a system of beliefs, teachings and rituals focused on spiritual betterment. Science fiction and fantasy author L. Ron Hubbard’s 1950 book “Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health” is a foundational text. The religion has a notable celebrity following — Tom Cruise, John Travolta and Kirstie Alley are among those who have practiced Scientology.

Within the NFL, Christianity has long permeated the culture, and regular fans are familiar with expressions of faith, from locker-room prayers to Hail Mary passes to players pointing skyward after touchdowns.

“One of the main purposes for ‘He Gets Us’ is to try and invite anyone, no matter what they believe, to explore the story of Jesus,” Miller said. “The audience of the Super Bowl allows us to do that with the greatest potential reach.”

Pakistan’s election left no clear winner. So who is likely to govern and what happens next?

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan’s parliamentary elections left no clear winner.

Allies of imprisoned ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan won the most seats in the lower house of parliament in the elections last Thursday. It was a shock outcome given the obstacles: His Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party could hold no campaign rallies, had no polling agents on election day and faced internet restrictions. They won 93 out of 265 National Assembly seats. It’s not enough to form a government, however.

The other two mainstream parties, led by Khan’s rivals, also failed to secure enough seats to form a government on their own. They are the PML-N of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the PPP, led by political dynasty scion Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari. They won 75 and 54 seats respectively.

It’s Pakistan’s parliament that chooses the next prime minister, so having a majority is crucial.

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WHO'S IN THE RUNNING?

Not Imran Khan. He's in prison and barred from holding public office. The PTI said it doesn't want or need an alliance, claiming it has enough seats. It doesn't. The party has public support — as shown by the number of seats that candidates scooped up — but it doesn't have the backing of political peers.

Analyst Azim Chaudhry said the other parties have "grievances and grudges" against Khan from his time in office and that they're not ready to shake hands with him because he's made it clear he doesn't want to talk to them.

The PML-N and PPP started coalition talks once it became clear that Khan loyalists had taken a lead. They claim to have pacts with smaller parties and newly minted parliamentarians, including defectors from Khan's side, to bump up their seat quota to the magic majority number of 169.

But knowing who could become prime minister from this ragtag crowd is trickier.

Party insiders say Sharif isn't suited to a coalition because of his temperament. His younger brother, Shehbaz, led a coalition after Khan was ousted from power and is regarded as more accommodating.

And then there's Bhutto-Zardari, a former foreign minister. It's not clear if he'll want the top job in a government that came to power through such a tainted election.

But he and his party are key to any coalition because they have the third largest share of seats. Not for nothing is his father, Asif Ali Zardari, regarded as a kingmaker. He won't do something that jeopardizes his son's political future, like joining hands with Khan, according to Chaudhry.

There's a chance of an outside candidate becoming prime minister to keep all sides happy, but it's hard to see the two families relinquishing their claim to power.

WHAT'S THE MOOD?

People are unhappy about the way the election unfolded and how votes were counted. Legal challenges are underway to contest some results. There are protests and allegations about vote-rigging, with Khan's supporters in particular angry about what they perceive as electoral theft. Police have used tear gas to disperse crowds and arrested dozens of people in sporadic demonstrations that have broken out across Pakistan. The international community and rights groups have expressed concern about voting irregularities.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Pakistan's president has to convene the inaugural session of the new National Assembly within 21 days of the election, or Feb. 29. Lawmakers are sworn in during that session. They submit nomination papers for a number of key roles, including the speaker and leader of the house. After these positions are filled, a new prime minister is elected through a parliamentary vote, a task that requires a simple majority.

Trump's threat to NATO allies draws little condemnation from GOP, reflecting his grip on the party

By JILL COLVIN, KEVIN FREKING and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's claim that he once told a NATO ally that he would encourage Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to "delinquent" members of the group sent shockwaves through Europe over the weekend.

But in Washington, most Republicans downplayed or defended remarks that seemed to invite Russian aggression.

"I was here when he was president. He didn't undermine or destroy NATO," said Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, a longtime defense hawk.

"I think I'll look at what his actions are rather than what his words are," said Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota, who has been a strong supporter of NATO and of sending additional aid to Ukraine as the country enters its third year of war after Russia's invasion.

As he moves closer to winning the Republican presidential nomination a third straight time, Trump's tightening grip on the GOP is reshaping the party's traditional defense of longstanding military alliances and rejection of Moscow, positions that date back to the days of the Soviet Union. Many who once would have responded with alarm to the NATO remarks have largely fallen in line with Trump's priorities or have

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chosen to retire as it has become clear his influence has not waned.

Trump has a long history of denigrating NATO, and former administration officials say he repeatedly threatened to withdraw the U.S. from the alliance that has been central to U.S. policy for decades. One former adviser said he expects Trump to move forward with his threats if he wins a second term.

But allies and supporters argue that, despite his denunciations, Trump did not ultimately abandon NATO while president and dismiss his claims as bluster or tough negotiating tactics.

"Just look what he did in four years," said retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, who served in Trump's administration and is now an outside adviser. "That's the beauty of right now. Look at the track record."

Some, including Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., credited Trump with pressuring some countries to increase their defense spending. "He kept us in NATO. He didn't leave NATO. He made them do what they needed to do," he said.

Even outgoing Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, a longtime Trump critic, questioned whether Trump's comments were serious, while noting that "people in other nations read it with concern and make their calculations accordingly."

"What Donald Trump says is often designed to elicit media and applause and outrage and he has no intent of actually doing anything about it," he said.

But it's clear that Trump and some around him want to change how the alliance works. In a policy video on his campaign website, Trump pledged to "finish the process we began under my administration of fundamentally reevaluating NATO's purpose and NATO's mission."

Asked during a Fox News town hall last month whether he would be committed to NATO in a possible second term, he responded, "Depends if they treat us properly."

Kellogg is a co-chair of the Center for American Security at the America First Policy Institute, one of the groups helping to lay the groundwork for a possible second Trump term. He argued Trump's comments underscored his longstanding frustrations about countries like Germany that he believes are freeloading off the U.S.

Kellogg has proposed refashioning NATO as "a tiered alliance" in which Article 5 — the alliance's provision for collective mutual defense — would only apply to members who reach their defense spending obligations. He stressed that he was speaking for himself, not Trump or the campaign, and declined to say whether he had discussed the proposal with the former president.

The only time Article 5 has been invoked was after the U.S. was attacked by al-Qaida on Sept. 11, 2001.

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, now Trump's last major rival for the Republican nomination, told reporters Monday she was "appalled" by Trump's comment and questioned why he was siding against "our allies who were with us after 9/11."

She told CNN that Trump "talked many times about getting out of NATO behind closed doors and publicly. So that's just a fact."

And John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser and now a strident critic, said he believed Trump would almost certainly try to withdraw from NATO if he wins a second term.

"To those who say this is just the way he bargains with NATO, I can tell you I was there when he damn (near) well withdrew," he said. "He often referred to getting out of NATO. ... He was looking for arguments to withdraw from NATO."

Trump is often criticized for praising Russian President Vladimir Putin and suggesting cuts to aid to Ukraine as it fights Russia's offensive. But the former president's allies note that Russia seized Ukrainian territory in 2014 during the administration of then-President Barack Obama and then launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with President Joe Biden in the White House.

"Democrat and media pearl-clutchers seem to have forgotten that we had four years of peace and prosperity under President Trump, but Europe saw death and destruction under Obama-Biden and now more death and destruction under Biden," Trump adviser Jason Miller said.

Trump's comments came at a rally in Conway, South Carolina, where he told a familiar story aimed at demonstrating his negotiating prowess. He recounted how he had been asked by an unidentified NATO member about his threat not to defend members of the transatlantic alliance who fail to meet the group's

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defense spending targets of 2% of annual gross domestic product.

Nineteen countries fall short of that baseline, which Trump has often distorted as a requirement to directly pay the alliance.

"I said, 'You didn't pay? You're delinquent?'" Trump recounted telling the person. "He said: 'Yes. Let's say that happened.'

'No I would not protect you,' Trump said, adding: "In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay. You gotta pay your bills."

It remains unclear whether the conversation Trump recounted Saturday actually took place. The former president has a long history of fabrications and exaggerations. Aides declined to answer questions about the conversation.

But at a forum last month in Brussels, French European Commissioner Thierry Breton recounted that Trump made similar comments in 2020, telling NATO European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen that "NATO is dead" and that the U.S. would not protect the European Union if attacked.

"Donald Trump said to Ursula, 'You need to understand that if Europe is under attack we will never come to help you and to support you,'" Breton alleged Trump said at a meeting at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"By the way, NATO is dead, and we will leave, we will quit NATO," Trump also said, according to Breton.

Regardless of whether it happened as Trump said, the statement sparked immediate panic across Europe, which continues to grapple with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg issued a rare critical statement Sunday, warning, "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." And other countries threatened by Russia weighed in. Biden, meanwhile, said NATO's protection clause "keeps American families safe" and "any individual who calls into question the durability of that vow is a danger to our security."

But Rubio, the senior Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he wasn't bothered.

"He did not talk about anything prospective. What he talked about is he told a story, an analogy, whatever we want to call it, about the way he approached it in the past," said the senator, who led efforts to include a provision that prohibits any president from withdrawing from NATO without Senate approval or an act of Congress in the most recent defense policy bill.

"The truth of the matter is that NATO today is as strong as it's ever been, and it wouldn't be that way if somehow Trump had undermined it as a leader," Rubio said.

Difficult driving, closed schools, canceled flights: What to expect from Northeast snowstorm

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Parts of the Northeast were preparing Monday for a coastal storm that was expected to pack high winds and dump a foot or more of snow in some areas, leading to school closures, warnings against road travel and the possible disruption of flights.

The nation's largest school system in New York City said it was switching to remote learning and closing its buildings Tuesday because of the impending storm.

"With several inches of snow, poor visibility on the roads, and possible coastal flooding heading our way, New Yorkers should prepare in advance of tomorrow's storm and take the necessary precautions to remain safe," New York City Mayor Eric Adams said in a statement. "If you do not have to be on the roads tomorrow, please stay home."

Some of the highest snowfall totals were forecast for the northern suburbs of New York City and southwestern Connecticut, where 12 to 15 inches (30 to 38 centimeters) were possible, according to the National Weather Service. Wind gusts could hit 60 mph (100 kph) off the Massachusetts coast and 40 mph (65 kph) in interior parts of southern New England.

"It will make for a messy commute tomorrow morning," Christina Speciale, a meteorologist for the weather

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service in Albany, New York, said Monday. "This is a fast-moving storm, so things should be cleared out by tomorrow afternoon."

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey told all non-essential Executive Branch employees to not report to work Tuesday. Boston schools were closing and a parking ban was in effect. Similar closures and bans were put in place in other cities and towns. Emergency officials had equipment in place to help keep roads clear.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu said the city's homeless shelters would remain open.

"With the arrival of our first major snowstorm this winter, city teams are prepared to clear our roadways and respond to any emergencies during the storm," Wu said.

Healey warned of downed power lines and coastal flooding, saying the heaviest snow would be from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"Let's be smart and not too glib about things," Healey told reporters. "We haven't seen big storms in some time but the teams are predicting that this is going to be a real storm."

Rhode Island Gov. Dan McKee signed an executive order shuttering state government offices on Tuesday and banning tractor-trailer travel on all interstates and state roads beginning at midnight.

McKee said he issued the tractor-trailer ban in coordination with Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York.

Transportation officials in Pennsylvania warned against unnecessary travel and said vehicle restrictions would go into effect early Tuesday on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and other major roads.

The city of Scranton said City Hall would be closed Tuesday, a public meeting on stormwater projects was canceled, and parking downtown was banned to allow for rapid plowing of streets.

Airports in the region asked travelers to check with their airlines in case of cancellations and delays.

Power companies said they were preparing to respond to possible outages that could occur because of trees and branches falling onto electricity lines.

"The hazardous conditions can also make travel challenging for our crews, so we're staging extra staff and equipment across the state to ensure we're ready to respond as quickly as possible," said Steve Sullivan, Eversource's president of Connecticut electric operations.

The storm was expected to bring a mixed bag of weather to New Jersey. Most of the north and center of the state was expecting 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of snow, more in some spots.

Rain was expected elsewhere in the state, with around an inch of snow possible toward the end of the storm if temperatures turned cold enough. The rain was forecast to start late Monday then turn to snow in northern areas early Tuesday. Officials said travel would be treacherous in north Jersey.

On Monday afternoon, dozens of shoppers loaded snow shovels and bags of ice melt into their cars at a Lowe's Home Improvement Store in Stony Brook, New York, where up to 10 inches of snow was forecast.

"I'm just trying to make sure I'm prepared early," said Mark Richardson, 29, as he unloaded a yellow shovel into the back of his SUV. "This will be the first big snowfall this year. All I have to do is get to the highway and I'm fine."

Richardson, an ironworker, said he plans to shovel his driveway early Tuesday morning and try to make it to his regular commuter train into New York City.

At a news conference, New York City officials said that despite the snow predictions, they had no plans to relocate people from several large, heated tent shelter complexes built for thousands of homeless migrants.

"Those structures are designed to handle inclement weather," said the city's emergency management commissioner, Zachary Iscol. He said the city wasn't expecting the type of strong winds or coastal flooding that prompted the evacuation of one of the tent shelters last month.

In the South, flood watches covered much of Alabama and parts of central Georgia on Monday. Up to 5 inches (12.7 centimeters) of rain was expected in parts of Georgia and Alabama, the National Weather Service warned.

Thunderstorms were rolling through both states Monday, and the rough weather also extended into the Florida panhandle.

What's at stake in Indonesia as the world's third-largest democracy elects a new president?

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, will open its polls on Wednesday to nearly 205 million eligible voters in presidential and legislative elections, the fifth since Southeast Asia's largest economy began democratic reforms in 1998.

The sprawling archipelago of 17,000 islands and more than 270 million people from about 1,300 ethnic groups is a bastion of democracy in Southeast Asia, a diverse and economically vibrant region of authoritarian regimes, police states and nascent democracies.

WHAT IS AT STAKE IN THE ELECTION?

The presidential election will determine who will succeed President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, who is serving his second and final term.

The election is shaping up to be a three-way race among current Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and two former governors, Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. If none of the candidates secures more than 50% of the votes in the first round, a runoff between the top two is scheduled for June 26.

Tens of thousands of candidates across the world's largest archipelago nation are battling for some 20,000 national, provincial and district parliamentary positions. About 10,000 candidates from 18 political parties are contesting for spots in the 580-seat national parliament alone.

Political parties are required to have a woman in at least every third position in their party list, and parties need at least 4% of votes across the country to qualify for representation in the national parliament.

A party or coalition of parties needs to control at least 20% of seats in national parliament to nominate a presidential candidate.

HOW DOES INDONESIA'S ELECTION WORK?

Any Indonesian citizen who is 17 or older can vote, but members of the police and military are banned from voting, though their families can.

In this year's election, about 52% of registered voters are under the age of 40. A third of them are under the age of 30, making the "youth vote" important, and candidates have been making a concerted effort to target them through social media campaigns.

Voters can cast their ballots at over 820,000 polling stations across Indonesia's three time zones. Polls will open at 7:00 a.m. and close at 1:00 p.m. and will be overseen by about 7 million election officials and independent workers. Indonesians living overseas have been casting votes since Feb. 5 at 3,000 polling stations in many countries or by mail.

Once entering a voting booth, a voter must deal with five ballots at once and choose one of the three pairs of presidential and vice presidential hopefuls, as well as representatives at the national, provincial, regional, regency and city levels, making it the most complex election in the world.

Votes are counted in public at polling stations.

WHY DO THESE ELECTIONS MATTER?

Located between the Indian and Pacific oceans, Indonesia is the world's largest island chain and spans an equivalent distance from New York to London. It is the world's fourth most populous country, with a rich cultural heritage and diverse natural resources. Nearly 90% of Indonesia's 277 million people are Muslims, making it the world's largest Muslim-majority nation.

Indonesia's strategic location also gives it geopolitical significance, and as a member of several international organizations, including the United Nations, G20 and ASEAN, it plays a key role in regional and global affairs. Indonesia's political stability plays a central role in maintaining regional peace and stability.

WHAT IS WIDODO'S ROLE IN THE ELECTION?

There is unease in civil society that Widodo wants to retain influence even after leaving office. Activists, students and university lecturers in recent days have expressed concern over democratic standards in Indonesia, citing unethical, corrupt and nepotistic practices and worsening quality of life in the country.

Widodo faces mounting criticism over his lack of neutrality after he threw his support behind frontrun-

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ner Subianto, who has picked Widodo's son as his running mate. Widodo has distanced himself from the governing Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, under whose banner he ran in 2014 and 2019, since the party nominated Ganjar Pranowo and former top security minister in his cabinet, Mohammad Mahfud, as presidential and vice presidential candidates.

WHO IS LIKELY TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY?

With three presidential candidates running, the electoral rules require a candidate to win at least 50% of the national vote and at least 20% of the vote in each province to avoid a runoff.

Various polling institutions have forecast that Subianto and his vice presidential candidate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, will likely win the first round. But whether they will get enough votes to win the election outright or be forced into a runoff is still unclear as observers say undecided voters will have a significant impact on results. About one-fifth of Indonesians fell in this category in late December surveys.

The new president will be inaugurated on Oct. 20 and will have to appoint a Cabinet within two weeks.

WHEN ARE RESULTS EXPECTED?

The official vote-counting process, which is lengthy and laborious, may take up to 35 days to be completed, the maximum time regulated by the Elections Law.

But the public can expect numerous early vote count results based on sampling, as registered private polling and survey groups will deploy thousands of volunteers and staff to polling stations nationwide.

The early results, widely known as a "quick count," are considered a reliable indicator of what the official count will show when all votes are tallied in about a month.

Biden says 'key elements' of a Gaza deal are on the table as he meets with Jordan's King Abdullah

By COLLEEN LONG and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Declaring that "every innocent life lost in Gaza is a tragedy," President Joe Biden welcomed Jordan's King Abdullah II to the White House Monday for talks on how to end the months-long war and plan for what comes afterward.

The meeting with Abdullah 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 rising casualties in Gaza since Hamas launched its Oct 7 attack on Israel.

"The key elements of the deal are on the table," Biden said alongside the king, though "there are gaps that remain." He said the U.S. would do "everything possible" to make an agreement happen: a pause to fighting for at least six weeks and the release of the remaining hostages held by Hamas.

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. 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.

Abdullah said Biden's leadership was "key to addressing this conflict," as he raised the plight of the tens of thousands of civilians killed and wounded in the fighting.

"We need a lasting cease-fire now," the king said. "This war must end."

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's stance marks a subtle but notable break for the president, who has continued to oppose a permanent cease-fire. His administration has insisted that Hamas not retain political or military control over Gaza after the war — a key objective of the Israeli operation to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attack that killed more than 1,200 Israelis and saw about 250 taken hostage.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians in the territory, displaced over 80% of the

population and set off a massive humanitarian crisis. Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, has said the majority of those killed are women and children. Israel claims to have killed about 10,000 Hamas fighters but has not provided evidence.

Biden repeated his warning that Israel must not launch a full-scale attack on Rafah, the last major holdout of Hamas where more than 1.3 million people are sheltering unless it devises plans to safeguard the civilians there from harm's way. Earlier Monday, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby acknowledged there were "legitimate military targets" for Israel in Rafah, but said the Israelis must ensure their operations are designed to protect the lives of innocent civilians. Officials have said the U.S. is not sure there is a feasible plan to relocate civilians out of Rafah to allow military operations to take place.

Biden, who has held out hope for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, added that he and the king discussed the need for the Palestinian Authority, which has some control over parts of the West Bank, to "urgently reform" to be ready to assume some authorities in Gaza if Hamas is removed from power. "They must prepare to build a state that accepts peace, does not harbor terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad," Biden said.

Abdullah insisted that "Separation of the West Bank and Gaza cannot be accepted."

Earlier Monday, Biden, joined by his wife, Jill, welcomed the king, Queen Rania, and crown prince Hussein at the White House before the leaders met.

It was 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 deaths, 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.

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.

Biden forms task force to avoid mishandling of classified documents during presidential transitions

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday launched a task force aimed at addressing the "systemic" problem of mishandling classified information during presidential transitions, days after a Justice Department special counsel's sharply critical report said he had done just that.

The Presidential Records Transition Task Force will study past transitions to determine best practices for safeguarding classified information from an outgoing administration, the White House said. It will also assess the need for changes to existing policies and procedures to prevent the removal of sensitive information that by law should be kept with the National Archives and Records Administration.

The report from special counsel Robert Hur listed dozens of sensitive documents found at Biden's home in Wilmington, Delaware, and at his former Washington office. The papers were marked as classified or later assessed to contain classified information.

The majority of the documents, Hur's report stated, appeared to have been mistakenly removed from government offices, though he also detailed some items that Biden appeared to knowingly retain. He concluded that criminal charges were not warranted in the matter.

"I take responsibility for not having seen exactly what my staff was doing," Biden said last week after Hur's report was released. He added that "things that appeared in my garage, things that came out of my home, things that were moved were moved not by me but my staff."

Biden aides first discovered some of the documents as they cleared out the offices of the Penn-Biden Center in Washington in 2022, and more were discovered during subsequent searches by Biden's lawyers and the FBI.

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Biden promptly reported the discoveries to federal authorities, which prompted the special counsel probe. That's unlike former President Donald Trump, who is accused of resisting efforts to return classified government records that he moved to his Florida residence before leaving office in 2021 and of obstructing the investigation into them in a separate special counsel investigation.

In even the best of circumstances, presidential transitions can be chaotic as records of the outgoing administration are transferred to the National Archives and thousands of political appointees leave their jobs to make way for the incoming administration. Officials of multiple administrations have said there is a systemic problem with mishandling of classified information by senior government officials, particularly around transitions, magnified by rampant over-classification across the government.

Former Vice President Mike Pence turned over some classified documents discovered at his home last year. And former officials from all levels of government discover they are in possession of classified material and turn them over to the authorities at least several times a year.

"Previous presidential transitions, across administrations stretching back decades, have fallen short in ensuring that classified presidential records are properly archived at NARA," the White House said. "In light of the many instances that have come to light in recent years revealing the extent of this systemic issue, President Biden is taking action to strengthen how administrations safeguard classified documents during presidential transitions and to help address this longstanding problem going forward."

Hur's report said many of the documents recovered at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, in parts of Biden's Delaware home and in his Senate papers at the University of Delaware were retained by "mistake."

Biden could not have been prosecuted as a sitting president, but Hur's report states that he would not recommend charges against Biden regardless. Investigators did find evidence of willful retention of a subset of records found in Biden's Wilmington, Delaware house, including in a garage, office and basement den, but not enough to suggest charges. The files pertain to a troop surge in Afghanistan during the Obama administration that Biden had vigorously opposed. He kept records that documented his position, including a classified letter to Obama during the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday.

Biden also retained his personal notebooks after leaving the vice presidency, some of which investigators found contained classified information, though other officials have kept similar documents as their personal property.

"President Biden takes classified information seriously – he returned the documents that were found, he fully cooperated with the investigation, and it concluded that there was no case," said Ian Sams, a spokesperson for the White House Counsel's Office. "Now he is taking action to help strengthen future transitions to better prevent classified documents from being accidentally packed up and removed from the government, like we have seen with officials from every administration for decades."

The task force will be headed by Katy Kale, deputy administrator of the General Services Administration, who was assistant to the president for management and administration during the Obama administration, the post that oversees the human resources and document retention functions at the White House.

The panel will include representatives from the White House, General Services Administration, NARA, the National Security Council and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The task force is to produce its recommendations ahead of the next presidential transition. It is set to operate independently from the White House Transition Coordinating Council, which is chaired by the White House chief of staff and required by law to be stood up six months before any presidential election.

A shooter opened fire in a Houston church. Gunfire has also scarred other Texas places of worship

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The weekend shooting at Joel Osteen's megachurch in Houston is not the first time gunfire has caused panic and tragedy at a Texas house of worship.

It also underscored the ease of bringing weapons into sanctuaries in a state with few limits on gun possession, as well as a growing effort by some churches to provide armed security, either through volunteers

or paid off-duty officers.

The shooting Sunday at Lakewood Church ended when two off-duty officers, who were working security, returned fire on a shooter who police say entered the building with an AR-style rifle and a backpack.

Police identified the shooter as Genesse Ivonne Moreno, 36. Authorities said Moreno's 7-year-old son, who the shooter brought into the church, was shot in the head and critically injured.

Here is a look at shootings at other places of worship in Texas and the laws surrounding firearms:

2017: SUTHERLAND SPRINGS

In November 2017, a gunman killed 26 people, including eight children, and wounded 20 more at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs. The gunman later died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound after being shot and chased by two men who heard the gunfire at the church.

2019: WHITE SETTLEMENT

In December 2019, a man pulled out a shotgun during a service at West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement and killed two worshippers, before he was shot and killed by two congregants who were part of a volunteer security team.

1999: FORT WORTH

In September 1999, a man shot and killed seven people and wounded seven others before taking his own life at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

TEXAS GUN LAWS

Texas does not require a license to carry a handgun or a rifle, although state law sets a handgun minimum age requirement at 21. Texas has also been an "open carry" state, which allows people to carry their weapons in plain view, since 2015, and eliminated the handgun license requirement in 2021.

In the first regular legislative session after the Sutherland Springs massacre, Texas lawmakers in 2019 clarified state law to allow the carrying of weapons in houses of worship, unless specifically banned by a congregation with written and oral notice.

Texas law does not require churches to provide armed security, although they are allowed to have volunteer security teams or hire security from law enforcement or licensed guards.

Police said the two Lakewood security team members who took down the shooter on Sunday are an off-duty officer from the Houston Police Department and a Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission agent. Both will be placed on administrative leave while their respective agencies investigate the shooting.

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner and other authorities at the scene praised the officers for taking down the shooter.

"They stepped up and did their job," Finner said.

France accuses Russia of a disinformation campaign in a key election year

By BARBARA SURK and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France condemned "hostile" disinformation maneuvers after the country's authorities on Monday accused Russia of operating a long-running online manipulation campaign against Ukraine's Western backers, in the lead up to the second anniversary of Moscow's military invasion of its neighbor.

The French foreign ministry said in a statement "no manipulation attempt will distract France from its support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's war of aggression."

Earlier Monday, French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné said that a network of "at least 193" websites had been set up with the aim "to spread Russian disinformation," speaking alongside his German and Polish counterparts after a meeting near Paris involving Ukraine-related talks and other issues.

Séjourné said "Russia seeks to destroy Europe's unity and even worse, wants to make our democracies exhausted ... by blurring the limit between real and fake (news), by manipulating information."

The French agency responsible for fighting foreign digital interference, Viginum, released a report describing the network codenamed "Portal Combat" that it analyzed between September and December in 2023.

Viginum said it involves websites using the name "pravda" targeting countries including France, Germany,

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Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States. "Very ideologically oriented, this content repeatedly presents inaccurate or misleading narratives," the report said.

It said the network also involves social media, including Telegram, through "massive content sharing automation."

French foreign ministry officials said in a media briefing that Russia has stepped up efforts to manipulate information and spread deception, targeting Kyiv's allies in the West. They referred to messages on social media platforms such as X, formerly Twitter, and websites like Sputnik as "massive in scope" and "complex in structure."

The aim of Russia's disinformation campaign remains the same, officials said: To amplify Russia's success in the Ukraine war, justify its invasion, discredit and diminish Ukraine's military resistance and undermine civilians' resilience in the face of daily attacks on cities and towns, and fracture Western support for Ukraine's military and slow if not stop supply with weapons Kyiv.

Officials say Russia's disinformation campaign goes beyond the war in Ukraine. In a year of high-stake elections in the U.K., the European Union and the United States, French officials say Russia is working to confuse and scare voters, discredit some candidates and support others, and disrupt mega sporting events such as the Paris Olympics and the European soccer championship in Germany.

The ministry also accused Russia of being behind the stenciling of Jewish stars last November on walls in Paris and its suburbs, causing alarm about the safety of France's Jewish community, the largest in Europe.

Last month, French defense officials said France, a staunch ally of Ukraine, had been a target of a Russian disinformation campaign following President Emmanuel Macron's reaffirmation of support for Kyiv.

Last year, Viginum said it has monitored the alleged operation since soon after Russia invaded its neighbor and that France was one of several European countries targeted. It said it traced the campaign to Russian individuals, companies and "state entities or entities affiliated to the Russian state."

The agency detected a mirror website mimicking the French Foreign Ministry's and intervened with "protective and preventive measures," Viginum said in a report last year.

AP PHOTOS: New Orleans, Rio, Cologne — Carnival joy peaks around the world as Lent approaches

By The Associated Press undefined

Parades, music, dancing in the streets — joyous Carnival celebrations marking the final days of revelry before Lent are peaking in New Orleans, Rio de Janeiro and other locales in the Americas and Europe.

Each city has its unique Carnival customs but the similarities are inescapable. Dancers in feathered headdresses gyrated and strutted in parades featuring lavish floats with giant figures of Greek gods or pop stars. Costumes abounded and the themes of the various festivities ran from whimsical to satirical.

Shoulder-to-shoulder crowds savored the music and rhythms around a music truck in Salvador or outside Bourbon Street nightclubs in New Orleans.

As the celebrations grew over the weekend, fanciful costumes were on the rise. One group of revelers wore costumes made from beer and soda cans during a parade in Madre de Deus, Brazil, on Sunday. A reveler in New Orleans strolled Bourbon Street in an intricately beaded hat adorned with gold butterflies.

Politicians and world figures were lampooned. The words "Choke on it" were lettered on a float in Cologne, Germany, showing a giant Vladimir Putin eating Ukraine. In New Orleans, Donald Trump, President Joe Biden and his son Hunter and the local mayor were ridiculed in caricatures on floats.

Trump asks Supreme Court to put off his election interference trial, claiming immunity

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump is asking the Supreme Court to extend the delay in his election interference trial, saying he is immune from prosecution on charges he plotted to overturn

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his 2020 election loss.

His lawyers filed an emergency appeal with the court on Monday, just four days after the justices heard Trump's separate appeal to remain on the presidential ballot despite attempts to kick him off because of his efforts following his election loss in 2020.

"Without immunity from criminal prosecution, the Presidency as we know it will cease to exist," Trump's lawyers wrote, repeating arguments that have so far failed in federal courts.

The filing keeps on hold what would be a landmark criminal trial of a former president while the nation's highest court decides what to do. It met a deadline to ask the justices to intervene that the federal appeals court in Washington set when it rejected Trump's immunity claims and ruled the trial could proceed.

The Supreme Court's decision on what to do, and how quickly it acts, could determine whether the Republican presidential primary frontrunner stands trial in the case before the November election.

There is no timetable for the court to act, but special counsel Jack Smith's team has strongly pushed for the trial to take place this year. Trump, meanwhile, has repeatedly sought to delay the case. If Trump were to defeat President Joe Biden, he could potentially try to use his position as head of the executive branch to order a new attorney general to dismiss the federal cases he faces or even seek a pardon for himself.

The Supreme Court's options include rejecting the emergency appeal, which would enable U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan to restart the trial proceedings in Washington's federal court. The trial was initially scheduled to begin in early March.

The court also could extend the delay while it hears arguments on the immunity issue. In that event, the schedule the justices set could determine how soon a trial might begin, if indeed they agree with lower court rulings that Trump is not immune from prosecution.

In December, Smith and his team had urged the justices to take up and decide the immunity issue, even before the appeals court weighed in. "It is of imperative public importance that Respondent's claim of immunity be resolved by this Court and that Respondent's trial proceed as promptly as possible if his claim of immunity is rejected," prosecutors wrote in December.

Trump's legal team has ascribed partisan motives to the prosecution's push for a prompt trial. "Conducting a months-long criminal trial of President Trump at the height of election season will radically disrupt President Trump's ability to campaign against President Biden — which appears to be the whole point of the Special Counsel's persistent demands for expedition," the former president's lawyers wrote.

Courts should not rush into a trial because the subject of presidential immunity from criminal charges is "a novel, complex, and momentous question that warrants careful consideration on appeal," the legal team led by D. John Sauer wrote.

In their request to keep the trial on hold, Trump's lawyers indicated they would seek to stretch out the delay by also asking the full federal appeals court in Washington to weigh in. Only after that would they file a formal appeal to the Supreme Court, the lawyers wrote. That could add weeks, if not months, before trial preparations could restart.

Now it's up to a court on which three justices, Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, were appointed by Trump when he was president. They have moved the court to the right in major decisions that overturned abortion rights, expanded gun rights and ended affirmative action in college admissions.

But the Supreme Court hasn't been especially friendly to Trump on legal matters directly concerning the former president. The court declined to take up several appeals filed by Trump and his allies related to the 2020 election. It also refused to prevent tax files and other documents from being turned over to congressional committees and prosecutors in New York.

Last week, however, the justices did seem likely to end the efforts to prevent Trump from being on the 2024 ballot. A decision in that case could come any time.

The Supreme Court has previously held that presidents are immune from civil liability for official acts, and Trump's lawyers have for months argued that that protection should be extended to criminal prosecution as well.

Last week, a unanimous panel of two judges appointed by President Joe Biden and one by a Republican

president sharply rejected Trump's novel claim that former presidents enjoy absolute immunity for actions that fall within their official job duties. It was the second time since December that judges have held that Trump can be prosecuted for actions undertaken while in the White House and in the run-up to Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol.

The case was argued before Judges Florence Pan and J. Michelle Childs, appointees of Biden, a Democrat, and Karen LeCraft Henderson, who was named to the bench by President George H.W. Bush, a Republican.

The case in Washington is one of four prosecutions Trump faces as he seeks to reclaim the White House. He faces federal charges in Florida that he illegally retained classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate, a case that was also brought by Smith and is set for trial in May.

He's also charged in state court in Georgia with scheming to subvert that state's 2020 election and in New York in connection with hush money payments made to porn actor Stormy Daniels. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Poland, France and Germany vow to make Europe stronger as fears grow over Russia and Trump

By SYLVIE CORBET, VANESSA GERA and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The governments of Poland, France and Germany vowed Monday to make Europe a security and defense power with a greater ability to back Ukraine, amid concerns that former U.S. President Donald Trump might return to the White House and allow Russia to expand its aggression on the continent.

The foreign ministers of the three countries met in the Paris suburb of La Celle-Saint-Cloud to have talks about Ukraine, amid other issues. They discussed reviving the so-called Weimar Triangle, a long dormant regional grouping that was designed to promote cooperation between France, Germany and Poland.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin on Monday, said he wanted to "revitalize" his nation's relations with its key European partners.

"There is no reason why we should be so clearly militarily weaker than Russia, and therefore increasing production and intensifying our cooperation are absolutely indisputable priorities," Tusk said in arguing for the European Union to become "a military power" in its own right.

The diplomatic push came after Trump shocked many in Europe over the weekend by appearing to invite Russia to invade any NATO member not spending enough on its own defense.

"You didn't pay? You're delinquent?" Trump recounted telling an unidentified NATO member during his presidency. "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."

The Republican front-runner's words at a campaign rally were particularly shocking for front-line NATO countries like Poland, which experienced both German and Soviet occupation during World War II and later spent decades under Soviet control. Anxieties run high there over the ongoing war just across Poland's eastern border.

Speaking alongside Tusk in Berlin, Scholz blasted Trump's comments.

"NATO's promise of protection is unrestricted -- 'all for one and one for all,'" Scholz said without mentioning the former president by name. "And let me say clearly for current reasons: Any relativization of NATO's support guarantee is irresponsible and dangerous, and is in the interest of Russia alone."

"No one can play, or 'deal,' with Europe's security," the chancellor added.

Earlier Monday, Scholz inaugurated a new ammunition factory, underlining Europe's efforts to ramp up weapons production.

Tusk also urged European nations to invest more in military projects in order "to achieve as quickly as possible... in the next dozen or so months, much greater air defense capabilities, much greater production capabilities in terms of ammunition."

Asked about Trump's remarks, Tusk said they "should act like a cold shower for all those who continue

to underestimate this increasingly real threat which Europe is facing.”

Macron, speaking alongside Tusk in Paris, said Europe’s will “to further supply and meet Ukrainian needs is crucial,” after leaders of the 27 EU member nations sealed a deal to provide Ukraine with 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) in support for its war-ravaged economy.

This “will enable us to make from Europe a security and defense power that is both complementary to NATO and a pillar of the Atlantic alliance, Macron said.

Trump’s remarks raised concerns that if reelected, he could embolden Russia to attack other countries besides Ukraine. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg issued a statement Sunday saying that Trump’s remarks put American troops and their allies at greater risk.

NATO does not require its 31 members to pay bills, but they are expected to invest a certain percentage of their own budgets — ideally, 2% of their gross domestic product — on defense.

Some countries, like Poland, have long met the target. Other European nations ramped up their military spending after Russia invaded Ukraine almost two years ago.

Speaking in Rome, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani dismissed Trump’s threat as “electoral campaign joke,” but said it was legitimate for all NATO members to do their part. Italy hasn’t yet reached the 2% GDP defense spending target.

“To have more influence within NATO we need a Europe with its own army,” he said. “We must look forward, because it is fair that Americans are asking us to do our part, we must have equal responsibility.”

Germany, with a post-World War II political culture of military caution, was a frequent target of Trump’s ire during his presidency for falling short of the 2% target, But Berlin announced plans to step up military spending after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and plans to hit the benchmark this year.

France’s military budget grew in recent years and reached the level of about 2% of GDP.

Tusk returned to power as prime minister of his central European nation in December after eight years of rule by a national conservative government that often took an antagonistic stance with European allies, particularly Germany. As a result, Warsaw’s influence in Europe diminished.

The Weimar Triangle was created in 1991 as Poland was emerging from decades of communism as a platform for political cooperation among the three nations.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski noted Monday that he and his French and German counterparts “meet at a dramatic, but also solemn moment.” Russian President Vladimir Putin “must not be allowed to win this war. We must fulfill our obligations toward Ukraine.”

French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné said “each minute counts to get Europeans prepared to absorb the shock of a scenario that has been well described by Donald Trump.”

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.

UK's Labour Party cuts ties with a candidate who said Israel allowed Hamas' attack to happen

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's opposition Labour Party on Monday disowned an election candidate who claimed that Israel allowed Hamas' Oct. 7 attack to happen as a pretext to invade Gaza.

Azhar Ali was selected last month to run for Labour in a Feb. 29 special election for the House of Commons seat representing Rochdale, a constituency in northwest England. Soon after, a newspaper published remarks he had made during a local party meeting last year.

Ali apologized, and senior Labour figures called the comments "totally unacceptable," but the party did not immediately suspend him. After increasing pressure, Labour said Monday that while it was too late to replace Ali on the ballot, the party had "withdrawn its support" for him.

"We understand that these are highly unusual circumstances, but it is vital that any candidate put forward by Labour fully represents its aims and values," the party said in a statement.

Ali was suspended from Labour pending an investigation, meaning that he would sit as an independent lawmaker, if he is elected.

Since taking the helm of Labour in 2020, leader Keir Starmer has steered the social democratic party back toward the political middle ground after the divisive tenure of predecessor Jeremy Corbyn, a staunch socialist who advocated nationalization of key industries and infrastructure.

The party now has a double-digit poll lead over the governing Conservatives, with an election due to be held this year.

Starmer also repaired relations with Britain's Jewish community and vowed to root out antisemitism that's alleged to have tainted the party under Corbyn, a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause. Corbyn was suspended from Labour in 2020 after he claimed opponents had exaggerated the scale of antisemitism in the party for "political reasons."

Ali had been the front-runner to win the election, caused by the death of the previous Labour lawmaker.

Other candidates include George Galloway, a former Labour lawmaker who now represents the tiny Workers Party and is campaigning against Labour's stance on the Israel-Hamas war. The party has criticized Israel's conduct of the war and the toll on Palestinian civilians but has not called for an immediate cease-fire.

Britain's Conservative government said Monday that it was imposing sanctions on four Israeli settlers accused of committing human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank.

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 have taken the biggest stage in Rio de Janeiro to pay tribute to Brazil's largest Indigenous group and pressure President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to deliver on promises to eradicate illegal mining.

Carnival has long been a platform for samba schools to protest. Percussionists had "Miners out" written across the skins of their drums as participants marched through the Sambadrome on Sunday evening, delivering their message to more than 70,000 revelers and millions watching live on television.

"The chance that's left for us is an Indigenous Brazil," they said as part of Salgueiro's samba school's tribute to the Yanomami — one year after Lula declared a public health emergency for the group in the Amazon. They suffer 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. "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. Thirteen other Yanomami participated.

Sônia Guajajara, who leads the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples created in 2022 under Lula, congratulated Kopenawa and Salgueiro on Monday for their efforts recounting the group's long struggle, from colonization to more recent efforts to repeal Indigenous land rights.

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

Three weeks after assuming the presidency, Lula declared a public health emergency over the effects of illegal mining there 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 also created an 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, Starlink internet units and campsites.

Government officials say that since the operation began, areas with illegal mining inside Yanomami territory have dropped 85% and health has improved.

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

"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 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 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.

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

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, with 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?" said Martins Filho, a professor

at the Federal University of Sao Carlos. "In a certain way, they were accomplices."

In a written response to the AP, the army said illegal mining and the health crisis in the Yanomami territory "are complex issues involving the legal jurisdiction of various government agencies," and the army is "always prepared to fulfill its strategic missions" including providing support to federal agencies.

Illegal planes are essential for transporting prospectors and equipment to far-flung reserves, as shown in a 2022 AP investigation in Roraima state, where most mining affecting the Yanomami takes place.

After a January 2023 presidential decree ordered the air force to close the airspace over Yanomami territory, the situation improved significantly, authorities and Indigenous people said.

In a written response to the AP, Brazil's air force said it has been patrolling the so-called Air Defense Identification Zone over the territory. It claims the measure led to a 90% reduction in illegal flights.

But in a joint statement last month, 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 and hasn't collaborated in the destruction of mining machinery and airstrips.

Government health teams have been targeted by armed miners and are unable or unwilling to reach certain communities, said Júnior Hekurari, president of Condisi-Y, the local health council.

"This state of emergency cannot solve the problem. We need something permanent, for all the communities," Hekurari said.

UK sanctions 4 Israeli settlers accused of human rights abuses in West Bank

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's government said Monday it is imposing sanctions on four Israeli settlers accused of committing human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank.

The Foreign Office said the sanctions were in response to "unprecedented levels" of violence by settlers in the West Bank over the past year, including those who aggressively harassed or intimidated Palestinians to pressure them to leave their land. It said Israel's failure to act has led to "near total impunity" for the settlers.

Officials alleged that Moshe Sharvit and Yinon Levy threatened Palestinian families at gunpoint and destroyed property in recent months as part of a "targeted and calculated effort to displace Palestinian communities."

They named Zvi Bar Yosef and Ely Federman as the other two men sanctioned Monday. The four are subjected to a U.K. asset freeze and travel and visa ban.

"Extremist Israeli settlers are threatening Palestinians, often at gunpoint, and forcing them off land that is rightfully theirs. This behavior is illegal and unacceptable," Foreign Secretary David Cameron said in a statement.

"Israel must also take stronger action and put a stop to settler violence. Too often, we see commitments made and undertakings given, but not followed through," Cameron added.

The sanctions followed a similar order earlier this month by U.S. President Joe Biden, which also named Levy among four settlers accused of attacking Palestinians in the West Bank. The U.S. sanctions target three other settlers who are different from those named in the British sanctions.

Shlomo Ne'eman, the chairman of the Yesha Council, a right-wing organization which represents Jewish settlements in the West Bank, called for an immediate cancellation of the "ridiculous sanctions."

But human rights lawyer Eitay Mack said he and others had documented Sharvit's violence towards Palestinian farmers that had forced at least 10 Palestinian families to leave the area near Sharvit's farm.

Mack, who was part of a group of organizations that have been calling for international sanctions against a dozen extremist settlers since 2021, said the sanctions will impact Sharvit's ability to fundraise for his farm.

"It's important because this is part of putting leverage on them, and I think other settlers and other

settler organizations are afraid they don't know who is going to be next," he said.

Israel's Foreign Ministry did not react to the latest sanctions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the earlier U.S. measures, saying that "the vast majority of settlers are law-abiding citizens." He said his country "takes action against law breakers in every place, and therefore there is no place for exceptional steps on this measure."

How Trump urging Russia to invade 'delinquent' NATO members distorts how the alliance works

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Donald Trump, the front-runner in the U.S. for the Republican Party's nomination this year, says he once warned that he would allow Russia to do whatever it wants to NATO member nations that are "delinquent" in devoting 2% of their gross domestic product to defense.

Trump's comment on Saturday represented the latest instance in which the former president seemed to side with an authoritarian state over America's democratic allies. It also adds to evidence that the 77-year-old either does not understand how NATO works or is distorting the truth for political gain.

WHAT DID TRUMP SAY?

Speaking at a rally in Conway, South Carolina, Trump recalled how as president he told an unidentified NATO member that he would withhold U.S. help and "encourage" Russia to do as it wishes with allies that do not contribute enough to military spending.

"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 Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg shot back with an unusually strong statement saying that Trump was threatening the security of the entire trans-Atlantic alliance.

"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," Stoltenberg said.

President Joe Biden, who is on track toward a rematch against Trump in November, also issued a statement criticizing Trump.

"Donald Trump's admission that he intends to give Putin a green light for more war and violence, to continue his brutal assault against a free Ukraine, and to expand his aggression to the people of Poland and the Baltic States are appalling and dangerous," Biden said.

WHAT DID TRUMP GET WRONG?

NATO members don't pay to belong and don't owe the organization anything other than contributions to a largely administrative fund. Trump clearly wasn't referring to those administrative payments.

His frequent complaint during his presidency, and now, has been how much NATO countries put into their own military budgets.

U.S. presidents before him raised that concern. In fact, it was in 2014, during the Barack Obama administration, that NATO members agreed to move "toward" spending 2% of GDP on national defense by 2024. Stoltenberg also has said members needed to invest more in their militaries.

At their last summit, in Lithuania in July, NATO leaders adjusted that pledge by agreeing to spend at least 2% of GDP on their military budgets. No target date was set for meeting the goal.

The 2% is a benchmark that each member should spend on its own defense in order to be able to contribute to the joint defense of the alliance. However, the goal is voluntary, and there is no debt or "delinquency" involved.

The countries don't pay the money to NATO but invest it in their own armed forces.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago has given them further impetus to beef up their armies.

WHAT IS NATO?

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded after World War II in an attempt to stop the expansion of Soviet control in Europe as the eastern part of the continent was coming under the Kremlin's firm grip.

The alliance's first secretary-general, the British Gen. Hasting Ismay, said the goal was "to keep the

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Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The often repeated comment highlights how a fear of Russia's expansion has been part of the alliance's DNA from the beginning.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led some to question whether NATO still had a purpose. Russia, for its part, has observed the military alliance's eastward growth with anger. President Vladimir Putin for years has warned that Moscow views NATO's expansion into what the country views as its historical sphere of influence as a threat.

Putin tried to justify his war against Ukraine in part by citing NATO's enlargement, though Ukraine had no immediate prospects of joining the alliance when Russian troops entered the neighboring country in February 2022. However, NATO leaders have said that Ukraine will join the alliance at some point in the future.

NATO currently has 31 members. Finland became the newest member last year, breaking with decades of non-alignment after Russia invaded Ukraine. Sweden is hoping to join, too, but is still waiting for approval from Hungary, the only member that has not ratified the Scandinavian country's bid.

WHAT ELSE HAS TRUMP SAID ON THE ISSUE?

Trump has a history of misrepresenting NATO or suggesting that the United States might not honor its commitment to allies. Former national security adviser John Bolton said in a memoir that Trump was close to pulling the U.S. out of NATO in 2018.

Trump spoke that year about NATO as if it were a business going bankrupt until he came along. "I went to NATO. And NATO was essentially going out of business 'cause people weren't paying and it was going down, down, down," he said.

He also bemoaned that Americans were "the schmucks that are paying for the whole thing." U.S. defense spending, while well above 2%, has actually been decreasing for years.

While Trump's hectoring of allies to spend more on defense during his presidency might have spurred some into doing so, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a greater catalyst in pushing them to make much larger investments.

WHEN HAS NATO COME TO AN ALLY'S DEFENSE?

On the ground, NATO has helped to keep peace in the Balkans and helped to provide security in Afghanistan after a U.S. led coalition invaded the country. The U.S. triggered NATO's common defense clause, known as Article 5, for the first and only time in the alliance's history after the Sept. 11, 2001 attack.

"Poland then sent an army brigade to Afghanistan for a decade and we did not send an invoice to Washington for it. Alliances also strengthen the United States," Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski said on Monday.

Sikorski said he if he had a chance to speak with Trump he would tell him that the North Atlantic alliance "is not a contract with a security company." But he also said he prefers to remember Trump as a president who sent Javelins and American anti-tank missiles to Ukraine even before Putin's attack on Ukraine.

Even during his presidency, Trump threatened not to come to the aid of allies who might be under attack if they had not paid their dues.

His presidency raised questions about whether the U.S. would remain committed to the West's collective defense, fears returning in anticipation of a likely rematch between him and Biden.

A defense policy bill approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in December includes provisions that say the president must get the advice and consent of the Senate or an act of Congress before withdrawing the U.S. as a member of NATO.

Trump appears at federal court in Florida for closed hearing in his classified documents case

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — Seeking to turn legal problems into political gain, former President Donald Trump arrived Monday to a crowd of supporters at a federal courthouse in Florida for a closed hearing in the criminal case charging him with mishandling classified documents.

His motorcade left after several hours as supporters called his name.

In the latest mixing of court appearances into Trump's election-season calendar, supporters with signs and flags assembled outside a courthouse barricade as a Trump campaign message to allies with the subject line of "I'm in court. Again!" warned that unspecified opponents "want me arrested" and "erased from the ballot."

The message reinforced his team's strategy of politicizing his four criminal prosecutions, including in Florida, where he faces dozens of felony counts accusing him of hoarding highly classified records at his Mar-a-Lago estate and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back.

Monday's court date was scheduled as a procedural hearing, closed to the public, to discuss the procedures for handling classified evidence in the trial currently set for May 20. U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon set arguments in the morning from defense lawyers and in the afternoon from prosecutors, each outside of the other's presence.

"Defense counsel shall be prepared to discuss their defense theories of the case, in detail, and how any classified information might be relevant or helpful to the defense," Cannon wrote in scheduling the hearing.

The closed hearing comes as prosecutors have also revealed that a prospective government witness has received threats over social media that are now the subject of federal investigation.

Trump's motorcade arrived at the courthouse in Fort Pierce shortly after 9 a.m. Supporters outside held signs with messages including "Trump 2024" and "Florida is Trump Country." He left the building in his motorcade after 2 p.m. while supporters shouted his name.

The hearing is one of several voluntary court dates that Trump has attended in recent weeks — he was present, for instance, at appeals court arguments last month in Washington — as he looks to demonstrate to supporters that he intends to fight his criminal prosecutions while also seeking to reclaim the White House this November.

In addition to the Florida case, Trump faces charges in Atlanta and Washington related to efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. He's also charged in state court in New York in connection with hush money payments made to porn actor Stormy Daniels. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Pakistan's premier defends the delay in releasing election results and denies the vote was unfair

By MUNIR AHMED and ABDUL SATTAR Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's caretaker prime minister on Monday defended the widely criticized delay in announcing the results of last week's parliamentary election, saying authorities took only 36 hours to count over 60 million votes while grappling with militant attacks.

Anwaarul-Haq-Kakar insisted that a "level playing field" was available to all political parties, including that of imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan, and pointed out that election results in 2018, when Khan won office, had been announced after 66 hours.

Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, won more seats than any other in Thursday's election, but only because its candidates ran as independents after the party was expelled from the vote. The candidates won 93 out of 265 National Assembly seats, not enough to form a government. Khan couldn't run because of criminal convictions that he calls politically motivated.

The Pakistan Muslim League-N party, led by three-time premier and ex-felon Nawaz Sharif, secured 75 seats. The Pakistan People's Party, or PPP, led by Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, came in third with 54 seats.

The two parties, which led the campaign to kick Khan out of office in 2022, were in talks to form a coalition government.

Sharif was marked as the Pakistani security establishment's preferred candidate because of his smooth return to the country in October. He spent four years in exile to avoid serving prison sentences, but his convictions were overturned within weeks of his arrival.

The vote was overshadowed by allegations of vote-rigging and an unprecedented mobile phone shut-down. The Election Commission denied the allegations of rigging.

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Kakar told a news conference that mobile phone service was suspended on election day for security reasons following a pair of militant attacks that killed 30 people in southwestern Baluchistan province a day before the vote. He said that security forces last week killed a key militant from the Islamic State group who was behind the elections-related attacks.

He said he could afford a delay in announcing results "but not the terrorism."

Kakar said the elections were largely peaceful, free and fair, and the process to install a new government could begin in the next eight or nine days when the National Assembly is expected to convene. He said the parliament will elect the speaker, deputy speaker and new prime minister.

Kakar also said people were allowed to hold peaceful protests but warned that action would be taken if rallies turned violent.

On Monday, thousands of Khan's supporters and members of other political parties blocked key highways and held a daylong strike in the volatile southwest to protest alleged vote-rigging. Separately, several nationalist and Islamist political parties in Baluchistan blocked two highways leading to Iranian and Afghan border crossings.

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

The U.N. secretary-general urged Pakistan's parties and political leaders "to maintain a calm atmosphere" and reject any actions that could increase tensions, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The statement called for all disputes to be settled through established legal frameworks and for rights to be respected.

Post-Roe v. Wade, more patients rely on early prenatal testing as states toughen abortion laws

By LAURA UNGAR and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Since Roe v. Wade was overturned, many health care providers say an increasing number of patients are deciding the fate of their pregnancies on whatever information they can gather before state abortion bans kick in.

But early ultrasounds show far less about the condition of a fetus than later ones. And genetic screenings may be inaccurate.

When you find out your fetus has a serious problem, "you're in crisis mode," said doula Sabrina Fletcher. "You're not thinking about legal repercussions and (state) cutoff dates, and yet we're forced to."

About half of states ban abortion or restrict it after a certain point in pregnancy.

This leaves millions of women in roughly 14 states with no option to get follow-up diagnostic tests in time to feasibly have an abortion there if they wanted, a paper published last March in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology* found. Even more states have abortion cutoffs too early for mid-pregnancy ultrasounds.

"More people are trying to find these things out earlier to try to fit within the confines of laws that in my mind don't have a place in medical practice," said Dr. Clayton Alfonso, an OB-GYN at Duke University in North Carolina.

CHECKING FOR PRENATAL PROBLEMS

When done at the right time, doctors said prenatal testing can identify problems and help parents decide whether to have an abortion or continue a pregnancy and prepare for a baby's complex needs after delivery.

One of the most common tests is the 20-week ultrasound. It checks on the fetal heart, brain, spine, limbs and other parts of the body, looking for signs of congenital problems. It can detect things like brain, spine and heart abnormalities and signs of chromosomal problems such as Down syndrome. Follow-up testing may be needed to make a diagnosis.

The earlier ultrasounds, in the first trimester for example, are not standard practice because it is too soon to see many of the fetus' limbs and organs in detail, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says.

It's impossible to spot problems like serious heart defects much before mid-pregnancy because the fetus is so small, said Dr. Cara Heuser, who practices maternal-fetal medicine in Utah. Nonetheless, she said,

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more patients are having ultrasounds at 10 to 13 weeks to get access to abortion if they choose.

Experts say there are no statistics on how many people opt for early ultrasounds or make choices based on them. But some health care providers say they've noticed an uptick in requests for the scans, including Missouri genetic counselor Chelsea Wagner. She counsels patients from around the nation through telehealth.

But she said doctors can't provide patients with "an everything looks good" or a clean bill of health off of an ultrasound at 10 weeks."

Doctors also can't make a firm diagnosis from a genetic screening, which is done at 10 weeks gestation or later. These screenings are designed to detect abnormalities in fetal DNA by looking at small, free-floating fragments circulating in a pregnant woman's blood.

They screen for chromosomal disorders such as trisomy 13 and 18, which often end in miscarriage or stillbirth, Down syndrome and extra or missing copies of sex chromosomes.

The accuracy of these tests varies by disorder, but none is considered diagnostic.

Natera, one of only a handful of U.S. companies that makes such genetic tests, said in an email that prenatal test results are reported as either "high risk" or "low risk" and that patients should seek confirmatory testing if they get a "high risk" result.

Some may be pretty accurate, doctors said, but false positives are possible. In 2022, the Food and Drug Administration issued a warning about the screenings, reminding patients and doctors that results need further confirmation.

The agency is poised to release a new regulatory framework in April that would require prenatal screenings, and thousands of other lab tests, to undergo FDA review.

AN 'AWFUL' DECISION TO MAKE

In states with tough abortion laws, health care providers said, there's more urgency because of the timing of diagnostic tests.

CVS or chorionic villus sampling, is offered at 10 to 13 weeks gestation. Initial results take a few days and more detailed ones around two weeks. Amniocentesis is typically done at 15 to 20 weeks, with similar timing for results.

If a state has a 12-week abortion ban, for instance, "some people may have to act on a screening," Alfonso said.

Wagner said she's had to counsel patients who couldn't afford to travel out of state for an abortion if they waited for diagnostic testing. "They are forced to use the information they have to make choices they never thought they'd have to make," she said.

Some states restrict abortion so early that women would not have the chance to get any prenatal testing done before the cutoff.

That was the case for 26-year-old Hannah in Tennessee, which has a strict abortion ban. An ultrasound in late November, at about 18 weeks, revealed she had amniotic band sequence, when very thin pieces of the amniotic membrane get attached to the fetus. In Hannah's case, the bands were attached to many of her baby's body parts and ripped open multiple areas of his body.

After calling clinics in Ohio and Illinois to terminate the pregnancy, she finally found one 4 1/2 hours away in Illinois and had the procedure in early December at 19 weeks gestation. Results from the amniocentesis – which was done to look for the cause of the problem – came back the day after her abortion, and other results after that.

Hannah, who didn't want her last name used for fear of backlash, said it's "awful" to have to think about state timelines, and to travel long distances when dealing with something like this. But she's grateful she had enough information to feel confident in her decision.

"I know some women are not that lucky," Hannah said. She named her son Waylen.

Less is more? Consumers have fewer choices as brands prune their offerings to focus on best sellers

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — How much choice is too much?

Apparently for Coca-Cola, it's about 400 different types of drinks.

That's why the beverage company recently decided to discontinue half of them, shedding brands like Tab, Zico coconut water, Diet Coke Feisty Cherry and Odwalla juices but still leaving about 200 others to choose from.

It's a move that other businesses are making as well, reducing the variety of offerings from mayonnaise to cereals to cars and instead focusing on what they think will sell best.

Stew Leonard's, a supermarket chain that operates stores in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, now has 24 cereal flavors or types, down from 49 in 2019. Edgewell Personal Care Co., the maker of Schick razors and Banana Boat suntan lotion, has trimmed certain varieties of its anti-bacteria wipes Wet Ones, among others. And Dollar General, based in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, used to stock six different kinds of mayonnaise on its shelves and is now looking to drop a couple of them.

"The consumer is not going to know the difference," Todd J. Vasos, CEO of Dollar General, told analysts in December. "Actually, it's going to make her life a little simpler when she goes to the shelf."

Just a year ago, Kohl's store in Clifton, New Jersey had tables stacked high with sweaters and shirts in a rainbow of colors as well as dress racks crammed with a wide assortment of styles. Now, it boasts a more edited approach — tables have slim piles of knit shirts that focus on fewer colors, and many dress racks have been reduced to just three or four styles.

Under its new CEO Tom Kingsbury, Kohl's has been cutting back on the colors and variations of sweaters, jeans and other items, while sending their buyers into the New York market more frequently to bring in fresh trendy merchandise.

"We would go out, and we would buy a lot of goods and it would come in 12, 14 months later, and it didn't perform very well," Kingsbury told analysts in a call in November. "We're going to be using the marketplace, so that we can react to the business quickly, getting into trends."

Some customers like the changes so far.

"It's pretty organized," said Kimberly Ribeiro, 30, who was at the Kohl's store on a recent Friday. "If it's not so cluttered, then you don't get overwhelmed."

Even in the auto world, shoppers are finding fewer choices. Both General Motors and Ford have been touting how they are limiting the number of option combinations customers can get on their vehicles to reduce manufacturing and purchasing complexity.

That's a reversal from a few years ago when there was an explosion of choices, encouraged in part by online shopping that paid no mind to space constraints. But that didn't always lead to sales so companies started pruning selections a year or two before the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the pruning only accelerated, with companies focusing on necessities as they wrestled with supply chain clogs. But even after the pandemic, when goods began moving freely again, many businesses decided less was better and justified the limited selection by asserting shoppers don't want so much choice. It's also more profitable for companies because they're not carrying over as many leftovers that need to be discounted.

Overall, new items accounted for about 2% of products in stores in 2023 across categories such as beauty, footwear, technology and toys, down from 5% of items in 2019, says market-research firm Circana.

Eric O'Toole, president of Edgewell's North America division, noted the pandemic presented "a really valuable stimulus" for reassessing assortment.

"We avoid jumping on fads, as the supply chain and retailer costs required to support getting to shelf typically don't generate a return in the end," O'Toole said. "A tighter, more curated portfolio supports healthy profit management."

Many think they're also doing shoppers a favor, with studies showing that fewer choices, not lots of

variety, actually encourage shoppers to buy more.

In 2000, psychologists Sheena Lyengar and Mark Lepper published a study that showed limited selection is better for the shopper. In their experiment, Lyengar and Lepper found consumers were 10 times more likely to purchase jam on display when the number of jams available was cut down from 24 to 6 even though they were more likely to stop at the display offering more selection. Subsequent studies have confirmed this phenomenon.

"Retailers are recognizing that they have to be respectful of shoppers' time," said Paco Underhill whose company, Envirosell, studies consumer behavior.

Still, retailers can't just slash products willy-nilly, said David Berliner, who leads the business restructuring and turnaround practice at BDO.

"You want to make these cuts so they're not even aware of it, and you want the store to still look full," Berliner said. "If you do it too much, you might scare some away."

Berliner also believes reducing variety may also hurt smaller brands who relied on retailers to offer different products — and will send shoppers like Bob Friedland to other competitors.

The 48-year-old communications consultant from Little Falls, New Jersey said that for years, his go-to barbecue sauce has been Open Pit. But Friedland noticed that over the past few years, his local grocers hadn't been carrying it, and he's since turned to Amazon to buy it. That means those local stores not only lost out on Open Pit sales to Friedland. but all the other purchases he used to make while shopping for his favorite barbecue sauce.

"I really don't love the idea of a retailer telling me what I should and should not be interested in," Friedland said. "I like variety. I like specific brands."

The Chiefs have achieved dynasty status with their third Super Bowl title in five years

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — This was supposed to be the year when the Kansas City Chiefs were vulnerable. Their wide receivers were dropping passes, their offense was committing penalties, Travis Kelce was supposedly getting old and there was no way that Andy Reid and Patrick Mahomes could possibly overcome all of that.

Yet they did, and wiped away any doubt that the Chiefs are the new NFL dynasty.

With their come-from-behind overtime win over the San Francisco 49ers in the Super Bowl on Sunday night, the Chiefs raised their third Lombardi Trophy in four trips over a five-year span. And they became the first team since the New England Patriots with Tom Brady two decades ago — the last great football dynasty — to successfully defend their title.

Even Mahomes, when asked whether the Chiefs had become a dynasty, replied: "It's the start of one."

"It's a little bit surreal," Reid said. "I don't know what a dynasty is. You guys have the thesaurus, so you can figure it out. It's a great win because I know how hard it is to do and how hard the season was, the ups and downs of the season, and how proud I am of the guys for just hanging with each other and staying positive with each other."

Never before has an underdog in back-to-back Super Bowls won both, and that may best illustrate two important facts: The Chiefs were eminently beatable this season, and nobody was able to beat them when it mattered.

Start with the roster, which had to be creatively put together by general manager Brett Veach around \$37 million in salary cap space taken up by Mahomes, the biggest cap hit in the NFL this season. Yet the architect of each of their last three title runs was able to find bargains such as Jerick McKinnon and Drue Tranquill who contributed far beyond their monetary value.

Look at their wide receivers, youngsters and journeymen who dropped more passes than any team in the league this season. Yet they galvanized around a quiet rookie, Rashee Rice, who not only became their No. 1 option but a bona fide star.

It goes beyond personnel, though. Consider the road Kansas City had to navigate this season.

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At one point, the Chiefs played six consecutive games in which the other team had extra days of rest, the only time that has happened in NFL history. They had to play in Germany, beating the Dolphins in Frankfurt in a preview of a future wild-card game, and at one point lost five of eight midway through the season to drop to the No. 3 seed for the playoffs.

After beating the Dolphins in the fourth-coldest game in NFL history, the Chiefs hit the road in the post-season for the first time in six years with Mahomes as the starter. But as underdogs in Buffalo and Baltimore, the Chiefs embraced their newfound status as hunters rather than the hunted, and they responded by playing their best football of the season.

In terms of strength of opposition, the Chiefs successfully navigated the toughest path to the Super Bowl in history.

Then came a fitting finale in Las Vegas.

The Chiefs started off by making the same silly mistakes that dragged them down too often during the regular season, and they fell behind San Francisco by double digits, just as they did in each of their four Super Bowls with Mahomes under center. But just as they did in beating the 49ers four years ago, and the Eagles last year, the best team of its era rallied around what is fast becoming the best quarterback of any era to mount a comeback to remember.

Mahomes drove the Chiefs for a field goal to tie the game 16-all with about 5 1/2 minutes to go. He drove them for another field goal with 3 seconds left to force overtime. And he answered a field goal by San Francisco to start the extra session with a gutsy drive that Mahomes capped with his winning touchdown throw to the much-maligned Mecole Hardman.

"Same as always," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said of Mahomes afterward. "He's unbelievable."

Same as always for the Chiefs: unbelievable.

"They're all tough. I'm not going to say one's tougher than the other," Mahomes said of the championship run. "It takes your best, and I think for me, personally, it was just battling through adversity throughout the season, whenever the offense wasn't playing like I wanted it to play, and just to believe and fight. But all these games are tough. It takes your best football."

Reid and Kelce assuaged some concerns among Chiefs fans that they would retire after the Super Bowl, saying late Sunday both planned to be back next season. Mahomes and most of their key players also will be back, though some difficult decisions loom when it comes to pending free agents.

All-Pro defensive tackle Chris Jones and cornerback L'Jarius Sneed will demand massive contracts, and the Chiefs need to be mindful of next year, too, when they have several more important players reaching free agency.

The Chiefs will celebrate their latest Super Bowl triumph with a parade through downtown Kansas City on Wednesday, and after a brief exhale, Veach will join Reid and the rest of their brain trust in getting back to work. The cycle will begin anew.

Because sustained success — the kind the Chiefs have achieved, year after year — is what turns great teams into a dynasty.

"I mean, I'm going to celebrate tonight. I'm going to celebrate at the parade," Mahomes said after earning his third Super Bowl MVP award, "and then I'm going to do whatever I can to be back in this game next year, and try for that three-peat.

"I think Tom said it best: Once you win that championship, and you have those parades and you get those rings, you're not the champion anymore," Mahomes added. "You have to come back with that same mentality, and learn from guys like that that have been the greatest of all time, at the top level, and so that is my mindset. I'm going to celebrate with my guys because of how we've done this, but then we're going to work our way back to this game next year."

Timeline of the Israeli raid in Gaza that rescued two hostages and killed dozens of Palestinians

By The Associated Press undefined

The Israeli raid in the southern Gaza Strip lasted less than 90 minutes.

When it was over, two hostages had been safely rescued from a second-floor apartment guarded by Hamas gunmen, and local officials said 67 Palestinians were killed.

A wave of heavy airstrikes launched to cover the rescuers echoed across the border town of Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has sought shelter from fighting elsewhere.

Israel has said the town on the border with Egypt will be the next target of its offensive, which has already killed over 28,000 Palestinians and driven around 80% of Gaza's population from their homes. The war erupted after Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people and capturing 250 others. Over 100 hostages were released during a cease-fire last year.

Here is a look at how the raid unfolded.

1:49 a.m. — Israeli special forces storm a second-floor apartment in Rafah where the hostages are being held. The military says the soldiers used their own bodies to shield the two hostages as a gunbattle erupted with the captors.

1:50 a.m. — Immediately after the start of the operation, Israeli warplanes and attack helicopters unleash a series of airstrikes to provide cover. The strikes flatten several residential blocks in a built-up refugee camp dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

2:30 a.m. — First reports of Palestinian casualties from Israeli strikes.

3:14 a.m. — The freed hostages, Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, arrive at Sheba Hospital in central Israel by helicopter from Gaza. They are embraced by relatives, who say they are in good physical condition.

5:30 a.m. — Hospitals in Rafah confirm 20 Palestinians killed in strikes.

9:59 a.m.— Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomes the hostages home and praises the forces who rescued them in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.

10:17 a.m.— The Gaza Health Ministry says 67 Palestinians were killed in the operation, with the toll likely to rise as recovery efforts continue.

Post-Roe v. Wade, more patients rely on early prenatal testing as states toughen abortion laws

By LAURA UNGAR and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In Utah, more of Dr. Cara Heuser's maternal-fetal medicine patients are requesting early ultrasounds, hoping to detect serious problems in time to choose whether to continue the pregnancy or have an abortion.

In North Carolina, more obstetrics patients of Dr. Clayton Alfonso and his colleagues are relying on early genetic screenings that don't provide a firm diagnosis.

The reason? New state abortion restrictions mean the clock is ticking.

Since Roe v. Wade was overturned, many health care providers say an increasing number of patients are deciding the fate of their pregnancies based on whatever information they can gather before state bans kick in. But early ultrasounds show far less about the condition of a fetus than later ones. And genetic screenings may be inaccurate.

When you find out your fetus has a serious problem, "you're in crisis mode," said Sabrina Fletcher, a doula who has helped women in this predicament. "You're not thinking about legal repercussions and (state) cutoff dates, and yet we're forced to."

About half of states ban abortion or restrict it after a certain point in pregnancy. In Utah, it's generally illegal after the 18-week mark; in North Carolina, after 12 weeks.

This leaves millions of women in roughly 14 states with no option to get follow-up diagnostic tests in time

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to feasibly have an abortion there if they wanted, a paper published last March in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology* found. Even more states have abortion cutoffs too early for mid-pregnancy ultrasounds.

"More people are trying to find these things out earlier to try to fit within the confines of laws that in my mind don't have a place in medical practice," said Alfonso, an OB-GYN at Duke University.

CHECKING FOR PRENATAL PROBLEMS

When done at the right time, doctors said prenatal testing can identify problems and help parents decide whether to continue a pregnancy or prepare for a baby's complex needs after delivery.

One of the most common tests is the 20-week ultrasound, sometimes called an "anatomy scan." It checks on the fetal heart, brain, spine, limbs and other parts of the body, looking for signs of congenital problems. It can detect things like brain, spine and heart abnormalities and signs of chromosomal problems such as Down syndrome. Follow-up testing may be needed to make a diagnosis.

The type of ultrasounds patients receive – and when in pregnancy they have one done – can vary depending on the risk level of the patient, as well as the equipment and policies each practice has. For example, some women may have a first-trimester ultrasound to estimate a due date or check for multiple fetuses. But it's not standard practice because it is too early to see many of the fetus' limbs and organs in detail, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says.

It's impossible to spot problems like serious heart defects much before mid-pregnancy because the fetus is so small, Heuser said. Nonetheless, she said, more patients are having ultrasounds at 10 to 13 weeks to get access to abortion if needed.

Experts say there are no statistics on exactly how many people opt for early ultrasounds or make choices based on them. But some health care providers say they've noticed an uptick in requests for the scans, including Missouri genetic counselor Chelsea Wagner. She counsels patients from around the nation through telehealth, frequently discussing the results of ultrasounds and genetic tests.

Wagner said these early ultrasounds can't provide the assurance patients are looking for because "you can't give somebody an 'everything looks good' or a clean bill of health off of an ultrasound at 10 weeks."

Doctors also can't make a firm diagnosis from a genetic screening, which is done at 10 weeks gestation or later.

These screenings, also called "non-invasive prenatal tests," are designed to detect abnormalities in fetal DNA by looking at small, free-floating fragments circulating in a pregnant woman's blood.

They screen for chromosomal disorders such as trisomy 13 and 18, which often end in miscarriage or stillbirth, Down syndrome and extra or missing copies of sex chromosomes.

The accuracy of these tests varies by disorder, but none is considered diagnostic.

Natera, one of only a handful of U.S. companies that makes such genetic tests, said in an email that prenatal test results are reported as either "high risk" or "low risk" and that patients should seek confirmatory testing if they get a "high risk" result.

Some may be pretty accurate, doctors said, but false positives are possible. In 2022, the Food and Drug Administration issued a warning about the screenings, reminding patients and doctors that results need further confirmation.

"While genetic non-invasive prenatal screening tests are widely used today, these tests have not been reviewed by the FDA and may be making claims about their performance and use that are not based on sound science," Jeff Shuren, the director of the FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health, wrote in a statement.

The agency is poised to release a new regulatory framework in April that would require prenatal screenings, and thousands of other lab tests, to undergo FDA review.

AN 'AWFUL' DECISION TO MAKE

Even before Roe was overturned, pregnant patients have sometimes been confused by what prenatal testing does – or doesn't – reveal about the pregnancy or fetus, said bioethicist Megan Allyse, whose research focuses on emerging technologies around women's reproductive health. She said it's important for doctors to go over the limitations of such screens and emphasize that the results they receive are not

diagnoses.

Alfonso and Wagner said they advise getting diagnostic tests too. In addition to amniocentesis, which removes and tests a small sample of cells from amniotic fluid, these also include CVS, or chorionic villus sampling, which tests a small piece of tissue from the placenta. Both carry a small risk of miscarriage.

But lately, Wagner said, there's "more urgency to patients' decisions" in many states.

That's because of the specifics of test timing. It can take a week or two to get the results of genetic screenings. CVS is offered at 10 to 13 weeks gestation, with initial results taking a few days and more detailed results around two weeks. Amniocentesis is typically done at 15 to 20 weeks, with similar timing for results.

If a state has a 12-week abortion ban, for instance, "some people may have to act on a screening," Alfonso said.

Wagner said she's had to counsel patients who couldn't afford to travel out of state for an abortion if they waited for diagnostic testing.

"They are forced to use the information they have to make choices they never thought they'd have to make," she said.

Some states restrict abortion so early that women would not have the chance to get any prenatal testing done before the cutoff.

That was the case for 26-year-old Hannah in Tennessee, which has a strict abortion ban. An ultrasound in late November, at about 18 weeks gestation, revealed she had amniotic band sequence, which is when very thin pieces of the amniotic membrane get attached to the fetus, sometimes causing fetal amputation and other problems. In Hannah's case, the bands were attached to many of her baby boy's body parts and ripped open multiple areas of his body.

She called clinics in Ohio and Illinois looking for a place to terminate the pregnancy, while her genetic counselor's office phoned roughly six facilities. She finally found a clinic 4 ½ hours away in Illinois and had the procedure in early December at 19 weeks gestation. A set of results from the amniocentesis – which was done to look for the cause of the problem – came back the day after her abortion, and other results after that.

Hannah, who didn't want her last name used for fear of backlash, said it's "awful" to have to think about state timelines, and to travel long distances out of state, when dealing with something like this. But she's grateful she had a firm diagnosis from the ultrasound and enough information to feel confident in her decision, which she made so her baby wasn't in "pain and misery."

"I know some women are not that lucky," Hannah said. She named her son Waylen.

Dutch appeals court orders Netherlands to stop exports of F-35 parts to Israel, citing war in Gaza

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — An appeals court ordered the Dutch government on Monday to halt the export of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel, citing a clear risk of violations of international law.

A trio of human rights organizations brought a civil suit against the Netherlands in December, arguing authorities needed to reevaluate the export license in light of Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip.

"It is undeniable that there is a clear risk that the exported F-35 parts are used in serious violations of international humanitarian law," Judge Bas Boele said in reading out the ruling, eliciting cheers from several people in the courtroom.

The exports must cease within seven days.

The decision came as Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte traveled to Israel to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss the conflict. Rutte was also expected to separately meet with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the government would appeal. "It is up to the state to shape its for-

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aign policy," Geoffrey van Leeuwen, the minister for foreign trade and development said in a statement. In the meantime, van Leeuwen said his office would abide by the export ban.

"We are extremely grateful that there is justice and that the court was willing to speak out on justice," lead lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld told reporters after the hearing.

Oxfam Novib, Pax Nederland and The Rights Forum filed the case in December. They argued the continued transfer of the aircraft parts makes the Netherlands complicit in possible war crimes being committed by Israel in its war with Hamas.

In January, a lower court sided with the government, allowing the Dutch to continue sending U.S.-owned parts stored at a warehouse in the town of Woensdrecht to Israel. The Netherlands is home to one of three F-35 European regional warehouses.

Other countries are also considering restricting weapons sales to Israel. Human rights groups in the United Kingdom have brought a similar suit against their government, attempting to block weapons exports to Israel.

In the United States, Democrats in the Senate are pushing a bill that would require President Joe Biden to get congressional approval before greenlighting weapons sales to Israel.

Late last month, the U.N. top court ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza. Although that decision was made after the appeal in the Dutch case was heard, the groups' lawyers say judges likely considered the legally binding order from the International Court of Justice.

The decision left some room for Dutch authorities to export parts of the aircraft being used in operations other than Gaza.

Mahomes, the Chiefs, Taylor Swift and a thrilling game. It all came together at the Super Bowl

By NOAH TRISTER AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The Kansas City Chiefs beat the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 in overtime in a Super Bowl unlike any other. Here's a look at a few topics that will linger in the aftermath:

BEST SUPER BOWL EVER?

This Super Bowl will likely go down as one of the most memorable, given Taylor Swift's involvement and the fact that it was in Las Vegas for the first time. Throw in Kansas City winning back-to-back titles — a rare accomplishment — and Patrick Mahomes' late brilliance, and it was a classic.

But it wasn't the most well-played game, with both teams losing big turnovers and neither offense really doing much until the end, when fatigue might have been a factor.

BEST TEAM EVER?

It's in play now for the Chiefs, who have reached four Super Bowls in five years and won three of them. Now they'll go for something nobody — not Joe Montana's 49ers or Tom Brady's Patriots — has done. Kansas City can win a third consecutive Super Bowl.

That might seem unlikely, but so did this championship for most of the season. The Chiefs went the whole second half of the AFC championship game and the whole first half of the Super Bowl without a touchdown. If they could manage to win it all anyway, what does it take to beat them?

"Battling through the adversity that we went through this year, and the guys staying with the process, keeping believing," Mahomes said. "You never know how it's going to happen, and to be able to go play three great teams to get to this game and play another great team, and win all those games, it was a true road in the playoffs, and we were able to come through and be Super Bowl champs."

BEST QB EVER?

Mahomes has a while to go before he can match Tom Brady's longevity and career accomplishments, but he may have an even better resume than the New England quarterback did at the same age. Mahomes has three Super Bowl titles at age 28 and was the MVP in each of those wins. When he was 28, Brady had

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won three Super Bowls and been MVP for two.

But at that age, Brady hadn't won any regular-season MVPs, and Mahomes already has two.

BEST CELEBRITY FAN EVER?

Taylor Swift's fiercest loyalists might claim that she was the good luck charm that brought Kansas City another championship. Even if you're not buying that, there's no denying that her relationship with Travis Kelce added some buzz to what was a fairly drab regular season for the Chiefs.

Then they went on their postseason run, culminating in an almost perfect storm of sports and pop culture intersecting at the Super Bowl. Maybe Kelce and Swift will be back at the Super Bowl next year, too, but the NFL and Chiefs fans shouldn't take for granted the sequence of events that unfolded over the past few months.

BEST HOST CITY EVER?

Now we're definitely in the realm of the subjective, but the first Super Bowl in Las Vegas was a hit among many fans — some of whom came to town even if they weren't sure they'd be able to get into the game.

The demand for tickets made it clear how popular a site this was. And as sports leagues embrace Las Vegas more and more, it's a question of when, not if, more events like this come to town.

CRUSHING LOSS

The 49ers were about as close to a championship as you can be without winning it, and coach Kyle Shanahan is still chasing a title after losing another Super Bowl. He's been on the wrong end of the only two Super Bowls to go to overtime — this one and Super Bowl 51, which he lost as an offensive coordinator for the Atlanta Falcons.

Shanahan is one of the game's most influential offensive minds, but this wasn't one of his masterpieces. The 49ers got 160 total yards from Christian McCaffrey, but two touchdowns and three field goals weren't enough for San Francisco to win. And Shanahan's decision to take the ball first in overtime raised some eyebrows.

Meanwhile, Kansas City's Andy Reid won his third Super Bowl title.

HIS FINEST HOUR?

What a career defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo has put together. When he was with the 2007 New York Giants, he helped take down previously unbeaten New England in the Super Bowl. Now he's won three titles with the Chiefs.

With Mahomes and the offense no longer lighting up opposing secondaries like in the past, the pressure was on Spagnuolo's defense. It delivered, holding Lamar Jackson and Baltimore to 10 points in the AFC championship game and then keeping Kansas City in it against the 49ers until the offense got rolling late.

USHER SHINES

There was talk about whether Usher's halftime show might be overshadowed by Swift's presence in the crowd, but he delivered a set with several highlights, including appearances by Alicia Keys, H.E.R., Jermaine Dupri, Lil Jon and Ludacris.

BRIGHT FUTURE

MVP Lamar Jackson may have taken home the biggest prize at NFL Honors this week, but the Houston Texans look like a team to watch going forward. They swept the Rookie of the Year awards for offense and defense with quarterback C.J. Stroud and defensive lineman Will Anderson Jr.

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 U.S. 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

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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 it is currently lacking in the Israeli government," 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. 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 that if Israel attacks Rafah, it would "threaten to draw Egypt into the hostilities, which would be catastrophic for the entire region."

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Today in History: February 13

Bruno Richard Hauptmann found guilty of killing the Lindbergh baby

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 13, the 44th day of 2023. There are 322 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 13, 1935, a jury in Flemington, New Jersey, found Bruno Richard Hauptmann guilty of first-degree murder in the kidnap-slaying of Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh. (Hauptmann was later executed.)

On this date:

In 1633, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei arrived in Rome for trial before the Inquisition, accused of defending Copernican theory that the Earth revolved around the sun instead of the other way around. (Galileo was found vehemently suspect of heresy and ended up being sentenced to a form of house arrest.)

In 1933, the Warsaw Convention, governing airlines' liability for international carriage of persons, luggage and goods, went into effect.

In 1939, Justice Louis D. Brandeis retired from the U.S. Supreme Court. (He was succeeded by William O. Douglas.)

In 1965, during the Vietnam War, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, an extended bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese.

In 1972, the film "Cabaret," directed by Bob Fosse, based on John Kander and Fred Ebb's musical of the same name, starring Liza Minnelli and Michael York, was released.

In 1980, the 13th Winter Olympics opened in Lake Placid, New York.

In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, allied warplanes destroyed an underground shelter in Baghdad that had been identified as a military command center; Iraqi officials said 500 civilians were killed.

In 1996, the rock musical "Rent," by Jonathan Larson, opened off-Broadway less than three weeks after Larson's death.

In 2000, Charles Schulz's final "Peanuts" strip ran in Sunday newspapers, the day after the cartoonist died in his sleep at his California home at age 77.

In 2002, John Walker Lindh pleaded not guilty in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, to conspiring to kill Americans and supporting the Taliban and terrorist organizations. (Lindh later pleaded guilty to lesser offenses and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

In 2011, Egypt's military leaders dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and promised elections in moves cautiously welcomed by protesters who had helped topple President Hosni Mubarak.

In 2013, beginning a long farewell to his flock, a weary Pope Benedict XVI celebrated his final public Mass as pontiff, presiding over Ash Wednesday services inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

In 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia, the influential conservative and most provocative member of the U.S. Supreme Court, was found dead at a private residence in the Big Bend area of West Texas; he was 79.

In 2017, President Donald Trump's embattled national security adviser, Michael Flynn, resigned following reports he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other officials about his contacts with Russia.

In 2018, President Donald Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, said he had paid \$130,000 out of his own pocket to a porn actress who claimed to have had a sexual relationship with Trump.

In 2021, former President Donald Trump was acquitted by the Senate at his second impeachment trial, the first to involve a former president, in which he was accused of inciting the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6; seven Republicans joined all 50 Democrats in voting to convict, but it was far from the two-thirds threshold required.

In 2022, playing in their home stadium, the Los Angeles Rams beat the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20 in the Super Bowl.

In 2023, David Jude Jolicoeur aka Trugoy the Dove, one of the founding members of the hip-hop trio De La Soul, died at age 54.

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Today's birthdays: Actor Kim Novak is 91. Actor Bo Svenson is 83. Actor Stockard Channing is 80. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is 78. Singer Peter Gabriel is 74. Actor David Naughton is 73. Rock musician Peter Hook is 68. Actor Matt Salinger is 64. Singer Henry Rollins is 63. Actor Neal McDonough is 58. Singer Freedom Williams is 58. Actor Kelly Hu is 56. Rock singer Matt Berninger (The National) is 53. Country musician Scott Thomas (Parmalee) is 51. Singer Robbie Williams is 50. Singer-songwriter Feist is 48. R&B performer Natalie Stewart is 45. Actor Mena Suvari (MEE'-nuh soo-VAHR'-ee) is 45. Actor Katie Volding is 35. Michael Joseph Jackson Jr. (also known as Prince Michael Jackson I) is 27.