

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 1 of 72

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [1- Boys Game added](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Jackrabbits Forensics celebrating successful season ahead of international trip](#)
- [4- RoseHill Women's Gathering Ad](#)
- [5- Four New Projects Will Bring Additional Jobs to South Dakota](#)
- [5- South Dakota Dairy Numbers See Massive Growth](#)
- [6- Notice of Garbage Pick-up](#)
- [7- Veteran's Affairs Column: Investing in America's Future](#)
- [8- We the People Column: Freedom of the Press: The Essential Foundation of Democracy](#)
- [9- Sundial Manor Ad](#)
- [9- Andover City Ad](#)
- [9- Conde National League](#)
- [10- Big Dakota Valley run gives Panthers win over Tigers](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: SD's Johnson votes yes as U.S. House Republicans impeach Homeland Security chief](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Deepfakes bill clears state Senate, loses impact on 2024 primary](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: State revenue projections 'cautiously conservative' as COVID federal funding ends](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Blaze pink may become an official hunter safety color in South Dakota](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Thune, Rounds vote yes as U.S. Senate approves \\$95 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [22- Daily Devotional](#)
- [23- Subscription Form](#)
- [24- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

Boys Game Added

There will be a make-up boys basketball game with Dakota Valley on Monday, Feb. 19th. Junior varsity game to start at 4:30 p.m. with the varsity game to follow.

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



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.

Thursday, Feb. 15

Senior Menu: Chicken cacciatore, rice pilaf, Italian blend vegetables, apple sauce bars, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Pop tarts.
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, corn.
Parent-Teacher Conferences, 1:30 p.m. to 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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Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 2 of 72

1440

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The House of Representatives yesterday impeached Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas by a 214 to 213 vote for allegedly violating immigration laws over his handling of the southern US border. Mayorkas is the second cabinet member in US history to be removed from office, following the 1876 impeachment of then-Secretary of War William Belknap.

A powerful nor'easter storm completed its pass through parts of the northern Mid-Atlantic and Northeast yesterday, unleashing up to 2 inches of snow per hour in certain areas. The storm disrupted travel, left more than 130,000 customers without power, and forced the closure of schools for millions of students across the region.

The consumer price index in January fell to 3.1% year-over-year growth, down from the 3.4% rise in December but higher than analyst's predictions of 2.9%. The annual figure, which tracks the change in prices of a basket of goods and services, is the lowest increase since June.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Super Bowl LVIII hauls in 123.7 million viewers, a 7% increase from last year and the most-watched telecast in history.

Paramount Global lays off 800 employees across all company divisions including CBS, Paramount Pictures, and Showtime.

UEFA Champions League Round of 16 kicks off; see full schedule of matchups. Arrest made in connection with theft of Jackie Robinson statue from Kansas park.

Science & Technology

OpenAI to roll out memory function for ChatGPT to remember past conversations; move prompts concerns from privacy advocates, company says system won't remember sensitive information like health data.

Archaeologists discover 11,000-year-old stone wall believed to have been a corral trap for reindeer; find sheds light on group hunting practices during the end of the Stone Age.

Researchers pinpoint key gene involved in building and sustaining muscle mass, with mice born without the BCL6 gene showing 30% less muscle mass; results may have applications in treating age- or disease-related muscle loss.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -1.4%, Dow -1.4%, Nasdaq -1.8%); Dow posts worst day since March 2023 following hotter-than-expected inflation report.

JetBlue Airways shares up 22% after activist investor Carl Icahn takes nearly 10% stake in airline, believes company is undervalued. Vizio shares rise 25% on report of Walmart considering buying the TV maker for \$2B to boost advertising revenue by selling ads through Vizio products.

Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash drivers strike today over fair pay and safety; roughly 130,000 drivers expected to decline rides to and from airports in 10 US cities between 11 am and 1 pm local time. Instacart to lay off 250 employees, or 7% of workforce.

Politics & World Affairs

Senate passes \$95B military aid bill, including funding for Ukraine (\$60B), Israel (\$14), and the Indo-Pacific (\$8B); effort was split from failed border security bill last week. House leaders say aid package won't be voted on without border security provisions.

Former Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi defeats Republican Nassau County legislator Mazi Pilip in special election in New York's 3rd Congressional District to fill House seat vacated by former Rep. George Santos (R).

Gaza cease-fire talks restart in Cairo, with officials from the US, Israel, Qatar, and Egypt; meeting comes as Israeli forces prepare to advance into the Gaza city of Rafah near the Egyptian border. Officials estimate 74 people killed in Israeli airstrikes during Monday operation to rescue two hostages (

Jackrabbits Forensics celebrating successful season ahead of international trip

BROOKINGS, S.D. (02/13/2024)-- One of South Dakota State University's most historical cocurricular teams is preparing to make history at its first international tournament in March.

Jackrabbits Forensics, SDSU's competitive speech and debate team, will travel to Dublin, Ireland, March 8-14 to compete in the International Forensics Association contest.

Eleven students from the 14-person roster will participate in the competition. The team includes:

Grace Kleinschmit

Meara McIntyre

Jacob Ramp

Hannah Dayaget

Emma Arneson

Taylor Sutton

Sam Pappas (from Groton)

Rachael Guler

Autumn Rathjens

Kara Vetch

Abby Gilk

Other members of the team who will not attend IFA include Courtnie Forcier, Raegan Modlin and Annie Witt.

Program history

Jackrabbits Forensics is directed by Andrea Carlile, assistant professor in the School of Communication and Journalism. She began as director of forensics and an instructor in 2012.

SDSU has a rich tradition of speech and debate on campus. Starting in 1920, SDSU has the longest-running chapter of Pi Kappa Delta, the nation's oldest speech and debate honor society, in South Dakota.

"The role of speech and debate is central to our land-grant institution," Carlile explained. "We equip students with skills to improve their lives and the communities in which they live.

"Further, it is exciting to see the renovations of Lincoln Hall, the original home of our debate team, which was housed in Lincoln Library," Carlile continued. "We recently hosted a tournament and were able to share not only campus, but also team history with visiting teams."

Building a legacy

This year's team has shown its commitment to building upon its legacy and traditions.

"At one point in the fall semester, we had 18 active students on our roster, which is the most we have seen in my time at SDSU," Carlile said. "The new season brought energy and excitement for our team, and with increased numbers we have had great success."

Part of that legacy-building commitment is putting time into team practice on Tuesdays and one-on-one coaching appointments. Team members can invest a personalized number of hours into their craft, providing the flexibility for any student of any major to be involved.

"Our students span the university with students having majors or minors from all colleges at SDSU," Carlile said. "Senior Kara Vetch studies data science, while sophomore and first-year team member Taylor Sutton is pre-veterinary science. Unsurprisingly, we have many students on the team who are majors within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, including Rachael Guler, Hannah Dayaget, Jacob Ramp, Grace Kleinschmit, Raegan Modlin, Annie Witt, Meara McIntyre, Courtnie Forcier and Emma Arneson."

Throughout the 2023-24 season, the team won five tournaments and placed in the top three at another three tournaments. Members also qualified in 30 events, the most in program history, by the start of February 2024 to compete at the American Forensics Association National Speech Tournament at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in April.

Now, Jackrabbits Forensics is preparing for its debut at a competitive international tournament. The International Forensics Association is an open national tournament with events in categories like informa-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 4 of 72

tive speaking, dramatic duo, poetry interpretation, public debate and more.

"South Dakota State University boasts a distinguished legacy of excellence in speech and debate," said Josh Westwick, director of the School of Communication and Journalism. "Under the guidance of Dr. Carlile, the program has continuously advanced and is positioned for ongoing success at the regional, national and international levels."

When discussing the team's growth, Carlile reflected back on her first year as director of forensics.

"There was a great deal I didn't know, but I knew we had the potential to achieve excellence at every level," Carlile said. "I remind our team at American Forensics Association each year that in my first season as coach, SDSU had one student in one event. I also remind them where we are now reflects their commitment to our legacy."

The generous support Carlile and Jackrabbits Forensics have received has helped build that legacy.

"Some days, getting to a place like we are now seemed almost out of touch, but with each turn, I had support. I decided to start asking for what was needed to achieve greatness on par with our Division 1 athletics, and as such, we are at a place poised to keep adding to our legacy.

"Thank you to the leaders who agreed to my ideas to create a Division 1 forensics experience for our students," Carlile continued. "This would also not be possible without the support of generous alumni and donors who also believe in the power of forensics to transform lives."



Women's Gathering

IF: 2024

IF2024.COM



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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 5 of 72

Four New Projects Will Bring Additional Jobs to South Dakota

PIERRE, SD – The Governor’s Office of Economic Development (GOED) Board of Economic Development and the Economic Development Finance Authority (EDFA) took action at this month’s meetings, approving one request for up to \$8.7 million in tax-exempt qualified bonds and approving three loans totaling over \$3.2 million. These projects reflect a capital investment totaling over \$44.5 million and will bring a projected 185 full-time jobs to South Dakota.

“GOED is thrilled to work with such a diverse group of businesses who are looking to expand and grow in South Dakota. By assisting in the funding of these four projects, businesses across multiple industries will benefit,” said GOED Commissioner Chris Schilken. “South Dakota will continue attracting new businesses and working within our communities to help existing businesses grow and thrive.”

EDFA took action to approve the Inducement Resolution of Silverstreak Dairies LLP – Warner Dairy. The Warner Dairy applied for a Livestock Nutrient Management Bond to finance the expansion of their current operations. After the completion of this \$32 million expansion, the operation will double the number of milking cows, and will add a projected five new full-time employees. Up to \$8,740,000 in tax-exempt qualified expenses will be focused on updates that use available technologies for the modernization of barns, equipment, facilities, and solid-waste management. This dairy will be located on the existing Warner Dairy site.

Meridian Holdings, LLC of Yankton was approved for a SD Works loan of \$810,000. A full-service event hosting business, Meridian Holdings, LLC will specialize in weddings and parties while operating a full bar and custom meals for its clients. Funding will aid in the purchase of four properties. A projected 14 full-time employees will be added from this new business.

Sentry LLC of Watertown was approved for a Revolving Economic Development and Initiative (REDI) loan for \$1,275,000 and a SD Works loan for \$637,500. This funding will help with the acquisition and installation of equipment for offices and workspaces. A projected 106 full-time jobs will be created.

Hairy Cow Brewing, LLC of Box Elder was approved for a SD Works loan of \$501,924. Funding will assist with equipment costs for the company that is planning to relocate from Illinois. Once complete, this family-friendly craft brewery and restaurant are projected to create approximately 60 full-time jobs.

South Dakota Dairy Numbers See Massive Growth

SIOUX FALLS, SD - South Dakota’s dairy industry is growing tremendously, thanks in part to Governor Kristi Noem’s commitment to expanding this vital commerce.

As of January 2024, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that the total count of dairy cows in South Dakota totals 208,000, up 70.5% since 2019.

“South Dakota farmers and ranchers are passionate about what they do,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Their dedication to the industry has created a tremendous impact on our state’s economy, and our dairy industry in particular is thriving.”

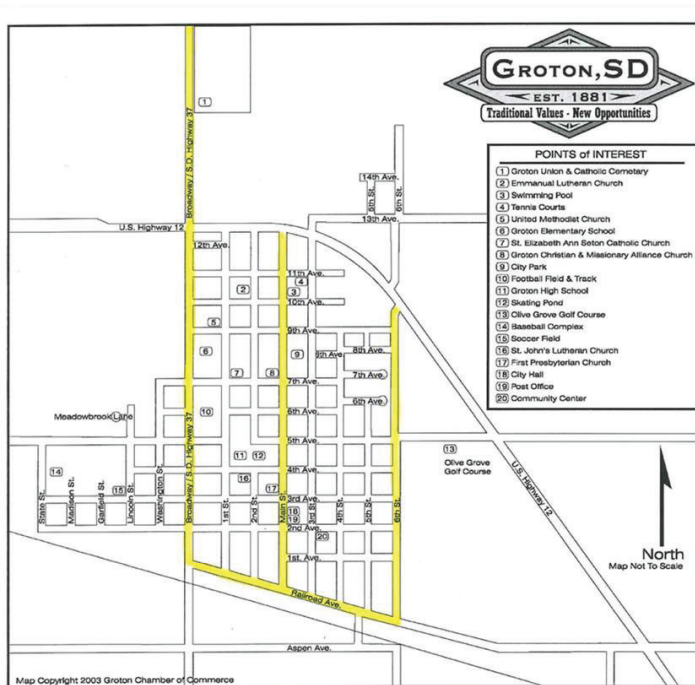
In the past 12 years, South Dakota’s dairy herd has grown from 90,000 head to 208,000.

“South Dakota is a leader amongst the dairy industry. The economic impact of those additional 118,000 cows is nearly \$4 billion annually,” said GOED Commissioner Chris Schilken. “That is a huge win for South Dakota and its economy. South Dakota is open for business, and producers from across the country are investing here because of our welcoming approach to the dairy industry.”

Junior High Games

Upcoming junior high games include two with Florence/Henry and one with Aberdeen Christian. Groton Chiropractic Clinic is sponsoring the junior high games on Friday with Britton-Hecla. Text Paul at 605-397-7460 if you are interested in sponsoring the junior high games with Florence/Henry or Aberdeen Christian. They are \$25 per game.

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!

Broton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 7 of 72



**Greg Whitlock,
Secretary
South Dakota
Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Investing in America's Future

South Dakota is the best state in the nation for veterans to live and work. And the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to providing veterans with a seamless transition from military service to sustainable civilian employment.

Education looks different for everyone, and it is important that veterans understand and utilize their GI Bill® benefits in the pursuit of their education. While the GI Bill® covers nearly every imaginable school related expense, from tuition, books, fees, and even a living stipend, we understand that utilizing this benefit can be confusing at times.

SDDVA's Veteran Education Team guides veterans, service members, and their families through approved education and training programs that equip our veterans with the skills they need to achieve permanent, fulltime careers with competitive salaries. Our department partners with both private and public employers throughout the state. Together, we understand and value the skills, ethics, and discipline of our veterans, and we work to help them accomplish their goals.

Opportunities include college degrees, certificate programs, on-the-job training programs, apprenticeships, flight training, and correspondence courses.

Veterans can choose to use their GI Bill® from 35 institutes of higher learning (colleges and universities), 25 non-college degree institutions (high schools, welding schools, and trade schools), and two flight training schools.

We encourage veterans wishing to grow their educational footprint to reach out and visit with our team. Reach out to Shane Olivier for education questions (shane.olivier@state.sd.us) and Ryan Fowler (ryan.fowler@state.sd.us) for OJT and apprenticeships. They recognize the specific needs and challenges veterans face in transitioning.

America's veterans are the pride of our nation. They have fought our wars, defended our shores, and kept us free. Providing quality and effective service to veterans and their dependents is, and always will be, our number one mission.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

Freedom of the Press: The Essential Foundation of Democracy

When the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Richmond Newspapers v. Virginia* (1980), in the words of Justice John Paul Stevens, "squarely held that the acquisition of newsworthy matter is entitled to constitutional protection," it was protecting under the First Amendment's Free Press Clause the essential foundation of our democracy.

The conception of the press as a pillar of strength for a free people who mean to govern themselves is as old as the republic itself. In 1765, in his acclaimed treatise, "A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law," a youthful John Adams wrote: "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right . . . and a desire to know; but besides this, they have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible, divine right to that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean of the characters and conduct of their rulers."

Adams's insistence that the "preservation of liberty" rests on the "general knowledge of the people," represented the earliest version of our historic understanding of Freedom of the Press as the public's right to know. What is it that "we the people have a right to know?" Adams answered: "that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean of the characters and conduct of their rulers."

Adams anticipated James Madison's eloquent defense of freedom of the press which, in combination with freedom of speech, provided the essential protection for a republican system of government. The press, he believed, must have "the right of freely examining public characters and measures." It is only through close study and reporting on the means and measures of governmental policies, programs and actions, Madison explained, that the "sovereign people" can be sufficiently informed. Without information supplied by the press, the people, lacking knowledge, would be limited in their ability to scrutinize, critique and criticize governmental programs and actions. Without such knowledge, self-government would be but a pretense.

Critically, this historical understanding of the foundational role that freedom of the press plays in safeguarding the republic transcends political, partisan and ideological lines. Justice George Sutherland, surely one of the most conservative members of the Supreme Court, echoed the words of Adams and Madison. In a 1936 case, Justice Sutherland wrote, "The people are entitled to full information in respect of the doings or misdoings of their government; informed public opinion is the most potent of all restraints upon misgovernment."

The informing function of the press, what may be described as the checking value of the "Fourth Estate," is indispensable to the maintenance of the republic. It has played a critical role, for example, in exposing governmental deceit in wartime—Vietnam and Iraq—and governmental efforts to suppress the truth, as seen in the Pentagon Papers Case (1971) and the Watergate Tapes Case (1974).

It is precisely because "we the people" cannot attend the seat of government—state or national—to listen to debates on the great issues of our time or attend important trials that carry great significance for our democracy and the future of the nation, that we depend upon a free and independent press to provide accurate coverage of newsworthy events. We are reminded of Madison's fervent belief that the press must be free to "canvass the merits and measures of public men."

The press is an indispensable representative of the people, a fourth estate. It is for this reason, as Justice Potter Stewart noted in the Pentagon Papers Case, that the press plays a vital checking role in national security matters, particularly because expansive claims of presidential power face little challenge from a

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 9 of 72

quiescent Congress and a deferential judiciary. So, he wrote, "the only effective restraint upon executive policy and power . . . may lie in an enlightened citizenry—in an informed and critical public opinion. For this reason, it is perhaps here that a press that is alert, aware and free most vitally serves the purpose of the First Amendment. For without an informed and free press there cannot be an enlightened people."

Freedom of the Press, Justice Hugo Black rightly said, was created for the governed, not the government. If an enlightened citizenry is integral to democracy, as a long line of American statesman, from Adams and Madison to Stewart and Black, have so declared, then the press must be not only free and unfettered but dedicated, energetic and aggressive in informing the American people. Madison, who was prone to romantic musings about the press, nevertheless captured its historic importance when he wrote in 1799: "To the press alone, chequered as it is with abuses, the world is indebted for all the triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity over error and oppression."

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



We participate in SD Rural Healthcare Grant program!

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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)



Conde National League

Feb. 12 Team Standings: Tigers 21, Braves 20, Mets 16, Cubs 15, Pirates 13, Giants 11.

Men's High Games: Aaron Severson 191, Butch Farmen 188, Russ Bethke 186.

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 513, Chad Furney 505, Russ Bethke 498

Women's High Games: Suzi Easthouse 190, Vickie Kramp 164, Sam Bahr 152

Women's High Series: Suzi Easthouse 539, Vickie Kramp 448, Sam Bahr 429

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 10 of 72

GHS Girls Basketball

Big Dakota Valley run gives Panthers win over Tigers

Dakota Valley outscored Groton Area, 18-1, in the third quarter to pull away from a close game in girls basketball action played Tuesday in Groton.

The game was tied twice with three lead changes in the first quarter as Groton Area held a 10-8 lead. The second quarter featured a defensive struggle with the two teams as only eight total points were scored with Groton Area holding 14-12 lead at halftime.

Ella Otten came out firing for the Panthers in the third quarter with two three-pointers and a total of 12 points in that quarter to help propel Dakota Valley to a 39-22 lead at the end of the third quarter. Groton Area battled back to within nine, 39-30, midway in the fourth quarter; however, Dakota Valley quickly went back on top by 13 and won by the same margin.

Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with its 11 points. Jaedyn Penning had nine points, three rebounds and two steals. Rylee Dunker had four points, six rebounds, one assist and one steal. Faith Traphagen had four points, one rebound and one steal. Taryn Traphagen had four points, five rebounds, one assist and one steal. Kennedy Hansen had three points, two rebounds and two assists. Jerica Locke had one point, one rebound and three assists. Brooklyn Hansen had four rebounds and Laila Roberts had two assists and one steal.

Three-Pointers: Leicht - 3, Kennedy Hansen - 1, Taryn Traphagen - 1.

Groton Area made eight of 22 two-pointers for 36 percent, five of 18 three-pointers for 28 percent, five of nine free throws for 56 percent, had 22 rebounds, 21 turnovers, nine assists, six steals and 16 team fouls.

Otten led Dakota Valley with 17 points followed by Aubree Worden with 11, Cameron Sommervold 10, Emerson Mead four, Lexi Vaske three and Alexa Verdoorn added two points.

Dakota Valley made 19 of 46 field goals for 41 percent, seven of 10 free throws for 70 percent, had 16 turnovers and 12 team fouls.

Three-Pointers: Vaske - 1, Worden - 1, Otten - 2.

Groton Area has a 15-point run in the third quarter to edge out Dakota Valley in the junior varsity game, 34-32. The game was tied once and there were four lead changes in the first quarter as the Panthers held a 9-7 lead after the first quarter. The Tigers went scoreless in the second quarter as Dakota Valley upped its lead to seven at halftime, 14-7. Dakota Valley had a seven-point lead at 17-10 before Groton Area scored 15 straight points to take a 22-17 lead after the third quarter and extended it to 25-17 on the run early in the fourth quarter. Dakota Valley rallied late in the game, but Groton Area did not give in and hung on for the win.

Faith Traphagen led the Tigers with 12 points while Kella Tracy had 11, Taryn Trapahgen four, Laila Roberts three and Ashlynn Warrington and Talli Wright each had two points.

Katie Betsworth led Dakota Valley with 14 points while Sophie Meyer and Alexa Verdoorn each had five, Isabelle Carreau had four and Bella Stokes and Ava Redstone each added two points.

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

- Paul Kosel



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

SD's Johnson votes yes as U.S. House Republicans impeach Homeland Security chief

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 13, 2024 8:07 PM

WASHINGTON — In their second attempt in as many weeks, U.S. House Republicans impeached Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Tuesday, marking an inflection point in the growing rift between the GOP and the White House over immigration policy decisions at the southern border.

In a 214-213 vote, the House approved two articles of impeachment that charged Mayorkas with willfully ignoring immigration law and lying to Congress about the status of border security. It is only the second time in history that a Cabinet member has been impeached; William Belknap, the secretary of war and a former Iowa state legislator, was impeached in 1876.

A vote on the same resolution failed spectacularly last week, 214-216, while House GOP Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana was absent due to ongoing cancer treatments. Republican Blake Moore of Utah switched his vote from "yes" to "no" as a procedural move to allow the resolution to be reconsidered.

South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson voted yes both times.

"The southern border is an abject disaster," Johnson said in a statement. "His willful and systemic refusal to comply with laws set by Congress has created a safety and security crisis around America. Mayorkas has failed to uphold his oath of office and should be removed."

"House Republicans are far from done," House Homeland Security Committee Chair Mark Green of Tennessee wrote on X before the Tuesday vote. "Secretary Mayorkas has sparked the worst border crisis in American history, and it's long past time for him to be impeached."

Green held several hearings on impeachment proceedings against Mayorkas.

All House Democrats present and three Republicans voted against the two articles of impeachment. Critics of the process have said a Cabinet official should not be impeached over what they say are policy disputes.

The Republicans who voted against impeachment were Reps. Ken Buck of Colorado, Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Tom McClintock of California.

President Joe Biden slammed House Republicans, calling the impeachment vote "petty political games."

"Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas, a Cuban immigrant who came to the United States with his family as political refugees, has spent more than two decades serving America with integrity in a decorated career in law enforcement and public service," Biden said. "Instead of staging political stunts like this, Republicans with genuine concerns about the border should want Congress to deliver more border resources and stronger border security."

Following the vote, Mia Ehrenberg, a spokesperson for DHS, said in a statement that "House Republicans will be remembered by history for trampling on the Constitution for political gain rather than working to solve the serious challenges at our border."

The Senate will be required under the Constitution to hold an impeachment trial. Conviction would require a vote by two-thirds of that chamber.

According to the office of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, House impeachment managers will present the articles of impeachment to the Senate when the chamber returns later this month. Senators will be sworn in as jurors in the trial the next day. Senate President Pro Tempore Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, will preside.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 12 of 72

Immigration clash

The impeachment effort, initiated by Georgia Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene, is perhaps the most high-profile example of the growing clash between Democrats and Republicans on how to handle an unprecedented number of migrants at the southern border.

Tensions have only increased after Senate Republicans tanked a bipartisan border security deal last week. The agreement would have significantly overhauled U.S. immigration law by creating a temporary procedure to shut down the border during active times and raising the bar for asylum claims.

The border security deal, which was tied to a \$95 billion security package, died in the Senate after Republicans fell in line with GOP presidential front-runner Donald Trump, who has centered his campaign on stoking fears about immigration at the southern border.

The global security package passed early Tuesday without the immigration deal.

House Democrats have decried the efforts to impeach Mayorkas as political, while Republicans have argued that Mayorkas should be held accountable for what they have deemed a "crisis" at the southern border.

The first article of impeachment accuses Mayorkas of a "willful and systemic refusal to comply with the law," and the second accuses him of a breach of public trust by making false statements during congressional testimony, particularly citing statements by Mayorkas telling lawmakers the border is "secure."

Two impeachment votes

Due to House Republicans' razor-thin majority and absences last week, House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana could only afford to lose two votes during the first impeachment vote, on Feb. 6. Scalise was back in Washington on Tuesday, giving Republicans the margin they needed to overcome three members voting with Democrats.

The same GOP lawmakers who voted against the second impeachment also voted against the first — Buck, McClintock and Gallagher.

Gallagher, who was a key holdout in the effort to impeach Mayorkas, announced shortly after that he would not seek reelection.

In an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal, Gallagher explained his vote against impeachment, expressing concern about the precedent it would set.

"Creating a new, lower standard for impeachment, one without any clear limiting principle, wouldn't secure the border or hold President Biden accountable," he wrote. "It would only further pry open the Pandora's box of perpetual impeachment."

The White House said in a statement last week that impeaching Mayorkas "would be an unprecedented and unconstitutional act of political retribution that would do nothing to solve the challenges our Nation faces in securing the border."

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

Deepfakes bill clears state Senate, loses impact on 2024 primary

Bill would restrict election-related digital fakery three months before an election

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 13, 2024 5:06 PM

A bill to bar the dissemination of unlabeled "deepfakes" within 90 days of an election cleared the state Senate on Tuesday, but not before lawmakers stripped it of an emergency clause that would have changed the law in time for the 2024 primary.

Deepfakes is the blanket term attached to photos, audio and video manipulated digitally to resemble or sound like a real person, and they've already been used to target voters in the U.S. presidential election. In last month's primary election in New Hampshire, voters heard robocalls from a voice purporting to be President Joe Biden that urged them to "save their vote" for the general election.

Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, is the prime sponsor of Senate Bill 96, which she calls a "light touch"

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 13 of 72

regulation. Twenty-seven states have or are trying to enact outright bans or create regulations around deepfakes, but Larson said South Dakota should take a careful approach that creates accountability without overreaching.

There may be a need for more serious regulation as the technology evolves, she said, but deepfakes are already convincing enough to be used against any candidate.

"There are currently no laws on our books to prevent anyone from doing this," Larson said.

Larson played a phony audio clip made to sound like former President Donald Trump during the bill's committee hearing last week.

SB 96 would make it a class 1 misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail, to create and release a video, photo or audio manipulated by digital means to resemble a real person "with the intent to injure a candidate or influence the result of an election" unless it is labeled as fake.

It would also empower the attorney general or targeted candidate to "seek injunctive or other equitable relief prohibiting the dissemination of the deepfake," and allow the state Board of Elections to issue fines for breaking the law.

Those caught creating and releasing election-related deepfakes not labeled as such more than once in five years could be fined up to \$10,000 by the board, and those who do so with the intent to cause violence could be fined up to \$5,000. In all other cases, the board could issue a \$1,000 fine.

As debate on the bill commenced, Larson asked for and received support from her fellow senators to amend the bill with exemptions for media organizations that unknowingly publish or broadcast deepfakes in electoral ads. There are also exemptions for satire or parody.

Those clauses were an issue for Sen. David Wheeler, R-Huron. Satire is subjective, he said, and he also didn't like the idea that he could "pay a buddy \$5" to post a deepfake to a blog and avoid punishment.

"As long as you pay someone to publish it, it's OK," Wheeler said of the amendment.

Sen. John Wiik, R-Big Stone City, argued that it's too soon to regulate such a new technology.

"This is a new thing. And when we're entering into new territory, our gut instinct is 'we need a law,'" Wiik said.

He also objected to handing the Board of Elections the power to fine people – something it's never had, Wiik said.

The majority of senators disagreed with Wheeler and Wiik, though. They voted to back the bill 21-11, not enough to get the two-thirds majority required to make the bill law immediately with the governor's signature. It was enough, however, for Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden to invoke Joint Rule 513, which allows a bill that misses the two-thirds mark but gets majority support to be immediately reconsidered without an emergency clause.

After an amendment removing the clause was moved and seconded, SB 96 passed on a 22-10 vote. Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller, R-Rapid City, switched her vote after the amendment.

Larson's bill now moves to a House of Representatives committee. If it passes that chamber and is signed by the governor, it will take effect July 1, after the June primary election and before the November general election.

Another bill on deepfakes, SB 107, has yet to see a committee hearing. That bill, from Rapid City Republican Sen. David Johnson, is a companion bill to SB 96. It would go beyond elections to punish those who create deepfakes of any person "with the intent to defame, exploit, harass, intimidate, or sabotage the person."

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.

State revenue projections 'cautiously conservative' as COVID federal funding ends

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 13, 2024 1:05 PM

Financial experts are cautious heading into the 2025 fiscal year, expecting South Dakota to have one of its lowest increases in revenue in the last 15 years.

At the Joint Committee on Appropriations meeting Tuesday morning at the Capitol, the Legislative Research Council projected \$2.43 billion in ongoing revenue for fiscal year 2025 – a 1.1% increase in revenue from its revised fiscal year 2024 numbers.

The Bureau of Finance and Management presented a slightly lower estimate of \$2.41 billion for ongoing revenue — a 1.24% increase over its revised fiscal year 2024 numbers.

South Dakota's historical average revenue growth hovers around 4%. Both estimates project millions more in revenues than Gov. Kristi Noem's budget address in December.

The legislators on the committee use the revenue projections to set the fiscal year 2025 budget. The fate of several bills is dependent on the numbers in that budget.

"This year's forecast looks cautiously conservative with a hint of optimism," Legislative Research Council Chief Fiscal Analyst Jeff Mehlhaff told lawmakers.

It's a stark contrast from the "aggressive" projections the LRC and BFM made last year, hoping to take advantage of federal stimulus money still entering the economy. In the coming years, South Dakota will see a "return to normal" in revenue as those federal dollars exit the economy, said Mehlhaff and BFM's state economist Derek Johnson.

Mehlhaff has cautioned lawmakers for years about that effect, expecting it to hit South Dakota's revenue in 2025.

Lawmakers on the Revenue Projection Subcommittee planned to meet later Tuesday to consider ongoing revenue estimates for the remainder of the current fiscal year and fiscal year 2025, which will be a combination of the revenue estimates the two state offices presented to legislators.

The revised fiscal year 2024 revenue and the fiscal year 2025 revenue will be presented at Wednesday's Joint Committee on Appropriations meeting.

The revenue estimates factor in federal stimulus dollars circulating in the state's economy, increased wages due to a tight labor market, housing growth in the state, and inflation. Financial experts expect inflation will sit at 3% for the foreseeable future, Mehlhaff said.

Johnson added that the revenue estimates are impacted by interest rates remaining high, which can stress businesses and consumers, and farm income expected to decrease due to lower prices and increased costs – both leading to lower sales and use tax revenue, which is the biggest source of revenue for state government.

The state is seeing a decrease in year-over-year sales tax revenue due to a 0.3 percentage-point reduction in the state sales tax rate implemented last July. But adjusting for that rate change, South Dakota would still have positive revenue growth.

BFM projects a 4% increase in real sales tax revenue growth for fiscal year 2025, while LRC holds to 2.2% growth.

Lottery revenue is also slowing down, and contractor's excise tax is growing at a slower rate than recent years. The drastic decrease in revenue growth – the lowest projection since 2010 – is also driven by a decrease in unclaimed property, which reached a record high this year. The state treasurer has said the record was driven by banks catching up on unclaimed property work that went undone during office-work disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Sales tax revenue is cyclical, Mehlhaff told lawmakers, noting that there is always a decline in sales tax revenue after it peaks.

"The trend is starting to maybe peak," Mehlhaff said. "That could be next year, that could be this year. It will peak eventually. It's just what year will that federal money run out."

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.

Blaze pink may become an official hunter safety color in South Dakota

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 13, 2024 10:24 AM

PIERRE — A committee of lawmakers endorsed a bill Tuesday that would add blaze pink as a legally recognized hunter safety color.

The South Dakota House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee approved the bill in an 11-1 vote. It goes to the House of Representatives next.

Sponsored by Rep. Jessica Bahmuller, R-Alexandria, the legislation aims to provide hunters with an alternative to the traditional blaze orange. She said several fellow lawmakers have asked why she brought the bill forward.

"The answer is very simple: It's safety," Bahmuller said. "Blaze pink is not a color that occurs naturally in nature."

In South Dakota, hunters must wear orange to increase their visibility to other hunters, thereby reducing the risk of hunting accidents. Game licensees (excluding turkey, mountain lion and duck) who hunt with a firearm must wear the color.

George Vandell with the South Dakota Wildlife Federation supported the bill, saying the group hopes the effort will encourage more people, particularly women, to participate in hunting.

The bill's lone no vote came from Rep. Randy Gross, R-Elkton, who said, "I'll be voting no because I think there is value in consistency," referring to the current standard that all hunters wear orange.

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.

Thune, Rounds vote yes as U.S. Senate approves \$95 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 13, 2024 8:51 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly early Tuesday to approve a \$95 billion emergency spending package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

The measure now goes to the U.S. House, where Speaker Mike Johnson hasn't committed to putting the bill on the floor for debate and votes amid opposition to the military and humanitarian assistance from some in the right flank of his conference.

The Senate's 70-29 vote — which followed an overnight session where GOP senators opposed to the bill spoke most of the night — shows it has broad bipartisan support in at least one chamber of Congress, though it'll need House approval before it can go to President Joe Biden's desk for his signature.

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, released a statement late Monday evening indicating he doesn't approve of the Senate bill in part because it does not contain any immigration provisions, after Senate Republicans tanked a bipartisan border security deal that was also opposed by Johnson and House GOP leaders.

"The mandate of national security supplemental legislation was to secure America's own border before sending additional foreign aid around the world. It is what the American people demand and deserve," Johnson said.

"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," he added. "America deserves better than the Senate's status quo."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, supported the bill, saying it is in the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 16 of 72

best interest of U.S. national security.

"Our adversaries want America to decide that reinforcing allies and partners is not in our interest, and that investing in strategic competition is not worth it," McConnell said. "They want us to take hard-earned credibility and light it on fire."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, called on Johnson to put the bill up for a vote in that chamber and said he hoped to talk "directly" with the speaker about the legislation.

"My message is, this is a rare moment where history is looking upon the United States and seeing if we will stand up for our values, stand up to bullies like (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and do the right thing," Schumer said. "I will say to Speaker Johnson, I am confident that there's a large majority in the House who will vote for this bill."

Republicans voting to approve the bill included Arkansas' John Boozman, West Virginia's Shelley Moore Capito, Louisiana's Bill Cassidy, Maine's Susan Collins, Texas' John Cornyn, North Dakota's Kevin Cramer, Idaho's Mike Crapo, Iowa's Joni Ernst, Iowa's Chuck Grassley, North Dakota's John Hoeven, Louisiana's John Kennedy, McConnell, Kansas' Jerry Moran, Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, Idaho's Jim Risch, Utah's Mitt Romney, South Dakota's Mike Rounds, Alaska's Dan Sullivan, South Dakota's John Thune, North Carolina's Thom Tillis, Mississippi's Roger Wicker and Indiana's Todd Young.

Oregon's Jeff Merkley, Vermont independent Bernie Sanders and Vermont's Peter Welch were the three Democrats who voted against passage.

'A strong message to Putin'

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, said during debate the legislation is essential aid for U.S. allies, who have "so much at stake."

"By passing this bill, we will show our allies we stand by our word and we will help them in their time of need. We will show dictators that their flagrant attacks will not go unchecked and they cannot steamroll our allies," Murray said. "And we will show the world that American leadership is still alive and well, and that we are still a strong protector of democracy and provider of humanitarian aid."

Maine's Collins, the top Republican on the spending panel, urged her fellow GOP senators to support the legislation, saying it would invest heavily in the U.S. military and other countries that aid national security interests.

"This bill focuses on fortifying our military, rebuilding our own defense industrial base and strengthening and defending our partners and allies," Collins said.

"This legislation would send a strong message to Putin that his goal of capturing free, democratic nations will not be allowed to succeed; it would reassure our closest ally in the Middle East, Israel, that terrorists will not achieve their goal of wiping that nation off the map; and it would counter ever-growing Chinese aggression," Collins added.

Senators, she said, should "recognize the perilous times in which we are living and vote for this absolutely essential national security bill."

Some Republicans still demand border changes

Tennessee Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn argued that Congress should deal with the "crisis" at the southern border before sending assistance to allies at war.

Republicans late last year insisted that in order for their party to approve additional military assistance, Congress must address immigration policy and border security.

A group of three senators — Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford, Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy and Arizona independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema — spent months brokering a deal that was then blocked by nearly all GOP senators.

The stalemate led McConnell to call on the Senate to pass a stand-alone bill for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. Blackburn rebuked her colleagues for not renegotiating that bipartisan border security and immigration deal.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 17 of 72

"There are some of us who have said, 'Hey, wait a minute, we've got these problems at our southern border and we really can't help others until we deal with the crisis at our southern border,'" Blackburn said.

Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee opposed approving the foreign assistance package before Congress can make changes to border security and immigration policy.

"Republicans stand for border security and the rule of law," Lee said. "Regardless of where they come down on Ukraine aid, they should realize that we're forfeiting that leverage, that bargaining power tonight if we vote for this."

Lee also appeared to oppose additional aid to Ukraine, saying it wouldn't help Ukrainians.

"We're not helping any group of people whenever we prolong a war in which they're involved," Lee said. "It doesn't help the Ukrainian people to prolong their suffering in this war."

Assistance for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan

The bill would provide Ukraine with \$60 billion in assistance that would predominantly go to the U.S. departments of Defense and State, as well as the U.S. Agency for International Development.

An additional \$14 billion would provide military assistance to Israel that would flow through the U.S. Defense Department.

More than \$9 billion would go to humanitarian assistance, including emergency water, food and shelter for civilians in Gaza, Ukraine and other conflict zones around the world.

U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations throughout much of the Middle East, would get \$2.4 billion to address the attacks on shipping vessels and military ships in the Red Sea, according to a summary of the bill.

U.S. partners in the Indo-Pacific region, including Taiwan, would receive \$4.8 billion in funding through the U.S. Defense Department.

The legislation includes \$8 million for the Defense Department inspector general and \$25 million for the inspectors general offices for the State Department and USAID.

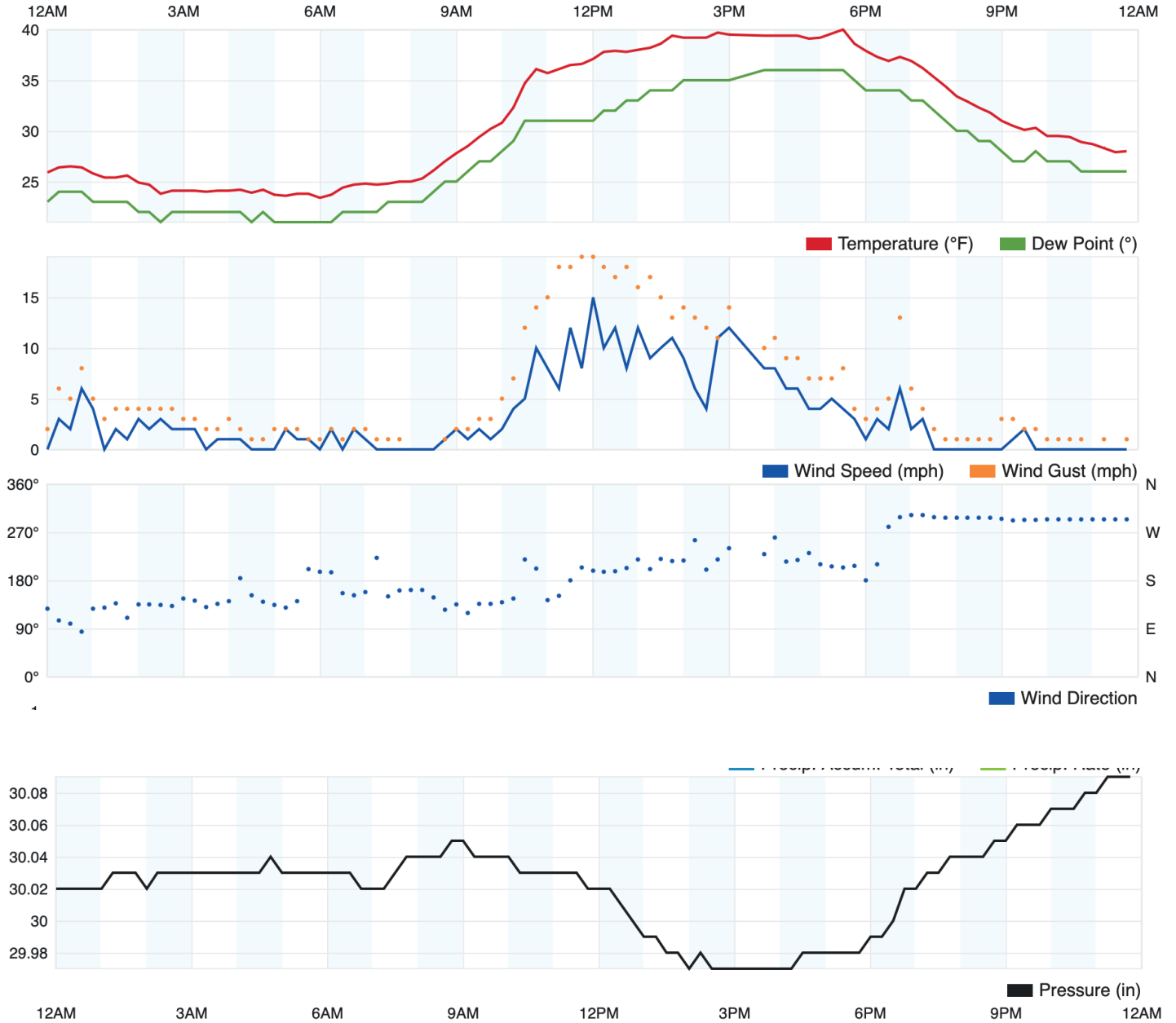
The package also includes the Fentanyl Eradication and Narcotics Deterrence, or the FEND Off Fentanyl Act. The bipartisan bill, sponsored by Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown and South Carolina Republican Sen. Tim Scott, would allow the U.S. "to apply economic and other financial sanctions to those who engage in the international trafficking of fentanyl, fentanyl precursors, or other related opioids to protect the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States."

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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 18 of 72

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 19 of 72

Wed Feb 14	Thu Feb 15	Fri Feb 16	Sat Feb 17	Sun Feb 18	Mon Feb 19	Tue Feb 20
30°F 17°F	29°F 14°F	22°F 13°F	32°F 17°F	32°F 19°F	34°F 20°F	34°F 25°F
N 9 MPH	NNW 7 MPH	N 21 MPH	W 18 MPH	NW 11 MPH	S 12 MPH	SSW 11 MPH
70%	20%					



Band of Snow Today into this Evening

February 14, 2024

3:46 AM

Developing west-river this morning moving east through the day

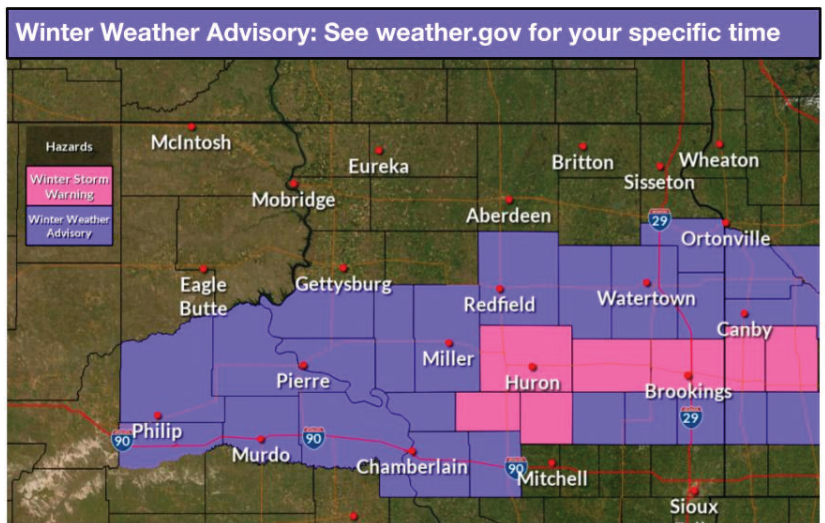
Key Messages

- Band of snow develops west river in the morning and moves east through the day.
- Narrow axis of moderate snowfall oriented west to east, with locally heavier amounts (upwards of 6 inches). A tight gradient in snow accumulations to the north and south of the line.
- Slight shifts in storm track will greatly influence peak snowfall accumulations.

NEW

Important Updates

- Expansion of the Winter weather advisory for central and eastern South Dakota.
- Slight northward shift in axis of heaviest snow in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A band of snow will migrate across western, central and eastern South Dakota Wednesday, with locally heavy snowfall amounts possible.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 20 of 72

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 40 °F at 5:25 PM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 5:55 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 11:33 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 24 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1934

Record Low: -30 in 1936

Average High: 28

Average Low: 6

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.28

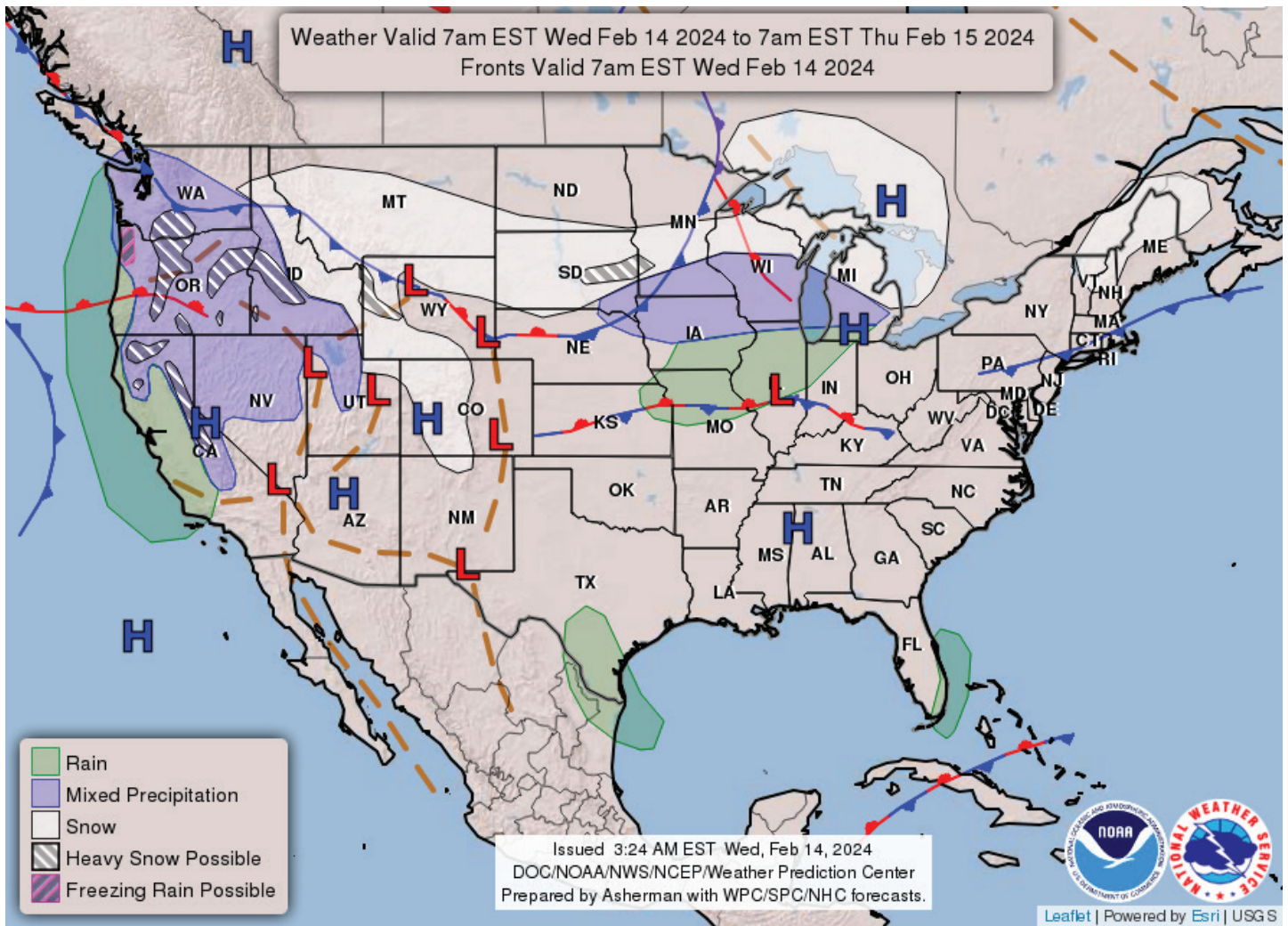
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 0.83

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 5:58:55 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32:38 am



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 21 of 72

Today in Weather History

February 14th, 1967: The heaviest snow fell in the central part of the state, with Pierre receiving 10 inches with 14 inches reported near Harrold. Elsewhere, 1 to 4 inches of snow was typical. Winds of 20 to 30 mph with gusts over 40 mph caused extensive drifting and blowing snow reducing visibilities to near zero. As a result, many schools were closed, and other activities were canceled. Temperatures of 5 to 15 degrees below zero were typical on the morning of the 15th. A farmer died in the storm near Yale, where his car stalled, and he attempted to walk.

February 14th, 1979: High winds of 50 mph or greater and snow from a half-inch to more than 14 inches moved through the state late on the 14th, with winds slowly subsiding on the 16th. Visibility was reduced to near zero at the height of the storm, and no travel was advised. Temperatures fell to 25 degrees below zero, with wind chills to 80 to 90 below on the 15th. One man suffered frostbite after being stranded in his truck for seventeen hours. In addition, power was lost at Wall due to high winds snapping power lines together.

1895: The most significant snowfall in the history of Houston, Texas, occurred on the 14th and 15th. The Houston area saw 20 inches of snow.

1899 - A great blizzard struck the eastern U.S. Washington D.C. received 20.5 inches of snow to bring their total snow depth to nearly three feet. The storm produced 36 inches of snow at Cape May NJ. (David Ludlum)

1940: A St. Valentine's Day Blizzard blankets New England with up to 18 inches of snow. Gale force winds associated with the storm strand many in downtown Boston.

1982: A "meteorological bomb" exploded in the Atlantic southeast of Newfoundland. The term is used to describe a storm that rapidly intensifies. The intense cyclone off the Atlantic coast capsized a drilling rig killing 84 persons and sank a Soviet freighter resulting in 33 more deaths. The cyclone produced 80 mph winds that whipped the water into waves fifty feet high.

1987 - A powerful storm spawned severe thunderstorms in Texas and Oklahoma, and produced heavy snow in the Rocky Mountain Region. Snowfall totals in Colorado ranged up to 27 inches at Telluride. Straight line winds gusting to 104 mph howled through Guadalupe Pass in West Texas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong northerly winds ushered arctic air into the north central U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Winds gusted to 56 mph at Rapid City SD, and reached 65 mph at Cody WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - While "Valentine's Day" was a soggy one in the Ohio Valley and the Tennessee Valley, unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Seventeen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Valentine's Day was a snowy one for many parts of the western and central U.S. Five to ten inches of snow fell across Iowa, and 6 to 12 inches of snow blanketed northern Illinois, and strong northeasterly winds accompanied the heavy snow. Air traffic came to a halt during the evening at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, where 9.7 inches of snow was reported. More than 250 traffic accidents were reported around Des Moines IA during the evening rush hour. An icestorm glazed east central sections of Illinois, causing twelve million dollars damage in Champaign County alone. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - Dallas receives 3 inches of snow, wreaking havoc with Valentine's Day flower deliveries. The greatest snowfall since 1978 caused numerous traffic accidents, power outages and flight cancellations at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

2007: Light snow fell on Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, for the first time in over 60 years. They also saw light snow on February 28th, 2019.

2010: Vancouver struggled with above average, non-winter-like temperatures during the first weekend of the 2010 Winter Olympics. In fact, Vancouver was warmer, 48 degrees, than Miami, Florida, 45 degrees!

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 22 of 72

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

TO BELIEVE IS TO ACHIEVE

A group of men was preparing to climb Mount Everest. As the final pieces of their plan fell into place, a psychologist asked if he could interview them. They agreed to his request, and he met with them at their camp.

Looking at each one of them carefully and intently, he asked them – one by one – “Tell me, will you get to the top?”

The first answered, “I certainly hope so.” The second responded, “I’ll do my best.” The third, “I’m going to give it all I’ve got.” And, the fourth said, “Yes, I will.” And he did – and he was the only one!

Our bodies can achieve what our hearts believe, and our hearts believe what comes from our minds. A lack of faith enlarges our fears and turns the fears into facts. The shadows that our thoughts create can become so dreadful that we are afraid to face them. Our worries eventually become walls that we cannot climb over or around.

Often when someone asks us to do “something” for the Lord, our minds create fears that are not based on facts, but shadows that have no substance. We have no vision of being able to accomplish new challenges and cannot see through the windows of opportunity God offers us.

Isaiah, the Prophet, boldly declared, “See, God has come to save me, I will trust in Him and not be afraid! The Lord God is my strength and my song, He has become my salvation!”

If we truly trust God, all things are possible.

Prayer: Lord, in Your grace, You bring so many opportunities and challenges into our lives that allow us to honor You. Help us to trust in You and be victorious. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: See, God has come to save me, I will trust in Him and not be afraid. The Lord God is my strength and my song, He has become my salvation. Isaiah 12:2



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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 23 of 72

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.13.24

1 3 19 25 58 20

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$457,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 32 Mins 29 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 DRAW: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.13.24

5 11 35 41 44 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.24

4 7 23 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$48,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.12.24

29 49 51 61 66 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 30 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 DRAW: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 25 of 72

News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 47, Florence-Henry 42
Alcester-Hudson 61, Freeman Academy-Marion 29
Arlington 55, Chester 46
Avon 55, Gayville-Volin High School 44
Belle Fourche 48, Sturgis Brown 43
Canistota 64, Scotland 29
Centerville 68, Dell Rapids St Mary 40
Clark-Willow Lake 62, Tiospa Zina 33
Colman-Egan 52, Iroquois-Lake Preston 45
Corsica/Stickney 39, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 33
Dakota Valley 49, Groton 36
Dupree 51, McIntosh 15
Estelline-Hendricks 53, Flandreau Indian 23
Flandreau 64, Baltic 20
Freeman 57, Ethan 52
Garretson 61, Parker 44
Great Plains Lutheran 56, North Central 35
Hamlin 54, Britton-Hecla 36
Hanson 62, Chamberlain 28
Harding County 64, Philip 51
Herreid-Selby 51, Potter County 46
Highmore-Harrold 38, Ipswich 24
Hill City 64, Custer 49
Hot Springs 39, Edgemont 33
Irene-Wakonda 43, Bridgewater-Emery 32
James Valley Christian 54, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 39
Lakota Tech 69, Crow Creek Tribal School 53
Langford 34, Aberdeen Christian 29
Lennox 56, Beresford 39
Marty 68, St Francis 46
Milbank 50, Madison 39
Miller 50, Faulkton 45
Mobridge-Pollock 69, Stanley County 27
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 60, Bon Homme 52
New Underwood 35, Newell 31
Northwestern 41, Redfield 36
Pierre 61, Brookings 39
Rapid City Central 64, Douglas 25
Sioux Falls Christian 53, Yankton 31
Sioux Falls Lincoln 39, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 33, OT
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 44, Harrisburg 31
Sioux Falls Washington 50, Mitchell 34
Sioux Valley 53, Castlewood 38

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 26 of 72

Sisseton 65, Deuel 26
Spearfish 52, Rapid City Christian 23
Sully Buttes 61, Sunshine Bible Academy 24
Todd County 59, Little Wound 54
Viborg-Hurley 55, Menno 33
Wagner 57, Vermillion 54
Wakpala 67, McLaughlin 56
Wall 66, Lead-Deadwood 23
Watertown 55, Aberdeen Central 46
Wessington Springs 58, Kimball-White Lake 37
West Central 48, Canton 39
White River 52, Jones County 45
Winner 55, Platte-Geddes 40

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 75, Langford 20
Alcester-Hudson 69, Freeman Academy-Marion 53
Brandon Valley 50, Tea 42
Bridgewater-Emery 77, Irene-Wakonda 49
Burke 70, Colome 65
Chester 59, Arlington 41
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 79, St Francis 49
Clark-Willow Lake 59, Tiospa Zina 49
Corsica/Stickney 52, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 40
Dell Rapids St Mary 72, Centerville 52
Deuel 60, Sisseton 51
Dupree 80, McIntosh 41
Ethan 49, Freeman 45
Faith 60, Lemmon High School 50
Faulkton 67, Miller 48
Flandreau 62, Baltic 52
Garretson 63, Parker 58
Gayville-Volin High School 55, Avon 52
Great Plains Lutheran 68, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 41
Hamlin 90, Britton-Hecla 31
Hanson 62, Chamberlain 45
Harrisburg 63, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 42
Hot Springs 43, St Thomas More 38
Howard 63, Canistota 50
James Valley Christian 63, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 61
Lakota Tech 79, Crow Creek Tribal School 62
Lennox 78, Beresford 42
Little Wound 56, Bennett County 37
McCook Central-Montrose 68, Tri-Valley 60
Mitchell 60, Sioux Falls Washington 55
Mitchell Christian 68, Colman-Egan 63
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 73, Bon Homme 61
Northwestern 63, Redfield 37
Pierre 54, Brookings 50, OT
Pine Ridge 79, Crazy Horse 43

Rapid City Central 53, Douglas 45
Rapid City Christian 84, Spearfish 76
Sioux Falls Christian 59, Yankton 44
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 56, Sioux Falls Lincoln 55
Sioux Valley 48, Castlewood 41
Stanley County 62, Mobridge-Pollock 59
Sturgis Brown 70, Belle Fourche 36
Takini 74, Bison 57
Tri-State, N.D. 65, Wilmot 48
Vermillion 71, Wagner 51
Viborg-Hurley 75, Menno 29
Wall 75, Lead-Deadwood 50
Watertown 74, Aberdeen Central 71
Wessington Springs 54, Kimball-White Lake 28
West Central 76, Canton 41
Winner 50, Platte-Geddes 46
Wolsey-Wessington 60, Warner 41

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

Displaced Palestinians leave one of Gaza's main hospitals after weeks of being isolated by fighting

By NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians have begun evacuating the main hospital in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis, according to videos shared by medics on Wednesday. Weeks of heavy fighting had isolated the medical facility and claimed the lives of several people inside it.

The war between Israel and Hamas, now in its fifth month, has devastated Gaza's health sector, with less than half of its hospitals even partially functioning as scores of people are killed and wounded in daily bombardments. Israel accuses the militants of using hospitals and other civilian buildings as cover.

Khan Younis is the main target of a rolling ground offensive that Israel has said will soon be expanded to Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah. Some 1.4 million people — over half the territory's population — are crammed into tent camps and overflowing apartments and shelters in the town on the Egyptian border.

The videos showed dozens of Palestinians carrying sacks of their belongings and making their way out of the Nasser Hospital complex. A doctor wearing green hospital scrubs walked ahead of the crowd, some of whom were carrying white flags.

The Israeli military ordered the evacuation of the hospital and surrounding areas last month. But as in previous instances, medics said patients were unable to safely leave or be relocated, and thousands of people displaced by fighting elsewhere remained there. Palestinians say nowhere is safe in the besieged territory, as Israel continues to carry out strikes in all parts of it.

The Gaza Health Ministry said last week that Israeli snipers on surrounding buildings were preventing people from entering or leaving the hospital. It said 10 people have been killed inside the complex over the past week, including three shot and killed on Tuesday.

The ministry says around 300 medical staff were treating some 450 patients, including people wounded in strikes. It says 10,000 displaced people were sheltering in the facility. It said Israel had ordered the evacuation of the displaced people but said the medics and patients could stay.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The war erupted after Hamas launched a surprise attack into Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 captive. Over 100 hostages were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November in return for 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 28 of 72

Israel responded to the attack by launching one of the deadliest and most destructive air and ground offensives in recent history. At least 28,576 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

That includes over 100 bodies brought to hospitals in the last 24 hours. Over 68,000 people have been wounded in the war, including around 11,000 in need of evacuation for urgent treatment, according to the ministry.

Around 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes, large areas in northern Gaza have been completely destroyed and a humanitarian crisis has left a quarter of the population starving.

The fighting also threatens to trigger a wider conflict. Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group has traded fire with Israeli forces on a daily basis along the border. A rocket attack on Wednesday wounded at least eight people when one of the projectiles hit a home in the northern Israeli town of Safed.

The United States, which has provided crucial military and diplomatic support to Israel, has been working with Qatar and Egypt to try and broker a cease-fire and the return of the remaining 130 hostages, around a fourth of whom are believed to be dead.

The negotiators held talks in Cairo on Tuesday that were attended by CIA chief William Burns and David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, but there were no signs of a breakthrough.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until "total victory" over Hamas and the return of all the hostages. Hamas has said it will not release all the captives until Israel ends its offensive, withdraws from Gaza and releases a large number of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants. Netanyahu has rejected those demands, calling them "delusional."

Ukrainian military says it sank a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's military said Wednesday it sank a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea using naval drones, a report that has not been confirmed by Russian authorities.

The Caesar Kunikov amphibious ship sank near Alupka, a city on the southern edge of the Crimean Peninsula that Moscow annexed in 2014, Ukraine's General Staff said. It said the ship can carry 87 crew members.

Sinking the vessel would be another embarrassing blow for the Russian Black Sea fleet and a significant success for Ukraine 10 days before the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

Ukraine has moved onto the defensive in the war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel, but has kept up its strikes behind the largely static 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line.

It is the second time in two weeks that Ukrainian forces have said they sank a Russian vessel in the Black Sea. Last week, they published a video that they said showed naval drones assaulting the Russian missile-armed corvette Ivanovets.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence, known by its Ukrainian acronym GUR, said its special operations unit "Group 13" sank the Caesar Kunikov using Magura V5 sea drones on Wednesday. Explosions damaged the vessel on its left side, it said, though a heavily edited video it released was unclear. The same unit also struck on Feb. 1, according to officials.

The private intelligence firm Ambrey said the video showed that at least three drones conducted the attack and that the ship likely sank after listing heavily on its port side.

The Caesar Kunikov probably was part of the Russian fleet escorting merchant vessels that call at Crimean ports, Ambrey said.

Ukrainian attacks on Russian aircraft and ships in the Black Sea have helped push Moscow's naval forces back from the coast, allowing Kyiv to increase crucial exports of grain and other goods through its southern ports.

A new generation of unmanned weapons systems has become a centerpiece of the war, both at sea and on land.

The Magura V5 drone, which looks like a sleek black speedboat, was unveiled last year. It reportedly has

a top speed of 42 knots (80 kph, 50 mph) and a payload of 320 kilograms (700 pounds).

The Russian military did not immediately comment on the claimed sinking, saying only that it downed six Ukrainian drones over the Black Sea overnight.

Caesar Kunikov, for whom the Russian vessel was named, was a World War II hero of the Soviet Union for his exploits and died on Feb. 14, the same day as the Ukrainian drone strike, in 1943.

In other developments, nine Ukrainian civilians were killed and at least 25 people wounded by Russian shelling over the previous 24 hours, the president's office said Wednesday.

Defense Minister Subianto leads in early, unofficial count of Indonesia's presidential race

By NINIEK KARMINI and EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto had a strong lead in an early, unofficial tally of Indonesia's presidential race Wednesday, suggesting the former general may be able to avoid a runoff.

The 72-year-old candidate has presented himself as an heir to immensely popular sitting President Joko Widodo, whose son he chose as running mate.

He's also a link to the brutal period of dictatorship that ended just over 25 years ago, when he served as a special forces commander in a unit linked to torture and disappearances, allegations Subianto denies.

Widodo's successor will inherit an economy with impressive growth and ambitious infrastructure projects, including the ongoing transfer of the nation's capital from congested Jakarta to the frontier island of Borneo at a staggering cost exceeding \$30 billion.

The election also has high stakes for the United States and China, since Indonesia has a huge domestic market, natural resources like nickel and palm oil, and diplomatic influence with its Southeast Asian neighbors.

Widodo's rise from a riverside slum to the presidency has shown the vibrancy of Indonesia's democracy in a region rife with authoritarian regimes.

But with a leading candidate linked to a former dictator, and Widodo's son on the ballot, some observers fear that that democracy is eroding.

According to the early, unofficial tally conducted by polling agency Kompas Search and Development, Subianto had a 58% lead with 70% of the vote counted in polling places sampled.

The quick count is based on the actual vote count at a sample of polling stations across Indonesia. The official count may not be finished up to a month, but quick counts have provided an accurate picture of the results of all four presidential elections held in Indonesia since it began direct voting in 2004.

To avoid a runoff against his rivals — two former provincial governors, Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo — Subianto will need more than 50% of all votes cast and at least 20% in each of the country's provinces.

Indonesians voted on Wednesday in an election that took just six hours. The logistics of the vote across the tropical nation's 17,000 islands inhabited by 270 million people were daunting: Ballot boxes and ballots were transported by boats, motorcycles, horses and on foot in some of the more far-flung locations.

Aside from the presidency, some 20,000 national, provincial and district parliamentary posts were contested by tens of thousands of candidates in one of the world's largest elections, which authorities said concluded with no major problems. About 10,000 aspirants from 18 political parties eyed the national parliament's 580 seats alone.

Voters interviewed by The Associated Press expressed hope their next leader would help them achieve greater prosperity in a country where nearly a tenth of the population still lives in poverty.

"I hope Indonesia can progress better and that I did not vote for the wrong person," said Indra Nurohim, a 17-year-old high school student and first-time voter. "I hope we will have a better government."

The official vote tally is a laborious process that could take about a month, but early results based on

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 30 of 72

sampling from registered private polling and survey groups are considered a reliable indicator of the final results. The presidential race will go to a runoff on June 26 if no candidate gets more than 50% of the votes.

Subianto, the oldest presidential candidate at 72, lost in two previous runs to Widodo but was the front-runner in independent surveys. He picked Widodo's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as his vice-presidential running mate in a move that could shore up his chances given the outgoing president's popularity.

Raka, 36, was allowed to run when the Constitutional Court made an exception to the minimum age requirement of 40. The court was then headed by Widodo's brother-in-law, who was removed by an ethics panel for not recusing himself, and Widodo was accused of favoritism and nepotism.

Critics have accused Widodo of trying to build a political dynasty despite his being the first president to emerge outside the political and military elite since the 1998 end of the dictatorial rule of Suharto, characterized by widespread human rights violations, plunder and political unrest.

Subianto, a former lieutenant general who married one of Suharto's daughters, was a longtime commander in the army special forces, called Kopassus. He was dishonorably discharged in 1998 after Kopassus forces kidnapped and tortured political opponents of Suharto.

Of at least 22 activists kidnapped that year, 13 remain missing to this day, and their families protest weekly outside the presidential palace demanding the activists be accounted for. Subianto never faced a trial and denied any involvement, although several of his men were tried and convicted.

During the campaign period that concluded last weekend, Subianto and his strategists used AI and social media platforms like TikTok to soften his image by portraying him as a cuddly grandfather to his youthful running mate. Rejected by human rights activists, he danced on the campaign stage and promised to generate nearly 20 million jobs in his first term if elected.

Baswedan, the former head of an Islamic university, served as governor of Jakarta until last year. A former Fulbright scholar, Baswedan was education and culture minister from 2014 to 2016, when Widodo removed him from the Cabinet after accusing him of failing to address problems by thousands of students affected by forest fires.

Baswedan opposes Widodo's plan to move the Indonesian capital from Jakarta to Nusantara on Borneo island, which involves constructing government buildings and residential enclaves by clearing lush tropical rainforests.

In an interview with the AP last month, he said democracy in Indonesia is under threat, given Subianto's choice of the president's son as running mate.

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

Pranowo is the ruling party candidate but does not have Widodo's support. He was a national legislator for the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle for 10 years before being elected in 2013 for the first of two terms as governor of vote-rich Central Java region.

While governor, Pranowo refused to allow Israel to participate in the Under-20 FIFA World Cup to be held in his province. FIFA subsequently dropped Indonesia as host of the games, angering Indonesian soccer fans and Widodo.

Israel and Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, do not have diplomatic ties.

Under Widodo, Indonesia saw a period of remarkable growth averaging 5% annually, except in 2020, when the economy contracted due to the coronavirus pandemic.

His economic roadmap, called "Golden Indonesia 2045," projects Indonesia becoming one of the world's top five economies with GDP of up to \$9 trillion, exactly a century after it won independence from Dutch colonizers.

Blasts hit a natural gas pipeline in Iran and an official says it was an act of sabotage

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Explosions struck a natural gas pipeline in Iran early on Wednesday, with an official blaming the blasts on a “sabotage and terrorist action” in the country as tensions remain high in the Middle East amid Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Details were scarce, though the blasts hit a natural gas pipeline running from Iran’s western Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province up north to cities on the Caspian Sea. The roughly 1,270-kilometer (790-mile) pipeline begins in Asaluyeh, a hub for Iran’s offshore South Pars gas field.

Saeed Aghli, the manager of Iran’s gas network control center, told Iranian state television that a “sabotage and terrorist” action caused explosions along several areas of the line.

There are no known insurgent groups operating in that province, home to the Bakhtiari, a branch of Iran’s Lur ethnic group. Aghli did not name any suspects in the blasts.

Iran’s Oil Minister Javad Owji, also speaking to state TV, compared the attack to a series of mysterious and unclaimed assault on gas pipelines in 2011 — including around the anniversary of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution. Tehran marked the 45th anniversary of the revolution on Sunday.

“The goal that the enemies were pursuing were to cut the gas in the major provinces of the country and it did not happen,” Owji said. “Except for the number of villages that were near the gas transmission lines, no province suffered a cut.”

In the past, Arab separatists in southwestern Iran have claimed attacks against oil pipelines. However, attacks elsewhere in Iran against such infrastructure are rare.

Since the revolution, Iran has faced low-level separatist unrest from Kurds in the country’s northwest, the Baluch in the east and Arabs in the southwest.

However, tensions have risen in recent years as Iran faces an economy hobbled by international sanctions over its nuclear program. The country has faced years of mass demonstrations, most recently in 2022 over the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman who died in custody after her arrest allegedly over how she wore her mandatory headscarf.

Meanwhile, Israel has carried out attacks in Iran that have predominantly targeted its nuclear program. On Tuesday, the head of the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog warned that Iran is “not entirely transparent” regarding its atomic program, particularly after an official who once led Tehran’s program announced the Islamic Republic has all the pieces for a weapon “in our hands.”

Tensions over Iran’s nuclear program comes as groups that Tehran is arming in the region — Lebanon’s militant Hezbollah and Yemen’s Houthi rebels — have launched attacks targeting Israel over the war in Gaza. The Houthis continue to attack commercial shipping in the region, sparking repeated airstrikes from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Democrat Tom Suozzi wins New York race to succeed George Santos in Congress

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

Democrat Tom Suozzi won a special election for a U.S. House seat in New York on Tuesday, coming out on top in a politically mixed suburban district in a victory that could lift his party’s hopes heading into a fiercely contested presidential election later this year.

Suozzi defeated Republican Mazi Pilip to take the seat that was left vacant when George Santos, also a Republican, was expelled from Congress. The victory marks a return to Washington for Suozzi, who represented the district for three terms before giving it up to run, unsuccessfully, for governor.

It’s unclear how long his next stint on Capitol Hill will last, as a redistricting process unfolds that could reshape the district. But for now the result narrows the already slim Republican majority in the House. And it provides Democrats a much-needed win in New York City’s Long Island suburbs, where the GOP

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 32 of 72

showed surprising strength in recent elections.

Suozi stressed his campaign trail theme of bipartisan cooperation in a victory speech that was briefly interrupted by protestors criticizing his support of Israel.

"There are divisions in our country where people can't even talk to each other. All they can do is yell and scream at each other," he said, acknowledging the demonstrators. "That's not the answer to the problems we face in our country. The answer is to try and bring people together to try and find common ground."

"The way to make our country a better place is to try and find common ground. It is not easy to do. It is hard to do," Suozzi told supporters at his election night party in Woodbury.

Suozi's win will likely reassure Democrats that they can perform well in suburban communities across the nation, which will be critical to the party's efforts to retake control of the U.S. House and reelect President Joe Biden.

Still, forecasting for November could be complicated given that turnout, already expected to be low given the abbreviated race, was potentially hampered by a storm that dumped several inches of snow on the district on election day. Both campaigns offered voters free rides to the polls as plows cleared wet slush from the roads.

In the short term, the result could be a factor in ultratight votes in the House, where Republicans hold just a 219-212 majority. In an example of how important one seat can be, House Republicans voted Tuesday night to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas by a single vote, punishing the Biden administration over its border policies.

At a polling place on Long Island earlier in the day, 59-year-old Eliezer Sarrias said he cast a ballot for Suozzi because the former congressman appeared more able to work with the opposing party to reach agreements and end congressional gridlock.

"The constituents elect our officials to perform a certain job, and we've really had a very stagnant congressional year," Sarrias said after voting at a middle school in Levittown. "Even with the migrants now, we had bipartisan deal in Congress and suddenly it evaporated, like, why? Do we really need to wait for another president to come, or aren't the issues that are pressing to everyone important at the moment?"

On the campaign trail, Suozzi, a political centrist, leaned into some of the same issues that Republicans have used to bash Democrats, calling for tougher U.S. border policies and a rollback of New York laws that made it tougher for judges to detain criminal suspects awaiting trial.

The unusual midwinter election became necessary after Santos was ousted by his colleagues in December, partway through his first term.

Santos won office in what had been a reliably Democratic district partly by falsely portraying himself as an American success story — a son of working class immigrants who made himself into a wealthy Wall Street dealmaker. But many elements of Santos' life story were later exposed as fabrications, and he was indicted on multiple charges including allegations he stole money from Republican donors. He has pleaded not guilty.

With no time for a primary before the special election, Democrats nominated Suozzi, a political centrist well known to voters in the district.

Republican leaders turned to Pilip, a relatively unknown candidate with a unique personal backstory. Born in Ethiopia, she migrated to Israel as part of Operation Solomon and served in Israel's defense forces before eventually moving to the U.S. and winning a seat in Nassau County's legislature in 2021.

Pilip conceded the race and said she congratulated Suozzi in a phone call Tuesday night.

"Yes we lost, but it doesn't mean we are going to end here," Pilip told supporters at her election watch party.

Biden's campaign manager was quick to link the victory to the upcoming presidential race: "Donald Trump lost again tonight. When Republicans run on Trump's extreme agenda — even in a Republican-held seat — voters reject them," Julie Chavez Rodriguez said.

Trump responded to the result in a post on his social media site Truth Social, calling Pilip a "very foolish woman" who was "running in a race where she didn't endorse me and tried to 'straddle the fence,' when she would have easily WON if she understood anything about MODERN DAY politics in America."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 33 of 72

The short campaign was dominated by issues — abortion, immigration and crime — that are expected to shape crucial suburban races nationwide in this year's battle for control of Congress.

Despite being an international migrant once herself, Pilip hammered Suozzi over an influx of asylum-seekers into New York City, accusing Democrats and Biden of failing to secure the U.S. southern border.

In response, Suozzi spent much of the campaign talking about the need to strengthen border policy, pointing out times when he bucked his own party on the issue while in Congress. In the final stretch, Suozzi said he would support a temporary closure of the border to slow the number of arrivals, similar to comments that Biden has made.

Suozzi counterattacked Pilip on abortion, saying she couldn't be trusted to protect abortion rights in places like New York where it remains legal.

Pilip said she is personally against abortion but wouldn't force her beliefs others and would oppose any attempt by Congress to impose a nationwide ban. She has also said mifepristone, an abortion medication, should be available nationally.

Both candidates expressed unwavering support for Israel in its conflict with Hamas, even appearing side-by-side in an unusual joint event intended to convey solidarity.

Democrats and Republicans will get a chance to fight over the congressional seat again in November's general election, though the battleground may look different.

That's because the state's congressional districts are set to be redrawn again in the next few months because of a court order. Democrats, who dominate state government, are widely expected to try to craft more favorable lines for their candidates.

New York is expected to play an outsize role in determining control of Congress this year, with competitive races in multiple contests in the suburban and exurban rings around New York City.

Greek lawmakers are debating a landmark bill to legalize same-sex marriage. Here's what it means

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Lawmakers begin a debate Wednesday on a landmark bill to legalize same-sex marriage that would make Greece the first Orthodox Christian country to do so.

The Valentine's Day session in parliament follows vocal opposition and protests from the church but also a shift in public opinion which — while still divided — is narrowly supportive of the reform.

If approved, the bill would grant same-sex couples full parental rights but not allow male partners to seek children born in Greece through surrogacy.

Here's a look at the reform and why it's happening now.

THE SLOW ROAD TO CHANGE

The journey toward legalizing same-sex civil marriage in Greece has been long and contentious, with governments in the past shying away from a confrontation with the Orthodox Church.

Civil partnerships for gay couples were made legal in 2015, with conservatives at the time opposing the initiative. Promises to extend those rights were repeatedly deferred as the country emerged from a severe financial crisis followed by the pandemic.

Many same-sex couples, meanwhile, chose to tie the knot in one of more than a dozen other European Union countries which already have marriage equality laws, bypassing restrictions they faced at home.

Early in his second term, center-right Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is currently pushing through a series of difficult reforms, that also include tackling fan violence in sport and controversially ending an official state monopoly on higher education.

WHY IS THE CHURCH SO STRONGLY OPPOSED?

The Greek church's opposition to the marriage bill has been emphatic.

The governing Holy Synod of senior bishops sent letters to all lawmakers outlining its objections. A circular with similar wording was read out during Sunday services at all Orthodox churches in the country,

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 34 of 72

and religious groups have staged public protests against the proposal.

The church regards same-sex marriage as a threat to the traditional family model, arguing that support for that model could help address the declining birth rate in many European countries.

Support for that view in Greece has been expressed by other Orthodox countries, significantly including the Ecumenical Patriarchate which is based in Istanbul, Turkey.

Orthodox-majority countries, where churches take pride in continuity of tradition, are all located in eastern and southern Europe where public acceptance of gay rights has been broadly more apprehensive than in western Europe.

IS THE REFORM FINISHED?

Campaigners for LGBTQ+ rights are calling the bill a milestone reform, as same-sex couples would for the first time be recognized as a family unit.

Partners who are not the biological parents of the couple's children would have to seek guardianship through adoption, which is more time-consuming than the process in many other European countries.

Transgender activists say they are likely to remain in legal limbo and are seeking additional changes to family law.

A RARE POLITICAL AGREEMENT

The political landscape surrounding same-sex marriage is complicated, but also offers a rare moment of consensus at a time when politicians across the European Union are keen to mark out their differences ahead of bloc-wide elections in June.

The Mitsotakis government is facing dissent from inside his own party and needs opposition votes for the bill to pass.

Many from the opposition are keen to back the reform. Stefanos Kasselakis, the opposition leader, last year became the first openly gay leader of a major Greek political party. Left-wing and centrist votes should provide a comfortable majority.

Political parties on the far-right are aligned with religious protests. They are unlikely to topple the bill but are seeking to draw support away from Mitsotakis' traditional conservative base of voters.

The vote on the same-sex marriage bill is due Thursday.

Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day fall on the same day this year. Here's what you need to know

By HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

Feb. 14 is a holiday heavyweight this year due to a calendar collision of events.

Yes, it's Valentine's Day, the fixed annual celebration of love and friendship, marked by cute couples, eager elementary school students — and critics who deride its commercialization. But it also happens to be Ash Wednesday, the solemn day of fasting and reflection that signals the start of Christianity's most penitent season.

WHY IS ASH WEDNESDAY ON VALENTINE'S DAY THIS YEAR?

Ash Wednesday is not a fixed date. Its timing is tied to Easter Sunday, and for most Christians, Easter will fall on March 31 this year.

Easter also moves annually, swinging between March 22 and April 25 based on a calendar calculation involving the moon.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops lays it out: "Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon, which is the first full moon occurring either on or after the spring equinox (March 21). ... To find the date for Ash Wednesday, we go back six weeks which leads to the First Sunday of Lent and four days before that is Ash Wednesday."

This year, that happens to be Feb. 14.

WHAT HAPPENS ON ASH WEDNESDAY?

Not all Christians observe Ash Wednesday. For those who do, they typically attend an Ash Wednesday church service, where a priest or other minister draws a cross — or at least what is intended to look like

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 35 of 72

one — of ashes on their forehead. The distribution of ashes underscores human mortality, among other themes.

It's an obligatory day of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. The abstinence restrictions are continued on Fridays during Lent, which is the period of repentance and penance leading up to Holy Week observances — most significantly their belief in the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.

WHERE DO THE ASHES COME FROM?

Typically, the ashes are from the palms used on Palm Sunday, which falls a week before Easter, according to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Ashes can be purchased, but some churches make their own by burning the palms from prior years. For example, several parishes and schools in the Chicago Catholic Archdiocese plan to hold palm burning ceremonies this year.

CAN CATHOLICS CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY ON ASH WEDNESDAY?

In addition to the candy heart and chocolate-fueled secular celebrations, Feb. 14 is also the Feast of St. Valentine. But Ash Wednesday with its fasting and abstinence requirements is far more significant and should be prioritized, said Catholic Bishop Richard Henning of Providence, Rhode Island, in the diocese's official newspaper. His predecessor shared a similar message in 2018.

"Ash Wednesday is the much higher value and deserves the full measure of our devotion," he said. "I ask with all respect that we maintain the unique importance of Ash Wednesday. If you would like to wine and dine your Valentine, please do so on the Tuesday before. February 13 is Mardi Gras, 'Fat Tuesday,' a perfect day to feast and celebrate!"

WHO WAS ST. VALENTINE?

The history of Valentine's Day and St. Valentine is a bit murky, but the holiday began as a liturgical feast day for a third-century Christian martyr, according to Lisa Bitel, a history and religion professor at the University of Southern California.

In the Conversation, her article titled, "The 'real' St. Valentine was no patron of love," explains there may have been more than one St. Valentine executed for their faith in the same time period, but none of them appear to have been romantics. The emphasis on love appears to have come later.

Harvey Weinstein is appealing 2020 rape conviction. New York's top court to hear arguments

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Nearly four years after Harvey Weinstein was convicted of rape and sent to prison, New York's highest court will hear arguments Wednesday in his quest to overturn the landmark #MeToo-era verdict.

Weinstein's lawyers are asking the state's Court of Appeals in Albany to dismiss the disgraced movie mogul's 2020 conviction, arguing the judge trampled his right to a fair trial by "succumbing to the pressure" of America's reckoning with sexual misconduct perpetrated by powerful figures.

The judge, James Burke, allowed testimony from three women whose allegations weren't part of the case and ruled that prosecutors could confront Weinstein about other, unrelated misbehavior if he had testified, which he declined to do.

"What we're arguing is that there should not be a different set of rules for an individual in society who becomes vilified," Weinstein's lawyer, Arthur Aidala, said. There can't be "the Weinstein rule that just applies to that little sliver of society that everyone decides to really hate," he said.

Weinstein, 71, was convicted February 24, 2020 of a criminal sex act for forcibly performing oral sex on a TV and film production assistant in 2006, and rape in the third degree for an attack on an aspiring actress in 2013. He was sentenced to 23 years in prison and is incarcerated at the Mohawk Correctional Facility, a state prison about 100 miles (161 kilometers) northwest of Albany.

Weinstein was acquitted at the same Manhattan trial of first-degree rape and two counts of predatory

sexual assault stemming from actor Annabella Sciorra's allegations of a mid-1990s rape. The Associated Press does not generally identify people alleging sexual assault unless they consent to be named; Sciorra has spoken publicly about her allegations.

Last year, Weinstein was convicted in Los Angeles of raping and sexually assaulting an Italian actor and model, who said he appeared uninvited at her hotel room door during a film festival there in 2013. He was sentenced to an additional 16 years in prison in that case, meaning he'd still be locked up even if the Court of Appeals were to rule in his favor.

Weinstein maintains his innocence. He contends any sexual activity was consensual. He is not expected to attend Wednesday's arguments, which pertain only to the New York case, but may monitor the court's livestream from prison. The court is not likely to rule immediately.

The New York Court of Appeals agreed last year to take Weinstein's case after an intermediate appellate court upheld his conviction. Weinstein's lawyers want a new trial, but only for the criminal sexual act charge. They argue the rape charge can't be retried because it involves alleged conduct outside the statute of limitations.

Allegations against Weinstein, the once powerful and feared studio boss behind such Oscar winners as "Pulp Fiction" and "Shakespeare in Love," ushered in the #MeToo movement. His New York trial drew intense publicity, with protesters chanting "rapist" outside the courthouse.

In their appeal, Weinstein's lawyers argued that Burke swayed the trial's outcome with repeated rulings favorable to prosecutors, including decisions that "overwhelmed" the trial with "excessive, random, and highly dubious prior bad act evidence." Burke's term expired at the end of 2022. He was not reappointed and is no longer a judge.

Had Weinstein testified, Burke ruled that prosecutors would've been able to question him about more than two-dozen alleged acts of brutish behavior over 30 years, including whether he'd stranded a colleague in a foreign country or screamed at restaurant staff while demanding a late-night meal.

Weinstein's lawyers argued Burke's rulings went beyond what's normally allowed — detailing motive, opportunity, intent or a common scheme or plan — and essentially put the ex-studio boss on trial for crimes he wasn't charged with and hadn't had an opportunity to defend himself against. That evidence would have served "only to make the jury hate Weinstein," his lawyers said.

Rules vary by state on calling witnesses to testify and allowing prosecutors to present evidence about "prior bad acts" aside from the actual charges. New York's rules are among the more restrictive.

They also challenged Burke's refusal to remove a juror who had written a novel involving predatory older men, as well as his decision to allow prosecutors to have an expert on victim behavior and rape myths testify while rejecting testimony on similar subjects from defense experts.

A five-judge panel in New York's intermediate appellate court ruled unanimously in 2022 that Burke had "providently exercised" his discretion, though some of the judges had previously raised doubts about his conduct. During oral arguments, Judge Sallie Manzanet-Daniels said that Burke had let prosecutors pile on with "incredibly prejudicial testimony" from additional witnesses.

Aidala said he wants the Court of Appeals to remind the state's trial courts "that a defendant cannot be tried based on his character — but must be tried based on the conduct for which he has been accused."

Judge to consider whether to remove District Attorney Fani Willis from Georgia election case

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A Georgia judge who is deciding whether to toss Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis off of her election interference case against former President Donald Trump has set a hearing for Thursday that is expected to focus on details of Willis' personal relationship with a special prosecutor she hired.

As soon as allegations of an inappropriate romantic relationship between Willis and attorney Nathan Wade surfaced last month, speculation about the future of the case began to swirl. Even if the prosecu-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 37 of 72

tion isn't derailed, the upheaval has certainly created an unwanted distraction for Willis and her team and could undermine public confidence in the validity of the case.

The defense attorney who first exposed the relationship says it creates a conflict of interest and is asking the judge to toss out the indictment and to prohibit Willis, Wade and their offices from further involvement in the case. In a response filed earlier this month, Willis acknowledged a "personal relationship" but said it has no bearing on the serious criminal charges she's pursuing and asked the judge to dismiss the motions seeking her disqualification without a hearing.

The law says "disqualification can occur if evidence is produced demonstrating an actual conflict or the appearance of one," Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee said during a hearing Monday. Because he believes "it's possible that the facts alleged by the defendant could result in a disqualification, I think an evidentiary hearing must occur to establish the record on those core allegations."

The highly anticipated hearing, like all courtroom proceedings in the case, will be streamed live on the judge's YouTube channel, as well as by news outlets.

As he makes another run for the White House, the former president has exploited the revelation of the relationship, repeatedly referring to Wade as Willis' "lover" or "boyfriend" in an attempt to cast doubt on Willis' motivations and the legitimacy of the case. Other Republicans have piled on, using the claims to justify calls for investigations into or sanctions against Willis, an elected Democrat who's up for reelection this year.

The original motion was filed by former Trump campaign staffer and onetime White House aide Michael Roman, but Trump and several other co-defendants have joined with motions of their own.

Roman's motion says that Willis and Wade were romantically involved when she hired him in November 2021 to manage an investigation into whether Trump and others committed any crimes as they tried to overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia. That investigation led to the indictment in August of Trump and 18 others who are accused of participating in a sprawling illegal scheme to keep Trump in office.

Four of the people charged have already pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors. Trump and the remaining 14 have all pleaded not guilty.

Willis has paid Wade more than \$650,000 for his work and then profited personally when Wade used that money to take her on expensive vacations, including cruises in the Bahamas and trips to Aruba, Belize and Napa Valley, Roman alleges. His filing also questions Wade's qualifications for the job, saying there's no evidence he had ever prosecuted a felony or handled a racketeering case.

Just under a week after Roman's motion was filed, Willis used a speech at a historic Black church in Atlanta to forcefully defend Wade's qualifications and her own decision to hire him. She didn't address the allegations of a relationship in that speech, waiting nearly three more weeks to acknowledge a "personal relationship" in a court filing.

Attached to that filing was a sworn statement from Wade saying that the pair only began that personal relationship in 2022, once he was already working as a special prosecutor. His statement also said that travel expenses for him and Willis were "roughly divided equally between us" and that Willis "received no funds or personal financial gain" from his position as a special prosecutor.

McAfee said Thursday's hearing needs to explore "whether a relationship existed, whether that relationship was romantic or non-romantic in nature, when it formed and whether it continues." Those questions are only relevant, he said, "in combination with the question of the existence and extent of any personal benefit conveyed as a result of the relationship."

Roman's attorney, Ashleigh Merchant, has subpoenaed Willis, Wade, seven employees of the district attorney's office and others, including Wade's former business partner, Terrence Bradley. Merchant told McAfee on Monday that Bradley would testify that Willis and Wade's romantic relationship began before Wade was hired as special counsel and that they had stayed together in homes where the county was paying for Willis to stay.

Willis sought to quash those subpoenas. She argued Roman's attempts to subpoena people in her office "suggests an eye toward public narrative as opposed to legal remedy" and that anything Bradley knows

is protected by attorney-client privilege as he once served as Wade's divorce attorney. McAfee declined on Monday to quash those subpoenas, but agreed to revisit that after Bradley testifies.

Aware of the personal nature of some of the details that could arise in Thursday's hearing, the judge said that if there's anything that amounts to "harassment or undue embarrassment," he is "not going to feel inhibited from stepping in, even without an objection from counsel, to move this along and keep it focused on the issues at hand."

McAfee also made clear that he does not believe arguments over Wade's qualifications are relevant, saying that as long as an attorney "has a heartbeat and a bar card," it is within the district attorney's discretion to hire him.

Detecting Russian 'carrots' and 'tea bags': Ukraine decodes enemy chatter to save lives

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

SEREBRYANSKY FOREST, Ukraine (AP) — As the radio crackles with enemy communications that are hard to decipher, one Russian command rings out clear: "Brew five Chinese tea bags on 38 orange."

A Ukrainian soldier known on the battlefield as Mikhass is able to quickly decode the gibberish. It means: Prepare five Beijing-made artillery shells and fire them on a specific Ukrainian position in the Serebryansky Forest, which forms the front line in the country's restive northeast.

Hiding in the basement of an abandoned home 12 kilometers (7 miles) away, Mikhass immediately warns the commander of a unit embedded in that part of the forest, giving him crucial minutes to get his men into trenches, saving their lives.

On the defensive and critically short of ammunition and soldiers after two years of war, Ukrainian forces are increasingly resorting to an age-old tactic — intelligence gleaned from radio intercepts — in a desperate effort to preserve their most vital resources.

The painstaking work is part of a larger effort to beef up and refine electronic warfare capabilities so that soldiers can be warned earlier of impending attacks, while having the battlefield intelligence needed to make their own strikes more deadly. To prevent enemy drone attacks, signal-jamming is also on the rise.

After months of near stalemate along the 1,000 kilometer (621 mile) front line, Ukraine expects fierce attacks in the year ahead from a Russian enemy determined to wear down its defenses to forge a breakthrough. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said there will be no peace until Russia achieves its goals, which include recapturing the entire Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, which it illegally annexed in 2022.

The commander elevated last week to lead Ukraine's army, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, has highlighted the importance of electronic warfare, and the country's defense ministry has increased spending on the people and technology behind it.

SAVING LIVES

Russia, which controls about one-fifth of Ukraine, has the advantage of a more developed domestic weapons industry and it uses conscription and coercion to call up troops.

For Ukraine, ammunition shortages have forced brigades to use shells sparingly and only after locating precise targets. Difficulty in mobilizing troops means Ukrainian commanders must be extra protective of soldiers' lives as they try to fend off ferocious Russian attacks.

It is within this context that better surveillance, eavesdropping and jamming have become more urgent.

Several kilometers south of where Mikhass is positioned, in the Donetsk region town of Konstantinivka, the 93rd Brigade's Electronic Warfare unit is using jammers to stave off attack drones, the main driver of injuries for soldiers in the region.

The platoon commander is alert, staring at a laptop that shows signals picked up by small antennas planted near the front line. When a Russian Lancet attack drone approaches their area of operation, his screen lights up with activity.

The commander, known on the battlefield as Oleksandr, flips a switch to activate the jammer which

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 39 of 72

interferes with the drone's radar; it's the equivalent of shining a bright light in someone's eye to disorient them.

"It's a must," he says of their operation. "A lot of guys are dying because of drones."

Radio operators like Mikhass work in shifts around the clock.

The antennas he relies on to pick up Russian radio signals are camouflaged, jutting out of trees in the forest near Kreminna, close to Russian positions. From a quiet basement command center nearby, Mikhass and other soldiers chain smoke cigarettes and listen through headphones.

A new and sophisticated signal-finding antenna, which resembles a carousel, uses triangulation to locate where the radio waves are emanating from.

They cross-reference what they hear against images they gather from reconnaissance drones and use detailed maps of their enemy's positions to slowly piece together what it all means.

They are part of a 50-man intelligence unit dubbed the Bunnies of Cherkess — the name inspired by the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu, who advised warriors to feign weakness when one is strong.

"No one takes bunnies seriously, right?" said Cherkess, the commander of the eponymous unit.

Radio intercepts reveal that the Kremlin is determined to control the entire Serebryansky Forest, which divides Ukraine-controlled Lyman from Russian-occupied Kreminna. It's part of an effort to reach Torske, a village in Donetsk that is west of Kreminna. From Torske, Russia will be closer to recapturing the nearby hub of Lyman, which would be a devastating setback for Ukraine and disrupt its ability to move supplies to the front.

DECODING ORDERS

Cherkess and his men, most of whom are volunteers who signed up for the infantry, understand the stakes couldn't be higher, especially as signs grow that support from Western allies is less secure.

After listening to hours and hours of Russian communications each day, much of it related to troop rotations, artillery fire and drone reconnaissance, they gradually build an understanding — with help from specialized computer software — of what it all means.

"Cucumbers" are mortars, "carrots" are grenade launchers -- and locations are conveyed in a numerical code with a corresponding color. It took the unit months to decode these Russian orders.

The arrival of new combat equipment and ammunition — and especially infantrymen — signals a fresh attack is imminent.

"(A soldier) is not interested in what kind of radar Russians have, he needs information on if there will be an attack tonight, and who will come, if they will have tanks, if they have armored vehicles or if it's just infantry," said Cherkess.

"And we have to understand how long we have to prepare. A week? Two weeks? A month?"

Advance word of enemy troops being rotated in and out is also useful to Ukrainian soldiers seeking to go on the offensive, he said. That is when they can exact maximum personnel losses.

The previous week, a Russian assault operation was carried out against a neighboring brigade. But the Ukrainian soldiers positioned there were prepared to greet them.

STAYING AHEAD

The importance of electronic surveillance can't be underestimated, said Yaroslav Kalinin, the CEO of Infozahyst, a company under contract with Ukraine's Defense Ministry.

Before the war, Infozahyst provided anti-wiretapping services for the offices of the president and prime minister. Once the war began, the company pivoted to help the army by manufacturing a versatile signal direction finding system, which is now in high demand.

The government recently doubled its contract with Infozahyst, according to Kalinin.

The buildup of surveillance capabilities is partly a recognition of the need to catch up to the Russians, who invested heavily in this technology long before it invaded Ukraine.

Kalinin believes that better and smaller devices that are easier to hide and move around will eventually give Ukraine an edge.

The Russians know they are being listened to and routinely try to deceive their enemy with bogus information. It is up to Mikhass and other radio operators to discern the signal from the noise.

"Their artillery helps us," he explained. "They say where they will shoot, and then we check where the shells landed."

"38 orange," the location Mikhass recently heard about for an upcoming attack, is represented on a map by a small dot. And it is surrounded by hundreds of other dots that signify locations they have decoded.

"We need a lot of time to uncover these points," he said.

But, as Russia steps up the pressure, the clock is ticking.

What's at stake in Trump's hush-money criminal case? Judge to rule on key issues as trial date nears

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump is expected in court Thursday for an important hearing in his New York hush-money criminal case, which now appears increasingly likely to go to trial next month.

Judge Juan Manuel Merchan is set to rule on key pretrial issues and say for certain if the trial will begin as scheduled on March 25. If that happens, the New York case will be the first of Trump's four criminal indictments to go to trial.

Trump's lawyers have asked Merchan to dismiss the case entirely. The judge's recent activities suggest that's unlikely to happen. In recent weeks, court records show, Merchan has been communicating with defense lawyers and Manhattan prosecutors to plan jury selection for a March trial.

A delay might cause conflicts in Trump's crowded legal calendar.

Trump, the Republican front-runner in his quest to return to the White House, has not been in court for the New York case since his arraignment last April, though he did appear by video for a hearing in May where the judge warned him against posting evidence to social media or using it to attack witnesses.

Here's a refresher on where the case stands.

WHAT IS THIS CASE ABOUT?

Trump's New York case involves an alleged scheme to prevent potentially damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public during his 2016 presidential campaign.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg charged Trump last year with falsifying internal records kept by his company, the Trump Organization, to hide the true nature of payments made to his then-lawyer Michael Cohen, for helping bury stories alleging Trump had extramarital sexual encounters.

The case centers on payoffs to two women, porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal, as well as to a Trump Tower doorman who claimed to have a story about Trump having a child out of wedlock. Trump says he didn't have any of the alleged sexual encounters.

Cohen paid Daniels \$130,000 and arranged for the publisher of the National Enquirer supermarket tabloid to pay McDougal \$150,000 in a practice known as "catch-and-kill."

The Trump Organization then reimbursed Cohen at an amount far more than what he'd spent, prosecutors said. The company logged the payments — delivered in monthly installments and a year-end bonus check — as legal expenses, prosecutors said. Over several months, Cohen said he got \$420,000.

The records at issue include general ledger entries, invoices and checks that prosecutors say were falsified.

WHAT IS TRUMP CHARGED WITH?

Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records. The charge is a Class E felony in New York, the lowest tier of felony charges in the state. It is punishable by up to four years in prison, though there is no guarantee that a conviction would result in jail time.

Because it is a state case, Trump would not be able to pardon himself if he were to become president again. Presidential pardons only apply to federal crimes.

To convict Trump of a felony, prosecutors must show he not only falsified or caused business records to be entered falsely, which would be a misdemeanor, but that he did so to conceal another crime.

Prosecutors did not specify the other crime in Trump's indictment, but have since said that evidence shows his actions were meant to conceal campaign finance crimes.

The payments to Daniels and McDougal violated federal restrictions on corporate and individual campaign

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 41 of 72

contributions, prosecutors said, and were meant to "conceal damaging information from the voting public."

Prosecutors also said that characterizing the payments to Cohen as income rather than a reimbursement amounted to a tax crime, even if it didn't result in the government getting cheated out of taxes.

Cohen pleaded guilty to a campaign finance crime for his role in the alleged hush-money scheme. The publisher of the National Enquirer signed a non-prosecution agreement with federal prosecutors, who considered the payment to McDougal an illegal corporate contribution to Trump's campaign.

WHAT DO TRUMP AND HIS LAWYERS SAY?

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and pleaded not guilty. He has repeatedly assailed the hush-money investigation and indictment as "political persecution." His lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses and not part of any cover-up.

In their request to have the case thrown out, which Merchan is to decide at Thursday's hearing, Trump's lawyers accused Bragg, a Democrat, of reviving a so-called "zombie case" to interfere with the Republican front-runner's chances of retaking the White House.

Bragg's predecessor, Cyrus Vance Jr., declined to pursue a case on the same allegations.

"After a five-year meandering, halting, and roving investigation that entailed inexplicable and unconstitutional delay, the District Attorney's Office filed a discombobulated package of politically motivated charges marred by legal defects," Trump lawyers Todd Blanche and Susan Necheles argued in their 57-page motion to dismiss the case.

WHAT DOES THE CASE MEAN FOR TRUMP?

The New York indictment, filed on March 30, 2023, made Trump the first former U.S. president ever to face criminal charges. Trump was subsequently indicted in Georgia and Washington, D.C. on charges that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election loss, and in Florida for hoarding classified documents.

Despite the sting to Trump's reputation and the spectacle of his historic arraignment last April, the New York case is arguably the least perilous of Trump's four indictments. While a guilty verdict would give him another historic moniker as the first ex-president convicted of a crime, it's unlikely Trump would be sentenced to significant prison time.

New York court records and newspaper archives show defendants convicted of felony falsifying business records are seldom sentenced to prison for that offense alone. Often, the charge is coupled with more serious felonies like grand larceny.

In contrast, the most serious charges in Trump's Washington, D.C. and Georgia election cases carry maximum 20-year sentences. Each of the more than 30 willful retention counts in his Florida classified documents case carries a maximum 10-year sentence.

WHAT'S AT STAKE AT THURSDAY'S HEARING?

Merchan is slated to rule on various requests from Trump's lawyers and prosecutors, including the defense's motion to dismiss the case entirely.

If Merchan were to grant the motion, the charges would be dropped and there would be no trial. If he denies it, Trump's lawyers have asked for hearings to explore Constitutional and procedural issues they say "provide alternative basis" for throwing out the charges.

Those issues include claims that Trump was a target of selective prosecution, that the yearslong delay in bringing charges violated his legal rights, and that purported leaks of information about the grand jury investigation created "political pressure on the prosecutors and grand jurors to indict him."

Prosecutors, in their reply to the defense's motion, said the evidence "more than supports" the charges. They contend that Trump is seeking special treatment and attempting to "evade criminal responsibility" because he's a current presidential candidate.

Prosecutors have accused Trump's lawyers of ignoring deadlines to turn over evidence and engaging in potential witness intimidation by sending Cohen a subpoena in October that sought a wide array of documents.

WHAT ELSE HAS HAPPENED?

Two big developments: Trump's lawyers asked Merchan to step aside from the case and they tried to

get it moved from state court to federal court. Both failed.

In August, Merchan rejected Trump's demand that he recuse himself, denying defense claims that he's biased because he's given cash to Democrats and his daughter is a Democratic political consultant. The judge did acknowledge making several small donations to Democratic causes during the 2020 campaign, including \$15 to Trump's rival Joe Biden. But, he said he is certain of his "ability to be fair and impartial."

In July, a federal judge rejected Trump's bid to move the case to federal court. Trump's lawyers had argued that he couldn't be tried in state court because the alleged conduct occurred while he was president. U.S. District Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein ruled that the hush-money case involved a personal matter, not official presidential duties.

Airstrike from Israeli hostage rescue wipes out entire Palestinian family in Gaza border town

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Ibrahim Hasouna trudged over the rubble of the destroyed house, pointing out where family moments had taken place — where his mother and sister-in-law used to sleep, where he played with his 5-year-old nieces, where he helped his 1-year-old nephew take his first steps.

His entire family was now dead — his parents, his two brothers, and the wife and three children of one of those brothers. The house was reduced to rubble on top of them in the barrage of airstrikes that Israeli warplanes inflicted across Rafah before dawn Monday as cover for troops rescuing two hostages elsewhere in the city on the southern Gaza border.

At least 74 Palestinians were killed in the bombardment, which flattened large swaths of buildings and tents sheltering families who had fled to Rafah from across Gaza.

Among the dead were 27 children and 22 women, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, whose researchers compiled the list from Rafah hospitals. The Israeli offensive has taken a heavy toll on women and children, with more than 12,300 Palestinian children and young teens killed in the conflict, the Gaza Health Ministry said Monday.

The 30-year-old Ibrahim, his parents and his brothers arrived in Rafah a month earlier, the latest of their multiple moves to escape fighting after fleeing their homes in northern Gaza. They rented a small, one-story house on the east side of Rafah.

"I was close to them," Ibrahim said of his older brother Karam's children. In the house, he would play cards or hide-and-seek with them to distract them from the war, he said. The twin girls, Suzan and Sedra, often asked if they would go to kindergarten and if their teacher from kindergarten back home was alive or dead, he said.

The strikes came at a moment of joy. The families had just obtained three chickens — the first they would have to eat since the war started more than four months ago.

"The children were thrilled," Ibrahim said. The family was sick of canned food, which was the main thing they were able to get under an Israeli siege that has allowed only a trickle of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

They planned to eat the chicken Sunday night. But during the day, Ibrahim went to visit a friend on the other side of Rafah, who convinced him to stay the night. Ibrahim called home, and they decided to put off the treasured meal so he wouldn't miss it. Ibrahim's mother, Suzan, put the chickens in the neighbor's fridge.

Just after 2 a.m. Monday, Ibrahim began getting calls from friends telling him strikes had hit in the neighborhood where his family was staying. Unable to reach them by phone, he walked and hitched a motorcycle ride back home. He found massive destruction, he said.

The first thing he saw was a woman's arm that had been hurled across the street to the door of a neighboring mosque. It was his mother's. He dug through the rubble, pulling out body parts.

Later he went to the Youssef Najjar Hospital and identified the bodies of his mother and his father, Fawzi, an engineer. The body of his younger brother Mohammed had no head, but he recognized the clothes.

In a bag that staff brought him were parts of his brother Karam and his family. He recognized pieces of his niece Suzan from her earrings and a bracelet, one she used to fight over all the time with her sister,

Ibrahim said.

He spoke to The Associated Press on Tuesday as he walked around the rubble of the home. He recalled how the children's noise in the morning would wake him up, but "their noises were comforting for me."

He pointed to part of the wreckage. There, he said he would sit with his nephew Malek "to bask in the sun and to walk him for a little bit. To walk a little bit and have a sense of life."

Israel said the bombardment was to cover its troops as they extracted two Israeli hostages from an apartment and made their way back out of Gaza. The military has not commented on why specific sites across Rafah were targeted in the barrage, but Israeli officials have blamed Hamas for causing civilian casualties by operating in the heart of residential areas.

The extent of the bloodshed from the raid has increased fears of what could happen if Israel follows through with vows to attack Rafah in its campaign to destroy Hamas. The city and its surroundings now shelter more than half of the Gaza Strip's entire population of 2.3 million after hundreds of thousands took refuge there.

Already, Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians, more than 70% of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Israel has vowed to uproot Hamas from Gaza and win the return of more than 100 hostages still in the group's hands after the Oct. 7 attacks in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

GOP-led House impeaches Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas — by one vote — over border management

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. House voted Tuesday to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, with the Republican majority determined to punish the Biden administration over its handling of the U.S.-Mexico border after failing last week in a politically embarrassing setback.

The evening roll call proved 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 charged in nearly 150 years.

In a historic rebuke, the House impeached Mayorkas 214-213. With the return of Majority Leader Steve Scalise to bolster the GOP's numbers after being away from Washington for cancer care and a Northeastern storm impacting some others, Republicans recouped — despite dissent from their own ranks.

President Joe Biden called it a "blatant act of unconstitutional partisanship that has targeted an honorable public servant in order to play petty political games."

The charges against Mayorkas next go to the Senate for a trial, but neither Democratic nor even some Republican senators have shown interest in the matter and it may be indefinitely shelved to a committee. The Senate is expected to receive the articles of impeachment from the House after returning to session Feb. 26.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called the case against Mayorkas a "sham impeachment" and a "new low for House Republicans."

In a frantic scene of vote-tallying on the House floor, the GOP effort to impeach Mayorkas over his handling of the southern border took on an air of political desperation as Republicans struggle to make good on their priorities.

Mayorkas faced two articles of impeachment filed by the Homeland Security Committee 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.

But critics of the impeachment effort said the charges against Mayorkas amount to a policy dispute over Biden's border strategy, hardly rising to the Constitution's bar of high crimes and misdemeanors.

The House had initially launched an impeachment inquiry into Biden over his son's business dealings, but instead turned its attention to Mayorkas after Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, an ally of former

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 44 of 72

President Donald Trump, pushed the debate forward following the panel's months-long investigation.

Greene, who will serve as an impeachment manager in a potential Senate trial, hugged Scalise afterward and posed for photos with other lawmakers. She said senators "better pay attention to the American people and how they feel, and then they need to read our articles of impeachment."

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

Various House Republicans have prepared legislation to begin deporting migrants who were temporarily allowed into the U.S. under the Biden administration's policies, many as they await adjudication of asylum claims.

"We have no choice," Trump said in stark language at a weekend rally in South Carolina.

At the same time, Johnson rejected a bipartisan Senate border security package Mayorkas had spent weeks negotiating. But the speaker has been unable to advance his Republicans' own proposal, which is a nonstarter in the Senate.

"Congress needs to act," Biden said in a statement after the vote, "to give me, Secretary Mayorkas, and my administration the tools and resources needed to address the situation at the border."

Three Republican representatives who broke ranks last week over the Mayorkas impeachment — Ken Buck of Colorado, Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Tom McClintock of California — all did so again Tuesday. With a 219-212 majority, Johnson had few votes to spare. His margin got even smaller later Tuesday night when New York Democrat Thomas Suozzi won a special election to the seat once held by Republican George Santos before his expulsion from Congress.

Several leading conservative scholars along with former Homeland Security secretaries from both Republican and Democratic administrations have dismissed the Mayorkas impeachment as unwarranted or a waste of time.

Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland said what the Republicans "have succeeded in doing is degrading and tarnishing the constitutional meaning of impeachment."

But Scalise told reporters after the vote, "It sends a message that we're not just going to sit by while the secretary of homeland security fails to do his job at keeping our homeland safe."

Mayorkas is not the only Biden administration official the House Republicans want to impeach. They have filed legislation to impeach a long list including Vice President Kamala Harris, Attorney General Merrick Garland, FBI Director Christopher Wray and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Never before has a sitting Cabinet secretary been impeached, and it was nearly 150 years ago that the House voted to impeach President Ulysses S. Grant's secretary of war, William Belknap, over a kickback scheme in government contracts. He resigned 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.

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.

At the time, Rep. Al Green, D-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 and leading to its failure.

"Obviously, you feel good when you can make a difference," said Green, describing his painstaking route

from hospital bed to the House floor. "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."

Republican holdout Gallagher, who had served as a Marine, announced over the weekend he would not be seeking reelection in the fall, joining a growing list of serious-minded Republican lawmakers heading for the exits.

Illegal border crossings from Mexico plunge after a record-high December, with fewer from Venezuela

By REBECCA SANTANA and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Arrests for illegal crossings on the U.S. border with Mexico fell by half in January from record highs in December to the third lowest month of Joe Biden's presidency, authorities said Tuesday.

The sharp drop is welcome news for the White House, even if it proves temporary, as immigration becomes one of the biggest issues in this year's presidential election, with exit polls showing it is the top concern among many Republican voters in early primaries. House Republicans voted Tuesday to impeach U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for his oversight of the border.

Seasonal declines and heightened enforcement by the U.S. and its allies led to the sharp decline, said Troy Miller, acting commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. U.S. authorities have repeatedly praised Mexico for a crackdown launched in late December.

Border Patrol arrests totaled 124,220 in January, down 50% from 249,735 in December, the highest monthly tally on record. Arrests of Venezuelans plunged 91% to 4,422 from 46,920 in December.

Numbers ebb and flow, and the January decline may prove tenuous. Panama reported that 36,001 migrants traversed the notorious Darien Gap in January, up 46% from December. The vast majority who cross the Panamanian jungle are Venezuelans headed to the United States, with considerable numbers from Haiti, China, Ecuador and Colombia.

"We continue to experience serious challenges along our border which surpass the capacity of the immigration system," Miller said.

Tucson, Arizona, was again the busiest sector for illegal crossings with 50,565 arrests, down 37% from December, followed by San Diego. Arrests in the Border Patrol's Del Rio sector, which includes the city of Eagle Pass, the main focus of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's border enforcement efforts, plummeted 76% from December to 16,712, the lowest since December 2021. Arrests in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, dropped 60% to 7,340, the lowest since July 2020.

The only months of Biden's presidency with fewer border arrests were in June 2023, after pandemic-related asylum restrictions lifted, and February 2021, his first full month in office.

During an interview with The Associated Press in January, Mayorkas said that Mexico's immigration enforcement agency didn't have the funds in December to carry out enforcement actions but when that was rectified, there was an immediate and substantial drop in the number of migrants encountered at the southern border.

When including migrants who were allowed to enter the United States under new or expanded legal pathways, migrant encounters totaled 176,205 in January after topping 300,000 for the first time in December. U.S. authorities admitted about 45,000 people at land crossings with Mexico in January through an online appointment system called CBP One, bringing the total to 459,118 since it was introduced a year earlier.

Trump's pick to lead the RNC is facing skepticism from some Republicans

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In pushing Michael Whatley as the next leader of the Republican National Committee, Donald Trump zeroed in on the North Carolina GOP chairman's dedication to "election integrity," baselessly suggesting he would ensure the 2024 race "can't be stolen."

Some of Trump's most ardent supporters in Whatley's home state would, no doubt, like a word.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 46 of 72

Whatley has been accused by some Republicans of essentially manufacturing his win as state party chairman last year following a chaotic vote, which resulted in a legal challenge that offered evidence some ballots were improperly cast. While Whatley and his allies acknowledged that technical problems made voting with the party's mobile app difficult, they vehemently deny that the irregularities changed the outcome of the contest and note that the lawsuit was dismissed.

But for some conservatives, primed by years of Trump urging vigilance against voter fraud, the episode instilled a suspicion that the party contest was stolen by a Washington Beltway fixture whose work for the George W. Bush administration and as a lobbyist they viewed skeptically.

"I can only conclude two possibilities. One, he felt he needed to cheat to win. Two, he is completely incompetent. Both are disqualifying," said Whatley's challenger, John Kane Jr., who described himself as "unquestionably" the true "MAGA candidate" in the contest.

The controversy surrounding Whatley's election to the GOP's top political post in North Carolina is one of several emerging signals suggesting challenges ahead. Trump is aiming to wrest control of the RNC by muscling Whatley through in an orchestrated ouster of the organization's current chair, Ronna McDaniel. But in doing so, he's elevating someone with a relatively scant national profile and a gilded resume that includes links to establishment figures largely reviled by the hardline activists who are most vocal in supporting Trump.

Whatley, 55, declined through a spokesman to comment for this story. The Trump campaign did not respond to a message.

If Whatley ultimately becomes RNC chair, he would be charged with leading the effort to defeat President Joe Biden at a time when the party is struggling to raise money and navigating a restless far-right flank. To his critics, Whatley represents more of the same at a time when they're seeking more dramatic change.

'A complete overhaul'

"We need a complete overhaul of the RNC. Choosing, or anointing, someone that is the male version of Ronna is the exact opposite of what the RNC needs at this time," said Sigal Chattah, an RNC committee-woman for Nevada who is closely aligned with the group Turning Point, which advocated for McDaniel's ouster.

Whatley's allies portray him as a steady hand and strategic thinker with decades of Republican political experience, stretching from the mountains of western North Carolina to the halls of Congress and the executive branch.

A formative political experience came when Whatley was still a sophomore at Watauga High School. He volunteered for the 1984 reelection campaign of Jesse Helms, a hard-edged conservative senator whose crusades against civil rights, art and homosexuality presaged the GOP's embrace of grievance politics under Trump.

Yet for much of his professional life, Whatley's political sensibilities appeared to align far more closely with the party's mainstream and corporate establishment.

He spent much of his 20s as a student earning four degrees, including a law degree, as well as a master's in theology, from Notre Dame. Later, he clerked for a federal judge in North Carolina before departing for Washington as Bush campaigned for the presidency.

One early assignment dispatched him to Broward County, Florida, where he worked among a team of lawyers on Bush's behalf to dispute the outcome of the 2000 presidential contest.

"It was really the first time that Republicans got down into the trenches and fought," Whatley recalled during a 2021 appearance on an election integrity panel at the Conservative Political Action Conference. "We knew if we were not there, they were going to steal it."

After the Supreme Court ruled in Bush's favor, Whatley landed a job in the Department of Energy, which was he followed by a two-year stint working for Sen. Elizabeth Dole, the North Carolina Republican.

Oil and gas lobbying

Lobbying on behalf of oil and gas giants soon became his calling, however.

He launched his own firm, the Patriot Group, in 2005. But it wasn't until joining forces with two other oil

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 47 of 72

and gas lobbyists in 2009 that his fortunes precipitously rose. Their firm, HBW Resources (the W stands for Whatley), became a political will-bending force.

HBW became a key proponent of the Keystone XL pipeline. Whatley was also an architect of a federal and state-level campaign that played a pivotal role in stopping a bipartisan push to enact cleaner standards for oil used in the U.S.

The regulations would have drastically curtailed imports of crude extracted from the oil sands of Alberta, Canada — a labor-intensive process that requires so much energy usage that fuels derived from the region are considered among the world's dirtiest.

But the legislative push collapsed after the campaign amped up pressure in Congress as well as members' home states.

To advance their aims, Whatley's firm also established the Consumer Energy Alliance, a nonprofit organization that presented itself as nonpartisan. In reality, the group was supported by some of the world's biggest oil companies, including Chevron, ExxonMobil and British Petroleum, as well as major industrial energy users. The group has been accused of using deceitful tactics to generate support for their efforts, including allegations that they gathered petition signatures under misleading pretenses for local initiatives in Ohio, Wisconsin and South Carolina.

After a major corruption scandal at the North Carolina Republican Party, which saw the party's former chairman convicted in a bribery scandal, Whatley ran to replace him and stepped down from the nonprofit after he won. He left the firm that he helped found in 2022.

Army of poll watchers

His focus soon turned to "election integrity." As Trump railed against fraud ahead of the 2020 election, Whatley said he recruited hundreds of lawyers, as well as an army of poll watchers, to fan out across the state. After Trump won the state, he took credit for the effort, claiming that it stopped Democrats from cheating.

"They knew if this happens, we were going to scream bloody murder," Whatley said in 2021. "Because we put so much pressure on the system more than a year in advance, it really came down to being a pretty clean election."

But to Democrats, many of the North Carolina GOP's tactics are tantamount to voter intimidation or suppression, which they say is ironic in light of Whatley's own contested election last year, as state party chair.

"The next chair of the Republican Party is running on election integrity. His own election was called into question. And a lot of people in North Carolina don't think he was elected fair," said Anderson Clayton, chairwoman of the North Carolina Democratic Party.

As Whatley looks to take the reins of the RNC, which will require approval by the organization's 168 voting members, much of his success will turn on whether or not he can raise enough money to turn around the organization's dismal finances. The RNC has been significantly out-raised in recent months by the Democratic National Committee, reporting cash reserves of just \$8 million at the end of last year, while carrying \$1 million in debt.

Art Pope, a North Carolina businessman and major conservative donor, said Whatley was well-equipped to lead the organization. But he wasn't sure that the underlying dynamics would change.

"When the Republican National Committee was helping with Donald Trump's legal fees, a lot of people didn't want to give" for that reason, said Pope. "Anyone who has been, or will be, the Republican National Committee chairperson will have that challenge."

Quick-moving winter storm brings snow to Northeast, disrupting travel and schools

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A quick-moving winter storm battered cities in the Northeast with snowfall, sending huge waves crashing into the New England coastline and forcing New York City schools into glitch-filled remote learning reminiscent of the early days of the pandemic.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 48 of 72

Airlines canceled or delayed flights while accidents were reported on slippery roads, and at least one person died.

The storm quickly passed through the region, producing snowfall totals that were significant in some cities but much less than expected in others. New York City recorded just 3 inches (7.62 centimeters) of snow in Central Park, but areas of Pennsylvania and Connecticut were blanketed with 15 inches (38.10 centimeters) of fluffy snow, according to National Weather Service reports.

"It's been a quiet winter, so it's kind of welcoming," Ricky Smith said as he made his way to a construction job in New York City. "I just hope nobody gets hurt."

In New York City, the nation's largest school district opted to shift to remote learning instead of giving students and staff a snow day, sparking criticism by many. And when classes began, technical problems prevented many of the 915,000 students from logging in, exacerbating the discontent.

PS 112 in East Harlem had a promising start to its virtual school day with a schoolwide read-aloud, teacher Jessica Roach said. But the rest of the morning, when teachers and families tried to access the district's domain, cascading technical problems confused her young special education students and inconvenienced their parents.

"A lot of kids lost out because of technical issues," she said.

Chong Bretillon, a parent in Queens, said she received repeated errors as she tried to gain entry to a Zoom room for her elementary school student, while messaging with dozens of other parents who were encountering the same problems.

"I just spent almost an hour trying to log in and log out," Bretillon said. "Everyone's frustrated."

New York Mayor Eric Adams defended the decision to go remote in the schools, saying it was necessary because of learning losses during the coronavirus pandemic.

School officials blamed the troubles on IBM, with Schools Chancellor David Banks saying the company "was not ready for primetime."

IBM said in a statement Tuesday afternoon that it worked with the schools and the issues "were largely resolved," but the company did not immediately respond to questions about what specifically happened and why. City officials said there were problems with authentication services.

More than 1,000 flights were canceled Tuesday morning, mostly at the airports in the New York City area and in Boston. Accidents were reported across the region and several states banned tandem and empty tractor-trailers from highways.

There were more than 145,000 power outages reported Tuesday morning in Pennsylvania and several thousand in New Jersey, but few outages in New York and New England, according to the tracking site poweroutage.us.

Authorities in Newberry Township, Pennsylvania, said a man operating a snowmobile was killed when he hit a downed utility line around 8 a.m. Tuesday during the storm. The cause and manner of death were pending further investigation.

At the time of the crash, police said in a statement that the area was "experiencing a multitude of weather related conditions due to a winter storm which caused downed trees, downed power lines and hazardous travel conditions throughout the area."

Robert Bylone, 51, a university research operations manager from Orwigsburg, Pennsylvania, was at home around 6 a.m. Tuesday when he heard a "splintering crack" outside his window. A 30-year-old flowering pear tree in his front yard had come down.

"We anticipated a snow storm, and sure enough, we got it," he said. "But it was quick, very wet with a lot of moisture in the snow. So with that much water in the snow, it was very heavy. Very heavy to pick up, very heavy on the tree branches."

Throughout the region, officials urged people to take precautions including staying off the roads.

In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont ordered all executive branch office buildings closed to the public for the day, and all state courts were closed.

Susan Smith was spending the day with her three children, ages 14, 11 and 8, at her home in Columbia,

Connecticut, because schools were closed. She said she likes traditional snow days off but would also like to see remote learning on some bad weather days.

"But I still remember being a kid and really looking forward to snow days, so I don't want to completely wipe that off the map with remote learning," Smith said.

Ahead of the storm, Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey told all non-essential Executive Branch employees to not report to work Tuesday. Boston schools were closed and a parking ban was in effect until 4 p.m. Similar closures and bans were put in place in other cities and towns.

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

Along the Plymouth, Massachusetts waterfront, residents sat in their vehicles marveling at the waves crashing ashore as a mix of rain and snow lashed their vehicles. Some spots began to flood as high tide approached early Tuesday afternoon.

"I enjoy the weather a lot today," said Marissa O'Keefe, who was with a friend in an SUV along the waterfront. "I'm kind of happy our boss gave us the day off so we can enjoy the way the waves are moving. Whether the snow comes or it just rains, I'm excited by nature's power."

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.

How Texas church shooter bought rifle despite mental illness and criminal history is under scrutiny

By JUAN A. LOZANO and JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The shooter who opened fire at a Houston megachurch before being gunned down by security officers used an AR-style rifle that police say she legally purchased despite a years-long criminal record, a history of mental illness and allegations she threatened to shoot her ex-husband.

Key questions remained Tuesday about Genesse Moreno's motive in the shooting, and police have given no details about where and how she obtained the rifle in December. The shooting joins others in Texas and elsewhere that have involved shooters who legally obtained guns despite criminal history and mental health problems.

Authorities say Moreno, 36, entered celebrity pastor Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church on Sunday with her 7-year-old son and began firing in a hallway, sending worshippers scrambling for safety. Moreno did not reach the main sanctuary and was killed after exchanging gunfire with two off-duty officers.

Moreno's son was critically injured after being shot in the head and Houston police did not immediately have an update on his condition Tuesday.

Moreno used both male and female aliases, but investigators found through interviews and past police reports that Moreno identified as female, according to Houston Police Commander Chris Hassig.

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner did not say whether the AR-15 was purchased retail, which would have required a background check if bought from a federally licensed firearms dealer, or a private sale, which would not. Texas requires no license to carry a rifle or handgun in public. Police added that Moreno also carried a .22 caliber rifle that she did not fire during the shooting.

"We're not people standing up here against (Second Amendment) rights, but people who are suffering from mental illness, criminals ... we're looking at that," Finner said.

Moreno's rap sheet included charges for forging a \$100 bill, a 2009 assault conviction for kicking a detention officer — which resulted in a 180-day county jail sentence — and a 2022 misdemeanor count for unlawfully carrying a weapon.

In a guilty plea to the 2022 misdemeanor count in nearby Fort Bend County, Moreno surrendered a pistol and a rifle that were found during a traffic stop. The weapons were destroyed as part of the plea agreement.

Wesley Wittig, a Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office prosecutor, said Moreno's mental health history did not come up in the case, but noted there isn't a comprehensive mental health tracking system to flag such issues.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 50 of 72

"Systems only document what's already happened. While that could result in some prevention, the real issue is probably deeper than that because it's people and just tracking stuff doesn't fix people," Wittig said. "Without having a serious sit down with all the potential issues and problems and paths forward, we're probably not going to have a comprehensive answer any time soon."

Walli Carranza, Moreno's former mother-in-law, said in court filings that she long tried to alert authorities about the danger her ex-daughter-in-law posed but that authorities failed to take action.

In documents filed in connection with Moreno's 2022 divorce, Carranza alleged Moreno had a history of threatening people with guns or being careless with how they were stored around her young son.

Carranza said that in January 2020 she saw an unlocked gun in her grandson's diaper bag, and alleged Moreno pulled out a gun and threatened to shoot her ex-husband while their son slept in the back seat of their car.

Carranza said she alerted Child Protective Services in Texas, but was told that until Moreno shot someone or her grandson used the gun, there was nothing the agency could do.

Melissa Landford, spokesperson for the state Department of Family and Protective Services, said CPS was investigating the shooting alongside law enforcement and could not provide further information due to confidentiality reasons.

In a statement posted Monday on Facebook, Carranza blamed CPS for not taking any action, and the state for not having laws that would have prevented someone with a history of mental illness from having a gun.

"Let it be clear that the Second Amendment stops where the First Amendment right to life begins and it's time to remove from the U.S. Constitution any protection for gun ownership," Carranza wrote.

Nicole Golden, executive director of Texas Gun Sense, which advocates for background checks and tougher gun restrictions, said state lawmakers for years have resisted passing so-called "red flag" laws. Those generally allow law enforcement or family members to ask a judge to order the seizure or surrender of guns from someone who is deemed dangerous, often because of mental health concerns or threats of violence.

Houston police said Monday that Moreno was put under emergency detention by officers in 2016, but did not elaborate. In Texas, an emergency detention is not an arrest, but allows an offer to detain a mentally ill person if they pose a "substantial risk of serious harm" to themselves or others.

"We should be protecting our communities from harm by those with documented dangerous history," Golden said.

Texas has had other major shootings involving individuals who legally obtained guns despite documented criminal and mental health histories.

The gunman who killed 26 people and wounded 20 others in the 2017 shooting at a church in Sutherland Springs was able to legally purchase his firearm despite a previous military conviction of domestic violence assault.

In 2023, a man with a history of mental health problems and a prior arrest on charges of assaulting family members killed six people in a violent rampage spanning from San Antonio to Austin. He purchased his gun through a private sale that avoided a background check.

An Oregon resident was diagnosed with the plague. Here are a few things to know about the illness

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

Officials in central Oregon this week reported a case of bubonic plague in a resident who likely got the disease from a sick pet cat.

The infected resident and the resident's close contacts have all been provided medication, public health officials say, and people in the community are not believed to be at risk. The cat was also treated but did not survive.

Plague isn't common, but it also isn't unheard of in the western United States, where a handful of cases

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 51 of 72

occur every year. It's different from Alaskapox, a rare, recently discovered disease that killed a man in Alaska last month.

Here are a few things to know about what the plague is, who is at risk and how a disease that was once a harbinger of death became a treatable illness.

What is plague?

Plague is an infectious disease that can affect mammals. It's caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, which is carried by rodents and fleas. Sunlight and drying can kill plague bacteria on surfaces, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Humans and pets suspected to be sick with plague are typically treated with antibiotics, and sometimes with other medical measures.

Plague symptoms can manifest in a few ways. Bubonic plague — the kind contracted by the Oregon resident — happens when the plague bacteria gets into the lymph nodes. It can cause fever, headache, weakness and painful, swollen lymph nodes. It usually happens from the bite of an infected flea, according to the CDC.

Septicemic plague symptoms happen if the bacteria gets into the bloodstream. It can occur initially or after bubonic plague goes untreated. This form of plague causes the same fever, chills and weakness, as well as abdominal pain, shock and sometimes other symptoms like bleeding into the skin and blackened fingers, toes or the nose. The CDC says this form comes from flea bites or from handling an infected animal.

Pneumonic plague is the most serious form of the disease, and it occurs when the bacteria gets into the lungs. Pneumonic plague adds rapidly developing pneumonia to the list of plague symptoms. It is the only form of plague that can be spread from person to person by inhaling infectious droplets.

All forms of plague are treatable with common antibiotics, and people who seek treatment early have a better chance of a full recovery, according to the CDC.

Am I at risk of plague?

In the U.S., an average of 7 cases of human plague is reported each year, according to the CDC, and about 80% of them are the bubonic form of the disease. Most of those cases were in the rural western and southwestern U.S.

A welder in central Oregon contracted it in 2012 when he pulled a rodent out of his choking cat's mouth in 2012 — he survived but lost his fingertips and toes to the disease. A Colorado teen contracted a fatal case while hunting in 2015, and Colorado officials confirmed at least two cases last year — one of them fatal.

Worldwide, most human cases of plague in recent decades have occurred in people living in rural towns and villages in Africa, particularly in Madagascar and Congo, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

People can reduce the risk of plague by keeping their homes and outdoor living areas less inviting for rodents by clearing brush and junk piles and keeping pet food inaccessible. Ground squirrels, chipmunks and wood rats can carry plague as well as other rodents, and so people with bird and squirrel feeders may want to consider the risks if they live in areas with a plague outbreak.

The CDC says repellent with DEET can also help protect people from rodent fleas when camping or working outdoors.

Flea control products can help keep fleas from infecting household pets. If a pet gets sick, they should be taken to a vet as soon as possible, according to the CDC.

Isn't plague from the Middle Ages?

The Black Death in the 14th century was perhaps the most infamous plague epidemic, killing up to half of the population as it spread through Europe, the Middle East and northern Africa. It began devastating communities in the Middle East and Europe between 1347 and 1351, and significant outbreaks continued for roughly the next 400 years.

An earlier major plague pandemic, dubbed the Justinian plague, started in Rome around 541 and continued to erupt for the next couple hundred years.

The third major plague pandemic started in the Yunnan region of China in the mid-1800s and spread along trade routes, arriving in Hong Kong and Bombay about 40 years later. It eventually reached every continent except Antarctica, according to the Cleveland Clinic, and is estimated to have killed roughly 12

million people in China and India alone.

In the late 1800s, an effective treatment with an antiserum was developed. That treatment was later replaced by even more effective antibiotics a few decades later.

Though plague remains a serious illness, antibiotic and supportive therapy is effective for even the most dangerous pneumonic form when patients are treated in time, according to the World Health Organization.

Jon Stewart's return to 'The Daily Show' felt familiar to those who missed him while he was away

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — No, Jon Stewart really wasn't sitting at his desk at Comedy Central for the last nine years, waiting for someone to turn the lights back on.

Yet it almost felt that way during Stewart's return to "The Daily Show" Monday night. His signature moves — blunt satire, facial grimaces, incisive use of video and some occasional lectures — were all intact. Public figures are served notice that the media's sharpest bull detector is back on the job.

Stewart has said that the lack of a comedic outlet for his observations as the presidential campaign unfolded largely drove his decision to reprise his most memorable role, one night a week through the election. The much-diminished Comedy Central, unable to find a successor to Trevor Noah as host, happily welcomed him back.

Questions about the future of late-night TV, which is rapidly shedding viewers and losing influence, won't be answered in one night. Neither will that night prove Stewart can regain the position of prominence he stepped away from in August 2015.

But it was a promising start.

"Are you disappointed yet?" Stewart said after one sophomoric joke, about naming "The Daily Show" election coverage, "Indecision 2024: Electile Dysfunction."

HE DOVE DIRECTLY INTO THE NEWS OF THE DAY

Stewart seemed to take a page from MSNBC's Rachel Maddow when she turned a daily hosting role into a weekly one. Both resisted trying to do too much, to cram a week's — or in Stewart's case, nine years — worth of material into one show. He moved swiftly into the news, and up-to-date doings of President Joe Biden and his Republican rival.

In Biden's case, it meant directly addressing questions about his age and fitness for office, which the president's supporters surely want to avoid. He examined Biden's news conference last week meant to counter characterizations in special counsel Robert Hur's report on classified documents found in Biden's home.

"Joe Biden had a big press conference to dispel the notion that he may have lost a step and, politically speaking, lost three or four steps," he said.

He said about Biden aides who thought it was a good idea for him to turn down a Super Bowl interview in favor of a TikTok appearance: "Fire everyone."

Stewart showed tape of administration officials like Vice President Kamala Harris and other Democrats testifying to Biden's sharpness and suggested it might be a good idea to film the president in those meetings so the public can see him.

Yet Stewart also used tightly-edited videotape of Donald Trump and his family during depositions saying they couldn't recall things to counter the notion that Biden is alone in showing memory issues during such high-pressure legal proceedings. "The Daily Show" even found one where Trump said he couldn't remember talking about how good his memory is.

His main point: Worries about whether either the 81-year-old Biden or 77-year-old Trump are up to the toughest job in the world shouldn't be swept under the rug.

"It is the candidates' job to assuage concerns, not the voters' job not to mention them," Stewart said.

HE WAS PRETTY WELL-RECEIVED BY CRITICS

Based on one night, a handful of critics noted Stewart's seamless transition.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 53 of 72

Alison Herman of Variety wrote that "it almost seemed like he never left," a phrase repeated in the headlines of reviews by both NPR critic Eric Deggans and CNN's Brian Lowry.

"From the show's opening moments, Stewart eased back into the host's chair without missing a beat, firing off jokes with a familiar style that felt like he had left just a few weeks ago, rather than in 2015," Deggans wrote. "He brought a confidence the show sorely needs."

Jeremy Egner of The New York Times wrote that "Stewart's first night found him grayer — at one point he used his own wizened face as a prop in a joke about the presidential candidates' ages. But he was otherwise in classic form."

The show was seen by 930,000 people on Comedy Central, and viewership jumped to 1.85 million when a later repeat and simulcasts with other Paramount-owned networks like MTV and Paramount are included, the Nielsen company said. It was the most-watched episode of "The Daily Show" since 2018, and more than double what Trevor Noah averaged in 2022.

The comparison of Stewart returning to "The Daily Show" and two candidates likely staging a rematch was too obvious to let go by. Correspondent Dulce Sloan, ostensibly talking about discouraged voters, said they needed someone new, more than just "old white dudes" coming back to reclaim a job.

"We're talking about the election, right?" Stewart said.

The "campaign" interlude allowed Stewart, and viewers who had drifted away from "The Daily Show" after he left, to become acquainted with unfamiliar cast members. An on-set interview with Jordan Klepper, who will host the show for the rest of the week, was less successful.

During his time away, Stewart spent time as an activist fighting to get benefits for Sept. 11, 2001, responders and two years hosting "The Problem with Jon Stewart" on the Apple TV+ streaming service. He made a subtle allusion to the latter on Monday, saying he would be making jokes about China and AI, subjects that reportedly made Apple uncomfortable before axing the show.

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 another cease-fire and hostage-release deal, officials said Tuesday, as negotiations went on and Israel threatened to expand its offensive to Gaza's southern edge, where some 1.4 million Palestinians have sought refuge.

The talks continued in Egypt a day after Israeli forces rescued two captives in Rafah, the packed southern town along the Egyptian border, in a raid that killed at least 74 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and caused heavy destruction. The operation offered a glimpse of what a full-blown ground advance might look like.

A cease-fire deal, on the other hand, 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 estimated 100 people still held captive in Gaza. Qatar, the United States and Egypt have sought to broker a deal in the face of starkly disparate positions expressed publicly by both Israel and Hamas.

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 on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking roughly 250 people captive. Tens of thousands of Israelis were displaced from destroyed communities.

The war has brought unprecedented destruction to 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 the population toward starvation.

In other developments, South Africa, which has lodged genocide allegations against Israel at the International Court of Justice, said Tuesday that it filed an "urgent request" with the court to consider whether Israel's military operations in Rafah constitute a breach of provisional orders handed down by the justices

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 54 of 72

last month. Those orders called on Israel to take greater measures to spare civilians.

Israel has adamantly denied the genocide allegations and says it is carrying out operations in accordance with international law. It blames Hamas for the high death toll because the militants operate in dense residential areas.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press on until "total victory," and has insisted that military pressure will help free the hostages. But the rescued hostages, 60-year-old Fernando Marman and 70-year-old Louis Har, 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 large numbers of hostages.

Over 100 were freed in exchange for 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel during a weeklong truce last year. 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. Israeli officials say around 30 hostages taken on Oct. 7 have died, either during the initial attack or in captivity.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

A senior Egyptian official said mediators have achieved "relatively significant" progress ahead of a meeting Tuesday in Cairo of representatives from Qatar, the U.S. and Israel. The 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.

CIA chief William Burns and David Barnea, head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, attended the Cairo talks. Both men played a key role in brokering the previous 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. The diplomat said the meeting Tuesday would be crucial in bridging the remaining gaps.

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

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-phase 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 wind down, with Israel withdrawing its troops. That was viewed as a non-starter for Israel, which wants to topple Hamas before ending the war.

But President Joe Biden signaled Monday that a deal might be within reach.

"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 as the death toll climbed Tuesday to 74. Residents and displaced Palestinians in Gaza were searching through the rubble from Israeli airstrikes that provided cover for the rescue mission.

Al Jazeera, the pan-Arab broadcaster funded by Qatar, said an Israeli airstrike in Rafah wounded two of its journalists, with one having to undergo an amputation. It identified the wounded as cameraman Ahmad Matar and reporter Ismail Abu Omar. It was unclear when the strike took place, and the Israeli military had no immediate comment.

While concerns have grown over Rafah because it is sheltering such a large number of Palestinians, fighting continued throughout the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said 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.

Biden says Trump sowing doubts about US commitment to NATO is 'un-American'

By ZEKE MILLER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday said Donald Trump's comments calling into question the U.S. commitment to defend its NATO allies from attack were "dangerous" and "un-American," seizing on the former president's comments that sowed fresh fears among U.S. partners about its dependability on the global stage.

Trump, the front-runner in the U.S. for the Republican Party's nomination this year, said Saturday that 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. It was the latest instance in which the former president seemed to side with an authoritarian state over America's democratic allies.

Speaking from the White House as he encouraged the House to take up a Senate-passed aid bill to fund Ukraine's efforts to hold off a two-year Russian invasion, Biden said Trump's comments about the mutual defense pact were "dangerous and shocking."

"The whole world heard it and the worst thing is he means it," Biden added.

Biden said that "when America gives its word, it means something," and called Trump's comments sowing doubt about its commitments "un-American."

Biden said of Trump: "He doesn't understand that the sacred commitment that we've given works for us as well."

NATO's Article 5 mutual defense clause states that an armed attack against one or more of its members shall be considered an attack against all members. But Trump has often depicted NATO allies as leeches on the U.S. military and openly questioned the value of the military alliance that has defined American foreign policy for more than 70 years.

Since the full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Biden has ushered Finland into the alliance and is clearing the way for Sweden to do the same. While Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the alliance has served as a key contributor of the U.S.-organized effort to support Kyiv's military defenses in the nearly two year old conflict.

NATO allies agreed in 2014, after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, to halt the spending cuts they had made after the Cold War and move toward spending 2% of their GDP on defense by 2024. The spending target is not a requirement for NATO members.

NATO's secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, said in a statement Sunday that "any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the U.S., and puts American and European soldiers at increased risk." The defense minister in Poland, which has been under Russian control more often than not since the end of the 18th century, said "no election campaign is an excuse for playing with the security of the alliance."

"President Trump got our allies to increase their NATO spending by demanding they pay up, but Joe Biden went back to letting them take advantage of the American taxpayer," said Jason Miller, a Trump senior adviser, in response to Biden's comments. "When you don't pay your defense spending you can't be surprised that you get more war."

Biden warns opposing Ukraine funding plays 'into Putin's hands,' but faces resistance in House

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, STEPHEN GROVES and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday called for House Republicans to urgently bring a \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan to a vote, warning that refusal to take up the bill, passed by the Senate in the morning, would be “playing into Putin’s hands.”

“Supporting this bill is standing up to Putin,” Biden said, raising his voice in strong comments from the White House as he referred to the Russian leader. “We can’t walk away now. That’s what Putin is betting on.”

But 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 has cast new doubt on the package and made clear that it could be weeks or months before Congress sends the legislation to Biden’s desk — if at all.

The potential impasse comes at a crucial point in the nearly two-year-old war, and supporters warn that abandoning Ukraine could embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin and threaten national security across the globe. Yet the months-long push to approve the \$60 billion in aid for Kyiv that is included in the package has exposed growing political divisions in the Republican Party over the role of the United States abroad.

Biden also lashed at Trump, who on Saturday said during a campaign appearance that he once warned 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.

“When America gives its word it means something,” Biden said. “Donald Trump looks at this as if it’s a burden.”

The Senate vote came early Tuesday 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. Yet 22 Republicans voted with nearly all Democrats to pass the package 70-29.

“With this bill, the Senate declares that American leadership will not waver, will not falter, will not fail,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who worked closely with Republican Leader Mitch McConnell on the legislation.

The bill’s passage through the Senate with a flourish of GOP support was a welcome sign for Ukraine amid critical shortages on the battlefield.

“Ukrainian soldiers out of artillery shells, Ukrainian units rationing rounds of ammunition to defend themselves, Ukrainian families worried that the next Russian strike will permanently plunge them into darkness, or worse,” Biden said.

The president appealed to House members in stark terms and called on Johnson to let the matter come to a vote. Ukraine supporters were also hoping that the showing of bipartisan support in the Senate would pressure Johnson to advance the bill. McConnell has made the issue 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, the longtime Republican leader said in a statement, “History settles every account. And today, on the value of American leadership and strength, history will record that the Senate did not blink.”

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.

“Putin’s ambitions have never been limited to Ukraine. His goals are far broader. This means that our defense solidarity must be even broader,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted on social media.

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 \$9.1 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza and the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 57 of 72

West Bank, Ukraine, and other populations caught in conflict zones across the globe.

Progressive lawmakers have objected to sending offensive weaponry to Israel, and Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent of Vermont, as well as two Democrats, Sens. Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Peter Welch of Vermont, voted against it.

"I cannot in good conscience support sending billions of additional taxpayer dollars for Prime Minister Netanyahu's military campaign in Gaza," Welch said. "It's a campaign that has killed and wounded a shocking number of civilians. It's created a massive humanitarian crisis."

The bill's passage followed almost five months of torturous negotiations over an expansive proposal 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 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 deal 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 a healthy showing of GOP support, several Republicans 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. They 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.

In the House, many Republicans have opposed the aid and are unlikely to cross Trump, but some key 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 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 compromise as "dead on arrival," contributing to its rapid demise.

House Democratic leaders are looking at rarely used procedures to force a vote on the bill, but those represent a long-shot effort without Johnson's support.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a letter to fellow Democrats Tuesday, "The American people deserve an up or down vote, and we will use every available legislative tool to get comprehensive national security legislation over the finish line."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 58 of 72

Super Bowl was the most-watched program ever in the US, averaging 123.7 million viewers

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

The longest Super Bowl game will also go down as the most-watched program in U.S. television history. According to Nielsen and Adobe Analytics, Kansas City's 25-22 overtime victory over San Francisco on Sunday night averaged 123.7 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.

Nielsen updated its numbers Tuesday after releasing an early figure of 123.4 million on Monday night.

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% jump over last year's figure of 183.6 million.

The CBS broadcast averaged 120.3 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 65% of the country. That measurement is expected to expand to include all 50 states later 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 2.3 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.

Nielsen also said Tuesday that Usher's Super Bowl halftime performance averaged 129.3 million viewers — the most-watched Super Bowl halftime on record and a 7% increase from Rihanna's last year (121 million).

Nickelodeon's kids-centric broadcast, the first alternate feed of a Super Bowl, averaged 1.2 million.

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.

US inflation slows but remains elevated in sign that price pressures are easing only gradually

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer inflation in the United States cooled last month yet remained elevated in the latest sign that the pandemic-fueled price surge is only gradually and fitfully coming under control.

Tuesday's report from the Labor Department showed that the consumer price index rose 0.3% from December to January, up from a 0.2% increase the previous month. Compared with a year ago, prices

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 59 of 72

are up 3.1%.

That is less than the 3.4% figure in December and far below the 9.1% inflation peak in mid-2022. But the latest reading is still well above the Federal Reserve's 2% target level at a time when public frustration with inflation has become a pivotal issue in President Joe Biden's bid for re-election.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices climbed 0.4% last month, up from 0.3% in December. On a year-over-year basis, core prices were up 3.9% in January, the same as in December. Core inflation is watched especially closely because it typically provides a better read of where inflation is likely headed.

Tuesday's report showed that the drivers of inflation have decisively shifted from goods, like used cars, gasoline and groceries, which are now falling in price or rising much more slowly, to services, including hotel rooms, restaurant meals and medical care. That shift could raise concerns for the Fed, because services inflation typically takes longer to cool.

At his most recent news conference, Fed Chair Jerome Powell singled out persistently high services prices as a concern and indicated the central bank's policymakers would like to see services inflation ease further before starting to cut their key interest rate.

"There's still some inflation in the system that's going to take some time to work through," said Omair Sharif, founder of Inflation Insights, a research firm. "This justifies the Fed wanting to wait and see how things are going to go."

Tuesday's unexpectedly sticky inflation data sent stock and bond prices tumbling, with financial markets now envisioning the Fed's first cut rates in June, rather than in May or March as many traders had previously expected. The S&P 500 was off nearly 1.2% in early afternoon trading, and the yield on the 10-year Treasury note jumped by a sharp one-tenth, to 4.28%.

Biden administration officials responded to Tuesday's report by noting that average hourly pay, adjusted for inflation, rose in January and is 1.4% higher than it was a year earlier. But the average work week has declined because some businesses have reduced their employees' hours, leaving weekly inflation-adjusted pay slightly lower than it was a year earlier.

"We understand there's more work to be done, but this is an economy that is in a much different place than it was a year ago," said Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary. "When you see eggs and milk and products like that at the grocery store going down, they're lower than they were a year ago, that's important."

Some economists cautioned against assigning too much weight to January's inflation data, noting that many companies impose annual price increases in the first month of the year, imparting a temporary boost to January's figures. The government seeks to seasonally adjust the data to account for such trends but doesn't always do so perfectly.

A raft of forward-looking data, in fact, suggests that inflation will continue to cool. The pace of wage growth has slowed, which reduces the pressure on companies to raise prices to offset higher labor costs. And consumers and business owners collectively expect lower inflation in the coming months and years, surveys show, a trend that can itself hold down price increases.

From December to January, average national gas prices tumbled 3.3%, the government said. Yet so far this month, the average price has climbed higher, rising 15 cents to \$3.23 a gallon as of Tuesday, according to AAA.

Grocery prices rose 0.4% from December to January, the biggest such rise in a year, though compared with 12 months earlier, food prices are up just 1.2%.

But the costs of services — including auto insurance, apartment rents, and concert tickets — are still rising faster than they did before the pandemic and keeping overall inflation persistently high. The cost of car insurance has soared more than 20%, on average, compared with a year ago.

Such price spikes are causing heartburn for many consumers. Bill Milligan of Atlanta said he was stunned last month to find that the cost of insuring one of his cars had soared nearly 30% compared to six months earlier.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 60 of 72

"I was going, 'What the hell is that?'" Milligan said he thought when he saw the charge on his bank statement.

Milligan, a 46-year-old software architect, called his insurance company, which confirmed that the price increase didn't reflect any recent tickets or accidents and said he was still receiving a discount for insuring several cars at once.

"And they're like, 'Yeah, sorry, it's just the price of everything is going up,'" Milligan said.

Milligan, who said he received a substantial pay raise last year, acknowledged that financially he is still doing fine.

"I can't complain about this," he said, referring to inflation overall.

But as with many Americans, higher prices have caused him to worry about the future. He wonders how his oldest of three daughters, who wants to become a schoolteacher, will live on an educator's salary with costs having risen so high.

The mixed data released Tuesday will likely reinforce the caution of Fed officials, who have said they're pleased with the progress in sharply reducing inflation but want to see further evidence before feeling confident that it's sustainably headed back to their 2% target. Most economists still think the Fed will start cutting its rate in June from its 22-year-high of roughly 5.4%.

Another driver of high prices has been housing costs, particularly the price of home ownership. It rose 0.6% from December to January, the biggest one-month jump since April. That measure is 6.2% higher than it was a year earlier.

But housing costs should slow in the coming months. The price of new apartment leases has been declining steadily as new apartment buildings have been completed. It can take months for the drop in new lease prices to feed through into the government's data.

At the same time, economists say that inflation in health care services is likely to stay high. The cost of hospital services jumped 1.6% just from December to January. Doctors' services rose 0.6%.

Sharif said those increases likely reflected, in part, sharp pay gains in recent years for nurses and other in-demand medical workers, such as anesthesiologists and radiologists.

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. Rate cuts, whenever they happen, would eventually lead to lower borrowing costs for many categories of loans.

Lower borrowing costs could boost economic growth. But a strong economy may 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 typically respond by raising prices, which would worsen inflation.

Pakistan's former premier Sharif and allies agree to form a coalition

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The party of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and its allies announced late Tuesday that they will jointly form a coalition government, ending the uncertainty since last week when no party won a simple majority in parliamentary elections.

The latest development came hours after the parties — all of them rivals of the country's imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan — met in Islamabad.

The meeting was attended by the Pakistan People's Party of former President Asif Ali Zardari and by Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League, including his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced Khan when he was ousted through a no-confidence vote in parliament in 2022.

At a news conference with Zardari and other politicians, Shebaz Sharif did not say who would be the joint choice for prime minister, though it is widely believed that Sharif would head the new government. In his brief remarks, Sharif said that the talks on a coalition were successful.

"We have decided that we will form the government jointly," Zardari said.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 61 of 72

A spokesperson for the Pakistan Muslim League, Mairiyum Aurangzeb, said that the elder Sharif — a three-time prime minister — had nominated his younger brother for the prime minister role.

The Pakistan Muslim League party had been in talks with Zardari and other allies after Thursday's election for the National Assembly or lower house of the parliament.

Though candidates backed by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 93 out of 265 National Assembly seats, it was not enough to form a government. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League and Zardari's Pakistan People's Party won 75 and 54 seats respectively.

The surprisingly strong showing for Khan's party were a shock for former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who was marked out as the powerful security establishment's preferred candidate following his smooth return to the country last October.

Pakistan's military has always cast itself as the ultimate arbiter in who becomes prime minister.

Tuesday's move by the rivals of Khan came hours after Khan's PTI party refused to hold any talks with them. Khan, who is currently serving multiple prison terms because of convictions on charges of corruption and violating a marriage law, was disqualified from contesting the vote.

Members of Khan's party also had to contest the vote as independent candidates after the Election Commission and Supreme Court stripped his party of its electoral symbol, which helps illiterate voters find candidates on the ballot. They also imposed other legal barriers.

Khan's party says last Thursday's vote was rigged to stop it from getting a majority in the parliament, a charge the election officials denied.

Under the constitution, Pakistan's President Arif Alvi will convene the inaugural National Assembly session before Feb. 29 so that lawmakers can be sworn in. The parliament will later elect the new prime minister.

South Africa asks UN court to urgently examine Israel's targeting of Rafah in ongoing genocide case

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — South Africa's government said Tuesday it had lodged an "urgent request" with the U.N.'s International Court of Justice to consider whether Israel's military operations targeting the southern Gaza city of Rafah are a breach of provisional orders the court handed down last month in a case alleging genocide.

South Africa said it asked the court to weigh whether Israel's strikes on Rafah, and its intention to launch a ground offensive on the city where 1.4 million Palestinians have sought shelter, breaches both the U.N. Genocide Convention and preliminary orders handed down by the court last month in a case accusing Israel of genocide.

Rafah is on the border with Egypt, which has warned that an offensive on the city now holding more than half of Gaza's population would bring disaster.

South Africa's government said in a statement that Rafah was "the last refuge for surviving people in Gaza." It asked the top U.N. court to consider using its powers to issue additional preliminary orders telling Israel to halt the deaths and destruction there.

South Africa already alleged Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people in its war against the Hamas militant group in Gaza and filed a case with the world court in December. A ruling on the genocide allegation could take years.

South Africa also asked the court to order a cease-fire by Israel, but the justices stopped short of that.

In its new filing, South Africa's government said it was "gravely concerned that the unprecedented military offensive against Rafah, as announced by the State of Israel, has already led to and will result in further large scale killing, harm and destruction."

South Africa said it was asking that the matter be dealt with urgently "in light of the daily death toll in Gaza."

On Tuesday night, the court confirmed in a message on X, formerly Twitter, that it had received South Africa's new request. It did not comment further. If the court decides to hold another hearing on the

request for further provisional measures, it would likely then rule within weeks.

Israel strongly denies committing genocide in Gaza and says it does all it can to spare civilians and is only targeting Hamas militants. It says Hamas' tactic of embedding in civilian areas makes it difficult to avoid civilian casualties.

Israel's assault has wrought destruction in Gaza, with more than 28,000 people killed, over 70% of them women and minors, according to local health officials in the Hamas-controlled enclave. Around 80% of the population has been displaced and the U.N. says a humanitarian catastrophe has pushed more than a quarter of Palestinians in Gaza toward starvation.

Israel says it has killed thousands of militants in its aim of crushing Hamas in retaliation for the Oct. 7 attacks on southern Israel. About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and 250 were taken hostage.

South Africa has accused Israel of ignoring the court's preliminary ruling in the days after it was issued by continuing to kill civilians.

"Israel believes it has license to do as it wishes," Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor said.

South Africa's legal efforts are rooted in issues central to its identity: Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Blacks to "homelands." Apartheid ended in 1994.

Israel's military assault in Gaza was described last week as "over the top" by U.S. President Joe Biden, a strong criticism from a close ally. The White House said Biden has also warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel should not conduct a military operation against Hamas in Rafah without a "credible and executable" plan to protect civilians.

Family of Palestinian-American detained by Israel seeks her release. 'I want my mother back'

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The family of a Palestinian-American woman arrested by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank says they still haven't had contact with her, more than a week after she was seized from her home in an overnight raid.

Relatives of Samaher Esmail say they are getting increasingly worried because they believe the 46-year-old woman has not received the medication she takes for her cancer treatment.

"I want my mother back," her son, Ibrahim Esmail, told a news conference on Monday hosted by the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Washington.

Esmail's family says that she was dragged out of bed in the early hours of Feb. 5. They have expressed concerns about her health because she is undergoing treatment for uterine cancer.

The Israeli military has said she was arrested for "incitement on social media," but given no other details. The army and Israeli prison service did not immediately respond to requests for comment Tuesday.

Esmail's family said Tuesday that a lawyer had visited her and reported that she was in poor condition and had been beaten. They claimed she had not received her medication.

Esmail is from Gretna, Louisiana, the same hometown of a Palestinian American teenager who was recently killed by Israeli fire in a nearby village. The death of 17-year-old Tawfic Abdel Jabbar drew an expression of concern from the White House and an uncommonly quick pledge to investigate from the Israeli police. No findings from that investigation have yet been released.

Esmail's family said she often traveled back and forth between the West Bank and the U.S., where she managed a family-owned grocery store in Gretna and worked as a tutor at a nearby high school.

At his press conference, Ibrahim Esmail said the family had not heard from his mother and said that as of Monday, the embassy had not contacted them nor sent consular officials to visit her. The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem declined to comment.

He said the family is seeking his mother's "unconditional release" from what it says is wrongful detention.

"I want our government to be much more aware and active," he said.

What is happening at the Republican National Committee and could Lara Trump become its co-chair?

By STEVE PEOPLES and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump is calling for a shakeup at the highest levels of the Republican National Committee. And party leaders are taking it very seriously.

To be clear, this is not normal.

Trump has yet to secure the GOP's presidential nomination and just last week, he and current Chair Ronna McDaniel privately agreed that no major changes would take place until after South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary. But that didn't stop Trump from announcing Monday on social media that he wants McDaniel to be replaced by Michael Whatley, the North Carolina GOP chairman. The new co-chair, Trump said, should be his daughter-in-law Lara Trump.

McDaniel has said nothing will change at least until after South Carolina. And the RNC membership isn't meeting until later this spring at the earliest to formalize any changes.

What is happening at the RNC and why does it matter? Here's an explanation:

What is the RNC?

The Republican National Committee is the governing body of the national Republican Party and runs the GOP's political machine. It's focused above all on winning elections. The committee is made up of 168 voting members, including at least one man and woman from every state.

Day-to-day operations and strategic decisions are controlled by a chairperson based in the Washington headquarters.

The RNC chair is elected every two years by the RNC's 168 members. But when a Republican president occupies the White House, the 168 effectively act as a rubber stamp for the president's wishes given his or her role as the undisputed head of the party. It's the same for Democrats.

That's why, back in 2016, Donald Trump had the power to handpick Ronna McDaniel to lead the RNC after he entered the White House. McDaniel, the niece of Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, previously led the Michigan state GOP and was viewed as popular among the party's establishment and grassroots.

Trump's choice was ratified by the RNC membership in January 2017, and McDaniel has led the committee ever since. In that position, she's raised and spent hundreds of millions of dollars, maintained and expanded GOP field offices and staffing in key states and communities across the country, and coordinated the presidential nomination process in 2020 and 2024.

But make no mistake, Trump — not McDaniel — has been the real leader of the Republican Party over the last eight years.

Why does Trump want to replace the RNC's leadership?

Trump has for years had a hot-and-cold relationship with the RNC, but he has been under increasing pressure from leaders in the party's "Make America Great Again" movement to break from establishment leaders like McDaniel.

In particular, people like former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, conservative activist Charlie Kirk and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy blame McDaniel's leadership decisions for the GOP's political struggles in the last three national elections. (Those election losses also coincide, of course, with Trump's emergence as the face of the party.)

But until recently, McDaniel was viewed as a staunch Trump ally. Trump's advisers quietly worked to ensure her reelection just last year, despite criticism from those same MAGA leaders.

Trump's allies complain that the RNC has been irresponsible with its money. Recent campaign finance disclosures released showed the RNC had just \$8 million in the bank and \$1 million in debt.

Others say that the committee under McDaniel's leadership has not focused enough on the voter fraud that Trump falsely blames for his 2020 reelection loss. That's despite his own Justice Department saying there was no evidence of widespread fraud and Trump's team losing more than 50 lawsuits over the election.

Other frictions have developed with McDaniel and the organization as Trump launched his third presidential bid.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 64 of 72

The former president began making clear early last year that he did not intend to participate in the party's debates or sign a pledge requiring candidates to support the eventual nominee. Trump in April complained that "nobody got my approval, or the approval of the Trump Campaign, before announcing them."

In October, he called for the RNC to cancel its remaining debates, all of which he sat out, and to focus instead on the likely rematch with President Joe Biden. The RNC did not heed his call.

The leadership changes Trump wants would both appease frustrated MAGA leaders while ensuring Trump has close allies — including a family member — running the organization.

Can he actually replace the chair?

Trump's social media post on Monday night calling for new leadership at the RNC has no legal authority.

McDaniel and her lieutenants can continue to run the committee's operations until they are replaced by a formal vote of the RNC's 168 members. That said, McDaniel is not expected to fight Trump's wishes. And barring an unforeseen development, her days as the RNC chair will end in the coming weeks or months.

That's because the Republican president — or the Republican presidential nominee — effectively controls the RNC. And Trump is on the precipice of becoming the party's presumptive presidential nominee. When that happens, he will essentially have the keys to the building.

Having already secured commanding victories in Iowa and New Hampshire, Trump is eyeing a knockout blow in South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary that would embarrass his only remaining Republican rival, Nikki Haley, in her home state and likely force her out of the race altogether.

The RNC's 168 members are widely expected to formalize Trump's preferences when they meet next in person. The next scheduled meeting isn't until the summer, although the committee typically holds a training session each spring that might offer an opportunity for such a vote.

Why is he picking his daughter-in-law?

Trump has a history of installing family members in key roles.

That includes having his children run his businesses. Once he entered the White House, he tapped daughter Ivanka Trump to serve as a senior White House adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner as key presidential adviser covering weighty issues like Middle East peace, criminal justice reform and the government response to the coronavirus pandemic. Ethics experts condemned those moves.

Lara Trump has been a key member of her father-in-law's political orbit for years, emerging from relative obscurity to become a steadfast and camera-ready advocate for the businessman-turned politician. She served as a senior adviser on his 2020 reelection campaign, and, like other family members, she has been an active presence on the campaign trail on her father-in-law's behalf.

Lara Trump, a former television producer, has also shown an interest in political office. In 2021, she openly considered a run for the U.S. Senate out of North Carolina, before bowing out.

One more factor in his decision: Trump needed to pick a woman to serve as co-chair because he tapped a male to fill the chair's role. RNC rules require the committee's top two staffers to be different genders.

Russia puts leader of NATO member Estonia on a wanted list over removal of Soviet-era monuments

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Estonia's prime minister has been put on a wanted list in Russia because of her efforts to remove Soviet-era World War II monuments in the Baltic nation, officials said Tuesday as tensions between Russia and the West soar amid the war in Ukraine.

The name of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas appeared on the Russian Interior Ministry's list of people wanted on unspecified criminal charges. While independent Russian news outlet Mediazona first reported Tuesday that Kallas was on the list, it said she has been on it for months. The list includes scores of officials and lawmakers from other Baltic nations.

Russian officials said that Kallas had been put on the list because of her efforts to remove World War II monuments.

Kallas dismissed it as Moscow's "familiar scare tactic."

"Russia may believe that issuing a fictitious arrest warrant will silence Estonia," she said. "I refuse to

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 65 of 72

be silenced — I will continue to vocally support Ukraine and advocate for the strengthening of European defenses.”

Estonia and fellow NATO members Latvia and Lithuania have pulled down monuments that are widely seen as an unwanted legacy of the Soviet occupation of those countries.

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago, numerous monuments to Red Army soldiers also have been taken down in Poland and the Czech Republic, a belated purge of what many see as symbols of past oppression.

Moscow has denounced those moves as desecrating the memory of Soviet soldiers who fell while fighting Nazi Germany.

The inclusion of Kallas — who has fiercely advocated for increased military assistance to Ukraine and stronger sanctions against Russia — appears to reflect the Kremlin’s effort to raise the stakes in the face of NATO and European Union pressure over the war.

“Estonia and I remain steadfast in our policy: supporting Ukraine, bolstering European defense, and fighting against Russian propaganda,” Kallas said, pointing to her family’s history of facing Soviet repression. “This hits close to home for me: My grandmother and mother were once deported to Siberia, and it was the KGB who issued the fabricated arrest warrants.”

It’s the first time the Russian Interior Ministry has put a foreign leader on a wanted list. Estonian Secretary of State Taimar Peterkop and Lithuanian Culture Minister Simonas Kairys also are on the list, which is accessible to the public, along with scores of officials and lawmakers from Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

“This, of course, is a kind of reward for people who support Ukraine and support the fight of good against evil,” Lithuania Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said, adding that those on the list should be careful while traveling to third countries in the future.

Mika Golubovsky, editor of Mediazona’s English-language service, told The Associated Press that Kallas and other politicians from the Baltic nations have been in the Interior Ministry’s wanted database since mid-October and was the only head of state on the list.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova confirmed that Kallas and Peterkop were on the list because of their involvement in removing monuments.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was a response to action by Kallas and others who “have taken hostile action toward historic memory and our country.”

Russia has laws criminalizing the “rehabilitation of Nazism” that include punishing the desecration of war memorials. Russia’s Investigative Committee, the country’s top criminal investigation agency, has a department dealing with alleged “falsification of history” and “rehabilitation of Nazism,” which has ramped up its action since the start of the war, according to Mediazona, which broke the news on Kallas’ addition to the wanted list.

Mediazona, which downloaded and studied more than 96,000 individual entries in the database, said it also includes scores of Ukrainian officials and foreign nationals accused of fighting alongside Ukrainian armed forces. The entries usually don’t specify the charges or when the person was added to the list.

Golubovsky noted that not every high-profile addition to the list is publicly announced by the authorities. Officials in the Investigative Committee probably initially added Kallas and other Western officials to the list to score points with their superiors, he said, and the Kremlin only used it in its rhetoric about the West attacking Russia’s historic memory after it was disclosed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that ridding Ukraine of far-right, neo-Nazi groups is one of the central aims of the war, but he has offered no proof to back his repeated claims that such groups have a decisive voice in shaping Ukraine’s policies.

The inclusion of Kallas could also mark an attempt by Moscow to counter last year’s arrest warrant against Putin issued by the International Criminal Court over the alleged deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. The Interior Ministry’s list also includes ICC President Piotr Hofmanski, as well as judges and prosecutors.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and Meta spokesperson Andy Stone are on the list too. Meta is the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, which are banned in Russia.

While it means little in practical terms since contacts between Moscow and the West have been frozen

during the conflict, it comes at a time when European members of NATO are growing increasingly worried about how the U.S. election will affect the alliance.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump has rekindled the fears of NATO allies that he could allow Russia to expand its aggression in Europe if he returns to the White House.

"You didn't pay? You're delinquent?" the Republican front-runner recently said he told 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."

That statement sharply contrasted with U.S. President Joe Biden's pledge "to defend every inch of NATO territory," as the alliance commits all members to do in case of attack.

Trump's statement shocked many in Europe, drawing a pledge from Poland, France and Germany to bolster Europe's security and defense power.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith told reporters Tuesday that "encouraging the Kremlin to attack any NATO ally or alliance territory really puts our soldiers — U.S. soldiers and our allies' soldiers — in greater danger. Doing so, making those types of statements, is dangerous and frankly irresponsible."

While Putin insists he has no plans to strike any NATO countries unless they attack first, Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service released an annual report Tuesday noting that Russia has significantly increased weapons output and warning that "the Kremlin is probably anticipating a possible conflict with NATO within the next decade."

There also are scores of Belarusian nationals on Russia's wanted list, including opposition figures, rights advocates and journalists who are being sought by authorities in Minsk. Leanid Sudalenka of Viasna, Belarus' oldest and most prominent human rights group, told AP that Russian and Belarusian databases have been synchronized as part of the close relationship between the two nations.

Sudalenka, who fled to Lithuania last year after serving three years in a Belarusian prison and is on the list himself because of new charges, called it "an ugly conflation of two dictatorships that joined forces in prosecuting active people who protest against those dictatorships and the war."

The head of UN's nuclear watchdog warns Iran is 'not entirely transparent' on its atomic program

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog warned Tuesday that Iran is "not entirely transparent" regarding its atomic program, particularly after an official who once led Tehran's program announced the Islamic Republic has all the pieces for a weapon "in our hands."

Speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, just across the Persian Gulf, Rafael Mariano Grossi, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, alluded to remarks made this weekend by Ali Akbar Salehi. Grossi noted "an accumulation of complexities" in the wider Middle East amid Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Iran, after the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, has pursued nuclear enrichment just below weapons-grade levels. Tehran has accumulated enough enriched uranium to build several weapons if it chooses. However, U.S. intelligence agencies and others assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons program. Israel long has been believed to have its own nuclear weapons program.

Iran is "presenting a face which is not entirely transparent when it comes to its nuclear activities. Of course this increases dangers," Grossi said. "There's loose talk about nuclear weapons more and more, including in Iran recently. A very high official said, in fact, we have everything, it's disassembled. Well, please let me know what you have."

Iran, as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has pledged to allow the IAEA to visit its atomic sites to ensure its program is peaceful. Tehran also agreed to additional oversight from the IAEA as part of the 2015 nuclear deal.

Grossi did not identify the Iranian official who made the comment. However, in an Iranian state television show late Sunday, Salehi said that the country had all it needed to build a weapon.

"We have all the (pieces) of nuclear science and technology. Let me give an example," Salehi said. "What does a car need? It needs a chassis, it needs an engine, it needs a steering wheel, it needs a gearbox. Have you made a gearbox? I say yes. An engine? But each one is for its own purpose."

Salehi made a similar comment Saturday.

"We have it in our hands," he said then.

Since 2022, Iranian officials have spoken openly about something long denied by Tehran as it enriches uranium at its closest-ever levels to weapons-grade material: the Islamic Republic is ready to build an atomic weapon at will. That includes Kamal Kharrazi, an adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who told Al Jazeera that Tehran has the ability to build nuclear weapons but does not intend to do so.

Salehi's comments represent an escalation. He served as the head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organization of Iran under then-President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's theocracy who reached the 2015 deal with world powers.

The hardening of Iran's position comes as militias it arms in the region — Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels — have launched attacks targeting Israel. The Houthis continue to attack commercial shipping in the region, sparking repeated airstrikes from the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile Tuesday, Iran released footage of a ballistic missile being fired off the Shahid Mahdavi, a container ship transformed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard into a floating base. The footage showed a Fateh missile fired from a launcher disguised as a shipping container, potentially meaning Iran could hide the launcher on other vessels.

Trump wants to install new RNC leadership including his daughter-in-law as co-chair

By STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump wants a leadership change at the Republican National Committee in an attempt to install a new slate of loyalists — including his daughter-in-law — atop the GOP's political machine even before the former president formally secures the party's next presidential nomination.

Current RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel says she has no plans to leave the committee until at least after South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary election.

Still, Trump on Monday night called for McDaniel to be replaced by Michael Whatley, the North Carolina GOP chairman. The new co-chair, Trump said, should be his daughter-in-law Lara Trump.

Trump's move to push out McDaniel — days after the two met at his Mar-a-Lago residence and agreed to delay a decision on her future — reflects his urgency to force Republicans to unite behind him in a likely rematch against President Joe Biden. While Trump has not come close to gathering sufficient delegates to secure the nomination, he is eyeing a potential knockout blow against Nikki Haley, his last major primary rival, in her home state of South Carolina next week.

Central to Trump's demands are his false theories of voter fraud. Trump has long complained that the RNC is not focused enough on preventing voter fraud, which he continues to falsely insist cost him the 2020 election, even though his own election officials, Justice Department and numerous courts found no evidence to support his claims.

Trump, in his statement, noted Whatley is "committed to election integrity, which we must have to keep fraud out of our election so it can't be stolen."

RNC spokesman Keith Schipper said McDaniel had no immediate plans to step down.

"Chairwoman McDaniel has been on the road helping elect Republicans up and down the ballot and she will continue working hard to beat Biden this fall. Nothing has changed, and there will be no decision or announcement about future plans until after South Carolina," he said.

That's even as Haley warned her party against acceding to Trump's wishes.

Referencing Trump's efforts to "get the RNC to name in the presumptive nominee," Haley talked Tuesday about her rival's moves to replace McDaniel, who has not announced her departure.

"What we saw yesterday was, he took a different approach," she said. "Now he has decided he has fired

the RNC chair, he's named who's going to be the new RNC chair, his daughter-in-law will be the co-chair, and he is making his campaign manager the officer that runs the party. Think about what is happening right now. Is that how you're going to try and take an election?"

Immediately following Trump's announcement, Haley campaign manager Betsy Ankney said Trump is simply "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic."

Haley's plan if given the opportunity to run the RNC? She'd "blow it all up," Ankney said, and fire everyone.

McDaniel, the niece of Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, was Trump's hand-picked choice to lead the RNC shortly after his 2016 election. The 50-year-old from Michigan was a strong advocate for the former president and helped reshape the GOP's governing body in his image, but Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement increasingly blamed her for the party's struggles in recent national elections.

The campaign's effective takeover of the RNC would bring benefits for both the committee and Trump's campaign — at least in theory.

The RNC has been struggling with fundraising, especially after Trump tried to bar it from using his name and image to raise money. An integration would also open the door to more skeptical party donors who remain reluctant to give directly to Trump's campaign or super PAC. Campaign finance disclosures released last week showed the RNC had just \$8 million in the bank and \$1 million in debt.

None of Trump's leadership wishes will come to fruition without an in-person vote by the Republican National Committee, which is expected to meet later this spring.

Under Trump's preferred arrangement, senior adviser Chris LaCivita would maintain his current role leading Trump's campaign in addition to becoming the RNC's chief operations officer.

Whatley, who serves as general counsel to the RNC, would take over for McDaniel.

He has paid particular attention to the prospect of voter fraud in recent years, having taken credit for hiring a large contingent of lawyers ahead of the 2020 election. He failed in his bid last year to become the RNC co-chair despite earning Trump's endorsement.

Lara Trump would then presumably take over as the RNC's No. 2.

She is married to Trump's middle son, Eric, and has taken an especially active role in all three of her father-in-law's campaigns. She briefly considered running for Senate in her home state of North Carolina in 2022, but decided against it, saying she wanted to spend more time with her young children.

The New York Times first reported Trump was considering installing Lara Trump at the RNC.

Meanwhile, Democratic National Committee spokesman Director Alex Floyd said, "Trump is making it clear that the GOP is the home for insurrectionists and extreme MAGA fanatics."

"Whatley already threatened our democracy once before when he spread lies about the results of the 2020 election," Floyd said. "Now, Trump is rewarding him in just the latest display that democracy will be on the ballot this November."

Mental health emerges as a dividing line in abortion rights initiatives planned for state ballots

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The weeks after Kaniya Harris found out she was pregnant were among the hardest in her life.

Final exams were fast approaching for the college junior. Her doctors told her she had an ovarian cyst, and the risk of ectopic pregnancy was high. The wait times for abortion clinics near her city of Bethesda, Maryland, seemed impossibly long. And she couldn't visit her family in Kentucky because of the state's abortion ban.

Harris was having regular panic attacks. It all felt like too much, she said.

"My mental health was at the lowest point it's ever been in my life," said Harris, who had an abortion last May.

As advocates push this year for ballot measure initiatives aiming to protect abortion rights, key differences have emerged in the language of proposed measures. Among them is the inclusion of mental health

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 69 of 72

exceptions.

A Missouri proposal would allow lawmakers to restrict abortions after a fetus is considered viable, except if an abortion "is needed to protect the life or physical or mental health of the pregnant person." A similar measure has been proposed in Arizona. In 2022, Michigan voters passed an abortion rights amendment with a mental health exception for viability limits.

Meanwhile, proposed ballot measure language in Arkansas only says "physical health," excluding a mental health exception. Proposed abortion rights initiatives in other states, including Florida, Montana and Nebraska, don't explicitly mention mental health.

"It's heartbreaking to hear about these policies ignoring mental health," said Harris, now 21. "An abortion can save someone's life, including when they're in a mental health emergency."

Most states with abortion bans include exemptions for life-threatening emergencies, but only Alabama's includes an exception for "serious mental illness" that could result in the death of the mother or fetus. Lawmakers added the provision after getting pressure from the state's medical association, which was concerned about women at high risk for suicide.

The law, passed in 2019, was among the strictest abortion restrictions in the country at the time. It did not include exceptions in cases of rape or incest and considered performing an abortion to be a felony. Alabama began enforcing the ban in 2022 after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which once granted a federal right to abortion.

Abortion bans in at least 10 states — Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Ohio, Tennessee, West Virginia and Wyoming — explicitly exclude mental health conditions as a possible exception. Others are murkier, allowing for exemptions for the "life and health" of the woman without defining if mental health is included.

Medical experts say even states that do allow mental health exceptions require patients to jump through hoops that may be inaccessible to some people, especially those with low incomes. Alabama, for example, requires a state-licensed psychiatrist with at least three years of clinical experience to certify the mental health condition as an emergency.

Some days, when Harris would get home from class, she would be "so overwhelmed that I'd have a breakdown on the floor," she said. For two months, she cried every day. But facing an abortion ban in her home state and stigma from doctors, Harris said she didn't feel comfortable speaking about her experience with a mental health professional.

"People shouldn't have to jump through hoops and prove their pain to have access to the care they need," she said.

Mental health conditions were the leading underlying cause of pregnancy-related deaths from 2017 to 2019 with nearly 23% of pregnancy-related deaths attributed to mental health conditions, including suicides and overdoses from substance use disorders, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

About one in eight women experience postpartum depression, according to the CDC. But mental health struggles during pregnancy, especially the psychological trauma of those forced to carry unwanted pregnancies, are understudied, said Michelle Oberman, a Santa Clara University law professor researching the impact of abortion restrictions.

"These statistics, these stories of women's suffering have been really haunting me," Oberman said. "We don't as a society have a great track record of treating mental health the same way we do physical health."

Policies that dismiss mental health as less important than physical health put lives at risk, said Columbia University psychiatrist Paul Appelbaum. He said there is also growing evidence that being denied an abortion causes significant mental distress. This distress has been apparent in recent stories of women forced to flee their states or continue pregnancies despite serious risks to their health.

"I am extremely concerned by the exclusion of mental health exceptions in these ballot measures," said Appelbaum, former president of the American Psychiatric Association. "It's absolutely cruel and will lead to the suffering deaths of pregnant women in these states."

Jayne Trevino, an OB-GYN in Missouri and fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health, said she has

seen first-hand how being denied abortion care can affect a patient's well-being, including their mental health.

"It's a devastating, regular reality for my patients," she said, adding that she was grateful for the mental health exemption in the state's proposed ballot measure language.

Mallory Schwarz, a spokesperson for Missourians for Constitutional Freedom, said the initiative's language "is written to make sure that doctors — not politicians — are able to determine what's best for their patients."

Conversely, an Arkansas initiative only includes exemptions "to protect a pregnant female's life or to protect a pregnant female from a physical disorder, physical illness, or physical injury."

Previous versions of the proposal included broader exceptions, said Gennie Diaz, executive director of For AR People. Initially, she said, "We wanted to craft language for a constitutional amendment that would be as broad as possible and would hopefully account for something like mental health."

But when handed a proposal with exceptions to "protect the life and health" of the mother, the state's attorney general, a Republican, rejected the language, saying it must define "health."

"That was a signal to us that we were going to have to make a choice," Diaz said. "And another unfortunate factor is that the majority of Arkansas voters are unlikely to support mental health as a reason for an abortion after a particular timeframe. We felt it was unlikely for a version that explicitly names mental health to pass."

Arkansas advocates were also worried the opposition campaign would target a mental health exception, Diaz said.

The National Right to Life Committee's model state legislation for abortion bans explicitly excludes mental health exceptions. These exceptions allow pregnant women "to kind of bypass those laws and still abort pregnancies of children that were viable," said Ingrid Duran, state legislative director of the NRLC.

"We specifically exclude mental health exemptions because we saw how that creates a loophole in a law and it leaves that unborn child at risk of dying for a sometimes treatable, sometimes temporary condition that the mother may be experiencing," she said.

When asked if targeting mental health exceptions will be part of their strategy for campaigning against abortion ballot measures in 2024, she said, "I can't necessarily say that would be part of the strategy." Still, said Duran, "When I see mental health exceptions like this, my heart drops."

Oberman from Santa Clara University said she expects to see the anti-abortion movement "employ a strategy of minimizing and dismissing the mental health consequences of forced pregnancy."

"The mental health issues of pregnant people remain in the shadows and highly stigmatized," she said. "And that clouds our judgment of what a medical emergency looks like during pregnancy."

Why tens of thousands of Indian farmers are marching toward the capital in protest

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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 71 of 72

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 legislation that will guarantee 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.

Today in History: February 14, Aretha Franklin records 'Respect'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 14, the 45th day of 2024. There are 321 days left in the year. This is Valentine's Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 14, 1967, Aretha Franklin recorded her cover of Otis Redding's "Respect" at Atlantic Records in New York.

On this date:

In 1876, inventors Alexander Graham Bell and Elisha Gray applied separately for patents related to the telephone. (The U.S. Supreme Court eventually ruled Bell the rightful inventor.)

In 1912, Arizona became the 48th state of the Union as President William Howard Taft signed a proclamation.

In 1913, labor leader Jimmy Hoffa was born in Brazil, Ind.; college football coach Woody Hayes was born in Clifton, Ohio; sports broadcaster Mel Allen was born in Birmingham, Ala.

In 1924, the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Co. of New York was formally renamed International Business Machines Corp., or IBM.

In 1929, the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre" took place in a Chicago garage as seven rivals of Al Capone's

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 235 ~ 72 of 72

gang were gunned down.

In 1945, during World War II, British and Canadian forces reached the Rhine River in Germany.

In 1984, 6-year-old Stormie Jones became the world's first heart-liver transplant recipient when the surgery was performed at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

In 1989, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini called on Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie, author of "The Satanic Verses," a novel condemned as blasphemous.

In 2012, a fire broke out at a farm prison in Honduras, killing 361 inmates.

In 2013, double-amputee Olympic sprinter Oscar Pistorius shot and killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, at his home in Pretoria, South Africa; he was later convicted of murder and served nearly nine years of a sentence of 13 years and five months before being released from prison in January 2024.

In 2017, a former store clerk, Pedro Hernandez, was convicted in New York of murder in one of the nation's most haunting missing-child cases, nearly 38 years after 6-year-old Etan Patz (AY'tahn payts) disappeared while on the way to a school bus stop.

In 2018, a gunman identified as a former student opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School near Fort Lauderdale, Fla., killing 17 people in the nation's deadliest school shooting since the attack in Newtown, Conn., more than five years earlier. (Nikolas Cruz pleaded guilty to murder in October 2021 and was sentenced in November 2022 to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

Today's birthdays: Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is 82. Jazz musician Maceo Parker is 81. Journalist Carl Bernstein is 80. Former Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., is 77. TV personality Pat O'Brien is 76. Magician Teller (Penn and Teller) is 76. Cajun singer-musician Michael Doucet (doo-SAY') (Beausoleil) is 73. Actor Ken Wahl is 67. Opera singer Renee Fleming is 65. Actor Meg Tilly is 64. Pro Football Hall of Famer Jim Kelly is 64. Singer-producer Dwayne Wiggins is 63. Actor Sakina Jaffrey is 62. Actor Enrico Colantoni is 61. Actor Zach Galligan is 60. Former tennis player Manuela Maleeva is 57. Actor Simon Pegg is 54. Rock musician Kevin Baldes (Lit) is 52. Rock singer Rob Thomas (Matchbox Twenty) is 52. Former NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe is 52. Actor Danai Gurira is 46. Actor Matt Barr is 40. Actor Stephanie Leonidas is 40. Actor Jake Lacy is 38. Actor Tiffany Thornton is 38. Actor Brett Dier is 34. Actor Freddie Highmore is 32.