

Groton Daily Independent

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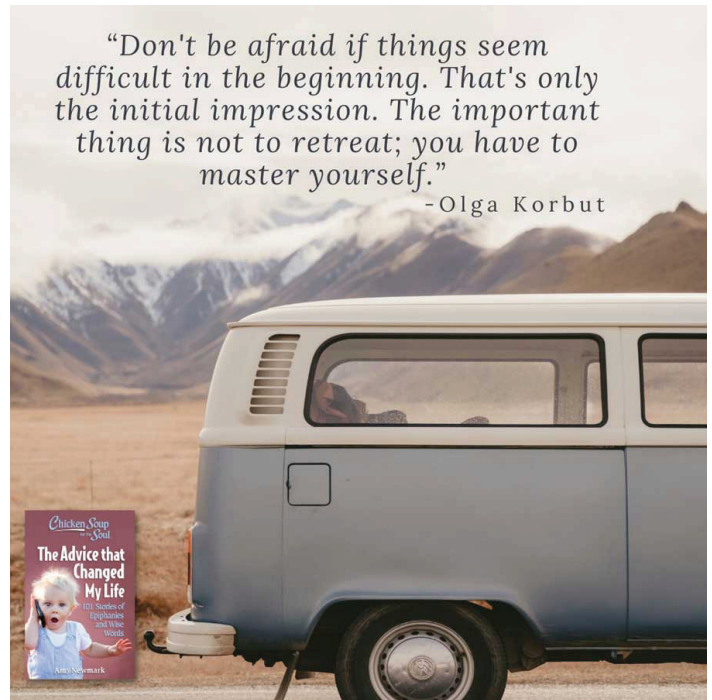
Saturday, Feb. 24

Robotics VRC state competition, 609 Cliff Avenue
Harrisburg, 10 AM State Wrestling at Sioux Falls
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Feb. 25

Open Gym:
Grades JK-8 2:00-3:30 [Students accompanied by adults] Grades 6-12 3:30-5:00
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45

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



"Don't be afraid if things seem difficult in the beginning. That's only the initial impression. The important thing is not to retreat; you have to master yourself."

-Olga Korbut

a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.;
Worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday
School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m.
and Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School at 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m.;
and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.;
Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.

Monday, Feb. 26

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzini, carrots, pineapple
tidbits, bread stick.

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.

School Lunch: Pork chops, peas.

Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community
Center with potluck at noon.

Planning and Zoning Board Meeting, 6 p.m.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city
shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum
cans.
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1440

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Chinese 'Dragon' Fossil

An international team of paleontologists from the US, Europe, and China have uncovered the fossils of a 240-million-year-old dragon-like marine animal in southwestern China, according to research published yesterday.

The nearly 17-foot-long aquatic reptile, dubbed the "Chinese dragon," belongs to the *Dinocephalosaurus orientalis* species. The animal features flippers and what paleontologists describe as an unusually long neck that stretches nearly 8 feet, resembling snake-like dragons in Chinese mythology (see overview). The species was first discovered in 2003 when a skull and three cervical vertebrae were uncovered from limestone deposits. More remains were eventually found, allowing paleontologists to piece together the complete skeleton over a 10-year period.

The specimen's remains were found in Guizhou province in China, home to the discovery of several other species from the Triassic period (about 252 million to 201 million years ago) when Earth featured the single supercontinent of Pangea. The Triassic period was the first period of the Mesozoic Era.

Netanyahu outlines official blueprint for postwar Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unveiled a two-page outline of his plans to his security cabinet, mostly reflecting his public statements. The plan includes Israel's military operating in Gaza indefinitely and shuttering the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Gaza and the West Bank, which faces allegations that some of its workers are linked to militants. The US has pushed for the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority to play a role in governing Gaza.

US announces over 500 sanctions against Russia.

The sanctions target individuals connected to the imprisonment of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died last week, as well as Russia's financial and defense sectors and people and entities believed to be providing support to Russia. The measure is the largest batch of sanctions the US has imposed on Russia since it invaded Ukraine and comes on the war's two-year anniversary.

Nvidia briefly surpasses \$2T valuation in intraday trading.

The chipmaker eventually closed with a \$1.97T valuation. Nvidia has seen its shares skyrocket in the past year as a prominent player in the artificial intelligence boom, adding a record \$277B to its market capitalization Thursday alone. In comparison, Coca-Cola as a whole is worth \$264B. Nvidia is currently the third largest US company, behind Microsoft (\$3.05T) and Apple (\$2.82T).

AT&T says cell outage caused by technical error, not cyberattack.

A preliminary review found the hourslong cellphone outage across the US was caused by an error in the application and execution of a software update intended to expand AT&T's network. An estimated 70,000 people (less than 1% of the network's estimated 100 million people serviced) were affected by Thursday's outage.

Voters head to polls in South Carolina's GOP primary today.

An average of all South Carolina polls shows former President Donald Trump with about 62% of the vote and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley with about 34% of the vote. Trump has so far won Republican races in Iowa, New Hampshire, and Nevada. Whoever wins South Carolina's statewide vote will receive 29 delegates, while the winner of each of the seven congressional districts will receive three delegates for each district won.

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Germany moves closer to legalizing cannabis.

German lawmakers approved legislation Friday legalizing limited amounts of cannabis for recreational use. The proposal includes letting adults carry up to 25 grams (nearly an ounce) of cannabis in public and privately owning up to 50 grams. The proposal still requires approval from the country's Federal Council next month and subsequent sign-off from the president. If fully approved, the law will go into effect in April.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Milam B. in South Carolina.

"In 1951, after graduating from high school, two friends and I took my 1931 Model A Ford on a trip from Louisville, Kentucky, to New Orleans, Louisiana (over 1,700 miles). There were no interstates in those days, and we couldn't get much over 35 mph with the 4-cylinder engine. We drove both day and night and were very seldom relieved from the heat of travel. Upon returning to Louisville, we had run out of funds and had a car problem in Jackson, Mississippi. The only gasoline station opened at 10 am and was a Phillips 66 station that did not perform any auto repairs. They did tell me of a mechanic living across the street from the station. Since it was so late, we were concerned about contacting him."

"With no other answers, we reluctantly knocked on his door and he answered in his PJs. We told him our story and he dressed and took us to his garage, where he spent over an hour repairing the car and bid us farewell. With our limited funds, he would not take a penny and we offered him anything we had in the car as payment (souvenirs, clothes, etc.) and he wouldn't take a thing for his efforts. Three broke boys were able to obtain a loan from a relative in Memphis and carry on to our home in Louisville, with grateful hearts and wonderful experiences with a kind and gentle man."



The Groton community has had an outpouring of support for Bill Shilhanek who was involved in an accident on Wednesday, Feb. 7, when he fell 12 feet from a scissor lift. He is in rehab at the Madonna Rehab Hospital in Lincoln, Neb. There have been many donations for give-aways on squares at both the Groton Legion and Jungle Lanes. The Legion is having a fund-raiser for Billy on Saturday, March 23, with a silent auction. In the photo above, there was a split pot with a little over \$3,600 raised. Pam Hanson won the split pot and donated her half of the proceeds back to the pot. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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Region 1A Boys Bracket

Class A - Region 1



#1 -

	1 Groton Area	16-4	2/27 TBD
	8 Redfield	1-19	


#2 -

	4 Waubay/Summit	14-6	2/27 TBD
	5 Aberdeen Ronc...	13-7	

#3 -

	2 Milbank	15-5	2/27 TBD
	7 Sisseton	3-17	

#4 -

	3 Tiospa Zina	13-7	2/27 TBD
	6 Webster Area	8-12	

#5 -

#1 WINNER	3/1 TBD
#2 WINNER	

#6 -

#3 WINNER	3/1 TBD
#4 WINNER	



SODAK 16 QUALIFIER



SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

















Seed Points Averages (calculated Feb. 23)

#1 Groton Area 44.050 - #2 Milbank 42.900 - #3 Tiospa Zina 42.250 - #4 Waubay/Summit 42.050 - #5 Aberdeen Roncalli 41.950 - #6 Webster Area 39.500 - #7 Sisseton 36.750 - #8 Redfield 34.450

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Current top 16 in the state in Class A

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Sioux Falls Christian	20	0	1.000	46.550
2	 Hamlin	17	3	.850	45.800
3	 Sioux Valley	18	2	.900	45.450
4	 Pine Ridge	18	1	.947	45.316
5	 Dakota Valley	17	3	.850	44.900
6	 Hot Springs	17	3	.850	44.450
7	 Rapid City Christian	17	3	.850	44.300
8	 Groton Area	16	4	.800	44.050
9	 Dell Rapids	15	5	.750	43.650
10	 Winner	16	4	.800	43.600
11	 Lennox	13	7	.650	43.150
12	 Milbank	15	5	.750	42.900
13	 St. Thomas More	15	5	.750	42.900
14	 Vermillion	13	7	.650	42.850
15	 Custer	13	7	.650	42.400
16	 Flandreau	13	7	.650	42.400

GHS Boy's Basketball

Tigers end regular season with win over Aberdeen Christian

This is the fifth year that these two teams have played each other in boys basketball. Over the years, the traveling team has been the winner, but not this year. Groton Area defeated Aberdeen Christian in Groton, 74-55.

The Tigers led at the quarterstops at 16-8, 33-23 and 58-37.

Four players hit double figures with Jacob Zak leading the Tigers with 24 points, five rebounds, two assists and four steals. Ryder Johnson had 14 points, six rebounds, one assist and one steal. Keegen Tracy had 14 points, one rebound, three assists and three steals. Lane Tietz had 12 points (all in the first half), but had eight assists, three rebounds and three steals. Logan Ringgenberg had six points, two rebounds, one assist and two steals. Kas-sen Keough had two points and one assist. Colby Dunker had one rebound and two assists. Turner Thompson had one assist.

Groton Area made 25 of 40 two-pointers for 63 percent, six of 13 three pointers for 46 percent, six of eight free throws for 75 percent, had 18 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 19 assists, 13 steals and 13 team fouls.

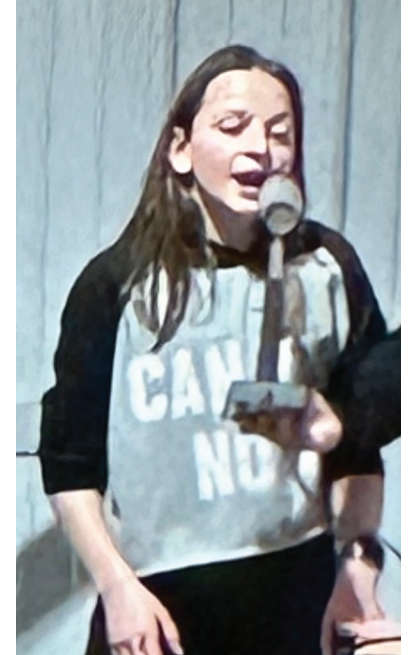
Three-Pointers: Tracy - 2, Johnson - 1, Tietz - 2, Zak - 1.

Joey Johnson led the Knights with 26 points while Konnar Furman had eight, Ellis Russell five, Luke Kaiser four and Jett Johnson and Becker Bosma each had three points.

Aberdeen Christian made 20 of 34 field goals for 59 percent, 11 of 12 free throws for 92 percent, had 18 turnovers and eight team fouls.

Three-Pointers: Jett Johnson - 1, Bosma - 1, Joey Johnson - 1.

Groton Area is now 16-4 on the season while Aberdeen Christian goes to 14-6.



Groton Area 5th Grader, Charli Jacobsen sang the National Anthem Friday night. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 43-35, leading at the quarterstops at 12-8, 23-22 and 33-27.

Gage Sippel led the Tigers with 11 points followed by Jayden Schwan with eight, Karson Zak seven, Kas-sen Keough six, Blake Pauli five and Easton Weber, Logan Warrington and Turner Thompson each had two points. Pauli, Schwan and Zak each made one three-pointer.

Gabe Eichler led the Knights with 10 points while Dylan Hofer had seven, Will Haskell six, Raymond Rodriguez-Martinez had five, Grady Jett four and Jett Johnson had three points. Johnson, Eichler and Haskell each made one three-pointer.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Lopsided First Half Leads Wolves to Friday Loss

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team opened their weekend at Augustana on Friday evening, falling to the Vikings by 27-points. Augustana led for the entirety of the game, as the Wolves started the first half shooting just 35.5% from the floor.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 73, AU 100

Records: NSU 10-17 (8-13 NSIC), AU 17-10 (12-9 NSIC)

Attendance: 1674

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern scored 31 points in the first and 42 in the second, while Augustana notched 54 points in the first and 46 in the second

The Wolves responded in the second half shooting 50.0% from the floor, however, were unable to overcome the 23-point first half deficit

NSU shot 42.6% from the floor, 34.6% from the 3-point line, and 85.7% from the foul line in the loss

They were out-rebounded 41-25, and added 11 assists, nine made 3-pointers, six steals, and two blocks

Northern scored 24 points in the paint, 14 points off ten AU turnovers, and four points off the bench

Andrew Bergan led four in double figures with a career high 21 points, hitting 8-of-11 from the floor and 4-of-7 from beyond the arc

Jacksen Moni and Michael Nhial led the team at the rim with five rebounds apiece, while Moni dished out a team high five assists

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL LEADERS

Andrew Bergan: 21 points, 72.7 field goal%, 2 rebounds, 2 steals

Jacksen Moni: 17 points, 5 rebounds, 5 assists

Josh Dilling: 16 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists

Michael Nhial: 13 points, 50.0 field goal%, 5 rebounds

UP NEXT

The Wolves close out the regular season today at Wayne State. Tip-off time is set for 5:30 p.m. versus the Wildcats. Northern sits tied for tenth in the league standings with St. Cloud State.

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Triumph Over the Vikings in NSIC Action

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The Northern State University women's basketball team rallied back in the final minutes against Augustana University, 60-57. Rianna Fillipi led the Wolves with her seventh double-double of the season.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 60, AU 57

Records: NSU 20-7 (16-5 NSIC), AU 7-18 (6-15 NSIC)

Attendance: 2351

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State tallied 11 points in the first quarter, 14 in the second, 12 in the third, and 23 in the fourth; out-scoring Augustana by 14 points in the fourth quarter

NSU shot 32.4 % from the floor, 14.3 % from beyond the 3-point line and 66.7 from the foul line

They tallied 40 rebounds, 36 points in the paint, 17 bench points, 16 points off of turnovers, and 14 points off of free throws

Rianna Fillipi was first on the team with 19 points and 12 rebounds for her seventh double-double of the season along with three assists

Alayna Benike and Decontee Smith followed behind with 14 points each and six and four rebounds respectively

In addition, Smith connected on 50.0 % of shots from the floor along with leading the Wolves off the bench

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Rianna Fillipi: 19 points, 12 rebounds, 3 assists

Alayna Benike: 14 points, 6 rebounds

Decontee Smith: 14 points, 4 rebounds, 50.0 FG %

UP NEXT

Northern State returns to action Saturday, February 24 to take on Wayne State. Tip-off time is set for 3:30 p.m. from Wayne, Neb. against the Wildcats to close out the regular season.

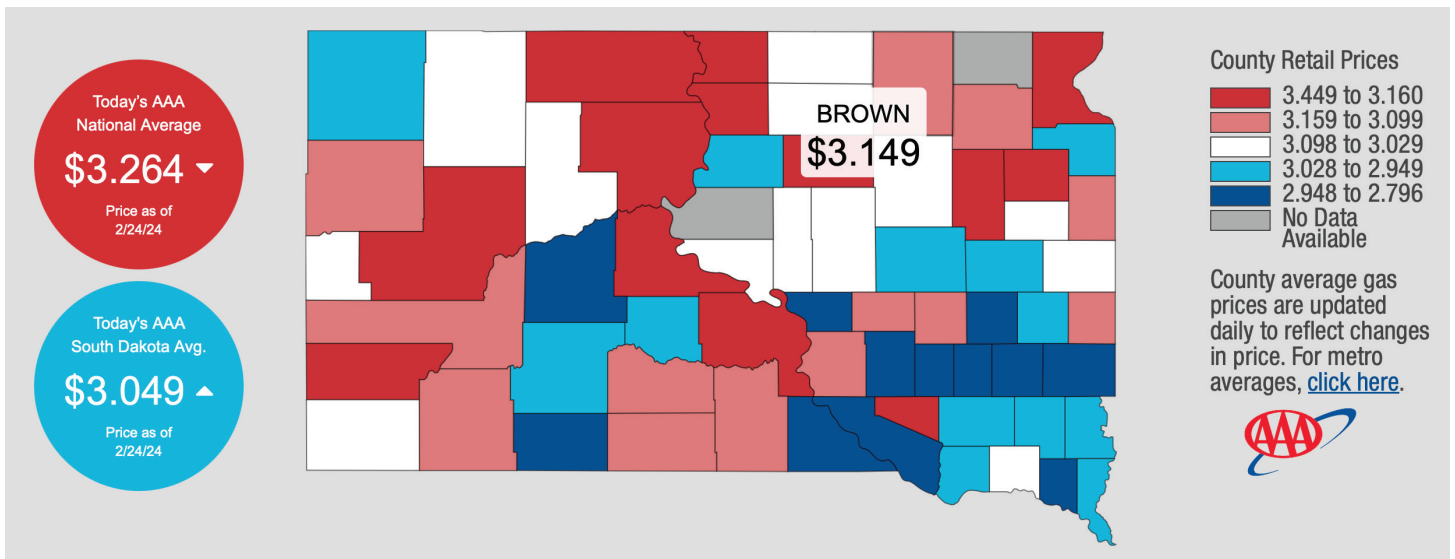
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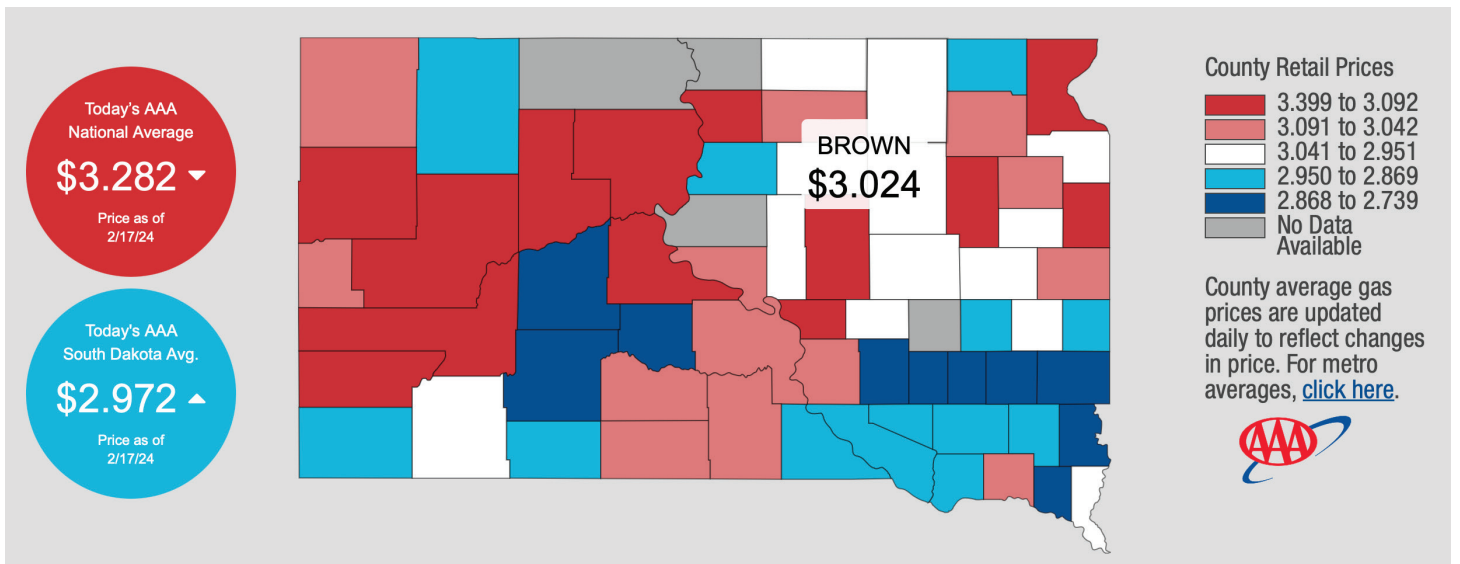
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.042	\$3.197	\$3.654	\$3.752
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.972	\$3.137	\$3.593	\$3.778
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.855	\$3.009	\$3.465	\$3.646
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.314	\$3.493	\$3.987	\$4.243

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



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Ehresmann, Krueger place fourth, Kucker sixth at state wrestling

Three Groton Area wrestlers placed at the State Wrestling Tournament held in Sioux Falls. Christian Ehresmann and Liza Krueger both placed fourth while Korbin Kucker placed sixth.

B106: Wyatt Hagen (29-18).

Champ. Round 1 - Rylan Robbins (Winner Area) 38-5 won by fall over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 29-18 (Fall 5:10)

Cons. Round 1 - Cade Gaikowski (Clark/Willow Lake) 37-11 won by decision over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 29-18 (Dec 6-3)

B126: Walker Zoellner (32-16).

Champ. Round 1 - Maxton Brozik (Winner Area) 37-3 won by tech fall over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 32-16 (TF-1.5 2:58 (20-5))

Cons. Round 1 - Drew Janke (Lead-Deadwood) 28-11 won by decision over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 32-16 (Dec 3-0)

B144: Christian Ehresmann (38-6) placed 4th and scored 18.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-6 won by fall over Bryce Hawkinson (Britton-Hecla) 39-12 (Fall 1:15)

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-6 won by fall over Teague Granum (Canton) 44-7 (Fall 2:40)

Semifinal - Jace Blasius (Philip/Kadoka Area/Wall) 34-4 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-6 (Dec 7-3)

Cons. Semi - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-6 won by injury default over Teagan Foreman (Miller/Highmore-Harrold) 30-5 (Inj. 3:54)

B157: Korbin Kucker (27-9) placed 6th and scored 7.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 27-9 won by decision over Charlie Dulany (Warner/Northwestern) 28-9 (Dec 5-4)

Quarterfinal - Jackson Remmers (Howard) 46-0 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 27-9 (Fall 0:32)

Cons. Round 2 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 27-9 won by decision over Kahle Hill (Wagner) 23-23 (Dec 4-1)

Cons. Round 3 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 27-9 won by decision over Gunner Ewing (Elk Point-Jefferson) 25-16 (Dec 5-1)

Cons. Semi - Wyatt Anderson (Parkston) 38-8 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 27-9 (Fall 4:19)

G100: Liza Krueger (30-4) placed 4th and scored 16.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 30-4 won by fall over Kinsley Sheridan (O`Gorman) 21-17 (Fall 3:53)

Quarterfinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 30-4 won by fall over Mataya Jacobs (Rapid City Central) 37-13 (Fall 5:37)

Semifinal - Olivia Anderson (Watertown) 46-1 won by decision over Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 30-4 (Dec 4-2)

Cons. Semi - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 30-4 won by decision over Annalee Pierson (Sturgis Brown) 31-8 (Dec 3-1)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Bills simplifying removal of tenants clear legislative panel

Successful vote in state House will send proposals to Gov. Noem's desk

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 23, 2024 3:18 PM

PIERRE — Two bills that streamline the process of removing tenants from their homes are on their way to the state House of Representatives after earning an endorsement from a House commerce panel Friday morning.

Senate Bill 90 would remove the requirement that landlords issue a non-binding three-day "notice to quit" on tenants before starting an eviction proceeding in court.

Senate Bill 89, meanwhile, adjusts the required waiting period on a notice to vacate from 30 to 15 days for "at will" tenants.

The bills deal with differing rental scenarios. Evictions, formally known as "forcible entry and detainer" actions, are court cases filed to remove tenants "for cause," meaning they haven't paid rent for at least three days after its due date, have destroyed property or have otherwise violated landlord-tenant law.

At-will tenants are those without a set lease time, and landlords can give them a notice to vacate at any time for any reason.

Both bills have already cleared the full Senate. They apply to different situations, but housing advocates have decried both as proposals that will spark more homelessness in South Dakota.

"Both of these bills are intended to increase tenant turnover," Karissa Loewen of West River Tenants United told South Dakota Searchlight. "That is the business model of slumlords, of people who prey on vulnerable tenants."

Backers: Better landlord protections will spark development

Supporters argue that the laws cut red tape and protect the property rights of landlords.

The bills' sponsor, Sen. Mike Rohl, R-Aberdeen, has called SB 90 a bill to protect "landlords who've literally mortgaged their lives for a better life" from "squatters" who would seek to draw out the eviction process.

The House sponsor, Mitchell Republican Ben Krohmer, told the House Commerce and Energy Committee on Friday that SB 89 tips the scales in favor of property owners in situations without written lease terms.

That's how the law ought to work, Krohmer said.

"If there's no contract in place, I do think it should default to the landlord," Krohmer said. "It's their property. They pay for it."

Krohmer is a landlord, and he told the committee that his own leases specify longer notices. Those are better for landlords, he said, as they give landlords more time to find new tenants.

Rohl has stressed that same point in his speeches and testimony about the bill, calling 15 days "a floor" for notice. SB 89 is largely aimed at helping out landlords who would rent to traveling doctors or nurses that might not want to pay for a full month of rent on short deployments.

"What this is going to do is provide economic development in niche housing," Rohl said.

He's also repeatedly stressed that at-will tenancy is fairly rare, as most people have a lease that specifies terms. In those situations, landlords wouldn't be able to use a 15-day notice.

As for SB 90, he argued that his bill is a benefit for tenants being evicted. A tenant served with a forcible entry and detainer complaint – a complaint that can't be filed without a three-day notice under current law – have four business days to respond. Without a response, landlords are entitled to a default judg-

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ment, which in turn allows them to request a lockout from a sheriff's deputy.

His bill would remove the first step, but add a day to that response time. Since weekends don't count in the response clock, he said, a five-day window amounts to a seven-day notice.

"We're guaranteeing that the person would have at least a weekend," Rohl said.

Rohl also pointed to a story televised this week on Dakota News Now about a landlord whose rental unit was all but destroyed by a tenant.

"He's going to stop renting altogether, because of all the problems that come with it," Rohl said.

Opponents: Bills will contribute to homelessness

Loewen testified against both bills on Friday, urging lawmakers to consider the kinds of landlords she hears about through her organization. West River Tenants United fields calls from people facing eviction, and Loewen said most of them have tales of unsanitary homes, improper evictions, or refusals to renew a lease that come after a tenant complains about unsanitary conditions or other problems with their home or apartment.

One landlord moved to oust an elderly woman in a wheelchair last December, in spite of her being up-to-date on her rent and having lived in her home for three decades.

Landlords who engage in that kind of behavior will use SB 89 and SB 90 to take advantage of vulnerable tenants, Loewen said, regardless of whether they pay their rent on time.

"A lot of times when folks are voting on these bills, they're considering reasonable landlords who care about their tenants," Loewen said. "We need to consider tenants who are under a landlord who's not treating them fairly."

Loewen argued that the at-will tenancy bill will affect far more people than supporters suggest. She read from a lease that stated that a tenant becomes "at-will" after a year, which she said came from a caller to her organization. Another lease said that after one year, the notice to vacate rules default to South Dakota law – a sign that a lease may not be enough to protect a person from a notice that would force them to find a new home within 15 days.

Krohmer and Rohl contend that either a landlord or tenant can give notice under SB 89, but Loewen pointed out that the words "or tenant" do not appear in the bill. They also do not appear in the law the bill would amend, or in the chapter of South Dakota code where the law appears.

"It does not say anything about the notice a tenant must give to a landlord," Loewen said of the bill. "So I don't believe this goes two ways."

After the hearing, Rohl told South Dakota Searchlight that a notice to vacate does apply to both landlords and tenants. He also said he'd be willing to add an amendment to make certain that tenants would also have the right to give a notice to vacate.

Tillie Bulman, a staff attorney for East River Legal Services in Sioux Falls, testified against SB 90. East River offers legal aid to people in 33 counties, most often for divorce and child custody cases and evictions. Requests for help with evictions have spiked recently, she said, with more than 100 appearing since the start of the year.

"In 2023, we received 509 applications for housing issues," Bulman said.

She argued that the three-day notice is critical, in that it gives tenants additional time to find financial assistance or otherwise work through a way to get their rent paid.

Removing that notice but adding another day isn't a huge help, Bulman said, particularly in South Dakota. Most civil cases offer people 30 days to respond to a complaint before a default judgment is possible. Evictions are unique in that people have just four days, and Bulman said a quirk in state law makes that timeline even more difficult to deal with.

"South Dakota law doesn't require a landlord to file a summons and complaint before serving it," Bulman said. "So we have clients who are trying to file an answer in the court to the summons and complaint, and they're turned away because nothing's been filed."

Tenants can file an answer directly to the landlord's lawyer, but Bulman said most tenants don't know

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that. By the time they call East River, she said, it's often too late.

Last year, she said, East River tried to help a single mother who lost her job for missing work to care for a child who'd developed a serious illness.

"Fortunately, through East River's assistance, we were able to get her help in the community from programs like Interlakes Community Action Partnership," Bulman said. "(This bill) still takes down the timeline for a client to find alternative housing."

More people will be homeless if the bills pass, she said, both because of simpler evictions and because people with an eviction on their record struggle to find landlords who'll rent to them.

Committee backs both bills

Committee members largely sided with Rohl and Krohmer.

"I think this gives the landlord some protections. It gives them a chance to get rid of a bad tenant that they need to get out of there," said Rep. Neal Pinnow, R-Lemmon.

Rep. Tina Mulally, R-Rapid City, said that tenants have protections from unscrupulous landlords already, whether they know about them or not.

"We always hear that ignorance of the law is no excuse," Mulally said before her yes vote on SB 90.

She also talked about her own rental properties. She described herself as one of the "good landlords," as she allows pets and works with struggling tenants. She also talked about a tenant who ducked service of an eviction notice for four months.

"I hate to go through evictions," Mulally said. "But it is a process that has to be done, and maybe the bad landlords need to be the ones that are prosecuted."

Rep. Kameron Nelson, D-Sioux Falls, and Rep. Byron Callies, R-Watertown, voted against both proposals. Nelson said removing the three-day notice is troubling, particularly if there are instances where there may be a miscommunication between a landlord and tenant that color the start of an eviction proceeding.

Lawmakers have trouble with miscommunication all the time, he said, and he urged his fellow committee members to consider the impact such issues could have on the less fortunate.

"The individuals who are sitting here in this committee probably have more significant means than a lot of other individuals across the state," Nelson said.

Callies, before casting his vote on the 15-day notice proposal, argued that a month's notice is a practical time frame.

"People pay their rent by the month. They pay their light bill by the month. I've got to disagree with this 15 days," Callies said.

SB 89 passed on a 10-3 vote; SB 90 passed 11-3. Rep. Carl Perry, R-Aberdeen, voted against SB 89 and for SB 90.

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.

Phonics training is among the winners as budget panel plows through spending requests

BY: JOHN HULT, MAKENZIE HUBER AND SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 23, 2024 5:43 PM

PIERRE – The Legislature's budget committee endorsed a bill Friday to spend \$3 million on phonics-based reading instruction for elementary teachers, and the committee also dealt with a raft of other proposals ahead of a deadline to advance spending bills to the House and Senate.

Earlier in the week, state Education Secretary Joe Graves told the Joint Appropriations Committee that state universities are already training the next generation of teachers in the phonics-based approach to instruction, which he referred to as the "science of reading" approach.

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That approach was built from the results of a rigorous review of an approach called the “whole language model,” Graves said, which began to replace phonics-based reading instruction around 40 years ago. The creep of reading losses in the face of that shift forced the educational community to reevaluate the whole language approach, he said, which de-emphasizes memorization and the sounding out of words.

State colleges once again train future teachers in the phonics-first instructional approach, which Graves called a good sign for the future.

“We believe we’re already going to address the long-term issues,” Graves said. “What it doesn’t solve, however, is our current instruction.”

The Department of Education began to re-train current teachers in the science of reading model last August. The funds in House Bill 1022 are meant to fill a gap in training dollars that will emerge in the coming months as federal COVID relief dollars dry up.

The \$6 million appropriation initially requested in the bill – lawmakers amended the amount down to \$3 million on Friday morning – would have covered four years of training, at which point most teachers would be up to speed. It’s unclear how long funding might last with a \$3 million allocation. Graves did not appear before the committee on Friday.

The committee endorsed the bill 12-4 and sent it to the Senate. Following are summaries of some other bills that received definitive action from the committee.

\$5 million for victim service providers & shelters

The committee supported a bill that would allocate \$5 million to sexual assault, domestic violence and children’s shelters in South Dakota. The bill is a result of decreased federal funding for such organizations over the last few years and minimal state funding for such services.

The Legislature previously approved \$5 million in 2022, but that money quickly ran out, providers told South Dakota Searchlight earlier this year. The need for services has increased in recent years, as the number of victims served in South Dakota rose from 12,763 in 2017 to 15,375 in 2023.

Yankton Republican Rep. Jean Hunhoff, who serves as co-chair of the Joint Appropriations Committee, told lawmakers the grants would go through the Attorney General’s Office to address organizations’ needs that aren’t eligible for federal funding. That can include costs for keeping a crisis line open, case management and staffing, facility repair and maintenance, transportation, food, lodging and counseling services.

\$5 million in technology grants for nursing homes

The committee supported a \$5 million effort to provide technology grants to nursing homes and assisted living facilities across the state with remaining federal American Rescue Plan Act funds. The bill came as a recommendation out of the long term care summer study committee, which explored ways to support the industry.

The prime sponsor of the bill is Sen. Sydney Davis, R-Burbank.

“ARPA dollars are meant to be used for the recovery of these devastating economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and I can’t think of an industry more deserving of those funds,” Davis said, referencing the pronounced workforce shortage for nursing homes across the state and country.

The grants would be distributed by the state Department of Health and would need to be allocated by the end of 2024 to comply with federal ARPA funding stipulations.

\$7 million in cybersecurity funding for counties, municipalities

One of the top priorities to come out of the county funding summer study committee was a recommendation to bolster local governments’ cybersecurity. The committee endorsed a \$7 million effort to provide that support.

The \$7 million price tag is roughly what South Dakota would have received from the federal government over the last three years if South Dakota had enrolled in a federal grant program aimed at bolstering local government cybersecurity, Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, told South Dakota Searchlight. South Dakota

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is the lone state in the nation to not have signed up for the program, with Gov. Kristi Noem's administration saying there were too many strings attached to the offer.

The amount would cover the development of a centralized email system, similar to an existing email system for schools. Leftover funds could be used to strengthen the state's Project Boundary Fence program, where cybersecurity experts from Dakota State University test local governments' cybersecurity and offer recommendations to better protect themselves.

Other bills

Summer child feeding program: The committee voted 13-4 to reject a bill that would have included South Dakota in a summer food program for children. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, said 36 other states have opted in to the program. South Dakota has chosen not to, even though the federal government would cover the food costs and half of the administrative costs to give low-income families preloaded cards to buy groceries during the summer months. Opponents expressed concerns about potential misuses of the cards and unforeseen expenses if the federal government reduces its share of the funding.

Lake Alvin: HB 1064 would send \$1.9 million to the state Department of Game, Fish and Parks "for the construction, reconstruction, renovation, and modernization of infrastructure at Lake Alvin and Newell Lake." It passed 18-0.

Lake Hiddenwood dam: A bill seeking \$3.75 million to rebuild the dam at Lake Hiddenwood near Selby failed to gain the support of the committee, despite a busload of local residents showing up to support the legislation. The dam was washed away several years ago by flooding. The committee voted 11-7 to defeat the bill.

Quantum Center: SB 45 would offer about \$3 million for a Center for Quantum Information Science and Technology, which would be a partnership between multiple state universities. The dollar amount was revised downward from \$6 million Friday morning before passing 18-0.

Richmond Lake dam: SB 70 would send \$3.1 million in state money and \$10.6 million in federal money to replace the Richmond Lake dam and spillway in Brown County and to pay for "general maintenance and repair of other state owned dams." It passed 18-0.

Emergency declarations: An amendment to HB 1061 upped the funding to pay for the state's disaster declarations to \$4.3 million from \$2.8 million. The amendment added money to pay for the latest South Dakota National Guard deployments to the southern border. Typically such bills "backfill" funds for emergencies addressed the previous year, but the amendment was meant to pay for the deployment up front, according to Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, who moved the amendment. It passed 16-2.

Douglas School money: SB 204 would have sent \$5 million to the rapidly growing Douglas School District, which serves the children of airmen and women at Ellsworth Air Force Base. It was defeated 11-7.

Custer West Dam: HB 1209 would have put \$3 million toward the rebuilding of Custer West Dam, which Custer city officials said is important for flood mitigation in periods of heavy rainfall. It was defeated 16-2.

Water quality for the Northern Black Hills: HB 1235 would have put \$5 million in state funding into a Northern Black Hills water quality program, with grants offered for projects to mitigate potential pollution sources. It was tabled, effectively defeating it, on an 11-7 vote.

Prison cash: SB 49 would move \$132.5 million in general funds and \$93.6 million in budget reserve money into the incarceration construction fund for the purpose of building a new men's prison in Lincoln County. An attempt to amend the cost downward failed, and the bill passed 14-4. Earlier this week, state officials said a total of \$567 is allocated for the project so far.

Sheep shed: HB 1065 would help pay for a new sheep building on the South Dakota State Fairgrounds. It was amended down to \$4 million from an original \$8 million on Friday and passed 12-3.

Lifescape funding: HB 1093 would help LifeScape pay for a new facility in Sioux Falls for the developmentally disabled. The original bill would have put \$8 million toward the project. It was amended to \$2 million on Friday before passing 16-1.

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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.

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.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Noem, a contender in the veepstakes, rallies for Trump at CPAC

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 23, 2024 4:59 PM

Republican South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem told an audience at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Friday in Maryland that the Republican Party is "not going back to the old days of the Romneys and Cheneys" because the party is "much bigger than that now."

Mitt Romney was the party's nominee for president in 2012, and Dick Cheney was vice president from 2001 to 2009. Cheney's daughter, Liz Cheney, is a former congresswoman and a leading critic of Donald Trump.

Noem is on a shortlist of Trump's potential running mates, the former president and current presidential candidate publicly confirmed earlier this week. Trump will speak at CPAC on Saturday.

Noem's speech echoed the previewed themes of a book she plans to release in May titled "No Going Back." Noem said Republicans "have a clear choice" between Trump and the Biden-Harris administration. Noem claimed Biden and Harris have "facilitated communist policies and socialist programs into our American democracy."

Noem also promoted her own accomplishments.

"If America wants to be great again, I'd suggest taking a look at South Dakota and all we have achieved and then vote for President Trump," she said.

Noem said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, "government leaders in other states used fear to control people, to promote their agenda of socialism and control. That has not been our story in South Dakota."

Noem highlighted her alignment with Trump's vision for America, underscoring their shared views on the southern border and China.

"There are two kinds of people in this country: those who love America, and those who hate America," she said. "Those who hate America are working every day to destroy it."

The Democratic National Committee responded to Noem's speech with an emailed statement that said Noem will "do or say anything" to be chosen as Trump's running mate. The DNC also criticized Noem's support of South Dakota's abortion ban, which includes an exception for the life of the mother but not for victims of rape or incest.

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

Trump comes out against Alabama IVF ruling as national Republicans scramble for distance

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - FEBRUARY 23, 2024 5:55 PM

Former President Donald Trump called on Alabama lawmakers Friday to “find an immediate solution” to remedy a state Supreme Court ruling that threatened the availability of in vitro fertilization, and national Republicans running for Congress sought to distance themselves from the Alabama decision as well.

In a post to his social media site, Truth Social, Trump said the Alabama Supreme Court ruling last week that gave fertilized embryos the same rights as children was at odds with the anti-abortion movement that is influential in the Republican Party.

The front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination endorsed efforts by Alabama legislators to tweak state law — which includes one of the most restrictive bans on abortion — to protect IVF.

“Today, I am calling on the Alabama Legislature to act quickly to find an immediate solution to preserve the availability of IVF in Alabama,” the post read, in Trump’s first public comments since the Alabama ruling. “The Republican Party should always be on the side of the Miracle of Life – and the side of Mothers, Fathers, and their Beautiful Babies. IVF is an important part of that.”

IVF, a common fertility practice, involves harvesting a woman’s eggs and fertilizing them outside the body. The resulting embryos are frozen and stored for future transfer into a uterus, but couples often create more embryos than they end up using.

The Alabama justices’ ruling could open prospective parents and clinics to criminal charges of abandonment or manslaughter for embryos that are destroyed rather than implanted into a uterus.

Leaders in Alabama’s Legislature scrambled late this week to address the ruling, with a key committee chairman authoring a bill to declare embryos created during IVF would not be considered a human life unless implanted into a uterus.

The decision led to the closure of at least three IVF programs in the state this week and inspired intense criticism of anti-abortion Republicans from Democrats from President Joe Biden on down.

U.S. Supreme Court decision

The ruling was a continuation of Republicans’ attempts in the states to control pregnancy after the U.S. Supreme Court 2022 ruling overturning the constitutional right to an abortion, many national Democrats said this week.

“They came for abortion first. Now it’s IVF and next it’ll be birth control,” Trump’s 2016 Democratic rival Hillary Clinton said in a tweet Thursday. “The extreme right won’t stop trying to exert government control over our most sacred personal decisions until we codify reproductive freedom as a human right.”

The House Majority PAC, which helps Democrats running for the U.S. House, compiled a list Friday of Republicans in competitive districts who’d voted for legislation the group said would have the same effect nationally as the Alabama Supreme Court’s ruling.

Biden, who is likely to face Trump in the November general election, is seeking to hold the former president responsible. Trump appointed three of the six justices who voted to overturn abortion protections.

Biden campaign director Julie Chavez Rodriguez said in a statement that Trump bore responsibility for the Alabama decision and other restrictions on abortion and fertility treatment.

“American women couldn’t care less what Donald Trump posts on Truth Social, they care that they can’t access fertility treatment because of him,” Chavez Rodriguez said. “Let’s be clear: Alabama families losing access to IVF is a direct result of Donald Trump’s Supreme Court justices overturning Roe v. Wade.”

U.S. Senate GOP campaign arm sends out memo

Trump’s position — that Alabama lawmakers should find a legislative fix to protect IVF after the court’s ruling — is in line with U.S. Senate Republicans’ campaign arm.

National Republican Senatorial Committee Executive Director Jason Thielman sent a memo to GOP Sen-

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ate candidates, Politico reported Friday.

The memo instructed candidates to "Clearly state your support for IVF and fertility-related services as blessings for those seeking to have children" and to "Publicly oppose any efforts to restrict access to IVF and other fertility treatments, framing such opposition as a defense of family values and individual freedom," according to the Politico report.

Five GOP Senate hopefuls in key races then issued statements expressing support for IVF. The candidates were Kari Lake in Arizona, Tim Sheehy in Montana, Sam Brown in Nevada, Mike Rogers in Michigan and Matt Dolan in Ohio.

Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, the last Republican still challenging Trump's 2024 nomination, sent mixed messages this week about her position.

The former South Carolina governor said in an NBC News interview Wednesday that she personally agreed that embryos "are babies," and that the Alabama court ruled correctly under state law. But she later told CNN's Jake Tapper she disagreed with the ruling and said the state should reexamine the law.

Alabama lawmakers search for fix

Alabama legislators worked Thursday to file legislation addressing the court's ruling.

Republican Tim Melson, the chair of the Alabama Senate's Healthcare Committee, drafted a bill on Thursday that would declare that a human egg fertilized in vitro would not be considered a human life unless implanted in a uterus.

Alabama House Democratic Leader Anthony Daniels, a candidate in Alabama's 2nd Congressional District, filed a bill that said that a fertilized egg or human embryo outside a uterus shall not "be considered an unborn child, a minor child, a natural person, or any other term that connotes a human being for any purpose under state law."

Gov. Kay Ivey, a Republican, and leaders of the Alabama Legislature, which has a Republican supermajority, expressed a cautious desire to address the Supreme Court's ruling.

Ivey, who signed Alabama's near-total abortion ban in 2019, said in a statement Friday that she looked forward "to continue closely following this issue."

"Following the ruling from the Alabama Supreme Court, I said that in our state, we work to foster a culture of life," the statement said. "This certainly includes some couples hoping and praying to be parents who utilize IVF."

Alabama House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter said in a statement Friday that the Legislature would "soon consider a solution" to the issue.

"Alabamians strongly believe in protecting the rights of the unborn, but the result of the State Supreme Court ruling denies many couples the opportunity to conceive, which is a direct contradiction," the statement said.

Senate President Pro Tem Greg Reed told reporters Thursday the chamber was weighing options.

"If we're supposed to do something or there's an opportunity for us to do something with it, what would we do?" he asked. "How would we address that? And so we've got some smart legal minds trying to help us understand."

The office of the state's Republican attorney general, Steve Marshall, said in a statement he "has no intention of using the recent Alabama Supreme Court decision as a basis for prosecuting IVF families or providers."

Senate Minority Leader Bobby Singleton, a Democrat, said that Democrats in 2019 pushed for exceptions in the abortion ban, but were rebuffed by majority Republicans.

"At the end of the day, the Republican Party has to be responsible for what they have done," he said. "They need to watch how they're passing these laws that could affect people, and this is one of the unintended consequences they never saw coming. This is what we keep trying to tell them on a regular basis. This is theirs. They need to fix it."

Brian Lyman and Jemma Stephenson contributed to this report.

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

Efforts to thwart the influence of 'deepfakes' meet resistance in the Legislature

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 23, 2024 3:40 PM

Legislative efforts to curb the spread of computer-generated fake video, audio and imagery – referred to as “deepfakes” – may have to wait until next year.

A committee of lawmakers defeated a bill Friday that would have regulated election-related deepfakes, after a broader deepfakes bill was tabled earlier during the legislative session in Pierre.

“We have time to get it right in 2025,” said Justin Smith, a lobbyist for the South Dakota NewsMedia Association. He said more discussion of rapidly evolving technologies, including artificial intelligence, needs to occur before legislation is adopted.

One of the proposed bills would have required people sharing fake or altered videos, images and audio clips to clearly state that it’s been manipulated. That bill was tabled during its initial committee hearing earlier in the session.

The other bill would have criminalized the dissemination of unlabeled deep fakes aimed at harming a political candidate within 90 days of an election. It was defeated in the House State Affairs committee Friday with a 7-5 vote.

Critics of the bill raised concerns about free speech and enforcement.

Smith said he appreciates the effort but said broadcasters and the news media still have questions, like if “disseminate” would include sharing a social media post online.

Smith said libel and harassment laws already cover much of what the bill hopes to address.

Additionally, he criticized the bill for saying it’s fine to share unlabeled deepfakes 91 days before an election, “but then you’re a criminal the next day.”

The election-related bill’s prime sponsor, Sioux Falls Democratic Sen. Liz Larson, said she worked with media groups and amended the bill to their liking. She criticized the lobbyists opposing the bill, saying, “I don’t see any path forward that they would be happy with, at all.”

“This is coming, and right now, and nobody has any recourse,” she said. “Do you like looking at the news and not knowing if it’s true?”

Smith was asked by the committee what else would need to be amended in the bill to satisfy his clients.

“I can’t answer that as I sit here today,” Smith said.

EDITOR’S NOTE: South Dakota Searchlight is a member of the South Dakota NewsMedia Association.

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.

State Senate committee OK's creating new Indian Child Advisory Council

BY: ANNIE TODD - FEBRUARY 23, 2024 12:05 PM

PIERRE — An effort to establish an advisory council to host formal conversations and gather data on the high number of Native American children in South Dakota's foster care system was approved by a Senate committee Friday morning. The bill now heads to the Senate floor.

HB 1232 creates an Indian Child Advisory Council made up of representatives from the Legislature, South Dakota's nine tribes, the state Department of Social Services and other child welfare experts. Rep. Tamara St. John, R-Sisseton, explained the council would bring those key stakeholders together to have formal conversations and find possible solutions.

"I do think that having the tribal people that have that unique knowledge to allow them to connect with everybody at the table, I think will be highly beneficial," said the Sisseton Wahpeton tribal member. "This is a really small ask."

A six-month joint investigation by South Dakota Searchlight and the Argus Leader following last year's legislative session explored the causes, effects and potential solutions to the decades-long overrepresentation of Native American children in South Dakota's foster care system. Native American children accounted for nearly 74% of the foster care system in June 2023, despite accounting for only 13% of the state's overall child population.

"When you look at the numbers, it's a critical issue," St. John said. "I think we need all hands on deck and I don't think we can any longer afford to continue to look at this with a really narrow lens. Bring all the experts and those that are involved and can impact this issue together at least once a year."

The state Department of Social Services opposed the bill with Secretary Matt Althoff warning that creation of the council may feel good at the moment, but may not be fruitful.

"I think the committee might give us a false sense of expectation," he said, adding that if the bill passes and is signed by Gov. Kristi Noem, the department will support the council.

In the 4-2 vote to pass HB 1232 along to the Senate floor, Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, explained his opposition saying that he worried about the lack of participation from the Center for the Prevention of Childhood Maltreatment. He felt the council was focused on the prevention of children entering into foster care.

"We need more involvement because we're on the prevention side of it," he said, noting the center should be in the audience of the annual meetings. "I think there's a greater body of knowledge there. I think we need some help."

Neglect is the leading cause of why children are removed from their parents, with 68% of cases citing neglect, according to federal data. Parental substance abuse is the second leading cause at 57%.

As the former chair of the CPCM, Reed said the organization, housed at the University of South Dakota, had struggled to engage with the tribes on the prevention of maltreatment and neglect.

CPCM could always be added in later as a formal participant, Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, noted in her comments supporting the bill.

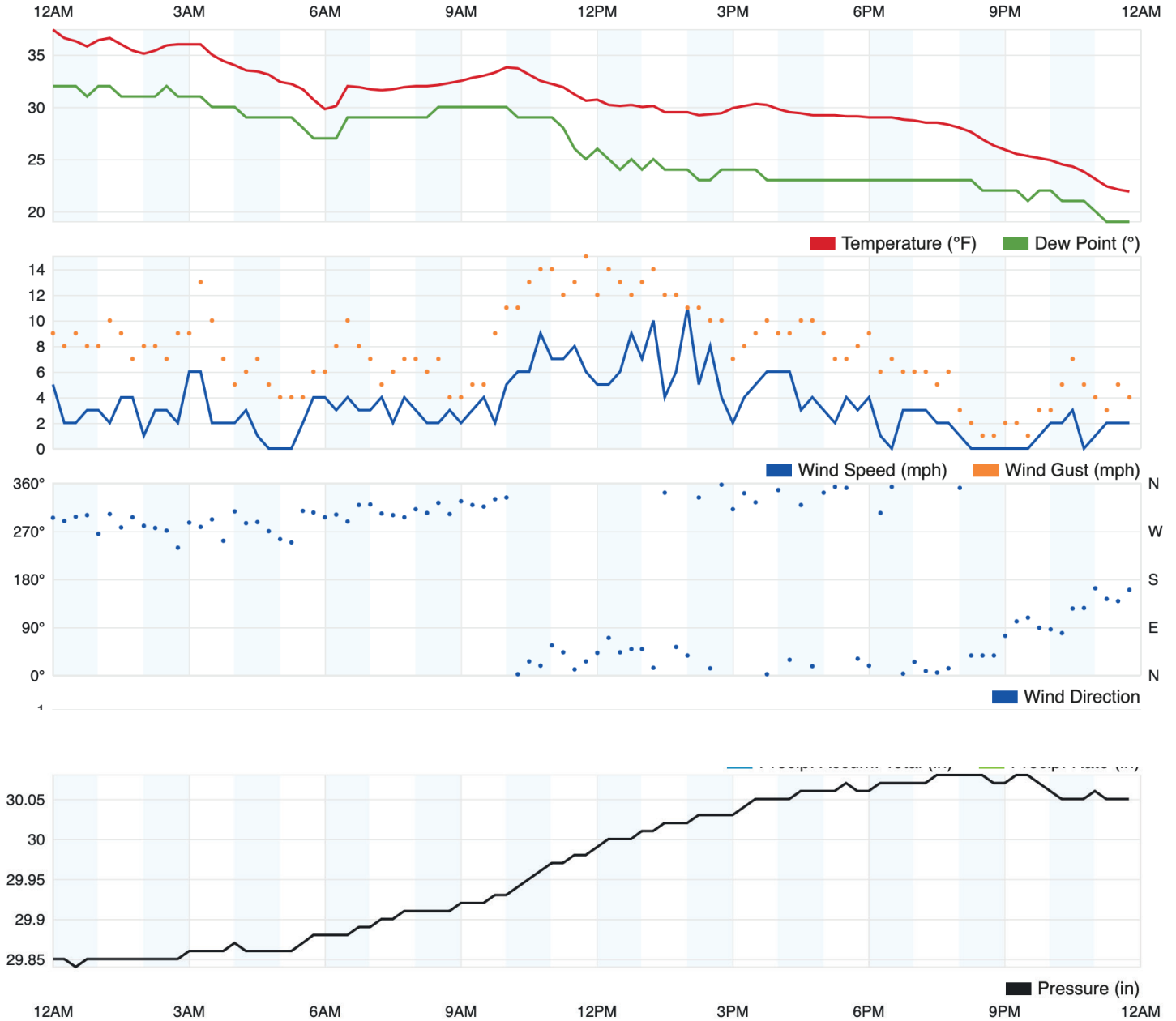
"I think this is a valuable thing that could be used to allow communication because sometimes it's just really hard to understand if you're not on the reservation, working on the reservation, haven't lived close to the reservation," she said.

Annie Todd covers state politics for the Argus Leader in Sioux Falls. She was born and raised in Colorado and graduated from the University of Wyoming.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

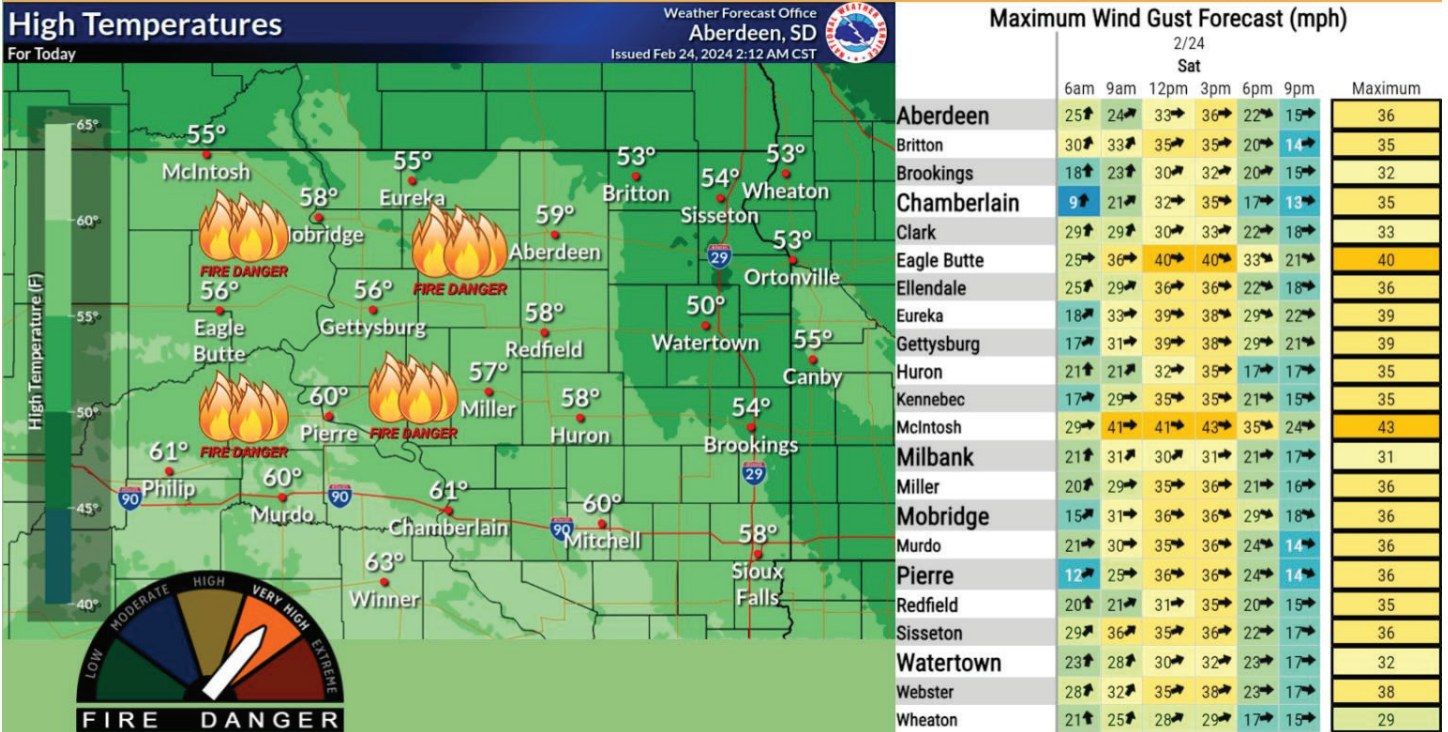


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Today	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
				
57 °F 27 °F	46 °F 34 °F	62 °F 13 °F	22 °F 3 °F 30%	28 °F

Gusty Winds & Fire Danger Today



Happy Saturday! A warm front will push east today across the forecast area with highs in the 50s and possibly 60 in some locations. No precipitation expected, however, winds will be on the increase gusting from 30-45mph out of the west. The dry air and winds will lead to widespread high to very high fire danger this afternoon, mainly from north central to south central SD. Avoid burning and do not carelessly discard cigarettes!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 38 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 22 °F at 11:26 PM

Wind: 15 mph at 11:43 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 55 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1976

Record Low: -26 in 1940

Average High: 32

Average Low: 10

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.52

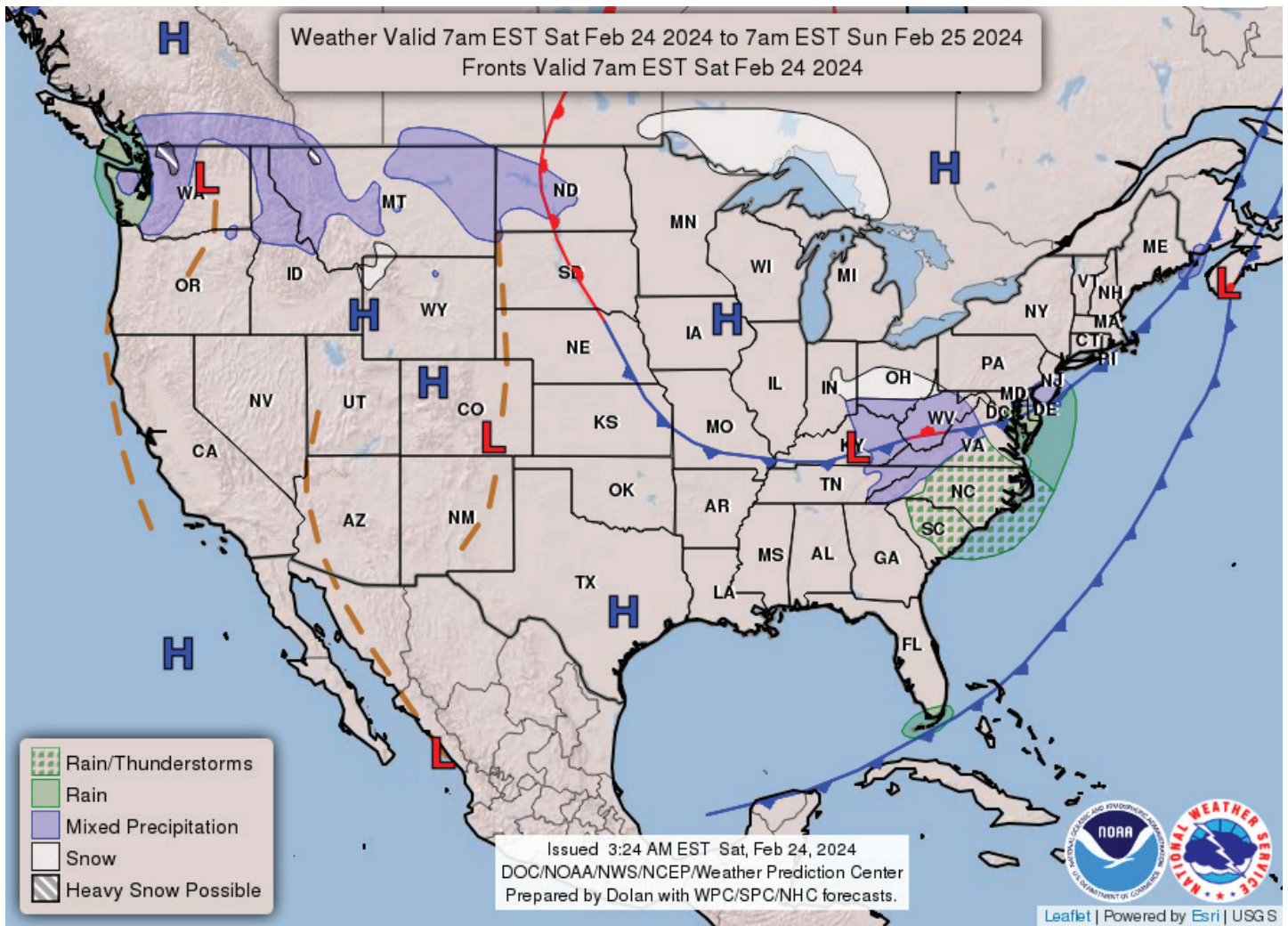
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 1.07

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 6:13:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16:20 am



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Today in Weather History

February 24, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Along with the heavy snow came blizzard conditions across northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota during the morning hours of the 25th as northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph. As a result of the heavy snow and blizzard conditions, travel became difficult, if not impossible, resulting in some accidents and stranded motorists. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Waubay, Onida, Murdo, and Artas, 7 inches at Aberdeen, Faulkton, Ipswich, Kennebec, and Clark, and 8 inches at Miller, Castlewood, 23 N Highmore, and Pierre. In addition, nine inches of snow fell at Browns Valley, Wheaton, Clinton, Graceville, Dumont, Roy Lake, Mellette, Blunt, and Watertown. Other snowfall amounts included 10 inches near Summit, 11 inches at Webster, Ortonville, and Artichoke Lake, and 14 inches at Milbank.

1969: The famous "100-Hour Storm" began in Boston, MA. Snow often fell between early on the 25th and noon on the 28th. The 26.3 inches at Logan Airport is the 2nd most significant snowstorm in Boston's history. In addition, 77 inches fell at Pinkham Notch Base Station in New Hampshire, bringing their February total to 130 inches. Their snow cover on the 27th was 164 inches. Mt. Washington, NH, received 172.8 inches of snow in the month.

1852 - The Susquehanna River ice bridge at Havre de Grace, MD, commenced to break up after forty days of use. A total of 1738 loaded freight cars were hauled along rails laid on the ice. (David Ludlum)

1936 - Vermont and New Hampshire received brown snow due to dust from storms in the Great Plains Region. A muddy rain fell across parts of northern New York State. (24th-25th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A massive winter storm began to overspread the western U.S. In southern California, Big Bear was blanketed with 17 inches of snow, and Lake Hughes reported four inches of snow in just one hour. Snow pellets whitened coastal areas of Orange County and San Diego County, with three inches at Huntington Beach. The storm also produced thunderstorms with hail and waterspouts. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region which created "white-out" conditions in eastern Upper Michigan. Squalls produced up to 14 inches of snow in Geauga County of northeastern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A total of thirty-three cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, and an Atlantic coast storm spread heavy snow from Georgia to southern New England. Snowfall totals in New Jersey ranged up to 24 inches in May County, with 19 inches reported at Atlantic City. Totals in North Carolina ranged up to 18 inches in Gates County, and winds along the coast of North Carolina gusted to 70 mph at Duck Pier. Strong winds gusting to 52 mph created blizzard conditions at Chatham MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong northerly winds prevailed from Illinois to the Southern and Central Appalachians. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Sewickley Heights PA. High winds caused considerable blowing and drifting of snow across northern and central Indiana through the day. Wind gusts to 47 mph and 6 to 8 inches of snow created white-out conditions around South Bend IN. Traffic accidents resulted in two deaths and 130 injuries. Sixty-five persons were injured in one accident along Interstate 69 in Huntington County. Wind gusts to 60 mph and 4 to 8 inches of snow created blizzard conditions in eastern and northern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2001: Over a dozen tornadoes spawned in central and eastern Arkansas. The strongest tornado (F3) was in Desha County, with parts of a farm shop found six miles away from where it was blown apart. An 18-month-old was killed in Fulton County by an F2 tornado.

2004 - Heavy snows blanket wide areas of northern New Mexico, closing schools and highways. Mountains east of Santa Fe receive 20 inches. Sandia Park, east of Albuquerque, measures 11 inches. 8 inches falls at Los Alamos.

2007: An EF3 tornado struck Dumas, Arkansas, injuring 28. Seven other tornadoes hit southeast Arkansas on this day, but no fatalities.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE THINKING TABLE

A local television station sent one of its reporters to a kindergarten to interview the children. One young boy seemed to stand out above all of the other children. His energy, his enthusiasm, and his excitement were very obvious.

Approaching him, the reporter asked, "Do you like school?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. Then he became quiet for a moment and said, "Except for the thinking table."

"The thinking table? What's the thinking table?" asked the reporter.

"It's that table over in the corner. The teacher sends us over there to make us think," he responded.

"Think? Think about what?" continued the interviewer.

"Well," the boy answered, "the last time I had to go there and think was after I hit Sarah. I had to go over there and think about why I hit her and why I shouldn't have."

Paul said that we "should think of others better than ourselves." His statement does not mean that we should put ourselves down, but that we are to set aside our desires and not take advantage of others. We are to treat others with respect and common courtesy that we ourselves want. If we did think of their needs first, we would not need "thinking tables."

Prayer: Often, Father, we think "more highly of ourselves" than we should. We ask You to convict and convince us to "let Your mind be in (control) of us." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. Philippians 2:3-4



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.23.24

4 6 40 41 60 11

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$563,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.21.24

2 6 26 40 43 1

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,270,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 1 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.23.24

7 11 30 35 36 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 16 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.21.24

2 5 6 10 20

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 16 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.21.24

23 49 51 54 58 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 45 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.21.24

4 27 33 41 42 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$376,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 45 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Avon 81, Burke 69
Brookings 61, Sturgis Brown 48
Chamberlain 45, Corsica/Stickney 41, OT
Clark-Willow Lake 64, Arlington 33
Crazy Horse 82, Wakpala 70
Dakota Valley 72, Lennox 58
Dell Rapids St Mary 66, Bridgewater-Emery 65
Dupree 66, Newell 24
Estelline-Hendricks 86, Flandreau Indian 14
Faith 83, Wall 72
Florence-Henry 63, Webster 50
Great Plains Lutheran 75, Wilmot 38
Groton 74, Aberdeen Christian 55
Hanson 73, Mitchell Christian 38
Harding County 68, Bison 40
Harrisburg 53, Watertown 37
Hitchcock-Tulare 66, Northwestern 57
Hot Springs 61, Rapid City Christian 60
Iroquois-Lake Preston 61, Sunshine Bible Academy 38
Jones County 66, New Underwood 45
Kadoka 50, Philip 48
Leola-Frederick High School 69, Ipswich 46
Lyman 84, Alcester-Hudson 80, 2OT
McLaughlin 65, St Francis 45
Milbank 57, Tiospa Zina 55
Miller 58, Highmore-Harrold 56
Mitchell 60, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 50
Potter County 62, Timber Lake 51
Sioux Falls Christian 90, Tri-Valley 55
Sioux Falls Jefferson 65, Aberdeen Central 34
Sioux Falls Lincoln 57, Rapid City Central 26
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 68, Pierre 61
Sioux Falls Washington 58, Rapid City Stevens 55
Spearfish 52, Yankton 47
Stanley County 51, Little Wound 40
Sully Buttes 60, North Central 50
Tiospaye Topa 62, Oelrichs 40
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 71, Colome 33
Vermillion 76, Parker 41
Viborg-Hurley 57, Madison 53
Waubay/Summit 59, Sioux Falls Lutheran 25
Waverly-South Shore 72, Langford 38
Wessington Springs 67, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 49

White River 61, Lakota Tech 58
Winner 56, Mobridge-Pollock 45

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brookings 54, Sturgis Brown 20
Pierre 56, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 32
Rapid City Central 58, Sioux Falls Lincoln 29
Rapid City Stevens 52, Sioux Falls Washington 42
Sioux Falls Jefferson 59, Aberdeen Central 29
Sioux Falls O’Gorman 51, Mitchell 35
Spearfish 60, Yankton 41

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

Bill headed to South Dakota governor would allow museum’s taxidermy animals to find new homes

By JACK DURA and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

South Dakota’s Legislature has made it easier for the city of Sioux Falls to find new homes for more than 150 taxidermy animals of its arsenic-contaminated menagerie.

The mounted lion, tiger, polar bear and gorilla were part of display that filled a natural history museum at the state’s largest zoo. But when testing in August showed detectable levels of arsenic in nearly 80% of the specimens, the city closed the Delbridge Museum.

That set off a heated debate in the community and among museum taxidermy experts, who say the arsenic risk is overblown.

Older taxidermy specimens are frequently displayed, experts say, with museums taking precautions like using special vacuums to clean them — or encasing them in glass. But Sioux Falls officials have expressed concerns about the cost. And the display occupies prime real estate near the Great Plains Zoo’s entrance, which officials are eyeing as they look for a spot to build an aquarium and butterfly conservatory.

The situation is complicated by a morass of state and federal laws that limit what can be done with the mounts.

One issue is that the Endangered Species Act protects animals even in death, so the collection can’t be sold. Under federal law, they could be given to another museum. But state law stipulates that exhibits like this must remain within the state.

And that stipulation is what the new legislation aims to address. The bill, passed Thursday by the Senate and headed to Gov. Kristi Noem, would allow the city to donate the collection to an out-of-state nonprofit. The bill would take effect July 1.

“Rather than losing it to history, we could donate it to a reputable museum out of state,” Sioux Falls City Council Member Greg Neitzert said in an interview. Such a donation would still have to navigate federal laws, he added.

No decision has yet been made as to the collection’s future. Great Plains Zoo spokesperson Denise De-Paolo said a city working group “will take this new possibility and weigh it against other options before making a recommendation to the city council and mayor in the coming months.”

Virtually no nonprofit in the state could accept the collection, as large as it is, Neitzert said.

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections told the city that museums outside of South Dakota have expressed interest in accepting the collection in whole or in part, he said. Neitzert declined to identify what entities have reached out with interest.

The law change comes as the city awaits the results of an evaluation of the condition of the mounts and how much it would cost to restore them. The city decided in December to pay \$55,000 for the evaluation, which the consultant recently finished.

"Basically, everybody's on hold waiting for that report and for the task force to continue its work," he said.

The shift away from ditching the collection entirely began in September when Mayor Paul TenHaken announced a "strategic pause" and created the working group. That group has discussed several possibilities for the taxidermy, including keeping a scaled-back portion of the collection and relocating it.

To destroy the collection, particularly specimens of endangered species at risk of extinction, would be a moral tragedy, Neitzert said.

"I mean, these are irreplaceable. They're works of art," he said.

EPA approves year-round sales of higher ethanol blend in 8 Midwest states

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Drivers in eight Midwestern states will be able to fuel up with a higher blend of ethanol throughout the year under a final rule announced Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The biofuels industry and farming groups, with support of Midwest governors, sought the end of a summertime ban on sales of gasoline blended with 15% ethanol for years. The higher blend has been prohibited because of concerns it could worsen smog during warm weather.

The move reflects the importance of ethanol to agriculture. The fuel additive consumes roughly 40% of the nation's corn crop, so higher sales of ethanol could mean greater profits for corn farmers.

The rule, which takes effect in April 2025, will apply in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Those states grow the bulk of the U.S. corn crop and are home to much of the nation's ethanol production.

The EPA said it delayed implementation of the new rule because of concerns there wasn't enough supply to meet demand this summer. Ethanol producers welcomed the change but criticized the EPA for that delay.

"While we are pleased to see EPA has finally approved year-round E15 in these eight states, we are extremely disappointed by the agency's needless decision to delay implementation until 2025," the Renewable Fuels Association, a trade group, said in a statement. "It's helpful to finally have some certainty about 2025 and beyond, but what happens this summer?"

Most gasoline sold across the country is blended with 10% ethanol, though 15% blends are becoming increasingly common, especially in the Midwest. E15 summer sales still will not be allowed in most of the country during summer, though agricultural groups are pushing for a nationwide policy change.

The biofuels industry and politicians of both parties have portrayed ethanol as a product that helps farmers, reduces prices at the pump and lessens greenhouse gas releases because the fuel burns more cleanly than straight gasoline. However, environmentalists and others have said increased ethanol production can increase carbon releases because it results in more corn production, leading to increased use of fertilizer and greater releases of nitrate. Synthetic and natural fertilizers also are a leading source of water pollution.

The EPA has approved sales of E15 for cars and trucks manufactured after 2000. Growth Energy, another bioenergy trade association, estimates the higher blend will cost consumers 15 cents a gallon less than 10% ethanol.

Petroleum refiners have opposed the Midwest-specific rules, saying a special blend in one region would increase costs and could lead to tighter fuel supplies.

The American Petroleum Institute, a trade group, said a national standard was needed.

"We are concerned this piecemeal approach could weaken the resiliency of the region's fuel supply chain," Will Hupman, a vice president at the group said in a statement. "We continue to call on Congress to pass the bipartisan Nationwide Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act, which would bring much needed consistency to the marketplace by allowing for the year-round sale of E15 nationwide, preserving access to E10 and eliminating the need for regional or state-specific waiver petitions."

Widow of Navalny accuses Putin of mocking Christianity for refusing to return her husband's body

By The Associated Press undefined

The widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny accused President Vladimir Putin of mocking Christianity by trying to force his mother to agree to a secret funeral after his death in a penal colony.

Yulia Navalnaya said in a video released Saturday that Navalny's mother, who wants her son's body returned to her, is being "literally tortured" by authorities who had threatened to bury Navalny in the Arctic prison. They suggested to his mother that she does not have much time to make a decision because the body is decomposing, Navalnaya said.

"Give us the body of my husband," Navalnaya said. "You tortured him alive, and now you keep torturing him dead. You mock the remains of the dead."

Navalny, 47, Russia's most well-known opposition politician, unexpectedly died on Feb. 16 in the penal colony, prompting hundreds of Russians across the country to stream to impromptu memorials with flowers and candles.

Authorities have detained scores of people as they seek to suppress any major outpouring of sympathy for Putin's fiercest foe before the presidential election he is almost certain to win. Russians on social media say officials do not want to return Navalny's body to his family because they fear a public show of support for him.

Navalnaya accused Putin, an Orthodox Christian, of killing Navalny.

"No true Christian could ever do what Putin is now doing with the body of Alexei," she said, asking, "What will you do with his corpse? How low will you sink to mock the man you murdered?"

Saturday marked nine days since the opposition leader's death, a day when Orthodox Christians hold a memorial service.

Residents of several Russian cities came out to mark the occasion and honor Navalny's memory by leaving flowers at public monuments or holding one-person protests. At least four people were detained, according to the OVD-Info rights group that tracks political arrests.

They included Sergei Karabatov, 64, who laid flowers at a Moscow monument to victims of political repression, along with a handwritten note saying "Don't think this is the end." Also arrested was Aida Nuriyeva, from the city of Ufa near the Ural Mountains, who stood in a street with a sign saying "Putin is Navalny's murderer! I demand that the body be returned!"

Putin is often pictured at church, dunking himself in ice water to celebrate the Epiphany and visiting holy sites in Russia. He has promoted what he has called "traditional values" without which, he once said, "society degrades."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected allegations that Putin was involved in Navalny's death, calling them "absolutely unfounded, insolent accusations about the head of the Russian state."

Musician Nadya Tolokonnikova, who became widely known after spending nearly two years in prison for taking part in a 2012 protest with her band Pussy Riot inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, released a video in which she also accused Putin of hypocrisy.

"We were imprisoned for allegedly trampling on traditional values. But no one tramples on traditional Russian values more than you, Putin, your officials and your priests who pray for all the murder that you do, year after year, day after day," Tolokonnikova, who lives abroad, said. "Putin, have a conscience, give his mother the body of her son."

Tolokonnikova was one of several cultural icons who have released videos calling on Russian authorities to return Navalny's body to his family so that they can give him a funeral. Navalny's mother and lawyers have been trying to retrieve his body since late last week.

Lyudmila Navalnaya said Thursday that investigators allowed her to see her son's body in the morgue in the Arctic city of Salekhard. She has filed a lawsuit at a court in Salekhard contesting officials' refusal to release the body. A closed-door hearing has been scheduled for March 4.

Navalny's spokesman, Kira Yarmysh, said on X, formerly Twitter, that Lyudmila Navalnaya was shown a medical certificate stating that her son died of "natural causes."

Zelenskyy hosts Western leaders in Kyiv as Ukraine marks 2 years since Russia's full-scale invasion

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed Western leaders to Kyiv Saturday to mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, as Ukrainian forces run low on ammunition and weaponry and foreign aid hangs in the balance.

Zelenskyy posted a video from the Hostomel airfield together with Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, as well as the the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

"Two years ago, here, we met enemy landing forces with fire; two years later, we meet our friends and our partners here," Zelenskyy said at the airport just outside of Kyiv, which Russian paratroopers unsuccessfully tried to seize in the first days of the war.

The Western leaders arrived shortly after a Russian drone attack struck a residential building in the southern city of Odesa, killing at least one. Three women also sustained severe burns in the attack on a residential building Friday evening, regional Gov. Oleh Kiper wrote on his social media account. Rescue services combed through the rubble looking for survivors.

Italy, which holds the rotating presidency of the Group of Seven leading economies, announced that the G7 will meet virtually on Saturday with Zelenskyy and would adopt a joint statement on Ukraine.

"More than ever we stand firmly by Ukraine. Financially, economically, militarily, morally. Until the country is finally free," von der Leyen said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

On the front line in the eastern Donetsk region, Ukrainian soldiers pleaded for ammunition.

"When the enemy comes in, a lot of our guys die. ... We are sitting here with nothing," said Volodymyr, 27, a senior officer in an artillery battery.

"In order to protect our infantry ... we need a high number of shells, which we do not have now," said Oleksandr, 45, a commander of an artillery unit. The two officers only gave their first names, citing security concerns.

In a message on the war's second anniversary, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, thanked Ukrainian soldiers for their sacrifices and Western allies for their support, saying, "Every projectile, every tank, every armored vehicle is, first of all, saving the life of a Ukrainian soldier."

Earlier this month, Zelenskyy fired top military commander Valerii Zaluzhnyi and replaced him with Syrskyi, marking the most significant shakeup of top brass since the full-scale invasion.

Authorities also pointed to successes, including the downing of a Russian early warning and control aircraft Friday.

If confirmed, it would mark the loss of the second such aircraft in just over a month. The Ukrainian military says Russia uses the aircraft to direct missile attacks.

The war has also come to Russia. Drones hit a steel plant in the Lipetsk region in southern Russia Saturday, causing a large fire, regional Gov. Igor Artamonov said, adding there are no casualties. Independent Russian media said the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant is the largest steel plant in Russia. Videos shared on Russian social media showed several fires burning at the plant, and an explosion could be heard.

Independent Russian news outlet Mediazona said Saturday that around 75,000 Russian men died in 2022 and 2023 fighting in the war.

A joint investigation published by Mediazona and Meduza, another independent Russian news site, indicates that the rate of Russia's losses in Ukraine is not slowing and that Moscow is losing around 120 men a day. Based on a statistical analysis of the recorded deaths of soldiers compared with a Russian inheritance database, the journalists said around 83,000 soldiers are likely to have died by Saturday, the second anniversary of the full scale invasion.

According to Mediazona and Meduza's analysis, regular Russian troops sustained the heaviest losses in the first months of the war. But, after prisoners were offered their freedom in exchange for fighting and

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after President Vladimir Putin ordered a partial mobilization, those groups started to sustain more casualties, particularly in the early months of 2023.

A somber mood hangs over Ukraine as the war against Russia enters its third year and Kyiv's troops face mounting challenges on the front line amid dwindling ammunition supplies and personnel challenges. Its troops recently withdrew from the strategic eastern city of Avdiivka, handing Moscow one of its biggest victories.

Russia still controls roughly a quarter of the country after Ukraine failed to make any major breakthroughs with its summertime counteroffensive. Meanwhile, millions of Ukrainians continue to live in precarious circumstances in the crossfire of battles, and many others face constant struggles under Russian occupation. Most are waiting for a Ukrainian liberation that hasn't come.

Olena Zelenska, the president's wife, said Saturday that more than 2 million Ukrainian children have left the country since the war began and that at least 528 have been killed. "The war started by Russia deliberately targets children," she said.

Britain has pledged an additional 8.5 million pounds (\$10.8 million) of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, bolstering efforts to provide medical care, food and basic services to residents as the nation marks the second anniversary of Russia's invasion.

About 14.6 million people, or 40% of Ukraine's population, need assistance, with many left homeless or without adequate access to food, water and electricity, Britain's Foreign Office said in announcing the aid.

In the U.S. Congress, Republicans have stalled \$60 billion in military aid for Kyiv, desperately needed in the short term. The EU recently approved a 50 billion-euro (about \$54 billion) aid package for Ukraine meant to support Ukraine's economy, despite resistance from Hungary.

President Joe Biden tied the loss of the defensive stronghold of Avdiivka in the Donetsk region after months of grueling battles to the stalled U.S. aid. Fears have since spiked that Ukrainian forces will face similar difficulties across other parts of the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line as they come under mounting pressure from Russian assaults.

An attack on a cargo ship in the Red Sea has caused a miles-long oil slick. Things could get worse

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — An attack by Yemeni Houthi rebels on a Belize-flagged ship earlier this month caused an 18-mile (29-kilometer) oil slick, the U.S. military said Saturday. It also warned of the danger of a spill from the vessel's cargo of fertilizer.

The Rubymar, a British-registered, Lebanese-operated cargo vessel, was attacked on Feb. 18 while sailing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, U.S. Central Command said.

The missile attack forced the crew to abandon the vessel, which had been on its way to Bulgaria after leaving Khorfakkan in the United Arab Emirates. It was transporting more than 41,000 tons of fertilizer, CENTCOM said in a statement.

The vessel suffered significant damage, which led to the slick, said the CENTCOM statement, warning that the ship's cargo "could spill into the Red Sea and worsen this environmental disaster."

"The Houthis continue to demonstrate disregard for the regional impact of their indiscriminate attacks, threatening the fishing industry, coastal communities, and imports of food supplies," it said.

The Associated Press, relying on satellite images from Planet Labs PBC of the stricken vessel, reported Tuesday that the vessel was leaking oil in the Red Sea.

Yemen's internationally recognized government on Saturday called for other countries and maritime-protection organizations to quickly address the oil slick and avert "a significant environmental disaster."

In a statement, the government, which sits in the southern city of Aden, said the vessel is heading toward the Hanish Islands, a Yemeni archipelago in the southern Red Sea.

Separately, CENTCOM said it launched attacks on Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Friday, destroying seven

mobile anti-ship cruise missiles that were prepared to launch toward the Red Sea.

It described the strikes as "self-defense," saying that the missiles "presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and to the U.S. Navy ships in the region."

CENTCOM didn't give further details. Houthi-run media, however, reported strikes by the U.S. and the U.K. on the district of Durayhimi in the Red Sea province of Hodeida.

The U.S. military has in recent weeks launched waves of strikes on Houthi-held areas inside Yemen in response to the Houthis' attacks on shipping routes in the Red Sea.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters. They claim to be acting over Israel's war targeting Hamas in the Gaza Strip, however they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe. The targeted vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor.

Forensic police find a 10th body in the charred remnants of a Spanish apartment building

By ALICIA LEÓN Associated Press

VALENCIA, Spain (AP) — The death toll from a dramatic fire that left two residential buildings charred in the Spanish city of Valencia rose to 10 on Saturday after authorities announced they had located the remains of what they believed was the last missing person.

Forensic police found the 10th victim inside the scorched building, national government delegate in Valencia Pilar Bernabé told journalists. Police will proceed with DNA testing to confirm the identities of all the victims, she said.

While there were no other missing persons reported, Bernabé stressed that police and firefighters would continue the "complex" work of combing through the building debris in search of any other possible victim.

It was not immediately known how many people were in the two buildings when the fire broke out, but the complex had some 140 apartments.

The blaze that appeared to begin in one home Thursday afternoon engulfed the rest of the 14-story apartment block in less than an hour, raising questions about whether construction materials used on the façade may have contributed to the fire spreading so furiously.

Neighbors described seeing the rapid evolution of the flames, with residents stuck on balconies and children screaming. Those left homeless from the fire, including many Ukrainian refugees who lived in the large residential complex, were initially given refuge in city hotels but were expected to be moved to other accommodation over the weekend.

Experts suggested that a type of cladding might have made the blaze spread faster. However, Valencia Mayor María José Catalá said the fire's cause was still unknown and that it was too early to comment on whether some materials used in the construction of the modern complex might have worsened it.

LeBron scores 30 points, Davis handles Wembanyama's 5x5 effort in Lakers' 123-118 win over Spurs

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — LeBron James had 30 points, nine assists and seven rebounds and the Los Angeles Lakers overcame Victor Wembanyama's historic "5x5" statistical performance for their seventh victory in nine games, 123-118 over the San Antonio Spurs on Friday night.

Wembanyama had 27 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists in his first road game against the Lakers. The French rookie sensation added five blocked shots and five steals, making him the youngest player in NBA history and the 15th overall to achieve the rare 5x5 — at least five points, rebounds, assists, blocks and steals in one game.

"He doesn't have a ceiling," James said of Wembanyama. "He can do whatever he wants to do in his

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career. It seems like he enjoys the game. It seems like he puts the work in, just from the outside looking in. ... I said a long time ago how special he was, and it's really that simple."

Wembanyama fell one assist shy of a 5x5 game in Sacramento on Thursday night, only to hit the mark one night later in Los Angeles in just 30 minutes, 55 seconds of play — the smallest amount of playing time in a 5x5 performance in league history.

Wembanyama also joined Michael Jordan as the only players to get at least five steals and five blocks in consecutive games.

"I wonder if (Jordan) did it in wins, not losses," Wembanyama said. "To me, it's secondary. Hopefully in the future we can look back and see this as a good performance, but as of today, I can't be satisfied in a loss."

Wembanyama scored 16 points in a dominant first quarter, but Anthony Davis answered his fellow No. 1 overall pick's challenge with impressive play in the next two quarters while the Lakers maintained their lead.

Davis racked up 28 points and 13 rebounds before sitting out the entire fourth quarter of the second game in a back-to-back set. Jaxson Hayes performed capably in his place against Wembanyama while James led the Lakers to their 12th win in 18 games.

"(James) powered through some good stretches and some tough stretches, but all in all, when we needed him to make plays, make shots, he stepped up and he did that," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "Coming out of the All-Star break, everything is a little topsy-turvy. Guys are still trying to get back in rhythm to where we were beforehand, but I thought (James) was good."

San Antonio finished on a 17-5 run in the final 3 1/2 minutes to trim the final margin considerably.

D'Angelo Russell had 22 points and six assists on his 28th birthday, while Rui Hachimura added 17 points for the Lakers, who haven't been able to move higher ninth place in the Western Conference standings despite their surge in recent weeks. Los Angeles returned from the All-Star break with a loss to Golden State on Thursday.

James came back strong after missing the Lakers' last two games to rest his sore ankle, although he played in the All-Star Game in between.

"I can't tell you how we're going to be each and every single day," James said. "We just put the work in and live with the results. We approach the game the right way defensively. Offensively, we continue to share the ball. ... If we defend, we get back in transition and we clean glass when teams miss, we'll give ourselves a chance to win every night."

Wembanyama embraced his first opportunity to play underneath the Lakers' wall of championship banners by getting off to a brilliant start, racking up 13 points and three rebounds while drawing two fouls from Davis in the game's first six minutes alone. He was up to 20 points by halftime, but was just 2 for 6 after halftime.

Malaki Branham scored 17 points and Jeremy Sochan had 15 points and 13 rebounds for the Spurs, who have lost three straight and 10 of 11. They're 1-6 on their nine-game annual Rodeo Road Trip.

San Antonio snapped its franchise-record losing streak at 18 games in these teams' last meeting in December.

UP NEXT

Spurs: At Utah on Sunday.

Lakers: At Phoenix on Sunday.

Two daughters ran away to join Islamic State. Years later, their family's story is an Oscar nominee

By MARIAM FAM Associated Press

Olfa Hamrouni doesn't know much about her granddaughter; not her favorite toy nor food — is it the pasta the child's mother loves, or something else?

The Tunisian grandmother doesn't even let her mind go there. "I don't want to know. What for but more heartache?" she said.

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For now, she just fights for 8-year-old Fatma. The child has spent virtually all her life with her mother and aunt — Hamrouni's eldest daughters — raised in detention in Libya, where the women wound up after leaving home as teenagers and joining Islamic State group extremists.

The real-life story of Hamrouni and her children is the focus of "Four Daughters," an Academy Award nominee for best documentary feature film. On camera, there are many layers to Kaouther Ben Hania's film: It's about the radicalization of two teenage girls; an intimate portrait of a chaotic, and often dysfunctional, family life; and reflections on generational trauma, patriarchy, motherhood and adolescence.

Off camera, it's more than just one family's tale.

The names change, the details vary, but the nightmare is familiar to some others in Tunisia, where at one point many left to join militant groups, including the Islamic State, in conflict zones abroad. Militants have also struck at targets in Tunisia. Today, families like Hamrouni's are living reminders of that complex legacy, the unresolved issues and difficult questions persisting years later.

"It's ... an open wound in my country," said actor Hend Sabri, who appears in the film as Hamrouni in some scenes. "As long as we don't talk about it, then we're not going to heal."

Hamrouni hopes the film's high profile will boost her advocacy for her daughters to be repatriated from Libya, where they had been sentenced to prison, and stand trial in their home country. In Tunisia, as in other countries, some people have been suspicious and fearful of returnees for security reasons.

Hamrouni wants Fatma freed from the confines of her existence. "What fault is it of hers? She hasn't chosen her father or mother."

Ben Hania, who wrote and directed the film, echoed the demands. "We're trying hard to push the Tunisian government," she said. "A country is responsible for its citizens."

The film experiments with format. Hamrouni and her youngest daughters, Eya and Tayssir, appear as themselves. Besides Sabri, actors play Ghofrane and Rahma, the daughters who left, as Ben Hania reconstructs the family's past in search for clues for their radicalization. (The film offers theories but no concrete motives, especially with the real Ghofrane and Rahma imprisoned in Libya.) In some scenes, the actors reenact key moments alongside family members; in others, they question, challenge or reflect. Ben Hania said her role as a filmmaker is to understand and analyze, not judge.

In the film and the family's telling, the daughters grew up with little in a tumultuous home. Dad was largely absent and drank too much; mom was overburdened and harsh.

Hamrouni, in the film, is fixated on preserving her daughters' sexual purity for marriage. She's quick to hurl insults and accusations and to punish perceived or real infringements — a waxed leg, a diary entry about a first kiss — with severe beatings.

There was some rebellion, a gothic phase, a guy with a motorcycle. Then the changes that swept Tunisia following the Arab Spring pro-democracy movement more than a decade ago brought another transformation as different currents, including hard-liners and extremists, jockeyed for influence. A preaching tent popped up in the family's neighborhood.

Ghofrane and Rahma, whose mother says grew up with only basic religious knowledge, were introduced to austere interpretations. Their radicalization further deepened — in the film, Rahma is said to have whipped younger sisters for skipping or delaying prayers, self-flagellated for such things as gossiping, and daydreamed about stoning a woman who had sex outside of marriage.

When Ghofrane left nearly a decade ago, Hamrouni, according to the film, sought police help to stop Rahma from following. She accuses the police of doing little.

The family crumbled. Hamrouni grieved the departed daughters and worried about the remaining ones. One, a child at the time, adored Rahma and had absorbed her sisters' beliefs. The other, Eya, was unraveling.

The younger girls were placed in a government facility, which they credit with helping them rebuild their lives. But outside, the family says, life was hard and neighbors and relatives shunned them.

Mohamed Iqbel Ben Rejeb of the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad said some who found themselves in similar situations disowned family members who left, sometimes to protect those who remained from the fallout. Others fight for the repatriation of loved ones. Some don't know whether their

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relatives are dead or alive.

He said his organization doesn't defend Tunisians with blood on their hands but advocates for the rehabilitation of others and, especially, for the rescue and reintegration of children taken by parents to conflict zones or born there. But he also says that Tunisia may lack sufficient capabilities and argues that authorities often appear to be dragging their feet.

He and other activists are particularly concerned for the children's rights and futures. Inaction, they warn, can prove perilous.

"The normal place for children is ... the extended family, the school," said Mostafa Abdelkebir, head of the Tunisian Observatory for Human Rights. "After spending long periods in prisons and camps ... they'll resent society, become ticking bombs."

Abdelkebir called on Tunisian authorities to find solutions and, especially, to bring home the children from abroad, but said that the repatriation issue is often mired in a myriad of diplomatic, political, financial, legal or logistical challenges.

Still, some Tunisian women cleared by Libyan courts were repatriated to Tunisia, where they were detained, according to Abdelkebir. A number of children have also been returned — including orphaned ones, he added. The children have been given to relatives or placed in government social care facilities, he said. Tunisian government officials didn't provide a comment, or respond to questions on the sisters' case and the larger repatriation issue, in time for publication.

Sabri, one of the Arab world's best-known stars, said her heart breaks for Fatma — but she finds it harder to sympathize with Ghofrane and Rahma. She also stresses the importance of accountability for Tunisians who have joined such groups.

During filming, Hamrouni saw a mirror held up to her life.

Hamrouni, who had a difficult childhood herself, said she both recognizes where she went wrong as a mother, and that her mistakes don't justify her daughters' decisions. But she also blames the political climate and government policies at the time of their radicalization at a young age and says the two have now regretted their choices.

When asked about Fatma, Hamrouni's voice softens. Her eyes light up before they well with tears.

She frets: How will Fatma learn manners? Who will teach her about her country? How is she supposed to grow up to love Tunisia, to know how to deal with others?

If Fatma ever lives with her, there will be no more hitting, said Hamrouni, who has remarried and now lives outside of Tunisia. "I will teach her right from wrong but let her make her choices."

But nothing is certain. She feels for Fatma, for how little she knows of the world, how the world may treat her.

"Her past has been bleak," Hamrouni said. "Only God knows what awaits her."

Facing backlash over IVF ruling, Alabama lawmakers look for a fix

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Lawmakers began scrambling for ways to protect Alabama in vitro fertilization services after multiple providers paused treatment in the wake of a state Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos could be considered children under a state law.

Facing a wave of shock and anger from the decision, legislators prepared separate proposals in the House and Senate that would seek to prevent a fertilized egg from being recognized as a human life or an unborn child under state laws until it is implanted in a woman's uterus.

Justices ruled last week that three couples who had frozen embryos destroyed in a mishap at a storage facility could pursue wrongful death claims for their "extrauterine children." Justices cited sweeping language that the GOP-controlled Legislature and voters added to the Alabama Constitution in 2018 saying that the state recognizes the "rights of the unborn child."

Senate Minority Leader Bobby Singleton, a Democrat, said Republicans helped create the situation in their push to enact some of the most stringent anti-abortion laws in the country. The result, he said, was

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eliminating a path for people to become parents.

"At the end of the day, the Republican Party has to be responsible for what they have done," Singleton said.

Former President Donald Trump joined the calls for Alabama lawmakers to act Friday and said he would "strongly support the availability of IVF."

State Republican lawmakers said they were working on a solution.

"Alabamians strongly believe in protecting the rights of the unborn, but the result of the State Supreme Court ruling denies many couples the opportunity to conceive, which is a direct contradiction," House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter said.

Republican state Sen. Tim Melson, who is a doctor, said his proposal seeks to clarify that a fertilized egg is a "potential life" and not a human life until it is implanted in the uterus.

"I'm just trying to come up with a solution for the IVF industry and protect the doctors and still make it available for people who have fertility issues that need to be addressed because they want to have a family," Melson said.

House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels, a Democrat, introduced legislation to clarify that a "human egg or human embryo that exists in any form outside of the uterus shall not, under any circumstances, be considered an unborn child" under state law.

"This is just the first step in unwinding this predicament our state has placed itself in," Daniels said.

Melson said he was not surprised that the state is seeing unintended consequences from the constitutional language. Supporters said it was intended to block abortion if the states ever gained control of the issue. But opponents warned it was essentially a "personhood" measure that would establish "constitutional rights for fertilized eggs."

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said the state wants to foster a culture of life and that includes "couples hoping and praying to be parents who utilize IVF."

Alabama Attorney General Marshall does not intend to prosecute IVF providers or families based on the state Supreme Court ruling, Chief Counsel Katherine Robertson said in a statement.

The court's ruling, treating the embryos the same as a child or gestating fetus under the wrongful death statute, raised questions about what legal liabilities clinics could face during IVF processes, including the freezing, testing and disposal of embryos. Three in vitro fertilization providers in Alabama paused their services in the aftermath of the ruling.

Gabby Goidel, who was days from an expected egg retrieval appointment, was told Thursday that her provider would not continue doing embryo transfers.

"I started crying," said Goidel, who swiftly traveled with her husband to Texas to try to continue the IVF cycle with a provider there. The Alabama ruling is "not pro-family in any way," Goidel said.

At the Fertility Institute of North Alabama, Dr. Brett Davenport said his clinic will continue providing IVF. But he also urged state policymakers to act and remove the uncertainty for providers.

"What we do could not be any more pro-life. We're trying to help couples who can't otherwise conceive a child," Davenport said.

The court ruled only that embryos are covered under Alabama's wrongful death statute, said Mary Ziegler, a legal historian at the University of California, Davis School of Law. The court did not say embryos had full constitutional rights, she said, or at least not yet.

"I think people in Alabama are rightly expecting that this is the tip of the iceberg though, and this ruling will lead to more down the road," Ziegler said. She also said anti-abortion groups and politicians have been pushing to get some sort of ruling through the federal courts "that a fetus is a constitutional rights holder."

"It's not just about in vitro and it's not just about Alabama. It's part of this nationwide movement too," she said.

Alabama IVF ruling puts spotlight on state plans for tax breaks and child support for fetuses

By JOHN HANNA and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — The recent Alabama Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos are legally protected children is highlighting how support for the idea that a fetus should have the same rights as a person underpins far less dramatic laws and proposals from abortion foes across the U.S.

Lawmakers in at least six states have proposed measures similar to a Georgia law that allows women to seek child support back to conception to cover expenses from a pregnancy. Georgia also allows prospective parents to claim its income tax deduction for dependent children before birth, Utah enacted a pregnancy tax break last year, and variations of those measures are before lawmakers in at least four other states.

Including legislation that makes harming or killing a fetus a crime, several dozen proposals falling under the broad umbrella of promoting fetal personhood are pending in at least 15 states, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

The Alabama court decision spotlighted the anti-abortion movement's longstanding goal of giving embryos and fetuses legal and constitutional protections on par with those of the women carrying them. But abortion rights advocates see proposals granting even limited protections to embryos and fetuses as potentially having broader implications.

"Any law that applies to a human could then be deployed with regard to fetuses," said Melissa Murray, a professor at the New York University School of Law. "The whole array of statutory law and constitutional law is available."

Abortion opponents argue that proposals on income taxes or child support — or state aid to anti-abortion centers that provide services during pregnancy and after birth — are driven by compassion for vulnerable women and girls. The help could persuade some not to terminate pregnancies, abortion opponents contend, but their tax and child support proposals also would help women and girls who never consider abortion.

"The main goal is just to help provide support for mothers and families who need extra support here and then provide support to those who are also helping them, such as the pregnancy resource centers," said Lucrecia Nold, who lobbies for the Kansas Catholic Conference.

A Kansas House committee held a hearing earlier this month on the child support proposal, and a bill to allow prospective parents to claim the state's \$2,250 dependent income tax deduction before a child's birth is before a Senate committee. Lawmakers are expected to discuss both in coming weeks.

Kansas is an outlier among states with Republican-controlled Legislatures because of a 2019 state Supreme Court decision declaring that the Kansas Constitution protects access to abortion as a matter of a fundamental right to bodily autonomy. Lawmakers put an amendment on the ballot to explicitly declare that the constitution doesn't grant a right to abortion — allowing them to greatly restrict or ban the procedure — but voters soundly rejected it in August 2022. It was the first of seven state votes affirming abortion rights after the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision allowing states to ban abortion.

But Kansas also has had a law since 2007 that allows people to face separate charges for crimes against fetuses, including capital murder, vehicular homicide and battery, and it hasn't been challenged. A 2013 state law declares that life begins at fertilization and "unborn children have interests in life, health and well-being that should be protected," but it's not been enforced as a limit on abortion.

Brittany Jones, an attorney and policy director for Kansas Family Voice, which opposes abortion and sought the child support measure, said the state Supreme Court didn't care about those laws when it ruled in 2019.

"This freakout — that we're trying to do something unique legally — is just hysterical," she said. "We believe that the mother and the child both have value. I won't run from that; that's true."

In questioning abortion opponents' motives for pursuing more limited measures dealing with child support or income taxes, abortion rights advocates argue that they don't represent meaningful aid for pregnant women or their families.

During the Kansas House committee hearing this month, abortion providers argued that if the state

wants to help them, it should consider expanding social services, including Medicaid; improve access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive care; or mandate paid family leave. The state's budget division projected that almost 21,000 extra income tax filers could claim the dependent deduction — but the average savings would be about \$91 each.

Elisabeth Smith, state policy and advocacy director for the Center for Reproductive Rights, which fights for abortion access, called such measures “window dressing” and said they and the Alabama Supreme Court ruling are part of a coordinated anti-abortion campaign across the U.S.

“This is absolutely part of the anti-abortion long campaign to perpetuate abortion stigma and to normalize that an embryo and a fetus are equal to a living, breathing human being walking around,” Smith said.

But Mary Zieger, a law professor at the University of California, Davis, who has published six books since 2015 about the national abortion debate and its history, said states' fetal personhood measures also could influence the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority to consider whether the U.S. Constitution's rights apply to fetuses and embryos as a matter of history or tradition.

“And then they're going to say, ‘Well, look, there's also all these states that hold this position,’” she said.

In Alabama, voters amended the state constitution in 2018 to declare that the state's public policy is “to ensure the protection of the rights of the unborn child.” Justices cited that provision in separate opinions on frozen embryos.

Broad fetal personhood proposals are pending in at least four states, and Vermont has one to grant rights to fetuses at the 24th week of pregnancy, though it is not likely to pass the Democratic-controlled Legislature.

Ziegler, who's working on a book about the push for fetal rights, said such broad measures are likely to be unpopular with voters who want to protect abortion access or in vitro fertilization for women who have trouble conceiving.

She said abortion foes are trying to find “unicorn” bills that advance fetal personhood without “actually making voters angry.”

“There's a kind of longer game being played here in the sense that the goal is ultimately some kind of federal recognition for fetal personhood,” she said.

Man guilty in Black transgender woman's killing in 1st federal hate crime trial over gender identity

By JAMES POLLARD Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A South Carolina man was found guilty Friday of killing a Black transgender woman in the nation's first federal trial over a hate crime based on gender identity.

After deliberating for roughly four hours, jurors convicted Daqua Lameek Ritter of a hate crime for the murder of Dime Doe in 2019. Ritter was also found guilty of using a firearm in connection with the fatal shooting and obstructing justice.

A sentencing date has not yet been scheduled. Ritter faces a maximum of life imprisonment without parole.

“This case stands as a testament to our committed effort to fight violence that is targeted against those who may identify as a member of the opposite sex, for their sexual orientation or for any other protected characteristics,” Brook Andrews, an assistant U.S. attorney for the District of South Carolina, told reporters after the verdict.

While federal officials have previously prosecuted hate crimes based on gender identity, the cases never reached trial. A Mississippi man received a 49-year prison sentence in 2017 as part of a plea deal after he admitted to killing a 17-year-old transgender woman.

The four-day trial over Doe's killing centered on the secret sexual relationship between her and Ritter, the latter of whom had grown agitated by the exposure of their affair in the small town of Allendale, according to witness testimony and text messages obtained by the FBI. Prosecutors accused Ritter of shooting Doe three times with a .22 caliber handgun to prevent further revelation of his involvement with

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a transgender woman.

Prosecutors presented police interviews in which Ritter said he did not see Doe the day she died. But body camera video from a traffic stop of Doe showed Ritter's distinctive left wrist tattoo on a person in the passenger seat hours before police found her slumped in the car, parked in a driveway.

Defense lawyer Lindsey Vann argued at trial that no physical evidence pointed to Ritter. State law enforcement never processed a gunshot residue test that he took voluntarily, she said, and the pair's intimate relationship and frequent car rides made it no surprise that Ritter would have been with her.

Doe's close friends testified that it was no secret in Allendale that she had begun her social transition as a woman shortly after graduating high school. She started dressing in skirts, getting her nails done and wearing extensions. She and her friends discussed boys they were seeing — including Ritter, whom she met during one of his many summertime visits from New York to stay with family.

But text messages obtained by the FBI suggested that Ritter sought to keep their relationship under wraps as much as possible, prosecutors said. He reminded her to delete their communications from her phone, and hundreds of texts sent in the month before her death were removed.

Shortly before Doe's death, their exchanges grew tense. In one message from July 29, 2019, she complained that Ritter did not reciprocate her generosity. He replied that he thought they had an understanding that she didn't need the "extra stuff."

He also told her that Delasia Green, his main girlfriend at the time, had insulted him with a homophobic slur after learning of the affair. In a July 31 text, Doe said she felt used and Ritter should never have let Green find out about them.

Ritter's defense attorneys said the sampling represented only a "snapshot" of their messages. They pointed to other exchanges where Doe encouraged Ritter, or where he thanked her for one of her many kindnesses.

Witnesses offered other damaging testimony.

On the day Doe died, a group of friends saw Ritter ride away in a silver car with tinted windows — a vehicle that Ritter's acquaintance Kordell Jenkins said he had seen Doe drive previously. When Ritter returned several hours later, Jenkins said, he wore a new outfit and appeared "on edge."

The friends built a fire in a barrel to smoke out the mosquitoes on that buggy summer day, and Ritter emptied his book bag into it, Jenkins testified. He said he couldn't see the contents but assumed they were items Ritter no longer wanted, possibly the clothes he wore earlier.

The two ran into each other the following day, Jenkins said, and he could see the silver handle of a small firearm sticking out from Ritter's waistline. He said Ritter asked him to "get it gone."

Defense attorneys suggested that Jenkins fabricated the story to please prosecutors and argued it was preposterous to think Ritter would ask someone he barely knew to dispose of a murder weapon. They said Ritter's friends gave conflicting accounts about details like the purported burning of his clothes while facing the threat of prosecution if they failed to cooperate.

With Allendale abuzz with rumors that Ritter killed Doe, he began behaving uncharacteristically, according to witness testimony.

Green said that when he showed up days later at her cousin's house in Columbia, he was dirty, smelly and couldn't stop pacing. Her cousin's boyfriend gave Ritter a ride to the bus stop. Before he left, Green asked him if he had killed Doe.

"He dropped his head and gave me a little smirk," Green said.

Ritter monitored the fallout from New York, FBI Special Agent Clay Trippi said, citing Facebook messages with another friend, Xavier Pinckney. On Aug. 11, Pinckney told Ritter that nobody was "really talking." But by Aug. 14, Pinckney was warning Ritter to stay away from Allendale because he had been visited by state police. Somebody was "snitching," he later said.

Pinckney faces charges of obstructing justice. Federal officials allege he gave false and misleading statements to investigators.

Celebrity owl Flaco dies a year after becoming beloved by New York City for zoo escape

By RUTH BROWN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Flaco, the Eurasian eagle-owl who escaped from New York City's Central Park Zoo and became one of the city's most beloved celebrities as he flew around Manhattan, has died, zoo officials announced Friday.

A little over one year after he was freed from his cage at the zoo in a criminal act that has yet to be solved, Flaco appears to have collided with an Upper West Side building, the zoo said in a statement.

"The vandal who damaged Flaco's exhibit jeopardized the safety of the bird and is ultimately responsible for his death," the statement said. "We are still hopeful that the NYPD which is investigating the vandalism will ultimately make an arrest."

Staff from the Wild Bird Fund, a wildlife rehabilitation center, responded to the scene and declared Flaco dead shortly after the collision. He was taken to the Bronx Zoo for a necropsy.

"We hoped only to see Flaco hooting wildly from the top of our local water tower, never in the clinic," the World Bird Fund wrote in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Flaco's time in the sky began on Feb. 2, 2023, when someone breached a waist-high fence and slipped into the Central Park Zoo. Once inside, they cut a hole through a steel mesh cage, freeing the owl that had arrived at the zoo as a fledgling 13 years earlier.

Since the zoo suspended efforts to re-capture Flaco in February 2023, there has been no public information about the crime.

Until now, Flaco had defied the odds, thriving in the urban jungle despite a lifetime in captivity. He became one of the city's most beloved characters. By day he lounged in Manhattan's courtyards and parks or perches on fire escapes. He spent his nights hooting atop water towers and preying on the city's abundant rats.

He was known for turning up unexpectedly at New Yorkers' windows and was tracked around the Big Apple by bird watchers. His death prompted an outpouring of grief on social media Friday night.

One of Flaco's most dedicated observers, David Barrett, suggested a temporary memorial at the bird's favorite oak tree in Central Park.

There, fellow birders could "lay flowers, leave a note, or just be with others who loved Flaco," Barrett wrote in a post on X for the account Manhattan Bird Alert, which documented the bird's whereabouts.

Trump says his criminal indictments boosted his appeal to Black voters

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump claimed Friday that his four criminal indictments have boosted his support among Black Americans because they see him as a victim of discrimination, comparing his legal jeopardy to the historic legacy of anti-Black prejudice in the U.S. legal system.

Trump argues he is the victim of political persecution, even though there is no evidence President Joe Biden or White House officials influenced the filing of 91 felony charges against him. Earlier in the week, Trump compared himself to Alexei Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's top domestic rival, who died in a remote Arctic prison after being jailed by the Kremlin leader.

"I got indicted for nothing, for something that is nothing," Trump told a black-tie event for Black conservatives in South Carolina ahead of Saturday's Republican primary. "And a lot of people said that's why the Black people like me, because they have been hurt so badly and discriminated against, and they actually viewed me as I'm being discriminated against. It's been pretty amazing but possibly, maybe, there's something there."

Trump has centered his third campaign for the White House on his grievances against Biden and what he alleges is a "deep state" targeting him, even as he faces charges from his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, keeping classified documents at his Florida estate, and allegedly arranging payments to a porn actress. He is the dominant Republican front-runner, as many GOP voters echo his beliefs, and is favored

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to soundly beat former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley in her home state.

Trump noted the mug shot taken by Georgia authorities after he was indicted on state racketeering charges over the 2020 election.

"When I did the mug shot in Atlanta, that mug shot is No. 1," he said, adding: "You know who embraced it more than anyone else? The Black population."

Trump's campaign has predicted he can do better with Black voters in November than he did four years ago, citing Biden's faltering poll numbers with Black adults and what Trump sees as advantages on issues like the economy and the record-high number of people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, often ending up in cities with large Black populations.

He was flanked on stage at the Black Conservative Federation's gala in Columbia, South Carolina, by Black elected officials including Reps. Byron Donalds of Florida and Wesley Hunt of Texas. Many in the crowd cheered throughout the speech.

In a freewheeling speech, Trump mixed his regular campaign remarks with appeals to the Black community and jokes that touched on race.

"The lights are so bright in my eyes I can't see too many people out there. But I can only see the Black ones. I can't see any white ones. That's how far I've come," Trump said to laughter from the audience.

He also said that he knew many Black people because his properties were built by Black construction workers.

In telling a story about how he renegotiated the cost of remodeling Air Force One, Trump criticized his predecessor, former President Barack Obama, the first Black person to be elected to the White House.

"I have to tell you, Black president, but I got \$1.7 billion less," Trump said. "Would you rather have the Black president or the white president who got \$1.7 billion off the price?"

As the crowd cheered, he added, "I think they want the white guy."

Republicans face an uphill battle in courting Black voters, who are overwhelmingly supportive of the Democratic Party. And while Black voter enthusiasm for Biden has cooled over the last year, only 25% of Black Americans said they had a favorable view of Trump in a December AP-NORC poll.

Black voters who spoke with The Associated Press ahead of the gala expressed skepticism that Republicans, and Trump in particular, could persuade them to switch parties.

"There's just so much controversy," said Ebony McBeth, a Columbia resident and transportation worker. "I would go for Biden just because Trump has his own agenda."

Isaac Williams Sr., a retired cook from Columbia and a lifelong Democrat, said he disliked both parties but found Trump to "have mobster tendencies. He's only out for himself."

Multiple conservatives interviewed said the Democratic Party's appeal to Black voters was based on "emotional politics" by evoking racism.

"In order for the Republican Party to win more of the African American community over, we'll have to invest a lot of time and more money into really letting people know our platform, because the truth of the matter is a lot of them, they agree with our platform but they don't associate that with the Republican Party," said Samuel Rivers Jr., a former Republican state senator in South Carolina.

Rivers, who is Black, argued that Black voters view Republicans "in a negative way based on emotional triggers of racism that no longer exists."

Trump has a long history of stoking racial tensions. From his earliest days as a New York real estate developer, Trump has faced accusations of racist business practices. In 1989, he took out full-page newspaper ads calling for New York state to reinstate the death penalty as five Black and Latino teenagers were set to stand trial for beating and raping a white woman in Central Park. The five men were eventually exonerated in 2002 after another man admitted to the crime and it was determined their confessions were coerced.

He spent years spreading the lie that Obama was ineligible to hold office. When he was president, Trump derided "shithole countries" in Africa and said four congresswomen of color should go back to the "broken and crime-infested" countries they came from, ignoring the fact that all of the women are American citizens and three were born in the U.S.

After 2 years of war, questions abound on whether Kyiv can sustain the fight against Russia

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The future looks bleak for war-weary Ukraine: It is beset by shortages in soldiers and ammunition, as well as doubts about the supply of Western aid. Ukrainian forces also face a Russian enemy that has recently seized the initiative on the battlefield.

Two years after Russia's full-scale invasion captured nearly a quarter of the country, the stakes could not be higher for Kyiv. After a string of victories in the first year of the war, fortunes have turned for the Ukrainian military, which is dug in, outgunned and outnumbered against a more powerful opponent.

As the war enters its third year, here is a look at the situation on the ground, the challenges ahead and some of the potential consequences if Ukraine does not acquire the people, ammunition and assistance it needs to sustain the fight.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF PLAY?

Triumphs have turned to attrition for Ukraine along the snaking front line in the country's east. With Russia gaining advantages, shortages mounting and a major military shake-up still fresh, questions abound about whether Kyiv can keep going.

"As things stand, neither side has won. Neither side has lost. Neither side is anywhere near giving up. And both sides have pretty much exhausted the manpower and equipment that they started the war with," said Gen. Richard Barrons, a British military officer who is co-chair of a defense consultancy.

Ukraine suffered setbacks after the much-anticipated summer counteroffensive failed to produce any breakthroughs. The armed forces switched to a defensive posture in the fall to repel new advances from Moscow.

On Feb. 17, Russian forces took control of the embattled city of Avdiivka, where Kyiv's troops were under constant fire with Russians approaching from three directions. Ukrainian commanders had complained for weeks of personnel and ammunition shortages. It was the biggest battlefield victory for Russia since the fight for Bakhmut, and it confirmed that Moscow's offensive was gaining steam.

Away from the battlefield, Ukraine has proven successful in the Black Sea, where it has used long-range weapons to strike military installations in Crimea and maritime drones to sink Russian warships. Ukraine has disabled a third of the Black Sea Fleet, according to the Atlantic Council.

Ukraine is looking to acquire more long-range missiles to strike deep into Russian-occupied territory, a move that some European countries fear may spark escalation from Moscow.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED?

Both Russia and Ukraine have sought to keep casualty figures under wraps.

Few details about Ukrainian military deaths have emerged since the full-scale invasion began in 2022. But it's clear that tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians have been killed.

In 2023, the first independent statistical analysis of Russia's war dead concluded that nearly 50,000 Russian men had died in the war. Two independent Russian media outlets, Mediazona and Meduza, worked with a data scientist from Germany's Tübingen University to analyze Russian government data.

WHAT HAPPENS IF UKRAINE CAN'T FIND MORE TROOPS?

Without more soldiers, Ukraine's defensive lines will be overstretched and more vulnerable to Russian attack, especially if Moscow launches intense multi-pronged assaults along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line.

The Ukrainian military has an average personnel shortage of 25% across brigades, according to lawmakers. Military commanders are unable to give their soldiers enough rest, and Russia has recently increased the tempo of attacks. As a result, soldiers are tired — and more easily injured — exacerbating the effects of the shortage.

Ukraine's military command has said 450,000 to 500,000 additional recruits are needed for the next phase of the war. Even if Ukraine succeeds in mobilizing that number, which is unlikely, it still would not be able to match the manpower of Russia, which has more than three times Ukraine's population.

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Lawmakers have spent months mulling over a controversial proposal to increase the conscription pool, as many Ukrainian men continue to evade the war in Ukrainian cities.

Commanders say they don't have enough men to dig trenches or carry out offensive operations. Shortages have also required them to switch tactics and focus on preserving the lives of the soldiers they do have, sometimes at the expense of holding territory.

WHAT ABOUT WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION?

If they continue, ammunition shortages will jeopardize Ukraine's ability to hold territory and keep soldiers alive.

Military leaders appear to be rationing shells, sending trickles of ammunition to firing positions to preserve stockpiles, while promises for more ammunition from Western allies have gone unfulfilled. The European Union failed on its promise to deliver 1 million rounds by the start of the year, delivering only a few hundred thousand.

At the same time, Russia is mobilizing its defense industry and may soon be able to fire 5,000 artillery rounds a day, Barrons said. Ukraine is building up its domestic arms production but will not be able to match Moscow in scale in the short-term.

Military commanders have complained for months of ammunition shortages for infantry fighting vehicles, machine guns, artillery and multiple rocket launch systems. Those shortages grew particularly acute by the end of 2023, with some artillery commanders saying they can meet only 10% of ammunition needs.

Commanders say long-range artillery in particular serves two important purposes: First, it acts as a protective umbrella to cover infantry, allowing them to hold territory and prepare for offensive operations. Second, by striking Russian troops and heavy weaponry from a distance, artillery prevents planned assaults by seriously degrading Moscow's capabilities.

Without it, Ukraine will increasingly come under the pressure of Russia's relentless artillery barrages. Commanders say their soldiers have no choice but to dig in deeper to hold their lines.

IS WESTERN SUPPORT WANING, AND WHAT IF IT DOES?

Ukraine is reliant on Western allies and international organizations not just for military aid but also for financial support and humanitarian help.

Without Western assistance, Ukraine will not have the weapons, ammunition and training it needs to sustain the war effort, nor will it be able to keep its battered economy afloat or reach Ukrainians trapped in the crossfire of battles.

Between divisions about the future of aid within the EU and \$60 billion in military aid languishing in the United States Congress, Western countries have not been as forthcoming with money this year.

Kyiv breathed a sigh of relief in February when the EU approved extending a 50-billion-euro (\$54-billion) aid package for Ukraine after resistance from Hungary. That money is meant to support the economy and rebuild the country, not to fight Russia.

But it's the U.S. funding that many Ukrainian leaders are waiting for. The funds will enable Ukraine to purchase weapons and equipment from American firms, access more military training and intelligence sharing, and bolster air and sea defenses. The money will also provide direct budget support for Kyiv.

Ukrainian leaders also need Western help to cover the salaries of public servants and medical workers.

On the humanitarian side, the United Nations and its partner agencies said if an appeal for \$3.1 billion in new funding for the year is not fulfilled, the U.N. won't be able to meet the basic needs of 8.5 million Ukrainians living on the front line.

Video shows Oklahoma nonbinary teen after attack in school bathroom, the day before their death

By KEN MILLER, PHILIP MARCELO and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A 16-year-old Oklahoma student who died the day after a fight in a high school bathroom was conscious and alert when telling police about the attack by three girls that occurred after the teen squirted them with water, according to police video released Friday.

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Nex Benedict's mother called police to come to the hospital on Feb. 7 after the teen was attacked at school in the Tulsa suburb of Owasso. Nex, who identified as nonbinary and used they/them pronouns, died the next day after their mother called emergency responders to their home, saying Nex's breathing was shallow, their eyes were rolling back and their hands were curled, according to audio also released by Owasso police.

In the video from the hospital the day of the altercation, Nex explains to an officer that the girls had been picking on them and their friends because of the way they dressed. Nex claims that in the bathroom the girls said "something like: why do they laugh like that," referring to Nex and their friends.

"And so I went up there and I poured water on them, and then all three of them came at me," Nex tells the officer while reclining in a hospital bed.

"They came at me. They grabbed on my hair. I grabbed onto them. I threw one of them into a paper towel dispenser and then they got my legs out from under me and got me on the ground," Nex says in the video, adding that the girls then started beating Nex and they blacked out.

In the 911 call on Feb. 8, Nex's mother, Sue Benedict, expressed concern about a head injury as she described Nex's symptoms.

"I hope this ain't from her head. They were supposed to have checked her out good," said Benedict, who remained calm during the call and said she had been to nursing school. Benedict said in a statement on a GoFundMe page set up to help cover funeral expenses that the family was still learning to use the teen's preferred name and pronouns.

Paramedics responding to the family's house performed CPR and rushed Nex to the hospital, where they later died.

In audio of the call Benedict made to police on Feb. 7, Benedict said she wanted an officer to come so she could file charges. The officer who responded can be heard in the hospital video explaining that Nex started the altercation by throwing the water and the court would view it as a mutual fight.

According to a police search warrant, Benedict indicated to police on Feb. 7 that she didn't want to file charges at that time. Benedict instead asked police to speak to school officials about issues on campus among students.

The Feb. 9 search warrant, which was filed with the court on Feb. 21, also shows investigators took 137 photographs at the school, including inside the girl's bathroom where the fight occurred. They additionally collected two swabs of stains from the bathroom and retrieved records and documents of the students involved in the altercation.

While the two-week-old warrant states that police were seeking evidence in a felony murder, the department has since said Benedict's death was not a result of injuries suffered in the fight, based on the preliminary results of the autopsy.

The police department, which didn't respond to multiple messages sent Friday, has said it won't comment further on the teen's cause of death until toxicology and other autopsy results are completed.

Video released by police from the high school on Feb. 7 shows students walking into and then out of a bathroom after stacking chairs on top of tables in a cafeteria. Six students are seen entering the bathroom before Nex, who stops at a water fountain and then enters the bathroom along with two other students. A faculty member is then seen going into the bathroom, and the students walk out.

There is no indication from the footage, which only shows the bathroom door and part of the cafeteria, of what occurred in the bathroom.

The school district has said the students were in the restroom for less than two minutes before the fight was broken up by other students and a staff member. Police and school officials have not said what provoked the fight.

The family, through their lawyer, declined to comment Friday on the search warrant. The attorney did not immediately offer any comment Friday on behalf of the family on the video and audio released. Earlier this week, they said they have launched their own independent investigation into what happened.

Vigils are planned over the weekend in Oklahoma for the teen.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Friday that she was "absolutely heartbroken" over

Nex's death.

"Every young person deserves to feel safe and supported at school," Jean-Pierre said.

Police: 7 farmworkers in van, 1 pickup driver killed in head-on crash in California farming region

MADERA, Calif. (AP) — Seven farmworkers traveling in a van and the driver of a pickup truck were killed Friday in a head-on crash in a farming area in central California, police said.

The crash at 6:15 a.m. left the van almost completely crumpled among blooming almond trees near the town of Madera, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) outside Fresno, California Highway Patrol Officer Javier Ruvalcaba said.

One farmworker seated in the rear of the van survived and was taken to a hospital, Ruvalcaba said. He is expected to recover, Ruvalcaba said.

Only two of the farmworkers were wearing a seatbelt, he said. "If they had been wearing their seatbelts, the rear passengers would have probably survived," Ruvalcaba said.

A witness told police the black pickup truck was swerving in and out of its lane on a two-lane rural highway before crashing head-on with the van, Ruvalcaba said.

"At this point, we don't know whether alcohol or drugs played a factor," he said.

The farmworkers were about 5 miles (8 kilometers) from the vineyard where they worked as pruners when the crash happened, Ruvalcaba said.

The van was headed to the farming community of Firebaugh, an area known for its vineyards and fields of tomatoes, garlic, asparagus and other vegetables.

Private US spacecraft is on its side on the moon with some antennas covered up, the company says

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A private U.S. lunar lander tipped over at touchdown and ended up on its side near the moon's south pole, hampering communications, company officials said Friday.

Intuitive Machines initially believed its six-footed lander, *Odysseus*, was upright after Thursday's touchdown. But CEO Steve Altemus said Friday the craft "caught a foot in the surface," falling onto its side and, quite possibly, leaning against a rock. He said it was coming in too fast and may have snapped a leg.

"So far, we have quite a bit of operational capability even though we're tipped over," he told reporters.

But some antennas were pointed toward the surface, limiting flight controllers' ability to get data down, Altemus said. The antennas were stationed high on the 14-foot (4.3-meter) lander to facilitate communications at the hilly, cratered and shadowed south polar region.

Odysseus — the first U.S. lander in more than 50 years — is thought to be within a few miles (kilometers) of its intended landing site near the Malapert A crater, less than 200 miles (300 kilometers) from the south pole. NASA, the main customer, wanted to get as close as possible to the pole to scout out the area before astronauts show up later this decade.

NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter will attempt to pinpoint the lander's location, as it flies overhead this weekend.

With Thursday's touchdown, Intuitive Machines became the first private business to pull off a moon landing, a feat previously achieved by only five countries. Japan was the latest country to score a landing, but its lander also ended up on its side last month.

Odysseus' mission was sponsored in large part by NASA, whose experiments were on board. NASA paid \$118 million for the delivery under a program meant to jump-start the lunar economy.

One of the NASA experiments was pressed into service when the lander's navigation system did not kick in. Intuitive Machines caught the problem in advance when it tried to use its lasers to improve the

lander's orbit. Otherwise, flight controllers would not have discovered the failure until it was too late, just five minutes before touchdown.

"Serendipity is absolutely the right word," mission director Tim Crain said.

It turns out that a switch was not flipped before flight, preventing the system's activation in space.

Launched last week from Florida, Odysseus took an extra lap around the moon Thursday to allow time for the last-minute switch to NASA's laser system, which saved the day, officials noted.

Another experiment, a cube with four cameras, was supposed to pop off 30 seconds before touchdown to capture pictures of Odysseus' landing. But Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's EagleCam was deliberately powered off during the final descent because of the navigation switch and stayed attached to the lander.

Embry-Riddle's Troy Henderson said his team will try to release EagleCam in the coming days, so it can photograph the lander from roughly 26 feet (8 meters) away.

"Getting that final picture of the lander on the surface is still an incredibly important task for us," Henderson told The Associated Press.

Intuitive Machines anticipates just another week of operations on the moon for the solar-powered lander — nine or 10 days at most — before lunar nightfall hits.

The company was the second business to aim for the moon under NASA's commercial lunar services program. Last month, Pittsburgh's Astrobotic Technology gave it a shot, but a fuel leak on the lander cut the mission short and the craft ended up crashing back to Earth.

Until Thursday, the U.S. had not landed on the moon since Apollo 17's Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt closed out NASA's famed moon-landing program in December 1972. NASA's new effort to return astronauts to the moon is named Artemis after Apollo's mythological twin sister. The first Artemis crew landing is planned for 2026 at the earliest.

Kayakers paddle in Death Valley after rains replenish lake in one of Earth's driest spots

By TY O'NEIL, JOHN LOCHER and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — Kayakers have been paddling in one of the driest places on Earth after a series of record rainstorms battered California's Death Valley and replenished Lake Manly.

Park Ranger Nichole Andler said Badwater Basin at Death Valley National Park, which runs along part of central California's border with Nevada, "is normally a very beautiful, bright white salt flat."

This year it is a lake.

In the past six months, Death Valley has received more than double its annual rainfall amount, recording more than 4.9 inches (12.45 centimeters) compared to a typical year that gets about 2 inches (5.08 centimeters). Temperatures at or above 130 F (54.44 C) have only been recorded on Earth a handful of times, mostly in Death Valley.

Badwater Basin is the lowest point in North America at 282 feet (85.95 meters) below sea level and has been a favored spot for tourists to take selfies and briefly walk along the white salt flats ringed by sandy-colored mountains.

"It's the lowest point, in North America. So it's going to collect water, but to have as much water as we have now — and for it to be as deep and lasting as long as it has — this is extremely uncommon," Andler said. "If it's not once-in-a-lifetime, it's nearly."

Andler said kayakers should come soon since water levels are expected to drop in a matter of weeks, though the lake "will probably be here into April. If we're lucky, May. And then it'll be a muddy, wet mess, and then it'll dry out into those gorgeous white salt flats."

On Thursday, Heather Gang of Pahrump, Nevada, and her husband, Bob, were among hundreds of visitors playing in the water. Most waded into the lake, though the couple and others paddled where the water reached up to about a foot (0.3 meters) deep in parts.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to kayak Lake Manley," Heather Gang said.

It was a sharp contrast to the Death Valley of the past where they figured they had once stood around

the same spot and looked at the chalky salt flats for as far as the eye could see.

The couple has been eyeing the lake's evolution ever since last year's storms started filling the lake. In the fall, they drove out to see it re-emerge as a lake but they said it wasn't deep enough for kayaks like now. This time the water reached up to the boardwalk.

The lake, which is currently about six miles (9.66 kilometers) long and three miles (4.83 kilometers) wide, is still nowhere near its original state thousands of years ago after it formed during the Ice Age and covered a significant part of the park and was several hundred feet deep.

Bob Gang said he had heard the lake had filled up to the point that boaters could go on it about 20 years ago, so he didn't want to miss out on the experience this time.

"It's a lot of fun," said Bob Gang, who gave a girl a ride on his kayak. "It's good to see the little kids out here enjoying this and seeing something totally unique."

It could be another 20 years before boaters return, he added, but "with climate change, who knows, maybe this will be the normal."

Guo Yu, an assistant research professor of hydrometeorology at the Nevada-based Desert Research Institute, said the lake's size is a "simple natural phenomenon."

It's linked to a wet winter from a strong El Nino — a natural and occasional warming of part of the Pacific Ocean that can lead to more precipitation than usual in California — plus climate change, which brings more intense atmospheric rivers to the area more frequently, Yu said.

Scientists need to study Lake Manly now, he said, to see if they can harness the water for other uses in the future, such as drinking water throughout the dry Southwest.

Tiffany Pereira, an associate research scientist at the institute, said the lake's size now can be beneficial to local flora and fauna.

Certain seed species endemic to the area, meaning they only naturally exist in Death Valley, have lain dormant for a decade or more and are now beginning their short-lived life cycle because there is enough water to sustain them.

"They hang out, they do their thing, and as soon as it dries up, that's it. They're done," she said.

For now, friends Trudell Artiglere and Sheri Dee Hopper of Las Vegas will enjoy paddling through the lake. At the end of the day on Thursday, Artiglere said, their salt-encrusted kayaks looked like "glazed donuts."

Ahead of South Carolina primary, Trump says he strongly supports IVF after Alabama court ruling

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, JAMES POLLARD, MEG KINNARD and BILL BARROW Associated Press
ROCK HILL, S.C. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump said Friday that he would "strongly support the availability of IVF" and called on lawmakers in Alabama to preserve access to the treatment that has become a new flashpoint in the 2024 presidential election.

It was his first comment since an Alabama Supreme Court ruling that led some providers in the state to suspend their in vitro fertilization programs and has left Republicans divided over the issue.

Trump, in a post on his Truth Social network, said: "Under my leadership, the Republican Party will always support the creation of strong, thriving, healthy American families. We want to make it easier for mothers and fathers to have babies, not harder!"

The all-Republican Alabama Supreme Court, among the nation's most conservative judicial panels, ruled that frozen embryos can be considered children under state law. Since then, some Alabama clinics and hospitals, including the University of Alabama at Birmingham health system, have announced pauses on IVF services.

The fallout has deepened divisions among conservatives over abortion and other reproductive services in a campaign year already fraught with debates over whether Republicans should pursue national abortion limits after the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 ruling that overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide. Trump and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, his last remaining major opponent for the GOP presidential nomination, have both cautioned against an absolute national ban and now have

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distanced themselves from the Alabama case.

As president, Trump nominated three of the justices who overturned Roe and paved the way for state lawmakers across the country to impose dramatic restrictions on access to abortion.

"Trump cannot run from his record and neither can the millions of women who his actions have hurt," said Julie Chavez Rodriguez, President Joe Biden's campaign manager, in a statement.

Trump and Haley were campaigning Friday ahead of Saturday's South Carolina Republican presidential primary, in which the former president is the overwhelming favorite, despite Haley having been twice elected South Carolina governor. The Alabama decision almost certainly will not change GOP primary dynamics, but the conversation carries important implications for the general election as Republicans try to avoid being tagged by Democrats as too extreme on reproductive policy.

Republicans' Senate campaign committee leaders acknowledged the stakes with an open memo Friday warning that the Alabama case "is fodder for Democrats hoping to manipulate the abortion issue for electoral gain." The memo included talking points for Republican Senate candidates, with "Express Support for IVF" topping the list of recommendations.

Speaking Friday night in Columbia, South Carolina, Trump acknowledged the tension among Republicans over the issue and said he had received praise for supporting IVF.

"A lot of politicians were very happy because they didn't know how to respond to the decision that came down," he said. "Now they all know how to respond."

Haley steered clear of the IVF conversation Friday. She said Thursday, after the Alabama ruling, that she views human embryos, which are the earliest form of development after fertilization, as "babies." But she also said she disagrees with the Alabama court and said the state's legislators should "look at the law." Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and Republican legislative leaders had already started that conversation before the GOP's presidential candidates weighed in.

In his social media post, Trump steered clear of declaring embryos to be distinct humans worthy of legal protection. His statement focused instead on the practical considerations for would-be parents trying to start families. IVF is typically a months-long process for couples or women who have struggled to conceive and maintain a viable pregnancy naturally. The treatments can cost patients tens of thousands of dollars, with no assurances that an implanted embryo will become viable and end with a healthy child.

"I'm pro-family," Donald Trump Jr. said Friday in Charleston, campaigning on his father's behalf not long before the elder Trump issued his statement. "Families should do what they want to be able to make families."

Trump Jr. said he had not discussed the specifics with his father since the Alabama ruling but said he and his father both know families who have used IVF as a path to having children.

The former president and Haley have found themselves ensnared by abortion and reproductive politics already in the 2024 campaign.

Trump has taken credit for the ruling overturning Roe but also warned Republicans about going too far adopting statutory restrictions on abortions, lest the party lose support from moderate voters. Polling has shown for years that most Americans, even many who think of themselves as "pro-life," want to preserve some access to the procedure.

Nonetheless, anti-abortion advocates have suggested courts should go further to rule embryos are children, though that would sharply ramp up restrictions on treatments like IVF. Specifically, the Alabama ruling raises questions about what would become of frozen embryos that are not used in implantation procedures, what financial responsibility patients might have to maintain them if they could not legally be destroyed and what civil and even criminal liabilities medical providers could face throughout the process.

As she campaigned Friday in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, Haley stuck to her argument that Trump, who has been indicted four times, is too big a risk for Republicans to nominate again. She repeated her pledge to stay in the primary fight at least until the March 5 Super Tuesday primaries, and she again hammered Trump for cozying up to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Trump is siding with a dictator who kills his political opponents," she said, referring to Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, who died recently in an Arctic prison camp after being jailed by Putin's Kremlin government.

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Haley's approach, however, has yet to persuade enough Republican primary voters, with Trump running up wide margins in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada. Even in South Carolina, where Haley was once the state's most powerful, popular Republican figure, she has had trouble winning over conservatives.

"I'm assuming that every one of you wants to see a change in our country," she said later in Mount Pleasant, drawing chants of "Nikki! Nikki! Nikki!"

But that crowd of supporters was measured in hundreds. Trump's was measured in thousands.

Jim Schurtz, a 72-year-old retired engineer who came to hear Trump on Friday in Rock Hill, went so far as to say Haley had been "a terrible governor." Sporting a red Trump hat with a giant "T" and "2024" across the top, Schurtz said he doesn't think Haley would be elected governor if she had to run again.

"All she does is put Trump down," he said.

Both Trumps took shots at Haley, saying she's staying in the race to ensure financial windfalls after the campaign. Trump Jr. suggested Haley is running for a post on "the Raytheon board," referring to the defense conglomerate now known as RTX Corp. The former president mused at his rally about a different landing spot: "Maybe she wants to get a contract at CNN."

Even if Haley can narrow Trump's expected margins, she could watch him extend his delegate lead nationally. Of South Carolina's 50 delegates, 29 are awarded to the statewide winner. The other 21 are distributed according to the outcome within each of the state's seven congressional districts; each district is worth 3 delegates for the top vote-getter. In 2016, Trump used that system to sweep South Carolina's delegates.

In Rock Hill, Trump spent more time on a string of attacks directed at Biden, former President Barack Obama and Republican Sen. Mitt Romney than he did talking about Haley. But, Trump said mockingly, "I have an obligation" to mention Haley before polls open Saturday.

So, he offered a prediction: "She's going to have a very bad day tomorrow."

US and EU pile new sanctions on Russia for the Ukraine war's 2nd anniversary and Navalny's death

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and LORNE COOK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and European Union on Friday heaped hundreds of new sanctions on Russia in connection with the second anniversary of its invasion of Ukraine and in retaliation for the death of noted Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny last week in an Arctic penal colony.

The U.S. government imposed roughly 600 new sanctions on Russia and its war machine in the largest single round of penalties since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.

The EU, for its part, added sanctions on several foreign companies over allegations that they have exported dual-use goods to Russia that could be used in its war against Ukraine. The 27-nation bloc also targeted scores of Russian officials, including members of the judiciary, local politicians and people it said were "responsible for the illegal deportation and military re-education of Ukrainian children."

President Joe Biden said the sanctions come in response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's "brutal war of conquest" and to Navalny's death, adding that "we in the United States are going to continue to ensure that Putin pays a price for his aggression abroad and repression at home."

But while previous sanctions have increased costs for Russia's ability to fight in Ukraine, they appear to have done little so far to deter Putin and it was unclear that the latest big round would significantly alter that.

In specific response to Navalny's death, the State Department targeted three Russian officials the U.S. says are connected to his death, including the deputy director of Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service, who was promoted by Putin to the rank of colonel general on Monday, three days after Navalny died.

The sanctions bar the officials from traveling to the U.S. and block access to U.S.-owned property. But they appear largely symbolic given that the officials are unlikely to travel to or have assets or family in the West.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said to "expect more" action later related to Na-

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valny's death, adding that "today this just a start."

The Biden administration is levying additional sanctions as House Republicans are blocking billions of dollars in additional aid to Ukraine. The war is becoming entangled in U.S. election-year politics, with former President Donald Trump voicing skepticism about the benefits of the NATO alliance and saying that he would "encourage" Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to countries that, in his view, are not pulling their weight in the alliance.

Biden on Friday called on Congress to pass Ukraine aid, which has stalled since House Speaker Mike Johnson blocked votes on aid passed by the Senate for Ukraine and other countries.

"Russia is taking Ukraine territory for the first time in many months," Biden said. "But here in America, the speaker gave the house a two week vacation. They have to come back and get this done, because failure to support Ukraine in this critical moment will never be forgotten in history."

Biden spoke later Friday with French President Emmanuel Macron about Russia's recent actions and the need to support Ukraine. A White House readout said they also discussed developments in the Middle East.

Many of the new U.S. sanctions announced Friday target Russian firms that contribute to the Kremlin's war effort — like drone and industrial chemical manufacturers and machine tool importers — as well as financial institutions, such as the state-owned operator of Russia's Mir National Payment System.

The U.S. also will impose visa restrictions on Russian authorities it says are involved in the kidnapping and confinement of Ukrainian children. In addition, 26 third-country people and firms from across China, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates, and Liechtenstein are listed for sanctions, for assisting Russia in evading existing financial penalties.

The Russian foreign ministry called the EU sanctions "illegal" and said they undermine "the international legal prerogatives of the UN Security Council." In response, the ministry is banning some EU citizens from entering the country because they have provided military assistance to Ukraine. It did not immediately address the U.S. sanctions.

Overall, since the start of the war, the U.S. Treasury and State departments have targeted more than 4,000 officials, oligarchs, firms, banks and others under Russia-related sanctions authorities. The EU asset freezes and travel bans constitute its 13th package of measures imposed by the bloc against people and organizations it suspects of undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

"Today, we are further tightening the restrictive measures against Russia's military and defense sector," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. "We remain united in our determination to dent Russia's war machine and help Ukraine win its legitimate fight for self-defense."

In all, 106 more officials and 88 "entities" — often companies, banks, government agencies or other organizations — have been added to the bloc's sanctions list, bringing the tally of those targeted to more than 2,000 people and entities, including Putin and his associates.

Companies making electronic components, which the EU believes could have military as well as civilian uses, were among 27 entities accused of "directly supporting Russia's military and industrial complex in its war of aggression against Ukraine," a statement said.

Those companies — some of them based in India, Sri Lanka, China, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Thailand and Turkey — face tougher export restrictions.

Some of the measures are aimed at depriving Russia of parts for pilotless drones, which are seen by military experts as key to the war.

A \$60 per barrel price cap has also been imposed on Russian oil by Group of Seven allies, intended to reduce Russia's revenues from fossil fuels.

Critics of the sanctions, price cap and other measures meant to stop Russia's invasion say they are not working fast enough.

Maria Snegovaya, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that primarily sanctioning Russia's defense industry and failing to cut meaningfully into Russia's energy revenues will not be enough to halt the war.

"One way or another, they will have to eventually address Russia's oil revenues and have to consider an

oil embargo," Snegovaya said. "The oil price cap has effectively stopped working."

Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo, in previewing the new sanctions, told reporters that the U.S. and its allies will not lower the price cap; "rather what we'll be doing is taking actions that will increase the cost" of Russia's production of oil.

The Treasury Department says the current cap is working, with an agency analysis finding that Kremlin oil tax revenue was more than 40 percent lower in the first nine months of 2023 because of it.

Adeyemo added that "sanctions alone are not enough to carry Ukraine to victory."

"We owe the Ukrainian people who have held on for so long the support and resources they desperately need to defend their homeland and prove Putin wrong once and for all time."

Biden tells governors he's eyeing executive action on immigration, seems 'frustrated' with lawyers

By ZEKE MILLER and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden told the nation's governors on Friday that he's exploring what executive actions he can take to curb migration across the southern border after a bipartisan deal collapsed in Congress this month. He seemed to express frustration at the legal limits of his authority to act unilaterally.

Biden hosted members of the National Governors Association in the East Room, where he implored them to urge their representatives in Congress to resurrect the bipartisan proposal that collapsed within 48 hours. He also sharply criticized Republicans for backing away from the agreement after former President Donald Trump lobbied in opposition to the deal.

"Over time, our laws and our resources haven't kept up with our immigration system and it's broken," Biden told the governors, lamenting that "petty politics intervened" to kill the deal.

Later, during a private question-and-answer session with the governors, he indicated he was looking at what his options are for doing something by executive order.

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, the Republican chair of the association, told reporters later that Biden didn't specify what actions he is considering, but he said the president noted that he was confronting the limits of what he can do without Congress.

"He did say that he has been working with his attorneys, trying to understand what executive action would be upheld in the courts and would be constitutional, and that he seemed a little frustrated that he was not getting answers from attorneys that he felt he could take the kind of actions that he wanted to," Cox said.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, Democratic vice-chair of the governors' group, said governors got a "general sense that they're looking into whatever they can do on the executive side. Again, keeping our expectations realistic, that's going to be more limited than a congressional solution."

Polis said Biden cited federal courts overruling some of Trump's immigration actions, and a desire to avoid a similar fate with any action he took.

"And so there was a frustration that that would occur under under his leadership as well, under any president, absent a change in the law," Polis said. "A lot of the steps we need to take simply aren't legal under current law."

Cox added that Biden mentioned declaring an emergency at the border, which in theory could unlock additional federal funds that would be needed to execute any new border crackdowns.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to comment on private conversations.

Among the actions under consideration by Biden is invoking authorities outlined in Section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which gives a president broad leeway to block entry of certain immigrants into the United States if it would be "detrimental" to the national interest.

Trump, the likely GOP candidate to face off against Biden this fall, repeatedly leaned on the 212(f) power while in office, including his controversial ban on travelers from Muslim-majority nations. Biden rescinded that ban on his first day in office through executive order.

But as White House officials contemplate various unilateral options, they have faced resistance from Justice Department lawyers, who have been hesitant on greenlighting any executive actions on immigration that would promptly be blocked in court, according to two people familiar with the deliberations. DOJ declined to comment.

For instance, Trump used the 212(f) authority to issue a directive that said migrants who arrive between ports of entry at the southern border would be rendered ineligible to seek asylum. But that was halted in the lower courts and the Supreme Court, with a 5-4 ruling, didn't revive Trump's proposed ban. Still, any similar challenge now could be different since one of the justices who ruled against Trump in the case, the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg, was replaced by Justice Amy Coney Barrett, a reliable conservative vote.

Currently, it's unclear how Biden would use that presidential authority to deter the migrants arriving at the southern border, and people familiar with the discussions have cautioned that it has not been finalized and that Biden has not signed off on any directive. The White House could also ultimately choose not to take any executive action at all.

"No decisions have been made on this," Jean-Pierre said Friday.

Cox noted that as he's pressed Biden to act unilaterally, ultimately, more comprehensive solutions will depend on Congress.

"There's some disagreement on how much the president can do and can't do and I pushed back on the president on that," he said. "But we I think there's also general consensus that the Congress does have to do something."

He said if Congress can't back the comprehensive deal, then perhaps pieces of it, like boosting money for border patrol agents and asylum officers, could be tacked on to coming spending bills.

Cellphone data cited in court filing raises questions about testimony on Fani Willis relationship

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A court filing Friday uses cellphone location data to try to raise questions about the testimony given by a special prosecutor in the Georgia election interference case against former President Donald Trump who had a romantic relationship with Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis.

The analysis of cellphone location data filed by Trump's attorneys shows prosecutor Nathan Wade had visited the neighborhood south of Atlanta where Willis lived at least 35 times during the first 11 months of 2021, an investigator said. Wade had testified that he had been to the condo where Willis lived fewer than 10 times before he was hired as special prosecutor in November 2021.

The new filing prompts fresh questions about the timeline of the relationship between Willis and Wade as Trump and other defendants, who are accused of illegally trying to overturn the 2020 election in Georgia, have argued that both prosecutors should be removed from the case because their romantic relationship created a conflict of interest.

In a response filed with the court late Friday, Willis' team said Trump's lawyers are trying to introduce inadmissible evidence and that even if the judge were to consider it, "the phone records simply do not prove anything relevant."

The investigator, Charles Mittelstadt, wrote that the data show that Wade visited the area in Hapeville where Willis lived at least 35 times during the first 11 months of 2021. Wade had testified during a hearing last week that he had visited the Hapeville condo where Willis was living fewer than 10 times before he was hired as special prosecutor on Nov. 1, 2021.

"So if phone records were to reflect that you were making phone calls from the same location as the condo before Nov. 1, 2021, and it was on multiple occasions, the phone records would be wrong?" Trump attorney Steve Sadow asked Wade during the hearing.

"If phone records reflected that, yes, sir," Wade responded.

"They'd be wrong?" Sadow asked.

"They'd be wrong," Wade responded.

Wade also testified last week that he had never spent the night at the condo where Willis was living, and Willis confirmed that. The investigator's statement says that on two occasions — one in mid-September 2021 and one in late November 2021 — the data show that Wade's phone appears to have arrived in the area where Willis lived late at night and remained there until early morning.

In their filing, Willis' team said the records "do nothing more than demonstrate that Special Prosecutor Wade's telephone was located somewhere within a densely populated multiple-mile radius where various residences, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and other businesses are located."

They do not prove the content of communications between Willis and Wade or that Wade was ever at any particular location, the filing says. They also don't prove that Wade and Willis were ever in the same place at any of the times listed, including during times when Willis was known to be elsewhere, it says.

A motion filed by Trump co-defendant Michael Roman alleges that Willis paid Wade large sums of money for his work and then benefited personally when he then used some of that money to pay for vacations. During a hearing last week, a former Willis friend and employee testified that she saw the two kissing and hugging before Wade's hiring.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee held a two-day evidentiary hearing last week on motions by Roman and others to disqualify Willis and her office from the case. He has scheduled arguments on the matter for March 1.

Willis and Wade both testified during last week's hearing that they did not begin dating until early 2022, after Wade had already been hired as special prosecutor. They also both said that they shared travel expenses and that Willis reimbursed Wade in cash for money he spent on trips.

Mittelstadt wrote that he used a tool called CellHawk to analyze the data received from Wade's cellphone carrier. He said he focused on geolocation activity near the address of the condo where Willis had been living by creating a "very conservative geofence, which isolated the two cell towers in closest proximity to this address."

He said the geofence was used to conduct an assessment of whether Wade's phone had ever connected to those two towers and to eliminate any hits that could have happened during routine travel on nearby interstates. He wrote that the report included only occasions when the phone was connected for an extended period.

Mittelstadt's statement also says that the analysis revealed more than 2,000 voice calls and just under 12,000 interactions between Willis and Wade during the first 11 months of 2021, with "a prevalence of calls made in the evening hours."

Wade testified that they met during a judicial conference in October 2019 and spoke often beginning in 2020. Wade wrote in a sworn statement filed with the court that he served on Willis' transition team after she was elected district attorney in November 2020. In the spring of 2021, Willis asked him and two other attorneys to help her find a lawyer to lead the election investigation before ultimately tapping him for the job, he wrote.

Trump's lawyers seek to suspend \$83M defamation verdict, citing 'strong probability' it won't stand

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's lawyers asked a New York judge Friday to suspend an \$83.3 million defamation verdict against the former president, saying there was a "strong probability" that it would be reduced on appeal, if not eliminated.

The lawyers made the request in Manhattan federal court, where a civil jury in late January awarded the sum to advice columnist E. Jean Carroll after a five-day trial that focused only on damages. A judge had ordered the jury to accept the findings of another jury that last year concluded Trump sexually abused Carroll in 1996 and defamed her in 2022.

The second jury focused only on statements Trump made in 2019 while he was president in a case long delayed by appeals.

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In the filing Friday, Trump's lawyers wrote that Judge Lewis A. Kaplan should suspend the execution of a judgment he issued on Feb. 8 until a month after he resolves Trump's post-trial motions, which will be filed by March 7. Otherwise, they said, he should grant a partially secured stay that would require Trump to post a bond for a fraction of the award.

The lawyers said the \$65 million punitive award, atop \$18.3 in compensatory damages, was "plainly excessive" because it violates the Constitution and federal common law.

"There is a strong probability that the disposition of post-trial motions will substantially reduce, if not eliminate, the amount of the judgment," they said.

Trump did not attend a trial last May when a Manhattan jury awarded Carroll \$5 million after concluding that the real estate magnate sexually attacked Carroll in spring 1996 in the dressing room of a luxury Bergdorf Goodman store across the street from Trump Plaza in midtown Manhattan.

Since Carroll, 80, first made her claims public in a memoir in 2019, Trump, 77, has repeatedly derided them as lies made to sell her book and damage him politically. He has called her a "whack job" and said that she wasn't "his type," a reference that Carroll testified was meant to suggest she was too ugly to rape.

Carroll also testified that she has faced death threats from Trump supporters and has had her reputation shattered after remarks Trump continued to make even as the trial was going on.

At the second trial, Trump attended regularly and briefly testified, though he did most of his communication with the jury through frequent shakes of his head and disparaging comments muttered loudly enough that a prosecutor complained that jurors surely heard them and the judge threatened to banish him from the courtroom.

Roberta Kaplan, a lawyer for Carroll and no relation to the judge, declined comment Friday.

Alina Habba, one of Trump's attorneys, said in a statement that January's jury award was "egregiously excessive."

"The Court must exercise its authority to prevent Ms. Carroll's (sic) from enforcing this absurd judgment, which will not withstand appeal," Habba said.

Since the January verdict, a state court judge in New York in a separate case has ordered Trump and his companies to pay \$355 million in penalties for a yearslong scheme to dupe banks and others with financial statements that inflated his wealth. With interest, he owes the state nearly \$454 million.

White House, tribal leaders hail 'historic' deal to restore salmon runs in Pacific Northwest

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration, leaders of four Columbia River Basin tribes and the governors of Oregon and Washington celebrated on Friday as they signed papers formally launching a \$1 billion plan to help recover depleted salmon populations in the Pacific Northwest.

The plan, announced in December, stopped short of calling for the removal of four controversial dams on the Snake River, as some environmental groups and tribal leaders have urged. But officials said it would boost clean energy production and help offset hydropower, transportation and other benefits provided by the dams should Congress ever agree to breach them.

The plan brokered by the Biden administration pauses long-running litigation over federal dam operations and represents the most significant step yet toward eventually taking the four Snake River dams down. The plan will strengthen tribal clean energy projects and provide other benefits for tribes and other communities that depend on the Columbia Basin for agriculture, energy, recreation and transportation, the White House said.

"Since time immemorial, the strength of the Yakama Nation and its people have come from the Columbia River, and from the fish, game, roots and berries it nourishes," Yakama Nation Chairman Gerald Lewis said at a White House ceremony.

"The Yakama Nation will always fight to protect and restore the salmon because, without the salmon, we cannot maintain the health of our people or our way of life," Lewis said, adding that Columbia Basin

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salmon are dying from the impacts of human development.

"Our fishers have empty nets and their homes have empty tables because historically the federal government has not done enough to mitigate these impacts," he said. "We need a lot more clean energy, but we need to do development in a way that is socially just."

Lewis was among four tribal leaders who spoke at the hourlong ceremony at the White House complex, along with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek and an array of federal officials.

The agreement, formally known as the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative, "deserves to be celebrated," said Jonathan W. Smith, chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

The settlement "takes the interests of all the stakeholders in the Columbia Basin into account," he said. "It lays out a pathway to restore salmon and steelhead to healthy and abundant levels and moves forward with the necessary green energy transition in a socially just and equitable way."

Corinne Sams of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation called the signing ceremony a historic moment, not just for the tribes, but also for the U.S. government "and all Americans in the Pacific Northwest. My heart is big today."

The Columbia River Basin, an area roughly the size of Texas, was once the world's greatest salmon-producing river system, with at least 16 stocks of salmon and steelhead. Today, four are extinct and seven are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Dams are a main culprit behind the salmon's decline, and federal fisheries scientists have concluded that breaching the dams in eastern Washington on the Snake River, the largest tributary of the Columbia, would be the best hope for recovering them, providing the fish with access to hundreds of miles of pristine habitat and spawning grounds in Idaho.

Conservation groups sued the federal government more than two decades ago in an effort to save the fish. They have argued that the continued operation of the dams violates the Endangered Species Act as well as treaties dating to the mid-19th century ensuring the tribes' right to harvest fish.

Friday's celebration did not include congressional Republicans who oppose dam breaching and have vowed to block it.

Dams along the Columbia-Snake River system provide more than one-third of all hydropower capacity in the United States, said Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, a Washington Republican who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee. In Washington state, hydropower accounts for 70% of electricity consumed.

The Snake River dams "helped transform Eastern Washington into one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world," including 40% of America's wheat, Rodgers said in a statement.

She denounced "secret negotiations" led by White House senior adviser and climate envoy John Podesta, saying he and other officials "worked behind closed doors with a select group of radical environmentalists to develop a secret package of actions and commitments" that advance "efforts to remove the four Lower Snake River dams."

Biden officials "ignored the concerns of people who live in the Pacific Northwest and who would be significantly impacted if these dams were breached," Rodgers said.

Podesta and other speakers at the White House ceremony looked past those concerns, with few even mentioning the dams.

"President Biden understands that the Columbia River is the lifeblood of the Pacific Northwest, for its culture, for its economy and for its people," said Brenda Mallory, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

"The historic agreement is charting a new and exciting path to restore the river, provide for clean energy and live up to our responsibilities and obligations to tribal nations," Mallory said. "I'm confident we will secure the vision ... of securing a restored Columbia River Basin, one that is teeming with wild fish, prosperous to tribal nations, (with) affordable clean energy, a strong agricultural economy and an upgraded transportation and recreation system."

Two Navy SEALs drowned in the Arabian Sea. How the US charged foreign crew with smuggling weapons

By DENISE LAVOIE and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Two Navy SEALs drowned last month while trying to board a vessel that was intercepted by U.S. naval forces in the Arabian Sea. On Thursday, federal prosecutors unsealed a criminal complaint against four foreign nationals they say were transporting suspected Iranian-made missile components on the vessel.

The four sailors were later taken to Virginia where they were criminally charged. Material witness warrants were filed against another 10 crew members.

In an affidavit supporting the criminal complaint, an FBI agent wrote that the sailors admitted they had departed from Iran after at least one of the them initially claimed they left from Pakistan. All four sailors had Pakistani identifications cards.

Prosecutors said they were smuggling missile components for the type of weapons used by Houthi rebel forces in recent weeks.

Here's a look at the case and what comes next:

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE ARABIAN SEA?

On the night of Jan. 11, U.S. Central Command Navy forces, including Navy SEALs, along with members of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Team, boarded an unflagged vessel described as a dhow in international waters of the Arabian Sea, off the coast of Somalia.

U.S. officials have said that while boarding the boat, Navy Special Warfare Operator 1st Class Christopher J. Chambers slipped into the gap created by high waves between the vessel and the SEALs' combatant craft. As Chambers fell, Navy Special Warfare Operator 2nd Class Nathan Gage Ingram jumped in to try to save him, according to U.S. officials familiar with what happened. Both men were lost at sea. Efforts to find and rescue them were unsuccessful.

During a search of the ship, U.S. forces found and seized what an FBI official described as Iranian-made advanced conventional weaponry, including critical parts for medium-range ballistic missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles, a warhead, and propulsion and guidance components.

The FBI affidavit said the type of weaponry found on the vessel is consistent with weaponry used by Houthi rebel forces in recent attacks on merchant ships and U.S. military ships in the region.

WHY CAN THE U.S. ARREST FOREIGN NATIONALS IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS?

Navy forces were conducting an "authorized flag verification" when they boarded the vessel in international waters.

U.S. authorities can board a ship to verify if it has the authority to fly its flag or to determine the nationality of a vessel without a flag. Any country has a right under international law to board vessels and check for documentation of its nationality.

In this case, U.S. forces determined the vessel was violating international law by not having any flag in international waters. That made it a "vessel without nationality" subject to U.S. jurisdiction, the FBI affidavit states.

Navy forces ultimately determined the dhow was unsafe and unseaworthy and sunk the vessel "according to protocol," the FBI agent wrote.

All 14 sailors on the vessel were brought onto the USS Lewis B. Puller and were later taken to Virginia.

Martin Davies, director of the Maritime Law Center at Tulane University Law School, said flag verifications are more common in drug investigations because ships smuggling drugs often conceal any signs of identification.

"It's clearly permitted under international law," Davies told The Associated Press. "Any country would have the authority to do this."

Some countries may not like the U.S. "throwing its weight around in another part of the world," Davis noted.

"But that's a political thing, not a legal thing," he said.

WHY CAN PROSECUTORS HOLD THE 10 CREW MEMBERS?

The other 10 crew members are being detained under the federal material witness law. It allows courts to issue warrants for the arrest and detention of a person if their testimony is "material in a criminal proceeding," and if it "may become impracticable to secure the presence of the person by subpoena."

The law attracted attention and sparked controversy when it was used in international terrorism investigations after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Defense lawyers have criticized the law because it can result in people being detained for lengthy periods even though they are not charged with or suspected of committing a crime.

A 2014 report by the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General identified 112 cases in which material witnesses were detained from 2000 until 2012. The median period of time those witnesses were detained was 26 days.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE MEN WHO WERE CHARGED?

All four sailors are being held in custody pending preliminary and detention hearings scheduled for Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Richmond. A judge will determine whether to detain the defendants without bail as they await trial.

Muhammad Pahlawan is charged with attempting to smuggle advanced missile component and providing false information to U.S. Coast Guard officers during the boarding of the vessel.

Pahlawan's co-defendants — Mohammad Mazhar, Ghufuran Ullah and Izhar Muhammad — were charged with providing false information.

Melissa O'Boyle, Ullah's attorney, and Charles Gavin, Muhammad's attorney, declined to comment on the charges. Attorneys for the other two defendants did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment Friday.

Netanyahu seeks open-ended control over security and civilian affairs in Gaza in new postwar plan

By WAFAA SHURAFI and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — A long-awaited postwar plan by Israel's prime minister shows that his government seeks open-ended control over security and civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip. That was swiftly rejected Friday by Palestinian leaders and runs counter to Washington's vision for the war-ravaged enclave.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented the two-page document to his security Cabinet late Thursday for approval.

Deep disagreements over Gaza's future have led to increasingly public friction between Israel and the United States, its closest ally. The Biden administration seeks eventual Palestinian governance in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank as a precursor to Palestinian statehood, an outcome vehemently opposed by Netanyahu and his right-wing government. Netanyahu's plan envisions hand-picked Palestinians administering Gaza.

Separately, cease-fire efforts appeared to gain traction, with mediators to present a new proposal at an expected high-level meeting this weekend in Paris. The U.S., Egypt and Qatar have been struggling for weeks to find a formula that could halt Israel's devastating offensive in Gaza, but now face an unofficial deadline as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan approaches.

In Gaza, Israeli airstrikes in the center and south of the territory killed at least 92 Palestinians, including children and women, overnight and into Friday, health officials and an Associated Press journalist said. Another 24 bodies remained trapped under the rubble.

After a strike levelled his apartment building in the central town of Deir al-Balah, online video showed Mahmoud Zueitar — a comedian well known in Gaza for his appearances in TV commercials — rushing into the hospital holding his young sister, who was screaming and covered in blood. At least 25 people were killed in the strike, 16 of them women and children.

Throughout the war, Zueitar has been posting upbeat and cheerful videos on social media, joking with

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people about ways they endure bombardment and displacement, praising Palestinian culture and assuring those around him that one day things will be better.

Another video at the hospital showed him cradling his wounded sister in his lap. "I always say, 'God, may they not force us out of Gaza,' that's how much I love it and its people," he says, crying. "But it looks like they want us to leave Gaza." Earlier at the hospital, relatives wept over bodies laid out in burial shrouds in the courtyard, and a man cradled a dead infant.

The overall Palestinian death toll since the start of the war rose to more than 29,500, with close to 70,000 people wounded, Gaza health officials said. The death toll amounts to close to 1.3% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million.

NETANYAHU'S VISION FOR GAZA

Netanyahu's plan, while lacking specifics, marks the first time he has presented a formal postwar vision. It reiterates that Israel is determined to crush Hamas, the militant group that overran the Gaza Strip in 2007.

Polls have indicated that a majority of Palestinians don't support Hamas, but the group has deep roots in Palestinian society. Critics, including some in Israel, say the goal of eliminating Hamas is unattainable.

Netanyahu's plan calls for freedom of action for Israel's military across a demilitarized Gaza after the war to thwart any security threat. It says Israel would establish a buffer zone inside Gaza, which is likely to provoke U.S. objections.

The plan also envisions Gaza being governed by local officials who it says would "not be identified with countries or entities that support terrorism and will not receive payment from them."

It's not clear if any Palestinians would agree to such sub-contractor roles. Over the past decades, Israel has repeatedly tried and failed to set up hand-picked local Palestinian governing bodies.

The Palestinian Authority, which administers pockets of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Friday denounced Netanyahu's plan as "colonialist and racist," saying it would amount to Israeli reoccupation of Gaza. Israel withdrew its soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but maintained control of access to the territory.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had not seen details of the plan. But he said any plan should be consistent with basic principles the U.S. had set out for Gaza's future, "including that it cannot be a platform for terrorism, there should be no Israeli re-occupation of Gaza, the size of Gaza's territory should not be reduced."

The Biden administration wants to see a reformed Palestinian Authority govern both Gaza and the West Bank as a step toward Palestinian statehood. It has sought to chip away at Netanyahu's resistance by holding out the prospect of the normalization of ties between Israel and Arab powerhouse Saudi Arabia, which demands a Palestinian state as a precondition.

THE WAR DRAGS ON

U.S., Israeli, Qatari and Egyptian officials are expected to meet in Paris this weekend to discuss cease-fire efforts. A senior Egyptian official said Egypt and Qatar would bring an understanding reached with Hamas leaders that calls for a six-week cease-fire and the release of elderly and sick hostages in return for Palestinian prisoners in Israel. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the press. During the cease-fire, details would be worked out on a further stage.

Hamas has demanded a complete halt to Israel's offensive and a withdrawal of its troops from Gaza in return for releasing all its remaining hostages, as well as the freeing of Palestinians held by Israel, including top militants. Netanyahu has rejected those demands.

Israel declared war on Hamas on Oct. 7, after the militants stormed into southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were freed in a weeklong cease-fire in late November.

Since the start of the war, 29,514 Palestinians were killed in Israel's offensive and close to 70,000 were wounded, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Friday. Two-thirds of those killed have been women and children, said the ministry, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

Israel says it has killed at least 10,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence for its count. It holds

Hamas responsible for civilian casualties because the group operates and fights from within civilian areas. The Israeli offensive has inflicted immense suffering in Gaza. About 80% of the population have been displaced, infectious diseases run rampant and hundreds of thousands of people are facing hunger.

In the West Bank, two Palestinians killed in an Israeli drone strike on their car were buried Friday in the Jenin refugee camp. The two bodies were wrapped in flags of the militant group Islamic Jihad and carried on stretchers during the funeral procession.

Israel says one of those killed was previously involved in shooting attacks on Israeli settlements and army posts, and was about to carry out another attack when he was killed in the drone strike late Thursday.

Chief justice's Christian reasoning in IVF opinion sparks alarm over church-state separation

By PETER SMITH and TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

When the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are considered children under state law, its chief justice had a higher authority in mind.

By citing verses from the Bible and Christian theologians in his concurring opinion, Chief Justice Tom Parker alarmed advocates for church-state separation, while delighting religious conservatives who oppose abortion.

Human life, Parker wrote, "cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God, who views the destruction of His image as an affront to Himself."

The Alabama court's ruling last week stemmed from wrongful death lawsuits brought by couples whose frozen embryos were accidentally destroyed.

The most immediate impact of the ruling was to leave in vitro fertilization clinics in Alabama potentially vulnerable to more lawsuits and reluctant to administer treatment. But not far behind were mounting worries about Parker's explicit references to Christian theology.

While Parker's concurring opinion does not carry the force of precedent, advocates for church-state separation fear he could inspire judges in other states to push the envelope.

"Now we're in a place where government officials feel emboldened to say the quiet part out loud, and directly challenge the separation of church and state, a foundational part of our democracy," said Rachel Laser, CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

She said Parker's opinion was just the latest example – and a brazen one at that – of government officials advocating for Christian nationalism, a movement that seeks to privilege Christianity and fuse Christian and American identity.

Other instances she cited include Missouri lawmakers citing Catholic and biblical teachings for restricting abortion and U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson saying the notion of church-state separation in the U.S. was a "misnomer."

Parker argued in his opinion that the court was merely enforcing the Alabama state constitution, which was amended in 2018 to recognize "the sanctity of unborn life." That principle has "deep roots that reach back to the creation of man 'in the image of God,'" Parker said, quoting the Book of Genesis.

Parker sprinkled his opinion with a litany of religious sources, from classic Christian theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, to a modern conservative Christian manifesto, the Manhattan Declaration, that opposes "anti-life" measures.

He also quoted a Bible verse that is legendary within the anti-abortion movement, in which God told the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

THE ROOTS OF A RULING

The Alabama court's ruling that frozen embryos are children is an extension of the ideology that undergirds the anti-abortion movement, said Mary Ziegler, a historian of the abortion debate and a law professor at the University of California, Davis.

And it points to the influence of the conservative Christian legal movement, she said. Namely, its position "that the U.S. has an intrinsically Christian Constitution" — a notion that Ziegler and many historians reject.

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"The point, I think, for the movement was never just getting rid of Roe," Ziegler said. "It was always to achieve fetal personhood," the idea that human rights are conferred at conception.

The Alabama ruling could influence decisions in other state courts and legislatures, particularly in the 11 states that already have fetal personhood language in their laws, Ziegler said. But because it's about the interpretation of a state law, she said the case is unlikely to make its way to the Supreme Court.

'VICTORY FOR LIFE'

Some anti-abortion activists rejoiced at the ruling.

It's "a tremendous victory for life," said the powerful Christian legal firm Alliance Defending Freedom. "A beautiful defense of life," said Tony Perkins, head of the Family Research Council.

The Liberty Counsel filed a notice with the Florida Supreme Court, saying the Alabama decision — including Parker's concurrence — should be factored into a pending decision about a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would protect abortion rights.

"Unborn life must be protected at every stage," Mat Staver, Liberty Counsel's chairman, said in a statement.

Still, Christian perspectives on IVF are mixed, and in some cases, undecided.

While the Catholic Church condemns such reproductive technology as immoral, many Protestant churches and denominations do not have a firm stance against the practice.

Kellyanne Conway, the political consultant who worked for former President Donald Trump, lobbied GOP lawmakers in December to advocate for contraception and fertility treatments. She cited her firm's finding that even anti-abortion evangelicals overwhelmingly support access to IVF.

On Friday, Trump shared his strong support for IVF in a post on his Truth Social network and called on Alabama lawmakers to protect access to the procedure.

JUSTICE PARKER'S MISSION

Parker is no stranger to church-state debates.

He served as former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's spokesperson during fights over a Ten Commandments monument Moore erected inside the building housing the Supreme Court.

Parker is a member of Frazer Church, a Montgomery megachurch that until 2022 was part of the United Methodist Church. The congregation, which left amid a UMC schism over the denomination not upholding its LGBTQ clergy and marriage bans, is now part of the Free Methodist Church, a more conservative denomination.

Neither United Methodists nor Free Methodists specifically condemn IVF in their church doctrines. The Free Methodist Book of Discipline emphasizes the value of human life at all stages. It notes that reproductive technologies raise many "ethical, medical, legal and theological questions even as they offer hope."

Parker was the founding executive director of what is now called the Alabama Policy Institute, which is associated with the evangelical ministry Focus on the Family. On its website, Focus on the Family recommends that married couples not freeze or discard embryos created during IVF.

Fertility experts say IVF without the option of frozen embryos would likely increase the costs of fertility treatments and reduce the chances for patients trying to have a baby.

A SETBACK FOR THE SECULAR STATE?

Because religious groups have different opinions about when life begins, "it's quite problematic to see a judge essentially embedding a Christian view into state law," said Greer Donley, an associate professor of law at the University of Pittsburgh who specializes in bioethics and health.

She said that other judges might increasingly apply religious thinking to their decisions.

"It's particularly notable that (Parker) is not trying to hide that, but even if judges were careful in their language, the result is essentially the same," Donley said.

Laser, of Americans United, said that even the Alabama court's majority decision — which does not explicitly reference religion — is problematic; it states that all participants in the case "agree that an unborn child is a genetically unique human being whose life begins at fertilization and ends at death."

"That is not taking into account everyone this policy is going to be imposed upon, including religious minorities, the nonreligious, Christians who have a different belief system," Laser said. "It undermines true religious freedom."

Angry French farmers with tractors are back on the streets of Paris for another protest

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Angry farmers were back in Paris on their tractors in a new protest Friday demanding more government support and simpler regulations, on the eve of a major agricultural fair in the French capital.

Dozens of tractors drove peacefully into Paris carrying flags from Rural Coordination, the farmers' union that staged the protest. The protesters then posed with their tractors on a bridge over the Seine River with the Eiffel Tower in the background, before heading towards the Vauban plaza in central Paris, where they all gathered for the demonstration.

The latest protest comes three weeks after farmers lifted roadblocks around Paris and elsewhere in the country after the government offered over 400 million euros (\$433 million) to address their grievances over low earnings, heavy regulation and what they describe as unfair competition from abroad.

"Save our agriculture," the Rural Coordination said on X, formerly Twitter. One tractor was carrying a poster reading: "Death is in the field."

The convoy temporarily slowed traffic on the A4 highway, east of the capital, and on the Paris ring-road earlier on Friday morning.

French farmers' actions are part of a broader protest movement in Europe against EU agriculture policies, bureaucracy and overall business conditions.

Farmers complain that the 27-nation bloc's environmental policies, such as the Green Deal, which calls for limits on the use of chemicals and on greenhouse gas emissions, limit their business and make their products more expensive than non-EU imports.

Other protests are being staged across France as farmers seek to put pressure on the government to implement its promises.

Government officials have held a series of meetings with farmers unions in recent weeks to discuss a new bill meant to defend France's "agricultural sovereignty," and which will be debated in parliament this spring.

The government's plan also includes hundreds of millions of euros in aid, tax breaks and a promise not to ban pesticides in France that are allowed elsewhere in Europe. French farmers say such bans put them at an unfair disadvantage.

Cyril Hoffman, a cereal producer in the Burgundy region and a member of the Rural Coordination, said farmers now want the government to "take action."

He said his union is advocating for exempting the farming industry from free trade agreements.

"They can make free trade agreements but agriculture should not be part of them, so we can remain sovereign regarding our food," Hoffman said. "Only in France do we let our farming disappear."

French President Emmanuel Macron planned to visit the Paris Agricultural Fair on Saturday, though his office appeared to have removed his agenda a previously scheduled "big debate" with farmers and members of environmental groups at the event.

The president will meet with farmers' unions before the fair's opening, his office said late Friday.

Yet France's major farmer's union, the FNSEA, said Friday its board decided not to participate in the debate because "conditions for a peaceful dialogue are not met." The FNSEA staged another protest in Paris, near the site of the fair, on Friday afternoon.

The Paris Agricultural Fair is one of the world's largest farm fairs, drawing crowds every year.

Ally of late Kremlin critic Navalny says authorities threaten to bury him on prison grounds

By The Associated Press undefined

An ally of the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Friday that Russian authorities have given his mother a deadline to agree to forgo a public funeral or else they'll bury him on prison grounds.

Investigators gave Lyudmila Navalnaya three hours to accept a proposal for a private funeral outside

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the public eye, Navalny's close associate Ivan Zhdanov said on social media, another twist in the almost week-long standoff with the authorities to retrieve the politician's body.

Navalnaya is refusing to continue negotiations and demanding that authorities follow the law and hand over the body within 48 hours of determining the cause of death, which would be on Saturday, Zhdanov said. She also has filed a complaint accusing authorities of desecrating the body, he said.

"She insists that the authorities allow a funeral and a memorial service to be held according to traditions," Zhdanov said.

Navalny, 47, Russia's most well-known opposition politician, unexpectedly died on Feb. 16 in an Arctic penal colony, prompting hundreds of Russians across the country to stream to impromptu memorials with flowers and candles. The Russian authorities have detained scores of people as they seek to suppress any major outpouring of sympathy for President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe before the presidential election he is almost certain to win.

Navalny's mother and lawyers have been trying to retrieve his body since late last week — drawing support in those efforts from prominent Russians.

Lyudmila Navalnaya said Thursday that investigators allowed her to see her son's body in the morgue in the Arctic city of Salekhard. She said she repeated her demand to have Navalny's body returned to her and protested what she described as authorities trying to force her to agree to a secret burial. "They want it to do it secretly without a mourning ceremony," she said.

Navalny's spokesman, Kira Yarmysh, said on X, formerly Twitter, that Navalnaya was shown a medical certificate stating that the 47-year-old politician died of "natural causes." Yarmysh didn't specify what those were.

Posting on social media, prominent public figures have appealed directly to Putin to demand that he return Navalny's body to his family.

"Just give Lyudmila her son," Nobel Prize-winning journalist Dmitry Muratov said, adding, "It's awkward to talk about this in a country that still considers itself Christian."

Nadya Tolokonnikova, who became widely known after spending nearly two years in prison for taking part in a 2012 protest with the band Pussy Riot inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, also released a video.

"We were imprisoned for allegedly trampling on traditional values. But no one tramples on traditional Russian values more than you, Putin, your officials and your priests who pray for all the murder that you do, year after year, day after day," Tolokonnikova said.

"Putin, have a conscience, give his mother the body of her son," she added.

Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov said he "firmly requests" authorities return "the body of the murdered Alexei Navalny to his mother."

Navalny's mother has filed a lawsuit at a court in Salekhard contesting officials' refusal to release her son's body. A closed-door hearing has been scheduled for March 4. On Tuesday, she appealed to Putin to release her son's remains so that she could bury him with dignity.

In a video on Monday, Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, accused Putin of killing her husband and alleged the refusal to release his body was part of a cover-up.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected the allegations, calling them "absolutely unfounded, insolent accusations about the head of the Russian state."

Zhdanov on Friday announced a reward of 50,000 euros for "comprehensive information" about what happened to Navalny.

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Today in History: February 24

Soviet sub torpedoes ship, kills nearly 800 Jewish refugees

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 24, the 55th day of 2024. There are 311 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 24, 1942, the SS Struma, a charter ship attempting to carry nearly 800 Jewish refugees from Romania to British-mandated Palestine, was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine in the Black Sea; all but one of the refugees perished.

On this date:

In 1803, in its Marbury v. Madison decision, the Supreme Court established judicial review of the constitutionality of statutes.

In 1868, the U.S. House of Representatives impeached President Andrew Johnson by a vote of 126-47 following his attempted dismissal of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; Johnson was later acquitted by the Senate.

In 1981, a jury in White Plains, New York, found Jean Harris guilty of second-degree murder in the fatal shooting of "Scarsdale Diet" author Dr. Herman Tarnower. (Sentenced to 15 years to life in prison, Harris was granted clemency by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo in December 1992.)

In 1986, the Supreme Court struck down, 6-3, an Indianapolis ordinance that would have allowed women injured by someone who had seen or read pornographic material to sue the maker or seller of that material.

In 1988, in a ruling that expanded legal protections for parody and satire, the Supreme Court unanimously overturned a \$150,000 award that the Rev. Jerry Falwell had won against Hustler magazine and its publisher, Larry Flynt.

In 1989, a state funeral was held in Japan for Emperor Hirohito, who had died the month before at age 87.

In 1993, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney resigned after more than eight years in office.

In 2002, the Salt Lake City Olympics came to a close, the same day Canada won its first hockey gold in 50 years and three cross-country skiers were thrown out of the games for using a performance-enhancing drug.

In 2008, Cuba's parliament named Raul Castro president, ending nearly 50 years of rule by his brother Fidel.

In 2011, Discovery, the world's most traveled spaceship, thundered into orbit for the final time, heading toward the International Space Station on a journey marking the beginning of the end of the shuttle era.

In 2012, Jan Berenstain who with her husband, Stan, wrote and illustrated the Berenstain Bears books, died in Solebury Township, Pennsylvania at age 88.

In 2015, the Justice Department announced that George Zimmerman, the former neighborhood watch volunteer who fatally shot Trayvon Martin in a 2012 confrontation, would not face federal charges.

In 2020, former Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein was convicted in New York on charges of rape and sexual assault involving two women. (Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison.)

In 2022, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launching airstrikes on cities and military bases and sending troops and tanks from multiple directions.

Today's birthdays: Actor-singer Dominic Chianese is 93. Singer Joanie Sommers is 83. Actor Jenny O'Hara is 82. Former Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., is 82. Actor Barry Bostwick is 79. Actor Edward James Olmos is 77. Singer-writer-producer Rupert Holmes is 77. Rock singer-musician George Thorogood is 74. Actor Debra Jo Rupp is 73. Actor Helen Shaver is 73. News anchor Paula Zahn is 68. Baseball Hall of Famer Eddie Murray is 68. Country singer Sammy Kershaw is 66. Actor Mark Moses is 66. Actor Beth Broderick is 65. Actor Emilio Rivera is 63. Singer Michelle Shocked is 62. Movie director Todd Field is 60. Actor Billy Zane is 58. Actor Bonnie Somerville is 50. Jazz musician Jimmy Greene is 49. Former boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. is 47. Rock musician Matt McGinley (Gym Class Heroes) is 41. Actor Wilson Bethel is 40. Actor Alexander Koch is 36. Actor Daniel Kaluuya (Film: "Get Out") is 35. Actor O'Shea Jackson Jr. is 33.