

Groton Daily Independent

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Tuesday, Sept. 24

School Breakfast: egg omelets.
School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce, bread stick.
Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu hotdish, Cauliflower and broccoli, pears, whole wheat bread.
Volleyball hosts Warner: 7th/C at 5 p.m., 8th/JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 209 N Main, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Pantry open, Community Center, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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



Wednesday, Sept. 25

School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Cheese stuffed breadsticks, marina sauce.
Senior Menu: Beef stew, buttermilk biscuit, waldorf salad, cookie.
Confirmation, 6:30 p.m.
Groton C&MA: Kids' Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study at 7 pm.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
United Methodist: Community coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Sept. 26

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.
School Lunch: Ranch parmesan chicken bake, peas.
Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
Boys golf at Sisseton, 10 a.m.
Boys Soccer at James Valley Christian, 4 p.m.
Volleyball hosts Tiospa Zina: 7th/C at 5 p.m., 8th/JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow
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1440

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

Deadly Barrage in Lebanon

Nearly 500 people, including 35 children and 58 women, were killed in southern and eastern Lebanon after Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes yesterday on the area's deadliest day of attacks since Israel's war with Hezbollah militants in 2006. At least 1,645 people were also wounded yesterday, according to Lebanon's health ministry. The casualty count does not distinguish between civilians and militants.

Israel said it struck roughly 1,300 Iran-backed Hezbollah targets in Lebanon, which shares borders with Israel to the south and Syria to the northeast. Civilians have also been ordered to evacuate from areas near the conflict. At least 60,000 people have been displaced from Israel's side of the border, while roughly 100,000 have been displaced from Lebanon.

Fears of an all-out conflict in the Middle East continue to grow, with the US Pentagon announcing it is sending additional troops to the region.

Octopus Hunting Parties

Octopuses can lead a group of fish in collaborative hunting, according to a new study published yesterday. The study is the first to outline the hierarchical roles each animal plays in the multispecies pack.

A team of German researchers diving in the Red Sea near Eilat, Israel, tracked 13 group cross-species hunts. In each case, a blue octopus normally found hunting alone, *Octopus cyanea*, led a pack of between two and 10 fish—often goatfish—to descend on mollusks and other small fish. The goatfish served as explorers, scouting possible targets that the octopus moved to approve or reject. Meal-sharing was not observed; each animal ate what it could scrounge from the hunt.

The octopus was also seen punching blacktip groupers attempting to freeload and fish within the group who were slacking in their roles (see video). As a next step, researchers are interested in investigating whether octopuses can remember and exclude individual fish for repeated misbehavior.

UNGA Kicks Off

The general debates of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly are officially underway, with world leaders convening in New York to address urgent global challenges. More than 130 leaders are scheduled to speak, with President Joe Biden delivering his address this morning.

This year's summit will focus on the group's Sustainable Development Goals (about 17% of which are on track to be completed by a 2030 deadline), combating climate change, and addressing international conflicts and health crises. The Summit of the Future, aimed at reinvigorating the multilateral system, featured the negotiation of a 56-action document designed to strengthen global cooperation. With more than 50 active conflicts in the world—the highest number since World War II—many discussions are expected to focus on ongoing conflicts such as those in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan.

The assembly will run through Sept. 30. Established in 1945, the UNGA is the only universally representative body of the 193-member United Nations.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Friends" competition game show begins production at Max in honor of the show's 30th anniversary. 2005 Heisman winner Reggie Bush sues NCAA, Southern Cal, and the Pac-12 over name, image and likeness compensation.

"Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda set to star in "All In: Comedy About Love" on Broadway in January. 2025 Tony Awards to return to Radio City Music Hall after a two-year hiatus.

Science & Technology

Encrypted messaging app Telegram will begin providing some user information, including IP addresses and names, to officials when legally requested; change comes a few weeks after CEO Pavel Durov was arrested in France.

Giant panda skin cells reprogrammed into pluripotent stem cells, a key step toward potentially conserving the endangered species.

Space experiment reveals low gravity environments weaken heart muscles, disrupt normal rhythms.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq +0.1%); S&P 500, Dow close at new records.

California sues ExxonMobil over allegedly misleading the public for decades about whether the plastics the oil giant manufactured can be recycled.

Boeing raises offer to striking union workers amid nearly two-week long walkout, which brought production of commercial jets to a near-halt; latest proposal includes 30% pay increase over four years and doubles signing bonus to \$6K.

Politics & World Affairs

Man found guilty of killing 10 people at a Boulder, Colorado, supermarket in March 2021, will receive life sentence.

Man accused in this month's assassination attempt of former President Donald Trump wrote down plans and tracked Trump's whereabouts months before incident, prosecutors say.

Murders in the US fell 11.6% year-over-year in 2023, the largest single-year decline in two decades, according to new FBI data; overall violent crime dropped 3% in 2023 while motor vehicle thefts rose 12.6%.

Southeast US under storm warning as disturbance in Gulf of Mexico expected to strengthen into Hurricane Helene this week, with potential US landfall as Category 3 hurricane as soon as Thursday.

The Life of Steven Dixon



A Celebration of Life for Steven Dixon, 66, of Tularosa, New Mexico will be 2:00 p.m., Saturday, October 5, 2024 at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Rev. Yeadon will officiate. Inurnment will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel. A luncheon will follow at the funeral chapel.

Visitation will be held for one hour prior to services at the chapel.

Steven passed away September 1, 2024 in Tularosa after a courageous battle with cancer.

Steven Lynn Dixon was born on July 16, 1958 in Aberdeen to Jack and Lilian (Hein) Dixon. He was the first of eight children born to Jack and Lil. He attended school in Aberdeen until 1970 and then spent his middle and high school years in Groton. Steve graduated from Groton High School in 1976. He was united in marriage with Nancy Kern in 1984 and they were blessed with a son, Jacob Isaiah. Steve worked various jobs. He worked as an OSHA Safety Coordinator for Border States Electric in Fargo from 2003-2017. In 2018, Steve married Maria Catalina "Katie" Garcia. They moved to Tularosa, New Mexico in 2019, where he resided until the time of his passing.

Steve enjoyed the outdoors; especially hunting, fishing and camping. He was a strong supporter of Alcoholic Anonymous, having been sober for 46 years. Through AA, he developed many true friendships and was a proud sponsor and advocate.

Celebrating his life is his wife, Katie, his son, Jacob Dixon of West Fargo, ND, many step-children and step-grandchildren, his siblings, Sherry (Rick) Koehler, Patty (Mike Lee) Smith, Jackie (Dennis) Hales, Mike (Karen) Dixon, Dianne (Rick) Schelle, Kelli (Dan) Danburg, Kathy (Jason) Holm, his last surviving aunt and uncle, Nancy & Don Hein and many nieces, nephews and cousins. Steve also leaves behind his faithful dog, Rosie.

Preceding him in death were his parents, both sets of grandparents, one niece, several aunts, uncles, and cousins.

The family prefers memorials in lieu of flowers.

Four South Dakota schools selected as Blue Ribbon Schools

Four South Dakota schools have been selected as National Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education. The award recognizes schools for their excellence in overall academic performance or for their progress in closing the achievement gap among student subgroups.

The South Dakota schools named as National Blue Ribbon Schools are:

Christ the King Elementary, O’Gorman Catholic Schools, Sioux Falls
Lennox Elementary School, Lennox School District
Lincoln Elementary School, Aberdeen School District
Warner High School, Warner School District

Lennox Elementary, Christ the King Elementary, and Warner High School are honored for their high scores in English and mathematics. Lincoln Elementary is recognized for its progress in closing the achievement gap among student subgroups.

“Blue Ribbon status is awarded to schools that demonstrate commitment to excellence for all students,” said Secretary of Education Joe Graves. “The work that is being done at Lennox Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, Christ the King Elementary, and Warner High School is a testament to talented teachers and staff, students who work hard to achieve their potential, and dedicated leadership.”

Principals at each Blue Ribbon school cited outstanding teachers and a supportive community as key to their success. With that as the foundation, each school has a unique approach that has brought them to excellence.

Lennox Elementary uses a data-centered approach; data from various assessments equip teachers with an individualized profile of each student, which allows teachers to curate learning experiences to target deficiencies and build on established knowledge.

Lincoln Elementary has instituted math and reading interventions, allowing students to acquire fundamental skills. The school also has a dedicated STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) program, which provides hands-on, project-based learning for all students.

Christ the King Elementary uses data to target learning priorities and combines that with small-group instruction to meet the needs of each student.

Warner High School thrives on a traditional approach to education. Academic offerings are bound to fundamental subjects, which are taught and reinforced by experienced staff who are resolute in their high expectations for all students.

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Week 5 Coaches Football Poll

11AAA

Harrisburg- 99 pts (12 1st place votes)
Sioux Falls Lincoln- 86 pts
Brandon Valley- 77 pts
Sioux Falls Jefferson- 43 pts
O'Gorman- 24 pts
Receiving votes: Sioux Falls Roosevelt, Sioux Falls Washington

11AA

Watertown- 107 pts (17 1st place votes)
Brookings- 101 pts
TIE Spearfish & Yankton- 37 pts
5. Tea- 33 pts
Receiving votes: Pierre, Aberdeen Central

11A

Sioux Falls Christian- 115 pts (23 1st place votes)
Lennox- 72 pts
Dell Rapids- 57 pts
Dakota Valley- 54 pts
Canton- 38 pts
Receiving votes: West Central, Tri-Valley

11B

Winner- 109 pts (21 1st place votes)
Sioux Valley- 77 pts
Elk Point-Jefferson- 65 pts
Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central- 32 pts
Mt. Vernon-Plankinton- 30 pts
Receiving votes: Aberdeen Roncalli, Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan

9AA

Parkston- 106 pts (18 1st place votes)
Hamlin- 86 pts
Elkton/Lake Benton- 74 pts
Tripp-Delmont/Armour/Andes Central/Dakota Christian- 38 pts
Leola/Frederick Area- 16 pts
Receiving votes: Viborg-Hurley, Kimball/White Lake

9A

Howard- 95 pts (15 1st place votes)
Wall- 72 pts
Warner- 60 pts
Wolsey-Wessington- 38 pts
Harding County/Bison- 18 pts
Receiving votes: Philip, Alcester-Hudson

9B

Avon- 69 pts (13 1st place votes)
Dell Rapids St. Mary- 56 pts
Sully Buttes- 37 pts
Faulkton- 21 pts
Canistota- 12 pts
Receiving votes: Oldham-Ramona-Rutland, Corsica-Stickney

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Groton Area - Junior Varsity - Tigers Football Stats

September 23, 2024

Questions call Tom Woods - Groton Volunteer Stat Guy 605-397-7565

Location: Groton, SD

	<u>Quarter Scores</u>			<u>Final</u>
Groton Area	6	0	7	0 - 13
Oakes, ND	0	2	0	8 - 10

Groton Area Tigers

First Downs: 6

Rushing: Team Carries - 23
Team Yards - 141

Individual Rushing Leaders

Player	Carries - Yards
Ryder Schelle	12 - 115 (1 TD)
Skyler Godel	10 - 25 (1 TD)
Brady Small	1 - 1

Team Passing:

Completed 2 of 6 for 10 yards 0 TD 1 Int

Individual:

Bradyn Small 2 of 6 for 10 yards 0 TD 0 Int
Alex Abeln 0 of 1 for 0 yards 0 TD 1 Int

Receiving:

Ryder Schelle - 1 catch for 5 yds
Ben Hoelt - 1 catch for 5 yds

Fumbles: Had 0 Lost 0

Penalties: 2 for 10 Yards Lost

Defensive Leaders: (tackles, sacks, fumbles recovered, Int's)

Isaiah Scepaniak	9 tackles (2 sacks for -16)
Braeden Flihs	5 tackles
Ben Hoelt	4 tackles
Skyler Godel	4 tackles (1 interception)
Lincoln Krause	4 tackles (1 interception)
Gunner Hardy	3 tackles
Ryder Schelle	3 tackles
Blake Lord	2 tackles (1 sack for -5)
Hunter Aden	2 tackles
Gavin Kroll	1 tackle (1 fumble recovery)
Layne Johnson	1 tackle
John Bisbee	1 tackle
Joao Nunes	1 tackle

Oakes, ND Tornadoes

First Downs: 6

Rushing: Team Carries - 23
Team Yards - 55

Individual Rushing Leaders

Player	Carries - Yards
Mathias Dahlstrom	14 - 66
Matvei Dimitrov	4 - 7
Landon Titus	5 - -18 (1 TD)

Team Passing:

Completed 2 of 9 for 27 yards 0 TD 2 Ints

Individual:

Landon Titus 2 of 8 for 27 yards 0 TD 2 Ints
David Bakke 0 of 1

Receiving:

Matvei Dimitrov 2 for 27 yards

Fumbles: Had 1 Lost 1

Penalties: 4 for 27 Yards Lost

Defensive Leaders: (tackles, sacks, fumbles recovered, Int's)

Brody Moore	8 tackles
Elijah Dinger	5 tackles
Trey Miles	3 tackles
Mathias Dahlstrom	3 tackles
Levi Thorpe	2 tackles
Andrew Undem	1 tackle
Jacob Ptacek	1 tackle
Dylan Quandt	1 tackle
Joseph Dobitz	1 tackle
Evan Larson	1 tackle

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SCORING: Groton Area 13 vs 10 Oakes, ND

September 23, 2024 - At Groton

FIRST QUARTER

Time	Points	Play
6:20	6 Groton	Skyler Godel 14 yard run Alejandro Jativa kick failed

SECOND QUARTER

Time	Points	Play
7:45	2 Oakes	Elijah Dinger Safety tackle punter (Skyler Godel) in end zone

THIRD QUARTER

Time	Points	Play
1:52	7 Groton	Ryder Schelle 69 yard run Alejandro Jativa kick good

FOURTH QUARTER

Time	Points	Play
7:45	8 Oakes	Landon Titus 1 yard run Matvei Dimitrov pass reception good from Landon Titus

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Updated

**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY
September 24, 2024 8:45 A.M.**

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Adopt Fiscal Year 2025 Budget
5. First Reading of following Ordinances:
 - a. Ord. #276 – Rezone
 - b. Ord. #277 – Rezone
 - c. Ord. #278 - Rezone
6. Mike Scott, Landfill Manager
 - a. Set Solid Waste Fees
 - b. Approve Purchase of Pickup
 - c. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Permit Renewal Documents
7. Rachel Kippley
 - a. RFP for Grandstands 2025-2029
8. Justin Scott, Brown County Treatment Court Association
 - a. Request funds from Opioid Settlements
9. Judy Dosch, Building Superintendent
 - a. Change Order for Building Restoration Project
 - b. Quotes for 124 Building – Down Spouts
10. R-O-W's for NVC
11. Approve & Authorize Allison Tunheim, HR Director to sign the documents for Cafeteria Plan
12. Approve using Public Purchase & Public Surplus for Bids – Auction – Etc.
13. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of September 10, 2024
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Lease Agreement
 - e. Claim Assignments
 - f. Travel Requests
 - g. Local Emergency Management Performance Grant (LEMPG) 4th Qtr. Report
 - h. Zoning Ordinances – Set Hearing Date/Authorize Advertising
 - i. Plats
 - i. Final Plats
 1. Sombke Second Subdivision
 2. Donald Raba & WW Rentals First Addition
 3. OALC Second Subdivision
 4. Dixon Third Addition
14. Other Business
15. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
16. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting
Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes. Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at

<https://www.brown.sd.us/department/commission>

FCS raises money for Safe Harbor

Friday had exceptional weather for a dunk tank! FCS (Fellowship of Christian Students) Group moved their annual Homecoming dunk tank fundraiser to the soccer fields to entertain spectators before, during and after the boys' soccer game Friday afternoon. Students lined up to see if they could soak their administrators, while even adults and the younger ones joined in the fun to try their luck. The proceeds from the event were to be split with Safe Harbor and FCS student leaders will present the donation to the non-profit organization in the coming days.



Kennedy Hanson, student volunteer, watches on as Drew Sombke threw the ball at the target. (Courtesy Photo)



Elementary Principal Brett Schwan kept encouraging students to hit the target during halftime, Owen Sperry, dunk tank volunteer, watches on from behind the tank. (Courtesy Photo)



Alli Iverson smiles after her throw dunked the Boys' Soccer Head Coach Ryan Olson.

(Courtesy Photo)



Layne Johnson tries his luck while fellow students and volunteers watch on the sidelines. (Courtesy Photo)

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Rachel Crank wanted to see if she could hit the target. (Courtesy Photo)



Middle School/High School Principal Shelby Edwards gave the okay that she was ready to be dunked. (Courtesy Photo)



Scott Thorson, Social Science Teacher, falls down into the water after a ball hit the target.

(Courtesy Photo)



Superintendent Joe Schwan watches closely as Evalynn Peterson's ball is about to hit the target. (Courtesy Photo)

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Deuel Cross Country Meet

Boys 5K Varsity

25, Jayden Schwan, 20:05.08.

57, Kason Oswald, 24:09.36

Girls 5K Varsity

6, Faith Traphagen, 20:46.99

13, Ryelle Gilbert, 21:24.31

Girls 3K Junior Varsity

9, Sydney Holmes, 13:49.36

Boys 3K Middle School

4, Grayden Zeck, 12:44.99

6, Blake Malsam, 12:57.52

13, Landon Thornton, 14:27.39

Girls 3K Middle School

32, Rayna Loeschke, 17:26.20



Boys Junior High Golf Meet

Olive Grove Golf Course

Pictured left to right are Hayden Harder and Liam Johnson. Johnson placed second with a score of 42. (Courtesy Photo)

Q&A: South Dakota's food tax repeal measure

By STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

Sophie Stoffers carried groceries to her car in a Sioux Falls Hy-Vee parking lot and pondered a question from a reporter.

Would Initiated Measure 28, an effort on the Nov. 5 ballot to eliminate South Dakota's sales tax on food, make life better for her?

"I'm always a fan of saving money," said Stoffers, 24, who recently moved to Sioux Falls and works as an assistant athletic trainer at Augustana University. "But I don't know much about (the measure). I need to hear the pros and cons before voting."

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture data, an average family of four in South Dakota spends about \$1,200 a month on food purchased at a store and prepared at home. Eliminating the 4.2% tax on food would save that household \$50.40 a month, or about \$600 a year.

Stoffers and her boyfriend have noticed grocery bills ticking upward. She'll glance at the receipt on the way out of the store and try to cut back on nonessential items.

But that's a long way from breaking down the ramifications of a sales tax cut on consumables, especially with differing viewpoints of what IM 28 will do.

Opponents pounced on the wording of the measure as broader than just groceries. They said it could cause a budget crunch by preventing the state from collecting sales tax on "consumable" items such as tobacco, toothpaste and toilet paper.

Estimates for the loss of state revenue range from \$124 million to \$646 million annually.

From a consumer perspective, national data shows that while the rate of inflation on food has softened, the price of grocery staples such as beef and eggs increased by 3.2% over the past year.

"This is the right thing to do," said Rick Weiland, co-founder of Dakotans for Health, the petition-gathering group whose tax repeal effort was certified for the ballot with 22,315 signatures.

Assessing that statement means wading through a litany of factors, from legal language and tax policy to the ongoing conflict between a Republican-led Legislature and progressive groups that pursue policy change through citizen initiatives.

Here are the most pressing questions surrounding IM 28 as the November vote approaches:

What's the argument for grocery tax repeal?

Supporters call the measure a long-overdue effort to take the tax burden off low-income families and individuals. South Dakota and Mississippi are the only states that fully tax food without offering credits or rebates.



A Hy-Vee employee stocks cereal boxes on the shelves at the 26th Street location in Sioux Falls, S.D. on Sept. 6, 2024. Initiated Measure 28 seeks to eliminate the state sales tax on groceries in South Dakota, but questions about the measure persist. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

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Rick Weiland, co-founder of Dakotans for Health, talks to supporters at a press conference May 1, 2024, at the downtown library in Sioux Falls, S.D. The group's grocery tax repeal effort was certified for the ballot with 22,315 signatures. (Photo: Stu Whitney

/ South Dakota News Watch)

The basic premise for eliminating the grocery tax is to make it easier for people to put food on the table within the constraints of their household budget.

"The tax is quite regressive," Anna Phillips, an analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, told News Watch. "If you look at the percentage of household income spent on groceries, low-income earners spend roughly double the percentage of their income that high-income earners do on groceries. So this is going to make more of a meaningful difference to families who are currently struggling to get by."

Feeding South Dakota, the state's largest hunger relief organization, estimates that about 106,000 people in South Dakota, more than 11%, are food insecure, which means they lack reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food. Of that number, 1 out of 6 are children.

Has this been tried before?

South Dakota's grocery tax has been a target of legislative reform for decades, mostly

by Democrats.

In 2004, the South Dakota Democratic Party gathered enough signatures to put a state food tax repeal on the ballot after legislative attempts to eliminate the tax fell short.

Opponents of the effort, including then-Gov. Mike Rounds, warned that passing the repeal would likely reduce the amount of state aid available for schools and health care.

Voters responded to that message and rejected the measure by a margin of 68% to 32%. Later attempts by state legislators to lower the tax on food or exempt groceries from the general sales tax rate also failed.

Weeks before being re-elected in November 2022, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem made a public pledge to preside over "the largest tax cut in state history," a full repeal of the grocery tax. She vouched for its affordability and noted that voters might pass the repeal if lawmakers didn't.

But legislators rejected Noem's proposal during the 2023 session, opting instead to temporarily reduce the overall sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%, with a sunset (or expiration) of 2027.

What's the main argument against it?

There are fiscal consequences to eliminating the tax. Sales taxes are the largest source of state government revenue in South Dakota, one of seven states without a state income tax.

Phillips stressed that, while eliminating the grocery tax is a good way to advance racial and economic equity, states should pursue full repeals with caution due to budgetary impacts.

It's important to remember that state revenue lost from eliminating the grocery tax would be on top of the \$104 million estimated annual revenue loss from the overall sales tax cut passed by legislators in 2023.

So the question becomes: Can South Dakota afford to do this without having to cut important programs elsewhere or adding another tax?

Opponents of the measure answer that with a resounding no, citing what they said are ambiguous and problematic wording in the ballot measure.

The specific language of IM 28 prohibits the state from collecting sales tax on "anything sold for human consumption, except alcoholic beverages and prepared food."

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Nathan Sanderson, executive director of the South Dakota Retailers Association, said that wording is so vague that it could prevent the state from collecting sales tax on “consumable” items such as tobacco, toothpaste and toilet paper.

The Legislative Research Council took that a step further in a report to state legislators in July, extrapolating the “human consumption” definition to include propane and motor fuel and services rendered by a plumber or landscaper.

Weiland countered that it was the LRC and attorney general's office that questioned earlier language in IM 28, which led to the current framework. He called for common sense, saying interpretations of the measure should be shaped by the stated intent of petitioners to target taxes on food and drink.

“You don’t drink gasoline,” Weiland said. “You don’t eat services.”

What kind of budget crunch are we talking about?

Well, it’s complicated.

Not even the LRC, which provides statutory and legal guidance for proposed ballot initiatives, has been consistent on what the impact will be.

Reed Hollweger, who resigned as LRC director during a meeting of the Legislature’s executive board in October 2023, addressed the potential for differing interpretations of “anything sold for human consumption” in a fiscal note sent to the secretary of state as required by law in January 2023.

“For purposes of this fiscal note,” he wrote, “the LRC assumes the phrase only includes food items because of the modifying language ‘except alcoholic beverages and prepared food’ and does not include personal tangible property and services, both of which can also be sold for human consumption. Other assumptions as to the meaning of this phrase may be just as reasonable, if not more so.”

With that qualification, the fiscal note said that the state could see a reduction in sales tax revenue of \$123.9 million annually.

Sanderson estimated to News Watch in June that IM 28 would result in a budget downturn of at least \$176 million annually because it would include tobacco products, defined in state law as “any item made of tobacco intended for human consumption.”

Then came the kitchen-sink estimate the LRC presented to legislators as an update in July – a worst-case scenario analysis that said the budget impact could soar as high as \$646 million annually.

So which number is right?

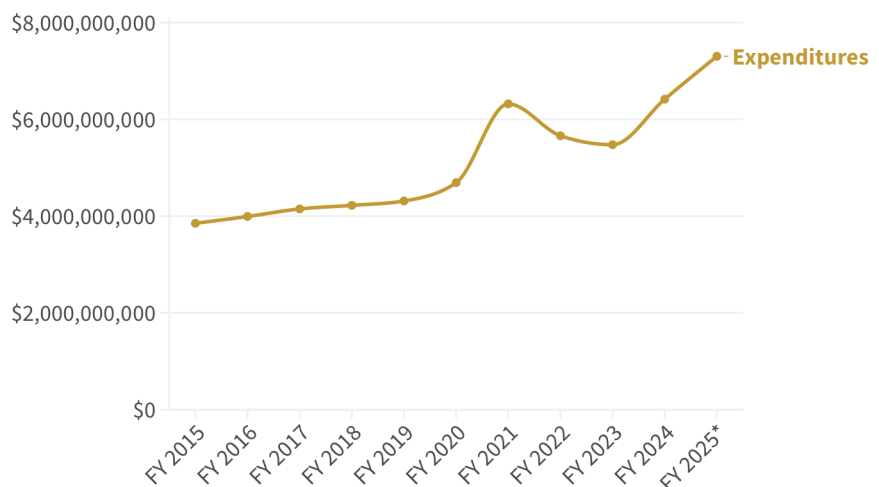
The official fiscal note produced by Hollweger uses the \$123.9 million figure, while Attorney General Marty Jackley's ballot statement noted that human consumption “is not defined by state law, but its common definition includes more than just food and drinks.”

Jackley’s statement also said that “judicial or legislative clarification of the measure will be necessary.” That’s the one thing that both sides agree upon.

Any judicial review will likely involve trying to find a “harmonious reading” of the conflicting statutes or language, according to Neil Fulton, dean of the University of

South Dakota state budget through the years

The state budget increased \$1.6 billion in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and has stayed considerably higher than FY2020 since then.



Source: State of South Dakota • Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch
* Estimated budget for FY 2025.

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Gov. Kristi Noem meets with members of the media at Sunshine Foods in Sioux Falls, S.D., on Oct. 12, 2022, to discuss a repeal of the food tax. Her bill stalled in the Legislature, but Initiated Measure 28 would repeal the tax if approved by voters on the November ballot. (Photo: Argus Leader)

South Dakota School of Law and former chief of staff to Rounds.

"The goal is to identify the intent of the enacting Legislature, or the people in this instance," Fulton told News Watch. "Commonly, that's found from the text alone because it's free of ambiguity. But if the context or other aspects of the enactment lead to a different reading, or when a statute can be read multiple ways, the guiding star is, 'What did the people intend?'"

How much of a problem is IM 28's wording?

Phillips, the policy analyst, said the measure should have stipulated that the tax rate will be changed to 0% rather than saying the state "may not tax" consumables.

Eliminating the tax entirely would likely put South Dakota out of alignment with the Streamlined Sales Tax Project, a cooperative effort of states, local governments and the business community that standardizes collection of sales tax, she said.

"That agreement makes administration easier across states, both for vendors who have to comply with sales and use taxes as well as tax administrators," said Phillips. "So removing the tax entirely on groceries will take South Dakota out of that agreement, which would be unfortunate."

South Dakota could also lose revenue from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, a 1998 pact among 46 states and major cigarette manufacturers as part of litigation for health care costs and deceptive trade practices.

Jackley has said that not taxing tobacco could jeopardize South Dakota's share of that settlement, which amounts to about \$20 million annually.

As for the "anything sold for human consumption" language, Phillips pointed to more specific wording used by Oklahoma legislators in a bipartisan effort to reduce the state's tax on food and food ingredients to 0% earlier this year.

To stay aligned with the streamlined sales tax, the Oklahoma law defines food and food ingredients as "substances, whether in liquid, concentrated, solid, frozen, dried, or dehydrated form, that are sold for ingestion or chewing by humans and are consumed for their taste or nutritional value."

That's essentially the same standardized language found in South Dakota law, which Hollweger said in a letter to Dakotans for Health in 2022 would "likely apply" to the LRC's original suggested language for the measure.

The Oklahoma law also states that the 0% tax rate does not apply to alcoholic beverages, dietary supplements, marijuana products, prepared food or tobacco.

Phillips said the differences between Oklahoma's law and IM 28 underscore the difficulty of articulating complex tax policy through a ballot measure, which needs to be clear to voters and cannot encompass more than one subject under South Dakota law.

Fixing that language "shouldn't be difficult to do," she said. "I would imagine the Legislature would have a bit of an incentive to do it because they don't want to blow that hole in their budget."

What will legislators do if it passes?

Because IM 28 is an initiated measure, not a constitutional amendment, legislators have more power to craft the policy.

For instance, they can adjust the language to align with the definition found in South Dakota law, removing some of the unintended consequences cited by IM 28's opponents.

"The counter to many of these complaints (about wording) is that the Legislature has eight months to fix it," said Michael Card, an emeritus professor of political science at the University of South Dakota. "Part of this back-and-forth is due to efforts to limit the scope of initiated measures, a fight between the dominant (Republican) party and those who want to change laws through the ballot."

Sanderson responded that even if the language is fixed and IM 28 is sharpened to include only groceries, there are still repercussions on top of the earlier general sales tax cut.

Sales tax receipts declined by 2.6% in fiscal year 2024 after gains of 9%, 12.2% and 12.7% the previous three years, according to the South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management. That dip reflects the earlier sales tax cut and will require action if the state can't tax groceries or other consumables, he said.

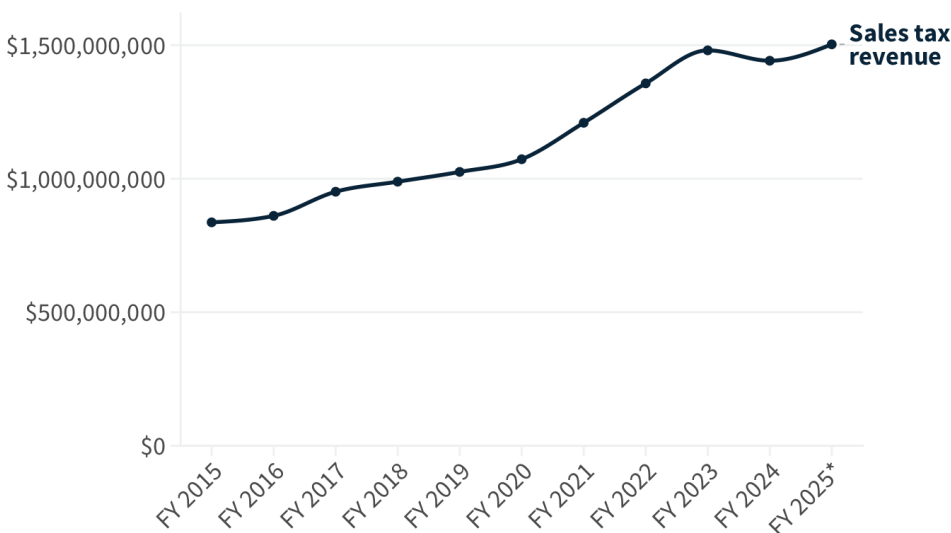
"The problem is that IM 28 doesn't have any mechanism for replacing the lost revenue, so the money's going to have to come from somewhere," said Sanderson, who spearheads a coalition that opposes the measure.

"In order to make that up, they're going to have to raise a tax somewhere. That requires a two-thirds vote of a Legislature in which 94 out of 105 are currently Republicans. Are legislators going to vote for a (sales) tax increase to raise revenue? I don't think so. And that's why we've expressed our concerns that if IM 28 passes, it's going to lead to higher property taxes or an income tax (through ballot measure), because the Legislature is simply not going to vote with a two-thirds majority vote to raise the tax."

Weiland called these claims scare tactics meant to influence voters and take the focus away from the merits of a grocery tax repeal.

South Dakota sales tax revenue

The state collected \$1.44 billion in sales tax revenue in fiscal year 2024.



Source: State of South Dakota • Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch
* Estimated sales tax revenue for FY 2025.

* A Flourish chart

He referenced past legislative overrides of resident-led initiatives such as IM 22, a campaign finance and ethics reform package approved by voters in 2016 that was later repealed by lawmakers with an emergency clause that ensured it could not be referred back to the ballot.

"I think every concern that's been raised, if in fact it was a real concern and not a campaign tactic, they could address very simply in the upcoming legislative session," said Weiland, a former Democratic candidate for U.S. House and Senate. "What I think they're more likely to do is talk about this \$646 million hole in their budget so they can declare a state of emergency and repeal it like they

did with IM 22."

Does Gov. Noem support a grocery tax repeal?

Noem personally testified in committee for her 2023 bill to repeal the grocery tax, based on her campaign pledge.

She pointed to double-digit increases in sales tax revenue in 2021 and 2022 and a budget surplus in 2022 of \$115 million, an outlook boosted by COVID-related federal stimulus and inflation-impacted tax receipts.

The bill ultimately failed, but the message was duly noted by Dakotans for Health and other groups that have pushed for eliminating the grocery tax.

"The Republicans' big argument has always been, 'Oh, we don't have the money to repeal the food tax. It will come on the backs of firefighters and teachers, or we'll have to do a state income tax,'" Weiland said. "Well, the governor took all those arguments and threw them in the trash."

But Jim Terwilliger, the governor's budget director, noted that Noem's proposal would have reduced the state's food tax to 0% rather than eliminating it, addressing concerns about compliance with the streamlined sales tax agreement.

The bill's language aligned with state definitions for food and food ingredients and it spelled out exceptions such as alcohol, tobacco and cannabis.

She warned lawmakers of potential budget fallout if voters passed a grocery tax initiative on top of the general sales tax cut, pointing to public support for such a measure.

Terwilliger told News Watch earlier this year that Noem doesn't support IM 28 because of concerns about the wording. He added that the governor "still believes a repeal of the grocery tax is the best tax relief for South Dakota families if it is done in a responsible manner," though she didn't mention the repeal in her 2024 budget message or State of the State address.

Can cities and towns still tax groceries if this passes?

Again, it's complicated. The actual wording of the measure states that "municipalities may continue to impose such taxes."

But opponents, including the South Dakota Municipal League, said eliminating the tax, rather than reducing it to 0%, will render local governments unable to impose the food tax because of South Dakota Codified Law 10-52-2.

That law states that cities and towns can charge a sales tax if the tax "conforms in all respects to the state tax ... with the exception of the rate." Eliminating the tax entirely would create problems with state and local alignment, said Sanderson.



Nathan Sanderson (right), executive director of the South Dakota Retailers Association, speaks against Initiated Measure 28 as Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken looks on during a press conference July 9, 2024 at the downtown library in Sioux Falls, S.D. (Photo: Argus Leader)

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A Hy-Vee employee puts grapes on display at the 26th Street location in Sioux Falls, S.D. on Sept. 6, 2024. Initiated Measure 28 seeks to eliminate the state sales tax on groceries in South Dakota, but questions about the measure persist. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

Fulton, the USD law school dean, pointed to a legal principle that says when there is a general statute and a more specific law on the same topic, the more specific statute wins out.

"In this instance, the court would be looking at how IM 28 fits, or doesn't fit, with other taxation statutes and giving the right of way to the more specific statute," he said.

What are the alternatives to grocery tax repeal?

Several states use refunded tax credits for low-income brackets in which consumers pay the full sales tax rate on food but recoup some of those added costs by claiming a credit when they file their taxes.

The benefit of this, Phillips said, is that the relief is targeted toward low-income households, which makes it more efficient. Simply cutting the grocery tax affects these low-income groups as well as higher-earning families that are likely not as reliant on state dollars that could be used for other services.

The downside, she added, is that "people are going to have to know to apply for it, especially if you are dealing with people on very low incomes or fixed incomes who may not even file income taxes."

Even for those who do apply, the relief comes once a year during tax season, Phillips noted.

"If you're a family that's living paycheck to paycheck, you would rather take the benefits (every trip to the store) rather than waiting a year from now and getting it in a lump sum, which is harder to budget for," she said.

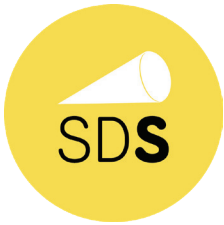
This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit news organization.

"Cities and towns can only tax the same items as the state," he said. "So despite the language in IM 28, if the state cannot charge a tax on 'anything for human consumption,' neither can a municipality."

Rapid City lawyer Jim Leach, who represents Dakotans for Health, called that a flawed analysis. His contention is that IM 28, if it passes, "becomes the law of South Dakota" and supersedes the existing provisions, "which would allow municipalities to continue to tax food."

Hollweger, in a written statement to News Watch before he resigned, noted that "only the state was specified" in Dakotans for Health's final submission and that municipalities are not legally defined as agencies of the state. "Therefore, LRC concludes the proposed (ballot measure) would not prevent municipalities from imposing a sales tax on food," he wrote.

Hollweger did not respond to an interview request for this story.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Report finds deficiencies in defense of South Dakotans who can't afford an attorney

Group says state should consider standardized advisement of rights, ending practice of recouping costs from defendants

BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 23, 2024 12:21 PM

A just-released report on South Dakota's public defense system identified many of the same "structural deficiencies" outlined in a similar report 47 years ago.

The nonprofit Sixth Amendment Center released its state-funded study Monday. The report was released just under a week after the state announced its hiring of the Unified Judicial System's first state-wide public defender, Christopher Miles. He will run the first state-level public defense office and lead a team of attorneys who will handle appeals to the state Supreme Court by "indigent" defendants — those who can't afford an attorney. Counties will remain responsible for providing lawyers for those defendants prior to their appeals.

The state's longstanding practice of delegating the management and funding of public defense to counties hamstrings the state's ability to provide effective representation to those who can't afford it, the report says.

Tying public defense to counties "results in counties funding indigent defense systems at levels they can afford instead of at levels that meet the counties' indigent defense needs."

The report also suggests that counties stop sending bills to people who use public defenders, set standards for public defenders and adopt a uniform advisement of rights for defendants, and that state lawmakers should fund the Commission on Indigent Services well enough to allow it to enforce state standards.

The last major review of the state's public defense system, undertaken in 1977, concluded that "while it is not impossible, it is difficult to be an effective yet aggressive defender lawyer in South Dakota."

The 2024 report says, "Based on our evaluation, we believe this remains an apt description of indigent defense in South Dakota."

The report was undertaken at the behest of the Commission on Indigent Defense. That group was created in 2023 at the urging of state Supreme Court Chief Justice Steven Jensen, and a comprehensive



An equal justice statue stands outside the doors of the Minnehaha County Courthouse in Sioux Falls. (Makenzie Huber/South

Dakota Searchlight)

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review of indigent defense practices was among its initial recommendations. Lawmakers also signed off on creating the state office of public defense a year later based on the commission's findings, setting a \$1.5 million budget for the seven-person office.

"This report includes a thorough, and sometimes candid, look at some of the current challenges the state faces as it seeks to fulfill the constitutional obligation to ensure the right to counsel for indigent people who are facing the prospect of jail or prison," Chief Justice Jensen said in a press release on the report.

South Dakota early adopter of public defense

The Dakota Territory established a right to counsel for those who couldn't afford it in 1868, 95 years before the right was extended nationwide by the 1963 Supreme Court decision in the case of Gideon vs. Wainwright.

In 1879, pre-statehood lawmakers ordered counties to pay "reasonable and just compensation." South Dakota became a state ten years later.

Current U.S. Supreme Court case law directs states to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring legal defense. South Dakota delegates public defense costs to counties, which creates difficulties and disparities from place to place, the report says. Paying public defenders through local property tax dollars, particularly for smaller, rural counties, has been a burden since the state last looked at the issue.

"Because the state did not make changes to the structure of the indigent defense system in response to the 1977 report, the right to counsel issues that existed nearly 50 years ago have been passed down, institutionalized, and inherited to present day," the report says.

Costs have risen in recent years, as well. The total cost for indigent defense statewide jumped from \$18.2 million in 2018 to \$21.5 million in 2022.

It's not just the overall cost that impacts counties, the report says, but the unpredictability of costs. One or a handful of major felony cases with high defense lawyer costs are enough to throw county budgets, it says. In Hughes County, the number of cases with court-appointed attorneys fell 7.6% over the report's six-year study period, but the cost increased 27.4%. County revenue grew 3.6% in that time frame.

Fall River County had to dip into its contingency fund to pay the state-set hourly rates for public defense.

Part of the cost increase is tied to a shortage of rural lawyers. Nearly 70% of the state's attorneys live in Minnehaha, Pennington or Hughes counties, meaning lawyers willing to take contract cases in counties without dedicated public defenders' offices – every county save Minnehaha, Pennington and Lawrence – often need to travel from their home cities to visit clients and appear in court.

When lawmakers passed the bill creating the statewide public defender's office, they also allocated \$3 million to reimburse counties for public defense costs. The amounts disbursed to each county were announced last week. They're based on counties' public defense costs and range from \$310 for the county with the lowest costs (Harding) to \$915,000 for the county with the highest costs (Minnehaha).

Suggestions: Set state standards, consider ditching cost reimbursement

The report does not recommend that the state switch to a state-funded system for public defense, however.

Instead, it trains its recommendations on smaller adjustments that could improve the delivery of legal services to indigent defendants.

The report found inconsistencies in how judges explain the right to an attorney, for example. For counties with public defender's offices, an attorney represents people at their initial appearances and bond appearances. In most other counties, those appearances tend to be the venues where a person is advised of their right to an attorney.

"Despite giving the defendant the opportunity to request an attorney, in most magistrate courts no attorney is present and available to accept court appointments at initial appearance," the report says.

There is no standard advisement of rights at the state level. The report recommends adopting one, as there are some inconsistencies in what defendants hear from judges in the early stages of a case. There are also inconsistencies in determining who's eligible for a public defender, as there is no state standard for what financial factors make a person eligible.

"As a result, a judge in one county may find a person indigent and provide counsel, but a judge in a different county may find that same person not indigent and deny them counsel," the report says.

State law allows counties to charge indigent clients for attorney services after a case has ended, but judges vary in how they explain that to defendants. No judges advised defendants of the state-set hourly rate for attorney fees they'd be expected to pay back after the case during courtroom visits by Sixth Amendment Center researchers.

Defendants typically aren't aware of the total cost of their representation at the time of their sentencing, even though liens can be placed on their property to pay them.

The report recommends that the state consider ending the practice of fee reimbursement. Tying representation to costs changes the dynamic between clients and their attorneys in ways that could impact their rights.

"During this evaluation, appointed attorneys across the state reported that recoupment impacted their ability to adequately represent their clients because the cost of representation dictated the attorney-client relationship and decisions on the case," the report says.

Stop pretrial negotiations with defendants who have no lawyer

There are also counties where a magistrate judge – the kind of judge who sets pretrial bond conditions in both felony and misdemeanor cases – allows prosecutors to meet defendants and negotiate a plea before the defendant has a chance to request a court-appointed attorney.

"Sometimes referred to as a 'preconference,' this meeting occurs off the record and without defense counsel. There is no state law or court rule that governs this practice," the report says.

One researcher with the Sixth Amendment Center observed a defendant tell a judge he had a head injury and "could not remember much" after the judge explained his rights to him and others in a group message at the start of a hearing. Even so, he took a plea deal that day on two misdemeanor charges, with no defense attorney present, even after he repeated that he had no memory of the incident.

The report recommends ending the practice of negotiation between prosecutors and clients who've not yet had the chance to request a lawyer.

The Commission on Indigent Defense, the report says, should be funded by the Legislature at a level high enough to allow it to do oversight, and the commission should work to set statewide standards for effective public defense.

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.

Harris' and Trump's contrasting plans for agriculture and climate change action

As extreme weather events increase, some farmers hope for more federal aid and policies to mitigate climate-related risks

BY: JOHN MCCrackEN, INVESTIGATE MIDWEST - SEPTEMBER 23, 2024 7:00 AM

Hans Breitenmoser believes that regardless of a farmer's political affiliation, everything comes down to the weather.

"Whether you grow cows or grow corn or both, we live and die by the weather forecast," said Breitenmoser, a 55-year-old dairy farmer from Lincoln County, Wisconsin.

That's why the impact of climate change policies from Donald Trump and Kamala Harris on the agriculture sector is top of mind for the lifelong farmer.

Investigate Midwest researched the Trump and Biden-Harris administrations to better understand what could be at stake this election at the intersection of environment and agriculture. While President Joe Biden

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is not seeking reelection, his four years in office offer possible clues for what a Harris presidency might mean as the vice president has become the Democratic nominee.

The Biden-Harris administration has poured billions into agriculture practices meant to curtail greenhouse gas emissions, but some environmentalists say not all of the practices are climate-friendly. Meanwhile, Trump has a history of downplaying the threat of climate change, and various Republican playbook strategies plan on slashing funding to “climate-smart” agriculture programs.

“You’ve got one administration that’s taken this thing seriously and understands that we can have a robust economy while becoming greener, and then you’ve got the other side who doesn’t even think there’s a problem,” Breitenmoser said.

Climate change — predominantly caused by human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and industrialized agriculture — has made the weather more volatile and extreme.

Extreme weather touches every aspect of agriculture. Increased flooding has drowned crops across the Midwest, droughts have brought the nation’s beef supply to historic lows and farmworkers are also more prone to heat-related injury and illness.

“As the weather changes, it’s going to have a profound impact on how we do business,” said Breitenmoser, who has had to spend more money on hay in recent drought years and is currently debating having to spend more money on nitrogen to perk up a wet soybean crop.

Ranjani Prabhakar, the legislative director of healthy communities for Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law center, worries another Trump administration would immediately roll back funding for farming practices aimed to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

“There’s a possibility that \$19 billion of historic generational climate investments in agriculture could be completely lost,” she said.

The nation’s agriculture sector accounted for 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions in 2022, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data. The agency cites cattle production, rice crops and the application of chemical fertilizers as major sources of climate pollution.

But Republican leaders see Biden’s agricultural policies and investments in climate change as restrictive and onerous for the nation’s farmers. This division has delayed a highly anticipated Farm Bill and signals how either administration could approach climate change after the election.

Jeff Kaufmann, a livestock farmer, former Iowa state lawmaker and current chairman of the state’s Republican Party, told Agri Pulse that he expects to see the end of “blind climate change policies” that won’t hinder agricultural producers under a new Trump administration.

“I think you are going to see fairness based on science and we haven’t had that in four years,” Kaufman said.

U.S. Rep. Glenn GT Thompson, a Pennsylvania Republican who chairs the House Committee on Agriculture, told Investigate Midwest he supports voluntary, locally-run and incentive-based conservation efforts for agriculture producers, and rebukes the Biden administration’s imposition of climate regulations onto American farmers.



Vice President and Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris, and former President and current Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. (Photos

by Jonathan Ernst/Scott Olson/Getty Images)

"Agriculture has done more to reduce carbon emissions than anything else, certainly (more than) any government regulation," said Thompson, speaking at this year's Republican National Convention.

Thompson, calling American farmers the "original climate champions," said farmers who use conservation practices have been able to create healthy soils and sequester carbon to avoid releasing it into the atmosphere.

The secret to keeping the nation's farmers at the center is making the programs voluntary and locally-led, rather than imposing broad rules and regulations, Thompson added.

Biden-Harris climate investments, pitfalls

To combat climate change's effects on farming, the Biden-Harris Administration allotted an historic \$22 billion to fund "climate-smart" agriculture two years ago. This funding was part of the administration's sweeping investments in clean energy and climate solutions, known as the Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA.

Included in the bill was funding for farm operations to implement cover crops and proper management of nutrient application, be it fertilizer or livestock waste, as well as no-till and strip-till farming.

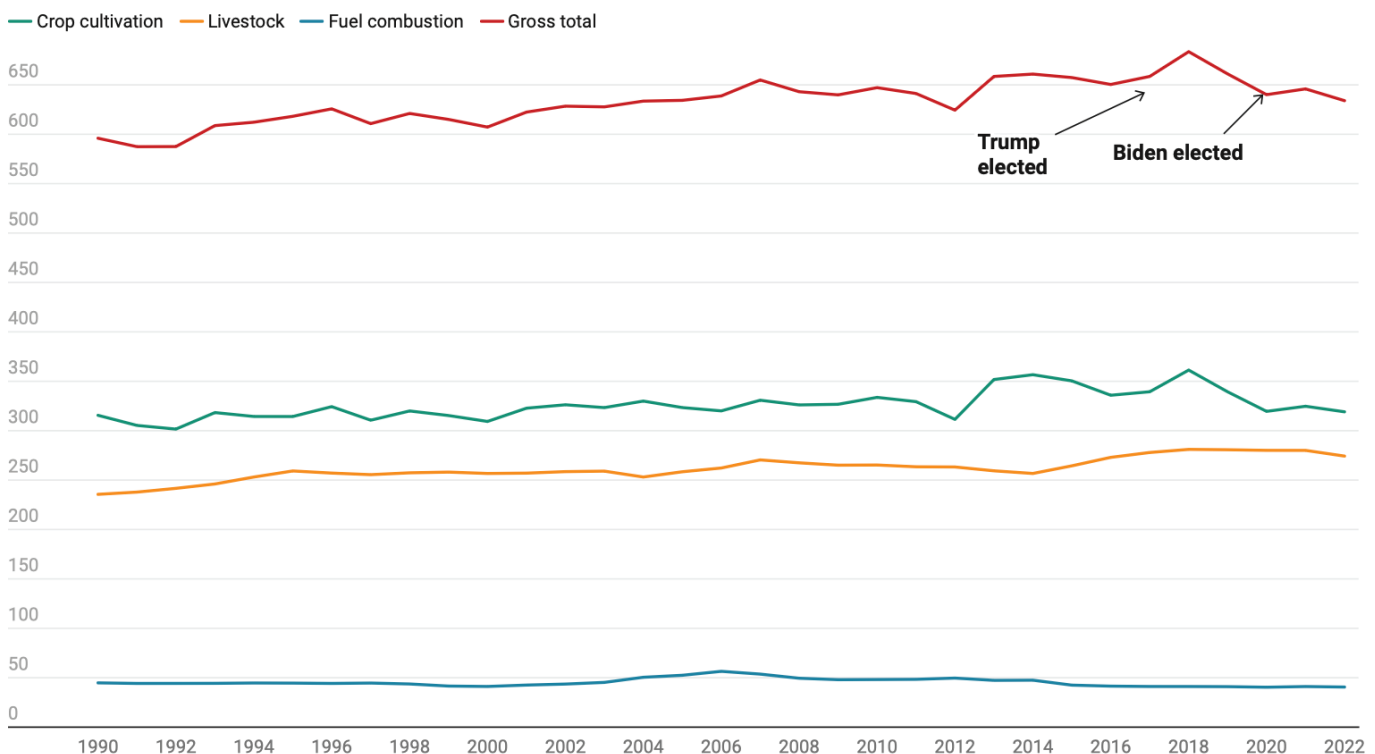
But, this influx of funding has created a division between lawmakers tasked with crafting the industry's most important piece of legislation, the Farm Bill. The most recent version now puts the USDA in charge of managing IRA funds for agriculture.

Republican lawmakers have said they want to strip the word "climate" from the legislation, while Democrats have said they won't budge on funding for these climate-smart practices. Biden spokesperson John Podesta said last year the administration is willing to fight for climate-smart agriculture as it is popular for farmers and will be "successful in the upcoming farm bill negotiations."

Additionally, Harris argued for increased funding for clean energy jobs and energy efficiencies while in the White House. During her time as California attorney general, she created an office responsible for

Annual US agriculture greenhouse gas emissions

Emissions are tracked in million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent gases



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litigating against polluters who operated in historically disadvantaged communities.

At the Sept. 10 presidential debate, Harris extolled the current administration's push for clean energy jobs and manufacturing, while also promoting the nation's increase in domestic oil production and her support of fracking.

However, Harris hasn't been detailed about her specific approach to climate change and agriculture, and her campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Still, environmental justice and climate change advocates have rallied in support of Harris since she became the Democratic nominee.

"Vice President Harris has fought to hold polluters accountable and deliver for the hardest-hit communities her entire career. We are confident that she is ready to carry forward President Biden's historic legacy and set a new high bar for climate ambition in America," Lena Moffitt, the executive director of climate advocacy group Evergreen Action, said in a statement.

Harris selected Tim Walz as her vice presidential running mate. The current governor of Minnesota, Walz has an extensive climate-focused and clean energy track record and also worked on Farm Bills during his time in Congress. His background in agricultural policy is a boon to Harris, but environmental groups have called out past actions supporting industrialized, emissions-heavy agriculture and allowing the Line 3 pipeline to continue construction in his state.

While the Biden-Harris administration has been lauded for climate efforts, some environmental groups believe the administration has not gone far enough. Despite the investments in climate, the country exported record amounts of fossil fuels under the Biden-Harris Administration.

Environmental groups have urged the Biden-Harris administration to stop investing in methane, a major contributor to climate pollution.

Methane, a potent greenhouse gas that warms the atmosphere faster than carbon, is produced by livestock waste and ruminant livestock. These animals, like cattle, sheep and goats, have unique digestive systems and diets linked to increased methane emissions.

The EPA estimates that methane from animals makes up 11% of the agriculture sector's greenhouse gas emissions. The Biden Administration announced rules in 2021 to reduce the country's methane emissions across various sectors, including agriculture.

A major initiative seen across the country has been the capture of methane on farms using technologies known as biogas digesters.

Digesters are massive, air-tight domes where livestock waste is converted into fuel through a process known as anaerobic digestion. Once the methane is turned into a fuel source, it is often used on the farm to power routine operations, or it can be sold to a pipeline grid for additional farm revenue.

The Inflation Reduction Act set aside billions of dollars in tax credits for new digester facilities and technologies, billed as a clean energy source. However, digesters are a controversial climate solution in the agricultural space.

Various environmental and climate groups have called on the Biden Administration to remove government support for digesters, believing that digesters incentivize large-scale, industrial livestock operations that are linked to environmental pollution and public health problems.

Digesters still leak and emit methane, and according to the USDA, the tracking of methane leaked from digesters is limited.

Earlier this year, a group of Democratic lawmakers sent a letter to the USDA asking for the removal of digesters from government-funded programs, arguing that the supposed climate tool is "an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars and an ineffective way to advance climate goals."

Trump's climate reversal

Trump has a lengthy record of downplaying and reversing climate change policy and has announced plans to reverse Biden administration investments in climate funding.

"It actually sets us back, as opposed to moves us forward. And [I will] rescind all unspent funds under the misnamed Inflation Reduction Act," Trump said in early September, according to Politico.

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Earlier this year, Trump made promises to a roomful of oil executives to revert pollution regulations and pauses on oil expansion made by the Biden-Harris Administration on his first day of office, according to a recent Washington Post report.

It wouldn't be the first time he has rolled back environmental protections.

Trump's climate track record includes more than 100 reversals of climate and environmentally-focused rules that originated in the Obama era. A New York Times analysis found that the majority of his rollbacks were aimed at EPA rules that limited greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and power plants, as well as those protecting the nation's wetlands.

During his first presidency, the USDA stopped publishing government studies that mentioned climate change, according to a 2019 Politico investigation. He also pulled the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Trump's campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

The Republican Party's official 2024 platform makes no mention of climate change nor its impact on agriculture. The platform document outlines plans to expand American-made fossil fuel production.

Another conservative policy playbook has more direct plans to roll back policy and funding for climate solutions in agriculture.

The 2025 Presidential Transition Project, an initiative circulated and organized by right-wing policy groups and advocacy organizations, has released plans to secure conservative policies under a Trump administration. Trump has disavowed any relation with this controversial document, but numerous authors of the manifesto have previously worked for him.

"Never before has the whole conservative movement banded together to systematically prepare to take power day one and deconstruct the administrative state," Paul Dans, director of Project 2025, told Energy & Environment News last year.

Project 2025 outlines that the next USDA would remove the country from any "schemes" to produce sustainable food or provide funding for climate-smart practices for producers.

"From the outset, the next Administration should: Denounce efforts to place ancillary issues like climate change ahead of food productivity and affordability when it comes to agriculture," the document states.

Project 2025 also outlines plans to defund the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Weather Service, which it described as "one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry."

Paul Overby, a North Dakota grain farmer and volunteer with the environmental advocacy group Citizens Climate Lobby and a self-described "traditional Republican," said he worries that the partisan fight over climate change in agriculture conversations will continue to derail an already delayed Farm Bill.

He said that he would be willing to compromise on taking the words "climate change" out of the Farm Bill if funding for conservation was increased because "the net result would be the same."

"The focus on climate has — unfortunately — become partisan," he said.

Jennifer Bamberg contributed to this reporting.

John McCracken covers the industrial agriculture meat industry for Investigate Midwest. He has experience reporting at the intersection of agriculture, environmental pollution and climate change. He is a former Midwest reporting fellow for Grist, a national nonprofit newsroom focused on climate change, environmental justice, and solutions.

Departments say they're tightening internal controls after alleged state employee crimes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - SEPTEMBER 23, 2024 5:15 PM



The South Dakota State Capitol, pictured on Nov. 2, 2022. (John Hult/

South Dakota Searchlight)

Two state departments victimized by the allegedly criminal behavior of some employees said Monday they are implementing reforms, including a full-time internal control officer and an anonymous tip line for employees.

During a meeting in Pierre with the State Board of Internal Control, officials from the Department of Social Services and the Department of Revenue outlined the new measures.

"We have been inspired to rethink our internal controls, ensuring they are more robust and frequent," Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff said.

A former employee allegedly stole \$1.8 million from the department's Division of Child Protection Services over a 13-year period. She allegedly submitted financial assistance requests for children in the state's care, intercepted the checks, deposited them into an account she controlled, and transferred the money to her personal account.

The former employee, Lonna Carroll, is charged with aggravated grand theft.

Althoff said new measures include stricter supervisory approval processes, such as a two-person protocol to ensure no single employee has unchecked control over financial transactions. Another addition is the appointment of a full-time internal controls officer, a role created to continuously monitor and refine the department's processes.

Similarly, the Department of Revenue is taking steps to address internal vulnerabilities after a former employee allegedly used her position to create 13 fake vehicle titles, which she then used to secure approximately \$400,000 in loans. That employee, Sandra O'Day, has since died. Another former Department of Revenue employee is being investigated for separate but similar allegations, according to The Dakota Scout.

Kristen Jasper, chief legal counsel for the Department of Revenue, discussed the department's new efforts. "Internal controls are a living document," Jasper said. "They need to be constantly reviewed and updated as things change."

Initiatives include an anonymous reporting system that allows employees to report suspicious activities without fear of reprisal. Additionally, the department has ramped up its internal training programs, and is looking to hire a full-time internal controls officer like the Department of Social Services.

Meanwhile, Althoff said he would look into setting up an anonymous tip line for his department.

The Board of Internal Control reviewed recent state audit findings and updates on various departments' internal controls.

The 2023 audit highlighted weaknesses in the Department of Social Services. It found inadequate controls over the payment of claims, allowing the same individual to both initiate and approve transactions without a secondary review.

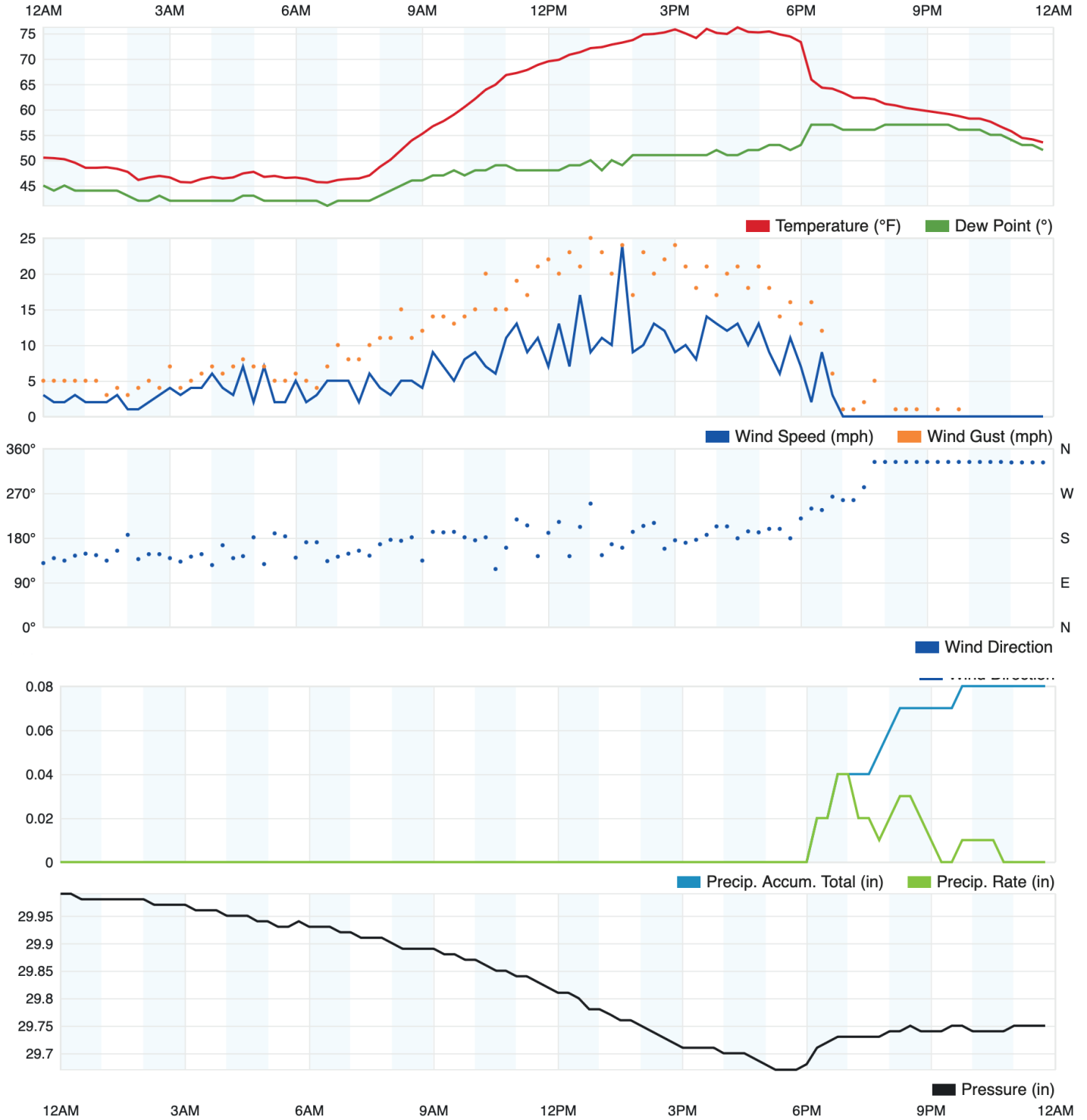
The legislative Government Operations and Audit Committee has said it will meet in October and December to review the alleged criminal activity in both departments.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 75 °F

Areas Fog
then Sunny

Tonight



Low: 48 °F

Clear

Wednesday



High: 80 °F

Sunny

Wednesday
Night



Low: 55 °F

Clear

Thursday



High: 83 °F

Sunny and
Breezy

Above Average
Temperatures

Today
Clearing skies
Highs: 70 - 80°F

Wednesday
Sunny!
Highs: 77 - 85°F

Thursday
Sunny and windy
Highs: 78 - 93°F

Gusts around 35 mph
west of James River
Valley on Thursday

September 24, 2024 3:29 AM

It's not going to feel like fall for the next few days. Temperatures will be 10-20 degrees above normal through at least Thursday. Enjoy the unseasonable warmth and abundant sunshine!

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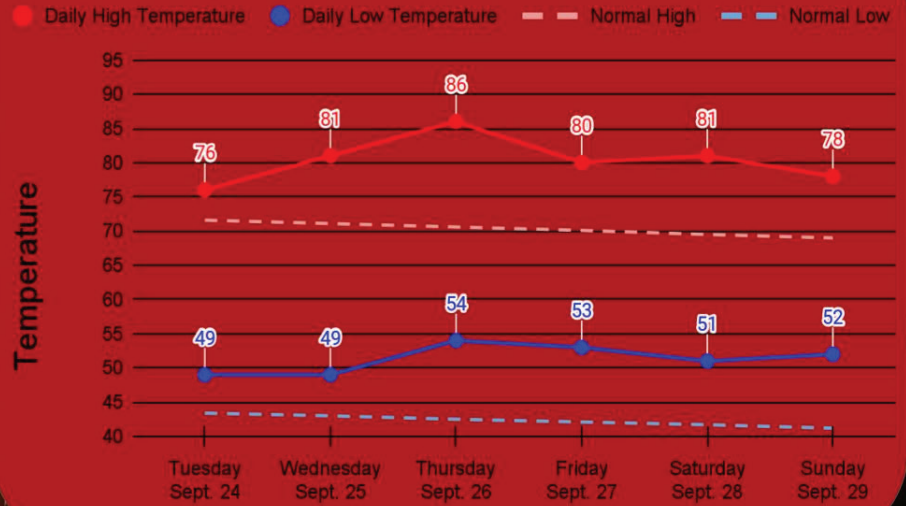


Above Normal Temperatures to Continue



- Fall may be here, but summer temperatures will stick around through the rest of the week!
- **Both high and low temperatures will be 5 to 10 degrees above normal for this time of year.**
- Locally higher or lower temperatures are possible.

This Week's Temperature Forecast



NWS Aberdeen, SD
September 23rd, 2024, 3:40 PM

Fall may be here, but summer is sticking around in the form of above normal temperatures! High and low temperatures are expected to stay 5 to 10 degrees above normal for this time of year through the week and into the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 3:05 PM

Low Temp: 45 °F at 3:26 AM

Wind: 26 mph at 12:52 PM

Precip: : 0.08

Day length: 12 hours, 5 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1935

Record Low: 23 in 2000

Average High: 72

Average Low: 43

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.59

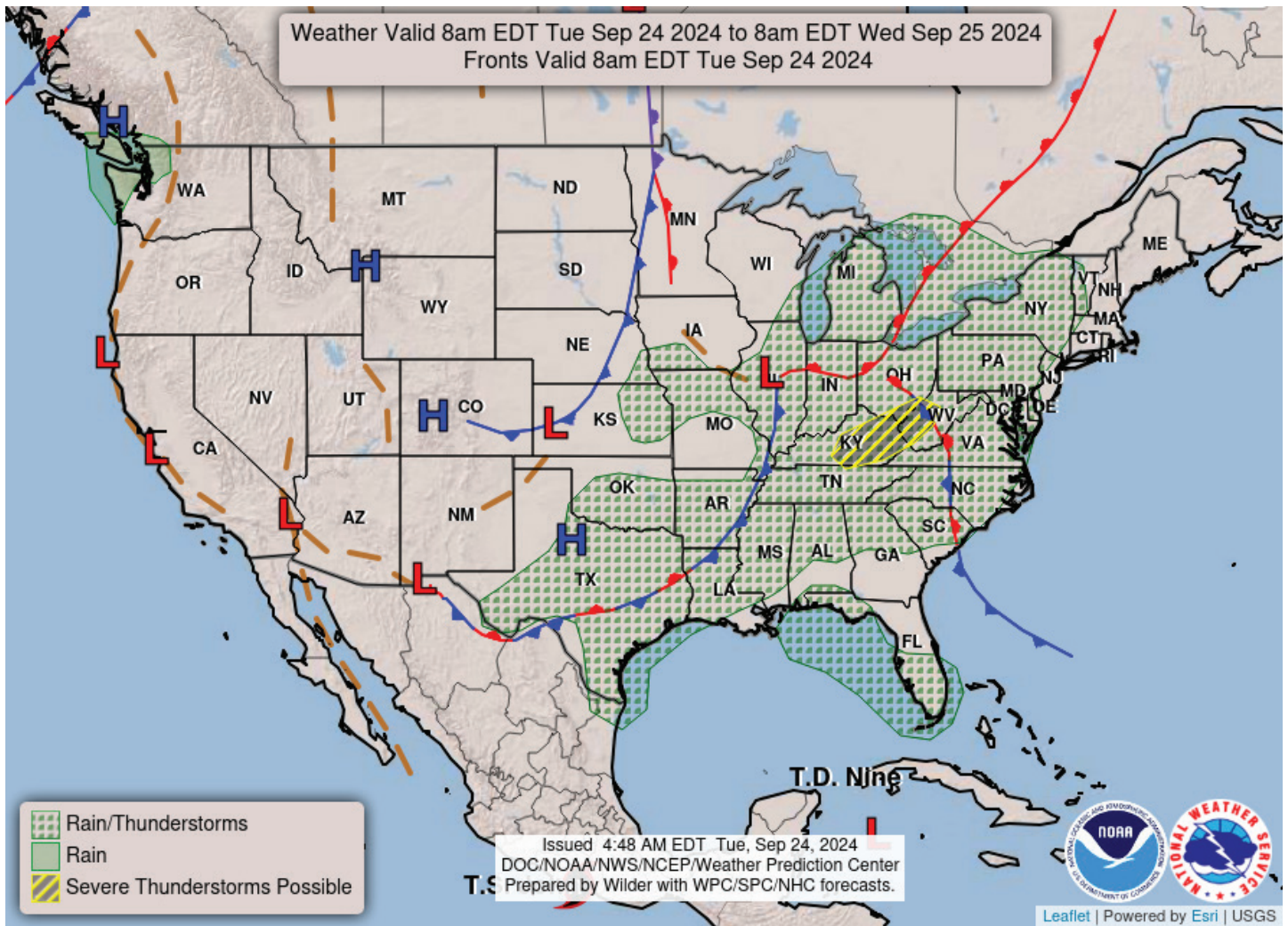
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.32

Average Precip to date: 17.93

Precip Year to Date: 19.74

Sunset Tonight: 7:26:50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22:40 am



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Today in Weather History

September 24, 1986: Thunderstorms brought high winds along with several tornados to parts of western and central South Dakota from the late evening in the morning hours of the 25th. Winds were estimated up to 80 mph. Many trees and power poles were downed along with damage to many buildings. The tornadoes occurred near Newell, east of Cedar Butte, west of Murdo, 20 miles northwest of Pierre, and northwest of Ridgeview in Dewey County.

September 24, 1992: South winds gusting to 50 to 55 mph across northeast South Dakota during the day toppled several trees and light poles. In Aberdeen, a front window was blown out of a store.

1926 - The temperature at Yellowstone Park dipped to nine degrees below zero. It was the coldest reading of record in the U.S. during September. Severe freezes were widespread over the northwestern U.S. causing great crop destruction. In Washington State, Spokane County experienced their earliest snow of record. Harney Branch Experiment Station in Oregon reported a temperature of 2 degrees above zero to establish a state record for the month of September. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1939: A thunderstorm on this day dropped 6.45 inches in six hours at Indio, CA. This rainfall preceded "El Cordonazo" or "The Lash of St. Francis", an actual tropical storm. For the entire storm, which started on this day and ended on the 26th, four inches of rain fell across the deserts and mountains as a dying tropical cyclone moved across Baja California into southwestern Arizona. This storm was the second tropical cyclone to impact California during this month. A strong El Niño may have contributed to the activity. The tropical storm produced 50 mph winds over the ocean and estimated seas of 40 feet. September rain records were set in Los Angeles with 5.66 inches and 11.6 inches at Mt. Wilson. 45 people died from sinking boats, and harbors were damaged. Total damage was estimated at \$2 million. Californians were unprepared and were alerted to their vulnerability to tropical storms. In response, the weather bureau established a forecast office for Southern California, which began operations in February of 1940.

1950 - A smoke pall from western Canada forest fires covered much of the eastern U.S. Daylight was reduced to nighttime darkness in parts of the Northeast. The color of the sun varied from pink to purple, blue, or lavender. Yellow to grey-tan was common. (24th-30th) (The Weather Channel)

1956: Hurricane Flossy made landfall near Destin, Florida as a Category 1 storm.

1972 - Lightning struck a man near Waldport, OR, a young man who it so happens was carrying thirty-five pieces of dynamite. (The Weather Channel)

1986: An F2 tornado, unusually strong for one in California, touched down just southeast of Vina on this day and traveled two miles through an agricultural area. A mobile home was destroyed, injuring a 22-year-old occupant. Eleven other buildings were damaged or demolished, and 50 acres of walnut orchards were flattened.

1987 - The first full day of autumn proved to be a pleasant one for much of the nation, with sunny skies and mild temperatures. Thunderstorms again formed over Florida and the southwestern deserts, and also formed along a cold front in the northeastern U.S. A storm spotter at Earp CA sighted a couple of funnel clouds, one on the California side of the state line, and the other on the Arizona side. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced large hail and damaging winds in the southeastern U.S., with reports of severe weather most numerous in North Carolina. Golf ball size hail was reported at Tick Creek and a number of other locations in North Carolina. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Forty-seven cities between the Rockies and the Appalachians reported record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 38 degrees at Abilene TX, 34 degrees at Jackson KY, and 36 degrees at Midland TX established records for the month of September. The low of 36 degrees at Midland smashed their previous record for the date by thirteen degrees. Fayetteville AR and Springfield MO reported their earliest freeze of record. Thunderstorms produced torrential rains in northeastern Florida. Jacksonville was deluged with 11.40 inches of rain, and flash flooding resulted in two deaths. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2001: A weak, F0 tornado passed in the sight of the Washington Monument. Soon after, an F3 tornado struck College Park, Maryland.

2005 - Early in the morning, major Hurricane Rita came ashore near the Texas/Louisiana border.



WHAT DO YOU WANT?

A young man, aspiring to become a great philosopher, went to Socrates and said, "I want knowledge. What must I do to get it?"

Socrates asked the young man to accompany him to a beach. After staring at the water for a few moments he asked the young man to join him and walk with him into the water. They waded slowly into the water until they were neck deep. After pausing for a moment he pushed him under the water and held him there. The young man struggled and finally, after becoming exhausted, Socrates allowed him to surface and take some deep breaths.

After releasing him, Socrates asked, "While you were struggling underneath the water, what did you want more than anything in the world?"

"Air," came the quick reply.

"When you want knowledge as much as you wanted air," said the philosopher, "then you will get it."

Whatever our hearts truly desire is what motivates us. Throughout the Bible we are reminded constantly of this irony. If we focus our attention on the things of this world, we will no doubt acquire many "things." If, on the other hand we "Delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts" and good things will come to us as by-products of His grace and goodness. We have His promise and that's all we need!

Prayer: Lord, we ask for Your Spirit to move in our hearts and create a deep desire within us that will encourage us to take delight in honoring You always. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

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:
09.20.24

20 21 40 49 55 11

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$62,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 23 Mins
DRAW: 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.23.24

13 15 22 23 35 9

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$9,720,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 38
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.23.24

1 21 24 27 48 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 53 Mins
DRAW: 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.21.24

6 16 26 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$38,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 53
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.23.24

23 39 57 61 67 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 22
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.23.24

15 21 25 37 45 19

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$223,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 22
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

- 07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center
- 07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day
- 07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm
- 07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church
- 07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
- 07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm
- 08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center
- Cancelled:** Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
- 08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm
- 08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament
- 08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm
- 09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party & Tour of Homes with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 26-24, 25-20, 23-25, 23-25, 15-13

Aberdeen Christian def. Herreid-Selby, 25-17, 17-25, 25-15

Colome def. St. Francis Indian, 25-17, 25-14, 25-17

Dell Rapids St Mary def. Ethan, 25-21, 25-23, 22-25, 25-19

Great Plains Lutheran def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 26-24, 25-12, 25-12

Harding County def. Hettinger-Scranton, N.D., 25-27, 25-19, 14-25, 25-19, 15-13

Herreid-Selby def. Timber Lake, 25-14, 25-12

Langford def. Herreid-Selby, 25-22, 25-18

Parkston def. McCook Central-Montrose, 23-25, 25-15, 25-11, 25-19

Pine Ridge def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-20, 25-20, 12-25, 21-25, 15-8

Sioux Valley def. Tri-Valley, 25-13, 25-17, 25-19

Tripp-Delmont-Armour def. Wessington Springs, 27-25, 25-13, 25-22

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

Israel-Hamas war latest: Israeli strikes on Gaza kill 7; Hezbollah fires scores of rockets at Israel

By The Associated Press undefined

Palestinian officials say Israel's strikes early Tuesday killed at least seven people in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis. At least 15 others, including women and children, were injured in the strikes, they said.

Israel's military says it will do "whatever is necessary" to push Hezbollah away from Lebanon's border with Israel. Israel and Hezbollah have been trading fire since the Israel-Hamas war began. On Monday, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes in southern and eastern Lebanon, killing nearly 500 people and wounding more than 1,600 others.

Thousands of people fled southern Lebanon, jamming the main highway to Beirut in the biggest exodus since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

It's a staggering one-day toll for a country still reeling from a deadly attack on communication devices the week before. Lebanon blamed the attacks on Israel, but Israel did not confirm or deny its responsibility.

Hezbollah launched more than 100 projectiles toward Israel on Monday, the military said, reaching deep into Israel including around the northern city of Haifa and parts of the occupied West Bank. Most of the missiles were intercepted but two people were lightly injured from falling shrapnel in northern Israel.

Here's the latest:

Lebanon's health ministry raises two-day death toll from Israeli strikes to 558

BEIRUT — Lebanon's Health Ministry said on Tuesday that the death toll from Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon over the past two days of escalation has reached 558, including 50 children and 94 women.

Health Minister Firass Abiad told reporters that 1,835 people have also been wounded since early Monday. They were taken to 54 hospitals around Lebanon, he said.

Abiad added that four paramedics were among those killed, and 16 paramedics and firefighters were among the wounded.

A journalist working for a pan-Arab television is killed in an Israeli airstrike in southern Lebanon, the station says

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BEIRUT — A journalist working for the pan-Arab network Al-Mayadeen was killed in Israeli airstrikes while he was at his home in southern Lebanon, the network said Tuesday.

Hadi Al-Sayyed, 22, is the third journalist from the network killed in the ongoing conflict between the Israeli military and Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group. The network said he was wounded on Monday and died of his wounds on Tuesday.

According to the TV station, Al-Sayyed worked for the Al-Mayadeen's online section and was at his house in the town of Burj Rahhal near the southern city of Tyre when it was hit in the airstrike.

Last November, Al-Mayadeen's correspondent Farah Omar and cameraman Rabih Al-Maamari were killed in an Israeli strike while covering southern Lebanon.

Reuters video journalist Issam Abdallah was killed in Israeli shelling last October while covering the clashes alongside colleagues from the news agency as well as reporters from Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV and France's international news agency, Agence France-Presse. His colleagues were all wounded but survived the attack.

Bombardment from Lebanon hits supermarket in Arab town in northern Israel

JERUSALEM — Bombardment from Lebanon on Tuesday damaged a supermarket in Israel's Arab city of Tamra, where the majority of residents are Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The attack spread fear through the community, which has no shelters. It was not immediately clear whether the supermarket was hit by a rocket that permeated Israel's missile defense system or by shrapnel falling from an interception.

"I came here immediately to see what exactly happened," said Jamal Diab, a friend of the market's owner. "I saw here lots of damage."

Tamra has no shelters, according to its mayor, Mousa Abu Rumi. An Israeli state comptroller's report found in 2018 that only 11 out of 71 Arab local communities have public shelters.

He told The Associated Press that Tamra's residents have been instructed to find "the most protected place" nearby to seek shelter when they hear rocket sirens go off.

A hospital in central Gaza says it received bodies of two Palestinian children killed in Israeli airstrikes on Tuesday

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — A hospital in central Gaza said the bodies of two children killed in an Israeli airstrike on Tuesday were brought there.

The Awda hospital in the Nuseirat refugee camp said the strike hit a group of people in the nearby Bureij camp, and also wounded six other Palestinians.

The Health Ministry in the coastal territory, meanwhile, said Gaza's hospitals received 12 dead and 43 wounded Palestinians over the last 24 hours.

The latest fatalities brought the overall death toll in Gaza since the war began on Oct. 7 to 41,467, and 95,921 wounded, said the ministry, which doesn't differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count.

Israel's military says 100 rockets fired from Lebanon since early morning in second day of intense escalation

JERUSALEM — Israel's military said that 100 rockets had been fired from Lebanon into northern Israel since the early hours of Tuesday morning, setting several fires and damaging buildings in the country's north in the second day of much-intensified hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

The rockets came in five volleys throughout the morning, the largest of them containing 50 rockets toward the Upper Galilee area. The military said it had struck the launchers where the rockets were fired. Another heavily-targeted area was southeast of the Israeli city of Haifa.

Rocket sirens blared throughout the morning in the country's north. A video circulating on Israeli media showed explosions on a highway, with drivers pulling over and lying on the ground next to their vehicles.

Galilee Medical Center, a northern Israel hospital, said that two patients arrived to the hospital with minor head injuries from a rocket falling near their car. Several others were being treated for light wounds from running to shelters and traffic accidents when alarms sounded.

Hezbollah has been sending heavy volleys of rockets into Israel as Israel intensifies its operation in Lebanon. In Monday, Israeli strikes killed nearly 500 people, Lebanese health officials say, and Israel's military ordered the south of the country evacuated.

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Southern Lebanese families find shelters farther north as they flee violence near the border

BEIRUT — Lebanese families displaced from villages farther south slept in shelters hastily set up in schools in Beirut and the coastal city of Sidon. Some who did not find shelter elsewhere slept in cars and parks and on the seaside corniche.

Monday's heavy bombardment sent thousands fleeing from south Lebanon. Hotels in Beirut were quickly booked to capacity and apartments in the mountains surrounding the capital were snapped up by families seeking safe accommodations.

Some offered up empty apartments or rooms in their houses in social media posts, while volunteers set up a kitchen at an empty gas station in Beirut to cook meals for the displaced.

In the eastern city of Baalbek, the state-run National News Agency reported that lines formed at bakeries and gas stations as residents rushed to stock up on essential supplies in anticipation of another round of strikes on Tuesday.

Satellite data shows a wide range of Israeli airstrikes targeted southern Lebanon

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Data from fire-tracking satellites used by the United States showed the wide range of Israeli airstrikes that target southern Lebanon, an Associated Press analysis Tuesday showed.

NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System typically is used by experts to track wildfires across rural areas of the U.S. However, they also can be used to track the flashes and burning that follow airstrikes. That's particularly true when an airstrike ignites flammable material on the ground, like munitions or fuel.

On Monday, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes in southern and eastern Lebanon, killing nearly 500 people and wounding more than 1,600 others. Thousands of people fled southern Lebanon, jamming the main highway to Beirut in the biggest exodus since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

Data from Monday show significant fires breaking out across southern Lebanon, stretching from the border with Israel as far north as Mashghara in the Bekaa Valley, some 20 kilometers (more than 10 miles) from the border. The area of the strikes is over 1,700 square kilometers (650 square miles).

There were several areas that showed multiple, intense fires. One was near the southern coastal town of Naqoura, which hosts a base for the United Nations peacekeeping mission in southern Lebanon known as UNIFIL. Others were in rural areas or villages.

Since its creation at the start of Israel's occupation of Lebanon from 1982 to 2000, the Shiite militia Hezbollah is believed to have stockpiled weapons and missiles throughout southern Lebanon as a deterrent to Israel.

United States Embassy in Jerusalem restricts employees from traveling to Israel's north

JERUSALEM — The United States Embassy in Jerusalem has restricted American government employees from traveling to Israel's north after a heavy exchange of fire between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group.

The embassy said Tuesday that employees require an armored vehicle and prior approval to travel to a large region of the north that includes the bustling coastal city of Haifa.

The U.S. State Department meanwhile urged American citizens to leave the country, where Israeli strikes killed nearly 500 people on Monday.

Israeli strikes kill at least 7 in Khan Younis

DEIR-AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Palestinian officials say Israel's strikes early Tuesday killed at least seven people in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis. At least 15 others, including women and children, were injured in the strikes, they said.

The civil defense said the dead include five people who were killed in a strike on the Abu Harb family house in the Qizan al-Najjar area. The strike also wounded at least 10 others, it said.

Another strike hit a house in the Tahlia area in Khan Younis, killing at least two people and wounding five others, according to the rescue service. The casualties from both strikes were confirmed in hospital records in Khan Younis.

Israel says it tries to avoid harming civilians but rarely comments on individual strikes.

Gaza's Health Ministry says over 41,000 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war. It does not say how many were fighters, but says a little over half were women and children.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 of the captives are still being held in Gaza, and a third of them are believed to be dead.

Airlines in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt cancel flights to Lebanon

Airlines in the United Arab Emirates, a key East-West travel hub, canceled flight Tuesday to Lebanon over the ongoing cross-border fire between Israel and Hezbollah.

Long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad canceled flights, as did FlyDubai, the low-cost carrier.

The United Arab Emirates, which reached a diplomatic recognition deal with Israel in 2020, is home to a large Lebanese population.

Egypt's flagship airliner also canceled its flights to Lebanon on Tuesday. EgyptAir operates two flights daily between Cairo and Beirut. It said the cancellation will stay in place until "the signal stabilizes."

Also Tuesday, Israeli media reported that Wizz Air, British Airways, Iberia and Azerbaijan Airlines were among several airlines to cancel flights to Israel's major airport, Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv.

Israel and Hezbollah renew fire after the deadliest day in Lebanon since 2006

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Israel and Hezbollah traded strikes again Tuesday as the death toll from a massive Israeli bombardment climbed to nearly 560 people and thousands fled from southern Lebanon with the two sides on the brink of all-out war.

Displaced families slept in shelters hastily set up in schools in Beirut and the coastal city of Sidon. With hotels quickly booked to capacity or rooms priced beyond the means of many families, those who did not find shelter slept in their cars, in parks or along the seaside.

Issa Baydoun fled the village of Shihine in southern Lebanon when it came under bombing and came to Beirut in a convoy of cars with his extended family. They slept in the vehicles on the side of the road after discovering that the shelters were full.

"We struggled a lot on the road just to get here," he said.

Baydoun rejected Israel's contention that it hit only military targets.

"We evacuated our homes because Israel is targeting civilians and attacking them," he said. "That's why we left our homes, to protect our children."

Well-wishers offered up empty apartments or rooms in their houses in social media posts, while volunteers set up a kitchen at an empty gas station in Beirut to cook meals for the displaced.

In the eastern city of Baalbek, the state-run National News Agency reported that lines formed at bakeries and gas stations as residents rushed to stock up on essential supplies in anticipation of another round of strikes on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the border crossing with Syria saw massive traffic jams as a result of people escaping from Lebanon to the neighboring country.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah said it launched missiles overnight at eight sites in Israel, including an explosives factory in Zichron, 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the border.

The Israeli military said Tuesday morning that 55 rockets were fired from Lebanon into northern Israel, setting fires and damaging buildings. Military officials said they carried out dozens of airstrikes on Hezbollah targets, including on a cell that fired rockets overnight, and that tanks and artillery struck targets near the border.

Galilee Medical Center, a northern Israel hospital, said that two patients arrived with minor head injuries from a rocket falling near their car. Several others were being treated for light wounds from running to shelters and traffic accidents when alarms sounded.

The renewed exchange came after Monday's barrages racked up the highest death toll in any single day

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in Lebanon since Israel and Hezbollah fought a bruising monthlong war in 2006.

Israel said it targeted sites where Hezbollah had stored weapons. Data from American fire-tracking satellites analyzed Tuesday by The Associated Press showed the wide range of Israeli airstrikes aimed at southern Lebanon, covering an area of over 1,700 square kilometers (650 square miles).

NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System typically is used to track wildfires across rural areas of the U.S. However, it can also be used to track the flashes and burning that follow airstrikes. That's particularly true when an airstrike ignites flammable material on the ground, such as munitions or fuel.

Data from Monday showed significant fires breaking out across southern Lebanon and in the Bekaa Valley. Several areas showed intense, multiple fires, including near the southern coastal town of Naqoura, which hosts a base for the U.N. peacekeeping mission in southern Lebanon known as UNIFIL. Others were in mountainous rural areas or villages.

The sides appear on the verge of war again after tensions have steadily escalated over the last 11 months. Hezbollah has been firing rockets, missiles and drones into northern Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians and its ally Hamas, a fellow Iran-backed militant group, in Gaza.

Israel has responded with increasingly heavy airstrikes and the targeted killing of Hezbollah commanders while threatening a wider operation.

Thousands of Lebanese fled the southern part of the country on Monday after the Israeli military ordered people to evacuate areas where it accuses Hezbollah of positioning rocket launchers and other weapons, in the biggest exodus since the monthlong war waged 18 years ago.

The Lebanese Health Ministry said the strikes since Monday killed at least 558 people, including 50 children and 94 women, and wounded more than 1,800 people — a staggering one-day toll for a country still reeling from a deadly attack on communication devices last week.

Nearly a year of cross-border fire had already emptied out communities near the border, displacing tens of thousands of people on both sides. Israel has vowed to do whatever it takes to ensure its citizens can return to their homes in the north, while Hezbollah has said it will keep up its rocket attacks until there is a cease-fire in Gaza, which appears increasingly remote.

The Israeli military says it has no immediate plans for a ground invasion but is prepared for one, after moving thousands of troops who had been serving in Gaza to the northern border. It says Hezbollah has launched some 9,000 rockets and drones into Israel since last October, including 250 on Monday alone.

The military said Israeli warplanes struck 1,600 Hezbollah targets Monday, destroying cruise missiles, long- and short-range rockets and attack drones, including weapons concealed in private homes. Lebanese officials have said many of the victims were civilians, including more than 90 women and children killed.

Israel estimates Hezbollah has some 150,000 rockets and missiles, including guided missiles and long-range projectiles capable of striking anywhere in Israel.

Monday's escalation came after a particularly heavy exchange of fire Sunday. Hezbollah launched around 150 rockets, missiles and drones into northern Israel in retaliation for strikes that killed a top commander and dozens of fighters.

Last week, thousands of communications devices, used mainly by Hezbollah members, exploded in different parts of Lebanon, killing 39 people and wounding nearly 3,000, many of them civilians. Lebanon blamed Israel, but Israel did not confirm or deny responsibility.

Tropical Storm John strikes Mexico's southern Pacific coast with 'life-threatening' flood potential

By LUIS ALBERTO CRUZ Associated Press

PUERTO ESCONDIDO, Mexico (AP) — Tropical Storm John struck Mexico's southern Pacific coast with life-threatening flood potential after growing into a major hurricane in a matter of hours.

It came ashore near the town of Punta Maldonado late Monday night as a Category 3 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 120 mph (190 kph). It weakened back to tropical storm status early Tuesday

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with maximum sustained wind speeds of 70 mph (110 kph) and was expected to weaken rapidly.

Still, the United States National Hurricane Center warned that the storm's slow pace and heavy rains could cause potentially catastrophic flash flooding and mudslides in some Mexican states.

"Seek higher ground, protect yourselves and do not forget that life is the most important thing; material things can be replaced. We are here," Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador wrote on the social media platform X.

The storm was expected to batter Punta Maldonado and the nearby tourist hubs Acapulco and Puerto Escondido before being weakened over the high terrain inland.

The center said heavy rainfall over coastal southwest Mexico through the week was likely to cause "significant and possible catastrophic, life-threatening flash flooding and mudslides" in parts of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero states.

Monday's unexpected surge in strength caught scientists, authorities and residents of the area by surprise, something AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Matt Benz attributed to warmer oceans, which add fuel to hurricanes.

As a result, surprise surges in hurricanes' strength have become increasingly common, Benz said.

"These are storms that we haven't really experienced before," he said. "Rapid intensification has occurred more frequently in modern times as opposed to back in the historical record. So that's telling us there's something going on there."

Residents were tense in Oaxaca's coastal cities as the forecast shifted and authorities responded.

Laura Velázquez, the federal coordinator of civil protection, told residents of Pacific coastal cities they should evacuate their homes and head to shelters in order to "protect theirs and their family's lives."

"It's very important that all citizens in the coastal zone ... take preventive measures," Velázquez said.

Ana Aldai, a 33-year-old employee of a restaurant on the shores of the tourist hub Puerto Escondido, said businesses in the area began closing after authorities ordered the suspension of all work on the area's main beaches.

The governments of Guerrero and Oaxaca states said classes would be suspended Tuesday in a number of coastal zones.

Oaxaca's governor said the state government evacuated 3,000 people and set up 80 shelters. It also said it sent out 1,000 military and state personnel to address the emergency.

Videos on social media from Puerto Escondido showed flip-flop-clad tourists walking through heavy rain and fishers pulling their boats out of the water. Strong rains in previous days have already left some roads in the region in a precarious position.

The storm is bleak news for the region, which was walloped by Otis, a similar rapidly intensifying hurricane, in 2023.

Otis devastated the resort city of Acapulco, where residents had little warning of the strength of what was about to hit them. One of the most rapidly intensifying hurricanes ever seen, scientists at the time said it was a product of changing climate conditions.

Otis blew out power in the city for days, left bodies scattered on the coast and desperate family members searching for lost loved ones. Much of the city was left in a state of lawlessness and thousands scavenged in stores, scrambled for food and water.

The government of López Obrador received harsh criticism for its slow response to Otis, but authorities have since pledged to pick up their speed.

President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum said her government planned to work on improving an early alert system, similar to what the country has with earthquakes.

Through Thursday, John is expected to produce 15 to 30 centimeters (6 to 12 inches) of rain across coastal areas of Chiapas state with more in isolated areas. In areas along and near the Oaxaca coast to southeast Guerrero, between 25 and 50 centimeters (10 and 20 inches) of rain with isolated higher totals can be expected through Thursday.

"You're going to feel the impacts of the storm probably for the next couple of weeks to a couple of months," meteorologist Benz added.

World leaders meet under shadow of global divisions, 3 wars and possible Mideast conflict

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — World leaders will open their annual meeting at the U.N. General Assembly Tuesday under the shadow of increasing global divisions, major wars in Gaza, Ukraine and, Sudan and the threat of an even larger conflict in the wider Middle East.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres previewed his opening "State of the World" speech to presidents, prime ministers, monarchs and ministers at Sunday's "Summit of the Future," saying "our world is heading off the rails — and we need tough decisions to get back on track."

He pointed to conflicts "raging and multiplying, from the Middle East to Ukraine and Sudan, with no end in sight" and to the global security system, which he said is "threatened by geopolitical divides, nuclear posturing, and the development of new weapons and theaters of war."

He also cited huge inequalities, the lack of an effective global system to respond to emerging and even existential threats, and the devastating impact of climate change.

One notable moment at Tuesday's opening assembly meeting: U.S. President Joe Biden's likely final major appearance on the world stage, a platform he has tread upon for decades.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters last week that the U.S. focus in the assembly will be on ending "the scourge of war," lamenting that roughly 2 billion people live in conflict-affected areas.

But she also said: "The most vulnerable around the world are counting on us to make progress, to make change, to bring about a sense of hope for them."

Among other speakers on opening day are Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, King Abdullah II of Jordan, and Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian.

The Iranian leader accused Israel on Monday of seeking a wider war in the Middle East and laying "traps" to lead his country into a broader conflict. He pointed to the deadly explosions of pagers, walkie-talkies and other electronic devices in Lebanon last week, which he blamed on Israel, and the assassination of Hamas' political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31, hours after Pezeshkian's inauguration.

"We don't want to fight," the Iranian president said. "It's Israel that wants to drag everyone into war and destabilize the region. ... They are dragging us to a point where we do not wish to go." Iran supports both Hamas in Gaza and Lebanon's Hezbollah militants.

International Rescue Committee President David Miliband recalled that at the San Francisco conference in 1945 where the U.N. was established, then-U.S. President Harry Truman pleaded with delegates to reject the premise that "might makes right" and reverse it to "right makes might," which was enshrined in the U.N. Charter.

"Almost 80 years later, we have seen the terrible consequences of the failure to flip this equation," Miliband said. "In contexts like Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, might is making right."

Facing mounting global humanitarian needs, unchecked conflict, unmitigated climate change and growing extreme poverty, Miliband challenged world leaders asking: "How will you strengthen, not weaken, the principles of the U.N. Charter for the next 80 years?"

The assembly's annual meeting, which ends on Sept. 30, followed the two-day Summit of the Future, which adopted a blueprint aimed at bringing the world's increasing divided nations together to tackle the challenges of the 21st century from conflicts and climate change to artificial intelligence and women's rights.

The 42-page "Pact for the Future" challenges leaders of the 193 U.N. member nations to turn promises into real actions that make a difference to the lives of the world's more than 8 billion people.

"We are here to bring multilateralism back from the brink," Guterres said.

By adopting the pact, leaders unlocked the door, he said. "Now it is our common destiny to walk through it. That demands not just agreement, but action."

At last year's U.N. global gathering, Ukraine and its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, took center stage. But as the first anniversary of Hamas' deadly attack in southern Israel approaches on Oct. 7, the spotlight is certain to be on the war in Gaza and escalating violence across the Israeli-Lebanon border, which is

now threatening to spread to the wider Middle East.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is scheduled to speak Thursday morning and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday afternoon.

Zelenskyy will get the spotlight twice. He will speak Tuesday afternoon at a high-level meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by the United States, France, Japan, Malta, South Korea and Britain, whose foreign ministers are expected to attend. He will also address the General Assembly on Wednesday morning.

Israeli strikes kill 492 in Lebanon's deadliest day of conflict since 2006

By BASSAM HATOUM, MELANIE LIDMAN and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press
MARJAYOUN, Lebanon (AP) — Israeli strikes Monday on Lebanon killed more than 490 people, including more than 90 women and children, Lebanese authorities said, in the deadliest barrage since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. The Israeli military warned residents in southern and eastern Lebanon to evacuate ahead of its widening air campaign against Hezbollah.

Thousands of Lebanese fled the south, and the main highway out of the southern port city of Sidon was jammed with cars heading toward Beirut in the biggest exodus since 2006.

Lebanon's health ministry said the strikes killed 492 people, including 35 children and 58 women, and wounded 1,645 people — a staggering one-day toll for a country still reeling from a deadly attack on communication devices last week.

In a recorded message, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged Lebanese civilians to heed Israeli calls to evacuate, saying "take this warning seriously."

"Please get out of harm's way now," Netanyahu said. "Once our operation is finished, you can come back safely to your homes."

Israel's military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said the army will do "whatever is necessary" to push Hezbollah from Lebanon's border with Israel.

Hagari claimed Monday's widespread airstrikes had inflicted heavy damage on Hezbollah. But he would not give a timeline for the operation and said Israel was prepared to launch a ground invasion of Lebanon if needed.

"We are not looking for wars. We are looking to take down the threats," he said. "We will do whatever is necessary to do to achieve this mission."

Hagari said Hezbollah has launched some 9,000 rockets and drones into Israel since last October, including 250 on Monday alone.

The military said Israeli warplanes struck 1,600 Hezbollah targets Monday, destroying cruise missiles, long- and short-range rockets and attack drones. The spokesman said many were hidden in residential areas, showing photos of what he said were weapons concealed in private homes.

"Hezbollah has turned southern Lebanon into a war zone," he told a news conference.

Israel estimates Hezbollah has some 150,000 rockets and missiles, including guided missiles and long-range projectiles capable of striking anywhere in Israel.

Earlier Monday evening, the Israeli military said it had carried out a targeted strike in Beirut. It did not give details. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported three missiles hit southern Beirut's Beir al-Abed neighborhood. Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV said six people were wounded.

Lebanese Health Minister Firass Abiad said the earlier strikes hit hospitals, medical centers and ambulances. The government ordered schools and universities to close across most of the country and began preparing shelters for the displaced.

Some strikes hit residential areas in the south and the eastern Bekaa Valley. One hit a wooded area as far away as Byblos, more than 80 miles (130 kilometers) from the border north of Beirut.

Israel said it was expanding the airstrikes to include areas of the valley along Lebanon's eastern border with Syria. Hezbollah has long had an established presence in the valley, where the group was founded in 1982 with the help of Iran's Revolutionary Guards in the wake of Israel's invasion and occupation of Lebanon.

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Israel's military chief, Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, said Israel was preparing its "next phases" of operations against Hezbollah, and that its airstrikes were "proactive," targeting Hezbollah infrastructure built over the past 20 years.

Halevi said the goal was to allow displaced Israelis to return to their homes in northern Israel.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah said it fired dozens of rockets toward Israel, including at military bases. It also targeted for a second day the facilities of the Rafael defense firm, headquartered in Haifa.

The evacuation warnings were the first of their kind in nearly a year of steadily escalating conflict and came after a particularly heavy exchange of fire Sunday. Hezbollah launched around 150 rockets, missiles and drones into northern Israel in retaliation for strikes that killed a top commander and dozens of fighters.

The increasing strikes and counterstrikes have raised fears of all-out war, even as Israel battles Hamas in Gaza and tries to negotiate the release of scores of hostages taken in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. Hezbollah has vowed to continue its strikes in solidarity with Hamas, a fellow Iran-backed militant group.

A spokeswoman for President Joe Biden said the administration was concerned about what's happening between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon and insisted that getting a cease-fire deal between Israel and Gaza was key to easing tensions in the region.

"It's in everyone's interest to resolve it quickly and diplomatically," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters traveling with Biden to New York, where he is to deliver his final address to the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday.

A State Department official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss the private diplomatic efforts, said the U.S. and numerous other countries were keen to present an "off-ramp" for both Israel and Hezbollah to reduce tensions and prevent an all-out war.

The U.S. has "concrete ideas" for restoring calm that it will present to allies and partners at this week's U.N. General Assembly, the official said. He wouldn't detail what the "concrete ideas" were because he said they had yet to be presented to allies and partners for what he termed a "stress test" for their likelihood of success.

U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon near the Israeli border, meanwhile, have stopped their patrols and are staying in their bases "given the volume of exchange of fire," a U.N. spokesman said. Stéphane Dujarric told reporters that U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres was "alarmed" at the escalating violence and large number of civilian casualties reported in Lebanon.

Monday's death toll far surpassed that of Beirut's devastating port explosion in 2020, when hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate stored in a warehouse detonated, killing at least 218 people and wounding more than 6,000.

The Lebanese Health Ministry asked hospitals in southern Lebanon and the eastern Bekaa Valley to postpone non-urgent surgeries to treat people wounded by "Israel's expanding aggression on Lebanon."

On Monday, residents received text messages reading: "If you are in a building housing weapons for Hezbollah, move away from the village until further notice," Lebanese media reported.

Lebanon's information minister, Ziad Makary, said his office in Beirut had received a recorded message telling people to leave the building.

"This comes in the framework of the psychological war implemented by the enemy," Makary said, and urged people "not to give the matter more attention than it deserves."

Communities on both sides of the border have largely emptied because of the near-daily exchanges of fire.

Israel has accused Hezbollah of transforming entire communities in the south into militant bases, with hidden rocket launchers and other infrastructure. That could lead the Israeli military to wage an especially heavy bombing campaign, even if no ground forces move in.

An Israeli airstrike on a Beirut suburb on Friday killed a top Hezbollah military commander and more than a dozen fighters, as well as dozens of civilians, including women and children.

Last week, thousands of communications devices, used mainly by Hezbollah members, exploded in different parts of Lebanon, killing 39 people and wounding nearly 3,000, many of them civilians. Lebanon blamed Israel, but Israel did not confirm or deny responsibility.

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Hezbollah began firing into Israel a day after the Oct. 7 attack in what it said was an attempt to pin down Israeli forces to help Palestinian fighters in Gaza. Israel has retaliated with airstrikes, and the conflict has steadily intensified.

Hezbollah has said it will keep up attacks until there is a cease-fire in Gaza, but that appears increasingly elusive as the war nears its anniversary.

Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Some 100 captives are still held in Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead, after most of the rest were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Israel's offensive has killed over 41,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between civilians and fighters. It says women and children make up a little over half of those killed. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Climate solutions: 2 kinds of ocean energy inch forward off the Oregon coast

By CLAIRE RUSH and JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

NEWPORT, Ore. (AP) — On a cloudy late August morning, Burke Hales was on a boat a mile off the central Oregon coast, pointing to a sandy beach along the forested shoreline. It was there, the Oregon State University oceanography professor said, that the subsea cables from the first large wave energy test site in the continental U.S. will connect to land — and ultimately the local power grid.

"This is the highest power — probably the most energetic — wave condition of any of the test sites out there," he said, as the high swells known to pound the Oregon coast rocked the boat.

The coastal waters of Oregon are shaping up to be key for advances in two forms of renewable energy: wave power and wind turbines that float. The way electricity is traditionally made is a major cause of climate change, so clean alternatives are key to addressing it.

Wave energy is at an earlier stage than floating wind, but the potential could be big. According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, marine energy, a term researchers use to refer to power generated from tides, currents or waves, is the world's largest untapped energy resource. The Biden administration announced Monday it will invest over \$112 million to boost the design, fabrication and testing of wave energy devices.

The work on floating wind turbines is further along, but still early, and encountering resistance.

The only way to build offshore wind power on the West Coast is to use floating turbines. The ocean is too deep to affix traditional turbines to the seafloor, said Mark Severy, a research engineer at the Pacific Northwest National Lab who works on addressing challenges to offshore wind development in the U.S.

So far there are only a handful of floating offshore arrays across the globe, mostly small pilots in Europe and China, testing the technology to pave the way for larger projects. The largest is Hywind Tampen, 11 turbines that supply electricity to oil and gas fields in the Norwegian North Sea. Floating wind has not yet been constructed in the United States.

California awarded the first-ever leases in the U.S. to develop commercial-scale floating wind farms in 2022. The federal government issued the nation's first floating offshore wind research lease to the state of Maine in August, and Oregon's commercial lease sale is next month. These are areas where the wind blows fast and hard, meaning a single turbine can generate more electricity than in areas where the wind isn't as strong.

In Oregon, opposition from tribes, fishermen and coastal residents highlights some of the challenges with renewable energy offshore.

The opposition is largely directed at the U.S. government's plans for floating wind in two areas covering 305 square miles (790 square kilometers) off Oregon's southern coast.

The two areas identified by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, or BOEM, are 32 miles (52 kilometers) off the coast of Coos Bay and 18 miles (29 kilometers) from the small city of Brookings, near the California state line.

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Some in those communities are concerned that the construction will harm sea life, marine habitat, culturally important areas and views of the ocean. While the wind areas are miles from land, the lights used to illuminate the turbines at night would be visible from the shore, according to a BOEM visual simulation.

Two coastal counties will ask voters in November whether they oppose the development of floating offshore wind. And the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians — whose culture is tied to the ocean — sued the federal government ahead of its upcoming lease sale.

BOEM says it has engaged with tribes. But tribes in Oregon and California have expressed frustration with what they say is a lack of consultation.

John Ogan, executive director of natural resources for the Coquille Indian Tribe on the southern Oregon coast, said that tribal members during meetings with the federal government were “talked at without having our issues or our concerns or requests for information responded to in a substantive way.”

“We have sacred sites,” he said. “Tribal people will never see a sunset the same way, as they have for 10,000-plus years, ever again.”

Oregon’s wave energy test site hasn’t sparked similar resistance. Hales, the Oregon State professor serving as chief scientist for the site, attributed this to researchers working together with fishermen to identify the location for the site early in the permitting process.

Wave energy test sites allow companies to deploy devices they’ve designed in a real-world environment to see how they fare. While the PacWave South site in Oregon isn’t the first grid-connected wave energy test site in the nation — the U.S. Navy has one in Hawaii — it will be the first to be connected to the continental U.S. grid.

Globally there are roughly 40 operational, grid-connected marine energy projects, according to the PRIMRE data portal developed by three national laboratories on behalf of the U.S. Energy Department, or DOE. Some bob like buoys or sit on the sea floor. Some look like submerged wind turbines.

With waves topping 20 feet (6 meters) possible at the Oregon test site in winter, Hales estimates its peak capacity will be 20 megawatts — enough to power some 2,000 homes.

One reason wave energy is still in its infancy and not yet competitive with wind, solar and geothermal power is because it’s challenging for companies to develop projects that can withstand the harshest ocean conditions where the waves or currents are the strongest, then convert that movement to electricity efficiently and affordably.

“A huge part of this operation is survivability at sea,” Hales said. “We’re putting devices made of metal into salt water. They’re generating electricity. Being able to do that without suffering extensive corrosion is high risk.”

Companies also have to consider how devices would affect sea life, he said. Gray whales, sea lions, seals and sea birds abound on the Oregon coast.

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek has been working to ease tensions over wind development in her state and acknowledged that the federal government’s process for developing it “hasn’t started off on the right foot.” But she said the state must explore renewable energy options — including floating offshore wind — in order to meet its climate goals.

“In Oregon, we are working towards clean electricity, 100% clean electricity, by 2040. That means what we’re doing now, we have to do more of, and we need to put new options on the table. And that means offshore floating wind as a possibility,” she said.

“This is an opportunity. It’s also a challenge,” she added. “But we have to try.”

Brick by brick, Morocco rebuilds 12th-century mosque destroyed by 2023 earthquake

By SAM METZ Associated Press

TINMEL, Morocco (AP) — The hand-carved domes and brick-laid arches had almost all been put back together when an earthquake shook Morocco so violently that they caved in on themselves and crashed to the earth.

After nearly 900 years, the Great Mosque of Tinmel lay in pieces — its minaret toppled, its prayer hall full of rubble, its outer walls knocked over.

But even in ruins, it remained holy ground for the residents of Tinmel. Villagers carried the sheet-laden bodies of the 15 community members killed in the quake down the hillside and placed them in front of the decimated mosque.

Among the mourners was Mohamed Hartatouch, who helped carry the remains of his son Abdelkrim. A 33-year-old substitute teacher, he died under bricks and collapsed walls while the village waited a day and a half for rescue crews to arrive.

“It looked like a storm. I wasn’t able to feel anything,” the grieving father said, remembering the day after the quake.

One year later, the rubble near Hartatouch’s half-standing home has been swept aside and Tinmel residents are eager to rebuild their homes and the mosque. They say the sacred site is a point of pride and source of income in a region where infrastructure and jobs were lacking long before the earthquake hit.

“It’s our past,” Redwan Aitsalah, a 32-year-old construction worker, said the week before the earthquake’s anniversary as he reconstructed his home overlooking the mosque.

The September 2023 quake left a path of destruction that will take Morocco years to recover from. It killed nearly 3,000 people, knocked down almost 60,000 homes and leveled at least 585 schools. The damage will cost about \$12.3 billion to rebuild, according to government estimates.

Stretches of road were left unnavigable, including Tizi N’Test, the steep mountain pass that weaves from Marrakech to Tinmel and some of the hardest-hit villages near the earthquake’s epicenter.

Workers are now sifting through the rubble searching for the mosque’s puzzle pieces. They are stacking useable bricks and sorting the fragments of remaining decorative elements arch by arch and dome by dome, preparing to rebuild the mosque using as much of the remains as possible.

Though incomparable to the human loss and suffering, the restoration effort is among Morocco’s priorities as it attempts to rebuild.

The country’s Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Ministry of Culture have recruited Moroccan architects, archaeologists and engineers to oversee the project. To assist, the Italian government has sent Moroccan-born architect Aldo Giorgio Pezzi, who had also consulted on Casablanca’s Hassan II Mosque, one of Africa’s largest.

“We will rebuild it based on the evidence and remains that we have so it returns to how it was,” Morocco’s Minister of Islamic Affairs Ahmed Toufiq told The Associated Press.

The Great Mosque was a marvel of North African architecture with lobed arches, hand-carved moldings and the adobe-style bricks made of rammed earth used to construct most the area’s structures.

It was undergoing an 18-month-long restoration project when the quake struck, causing its ornate domes and pillars to cave in. Its clay-colored remnants lay in pieces beneath scaffolding erected by restoration workers from villages throughout the region, five of whom also died.

“The mosque withstood centuries. It’s the will of God,” Nadia El Bourakkadi, the site’s conservationist, told local media. The temblor leveled it months before repairs and renovations were to be completed.

Like in many of the area’s villages, residents of Tinmel today live in plastic tents brought in as temporary shelter post-earthquake. Some are there because it feels safer than their half-ruined homes, others because they have nowhere else to go.

Officials have issued more than 55,000 reconstruction permits for villagers to build new homes, including for most of the homes in Tinmel. The government has distributed financial aid in phases. Most households

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with destroyed homes have received an initial \$2,000 installment of rebuilding aid, but not more.

Many have complained that isn't enough to underwrite the initial costs of rebuilding. Less than 1,000 have completed rebuilding, according to the government's own figures.

Despite the extent of their personal losses, Moroccans are also mourning the loss of revered cultural heritage. Centuries-old mosques, shrines, fortresses and lodges are scattered throughout the mountains. Unlike Tinnel, many have long been neglected as Morocco focuses its development efforts elsewhere.

The country sees Tinnel as the cradle of one of its most storied civilizations. The mosque served as a source of inspiration for widely visited sacred sites in Marrakech and Seville. Pilgrims once trekked through the High Atlas to pay their respects and visit. Yet centuries ago it fell into disrepair as political power shifted to Morocco's larger cities and coastline.

"It was abandoned by the state, but materials were never taken from it," said Mouhcine El Idrissi, an archaeologist working with Morocco's Ministry of Culture. "People here have long respected it as a witness to their glorious and spiritual past."

Some of the historic sites of the High Atlas have long been a lure to tourists. But the earthquake shone a spotlight on the vast disparities plaguing the primarily agricultural region. Long marginalized, poverty and illiteracy rates are higher than the nationwide average, according to census data and an October 2023 government report on the five earthquake-hit provinces.

"The mountainous areas most affected were those already suffering from geographical isolation," Civil Coalition for the Mountain, a group of Moroccan NGOs, said in a statement on the earthquake's anniversary. "The tragedy revealed structural differences, and a situation caused by development policies that have always kept the mountains outside the scope of their objectives."

"There's a Morocco that exists in Rabat and Marrakech, but we're talking about another Morocco that's in the mountains," added Najia Ait Mohannad, the group's regional coordinator. "Right now, the most urgent need is rebuilding houses."

The government has promised "a well-thought-out, integrated and ambitious program" for the reconstruction and general upgrading of the affected regions, both in terms of infrastructure reinforcement and improving public services. It has also pledged to rebuild "in harmony with the region's heritage and respecting its unique architectural features" and "to respect the dignity and customs" of the population.

For the village's residents, the landmark could stand as a symbol of reinvestment in one of Morocco's poorest regions, as well as a tribute to a glorious past.

For now, it stands in disrepair, its enchanting ruins upheld by wooden scaffolding, while down the hill, villagers hang laundry and grow vegetables amid the remnants of their former homes and the plastic tents where they now live.

Rookie Jayden Daniels nearly flawless for Commanders in 38-33 win over Bengals

By MITCH STACY AP Sports Writer

CINCINNATI (AP) — Jayden Daniels stood in the pocket against an all-out blitz, took a hit from Bengals safety Geno Stone and launched a perfect ball toward Terry McLaurin in the corner of the end zone. McLaurin hauled it in and kept both feet in bounds while being tackled.

In his third NFL game and first in prime time, Daniels couldn't miss.

The No. 2 overall draft pick threw for two touchdowns and ran for a score in a remarkably efficient performance, and the Commanders stunned Joe Burrow and the Cincinnati Bengals 38-33 on Monday night.

"He's a real cool customer, and he's got a real poise about him," Washington coach Dan Quinn said of his quarterback.

Daniels finished 21 of 23 for 254 yards, setting an NFL rookie record for completion percentage at 91.3%. The Commanders (2-1) scored on every possession except for kneel-downs at the end of each half and have not punted or turned the ball over in their last two games.

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"That's crazy," Daniels said of the record. He said he couldn't remember being that efficient in his passing at any level.

Neither Washington nor Cincinnati punted or had a turnover, the first time that's happened in a game in the Super Bowl era.

Burrow threw for a season-best 324 yards and three scores, but the Bengals (0-3) simply couldn't keep up. Cincinnati is off to its worst start since dropping its first 11 games on the way to a 2-14 finish in 2019.

Daniels' first career touchdown pass was a 1-yard toss to eligible tackle Trent Scott to start the second half, the second straight game in which the Bengals gave up a TD to a lineman.

"They were all discombobulated on defense," Daniels said. "We got a sneaky one."

The Commanders were clinging to a 31-26 lead when Daniels connected with McLaurin from 27 yards out with 2:10 remaining for the game-sealing score.

"I put in the work," said Daniels, last year's Heisman Trophy winner at LSU. "What's done in the dark will always come to light. I just know that I prepare for these moments week in and week out. I just have to go out there and play football and execute."

In the first half, Washington got rushing touchdowns from Brian Robinson Jr., Austin Ekeler and Daniels.

McLaurin had four receptions for 100 yards.

The Bengals couldn't reach the end zone on three first-half drives, with Evan McPherson kicking two field goals and missing another.

Meanwhile, Washington didn't have a drive that fell short of the end zone until early in the fourth quarter, when Austin Seibert kicked a 42-yard field goal to make it 31-20.

Cincinnati got within five points on Burrow's second TD pass to Ja'Marr Chase, but the 2-point conversion failed.

Daniels then led a drive that ate up 7 1/2 minutes and ended with the toss to McLaurin, which had a completion probability of 10.3%, according to the NFL's Next Gen Stats.

Cincinnati scored on a 1-yard run by Zack Moss to cut the deficit to 38-33 with 40 seconds left, but McPherson's onside kick was unsuccessful.

Chase had six receptions for 118 yards and two TDs for the Bengals, who also got a touchdown catch by Andrei Iosivas.

"I knew that would be a difficult football team," Bengals coach Zac Taylor said. "They scored on every possession last week, and they scored on every possession this week. It was a dangerous team. They were ready for us. They dictated the flow of the game."

Daniels the competitor

Daniels said he wanted to show his competitive spirit in his first prime-time game.

"I want to compete on a high level," he said. "I'm just blessed to go out there each and every Sunday and do things that a lot of people in the world can't do. And Monday, or whenever we play."

Injuries

Commanders RB Ekeler left in the second half with a concussion.

Bengals OT Trent Brown was carted off the field with a right knee injury in the first half and didn't return.

Up next

Commanders: At Arizona on Sunday.

Bengals: At Carolina on Sunday.

Josh Allen throws 4 TD passes and the Bills roll to a 47-10 win over the unraveling Jaguars

By JOHN WAWROW AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) — Any concerns Josh Allen had about how the Bills would perform following a 10-day break were eased during a 10-play opening drive that ended with James Cook scoring on a 6-yard touchdown run.

Buffalo kept on scoring. Allen threw four touchdown passes and the Bills scored TDs on each of their five first-half drives in a 47-10 win over a misfiring Trevor Lawrence and the unraveling Jacksonville Jaguars on Monday night.

"It feels good. I'll tell you that," said Allen, whose 11 games with four TD passes set a team record, surpassing Hall of Famer Jim Kelly.

"I think this could have easily been a game where we had 10 days off and let up on the gas. But didn't sense that from our guys, a lot of urgency throughout the week," he said of a team that hadn't played since a 31-10 rout of Miami on Sept. 12. "We didn't win it today. We won it in the last 10 days."

Allen went 22 of 28 for 247 yards in the first 30 minutes alone, with completions to nine receivers. He only attempted two passes after halftime, finishing 23 of 30 for 263 yards before Mitchell Trubisky relieved him.

And he spread the wealth, completing touchdown passes to Dalton Kincaid, Keon Coleman, Khalil Shakir and Ty Johnson.

"Freak of nature, all those things," Shakir said of Allen, whose 230 touchdowns (passing, rushing and receiving) are one short of matching Patrick Mahomes for most by a player in his first seven NFL seasons.

Buffalo's defense limited Jacksonville to 70 yards, five first downs and a field goal in five first-half possessions. The game was essentially over when Allen completed a 16-yard TD pass to Johnson 19 seconds before halftime.

Safety Damar Hamlin contributed to the rout with his first career interception. He easily picked off Lawrence's overthrown pass intended for rookie Brian Thomas Jr. Five plays later, Allen completed a 27-yard TD pass to Shakir, who caught the ball at the 22 and broke two tackles running up the right sideline for the score.

Hamlin's interception came about 21 months after he went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated on the field in a Monday night game at Cincinnati.

"We all know my last game and how that game went," said Hamlin, a starter after spending last season as a backup. "So to be able to come all the way back from that, and have a special moment, it's all God."

The four-time defending AFC East champions are off to their first 3-0 start since 2020 and third since coach Sean McDermott took over in 2017. They have topped 30 points in each game.

The Jaguars are in free fall. They last opened 0-3 in 2021 under coach Urban Meyer, who was fired before the end of the season.

And if things couldn't go any worse for the Jaguars, mechanical issues led to their flight being delayed out of Buffalo, the team announced.

Jacksonville's latest defeat comes a week after Lawrence expressed his frustrations by saying "We suck right now" following an 18-13 loss to Cleveland. The Jaguars squandered leads of 14-0 and 17-7 in a season-opening loss at Miami.

On Monday, it was coach Doug Pederson's turn to question his team.

"It's really shocking. Very disappointed. You hate to say it, but the reality is we're not very good right now," Pederson said. "I need everybody to coach and play better. Let's leave it at that."

Lawrence finished 21 of 38 for 178 yards with a touchdown and interception. He's lost eight straight starts dating to last season, and hasn't won since he had 364 yards passing in a 24-21 victory at Houston on Nov. 26.

"I'm not playing my best right now and that's frustrating," Lawrence said. "It seems like everyone takes their turn in making a bad play at the wrong time, including myself. It seems really difficult to go forward. Can't find that rhythm right now. We all have our share in it."

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After opening the second half with a 6-yard touchdown pass to Brenton Strange, Lawrence's final two drives ended on downs.

He was yanked with 7:45 left and watched from the sideline with his hands on his collar as backup Mac Jones was sacked and lost a fumble three snaps into his first possession. That led to Ray Davis scoring on a 3-yard run.

More concerning is a Jaguars defense that couldn't find a way to stop Allen. The Bills gained 288 yards, posted 19 first downs and converted 6 of 8 third-down chances and both fourth-down opportunities in the first half alone.

Buffalo's 31-point lead at the half matched the third largest in team history, and its largest since leading Atlanta 38-7 on Nov. 22, 1992.

Von Miller had a sack to increase his total to 126 1/2 and move into a tie for 17th on the career list with Derrick Thomas, one ahead of Dwight Freeney.

Injuries

Jacksonville: CB Jarrian Jones did not return after hurting his left shoulder on Buffalo's opening drive. ... LB Foyesade Oluokun was ruled out with a foot injury. ... RT Anton Harrison was ruled out with a knee injury.

Bills: DB Cam Lewis returned after being evaluated for a head injury.

Up next

Jaguars: At Houston on Sunday.

Bills: Make their third straight prime-time appearance and open a stretch of three straight road games at Baltimore on Sunday night.

As Israel's fight with Hezbollah heats up, people of Gaza fear being forgotten

By JULIA FRANKEL and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

MUWASI, Gaza Strip (AP) — As the escalating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah grabs global attention, Palestinians in Gaza wonder: What will become of their plight after nearly a year of devastating war?

They are petrified that international concern has been diverted, and that a dark possibility looms: abandonment.

The families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza have the same worry.

Nezar Zaqout, one of some 1.9 million Palestinians forced to flee their homes since the Israel-Hamas war broke out, said he fears the fighting across the Israel-Lebanon border will overtake interest in the abysmal living conditions in Gaza and efforts to negotiate a cease-fire.

"We have become completely forgotten," said Zaqout, who is living in Khan Younis after fleeing from Gaza City months ago. "There is no news about us in the media."

Palestinians fret the miserable conditions in Gaza will become permanent. Ninety percent of the population is homeless, with hundreds of thousands in unsanitary tent camps struggling to find food and clean water.

"A year on, and no one cares about us. Every day there is bombing, every day there are martyrs, and every day there are injuries," said Saadi Abu Mustafa, who fled Khan Younis to Muwasi, a sprawling tent camp along Gaza's southern coast.

Since Hamas launched the war on Oct. 7, Israel's retaliatory invasion of Gaza has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians and wounded more than 95,000, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between civilians and militants, but says over half of the dead were women and children.

Months of intense air and ground assaults have razed entire housing blocks to the ground; researchers who study satellite imagery estimate nearly 60% of buildings in the Gaza Strip have likely been damaged since the start of the war.

Israel vowed to destroy Hamas after Oct. 7, when its militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 250 others. While it has been badly hobbled, the militant group backed by Iran remains in power.

Israel's government says about 70 of the 100 hostages are still presumed alive. Their families dread the

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government's focus on ending the war is fading.

"My biggest concern is that all the public's attention and the world's attention would be gone to the north," said Udi Goren, a relative of Tal Haimi, an Israeli killed on Oct. 7 and whose body was taken to Gaza. "Eventually the hostages will just be completely left alone without anyone to bring them out."

As the threat of all-out-war between Israel and Hezbollah has risen, Israel has drawn down its troop presence in Gaza to move key units to its northern border with Lebanon. Still, thousands of soldiers remain in Gaza, carrying out sporadic raids and preventing displaced Palestinians from returning home.

Daily strikes have continued in Gaza, too. An Israeli strike on a school-turned-shelter in northern Gaza Saturday killed at least 22 people and wounded 30 others, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Recent rains have made already difficult living conditions in the Israeli-designated "safe zone" of Muwasi unbearable. On Sunday, children living there walked barefoot through mud that reached above their ankles, while men dug through the muck to salvage precious canned goods and furniture.

"The entire kitchen in which we prepare food was filled with water. We did not know what to do. This is the beginning of winter. What will happen in the coming days?" said Rana Goza't, a mother displaced from Gaza City.

Others lamented water-logged mattresses and pleaded for international groups to help keep attention on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

"We hope that all peoples care about us and see where we have reached," said Enas Kollab, who relocated to Muwasi from northern Gaza.

A flurry of diplomatic activity to broker an agreement between Israel and Hamas appears to have subsided, with each side accusing the other of negotiating in bad faith and making untenable demands.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel must keep troops in two areas of Gaza to prevent Hamas from rearming. But Hamas has said it will not agree to any deal that allows Israeli troops to remain.

Hopes for a deal have further dimmed as the United States, a key mediator in the talks, appears to be losing the ability to influence its closest ally. In a trip to the region last week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited only Egypt because U.S. officials believed having him travel to Israel in support of a deal might cause Netanyahu to say something that would undermine mediation efforts.

No clear vision has emerged for postwar Gaza — or who will guide and govern that process — but one thing is clear: Rebuilding the territory will take decades. The U.N. estimated this summer that just removing some 40 million tons of rubble would take 15 years.

One of Titan submersible owner's top officials to testify before the Coast Guard

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

One of the top officials with the company that owned the experimental submersible that imploded en route to the wreckage of the Titanic is scheduled to testify in front of the Coast Guard on Tuesday.

Amber Bay, OceanGate's former director of administration, is one of the key witnesses Tuesday. OceanGate co-founder Stockton Rush was among the five people who died when the submersible imploded in June 2023.

The Coast Guard opened a public hearing earlier this month that is part of a high level investigation into the cause of the implosion. Some of the testimony has focused on the troubled nature of the company.

The co-founder of the company told the Coast Guard panel Monday that he hoped a silver lining of the disaster is that it will inspire a renewed interest in exploration, including the deepest waters of the world's oceans.

Businessman Guillermo Sohnlein, who helped found OceanGate with Rush, ultimately left the company before the Titan disaster.

"This can't be the end of deep ocean exploration. This can't be the end of deep-diving submersibles and I don't believe that it will be," said Sohnlein.

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Earlier in the hearing, former OceanGate operations director David Lochridge said he frequently clashed with Rush and felt the company was committed only to making money. "The whole idea behind the company was to make money," Lochridge testified. "There was very little in the way of science."

Sohnlein said Monday he had the opportunity to dive in Titan "many times" and he declined. He said his reasons included not wanting to take space away from potential customers. He also said when Rush reached a point when it was "time to put a human in there," he wanted to do it himself. Rush felt it was his design and said "if anything happens, I want it to impact me," Sohnlein said.

But Lochridge and other previous witnesses painted a picture of a troubled company that was impatient to get its unconventionally designed craft into the water. The accident set off a worldwide debate about the future of private undersea exploration.

The hearing is expected to run through Friday and include several more witnesses, some of whom were closely connected to the company.

Coast Guard officials noted at the start of the hearing that the submersible had not been independently reviewed, as is standard practice. That and Titan's unusual design subjected it to scrutiny in the undersea exploration community.

OceanGate, based in Washington state, suspended its operations after the implosion. The company has no full-time employees currently, but has been represented by an attorney during the hearing.

During the submersible's final dive on June 18, 2023, the crew lost contact after an exchange of texts about Titan's depth and weight as it descended. The support ship Polar Prince then sent repeated messages asking if Titan could still see the ship on its onboard display.

One of the last messages from Titan's crew to Polar Prince before the submersible imploded stated, "all good here," according to a visual re-creation presented earlier in the hearing.

When the submersible was reported overdue, rescuers rushed ships, planes and other equipment to an area about 435 miles (700 kilometers) south of St. John's, Newfoundland. Wreckage of the Titan was subsequently found on the ocean floor about 330 yards (300 meters) off the bow of the Titanic, Coast Guard officials said. No one on board survived.

OceanGate said it has been fully cooperating with the Coast Guard and NTSB investigations since they began. Titan had been making voyages to the Titanic wreckage site going back to 2021.

Conflicts in the Mideast and Ukraine will loom over Biden's farewell address at the United Nations
By AAMER MADHANI, MATTHEW LEE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to deliver his final address to the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday as Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon are edging toward all-out war and Israel's bloody operation against Hamas in Gaza nears the one-year mark.

Biden is expected to use his wide-ranging address to speak to the need to end the Middle East conflict and the 17-month-old civil war in Sudan and to highlight U.S. and Western allies' support for Kyiv since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

His appearance before the international body also offers Biden one of his last high-profile opportunities as president to make the case to keep up robust support for Ukraine, which could be in doubt if former President Donald Trump, who has scoffed at the cost of the war, defeats Vice President Kamala Harris in November.

Biden came to office promising to rejuvenate U.S. relations around the world and to extract the U.S. from "forever wars" in Afghanistan and Iraq that consumed American foreign policy over the last 20 years.

He achieved both goals. But his foreign policy legacy may ultimately be shaped by his administration's response to two of the biggest conflicts in Europe and the Middle East since World War II.

The Pentagon announced Monday that it was sending a small number of additional U.S. troops to the Middle East to supplement the roughly 40,000 already in the region, because of the rising tensions. All the while, the White House insists Israel and Hezbollah still have time to step back and de-escalate.

"It's in everyone's interest to resolve it quickly and diplomatically," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters as Biden made his way to New York on Monday ahead of his address at the U.N.

Biden administration officials will be speaking to their counterparts on the sidelines of the U.N. about

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ideas that they believe could prevent the fighting between Israel and Lebanon from escalating, according to two senior administration officials.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations, declined to offer any further details on the potential off-ramps. One of the officials said that other countries were also keen to present ideas to reduce tensions.

Biden had a hopeful outlook for the Middle East when he addressed the U.N. just a year ago. In that speech, Biden spoke of a "sustainable, integrated Middle East" coming into view.

At the time, economic relations between Israel and some of its Arab neighbors were improving with implementation of the Abraham Accords that Israel signed with Bahrain, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates during the Trump administration.

Biden's team helped resolve a long-running Israel-Lebanon maritime dispute that had held back gas exploration in the region. And Israel-Saudi normalization talks were progressing, a game-changing alignment for the region if a deal could be landed.

"I suffer from an oxymoron: Irish optimism," Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when they met on the sidelines of last year's U.N. gathering. He added, "If you and I, 10 years ago, were talking about normalization with Saudi Arabia ... I think we'd look at each other like, 'Who's been drinking what?'"

Eighteen days later, Biden's Middle East hopes came crashing down. Hamas militants stormed into Israel killing 1,200, taking some 250 hostage, and spurring a bloody war that has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians in Gaza and led the region into a complicated downward spiral.

Now, the conflict is threatening to metastasize into a multi-front war and leave a lasting scar on Biden's presidential legacy.

Israeli strikes on Lebanon on Monday killed more than 490 people, including more than 90 women and children, Lebanese authorities said, in the deadliest barrage since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

Israel has urged residents of southern Lebanon to evacuate from homes and other buildings where it claimed Hezbollah has stored weapons, saying the military would conduct "extensive strikes" against the militant group.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, has launched dozens of rockets, missiles and drones into northern Israel in retaliation for strikes last week that killed a top commander and dozens of fighters. Dozens were also killed last week and hundreds more wounded after hundreds of pagers and walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah militants exploded, a sophisticated attack that was widely believed to have been carried out by Israel.

Israel's leadership launched its counterattacks at a time of growing impatience with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah's persistent launching of missiles and drones across the Israel-Lebanon border after Hamas started the war with its brazen attack on Oct. 7.

The stepped-up Israeli operations were launched shortly after a White House senior adviser, Amos Hochstein, visited Israel last week and urged the Israelis to avoid an escalation that could risk spurring a regional conflict.

"Reality is intervening," said Bradley Bowman, a defense strategy and policy analyst at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington. "There are contrasting interests that transcend the politics and the politicians of the U.S.-Israel relationship. For Israel, Oct. 7 did happen, and the reality is they are facing a multifront threat and the current status quo is unacceptable. Sometimes to get to a better status quo, you have to escalate."

Biden has seemed more subdued in recent days about the prospects of Israel and Hamas agreeing to a temporary cease-fire and hostage deal. But he insists that he hasn't given up.

"If I ever say it's not realistic then I might as well leave," Biden said last week when asked if the chances for a deal were quickly fading under his watch. "A lot of things don't look realistic until we get them done."

Biden, in his address, also is expected to address ongoing Western support for Ukraine in its war with Russia. Biden helped galvanize an international coalition to back Ukraine with weapons and economic aid in response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's February 2022 assault on Ukraine.

Biden has managed to keep up American support in the face of rising skepticism from some Republican lawmakers — and Trump — about the cost of the conflict.

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At the same time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is pressing Biden to loosen restrictions on the use of Western-supplied long-range missiles so that Ukrainian forces can hit deeper in Russia.

So far Zelenskyy has not persuaded the Pentagon or White House to loosen those restrictions. The Defense Department has emphasized that Ukraine can already hit Moscow with Ukrainian-produced drones, and there is hesitation on the strategic implications of a U.S.-made missile potentially striking the Russian capital.

Putin has warned that Russia would be "at war" with the United States and its NATO allies if they allow Ukraine to use the long-range weapons.

Over the course of the war, Biden has previously resisted Ukrainian requests for certain weaponry, including M1 Abrams tanks and F-16 fighter jets, before agreeing to allow their use because of worries about escalating tensions with Russia.

Max Bergmann, a Russia analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the administration has slowly come around to giving Ukraine weapons that it initially deemed "unimaginably escalatory" at the start of the war.

"Allowing Ukraine to strike further into Russian territory with U.S. weapons would be another big step and the Biden administration is right to be deliberate," Bergmann said.

Biden and Harris are scheduled to hold separate meetings with Zelenskyy in Washington on Thursday. The Ukrainian leader also is expected to meet with Trump this week.

Hurricane John strikes Mexico's southern Pacific coast with 'life-threatening' flood potential

By LUIS ALBERTO CRUZ Associated Press

PUERTO ESCONDIDO, Mexico (AP) — Hurricane John struck Mexico's southern Pacific coast Monday night with fierce winds and heavy rainfall after strengthening from tropical storm to major hurricane in a matter of hours.

John's rapid intensification caught authorities off guard as they scrambled to update their guidance to residents and keep pace with the stronger storm.

It hit land as a Category 3 hurricane, pummeling a tourist hub of the country's Oaxaca state with maximum sustained winds of 120 mph (190 kph).

Shortly before the hurricane hit, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said "life-threatening" and storm surges and flash floods were already ravaging the Pacific coast near Oaxaca. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and other authorities urged people to take shelter.

"Seek higher ground, protect yourselves and do not forget that life is the most important thing; material things can be replaced. We are here," López Obrador wrote on the social media platform X.

John hit land near the town of Punta Maldonado and was also likely to batter nearby tourist hubs Acaapulco and Puerto Escondido before weakening inland.

The unexpected surge in strength caught scientists, authorities and residents of the area by surprise, something AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Matt Benz attributed to warmer oceans, which add fuel to the hurricanes.

As a result, surprise surges in hurricanes' strength have become increasingly common, Benz said.

"These are storms that we haven't really experienced before," he said. "Rapid intensification has occurred more frequently in modern times as opposed to back in the historical record. So that's telling us there's something going on there."

Residents were tense in Oaxaca's coastal cities as the forecast shifted and authorities responded.

Laura Velázquez, the federal coordinator of civil protection, told residents of Pacific coastal cities they should evacuate their homes and head to shelters in order to "protect theirs and their family's lives."

"It's very important that all citizens in the coastal zone ... take preventive measures," Velázquez said.

Ana Aldai, a 33-year-old employee of a restaurant on the shores of the tourist hub Puerto Escondido,

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said businesses in the area began closing after authorities ordered the suspension of all work on the area's main beaches.

The governments of Guerrero and Oaxaca states said classes would be suspended in a number of coastal zones on Tuesday.

Oaxaca's governor said the state government had evacuated 3,000 people and set up 80 shelters. It also said it sent out 1,000 military and state personnel to address the emergency.

Videos on social media from Puerto Escondido showed flip-flop-clad tourists walking through heavy rain and fishermen pulling their boats out of the water. Strong rains in previous days have already left some roads in the region in a precarious position.

Aldai said she was "a little bit distressed" because notice from authorities came quickly. "There was no opportunity to make the necessary purchases. That also distresses us," she said.

Benz, the meteorologist, expressed concern that the storm could slow once it hits land, leaving the storm hovering over the coastal zone, which could cause even greater damage.

The hurricane is bleak news for the region, which last year was walloped by Otis, a similar rapidly intensifying hurricane.

Otis devastated the resort city of Acapulco, where residents had little warning of the strength of what was about to hit them. One of the most rapidly intensifying hurricanes ever seen, scientists at the time said it was a product of changing climate conditions.

Otis blew out power in the city for days, left bodies scattered on the coast and desperate family members searching for lost loved ones. Much of the city was left in a state of lawlessness and thousands scavenged in stores, scrambled for food and water.

The government of López Obrador received harsh criticism for its slow response to Otis, but authorities have since pledged to pick up their speed.

President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum said her government planned to work on improving an early alert system, similar to what the country has with earthquakes.

Through Thursday, John is expected to produce 15 to 30 centimeters (6 to 12 inches) of rain across coastal areas of Chiapas state with more in isolated areas. In areas along and near the Oaxaca coast to southeast Guerrero, between 25 and 50 centimeters (10 and 20 inches) of rain with isolated higher totals can be expected through Thursday.

"You're going to feel the impacts of the storm probably for the next couple of weeks to a couple of months," meteorologist Benz added.

Pac-12 adding Utah State, in talks with Gonzaga, as Mountain West tries to hold UNLV, AP sources say

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

The Pac-12 is adding Utah State as its seventh member and is in discussions with basketball powerhouse Gonzaga to join the rebuilding conference in 2026, multiple people with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Monday.

In a whirlwind day of maneuvering by three leagues, Utah State and UNLV of the Mountain West became prime targets for the Pac-12 after a group of American Athletic Conference schools decided to stay put, following a pitch to join the rebuilding Conference of Champions.

Utah State, based in Logan, accepted the Pac-12's invitation, according to two people, but UNLV's decision was uncertain Monday night as Mountain West Commissioner Gloria Nevarez worked to keep the conference's remaining schools together.

The Mountain West received commitments from Air Force and San Jose State earlier in the day, according to two other people with knowledge of that conference's situation, but it was unclear if anything was binding if the rest of the remaining members were not on board. Air Force had been drawing interest from the AAC to join Army and Navy in that conference.

The other Mountain West schools include New Mexico, Wyoming, Nevada and Hawaii for football only.

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The people all spoke on condition of anonymity because both Pac-12's and Mountain West's strategy and internal discussions were not being made public.

The Pac-12's latest expansion addition, which was not immediately confirmed by the league, came hours after four American Athletic Conference schools announced they remained committed to the AAC.

Memphis, Tulane, South Florida and UTSA released a statement that made no mention of the Pac-12, but several people with knowledge of those talks told AP the conference had targeted those schools as potential new members.

"While we acknowledge receiving interest in our institutions from other conferences, we firmly believe that it is in our individual and collective best interests to uphold our commitment to each other," the schools said. "Together, we will continue to modernize the conference, elevate the student-athlete experience, achieve championship-winning successes, and build the future."

The Pac-12 began to restock for a 2026 relaunch two weeks ago by landing Boise State, Fresno State, San Diego State and Colorado State from the Mountain West to join Washington State and Oregon State, the only two Pac-12 schools left after a dramatic round of realignment took effect this summer.

The Pac-12 needed at least two more members in all sports to reach the eight required to be a recognized conference with access to NCAA championships and the College Football Playoff in 2026.

With Utah State on board, that's down to one and the conference is exploring options beyond just UNLV. Zags

Adding Gonzaga would give the Pac-12 one of the best men's basketball programs in the country. The Bulldogs have thrived in the West Coast Conference, reaching the NCAA Tournament every year it has been played since 1998, with two Final Four appearances and eight seasons of at least 30 victories. Gonzaga does not have a football program.

The school has in the past talked to the Big East about conference affiliation, and the Big 12 has discussed potentially adding Gonzaga to its strong men's basketball lineup, as it did with UConn earlier this year.

The Zags have also become a perennial tournament team in women's basketball.

Adding Gonzaga would still leave the Pac-12 in need of another football-playing member for CFP purposes. Money matters

One person with knowledge of the discussions between the Pac-12 and AAC schools said the conference's pitch included a projected \$12 million to \$15 million annual media-rights distribution to each school. The schools were also presented with options to join solely in football and basketball to alleviate travel costs associated with other sports programs making trips across one or two time zones.

All the Pac-12 schools are in the Mountain and Pacific time zones. The Pac-12 was targeting new members in the Central time zone as a way to potentially increase value for possible television partners.

Leaving the AAC would have been costly for the schools. The conference's bylaws require a 27-month notification for departing schools and a \$10 million exit fee. The required early departure would cost more.

When UConn left the AAC to return to the Big East it cost the school \$17 million, but the conference received \$25 million in a lump sum from SMU for an expedited move to the ACC this year.

The Pac-12 and its four newest members are already on the hook for about \$110 million in exit fees and penalties to the Mountain West, a potential windfall for that conference to share with schools that choose to stay or join.

Pac-12 Commissioner Teresa Gould has declined to detail how that cost will be shared by the incoming schools and conference, which is sitting on about \$250 million in revenue the previous iteration of the league was in line to receive this year and next.

A football scheduling agreement between Oregon State, Washington State and the Mountain West, which was not renewed for next year, includes a poaching penalty of more than \$10 million per school that increases as the number of schools the Pac-12 takes increases.

The penalty will be \$12 million for Utah State, and would increase to \$12.5 million if UNLV also joins. That's on top of a \$17 million exit fee.

Trump listens during a farming event in rural Pennsylvania, then threatens John Deere with tariffs

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON, JILL COLVIN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press SMITHTON, Pa. (AP) — Donald Trump sat in a large barn in rural Pennsylvania on Monday, asking questions of farmers and offering jokes but, in a rarity for his campaign events, mostly listening.

The bombastic former president was unusually restrained at an event about China's influence on the U.S. economy, a roundtable during which farmers and manufacturers expressed concerns about losing their way of life. Behind Trump were large green tractors and a sign declaring "Protect our food from China."

The event in Smithton, Pennsylvania, gave Trump a chance to drive his economic message against Vice President Kamala Harris, arguing that imposing tariffs and boosting energy production will lower costs. He highlighted Harris' reversal of a previous vow to ban fracking, a method of producing natural gas key to Pennsylvania's economy.

And he noted the tractors behind him were manufactured by John Deere, which announced in June it was moving skid steer and track loader manufacturing to Mexico and working to acquire land there for a new factory. Trump threatened the firm with a 200% tariff should he win back the presidency and it opted to export manufacturing to Mexico.

"If they want to build in the United States, there's no tariff," he added.

Trump opened the event with some of his usual themes. He declared that in 2020: "We had an election that didn't exactly work out too good. And it was a disgrace."

But he then did something unusual: He let others do most of the talking.

When one farmer said recent decades had seen scores of family farms shut down, Trump asked what that meant for overall production. The response was that, thanks to larger farms now operating, total production is actually up but "we are losing the small family farms."

"I know that, yes," Trump responded somberly. Later, he said, "I am not too worried about the people around this table" supporting him on Election Day, while jokingly adding, "But you never know."

In response to another participant's concerns about energy production, Trump said he didn't know that farmers were so energy-dependent. Another farmer talked about Chinese-subsidized businesses, prompting Trump to respond, "That's why we need tariffs."

After the same farmer finished her comments by praising him profusely, he intoned: "Amen. I agree."

Trump has embraced tariffs as he tries to appeal to working-class voters who oppose free-trade deals and the outsourcing of factories and jobs, and the event wasn't all about showing a more personable side.

Later, the former president took questions from reporters and got more customarily combative when asked whether he was concerned that tariffs on manufacturers like John Deere would increase costs for farmers. He said of Harris, "She is not going to be good for Pennsylvania."

Stopping at a neighborhood market prior to an evening rally in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Trump bought a bag of popcorn and quipped that, if elected, he may send for more from the Oval Office. He also gave a woman paying for groceries a \$100 bill, declaring that her total "just went down a hundred bucks."

The change didn't last long. At his evening rally, Trump reverted to form, using an abrasive message to energize mostly conservative, white, working-class voters.

"She's a one-woman economic wrecking ball and if she gets four more years, her radical agenda will smash the economy into rubble and grind your financial situation right into the dust," Trump said of Harris. He claimed, "She wants to take your guns away" even as the vice president has stressed being a gun owner herself.

"She's coming for your money. She's coming for your pensions, and she's coming for your savings," he said.

The former president urged supporters to "get out and vote" but scoffed at the idea of casting early ballots, suggesting without evidence that it allowed more time to commit fraud. Citing unknown sources, he declared, "They said, if we don't win this election, there may never be another election in this country."

At one point, the former president caught a glimpse of himself on the big screen and joked about a

"handsome man over there" before concluding, "Oh, it's Trump."

He also got especially candid with the rally audience saying, "I don't like anybody that doesn't like me, I'll be honest," before adding, "sounds childish" but "that's the way it is ... call it a personality defect."

It was a starkly different tone from Trump's first event in Smithton, which was hosted by the Protecting America Initiative, led by Richard Grenell, Trump's former acting director of national intelligence, and former New York congressman Lee Zeldin.

Grenell told the small group of attendees there, "China is getting into our farmlands, and we have to be able to see China very clearly."

At the end of 2022, China held nearly 250,000 acres of U.S. land, which is slightly less than 1% of foreign-held acres, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. By comparison, Canada was the largest foreign owner of U.S. land, accounting for 32%, or 14.2 million acres.

Still, the National Agricultural Law Center estimates that 24 states ban or limit foreigners without residency and foreign businesses or governments from owning private farmland. The issue emerged after a Chinese billionaire bought more than 130,000 acres near a U.S. Air Force base in Texas and another Chinese company sought to build a corn plant near an Air Force base in North Dakota.

Rex Murphy, from a nearby rural community who raises cattle and grows corn and hay, said farmers support Trump in this area, and said he wanted fewer taxes and "more freedom."

"I want him to do everything for the economy," said Murphy, 48. "If he just becomes president, and he does what he does, he will do more."

Harris is visiting Pennsylvania on Wednesday. Attending a New York fundraiser on Monday, Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, told a group of about 30 donors focused on climate change that Trump's energy catchphrase of "drill, baby, drill" is "not a solution to things, and the public knows that it's a cheap, easy thing."

Walz, speaking at a midtown Manhattan hotel to an audience that included former presidential candidate Tom Steyer and Hollywood producer Jeffrey Katzenberg, called climate change an "existential threat" but also "an incredible opportunity to grow our economy." He specifically cited farmers who use their land to generate wind energy in addition to growing crops.

Harris campaign spokesman Joseph Costello said that "despite all his lies and pandering, Donald Trump used the White House to give handouts to wealthy corporations and foreign companies."

Costello said in a statement that those came "at the expense of family farmers, drive farm bankruptcies to record levels, and sacrifice small American farmers as pawns in his failed trade war with China."

Boeing makes a 'final offer' to striking workers, but union says it's not good enough

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Boeing said Monday it made a "best and final offer" to striking machinists that includes bigger raises and larger bonuses, but the workers' union said the proposal isn't good enough and there won't be a ratification vote before Boeing's deadline at the end of the week.

The union complained that Boeing publicized its latest offer to 33,000 striking workers without first bargaining with union negotiators.

"Boeing does not get to decide when or if you vote," leaders of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers district 751 told members Monday night. "The company has refused to meet for further discussion; therefore, we will not be voting" on Friday, as Boeing insisted.

Boeing said that after two days of talks last week with federal mediators failed to produce an agreement, "we presented a best and final offer that made significant improvements and addresses feedback from the union and our employees."

The new offer is more generous than the one that was overwhelmingly rejected earlier this month. The company said the offer includes pay raises of 30% over four years, up from 25% in the first proposal. The union originally demanded 40% over three years.

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The new offer — and labeling it a final one — demonstrates Boeing's eagerness to end the strike that began Sept. 13. The company introduced rolling furloughs of non-unionized employees last week to cut costs during the strike.

The strikers face their own financial pressure to return to work. They received their final paychecks last week and will lose company-provided health insurance at the end of the month, according to Boeing.

The company said its new offer is contingent on members of the machinists' union in the Pacific Northwest ratifying the contract by late Friday night, when the strike will be a little over two weeks old.

The union, which represents factory workers who assemble some of the company's best-selling planes, waited several hours before pushing back Monday night.

"This proposal does not go far enough to address your concerns, and Boeing has missed the mark with this proposal," the union told members. The group added that it will survey members about the new offer.

Boeing's latest offer includes upfront pay raises of 12% plus three annual raises of 6% each.

It would double the size of ratification bonuses to \$6,000. It also would keep annual bonuses based on productivity. In the rejected contract, Boeing sought to replace those payouts with new contributions to retirement accounts.

Boeing said average annual pay for machinists would rise from \$75,608 now to \$111,155 at the end of the four-year contract.

The new offer would not restore a traditional pension plan that Boeing eliminated about a decade ago. Striking workers cited pay and pensions as reasons why they voted 94.6% against the company's previous offer.

Boeing also renewed a promise to build its next new airline plane in the Seattle area -- if that project starts in the next four years. That was a key provision for union leaders, who recommended adoption of the original contract offer, but one that seemed less persuasive to rank-and-file members.

The strike is likely already starting to reduce Boeing's ability to generate cash. The company gets much of its cash when it delivers new planes, but the strike has shut down production of 737s, 777s and 767s. Work on 787s continues with nonunion workers in South Carolina.

On Friday, Boeing began requiring thousands of managers and nonunion employees to take one week off without pay every four weeks under the temporary rolling furloughs. It also has announced a hiring freeze, reduced business travel and decreased spending on suppliers.

The money-saving measures are expected to last as long as the strike continues.

Gunman who killed 10 at a Colorado supermarket is sentenced to life in prison

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — A mentally ill man who killed 10 people at a Colorado supermarket in 2021 was sentenced Monday to life in prison for murder after a jury rejected his attempt to avoid prison time by pleading not guilty by reason of insanity.

Victims' relatives recounted in pained testimony the lives gunman Ahmad Alissa destroyed in the 2021 attack in the college town of Boulder.

"To the person that's done this, we hope that you suffer for the rest of your life. You are a coward," said Nikolena Stanistic, whose only sibling, Neven, was killed. "I hope this haunts the defendant until the end of time. The defendant deserves the absolute worst."

Stanistic recalled going out to ice cream with her brother the night before he was shot and how he would sometimes help her with bills. Their household — once filled with talk and laughter — is now mostly silent, she told the court.

Defense attorneys did not dispute that Alissa, who has schizophrenia, fatally shot 10 people including a police officer. But they argued he was insane at the time of the attack and couldn't tell right from wrong. He became the latest person to fail in an attempt to be acquitted by reason of insanity.

In addition to first-degree murder, the jury found Alissa guilty on 38 charges of attempted murder, one

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count of assault, and six counts of possessing illegal, large-capacity magazines.

Judge Ingrid Bakke sentenced him to 10 consecutive life prison sentences without the possibility of parole for the murders and an additional 1,334 years for the other offenses.

"This was not about mental illness. This was about brutal, intentional violence," District Attorney Michael Dougherty said.

Alissa, now 25 years old, declined through his attorneys to make a statement during his sentencing.

The courtroom was packed largely with victims' families and police, including officers shot at by Alissa. Several members of Alissa's family sat behind him.

Alissa started shooting immediately after getting out of his car in a King Soopers store parking lot in March 2021. He killed most of the victims in just over a minute and surrendered after an officer shot him in the leg.

The daughter of killed Officer Eric Talley lamented the life milestones they would not be able to share. But Madeline Talley said she would not hold onto bitterness and forgave Alissa.

"He taught me to believe that God brings good out of evil," Madeline Talley said of her father.

Others weren't ready to forgive. Robert Olds — whose niece, Rikki, was killed — said Alissa's family should have been held criminally responsible because their "ignorance, inattentiveness and inaction" led directly to the attack.

Alissa did not visibly react as the verdict was read. During sentencing, he looked at times toward the victims' relatives as they spoke. For much of the time he sat hunched over, talking to his attorney or writing.

Defense attorneys later declined comment.

Prosecutors had to prove Alissa was sane. They argued he didn't fire randomly and showed an ability to make decisions by pursuing people who were running and trying to hide from him. He twice passed by a 91-year-old man who continued to shop, unaware of the shooting.

He came armed with steel-piercing bullets and illegal magazines that can hold 30 rounds of ammunition, which prosecutors said showed he wanted to make the attack as deadly as possible.

Jurors asked during deliberations to review videos of Alissa killing the victims, complying with commands as he was arrested and later being interviewed by psychologists.

Several members of Alissa's family, who immigrated to the United States from Syria, testified that he became withdrawn and spoke less a few years before the shooting. He began acting paranoid and showed signs of hearing voices, they said, and the condition worsened after he got COVID-19 in late 2020.

Alissa was diagnosed with schizophrenia after the attack, and experts said the behaviors described by relatives were consistent with onset of the disease.

Psychologists who evaluated Alissa concluded he was sane during the shooting. The defense did not have to provide any evidence and did not present any experts to say that Alissa was insane.

Despite the fact that he heard voices, the state psychologists said Alissa did not experience delusions. They said his fear he could be jailed or killed by police revealed Alissa knew his actions were wrong.

Alissa repeatedly told the psychologists that he heard voices, including "killing voices" right before the shooting. But Alissa failed during about six hours of interviews to provide more details about the voices or whether they said anything specific, forensic psychologist B. Thomas Gray testified.

Mental illness is not the same as insanity. Colorado law defines insanity as having a mental disease so severe that it's impossible for a person to tell right from wrong.

Relatives of the victims attended the two-week trial and watched graphic surveillance and police body camera video. Survivors testified about how they fled and in some cases helped others to safety.

Prosecutors did not offer any motive for the shooting. Alissa initially searched online for public places to attack in Boulder, including bars and restaurants, then a day before the shooting focused his research on large stores.

On the day of the attack, he drove from his home in the Denver suburb of Arvada and pulled into the first supermarket in Boulder that he encountered. He shot three victims in the parking lot before entering the store.

An emergency room doctor said she crawled onto a shelf and hid among bags of potato chips. A phar-

macist who took cover testified that she heard Alissa say, "This is fun" at least three times as he went through the store firing his semi-automatic pistol that resembled an AR-15 rifle.

Alissa's mother told the court that she thought her son was "sick." His father testified that he thought Alissa was possessed by a djin, or evil spirit, but did not seek any treatment for his son because it would have been shameful for the family.

Gov. Jared Polis said in a statement justice had been served. "Loved ones, friends, and neighbors were taken from us far too soon by an act of pure evil," he said.

Texas jury clears most 'Trump Train' drivers in civil trial over 2020 Biden-Harris bus encounter

By NADIA LATHAN Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal jury in Texas on Monday rejected voter intimidation allegations against all but one of a group of former President Donald Trump supporters who surrounded a Biden-Harris campaign bus on an interstate days before the 2020 election.

Only one of the six Trump supporters who were sued in the civil trial was held responsible by the jury. A Texas man whose car brushed up against another as the caravan of vehicles dubbed the "Trump Train" raced down Interstate 35, was ordered to pay the bus driver \$10,000 and another \$30,000 in punitive damages.

Both sides declared victory at the end of a two-week trial in an Austin courthouse. The five Trump supporters cleared in the lawsuit — which was brought by three people aboard the campaign bus, including former Texas Democratic lawmaker Wendy Davis — described the verdict as vindicating and a relief.

"We're just ready to feel like normal people again," said Joeylynn Mesaros, one of the defendants, who described being harassed for participating in the 'Trump Train.' "It's been a thousand something days to have our day in court."

Attorneys for those aboard the bus said justice was served, even as they disagreed with the jury's decision to clear five of the defendants.

"When I came to this case it was never about politics that day. I'm grateful, I'm proud of my team," said Tim Holloway, who was behind the wheel of the campaign bus on Oct. 30, 2020.

The Biden-Harris campaign bus was traveling from San Antonio to Austin for an event when a group of cars and pickup trucks waving Trump flags boxed in the bus on the highway. Davis testified she feared for her life.

Video that Davis recorded from the bus shows one of the defendants, Eliazar Cisneros, hit a campaign volunteer's car while the trucks occupied all lanes of traffic, forcing the bus and everyone around it to a 15 mph crawl.

It was the last day of early voting in Texas and the bus was scheduled to stop at San Marcos for an event at Texas State University. The event was canceled after Davis and others on the bus — a campaign staffer and the driver — made repeated calls to 911 asking for a police escort through San Marcos and no help arrived.

The trial centered on whether the actions of the "Trump Train" participants amounted to political intimidation.

No criminal charges were filed against the six Trump supporters.

An attorney for Cisneros, the only member of the convoy who the jury found liable, said they would appeal.

"With regard to my client, it's not over yet," attorney Francisco Canseco said.

Davis testified that she felt scared and anxious throughout the ordeal. "I feel like they were enjoying making us afraid," she testified. "It's traumatic for all of us to revisit that day."

US is sending more troops to the Middle East as violence rises between Israel and Hezbollah

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is sending a small number of additional troops to the Middle East in response to a sharp spike in violence between Israel and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon that has raised the risk of a greater regional war, the Pentagon said Monday.

Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, would not say how many more forces would be deployed or what they would be tasked to do. The U.S. now has about 40,000 troops in the region.

On Monday, the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, two Navy destroyers and a cruiser set sail from Norfolk, Virginia, headed to the Sixth Fleet area in Europe on a regularly scheduled deployment. The ships' departure opens up the possibility that the U.S. could keep both the Truman and the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, which is in the Arabian Gulf, in the region in case more violence breaks out.

"In light of increased tension in the Middle East and out of an abundance of caution, we are sending a small number of additional U.S. military personnel forward to augment our forces that are already in the region," Ryder said. "But for operational security reasons, I'm not going to comment on or provide specifics."

The new deployments come after significant strikes by Israeli forces against targets inside Lebanon that have killed hundreds and as Israel is preparing to conduct further operations.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday warned Lebanese civilians in a videotaped message to evacuate their homes ahead of a widening air campaign. He spoke as Israeli warplanes struck alleged Hezbollah targets in southern and eastern Lebanon.

The U.S. has "concrete ideas" for restoring calm along the Israel-Lebanon border that it will present to allies and partners this week on the sidelines of the annual U.N. General Assembly gathering of world leaders, a senior State Department official said Monday.

The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss the private diplomatic efforts, said the U.S. and numerous other countries were eager to present an "off-ramp" for both Israel and Hezbollah to reduce tensions and prevent an all-out war.

The official would not detail what the "concrete ideas" are because he said they had yet to be presented to allies and partners for what he termed a "stress test" for their likelihood of success.

The State Department is warning Americans to leave Lebanon as the risk of a regional war increases.

"Due to the unpredictable nature of ongoing conflict between Hezbollah and Israel and recent explosions throughout Lebanon, including Beirut, the U.S. Embassy urges U.S. citizens to depart Lebanon while commercial options still remain available," the State Department cautioned Saturday.

Ryder would not say if the additional forces might support the evacuation of American citizens if needed.

U.S. officials said a decision is expected soon, possibly this week, on whether the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier will stay in the Middle East or continue to the Asia-Pacific.

Having two carrier strike groups in the Middle East at the same time has been relatively rare in recent years. But as violence has spiked between Israel and Hamas and Hezbollah, both Iranian-backed militant groups, the Biden administration has ordered the Navy to have the carriers and their warships overlap for several weeks on a couple occasions.

It will take the Truman aircraft carrier about two weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean and get into the Mediterranean Sea. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss troop movements.

There is already a Marine amphibious ready group in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit aboard, which is expected to be able to assist in an evacuation if needed.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin held back-to-back calls with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant over the weekend as he pressed for a cease-fire and a reduction of tensions in the region, Ryder said.

"Given the tensions, given the escalation, as I highlighted, there is the potential for a wider regional conflict. I don't think we're there yet, but it's a dangerous situation," Ryder said.

The American presence in the Middle East is designed both to help defend Israel and protect U.S. and allied personnel and assets. Navy warships are scattered across the region, from the eastern Mediterra-

near Sea to the Gulf of Oman, and both Air Force and Navy fighter jets are strategically based at several locations to be better prepared to respond to any attacks.

OceanGate co-founder says he hopes submersible tragedy yields renewed interest in exploration

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

The co-founder of the company that owned the experimental submersible that imploded en route to the wreckage of the Titanic told a Coast Guard panel Monday he hoped the silver lining of the disaster would be that it inspires a renewed interest in exploration, including the deepest waters of the world's oceans.

"This can't be the end of deep ocean exploration. This can't be the end of deep-diving submersibles and I don't believe that it will be," said businessman Guillermo Sohnlein, who helped found OceanGate with Stockton Rush.

Sohnlein ultimately left the company before the Titan disaster in June 2023. Rush was among the five people who died when the submersible imploded. Though Sohnlein left the Washington company years ago, he spoke in defense of its efforts in the aftermath of the submersible's implosion.

On Monday, he testified that the company wanted to create a fleet of four or five deep-diving submersibles capable of carrying five people to 6,000 meters (6,500 yards) deep. The plan for the company was to have no dedicated mothership — which would've lowered costs substantially, he said.

"We wanted to give humanity greater access to the ocean, specifically the deep ocean," Sohnlein said.

Sohnlein testified that the company zeroed in on the use of carbon fiber for the doomed vessel because the company wanted a lightweight, less costly submersible that did not need to be tethered to a specific mother ship. He testified that the use of carbon fiber as "not a novel idea" and said "people have looked at that before."

No existing submersible builders could meet the company's requirements, necessitating the pivot to building its own subs, Sohnlein said. And he said the company worked closely with the Coast Guard during development.

Sohnlein said he had the opportunity to dive in Titan "many times" and he declined. He said his reasons included not wanting to take space away from potential customers. He said when Rush reached a point when it was "time to put a human in there," he wanted to do it himself. Rush felt it was his design and said "if anything happens, I want it to impact me," Sohnlein said.

The Coast Guard opened a public hearing earlier this month that is part of a high level investigation into the cause of the implosion. Some of the testimony has focused on the troubled nature of the company.

Earlier in the hearing, former OceanGate operations director David Lochridge said he frequently clashed with Rush and felt the company was committed only to making money. "The whole idea behind the company was to make money," Lochridge testified. "There was very little in the way of science."

Sohnlein said Monday that neither he nor Rush was ever "driven by tourism" and the idea of visiting the Titanic, which had already been explored by others, was not exciting to either of them.

But Lochridge and other witnesses painted a picture of a troubled company that was impatient to get its unconventionally designed craft into the water. The accident set off a worldwide debate about the future of private undersea exploration.

Phil Brooks, a former OceanGate engineering director who testified Monday, said economic issues with the company included that it was asking workers to forego paychecks for periods of time with the promises that they would be caught up in the future. The financial problems with the company seemed to affect safety decisions, he said.

"It was clear that the company was economically very stressed and as a result that they were making decisions and doing things that resulted in, I felt, that the safety was just being compromised way too much," he said.

An earlier engineering director with the company testified last week that he felt pressured to get the vessel ready to dive and refused to pilot it for a journey several years earlier. Tony Nissen said Rush could

be difficult to work for and was often very concerned with costs and project schedules.

Sohlein also testified Monday that he left the company in 2013 as the company transitioned to engineering, which he described as a bigger strength of Rush's than his. He said it was a "fairly easy decision" for Rush to take over the company, but it was more difficult to decide whether to stay on at all.

The hearing is expected to run through Friday and include more witnesses. Roy Thomas of the American Bureau of Shipping also testified Monday and detailed the challenges associated with carbon fiber as a material for submersibles. He said carbon fiber is "susceptible to fatigue failure under repeated external pressurization."

Coast Guard officials noted at the start of the hearing that the submersible had not been independently reviewed, as is standard practice. That and Titan's unusual design subjected it to scrutiny in the undersea exploration community.

OceanGate, based in Washington state, suspended its operations after the implosion. The company has no full-time employees currently, but has been represented by an attorney during the hearing.

During the submersible's final dive on June 18, 2023, the crew lost contact after an exchange of texts about Titan's depth and weight as it descended. The support ship Polar Prince then sent repeated messages asking if Titan could still see the ship on its onboard display.

One of the last messages from Titan's crew to Polar Prince before the submersible imploded stated, "all good here," according to a visual re-creation presented earlier in the hearing.

When the submersible was reported overdue, rescuers rushed ships, planes and other equipment to an area about 435 miles (700 kilometers) south of St. John's, Newfoundland. Wreckage of the Titan was subsequently found on the ocean floor about 330 yards (300 meters) off the bow of the Titanic, Coast Guard officials said. No one on board survived.

OceanGate said it has been fully cooperating with the Coast Guard and NTSB investigations since they began. Titan had been making voyages to the Titanic wreckage site going back to 2021.

US to seek attempted assassination charge against man accused of staking out Trump at golf course

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and STEPHANY MATAT Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The man accused in the assassination attempt of Donald Trump at a golf course in Florida left behind a note detailing his plans to kill the former president and kept in his car a handwritten list of dates and venues where Trump was to appear, the Justice Department said Monday.

Trump complained that the current holding charges against the man were too light, but prosecutors indicated much more serious attempted assassination charges were coming.

The new allegations about the note were included in a detention memo filed ahead of a hearing Monday at which federal prosecutors argued that Ryan Wesley Routh should remain locked up as a flight risk and a threat to public safety. U.S. Magistrate Ryon McCabe agreed, saying the "weight of the evidence against the defendant is strong" and ordered him to stay behind bars.

The latest details were meant to bolster the Justice Department's contention that the 58-year-old suspect had engaged in a premeditated plan to kill Trump, a plot officials say was thwarted by a Secret Service agent who spotted a rifle poking out of shrubbery on the West Palm Beach golf course where Trump was playing and then opened fire in Routh's direction.

The note describing Routh's plans was placed in a box that he dropped off months earlier at the home of an unidentified person who did not open it until after last Sunday's arrest, prosecutors said.

The box also contained ammunition, a metal pipe, building materials, tools, phones and various letters. The person who received the box and contacted law enforcement was not identified in the Justice Department's detention memo and was described only as a "civilian witness."

One note Routh left, addressed "Dear World," appears to have been premised on the idea that the assassination attempt would be unsuccessful.

"This was an assassination attempt on Donald Trump but I failed you. I tried my best and gave it all the

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gumption I could muster. It is up to you now to finish the job; and I will offer \$150,000 to whomever can complete the job," the note said, according to prosecutors.

The letter offers "substantial evidence of his intent," Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Dispoto said in court Monday.

"That's the message he wanted to send to the world in advance of this incident" he said.

In a statement, Trump accused the Justice Department of "mishandling and downplaying" the apparent assassination attempt by bringing charges that were a "slap on the wrist."

Routh is currently charged with illegally possessing his gun in spite of multiple felony convictions, including two charges of possessing stolen goods in 2002 in North Carolina, and with possessing a firearm with an obliterated serial number. But Dispoto said in court Monday that prosecutors would pursue additional charges before a grand jury accusing him of having tried to "assassinate a major political candidate" — charges that would warrant life in prison in the event of a conviction.

It is common for prosecutors to file more easily provable charges as an immediate placeholder before adding more significant allegations as the case proceeds.

Trump also claimed that the Justice Department has a conflict of interest in prosecuting this case since, under the supervision of a special counsel, it is simultaneously pursuing cases charging him with plotting to overturn the 2020 election and with hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate. He signaled support for a separate state-level criminal investigation announced last week by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Kristy Militello, an assistant federal public defender representing Routh, asked during Monday's hearing for Routh to be permitted to live with his sister in Greensboro, N.C., as the case moves forward. She argued that prosecutors had failed to show that he was a threat to the community and noted his track record of habitually showing up for court appearances throughout decades of legal troubles.

Besides the note, prosecutors also cited cellphone records indicating that Routh traveled to West Palm Beach from Greensboro in mid-August, and that he was near Trump's golf club and the former president's Mar-a-Lago residence "on multiple days and times" between Aug. 18 and the day of the apparent attempted assassination.

He was arrested Sept. 15 after a Secret Service agent who was scoping the Trump International Golf Club for potential security threats saw a partially obscured man's face, and the barrel of a semiautomatic rifle, aimed directly at him.

The agent fired at Routh, who sped away before being stopped by officials in a neighboring county, leaving behind a loaded rifle, digital camera, a backpack and a reusable shopping bag that was hanging from a chain link fence.

The FBI has previously said Routh had camped outside the golf course for 12 hours before his arrest. The Secret Service has said Routh did not fire any shots and never had Trump in his line of sight.

The Justice Department also said Monday that authorities who searched his car found six cellphones, including one that showed a Google search of how to travel from Palm Beach County to Mexico.

They also found a list with dates in August, September and October and venues where Trump had appeared or was scheduled to, according to prosecutors. A notebook found in his car was filled with criticism of the Russian and Chinese governments and notes about how to join the war on behalf of Ukraine.

In addition, the detention memo cites a book authored by Routh last year in which he lambasted Trump's approach to foreign policy, including in Ukraine. In the book, he wrote that Iran was "free to assassinate Trump" for having left the nuclear deal.

Memphis man testifies that he and another man killed rapper Young Dolph

By ADRIAN SAINZ and TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A Memphis man testified on Monday that he and a second person shot and killed rapper Young Dolph after Big Jook, the brother of rapper Yo Gotti, put a hit on him.

Cornelius Smith identified himself and Justin Johnson as the two people seen on a Nov. 17, 2021, sur-

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veillance video exiting a white Mercedes outside a Memphis cookie store about 30 seconds after Young Dolph entered the store and then opening fire in broad daylight.

Smith was testifying in the first day of Johnson's trial on charges of murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and being a felon in possession of a gun.

Smith also faces murder and conspiracy charges. Johnson's attorney, Luke Evans, told the jury in opening statements that they should not trust Smith's testimony because he was just trying to save himself. Johnson is innocent, Evans said. Photos of him wearing clothes like the person in the video do not mean he is same as person, Evans said.

Deputy District Attorney Paul Hagerman, in opening statements, said Young Dolph, whose real name was Adolph Thornton Jr., was determined to make it on his own as an artist, and also with his own label, Paper Route Empire.

"Trying to make it on your own can create enemies," Hagerman said.

He noted that Yo Gotti-founded rival record label Cocaine Muzic Group (now known as Collective Music Group) and wanted Young Dolph to work for them, but he turned them down. Young Dolph later wrote diss tracks directed at the label, its artists, and its "number two person," Big Jook.

Young Dolph had survived previous shootings. He was shot multiple times in September 2017 after a fight outside a Los Angeles hotel. In February of that year, his SUV was shot at in Charlotte, North Carolina, more than 100 times. The incident was the inspiration for the song "100 Shots." He said he survived because he had bulletproof panels in his vehicle.

Big Jook, whose real name was Anthony Mims, was shot and killed outside a restaurant in January 2024, according to media reports.

Smith, who said he was shot in the arm and the leg by Young Dolph's brother, Marcus Thornton, as he fled the cookie store shooting testified that he received only \$800 prior to his arrest. He said his attorney was later paid another \$50,000 by Big Jook.

Asked by Hagerman how he felt after shooting Young Dolph, Smith said, "I wasn't feeling nothing at the time. I'm not gonna lie. I was trying to get some money."

Smith testified that his young son had died a few months before and he had started "popping pills and not caring about nothing." His conscience started bothering him only later after he sobered up in jail, he said.

Jermarcus Johnson pleaded guilty in June 2023 to three counts of serving as an accessory after the killing by helping Smith and Justin Johnson, his half-brother.

Jermarcus Johnson acknowledged helping the two shooting suspects communicate by cellphone while they were on the run from authorities and helping one of them communicate with his probation officer. Jermarcus Johnson has not been sentenced.

Hernandez Govan has pleaded not guilty to organizing the killing.

Young Dolph began his career by releasing numerous mixtapes, starting with 2008's "Paper Route Campaign." His multiple studio albums include his 2016 debut "King of Memphis." He also collaborated on other mixtapes and albums with fellow rappers Key Glock, Megan Thee Stallion, T.I., Gucci Mane, 2 Chainz and others.

He had three albums reach the top 10 on the Billboard 200, with 2020's "Rich Slave" peaking at No. 4.

Kmart's blue light fades to black with the shuttering of its last full-scale US store

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Attention, Kmart shoppers, the end is near!

The erstwhile retail giant renowned for its Blue Light Specials — featuring a flashing blue orb affixed to a pole enticing shoppers to a flash sale — is shuttering its last full-scale store in mainland United States.

The store, located in swank Bridgehampton, New York, on Long Island, is slated to close Oct. 20, according to Denise Rivera, an employee who answered the phone at the store late Monday. The manager

wasn't available, she said.

That will leave only a small Kmart store in Miami. It has a handful of stores in Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Transformco, the company that bought the assets of Sears and Kmart out of the bankruptcy of Sears Holdings in 2019, did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

In its heyday, there were more than 2,000 Kmart stores in the U.S.

Struggling to compete with Walmart's low prices and Target's trendier offerings, Kmart filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in early 2002 — becoming the largest U.S. retailer to take that step — and announced it would close more than 250 stores.

A few years later, hedge fund executive Edward Lampert combined Sears and Kmart and pledged to return them to their former greatness. But the 2008 recession and the rising dominance of Amazon contributed in derailing that mission. Sears filed for Chapter 11 in 2018 and now has just a handful of stores left in the U.S., where it once had thousands.

'Short corn' could replace the towering cornfields steamrolled by a changing climate

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

WYOMING, Iowa (AP) — Taking a late-summer country drive in the Midwest means venturing into the corn zone, snaking between 12-foot-tall green, leafy walls that seem to block out nearly everything other than the sun and an occasional water tower.

The skyscraper-like corn is a part of rural America as much as cavernous red barns and placid cows.

But soon, that towering corn might become a miniature of its former self, replaced by stalks only half as tall as the green giants that have dominated fields for so long.

"As you drive across the Midwest, maybe in the next seven, eight, 10 years, you're going to see a lot of this out there," said Cameron Sorgenfrey, an eastern Iowa farmer who has been growing newly developed short corn for several years, sometimes prompting puzzled looks from neighboring farmers. "I think this is going to change agriculture in the Midwest."

The short corn developed by Bayer Crop Science is being tested on about 30,000 acres (12,141 hectares) in the Midwest with the promise of offering farmers a variety that can withstand powerful windstorms that could become more frequent due to climate change. The corn's smaller stature and sturdier base enable it to withstand winds of up to 50 mph — researchers hover over fields with a helicopter to see how the plants handle the wind.

The smaller plants also let farmers plant at greater density, so they can grow more corn on the same amount of land, increasing their profits. That is especially helpful as farmers have endured several years of low prices that are forecast to continue.

The smaller stalks could also lead to less water use at a time of growing drought concerns.

U.S. farmers grow corn on about 90 million acres (36 million hectares) each year, usually making it the nation's largest crop, so it's hard to overstate the importance of a potential large-scale shift to smaller-stature corn, said Dior Kelley, an assistant professor at Iowa State University who is researching different paths for growing shorter corn. Last year, U.S. farmers grew more than 400 tons (363 metric tonnes) of corn, most of which was used for animal feed, the fuel additive ethanol, or exported to other countries.

"It is huge. It's a big, fundamental shift," Kelley said.

Researchers have long focused on developing plants that could grow the most corn but recently there has been equal emphasis on other traits, such as making the plant more drought-tolerant or able to withstand high temperatures. Although there already were efforts to grow shorter corn, the demand for innovations by private companies such as Bayer and academic scientists soared after an intense windstorm — called a derecho — plowed through the Midwest in August 2020.

The storm killed four people and caused \$11 billion in damage, with the greatest destruction in a wide

strip of eastern Iowa, where winds exceeded 100 mph. In cities such as Cedar Rapids, the wind toppled thousands of trees but the damage to a corn crop only weeks from harvest was especially stunning.

"It looked like someone had come through with a machete and cut all of our corn down," Kelley said.

Or as Sorgenfrey, the Iowa farmer who endured the derecho put it, "Most of my corn looked like it had been steamrolled."

Although Kelley is excited about the potential of short corn, she said farmers need to be aware that cobs that grow closer to the soil could be more vulnerable to diseases or mold. Short plants also could be susceptible to a problem called lodging, when the corn tilts over after something like a heavy rain and then grows along the ground, Kelley said.

Brian Leake, a Bayer spokesman, said the company has been developing short corn for more than 20 years. Other companies such as Stine Seed and Corteva also have been working for a decade or longer to offer short-corn varieties.

While the big goal has been developing corn that can withstand high winds, researchers also note that a shorter stalk makes it easier for farmers to get into fields with equipment for tasks such as spreading fungicide or seeding the ground with a future cover crop.

Bayer expects to ramp up its production in 2027, and Leake said he hopes that by later in this decade, farmers will be growing short corn everywhere.

"We see the opportunity of this being the new normal across both the U.S. and other parts of the world," he said.

Michigan State football's Armorion Smith is raising 5 siblings since his mother's death

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Armorion Smith pressed his palms together over the bridge of his nose, closed his eyes and leaned against the kitchen sink.

The 21-year-old Michigan State defensive back needed a moment in the four-bedroom, two-bathroom home he shares with five younger siblings. He has a lot on his plate, more than most college students and certainly more than most student-athletes.

His mother, Gala Gilliam, died of breast cancer a month ago and without a father in the family's life, Smith has become the head of the household while studying criminal justice and playing major college football. He became the legal guardian for four siblings on Sept. 11.

"My cards were given to me," Smith said softly with a steely gaze, standing on a small porch behind the home as the sun set on a recent evening. "I didn't choose my deck of cards."

His 19-year-old sister, Aleion, is in charge while he is gone for about 12 hours most days to be a student and athlete. Appreciating her selfless sacrifice, Smith said he hopes to help her find a way to start taking classes next semester while juggling her role with the family.

Smith looks and sounds determined to help his siblings be happy, healthy and safe. His teammates watch in awe.

"I couldn't even begin to imagine if I was in his situation," linebacker Jordan Hall said. "He's in a tough spot, but he is one of the strongest guys I have ever known."

The family

Smith grew up in in Detroit, recalling how he was homeless at times and hopped from house to house to find places to sleep. He was a three-star prospect at River Rouge High School and attended the University of Cincinnati for two years.

After Smith's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2022 during his sophomore season with the Bearcats, he transferred last year to be closer to home. The life lessons from his mom continued.

When Smith, holding his 2-year-old sister, arrived at a recent fundraiser, each of his other siblings introduced themselves to people there to support the family and shook their hands while making eye contact.

"That's from my mom," he said.

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She was trying to prepare him for what was to come before she died Aug. 19. She was 41.

"She used to tell me everything: 'Get hard' and all of that," he recalled. "And I see why she was under a lot of stress."

Smith keeps notes on his phone to help manage busy days that start before dawn, when he is up to make sure his two sisters and three brothers are awake before he leaves for school. Smith gets a lift from a teammate or a ride-hailing service to make the 4-mile trip to campus for therapy on his surgically repaired shoulders and meetings with the football team before going to classes and practice.

His eldest sister gets their 16- and 15-year-old brothers, Armond and Avaugn, and 11-year-old sister, Arial, ready for school. There are two varieties of Cap'n Crunch atop the refrigerator in a kitchen that didn't have a table or chairs during a recent visit.

The school-age brothers rely on a ride-hailing company to get them to school and back while their oldest sister cares for their toddler sister, Amaira.

"Me and my sister got to work together to keep this all afloat," he said. "While I'm in college sports, she's got to be able to take care of everything that I can't do, like pick up where I left off, while I'm taking care of business."

He and the siblings he is now responsible for at least have a home thanks in part to a GoFundMe campaign. Student caregivers

While Smith's story is unusual in college sports — the NCAA does not track the number of athletes whose day-to-day activities include caring for a dependent — a 2020 study from the National Center for Education Statistics found 19.5% of undergraduate college students had a dependent and 5.5% of them were responsible for non-child dependents. Other research shows student-caregivers are disproportionately from historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups.

Ray Ray McElrathbey was a 19-year-old freshman at Clemson in 2006 when he took over custody of his 10-year-old brother because of his mother's drug problems and his father's gambling addiction. Initially, they lived solely off McElrathbey's scholarship and later the NCAA approved a plan where donations were administered by a local bank and distributed to Ray and Fahmarr. His story was the subject of "Safety," a Disney movie.

When McElrathbey was a child and saw "Angels in the Outfield," it inspired him because he felt there were other children out there like him. These days, he does speaking engagements and shares his message of hope with young people.

"Just kind to speak to those kids in a similar situation like I was growing up and have them have something to inspire them is the greatest gift," he said.

Tufts University professor Emma Armstrong-Carter, who has done research on children caregivers, said these young people show amazing strength and don't want to be pitied.

"Isn't it incredible that these young people are able to overcome so many challenges and support their families in ways that are necessary and meaningful?" Armstrong-Carter said. "There's a need for more institutional support to help them thrive."

Smith and his family are able to afford renting a house in the state capital, paying for utilities, bills, food and ride-hailing services thanks to waves of financial support. The GoFundMe effort has raised more than \$60,000, and he makes some money through name, image and likeness deals. Michigan State has helped through a student assistance fund. Two fundraisers were hosted at a McDonald's in Lansing and an IHOP in Livonia set up by former Michigan State football players Jason Strayhorn and Sedrick Irvin and promoted on their "This is Sparta MSU" podcast.

Road trips are part of the calendar and the Spartans don't play two home games in a row until the end of the season in November, though two bye weekends will give Smith more time at home.

One of his mother's close friends, Yolanda Wilson, whose son, Nick Marsh, is a standout freshman receiver and former high school teammate, has been a source of support.

"I'm going to be there no matter what," she said. "That's a promise I made to their mother. And they have everybody here backing them up. So, it's going to be a hard transition as it is, but we're going to be

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that tight-knit community and have their back.”

The love is not lost on Smith.

“Me and my family are very happy, very appreciative and grateful,” he said. “There’s a lot of love Spartan Nation has shown us these past few months. It’s been a rough time, but to be able to take some of the stress off of my shoulders and show me a lot of love is a blessing and has warmed my heart.”

When Smith gave The Associated Press access to his home one recent evening, three siblings were upstairs in their bedrooms while a teenage brother was napping on a sectional couch in a living room without a TV or table. His toddler sister giggled between drinks from a sippy cup.

“It just puts a smile on my face to see them happy,” he said while watching video clips from practice on his phone.

Smith’s sadness comes and goes, but he knows his mother would want him to carry on.

“I can feel her living through me,” he said. “Almost like I hear her voice telling me how proud she is of me.”

At the UN, world leaders try to lay out a vision for the future — and actually make it happen

By JENNIFER PELTZ and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. General Assembly adopted a “Pact for the Future” to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Now comes the hard part: uniting the world’s divided nations to move quickly to implement the agreement’s 56 actions.

As Czech President Petr Pavel put it Monday at the summit meeting surrounding the pact: “Our work begins at home.”

The 193-member world body approved the pact Sunday. The document is meant to link nations in tackling challenges ranging from climate change and artificial intelligence to escalating conflicts and increasing inequality and poverty — and improve the lives of the world’s more than 8 billion people.

The 42-page pact was adopted at Sunday’s opening of a two-day “Summit of the Future,” which continued Monday as leaders of many countries gave their views on the challenges facing the world.

And with those remarks, the leaders previewed some themes to expect at the assembly’s big annual meeting, which gets into full gear Tuesday.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for technology regulation that’s global but “ensures that national sovereignty and integrity are upheld.” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated his country’s frequent complaints about nations dividing into geopolitical blocs, and about countries singlehandedly imposing sanctions.

Leaders from countries ranging from Angola to Ecuador to Slovakia mentioned a roster of other challenges: inequality, youth unemployment, the spread of disinformation, and more.

Russia tried to change the pact

Right up to Sunday’s vote, it was unclear whether the pact would be adopted. In fact, there was so much suspense that U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres had three prepared speeches, one for approval, one for rejection, and one if things weren’t clear, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin proposed an amendment that would have significantly watered down the agreement. “No one is happy with this pact,” he said.

It turned out he was wrong. Some 143 countries, including Africa’s 54 nations, voted not to take action on Russia’s amendment. Only six countries supported Russia -- Iran, Belarus, North Korea, Nicaragua, Sudan and Syria. Fifteen countries abstained.

Assembly President Philémon Yang then put the pact to a vote and banged his gavel, signifying the consensus of all U.N. member nations that was required for approval — to vigorous applause.

Russia has made significant inroads in Africa, in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Central African Republic. The rejection of Russia’s amendments by African countries and Mexico, a major Latin American power, was seen as a blow to Moscow by some diplomats and observers.

Vershinin complained at the summit Monday that the pact contains some “unacceptable elements.” His

country wants “to disassociate ourselves from the consensus” on it, he said.

He spoke about an hour before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who referred to Russia and supporters of its proposed amendment as “accomplices” in opposing efforts to make the U.N. more effective.

The secretary-general issues a challenge

Guterres, clearly relieved by the pact’s approval, then issued a challenge to the leaders: Implement the pact. Prioritize dialogue and negotiations. End “wars tearing our world apart” from the Middle East to Ukraine and Sudan. Reform the powerful U.N. Security Council. Accelerate changes to the international financial system. Ramp up a transition from fossil fuels. Listen to young people and include them in decision-making.

For all the endorsements of the agreement, some speakers noted shortcomings.

The Marshall Islands’ president, Hilda Heine, said it’s “hard not to be frustrated over apparent political limitations” in the pact.

“There is an incredible and persistent gap between ambitious solutions and international finance at hand,” she said.

Speaking for the U.N.’s main bloc of developing countries — the Group of 77, which now has 134 members, including China — Ugandan Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja regretted that the pact doesn’t recognize actions that developed countries should take to close the widening gaps between them and developing countries.

In a rare move at a high-level U.N. meeting where leaders often exceed the announced time limit, speeches were muted after five minutes.

There’s a long list of things to tackle

The Pact for the Future says world leaders are gathering “at a time of profound global transformation,” and it warns of “rising catastrophic and existential risks” that could tip people everywhere “into a future of persistent crisis and breakdown.”

Guterres singled out a number of key provisions in the pact and its accompanying annexes, a Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations.

The pact commits world leaders to reform the 15-member Security Council, to make it more reflective of today’s world and “redress the historical injustice against Africa,” which has no permanent seat, and to address the under-representation of the Asia-Pacific region and Latin America.

It also “represents the first agreed multilateral support for nuclear disarmament in more than a decade,” Guterres said, and it commits “to steps to prevent an arms race in outer space and to govern the use of lethal autonomous weapons.”

The Global Digital Compact “includes the first truly universal agreement on the international governance of artificial intelligence,” the U.N. chief said.

As for human rights, Guterres said, “in the face of a surge in misogyny and a rollback of women’s reproductive rights,” the document commits governments to removing legal, social and economic barriers facing women and girls.

Iran’s president accuses Israel of seeking wider Mideast war and laying ‘traps’ to lead Iran into it

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Iran’s new president accused Israel on Monday of seeking a wider war in the Middle East and laying “traps” to lead his country into a broader conflict.

Masoud Pezeshkian told about two dozen media representatives that Iran doesn’t want to see the current war in Gaza and airstrikes across the Israeli-Lebanon border expanded.

“We don’t want to fight,” he said. “It’s Israel that wants to drag everyone into war and destabilize the region. ... They are dragging us to a point where we do not wish to go.”

Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon and reformer, defeated a hardliner in Iran’s July presidential runoff, after the death of the former president in a helicopter crash. He is making his debut on the international stage at this week’s annual gathering of world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly, just as Israel steps up at-

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tacks on Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

The Iranian leader, who will turn 70 on Sunday, said that while Israel insists it doesn't want a wider war, its actions show otherwise. Pezeshkian pointed to the deadly explosions of pagers, walkie-talkies and other electronic devices in Lebanon last week, which he blamed on Israel, and the assassination of Hamas' political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31, hours after Pezeshkian's inauguration.

Pezeshkian said the Iranian drone and missile attacks on Israel in April, in response to attack on an Iranian consular building in Syria's capital that Tehran blamed on Israel, proved its defensive capabilities.

He said Iran is not seeking to destabilize the Middle East. "We are willing to put all our weapons aside so long as Israel is willing to do the same," he said.

On Russia and Ukraine

Two weeks ago, the United States and Britain formally accused Iran of supplying short-range ballistic missiles to Russia to use against Ukraine and announced new sanctions on Moscow and Tehran before a joint visit to Kyiv by their top diplomats.

Pezeshkian insisted that Iran has not and will not supply Russia with ballistic missiles to attack Ukraine. "We have never approved of Russia's aggression against Ukrainian territory," he said, adding that the two countries should establish a dialogue.

On Iran's nuclear program

The president was asked about Iran's nuclear program following the Trump administration's withdrawal from its 2015 nuclear deal with the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany. It has seen Tehran expand its uranium enrichment from 3.67% purity under the deal to 60% purity, making many countries in the West nervous that it is seeking to make a nuclear weapon.

Would Iran go back to low-enriched uranium and give up its stockpile of high enriched uranium if the nuclear deal is restored?

Pezeshkian said weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran and its military structures.

"We are still ready to live up to the same framework" that was agreed on in 2015, he said, but the Europeans tried to get Iran to sign a different accord.

He said Iran is willing to sit down with Europeans and Americans to negotiate.

On Israel and Gaza

Pezeshkian was asked if Iran had advance knowledge of the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks on Israel that killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians.

"The Americans know, and Israel is very well aware that Iran was not aware," he replied.

Israel says it only targets militants and accuses Hamas and other armed groups of endangering civilians by operating in residential areas.

Pezeshkian also accused Israel of committing "genocide" in Gaza by attacking schools, hospitals and homes. He defended Iran's support for the Palestinians and Lebanon's Hezbollah militants, saying his country "will not stand by to oppression and injustice."

Israel's nearly year-long retaliation has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants.

On the U.S. presidential election

Pezeshkian responded to America's top intelligence official Avril Haines, who said in July that the Iranian government is covertly encouraging American protests over the war in Gaza in a bid to stoke outrage ahead of the November presidential election.

"Please don't believe these things – they're childish," he said.

On the captivity of a Nobel Peace Prize winner

When a reporter asked if Iran would free Narges Mohammadi, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 for her activism including for women's rights, Pezeshkian said there are four women ministers in his administration. And if the Western media is so concerned about human rights, he asked, "Why are you not screaming about what is going on in Gaza?"

Birmingham, Alabama, leaders plead for information on mass shooting and announce reward money

By KIM CHANDLER and SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Officials in Birmingham, Alabama, pleaded Monday with members of the public for information leading to arrests in a weekend mass shooting that killed four people and injured more than a dozen others, announcing rewards totaling \$100,000.

"We have a laser-like focus on hunting down, finding and capturing and making an arrest that leads to a conviction for those responsible for killing and shooting so many people, especially so many innocent people," Mayor Randall Woodfin told The Associated Press Monday .

Authorities have still made no arrests after Saturday's shooting killed four people and left 17 others injured. Police said multiple shooters opened fire on a crowd waiting in line outside a nightspot in Birmingham's bustling Five Points South district. Birmingham Police Chief Scott Thurmond said they believe the shooters were targeting at least one of the victims in a possible "hit" and that bystanders were caught in the barrage of bullets.

The FBI is offering a \$50,000 reward, and Crime Stoppers is offering \$50,000, officials said. Tipsters can remain anonymous.

Police identified the three victims found on the sidewalk as Anitra Holloman, 21, of the Birmingham suburb of Bessemer; Tahj Booker, 27, of Birmingham; and Carlos McCain, 27, of Birmingham. The fourth victim was identified Monday as Roderick Lynn Patterson Jr., 26.

Tahj Booker was out with his cousin celebrating his high school alumni week on Saturday night when he was killed, said Booker's aunt Sheila Everson. Her son, Ra'Darrius Everson, 29, is one of five people still being treated for gun shot wounds in the hospital.

Before Booker was killed on Saturday night, Everson said that he was like a "teddy bear" who loved taking care of his cousin Ra'Darrius' two young daughters, aged two and six.

The family is not new to gun violence, Everson said. She said she had another nephew shot and killed in Birmingham 2017. As she anxiously waits for her son to receive medical treatment for his wounds, Everson said her family is strongly considering leaving Birmingham altogether to escape the constant fear of guns.

"They took two of my nephews. I'll be damned if I let them take three. So we -- my family -- we have to get up out of here," Everson said. She added, "It's sad to say that, because for me, we were told when I was young that Birmingham was a retirement state, but now Birmingham is like Chicago or Iraq, you know. We're in a war zone. It's killing women and kids and innocent people now."

The shooting — Birmingham's third quadruple homicide of the year — has put a spotlight on a city once best known for its role in the Civil Rights Movement but more recently plagued by gun violence.

Three of the nation's 31 mass killings this year occurred in Birmingham, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. Birmingham, a city of about 200,000, has seen 114 homicides this year. Chicago, with more than 10 times the population, has seen a little over 400 homicides this year.

"I think America has a gun culture problem. I think when you bring that to the South, it's even more pervasive," Woodfin said Monday.

He said two things that have changed in recent years are the types of weapons available and the prevalence of devices, sometimes known as Glock switches, that convert semi-automatic weapons to more rapid fire.

Police said about 100 shell casings were recovered at the scene of Saturday's shooting. The number of bullets fired and audio that captured the rapid pace of the shots has led authorities to believe the weapons used fired like automatics, Woodfin said. While conversion devices that speed the firing pace of semi-automatic weapons are banned under federal law, he urged state lawmakers to ban them as well, a move that would help local law enforcement crack down on particular guns.

The Birmingham mayor also urged state and federal officials to give cities more tools to address gun violence. He put both hands behind his back during a Sunday press conference as a metaphor of what it

is like for cities to combat crime.

Woodfin, a gun owner, said he believes people have the right to protect themselves and their homes, but he said the weapons made to fire like an automatic spray bullets everywhere "producing more casualties and more people shot."

Woodfin, who lost his brother and nephew to gun violence several years ago, said his calls to victims' families remind him of his mother's screams when she learned his brother was killed.

"These aren't easy calls. This isn't an easy conversation. It gives me the motivation to figure out a way to solve this so more mothers aren't grieving," Woodfin said.

Thousands flee southern Lebanon in search of safety and shelter

By FADI TAWIL and MOHAMMAD ZAATARI Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Thousands of families from southern Lebanon packed cars and minivans with suitcases, mattresses, blankets and carpets and jammed the highway heading north toward Beirut on Monday to flee the deadliest Israeli bombardment since 2006.

Some 100,000 people living near the border had already been displaced since October, when the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and Israeli forces began exchanging near-daily fire against the backdrop of the war in Gaza. As the fighting intensifies, the number of evacuees is expected to rise.

In Beirut and beyond, schools were quickly repurposed to receive the newly displaced as volunteers scrambled to gather water, medicine and mattresses.

In the coastal city of Sidon, people seeking shelter streamed into schools that had no mattresses to sleep on yet. Many waited on sidewalks outside.

Ramzieh Dawi had arrived with her husband and daughter after hastily evacuating the village of Yarine, carrying just a few essential items as airstrikes boomed nearby.

"These are the only things I brought," she said, gesturing at the three tote bags she carried.

Fatima Chehab, who came with her three daughters from the area of Nabatieh, said her family had been displaced twice in quick succession.

"We first fled to stay with my brother in a nearby area, and then they bombed three places next to his house," she said.

Some people waited for hours in gridlocked traffic to get to what they hoped would be safety.

The Israeli military warned residents in eastern and southern Lebanon to evacuate ahead of a widening air campaign against what it said were Hezbollah weapons sites. More than 490 people were killed in Lebanon on Monday, officials said, and more than 1,240 people were wounded — a staggering toll for a country still reeling from a deadly attack on communication devices last week.

That attack was widely blamed on Israel, which has not confirmed or denied responsibility.

Israeli officials have said they are ramping up pressure against Hezbollah in an attempt to force it to stop firing rockets into northern Israel so that tens of thousands of displaced Israelis can return home. Hezbollah has said it will only stop when there is a cease-fire in Gaza.

At a public high school in the capital's Ras al-Nabaa neighborhood, a few dozen men, women and children were milling around as volunteers registered them.

Yahya Abu Ali, who fled with his family from the village of Doueir in Lebanon's Nabatieh district, struck a defiant tone.

"Don't think that an airplane or a missile will defeat us, or that a wounded person or a martyr on the ground will weaken us," he said. "On the contrary, it gives us strength, determination, and resilience."

But Abu Ali also admitted that he was worried about his four siblings and their families who remained behind in southern Lebanon.

"God willing, I hope they will make it out," he said.

Minar al-Natour, a volunteer at the school, said the team on the ground was still in "early stages" of preparations to host the larger numbers expected to arrive.

"We're securing medicine, water, and of course all the essential supplies," she said.

In Beirut's Aisha Bakkar neighborhood — where some residents had received messages instructing them to evacuate — shop owner Mazen al-Hakeem said most had not heeded the call.

"There is no fear but there is anticipation," he said. "People are filling their tanks with fuel, storing food and groceries. They are taking their precautions."

Imran Riza, the U.N.'s humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon, said in a statement the international body had allocated \$24 million in emergency funding for people affected by the fighting.

With its economy in shambles and Beirut still recovering from a massive port explosion in 2020, Lebanon is "grappling with multiple crises, which have overwhelmed the country's capacity to cope," Riza said.

"As the escalation of hostilities in south Lebanon drags on longer than we had hoped, it has led to further displacement and deepened the already critical needs," Riza said.

Is this war?

The Israeli-Hezbollah conflict is hard to define — or predict

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Israel is bombing targets across many parts of Lebanon, striking senior militants in Beirut and apparently hiding bombs in pagers and walkie-talkies. Hezbollah is firing rockets and drones deep into northern Israel, setting buildings and cars alight.

But no one is calling it a war — not yet.

Israeli officials say they are not seeking war with Hezbollah and that it can be avoided if the militant group halts its attacks and backs away from the border. Hezbollah also says it doesn't want a war but is prepared for one — and that it will keep up the strikes on Israel that it began in the wake of ally Hamas' Oct. 7 attack until there is a cease-fire in Gaza.

Israel and Hezbollah have repeatedly traded fire since then — but the intensity rose to another level Monday, when Israeli airstrikes killed more than 490 people, according to Lebanese officials. That would make it the deadliest day in Lebanon since Israel and Hezbollah last went to war in 2006.

"If someone had told me or most analysts in summer 2023 that Hezbollah is striking Israeli bases in Israel, and Israel is striking southern Lebanon and parts of southern Beirut, I would have said, OK, that's an all-out war," said Andreas Krieg, a military analyst at King's College London.

The term hasn't yet been applied to the current conflict because "there haven't been any boots on the ground," but that might be "the wrong metric," he added.

Is there any agreed definition of war?

Merriam-Webster defines war as "a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations." Scholars generally expand that definition to cover large-scale violence involving insurgents, militias and extremist groups.

But any attempt at greater precision is difficult since armed conflicts run the gamut from states clashing with tanks and fighter jets to lower-level fighting.

Sometimes states officially declare war, as Israel did after Hamas' attack last year.

It has not made a similar declaration with regard to Hezbollah, but it has linked its strikes against the group to the war in Gaza, saying last week that allowing tens of thousands of residents to safely return to the north is an objective in that conflict. Israel's defense minister, Yoav Gallant, also frequently talks about an ongoing war with Iran and its allies along "seven fronts," including Lebanon.

States often refrain from declaring war even when they are plainly engaged in one. Russia officially refers to its invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation" and has banned public references to it as a war. The United States has not formally declared war since World War II, even as it took part in major conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Why does neither side want to call it a war?

Part of the reason neither Israel nor Hezbollah is using the word "war" is because they both hope to achieve their aims without setting off a more severe conflict — or being blamed for one.

"Though tensions are flaring, the situation in southern Lebanon is not that of a full-scale war as both

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Hezbollah and Israel hope to use limited means to pressure one another," said Lina Khatib, a Middle East expert at Chatham House.

With its rocket and drone attacks, Hezbollah hopes to pressure Israel to agree to a cease-fire with Hamas — a fellow Iran-backed militant group — and to avoid being seen as bowing to Israeli pressure.

Hezbollah has said it would cease the attacks if there were a truce in Gaza, but the prospects for such a deal appear remote.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to do whatever is necessary to halt the attacks so that displaced Israelis can return to their homes.

"I think the Israelis are trying to either tell Hezbollah, you come to the negotiation table and we'll settle this through diplomacy, or we'll push you into a corner until you overreact," Krieg said. "And that will be the all-out war."

What might a full-scale war look like?

Until recently, experts generally agreed that any future war between Israel and Hezbollah would look like the war they fought in 2006 — but much, much worse.

For years, Israeli officials warned that in any future war with Hezbollah, the army would exact a punishing toll on Lebanon itself, destroying critical infrastructure and flattening Hezbollah strongholds. It came to be known as the Dahiyyeh Doctrine, named for the crowded southern Beirut district where the militant group is headquartered, and that suffered heavy destruction in 2006.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, spent years expanding and improving its arsenal, and is believed to have some 150,000 rockets and missiles capable of hitting all parts of Israel.

The military build-up and threats created a situation of mutual deterrence that kept the border largely quiet from 2006 until October of last year. For most of the past year, the region has been braced for the worst, but both sides have showed restraint, and the talk of "all-out war" has been hypothetical.

That could change at any time.

"We've gone up a step, but we haven't yet made it to the penthouse floor," said Uzi Rabi, the director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University. "At the end, I don't see there's going to be any alternative to a ground operation."

Is it definitely a war if there's a ground invasion?

Any Israeli decision to send tanks and troops into southern Lebanon would mark a major escalation and lead many to categorize the conflict as a war. But the two don't necessarily always go hand in hand.

Israel officially declared war in Gaza nearly three weeks before it sent any ground troops in. Israeli ground forces have been operating in the occupied West Bank for decades, and in recent months have routinely launched airstrikes against militants, without anyone suggesting it's a war.

A limited Israeli ground incursion might still leave room for both sides to back down.

Of course, Lebanon would likely see a ground invasion as a blatant violation of its sovereignty and an act of war. But Beirut already accuses Israel of routinely violating its airspace and of occupying disputed territory along the border.

In fact, the two countries are already officially in a state of war, and have been since 1948.

FBI finds violent crime declined in 2023.

Here's what to know about the report

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Violent crime in the U.S. dropped in 2023, according to FBI statistics that show a continued trend downward after a coronavirus pandemic-era crime spike.

Overall violent crime declined an estimated 3% in 2023 from the year before, according to the FBI report Monday. Murders and non-negligent manslaughter dropped nearly 12%.

Violent crime has become a focal point in the 2024 presidential race, with former President Donald Trump recently claiming that crime is "through the roof" under President Joe Biden's administration. Even with the 2020 pandemic surge, violent crime is down dramatically from the 1990s.

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Here's what to know about the FBI's report and the state of crime in the U.S.:

The numbers

Crime surged during the coronavirus pandemic, with homicides increasing nearly 30% in 2020 over the previous year — the largest one-year jump since the FBI began keeping records. The rise defied easy explanation, though experts said possible contributors included the massive disruption of the pandemic, gun violence, worries about the economy and intense stress.

Violent crime across the U.S. dipped to near pre-pandemic levels in 2022, according to the FBI's data. It continued to tick down last year, with the rate falling from about 377 violent crimes per 100,000 people to in 2022 to about 364 per 100,000 people in 2023. That's just slightly higher than the 2019 rate, according to Deputy Assistant Director Brian Griffith of the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division.

"Are we looking at crime rates at a return to pre-pandemic levels? I think a reasonable person would look at that and say, 'Yes, that's what has happened,'" Griffith said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Law enforcement agencies in the biggest municipalities in the U.S. — communities with at least 1,000,000 people — showed the biggest drop in violent crime last year — nearly 7%. Agencies in communities between 250,000 and 499,999 people reported a slight increase — 0.3%— between 2022 and 2023.

Rapes decreased more than 9% while aggravated assault decreased nearly 3%. Overall property crime decreased more than 2%, but motor vehicle theft shot up nearly 13%. The motor vehicle theft rate — nearly 319 per 100,000 people — was the highest last year since 2007.

The limitations of the FBI's data

The FBI collects data through its Uniform Crime Reporting Program, and not all law enforcement agencies in the U.S. participate. The 2023 report is based on data from more than 16,000 agencies, or more than 85 percent of those agencies in the FBI's program. The agencies included in the report protect nearly 316 million people across the U.S. And every agency with at least 1 million people in its jurisdiction provided a full year of data to the FBI, according to the report.

"What you're not seeing in that number are a lot of very small agencies," Griffith said.

Other crime reports

The FBI's report is in line with the findings of the nonpartisan Council on Criminal Justice, which earlier this year analyzed crimes rates across 39 U.S. cities, and found that most violent crimes are at or below 2019 levels. That group found there were 13 percent fewer homicides across 29 cities that provided data during the first half of 2024 compared the same period the year before.

On the campaign trail, Trump has cited another recent Justice Department survey to suggest the crime is out of control under the Biden administration.

That National Crime Victimization Survey, released earlier this month, shows that the violent crime victimization rate rose from about 16 per 1,000 people in 2020 to 22.5 in 2023. But the report notes that the rate last year was not statistically different from the rate in 2019 — when Trump was president. And the rate has declined dramatically overall since the 1990s.

The FBI's report and the National Crime Victimization Survey use different methodologies and capture different things.

The victimization survey is conducted every year through interviews with about 240,000 people to determine whether they were victims of crimes. While the FBI's data only includes crimes reported to police, the victimization survey also aims to capture crimes that were not.

Because it's done through interviews with victims, the victimization survey doesn't include data on murders. And it only captures crimes against people ages 12 and over.

Case of Mexico's 43 missing students persists among tens of thousands of disappearances

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — All countries have crimes that resonate. In Mexico, one of the modern day ones is the disappearance of 43 students from a rural teacher's college in 2014.

Ten years later, it's still not clear where the students from the Rural Normal School at Ayotzinapa are. Authorities believe they were killed, but have only turned up small bone fragments from three of them.

The families, with the support of the school known for its radical activism, continue to demand justice. They maintain a lack of political will is responsible for not finding the truth. If it was a "state crime" as the current administration says, the government must know what happened and who is hiding information.

Why is the case still alive?

In a country with more than 115,000 registered disappearances, this case continues to hold the public's attention because it combined cartel violence and corrupt authorities and remains stubbornly unresolved.

It's considered an emblematic case and another example of abuses that occurred decades ago in Mexico's dirty war and were never corrected.

What happened on Sept. 26?

The students were attacked by security forces linked to a local drug gang, Guerreros Unidos, in Iguala, when the students were stealing buses to transport themselves to a protest.

During the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), authorities said the students had gone to Iguala, Guerrero to protest at an event — the mayor, now jailed, was linked to local gang Guerreros Unidos. They were allegedly mistaken for members of a rival gang.

The Peña Nieto administration said that Guerreros Unidos had abducted and killed the students, burned their bodies in a huge fire and tossed their ashes into a river.

But investigations by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the successor Attorney General's Office and a Truth Commission created in 2019, found that the fire at a dump was a lie built on false statements extracted under torture and manipulated evidence.

Those subsequent investigations found that an enormous operation was put in motion that night involving members of Guerreros Unidos, but also local, state and federal police. And the army was aware of everything that was happening because it had a base in Iguala, soldiers in the streets and spies among the students.

Investigators said members of the army were involved with the gang in smuggling heroin from the mountains of Guerrero on buses to the United States. Prosecutors said the decision to hide the truth was taken at the highest levels of government.

Has anyone been held accountable?

There are more than 100 people in custody and dozens have been charged, but no one has been convicted.

At the end of the previous administration, Mexican courts determined that the investigation was plagued by errors and manipulation. There were dozens of cases of torture.

Those abuses and missteps led to many of those involved being released. Some have been arrested again under the current administration.

The highest-ranking person charged is former Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam, who is accused of torture, forced disappearance and obstruction of justice. There are also 16 soldiers, most of whom are awaiting trial on house arrest, which infuriates the students' families.

When did attitudes shift on the current administration?

López Obrador had promised to find the students and hold those responsible accountable. But in 2022, when more and more evidence pointed toward the military's involvement in the attack and cover-up the administration's tone changed.

The president had ordered the military to open its archives to investigators. That didn't happen. Instead, López Obrador shifted more power and responsibility to the military than any president in recent history.

The prosecutor leading the investigation, Omar García Trejo, was suddenly demoted after he sought arrest orders for two dozen soldiers. He was replaced by someone unfamiliar with the case.

There was also growing political pressure to show results, said Santiago Aguirre, one of the families' lawyers. The administration presented some evidence that did not appear to come from reliable sources and the government's searches turned slipshod.

Where do the families want the investigation to go?

Their lawyers point out key arrests are still lacking, among them the man who led the investigation during the Peña Nieto administration, Tomás Zerón. In videos, Zerón is seen interrogating and threatening prisoners. He sought refuge in Israel, which has not agreed to extradite him despite Mexico's request.

They also say they want to see military intelligence records from that night that they still haven't had access to. They want too more cooperation from the United States government, which has prosecuted members of Guerreros Unidos in drug trafficking cases that also revealed their ties to the military.

Harris owns a gun? Trump wants to cap credit card rates? Party lines blur in campaign's last stretch

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — One presidential candidate is talking up gun ownership and promising tough border security measures. The other vows to cap credit card interest rates and force insurance companies to cover in vitro fertilization.

Which one is the Democrat and the Republican?

The lines that have long defined each party's policy priorities are blurring as Kamala Harris and Donald Trump seek to expand their coalition in the final weeks of a fiercely competitive election. The contest may well hinge on how many disaffected suburban Republicans vote for Harris and how much of the Democrats' traditional base — African Americans, Latinos, young people and labor union members — migrates to Trump.

That's prompting both candidates to take stances that would have once been anathema to their bases, scrambling longtime assumptions about what each party stands for.

"There's a whole host of issues that draw people to support President Trump, and quite frankly, these are issues that used to be core pillar issues of the Democratic Party," Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii who has emerged as a top Trump ally, said in an interview.

Barbara Comstock, who co-chaired Nikki Haley's GOP presidential campaign earlier this year, is now backing Harris. A former Republican congresswoman from Virginia, she marveled at feeling more aligned with Democrats this year, pointing to Harris' call for an expanded child care tax credit, support for a tough bipartisan immigration bill and a foreign policy stance that Comstock said was in stark contrast to Trump's admiration for leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"As a Republican, I feel like, hey, the Democrats are on my side now," Comstock said in an interview.

Trump has long bucked the GOP's traditional values

Of course, Trump has broken from the GOP's traditional conservative values on issues like trade and foreign policy for much of the past decade. But he has gone further this fall, testing the loyalty of social and small-government conservatives with an agenda that downplays his opposition to abortion and calls for significant government intervention in health care and the economy.

Trump last week said he wanted the federal government to cap credit card interest rates at 10%, a move that quickly irked fiscal conservatives. He said last month he supports a federal law that would force insurance companies to pay for IVF, frustrating some social conservatives who believe the embryos used in the process should be protected. Republicans in Congress have repeatedly voted against the issue.

Gabbard declined to say whether she views Trump as a conservative, instead describing his policy approach as "common sense."

In addition to IVF, she pointed to the Trump-backed criminal justice reform that reduced sentences for many inmates. She also highlighted a foreign policy philosophy that seeks to avoid U.S. involvement in

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global conflicts like the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"A lot of political independents and a lot of Democrats don't recognize the Democrat Party of today where not a single Democrat in the House or Senate is standing up and saying we need to bring an end to the war in Ukraine," Gabbard said.

Gabbard and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., both former Democrats, have emerged as the Trump campaign's most visible national surrogates in his bid to win over undecided Democrats and independents. The campaign has been slow to embrace other would-be allies, including Haley, who issued her first fundraising appeal on Trump's behalf just last week.

Harris has an organized program to attract Republicans

By comparison, Harris has adopted a more organized program to connect with Republican voters.

In recent days, her campaign has hosted events around abortion rights, border security and small business creation that featured Republican officials. Seven Republicans were granted speaking slots at the Democratic National Convention last month. And a slew of outside groups are spending millions of dollars to help Harris connect with disaffected Republicans, including Republican Voters Against Trump and the Anti-Psychopath PAC.

At the same time, Harris has embraced a much more muscular foreign policy. She has vowed to feature a Republican in her Cabinet if elected. And she is speaking more openly about owning a gun — and her willingness to use it.

"I'm a gun owner," Harris told Oprah Winfrey late last week.

"I did not know that!" the television star, a Harris supporter, said in surprise.

"If somebody breaks in my house they're getting shot. Sorry," Harris responded with a laugh.

Harris' support for robust U.S. leadership on the global stage has already helped her win the support of more than 100 Republican national security and foreign policy officials who previously served under Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, and Trump himself. Former Vice President Dick Cheney is among the notable converts.

Both candidates still largely align with their parties

While Harris and Trump are embracing policies that appeal to the other side, their priorities still largely align with their party's tradition.

Trump opposes abortion rights and says he is proud that the Supreme Court he transformed with conservative appointees overturned *Roe v. Wade*. He says abortion laws should be left to states, but he plans to vote this fall to uphold a Florida law that bans all abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many women realize they're pregnant.

The Republican former president has promised the largest deportation in U.S. history and pledges to finish a massive border wall to stop illegal immigration. He calls climate change "a hoax" and has outlined an energy plan that offers strong support for the fossil fuel industry. He wants to expand tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the richest Americans. He opposes virtually all restrictions on gun ownership. And he strongly opposes diversity and inclusion initiatives designed to promote civil rights.

Still, his team believes his policy platform offers much for persuadable Democrats to like.

Trump spokesman Brian Hughes argued that the GOP nominee has appeal among African Americans, Hispanics and labor union members. Notably, the Teamsters Union, which has long supported Democrats, announced last week it would not endorse either presidential candidate, which was viewed as a big win for Trump.

"We are already demonstrably inside their base no matter how hard they insist we're not," Hughes said.

Harris, meanwhile, has only just begun to articulate specific policy plans, having been in the presidential race for just eight weeks. But her record and her recent statements make clear that she favors liberal policies in most cases.

Harris supports abortion rights as they were protected under *Roe*. She backs a ban on assault weapons and wants to extend to all Americans the \$35 cap on insulin and \$2,000 annual cap on out-of-pocket prescription drug spending enacted for seniors under President Joe Biden. She called for a ban on price

gouging for groceries while pushing for a pathway to citizenship for immigrants in the country illegally.

She has pledged bold action to combat climate change, although she says she supports fracking — a shift from her position in 2020. She supports labor unions. And she supports voting rights legislation designed to combat racial discrimination.

"Vice President Harris' focus on opportunity and freedom speaks to fundamental American values that transcend party lines," said Harris spokesperson Mia Ehrenberg. "Any American looking to turn the page on Trump's chaos and division and chart a new way forward for America has a home in Vice President Harris' campaign."

Harris raises \$27 million in New York fundraiser, promises economic speech this week

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris raised \$27 million at a packed New York City fundraiser on Sunday, her largest fundraising haul since she took over at the top of the ticket from President Joe Biden, according to a Harris campaign aide.

Though Harris has far more money than former President Donald Trump, the money will be needed to compete with pricey advertising by deep-pocketed outside groups that support Trump, said the aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private fundraising details.

The blockbuster fundraiser was held at Cipriani Wall Street in a massive Greek Revival ballroom with over a dozen columns. Much of the crowd stood shoulder to shoulder as Harris needled Trump for refusing to debate her again.

"My opponent seems to be looking for an excuse," Harris told the crowd. "I feel very strongly that we owe it to the American people, to the voters, to meet once more before Election Day."

She reiterated that later, telling reporters after landing outside Washington, "We have more to discuss."

Trump has rejected more debates, saying Saturday that "it's just too late."

"Voting is already started," he said at a rally in Wilmington, North Carolina. Voters cast the first in-person ballots last week in Minnesota, South Dakota and Virginia, the states with the first early in-person voting opportunities. About a dozen more states will follow by mid-October.

Harris also said she would deliver a speech Wednesday outlining her economic vision, saying there is "more we can do to invest in the aspirations and ambitions of the American people while addressing the challenges they face."

She cited the high cost of home ownership and stubbornly high grocery bills as examples.

"I grew up a middle-class kid and I will never forget where I came from," she said.

By fleshing out her economic agenda in more detail, Harris can address an issue that's front of mind for voters after prices soared during Biden's presidency and distance herself from the president's economic track record. Trump has criticized her for being slow to release detailed policy proposals of her own since she rose to the top of the ticket.

Harris has said she'd push for middle-class tax cuts and tax hikes on the wealthy and corporations, and she adopted Trump's proposal to end taxes on tipped wages, though she'd limit her plan to low- and middle-income taxpayers. She's also criticized Trump's plan to impose large tariffs on most imported goods, which she says would severely raise the cost of goods.

Neither Harris nor Trump has a decisive edge with the public on the economy, according to the latest poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The survey suggests Harris is gaining ground on an issue that was once a clear strength for Trump.

About 4 in 10 registered voters say Republican Trump would do a better job handling the economy, while a similar number say that about the Democratic vice president, according to the poll. About 1 in 10 voters don't trust either candidate, and a similar share has equal faith in them.

The new poll found that the economy is one of the most important issues for about 8 in 10 voters as

they consider which candidate to support, dwarfing other top issues like health care and crime.

Harris has backed away from the liberal positions she took during her ill-fated 2020 presidential campaign, including proposals to ban fracking, establish a single-payer health care system and decriminalize illegal border crossings.

Who is Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sri Lanka's new Marxist president?

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Marxist politician Anura Dissanayake won Sri Lanka's presidential election over the weekend, dealing a blow to a political old guard that has been widely blamed for the unprecedented economic crisis that hit the South Asian island nation two years ago.

Dissanayake, whose pro-working class populist campaign won him youth support, secured victory over opposition leader Sajith Premadasa, the runner up; and incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who took over the country two years ago after its economy hit bottom.

Dissanayake is the leader of National People's Power alliance, and of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, or People's Liberation Front, a Marxist political party that waged two unsuccessful armed insurrections in 1970s and 1980s to capture power through socialist revolution.

Early interest in politics

Born on Nov. 24, 1968 into an ordinary family in a paddy-growing central part of Sri Lanka, Dissanayake was politically active from his school days, taking part in student demonstrations against an agreement with India to grant a degree of self rule to Sri Lanka's Tamil minority in an effort to resolve the demands for autonomy that later erupted into a decades-long civil war.

Dissanayake political involvement was further sharpened when he entered university to read for his science degree and joined the Socialist Students' Union, the student wing of the JVP, which had already staged one armed insurrection in 1971 before giving up arms and entering politics.

In 1987, the JVP started its second armed insurrection after the government banned the movement, aiming at overturning the deal with India and overthrowing the government. Dissanayake went underground as the government stepped in to violently crush the insurrection, killing the group's leader Rohana Wijeweera and nearly all of its top members.

Several thousands were killed by the JVP and government forces and their agents in the course of the insurgency and its suppression.

Parliamentary politics

Dissanayake entered public politics in 1993, working to rebuild the party under a new leader-in-exile, Somawansa Amarasinghe. The party won its first seat in Parliament in 1994, signalling its re-entry into democratic politics.

Dissanayake became national organiser of the Socialist Students' Union in 1997 and the same year, he was added to to the Central Committee of the JVP. One year later, he joined the party's politburo.

Dissanayake was elected to Parliament in 2000, and when the JVP entered an alliance with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, he briefly served as agriculture and irrigation minister.

That alliance was formed to oppose a cease-fire agreement signed between then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the now-defeated Tamil Tiger rebels to resolve the separatist conflict that had blown into a full scale civil war.

Later, Dissanayake and the JVP backed former President Mahinda Rajapaksa to militarily defeat the rebels in 2009.

He was elected JVP leader in 2014, after a party schism in which a radical left wing broke off to form a new party.

A new coalition

Having realised that it was not possible to come to power through his party alone, Dissanayake formed

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the NPP in 2019, bringing together 21 groups including political parties, youth groups, women's groups, trade unions and other civil society groups.

Since the formation of the coalition, Dissanayake has moved away from his far leftist stance. Although he remains head of a Marxist party, he now says that he supports a free market economy.

He ran for president as the head of the NPP for the first time in 2019, losing to Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was forced to flee two years later because of protests driven by the country's economic crisis.

Vows to end austerity and corruption

Dissanayake enters office with a raft of promises to improve standards of living and clean up government.

His main campaign theme was accountability, promising that politicians and officials will be held responsible for their actions. He's also promised to end corruption and privileges for politicians and retired presidents.

But supporters are also counting on him to ease up on the punishing austerity imposed by the country's deal with the IMF. He's promised to keep the deal alive with changes, given its importance to the ongoing economic recovery. He's also pledged to encourage local businesses instead of relying solely on foreign investments.

For the country's Tamil minority, Dissanayake's election offers little hope. During the campaign, he rejected devolving more power to the north and east, where most Tamils live, and investigating incidents during the civil war that U.N. investigators said could amount to war crimes. Tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were killed during the final months before the Tamil Tiger rebels' defeat.

Marxist Anura Kumara Dissanayake sworn in as Sri Lanka's president

By KRISHAN FRANCIS and BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Marxist politician Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in as Sri Lanka's president on Monday after an election that saw voters reject an old guard accused of leading the country into economic crisis.

Dissanayake, 55, who ran as head of the Marxist-leaning National People's Power coalition, defeated President Ranil Wickremesinghe, opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and 35 other candidates in Saturday's election.

The election came as the country seeks to recover from a severe economic crisis that led to shortages of essentials such as foods, medicines, cooking gas and fuel in 2022, triggering massive protests that forced then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and resign.

In a brief speech after the swearing-in, Dissanayake pledged to work with others to take on the country's challenges.

"We have deeply understood that we are going to get a challenging country," Dissanayake said. "We don't believe that a government, a single party or an individual would be able to resolve this deep crisis.

He's the ninth person to hold Sri Lanka's powerful executive presidency, created in 1978 when a new constitution expanded the office's powers.

However, Dayan Jayatilleka, a former diplomat and political analyst said Dissanayake could face challenges as the first president to enter office without a majority of the vote.

"It's not an insurmountable obstacle," said Jayatilleke, but said he will have to "engage as much as possible in politics of consensus."

Dissanayake's coalition is led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, or People's Liberation Front, a Marxist party that waged two unsuccessful armed insurrections in the 1970s and 1980s to capture power through socialist revolution. After its defeat, the JVP entered democratic politics in 1994 and has been mostly in opposition since then. However, they have supported several previous presidents and been part of governments briefly.

The NPP also includes groups representing academics, civil society movements, artists, lawyers and students.

Just before the swearing in, Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena resigned, clearing the way for the new president to appoint a prime minister and a cabinet.

Chinese president Xi Jinping congratulated Dissanayake on his victory, saying on Monday that China looks forward to working together "to jointly carry forward our traditional friendship." The U.S. and India previously congratulated Dissanayake.

Dissanayake was first elected to Parliament in 2000 and briefly held the portfolio of agriculture and irrigation minister under President Chandrika Kumaratunga. He ran for president for the first time in 2019 and lost to Rajapaksa.

Dissanayake's first major challenge will be to act on his campaign promise to ease the crushing austerity measures imposed by his predecessor Wickremesinghe under a relief agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

Wickremesinghe has warned that any move to alter the basics of the agreement could delay the release of a fourth tranche of nearly \$3 billion.

That economic crisis resulted from excessive borrowing to fund projects that did not generate revenue, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the government's insistence on using scarce foreign reserves to prop up its currency, the rupee.

Dissanayake has also vowed to dissolve parliament, where his party holds only three of 225 seats.

Families from Tennessee to California seek humanitarian parole for adopted children in Haiti

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — At only 6 years old, Esai Reed has endured three emergency evacuations from orphanages across Haiti as gangs pillage and plunder their way through once peaceful communities.

He is now in northern Haiti under the care of a U.S. organization after the director of Esai's last orphanage fled the troubled Caribbean country where gangs control 80% of the capital.

Nearly five months have passed since the last evacuation, and in that time, Esai, who loves soccer and is mischievous, hasn't been able to talk to his adoptive mother in the U.S. or his two older brothers who live with her as internet connections and other logistics falter.

"Clearly, this is an emergency," said Michelle Reed, a 51-year-old teacher and single mother who lives in Florida.

Reed's is one of 55 families from Tennessee to California asking the U.S. government for humanitarian parole for some 70 children they're adopting. It was an opportunity the U.S. granted to more than a dozen other children earlier this year when gangs attacked key government infrastructure and forced Haiti's main international airport to close for nearly three months, prompting evacuations of dozens of U.S. citizens and 39 children from March to May who had final adoption decrees.

Reed and other families said they were initially told they would be part of the evacuation group, but the U.S. government later said that "despite intensive efforts," it had not found a solution to allow children without adoption decrees to leave Haiti and enter the U.S., according to a letter from the office of children's issues at the State Department.

"We understand that this update will be disappointing for both you and your child(ren)," the office wrote.

Reed and other families warned that completing the adoption process in Haiti instead of in the U.S. as requested forces the children to travel to Port-au-Prince, which is largely under siege by gangs, to obtain a visa, passport and medical exam.

"Why aren't they doing that for our kids?" asked Emmerson, who lives in the U.S. and requested that his last name be withheld for safety since he and his wife, who are adopting his niece and nephew, have family in Haiti.

Reed noted that the Haitian Central Adoption Authority has given the families permission for the children to leave the country and complete the adoption in the U.S.

But a State Department spokesperson told The Associated Press that other Haitian authorities overseeing the adoption process do not agree. It added that it's working with the Haitian government "to move

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adoptions forward as quickly as possible" while ensuring that laws, regulations and obligations are met. "The Department is working to expedite final processing steps for additional children," it said, adding that all Haitian government offices that process adoptions are open, "although some offices could be intermittently closed or operating at limited capacity due to localized violence."

The department said it "understands and empathizes with the concerns and frustration of U.S. families adopting from Haiti."

Stéphane Vincent, director of Haiti's Directorate of Immigration and Emigration, did not return messages for comment.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security told the AP that consideration for parole applies "to a very limited number of Haitians adoptees" who have reached a specific stage in their process. It said that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services "is working tirelessly" with U.S. government partners "to navigate the current circumstances."

Aside from the dangers of being in Port-au-Prince, families note their cases could be further delayed because Haitian judges have been on strike while others have left the country because of the violence.

The U.N. noted in a recent report that ever since Haiti's judicial year started in October 2023, "courts have been operational for barely ten days."

Backing the families in their push to obtain humanitarian parole are lawmakers including U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown, Marco Rubio and Rick Scott, who have written the U.S. State Department and the Department of Homeland Security on their behalf.

Haiti has been under a state of emergency for several months, and the State Department has long upheld a "do not travel" advisory, warning of kidnappings, killings, sexual assault and other crimes, adding that "the U.S. government is very limited in its ability to help U.S. citizens in Haiti."

From April to June, at least 1,379 people were reported killed or injured, and another 428 kidnapped, according to the U.N., which noted that 88% of those crimes were in Port-au-Prince.

Meanwhile, gang violence has left at least 700,000 people homeless in recent years, half of them children, William O'Neill, the U.N. independent human rights expert on Haiti, said Friday.

"All indicators remain extremely worrying," he said during his visit to Haiti. "The first and most concerning of them, insecurity."

Meanwhile, Kenyan police who arrived in late June as part of a U.N.-backed mission to help quell gang violence only recently launched joint operations with Haiti's police and military as the U.S. ponders a U.N. peacekeeping operation after warning that the current mission lacks resources.

"The children are at great risk," said Diane Kunz, executive director for the New York-based nonprofit Center for Adoption Policy. "You have the State Department saying they can't guarantee the protection of their own people."

In Florida, Reed worries about Esai as she tries to comfort his brothers, ages 8 and 10, who were physically abused, sick and malnourished when she adopted them nearly two years ago.

"The boys are afraid for him, and they don't want to talk about it," she said, adding that no one told her they had a brother when she adopted them.

Reed recalled how, after arriving in the U.S., her two older sons slept in a single twin bed despite having two available and held each other through the night.

"Nighttime was scary for them," Reed said. "They had nightmares for a long time."

Fighting alongside Reed is Emmerson and his wife, Michelle, who also asked that her name be withheld for safety.

Emmerson's mother was in Haiti looking after his niece and nephew when she had a heart attack after gangs raided their neighborhood, located near where a young U.S. missionary couple was killed earlier this year.

"They were shooting, and she passed away," he said. "The kids were traumatized."

After speaking with his brother, who has health issues and struggles to care for his five other children, they agreed adoption was best. But Emmerson and Michelle have not been able to visit Haiti in nearly a

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year given the ongoing violence.

Gangs forced the children to relocate to southwest Haiti, where their family is running low on food and other basic supplies. Gunmen control the main roads leading in and out of Port-au-Prince, on occasion firing on those passing through.

The boy is 6 years old and extroverted, and his sister is "like a little old lady in a 3-year-old's body," Michelle said. They worry what will happen to them if they're forced to travel to Port-au-Prince to finalize the adoption, with Emmerson recalling how his brother's twins were kidnapped in the capital and later released, with the boy's face slashed by gangs.

"We just don't want that for our kids," he said.

Angela, who lives in California and asked that her last name be withheld for safety, said she and her husband are trying to adopt a 5-year-old girl who — like Reed's youngest son — has been evacuated from orphanages three times.

Angela recalled how she was on the phone with an orphanage worker and her daughter when gunfire erupted.

"Quite honestly, I didn't know if she was going to be killed right then and there," she said. "Gunfire was penetrating the walls."

She said it's terrifying to think that her daughter, who is shy and loves to read books, will have to travel to Port-au-Prince to complete the required paperwork after violence forced her to flee the city.

"It's just not right for these children to be thrown into the war zone to meet requirements that could easily be waived," Reed said. "We are not looking to bypass any part of the adoption process. We want our children evacuated to safety so we have children to adopt. We don't want them to die in Haiti."

Today in History

September 24, Protesting NFL players take a knee

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 24, the 268th day of 2024. There are 98 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 24, 2017, more than 200 NFL players kneeled or sat during the national anthem after President Donald Trump criticized the players' protests in a speech and a series of tweets.

Also on this date:

In 1789, President George Washington signed a Judiciary Act establishing America's federal court system and creating the post of attorney general.

In 1869, thousands of businessmen were ruined in a Wall Street panic known as "Black Friday" after financiers Jay Gould and James Fisk attempted to corner the gold market.

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt established Devil's Tower as the first U.S. national monument.

In 1957, the Los Angeles-bound Brooklyn Dodgers played their last game at Ebbets Field, defeating the Pittsburgh Pirates 2-0.

In 1960, the USS Enterprise, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, was launched at Newport News, Virginia.

In 1963, the U.S. Senate ratified a treaty with Britain and the Soviet Union limiting nuclear testing.

In 1968, the TV news magazine "60 Minutes" premiered on CBS.

In 1969, the trial of the Chicago Eight, later the Chicago Seven, began. (Five were later convicted of crossing state lines to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic convention, but the convictions were ultimately overturned.)

In 1988, Jackie Joyner-Kersey won gold and set a world record in the women's heptathlon at the Summer Olympics in Seoul.

In 2013, a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake rocked southwest Pakistan, killing at least 376 people.

In 2015, a stampede and crush of Muslim pilgrims occurred in the holy city of Mina, Saudi Arabia. While the official Saudi death toll stood at 769, The Associated Press estimated that more than 2,400 people

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were killed.

In 2022, Russian forces launched new strikes on Ukrainian cities as Kremlin-orchestrated votes took place in occupied regions of Ukraine to create a pretext for their annexation by Moscow.

Today's Birthdays: Football Hall of Famer Joe Greene is 78. Actor Gordon Clapp is 76. Actor Harriet Walter is 74. Filmmaker Brad Bird is 67. Actor Kevin Sorbo is 66. Actor-screenwriter Nia Vardalos is 62. Celebrity chef Robert Irvine is 59. TV personality Ross Matthews is 45. Olympic gold medal gymnast Paul Hamm (hahm) is 42. Actor Spencer Treat Clark is 37. Actor Grey Damon is 37. Actor Ben Platt is 31. Actor Joe Locke is 21.