

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, Oct. 19

Girls state soccer: Groton Area vs. SF Christian, 5 p.m. in Yankton
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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



Sunday, Oct. 20

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 10 a.m. (practice and snack), Sing in church at 10:30 then dismiss for Sunday School; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion: St. John's at 9 a.m., Zion at 11 a.m., Sunday School at 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 10:30 a.m., with confirmation/Milestones; No Sunday School, Choir, 6 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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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.

Delphi Murder Trial Begins

The trial against a man accused of murdering two teenage girls outside the small Indiana town of Delphi in 2017 is officially underway, with opening arguments presented to the jury yesterday.

Close friends Abigail "Abby" Williams, 13, and Liberty "Libby" German, 14, went missing Feb. 13, 2017, after going to a hiking trail near their hometown of 3,000 people. Their bodies were found a day later in a wooded area near the Delphi Historic Trail. The case, which gained national attention, remained unsolved until 2022, when now-52-year-old Richard Allen was arrested on charges of murder and murder while kidnapping. See a timeline here.

Investigators seized a .40-caliber pistol at the one-time drugstore pharmacy employee's house and linked it to an unspent bullet (one that wasn't fired) found between the girls' bodies. The suspect allegedly admitted to the killings in a prison phone call to his wife.

The defense claims the girls were killed as part of a pagan ritual sacrifice. The trial is expected to last a month.

Cuba plunges into darkness after island's power grid fails.

A power plant failure in Cuba has led to a nationwide blackout affecting roughly 10 million residents. The Antonio Guiteras power plant, which is the country's largest and provides about 20% of Cuba's electricity, went offline due to technical issues. The shutdown comes as the country already faces a fragile energy infrastructure coupled with fuel and food shortages. Residents and businesses have been experiencing rolling blackouts for months. See an overview of Cuba's crisis here.

CVS shares close down 5% after CEO is abruptly replaced.

The healthcare giant's chief executive officer, Karen Lynch, stepped down Friday after nearly four years at the helm. She will be replaced by David Joyner, an executive vice president at CVS who has led its pharmacy-benefit manager, CVS Caremark. CVS also announced its Q3 earnings would miss expectations for a third consecutive quarter. The company's shares have fallen roughly 25% this year.

Regulators open new probe into Tesla's "Full Self-Driving" system.

The US auto safety regulator is investigating Tesla's "Full Self-Driving" software in 2.4 million vehicles after reports of four crashes in low-visibility conditions, including one that killed a pedestrian. The probe will assess the software's ability to detect and respond to reduced roadway visibility and examine any system updates that may have affected its performance in these conditions. The investigation comes amid ongoing scrutiny of Tesla's autonomous driving technology.

Virginia men's basketball coach Tony Bennett retires.

Bennett, 55, announced his immediate retirement as head coach of the University of Virginia men's basketball team after 15 seasons. Bennett led the Cavaliers to a national championship in 2019 and became the program's winningest coach with a record of 364-136. His departure comes just weeks before the 2024-25 season, despite signing a contract extension in June that would have kept him at Virginia until at least 2030.

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Former Olympic snowboarder wanted for running drug cartel.

Ryan James Wedding, a former Canadian Olympic snowboarder, is accused of leading a drug trafficking organization responsible for transporting hundreds of kilograms of cocaine from Colombia to Mexico, the US, and Canada. The FBI is offering a \$50K reward for information leading to his capture. Wedding faces multiple felony charges, including murder and conspiracy to distribute cocaine, as part of a broader indictment involving 16 individuals in the alleged criminal network.

North Korea reportedly sending troops to help Russia.

South Korean intelligence reports North Korea has sent at least 1,500 troops to support Russia in its war against Ukraine. If confirmed, the development would mark North Korea's first major participation in a foreign conflict since the 1950-53 Korean War. Analysts, however, question the effectiveness of North Korean troops due to outdated equipment and a lack of combat experience.

















Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Lois B. in Tampa, Florida.

"We lost power from Hurricane Milton and subsequently cell life was lost. I went in search of a place to recharge on my bicycle and came across a neighbor surveying damage with a drone who told me she hadn't lost power and offered to recharge my devices. She had a portable generator, and I rode with her while she continued her work. She continued to check on us in the following days and lent us a backup charger, brought us ice, asking nothing in return. We had never met before this encounter. So heartwarming to know there are kind souls like her, especially during a disaster."

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Top 16 in 11B		Season			Seed Pts
#	Name	W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Sioux Valley	8	0	1.000	46.500
1	 Winner	8	0	1.000	46.500
3	 Mount Vernon/Plankinton	6	2	.750	44.250
4	 Clark/Willow Lake	5	2	.714	43.429
5	 Elk Point-Jefferson	6	2	.750	43.125
6	 Aberdeen Roncalli	6	2	.750	42.000
6	 Groton Area	6	2	.750	42.000
6	 McCook Central/Montrose	6	2	.750	42.000
9	 Mobridge-Pollock	6	2	.750	41.625
9	 St. Thomas More	6	2	.750	41.625
9	 Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central	6	2	.750	41.625
12	 Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan	5	3	.625	41.000
12	 Flandreau	5	3	.625	41.000
14	 Wagner	3	5	.375	40.125
15	 Hot Springs	4	4	.500	39.250
16	 Deuel	2	6	.250	38.750

Top 8 host the first round.

Due to lack of officials, Clark/Willow Lake and Webster will be playing tonight which could shift some teams around, so final standings will not be available until that game is played.

A Webster Area win could propel the Bearcats into 16th place.

Gridiron team beats Baltic; host playoff on Thursday

Groton Area's football team took advantage of five interceptions and two fumbles to post a 37-0 win over Baltic. The game was played Friday in Groton.

The Tigers had the first possession, but ended up punting on fourth and 19. Baltic's first drive was thwarted by a Ryder Johnson interception which put Groton Area on the Baltic 44 yard line. The Tigers would score seven plays, 44 yards, three first downs and 3:40 later when Keegen Tracy would have a 19 yard pass play from Korbin Kucker. The PAT kick was no good and the Tigers were on the board, 6-0, 3:28 left in the first quarter.

"It's all in the timing," said Coach Shaun Warner. "If the snap is not good, if the holder does not get the ball on the T just right, you don't get a very good kick. That hurt us against Roncalli. A lot of people don't realize that you have to do all three things right, not to mention that you have the defense coming through as well. Nunes had some good kicks for the field goals. That might come in handy during the playoffs."

Baltic would end up punting on fourth and five with no first downs and the Tigers would take over on the Groton Area 48 yard line. Four plays, one first down, 52 yards and 61 seconds later, Keegen Tracy would score on a 48 yard run. The PAT run attempt failed and it was 12-0 with 52 seconds left in the first quarter.

The Tiger defense would stop the Bulldogs' next drive in two plays as Korbin Kucker would intercept the ball and return the ball to the Bulldog 32 yard line. But the Tiger drive was haunted by two penalties and the Tigers would end up punting on fourth and 22.

Baltic would start out on its own 14 yard line, but three plays later, Teylor Diegel would intercept the ball and return it 20 yards and would end up pitching it off to Gavin Englund at the one yard line who would finish the touchdown play. The PAT kick was no good and the Tigers took an 18-0 lead with 8:22 left in the first half.

Baltic would finally have a drive going, starting at its own 35 yard line. The Bulldogs would get three first downs before ending up punting on fourth and 14. Groton Area's next drive had one first down before the Tigers would end up punting on fourth and five. Baltic would take a knee with 20 seconds left in the half and it remained 18-0 at half time.

Baltic would have the ball first in the third quarter. The Bulldogs got a first down, but ended up punting on fourth and seven. The Tigers would take over on their own 26 yard line. On second and 21, Korbin Kucker would break free and dash 85 yards to score. That drive took 59 seconds in three plays and one first down. Joao Nunes kicked the PAT and the Tigers took a 25-0 lead with 7:50 left in the third quarter.

Baltic failed to get a first down and would end up punting on fourth and six. The Tigers took over on their own 38 yard line. The Tigers got a first down, but on third and seven, Riiker Rogers would intercept the ball and the Bulldogs would take over on the Tiger 34 yard line. Baltic would only have two plays before Brevin Flihs would intercept the ball and return it 70 yards for a touchdown. The PAT kick was no good and the Tigers led, 31-0, with 1:39 left in the third quarter.

Baltic's next drive consisted of just four plays as the Bulldogs punted on fourth and 10. Groton Area took



Joao Nunes kicked two field goals in the game with Baltic on Friday. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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over on the Baltic 20 yard line as the third quarter ended.

Groton Area was deep in Baltic territory and on fourth and two, Joao Nunes would kick a 30 yard field goal as Groton Area took a 34-0 lead with 11:07 left in the game.

Baltic would only have three plays as on the fourth play, Keegen Tracy would intercept the ball and return it 15 yards for a touchdown, only to have the touchdown negated by a penalty. The Tigers would retain possession of the ball at the Baltic 35 yard line. That drive would have one penalty and one first down before Joao Nunes would kick a 33 yard field goal and the Tigers had a 37-0 lead with 4:51 left in the game.

On the kickoff, the Bulldogs would fumble the ball and Skyler Godel would recover the ball for the Tigers on the Baltic 25 yard line. The Tigers went for the conversion on fourth and one, only to have the Baltic defense stop the play and the Bulldogs would have the ball with 2:11 left in the game. The Bulldogs would get a first down before time ran out and the Tigers got a the 37-0 win.

Groton Area had more first downs, 8-5. The Tigers carried the ball 31 times for 207 yard. (Korbin Kucker 12-97, Keegen Tracy 2-45, Christian Ehresmann 5-27, Skyler Godel 5-16, Brevin Flihs 5-19, Ryder Schelle 2-9). Baltic carried the ball 34 times for 95 yards (Aaron Nordbye 12-57, Jackson Goehring 13-21, Riiker Rogers 5-18, Gavin Skotvold 1-0, Dylan Runestad 3-(-1)).

Korbin Kucker would complete five of 11 passes for 56 yards, one touchdown and one interception. Receivers were Keegen Tracy 2-30, Ryder Johnson 1-11, Teylor Diegel 1-15 and Brevin Flihs 1-0. Baltic's Gavin Skotvold would complete two of eight passes for two yards and five interceptions (Teylor Deigel, Brevin Flihs (2), Ryder Johnson and Korbin Kucker). Receivers were Ben Erickson with one catch for four yards and Jackson Goehring one for a minus two yards.

Groton Area had no fumbles while Baltic had four and lost two, recovered by Skyler Godel and Caleb Mertz.

Groton Area had seven penalties for 65 yards and Baltic had three for 25 yards.

Christian Ehresmann led the Tigers in tackles with 13 followed by Keegen Tracy with six and Karter Moody and Brevin Flihs each had five. Riiker Rogers had eight tackles for Baltic while Ryder Siemonsma and Tyler Kennedy each had six.

Groton Area is now 6-2 on the season and will be heading to the playoffs. Baltic ends its season at 0-8.

Wanner said that Groton Area is in good shape. "We have seniors and we have experience. "These kids have played together for eight game. We don't have to move people around which is nice when you don't have injuries to tend with. We're executing well and playing well. We know our spots."

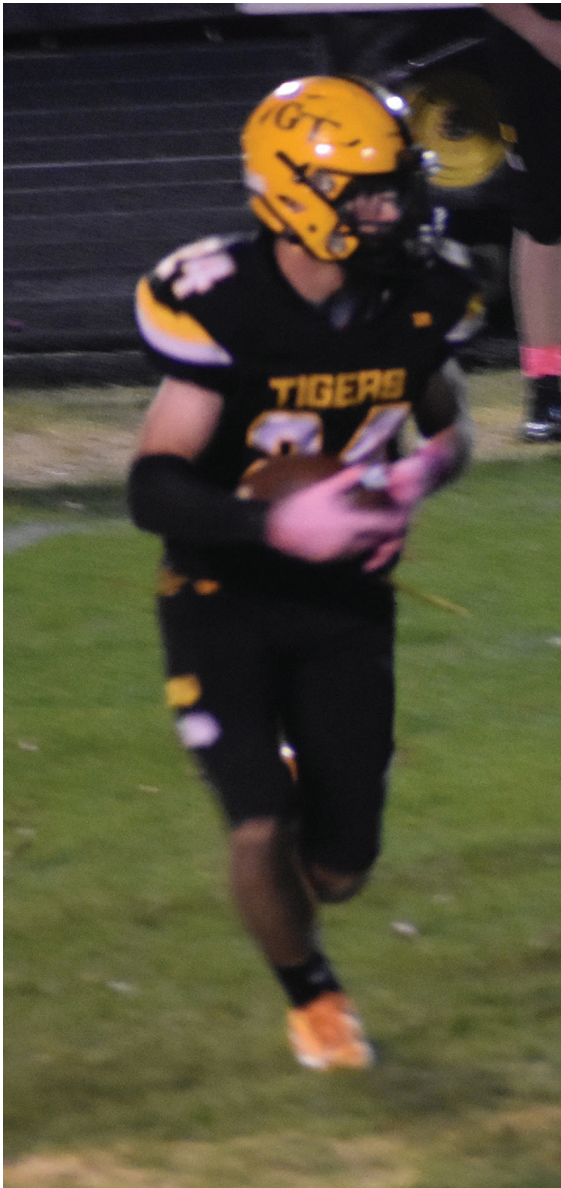
The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt from Groton Ford, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms and The Meathouse in Andover. Justin Olson provided the play-by-play and Jeslyn Kosel operated the camera and Paul Kosel in charge of the technology.



Quarterback Korbin Kucker gains a few yards after not finding an open receiver. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Christian Ehresmann looks for an opening carrying the football. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

The Playoffs

The playoff game is up in the air. Sioux Valley and Winner are tied for first with an 8-0 record, then the next nine teams are 6-2 with Groton Area, Aberdeen Roncalli and McCook/Central all tied at sixth and Mobridge-Pollock, St. Thomas More and Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central (WWSSC) all tied for ninth.

Clark/Willow Lake and Webster Area play at 2 p.m. today as they could not find officials for the game Friday night. Coach Shaun Wanner said that it has been a challenge getting officials. "We had officials from Madison and Brookings at our game. We've had officials come down from North Dakota as well."

Wanner said that if Webster Area win, McCook Central/Montrose would move up to sixth and Groton Area would drop to seventh and Roncalli to eighth. If Clark/Willow Lake wins, Groton Area would stay at sixth and Roncalli would move to seventh. Either way, Groton Area will host either WWSSC or St. Thomas More. There is an outside chance that it could also be Mobridge-Pollock. Also, Webster Area is currently in 17th place and a win over Clark/Willow Lake would boost the Bearcats into the playoffs, not to mention that a Webster win would give Groton Area the outright Northeast Conference title. If Groton Area should win the first round, the Tigers could end up going back to Clark/Willow Lake in the second round.

- Paul Kosel

2025 DOG LICENSES DUE BY 12/31/2024



LICENSE YOUR DOG.



Licenses due by December 31, 2024

Fines start January 1, 2025

**Spayed/Neutered dogs are \$5 per dog,
otherwise \$10 per dog**

Proof of rabies shot information is REQUIRED!!

Email proof to city.kellie@nvc.net

fax to (605) 397-4498 or bring a copy to City Hall!!

Please contact City Hall as soon as possible if you no longer have a dog(s) that
were previously licensed!

Questions call (605) 397-8422

Groton Area Junior High Football Team goes undefeated

The Groton Area junior high football team recently wrapped up an undefeated season. The record is 13-0. All games were combined seventh and eighth grade, except with Milbank and Roncalli where Groton Area played separate seventh and eighth grade games.

Vs. Ellendale/Edgely-Kulm 34-14
Vs. Webster 32-0
Vs. Milbank 7th grade 24-6, 8th grade 30-0
Vs. Britton/Hecla 44-14
Vs. Florence/Henry 48-0
Vs. Webster 24-6
Vs. Clark/Willow Lake 30-0
Vs. Oakes 38-14
Vs. Clark/Willow Lake 32-0
Vs. Roncalli 7th grade 8-0, 8th grade 24-6
Vs. Sisseton 38-6



In back, left to right, are Coach Jordan Carson, Zach Fliehs, Asher Johnson, Anthony Tracy, Jordan Schwan, Carter Glines, Eli Heilman, Case Reints, Tate Johnson and Coach Lance Hawkins; in the middle row, left to right, are Kyson Kucker, Gavin Hanten, Lincoln Shilhanek, Trayce Schelle, Major Dolan, Ryder Schwan, Ryker Bruns, Kolton Antonsen, Xavier Klebsch and Sam Crank; and in front, left to right are Brantley Belden, Trey Teitz, Asher Zimmerman, Jameson Penning, Eli Heilman, Wesley Borg, Keegan Kucker and Liam Lord. (Courtesy Photo)

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Pep Rally held for Girls Soccer Team

Groton Area will battle Sioux Falls Christian in the state championship game today at 5 p.m. The two teams battled it out in the first game of the season in Groton and it ended up in a 1-1 tie. A pep rally was held Friday morning for a send off for the Lady Tigers. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The team used boxes to collect balls and put them into a goal as part of the pep rally. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Groton Area Soccer team was introduced at the pep rally. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Groton Area girls soccer team was given an escort out of town on their way to Yankton. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Name Released in Yankton County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle/pedestrian fatal crash
Where: E 19th Street and Mulberry Street, Yankton, SD
When: 8:20 a.m., Tuesday, October 15, 2024

Driver 1: Michael Ray Hanson, 60-year-old male from Yankton, SD, no injuries
Vehicle 1: Chevy Silverado
Seat Belt Used: Yes

Pedestrian: Female, 5 years old from Yankton, SD, fatal injuries. The victim's name has not been released.

Yankton County, S.D.- A 5-year-old girl died after being struck by a vehicle in Yankton, SD Tuesday morning.

Preliminary crash information indicates Michael Ray Hanson, the driver of a Chevrolet Silverado, was reentering the roadway on east 19th Street near Mulberry Street at a four-way stop. At the same time, a 5-year-old child was crossing the street and was struck by the truck. The child was transported to a Yankton hospital where she was pronounced deceased.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

October 22, 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. RFP for Indigent Counsel
5. R-O-W's as follows:
 - a. NorthWestern Energy
 - b. Arlen McNeil
 - c. Northern Electric
 - i. Along Hwy. 12W
 - ii. Along Hwy. 13
6. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of October 15, 2024
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Travel Requests
 - e. Claim Assignments
 - f. Zoning Ordinance – Set Hearing Date/Authorize Advertising Plats
 - g. Plats
 - i. Final Plats:
 1. Prairie's Edge Sixteenth Addition
 2. Larkota Acres First Addition
 3. SC Krueger Addition
 4. Jeremy Johnson Addition to Columbia
 5. Columbia 20S Outlot
 6. Knecht First Addition to Houghton
 7. Mopar First Addition
 8. New Angus Second Subdivision
7. Other Business
8. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
9. 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/departments/commission>



18 South Dakota Linemen from five co-ops volunteered to help with power restoration efforts in South Carolina and Georgia. (Courtesy Photo)

Cooperative linemen return from hurricane recovery

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota linemen returned Thursday from the Southeastern U.S. after helping restore power for thousands of people affected by Hurricane Helene.

The 18 linemen from five rural electric cooperatives—East River Electric Power Cooperative, Sioux Valley Energy, Bon Homme Yankton Electric Association, Oahe Electric Cooperative, and West River Electric Association—left Oct. 2 to join line crews from around the country working to repair the devastated power grid.

During their restoration efforts, South Dakota's linemen assisted Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative in Pickens, South Carolina, where crews faced more than 64,000 meter outages and over 800 broken poles after the storm. The linemen were then called to Wrens, Georgia, where Jefferson Energy Cooperative worked to build back after a total system outage.

"Tropical storm Helene tested our cooperative unlike any other natural disaster in our 84-year history, and we needed every ounce of help we could bring in to restore power to the 90% of our membership that lost power in this storm," Blue Ridge Electric CEO Jim Lovinggood said.

South Dakota's linemen stayed at basecamps with dozens of other utility workers from all across the country. The workers camped in several large, army-sized tents, but with the linemen's busy schedules, nobody spent much time there anyway.

"We'd get up at about 5:30, head to the chow hall for breakfast at 6 o'clock, get to our trucks and do our service checks, load up material, and then head out to the job," recalled West River Electric lineman Zach Hansen. "Then about 7 o'clock or 7:30 p.m., we'd head back to the yard for supper from 8 o'clock to 10 o'clock. Then we'd hit the sack for the next day."

Hansen said that each time the crew repaired damaged infrastructure, they'd first need to start the labor-intensive process of clearing through debris and trees toppled by Helene's heavy wind gusts.

"When we have blizzards and ice storms in South Dakota, it's hard work—and you're trying to stay warm," Hansen explained. "But out here, there's a lot more chainsaw work and fixing wire breaks. It's not just straight miles of lines lying down like we're used to at home."

By Oct. 9, fewer than 1,000 meters in Blue Ridge Electric territory remained offline and the South Dakota crews were dismissed to begin the 1,200-plus mile journey home.

But as the South Dakota convoy—which included bucket trucks, skid steers and ATVs—moved homeward to reunite with their families, another call came in.

The call was from Jefferson Electric in Wrens, Georgia, where still more than 10,000 homes and businesses remained without power nearly two weeks after the storm.

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Just like before, South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives answered the call.

"When our line superintendent called me that morning and asked me how we felt about going to Georgia, I said, 'well, we're right here, so we might as well go in and help,'" Bon Homme Yankton lineman Gunnar Dally said. "If they need help, we're more than willing to come."

The stop in Wrens delayed the linemen's return home by about a week, but the appreciation from the communities helped keep spirits high.

"When we were on breaks, there were people stopping to thank us for helping," Dally said. "A lot of them were very surprised when we said we were from South Dakota."

Bon Homme Yankton Electric Manager Stephanie Horst thanked Dally and the 17 others who volunteered to travel, saying their selfless actions reflect their deep strength and dedication to community.

"We're deeply thankful for their service and we reflect on the profound impact they've made—not just in restoring power, but in bringing hope and relief to communities in need," Horst said. "Their efforts truly embody the heart and soul of our cooperative family."

Sioux Valley Energy Vice President of Engineering and Operations Ted Smith thanked his eight linemen for volunteering for a challenging restoration mission while also commending the rest of his co-op crew.

"We also need to recognize the line workers that stayed behind taking on extra duties for their teammates," he said.

Hansen recognized another subset of heroes: the families.

"The unsung heroes of storm jobs are the people we leave behind," he said. "My wife is at home with six kids taking care of the ranch while I'm gone. If we didn't have those people, we couldn't go out and do the things we needed to do. They are the real heroes."

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett thanked the linemen for volunteering to help with the storm restoration efforts and for embodying the values of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives.

"These 18 linemen gave up time at home with their families to help people in need they've never met in a place they've never been," Barnett said. "Their selfless actions reflect what we stand for as a family of cooperatives, as South Dakotans, and as fellow Americans. We thank them for their work, their spirit and their dedication to keeping the lights on—at home, and in South Carolina and Georgia."



West River Electric Association lineman Lucas Schreurs (left) and Zach Hansen (right). (Courtesy Photo)

Annual Report Card of school performance shows growth

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Education (DOE) released its 2023-24 Report Card today. The report showed academic growth in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The statewide attendance rate also increased from 86 percent to 87 percent.

“We are pleased with this positive momentum,” said Secretary of Education Joe Graves. “We have emphasized addressing attendance rates over the last few years at the state and district levels. It is promising to see our efforts are working.”

The academic assessment indicated that ELA proficiency rates rose by one percentage point, from 50 percent in 2022-23 to 51 percent in 2023-24. Mathematics proficiency rates also rose by one percentage point, from 43 percent in 2022-23 to 44 percent in 2023-24. These tests are given to students in grades 3-8 and 11.

While South Dakota’s statewide literacy initiative is in its beginning stages, Secretary Graves expects to see growth in ELA proficiency as educators become more knowledgeable in research and best practices related to the “Science of Reading,” a proven method for teaching students how to read and write.

The department has been providing free training based in the “Science of Reading” to K-12 teachers and is working with the Board of Regents’ public universities to incorporate these concepts into their programming.

The full Report Card is now available at <https://sdschools.sd.gov>.

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Groton Area Overall Report

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

South Dakota's students take the annual state assessments for the subjects of English language arts and mathematics in grades 3-8 and 11, and science in grades 5, 8 and 11. Student Performance measures how well the students performed on the state assessments.



English Language Arts

62%

Mathematics

51%

Science

54%

STUDENT PROGRESS

This measure shows the progress students have made on the state assessments for English language arts and mathematics since the prior school year. It illustrates whether students are learning and improving.



English Language Arts

59%

Mathematics

48%

English Learners On Track

62%

ATTENDANCE AND GRADUATION

Attending school regularly is essential for students to progress through each level of their education. Attendance rate is measured for elementary and middle schools. At the high school level, graduation rate and college and career readiness are important indicators of students' readiness to pursue higher education, career, and life beyond high school.



Attendance Rate

91%

High School Completion

97%

College & Career Readiness

82%

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General Election - Nov. 5
Absentee Voting has begun

Groton Daily Independent

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**We'll be publishing each ballot measure in the GDI.
Today it's Constitutional Amendment G**

2024 Statewide Ballot Measures

Underscores indicate new language.

~~Overstrikes~~ indicate deleted language.

Constitutional Amendment G

Title: An Initiated Amendment Establishing a Right to Abortion in the State Constitution.

Attorney General Explanation: This initiated amendment establishes a constitutional right to an abortion and provides a legal framework for the regulation of abortion. This framework would override existing laws and regulations concerning abortion.

The amendment establishes that during the first trimester a pregnant woman's decision to obtain an abortion may not be regulated nor may regulations be imposed on the carrying out of an abortion.

In the second trimester, the amendment allows the regulation of a pregnant woman's abortion decision, and the regulation of carrying out an abortion. Any regulation of a pregnant woman's abortion decision, or of an abortion, during the second trimester must be reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman.

In the third trimester, the amendment allows the regulation or prohibition of abortion except in those cases where the abortion is necessary to preserve the life or health of the pregnant woman. Whether an abortion is necessary during the third trimester must be determined by the pregnant woman's physician according to the physician's medical judgment.

Judicial clarification of the amendment may be necessary. The Legislature cannot alter the provisions of a constitutional amendment.

Vote "Yes" to adopt the amendment.

Vote "No" to leave the Constitution as it is.

Full Text of Constitutional Amendment G:

Amendment Text: That Article VI of the Constitution of the State of South Dakota be amended by adding a NEW SECTION:

Before the end of the first trimester, the State may not regulate a pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation, which must be left to the judgment of the pregnant woman.

After the end of the first trimester and until the end of the second trimester, the State may regulate the pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman.

After the end of the second trimester, the State may regulate or prohibit abortion, except when abortion is necessary, in the medical judgment of the woman's physician, to preserve the life or health of the pregnant woman.

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Family	\$72.43	\$67.10..... \$702.26
Daily Fee	\$5.00	



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Funeral mourners recall Tim Johnson's hard work, humor, faith and devotion to family

Political luminaries from both parties gather to honor former US senator

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - OCTOBER 18, 2024 3:30 PM

SIoux FALLS — Tim Johnson's legacy stretches across South Dakota.

It's in each drop of water from the Mni Wiconi water project, the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System, and several other water systems in South Dakota, said former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle at Johnson's funeral on Friday in Sioux Falls.

"They weren't just legislative accomplishments but lifelines that brought water, stability and prosperity to thousands of South Dakota farmers and ranchers," Daschle said. "And they stand today as monuments to his commitment to improving the lives of every person he served."



Democratic former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle speaks during former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson's funeral at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls on Oct. 18, 2024. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Daschle and Johnson, both Democrats, worked together at the federal level for 18 years. Johnson served a combined 36 years in state and federal offices — the longest in South Dakota history. He served 10 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and 18 in the U.S. Senate, after eight years in the state Legislature.

Johnson, 77, died on Oct. 8. Since 2006, he had dealt with the lingering stroke-like effects of brain bleeding caused by a cerebral arteriovenous malformation.

Along with his infrastructure achievements, Johnson was known as an advocate for tribal nations in South Dakota — the Mni Wiconi project, for example, serves the Pine Ridge, Rosebud and Lower Brule reservations. He was also known for working across the aisle to help save South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base from closing in 2005, for obtaining hundreds of millions of dollars in congressional spending earmarks

for projects across the state, and for securing important committee posts on the Indian Affairs Committee, the Appropriations Committee, and as chairman of the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs.

Hundreds of people attended Johnson's funeral, which was also broadcast live on KELO and Dakota News Now. Prominent Democratic former and current officeholders attended the ceremony, including Daschle, former U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseht Sandlin, tribal leaders, and state and local officials.

Republicans Gov. Kristi Noem, former Gov. Dennis Daugaard, former U.S. Sen. Larry Pressler and current U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds and John Thune also attended. Thune, who lost to Johnson in a 2002 U.S. Senate race, worked with Johnson for 10 years after defeating Daschle in 2004.

Thune remarked after the ceremony that although parties have political differences, he worked with Johnson to find common ground on issues of importance to South Dakotans.

"He had a powerful work ethic, and he was a man of character and integrity," Thune said. "As sad as today is, we celebrate that legacy and heritage and grieve with his family."

Johnson was remembered by Daschle and other speakers for being fair-minded and authentic, for his quiet strength, wry humor, "profound" dedication to public service and for being an "exemplary human being."

Johnson never lost an election. While he didn't earn all South Dakotans' votes in his 36-year run in politics, Herseht Sandlin said, he valued his constituents' opinions enough to listen and earn their respect.

Above all, he was lauded for his dedication to his family, ensuring his two sons, daughter and wife remained the central part of his life. Brooks Johnson, one of Johnson's sons, said the greatest gift he's received was to be raised by Tim and Barbara Johnson, who set an example of courage and the importance of valuing family.

"Dad, thank you so much. I miss you," Brooks said, on the edge of tears.

But Tim Johnson "wouldn't want to be remembered as perfect," because "he wasn't," said Brendan Johnson, the late senator's other son and a former U.S. attorney for the District of South Dakota.

For starters, Brendan joked, preparing a grilled cheese sandwich was his dad's highest culinary skill.

That endearing flaw, coupled with memories of Johnson's humor and resilience, transcended family and politics. Even one of Johnson's spiritual leaders, the Rev. Lori Hope from St. Mark's Lutheran Church, said she will never forget the smell of Johnson's "grilled" cheese sandwich — prepared in a microwave.

"A unique smell that still reeks in our memories," Hope added.

Johnson has "yielded the floor," Hope concluded in an allusion to U.S. Senate terminology, but his example will continue to influence those who loved and admired him.

"We will pray for courage to carry out Tim's legacy," Hope said, "of hard work, tenacity, humor, open-



Hundreds of people line the pews at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls for former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson's funeral on Oct. 18, 2024. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

ness, compassion, kindness, generosity, hospitality, compassion and love.”

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

COMMENTARY

Tim Johnson proved doubters wrong until he had nothing left to prove

by KEVIN WOSTER

Tim Johnson described us as a couple of “old codgers” that day in the spring of 2013, as we spoke whimsically about politics and life and campaigns won and, well, won.

Because Johnson never lost a campaign, including that nationally prominent U.S. Senate race in 2002, which we’ll get to in a minute.

For now, though, let’s consider that impromptu old-codgers meeting, which actually included a third old codger named Al Van Zee, a veteran TV reporter of sonorous voice and engaging news recollections.

Van Zee and I had joined other reporters for a news conference in Johnson’s Rapid City field office where, among other things,

After the news conference, the young reporters scurried off to make their deadlines. But Van Zee and I lingered, as old-codger reporters tend to do, enjoying the opportunity to chat with one of the state’s most prominent newsmakers before his next scheduled obligation.

Johnson was seated comfortably enough in an electric scooter, which had become part of his life since a brain hemorrhage in 2006 that nearly killed him and left him with speech and mobility challenges. His wife, Barbara, was at his side, smiling, listening intently and occasionally sharing wise perspective.

Van Zee asked what the Democratic senator would not miss about running for office. “Fundraising,” Johnson said without pause. And who could blame him? Who likes asking people for money?

It sure wasn’t part of Tim Johnson’s nature. Neither were the gregarious necessities of campaigning. He was a bit of an introvert, even more of a policy wonk, and serious enough in his demeanor that a friend



Former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson’s urn is displayed during his funeral at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls on Oct. 18, 2024.

(Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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of mine referred to him as Senator Grumpy.

Johnson wasn't really grumpy. But he was far from a natural in the grinning, glad-handing outreach of "retail politics."

Fellow South Dakota Democrat Tom Daschle, an Aberdeen kid who rose to become Democratic leader in the U.S. Senate, seemed energized by the sidewalk sales of a political campaign. So did John Thune, a lanky Republican from Murdo who served three terms in the U.S. House before challenging Johnson for his Senate seat in 2002.

Natural or not, Johnson was a smart, effective campaigner who had never lost an election going into that 2002 campaign. The Vermillion lawyer won two terms in the South Dakota House of Representatives, two terms in the state Senate and five straight terms in the U.S. House.

Then there was his big win over three-term Republican U.S. Sen. Larry Pressler in 1996, which made Johnson a bit of a political rock star, albeit a reluctant one. It also made him the incumbent senator going into that 2002 race. Yet some, including me, doubted that he could beat a rising GOP star like Thune in a heavily Republican state.

Johnson proved me and other doubters wrong, just barely, topping Thune by a razor-thin margin of 524 votes. It was a feat he liked to bring up with me from time to time, as he did during our old-codgers meeting in his office that day in 2013.

"You didn't think I would win that one, did you?" he said with a mischievous smile.

Despite his generally staid personality, Johnson could be mischievous. He could be tough, too. Oh, so tough. He showed that in his politics, but even more so in his personal life.

Johnson's recovery from the brain hemorrhage, his return to the Senate and successful 2008 campaign for a third six-year term was probably the greatest act of courage I have seen by a South Dakota politician.

When I heard last week that the 77-year-old Johnson had died, I thought about that inspiring 2008 campaign, something political consultant Steve Jarding saw close up as Johnson's campaign manager. He got the job just two days before the senator's brain hemorrhage.

"It was just stunning," Jarding says. "We had just had the meeting and the handshake two days earlier, and Tim had said 'You're my man.' And then, suddenly, we didn't know if he would live."

Johnson did more than just live. He came back after a complicated surgery and a medically induced coma to begin the slow, grueling process of recovery and rehabilitation that would take him back to his Senate duties and on into the 2008 reelection campaign.

Each day was a struggle for Johnson and an inspiration for those around him, including Jarding.

"It would have been so easy for him to say 'No, I've done enough. This is too hard,'" Jarding says. "It was painful just to watch him go through it. But clearly he had a greater calling. He was proud of what he had done and knew he could do more."

So Johnson ran and won and served, something he had been doing since his first state legislative campaign in 1978. When he decided not to run in 2014, some wondered if he was intimidated by the possibility of a matchup with former Republican Gov. Mike Rounds, who ended up winning the Senate seat that year.

Johnson? Intimidated by a difficult challenge? Hardly, Jarding says.

"Tim didn't think that way. He never seemed to be intimidated by anybody. And he was just so tough," Jarding says. "I just think he just thought it was time. It was really hard, getting to the Senate early, being there all day. Traveling. He wanted to prove that he could come back, win another term and do the work. And he did that. He felt good about it. He didn't have anything left to prove."

So Johnson retired on his own terms never having lost an election, including that big one in 2002 — the one I didn't think he could win.

Which was something he liked to remind me of from time to time, one old codger to another.

Kevin Woster grew up on a farm near Reliance and worked for decades as a journalist, including stops at the Brookings Register, Sioux Falls Argus Leader, Rapid City Journal, KELO-TV and South Dakota Public Broadcasting, plus freelance assignments for outdoors and agricultural magazines. He lives in Rapid City.

Pot laws in South Dakota: Thousands of charges, few harsh penalties imposed

Opposing sides make competing claims about impact as voters consider legalization

BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 18, 2024 12:29 PM

It's true that on paper, South Dakota's cannabis laws are some of the strictest in the nation. It's also true that judges rarely impose the most severe sanctions available in marijuana cases, and that marijuana charges have dropped off considerably in recent years.

Even so, thousands of South Dakotans continue to pick up charges, including felony ones, for possession of cannabis and cannabis concentrates.

Defense attorneys say that because the state lacks a mechanism for expunging pot charges unless a judge grants one at the time of a guilty plea, the state's marijuana laws do damage, with or without jail or prison terms.

"Having a stigma of a felony arrest and facing a felony charge, even if it's later reduced or dismissed, can often affect your ability to travel, your ability to get a job, and you might lose your job," said Eric Whitcher, the Pennington County public defender.

In the coming weeks, voters will decide whether to upend or stick with the state's cannabis norms. Initiated Measure 29, which would legalize cannabis possession for adult South Dakotans, is on the Nov. 5 ballot. Early voting began Sept. 20.

Backers of IM 29 say the enforcement of "harsh" cannabis laws wastes policing resources and threatens to take away citizens' freedom for partaking of a drug they call less harmful than alcohol.

Opponents of the measure say those claims are overblown, that cannabis possession alone rarely results in serious penalties or jail time and almost never puts people in prison.

Both sides have valid points, based on a South Dakota Searchlight analysis of data from the Unified Judicial System (UJS), Department of Corrections (DOC), and interviews with prosecutors, defense attorneys, activists and defendants.

A Legislative Research Council fiscal impact statement on IM 29 did not calculate the cost to counties for the prosecution of felony pot charges, but the statement says counties would save \$500,000 a year by removing misdemeanor cases from county dockets.

But those savings wouldn't come by way of avoided jail time for people charged with pot possession. Instead, they'd come from clearing the clutter of pot possession charges from the court system's lengthy to-do list.



Marijuana wax from Dakota Herb, a medical marijuana company headquartered in South Dakota. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Marijuana and jail, prison

Possession of 2 ounces or less of marijuana flower is a class 1 misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

Those penalties are higher than average in the region – the highest fine for similar crimes among South Dakota’s immediate neighbors is \$1,500; the longest potential jail sentence is six months – but it’s the state’s felony possession statute that stands out more starkly on the national level.

According to the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), South Dakota is one of five states where a person can be charged with a felony for the possession of concentrated cannabis products like vape pens, gummies or hash oil.

Vapes and gummies can also draw felony charges in Florida, Texas, Georgia and Alabama, according to NORML.

In practice, it’s exceedingly rare for South Dakotans to wind up in prison or jail for simple possession of any kind of cannabis product.

That’s even true for parolees on supervision. Drug use alone can draw mild to moderate sanctions for a parolee, but generally doesn’t constitute a “parole violation” – the sanction that returns a person to prison.

“We do not have any offenders who were violated from parole supervision solely for possession of marijuana,” Department of Corrections spokesman Michael Winder wrote in response to a records request from South Dakota Searchlight.

“A recommendation to violate parole is the final and most serious sanction available,” he added.

As of June 30, Winder wrote, there were 10 people in state prisons for pot-related crimes. Of those, three were serving sentences for possession of 10 or more pounds of pot. The remaining inmates were serving time on pot as well as other charges, or had violated parole.

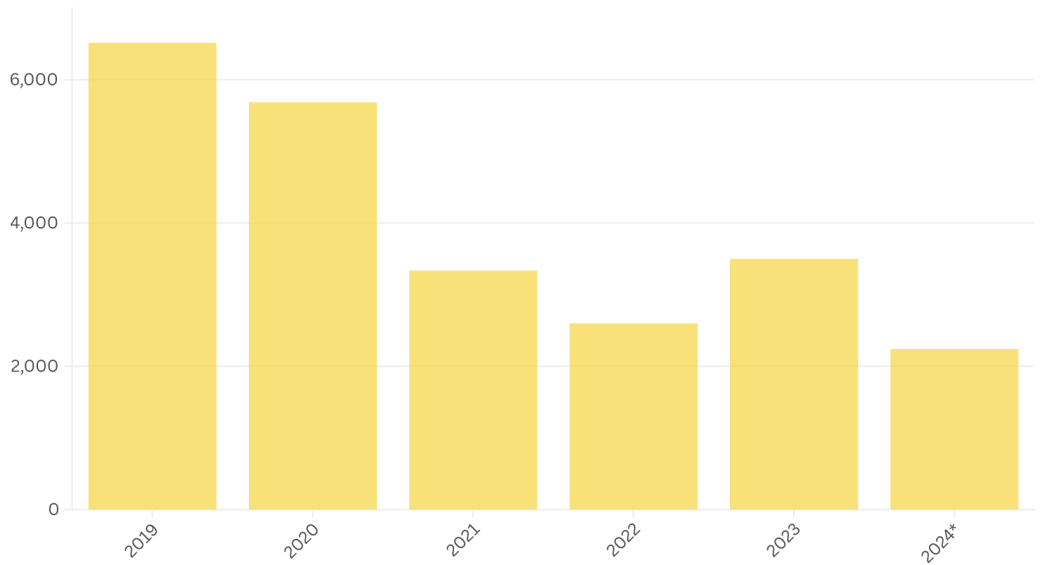
County jail time for pot alone is similarly uncommon.

According to the Unified Judicial System, South Dakotans have served 5,450 days in jail on marijuana possession sentences since 2019. But in most of those cases, the defendant was at least initially charged with multiple offenses, often felony drug possession, before being sentenced to jail for pot as part of a plea deal.

In cases where possession of 2 ounces of pot or less was a defendant’s only charge during that same time period, South Dakotans served 220 days in jail. More than half those days were served by a single defendant who had a lengthy arrest history before picking up a standalone pot charge. She was never released from jail after her initial arrest, and was sentenced to 127 days in jail, which was the amount of time she’d served on the day the sentence was imposed.

Most jail time issued by judges in pot possession cases is suspended on the condition that defendants pay their fines and don’t break the law. In total, since 2019, judges have suspended 205,393 days of jail time for misdemeanor pot possession.

Misdemeanor marijuana possession charges in South Dakota



Source: South Dakota Unified Judicial System • *2024 numbers are through mid-August

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Jail officials in Minnehaha and Pennington County said it's nearly unheard of for someone to serve time in a county jail for pot possession alone.

"I can confidently say nobody has sat in jail on just possession of marijuana, 2 ounces or less, since at least 2021," said Minnehaha County Jail Warden Mike Mattson, who operates the jail serving South Dakota's largest metropolitan area.

Charges fell after 2020, started climbing again in 2023

A lack of jail terms isn't for a lack of charges. Since 2019, 23,873 misdemeanor pot possession charges have been filed in South Dakota.

The highest number in that five-year period came in 2019, when 6,514 were filed. By 2022, that figure had dropped by more than half, to 2,598.

Charges began to creep back up in 2023, reaching 3,499. By mid-August this year, 2,241 charges had been filed, on pace to once again climb above 3,000 for the year.

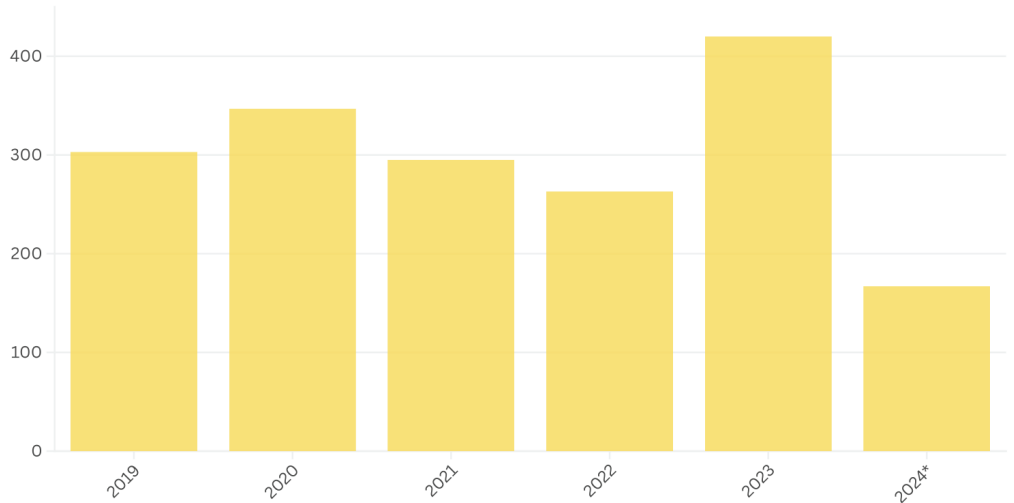
That could be the result of the increased availability of cannabis, according to Brookings County State's Attorney Dan Nelson. Nelson offers nearly all of his first-time pot possession offenders a diversion program that scrubs charges from their records after they take a class, do 10 hours of community service and avoid new criminal charges for 13 months.

The state's medical marijuana program went live in the summer of 2022, Nelson noted, and there's growing acceptance of the drug in some quarters as more states legalize it.

"Maybe the why is just because there's more of it out there," Nelson said.

A similar trend is apparent in felony marijuana charges, although court data on those charges offer an incomplete picture of their prevalence.

Felony marijuana possession charges in South Dakota



Source: South Dakota Unified Judicial System • *2024 numbers are through mid-August

Note: Figures include charges for possession of marijuana and marijuana wax, but do not include all felony marijuana charges filed in South Dakota during this time period. Felony pot charges can also be filed as "other," or "unknown."

Blind spots in felony pot data

South Dakota's felony drug possession laws do not distinguish between individual drug types.

The possession of pot gummies is a violation of the same statute – possession of a controlled substance – that bans heroin, methamphetamine or cocaine, and it's punishable by up to five years in prison.

But the Unified Judicial System does track drug types, to an extent. The UJS says there have been 56,641 charges filed for possession of a controlled substance filed since 2019, a figure that does not include distribution or ingestion charges.

"Charges" do not necessarily equate to individual defendants. Individual people can face multiple charges, and charges can be dismissed and refiled for a number of reasons as a case moves through the system.

Of the charges filed for possession of a controlled substance since 2019, 1,795 were for "marijuana" or "marijuana wax." Those numbers fell in 2021 and 2022, but began to climb in 2023. In 2019, there were 303 felony pot charges; in 2023, there were 420.

Those figures represent a fraction of felony pot charges. The UJS only tracks certain drug types,

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and prosecutors often file charges using terms that aren't included in those tracked categories.

Prosecutors in Minnehaha County, for example, often charge people caught with gummies or vape pens with possessing "delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol," which is the high-inducing chemical compound in marijuana. In other jurisdictions, indictments use terms like "THC wax" or "hash oil."

The UJS doesn't have a category for any of those terms. As a result, clerks of court might log the drug type in such charges as "other" or "unknown."

It's unclear how many felony drug charges labeled "other" or "unknown" involve cannabis, but a Searchlight analysis of case data suggests a significant figure.

Taken together, 12,176 charges were filed under "other" or "unknown," representing the second-largest number of felony possession charges filed since 2019, behind methamphetamine.

The only way to find out which drug is involved in an "unknown" or "other" case is to open the criminal file at a county courthouse and read the indictment or criminal complaint. Those documents are not accessible online.

A random check of more than 200 felony possession cases with charges labeled "other" or "unknown" in the UJS data found 84 that involved cannabis. The tags "other" and "unknown" were also applied to charges for psilocybin mushrooms and prescription drugs like Ativan and Valium, and occasionally to charges for drugs like methamphetamine, which do have a line item in the court system's database.

The cases with felony pot charges uncovered in those spot checks most often ended in one of two ways: with guilty pleas to misdemeanor pot or ingestion charges in exchange for a dismissal of more serious ones, or with suspended sentence deals in which a defendant admitted to a felony on the promise it be scrubbed from their record after a period of good behavior, the payment of fines and other conditions imposed by a judge.

That's not a surprise to Roberts County State's Attorney Dylan Kirchmeier.

"Unless there's something else involved, my standard approach is to offer a plea to a lesser charge," Kirchmeier said of felony marijuana cases.

Diversion programs avoid strain on system

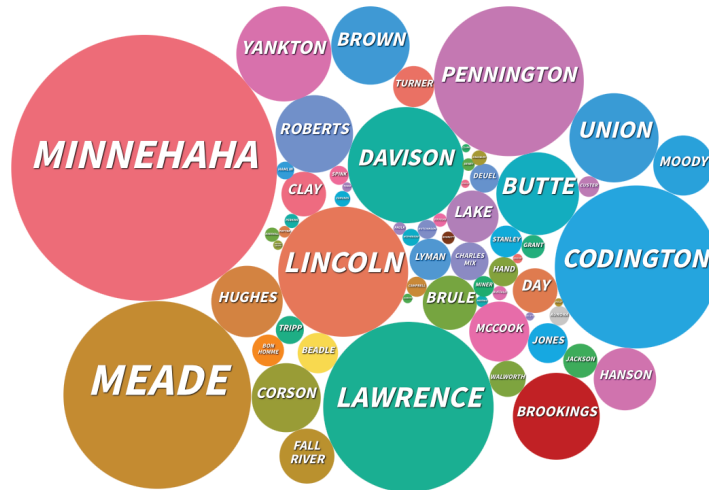
Kirchmeier said felony pot cases most often include charges for other drugs or other crimes. That's why he doubts legalizing gummies or vapes, as IM 29 would do, would save him a ton of time or money.

"I'd be handling those cases anyway," Kirchmeier said.

Usually, anyway. Standalone felony arrests for vape pens or gummies do land on his desk sometimes. The Sisseton-area prosecutor said his approach to plea deals in those situations "really depends on the defendant."

"If it's a young kid that's never been in trouble before and it's their first time with any sizable amount of

Felony drug charges by county: Marijuana, other and unknown
2019-2024



Source: South Dakota Unified Judicial System
Note: Charges filed as "other" or "unknown" could indicate cannabis products like vape pens, dabs or gummies, or drugs like psilocybin mushrooms or prescription drugs like Ativan or Valium not specifically tracked by the UJS.

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trouble, a lot of times I'll handle those with deferred prosecution agreements," he said. "I tell them, 'Be good, keep your nose out of trouble for a year, and if I don't see you again, (the charge) is not coming back.'"

Like Kirchmeier and any other prosecutor in the state, Nelson has flexibility in how to manage pot cases. Nelson said his use of diversion in pot cases has probably saved his county a million dollars over the past four years.

With limited tax dollars for law enforcement, he said, pot possession cases are less worthy of investment than drug dealing, theft or violent crime.

"It's a triage approach, because we only have so much manpower on the policing side, the court system side," Nelson said. "We can't just track down every single drug user and not simultaneously neglect some of our responsibilities as it relates to violent crime, or some of the harder drug dealers or on domestic violence."

The absence of prison or jail terms in most pot possession cases doesn't equate to a lack of impact. Especially when it comes to felony charges, for which defendants are often assigned county-funded public defenders.

When asked if legalizing marijuana would save counties more money, Nelson said he's not sure the savings to law enforcement would be worth the potential costs of legitimizing marijuana use. He's seen more pot-related DUIs in recent years, and he said legalization wouldn't improve matters there. He also wonders what legal weed might mean for students, employers or the mental health system.

"Part of it is, 'What are the societal trade-offs if pot becomes legal?'" Nelson said. "What are the other costs, the hidden costs, if we normalize people using marijuana?"

Impacts on users

Even felony charges that end with deferred prosecutions or diversions can put a strain on defendants, according to Minnehaha County Deputy Public Defender Aaron Gehrke.

A person caught with a joint in Sioux Falls gets a citation and a court date. A person caught with a gummy goes to jail, at least initially.

"You get arrested, your vehicle gets towed, you get hauled in front of a judge, you have to get a bond and all of that," said Gehrke, who represents clients charged with marijuana felonies.

South Dakota Searchlight reached out to several people charged with felony pot possession after 2019. None of those who responded were willing to speak about their case on the record.

David Blackburn was, though. Blackburn is a manager for Royzzz, a medical cannabis company with dispensaries in Sioux Falls and Yankton. His boss, Roy Nielsen, is pushing for the passage of IM 29 by offering pro-pot information at his dispensaries and contributing to the measure's sponsor, South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws.

Blackburn told South Dakota Searchlight he was working as a welder in Freeman when he was arrested for felony pot possession in 2016. He was on the way to work, but he was late. He'd put on his welding jacket on his way out the door, on top of his winter coat.

"The cop pulled me over because I had my windows down, and he thought it was suspicious that I had my windows down in the winter," Blackburn said.

He didn't make it to work. Instead, he found himself in jail in Mitchell and charged with felony pot possession after a drug dog alerted to marijuana flower and "an empty vaporizer cartridge" in his trunk.

He'd lost his job by the next day, he said. He wound up pleading guilty to the felony charge in a deal that suspended two years of prison time in exchange for a period of good behavior, the payment of fines and a court-ordered drug class.

He struggled to find steady work after that, instead doing "random pick-me-up jobs with whoever would hire me" until South Dakotans voted in 2020 to legalize medical marijuana.

Not long after that, Blackburn was working for a different dispensary company in Sioux Falls. He moved to Royzzz earlier this year to help open the dispensary he now manages.

"If it wasn't for the fact that I work where I work now, it would have absolutely ruined my life," Blackburn said.

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.

Counties fending off a storm of election-related lawsuits

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 18, 2024 2:10 PM

Some county officials in South Dakota are still dealing with a flurry of election-related litigation that began last spring, despite several losses by plaintiffs claiming violations of election laws and after a judge labeled one lawsuit's claims "not fully developed" and "illogical."

At least a dozen county auditors have received petitions from local residents this year seeking to ban election technology such as electronic tabulators, and also seeking to require hand-counting in future elections. Three counties — Gregory, Haakon and Tripp — accepted petitions this summer and put them on the June primary ballot, where voters rejected all three measures.

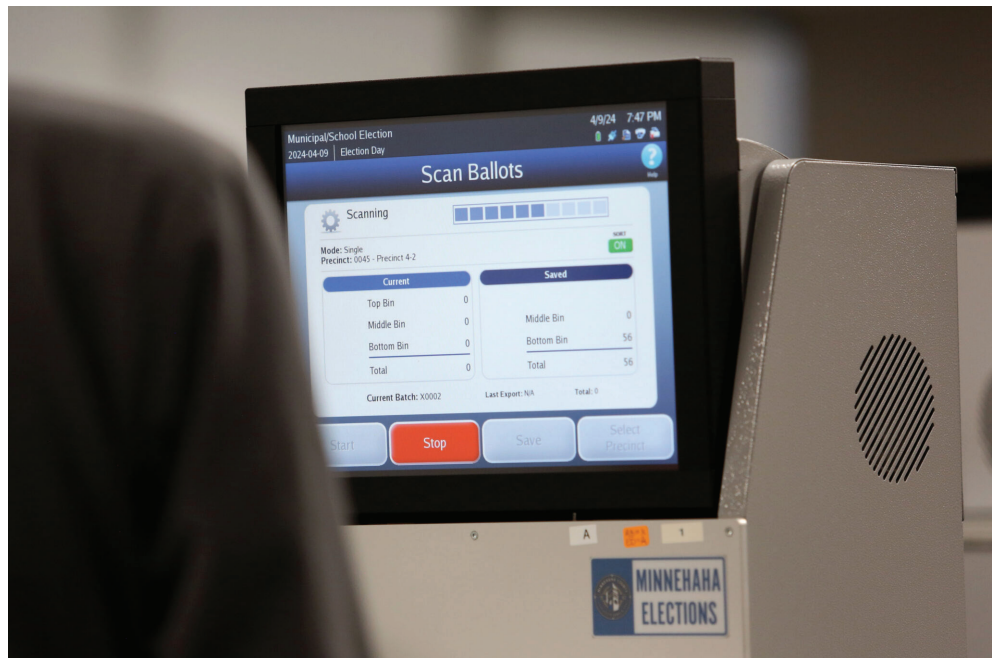
The petitioners in South Dakota include people who believe

former President Donald Trump's false claims — thrown out by dozens of courts — that President Joe Biden's 2020 victory over Trump was fraudulent (in South Dakota, Trump won with 62% of the vote in 2020). The South Dakota lawsuits are playing out amid a broader atmosphere of harassment against county officials, which recently took the form of activists accusing Minnehaha County commissioners of "treason" for upholding laws that allow people such as full-time traveling RVers to register and vote in South Dakota.

Lawrence County has been an epicenter for lawsuits in South Dakota, although most have been dismissed. The lawsuits began after the county commission rejected petitions seeking to ban various forms of election technology and require hand-counting. The commission cited reasons for the rejection including state and federal laws that require electronic voting systems for people with disabilities.

A legal challenge to the commission's rejection of those petitions remains active, as does one of five legal actions claiming the results from the June primary are invalid because of allegedly improper uses of tabulating machines. Another open case in Charles Mix County challenges a similarly rejected petition on hand counting.

In those two counties alone, eight legal actions have been filed under the banner of "election integrity" since last spring.



A tabulator machine scans ballots during the Sioux Falls city and school board election on April 9, 2024. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota

Searchlight)

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What are the arguments?

Nichole Braithwait, who introduced and circulated the Lawrence County hand-counting petition, argues that county commissioners do not have the authority to reject a properly filed petition with enough signatures to support a public vote. The authority to determine a petition's legality lies with the courts and not commissioners, her lawsuit says.

Braithwait is associated with South Dakota Canvassing, the group that helped coordinate the statewide petition effort seeking to require hand-counting at the county level.

"I am convinced that we are on the right side of this issue and eventually the people will realize that our elections are run by corporations where the people have no oversight," Braithwait said in an emailed statement, adding that "our elections are selections."

South Dakota's elections are run by elected county auditors, and statewide results are reported by the Secretary of State's Office. Government officials do contract with companies to provide electronic tabulating machines. Post-election audits after the June primary matched the machine tallies in most counties, with minimal discrepancies in some counties that did not change results.

Braithwait and some other South Dakotans who suffered rejected hand-counting petitions have been unable to find lawyers to represent them.

Braithwait's lawsuits have cost her over \$1,000 in printing costs alone, she said. She has taken time off work and away from her family to prepare and attend court.

Lawyer for counties calls lawsuits 'frivolous'

Rapid City lawyer Sara Frankenstein specializes in election law and represents many South Dakota counties in election-related lawsuits, including some of Lawrence County's.

The petitioners' struggle to retain a lawyer, Frankenstein said, reflects poorly on the claims in the lawsuits. Attorneys generally avoid cases with little to no chance of success, she said.

Frankenstein described the lawsuits as "frivolous" actions that cost counties money for elected officials "just doing what they swore an oath to do," which is conduct elections according to local, state and federal laws.

18-point loser won't drop claims

Lawrence County elected officials have also faced six legal actions from Kate Crowley-Johnson, who ran unsuccessfully for state Senate as a Republican in the June primary. Four have been dismissed, one against the Lawrence County auditor and board of commissioners is pending, and an appeal was filed in another case in September.

Crowley-Johnson lost by 18 percentage points to incumbent Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish. She's filed actions against Deibert, Lawrence County commissioners and the auditor challenging the use of automatic tabulating machines to count ballots.

In one case, Crowley-Johnson sued Deibert, requested a hand recount and called for a new election, alleging the county's election equipment had not been properly tested. The judge dismissed her claims, citing a lack of evidence of voting irregularities.

"Many of the claims are not fully developed," Judge Jeffrey Connolly wrote. "Many are illogical."

Crowley-Johnson denied an interview request for this story but alleged in text messages to South Dakota Searchlight that "the court system broke its own laws." She also used profanity in the text messages and accused South Dakota Searchlight of writing "propaganda."

Deibert said the cases have caused unnecessary public costs.

"It is taxpayer dollars paying for our court system. People should understand that," Deibert said. "We're talking property tax dollars. These frivolous lawsuits are part of the problem."

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

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.

Officials urge voters to be prepared and consider voting early as turnout predictions grow

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - OCTOBER 18, 2024 10:45 AM

The county officials who run South Dakota's elections want voters to study up and prepare for long wait times on Election Day, if they don't plan to vote early.

As of Oct. 11, 40,135 South Dakotans had already voted in the 2024 general election. Early and absentee voting began Sept. 20.

That's a bellwether of overall voter turnout, Secretary of State Monae Johnson said. Twice as many South Dakotans have cast absentee ballots this year compared to the same date prior to the 2022 election. About 59.4% of registered voters turned out for the midterm election.

Johnson estimates up to 75% voter turnout this election. The 2020 election had about 74% turnout; 2016 had about 69%.

"There's a huge interest in the ballot we have," Johnson said.

This year's ballot not only includes a hotly contested presidential race, but a U.S. House of Representatives race, a Public Utilities Commission race, South Dakota Legislature races and seven ballot measures, plus local races and issues.

Given the size of the ballot, Johnson and county auditors are encouraging South Dakotans to utilize the South Dakota voter information portal on the secretary of state's website. South Dakotans can check their voter registration status and view their sample ballot. South Dakotans have until 5 p.m. Monday to register to vote.

Voters can print, fill out and bring a sample ballot into the voting booth, Johnson added. South Dakotans can also bring a translated sample ballot.

State law limits South Dakotans to 10 minutes in a booth on Election Day, Johnson said. Sample ballots and absentee voting are options for people who need extra time.

"It's not like they're going to be removed," Johnson said, "but it's so people go in ready to cast their vote instead of figuring it out at the time of voting."

Auditors are preparing for longer wait times and more standing in line for voters on Election Day, Nov. 5. That's part of the reason why Pennington County Auditor Cindy Mohler believes more people than



A Sioux Falls resident votes in the city and school board election at Southern Hills United Methodist Church on April 9, 2024. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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usual are voting early or requesting absentee ballots.

On the first day of in-person early voting in 2022, 206 people in Pennington County showed up to vote or request an absentee ballot in person. This year, the number rose to 602.

"We usually don't see those kinds of numbers until the third week, and then it kind of keeps growing," Mohler said.

With more people voting early, auditors answer more questions about election security as well. Security concerns and questions "are a little bit more amped up," Lincoln County Auditor Sheri Lund said.

Residents question the validity of elections, ask how absentee voting works and want to know what security measures are in place. But that's a good thing, Lund said. She and her staff explain how they're keeping people's ballots safe and secured before Election Day. One way they've done that is rekeying the vaults in which all ballots — including absentee ballots — are kept.

"People are more in tune," Lund said. "They want to be reassured that their vote is going to count."

Haakon County Auditor Stacy Pinney also doesn't mind answering questions.

"I welcome it. As long as they're civil and curious, I don't have a problem answering them," Pinney said. "I wish more people would."

South Dakotans are not allowed to wear or bring items to a polling location that can be interpreted as campaign material for candidates or issues — that includes hats with campaign slogans, buttons or T-shirts with a candidate's face on it. Auditors have asked people to remove the items or turn them inside out before voting.

Johnson hasn't heard about county auditors struggling to find poll workers, though she encouraged South Dakotans to check with their local auditor to see if more workers are needed. She added that auditors work with local law enforcement to prepare security and safety measures the day of the election.

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



Absentee voting is available on the third floor of the Minnehaha County building in downtown Sioux Falls ahead of the city and school board election in April 2024. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Guns: Where do Trump and Harris stand?

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - OCTOBER 18, 2024 6:30 AM

WASHINGTON — A mass shooting at a Georgia high school in September thrust the issue of gun violence to the forefront of the presidential race.

Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump agree that gun violence is a major problem, but they offer strikingly different views on how to address it.

Two 14-year-old students and two math teachers were killed at Apalachee High School.

While at a campaign rally in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, shortly after the Apalachee shooting, Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, renewed calls for an assault weapons ban, universal background checks and red flag laws.

Students should not have to be frightened of school shootings, she said. "They are sitting in a classroom where they should be fulfilling their God-given potential, yet some part of their big, beautiful minds is worried about a shooter breaking through the door," she said. "It doesn't have to be this way."

Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, expressed his condolences.

"Our hearts are with the victims and loved ones of those affected by the tragic event in Winder, GA," Trump wrote on his social media site Truth Social. "These cherished children were taken from us far too soon by a sick and deranged monster."

Trump has survived two assassination attempts, one where he was injured in the ear, but has not changed his stance on guns.

After the first assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania, Trump campaign senior adviser Chris LaCivita said at the Republican National Convention that the party won't back away from its support of Second Amendment rights.

During a Univision town hall with undecided Latino voters that aired Wednesday night, an audience member asked Trump how he would explain his gun policy to "parents of the victims of school shootings."

"We have a Second Amendment and a right to bear arms," Trump said. "I'm very strongly an advocate of that. I think that if you ever tried to get rid of it, you wouldn't be able to do it. You wouldn't be able to take away the guns, because people need that for security, they need it for entertainment and for sport, and other things. But they also, in many cases, need it for protection."

A majority of Americans view gun violence as a problem — about 60% — and they expect it to only get worse over the next five years, according to a Pew Research Center study.

This year there have been 421 mass shootings, according to the Gun Violence Archive, which tracks gun violence in the U.S.



Guns on display in February 2023 at Caso's Gun-A-Rama in Jersey City, New Jersey. (Aristide Economopoulos/NJ Monitor)

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For a third year in a row, in 2022 — the most recent year of finalized data — firearms were the leading cause of death for children and teens ages 1 to 17, according to a report from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

Harris' record

In the aftermath of two mass shootings in 2022, Congress passed the most comprehensive bipartisan gun safety legislation in decades.

In Uvalde, Texas, 19 children and two teachers were murdered, making it the second-deadliest mass shooting since the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in 2012. In Buffalo, a white supremacist targeted a Black neighborhood and killed 10 Black people in a grocery store.

The package that Congress passed and President Joe Biden signed into law provided \$11 billion in mental health funds and \$750 million for states to enact red flag laws. It also closed loopholes and established a White House Office for Gun Violence Prevention, among other provisions.

Red flag laws allow courts to temporarily remove a firearm from an individual who is a threat to themselves or others, among other provisions.

Biden tasked Harris with leading the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, which helps local communities implement that 2022 bipartisan gun legislation and aids communities impacted by gun violence.

Trump's record

During Trump's first presidency, he had a mixed record on gun policy.

After a mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Trump administration moved to ban bump stocks, which allow a semi-automatic rifle to quickly fire bullets.

However, the U.S. Supreme Court, to which Trump appointed three conservative justices, struck down the ban on bump stocks.

Trump also threatened to veto legislation from Congress that would have enhanced background checks on guns.

Promise: a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines

Democrats have long called for a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, which are typically used in mass shootings.

The U.S. used to have a ban on assault weapons, but it expired in 2004 and Congress failed to renew the ban.

"I am in favor of the Second Amendment, and I believe we need to reinstate the assault weapons ban," Harris said at the White House in late September.

Fulfilling this promise would come down to the makeup in Congress and overcoming the Senate's 60-vote threshold to advance legislation.

Promise: a rollback of Biden regulations

During a forum with the National Rifle Association in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in February, Trump promised to roll back all gun-related regulations that the Biden administration has implemented.

"Every single Biden attack on gun owners and manufacturers will be terminated on my very first week back in office, perhaps my first day," Trump said.

Trump specifically said he would cancel the Biden administration's "zero-tolerance" policy, which revokes federal licenses from gun dealers who violate firearm laws.

Brian Hughes, a Trump campaign senior adviser, said in a statement to States Newsroom that if Trump wins a second term, "he will terminate every single one of the Harris-Biden's attacks on law-abiding gun owners his first week in office and stand up for our constitutionally enshrined right to bear arms."

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Promise: tax credits, no gun-free zones

During an NRA event in April 2023, Trump said that he was supportive of a tax credit for teachers who wanted to carry a firearm in schools.

Trump has also previously voiced his disapproval of schools being gun-free zones. Days after the Uvalde school shooting, Trump attended another NRA event in Houston, Texas, where he argued that a gun-free zone does not allow people to protect themselves.

"As the age-old saying goes, the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," Trump said. "The existence of evil is one of the very best reasons to arm law-abiding citizens."

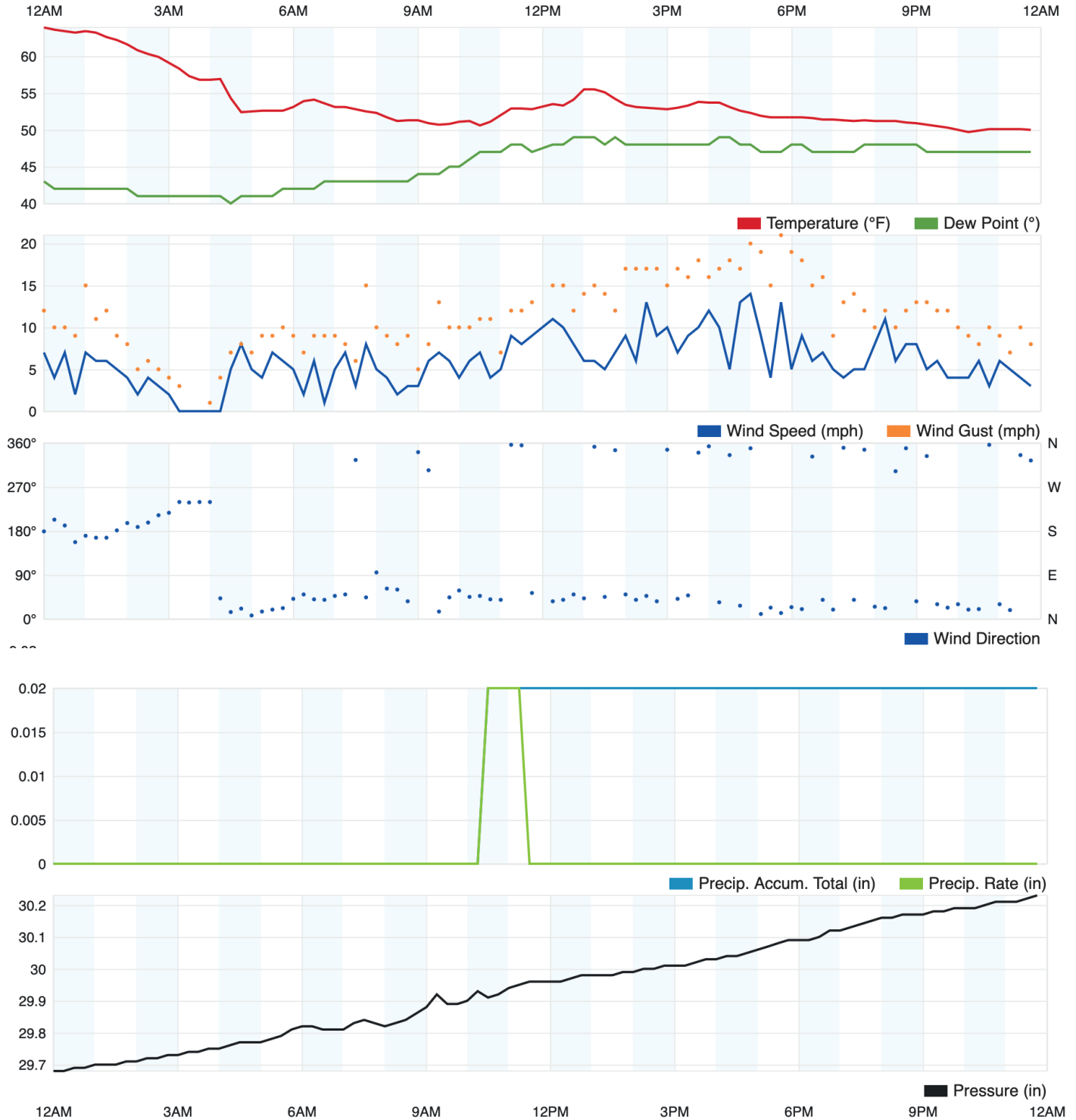
He argued that schools should have metal detectors, fencing and an armed police officer.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 66 °F

Patchy Fog
then Sunny

Tonight



Low: 44 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 78 °F

Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 53 °F

Mostly Clear

Monday



High: 78 °F

Mostly Sunny



Today



Highs: 63 - 69°F

Lows: 42 - 49°F

Areas of fog clearing before
noon

Expect clouds today at least through the morning hours east of the Missouri River along with areas of fog across central and northeast SD. Highs today will be 10-15 degrees above average, in the 60s.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 64 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 50 °F at 10:12 PM

Wind: 21 mph at 5:43 PM

Precip: : 0.02

Day length: 10 hours, 47 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1958

Record Low: 10 in 1917

Average High: 58

Average Low: 32

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.44

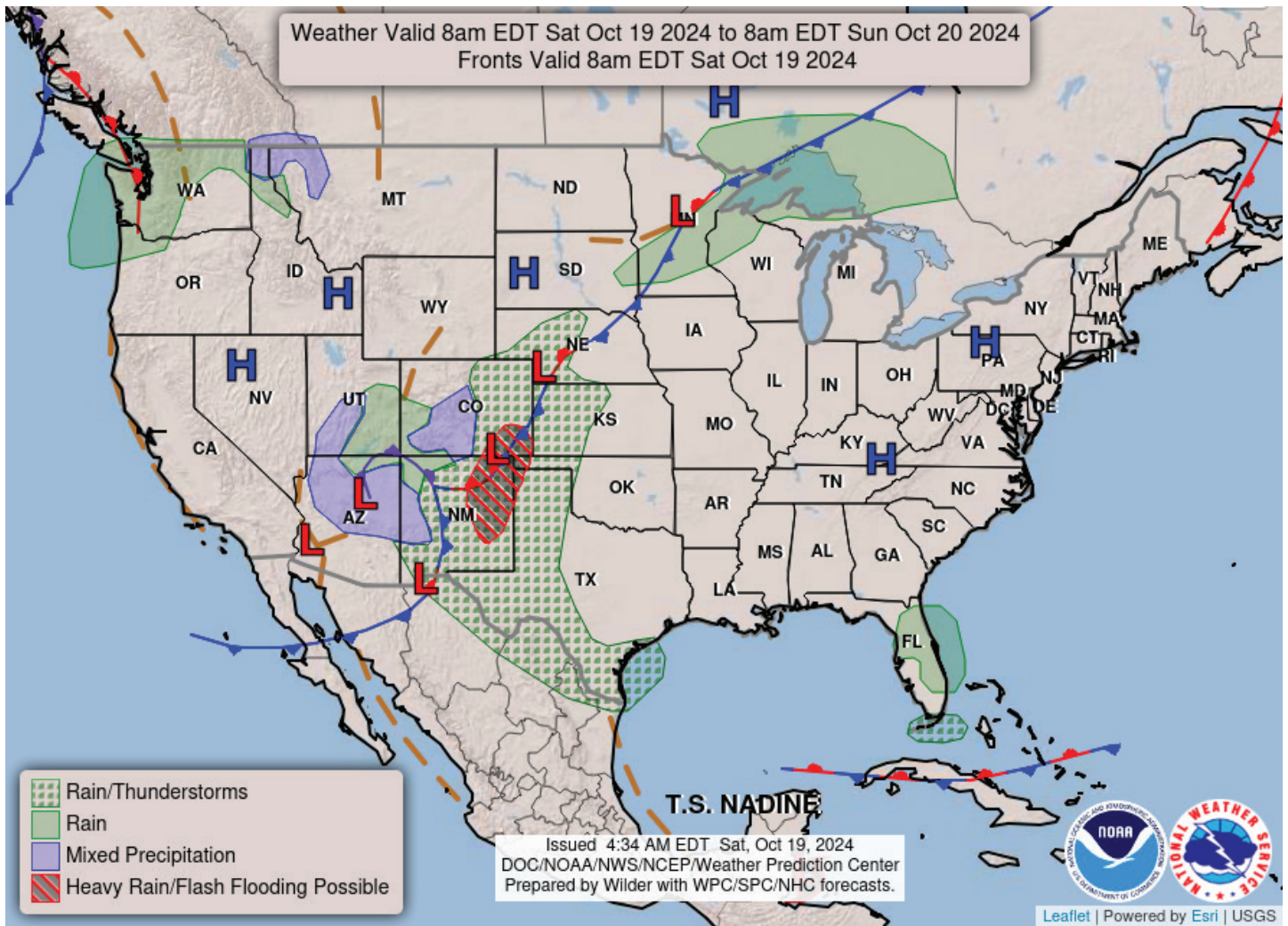
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.02

Average Precip to date: 19.77

Precip Year to Date: 19.77

Sunset Tonight: 6:40:54 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:54:52 am



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Today in Weather History

October 19, 1982: An early fall snowstorm dropped 3 to 12 inches of wet snow over the southeastern corner of South Dakota. The wet snow combined with the gusty winds of 20 to 40 mph dropped wind chills to around zero. Numerous trees snapped downing power lines. Power outages were extensive from Vermillion to Mitchell. Thunder rumbled, and lightning flashed amidst the height of the snowstorm. Almost a foot of snow fell in northern Union and southern Lincoln counties. High wind gusts knocked out television and radio transmitters in Sioux Falls. The weight of the snow collapsed a panel on the covered stadium at the University of South Dakota at Vermillion.

1844 - The famous "Lower Great Lakes Storm" occurred. Southwesterly winds were at hurricane force for five hours, driving lake waters into downtown Buffalo NY. The storm drowned 200 persons. (David Ludlum)

1961 - Rain changed to a record early season, heavy wet snow over the southern mountains of West Virginia. Leaves were still on trees, resulting in the worst forest disaster since the fires of 1952 and 1953. One to two feet of snow fell near Summersville and Richwood. (19th-20th) (The Weather Channel)

1984 - Thunderstorms deluged the town of Odem, TX (located 15 miles northwest of Corpus Christi) with 25 inches of rain in just three and a half hours. Most businesses in Odem were flooded, as were 1000 homes in nearby Sinton. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front brought rainshowers to parts of the central U.S., and ushered cool Canadian air into the Great Plains Region. Daytime highs were only in the 30s in North Dakota and eastern Montana. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced high winds in eastern Colorado, with gusts to 63 mph reported at La Junta. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Record breaking snows fell across northern and central Indiana. Totals ranged up to 10.5 inches at Kokomo, and 9.3 inches was reported at Indianapolis. The 8.8 inch total at South Bend was a record for the month as a whole. Up to seven inches of snow fell in extreme southern Lower Michigan, and up to six inches fell in southwestern Ohio. The heavy wet snow downed many trees and power lines. Half the city of Cincinnati OH was without electricity during the morning hours. Temperatures dipped below freezing across much of the Great Plains Region. Twenty cities, including fourteen in Texas, reported record low temperatures for the date. North Platte NE reported a record low of 11 degrees. In Florida, four cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The record high of 92 degrees at Miami also marked a record fourteen days of 90 degree weather in October, and 116 such days for the year.

1996: The opening game of World Series between the Braves and Yankees in New York was postponed by heavy rains and high wind from a major storm system affecting the East Coast, marking the third time in history that the World Series opener had been postponed. Overall, nine of the 22 games that have been canceled in Series history were scheduled in New York or Brooklyn.

2007: A total of 87 tornadoes were reported in the United States from Oct. 17-19, a new record outbreak for the month, according to NOAA's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma. The outbreak also contributed to the monthly total of 105 tornado reports – the second highest for October, behind the 117 tornadoes in October 2001. Records date back to 1950.



ONE PRAYER – DIFFERENT ANSWERS?

Janie had been disobedient and refused to follow her mother's instructions. Wanting her to learn the importance of obedience and necessity of prayer, her mother sent her to her room to ask God to help her. In a few moments she returned to the kitchen where her mother was preparing the evening meal.

"Mom," she announced, "I prayed about my disobedience."

"Good," said her mother. "Did you ask God to help you to be a good girl?"

"No, Mom, I didn't," she answered. "Instead, I asked Him to help you put up with me."

Jesus said something important about obedience: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." There is always a connection in Scripture between love and obedience. Again, He said, "If you love me, you will obey my commandments."

If we say that we love God, we will show this love by being obedient to God. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see a relationship between a Father and His Son founded on love and reflected in obedience. His life set the standard for us to follow.

It was His sacrificial life that ultimately showed us what it means to obey the Father. When we waver in our obedience to Christ we need to examine our lives to make certain that what we say is seen in what we do.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, in our struggle to be obedient to You. We know that selfish temptation often overwhelms us – but give us strength to persevere. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." John 14:21

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:
10.18.24

4 9 26 39 58 23

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$205,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.16.24

2 16 21 33 52 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$12,050,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 23 Mins
48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.18.24

10 31 32 36 38 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 38 Mins
48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.16.24

3 5 14 24 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$64,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 38 Mins
48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.16.24

29 35 41 53 68 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 7 Mins
48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.16.24

4 30 39 44 60 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$437,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 7 Mins
48 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 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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 50, Sisseton 0
Belle Fourche 50, Lakota Tech 0
Brandon Valley 21, Harrisburg 7
Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 28, Parker 8
Britton-Hecla 50, Waverly-South Shore 0
Brookings 42, Douglas 7
Castlewood 38, Deubrook 0
Chester 41, Garretson 33
Colman-Egan 52, Iroquois-Lake Preston 0
Corsica/Stickney 42, Centerville 40
Dakota Valley 14, Vermillion 7
DeSmet 28, Estelline-Hendricks 14
Dell Rapids St Mary 46, Sioux Falls Lutheran 8
Dupree 56, Timber Lake 20
Faulkton 56, Northwestern 6
Flandreau 35, Beresford 7
Freeman-Marion-FA 36, Avon 26
Great Plains Lutheran 44, Wilmot 0
Groton 37, Baltic 0
Hamlin 40, Elkton-Lake Benton 35
Hanson 11, Canistota 6
Hitchcock-Tulare 30, Arlington 22
Howard 48, Viborg-Hurley 14
Huron 29, Mitchell 26
Ipswich 58, North Central 6
Irene-Wakonda 56, Colome 0
Kadoka 52, Jones County 0
Lemmon High School 60, Faith 8
Lennox 46, Tri-Valley 8
Madison 38, Canton 16
Mobridge-Pollock 19, Deuel 13
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 22, WWSSC 20
Parkston 68, Gregory 18
Philip 46, New Underwood 24
Platte-Geddes 45, Scotland/Menno 8
Rapid City Christian 44, Custer 7
Sioux Falls Christian 21, Dell Rapids 0
Sioux Falls Jefferson 39, Rapid City Central 13
Sioux Falls Lincoln 53, Aberdeen Central High School 2
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 48, Rapid City Stevens 0
Sioux Falls Washington 42, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 7
Sioux Valley 17, Elk Point-Jefferson 14
St Thomas More 55, Lead-Deadwood 0

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Stanley County 54, Potter County 12
Sully Buttes 60, Sunshine Bible Academy 6
T F Riggs High School 35, Spearfish 15
Wagner 42, Miller 28
Wall 60, Lyman 6
Warner 21, Leola-Frederick High School 0
Watertown 35, Sturgis Brown High School 24
Waubay/Summit 39, Florence-Henry 0
West Central 51, Milbank 7
Winner 46, Chamberlain 0
Wolsey-Wessington 22, Kimball-White Lake 20
Yankton 28, Tea 7

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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Brandon Valley def. Rapid City Central, 25-13, 25-19, 25-11

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte def. Standing Rock, N.D., 25-22, 25-17, 25-19

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-13, 25-13, 25-18

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

Drone targets Israeli prime minister's house as strikes in Gaza kill 50

By ADAM SCHRECK and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli government said a drone targeted the prime minister's house Saturday, though there were no casualties, as Iran's supreme leader vowed Hamas would continue its fight following the killing of the mastermind of last year's deadly Oct. 7 attack.

Sirens wailed in Israel warning of incoming fire from Lebanon. The military said dozens of projectiles were launched. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the drone targeted his house in the Mediterranean coastal town of Caesarea, though neither he nor his wife were home.

The barrage comes as Israel considers its expected response to an Iranian attack earlier this month and presses its offensives against Hamas militants in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In Gaza, Israeli forces fired at hospitals in the battered northern part of the Palestinian enclave, and strikes in the strip killed more than 50 people, including children, in less than 24 hours, according to hospital officials and an Associated Press reporter there.

In September, Yemen's Houthi rebels launched a ballistic missile toward Ben Gurion Airport when Netanyahu's plane was landing. The missile was intercepted.

Barrages from Lebanon target northern Israel

In addition to the drone launched at Netanyahu's private residence, Israel's military said some 55 projectiles were fired in two separate barrages at northern Israel from Lebanon on Saturday morning. A 50-year-old man was killed after being hit by shrapnel while sitting in his car in northern Israel, and four people were injured, Israel's medical services said.

Israel's war with Lebanon's Hezbollah — a Hamas ally backed by Iran — has intensified in recent weeks. Hezbollah said Friday that it planned to launch a new phase of fighting by sending more guided missiles and exploding drones into Israel. The militant group's longtime leader, Hassan Nasrallah, was killed in an Israeli airstrike in late September, and Israel sent ground troops into Lebanon earlier in October.

Israel also said Saturday it killed Hezbollah's deputy commander in the southern town of Bint Jbeil. The

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army said Nasser Rashid supervised attacks against Israel.

In Lebanon, the health ministry said an Israeli airstrike Saturday hit a vehicle on a main highway north of Beirut, killing two people. It was unclear who was in the car when it was struck.

Israeli strikes pound Gaza as Hamas rejects hostage release

A standoff is also ensuing between Israel and Hamas, which it's fighting in Gaza, with both signaling resistance to ending the war after the death of Hamas' leader Yahya Sinwar this week.

On Friday, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Sinwar's death was a painful loss but noted that Hamas carried on despite the killings of other Palestinian militant leaders before him.

"Hamas is alive and will stay alive," Khamenei said in his first comments on the killing.

Since Israel claimed Sinwar's death Thursday, confirmed by a top Hamas official Friday, Hamas has reiterated its stance that the hostages taken from Israel a year ago will not be released until there is a cease-fire in Gaza and a withdrawal of Israeli troops. The staunch position pushed back against a statement by Netanyahu that his country's military will keep fighting until the hostages are released, and will remain in Gaza to prevent a severely weakened Hamas from rearming.

Sinwar was the chief architect of the 2023 Hamas raid on Israel that killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and kidnapped another 250. Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish combatants from civilians but say more than half the dead are women and children.

More strikes pounded Gaza on Saturday. The Palestinian Health Ministry said in a statement that Israeli strikes hit the upper floors of the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahiya, and that forces opened fire at the hospital's building and its courtyard, causing panic among patients and medical staff.

At Al-Awda hospital in Jabaliya, in northern Gaza, strikes hit the building's top floors, injuring several staff members, the hospital said in a statement. Three houses in Jabaliya were struck overnight Friday, killing at least 30 people, more than half of them women and children, said Fares Abu Hamza, head of the health ministry's ambulance and emergency service. At least 80 people were injured.

In central Gaza, at least 10 people were killed, including two children, when a house was hit in the town of Zawayda, according to the al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where the casualties were taken. Another strike killed 11 people, all from the same family, in the Maghazi refugee camp, the same hospital said. Associated Press journalists counted the bodies from both strikes at the hospital.

The strikes knocked out internet networks in northern Gaza, said Paltel, the Palestinian communications company, on Facebook Saturday.

The war has destroyed vast swaths of Gaza, displaced about 90% of its population of 2.3 million people, and left them struggling to find food, water, medicine and fuel.

Opportunity in Sinwar's death

Sinwar's killing appeared to be a chance front-line encounter with Israeli troops on Wednesday, and it could shift the dynamics of the war in Gaza even as Israel presses its offensive against Hezbollah with ground troops in southern Lebanon and airstrikes in other areas of the country.

Israel has pledged to destroy Hamas politically in Gaza, and killing Sinwar was a top military priority. But Netanyahu said in a speech Thursday announcing the killing that "our war is not yet ended."

Still, the governments of Israel's allies and exhausted residents of Gaza expressed hope that Sinwar's death would pave the way for an end to the fighting.

In Israel, families of hostages still held in Gaza demanded the Israeli government use Sinwar's killing as a way to restart negotiations to bring home their loved ones. There are about 100 hostages remaining in Gaza, at least 30 of whom Israel says are dead.

Japan's ruling party headquarters is attacked with firebombs and suspect is arrested

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A man threw several firebombs into the headquarters of Japan's ruling party in Tokyo Saturday, then crashed his car into the fencing of the prime minister's residence, Tokyo police said. There were no reports of injuries.

The man, identified by police as Atsunobu Usuda, 49, was arrested on the spot on charges of obstructing the performance of official duties, although additional charges can be added later.

Although the motive for the attack was not immediately clear, Japanese media reports said social media posts believed to be Usuda's showed him complaining about the sums of money required to run for office under Japanese law, implying Usuda had political ambitions.

The media reports also quoted unidentified sources as saying Usuda had taken part in protests against nuclear plants. Usuda was not immediately available for comment.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party is increasingly unpopular with the public due to a ballooning money scandal involving dubious funding and suspected tax evasion. The party declined to comment on Saturday's attack, referring all queries to the police.

Voting for the lower house of Parliament is set for Oct. 27. Some tarnished politicians lost the official backing of the ruling party but are running as independents.

The party recently chose a new leader, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, hoping to present a new image. But polls show its popularity plummeting, although it's still unclear whether they will lose their majority grip on the lower house in the upcoming election given the splintered opposition.

Some candidates have been heckled, which is relatively rare in Japanese culture.

The Liberal Democrats have ruled Japan almost continuously over recent decades. They are credited with leading Japan as it became an economic powerhouse from the devastation of World War II.

Then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated in 2022, while making a speech for a ruling party candidate during a parliamentary election. The killer used a handmade firearm, saying he resented Abe because his mother gave all the family money to the Unification Church, and he saw Abe as affiliated with that church. Such ties are still ongoing with some ruling party politicians.

Judges punishing Jan. 6 rioters say they fear more political violence as Election Day nears

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Over the past four years, judges at Washington's federal courthouse have punished hundreds of rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol in an unprecedented assault on the nation's democracy. On the cusp of the next presidential election, some of those judges fear another burst of political violence could be coming.

Before recently sentencing a rioter to prison, U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton said he prays Americans accept the outcome of next month's election. But the veteran judge expressed concern that Donald Trump and his allies are spreading the same sort of conspiracy theories that fueled the mob's Jan. 6, 2021, riot.

"That sore loser is saying the same things he said before," Walton said earlier this month without mentioning the Republican presidential nominee by name. "He's riling up the troops again, so if he doesn't get what he wants, it's not inconceivable that we will experience that same situation again. And who knows? It could be worse."

Walton, a nominee of President George W. Bush, is not alone. Other judges have said the political climate is ripe for another attack like the one injured more than 100 police officers at the Capitol. As Election Day nears, judges are frequently stressing the need to send a message beyond their courtrooms that political violence can't be tolerated.

"It scares me to think about what will happen if anyone on either side is not happy with the results of

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the election," Judge Jia Cobb, a nominee of President Joe Biden, said during a sentencing hearing last month for four Capitol rioters.

Judge Rudolph Contreras lamented the potential for more politically motivated violence as he sentenced a Colorado man, Jeffrey Sabol, who helped other rioters drag a police officer into the mob. Sabol later told FBI agents that a "call to battle was announced" and that he had "answered the call because he was a patriot warrior."

"It doesn't take much imagination to imagine a similar call coming out in the coming months, and the court would be concerned that Mr. Sabol would answer that call in the same way," Contreras, a President Barack Obama nominee, said in March before sentencing Sabol to more than five years in prison.

Trump's distortion of the Jan. 6 attack has been a cornerstone of his bid to reclaim the White House. The former president has denied any responsibility for the crimes of supporters who smashed windows, assaulted police officers and sent lawmakers running into hiding as they met to certify President Joe Biden's 2020 victory.

Trump has vowed to pardon rioters, whom he calls "patriots" and "hostages," if he wins in November. And he said he would accept the results of the upcoming election only if it's "free and fair," casting doubts reminiscent of his baseless claims in 2020.

Judges have repeatedly used their platform on the bench to denounce those efforts to downplay the violence on Jan. 6 and cast the rioters as political prisoners. And some have raised concerns about what such rhetoric means for the future of the country and its democracy.

"We're in a real difficult time in our country, and I hope we can survive it," Walton said this month while sentencing a Tennessee nurse who used a pair of medical scissors to smash a glass door at the Capitol.

"I've got a young daughter, I've got a young grandson, and I would like for America to be available to them and be as good to them as it has been to me," he added. "But I don't know if we survive with the mentality that took place that day."

More than 1,500 people have been charged with federal crimes related to Jan. 6 siege, which disrupted the peaceful transfer of presidential power for the first time in the nation's history. Over 1,000 rioters have been convicted and sentenced. Roughly 650 of them received prison time ranging from a few days to 22 years.

Justice Department prosecutors have argued in many cases that a prison sentence is necessary to deter convicted Capitol rioters from engaging in more politically motivated violence.

"With the 2024 presidential election approaching and many loud voices in the media and online continuing to sow discord and distrust, the potential for a repeat of January 6 looms ominously," prosecutors have repeatedly warned in court filings.

Prosecutors argue that defendants who have shown little or no remorse for their actions on Jan. 6 could break the law again. Some rioters even seem to be proud of their crimes.

The first rioter to enter the Capitol texted his mother, "I'll go again given the opportunity." A man from Washington state who stormed the Capitol with fellow Proud Boys extremist group members told a judge, "You can give me 100 years and I'd do it all over again." A Kentucky nurse who joined the riot told a television interviewer that she would "do it again tomorrow."

A Colorado woman known to her social media followers as the "J6 praying grandma" avoided a prison sentence in August when a magistrate judge sentenced her for disorderly conduct and trespassing on Capitol grounds. Rebecca Lavrenz told the judge that God, not Trump, led her to Washington on Jan. 6.

"And she has all but promised to do it all over again," said prosecutor Terence Parker.

Prosecutors had sought 10 months behind bars. After her April trial conviction, Lavrenz went on a "media blitz" to defend the mob, spread misinformation, undermine confidence in the courts and boost her celebrity in a community that believes Jan. 6 "was a good day for this country," Parker said.

Magistrate Zia Faruqui sentenced Lavrenz to six months of home confinement and fined her \$103,000, stressing the need to "lower the volume" before the next election.

"These outside influences, the people that are tearing our country apart, they're not going to help you," Faruqui told her.

The last in-person vote in the US will be cast on the desolate tundra of Alaska's Aleutian Islands

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — On a desolate slab of island tundra in western Alaska, a resident of Adak will again become the last American to cast an in-person ballot for president, continuing a 12-year tradition for the nation's westernmost community.

The honor of having the last voter in the nation fell to Adak when they did away with absentee-only voting for the 2012 election and added in-person voting.

"People have a little bit of fun on that day because, I mean, realistically everybody knows the election's decided way before we're closed," said city manager Layton Lockett. "But, you know, it's still fun."

When polls close in Adak, it's 1 a.m. on the East Coast.

Adak Island, midway in the Aleutian Island chain and bordered by the Bering Sea to the north and the North Pacific Ocean to the south, is closer to Russia than mainland Alaska. The island best known as a former World War II military base and later naval station is 1,200 miles (1,931 kilometers) southwest of Anchorage and further west than Hawaii, where polls close an hour earlier.

Mary Nelson said Republican Mitt Romney was likely conceding the 2012 race to President Barack Obama on election night when she became Adak's first last voter in a presidential election, although she didn't know Obama had been reelected until the next morning when she turned on her computer to read election results.

Nelson, who now lives in Washington state, recalled to The Associated Press by telephone that she was a poll worker in Adak at the time and had forgotten to vote until just before the 8 p.m. poll closing time.

"When I opened the (voting booth's) curtain to come back out, the city manager took my picture and announced that I was the last person in Adak to vote," she said.

That was also the end of the celebration since they still had work to do.

"We had votes to count, and they were waiting for us in Nome to call with our vote count," she said.

There are U.S. territories farther west than Alaska, but there's no process in the Electoral College to allow residents in Guam, the northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa and the U.S. Minor Outlying Islands to vote for president, according to the National Archives.

"I've been tickled pink and told people about it," said Nelson, now 73. "I have the story I printed out about it and show some people who I think would think it's a big deal, like my family," she said.

Adak Island has historical significance for its role in World War II. The U.S. built facilities on the island after Japanese forces took islands farther west in the Aleutian chain.

Troops landed in August 1942 to begin building an Army base, and enemy planes dropped nine bombs on the island two months later, but in undeveloped areas, and riddled the landscape with machine gun fire. The Navy began building facilities in January 1943.

In May 1943, about 27,000 combat troops gathered on Adak as a staging point to retake nearby Attu Island from the Japanese.

Among famous Americans stationed at Adak were writers Dashiell Hammett and Gore Vidal. The island also played host to President Franklin Roosevelt, boxing champion Joe Lewis and several Hollywood stars, according to the Adak Historical Society.

In a lighter note, the Army attempted to start a forest on Adak Island between 1943-45. A sign placed by residents in the 1960s outside the area of 33 trees noted: "You are now Entering and Leaving the Adak National Forest."

After the war, the island was transferred to the Air Force and then the Navy in 1950. Nearly 80,000 acres (32,000 hectares) of the 180,000-acre (73,000 hectare) island were set aside for Navy use and the rest of the island remained part of what eventually became the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

The base closed in 1997. The Navy retains about 5,600 acres (2,300 hectares) with the remainder either owned by the Aleut Corp., the Alaska Native regional corporation for the area; the city of Adak, or the refuge.

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Lockett said the city is facing tough times with a dwindling population and lack of an economic driver. The town's fish processing plant has closed numerous times over the years.

When the base was active, there were about 6,000 residents on Adak Island. The 2020 Census counted 171 residents. Lockett says that's probably now down to below 50 full-time residents.

In Alaska, a school must have 10 students to remain open. Mike Hanley, the Aleutian Region School District superintendent, said in an email that the school closed in 2023 after it started the year with six students. That shrank to one by November, and then that student left.

Hanley said by the time he notified the state education department, "there were literally no children on the island, not even younger pre-K students."

When it comes to politics, Lockett said it's pretty easy in a small town to know where your neighbors fall politically, but there seems to be one goal that unites everyone.

Whoever is in office, are they going to try to "encourage the military to come back to Adak in some way, shape or form?" he said.

"We're kind of in that great midst of, what's next for Adak, because we're struggling," he said.

For now, with the presidential election coming up, the city can focus on its unique place in America.

"I'm not sure who the last voter will be this year," said Adak City Clerk Jana Lekanoff. "Maybe it'll be a bit of a competition?"

Israel unearths Hezbollah's web of tunnels in southern Lebanon

By TIA GOLDENBERG and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli forces have spent much of the past year destroying Hamas' vast underground network in Gaza. They are now focused on dismantling tunnels and other hideouts belonging to Hezbollah militants in southern Lebanon.

Scarred by Hamas' deadly raid into Israel last year that sparked the war in Gaza, Israel says it aims to prevent a similar incursion across its northern border from ever getting off the ground.

The Israeli military has combed through the dense brush of southern Lebanon for the past two weeks, uncovering what it says are Hezbollah's deep attack capabilities — highlighted by a tunnel system equipped with weapons caches and rocket launchers that Israel says pose a direct threat to nearby communities.

Israel's war against the Iran-backed militant group stretches far inside Lebanon, and its airstrikes in recent weeks have killed more than 1,700 people, about a quarter of whom were women and children, according to local health authorities. But its ground campaign has centered on a narrow patch of land just along the border, where Hezbollah has had a longstanding presence.

Hezbollah has deep ties to southern Lebanon

Hezbollah, which has called for Israel's destruction, is the Arab world's most significant paramilitary force. It began firing rockets into Israel a day after Hamas' attack. After nearly a year of tit-for-tat fighting with Hezbollah, Israel launched its ground invasion into southern Lebanon on Oct. 1 and has since sent thousands of troops into the rugged terrain.

Even as it continues to bolster its forces, Israel says its invasion consists of "limited, localized and targeted ground raids" that are meant to destroy Hezbollah infrastructure so that tens of thousands of displaced Israelis can return home. The fighting also has uprooted more than 1 million Lebanese in the past month.

Many residents of southern Lebanon are supporters of the group and benefit from its social outreach. Though most fled the area months ago, they widely see the heavily armed Hezbollah as their defender, especially as the U.S.-backed Lebanese army does not have suitable weapons to protect them from any Israeli incursion.

That broad support has allowed Hezbollah to establish "a military infrastructure for itself" within the villages, said Eva J. Koulouriotis, a political analyst specialized in the Middle East and Islamic militant groups. The Israeli military says it has found weapons within homes and buildings in the villages.

Hezbollah built a network of tunnels in multiple areas of Lebanon

With Israel's air power far outstripping Hezbollah's defenses, the militant group has turned to under-

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ground tunnels as a way to elude Israeli drones and jets. Experts say Hezbollah's tunnels are not limited to the south.

"It's a land of tunnels," said Tal Beer, who studies Hezbollah as director of research at The Alma Research and Education Center, a think tank with a focus on northern Israel's security.

Koulouriotis said tunnels stretch under the southern suburbs of Beirut, where Hezbollah's command and control are located and where it keeps a stockpile of strategic missiles. She said the group also maintains tunnels along the border with Syria, which it uses to smuggle weapons and other supplies from Iran into Lebanon.

Southern Lebanon is where Hezbollah maintains tunnels to store missiles — and from where it can launch them, Koulouriotis said. Some of the more than 50 Israelis killed by Hezbollah over the past year were hit by anti-tank missiles.

In contrast to the tunnels dug out by Hamas in the sandy coastal terrain of Gaza, Hezbollah's tunnels in southern Lebanon were carved into solid rock, a feat that likely required time, money, machinery and expertise.

An Israeli military official said that using prior intelligence, Israel had found "hundreds and hundreds" of underground positions, many of which could hold about ten fighters and were stocked with rations. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with military rules, said troops were blowing up the tunnels found or using cement to make them unusable.

The group used tunnels during the monthlong 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, but the network has been expanded since, even as a United Nations cease-fire resolution compelled Lebanese and U.N. forces to keep Hezbollah fighters out of the south.

In mid-August, Hezbollah released a video showing what appeared to be a cavernous underground tunnel large enough for trucks loaded with missiles to drive through. Hezbollah operatives were also seen riding motorcycles inside the illuminated tunnel, named Imad-4 after the group's late military commander, Imad Mughniyeh, who was killed in Syria in 2008 in an explosion blamed on Israel.

Hezbollah's tunnels could be hindering Israel's mission

Israeli troops are pushing through southern Lebanon using tanks and engineering equipment, and air and ground forces have struck thousands of targets in the area since the invasion began.

The military recently said it found one cross-border tunnel that stretched just a few meters into Israel but did not have an opening. Israel also exposed a tunnel shaft that was located about 100 meters (yards) from a U.N. peacekeepers' post, although it wasn't clear what the precise purpose of that tunnel was.

Israel says the tunnels are stocked with supplies and weapons and are outfitted with lighting, ventilation and sometimes plumbing, indicating they could be used for long stays. It says it has arrested several Hezbollah fighters hiding inside, including three on Tuesday who were said to have been found armed. The Israeli military official said many Hezbollah fighters appear to have withdrawn from the area.

Lebanese military expert, Naji Malaeb, a retired brigadier general, said he assessed that Hezbollah's tunnels were preventing Israel from making major gains. He compared that achievement to the war in Gaza, where Hamas has used its tunnels to bedevil Israeli forces and stage insurgency-like attacks.

Israeli authorities insist the mission in Lebanon is succeeding. It says it has killed hundreds of Hezbollah fighters since the ground operation in Lebanon began, though at least 15 Israeli soldiers have been killed during that time.

Israel has encountered Hezbollah's tunnels before. In 2018, Israel launched an operation to destroy what is said were attack tunnels that crossed into Israeli territory. Beer said that six tunnels were discovered, including one that was 1 kilometer (1,000 yards) long and 80 meters (87 yards) deep, crossing some 50 meters (yards) into Israel.

Israel believes Hezbollah was planning an Oct. 7-style invasion

For Israel, the tunnels are evidence that Hezbollah planned what Israel says would be a bloody offensive against communities in the north.

"Hezbollah has openly declared that it plans to carry out its own Oct. 7 massacre on Israel's northern border, on an even larger scale," Israeli military spokesman Rear. Adm. Daniel Hagari said the day troops

entered Lebanon.

Israel has not released evidence that any such attack was imminent but has expressed concern that one might be launched once residents return.

Former Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed by Israel last month while in an underground bunker, had signaled in speeches that Hezbollah could launch an attack on northern Israel.

In May 2023, just months before Hamas' attack, Hezbollah staged a simulation of an incursion into northern Israel with rifle-toting militants on motorcycles bursting through a mock border fence bedecked with Israeli flags.

Hezbollah officials have at times framed calls for an attack against Israel as a defensive measure that would be taken in times of war.

Cuba's grid goes offline with massive blackout after a major power plant fails

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Cuba's electrical grid went down Friday after one of the island's major power plants failed, a day after a massive blackout swept across the Caribbean island and with no official estimate for when service will be restored.

The Cuban energy ministry announced that the grid had gone down hours after the Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric plant had ceased operations, at about 11 a.m. local time Friday. It said state-owned power company UNE was using distributed generation to provide power to some areas and that a gas-fired thermoelectric plant was starting operations.

But as darkness started to fall, millions of Cubans remained without power.

Even in a country accustomed to frequent outages amid a deepening economic crisis, Friday's supply collapse was unprecedented in modern times, aside from incidents involving intense hurricanes, like one in 2022. Various calls by The Associated Press seeking to clarify the extent of the blackout on Friday weren't answered. In addition to the Antonio Guiteras plant, Cuba has several others and it wasn't immediately clear whether or not they remained functional.

"The power went out at 8 in the morning and it is now 5 in the afternoon and there is no electricity anywhere," said Luis González, a 73-year-old retiree in Havana.

Early Friday, Prime Minister Manuel Marrero had sought to assuage concerned citizens about the blackout Thursday evening, which was already the nation's worst in at least two years.

Officials said that 1.64 gigawatts went offline during peak hours, about half the total demand at the time. Millions were left without power, and on Friday the government implemented emergency measures to slash demand, including suspending classes, shutting down some state-owned workplaces and canceling non-essential services.

"The situation has worsened in recent days," Marrero said in a special address on national television in the early hours of Friday. "We must be fully transparent ... we have been halting economic activities to ensure energy for the population."

During Marrero's address, he was accompanied by Alfredo López, the chief of UNE, who said the outage Thursday stemmed from increased demand from small- and medium-sized companies and residences' air conditioners, as well as breakdowns in old thermoelectric plants that haven't been properly maintained and the lack of fuel to operate some facilities.

Changes to electricity rates for small- and medium-sized companies, which have proliferated since they were first authorized by the communist government in 2021, are also being considered, Marrero said.

Marrero sought to provide reassurance about the outage, citing an expected influx of fuel supply from Cuba's state-owned oil company.

"We are devoting absolute priority to addressing and solving this highly sensitive energy contingency," Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel wrote on X. "There will be no rest until its restoration."

The blackout has left millions of Cubans on edge. Thursday night, residents shut their doors and windows they typically leave open at night, and candles or lanterns were visible inside their homes. By Friday night, there was no indication that a solution was imminent.

Prolonged electricity outages in the past have affected services like water supply and Yasunay Pérez, a Havana resident, said, with sarcasm, that she's willing and able to bathe in the sea.

"We can use all our survival (skills)," she said.

Harris and Trump seek Arab American votes in Michigan in effort to shore up battleground states

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, JOEY CAPPELLETTI and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — Kamala Harris insisted it was time to "end the suffering" in the Middle East while Donald Trump visited one of the nation's only Muslim-majority cities on Friday as the dueling presidential contenders fought for a small but pivotal bloc of Arab American voters in swing-state Michigan.

In a rare reference to Israel's fight against Hamas and Hezbollah, Harris said, "This year has been very difficult, given the scale of death and destruction in Gaza and given the civilian casualties and displacement in Lebanon." She said the death of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar "can and must be a turning point."

"Everyone must seize this opportunity to finally end the war in Gaza, bring the hostages home and end the suffering once and for all," she said.

Trump, meanwhile, avoided any specifics about his plans for the Middle East, but he said he didn't think the Arab American community would vote for Harris "because she doesn't know what she's doing."

Later, he fought through technical glitches that silenced his microphone for almost 20 minutes at a rally in Detroit.

Michigan is one of three "blue wall" states that, along with Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, will help decide the election on Nov. 5. Diverse voting blocs are key to winning virtually any swing state, but Michigan is unique with its significant Arab American population, which has been deeply frustrated by the Biden administration's support for Israel's offensive in Gaza following Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

Trump, who instituted a travel ban targeting Muslim countries while in office and has vowed to expand the ban to include refugees from Gaza if elected again, is trying to capitalize on the community's frustration with the Democratic administration, despite his well-documented history of hostile rhetoric and policies.

There were modest signs Friday that he may be making progress.

The Republican nominee visited a new campaign office in Hamtramck, one of the nation's only Muslim-majority cities, and was joined there by Mayor Amer Ghalib, a Democrat who has endorsed Trump. Meanwhile, three city council members in the same town have endorsed Harris.

"His visit today is to show respect and appreciation to our community," said Ghalib, who presented Trump with a framed certificate of appreciation.

Trump's allies have held meetings for months with community leaders in the state, which Biden carried by less than 3 points in 2020. Asked about the Hamtramck mayor's endorsement, Trump said: "I mean, frankly, it's an honor. I've got a lot of endorsements, Arab Americans, from a lot of people."

Trump has held 15 separate events in Michigan dating back to April, when Biden was still the presumed Democratic nominee. Including a scheduled Saturday event in Detroit, Harris will have visited Michigan 11 times since she became the nominee, according to AP tracking of the campaigns' public events.

And while foreign policy rarely sways U.S. elections, the war in the Middle East is a critical concern for many of Michigan's Arab American voters.

Trump said Sinwar "was not a good person" when asked about the Hamas leader's death. Sinwar, one of the architects of the Oct. 7 attack, was killed Wednesday by Israelis.

"That's my reaction. That's sometimes what happens," Trump told reporters at the airport in Detroit.

Even as he reached out to disillusioned Arab American voters, Trump suggested he would end efforts to encourage Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to restrain military operations that have killed tens of thousands of Palestinians.

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Even though Biden "is trying to hold him back ... he probably should be doing the opposite, actually," Trump said.

Harris highlighted her support from the Arab American community as well.

On Friday, 52 Lebanese Americans endorsed Harris and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, saying in a letter that the voice of their community "will be heard" under the ticket's leadership.

The letter reiterated calls for a cease-fire, and it cited a recent decision by the Department of Homeland Security to extend temporary legal status to Lebanese citizens in the U.S. Such status is made available to people from certain countries marred by war, turmoil or natural disasters.

But Harris has also faced demonstrators protesting U.S. support of Israel in the conflict. During a closed-door meeting Thursday with students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she was confronted by a protester, according to a video posted by a pro-Palestinian student group on social media.

According to the video, as Harris was telling students she was invested in them, a protester interrupted her, asking, "And in genocide, right? Billions of dollars in genocide?"

A phalanx of Democratic governors — Maura Healey of Massachusetts, Wes Moore of Maryland, Tony Evers of Wisconsin, Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania and Kathy Hochul of New York — campaigned with Harris earlier Friday.

Longtime Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Democrat, emphasized that the army of top Democrats descending on the state was not a sign of panic, stating, "We have to run like we're behind."

"A lot of people have always said we're a blue state. She knows we're not. And she's not taking us for granted," Stabenow told the AP ahead of a rally for Harris in Oakland County.

Both Trump and Harris also made a push for union workers and Black voters as they worked every angle for support.

At an appearance at the United Auto Workers Local 652 hall in Lansing, Harris offered a direct message to union members: "I will always have your back."

She warned that Trump would undermine collective bargaining and worker protections.

"We've got to get the word out to all the brothers and sisters in labor to remind them what this dude does," she said before the campaign played a clip of Trump saying it's not hard to build a car. "We could have our child doing it," he said.

Meanwhile, Trump talked up his own support among labor unions and criticized the rise of electric cars during a rival event in Oakland County ahead of his evening rally in Detroit.

While visiting a campaign office, Trump said the head of the United Auto Workers — who has endorsed Harris — doesn't have a clue.

"I've saved Michigan," he said, telling the crowds he would bring back more manufacturing. "We'll end up having those plants built over here instead of in other countries."

Later, he called Teamsters President Sean O'Brien "a great guy." O'Brien spoke at the Republican National Convention, and his union decided not to endorse Harris, which was viewed as a victory for Trump, given the union's past support for Democrats.

"I think it's been many decades before they endorsed a Republican. I think they'll start very soon," Trump said.

Trump's Detroit event was his first there since insulting the city last week. While warning what will happen if Harris is elected, he said that "our whole country will end up being like Detroit." The city spent years hemorrhaging residents and businesses, plunging into deep financial problems, before rebounding in recent years.

"We love Detroit," Trump said Friday night as the crowd erupted. "We're going to make Detroit great again."

Liam Payne's 1D bandmates, Cheryl, Simon Cowell and more mourn singer

LONDON (AP) — Friends, collaborators and fellow musicians have expressed shock and sadness over the death of former One Direction singer Liam Payne, who died in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Wednesday at age 31.

A look at some of the reactions:

"We're completely devastated by the news of Liam's passing. In time, and when everyone is able to, there will be more to say. But for now, we will take some time to grieve and process the loss of our brother, who we loved dearly. The memories we shared with him will be treasured forever." — the surviving members of One Direction, Niall Horan, Louis Tomlinson, Harry Styles and Zayn Malik, in a statement.

"We are heartbroken. Liam will forever live in our hearts and we'll remember him for his kind, funny and brave soul. We are supporting each other the best we can as a family and ask for privacy and space at this awful time." — Payne's family, in a statement.

"Liam was not only a pop star and a celebrity, he was a son, a brother, an uncle, a dear friend and a father to our 7 year old son. A son that now has to face the reality of never seeing his father again. What is troubling my spirit the most is that one day Bear will have access to the abhorrent reports and media exploitation we have seen in the past two days. It is breaking my heart further that I cannot protect him from that in his future." — Cheryl, the Girls Aloud singer and mother of Payne's son Bear Grey Payne, on Instagram.

"Liam had an energy for life and a passion for work that was infectious. He was the brightest in every room and always made everyone feel happy and secure. ... We got to live out our wildest dreams together and I will cherish every moment we had forever." — Horan, on Instagram.

"Liam lived wide open, with his heart on his sleeve, he had an energy for life that was infectious. He was warm, supportive, and incredibly loving. The years we spent together will forever remain among the most cherished years of my life. I will miss him always, my lovely friend." — Styles, on Instagram.

"A message to you Liam if you're listening, I feel beyond lucky to have had you in my life but I'm really struggling with the idea of saying goodbye. I'm so grateful that we got even closer since the band, speaking on the phone for hours, reminiscing about all the thousands of amazing memories we had together is a luxury I thought I'd have with you for life. I would have loved to share the stage with you again but it wasn't to be." — Tomlinson, on Instagram.

"I lost a brother when you left us and can't explain to you what I'd give to just give you a hug one last time and say goodbye to you properly and tell you that I loved and respected you dearly. I will cherish all the memories I have with you in my heart forever." — Malik, on Instagram.

"I have been at a complete loss. Nothing about the past few days have felt real. ... Liam, my angel. You are everything. I want you to know I loved you unconditionally and completely. I will continue to love you for the rest of my life." — Payne's girlfriend Kate Cassidy, on Instagram.

"This is so difficult to put in words right now. I went outside today, and I thought about so many times we had together. I wanted to let you know what I would always say to the thousands of people who would always ask me. What is Liam like? And I would tell them you were kind, funny, sweet, thoughtful, talented, humble, focused. And how much you loved music. And how much love you genuinely had for the fans." — Simon Cowell, mentor to One Direction and "X Factor" judge who helped form the band, on Instagram.

"Talking about Liam in the past tense is utterly heartbreaking. He was such a loving and kind soul. I will treasure the moments I got to spend with him." — James Corden, on Instagram.

"I'm devastated. He had the kindest soul, I will never forget. I loved working with him so much – he was just such a joy to be around on and off stage." — singer Rita Ora on X.

"Just a boy." — Anne Twist, mother of Styles, posted on Instagram with a broken-heart emoji.

"We are heartbroken by the sad passing of Liam Payne," — "X Factor" official account, on X.

"I am shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Liam Payne. It was a pleasure to work with him

on our X Factor performance. God bless Liam, thinking of all his loved ones. He will be dearly missed." — Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones, on X.

"I am in shock right now. Liam was always so kind to me. He was one of the first major artists I got to work with. I can not believe he is gone." — singer Charlie Puth, who wrote a song for Payne's solo debut album, on Instagram.

"So upsetting to hear the news of @LiamPayne passing Sending love and condolences to his family & loved ones. RIP my friend." — Paris Hilton, on X.

"We greatly appreciate the compassion and kindness he always showed to people facing hunger and hardship. His death is a very tragic loss, and our thoughts are with his loved ones." — Emma Revie, chief executive of the U.K. food bank charity Trussell Trust, in a statement.

"R.I.P. Liam Payne wow I can't believe it prayers up for the family." — rapper Juicy J, who had Payne sing on the 2016 track "You," on X.

"RIP Liam... I can't believe this is real... absolutely heartbreaking." — producer and DJ Zedd, who collaborated with Payne on the 2017 song "Get Low," on X.

North Carolina early voters, still recovering from Helene, exceed 2020 voter turnout

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — More North Carolina residents turned out to cast ballots on the first day of early voting this year than in 2020, even as residents from the mountainous western portion of the state continued to recover from the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene.

Preliminary data shows a record 353,166 people cast ballots at more than 400 early voting sites statewide on Thursday, compared to 348,599 on the first day in October 2020, the State Board of Elections said Friday.

As North Carolina's population and voter registration continues to grow, Thursday's total as a percentage of the current number of registered voters in the state was slightly lower compared to the percentage of the electorate four years ago, according to data provided by the board. Thursday's number was 4.54% of the state's 7.78 million voters, while the 2020 first-day figure was 4.78% of the 7.29 million registrants at the time.

The number of ballots that were cast and voters who were registered as of Thursday is expected to increase as county election boards continue to upload data, board spokesperson Pat Gannon said.

Lines and full parking lots were common on Thursday at voting sites in highly populated Piedmont counties and in the mountainous region where historic flooding three weeks ago destroyed homes, roads and bridges and knocked out power and water systems. The board said Friday it had received no reports of significant issues or voting problems.

Thursday's turnout "is a clear sign that voters are energized about this election, that they trust the elections process, and that a hurricane will not stop North Carolinians from exercising their right to vote," state board Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell said in a news release. Clear, sunny weather on Thursday likely aided the turnout, according to election officials.

Helene was the deadliest hurricane to hit the U.S. mainland since Katrina in 2005, decimating remote towns throughout Appalachia and killing at least 246 people, with a little over half of the storm-related deaths in North Carolina.

While electricity has nearly been fully restored in western North Carolina, tens of thousands lack access to clean running water. Still, all but four of the 80 early voting sites initially planned for the 25 western counties hardest hit by the storm were open on Thursday.

"Obviously, any time you have something this cataclysmic, it's going to disrupt people's lives," early voter Bill Whalen, 75, of Asheville, said Thursday, but "at least in my neighborhood, there's a widespread understanding of the importance of this election and how important it is to vote."

The early-vote period, which continues through Nov. 2 in all 100 counties, is extremely popular in North

Carolina. More than 3.6 million ballots — 65% of all ballots — were cast during early voting in the 2020 general election. Voters can simultaneously register to vote and cast a ballot during the 17-day period.

Traditional absentee balloting began several days before Helene reached the state. More than 75,000 ballots were received from in-state, military and overseas voters through Thursday, the board said.

In addition to president, the North Carolina ballot also includes races for governor, attorney general and several other statewide positions. All U.S. House and General Assembly seats also are up for reelection.

Video and an unused bullet prove man's guilt in Indiana girls' killings, prosecutor says

By RICK CALLAHAN Associated Press

DELPHI, Ind. (AP) — A man charged with killing two teenage girls in a small Indiana community forced them off a hiking trail before cutting their throats, a prosecutor said Friday, telling jurors that the evidence includes an unused bullet and video recorded on the eldest girl's phone.

"The last thing the girls saw was Richard Allen's face," Carroll County prosecutor Nicholas McLeland said.

And they heard his "chilling words: 'Girls, down the hill,'" while Allen was wielding a gun, McLeland said. "Out of fear the girls complied."

Richard Allen, 52, is charged with two counts of murder as well as two additional counts of murder while committing or attempting to commit kidnapping. The trial is a spectacle in Delphi, a town of 3,000, with people lining up in the morning chill to secure a seat in the courtroom.

Allen, a pharmacy technician, was arrested in October 2022, more than five years after the deaths of 13-year-old Abigail Williams and 14-year-old Liberty German, a case that had vexed police and inspired much speculation by true-crime enthusiasts. The outsized media attention in the small community prompted a specially appointed judge to pick jurors in Fort Wayne, nearly 100 miles (160 kilometers) away.

They'll be sequestered for what could be a monthlong trial, banned from watching the news and allowed only limited use of their phones to call relatives while monitored.

In his opening statement, McLeland described the crime scene: a rugged, wooded area near the Monon High Bridge Trail, just outside Delphi, the Carroll County seat.

He said an unused bullet discovered at the "gruesome" scene between the girls' bodies came from a gun that belonged to Allen, and that his grainy image and voice were captured by German on her phone.

A short video released in 2019 that also came from German's phone showed a suspect walking on Monon High Bridge. McLeland said that man was Allen.

Investigators searched Allen's home in 2022 and seized a .40-caliber pistol. Prosecutors disclosed in court documents released several weeks after his arrest that testing determined that an unspent bullet found between Williams and German "had been cycled through" Allen's pistol.

McLeland told jurors that in addition to the bullet evidence, they would also hear incriminating statements Allen made to correctional officers, inmates, law enforcement, and even his wife.

"They had details that only the killer would know," the prosecutor said. "Richard Allen is the man on the bridge."

Allen shook his head at times while McLeland spoke, and his wife, seated in the gallery, did the same when the prosecutor said her husband had confessed to her.

Defense attorney Andrew Baldwin told the jury there's plenty of reasonable doubt.

He said Allen's statements were made under the stress of being in a tiny cell while under constant watch following his arrest. Baldwin noted that Allen mentioned shooting the girls in the back, though that wasn't how they died.

He said some police officers had believed that one person could not have committed the homicides alone.

"Richard Allen is innocent," Baldwin told the jury. "He is truly innocent."

The teens, known as Abby and Libby, were found dead Feb. 14, 2017. They went missing a day earlier while hiking the trail on a mild winter's day off school. Within days, police released files found on German's

cellphone. Investigators also released one sketch of a suspect in July 2017 and another in April 2019, along with the bridge video.

After more years passed without a suspect identified, investigators said they went back and reviewed prior tips.

Investigators found that Allen had been interviewed in 2017. He told an officer he had been walking on the trail the day Williams and German went missing and had seen three "females" at a bridge called the Freedom Bridge but did not speak to them, according to an affidavit.

Allen also told the officer that as he walked from that bridge to the Monon High Bridge he did not see anyone but was distracted, "watching a stock ticker on his phone as he walked."

Police interviewed Allen again Oct. 13, 2022, when he said he had seen three "juvenile girls" during his walk in 2017. Investigators searched his home within days, a search that led to the discovery of the .40-caliber pistol.

At earlier hearings, Allen's attorneys had sought to argue that the girls were killed in a ritual sacrifice by members of a pagan Norse religion and white nationalist group known as the Odinists.

Several relatives of the girls testified Friday afternoon, including German's grandmother, Becky Patty, who told jurors the two friends were so close that Williams once joined their family on a trip to Florida. She choked up as she recalled her last conversation with her granddaughter on the morning the girls left for their hiking trip to the Monon High Bridge, dropped off there by German's older sister, Kelsi.

Patty said she told her granddaughter to dress warmly for their excursion despite the mild weather.

"The last thing she said to me was, 'Grandma, we'll be OK,'" Patty said.

News media are barred by Judge Fran Gull from reporting directly from the courtroom with electronic devices. The judge also set strict rules for photo or video coverage outside the courthouse. Police confiscated cameras from several journalists outside the building on Friday morning before court proceedings began, including 2 cameras from a photographer with The Associated Press.

US to probe Tesla's 'Full Self-Driving' system after pedestrian killed in low visibility conditions

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The U.S. government's road safety agency is investigating Tesla's "Full Self-Driving" system after getting reports of crashes in low-visibility conditions, including one that killed a pedestrian.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in documents that it opened the probe on Thursday after the company reported four crashes when Teslas encountered sun glare, fog and airborne dust.

In addition to the pedestrian's death, another crash involved an injury, the agency said.

Investigators will look into the ability of "Full Self-Driving" to "detect and respond appropriately to reduced roadway visibility conditions, and if so, the contributing circumstances for these crashes."

The investigation covers roughly 2.4 million Teslas from the 2016 through 2024 model years.

A message was left Friday seeking comment from Tesla, which has repeatedly said the system cannot drive itself and human drivers must be ready to intervene at all times.

Last week Tesla held an event at a Hollywood studio to unveil a fully autonomous robotaxi without a steering wheel or pedals. Musk, who has promised autonomous vehicles before, said the company plans to have autonomous Models Y and 3 running without human drivers next year. Robotaxis without steering wheels would be available in 2026 starting in California and Texas, he said.

The investigation's impact on Tesla's self-driving ambitions isn't clear. NHTSA would have to approve any robotaxi without pedals or a steering wheel, and it's unlikely that would happen while the investigation is in progress. But if the company tries to deploy autonomous vehicles in its existing models, that likely would fall to state regulations. There are no federal regulations specifically focused on autonomous vehicles, although they must meet broader safety rules.

NHTSA also said it would look into whether any other similar crashes involving "Full Self-Driving" have happened in low visibility conditions, and it will seek information from the company on whether any up-

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dates affected the system's performance in those conditions.

"In particular, this review will assess the timing, purpose and capabilities of any such updates, as well as Tesla's assessment of their safety impact," the documents said.

Tesla reported the four crashes to NHTSA under an order from the agency covering all automakers. An agency database says the pedestrian was killed in Rimrock, Arizona, in November of 2023 after being hit by a 2021 Tesla Model Y. Rimrock is about 100 miles (161 kilometers) north of Phoenix.

The Arizona Department of Public Safety said in a statement that the crash happened just after 5 p.m. Nov. 27 on Interstate 17. Two vehicles collided on the freeway, blocking the left lane. A Toyota 4Runner stopped, and two people got out to help with traffic control. A red Tesla Model Y then hit the 4Runner and one of the people who exited from it. A 71-year-old woman from Mesa, Arizona, was pronounced dead at the scene.

The collision happened because the sun was in the Tesla driver's eyes, so the Tesla driver was not charged, said Raul Garcia, public information officer for the department. Sun glare also was a contributing factor in the first collision, he added.

Tesla has twice recalled "Full Self-Driving" under pressure from NHTSA, which in July sought information from law enforcement and the company after a Tesla using the system struck and killed a motorcyclist near Seattle.

The recalls were issued because the system was programmed to run stop signs at slow speeds and because the system disobeyed other traffic laws. Both problems were to be fixed with online software updates.

Critics have said that Tesla's system, which uses only cameras to spot hazards, doesn't have proper sensors to be fully self driving. Nearly all other companies working on autonomous vehicles use radar and laser sensors in addition to cameras to see better in the dark or poor visibility conditions.

Musk has said that humans drive with only eyesight, so cars should be able to drive with just cameras. He has called lidar (light detection and ranging), which uses lasers to detect objects, a "fool's errand."

The "Full Self-Driving" recalls arrived after a three-year investigation into Tesla's less-sophisticated Autopilot system crashing into emergency and other vehicles parked on highways, many with warning lights flashing.

That investigation was closed last April after the agency pressured Tesla into recalling its vehicles to bolster a weak system that made sure drivers are paying attention. A few weeks after the recall, NHTSA began investigating whether the recall was working.

NHTSA began its Autopilot crash investigation in 2021, after receiving 11 reports that Teslas that were using Autopilot struck parked emergency vehicles. In documents explaining why the investigation was ended, NHTSA said it ultimately found 467 crashes involving Autopilot resulting in 54 injuries and 14 deaths. Autopilot is a fancy version of cruise control, while "Full Self-Driving" has been billed by Musk as capable of driving without human intervention.

The investigation that was opened Thursday enters new territory for NHTSA, which previously had viewed Tesla's systems as assisting drivers rather than driving themselves. With the new probe, the agency is focusing on the capabilities of "Full Self-Driving" rather than simply making sure drivers are paying attention.

Michael Brooks, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety, said the previous investigation of Autopilot didn't look at why the Teslas weren't seeing and stopping for emergency vehicles.

"Before they were kind of putting the onus on the driver rather than the car," he said. "Here they're saying these systems are not capable of appropriately detecting safety hazards whether the drivers are paying attention or not."

Stock market today: Wall Street sets more records and closes a 6th straight winning week

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks closed their latest winning week with more records on Friday.

The S&P 500 rose 0.4% to squeak past the all-time high it had set early this week. The Dow Jones

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Industrial Average added 36 points, or 0.1%, to its own record set the day before, and the Nasdaq composite gained 0.6%.

Netflix helped drive the market with a leap of 11.1% after the streaming giant reported stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. That was despite a slowdown in subscriber growth.

It helped offset a 5.2% drop for CVS Health, which said it's likely to report a profit for the latest quarter that's well below what analysts had been expecting. The company also said David Joyner, an executive vice president, is taking over as president and CEO for Karen Lynch.

Trading overall on Wall Street remained relatively calm, as the S&P 500 closed its sixth straight winning week. That's its longest such winning streak of 2024.

Solid economic data has boosted hopes the U.S. economy can make a perfect escape from the worst inflation in generations, one that ends without a painful recession that many investors had seen as nearly inevitable. And with the Federal Reserve now cutting interest rates to keep the economy humming, the expectation among optimists is that stocks can rise even further.

But critics are warning that stock prices look too expensive given how much faster they've climbed than corporate profits.

David Lefkowitz, head of U.S. equities at UBS Global Wealth Management, sees both sides. But while stock prices are indeed high relative to profits, he says they're "reasonable" when considering the Fed is cutting interest rates and other factors.

He's also expecting growth in corporate profits to continue, and he raised his forecast for where the S&P 500 could be in June to 6,300 from 6,200.

On Wall Street, American Express fell 3.1% despite reporting better profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Its revenue fell short of forecasts, and it said its revenue for the full year of 2024 will likely come in at the lower end of the forecasted range it gave at the start of the year.

The credit-card company's drop was the biggest reason the Dow lagged behind other stock indexes.

SLB, the giant that helps companies extract oil and natural gas, fell 4.7% after delivering a mixed earnings report. Its profit edged past analysts' expectations, but its revenue fell short as lower crude prices pushed some international producers to be cautious with their spending. CEO Olivier Le Peuch said revenue grew in the Middle East and Asia, along with offshore North America, but declined in Latin America.

Oil prices tumbled this week as worries receded that Israel will attack Iranian oil facilities as part of its retaliation for Iran's missile attack early this month. Iran is a major producer of crude, and a strike could upend its exports to China and elsewhere. Concerns about the strength of demand from China have also hit oil prices.

A barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, fell another 1.9% Friday for a 7.5% decline for the week. It's back to \$73.06 after topping \$80 early last week.

On the winning side of Wall Street was Intuitive Surgical, which climbed 10% after reporting stronger profit for the latest quarter than expected. The company, whose robotic-assisted systems allow for less invasive surgery, also delivered better revenue than expected.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 23.20 points to 5,864.67. The Dow added 36.86 to 43,275.91, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 115.94 to 18,489.55.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.07% from 4.10% late Thursday.

Traders are coalescing around the idea that the Federal Reserve will cut its main interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point at its next meeting in November. Expectations had been high earlier for the Fed to deliver another larger-than-usual cut of half a percentage point, but strong updates on the economy have eliminated those. The federal funds rate is currently sitting in a range of 4.75% to 5%.

In stock markets abroad, Chinese indexes jumped in their latest sharp swing. Stocks rose 2.9% in Shanghai and 3.6% in Hong Kong after a report showed growth slowed during the summer for the world's second-largest economy.

The slowdown, exacerbated by a weak real-estate market, has raised expectations for big stimulus from

the Chinese government and central bank, though doubts are still prevalent about how much effect they will have.

Stock indexes were mixed elsewhere in Asia and Europe.

What's next for Hamas after its leader Yahya Sinwar's death?

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar by Israeli forces in Gaza this week leaves the Palestinian militant group considering new leadership for the second time in less than three months.

Will Hamas now turn away from its hard-line wing or will it double down, and what will it mean for the group's future and for the revival of cease-fire and hostage exchange negotiations between Hamas and Israel?

Sinwar replaced Hamas' previous leader, Ismail Haniyeh, after Haniyeh was killed in July in a blast in Iran that was widely blamed on Israel.

As an architect of the Oct. 7, 2023, attack in southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza, Sinwar was a defiant choice at a time when some expected the militant group to take a more conciliatory approach and seek to end the conflict.

Sinwar's killing appeared to be a chance front-line encounter with Israeli troops on Wednesday.

Sinwar's death has little immediate impact on Hamas

Killing Sinwar marked a major symbolic victory for Israel in its yearlong war against Hamas in Gaza. But it has also allowed Hamas to claim him as a hero who was killed in the battlefield, not hiding in a tunnel.

While the group is on the defensive and has been largely forced underground in Gaza, it continues to fight Israeli forces in the enclave and to exert political influence.

Bassem Naim, a Qatar-based member of the group's political bureau, said in a statement that Israel had killed other Hamas leaders, including its founding leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and his successor, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who were killed by airstrikes in 2004.

"Hamas each time became stronger and more popular, and these leaders became an icon for future generations," he said.

The impact of Sinwar's death on military operations in Gaza remains to be seen. But Sadeq Abu Amer, head of the Turkey-based think tank Palestinian Dialogue Group, said that "there will be no significant impact on the political structure of Hamas."

When Sinwar was appointed, "the situation was basically arranged so that Hamas could manage its political affairs and manage the organization independently of Sinwar" because of the difficulties of communication between Sinwar and Hamas' political leaders outside of Gaza, he said.

Most matters were managed by "collective leadership" between the head of the group's Shura Council and officials in charge of the West Bank, Gaza and regions abroad, he said. The notable exception: Sinwar controlled all matters related to Israeli hostages in Gaza.

The search for a replacement

Sinwar's term was a temporary one and would have expired in the second half of 2025.

"Hamas will not move urgently at the present time to choose a head of the political bureau," Thabet al-Amour, a political analyst in Gaza, said. He noted that Khalil al-Hayya, Sinwar's deputy based in Qatar, was already managing executive affairs and can continue to do so.

Abu Amer agreed that Hamas might opt to keep running with the current "formula of collective leadership." Another possibility, he said would be the election of one of the three regional leaders: al-Hayya, who is in charge of Gaza; Zaher Jibril, in charge of the West Bank; or Khaled Mashaal, in charge of areas outside of the Palestinian territories.

The group also might select a leader without publicly announcing the name "for security reasons," he said.

Who are the contenders?

If Hamas names a replacement for Sinwar, Khaled Mashaal and Khalil al-Hayya, both members of Hamas' political leadership based in Qatar, are widely considered the most likely contenders.

Al-Hayya had served as Sinwar's deputy and as the head of the group's delegation in cease-fire negotia-

tions, both in the current war and during a previous conflict in 2014. He is a longtime official with the group and survived an Israeli airstrike that hit his home in Gaza in 2007, killing several of his family members.

Al-Hayya is seen as close to Iran, but as less of a hard-liner than Sinwar. He was close to Haniyeh.

In an interview with The Associated Press in April, al-Hayya said Hamas was willing to agree to truce of at least five years with Israel and that if an independent Palestinian state were created along 1967 borders, the group would dissolve its military wing and become a purely political party.

Mashaal, who served as the group's political leader from 1996 to 2017, is seen as a relatively moderate figure. He has good relations with Turkey and Qatar, although his relations with Iran, Syria and Hezbollah have been troubled due to his support for the Syrian opposition in the country's 2011 civil war.

Moussa Abu Marzouk, a founding member of Hamas and the first head of its political bureau, is another potential candidate who is seen as a moderate.

Some have suggested that Sinwar's brother, Mohammed, a key military figure in Gaza, could replace him — if he is still alive. Al-Amour downplayed that possibility.

"Mohammed Sinwar is the head of the field battle, but he will not be Sinwar's heir as head of the political bureau," he said. Rather, al-Amour said the death of Sinwar, "one of the most prominent hawks within the movement," is likely to lead to "the advancement of a trend or direction that can be described as doves" via the group's leadership abroad.

Cease-fire negotiations

In the first public statement by a Hamas official after Sinwar's death, al-Hayya appeared to take a hard line on negotiations for a cease-fire deal that would see the release of some 100 Israeli hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war and who are believed to be held in Gaza.

There will be no hostage release without "the end of the aggression on Gaza and the withdrawal (of Israeli forces) from Gaza," al-Hayya said.

But some believe that the group may now moderate its stance.

In particular, Mashaal "shows more flexibility when it comes to collaborating with the Qataris and Egyptians to reach cease-fire in Gaza, which would also have a positive impact on the situation in Lebanon," Saad Abdullah Al-Hamid, a Saudi political analyst, said.

But Sinwar's death could leave some "practical difficulties in completing a prisoner exchange," Abu Amer said.

The Gaza-based leader was "the only one in the Hamas leadership who held the secrets of this file," he said, including the location of all the hostages.

Israel and Hamas signal resistance to ending Gaza war after Sinwar's death

By JULIA FRANKEL and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Hamas confirmed Friday that its leader, Yahya Sinwar, was killed by Israeli forces in Gaza and reiterated its stance that hostages the militant group took from Israel a year ago will not be released until there is a cease-fire in Gaza and a withdrawal of Israeli troops.

The group's staunch position pushed back against a statement by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin a day earlier that his country's military will keep fighting until the hostages are released and will remain in Gaza to prevent a severely weakened Hamas from rearming.

The conflicting stands signal continued deep resistance on both sides to ending the war, even as President Joe Biden and other world leaders press the case that Sinwar's death is a turning point that should be used to unlock stalled cease-fire negotiations.

The standoff comes as Israel's war with Lebanon's Hezbollah — a Hamas ally backed by Iran — has intensified in recent weeks. Hezbollah said Friday it planned to launch a new phase of fighting by sending more guided missiles and exploding drones into Israel. The militant group's longtime leader, Hassan Nasrallah, was killed in an Israeli airstrike late last month, and Israel sent ground troops into Lebanon earlier this month.

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Sinwar, the former lead of Hamas, died "confronting the occupation army until the last moment of his life," said his Qatar-based deputy, Khalil al-Hayya, who represented Hamas during several rounds of cease-fire negotiations. Hamas will not return any of the hostages, al-Hayya said, "before the end of the aggression on Gaza and the withdrawal from Gaza."

Hamas heralded Sinwar in a statement, calling him a hero for "not retreating, brandishing his weapon, engaging and confronting the occupation army at the forefront of the ranks."

The statement appeared to refer to a video the Israeli military circulated of Sinwar's apparent last moments in which a man sits on a chair in severely damaged building, badly wounded and covered in dust. In the video, the man raises his hand and flings a stick at an approaching Israeli drone.

Sinwar was the chief architect of the Hamas raid on Israel last year that killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and kidnapped another 250. Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish combatants from civilians but say more than half the dead are women and children.

The war has destroyed vast swaths of Gaza, displaced about 90% of its population of 2.3 million people and has left them struggling to find food, water, medicine and fuel.

Sinwar's killing appeared to be a chance front-line encounter with Israeli troops on Wednesday, and it could shift the dynamics of the Gaza war even as Israel presses its offensive against Hezbollah with ground troops in southern Lebanon and airstrikes in other areas of the country.

Hezbollah has fired rockets into Israel nearly every day since the Israel-Hamas war began, displacing tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes in the country's north. More than 1 million people in Lebanon have been displaced by Israel's aerial bombardment and ground offensive.

Iran, which also supports Hamas, hailed Sinwar Friday as a martyr who can inspire others in challenging Israel.

"We, and countless others around the world, salute his selfless struggle for liberation of the Palestinian people," Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, wrote on the X social media platform. "Martyrs live forever, and the cause for liberation of Palestine from occupation is more alive than ever."

Israel has pledged to destroy Hamas politically in Gaza, and killing Sinwar was a top military priority. But Netanyahu said in a speech announcing the killing Thursday night that "our war is not yet ended."

Still, the governments of Israel's allies and exhausted residents of Gaza expressed hope that Sinwar's death would pave the way for an end to the war.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Friday Sinwar's death provides "an extraordinary opportunity to achieve a lasting cease-fire" and suggested the U.S. could have a role in helping to stabilize Gaza in the future. "Hopefully countries in the region will step up there," Austin said at a NATO meeting in Brussels.

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, meeting with her counterpart in Lebanon, said European countries are working for a "sustainable cease-fire" in both that country and in Gaza. Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said "a diplomatic solution should overcome" the fighting.

But a day after Biden labeled Sinwar's death an "opportunity for a 'day after' in Gaza without Hamas in power," he acknowledged the difficulty of forging a cease-fire there, saying it might be easier to negotiate a stop to the fighting in Lebanon.

"It's going to be harder in Gaza," Biden told reporters Friday after meeting with European leaders in Berlin. A White House national security spokesman, John Kirby, said it was "too soon" to assess who Hamas "might anoint as Sinwar's successor and what that individual may be willing to pursue."

In Israel, families of hostages still held in Gaza demanded the Israeli government use Sinwar's killing as a way to restart negotiations to bring home their loved ones. There are about 100 hostages remaining in Gaza, at least 30 of whom Israel says are dead.

"We are at an inflection point where the goals set for the war with Gaza have been achieved, all but the release of the hostages," Ronen Neutra, father of the Israeli-American hostage Omer Neutra, said in a video statement. "Sinwar, who was described as a major obstacle to a deal, is no longer alive."

Netanyahu was planning to convene a special meeting Friday to discuss hostage negotiations, an Israeli

official with knowledge of the negotiations said. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential information.

Israel's military said Friday it allowed 30 trucks of food, water, medical and other supplies into northern Gaza, as the country faces pressure from the U.S. to ramp up aid. There was no immediate confirmation from the U.N. that the aid arrived and was being distributed in the north.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah issued a statement early Friday saying its fighters have used new types of precision-guided missiles and explosive drones against Israel for the first time in recent days.

The statement appeared to refer to an explosives-laden drone that evaded Israel's multilayered air-defense system and slammed into a mess hall at a military training camp deep inside Israel last Sunday, killing four soldiers and wounding dozens. The group announced earlier this week it fired a new type of missile called Qader 2 toward the suburbs of Tel Aviv.

The Israeli military said Friday it would activate an additional reserve brigade to the north of its country to support troops battling in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese health ministry said six people were killed in the past 24 hours of fighting, bringing the death toll over the past year to 2,418, a quarter of whom were women and children.

On Friday Israel said its forces killed two militants who crossed into Israeli territory south of the Dead Sea from neighboring Jordan. Such infiltrations are relatively rare, especially as Israel has ramped up border security since the Hamas attack in October 2023.

Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' top leader and a mastermind of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, is dead at 61

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' top leader and a mastermind of the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the longest, deadliest and most destructive war in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was killed by Israeli forces in Gaza. He was 61.

In Gaza, no figure loomed larger in determining the war's trajectory than Sinwar. Obsessive, disciplined and dictatorial, he was a rarely seen veteran militant who learned Hebrew over years spent in Israeli prisons and who carefully studied his enemy. He worked on bringing Hamas closer to the Iran-led alliance after it moved away following the start of Syria's conflict in 2011.

His death came in what appeared to be a chance front-line encounter with Israeli troops on Wednesday. Israel declared Thursday that the troops had killed him. A top Hamas political official confirmed the death Friday.

The secretive figure feared on both sides of the battle lines engineered the surprise Oct. 7, 2023, attack into southern Israel, along with the even more shadowy Mohammed Deif, head of Hamas' armed wing. Israel said that it killed Deif in a July airstrike in southern Gaza that killed more than 70 Palestinians.

Soon after, Hamas' leader in exile, Ismail Haniyeh, was killed while visiting Iran in an explosion that was blamed on Israel. Sinwar was then chosen to take his place as Hamas' top leader, though he was in hiding in Gaza.

Palestinian militants who carried out the October 2023 attack killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 others, catching Israel's military and intelligence establishment off guard and shattering the image of Israeli invincibility.

Israel's retaliation was crushing. The conflict has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish combatants from civilians. It also has caused widespread destruction in Gaza, and left hundreds of thousands of people homeless and many on the verge of starvation.

Sinwar held indirect negotiations with Israel to try to end the war. One of his goals was to win the release of thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli jails, much like the deal that got him released more than a decade ago.

The war he ignited drew in Hezbollah, eventually leading to another Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and led Iran and Israel to trade fire directly for the first time, raising fears of an even more expansive conflict.

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To Israelis, Sinwar was a nightmarish figure. The Israeli army's chief spokesperson, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, called him a murderer "who proved to the whole world that Hamas is worse than ISIS," referring to the Islamic State group.

Always defiant, Sinwar ended one of his few public speeches by inviting Israel to assassinate him, proclaiming in Gaza, "I will walk back home after this meeting." He then did so, shaking hands and taking selfies with people in the streets.

Among Palestinians, he was respected for standing up to Israel and remaining in impoverished Gaza, in contrast to other Hamas leaders living more comfortably abroad.

But he was also deeply feared for his iron grip in Gaza, where public dissent is suppressed.

In contrast to the media-friendly personas cultivated by some of Hamas' political leadership, Sinwar never sought to build a public image. He was known as the "Butcher of Khan Younis" for his brutal approach to Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel.

Sinwar was born in 1962 in Gaza's Khan Younis refugee camp to a family that was among hundreds of thousands of Palestinians driven from what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation.

He was an early member of Hamas, which emerged from the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1987, when the coastal enclave was under Israeli military occupation.

Sinwar convinced the group's founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, that to succeed as a resistance organization, Hamas needed to be purged of informants for Israel. They founded a security arm, then known as Majd, which Sinwar led.

Arrested by Israel in the late 1980s, he admitted under interrogation to having killed 12 suspected collaborators. He was eventually sentenced to four life terms for offenses that included the abduction and killing of two Israeli soldiers.

Michael Koubi, a former director of the investigations department at Israel's Shin Bet security agency who interrogated Sinwar, recalled the confession that stood out to him the most: Sinwar recounted forcing a man to bury his own brother alive because he was suspected of working for Israel.

"His eyes were full of happiness when he told us this story," Koubi said.

But to fellow prisoners, Sinwar was charismatic, sociable and shrewd, open to detainees from all political factions.

He became the leader of the hundreds of imprisoned Hamas members. He organized strikes to improve conditions. He learned Hebrew and studied Israeli society. He was known for feeding fellow inmates, making kunafa, a treat of shredded dough stuffed with cheese.

"Being a leader inside prison gave him experience in negotiations and dialogue, and he understood the mentality of the enemy and how to affect it," said Anwar Yassine, a Lebanese citizen who spent about 17 years in Israeli jails, much of the time with Sinwar.

Yassine noted how Sinwar always treated him with respect even though he belonged to the Lebanese Communist Party, whose secular principles conflicted with Hamas' ideology.

During his years in detention, Sinwar wrote a 240-page novel, "Thistle and the Cloves." It tells the story of Palestinian society from the 1967 Mideast war until 2000, when the second intifada began.

"This is not my personal story, nor is it the story of a specific person, despite the fact that all the incidents are true," Sinwar wrote in the novel's opening.

In 2008, Sinwar survived an aggressive form of brain cancer after treatment at a Tel Aviv hospital.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released him in 2011 along with about 1,000 other prisoners in exchange for Gilad Schalit, an Israeli soldier captured by Hamas in a cross-border raid. Netanyahu was harshly criticized for releasing dozens of prisoners held for involvement in deadly attacks.

Back in Gaza, Sinwar closely coordinated between Hamas' political leadership and its military wing, the Qassam Brigades. He also cultivated a reputation for ruthlessness. He is widely believed to be behind the unprecedented 2016 killing of another top Hamas commander, Mahmoud Ishtewi, in an internal power struggle.

He also married after his release.

In 2017, he was elected head of Hamas' political bureau in Gaza. Sinwar worked with Haniyeh to realign the group with Iran and its allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah. He also focused on building Hamas' military power.

After Sinwar's death, hostage families see a 'window of opportunity' to bring their loved ones home

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Two days after Israeli forces killed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in Gaza, families of the hostages taken last year are urging the government to use this moment to bring their loved ones home.

Many are caught between deep fear and cautious optimism. They worry the militants holding their loved ones captive might now take matters into their own hands and retaliate against the hostages for Sinwar's death. But they also see a glimmer of hope: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may now be able to claim victory on one of his war goals, destroying Hamas politically, and pivot to the other, returning the hostages.

"Netanyahu and the U.S. said in the last couple of weeks that Sinwar was the obstacle to getting a deal. Now he's not the obstacle. So this should bring them to take advantage of the window of opportunity to get a deal done, and fast," said Ruby Chen, 55, father of American-Israeli hostage Itay Chen.

Chen, a 19-year-old former Boy Scout who loved basketball, was kidnapped from a military base on Oct. 7, 2023, one of some 250 hostages taken that day, in an attack where Hamas fighters killed roughly 1,200 people across southern Israel. Ruby Chen said the military has told the family they had some indication that Itay died in captivity, but he's not sure that claim is true.

Assassinating Sinwar has been a top priority for Israel's military since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. Israeli soldiers killed the Hamas leader in a chance encounter Wednesday, Israel's military said, with a tank shell fired into a building where he was taking refuge following a gunfight with Israeli soldiers.

Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, about a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Ceasefire negotiations to secure their release have sputtered time and time again, and hostage families have criticized Netanyahu for prioritizing military victory over a deal.

"Mr. Netanyahu had a very dark legacy up to this day," said Efrat Machikawa, 56, the niece of 80-year-old hostage Gadi Moses, who was kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz. "But the time is now, exactly now ... Now is his chance to make sure all the hostages are coming back, the dead so they can have a proper burial and the living so they can be returned to their families."

During a recent round of negotiations over a deal proposed by the Biden administration, Netanyahu refused to agree to withdraw Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip at war's end, a precondition for Hamas to agree to release hostages, and one Sinwar is believed to have clung to fiercely.

Now that Sinwar is dead, hostage families have reason to believe that both Netanyahu and Hamas negotiators could soften their stance.

In a speech late Thursday, Netanyahu said Sinwar's death does not mean the war is over. But he signaled that the killing could bring a deal closer, calling the return of the hostages his "supreme obligation," and offering immunity to Hamas fighters who "put down their weapons and leave our hostages."

To Ricardo Grichener, the uncle of 23-year-old hostage Omer Wenkert, Netanyahu's tone sounds more sincere than ever before.

"Before now, he was always aggressive, talking about how we needed to annihilate everyone from Hamas. Now he seems more dedicated, talking about returning the hostages as his own personal mission," Grichener said.

Grichener's nephew, Wenkert, has colitis, an intestinal disease for which he needs daily medication. A hostage held with Wenkert in the tunnels who was released last year has said the conditions were dismal: they lived in complete darkness, slept on sand, and ate only three dates a day, and half a bottle of water every two days.

"Time is of the essence," Grichener said.

"After 12 months held in nonhuman conditions, we are afraid that our loved ones will not survive. Espe-

cially after Sinwar's death, we don't know who is controlling the guards. We don't know if there will be any retaliation against the hostages. We need a deal now."

What's a 'Jezebel spirit'? Some Christians use the term to paint Kamala Harris with a demonic brush

By ISABELLA VOLMERT and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

Christian nationalist leaders are telling followers that Vice President Kamala Harris is under the influence of a "Jezebel spirit," using a term with deeply racist and misogynistic roots that is setting off alarm bells for religious and political scholars.

The concept is inspired by the biblical story of the evil Queen Jezebel, who persecuted prophets and was punished with a horrible death. The word "Jezebel" was used during slavery and throughout U.S. history to describe Black women, casting them as overtly sexual and untrustworthy.

In the context of "Jezebel spirit," the term has sinister connotations, suggesting the person is under the influence of demons in a spiritual battle between good and evil. People who have studied the Jan. 6 insurrection warn that similar rhetoric on spiritual warfare drove many to the U.S. Capitol that day.

"People ... are hearing this woman is possessed by a demonic spirit that is hardcore, terrible, hates men, hates authority, is going to do whatever she wants to do," said Anthea Butler, professor at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the book "White Evangelical Racism," who has studied the New Apostolic Reformation.

The term, Butler said, is coded language to communicate that the person – a woman, usually a Democrat, Black or multiracial – is not an acceptable candidate. Harris is a Christian and a Baptist, but when faith leaders tie her to Jezebel, Butler said it suggests falsely that she is non-Christian.

Where does the term come from?

In the Old Testament, Jezebel is among the vilest of villains. She was a foreign-born queen who wielded great power, persecuted prophets and worshiped false gods. Ultimately, she was punished by being thrown out a window, trampled by a horse, then eaten by dogs.

Later in the Bible, a Jezebel appears as a false prophet portending the end times and promoting sexual promiscuity.

The term has a long history of being used in the U.S. against women, especially Black women. During times of slavery, the idea was used to justify the systemic sexual assault and rape of Black women and girls. It has been used in the past to target other women such as Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama, and to categorize movements such as feminism, abortion rights and LGBTQ+ rights.

Conceptualizing female candidates through the "Jezebel spirit" is dangerous, said Tamara Lomax, author of the book "Jezebel Unhinged" and associate professor of religious studies at Michigan State University.

"Any woman who is stepping into her power in any kind of way, is going to be seen as this Jezebel who is deserving of violence," she said.

Who is using the term? And why?

The usage comes from a politicized movement of charismatic Christianity called the New Apostolic Reformation, a decentralized yet highly networked movement whose leaders widely teach that demonic forces are involved in spiritual warfare and can speak through people. In this case, the Jezebel spirit is a demon who is at work on earth and has the qualities of the Bible's Jezebel, although the phrase "Jezebel spirit" never appears in the Bible.

The language is used to galvanize and catalyze Christians with apocalyptic sensibilities with messages that the next election is "do or die," said Matthew Taylor, whose new book, "The Violent Take It By Force," provides a history of the New Apostolic Reformation and details its influence in the Jan. 6 insurrection.

"It's used as a means of justifying aggression," Taylor said. "Christians are supposed to love their enemies. ... But Christians are allowed to hate demons."

And some people could use that militant rhetoric to justify real-world violence, he said.

The movement was on prominent display on Jan. 6, Taylor said, as believers waged "spiritual warfare"

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at the Capitol. As the attack took place, people sang religious songs, prayed and blew shofars – a horn in Jewish tradition that has been adopted by Christian nationalists, inspired by their use in the biblical Battle of Jericho.

Since that day, Taylor said, there has been a huge increase in talk of spiritual warfare in American politics. Christian nationalism is a fusion of American and Christian identities that seeks a privileged place for Christianity in American public life.

Lance Wallnau, who has 1 million Facebook followers and is one of the leaders who has used “Jezebel spirit” to describe Harris, is considered a prophet in the New Apostolic Reformation, according to Taylor, and says he receives messages directly from God. He was an early evangelical supporter of Trump and remains close to his campaign. Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance recently appeared at an event organized by Wallnau.

The Trump and Harris campaigns did not respond to requests for comment.

Wallnau posted a video on X in which he said, “with Kamala you have a Jezebel spirit, a characteristic in the Bible, that is a Jezebel spirit. The personification of intimidation, seduction, domination and manipulation,” he said, adding. “She can look presidential and that’s the seduction of what I would say is witchcraft.” In a different video, he said Harris represents “an amalgam of the spirit of Jezebel in a way that’ll be even more ominous than Hillary (Clinton), because she’ll bring a racial component, and she’s younger.”

Meanwhile, Trump is described by some preachers with New Apostolic Reformation ties as being anointed by God, fighting on the side of the angels.

Wallnau didn’t respond to the AP’s attempts to reach him for comment. But after backlash over his use of the “Jezebel spirit” rhetoric, Wallnau posted on X to clarify his thoughts on Harris.

“For the record, Kamala isn’t a demon and no living soul on planet earth is a demon. However people, political parties and organizational structures can be under demonic influence,” Wallnau wrote Sept. 29.

The language has seeped into down ballot races as well. In Indiana, the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor said that the election is between “strength and godly boldness” on the state Republican ticket and the “Jezebel spirit” on the Democratic ticket, which is led by three women.

Micah Beckwith, a pastor, and self-proclaimed Christian nationalist, did not respond to voicemails and text messages seeking clarity on his comment. Beckwith told the IndyStar this month that his comment was not about gender but Democratic ideas.

On Oct. 12, thousands gathered to pray at the National Mall where Ché Ahn, a leader in the New Apostolic Reformation, decreed that that Trump is a “type of Jehu,” the biblical figure who overthrew Jezebel’s reign and ordered her death. Ahn, who did not respond to the Associated Press seeking comment, pleaded with the crowd to get out and vote.

“I decree it by faith that Trump will win on November the 5th,” he told the crowd. “He will be our 47th president and Kamala Harris will be cast out.”

Reba McEntire finds a new on-screen family in NBC’s ‘Happy’s Place’

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Reba McEntire finds herself behind the bar in her latest return to network TV, making a series that’s a nicely calibrated cocktail of drama and comedy.

“The things that are most important in my life is love, hope, faith, happiness, energy, light. And that’s all of the things that are happening with this show,” the country music legend says.

NBC’s “Happy’s Place” — premiering Friday — finds McEntire’s character, Bobbie, inheriting a Tennessee tavern from her recently-deceased father and finding out in the first episode that he had a second family.

Even more alarming is the fact that her dad left ownership of the bar to both Bobbie and her newly-discovered sister, Isabella. Add to the tension is that the two women are divided by ethnicity and a generation or two.

“I’m shocked. I mean, I didn’t think Daddy could ever do anything like this, ‘cause he always said family

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was the most important thing," Bobbie says. To which, Isabella replies: "Maybe that's why he started two of them."

Belissa Escobedo, who plays Isabella, says the new series can be seen as both sweet and sour, as these two women learn to make peace and move forward.

"I think Bobbie reacts to this news very differently than Isabella does, and the audience is able to see it and understand both sides. I love that Isabella kind of just inches her way into Bobbie's heart," says Escobedo.

In the series, Bobbie finally looks at Isabella and realizes what she's done: "I've been looking at you like a person that has been forced upon me. Instead, I should be looking at you like a sister that's been given to me."

Escobedo, whose film credits include "Blue Beetle," "Hocus Pocus 2" and who has been a series regular in TV shows like "The Baker and the Beauty," says working with McEntire is a joy.

"She is an angel. She is so sweet, so down to earth. She does everything with a smile and comes in ready to work, but also ready to have fun."

The new series comes from TV veteran Kevin Abbott with a lengthy list of credits, including producing "Reba," "Last Man Standing," "Roseanne" and "Golden Girls."

The show has a welcome "Cheers" vibe, another NBC stalwart set in a bar, which allows easy reasons for new stories through guest stars and room for some oddball regulars to flourish, including a reunion with McEntire and Melissa Peterman, who shined together in "Reba" and Rex Lin, a frequent collaborator.

One of the early production ideas was to cast McEntire as a schoolteacher and have Peterman as the principal. But "Abbott Elementary" came out on ABC so that idea went out the window. The next proposal was exploring the idea of a secret family, inspired by 23andMe, the ancestry-tracing company.

"A lot of people can relate to this — finding that you've got a third cousin you didn't know. I think that's what helps shows be successful is when they're relatable. That happens with books, songs, movies: If you can relate to it, it's going to be more successful," says McEntire.

Alongside Reba, Escobedo and Peterman, the cast also includes Pablo Castelblanco ("Alaska Daily"), Tokala Black Elk ("American Primeval," "1883") and Rex Linn ("Young Sheldon," "Better Call Saul"). It's a multicultural set — Castelblanco is from Colombia, Linn is of Sioux descent and Escobedo has Mexican roots.

"To have that diverse cast has been interesting on screen and off screen for us because when we're not doing something — when they're rewriting or we're waiting on something or we're at rehearsals — we sit and visit and talk about each other and learn from each other. It's been an education for all of us," McEntire says.

McEntire will be hoping fans of "Reba" will check it out. Over six seasons, "Reba" performed more than decently for The WB — and later The CW — but faced competition at the awards shows from the likes of "Everybody Loves Raymond," "Friends," "Will & Grace," "Sex and the City," "Desperate Housewives," "Malcolm in the Middle," "Ugly Betty" and "30 Rock."

The indefatigable McEntire, who is also shooting "The Voice" for NBC and presides over clothing and footwear lines, teamed up with iconic songwriter Carole King to write the new show's theme song.

In one powerful scene from the new show, a framed children's drawing at the tavern falls and reveals that it was drawn by Isabella, proof their father cared about his secret child.

"I think the theme that we really explore, while also bringing comedy into it, is grief and what comes out of grief?" says Escobedo. "When one door closes, another opens — that's one of the things that I think is not touched upon enough."

What to know about Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader who was killed in Gaza

By The Associated Press undefined

Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader who was killed by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, was the mastermind behind the Oct. 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

He rose to the top position in August after the killing of the previous leader, Ismail Haniyeh, in an explosion in Iran that was blamed on Israel. On Thursday, Israel said troops in Gaza had killed Sinwar. A top Hamas political official confirmed the death Friday.

Some things to know about Sinwar:

From refugee camp to Hamas militant

Sinwar was born in 1962 in a refugee camp in the Gaza town of Khan Younis. He was an early member of Hamas, which was formed in 1987. He eventually led the group's security arm, which worked to purge it of spies for Israel.

Israel arrested him in the late 1980s and he admitted to killing 12 suspected collaborators, a role that earned him the nickname, "The Butcher of Khan Younis." He was sentenced to four life terms for offenses that included the killing of two Israeli soldiers.

A prison leader while jailed in Israel

Sinwar organized strikes in prison to improve working conditions. He also studied Hebrew and Israeli society.

He survived brain cancer in 2008 after being treated by Israeli doctors.

Sinwar was released from prison in 2011 by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as part of an exchange for an Israeli soldier captured by Hamas in a cross-border raid.

Rise to Gaza power with a reputation for ruthlessness

When Sinwar returned to Gaza, he quickly rose through Hamas' leadership ranks with a reputation for ruthlessness. He was widely believed to be behind the 2016 killing of another top Hamas commander, Mahmoud Ishtewi, in an internal power struggle.

Sinwar became head of Hamas in Gaza, effectively putting him in control of the territory, and worked with Haniyeh to align the group with Iran and its proxies around the region while also building the group's military capabilities.

The October attack on Israel

Sinwar, along with Mohammed Deif, the head of Hamas' armed wing, is believed to have engineered the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

The attack killed about 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, and the militants took some 250 people hostage, sparking the war with Hamas. The conflict has killed over 42,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish combatants from civilians.

Hamas said it launched the attack in retaliation for Israel's treatment of Palestinians and to push the Palestinian cause back onto the world agenda.

Israel said it killed Deif in an attack in July.

Right-wing influencers hyped anti-Ukraine videos made by a TV producer also funded by Russian media

By ALAN SUDERMAN and GARANCE BURKE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Kremlin could not have asked for better publicity at a better time when Ben Swann, a self-described independent journalist who promotes conspiracy theories, released a 12-part video series he promised would reveal dark truths about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Swann's flashy documentary-style videos were filled with innuendo, attacks on Zelenskyy's character and commentary from guests sympathetic to Russia in its two-year war with Ukraine.

The series, titled "Zelenskyy Unmasked," launched in April as Congress was debating increasing military assistance to Ukraine, and it quickly caught the attention of conservative social media influencers who hyped the project to their millions of followers.

Among those who promoted the series was Donald Trump Jr., the former president's eldest son.

"Curious about the billions of dollars and weapons Congress sent Ukraine?" Trump Jr. posted on X, Truth Social and Threads. "You need to watch the first episode of the explosive 12-part series."

Unlike other conservative media personalities who last month expressed shock upon learning they

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may have been secretly financed by the Kremlin, Swann has no such qualms. He's worked for Russia's state-owned media empire for years, with one of his companies earning millions of dollars for producing Kremlin-friendly shows.

The creation of "Zelenskyy Unmasked" and its viral spread reveal how widely Russia-backed talking points are traveling on social media — a trend that concerns current and former U.S. intelligence officials and disinformation experts.

An investigation by The Associated Press also provides insights into the shadowy and profitable world of political influencers who are not required to disclose who is paying them, raising transparency concerns about their political endorsements in the largely unregulated realm of social media.

Swann brought on a digital marketing firm to publicize "Zelenskyy Unmasked," and at least one creator acknowledged he was paid to promote the series.

Dire warnings

The revelations about Swann's work for Russia come as U.S. authorities have issued increasingly dire warnings about the threat posed by Russian disinformation campaigns. In addition to undermining Ukraine, the Kremlin is seeking to disrupt the presidential election and sow discord in the U.S. and elsewhere in the West, those officials have said.

U.S. officials are particularly concerned about Russia's covert efforts to take advantage of unwitting Americans to spread Moscow's message and use artificial intelligence to quickly tailor false content.

Russia's influence operation also appears aimed at boosting support for GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump, who has criticized Ukraine and praised Russian President Vladimir Putin, the officials said.

Trump has dismissed evidence of Russian influence operations, and he and many of his supporters have mocked the broader U.S. government's effort to highlight Kremlin propaganda efforts.

Registered with the DOJ

Swann filed paperwork with the Justice Department two years ago to register one of his companies as working for Russian state media. In an interview with the AP, Swann said he has kept his work for Russian interests separate from what he produces for U.S. audiences. He has done this, Swann said, by operating two companies — one that generates content for Russian media and another that produces independent journalism, like "Zelenskyy Unmasked," for U.S. audiences.

"The only connection is that I own both companies," Swann said.

The AP, however, found that there was some overlap in how the two entities operated.

A handful of guests on "Zelenskyy Unmasked" also appeared on RT shows produced by Swann, according to a review of RT's video archives and records filed with the Justice Department.

Swann's shows for U.S. audiences and RT also have similar themes. The Zelenskyy series, for example, echoed Russian state media's messaging that the Ukrainian president is a would-be autocrat who has duped the West into supporting a conflict that Russia will inevitably win.

A former TV anchor

Swann, 46, was a longtime TV journalist before he was fired from an Atlanta station in 2018 after promoting the debunked "Pizzagate" conspiracy that alleged Democrats were abducting children to serve as sex slaves.

He has since become a social media star who portrays himself as someone daring to ask uncomfortable questions on tough topics — revolving around unfounded claims such as whether the Sandy Hook school shooter acted alone, the coronavirus vaccine was a money-making ploy by big pharmaceutical companies, and Israel was a "participant" in the massacre of Oct. 7, 2023.

Swann joined Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s anti-vaccine organization, Children's Health Defense, in a lawsuit pending against several news organizations, including the AP, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines.

Swann said he worked as a correspondent for RT America, a cable channel that was part of a Russian state media outlet, until it went off the air following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. RT officials then asked if he wanted to produce shows for the network to air outside the U.S., Swann said.

"I said, 'Well, I can't produce shows for the United States, but if these shows are for overseas, I'll help

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you produce them.' So I started doing that for them, and we've been doing that ever since," Swann said in a July interview.

Producing RT shows

Swann said he produced 10 shows a week using RT America's old studios in Washington, and he stressed that those shows don't air in the U.S. or Western Europe, although they are visible across the globe on RT's website.

Under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, individuals must register with the Justice Department when they seek to influence U.S. policy and public opinion on behalf of foreign governments. Not doing so can result in criminal charges.

Swann's company, Rebel Media Productions, first registered with the Justice Department in August 2022, saying it worked for RT's parent company and related entities. The disclosures show Rebel Media Productions was paid more than \$6 million in less than two years by RT-related entities.

RT, formerly known as Russia Today, is a major player in Russia's sprawling propaganda apparatus, and a target of U.S. efforts to block Moscow's covert influence.

The Justice Department has said RT has links to Russian intelligence agencies, while the U.S. State Department recently unveiled new sanctions on Russian state media. The sanctions target RT's parent organization, TV Novosti, which Swann contracted with for his Russia-related work.

In February, Swann stopped reporting Rebel Media's work for Russia to the Justice Department, even as his company kept producing RT shows.

Swann said he ended that registration with the Justice Department because his attorneys told him it wasn't necessary, despite his company's continued work for RT. "They said, 'Why are you making things more difficult for yourself?'" Swann said.

In response to the recent sanctions, Swann said his company last month severed all ties to RT.

"While we disagree with the censorship of our journalists, who were doing quality work on behalf of our client, we have and will continue to respect the rule of law," Swann said in a statement.

The Justice Department declined to comment.

'Assume they don't like Zelenskyy'

Swann said he creates content — like the "Zelenskyy Unmasked" series — for American viewers through another company, Truth in Media.

Truth in Media, Swann said, isn't profitable and is funded by wealthy U.S. individuals whom he refused to name. "Most of them own very large companies," he said, "if not publicly traded companies."

Swann said the large payouts he received from Russian state media had not influenced his work on "Zelenskyy Unmasked," but he acknowledged Russia's leaders probably liked the series' tough take on Ukraine's president.

"I don't know, I assume they don't like Zelenskyy," Swann said.

Many of the guests interviewed in "Zelenskyy Unmasked" have been RT contributors and guests on its programs.

That includes RT contributor Tara Reade, who briefly moved to Moscow after accusing President Joe Biden of assaulting her in the 1990s; former Ukrainian diplomat Andrii Telizhenko, who was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury on allegations he had close ties to a "Russia-linked foreign influence network"; and Russell Bentley, an American citizen known to have fought with Kremlin-backed separatists and worked for Russian state media, who died earlier this year in Ukraine.

Another guest who has appeared on RT shows and in the Zelenskyy videos is Scott Ritter, a former U.N. weapons inspector sympathetic to Russia whose upstate New York home was raided in August by the FBI. Ritter told the AP that FBI agents in their questioning made clear that they were investigating his Russia-related work but did not ask specifically about his work with Swann.

Ritter provided the AP with a copy of an email he said was from a booking producer for Swann's RT shows asking him to appear in the Zelenskyy series.

Ritter said an email invitation he received to participate in "Zelenskyy Unmasked" indicated that its ex-

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Executive producer was Sean Stone, who hosted an RT show and is the son of the filmmaker Oliver Stone. Sean Stone did not respond to requests for comment, and Swann did not respond to a question about Stone's involvement on the series.

Swann said his RT-linked company had passed along guest contact details to his business producing "Zelenskyy Unmasked."

The two entities did not share staff, he said.

An 'explosive' series

Truth in Media began teasing the "Zelenskyy Unmasked" videos earlier this year on its website, writing the "explosive" 12-part series would answer "who is really benefitting from the \$100 billion the U.S. has sent Ukraine."

At that time, hard-right congressional Republicans were fighting a proposal to send more money and weapons to Ukraine.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Rep. Mike Turner and House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul, both Republicans, said some GOP lawmakers had been heavily influenced by Russian talking points.

Turner said on CNN that some of those talking points were being "uttered on the House floor."

To promote "Zelenskyy Unmasked," Swann said he paid for advertising on social media but believes the series received its most substantial boost in viewership thanks to promotion from conservative influencers. Swann's videos that were embedded in X posts garnered tens of millions of views.

"When you have different influencers that you can send it directly to, who can watch it for themselves, decide if they like it, and then share it, that's a pretty powerful tool," Swann said. "That's more powerful than the actual marketing of it on Meta or X."

With the assistance of the tech firm Bright Data, the AP identified a core group of influencers who played a significant role in helping promote the series. Posts by those influencers were shared by at least 9,300 other unique X accounts that have 33 million total followers, according to an AP analysis of "Zelenskyy Unmasked" X data created by Syracuse University's Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship.

Influencers promote videos

The spread of "Zelenskyy Unmasked" highlighted how such influencers are playing increasingly pivotal roles in politics, and many have become de facto campaign surrogates for Democratic and Republican candidates. Trump told a core group of conservative content creators — who met in a "war room" during the last presidential debate — that they "are more important than I am."

Some of those same influencers promoted the series, using identical or similar language to what Swann or Truth in Media promoted online.

Chaya Raichik, the founder of the far-right Libs of TikTok social media accounts, echoed Truth in Media's promotion of the series, tweeting: "Where did \$100 billion of our tax dollars that Congress sent to Ukraine go? Watch 'Zelenskyy Unmasked' to find out!" Raichik did not respond to requests for comment.

When Truth In Media promoted the third episode in the series, it tweeted, "The list of rich and powerful people profiting off the war in Ukraine includes President Biden and his son, but they're far from the only ones."

A few days later, C.J. Pearson, co-chair of the Republican National Committee's Youth Advisory Council, wrote the exact same thing in a tweet about "Zelenskyy Unmasked."

Others who touted the series were former Trump campaign attorney Jenna Ellis; Morgonn McMichael, a young creator linked to the right-leaning group Talking Points USA; and Andrew Giuliani, a former New York gubernatorial hopeful and the son of Trump confidant Rudy Giuliani. Ellis, McMichael and Giuliani did not respond to requests for comment from the AP.

Conservative influencer Xaviaer DuRousseau, another member of the RNC's Youth Advisory Council, said he was paid to promote "Zelenskyy Unmasked" on X through Urban Legend, an influencer marketing firm led by a former Trump administration staffer.

DuRousseau did not disclose how much he was paid, said he was unaware of Swann's work for Russian state media until interviewed by the AP and said he would carefully consider any future collaborations.

"Is there maybe an ulterior motive to you being against Ukraine? Potentially," he said. "But I would stress myself out so much if I researched every single person in this industry that thoroughly, to be honest."

Swann said Truth in Media hired Urban Legend to help with marketing, but didn't know the details of its work.

"We didn't know whether or not they were talking to influencers," Swann said in a statement.

Urban Legend declined to discuss its financial relationships with specific influencers. The company said in a statement that it had been unaware of Swann's ties to RT and would no longer work with Truth in Media.

Among Swann's most influential promoters was the former president's son, Trump Jr., who did not respond to requests for comment from the AP.

In a tweet on April 5, Trump Jr. hailed the series as "explosive" for exposing "the truth behind the war in Ukraine!"

The social media platform's users added a community note to his tweet that noted Swann's ties to Russia and said his claims "are likely to be disinformation."

The warning did not seem to deter Trump Jr. A few days later, he again took to X to praise Swann's work — in identical language.

Wealthier Americans are driving retail spending and powering US economy

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's a trend that has surprised many: Why, despite being squeezed by high prices, have Americans kept spending at retail stores and restaurants at a robust pace?

One key reason is a relatively simple one: Wealthier consumers, boosted by strong gains in income, home equity and stock market wealth, have increasingly driven the spending.

That trend, documented by Federal Reserve research, represents something of a shift from the pre-pandemic period. And it suggests that consumer spending, the primary driver of the U.S. economy, could help sustain healthy growth this year and next.

Lower-income consumers, by contrast, have been disproportionately squeezed by higher-priced rent, groceries and other necessities, leaving them less able to spend on discretionary items, like electronics, entertainment and restaurant meals, than they were before the pandemic. Though their spending is starting to rebound as inflation-adjusted incomes rise, it could be years before their finances fully recover.

The disparities help explain the gap between gloomy consumer sentiment and widespread evidence of a healthy U.S. economy — a major dynamic in the presidential race that is now in its final weeks. Only a portion of the American population is fueling most of the growth that is evident in government economic data.

The trends also help illustrate how the economy has managed to keep expanding at a solid pace even though the Federal Reserve, until last month, kept its key interest rate at its highest level in more than two decades. Despite the much higher borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards that resulted from the Fed's rate hikes, inflation-adjusted consumer spending rose 3% in 2022 and 2.5% in 2023. And it increased at a 2.8% annual rate in the April-June quarter, the government said last month.

On Thursday, the Commerce Department reported that retail sales in the United States rose 0.4% from August to September, a solid gain that suggested that shoppers are confident enough in the economy to continue spending freely. Restaurant sales jumped 1%, a particularly encouraging sign because it meant that many people felt they could spend on meals outside the home. The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta now estimates that the economy grew at a strong 3.4% in the July-September quarter.

Higher-income households have been fortified by huge gains in housing and stock market wealth since the pandemic. Home values have marched steadily up, fueled by high demand and an unusually low supply of houses. And the stock market has been consistently hitting new highs, with the S&P 500 index up a sizzling 22.5% for the year. Roughly 80% of stock market value is owned by the richest 10% of U.S. households.

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"It speaks to the ongoing strength of those Americans, which is still carrying overall spending," said Michael Pearce, deputy chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics.

Housing and stock values have soared in particular for the wealthiest one-tenth of Americans over the past four years. The value of their home equity has leapt 70% from the first quarter of 2020 through the second quarter of this year, according to Fed data — to \$17.6 trillion. Their stock and mutual fund wealth has jumped 86%, to just under \$37 trillion. Though inflation has eroded some of those gains, they are still quite substantial.

Such sharp growth in wealth has reduced the need for affluent Americans to save from their paychecks while still ramping up their spending. A report last week by Fed economists found that before the pandemic, retail spending had been rising for all income groups at roughly the same pace. But about three years ago, the trend shifted: Upper- and middle-income consumers started spending at a much faster pace than lower-earners.

By August 2024, inflation-adjusted spending on retail goods was nearly 17% higher than it was in January 2018 for upper-income households, defined as those earning more than \$100,000. For middle-income households — earning \$60,000 to \$100,000 — their spending rose 13.3% during the same period, the Fed study found. And for those earning less than \$60,000, spending has risen just 7.9% since 2018. It actually fell from mid-2021 through mid-2023.

"Middle- and high-income households have been fueling the strong demand for retail goods," Fed economist Sinem Hacıoglu Hoke and two colleagues wrote.

Among those who have felt pressure to spend cautiously is Helaine Rapkin, a 69-year-old teacher who was shopping last week at a Kohl's in Ramsey, New Jersey, looking for discounts on athletic wear and gifts for her nephew, niece and daughter. Rapkin said she's wrestling with higher costs on a range of items and isn't feeling the benefits of a dramatically reduced inflation rate.

"I am not feeling good at all," she said. "I can't believe how expensive things have gotten...Clothes or food."

Pearce, in his own research, has found that since the pandemic, lower-income Americans have had to cut their spending on discretionary items. Inflation sharply increased the portion of their income that they had to spend on housing and food, leaving little for other purchases.

As a result, for the lowest-income one-fifth of Americans — those earning less than \$28,000 — the share of their spending on discretionary items fell 2.5 percentage points by the second quarter of this year compared with 2019. It also declined for the second-lowest one-fifth of households and for the middle fifth. But for the wealthiest one-fifth, the share of their spending on discretionary purchases actually increased.

"This has clearly been a very large shock to households, particularly those at the lower end," Pearce said. "What surprised me is how little has been clawed back."

One sign of the struggles that lower-income consumers have faced is that the proportion of borrowers who are behind on credit cards or auto loans has risen in the past two years to the highest levels in about a decade.

Karen Dynan, an economist at Harvard and a nonresident fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, suggested, though, that such trends aren't likely to derail the overall economy.

"There are increasing cracks in consumers' spending," she said. "But it's not yet a broader economic story."

Dynan and Pearce say they're optimistic that consumers overall — including lower-income ones — will keep spending in the coming months as inflation-adjusted incomes keep rising, restoring more of Americans' purchasing power.

"We're probably past the worst, the most intense pressures on spending from both the inflation shock and from rising interest rates," Pearce said. "Now, I think the outlook is pretty strong."

South Korean intelligence says North has sent troops to aid Russia's war in Ukraine

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's spy agency said Friday that North Korea has dispatched troops to support Russia's war against Ukraine. If confirmed, the move would bring a third country into the war and intensify a standoff between North Korea and the West.

The South Korean announcement came a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his government has intelligence that 10,000 troops from North Korea are being prepared to join Russian forces fighting against his country.

The National Intelligence Service said in a statement that Russian navy ships transferred 1,500 North Korean special operation forces to the Russian port city of Vladivostok from Oct. 8 to Oct. 13. It said more North Korean troops are expected to be sent to Russia soon.

The North Korean soldiers deployed in Russia have been given Russian military uniforms, weapons and forged identification documents, the NIS said. It said they are currently staying at military bases in Vladivostok and other Russian sites such as Ussuriysk, Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk, and that they will likely be deployed to battle grounds after completing their adaptation training.

The NIS posted on its website satellite and other photos showing what it calls Russian navy ship movements near a North Korean port and suspected North Korean mass gatherings in Ussuriysk and Khabarovsk in the past week.

South Korean media, citing the NIS, reported that North Korea has decided to dispatch a total of 12,000 troops formed into four brigades to Russia. The NIS said it could not confirm the reports.

The NIS has a mixed record in finding developments in North Korea, one of the world's most secretive countries. If confirmed, the move would be North Korea's first major participation in a foreign war. North Korea has 1.2 million troops, one of the largest standing militaries in the world, but it hasn't fought in large-scale conflicts following the 1950-53 Korean War.

Asked about the NIS finding, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said "At this moment, our official position is that we cannot confirm reports that North Koreans are actively now as soldiers engaged in the war effort, but that may change."

Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Thursday that the U.S. couldn't confirm or corroborate media reports on the North Korean troop dispatch to Russia.

Russia has earlier denied using North Korean troops in the war, with presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov describing the claims as "another piece of fake news" during a news conference last week. North Korea's state media hasn't commented on the issue.

North Korea and Russia, locked in separate confrontations with the West, have sharply boosted their cooperation in the past two years. The U.S., South Korea and their partners have accused North Korea of supplying artillery shells, missiles and other conventional arms to Russia to help fuel its war on Ukraine in return for economic and military assistance. In June, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a pact stipulating mutual military assistance if either country is attacked.

Many experts question how much the North Korean troop dispatch would help Russia, citing North Korea's outdated equipment and shortages of battle experience. They say North Korea likely received Russian promises to provide it with high-tech weapons technology associated with its nuclear and missile programs, a move that will complicate U.S. and South Korean efforts to neutralize North Korea nuclear threats.

"Diplomatically, Pyongyang would be sacrificing its relations with European countries for the foreseeable future. The quid pro quo in terms of Russian military technology provided to the Kim regime could be significant enough to threaten South Korea's security," said Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification, believed Russia has likely offered technology transfers related to intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered submarines and surface-to-air defense systems that would enhance North Korea's deterrence posture against the U.S.

and South Korean forces.

Hong said Kim may also see the troop dispatch as a crucial opportunity to expose his soldiers to modern weapons technology and warfare and test their combat capabilities.

Earlier Friday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol convened an emergency security meeting to discuss the fallout of the North Korean troop dispatch. Meeting participants agreed that North Korea's troop dispatch poses "a grave security threat" to South Korea and the international community, according to Yoon's office.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have intensified in recent years, with Kim sharply increasing the pace of provocative missile tests and openly threatening to use nuclear weapons preemptively. South Korea and the U.S. have responded by expanding their military exercises, which North Korea views as invasion rehearsals.

On Thursday, Zelenskyy warned that a third nation wading into the hostilities could turn the conflict into a "world war."

"From our intelligence we've got information that North Korea sent tactical personnel and officers to Ukraine," Zelenskyy told reporters at NATO headquarters. "They are preparing on their land 10,000 soldiers, but they didn't move them already to Ukraine or to Russia."

Ukrainian media reported earlier this month that six North Koreans were among those killed after a Ukrainian missile strike in the partially occupied eastern Donetsk region on Oct. 3.

Many experts were earlier skeptical of possible North Korean troop deployments to Russian-Ukraine battlefields because North Korea is preoccupied with its nuclear standoff with the U.S. and South Korea.

North Korea sent pilots to fight for North Vietnam during the Vietnam war and for Egypt during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, but there have been no known large-scale dispatch of its ground troops overseas.

There have been speculations that North Korea has likely sent military technicians and engineers to support Russia's use of North Korean weapons and learn their wartime performances.

Easley, the professor, said "it would be surprising if Pyongyang deployed thousands of soldiers to fight as hired mercenaries." But he added North Korea could have sent construction workers, technicians, engineers, and military intelligence officers to Russian-controlled enclaves.

King Charles III's visit rekindles Australia's debate on ending ties to the British monarchy

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — King Charles III and Queen Camilla arrived in Sydney on Friday for the first Australian visit by a reigning monarch in more than a decade, a trip that has rekindled debate about the nation's constitutional links to Britain.

The Sydney Opera House's iconic sails were illuminated with images of previous royal visits to welcome the couple, whose six-day trip will be brief by royal standards. Charles, 75, is being treated for cancer, which led to the scaled-down itinerary.

Charles and Camilla were welcomed in light rain at Sydney Airport by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, New South Wales state Premier Chris Minns and the king's representative in Australia, Governor-General Sam Mostyn.

Charles is only the second reigning British monarch to visit Australia. His mother, Queen Elizabeth II, became the first 70 years ago.

While the welcome has been warm, Australia's national and state leaders want the royals removed from their constitution.

Monarchists expect the visit will strengthen Australians' connection to their sovereign. Opponents hope for a rejection of the concept that someone from the other side of the world is Australia's head of state.

The Australian Republic Movement, which campaigns for an Australian citizen to replace the British monarch as head of state, likens the royal visit to a touring act in the entertainment industry.

The ARM this week launched what it calls a campaign to "Wave Goodbye to Royal Reign with Monarchy:

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The Farewell Oz Tour!"

ARM co-chair Esther Anatolitis said royal visits to Australia were "something of a show that comes to town." "Unfortunately, it is a reminder that Australia's head of state isn't full-time, isn't Australian. It's a part-time person based overseas who's the head of state of numerous places," Anatolitis told the AP.

"We say to Charles and Camilla: 'Welcome, we hope you're enjoying our country and good health and good spirits.' But we also look forward to this being the final tour of a sitting Australian monarch and that when they come back to visit soon, we look forward to welcoming them as visiting dignitaries," she added.

Philip Benwell, national chair of the Australian Monarchist League, which campaigns for Australia's constitutional links to Britain to be maintained, expects reaction to the royal couple will be overwhelmingly positive.

"Something like the royal visit brings the king closer in the minds of people, because we have an absent monarchy," Benwell told the AP.

"The visit by the king brings it home that Australia is a constitutional monarchy and it has a king," he added.

Benwell is critical of the premiers of all six states, who have declined invitations to attend a reception for Charles in the national capital Canberra.

The premiers each explained that they had more pressing engagements on the day such as cabinet meetings and overseas travel.

"It would be virtually incumbent upon the premiers to be in Canberra to meet him and pay their respects," Benwell said. "To not attend can be considered to be a snub, because this is not a normal visit. This is the first visit of a king ever to Australia."

Charles was drawn into Australia's republic debate months before his visit.

The Australian Republic Movement wrote to Charles in December last year requesting a meeting in Australia and for the king to advocate their cause. Buckingham Palace politely wrote back in March to say the king's meetings would be decided upon by the Australian government. A meeting with the ARM does not appear on the official itinerary.

"Whether Australia becomes a republic is ... a matter for the Australian public to decide," said the letter from Buckingham Palace.

The Associated Press has seen copies of both letters.

Australians decided in a referendum in 1999 to retain Queen Elizabeth II as head of state. That result is widely regarded as a consequence of disagreement about how a president should be chosen rather than majority support for a monarch.

After visiting Sydney and Canberra, which are 250 kilometers (155 miles apart), Charles will then travel to Samoa to open the annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

When his mother made the last of her 16 journeys to Australia in 2011 at the age of 85, she visited Canberra, Brisbane and Melbourne on the east coast before opening the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in the west coast city of Perth.

Elizabeth's first grueling Australian tour at the age of 27 took in scores of far-flung Outback towns; an estimated 75% of the nation's population turned out to see her.

Australia then had a racially discriminatory policy that favored British immigrants. Immigration policy has been non-discriminatory since 1973.

Anatolitis noted that Australia is far more multicultural now, with most of the population either born overseas or with a overseas-born parent.

"In the '50s, we didn't have that global interconnectedness that we have now," she said.

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Today in History: October 19, 'Black Monday' on Wall Street

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Oct. 19, the 293rd day of 2024. There are 73 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Oct. 19, 1987, the stock market crashed as the Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged 508 points, or 22.6% in value (its largest daily percentage loss ever), to close at 1,738.74 on what came to be known as "Black Monday."

Also on this date:

In 1781, British troops under Gen. Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, as the American Revolution neared its end.

In 1914, the First Battle of Ypres began in World War I.

In 1960, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested during a sit-down protest at a lunch counter in Atlanta.

In 1977, the supersonic Concorde made its first landing in New York City, flying from Toulouse, France, in three hours and 44 minutes.

In 2003, Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa during a ceremony in St. Peter's Square.

In 2005, Saddam Hussein was put on trial by the Iraqi Interim Government, accused of crimes against humanity.

In 2016, in the third and final 2016 presidential debate, Republican Donald Trump refused to say he would accept the results of the election if he were to lose.

Today's Birthdays: Artist Peter Max is 87. Actor John Lithgow (LIHTH'-goh) is 79. Fox News host Steve Doocy is 68. Singer Jennifer Holliday is 64. Boxing Hall of Famer Evander Holyfield is 62. "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" host Ty Pennington is 60. Filmmaker Jon Favreau is 58. Former first daughter Amy Carter is 57. "South Park" co-creator Trey Parker is 55. Comedian Chris Kattan is 54. Musician Pras Michel (Fugees) is 52. Filmmaker Jason Reitman is 47. Actor Gillian Jacobs is 42. Actor Rebecca Ferguson is 41.