

No. 1 UConn beats St. John's, 77-64, at Madison Square Garden **Page F1**

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"We went in assuming it was a worst-case scenario, a fire or explosion involving casualties."

NEW LONDON FIRE MARSHAL VERNON SKAU

A textbook response to tragedy



Emergency personnel from across the region well-prepared to work together

By JOHN PENNEY
Day Staff Writer

New London
SECONDS AFTER THE TOWERING steeple of the former First Congregational Church collapsed onto itself on the afternoon of Jan. 25, frantic calls from horrified eyewitnesses began pouring into police headquarters.

Though some of the information relayed to dispatchers later proved inaccurate — there were no victims trapped under the tons of granite and timber that tumbled out of the 66 Union St. building — it was clear the city had a major disaster to contend with right in the heart of downtown New London.

"We went in assuming it was a worst-case scenario, a fire or explo-

sion involving casualties," Fire Marshal Vernon Skau said on Thursday from his Bank Street office inside New London Fire Department headquarters.

The response to the collapse entailed the rapid coordination of several local, regional and state emergency agencies, as well as the private construction crews who'd soon demolish the 174-year-old church that was home to two congregations.

Marshaling resources

As the tones rang out at 1:30 p.m. alerting city firefighters about the collapse, Skau was in front of a group of Nathan Hale Arts Magnet School fourth-graders.

SEE EMERGENCY PAGE A4

Churches eye their own aging buildings in wake of collapse

By GREG SMITH
Day Staff Writer

New London — Less than a week after the spectacular collapse of the First Congregational Church in downtown New London, a drone buzzed around a 156-foot tall bell tower at the historic St. James Episcopal Church.

St. James Priest-in-Charge Denise Cabana said that despite repairs performed at the nearly 175-year-old church on Federal Street about 20 years ago, parishioners were understandably shaken by what happened Jan. 25 just blocks away, when the First Congregational Church's roof and stone steeple tumbled to the ground.

SEE CHURCHES PAGE A5



Above, Scott Loring, of Loring & Son Masonry Restoration, points out gaps in mortar that need to be repaired inside the steeple of St. James Episcopal Church in New London. Heavy equipment, **left**, was used to demolish the remains of New London's First Congregational Church in the days following its Jan. 25 collapse. Go to [theday.com](#) to see a time-lapse video of the demolition work.

LEFT: PETER HUOPPI/THE DAY | ABOVE: DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

U.S., U.K. hit dozens of Houthi sites

Allies escalate effort to end ship attacks

By KHALID AL-ANSARY
Bloomberg News

United States forces followed up strikes on Syria and Iraq with a new round of attacks against Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, signaling that President Joe Biden is willing to deepen U.S. involvement in the region's spreading conflict.

Targeting Houthi sites at 13 locations in Yemen, the U.S. and its allies escalated their effort to destroy the militant group's ability to attack Red

Sea shipping with strikes including their hardened facilities. It marked the biggest set of strikes against the Houthis since an initial operation on Jan. 11, also carried out jointly by the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

Supported by six other countries including Bahrain, the strikes on Saturday targeted 36 Houthi sites in all, specifically those associated with the group's deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defense systems and radars, the Pentagon said in a statement.

"These precision strikes are intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to threaten global trade, and the lives of innocent mariners," according to the Pentagon statement, which warned that "we will not hesitate to continue to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways."

But a Houthi leader said the group wouldn't be deterred by the new round of strikes — nor by ones to come.

"The American-British ag-

SEE HOUTHS PAGE A6

Biden wins S.C.'s Democratic primary as he gears up for his reelection bid

By WILL WEISSERT and MEG KENNARD
Associated Press

Columbia, S.C. — President Joe Biden easily won South Carolina's Democratic primary on Saturday, clinching a state he pushed to lead off his party's nominating process after it revived his then-struggling White House bid four years ago.

Biden on Saturday defeated the other long-shot Democrats on South Carolina's ballot, including Minnesota

Rep. Dean Phillips and author Marianne Williamson. His reelection campaign invested heavily in driving up turnout in what it saw as a test drive of its efforts to mobilize Black voters, a key Democratic bloc central to Biden's chances in a likely November rematch against former President Donald Trump.

In 2020, it was the voters of South Carolina who proved the pundits wrong, breathed new life into our campaign, and set us on the path to win-

ning the presidency," Biden said in a statement. "Now in 2024, the people of South Carolina have spoken again and I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the presidency again — and making Donald Trump a loser — again."

The Associated Press de-

SEE CAMPAIGN PAGE A6

WEATHER

Today, sunny and seasonable. High 40. Monday, more of the same. High 40. **B6**

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FRANKLIN TO SIT BY CHARLIE BROWN IN 'PEANUTS' SPECIAL

Franklin's isolated seat at the dinner table in "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving" riled viewers of the classic that aired 50 years ago. But a new TV special coming out this month about the first Black "Peanuts" character literally gives him a better seat at the table.

"Snoopy Presents: Welcome Home, Franklin," premiering Feb. 16 on Apple TV Plus, will focus on Franklin's origin story. The trailer, released Friday, shows that after moving to a new neighborhood, Franklin Armstrong initially struggles to fit in.

The special was co-written by Robb Armstrong — the "JumpStart" creator who inspired Franklin's surname — along with Charles M. Schulz's son and grandson — Craig and Bryan Schulz, respectively — and "The Peanuts Movie" executive producer Cornelius Uliano.

— Washington Post

ROGAN SIGNS SPOTIFY DEAL FOR UP TO REPORTED \$250M

New York — Spotify has penned a new multi-year partnership deal with controversial podcast host Joe Rogan, whose enormously popular show will soon also be available on competing platforms, including YouTube and Apple Podcasts.

Spotify announced the renewed partnership in a post on the company's blog Friday. Under a prior deal, "The Joe Rogan Experience," had been a Spotify exclusive since 2020.

The Wall Street Journal, which first reported the new deal on Friday, estimated that the new contract was worth as much as \$250 million over its multiyear term. It cited unnamed people familiar with the matter.

In an email to The Associated Press on Saturday, Spotify declined to comment on details, including the estimated value of the deal.

— Associated Press

Recommittng to 2024?



COURTESY OF A PEACE OF SPACE
Attendees hold their hands in a meditative mudra at A Peace of Space in Taftville in 2019. Meditation, as well as other approaches, can help get new year's resolutions back on track. Story, E1