

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 1 of 74

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 Headline News](#)
- [3- Weber Landscaping Greenhouse Ad](#)
- [4- Secretary of State updates voters on post-election audits](#)
- [4- James Valley Telco Annual Meeting Ad](#)
- [5- Name Released in Stanley County Fatal Crash](#)
- [5- Manhart Ad](#)
- [6- Legion Auxiliary serves Memorial Day Lunch](#)
- [6- Harry Implement Ad](#)
- [7- Ceremony brings memories of sacrifices made for freedom](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Credit card swipe fees are hurting SD small businesses and consumers](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: \\$32 million sales tax loss made up for with lost money, state investments, contractor taxes](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Former mayor, sheriff's deputy charged in Centerville triple homicide](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: The jury now will decide Trump's fate in hush money trial, after lengthy closing arguments](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Amid mental health crisis, new compact allows social workers to practice across state lines](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Medicaid unwinding deals blow to tenuous system of care for Native Americans](#)
- [17- Christopher Reder Ad](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [22- Daily Devotional](#)
- [23- Subscription Form](#)
- [24- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

Wednesday, May 29

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, oriental blend vegetables, cinnamon apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour 9:30 a.m.

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



The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything. They just make the best of everything.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Thursday, May 30

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, garlic toast, fudge cake squares, fruit.

James Valley Annual Meeting, 11 a.m., GHS Gym/Arena

Story Time at Wage Memorial Library, 10 a.m.

Friday, May 31

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken on bun, oven roasted potatoes, pea and cheese salad, honey fruit salad.

High School State Tournament at Augusta University through June 1

Junior Teeners at Clark, 5:30 p.m., double header

Groton Legion hosts Aberdeen Smitty's, 4 p.m., double header

Saturday, June 1

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. at 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

© 2024 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 2 of 74

1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

Israeli tanks reportedly entered the center of Gaza's southern city of Rafah yesterday for the first time since the Israel-Hamas war began in October. Israeli shelling and airstrikes also reportedly hit a tent camp west of Rafah, killing at least 37 people.

A New York jury will begin deliberating today on whether former President Donald Trump is guilty of falsifying business records in 2016 to cover up an alleged 2006 sexual encounter with adult film star Stormy Daniels. A guilty verdict would mark the first-ever criminal

conviction of a former US president.

T-Mobile announced yesterday it will acquire most of US Cellular's wireless operations, including around 4.5 million customers and 620 stores, in a \$4.4B deal. The transaction, which combines cash and up to \$2B in debt, aims to improve coverage and speed in rural areas by providing US Cellular customers with access to T-Mobile's 5G network.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Minnesota Timberwolves beat Dallas Mavericks in Game 4 of the Western Conference Finals; Game 5 is tomorrow in Minnesota. Boston Celtics sweep the Indiana Pacers 4-0 to win the Eastern Conference Finals, advance to the NBA Finals.

Albert Ruddy, two-time Oscar-winning film producer known for "The Godfather" and "Million Dollar Baby," dies at 94. "Beautiful Girls" singer Sean Kingston faces 10 charges in Florida related to fraud and theft.

Two albums pass 300,000 units sold in a single week for first time in eight years as both Taylor Swift's and Billie Eilish's latest albums haul in more than 300,000 units sold.

Science & Technology

OpenAI begins training its next generation large language model to replace current GPT-4, may take up to a year before it is available; CEO Sam Altman to lead safety and security committee.

New mRNA vaccine shown to be effective in preventing lab animal deaths from H5N1 avian flu currently spreading across the US.

Engineered CAR-T cells, typically used in cancer immunotherapy, shown to treat chronic asthma in mouse studies.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.02%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq +0.6%); Nasdaq closes above the 17,000 level for the first time ever, boosted by a 7% rise in shares of chipmaker Nvidia.

Adam Neumann drops \$500M bid to buy back WeWork; US judge overseeing WeWork's bankruptcy proceedings instead sign off on a restructuring deal approving \$450M in funding from SoftBank.

Former FTX executive Ryan Salame sentenced to seven and a half years in prison after pleading guilty to conspiring to make illegal political contributions and operate an unlicensed money-transmission business.

Politics & World Affairs

Storms in North Texas with baseball-sized hail leave almost 800,000 residents without power, including across Dallas and Fort Worth.

Georgia's parliament overrules president's veto of the "foreign agents" bill that sparked weeklong protests; bill requires media and nonprofits to register as foreign agents if over 20% of funding comes from outside the country.

Tens of thousands of people protest in Armenian capital of Yerevan after Armenia's prime minister agrees to hand over four border villages to Azerbaijan.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 3 of 74



Secretary of State updates voters on post-election audits

(Pierre, S.D.) – With the June 4th Primary Election quickly approaching, Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson would like to update voters on the newest process being implemented to ensure the accuracy of South Dakota's elections: post-election audits.

Post-election audits must be conducted within fifteen days of the completion of the state canvassing of a primary or general election, which means that they will occur between June 12-26 this year. During an audit, voted ballots from five percent of the precincts in each county (randomly selected by the county auditor in front of the county canvassing board without the use of a computer) will be hand counted, and the results of the hand count will be compared with the results produced by the automatic tabulating equipment that was used in the election. All audits will be conducted by a county auditing board composed of members appointed by the county auditor. In order to provide added transparency, each county auditing board must have members from different political parties. Voters can be confident in the integrity of South Dakota's elections. Tabulating machines, in use for over twenty years, will be verified with post-election audits by our county auditors.

"A post-election audit is another check and balance to ensure integrity of South Dakota elections," said Secretary Johnson. "It gives voters assurance their vote was counted and that all election results can be trusted."

Just like the mandatory tests of automatic tabulating equipment that occur before each election as well as all election-day processes, post-election audits are open to the public. We encourage everyone to go watch and participate if they get the chance. Please visit the Secretary of State's website at <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/election-resources/post-election-audits.aspx> to learn more about South Dakota's new post-election audits.

JAMES VALLEY TELECOMMUNICATIONS

67th ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, May 30th
Groton Area High School Arena
11:30am Registration & Lunch
12:30pm Meeting

- Membership Gift
- Lunch will be Ken's Famous Fried Chicken, Potato Salad, Chips, Beverage & Dessert
- Door Prizes, including a \$500 JVT credit
- Our Groton Office will be closed 11am-2pm



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 5 of 74

Name Released in Stanley County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: War Creek Road and 286th Ave., 13 miles south of Fort Pierre, SD

When: 1:00p.m. Friday, May 24, 2024

Driver 1: Barb Ann Stoesser, 63-year-old female from Midland, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2005 Ford Taurus

Seatbelt Use: No

Stanley County, S.D.- A 63-year-old Midland, SD woman died Friday afternoon in a single-vehicle crash 13 miles south of Fort Pierre.

Preliminary crash information indicates Barb A. Stoesser, the driver of a 2005 Ford Taurus was southbound on War Creek Road when for an unknown reason the vehicle left the roadway and entered the east ditch. The vehicle rolled multiple times and came to rest on its passenger side. Stoesser died from injuries sustained in the crash.

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.



MANHART
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 1

**Working to Protect & Promote
Traditional American Values**

- Pro Law Enforcement
- Pro Constitution
- Pro Family
- Property Rights



Visit the Campaign Site
ManhartForHouse.com or
facebook.com/ManhartLogan

Paid for by Manhart for State House

Primary Election: Vote Now Through June 4th

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 6 of 74



Groton Post 39 Auxiliary members prepared and served lunch after Groton Memorial Day Service. L-R Madeline Grant, Sarah Grant, Coralea Wolter, Lori Giedt, Deb McKiver, Wendy Cooper, and Berdette Zastrow. (Photo by Karyn Babcock)

Cub Cadet.

ULTIMA[™] ZTS[™]

**STEER IT
TO BELIEVE IT.**

Engineered for precision and confident control on challenging hills — all backed by the strength, comfort and quality of a Cub Cadet[®] zero-turn.

Your independent Cub Cadet Dealer - Expert Service. Locally Owned.
The Advice, Service, Selection and Support you need to find the right fit for

Harry Implement

"Family Owned & Operated Since 1935!"

(605) 395-6421 ~ Ferney



Ultima[™] ZTS1 42
ZERO-TURN

- 22 HP¹ Kohler[®] KT 7000 Series V-Twin OHV engine
- 42" AeroForce[™] fabricated twin-blade deck
- Sealed ball bearing maintenance-free spindles

\$4,399*



Ultima[™] ZTS1 46
ZERO-TURN

- 22 HP¹ Kohler[®] 7000 Series V-Twin OHV engine
- 46" AeroForce[™] fabricated twin-blade deck
- Sealed ball bearing maintenance-free spindles

\$4,499*



Ultima[™] ZT1 50
ZERO-TURN

- 23 HP¹ Kawasaki[®] FR691V V-twin OHV engine
- 50" AeroForce[™] fabricated triple-blade deck
- Dual Hydro-Gear[®] EZT-2200[™] transmission

\$3,299*

*Actual retail prices are set by dealer and may vary. Taxes are additional and vary by location. Freight and PDI charges may be additional and vary by dealer. Models subject to limited availability. Prices may not reflect dealer incentives or other promotional offers. All retail prices are subject to change without notice. ©2024 Cub Cadet. All rights reserved. **See operator's manual for warranty details and information. Certain restrictions apply. Kohler is a registered trademark of Kohler Co. Kawasaki is a registered trademark of KAWASAKI JUKOGYO KABUSHIKI KAISHA.

FOR FULL PRODUCT SPECS

Cub Cadet.

VISIT CUBCADET.COM

Ceremony brings memories of sacrifices made for freedom

On a windy mid-day Monday, community members gathered to pay tribute to the brave men and women who sacrificed their lives in services to the nation.

The American Legion Post 39 hosted its annual Memorial Day Ceremony at Groton Union Cemetery.

"This is way different than Veterans Day," said Post Commander Bruce Babcock. "On Veterans Day you honor the living. But Memorial Day is honoring those who have served and they've passed..."

"I think it's good for the public to come, and we always have a great turnout here in Groton," he added.

Eight deceased Groton area veterans were added to the Honor Roll this year, including Robert "Jack" Oliver, Terry Furman, Leslie Dohman, Charles Robinson, Douglas Ehrenberg, Dennis Furman, Harlan Grote and Gerald Rossow. Two were added from the Legion Auxiliary: Ruth Pray and Marjorie Overacker.

Following the reading of the Honor Roll, which totaled 321 names this year, the Honor Guard gave a salute, including the playing of Taps and a 21-gun salute.

"It almost makes me shed a tear," Babcock said of the emotional ending of the event.

There was more than ceremony to Monday's event.

"I really like that we can get our local guys who have served to come and speak," Babcock said.

This year's speaker was retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Roderick C. Zastrow. The Columbia native called on attendees to remember the sacrifices made.

"Today is a hallowed day on which we gather each year to remember those who served and gave the ultimate sacrifice for our nation," he said. "It is entirely proper that we Americans stop on this one day each year to do as the holiday namesake implies – to memorialize, that is, to remember, and to never forget the sacrifices so many have given so that we, the living, the descendants of those who paid for our freedom in their blood in earlier times may indeed seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as our forefathers intended."

Zastrow recounted sacrifices that had been made through American history to ensure citizens' freedom.

"While Memorial Day is filled with the sobering remembrances of those who have fallen, it should also be filled with gratitude and optimism," he said. "Today and every day, we should be filled with the gratitude that those fallen veterans, and their supporting families and communities, helped enable and shape a better country, one that remains the most innovative country on this planet.

"And we should be optimistic and hopeful for a better future knowing that the same values of integrity, selflessness and excellence, along with a strong work ethic, are what created and shaped this country then, now and in going forward," he continued. "While we can get lost in the clutter of social media and endless news from wide-ranging perspectives, we can look forward to each day knowing that our men and women in uniform, day in and day out, honor the fallen, as we do here today, by preserving the peace and freedoms that those we remember and honor here today selflessly gave.

"May God bless those we remember today, may God bless our men and women in uniform and their families, and may God Bless America," he said.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

Credit card swipe fees are hurting SD small businesses and consumers

KELLI FORD

MAY 28, 2024 5:07 PM

Despite hopes of cooling inflation, the consumer price index climbed 3.5% in March, exemplifying the ongoing strain on American businesses and families as they grapple with elevated prices. For South Dakotans, median home listing prices adjusted for inflation are up 26% percent since 2020, much higher than the national average of 11%. Everywhere Americans look, things are getting more expensive. But unaware to many, and adding to this financial stress, are hidden credit card swipe fees that multiply the impact of inflation and hamper our local economy.

Despite processing costs becoming cheaper, the Visa/Mastercard duopoly continues to raise these fees on small businesses like mine, worsening the financial burden for merchants and consumers.

Last year, South Dakota merchants paid more than \$268 million in credit card swipe fees, a charge incurred whenever a credit card payment is processed. These fees average around 1.5-3.5% of a total transaction amount and continue to rise year over year as major credit card companies consolidate control over the industry. Visa and Mastercard now dominate over 80% of the credit card market and, for the first time, pulled in over \$100 billion in swipe fees last year.

What's worse is that these excessive fees often get passed on to consumers through higher-priced products when merchants are unable to absorb the added cost. This has resulted in South Dakotans and Americans across the country paying on average more than \$1,100 for inflated prices as a result of swipe fees. That's comparable to the median price of rent in South Dakota, exemplifying the need to treat these fees with the urgency they demand.

And while these credit card giants are siphoning funds from our small businesses, they are also keeping our payments system less secure.

Visa and Mastercard have failed to address the security concerns raised by the Federal Reserve, showing rates of fraud for the two companies are now 8 times higher than that of comparable networks in the debit space. Without competition, Visa and Mastercard have grown complacent with security protections for their credit cards while their record-high profit margins see exponential growth.

Safeguarding payment security for Americans also faces additional hurdles, as companies like China UnionPay are welcomed into domestic security standard-setting organizations largely controlled by Visa and Mastercard. UnionPay is a Chinese state-owned financial services corporation. It joined EMVCo's governing body in 2013 and four years later was welcomed by Visa and Mastercard into the Payment Card Industry (PCI) Security Standards Council as a part of its decision-making body on payment security. Currently, UnionPay is available to American banks should they choose to enable their services on their cards, which is an extremely concerning possibility given China's threat to national security.

Fortunately, Congress is considering the Credit Card Competition Act (CCCA) that would block networks like China UnionPay from continuing to pose a threat to national security and would increase competition in the credit card industry, helping to reduce swipe fees and bolster protections for merchants and consumers.

By allowing merchants to choose between at least two different processing networks when routing a transaction, the CCCA would make the credit card industry subject to increased competition, similar to how

small businesses across the state must compete for business. The CCCA would encourage major players like Visa and Mastercard to reduce their excessive credit card swipe fees, and continue advancing their protections against fraud and other security risks to ensure merchants choose their services. With reduced swipe fee costs, merchants could then afford to lower their prices and spare consumers the added strain currently being imposed by these credit card behemoths.

Our federal delegation knows full well the consequences of inflation and the ongoing threat posed by China, and I hope Sens. Mike Rounds and John Thune will give careful consideration to the CCCA. It holds the potential to save South Dakota merchants more than \$40 million annually and keep China's influence at bay.

Kelli Ford is the owner of the BeeHive Salon in Pierre. She has run a small business for over 25 years.

\$32 million sales tax loss made up for with lost money, state investments, contractor taxes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 28, 2024 1:51 PM

Despite a \$32 million dip in sales tax revenue, South Dakota has collected about \$115 million more in total revenue this year than it did the previous July through April.

That news was shared with the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors Tuesday by state Bureau of Finance and Management economist Derek Johnson. The council includes economists and businesspeople from around the state who review and critique the department's forecasting.

Tax collection metrics begin in July because a fiscal year in South Dakota runs from July 1 to June 30 the following year.

The state's unclaimed property fund is the primary reason for the revenue uptick in the face of sales tax declines. The state has banked approximately \$62 million more this year in abandoned or forgotten money from bank accounts, stocks, life insurance payouts, uncashed checks and the contents of safe deposit boxes. The holder of the money or items, such as a bank, tries to find the owners. After three years of dormancy, the property reverts to the state. The property represents a perpetual liability to the state, however, as the state is obligated to pay the rightful owner at any point.

"Kind of an unpredictable revenue source that we have in South Dakota," Johnson said.

It is difficult to say what caused the unclaimed property uptick, according to South Dakota Bankers Association President Karl Adam, who serves on the council.

"I'm not questioning the sustainability of it, but that is something that I know the state relies heavily on, and I don't know if there would be an asterisk next to that for future years," Adam said.

Adviser Derek Johnson agreed.

"As it pertains to unclaimed property, certainly there should be an asterisk by that number."

Earnings from the state's investments have jumped by \$35 million this year, as well. This includes returns from assets the state holds, like bonds and stocks. The income might come as interest payments or dividends.

"Certainly was a big boost to the general fund," Johnson said, referring to the state's primary budget.

Contractor's excise tax revenues are also up about \$24 million, referring to the tax contractors pay based on earnings from construction and repair projects.

The \$31.9 million decline in sales and use tax revenue was largely due to a reduction in the state sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%. That happened in July 2023.

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.

Former mayor, sheriff's deputy charged in Centerville triple homicide

Attorney General's office to lead prosecution in Turner County case

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 28, 2024 12:41 PM

A former Centerville mayor and one-time Turner County sheriff's deputy reportedly shot and killed three men Monday night upon learning that one of the men allegedly sexually assaulted his wife.

Jay Edward Ostrem, 64, is currently in custody at the Minnehaha County Jail on a \$1 million cash-only bond as he awaits an initial appearance in court.

Attorney General Marty Jackley, through a press release, confirmed that Ostrem is charged with three counts of first-degree murder. Each count carries a maximum sentence of life in prison without parole.

"There is no further threat to the public," Jackley wrote in the press release.

Ostrem served as a Turner County sheriff's deputy through the early 2000s after a two-decade career in law enforcement in Wyoming. He was among the deputies involved in investigating the death of Dep. Chad Mechels, who was shot and killed by Ethan Johns in March of 2009. Johns is serving a life sentence for that crime.

In 2010, while serving as mayor of Centerville, Ostrem was sued for sexual harassment in federal court by former Police Chief Rachel Kopman, who claimed she'd been subjected to unwelcome sexual comments for more than a year before her dismissal as chief. The suit was settled in 2012.

Ostrem's law enforcement certification expired in 2016, Jackley spokesman Tony Mangan told South Dakota Searchlight.

A complaint filed against Ostrem on Tuesday in Turner County names the three victims. South Dakota Searchlight is withholding their names, because the Attorney General's office says next of kin have yet to be notified. One of the men was the alleged perpetrator of the sexual assault. Another was a relative of that man, who called police to report the shooting before being shot himself.

According to a probable cause affidavit filed Tuesday in Turner County, Ostrem's wife told police that the fatal events of Tuesday evening came after her disclosure to him that one of the victims had sexually assaulted her by rubbing his erect penis against her at the couple's Centerville home Thursday evening, as Ostrem slept.

The man lived across the street from Ostrem.

Upon learning of the incident, the affidavit said, Ostrem "got up and went raging out of the house." His wife stayed inside until police arrived, which happened shortly after Ostrem was found walking near his home with an "AR-style rifle" and a .380 pistol.

A South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks conservation officer was the first to encounter Ostrem after the shooting, the affidavit said, and the officer noted "an odor of consumed alcohol" from Ostrem. The one-time deputy complied with the officer's commands to stop walking, and he told the officer he had a pistol in his pocket.

The date for Ostrem's initial appearance on the Turner County charges has yet to be set, according to the Turner County Clerk of Court.

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.

The jury now will decide Trump's fate in hush money trial, after lengthy closing arguments

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 28, 2024 10:55 PM

WASHINGTON — Closing arguments in the first-ever criminal trial of a former U.S. president concluded Tuesday, leaving the jury to now decide if Donald Trump is guilty of faking reimbursement to his personal lawyer for hush money paid to a porn star just before the 2016 presidential election.

Just outside the Lower Manhattan courthouse during summations, the campaign to reelect President Joe Biden held a press conference featuring actor Robert DeNiro and two former U.S. Capitol Police officers who were overwhelmed by the angry mob of Trump supporters who stormed the building on Jan. 6, 2021.

DeNiro bickered with a heckler and the Trump campaign then followed with its own press conference.

The trial's final day of arguments wrapped up after nearly eight hours of closing arguments, during which the defense portrayed Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen as the "M.V.P. of liars" and Trump as a victim of extortion and too busy a leader in 2017 to understand the payments to Cohen.

Meanwhile, the prosecution walked jurors through excruciating details of events and witness testimony to show that Trump's objective, along with those in his orbit, was to "hoodwink the American voter" leading up to the 2016 election, according to reporters at the courthouse.

New York does not allow recording in the courtroom but provides public transcripts of the proceedings. States Newsroom covered the trial in person on May 20.

Trump, the presumed 2024 Republican presidential nominee, is charged with 34 felonies, one for each of the 11 invoices, 11 checks, and 12 ledger entries that New York state prosecutors allege were cooked-up as routine "legal expenses," hiding what were really reimbursements to Cohen for paying off adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

Trump denies any wrongdoing

Daniels, also an adult film director, testified in early May to a 2006 sexual encounter at a Lake Tahoe golf tournament with Trump, which he maintains never happened.

Cohen, the prosecution's key witness, later told the jurors that he wired Daniels \$130,000 to secure her signature on a nondisclosure agreement in late October 2016, and that Trump was aware.

Cohen's payment swiftly followed the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape, in which Trump was recorded telling a TV host that his fame allows him to grab women by the genitals.

The revelation spun Trump's campaign into a frenzy over possibly losing women voters, additional witnesses testified.

Further, Cohen testified that Trump was present during conversations to hatch a plan with the Trump Organization's longtime chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, to repay Cohen under the guise of "legal expenses." Cohen would eventually receive a grossed-up sum of \$420,000 to account for a bonus and taxes.

The hush money trial, which began in mid-April, is likely the only one to occur prior to the November election. Three other criminal cases against the former president, two federal and one in Georgia, remain stalled.

Throughout the six-week trial, jurors heard from nearly two dozen witnesses called by the prosecution to establish Trump's history of working to suppress negative stories.

David Pecker, former National Enquirer publisher, testified to coordinating with Trump and Cohen earlier in 2016 to pay off former Playboy model Karen McDougal and bury her story of an alleged affair with Trump.

The G.L.O.A.T.

In his closing statements, Trump attorney Todd Blanche addressed the jury for nearly three hours, arguing that Trump made no such effort to influence the 2016 election by "unlawful means."

Blanche told the jurors to put the idea of a conspiracy aside, emphasizing that the existence of a nondisclosure agreement is "not a crime." Working with editors to buy sources' silence and bury stories was

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 12 of 74

routine, Blanche said.

"Every campaign in this country is a conspiracy," he told the jurors, according to reporters at the courthouse.

While no hard contract existed between Trump and Cohen at the time, Blanche argued that the two had entered into an "oral" retainer agreement, and that Cohen was lying about how much work he was actually doing for Trump.

By the time Trump reached the Oval Office and personally signed nine of the 11 checks for Cohen, the then-president was too busy "running the country" to realize what he was signing, Blanche said.

As for the classification of the payments on the ledger, Blanche argued that the Trump Organization's software featured limited dropdown menu categories, and that "legal expenses" was one of the options.

Blanche's closing statements were largely dominated by his effort to persuade jurors that Cohen's testimony could not be trusted.

"There is no way that you can find that President Trump knew about this payment at the time it was made without believing the words of Michael Cohen — period," Blanche told the jurors, according to reporters in the courtroom.

Cohen pleaded guilty in 2018 for lying to Congress.

Using another sports metaphor, Blanche told jurors that Cohen is the "G.L.O.A.T."

"He's literally the greatest liar of all time," Blanche said.

He closed by urging the jurors to not send Trump "to prison" based on Cohen's testimony.

Justice Juan Merchan admonished Blanche for mentioning prison, pointing out that a guilty verdict does not necessarily mean prison time. Merchan told the jurors to disregard that "improper" comment, according to reporters at the courthouse.

'The only one who's paid the price'

For just under five hours, prosecutor Joshua Steinglass led jurors through his closing argument, clocking the longest day of the trial.

Steinglass started off by telling them the prosecution only needs to prove the following: There were false business records used as part of the conspiracy and that Trump knew about them.

Steinglass reviewed earlier evidence presented to the jury — phone records, handwritten notes, recorded phone conversations and checks bearing Trump's own signature. He also recalled the damning testimony of several Trump allies, including Pecker, the publisher.

"The conspiracy to unlawfully influence the 2016 election — you don't need Michael Cohen to prove that one bit," Steinglass said, according to reporters at the courthouse.

Steinglass leaned into Cohen's seedy past, including his lying to Congress and his jail time for campaign finance violations related to hush money payments to women who alleged extramarital affairs with Trump.

These actions, he said, were taken on Trump's behalf to defend and shield him; the irony, Steinglass said, is now they are being used against Cohen, again, to protect Trump.

Cohen transformed from a loyal Trump ally into a bitter foe who has published books titled "Disloyal" and "Revenge," and produces a podcast called "Mea Culpa" on which he regularly lambastes Trump.

Cohen is "understandably angry that to date, he's the only one who's paid the price for his role in this conspiracy," Blanche told the jurors, according to reporters, who noted Trump was shaking his head.

Steinglass attempted to humanize Cohen for the jurors, telling them one can "hardly blame" the former fixer — who now has a criminal record and no law license — for selling merchandise including t-shirts depicting Trump in an orange prison jumpsuit.

Steinglass also refuted the defense's argument that Trump's actions ahead of the 2016 were routine, describing the National Enquirer as "a covert arm" of the Trump campaign and "the very antithesis of a normal legitimate press function."

"Everything Mr. Trump and his cohorts did in this case was cloaked in lies," Steinglass said nearing the end of his closing statement. "The name of the game was concealment, and all roads lead to the man who benefited the most, Donald Trump."

Biden deploys DeNiro

On the sidewalk just outside the New York County Supreme Court, the Biden campaign deployed DeNiro, the voice of the latest campaign ad, and former U.S. Capitol Police officers Harry Dunn and Michael Fanone. The officers are campaigning for Biden in battleground states, the campaign said in a press release.

The campaign's Michael Tyler, communications director, introduced the trio and said they were not in Manhattan because of the trial proceedings, but rather because that's where the media is concentrated.

Loud protesters, whom DeNiro called "crazy," competed with the speakers.

"Donald Trump has created this," DeNiro said, pointing to the demonstrators. "He wants to sow total chaos, which he's succeeding in some areas ... I love this city, and I don't want to destroy it. Donald Trump wants to destroy, not only this city, but the country, and eventually he could destroy the world."

"These guys are the true heroes," De Niro said, pointing to Dunn and Fanone behind him. "They stood and put their lives on the line for these low lives, for Trump."

A protester then interrupted DeNiro to call the officers "traitors."

"I don't even know how to deal with you, my friend," DeNiro snapped back during the livestreamed event.

Both Dunn and Fanone testified two years ago before lawmakers investigating the violent mob that overran the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 as Congress gathered for a joint session to certify Biden's 2020 presidential election victory. Trump still falsely claims he won the election.

Trump's campaign immediately followed with its own press conference.

Jason Miller, senior adviser to Trump, held up Tuesday's copy of the New York Post bearing the headline "Nothing to Bragg About," a play on Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's name.

"Everybody knows this case is complete garbage," Miller said. "President Trump did nothing wrong. This is all politics."

On Trump's social media platform Truth Social, the former president posted "BORING!" in all capital letters during a break in the Steinglass summation.

Late Monday, Trump posted in all caps a complaint about the order in which closing arguments would occur — a routine, well-established series of remarks in trials.

"WHY IS THE CORRUPT GOVERNMENT ALLOWED TO MAKE THE FINAL ARGUMENT IN THE CASE AGAINST ME? WHY CAN'T THE DEFENSE GO LAST? BIG ADVANTAGE, VERY UNFAIR. WITCH HUNT!" he wrote.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Amid mental health crisis, new compact allows social workers to practice across state lines

South Dakota among states to adopt Social Work Licensure Compact

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI - MAY 28, 2024 10:56 AM

Stefani Goerlich, a certified sex therapist and social worker with a private practice in Detroit, sees several dozen clients a month, most of them from underserved and minority backgrounds. She speaks to them about sensitive matters such as gender-affirming care, and building trust takes time.

Those hard-won relationships often are upended when clients move away from Michigan, because most states bar social workers from providing telehealth services across state lines. Finding another therapist who is a good fit isn't easy, especially since many areas of the country have a shortage of mental health providers.

"It takes them such a long time to find somebody that they feel safe with," Goerlich said. "To have a spouse get transferred in their job and to lose all of that? Statistically, people are more likely to just stop therapy entirely, because they don't want to have to go through that again."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 14 of 74

Amid what many Americans are calling a mental health crisis, an increasing number of states are trying to address the problem by empowering social workers to practice across state lines.

Under the Social Work Licensure Compact, social workers can get a multistate license, which clears them to care for patients in a participating state, even if they don't live there. Social workers must abide by the laws of the state where the patient resides.

Missouri was the first state to approve compact legislation, in July 2023. Since then, 14 other states have signed on. And at least 17 more are considering bills to do the same, according to the nonpartisan Council of State Governments, a nonprofit organization that promotes the exchange of ideas across state lines.

South Dakota lawmakers endorsed House Bill 1015 during the 2024 session, which enabled South Dakota to join the compact. Gov. Kristi Noem signed HB 1015 into law on Feb. 5.

The compact is the result of a collaboration among the council, the U.S. Department of Defense and the Association of Social Work Boards, which develops social work licensing exams. The National Association of Social Workers and the Clinical Social Work Association, both membership organizations for social workers, are partners in the effort.

The Defense Department is involved because military families move frequently, and many of them include social workers. Getting a new license every one or two years is burdensome. The social work compact is one of 10 multistate licensing agreements the Defense Department agreed to fund a few years ago, ranging from teaching to cosmetology, according to Matt Shafer, a deputy program director at the Council of State Governments.

Shafer told Stateline it likely will take one to one and a half years until licenses are issued under the social work compact.

This isn't the first compact to allow mental health providers to practice across state lines. Thirty-six states have passed legislation to allow psychologists to practice elsewhere by joining an interstate compact known as PSYPACT.

"It works," Robin McLeod, a senior director at the American Psychological Association, said of PSYPACT. "It allows for people who have specialized practice to provide care, or for people who need specialized practice to receive care."

For example, McLeod said, a therapist might specialize in serving patients with autism and also speak Arabic. Under the interstate compact, a practitioner could serve more people with those specific treatment and language needs, via telehealth.

However, McLeod noted, therapists practicing under the compact still have to navigate differing state laws. She pointed to Texas, where providers need to be aware of laws prohibiting abortion and gender-affirming medical care.

"Those are times where it can be really tricky," she said. "If you're practicing in that state from another state, it's the Texas health and safety laws that you would have to follow."

But Alabama Democratic state Rep. Kenyatté Hassell, who sponsored successful compact legislation in his state, thinks the benefits outweigh the potential complications. A 2023 report from Mental Health America, a nonprofit that focuses on issues of mental illness, ranked Alabama 48th among the states in its effectiveness addressing mental health and substance use issues, citing its high prevalence of mental illness and limited access to care.

"I know, as a state, we need to put more money into the health department to deal with mental health, from schools to workplaces," Hassell told Stateline. "We defunded some of the mental health hospitals that we had in the state. And it became a problem."

In Colorado, where a bill that would allow the state to join the compact is on the governor's desk, Democratic state Rep. Emily Sirota — a social worker herself — noted the issue is bipartisan. Compact bills also are awaiting governors' signatures in Minnesota, New Hampshire and Tennessee, according to the Council of State Governments.

"It's not a partisan issue to recognize a need in the workforce," Sirota told Stateline. She said the licensing compact is a way to make connections between patients and social practitioners "more streamlined

and more effective.”

For Goerlich, who sees clients in at least four states, anything that can make licensure easier for therapists is a good thing. In addition to Michigan, Goerlich went through the licensing process in Arizona and Ohio so she could continue to treat patients who moved to those states. She also works in Florida, where she says she doesn't need a full license because she is a registered telehealth provider.

“I went through all the hoops, I got licensed,” she said. “But that ended up costing me money. And I'm fine with it, because I'm able to help people. But if we had something like a compact, I would have been able to see them without needing to do that.”

Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.

Medicaid unwinding deals blow to tenuous system of care for Native Americans

BY: JAZMIN OROZCO RODRIGUEZ - MAY 28, 2024 6:00 AM

About a year into the process of redetermining Medicaid eligibility after the COVID-19 public health emergency, more than 20 million people have been kicked off the joint federal-state program for low-income families.

A chorus of stories recount the ways the unwinding has upended people's lives, but Native Americans are proving particularly vulnerable to losing coverage and face greater obstacles to reenrolling in Medicaid or finding other coverage.

“From my perspective, it did not work how it should,” said Kristin Melli, a pediatric nurse practitioner in rural Kalispell, Montana, who also provides telehealth services to tribal members on the Fort Peck Reservation.

The redetermination process has compounded long-existing problems people on the reservation face when seeking care, she said. She saw several patients who were still eligible for benefits disenrolled. And a rise in uninsured tribal members undercuts their health systems, threatening the already tenuous access to care in Native communities.

One teenager, Melli recalled, lost coverage while seeking lifesaving care. Routine lab work raised flags, and in follow-ups Melli discovered the girl had a condition that could have killed her if untreated. Melli did not disclose details, to protect the patient's privacy.

Melli said she spent weeks working with tribal nurses to coordinate lab monitoring and consultations with specialists for her patient. It wasn't until the teen went to a specialist that Melli received a call saying she had been dropped from Medicaid coverage.

The girl's parents told Melli they had reapplied to Medicaid a month earlier but hadn't heard back. Melli's patient eventually got the medication she needed with help from a pharmacist. The unwinding presented an unnecessary and burdensome obstacle to care.

Pat Flowers, Montana Democratic Senate minority leader, said during a political event in early April that 13,000 tribal members had been disenrolled in the state.

Native American and Alaska Native adults are enrolled in Medicaid at higher rates than their white counterparts, yet some tribal leaders still didn't know exactly how many of their members had been disenrolled as of a survey conducted in February and March. The Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee of the Indian Health Service conducted and published the survey. Respondents included tribal leaders from Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico, among other states.

Tribal leaders reported many challenges related to the redetermination, including a lack of timely information provided to tribal members, patients unaware of the process or their disenrollment, long processing times, lack of staffing at the tribal level, lack of communication from their states, concerns with obtaining accurate tribal data, and in cases in which states have shared data, difficulties interpreting it.

Research and policy experts initially feared that vulnerable populations, including rural Indigenous com-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 16 of 74

munities and families of color, would experience greater and unique obstacles to renewing their health coverage and would be disproportionately harmed.

"They have a lot at stake and a lot to lose in this process," said Joan Alker, executive director of the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and a research professor at the McCourt School of Public Policy. "I fear that that prediction is coming true."

Cammie DuPuis-Pablo, tribal health communications director for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in Montana, said the tribes don't have an exact number of their members disenrolled since the re-determination began, but know some who lost coverage as far back as July still haven't been reenrolled.

The tribes hosted their first outreach event in late April as part of their effort to help members through the process. The health care resource division is meeting people at home, making calls, and planning more events.

The tribes receive a list of members' Medicaid status each month, DuPuis-Pablo said, but a list of those no longer insured by Medicaid would be more helpful.

Because of those data deficits, it's unclear how many tribal members have been disenrolled.

"We are at the mercy of state Medicaid agencies on what they're willing to share," said Yvonne Myers, consultant on the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid for Citizen Potawatomi Nation Health Services in Oklahoma.

In Alaska, tribal health leaders struck a data-sharing agreement with the state in July but didn't begin receiving information about their members' coverage for about a month — at which point more than 9,500 Alaskans had already been disenrolled for procedural reasons.

"We already lost those people," said Gennifer Moreau-Johnson, senior policy adviser in the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, a nonprofit organization. "That's a real impact."

Because federal regulations don't require states to track or report race and ethnicity data for people they disenroll, fewer than 10 states collect such information. While the data from these states does not show a higher rate of loss of coverage by race, a KFF report states that the data is limited and that a more accurate picture would require more demographic reporting from more states.

Tribal health leaders are concerned that a high number of disenrollments among their members is financially undercutting their health systems and ability to provide care.

"Just because they've fallen off Medicaid doesn't mean we stop serving them," said Jim Roberts, senior executive liaison in the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. "It means we're more reliant on other sources of funding to provide that care that are already underresourced."

Three in 10 Native American and Alaska Native people younger than 65 rely on Medicaid, compared with 15% of their white counterparts. The Indian Health Service is responsible for providing care to approximately 2.6 million of the 9.7 million Native Americans and Alaska Natives in the U.S., but services vary across regions, clinics, and health centers. The agency itself has been chronically underfunded and unable to meet the needs of the population. For fiscal year 2024, Congress approved \$6.96 billion for IHS, far less than the \$51.4 billion tribal leaders called for.

Because of that historical deficit, tribal health systems lean on Medicaid reimbursement and other third-party payers, like Medicare, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and private insurance, to help fill the gap. Medicaid accounted for two-thirds of third-party IHS revenues as of 2021.

Some tribal health systems receive more federal funding through Medicaid than from IHS, Roberts said.

Tribal health leaders fear diminishing Medicaid dollars will exacerbate the long-standing health disparities — such as lower life expectancy, higher rates of chronic disease, and inferior access to care — that plague Native Americans.

The unwinding has become "all-consuming," said Monique Martin, vice president of intergovernmental affairs for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

"The state's really having that focus be right into the minutiae of administrative tasks, like: How do we

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 17 of 74

send text messages to 7,000 people?" Martin said. "We would much rather be talking about: How do we address social determinants of health?"

Melli said she has stopped hearing of tribal members on the Fort Peck Reservation losing their Medicaid coverage, but she wonders if that means disenrolled people didn't seek help.

"Those are the ones that we really worry about," she said, "all of these silent cases. ... We only know about the ones we actually see."

Jazmin Orozco Rodriguez is a Nevada correspondent for KFF Health News.

PAID FOR BY REDER FOR SD HOUSE

DEAR SD DISTRICT #1,

I AM A NAVY VETERAN,

... AND A DAD, FOUNDER OF THE DTOM 22/0 FOUNDATION,
NATIONAL PUBLIC SPIRIT AWARD WINNER, & SOUTH DAKOTA VETERAN OF THE YEAR.

NOT A CAREER POLITICIAN

A CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN VOICE THAT YOU CAN TRUST TO

GET THE JOB DONE & GET HOME.

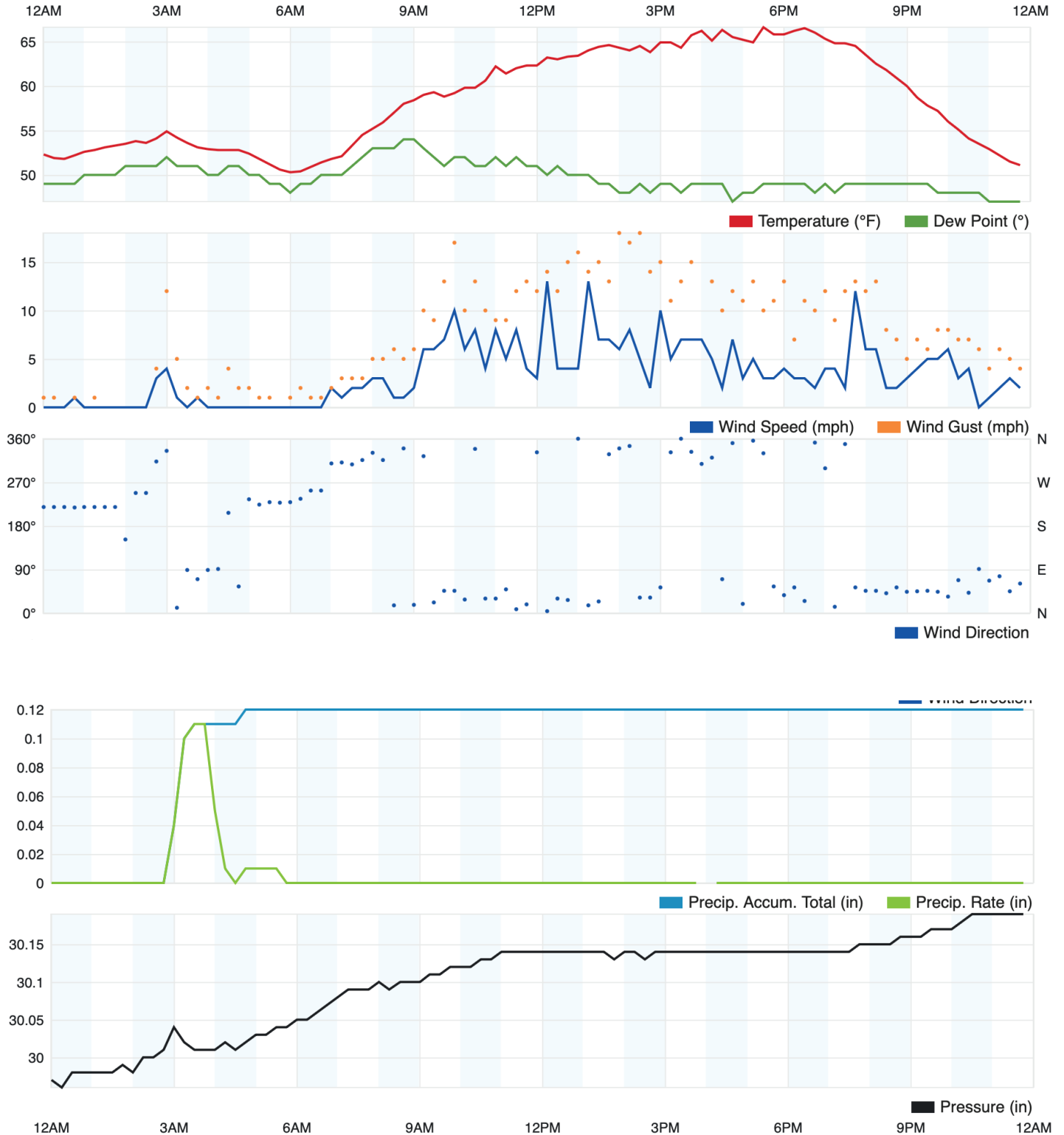
CHRISTOPHER
REDER
DISTRICT 1 HOUSE

VETERAN RANGERS

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 18 of 74

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 19 of 74

Today



High: 76 °F

Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

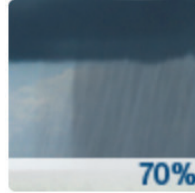
Tonight



Low: 57 °F

Mostly Clear
then Slight
Chance
T-storms and
Breezy

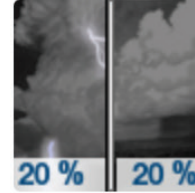
Thursday



High: 71 °F

Showers
Likely and
Breezy

Thursday
Night



Low: 45 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Slight Chance
Showers

Friday



High: 72 °F

Mostly Sunny

Wednesday



Gusts: 25-45 mph

Highs: 70-80°

Wednesday Night



Lows: 53-58°



National Weather Service, Aberdeen, SD

Southeast winds will increase throughout the daytime hours today. By midday and through late afternoon, gusts will range from 25-45 mph. Some locales across north central South Dakota could approach gusts closer to 50 mph for a short time. After starting the day off on the cool side, temperatures will warm nicely through the 70s to low 80s this afternoon.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 20 of 74

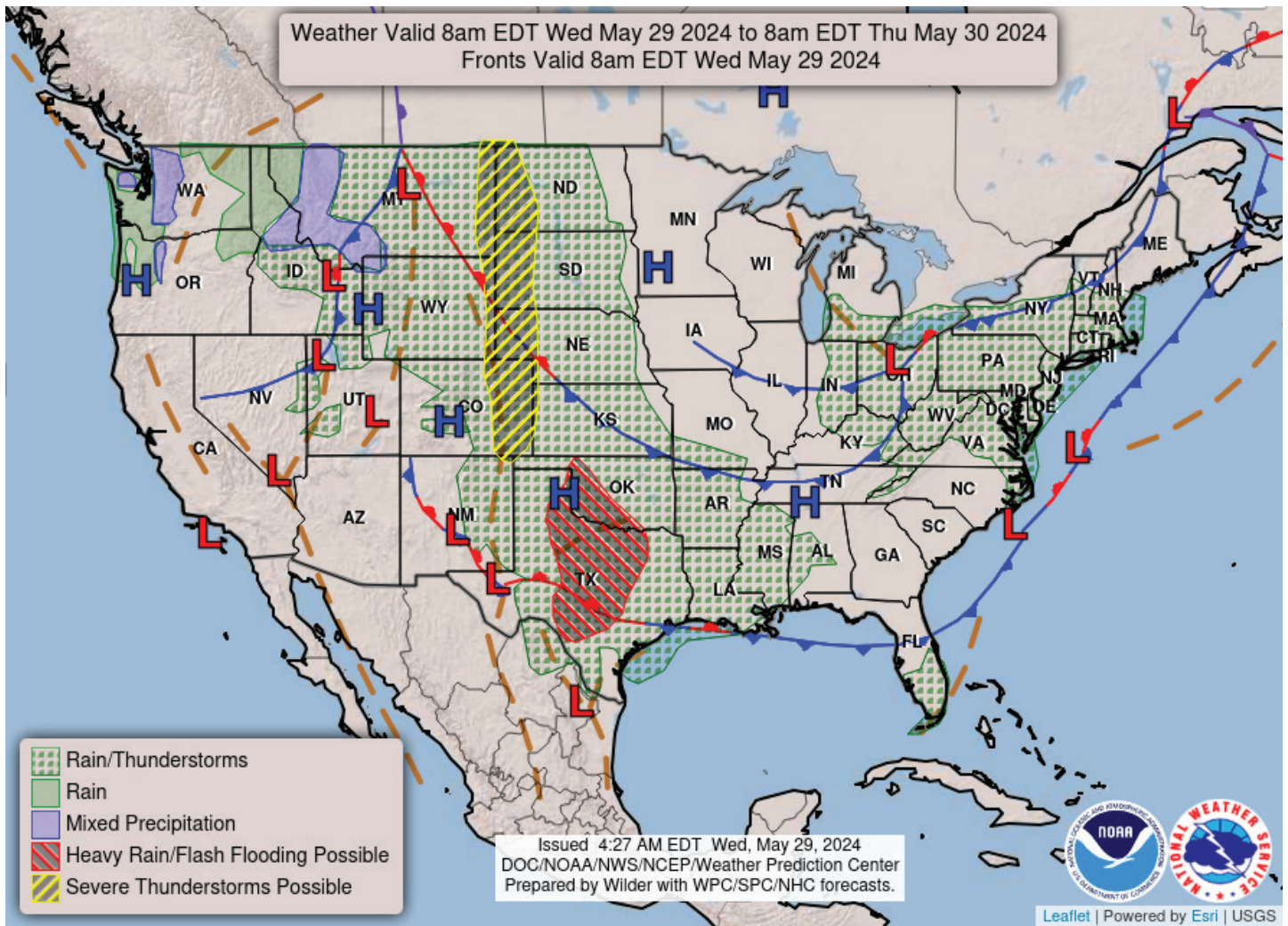
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 67 °F at 5:33 PM
Low Temp: 50 °F at 6:08 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 1:34 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 26 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 1934
Record Low: 23 in 1947
Average High: 75
Average Low: 50
Average Precip in May.: 3.07
Precip to date in May: 2.26
Average Precip to date: 7.04
Precip Year to Date: 6.80
Sunset Tonight: 9:13:06 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:46:07 am



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 21 of 74

Today in Weather History

May 29, 1953: An auditorium was almost entirely unroofed, and barns, along with outbuildings were destroyed in McLaughlin by a tornado. Seven businesses and two homes were also damaged. Estimate of property damage at \$100,000. This tornado was estimated to have F2 strength.

May 29, 2004: Hail, with the largest a quarter sizes, fell in many parts of north-central South Dakota. Lightning struck a house in Veblen and caused some damage. Glass from a broken window hit a man, and some debris from the ceiling hit a woman. They were taken to the hospital and treated for minor injuries. The torrential rains of 3 to 6 inches fell between Westport and Columbia with cropland and many roads flooded. Also, some basements were flooded. Four, weak F0 tornadoes, also were reported. The first two touched down near Bath causing no damage. The other two occurred near Ipswich, also causing no damage.

1947: An unprecedented late-spring snowstorm blasts portions of the Midwest from eastern Wyoming to eastern Upper Michigan. The heavy snow caused severe damage to power and telephone lines and the already-leafed-out vegetation.

1951 - A massive hailstorm, from Wallace to Kearney County in Kansas, caused six million dollars damage to crops. (David Ludlum)

1953 - A tornado, 600 yards wide at times, killed two persons on its 20 mile path from southwest of Fort Rice ND into Emmons County. Nearly every building in Fort Rice was damaged. The Catholic church was leveled, with some pews jammed four feet into the ground. (The Weather Channel)

1982: Two significant tornadoes ripped through southern Illinois. The most severe was an F4 that touched down northeast of Carbondale, Illinois then moved to Marion. The twister had multiple vortices within the main funnel. Extensive damage occurred at the Marion Airport. A total of 10 people were killed, and 181 were injured. 648 homes and 200 cars were damaged or destroyed, with total damages around \$100 million.

1986: Hailstones over 3 inches in diameter pounded South Shore in Montreal, Quebec Canada causing over \$65 million in damage.

1987 - Thunderstorms in West Texas produced softball size hail at Lamesa, and hail up to twelve inches deep east of Dimmitt. Thunderstorms also spawned seven tornadoes in West Texas, including one which injured three persons at Wolfforth. Thunderstorms deluged the Texas Hill Country with up to eleven inches of rain. Severe flooding along the Medino, Hondo, Seco, Sabinal and Frio rivers caused more than fifty million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful cold front brought snow and high winds to parts of the western U.S. Austin, NV, was blanketed with ten inches of snow, and winds gusted to 75 mph at the Mojave Airport in California. Strong southerly winds and unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Glasgow, MT, equalled their record for the month of May with a high of 102 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Wintry weather gripped parts of the northwestern U.S. for the second day in a row. Great Falls, MT, was blanketed with 12 inches of snow, which pushed their total for the winter season to a record 117.4 inches. Six inches of snow whitened the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from north central Colorado to the northern half of Texas. Severe thunderstorms spawned four tornadoes, and there were seventy reports of large hail or damaging winds. Midday thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Hobart, OK, and produced up to three and a half inches of rain in eastern Colorado in four hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WATCH YOUR MOUTH!

Legend has it that in old Tibet whenever people met they would face each other, bend low and open both of their hands. This was done to let the other person know that they held no weapons.

Then they would straighten up, take a step back and open their mouths wide to let the other person know that their mouths contained no wicked words.

What would happen if we had a custom like that today? How would our world and our lives be different? Imagine what it would be like if we even entertained the idea that people could search our mouths for "wicked words."

David wrote in a Psalm, "Take control of what I say, O Lord, and keep my lips sealed." James wrote that "the tongue is a small thing but what enormous damage it can do."

Someone said that the average person opens his mouth an average of 700 times a day to speak. That does not include the number of words, either. With the use of the cell phone today the number has no doubt increased!

We rarely consider the significance of the words that come out of our mouths until we see their results. Too often we speak first and then think. We need to turn the process around: think first and then speak.

Words, once spoken, can never be retrieved. They become part of eternity. We must use them to honor God.

Prayer: Lord, we ask that You fill our minds with Your thoughts, our hearts with Your love and our mouths with words that speak of Your grace, mercy and hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Psalm 141:3



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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 23 of 74

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$15.98
- 3 Months \$26.63
- 6 Months \$31.95
- 9 Months \$42.60
- 12 Months \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul





WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.28.24

12 18 48 57 62 4

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$522,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 3 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.27.24

9 25 32 40 51 5

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,700,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 18 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.28.24

9 18 21 37 46 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 33 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.25.24

7 8 10 24 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$119,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 33 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.27.24

20 31 39 45 56 19

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 2 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.27.24

9 30 39 49 59 21

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$143,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 2 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Authorities urge proper cooking of wild game after 6 relatives fall ill from parasite in bear meat

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reaffirmed the importance of properly cooking wild game after six people became sick from a parasite traced to undercooked bear meat that was served at a family reunion in South Dakota.

The six — one in South Dakota, four in Minnesota and one in Arizona — became infected when bear meat that was served rare turned out to be contaminated with roundworms that cause trichinellosis, also known as trichinosis. Two of the people ate only the vegetables that were grilled with the meat. While the meat had been frozen for 45 days, the trichinella worms were from a freeze-resistant species.

“Persons who consume meat from wild game animals should be aware that that adequate cooking is the only reliable way to kill *Trichinella* parasites and that infected meat can cross-contaminate other food,” the CDC said in its report on the outbreak last week.

The first case turned up after the 2022 reunion in a 29-year-old Minnesota man who had been hospitalized twice with fever, muscle aches and pain and swelling around his eyes, among other abnormalities. A sample of the meat, from a black bear harvested in Saskatchewan, tested positive. Three of the victims were hospitalized in all. All six, ranging in age from 12 to 62, eventually recovered.

Trichinellosis has become rare in the U.S. While it was once commonly associated with undercooked pork, most U.S. cases nowadays are attributed to consumption of wild game. From 2016 to 2022, seven outbreaks, including 35 probable and confirmed cases, were reported to the CDC. Bear meat was the suspected or confirmed source in most of those outbreaks.

The larvae can settle into intestinal, muscle, heart and brain tissues, according to the National Institutes of Health. Most patients fully recover within two to six months.

The CDC recommends cooking wild game to at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit (74 degrees Celsius), as verified with a meat thermometer. Meat color is not a good indicator. The family members ate some of the meat before realizing it was undercooked and re-cooking it, the report said. Raw and undercooked meat and their juices should be kept separate from other foods.

Three people shot to death in tiny South Dakota town; former mayor charged

By The Associated Press undefined

CENTERVILLE, S.D. (AP) — Three people were shot to death in a small South Dakota town, and a former law officer who once served as the town’s mayor is charged in the killings.

Jay Ostrem, 64, was jailed on \$1 million cash-only bond on three counts of first-degree murder, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said Tuesday in a news release. It wasn’t immediately clear if Ostrem had an attorney. Calls to a phone listing for Ostrem went unanswered.

A probable cause affidavit identified the victims as two brothers, ages 26 and 21, and a 35-year-old man.

Ostrem worked in law enforcement for more than two decades in Wyoming and South Dakota, media reports said. He served as mayor of Centerville about a decade-and-a-half ago, but the exact dates weren’t immediately available.

The probable cause document said a man in Centerville called police at 9:44 p.m. Monday to report that his brother had been shot by “a guy from across the street” and that the shooter had gone back home. The caller was still on the phone with a dispatcher when he said that he had been shot, too. He then stopped talking, the document said.

The document didn’t specify any connection between the third victim and the brothers.

Ostrem was arrested a short time later. An AR-style rifle was on the ground near him, and he had a

handgun in his pocket, the document stated.

Officers then went to the home where the call originated and found all three victims.

Ostrem's wife told police that a neighbor named Paul had sexually assaulted her on Thursday, and she told Ostrem about the assault Monday night, the document stated. She said Ostrem "got up and went raging out of the house," according to the document.

Centerville is about 40 miles (64 kilometers) south of Sioux Falls.

Black Hills highway closure to upend summer holiday traffic

By BART PFANKUCH, South Dakota News Watch undefined

PACTOLA RESERVOIR, S.D. (AP) — Angie Weaver, who co-owns the Pactola Marina in the Black Hills, remains hopeful that the full closure of U.S. 385 won't sink her summer revenues that are critical to remaining profitable for the entire year.

U.S. 385 is the only north-south highway through the central Black Hills and the only route people can take to get to Pactola Reservoir and the marina.

"It's going to be a weird year for us, and I'm looking forward to it being over," Weaver said. "All we can do at this point is let customers know about the construction and hope for the best."

The full closure of the highway just north of the reservoir began on May 19 and will remain closed until July 12, messing up traffic in the tourism-dominated region over both the Memorial Day and July 4 holidays.

The South Dakota Department of Transportation has embarked on a \$72 million project to rebuild 15 miles of the highway, which is a scenic drive but one that also has a high rate of crashes and fatalities.

The closure will disrupt any motorist driving between Hill City on the south and the Lead-Deadwood area on the north. The hour-long, more than 50-mile official detour will require people to drive through Rapid City to get around the highway closure near Pactola.

The two-lane highway provides access to Pactola Reservoir and Sheridan Lake. The road is also a pipeline to Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Crazy Horse Memorial and helps fuel a regional tourism industry that brought \$2 billion in revenue to South Dakota in 2021.

In all, the project will include five separate complete closures of the winding two-lane highway that flows amid scenic lakes, rock outcroppings and dramatic ridges.

"This construction goes through 2027, so it's gonna be a long process," Weaver said. "But this year, for us, is going to be the biggest year in terms of affecting our business."

Like other business owners in the Black Hills, Weaver and marina partner Dan Fisher have tried to get ahead of the road closure to keep customers happy and coming back.

The pair rents boats and kayaks, sells snacks and supplies and has 200 boat slip rentals, about half of which are on the north side of the reservoir where the entrance road will be closed for a while in May and June. During that time, they have agreed to use a boat to ferry people from the south marina to the north marina so slip renters can still access their boats.

Weaver was heartened to see a solid pre-booking of boat rentals for the Independence Day holiday, typically her busiest time of the summer, despite the fact U.S. 385 will be completely closed during that period.

"That's a whole month-and-a-half that our renters have to drive an extra hour to get to us," she said, adding they have posted notice of the pending road closure on their website and in confirmation emails sent to renters.

The South Dakota Department of Transportation issued a press release on May 13 that spelled out the closure time frames and stated that while the road will be fully blocked, temporary access to the Pactola north boat ramp will be available on weekends and on Memorial Day.

The overall construction project will include widening road shoulders, smoothing out sharp curves and adding turn lanes to make the road safer. In the five-year period from 2018-2022, 187 crashes were reported in the area now under construction, with four fatalities and 57 injuries. A third of those wrecks and most of the deaths occurred when motorists left the roadway, which in spots is flanked by deep ravines or craggy rocks.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 27 of 74

DOT plans to clear trees, blast rock, enact lane closures with use of pilot cars and close the highway completely at five separate locations for up to months at a time. Tree-clearing began in November and in recent weeks, a 15-minute pilot car delay has been in place north of Highway 44. The state will open the road fully during certain high-traffic times, including for the Sturgis rally in August.

The state has created a website to provide project information and updates. Prior to the start of the project, DOT officials held a series of public meetings to inform the public about the need for the construction.

"Complete closures were deemed necessary for the safety of the traveling public and efficiency of the project due to the large amount of material being blasted and moved throughout the closure areas," DOT said in its May 13 release.

However, Weaver and some other business owners have told News Watch that they weren't fully satisfied with the DOT's approach to the project and an overall unwillingness to listen to ideas or accommodate the needs of residents.

"There's a group of us small business owners in the area that also had a meeting with them, and it felt more like an informative meeting," she said. "Instead of a, 'Hey, what are some suggestions,' approach, and 'What do you guys need from us,' there was none of that."

But Weaver insisted that in the end, it will all be worth it to have a safer highway through the scenic central Black Hills region.

"It's going to be a great road, and I know they're going to do a really great job," she said.

Pennington County Sheriff Lt. David Switzer told News Watch that his agency is working closely with the state local fire departments, the Highway Patrol, and the Game, Fish and Parks Department to coordinate emergency response efforts during the highway closures.

"We're aware that when there are pilot cars running up there or a full closure, there's going to be significant delays," he said.

The sheriff's office has realigned its patrol "beats" and will have more deputies in the area to respond efficiently to incidents to emergencies on both sides of the road closure, Switzer said.

"There's going to be a point where they're going to break up the road because they have to remove a big chunk of it, so you have to adjust your resources to respond to that," he said.

In advance of the full closure of U.S. 385, authorities have posted a boat in a slip at the north Pactola marina to respond to lake emergencies more quickly by not having to trailer a rescue boat through a road closure or construction zone.

"If we have any emergency at the swim beach or the marina or any of the campgrounds close to the boat ramps, we'll be able to quickly get to a boat there to respond," said Switzer, who also serves with the nearby Johnson Siding Volunteer Fire Department.

Switzer's big advice to motorists is to plan ahead, be patient and follow signage to avoid accidents or injuries.

"Don't drive around road closure signs," he said. "Follow the detours and be patient because the worst thing you can do is get stuck in a construction zone where there is no road."

On a recent Sunday, Jeff Woods of Black Hawk secured his family's boat at their rented slip at the Pactola Marina after going for one of their frequent joy rides.

Woods said the highway closure will cost him about 20 minutes in extra travel time to get to the marina via the southern detour. Woods said he will take Sheridan Lake Road on the south end and shave off distance from the official detour route that takes drivers on U.S. Highway 16 through Rapid City and then back to U.S. 385.

Woods said the road blockage will not stop his family from using their boat or visiting their nearby cabin as often as usual this summer.

"It makes it more of a hassle," Woods said. "But it's really just more of an annoyance than anything else."

The Latest | 3 Israeli soldiers killed in Rafah booby trap explosion, media say, as offensive widens

By The Associated Press undefined

Three soldiers have been killed in Rafah, the Israeli military said Wednesday. Israeli media reported that the soldiers were killed when a booby trap exploded Tuesday, and three other soldiers were wounded. The military says at least 290 soldiers have been killed since the ground operation in Gaza began in October.

Israel says it is carrying out limited operations in eastern Rafah along the Gaza-Egypt border. Palestinians in Rafah reported heavy fighting Wednesday as Israeli forces pressed their assault on the border town once seen as the territory's last refuge. The United States and other allies of Israel have warned against a full-fledged offensive in the city.

Israeli leaders say their forces must enter Rafah to dismantle Hamas and return hostages taken in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war.

Fighting in Rafah has caused more than 1 million Palestinians to flee, most of whom had already been displaced in the war between Israel and Hamas. They now seek refuge in squalid tent camps and other war-ravaged areas, where they lack shelter, food, water and other essentials for survival, the U.N. says.

Israeli bombardments and ground offensives in Gaza have killed more than 36,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Israel launched its war in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Israel says around 100 hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more.

Currently:

- Israeli strikes kill at least 37 Palestinians, most in tents, near Gaza's Rafah.
- Missile attacks damage a ship in the Red Sea off Yemen's coast, near previous Houthi rebel assaults.
- A U.S.-built pier will be removed from the Gaza coast and repaired after damage from rough seas.
- Algeria proposes a Security Council resolution demanding Israel halt its offensive in Rafah.
- The U.S. says it is not planning any policy changes in response to civilian deaths from an Israeli strike.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Gaza at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

3 ISRAELI SOLDIERS KILLED IN RAFAH, MILITARY SAYS

TEL AVIV, Israel — Three soldiers have been killed in Rafah during the ongoing fighting in the southernmost city in Gaza, the Israeli military said Wednesday.

Israeli media reported that the soldiers were killed when a booby trap exploded Tuesday, adding that three other soldiers were wounded.

Palestinians on Wednesday reported heavy fighting in different parts of Rafah. Israel appears to be broadening its incursion, which has already caused over 1 million people to flee the city. Most had already been displaced earlier in the war.

Israel launched what it said was a limited incursion into Rafah on May 6, focused on the Gaza-Egypt border, which it says Hamas has long used to smuggle arms. It says Rafah is the last major stronghold for Hamas, but the militants have regrouped elsewhere in Gaza.

The military says at least 290 soldiers have been killed since the ground operation in Gaza began in October.

IFRC JOINS GROWING CALLS FOR A CEASE-FIRE AND DESPERATELY NEEDED AID IN GAZA

MANILA, Philippines — The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies joined growing calls Wednesday for a cease-fire and humanitarian aid access to the Gaza Strip, saying these were critically needed to ease the horrific suffering of civilians trapped in the seven-month conflict.

"It's absolutely imperative," IFRC President Kate Forbes told The Associated Press in an interview in the Philippine capital, Manila, where she was to hold a series of meetings. "First, we have to have a government solution to get a cease-fire so that we can get access and then, we will give aid to both sides."

Some areas need "psychosocial support and in some, it's going to be absolute aid," said Forbes, who

rose to the presidency of the world's largest humanitarian network in December.

"I've said this is both a sprint and a marathon. We need to get aid in immediately in Gaza for people who have malnutrition, there's not adequate sanitation," she said. "But it's going to be a marathon in that there's going to be aid that's going to be needed for decades to repair Gaza and the people there."

Jury in Trump's hush money case will begin deliberations after hearing instructions from the judge

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial are expected to begin deliberations Wednesday after receiving instructions from the judge on the law and the factors they may consider as they strive to reach a verdict in the first criminal case against a former American president.

The deliberations follow a marathon day of closing arguments in which a Manhattan prosecutor accused Trump of trying to "hoodwink" voters in the 2016 presidential election by participating in a hush money scheme meant to stifle embarrassing stories he feared would torpedo his campaign.

"This case, at its core, is about a conspiracy and a cover-up," prosecutor Joshua Steinglass told jurors during summations that stretched from early afternoon into the evening.

Trump's lawyer, by contrast, branded the star prosecution witness as the "greatest liar of all time" as he proclaimed his client innocent of all charges and pressed the panel for an across-the-board acquittal.

The lawyers' dueling accounts, wildly divergent in their assessments of witness credibility, Trump's culpability and the strength of evidence, offered both sides one final chance to score points with the jury as it prepares to embark upon the momentous and historically unprecedented task of deciding whether to convict the presumptive Republican presidential nominee ahead of the November election.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records, charges punishable by up to four years in prison. He has pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing. It's unclear whether prosecutors would seek imprisonment in the event of a conviction, or if the judge would impose that punishment.

Jurors will have the option of convicting Trump of all counts, acquitting him of all counts, or delivering a mixed verdict in which he is found guilty of some charges and not others. If they deadlock after several days of deliberations and are unable to reach a unanimous verdict, Judge Juan M. Merchan may declare a mistrial.

The trial featured allegations that Trump and his allies conspired to stifle potentially embarrassing stories during the 2016 presidential campaign through hush money payments, including to a porn actor who alleged that she and Trump had sex a decade earlier. His lawyer Todd Blanche told jurors that neither the actor, Stormy Daniels, nor the Trump attorney who paid her, Michael Cohen, can be trusted.

"President Trump is innocent. He did not commit any crimes, and the district attorney has not met their burden of proof, period," Blanche said.

Steinglass sought to defray potential juror concerns about witness credibility. Trump, for instance, has said he and Daniels never had sex and has repeatedly attacked Cohen as a liar.

The prosecutor acknowledged that Daniels' account about the alleged 2006 encounter in a Lake Tahoe hotel suite, which Trump has denied, was at times "cringeworthy" but he said the details she offered — including about decor and what she said she saw when she snooped in Trump's toiletry kit — were full of touchstones "that kind of ring true."

And, he said, the story matters because it "reinforces (Trump's) incentive to buy her silence."

"Her story is messy. It makes people uncomfortable to hear. It probably makes some of you uncomfortable to hear. But that's kind of the point," Steinglass said. He told jurors: "In the simplest terms, Stormy Daniels is the motive."

The payoff unfolded against the backdrop of the disclosure of a 2005 "Access Hollywood" recording in which Trump could be heard bragging about grabbing women sexually without their permission. Had the Daniels story emerged in the aftermath of the recording, it would have undermined his strategy of spin-

ning away his words, Steinglass said.

"It's critical to appreciate this," Steinglass said. At the same time he was dismissing his words on the tape as "locker room talk," Trump "was negotiating to muzzle a porn star," the prosecutor said.

Blanche, who spoke first, sought to downplay the fallout by saying the "Access Hollywood" tape was not a "doomsday event."

Steinglass also tried to reassure jurors that the prosecution's case did not rest solely on Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer who paid Daniels \$130,000 to keep quiet. Cohen later pleaded guilty to federal charges for his role in the hush money payments, as well as to lying to Congress. He went to prison and was disbarred, but his direct involvement in the transactions made him a key witness at trial.

"It's not about whether you like Michael Cohen. It's not about whether you want to go into business with Michael Cohen. It's whether he has useful, reliable information to give you about what went down in this case, and the truth is that he was in the best position to know," Steinglass said.

Though the case featured sometimes seamy discussion of sex and tabloid industry practices, the actual charges concern something decidedly less flashy: reimbursements Trump signed for Cohen for the payments.

The reimbursements were recorded as being for legal expenses, which prosecutors say was a fraudulent label designed to conceal the purpose of the hush money transaction and to illicitly interfere in the 2016 election. Defense lawyers say Cohen actually did substantive legal work for Trump and his family.

In his own hourslong address to the jury, with sweeping denials echoing Trump's "deny everything" approach, Blanche castigated the entire foundation of the case.

He said Cohen, not Trump, created the invoices that were submitted to the Trump Organization for reimbursement and rejected the prosecution's caricature of a details-oriented manager, suggesting instead that Trump was preoccupied by the presidency and not the checks he was signing. And he rejected the idea that the alleged hush money scheme amounted to election interference.

"Every campaign in this country is a conspiracy to promote a candidate, a group of people who are working together to help somebody win," Blanche said.

As expected, he reserved his most animated attack for Cohen, with whom he tangled during a lengthy cross-examination.

Mimicking the term "GOAT," used primarily in sports as an acronym for "greatest of all time," Blanche labeled Cohen the "GLOAT" — greatest liar of all time — and also called Cohen "the human embodiment of reasonable doubt." That language was intentional because, to convict Trump, jurors must believe that prosecutors proved their case beyond a reasonable doubt.

"He lied to you repeatedly. He lied many, many times before you even met him. His financial and personal well-being depend on this case. He is biased and motivated to tell you a story that is not true," Blanche said, a reference to Cohen's relentless and often biting personal social media attacks on Trump and the lucrative income he has derived from books and podcasts about Trump.

The Latest | Trump's criminal trial to enter deliberations phase after jury receives instructions

NEW YORK (AP) — Jury deliberations in Donald Trump's criminal hush money trial are expected to begin Wednesday after the panel receives instructions from the judge on the law governing the case and what they can take into account in evaluating the former president's guilt or innocence.

The historic deliberations follow Tuesday's whirlwind of closing arguments, which stretched into the evening hours as prosecutor Joshua Steinglass accused Trump of intentionally deceiving voters by allegedly participating in a "catch-and-kill" scheme to bury stories that might obliterate his 2016 presidential bid. Steinglass further suggested that Trump operated with a "cavalier willingness" to hide payoffs and did so in a way that left "no paper trail."

The defense approached its summation much in the same way it approached cross-examination: by targeting the credibility of star witness Michael Cohen. Defense lawyer Todd Blanche branded Trump's

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 31 of 74

former lawyer as “the greatest liar of all time” while urging jurors to quickly acquit his client.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records, charges which are punishable by up to four years in prison. He has denied all wrongdoing and pleaded not guilty.

At the heart of the charges are reimbursements paid to Cohen for a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in exchange for not going public with her claim about a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump.

Prosecutors say the reimbursements were falsely logged as “legal expenses” to hide the true nature of the transactions.

The case is the first of Trump’s four indictments to reach trial and is the first-ever criminal case against a former U.S. president.

Currently:

- Cohen’s credibility, campaigning at court and other highlights from closing arguments
- Rallies and debates used to define campaigns. Now they’re about juries and trials
- Biden’s campaign shows up outside Trump’s trial with Robert De Niro and others
- Another big name will be at the courthouse in Manhattan on Wednesday: Harvey Weinstein
- Trump hush money case: A timeline of key events

Here’s the latest:

HOW WILL THE JURY DELIBERATIONS WORK?

Jury deliberations in Donald Trump’s hush money trial will proceed in secret, in a room reserved specifically for jurors and in a process that’s intentionally opaque.

Jurors can communicate with the court through notes that ask the judge, for instance, for legal guidance or to have particular excerpts of testimony read back to them.

But without knowing what jurors are saying to each other, it’s hard to read too much into the meaning of any note.

ANOTHER FAMOUS FACE AT THE COURTHOUSE

Donald Trump will not be the only big name appearing before a judge in lower Manhattan on Wednesday — fallen movie mogul Harvey Weinstein is expected to appear for a hearing related to the retrial of his landmark #MeToo-era rape case.

The hearing will take place in the same courthouse where Trump is currently on trial and where Weinstein was originally convicted in 2020.

Weinstein’s conviction was overturned in April after the court found that the trial judge unfairly allowed testimony against Weinstein based on allegations that weren’t part of the case. His retrial is slated for sometime after Labor Day.

A MOTION THAT STILL HASN’T BEEN DECIDED

The judge in Donald Trump’s hush money trial might have one last piece of business to address on Wednesday before jurors receive instructions and can begin deliberations.

Last Monday, defense lawyers filed a motion asking the judge to dismiss the case, arguing that prosecutors had failed to prove their case and there was no evidence of falsified business records or an intent to defraud.

Prosecutors rebutted that assertion, saying “the trial evidence overwhelmingly supports each element” of the alleged offenses, and the case should proceed to the jury.

Judge Juan M. Merchan did not indicate at the time when he would issue a decision on the request. More than a week later, it remains unclear whether he will address it before the case goes to the jury.

WHAT MUST BE PROVED FOR A CONVICTION?

Jurors in Donald Trump’s hush money trial are expected to begin deliberations on Wednesday after receiving instructions from the judge on the law that governs the case and what they can consider as they strive toward a verdict in the first criminal case against a former U.S. president.

The panel has a weighty task ahead of them — deciding whether to convict or acquit Trump of some, all or none of the 34 felony counts he’s charged with.

But what had to be proved for a conviction?

To convict Trump of felony falsifying business records, prosecutors had to convince jurors beyond a reasonable doubt that he not only falsified or caused business records to be entered falsely but also did so with intent to commit or conceal another crime. Any verdict must be unanimous.

To prevent a conviction, the defense needed to convince at least one juror that prosecutors didn't prove Trump's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, the standard for criminal cases.

If the jury deadlocks after several days of deliberations and are unable to reach a unanimous verdict, the judge may declare a mistrial.

Most AAPI adults think the history of racism should be taught in schools, an AP-NORC poll finds

By ANNIE MA and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. schools should teach about issues related to race, most Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders believe. They also oppose efforts to restrict what subjects can be discussed in the classroom, according to a new poll.

In the survey from AAPI Data and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 71% of AAPI adults favor teaching about the history of slavery, racism and segregation in K-12 public schools. The same share also said they support teaching about the history of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in the United States, while about half support teaching about issues related to sex and sexuality.

AAPI Democrats are more supportive of these topics being taught in classrooms than AAPI Republicans.

Still, only 17% of AAPI adults think school boards should be able to limit what subjects students and teachers talk about in the classroom, and about one-quarter of AAPI Republicans are in favor of these restrictions.

The results indicate that efforts to politicize education through culture war issues have not gained strong inroads in Asian American communities, said Karthick Ramakrishnan, a public policy professor at the University of California, Riverside, and founder of AAPI Data. Across the country, conservative members of state legislatures and local school boards have made efforts to restrict teaching about race and gender in classrooms.

"Even as parents are concerned and engaged in various ways with K-12 education, the culture wars are not something that resonate with AAPI parents," he said. "I think that's important because there's so much news coverage of it and certainly a lot of policy activity."

AAPI Americans are a fast-growing demographic, but small sample sizes and linguistic barriers often prevent their views from being analyzed in other surveys.

Glenn Thomas, a 53-year-old father to three children in public schools who identifies as a political independent and is Japanese and white, said that while he does not oppose classrooms covering topics like race and gender, he does not think they should be the sole focus of how curriculums are designed.

"I'm kind of old-school, reading, writing, arithmetic," he said of how schools approach topics like gender and race. "I don't think it necessarily needs to be taught as separate curriculums."

Thomas, whose family has lived all over the country because of his career in the military, said the influence of politics and external actors in public schools varied greatly depending on where they lived. In Florida, where he currently lives, he thinks the state government too heavily influences local schools.

Nationally, 39% of AAPI adults say that they follow news about their school boards, while just 13% say they have attended a local school board meeting and 18% have communicated in-person or online with a local school board member. When it comes to elections, 28% have voted in a local school board election.

While those percentages are roughly consistent with the general public, AAPI adults are slightly less likely to say they have voted in a local school board election.

Because a high percentage of Asian Americans are immigrants, Ramakrishnan said, many did not grow up in the same political system as the United States, where there is a high level of local control and influence over schools. A lack of outreach from mainstream institutions may also contribute to a lower level

of engagement, he added.

"It takes a fair amount of effort to learn how the system works and how to have influence in that system," he said. "Given the high level of interest that (Asian American and Pacific Islander) parents place in education, you would expect higher rates of participation."

Varisa Patraporn, a Thai American mother of two public school children in California, said that she is a consistent voter in local elections, given the importance of those individuals in making decisions that affect schools. In Cerritos, where she lives, candidates tend to host events and send out mailers during elections, reflecting a robust campaign for seats on the school board.

Patraporn said that while she has communicated with school board members, she has not attended a school board meeting. Part of that, she said, is because the meetings happen in the evening and are harder to attend for parents who have young children or other obligations. That means the parents who do attend and speak up can have a disproportionate amount of sway.

Patraporn said that she wants the school curriculum to be more diverse and inclusive, despite pushback from some parents who do not want discussions of race in the classroom. She said she often supplements her children's reading to expose them to a wider range of perspectives beyond what they get from their assignments.

"Those conversations have started, but there's a lot of resistance in our community to that," she said. "There's a lot of resistance in terms of being fearful of what it means to actually talk about race."

Ramakrishnan said the polling data indicates an opening to engage AAPI communities more intensely with their local educational institutions. According to the poll, about two-thirds of AAPI adults see the schools that children attend as extremely or very important to their success in adulthood. And about half say parents and teachers have too little influence on the curriculum in public schools, similar to the general population.

"This is a community that still sees college as a good deal, as an important pathway toward mobility and success, and is concerned about the quality of K-12 education as well," he said. "We have a ripe opportunity to engage and boost participation in these Asian American Pacific Islander communities when it comes to educational policy."

The poll of 1,068 U.S. adults who are Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders was conducted from April 8-17, 2024, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based Amplify AAPI Panel, designed to be representative of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander population. Online and telephone interviews were offered in English, the Chinese dialects of Mandarin and Cantonese, Vietnamese and Korean. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.7 percentage points.

The Associated Press' education coverage receives financial support from multiple private foundations. AP is solely responsible for all content. Find AP's standards for working with philanthropies, a list of supporters and funded coverage areas at AP.org.

Palestinian prime minister visits Madrid after Spain, Norway and Ireland recognize Palestinian state

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa and leading officials from several Middle Eastern countries in Madrid on Wednesday after Spain, Ireland and Norway recognized a Palestinian state.

The diplomatic move by the three western European nations on Tuesday was slammed by Israel and will have little immediate impact on its grinding war in Gaza, but it was a victory for the Palestinians and could encourage other Western powers to follow suit.

Mustafa was joined by Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and the foreign ministers for Turkey and Jordan, members

of the group called the Foreign Ministerial Committee of Arabic and Islamic countries for Gaza. They also met with Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares.

More than 140 countries recognize a Palestinian state — more than two-thirds of the United Nations.

With Spain and Ireland, there are now nine members of the 27-nation European Union that officially recognize a Palestinian state. Norway is not an EU member but its foreign policy is usually aligned with the bloc.

Slovenia, an EU member, will decide on the recognition of a Palestinian state on Thursday and forward its decision to parliament for final approval.

The move to recognize a Palestinian state has caused relations between the EU and Israel to nosedive. Madrid and Dublin are pushing for the EU to take measures against Israel for its continued attacks on southern Gaza's city of Rafah.

The decision by Spain, Ireland and Norway comes more than seven months into an assault waged by Israel following the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attack in which militants stormed across the Gaza border into Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostage. Israel's air and land attacks have since killed 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Inflation pressures lingering from pandemic are keeping Fed rate cuts on pause

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hopes for interest rate cuts this year by the Federal Reserve are steadily fading, with a stream of recent remarks by Fed officials underscoring their intention to keep borrowing costs high as long as needed to curb persistently elevated inflation.

A key reason for the delay in rate cuts is that the inflation pressures that are bedeviling the economy are being driven largely by lingering forces from the pandemic — for items ranging from apartment rents to auto insurance to hospital prices. Though Fed officials say they expect inflation in those areas to eventually cool, they've signaled that they're prepared to wait as long as it takes.

Yet the policymakers' willingness to keep their key rate at a two-decade peak — thereby keeping costs painfully high for mortgages, auto loans and other forms of consumer borrowing — carries its own risks.

The Fed's mandate is to strike a balance between keeping rates high enough to control inflation yet not so high as to damage the job market. While most measures show that growth and hiring remain healthy, some gauges of the economy have begun to reveal signs of weakness. The longer the Fed keeps its benchmark rate elevated, the greater the risk of causing a downturn.

At the same time, with polls showing that costlier rents, groceries and gasoline are angering voters as the presidential campaign intensifies, Donald Trump has sought to pin the blame for higher prices squarely on President Joe Biden.

The Fed, led by Chair Jerome Powell, raised its benchmark rate by 5 percentage points from March 2022 through June 2023 — the fastest such increase in four decades — to try to drive inflation back down to its 2% target. According to the Fed's preferred measure, inflation has tumbled from 7.1% in June 2022 to 2.7% in March.

That same gauge showed, though, that prices accelerated in the first three months of 2024, disrupting last year's steady slowdown. On Friday, economists expect the government to report that this measure rose 2.7% in April from a year earlier.

A separate inflation indicator that the government reported this month suggested that prices cooled slightly in April. But with inflation remaining stubbornly above the Fed's target level, Wall Street traders now expect just one rate cut this year, in November. And even that is hardly a slam-dunk, with investors placing the likelihood of a cut in November at 63%, down from 77% a week ago.

Last week, economists at Goldman Sachs became the latest analysts to give up on a rate cut in July, pushing back their forecast for the first of two cuts they expect this year to September. Oxford Economics made a similar call last month. Bank of America foresees just one Fed rate cut this year, in December.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 35 of 74

Just months ago, many economists had forecast the first rate cut for March of this year.

"We will need to accumulate further data over the coming months to have a clearer picture of the inflation outlook," Loretta Mester, president of Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, said this month. "I now believe that it will take longer to reach our 2% goal than I previously thought." (Mester is among 12 officials who are voting on the Fed's rate policy this year.)

As further data accumulates, so do some signs that the economy is cooling a bit. More Americans, particularly younger adults, are falling behind on their credit card bills, for example, with the share of card debt 90 days or more overdue reaching 10.7% in the first quarter, according to the Fed's New York branch. That's the highest proportion in 14 years.

Hiring is also slowing, with businesses posting fewer open jobs, though job advertisements remain high. And more companies, including Target, McDonalds and Burger King, are highlighting price cuts or cheaper deals to try to attract financially squeezed consumers. Their actions could help lower inflation in the coming months. But they also underscore the struggles that lower-income Americans face.

"There's a lot of signs that consumers are kind of losing some steam and hiring demand is cooling," said Julia Coronado, a former Fed economist who is president of MacroPolicy Perspectives. "You could see more of a slowdown."

But Coronado and other economists also regard the latest trends as a sign that the economy may simply be normalizing after a period of rapid growth. Companies are still hiring, though at a more modest pace than at the start of the year. And data suggests that Americans traveled in record numbers over the Memorial Day weekend, a sign they're confident in their finances.

One reason why inflation remains above the Fed's target is that distortions stemming from the pandemic are still keeping prices elevated in several areas even as much of the rest of the economy has moved past the pandemic.

Housing costs, led by apartment rents, jumped two years ago after many Americans sought additional living space during the pandemic. Rental costs are now slowing: They rose 5.4% in April on an annual basis, down from 8.8% a year earlier. But they're still rising faster than before the pandemic.

Last month, rent and homeownership, along with hotel prices, accounted for two-thirds of the annual rise in "core" inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs. Powell and other Fed officials have acknowledged that they had expected rents to fall more quickly than they have.

The cost of a new lease, though, has tumbled since mid-2022. A gauge of newly leased apartment rents calculated by the government shows that they rose just 0.4% in the first three months of 2024 compared with a year earlier. Yet it takes time for newer, lower-priced rents to feed into the government's inflation measure.

"Market rents adjust more quickly to economic conditions than what landlords charge their existing tenants," Philip Jefferson, the Fed's vice chair and a top lieutenant to Powell, said last week. "This lag suggests that the large increase in market rents during the pandemic is still being passed through to existing rents and may keep housing services inflation elevated for a while longer."

The cost of auto insurance has soared nearly 23% from a year earlier, a huge jump that reflects the surge in prices of new and used cars during the pandemic. Insurance companies now must pay more to replace totaled cars and as a result are charging their customers more.

"This is about stuff that happened in 2021," said Claudia Sahm, chief economist at New Century Advisors and a former Fed economist. "You cannot go back and change that."

South Africans vote in a pivotal election as president says he has no doubt his ANC party will win

By GERALD IMRAY, MOGOMOTSI MAGOME and FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — South Africans voted Wednesday at schools, community centers, and in large white tents set up in open fields in an election seen as their country's most important in 30 years. It could

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 36 of 74

put the young democracy in unknown territory.

At stake is the three-decade dominance of the African National Congress party, which led South Africa out of apartheid's brutal white minority rule in 1994. It is now the target of a new generation of discontent in a country of 62 million people — half of whom are estimated to be living in poverty.

After casting his vote, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said he had no doubt his ANC would win with a majority and remain in government.

Africa's most advanced economy has some of the world's deepest socioeconomic problems, including one of the worst unemployment rates at 32%. The lingering inequality, with poverty and joblessness disproportionately affecting the Black majority, threatens to unseat the party that promised to end it by bringing down apartheid under the slogan of a better life for all.

"Our main issue here in our community is the lack of jobs," said Samuel Ratshalingwa, who was near the front of the queue at the same school in the Johannesburg township of Soweto where Ramaphosa voted.

"We have to use the vote to make our voices heard about this problem," said Ratshalingwa, who came out before 7 a.m. on a chilly winter morning.

After winning six successive national elections, several polls have the ANC's support at less than 50% ahead of this one, an unprecedented drop. It might lose its majority in Parliament for the first time, although it's widely expected to hold the most seats.

The ANC won 57.5% of the vote in the last national election in 2019, its worst result to date and down from a high of nearly 70% of the vote 20 years ago.

Ramaphosa, the leader of the ANC, has promised to "do better." The ANC has asked for more time and patience.

The 71-year-old Ramaphosa sat alongside other voters in Soweto, where he was born, before shaking hands with two smiling officials who registered him and then voting.

"I have no doubt whatsoever in my heart of hearts that the people will once again invest confidence in the African National Congress to continue to lead this country," Ramaphosa said. He said he was certain South Africans would give the ANC "a firm majority."

Any change in the ANC's hold on power could be monumental for South Africa. If it does lose its majority, the ANC will likely face the prospect of having to form a coalition with others to stay in government and keep Ramaphosa as president for a second term. The ANC having to co-govern has never happened before.

South Africans vote for parties, not directly for their president. The parties then get seats in Parliament according to their share of the vote and those lawmakers elect the president after the election. The ANC has always had a majority in Parliament since 1994.

The election was to be held on one day across South Africa's nine provinces, with nearly 28 million people registered to vote at more than 23,000 polling stations. Final results are expected by Sunday.

The opposition to the ANC in this election is fierce, but fragmented. The two biggest opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters, are not predicted to increase their vote by anything near enough to overtake the ANC. The DA is part of an agreement with other smaller parties to combine their vote in an effort to remove the ANC completely, but that's not seen as likely.

Disgruntled South Africans are moving to an array of opposition parties; more than 50 will contest the national election, many of them new. One is led by South Africa's former President Jacob Zuma, who has turned against his former ANC allies. Zuma was disqualified from standing as a candidate for Parliament but his MK Party is still contesting and is the wild card.

The ANC says it is confident of retaining its majority and analysts have not ruled that out, given the party's decades of experience in government and its unmatched grassroots campaigning machine. It still has wide support, especially among older voters and those in more rural areas.

"I woke up at 4 a.m. this morning, took a bath and made my way," said 68-year-old Velaphi Banda, adding he has voted for the ANC since 1994 and would do so again. "I was never undecided about which party I will vote for. I have always known."

Ramaphosa has pointed out how South Africa is a far better country now than under apartheid, when Black people were barred from voting, weren't allowed to move around freely, had to live in certain areas

and were oppressed in every way. This election is only South Africa's seventh national vote in which people of all races are allowed to take part.

Memories of that era of apartheid, and the defining election that ended it in 1994, still frame much of everyday South Africa. But fewer remember it as time goes on, and this election might give voice to a younger generation who weren't born when apartheid fell.

The vote will showcase the country's contradictions, from the economic hub of Johannesburg — labelled Africa's richest city — to the picturesque tourist destination of Cape Town, to the informal settlements of shacks in their outskirts.

There were delays in some polling stations opening, with voting due to start at 7 a.m. and end at 9 p.m. South Africa has held peaceful and credible elections since a violent buildup to the pivotal 1994 election. The independent electoral commission said two days of special early voting went smoothly on Monday and Tuesday, although two people were arrested for interfering with voting operations, it said.

South Africa will deploy nearly 3,000 soldiers across the country to ensure a peaceful election, authorities said.

While 80% of South Africans are Black, it's a multiracial country with significant populations of white people, those of Indian descent, those with biracial heritage and others. There are 12 official languages.

It's the diversity that Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first Black president, highlighted as a beautiful thing by referring to his country as a "Rainbow Nation." It's a diversity that, with the emergence of many new opposition parties, also might now be reflected in its politics.

Biden, Harris to launch Black voter outreach effort amid signs of diminished support

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are stepping up their re-election pitch to Black voters, a key part of their 2020 winning coalition that has shown signs of fraying.

They'll launch a new Black voter outreach effort during a visit to the battleground state of Pennsylvania on Wednesday. The two will stop at Girard College, an independent boarding school in Philadelphia with a predominantly Black student body, and visit a small business to speak to members of the Black Chamber of Commerce.

The Philadelphia stops are the start of what the campaign is describing as an eight-figure, summerlong effort to engage Black student organizations, community groups and faith centers.

"We will continue to be aggressive, innovative, and thorough in our work to earn the support of the very voters who sent Joe Biden and Kamala Harris to the White House in 2020 and will do so again in 2024," said Quentin Fulks, Biden's principal deputy campaign manager.

The push comes at a moment when Biden has seen his solid support among Black voters show signs of erosion. Among Black adults, Biden's approval has dropped from 94% when he started his term to just 55%, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll published in March.

The economy has been a particular thorn in Biden's side since 2022, when inflation hit a 40-year high. But there have also been signs of discontent in the Black community more recently over Biden's handling of the seven-month Israel-Hamas war.

Turning out Black voters could prove pivotal for Biden's chances in what are expected to be among the most closely contested states — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Biden beat his predecessor and 2024 challenger, former President Donald Trump, in all six states in 2020, but he could face a more difficult climb this year.

Trump, for his part, has been offering himself as a better president for Black voters than Biden. At a rally last week in the Bronx, he railed against Biden on immigration and said "the biggest negative impact" of the influx of migrants in New York is "against our Black population and our Hispanic population who are losing their jobs, losing their housing, losing everything they can lose."

The Biden campaign says it hopes to use the new engagement effort in part to remind Black voters of some of the Democratic administration's achievements of his term.

The Black unemployment rate sits at 5.6%, according to the latest federal government data, compared to the average of about 8% from 2016 to 2020 and 11% from 2000 to 2015. Black household wealth has surged, and Biden's effort to cancel billions in student loan debt has disproportionately impacted Black borrowers.

Biden also points to his appointment of Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black female justice on the U.S. Supreme Court and his pick of Harris as the first Black woman to serve as vice president.

The president's visit to Philadelphia follows on a series of engagements with Black community members in recent weeks, including hosting plaintiffs in the 1954 Supreme Court decision that struck down institutionalized racial segregation in public schools, a commencement address at Morehouse College in Atlanta, and a virtual address to the Rev. Al Sharpton's racial justice conference.

Storm-weary Texas battered again as powerful storm, strong winds kill 1, cause widespread damage

By LEKAN OYEKANMI and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Power outages remained widespread in storm-weary Texas after another burst of severe weather flooded streets, uprooted trees and ripped off roofs. Authorities said a teenager was killed at a construction site while working on a home that collapsed.

The severe weather Tuesday, which at one point left more than 1 million customers without electricity, was a continuation of deadly storms, some spawning tornadoes, across the U.S. over the long Memorial Day weekend that killed 24 people in seven states.

The flooding and damage in Houston came just weeks after the area was walloped by a weather event known as a derecho — a widespread, long-lived windstorm that's associated with a band of rapidly moving showers or thunderstorms. That storm left eight people dead and knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of customers.

"A lot of people are without power again. We just got through with derecho a couple week ago, which was extremely devastating and many are still trying to recover from," Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official in the county home to Houston, said in a video posted on social media late Tuesday.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell was scheduled to travel Wednesday to Arkansas, where seven people died in the weekend storms, as the Biden administration continues assessing tornado damage.

The potential for heavy rains, localized flash flooding and severe weather will continue Wednesday through Oklahoma and Texas. Thunderstorms are predicted late Wednesday and Thursday across eastern Montana and Wyoming and northeast Colorado before pushing into Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and northern Texas.

Tuesday's power outages in the Dallas metro area prompted officials to extend polls by two hours in the state's runoff elections after dozens of polling places lost power.

The city opened respite centers, where residents could seek shelter and air conditioning after winds gusting to 80 mph (129 kph) caused extensive damage to homes. Local news footage showed several homes without roofs, with some of that damaged caused by trees ripped from the ground by the winds. City crews planned to work around the clock this week to clear downed trees, a notice on the city's website said.

Social media posts showed winds pushing one American Airlines plane away from a gate at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

The airline said in a statement that the severe weather affected several parked and unoccupied aircraft. No one was injured.

"Our maintenance team is currently conducting thorough inspections and will make any needed repairs," the statement said.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 39 of 74

The airport said in an email to The Associated Press that about 500 flights were canceled because of the weather. Nearly another 200 flights were canceled at Dallas Love Field Airport, according to the website FlightAware.

Cars crawled through flooded highways and more than 300,000 customers were without power in the Houston area, which includes parts still recovering from the hurricane-force winds earlier this month.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that a 16-year-old boy was killed when a home under construction began to shift and then collapsed during a thunderstorm in the Houston suburb of Magnolia. The teen was confirmed to be an employee of the construction company and was authorized to be on the site, the statement said.

Magnolia Fire Department Division Chief Jason Herrman said it was one of three homes under construction that collapsed.

There doesn't appear to be much relief in sight.

The National Weather Service said the "very active and highly impactful" weather pattern will continue in the central U.S. over the next several days.

Destructive storms over the weekend caused deaths in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia. Meanwhile in the Midwest, an unusual weather phenomenon called a "gustnado" that looks like a small tornado brought some dramatic moments to a western Michigan lake over the weekend.

For more information on recent tornado reports, see The Associated Press Tornado Tracker.

Washington Post said it had the Alito flag story 3 years ago and chose not to publish

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Nine days after The New York Times reported about the political symbolism of an upside-down American flag that flew at U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito's home, the Washington Post acknowledged it had the same story more than three years ago and decided not to publish it.

The Post's story was both an extraordinary example of journalistic introspection and an illustration of how coverage of the Supreme Court has changed since the incident itself, shortly after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection.

That day, some of the demonstrators who marched in support of former President Donald Trump carried the upside-down flag. Both newspapers reported that the same symbol was displayed outside of Alito's home in Fairfax County, Virginia, before President Joe Biden's inauguration.

Alito has said that his wife, Martha-Ann Alito, raised the flag as part of a dispute with neighbors who had placed "personally insulting" yard signs directed at them. Judges traditionally avoid partisan symbols to maintain the appearance of neutrality in political disputes that may come before them.

For journalists, it raises a question: Should a public official's family be held to the same standards as that official themselves?

'A SURPRISING ADMISSION' FROM THE POST

The Times, in its story that ran on May 16, said it had "recently obtained" photographs of the flag that flew outside of the Alito home. The Post, in its own story Saturday, said that it had been told of the story in January 2021 and investigated, choosing not to write about it because it appeared Alito's wife was responsible and that it was not clear the neighborhood argument was over politics.

"It was a surprising admission from such a major news organization," said Jesse Holland, associate dean of the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, and a former journalist who covered the Supreme Court for five years. "Very, very rarely do you have a major news organization say they likely would have made a different decision."

Nowhere in the story, however, does the Post say that its decision more than three years ago was wrong, and a spokesperson on Tuesday declined to elaborate.

Kathleen Culver, director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin, said it was

a bad call. And, she added, if she were at the Post she would have argued for the paper to be more forthcoming.

While Martha-Ann Alito has the right to her own opinions, a flag like that shouldn't be on display outside the home of a U.S. Supreme Court justice, Culver said. "It's a flag that flies in the face of the neutrality that the Supreme Court is supposed to be observing," she said.

When a since-retired Post reporter visited the Alito home in January 2021, after the flag had been taken down, Martha-Ann Alito pointed out that an upside-down flag has long been interpreted as a symbol of distress, the newspaper said.

A FORMER SENIOR EDITOR SAYS IT WAS HIS CALL

The publication Semafor reported that Cameron Barr, then the Post's senior managing editor, said he took responsibility for the decision. He said he suggested the newspaper write about the neighborhood dispute, with the flag as one element. But that wasn't done and Barr expressed regret for not pushing harder for it. Barr left the Post in 2023.

Holland, who covered the Supreme Court for The Associated Press, said he could understand a decision being made that the action of a government official's wife is not news.

"One of the things we try not to do is convict a person for their spouse's action," he said. "And if this was the action of Sam Alito's wife, should we hold him accountable for something that his wife did?"

A longtime court reporter may have concluded that writing it was not worth alienating someone so important on the beat, he said. Yet Martha-Ann Alito has now attracted attention for opinions related to the 2020 election in much the same way as Justice Clarence Thomas' wife, Ginny Thomas. Both men are in the position of helping to decide cases that involve the election's aftermath.

Martha-Ann Alito has to be cognizant of the fact that she shares a home with a Supreme Court justice, Culver said. The flag display, even if she was responsible, is still a story.

The Post's decision reflects a long-held view by some media organizations that the Supreme Court should be covered through the decisions that it makes, and not as a political institution, she said.

The Post's initial decision came before the unprecedented leak of a draft decision that struck down a woman's right to an abortion, she said. ProPublica also won a Pulitzer Prize for public service earlier this month for its reporting that showed how billionaires gave expensive gifts to Supreme Court justices and paid for their travel.

"It is long past time," she said, "for journalists to set aside deference to the court."

Rallies and debates used to define campaigns. Now they're about juries and trials

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump has been sitting for hours a day in a Manhattan courtroom, where his hush-money trial is nearing its end. On Monday, a trial is set to begin in Wilmington, Delaware, for President Joe Biden's son Hunter, who is accused of lying on a federal gun purchase form.

While presidents have been deposed in criminal matters, impeached and pardoned, and their family members entangled in legal scrapes before, never has the criminal courtroom taken center stage in a presidential election like this.

"It's so unusual that we lack the terminology to express how unusual it is," said presidential historian Lindsay Chervinsky, author of the upcoming book, "Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents That Forged the Republic."

The two criminal cases are in no way the same. One involves the conduct of a former president who is running to reclaim the White House, yet stands accused of falsifying business records to conceal an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 election. The other focuses on a private citizen — albeit the current president's son — who is facing charges of lying on a federal gun-purchase form when he claimed he wasn't using drugs.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 41 of 74

Politically, though, there is some obvious overlap. Both men say they're being persecuted by overzealous prosecutors and unfairly targeted for political gain. And both sides are seeking to capitalize on highly personal and potentially embarrassing witness testimony about their adversaries, with Republicans trying to use Hunter Biden as a sort of target by proxy for the president himself.

The politics of the moment

Trump has leaned hard into the politics of the moment, campaigning from court, claiming he's the subject of a "witch hunt" and casting doubt on the validity of the nation's criminal justice system. Biden, for his part, has largely steered clear, a purposeful effort to highlight the independence of the judiciary.

But this week, Biden's campaign decided that Trump's case — the first of four criminal cases and quite possibly the only one to go to trial before the 2024 election — couldn't be ignored any longer. The campaign brought in actor Robert De Niro and law enforcement officers who had defended the U.S. Capitol during the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, to denounce Trump in a press conference near the lower Manhattan courthouse.

Biden campaign spokesman Michael Tyler said the press conference was called because reporters are "incessantly covering this day in and day out."

"And we want to remind the American people ahead of the first debate on June 27, of the unique, persistent and growing threat that Donald Trump poses to the American people and to our democracy," he said.

Trump's operation was quick to follow team Biden to the same bank of microphones to deride the press conference as evidence of "a desperate and failing and pathetic campaign who knows that they are losing," in the words of Trump campaign spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt.

Inside, meanwhile, jurors were hearing closing arguments in Trump's hush money trial.

Trump's trial is ending

Prosecutors say Trump and his allies mounted a campaign to purchase and squelch potentially embarrassing stories, and cover up those payments in an illegal effort to influence voters in the waning weeks before the 2016 presidential election, particularly as Republicans grew concerned over potential fallout from the "Access Hollywood" tape in which Trump bragged about grabbing women sexually without their permission.

To help make their case to jurors, prosecutors relied on checkered characters from Trump's orbit including porn actor Stormy Daniels, who testified about an alleged sexual encounter with Trump. The prosecution's most important witness was Trump's former lawyer-turned-foe Michael Cohen, who paid off Daniels and who placed Trump at the center of the scheme he denies.

Throughout, Trump has strategically positioned prominent allies in the audience of the courtroom and used the trial as a fundraising pitch. These allies have held press conferences in a small park nearby where they decry the criminal justice system. Trump's family, too, has appeared in court.

Hunter Biden's trial is beginning

In contrast, Hunter Biden has been largely on his own in public to face his legal problems.

Republicans have relentlessly dug into his personal life, struggles with addiction and business dealings, trying — unsuccessfully — to link those dealings to the president. Hunter Biden was silent for years amid GOP criticism. But as his case looms, he has gone on the offense, arguing publicly that he's being unfairly targeted.

President Biden has said he loves his son and doesn't generally comment on the details of his son's case. But the president has already been put in the unusual if not awkward position of ruling out a pardon should his son be convicted. He is scheduled to head to France for a D-Day commemoration as Hunter Biden's case begins.

White House aides say they're concerned about the toll the trial will take on the president and first lady, who remain deeply concerned about the health, well-being and sobriety of their son. Privately, some Democrats have expressed concern that Hunter Biden's legal problems could harm the president's reelection campaign and even pose difficulties for Democrats in tight House races.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Tuesday the president was focused on the American

people, not the trials.

"The president and the first lady, they love their son. They are proud of how their son has been able to get back on his feet and continue his progress and will continue to support him," she said.

Hunter Biden pleaded not guilty to tax and gun charges after a plea deal collapsed last year that would have spared him — and his father -- the spectacle of a trial. His defense attorney Abbe Lowell has argued prosecutors then "buckled under political pressure" to indict the president's son as Republicans and Trump rained down criticism of the proposed plea deal and claimed the younger Biden was getting special treatment.

The proposed list of questions for prospective jurors includes: "Raise your hand if you do not believe in this statement: The law should apply equally to all, including the son of the president."

The case against Hunter Biden stems from a period where, by his own public admission, he was addicted to crack. His descent into drugs and alcohol followed the 2015 death of his brother Beau Biden from cancer. Hunter Biden bought and owned a gun for 11 days in October 2018, and indicated on the gun purchase form that he was not using drugs.

Prosecutors are planning to use as evidence Hunter Biden's published memoir, and they may also introduce contents from a laptop that he left at a Delaware repair shop and never retrieved. The contents made their way to Republicans in 2020 and were publicly leaked, revealing embarrassing and personal photos and messages.

They're also planning to call as witnesses Hunter Biden's ex-wife and his brother's widow Hallie, with whom he became romantically involved. Prosecutors hope to show he was in the throes of addiction when he bought the gun.

The court documents do not name them, but it's clear from context that "witness three" describes Hallie Biden, who saw Hunter Biden using drugs many times, and according to the court documents: "searched his bags, backpacks, and vehicle in an effort to help him get sober, and discovered drug paraphernalia and drugs in his possession on multiple occasions."

Biden visited Hallie Biden last weekend, prompting questions about whether they'd talked about the upcoming case.

Jean-Pierre said the visit was "not about that," but rather about the approaching anniversary of Beau's death.

Mexico's next president is likely a woman.

But in some Indigenous villages, men have all the power

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

PLAN DE AYALA, Mexico (AP) — At 4:30 a.m., girls and women begin to appear in the dark streets of this village of Tojolabal people in southern Mexico. They walk in silence. Some head to grind corn to make their family's tortillas. Others fetch firewood to carry home, on their backs or with the help of a donkey. The youngest hurry to finish chores before running to school.

Hours later, it's still morning, and it's time to talk. A group of young women and men gathers in a classroom at the Plan de Ayala high school. They've come to discuss gender equality and reflect on the role of women in this remote Indigenous community in Chiapas, Mexico's poorest state.

Jeydi Hernández, 17, wants to be a veterinarian and play basketball, though her first attempt to form a team failed: "There were 12 of us, but my friends got married, and there were only four of us left." Madaí Gómez, 18, complains she can't express opinions in her town: "They think women don't know anything."

Two Indigenous women lead the workshop; dozens attend. Years ago, such an initiative wouldn't have been so well-received, they say. But change is coming — albeit slowly.

Seventy years ago, Mexican women won the right to vote, and today the country is on the verge of electing its first woman president. Yet some of the Indigenous women who will vote in Sunday's national election don't have a voice in their own homes and communities.

In Plan de Ayala and other corners of Mexico, women can't participate in local government. Men set

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 43 of 74

priorities. Plan de Ayala's women aren't even registered residents, even though they are on voter rolls, so its 1,200 men can only guess at the true population.

With no official data, it's unclear how many communities operate this way. But it's one of many contradictions for a part of the Mexican population that for centuries has been marginalized. Now, Indigenous women are pushing for change — little by little — with the younger generation often leading the charge.

Of more than 23 million Indigenous people in Mexico — nearly 20% of the population — well over half live in poverty, according to 2022 government data. And women face the worst of it, with the lowest rates of literacy in their communities and little, if any, rights to own land.

Neither of the two women candidates for president — Claudia Sheinbaum of the governing Morena party and the opposition's Xóchitl Gálvez — have spoken much about Indigenous issues. Still, women in this region can't hide some hope that a woman president could better address some of their most pressing needs: health care and education access, and protection from domestic violence.

Juana Cruz, 51, is one of the women on a crusade to bring change. She grew up listening to stories of abuses suffered by four generations of her family forced to work on an estate where they had to speak Spanish rather than their native Tojolabal, a Mayan-family language. She remembers being beaten in school for not speaking Spanish well.

Today she's one of the most veteran social activists in Las Margaritas, the municipality that includes Plan de Ayala, and director of Tzome Ixuk, which means "organized woman" in Tojolabal.

There's been progress in places like Las Margaritas, a sprawling township of some 140,000 people spread across about 400 mostly Indigenous communities, including Plan de Ayala, but unwritten rules still govern much of life in the villages.

Increasingly, girls and young women are rejecting such norms. That's part of what's discussed in the workshops at Plan de Ayala high school.

About a third of those gathered said they'd like to continue studying, according to María Leticia Santiz, 28, and Liz Vázquez, 33, who lead the discussion.

"You all have the ability to make decisions in your communities, in your schools, in your families," Vázquez tells the group. "You are a generation of change." Santiz translates to Tojolabal.

Vázquez and Santiz are from a collective called Ch'ieltik, meaning "we are those who grow" in the Indigenous language Tseltal. The group's goal is to encourage conversation and reflection among young people in some of Chiapas' most closed communities.

In Plan de Ayala, like most rural corners of Las Margaritas, there's little evidence of the coming national election. Posters of Sheinbaum are seen in some places. The face of Gálvez — who has Indigenous roots, with an Otomi father — is not.

Vázquez says that personally, she hasn't connected with either candidate. But in the workshop, she tells the group that a woman becoming president proves nothing is impossible.

The campaigns of the two leading female presidential candidates are notable for what's lacking: any prioritization of gender issues or detailed plans to address Indigenous communities' issues.

Sheinbaum insists she'll try to reach agreements to compensate for past injustices against some Indigenous peoples. Gálvez has only gone so far as to remind voters of projects she pushed when she was in charge of Indigenous development under a previous administration, two decades ago.

In Plan de Ayala, Vázquez and Santiz leave the workshop at the school encouraged. The young men seem receptive to speaking about equality, and they see signs of change: fathers supporting daughters' dreams, young women carving out spaces for themselves.

After the workshop, Madaí Gómez, the 18-year-old, heads home to finish helping her mother. She's not yet sure about continuing school — she wants to be economically independent and considers herself a strong woman who doesn't take "no" for an answer. Maybe she'll stay here and find work. Maybe she'll try making it to the U.S.

That afternoon, she puts on her soccer uniform and heads to the local field, optimistic that more girls want to join. On the dirt track, teens pass older women wearing traditional embroidered blouses and satin skirts returning from the fields, their bodies stooped by bundles of grass hoisted on their backs.

Gómez said she believes in the potential of her community's women and thinks Mexico's first woman president could show they can do more even than men.

"I want gender equality to come, for them to give us that chance to raise our voices, for our voice to be valued the same as a man's," she said.

Netanyahu frequently makes claims of antisemitism. Critics say he's deflecting from his own problems

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — After the International Criminal Court's top prosecutor sought arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his defense minister and top Hamas officials, the Israeli leader accused him of being one of "the great antisemites in modern times."

As protests roiled college campuses across the United States over the Gaza war, Netanyahu said they were awash with "antisemitic mobs."

These are just two of the many instances during the war in which Netanyahu has accused critics of Israel or his policies of antisemitism, using fiery rhetoric to compare them to the Jewish people's worst persecutors. But his detractors say he is overusing the label to further his political agenda and try to stifle even legitimate criticism, and that doing so risks diluting the term's meaning at a time when antisemitism is surging worldwide.

"Not every criticism against Israel is antisemitic," said Tom Segev, an Israeli historian. "The moment you say it is antisemitic hate ... you take away all legitimacy from the criticism and try to crush the debate."

There has been a spike in antisemitic incidents since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, according to researchers. And many Jews in North America and Europe have said they feel unsafe, citing threats to Jewish schools and synagogues and the pro-Palestinian campus demonstrations in the U.S., although organizers deny that antisemitism drives the protests.

The war has reignited the long debate about the definition of antisemitism and whether any criticism of Israel — from its military's killing of thousands of Palestinian children to questions over Israel's very right to exist — amounts to anti-Jewish hate speech.

Netanyahu, the son of a scholar of medieval Jewish persecution, has long used the travails of the Jewish people to color his political rhetoric. And he certainly isn't the first world leader accused of using national trauma to advance political goals.

Netanyahu's supporters say he is honestly worried for the safety of Jews around the world.

But his accusations of antisemitism come as he has repeatedly sidestepped accountability for not preventing Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. Hamas killed roughly 1,200 people and took 250 hostage, which many in Israel's defense establishment acknowledge they shoulder the blame for.

Netanyahu has continued to face criticism at home and abroad throughout the war, which has killed 35,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between fighters and noncombatants. The fighting has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe, and ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan has accused Netanyahu and his defense minister of using starvation as a "method of warfare," among other crimes.

Segev, the historian, acknowledged there is a rise in "violent hate" toward Israel and, speaking from Vienna, said he wasn't sure if speaking Hebrew in public was safe. But he said Netanyahu has long used Jewish crises to his political benefit, including invoking the Jewish people's deepest trauma, the Holocaust, to further his goals.

At the height of the campus protests, Netanyahu released a video statement condemning their "unconscionable" antisemitism and comparing the mushrooming encampments on college greens to Nazi Germany of the 1930s.

"What's happening in America's college campuses is horrific," he said.

In response to Khan seeking the arrest warrants, he said the ICC prosecutor was "callously pouring

gasoline on the fires of antisemitism that are raging across the world,” comparing him to German judges who approved of the Nazis’ race laws against Jews.

Netanyahu has compared accusations that Israel’s war is causing starvation in Gaza or that the war is genocidal to blood libels — unfounded centuries-old accusations that Jews sacrificed Christian children and used their blood to make unleavened bread for Passover.

“These false accusations are not levelled against us because of the things we do, but because of the simple fact that we exist,” he said at a ceremony marking Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day earlier this month.

Netanyahu previously made repeated allusions to the Holocaust while trying to galvanize the world against Iran’s nuclear program.

Israeli leaders and the country’s media also made such comparisons about Oct. 7, describing the Hamas attackers as Nazis, comparing their rampage to the historic violence inflicted on Eastern European Jews, and referring to the images of Jewish victims’ burned bodies as a Shoah — the Hebrew word for Holocaust.

Israelis have been jarred by the global rise in antisemitism, and many view the swell of criticism against Israel as part of the rise. They see hypocrisy in the world’s intense focus on Israel’s war with Hamas while other conflicts get much less attention.

Moshe Klughaft, a former advisor to Netanyahu, said he believes the Israeli leader is genuinely concerned over rising antisemitism.

“It is his duty to condemn antisemitism as prime minister of Israel and as head of a country that sees itself as responsible for world Jewry,” he said.

Many Israelis view the war in Gaza as a just act of self-defense and are befuddled by what many think should be criticism directed at Hamas — blaming the group for starting the war, using Palestinian civilians as human shields and refusing to free the hostages. The ICC warrant requests have likely bolstered such feelings.

When Netanyahu leans on accusations of antisemitism, he is doing so with the Israeli public in mind, said Reuven Hazan, a political scientist at Jerusalem’s Hebrew University.

Hazan said Netanyahu has leveraged the campus protests, for example, to get Israelis to rally around him at a time when his public support has plummeted and Israelis are growing impatient with the war. He said Netanyahu has also used the protests as a scapegoat for his failure so far to achieve the war’s two goals: destroying Hamas and freeing the hostages.

“He deflects blame from himself, attributing any shortcomings not to his foreign policies or policies in the (Palestinian) territories, but rather to antisemitism. This narrative benefits him greatly, absolving him of responsibility,” Hazan said.

Shmuel Rosner, a senior fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, rejects the notion that Netanyahu stifles criticism by calling it antisemitic, pointing to just how much criticism the country receives. But he said using the antisemitic label to achieve political ends could cheapen it.

“I’d be more selective than the government of Israel in choosing the people and bodies they tag ‘antisemitic,’” he said.

Fears rise of a second landslide and disease outbreak at site of Papua New Guinea disaster

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Authorities fear a second landslide and a disease outbreak are looming at the scene of Papua New Guinea’s mass-casualty disaster because of water streams and bodies trapped beneath the tons of debris that swept over a village. Thousands are being told to prepare to evacuate, officials said Tuesday.

A mass of boulders, earth and splintered trees devastated Yambali in the South Pacific nation’s remote highlands when a limestone mountainside sheared away Friday. The blanket of debris has become more unstable with recent rain and streams trapped between the ground and rubble, said Serhan Aktoprak,

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 46 of 74

chief of the International Organization for Migration's mission in Papua New Guinea.

The U.N. agency has officials at the scene in Enga province helping shelter 1,600 displaced people. The agency estimates 670 villagers died, while Papua New Guinea's government has told the United Nations it thinks more than 2,000 people were buried. Six bodies had been retrieved from the rubble by Tuesday.

"We are hearing suggestions that another landslide can happen and maybe 8,000 people need to be evacuated," Aktoprak told The Associated Press.

"This is a major concern. The movement of the land, the debris, is causing a serious risk, and overall the total number of people that may be affected might be 6,000 or more," he said. That includes villagers whose source of clean drinking water has been buried and subsistence farmers who lost their vegetable gardens.

"If this debris mass is not stopped, if it continues moving, it can gain speed and further wipe out other communities and villages further down" the mountain, Aktoprak said.

A U.N. statement later tallied the affected population at 7,849, including people who might need to be evacuated or relocated. The U.N. said 42% of those were children under 16.

Some villagers were evacuated on Tuesday, Enga provincial disaster committee chairperson and provincial administrator Sandis Tsaka told Radio New Zealand. The number was unclear.

As many people as possible would be evacuated on Wednesday, Tsaka said.

Relocating survivors to safer ground has been a priority for days and evacuation centers have been established on either side of the debris heap, which is up to 8 meters (26 feet) high and sprawling over an area the U.N. says is equivalent to three or four football fields.

Scenes of villagers digging with their bare hands through muddy debris in search of their relatives' remains were also concerning.

"My biggest fear at the moment is corpses are decaying, ... water is flowing and this is going to pose serious health risks in relation to contagious diseases," Aktoprak said.

Aktoprak's agency raised those concerns at a disaster management virtual meeting of national and international responders Tuesday.

The warning comes as geotechnical experts and heavy earth-moving equipment are expected to reach the site soon.

The Papua New Guinea government on Sunday officially asked the United Nations for additional help and to coordinate contributions from individual nations.

An Australian disaster response team arrived Tuesday in Papua New Guinea, which is Australia's nearest neighbor. The team includes a geohazard assessment team and drones to help map the site.

"Their role will be particularly helping perform geotechnical surveillance to establish the level of the landslip, the instability of the land there, obviously doing some work around identifying where bodies are," said Murray Watt, Australia's minister for emergency management.

The Australian government has offered long-term logistical support for clearing debris, recovering bodies and supporting displaced people. The government announced an initial aid package of 2.5 million Australian dollars (\$1.7 million).

Earth-moving equipment used by Papua New Guinea's military was expected to arrive soon, after traveling from the city of Lae, 400 kilometers (250 miles) to the east, said Justine McMahon, country director of for humanitarian agency CARE International.

The landslide buried a 200-meter (650-foot) stretch of the province's main highway. But the highway had been cleared from Yambali to the provincial capital Wabag through to Lae, officials said Tuesday from Enga.

"One of the complicating factors was the destruction of parts of the road plus the instability of the ground, but they have some confidence that they can take in heavy equipment today," McMahon said Tuesday.

An excavator donated by a local builder Sunday became the first piece of heavy earth-moving machinery brought in to help villagers who have been digging with shovels and farming tools to find bodies.

Heartbroken and frustrated Yambali resident Evit Kambu thanked those who were trying to find her missing relatives in the rubble.

"I have 18 of my family members buried under the debris and soil that I'm standing on," she told Australian Broadcasting Corp. through an interpreter.

"But I can't retrieve the bodies, so I'm standing here helplessly," she added.

Yambali couple John and Jacklyn Yandam spoke of being trapped in the rubble for eight hours on Friday morning before they were dug out by neighbors.

Large fallen boulders had formed a barrier that prevented the couple from being crushed in their house by tumbling rubble. But they would have remained trapped without their neighbors' help.

"We thank God for saving our lives at that moment," the wife told Papua New Guinea's National Broadcasting Corp., referring to the mountainside collapsing at 3 a.m.

"We were certain that we were going to die, but the big rocks didn't crush us," she added.

Australian Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said an Australian air force C-17 Globemaster, a four-engine transport jet capable of carrying 77 metric tons (85 U.S. tons) of cargo, was already bringing supplies from Australia to Papua New Guinea's capital, Port Moresby.

Two smaller Australian air force turboprop transport planes were already at Port Moresby, which is 600 kilometers (370 miles) southeast of the devastated village.

"There is more that we are seeking to do, but to be frank, part of the issue here is about not overwhelming a system which is currently under a lot of stress," Marles told Parliament.

The smaller C-130 Hercules and C-27J Spartan transport planes are to fly supplies from the capital to Mount Hagen, the capital of Western Highlands province, from where the cargo would travel by road to neighboring Enga province.

That plan took a blow with news that a bridge between Mount Hagen and Wabag collapsed on Tuesday, officials said. The cause of the collapse was not explained, but it was unrelated to the landslide.

A detour would add two or three hours to the journey, the migrant agency said. Urgent efforts were underway to repair the bridge.

Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation with 800 languages and 10 million people who are mostly subsistence farmers.

Storms leave widespread outages across Texas, cleanup continues after deadly weekend across US

By LEKAN OYEKANMI and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Strong storms with damaging winds and baseball-sized hail pummeled Texas on Tuesday, leaving one person dead and about 1 million businesses and homes without power as much of the U.S. recovered from severe weather, including tornadoes, that killed at least 24 people during the Memorial Day holiday weekend.

Widespread outages were reported across a wide swath of storm-weary Texas, where an oppressive, early-season heat wave added to the misery. Voters in the state's runoff elections found dozens of polling places without power. Dallas County said it would keep polls open two hours later because of the outages Tuesday.

Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins declared a disaster and noted that some nursing homes were using generators. "This ultimately will be a multiday power outage situation," Jenkins said Tuesday.

Social media posts showed winds pushing one American Airlines plane away from a gate at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

The airline said in a statement that the severe weather, including straight-line wind gusts up to 80 mph, affected several parked and unoccupied aircraft. No one was injured.

"Our maintenance team is currently conducting thorough inspections and will make any needed repairs," the statement said.

The airport said in an email to The Associated Press that about 500 flights were canceled because of the weather. Nearly another 200 flights were canceled at Dallas Love Field Airport, according to the website FlightAware.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 48 of 74

Around Houston, cars crawled through flooded highways and more than 300,000 customers were without power in the area, which includes parts still recovering from hurricane-force winds earlier this month.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that a 16-year-old boy died when a home under construction began to shift and then collapsed during a thunderstorm in the Houston suburb of Magnolia. The teen was confirmed to be an employee of the construction company and was authorized to be on the site, the statement said.

An East Houston school district issued a shelter-in-place order and directed buses with students back to their campuses in the afternoon until the weather subsided.

Destructive storms over the weekend caused deaths in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia. Meanwhile in the Midwest, an unusual weather phenomenon called a "gustnado" that looks like a small tornado brought some dramatic moments to a western Michigan lake over the weekend.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell will travel to Arkansas on Wednesday as the Biden administration continues assessing the damage from the weekend tornadoes.

Seven people were killed in Cooke County, Texas, from a tornado that tore through a mobile home park Saturday, officials said, and an additional seven deaths were reported across Arkansas.

Two people died in Mayes County, Oklahoma, east of Tulsa, authorities said. The injured included guests at an outdoor wedding. A Missouri man died Sunday after a tree limb fell onto his tent as he was camping.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said five people had died in his state during storms that struck close to where a devastating swarm of twisters killed 81 people in December 2021. One family lost their home for a second time on the same lot where a twister leveled their house less than three years ago.

Roughly 150,000 homes and businesses lacked electricity midday Tuesday in Louisiana, Kentucky, Arkansas, West Virginia and Missouri.

It has been a grim month of tornadoes and severe weather in the nation's midsection.

Tornadoes in Iowa last week left at least five people dead and dozens injured. Storms killed eight people in Houston this month. April had the second-highest number of tornadoes on record in the country. The storms come as climate change contributes in general to the severity of storms around the world.

Late May is the peak of tornado season, but the recent storms have been exceptionally violent, producing very strong tornadoes, said Victor Gensini, a meteorology professor at Northern Illinois University.

"Over the weekend, we've had a lot of hot and humid air, a lot of gasoline, a lot of fuel for these storms. And we've had a really strong jet stream as well. That jet stream has been aiding in providing the wind shear necessary for these types of tornadoes," Gensini said.

Harold Brooks, a senior scientist at the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma, said a persistent pattern of warm, moist air is to blame for the string of tornadoes over the past two months.

That air is at the northern edge of a heat dome bringing temperatures typically seen at the height of summer to late May.

The heat index — a combination of air temperature and humidity to indicate how the heat feels to the human body — reached triple digits in parts of south Texas and was expected to stay there for several days.

For more information on recent tornado reports, see The Associated Press Tornado Tracker.

The toll of Beijing's security law on Hong Kong's activists

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Activist Chan Po-ying is permitted only 15-minute daily visits to see her husband, Leung Kwok-hung, separated by a plexiglass barrier in a highly guarded Hong Kong jail.

Leung, 68, is one of 47 activists who were prosecuted in the largest national security law case to date in the former British colony. Most of them have been separated from their loved ones for years, uncertain when they might reunite. On Thursday, 16 activists who pleaded not guilty — including Leung — will begin hearing their verdict.

The government had warned there might be legal consequences, but Chan didn't stop former pro-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 49 of 74

democracy legislator Leung from participating in an unofficial 2020 primary election that would lead to his prosecution under a national security law that Beijing imposed on the semi-autonomous city.

"Maybe we were too naive," Chan, 68, said with a laugh.

Charged with conspiracy to commit subversion, Leung and other defendants are accused of attempting to paralyze Hong Kong's government and topple the city's leader by securing the legislative majority necessary to veto budgets. The charge carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Those who pleaded guilty have a better chance at shorter prison terms and will be sentenced at a later date.

"I guess almost none can be acquitted," said Chan, who chairs the League of Social Democrats, one of the city's few remaining pro-democracy parties. "I am not optimistic. But I also hope someone can get away from it."

ACTIVISM IN HONG KONG

Chan was part of a wave of youth activism spreading through Hong Kong when she met Leung in a Marxist group around 1975, when the city was still under British rule.

At first, Chan viewed Leung as a "troublesome guy," being adamant about winning every debate. Despite this, they fell in love, and their bond transcended mere romance, Chan said; they are "comrades-in-arms."

A 2005 protest solidified their bond. The two were some of the only Hong Kongers who stayed steadfast with the overseas demonstrators, even after police deployed tear gas and threatened arrest.

"Among those who stood with us in our youth, only the two of us stayed at the site," she said.

Activism in Hong Kong reached a peak in 2014 with the so-called Umbrella Movement, in which demonstrators used umbrellas to fend off police pepper spray in a nearly 80-day face-off. When Beijing didn't budge, some young activists began advocating for Hong Kong's independence.

Suppression was swift. Several pro-independence activists were blocked from joining elections, and in 2018, Hong Kong authorities banned a small pro-independence party.

Ventus Lau was among those caught in the crackdown. He was barred from running in an election in 2018, even though he renounced his pro-independence stance. But that didn't deter him from becoming more politically active, helping organize protests in 2019 that saw generations of Hong Kongers rallying against a now-withdrawn bill that would have allowed people in the city to be extradited to mainland China.

The largest protest drew an estimated 2 million people — more than a quarter of the city's population.

Lau, now 30, is one of the defendants who decided to plead guilty in the subversion case related to the 2020 primary. Emilia Wong, a 29-year-old feminist influencer and longtime girlfriend of Lau, supported his activism.

In those years after the Umbrella Movement was stifled, Wong remembered feeling hopeful for a more democratic Hong Kong, despite the somber mood in the city.

"2019 represented a peak of such hopes," she said. But the high hopes were short-lived.

THE PRIMARY VOTE AND THE CLAMPDOWN

As protests waned due to mass arrests and COVID-19 restrictions, Beijing intensified its control. On June 30, 2020, the sweeping national security law was imposed. Both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments deemed it necessary to restore the city's stability. Several political groups dissolved on the same day.

Just a week later, a city official warned that the pro-democracy primaries might violate the security law. They held the vote anyway, resulting in an unexpectedly high turnout of 610,000.

The poll, organized within the pro-democracy camp, was meant to shortlist candidates who would then run in the official election for the legislature, typically dominated by the pro-Beijing camp. They hoped that, with a legislative majority, the government would listen to their demands.

But things didn't go as planned.

After the primary, Beijing said the vote challenged the security law that critics argue has been broadly applied to anything the government claims could threaten stability.

When police officers arrived at Wong's home in January 2021 to arrest Lau for participating in the election, she recalled, "It felt so absurd that I had to laugh."

That month, over 50 former lawmakers and democracy proponents were arrested under the national

security law. Authorities accused them of planning to get enough people into office to indiscriminately veto budgets, grinding governmental functions to a halt, and to force the city leader to step down.

Of those arrested, 47 were charged and brought to court for days of bail hearings, during which time some were hospitalized due to fatigue and others weren't able to shower for days. Most of the defendants were denied bail.

LIVES UPENDED

After Lau was taken into custody, Wong devoted her time to arranging food and book deliveries for him, handling media interviews about the case, organizing visits from his friends, and assisting him with his application to restart university studies while detained.

Each day left Wong feeling utterly drained as she also grappled with the shock of Lau's prosecution. One day, upon receiving clothes worn by Lau during his detention that still carried his scent, she burst into tears.

"It was a blow to me, specifically to my personal vision of Hong Kong," she said.

Even for veteran activists like Chan, the situation was painful. To her, 2021 was suffocating. After Leung was denied bail, Chan would find herself crying without any particular reason during her commutes.

Months after the 47 activists were prosecuted, arrests of top management at Apple Daily and Stand News — prominent media outlets known for their critical reports on the government — forced them to shut down. Dozens of civil society groups disbanded. Some of Chan's League of Social Democrats members were also jailed.

That year, Chan wondered daily what would happen next. "I felt lonely, but I had to handle so many things," she said.

LIFE IN DETENTION

To maintain their relationship between the limited visits, Lau has been writing Wong a letter every day since 2021, sometimes penning Canto-pop song lyrics to express his love. In return, Wong dedicated a love song to Lau on the radio for his birthday.

To Wong, staying with Lau is a natural choice. Lau signed an agreement granting her control over his affairs — a document she described as more powerful than a marriage certificate. She said she would do her best to support him.

Even behind bars, Wong said, Lau drives her to become a better person — when he picked up his reading pace, Wong followed suit. In turn, Wong offered critiques of Lau's lyrics. Lau pursued his translation degree and Wong became a regular at the gym.

"I'm not just standing still waiting; I've been running all along, and so has he," she said.

Chan said life in detention has left Leung visibly thinner and downhearted. Despite their fiery temperaments, Leung sometimes avoids arguments during their brief visits.

"He cherishes our 15 minutes together," Chan said. "But I also feel very upset because this isn't the real him."

In the most optimistic scenario, it might take three to four more years to see Leung free again, Chan said. In the meantime, she continues to organize small-scale street demonstrations, despite the threat of the new national security law that critics fear will further constrict civil liberties.

Chan knows her actions might not make a significant impact, but she says persistence in their respective roles is still meaningful.

"It's not like nothing has been achieved," she said.

Israeli strikes kill at least 37 Palestinians, most in tents, near Gaza's Rafah as offensive expands

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli shelling and airstrikes killed at least 37 people, most of them sheltering in tents, outside the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight and on Tuesday — pummeling the same area where strikes triggered a deadly fire days earlier in a camp for displaced Palestinians — according to witnesses, emergency workers and hospital officials.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 51 of 74

The tent camp inferno has drawn widespread international outrage, including from some of Israel's closest allies, over the military's expanding offensive into Rafah. And in a sign of Israel's growing isolation on the world stage, Spain, Norway and Ireland formally recognized a Palestinian state on Tuesday.

The Israeli military suggested Sunday's blaze in the tent camp may have been caused by secondary explosions, possibly from Palestinian militants' weapons. The results of Israel's initial probe into the fire were issued Tuesday, with military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari saying the cause of the fire was still under investigation but that the Israeli munitions used — targeting what the army said was a position with two senior Hamas militants — were too small to be the source.

The strike or the subsequent fire could also have ignited fuel, cooking gas canisters or other materials in the camp. The blaze killed 45 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials' count. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the fire was the result of a "tragic mishap."

Israel's assault on Rafah, launched May 6, spurred more than 1 million people to flee the city, the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees said Tuesday. Most were already displaced multiple times in the nearly eight-month war between Israel and Hamas. Families are now scattered across makeshift tent camps and other war-ravaged areas.

The strikes over the past few days have hit areas west of Rafah, where the military had not ordered civilians to evacuate. Israeli ground troops and tanks have been operating in eastern Rafah, in central parts of the city, and along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Shelling late Monday and early Tuesday hit Rafah's western Tel al-Sultan district, killing at least 16 people, the Palestinian Civil Defense and the Palestinian Red Crescent said. Seven of the dead were in tents next to a U.N. facility about about 200 meters (yards) from the site of Sunday's fire.

"It was a night of horror," said Abdel-Rahman Abu Ismail, a Palestinian from Gaza City who has been sheltering in Tel al-Sultan since December. He said he heard "constant sounds" of explosions overnight and into Tuesday, with fighter jets and drones flying above.

He said it reminded him of the Israeli invasion of his neighborhood of Shijaiyah in Gaza City, where Israel launched a heavy bombing campaign before sending in ground forces in late 2023. "We saw this before," he said.

The United States and other allies of Israel have warned against a full-fledged offensive in the city, with the Biden administration saying this would cross a "red line" and refusing to provide offensive arms for such an undertaking. On Tuesday, U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller gave no indication the administration sees Israel as crossing any of the red lines for Rafah, saying the offensive is still on a "far different" scale than assaults on other population centers in Gaza.

The International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive last week as part of South Africa's case accusing Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza.

A proposed U.N. Security Council resolution demanding a halt to the fighting in Rafah was being circulated by Algeria on Tuesday, with plans to potentially bring it to a vote this week. The U.S. has vetoed multiple Gaza cease-fire resolutions.

On Tuesday afternoon, an Israeli drone strike hit tents near a field hospital by the Mediterranean coast west of Rafah, killing at least 21 people, including 13 women, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

A witness, Ahmed Nassar, said his four cousins and some of their husbands and children were killed in the strike and a number of tents were destroyed or damaged. Most of those living there had fled from the same neighborhood in Gaza City earlier in the war.

"They have nothing to do with anything," he said.

Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead in Rafah, saying Israeli forces must enter the city to dismantle Hamas and return hostages taken in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war.

In its investigation of Sunday's deadly strike and fire, the Israeli military released satellite photos of what it said was a Hamas rocket launch position about 40 meters (yards) from an area of sheds that was targeted. In the photo, the alleged launcher itself did not appear to have been struck.

He said Israeli warplanes used the smallest bombs possible — two munitions with 17-kilogram (37-pound)

warheads. "Our munition alone could not have ignited a fire of this size," he said.

Hagari said that the fire was "a devastating incident which we did not expect" and ignited due to "unforeseen circumstances."

Still, the strikes have triggered a flight of people from areas west of Rafah. Sayed al-Masri, a Rafah resident, said many families were heading to the crowded Muwasi area or to Khan Younis, a southern city that suffered heavy damage during months of fighting.

"The situation is worsening" in Rafah, al-Masri said.

Gaza's Health Ministry said two medical facilities in Tel al-Sultan are out of service because of intense bombing nearby. Medical Aid for Palestinians, a charity operating throughout the territory, said the Tel al-Sultan medical center and the Indonesian Field Hospital were under lockdown with medics, patients and displaced people trapped inside.

Most of Gaza's hospitals are no longer functioning. Rafah's Kuwait Hospital shut down Monday after a strike near its entrance killed two health workers.

A spokesperson for the World Health Organization said the casualties from Sunday's strike and fire "absolutely overwhelmed" field hospitals in the area, which were already running short on supplies to treat severe burns.

"That requires intensive care, that requires electricity, that requires high-level medical services," Dr. Margaret Harris told reporters in Geneva. "Increasingly, we are struggling to even have the high-level skilled doctors and nurses because they've been displaced."

The war began when Hamas and other militants burst into southern Israel in a surprise attack on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 civilians and abducting around 250. More than 100 were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Israel responded to the attack with a massive air, land and sea offensive that has killed at least 36,096 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its count. Around 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has been displaced and U.N. officials say parts of the territory are experiencing famine.

The fighting in Rafah has made it nearly impossible for humanitarian groups to import and distribute aid to southern Gaza.

The Israeli military says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter through the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing since the start of its operation, but aid groups say it's extremely difficult to access that aid on the Gaza side because of the fighting.

The U.N. says it has only been able to collect aid from around 170 trucks over the past three weeks via Kerem Shalom. Smaller amounts of aid were also entering through two crossings in the north and by sea through a U.S.-built floating pier, but it's nowhere near the 600 trucks a day that aid groups say are needed. And the pier is being removed for repairs.

Transitional council in Haiti selects new prime minister for a country under siege by gangs

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — U.N. development specialist Garry Conille was named Haiti's new prime minister Tuesday evening, nearly a month after a coalition within a fractured transitional council sought to choose someone else for the position.

The long-awaited move comes as gangs continue to terrorize the capital of Port-au-Prince, opening fire in once peaceful neighborhoods and using heavy machinery to demolish several police stations and prisons.

Council member Louis Gérald Gilles told The Associated Press that six out of seven council members with voting power chose Conille earlier Tuesday. He said one member, Laurent St. Cyr, was not in Haiti and therefore did not vote.

Conille has been UNICEF's regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean since January 2023 and previously served as Haiti's prime minister from October 2011 to May 2012 under then President Michel

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 53 of 74

Martelly. He replaces Michel Patrick Boisvert, who was named interim prime minister after Ariel Henry resigned via letter in late April.

Henry was on an official trip to Kenya when a coalition of powerful gangs launched coordinated attacks Feb. 29, seizing control of police stations, shooting at Haiti's main international airport and storming the country's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates.

Henry was locked out of the country by the attacks, with the airport in the Port-au-Prince capital remaining shuttered for nearly three months.

Gang violence is still surging in parts of Haiti's capital and beyond as Conille takes over the helm of the troubled Caribbean country awaiting the U.N.-backed deployment of a police force from Kenya and other countries.

Conille studied medicine and public health and helped develop health care in impoverished communities in Haiti, where he helped coordinate reconstruction efforts after the devastating 2010 earthquake. The gang violence has taken a toll on that system, however.

He worked for several years at the United Nations before Martelly designated him as prime minister in 2011. Conille resigned less than a year later following clashes with the president and his Cabinet over an investigation into government officials who have dual nationality, which is not allowed by Haiti's constitution.

Conille could not be immediately reached for comment. UNICEF said in a brief statement to late Tuesday that he was stepping down from his role as regional director: "We are working closely with Garry to ensure a smooth transition at this time."

Conille has an arduous task ahead of him, having to quell rampant gang violence while helping lift Haiti out of deep poverty, with inflation reaching a record 29%, according to the latest data available. In recent years, gangs that control at least 80% of Port-au-Prince have forced more than 360,000 people from their homes, and they continue to control key routes from the capital to Haiti's northern and southern regions, often paralyzing the transportation of critical goods.

The selection of Conille as prime minister comes just weeks after former Haitian sports minister Fritz Bélizaire was chosen for the post in late April by a four-member coalition within the nine-member transitional council in a surprise announcement that angered many. Critics said proper procedure was not followed as dictated by the framework that established the council, so a new process was started to choose a prime minister, with dozens of names submitted for the post.

The drawn-out process has been criticized by many, including the Montana Accord, a Haitian civil society group that has a representative on the council.

In a statement Tuesday, the group accused the council of not taking any "consequential measures" since being installed as "the suffering of the people is getting worse, while the gangs are taking control of more territory and committing more crimes."

It also accused the council of not being transparent while choosing a new prime minister, saying it did not publicly share the criteria used or the names submitted, among other things.

Liné Balthazar, president of the Tet Kale party, called on the council to be transparent in an interview Monday with Magik9, a local radio station, and said the selection of a prime minister appeared improvised.

In addition to selecting a new prime minister, the nine-member council, of which seven have voting powers, also has to appoint a provisional electoral commission, a requirement before elections can take place. The council's non-renewable mandate expires Feb. 7, 2026, at which date a new president is scheduled to be sworn in.

In addition to picking a new prime minister, the council also is responsible for selecting a new Cabinet and holding general elections by the end of next year.

The council members are Emmanuel Vertilaire for Petit Desalin, a party led by former senator and presidential candidate Jean-Charles Moïse; Smith Augustin for EDE/RED, a party led by former Prime Minister Claude Joseph; Fritz Alphonse Jean of the Montana Accord; Leslie Voltaire for Fanmi Lavalas, the party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide; Louis Gérald Gilles for the Dec. 21 coalition that backs former Prime Minister Ariel Henry; Edgard Leblanc Fils for the Jan. 30 Collective, which represents parties including that of former President Michel Martelly; and Laurent Saint-Cyr for the private sector.

Missile attacks damage a ship in the Red Sea off Yemen's coast near previous Houthi rebel assaults

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Missile attacks twice damaged a Marshall Islands-flagged, Greek-owned ship Tuesday in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen, with a private security firm saying radio traffic suggested the vessel took on water after being struck.

No group claimed responsibility, but suspicion fell on Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have launched a number of attacks targeting ships over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The first attack on the bulk carrier Laax happened off the port city of Hodeida in the southern Red Sea, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that links it to the Gulf of Aden, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center. The vessel "sustained damage" in the assault and later reported an "impact in the water in close proximity to the vessel," the UKMTO said.

"The crew are reported safe and the vessel is proceeding to its next port of call," the center said.

The private security firm Ambrey said the vessel reported by radio of having "sustained damage to the cargo hold and was taking on water."

Late Tuesday night, the UKMTO reported the Laax "sustained further damage" in a second missile attack near Mokha in the Bab el-Mandeb.

The U.S. military's Central Command also identified the targeted ship as the Laax. The vessel reported being headed to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates.

Grehel Ship Management of Piraeus, Greece, manages the Laax. A man who answered the phone at Grehel declined to answer questions about the attack and an emailed request for comment was not returned.

Central Command separately said it destroyed five Houthi drones over the Red Sea amid the attacks.

The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge the attack, though it can take the rebels hours or even days to claim their assaults.

The Houthis have launched attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in recent months, demanding that Israel ends the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 36,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostage.

The rebels have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the United States Maritime Administration.

Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat. In recent weeks, the tempo of Houthi attacks has dropped, though the rebels have claimed shooting down U.S. surveillance drones.

Yemen has been wracked by conflict since the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, in 2014. A Saudi-led coalition entered the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in 2015, but the conflict has remained at a stalemate for years as Riyadh tries to reach a peace deal with the Houthis.

Speaking Tuesday in Dubai, the prime minister of Yemen's exiled, internationally recognized government urged the world to see past the Houthis' claims of backing the Palestinians through their attacks.

"The Houthis' exploitation of a very just cause such as the cause of our people in Palestine and what is happening in Gaza is to escape the benefits of peace and lead us to major complications that exist," Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak told the Arab Media Forum. "Peace is a strategic choice. We must reach peace. The war must stop. This is a must. Our people need security and stability. The region itself needs stability."

Cohen's credibility, campaigning at court and other takeaways from Trump trial's closing arguments

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, JILL COLVIN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's lawyers and Manhattan prosecutors made their final pitches Tuesday to jurors who will decide whether the Republican will be the first former U.S. president convicted of a crime, squaring off over the strength of the evidence and credibility of the prosecution's star witness as his hush money trial drew toward a close.

After listening to more than four weeks of testimony, the panel of New Yorkers sat attentively through a marathon of closing arguments — almost three hours from the defense and roughly five from the prosecution — that stretched from morning until dinner time.

The jury could begin deliberating as early as Wednesday to decide if Trump is guilty of falsifying business records to cover up hush money payments during the 2016 presidential campaign to a porn actor who claimed she had sex with him. Trump says Stormy Daniels' story is a lie and that he's innocent of the charges. The judge is expected to give jurors instructions on Wednesday before they begin deliberating.

Here are some takeaways from closing arguments:

ALL ABOUT MICHAEL COHEN

Trump attorney Todd Blanche had a clear message for jurors: The prosecution's case rests on the testimony of Trump fixer-turned-foe Michael Cohen, and he can't be believed. Cohen is a crucial witness because he made the \$130,000 hush money payment to Daniels and the reimbursements to Cohen are what prosecutors say were falsely logged as legal expenses.

As the defense has done throughout the case, Blanche attacked Cohen as a liar with a personal vendetta against his former boss. While Blanche tried to chip away at Cohen's credibility, the defense showed jurors a PowerPoint slide that read: "Case Turns on Cohen."

Blanche repeatedly reminded jurors of Cohen's past lies, including his 2018 guilty plea for lying to Congress. And the defense played for jurors clips of Cohen's podcast in which the now-disbarred attorney said seeing the former president booked on criminal charges "fills me with delight."

The case against Trump is built around testimony from "a witness that outright hates the defendant, wants him in jail, is actively making money off that hatred," Blanche said.

Prosecutor Joshua Steinglass acknowledged that Cohen is a challenging witness. But prosecutors did not choose him, Trump did, Steinglass said.

"The defendant chose Michael Cohen to be his fixer because he was willing to lie and cheat on the defendant's behalf," Steinglass said. Furthermore, he said, there is "a mountain" of evidence and corroborating testimony connecting Trump to the crime.

"It's not about whether you like Michael Cohen. It's not about whether you want to go into business with Michael Cohen. It's whether he has useful, reliable information to give you about what went down in this case, and the truth is that he was in the best position to know," the prosecutor said.

'A CONSPIRACY AND A COVER-UP'

The prosecutor used his closing argument to bring jurors back to what District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office alleges is the crux of the case: a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election by keeping Daniels' story from surfacing. The case "at its core, is about a conspiracy and a cover-up," Steinglass said.

The purpose of the effort, Steinglass argued, was "to manipulate and defraud the voters, to pull the wool over their eyes in a coordinated fashion." It's impossible to know whether Trump's effort to "hood-wink voters" made a difference in the 2016 election, Steinglass said, but that's not something prosecutors have to prove.

Steinglass pushed back against the defense's contention that the former president was trying to protect his reputation and family — not his campaign — by shielding them from embarrassing stories about his personal life. It's "no coincidence" that Daniel's alleged sexual encounter with Trump happened in 2006 but she wasn't paid for her silence until right before the 2016 election, Steinglass said.

The defense, meanwhile, told jurors that "every campaign in this country is a conspiracy to promote a

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 56 of 74

candidate, a group of people who are working together to help somebody win." Trump's alleged efforts to suppress negative stories were no different, Blanche said.

"The government wants you to believe that President Trump did these things with his records to conceal efforts to promote his successful candidacy in 2016, the year before," Blanche said. "Even if you find that is true, that is not enough...it doesn't matter if there's a conspiracy to win an election."

CAMPAIGN COMES TO THE COURTHOUSE

Outside the courthouse, there were dueling press conferences from the Trump and Biden campaigns, which sought to capitalize on the gathering of reporters and cameras to attack their respective opponents and score political points.

While the defense was delivering its closing argument, the Biden campaign deployed outside the courthouse actor Robert De Niro and a pair of police officers who defended the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. It was a sharp about-face for Biden's team, which had largely ignored the trial since it began six weeks ago.

De Niro and the officers didn't reference Trump's criminal case directly, but slammed the former president as a threat to the country. De Niro told reporters that if Trump returns to the White House, Americans can "kiss these freedoms goodbye that we all take for granted."

Trump's campaign staffers followed with their own news conference at the same spot. Jason Miller, Trump's senior campaign adviser, told reporters the Biden campaign's press event shows that the trial is political.

"After months of saying politics had nothing to do with this trial, they showed up and made a campaign event out of a lower Manhattan trial day for President Trump," Miller said. Karoline Leavitt, the campaign press secretary, said the event was "a full blown concession that this trial is a witch hunt that comes from the top."

POLITICIZED LANGUAGE

The defense repeatedly referred to the prosecution as "the government." The prosecution invoked the phrase "big lie." Closing arguments on both sides were peppered with words and phrases that have become politicized.

Blanche called the prosecution "the government" — a term typically used for federal prosecutors, not the state-level team trying Trump's case. In New York, state prosecutors are typically referred to in court as "the people," short for "the people of the State of New York."

Trump's two main attorneys are former federal prosecutors who are used to arguing in federal courtrooms. But Trump has also been trying to cast the case — and the separate federal cases brought by Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith — as a politically motivated effort by President Joe Biden's administration to tank Trump's campaign.

The hush money case was filed by local prosecutors in Manhattan who do not work for the Justice Department, and the Justice Department has said the White House has had no involvement in the two Trump cases brought by Smith.

But by referring to the prosecution as the "government," the defense is evoking images of the "deep state" conspiracies that Trump claims are aimed at putting him behind bars and preventing him from re-taking the White House.

Steinglass, in his closing argument, used the phrase "big lie" to describe the defense's characterization of phone and text message records between Cohen and Trump bodyguard Keith Schiller. Democrats have used that phrase to describe Trump's false claims that he won the 2020 election, which helped spur his supporters' riot at the U.S. Capitol.

College in Detroit suspends in-person classes because of pro-Palestinian camp

By ED WHITE and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Wayne State University in Detroit suspended in-person classes Tuesday and encouraged staff to work remotely to avoid any problems with a pro-Palestinian encampment that sprouted last week.

"All on-campus events are canceled until further notice. Critical infrastructure workers are expected to report to campus," the school said in a statement around 5:30 a.m.

Wayne State spokesperson Matt Lockwood said there have been "public safety concerns," especially about access to certain areas.

There were two dozen tents on green space near the undergraduate library Tuesday. Participants milled around while police and private security watched nearby. Two portable toilets were full and not usable.

U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., has been at the site to offer support.

"We have told the organizers to remove the encampment several times and they have declined to do so," Lockwood said.

Wayne State has 16,000 undergraduate students but fewer during the summer term.

Protest camps sprang up across the U.S. and in Europe as students demand their universities stop doing business with Israel or companies that they say support its war in Gaza. Organizers seek to amplify calls to end Israel's war with Hamas, which they describe as a genocide against the Palestinians.

In California on Tuesday, about 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators blocked the entrances to the University of California, Santa Cruz campus, keeping cars from coming and going for several hours.

The action came as graduate student workers continued a strike that began last week over the university system's treatment of pro-Palestinian protesters during weeks of campus protests this month.

The student workers say the university violated students' free speech rights and they are demanding amnesty for anyone facing discipline for protesting. The demonstrators blocking campus access Tuesday appeared to include a mix of striking workers and others.

Protesters said Tuesday's blockage was meant to draw attention to an Israeli strike in the southern Gaza city of Rafah that local officials said killed at least 45 people.

By late afternoon in Detroit, Wayne State said students declined to meet Tuesday with President Kimberly Andrews Espy and two more officials. It was the second offer this week.

A video from Monday showed Vice President Patrick Lindsey asking that the camp be disbanded in exchange for a meeting. One protester is heard calling the offer a "joke."

Lindsey explained that Wayne State's investment policy would be publicly discussed at a June 26 meeting of the university's governing board.

The University of Michigan on May 21 broke up a similar encampment after 30 days.

Algeria proposes Security Council resolution demanding Israel halt offensive in Rafah

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Algeria is circulating a proposed U.N. Security Council resolution that would demand an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and order Israel to halt its military offensive in the southern city of Rafah immediately.

The draft resolution, obtained Wednesday evening by The Associated Press, also demands that the cease-fire be respected by all parties. It also calls for the immediate release of all hostages taken during Hamas' attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7.

Some diplomats said they hoped for a quick vote, even as early as Wednesday.

"It is our hope that it can be done as quickly as possible because life is in the balance," Chinese Ambassador Fu Cong told reporters.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said: "We're waiting to see it and then we'll react to it."

The United States has vetoed multiple resolutions demanding a cease-fire in Gaza.

The draft demands compliance with previous Security Council resolutions that call for the opening of all border crossings and humanitarian access to Gaza's 2.3 million people who desperately need food and other aid.

The proposed resolution says that "the catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip constitutes a threat to regional and international peace and security." It expresses grave concern at "famine spreading throughout the Gaza Strip" and the suffering of Palestinians who took refuge in Rafah.

The resolution would demand that Israel "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in Rafah."

The draft condemns what it calls "the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, including women and children, and civilian infrastructure" and reiterates the council's demand for all parties to comply with international law requiring the protection of civilians.

Algeria's U.N. ambassador, Amar Bendjama, who is also the Arab representative on the Security Council, told reporters after emergency closed council consultations Tuesday that he would be sending the draft resolution to the 15-member council later in the evening.

Algeria called the emergency council meeting as Israel pushed ahead with its military operation in Rafah, where over a million Palestinians had sought refuge. It followed Sunday night's Israeli airstrikes that triggered a fire engulfing tents in a camp for displaced Palestinians west of Rafah, killing 45 people and injured over 100 others.

US-built pier will be removed from Gaza coast and repaired after damage from rough seas

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S.-built temporary pier that has been taking humanitarian aid to starving Palestinians for less than two weeks will be removed from the coast of Gaza to be repaired after getting damaged in rough seas and weather, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

Over the next two days, the pier will be pulled from the beach and sent to the southern Israeli city of Ashdod, where U.S. Central Command will repair it, Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh told reporters. She said the fixes will take "at least over a week" and then the pier will need to be anchored back into the beach in Gaza.

"From when it was operational, it was working, and we just had sort of an unfortunate confluence of weather storms that made it inoperable for a bit," Singh said. "Hopefully just a little over a week, we should be back up and running."

The pier, used to carry in humanitarian aid arriving by sea, is one of the few ways that free food and other supplies are getting to Palestinians who the U.N. says are on the brink of famine amid the nearly 8-month-old war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

The two main crossings in southern Gaza, Rafah from Egypt and Kerem Shalom from Israel, are either not operating or are largely inaccessible for the U.N. because of fighting nearby as Israel pushes into Rafah. The pier and two crossings from Israel in northern Gaza are where most of the incoming humanitarian aid has entered in the past three weeks.

The setback is the latest for the \$320 million pier, which only began operations in the past two weeks and has already had three U.S. service members injured and had four vessels beached due to heavy seas. Two of the service members received minor injuries but the third is still in critical condition, Singh said.

Deliveries also were halted for two days last week after crowds rushed aid trucks coming from the pier and one Palestinian man was shot dead.

The pier was fully functional as late as Saturday when heavy seas unmoored four of the Army boats that were being used to ferry pallets of aid from commercial vessels to the pier. The system is anchored into the beach in Gaza and provided a long causeway for trucks to drive that aid onto the shore.

Two of the vessels got stuck on the coast of Israel. One has already been recovered and the other will

be in the next 24 hours with the help of the Israeli military, Singh said. The other two boats were stranded on the beach in Gaza and were expected to be recovered in the next two days, she said.

The suspension of the pier comes after the new sea route had begun to pick up steam, with more than 1,000 metric tons of food aid delivered.

U.S. officials have repeatedly emphasized that the pier cannot provide the amount of aid that starving Gazans need and said that more checkpoints for humanitarian trucks need to be opened. At maximum capacity, the pier would bring in enough food for 500,000 of Gaza's people, and U.S. officials have stressed the need for open land crossings for the remaining 1.8 million.

The U.S. also has planned to continue to provide airdrops of food, which likewise cannot meet all the needs.

A deepening Israeli offensive in the southern city of Rafah has made it impossible for aid shipments to get through the crossing there, which is a key source for fuel and food coming into Gaza. Israel says it is bringing aid in through another border crossing, Kerem Shalom, but humanitarian organizations say Israeli military operations make it difficult for them to retrieve the aid there for distribution.

Farmers must kill 4.2 million chickens after bird flu hits Iowa egg farm

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — More than 4 million chickens in Iowa will have to be killed after a case of the highly pathogenic bird flu was detected at a large egg farm, the state announced Tuesday.

Crews are in the process of killing 4.2 million chickens after the disease was found at a farm in Sioux County, Iowa, making it the latest in a yearslong outbreak that now is affecting dairy cattle as well. Last week, the virus was confirmed at an egg farm west of Minneapolis, Minnesota, leading to the slaughter of nearly 1.4 million chickens.

Overall, 92.34 million birds have been killed since the outbreak began in 2022, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Although bird flu has become somewhat common among poultry, its spread to cattle has added to worries about the disease. In May, a second dairy farmworker was diagnosed with bird flu, and the virus was detected in both beef and milk. It has been confirmed on dairy cattle farms in nine states.

Health and agriculture officials have said the risk to the public remains low. The U.S. Department of Agriculture said the meat from a single sickened dairy cow was not allowed to enter the nation's food supply and beef remains safe to eat.

Workers exposed to infected animals are at a higher risk. The only three human cases confirmed in the United States included two dairy workers and one man working to slaughter infected birds on a poultry farm.

US condemns loss of life, but says no policy changes after civilian deaths in Israeli strike

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Tuesday condemned the loss of life of dozens of civilians as a result of an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, but said it is not planning any policy changes as a result of the Israeli actions.

National security spokesman John Kirby told reporters that Israel had not violated President Joe Biden's "red line" for withholding future offensive arms transfers because it has not, and it appears to the U.S. that it will not, launch a full-scale ground invasion into the city in southern Gaza.

"Everything that we can see tells us that they are not moving into a major ground operation in population centers in the center of Rafah," Kirby said. Most of those killed in the Sunday strike were sheltering in tents.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said a "tragic mishap" was made in carrying out the airstrike, adding to the surging international criticism Israel has faced over its war with Hamas, with even its closest allies expressing outrage at civilian deaths.

Biden and his top advisers have repeatedly warned the Israelis against carrying out widescale operations

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 60 of 74

in Rafah without a plan to secure the safety of innocent civilians. But the administration made clear that it would not move — at least not immediately — to curtail any support for Israel as a result of the strike.

But other global leaders were sharper in their condemnation.

President Emmanuel Macron used social media to say that “these operations must stop.” The Foreign Ministry of Germany called the images of the strike “unbearable” and said the “civilian population must finally be better protected.” And Qatar, a key mediator in attempts to secure a cease-fire and the release of hostages held by Hamas, said the Rafah strike could “complicate” talks.

The incident came two days after the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to end its military offensive in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza’s 2.3 million people had sought shelter before Israel’s incursion earlier this month. Tens of thousands of people remain in the area, while many others have fled.

Kirby said Biden’s “not making decisions based on popularity or public opinion polls here or around the world,” but acknowledged it wasn’t in the U.S. interest or “our Israeli partner’s interest for them to become further isolated” on the world stage.

He called the loss of life “heartbreaking” and “horrific,” and said “we certainly condemn the loss of life here.” He added that the U.S. was monitoring the results of an Israeli investigation into the strike, which suggested the civilian deaths were the result of a secondary explosion after a successful strike on two Hamas operatives.

“We understand that this strike did kill two senior Hamas heads who are directly responsible for attacks,” Kirby said. “We’ve also said many times Israel must take every precaution possible to do more to protect innocent life.”

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters that Israel’s weeks-old offensive in Rafah was still on a “far different” scale than the assaults Israeli forces waged on other cities in Gaza earlier in the seven-month war against Hamas. The U.S. had urged Israel not to replicate those earlier attacks in Rafah, given the vulnerable civilians crowded there.

Miller said he had no direct knowledge of reported accounts from witnesses on the ground Tuesday that Israeli tanks had entered the center of Gaza, and noted Israel had denied responsibility for a new Israeli strike outside of Rafah on Tuesday that Gaza health officials said killed more than 20 people.

Asked whether the strike would result in any U.S. policy changes, Kirby said, “I have no policy changes to speak to.”

Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh said she did not know whether it was a U.S.-provided weapon that was used in the deadly Sunday strike that killed the dozens of civilians at a displacement camp. “I do not know what type of ammunition was used in that airstrike,” Singh said. “I have to refer you to the Israelis to speak to that.”

The Israelis have said they used small-diameter precision munitions in the attack and have suggested that a secondary explosion caused the number of civilian deaths. Singh said the U.S. has not paused shipments to Israel in the wake of the strike. “Security assistance continues to flow,” Singh said.

Still, Kirby said the incident reflected the challenge of conducting military operations in densely populated areas like Rafah, a concern that Biden and his top advisers have repeatedly raised with the Israelis.

“There’s going to be an investigation. They’ve already said it was a tragic mistake,” he added. “They’re looking into it. They have been able to investigate themselves and hold people accountable in the past. We’ll see what they do here.”

Albert Ruddy, Oscar-winning producer of ‘The Godfather’ and ‘Million Dollar Baby,’ dies at 94

BY HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Albert S. Ruddy, a colorful, Canadian-born producer and writer who won Oscars for “The Godfather” and “Million Dollar Baby,” developed the raucous prison-sports comedy “The Longest Yard” and helped create the hit sitcom “Hogan’s Heroes,” has died at age 94.

Ruddy died “peacefully” Saturday at the UCLA Medical Center, according to a spokesperson, who added

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 61 of 74

that among his final words were, "The game is over, but we won the game."

Tall and muscular, with a raspy voice and a city kid's swagger, Ruddy produced more than 30 movies and was on hand for the very top and very bottom, from the "Godfather" and "Million Dollar Baby" to "Cannonball Run II" and "Megaforce," nominees for Golden Raspberry awards for worst movie of the year.

Otherwise, he had a mix of successes such as "The Longest Yard," which he produced and created the story for, and such flops as the Arnold Schwarzenegger thriller "Sabotage." He worked often with Burt Reynolds, starting with "The Longest Yard" and continuing with two "Cannonball Run" comedies and "Cloud Nine." Besides "Hogan's Heroes," his television credits include the movies "Married to a Stranger" and "Running Mates."

Nothing looks better on your resume than "The Godfather," but producing it endangered Ruddy's job, reputation and his very life. Frank Sinatra and other Italian Americans were infuriated by the project, which they feared would harden stereotypes of Italians as criminals, and real-life mobsters let Ruddy know he was being watched. One night he heard gunfire outside his home and the sound of his car's windows being shot out.

On his dashboard was a warning that he should close the production, immediately.

Ruddy saved himself, and the film, through diplomacy; he met with crime boss Joseph Colombo and a couple of henchmen to discuss the script.

"Joe sits opposite me, one guy's on the couch, and one guy's sitting in the window," Ruddy told Vanity Fair in 2009. "He puts on his little Ben Franklin glasses, looks at it (the script) for about two minutes. What does this mean "fade in?" he asked."

Ruddy agreed to remove a single, gratuitous mention of the word "mafia" and to make a donation to the Italian American Civil Rights League. Colombo was so pleased that he urged Ruddy to appear with him at a press conference announcing his approval of the movie, a gathering that led to Ruddy's being photographed alongside members of organized crime.

With the stock of parent company Gulf & Western dropping fast, Paramount fired Ruddy, only to have director Francis Coppola object and get him rehired. In the end, mobsters were cast as extras and openly consulted with cast members. Ruddy himself made a cameo as a Hollywood studio guard.

"It was like one happy family," Ruddy told Vanity Fair. "All these guys loved the underworld characters, and obviously the underworld guys loved Hollywood."

With a cast including Marlon Brando, Al Pacino and Robert Duvall, "The Godfather" was a critical and commercial sensation and remains among the most beloved and quoted movies in history. When Ruddy was named winner of the best picture Oscar at the 1973 ceremony, the presenter was Clint Eastwood, with whom he would produce "Million Dollar Baby," the best picture winner in 2005. Upon the 50th anniversary of "The Godfather," in 2022, Ruddy himself became a character. Miles Teller played him in "The Offer," a Paramount+ miniseries about the making of the movie, based on Ruddy's experiences.

"Al Ruddy was absolutely beautiful to me the whole time on 'The Godfather'; even when they didn't want me, he wanted me," Pacino said in a statement. "He gave me the gift of encouragement when I needed it most and I'll never forget it."

Ruddy was married to Wanda McDaniel, a sales executive and liaison for Giorgio Armani who helped make the brand omnipresent in Hollywood, whether in movies or at promotional events. They had two children.

Born in Montreal in 1930, Albert Stotland Ruddy moved to the U.S. as a child and was raised in New York City. After graduating from the University of Southern California, he was working as an architect when he met TV actor Bernard Fein in the early 1960s. Ruddy had tired of his career, and he and Fein decided to develop a TV series, even though neither had done any writing.

Their original idea was a comedy set in an American prison, but they soon changed their minds.

"We read in the paper that ... (a) network was doing a sitcom set in an Italian prisoner of war camp and we thought, 'Perfect,'" Ruddy later explained. "We rewrote our script and set it in a German POW camp in about two days."

Starring Bob Crane as the wily Col. Hogan, "Hogan's Heroes" ran from 1965-71 on CBS but was criticized for trivializing World War II and turning the Nazis into lovable cartoons. Ruddy remembered network head

William Paley calling the show's concept "reprehensible," but softening after Ruddy "literally acted out an episode," complete with barking dogs and other sound effects.

While Fein continued with "Hogan's Heroes," Ruddy turned to film, overseeing the low-budget "Wild Seed" for Brando's production company. His reputation for managing costs proved most useful when Paramount Pictures head Robert Evans acquired rights to Mario Puzo's bestselling novel "The Godfather" and sought a producer for what was supposed to be a minor, profit-taking gangster film.

"I got a call on a Sunday. 'Do you want to do The Godfather?'" Ruddy told Vanity Fair. "I thought they were kidding me, right? I said, 'Yes, of course, I love that book' — which I had never read."

Democrats plan to nominate Biden by virtual roll call to meet Ohio ballot deadline

By SEUNG MIN KIM and BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will be formally nominated as the Democratic presidential nominee through a virtual roll call ahead of the party's official convention in Chicago in August — a maneuver that will allow Biden to appear on the November ballot in Ohio.

The Democratic National Convention, where the president would otherwise be formally nominated, comes after Ohio's ballot deadline of Aug. 7. The party's convention is scheduled for Aug. 19-22.

Ohio lawmakers have moved the deadline in the past for candidates of both parties, although they had not done so yet for Biden this year and were called to a rare special session by Gov. Mike DeWine to address the issue.

The virtual proceedings will allow Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris to get the party's formal nod and will be very similar to the process used in 2020, when the convention went virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chicago, Democrats will still hold a state-by-state roll call that is a fixture of nominating conventions, according to a Democratic National Committee official, although it would largely be ceremonial and it's unclear how that in-person roll call would commence.

The DNC on Tuesday did not say when the virtual roll call will take place, but it is expected in the weeks after the committee's rules and bylaws committee votes to propose changes to the roll call process. That committee vote is scheduled for June 4.

"Joe Biden will be on the ballot in Ohio and all 50 states, and Ohio Republicans agree. But when the time has come for action, they have failed to act every time, so Democrats will land this plane on our own," Jaime Harrison, the Democratic National Committee chairman, said in a statement. "Through a virtual roll call, we will ensure that Republicans can't chip away at our democracy through incompetence or partisan tricks and that Ohioans can exercise their right to vote for the presidential candidate of their choice."

Ohio lawmakers, meanwhile, were gathering Tuesday for the special session.

Negotiations between the House and Senate on a solution to Biden's ballot conundrum began Friday. State Rep. Bill Seitz told reporters during a conference call that he and state Sen. Rob McColley, both Republicans, are leading the talks, with no resolution announced as of Tuesday.

Since Ohio changed its certification deadline from 60 to 90 days ahead of its general election, state lawmakers have had to adjust the requirement twice, in 2012 and 2020, to accommodate candidates of both leading parties. Each change was only temporary.

And the ability of voters to speak directly through the ballot initiative process on questions such as abortion has made reaching a solution more difficult in both chambers, where the GOP has lopsided majorities.

The Senate sent its version of the ballot fix to the House after attaching a prohibition on foreign nationals donating to Ohio ballot campaigns, stopping it in its tracks.

DeWine urged legislators to pass the combination measure during the special session, but Democrats have balked, saying the proposal goes beyond the foreign nationals ban to add requirements intended to make it more difficult to mount future ballot campaigns in the state.

That's after Ohio voters overwhelmingly approved three ballot measures last year, including a constitutional amendment protecting access to abortions that Republicans opposed and an initiated statute

legalizing adult-use marijuana.

A "clean" House bill containing only the adjustment to Ohio's ballot deadline may also be considered.

Due to differing interpretations of the proclamation DeWine issued Thursday, the Ohio Senate scheduled a single day of activity for Tuesday, while the Ohio House plans to begin with two days of committee hearings before taking its vote Thursday.

A Senate spokesman has said it's possible the upper chamber can convene Tuesday and then recess to wait for the House.

Pope apologizes after being quoted using vulgar term about gay men in talk about ban on gay priests

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis apologized Tuesday after he was quoted using a vulgar and derogatory term about gay men to reaffirm the Catholic Church's ban on gay priests.

The ruckus that ensued underscored how the church's official teaching about homosexuality often bumps up against the unacknowledged reality that there are plenty of gay men in the priesthood, and plenty of LGBTQ+ Catholics who want to be fully part of the life and sacraments of the church.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni issued a statement acknowledging the media storm that erupted about Francis' comments, which were delivered behind closed doors to Italian bishops on May 20.

Italian media on Monday had quoted unnamed Italian bishops in reporting that Francis jokingly used the term "faggotness" while speaking in Italian during the encounter. He had used the term in reaffirming the Vatican's ban on allowing gay men to enter seminaries and be ordained priests.

Bruni said Francis was aware of the reports and recalled that the Argentine pope, who has made outreach to LGBTQ+ Catholics a hallmark of his papacy, has long insisted there was "room for everyone" in the Catholic Church.

"The pope never intended to offend or express himself in homophobic terms, and he extends his apologies to those who were offended by the use of a term that was reported by others," Bruni said.

With the statement, Bruni carefully avoided an outright confirmation that the pope had indeed used the term, in keeping with the Vatican's tradition of not revealing what the pope says behind closed doors. But Bruni also didn't deny that Francis had said it.

And for those who have long advocated for greater inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ+ Catholics, the issue was bigger than the word itself.

"More than the offensive slur uttered by the pope, what is damaging is the institutional church's insistence on 'banning' gay men from the priesthood as if we all do not know (and minister alongside) many, many gifted, celibate, gay priests," noted Natalia Imperatori-Lee, chair of the religious studies department at Manhattan College.

"The LGBTQ community seems to be a constant target of offhand, off the cuff 'mistakes' from people in the Vatican, including the pope, who should know better," she added.

Francis was addressing an assembly of the Italian bishops conference, which recently approved a new document outlining training for Italian seminarians. The document, which hasn't been published pending review by the Holy See, reportedly sought to open some wiggle room in the Vatican's absolute ban on gay priests by introducing the issue of celibacy as the primary requirement for priests, gay or straight.

The Vatican ban was articulated in a 2005 document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, and later repeated in a subsequent document in 2016, which said the church cannot admit to seminaries or ordain men who "practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called gay culture."

The position has long been criticized as homophobic and hypocritical for an institution that certainly counts gay priests in its ranks. The late psychotherapist Richard Sipe, a onetime Benedictine monk who taught in U.S. seminaries, estimated in the early 2000s that as many as 30% of the U.S. clergy was homosexually oriented.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 64 of 74

The late Rev. Donald Cozzens, a seminary rector, said the percentage was even higher, and asserted in his book "The Changing Face of The Priesthood" that the U.S. priesthood was increasingly becoming a gay profession since so many heterosexual men had left the priesthood to marry and have families.

Priests in the Latin rite Catholic Church cannot marry, while those in eastern rite churches may. Church teaching holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect but that homosexual activity is "intrinsically disordered."

Francis strongly reaffirmed the Vatican ban on gay priests in his May 20 meeting with the Italian bishops, joking that "there is already an air of faggotness" in seminaries, the Italian media reported, after initial reporting from gossip site Dagospia.

Italian is not Francis' mother tongue language, and the Argentine pope has made linguistic gaffes in the past that raised eyebrows. The 87-year-old Argentine pope often speaks informally, jokes using slang and even curses in private.

He has been known for his outreach to LGBTQ+ Catholics, however, starting from his famous "Who am I to judge" comment in 2013 about a priest who purportedly had a gay lover in his past. He has ministered to transgender Catholics, allowed priests to bless same-sex couples and called for an end to anti-gay legislation, saying in a 2023 interview with The Associated Press that "Being homosexual is not a crime."

However, he has occasionally offended LGBTQ+ people and their advocates, including in that same interview where he implied that while homosexuality wasn't a crime, it was a sin. He later clarified that he was referring to sexual activity, and that any sex outside marriage between a man and a woman was sinful in the eyes of the church.

And most recently, he signed off on a Vatican document asserting that gender-affirming surgery was a grave violation of human dignity.

New Ways Ministry, which advocates for LGBTQ+ Catholics, welcomed Francis' apology Tuesday and said it confirmed that the "use of the slur was a careless colloquialism." But the group's director Francis DeBernardo questioned the underlying content of the pope's comments and the overall ban on gays in the priesthood.

"Without a clarification, his words will be interpreted as a blanket ban on accepting any gay man to a seminary," DeBernardo said in a release, asking for a clearer statement on Francis' views about gay priests "so many of whom faithfully serve the people of God each day."

Andrea Rubera, a spokesperson for Paths of Hope, an Italian association of LGBTQ+ Christians, said he was incredulous when he first read about the pope's comments, and then sad when no denial came from the Vatican. It showed, he said, that the pope and the Vatican still have a "limited view" of the reality of LGBTQ+ people.

"We hope, once again, that the time will come to undertake a discussion in the church toward a deepening of the LGBT issue, especially from the experience of the people themselves," he said.

OpenAI forms safety committee as it starts training latest artificial intelligence model

Associated Press undefined

OpenAI says it's setting up a safety and security committee and has begun training a new AI model to supplant the GPT-4 system that underpins its ChatGPT chatbot.

The San Francisco startup said in a blog post Tuesday that the committee will advise the full board on "critical safety and security decisions" for its projects and operations.

The safety committee arrives as debate swirls around AI safety at the company, which was thrust into the spotlight after a researcher, Jan Leike, resigned and leveled criticism at OpenAI for letting safety "take a backseat to shiny products." OpenAI co-founder and chief scientist Ilya Sutskever also resigned, and the company disbanded the "superalignment" team focused on AI risks that they jointly led.

Leike said Tuesday he's joining rival AI company Anthropic, founded by ex-OpenAI leaders, to "continue the superalignment mission" there.

OpenAI said it has "recently begun training its next frontier model" and its AI models lead the industry on capability and safety, though it made no mention of the controversy. "We welcome a robust debate at this important moment," the company said.

AI models are prediction systems that are trained on vast datasets to generate on-demand text, images, video and human-like conversation. Frontier models are the most powerful, cutting edge AI systems.

The safety committee is filled with company insiders, including OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Chairman Bret Taylor, and four OpenAI technical and policy experts. It also includes board members Adam D'Angelo, who's the CEO of Quora, and Nicole Seligman, a former Sony general counsel.

The committee's first job will be to evaluate and further develop OpenAI's processes and safeguards and make its recommendations to the board in 90 days. The company said it will then publicly release the recommendations it's adopting "in a manner that is consistent with safety and security."

Judge denies request to restrict Trump statements about law enforcement in classified records case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The judge overseeing Donald Trump's classified documents case in Florida on Tuesday denied prosecutors' request to bar the former president from making public statements that could endanger law enforcement agents participating in the prosecution.

Prosecutors had told U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon that the restriction was necessary to protect law enforcement from potential threats and harassment after the presumptive Republican presidential nominee baselessly claimed that the Biden administration wanted to kill him during a search of his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, nearly two years ago.

Cannon chided prosecutors in her order denying their request, saying they didn't give defense lawyers adequate time to discuss the matter before it was filed Friday evening. The judge warned prosecutors that failing to comply with court requirements in the future may lead to sanctions. She denied the request without prejudice, meaning prosecutors could file it again.

A spokesperson for special counsel Jack Smith's team declined to comment Tuesday.

The judge's decision came as Trump's lawyers were delivering their closing argument at trial in another criminal case he's facing in New York stemming from a hush money payment to a porn actor during the 2016 presidential campaign.

It's the latest example of bitterness between Cannon, who was nominated to the bench by Trump, and prosecutors who have accused the former president of illegally hoarding at his Mar-a-Lago estate classified documents that he took with him after he left the White House in 2021 and then obstructing the FBI's efforts to get them back. Trump has pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing.

Cannon has chided prosecutors both in hearings and in court papers over a number of matters, including telling Smith's team during one hearing that it was "wasting the court's time." Prosecutors have also signaled mounting frustration with Cannon's rulings, saying in one recent court filing that a request from the judge was based on a "fundamentally flawed legal premise."

Prosecutors' request followed a distorted claim by Trump last week that the FBI agents who searched his Mar-a-Lago estate in August 2022 were "authorized to shoot me" and were "locked & loaded ready to take me out & put my family in danger."

Trump was referring to the disclosure in a court document that the FBI, during the search followed a standard use-of-force policy that prohibits the use of deadly force except when the officer conducting the search has a reasonable belief that the "subject of such force poses an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to the officer or to another person."

The Justice Department policy is routine and meant to limit, rather than encourage, the use of force during searches. Prosecutors noted that the search of the Florida property was intentionally conducted when Trump and his family were out of state and was coordinated in advance with the U.S. Secret Service. No force was used.

Prosecutors said in court papers late Friday that Trump's false suggestion that federal agents "were complicit in a plot to assassinate him" exposes law enforcement officers "to the risk of threats, violence, and harassment." They had urged the judge to bar Trump from making any comments that "pose a significant, imminent, and foreseeable danger to law enforcement agents" participating in the case.

Defense attorneys in a court filing late Monday called prosecutors' proposed restriction on Trump's speech "unconstitutional" and noted that the identities of law enforcement officers in the case are subject to a protective order preventing their public release. Defense attorneys said they asked Smith's team on Friday if the two sides could meet on Monday to give the defense time to discuss the request with Trump before prosecutors filed it.

But prosecutor David Harbach said the situation needed to be addressed urgently, saying in an email to the defense that Trump created a situation that "necessitated a prompt request for relief that could not wait the weekend to file." Prosecutors told the judge in their filing late Friday while Trump's lawyers didn't believe there is any "imminent danger," Trump had continued that day to make false statements "smearing and endangering the agents who executed the search."

A spokesperson for Trump's campaign, Steven Cheung, said in a statement Tuesday that "the entire documents case was a political sham from the very beginning and it should be thrown out entirely."

It's among four criminal cases Trump is confronting as he seeks to reclaim the White House, but outside of the ongoing New York hush money prosecution, it's unclear that any of the other three will reach trial before the November election.

Trump has already had restrictions placed on his speech in two of the other cases over incendiary comments officials say threaten the integrity of the prosecutions.

In the New York case, Trump has been fined and threatened with jail time for repeatedly violating a gag order that bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to the matter.

He's also subject to a gag order in his federal criminal election interference case in Washington. That order limits what he can say about witnesses, lawyers in the case and court staff, though an appeals court freed him to speak about special counsel Smith, who brought the case.

Voter outreach groups targeted by new laws in several GOP-led states are struggling to do their work

By AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — During the presidential election four years ago, the Equal Ground Education Fund hired over 100 people to go door-to-door and attend festivals, college homecomings and other events to help register voters across Florida. Their efforts for this year's elections look much different.

A state law passed last year forced them to stop in-person voter registration, cut staff and led to a significant drop in funding. Organizers aren't sure how robust their operations will be in the fall.

Genesis Robinson, the group's interim executive director, said the law has had a "tremendous impact" on its ability to host events and get into communities to engage directly with potential voters.

"Prior to all of these changes, we were able to operate in a space where we were taking action and prepare our communities and make sure they were registered to vote — and help if they weren't," he said.

Florida is one of several states, including Kansas, Missouri and Texas, where Republicans have enacted voting restrictions since 2021 that created or enhanced criminal penalties and fines for those who assist voters. The laws have forced some voter outreach groups to cease operations, while others have greatly altered or reduced their activities.

The Florida law, signed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis last May, imposed a \$50,000 fine on third-party voter registration organizations if the staff or volunteers who handle or collect the forms have been convicted of a felony or are not U.S. citizens. It also raised the fines the groups could face, from \$1,000 to \$250,000, and reduced the amount of time they are able to return registration applications from 14 days to 10 days.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 67 of 74

A federal judge blocked portions of the law earlier this month, including the one targeting felons and those who are not citizens. Even so, the law had a direct effect on the operations of Equal Ground and other voter advocacy organizations in the state before the ruling.

The League of Women Voters in Florida, one of the plaintiffs, shifted away from in-person voter registration to digital outreach. Cecile Scoon, the league's co-president, said the law stripped the personal connection between its workers and communities. Digital tools aren't easy to use when registering voters and can be expensive, she said.

These organizations are needed because local election officials don't always provide adequate support and information, said Derby Johnson, a voter in Ormond Beach who attended a recent community event in Daytona Beach organized by Equal Ground. He said it appeared the Florida Legislature was just trying to make it harder for certain communities to register and cast ballots.

"There are parties actively working to suppress the vote, particularly in Black and brown communities, and these groups help educate and register voters to mitigate that," she said.

MOVE Texas, a voting rights group that focuses on voters who are 30 or younger, adjusted to that state's 2021 election overhaul with additional training for their staff and volunteers. Among the provisions drawing concern was one that increased criminal penalties for anyone who receives compensation for assisting a voter, which especially affected the ability to recruit high school and college students for voter registration drives.

"The law contributed to this culture of fear in our elections and being a person who registers voters," said Stephanie Gomez, the group's political director.

Republicans in Kansas overrode a veto by Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly to pass a bill that made it a felony if anyone registering voters impersonated or was assumed to impersonate an election official.

That forced Loud Light Kansas, a voter outreach group that focuses on minority communities, to stop its registration efforts. Would-be voters typically perceived their staff and volunteers as election workers even when told otherwise, said Anita Alexander, the organization's vice president.

"We're trying to engage impacted people, but we weren't willing to risk anyone getting charged by doing voter engagement work," she said.

Loud Light and other local voter registration groups sued the Legislature. The Democratic governor said there has been no evidence in the state of widespread voter fraud or instances of individuals impersonating election officials.

In Missouri, the state chapter of the League of Women Voters and the Missouri State Conference of the NAACP sued after the state enacted wide-ranging election legislation in 2022.

Among other things, the new law bans compensation for those who register voters and requires that anyone who helps more than 10 people register must also register with the secretary of state's office and be a voter themselves. Violators can face criminal penalties.

The completed secretary of state's forms are public, which presents a privacy concern for many people who might otherwise want to help with voter registration efforts, said Denise Lieberman, director and general counsel of the Missouri Voter Protection Coalition.

"Historically, when those membership lists have been obtained, they've been used to intimidate. So, there's a lot of trepidation, especially in groups that are targeting low-income or communities of color," she said. "If you just want to volunteer for one hour on a Saturday morning to help out on your college campus or on an Earth Day or anything, you have to go through this whole process."

The Missouri law is on hold while the legal challenge plays out, with a trial set for August.

Voting rights experts expect to see continued attempts to restrict voting and the activities of voter outreach groups in Republican-controlled states, said Megan Bellamy, vice president of law and policy at the Voting Rights Lab.

"The effort to target third-party voter registration groups is just, unfortunately, one of many policy areas that state legislatures are moving to address," she said.

A look at Pope Francis' comments about LGBTQ+ people

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis' apology Tuesday for using a vulgar term to refer to gay men was the latest comment to make headlines about the Catholic Church's teachings on homosexuality.

Francis has made a hallmark of reaching out to LGBTQ+ Catholics, but his 11-year pontificate has also seen plenty of problems arise over his informal way of speaking and his outreach, evidence of how fraught the issue is for the church.

Officially, the Catholic Church teaches that homosexual people must be treated with dignity and respect, but that homosexual activity is "intrinsically disordered." It also says that men who "practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called gay culture" cannot be ordained.

Here is a look at some of Francis' most noteworthy comments.

— July 30, 2013. During his first press conference, says "Who am I to judge?" when asked about a purportedly gay priest, signalling a more welcoming approach to LGBTQ+ Catholics.

— May 21, 2018: Tells a gay man "God made you like this and he loves you."

— Aug. 28, 2018: Vatican deletes from the official, online transcript of an in-flight press conference Francis' reference that young gay children might seek "psychiatric help."

— Nov. 2, 2020: Vatican clarifies pope's endorsement of legal protections for same-sex couples.

— Jan. 24, 2023: Declares in an Associated Press interview that "Being homosexual is not a crime."

— Jan. 28, 2023: Clarifies his comments to AP which implied that while homosexual activity was not a crime it is a sin in the eyes of the church. "When I said it is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin."

— Aug. 24, 2023: During World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, leads a crowd of a half-million young people chanting "todos, todos, todos" (everyone, everyone, everyone) to emphasize that all are welcome in the Catholic Church.

— Oct. 21, 2023: Signs doctrine office document allowing transgender people to be baptized and serve as godparents.

— Dec. 19, 2023: Approves blessings for same-sex couples provided they don't resemble marriage, sparking fierce opposition from conservative bishops in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

— March 25, 2024: Approves doctrinal document declaring gender-affirming surgery as a grave violation of human dignity, on par with abortion and euthanasia as practice that rejects God's plan for life.

— May 20, 2024: Francis reportedly says "there is already an air of faggotness" in seminaries, in closed-door comments to Italian bishops in reaffirming the church's ban on gay priests. He later apologized for causing offense.

Recovery of Brazil's Spix's macaw, popularized in animated 'Rio' films, threatened by climate change

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

CURACA, Brazil (AP) — All Spix's macaws are majestically blue in the blazing sun of Brazil's Northeast, but each bird is distinct to Candice and Cromwell Purchase. As the parrots soar squawking past their home, the couple can readily identify bird No. 17 by its smooth feathers and can tell No. 16 from No. 22, which has two beads attached to its radio collar.

This familiarity offers a glimpse of the South African couple's commitment to saving one of the world's most critically endangered species. The parrot — endemic to a small fraction of the Sao Francisco River basin and already rare in the 19th century — was declared extinct in the wild in 2000, when a lonely surviving male disappeared following decades of poaching and habitat destruction from livestock overgrazing. The few remaining birds were scattered in private collections around the world.

For the Spix's macaws, immortalized in the popular animated "Rio" films, the road back from the edge of extinction has been a long, winding and bumpy one.

Threats that had devastated the Spix's macaws still loom, and the birds now face another menace: climate change. The species' original territory overlaps what has recently been officially designated Brazil's

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 69 of 74

first arid climate region.

The drier conditions worry Cromwell Purchase because of their potential impact on habitat for the few surviving Spix's macaws.

"A dry area only gets rain for a very short period of the year. A drought in that period might go an entire year before you're going to get your next rain," said Purchase, a tall and slim 46-year-old. "The animals are adapted to harsh environments, but they are on the edge. Any small increment of change will decimate populations."

In November, two federal research institutes released a study of rainfall water loss in plants and soil between 1960 and 2020. It showed that northern Bahia state, including Curaca, where the Spix's macaws are trying to survive, is now consistent with a desert area. It also identified the expansion of semi-arid climate in the Northeast, where nearly 55 million people live.

"If the planet is warmer, there will be much greater evaporation. So, the water leaves the environment and generates aridity," the director of Brazil's anti-desertification efforts, Alexandre Pires, told The Associated Press.

Since 2005, semi-arid area in Brazil has expanded by 300,00 square kilometers (116,000 square miles) and is now roughly the size of three Californias. The government is set to announce measures to avoid desertification by promoting better management of soil and other natural resources in the region.

In the face of the changing climate and numerous challenges, at every turn the Purchases have dedicated the better part of their adult lives to breeding Spix's macaws and reintroducing them into nature. The journey first took the biologists to work with a private collection on an oasis in Qatar. When the birds were transferred to a nonprofit organization, the couple moved with them to Germany.

Over the past four years, their efforts have been centered in the rural area of Curaca, a nondescript town of 34,000 people.

Under an agreement between the Brazilian government and the German nonprofit Association for the Conservation of Threatened Parrots, 52 Spix's macaws were sent in 2020 to Brazil on two charter flights. Federal police escorted them to breeding and reintroduction facilities accessible by a 1-hour drive on a rough dirt road, where the Purchases live and work for the nonprofit.

Two years later, 20 Spix's macaws were released in the wild, along with 15 wild-sourced Blue-Winged macaws, whose purpose was to "teach" them how to fly, avoid risks and forage. Last year, two Spix's macaw chicks were born in freedom — the first ones in decades— but they didn't survive.

All released birds were equipped with radio collars designed to resist macaws' strong bills. Each collar has an antenna. The Purchases and their assistant check the birds' locations three times a day.

Half of the Spix's macaws have died, mostly from predation, or disappeared. Now, the remaining ones live within 5 kilometers (3 miles) of the facilities, a compound that includes the couple's house and a U-shaped flight-and-release cage that's 47 meters (51 yards) long.

In March, three more of the light pale blue chicks were born in the wild. Not only did they survive, but one of them also flew for the first time last week, a major breakthrough.

"This event is so important as it shows how comfortable the parents are in their wild environment," Candice Purchase said in a text message. "A remarkable achievement for the birds and an incredible success for the release."

To mitigate the impacts of desertification, the German parrot nonprofit partnered with a private company, Blue Sky Caatinga, to promote reforestation of 24,000 hectares (59,300 acres) in the territory of Spix's macaw. This initiative involves engaging small farmers who heavily depend on goat raising.

Unlike depictions in the animated films "Rio" and "Rio 2," which brought attention to the Spix's macaw extinction threat, the parrot's natural habitat is far from Brazil's most famous city, Rio de Janeiro, and the Amazon rainforest. It lives among the sparse, thorny, low caatinga vegetation that often loses greenery during dry periods. And the bird uses the Caraibeira, a towering evergreen tree that grows near small intermittent creeks, for nesting and food. During breeding season, the trees allow the pairs to conserve energy and avoid flying long distances to feed.

When the macaws first arrived from Germany, they were offered various foods from the wild. "We found that it took a while for the birds to recognize them as food," Purchase said. "But the Caraiqueira tree produces a seed pod, almost like helicopter seeds. The Spix's had never seen anything like it before. We put those in the cages and some picked them up and immediately knew how to open them and eat the kernel inside, which was totally remarkable and took us by surprise."

The project also faces challenges outside the natural world. On May 15, the federal government informed the nonprofit that it would terminate the agreement, which expires on June 5. In a statement to the AP, Brazil's federal environmental agency said it discovered that, in 2023, the nonprofit transferred Spix's macaws from its center in Germany to other countries without its consent. The agreement will not be renewed until the situation is clarified, but the government said the nonprofit can continue its reintroduction work. The project's funding comes from international donors.

The strained relations have put a pause on plans to release 20 parrots per year over 20 years. "No release in 2023 and now looking like a 2024 release is unlikely. It would be a shame for the project to fail because of government politics," Purchase said.

There are approximately 360 Spix's macaws in captivity worldwide, with 46 in Curaca.

Despite the hurdles, many residents of Curaca, even if they never have never seen a Spix's macaw, expect them to soon return to flying over the region and not just be seen in countless paintings that made the parrot part of the city's identity.

"The project is already a success. They are free," said Maria de Lourdes Oliveira, whose family leased part of their land for reforestation. "The most difficult thing was to arrive in Brazil. I cried when I saw them going to freedom and flapping their wings."

South Africa's opposition parties make a final call for historic change the day before election

By GERALD IMRAY and ANNIE RISEMBERG Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — South African opposition parties made a final appeal to voters Tuesday as the country faces the possibility of a landmark change in its young democracy.

At the heart of Wednesday's national election is the question of whether South Africans will deliver their biggest rejection yet of the ruling African National Congress party, which has governed since the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994.

The ANC has won a majority in every national election over the last 30 years, but several polls put its support at less than 50% ahead of this one, raising the chance of a major shift in Africa's most advanced economy. Final election results are expected by Sunday.

As the ANC's appeal as liberator fades among younger voters with no memory of apartheid, opposition parties are closing in and vowing to deliver on promises that many feel have gone unfulfilled.

Main opposition leader John Steenhuisen of the Democratic Alliance party called it "South Africa's most consequential election in post-democratic history." He urged people to vote the ANC out to "rescue" the country.

"There's so much at stake in this election, people cannot stay at home," Steenhuisen said as he campaigned in the party's stronghold of Cape Town.

The Economic Freedom Fighters, the third biggest party in Parliament, said it was calling on supporters to "flood the voting stations to have our say tomorrow."

The ANC asserted that it was "the only authentic political party with the capacity and experience to govern."

South Africa's opposition parties have highlighted the widespread poverty, high unemployment and failure of basic government services in many communities as reasons to turn away from the ANC after three decades.

But there likely will not be a new ruling party in its place.

The ANC is still expected to win the most seats in Parliament. But without an outright majority it might need to rely on a coalition to govern and reelect President Cyril Ramaphosa for a second and final five-year term. That's never happened before in South Africa. Who in the opposition the ANC might turn to is still not clear.

The ANC insists it is focused on retaining its majority.

Voting began Monday and Tuesday with South Africans who were given special permission, like older people, members of the armed forces and critical workers, casting early ballots. A little over 600,000 people were registered to vote early, the independent electoral commission said.

The vast majority of the nearly 28 million registered voters in the country of 62 million are expected to go to the polls across South Africa's nine provinces on Wednesday, which is a national holiday.

More than 50 parties are registered to contest the national election, the most ever, according to the electoral commission. Many of the parties are new. Independent candidates are also allowed to stand for the first time.

That's given rise to a fragmented opposition which also includes former South African President Jacob Zuma's new MK Party.

Shamiso Tebogo Bopape, a 21-year-old University of Johannesburg student, said there was not one clear opposition party for her and other young people to choose.

"We don't know who to put our trust in," she said. "The smaller parties, they have not been placed in these more affluent positions or bigger positions. We haven't given them enough power to see what they would do in that position, so we can't necessarily say we trust them."

The electoral commission has said the special voting generally started smoothly. South Africa has held largely peaceful and credible elections since a violent buildup to the pivotal 1994 vote that brought down apartheid.

The commission did say it faced a battle against election misinformation. In the latest example, it said that South Africans would be allowed to vote even if they had manicured or false fingernails, debunking claims they wouldn't. Such nails would not affect how officials apply a mark of indelible ink at the base of the left thumb to indicate someone has voted, the commission said.

Still hurting from violence, Mexican priests and families hope for peace ahead of elections

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

CHIHUAHUA, México (AP) — José Portillo Gil, the gang leader known as "El Chueco" — the Crooked One — lowered his gun. The Rev. Jesús Reyes then spoke what he feared might be his final words: Please, don't take my brothers' corpses away.

Next to him, at the altar of his church in northern Mexico, Jesuit priests Javier Campos, 79, and Joaquín Mora, 80, lay in a pool of blood.

"I could almost feel the bullets going through my body," said Reyes, who survived the attack without being shot.

The killings took place in Cerocahui in mid-2022, but the sorrow over the crimes has not diminished in the communities nestled in the remote Tarahumara mountains. Nor have Catholic leaders' demands for peace abated.

Since he took power in 2018, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has avoided direct confrontation with cartels and violent gangs controlling and terrorizing local communities. His "hugs, not bullets" policy has drawn extensive criticism from faith leaders, human rights organizations and journalists who have echoed victims' fears and anger.

Organized crime has long controlled swaths of territory in states such as Guerrero and Michoacan. Many people have been displaced from rural villages in Chiapas by warring cartels and some two dozen candidates have been killed ahead of June 2 elections.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 72 of 74

Presidential front-runner and governing party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum hesitantly met with representatives from the Mexican bishops' conference. And though she agreed to sign a peace commitment that proposed strategies to reduce the violence in Mexico, the 61-year-old said she did not share the bishops' "pessimistic evaluation" of the current situation.

"In the time that I have been here in the Tarahumara, I had never faced such difficult times," said Reyes, whose hearing was severely damaged by the gunshots.

Like some other organized crime leaders, El Chueco, who was linked to the Sinaloa cartel, had control over the local beer market. He financed bars, a baseball team and had a say over local elections and police designations.

"We did not have safety, peace," Reyes said. "We were always in fear because he even showed up at parties and weddings."

Hours before El Chueco stormed into the church, furious by the defeat of his baseball team during a match, he shot one of the players and burned his home to the ground. He then headed to a hotel, where tourist guide Pedro Palma had just dropped off foreign tourists and asked El Chueco to behave. Palma, too, was shot and later taken to the church.

"Father Joaquín had just put the holy anointing on him when, all of a sudden, he (El Chueco) took out his gun and shot him twice," Reyes said. "Then Father Javier looked at him like saying 'What have you done?' and he shot him twice, too."

Members of the National Guard established a permanent base in Cerocahui in response to the killings and the military remained in the area after El Chueco was found dead in 2023. But that hasn't deterred locals from abandoning their homes to flee violence and death.

"Here in the mountains, there are many communities displaced by organized crime," said Azucena González, a teacher from the nearby town of Creel who works at a shelter for women facing risky situations. "We take in many families in which the husband is killed, and the wife can't stay."

González's hometown has a bloody history of its own.

In 2008, soon after then-President Felipe Calderon declared a war on drugs that spiked nationwide violence, armed men opened fire against a group of locals hanging out in a public square. The massacre killed 13, a baby among them.

It was a hellish scene, said Javier Ávila, another Jesuit priest who has worked in the region since the 1970s and arrived promptly at the massacre site.

"There were bodies everywhere," Ávila said. "But no signs of the police."

Instead of praying, he reached out to the local authorities and demanded security back-up. He asked the families to refrain from touching the bodies or altering the crime scene. He took late night walks to send a message: "I'm not afraid and I won't leave."

Among the inhabitants of the Tarahumara mountains, specially within the Indigenous Raramuri people, priests like Ávila, Reyes and the murdered Jesuits are often regarded as profoundly beloved figures who fearlessly offer comfort and help.

Deep in the Sierra, where no roads or phone signal are available, the Rev. Javier Campos worked closely with the impoverished communities. For his famous imitation of a rooster, he earned the nickname of "Father Gallo."

Many locals recall that he baptized their children or confirmed their grandchildren. Others remember him dearly for fixing their TVs or teaching them carpentry.

"He taught me how to play the guitar," said Rarámuri Jesús Vega during a sacred ceremony called Yúmari, which was celebrated on a recent Saturday at the town of Cuiteco.

"When he died, I felt very sad," Vega said. "They (Campos and Mora) were very well-known priests who spoke our language."

Despite their deaths, they still seem present among those who ache from their murders.

During the recent Yúmari in Cuiteco, the community placed the Jesuits' portraits next to the image of a saint to whom they prayed for good harvests and Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron saint of close to 100

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 73 of 74

million Mexican Catholics.

"We gathered here to ask God to look at us, because we are in need," said Sister Silvina Salmerón, from the Diocese of Tarahumara, where the murdered priests also served.

Earlier this year, four bishops from the Pacific coast state of Guerrero met with Mexican drug cartel bosses in a bid to negotiate a possible peace accord. The meeting highlighted how the government's policy of not confronting the cartels has left ordinary citizens to work out their own separate peace deals with the gangs.

"I have felt myself compelled to talk to the (criminal) leaders," said Ávila, whom the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights deemed in need of security measures for his protection. "Everyone has the freedom and right to do what they believe they should do to achieve peace."

Often, people knock on his door in Creel. A few ask for a marriage, a divorce or a blessing. Many others seek help to find missing family members or to denounce excessive use of force from the National Guard.

"People still believe in us," Ávila said.

In the last few days, a Raramuri man called him from a hill where he was hiding from criminals who took control of his ranch. "They threw us out and they are firing at us," the man told Ávila. "We've been here for three days, we've run out of food and my children are here with me. What should I do?"

Todos Los Santos Dolores Villalobos, a Raramuri women's rights defender, said Ávila, 81, taught her how to approach prosecutors' offices, civil registries, hospitals and human rights offices to intercede for the Indigenous communities she represents.

"The priests have understood us as Raramuri," Villalobos said. "We can go and tell them: they (the criminals) cut down our trees, stole our cows, locked us in. They brought destruction."

"If the priests are at risk, who will guide us?"

Today in History: May 29

Reagan and Gorbachev meet in Moscow summit

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, May 29, the 150th day of 2024. There are 216 days left in the year. This is Memorial Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 29, 1988, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev opened their historic summit in Moscow.

On this date:

In 1765, Patrick Henry denounced the Stamp Act before Virginia's House of Burgesses.

In 1790, Rhode Island became the 13th original colony to ratify the United States Constitution.

In 1848, Wisconsin became the 30th state of the union.

In 1914, the Canadian ocean liner RMS Empress of Ireland sank in the St. Lawrence River in eastern Quebec after colliding with the Norwegian cargo ship SS Storstad; of the 1,477 people on board the Empress of Ireland, 1,012 died. (The Storstad sustained only minor damage.)

In 1953, Mount Everest was conquered as Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and Tensing Norgay of Nepal became the first climbers to reach the summit.

In 1977, Janet Guthrie became the first woman to race in the Indianapolis 500, finishing in 29th place (the winner was A.J. Foyt).

In 1985, 39 people were killed at the European Cup Final in Brussels, Belgium, when rioting broke out and a wall separating British and Italian soccer fans collapsed.

In 2009, a judge in Los Angeles sentenced music producer Phil Spector to 19 years to life in prison for the murder of actor Lana Clarkson. (Spector remained in prison until his death in January 2021.)

In 2012, Doc Watson, the Grammy-award winning folk musician whose lightning-fast style of flatpicking influenced guitarists around the world, died in North Carolina at age 89.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 29, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 338 ~ 74 of 74

In 2014, Starbucks closed thousands of stores for part of the day to hold training sessions for employees on unconscious bias, in response to the arrests of two Black men at one of its Philadelphia stores for sitting in the Starbucks without ordering anything.

In 2015, the Obama administration formally removed Cuba from the U.S. terrorism blacklist.

In 2017, Manuel Noriega, a onetime U.S. ally who was ousted as Panama's dictator by an American invasion in 1989, died at age 83.

In 2018, ABC canceled the reboot of "Roseanne," after star Roseanne Barr's tweet that referred to former Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett as a product of the Muslim Brotherhood and the "Planet of the Apes."

In 2019, in his first public remarks on the Russia investigation, special counsel Robert Mueller said charging President Donald Trump with a crime was "not an option" because of federal rules, but he emphasized that the investigation did not exonerate the president.

In 2020, fired Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was arrested and charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the death of George Floyd. (He would be convicted in April 2021 on those charges as well as second-degree unintentional murder.)

In 2021, actor Gavin MacLeod, best known for his roles on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and "The Love Boat," died at age 90, and Grammy-winning singer B.J. Thomas, who hit the charts with songs including "Hooked on a Feeling" and "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head," died at 78.

In 2022, President Joe Biden sought to comfort a city grieving the killings of 19 elementary school pupils and two teachers at the hands of a lone gunman in Uvalde, Texas. Faced with chants of "do something" as he departed a church service to meet privately with the families, Biden responded: "We will."

Today's Birthdays: Former Baseball Commissioner Fay Vincent is 86. Actor Anthony Geary is 77. Actor Cotter Smith is 75. Singer Rebbie (ree-bee) Jackson is 74. Movie composer Danny Elfman is 71. Singer LaToya Jackson is 68. Actor Ted Levine is 67. Actor Annette Bening is 66. Actor Rupert Everett is 65. Actor Adrian Paul is 65. Singer Melissa Etheridge is 63. Actor Lisa Whelchel is 61. Actor Tracey Bregman is 61. Rock musician Noel Gallagher is 57. Actor Anthony Azizi is 55. Rock musician Chan Kinchla (Blues Traveler) is 55. Actor Laverne Cox is 52. Cartoonist Aaron McGruder ("The Boondocks") is 50. Singer Melanie Brown (Spice Girls) is 49. Latin singer Fonseca is 45. Actor Justin Chon (TV: "Deception"; "Dr. Ken") is 43. NBA player Carmelo Anthony is 40. Actor Blake Foster is 39. Actor Riley Keough is 35. Actor Brandon Mychal Smith is 35. Actor Kristen Alderson is 33. Actor Lorelei Linklater is 31.