

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, June 6

Senior Menu: Ham, sweet potatoes, vegetable blend Provence, baked apples, dinner roll.
U10 B/W at Britton, 5:30 p.m. (2)
SB hosts Ipswich (U8 at 6 p.m. (1), U10 Blk at 6 p.m. (2), U12 at 7 p.m. (2))
T-Ball G/B practice, 6 p.m.
Wage Memorial Library Story Time, 10 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, June 7

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice with beans, breadstick, cherry fluff.
T-Ball G at Andover, 6 p.m.
T-Ball B at Claremont, 6 p.m.

Saturday, June 8

Inaugural Groton Day of Baseball/Softball
Junior Legion hosts W.I.N., 5 p.m. (1)
Legion hosts W.I.N., 7 p.m. (1)
Junior Teeners hosts Redfield, 3 p.m. (1)
U12 All host Britton
U10 All hosts Columbia
U8 R/B hosts Britton
SB hosts Britton (U8 at 9 a.m. (2), U10 Gld at 11 a.m. (1), U10 Blk at noon (1), U12 at 1 p.m. (2))
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

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

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

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80th Anniversary of D-Day

Today marks the 80th anniversary of the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France during World War II, the largest amphibious assault in history. President Joe Biden and dozens of heads of state are slated to attend commemorations along a 50-mile stretch of northern France. Nearly 200 veterans, whose average age is 100, will be present.

Operation Overlord was the Allies' bid to open up a second front in the war against Nazi Germany. Early on June 6, 1944, roughly 13,000 paratroopers parachuted behind entrenched enemy lines ahead of the 135,000 US, British, and Canadian soldiers who later landed on the beaches of Normandy. Over 4,400 troops were killed that day—including 2,501 Americans—with over 73,000 lost in the ensuing monthlong Battle of Normandy. The invasion, alongside the Soviet Union's push from the East, helped seal the defeat of Nazi Germany a year later.

French President Emmanuel Macron will also commemorate the roughly 20,000 French civilians killed during the Allied bombardment and battle.

Starliner in Space

Boeing's Starliner astronauts are set to dock at the International Space Station today at 12:15 pm ET, after yesterday marked the company's first successful launch to outer space.

Aboard the Starliner capsule are two veteran NASA astronauts: Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams. For the next eight days, Wilmore and Williams will join seven others at the ISS and deliver a replacement pump to fix the station's urine processor. That processor is a critical part of NASA's water recovery system, enabling the station to recycle 98% of its water.

With yesterday's mission, Starliner is now the sixth unique spacecraft to transport crew in US history, following a series of mechanical and software issues costing \$1.4B. The launch comes as NASA has outsourced transportation to the ISS to SpaceX and Boeing. SpaceX's Crew Dragon—four years ahead of Boeing—has launched 13 crewed flights to space to date.

NBA Finals Tip Off

The Boston Celtics and the Dallas Mavericks face off in Game 1 of the NBA Finals tonight (8:30 pm ET, ABC), the first-ever postseason matchup between the two franchises. Both teams easily won their conference championships, with Dallas dropping the Minnesota Timberwolves in five games and Boston sweeping the Indiana Pacers.

Both are led by a pair of star players: Dallas' Luka Dončić and Kyrie Irving combined for nearly 60 points per game in the conference finals, while Boston's Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown look to avenge their 2022 Finals loss to the Golden State Warriors. Irving, in particular, is experiencing a renaissance with the Mavericks after developing a reputation as a mercurial teammate during four seasons (2019-23) with the Brooklyn Nets.

Boston enters as the favorites—seeking a record 18th championship—while Dallas is chasing its second title, and first since 2011.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

No. 3 seed American Coco Gauff takes on No. 1 seed Iga Świątek in French Open semifinals today.

Parnelli Jones, legendary race car driver and winner of 1963 Indianapolis 500, dies at 90.

Reigning English Premier League champions Manchester City sue the league over "financial fair play" regulations.

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Science & Technology

Neuroscientists identify molecular process in the brain that promotes opioid addiction; same process, which adds fat cells around neurons to help signals move faster, is involved in learning new skills.

Researchers discover major cause of inflammatory bowel disease; 95% of patients with the condition shared genetic mutation causing white blood cells to release excess inflammation-causing chemicals.

Microsoft unveils AI platform capable of modeling global weather and air pollution, while providing predictions in minutes; model is comparable to Google's GraphCast platform.

Business & Markets

> US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.2%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +2.0%) with S&P 500 and Nasdaq reaching record highs amid Nvidia stock rally and economic data fueling interest rate cut hopes. Nvidia overtakes Apple as world's second most valuable company as market capitalization passes \$3T.

Canada becomes first G7 country to cut interest rates, reducing rates from 5% to 4.75%; European Central Bank expected to cut interest rates today. Hiring for private US companies slows to four-month low in May, per ADP report.

BlackRock, Citadel Securities, and roughly two dozen other investors raise \$120M to launch Dallas-based Texas Stock Exchange later this year to compete with the New York Stock Exchange; exchange plans to be apolitical, CEO-friendly.

Politics & World Affairs

Amanda Knox loses appeal to toss 2009 slander conviction; Knox—ultimately cleared in the 2007 murder of her roommate Meredith Kercher—had been charged with slander for falsely implicating a Congolese bar owner in the murder.

Gunman and five others arrested after shootout near the US Embassy in Beirut; suspect wore ISIS insignia, per US official. More than a dozen pro-Palestinian protesters arrested while barricading the Stanford University president's office. Israel launches operation in central Gaza; dozens reported killed.

Ukraine has deployed US-made weapons to strike inside Russia, a US senator confirms, days after Biden administration partially lifts weapons restrictions.



Death Notice: Merle Harder

Merle Harder, 78, of Waubay passed away June 4, 2024 at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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Groton Jr Teeners Walk It Off Against Britton Jr Teeners

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr Teeners took Wednesday's game in dramatic fashion, with a 10-8 walk-off victory over Britton Jr Teeners. The game was tied at eight in the bottom of the seventh when an error scored two runs.

Britton Jr Teeners got on the board in the top of the first inning after Ben Suther singled, Drew Heitmann walked, and Chaz Vietor was struck by a pitch, each scoring one run.

Britton Jr Teeners added to their early lead in the top of the second inning after Mitch Burger singled, and Suther grounded out, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr Teeners tied the game in the bottom of the third thanks to a single by Layne Johnson, and an error.

In the bottom of the fourth, Groton Jr Teeners broke up the tie when John Bisbee doubled, scoring one run. Then an error followed to extend the lead to 7-5.

Britton Jr Teeners captured the lead, 8-7, in the top of the seventh after Groton Jr Teeners committed an error, Groton Jr Teeners committed an error, and Jack Teveldal singled, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr Teeners captured the lead, 10-8, in the bottom of the seventh when one run scored on another play, and an error scored two runs.

Alex Abeln earned the win for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. The starting pitcher allowed eight hits and five runs over five and one-third innings, striking out eight and walking two. Heitmann led things off on the bump for Britton Jr Teeners. The righty gave up five hits and five runs (three earned) over three innings, striking out three and walking two. Ryder Schelle appeared in relief for Groton Jr Teeners 14U.

Groton Jr Teeners piled up 10 hits in the game. Number seven hitter, Ethan Kroll, showed the depth of Groton Jr Teeners 14U's lineup, by leading them with two hits in three at bats. Johnson, Kroll, Schelle, and Bisbee each drove in one run for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. Groton Jr Teeners had a strong eye at the plate, piling up six walks for the game.

Britton Jr Teeners piled up 10 hits in the game. Suther provided pop in the middle of the lineup, and led Britton Jr Teeners with two runs batted in. They went 2-for-4 on the day. Burger went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Britton Jr Teeners in hits.

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GROTON

SUBWAY

**Opening
June 12th
Hours Daily
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**Under new ownership,
Beau and Chelsea Larson**



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Groton Jr Teeners With Tough Game Against Britton Jr Teeners

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr Teeners had trouble keeping up with Britton Jr Teeners in a 20-7 loss on Wednesday. Britton Jr Teeners got on the board in the top of the first inning after Mitch Burger grounded out, and Colton Chapin walked, each scoring one run.

Britton Jr Teeners added to their early lead in the top of the third inning after Ben Suther hit an inside the park home run, and Luke Bosse grounded out, each scoring two runs.

Groton Jr Teeners scored six runs on three hits in the bottom of the fifth inning. Ethan Kroll singled, scoring two runs, a passed ball scored one run, Sam Crank drew a walk, scoring one run, and an error scored two runs.

Britton Jr Teeners scored 10 runs on two hits in the top of the sixth inning. An error scored two runs, Bosse drew a walk, scoring one run, Burger scored after tagging up, Joel Quezada drew a walk, scoring one run, Carter Nelson was struck by a pitch, driving in a run, Drew Heitmann was struck by a pitch, driving in a run, Carter Grobe drew a walk, scoring one run, and Suther singled, scoring two runs.

Lincoln Kilker earned the win for Britton Jr Teeners. The right-handed pitcher allowed three hits and one run (zero earned) over four innings, striking out three and walking three. Lincoln Shilhanek started the game for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. They gave up three hits and six runs (one earned) over three innings, striking out none and walking three.

Leadoff hitter Alex Abeln led Groton Jr Teeners with two hits in two at bats. Kroll led Groton Jr Teeners with two runs batted in. They went 1-for-2 on the day. Ryder Schelle stole two bases. Groton Jr Teeners worked the count all day, collecting six walks. Groton Jr Teeners stole seven bases in the game. Groton Jr Teeners turned one double play in the game.

Suther provided pop in the middle of the lineup, and led Britton Jr Teeners with seven runs batted in. The third baseman went 3-for-4 on the day. Burger collected two hits for Britton Jr Teeners in five at bats. Britton Jr Teeners had a strong eye at the plate, piling up 13 walks for the game. Bosse, Chapin, and Grobe led the team with two walks each. Burger stole two bases. Britton Jr Teeners stole seven bases in the game.

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Rounds, Durbin Introduce Legislation to Protect Rural Postal Processing Facilities

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) today introduced legislation that would require the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to consider consequences for rural areas during their closure or downsizing review process in order to protect rural mail processing facilities.

USPS's reviews of processing facilities closures does not require them to consider the impact on rural areas or highly rural areas as long as the closure gains efficiencies. However, USPS's reviews of post office retail locations does require them to answer whether closing the location is consistent with their obligation to provide effective and regular postal services to rural areas. This legislation would require USPS to consider the impact to rural areas when closing or downsizing processing centers, just as they do with closing post office retail locations.

"Rural mail services are a lifeline for residents of many communities across South Dakota," said Rounds. "The U.S. Postal Service should be required to consider the impact of closing processing facilities on rural residents, just as they consider it when closing retail locations. I'm pleased to be introducing this legislation to make certain rural residents receive their mail in a timely and efficient manner."

"If I drop a piece of mail off in Springfield to make it across town, why should it have to go all the way to St. Louis and back? Eliminating mail processing centers across our state, without consideration for the impact on mail service and postal employees, will only decimate USPS. It is yet another instance of Postmaster General DeJoy's 'Delivering for America' plan disastrously missing the mark," said Durbin. "I'm joining Senator Rounds in introducing legislation requiring USPS to study the effects of closing or consolidating mail processing and shipping facilities to ensure that our postal service serves Illinoisans to the best of its abilities."

This legislation is cosponsored by Senators Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) and Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.).

BACKGROUND:

- As part of its Delivering for America plan, USPS is reviewing every processing and distribution center in the nation with the goal of creating efficiencies by reducing services at some centers and eliminating others.
- There are three USPS processing facilities in South Dakota: Huron, Rapid City and Sioux Falls.
- In February 2024, USPS finalized a plan to move all non-local processing at the Huron facility to Fargo, North Dakota.
- In April 2024, USPS finalized a plan to move all non-local processing at the Sioux Falls facility to Omaha, Nebraska.
- In April 2024, Rounds led a letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy urging the postal service to avoid downsizing or significantly reorganizing mail processing operations in South Dakota.
- In May 2024, Rounds sends follow up letter to Postmaster DeJoy highlighting continued concerns with USPS' plans to downsize mail processing centers nationwide.
- In May 2024, following bipartisan pressure from Senators, USPS announced it is pausing the downsizing of mail processing facilities in South Dakota.



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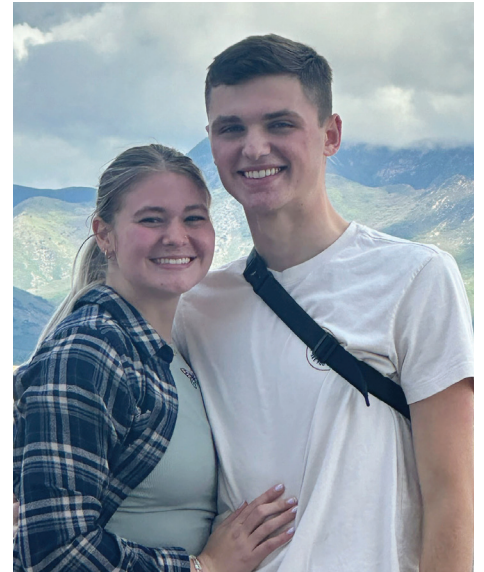
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Kosel/Moll Engaged

Julianna Kosel and Isaac Moll are engaged and plan a July 30, 2024 wedding in Florida.

Julianna is the daughter of Paul and Tina Kosel, Groton. She is currently a nanny and will be pursuing her cosmetology license in Utah. Isaac is the son of Cameron and Suzanne Moll, Sarasota, Fla. Isaac is a student at Brigham Young University, Provo, pursuing a degree in cyber security. The couple plan to make their home in Provo, Utah.

Clay County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 19, mile marker 0, five miles west of Vermillion, SD

When: 12:31 a.m. Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Driver 1: Female, 22, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2018 Chevrolet Impala

Seatbelt Use: No

Clay County, S.D.- A 22-year-old woman died this morning in a single-vehicle crash near Vermillion, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2018 Chevrolet Impala was northbound on SD Highway 19 near mile marker 0, having just crossed over the Nebraska/South Dakota bridge. The driver failed to negotiate a curve in the roadway and entered the east ditch where the vehicle vaulted over a field approach and rolled. The driver was not wearing a seatbelt and sustained fatal injuries.

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.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

New landscape confronts South Dakota Republicans after political earthquake shakes incumbents

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 5, 2024 6:02 PM

A literal 3.7-magnitude earthquake shook the state Capitol in Pierre last week. State Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said a political earthquake shook the Capitol on Tuesday night.

"The people are waking up," Odenbach said.

He and others within a faction of the South Dakota Republican Party say it's being run by politicians who are not as conservative as the party's base of supporters. Their efforts to change that contributed to 14 losses by incumbent Republican legislators in Tuesday's primary election. Odenbach's political action committee spent \$58,000 ahead of the primary in support of some winning candidates.

Current Republican House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Fort Pierre — who is unopposed for reelection — said new legislators are always welcome, but losing 14 incumbents comes with a cost.

"It's an opportunity for new ideas, but it does mean we lost a lot of institutional knowledge," he said.

Those losses include Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, who's served 24 years in the Legislature, and Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel, who has served 16 years, among others.

Mortenson's political action committee spent \$48,271 to help some of the incumbents and other candidates that Odenbach opposed.

Mortenson blamed the incumbent losses mostly on historically low voter turnout of 17%, which he said creates an environment in which a motivated faction can turn out enough voters to swing a primary race.

Pipelines and property taxes

Odenbach said challengers won because of quality candidate recruitment, a good ground game and the right messaging.

Much of that messaging, especially in eastern South Dakota, capitalized on opposition to Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed multibillion-dollar pipeline project. It would collect carbon dioxide produced by ethanol plants in South Dakota and other states and move it through an underground pipeline for sequestration in North Dakota, passing through farms, ranches and other private property along the way.

The project has caused more than two years of legal and legislative wrangling over landowner rights and eminent domain, the legal maneuver through which a company can seize property for projects in the public interest.

"A lot of candidates have been saying South Dakota is open for business, but not for sale, and that was proven last night," Odenbach said.

Mortenson and some other Republican leaders passed a bill during the last legislative session to preserve a regulatory path forward for the pipeline while ensuring landowners receive additional protections. That put them at odds with some in their own party who sought stricter measures such as a ban on eminent domain for carbon pipelines. Some members of that faction are gathering petition signatures to refer the bill passed last session to a public vote in November.

Odenbach said the pipeline debate is not over.

"We're going to be back next session to better define public use and who gets to use eminent domain in South Dakota, like I tried to do during the recent session," he said.

Incumbent Rep. Aaron Aylward, R-Harrisburg, won his primary. He's the president of the South Dakota Freedom Caucus, which has butted heads with Republican leadership. On the topic of pipelines, he said,

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"It's not looking good for the carbon ones, that's for sure."

Aylward said incumbents lost Tuesday because "people are tired of the same type of bureaucratic garbage they've been fed for the last number of years."

Meanwhile, in the Black Hills, rising property taxes animated many Republican voters. Former legislator Tim Goodwin, of Rapid City, earned one of District 30's two Republican House nominations Tuesday. He and incumbent Rep. Trish Ladner, of Hot Springs, will face one Democrat in the November race for two House seats.

"Out here, property rights isn't even on the radar," Goodwin said. "It's property taxes."

Greasing the open primaries wheel

Some Republicans think the inner-party friction is self-defeating. Pat Powers, writer of the Dakota War College political blog, said Tuesday's primary results offer Democrats an opportunity to win some general election races if they run to the middle of the political spectrum. Democrats currently hold only 11 of the Legislature's 105 seats.

"It could very well mark a shift in the Republican party's fortunes," Powers said.

Powers said Republican infighting also gives an open primaries ballot measure a better chance of passing during the November general election. The measure would change some primaries to include all the candidates for an office, rather than splitting the candidates into party-specific primaries.

Tuesday's low turnout and poor showing by incumbents gives ammunition to open primaries supporters, Powers said.

"They can say, 'Look at what happens when we don't have open primaries,' and they have the money to get the message across."

Drey Samuelson, who worked as Democratic former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson's chief of staff for many years, is involved in the open primaries effort. He's already making that argument.

"The closed primary system does not work very well. It nominates people who are to the extremes of the parties," Samuelson said. "We can look at these primary results to see that."

Samuelson said turnout would have been better if Democrats and independents had more to vote on than the Democratic presidential primary, in which President Joe Biden was already all but guaranteed a victory. There was only one Democratic legislative primary Tuesday in South Dakota, and 44 Republican legislative primaries.

Seeking change 'for the average person'

Joy Hohn, a vocal opponent of eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines, bested former legislator Mark Willadsen for the Republican nomination for Sioux Falls District 9's Senate seat. There is no Democratic or independent candidate running in the general election.

Hohn received a donation from Odenbach's political action committee.

"I think that the citizens of South Dakota are seeing the need for a bigger focus on 'we the people,'" Hohn said. "We don't really need this pipeline."

Hohn said the results of the election move the state in the right direction, "toward true conservative values and our country's founding principles."

Incumbent Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, fell by 48 votes (which is within the possible recount margin) to a political newcomer from Bonesteel named Mykala Voita, who also campaigned on the primacy of land-owner rights.

"The people of South Dakota drew a line and they are speaking," Voita said. "I think the people are sending a clear message that we don't want to be trampled on, and if they're going to come into our state, they're going to play by our rules."

In a four-way District 13 House of Representatives primary, incumbent Republican Tony Venhuizen, of Sioux Falls, advanced to the general election as one of the top two finishers. But he received fewer votes than newcomer John Hughes. There is no Democrat or independent on the ballot in November.

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Hughes plans to push for change.

"Government just isn't working for the average person in South Dakota, especially in terms of economic development," Hughes said. "It's helping large corporate interests that are not paying their fair share when they come into South Dakota and take advantage of our business climate, and it's at the expense of the taxpayer."

Ousted Republican legislators

Republican legislators who lost their primary races Tuesday, according to unofficial results from the Secretary of State's Office (results are not official until the election is canvassed):

Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner
Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton
Rep. Byron Callies, R-Watertown
Rep. Tyler Tordsen, R-Sioux Falls
Rep. Tamara St. John, R-Sisseton
Rep. James Wangsness, R-Miller
Rep. Fred Deutsch, R-Florence
Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel
Rep. Becky Drury, R-Rapid City
Sen. Mike Walsh, R-Rapid City
Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City
Rep. Gary Cammack, R-Union Center
Rep. Kirk Chaffee, R-Whitewood
Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller, R-Rapid City

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.

Thune, Rounds among Republicans blocking contraception access bill from moving ahead

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JUNE 5, 2024 5:20 PM

WASHINGTON — An attempt to reinforce Americans' access to contraception failed Wednesday when U.S. Senate Republicans blocked a bill from advancing toward final passage.

The 51-39 procedural vote required at least 60 senators to move forward, but fell short after GOP lawmakers said the measure was too broad as well as unnecessary. Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Maine Sen. Susan Collins, both Republicans, broke with their party and voted to advance the legislation.

Democrats argued during debate on the 12-page bill that it would provide a safety net should a future Supreme Court overturn two cases that ensure married and unmarried Americans have the right to make decisions about when and how to use contraception.

GOP senators contended the vote was mere politics and that if Democrats were serious about safeguarding access to contraception for future generations, they'd work with Republicans on a bipartisan bill.

Nevada Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen said the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the constitutional right to an abortion in the Dobbs decision two years ago showed women how quickly things can change.

"It demonstrated that a fundamental right, the right of women to make decisions over their own bodies, could be taken away in the blink of an eye," Rosen said.

Women, she said, can't rely solely on the Supreme Court to uphold the cases that have guaranteed Americans access to contraception for more than 50 years.

"Contraception has been safely used by millions of women for decades," Rosen said. "It's allowed women

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to take control over their own bodies — to decide when they want to start a family, how many kids they have, who they want to start a family with.”

“For these very same reasons, the right to contraception has been a target of anti-choice extremists for years,” Rosen added.

Senate Minority Whip John Thune, the South Dakota Republican seeking to become the chamber’s next GOP leader, voted against the bill and said it was meant to “provide a talking point for Democratic candidates.”

“These votes have nothing to do with legislating and everything to do with boosting Democrats’ electoral chances, he hopes, in this fall’s election,” Thune said, referring to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

The legislation was a non-starter with many Republicans, Thune said, because it didn’t carve out the conscience protections that exist under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Thune’s fellow Republican South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds also opposed the bill.

The federal law, enacted in 1993 after being sponsored by Schumer, established “a heightened standard of review for government actions that substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion.”

Sales of contraceptives

Democrats’ bill would have protected “an individual’s ability to access contraceptives” and “a health care provider’s ability to provide contraceptives, contraception, and information related to contraception.”

The legislation would have barred state and federal governments from prohibiting the sale of any contraceptives or blocking “any individual from aiding another individual in voluntarily obtaining or using any contraceptives or contraceptive methods.”

The bill defined contraception as “an action taken to prevent pregnancy, including the use of contraceptives or fertility-awareness-based methods and sterilization procedures.”

House Democrats introduced an identical bill in that chamber on Tuesday, though it’s unlikely to get a vote while Republicans remain in control.

Supreme Court opinion

Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas stirred up concerns about access to contraception two years ago when he wrote a concurring opinion in the Dobbs case.

Thomas wrote that the justices should “reconsider all of this Court’s substantive due process precedents, including Griswold, Lawrence, and Obergefell.”

None of the other nine justices joined Thomas in writing that opinion, likely signaling they didn’t agree with some or all of it.

The 1965 Griswold v. Connecticut case was the first time the court recognized that married couples’ constitutional privacy rights extend to decisions about contraception. That ruling struck down a Connecticut state law that barred access to contraceptives.

The Supreme Court, in 1972, extended the right to make private decisions about contraception to unmarried people in the Eisenstadt v. Baird ruling.

Following the release of Thomas’ concurring opinion, Democrats and reproductive rights organizations immediately began pressing for federal laws that would reinforce current contraception access. Congress has not passed any so far.

Mini Timmaraju, president and chief executive officer of Reproductive Freedom for All, said during a press conference with Senate Democrats on Wednesday before the vote that women should talk with their mothers and grandmothers about when they were first able to obtain birth control.

“When we talk about the generations of women in this country who didn’t have access to birth control, we’re just talking about my mother’s generation — 1965,” Timmaraju said. “It was not that long ago and that should really be a wake-up call.”

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White House, Biden campaign weigh in

The Biden administration signaled its support for Senate Democrats' bill hours before the vote, writing in a Statement of Administration Policy the measure "would protect the fundamental right to access contraception and help ensure that women can make decisions about their health, lives, and families."

"Women must have the freedom to make deeply personal health care decisions, including the right to decide if and when to start or grow their family," the policy states. "Now is the time to safeguard the right to contraception once and for all."

The Biden-Harris campaign held a press call on reproductive rights Wednesday morning to highlight the differences between the presidential candidates on reproductive rights, including access to abortion, contraception and in vitro fertilization.

Biden-Harris Campaign Manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez said during the call that Donald Trump, Republicans' presumptive nominee for president, couldn't be further away from Biden on access.

Rodriguez said Trump's comments during an interview with TIME magazine in April and his statements to a local Pennsylvania TV news station in May show he's not supportive of women's reproductive rights.

Decisions about contraception, abortion and in vitro fertilization belong to women and their doctors, "not politicians and the government," Rodriguez said.

North Carolina Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, a member of the Biden-Harris campaign's advisory board, said on the call this year's election will be a "defining moment" for the country.

Republican efforts to restrict access to reproductive health care, he said, mean they are trying to "control women."

Ernst alternative proposal

Iowa Republican Sen. Joni Ernst said during debate on the bill that Democrats' legislation went too far and pressed for the Senate to take up a bill she introduced earlier this week.

The measure has since gained nine co-sponsors including Chuck Grassley of Iowa, Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, Steve Daines of Montana, Todd Young of Indiana, Thom Tillis of North Carolina, Ted Cruz of Texas, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, James E. Risch of Idaho and John Cornyn of Texas.

Iowa Republican Rep. Ashley Hinson plans to introduce the companion bill in the House, according to an announcement from Ernst's office.

"With my bill, we're ensuring women 18 and over can walk into any pharmacy, whether in Red Oak, Iowa, or Washington, D.C., and purchase a safe and effective birth control option," Ernst said. "This Republican bill creates a priority review designation for over-the-counter birth control options to encourage the FDA to act quickly."

Ernst said she was "encouraged" that one over-the-counter oral contraceptive has been approved and is available, but that should be "just a starting point."

The four-page bill would encourage the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to approve additional over-the-counter oral contraceptives and "direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on federal funding of contraceptive methods."

The legislation would require the secretary of the Health and Human Services Department to give priority review to a supplemental application for oral contraceptives "intended for routine use." But it does not extend that to "any emergency contraceptive drug" or "any drug that is also approved for induced abortion."

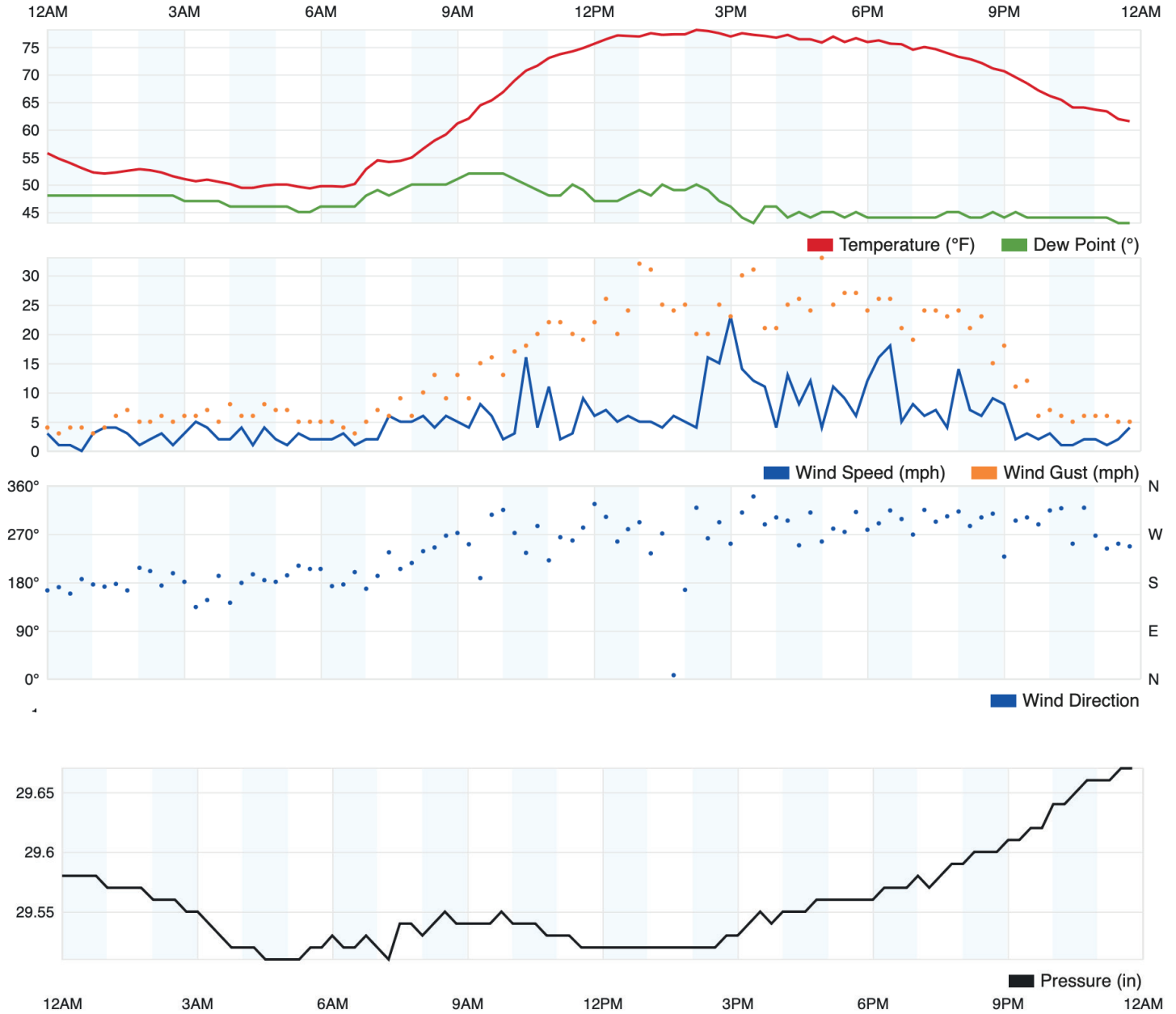
Access to over-the-counter oral birth control that receives FDA approval so that it no longer requires a prescription would be available for people over 18.

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Groton Daily Independent

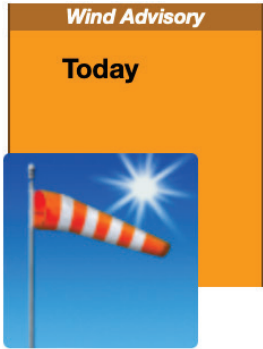
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



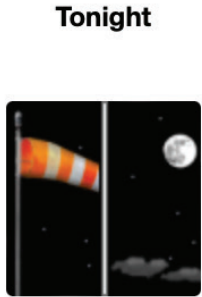
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High: 76 °F

Sunny and Windy



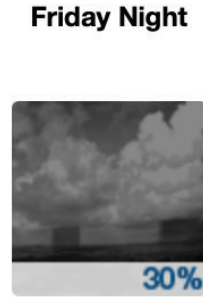
Low: 47 °F

Clear and Breezy then Mostly Clear



High: 81 °F

Sunny



Low: 50 °F

Chance Showers



High: 76 °F

Sunny



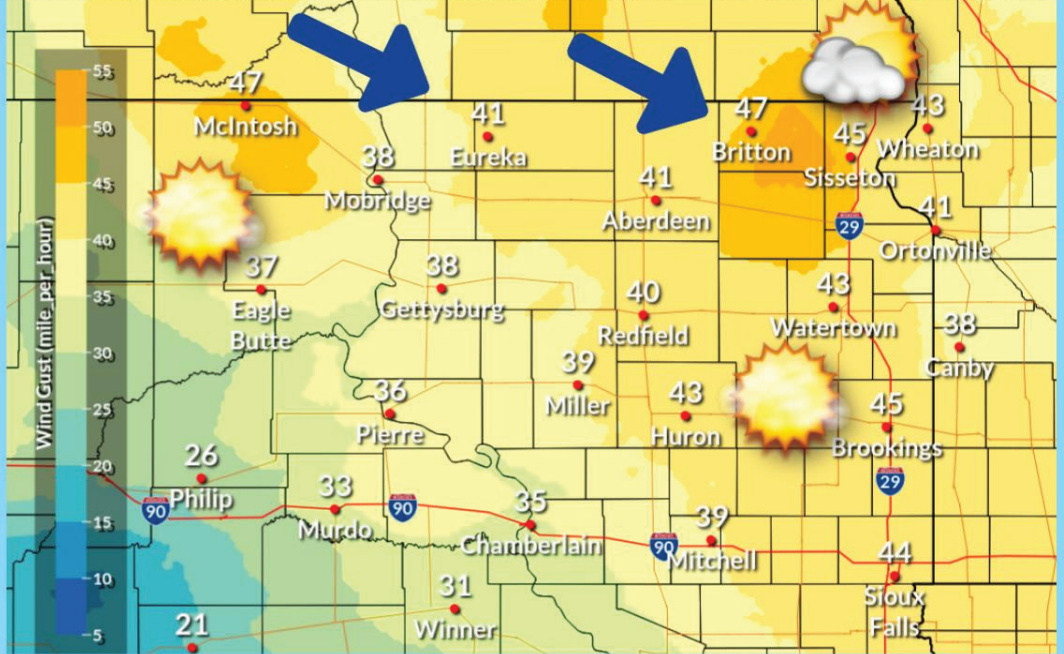
Winds out of the northwest gusting 40 to near 50 mph from northeastern SD to eastern SD/west central MN.

Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abardeen

Maximum Wind Gusts Today

gusts 40 to near 50 mph over north central and eastern SD into west central MN

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Jun 06, 2024 3:55 AM CDT



Winds will continue out of the northwest gusting 40 to near 50 mph from northcentral to northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota during the daytime hours today. The lightest winds will be over south central South Dakota. Temperatures will top out mainly in the 70s today with dry weather continuing.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 78 °F at 2:14 PM

Low Temp: 49 °F at 5:43 AM

Wind: 33 mph at 4:53 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 36 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 1950

Record Low: 30 in 1897

Average High: 78

Average Low: 53

Average Precip in June.: .66

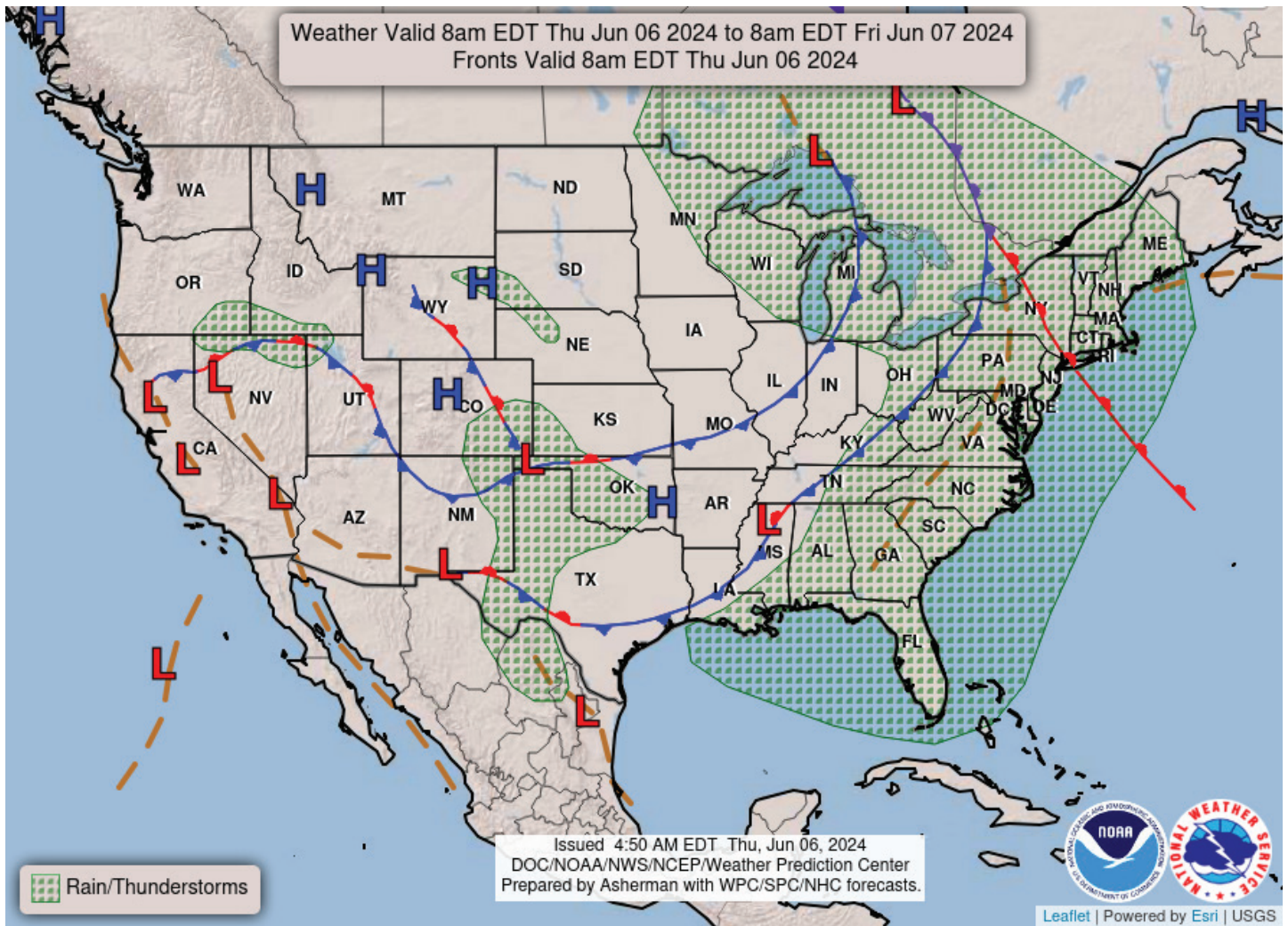
Precip to date in June: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 7.91

Precip Year to Date: 7.14

Sunset Tonight: 9:19:39 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:30 am



Today in Weather History

June 6, 1895: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast from 6 miles west of Summit, passing 3 miles northwest of Summit. Buildings were damaged on eight farms.

June 6, 1897: Light to heavy frost, and in some localities, killing frost occurred on the 6th and 7th. These cold temperatures along with last season frost in May and wet conditions several hampered the planting season. Luckily growing conditions changed towards the middle and end of the month. Some low temperatures on the 6th include 26 degrees in Castlewood and Watertown, 29 in Mellette, 30 in Aberdeen and Milbank, and 32 in Highmore. Some low temperatures on the 7th include; 24 degrees in Castlewood, 25 in Watertown, and 30 degrees in Milbank.

June 6, 1999: Heavy rains of 2 to 4 inches caused flash flooding on a creek feeding into the Grand River. At a ranch southwest of Bullhead, a bunkhouse wall moved off the foundation by a wall of water coming down the creek. All of the contents in the bunkhouse were destroyed. A machine shop was washed away along with several pieces of equipment and many tools. Some tools and equipment were found more than a mile down the creek. A pump house and a grain bin were also destroyed. A pickup was washed down the stream, and a propane tank near home was rolled over. A colt was picked up by the water but managed to escape. The powerful flow of water took out several dead trees and washed them downstream. Finally, a road and a culvert were washed out by the flash flood.

1816: The temperature reached 92 degrees at Salem, Massachusetts during an early heat wave, but then plunged 49 degrees in 24 hours to commence the famous "year without a summer." Snow fell near Quebec City, Quebec Canada from the 6th through the 10th and accumulated up to a foot with "drifts reaching the axle trees of carriages."

1894: One of the greatest floods in U.S. history occurred as the Willamette River overflowed to inundate half of the business district of Portland, Oregon. The river crested at 33.5 feet, the worst flood ever recorded in the city.

1975 - A tornado, reportedly spinning backwards (spinning clockwise), was sighted near Alva, OK. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Severe thunderstorms with large hail and winds to 100 mph caused one million dollars damage around Norfolk, VA. A forty-two foot fishing boat capsized near the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel drowning 13 of the 27 persons on board. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in southern California produced one inch hail at Mount Pinos, and marble size hail at Palmdale. Thunderstorms in southeastern Arizona produced heavy rain leaving some washes under four feet of water. Six cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the upper 90s. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Seventeen cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Williston ND with a reading of 104 degrees. Thunderstorms in Florida produced wind gusts to 65 mph which damaged two mobile homes northwest of Melbourne injuring six people. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing during the late morning hours produced severe weather through the afternoon and night. Thunderstorms spawned 13 tornadoes, and there were 154 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-3) tornado injured six persons at Lorenzo, TX, and thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph killed one person at Glasscock City, TX. Softball size hail was reported at Lipscomb and Glen Cove TX. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NO MISTAKE

Walter came home from Sunday school with a question all over his face. "Mom," he asked, "did the shepherds have washing machines where they kept their sheep?"

"Shepherds? Washing machines?" After a moment she said, "No, darling, they did not have washing machines. Why do you ask?"

"Well, Mrs. Mathis was reading the story of the birth of Jesus and she said, 'While shepherds washed their socks that night...' and I didn't understand what was going on."

While we often think of the shepherds in the field that night, the glory that appeared with the angel and the fear that gripped them, we seldom connect the shepherds in that field with the Good Shepherd.

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd" twice in John's Gospel. In those statements, he summarized all of the prophetic images of His role as prophet in the Old Testament. This declaration is a claim to His divinity as revealed in the Old Testament and focuses on His love, protection, and guidance of us – His lambs – in the New Testament.

But there is more. Not only is He our Shepherd but He chose to identify Himself as the "good shepherd" – and good is a term that carries with it nobility. It stands in sharp contrast to shepherds who were hired hands who worked and cared only for their own self-interests.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for loving us, for being our Good Shepherd and for laying down Your life for us. May we always follow You, our "Good Shepherd!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.04.24

19 37 40 63 69 17

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18
Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

3 15 17 43 49 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,900,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 33
Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

1 2 12 30 33 6

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 48 Mins 3
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

12 20 23 24 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 48
Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

4 11 20 45 49 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 17
Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

8 44 45 51 69 12

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$206,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 17
Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

A hail stone the size of a pineapple was found in Texas. It likely sets a state record

VIGO PARK, Texas (AP) — Storm trackers in the Texas Panhandle recovered a massive hail stone that researchers say is likely to be a new state record.

Val and Amy Castor, veteran storm chasers with Oklahoma City television station KWTU, discovered a piece of hail more than 7 inches (17.78 centimeters) long Sunday along the side of the road near Vigo Park while they were chasing a major thunderstorm system.

Val Castor said the stone was about the size of a pineapple.

"That's the biggest hail I've ever seen, and I've been chasing storms for more than 30 years," Castor said.

Castor said several baseball-sized hail stones fell while he was driving, including one that cracked his windshield, before he spotted the big piece in a ditch on the side of the road.

"I could see it from probably 100 yards away," he said.

The massive hail stone is believed to be a new state record, topping a 6.4-inch (16.25-centimeter) hail stone found in Hondo in 2021. It still must be confirmed by a group of researchers that includes the Texas state climatologist, said Jordan Salem, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Lubbock.

The heaviest hail stone on record in the United States had a reported diameter of 11 inches (27.94 centimeters) and weighed nearly 2 pounds (907 grams). It was discovered near Vivian, South Dakota, in July 2010, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.

Voters defeat hand-counting measures in South Dakota, but others might come in future

By JACK DURA Associated Press

Voters in three small South Dakota counties on Tuesday rejected initiated measures to require hand-counting of ballots in future elections.

The votes in Gregory, Haakon and Tripp counties were an unusual step even as other places in the U.S. have considered moving to hand-counting in the wake of former President Donald Trump's claims of 2020 election fraud.

The measures sought to prohibit the use of tabulating machines and would require hand-counting, which local election officials said would cost more money and require more election workers, who might be difficult to find. Election experts say counting ballots by hand isn't as accurate as machines tabulating the votes.

The measures might not be the only ones put to a vote in South Dakota. Citizens in dozens of other counties are circulating petitions for hand-counting measures, according to Jessica Pollema, president of SD Canvassing, a group which supports the efforts. Other hand-count initiatives could "possibly" appear on November ballots, she said. Pollema did not immediately respond to a phone message or email for comment on the election results.

Todd and Tripp County Auditor Barb DeSersa, who opposed the measure, said, "Well, obviously, the voters have spoken, but I feel that they believe ... we'd be going backwards in time and there is confidence in the machine. There was no reason not to have confidence."

Turnout in Tripp County was 37%, which is typical for a primary election, she said. The three rural counties have a combined 7,744 active registered voters, according to an online report.

South Dakota's primary election will be the first to undergo a post-election audit, a new process from a 2023 law that requires all counties to hand-count the results from two races in 5% of precincts to compare with the official results. But Tripp County will hand-count the whole election for its audit, per the county commission, DeSersa said. In 2022, Tripp hand-counted its general election ballots.

Fall River County hand-counted its primary election ballots, after the county commission voted earlier

this year to do so. County Auditor Sue Ganje said it took about 40 election workers over six hours to hand-count 1,913 ballots.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. June 3, 2024.

Editorial: Hand-Counting Ballots Is Not The Path Forward

There are numerous moving parts involved in conducting an election, with the actual act of voting being just a small (albeit the most essential) component of the scenario. The process also includes tabulating votes in a timely and accurate manner, and those tabulations must be safeguarded to avoid tampering.

That latter aspect is behind an effort in some places across this state and the nation to return to hand-counting votes rather than relying on tabulation machines.

But election overseers — such as, for instance, the county auditors across South Dakota who must conduct elections — say the current process of tabulating votes digitally works well, works quickly, is cost effective and is secure.

Last week, South Dakota Board of Elections decided to not approve petitions submitted from activists to go back to hand counting ballots in elections.

Such a retrogression in the process would require more workers to conduct an election — at a time when finding enough people to work during elections (or anything else) is already difficult — and add significant costs to the process.

The concerns about election integrity hail in part from the 2020 presidential election, during and after which now-former President Donald Trump and some supporters claimed, without evidence, that there was massive election fraud, according to South Dakota Searchlight. One culprit pointed to was the possibility of electronic vote-tabulating software being hacked or manipulated to change the outcome.

However, county auditors have assured the public that electronic tabulation is secure.

Meanwhile, three South Dakota counties — Gregory, Haakon and Tripp — will be voting today (Tuesday) on measures to ban the use of tabulator machines and permit only hand counting of ballots. Petitions for similar efforts were circulated in more than 30 other South Dakota counties.

Such a switch could sow needless chaos in the election process and fuel the very perceptions it is intended to address.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin reported last year that voter tabulation machines “are proven to produce faster, more accurate election results. Hand counts of ballots, especially with multiple races, can take weeks to complete. By contrast, the speed and accuracy of tabulators, and thus election results, help bolster voter confidence.” Also, the manual post-election audits of the results confirmed a high degree of accuracy.

The non-profit group Voting Rights Lab echoed the findings, reporting recently that hand counting can “lead to higher error rates in vote counts and heighten voter concern over corruption. The secure tabulation equipment currently used by states provides a quicker and more accurate result than hand counts.”

In South Dakota, auditors have worked to educate voters “on the election process, including the accuracy and safety of tabulators, and highlighting the potential financial consequences of hand-counting ballots,” Searchlight reported.

One irony in all this is the past demands by some that the results of an election should be known on election night. (Recall Trump’s 2020 election night tweets calling on officials to “stop the count” as ballots in every state continued to be processed.) That instant outcome cannot be guaranteed even with electronic voting. Hand counting would make the wait even longer — much, much longer, in some cases.

Certainly, election security is important, and vigilance must always be maintained. County auditors are the first to point that out.

However, shifting back to hand counting would turn the vote-tabulating process into a slow, expensive and less accurate headache, and it would undercut, not restore, voter faith in this process.

Spain applies to join South Africa's case at top UN court accusing Israel of genocide

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Spain will ask a United Nations court for permission to join South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza, its foreign minister announced Thursday.

Spain is the first European country to take the step after South Africa filed its case with the International Court of Justice late last year. It alleged that Israel was breaching the genocide convention in its military assault that has laid waste to large swaths of Gaza.

Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, Libya and the Palestinians have already requested to join the case currently being heard at the court in The Hague, Netherlands.

The court has ordered Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah but stopped short of ordering a cease-fire for the enclave. Israel has not complied.

"We take the decision because of the ongoing military operation in Gaza," Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said in Madrid. "We want peace to return to Gaza and the Middle East, and for that to happen we must all support the court."

Israel denies it is committing genocide in its military operation to crush Hamas triggered by its deadly Oct. 7 attacks in southern Israel.

Hamas killed 1,200 people and took 250 more hostage in the surprise attacks. Israel's air and land attacks have killed 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Spain's request to join the case is the latest move by the government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to support peacemaking efforts in Gaza.

Spain, Ireland and Norway formally recognized a Palestinian state on May 28 in a coordinated effort by the three Western European nations to add international pressure on Israel. Slovenia, a European Union member along with Spain and Ireland, followed suit and recognized the Palestinian state this week.

Over 140 countries have recognized a Palestinian state — more than two-thirds of the U.N. — but none of the major Western powers, including the United States, has done so.

While Sánchez has denounced the attacks by Hamas and joined demands for the return of the remaining Israeli hostages, he has not shied away from the diplomatic backlash from Israel. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said that by recognizing a Palestinian state, Sánchez's government was "being complicit in inciting genocide against Jews and war crimes."

The latest step by Sánchez's government comes as elections for the European Parliament start across the 27-country bloc. Spaniards will vote on Sunday. Sánchez's backing of the Palestinians is generally supported in Spain, where some university students have followed their American counterparts in protesting on campuses.

The Latest | D-Day's 80th anniversary brings World War II veterans back to the beaches of Normandy

By The Associated Press undefined

World War II veterans are joining heads of state and others Thursday on the beaches of Normandy to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

The Allied invasion, which began on June 6, 1944, led to the defeat of the Nazis and the end of the war. The assault began with Allied aircraft bombing German defenses in Normandy, followed by around 1,200 aircraft that carried airborne troops. As dawn broke, Allied forces started bombing German coastal defenses and shortly after that vessels began putting troops ashore on five codenamed beaches: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. By the end of the day, nearly 160,000 Allied troops had landed in Normandy, although there were thousands of casualties.

Few witnesses to history's biggest amphibious invasion remain alive today.

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Currently:

- Hour by hour: A brief timeline of the Allies' invasion of occupied France
- With time short, veterans seize the chance to keep their D-Day memories alive for others
- Women were barred from combat. But they helped D-Day succeed in other ways
- How AP covered the D-Day landings and lost a photographer in the battle for Normandy
- A Jewish veteran from London prepares to commemorate the 80th anniversary

Here's the latest:

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE DOT FRANCE'S UTAH BEACH FOR D-DAY COMMEMORATIONS

UTAH BEACH, France — Thousands of people, including many people in World War II-era uniforms, were stretched for several kilometers (miles) along Utah Beach ahead of commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings.

Utah was one of the five landing beaches along the coast of Normandy where Allied troops landed on June 6, 2024. Utah and Omaha were taken — at the cost of hundreds of lives — by American forces, with the others stormed by troops from Britain and Canada, also killing many hundreds, plus others from France.

The long stretch of the Normandy coast is where the largest-ever land, sea and air armada punctured Hitler's defenses in Western Europe and helped precipitate his downfall 11 months later.

A fair-like atmosphere is fueled by World War II-era jeeps and trucks tearing down hedge-rowed lanes so deadly for Allied troops who fought dug-in German defenders, and of reenactors playing at war on sands where D-Day soldiers fell.

Surviving veterans, who are around 100 years old now, are the VIPs of the day's events.

'FREEDOM COSTS,' DENMARK'S PRIME MINISTER SAYS AS SHE MARKS D-DAY'S 80TH ANNIVERSARY

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark's prime minister said that this year's observances of the D-Day landings, which come as Russia is at war against Ukraine, are a reminder that there is a price for defending freedom.

"From D-Day we have learned that freedom costs," Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said in a statement as she headed to Normandy for ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of the Allied landings.

"Eighty years later, Europe once again finds itself at a fateful moment. Where freedom is once again being fought for on our own continent," she said, "against an aggressive and brutal enemy who will dictate country borders with brute force and leave a trail of death and destruction."

IMAGINING THE HORROR AND CELEBRATING FREEDOM

UTAH BEACH, France — Because freedom is worth celebrating and passing on to children, too, Alexandra Hamon, 35, drank champagne and shared the sunrise with her boys, Karl and Neils, both 13, as the day dawned Thursday over the beaches where Allied soldiers landed on D-Day.

The family was among a crowd several thousands strong that stretched for kilometers along Utah beach — one of the five beaches along the coast of Normandy where Allied troops landed. Utah and Omaha were taken — at the cost of hundreds of lives — by American forces, with the others stormed by troops from Britain and Canada, also killing many hundreds, plus others from France. The other code-named beaches are Juno, Sword and Gold.

Karl sat perched on the hood of their 1943 Dodge truck, lovingly restored by her husband, Enogat, as the family from Saint Malo, a French coastal city that was badly damaged in major fighting about two months after D-Day, stared out across the English Channel.

The waters Thursday were still and peaceful — unlike on that fateful day that helped change the course of WWII and precipitate Adolf Hitler's downfall 11 months later.

"It's indescribable, just imagining the chaos. Now it's peaceful, almost festive, we try to imagine but I think it's unimaginable," she said.

"You think of all those guys, everything they went through," she added of the fast-dwindling D-Day veterans. "They say they aren't heroes. But they are, they are. Those guys really should never die. I imagine the boats, the guys arriving, the sounds. It must have been horrible, yes, horrible."

KEEPING ALIVE THE MEMORY OF SOLDIERS 'WHO DIED FOR OUR FREEDOM'

Groton Daily Independent

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UTAH BEACH, France — As the rising sun took the night's chill off Utah Beach, Christophe Receveur, 57, from Thionville in eastern France, unfurled a Stars and Stripes he bought in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, six months ago specifically to honor the Americans who fell on D-Day.

"To keep alive the memory of the soldiers who died for our freedom," he said. "To forget them is to let them die all over again."

Receveur and his daughter, Julie, 28, carefully folded the flag into a tight triangle after their quiet, reflective homage on an empty stretch of the beach, busy with hundreds of people strung out along the sands.

Receveur said the Ukraine war was on his mind, too, as he honored the fallen of WWII. His great grandfather fought in WWI, his grandfather was a prisoner of war in WWII, and his father was a veteran of France's war in former North African colony Algeria.

"I don't want our freedom, for our kids, our grandkids, to be hit by ... I don't want to say a madman," referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin. "So a lot of respect for these people who died and for those who are still dying," he said of the WWII dead and those in Ukraine.

He said the D-Day sacrifices have to be remembered. "Lots of emotion that all these troops came to liberate a country that they didn't know for an ideology — democracy, freedom — that is under severe strain now."

'WE JUST HAVE TO REMEMBER THE SACRIFICES'

UTAH BEACH, France — As the golden sun pierced low clouds over the seas that were thick with landing craft approaching Normandy on D-Day, Becky Kraubetz peered across the English Channel toward her native Britain, her eyes filled with tears as she thought about the scene 80 years ago.

"It's so historic and we just have to remember the sacrifices of everybody who gave us our freedom," said Kraubetz, whose grandfather served with the British Army during World War II and was captured in Malta.

"It gives you goosebumps, everything that happened here. Imagine just jumping into the water, freezing cold," said the 54-year-old who now lives in Florida, as the rays of the morning sun started to warm the hundreds of people who'd waited through the night's chill for dawn's break.

"The bravery, the courage, for people to face that is just unbelievable — very, very humbled to be here."

THE SUN RISES OVER NORMANDY BEACHES AS THE WORLD REMEMBERS D-DAY

UTAH BEACH, France — As the sun sets on the D-Day generation, it's rising again over Normandy beaches where soldiers fought and died exactly 80 years ago, kicking off intense anniversary commemorations Thursday against the backdrop of renewed war in Europe, in Ukraine.

Ever-dwindling numbers of World War II veterans, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, make this anniversary particularly meaningful, mixing poignant remembrances for D-Day sacrifices with an Allied show of solidarity for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, among the guests.

But host France hasn't invited World War II ally Russia, citing its "war of aggression against Ukraine that has intensified in recent weeks."

HUNDREDS GATHER AT DAWN AT UTAH BEACH TO MARK D-DAY'S 80TH ANNIVERSARY

UTAH BEACH, France — Hundreds of people, some in WWII-era uniforms, arrived before dawn to stretch out across the now peaceful sands of Utah Beach, one of the five Allied landing zones on D-Day where troops waded into cold seas through hails of fire exactly 80 years ago.

"It's our way of paying homage, and better understanding what really happened in the 1944 landings," said Dimitri Picot, a 33-year-old from the nearby Normandy town of Carentan who works as a rat and pest catcher.

Picot said he often dives on a wrecked ship that was hit and exploded, its wreckage visible Thursday as night gave way to day. Growing up amid the June 6, 1944, landing zones, he said he has become accustomed to seeing walls still pockmarked by bullets, shrapnel and other reminders of that fateful day.

But on the 80th anniversary "to think that they liberated us" hammered home the emotion, he said.

Israeli strike kills at least 33 people at Gaza school the military claims was being used by Hamas

By WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An Israeli strike early Thursday on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in central Gaza killed more than 30 people, including 23 women and children, according to local health officials. The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school.

It was the latest instance of mass casualties among Palestinians trying to find refuge as Israel expands its offensives in the Gaza Strip. A day earlier, the military announced a new ground and air assault in central Gaza, pursuing Hamas militants it says have regrouped there. Troops repeatedly have swept back into sections of the Gaza Strip they have previously invaded, underscoring the resilience of the militant group despite Israel's nearly eight-month onslaught in the territory.

Witnesses and hospital officials said the predawn strike hit the al-Sardi School, run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees known by the acronym UNRWA. The school was filled with Palestinians who had fled Israeli offensives and bombardment in northern Gaza, they said.

Ayman Rashed, a man displaced from Gaza City who was sheltering at the school, said the missiles hit classrooms on the second and third floor where families were sheltering. He said he helped carry out five dead, including an old man and two children, one with his head shattered open. "It was dark, with no electricity, and we struggled to get out the victims," Rashed said.

Casualties from school strike arrived at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah, which had already been overwhelmed by a stream of constant ambulances since the central Gaza incursion began 24 hours earlier, said Omar al-Derawi, a photographer working for the hospital. Videos circulating online appeared to show several wounded people being treated on the floor of the hospital, a common scene in Gaza's overwhelmed medical wards. Electricity in much of the hospital is out because staff are rationing fuel supplies for the generator.

"You can't walk in the hospital — there's so many people. Women from the victims' families are massed in the hallways, crying," he said.

Hospital records and an Associated Press reporter at the hospital recorded at least 33 dead from the strike, including 14 children and nine women. Another strike on a house overnight killed six people, according to the records. Both strikes occurred in Nuseirat, one of several built-up refugee camps in Gaza dating to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes in what became the new state.

Footage showed bodies wrapped in blankets or plastic bags being laid out in lines in the courtyard of the hospital. Mohammed al-Kareem, a displaced Palestinian sheltering near the hospital, said he saw people searching for their loved ones among bodies, and that one woman kept asking medical workers to open the wraps on the bodies to see if her son was inside.

"The situation is tragic," he said.

The Israeli military said Hamas had embedded a "compound" within the school and that Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants inside were using it as a shelter where they were planning attacks against Israeli troops, though it didn't immediately offer evidence. It released a photo of the school, pointing to classrooms on the second and third floor where it claimed militants were located.

It said it took steps before the strike "to reduce the risk of harming uninvolved civilians ... including conducting aerial surveillance, and additional intelligence information."

UNRWA schools across Gaza have functioned as shelters since the start of the war, which has driven most of the territory's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes.

Last week, Israeli strikes hit near an UNRWA facility in the southern city of Rafah, saying they were targeting Hamas militants. An inferno that followed ripped through tents nearby housing displaced families, killing at least 45 people. The deaths triggered international outrage, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the fire was the result of a "tragic mishap." The military said the fire may have been caused by secondary explosions. The cause of the explosions has not been determined.

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Israel sent troops into Rafah in early May in what it said was a limited incursion, but those forces are now operating in central parts of the city. More than 1 million people have fled Rafah since the start of the operation, scattering across southern and central Gaza into new tent camps or crowding into schools and homes.

Israel launched its campaign in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and took another 250 hostage. Israel's offensive has killed at least 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its figures.

Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it positions fighters, tunnels and rocket launchers in residential areas.

The United States has thrown its weight behind a phased cease-fire and hostage release outlined by President Joe Biden last week. But Israel says it won't end the war without destroying Hamas, while the militant group is demanding a lasting cease-fire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Far-right members of Netanyahu's government have threatened to bring down the coalition if he signs onto a cease-fire deal. On Wednesday, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, a leading hard-liner, spoke at an annual march through Jerusalem's Old City, saying, "We are delivering a message from here to Hamas: Jerusalem is ours. Damascus Gate is ours" — referring to a main gate into the Arab-majority section of the city — "And with God's help total victory is ours."

The annual march commemorates "Jerusalem Day," which marks Israel's capture of east Jerusalem, including the Old City and its holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, in the 1967 Middle East war.

Israel has routinely launched airstrikes in all parts of Gaza since the start of the war and has carried out massive ground operations in the territory's two largest cities, Gaza City and Khan Younis, that left much of them in ruins.

The military waged an offensive earlier this year for several weeks in Bureij and several other nearby refugee camps in central Gaza.

Troops pulled out of the Jabaliya camp in northern Gaza last Friday after weeks of fighting caused widespread destruction. First responders have recovered the bodies of 360 people, mostly women and children, killed during the battles.

The sun rises over Normandy's beaches on D-Day's 80th anniversary

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

UTAH BEACH, France (AP) — As the sun sets on the D-Day generation, it rose again over Normandy beaches where soldiers fought and died exactly 80 years ago Thursday, kicking off intense anniversary commemorations against the backdrop of renewed war in Europe, in Ukraine.

Ever-dwindling numbers of World War II veterans who have pilgrimaged back to France, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that has dashed hopes that lives and cities wouldn't again be laid to waste in Europe, are making the poignant anniversary of the June 6, 1944, Allied landings even more so 80 years on.

As now-centenarian veterans revisit old memories and fallen comrades buried in Normandy graves, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presence at D-Day commemorations with world leaders who are supporting Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion — including United States President Joe Biden — will inevitably fuse together World War II's awful past with the fraught present on Thursday.

The break of dawn almost eight decades exactly after Allied troops waded ashore under hails of gunfire on five code-named beaches — Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword — kicked off a day of remembrance by Allied nations now standing together again behind Ukraine — and with World War II ally Russia not invited by host France. It cited Russia's "war of aggression against Ukraine that has intensified in recent weeks" for the snub.

With the dead and wounded on both sides in Ukraine estimated in the hundreds of thousands, commemorations for the more than 4,400 Allied dead on D-Day and many tens of thousands more, including French civilians, killed in the ensuing Battle of Normandy are tinged with concerns that World War II lessons are being lost.

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"There are things worth fighting for," said World War II veteran Walter Stitt, who fought in tanks and turns 100 in July, as he visited Omaha Beach this week. "Although I wish there was another way to do it than to try to kill each other."

"We'll learn one of these days, but I won't be around for that," he said.

Conscious of the inevitability that major D-Day anniversaries will soon take place without World War II veterans, huge throngs of aficionados in uniforms and riding vehicles of the time, and tourists soaking up the spectacle, have flooded Normandy for the 80th anniversary.

"It's so historic and we just have to remember the sacrifices of everybody who gave us our freedom," said Becky Kraubetz, a Briton now living in Florida whose grandfather served with the British Army during World War II and was captured in Malta.

"It gives you goosebumps, everything that happened here. Imagine just jumping into the water, freezing cold," the 54-year-old said as she gazed across the English Channel, tears in her eyes. "The bravery, the courage, for people to face that is just unbelievable — very, very humbled to be here."

She was among a crowd of thousands of people that stretched for several kilometers (miles) along Utah beach, the westernmost of the D-Day beaches.

In a quiet spot away from the official ceremonies, France's Christophe Receveur performed his own tribute, unfurling an American flag he had bought on a trip to Pennsylvania to honor those who died on D-Day.

"To forget them is to let them die all over again," the 57-year-old said as he and his daughter, Julie, then carefully refolded the flag into a tight triangle, adding that those now dying in Ukraine fighting the invading Russian army were also on his mind.

"All these troops came to liberate a country that they didn't know for an ideology — democracy, freedom — that is under severe strain now," he said.

The fair-like atmosphere fueled by World War II-era jeeps and trucks tearing down hedge-rowed lanes so deadly for Allied troops who fought dug-in German defenders, and of reenactors playing at war on sands where D-Day soldiers fell, leave open the question of what meaning anniversaries will have once the veterans are gone.

But at the 80th, they're the VIPs of commemorations across the Normandy coast where the largest-ever land, sea and air armada punctured Hitler's defenses in Western Europe and helped precipitate his downfall 11 months later.

"They really were the golden generation, those 17-, 18-year-old guys doing something so brave," said James Baker, a 56-year-old from the Netherlands, reflecting as dawn broke on Utah Beach.

Farther up the coast on Gold beach, a military bagpiper played at precisely the time that British troops landed there 80 years ago.

U.K. King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak were to take part in a ceremony later in the day to honor them and the British troops who also landed on Sword beach, while Prince William was set to participate in a ceremony for the Canadian troops who landed on Juno beach that will also include Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Biden was to take part in a ceremony at the American cemetery overlooking Omaha beach.

Those who traveled to Normandy include women who were among the millions who built bombers, tanks and other weaponry and played other vital World War II roles that were long overshadowed by the combat exploits of men.

"We weren't doing it for honors and awards. We were doing it to save our country. And we ended up helping save the world," said 98-year-old Anna Mae Krier, who worked as a riveter building B-17 and B-29 bombers.

Feted where ever they go in wheelchairs and walking with canes, veterans are using their voices to repeat their message they hope will live eternal: Never forget.

"To know the amount of people who were killed here, just amazing," 98-year-old Allan Chatwin, who served with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, said as he visited Omaha, the deadliest of the Allied beaches on D-Day. He quickly added: "I don't know that amazing is the word."

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Netherlands kicks off 4 days of European Union elections across 27 nations

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Polls opened in the Netherlands on Thursday to kick off four days of voting in European Union parliamentary elections across the 27 member states that are expected to deliver gains for the hard right.

Geert Wilders, of the far-right Party for Freedom, or PVV, was among the first senior politicians to cast his ballot. Having sent shockwaves around Europe six months ago by becoming the biggest party in the Dutch national parliament, he now wants to build on that popularity and set the tone for much of the bloc, with calls to claw powers back to national capitals and away from the EU so member states have more autonomy on issues such as migration.

Paradoxically, like many hard right parties across the bloc, he wants to get more powers in the European parliament, so he can weaken the EU institutions from within.

"You also need to have a strong presence in the European Parliament and make sure that, if necessary, we will be able to change the European guidelines in order to be in charge of our own immigration policy and asylum policy," Wilders said after voting in The Hague.

That is why he was immediately calling for a broad alliance of hard right parties to break up the traditional coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists, pro-business Liberals and Greens.

"Making a larger group in the European Parliament," Wilders said, "that gives us power to change all those European regulations in order to be more in charge of it ourselves — here in the national parliaments."

Wilders, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and French opposition leader Marine Le Pen stand in stark contrast to much of the left and many center parties, which call for a more united European approach on anything from climate change measures to defense, arguing individual nations only have a weak voice on the global stage.

"It is important that the European Union is a good and strong partner," said Gerard Kroon, a 66-year-old who works for the Hague municipality and voted in city hall for pro-Europe party Volt. "We have to get things done all together. Not only in Europe but in the Netherlands too."

Since the last EU elections five years ago, populist, far-right and extremist parties now lead governments in three EU nations, are part of governing coalitions in several others, and appear to have surging public support across the continent.

The EU elections are the world's second-biggest exercise in democracy behind the election in India, and the stakes are high.

Almost 400 million voters will be electing 720 members of the European Parliament from beyond the Arctic circle to the edges of Africa and Asia. The results will have an impact on issues ranging from global climate policies and defense to migration and geopolitical relations with China and the United States.

There was some early voting in some countries, but the Netherlands is the only EU country to start its single-day vote so early, followed by Ireland and the Czech Republic on Friday and the rest of the EU nations over the weekend. Europe-wide results will be announced Sunday night after all member states have completed voting.

Since the last European elections in 2019, war has broken out on the fringe of the bloc following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a country that desperately wants to join the EU.

A founding member, the Netherlands was long unwavering in its support of EU policies. Research from the Clingendael think tank, though, suggests dissatisfaction with the EU among Dutch people, and that while most believe that the Netherlands should remain in the bloc, many also believe it should be more self-sufficient.

While many voters are predicted to lurch to the right, the Christian Democrat-dominated European People's Party, led by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, is currently the EU legislature's biggest bloc and is bound to be the coalition kingmaker when the dust settles on the election results.

In the Netherlands, Wilders' PVV could build on its domestic success and surge, possibly overtaking the combined Labor Party and Green Left. Labor topped the Dutch EU Parliament election in 2019 with

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19% of the vote for six seats while the Greens took 11% and three seats. Wilders' party at the time only managed 3.5% and no seats.

Wilders and one of his likely coalition partners, the Farmer Citizen Movement, are popular among farmers in the Netherlands who have staged regular protests to call for an easing of EU legislation they say is crippling their livelihoods.

Wilders has in the past called for the Netherlands to leave the EU as Britain did, but his party's manifesto for the election starting Thursday makes no mention of a so-called Nexit. Instead, it urges voters to back the PVV so it can change the EU from within, similar to plans of many other hard right parties across the bloc.

The number of members elected in each country depends on the size of the population, ranging from six for Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus to 96 for Germany. In 2019, Europeans elected 751 lawmakers. Following the United Kingdom's departure from the EU in 2020, the number of MEPs fell to 705. Some of the 73 seats previously held by British MEPs were redistributed to other member states.

The lawmakers, known as Members of the European Parliament, or MEPs, can vote on a wide range of legislation covering banking rules, climate, agriculture, fisheries, security and justice. They also vote on the EU budget, which is crucial to the implementation of European policies, including, for instance, the aid delivered to Ukraine.

After the election, MEPs will elect their president at the first plenary session, from July 16-19. Then, most likely in September, they will nominate the president of the European Commission, following a proposal made by the member states. In 2019, von der Leyen narrowly won a vote to become the first woman to head the institution. She is seeking a second term.

The UN says a quarter of the world's children under 5 have severe food poverty. Many are in Africa

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

KALTUNGO, Nigeria (AP) — The 9-month-old twins cried nonstop and tugged at their mother, seeking attention but also food. They had received little in the past 24 hours, and there were signs of deeper hunger in the heads too big for their tiny bodies.

"Not much milk comes out," said their 38-year-old mother, Dorcas Simon, who struggles to breastfeed and has three other children. She laughed, as if to conceal the pain. "What will I give them when I don't have food myself?"

Here in northern Nigeria, where conflict and climate change have long contributed to the problem, her twins are among 181 million children under 5 — or 27% of the world's youngest children — who live in severe food poverty, according to a new report Thursday by the U.N.'s children agency.

The report, which focused on nearly 100 low- and middle-income countries, defines severe food poverty as consuming nothing in a day or, at best, two out of eight food groups the agency recognizes.

Africa's population of more than 1.3 billion people is one of the most affected mainly due to conflict, climate crises and rising food prices. The continent accounts for one-third of the global burden and 13 of the 20 most affected countries.

But it has also recorded some progress, the report said.

The percentage of children living in severe food poverty in West and Central Africa fell from 42% to 32% over the last decade, it said, noting advances including diversified crops and performance-based incentives for health workers.

In the absence of vital nutrients, children living with "extremely poor" diets are more likely to experience wasting, a life-threatening form of malnutrition, the agency known as UNICEF said.

"When wasting becomes very severe, they are 12 times more likely to die," Harriet Torlesse, one of the report's authors, told The Associated Press.

In several Nigerian communities like Kaltungo in the northeast where Simon lives, UNICEF is training thousands of women in how to boost their families' nutrient intake with cassava, sweet potato, maize and

millet grown in gardens at home.

More than a dozen women gathered this week in Kaltungo's Poshereng village to learn dozens of recipes they can prepare with those foods which, in the absence of rain, are grown in sand-filled sacks that require little water.

Mothers in Nigeria also face the country's worst cost of living crisis. Growing food at home saves money.

Aisha Aliyu, a 36-year-old mother of five, said her latest child "used to be skinny but is growing fatter" because of what they now grow at home. Hauwa Bwami, a 50-year-old mother of five, nearly lost her grandchild to kwashiorkor, a disease with severe protein malnutrition, before the UNICEF training started a year ago. Now she grows enough food that she sells to other women.

Kaltungo is in a semi-arid agricultural region where climate change has limited rainfall in recent years. Some children have died of acute malnutrition in the past because food is scarce, said Ladi Abdullahi, who trains the women.

The training "is like answered prayers for me," Simon said in her first time with the group.

But it can be a painful lesson. Another trainee, Florence Victor, 59, watched helplessly as her nine-month-old grandchild succumbed to malnutrition in 2022.

Malnutrition also can weaken the immune system over time, leaving children vulnerable to diseases that can kill.

In the Sahel, the semiarid region south of the Sahara Desert which is a hot spot for violent extremism, there has been an increase in acute malnutrition — worse than severe food poverty — that has reached emergency levels, said Alfred Ejem, senior food security advisor with the Mercy Corps aid group in Africa.

Because of displacement and climate change, families have resorted to "bad coping mechanisms like eating leaves and locusts just to survive," Ejem said.

In conflict-hit Sudan, children are dying of severe malnutrition in large numbers.

In Nigeria's troubled northwest, the French medical organization Doctors Without Borders said at least 850 children died last year within 24 to 48 hours of being admitted to its health facilities.

"We are resorting to treating patients on mattresses on the floor because our facilities are full," Simba Tirima, MSF's Nigeria representative, said Tuesday.

Many malnourished children in the region never make it to a hospital because they live in remote areas or their families cannot afford care.

Inequality also plays a role in severe food poverty among children in Africa, the new report said. In South Africa, the most unequal country in the world, roughly one in every four children is affected by severe food poverty even though it is the continent's most developed nation.

Governments and partners must act urgently, author Torlesse said: "The work starts now."

Yemen's Houthi rebels unveil solid-fuel 'Palestine' missile that resembles Iranian hypersonic

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels have unveiled a new, solid-fuel missile in their arsenal that resembles aspects of one earlier displayed by Iran that Tehran described as flying at hypersonic speeds.

The rebels fired its new "Palestine" missile, complete with a warhead painted like a Palestinian keffiyeh checkered scarf, at the southern Gulf of Aqaba port of Eilat in Israel on Monday. The attack set off air raid sirens but caused no reported damage or injuries.

Footage released by the Houthis late Wednesday showed the Palestine being raised on what appeared to be a mobile launcher and rising quickly into the air with plumes of white smoke coming from its engine. White smoke is common with solid-fuel missiles.

Solid-fuel missiles can be set up and fired faster than those containing liquid fuel. That's a key concern for the Houthis as their missile launch sites have been repeatedly targeted by U.S. and allied forces in

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recent months over the rebels' attacks on shipping through the Red Sea corridor. One such strike hit the Houthis even before they were able to launch their missile.

For their part, the Houthis described the Palestine as a "locally made" missile. However, the Houthis are not known to possess the ability to manufacture complicated missile and guidance systems locally in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, which been gripped by war since the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, nearly a decade ago.

The Houthis have, however, been repeatedly armed by Iran during the war despite a United Nations arms embargo. While Iran claims it doesn't arm the Houthis, ships seized by the U.S. and its allies have found Iranian weaponry, missile fuel and components on board.

Iranian media reported the launch of the Palestine and described it as locally manufactured, citing the Houthis. However, design elements on the missile resemble other missiles developed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. That includes one called the Fattah, or "Conqueror" in Farsi.

Iran unveiled the missile last year and claimed it could reach Mach 15 — or 15 times the speed of sound. It also described the missile's range as up to 1,400 kilometers (870 miles). That's a little short of Eilat from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, but missile can be reconfigured to boost their range.

In March, Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted an anonymous source claiming the Houthis had a hypersonic missile.

"While we cannot say for sure what exact version the 'Palestine' corresponds to, we can say with high certainty that it is an advanced and precision-guided (Guard)-developed solid propellant missile provided by Iran," wrote Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the similarity between the Palestine and its missiles.

Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds higher than Mach 5, could pose crucial challenges to missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

Ballistic missiles fly on a trajectory in which anti-missile systems like the U.S.-made Patriot can anticipate their path and intercept them. The more irregular the missile's flight path, such as a hypersonic missile with the ability to change directions, the more difficult it becomes to intercept.

China is believed to be pursuing the weapons, as is America. Russia claims it has already used them. It remains unclear how well the Palestine maneuvers and at what speed it travels.

What's at stake in the European Parliament election this week

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Nearly 400 million European Union citizens can go to the polls over the coming days to elect members of the European Parliament, or MEPs, in one of the biggest global democratic events.

Far-right parties are seeking to gain more power amid a rise in the cost of living and farmers' discontent, while the wars in Gaza and Ukraine stay on the minds of voters.

One of the biggest questions is whether European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will remain in charge as the public face of the EU.

Here is a look at the election, which runs Thursday to Sunday, and the biggest issues at stake:

WHEN IS THE VOTE?

EU elections are held every five years across the 27-member bloc. This year marks the 10th parliamentary election since the first polls in 1979, and the first after Brexit.

The vote takes place from June 6-9. Initial results can only be revealed on the evening of June 9, once polling stations have closed in all member states.

HOW DOES VOTING WORK?

The elections started Thursday in the Netherlands and finish on Sunday, when most countries hold their election. The voting is done by direct universal suffrage in a single ballot.

The number of members elected in each country depends on the size of the population. It ranges from

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six for Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus to 96 for Germany. In 2019, Europeans elected 751 lawmakers. Following the United Kingdom's departure from the EU in 2020, the number of MEPs fell to 705 with some of the 73 seats previously held by British MEPs redistributed to other member states.

After the election, the European Parliament will have 15 additional members, bringing the total to 720. Twelve countries will get extra MEPs.

National political parties contest elections, but once they are elected, most of the lawmakers then join transnational political groups.

WHO IS VOTING?

People under 18 are allowed to vote in some countries. In Belgium, a law adopted in 2022 lowered the minimum voting age to 16. Germany, Malta and Austria are also permitting 16-year-olds to vote. In Greece, the youngest voting age is 17. In all other member states, it's 18.

A minimum age is also required to stand for election — from 18 in most countries to 25 in Italy and Greece.

WHAT ABOUT TURNOUT?

European Union elections usually don't bring a huge turnout, but there was a clear upturn in public interest in the 2019 election. At 50.7%, the turnout was eight points higher than in 2014 after steadily falling since 1979, when it reached 62%.

In April, the latest edition of the European Parliament's Eurobarometer highlighted a surge of interest in the upcoming election. Around 71% of Europeans said they are likely to cast a ballot.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES?

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is at the forefront of citizens' minds, with defense and security seen as key campaign issues. At national level, the EU's defense and security was mentioned first in nine countries.

The economy, jobs, poverty and social exclusion, public health, climate change and the future of Europe are also featuring prominently as issues.

WHAT DO EU LAWMAKERS DO?

The European Parliament is the only EU institution to be elected by European citizens. It's a real counterpower to the powerful EU's executive arm, the European Commission.

The parliament doesn't have the initiative to propose legislation, but its powers are expanding. It is now competent on a wide range of topics, voting on laws relating to climate, banking rules, agriculture, fisheries, security or justice. The legislature also votes on the EU budget, which is crucial to the implementation of European policies, including, for instance, aid delivered to Ukraine.

Lawmakers are also a key element of the check and balances system since they need to approve the nomination of all EU commissioners, who are the equivalent of ministers. It can also force the whole commission to resign with a vote of a two-third majority.

WHAT'S THE CURRENT MAKEUP OF THE PARLIAMENT?

With 176 seats out of 705 as of the end of the last plenary session in April, the center-right European People's Party is the largest political group in the European Parliament.

Von der Leyen is from the EPP and hopes to remain at the helm of the EU's executive arm after the election.

The second-largest group is the S&D, the political group of the center-left Party of European Socialists, which currently holds 139 seats. The pro-business liberal and pro-European Renew group holds 102 seats ahead of an alliance made up of green and regionalist political parties that holds 72 seats.

FAR RIGHT LOOKS TO MAKE GAINS

Two groups with far-right parties, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID), could be headed to becoming the third- and fourth-largest political groups at the European Parliament. The two groups have many divergences and it's unclear to what extent they could team up to affect the EU's agenda, especially the EU's efforts to support Ukraine against Russia in the war.

The EPP and S&D are expected to remain stable. Pro-business liberals and greens could both take a hit

after they made big gains at the previous election.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE ELECTION?

Once the weight of each political force is determined, MEPs will elect their president at the first plenary session, from July 16-19. Then, most likely in September after weeks of negotiations, they will nominate the president of the European Commission, following a proposal made by the member states.

In 2019, von der Leyen won a narrow majority (383 votes in favor, 327 against, 22 abstentions) to become the first woman to head the institution. Parliamentarians will also hear from the European commissioners before approving them in a single vote.

Von der Leyen has good chances to be appointed for another term, but she needs to secure the support of enough leaders. She has also antagonized many lawmakers by suggesting she could work with the hard right depending on the outcome of the elections.

Tornado hits Michigan without warning, killing toddler, while twister in Maryland injures 5

LIVONIA, Mich. (AP) — A toddler was killed and his mother was injured when a tornado struck suburban Detroit without warning, while five people were injured when a tornado in Maryland collapsed structures and trapped people inside.

Officials in Livonia, Michigan, said the tornado tore through several neighborhoods on Wednesday afternoon and developed so quickly that there was no advance notice from the National Weather Service or others that would have normally led to the activation of warning sirens.

The storm uprooted a massive tree that fell on one family's house and came through the roof, landing on a bed where a woman and her 2-year-old were sleeping, officials said in a post on the city's website. Crews worked for nearly an hour to remove the roof and parts of the tree and then lift the tree to get the victims out.

The toddler was pronounced dead at the scene, officials said. The mother was transported to a local hospital in critical condition.

A 2-week-old sibling who was in a crib in a separate room was not injured but taken to a hospital for an evaluation, Livonia Fire Department Chief Robert Jennison told WDIV-TV.

"This is a terrible tragedy for our community," Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan said in the statement. "Our hearts are broken, too, and we send our deepest sympathies."

The National Weather Service in Detroit confirmed on the social platform X that an EF1 tornado with a peak wind speed of 95 mph (153 kmh) moved through Livonia. The agency said the twister traveled a path spanning over 5 miles (8 kilometers), uprooting trees and damaging some homes.

A representative from the weather service called it a spin-up storm that didn't show up on their radars in enough time to issue a warning, according to city officials.

Tornado warnings were issued for parts of several other states on Wednesday night, including Ohio, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.

In Maryland, emergency workers responded to reports that people were trapped inside structures that collapsed after a tornado hit Wednesday night.

The tornado was spotted in a suburban area of Montgomery County northwest of Washington, the National Weather Service said in a social media post warning people in the area to take cover.

There were reports of three collapsed structures in Gaithersburg with people trapped inside, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service spokesperson Pete Piringier said.

Piringier said the most significant damage occurred when a large tree fell on a single-family house, leaving five people injured, including one with traumatic injuries. He said they were all transported to a hospital.

Local television footage showed large downed trees that damaged houses when they fell.

David Pazos, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue assistant chief, said there were a lot of power outages.

"We don't know what people's needs are, so we're having to go door to door to assess whether they need fire and rescue services or need relocation because of damage to their homes," he said.

India's opposition, written off as too weak, makes a stunning comeback to slow Modi's juggernaut

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's bruised and battered opposition was largely written off in the lead-up to the national election as too weak and fragmented to take on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his powerful Hindu nationalist governing party.

It scored a stunning comeback, slowing the Modi juggernaut and pushing his Bharatiya Janata Party well below the majority mark. It's uncharted territory for the populist prime minister, who needs the help of his allies to stay in power. That could significantly change his governance style after he enjoyed a commanding majority in Parliament for a decade.

The election results released Wednesday also marked a revival for the main opposition Congress party and its allies, who defied predictions of decline and made deep inroads into governing party strongholds, resetting India's political landscape. The opposition won a total of 232 seats out of 543, doubling its strength from the last election.

"The opposition has proved to be tremendously resilient and shown courage of conviction. In many ways it has saved India's democracy and shown Modi that he can be challenged — and even humbled by denting his image of electoral invincibility," said journalist and political analyst Rasheed Kidwai.

The unwieldy grouping of more than two dozen opposition parties, called INDIA, was formed last year. Beset with ideological differences and personality clashes, what glued them together was a shared perceived threat: what they call Modi's tightening grip on India's democratic institutions and Parliament, and his strident Hindu nationalism that has targeted the country's minorities, particularly Muslims.

The election battle is between "Narendra Modi and INDIA, his ideology and INDIA," the alliance's campaign face, Rahul Gandhi, said at an opposition meeting last year.

Gandhi, heir to India's Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, has long been mocked by Modi, his party and his supporters as a beneficiary of dynastic politics. Gandhi's father, grandmother and great-grandfather were all prime ministers.

Under his leadership, the Congress party was reduced to a paltry 52 seats in 2019 when Modi romped to victory in a landslide win. And last year he was expelled from Parliament due to a defamation case after Modi's party accused him of mocking the prime minister's surname. (He was later returned to his seat by India's top court.)

But ahead of the 2024 election, Gandhi went through a transformation — he embarked on two cross-country marches against what he called Modi's politics of hate, re-energizing his party's members and rehabilitating his image.

During the election campaign, he, along with other opposition leaders, sought to galvanize voters on issues such as high unemployment, growing inequality and economic and social injustice, while targeting Modi over his polarizing campaign and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

"They certainly gained significant momentum through the course of the campaign, to the point where the opposition agendas became the agenda points of this election," said Yamini Aiyar, a public policy scholar.

The election results showed his messaging worked with the voters, as his party made substantial gains in BJP-governed states such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Maharashtra by tapping into economic stress. It won 99 seats across India.

"Rahul Gandhi has emerged as a strong national leader and that should worry Modi," Kidwai said.

The opposition proved even more successful in a Modi party bastion where it flipped the largest number of seats: Uttar Pradesh, which sends the most lawmakers of any state — 80 — to Parliament.

Long considered the biggest prize in Indian elections, the opposition clinched a staggering 44 parliamentary seats in the state, with the regional Samajwadi Party winning a whopping 37, leaving Modi's party with less than half of the seats. In the 2019 election, the BJP won 62 seats in the state.

The opposition also managed to wrest away BJP's seat in Ayodhya city, a deeply symbolic loss for Modi's party after the prime minister opened a controversial grand Hindu temple on the site of a razed mosque

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there in January. The opening of the temple dedicated to Lord Ram, at which Modi performed rituals, marked the unofficial start of his election campaign, with his party hoping it would resonate with the Hindu majority and bring more voters into its fold.

"The BJP lost because its leadership did not have its ears to the ground. They believed that the issue of the Ram Temple would secure their victory, but they overlooked important issues like jobs and inflation," said political analyst Amarnath Agarwal.

A strong showing by the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party in Tamil Nadu further boosted the opposition's numbers, denying Modi the supermajority he hoped for after exhibiting confidence his alliance would take 400 seats.

It also meant that the regional parties, once relegated to the margins after Modi's dominating wins in 2014 and 2019, will acquire a greater political space in Indian politics.

"It also gives a lot of power back to the states," said Milan Vaishnav, director of the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "We've seen a lot of centralization in the hands of the executive, in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office specifically."

The opposition's surprise gains came against the backdrop of what it calls Modi's intensified political crackdown against them.

Modi and his government have increasingly wielded strong-arm tactics to subdue political opponents. In the run-up to the election, opposition leaders and parties faced a slew of legal and financial challenges. The chief ministers of two opposition-controlled states were thrown in jail and the bank accounts of the Congress party were temporarily frozen.

Aiyar, the public policy scholar, said the opposition was able to "palpably catch on to signs of discontentment" even as it faced "fairly significant constraints of their own."

"This was certainly not a level playing field at the start of the election," she said.

As election results showed the opposition doing better than expected on Tuesday, a beaming Gandhi pulled out a red-jacketed copy of India's Constitution that he had displayed on the campaign trail and said his alliance's performance was the "first step in its fight" to save the charter.

"India's poorest stood up to save the Constitution," he said.

Israeli settlers in the West Bank were hit with international sanctions. It only emboldened them

By SAM MEDNICK and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

SOUTH HEBRON HILLS, West Bank (AP) — For weeks after being sanctioned by the United States, Yinon Levi struggled to pay the bills, living at his farming outpost atop a hill in the occupied West Bank. But the Israeli settler's problems didn't last.

When the banks froze his accounts, his community raised thousands of dollars for him, and Israel's finance minister vowed to intervene on sanctioned settlers' behalf. Two months after sanctions were issued, Levi was granted access to his money.

"America thought it would weaken us, and in the end, they made us stronger," Levi, 31, told The Associated Press from his farm in the South Hebron Hills — one of dozens of unauthorized settlement outposts dotting the West Bank.

Levi is among 13 hard-line Israeli settlers — as well as two affiliated outposts and four groups — targeted by international sanctions over accusations of attacks and harassment against Palestinians in the West Bank. The measures are meant as a deterrent, and they expose people to asset freezes and travel and visa bans.

But the measures have had minimal impact, instead emboldening settlers as attacks and land-grabs escalate, according to Palestinians in the West Bank, local rights groups and sanctioned Israelis who spoke to AP.

Sanctions prohibit financial institutions and residents in the issuing country from providing funds to a person or entity. In some cases, property is seized. Even though Israeli banks aren't obliged to freeze

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accounts, many do so to maintain relations with banks — particularly for U.S. sanctions — and avoid risk.

But for sanctioned settlers, the implications didn't last long, with communities donating money and holding fundraisers making tens of thousands of dollars. And Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a far-right settler leader, said he'd "take care of the issue" of people being sanctioned, Levi's father-in-law, Noam Federman, told AP.

Smotrich said in a text-message statement that sanctions are "a grave mistake by the Biden administration." He didn't address questions about whether he intervened directly to unfreeze settlers' accounts. But he said his actions to develop settlements are authorized, and the government is working with "our friends in the U.S." to cancel or reduce sanctions.

Israel seized the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. Some 500,000 Israelis have settled in the West Bank; the international community largely considers their presence illegal. But under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition — the most right-wing in Israeli history, with settlers themselves in key positions — expansion has been turbocharged.

Palestinians say expanding Israeli outposts are shrinking their access to land, and settler violence against them has soared since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war with Israel. Land seized through unauthorized outposts has more than doubled since the war started, according to settlement watchdog Kerem Navot.

Palestinians living in small hamlets ringed by hilltop outposts say they fear it's just a matter of time until they're forced to leave their homes.

U.S. officials have repeatedly raised concerns about surging settler violence, with President Joe Biden saying it had reached "intolerable levels" when announcing sanctions. Israel has said it's calling for settlers to stand down and investigating violence. But rights groups accuse the government and army of complicity with the settlers.

In March, even the Israeli army complained about the extent to which the government intervenes on settlers' behalf. An internal document, seen by AP and published by The New York Times, said the army is routinely denied authorization to act against illegal building by Israelis and regularly authorized to act against Palestinians.

REALITY OF SANCTIONS

Three sanctioned settlers — Levi, Federman and Elisha Yered — told AP the measures against them were, at most, an annoyance.

Levi founded Meitarim Farm in 2021 on a hill whose sloping sides give way to lowlands where Bedouin farmers graze sheep. He said he wanted to protect the area from being overtaken by Palestinians.

"Little by little, you feel when you drive on the roads that everyone is closing in on you," he said. "They're building everywhere, wherever they want. So you want to do something about it."

Since then, anti-settlement activists say, more than 300 people from four nearby hamlets have been pushed off their land. Levi said the land is his and denies violently chasing anyone away.

U.S. officials sanctioned him in February over accusations that from his outpost, he led settlers who assaulted Palestinians and Bedouins, threatened them, burned their fields and destroyed property.

Levi said his Israeli bank froze his accounts — holding nearly \$95,000 — and within days, he couldn't pay his mortgage or children's school and activities fees.

Friends and relatives donated about \$12,000 to him through April, he said, when the bank allowed him to withdraw on a controlled basis — he calls for permission and explains each transaction's purpose.

An online fundraiser by the area's regional council raised \$140,000 for Levi from 3,000 donors worldwide. Following AP reporting on the fundraiser, the Mount Hebron Fund was also sanctioned by the U.S.

Since regaining access to his money, Levi said, he's never been refused a request. The bank gave him a monthly limit of \$8,000 in withdrawals, he said, but he nearly doubled that in the first few weeks.

In a clarification letter to Israel's banks in March, the U.S. Treasury said banks can process transactions for sanctioned people for basic needs such as food and healthcare, provided the transactions don't involve the U.S. financial system or U.S. residents.

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But Levi said he could buy whatever he wanted — he wouldn't give specifics but said it wasn't limited to "food or diapers."

A U.S. Treasury spokesperson didn't respond to emailed requests for comment on Levi's claims, sanctioned settlers and monitoring mechanisms.

The spokesperson for Bank Leumi, Levi's bank and a major Israeli financial institution, didn't respond to calls and messages seeking comment on the settlers' accounts and transactions.

BEYOND SETTLER SANCTIONS

Local rights groups hope sanctions will be extended to Israeli government officials who they say embolden settler activity.

That would send a stronger signal of Washington's condemnation, said Delaney Simon, of the International Crisis Group.

"Sanctions against government officials have cast a chilling effect in other countries, causing firms to shy away from doing business in those places," she said.

Smotrich, who lives in the Kedumim settlement and was given special powers over settlement policies as part of the governing coalition agreement, told Israeli media in April that he'd take steps to help sanctioned settlers.

Levi's father-in-law, Federman, told AP that he spoke to Smotrich directly.

"He said he will take care of it, and if necessary he will even make a law against interference of other countries in Israelis' bank accounts," Federman said. Shortly after, he added, his son-in-law's account was unfrozen.

During a U.S. congressional subcommittee meeting Tuesday with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland urged sanctions against Smotrich.

"This is in direct contradiction of U.S. policy," he said.

Yellen said she shared "concerns about what's happening in the West Bank." No action was taken in the meeting.

Britain sanctioned Federman, 55, in May over allegations that he trained settlers to commit violence against Palestinians, which he denied. He said he'd already had his wife open a separate account, after seeing others sanctioned.

He said he's had no issues accessing money.

Israeli human rights lawyer Eitay Mack said that in addition to sanctioning settlers, the international community should target organizations funding settler expansion.

"If the international community is serious about the two-state solution, they have to tackle everything that gives the system money and legitimacy," he said.

Activists cite groups such as Amana, which funds settlements and maintains oversight for some of Levi's farm, according to a contract seen by AP. They also point to the group Nachala, which has a stated goal of enhancing West Bank settlement and has openly planned construction of unauthorized outposts.

Nachala is run by Daniella Weiss, a prominent figure in fringe Israeli efforts to resettle Gaza who's regarded as the godmother of the settler movement.

"I'm not afraid of sanctions," Weiss said. "The truth of the matter is that the United States wants us to be in Gaza because the United States does not want jihad to rule the world."

EFFECTS FOR PALESTINIANS

Meanwhile, Palestinians in the West Bank say sanctions are mostly futile.

Eight Palestinians in two hamlets in the South Hebron Hills told AP they're still being pushed off their land, with several alleging Levi has threatened them since being sanctioned.

One man said that in February, while out with his sheep, Levi held him at gunpoint, recounted all the places he'd forced people away, and threatened to kill him if he returned.

"He told me, 'I displaced people from Zanuta to ad-Dhahiriya ... I am from the family of the farm of mad people,'" said Ahmed, who spoke on condition that only his first name be used, over retaliation fears.

Levi told AP the incident never happened.

Ahmed and other Palestinians said they are verbally and physically harassed, can't move freely, and face

intimidation by settlers circling their properties on motorbikes, cars or horses and spying via drones. A drone hovered overhead while AP was on the land; Palestinians say the buzzing is used to send sheep fleeing.

The few Palestinians who've refused to leave the area around Levi's farm say their land has shrunk by 95% since he established Meitarim, crippling them economically.

In recent years, settlers have changed land-grabbing tactics, anti-occupation researcher Dror Etkes said: Rather than establishing residential settlements, they've turned to farming outposts, which use more land for grazing animals and spark more violence because they're spread out, with high visibility.

Etkes said there's been a total collapse of rule of law in the territory, with the Israeli government defending settlers.

Etkes said land Levi controls has nearly doubled since the war, from about 1,000 (400 hectares) to 2,000 acres (800 hectares).

And settlers say they'll keep expanding.

In a makeshift clubhouse on a hilltop near the settlement of Maskiyot in the northern West Bank, Elisha Yered said he's established five outposts since 2021. The most recent was built about a month before he was sanctioned by the European Union in April.

He's a leading figure for Hilltop Youth — a group of Jewish teenagers and young men who occupy West Bank hilltops and have been accused of attacking Palestinians and their property. Hilltop Youth was also sanctioned by the UK and the EU.

The EU order said Yered, 23, was involved in deadly attacks on Palestinians. He was accused of involvement a 19-year-old Palestinian's death last year.

Yered told AP the incident was one of self-defense over Palestinians attacking a herder and said he had nothing to do with his death. He was arrested in the case but never charged.

Yered is also sanctioned by the UK, which said he incited religious hatred and violence and called for Palestinian displacement.

Yered said that while the sanctions initially posed challenges accessing money, friends and family supported him. His credit card remains blocked, he said, but his bank lets him withdraw with permission.

He said nothing has halted his expansion goals.

"Only settling the land will bring security," Yered said. "Anyone who thinks this will break us is mistaken. We've survived harder things than this."

Keeping children safe on social media:

What parents should know to protect their kids

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

At what age should kids be on social media? Should they be on it at all? If they aren't, will they be social pariahs? Should parents monitor their conversations? Do parental controls work?

Navigating social media as a parent — not to mention a child — is not easy. Using social media platforms is still the default for most American teenagers, with the Pew Research Center reporting that 58% of teens are daily users of TikTok, including 17% who describe their TikTok use as almost constant. About half of teens use Snapchat and Instagram daily, with near-constant use at 14% and 8% for each, respectively.

But parents — and even some teens themselves — are growing increasingly concerned about the effects of social media use on young people. Lawmakers have taken notice and have held multiple congressional hearings on child online safety. But even with apparent bipartisan unity, making laws and regulating companies takes time. So far, no regulation has passed.

What are parents — and teens — supposed to do in the meantime? Here are some tips on staying safe, communicating and setting limits on social media — for kids as well as their parents.

IS 13 THE MAGIC AGE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA?

There's already, technically, a rule that prohibits kids under 13 from using platforms that advertise to them without parental consent: The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act that went into effect in 2000, before today's teenagers were even born.

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The goal was to protect kids' online privacy by requiring websites and online services to disclose clear privacy policies and get parents' consent before gathering personal information on their kids, among other things. To comply, social media companies have generally banned kids under 13 from signing up for their services.

But times have changed, and online privacy is no longer the only concern when it comes to kids being online. There's bullying, harassment, the risk of developing eating disorders, suicidal thoughts or worse.

For years, there has been a push among parents, educators and tech experts to wait to give children phones — and access to social media — until they are older, such as the "Wait Until 8th" pledge that has parents sign a pledge not to give their kids a smartphone until the 8th grade, or about age 13 or 14. Some wait even later, like 16 or 17.

But neither social media companies nor the government have done anything concrete to increase the age limit.

IF THE LAW WON'T BAN KIDS, SHOULD PARENTS?

"There is not necessarily a magical age," said Christine Elgersma, a social media expert at the nonprofit Common Sense Media. But, she added, "13 is probably not the best age for kids to get on social media."

The laws currently being proposed include blanket bans on the under-13 set when it comes to social media. The problem? There's no easy way to verify a person's age when they sign up for apps and online services. And the apps popular with teens today were created for adults first. Companies have added some safeguards over the years, Elgersma noted, but these are piecemeal changes, not fundamental rethinks of the services.

"Developers need to start building apps with kids in mind," she said.

Some tech executives, celebrities such as Jennifer Garner and parents from all walks of life have resorted to banning their kids from social media altogether. While the decision is a personal one that depends on each child and parent, some experts say this could lead to isolating kids, who could be left out of activities and discussions with friends that take place on social media or chat services.

Another hurdle — kids who have never been on social media may find themselves ill-equipped to navigate the platforms when they are suddenly allowed free rein the day they turn 18.

TALK, TALK, TALK

Start early, earlier than you think. Elgersma suggests that parents go through their own social media feeds with their children before they are old enough to be online and have open discussions on what they see. How would your child handle a situation where a friend of a friend asks them to send a photo? Or if they see an article that makes them so angry they just want to share it right away?

For older kids, Elgersma says to approach them with curiosity and interest, "asking about what their friends are doing or just not asking direct questions like, 'What are you doing on Instagram?' but rather, 'Hey, I heard this influencer is really popular.'" And even if your kid rolled their eyes it could be a window."

Don't say things like "Turn that thing off!" when your kid has been scrolling for a long time, says Jean Rogers, the director of the nonprofit Fairplay's Screen Time Action Network.

"That's not respectful," Rogers said. "It doesn't respect that they have a whole life and a whole world in that device."

Instead, Rogers suggests asking them questions about what they do on their phone, and see what your child is willing to share.

Kids are also likely to respond to parents and educators "pulling back the curtains" on social media and the sometimes insidious tools companies use to keep people online and engaged, Elgersma said. Watch a documentary like "The Social Dilemma" that explores algorithms, dark patterns and dopamine feedback cycles of social media. Or read up with them how Facebook and TikTok make money.

"Kids love to be in the know about these things, and it will give them a sense of power," she said.

SETTING LIMITS

Rogers says most parents have success with taking their kids' phones overnight to limit their scrolling. Occasionally kids might try to sneak the phone back, but it's a strategy that tends to work because kids

need a break from the screen.

"They need to an excuse with their peers to not be on their phone at night," Rogers said. "They can blame their parents."

Parents may need their own limits on phone use. Rogers said it's helpful to explain what you are doing when you do have a phone in hand around your child so they understand you are not aimlessly scrolling through sites like Instagram. Tell your child that you're checking work email, looking up a recipe for dinner or paying a bill so they understand you're not on there just for fun. Then tell them when you plan to put the phone down.

WHAT ABOUT PARENTAL CONTROLS?

Social media platforms that cater to children have added an ever-growing array of parental controls as they face increasing scrutiny over child safety. For instance, Meta unveiled parental supervision tools last year that lets parents set time limits, see who their kid follows or is followed by, and allows them to track how much time the minor spends on Instagram. It does not let parents see message content.

But as with similar tools on other platforms such as TikTok, the feature is optional, and both kids and parents have to agree to use it. In order to nudge kids toward agreeing to set up the controls, Instagram sends a notice to teens after they block someone, encouraging them to let their parents "supervise" their account. The idea is to grab kids' attention when they might be more open to parental guidance.

By making the feature optional, Meta says it is trying to "balance teen safety and autonomy" as well as prompt conversations between parents and their children.

Such features can be useful for families in which parents are already involved in their child's online life and activities. Experts say that's not the reality for many people.

U.S. Surgeon General Murthy said last year it's unfair to expect parents to manage what their children do with rapidly evolving technology that "fundamentally changes how their kids think about themselves, how they build friendships, how they experience the world — and technology, by the way, that prior generations never had to manage."

Putting all of that on the shoulders of parents, he said, "is just simply not fair."

Migrants are rattled and unsure as deportations begin under new rule halting asylum

By VALERIE GONZALEZ and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

DULZURA, Calif. (AP) — Abigail Castillo was about to cross the U.S. border illegally when she heard President Joe Biden was halting asylum. She continued anyway, walking hours through the mountains east of San Diego with her toddler son, hoping it wasn't too late.

"I heard that they were going to do it or were about to do it," Castillo, 35, said Wednesday as she and her son were escorted to a Border Patrol van with about two dozen others from Brazil, Ecuador and her village in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, which she said she left because it was gripped by violence.

They had missed the deadline, and were now subject to the new deportation rule.

Her sense of uncertainty prevailed among many migrants after Biden invoked presidential powers to stop asylum processing when arrests for illegal crossings top 2,500 in a day. The measure took effect at 12:01 a.m. EDT on Wednesday because that threshold was met.

Two senior Homeland Security Department officials confirmed the first deportations under the new rule took place Wednesday, though they did not say how many were deported. The officials briefed reporters on condition their names not be used in keeping with regulations.

Sergio Franco, who clutched his baby girl after a nearly two-month journey from Ecuador with his family, walking through the perilous Darien jungle on the border between Colombia and Panama, said he was confident that he would prevail in his plea to find a safe haven in the United States.

"If we have evidence, there shouldn't be a problem," he said as he got into the van with Castillo and the others.

As the group was driven away, several migrants from India walked up to the same dusty area near a

gun shop in the town of Dulzura, one of several that have popped up over the last year in the remote rural outskirts of San Diego for migrants to surrender to Border Patrol agents. There was no water or restrooms and little shade.

Several Guatemalan women arrived later. Among them was Arelis Alonzo Lopez, who said she was nearly five months pregnant and had walked for two nights. A Border Patrol agent asked how she felt.

"I can't take any more," she answered.

Asylum remains suspended until average daily arrests fall below 1,500 for a week straight. The last month that crossings were that low for that long was in July 2020, during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Migrants who express fear for their safety if they are deported will be screened by U.S. asylum officers but under a higher standard than what's currently in place. If they pass, they can remain to pursue other forms of humanitarian protection, including those laid out in the U.N. Convention Against Torture.

There are serious questions about whether the new measure can stop large-scale migrant entries. Mexico has agreed to take back migrants who are not Mexican, but only limited numbers and nationalities. And the Biden administration doesn't have the money and diplomatic support it needs to deport migrants long distances, including to Ecuador and India.

In Matamoros, Mexico, across the border from Brownsville, Texas, Esmeralda Castro of El Salvador worried the asylum halt will drive more people to compete for the 1,450 slots awarded daily to enter legally through U.S. Customs and Border Protection's heavily oversubscribed online app, known as CBP One. Castro, 40, said she has tried for nine months for an appointment using the app.

"Imagine what's going to happen with what they've done. The system is going to collapse again," said Castro, speaking at a migrant camp near the banks of the Rio Grande where she has been living with about 10 others. The app has become so overwhelmed at times that users got error messages and experienced other technical failures.

Juan Daniel Medina of the Dominican Republic said he was determined to stick with CBP One, even after eight months of fruitless attempts to get an appointment.

"It's the correct way because that way you do everything legally. They won't have to jump the river and risk facing criminal charges," the 30-year-old Medina said.

Two hours before the sun set Tuesday in San Diego, four busloads of migrants were dropped off by Border Patrol agents at a transit center, many of them to seek asylum in one of 68 immigration courts across the country. Asylum-seekers can generally work while their claims slowly wind through overwhelmed immigration courts.

Jesus Gomez of Medellin, Colombia, said Border Patrol agents told him he was one of the last people to be released to seek asylum and that he should tell friends and family back home that they will be deported if they attempt to enter illegally. He said he didn't know if it was true.

"It's a very difficult thing to navigate," Gomez, 49, said as he waited for his wife to be released by the Border Patrol before they fly to Boston, where their daughter lives.

Jurors in Hunter Biden's trial hear from the clerk who sold him the gun at the center of the case

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, RANDALL CHASE, COLLEEN LONG and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Jurors in Hunter Biden's criminal trial got a look at the .38 caliber Colt revolver he bought back in October 2018. They saw Form 4473, the firearms transaction record at the center of the case. And they're hearing testimony from the former store clerk who watched as the president's son checked off "no" to the question of whether he was "an unlawful user of or addicted to" marijuana, stimulants, narcotics or any other controlled substance.

Federal prosecutors have argued Hunter Biden was in the throes of a heavy crack addiction when he bought the gun, and they've accused him of lying on the form. He's been charged with three felonies: lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

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Hunter Biden has pleaded not guilty and said the Justice Department is bending to political pressure from Republicans and he is being wrongly targeted.

Gordon Cleveland, the former clerk at StarQuest Shooters & Survival Supply, told jurors he walked Hunter Biden through a few options before he settled on the \$900 gun and he watched Biden sign the form, which includes a warning about the consequences of submitting false information.

"Everything he bought, he ultimately decided on," he told jurors.

Much of the prosecution's case so far has been dedicated to highlighting the seriousness of his crack addiction and showcasing to jurors bare-chested moments with ex-girlfriends, infidelity, crack pipes — judgment lapses they believe prove he was actively using when he checked off no. Prosecutors argue it's necessary evidence to show his state of mind when he bought the gun.

The proceedings are unfolding after a plea deal collapsed that would have resolved the gun charge and a separate tax case, and spared the Biden family the spectacle of a trial so close to the 2024 election. Now, first lady Jill Biden has been spending her days in court, while President Joe Biden travels to France for the D-Day anniversary. Allies worry about the toll it will take on the president, who is deeply concerned about the health and sustained sobriety of his only living son.

And Hunter Biden's friends and family are being called to testify.

Kathleen Buhle, who was married to Hunter Biden for 20 years, told jurors Wednesday that she discovered her husband was using drugs when she found a crack pipe in an ashtray on their porch on July 3, 2015, a day after their anniversary. When she confronted him, "he acknowledged smoking crack," she said.

Buhle testified that even before she found the drugs, she suspected he was using. He had been kicked out of the Navy after testing positive for cocaine.

"I was definitely worried, scared," she said. They have three children and divorced in 2016 after his infidelity and drug abuse became too much, according to her memoir, "If We Break," about the dissolution of their marriage.

Buhle, who was subpoenaed, was on the stand for a brief 20 minutes. She remained composed but seemed upset as she recounted how she searched his car about a dozen times for drugs, whenever the children were driving it.

"Did you ever see Hunter using drugs?" defense attorney Abbe Lowell asked Buhle.

"No," she replied.

Then prosecutor Leo Wise asked Buhle how she knew Hunter Biden was using drugs.

"He told me," she said.

Prosecutors also called Zoe Kestan, who testified under immunity about meeting Hunter Biden in December 2017 at a strip club in New York where she worked. During a private session, he pulled out a pipe and began smoking what she assumed was crack.

"He was incredibly charming and charismatic and friendly, and I felt really safe around him," she said. "I remember after he had smoked it, nothing had changed. He was the same charming person."

Kestan detailed for jurors when she saw him use drugs, buy drugs, talk about drugs or possess drug paraphernalia. Prosecutors asked her where he stored his drugs and pipes, and she testified he kept them in pouches and other places, such as sunglasses cases.

On cross-examination, Kestan acknowledged that she had no contact with him in October 2018, the period when he bought the gun.

Jurors have also been shown dozens of pages of Hunter Biden's memoir, "Beautiful Things," written in 2021 after he got sober. And they heard lengthy audio excerpts from the book, which traces his descent into addiction following the death of his brother, Beau Biden, in 2015 from cancer. The memoir covers the period he bought the gun, though it doesn't mention the weapon specifically.

Lowell has said Hunter Biden's state of mind was different when he wrote the book than when he purchased the gun, when he didn't believe he had an addiction. And he's suggested Hunter Biden might have felt he had a drinking problem at the time, not a drug problem. Alcohol abuse doesn't preclude a gun purchase.

If convicted, Hunter Biden faces up to 25 years in prison, though first-time offenders do not get anywhere

near the maximum, and it's unclear whether the judge would give him time behind bars.

He's also facing a separate trial in September on charges of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes.

In Congress, Republicans have for months pursued an impeachment inquiry seeking to tie President Biden to his son's business dealings. So far, GOP lawmakers have failed to uncover evidence directly implicating President Biden in any wrongdoing. But on Wednesday, House Republicans accused Hunter Biden and the president's brother James Biden of making false statements to Congress as part of the inquiry.

The trial is unfolding shortly after Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, was convicted of 34 felonies in New York City. The two criminal cases are unrelated, but their proximity underscores how the courts have taken center stage during the 2024 campaign.

Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia are set to get seats on the UN Security Council

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia were set to get seats on the U.N. Security Council in a secret ballot Thursday in the General Assembly.

The 193-member world body is scheduled to vote to elect five countries to serve two-year terms on the council. The 10 non-permanent seats on the 15-member council are allotted to regional groups who usually select their candidates but sometimes can't agree on one. There are no such surprises this year.

Last year, Slovenia soundly defeated Russia's close ally Belarus for the seat representing the East European regional group, a vote that reflected strong global opposition to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This time, the regional groups put forward Somalia for an African seat, Pakistan for an Asia-Pacific seat, Panama for a Latin America and Caribbean seat, and Denmark and Greece for two mainly Western seats.

The five council members elected Thursday will start their terms on Jan. 1, replacing those whose two-year terms end on Dec. 31 — Mozambique, Japan, Ecuador, Malta and Switzerland.

They will join the five veto-wielding permanent members — the United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France — and the five countries elected last year — Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia.

The Security Council is charged with maintaining international peace and security. But because of Russia's veto power it has been unable to take action on Ukraine — and because of close U.S. ties to Israel it has not called for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza.

All five countries expected to win seats on Thursday have served previously on the Security Council — Pakistan seven times, Panama five times, Denmark four times, Greece twice and Somalia once.

Virtually every country agrees that almost eight decades after the United Nations was established the Security Council needs to expand and reflect the world in the 21st century, not the post-World War II era reflected now.

But with 193 countries with national interests, the central question — and the biggest disagreement — is exactly how. And for four decades, those disagreements have blocked any significant reform of the U.N.'s most powerful body.

South Africa questions its very being.

Yet a difficult change has reinforced its young democracy

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — South Africa is in a moment of deep soul-searching after an election that brought a jarring split from the African National Congress, the very party that gave it freedom and democracy 30 years ago.

In the days after rejecting what was once the country's most beloved organization, South Africans were dealing with essential questions over not just where they were going, but what they'd achieved in their young democracy since ending the racist apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994.

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Despite having Africa's most industrialized economy, the injustices of South Africa's past have not been made right three decades after Nelson Mandela and the ANC were elected in the country's first all-race vote and promised a better life for all. That has driven discontent among millions of the poor Black majority.

"We remain the pyramid society that apartheid and colonialism created," said Thuli Madonsela, a professor of law who helped craft a new, post-apartheid constitution for South Africa in 1997 that was meant to guarantee everyone was equal from then on.

Speaking on national broadcaster SABC, Madonsela outlined how South Africa's democratic journey is still marred by vast problems of joblessness and race-based inequality at some of the worst levels in the world. In last week's election, opposition parties were united in one thing: Something had to change in the country of 62 million.

The problems are both the hard-to-heal scars of apartheid and the contemporary failings of the ANC. The nation, once a prime example of brutal oppression that then embodied a great hope through Mandela, is still searching for what it wants to be — but self-aware, at least.

"What must we do with this South Africa of ours?" asked Thabo Mbeki, the former South African president who had the almost impossible task of succeeding Mandela as his nation's leader.

Politically, South Africa is heading into the unknown again as it did after the turning-point election of 1994, but with none of the joy or optimism of a transition celebrated across the world. The ANC has lost its majority, but with no other party overtaking it, South Africa faces what might be an excruciating series of negotiations to form the first national coalition government in its history.

Yet amid the uncertainty and South Africans' introspection, some have urged them to be proud and to take a closer look at what just happened.

The ANC has accepted the result of the election and the will of the people without question, even after it ended such a long political dominance that it was sometimes hard to see where the ANC ended and South Africa began. An ANC leader once said in bluster that it would govern South Africa "until Jesus comes back," but it graciously submitted to the will of the people last weekend and pledged to work with opposition parties for the good of the country.

After the election results were officially declared Sunday night, South Africans went to work Monday and their children went to school. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, while still digesting a historic defeat for the party he leads, sent an online message to the nation like he does at the start of every week. He began it with the words: "We have just held a successful general election" and wrote that the vote showed "that our democracy is strong, that it is robust and that it endures."

Frans Cronje, a political and economic analyst, said that shouldn't be lost given how other long-ruling post-colonial political parties in Africa have rejected election results and clung to power, sending their countries spiraling. And there have been efforts in recent years to subvert democracy and elections further afield in bigger countries, he said.

"There's actually not much to see here (in South Africa) other than a democracy that worked in a world where they don't always work as well as the architects of Western democracy would have wanted them to," Cronje said. Cronje said it was "the least profound" observation he could make, and yet it might have gone unnoticed.

It wasn't meant to underestimate South Africa's troubles, though, and they are stark: The South African Human Rights Commission, one of several independent bodies set up by the government with a mandate to guard democracy, found in 2021 that 64% of Black people in South Africa and 40% of those with biracial heritage were classified as poor, but for white people that figure was only 1%.

That must change quickly, Madonsela warned, or South Africa's democracy could face sterner tests ahead and the constitution that she co-wrote could be in danger of becoming "meaningless" to people. She cautioned that some might conflate the failure of the ANC with the failure of democracy as a whole. More than 80% of South Africa's population is Black and the frustration of millions over broken government promises cannot be underestimated.

South Africa's future now lies in coalition talks that will bring almost every major party in, although it's

still unclear what the final product will be. More than 50 parties contested last week's election, with at least eight receiving significant shares of the vote, reflecting a country that has never pretended not to be complicated. Ramaphosa said South Africa has to find unity "now more than ever."

As politically and racially diverse groups try to chart a new way forward together, an optimistic South African might find a connection with one of the most famous speeches Mandela gave 60 years ago when he stood in an apartheid courtroom and held firm in his defense of democracy, and that every South African be allowed to vote and have a say in their future.

"We believe that South Africa belongs to all the people who live in it," he said.

Election certification disputes in a handful of states spark concerns over presidential contest

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, two Republican members of a county canvassing board last month refused to sign off on the results of an election that led to the recall of three GOP members of the county commission. They did so only after state officials warned them it was their legal duty to record the final vote tally.

In Georgia's Fulton County, which includes the Democratic-voting city of Atlanta, a group run by members of former President Donald Trump's administration last week sued so a Republican member of the local elections board could refuse to certify the results of the primary election.

And in Arizona, GOP lawmakers sued to reverse the state's top Democratic officials' requirement that local boards automatically validate their election results.

The past four years have been filled with battles over all sorts of election arcana, including one that had long been regarded as an administrative afterthought — little-known state and local boards certifying the results. With the presidential election looming in November, attorneys are gearing up for yet more fights over election certification, especially in the swing states where the victory margins are expected to be tight. Even if those efforts ultimately fail, election officials worry they'll become a vehicle for promoting bogus election claims.

Trump and his allies have tried to use the tactic to stop election results from being made final if they lose. In 2020, two Republicans on Michigan's state board of canvassers, which must certify ballot totals before state officials can declare a winner, briefly balked at signing off before one relented and became the decisive vote. Trump had cheered the delay as part of his push to overturn his loss that ultimately culminated in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

During the 2022 midterms, some conservative, rural counties tried to hold up their state election results, citing the same debunked claims of voter fraud that Trump has made.

In New Mexico, rural county supervisors refused to certify the state's primary vote until they were threatened with prosecution. In Cochise County in southeastern Arizona, two Republican supervisors who refused to certify the local vote totals said they had no doubt their own county's tally was accurate but were protesting the counts in other counties that gave Democratic candidates for governor, attorney general and secretary of state their victories.

Responding to the certification controversies, Michigan's Democratic legislature passed a law making clear that state and local canvassing boards must certify election totals. The two Arizona county supervisors are currently facing criminal charges filed by the state's Democratic attorney general.

Democrats and nonpartisan groups say the thousands of local election oversight boards across the country aren't the place to contest ballot counts, and that state laws make clear they have no leeway on whether to sign off on their staff's final tallies.

"Election authorities don't have the discretion to reject the results of an election because of their vibes," said Jonathan Diaz of the Campaign Legal Center, adding that lawsuits and recounts are the proper recourse. "They're there to perform a function. They're there to certify."

But some Republicans argue that's going too far. Kory Langhofer, the attorney suing to overturn the election procedures manual's directive in Arizona that was issued by the Democratic attorney general and

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secretary of state, said he didn't support the effort to block certification in Cochise County in 2022. But, he argued, locally elected boards of supervisors have to have some discretion to police elections.

"It seems to me the system is stronger when you have multiple eyes on it," Langhofer said. Of the efforts to block certification in 2020 and 2022, he added, "I hope that's behind us."

Democrats doubt that's the case. They note that the America First Policy Institute, a pro-Trump organization run by former officials from his administration, filed the lawsuit in Georgia to let Fulton County Elections Board member Julie Adams vote against certifying elections. Adams' four other board members voted to certify last month's primary but Adams abstained last week, contending she couldn't accept the results given prior election administration problems in the county.

"This action will re-establish the role of board members as the ultimate parties responsible for ensuring elections in Fulton County are free from fraud, deceit, and abuse," the institute wrote in its release announcing the lawsuit. The group did not respond to a request for comment.

Fulton County is the heart of the Democratic vote in Georgia, and anything that holds up its totals in November could help make it look like Trump has a large lead in the state.

"Trump and MAGA Republicans have made it clear they are planning to try to block certification of November's election when they are defeated again, and this is a transparent attempt to set the stage for that fight," Georgia Democratic Party chair and Rep. Nikema Williams said in a statement.

In Michigan's Delta County, clerk Nancy Przewrocki, a Republican, said the two GOP canvassers had requested a hand recount of the votes, which is beyond the scope of their position. The canvassers eventually voted to certify the May election after receiving a letter from the State Elections Director Jonathan Brater, which reminded them of their duties and warned them of the consequences of failing to certify.

Still, Przewrocki said she's concerned about what could happen in November if a similar situation arises. "I can see this escalating, unfortunately. I'm trying to keep our voters confident in our voting equipment, and this is completely undermining it when there's really nothing there," Przewrocki said.

Following the Delta County incident, Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Attorney General Dana Nessel, both Democrats, issued a reminder to local canvassing boards throughout the state warning them of their legal obligation to certify election results based solely on vote returns. If they don't, there will be "swift action to ensure the legal certification of election results," along with "possible civil and criminal charges against those members for their actions," Benson warned.

Michigan is an example of the futility of the tactic. The new state law makes it clear that canvassing boards can't block certification, but Benson said in an interview that she still worries such an effort, even if legally doomed, would help spread false allegations about the November election.

"Misinformation and talking points emerge that enable others — particularly politicians — to continue to cast doubt on the accuracy of election results," she said.

A realistic way to protect kids from social media? Find a middle ground

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Ahmed Othman isn't on TikTok and doesn't want to be.

He and his younger sister got iPhones when they were in eighth and seventh grade respectively, but with no social media, just iMessage. Their parents, who are both computer scientists, spent the next year teaching them about social media, bombarding them with studies about its effects on teen mental health.

"They really tried to emphasize social media is a tool, but can also be like your worst enemy if you so make it," Othman said.

Now 17, Othman credits his parents' deep involvement for what he calls a "healthy relationship" with his phone. That includes staying away from TikTok.

"The algorithm is so potent that I feel like, you know, TikTok might not benefit me," he said.

Othman, who's originally from Libya and lives in Massachusetts, is an outlier among his peers, nearly two-thirds of whom are on TikTok either with or without their parents' permission, according to the Pew Research Center.

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Othman's parents took a middle ground approach that a growing number of experts say is the most realistic and effective way of teaching children about social media: Rather than an outright ban or allowing free reign, they recommend a slow, deliberate onboarding that gives children the tools and information they need to navigate a world in which places like TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat are almost impossible to escape.

"You cannot just expect that the kids will jump into the world of social media, learn how to swim on their own," said Natalie Bazarova, a professor of communications and director of the Cornell Social Media Lab. "They need to have instruction. They need to have practice on how to behave on social media. They need to have understanding of risks and opportunities. And they also need to learn that in a way that is age appropriate."

FEW GUARDRAILS

The harms to children from social media have been well-documented in the two decades since Facebook's launch ushered in a new era in how the world communicates. Kids who spend more time on social media, especially when they are tweens or young teenagers, are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, according to multiple studies — though it is not yet clear if there is a causal relationship.

Many are exposed to content that is not appropriate for their age, including pornography and violence. They also face bullying, sexual harassment and unwanted advances from their peers as well as adult strangers. Because their brains are not fully developed, teenagers are also more affected by social comparisons than adults, so even happy posts from friends could send them into a negative spiral.

Lawmakers have taken notice and have held multiple congressional hearings — most recently in January — on child online safety. Still, the last federal law aimed at protecting children online was enacted in 1998, six years before Facebook's founding.

Last May, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued a warning saying there is not enough evidence to show that social media is safe for kids and urged policymakers to address the harms of social media the same way they regulate things like car seats, baby formula, medication and other products children use. Parents, he stressed, can't do it all, although some — like Othman's — try.

Othman at first wanted a phone "with everything on it, no restrictions."

"But like now, after the years passed, I really do understand and appreciate what they did," he said.

WHEN IT'S NOT ENOUGH

Of course, the Othmans' approach may not work for every family. Most parents are not computer scientists, and many don't have the time or expertise to create a crash-course on social media for their children.

But even when parents are vigilant, that's still no guarantee their children won't fall prey to social media's traps.

Neveen Radwan thought she did everything right when she gave her children phones: putting restrictions on their accounts, having access to their passwords, taking away their phones at night, setting everything to private.

"I made sure that everything was very, very, you know, airtight," said Radwan, who worked in information technology for 20 years.

Her daughter didn't get a phone until she was 13. She started using social media in the eighth grade. When she was 16, she was diagnosed with anorexia.

"We were right in the beginning of (the COVID lockdowns) and it progressed very quickly because we were at home and she was on social media quite a bit at the time," Radwan recalled.

An avid athlete, the teen started looking for workouts and ways to stay healthy on Instagram. Soon, though, the algorithm began showing her social media challenges like "how to stay under 500 calories a day" and "if you want to stay skinny, you need to be able to fit in a baby swing." Within two or three months, Radwan said her daughter was in the hospital.

Today, Radwan speaks about the harms of social media to teens and has joined a lawsuit against Facebook and Instagram parent company Meta Platforms Inc. that seeks to hold the tech giant accountable for the harms its platforms have caused to children and teens. Her daughter has recovered and is attending college.

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ARE SCHOOLS THE ANSWER?

While parents are definitely part of the equation, most of the the teens and experts interviewed by The Associated Press pointed to schools as the key place where all children can learn about "digital citizenship," the umbrella term that includes news media literacy, cyberbullying, social media balance and now even artificial intelligence literacy.

"We have sex education. We don't have things about like online safety," said Bao Le, a 18-year-old freshman at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. "And a lot of kids are dying of suicide, you know, text sextortion. So I think it's really important the school also teaches this."

But while some schools offer digital literacy or online safety programs, these are still few and far between. Teachers already face pressure to teach the regular curriculum while also dealing with staffing shortages and funding issues. Not only that, but kids are often encouraged to be on social media if they want to participate in extracurricular activities and other school programs.

Some schools opt to ban phones altogether, but just as with parental bans, kids often find a way. For instance, at schools that collect the gadgets from kids in the morning, students say they get around it by turning in fake phones. To get around parental bans, they set up social media accounts on friends' phones, computers or buy burner phones to keep using after they have turned in their official phone.

"Hope is not a strategy. And pretending that (social media) doesn't exist is also not a strategy, because we have to deal with real life," said Merve Lapus, vice president of education outreach at the nonprofit Common Sense Media, whose digital citizenship curriculum is used in more than 90,000 schools in the U.S. "Our kids are being exposed to it in some shape or form. They're hearing about it with their friends. The pressure to feel connected has not changed. I mean, these are all pressures we felt as kids."

To really connect with kids, he said, it's best to get deeper into the pressures they face when it comes to social media, and validate that those are real pressures.

"I think that's one of the challenges right now, is that it becomes the center of attention only when it's problematic," Lapus said. "And so we frame these tools as only problematic tools very easily, very quickly, and our kids will say, you just don't get it, I can't talk to you about these things because you don't understand."

NONPROFITS STEP UP

Over the past decade or so, nonprofits and advocacy groups — many run by young people who emerged from their own struggles with social media — have popped up to offer help.

Larissa May stumbled on to social media a decade ago when she was in high school "without any roadmap" on its dangers or how to use it. May said she was dealing with depression and anxiety that social media exacerbated. In college, she became "obsessed" with social media and digital marketing, running a fashion blog where she was posting on every day.

"I got to a point where I was spending 12-plus hours a day on my phone in my room, more focused on my digital identity than the world around me, my mental health, my physical health, my sleep," May recalled. She almost took her own life.

The turning point came when May started going to a psychiatrist almost every day, with clear instructions of what she needed to do: Take antidepressants, start moving her body sleep, and start socializing.

"However, I was spending all of my day on my phone, which they never addressed, and being on my phone prevented me from doing all of those things," May said. "And it wasn't until one day where I had this, you know, midnight thought of, why can I not heal? And it was because I hadn't healed my relationship with technology."

So, she shut down her fashion blog and started HalfTheStory in 2015, with the intent of gathering stories from young people such as Othman to understand how social media was affecting them.

"And what I found out was that I wasn't alone in my struggle," she said.

Today, HalfTheStory works with young people to build better relationships with technology, on their own terms, starting in middle school even before some kids have a device.

To May, abstinence is not the answer to teens' problems with social media.

"What I learn from every single one of our teens is that they wish their parents had more boundaries for them," she said. "And I think that parents feel afraid because honestly, a lot of violence and conflict erupts around devices."

Tornadoes touch down across US, killing toddler in Michigan and injuring 5 in Maryland

LIVONIA, Mich. (AP) — A tornado killed a 2-year-old boy and injured his mother Wednesday when a tree fell on their house in suburban Detroit, while emergency workers in Maryland were responding to reports of collapsed structures with people trapped inside after a tornado there.

Officials in Livonia, Michigan, said in a post on the city's website that the quick-developing tornado struck several neighborhoods in the city on Wednesday afternoon.

A massive tree was uprooted and fell onto the family's house and through the roof, landing on a bed where the woman and her 2-year-old were sleeping, officials said. Crews worked for nearly an hour to remove the roof and parts of the tree and then lift the tree to get the victims out.

The toddler was pronounced dead at the scene, officials said. The mother was transported to a local hospital in critical condition.

A 2-week-old sibling who was in a crib in a separate room was not injured but taken to a hospital for an evaluation, Livonia Fire Department Chief Robert Jennison told WDIV-TV.

"This is a terrible tragedy for our community," Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan said in the statement. "Our hearts are broken, too, and we send our deepest sympathies."

The city of Livonia activates warning sirens based on notifications from the National Weather Service or tornado reports, officials said. However, Livonia Emergency Preparedness Director Brian Kahn said in the statement that the city did not receive any advance warning from the agency or others.

A representative from the weather service called it a spin-up storm that didn't show up on their radars in enough time to issue a warning, according to city officials.

The National Weather Service in Detroit confirmed on the social platform X Wednesday night that an EF1 tornado with a peak wind speed of 95 mph (153 kmh) moved through Livonia. The agency said the twister traveled a path spanning over 5 miles (8 kilometers), uprooting and damaging trees and damaging some houses.

In Maryland, emergency workers responded to reports that people were trapped inside structures that collapsed after a tornado was spotted in the area during rounds of strong storms Wednesday night.

A tornado was spotted in a suburban area of Montgomery County northwest of Washington, the National Weather Service said in a social media post warning people in the area to take cover.

There were reports of three collapsed structures in Gaithersburg with people trapped inside, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service spokesperson Pete Piringier said.

Piringier said the most significant damage occurred when a large tree fell on a single-family house, leaving five people injured, including one with traumatic injuries. He said they were all transported to a hospital.

Local television footage showed large downed trees that damaged houses when they fell.

David Pazos, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue assistant chief, said there were a lot of power outages. "We don't know what people's needs are, so we're having to go door to door to assess whether they need fire and rescue services or need relocation because of damage to their homes," he said.

Tornado warnings were still being issued throughout the state and in Delaware on Wednesday night.

Appeals court halts Trump's Georgia case during appeal of order allowing Willis to stay on case

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — An appeals court has halted the Georgia election interference case against former President Donald Trump and others while it reviews the lower court judge's ruling allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to remain on the case.

The Georgia Court of Appeals' order on Wednesday prevents Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee from moving forward with pretrial motions as he had planned while the appeal is pending. While it was already unlikely that the case would go to trial before the November general election, when Trump is expected to be the Republican nominee for president, this makes that even more certain.

The appeals court on Monday docketed the appeals filed by Trump and eight others and said that "if oral argument is requested and granted" it is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 4. The court will then have until mid-March to rule, and the losing side will be able to appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court.

A spokesperson for Willis declined to comment on the appeals court ruling.

A Fulton County grand jury in August indicted Trump and 18 others, accusing them of participating in a sprawling scheme to illegally try to overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. Four defendants have pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors, but Trump and the others have pleaded not guilty. It is one of four criminal cases against Trump.

Trump and eight other defendants had tried to get Willis and her office removed from the case, arguing that a romantic relationship she had with special prosecutor Nathan Wade created a conflict of interest. McAfee in March found that no conflict of interest existed that should force Willis off the case, but he granted a request from Trump and the other defendants to seek an appeal of his ruling from the state Court of Appeals.

McAfee wrote that "an odor of mendacity remains." He said "reasonable questions" over whether Willis and Wade had testified truthfully about the timing of their relationship "further underpin the finding of an appearance of impropriety and the need to make proportional efforts to cure it." He said Willis could remain on the case only if Wade left, and the special prosecutor submitted his resignation hours later.

The allegations that Willis had improperly benefited from her romance with Wade resulted in a tumultuous couple of months in the case as intimate details of Willis and Wade's personal lives were aired in court in mid-February.

Steve Sadow, Trump's lead attorney in Georgia, said the Court of Appeals was right to halt proceedings while it hears the appeal "which argues the case should be dismissed and Fulton County DA Willis should be disqualified for her misconduct."

Who's testified, and who might, in Hunter Biden's firearms trial

By RANDALL CHASE, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, CLAUDIA LAUER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Jurors who will decide whether President Joe Biden's son is guilty of federal firearms charges are hearing deeply personal testimony about a dark period for Hunter Biden.

The case playing out in Wilmington, Delaware, stems from a gun the younger Biden bought in October 2018, months before his father announced his bid for the presidency.

Prosecutors say Hunter Biden lied when he swore he wasn't a drug user on a form he filled out at the gun shop. He had the gun for about 11 days before it was thrown in a trash can.

Hunter Biden's attorney argues his client did not believe he was in the throes of addiction when he stated in the paperwork that he did not have a drug problem.

Hunter Biden was supposed to have avoided prosecution in the gun case altogether, but a deal with prosecutors fell apart last year. He was subsequently indicted on three felony gun charges. He also faces a trial scheduled for September on felony charges alleging he failed to pay at least \$1.4 million in taxes over four years.

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Here's a look at some key witnesses in the trial:

KATHLEEN BUHLE

One of the prosecutors' first witnesses was Hunter Biden's ex-wife, who filed for divorce in 2016 after more than 20 years of marriage. They have three children together. In divorce proceedings, she accused him of squandering their money on drugs, alcohol, strip clubs and prostitutes.

On the witness stand, Buhle described learning about Hunter Biden's drug use when she found a pipe used to smoke crack cocaine in an ashtray on their porch in July 2015, weeks after Hunter's brother Beau died from brain cancer.

When she confronted Hunter, he "acknowledged smoking crack," she told jurors.

Buhle testified that she suspected that Hunter was using drugs even before she found the crack pipe, given that he earlier had been kicked out of the Navy after testing positive for cocaine.

"I was definitely worried, scared," said Buhle, who was subpoenaed by prosecutors.

She also recounted searching the family's car for drugs whenever her children were driving it. But she acknowledged under questioning from Hunter's attorney that she never actually saw him using drugs.

HALLIE BIDEN

A key witness expected to take the stand for prosecutors is Beau's widow, who had a romantic relationship with Hunter Biden after his brother's death.

When their relationship became public in 2017, Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, said in a statement that the couple had their "full and complete support," adding, "We are all lucky that Hunter and Hallie found each other as they were putting their lives together again after such sadness."

Hunter detailed their troubled romance in his memoir "Beautiful Things," writing, "As much as we desperately thought we could be the answers to each other's pain, we only caused each other more."

Hallie Biden found the gun in Hunter Biden's truck days after he bought it and threw it in a trash can near a grocery store in Wilmington. Hunter Biden told police in 2018 that she took the gun because she was concerned about his mental health, according to a police report.

Hunter got upset when he found out she threw the gun away, but it was no longer there when she went back to look for it. A man collecting recyclables found it and gave it to the police.

Jurors have already seen text messages between the pair that prosecutors are using to try to prove that Hunter Biden knew he was addicted to drugs when he said on the form he wasn't.

In one late-night exchange shortly after he bought the gun, Hallie asked Hunter where he was. Hunter replied he was behind a baseball stadium in downtown Wilmington "waiting for a dealer."

ZOE KESTAN

Kestan, another former romantic partner, was given immunity in exchange for her testimony for prosecutors.

She described meeting Hunter in December 2017 at a strip club in New York where she was working. During a private session with her and another girl, he pulled out a pipe and began smoking what she assumed was crack, she testified.

"He was incredibly charming and charismatic and friendly, and I felt really safe around him," she said. "I remember after he had smoked it, nothing had changed. He was the same charming person."

The two met up again a couple of weeks later in New York. She recounted staying at his hotel for five days, a period in which she says Hunter Biden smoked crack perhaps every 20 minutes. At one point during their stay together, he asked her to go meet his drug dealer and bring him up to the room, she told jurors.

But Kestan acknowledged she had no contact with Hunter Biden in October 2018, the month he bought the gun.

JAMES BIDEN

The defense plans to call to the witness stand President Biden's brother, who is close with Hunter Biden and helped his nephew through rehab stints in the past.

Outside the case, James Biden's business dealings have made him a target of Republicans, who questioned both him and Hunter Biden in their stalled impeachment inquiry. Joe Biden told lawmakers during

a voluntary private interview in February that the president “never had any involvement or any direct or indirect financial interest” in his business ventures.

House Republicans on Wednesday accused Joe Biden and Hunter Biden of making false statements to Congress and sent criminal referrals to the Justice Department. The claim involving James Biden is over a statement he made about whether the president, while a private citizen, met with a former Biden family business partner.

James Biden’s lawyer called the Republicans’ move a “transparent and cynical attempt to distract and retaliate for Donald Trump’s recent criminal conviction.”

Hunter Biden’s lawyer, Abbe Lowell, said it was “nothing more than a desperate attempt by Republicans to twist Hunter’s testimony so they can distract from their failed impeachment inquiry and interfere with his trial.”

GORDON CLEVELAND

Cleveland sold Hunter Biden the .38 caliber revolver at a Wilmington gun shop in 2018.

Testifying for prosecutors, the former gun store clerk told jurors he stood next to Hunter Biden when he began to answer a series of questions on the federal form every person has to fill out when they buy a gun. Hunter checked a box saying he was purchasing the gun for himself, Cleveland said.

Another question asked whether the buyer was “an unlawful user of or addicted to” marijuana, stimulants, narcotics or any other controlled substance. Hunter Biden wrote “no,” Cleveland said.

He also testified that Hunter did not ask any questions or express any confusion about the question. Hunter Biden paid \$900 in cash, telling Cleveland to keep the change — about \$13.

Cleveland told jurors he watched Hunter sign the form, which includes a warning about the consequences of submitting false information.

YouTube toughens policy on gun videos and youth; critics say proof will be in enforcement

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — YouTube is changing its policies about firearm videos in an effort to keep potentially dangerous content from reaching underage users.

The video sharing platform owned by Google said Wednesday it will prohibit any videos demonstrating how to remove firearm safety devices. In addition, videos showing homemade guns, automatic weapons and certain firearm accessories like silencers will be restricted to users 18 and older.

The changes take effect June 18 and come after gun safety advocates have repeatedly called on the platform to do more to ensure gun videos aren’t making their way to the site’s youngest users, potentially traumatizing children or sending them down dark paths of extremism and violence.

Katie Paul, director of the Tech Transparency Project, said the change was welcome news and a step in the right direction. But she questioned why the platform took so long to issue a new policy, and said her group will look to see how effectively YouTube enforces its new rule.

“Firearms are the number one cause of death for children and teens in America,” said Paul, whose group has long sought stronger age controls on online gun videos. “As always with YouTube, the real proof of change is whether the company enforces the policies it has on the books. Until YouTube takes real action to prevent videos about guns and gun violence from reaching minors, its policies remain empty words.”

Last year, researchers at Paul’s group created YouTube accounts that mimicked the behavior of 9-year-old American boys with a stated interest in video games. The researchers found that YouTube’s recommendations system forwarded these accounts graphic videos of school shootings, tactical gun training videos and how-to instructions on making firearms fully automatic.

One video featured an elementary school-age girl wielding a handgun; another showed a shooter using a .50 caliber gun to fire on a dummy head filled with lifelike blood and brains. Many of the videos violated YouTube’s own policies against violent or gory content.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg last month called on YouTube to stop the proliferation of firearm-related videos to young users, and told the company it was failing to enforce its own policies. On Wednesday, Bragg said he applauded the company's new policy.

"We have heard firsthand from young individuals that YouTube's algorithm is driving them to the world of illegal and 3D-printed firearms, which is having a direct impact on the safety of Manhattanites," Bragg said in a statement emailed to reporters.

YouTube said the policy changes were designed to reflect new developments, like 3D printed guns, which have become more available in recent years. YouTube requires users under 17 to get their parent's permission before using their site; accounts for users younger than 13 are linked to the parental account.

"We regularly review our guidelines and consult with outside experts to make sure we are drawing the line at the right place," said company spokesman Javier Hernandez.

Along with TikTok, YouTube is one of the most popular sites for children and teens. Both sites have been questioned in the past for hosting, and in some cases promoting, videos that encourage gun violence, eating disorders and self-harm.

Several perpetrators of recent mass shootings have used social media and video streaming platforms to glorify violence, foreshadow or even livestream their attacks.

Hunter Biden's ex-wife and former girlfriend testify at trial about finding his drug paraphernalia

By CLAUDIA LAUER, RANDALL CHASE, COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Hunter Biden's ex-wife and a former girlfriend testified Wednesday in his gun trial about finding his crack pipes and other drug paraphernalia, and jurors saw photos of the president's son bare-chested in a bubble bath and heard about his visit to a strip club.

As the first lady sat in the front row, the courtroom grew quiet when Kathleen Buhle, who was married to Hunter for 20 years, walked in. She testified that she discovered her husband was using drugs when she found a crack pipe in an ashtray on their porch on July 3, 2015, a day after their anniversary. When she confronted him, "he acknowledged smoking crack," she said.

The trial, about whether he lied on a gun purchase form in 2018 when he said he wasn't using drugs, has quickly become a highly personal and detailed tour of the mistakes and drug use of Hunter Biden, whose struggles have been tabloid fodder for years and were used publicly by Republicans, including in their stalled impeachment effort against the president.

The proceedings are unfolding as the 2024 election looms, and allies worry about the toll it will take on President Joe Biden, who is deeply concerned about the health and sustained sobriety of his only living son. Prosecutors argue the photos, testimony and other evidence are necessary to show Hunter Biden's state of mind when he bought the gun.

Hunter Biden has been charged with three felonies stemming from the purchase in October 2018. He's accused of lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

Jurors have seen the gun and the form at the center of the case, and they have heard from the former clerk who sold the weapon. The clerk, Gordon Cleveland, said he watched as Hunter Biden entered his name, address and other personal information on the form.

He said he was standing next to Hunter Biden when he began to answer a series of questions on the form with "yes or no" boxes to check. Hunter checked a box saying he was purchasing the gun for himself. Another question asked whether the buyer was "an unlawful user of or addicted to" marijuana, stimulants, narcotics or any other controlled substance.

"He wrote 'no,'" Cleveland said. He also testified that Hunter did not ask any questions or express any confusion about the question. He paid \$900 in cash, telling Cleveland to keep the change — about \$13.

Prosecutors have hammered the idea that Hunter Biden was a habitual user, unable to stay clean for long. Buhle testified that even before she found the drugs, she suspected he was using. He had been

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kicked out of the Navy after testing positive for cocaine.

"I was definitely worried, scared," she said. They have three children and divorced in 2016 after his infidelity and drug abuse became too much, according to her memoir, "If We Break," about the dissolution of their marriage.

Buhle, who was subpoenaed, was on the stand for a brief 20 minutes. She remained composed but seemed upset as she recounted how she searched his car about a dozen times for drugs, whenever the children were driving it.

"Did you ever see Hunter using drugs?" defense attorney Abbe Lowell asked Buhle.

"No," she replied.

Then prosecutor Leo Wise asked Buhle how she knew Hunter was using drugs.

"He told me," she said.

Prosecutors also called Zoe Kestan, who testified under immunity about meeting Hunter Biden in December 2017 at a strip club in New York where she worked. During a private session, he pulled out a pipe and began smoking what she assumed was crack.

"He was incredibly charming and charismatic and friendly, and I felt really safe around him," she said. "I remember after he had smoked it, nothing had changed. He was the same charming person."

Kestan detailed for jurors when she saw him use drugs, buy drugs, talk about drugs or possess drug paraphernalia. Prosecutors asked her where he stored his drugs and pipes, and she testified he kept them in pouches and other places, such as a sunglasses cases.

On cross-examination, Kestan acknowledged that she had no contact with him in October 2018, the period when he bought the gun.

Jurors were shown dozens of pages of Hunter Biden's memoir, "Beautiful Things," written in 2021 after he got sober. And they heard lengthy audio excerpts from the book, which traces his descent into addiction following the death of his brother, Beau Biden, in 2015 from cancer. The memoir covers the period he bought the gun, though it doesn't mention the weapon specifically.

Lowell has said Hunter Biden's state of mind was different when he wrote the book than when he purchased the gun, when he didn't believe he had an addiction. And he's suggested Hunter Biden might have felt he had a drinking problem at the time, not a drug problem. Alcohol abuse doesn't preclude a gun purchase.

The Delaware trial comes after the collapse of a plea deal with prosecutors that would have resolved the gun case and a separate California tax case. He's now facing a separate trial in September on charges of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes.

Hunter Biden has since pleaded not guilty and has said he's being unfairly targeted by the Justice Department, after Republicans slammed the now-defunct plea agreement as a sweetheart deal for the Democratic president's son.

In Congress, Republicans have for months pursued an impeachment inquiry seeking to tie President Biden to his son's business dealings. So far, GOP lawmakers have failed to uncover evidence directly implicating President Biden in any wrongdoing. But on Wednesday, House Republicans accused Hunter and the president's brother James Biden of making false statements to Congress as part of the inquiry.

At his criminal trial, Hunter Biden's personal messages have been shown as evidence, including some that came from a laptop he left at a Delaware repair shop and never retrieved. In 2020, the contents made their way to Republicans and were publicly leaked, revealing some highly personal messages about his work and his life — some that appeared in congressional hearings. He has since sued over the leaked information.

Jurors are also expected to hear from James Biden, who is close with Hunter and helped his nephew through rehab stints in the past. They will also get details on how Beau Biden's widow, Hallie Biden, became addicted to crack during a brief relationship with Hunter after her husband's death.

Hallie took the gun from Hunter and tossed it into the garbage at a nearby market, afraid of what he might do with it. The weapon was later found by someone collecting cans and eventually turned over to police.

First lady Jill Biden went to court for the third consecutive day to support Hunter, ahead of her trip to

France to meet President Joe Biden, who was in Europe to mark the anniversary of D-Day.

If convicted, Hunter Biden faces up to 25 years in prison, though first-time offenders do not get anywhere near the maximum, and it's unclear whether the judge would give him time behind bars.

The trial is unfolding shortly after Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, was convicted of 34 felonies in New York City. The two criminal cases are unrelated, but their proximity underscores how the courts have taken center stage during the 2024 campaign.

Pro athletes understand gambling on their games is a non-negotiable no-no. Some learned the hard way

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Professional athletes get the lecture at the start of every season, and see the warnings any time they walk into their locker room or clubhouse: If you gamble on your games, the consequences are severe.

And, every once in a while, there is a more personal reminder.

When Major League Baseball banned San Diego Padres infielder Tucupita Marcano for life — following the NBA's permanent exile of Toronto Raptors forward Jontay Porter in April — it reinforced the message that the talk about gambling isn't just talk.

"What you do in the dark will come to light, I guess," Pirates outfielder Andrew McCutchen said this week after Marcano, his former teammate, was banished. "And you've got to deal with the consequences of poor choices."

A 24-year-old Venezuelan with 149 games of major league experience, Marcano was the first active baseball player in a century banned for life for gambling. MLB said he placed hundreds of bets totaling more than \$150,000 on baseball in 2022 and 2023 — including wagers on the Pirates while he was on Pittsburgh's big league injured list.

"I don't know if it's anywhere closer to home than here, because a lot of these guys were his teammates," Pirates manager Derek Shelton said. "We're talking about a 24-year-old kid that's been banned for life. I think that'll resonate extremely hard in our clubhouse."

Baseball dodged an even bigger scandal when two-way Japanese star Shohei Ohtani was found to be blameless in connection with the millions of dollars in bets placed by his former interpreter. Ipe Mizuhara admitted stealing nearly \$17 million from the unsuspecting athlete's bank account to fund his gambling addiction; he pleaded guilty to bank and tax fraud on Wednesday — the same day MLB banned Marcano and suspended four other players, who bet on major league games while in the minors, for one year.

Porter, who played 37 career NBA games for Memphis and Toronto over the last four seasons, went even further — sharing inside information with bettors and taking himself out of games early to help deliver the under on prop bets.

Other players said they should have known they were gambling with their careers.

"The rules are very clear, and everybody knows what not to do," Dallas Mavericks swingman Tim Hardaway Jr. said Wednesday at media day before the opener of the NBA Finals. "We have countless, countless meetings in the summer and during preseason and throughout the season."

Gambling has long been a scourge of professional sports, at least since the 1919 Chicago White Sox threw the World Series and brought to the forefront the risk of players giving less than their full effort. For decades after, any connection with gambling was forbidden.

"The reason is simple: We have to protect the integrity of this game," said Torey Lovullo, who managed one of the suspended players, pitcher Andrew Saalfrank, for parts of this season and last.

But leagues more recently opened their minds — and wallets — to some forms of gambling, once they realized they could get a piece of the action. What started with an acceptance of fantasy sports became a widespread embrace of full-on sports gambling since 2018, when the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for it in most states.

Still, gambling on one's own sport remains a no-no.

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The fear is that players — especially those at the lower end of the salary scale — could be swayed by gamblers offering them a cut if they shave a few points or make a timely error or pull themselves out of a game before a milestone is hit, as Porter did. (Porter made \$1.9 million in 2021-22 but was earning around \$400,000 on a two-way contract this season.)

"I'd like to think there's too much integrity within our fraternity to do that, but honestly I know money can sway a lot of people. I hope that's not the case at all," Detroit Tigers player representative Casey Mize said Wednesday. "And, yes, the fact that it's taken three or four years for this to come out is, you can't help but think maybe there will be more the past few years."

Baseball Rule 21 — many players and managers can cite it by number — says: "Any player, umpire, or Club or League official or employee, who shall bet any sum whatsoever upon any baseball game in connection with which the bettor has a duty to perform, shall be declared permanently ineligible." It's posted in every clubhouse in English and Spanish.

Shelton called it the "one non-negotiable rule we have in our sport. ... The gold standard."

"They just make it so clear that 'Fine, go bet on the other things, but don't bet on your sport,'" Mets outfielder and union representative Brandon Nimmo said before New York's game against the Nationals on Wednesday. "For me, it's such a clear-cut line that you know you are doing wrong when you are doing it."

As Nimmo spoke, the 4,000 square-foot BetMGM Sportsbook in the left field concourse was efficiently separating fans from their money. A BetMGM sign just to the right of the batter's eye in center field reminded those in the stands that their next bet was no farther away than their smartphone.

"But also just because they are selling beers here doesn't mean I want to have a beer before the game," Nimmo said. "There are things that we have to abstain from that are available at the park."

No matter what rules and safeguards are in place, Nimmo said, someone will try to find a way around them.

But not him.

"I am just not that greedy," he said. "For me, the juice isn't worth the squeeze."

Man in Mexico died of a bird flu strain that hadn't been confirmed before in a human, WHO says

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man's death in Mexico was caused by a strain of bird flu called H5N2 that has never before been found in a human, the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

The WHO said it wasn't clear how the man became infected, although H5N2 has been reported in poultry in Mexico.

There are numerous types of bird flu. H5N2 is not the same strain that has infected multiple dairy cow herds in the U.S. That strain is called H5N1 and three farmworkers have gotten mild infections.

Other bird flu varieties have killed people across the world in previous years, including 18 people in China during an outbreak of H5N6 in 2021, according to a timeline of bird flu outbreaks from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mexican health officials alerted the WHO that a 59-year-old man who died in a Mexico City hospital had the virus despite no known exposure to poultry or other animals.

According to family members, the WHO release said, the patient had been bedridden for unrelated reasons before developing a fever, shortness of breath and diarrhea on April 17. Mexico's public health department said in a statement that he had underlying ailments, including chronic kidney failure, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Hospital care was sought on April 24 and the man died the same day.

Initial tests showed an unidentified type of flu that subsequent weeks of lab testing confirmed was H5N2.

The WHO said the risk to people in Mexico is low, and that no further human cases have been discovered so far despite testing people who came in contact with the deceased at home and in the hospital.

There had been three poultry outbreaks of H5N2 in nearby parts of Mexico in March but authorities

haven't been able to find a connection. Mexican officials also are monitoring birds near a shallow lake on the outskirts of Mexico City.

Whenever bird flu circulates in poultry, there is a risk that people in close contact with flocks can become infected. Health authorities are closely watching for any signs that the viruses are evolving to spread easily from person to person, and experts are concerned as more mammal species contract bird flu viruses.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators arrested at Stanford University after occupying president's office

By TERRY CHEA and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. (AP) — Police arrested 13 people at Stanford University after pro-Palestinian demonstrators occupied the school president and provost's offices early Wednesday, causing what officials described as "extensive" vandalism inside and outside the building.

The takeover began around dawn on the last day of spring classes at the university in California's Silicon Valley, and ended three hours later. Some protesters barricaded themselves inside the building while others linked arms outside, The Stanford Daily reported. The group chanted "Palestine will be free, we will free Palestine."

Demonstrators cheered in support of those being arrested as the detainees were escorted out of the building and loaded into law enforcement vehicles.

The student newspaper said one of its reporters was among those detained.

Protest camps have sprung up on university campuses across the U.S. and in Europe as students demand their universities stop doing business with Israel or companies that support its war efforts.

Organizers seek to amplify calls to end Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, which they describe as a genocide against the Palestinians. The top United Nations court has concluded there is a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza — a charge Israel strongly denies.

Stanford students who participated in Wednesday's protest would be immediately suspended, and any seniors would not be allowed to graduate, university President Richard Saller and Provost Jenny Martinez said in a joint statement.

They said the university also removed a student encampment of Palestinian supporters on Wednesday, which had been set up on campus on April 25, citing public safety concerns and violations of school policies.

"The situation on campus has now crossed the line from peaceful protest to actions that threaten the safety of our community," they said, adding that demonstrators had recently tried to occupy a different building.

One law enforcement officer was lightly injured when he was shoved by protesters interfering with a transport vehicle, university spokesperson Dee Mostofi wrote in an email to The Associated Press. Other campus activities were not affected, she said.

In addition to the damage indoors, the president and provost said there was extensive graffiti on the sandstone buildings and columns of the Main Quad. Video posted on social media showed police busting in a door. Other photos showed an office desk splattered with a red liquid.

An AP journalist on campus saw walls spray-painted political slogans calling for the destruction of the U.S. and Israel, as well as killing police.

"This graffiti conveys vile and hateful sentiments that we condemn in the strongest terms," the president and provost said, adding that it remains unclear who graffitied the university.

Sarah Lebaron, a Stanford physics student, said she didn't think Wednesday's demonstration and graffiti were an effective way to protest the war in Gaza or question university endowments.

"I think the goal is to have Stanford divest from Israel. That is their stated goal. But I don't see how these actions necessarily lead to that goal," Lebaron said.

Columbia University, which was rocked by campus protests earlier this spring, agreed to take additional steps to make students feel secure on campus under a settlement reached with a Jewish student Tuesday.

The AP has recorded at least 86 incidents since April 18 where arrests were made at campus protests

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across the U.S. More than 3,130 people have been arrested on the campuses of 65 colleges and universities. The figures are based on AP reporting and statements from universities and law enforcement agencies.

Israel faces growing international criticism for its strategy of systematic destruction in Gaza, at a huge cost in civilian lives. Israeli bombardments and ground offensives in the besieged territory have killed more than 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Climate records keep getting shattered. Here is what you need to know

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Month after month, global temperatures are setting new records. Meanwhile, scientists and climate policymakers warn of the growing likelihood that the planet will soon exceed the warming target set at the landmark Paris 2015 climate talks.

Making sense of the run of climate extremes may be challenging for some. Here's a look at what scientists are saying.

WHAT CLIMATE RECORDS HAVE BEEN BROKEN RECENTLY?

The European Union's climate-watching agency Copernicus declared last month that it was the hottest May on record, marking the 12th straight monthly record high. Separately, the World Meteorological Organization estimated that there's almost a one-in-two chance that average global temperatures from 2024 to 2028 will surpass the hoped-for warming limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times that was agreed in the Paris talks.

And one more: Earth warmed at a slightly faster rate in 2023 than 2022, a group of 57 scientists determined in a report in the journal Earth System Science Data.

ARE CLIMATE SCIENTISTS SURPRISED?

Not really. Many climate scientists say warming trends are following what they have studied and predicted based on the buildup of carbon dioxide from rising fossil fuel use.

In 2023, the levels of those heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere reached historic highs, according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Carbon dioxide, in particular, which is the most abundant and important of the greenhouse gases produced by human activity, rose in 2023 by the third-highest amount in 65 years of recordkeeping, NOAA said.

WHAT DO THE SHATTERED RECORDS MEAN FOR HUMANS?

More suffering. Human-induced climate change has brought wild weather swings, increasingly unpredictable storms and heat waves that stay over a particular area for longer periods of time.

An Asian heat wave this spring forced schools to close in the Philippines, killed people in Thailand and set records there and in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives and Myanmar. Weeks of heat waves across parts of India last month also closed schools and killed people.

Life won't end if temperatures exceed the 1.5-degree limit, but things will get worse, scientists say. Previous U.N. studies show massive changes to Earth's ecosystem are more likely to begin between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius of warming, including eventual loss of the planet's coral reefs, Arctic sea ice, some species of plants and animals — along with even worse extreme weather events that kill people and damage infrastructure.

"The Paris threshold is not a magic number. Reaching that level of warming over a multiyear average will not cause a noticeable uptick in the impacts we're already witnessing," said Jennifer Francis, a scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center in Massachusetts.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Climate scientists are steadfast that fossil fuel use must be phased out to stave off the worst consequences of climate change. The burning of fossil fuels — oil, gas and coal — is the main contributor to global warming caused by human activity.

"Until greenhouse gas concentrations level off, we will keep breaking temperature records, along with increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events," said Francis.

Renewable energy has been growing fast, but needs to grow faster still. Efficiencies are being studied,

developed and rolled out all across the economy — in the ways we heat houses and buildings, for example, cook our food and make cement — but scientists say the need to adapt is urgent.

House Republicans issue criminal referrals against James and Hunter Biden, alleging false testimony

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans issued criminal referrals Wednesday against President Joe Biden's son and brother, accusing them of making false statements to Congress as part of the GOP's yearlong impeachment inquiry.

The Republican leaders of the House Oversight and Accountability, Judiciary and Ways and Means committees sent a letter to the Justice Department recommending the prosecution of Hunter Biden and James Biden and accusing them of making a "conscious effort" to undermine the House's investigation.

Abbe Lowell, Hunter Biden's attorney, said in a statement that the referrals are "nothing more than a desperate attempt by Republicans to twist Hunter's testimony so they can distract from their failed impeachment inquiry and interfere with his trial."

James Biden's lawyer Paul Fishman echoed that sentiment, calling it a "baseless partisan action," and reiterated that his client has "always maintained that Joe Biden never had any involvement in his business dealings."

The referrals to Attorney General Merrick Garland and special counsel David Weiss add to the legal challenges facing Hunter Biden, who is now on trial in a federal court in Delaware for three felony charges stemming from the purchase of a gun in October 2018. The 54-year-old has been accused by prosecutors of lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

On Capitol Hill, the Republicans pursued their wide-ranging investigation into Hunter Biden, separate from that federal case, are trying to tie the Democratic president to his son's business dealings. Both Hunter and James Biden sat for hourslong interviews with lawmakers even as they failed to uncover evidence directly implicating Joe Biden in any wrongdoing.

Rep. Jason Smith, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said testimony from IRS whistleblowers shows that Hunter Biden lied to Congress at least three times in his Feb. 28 deposition.

"I think the Justice Department needs to look at that and act accordingly. When you lie to Congress, that is a serious violation of the law. It's a felony," said Smith, R-Mo. "The president's son should not be treated any differently than any other American."

The Justice Department, which will ultimately decide whether to take up the criminal referrals, declined to comment.

The focus on the Biden family resulting from Hunter Biden's federal trial and the impeachment inquiry has proved to be a political and personal liability for the president. The proceedings are unfolding as the 2024 White House election looms, and allies of Joe Biden worry about the toll it will take on him. He is deeply concerned about the health and sustained sobriety of his only living son.

Since former President Donald Trump's conviction on charges in New York, Republican leaders have assailed the Justice Department for what they claim is a "two-tiered" system of justice that targets conservatives. They play down the department's current prosecution of Hunter Biden and the fact that other prominent Democrats have faced federal investigation during Joe Biden's presidency.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said Wednesday that if Garland "wishes to demonstrate he is not running a two-tiered system of justice and targeting the president's political opponents, he will open criminal investigations into James and Hunter Biden," under the false statements and perjury statutes.

The false statements in question, according to the House committee chairmen, include references Hunter Biden made about what position he held at a corporate entity that received millions of dollars from foreign clients. The president's son also "relayed an entirely fictitious account" about text messages between him and his Chinese business partner in which Hunter Biden allegedly invoked his father's presence with him

as part of a negotiation tactic, according to the GOP investigation.

There is also a focus on statements James Biden made about whether the president, while a private citizen, met with a former Biden family business partner.

House Democrats said Republicans are resorting to criminal referrals because their impeachment push has effectively flamed out despite 17 months of investigating the Biden family.

"This agonizingly protracted and completely fruitless investigation has proven only that President Biden was not part of, did not profit from, and took no official actions to benefit his family members' business ventures," Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the Oversight committee, said in a statement Wednesday.

Speaker Johnson appoints two Trump allies to a committee that handles classified intelligence

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday appointed two far-right Republicans to the powerful House Intelligence Committee, positioning two close allies of Donald Trump who worked to overturn the 2020 presidential election on a panel that receives sensitive classified briefings and oversees the work of America's spy agencies.

The appointments of GOP Reps. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania and Ronny Jackson of Texas to the House Intelligence Committee were announced on the House floor Wednesday. Johnson, a hardline conservative from Louisiana who has aligned himself with Trump, was replacing spots on the committee that opened up after the resignations of Republican Reps. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Chris Stewart of Utah.

Committee spots have typically been given to lawmakers with backgrounds in national security and who have gained respect across the aisle. But the replacements with two close Trump allies comes as Johnson has signaled his willingness to use the full force of the House to aid Trump's bid to reclaim the Oval Office. It also hands the hard-right faction of the House two coveted spots on a committee that handles the nation's secrets and holds tremendous influence over the direction of foreign policy.

Trump has long displayed adversarial and flippant views of the U.S. intelligence community, flouted safeguards over classified information and directly berated law enforcement agencies like the FBI. The former president faces 37 felony counts for improperly storing in his Florida estate sensitive documents on nuclear capabilities, repeatedly enlisting aides and lawyers to help him hide records demanded by investigators and cavalierly showing off a Pentagon "plan of attack" and classified map.

Johnson did not release a statement on his picks for the committee.

Perry, who formerly chaired the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus, was ordered by a federal judge last year to turn over more than 1,600 texts and emails to FBI agents investigating efforts to keep Trump in office after his 2020 election loss and illegally block the transfer of power to Democrat Joe Biden.

Perry's personal cellphone was also seized by federal authorities who have explored his role in helping install an acting attorney general who would be receptive to Trump's false claims of election fraud.

Perry and other conservatives have also pushed Congress to curtail a key U.S. government surveillance tool. They want to restrict the FBI's ability to use the program to search for Americans' data.

"I look forward to providing not only a fresh perspective, but conducting actual oversight — not blind obedience to some facets of our Intel Community that all too often abuse their powers, resources, and authority to spy on the American People," Perry said in a statement.

Jackson, who was elected to the House in 2020, was formerly a top White House physician under former presidents Barack Obama and Trump. Known for his over-the-top pronouncements about Trump's health, Jackson was nominated by Trump to be the secretary of Veterans Affairs.

He withdrew his nomination amid allegations of professional misconduct. An internal investigation at the Department of Defense later concluded that Jackson made "sexual and denigrating" comments about a female subordinate, violated the policy on drinking alcohol on a presidential trip and took prescription-strength sleeping medication that prompted worries from his colleagues about his ability to provide proper medical care.

Jackson has denied those allegations and described them as politically motivated.

The House committee that investigated the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol also requested testimony from Jackson as it looked into lawmakers' meetings at the White House, direct conversations with Trump as he sought to challenge his election loss and the planning and coordination of rallies. Jackson declined to testify.

The presence of Jackson and Perry on the committee could damage the trust between the president and the committee in handling classified information, said Ira Goldman, a former Republican congressional aide who worked as a counsel to the intelligence committee in the 1970s and 1980s.

He said, "You're giving members seats on the committee when, based on the public record, they couldn't get a security clearance if they came through any other door."

Gunman captured after shootout outside US Embassy in Lebanon

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and LUJAIN JO Associated Press

AUKAR, Lebanon (AP) — A gunman who attacked the U.S. embassy near Beirut was shot and captured by Lebanese soldiers after a Wednesday morning shootout that injured an embassy security guard, the military and embassy officials said.

The attack took place as tensions simmered in the tiny Mediterranean country, where months of fighting between Hezbollah militants and Israeli troops has displaced thousands along the border, following years of political deadlock and economic hardship.

Local media reported that there was a gunfight involving at least one attacker and lasting almost half an hour.

Joe Abdo, who works at a gas station near the compound said he heard "around 15 to 20 rounds of gunfire" while working that morning. "We ran here to see what's happening and suddenly, the army blocked us from going up," he told The Associated Press.

No motive was immediately clear, but Lebanese media have published photos that appear to show a bloodied attacker wearing a black vest with the words "Islamic State" written in Arabic and the English initials "I" and "S."

The Islamic State has not claimed the attack, nor has any other group.

A Lebanese security official and two judicial officials familiar with the case said the gunman appeared to be a lone attacker. They identified him as a resident of the eastern Lebanese border town of Majdal Anjar near Syria. Earlier, the Lebanese military identified the suspect as a Syrian national.

They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not cleared to speak to the press.

The military raided both Majdal Anjar and nearby Suweiri, the Lebanese army said in a statement, where it arrested three relatives of the suspect and two other people believed to be associated with him.

The officials said they did not find other gunmen or evidence of a possible extremist cell.

The suspect was shot in the stomach and leg before being captured and taken to the military hospital in Beirut, according to the officials.

A U.S. Embassy spokesperson said in a statement that one embassy security guard was injured in the attack.

"With respect to his privacy we cannot say more, but we wish him a full recovery," said the spokesperson, who spoke on condition of anonymity in accordance with regulations.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters the local guard was "seriously injured." He said U.S. officials were aware that the suspect was wearing what appeared to be IS apparel but that they do not yet know the motive for the shooting.

A statement from Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati's office said that he was informed following meetings with the defense minister and army commander that the situation was now stable and that serious investigations are underway.

The Lebanese military said it deployed troops around the embassy and surrounding areas.

In 1983, a deadly bombing attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut killed 63 people. U.S. officials blame

the attack on the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Following that attack, the embassy was moved from central Beirut to the Christian suburb of Aukar, north of the capital. Another bomb attack struck the new location on Sept. 20, 1984.

In September 2023, Lebanese security forces detained a Lebanese man who opened fire by the U.S. Embassy. There were no casualties in that attack.

In October 2023, hundreds of protesters clashed with Lebanese security forces in demonstrations near the U.S. Embassy in support of Gaza's people and the militant group Hamas in its war with Israel.

What will become of The Epoch Times with its chief financial officer accused of money laundering?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The arrest of an executive at The Epoch Times in a money-laundering scheme this week has drawn attention to a media outlet that has lived largely in the shadows since its founding in 2000 and a transformation during the Trump administration.

Federal prosecutors in New York charged Weidong "Bill" Guan of Secaucus, N.J., chief financial officer of The Epoch Times, of steering at least \$67 million in criminal proceeds, much from fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance benefits, to the company, its affiliates and himself. Guan pleaded not guilty but was suspended by The Epoch Times, which agreed to cooperate with prosecutors.

The case calls into question the future of a company that was a key online supporter of Trump and spreader of conspiracy theories.

WHAT IS THE EPOCH TIMES?

Started first as a newspaper, the company produces news websites and videos, and is now available in 23 languages. Its founder, John Tang, is a Chinese-American who practices Falun Gong, a form of meditation and exercise. The Chinese government has denounced, banned and, according to members, has consistently oppressed and mistreated Falun Gong followers.

While the outlet has sought to distance its operations from the Falun Gong movement itself, the company has said it "sees the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of Falun Gong practitioners, and the remarkably heroic ways in which practitioners have responded to the persecution, as one of the most underreported stories of the last 20 years."

It is by no means a one-issue news organization, and the lead story on its website Wednesday was about U.S. political primaries the night before. But The Epoch Times does frequent and tough reporting on the Chinese government; stories on its website Wednesday included an opinion piece on the origins of the COVID virus and a look back at the Tiananmen Square massacre on its 35th anniversary. The site also prominently touts a book by Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi.

The Epoch Times says that "our aim is not to force our perspective on you, but to give you the information you need to make up your own mind."

HOW DID THE EPOCH TIMES CHANGE?

The Epoch Times website currently has testimonials from Trump administration figures Peter Navarro and Sebastian Gorka and U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar, a Republican from Arizona.

That's a clue. The news organization transformed itself during the Trump years by becoming a site that supported the former president and his causes. It was opportunistic in two ways: leaders saw in Trump a president they believed would fight against the Chinese government, and sensed the chance to win funding from others who believe in the cause, said A.J. Bauer, a University of Alabama professor who studies conservative media.

In a few years' time, the outlet became a partisan powerhouse and "has also created a global-scale misinformation machine that has repeatedly pushed fringe narratives into the mainstream," The New York Times reported in 2020.

It embraced various conspiracy theories, many surrounding COVID. The Epoch Times and affiliates advanced the false story that the Obama administration spied on Trump's 2016 campaign and spread

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theories promoted by the QAnon conspiracy site and claims about voter fraud.

The Epoch Times was particularly aggressive on Facebook through advertising and the creation of different pages that guided social media users to their content. Following an investigation by NBC News, the social media giant in 2019 banned pro-Trump advertisements produced by the outlet for violating its ad policies.

The indictment doesn't specifically say that these pro-Trump efforts were funded through the alleged criminal scheme. But it was around this time that money was pouring in. The Epoch Times reported nearly \$128 million in revenue for 2021, a stunning increase from \$4 million in 2016, according to a federal financial disclosure. The turnaround caught the eye of banks, regulators and, eventually, federal prosecutors.

Much of the money came in through the company's "Make Money Online" team, run by Guan, according to the federal indictment. Guan has claimed the windfall was due in part to an increase in subscriptions and donations, the indictment said.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE EPOCH TIMES' FUTURE?

Guan is the only one charged by prosecutors. But the indictment states that "others known and unknown" were aware of what was going on, raising questions about whether anyone else at the company might be drawn in and what this might mean for The Epoch Times' future. The company didn't immediately respond to a query on the topic.

Given the action taken against the company by Facebook in 2019, it's questionable whether the playbook used before has relevance for the 2024 campaign. Some avenues for reaching people have undoubtedly closed because the social media site has been deemphasizing news and political content, Bauer said.

Conservative figures certainly noticed the work put in by The Epoch Times on behalf of their causes. Despite that, the outlet has had surprisingly little influence, said Howard Polskin, who monitors conservative media for The Righting website.

"They don't seem to be driving the news agenda in right wing media," Polskin said. "I don't think right wing media is paying much attention to what they are doing."

Bauer agreed. The Epoch Times' influence seems largely confined to people for whom opposing the Chinese government is a main cause, he said.

"They're having a hard time, just like everybody else in the media, in finding an audience at this moment," Bauer said. "I don't think there's too many people calling up The Epoch Times on their computer with their morning coffee to see what they have to say."

Boeing launches NASA astronauts for the first time after years of delays

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Boeing launched astronauts for the first time Wednesday, belatedly joining SpaceX as a second taxi service for NASA.

A pair of NASA test pilots blasted off aboard Boeing's Starliner capsule for the International Space Station, the first to fly the new spacecraft.

The trip by Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams was expected to take 25 hours, with an arrival Thursday. They will spend just over a week at the orbiting lab before climbing back into Starliner for a remote desert touchdown in the western U.S. on June 14.

"Let's get going!" Wilmore called out a few minutes before liftoff.

Half an hour later, he and Williams were safely in orbit and giving chase to the space station. Back at Cape Canaveral, the relieved launch controllers stood and applauded. After all the trouble leading up to Wednesday's launch, including two scrapped countdowns, everything went smoothly before and during liftoff, prompting congratulations from SpaceX's Elon Musk and others.

"Today it all lined up," said Boeing program manager Mark Nappi.

Years late because of spacecraft flaws, Starliner's crew debut comes as the company struggles with unrelated safety issues on its airplane side.

Wilmore and Williams — retired Navy captains and former space station residents — stressed repeatedly before the launch that they had full confidence in Boeing's ability to get it right with this test flight.

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Crippled by bad software, Starliner's initial test flight in 2019 without a crew had to be repeated before NASA would let its astronauts strap in. The 2022 do-over went much better, but parachute problems later cropped up and flammable tape had to be removed from the capsule.

Wednesday's launch was the third attempt with astronauts since early May, coming after a pair of rocket-related problems, most recently last weekend. A small helium leak in the spacecraft's propulsion system also caused delays, but remained extremely low and manageable.

"It's just a tough endeavor to get to flight and huge kudos to the entire team for getting there," said Steve Stich, NASA's commercial crew program manager.

Boeing was hired alongside Elon Musk's SpaceX a decade ago to ferry NASA's astronauts to and from the space station. The space agency wanted two competing U.S. companies for the job in the wake of the space shuttles' retirement, paying \$4.2 billion to Boeing and just over half that to SpaceX, which refashioned the capsule it was using to deliver station supplies.

SpaceX launched astronauts into orbit in 2020, becoming the first private business to achieve what only three countries — Russia, the U.S. and China — had mastered. It has taken nine crews to the space station for NASA and three private groups for a Houston company that charters flights.

The liftoff from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station was the 100th of an Atlas V for rocket maker United Launch Alliance. It was the first ride for astronauts on an Atlas rocket since John Glenn's Mercury era more than 60 years ago; the rocket usually launches satellites and other spacecraft.

Despite the Atlas V's perfect record, the human presence cranked up the tension for the scores of NASA and Boeing employees gathered at Cape Canaveral and Mission Control in Houston.

Boeing's Starliner and SpaceX's Dragon are designed to be fully autonomous and reusable. Wilmore and Williams occasionally will take manual control of Starliner on their way to the space station, to check out its systems. The only snag early in the flight involved the capsule's cooling system. More water was used than expected before the radiators took over in orbit. The tank will be refilled before the ride home.

If the mission goes well, NASA will alternate between SpaceX and Boeing for taxi flights, beginning next year. The backup pilot for this test flight, Mike Fincke, will strap in for Starliner's next trip.

"This is exciting. We built up to this moment for years and years, and it finally happened," Fincke said from neighboring Kennedy Space Center. "I feel like the whole planet was cheering for them."

Israeli nationalists march in Jerusalem as a far-right minister boasts of Jewish prayer at key site

By JULIA FRANKEL and MOSHE EDRI Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Thousands of ultranationalist Israelis marched through a sensitive Palestinian area of Jerusalem on Wednesday in an annual procession, chanting racist slogans as the country's far-right national security minister boasted that Jews had prayed freely at a key holy site in the city in violation of decades-old understandings.

The comments by Itamar Ben-Gvir and the march in Jerusalem, the emotional heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, threatened to stoke already high tensions that have gripped the region since the start of the war in Gaza. The annual march, seen by Palestinians as provocative, helped set off an 11-day war in Gaza three years ago.

Marchers convening outside the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem's historic Old City, a central gathering place for Palestinians in east Jerusalem, chanted "Death to Arabs" and other anti-Arab and anti-Islamic slogans. They danced and waved Israeli flags as the procession kicked off.

Ben-Gvir, who was once on the fringes of Israeli politics but now holds a key position in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, had insisted that the march follow its traditional route through the Palestinian area, despite tensions surging because of the war. Marchers entered the Muslim Quarter of the Old City through Damascus Gate and ended at the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray.

The police stressed that the march would not enter the sprawling Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the third

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holiest site in Islam. The hilltop on which it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the Jewish temples in antiquity.

But activists said hundreds of Jews had visited the compound earlier in the day, and Ben-Gvir said they prayed there freely, following what he said was his own policy that permitted prayer there.

Since Israel captured the site in 1967, Jews have been allowed to visit but not pray there. Perceived encroachments on the site have set off widespread violence on a number of occasions going back decades.

"Jews prayed on the Temple Mount. This is the minister's policy," Ben-Gvir told the Galey Israel radio station.

Netanyahu said there had been no change to the understandings at the holy site that prevented Jewish prayer there.

Ben-Gvir has long called for greater Jewish access to the holy site and has visited it repeatedly as a minister. Palestinians consider the mosque a national symbol and view such visits as provocative and as a potential precursor to Israel seizing control over the compound. Most rabbis forbid Jews from praying on the site, but there has been a growing movement in recent years of Jews who support worship there.

The annual march commemorates "Jerusalem Day," which marks Israel's capture of east Jerusalem, including the Old City and its holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, in the 1967 Mideast war.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem to be its capital, but its annexation of east Jerusalem is not internationally recognized. The Palestinians, who seek east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state, see the march as a provocation.

Just before the march began, crowds scuffled with police and threw plastic bottles at a journalist wearing a vest with the word PRESS emblazoned on it. Police said they arrested 18 marchers "on suspicion of violent crimes, assault and threats and disorderly conduct."

Police said they deployed 3,000 security personnel to ensure calm and were seen arresting several Palestinian men before the march got underway, leading them away with their hands bound behind their backs.

Ben-Gvir said the march sent a message to Hamas.

"We are delivering a message from here to Hamas: Jerusalem is ours. Damascus Gate is ours," he told marchers at the start of the rally. "And with God's help total victory is ours," Ben-Gvir said, referring to the war in Gaza, which he has demanded that Israel continue until Hamas is defeated.

Commenting on the march, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said "our people will not rest until the occupation is gone and an independent Palestinian state is established, with Jerusalem as its capital."

The march was taking place as tensions over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza are high. The war began with Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel responded with a massive offensive that has killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, displaced most of the territory's population and caused widespread destruction.

The United States has thrown its weight behind a phased cease-fire and hostage release outlined by President Joe Biden last week. But Israel says it won't end the war without destroying Hamas, while the militant group is demanding a lasting cease-fire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

In France, D-Day evokes both the joys of liberation and the pain of Normandy's 20,000 civilian dead

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

CARENTAN-LES-MARAIS, France (AP) — Shortly after D-Day in 1944, the American soldiers heading out to more fighting against Adolf Hitler's forces couldn't help but notice the hungry French boy by the side of the road, hoping for handouts.

One by one, the men fished fragrant, brightly-colored spheres from their pockets and deposited them in Yves Marchais' hands. The 6-year-old boy had never seen the strange fruits before, growing up in Nazi-occupied France, where food was rationed and terror was everywhere.

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Thrilled with his bounty, the young Marchais counted them all — 35 — and dashed home for his first taste of oranges.

But also seared into survivors' memories in Normandy are massive Allied bombing raids that pulverized towns, villages and the cities of Caen, Rouen and Le Havre, burying victims and turning skies fire-red.

The 80th anniversary this week of the June 6, 1944, Allied invasion on D-Day that punched through Hitler's western defenses and helped precipitate Nazi Germany's surrender 11 months later brings mixed emotions for French survivors of the Battle of Normandy. They remain eternally grateful for their liberation but cannot forget its steep cost in French lives.

Marchais remembers his family's house in Carentan, Normandy, shaking during bombardments that sounded "like thunder" and how his mother stunned him by gulping down a bottle of strong Normandy cider when they were sheltering in their basement, declaring as she finished it: "That's another one that the Germans won't drink!"

"The Americans, for us, were gods," Marchais, now 86, recalled. "Whatever they do in the world, they will always be gods to me."

RUINED NORMANDY TOWNS COUNT THEIR DEAD

Some 20,000 Normandy civilians were killed in the invasion and as Allied forces fought their way inland, sometimes field-by-field through the leafy Normandy countryside that helped conceal German defenders. Only in late August of 1944 did they reach Paris.

Allied casualties in the Normandy campaign were also appalling, with 73,000 troops killed and 153,000 wounded.

Allied bombing was aimed at stopping Hitler from sending reinforcements and at prying his troops out of the "Atlantic Wall" of coastal defenses and other strongpoints that German occupation forces had built with forced labor.

The list of Normandy towns left ruined and counting their dead grew with the Allied advances: Argentan, Aunay-sur-Odon, Condé-sur-Noireau, Coutances, Falaise, Flers, Lisieux, Vimoutiers, Vire and others. Leaflets scattered by Allied planes urged civilians to "LEAVE IMMEDIATELY! YOU DON'T HAVE A MINUTE TO LOSE!" but often missed their targets.

Some Normans were furious. Writing before being liberated, a woman in the bombarded port city of Cherbourg described Allied pilots as "bandits and assassins" in a June 4, 1944, letter to her husband who was being held prisoner in Germany.

"My dear Henri, it's shameful to massacre the civilian population as the supposed Allies are doing," reads the letter, which historians Michel Boivin and Bernard Garnier published in their 1994 study of civilian victims in Normandy's Manche region.

"We are in danger everywhere."

NORMAN LOSSES 'SWEEPED UNDER THE CARPET'

French President Emmanuel Macron paid homage to civilian victims in commemorations on Wednesday in Saint-Lo, recalling how the Normandy town became emblematic of losses from Allied bombing when it was razed on June 6 and 7, 1944. The death toll was 352, according to Boivin and Garnier's study. Playwright Samuel Beckett dubbed Saint-Lo "The Capital of the Ruins" after working there with the Irish Red Cross.

Macron said Saint-Lo was "a necessary target" because Allied bombers were aiming to prevent German reinforcements from reaching the invasion beaches and described it as "a martyred town sacrificed to liberate France."

Those killed in Saint-Lo included Marguerite Lecarpentier's older brother, Henri. She was 6 at the time. Henri was 19 and he'd been helping another man pull a teenage girl out from under debris when the town was bombarded again. All three were killed. Marguerite's father later identified her brother's body "because of his shoes, which were new," she said.

When her family subsequently fled Saint-Lo, they crossed through what was left of the town.

"It was terrible because there was rubble everywhere," Lecarpentier recalled. Her mother waved a white handkerchief as they walked, "because the planes were constantly flying overhead" and "so we'd

be recognized as civilians.”

Still, Lecarpentier speaks without rancor of Allied bombing. “It was the price to pay,” she said.

“It can’t have been easy,” she added. “When one thinks that they landed on June 6 and that Saint-Lo was only liberated on July 18 and they lost enormous numbers of soldiers.”

University of Caen historian Françoise Passera, co-author of “The Normans in the War: The Time of Trials, 1939-1945,” says Normandy’s civilian casualties were overshadowed for decades by the exploits of Allied soldiers in combat and their sacrifices.

Although towns held remembrances locally, she noted that it wasn’t until 2014 that a French president — Macron’s predecessor, François Hollande — paid national homage to Normandy’s civilian dead.

Until then, because France had been bombed by its liberators, “this was not a subject that could be raised very easily by French authorities,” Passera said.

“Civilian victims were swept under the carpet somewhat to not offend the Americans,” she said. “And to not offend the British.”

But for Normans, D-Day and its aftermath were “a bit of a confusion of feelings,” she said. “We cried with joy because we were freed, but we also cried because the dead were all around us.”

Spare a thought for weather watcher Maureen Sweeney who made the right call for D-Day

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

VER-SUR MER, France (AP) — Along with the generals and the paratroopers, the pilots and the infantrymen, spare a thought for the young Irish woman who may have played the most important role of all in making the D-Day landings a success.

Maureen Sweeney was a postal clerk at Blacksod Point on the northwest coast of Ireland, where one of her duties was to record data that fed into weather forecasts for the British Isles.

In early June 1944, Sweeney sent a series of readings that helped persuade Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe, to delay D-Day and avoid potentially disastrous weather that could have wrecked the landings. She didn’t learn of her role in history for more than 10 years.

“It’s something to remember for a lifetime,” Sweeney told her grandson in an interview filmed before she died last December. “It’s the only time they ever noticed our forecasts. The one that counted. And set the world alight.”

As D-Day loomed, Eisenhower faced a dilemma.

Almost 160,000 troops had gathered on the south coast of England in preparation for the long-awaited invasion that was scheduled for the early hours of June 5. The ships that would deliver them to the beaches were already warming up their engines. And 12,000 aircraft were ready to pound the Nazi defenses and provide air cover for the landings.

But the success of Operation Overlord depended as much on the elements as military might.

D-Day had been set for June 5 because it offered the right combination of low tides, full moon and, Eisenhower hoped, good weather to give Allied forces the best chance of smashing through the Nazi’s “Atlantic Wall” with a minimum of casualties.

As the appointed hour approached, however, Allied meteorologists were still arguing about the weather.

While U.S. Army Air Force experts forecast that good weather would continue, Britain’s Meteorological Office predicted high winds that could swamp landing craft and thick cloud cover that would hamper air operations.

Relying on readings Sweeney took at Blacksod Point, the Allies’ chief meteorologist, a Scot named James Martin Stagg, finally told Allied commanders that the weather would be unfavorable on June 5.

Eisenhower delayed the landings.

“It was the weather that worried the Supreme Commander most,” author John Ross wrote in his book “The Forecast for D-Day,” published in 2014.

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"If he gave the word to 'go,' and the weather turned sour, the lives of thousands of men and massive amounts of equipment and supplies would be lost," Ross added. "Worse yet, the Germans would have learned beyond any doubt where the Allies planned to invade," eliminating the advantage of surprise.

Operating in an era before Doppler radar and high-speed super computers, Allied meteorologists had to rely on hand-drawn maps, historical data, and spotty weather observations to put together their forecasts.

That's why Blacksod Point, about 500 miles (800 kilometers) from Normandy on the extreme northwest edge of Ireland, was so important.

While Ireland had been an independent country since 1922 and remained neutral throughout the war, it continued to share weather readings with Britain's Met Office, which used the data to produce forecasts needed by Irish farmers and fishermen. But after war broke out, British authorities asked for the readings to be taken every hour, instead of every six hours.

Sweeney was on the midnight to 4 a.m. shift on June 3, her 21st birthday, when she recorded a drop in the barometric pressure. She telegraphed the readings to Dublin, which sent them on to London, then didn't think much more about it.

But a few hours later, the phone rang and a "squeaky voiced Englishwoman" asked whether the readings were correct. She read off the data and hung up, only to get two more calls seeking confirmation of her readings.

For Stagg, the data from Blacksod confirmed his forecast that a low pressure system would move in from the Atlantic, bringing high winds and thick clouds to the Normandy coast on the night of June 4 and into June 5.

But Sweeney still had another part to play in D-Day.

At 1 p.m. on June 4, she recorded a slight increase in barometric pressure.

That helped Stagg forecast another change in the weather, and later that day, he told Eisenhower that he expected the winds to die down and the clouds to abate in time for a landing on June 6.

The invasion was a go.

"Well, Stagg, we're putting it back on again," Eisenhower told his chief forecaster, according to Stagg's book, "Forecast for Overlord," Ross said. "For heaven's sake, hold the weather to what you've told us and don't bring us any more bad news."

Sweeney didn't learn about the part she played in history until 1956, when Ireland's meteorological service gave her a copy of the data that informed the D-Day weather forecasts, her grandson, Fergus Sweeney, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

She died on Dec. 17 at a nursing home near Blacksod. She was 100.

"I think she she would be very proud that she did her job diligently that night because of what followed, and I think she would maybe try and remind us all that if we don't stop the madness, we could be back at another Normandy," Fergus Sweeney said.

Biden will mark D-Day anniversary in France as Western alliances face threats at home and abroad

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — United States President Joe Biden will mark the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion in France this week as he tries to demonstrate steadfast support for European security at a time when some allies fear Donald Trump threatens to upend American commitments if he wins another term in the White House.

The trip comes as the deadliest fighting on the continent since World War II continues in Ukraine and allied countries struggle to find ways to turn the tide against Russia, which has recently gained ground on the battlefield. It is also set against deepening cracks between the U.S. and many European allies over how to manage the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Biden arrived in Paris on Wednesday morning, and he was welcomed by French officials and an honor

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guard. On Thursday, he'll visit hallowed ground near the beaches of Normandy, where rows of bone-white headstones mark the graves of U.S. soldiers who died to bring an end to World War II. He'll also speak on Friday at Pointe du Hoc, a spot on the French coast where Army Rangers scaled seaside cliffs to overcome Nazi defenses.

White House National Security adviser Jake Sullivan said aboard Air Force One on the way to France that Biden will stress how the men on those cliffs "put the country ahead of themselves" and detail "the dangers of isolationism, and how, if we bow to dictators and fail to stand up to them, they keep going and ultimately America and the world pays a greater price."

"Eighty years later, we see dictators once again attempting to challenge the order, attempting to march in Europe," Sullivan said, "and that freedom-loving nations need to rally to stand against that, as we have."

He also said Biden would be meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in France to discuss "how we can continue and deepen our support for Ukraine."

On Saturday, Biden, along with his wife Jill, will be honored by French President Emmanuel Macron with a state visit, including a military parade in Paris and a banquet at the Élysée Palace, as well as business sessions where the leaders are to discuss strengthening their alliance, trade, and security cooperation for the upcoming Olympic games.

The two leaders also are expected to discuss the Middle East. Biden has invested geopolitical capital in brokering a ceasefire to the Israel-Hamas war that would see the release of hostages, even as he has maintained his staunch support for Israel and resisted European efforts to recognize a Palestinian state or investigate Israel over its handling of the war.

Biden, a Democrat, is scheduled to return to the United States on Sunday, but before he leaves France he's expected to stop at a cemetery where American soldiers who died in World War I are buried. Trump, a Republican, skipped plans to visit the same site during a 2018 trip to France, a decision that the White House blamed on weather at the time.

However, subsequent reporting found that Trump told aides he didn't want to go because he viewed the dead soldiers as "suckers" and "losers." He has denied the comments, which Biden referenced during a fundraiser in Greenwich, Conn., on Monday.

"This guy does not deserve to be president," Biden said.

Although foreign trips are ostensibly nonpartisan, Biden left no doubt that he sees a political connection between the D-Day anniversary and the election. The president described the invasion as "one of the most important moments in the history of defense of freedom and democracy."

"I want to say as clearly as I can," he added. "Democracy is literally on the ballot this year."

Biden's trip to France will be followed by another to Italy later this month for the annual Group of Seven summit, a rare doubleheader of international diplomacy in the middle of the presidential election season. Biden will skip a subsequent gathering in Switzerland, where leaders will be focused on the war in Ukraine, to attend a campaign fundraiser in Los Angeles with Hollywood stars. Vice President Kamala Harris will represent the United States instead.

Biden's travels, plus the North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit in Washington next month, aim to embody a vision of global American leadership that's central to his political identity but faces renewed threat from Trump.

Although the two presidents are from the same generation — Biden, 81, was born one and a half years before D-Day; Trump, 77, was born two years after the invasion — they developed divergent views on Europe and American alliances over the years.

For Biden, U.S. ties to Europe are a cornerstone of stability and a source of strength. For Trump, they're a drain on precious resources, and he's expressed more affinity for autocratic leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose invasion of Ukraine has upended the continent.

Even before voters decide which vision they prefer, cracks in Biden's foreign policy foundation have emerged. It took months to secure additional military assistance for Ukraine due to GOP resistance, and the delay led to depleted ammunition reserves and Russian advances on the battlefield.

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"All that happened with a die-hard Atlanticist and die-hard alliance supporter in the White House," said Charles Kupchan, a Georgetown University professor who previously served as Europe director on President Barack Obama's National Security Council. "Europeans have no option but to ask how reliable the United States can be."

Kupchan noted that "the bipartisan compact behind a steady and robust American internationalism has collapsed."

Given the political complications at home, Kupchan said, Biden should be careful about drawing historical parallels between D-Day and Ukraine while he's in France.

"I'm not sure that he wants to say that this is a moment like 1940 or 1941," he said, especially since Biden has ruled out sending American troops to fight against the Russian invasion.

Like all of his international engagements, Biden's trip will be shadowed by Trump's potential return to the White House. The presumptive Republican candidate, who last week became the first U.S. president to be convicted of a crime, has pledged to unravel American commitments to allies in Europe.

"It's every conversation. Every conversation is, what will happen?" said Max Bergmann, who leads Europe research at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Bergmann, who was in the middle of a trip around the continent in the days before Biden arrived, said some European officials hope that a second Trump term would be no more damaging than his first, when he failed to follow through on some of his more extreme ideas. But he doubts Trump will be held in check without moderate members of his administration — such as former Defense Secretary James Mattis — who are unlikely to return.

"I'm not reassuring to them," Bergmann said.

Rachel Rizzo, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, said there's a "palpable sense of uncertainty" as the United States and Europe wrestle with populist movements that have proven durably popular.

"This is not an aberration, this is not an accident," she said. "There are real grievances that citizens of both continents have, and they're playing out in support of right-wing parties."

In another complication for Biden, his trip is taking place at the same time that his son, Hunter, is standing trial in Delaware. The younger Biden is accused of lying while purchasing a gun by claiming that he was not a drug addict. He has pleaded not guilty.

The prosecution began presenting its case Tuesday, just days after Trump became the first U.S. president to be convicted of a felony. Trump was found guilty in New York of making illegal hush money payments to an adult film actress who said they had sex. Trump denies the affair.

Paul Begala, a longtime Democratic strategist, said Biden is probably better off ignoring Trump while he's in France.

"When you're 81 years old, and three-fourths of the country thinks you're too old, one of the things you have to do is to show strength," he said. "That's what he's got to do over there. He's got to show strength."

Will Biden's new border measures be enough to change voters' minds?

By JILL COLVIN, STEPHEN GROVES and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden tried to address a major liability for his reelection campaign by taking executive action to significantly restrict asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border.

But it's unclear whether the Democratic president's efforts will be enough to change the minds of voters who have increasingly voiced alarm over the record influx of migrants on his watch. Polls have found immigration and border security to be a top issue this election year and one that has been seized on by former President Donald Trump and his Republican campaign.

Biden has shifted far to the right on immigration since his winning campaign four years ago, when he criticized Trump's immigration priorities and promised he would restore asylum protections. Many Democrats acknowledge Biden now faces a wholly different political reality, even as key parts of his base push him to repudiate border restrictions and compare his move with Trump's policies as president.

Sue-Ann DiVito, a 61-year-old realtor from the Philadelphia suburb of Jenkintown who became an im-

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migration advocate during the Trump administration, says Republicans have been successful at spreading anti-immigrant messages in communities like hers, making some of her friends who are Democrats worry about the high number of people arriving in the U.S.

"I think that's why we see people who would normally support immigrants are now more quiet," DiVito said.

A CHALLENGE FOR BIDEN AMONG DEMOCRATS AND LATINOS

The border has been a top issue for voters throughout the presidential campaign so far.

According to Gallup's monthly data, Americans named immigration as the top issue facing the country in February, March, and April, surpassing even the share who cited the economy despite persistently higher prices. Immigration came up less frequently as a top issue in Gallup's May poll as attention turned to Trump's criminal trial and as the number of illegal crossings ebbed. The issue was still tied with the government and the economy as what voters saw as the nation's most important problem.

Most Americans, 56%, say Biden's presidency has hurt the country on the issue of immigration and border security, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted in April. That's far higher than the number — 37% — who said the same about Trump's time in office.

Even among Democrats, only about 3 in 10 say that Biden's presidency has done more to help the country on immigration and border security, while about the same share say it has hurt. Nearly 9 in 10 Republicans say Trump's presidency helped on this issue.

Hispanic adults are also more likely to think Trump's presidency helped the country with immigration and border security, compared to Biden's. About half of Hispanic adults in March said that Biden's presidency had done more to hurt the country on immigration and border security — a potentially alarming number as Trump's campaign works to chip away at Democrats' advantage with Hispanic voters.

"President Biden had no choice. He saw what was going on at the border. The numbers were higher than ever in terms of people trying to come here to seek asylum, and he knew he had to do something," said Maria Cardona, a Democratic strategist.

Frank Luntz, a longtime pollster who has previously worked for Republicans, said immigration seemed to be especially resonating earlier this spring across the political spectrum in a way it never had before.

He said he believes Biden is especially vulnerable with African American men under 40 who are worried about newcomers competing for jobs and Latinos who may resent those entering illegally.

"The reason why immigration matters so much to so many is that it is a living, breathing illustration of the failure of Washington to solve what everyone else in America sees as a crisis," he said Tuesday. "Biden's decision seems too little and too late. The public doesn't think he cares, and therefore thinks he doesn't get it."

TRUMP'S RECORD INCLUDES FAMILY SEPARATION

Trump has been campaigning on the border and immigration since he launched his 2016 bid with a speech in which he cast migrants from Mexico as criminals and rapists and vowed to build a southern border wall.

While in office, his administration separated immigrant parents and children to try to deter families from illegally crossing the border, a measure that drew widespread condemnation.

Border crossings hit record highs — albeit far below the marks they've reached under Biden — until falling sharply as the COVID-19 pandemic began.

As he runs to return to the White House again this year, Trump has escalated his already alarmist rhetoric, accusing Biden of orchestrating a "border bloodbath" and highlighting cases of women and children killed by people who entered the U.S. illegally. He's vowed to carry out the largest deportation operation in U.S. history if elected again.

His campaign quickly tried to cast Biden's effort as ineffective and one that would permit thousands of migrant crossings each week.

"This executive order from Biden can only be understood as a pro-invasion, pro-illegal migration executive order," said former Trump senior adviser Stephen Miller, who orchestrated some of Trump's most hard-line immigration policies, during a call with reporters organized by the campaign ahead of Biden's announcement.

Trump pollster John McLaughlin said the campaign believes the issue resonates especially among a

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group he calls "safety moms" — suburban, college-educated women who are worried about crime and the safety of their families.

"There's a sense of insecurity," he said. "It's not just the border communities, it's all over the country."

Trump has always turned to alarmist rhetoric on the border in election years. The difference now, according to Trump campaign aides and pollsters, is the reality voters are seeing day to day.

Crime overall is down and immigrants — even those who entered the country illegally — commit fewer crimes than those born in the U.S., according to studies of available data. But in Democratic-led cities like New York, local news reports were flooded earlier this year with images of migrants clashing with police and alarm over strained city budgets and resources to care for an influx of people coming from the border.

Conservative media and Trump's campaign also seized on high-profile incidents like the killing of nursing student Laken Riley. A Venezuelan man in the U.S. illegally has pleaded not guilty to charges in her death.

SPLITS IN THE DEMOCRATIC BASE

Biden's announcement laid bare lasting divisions among Democrats, with some left-leaning lawmakers and immigration advocates that form a key part of his coalition criticizing Biden's actions as a return to the measures that marked Trump's tenure.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said she was "profoundly disappointed." During a news conference with immigration advocates outside the Capitol, Jayapal pushed the administration to take action that would provide relief for immigrants already in the U.S.

Jayapal, D-Wash., said Tuesday's order "means that we have people, desperate people seeking asylum who should be able to apply, and yet they will not be able to."

Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat who has been involved in the Biden campaign's outreach to Latino communities, cast the order as a revival of "Trump's asylum ban" in a release Tuesday.

"You can build a wall as high as you want. You can make it as hard to seek asylum as you want. It's not going to sustainably reduce the number of people wanting to come to the United States," Padilla told reporters.

Still, other Democrats praised Biden's move as a necessary measure to respond to voters' concerns and gain control of a southern border that has at times been chaotic in recent years.

"The president is saying that, 'I hear you, I know this is an issue, and I'm taking action,'" said Rep. Tom Suozzi, who has helped form a group of House Democrats focused on border security.

Suozzi, who won a special election in New York this year with a campaign that called for tougher immigration enforcement measures, also called for action to help immigrants who are already in the country.

DiVito, the immigrant advocate in swing-state Pennsylvania, tried to square the difference from a Democratic perspective.

"There is a choice this November and whatever negative policy that Biden is implementing, Trump is going to be a million things worse," she said. "And we all know this."

NHL to broadcast Stanley Cup Final games in American Sign Language, a 1st for a major sports league

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

While interpreting the annual pre-Stanley Cup Final state of the NHL address into American Sign Language for the first time in 2022, Brice Christianson worried that it was a one-time thing, his only chance to open the door to hockey for the Deaf community.

Two years later, it is difficult for him not to get emotional as the league takes another big step.

The Stanley Cup Final will mark the first time a major sports league airs games in ASL, with each game of the series between Edmonton and Florida featuring deaf broadcasters doing play by play and color analysis. Game 1 is Saturday.

"This is a great first step of having representation, having deaf people on screen, having the Deaf community connect to people like them," said Christianson, the founder and CEO of P-X-P, which is doing the telecasts that will be available on ESPN+ and Sportsnet+. "For the NHL to sign off on this and to believe

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in this, it's groundbreaking. It's truly historic and also they've doubled down and said that they want to continue to do this."

This next step in the NHL's partnership with P-X-P, a company that works to make sports more inclusive through interpretation, comes on the heels of another history-making moment: TNT doing an ASL broadcast of the U.S. Women's Deaf National Soccer Team's match against Australia last weekend. Reporter Melissa Ortiz was on screen describing the action in ASL.

That will be the case in the Cup Final for Jason Altmann, who is third-generation deaf and P-X-P's chief operating officer, and Noah Blankenship from Denver's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. Having that representation is more significant than closed captioning because it serves the Deaf community directly rather than making members read words about the games.

"For us to be able to have this real-time coverage of play by play and color commentary in American Sign Language being called directly as opposed to a re-interpretation is really what the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community want," said Kim Davis, the NHL's senior executive VP of social impact, growth initiatives and legislative affairs. "It's what they deserve. That makes the game truly meaningful for them. It is not like you're re-interpreting for them basically from another language. They are hearing the game live in their own language and the way in which they understand it best."

Reaching this point is another accomplishment for Christianson, an ASL interpreter who was born to deaf parents and has tried for years to persuade teams and leagues to try things like this. The connection with the NHL began at a 2021 meeting with VP of youth strategy and hockey culture Paul LaCaruba that ended with Christianson pleading for one person to buy into his ideas to serve the Deaf community.

Christianson said LaCaruba became that person, paving the way for him to interpret for Commissioner Gary Bettman and Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly two years ago. That was at a news conference, but this is a chance to bring the most important games of the season to an underserved segment of the population.

"We know there are millions of deaf and hard of hearing hockey fans — and many more who have yet to fall in love with the sport," LaCaruba said. "We are building access for the Deaf community, by the Deaf community, and there is no better platform to gauge a reaction than during the Stanley Cup Final."

The intent is to gauge a reaction, not do a victory lap. Christianson said there is a plan to continue doing this for the NHL beyond just this series, and that path forward allows this to be a test of sorts, with possible changes and improvements for the next time.

"I think it's very brave for the NHL to say, 'Hey we want to do this,'" Christianson said. "We're all going to go in with our best and we're going to try our best, and then we're going to come back and we're going to debrief and we're going to try to get better with every process."

It may wind up being a blueprint for others. Davis, who has learned a lot about ASL and communicating with the Deaf community, would be thrilled if the NHL is the first but not the last to experiment with something like this.

"We're doing something no other major league has ever tried before, and that is a broadcast and experience for the Deaf by the Deaf," Davis said. "We're proud of that. We just want to continue to support those communities that we want to be authentic with, and if another league wants to model it, we think that imitation is the best form of flattery, so let's do it."

Amanda Knox reconvicted of slander in Italy for accusing innocent man in roommate's 2007 murder

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

FLORENCE, Italy (AP) — An Italian court reconvicted Amanda Knox of slander Wednesday, quashing her hope of removing a legal stain against her that has persisted after her exoneration in the brutal 2007 murder of her British roommate while the two were exchange students in Italy.

The decision by a Florence appeals court panel marked the sixth time that an Italian court found Knox had wrongly blamed the killing on an innocent man, the Congolese owner of the bar where she worked

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part time.

Knox has argued that her statements to police were forced during an intense night of questioning that included bullying as she relied on her then-remedial Italian when she was a 20-year-old university student.

The panel of two judges and six jurors, however, confirmed the three-year sentence, which she already served during four years in Italian custody while the investigation and multiple trials ensued. The court's reasoning will be released in 60 days.

Knox's appearance Wednesday in Florence, in a bid to clear her name "once and for all," was the first time she had returned to an Italian court since she was freed in 2011. Accompanied by her husband, Christopher Robinson, she showed no visible emotion as the verdict was read aloud.

But her lawyer, Carlo Dalla Vedova, said shortly afterward that "Amanda is very embittered."

"We are all very surprised at the outcome of the decision," Dalla Vedova said outside the courtroom. He added that Knox had expected an acquittal would put a cap on nearly 17 years of judicial proceedings.

Another defense lawyer, Luca Luparia Donati, said they expected to appeal to Italy's highest court.

Knox's new trial was set in motion after a European court ruling that said Italy violated her human rights during overnight questioning days after Kercher's murder, deprived of both a lawyer and a competent translator.

Addressing the Florence court in a soft and sometimes breaking voice, Knox said that she wrongly accused Patrick Lumumba under intense police pressure.

"I am very sorry that I was not strong enough to resist the pressure of police," Knox read in Italian from a prepared statement, addressing the panel from the jury bench. She told them: "I didn't know who the murderer was. I had no way to know."

The slaying of 21-year-old Meredith Kercher in the idyllic hilltop town of Perugia fueled global headlines as suspicion fell on Knox, a 20-year-old exchange student from Seattle, and her new Italian boyfriend of just a week, Raffaele Sollecito.

Flip-flop verdicts over nearly eight years of legal proceedings polarized trial watchers on both sides of the Atlantic as the case became one of the first trials by social media, then in its infancy.

All these years later, the intensity of media interest remained, with photographers massing around Knox, her husband and her legal team as they entered the courthouse about an hour before the hearing. A camera knocked her on the left temple, her lawyer Luparia Donati said. Knox's husband examined a small bump on her temple as they sat in the front row of the court.

Despite Knox's exoneration and the conviction of an Ivorian man whose footprints and DNA were found at the scene, doubts about her role persisted, particularly in Italy. That is largely due to the accusation she made against Lumumba.

Lumumba's lawyer, Carlo Pacelli, told reporters that the accusation branded him across the world, and his business in Perugia floundered. He has since re-established himself in his wife's native Poland.

"Patrick has always been dutiful to all of the court decisions, and all the courts up until today have affirmed that Amanda Knox was a slanderer," Pacelli said.

Knox is now a 36-year-old mother of two small children who advocates for criminal justice reform and campaigns against wrongful convictions. She was freed in October 2011, after four years in jail, by a Perugia appeals court that overturned the initial guilty verdict in the murder case against both Knox and Sollecito.

She remained in the United States through two more flip-flop verdicts before Italy's highest court definitively exonerated the pair of the murder in March 2015, stating flatly that they had not committed the crime.

In the fall, Italy's highest Cassation Court threw out the slander conviction that had withstood five trials, ordering a new trial, thanks to a 2022 Italian judicial reform allowing cases that have reached a definitive verdict to be reopened if human rights violations are found.

This time, the court was ordered to disregard two damaging statements typed by police and signed by Knox at 1:45 a.m. and 5:45 a.m. as she was held for questioning overnight into the small hours of Nov. 6, 2007. In the statements, Knox said she remembered hearing Kercher scream, and pointed to Lumumba for the killing.

Hours later, still in custody at about 1 p.m., she asked for pen and paper and wrote her own statement in English, questioning the version that she had signed, still in a state of confusion.

"In regards to this 'confession' that I made last night, I want to make clear that I'm very doubtful of the verity of my statements because they were made under the pressure of stress, shock and extreme exhaustion," she wrote.

India's Modi is known for charging hard. After a lackluster election, he may have to adapt his style

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Since coming to power a decade ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been known for big, bold and often snap decisions that he's found easy to execute thanks to the brute majority he enjoyed in India's lower house of parliament.

In 2016, he yanked over 80% of bank notes from circulation in an effort to curb tax evasion that sent shockwaves through the country and devastated citizens who lost money. In 2019, his government pushed through a controversial law that stripped the special status of disputed, Muslim-majority Kashmir with hardly any debate in parliament. And in 2020, Modi swiftly brought in contentious agriculture reforms — though he was forced to drop those about a year later after mass protests from farmers.

In his expected next term as prime minister — when he will need a coalition to govern after results announced Wednesday showed his Hindu nationalist party fell short of a majority — Modi may have to adapt to a style of governance he has little experience with, or desire for.

And it's not clear how that will play out.

"Negotiating and forming a coalition, working with coalition partners, grappling with the tradeoffs that come with coalition politics — none of this fits in well with Modi's brand of assertive and go-it-alone politics," said Michael Kugelman, director of the Wilson Center's South Asia Institute.

The surprising election results upended widespread expectations before the vote and exit polls that suggested a stronger showing for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. In the end, the party won 240 seats — short of the 272 needed to form the government on its own. But the coalition it belongs to, the National Democratic Alliance, secured a majority in the 543-seat lower house that should allow Modi to retain power in the world's most populous nation.

"India cuts Modi down," read one Indian newspaper headline on Wednesday, referring to the 642 million voters as well as the opposing INDIA alliance, which clawed seats away from the BJP.

This is both a major setback and unknown territory for Modi, who has never needed his coalition partners to govern since first becoming prime minister in 2014. It has left him the most vulnerable he has been in his 23-year political career.

"These results show that the Modi wave has receded, revealing a level of electoral vulnerability that many could not have foreseen," said Kugelman.

India has a history of messy coalition governments — but Modi, who has enjoyed astronomical popularity, offered a respite, leading his BJP to landslide victories in the last two elections. His supporters credit him with transforming the country into an emerging global power, matched by a robust economy that's the world's fifth-largest.

That economy, however, is in some trouble — and fixing it will now require partners. His opponents focused on vulnerabilities despite the brisk growth, like unemployment, inflation and inequality — but his campaign offered few clues to how he might address those.

"Modi hardly addressed the question of unemployment — they skirted around it," said Yamini Aiyar, a public policy scholar.

It's not just that Modi will have to adapt to relying on a coalition. The election has also left him diminished after he spent a decade building a persona of absolute invincibility, said Milan Vaishnav, director of the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

At the heart of his governance style has been his penchant for control, critics say, adding that Modi has increasingly centralized power.

But now to stay in power, Modi will have to do whatever he can to maintain a stable coalition, meaning he may have to govern in a way that is more collaborative since the smaller regional parties in his alliance could make or break his government.

The BJP's lackluster performance is "undoubtedly a slap in the face," Vaishnav said, of Modi, who confidently predicted at his first election rally in February that the party would secure more than 370 seats — 130 more than it did.

The gap between the high expectations Modi and others set for the BJP and its actual performance has left the victors looking like losers and the defeated feeling victorious.

Still, Vaishnav said "we shouldn't lose sight that the BJP is still in the driver's seat."

To be sure, his most consequential Hindu nationalist policies and actions are locked in — including a controversial citizenship law and Hindu temple built atop a razed mosque. His critics and opponents decry those policies, saying they have bred intolerance and stoked religious tensions against the country's Muslim community — and left India's democracy faltering, with dissent silenced and the media squeezed.

Now, his agenda, and ability to push through policies going forward could face fiercer challenges, especially from a once deflated but now resurgent opposition.

The INDIA alliance, led by the Congress party, will likely have more power to apply pressure and push back, especially in parliament where their numbers will grow.

"Modi is Modi. But I would say that with the attitude with which he ran the country until now, he will definitely face some problems now," said Anand Mohan Singh, a 45-year-old businessman in the capital, New Delhi. "Some changes will be visible."

UN agencies say over 1 million in Gaza could experience highest level of starvation by mid-July

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — United Nations agencies warned Wednesday that over 1 million Palestinians in Gaza could experience the highest level of starvation by the middle of next month if hostilities continue.

The World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization said in a joint report that hunger is worsening because of heavy restrictions on humanitarian access and the collapse of the local food system in the nearly eight-month Israel-Hamas war.

It says the situation remains dire in northern Gaza, which has been surrounded and largely isolated by Israeli troops for months. Israel recently opened land crossings in the north but they are only able to facilitate truck loads in the dozens each day for hundreds of thousands of people.

Israel's incursion into Rafah has meanwhile severely disrupted aid operations in the south. Egypt has refused to open its Rafah crossing with Gaza since Israeli forces seized the Gaza side of it nearly a month ago, instead diverting aid to Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing nearby.

The Israeli military says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter through Kerem Shalom in recent weeks, but the U.N. says it is often unable to retrieve the aid because of the security situation. It says distribution within Gaza is also severely hampered by ongoing fighting, the breakdown of law and order, and other Israeli restrictions.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, the world authority on determining the extent of hunger crises, said in March that around 677,000 people in Gaza were experiencing Phase 5 hunger, the highest level and the equivalent of famine.

The two U.N. agencies said in their report Wednesday that that figure could climb to more than 1 million — or nearly half of Gaza's total population of 2.3 million — by the middle of next month.

"In the absence of a cessation of hostilities and increased access, the impact on mortality and the lives of the Palestinians now, and in future generations, will increase markedly with every day, even if famine

is avoided in the near term," it said.

On Tuesday, a separate group of experts said it's possible that famine is underway in northern Gaza but that the war, and restrictions on humanitarian access, have impeded the data collection to prove it.

"It is possible, if not likely," the group known as the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, said about famine in Gaza.

Last month, the head of the World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said northern Gaza had already entered "full-blown famine," but experts at the U.N. agency later said she was expressing a personal opinion.

An area is considered to be in famine when three things occur: Twenty percent of households have an extreme lack of food, or are essentially starving; at least 30% of the children suffer from acute malnutrition or wasting, meaning they're too thin for their height; and two adults or four children per every 10,000 people are dying daily of hunger and its complications.

The war began when Hamas and other militants stormed across the border into Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. Most of Gaza's population have fled their homes, often multiple times, and the offensive has caused widespread destruction.

Life as a teen without social media isn't easy. These families are navigating adolescence offline

By JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writer

WESTPORT, Conn. (AP) — Kate Bulkeley's pledge to stay off social media in high school worked at first. She watched the benefits pile up: She was getting excellent grades. She read lots of books. The family had lively conversations around the dinner table and gathered for movie nights on weekends.

Then, as sophomore year got underway, the unexpected problems surfaced. She missed a student government meeting arranged on Snapchat. Her Model U.N. team communicates on social media, too, causing her scheduling problems. Even the Bible Study club at her Connecticut high school uses Instagram to communicate with members.

Gabriela Durham, a high school senior in Brooklyn, says navigating high school without social media has made her who she is today. She is a focused, organized, straight-A student with a string of college acceptances — and an accomplished dancer who recently made her Broadway debut. Not having social media has made her an "outsider," in some ways. That used to hurt; now, she says, it feels like a badge of honor.

With the damaging consequences of social media increasingly well documented, some parents are trying to raise their children with restrictions or blanket bans. Teenagers themselves are aware that too much social media is bad for them, and some are initiating social media "cleanses" because of the toll it takes on mental health and grades.

But it is hard to be a teenager today without social media. For those trying to stay off social platforms while most of their peers are immersed, the path can be challenging, isolating and at times liberating. It can also be life-changing.

This is a tale of two families, social media and the ever-present challenge of navigating high school. It's about what kids do when they can't extend their Snapstreaks or shut their bedroom doors and scroll through TikTok past midnight. It's about what families discuss when they're not having screen-time battles. It's also about persistent social ramifications.

The journeys of both families show the rewards and pitfalls of trying to avoid social media in a world that is saturated by it.

A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

Concerns about children and phone use are not new. But there is a growing realization among experts that the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed adolescence. As youth coped with isolation and spent excessive time online, the pandemic effectively carved out a much larger space for social media in the lives of American kids.

No longer just a distraction or a way to connect with friends, social media has matured into a physical

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space and a community that almost all U.S. teenagers belong to. Up to 95% of teenagers say they use social media, with more than one-third saying they are on it "almost constantly," according to the Pew Research Center.

More than ever, teenagers live in a seamless digital and non-digital world in ways that most adults don't recognize or understand, says Michael Rich, a pediatrics professor at Harvard Medical School and head of the nonprofit Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital.

"Social media is now the air kids breathe," says Rich, who runs the hospital's Clinic for Interactive Media and Internet Disorders.

For better or worse, social media has become a home-base for socializing. It's where many kids turn to forge their emerging identities, to seek advice, to unwind and relieve stress. It impacts how kids dress and talk. In this era of parental control apps and location tracking, social media is where this generation is finding freedom.

It is also increasingly clear that the more time youth spend online, the higher the risk of mental health problems.

Kids who use social media for more than three hours a day face double the risk of depression and anxiety, according to studies cited by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who issued an extraordinary public warning last spring about the risks of social media to young people.

Those were the concerns of the Bulkeleys and Gabriela's mother, Elena Romero. Both set strict rules starting when their kids were young and still in elementary school. They delayed giving phones until middle school and made social media off limits until 18. They educated the girls, and their younger siblings, on the impact of social media on young brains, on online privacy concerns, on the dangers of posting photos or comments that can come back to haunt you.

In the absence of social media, at least in these two homes, there is a noticeable absence of screen time battles. But the kids and parents agree: It's not always easy.

WHEN IT'S EVERYWHERE, IT'S HARD TO AVOID

At school, on the subway and at dance classes around New York City, Gabriela is surrounded by reminders that social media is everywhere — except on her phone.

Growing up without it has meant missing out on things. Everyone but you gets the same jokes, practices the same TikTok dances, is up on the latest viral trends. When Gabriela was younger, that felt isolating; at times, it still does. But now, she sees not having social media as freeing.

"From my perspective, as an outsider," she says, "it seems like a lot of kids use social media to promote a facade. And it's really sad. Because social media is telling them how they should be and how they should look. It's gotten to a point where everyone wants to look the same instead of being themselves."

There is also friend drama on social media and a lack of honesty, humility and kindness that she feels lucky to be removed from.

Gabriela is a dance major at the Brooklyn High School of the Arts and dances outside of school seven days a week. Senior year got especially intense, with college and scholarship applications capped by an unexpected highlight of getting to perform at Broadway's Shubert Theatre in March as part of a city showcase of high school musicals.

After a recent Saturday afternoon dance class in a Bronx church basement, the diverging paths between Gabriela and her peers is on full display. The other dancers, aged 11 to 16, sit cross-legged on the linoleum floor talking about social media.

"I am addicted," says 15-year-old Arielle Williams, who stays up late scrolling through TikTok. "When I feel like I'm getting tired I say, 'One more video.' And then I keep saying, 'One more video.' And I stay up sometimes until 5 a.m."

The other dancers gasp. One suggests they all check their phones' weekly screen time.

"OH. MY," says Arielle, staring at her screen. "My total was 68 hours last week." That included 21 hours on TikTok.

Gabriela sits on the sidelines of the conversation, listening silently. But on the No. 2 subway home to Brooklyn, she shares her thoughts. "Those screen-time hours, it's insane."

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As the train rumbles from the elevated tracks in the Bronx into the underground subway tunnels in Manhattan, Gabriela is on her phone. She texts with friends, listens to music and consults a subway app to count down the stops to her station in Brooklyn. The phone for her is a distraction limited to idle time, which has been strategically limited by Romero.

"My kids' schedules will make your head spin," Romero says as the family reconvenes Saturday night in their three-bedroom walkup in Bushwick. On school days, they're up at 5:30 a.m. and out the door by 7. Romero drives the girls to their three schools scattered around Brooklyn, then takes the subway into Manhattan, where she teaches mass communications at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Grace, 11, is a sixth grade cheerleader active in Girl Scouts, along with Gionna, 13, who sings, does debate team and has daily rehearsals for her middle school theater production.

"I'm so booked my free time is to sleep," says Gabriela, who tries to be in bed by 10:30 p.m.

In New York City, it's common for kids to get phones early in elementary school, but Romero waited until each daughter reached middle school and started taking public transportation home alone. Years ago, she sat them down to watch "The Social Dilemma," a documentary that Gabriela says made her realize how tech companies manipulate their users.

Her mom's rules are simple: No social media on phones until 18. The girls are allowed to use YouTube on their computers but not post videos. Romero doesn't set screen-time limits or restrict phone use in bedrooms.

"It's a struggle, don't get me wrong," Romero says. Last year, the two younger girls "slipped." They secretly downloaded TikTok for a few weeks before getting caught and sternly lectured.

Romero is considering whether to bend her rule for Gionna, an avid reader interested in becoming a Young Adult "Bookstagrammer" — a book reviewer on Instagram. Gionna wants to be a writer when she grows up and loves the idea that reviewers get books for free.

Her mother is torn. Romero's main concern was social media during middle school, a critical age where kids are forming their identity. She supports the idea of using social media responsibly as a tool to pursue passions.

"When you're a little older," she tells her girls, "you'll realize Mom was not as crazy as you thought."

STRUGGLING NOT TO MISS OUT

In the upscale suburb of Westport, Connecticut, the Bulkeleyes have faced similar questions about bending their rules. But not for the reason they had anticipated.

Kate was perfectly content to not have social media. Her parents had figured at some point she might resist their ban because of peer pressure or fear of missing out. But the 15-year-old sees it as a waste of time. She describes herself as academic, introverted and focused on building up extracurricular activities.

That's why she needed Instagram.

"I needed it to be co-president of my Bible Study Club," Kate explains, seated with her family in the living room of their two-story home.

As Kate's sophomore year started, she told her parents that she was excited to be leading a variety of clubs but needed social media to do her job. They agreed to let her have Instagram for her afterschool activities, which they found ironic and frustrating. "It was the school that really drove the fact that we had to reconsider our rule about no social media," says Steph Bulkeley, Kate's mother.

Schools talk the talk about limiting screen time and the dangers of social media, says Kate's dad, Russ Bulkeley. But technology is rapidly becoming part of the school day. Kate's high school and their 13-year-old daughter Sutton's middle school have cell phone bans that aren't enforced. Teachers will ask students to take out their phones to photograph material during class time.

The Bulkeleyes aren't on board with that, but feel powerless to change it. When their girls were still in elementary school, the Bulkeleyes were inspired by the "Wait Until 8th" pledge, which encourages parents to wait to give children smartphones, and access to social media, until at least 8th grade or about age 13. Some experts say waiting until 16 is better. Others feel banning social media isn't the answer, and that kids need to learn to live with the technology because it's not going anywhere.

Ultimately they gave in to Kate's plea because they trust her, and because she's too busy to devote

much time to social media.

Both Kate and Sutton wrap up afterschool activities that include theater and dance classes at 8:30 p.m. most weeknights. They get home, finish homework and try to be in bed by 11.

Kate spends an average of two hours a week on her phone. That is significantly less than most, according to a 2023 Gallup poll that found over half of U.S. teens spend an average of five hours each day on social media. She uses her phone mainly to make calls, text friends, check grades and take photos. She doesn't post or share pictures, one of her parents' rules. Others: No phones allowed in bedrooms. All devices stay on a ledge between the kitchen and living room. TV isn't allowed on school nights.

Kate has rejected her parents' offer to pay her for waiting to use social media. But she is embarking slowly on the apps. She has set a six-minute daily time limit as a reminder not to dawdle on Instagram.

Having the app came in handy earlier this year at a Model UN conference where students from around the world exchanged contact details: "Nobody asked for phone numbers. You gave your Instagram," Kate says. She is resisting Snapchat, for fear she will find it addictive. She has asked a friend on student government to text her any important student government messages sent on Snapchat.

Sutton feels the weight of not having social media more than her older sister. The eighth grader describes herself as social but not popular.

"There's a lot of popular girls that do a bunch of TikTok dances. That's really what determines your popularity: TikTok," Sutton says.

Kids in her grade are "obsessed with TikTok" and posting videos of themselves that look to her like carbon copies. The girls look the same in short crop tops and jeans and sound the same, speaking with a TikTok dialect that includes a lot of "Hey, guys!" and uptalk, their voices rising in tone at the end of a thought.

She feels left out at times but doesn't feel the need to have social media, since one of her friends sends her the latest viral videos. She has seen firsthand the problems social media can cause in friend groups. "Two of my friends were having a fight. One thought the other one blocked her on Snapchat."

There's a long way to go before these larger questions are resolved, with these two families and across the nation. Schools are trying. Some are banning phones entirely to hold students' focus and ensure that socializing happens face-to-face. It might, educators say, also help cut back on teen depression and anxiety.

That's something Sutton can understand at age 13 as she works to navigate the years ahead. From what she has seen, social media has changed in the past few years. It used to be a way for people to connect, to message and to get to know each other.

"It's kind of just about bragging now," she says. "People post pictures of their trips to amazing places. Or looking beautiful. And it makes other people feel bad about themselves."

Modi loses ground in parliament, but his Hindu nationalist policies are here to stay

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — For the first time since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party swept to power in 2014, the party did not secure a majority on its own in 2024 national election. But the prime minister's coalition is still expected to run the country for another five years.

Modi's allies generally support pro-Hindu legislation, but making new policies could be complicated by coalition politics and a slimmer majority.

Despite a setback, many of the Hindu nationalist policies he's instituted over the last 10 years remain locked in place:

Here is a look at some of these:

KASHMIR'S LOST SPECIAL STATUS

Soon after winning a second term in 2019, the Modi government stripped the special status of the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir. Since 1954, the Muslim-majority region had been semi-autonomous, with a separate constitution and inherited protections on land and jobs.

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The region is now run by unelected government officials and has lost its flag, criminal code and constitution.

The move divided the region into two federal territories, Ladakh and Jammu-Kashmir, both ruled directly by the central government. It was the first time in the history of India that a was downgraded from statehood to a federally administered territory.

That decision now seems to be irreversible, with India's top court in December upholding the move, ruling that the region's special status had been a "temporary provision."

The Supreme Court said the government has promised to restore Jammu-Kashmir's statehood and should do so as soon as possible. Ladakh, however, will remain a federal territory. The court also ordered the country's election commission to hold legislative polls in the region by Sept. 30.

A CONTROVERSIAL TEMPLE ON THE SITE OF A RAZED MOSQUE

In January, Modi inaugurated a grand temple to the Hindu god Lord Ram in the northern city of Ayodhya, considered to be the god's birthplace.

The temple was built on the site of a 16th-century mosque torn down by Hindu mobs in 1992, sparking riots in which nearly 2,000 people were killed.

Built at an estimated cost of \$217 million and spread over nearly 3 hectares (7.4 acres), the temple stands on a site that has long been a religious flashpoint for the two communities.

The Modi government says the dispute ended in 2019 when India's Supreme Court called the mosque's destruction "an egregious violation" of the law but granted the site to Hindus while giving Muslims a different plot of land.

Hindu hardliners are now eyeing two other mosques that they claim were built on the site of demolished Hindu temples, but a law protects monuments built before the British granted independence to India in 1947 and the opposition is likely to put up a stiff fight if the government seeks to change it.

CITIZENSHIP FOR NON-MUSLIMS

Just weeks before the election, Modi's government started implementing a 2019 citizenship law the extends citizenship to almost many refugees while barring Muslims

The law provides a fast track to naturalization for Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians who fled to Hindu-majority India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan before Dec. 31, 2014. It excludes Muslims, who are a majority in all three nations.

Opposition-ruled states like West Bengal and Kerala have said they would not implement the law, as they consider it to be discriminatory.

However, the Modi government started distributing citizenship certificates to non-Muslim migrants as the voting started in the national election.

The law was approved by the Indian Parliament in 2019, but Modi's government delayed its implementation after deadly protests broke out in capital New Delhi and elsewhere. Scores were killed during days of clashes.

Today in History: June 6, D-Day in Normandy during World War II

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 6, the 158th day of 2024. There are 208 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 6, 1944, during World War II, Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, France, on "D-Day" as they began the liberation of German-occupied Western Europe.

On this date:

In 1844, the Young Men's Christian Association was founded in London.

In 1912, Novarupta, a volcano on the Alaska peninsula, began a three-day eruption, sending ash as high as 100,000 feet; it was the most powerful volcanic eruption of the 20th century and ranks among

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the largest in recorded history.

In 1934, the Securities and Exchange Commission was established.

In 1939, the first Little League baseball game was played as Lundy Lumber defeated Lycoming Dairy 23-8 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

In 1968, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy died at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, 25 1/2 hours after he was shot by Sirhan Bishara Sirhan.

In 1977, a sharply divided U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Louisiana law imposing an automatic death sentence on defendants convicted of the first-degree murder of a police officer.

In 1982, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon to drive Palestine Liberation Organization fighters out of the country. (The Israelis withdrew in June 1985.)

In 1989, burial services were held for Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

In 2001, Democrats assumed control of the U.S. Senate after the decision of Vermont Republican James Jeffords to become an independent.

In 2005, the Supreme Court ruled, 6-3, that people who smoked marijuana because their doctors recommended it to ease pain could be prosecuted for violating federal drug laws.

In 2006, soul musician Billy Preston died in Scottsdale, Arizona, at age 59.

In 2018, President Donald Trump commuted the life sentence of Alice Marie Johnson, who had spent more than two decades behind bars for drug offenses; her cause had been championed by reality TV star Kim Kardashian West.

In 2020, tens of thousands rallied in cities from Australia to Europe to honor George Floyd and voice support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Massive, peaceful protests took place nationwide to demand police reform.

In 2023, Astrud Gilberto, the Brazilian singer, songwriter and entertainer whose English-language lines on "The Girl from Ipanema" made her a worldwide voice of bossa nova, died at age 83.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-songwriter Gary "U.S." Bonds is 85. Country singer Joe Stampley is 81. Jazz musician Monty Alexander is 80. Actor Robert Englund is 77. Folk singer Holly Near is 75. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., is 72. Playwright-actor Harvey Fierstein (FY'-ur-steen) is 72. Comedian Sandra Bernhard is 69. International Tennis Hall of Famer Bjorn Borg is 68. Actor Amanda Pays is 65. Comedian Colin Quinn is 65. Record producer Jimmy Jam is 65. Rock musician Steve Vai is 64. Rock singer-musician Tom Araya (Slayer) is 63. Actor Jason Isaacs is 61. Actor Anthony Starke is 61. Rock musician Sean Yseult (White Zombie) is 58. Actor Max Casella is 57. Actor Paul Giamatti is 57. R&B singer Damion Hall (Guy) is 56. Rock musician James "Munky" Shaffer (Korn) is 54. TV correspondent Natalie Morales is 52. Country singer Lisa Brokop is 51. Rapper-rocker Uncle Kracker is 50. Actor Sonya Walger is 50. Former actor Staci Keanan is 49. Jazz singer Somi is 48. Actor Amber Borycki is 41. Actor Aubrey Anderson-Emmons is 17.